PA official: Abbas won’t condemn terror because Israel will say it’s not enough

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The head of the Palestinian Prisoners Club on Tuesday said PA President Mahmoud Abbas had not denounced a string of terror attacks in which four Israelis were killed because Israel would insist condemnations alone were an insufficient response.

Qadura Fares, a former minister in the PA, who himself declined to condemn the attacks during an interview with Israel’s Army Radio, said the Palestinian leader “has already proven himself to be a moral leader.”

Abbas, he said, “has always condemned [attacks], and he [has always] received a response from the Israelis that it isn’t enough, that his words are twisted, that he has to take steps and that they’re sick of just talk,” Fares said. The Palestinian leader has thus concluded that “it doesn’t matter,” he continued. “Condemn or don’t condemn — it doesn’t matter to the Israelis.”

Abbas has been fiercely criticized by the Palestinians and is “between a rock and a hard place,” said Fares.

“He has already proven that he is a moral leader, even though he has absorbed a lot of internal criticism, and therefore you don’t need to put him to the test,” Fares said.

Fares would not condemn the attacks last week in which Naama and Eitam Henkin were gunned down in front of their four children in the West Bank, and Aharon Banita and Nehemia Lavi were fatally stabbed in Jerusalem’s Old City.

“You won’t hear a condemnation from me, because it isn’t worth it, and isn’t worth your asking me,” Fares said.

“These are army men, these are people who incite, these are people who stole lands from Palestinians,” he said in an apparent reference to the Israeli victims, three of whom lived in West Bank settlements and one in the Old City.

Pressed for more answers, Fares hung up.

Also Tuesday, Knesset member Ayman Odeh, the head of the Joint List party, told Army Radio that while he opposes armed conflict, he would not dictate to the Palestinians how they should fight Israel.

“I will not set red lines for the Arab nation; they will decide how to fight the occupation. I support the struggle of the Palestinian people to establish a Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel. I will always hold the Israeli occupation to blame; I cannot tell the Palestinians how to fight their fight,” said Odeh.

In response, Yisrael Beytenu party leader Avigdor Liberman said the members of the mostly Arab party were “terrorists.”

“Ayman Odeh and his party members are spitting in the face of the State of Israel, spitting the face of the Jews,” Liberman told Army Radio. “There is no doubt that these are terrorists sitting in Israel’s Knesset; they are a political arm of terror, and this too we aren’t dealing with.”

Despite public calls from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli officials to condemn the attacks, the Palestinian leadership has not denounced the killings. On Sunday, the PA condemned Israel for killing two Palestinian stabbers, the first of whom murdered Lavi and Banita and badly injured Banita’s wife. The second was an East Jerusalem resident who stabbed a 15-year-old Jewish youth outside the Old City.

In a written communique published on the official news agency Wafa, PA government spokesman Ihab Bseiso called on the international community to intervene following “the killing of two young men in occupied Jerusalem and the series of incursions into cities and villages in the West Bank.”

The statement made no mention of the fact that the two dead Palestinians had been killed while carrying out stabbing attacks against Israeli civilians.

On Tuesday, Abbas said that he had no interest in an “escalation” and was ready to talk with Israel. The remarks came at a meeting of top Palestinian officials on Tuesday over the latest surge in violence.

“We’re committed to the agreements,” he said. Abbas added that he has told the Israelis that the Palestinians don’t want “military and security escalations.” He said the message has been delivered to Palestinian security forces and activists.

“We want to reach a diplomatic solution through peaceful means and not another solution,” he said. “We want to mitigate the chances of destruction and loss which will afflict both sides from this situation.”

But Abbas also added that “at the same time, we will protect ourselves.”

Despite such comments, PA-controlled media was still broadcasting material warning that Israel is seeking to seize Al-Aksa Mosque and take over the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, Israel’s Channel 2 reported on Tuesday afternoon.