

Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen)

"Chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), President of the Palestine National Authority (PNA)"



Born in 1935 in Safad in northern Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas studied in Damascus and Moscow. He earned his Ph.D in history from Moscow's Oriental College and his B.A in Law from Damascus University, Syria. He is, with late Yasser Arafat and Faruq Qaddumi (Abu Lutof), one of the founders of Fatah.

On January 09, 2005 he was elected as the President of the PNA shortly after being elected as the Chairman of the PLO Executive Committee.

In 1980, he was elected to the PLO Executive Committee of which he is now the Secretary General (ie. Nr 2 of the PLO). He was appointed head of the PLO Department of National (Arab) Affairs in 1984. He returned to Palestine in July 1995. He is since then the Secretary General of the PLO.

In the seventies, he already played a leading role in encouraging contacts between the PLO and left-wing Israelis. His moderate and pragmatic views caused him trouble with hard-liners of his own camp.

In the early nineties, he officially became a key player in the design of the PLO's negotiation strategy. Aware of the limits of the Madrid process, his work resulted in the establishment of much of the basis for the eventual secret negotiations which were held with Israel in Oslo, and which led to the Declaration of Principles that Yasser Arafat signed on behalf of the PLO on September 13, 1993 in Washington (see Oslo peace process). His influence on Yasser Arafat was strong and evident. Thereafter, in the follow-up of the agreements, Abu Mazen attended several discussion groups with the Israelis (he headed, among others, the first session of the final status talks on May 5, 1996). He is famed for his high sense of pragmatism and propensity for secret diplomacy; which Israeli negotiators seemed to appreciate. Nonetheless, he expressed some bitterness towards the state of the peace process in the years following the agreement. In 1994 he even refused to become Minister in the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

Abu Mazen is considered to be politically close of Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala). Since the outburst of the Intifada "El Aqsa", Abu Mazen had called for a halt to armed attacks on Israeli targets to avoid giving Israel a pretext for its armed campaign against the Palestinian autonomy. A broad part of Palestinian population see him too much conciliatory with Israel.

As a high-profile member of the Palestinian leadership, he is respected as a statesman both regionally and internationally. He is recognised by his pragmatism and considered a valuable interlocutor for Israel. Following a campaign by Israel and the US for the dismissal of Yasser Arafat, Abu Mazen was appointed Prime Minister by the Palestinian Legislative Council on the 29th April 2003. After his nomination as Prime Minister the US called for the publication of the 'road-map' drafted by the Quartet and negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority resumed.