

Why did the Foreign Policy Research Institute invite the PLO ‘ambassador’ to present his opinions?



The Philadelphia-based [Maen Rashid Areikat](#) PLO ““ambassador”” and head of the Washington, DC based delegation to present his views at an event on March 28, 2017 at the [National Liberty Museum](#). FPRI was founded in 1955 by the legendary [Gwen Borowsky](#), a trustee of FPRI, providing the venue for “ambassador” Areikat and FPRI president, Alan Luxenberg to engage in a dialogue about the future for Israel and the Palestinians.

Background on “ambassador” Areikat

“ambassador” Areikat, a native of Jericho, Jordan is U.S. educated, a graduate of Arizona State University and Western International University. He has also received training at a diplomatic institute in Canada and at similar programs at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government. He became head of the PLO Delegation in Washington in 2009, following episodes as part of the PLO negotiating team with several Israeli governments over the past 20 years.

However, “ambassador” Areikat has had his moments of negative publicity in the US. In 2011, cited in a *USA Today* [Christian Science Monitor](#). He was responding to a question about the rights of minorities in a Palestine of the future.

To which former Bush National Security Council senior official Elliott Abrams replied:

Such a state would be the first to officially prohibit Jews or any other faith since [Elliott Abrams](#), a former U.S. National Security Council official.

The Palestinian demand is unacceptable and “a despicable form of anti-Semitism,” Abrams said. A small Jewish presence in a future Palestine, up to 1% of the population, would not hurt the Palestinian identity, he said.

“No civilized country would act this way,” Abrams said

How the PLO established a Washington, D.C. Delegation

The Washington, DC PLO delegation was enabled, despite its 1987 US terrorist designation, in 1994 by an executive waiver signed by President Clinton nullifying provisions against terrorist organizations operating in this country with the proviso that it was intended to facilitate negotiations towards a final status agreement based on the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords interim agreement. Legislation was [designation](#) by Israeli Minister of Defense Avigdor Liberman of the Palestinian National Fund as a terrorist organization operated by the PLO. The PNF provided salaries to jailed terrorists in Israel and monthly stipends to their families with amounts tied to the length of their sentences. *BBC Watch* provided [PMW](#):

“...PMW has uncovered PA Ministry of Finance documents that indicate a money trail, showing the transfer of money from the PA to the Palestinian National Fund (PNF), the body that funds the PLO, in the amount needed to pay the salaries to terrorist prisoners [...]

In 2015, after the Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs was closed, the PA raised its annual transfer to the PLO via the

Palestinian National Fund by 481 million shekels (\$128 million):

2014 transfer – 294 million shekels

2015 transfer – 775 million shekels

The additional 481 million shekels the PLO received from the PA in 2015 was the amount it needed to fund the PLO Commission of Prisoners' Affairs, undertaking the responsibilities of the Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs. The transfer of 481 million is virtually identical to the budget of the Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs in 2014 (442 million), plus 10% yearly growth due to rising prisoners salaries. According to PA law, the salaries of terrorist prisoners rise the longer they are in prison.

The Washington PLO delegation has a new man who is joining the 12 on staff, 43-year old Husam Zumlot. He appears to have a new strategy to implement in the political circus in DC that may be appealing to millennials and progressive Jewish youth in J Street university chapters. Especially those who sported tee shirts at the AIPAC Washington Policy Conference saying, "Anti- BDS, Anti-Occupation." Husam Zomlot, a product of a Gaza so-called refugee camp, earned a Master's from the London School of Economics and Doctorate from the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London. He was featured in a March 31, 2017 *Politico Magazine* [article](#), "Palestine's Man in Washington." He was cited in this *Politico* interview saying:

"U.S. public opinion is still tilted heavily against the Palestinians, but Zomlot claims, with some reason, that the youth of America aren't as reflexively pro-Israel as previous generations, an opening he will seek to exploit through his own powers of persuasion. "How this conflict has been depicted and portrayed in America is wrong, inaccurate, and misinformed. One of my main missions is to make it accurate,"

he said. "We will have to redefine the discourse on this whole thing."Congress perhaps aside, there are other more fertile areas of opportunity available to Zomlot. He is already a well-known presence in the Washington policy community, traveling to the U.S. several times a year for meetings at think tanks ("name them, I've been there," he says) and to give speeches at universities and conferences—including left-leaning Jewish ones like J Street and Haaretz. From his perch in Ramallah, he is already a darling of the international press corps. Strictly in terms of visibility, Zomlot's presence in Washington will likely be an upgrade for the Palestinians over the existing situation, wherein their official standing verges on nonexistent. As one Washington policy insider with long experience on Capitol Hill told me, "I couldn't even say who the [current] Palestinian ambassador is. I've never heard of him and never met him, if that tells you anything about his profile around town."

Putting the PLO Presentation in Context

The rationale for this FPRI event should be seen in the context of several recent events in Washington, Amman, Ramallah and Gaza.

The February 15, 2017 [concluded](#) talks with Netanyahu suggesting that any settlement freeze on construction in the major blocs in the disputed territories was not likely to be forthcoming. President Trump had previously announced that his son-in-law Jared Kushner would be responsible for handling US involvement in a renewed peace process.

An Arab League Summit was attended by 21 member monarchies, emirates, and republics on Wednesday March 29th held at a Jordanian Dead Sea resort hosted by King Abdullah II of Jordan. The summit Declaration [new charter](#) for the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas, mitigating many of the 1988 document's

worst articles with its Qur'anic doctrine anti-Semitic hatred and violence aimed at ridding the space between the river and the sea of the Jewish nation. Moreover there were broad hints of fairer treatment of non-Muslims and the prospect of distancing itself from its Muslim Brotherhood affiliation. How that is received by the Islamic State Province in the Sinai where a number of Hamas military wing leaders have left to join is another matter. All while Hamas retains the very means of terrorism committed in three rocket and tunnel wars against Israel in 2008, 2012 and 2014. The revised Hamas charter played a part in the FPRI presentation of PLO "ambassador" Areikat, as offering parallel political positions in any renewed negotiations with Israel. The revised Hamas Charter is to be unveiled shortly in Doha, Qatar by Hamas "Political Wing" leader Khalid Meshaal.

The Dialogue between Luxembourg and "ambassador" Areikat

At one point in the dialogue with "ambassador" Areikat, Luxenberg asked whether "this is the best of times or the worst of times to hold such a discussion?" To which Areikat ironically inveighed the moral imperative of Rabbi Hillel, "if not now when." A theme picked by the self named progressive Jewish protesters accusing Israel of "illegal occupation" of Palestinian lands who disrupted US Senate Foreign Relations Committee confirmation hearings of Trump's Israel "ambassador" nominee, since cleared by the US Senate, the Hon. David Friedman

Areikat noted the problems of the Palestinian's two governments, one in the disputed territories or West Bank, the other in Gaza, each with their own military wings. He also referred to the possible tacit alliance between Arab monarchies, emirates and republics in the Middle East on the one hand and Israel on the other that required in his view resolution of the Palestine-Israel conflict.

When asked by Luxenberg about his vision for the future of the Palestinian-Israeli conundrum he pointed to the history and issue of "trust and competing historical narratives." The high in these past negotiations he suggested was the Rabin – Arafat Oslo accords and subsequent arrangements in the 1990's that "broke the barrier" focusing on achieving a "win-win" solution. But that cratered in his mind with the election of the Netanyahu government and the onset of the Second Intifada in September 2000, fomented by Arafat using the late PM Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount as a false pretext. That period which ended with Arafat's death in 2004 and election of Mahmoud Abbas as succeeding PA President was marked by Israel building the security barrier and what he claimed was "excessive use of force by the IDF against Palestinian violence." Both Israel and the Palestinians failed to reach an "acceptable agreement" on key issues; "Jerusalem, Rights of Return of Refugees, borders and water rights." What he suggested was an end to "historical claims", meaning Israel's biblical and legal rights to the land and "acceptance of the two states solution."

Luxenberg then asked Areikat about several things that might build trust and acceptance of each other as equals. Areikat launched into a tirade about Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands which meant that there were no negotiations between equals. He argued it would amount to the "occupied people guaranteeing the security concerns of the occupier." That translates that the PLO doesn't accept UN Security Resolutions 242 and 338 that established Israel's rights to a just and secure border. He evaded the evidence of historical Jewish presence and the well documented legal claims to the land emanating from the League of Nations mandates granted at the San Remo Conference of 1920 establishing the Jewish Homeland. He illustrated the "imbalance" by saying the current policy amounted to providing "1,000 square kilometers to project a 2 kilometer settlement." He said what the PLO wants is a "win/win solution for both sides providing a future

independent Palestinian state living in freedom that would provide a bridge to peace with the larger Arab world."

Luxenberg posed the question of what kind of confidence building measures would it take to achieve a peace that Areikat proposes. He cited several caveats by long term US negotiator Dennis Ross, notably, "forswearing annexation of the West Bank and Gaza" by Israel. Areikat suggested that the crux of the conundrum was a "political conflict" not a "religious conflict" that provokes the "rise of religious extremists to further their objectives," an obvious reference to so-called religious right of the Israeli settler movement. Areikat illustrated the "imbalance" given the 1996 Agreements establishing "Area C, comprising 60% of the West Bank, Judea and Samaria under Israeli Control," containing most of the major blocs including Jewish communities established during the pre-State Yishuv period. He contended that Area A that constituted 18% of the disputed territories designated for Palestinian Authority control was "continually violated by the IDF."

That left Area B, representing "22% under joint control." What the PLO wants is greater control over Area C that if implemented would generate jobs and upwards of an estimated \$3 to \$4 billion in revenues for the Palestinian economy requiring less reliance on foreign donations." Clearly that is in conflict under the terms of the amendments to the Oslo Accords. Areikat said that "the parties lost confidence in trying to achieve a final agreement." He returned to the core argument of reaching agreement on all the issues and tradeoffs by both parties, Israel and the Palestinians. As we will see shortly, this amounts to a multilateral deal involving regional Arab countries, major powers like Russia and the US akin to the Quartet under UN auspices. He then recited the history of negotiations from the 1988 Palestine National Council recognition of UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338 to Oslo in 1993, the 1996 Amendments and the Wye River negotiations in

1998.

Areikat suggested that the 2006 negotiations came close to achievement, except for the internal problems with the Olmert government. While avoiding the matter of recognition of Israel as a Jewish nation, "we don't shy away from the 2 states solution and accepting Israel."

Luxenberg then brought up the 'elephant in the room," meaning the launch of a revised Hamas charter, that we have noted earlier. Luxenberg referenced the election of Yahya Sinwar, the extremist head of the Hamas military wing, to which Areikat suggested that the revised Hamas charter was the product of Ismail Haniyeh and Khalid Meshaal of the political wing and the Hamas Shura. Before addressing that development, Areikat discussed the 2011 USA Today contretemps over his statement rejecting Jewish presence in an independent Palestinian state that brought criticism from former Bush National Security adviser, Elliot Abrams, as tantamount to making a future Palestinian state, "judenrein." Areikat claimed that the PLO was not 'anti-Semitic", as they were "semites" and had no official policy of being anti-Jewish. He conveyed the fiction that throughout Islamic history that Muslims had treated Jews kindly, referencing the Kurdish leader, Saladin who allowed Jews to worship after the reconquest of Jerusalem that terminated the second Crusade. Further, he said that Hamas was "not anti-Semitic", which on its face was preposterous given the genocidal doctrine towards ethnic cleansing of Jews prominent in the articles of the 1988 charter. He suggested that the revised Hamas charter would transform the terrorist group into a politically pragmatic institution akin to the PLO.

On the matter of the role of youth, the next generation of Palestinian leaders, raised by Luxenberg Areikat was not optimistic. Despite the people to people exchanges, Palestinian youth, he contended, have no faith in its leaders to deliver a solution given the settlement growth with 600,000

Jews in the disputed territories/West Bank, the security walls and “the lack of progress.” Israel by contrast is “prosperous, yet their youth is drifting away from supporting possible peace.” He accused the Netanyahu government of “creating an atmosphere of paranoia and fear.” Thus, Areikat suggested that [peace] is not happening anytime soon.” That seems to be reflected in overwhelming responses to recent Israeli polls taken on the issue of peace based on the two state solution.

The Q & A that followed the Discussion

Luxenberg opened the forum inviting questions from the audience.

On the matter raised about challenges facing UN support for the two state solution, Areikat suggested that the UN was handicapped by US opposition to implementation of several anti-Israel UNSC resolutions, the latest being UNSC 2334 in December 2016. The U.S. did not oppose this, it abstained. Further he suggested that the US leadership over 23 years since Oslo has failed to achieve a final agreement. He suggested instead a “multilateral platform” that included regional Arab countries and other world powers. Even with that he suggested the Arab street would not recognize Israel.

When asked about Hamas being anti-Jewish, the questioner suggested that if the IDF was not in the disputed territories/West Bank that Hamas would take over in less than 3 to 5 days. Areikat launched into the recent archeological discoveries of 5,000 year old “giants” in Israel that he suggested demonstrated that they were “Palestinian ancestors.” He then segued to note what his new colleague at the PLO delegation in Washington, Zumlot, argued that American Jews evince growing concerns over Israel and the settlements, returning to the growth over 23 years of 600,000 Jewish settlers in the disputed territories as the primary obstacle to peace.

When asked about Palestinian Media Watch evidence of Jews being called by Palestinian Imams as “sons of Pigs and Monkeys”, he referred back to the 2011 contretemps with Elliott Abrams over the Palestinian arguments for separation as the equivalency of making the future state “judenrein”. He argued that Israel wanted a 99 year commitment to security control over any future Palestinian state to protect settlers that rejected its sovereignty and independence. That, he contended is an insult to the Palestinians and evidence of occupation a cause for incitement to violence. He suggested that a Trilateral Anti-Incitement commission involving Israel, the Palestinians and the US failed to be activated.

When asked why a final agreement wasn’t signed at Camp David in 2000, Areikat responded that ‘both sides were not ready’. Further he accused then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright of reneging about an alleged agreement “that if things don’t happen, don’t accuse us.”

The reality as we now know, Arafat had already made up his mind following Barak’s pell mell withdrawal from the southern Lebanon security zone in May 2000 that Israel was weakened by Hezbollah jihad. That suggested to Arafat that the Palestinians could foment a new and more violent Jihad Intifada on September 28, 2000 when PM Sharon visited the Temple Mount.

Conclusion

The FPRI invitation to PLO “ambassador” Maen Rashid Areikat gratuitously gave him a platform to present the usual Palestinian accusations against Israel as the intransigent party without any rebuttal by an Israeli. It also revealed a new agenda, forming an alliance with Hamas, following the latter’s unveiling of a revised charter virtually akin to that of the PLO. The strategy rejects US involvement under the guise of a regional and major power multilateral negotiations “peace” process that if followed would result in the ultimate

division of Jerusalem and destruction of the Jewish nation of Israel.

[Watch](#) the FPRI dialogue with PLO “ambassador” Maen Rashid Areikat on the Future for Israel and Palestine.

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