

Smashing the Abbas Icon of Palestinian Non-Violence

By [Nicola Nasser](#)

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Indisputably, the 80 - year old President Mahmoud Abbas has established himself internally and worldwide as the icon of Palestinian non - violence. His Israeli peace partners leave none in doubt that they are determined to smash this icon, which would leave them only with opposite alternatives the best of which is a massive peaceful intifada (uprising) against the Israeli occupation.

It is true that Abbas cannot yet be called the Ghandi of Palestine. He has yet to follow in the footsteps of the founder of modern India and deliver similar national results by leading a massive popular revolution for liberation and independence, but his strictly adhered to non - violence platform continues to be the prerequisite for any peaceful settlement of the Arab - Israeli conflict in and over Palestine.

For decades, before and after the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories was completed in 1967, Abbas has stuck to his belief in negotiations as the only way to settle the more than a century old conflict. Building on Abbas' legacy, his chief negotiator, Saeb Erakat, wrote his book, "*Life Is Negotiations.*"

Abbas has all along rejected "armed struggle" and all forms of violence. He even did his best to avoid popular uprisings lest they glide into violence. Instead he has *unequivocally* opted to act as a man of state committed to international law and United Nations legitimacy.

Ever since he was elected as president he conducted Palestinian politics accordingly to make his people an integral part of the international community. His respect to the signed accords with Israel raised backlash among his own people when he described, for example, the security coordination agreement with the Hebrew state as "sacred."

Demonising Abbas

Nonetheless, the Israelis are still persisting on an unabated campaign to demonise Abbas, tarnish his image, undermine his peace credentials and deprive him of any gains for his people.

A *Haaretz* editorial on Oct. 4 said that the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was "fanning the flames of incitement against" Abbas. On Oct. 10, *The Times of Israel* quoted the Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Ya'alon as saying that "We have come a long way to convince Israeli society that he's (i.e. Abbas) no partner."

Evidently, this is the only way for the Israelis to absolve themselves from their signed peace commitments. Ya'alon's deputy, Eli Ben - Dahan, was quoted on the same day as saying

that “Palestinians have to understand they won’t have a state and Israel will rule over them.”

The Israeli minister of education Naftali Bennett, speaking to the army radio on Oct. 11, raised the anti - Abbas ante to an adventurous and irresponsible end game when he said that Abbas’ “absence is better.”

Bennett left it to the former Israeli ambassador to the United States, Michael Oren, to explain the *raison d’être* for his call for the “absence” of Abbas. In a *Ynetnews* article on Oct. 3, Oren concluded absurdly that “Abbas poses a danger which may be revealed as strategically more serious than the tactical dangers posed by (the Islamic Resistance Movement) Hamas.”

Former foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman was more forthright when he called on Oct. 12 for Abbas’ Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank to be “overthrown.”

According to William Booth, writing in *The Washington Post* on Oct. 10, “Israeli (Cabinet) ministers have branded Abbas ‘a terrorist in a suit’ and ‘inciter in chief’. They mock him as weak,” ignoring that their smearing campaign accompanied by their government’s determination to undermine his peace - making efforts is making him weaker internally and render the “two - state solution” a non - starter among his people.

A poll released by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research on Oct. 6 found that 65% of the public want Abbas to resign and if new presidential elections were held the deputy chief of the Islamic Resistance Movement “Hamas,” Ismail Haniyeh, would win 49 percent of the votes against 44 percent for Abbas. The “main findings” indicated a “decline in the level of support for the two - state solution” as 51 percent “opposed” this solution. What is more important in this context was that “57% **support a return to an armed intifada.**”

International Community Indifference



The Israeli anti - Abbas campaign could only be interpreted as a premeditated endeavour to evade a mounting international pressure for saving the so - called “two - state solution.”

The cancelation of a visit scheduled for last week by senior envoys of the international Middle East Quartet upon Netanyahu’s request was the latest example of the world community’s helplessness and indifference vis - a - vis Israel’s sense of impunity against accountability, which empowers the Israeli occupying power to escalate its crackdown on Palestinians under its military occupation since 1967.

In particular, U.S. President Barak Obama Administration’s “reversals” and “empty

promises,” in the words of Peter Berkowitz on Oct. 13, to Abbas as well as the inaction of the European Union and the other two Russian and UN members of the Quartet are encouraging Israel in its anti - Abbas campaign, thus discrediting the Palestinian icon of non - violence further in the eyes of his own people as incapable of delivery to walk away from his non - violent path.

On Oct. 12 the *AFP* reported that the “frustrated’ Palestinians “have defied” both Abbas and the “Israeli security crackdown” to launch what many observers are calling the beginnings of a “third intifada.”

To his credit, Abbas proved true to his non - violence commitment. Israeli daily *Haaretz* on Oct. 11 quoted a senior official of the Israeli Shabak intelligence agency as telling a cabinet meeting on the same day “that not only does Abbas not support ‘terrorist attacks’ but also tells PA security services to ‘undermine’ anti-Israel protests as much as possible.”

Abbas was on record recently to tell “our Israeli neighbours that we do not want a security or military escalation. My message to our people, security agencies and leaders is that the situation must calm down.” He warned against “an intifada which we don’t want.” On Oct. 6, he publicly told a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) that “we want to reach a political solution by peaceful means and not at all by any other means.”

The practical translation of his on record “principles” was self evident on the ground during the past two weeks of Palestinian rebellion against the escalating violence of the illegal Israeli settlers of the occupied Palestinian territories and the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), especially in eastern Jerusalem, which so far claimed the lives of more than 25 Palestinians and at least four Israelis in October 2015.

Within the PA security mandate, violence was practiced by the IOF only and only Palestinians were killed. Mutual violence was confined to Jerusalem, the area designated “C” by the Oslo accords in the West Bank and Israel proper, where security is an exclusive Israeli responsibility. There Abbas has no mandate. Most victims of both sides fell there and there only Israel should be held responsible and accountable.

One could not but wonder whether eastern Jerusalem and area “C” of the West Bank would have seen no violence had Abbas’ security mandate been extended to include both areas. U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, who announced on Tuesday plans to visit “soon” to calm down the violence, should consider this seriously.

Ending the Israeli occupation is the only way to move the situation “away from this precipice,” lest, in Kerry’s words, the two-state solution, “could conceivably be stolen from everybody” if violence were to spiral out of control.

In 1974 late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat appealed to the UN General Assembly to “not let the olive branch fall from my hand,” saying that he was holding a “freedom fighter’s gun” in his other hand. Abbas embraced the “olive branch” with both hands and dropped the “gun” forever.

In May this year, Pope Francis told Abbas during a visit to the Vatican: “I thought about you: May you be an angel of peace.” The Jewish Virtual Library’s biography of the Palestinian President vindicates the Pope’s vision. It hailed him as “considered one of the leading

Palestinian figures devoted to the search for a peaceful solution to the Palestinian - Israeli conflict... It was Abbas who signed the 1993 peace accord with Israel.

End of Era

Writing in *Al - Ahrām Weekly* on Oct. 12, the President of Arab American Institute, James Zogby, was one only of several observers who announced recently the “burial” of the Oslo accords. In “fact” Oslo “was on life support” and “has been dying for years” Zogby said, concluding: “What happened this week was the final burial rite.”

The Oslo accords were the crown of Abbas’ life - long endeavour. The “burial” of Oslo would inevitably be the end Abbas’ era.

Smashing the Abbas icon of Palestinian non - violence would herald an end to his era, dooming for a long time to come any prospect for a negotiated peaceful solution. His “absence,” according to Gershon Baskin, the Co-Chairman of Israel/Palestine Center for research and Information (IPCRI), will be “definitely the end of an era” and “will be a great loss for Israel and for those who seek true peace.”

Israelis by their ongoing campaign of defamation of Abbas would be missing an irreversible historic opportunity for making peace.

However, Abbas will go down in Palestinian chronicles as a national symbol of non - violence, who raced against time to make what has so far proved to be an elusive peace. Despite his failure, thanks to Israeli unrealistic dreams of “Greater Israel,” he will be the pride of his people in future in spite of the current widespread national opposition to his life - long commitment.

Nicola Nasser is a veteran Arab journalist based in Birzeit, West Bank of the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories (nassernicola@gmail.com).

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