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Netanyahu is fomenting revolution in the West Bank

Avi Issacharoff

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<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/netanyahu-is-fomenting-revolution-i...> [1]

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Article Author(s): Avi Issacharoff

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Haaretz's report last week that there are no more Palestinian fugitives in Samaria sparked many responses from Palestinian groups and the Arab media. Once more the Palestinian Authority was accused of collaborating with Israel and trying to avoid a reconciliation with Hamas.

On the Israeli side, on the other hand, there were nearly no responses. This may stem from the relatively short collective memory of the Israeli public, which seeks to forget the old security realities and perhaps stubbornly hold on to the claim that "there is no partner" on the Palestinian side. To a large degree, decision makers in Israel and most of the public are unwilling to recognize the revolution in the West Bank over the past three years. It's much easier to stick to old slogans like "the Arabs can't be trusted" or "there is no one and nothing to talk about" than admit that the PA has done the impossible and created a security situation in the West Bank the residents of Lod, Netanya and other Israel cities can only be envious about.

The PA is engaged in a total war with Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Law and order is being restored in the cities' streets. Economic growth is evident everywhere, even in areas where there is great poverty. The Palestinians, according to a recent poll, are interested in the economy a lot more than the occupation or the settlements. A look at Hamas websites is enough to see the extent of the activity of the PA's security organs, not only against Hamas' military arm but against its civilian infrastructure.

The revolution in the West Bank is so dramatic that Israelis are having difficulty fathoming it. In the summer of 2003, under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, attorney Dov Weissglas held talks

with the PA to put together a security arrangement that would include the disarming of about 400 wanted militants in the West Bank. Their number in Judea can today be counted on the fingers of one hand. Weissglas says Yasser Arafat's aides would tell their Israeli counterparts they would not be able to implement the agreement because they feared for their lives.

Nonetheless, the right is still making claims against the Palestinian Authority, saying the PA is only taking action in the West Bank to counter the threat of Hamas, not because of a genuine wish to help Israel. This is accurate, but it may be that the time has come to step back from the dream of transforming PA officials into enthusiastic Zionists who will not only act against Islamist groups out of a desire to save Israelis but will also recognize Israel as a Jewish state. Even the PA's critics who say the situation there is fragile and explosive are right. This is an accurate statement mostly because the negotiations are stuck and due to the perception that the Israeli government has no desire to reach a peace agreement.

Hamas did not disappear from Samaria. It continues to enjoy public support there, and this will increase as long as the negotiations are delayed. Therefore, the government's avoidance of dramatic steps only serves Hamas. Surprisingly (or maybe not), many voices in the PA are pleased with Israel's prime minister and his policies. A Palestinian journalist who lives in the West Bank explained not long ago that in view of the enormous international support for the Palestinians caused by Israel's policies, he plans to put up in his office a photograph of his new hero, Benjamin Netanyahu, next to his old hero, Arafat.

In Algiers 22 years and a day ago, Arafat declared the establishment of the Palestinian state. According to some of Netanyahu's "supporters" in the PA, if Netanyahu continues with his "nay" policy, he will cause the declaration to be carried out.

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