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Manufactured Self-Defeat

◇ URIEL ZEHAVI

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Field Dossier: Manufactured Self-Defeat

Author: Uriel Zehavi · ׀׀׀׀׀׀ ׀׀׀׀ **Date:** January 15, 2026 **Publication:** Israel Brief

Introduction

The author addresses a recurring question about Palestinian circumstances: “What were they supposed to do?” He argues this reflects misplaced charity, asserting that analysis of primary documents—educational curricula, media content, budget allocations, and leadership statements—reveals a pattern of deliberate self-sabotage rather than tragic inevitability.

The piece establishes four key concepts: self-defeat (policy choices worsening outcomes), inculcation (institutional transmission of grievance-based ideology), rejectionism (treating partial solutions as illegitimate), and violence as governance (using armed force instead of administration).

The author notes that polling shows approximately 70 percent of Palestinians support Hamas, with even broader backing for the October 7 attack, contradicting Western narratives about civilian moderation being suppressed by leaders.

Manufactured Palestinian Self-Defeat

Palestinian self-defeat originates in institutional indoctrination rather than diplomatic failures. Educational systems teach that “compromise is betrayal and violence virtue,” ensuring rejection becomes reflexive rather than deliberative.

PA school curricula systematically erase Jewish historical presence, deny Israel’s legitimacy, glorify martyrdom, and omit peace agreements from instruction. Children memorize pledges to “the revolution” and learn arithmetic through problems counting prisoners.

Media and public spaces reinforce this messaging through consistent vocabulary: resistance, steadfastness, martyrdom. Terrorists receive honors. “Pay-for-slay” systems provide stipends to imprisoned attackers and their families. Squares and institutions bear the names of mass murderers like Dalal Mughrabi.

Foreign aid has sustained these structures without meaningful conditionality, funding educators who teach incitement and broadcasters glorifying terror.

Rejection as Regime Logic

Palestinian leadership consistently treats partial outcomes as fundamentally illegitimate, creating a repeatable pattern favoring permanent conflict over settlement.

Historical rejections include: the 1947 UN partition proposal (rejected outright), the 1967 Khartoum Resolution (embracing rejectionism), and multiple modern negotiations. At Camp David (2000), Arafat declined comprehensive offers without counterproposals. Similar dynamics occurred with the 2008 Olmert proposal and subsequent frameworks.

This pattern persists because compromise threatens leadership survival. Any leader accepting a final deal risks internal violence from militant factions who view any settlement as betrayal. Additionally, permanent conflict sustains aid flows and elite privilege—resolution would end the grievance economy enriching leadership while requiring accountability.

Hamas's legitimacy depends entirely on perpetual jihad; governance would require ideological collapse. The October 7 pogrom represented this logic "stripped of restraint," with leadership calculating escalation would reset regional agendas despite civilian devastation.

Coercion as Statecraft

Palestinian governance substitutes violence for normal administrative functions. Rather than monopolizing force under law, leaders use violence to suppress dissent, maintain revolutionary mystique, and attract international attention.

The landscape comprises overlapping armed hierarchies: Fatah maintains multiple security services alongside militias; Hamas operates as a one-party military state in Gaza; smaller groups maintain independent cells.

Violence functions domestically through intimidation and internationally through strategic escalation. Each war brings media saturation and renewed aid pledges, creating incentives for repetition. The Second Intifada demonstrated that bloodshed produces relevance even when strategically unsuccessful.

Economically, this approach proves catastrophic. The Second Intifada reduced Palestinian GDP per capita by nearly 40 percent. Over 100,000 Palestinians emigrated between 2007-2017. Budgets prioritize security organs and "martyr" payments over productive sectors.

Frozen Authority, Managed Decay

Palestinian political systems exist in suspended animation. The last legislative elections occurred in 2006. Abbas, elected in 2005 for a four-year term, remains in power nearly two decades later without electoral mandate.

Scheduled elections (2010, 2014, 2018, 2021) were repeatedly canceled under various pretexts. When Abbas announced elections in 2021, he postponed them indefinitely months later, citing Israeli restrictions on East Jerusalem voting—though analysts widely recognized fear of electoral loss.

Governance occurs through presidential decrees with no functioning legislature for oversight. This arrangement suits incumbents who benefit from patronage systems without accountability constraints.

Corruption has become both symptomatic and structurally necessary. Arafat reportedly diverted \$900 million to personal accounts. EU audits identified “significant shortcomings” in PA spending of \$2.7 billion in aid. Officials live lavishly while populations struggle, yet donors continue funding despite periodic complaints.

The PA-Hamas split of 2007 created two separate authoritarian fiefdoms that never reunited. Both claim national legitimacy while delegitimizing each other, arresting rival activists. This division prevents unified negotiation capacity while allowing each faction to blame the other for failure.

Economic Stagnation by Design

Palestinian leadership actively undermined economic development, viewing prosperity as morally suspect “normalization” incompatible with revolutionary identity.

This ethos emerged partly from Palestinian recoil against Israeli “economic peace” proposals, which many leaders feared would distract from independence demands. Arafat famously questioned why he would enrich people who might “forget Palestine.”

Hamas explicitly rejects economic cooperation with Israel unless tied to political gains. When the U.S. proposed a \$50 billion investment plan in 2019, both PA and Hamas boycotted entirely. Palestinian businesspeople considering attendance faced threats.

The PA sometimes restricted Palestinian workers from Israeli employment while offering no alternatives, limiting self-generated economic options. Hamas taxed young Gazans engaged in online freelancing and scrutinized them for foreign contacts. West Bank businesspeople face interrogation for Israeli joint ventures.

Youth unemployment reaches approximately 40 percent in the West Bank and over 60 percent in Gaza despite a young population that should represent economic potential. Brain drain accelerates as educated Palestinians emigrate, further undermining institution-building capacity.

The leadership benefits from aid-dependency, which provides patronage power without requiring transparent governance, indigenous capacity-building, or democratic accountability.

Narrative Exhaustion, Strategic Abandonment

Palestinian isolation developed through decades of grievance-first governance eroding credibility with international allies. While sympathy persists, confidence and strategic investment have dissipated.

Leadership claims commitment to two-state solutions for Western audiences while education systems, media, and Arabic-language discourse celebrate total victory and deny Jewish legitimacy.

European parliaments began conditioning aid; U.S. legislators tied funding to terror payments. Yet when international fatigue set in, donors often resumed funding anyway, removing consequences.

October 7 should have triggered irreversible perception shifts, yet Western responses remained contradictory: condemnations coexisted with escalated anti-Israel rhetoric, recognition of “Palestine,” and continued Israeli arms purchases and intelligence cooperation.

Palestinian narrative became frozen ritual. Holocaust inversions, detached genocide claims, and Nazi analogies rallied activist bases while alienating mainstream audiences understanding the distinction between war and extermination.

The contrast sharpens when considering other post-conflict movements. Egypt, Jordan, Gulf states, Kosovo, Rwanda, and Northern Ireland all transitioned from struggle to governance. Palestinian leadership resists such transformation.

Current support remains symbolic without leverage—statements without stakes and sympathy without strategy.

Enablers Without Accountability

Palestinian self-sabotage unfolded within international ecosystems rewarding grievance and subsidizing failure. The UN and allied NGOs enabled rather than merely misreading the conflict.

UNRWA deliberately froze refugee status across generations, treating “right of return” as permanent rather than problem-solving. The agency tolerated Hamas infrastructure in schools and hospitals while responding to exposure with denial and accusations against Israel.

The broader UN subjected Israel to more resolutions than any other country, including all serial human-rights abusers combined, while Palestinian violations triggered minimal sanctions. The message was unmistakable: Jewish defense would be prosecuted while jihadist violence would be contextualized.

NGOs amplified distortions, adopting antisemitic frameworks while claiming human rights credentials. Reports were “written first, facts selected later.” Hamas atrocities were minimized; Israeli counterterror labeled crimes.

This reflected ideological capture and “bigotry of low expectations”—treating Palestinian leadership as permanent wards incapable of agency while holding Israel, a functioning democracy, to uniquely illegitimate standards.

Arab states used Palestinians as shields for their own failures, preserving statelessness within Arab countries to maintain grievance utility. The Abraham Accords exposed changed priorities: Iran, modernization, and stability mattered more than frozen Palestinian maximalism.

Israel’s role remained constant despite governmental changes. Israeli leaders extended concessions; Palestinian leadership banked them and escalated.

Netanyahu's security-first approach reflected empirical judgment rather than ideological obstinacy. Gaza's post-2005 trajectory—rockets, tunnels, October 7—validated that assessment.

External actors normalized dysfunction, insulating leaders from consequences while turning antisemitism into policy language and punishing Israeli survival.

Regime Preservation as Strategy

Palestinian dysfunction functions exactly as designed for those administering it. Survival, not statehood, drives the governing logic.

Arafat grasped instinctively that signing end-of-conflict agreements would strip revolutionary legitimacy, reducing him to a president answerable for schools and sewage. Keeping struggle alive preserved myth and power. Abbas inherited identical calculus: permanent conflict guarantees permanent relevance as aid gatekeeper.

Hamas depends entirely on perpetual jihad for legitimacy. Disarmament means ideological collapse. Any meaningful deviation would be internally explosive.

The narrative trap proves absolute. Decades of teaching that every inch is Arab, every Jew is colonizer, and every compromise is betrayal cannot be unwound without detonating leadership authority.

Any leader truthfully stating Israel is permanent, Jews are indigenous, and return is symbolic rather than literal signs his death warrant. Moderates faced murder in the past; Sadat was assassinated; Hamas executes dissenters; Abbas governs behind armed guards while lacking electoral legitimacy.

The Palestinian public is not a peace constituency waiting for unlocking. Polling demonstrates it is radicalized, punishing moderation. Leadership responds rationally to that environment through stalling and donor collection rather than confronting mythology.

Permanent conflict sustains the grievance economy—aid flows, NGOs proliferate, security budgets swell, patronage networks thrive. Peace would bring audits, elections, and potential competitors. War remains profitable through reconstruction contracts, terror stipends, and NGO salaries.

Implications for Reality, Not Illusions

Three decades of conferences, roadmaps, summits, and pledges failed because they rested on false premises: assuming Palestinian leadership wanted deals and merely lacked incentives, that prosperity would soften ideology, that jobs would replace jihad, and that infrastructure would crowd out incitement.

Oslo failed not because Israel sabotaged it but because Palestinian leadership never intended success. They preserved militias, escalated incitement, and maintained maximalist claims through ambiguity.

Aid similarly failed. Western capitals believed prosperity would produce moderation. Gaza became “the most heavily subsidized failed territory on earth—and one of the most radicalized.”

Mediators repeatedly projected their own rationality onto Palestinian leadership, assuming fear of domestic backlash explained positions actually rooted in worldview. Each new envoy rediscovered the same reality: no credible peace partner exists where jihad retains legitimacy and elections represent existential threats.

For Israel, the operational conclusion is clear: containment, deterrence, regional integration, and defensive strength are necessities, not preferences. October 7 ended the argument.

For the West, implications are equally stark. Repeating identical formulas while expecting different results constitutes self-deception. Supporting Palestinian civilians requires opposing Palestinian leadership indulgence.

Indicators of Breakage, Not Hope

Real systemic change would announce itself through behaviors threatening existing power structures. Cosmetic rebranding does not constitute genuine transformation.

Serious rupture would begin with Arabic-language messaging stating Israel is permanent, Jews are indigenous, partition is final, and violence failed. Such messages would appear repeatedly in schools, mosques, and media—not once in English for Western consumption.

Political behavior would follow: elections held despite electoral risk, opposition tolerated despite embarrassment, corruption prosecutions targeting the top, courts constraining executives, and security forces answering to law rather than faction.

In Gaza, that would mean actual disarmament—not rhetoric but monopoly of force. Hamas historically chooses jihad; deviation would be unmistakable.

Economic signals would show prosperity ceasing to be treason, cooperation with Israel framed as necessity, entrepreneurs protected rather than extorted, and aid dependency declining.

Civil society would breathe: journalists criticizing without disappearing, teachers instructing history without erasure, peace activists operating openly, and children learning chemistry without Jew-hatred prerequisites.

Violence would face honest confrontation—renounced entirely, not managed or rationalized.

Most telling: accountability for past failure. Palestinian leaders have never admitted error. Until that changes, unity deals, committees, and ceasefire agreements remain camouflage.

No evidence suggests such changes are imminent. Current leadership structures cannot initiate them. If change arrives, it comes through fracture—generational, institutional, or catastrophic—not negotiation.

Conclusion

The author acknowledges the humane impulse behind “what were they supposed to do?” but insists history operates through responsibility and agency rather than tragic inevitability.

Palestinian leadership made repeated, predictable choices narrowing futures available to their own people more substantially than any UN speech expanded them. This does not render all Palestinian civilians guilty, though it does not excuse those promoting the system.

Until the system is named honestly—as one selling struggle as destiny and paralysis as virtue—nothing substantively changes. Diplomacy, aid, peace plans, and slogans remain performative without foundational accountability.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Uriel Zehavi

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR · MITZPE INSTITUTE

Uriel Zehavi is the executive director of Mitzpe Institute, where he writes the daily Israel Brief and co-directs its Institutional Intelligence practice with Modi Zehavi. He is the author of four books from Mitzpe Press and advises Israeli and allied clients on strategic communications for Western audiences.



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