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PA politics in crisis as their agenda does not agree with Arab donors who are cutting funds 08.09.19

The village of Al-Ram near Ramallah

PA economic crisis begins affecting civilians

Analysts say the money received by the PA is political funding and donors base their support of the PA on their political agenda, cutting funds when they do not agree with Ramallah and that includes Arab countries as well

The Media Line|Published: 08.09.19, 18:48

Due to the economic crisis the Palestinian Authority (PA) is going through, civilians say the situation is increasingly affecting their daily lives.

The latest example came when Jibril Rajoub, the head of the Palestinian Football Association (PFA), warned that the league's new season, which is scheduled to begin at the end of August, might have to be canceled.

"I briefed President Mahmoud Abbas on the situation. Unless funding is provided, there will be no league," Rajoub said, adding that "the president expressed his keenness to provide a minimum for the continuation of the league this year."

Omar Al Jafari, PFA spokesperson said that before the PA economic crisis, the football clubs used to receive an annual stipend to cover their expenses. "Each club used to get paid between 70 to 80 thousand dollars until last year."

Al Jafari revealed that Ooredoo Palestine, a private telecommunications company that used to sponsor the PFA, announced it too would be suspending funding.

He added that the PFA was looking for alternative sources of revenue, but that the difficult financial situation in the West Bank was affecting all sectors and that so far, no corporate donations had been received.

Last year, the Israeli cabinet approved a law slashing funds to the PA in the amount equivalent to what the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) – the dominant umbrella group that speaks for the Palestinian people – pays to Palestinian security prisoners and the families of those who died in clashes with Israeli soldiers, often as they were attempting to perpetrate attacks.

While that amount represents about 10 percent of the total taxes and tariffs Israel collects on behalf of the PA – as stipulated by the 1993 Oslo Accords – Abbas has refused to accept the remainder of the monthly installments totaling over an estimated \$150 million.

Hilmi Hamdan, general secretary of the Palestinian Teachers Union, told The Media Line that educators are going through tough times.

“For the last seven months, we have been paid half of our salaries. Teachers and public employees can barely buy basic goods for their families,” he said.

“The Palestinian people as a whole are being affected due to Israeli occupation policies and its financial blackmail of the PA”.

Hamdan added that “Israeli policies aim to pressure our leadership to accept the so-called ‘Deal of the Century’ (the Trump Administration’s peace plan) and end the Palestinian cause.” Concluding that no component of the Palestinian society would accept the deal.

“We stand with the PA and its position.”

In April, the World Bank called for an urgent solution to the Palestinian economic crisis and submitted a report to the Coordination of Assistance to the Palestinian People Committee in Brussels.

In the report, Anna Bjerde, the World Bank’s Director of Strategy and Operations, Middle East and North Africa, outlined the status of the Palestinian economy.

“The economy, which did not see real growth in 2018, now faces a severe fiscal shock,” Bjerde wrote, “so it’s necessary to find a solution urgently to prevent further deterioration of economic activity and living standards.”

Wael Aldaya, an economic analyst and head of the research and studies department at the Islamic University of Gaza, told The Media Line that the PA economic crisis started in 2017 due to the fact that most donor countries decreased their contributions.

“The money received by the PA are political funds,” Aldaya contended. “Donors support the PA based on a political agenda. If the PA doesn’t go along with their political views, they simply cut their funding, including some Arab states.”

He added the PA’s decision to react to the funding reductions by cutting spending worsened the crisis.

“The public sector isn’t spending so the private sector isn’t producing; we are witnessing a recession.” To avoid a complete collapse of the economy, Aldaya urged the PA to pressure donors to fulfill their responsibilities without regard to politics.

In 2018, the Trump administration reduced its direct aid to the PA and to projects in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by roughly \$300 million. Palestinian-American relations have been tense, since the PA imposed a diplomatic boycott on the White House to protest President Donald Trump’s December 2017 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

Palestinian leaders are engaging in new efforts to reduce their economic dependence on Israel by looking to Arab states for cooperation.

Palestine leadership split on agreements, may gradually sever ties with Israel
08.08.19

Palestinian leadership split on suspension of agreements with Israel

Sources say implementation of the decision to sever ties with Israel could harm the Palestinian people so the leadership will have to think hard before taking any steps in that direction

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The first meeting of the committee tasked with cutting ties with Israel at the request of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, saw sharp differences of opinion.

Abbas, 84, has made similar threats before but has not implemented them.

According to a Palestinian source with knowledge of the meeting, Abbas is not eager to sever relations with Israel, at least not yet.

Rather, he wants to wait before any major steps are taken. The source stressed that the Palestinian leadership isn't unified on the issue.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that the meeting saw sporadic shouting matches between participants, as Abbas tried to referee.

In an interview Fatah spokesman Osama Al Qawasmi contended that there is consensus among the Palestinian leadership. "There is no disagreement, but there are serious discussions, and everyone agrees that the next stage must be clear. The Palestinians alone cannot be committed to the agreements while Israel is in breach. The time has come for Israel to shoulder its responsibilities as an occupying force."

The meeting took place at the PA presidential headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah, where 14 top officials, all men, gathered.

According to the source, the meeting, which was chaired by Abbas, was split into two camps. One was led by Abbas who doesn't want to see a quick implementation of the decision. He was supported in his position by Palestinian Civil Affairs Minister Hussein al-Sheikh, who meets regularly with Israeli officials.

The other camp, headed by secretary general of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Saeb Erakat, advocated for quick and tangible measures to be taken to send a clear message to Israel, and to appease the Palestinian street.

The source said the discussion was intense and differences were so deep that those in attendance couldn't agree on a final statement.

Naser Tahboub, a former Palestinian official, explained Abbas' call to halt all agreements with Israel is "easier said than done."

"President Abbas's announcement was an expression of political anger over the situation, but I do not think it is a decision that is going to be implemented any time soon," Tahboub said.

He added that implementing the decision will be difficult. "There are consequences that may harm the Palestinian people. I think the leadership will think deep before taking such a step and that's why we see slow movement on the side of the PA."

Also present at the meeting was Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh, who called for "gradual disengagement" with Israel.

He said that his government needs time to find alternative partners to Israel.

Spokesman Al Qawasmi said the Palestinian leadership had made up its mind to confront ongoing Israeli actions and attacks against Palestinians.

Relations between the PA and the Israeli government have worsened in recent months, reaching a nadir when last month Israeli forces demolished dozens of housing units in a Palestinian-controlled neighborhood near Jerusalem.

Last February, Israel decided to deduct about \$10 million a month from tax revenues it collects on behalf of the Palestinians. Israel says the amount is equal to salaries the PA pays to families of prisoners or directly to inmates in Israeli jails.

Israel views these payments as encouraging attacks on Israelis, while Palestinians see them as providing support for families who have often lost their main breadwinner.

The Palestinians have in response refused to take any of the roughly \$170-\$200 million in monthly tax revenues Israel collects for it, saying it will not do so until Israel agrees to provide the full amount.

Article written by Mohammad Al-Kassim. Reprinted with permission from The Media Line 8/8/19

Trump says he wants stronger gun checks but gives no details

President says Americans 'must condemn racism, bigotry and white supremacy' and that he has directed FBI to examine steps to identify and address domestic terrorism, blames media for wave of gun violence, ignoring own inflammatory rhetoric on migrants
Associated Press | Published: 08.05.19 , 17:53

WASHINGTON -- U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday condemned weekend shootings in Texas and Ohio as "barbaric" attacks and crimes "against all humanity" as he called for bipartisan cooperation to strengthen the nation's gun laws.

Trump said he wants legislation providing "strong background checks" for gun users, but he provided scant details and has reneged on previous promises after mass shootings.

"We vow to act with urgent resolve," Trump said Monday.

Trump spoke Monday from the White House about shootings that left 29 dead and dozens wounded. He suggested early on Twitter that a background check bill could be paired with his long-sought effort to toughen the nation's immigration system.

But he didn't say how or why he was connecting the issues. Both shooting suspects were U.S. citizens, and federal officials are investigating anti-immigrant bias as a potential motive for the massacre in El Paso, Texas, that claimed 20 lives.

"In one voice, our nation must condemn racism, bigotry and white supremacy," Trump said, adding that he had directed the FBI to examine steps to identify and address domestic terrorism. "These sinister ideologies must be defeated. Hate has no place in America," he said.

Trump has frequently sought to tie his immigration priorities -- a border wall and transforming the legal immigration system to one that prioritizes merit over familial ties - - to legislation around which he perceives momentum to be building.

Over the weekend, Trump tried to assure Americans he was dealing with the problem and defended his administration in light of criticism following the latest in a string of mass shootings.

"We have done much more than most administrations," he said, without elaboration. "We have done actually a lot. But perhaps more has to be done."

Congress has proven unable to pass substantial gun violence legislation this session, despite the frequency of mass shootings, in large part because of resistance from Republicans, particularly in the GOP-controlled Senate. That political dynamic seems difficult to change.

And Trump himself has reneged on previous pledges to strengthen gun laws.

After other mass shootings he called for strengthening the federal background check system, and in 2018 he signed legislation to increase federal agency data sharing into the system. But he has resisted Democratic calls to toughen other gun control laws.

In February, the House approved bipartisan legislation to require federal background checks for all gun sales and transfers and approved legislation to allow a review period of up to 10 days for background checks on firearms purchases. The White House threatened a presidential veto if those measures passed Congress.

At a February meeting with survivors and family members of the 2018 Parkland, Florida, school shooting in which 17 people died, Trump promised to be "very strong on background checks."

Trump claimed he would stand up to the gun lobby and finally get results in quelling gun violence. But he later retreated, expressing support for modest changes to the federal background check system and for arming teachers.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer tweeted that if Trump is serious about strengthening background checks, he should demand Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell "put the bipartisan, House-passed universal background checks bill up for a vote."

In the El Paso attack, investigators are focusing on whether it was a hate crime after the emergence of a racist, anti-immigrant screed that was posted online shortly beforehand. Detectives sought to determine if it was written by the man who was arrested. The border city has figured prominently in the immigration debate and is home to 680,000 people, most of them Latino.

On Twitter Monday, Trump seemed to deflect from scrutiny over the manifesto, which had language mirroring some of his own. As Democrats have called on Trump to tone down his rhetoric, Trump blamed the news media for the nation's woes.

"Fake News has contributed greatly to the anger and rage that has built up over many years," he claimed.

As Trump weighs trips to the affected communities -- the Federal Aviation Administration advised pilots of a presidential visit Wednesday to El Paso and Dayton, Ohio -- local lawmakers signaled opposition to his presence.

Rep. Veronica Escobar, a Democrat who represents El Paso, said Trump is "not welcome" to visit the city.

In recent weeks, the president has issued racist tweets about four women of color who serve in Congress, and in rallies has spoken of an "invasion" at the southern border. His reelection strategy has placed racial animus at the forefront in an effort that his aides say

is designed to activate his base of conservative voters, an approach not seen by an American president in the modern era.

Trump also has been widely criticized for offering a false equivalency when discussing racial violence, notably when he said there were "very fine people, on both sides," after a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, that resulted in the death of an anti-racism demonstrator.

On gun control, a majority of Americans have consistently said they support stronger laws, but proposals have stalled repeatedly in Congress, a marked contrast to some countries that have acted swiftly after a mass shooting.

In March, a poll conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found a majority of Americans favor stricter gun laws. The survey was conducted both before and after a mass shooting at two mosques in New Zealand. It found that 67 percent of Americans support making US gun laws stricter, while 22 percent say they should be left as they are and 10 percent think they should be made less strict.

Less than a week after the mosque shootings, New Zealand moved to ban "military-style" semi-automatic weapons and high-capacity magazines; similarly, after a mass shooting in 1996, Australia enacted sweeping gun bans within two weeks.

The poll suggested many Americans would support similar measures, but there's a wide gulf between Democrats and Republicans on banning specific types of guns. Overall, 6 in 10 Americans support a ban on AR-15 rifles and similar semiautomatic weapons. Roughly 8 in 10 Democrats, but just about 4 in 10 Republicans, support that policy.

Iran threatened to block all energy exports of the Strait of Hormuz, if unable to sell oil
08.05.19

Iran: Further breach of nuclear deal in one month unless Europeans act

Tehran stockpiling enriched uranium, heavy water above limits agreed after Trump quit 2015 agreement last year and reimposed sanctions; Iranians could restart centrifuges, begin higher-grade enrichment as they rap 'inaction' of European signatories to preserve deal

Reuters|Published: 08.05.19 , 20:15

GENEVA - Iran told European powers on Monday it would further reduce compliance with its 2015 nuclear deal in about a month's time if they were still failing to protect it from crippling U.S. sanctions, reimposed after Washington exited the deal.

European signatories to the deal have so far been helpless to prevent U.S. President Donald Trump trying to force Iran to accept stricter limits to its nuclear activity and regional behaviour by strangling its vital oil trade.

Iran has threatened to block all energy exports out of the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of global oil traffic passes, if it is unable to sell oil as promised by the 2015 deal in exchange for curbing its uranium enrichment programme.

"With the continuation of the inaction of the Europeans in carrying out their commitments (to the nuclear deal) ... Iran will take a third step (in reducing commitments) in approximately one month," said Behrouz Kamalvandi, spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

Iran had increased its stockpile of heavy water above 130 tonnes and its reserve of enriched uranium above 300 kilograms, Kamalvandi told IRIB news agency.

The deal - designed to forestall Iran making high-enriched uranium suitable for nuclear bombs in short order - permitted a maximum reserve of 300 kilograms of low-enriched uranium. It also set a cap of 130 tonnes of heavy water, which in large quantities can yield plutonium, an alternative atom bomb fuel.

"What is certain is that by putting aside or suspending our commitments we will increase the speed of our nuclear activities," said Kamalvandi.

He did not specify what Iran's next step would be, but Tehran warned last month it could reactivate centrifuge machines and ramp up enrichment of uranium to 20% fissile purity.

The deal set an enrichment ceiling of 3.67%, the level deemed as appropriate for electricity generation and far below the 90% of weapons grade, though 20% would mark a big advance significantly reducing the time needed to yield bomb material.

It has long denied seeking a nuclear bomb but appears to be cranking up enrichment levels gradually as leverage to push the nuclear deal's remaining parties to do more to save it.

All Iran's steps, he said, were reversible if Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China eventually brought it protection from Washington's sanctions squeeze.

War fears

Fears of a Middle East war with global repercussions have risen since Trump withdrew in May 2018 from the nuclear deal embraced by predecessor Barack Obama and revived a panoply of sanctions meant to force Tehran into wider security concessions.

Oil tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz has become the focus for the increasingly tense U.S.-Iranian standoff and the Trump administration has beefed up its military presence in the Gulf since May.

On Monday, Iran declared that it ran security in the strait and would no longer tolerate "maritime offences" there, a day after the Islamic Republic said it had seized a second oil tanker near the strategic waterway that it accused of smuggling fuel.

On Sunday, Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards Corps diverted the Iraqi tanker to its shores and detained its seven crew, state media reported. Guards commander Ramezan Zirahi was quoted as saying it was carrying 700,000 litres of fuel.

"Iran used to forgo some maritime offences in ... (the) Gulf but will never close (its) eyes anymore," Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told a televised news conference in Tehran.

"Iran is responsible for the security and safety of the Strait of Hormuz and the region."

Zarif also criticised U.S. sanctions imposed on him on Wednesday, saying Washington had slammed the door to any diplomacy to salvage the 2015 nuclear deal.

Strains between Washington and Tehran have sharpened since the spring. In June, Iran's downing of a U.S. surveillance drone triggered preparations for a U.S. retaliatory air strike that Trump called off at the last minute.

"Iran will leave its nuclear deal with the powers if necessary," Zarif said. Iran has so far rejected calls by the Trump administration to negotiate a new deal.

He also labelled as "piracy" the seizure by Britain in July of an Iranian oil tanker near Gibraltar, that London accused of violating European Union sanctions on Iran ally Syria.

Two weeks later, Iran's Revolutionary Guards seized a British tanker, Stena Impero, near the Strait of Hormuz for alleged marine violations.

India's new Minister Modi invaded Kashmir Pakistan, arresting leaders & cut all internet 08.07.19

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi Just Lit the Fuse in Kashmir

Like Trump in the U.S., Modi has encouraged ethnic and religious hatred in India and destroyed norms. In blacked-out Kashmir the silence is deafening.

Matthew Clayfield

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OPINION

Suhaimi Abdullah/Getty

Not **three months after it won a second term** in power—and only five since it rewrote the rules of engagement in South Asia in a balls-to-the-wall display of **reckless** one-upmanship—the Hindu nationalist government of Narendra Modi is showing once again how willing it is to **risk regional stability in its feverish pursuit of ideological ends.**

The **status of Kashmir has been disputed between India and Pakistan** since the partition of British India in **1947**. Earlier this year, Modi ordered airstrikes against Pakistani targets after a suicide attack against a **military convoy in the Kashmiri** district of Pulwama **killed 40 Indian soldiers**. It was the largest such attack in decades and resulted in dogfights between the Pakistani and Indian air forces above the infamous Line of Control for the first time since 1971.

What Modi and his government have done now, however, is arguably more momentous, and equally as dangerous.

After **building up India's troop** presence in the region for the better part of a week, while simultaneously ordering Hindu pilgrims and foreign tourists to “curtail their stay” in light of unspecified terror threats, on Monday it split the state of Jammu & Kashmir into two new “Union Territories”—substantially less powerful entities to be controlled directly by Delhi.

This was accomplished by a **repeal of the Indian constitution's Article 370**, which has **granted Kashmir** some modicum of **autonomy since 1949**. Along with Article 35A, which was introduced in 1954 and forbade non-Kashmiris from permanently settling or buying land in the region, it has long been a thorn in the side of Hindu nationalists and their vision of a unified and religiously homogeneous country.

For Kashmiris, the majority of whom are Muslim, Article 370 represented a measure of insurance against, among other things, the communal hatred that Modi has stoked throughout his career in politics and which has become normalized (and expressed with ever-increasing violence) since he first came to power in 2014.

The theories that had swirled around the troop buildup—including one suggesting India was nervous about the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the heightened terrorist threat it might create on the Line of Control—ultimately were cut down to size by Occam's razor: this was, as it appeared, entirely about the Hindu nationalists' desire to bring about “Akhand Bharat,” or Undivided India, which is to say an undivided India united by Hinduism.

“From Kashmir to Kanyakumari India is one.”

Hindutva Twitter predictably exploded—jubilantly, yes, but with no less poison on its fangs than usual. “From Kashmir to Kanyakumari,” the bot army copy-and-pasted endlessly into the night, “India is one.”

Of course, not every Hindu nationalist is a bot. But when those who aren't, such as Pune-based author Shefali Vaidya, are tweeting the way she was last night, they might as well be. "Criticism of the [government] on issues all we want," she wrote, "but can we now say that we will not doubt [Modi's] intentions and his commitment EVER?"

In the short term, the government's decision, which was announced by Modi's home affairs minister and attack dog, Amit Shah, looks set to cause the restive valley to erupt in violence once again. Or at least looks set to cause it to erupt when Kashmiris actually find out what's been going on.

At the same time as troops were being transferred to Kashmir from around the country, and as the region's leaders were being placed under house arrest (and in a few cases actually behind bars), internet access was being restricted to the point of total blackout.

After 48 hours, it was still unclear how many Kashmiris actually knew what had been announced, so completely were they cut off from the world.

U.S. Troops and Their Allies Face a Shadow War in Syria

Long denied the plebiscite on their future they were promised by U.N. Security Council Resolution 47 in 1948, they have once again been denied their voice. Their silence, as the saying goes, is deafening.

The long-term prospects for the region are in some ways even more depressing. There have already been reports that, without 35A in place to prevent outside investment—in short, to prevent a land-grab—Modi's government is planning to host a so-called "investors' summit" in the region in two months' time.

As euphemisms go, it's a pretty transparent one. "Me and the Bois [sic] on our way to buy properties in Kashmir," one Twitter wag commented late last night, tweeting a picture of Bollywood gangster-types marching like the reservoir dogs towards the camera, guns locked and loaded, suits seriously ill-fitting.

For all the lip service paid by Shah to the idea that this measure will save—and is indeed designed to save—Kashmiri lives, it seems immediately and abundantly obvious that integrating Kashmir into India and integrating Kashmiris themselves are, as far as some people concerned, mutually exclusive priorities.

"We can reasonably expect an Israeli-style settlement program to take hold in Kashmir, motivated by fanatical Hinduism in this case."

Much like the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, a long-term nationalist struggle has been hijacked by religious zealots on both sides, and a lack of hope on the ground has transformed even the most peaceful members of the populace into front-line soldiers or voluntary human shields. As the activist Shehla Rashid told me last year, "People don't surrender now. They'd rather now die than surrender." In that respect, Kashmir has become a society with a death wish."

The similarities between Kashmir and Palestine are even more striking in the wake of the Indian government's actions: Without Article 35A in place, we can reasonably expect an Israeli-style settlement program to take hold in Kashmir before too long, motivated by fanatical Hinduism in this case rather than the desire to reclaim the biblical lands of Samaria and Judea as in the case of the West Bank.

A significant difference between the two conflicts is the relative lack of media coverage that Kashmir commands even today (despite the best efforts of journalists like The New York Times' Srinagar stringer Sameer Yasir and other local reporters).

LINES OF CONTROL

When They Want War, India and Pakistan Always Have Kashmir

Matthew Clayfield

If there is hope, it lies with Kashmir's small but dedicated community of civil society activists—a number of whom, such as Rashid, were not in Kashmir when the internet went down and who have been speaking at the top of their voices ever since. They have vowed to challenge the government's announcement on constitutional grounds in India's Supreme Court. But one has to admit that there isn't much hope to be had there.

Like Donald Trump in the United States, Modi has encouraged a tide of ethnic and religious hatred in India that has proven uncannily effective at washing away norms: supposedly sacred founding documents don't matter much these days and unleashed, validated, bloodthirsty voters don't seem very much to care.

The worst may still be ahead. What is beginning in Kashmir today may not necessarily end there. There are plenty of states that Modi's government might wish to bring under tighter, more centralized control, plenty of constitutional provisions it might wish to do away with on a whim, and plenty of minorities—Dalits, Adivasis, the LGBTQ community, women—as easily scapegoated as Kashmiri Muslims.

As the Indian journalist Rana Ayyub put it in a tweet last night, as Kashmir's silence began to grow louder than even the government's most fervent supporters: "It will be Assam next and then West Bengal and then the constitution and finally the democracy you cherish. I see you celebrating and wonder whether I should laugh at your ignorance or worry about your complicity."