Abbas ignores Biden’s call to condemn terrorist attacks

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By [KHALED ABU TOAMEH](http://www.jpost.com/Author/Khaled-Abu-Toameh), [TOVAH LAZAROFF](http://www.jpost.com/Author/Tovah-Lazaroff)

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Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas offered condolences Wednesday to visiting US Vice President Joe Biden over the death of US citizen Taylor Force, killed in a terrorist stabbing in Jaffa Tuesday night, but stopped short of heeding a strong call by the US to condemn the attack.

Biden called on the Palestinian leadership and the international community to denounce terrorist attacks against Israelis, including the one in Jaffa.

“Let me say in no uncertain terms: The US condemns these acts and condemns the failure to condemn these acts,” Biden said in Jerusalem on Wednesday at a joint press conference with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In Washington, the White House echoed his call. Press secretary Josh Earnest told reporters the Obama administration expects Palestinian leadership to condemn “any act of terrorism” against innocent civilians, including the stabbing attack that took Force’s life.

But the PA officials rejected the Vice President's request.

After offering his condolences at their Ramallah meeting, Abbas told Biden that Israel has “killed 200 Palestinians in the past five months,” but he did not clarify that many of those deaths were Palestinians killed attempting to execute attacks against Israelis.

Abbas stressed the need to “combat terrorism in all its forms,” according to a statement released by Abbas’s office after the meeting. “Victory over ISIS and terrorism requires the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with east Jerusalem as its capital,” the statement quoted Abbas as telling Biden.

Abbas held Israel responsible for the current wave of terrorism.

“The continued Israeli dictates, settlements and occupation are the reason behind the violence and bloodshed,” Abbas charged.

One official said Biden should have demanded that Israel “halt its policy of extra-judicial executions” against Palestinians and “daily assaults” on al-Aksa Mosque and other Islamic holy sites. Amin Maqboul, a senior Fatah official who is closely associated with Abbas, said the Palestinian leadership was not denouncing attacks on Israelis because Israel does not condemn “deliberate attacks against Palestinians.”

Maqboul and a number of Palestinian officials accused the US administration of “bias” in favor of Israel.

They said Biden’s remarks were further proof the White House has endorsed the Israeli government’s position.

Biden’s two-day visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories that began Tuesday was marked by the Jaffa attack that occurred soon after he landed at Ben-Gurion Airport.

The attack, in which 12 others were wounded, occurred just a short distance away from where Biden was meeting former president Shimon Peres.

Biden noted that his wife and his grandchildren were having dinner on the beach nearby.

“It just brings home that [terrorism] can happen anywhere at any time,” Biden said during his press conference with Netanyahu. “The kind of violence we saw yesterday, the failure to condemn it, the rhetoric that incites that violence, the retribution that it generates, has to stop.

“This cannot become an accepted modus operandi,” he continued.

“This cannot be viewed by civilized leaders as an appropriate way in which to behave even if it appears to inure to the benefit of one side or the other. It’s just not tolerable in the 21st century,” Biden said. “They’re targeting innocent civilians, mothers, pregnant women, teenagers, grandfathers, American citizens.

“There can be no justification for this hateful violence, and the United States stands firmly behind Israel’s right to defend itself, as we are defending ourselves at this moment as well.”

Biden also called on the Palestinians to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, something they have refused to do.

Israel has been known as a Jewish state since its inception in 1948, he said. “We should get over all of this.

It was a Jewish state that was set up,” said Biden.

He urged both Israelis and Palestinians to find a way to move beyond the impasse in the peace process and to resolve the conflict so that there can be two states for two peoples.

“The status quo has to break somewhere along the line here in terms of a two-state solution,” Biden said. “Even though it may be hard to see the way ahead, we continue to encourage all sides to take steps to move back toward the path to peace – not easy – and for the sake of Israel, and I might add, for the sake of the Palestinians.

“There cannot be unilateral steps to undermine trust,” he continued.

“That only takes us further away, further and further away from an outcome we know in our hearts is the only fundamental outcome, the only outcome that is the ultimate guarantor.”

Netanyahu thanked Biden for his strong support and denounced the PA for failing to condemn his people’s terrorist attacks against Israelis, including the one in which Force was killed.

“Unfortunately Abbas has not only refused to condemn these terror attacks. His Fatah party portrays the murderer of this American citizen as a Palestinian martyr and a hero,” Netanyahu said. “This is wrong. This failure to condemn terrorism should be condemned itself by everyone in the international community.”

Palestinian society itself persistently incites against the Jewish state and glorifies those who kill its citizens, Netanyahu said. Civilized societies must stand together to fight terrorism, and Israel has no better partner in this battle than the US, he added.

“I look forward to continuing to work together with you and President [Barack] Obama to strengthen the remarkable and unbreakable alliance between our two countries,” Netanyahu said.

Biden promised Netanyahu the US would insist Iran must comply with the terms of the deal it worked out with the six world powers to curb its nuclear program.

“If in fact they break the deal, we will act. We will act,” Biden said and explained that the US would also work to halt Iran conventional military aggression.

He noted that he had come to talk with Netanyahu, who he considers to be a decade-long friend, about regional issues even though he did not have any concrete plans in his back pocket.

He swore Islamic State – which he said had helped the region change its attitude toward Israel – would be crushed.

“They’ve realized they’d rather be in your orbit than in the orbit of Daesh and ISIS and terrorism, and al-Nusra, et cetera,” he added.

Similarly, he said, Israel’s natural gas reserve, “which is about to make it the epicenter of energy in the region” has also had a positive impact on its relations with its neighbors.

During their meeting the two men discussed ISIS and Syria including Iranian involvement in Syria and the flow of weapons from Syria to Hizbullah in Lebanon.They spoke about efforts to restore Israeli-Turkish diplomatic ties.

Additionally, Biden urged Netanyahu to renew the Memorandum of Understanding under which Israel annually receives defense funding from the US while Obama was still in office. Israel and the US are at odds the size of the funding package.

The two men talked about the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process and issued related to the security coordination between the IDF and the PA. Netanyahu also spoke with Biden about Palestinian incitement and showed him Fatah’s official Facebook page in which the Jaffa attack was lauded.

In a discussion with President Reuven Rivlin, Biden focused on the reduction of extremism and the offering of greater economic opportunities for both Israelis and Palestinians.

“The two-state solution and a strong and secure Israel are very much in the interests of the United States,” Biden told Rivlin at the start of their meeting.

At the President’s Residence Biden also spoke of Force’s death: “This plague of terrorism has a tendency to harden hearts,” he said. “Israelis and visitors cannot go about afraid to walk in the streets,” Biden insisted, adding: “This violence has to stop and it cannot be done just by physical force.”

Rivlin opened the meeting with Biden by referring to the more recent terrorist attack which had taken place in Jerusalem on Wednesday morning.

“Once again we woke up to terrorism in Jerusalem,” he said, adding “I stand here in grief and solidarity. Our prayers go to the victim’s family and to the injured.”