



Mahmoud Abbas Speech to the 67th UN General Assembly

Rejecting Negotiations with Israel

In the course of the first week of the 67th Session of the UN General Assembly a great deal of media attention has been paid to Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech, which focused on the problem posed by Iran's nuclear program. By contrast, very little attention was paid to the speech of President Mahmoud Abbas, a speech that offers very little hope of a peace agreement in the near future.

Abbas made it quite clear that he is not prepared to enter into negotiations with Israel. As he put it "marathon negotiations are not required to determine ... the core components of a just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict." These components, he said, "are the clearest and most logical in the world." They include "the realization of the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, over the entire territory occupied by Israel since 1967, **and the realization of a just, agreed solution to the Palestine refugee issue in accordance with resolution 194 (iii), as prescribed in the Arab Peace Initiative.**"

Abbas thus declared that peace between Israel and the secular (Fatah) Palestinians can be attained only by Israeli agreement to (a) a Palestinian state within the 1949 armistice lines, without swaps, and (b) the emigration to Israel of the 5 million persons of Palestinian ancestry now living in camps operated by UNRWA. This insistence on the claimed "right of return" is neatly paraphrased, so as to hide its true meaning from those who are not familiar with the interpretation of Res. 194 (iii) by Abbas and his colleagues. Res. 194 was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1948. It provides "that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so."

Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly are under the provisions of the UN Charter "recommendations." That is why Res. 194 uses the term "should" rather than "shall." There is no UN mandate requiring Israel to grant a "right of return" to the refugees of 1948 and to the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the refugees. By claiming a "right of return" as a condition of peace, Fatah joins Hamas in rejecting the two-state solution and insisting on an end to the existence of the State of Israel.

To be sure, throughout his speech to the UN General Assembly, Abbas emphasized his support of a two-state solution. But what the claim of the "right of return" means is that the "two-state solution" would be temporary. The establishment of the Palestinian state would be followed by the migration of Palestinians from Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza to Israel.

Joined with the Israeli Arab population they would constitute a majority of Israel's population. That majority would then be able to liquidate Israel and merge it with the Palestinian state.

It is clear that no Israeli government would agree to such a suicidal arrangement. That is why Fatah is pursuing the effort to delegitimize Israel.

Next Steps in the Delegitimization Effort

Having decided not to negotiate with Israel and having also decided not to join Hamas in acts of terrorism, Fatah's goal is to attain the support of the "international community," that is the UN, to impose its peace conditions on Israel. It recognizes that the U.S. has the power to veto any Security Council resolution which, if adopted, would be binding on Israel. It appears to hope that it can attain such widespread international support that the United States will ultimately give in.

With that long-term objective in mind, Abbas announced in his speech the intention of the Palestinian Authority to attain the status in the UN of a nonmember observer "state." Attaining that status would not have any significant meaning in the UN itself. However, the PA has been able to persuade the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court that if recognized by the UN General Assembly as a "state," it will be able to invoke the jurisdiction of the Court. At of now it appears that the General Assembly will indeed recognize "Palestine" as a nonmember "state," which will lead to the presentation of its case against Israel in the International Criminal Court.

It is evidently with that objective in mind that Abbas began his speech to the UN General Assembly with an accusation against Israel based on a gross exaggeration of acts of property damage committed by a small group of Israeli West Bank settlers. Here is how Abbas characterizes these acts:

"During the past months, attacks by terrorist militias of Israeli settlers have become a daily reality, with at least 535 attacks perpetrated since the beginning of this year. We are facing relentless waves of attacks against our people, our mosques, churches and monasteries, and our homes and schools; they are unleashing their venom against our trees, fields, crops and properties, and our people have become fixed targets for acts of killing and abuse with the complete collusion of the occupying forces and the Israeli Government."

There is no doubt that these disturbers of the peace need to be apprehended and punished, but to call them "terrorist militias" is absurd. And talk of "acts of killing" and of the "complete collusion of the occupying forces and the Israeli Government" simply misrepresents the facts. The speech indicates that the delegitimization campaign against Israel will continue to be based on allegations as to Israeli activities that are far removed from the facts.

For those interested in reading the speech in full, the text is set forth below. Whoever wrote that text was able cleverly to interweave a rejection of peace negotiations with words and phrases of a commitment to peace that is, sadly, simply not there.

The Text of Mahmoud Abbas' Speech

**“President of the United Nations General Assembly,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies Heads of Delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish to begin by extending congratulations to the President of the 67th session of the United Nations General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremic, wishing him all success. I express appreciation as well to H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz A1-Nasser for his leadership of the previous General Assembly session, and also to the United Nations Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Ban Kimoon, for his tireless efforts at the helm of this organization. Also, from the outset, I wish to affirm our appreciation to all Member States that, in their statements to this Assembly, have stressed the urgency for progress towards the realization of a just peace in our region that allows for the fulfillment by the Palestinian people of their inalienable national rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Developments over the past year have confirmed what we have persistently drawn attention to and warned of: the catastrophic danger of the racist Israeli settlement of our country, Palestine.

During the past months, attacks by terrorist militias of Israeli settlers have become a daily reality, with at least 535 attacks perpetrated since the beginning of this year. We are facing relentless waves of attacks against our people, our mosques, churches and monasteries, and our homes and schools; they are unleashing their venom against our trees, fields, crops and properties, and our people have become fixed targets for acts of killing and abuse with the complete collusion of the occupying forces and the Israeli Government.

The escalation of settler attacks should not surprise anyone, for it is the inherent byproduct of the continuation of occupation and a government policy that deliberately fosters the settlements and settlers and deems their satisfaction to be an absolute priority. And, it is the inherent byproduct of the racist climate fueled by a culture of incitement in the Israeli curriculum and extremist declarations, which are rife with hatred and are rooted in a series of discriminatory laws created and enacted over the years against the Palestinian people, as well as by the security apparatus and courts, which provide excuse after excuse for the settlers' crimes and for their accelerated release should one of them happen to be arrested, and by official and military commissions of inquiry, which fabricate justifications for soldiers who have committed what are clearly considered to be war crimes and perpetrated acts of murder, torture and abuse of peaceful civilians.

Over the past year, since the convening of the General Assembly's previous session, Israel, the occupying Power, has persisted with its settlement campaign, focusing on Jerusalem and its environs. It is a campaign clearly and deliberately aimed at altering the City's historic character and the glorious image of the Holy City etched in the minds of humankind. It is a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian people via the demolition of their homes and prevention of their construction; the revocation of residency rights; the denial of basic services, especially

with regard to construction of school; the closure of institutions; and the impoverishment of Jerusalem's community via a siege of walls and checkpoints that are choking the City and preventing millions of Palestinians from freely accessing its mosques, churches, schools, hospitals and markets.

The occupying Power has also continued its construction and expansion of settlements in different areas throughout the West Bank and continued its suffocating blockade as well as raids and attacks against our people in the Gaza Strip, who to this day continue to suffer from the disastrous impact of the destructive war of aggression committed against them years ago. Nearly five thousand Palestinians also remain captive as prisoners and detainees in Israel's jails. We call on the international community to compel the Government of Israel to respect the Geneva Conventions, to lift the blockade of Gaza and to investigate the conditions of detention of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, stressing the need for their release; they are soldiers in their people's struggle for freedom, independence and peace.

At the same time, the occupying Power continues to tighten the siege and impose severe restrictions on movement, preventing the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) from implementing vital infrastructure projects and providing services to its citizens, who are also being prevented from cultivating their land and deprived of water for irrigation. It is also obstructing the establishment of agricultural, industrial, tourism and housing projects by the private sector in vast areas of the Occupied Palestinian Authority, which are classified as areas subject to the absolute control of the occupation, which encompasses approximately 60% of the West Bank. The occupying Power continues to deliberately demolish what the PNA is building, projects funded by donor brethren and friends, and destroying PNA projects involving the building of roads, simple homes for its citizens and agricultural facilities. In fact, over the past 12 months, the Israeli occupying forces demolished 510 Palestinian structures in these areas and displaced 770 Palestinians from their homes. These illegal measures have caused great damage to our economy and impeded our development programs and private sector activity, compounding the socio-economic difficulties being endured by our people under occupation, a fact confirmed by international institutions.

Israel's overall policy is ultimately leading to the weakening of the Palestinian National Authority, undermining its ability to carry out its functions and to implement its obligations, which threatens to undermine its very existence and threatens its collapse. All of this is taking place in the context of an Israeli political discourse that does not hesitate to brandish aggressive, extremist positions, which in many aspects and its practical application on the ground is inciting religious conflict. This is something we firmly reject based on our principles and convictions and our understanding what it means to fuel such fires in this very sensitive area full of explosive flashpoints and how it can fuel the action of extremists from various quarters, especially those trying to use tolerant, monotheistic religions as an ideological justification for their terrorism.

**Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We, on our part, and as proof our seriousness and our sincere intention to create an opening in this impasse, conducted exploratory talks with the Israeli Government at the beginning of this year upon the initiative of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. We have also encouraged the expressed desires of several countries to contribute to efforts to break the cycle of deadlock and have also ourselves undertaken initiatives to create favorable conditions for the resumption of negotiations. Unfortunately, however, the result of all these initiatives has been very negative.

**Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

There can only be one understanding of the Israeli Government's actions in our homeland and of the positions it has presented to us regarding the substance of a permanent status agreement to end the conflict and achieve peace. That one understanding leads to one conclusion: that the Israeli Government rejects the two-State solution.

The two-State solution, i.e. the State of Palestine coexisting alongside the State of Israel, represents the spirit and essence of the historic compromise embodied in the Oslo Declaration of Principles, the agreement signed 19 years ago between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Government of Israel under the auspices of the United States of America on the White House Lawn, a compromise by which the Palestinian people accepted to establish their State on only 22% of the territory of historic Palestine for the sake of making peace.

The recent years have actually witnessed the systematic acceleration and intensification of Israeli measures aimed at emptying the Oslo Accords of their meaning, while simultaneously building facts on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory that are making the implementation of the Accords extremely difficult if not completely impossible.

**Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Israel aims to continue its occupation of East Jerusalem, to de facto annex large areas of the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to continue occupying a large portion of the Territory under different pretexts. It refuses to engage in any serious discussion of the issue of the Palestine refugees. It wants to continue its occupation of Palestinian water basins and its control over the most fertile agricultural areas in our land as well as over our air, skies and borders.

The final map and borders that can be drawn in accordance with Israel's official positions reveal to us the following: small Palestinian enclaves surrounded by large Israeli settlement blocs and walls, checkpoints and vast security zones and roads devoted to the settlers. Thus, the enclaves would remain subject to the full dominance of military, colonial occupation, only packaged under new names, such as the unilateral plan for a so-called State with provisional borders.

**Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Israel refuses to end the occupation and refuses to allow the Palestinian people to attain their rights and freedom and rejects the independence of the State of Palestine. Israel is promising the Palestinian people a new catastrophe, a new Nakba.

**Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I speak on behalf of an angry people, a people that feels that, at the same time that they continue with their calls for their right to freedom and their adoption of a culture of peace and adherence to the principles and rules of international law and resolutions of international legitimacy, rewards continue to be illogically bestowed upon Israel, whose Government pursues a policy of war, occupation and settlement colonization. And Israel continues to be permitted to evade accountability and punishment and some continue to obstruct the undertaking of decisive positions regarding its violations of international law and covenants. This, in fact, represents a license for the occupation to continue its policy of dispossession and ethnic cleansing and encourages it to entrench its system of apartheid against the Palestinian people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite our real feelings of anger, we, in the name of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, reaffirm, without hesitation, that we are committed to peace and international legitimacy and its covenants and its resolutions as we are adherent to our inalienable national rights and aspirations, and we reaffirm that we are committed to non-violence and reject terrorism in all its forms, particularly State terrorism.

Despite our feelings of disappointment and loss of hope, we continue to sincerely extend our hands to the Israeli people to make peace. We realize that ultimately the two peoples must live and coexist, each in their respective State, in the Holy Land. Further, we realize that progress towards making peace is through negotiations between the PLO and Israel.

Despite all the complexities of the prevailing reality and all the frustrations that abound, we say before the international community: there is still a chance – maybe the last – to save the two-State solution and to salvage peace.

However, this urgent task must be pursued via a new approach. Whoever rushes to advise us to repeat an experience that has proven to be fruitless – **negotiations with the Israeli Government without clear terms of reference** – must understand that this will result in reproduction of failure and again provide a cover for entrenchment of the occupation and will finish off an already-dying peace process. And, whoever who advises us to wait, must realize that the festering situation in our country and our region has its own timing and can neither withstand further procrastination and delay nor its placement at the bottom of the global agenda.

The approach required for saving the chance for peace must first and foremost be predicated on the understanding that racial settler colonization must be condemned, punished and boycotted in order for it to be completely halted. This approach also requires reaffirmation of and

adherence to the terms of reference and foundations of the solution to the conflict, which have been endorsed by all of you.

The core components of a just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict do not require effort to discover, but rather what is needed is the will to implement them. And marathon negotiations are not required to determine them, but rather what is needed is the sincere intention reach peace. And those components are by no means a mysterious puzzle or intractable riddle, but rather are the clearest and most logical in the world. This includes the realization of the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, over the entire territory occupied by Israel since 1967, **and the realization of a just, agreed solution to the Palestine refugee issue in accordance with resolution 194 (III), as prescribed in the Arab Peace Initiative.**

Indeed, the fundamental components of the solution to the conflict exist in the documents and resolutions of the United Nations and in the resolutions of regional organizations, starting from the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Non- Aligned Movement (NAM) and the African Union (AU), as well as in the statements of the European Union (EU) and the international Quartet.

The international community, embodied in the United Nations, is required now more than ever to uphold its responsibilities. The Security Council is called upon to urgently adopt a resolution comprising the basis and foundations for a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that would serve as a binding reference and guide for all if the vision of two-States, Israel and Palestine, is to survive and if peace is to prevail in the land of peace, the birthplace of Jesus (peace be upon him), and ascension of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and the final resting place of Abraham (peace be upon him), the land of the three monotheistic religions.

**Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The independence and freedom of the State of Palestine is above all and ultimately a sacred right of the Palestinian people and an entitlement that must be realized for it has been long overdue for too many decades.

At the same time, the Palestinian National Authority has affirmed, through implementation of its State institution-building program, the ability to create an advanced model for an effective, modern State through the development of the performance of its institutions, public finance management through the adoption of transparency, accountability and rules of good governance. These achievements have been considered by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to constitute an impressive undertaking and success story, one that was again commended in the latest report just a few days ago, confirming full Palestinian readiness for the transition to an independent State, while at the same time stressing that the Israeli occupation remains the only obstacle to the realization of the State of Palestine.

**Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

When, a year ago during the previous session of the General Assembly, we submitted our application for consideration by the Security Council to allow the State of Palestine to assume its rightful place among the nations of the world as a full member in the United Nations, a major and hostile uproar was raised by some against this political, diplomatic, peaceful step aimed at saving the peace process by asserting its basis and foundation. However, our endeavor was aborted, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the countries of the world supported, and continues to support, our application.

Yet, last autumn, when the countries of the world had the opportunity to declare their stance without any restrictions or “veto”, they voted, despite enormous pressures, in strong support of the acceptance of Palestine as a Member State of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). A year has passed and Palestine, the homeland of Mahmoud Darwish and Edward Said, is playing its role in UNESCO with high responsibility and professionalism, and is committed to international conventions, cooperating with all Member States in order to advance the objectives of the organization, and providing a model of what its positive, constructive contribution in international organizations would be.

**Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In order to enhance the chances for peace, we will continue our efforts to obtain full membership for Palestine at the United Nations. And, for the same purpose, we have begun intensive consultations with various regional organizations and Member States aimed at having the General Assembly adopt a resolution considering the State of Palestine as a non-Member State of the United Nations during this session. We are confident that the vast majority of the countries of the world support our endeavor aimed at salvaging the chances for a just peace.

In our endeavor, we do not seek to delegitimize an existing State – that is Israel; but rather to assert the State that must be realized – that is Palestine.

**Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

More than 64 years have passed since A1-Nakba and a large portion of those who were its direct victims and witnessed its horrors have died with their memories preserved in their minds and hearts about their beautiful world that was devastated, their warm homes that were demolished, and their peaceful villages that were erased from existence, and about their renaissance that was undermined, and their loved ones, dear men, women and children, who were killed in wars, massacres, attacks, raids and incursions, and about their beautiful country that was a beacon of coexistence, tolerance, progress and a crossroads of civilization. They died in the camps of displacement and refuge to which they were expelled following their uprooting from their homeland as they awaited the moment in which they would resume their suspended lives and complete their journey that was interrupted and repair their shattered

dreams. They died while they clung to their legitimate human right to justice and freedom and to redress for the historic unprecedented injustice inflicted upon them.

At present, 77% of the Palestinian people are under the age of 35 years. Although they did not experience the horrors of A1-Nakba, they know very well the details of its horrendous facts from the accounts told to them by their parents and grandparents who endured it. And, they are suffering its ongoing effects until today and every day as a result of the practices of the occupation and the settlers on a land that is diminishing and a horizon before them that is blocked against their simple, ordinary dreams. They see their homeland and, their present and future vulnerable to continued usurpation and they say firmly: we will not allow a new Nakba to happen.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I say to you that the brave Palestinian people will not allow themselves to be the victim of a new Nakba. My people will continue their epic steadfastness and eternal survival in their beloved land, every inch of which carries the evidence and landmarks affirming their roots and unique connection throughout ancient history. There is no homeland for us except Palestine, and there is no land for us but Palestine. Our people will continue to build the institutions of their State and will continue to strive to achieve national reconciliation to restore the unity of our nation, people and institutions via resorting to the ballot boxes, which will confirm our people's pluralistic democratic choice. Our people are also determined to continue peaceful popular resistance, consistent with international humanitarian law, against the occupation and the settlements and for the sake of freedom, independence and peace.

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Prevent the occurrence of a new Nakba in the Holy Land. Support the realization of a free, independent State of Palestine now. Let peace be victorious before it is too late.”

AJIRI Board of Directors

Richard Schifter (Chair)

Norman Goldstein (Vice Chair), Stuart Sloame (Vice Chair)

Ruth Baker-Battist (Secretary)

Benjamin Schlesinger (Treasurer)

Michael Alter, Shulamit Bahat, Dottie Bennett, Paul Berger, Pamela Cohen, Rabbi George Driesen, Hon. Stuart Eizenstat, Ellen Sloame Fawer, Edith U. Fierst, Stephen Gell, Michael Gelman, Norman Gelman, Hon. Joseph Gildenhorn, Hon. Benjamin Gilman, Prof. Oscar Gray, Emil Hirsch, Stephen Horblitt, Jeremy Kadden, Hon. Max M. Kampelman, Gil Kapen, Luis Landau, Gloria Landy, Prof. Robert Lieber, Prof. Joseph Mendels, Prof. Jack Minker, David Moses, Walter Nathan, Dr. Walter Reich, Wendy Revel, Naomi Revzin, Hon. Nicholas Rostow, Richard P. Schifter, Noah Silverman, Jonathan Simon, Jose Sokol, Sarah Stern, Marjorie Sonnenfeldt, Marc Snyder, Carl Tuvin, Robert Weinberg, Leon Weintraub, Leonard Wien, Sharon Wilkes, Dr. Beverly Zweiben