

US State Department “Tactics”: Kerry Uses Arabs to Bully Palestinians

By [Nicola Nasser](#)

Global Research, July 26, 2013

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

A new tactic by US Secretary of State John Kerry is causing a split within the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) ranks regarding further talks with Israel. Kerry is apparently using the Arab League's Follow-Up Committee on the Arab Peace Initiative (FCAPI) to bully the Palestinians into accepting new ground rules for the talks to which they had objected in the past.

In his sixth tour of the region as secretary of state, Kerry did something unusual. Instead of visiting Israel, as he always does, he left it out of his itinerary, deciding instead to hold most of the talks in the Jordanian capital Amman. While there, he conferred with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas as well as members of the FCAPI. As the talks progressed, it became clear that Kerry was no longer focussing on Israel, the country that has torpedoed all previous attempts at peace, but on the PLO. His aim is to get the latter to offer more concessions than any they have accepted in the past.

In order to do this, Kerry wanted to get the FCAPI to accept these concessions on behalf of the Palestinians, a new tactic that may or may not be working but that so far has succeeded in causing divisions and widespread consternation in Palestinian circles. The tactic is not totally new, for it resonates with the manner in which US diplomats have used the Arab League to justify foreign intervention for the sake of regime change in countries such as Iraq and Libya in the past.

Speaking after a meeting with Kerry in Amman, FCAPI diplomats voiced their “great support” for Kerry's efforts to revive the talks. Their remarks were seen as a “victory” for Kerry, said the Associated Press. It was a “success” for his diplomacy, added The New York Times. Kerry, for his part, announced that the gap was “narrowing” between the Palestinians and the Israelis, and that all that was needed now was to “iron out” a few kinks.

For the Palestinians, ironing out these kinks is going to be a quite a job, however. PLO chief negotiator Saeb Erekat is said to have had a “stormy” meeting with the PLO leadership concerning Kerry's proposals. The PLO, its back to the wall, is now forming a working committee to decide what to do about the talks.

All of this is unprecedented. In the past, the FCAPI used to take its cue from the Palestinians. When the Palestinians were faced with demands for concessions they were reluctant to give, they politely said they needed to consult with the FCAPI, which was a courteous way of turning down unacceptable proposals. Now the FCAPI is getting them into trouble by agreeing to concessions before the Palestinians even have time to discuss them at length.

In the absence of FCAPI support for the PLO negotiators, the latter had no option but to play along with Kerry's proposals. On Friday, the US secretary of state declared his satisfaction with the current plans to get the Palestinians and the Israelis talking again about a “final status” deal. He has invited the PLO and Israel to send negotiators to Washington soon to work out details of the agreement. PLO senior officials told the French news agency AFP that Kerry was determined to declare the resumption of the talks before leaving the region.

US Department of State spokeswoman Jen Psaki told reporters that unless progress was made on Kerry's sixth visit to the region, he would not be returning for more visits. If anything, this sounds like an unveiled threat aiming to put pressure on Abbas and his chief negotiator and force their cooperation.

During this round of talks, Kerry also left Abbas no chance to play for time. Instead of waiting for Abbas to go to talk with the FCAPI, Kerry brought the Arab League diplomats to Amman and had them agree to his proposals without prior consultation with the PLO.

In Amman, members of the FCAPI issued a statement saying that Kerry's ideas for the resumption of

talks were a “suitable foundation” for further negotiations. The FCAPI stamp of approval placed the PLO in a difficult position. Abbas, unable to wiggle free from this diplomatic ordeal, remained silent. But his silence, as the saying goes in Arabic, was seen as a “sign of approval”.

Yet, the situation is likely to spark resentment back home, where most of the PLO leaders are opposed to Kerry’s proposals. However, they know that a blunt rejection of these proposals may invoke an unpleasant US reaction, if not sanctions.

Abbas is waiting to give his answer following consultations with the PLO leadership. In all likelihood, the latter will have to agree, despite its deep reservations about Kerry’s proposals.

As a result of all this, the FCAPI has let down the Palestinians, and it is not the first time that this has happened. On 29 April, a Qatari-led FCAPI delegation offered Kerry what amounted to its consent to a land swap at a meeting in Washington . Critics of the FCAPI correctly noted that the step was extraordinary, for the FCAPI is not empowered to make such concessions. Only the Arab summit, which issued the Arab Peace Initiative, is entitled to make any amendment to this initiative. As a mere follow-up committee, the FCAPI had exceeded its mandate.

Israel, of course, is pleased to see the FCAPI offer concessions that the Palestinians do not seem willing to make. Tzipi Livni , Israel ’s foreign minister at the time, described the FCAPI statement as “good news.”

Lebanese analyst Ziad Al-Sayegh recently wrote that “after the failure of the internationalisation of the talks [through the Quartet], we are now going through a regionalisation of the talks [through the Arab League].” One symptom of this regionalisation is that the land swap, overwhelmingly rejected by the Palestinians, is now getting the Arab League’s stamp of approval.

Last Thursday, the Jordanian news agency Petra cited the Arab League chief, Nabil Al-Arabi, as saying that the “US plan concerning the peace process is based on three axes; political, economic and security-related”. The Israeli newspaper Yediot Ahronot then offered an interesting interpretation of this statement. The political axis, it said, was the resumption of talks. The security axis was going to be left to the US top brass to decide. And the economic axis would mean a lot more aid to the Palestinian Authority.

During his last tour of the region, Kerry made no reference to the Israeli settlements. Nor did he object when Israel declared plans to build 732 new settlement units in the settlement of Modi’in Illit in west Jerusalem . For him, this was not even a kink worthy of ironing out. Even worse, the FCAPI has not seemed interested in Israel ’s active settlement-building programme, and it did not even mention that future talks should focus on a two-state deal based on the 1967 borders.

Last Friday, Kerry said that the best way to give the talks a chance was to keep them “private”. He declined to reveal the details of his plan as a result, and the FCAPI had nothing to say. For now, the PLO leadership is also keeping its cards close to its chest.

This article was first published and translated from Arabic by the Al-Ahram Weekly.

Nicola Nasser is a veteran Arab journalist based in Bir Zeit, West Bank of the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories. nassernicola@gmail.com

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Nicola Nasser](#), Global Research, 2013

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Nicola Nasser](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca