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The Palestinian "Popular Resistance" and Its Built-In Violence¹



Palestinians throw stones and rocks at Israeli Border Policemen during a "popular resistance" riot in the village of Bila'in on March 1, 2013 (Facebook page of The International Communities against Israel)

¹ The full version of this document is being translated into English and will soon appear on our website.

The Main Findings of This Study

1. This study examines the concept of the Palestinian "popular resistance" (*al-muqawama al-sha'abiya*) as it was formulated during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, then adopted by the sixth Fatah conference in August 2009, and **has since been implemented in Judea and Samaria by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Fatah**. Thus the concept of "popular resistance" **has become a main component of PA policy**, utilized to promote PA interests when interacting with Israel and in both the international and internal Palestinian arenas.

2. The main findings:

1) The "popular resistance" is a prominent strategy implemented on the ground and integrated into **the political, economic, propaganda and judicial campaigns currently waged by the PA against Israel**. As far as the PA and Fatah are concerned, the "popular resistance" creates **constant, controlled tension** in the Palestinian relations with Israel. The "popular resistance" can be used to exert pressure on Israel to the extent and degree suitable to political developments, and is regarded as legitimate by the international community. **Internally, the PA and Fatah have presented the Palestinian public with the "popular resistance" as an acceptable alternative to Hamas' "armed resistance"** which PA and Fatah feel is not, at the present time, useful in the Palestinian campaign against Israel.

2) The **"popular resistance" is not the placid, non-violent protest the PA pretends it is. It makes massive use of violence, employing cold weapons. Usually but not always it involves the frequent use of Molotov cocktails and stones**. In addition, there are sporadic attacks involving **knives and hit and run attacks on Israelis**. In recent years, the use of cold weapons against Israeli security forces and Israeli civilians has increased considerably and **become the main component of anti-Israeli violence in Judea and Samaria**, as opposed to a significant decrease in the use of arms (guns and explosives). **The use of cold weapons has risen even more sharply since the end of Operation Pillar of Defense**, although the "popular resistance" has not yet turned into a mass uprising (in most instances "popular resistance" events attract between dozens and hundreds of participants). **Occasionally the "popular resistance" claims casualties (killed and wounded) among Israeli civilians and soldiers, as well as Palestinians**.

3) **The PA publicly supports the systematic violence used in "popular resistance" attacks and both directly and indirectly, providing financial and logistic support.** The PA's security forces do not take the same effective steps to prevent the use of cold weapons as they do to prevent the use of arms, although they make an effort to contain and control violent incidents of friction. **In the international arena the PA fully legitimizes the "popular resistance," despite its aggressive violence and despite the resulting casualties (an Israeli civilian was recently stabbed to death), the PA represents the "popular resistance" as "peaceful resistance."** The PA and Fatah call the violent events "peaceful resistance" or "unarmed resistance" and as such successfully market it to the international community.

4) On the other hand, **the PA does object to the use of arms (guns and explosives), which might turn the "popular resistance" into an armed military campaign against Israel.** The PA and its security forces **use preventive measures to enforce this position on Hamas and the other terrorist organizations. They also continue security coordination with Israel despite Hamas' harsh criticism.** However, ideologically at least, the PA and Fatah have not ruled out the option of an armed campaign: according to the Fatah political platform of August 2009, **an armed campaign remains a future option, dependent on the political and social conditions of the conflict with Israel.** In addition, even during the "popular resistance," **the PA and Fatah preserve the legacy and symbols of the armed campaign against Israel,** manifested, for example, in **commemorating the "shaheeds"** (of all the terrorist organizations) killed while carrying out terrorist attacks.

5) **While the "popular resistance" is generally not directed by the Palestinian terrorist organizations, it is not necessarily "popular" or spontaneous, as represented by the PA and its participants.** The original protests were in fact popular, local, spontaneous and authentic, but became institutionalized (especially since the sixth Fatah conference) and have turned into an important PA-Fatah political tool. **Approximately 30 "popular committees"** (a term taken from the first intifada) have been established to protest the security fence and the Israeli settlements, as well as a supreme coordinating committee that sits in Ramallah. **The PA also institutionalized and organized mechanisms to motivate popular protests around the Palestinian terrorist prisoners,** which gained momentum during

the past year. Various other elements have been integrated into the "popular resistance:" **University and college students** in Judea and Samaria, **Palestinian terrorist operatives** (especially from **Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine**), left-affiliated Palestinian **NGO activists** (especially from Mustafa Barghouti's National Initiative), **pro-Palestinian activists from abroad** (especially from Western countries) organized to arrive in Judea and Samaria for pre-determined periods of time, and **far leftist Israeli activists**.

6) In 2012 the number of "popular resistance" attacks rose in comparison to 2011 and their numbers reached several hundred every month. The numbers have continued to rise throughout the first half of 2013, to today's high level of violence in Judea and Samaria. Two issues which **inflamed events and increased their severity were Operation Pillar of Defense and the Palestinian terrorist operative prisoners in Israeli jails** (especially after the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal, which received much publicity). **Stabbings** also increased, from four in 2011 to 11 in 2012. This past year **cold weapons were used to kill two Israeli civilians in Judea and Samaria: one was stabbed to death and the other was the victim of a hit and run attack**. In 2012, **35 Israelis were wounded, more than half of them by stones and Molotov cocktails**. However, **terrorist attacks involving the use of arms remained relatively few**, despite attempts by Hamas and the other terrorist organizations to encourage them (only **6.4% of the overall number of violent attacks**).

7) **Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)** and other terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip **still consider an armed military campaign as their chosen method to achieve their overall strategic goal, that is, the destruction of the State of Israel**. Hamas, however, does not reject the "popular resistance," but regards it as only complementing the **main military-terrorist effort**. Thus Hamas and the other terrorist organizations **do their utmost to establish an armed terrorist infrastructure in Judea and Samaria** (so far without notable success). In our assessment, their failure to successfully export terrorism from the Gaza Strip to Judea and Samaria is primarily the result of **the Israeli security forces' effective counterterrorism activities**. To them can be added the preventive activities of the Palestinian security forces and the Palestinian public's unwillingness, at least at this point in time, to pay the high

price of a new intifada. **Hamas and other terrorist organization operatives participate in "popular resistance" events in Judea and Samaria, but they do not play a major role, and so far have been careful not to present too much of a challenge to the Palestinian security forces.** The Hamas and PIJ media give extensive coverage to the "popular resistance," praise it and encourage its continuation, **while making explicit appeals for a third intifada.**

8) **The PA allows and on occasion even encourages the participation in the "popular resistance" of anti-Israeli organizations from around the world (primarily from Western countries), some of them playing an important role in the campaign to delegitimize Israel.** Most of the foreigners operating in Judea and Samaria belong to NGOs, most of which are **affiliated with the far left in Europe, the United States and Israel** (particularly prominent is the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), anchored in the American radical left, and very active in Judea and Samaria). Of the Palestinian terrorist organizations involved in the "popular resistance" and maintaining ongoing contact with far leftist organizations in Europe (especially France and Italy), the most prominent is the **Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)**. For the PA and those motivating the "popular resistance," the participation of foreigners **increases its strength and its media presence, and helps them demonize Israel in the international arena** (branding Israel as an "apartheid state"). However, during the past year, the PA has made a point of the Palestinian role in popular events resistance and the PA heads publicly stated they would prefer to see Palestinians dominate the protests and demonstrations. In addition, **Hamas has also made extensive use of far left and extreme Islamic international organizations and activists** to promote projects supporting Hamas in the Gaza Strip, as well as campaigns to send boats and convoys to the Gaza Strip to break the "siege" (a campaign which, in light of a series of failures, has weakened since the *Mavi Marmara*).

3. **In our assessment, from the PA's perspective, the interim balance of implementing the "popular resistance" is extremely positive. For the past several years "popular resistance" events have kept the Israeli security forces in Judea and Samaria busy all the time and helped keep the Palestinian issue in the world media and on the international political agenda. Despite the massive amount of violence involved in the "popular resistance" and despite the casualties among Israeli civilians and soldiers, the Palestinians have managed to foster the false**

impression that they are waging a peaceful, unarmed resistance campaign against Israel, which is represented as an oppressive occupying power. On the other hand, the "popular resistance" has not spun out of the PA's control, it continues at the traditional, fixed friction points and its extent remains limited (although with the potential to deteriorate). In the internal Palestinian arena **the "popular resistance" has improved the status of the PA and Fatah vis-à-vis Hamas** and at the same time it has not harmed the PA's efforts to restore public order in Judea and Samaria and reduce anarchy on the ground.

4. **Thus senior PA and Fatah figures have repeatedly stated their intentions to extend the "popular resistance" in 2013** and improve its tactics (for example by blocking roads and erecting "outposts"). In our assessment, **the PA assumes it will continue to derive great political benefit from the "popular resistance" and at the same time be able to control it and prevent it from being exploited by Hamas and the other terrorist organizations.** It seems unlikely that American President Obama's visit to Israel and the PA, and the expectation for a renewal of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations will lead to a decrease in the extent or intensity of the "popular resistance" and its built-in violence. Rather, **the "popular resistance" and its attendant violence will probably increase in the coming year**, whether as a way of inciting the peace process or whether as a result of the Palestinians' frustration at not achieving what they expected would be the outcome of the renewal of the peace process.

5. The government of Israel, in its reservations regarding the Road Map, said at the time that the Palestinians had to dismantle the PA's security organizations and reform the structures, cease violence and incitement, and educate for peace (Website of the Israeli Knesset Library, government of the State of Israel decision of May 25, 2003). An analysis of the "popular resistance" indicates that the condition was not fully met. While the PA has invested effort in preventing terrorism resulting from armed military-terrorist activity, and has separated itself from Hamas on that particular issue, **the cold weapon violence built into the "popular resistance" is not being prevented.** On the contrary, both the PA and Fatah, in word and in deed, **encourage it, nurture its continuation and accompany the "popular resistance" with ongoing anti-Israeli propaganda and incitement.** As a result, the extreme terrorism prevalent during the era of Yasser Arafat (especially the second intifada) significantly decreased in recent years, and following that, so did the number of Israeli casualties in Judea and Samaria. **On the other hand, however, anti-Israeli Palestinian violence did not disappear, it merely changed form, became more sophisticated, more controlled, the**

Palestinians feel it is more acceptable and more easily digested by the United States (also as a scenario of the peace process), the international community and even Israel.

Structure of the Study

6. The study examines and analyzes the "popular resistance" in **seven sections**:

Section One: The concept of the "popular resistance" and its built-in violence

- 1) Historical background: the place of the "popular resistance" in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
- 2) The sixth Fatah conference adopts the concept of "popular resistance" (August 2009)
- 3) The "popular resistance" becomes a main component of PA policy
- 4) The place of violence in the "popular resistance"
- 5) Throwing stones: the most common form of attack
- 6) Is the use of cold weapons terrorism?

Section Two: Organizational and logistic aspects

- 1) The roots of the "popular committees"
- 2) Deployment and activity of the popular committees
- 3) The supreme coordinating committee
- 4) Prominent activists of the popular committees and the supreme coordinating committee
- 5) Student and academic institution involvement in "popular resistance" activities
- 6) Financial and logistic support for the "popular resistance"

Section Three: Applying the concept of "popular resistance" in Judea and Samaria

- 1) General description of "popular resistance" events

- 2) Focal points of "popular resistance" activity
- 3) Issues and dates inflaming "popular resistance" events
- 4) The leading issue during the past year: the protest of the prisoners
 - A. General description
 - B. Significance of the demand to release Palestinian terrorists imprisoned in Israel.
 - C. Institutions and organizations operating on behalf of the Palestinian prisoners
 - D. The dynamic that led to turning the prisoners' protests into a focal issue for the "popular resistance"
- 5) The Temple Mount compound as a powder keg
- 6) Main types of "popular resistance" activities
 - A. Increased use of cold weapons
 - B. Use of Molotov cocktails
 - C. Use of stones and rocks
 - D. Stabbing attacks
 - E. Hit and run attacks
- 7) Transition from "popular resistance" to armed attacks

Section Four: Models of the "popular resistance" in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip

- 1) Bila'in and Ni'lin
- 2) Attacks on Israeli vehicles driving on roads in Judea and Samaria
- 3) Erecting outposts
- 4) Blocking main roads
- 5) Other models

- 6) Propaganda events in the Gaza Strip

Section Five: PA position regarding the "popular resistance"

- 1) Encouraging but containing the "popular resistance"
- 2) Preventing military-terrorist activity
- 3) Providing Islamic religious approval
- 4) Preserving the belligerent legacy of the armed campaign

Section Six: Hamas and the "popular resistance"

- 1) Hamas' position on the "popular resistance"
- 2) Hamas involvement in "popular resistance" events
- 3) The Hamas-PA media discussion about the "popular resistance"

Section Seven: The "popular resistance" and the international community

- 1) International involvement in the "popular resistance"
- 2) The International Solidarity Movement (ISM): the most prominent foreign organization in "popular resistance" activities
- 3) The PA position on international involvement
- 4) Bila'in international conferences in support of the "popular resistance"
- 5) The involvement of an Israel group called "Anarchists against the fence"
- 6) Marketing the "popular resistance" to the West