

Abbas offers Palestinian Authority as Israel's prison guard in Gaza

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Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh submitted his resignation and that of his cabinet to President Mahmoud Abbas Monday. He did so amid reports that Abbas has agreed to appoint a new government of non-affiliated “technocrats” to ostensibly administer the Gaza Strip when Israel’s war of genocide and ethnic cleansing ends.

Abbas has asked Shtayyeh, an economist who has held the post since 2019, to continue in a caretaker capacity until a new government is formed. Shtayyeh said he had resigned as part of a broader effort to form a new government and political formation given “the new reality” of the war and the need to achieve reconciliation among the various Palestinian political factions, extending the PA’s rule over both the West Bank and Gaza.

Abbas and the Fatah-dominated PA are ready to do whatever the US and the Arab regimes demand. A “revitalized” PA, insisted on by the Biden administration, would serve as Israel’s prison guard in the West Bank and Gaza.

The Palestinian Authority

The PA was set up under the 1993-95 Oslo Accords as the supposed government-in-waiting of a future Palestinian state, including the West Bank and Gaza, illegally occupied by Israel since the 1967 Arab Israeli war. It administers less than 40 percent of the West Bank and, following the 2006 parliamentary elections, the only ones ever held, it has been excluded from Gaza.

Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud party never accepted the Oslo Accords, denouncing Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin as a traitor for signing the agreement. Likud and other right-wing Zionist formations declared it incompatible with Israel’s right to security and the Jewish people’s right to the whole land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Netanyahu worked to undermine and subvert the agreement when he became prime minister in 1996 after Rabin’s assassination in 1995 by a right-wing Jewish fanatic.

The current Netanyahu government is made up of fascists, settlers and religious bigots committed to Jewish Supremacy from the Jordan to the Mediterranean. Not only has Israel withheld the PA’s tax revenues, leading to the late, partial, or even non-payment of wages for its 144,000 employees, it has also withdrawn the entry permits of Palestinian workers in Israel’s construction industry and the settlements, leading to the loss of 276,000 jobs (32 percent of employment) by December. It has set up 400 checkpoints in the West

Bank, impeding the movement of people and goods. As a result, the West Bank’s economy shrunk by more than 20 percent in the last quarter of 2023, with one third of businesses closed or on short time and daily losses of \$25 million, creating the most explosive social conditions.

Under Netanyahu’s declared plans for post-war Gaza, Israel would maintain security control indefinitely. At the very least, it would be a ruined wasteland, with its Palestinian population massively reduced by war, starvation, and disease. Though if Netanyahu can fully realise his aims, the Palestinians would be ethnically cleansed, not just from Gaza but the West Bank also, and driven into the desert.

Abbas and the PA’s role is being discussed within the context of some form of continued Palestinian presence.

At least publicly, without mentioning the PA, Netanyahu insisted instead on a “demilitarized” Gaza, the removal of all military capability beyond that necessary for public order and a “Southern Closure” on Gaza’s border with Egypt to prevent smuggling, while ceding the administration of civilian life to Gazans without links to Hamas. He also called for the dismantling of UNRWA, the UN agency that delivers aid and public services to Palestinians displaced from their homes in the 1947-49 and 1967 Arab Israeli wars and their descendants in the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Netanyahu has ruled out any recognition of a Palestinian state, the phantom once again waved around by Washington and its imperialist allies to suggest an end point for the Gaza genocide other than ethnic cleansing. He noted that the Knesset had voted by an overwhelming majority days earlier to reject the “unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state,” which “would not only fail to bring peace but would endanger the State of Israel.”

The fraud of a “revitalized” PA

The plans for a “revitalized” PA first saw the light of day in Doha last December at a meeting of US imperialism’s key Arab allies in the region, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar and Jordan. The Butcher of Cairo, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, set out his plans for a new provisional PA government paving the way for parliamentary and presidential elections to determine the post-war administration of the West Bank and Gaza.

With the inclusion of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), both more popular than Fatah, in any Palestinian government

unacceptable to Israel, the Arab despots have proposed Abbas appoint a government of technocrats with no explicit political affiliations which they would support financially.

The pretense of “elections” is an attempt to counter the massive hostility to the PA, which is despised for its corrupt, autocratic and ineffective rule and subservience to Israel. Following the first and only presidential elections in 2005, Abbas’s term was indefinitely extended in 2009. Having held no parliamentary elections since the first in January 2006, when Hamas achieved a surprise win over Fatah, Abbas dismissed parliament and has largely ruled by decree, cancelling parliamentary elections planned for 2021 fearing another defeat.

No election would be possible in Gaza anyway, with much of the infrastructure destroyed. And no legitimate election could take place in the West Bank, especially given that the most popular candidate to head the PA is Marwan Barghouti, currently serving several life sentences in an Israeli jail.

The Arab regimes proposed this revamping of the PA as part of a wider strategy, including an immediate and permanent ceasefire, a swap of hostages and prisoners, the reconstruction of Gaza, full UN recognition of Palestine and an international conference to agree the establishment of a Palestinian statelet.

This rosy scenario will never be realized. Discussions on a temporary ceasefire continue at time of writing, with Netanyahu and Biden receptive to a hostage/prisoner swap in return for a brief pause in plans for a ground invasion of Rafah. But Netanyahu has insisted that once the formalities of sending more aid in for a few weeks, hostilities will resume. Moreover, a permanent ceasefire is unacceptable to any of Israel’s political factions, all of whom support the expansion of the settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the transport networks linking them that make a contiguous statelet impossible.

With both Jordan and Egypt hell-bent on preventing a mass flight of destitute Palestinians into countries that are already social powder kegs, the PA’s actual role would be to guard an open-air prison that the Arab regimes have been complicit in creating—not only in Gaza but also in the West Bank.

To carry out its repressive role, the PA would require the backup of an international force, whose troops would most likely come from the Arab states who had already signed normalization agreements with Israel and would be financed jointly by them and the imperialist powers.

Egypt’s fundamental aim was to provide a political mechanism for maintaining “stability”—meaning suppressing all opposition to Israel’s military occupation of the Palestinian territories and preventing it igniting a wider regional struggle against Arab regimes that have colluded for decades with Israel. Their ultimate fear is that the global popular support for the Palestinians will coalesce with the growing anger over the deteriorating social conditions of their own citizens.

To this end they are determined to cobble together a “Palestinian” mechanism for administering the territories that is acceptable to US imperialism, but with an Arab stamp of approval to protect Washington as the real author of the Gaza genocide.

The quid pro quo is Washington’s commitment to back their “security” in the event of a new “Arab Spring” or mass movement to unseat them, to neutralize the Houthi threat to Saudi Arabia and to wage war against Iran, which has backed opposition forces to their rule, as part of the preparations for war on China.

While Shtayyeh stated publicly that Hamas is an integral part of the

Palestinian political arena, he insisted that they drop their programme of “armed struggle.” He declared, “In order for Hamas to be a member of the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organisation], there have to be prerequisites that Hamas has to accept—the political platform of the PLO, an understanding on the issue of resistance—and we are calling for popular resistance and nothing else. They need to come to our political agenda. Our ground is very clear. Two states on the borders of 1967 through peaceful means.”

On Tuesday, Tel Aviv agreed to begin transferring funds, withheld since October 7, to the PA. The previous Sunday, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen had written to Netanyahu, warning that Israel’s actions are “seriously impairing the West Bank economy, reducing income, and also at the same time having an adverse impact on Israel.”

On Thursday, Hamas and PIJ fell into line and joined the other Palestinian factions in further discussions on the makeup of a future Palestinian “government” in Moscow. That such discussions are taking place amid the Gaza genocide signifies the complete dead-end of the “two-state solution”, which was never more than a cruel deception aimed at suppressing the legitimate political, economic and social aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Bourgeois nationalist movements all over the world that once sought “independence” from their colonial masters have ended up ever more dependent upon outside powers to impose their rule. Palestinian statehood and “independence” have degenerated into a mechanism for a handful of families—in both the West Bank and Gaza—to enrich themselves through the exploitation and suppression of the Palestinian workers and rural poor. Coming later to independence than the other bourgeois nationalist movements, that wealth could only be achieved and maintained by presiding over impoverished Bantustans in the West Bank and an open-air prison in Gaza.

Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution demonstrates that the colonial and semi-colonial peoples cannot achieve any of their most basic needs—freedom from imperialist oppression, democratic rights, jobs, and social equality—under the leadership of any section of the national bourgeoisie. Trotsky insisted that in the imperialist epoch, the realization of the basic democratic and national tasks in the oppressed nations—tasks associated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the rise of the bourgeoisie—poses the taking of power by the working class. This in turn could be achieved only as part of the struggle for world socialist revolution, to place all the resources of the national and international economy under the control of the workers and oppressed masses.

The growing international movement against the Gaza genocide—in the US, Europe, Israel/Palestine, the Middle East and elsewhere—must break with all the old organisations, parties and institutions that have been utterly discredited by their complicity with imperialism and build a unified, international movement of the working class against capitalism and for socialism.



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