

Point of View

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Who Is Coming To The US – The Chairman Of The PA Or Chairman Of The PLO?

During his upcoming trip to the United States, Abu-Mazen is expected to propose an immediate return to permanent status negotiations, effectively skipping over the Second Phase of the Roadmap and abandoning the idea of a Palestinian State with Provisional Borders. The answer to Abu-Mazen's proposal may be impacted by the perception of the organization he chairs: Is he the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority (PA) or Chairman of the PLO?

What's the Issue?

- Abu Mazen is both Chairman of the PLO and Chairman of the PA.
- Since the Oslo agreements, **differences between the PLO and the PA have blurred**. Part of the PLO leadership returned to the West Bank and Gaza to become part of the PA's leadership.
- However, the **symbolic and constitutional distinctions** carry **practical implications**:

	PA	PLO
Constituency / Geographic scope	In the West Bank and Gaza with functional powers in East Jerusalem	Palestinian People – Residents of PA and the Palestinian Diaspora
International Status	Political entity not a state. Powers and responsibilities primarily domestic and limited in international affairs, determined by the Interim Agreement	Organization – Sole Legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; including at the UN, international organizations, etc.
Status vis-à-vis Israel	No formal status. De facto "address" for Israel for the West Bank and Gaza.	The formal interlocutor for any political process.

- Therefore, there exists a structural mismatch between:
 - **The structure of the Roadmap**, which narrows the agenda of the political process promoting a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza (during the Second Phase) and postpones final status issues (to the Third Phase); *and*
 - **The status of the PLO** as the formal interlocutor representing the entire Palestinian people, which is thus prone to expanding the political agenda.
- Therefore, it is unlikely that an Israeli-PLO agreement will be reached concerning a Palestinian state with provisional borders during the 2nd Phase of the Roadmap.

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Why is this important? Why Now?

- Recently, Abu-Mazen expressed opposition to a Palestinian state with provisional borders as called for in the Second Phase of the Roadmap. Instead, Abu-Mazen proposed moving directly to Permanent Status negotiations (Third Phase of the Roadmap).
- He is simultaneously seeking to bring Hamas and Islamic Jihad into the PLO.
- It seems unlikely that there will be a Permanent Status Agreement between Israel's Sharon government and the Palestinians' Abu-Mazen government, particularly following the radicalization of the PLO by Hamas.
- Hence, prospects of reaching an agreement with the PLO – a Permanent Status Agreement or an agreement on the Roadmap - are minimal.

Policy-Options

- Addressing Abu-Mazen as Chairman of the PLO may lead to a deadlock in the Roadmap or the Permanent Status track.
- Hence, it may make sense to address Abu-Mazen as Chairman of the PA, so as to turn the PA into the official interlocutor for the Second Phase of the Roadmap instead of the PLO (hereinafter "switching the interlocutor").
- Below are considerations regarding switching the Palestinian interlocutor:
 - Agreements made with the PA may deal only with its territory and residents. Agenda of agreements with the PLO will include the refugees / Diaspora;
 - Thus, an agreement with the PA will not bring an end to the conflict or finality of claims between Israel and the Palestinians;
 - An agreement with the PA may be confirmed by the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) – the legislative body of the PA comprising of representatives of the West Bank and Gaza. However, agreements made with the PLO need to be confirmed by the Palestinian National Council (PNC) – the Palestinian parliament-in-exile representing the residents of the PA and the Palestinian Diaspora;
 - Formal Palestinian opposition is to be expected due to a switch of the interlocutor. However, factions within the PA will benefit politically.
 - Switching the interlocutor from the PLO to the PA is not supported by existing agreements. However, the PLO is formally the sole legitimate Palestinian representative according to the Oslo agreements.
 - However, the status of the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people was determined when there was no alternative Palestinian leadership. Today, the PA has a democratically elected leadership.
 - Switching the interlocutor will require Israel to rescind the constraints of the Interim Agreement on the PA and allow it to conduct international relations (exchanging foreign representatives which report directly to the PA, PA membership in international organizations, etc.).

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For Additional Sources check: www.reut-institute.org (Under: "Publications"):

Policy Papers:

- ["Who Should be the Interlocutor: the PLO or the Palestinian Authority"](#)
- ["Policy-Options for Switching the PLO with the PA"](#)

Points of View:

- ["Is Abu-Mazen Driving the Political Process to a Deadlock?"](#)
- ["Is it Time to Upgrade the Political Status of the Palestinian Authority?"](#) (in Hebrew)

Concepts:

- ["Upgrading the Sovereign Status of the Palestinian Authority"](#) (in Hebrew)
- ["Upgrading the Political Status of the Palestinian Authority"](#) (in Hebrew)
- ["Palestinian Constitutional Structure"](#)
- ["Sequence of Israeli-Palestinian Political Process"](#)
- ["Permanent Status"](#)

Terms:

- ["Roadmap"; "Oslo Process"](#) (in Hebrew)
- ["Chairman of the Palestinian Authority"](#) (in Hebrew); ["PLO"](#) (in Hebrew); ["Palestinian Authority"](#) (in Hebrew)
- ["Map of the Palestinian People"](#)

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