



The Palestinian Red Line

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BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 227, December 16, 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: PA leader Mahmoud Abbas views recognition of Israel as the Jewish state as a red line. It is high time the Palestinians recognize the Jewish people's right to their ancient homeland, as Israel already recognized Palestinian rights in the land 35 years ago.

The media reported that Mahmoud Abbas, head of the Palestinian Authority (PA), rejected the peace proposals submitted by US Secretary of State John Kerry. The Palestinians leaked that Abbas sent a letter to Kerry reiterating his complete opposition to the demand to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. This was declared a "red line" that the Palestinians will not cross.

This "red line" is not just about semantics, but rather the essence of the conflict. The Palestinian position amounts to denying the Jews the right to establish their state in their homeland. It also indicates without any doubt that the Palestinians, despite the conventional wisdom, are not ready to reach a historic compromise with Zionism, the Jewish national revival movement. Therefore, a stable peace based on mutual recognition and ending all demands is not in the cards. The weak PA seems to accept partition of Mandatory Palestine into two states – perhaps in accordance with the PLO's stages approach – but it still refrains from accepting the legitimacy of the Zionist enterprise.

This is in stark contrast to Israel, which recognized the "legitimate rights of the Palestinians" in the September 1978 Camp David Accords, and is ready for generous territorial concessions in order to implement a partition of the Land of Israel/Palestine. The bitter truth is that the asymmetry in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not changed for over a century. In essence, this ethno-religious conflict is not about territory – although it obviously has a territorial

dimension – but about securing the recognition of the other side to national rights in a given territory.

Despite the image of untrustworthiness in keeping written agreements, Palestinians actually give great importance to the language used in the documents they are asked to sign. Yasser Arafat, generally viewed by most Israelis as an accomplished liar, refused in 2000 to sign an agreement that included a clause about an end to all demands. For him the conflict could end only with Israel's eventual demise. Similarly, Abbas cannot bring himself to put his signature to a document which says that the Jews have returned to their homeland. We know that the perception of Jews being foreign invaders of Palestine is a fundamental widespread Palestinian attitude, which is instilled in the younger generations in the PA-run schools.

The entrenchment of such attitudes is clear also by the lack of a debate among the Palestinians whether to recognize Israel as a Jewish state. Discussing Jewish rights to the Land of Israel is not conceivable in the current intra-Palestinian deliberations. Not even the so-called Palestinian moderates are calling for a debate among the Palestinians on whether to recognize the right of self-determination of the Jews in their historic homeland. Palestinian polls do not ask whether Israel should be recognized as a Jewish state. Normative language mentioning rights and international norms in Palestinian discourse is reserved for Palestinian demands only, and is never applied to understand what Israelis want.

The efforts of the Palestinian media to negate the Jewish past and historic links to the Temple Mount, and even the Western Wall, indicate an ideological commitment to rewriting history. Palestinian archeology is similarly used to erase all traces of Jewish presence from the land. Even Koranic sources mentioning the links of the Jews to the Land of Israel are ignored. Such Palestinian behavior serves only to prolong the conflict because it does not teach the Palestinians that Jews are part of the history of this land. All these acts are intolerable and must stop before Israel considers signing a comprehensive peace agreement.

It was a mistake not to insist on recognition of Israel being a Jewish state in the negotiations with the Palestinians in the 1990s. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu understands very well the need for such recognition by the Palestinians to ensure a historic peace deal, and his insistence on getting it in the framework of a comprehensive settlement is right on the mark.

Moreover, Palestinians are different than the Egyptians or Jordanians, who were not required to accept Israel as a Jewish state. They have no claims to

Palestine, while it is the Palestinians and the Israelis that fight for the same piece of land.

The Israelis recognized Palestinian legitimate rights 35 years ago. It is high time for the Palestinians to learn about the “other” they are in conflict with, and reciprocate if they are serious about making peace.

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BESA Center Perspectives Papers are published through the generosity
of the Greg Rosshandler Family