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The Meir Amit Intelligence and
Terrorism Information Center

The Palestinian Authority launched a propaganda campaign to support its appeal to the UN. The campaign is intended to show internal Palestinian support for the move, strengthen international support and calm Israeli apprehensions (by downplaying the issue of the "right of return"). It will probably be reinforced by broad – and potentially violent – popular activities, even though the Palestinians aspire to contain the events. The appeal will be played out on the background of the break-in to the Israeli embassy in Cairo and Turkey's inflammatory declarations.



One of the logos of the Palestinian campaign to appeal to the UN

Overview

1. On September 8 the Palestinian Authority launched a propaganda campaign called "Palestine: State Number 194" to support its appeal to the UN, with the theme of "statehood recognition." The campaign began with a communiqué to the UN Secretary General sent through the UN representative in Ramallah. On September 9 and 10 demonstrations (of between dozens and several hundred demonstrators) were held at the usual friction points in Judea and Samaria (Bila'in, Nili'in and Nebi Saleh). Further demonstrations and popular protests are expected throughout the Palestinian Authority territories and among Palestinian communities abroad, **represented by the PA as nonviolent, although in our assessment most of them have the potential for violence.**

2. **The campaign is supposed to last for three weeks. It began on September 8 (with a low profile) and is expected to peak on September 21 and 23,** with the opening session of the General Assembly and a speech by Mahmoud Abbas, respectively, **and continue until the end of September.** During those three weeks propaganda events will be held in the **Palestinian Authority, the Arab world** (where the Israeli embassy in Jordan may be a focus of demonstrations¹) **and abroad** (especially in the United States and Britain). The campaign met with difficulties in the Gaza Strip **because of Hamas' ideological reservations concerning the Palestinian Authority appeal to the UN.**

3. The campaign has already been launched, but so far **it has not gathered momentum** in the Palestinian arena or abroad for a variety of reasons: in **Judea and Samaria** the local population is occupied with daily life and does not expect the move in the UN to bring about a fundamental change. In the **Gaza Strip** the campaign met with difficulties because of Hamas' basic reservations regarding the entire issue. The campaign still has not gathered massive support **abroad,** and **the dramatic events in the Middle East** during recent months have overshadowed the Palestinian move. However, **as the date of the General Assembly's opening session approaches, the motivation of supporters in Judea and Samaria, the Arab-Muslim world and abroad is likely to increase, and the profile of both the propaganda campaign and accompanying popular activities may become higher.**

¹Appeals appeared on Facebook for demonstrations in front of the Israeli embassy in Amman.

The Campaign's Objectives

4. **The campaign's objectives are to demonstrate internal Palestinian and international support for the UN move and at the same time to remove the international community's apprehensions regarding its inherent dangers** by providing a response to the claims against the UN move raised by Israel. An attempt is also being made to appease Israeli public opinion by a direct appeal to important figures and the Israeli public itself.

5. **To achieve those goals the following themes are emphasized** by high-ranking figures in the Palestinian Authority and by the Palestinian media:

1) **The Palestinian Authority is determined to go ahead with its appeal to the UN to gain UN recognition of a Palestinian state** regardless of the pressures against it.

2) **The objective of the move** is for the UN to **recognize a Palestinian state as the 194th member nation**, with the June 4, 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital.

3) Recognition of a Palestinian state as the 194th member state of the UN **does not negate the legitimacy of the State of Israel**, is not meant to isolate it and is not part of the campaign to delegitimize it.

4) The Palestinian move in the UN is **not a replacement for negotiations** but rather an additional effort and supplements the foundation of the "two-state solution," and will give the negotiations a push forward in the "right direction." **There is no contradiction between the appeal to the UN and a return to negotiations** if Israel fulfills its commitments.

5) **The move does not pose a danger to Israel's security**. The protests will be nonviolent. **The security coordination between the PA's security forces and Israel will continue** with no relation to the appeal to the UN.²

²Mahmoud Abbas stated the security theme, as well as others directed at Israeli public opinion, at a meeting with 20 Israeli cultural figures accompanied by journalists in the Muqata'a in Ramallah (Haaretz, September 6, 2011, Avi Issacharoff reporting from Ramallah: "Abbas: As long as I am in office the security coordination will be preserved."). Israeli Arabs, on the other hand, received a different message, far more blatant. Yasser Abd Rabbo, head of the Palestinian campaign, referred to meetings between Mahmoud Abbas and Ehud Barak, describing the Israeli defense minister as "the biggest liar in Israel" and a "political crook" (Kul al-Arab, Nazareth news site, September 7, 2011).

Downplaying the Issue of the "Right of Return"

6. The Palestinian campaign **focuses on recognition of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. It does not stress the stubborn Palestinian demand for the "right of return" of the Palestinian refugees to the State of Israel with the 1948 borders, as former campaigns have (for example, the Nakba Day campaign whose main theme was the "right of return").** In our assessment, that is because **the Palestinian Authority is afraid that stressing the "right of return" might harm the Palestinian effort to make its appeal to the UN seem moderate enough to win wide international support.**

7. **How to present the "right of return" was an important issue in internal Palestinian discourse held both in the territories and abroad** during preparations for the appeal to the UN:

1) A group of independent Palestinian political figures sent a memorandum to Mahmoud Abbas demanding that the Palestinian initiative in the UN **stress all the so-called "rights" of the Palestinians, especially the "right of return," alongside the right to self-determination and an independent state.** That was because of **the fear that gaining membership in the UN might cancel the demand for the "right of return" of the Palestinian refugees to the territory of the State of Israel** (Al-Hayat, Ramallah, September 2, 2011).

2) Hamas also fears that the **September move might harm the "right of return."** For example, **Mahmoud al-Zahar**, a high-ranking Hamas figure in the Gaza Strip, warned that recognition of the right of the State of Israel to exist would harm the so-called "rights" of millions of Palestinian refugees to "Palestine." Hamas' daily **Felesteen**, published in the Gaza Strip, warned that the UN move would lead to pressure being exerted on Mahmoud Abbas to have the "right of return" limited to the territory of the future Palestinian state.³ **Ali Barake**, Hamas representative in Lebanon, said it was important that the Palestinian appeal to the UN not involve a cancellation of the "right of return" of the Palestinian refugees (Saida Online website, Lebanon, September 7, 2011).

3) **Al-Awda**, a journal published by the Palestine Return Centre (PRC) in London and affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, specializes in promoting the so-called "right of return." It printed an article in its September 2011 issue stating that

³For further information about Hamas' fears, see the August 4, 2011 bulletin "Senior Hamas figures reiterate extremist positions, reject the Palestinian Authority's proposed September UN move and emphasize the ideological and strategic differences between Hamas and the PA" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam/multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ipc_e215.pdf.

political commentators and experts in refugee issues warned against the Palestinian Authority appeal to the UN because it ignored the so-called "right" of the Palestinian refugees to return to the territory of the State of Israel by assuming that the issue would be solved in the future.⁴

8. An analysis of the themes of the campaign indicates that **the Palestinian Authority decided to downplay the "right of return" and to raise it at a later stage, after the Palestinian state had received recognition by the UN** (assuming a subsequent improvement in its new starting point). At the same time, PLO spokesmen tried to calm the apprehensions of the internal Palestinian arena.⁵

9. Thus the "right of return" was downplayed, but nevertheless it has been occasionally mentioned in connection with the appeal to the UN. For example, **Mahmoud Abbas**, describing the future Palestinian state to Fatah's Revolutionary Council on September 4, mentioned that the Palestinian refugees' "right of return" in accordance with UN Resolution 184 (Wafa News Agency, September 4, 2011).⁶ **Nabil Shaath**, a member of Fatah's Central Committee, accused "the leaders of the [Israeli] occupation" of stubbornly leaving the settlements in place and refusing to accept the return of the refugees (Press conference held in the Ambassador Hotel in he organized by Sweden's Social Democratic party, September 3, 2011).

The Popular Campaign Accompanying the Propaganda Campaign

10. High-ranking figures in the Palestinian Authority and Fatah have reiterated **the need for a nonviolent popular protest by the Palestinian public** to accompany the deliberations in the UN. For example, in the presence of International Quartet representative Tony Blair, **Mahmoud Abbas** stressed **"the importance of popular nonviolent action"** (Alhayat-j.com/newsite website, September 7, 2011). **Azzam al-Ahmed**, a member of Fatah's Central Committee, said that everyone involved, both the PLO and civilian organizations, had agreed

⁴Alawda-mag.com

⁵For example, **Hanan Ashrawi**, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee said that "membership in the UN will not cancel the rights of the refugees, but on the contrary – it will confirm them" (Al-Hayat, September 2, 2011). **Dr. Zakaria Ala'a**, also a member of the PLO's Executive Committee and chairman of the refugee department, said in a press release that the "right of return" would not be harmed by the appeal to the UN because it was anchored in UN Resolutions 181 and 194 (palpress.co.uk website).

⁶The number, 194, of the Palestinian state in the UN, coincidentally refers to the same number as UN Resolution 194 from 1948, which according to the Palestinians gives the Palestinian refugees the "right" to "return" to the territory of the State of Israel. The Israeli legal position is that the Palestinian interpretation of Resolution 194 is incorrect and cannot be used as a foundation for the claim of the "right of return."

that the appeal to the UN **would be accompanied by broad "popular activity"** (Fatehwatan.ps website, August 3, 2011).

11. As opposed to the local nature of the Bila'in-type demonstrations, the Palestinian Authority called for **large solidarity and protest demonstrations throughout Judea and Samaria** for the campaign. Mahmoud Abbas stressed the issue in a speech he gave before the PLO's Central Council (PTV, July 27, 2011). He said that Palestinians had to be the dominant factor in the demonstrations, as opposed to the prominent presence of foreigners and Israelis in the demonstrations in the traditional friction spots (i.e., Bila'in).

12. The protest demonstrations expected to be held **in the large cities in Judea and Samaria will climax during the days of the UN General Assembly session**. In our assessment, they may leak into **the main roads** (near the Israeli roadblocks⁷), **the traditional friction points** (Bila'in, Nili'in, etc.) and possibly **near Israeli settlements**.

13. The Palestinian Authority encourages the popular action but also wants to contain and control it. During Nakba Day and Naksa Day the PA proved its security forces were capable of controlling the intensity of the demonstrations. **However, experience has shown that Bila'in-type demonstrations described as "nonviolent" can spin out of control and turn into violent confrontations, even against Israeli and the PA interests**. In addition, **elements opposed to the negotiations and hostile to the PA, including Hamas networks, are liable to initiate provocations during the popular actions or may even carry out a terrorist attack which will draw attention away from the Palestinian move and sabotage its chances for success**.⁸

⁷On September 7 the official Palestinian Authority paper Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda published the results of a survey held by the well-established Palestinian Center for Public Opinion (PCPO, headed by Nabil al-Kukali). The survey examined the position of the public regarding the appeal to the UN. One of the questions related to methods for popular protest. Of the respondents, 25.9% were in favor of **large nonviolent demonstrations including the takeover of roadblocks and blocking the roads to the Israeli army and the settlers**. Another 15.2% were in favor of armed action against the IDF and the settlers. A majority of 53.4% were in favor of a return to the negotiating table with the Israeli government.

⁸**The exposure of Hamas military-terrorist cells in Judea and Samaria in recent months** is an indication of the possibility that the terrorist organizations, especially Hamas, may try to disrupt the events in September. The various cells which were exposed were kept in readiness for military action directed from external headquarters. **One of the cells, based in Hebron, was planning to carry out a suicide bombing attack on August 21 in the Pisgat Zeev neighborhood in Jerusalem** (Shabak.gov.il website). Terrorist attacks, whether carried out in Judea and Samaria or elsewhere (the Gaza Strip, the Israeli-Egyptian border) could **draw attention away from the September move and harm the message the Palestinian Authority wants to send about nonviolent protest**.

Organizing and Directing the Propaganda Campaign

14. **The propaganda campaign is organized and directed by the Palestinian Authority in collaboration with Fatah, the PLO, civilian organizations operating in the PA-administered territory (some of them affiliated with the Palestinian left) and independent individuals.** The campaign is headed by **Yasser Abd Rabbo, secretary of the PLO's executive committee.** Some of the organizers are in contact with pro-Palestinian organizations around the world, especially, in our assessment, in **the United States and Britain. Local ad hoc pro-Palestinian initiatives and international networks also exist** with no connection to the Palestinian Authority and other bodies operating in the territories.

15. The decision to wage the campaign was made at a meeting of the PLO's Executive Committee on August 3, 2011. The meeting was attended by representatives of civilian organizations and institutions operating in Judea and Samaria. A **coordinating committee** was appointed which would maintain contact with Palestinian institutions and communities abroad to organization the "popular campaign" (Dflp-palestine.net website, August 9, 2011). **Yasser Abd Rabbo said that they would invest efforts to make September 20 [the day of the deliberations at the UN] a day of the Arab streets and of the Arab spring, which was "Palestine's true hope"** (Reuters, August 2, 2011).

16. Subordinate to Yasser Abd Rabbo there are **various coordinators** responsible for disseminating information to the media about activity in Judea and Samaria and about interfacing with the organizations abroad connected to the campaign. Among them are **Abdallah Abu Rahma, coordinator for popular activity**, who gained experience in the protests at Bila'in. The campaign organizers intend to open a situation room for coordinating campaign activities which will operate throughout September (Voice of Palestine Radio, September 5, 2011). According to **Ahmed Assaf**, one of the campaign coordinators, approximately 400 volunteers, government institutions, civilian organizations and municipalities will be active in the campaign. **It is expected to peak on September 21, the first day of the General Assembly session, and on September 23, the day Mahmoud Abbas speaks before the UN** (PNN, September 5, 2011).

17. The campaign organizers are making **intensive use of the Internet, especially Facebook**, to enlist volunteers and disseminate information:⁹

⁹The Internet has been a popular tool for social protest in the Arab world and pro-Palestinian propaganda events held this past year (the flotilla, the "fly-in," Nakba Day and Naksa Day)



The campaign's website, palestinestate194.com

- 1) **A number of websites have been set up.** The official site appears in English, Arabic, French, German and Spanish, and calls for people to join the campaign.
- 2) **A number of designated Facebook pages have been opened.** They call for various propaganda activities, such as waving Palestinian flags in streets around the globe on September 28, **holding demonstrations in front of Israeli embassies in Egypt and Jordan, and in front of Palestinian delegations.**



The campaign's Facebook page

Events Planned in Judea and Samaria

18. Campaign events include:

- 1) **Distributing fliers and other propaganda material** about the campaign throughout Judea and Samaria to encourage the public to participate in activities. Distributing the material is supposed to be the responsibility of the governors of the various Palestinian Authority districts.
- 2) **Teaching the significance of the process to school children** as part of the curriculum.
- 3) **Using the media** to display videos, panel discussions and programs about the issue.



An example of the lead-in to a campaign video

4) **Demonstrations and marches with the theme of "Palestine, State Number 194th."** The marches will be held at various locations, including at foreign delegations and in large cities, and will **culminate in so-called "the million-man march" planned for September 21, the day of the UN General Assembly's opening session.** Demonstrations against the security fence will continue at the **traditional friction points: Bila'in, Nili'in and Qalandia.**

5) **Giant screens will be set up in city squares** to broadcast Mahmoud Abbas' speech on September 23.

6) **The "flying chair" campaign:** A chair upholstered in UN blue was constructed to symbolize the chair of "Palestine" in the UN. It is being transferred from place to place in the Palestinian Authority and is supposed to eventually reach New York.



The flying chair campaign (Wafa News Agency, September 5, 2011)



The chair next to Yasser Arafat's grave in Ramallah (Wafa News Agency, September 5, 2011)

7) **Various events sponsored by the Catholic Church,** among them a peace festival and candlelight procession in front of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

The Gaza Strip

19. Hamas spokesman **Sami Abu Zuhri** declared that the Hamas movement, both inside the Gaza Strip and abroad, **was not party to the campaign activities** because there was no national consensus about the move, and that was because it would not benefit the Palestinian people (Qudsnet website, September 5, 2011). **The campaign coordinator for the Gaza Strip, Muhammad al-Zaq**, said that Hamas had forbidden all public action for the campaign in the Gaza Strip in general and Gaza City in particular (Voice of Palestine Radio, September 7, 2011). Nevertheless, in our assessment Hamas will not completely prevent events from being held in the Gaza Strip, but they can be expected to keep a low profile.¹⁰

20. Rogue organizations and operatives can be found in the Gaza Strip, including those affiliated with the global jihad, with reservations about the move in the UN and **unfettered by the considerations constraining Hamas**. In our assessment they are liable to make an attempt to accompany the events in the UN with terrorist attacks to attract attention away from them.

The Propaganda Campaign Abroad

Initial Overview

21. Yasser Abd Rabbo, who heads the campaign, stressed **the importance of waging it in the international arena**. At the August 3, 2011 Executive Committee meeting where the decision was made to conduct the campaign, he said that the **campaign demanded global activity** which would include all the Palestinian communities around the world.

22. A designated website for the campaign was set up in five languages to enlist support groups and it sent out a call for the citizens of the world to join. A site called Palestine194.org was set up in Britain which also issued a call to activists and organizations, trade unions and universities around the globe to join the "Palestine 194" campaign. According to the website, there will be a series of activities which will **climax on September 21**. The organizers intend to turn the date into **an international activity day for the sake of the Palestinians**. There were similar calls on other websites.

¹⁰**It can be assumed that Fatah and Palestinian Authority supporters in the Gaza Strip will succeed in carrying out some sort of activity**. For example, Ma'an News Agency reported that a group of children in the Gaza Strip waving Palestinian flags was brought from the southern Gaza Strip to the Erez crossing in the north (Ma'an News Agency, September 5, 2011).

23. According to our information about the organizations and networks abroad participating in the campaign, especially in the United States, **in some cases they have been set up ad hoc in view of the Palestinian move in the UN, and in others they are pro-Palestinian organizations of long standing.** In our assessment the organizations participating in the campaign to delegitimize Israel, striving to destroy it and rejecting the two-state solution have not yet engaged in intensive activity regarding the appeal to the UN. However, in some cases their activists joined networks striving to promote the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.¹¹

Europe

24. On September 15 the Freedom for Palestine Campaign announced the date of the end of the campaign to get one million signatures in support of the declaration of Palestine as an independent state with the June 4, 1967 borders and Jerusalem as its capital. **The signatures will be presented to the European Parliament on September 21,** and preparations are being made in Brussels to transmit them. The leader of the campaign said that people were asked to sign through political parties, social organizations and solidarity with Palestine committees (Bana.ir website, August 18, 2011).

Britain

25. A London campaign called **September 15** is organizing a demonstration whose date is not yet known. The UN has declared September 15 as international democracy day.



The campaign's logo

¹¹ Such ad hoc joint ventures among the organizations accepting the two state solution AND those delegitimizing Israel and seeking to destroy it were common in the past.

The United States

26. The September 15 campaign issued a call for activity on September 15 and the two days following.¹² Demonstrations are being organized throughout the United States, the most important of which will be held in New York. Other cities will include **Omaha**, organized by Katie Huerter from a network called Nebraskans for Peace; **Pittsburg**, where the protest will be organized by Students for Justice in Palestine; **San Francisco**, organized by Code Pink and the Palestinian Solidarity Movement; and **Washington, DC**, where a demonstration is planned near the State Department building, and from there the demonstrators will march to the White House (Facebook). The demonstrations will call on the United States not to support Israel. A network called **Stop US Aid to Israel** will participate in the demonstration.

27. The website of Adalah-NY (The New York Campaign for the Boycott of Israel) has information about **a march which will held on September 15 in Times Square and from there move eastward to the UN building**. It will be sponsored by a large number of organizations operating under an umbrella organization called the **Palestine UN Solidarity Coalition**. It is apparently an ad hoc group organized for the needs of the Palestinian appeal to the UN.

28. Among the organizations participating in the New York march are the following:

1) **The WESPAC Foundation**: According to their website, they "provide outreach and community to individuals, groups and leaders in civic and religious organizations...who find themselves without a voice or support system for their progressive positions."¹³ It is located in Westchester, New York, and has a committee dealing with the Middle East, primarily the Palestinian issue, including the so-called "right of return."

2) **The US Palestinian Community Network (USPCN)**: A network of Palestinians in the United States which originated from the Palestinian Popular Conference held in Chicago in August 2008. It works for self-determination and equality for the Palestinians, as well as for the so-called "right of return" and the end of the "colonization" of Palestine.

¹²According to the Mondoweiss blog, it is a network established by a journalist named Mya Guarnieri, who is located in Tel Aviv.

¹³<http://wespac.org/index.php/about-us/52-mission>



From the USPCM website (August 15, 2011).

- 3) **American Muslims for Palestine:** An organization whose objective is to "educate" the public about the Palestinian right to self determination.
- 4) **The United National Antiwar Coalition:** A group which opposes the United States policies in the war on terrorism.
- 5) **The International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network:** An international network of Jews who oppose the existence of the State of Israel and work to promote Palestinian rights, including the "right of return." The network is also active in the campaign to boycott Israel (BDS).
- 6) **The International Socialist Organization:** An organization with branches throughout the United States. Its objectives are justice and liberation in the present for the sake of a socialist society in the future.

29. A network called **The US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation** also conducts activities and includes organizations working to change American policy toward Israel and the Palestinians. In August 2011 it sent a letter to the American State Department signed by 125 groups including 30 national organizations and a petition signed by more than 25,000 people calling on President Obama not to use the American veto in the United Nations on the Palestinian issue. Between September 16 and 19 (on the eve of the opening session of the General Assembly) the network will hold its tenth annual convention in Washington, DC, with the participation of Omar Barghouti (an activist from Ramallah who heads the international BDS campaign).

Israel

30. The September 15 network is organizing activities in front of the American Embassy in Tel Aviv.