



Partial Settlements:

Implications of the Meeting between the Palestinian President and Israeli Defense Minister

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Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz held rare talks on August 30 in Ramallah, West Bank, in the first official high-level meeting between Israeli officials and the Palestinian leader since 2010.

A Palestinian source said that the talks were dedicated to discuss “routine security issues” and the economic situation. The meeting was attended by Israel’s military liaison officer to the Palestinians Ghasan Alian, PA intelligence chief Majid Faraj, and PA Minister of Civil Affairs Hussein Al-Sheikh.

Key highlights

The meeting between Abbas and Gantz shows that the both sides are focusing on certain issues, as any other discussions related to peace talks are currently ruled out. This can be detailed as follows:

1- Keeping the focus on security issues: The meeting between Abbas and Gantz was held solely to discuss security. It complements special security contacts and meetings held over the recent months between the Palestinians and Israelis.

2- Proposing an offer to the Palestinian Authority (PA): Tel Aviv proposed the following terms of an offer to the PA:

A- Recognizing the status of thousands of Palestinians: The status of some 3000 Palestinians will be regularized by granting them the Palestinian citizenship. Those either fled Gaza Strip to the Palestinian Authority or lived abroad for tens of years and lost their citizenship status.

B- Allowing Palestinians to build residential structures: Gantz granted permits to Palestinians for construction in the West Bank’s Area C, which is under Israel’s full security control. Yet, those permits are only valid in existing Palestinian villages and towns.

C- Offering funds to the PA: Israel will loan the PA 500 million shekels (USD 155m). The money is to be repaid through tax funds that Israel collects for the Palestinians.

D- More work permits: An additional 16000 Palestinians will receive Israeli work permits. Many permit applications for Palestinian will be digitized, which will generate 10 million shekels of tax income

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every year.

3- Ruling out the peace process: A source close to the Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said that “there is no peace process with the Palestinians, nor will there be one.” This is due to the nature of the Israeli ruling coalition, which includes extremist parties that reject any peace initiatives with the Palestinians. Additionally, former Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu will oppose any peace agreement.

This stance was evident by Knesset member Itamar Ben-Gvir’s attack on Abbas-Gantz meeting, which he described as “scandal”. Far-right Religious Zionist Party, a supporter of Israeli settlers in the West Bank, slammed the meeting, stressing in a statement that Bennette’s attempt to downplay the meeting will not hide the truth, which is that the Israeli government is pushing Abu Mazen to the front once again after the right-wing succeeded in rendering him irrelevant to the political landscape in the past years.

Explaining Israel’s Recent Openness

The facilities offered by Israel to Ramallah indicate a remarkable shift in its policy on the PA that will have implications for Hamas. This can be explained as follows:

1- Washington’s influence: The meeting between Abbas and Gantz was held only hours after Israeli Prime Minister returned home from Washington where he met US President Joe Biden. The Army Radio reported that Biden asked Bennett at their meeting at the White House to provide financial support to the PA and humanitarian and economic assistance to the Palestinians. Biden, who is known for being in favor of a two-state solution, has resumed economic and development assistance to the PA.

2- A Return to Calm with the Palestinians: The Benett government is handling the Palestinian issue with a policy mandating a return to calm, preventing security provocations by reaching direct understandings with Hamas in exchange for allowing economic assistance for Gaza Strip, as well as by avoiding building any new settlements. This would eventually allow the Israeli government to dedicate

its full attention to Iran’s nuclear program.

3- Reaching out to the PA: Abbas stressed that his meeting with Gantz aimed to build mutual confidence and preserve Israel’s interests and important relations with the PA, which he believes should be enhanced. On his part, the Israeli defense minister stressed that “As the Palestinian Authority gets stronger, Hamas gets weaker, and so long as it has greater governance, we will have more security and we will have to act less.”

Gantz further stressed that he spoke of “the means to improve security and the economic situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip,” which means that Israel will be dealing with Gaza through the PA, a sign of deep changes in Israel’s policy, which was previously based on utilizing divisions between the PA and Hamas, alongside maintaining direct contacts with Hamas to reach bilateral understanding to restore calm to Gaza Strip.

Labor Member of the Knesset Gilad Kariv, Chairman meeting of the Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, welcomed the meeting between Abbas and Gantz, and even called for regular meetings between the highest-level Israeli and Palestinian officials. Kariv even slammed the former Netanyahu government which, he said, preferred strengthening Hamas’ position to engaging in dialogue with the PA. He called upon the current government to change its course and work with the PA to significantly enhance the economy and security. For his part, Israeli Minister of Communications Yoaz Hendel told a local radio that it is in Israel’s interest to strengthen the Palestinian economy and make Hamas weaker.

Israel’s opening up to the PA is what raised Hamas’ concerns. The group was quick to slam Abbas-Gantz meeting. Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem said that such meetings will deepen inter-Palestinian division and weaken the anti-normalization positions despite Hamas’ approval of the formation of a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders. He described the meeting as “a continuation of the PA delusion of the possibility of achieving something to our people through the failed settlement path.”




Moreover, Israel, on September 1, announced a series of measures easing its blockade of the Gaza Strip, including opening Karm Abu Salem commercial crossing to imports. Israel also allowed construction materials into Gaza to initiate the reconstruction of Gaza following the military offensives in May. This

came as a result of pressures Hamas put on Israel by launching incendiary balloons and organizing violent protests along the border with Israel. Hamas's stand against the PA is surprising, especially as the recent Israeli policy change alleviates the suffering of Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip.


To conclude, it is safe to say that overall, the recent developments reveal that Israel's openness to the PA would usher in an easing of Israel's economic sanctions. They also show Washington's success in placing pressure on the Israeli government to eventually ease tensions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and pave the way for negotiations for a peaceful settlement, especially because the Biden Administration is expected to come up with a new initiative for a political settlement between the two sides.

ABOUT FARAS

Future for Advanced Research and Studies (FARAS) is an independent think tank founded on April 4, 2014 in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. FARAS seeks to enrich public dialogue, support decision-making and enhance academic research pertaining to future trends that currently constitute a real problem in the Middle East region. In light of instability and unpredictability, the overarching goal of FARAS is to help ward off future shocks regarding these developments.

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