A Candid Speech from President Abbas

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By Elliot Abrams

Council on Foreign Relations

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There have been many attacks on aspects of Palestinian President Abbas’s [speech](http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.743791) to the UN General Assembly last week, but it had one saving grace: candor.

Let’s take just two examples. First, Mr. Abbas said this about the Temple Mount: Israel must cease its aggression and provocations against the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque,” and Israel “continues to commit aggressions and provocations against our Christian and Muslim holy sites, especially Al-Aqsa Mosque. The continuation of the Israeli aggressions against our Muslim and Christian holy sites is playing with fire.”

This accusation–as we see, repeated twice–is false, but Mr. Abbas goes beyond merely stating it and turns it into a threat of violence. What else does “playing with fire” mean?

Second, and in a way worse, is Mr. Abbas’s treatment of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and his complete delegitimization of Israel. Here are some of his remarks on that:

By the end of this coming year….100 years have passed since the notorious Balfour Declaration, by which Britain gave, without any right, authority or consent from anyone, the land of Palestine to another people. This paved the road for the Nakba of Palestinian people and their dispossession and displacement from their land. As if this were not enough, the British Mandate interpreted this Declaration into policies and measures that contributed to the perpetration of the most heinous crimes against a peaceful people in their own land, a people that never attacked anyone or partook in a war against anyone.
Therefore, we ask Britain, as we approach 100 years since this notorious Declaration, to draw the necessary lessons and to bear its historic, legal, political, material and moral responsibilities for the consequences of this Declaration, including an apology to the Palestinian people for the catastrophes, miseries and injustices that it created, and to act to rectify this historic catastrophe and remedy its consequences, including by recognition of the State of Palestine.
In addition, Israel, since 1948, has persisted with its contempt for international legitimacy by violating United Nations General Assembly resolution 181 (II), the partition resolution, which called for the establishment of two states on the historic land of Palestine according to a specific partition plan. Israeli forces seized more land than that allotted to Israel, constituting a grave breach of Articles 39, 41 and 42 of the United Nations Charter.  In the preamble of resolution 181 (II), paragraph (c) clearly states: “The Security Council determine as a threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression, in accordance with Article 39 of the Charter, any attempt to alter by force the settlement envisaged by this resolution.”
Regrettably, however, the Security Council is not upholding its responsibilities to hold Israel accountable for its seizure of the territory allotted to the Palestinian State according to the partition resolution.  I appeal to you read this resolution once again.

Many Israelis have said for a long time that they could solve the “1967 issues” with the Palestinians but cannot possibly solve the “1948 issues”–meaning the Palestinian objections to the very establishment of the Jewish State. In his speech, Mr. Abbas showed this to be correct: his complaints went far beyond those related to issues in the West Bank or Gaza. He wants the Balfour Declaration of 1917 undone, wants the British to apologize for it, and complains of the UN’s partition resolution in 1948.

His history is wrong here, when he complains that Israel seized more land than that which the partition resolution allotted to it–because he forgets that Israel accepted the resolution but was then attacked by the Arab states, which did not accept it. The Arabs lost that war and paid the price. Mr. Abbas’s account is false and misleading.

Perhaps some day, a Palestinian leader might say something like this to the UN and to his own people: “We said no in 1947, when we could have had a state, and we chose war instead. We said no at Camp David in 2000, when we could have had a state, and we chose terrorism instead. We said no in 2008, after Annapolis. It is time to say yes.” Until that happens, the “unsustainable occupation” that began in 1967 will continue. In fact, next year marks its fiftieth anniversary. A speech such as Mr. Abbas gave shows us why it has not been possible to make more progress toward peace between Israel and the Palestinians. As long as Palestinian leaders are inciting violence with fantasies about the Temple Mount and are mired in their inaccurate history of past victimization, from the Balfour Declaration to today, it is hard to see how progress is possible.