

NO INCENTIVES FOR TERRORISM: U.S. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TAYLOR FORCE ACT AND EFFORTS TO STOP ‘PAY TO SLAY’

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA,
AND CENTRAL ASIA

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

September 27, 2023

Serial No. 118–113

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



Available: *www.foreignaffairs.house.gov*, *docs.house.gov*,
or *www.govinfo.gov*

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

56–742 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2025

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MICHAEL T. McCAUL, Texas, *Chairman*

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey	GREGORY MEEKS, New York,
JOE WILSON, South Carolina	<i>Ranking Member</i>
SCOTT PERRY, Pennsylvania	BRAD SHERMAN, California
DARRELL ISSA, California	GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia
ANN WAGNER, Missouri	WILLIAM KEATING, Massachusetts
BRIAN MAST, Florida	AMI BERA, California
KEN BUCK, Colorado	JOAQUIN CASTRO, Texas
TIM BURCHETT, Tennessee	DINA TITUS, Nevada
MARK E. GREEN, Tennessee	TED LIEU, California
ANDY BARR, Kentucky	SUSAN WILD, Pennsylvania
RONNY JACKSON, Texas	DEAN PHILLIPS, Minnesota
YOUNG KIM, California	COLIN ALLRED, Texas
MARIA ELVIRA SALAZAR, Florida	ANDY KIM, New Jersey
BILL HUIZENGA, Michigan	SARA JACOBS, California
AUMUA AMATA COLEMAN RADEWAGEN,	KATHY MANNING, North Carolina
American Samoa	SHEILA CHERFILUS-McCORMICK, Florida
FRENCH HILL, Arkansas	GREG STANTON, Arizona
WARREN DAVIDSON, Ohio	MADELEINE DEAN, Pennsylvania
JIM BAIRD, Indiana	JARED MOSKOWITZ, Florida
MICHAEL WALTZ, Florida	JONATHAN JACKSON, Illinois
THOMAS KEAN, JR., New Jersey	SYDNEY KAMLAGER-DOVE, California
MICHAEL LAWLER, New York	JIM COSTA, California
CORY MILLS, Florida	JASON CROW, Colorado
RICH MCCORMICK, Georgia	BRAD SCHNEIDER, Illinois
NATHANIEL MORAN, Texas	
JOHN JAMES, Michigan	
KEITH SELF, Texas	

BRENDAN SHIELDS, *Majority Staff Director*

SOPHIA LAFARGUE, , *Minority Staff Director*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND CENTRAL ASIA

JOE WILSON, South Carolina, *Chairman*

BRIAN MAST, Florida	DEAN PHILLIPS, Minnesota,
TIM BURCHETT, Tennessee	<i>Ranking Member</i>
RONNY JACKSON, Texas	BRAD SHERMAN, California
JIM BAIRD, Indiana	GERALD CONNOLLY, Virginia
MICHAEL LAWLER, New York	KATHY MANNING, North Carolina
RICH MCCORMICK, Georgia	

GABRIELLA ZACH, *Subcommittee Staff Director*

C O N T E N T S

REPRESENTATIVES

	Page
Opening Statement of Representative Joe Wilson, Chairman, Subcommittee on The Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia	1
Opening Statement of Representative Dean Phillips, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on The Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia	2

WITNESSES

Hon. Elliott Abrams, Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies, Council on Foreign Relations, Former Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor	4
Prepared Statement	6
Dr. Jonathan Schanzer, Senior Vice President for Research, Foundation for Defense of Democracies	10
Prepared Statement	12
Dr. Michael Koplow, Chief Policy Officer, Israel Policy Forum	21
Prepared Statement	23

APPENDIX

Hearing Notice	46
Hearing Minutes	47
Hearing Attendance	48

MATERIAL FOR THE RECORD

Statement for the record submitted by Representative Connolly	49
Statement for the record of Dr. Carolyn Ganeles submitted by Representative Lawler	51
Material for the Record Submitted by Representative Lawler	54

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

Responses to questions for the record for The Honorable Elliott Abrams from Representative Phillips	61
Responses to questions for the record for Dr. Schanzer from Representative Phillips	66
Responses to questions for the record for Dr. Koplow from Representative Phillips	72

NO INCENTIVES FOR TERRORISM: U.S. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TAYLOR FORCE ACT AND EFFORTS TO STOP ‘PAY TO SLAY’

Wednesday, September 27, 2023

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST,
NORTH AFRICA, AND CENTRAL ASIA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:07 a.m., in room 210, House Visitor Center, Hon. Joe Wilson (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN JOE WILSON

Mr. WILSON. Ladies and gentlemen, the subcommittee will come to order. I'm Joe Wilson, Chairman of the Subcommittee of the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia Subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs Committee. I am very grateful today to welcome you to this hearing on the serious issues of the terrorism being financed by U.S. taxpayers which should not occur, the explanation and the reason why we need to enforce the Taylor Force Act and to stop any Pay for Slay.

Last month I was grateful to travel with the Ranking Member Dean Phillips to Israel. While we were there, we met with senior Israeli officials who were trying to keep their country and their citizens safe amid a dangerous wave of terrorism that has lasted for over a year and killed dozens of people, being instigated by the regime in Tehran.

The violent acts coming from the West Bank are a threat to Israel and a threat to America because of our close relationship with our friend and ally Israel.

In 2016, an American citizen, Taylor Force from my birthplace of Charleston, South Carolina, was cruelly and senselessly murdered by stabbing while as a graduate student on a trip to Tel Aviv. He was simply a person who was attacked by a cowardly individual with no provocation.

Taylor was a former U.S. Army officer who graduated from West Point and was studying for his MBA. His wonderful and dedicated parents live in Kiawah Island, South Carolina. His death was a deranged and inhuman action. Please let us now bow our heads for a moment of silence in honor of Taylor and all other victims of terrorism who should be alive and with their families today.

[Moment of silence.]

Thank you and God bless the memory of Taylor Force.

After Taylor's death, Americans were shocked to learn that the Palestinian Authority maintains a system for paying salaries and pensions to imprisoned terrorists for the families of the deceased terrorists. These outrageous systems of awards in incentivizing of terrorists murder is why we are here today and that's why 5 years ago Congress passed the Taylor Force Act, which said that no U.S. economic aid could directly benefit the Palestinian Authority unless the Palestinian Authority fully dismantled this grotesque Pay for Slay system.

This made sure that no taxpayers were directly or indirectly enabling these payments for terrorism. But it also created an incentive for the Palestinian people to reject the PA's barbaric set of rewarded indiscriminate murder.

Unfortunately, 5 years later, terrorists are still getting their blood money, and Israelis are living through another wave of violent attacks. Right now the Palestinian Authority is trying to assert demands and conditions on their normalization of talks between Israel and Saudi Arabia. But the Palestinian Authority is paying people to commit acts of mass murder. The U.S. Government cannot take any of their asks seriously until they stop this conduct.

I hope the witnesses today will tell us about more of what the United States can do to try to get this shameful Pay for Slay system dismantled. I also hope that our witnesses will speak to the role of the regime in Tehran and supporting the most recent spike of terrorist attacks and what that means for Israelis and Palestinians moving forward.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today, and I am very grateful now to recognize our Ranking Member Dean Phillips of Minnesota for his opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER DEAN PHILLIPS

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Chair Wilson, for holding this hearing and to our esteemed witnesses for joining us today. I look forward to a robust discussion on ending Pay for Slay and discussing the importance of ensuring security and stability in both Israel and the West Bank.

This topic is clearly an important and timely one, as tension and violence in the West Bank is at an all-time high with more Israelis having been killed in terror attacks through August of this year than in all of 2022 combined along with a corresponding increase in violence against Palestinian civilians and their property.

Further, President Abbas' recent comments that yet again distort the holocaust and promote anti-Semitic stereotypes only seeks to incite hatred and make peace even more difficult to achieve for all.

Let me be clear. I condemn terrorism. I condemn glorification of terrorism and anti-Semitism in all of its forms.

The Taylor Force Act, which Congress passed in to law in 2018 rightly prevents economic support funds from going directly to benefit the Palestinian Authority until they end their grotesque policy of compensating individuals who commit acts of terrorism and the families of deceased terrorists.

This policy not only rewards acts of terrorism but also moves us further away from a negotiated two State solution that aims to see Israelis and Palestinians living with equal measures of freedom, security, and prosperity.

The Palestinian Authority must continue to work with the United States to end this harmful practice and create a system that supports all Palestinian people in need without incentivizing violence.

With violence at an all-time high, it is important to understand the numerous challenges contributing to the deteriorating security situation in the West Bank. Armed groups, particularly in Jenin and Nablus have flourished as a younger generation of militants have become increasingly active. Israeli military incursions, a lack of political process, declining legitimacy within the PA, severe economic stagnation and a proliferation of weapons have all led to growing discontent.

While many of these frustrations are indeed homegrown, it no doubt creates an opportunity for malign actors like Iran and Hamas to exploit, as hastening the downfall of the PA only creates a governance voice in the West Bank and further jeopardizes Israeli security.

The Palestinian Authority is already on a downward spiral as we all know. While the PA was created as an interim step in a diplomatic process that would culminate in statehood, it is sadly apparent that we are no closer to a Palestinian State than we were when the PA was established after the Oslo Accords.

Furthermore, the PA today has severe economic and governance challenges. A recent press release from an IMF staff visit noted that, “persistently high unemployment and poverty at macro-economic fragilities.” According to the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, around 80 percent of Palestinians considered the PA to be corrupt, 80 percent.

As these issues deepen, the PA leadership has responded by becoming even more autocratic. President Abbas, who is almost 88 years old and is on year 18 of his 4 year term, has repeatedly chosen to arrest critics, close political space and prevent serious discussions of what or who comes after his passing. So how does the United States support the Palestinian people while also ensuring that United States dollars do not support a corrupt mismanaged government that incentivizes terror?

The United States in accordance with all U.S. laws including the Taylor Force Act supports a variety of programs that help address the root causes of violence and instability, including public health, social services, education, private sector productivity, and workforce development.

The Middle East Partnership for Peace Act invests in Israeli and Palestinian peace building and cooperation while the United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority facilitates communication between Israeli and Palestinian security units and works to ensure the PA security forces become the effective and well-trained force necessary to assert more control on the West Bank.

All of these efforts are in place to foster opportunity, understanding and stability, which will often benefit both Palestinians and Israelis.

So let me close by speaking briefly about regional normalization. The Abraham Accords, the Negev Forum, the East Med Gas Forum are all examples of great opportunities to bring the region together around shared interests and a desire to make the Middle East a more secure, stable and prosperous region.

These efforts must prioritize having Palestinian voices at the table. As the U.S. continues to negotiate with Saudi Arabia on a path to normalized relations with Israel, we must capitalize on this opportunity to demand the PA take accountability for its governance, economic and security crisis and to push both sides to take meaningful and permanent steps toward a negotiated two State solution.

It will take the hard work of Israelis, Palestinians, regional and international partners to step up to the plate and take risks in the name of peace. But it is something that I would argue we should all strive for.

With that, I thank you, Mr. Chair. I yield back. Actually, I have no time left so I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Ranking Member Dean Phillips and you were perfect on time. Also I hope you see there is really bipartisanship as we approach this issue today. Republicans and Democrats united that there should be every effort to block any U.S. taxpayers promoting Pay for Slay.

We are pleased to have our distinguished witnesses with us today. The Honorable Elliott Abrams, the former Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor. We also have Jonathan Schanzer from the Foundation for Defense of Democracy, and finally we have Dr. Michael Koplow from the Israel Policy Forum. Thank you all three for being here.

We want to thank you for being here. Your statements will be made part of the record, and if each of you could have your spoken remarks to 5 minutes so that we may have time for questions from our members, and they too will be held to 5 minutes.

I now recognize Mr. Abrams for the opening statement.

Mr. WILSON.

STATEMENT OF HONORABLE ELLIOTT ABRAMS

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the subcommittee for inviting me here today.

Let me start by saying something you mentioned that there was a serious rise in terrorism and terrorist attacks in the West Bank this year. Why has that happened? I would give you three reasons.

First, Iran. I think Iran is making a serious effort to get more money and more weapons into the West Bank. Obviously, much of it is blocked by Israel or Jordan. But some of it gets through across the Syrian or Jordanian borders.

Second, Hamas is trying very hard to increase the amount of terrorism on the West Bank and in Jerusalem. It wants to restrain attacks from Gaza because it wants to avoid Israeli strikes on Gaza where it is governing. It wants a level of calm there. It wants the border crossings open.

It wants the violence to be on the West Bank, and it is succeeding in doing that. So far this year, 35 Israelis, I believe that's the correct number, have been murdered by terrorists, more than in all of 2022.

Third, underlying the increase in terrorism is the Palestinian authorities' continuing refusal to fight terrorism unless it comes from their rival for power, Hamas. Of course, when they're doing that, they're not really fighting terrorism. It's a power struggle between the PA, PLO, Fatah, and their rival in Hamas. As long as the Pay for Slay system continues, the message to Palestinians is terrorists should be honored and rewarded.

There are clear alternatives to Pay for Slay. It would be reasonable, I think, for the PA to say, for example, that whatever the crime is committed, the criminal's family, children, should not suffer. They could have implemented a welfare based system, a system of family allowances based on the number of children is one example, and they have steadfastly refused to do that precisely because such a system would no longer honor and reward terrorists based on the seriousness of their crimes.

The act, the Taylor Force Act, continues to constitute effective pressure against that unacceptable system. It has not meant, as you said Mr. Chairman and Mr. Phillips, it is not meant to abandon the Palestinian people. As you know, it only affects ESF funds that go directly to the PA. This is where the Biden administration resumed funding for UNRRA, and this year the United States will again be its largest donor at over \$200 million.

I want to make two points quickly about the Taylor Force specifically. First, the act urges that at the U.N. and at all bilateral and multilateral engagements, we have all, governments of organizations, committed to the cause of peace.

U.S. diplomats are supposed to highlight the issue of Palestinian payments for acts of terrorism and urge other governments and organizations to stop payments to the PA until they stop the Pay for Slay.

I don't think that's being done, and I would urge the subcommittee and committee at some point to ask Secretary Blinken and Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield, why not?

Second, the act calls on all donor countries providing budgetary support for the PA to stop it, to cease budgetary support until they stop incentivizing terror.

I don't actually think that's the position of the administration. I believe it has been encouraging other nations, and I give you the example of Saudi Arabia. They give cash to the PA, and that undermines the Taylor Force Act.

There are many ways to support the Palestinian people. By giving cash to the inefficient and corrupt PA is one of the worst of them. It fuels corruption and allows the PA to continue the Pay for Slay system. We should be urging support for the Palestinian people but not for the PA.

Thank you for convening this hearing and for your continuing monitoring of the Taylor Force Act and U.S. assistance to Palestinians. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Abrams follows:]

Testimony of Hon. Elliott Abrams
 Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies, Council on Foreign Relations
 House Committee on Foreign Affairs
 Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia
 September 27, 2023
 "No Incentives for Terrorism: U.S. Implementation of the Taylor Force Act and Efforts to Stop
 'Pay to Slay'"

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for inviting me here today.

As you know, there has been a serious rise in terrorist attacks this year in the West Bank. Why has this happened?

I would cite three reasons.

First, it's clear that Iran is making an effort to get more money and weapons to terrorists in the West Bank. Much is blocked but some gets through, across the Syrian and Jordanian borders. Like its support for Hezbollah, Iran's support for Palestinian terrorist groups such as Hamas and PIJ is part of its unending efforts against the State of Israel. And I do fear that the billions of dollars to which Iran will now newly have access as part of the prisoner deal will only add to the many more billions they are earning through rising oil exports, and will help fund terrorism against Israel to an even greater degree.

Second, Hamas is trying hard to increase terrorism against Israelis in the West Bank and Jerusalem. It is trying to restrain attacks from Gaza, because it wants to avoid Israeli strikes against Hamas itself. And because it has to govern Gaza, it wants a level of calm there, and wants border crossings open and the economy functioning. It wants the violence to be mostly in the West Bank, and it is succeeding in this. So far this year, 35 Israelis have been murdered by terrorists—more than in all of 2022.

And third, underlying this increase is the Palestinian Authority's continuing refusal to fight terrorism—unless it comes from their rival for power, Hamas. And of course when doing that, the PA is not really fighting terrorism; it is fighting for its own power against a rival. As long as the "pay for slay" system continues, the message to Palestinians is that terrorists should be honored and rewarded. And indeed year after year, the PA honors individuals who have committed acts of terror by naming plazas or schools after them or announcing what heroes they are or were.

Here's just one example: Nasser Abu Hamid (or Hmeid) was a founder and the commander of the U.S.-designated terror organization Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. During the Second Intifada,

his terrorist acts included killing two Americans, Binyamin and Talia Kahane, and murdering five Palestinians who collaborated with Israel.

When Hmeid died in an Israel prison in December, P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas issued this statement: "to our people, the fighters, and the free people of the world the death of heroic martyr, prisoner and commander Nasser Abu Hmeid, who died as a martyr today as a result of the policy of deliberate medical neglect, 'slow murder.'" The message to Palestinian society is clear: terrorist are heroes.

There are clear alternatives to "pay to slay." It would be reasonable for the PA to say that, whatever the crime committed, the criminal's family and children should not suffer for it. The PA could have implemented a welfare-based system, a system of family allowances based on the number of children—as one example. They have steadfastly refused to do so, precisely because such a system would no longer honor and reward terrorists based on the seriousness of their crimes.

Palestinian officials and their defenders sometimes say they cannot move away from "pay to slay" because of public support for it. But surveys done for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy by the Palestine Center for Public Opinion found that Palestinian public opinion is quite divided. When asked if they agreed that "The PA should stop special payments to prisoners and give prisoners' families normal social benefits like everybody else -- not extra payments based on their sentences or armed operations," the poll in 2023 found that in the West Bank 38.5% agreed (while nearly 60% disagreed) and in Gaza 45% agreed (and 52% disagreed). And that's with the PA strongly defending its current position. Presumably if the PA changed policy and defended a new approach, those numbers would change as well.

The Taylor Force Act continues to constitute effective pressure against the unacceptable pay to slay system. It has not meant abandoning the Palestinian people, for as you know it affects only ESF funds that go directly to the PA or PLO. The Biden administration has resumed funding for UNRWA and this year the United States will again be its largest donor, at over \$200 million.

Mr. Chairman, I would make three brief points specifically about the Taylor Force Act.

First:

The Act "urges the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations to use the voice, vote, and influence of the United States at the United Nations to highlight the issue of Palestinian Authority payments for acts of terrorism and to urge other Member States to apply pressure upon the Palestinian Authority to immediately cease such payments; and urges the Department of State to use its bilateral and multilateral engagements with all governments and organizations committed to the cause of peace between Israel and the Palestinians to highlight the issue of Palestinian Authority payments for acts of terrorism and to urge such governments and organizations to join the United States in calling on the Palestinian Authority to immediately cease such payments."

I do not believe this is being done, and I urge the Subcommittee to ask Secretary Blinken and Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield why not.

Second:

The Act "calls on all donor countries providing budgetary assistance to the Palestinian Authority to cease direct budgetary support until the Palestinian Authority stops all payments incentivizing terror." I do not believe that is the position of the Biden administration. I believe it has been encouraging other nations, for example Saudi Arabia, to give cash to the PA. There are many ways to support the Palestinian people, of which giving cash to the inefficient, ineffective, and corrupt PA is one of the worst. It encourages and fuels more corruption and allows the PA to continue its "pay to slay" system. We should indeed be urging support for the Palestinian people, but as the legislation states, not for the PA.

Third:

As you know the Act requires annual reports from the State Department on the "pay to slay" system: on Palestinian laws and practices, the amounts paid to terrorists, U.S. efforts to bring these practices to world attention, and U.S. efforts to persuade the PA to change its behavior. Those reports, under the Act, should be unclassified but may have a classified annex. The classified annex allows State to hide inconvenient facts, and to delay the annual reports. I suggest that you urge State to skip that annex, deliver the annual report on time and in unclassified form, and simply brief you on any classified material.

These efforts, like the Act itself, are not at all meant to diminish assistance to the Palestinian people. Rather, they are efforts to direct aid to the Palestinian people rather than to convicted terrorists. I sit on the Advisory Board established under the Middle East Partnership for Peace Act, and Congress has dedicated \$50 million per year to help promote, to quote the MEPPA web site, "economic cooperation, people-to-people peacebuilding programs, and advance shared community building, peaceful coexistence, dialogue, and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians."

My own view has been that we should not use these funds to support talk shops, but rather serious cooperation, for example between Palestinian and Israeli doctors, or pharmacists, nurses, lawyers, or entrepreneurs. There have been some good grants: one brought 15 Israeli and 15 Palestinian experts together to work on handling water scarcity; another trains Israeli and Palestinian medical professionals; one grant is for software training; one supports a program that engages 500 nurses; and a grant called Advanced Trauma Life Support offers courses on how to improve handling medical traumas and involves Israeli and Palestinian trauma surgeons. So the Taylor Force Act does not stop U.S. assistance to Palestinians, but keeps it out of hands in the PA that are channels for paying rewards for terror.

What is the longer run prognosis for U.S. aid to the Palestinians? I think it is impossible to answer that question today. The next great change in Palestinian politics will be the end of the rule of Mahmoud Abbas, who is now 87. I expect that there will be a division of his three

titles—as leader of the PA, PLO, and Fatah—and a power struggle that may last years. During that period, each contestant will be more responsive to public opinion and to extreme elements of the society than to the United States. For that reason I have no optimism that the PA will change its tune and stop rewarding terrorists in the foreseeable future. Assistance to Palestinians will have to go around the PA rather than through it.

Both today and in that coming period, should the United States continue to aid the Palestinian security forces? My answer is yes, and I note that it is also the answer of Israel and Jordan. As I've noted, PA efforts against Hamas or other groups may be self-interested—fights among rivals, not principled fights against terrorism. Yet they can have the same effect of lessening the Iranian-backed terrorism committed by Palestinian groups that Iran supports. And in the post-Abbas period, where violent rivalries for power may occur, the absence of PA forces that can work with Israel and Jordan could make a bad situation worse and lead to anarchy.

We are all aware that to many Palestinians, the PA and its security forces are doing Israel's work for it by trying to stop some forms of violence and terror in the West Bank. That situation may worsen—or it might conceivably improve post-Abbas when Palestinians will be more focused on their own politics and power struggles than on Israel. What we can, I think, say today is that neither we, nor Jordan, nor Israel—nor the Palestinian citizenry—will benefit if the PA security forces weaken even further or collapse. We have seen the effect of such trends this year as gangs and terrorists gained more and more power in the northern West Bank.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for convening this hearing and for your continuing monitoring of U.S. assistance to Palestinians. This complex and changing situation requires Congressional attention, and we all benefit when this Subcommittee shows such attentiveness to the Palestinian situation.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Secretary Abrams. We appreciate our distinguished service for our country.

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you.

Mr. WILSON. We now recognize Dr. Schanzer for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF JONATHAN SCHANZER

Mr. SCHANZER. Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Phillips, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning.

If you don't know the name Hakim Awad, you probably should. We all should. In 2011, he murdered all five members of the Fogel family, including a 3-month-old baby girl. Awad has since received tens of thousands of dollars from the Martyrs Fund of the Palestinian authority while he sits in an Israeli jail.

Awad is one of many convicted terrorists who benefit from the program commonly known as Pay for Slay. The bottom line, the PA once seen as a peace partner deliberately rewards terrorists for murdering Israeli civilians, and adding to the outrage, some of the victims have been American citizens, too.

When Congress passed the Taylor Force Act 5 years ago, it curbed the expansion of this twisted system. The Israelis also helped by withholding some of the fund earmarked for the PA but more can be done.

But in the meantime, the West Bank is boiling over. The Islamic Republic of Iran is flooding the West Bank with weapons and cash for terrorist groups that are eroding the PA's grip on power.

In just over a year, more than 2,100 attacks have been funded, orchestrated, or inspired by Iran and the West Bank. My organization, FTD, has tracked all of that on our website.

Groups like Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Lions' Den have established no-go zones in large towns like Jenin on the West Bank. The PA security forces should have stepped in, but unfortunately, they've been a complete non-factor, and this has only emboldened Iran and its proxies. The so-called axis has now set up a nerve center, as they call it, in Lebanon, to coordinate military operations in the West Bank.

Hamas, in short, is loving this strategy. Rather than periodically inviting destructive wars upon Gaza, where Hamas is the Governor, the group is now exporting chaos to the territory that it seeks to conquer. The West Bank is Hamas' ultimate prize in the political and military contest that it has had since 2006 with the Palestinian Authority.

If we're not careful, Mahmoud Abbas could gift Hamas and Iran this valuable piece of real eState. At 87 years old, after more than 18 years in power, Abbas is past his expiration date. Worse, he has turned the PA into a cesspool of corruption, where political expression is outlawed, and the government enriches Abbas' cronies, not to mention murders.

In other words, Pay for Slay is just one of many serious challenges facing the PA right now, which is why today's hearing is so important.

Let me recommend a couple of steps here that could help right the ship. First, let's continue the rigorous application of Taylor

Force. Make it clear no more U.S. assistance so long as Pay for Slay continues. We could even tweak the language to prevent the PA from even indirectly benefiting from U.S. aid.

Two, encourage the Palestinians to establish a social security program to negate the need for the Martyrs Fund. It would provide a financial safety net for all Palestinians in need. The Israelis actually support this. The White House might even ask the Saudis to finance this fund regardless of whether normalization talks succeed.

Three, Palestinian social security can help end American support to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency. UNRRA must be cut. The agency perpetuates a fiction of a Palestinian refugee problem that ended decades ago.

Fourth, let's push Mahmoud Abbas on succession. The more he refuses to clarify the PA succession process, the more likely we will see a full blown crisis on the West Bank after Abbas leaves the scene.

Five, increase support for the U.S. security coordinator for Israel and the Palestinians. This will strengthen the PA security forces and will also improve coordination with the IDF.

Similarly, we should strengthen the military cooperation between Jordan and Israel, particularly along that porous border, that long border, between the two countries where Iran and Hezbollah have been smuggling the bulk of the weapons getting into the West Bank.

Next, we should enforce the rewards for justice bounty on Hamas West Bank leader Saleh al-Aroui. He roams free in countries like Turkey and Qatar and Lebanon. We should be forcing these countries to take action.

Eighth, we should pass the Hamas International Financing Prevention Act. This would mandate sanctions on senior Hamas and Palestinian, Islamic, Jihad terrorists as well as individuals, companies and foreign State actors supporting them.

Finally we must halt all sanctions relief and ransom payments to the Islamic Republic of Iran. The regime directly finances West Bank terror. If Washington wants to sustain the PA and protect Israel, our Iran policy must change.

Let me stop here. On behalf of FTD, thank you for inviting me, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Schanzer follows:]

CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY: FOUNDATION FOR DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES

House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia

No Incentives for Terrorism: U.S. Implementation of the Taylor Force Act and Efforts to Stop ‘Pay to Slay’

DR. JONATHAN SCHANZER

Senior Vice President for Research
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Washington, DC
September 27, 2023



www.fdd.org

Introduction

Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Phillips, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, on behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, thank you for the opportunity to testify. My testimony is built upon the premise that the Palestinian Authority (PA) is valuable to Israel and the United States but only if it functions properly. Today, with chaos in the West Bank mounting, the PA is in danger of collapse, due primarily to Iranian malign activity and corruption. These and other issues in the Palestinian arena all contribute to the challenge of curbing the deplorable Palestinian policy of rewarding terrorism through “pay-for-slay.” At the conclusion of this testimony, I will offer a handful of concrete recommendations on how to tackle some of these challenges.

Iran’s Hand in the West Bank

The Islamic Republic of Iran has for years supported the Hamas terrorist group, which controls the Gaza Strip. The regime helped Hamas conquer the coastal enclave in 2007. Since then, Tehran has provided significant funding, weapons, and other assistance to the Hamas government ruling Gaza. Today, however, the regime is focusing its efforts on the West Bank. As Israeli defense minister Yoav Gallant noted, the recent West Bank violence “is related to Iranian funding, and to the proliferation of weapons under the Iranian directive. Iran seeks every means to harm the citizens of Israel.”¹

Israeli officials point to March 2022 as the starting point for the current wave of terror.² My colleague Joe Truzman at *FDD’s Long War Journal* has tracked more than 2,100 attacks against Israelis since then.³ Some were carried out by known groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Others were conducted by relatively new groups like the Lions’ Den.⁴ All of these groups receive funds and arms from Iran. They may also be receiving instructions from Iran by way of a “nerve center” based in Lebanon that coordinates the violent activities of the Iranian “axis” in the Palestinian theater.⁵

At the same time, Iran is flooding weapons into the West Bank. This is the result of a sustained smuggling operation by the Lebanese Hezbollah at the direction of the group’s paymasters in Tehran.⁶ The group is exploiting the long and porous border that Jordan and Israel share. More

¹ Seth Frantzman, “How is Iran Influencing Palestinian Terrorism in the West Bank?” *The Jerusalem Post* (Israel), August 22, 2023. (<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-755675>)

² Phone interview with Israeli official, September 20, 2023.

³ Joe Truzman, “Mapping Terrorism in the West Bank,” *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, last updated September 20, 2023. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2022/12/14/mapping-west-bank-insurgency>)

⁴ Joe Truzman, “A newly Established Militant Organization in the West Bank Claims Several Attacks,” *FDD’s Long War Journal*, September 16, 2022. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2022/09/a-newly-established-militant-organization-in-the-west-bank-claims-several-attacks.php>)

⁵ Jonathan Schanzer, “Iran-Hezbollah Intelligence Center May Help Hamas Target Israel,” *Foreign Policy*, September 13, 2022. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/09/13/iran-hezbollah-hamas-israel-beirut-lebanon-intelligence-sharing-center>)

⁶ Joe Truzman, “Hezbollah Smuggling Weapons to the West Bank Amid Surge in Military Activity,” *FDD’s Long War Journal*, September 20, 2022. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2022/09/hezbollah-smuggling-weapons-to-the-west-bank-amid-surge-in-militant-activity.php>)

than 330 handguns and rifles have been seized at the border this year.⁷ Earlier this year, one Jordanian lawmaker was caught smuggling large numbers of weapons and monetary instruments into Israel, as well.⁸ Many weapons cross the border without detection.

Tehran also appears to be trying to replicate its success in arming Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon with rockets. With training and assistance from Iran, West Bank terrorist groups have recently attempted to fire crude rockets at Israel.⁹ So far, the Israelis have managed this threat. Still, it is a development that must be monitored closely.

The ruling Fatah faction openly acknowledges the dangers of Iranian dominance in the West Bank.¹⁰ Israel, for its part, continues to conduct operations throughout the West Bank in a bid to mitigate the chaos. There have been more than 2,000 such operations by the Israel Defense Forces since March 2022,¹¹ including a large two-day operation in Jenin in July of this year.¹² Such operations are a gambit for Israel, however. While they are intended to neutralize the threat of Iran-backed terrorist groups, the Palestinians view the very presence of Israeli military personnel in their towns as a provocation. The temperature continues to rise.

The New Iranian Strategy

The crisis in the West Bank is the result of a new Iranian strategy. Hamas' Gaza-based leadership — notably Yahya Sinwar¹³ — is now rethinking its practice of provoking Israel with rocket fire. Israel responds with airstrikes that take out Hamas military targets. This consistently leads to misery and destruction in Gaza. The beleaguered population blames Israel, but Hamas does not emerge unscathed. To deflect this discontent, the group began exporting violence against Israel to the West Bank with the ultimate goal of taking it over.¹⁴

The new strategy is fully consistent with the goals of both Hamas and the Islamic Republic. Rather than waging war in a territory that they already control (Gaza), Hamas leaders are now attempting to spark a wider conflict in territory that the group does not control (the West Bank).

⁷ Ibrahim Hussein, "Mossad Accuses Iran of Jordan Border Arms Smuggling into West Bank," *The New Arab* (UK), September 20, 2023. (<https://www.newarab.com/news/mossad-accuses-iran-jordan-border-arms-smuggling#:~:text=It%20said%20its%20investigation%20revealed,border%20so%20far%20this%20year>)

⁸ Tia Goldenberg, "Israel Releases Jordan Lawmaker Said to Have Smuggled Guns," *Associated Press*, May 7, 2023. (<https://apnews.com/article/israel-jordan-guns-arms-smuggling-lawmaker-f632ef3bc3adafdd34d161777f074e94>)

⁹ Yoni Ben Menachem, "Hamas Begins to Establish a Rocket Production Infrastructure in Jenin," *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, August 21, 2023. (<https://jcpa.org/hamas-begins-to-establish-a-rocket-production-infrastructure-in-jenin>)

¹⁰ Gianluca Pacchiani, "Amid Tensions, Fatah Offshoot Accuses Islamist Rivals of Turning West Bank into Syria," *Times of Israel* (Israel), September 20, 2023. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/amid-tensions-fatah-offshoot-accuses-islamist-rivals-of-turning-west-bank-into-syria>)

¹¹ Joe Truzman, "Mapping Terrorism in the West Bank," *Foundation for Defending Democracies*, last updated September 20, 2023. (<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2022/12/14/mapping-west-bank-insurgency>)

¹² "Israeli Military Officially Ends Two-Day Operation in Jenin," *Deutsche Welle*, July 5, 2023. (<https://www.dw.com/en/israeli-military-officially-ends-two-day-operation-in-jenin/a-66119529>)

¹³ Davide Lerner, "'We Can't Prevail Against a Nuclear Power': Hamas' Gaza Chief Says He Doesn't Want War With Israel," *Ha'aretz* (Israel), October 4, 2018. (<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2018-10-04/ty-article/hamas-chief-in-gaza-says-he-doesnt-want-war-with-israel/0000017f-e60c-d62c-a1ff-fe7f08cc0000>)

¹⁴ Nidal al-Mughhrabi, "Hamas Sees West Bank as Battleground with New Israel Gov't," *Reuters*, January 18, 2023. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/hamas-sees-west-bank-battleground-with-new-israel-govt-2023-01-18>)

This strategy could yield two key benefits for the terror group and its sponsors in Tehran. First, it could enable yet another Iranian proxy, armed with Iranian weapons, to take control of another chunk of valuable territory in the ongoing war against Israel. This strategy of encirclement can already be seen in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria.¹⁵ The West Bank is the final frontier. Second, the success of this strategy could help Hamas emerge as the unquestioned leader of the Palestinians. Indeed, Hamas sees this as an opportunity to bring down the Palestinian Authority (PA) — Hamas' bitter political rival since the Palestinian civil war of 2007.¹⁶

The Failure of the Palestinian Security Forces

Despite the clear threat that Iran-backed terrorist groups pose to the viability of the PA, the Palestinian Authority has failed to respond. Specifically, the Palestinian Security Forces, the paramilitary force tasked with defending the people and interests of the Palestinian proto state, have largely failed to preserve order in the areas where the PA exercises full control.¹⁷ Indeed, the PSF has been a non-factor since the wave of violence began in March 2022.

Admittedly, low morale could be a byproduct of the impossible mission of the PSF. As Neri Zilber and Ghaith Al-Omari note, the PSF is an “Army with No State,” with severe limitations placed on the armaments and training it receives.¹⁸ Poor performance could also be linked to the spiking diplomatic tensions between Israel and the PA leadership, which periodically vows to halt security coordination with Israel after IDF operations in the West Bank.¹⁹ There have even been reports of PA security forces clashing with their Israeli counterparts (justifying the limits on military training and materiel for the PSF).²⁰

It's also worth noting that when the Palestinian Security Forces do their job in the West Bank, they can find themselves clashing with the local population,²¹ which has prompted some extremist voices to accuse them of doing Israel's dirty work.²²

¹⁵ Jonathan Schanzer, “Iran's Multifront Strategy Against Israel,” *Commentary*, June 2023.

(<https://www.commentary.org/articles/jonathan-schanzer/irans-multifront-strategy-against-israel>)

¹⁶ Jonathan Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah: The Struggle for Palestine* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

(<https://www.amazon.com/Hamas-vs-Fatah-Struggle-Palestine/dp/0230609058>)

¹⁷ Miriam Berger, “What to Know about Palestinian Security Forces and their Role in West Bank,” *The Washington Post*, July 11, 2023. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/07/11/palestinian-authority-security-forces-west-bank-faq/>)

¹⁸ Neri Zilber and Ghaith Al-Omari, *State with No Army, Army with No State: Evolution of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces 1994-2018* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2018).

(<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/state-no-army-army-no-state-evolution-palestinian-authority-security-forces-1994>)

¹⁹ Jacob Magid, “PA Announces Halt to Security Coordination with Israel; US Cautions Against Move,” *The Times of Israel* (Israel), January 26, 2023. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/pa-announces-halt-to-security-coordination-with-israel-us-cautions-against-move/>)

²⁰ Joe Truzman, “Mounting Evidence of the PA's Security Forces Clashing With IDF Troops in the West Bank,” *FDD's Long War Journal*, September 11, 2022. (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2022/09/mounting-evidence-of-the-pas-security-services-clashing-with-idf-troops-in-the-west-bank.php>)

²¹ “Man Killed in Rare Clash Between Palestinian Security Forces and Gunmen,” *Reuters*, August 30, 2023. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/one-killed-rare-clash-between-palestinian-security-forces-gunmen-2023-08-30/>)

²² Alaa Tartir, “The Palestinian Authority Security Forces: Whose Security?” *Al Shabaka*, May 16, 2017. (<https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/palestinian-authority-security-forces-whose-security/>)

Whether due to an inability or unwillingness to contain the violence in the West Bank, the absence of the PSF is palpable. Iran continues to gain strength, thereby increasing the likelihood of additional IDF operations in an already-tense environment, prompting periodic (and sometimes hyperbolic) warnings of a possible third intifada.²³

Political and Economic Corruption

The poor performance of the PSF mirrors the poor performance of the Palestinian Authority. It is an utterly dysfunctional government. One could easily try to blame the PA's dysfunction on the lack of diplomatic progress toward a two-state solution. However, this argument does not hold up. In the nearly 30 years since the PA was founded, there have been many instances in which the prospects for a two-state solution have been bleak.²⁴ Yet, it's hard to recall a time in which the Palestinian government has been this irrelevant.

The Palestinian Authority's crisis of legitimacy is the responsibility of one man: Mahmoud Abbas. He is currently more than 18 years into his four-year term as president. He took power in 2005.²⁵ The following year, the political crisis with Hamas erupted. Then, in 2007, the civil war erupted. Ever since, the octogenarian leader has refused to vacate his seat, and he has refused to take responsibility for the basic functions of his government. And yet, successive American administrations, both Democrats and Republicans, have declined to seek his resignation.

The lack of pressure from the West, coupled with the fear of a Hamas conquest in the West Bank, has enabled Abbas to eviscerate the political space in the West Bank. There are no political parties that can challenge the ruling Fatah party. There are no political candidates to conceivably replace him. He refuses to hold elections²⁶ — and derides the prospect of holding them.²⁷ His critics are harassed and arrested,²⁸ or even killed.²⁹ In other words, the political corruption in the West Bank rivals that of many other autocratic regimes in the Middle East.

Remarkably, the economic corruption in the West Bank is even worse. Poll after poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research shows that the Palestinian people view

²³ Daniel Byman, "The Third Intifada? Why The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict May Boil Over Again," *Foreign Affairs*, February 7, 2023. (<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/israel/third-intifada-israeli-palestinian-conflict>)

²⁴ Ben Birnbaum, "The End of the Two-State Solution," *The New Republic*, March 11, 2013.

(<https://newrepublic.com/article/112617/israel-palestine-and-end-two-state-solution>)

²⁵ "Abbas Declares Victory in Palestinian Presidential Vote," *The New York Times*, January 9, 2005.

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/09/international/middleeast/abbas-declares-victory-in-palestinian-presidential.html>)

²⁶ Daniel Estrin, "Palestinian Authority Postpones Parliamentary Elections," *National Public Radio*, April 29, 2021.

(<https://www.npr.org/2021/04/29/992065009/palestinian-authority-postpones-parliamentary-elections>)

²⁷ Jacob Magid, "'They're Animals': Abbas Blasts EU Over its Stance on Palestinian Elections," *The Times of Israel* (Israel), September 19, 2023. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/theyre-animals-abbas-blasts-eu-over-its-stance-on-palestinian-elections>)

²⁸ Daoud Kuttab, "How the Autocratic Rule of Mahmoud Abbas Fails Palestinians," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 2021. (<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2021-06-26/palestinian-authority-nizar-banat-killing>)

²⁹ Ali Sawaf, "Autopsy Shows Head Blows in Death of Abbas Critic, Palestinian Group Says," *Reuters*, June 24, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/breakingviews/critic-abbas-dies-palestinian-custody-un-demands-investigation-2021-06-24>)

economic corruption as a huge problem.³⁰ The problem certainly didn't begin with Abbas. It began with Arafat and the seemingly unlimited Western assistance that poured in during the 1990s and the peak of the peace process. However, Abbas has taken financial corruption to new heights. Abbas, his family, and his cronies all benefit from a system that American taxpayers have financed. I testified about this in the past.³¹ I was even sued (unsuccessfully) by Mahmoud Abbas' son for my work.³² It is an issue that I believe is worthy of additional congressional inquiry, given this subcommittee's interest in Palestinian financial crimes.

Pay-For-Slay

Perhaps the most outrageous financial crime perpetrated by the PA is the payment of stipends to the families of jailed or slain terrorists through what it calls a "Martyrs' Fund." This is not new, of course. It is a longstanding practice of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was founded in the 1960s and remains the official representative of the Palestinian people to this day. It is a practice deeply rooted in the violent, revolutionary ideology that accompanied the rise of Palestinian nationalism after the Arab defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War. Antisemitism is a significant driver of this phenomenon, too. Abbas occasionally lets this slip; a recent antisemitic slur recently earned him unwanted headlines.³³

Pay-for-slay was tolerated to various extents from the founding of the PA in 1994 until the murder of American citizen and Army veteran Taylor Force in Old Yaffo on March 8, 2016.³⁴ Since then, Congress has halted all direct assistance to the PA so long as payments continue. The Taylor Force Act, introduced in 2017 and signed into law in 2018,³⁵ has ensured this. What little Washington provides to the Palestinians now flows to accredited NGOs and hospitals. While American funds may still be misallocated, Washington has mitigated the problem significantly.

The government of Israel plays an important enforcement role in this process. It withholds an estimated 500 to 600 million shekels (\$130 to 160 million) annually in taxes and other funds that would normally flow to the PA coffers. This is the sum that the Israelis estimate is allocated annually by the PA to finance pay-for-slay. The Israelis are thus making the PA for this practice.³⁶

According to former and current Israeli officials, congressional pressure has ensured that the PA has not added new names to the pay-for-slay registry in recent years. And an uneasy but stable

³⁰ "Index Survey Research," Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, accessed September 22, 2023. (<https://www.pcpst.org/en/node/105>)

³¹ "Chronic Kleptocracy: Corruption Within the Palestinian Political Establishment," *Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia*, July 10, 2012. (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg74960/html/CHRG-112hhrg74960.htm>)

³² Ryan Abbott, "Palestinian Leader's Son Claims Defamation," *Courthouse News Service*, September 24, 2012. (<https://www.courthousenews.com/palestinian-leaders-son-claims-defamation>)

³³ Louis Imbert, "Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas Criticized for New Anti-Semitic Remark," *Le Monde* (France), September 8, 2023. (https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/09/08/palestinian-president-mahmoud-abbas-criticized-for-new-anti-semitic-remark_6128715_4.html)

³⁴ Oren Lieberman, Steve Almasy, and Amir Tal, "American Fatally Stabbed in Israel Terror Attack that Wounds 10 Others," *CNN*, March 9, 2016. (<https://www.cnn.com/2016/03/08/middleeast/israel-violence/index.html>)

³⁵ "Congress Passes Taylor Force Act As Part of \$1.3 Trillion Budget Bill," *The Times of Israel* (Israel), March 23, 2018. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/congress-passes-taylor-force-act-as-part-of-1-3-trillion-budget-bill/>)

³⁶ Interview with former Israeli official, September 19, 2023.

status quo has prevailed, despite several reported attempts by Hady Amr, the State Department's Special Representative for Palestinian Affairs, to free up more American assistance.

The Israelis have, however, offered a proposal related to Taylor Force Act enforcement: the creation of a Palestinian social security system.³⁷ The Israelis have conveyed to Washington and Ramallah, first informally and now formally, that they will not stand in the way of such a system, even if it covers the families of convicted or slain terrorists, so long as all Palestinians below a certain income level obtain equal benefits. The program could lift the standard of living for all Palestinians. It could bolster confidence in the PA, too. The mechanism might even obviate the need for the corrupt United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which perpetuates the fiction of a refugee problem in the West Bank (and beyond) by identifying the descendants of the original refugees from the 1948 war as refugees themselves.³⁸ Providing aid or services to destitute Palestinians was never the problem. Sustaining a non-existent refugee crisis, however, has only compounded the woes of the Middle East.

Unfortunately, despite the benefits or perhaps because of them, Abbas and his lieutenants have rejected the proposal. Consistent with Palestinian decision-making over decades, Palestinian leaders prefer to keep their population in misery rather than govern responsibly.

Succession

Mahmoud Abbas has utterly mismanaged the PA. Many Palestinians look forward to the day he leaves the scene, thereby clearing the way for new leadership. However, chaos could very likely follow his departure. Abbas, as noted, has gutted the Palestinian political system, and he refuses to name a successor. According to Palestinian Basic Law, if the president dies or is unable to govern, the speaker of the Palestinian parliament would preside over the government until elections are held. That won't work because Abbas dissolved the parliament.³⁹ Moreover, the last speaker was a member of Hamas.⁴⁰ If he were tapped to lead the PA, even temporarily, it would spark a crisis with Israel, the United States, and perhaps other Western states.

Not long ago, there were many candidates willing to succeed Abbas.⁴¹ Mohammed Dahlan (Arafat's former Gaza security chief), Jibril Rajoub (Arafat's former West Bank security chief), Mohammed Shtayyeh (Abbas' prime minister), Majid Farraj (head of the Palestinian General Intelligence Service) and Hussein al-Sheikh (head of the PLO's executive committee) were on the list, among others. Israeli security officials suggest that most of them have now reconsidered

³⁷ Interview with former Israeli official and phone interview with Israeli official, September 19, 2023.

³⁸ Richard Goldberg and Jonathan Schanzer, "The UN Refugee Agency With Few Actual Refugees," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 3, 2021. (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-u-n-refugee-agency-with-few-actual-refugees-11612378415>)

³⁹ "Palestinian President Dissolves PLC," *Asharq al-Awsat* (UK), December 23, 2018. (<https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/1516536/palestinian-authority-president-dissolves-plc>)

⁴⁰ "Mapping Palestinian Politics: Aziz Duwaik," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, accessed September 22, 2023. (https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_palestinian_politics/aziz_duwaik)

⁴¹ Grant Rumley, "The Race to Replace Mahmoud Abbas: Understanding and Shaping Palestinian Succession," *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*, September 2015. (https://s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/defenddemocracy/uploads/publications/Rumley_Understanding_Palestinian_Succession.pdf)

their bid for leadership. Given the state of the West Bank, many fear they could be metaphorically stepping in as captain of the *Titanic*.

Hamas thus emerges as the only viable alternative right now. And the group continues to expand its foothold in the West Bank. The man responsible for much of this is Saleh Arouri.⁴² The West Bank military commander splits his time between Turkey, Qatar, and Lebanon. However, Iran is the key to the terrorist infrastructure he has created in the West Bank.

The longer Abbas remains president, and the more Arouri can expand his terrorist network in the West Bank, the worse the outlook gets. Arouri and Abbas, who to my knowledge are not in communication, have together set the stage for an acute crisis.

Enter the Saudis?

Interestingly, there could be an opportunity for the situation to improve. Reports suggest that Saudi Arabia is currently engaged in consultations with the United States about a normalization agreement with Israel. Should the Saudis move forward, they have indicated that they seek to improve the living conditions and governance of the Palestinians.⁴³

If talks progress, Israel would need to make certain concessions to the Saudis on the Palestinian front in terms of freedom of movement or uprooting Israeli communities in the West Bank. Riyadh may also wish to make a direct contribution to the Palestinians to reassure them that their cause is not forgotten. The Palestinian leadership has already engaged in consultations with the Saudis.⁴⁴ In short, the Saudis have significant leverage. They can push for new Palestinian leadership, or even a succession plan, as a condition for the funds the Palestinians seek. Riyadh could also demand an end to pay-for-slay as a condition for funding the social security program.

Discussions are still in an early phase. But should they progress, the Saudis have an opportunity, together with the United States and Israel, to inject new life into the Palestinian Authority. They may be one of the few actors that have the credibility, not to mention the resources, to do so.

Recommendations

Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Phillips, and members of the subcommittee, I offer these recommendations to address some of the challenges noted in my testimony.

1. Continue rigorous enforcement of the Taylor Force Act to ensure, and clearly convey that no U.S. funding to the PA will resume so long as Pay-for Slay continues. This message should be unanimous, including from the special representative for Palestinian affairs.

⁴² Liran Tamari, "Netanyahu Threatens Hamas Leader Behind Uptick in Terror Attacks," *Ynet* (Israel), August 27, 2023. (<https://www.ynetnews.com/article/sj3cfi00t2>)

⁴³ Felicia Schwartz, "Saudi Arabia Says Solving Palestinian Issue Crucial to Deal with Israel," *Financial Times* (UK), September 20, 2023. (<https://www.ft.com/content/29383ce8-4d62-4957-a0b5-cf1970d3ceee>)

⁴⁴ "Palestinian Delegation to Visit Saudi Arabia to Raise its Demands in Any Israel Deal," *The Times of Israel* (Israel), August 28, 2023. (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinian-delegation-will-raise-demands-with-saudis-for-an-israel-deal-report/>)

2. Encourage the Palestinians to establish a social security program to negate the need for their so-called “Martyrs’ Fund.” The White House should ask the Saudis to support Palestinian social security, regardless of whether the current normalization talks succeed.
3. Consider stronger language in the Taylor Force Act. This could include striking the word “directly” from the statute to cover anything that indirectly benefits the PA.
4. Cut all American support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. The agency is a driver of continued conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.
5. Issue direct and unequivocal statements to the Palestinian Authority about the need to establish new laws or mechanisms to facilitate an orderly succession.
6. Provide additional support to the U.S. Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority to strengthen the capabilities of the PSF and bolster coordination with the IDF.
7. Strengthen the military-to-military cooperation between Jordan and Israel, particularly along their joint border.
8. Enforce the rewards for justice bounty on Hamas leader Saleh Al-Aroui. He travels freely to allied states like Qatar and Turkey, and to Lebanon, which enjoys American financial assistance. Washington should demand his arrest.
9. Work to pass the Hamas International Financing Prevention Act (HIFPA/Hamas),⁴⁵ which would mandate sanctions on senior members of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad as well as individuals, companies, and foreign state actors supporting to them. The bill is modeled after the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act, which has made it more difficult for Hezbollah to utilize the international financial system.
10. Halt all sanctions relief and ransom payments to the Islamic Republic of Iran. The regime directly finances West Bank terrorist groups and their infrastructure. If Washington wants to sustain the Palestinian Authority and protect Israel, our Iran policy must change.

There are many issues that I did not address in this testimony. If I have missed anything you wish to discuss, I am happy to answer your questions. On behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, thank you again for inviting me to testify.

⁴⁵ Hamas International Financing Prevention Act, H.R. 340, 118th Congress (2023).
(<https://www.congress.gov/bills/118/congress/house-bill/340>)

Mr. WILSON. Thank you so much, Dr. Schanzer. We now recognize Dr. Koplow for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL KOPLOW

Mr. KOPLOW. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you to discuss the important issue of terrorism against Israelis and the situation in Israel and the West Bank.

This issue has taken on greater salience this year as more Israelis have been killed in terror attacks through the end of August than Israeli terrorism fatalities in all of 2022.

Combating Palestinian terrorism directed at Israeli citizens and increasing stability and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike are clear interests and priorities of the United States.

It is critical to continue holding the Palestinian authority to account for its payments to prisoners and families of those killed in the course of committing terrorism. Have these payments incentivized violence against innocent Israelis and run counter to any peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In addition to enforcing the Taylor Force Act and fully implementing its provisions until its conditions are satisfied, it is also important to promote additional measures and policies that will counter the trend of increasing violence.

This requires unwavering support for Israeli security and support for measures that will stabilize the West Bank and building toward a negotiated and viable political outcome that improves the lives of Israelis and Palestinians.

The Taylor Force Act is an important policy tool that seeks to shift PA behavior away from tying and escalating payments directly to violent acts.

This payment system is an insidious initiative that encourages the murder of innocent Israelis, and it must be stopped.

The Taylor Force Act must remain in place until the PA meets its requirements and the burden must be on Palestinian leadership to demonstrate compliance, one of which may be moving to a needs based system.

The Taylor Force Act contains a number of accessions to its prohibition of economic support funds. This approach smartly recognizes the balance required between holding the PA to account for its misdeeds and ensuring that areas under the PA's control do not devolve into anarchy while continuing to work toward peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Support for the Palestinian people, rather than support for the PA, demonstrates the American commitment to improving lives and providing an alternative approach to violence.

ESF that is not controlled or implemented by and does not directly benefit the PA demonstrates to Palestinians the United States' commitment to their well-being and to a future society that can live in peace alongside Israel.

Similarly, the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act funding promotes active engagement and dialog between Israelis and Palestinians in support of a future two State outcome. People to people activities that receive funding from MEPPA provide pathways for peace while making terrorism less desirable.

Perhaps most saliently, it remains vital to support the efforts of the United States security coordinator in ensuring that security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority continues and that the Palestinian Authority security forces are properly trained and prepared for counterterrorism and law enforcement activities.

The drop in organized terrorism against Israelis since the first decade of the 21st Century is attributable in large measure to the success of the USSC mission. An effective and well trained PASF provides both severe risk mitigation for Israel's defense architecture and a key building block for future Palestinian statehood.

The USSC support for security coordination between Israel and the PA also ensures that Israeli security needs are met.

Concerns about the PACF's performance and willingness to confront terrorist elements in Palestinian cities are absolutely warranted, but the PACF remains an important security partner for Israel as Israeli political and security officials routinely attest.

There are measures that the United States should take in partnership with Israel as well in order to choke off incentives for Palestinian terrorism.

The United States should encourage Israel to limit growth in Israeli settlements to areas that would not challenge the contiguity of the future Palestinian State and to dismantle settlement outposts that are illegal under Israeli law.

There is no excuse for terror. There are no actions that justify its use. Yet all of those who live in the region have responsibility to avoid inflammatory behavior that can lead to escalating tension on the ground.

The United States should also embrace the opportunity created by the Abraham Accords to use the expansion of regional normalization to incentivize the PA to institute necessary reforms.

The United States and Israel can both encourage states that have normalized relations with Israel and potential future normalizers to engage with the PA on reforming its institutions and policies, including, and foremost, payments to prisoners and families of terrorist in return for the resumption of economic assistance.

Furthermore, including Palestinians in the normalization process would help inoculate these historic agreements from the instability that is endemic to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and can also incentivize Palestinians to embrace a diplomatic process rather than turn to terrorism.

If the PA loses more credibility, legitimacy and popularity, the leadership and institutional vacuum is contributing to more terrorism, more violence, and more instability. The U.S. must continue to use the Taylor Force Act along with the other tools available to it in order to support the Palestinian institutions and the Palestinian people working toward positive change.

All incentives for Palestinians to turn to terrorism must be combated, which means holding the PA to account while improving stability and security in the West Bank and the quality of life for Palestinians.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member. I look forward to your question.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Koplow follows:]



Prepared Statement of Michael J. Koplow, Chief Policy Officer of Israel Policy Forum

Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia
of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs

"No Incentives For Terrorism: U.S. Implementation of the Taylor Force Act and Efforts to Stop 'Pay to Slay'"

September 27, 2023

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the invitation to appear before you to discuss the important issue of terrorism against Israelis and the situation inside Israel and the West Bank. This issue has taken on greater salience this year, as more Israelis have been killed in terror attacks through the end of August than Israeli terrorism fatalities in all of 2022. Combating Palestinian terrorism directed at Israeli citizens and increasing stability and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike are clear interests and priorities of the United States and have been ongoing challenges for American policy. It is critical to continue holding the Palestinian Authority to account for its payments to prisoners and families of those killed in the course of committing terrorism, as these payments incentivize violence against innocent Israelis and run counter to any peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In addition to enforcing the Taylor Force Act and fully implementing its provisions until its conditions are satisfied, it is also important to promote additional measures and policies that will counter the trend of increasing violence. This requires unwavering support for Israeli security and support for measures that will stabilize the West Bank and build toward a negotiated and viable political outcome that improves the lives of Israelis and Palestinians.

The Taylor Force Act was passed in 2018 with overwhelming bipartisan support as a signal of Congress' commitment to holding the Palestinian Authority to account for its fiscal policies that create perverse and ugly incentives for Palestinians to commit terrorism and violence. The Taylor Force Act is both a statement about the repugnance of payments that escalate based on the severity of the violence that is undertaken and an important policy tool that seeks to shift Palestinian Authority behavior away from tying payments directly to violent acts. This payments system is an insidious initiative that encourages the murder of innocent Israelis and must be

stopped. The Taylor Force Act should remain in place until the Palestinian Authority meets its requirements, and the burden must be on Palestinian leadership to alter its policies and demonstrate compliance.

The Taylor Force Act contains a number of exceptions to its prohibition of Economic Support Funds (ESF) that will directly benefit the Palestinian Authority, in recognition of the fact that some funding that may incidentally directly benefit the Palestinian Authority has benefits that outweigh the harms. These exceptions—payments to the East Jerusalem Hospital Network, assistance for wastewater projects, and assistance for childhood vaccinations—are in line with the principles laid out in the act's findings that the United States continues to support programs that provide for basic human needs, peace, and development. This approach smartly recognizes the balance required between holding the Palestinian Authority to account for its misdeeds and ensuring that areas under the Palestinian Authority's control do not devolve into anarchy, while continuing to work toward peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

The Taylor Force Act is a critical tool in striking this balance. Other tools work in concert with the Taylor Force restrictions to reshape the environment so that better actors can be empowered and terrorism does not find such fertile ground. This holistic approach should continue so that the United States does not contribute to the Palestinian people suffering as a result of bad choices made by Palestinian leadership. While the Palestinian Authority must be held to account, the United States does not engage in collective punishment.

Support for the Palestinian people rather than support for the Palestinian Authority demonstrates the American commitment to improving lives and providing an alternative approach to violence. Economic support for water and sanitation projects, public health, private-sector development, good governance and transparency in municipal institutions, women's empowerment, vocational training, and food assistance all further the effort to better Palestinian lives under sometimes dire humanitarian conditions, while simultaneously laying the groundwork for a future functioning polity. These funds are not controlled or implemented by and do not directly benefit the Palestinian Authority. They demonstrate to a new generation of Palestinians the United States' commitment to their wellbeing, and ultimately to a future society that can be self-sustaining while living in peace alongside Israel.

Another important tool in the battle against terrorism is the funding allocated under the Nita M. Lowey Middle East Partnership for Peace Act (MEPPA) for peacebuilding and coexistence activities. This funding promotes active engagement between Israelis and Palestinians in support of a future two-state outcome, which will depend on dialogue and mutual understanding. If the incentives to terrorism are going to be stamped out, something else must replace them in order to create a sustainable alternative. People-to-people activities that receive funding through MEPPA provide pathways to peace while making terrorism less desirable. MEPPA was passed in both chambers by wide bipartisan margins and remains a shining example of bipartisan cooperation on efforts towards Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution.

Perhaps most saliently, it remains vital to support the efforts of the United States Security Coordinator (USSC) in ensuring that security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority continues and that the Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF) are properly trained and prepared for counterterrorism and law-enforcement activities. The drop in organized terrorism against Israelis since the first decade of the 21st century is attributable in a large measure to the success of the USSC mission. The future success of stabilizing Palestinian cities with large militant presences—such as Jenin and Nablus—without excessive and risky intervention by the Israel Defense Forces hinges on continued support for the USSC. An effective and well-trained PASF provides both severe risk mitigation for Israel's defense architecture and a key building block for future Palestinian statehood. The USSC's support for security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority also ensures that the counterterrorism architecture that exists inside the West Bank remains robust and that Israeli security needs are met. The PASF have a track record of suppressing Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorism and activities inside the West Bank, and the U.S. and its NATO partners must continue training the PASF and equipping them with non-lethal weaponry. Concerns about the PASF's performance and willingness to confront terrorist elements in Palestinian cities are warranted, but the PASF remains an important security partner for Israel, as Israeli political and security officials routinely attest. Unless the USSC has the funding and support to continue building a professional PASF and pushing for Palestinian security sector reforms, an important tool in combating Palestinian terrorism will be severely handicapped.

There are measures that the United States should take in partnership with Israel as well in order to choke off incentives for Palestinian terrorism. The number of attacks against Palestinians by Israelis in the West Bank is up sharply this year, as are the number of Palestinian fatalities in the West Bank. Security for Palestinians must be restored in order to prevent loss of innocent Palestinian life, and in order to prevent ordinary Palestinians from resorting to taking up arms against Israelis in response. The United States should urge the Israeli government to do whatever is necessary to combat growing settler violence and lawlessness in order to prevent friction between Israeli and Palestinian residents in the West Bank, and it should support the Israeli government in tackling this problem.

Another flashpoint is Israeli settlements deep inside the West Bank adjacent to large Palestinian population centers. While roughly 85% of Israelis living beyond the 1949 armistice lines—popularly known as the Green Line—are on approximately 8% of the territory of the West Bank, the remaining 15% live in places where the demographic balance is weighted overwhelmingly toward the Palestinians. There is no justification for terrorism against Israeli civilians no matter where they live, but limiting the friction that inevitably arises between Israelis and Palestinians in places where Israeli settlements are more isolated will reduce Israeli fatalities and the IDF's security burden. As much as possible, the United States should encourage Israel to limit growth in Israeli settlements to large settlement blocs rather than in isolated settlements or in settlement outposts that are illegal under Israeli law, as part of the effort to reduce Israeli fatalities and make

it easier to combat Palestinian terrorism. Building settlements that purposefully seek to erode the possibility of a future Palestinian state by disrupting territorial contiguity undermines any remaining Palestinian confidence in a negotiated process to establish a future state living alongside Israel in peace. Such lack of hope for the future and despair at the absence of a political horizon contribute to an escalating climate on the ground where terrorism festers. I reiterate that there is no excuse for terror and no actions that justify its use. Yet all those who live in the region have a responsibility to avoid inflammatory behavior that can lead to escalating tension on the ground.

The United States should also embrace the opportunity created by the Abraham Accords to use the expansion of regional normalization to incentivize the Palestinian Authority to institute necessary reforms. The Palestinian Authority is in the midst of a financial crisis driven in part by the cessation of direct budgetary support from Sunni states, which are frustrated by Palestinian Authority corruption, waste, and malfeasance. The United States and Israel can both encourage states that have normalized relations with Israel, such as the United Arab Emirates, and potential future normalizers, such as Saudi Arabia, to engage with the Palestinian Authority on reforming its institutions and policies, including payments to prisoners and families of terrorists, in return for the resumption of economic assistance. Doing so will benefit Israel's security, which is in the interest of states with new diplomatic relationships with Jerusalem, and will also benefit Palestinian stability and quality of life.

As the Biden Administration seeks to deepen the Abraham Accords and expand the circle of normalizers, it will both lower barriers for potential future normalizers and help ensure the future sustainability of agreements if there is a role for the Palestinians within the context of normalization. Inclusion of the Palestinians will also benefit regional stability and advance the goal of a peaceful future for Israelis and Palestinians. Heightened tensions around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in recent months, including settlement announcements in areas that would challenge the contiguity of a future Palestinian state, have caused needless bumps in the relationships between Israel and other Abraham Accords states, including postponements of ministerial convenings of the Negev Forum. Ensuring a Palestinian role and tangible benefits for the Palestinian people in the normalization process helps inoculate these historic agreements from the instability that is endemic to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and can also incentivize Palestinians to embrace a political and diplomatic process rather than turn to terrorism.

As the Palestinian Authority loses more credibility, legitimacy, and popularity, the leadership and institutional vacuum is contributing to more terrorism, more violence, and more instability. The Taylor Force Act must continue to be utilized in order to create pressure on Palestinian leadership to stop its incentivization of terrorism, which is neither improving Palestinian lives nor bringing Palestinian statehood any closer to fruition. The United States must use the other tools available to it as well in order to support the Palestinian institutions and the Palestinian people working toward positive change, contributing to a more peaceful and fruitful political and societal environment, and acting as a force for stability and against Iranian-backed malignant actors. All

financial and political incentives for Palestinians to turn to terrorism must be combated, which means holding the Palestinian Authority to account while improving stability and security in the West Bank and the quality of life for Palestinians.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you so much, Dr. Koplow, and I now recognize myself for 5 minutes, and, hey, I know that Dr. Jackson and myself were so pleased. We've never had three witnesses right on point in 5 minutes. This is a first. So thank you very much. We appreciate that.

Then, Secretary Abrams, I want to thank you for beginning with truly identifying that it is the regime in Tehran as the source of the terrorist mass murders and in every way sponsoring terrorism around the world.

I deeply regret that the Biden administration has agreed to pay \$6 billion in ransom to the regime in Tehran. To me this is just so bizarre as we are still in the global war on terrorism and additionally, we now have a war instigated by war criminal Putin where clearly with the Chinese Communist Party, the regime in Tehran, we have a conflict between dictators who seek to rule by gun opposing democracies which rule by law.

At this time, what a dangerous time for the people of Israel and for the United States and American families, too.

Dr. Schanzer, what is the role in the region that the regime in Tehran is playing and driving the current surge of terrorists emanating from the West Bank and what funding is Iran providing and other kinds of support and weapons?

Mr. SCHANZER. Mr. Chairman, thank you for the question. The hand of Iran can be seen throughout all of the various terrorist groups that are active on Israel's borders, Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Shiite militias in Syria. We've seen Iran's hand in all of them. We see cash. We see training. We see arms. The smuggling, all of it, has been orchestrated by Iran.

Really actually one of the eye opening things that came to light from the 2021 conflict, that 11-day war between Israel and Hamas, the Israelis learned of the existence of this nerve center. This is a coordinating operation out of Lebanon. We're not sure whether this is a virtual center or whether there is an actual physical location. But their goal is to coordinate the activities, the violent activities, that we see primarily in the West Bank with the idea of destabilizing this territory and ultimately bringing down the Palestinian Authority, thereby completing the sort of stranglehold, if you will, of Iran-backed terrorist groups surrounding Israel.

It's an encirclement strategy that I think is probably a prelude to the final sort of countdown if you will in the nuclear standoff between Iran and Israel.

This is, I think, a very dangerous development and one that I think we should be doing everything that we can to stop specifically by not giving the regime in Iran more money to finance these activities.

Mr. WILSON. It's shocking to think of, as you say, operating out of Lebanon, Hezbollah, just the interconnection with Hamas and Gaza. We've just got to be understanding how dangerous all of this is.

Dr. Koplow, the Biden administration has made a policy decision to restart substantial U.S. assistance to the Palestinian Authority. In your experience, has there been any assistance program to the West Bank in Gaza that served American national interests? If the

administration is going to spend the money, how should they spend it to further U.S. policy goals and provide for security?

Mr. KOPLOW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The assistance that the Biden administration is providing to the West Bank in Gaza to the best of my knowledge and according to State Department certification is not violating the Taylor Force Act. Thankfully, the United States is not providing any funds that go directly to the Palestinian Authority or that directly benefit the Palestinian Authority.

I do believe that the economic support funds that the United States provides are beneficial to Palestinians, to Israeli security and to U.S. interests. Furthermore, I believe that the funding that the United States provides to the U.S. security coordinator that goes to ensure coordination between Israel and the Palestinians and that goes to train and equip the Palestinian Authority security forces with non-lethal weapons is also extremely important, both for Israeli security and for U.S. interests.

In all of these cases, this funding contributes to a better environment on the ground helps build the Palestinian economy, ensures that there are Palestinians who would otherwise be either out of work, who may turn to terrorism, as we've seen in places like Jenin and Nablus where you have extremely high Palestinian unemployment are instead engage in more productive activities.

So long as this money does not benefit the Palestinian Authority directly in any way, I believe that it continues to be a U.S. interest to provide these funds.

Mr. WILSON. Secretary Abrams, how—what more can be do with the Taylor Force Act to protect the people of Israel?

Mr. ABRAMS. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. As I said in the testimony, I don't think we're talking to other governments and organizations about it enough. It think we're asking them to be helpful, the Palestinians, without saying but not this way because of the Pay to Slay system.

There is a risk that as other governments, Saudis may be the first, start helping the PA, they undermine the effectiveness of Taylor Force by providing cash.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you again for your insight and each of you for your service. I now recognize Ranking Member Dean Phillips for 5 minutes.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to yield my time to Mr. Schneider, as much as he might consume.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. I'll be quick. First of all, I thank witnesses for being here and sharing your insights. Let's talk quickly why we are here.

We are here because as noted because the PA continues to, as Mr. Abrams as you said, honor and reward terrorists. They call it a martyrs fund. We rightly call it Pay for Slay. It's something that the U.S. must not and will not ever accept, which is why we have the Taylor Force Act.

Dr. Schanzer, you said it well. We have to enforce it. We have to strengthen our enforcement of it and make sure the Palestinians understand that as long as they do that, there will be increasingly serious consequences for them.

But Dr. Koplow, you also touched on, and it's something that I'm proud of as the chair of the Abraham Accords Caucus, that the

Abraham Accords Caucus provides an opportunity for us not to just further possibilities within the region for peace and prosperity for all the people of the region, but also work with allies and other signatories of the Abraham Accords Caucus to join and put pressure on the Palestinians to end this horrible policy.

Again, going back to Mr. Abrams, it is the policy, the more we talk about it with these allies, the more impact we will have. So I am glad we are here.

I will close with this, just quoting what Dr. Koplow said in his remarks. We have unwavering support for Israeli security and support for measures that will stabilize the West Bank and build toward a negotiated and viable political outcome that improves the lives of Israelis and Palestinians. That's why we're here and that's why we will continue to enforce the act.

I'm sorry I went long. I yield my time back.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Mr. Schneider. I will continue with my questions. Just a quick yes or no from each of you if you might. Is the United States in compliance with the Taylor Force Act? Starting with you, Mr. Abrams.

Mr. ABRAMS. Not fully.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Not fully. Can you expand on that just a little bit?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes, I think our money is not going to the PA, ESF money.

Mr. PHILLIPS. So it's fungible.

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes. I think we're not putting the kind of pressure that we could on others.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Okay. Thank you. Dr. Schanzer?

Mr. SCHANZER. I believe we are in compliance, but I do think that there are other things that we can do to tighten the legislation itself. The indirect support might be cut as well.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Okay. I appreciate it. Dr. Koplow?

Mr. KOPLOW. Yes, I believe we are in compliance.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Okay. Thank you all. I think it's fair to say that we are looking at the lesser of two evils here as it relates to Hamas and PA. You know, we have not been terribly successful of the United States with regime change and replacement, I think it is fair to say.

I would like some perspective on the alternatives. If the PA were to collapse, what happens in that vacuum? I have my suspicions. Clearly, I don't think it's in the best interest of anybody for a full occupation by the Israelis. So starting with you, again, Mr. Abrams, I would welcome perspective on what we—A, what would happen, but B, what is the responsibility of other neighbors, the Jordanians, the Saudis, not just the United States and Israel as it relates to that question?

Mr. ABRAMS. You know, the Israeli view, Mr. Phillips, is a collapse of the PA would be dangerous. They certainly don't want, and they haven't wanted since Oslo, to take full administrative responsibility for the West Bank and Gaza.

I think you're right in suggesting that what we should be doing is talking to other donors and potential donors and particularly Jordan because they're right there because we're coming to the turning point.

Abbas is 87 or 88. He won't go on forever. What does the PA look like after that? Who is in control? Is that a calamity or is it a moment of opportunity to change the PA?

Mr. PHILLIPS. Doctor?

Mr. SCHANZER. Yes, thank you, Mr. Ranking Member. Let me just say this, I believe that we are on the precipice of a full collapse in not a lot of time, and the way to head this off is to force Abbas to clarify the succession process or potentially even have him stand aside.

We have been in a situation where we have been tracking the succession crisis now for years. The State Department has refused to engage directly with the Palestinian Authority for fear of upsetting Mahmoud Abbas, for fear of, I don't know, destabilizing him in some way.

The bottom line is, the longer we wait and the more chaotic the West Bank becomes, the less likely that the other candidates are going to be willing to step in. Nobody wants to be the captain of the Titanic, right? This is the mentality that I have heard to describe these other candidates for succession so long as this crisis endures.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you. If I could just have a minute for Dr. Koplow?

Mr. KOPLOW. Thank you, Mr. Ranking Member. As Mr. Abrams rightly notes, Israel has a strong interest in keeping the Palestinian Authority in place. That has been the policy of successive Israeli governments, including the current Israeli government.

If the PA collapses, the two most likely scenarios in my estimation are a full Hamas takeover of the West Bank, and they have been working assiduously over the past couple of years to increase their presence in the West Bank.

Second, Israel goes in and reestablishes its presence in large Palestinian cities, as was the case before the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and was the case during the Second Intifada, which is an outcome that I know the Israelis would like to avoid at nearly any cost.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you. Thank you all. I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Phillips. I will now proceed to Congressman Brian Mast of Florida.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Chairman. As U.S. representatives, it is, of course, important that we ask is the U.S. in compliance with something. But I think it misses a more important question, which maybe I will see if we have time to answer at the end, which is just simply why is the PA paying people to kill Israelis? That may be a little bit more of a philosophical question, but probably a more important one to answer to get to the crux of the issue in my opinion.

I want to use this backdrop of agreement to push something that I personally believe and then ask for analysis on. I think the two State solution is dead, and I think it should be dead. I have never agreed with it personally as an individual. It never made sense to me that you take an entity and make a State out of it that from its very inception would likely be a terrorist government organization.

I think you all have quantified that in part. Pay to Slay does exist. You know, you have all said in various ways they want—Mr. Abrams, they want violence here, but not there. They are very tactical and specific about where they want it, using the terms West Bank terror, you know, incentive for violence and the list goes on. This is not hyperbole. Everybody agrees on this.

Personally, I think we should be working to optimize the status quo. I use myself as an example to say sometimes, you know, I'm missing two legs. Things are never going to be perfect for me, but I work to optimize the status quo that exists for me. I think we should be working to optimize the status quo that exists there because sometimes things just aren't going to get better in a certain place. I am not going to regrow legs. I don't think the two State solution is going to regrow there.

I want to start with this question with the time that I have, and it was starting to be touched on in the last one, and it's just simply this. Would Hamas—let's just start with this. Would Hamas win an election in Gaza? Then I will ask, would Hamas win an election in the West Bank? Then I will ask, would Hamas win an election combined?

Mr. ABRAMS. There are polls, Mr. Mast.

Mr. MAST. I'm familiar with them.

Mr. ABRAMS. So, you know, many of them show that Hamas would win in the West Bank, but Fatah would win in Gaza. The devil you know is not liked because people live under oppression and so they react against the government that is repressing them.

Today, I think Hamas probably would win because the PA is so unpopular.

Mr. SCHANZER. I would tend to agree that I think Hamas has a leg up, if you will, on the Palestinian Authority. But I think it boils down to poor governance and corruption on the part of the PA. It is so thoroughly detested by its own people that Hamas has emerged as the anti-corruption candidate, and this is what lends it that credibility right now.

Mr. MAST. I will let you answer as well, sir, but let me add something that maybe, after you answer, you all could go back and answer as well. Should we be negotiating separately? Should they be considered separate entities, Gaza and the West Bank?

Mr. KOPLOW. Thank you, Congressman. Polls obviously are difficult within the West Bank and Gaza. I agree with Mr. Abrams that the likely scenario is that Fatah would win in Gaza given Hamas' unpopularity. That we should, of course, doubt the free and fair results of any election in Gaza held under Hamas auspices.

I think in the West Bank it is more complicated. Fatah before the last selections that were scheduled and then canceled had fractured into different lists. I think if there was one Fatah list that ran in a unified fashion, they would have a better chance of winning in the West Bank. But certainly the Palestinian Authority and Fatah are deeply unpopular at the West Bank at the moment given the various issues within the Palestinian Authority of corruption, transparency, and non-democracy.

Mr. SCHANZER. Just to answer your question, Mr. Congressman, we already are treating the West Bank and Gaza as two separate entities. In fact, if we are to be honest right now, the chances of

a two State solution are essentially nil because we have a three State solution.

I am not even sure that there is that, right? I am not sure that the West Bank is going to be willing to engage in any serious dialog that would lead to an independent State. But in the meantime, you still have this additional entity in Gaza run by Hamas, and it cannot be treated as part of the West Bank Palestinian Authority.

Mr. MAST. Anybody care to touch on that first question from the very beginning?

Mr. ABRAMS. Two State solution?

Mr. MAST. Why does Pay to Slay exist to begin with?

Mr. ABRAMS. This goes back, I think to Yasser Arafat and the founding of the PLO, which was a terrorist group from the beginning. I think if you look at what Arafat was saying in Arabic, from the very moment that he returned, he was a supporter of terrorism.

Mr. MAST. Thank you all for your questions. I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much. We will now proceed to Congresswoman Kathy Manning of North Carolina.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a constituent in my district whose daughter, an American who was living in Israel, was killed by a Palestinian terrorist. Every month this grief stricken father calls me to ask why that terrorist family continues to get money for the devastating crime he committed.

Those calls are a searing reminder to me that the PA's appalling policy of rewarding the families of terrorists is reprehensible. It should be condemned by all, and it must be stopped. When deadly terrorist acts are rewarded with money, it encourages more terrorism and makes peace harder to achieve.

The Taylor Force Act rightly ensures that our assistance does not directly benefit the PA until they end this brutal practice once and for all or rather it should ensure that.

Each of you have weighed in on whether the U.S. is in compliance with Taylor Force, and there is some disagreement among three of you. So I would like to ask those of you who said that the U.S. is in compliance, the followup question. If the U.S. is in compliance with the Taylor Force Act and if it is actually doing what it was intended to do, Dr. Koplow, do you think it is doing what it was intended to do?

Mr. KOPLOW. Thank you, Congresswoman. The Palestinian Authority, of course, has not complied with the requirements in the Taylor Force Act. It is why the United States is still not providing any assistance that directly benefits the Palestinian Authority.

The Palestinian Authority budget comes effectively from three sources. One of those three sources is foreign assistance. That source of support for the Palestinian Authority has been under severe threat since the Taylor Force Act was passed. It is not only the result of the Taylor Force Act directly. It is also a result of the fact that after Congress in its wisdom passed the Taylor Force Act, the Israeli Knesset passed companion legislation that is not identical but similar to Taylor Force.

In addition, countries in the region have also seized their support for the Palestinian Authority. I believe that no country in the region has given direct support to the Palestinian Authority.

Some reports State 2019 I have heard from Israeli officials since 2017. But obviously Taylor Force had an important demonstration effect as well on other countries.

The Palestinian Authority is undergoing severe fiscal crisis as a result. I think that the pressure needs to be maintained on the Palestinian Authority. I think that the more that that pressure is felt, the closer we will get to the Palestinian Authority ending this awful practice and hopefully instituting a different system that is not based on rewarding terrorist.

Ms. MANNING. Dr. Schanzer, would you agree with that?

Mr. SCHANZER. I would largely agree with it. I don't think I would take any exception to any one sentence. I just do think that the issue right now is how do we up that pressure further?

I don't know if there is a way to do it with the current system that we have advised, primarily because the Palestinian Authority is more than willing to pay the pain forward to its own people. In other words, that budget that Dr. Koplow just mentioned that continues to constrict because of America cutting its assistance, the Palestinian Authority will just essentially deprive its own people.

What I have suggested here based on conversations that I have had with Israelis and others who were very familiar with this dynamic, they suggest the implementation of a social security program that would begin to provide a safety net for all destitute Palestinian people who are in need and cut this other program entirely.

You could have people in who are in jail or the families of those who are in jail receiving the same amounts as any other family in the West Bank. That would, I think, be an equalizer, if you will. That would be the way, at least one would hope, we could cut Pay for Slay entirely.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Mr. Abrams, I want to turn to the malign influence of Iran, which we know is growing in the region. What can we be doing to cutoff the flow of resources from Iran to terrorist groups like Hamas and PIJ in the West Bank and in Gaza?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think it's very important that we work as closely as possible with Jordan. It used to be the case not too many years ago that you never heard about money or guns crossing over from Jordan, but you do now.

I don't think it is probably a lack of effort on the Jordanian part, but it is happening. I think we should be having conversations with them and the Israelis about how to do better at sealing that border.

Ms. MANNING. So what changed? Why were they effective previously but there is more leakage of resources and weapons now through Jordan?

Mr. ABRAMS. It may just be a much greater Iranian and Hezbollah effort. Maybe the Jordanians haven't sort of reacted by raising their effort.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you. My time is about to expire. I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Congresswoman Kathy Manning. We now proceed to Congressman Dr. Ronny Jackson of Texas of Texas.

Mr. JACKSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding this important hearing today and thank you to our witnesses for being here.

We here in Congress cannot afford to ignore threat posed by Iran, Iranian military proxies, terrorist organizations in the Middle East, all against the interest of the United States and our allies.

During my time in Congress, I have done everything I can to support Israel. I have signed letters to demand answers and to hold the Biden administration accountable. I have written legislation that has been signed into law. I have traveled to Israel as part of official delegations to show the world that the United States stands with our unique and important ally.

Let's just be clear. Israel has the right to exist in security free from violent assault. The United States should do everything we can to uphold that right and to oppose all of those who threaten it.

While I found that there are some here in Washington who do not share my views unfortunately, there are too many in public office who are choosing to side with the terrorist against Israel. Just in my personal opinion, some of those are members of our current administration in the actions that they take or they fail to take.

The Biden administration knows that the Palestinian Authority pays terrorists to injure or kill innocent Americans and Israelis in Israel through its Pay to Slay program, and they know American taxpayer dollars are directly funding it.

This is in direct violation of the Taylor Force Act. It personally makes me sick to think about it. So I personally wanted to do something about this and take action more so than what has been done to date.

Last December in my personal capacity, not as a member of the Congress, but in my personal capacity, I was proud to join with Taylor Force's parents, Stuart and Robbi Force to sue the Biden administration and Secretary Blinken for their blatant violations of the Taylor Force Act.

The Taylor Force Act is named after Taylor Force, of course, a U.S. Army veteran, a West Point graduate, considered to be a native of Lubbock, Texas, in fact, which is where I was born and just minutes away from my hometown in Levelland. Sadly, he was murdered by Palestinian terrorists, and we all know the story here, while he was in Israel.

His killers were then rewarded by the Palestinian Authority with the bounty payment as a part of the Pay to Slay program. Taylor Force as a good America. It breaks my heart to think that U.S. taxpayer dollars in any way contributed to his death. We must honor his life and his legacy by ensuring implementation of the law and preventing these senseless and brutal murders from ever happening again.

President Biden, in my opinion, has willingly ignored the law by resuming payments of U.S. taxpayer dollars to the Palestinian Authority directly facilitating and promoting violent extremists against our greatest ally.

Our lawsuit demands that the U.S. Government abide by the Taylor Force Act and immediately end funding to the Palestinian Authority.

According to an article from Forbes during the last year of the Obama administration, over 350 million U.S. taxpayer dollars were sent to the Palestinian Authority. In 2018 President Trump cut that aid to zero in accordance with the Taylor Force Act.

Just a few months after coming back into office, President Biden made the horrible decision to resume sending U.S. taxpayer dollars to the Palestinian Authority, which has been, in my opinion, directly used to fund this type of terrorism.

It is common knowledge, and we mention this in passing that once these taxpayer dollars are given to the PA that those funds instantly become fungible. While the funds may be designated for humanitarian support in reality these funds, if nothing else, they free up other resources within the Palestinian Authority organization. They can be put toward terrorist attacks and the Pay to Slay program.

I guess one of my questions is, do you have any recommendations on how, you know, we talk about direct support, direct money, but I think we are not naive enough to know that a lot of the money that is indirectly going there is actually doing the same thing that we are trying to prevent here.

What ways can we in Congress, what things can we put in place to assure that there is no indirect money that is going to support this as well because I think that serves the same purpose and we are not accomplishing anything that we wanted to accomplish with the Taylor Force Act is we allow that to happen.

Should it be tied to some type of incentive, you know, as the terrorist attacks, you know, arise, you know, the money, you know, dries up. I don't know. Do you have any suggestions? Mr. Abrams, I will start with you.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, this kind of hearing, I think, is a great way to draw attention to this. I think we should have another hearing like this with administration witnesses, asking them whether they are pushing as hard as they can on the PA on other donors and making sure that the money that is going in from State and from AID is not going to the PA indirectly as you suggest.

Mr. SCHANZER. I would just add this. That we currently have a position at the State Department, coordinator for Palestinian affairs. In that office, we see the day-to-day advocating for additional funds to the Palestinians, in some ways looking for creative work arounds to the Taylor Force Act and its enforcement. That is the kind of thing that is incredibly counterproductive, and I think it should be policy that these things stop. We might even need to consider a cessation of that office so long as those practices continue.

The idea here is that there should be a zero tolerance policy and that should be across U.S. Government. I don't think it is that way right now.

Mr. KOPLOW. Thank you, Congressman. I believe that the United States must continue to very thoroughly vet every organization as the State Department does, that receives any grant money through ESF or through MEPPA. It is important that vetting continue and the Congress maintain its oversight over that vetting process.

Mr. JACKSON. Thank you. I think my time has expired, but I would just like to say that I think that all of the money should dry up. Even the money that is going indirectly should somehow be

tied to the level of violence in the area. I think that if there is an incentive on that side, somehow I think that people would be incentivized to stop this Pay to Slay program. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Dr. Jackson, and also thank you very much for your association with the Taylor Force family. That is so inspiring, and I am grateful for your visits to Israel, too.

Ranking Member Phillips and I a month ago today were in Jerusalem meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and so our associations are so important.

Next we have Congressman Brad Sherman from California.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Twelve years ago, quite a number of members of this subcommittee and then the full committee joined me and co-sponsored my bill to make Israel a visa waiver country.

I am pleased to report to this subcommittee that while that bill never became law, today the administration announced the action to make Israel a visa waiver country.

There is nothing more important for the U.S.-Israel alliance than to allow travel of Israelis to the United States and the economic benefits of this will be very substantial as startup nation has a lot of deals to do with American business.

But now we focus on the purpose of this hearing, which is considerably less joyous. For decades the Palestinian Authority has paid cash stipends to terrorists in Israeli prisons and their families and has paid stipends to the families of terrorists who were killed. The clear purpose of this is to incentivize terrorism.

Taylor Force, a 28-year-old West Point graduate was stabbed and killed by a Palestinian terrorist in 2016. That is why we passed the Taylor Force Act.

I will ask any of our witnesses, how much of the PA budget is consumed by these Pay to Slay payments? The PA faces severe budgetary shortfalls and relies on international assistance to sustain itself, would they be in a better position to provide services to the Palestinian people if they stopped these payments? Yes, doctor?

Mr. SCHANZER. Yes, thank you, Congressman Sherman. The number that we hear coming out of the Israeli system is that it is somewhere in the neighborhood of \$300 to \$350 million per year.

Mr. SHERMAN. What is that as a percentage of their overall budget. Do any of the witnesses know?

Mr. SCHANZER. I am not sure what the current budget is.

Mr. KOPLOW. The current budget is, of course, not public and not transparent. But the best estimates are that it is somewhere between \$4-1/2 billion and \$5 billion annually.

Mr. SHERMAN. Four and a half, so closing in on 10 percent of their budget is going to these terrorists promoting efforts. Not only do you have to look at the money they lose by making the payments, it is the money that they would get from good people around the world if they suspended these payments.

Our law, in particular, the Taylor Force Act prevents us from direct benefits to the Palestinian Authority. While we have cut that assistance, pursuant to the Taylor Force Act we continued to provide indirect assistance, security assistance and funding through UNRWA. How does this funding impact the effectiveness of the

Taylor Force Act. Do we have to do more to effect Palestinian Authority policy? Mr. Abrams?

Mr. ABRAMS. Any funding that goes around the Taylor Force Act undermines it. That is true to some extent of UNRWA. UNRWA has its own problems, as you know, Mr. Sherman. In addition, there are the questions of who is on the staff? There are the questions of what is being taught in UNRWA schools.

So to use UNRWA as a kind of bypass is really a very bad solution.

Mr. SHERMAN. I understand. Our whole purpose is to prevent Pay to Slay and you give to UNRWA, for example, which in their education programs promotes terrorism.

Dr. Koplow, why is the Pay to Slay program so politically important for the Palestinian Authority? What consequences do its leaders face themselves if they abandon the program?

Mr. KOPLOW. Thank you for the question, Congressman. The issue of prisoners is paramount in Palestinian society. There is an enormous amount of political pressure on Palestinian leadership to make these payments.

Mr. SHERMAN. Is this the people speaking to leadership or has the leadership whipped up this sentiment by propaganda so that they are now responding to the very attitudes that they created?

Mr. KOPLOW. I'm not sure if I can answer that question because I think it is something of a chicken and an egg question. But certainly Palestinian leadership has been grossly irresponsible with this policy.

I do think that they are in some way responsive to sentiments within Palestinian society about the importance of prisoners, and as Mr. Abrams—

Mr. SHERMAN. I am going to sneak in one. Is there any effort to tell the Palestinian people how much they are losing not only from the 8 or 9 percent of their budget, but from the other money that would be flowing were it not for these payments?

Mr. KOPLOW. I think there is. I think that ordinary Palestinians certainly feel the pinch that the Palestinian Authority is feeling because of its budgetary crisis.

Mr. SHERMAN. I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Sherman. We will now proceed to Congressman Tim Burchett of Tennessee.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Are any of you all familiar with the Phoenix Center for Research and Field Studies?

Mr. ABRAMS. Congressman, I am a bit familiar with it just from its online presence from some reporting on it I have seen. I have—

Mr. BURCHETT. A simple yes or no will be fine, sir. That would be fine.

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Mr. BURCHETT. Sir? No?

Mr. SCHANZER. I have not.

Mr. KOPLOW. No, Congressman.

Mr. BURCHETT. Well, the Washington Examiner has brought to light a report by the watchdog group NGO Monitor. The report shows that the Phoenix Center has received over \$30,000 in U.S. funds, and it has been a partner with the popular front for the lib-

eration of Palestine and the Palestine Islamic Jihad, two U.S. designated terror groups.

Mr. Chairman, I request you ask consent to submit this report titled, New State Department Grantee Support Resistance, Partners with Palestinian Islamic Jihad Leaders, into the record.

Mr. WILSON. It shall be accepted.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Now according to the Phoenix Center's website, it has supported armed resistance against Israel, which is, of course, a euphemism for terrorism. I don't if you all catch this or not, but we are using American tax dollars to fund these thugs against an ally, Israel, and yet you all, our own State Department, has listed them as a terrorist organization, yet we are funding them.

In one discussion, participants in a Phoenix Center meeting emphasized the importance of resistance action. The viable Palestinian choice of confronting the occupation's threats required continued resistance action until achieving a Third Intifada. I will have to ask somebody else to pronounce that word for me, but which you all know what I am talking about.

But knowing this, do you all believe that the

State Department is conducting appropriate oversight of who receives U.S. taxpayer dollars?

Mr. ABRAMS. Sir, I don't. I think you are pointing to a big error that the State Department AID make. What they do to vet a group is they ask the National Counterterrorism Center or the FBI the Phoenix organization, is it on the list? If it isn't on the list then everything is fine. They don't do even internet research to try to find out the things that the Washington Examiner had that NGO monitor found out. They didn't put a spy in the organization.

Mr. BURCHETT. Sir, let me submit to you, we give you all what is over \$60 billion a year the State Department. I am sure everybody up here will write a strong letter to these terrorists, but they are dirt bags. They are killing people. They are killing innocent people. That is why we are here today talking about this.

I submit to you that is not acceptable. I think we as a Congress ought to start acting like a Congress like we are supposed to do and have control over this country's checkbook. And this money whether it be \$30,000 or 30 cents going to a terrorist group to me is just not acceptable.

What do you all think needs to happen so that U.S. tax dollars don't end up in the hands of designated terrorist groups?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think the first thing, sir, is the State Department AID need to go beyond a cursory check, are they on the list, and start doing some elementary research about recipients.

For example, what's on Twitter? For example, what happens if you do an internet search? Because you find out what NGO Monitor found out about this Phoenix group and that apparently the State Department never found out.

Mr. SCHANZER. Sir, I would just like to add this. That we have a vetting system that, I think, does a fairly good job of making sure that funds don't flow to organizations that work with Hamas or Islamic Jihad or Hezbollah. These are sort of the big three, if you will, in this space.

What I have seen consistently over the last several years is that the popular front for the liberation of Palestine, PFLP, the organization that you just mentioned, often goes overlooked.

Now this is traditionally a Marist-Leninist organization that in recent years has——

Mr. BURCHETT. Are you talking about the State Department or this group?

Mr. SCHANZER. That is a funny question. I am talking about the PFLP, sir.

Mr. BURCHETT. I am not laughing.

Mr. SCHANZER. The PFLP, sir. The PFLP now receives money directly from Iran. They have normalized themselves here in the United States. There are a lot of groups, in fact six charities that have been designated by the Israelis. There has been a big flack here in the U.S. about whether the Israeli evidence that they have provided against six different charities that work with the PFLP, whether their information is correct, I think starting with an investigation into PFLP and some of the other smaller groups might help kind of tighten the noose a little bit on the way that this funding flows.

Mr. BURCHETT. Let me stop you right there because we are out of time. Mr. Chairman, I would just submit to you that you all had one job, and you failed. I would hope better in the future because we will be looking at available dollars, and this to me is dollars that need to go elsewhere and not terrorizing Israelis. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Burchette. We now proceed to Congressman Rich McCormick of Georgia.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the witnesses for your testimony today.

U.S. foreign aid money should serve American National interests and should not reward behavior that hurts ourselves or any other country. I think we all agree on that.

The Taylor Force Act signed into law by President Trump in 2018 prohibits U.S. aid money to Palestinian Authority until they stop paying for these stipends for the martyr's funds.

In 2019, the U.S. made no contributions to the Palestinian Authority because of this, but President Biden blindly resumed these payments with very little evidence of added oversight. I hope anyone who, by the way, cares about Israel or cares about terrorism is paying attention to who they support.

This past May, terrorists in Gaza launched rockets at Israel. And since the beginning of the year, Palestinian terrorists have murdered 27 Israeli civilians and three soldiers.

Our aid cannot continue to reward and encourage this kind of behavior directly or indirectly by honoring those who participate in these activities.

Honorable Mr. Abrams, do the economic support fund dollars allocated to the West Bank and Gaza strip by Biden administration, does it illegally benefit the Palestinian Authority?

Mr. ABRAMS. Not to my knowledge. I think the ESF funds are being withheld in accordance with the Taylor Force Act.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Does sending aid money to Palestinian Authority serve to direct—does it serve a direct U.S. interest?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think it is a direct U.S. interest right now that the PA not collapse overnight because I think that would create chaos.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Have prior reductions in U.S. aid to Palestinian Authority, such as when we denied them their funds, such as Trump did in 2018, did that result in a collapse of the Palestinian Authority?

Mr. ABRAMS. No. It clearly did not.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Okay. So is it because something has changed since then?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I think it's partly because they keep running up debts. It is partly because they are getting money from other sources. And one of those sources, you know, is the government of Israel, which withholds customs taxes and then pays some of them basically to keep the PA afloat.

Mr. MCCORMICK. I have been kind of doing a history research on this and looking at the rise and fall of the PLO, the PA, Yasser Arafat, you probably know better than I, but you guys realize Yasser Arafat is kind of what brought in this nationalist movement, the anti-Zionist movement, during a time, as far as my research shows, where we had fairly peaceful people that were your typical electricians, your plumbers, your middle class workers in the Palestinian region. It had free travel all over Israel, and then this nationalist movement. Does anyone want to tell me where Yasser Arafat was born and grew up?

Mr. ABRAMS. He was born in Egypt to the best of my knowledge.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Exactly, Egypt. Then he came over to Palestine, raised this nationalist movement, which now we are kind of basically supporting this same nationalist movement, I would make the case, with our tax dollars, which also support martyrs with our tax dollars, for this movement that wasn't even born inside of Palestine, but came from a foreign nation with a people that were anti-Zionistic by definition and now we are paying to support an organization that you said, by the way, didn't suffer when we didn't pay for it.

I would just make the case that we have to be very careful when we decide where our money goes and what behaviors we reward. I think we all agree that this money has been mismanaged and that if we continue to use money to reward people who do things that are unacceptable to our Nation and to foreign nations that we support, we are the ones that hold accountability.

Mr. ABRAMS. Congressman, it is interesting, people are talking a lot now about the 50th Anniversary of the 1973 war. It is also the 30th Anniversary of the Oslo Accords. What you are saying really raises that very interesting question of whether historically whether bringing Arafat and his 30,000 troops back, because he was in exile, was a great historic error on the part of Israel.

Mr. MCCORMICK. I would make the case that it is. They probably made other errors. But I can only be, just like I tell my sons all the time, I am only accountable for my own actions. Whether Israel makes mistakes or not is on them, but whether we make mistakes with our money in who we support, that is on us. And that is why I call for higher accountability and not to spend money on people who support terrorist organizations. With that I yield.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Rich McCormick. We now proceed to Congressman Michael Lawler of New York.

Mr. LAWLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this important hearing. Five years ago, Congress passed the Taylor Force Act which barred U.S. economic assistance to the Palestinian Authority until it stops all payments incentivizing terror.

The PA's Martyr Fund, which is still around today, pays monthly stipends to the families of Palestinians killed, injured, or imprisoned for carrying out attacks against Israel. This Pay to Slay policy covers all terror attacks against Israel, including those that kill Americans. That is why the Taylor Force Act was so important.

It was supposed to ensure taxpayer dollars weren't funding the killing of our own children. Unfortunately, the Biden administration resumed these payments despite the Taylor Force Act still very much being the law of land and at a time when these killings are still going on.

Just this past February, American citizen Elan Ganeles was murdered by a Palestinian terrorist in the West Bank. I would like to enter into the record a statement by Elan's mom by unanimous consent.

Mr. WILSON. Absolutely, unanimous consent.

Mr. LAWLER. She is going through just about the worst thing that could happen to a parent. I would also like to welcome Elan's brother, Simon, who traveled to DC today to witness this important hearing. We must honor Elan's memory instead of furthering fueling the hate that led to his death.

Mr. ABRAMS, as you mentioned in your testimony, the Taylor Force Act requires the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. and the U.S. Secretary of State to highlight this issue on the international stage and pressure the PA to stop these payments.

Mr. ABRAMS, to the best of your knowledge, can you think of one single time Linda Thompson-Greenfield or Antony Blinken brought up this among our allies and pressed the PA to stop Pay to Slay?

Mr. ABRAMS. Not to my knowledge, Mr. Lawler, and you know, there is a thing called the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, which is the international group that tries to get funding for the Palestinians. I don't think the United States made this a big issue there either.

Mr. LAWLER. Not only have they not made it a big issue. They have failed completely to comply with this requirement. But they have actually been encouraging other countries to raise payments to the PA. It is absurd, and it is encouraging terrorism, violence, and corruption, and it violates our laws, and I have been especially appalled that the administration is dragging their disregard for the Taylor Force Act into negotiations regarding a Saudi Arabia-Israel normalization agreement. I have consistently said that bringing Saudi Arabia into the Abraham Accords is critical to cement Israel's role in the Middle East.

But the Biden administration is going about it all wrong. Recent reports indicate that a potential deal may include Saudi Arabia resuming financial payments to the PA. This is just another example of the Biden administration neglecting the Taylor Force Act and instead choosing to bolster the credibility of the anti-Semitic, anti-Israel and pro-terror PA.

Mr. Abrams, are you aware of these reports and can you give a few thoughts on how this agreement could be dangerous?

Mr. ABRAMS. The agreement basically undermines the Taylor Force Act by getting the Saudis or others to give cash to the PA, then it really is undermining the legislation completely. It is rewarding the PA for refusing to comply with what the Taylor Force Act demands.

So as the Abraham Accords grow in importance, and maybe there is an agreement that includes Saudi Arabia, this issue becomes far more important because it would allow potentially the PA to laugh off the Taylor Force Act.

Mr. LAWLER. I would like to submit an op-ed recently written by former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Sander Gerber by unanimous consent.

Mr. WILSON. Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. LAWLER. Mr. Abrams, did you read this recent op-ed by Secretary Pompeo and Sander Gerber?

Mr. ABRAMS. I did.

Mr. LAWLER. In sum and substance, they call for Saudi Arabia and the United States to create a responsible mechanism to help the Palestinian people without furthering PA corruption and support for terrorism. Specifically, they call for the establishment of a Saudi led international aid organization independent of the Palestinian Authority or the United Nations. Do you support this idea?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do. I think it's a terrific idea.

Mr. LAWLER. To our other witnesses, do you support this idea?

Mr. SCHANZER. I would support it, yes.

Mr. KOPLOW. Congressman, I think that's one approach. I think another potential approach is using the opportunity of the leverage that Saudi Arabia has over the Palestinian Authority to actually force it to implement some of the reforms that we have discussed here today.

Mr. LAWLER. Look, there is no question that Saudi Arabia has the ability to have influence. I think that is why the Abraham Accords are so important. It is why I advocated for a special envoy for the Abraham Accords so that we can focus on getting Saudi Arabia to the table. But I think one thing is fundamentally clear. The PA is a corrupt authority and no one, including the United States nor our allies, should be in any way funding them. I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Lawler. And I want to thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony. I want to thank the members who are here today. I am also very, very appreciative of the foreign affairs staff that are so dedicated. And at this time, we may have additional questions for the witnesses, and then I would like to invite our Congress members who are still here for a picture with our witnesses. If the witnesses would stay in place and Rich and Michael, you all are welcome to come and have a picture taken. And I want to also invite Simon Ganeles to be in the picture. Without objection, the committee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:25 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia
Joe Wilson (R-SC), Chairman**

September 20, 2023

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held at 10:00 a.m. in room 210 of the House Visitor's Center. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Wednesday, September 27, 2023

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

LOCATION: HVC-210

SUBJECT: No Incentives for Terrorism: U.S.
Implementation of the Taylor Force Act and
Efforts to Stop 'Pay to Slay'

WITNESSES: The Honorable Elliott Abrams
*Former Deputy Assistant to the President and
Deputy National Security Advisor*

Dr. Jonathan Schanzer
Senior Vice President for Research
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Dr. Michael Koplow
Chief Policy Officer
Israel Policy Forum

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chairs

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

Day Wednesday Date September 27, 2023 Room HVC-210

Starting Time 10:07 AM Ending Time 11:25 AM

Recesses ☐ (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Wilson

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Stenographic Record ☒

Televised ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

No Incentives for Terrorism: U.S. Implementation of the Taylor Force Act and Efforts to Stop 'Pay to Slay'

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Attached

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

NA

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

Attached

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 11:25

Clear Form

Meg Wagner
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia

118th Congress

ATTENDANCE

Meeting on: No Incentives for Terrorism: U.S. Implementation of the Taylor Force Act and Efforts to Stop “Pay to Slay”

Date: 9/27/23

Convened: 10:08am

Adjourned: 11:25am

Representative	Present	Absent	Representative	Present	Absent
Mr. Wilson (SC-02)	X		Mr. Phillips (MN-03)	X	
Mr. Mast (FL-18)	X		Mr. Sherman (CA-30)	X	
Mr. Burchett (TN-02)	X		Mr. Connolly (VA-11)		
Mr. Jackson (TX-13)	X		Mrs. Manning (NC-06)	X	
Mr. Baird (IN-04)			Mr. Schneider (IL-10)	X	
Mr. Lawler (NY-17)	X				
Mr. McCormick (GA-6)	X				

**“No Incentives for Terrorism: U.S. Implementation of the Taylor Force Act and Efforts to
Stop ‘Pay to Slay’”**

**House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia**

10:00 AM, Wednesday, September 27, 2023

HVC-210

Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

The Taylor Force Act, legislation named in honor of a U.S. Army veteran, Taylor Force, who was killed in a terrorist attack in March 2016, conditions aid to the Palestinian Authority based on funds paid to terrorists through the Palestinian Authority Martyrs Fund. For years, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has preserved an appalling program to compensate individuals who commit acts of violence against Israelis and Americans, or the families of such individuals if the individual is deceased. *Such a practice is abhorrent and worthy of our strongest condemnation.* The Taylor Force Act withheld U.S. assistance commensurate with the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian Authority payments that are estimated to be for acts of terrorism.

But six years following the implementation of the Taylor Force Act, there remains no visible change in the actions of the Palestinian Authority to incentivize violence against innocent civilians. The State Department’s Report to Congress submitted in May of this year as required by the Taylor Force Act (P.L. 115-141) cites the Department was unable to certify that the PA, the PLO, and any successor or affiliated organizations terminated payments for acts of terrorism against Israeli and U.S. citizens. The PA’s unwillingness to change course has resulted in a befitting modification to the way that the United States supports Palestinians: No Fiscal Year 2018, 2019, 2020, nor 2021 funds were provided directly to the Palestinian Authority such that they would be subject to the requirements under the Taylor Force Act.

On the brink of economic collapse, it is lamentable that the Palestinian Authority would prioritize funding terrorists over the economic well-being of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza; but in passing the Taylor Force Act, the United States Congress has not. I have been heartened to see the Biden administration reverse course from the misguided Trump policies that inflamed tensions in the West Bank and Gaza to strike a balance between protecting innocent Israeli and American citizens from terrorist attacks and providing lifesaving assistance to Palestinians. To help avert an economic collapse in the West Bank and Gaza, the Biden administration has funded critical programs for the West Bank and Gaza that total \$219 million from the FY2022 ESF account.

Aid to Palestinians included \$42 million in FY22 funds for public health programs, absolutely critical for U.S. foreign policy and our national security interests. We know that infectious

diseases know no borders, and the global fight against tuberculosis and malaria, for example, should not be put on hold until we reach a two-state solution. I was proud to work with Chairman Royce and Ranking Member Engel to include an exemption for childhood vaccinations into the Taylor Force Act. This exemption has allowed projects that support the universal vaccination of all infants in the West Bank and Gaza against rotavirus infection, which is the leading cause of severe and fatal diarrhea in children under five years of age, to continue. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), rotavirus is responsible for the deaths of more than 527,000 children each year globally. As stated in the Taylor Force Act, the United States, as a policy, supports basic humanitarian assistance that contributes to the dignity and wellbeing of Palestinian children. That's who we are, and I am proud that at my behest, the childhood vaccination exemption remains.

It is important to note that cutting off all aid to Palestinians would not only worsen the prospects for a two-state solution, but it would also endanger U.S. national security and counterterrorism efforts. In such a scenario, terrorist organizations such as Hamas, would fill the void of an absent Palestinian Authority should. Averting a collapse and finding long term sustainable solutions to enable an economically and politically stable Palestinian Authority after Abbas must continue to be U.S. policy.

Two weeks and thirty years ago, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) negotiator Mahmoud Abbas signed the Oslo Accord, which created the Palestinian Authority and thus provided Palestinians with temporary, limited self-rule pending a final Israeli-PLO peace agreement. While Palestinians face a colossal financial crisis and as a two-state solution feels increasingly beyond reach, the United States must do everything in its power to both counter appalling incentive structures in the West Bank and Gaza, but also avoid irreparable damage to a future two-state solution.

STATEMENT OF DR. CAROLYN GANELES

Distinguished committee members, thank you for giving me the opportunity to offer this testimony regarding the importance of the Taylor Force Act, not as a foreign policy expert, but as a bereaved parent whose son Elan Ganeles was murdered by Palestinian terrorists in February of this year.

My name is Carolyn Ganeles. I have been married to my husband, Andrew, for 29 years. Andrew and I both grew up in New York state. Andrew was the 4th of 5 children and lived in Far Rockaway. I grew up with my sister in Clinton Corners, a small town in upstate New York. We met in medical school and married during our internship year. Elan was our oldest child and was born in the Bronx in July 1996 right after I finished my pediatric residency. We moved to West Hartford, Connecticut, where our next 2 children Simon and Gabriel were born.

From early childhood, Elan had a great love for learning and deep intellectual curiosity. He was an early reader and loved absorbing information about presidents, states, capitals, birds, cars, planets, and animals. He knew more facts by age 4 about the world around us than even Andrew and I knew. Elan cherished time with his brothers Gabi and Simon (currently married to Gila, who became a very close friend of Elan) as well as his extended family. His appreciation for family was nurtured by the close-knit community in West Hartford, where everyone knew one another.

At one point in high school Elan decided he wanted to learn to fly, so he joined Civil Air Patrol - a junior division of the Air Force. Towards the end of high school he thought he would go to West Point and was nominated by his senator and congressman, but ultimately decided to go to Israel for a gap year.

While there he developed a very strong connection to Israel. This led to a 6 month program on Kibbutz *Sde Eliyahu* during which Elan participated in an *ulpan* (intensive Hebrew language program). Subsequently, he enlisted in the Israeli army, where he served for 2 ½ years in the *Mofet* division doing computer programming - in Hebrew. Following this, he returned to the states where he enrolled in and then graduated from Columbia University with a double major in sustainable development and neuroscience.

As part of his studies, Elan trained on a sophisticated computer mapping program. Through university he worked with the UN on mapping various municipalities and borders throughout

Africa. This led to his post graduate employment at the ESRI company, where he worked as a geospatial analyst.

During his freshman summer at Columbia University through his involvement with the Israel-China connection club at school, Elan traveled around China, working with an Israeli start-up incubator firm seeking Chinese investors. Elan learned about the products to be able to present them, translating between Hebrew and English for the potential investors. It was a very special experience for him.

Elan's many experiences and varied interests made him the incredibly complex individual that he was. He loved to travel and experience the world firsthand.

Being outside brought Elan joy - whether he was conquering challenging hiking trails or immersing himself in the captivating world of birding. But, he also loved to visit museums, where he would spend hours absorbing every detail offered in the exhibits. He had a passion for getting the most out of each day.

Elan loved to cook and had an adventurous culinary palate. During spring of 2020 when all the kids were sent home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Elan decided to master the art of ramen noodle soup, making batch after batch of fresh homemade noodles with exotic mushrooms. Ultimately when he returned to NYC he and a friend started a "soup night", making a different soup from around the world each week, finding all sorts of unique ingredients. His soup nights started small, then began to include friends, and friends of friends, an ever-enlarging circle of acquaintances, and he became known as the "soup night guy" of the Upper West Side. He cherished forming those meaningful friendships and fostering connections between people of diverse backgrounds.

In February 2023, Elan took a trip to Israel to visit friends. On February 27th, heading to a close friend's wedding, he was driving on a busy, well-traveled highway, Route 90, southbound towards Jerusalem. As he drove past Jericho he was approached by a pair of Palestinian terrorists, driver and gunman, in a passing car who fired into his vehicle. As we have been told, the bullet pierced his aorta and lodged in his spine.

Louie Maruf and Maher Shalon, the two murderers in the car, were captured by Israel at the beginning of March, and they await trial. The accomplice who sold the gun to the murderers has also been identified. According to the indictment, the murderers planned to shoot an Israeli Jewish civilian on the road, and they simply rode along the stretch of highway until they randomly selected their victims. In addition to murdering our son, the murderers opened fire on another vehicle before fleeing the scene.

For their crimes, Maruf and Shalon have been awarded monthly stipends from the Palestinian “pay for slay” program. I have been told that as the murderers have not been previously arrested and are single, they each are entitled to receive monthly salaries of 1,400 Israeli shekels per month, plus 400 shekels per month deposited directly to their canteen account in prison. These salaries are the awards granted by the Palestinian Authority to the terrorists for murdering my son.

Please understand that Elan was a gift for our family, for his friends, for his colleagues, and had so much potential that was taken away when he was brutally murdered. He wanted so much to live and experience the world - all its beauty, history, and culture. He accomplished so much in his 26 years, but it was supposed to be just the beginning.

We thank Congress for enacting the Taylor Force Act. It is an important piece of legislation that will truly help to end terrorism against both US and Israeli citizens, and it must be adhered to. It is unbearable to think that without the Taylor Force Act, US taxpayer funds, including my taxes, would help pay Elan’s murderers.

It is imperative that the US continues to withhold funds as long as the Palestinian Authority pays for terror, so that in the future lives are saved and no other family needs to go through such sorrow.



THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY CONTRIBUTORS ARE THEIR OWN AND NOT THE VIEW OF THE HILL

OPINION > INTERNATIONAL

The corrupt Palestinian Authority must not be a part of any Saudi-Israel deal

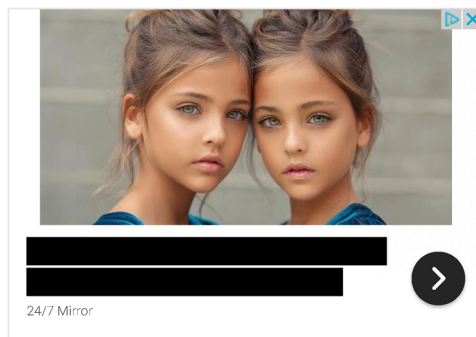
BY MIKE POMPEO & SANDER GERBER, OPINION CONTRIBUTORS 09/08/23 10:30 AM ET



Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas holds a joint press conference with the Turkish president after their meeting at the Presidential Complex in Ankara on July 25, 2023. (Photo by Adem ALTAN / AFP) (Photo by ADEM ALTAN/AFP via Getty Images)

American officials are [visiting](#) Saudi Arabia to discuss Palestinian demands regarding a potential deal for the kingdom to [normalize](#) relations with Israel. The deal could include Riyadh's [reported](#) proposal to resume its financial payments to the Palestinian Authority (PA) if it constrains militants. While Saudi Arabia desires any normalization deal to benefit the Palestinian people, it is financially and morally irresponsible to distribute funds through the corrupt, terrorist-funding PA.

Instead of funneling aid through the PA as part of any normalization agreement, the creation of a new nongovernmental organization would enable the Saudis to support fellow Muslims, develop a responsible organization to tangibly improve Palestinian lives, foster a civil society more amenable to Arab-Israeli normalization outside of the PA's repression and create a much-needed alternative to the PA's endemic misgovernance.





Building on the groundbreaking Abraham Accords that one of us helped negotiate during the Trump administration, Saudi normalization with Israel would demonstrate to the world that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is a historic figure focused on transforming his society and advancing global peace, as well as provide him an opportunity to chart a better course for Palestinians. Any deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel would mark a massive advancement of the Abraham Accords, creating the political cover for additional Muslim leaders to

formalize relations with Israel.

A notable holdout to the goodwill of Saudi-Israel peace could be Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who was elected to a four-year term in 2005 yet still remains in office. Abbas has repeatedly refused or stalled U.S. and Israeli [diplomatic proposals](#).

Yet providing funds to the Palestinian Authority, an organization that continues to reward Palestinian terrorism, would undercut the peaceful message and implications of normalization. Having recognized that the PA's payments to the families of terrorists encourages violence, Congress passed the [Taylor Force Act](#) in 2018, which cuts U.S. funding to the PA until its stops this "pay for slay" program. Since money is fungible, any foreign aid to the PA would effectively [incentivize](#) further terror against Israelis. Riyadh should not provide funds to the PA that would exempt the PA from ending its "pay for slay."


ADVERTISING 



De Beers - Sponsored

De Beers Classic Collection

The most beautiful diamonds, hand selected

Shop Now 

Moreover, and despite the international community having propped up the PA for the past 30 years as the representative of the Palestinian people, the corrupt organization remains a failure that services its leadership with luxuries, like the

[purchase](#) of a \$50 million jet for Abbas in 2018, amid funding cuts.

Considering the strong diplomatic, economic and security relationships that have developed through the Abraham Accords, it is the PA's intransigence, repression and cronyism that holds back an even deeper and wider peace between Israel and the Arab and Muslim worlds.

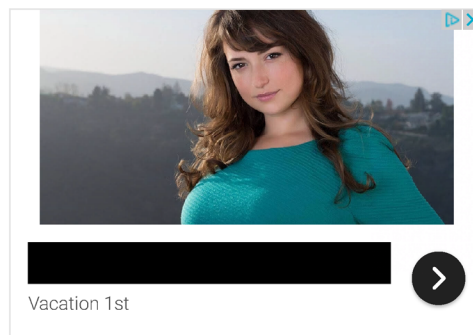
Simultaneously, Saudi Arabia has been signaling to its neighbors that it is [attaching conditions](#) to its bountiful foreign aid, which has long provided vital financial support to troubled economies throughout the Middle East. Riyadh has sent over \$5 billion to Palestinian causes, but, recognizing the PA's rampant corruption, began decreasing its aid in 2016 and cut it off entirely in 2021. "We used to give direct grants and deposits without strings attached and we are changing that," Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan [said](#) in January. "We are working with multilateral institutions to actually say we need to see reforms."



Having sent billions of dollars in aid to Middle Eastern nations like Egypt and Jordan, Saudi Arabia under MBS's leadership is increasingly insisting on economic reforms in these countries to ensure better returns on Saudi investment and help bolster key linchpins of regional stability.

The international community should adopt a parallel approach to Palestinian aid. It is past time to stop funding Palestinian aid through an organization like the Palestinian Authority that has no intention of yielding a return on that investment, and whose corruption and misgovernance works directly at cross-purposes with shared U.S., Israeli and Saudi goals of promoting peace, prosperity and stability.

Instead, the United States and Saudi Arabia should create a responsible mechanism for helping the Palestinians — not furthering PA corruption and support for terrorism. Establishing a new aid organization would enable the United States to provide assistance to the Palestinian people without violating the Taylor Force Act. Removing the PA from the aid equation would better ensure that aid reaches the Palestinian people and not PA coffers or as a subsidy for terrorist attacks against Israelis.

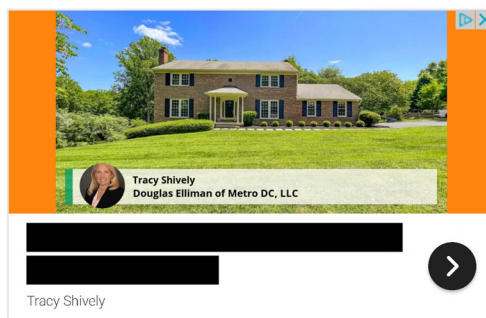


As part of the normalization process between Saudi Arabia and Israel, U.S. and Saudi officials should establish a Saudi-led international aid organization that would be independent of the PA's cronyism and of the United Nations, which has hindered Palestinian progress. A new "Future Investment Fund for the Palestinian People" would not only establish an [alternative mechanism](#) for providing the Palestinians with financial support, but also create a political power base that is independent of PA malfeasance and misgovernance.

Normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel provides an opportunity not only to reshape the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East but also to move past the outmoded Palestinian Authority, which has long been an obstacle to peace. In doing so, Saudi-Israel relations would pave the road to the long-sought peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Mike Pompeo is a former U.S. secretary of state. Sander Gerber is the chief executive of Hudson Bay Capital Management, a distinguished fellow at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA) and a member of the State Department's Middle East Partnership for Peace Act (MEPPA) advisory board.

Categories: [International](#), [Opinion](#)



International

Looters ransack downtown Philadelphia stores

A layperson's guide to the Federal Home Loan Banks review

Durbin, No. 2-ranking Senate Democrat, calls for Menendez to resign

Hundreds of colleges vow to boost transparency in financial aid offers

Cassidy Hutchinson says she'll be 'fully cooperative' on Trump prosecutions

Questions for the Record for Elliott Abrams from Rep. Dean Phillips (D-MN):

House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia
 “No Incentives for Terrorism: U.S. Implementation of the Taylor Force Act and Efforts to Stop
 ‘Pay to Slay’”
 September 27, 2023

Question 1:

What would a collapse of the Palestinian Authority (PA) mean for stability and security in the region?

Answer:

The total collapse of the PA would entail considerable burdens for Israel, which would have to step in to provide the services the PA now provides. In brief, Israel would have to substitute for the PA security forces and for all the government services the PA now provides. Israel has been working with the PA on all of this for decades and its disappearance would create instability in the West Bank.

Question 2:

How can the U.S. work with international partners, particularly regional ones, to better support effective governance, institution building, and engagement with the PA?

Answer:

Only once has any serious effort been to reform Palestinian politics, and that was the effort by former U.S. President George W. Bush starting in 2002. That was when efforts were made to sideline Arafat, he was forced to take on a prime minister, an empowered finance minister (Salam Fayyad) was pushed in, and Fayyad became prime minister under Abbas. Simultaneously, work began (under a U.S. general) to build a professional and reliable Palestinian security force.

Those who wish the Palestinians well, whether in an independent and sovereign state, in a future entity of some sort linked to Israel or Jordan, or in their current situation, must wish them a decent, honest, and competent government. But in recent years, there have been no efforts to build one—not by Israel, the Arab states, or the United States. There may well be some effort now, in the context of post-war Gaza. I suggest taking a close look at what the Bush administration did, and talking with Salam Fayyad (now at Princeton). It requires a real push from Washington, this time with strong support (we have to hope) from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, and Egypt. Given the needs of Gaza for reconstruction, and the fact that President Abbas is 88, this may be the moment to try.

Question 3:

How can the U.S. work with international partners, particularly regional ones, to advance prospects of a two-state solution? What role can and should the PA play in this process?

Answer:

This is not the moment to try to “advance” the two-state solution in any concrete way—not with the PA so dysfunctional and Gaza at war. The best thing to do now is try for significant PA reform. If there is ever going to be a Palestinian state, it will require a functional government that can provide services, fight terrorism, and maintain law and order. It cannot do those things now. I’ve never heard people who are pushing for the “two state solution” explain how that state will not be a mortal threat to Jordan and Israel—especially with Iran trying to make it a terrorist base and Iranian proxy. That question has to be addressed, and after the Hamas attack of October 7, Israelis are particularly sensitive to it now.

Question 4:

How does the Palestinian Authority’s refusal to address its “pay to slay” policy impact its legitimacy on the international stage and its ability to work with international actors to advance a two-state solution?

Answer:

In truth it probably has little impact on the PA’s overall international role, except in the United States. Most other countries don’t seem to care. But it should and does create insuperable boundaries for us. There cannot and should not be progress toward the “two state solution” if the Palestinian state is going to reward terror.

Question 5:

How do you assess the strength of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) inside the West Bank, particularly in Jenin and Nablus?

Answer:

That is hard to do in the current situation of war in Gaza. There is clearly some support, and there are Iranian efforts to create terrorism and violence through supporting violent groups with money and weapons. I think we need to wait until a few months after the war in Gaza ends to make an assessment. There are pre-war polls by Khalil Shikaki that try to estimate support at least for Hamas and Fatah. Once Hamas and PIJ are defeated by Israel, those numbers may change.

Question 6:

How do you assess the strength and popularity of Hamas and PIJ inside of Gaza?

Answer:

Again, that's not possible to gauge while the war is on. There are pre-war polls by Khalil Shikaki that try to estimate support at least for Hamas and Fatah. Once Hamas and PIJ are defeated by Israel, those numbers may change.

Question 7:

Research suggests that while in the past such groups were affiliated with major political factions like Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad, new groups appear to be unaligned and acting independently. Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?

Answer:

In Gaza, violence was in the hands of Hamas and PIJ. In the West Bank there were new groups, such as Lions' Den, that appear to be independent of both Hamas and Fatah. Given the great efforts by Iran to increase violence and terror in the West Bank, Iran may in part be responsible for their growth. Unhappiness with the PA surely plays a role as well.

Question 8:

What is the U.S. role in reducing tension and supporting confidence building measures between Israelis and Palestinians? Why is it important that the U.S. remain a trusted broker between the parties?

Answer:

The United States has the trust of Israel, and Palestinian officials understand that we are unique in this and therefore in our possible role. Relations between the parties continue, on security matters and on many others from health to water to movement of citizens, but they go through good and bad periods. It's important that the United States try to maintain their direct relationship and help, when we can, to overcome problems. No one else can do it.

Question 9:

How do you assess the Israeli government's response to increasing extremist settler attacks on Palestinian civilians and property? How do statements of support for the violent settlers by members of the current Israeli government impact the security and stability of the area? What more should the Israeli government be doing to address this violence and hold the perpetrators accountable? What role can and should the U.S. play in addressing this behavior?

Answer:

I think the magnitude of this problem is difficult to gauge. (See for example “The Myth of Settler Violence,” <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-773934>, and “IDF data on anti-Palestinian Jewish violence in West Bank paints complex picture,” <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/defense-news/article-776709>.) It certainly exists, but my impression is that the perpetrators are mostly teen-age hooligans and that the Israeli authorities are trying to stop them. Statements supporting such criminal acts are indefensible and especially reprehensible when coming from government officials.

Question 10:

We have heard in this hearing some detracting voices on the two-state solution, but I wanted to give an opportunity for some reflection on the support for a two-state solution, which, in my view, remains the only viable outcome to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that ensures security and self-determination for Israelis and Palestinians. Do you believe a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still a viable outcome, and if it is, should the United States still support two states as a matter of American policy?

Answer:

I think a two-state solution is one option, but there are others. It is irresponsible to advocate for a Palestinian state unless one can describe exactly how that state will not become an Iranian proxy and base for terror, as Gaza did. Iran is making a great effort to surround Israel—in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, and now getting the Houthis in the farther south to join the fight. A new, weak Palestinian state would be an obvious Iranian target. The only thing that has stopped Iran from succeeding in the West Bank has been the IDF and Shin Bet, and in an independent and sovereign Palestinian state they would be unable to defend Israel as they now do. I am in favor of a Palestinian entity that would govern itself to a great degree, but in confederation with Jordan which would control the security forces. Otherwise that state would be too great a threat to Jordan and Israel, at least while the Islamic Republic of Iran continues its “Death to Israel” policies and backs them with money and guns.

Question 11:

The World Food Programme is currently supporting a prioritized caseload of 348,000 people with in-kind food assistance and food vouchers in the West Bank (100,000) and the Gaza Strip (248,000). Due to severe funding shortfalls, WFP cut assistance to 200,000 in June, which is approximately 60% of their caseload. A contribution from Japan ensured that WFP could continue assistance for three months to 27,000 of the prioritized most-at-risk persons receiving

in-kind assistance, but the WFP food e-voucher program, which now prioritizes more than 140,000 Palestinians, is at risk of complete suspension if no funding emerges by November. To sustain in-kind food and e-voucher assistance to prioritized individuals, WFP urgently requires \$41.6 million through 2023.

- What does the impact of such humanitarian assistance shortfalls have on the Palestinian people and how does that impact the wider economic and security situation in the territories?
- With global inflation, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and worsening natural disasters, there are so many competing priorities for the international community. What more should the U.S. do to ensure sufficient funding to organizations like UNWRA and the WFP in the West Bank and Gaza?
- What role do our Gulf partners play in addressing these funding gaps? Saudi Arabia, which pledged \$25 million for the East Jerusalem Hospital Network in July 2022, has yet to provide these lifesaving funds. What more can the U.S. do to ensure our regional allies and partners support these important efforts?

Answer:

Three general comments. First, we should not increase funding for UNRWA. It has been in league with Hamas in Gaza, its employees have often had ties to Hamas, and its schools have taught hatred and antisemitism. UNRWA should be replaced over a period of years by UNHCR and other agencies that do not seek to maintain and aggravate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Second, the Arab world has not given nearly as much support to Palestinians as have the United States, EU, Japan, and other countries. This is intolerable and we should put much more pressure especially on wealthy Gulf states to contribute more.

Third, Palestinians are talented, literate, educated, and many speak English. There is no fundamental reason why they remain poor and why economic development has been impossible, but there are some obvious explanations. Hamas stole the funds given for humanitarian use in Gaza and used them to build its war machine. In the West Bank, the PA is massively corrupt. More generally, Palestinian leaders have for 75 years been dedicated to destroying the Jewish state rather than building their own; Arafat and Abbas repeatedly rejected offers to create a state. Until that changes, until Palestinians are dedicated to advancing their own society rather than attacking Israeli society, I fear that they will remain unable to escape widespread poverty and dependence on aid.

Questions for the Record for Dr. Jonathan Schanzer from Rep. Dean Phillips (D-MN):

House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia

“No Incentives for Terrorism: U.S. Implementation of the Taylor Force Act and Efforts to Stop ‘Pay to Slay’”

September 27, 2023

Question 1:**What would a collapse of the Palestinian Authority (PA) mean for stability and security in the region?**

An important corollary to this question is: To what extent has the PA already collapsed? Thirty years after its inception, the PA is an obsolete relic of a moribund peace process. PA President Mahmoud Abbas is old and unpopular. Corruption, nepotism, and internecine fighting have doomed the Palestinian governance structure. Israel offered assistance to the PA in July 2023 to prevent its collapse, but Palestinian leaders [refused](#) the help.

One of the PA’s most important roles has been its security coordination with Israel to crack down on terrorism, which threatens both Israel and the PA. However, lawlessness in the West Bank has been rampant over the past two years, leading to waves of terrorism and corresponding Israeli counterterrorism efforts that have left the PA largely invisible. The PA is completely absent from Gaza, where nearly half of the PA’s population lives. Moreover, the PA and its president, Mahmoud Abbas, are extremely unpopular among Palestinians. Eighty-five percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza [disapprove](#) of Abbas, who is currently in the 19th year of his four-year term.

If the collapse of the PA were to be completed, this would require much more direct Israeli involvement in the West Bank. The increasing direct contact between Israeli authorities and the Palestinians would be a bureaucratic challenge and would likely cause additional friction. And the decline of the PA in the West Bank would likely trigger the rise of even less savory actors in the territory, such as Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Regarding regional impact, though the Palestinian issue is clearly emotional for many Arabs, it is not central to regional stability and security. So long as Israel does not allow the West Bank to become a safe haven for terrorism, the collapse of the PA would not have a significant impact on regional stability or security.

Question 2:**How can the U.S. work with international partners, particularly regional ones, to better support effective governance, institution building, and engagement with the PA?**

There are a number of key reforms we would need to see adopted to enable better governance and institution building within the Palestinian Authority. First, we need a timetable and workplan to transition all services provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to the PA. Pretending that 900,000 West Bank Palestinians are refugees and absolving the PA of responsibility for schools, healthcare, housing, and other basic government services is antithetical to the notion of institution building. We also must see the removal of all incitement to violence and antisemitism embedded in PA

textbooks and media — raising generation after generation to prepare for war instead of peace. Indeed, the premise of having an UNRWA — raising kids to believe they will one day push the Jews into the sea and live in modern-day Israel, undermines effective governance and institution building — let alone the potential for peacemaking. The PA must end its pay-for-slay program — you cannot have a pension system that puts terrorists on its rolls for carrying out attacks against Israel. The PA security forces must root out the terrorist infrastructure inside the West Bank. If Iran, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other violent actors can turn West Bank cities into bases of operation — forcing the Israeli military to act on an almost daily basis — effective Palestinian governance will be challenging. We have poured significant taxpayer resources into training the Palestinian security forces — when will we finally see bigger returns on that investment? Basic freedoms and respect for human rights are missing within the Palestinian Authority — we should press for greater media freedom, freedom of religion, and freedom of speech.

Question 3:

How can the U.S. work with international partners, particularly regional ones, to advance prospects of a two-state solution? What role can and should the PA play in this process?

The prospects for peace would be greatly improved by a PA with leadership that represents the will of the Palestinian people; roots out corruption and terrorism within its midst; removes incitement against Israel and Jews from its schools and media; ends mythology of refugee status that raises generation after generation to prepare for war instead of peace; and recognizes Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. Abraham Accords partners are natural allies in promoting Palestinian economic development as a precursor to progress in their quest for statehood.

Question 4:

How does the Palestinian Authority's refusal to address its "pay to slay" policy impact its legitimacy on the international stage and its ability to work with international actors to advance a two-state solution?

The Palestinian Authority has created a system for payments to families of those jailed in Israel for attacks against the IDF and Israeli citizens. This system of payments is almost a cultural norm for those in the West Bank and is tightly guarded by the Palestinian Authority. The international community has had little response to this policy and would likely continue to provide payments to the Palestinian Authority regardless of whether it continued this practice or not.

However, "pay to slay" remains one of the biggest obstacles to U.S. engagement with the Palestinian Authority — and for good reason. The Taylor Force Act reflects broad bipartisan opposition to the pay-for-slay program. With a policy of paying terrorists who attack Israel, the PA has dramatically undermined its own credibility in the international community.

The United States has been one of the few countries that has demanded accountability for this practice, mainly from Congress. But there has not been a firm policy from successive administrations about ending the "pay to slay" policy, and the ad hoc messages about funding international organizations like UNRWA that prop up the Palestinian Authority have not forced change or meaningful reform to the practice.

Question 5:

How do you assess the strength of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) inside the West Bank, particularly in Jenin and Nablus?

Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian terrorist factions have garnered significant support within the West Bank, particularly in cities like Jenin and Nablus. This is evident from various indicators. First, the presence of multiple active terrorist groups is pronounced in these areas. For instance, Jenin serves as a central hub for numerous well-known Palestinian organizations involved in terrorism. These [include](#) Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Fatah-linked al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, alongside smaller [Gaza-based](#) terrorist groups.

Nablus is very similar to Jenin. [Hamas](#), [Islamic Jihad](#), and the [Lions' Den](#) operate in the city. Another indicator to consider is the [routine](#) clashes between Palestinian terror organizations and Israeli security forces when they enter Jenin and Nablus. During counter-terrorism operations in these cities, Israeli security forces often [encounter](#) intense small-arms fire and face the threat of improvised explosive device (IED) attacks. By contrast, when Israeli forces venture into regions located in the southern West Bank, such incidents are significantly less common.

In instances where governance is lacking, terrorist organizations inevitably flourish, and this stands true for the current situation in the northern West Bank, where the Palestinian Authority's influence is severely limited due to [corruption](#) and the arbitrary detention of [political opponents](#), including [journalists](#). Moreover, many Palestinians [perceive](#) the security collaboration between the Palestinian Authority and Israel as a betrayal of their cause, further eroding the Authority's trust and legitimacy among its people.

Additionally, a recent poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research [found](#) that Hamas is the most popular party in the West Bank.

Question 6:

How do you assess the strength and popularity of Hamas and PIJ inside of Gaza?

Many Palestinians in Gaza support the so-called Resistance (Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and others) because there has been no viable alternative. Hamas has ruled Gaza through [violence](#), [intimidation](#), and the [elimination](#) of its opponents. However, some cracks are [forming](#), primarily due to the war. Israel's war is also defanging the military capabilities of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian terrorist organizations, which will considerably weaken the organizations' grip on power. Given the opportunity, Palestinians may choose a different leadership. There have already been candid interviews in Gaza with civilians fed up with being dragged into Hamas's costly wars with Israel.

Question 7:

Research suggests that while in the past such groups were affiliated with major political factions like Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad, new groups appear to be unaligned and acting independently. Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?

No. Groups such as the Lions' Den have [stated](#) they are not politically or militarily aligned with established terrorist organizations, but this is a façade to increase their popularity and to evade the Israeli security establishment. Palestinian terrorist organizations [establish](#) proxy groups to create plausible deniability. In this case, the Lions' Den is very likely a grouping of several terrorist organizations, specifically [Hamas](#), [Islamic Jihad](#), and the [Popular Resistance Committees](#).

When the Lions' Den was formed in August 2021, they appeared to have considerable financial support and membership. At one of their first rallies in Nablus, all their fighters [wore](#) tactical gear and were armed with assault rifles. This is uncommon for nascent Palestinian terrorist organizations. While only a few Palestinian proxy groups have ever been established successfully, this modus operandi is popular with other [Iranian-backed terror organizations](#) in the region.

Question 8:

What is the U.S. role in reducing tension and supporting confidence building measures between Israelis and Palestinians? Why is it important that the U.S. remain a trusted broker between the parties?

We can't look at the Middle East and U.S. strategic interests in a narrow fashion. Israel is a bastion of democracy — one of our strongest and closest allies — living in one the most dangerous regions in the world. Ensuring Israel is strong and secure is a major national security priority. This involves countering Iran's threats, counterterrorism, counterproliferation, critical economic and high-tech innovations, and critical issues within America's strategy toward China and Russia. Advancing Arab-Israeli peace and integrating the region serves both America and Israel's national security interests — and we've seen much progress already within the Abraham Accords and Saudi discussions of normalization. We are not neutral arbiters in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and efforts to make us so typically diminish our support for Israel or otherwise put Israel's security at risk. That, however, is not mutually exclusive to advancing a future in which Palestinians live prosperously and securely in peace — stabilizing the region and enabling further Arab-Israeli normalization. Indeed, it is in America, Israel, and the entire region's interest to see that day come as soon as possible.

The United States should remain an important and necessary actor in reducing tensions between the Israelis and Palestinians. The source of tensions, however, between the Israelis and Palestinians remains varied and requires confidence-building measures on several fronts. Iran continues to stoke violence against Israel by providing weapons, funding, and direction to armed groups in the West Bank. This has grown in recent years and is well documented as attacks against Israelis had reached historic highs over the past several years before the conflict with Hamas began in October. To be seen as legitimate, the Palestinian Authority needs to demonstrate that it is the provider of security in the West Bank and that it can maintain order amongst armed factions in the territories. The Palestinian Authority must also look towards the issue of succession for Mahmoud Abbas. His departure could create a vacuum leading to increased violence and turmoil. A plan on who is to succeed him and who will govern when he is gone must be implemented before any future deal can be struck.

Question 9:

How do you assess the Israeli governments response to increasing extremist settler attacks on Palestinian civilians and property? How does statements of support for the violent settlers by members of the current Israeli government impact the security and stability of the area? What more should the Israeli government be doing to address this violence and hold the perpetrators accountable? What role can and should the U.S. play in addressing this behavior?

Reportedly, data from the Israeli Security Agency [indicate](#) there has not been a rise in violence perpetrated by Israelis in the West Bank against Palestinians. Regardless, this friction has taken place as Israelis have suffered increased terrorism over the past two years.

Nevertheless, the extrajudicial violence carried out by fringe extremists in the West Bank is problematic and must be stopped. Beyond eroding the rule of law and harming Palestinians, it diverts Israeli military forces needed in Gaza or in the north and could escalate tensions in the West Bank, leading to another front Israel can ill afford. The Netanyahu government should follow the example of the [previous government](#) and act decisively against the small minority destabilizing the West Bank. Jerusalem should make clear that it has zero tolerance for extrajudicial violence, no matter the target or the culprit. The United States should express its criticisms of violence by these fringe actors in private dialogues rather than airing them out in public. Ultimately, as a good ally, Washington should not intervene in domestic Israeli affairs.

Question 10:

We have heard in this hearing some detracting voices on the two-state solution, but I wanted to give an opportunity for some reflection on the support for a two-state solution, which, in my view, remains the only viable outcome to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that ensures security and self-determination for Israelis and Palestinians. Do you believe a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still a viable outcome, and if it is, should the United States still support two states as a matter of American policy?

It has been more than 30 years since the beginning of the Oslo process, which was supposed to bring about a two-state solution. This approach was premised on the idea that Palestinians want peace and that Israelis can live securely in their borders next to a Palestinian state. But the atrocities of October 7 have shattered what remained of that dream. According to a [poll](#) released in December, 72 percent of Palestinians are satisfied with Hamas's actions since October 7. Meanwhile, Hamas has vowed to repeat these attacks until Israel is destroyed. As such, a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian cannot involve a Palestinian state with the capacity to attack Israel.

But it is unclear that Palestinians will accept a demilitarized state. Beyond that, no Palestinian leader possesses the will, power, and legitimacy to enforce the necessary compromises for peace with Israel. If such a leader emerges who denounces violence and works towards coexistence, the United States should work with them to resolve the conflict.

Ultimately, it is up to Israelis and Palestinians to determine how exactly the conflict should be resolved. They both deserve to live in peace and security in whatever arrangement they choose. Though Israeli security and Palestinian autonomy need not be a zero-sum game, the two factors are intricately tied, a fact that cannot be ignored.

Question 11:

The World Food Programme is currently supporting a prioritized caseload of 348,000 people with in-kind food assistance and food vouchers in the West Bank (100,000) and the Gaza Strip (248,000). Due to severe funding shortfalls, WFP cut assistance to 200,000 in June, which is approximately 60% of their caseload. A contribution from Japan ensured that WFP could continue assistance for three months to 27,000 of the prioritized most-at-

risk persons receiving in-kind assistance, but the WFP food e-voucher program, which now prioritizes more than 140,000 Palestinians, is at risk of complete suspension if no funding emerges by November. To sustain in-kind food and e-voucher assistance to prioritized individuals, WFP urgently requires \$41.6 million through 2023.

- **What does the impact of such humanitarian assistance shortfalls have on the Palestinian people and how does that impact the wider economic and security situation in the territories?**

The World Food Programme has historically played a critical role in delivering food assistance to areas where it's needed the most. With an American at the helm, it's also historically been held up as a gold standard for governance. I must admit, I have been saddened to see the World Food Programme turn into a pro-Hamas propaganda machine these last few weeks in Gaza. Clearly the WFP's role in delivering food should be supported — but we cannot tolerate an agency succumbing to the political pressure of the UN system to blame Israel for a crisis Hamas created or to press for a ceasefire that would leave Hamas intact. That is not WFP's role, and we should insist that any assistance we provide be free of Hamas propaganda.

- **With global inflation, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and worsening natural disasters, there are so many competing priorities for the international community. What more should the U.S. do to ensure sufficient funding to organizations like UNRWA and the WFP in the West Bank and Gaza?**

We must confront the role UNRWA has played in enabling and subsidizing Hamas and other terrorism. UNRWA does not vet its staff or beneficiaries the way we do for USAID grantees. UNRWA does not recognize Hamas as a terrorist organization. UNRWA facilities are used as weapons storage facilities, staging grounds for attacks, and covers for underground tunnels. UNRWA employees are implicated in Hamas terrorism and hostage-taking. UNRWA's indoctrination of children to hate Jews and Israel must be considered in the context of what happened on October 7. Now is a moment to consider alternatives to UNRWA in a post-Hamas Gaza — a new model of delivering humanitarian assistance, promoting self-sufficiency and economic opportunity, and ending incitement to violence. Should the World Food Programme eliminate its Hamas propaganda, it can be a crucial player in addressing Palestinian food needs.

- **What role do our Gulf partners play in addressing these funding gaps? Saudi Arabia, which pledged \$25 million for the East Jerusalem Hospital Network in July 2022, has yet to provide these lifesaving funds. What more can the U.S. do to ensure our regional allies and partners support these important efforts?**

Egypt could open its border at any moment and allow civilians to leave a war zone — that Cairo won't allow that should be condemned at every possible moment. We are already seeing signs that Saudi Arabia and the UAE wish to play an outsized role in financing the reconstruction of Gaza and the reconstitution of a civilian government there. That should be encouraged. At the same time, we should block Hamas allies — namely Qatar and Turkey — from any further involvement in Gaza.

Questions for the Record for Dr. Michael Koplow from Rep. Dean Phillips (D-MN):

House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia

“No Incentives for Terrorism: U.S. Implementation of the Taylor Force Act and Efforts to Stop
‘Pay to Slay’”

September 27, 2023

Question 1:

What would a collapse of the Palestinian Authority (PA) mean for stability and security in the region?

A collapse of the Palestinian Authority would leave an enormous vacuum in the region. Israeli security has been, and will continue to be, dependent on the successful security coordination overseen by the United States Security Coordinator between the IDF and the Palestinian Authority Security Forces. The collapse of the PA would place a much larger burden on the IDF and on Israeli resources, making it harder not only to provide security in the West Bank and prevent a wholesale Hamas takeover of the territory, but eroding Israel’s security posture on other fronts, particularly the southern border with Gaza and the northern border with Lebanon.

A PA collapse would also detrimentally impact West Bank Palestinians. It would mean a collapse in all governmental services in Areas A and B, requiring Israel to directly govern and administer the daily lives of approximately 2.5 million Palestinians, give an opening for extremist groups to fill that void, or lead to anarchy and a complete breakdown of social order. Any such scenario would be unlikely to remain confined to the West Bank, and would have follow-on impacts on neighboring states, primarily Jordan. It would also present an opportunity for Iran to further destabilize the region and establish another front against Israel occupied by Iranian proxies.

Question 2:

How can the U.S. work with international partners, particularly regional ones, to better support effective governance, institution building, and engagement with the PA?

The U.S. can work with other states in the region to demand significant reforms to the PA. The U.S. and other regional partners have leverage over the PA due to its fiscal crisis and need for international support, some of which has been driven by the refusal of outside actors—most prominently the U.S. through the passage of the Taylor Force Act—to continue to support or defray the PA’s budget until it reforms its practices. The most important of these is the continuing prisoners and martyrs payment system, which incentivizes terrorism against Israelis and must be ended or converted to a needs-based welfare system. But the PA also needs to undergo serious governance, financial transparency, and security sector reforms if it is to convince regional actors to resume their support. The prospect of such support returning, and the

prospect of being included in aspects of regional normalization and agreements that arise from that process, should be used to leverage PA institutional reform, and to encourage Mahmoud Abbas to set forth a political transition process that will revitalize the PA and lead to a renewed political process with Israel.

Question 3:

How can the U.S. work with international partners, particularly regional ones, to advance prospects of a two-state solution? What role can and should the PA play in this process?

Prospects for a two-state solution have been dim in recent years, and have been further set back by Hamas' October 7 assault on Israel, which has eroded trust among Israelis that any Palestinian state will live alongside it in peace. Nevertheless, advancing a two-state outcome remains critical and should be a focus of U.S. policy. The U.S. can work with international partners in the region to impress upon both Israel and the PA that a two-state outcome will improve Israeli security and its full integration in the region, and that it is the only pathway toward sovereignty and improved quality of life for Palestinians. Regional normalization can and should be a part of this advancement, as it capitalizes on Israel's desire to expand rather than arrest the process, allows the Palestinians to benefit from regional arrangements that are leaving them behind, and allows states like Jordan, Egypt, and the UAE—all of which have relations with both parties—to provide reassurances to Israel and the PA that a two-state outcome will advance the tangible interests of both (e.g., Michael Koplow, Shira Efron, and Evan Gottesman, *The New Normal: Arab-Israel Normalization and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Israel Policy Forum, October 2021, <https://israelpolicyforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/The-New-Normal-Arab-Normalization-and-The-Israeli-Palestinian-Conflict-Full-Study.pdf>).

This process must involve the PA, as despite its faults and drawbacks, it is the Palestinian political actor that remains committed to a two-state vision.

Question 4:

How does the Palestinian Authority's refusal to address its "pay to slay" policy impact its legitimacy on the international stage and its ability to work with international actors to advance a two-state solution?

The PA's refusal to address this abhorrent policy has severely eroded its standing. It has led to the cutoff of all direct support and support that directly benefits it from the U.S., and to Israel withholding the transfer of tax revenues to the PA in the amount that offsets the Palestinian budget designated for prisoners and martyrs payments. Without rectifying this policy to bring it in compliance with U.S. law as laid out in the Taylor Force Act, the PA will continue to be

hampered on the world stage in its quest for legitimacy and in its ability to work with international actors toward two states and toward policies that will benefit the Palestinian people.

Post-October 7, PA refusal to change its policies and bring them in compliance with U.S. law will also hamper its involvement in Gaza. The Israeli government is skeptical of PA intentions, and the primary reason is an Israeli conviction that the PA does not truly want to live in peace alongside Israel. For Israel to overcome its reservations about PA involvement in post-war Gaza—something which is critical for stabilization efforts and for regional buy-in for those efforts—the PA must demonstrate good will, and the chief way it can do so is by ending its prisoners and martyrs payments.

Question 5:

How do you assess the strength of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) inside the West Bank, particularly in Jenin and Nablus?

Hamas and PIJ have seen their strength downgraded since Hamas' October 7 attacks on Israel. In the subsequent two months, the IDF has arrested hundreds of gunmen and fighters from both organizations across the West Bank in daily raids, particularly targeting Jenin, Nablus, and Tulkarem in the northern West Bank. Assessing the groups' strengths is difficult in the midst of an ongoing conflict environment with multiple daily operations, but they have unquestionably suffered significant losses and disruption, and their ability to successfully operate on a day-to-day basis has been weakened.

Question 6:

How do you assess the strength and popularity of Hamas and PIJ inside of Gaza?

Since the October 7 attacks, anecdotal evidence suggests that Hamas and PIJ have lost popularity, and their strength has obviously been eroded. As of this writing, Hamas appears to be unable to operate administratively in northern Gaza and Israel has taken military control of much of the northern part of the strip. In southern Gaza, Israel's military operation has only been active for a few weeks, so while Hamas' existing military capabilities remain concentrated in the south, they appear to have been downgraded as well. Videos and testimonies have emerged indicating that many Palestinians in Gaza are angry and frustrated with Hamas, have been openly challenging its policies rhetorically, and in some instances have physically attacked Hamas members, particularly surrounding distribution of humanitarian assistance inside of Gaza. While this does not necessarily translate into support for the PA or Fatah, it does mean that Hamas and PIJ are encountering what appears to be unprecedented resistance from Palestinians in Gaza who have chafed under Hamas control.

Question 7:

Research suggests that while in the past such groups were affiliated with major political factions like Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad, new groups appear to be unaligned and acting independently. Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?

New unaligned and independent militias have appeared over the past couple of years, particularly in the northern West Bank. The extent to which they are truly operating independently, however, is questionable. There is evidence that they are being funded by Iran, primarily through PIJ, and there have also been reports about joint war rooms and joint activities between militias like the Lions Den and Hamas/PIJ.

Question 8:

What is the U.S. role in reducing tension and supporting confidence building measures between Israelis and Palestinians? Why is it important that the U.S. remain a trusted broker between the parties?

The U.S. remains the indispensable party for creating a better situation between Israel and the Palestinians, by dint of our relationship with Israel, our long history of involvement in Israeli-Palestinian issues, and our status as the only country that is able and willing to serve as a guarantor for arrangements between the parties. The U.S. has and should continue to work with both sides to take steps that will reduce tensions, and to continue pushing for multilateral forums where both sides can come together and discuss avenues for cooperation, whether that be the continuation of the Sharm process or the reconvening of the Negev Forum with the Palestinians attending as observers. Without the U.S. being able to serve as a convener, mediator, and trusted interlocutor, the situation between Israel and the Palestinians will further deteriorate. It is critical that the U.S. maintain credibility and trust with both sides to the greatest possible extent.

Question 9:

How do you assess the Israeli government's response to increasing extremist settler attacks on Palestinian civilians and property? How do statements of support for the violent settlers by members of the current Israeli government impact the security and stability of the area? What more should the Israeli government be doing to address this violence and hold the perpetrators accountable? What role can and should the U.S. play in addressing this behavior?

The Israeli government must do a better job of addressing extremist settler violence against Palestinians. This was an ongoing problem before the October 7 Hamas attacks, but it has exponentially worsened in the subsequent two months. The number and severity of attacks by

extremist settlers is up, fueled by demands from Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich to forcibly cancel the annual Palestinian olive harvest and prevent Palestinians from accessing their agricultural land, and National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir's program to loosen firearms permitting requirements and his formation of community security squads, which are unaccountable and provided with weapons. Anything other than unwavering condemnation of settler violence from the Israeli government fuels more extremism, which ultimately destabilizes the West Bank, risks the collapse of the PA and widespread anarchy, and does a gross disservice to Palestinians who are subject to Israeli security control. The Israeli government must condemn this behavior, ensure that IDF troops act to prevent settler violence and in no circumstances accompany settlers who are carrying out attacks, arrest and charge settlers who have attacked Palestinians and their property, and prevent the establishment of any more illegal (under Israeli law) settlement outposts, from where most attacks on Palestinians originate. The U.S. should impress upon the Israeli government at every opportunity the necessity of taking these steps, and Congress should further highlight and condemn the damage that settler violence does to a two-state horizon, to Israeli security, and to Palestinian quality of life.

Question 10:

We have heard in this hearing some detracting voices on the two-state solution, but I wanted to give an opportunity for some reflection on the support for a two-state solution, which, in my view, remains the only viable outcome to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that ensures security and self-determination for Israelis and Palestinians. Do you believe a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still a viable outcome, and if it is, should the United States still support two states as a matter of American policy?

A two-state outcome to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the only viable outcome to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that maintains Israel as Jewish, democratic, and secure, and fulfills Palestinians' legitimate national aspirations for statehood. The formula of a Jewish and democratic state inside secure borders is what Zionism was created to fulfill, and unless the parties find a way to move toward a two-state outcome, this vision will be at fatal risk. With a roughly equal number of Jews and Palestinians between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, the status quo in which the West Bank and Gaza are in a state of permanent limbo and Israel manages to retain its Jewish and democratic nature is not sustainable. It is also unjust to the Palestinians to treat their legitimate national aspirations as undeserving, and if Palestinians remain stateless, it will not only be to their detriment. It will continue to create enormous dilemmas for Israel's security—ones that are outweighed by the risks of a permanent status agreement that has appropriate safeguards—and challenges for Israel on the world stage. A two-state outcome is not a perfect solution, will not solve all problems, and will not even resolve the core emotional and historical stumbling blocks that plague the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Questions about the feasibility and advisability of two states are understandable and legitimate, particularly as tension, distrust and violence between the parties is on the rise. But this is particularly why separation is so critical, and that separation will not bring full benefits or be

viewed as fully legitimate unless it is part of an eventual two-state outcome. Two states is the best choice on a menu that contains nothing else but truly devastating alternatives, and must remain the guiding light towards which everyone works. The question is not whether a two-state outcome is wise, but how to get there with the least amount of bloodshed and keeping the concerns of both sides in the foreground.

The U.S. should support two states conceptually without reservation, and should always work toward a permanent status agreement between the two sides that will safeguard Israeli security, provide Palestinians with sovereignty and control over their own lives, take into account changes on the ground since 1967 through the principle of mutually agreed upon land swaps that are equal in quantity and quality, and results in a Jewish state alongside a Palestinian state. Such an outcome does indeed remain viable, but it will first require a sustained effort to improve conditions on the ground, prevent further developments that could render two states unviable, and will require a considerable time horizon.

Question 11:

The World Food Programme is currently supporting a prioritized caseload of 348,000 people with in-kind food assistance and food vouchers in the West Bank (100,000) and the Gaza Strip (248,000). Due to severe funding shortfalls, WFP cut assistance to 200,000 in June, which is approximately 60% of their caseload. A contribution from Japan ensured that WFP could continue assistance for three months to 27,000 of the prioritized most-at-risk persons receiving in-kind assistance, but the WFP food e-voucher program, which now prioritizes more than 140,000 Palestinians, is at risk of complete suspension if no funding emerges by November. To sustain in-kind food and e-voucher assistance to prioritized individuals, WFP urgently requires \$41.6 million through 2023.

- What does the impact of such humanitarian assistance shortfalls have on the Palestinian people and how does that impact the wider economic and security situation in the territories?
- With global inflation, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and worsening natural disasters, there are so many competing priorities for the international community. What more should the U.S. do to ensure sufficient funding to organizations like UNWRA and the WFP in the West Bank and Gaza?
- What role do our Gulf partners play in addressing these funding gaps? Saudi Arabia, which pledged \$25 million for the East Jerusalem Hospital Network in July 2022, has yet to provide these lifesaving funds. What more can the U.S. do to ensure our regional allies and partners support these important efforts?

The aftermath of the October 7 Hamas attacks and the continuing Israeli operation in Gaza designed to remove Hamas from power and secure the return of Israeli hostages who were seized and are being held by Hamas has upended the humanitarian situation. As critical as it was to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza when this hearing convened, it is all the more so now. A surge in humanitarian assistance is vital to both give Israel more time to complete its

necessary military operations and to prevent a genuine humanitarian disaster inflicting Palestinians in Gaza. As outlined in Israel Policy Forum's report on U.S. policy recommendations for post-war Gaza (Michael Koplow and Shira Efron, *Starting From the Ground Up: U.S. Policy Options for Post-Hamas Gaza*, Israel Policy Forum, December 2023, <https://israelpolicyforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Starting-From-the-Ground-Up.pdf>), the U.S. should coordinate a humanitarian effort that relies on the United Nations, NGOs, and private sector actors to provide humanitarian relief and service provision in Gaza. The U.S. should also take this opportunity to push for long-needed reforms to UNRWA, increase oversight mechanisms of the organization, and lessen the reliance of Gazan Palestinians on UNRWA.