

The E.U. Read the Palestinians the Riot Act, But Will Biden Come to Their Rescue?

by Hugh Fitzgerald



As is well known, Mahmoud Abbas has for the past seven months refused to accept the taxes that Israel collects on Palestinian imports on behalf of the PA. This is the second time he has refused to accept the transfer of those taxes. The first time was when Israel insisted on deducting from the sum

to be transferred to the PA precisely the same amount that the PA provided to imprisoned terrorists and to the families of dead terrorists, in its “Pay-For-Slay” Program. Israel first announced it would be making that deduction in February 2019; Mahmoud Abbas promptly responded that in that case, the PA would refuse to accept the transfer to it of any of the taxes collected for it by Israel. The PA continued this self-defeating policy until October 2019, when it decided that yes, after all, it would again accept the transfer of the taxes, minus the amount deducted by Israel that matched what the PA spent on the Pay-For-Slay Program. Israel promptly delivered the \$430 million it had been patiently waiting to transfer.

But then, earlier this year, Abbas decided to cut off all relations with Israel because it had announced that it was planning to extend its sovereignty to the Jordan Valley and the five large settlement blocs. He wouldn’t deign – yet again – to accept the import taxes that Israel has been dutifully collecting on behalf of the Palestinians. That sum now amounts to some \$750 million. But even though Israel did not go forward with its plans to extend sovereignty (what the Palestinians, and too many others, call “annexation”) to part of the West Bank; Abbas is still refusing to accept the tax money from Israel. His people may be impoverished, but he’s doing quite well, thank you, with his \$400 million fortune; he can afford to keep raging in Ramallah. And in early October, to fill the PA’s budget gap, he had the gall to call on Europe for financial help. The story is here: “Europe, Finally, Tells the Palestinians That Enough’s Enough,” Elder of Ziyon, [Algemeiner](#), October 9, 2020:

...Finally, after doing everything the PA has demanded of them for years, the EU has had enough.

The EU, France, Germany, the U.K. and Norway made clear that they consider annexation to now be off the table, and thus the Palestinians should accept the \$750 million in revenues now held by the Israeli Ministry of Finance.

The “annexation” or extension of Israeli sovereignty has been “off the table” ever since July 1. And Abbas knows it. But he wants to prove that he can manage quite well without Israel, though of course he can’t. The Palestinians have relied since 1994 on Israel to collect taxes on Palestinian imports and to transfer those sums to the PA. They rely on Israel for other indispensable services too; the Israeli Electric Company supplies 95% of the electricity for the Palestinians – but Abbas hasn’t pulled that power plug. And while Abbas in his fit of political pique has ended all security cooperation with Israel, Israel continues to monitor and, if necessary in case of terror attacks, hunt down, members of Hamas and other jihadis in the West Bank who are a threat not just to Israelis, but to Abbas’ Palestinian Authority.

After lower-level pressure on the Palestinians didn’t bear fruit, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell called Abbas last Wednesday.

He repeated the same message in the call, European diplomats say: Until the Palestinians resume the acceptance of tax revenues from Israel, the EU will not provide new loans or other financial assistance.

Borrell also urged Abbas to relaunch security and civilian coordination with Israel, but Abbas was noncommittal, the diplomats say.

Another example of the Palestinian penchant for cutting-off-your-noise-to-spite-your-face policies. The security cooperation with Israel has been indispensable in helping Abbas fend off violent challenges to his rule; he knows that even without the PA’s active cooperation, Israel will try to share its own information about terrorist threats to the PA, but that may not always be possible, if Abbas continues to insist on suspending all ties with the Jewish state.

Some Palestinian officials around Abbas think his decision to

suspend all ties with Israel and the U.S. is self-defeating.

Of course his decision is “self-defeating.” Cutting off all ties to the U.S. means there is no possibility of a resumption of American aid. Cutting off all ties to Israel means not receiving in a timely fashion information Israel can provide about Jihadis, including members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, in the West Bank. It means a lack of civilian coordination, too, with Israel, which could lead to unnecessary misunderstandings and clashes between settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank. And it means not accepting the hundreds of millions of dollars that Israel collects for the PA.

But Abbas has so far fended off that pressure. He’s betting that Joe Biden will win in November and bring with him a much different set of policies toward the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

And so now help may be on the way for Abbas and his cronies.

This is another game changer. After the Arab world has shown a willingness to criticize the Palestinian leadership publicly, the EU is starting to move in the same direction.

Mahmoud Abbas is acting like he always has. He’s demanding money he doesn’t deserve, and he is waiting for a more palatable political environment to help him out.

Meanwhile, the PLO is getting chummy with terrorists from Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the interests of “unity.” Abbas, missing the way the wind is blowing, remains tone deaf and making the wrong decisions....

Representatives of Fatah had meetings with Hamas and Islamic Jihad, brokered by Turkey, in order to present a unified front against those Arab states, such as the Emirates and Bahrain,

that are normalizing relations with Israel and, as Abbas sees it, “betraying” the Palestinians. These “unity” meanings are unconvincing; no sooner are these expressions of solidarity forever made than some mid-level official of Fatah attacks Hamas, or someone from Hamas attacks Fatah, and the fissures that had been painted over reappear.

The Europeans are beginning to exhibit the same exasperation with the Palestinians as the Arabs, especially the Emirati Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed and the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Sultan, have been doing. Israel is sitting on \$750 million in taxes collected for the Palestinians who refuse to take delivery. And instead the Palestinians want money from Europe. The Europeans – the E.U. as a collective body, as well as the U.K., France Germany, Norway – have let the Palestinians know that there will be no loans, much less grants, forthcoming from them. The Palestinian leaders decided not to accept the tax money held by Israel. Very well then, is the message from Europe, that’s their decision and they will have to live with the consequences of their own folly.

Could this be the beginning of widespread European disaffection with the “Palestinians” whom those Europeans have coddled and cosseted for so long? One can only hope. Or will Joe Biden return the entire situation to the status quo ante and turn the aid spigot back on for the Palestinians? That seems more likely.

First published in