

THE PALESTINE PAPERS

A MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

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Briefing Notes
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The Palestine Papers - a matter of public interest

Following the leak of some 1600 documents a selection known as the Palestine Papers were released by Al Jazeera and the Guardian newspaper; they highlight previously unknown details relating to the peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

- The documents record hundreds of meetings between Palestinian, Israeli and US officials, leaders and politicians. They include a large number of emails and “secret proposals” relating to final status negotiations.
- The earliest document dates from 1999 and the most recent is a September 2010 memo. Most, however, focus on the Annapolis conference in 2007.
- They are records which have come mainly from the Palestinian Negotiation Support Unit (NSU), which is funded heavily by the British Government. Some other documents have come from the Palestinian Authority’s security forces.
- All of the documents are in English as this was the official language used by both Israeli and Palestinians during negotiations.
- The leaks highlight often startling differences between the private records of meetings and the public positions taken by the PA during the negotiations.
- The papers reflect the records of the PA and, significantly, the PA’s opinions and positions. The Israelis, Americans, British and others all kept their own records.

The contents

- The documents reveal countless details of negotiations and offer a unique insight into the negotiations, the peace process and ultimately, its failure to-date.
- The revelations cover a wide variety of deals and negotiations; one which has courted the most controversy was the willingness of Palestinian negotiators to accept Israel’s annexation of all but one of the illegal settlements in occupied East Jerusalem – this would have created the ‘biggest Jerusalem’ in history had Israel not rejected the offer.



- The Palestinian negotiators offered large concession on the right of return of Palestinian refugees, supposed to be a “final status” issue.
- The Papers reveal Israel’s request for the “transfer” of some of the Zionists state’s own Arab citizens from Israel to a Palestinian state (though the state remains as yet undeclared).
- The Papers also revealed the central role of the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) in a plan to orchestrate the complete destruction of Hamas within the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- The leaked documents exposed the PA’s foreknowledge of Israel’s offensive on the Gaza Strip in 2008-09 (Operation Cast Lead).

The controversial concessions

Certain concessions offered by the PA have caused the most controversy since the revelation of the documents as they expose the intention of the PA to waive fundamental rights which have formed the basis of the demands for justice for the Palestinians.

- Saeb Erekat, the (now former) Palestinian chief negotiator, handed Israel “the biggest Jerusalem in history” when he offered the Zionists not only the illegal settlements in what Israel calls “Greater Jerusalem” (excluding Har Homa) but also suggested a land swap for the Palestinian neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah; the latter remains under threat from illegal settlement activity.
- The PA proposed a “joint committee” to control the Noble Sanctuary of Al-Aqsa/Temple Mount site in the Old City of Jerusalem. It had been this issue which resulted in the collapse of the Camp David Accords in 2000, when Yasser Arafat refused to concede authority over the Noble Sanctuary.
- Diana Buttu, a former Palestinian negotiator, called for the resignation of Saeb Erekat, noting that the Papers revealed how “out of touch and unrepresentative” the negotiators are.



What do the revelations mean?

- The PA has been exposed as weak and desperate by its concession, which undermined previous negotiations.
- The Papers show that the PA does not represent the opinions of the majority of Palestinians.
- The revelation of the British-backed plan to remove Hamas undermines the credibility of the PA, following the 2006 elections which brought Hamas to government.
- The Papers reveal Israel's demand for Palestinian concessions, which have all been rejected as "inadequate" by the Israelis.
- The Israeli position in the negotiations has been supported by the US government, which advised Israel to reject a number of Palestinian concessions.
- As well as exposing a lack of support for the PA, the Papers reveal its concerns that the US and British teams involved in the negotiations were biased towards Israel, pointing out specifically that the Quartet Middle East envoy Tony Blair himself was biased towards Israel and its security demands over and above any issues raised by the PA.

Journalistic freedom or an attempt to ruin the peace process?

- The Palestine Papers have been criticised by those involved in the negotiations, who claim that the revelations have derailed the peace process.
- The leaks have proved that the peace process has been hampered by stalemates and stonewalling during the talks.
- The documents were leaked to Al Jazeera, a news channel which has provided extensive coverage of the Palestine-Israel conflict. The documents were shared with the Guardian newspaper.
- The documents were authenticated independently by the Guardian, former participants in the negotiations and intelligence and diplomatic sources.



- The Guardian's reports on the leaks have been supplemented and supported by the 'Wikileaks' cables from the US consulate in Jerusalem and the US embassy in Tel Aviv.
- The leaks have been embarrassing for the PA, given the major concessions that they were willing to make, despite the lack of support from within Palestinian society.
- The PA's mandate to negotiate without reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas has been severely weakened, increasing the number of calls for reconciliation talks between the two parties.
- The Guardian has promoted discussion about the documents from all parties, with officials from the PA, Israel, Hamas and others writing in the newspaper.
- Al Jazeera has redacted parts of the Palestine Papers in order to protect the identity of the sources.
- The individuals who leaked the Palestine Papers remain unknown, although Mahmoud Abbas has called for European assistance to identify them.

The next steps for the peace process

- Following the leaks, the PA has been under pressure to re-engage with the Palestinian people.
- Demonstrations have taken place in the West Bank calling for greater democracy, echoing similar demands across the region.
- Saeb Erekat, the Palestinian chief negotiator has resigned as has the PA Cabinet.
- The unelected PA Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, is to form a new cabinet expected to consist of "technocrats". He retains the confidence and support of western governments despite the lack of a democratic process in his appointment as prime minister.



- The President of the PA, Mahmoud Abbas, has now called for a general election, expected to take place in September. The election is long overdue and Hamas is reported to have said it will not take part without national reconciliation. It is not clear if Mahmoud Abbas will stand again for the presidency; his term of office expired two years ago.
- Many Palestinians complain of repression, intimidation and torture of political prisoners by the PA in the occupied West Bank. Some welcome the election call and see it as an opportunity to improve their situation.
- The most recent peace talks in September 2010 failed after Israel refused to renew the moratorium on illegal settlement activity. Calls remain for illegal settlement activity to be stopped and for direct talks to restart between the two sides. The US, however, abandoned its request for such a moratorium in December 2010.
- The Quartet expects to meet with Israeli and Palestinian officials separately in Brussels, at the beginning of March 2011.
- It is not yet known who will represent the PA at the next round of talks.

The Palestine Papers future

- Given the ongoing political unrest across the Middle East, the release of further Palestine Papers has been put on hold.
- The first panel discussion of the Palestine Papers, to include Guardian and Al Jazeera representatives, will take place in London on 22 February 2010.
- Al Jazeera released the documents believing them to be of *“inestimable value to journalists, scholars, historians, policymakers and the general public”*. It hopes to *“inform, not harm, to spark debate and reflection – not dampen it”*.

