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Do the Palestinians really want a state?

By [Bradley Burston](#)

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Do the Palestinians really want a state?

At first blush, the question seems preposterous. The Palestinian people have voiced their acute desire for an independent state since the day, whatever it may have been, that they became the Palestinian people.

In fact, until recently it seemed that nearly the whole world, Eastern and Western Europe, the entirety of Asia and Africa, many of the nations of the Americas - everyone, that is, except for the United States and Israel - wanted there to be an independent Palestine.

In time, even Israel and Washington came around. In a surreal turn, Ariel Sharon, the mantra of whose ashram had long been "Jordan is [the real] Palestine," announced his support in 2003 for the U.S.-sponsored road map peace plan, which provided for, though would fail to deliver, an independent Palestinian state by 2005.

But even as Sharon rammed the road map through the cabinet, the cause of Palestinian statehood was being undermined - by the Palestinians themselves.

Of course, the sandbagging of statehood came second nature to Israeli governments. Predictably, though, the Israelis' efforts, often as not, were hamhanded enough to actually work in favor of statehood.

Not so those of the Palestinians. The Palestinians worked against their own cause with a singleminded self-destructiveness worthy of the most hormone-driven of human bombs.

The uprising that was meant to have been the Palestinian war of independence turned into as disaster on the diplomatic as well as the military levels.

Though mindful of the media-irresistible David versus Goliath image of the

first Intifada, with children armed only with stones standing up to main battle tanks, the Palestinians managed in a matter of months to piss away the world's goodwill.

The immediate resort to firearms, the brutality of such attacks as the sniper-fire murder of a 10-month-old baby, the bare-handed cruelty of the crushing of the skulls of two 14-year-old boys with large stones, the indiscriminate horror of bombs on city buses, explosives at a Passover seder, whole families erased at a seaside restaurant where Jews and Arabs treated each other not only as equals but as friends - all of it will continue to tarnish the image of Palestinians for years to come.

There was the willingness of Marwan Barghouti and, yes, of Yasser Arafat, to "launder" criminal gangs of gun runners and drug smugglers by grafting them into the Fatah Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.

There was the readiness of Al Aqsa members to drop the traditional Fatah distinction between the 1967 border and the territories, their mounting adoption of the Hamas and Jihad view that all of Palestine was one unit, that the term occupation applied to Tel Aviv and Haifa and West Jerusalem as well.

But that was only the beginning. The Intifada also brought to glaring light the depth and breadth of old guard Fatah mismanagement and globe-circling corruption.

Yasser Arafat's bedrock unwillingness to root out corruption was as least as alienating to the PA's crucial allies the European Union, as was his unwillingness to take the merest action to fight terrorism.

In fact, if there was one signal obstacle to the cause of actual Palestinian independence, it was none other than Arafat himself, father of Palestine during the first intifada, abortionist of Palestine in the second.

Arafat's shameless and ultimately disastrous lying to his closest allies in Europe and the State Department during the Karine A arms ship affair, his fostering of impossible expectations among Palestinians at home and in exile, his rejection of Israeli peace offers in order to protect those false expectations, his egging-on of shahid candidates, his financing of their handlers, all these completed the campaign of homeland demolition that began long before Camp David in encounters of calibrated violence designed to wring concessions from Israel.

As Arafat stood by, losing his place in history even as he sought to keep his place among the Palestinians, bomb after bomb after bomb distanced

Palestinians from the state they nearly had, could already have had, should have had, by the end of the last decade.

The Palestinians, still shrouded in the self-pitying, self-adoring arrogance of the truly humiliated - the same arrogance they so fiercely hate in the Jews - are still busy proving what a victory the Intifada was.

Yet the real proof of the outcome of the Intifada lies in the change in Hamas declarations. For the first time, they have begun to speak of a demand for an Israeli return to the 1967 borders, as opposed to a Jewish withdrawal to the Mediterranean and beyond.

If nothing else, the reference to the 1967 borders demonstrates the danger to the Palestinians that the world will come to accept the Sharon-Bush vision of West Bank settlement blocs as part of Israel.

Thanks to the Intifada, Palestine is shrinking before the Palestinians' very eyes. The Palestinian West Bank is getting smaller and smaller, and the world is showing no interest, let alone outrage. In inheriting Gaza, the Palestinians gained one of the world's largest reservoirs of social ills. In throwing off Gaza, the vast majority of Israelis, while sympathizing with the pain of the displaced settlers, felt a distinct sense of relief.

Today, the question of whether the Palestinians can take the steps necessary to maintain a state - that is to say, whether they really do want a state, rather than just the flag they already have and the representative at the United Nations they already have, and the righteous indignation that they have in spades - remains an open question.

If they would rather demand the right of return until the end of time, rather than accepting some formula that amounts to a lesser gain, and with it, a Palestinian state, then the question is answered.

If they would rather insist on the right to violent resistance against Israel - allying themselves in the minds of others, if not in their own, with terrorist movements that bedevil civilized countries worldwide - rather than a renunciation of armed struggle and entrance into the community of nations, then we have their answer.

If they insist on a one-state solution, then it is a one-state solution that they will get, and that state will be Israel.

Today the question of what the Palestinians really want, and whether what they really want at this point is a state, is being asked more and more.

Their comrades on the far-left may still believe the Palestinians to be the most oppressed, most deserving, most horrendously sinned-against people on earth. But the far-left, like the far-right, much prefers cartoons to complex realities.

For the rest of us, the question remains open. The question of what the Palestinians really want is asked perhaps most frequently on the Israeli left, which the Intifada succeeded in dismantling. It is being asked by the Palestinians' traditional allies in the EU and in the State Department, whom the Intifada succeeded in alienating, and whom sudden terror at home has profoundly affected.

Do the Palestinians really want a state? What they have told us in deed and in word is "Yes, but on our own terms." They either mean that or they don't. If they do, I'll wager that they'll have themselves some form of a state by somewhere around 2028. Forty years bumbling and blustering and procrastinating their way through the wilderness.

My guess is that they're smarter than that, though. They'll do as Lenny Bruce once bitterly quipped: "Be a man - sell out."

They'll do what we do. Lie to themselves, swallow the compromises they can't disguise with feints of word and gesture. I wish them luck. They're going to need a lot more of it than they've had 'til now.

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