

Palestinians Furious at Discovering They are No Longer the Center of the Universe

by Hugh Fitzgerald



For decades the Palestinians found that their “cause” – that is, the destruction of the state of Israel and its replacement by an Arab “Palestine” – kept them at the center of the Arab World’s attention, and the object of its support and sympathy. But no longer. Mahmoud Abbas has been horrified to discover that even as Israel may extend its sovereignty over parts of Judea and Samaria (the “West Bank”), the Arab states have issued pro-forma and muted condemnations, while several of the most important – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt – have made it known that they do not intend to take any concrete steps against Israel and, in fact, they are continuing their cooperation with the Jewish state on intelligence and other

military matters against a mutual enemy, Iran.

The story is [here](#).

Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and several Persian Gulf states reportedly do not plan to take action over Israel's plan to apply sovereignty to parts of Judea and Samaria. PA said to be pressing for "holy war" against Israel "before it's too late."

Palestinian frustration and anger with the Arab world for its general indifference to Israel's plan to extend sovereignty to large parts of Judea and Samaria and the Jordan Valley is growing, Palestinian Media Watch reported over the weekend.

Diplomatic sources told Israel Hayom Sunday that high-ranking officials in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and several Persian Gulf states have told their Israeli counterparts that while they must have their ear to the ground with regard to their respective publics' response to the move, their governments do not plan on taking any action against Israel beyond declarative condemnations.

In other words, instead of whipping up anger against Israel, and support for the Palestinians – as the Palestinians expected – these Arab governments will attempt to satisfy the “Arab street” with verbal condemnation, but will take no further hostile action. Meanwhile, security cooperation with Israel against Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood will continue as before.

So far, the only Arab leader to oppose Israel's plan outright has been King Abdullah of Jordan, who has explained that while it is in Amman's interest to have permanent Israeli security presence along the western border between the two countries, such a move could spark riots that would threaten the stability of Jordan's government, which is why he has to try to counter the move on the regional and international

levels.

King Abdullah has had to take a stronger position against Israeli plans to extend sovereignty than other Arab states because 70% of Jordan's population is Palestinian, and he has to mollify them. But he has said privately that he knows perfectly well that his regime depends on Israel's security presence in the Jordan Valley, which will prevent Palestinians in the West Bank from joining up with the Palestinians in Jordan to overthrow Abdullah. He has to satisfy the Jordanian "street" with words in the hopes of preventing riots, but at the same time he will not risk whipping up that "street" in anti-Israel riots that might well morph into protests against his own regime. He will continue to claim to oppose that which, in fact, he needs: Israel's continued permanent security presence separating the Palestinians in the West Bank from those in Jordan.

This type of caution in the Arab world coincides with the overall change in policy in many Arab countries, which no longer immediately dismiss the notion of normalizing relations with the Jewish state.

Saudi Arabia has long stopped denying it maintains behind-the-scenes diplomatic and intelligence cooperation with Israel, primarily in pursuit of mutual objectives with respect to the two countries' common enemy – Iran; and just last week United Arab Emirates firms signed a historic partnership deal with Israeli companies as part of the fight against the coronavirus

Overall, since the Arab Spring stormed through the Middle East in 2011, toppling longtime rulers and forever changing the geopolitical landscape, many Arab leaders have been busy stabilizing their regimes and focusing on counterterrorism efforts.

This change has marginalized the Palestinian issue with

respect to Arab leaders' agendas. These leaders can no longer afford to prioritize the Palestinian interest over their own, something Ramallah has found hard to counter.

Since 2011's Arab Spring, the Arab rulers have been preoccupied with holding onto power and preventing regime change. The monarchies of the Gulf have been preoccupied with Shia Iran's threat to them, as the Islamic Republic has supported proxies and allies in Yemen (the Houthi rebels), Iraq (the pro-Iranian Shia militia Kataib Hezbollah), Syria (Bashar Assad's army) and Lebanon (Hezbollah). Regime change brought down Qaddafi in Libya, Ben Ali in Tunisia, and Mubarak in Egypt, all of them strongmen who were famously corrupt. Memories of these changes haunt today's rulers.

There are so many other things for Arab rulers to worry about, besides those pesky Palestinians who are so very needy, and take for granted continued support from the Arab countries that have supported them in the past. Egyptians, in particular, feel that in three wars – 1948-49, 1967, 1973 – their country lost men, money, and materiel (including almost the entire Air Force in 1967), for the sake of the Palestinians, and has received little gratitude in return. Kuwaitis remember how the Palestinians who had been given refuge in Kuwait all supported the Iraqi invaders in 1990. After Saddam Hussein's troops were chased out of Iraq by the Americans, Kuwait promptly expelled 400,000 Palestinians. But the anger remains.

Now the Arab lands are roiled in conflict. There are civil wars in Yemen, Syria, and Libya, as well as lesser conflicts in Lebanon – pitting Hezbollah against Sunnis, Christians, and even some Shi'a – and in Iraq, pitting much of the country, including many Shia, against the Iranian-backed Kataib Hezbollah. In Yemen Saudi Arabia is supporting the national government against the rebel Houthis backed by Iran; the UAE has dropped its support for the national government, and now

supports separatists in southern Yemen;. In Syria, Iran and its puppet Hezbollah are backing Bashar Assad's Alawite army, while the Gulf Arabs support the Sunni opposition; Turkey has entered Idlib Province, not just to push the Kurds away from the Turkish border, but to support Sunni forces opposed to Assad. In Libya, the GNA (Government of National Accord) is backed by Turkey, while the forces of General Khalifa Haftar, known as the LNA (Libyan National Army), are backed by the U.A.E., Egypt, France, and Russia. These ongoing conflicts use up men, money, and materiel. Domestic protests against mismanagement and corruption, too, threaten governments in Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran. In all of this continuing tohu-bohu, the Palestinians and their "cause" hardly register. For some Arab states, that have made security cooperation with Israel a cornerstone of their policies, there is not indifference to the Palestinians, but impatience and an outright antipathy, best expressed by an exasperated Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, who brusquely told a complaining Mahmoud Abbas that he had better accept whatever deal the Americans were offering, while there was still time.

According to Palestinian Media Watch, PA President Mahmoud Abbas has been taken aback by the fact that the solid backing he expected to receive from Arab leaders over Israel's sovereignty bid is simply not there.

Faced with this unexpected indifference, the Palestinian Authority is pressing all Palestinian factions, as well as the Arab world, to launch a "jihad" – holy war – against the Jewish state, saying they must "act before it's too late" using propaganda on Palestinian state media.

Mahmoud Abbas can come to some sort of understanding with Hamas and other Palestinian terror groups, albeit temporarily (for they will soon fall out again over the division of the spoils – that is, over the aid money provided by foreign governments to which Hamas and P.A. leaders help themselves),

but that will have no effect on the twenty-two Arab states that have nothing to gain, and much to lose, if they again sacrifice for the “Palestinians.” Some of them – Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain – stand to lose an effective ally against Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood. Just now Israel’s devastating series of cyberattacks on Iran have yet again demonstrated its value to the Arab states most alarmed about the Iranian threat. Israel’s military cooperation with Egypt against the Muslim Brotherhood and remnants of Al-Qaeda in the Sinai has also been appreciated by Saudi Arabia and UAE, both of which see the MB – Hamas, remember, is simply the Gazan branch of the group – as a threat to their regimes of inherited rule.

Mahmoud Abbas may have been “taken aback” at the lack of Arab interest in joining a “jihad” to be waged against Israel, but very few others are surprised. For the Arab leaders, dealing with so many different kinds of conflicts both within, and among, the Arab states, variously suffering from the severe drop in the price of oil, from the mismanagement and corruption that characterize so many Arab states, and from the effect of the coronavirus, have had enough – with, about, for, because of – the “Palestinians.” The Arabs may not all express their exasperation as brusquely as the Saudi Crown Prince, but they’ve had quite enough of the “Palestinians.” For the Arabs, the new policy is “Sauve qui peut.” From now on, those “Palestinians” are going to be, as they’ve never had to be before, on their own.

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