

Will Trump Dissolve the Palestinian Authority?



Former U.S. President Donald Trump concluded his first term with a virtually severed relationship with the Palestinian Authority (PA). During that period, he

systematically marginalized its role in any move concerning the occupied Palestinian territories, curtailed its financial assistance, and finally cut off diplomatic ties. Despite the concessions the PA made, it ceased to be a desired partner in the “peace” process.

Nevertheless, the current term which began only a few months ago appears far more tense: U.S. measures against the PA and its officials are moving toward stripping it of its international representative status.

These developments cannot be interpreted without reference to the devastating war of annihilation in Gaza, nor to the accelerating annexation plans in the West Bank under a U.S.-endorsed umbrella.

What are the limits of Trump’s relationship with the Palestinian Authority? How did the methodical marginalization contribute to diminishing its on-ground role? Then how has the Authority tried to correct the trajectory and salvage what it can?

What are the implications of the diplomatic breakup between the two parties for Palestinians? And what significance does branding the Authority as “terrorist” carry? Is Trump aiming to revoke its representative status and reduce it to a mere security-coordination office? This article attempts to answer these questions and more.

Systematic Marginalization

In the early months of his first presidential term, Trump developed a friendly relationship with Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, based on understandings about the PA’s security role in the West Bank.

Yet when Trump announced the U.S. embassy’s relocation to Jerusalem implicitly recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel relations between the two sides soured.

The PA refused to submit to this step or to continue relations based on it. This led to the closure of diplomatic channels between them, the shutdown of the PA’s representation in Washington, and the suspension of U.S. aid and funding to PA institutions.

But the situation swiftly changed: Throughout Trump’s two presidential terms, the Palestinian Authority was never a partner in his plans neither in the West Bank (the “Deal of the Century”) nor in Gaza (the so-called “Riviera-Gaza” project).

On the contrary, Trump deliberately bypassed the principle of a two-state solution which would have guaranteed the PA its continuity, function and representation declaring that a Palestinian state would amount to a “reward for

terrorism”.

In his first term, the Deal of the Century hammered the first nail into the coffin of the Palestinian Authority: no land, no sovereignty, no autonomy, no justification for existence.

The PA’s limited service—as defined in the Deal—was no hidden trap so much as an openly stated plan on Washington’s table: the so-called “Peace and Prosperity” plan envisaged a narrow role for the PA, working as a security agent chasing resistance cells in the West Bank, without possessing weapons, autonomous rule, or control over land, sea or air borders.

The plan, derived from the 1979 “droplets” scheme crafted by the World Zionist Organization, included no concept of Palestinian representative role at the time, and it saw no substantial modification when re-introduced during Trump’s first presidency.

Under it, the West Bank became a set of isolated islands linked by bridges and tunnels under Israeli security control, at minimal cost, with Palestinians relegated to providing for themselves rather than the occupier fulfilling its responsibilities under international law—what has been described as the cheapest occupation in modern history.

As for Riviera-Gaza, the plan left the PA no hope of governing the sector in the “day after the war”, as though Gaza had been detached from the Palestinian land the PA claims in international forums.

The project looked like a direct call for ethnic cleansing and the de-Arabization of the land, and for solidifying the one-state solution a notion that Trump preferred over a two-state solution, viewing the one state as Israel only, vast as the geography allows, ruling alone, sovereign, and secure with the help of its Arab agents within Palestine and its Arab surroundings.

The successive U.S. administrations had long resisted the PA’s proposals to govern Gaza, while Washington insisted on its symbolic support for a two-state solution.

The latest such stance was its rejection of the PA’s “day after” proposals for the war in Gaza, preferring to keep Gaza in a state of instability and international isolation under an Islamist government rejected by the West rather than grant more land to an entity that enjoys some international representation and acceptance in European and Arab circles.

All of this unfolded under the pretext of “PA corruption” or “its covert incitement against Israel”—scapegoats Washington has consistently used, regardless of how many rules the PA complied with or how much it increased its cooperation

and submission.

The Arab states likewise bypassed the PA in their moves related to Gaza governance after the war; from the absence of active forces such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia from the Arab leaders meetings attended by the PA such as the February meeting following the Trump plan to convening meetings that excluded the PA to discuss the sector's future, like the Saudi-Qatari-Egyptian-Emirati meeting after that announcement, and to Arab plans for temporary management of the sector as in Egypt's scheme.

It became clear that none of Washington's regional partners was concerned with the PA's existence or its playing an influential role in governing the sector.

Unlike Joe Biden, Trump gave no interest to reforming the PA; he sought to use it as a security pawn in the Palestinian equation—a fact that rang alarm bells within the Authority.

Marginalization by Trump of the PA in the Riviera plan and later its marginalization by his Sunni regional allies especially Saudi Arabia prompted the PA to move quickly: when the Arab League held its emergency summit the PA announced the appointment of Hussein Sheikh (America's preferred candidate) as the PA's deputy president, and issued a presidential pardon for dismissed Fatah members led by Mohammed Dahlan (gulf-favored).

Yet this step did not deter Trump from advancing his plans that excluded the PA entirely from actual governance and international representation.

Finally, U.S. direct negotiations with the Hamas movement about releasing Palestinian prisoners in Gaza dealt a fresh blow to the PA, which insists on excluding the movement from post-war rule of the sector on grounds of its diplomatic and international isolation and its adoption of a western-designated "terror" agenda.

Israeli leftists regarded Trump's ignoring of the PA and punishing its officials and institutions as a gift to Hamas, indicating the consequences of undermining the two-state solution principle for the PA's future.

The wind is blowing away

Once the possibility of Trump's return to the White House emerged ahead of the U.S. elections, the Palestinian Authority launched a series of steps to regain his trust and to forestall the gap that opened between them in his first term. The PA launched a violent crackdown in the camps of Tubas and Jenin in the north of the West Bank in late 2024, attempting to curb the growing Palestinian resistance there.

In February this year, Mahmoud Abbas announced that the PA would comply

with the 2017 Taylor Force Act—which bars the U.S. Congress from funding the PA as long as it continues paying stipends to those Washington describes as “terrorists” or families of martyrs who carried out attacks against Israelis.

This issue had been a heated point of dispute between the PA and successive U.S. administrations.

While the PA previously feared popular backlash from cutting the stipends to prisoners and families of martyrs, it finally initiated, just before Trump’s second term began, a plan to comply with U.S. demands: it announced, at the start of Trump’s return, transferring the stipend system for prisoners and martyrs to a social-welfare program based on financial need.

This removed the national and political dimension from these payments and retained them as part of the ruling system’s social services.

The PA complied verbatim with the Taylor-Force-Act’s requirements, which demand public and direct condemnation of what Washington defines as “terrorist attacks.”

After the latest operation by Palestinian resistance in the West Bank the Jerusalem operation in September the PA quickly condemned what it called the “terrorist attack” on civilians.

The PA learned its harsh lesson from the embassy transfer crisis of 2017; hence its response to Trump’s “Riviera-Gaza” plan differed: instead of outright refusal and confrontation, it hid behind a collective Arab rejection, hoping that it would avoid a full bilateral severance if Trump insisted on implementing his plan.

On the other hand, its moves with the Trump administration after the plan’s announcement occurred behind the scenes so as not to be accused of direct collusion.

Missing Diplomacy: Erasing the Palestinian

The closure of the Palestinian representative office in Washington and the cutting of diplomatic ties during Trump’s first term was not just an ear-twitch in protest of the Deal of the Century or relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem; once Trump returned to the White House he shuttered the U.S. Services Office (OPA) opened by Biden to serve Palestinians in East Jerusalem and merged it with the U.S. Embassy in Tel-Aviv a further step in severing diplomatic relations and nullifying the Palestinians’ international characterization.

The absence of a diplomatic channel between Washington and the PA has affected Palestinians both inside and outside the territories. Trump’s administration gave no credence to Palestinian sovereignty; it rejected it outright,

considering it a direct threat to Israeli sovereignty and security.

It treated Palestinians as stateless, effectively denying the role of the PA and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), stripping the rug from under the Oslo Accords which the Authority still clings to. This was demonstrated in a series of internal U.S., diplomatic, and even presidential statements.

Trump removed from the U.S. State Department's designations the term "Palestinian Territories"; Palestinians can no longer mention it in their applications or official American dealings. Nor may the term be used in aid or domestic political-diplomatic measures. Meanwhile Trump unequivocally rejected the "right of return" for Palestinian refugees and insisted on resettlement in the countries they fled to.

More recently, the decision to cancel diplomatic visas granted to PA representatives to attend the upcoming United Nations General Assembly meetings in New York this September underscored the Trump administration's unwillingness to allow the PA any meaningful international representative status or equality with other governing authorities in the free world.

The reasons given by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio for cancelling the visas appear vacuous, except insofar as they target the PA's international recognition efforts: from requiring condemnation of "terrorism" including the October 7 attack, to demanding changes in Palestinian curricula, to halting international legal motions against Israel the pattern shows Rubio disregarding the reality that the PA had already adopted such steps.

The condemnation of the Al-Aqsa flood and other West Bank operations is now public and reiterated by PA officials. The resistance itself has become a scapegoat and a basis for the PA's European efforts to gain recognition for a Palestinian state that would guarantee its stay in office; Abbas, in his June letter to Emmanuel Macron, condemned the October 7 attack and demanded the immediate release of "hostages" clearly distancing the Ramallah Authority from what the West calls "terrorism".

The current Palestinian curricula are virtually free of verses on jihad or martyrdom or the biographies of fighters, especially after reforms carried out by the PA between 2016-2017 in response to early Trump funding cuts and Congressional pressure.

Meanwhile the case before the International Criminal Court has been frozen for a long time and not moved an inch since Karim Khan replaced Fatou Bensouda as Prosecutor.

The PA itself no longer considers the case a priority, as it now faces an existential

battle against the current Trump administration.

The final pretext that Secretary Rubio cited contrary to U.S. laws and norms and tantamount to terrorism was the PA's efforts to obtain recognition of an independent Palestinian state by major Western governments such as Canada, Australia, Britain and France.

Yet the PA understands that backing down from that track would amount to shooting itself in the foot, removing its last card for surviving in power and in international representation.

Nevertheless, Rubio's own move conflicts with the 1947 agreement between Washington and the UN, which obliges the United States to grant entry visas to diplomatic delegations to attend the General Assembly at its New York headquarters.

“Terror” Designation: The Judiciary at Trump's Service

Since the beginning of this year, Trump's administration has not stopped encircling the Palestinian Authority and pulling the rug from under it. This campaign has converged with the U.S. Supreme Court with Republicans controlling six of nine justices which on 20 June issued a unanimous decision allowing U.S. citizens harmed by resistance operations in Israel and the occupied territories to sue the PA and the PLO for ‘terrorist acts’.

The ruling accompanies the 2019 law “Security and Justice for Victims of Terrorism” (PSJVTA) introduced under Trump's first administration and the Taylor Force Act, which condition aid to the PA on ending “pay-for-slay” payments.

The Court sidestepped whether the PA is an internationally sovereign party over its land and people aligning with U.S. policy that refuses to adjudicate that question but at the same time refrained from designating the PA as a “Foreign Terrorist Organization” (FTO), which would have led to a complete severance of relations.

This left the U.S. administration a margin of maneuver to act according to its and Israel's interests, while keeping the PA on the hook.

The judgment came at a highly sensitive moment and paved the way for Senator Rubio's decision to deny visas to the PA delegation to the UN. Ironically, the Court, which has long refused to support Palestinian victims or their U.S.-citizen backers citing a lack of jurisdiction because these matters relate to sovereign acts beyond its remit now implicitly affirmed that the PA is an entity engaging in terrorism, even if it did not call it so explicitly.

Security Coordination is Sacred for Everyone

Washington does not mix up the cards: the PA's security role remains central for Trump, and he is strongly inclined to elevate it over any other PA functions. On the one hand, there is U.S. funding which even at the darkest moments of Trump's first term never ceased flowing to the Palestinian security services.

In 2018, for example, Trump cut all U.S. aid to other PA institutions (including \$230 million for economic development in the West Bank and Gaza, \$25 million for East Jerusalem hospitals, and \$360 million for UNRWA), while preserving funding for security apparatus.

On the other hand, there is direct American training and supervision of these forces, led by the U.S. Security Coordinator's Office, which the PA established under the Bush administration. The office, alongside the U.S. National Security Council, played a major role in coordinating PA military operations in Jenin and Tubas earlier this year.

Despite Trump's threats to abolish the office as part of policy to marginalize the PA, a recent retreat from this move saw the task assigned to Ambassador Mike Huckabee (Trump's envoy to Israel) rather than Secretary Rubio as had been the case since 2005. This shift clearly signaled the PA's incorporation as a security agency adjunct to Israel, rather than being treated as an equal partner alongside the American mediator.

Despite the escalation in Israeli military operations in the West Bank, Washington continues to strive to empower the PA's security role, recognizing that maintaining this role long-term is key to stability in the West Bank and ensuring Israel's security.

In conclusion; Professor Anna Irfan, lecturer in gender, race and colonial studies at the University of London, argues in her book *A Short History of the Gaza Strip* that Trump's approach to marginalizing the PA, cutting its wings and trimming its nails was not an incidental deviation, but the culmination of a long trajectory of U.S. policies since the era of Bill Clinton, who established the PA under the Oslo Agreements.

Irfan asserts that the limited security role Washington limits the PA to today is a re-framing of its original intended function: a toothless administrative-security body deprived of claws, while any attempt to gain international representation is seen as stepping out of line, and subject to immediate discipline.

Accordingly, any partial liberation or paper declaration of sovereignty by the PA even if simply a formal move by declaring sovereignty on the occupied West Bank or the devastated Gaza Strip will likely trigger American wrath and sanctions from marginalization to aid freezes.

It could eventually escalate to dissolving the PA itself, leaving its officials with nothing but marginal roles in security and service offices fully subordinate to Tel Aviv, bearing the occupier's civil-administrative burden and guarding its security without any international representation or the right to stand on platforms.

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