

The Palestinian Authority's Response to the Israeli Aggression on Gaza Strip

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The Palestinian Authority (PA) in Ramallah was caught off guard by Al-Aqsa Flood Operation on 7/10/2023, followed by a widespread Israeli aggression on Gaza Strip (GS) and continuous incursions into various areas of the West Bank (WB). The PA has been confused, hesitant, helpless and weak in responding to the evolving confrontations and in taking practical measures against these aggressions. This situation raises questions about the factors influencing the PA's position.

First: Determinants and Influential Factors:

The most important factors influencing the PA decisions and positions regarding the Israeli aggression on GS and incursions into WB can be summarized as follows:

1. The PA is concerned about its existence and role in light of threats from the right-wing Israeli government to undermine the PA, limit its role and accuse it of financing terrorism. The lack of condemnation of Hamas' attack on October 7 has further complicated the situation. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has indicated the readiness of the Israeli army to confront the PA security forces, describing the Oslo Accords that established it as a "fateful mistake".
2. There is a contrast in opinions within the PA regarding how to deal with the aggression on GS: one advocating neutrality, caution and waiting for the outcome of the confrontation between Hamas and the occupation forces, and the other emphasizing the necessity of taking practical actions to preserve the PA's image and avoid condemnation for complicity and abandonment. News indicate that Mahmud 'Abbas, Hussein al-Sheikh and Majed Faraj adopt the first, which has reflected clearly in the PA's decisions and current position.
3. The security obligations imposed by the Oslo Accords, requiring the PA to coordinate security with Israel, maintain security conditions and prevent resistance activities. Unlike previous cases where the PA hinted at freezing security coordination with the occupation, it is noteworthy that no such position was made concerning the current aggression.
4. The US has called the PA to engage with its visions and arrangements in order to manage GS after the current confrontation with Hamas. The PA has responded to these demands, expressing its readiness to manage GS, after the end of confrontations, within a political framework that includes WB and GS.



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5. The political rivalry with Hamas and the desire to weaken it as a strong political opponent. Some PA prominent influential figures believe that the current confrontation between Hamas and Israel presents a crucial opportunity to settle the competition with their political rival and regain control over GS.
6. The positions of influential Arab parties that seek to end Hamas' rule of GS, weaken it and enhance the PA's role in WB and GS. They also want to stop the increase of resistance activities in WB, which threaten the PA's influence.
7. The PA's fear of economic repercussions if it adopts positions that provoke the Israeli side. Israel has decided to withhold about \$156 million from the monthly clearance funds, claiming that this amount includes salaries, allowances for employees and expenses for GS. There are indications that the Israeli security cabinet is considering the possibility of releasing the withheld clearance funds to the PA and allowing workers from WB to work inside the occupied Palestinian territories under new security conditions.
8. The decline of the PA's popularity among Palestinians due to its weak position concerning the war on GS and its inability to resist the widespread incursions in WB. Numerous angry protests in WB cities have called for the resignation of the PA's president. A recent opinion poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Political and Survey Research in collaboration with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung revealed a significant decline in the PA's popularity. About 58% of respondents called for its dissolution, while 72% supported Al-Aqsa Flood Operation, and 64% opposed the PA's participation in meetings with the United States, with the involvement of Arab countries, in order to discuss the future of GS after the war stops.

Second: The PA's Position on the Aggression:

Through monitoring the PA's actions and positions during the 70 days of Israeli aggression on GS and the continuous invasions of WB cities, its stance can be summarized in the following points:

- 1 .The PA had limited reaction, only declaring its rejection and condemnation of the Israeli aggression without undertaking effective and influential action to counter it. It relinquished its role in protecting the Palestinian people, or at least acknowledged its implicit inability to do so.
- 2 .The PA participated in the meetings of joint Arab and Muslim action institutions and became a member of the committees derived from these meetings to follow-up their decisions.
- 3 .The PA prevented its security forces from confronting the ongoing Israeli attacks in WB. It continued pursuing resistance groups and conducting arrests among Palestinian activists.



- 4 .The PA worked to restrain popular activities in WB that support the resistance and oppose the Israeli aggression on GS. It limited the spaces for popular movement and prevented interaction with the Israeli forces.
- 5 .The Palestinian mission at the United Nations (UN), along with some Palestinian ambassadors, have effectively clarified the Palestinian position, countered the Israeli narrative and worked to issue from the UN General Assembly resolutions to cease fire. They also confronted US proposals condemning the resistance.
6. The PA avoided calling for any joint national meetings to strengthen the internal front against the Israeli aggression. It emphasized that the PA and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) are the sole representatives of the Palestinian people, excluding any other party.

Conclusion:

In general, the PA's position aligned with the official Arab stance, dominated by a negative view of the Palestinian military resistance and reformist Islamic movements. This aligns with its desire for the PA to replace Hamas in managing GS.

Despite presenting itself as the representative of the Palestinian people, expressing their suffering and aspirations, its practical behavior on the ground in WB, especially through maintaining security coordination with Israel, suppressing popular movements and preventing any escalation of Intifadah, civil disobedience and armed resistance, established for a "comfortable" environment for Israel. It practically sidelined over three million Palestinians in WB from engaging in resisting activities, except under exceptional circumstances.

It seems that the PA leadership prefers a policy of waiting, anticipating what will result from the Israeli aggression on GS, with some of its leaders considering the defeat of the resistance and the dominance of the occupation a matter of time. Consequently, the PA is the candidate to take over the administration of GS, but it refuses to overtly acknowledge this, so as not to appear that it is coming riding Israeli tanks. For this would lead to further deterioration of its already declining popularity and loss of credibility. It prefers having transitional phase before assuming responsibility, within a national consensus if possible and a broader vision for genuine progress in the peace process.

Therefore, it is unlikely, in the coming days, that a substantial change in the PA's position on the Israeli aggression on GS will occur, given the continued influence of the mentioned factors and while it is waiting for battle outcomes to become clear.

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