

## **Abbas' Decision to Defer Vote on Goldstone's Report Undercuts his Legitimacy and Obama's Credibility**

By

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There is widespread consternation and outrage in the Palestinian territories and the region with the decision of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to defer the UN Human Rights Council vote on the Goldstone Report. Scores of condemnatory articles have been written by leading commentators across the political divide castigating the PA and the Obama administration for obstructing the process. They all seem to reach the same conclusion - that justice delayed is justice denied.

More than ever, Mahmud Abbas emerged with his credibility and legitimacy in utter tatters. For if he, as many commentators noted, could not support a report conducted by the UN and endorsed by civil society in Palestine, the Middle East and the wider international community exposing the Israeli crimes in Gaza what claim can he now make to lead the Palestinian national liberation struggle.

The level of mistrust, anger and disappointment is palpable. Abdul Bari Utwan, editor of the *Al Quds Al Arabi* daily wrote there is no other way to describe it except as a "stamp of dishonour." He added "those who stand behind Abbas in this matter deserve to be brought before a Palestinian people's court and charged with trading the blood of the Palestinian martyrs and selling the Palestinian national rights in exchange for nothing except the pleasure of America and Israel with them and their disgraceful authority".

It may be argued that Abbas managed to regain some initiative after the Fatah Congress in Bethlehem, seeing off the damning accusations by Farouq Qaddumi that he along with Muhammad Dahlan and Ariel Sharon were involved in the assassination of Yasser Arafat. Likewise it may be asserted that there was some momentum after his grudging decision to



bring into the movement's leadership some of the younger cadres from Fatah. All of this is now lost.

Azmi Bishara, the prominent Palestinian academic poignantly pointed out in an article which appeared on Al Jazeera.net that the split in the Palestinian national movement is no longer one of ideological persuasion or preference but rather one between an authority which is totally loyal to the occupation and a resistance movement that is Islamic in orientation.

Significantly, none of the critics of are recognized as "Islamists" in the political lingo of the day. Bilal Al-Hasan the veteran Palestinian journalist wrote in Al-Sharq Al Awsat;

*"The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank has with this decision degraded itself among its people first of all and then on the level of its status and reputation when it appears as a client authority in the face of American directives, even when these directives are against the interest of its people and completely in the interest of Israel.*

*After this, no one will believe the position and demands of this Authority. No one will after this respond to its calls for pressure on Israel when it is the one that abandoned its friends in order to protect Israel from the consequences of the international report prepared under the aegis of the UN.*

*What does all of this imply? It means that what has happened to the Goldstone Report is a carbon copy of what will happen in the Palestinian – Israeli negotiations and the peace process conducted under American auspices.*

*This is the politics of diktats and submission and in the context of national struggle no people have remained silent over its destiny."*



Writing under the title "Scandal in Geneva" Urayb Al Rantawi wrote in the Jordanian daily, Addustour, *"The PA committed one of its most disgusting errors when it joined the ranks of the deferrers and decided to postpone the vote on the report which looked into Israel's conduct during Operation Cast Lead. They caved in to the dual American-Israeli pressure and conceded to the illusion of "an opportunity for peace" and the project of "building a state under occupation" – all of this out of sheer fear that some of them would be exposed for encouraging the reoccupation of Gaza and toppling of Hamas rule"*.

Abu Mazen has lost a lot from this," said Shawan Jabarin, who runs the Al-Haq human rights watchdog in Ramallah, using Abbas's familiar name.

*"Even the average man in the street thinks Abu Mazen has given up the rights of the victims and given up on pursuing Israeli war criminals,"* Jabarin added.

Barak Obama has not escaped the popular wrath and that of regional commentators. He now appears no better than his predecessor George Bush [jnr], having committed to damning errors according to many commentators. Firstly, he not too long ago softened his stand on the settlement issue at the three-way summit with Abbas and Netanyahu in New York. Secondly, in this instance he used his power to obstruct the UN human rights report after the solemn promises made in Cairo of a new beginning, fairness and justice.

*"In as much as Obama would have the world believe this is about giving peace a chance, every schoolboy knows this is actually about giving Israel protection and immunity",* Yassir Zaatira, the Palestinian columnist told Memo. *"How can there be a just peace when the settlements continue to expand, when Jerusalemites are driven out of their homes and when 7 million Palestinian refugees are denied the right of return? Surely there could be no settlement in the shadow of impunity and war crimes,"* he added.

Notably, the British government took a different approach regarding the Report from that of the Americans and Israelis. When contacted by MEMO the Foreign Office acknowledged the Report was "generally balanced" and affirmed they would not do anything to obstruct its outcome.



In conclusion, Abbas' legitimacy and Obama's credibility have suffered a major blow. Unwittingly, on the day Hamas forced Israel to free 20 female Palestinian prisoners in exchange for a two minute video showing Gilad Shalit, Abbas's decision dictated by Israel and US has given a new lease of life to the Palestinian resistance now convinced that nothing positive comes out of negotiations with Israel, everything has to be won and taken.

