

## THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

**Steven Erlanger, Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, Europe, for *The New York Times***

Then we have not talked about, and I would like to get to, there was a lot of talk about the renewed or renovated Palestinian Authority, and you said it may have to wait for a new Israeli government, but a lot of people think it needs to wait for Abu Mazen to go. Itamar, talk a bit about how you see the Palestinian Authority, is it reforming, can it do this role, or does it just need to be a kind of figurehead?

**Itamar Rabinovich, Vice Chairman of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv, Distinguished Fellow at the Brookings Institution**

They clearly need a new leadership and personally I think Abu Mazen is very old and at some point, he will have to be replaced. Second, the government of the Palestinian Authority is corrupt and inefficient, and it needs to be overhauled. I am not sure they are ready for statehood right now and to have a failed Palestinian state, let us say, create a state by fear and for it then to fail after a year would be very counterproductive. I think we need to look at a three to five-year period to say that we will bring the PA together and begin negotiations with the Palestinians with a prospect of a two-state solution and move gradually. During this period, the Palestinian Authority could overhaul itself with Arab help. There are several important Palestinians in our host country here who are active in Palestinian politics and are supported by the government and that is the case in other countries with American and European support. We need to look at this three to five-year period as a period when we will move forward gradually.

**Nabil Fahmy, Dean Emeritus of the American University in Cairo, former Foreign Minister of Egypt**

People will assume I want to say something different, but it is the exact opposite. I just wanted to confirm that what Itamar is saying is exactly what I meant. We deal with the crisis and project the statehood three to five years down the road. Thank you.

**Steven Erlanger**

I must say the economic disaster in the West Bank is quite severe and there is a war going on there, it is not like nothing is happening, it is a second front. In the meantime, under this current government with Smotrich and Ben-Gvir, the settlement activity is proceeding, often with I would say the indifference of the Israeli forces. I do not think that they are actively helping much but what they are doing, is they are at war with Palestinian militancy and have killed an awful lot of Palestinians, you know they have bombed West Bank cities. For the PA even to get involved takes a bit of leap of courage because one of my friends in the West Bank, who teaches at

Birzeit University, said to me that one of the loneliest things in the world today is to be a moderate Palestinian. Nobody knows but this takes time, how do you manage the settler problem? Can you even have a viable Palestinian contiguous state at this point? You know the cliché but is it still possible?

**Itamar Rabinovich**

I do not think that Israel should be mentioning the names of Palestinians it would like to see because it would delegitimize them.

**Steven Erlanger**

It could be a death sentence.

**Itamar Rabinovich**

There was an excellent prime minister in the Palestinian Authority called Salam Fayyad, who began to build a state bottom-up. What he and other Palestinians I have been speaking to have said it that they have had this conflict for many years, you seem to have won, and we have looked at you and drawn a few lessons from what you did. What you did under the British Mandate is to build an embryonic state and it was there when independence came, and we need to do the same. Salam Fayyad is not alone in that outlook with his capabilities and these people need to be identified, not by Israel, and brought in to replace the current leadership of the Palestinian Authority and this could make a huge difference.

**Nabil Fahmy**

That is an important point but let me add something, and I say this regretfully. We cannot do it alone, in other words, Middle Easterners will not succeed in doing this alone for a multitude of reasons. We need international support as well as international leadership, not to do it for us but to provide, if you want, the support and the pressure to continue. Just the last couple of weeks or so, the Israeli Minister of Finance has openly said that he wanted the Israeli Jewish state to include parts of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi, and I think I missed the sixth.

**Steven Erlanger**

Parts of Florida too, maybe.

**Nabil Fahmy**

He also said the day before yesterday that Palestinians have three options, leave, live in Israel without political rights, or face the consequences of Gaza if they are going to resist. This cannot be what the world accepts. I support a two-state solution, we started the peace process, and we want peace with Israel with all the Arab countries but to bring these pieces together with Salam or others, we need serious international support. Trump is an interesting character, I do not know what he is going to do, but he is interested in that he likes deals. My problem is he likes deals in the business sense, not about right and wrong but about who is rich and who is poor, and who makes the benefit. His essence is not historic rights or rule of law, it is how you bridge the gap. Again, just yesterday, there was a decision I think to renounce the administrative law in the West Bank by the Israelis. Anyway, my concern is that the present Israeli government,

and I am saying government because I know there are other Israelis who want peace, will push to him that we should be realistic here and you cannot get a two-state solution. Let us actually go back to an interim situation where you get a ceasefire and claim it as the largest and the best in the world and change the realities on the ground, so they are irrevocable.

**Steven Erlanger**

This is why I asked the question. To some degree Trump wants to end Biden's wars and I am not sure he cares whose interests are sacrificed in order to get there, and then you have Huckabee who does not think Palestinians exist. What worries me is Trump giving the leeway for annexation of another part of the West Bank, like the Jordan Valley for instance.

**Nabil Fahmy**

I am concerned that the next step will be the Jordanian option, push the Palestinians towards Jordan, sacrifice Jordan in sake of the Palestinian state. That way it may appear feasible and that is a very dangerous approach.

**Itamar Rabinovich**

You remember the Abraham Accords but there was also the deal of the century, the plan put together by Trump's team, which was a bad plan but included two very important elements. It is true that 30% of the West Bank would have been lost to the Palestinians but there would be two states and secondly the idea of a swap was in the plan, and you could work to improve that plan. Second, without naming names, some of the people who were active on the Middle East in the first Trump administration are not there a second time, so I think he learned some lessons. Three, he said he wanted the problem in Gaza resolved before he came in because he does not want to waste his efforts on a minor issue, I think he wants to spend it on a bigger issue.