



Middle East

## **Will the Palestinian Authority Stop Security Cooperation with Israel?**

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Recently, starting from the end of February, Palestinian Authority officials have declared their intention to stop security coordination with Israel. This decision was made in the beginning of March, at the 27th meeting of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). A high-ranking PLO leader, Nabil Shaath, informed EU member states about the decision, while the chairman of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmud Abbas, repeated their intention during the economic conference held in Sharm El Sheikh on March 15. Then, immediately following the elections held in Israel on March 17, Palestinian spokesmen again reiterated this idea.

In response, the American administration warned the Palestinian Authority against bringing security coordination with Israel to a halt. The UN Secretary General, for his part, expressed his own concern about the decision. However, at the same time, Israeli spokespersons denied that there had been any change in the day-to-day management of security cooperation with the Palestinians. Indeed, as of now, no move in the direction of cutting off security coordination has been made.

Underlying the Palestinians' declared intention to stop security coordination with Israel is the protracted gridlock in the political process. It seems that the declaration was primarily meant to pressure Israel into renewing the transfer of tax money to the Palestinian Authority, which had been stopped in reaction to Palestinian diplomatic and legal activity against Israel in the international arena.

The main challenge now facing Israel and the Palestinian Authority is the political stalemate.

In regard to the Palestinian position, the Authority is committed to negotiating a peaceful resolution with Israel, but it is unwilling, or actually unable, to accept the

demands that Israel has presented as preconditions for a resolution (i.e., keeping the settlements blocs in place in the West Bank; preserving the unity of Jerusalem; renouncing the demand of Palestinian refugees' right to return; leaving the Israeli army in the Jordan Valley). Israel, for its part, is apparently not ready to return to the negotiating table due to the likelihood of public unrest if redeployment in the West Bank is discussed with the Palestinians, as well as the concern of a likely takeover of the West Bank by Hamas.

The latter rejects the idea of a two-state solution to the conflict and publicly expresses its preference for a one-state – Palestinian – resolution.

Therefore, it appears that the newly elected and established Israeli government will face the same difficulties and act under the same constraints as the previous one.

Indeed, if this situation continues without a breakthrough for a negotiated and mutually agreed upon resolution, there's a fair chance that the two sides will face a period of recurrent eruptions of violence. But to get the two sides out of deadlock, it will take political courage, historical responsibility, and vision, which, unfortunately, appears to be lacking, at least for now, on both sides. What is needed in the current situation is readiness on both sides to make ideological, political and territorial concessions, and to negotiate, agree, and, above all, implement a two-state solution.

It is possible that concerted international pressure on both sides to soften their positions will help get them back to the negotiating table and resume dialogue. In this regard, Russia might have an opportunity to play a more active role. After all, Russia is an active partner in the international "quartet" forum, which was established to promote a negotiated peace agreement between Israel and Palestine, and it enjoys good relations with both sides. Using its influential international position, which in the last several years has even become stronger, especially in the area of the Middle East, Russia could play a constructive role in renewing and pushing forward the peace process.

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