

Ongoing Crisis with the Palestinians

Nov 21, 2003



Brief Analysis

Yasir Arafat is the main problem in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not part of the solution. Despite the developments at Oslo, Camp David, and Taba, Arafat does not really want to reach an agreement with Israel. More than three years ago, he made a strategic decision to achieve his goals through the use of violence and terrorism. His chosen method has been to kill as many Israelis as possible. Intelligence documents show that on February 11, 2001, Arafat met with the heads of terrorist groups and asked them why there were not more Israeli casualties. He then gave the green light for suicide attacks, telling the attendees, "You know what to do."

The confrontation with the Palestinians represents the first Israeli conflict in which civilian casualties outnumber military casualties. The death toll has already reached 892. Fortunately, Israel has been successful in foiling more than 90 percent of attempted terrorist attacks (primarily suicide bombings). Since October 4, 2003, when suicide bombers struck a restaurant in Haifa, more than seven such bombers have been captured on their way into Israel. The Palestinian Authority (PA) is not stopping terrorist activity, so Israel is left to deal with the problem on its own.

Following the Aqaba summit, former Palestinian prime minister Abu Mazen wanted to take the PA in a different direction. Arafat and the terrorist factions became an obstacle to this process, however. Their opposition was supported from the outside: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria, and Hizballah all provided money to fund terrorism and hamper the progress of reform. Israel created all the necessary conditions for Abu Mazen to be successful in his policies, but Arafat nevertheless obstructed his government's efforts on a daily basis. For example, during my own meeting with PA minister of internal security Mohammed Dahlan, I said that Israel was willing to place Gaza, Bethlehem, and several other towns under Palestinian security jurisdiction; soon thereafter, however, a suicide bomber cut this attempted hand-over short.

Israel is committed to the tenets of the Aqaba summit, President George W. Bush's vision, and the Quartet Roadmap. Its goal is to bring the Palestinians to the negotiating table. Although Israel will work with the government of Prime Minister Abu Ala, concerns persist regarding the manner in which Palestinian security forces are controlled. Under the new PA government, Arafat retains authority over these forces, making it difficult for Israel to proceed with negotiations. Nevertheless, Israel will provide the same supportive conditions that it granted during Abu Mazen's attempt to establish a successful government.

Palestinians will judge Abu Ala's government based on the degree to which it improves their daily lives. Such improvement is primarily contingent on the PA's efforts to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure. Although Israel is prepared to ease its restrictions on Palestinians, terrorism continuously impedes this goal. Terrorism also undermines Palestinian efforts to build an economic infrastructure.

Currently, Israel is not targeting political leaders, but rather terrorist leaders who incite violence on a daily basis. Any other country would do the same to protect its citizens. The IDF does its best not to harm innocent Palestinians; indeed, no other military organization in the world has such a high level of morality. Some operations have been cancelled due to concerns that civilians would be hurt. In other cases, pilots preparing to launch missiles have spotted civilians and shifted their strike accordingly. This is the difference between countries like Israel (which have

a respect for law) and terrorist organizations (whose actions respect no limits).

The first stage of the Roadmap requires the Palestinians to dismantle terrorist groups. Israel will not be party to a ceasefire agreement with such groups, which have used previous ceasefires as an opportunity to buy time and increase their military capabilities.

The Israeli Fence

The security fence is a result of continued terrorist attacks; its purpose is to facilitate security against suicide bombers. The effectiveness of such a measure is demonstrated by the fact that those areas already protected by a fence have experienced only one-twentieth the number of penetration attempts that other areas have witnessed. In Gaza, for example, the security fence has thwarted all terrorists attempting to penetrate Israel, resulting in a complete halt to suicide attacks from that area. As such, the fence is solely a security measure, not a political maneuver. It is propagandistic for the Palestinians to call the fence a "wall." Only in a handful of urban areas does the fence become a short wall (5 to 7 kilometers out of the fence's total length of 300 to 400 kilometers). Moreover, Israel has taken property issues, access to services, and ease of movement into consideration in planning the construction of the fence.

In committing to President Bush's vision, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stated that Israel is willing to make difficult decisions in order to achieve a permanent peace. Yet, the map of the territories will be changed only in the context of a permanent agreement, and not while terrorism persists. Settlements are not the cause of terrorism; rather, terrorism has been a strategic tool employed by Arafat to attain a political goal.

Given the current situation, it will be difficult to reach a permanent solution in a few months or years. Israel has to bring the Palestinians to the negotiating table and obtain a permanent agreement. In the meantime, an interim agreement should be established in order to build trust and hope on both sides.

State-Sponsored Terrorism

There is a conflict between those who aspire to attain security in the region and those who strive to disrupt it. The United States leads the former category, while the latter is led by the "axis of evil" and other countries, along with terrorist organizations such as Hizballah and al-Qaeda. Those countries that seek weapons of mass destruction and support terrorism pose a threat to the free world, and U.S. success in Iraq will send a message to such countries and terrorists worldwide.

The January 2002 Israeli capture of the Karine-A, a ship carrying Iranian arms to the PA, demonstrated that there is a strategic connection between the Palestinians and Tehran. With that smuggling attempt, Iran essentially offered fifty tons of weaponry to the PA in exchange for a foothold in Israel and the territories. This relationship persists in the form of Hizballah's continuing terrorist activities against Israel. Moreover, Iran has consistently called for the destruction of Israel even as it moves toward obtaining nuclear power and long-range missiles. Iran already has operational Shahab-3 missiles, is close to completing the Shahab-4, and is working on the Shahab-5, which will have a range of 2,000 kilometers. In addition, Iran could develop nuclear weapons within as little as a year. The United States must continue to prevent this extremist regime from acquiring such weapons.

For its part, Syria instigates terrorism against Israel and against U.S. forces in Iraq. Damascus controls Lebanon, from which it allows Hizballah to stage terrorist activities against Israel. Syria has the capacity to dismantle Hizballah and allow Lebanese forces to deploy into southern Lebanon and establish control there. In order for this to occur, President Bashar al-Asad must demonstrate leadership. Israel's only means of determining Asad's goals is through Syria's actions and policies, which are currently conducted in a decidedly strange manner. In any case, Syria will pay a price if it continues to sponsor and harbor terrorists who threaten the free world.

RECOMMENDED

BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations](#)

Feb 15, 2022

Grant Rumley

(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria](#)

Feb 15, 2022

Anna Borshchevskaya

(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022

Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)

TOPICS

[Peace Process \(/policy-analysis/peace-process\)](#)

[Terrorism \(/policy-analysis/terrorism\)](#)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Israel (/policy-
analysis/israel)

Palestinians (/policy-
analysis/palestinians)