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Abbas Misses Another Opportunity

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Speaking at the United Nations today, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas missed an opportunity to gain the confidence of Israel and international Jewry by recognizing Israel as a Jewish state. Barack Obama understands this and in his UN speech earlier this week, tried to smooth his often tense relationship with Israel by reaffirming an observable fact: "The Jewish people have forged a successful state in their historic homeland."

Instead, Abbas achieved the exact opposite. His speech to the General Assembly was a slanderous assault on Israel rather than a warm and gentle handshake with his only possible peace partner. Finding it hard to speak of Israel by its name, Abbas referred to the Jewish state as "the occupying power", thereby denying its very existence.

Abbas took every opportunity to defame Israel and label it a criminal state on the world stage. He accused Israel of "ethnic cleansing," of "apartheid," of "racism," of "colonialism" and even of setting "dogs" and "settlers" on the Palestinians. Yet, at the same time, he claimed to be extending a hand to the Israeli people while maintaining Palestinian efforts are not designed to delegitimize Israel.

Really? And all this time, we thought he was playing nice.

Those of us with a clear grasp of history watched in astonishment as Abbas reminded the General Assembly of Yasser Arafat's 1974 UN speech in which he extended his hand of peace in the form of an olive branch (while wearing a gun holster). Arafat a peace maker? How ludicrous! Arafat was at the top of his terrorism game in the 1970s.

Let's see. Does anyone remember the 1972 Munich massacre or PLO terrorism in Kiryat Shimona, Ma'alot and Beit She'an in 1974? Or how about the PLO's 1974 rejection of Security Council Resolution 242 which calls for Israel's "right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force?" How many plane hijackings was Arafat involved in?

Abbas tried to sound like a statesman and he would have done himself and the Palestinians greater good if only he took an honest look in the mirror and declared the imperfections honestly. He failed to discuss the elephant in the room which is Hamas and Gaza. What happens to them? Are they included in the Palestinian UN bid to be recognized as a full state? If so, many Western nations, including the United States are not permitted by law to fund Hamas, which is deemed a terrorist organization. So what happens? How will he control Hamas' war with Israel?

Abbas could have reached into the heart of Israel by announcing that he has freed Gilad Shalit as a gesture of good will. He could have renounced the anti-Semitism that prevails on Palestinian television and in school curricula. He could have candidly and genuinely invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to have open and honest negotiations leading to a Palestinian state.

By refusing to accept Israel as the Jewish homeland -- nevermind his reluctance to even mention it respectfully by name, Abbas gave the impression that he is refusing to accept the Jewish state -- end of story. As Netanyahu reminded the General Assembly this afternoon, Abbas did not have the courtesy to reply to Ehud Olmert's sweeping offer two years ago. If Abbas is serious about peace, he should take Netanyahu up on his offer and immediately meet with him in New York to make peace.

Another missed opportunity for both Palestinians and Israelis would be a shame. What is he waiting for?