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PA-Sponsored Eighth International Conference for Popular Resistance Held in Bil'in to Discuss Broadening It and Increasing Its Effectiveness



Rami Hamdallah, Palestinian prime minister, speaks at the eighth international conference for popular resistance (Wafa News Agency, October 2, 2013)

Overview

1. The **popular resistance** is the central strategy used by the Palestinians on the ground and integrated into **the political, economic, propaganda and legal campaigns currently being waged against Israel by the PA**. The PA and Fatah use the popular resistance to maintain **constant, monitored, controlled tension** in Palestinian relations with Israel. The popular resistance is aimed to exert pressure on Israel to the extent and degree considered suitable according to political developments, and considered 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 the PA and Fatah feel is not, at the present time, useful in current stage of the Palestinian struggle against Israel.

2. **The popular resistance is not the peaceful, non-violent protest the PA pretends it is. It makes massive use of cold weapon violence, usually but not always frequently involving the frequent Molotov cocktails and stones.** In addition, there are sporadic attacks involving **knives and vehicular attacks on Israelis and Israeli targets.** 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). Although the popular resistance **has not turned into a mass uprising** (in most instances its events attract between dozens and hundreds of participants), occasionally it **claims casualties among Israeli civilians and soldiers, as well as Palestinians rioters.**¹

3. **International activists are integrated into the popular resistance, some of them belonging to NGOs hostile to Israel which participate in the campaign to delegitimize it.** To attract international NGOs to the popular resistance, **every year a conference is held in the town of Bil'in,** which has turned into a kind of symbol, a brand for the popular resistance. The conferences are attended by representatives from the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Fatah as well as local popular resistance activists. In addition **diplomats,** especially from European countries, also participate, as do representatives of anti-Israeli NGOs from various countries.²

4. The Bil'in conferences also **discuss ways to make the popular resistance more effective** and how to promote the international campaign to delegitimize Israel (BDS, lawfare and propaganda). **The recent 8th Bil'in International Conference,** sponsored by the PA and Fatah, was held **as Israel and the Palestinians were negotiating** within the American-sponsored peace process. **The conference called for extending the range of the popular resistance** by enlisting students and farmers **to make it more effective,** and by establishing an umbrella organization to unite all the popular resistance elements.

5. The resolutions passed by the conference and the public statements of senior popular resistance activists reflect, in our assessment, a certain degree of frustration **because the popular resistance has not yet turned into a broad popular uprising.**

¹ For further information see the May 20, 2013 bulletin "The Palestinian Popular Resistance and its Built-In Violence."

² The PA and Fatah encourage the participation of European diplomats and anti-Israeli activists in popular resistance events, regarding them as a means for boosting the legitimacy of the struggle, and strengthening the defenses of the Palestinian farmers against the Jewish settlers and a way to gain international diplomatic activity against Israel, especially in European countries. Senior Fatah figure **Nabil Shaath** recently participated in the olive harvest in the town of Beit Jala alongside European consuls and ambassadors in an effort to promote the popular resistance against the so-called Israeli "occupation" (Quds News website, October 11 and Radio Mawtini, October 12, 2013).

In effect, its activities have waxed and waned, while in recent weeks popular resistance violence has increased, especially with regard to the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails. There were also a number of incidents of **armed attacks** (with no connection between them) which resulted in the **killing of two IDF soldiers and one Israeli civilian**. The PA, hand in hand with its participation in the peace process, **encourages the popular resistance as what it considers a legitimate expression of the struggle against Israel**. At the same time, the PA **did not condemn the killing of the three Israelis** in armed attacks, which the PA opposes.

The Main Resolutions of the 8th Bil'in International Conference

6. **Between October 2 and 4, 2013**, the 8th Bil'in International Conference for Popular Resistance was held, and its theme was "**the reinforcement, expansion and development of the popular resistance in Palestine**" (Voice of Palestine, October 2, 2013). It was attended by senior figures of the PA and Fatah, prominent among who were **Rami Hamdallah**, the Palestinian prime minister, and **Mahmoud al-Alul and Jamal Muhaisen**, both senior Fatah figures. Also present were representatives of the various Palestinian organizations and **foreign representatives, including the British Consul in Jerusalem and the EU representative to the PA** (Wafa News Agency, October 2, 2013).



The British consul (third from right, yellow arrow)³ to whose right are Mustafa Barghouti, Lila Ghanem, the governor of the Ramallah district, Jamal Muhaisen of Fatah's Central Committee, and Rami Hamdallah, Palestinian prime minister (Wafa News Agency, October 2, 2013).

7. According to the conference organizers, its main objective is **to improve and strengthen collaboration among the various elements participating in the popular resistance** including the media, Palestinian decision-makers and Israeli and foreign activists. The opening session was headed by **Abdallah Abu Rahma**, head of the Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC) and considered one of the prominent activists of the popular resistance, and attended by the PA prime minister, Rami Hamdallah.

8. In its closing announcement, the conference noted that **the activities of the popular resistance would be developed and expanded**, and a call was heard to **increase preparations to join international organizations, especially the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, and to expand the global activities to boycott Israel (BDS)**. The conference organizers also said that as of 2014, instead of the Bil'in International Conference it would be known as the **"International Palestinian Conference for Popular Resistance"** (Wafa News Agency, October 4, 2013). In our assessment, the name was changed **to stress the overall Palestinian nature of the popular resistance and not just the limited local Bil'in campaign against the security fence**.

³ The British Consul-General in Jerusalem is **Sir Vincent Fean**, who has held his post since October 2010. Before that he served in diplomatic posts in Libya and Malta. He is active in Judea and Samaria and represents himself as concerned with projects and initiatives to promote peace and strengthen the friendship between Britain and the Palestinians. His name did not appear in the original Wafa News Agency caption and his picture was identified by the ITIC, as was that of **John Gatt Rutter**, the EU representative to the PA, who also participated in the conference, at the extreme right.

9. Among the resolutions adopted were the following (Wafa News Agency, October 4, 2013):

- a. To appoint a committee of representatives of the Palestinians organizations which would **establish an umbrella organization to unite all the organizations participating in the popular resistance with one united, effective program for the struggle.**
- b. **To establish a legal body to defend activists locally, regionally and internationally.**
- c. To **institute transparency** of the committees involved in the popular resistance.

Interviews with Senior Popular Resistance Figures

10. **Abdallah Abu Rahma**, a leading popular resistance activist, was interviewed a number of times after the conference. He dealt with ways to extend the popular resistance and increase its effectiveness. He said that the conference focused on improving inter-organization collaboration and defining methods for waging the struggle. He noted that one of the conference's achievements was the decision to progress from **protest to confrontation. That would mean a change in perception and initiating activities that would surprise Israel.** It was, he claimed, a change from the activities engaged in so far, which had been mainly responses to actions taken by Israel (Ajial, October 5, 2013).



Abdallah Abu Rahma, a prominent popular resistance activist, interviewed in Bethlehem (Al-Quds TV, August 31, 2013).

11. In a different interview **Abdallah Abu Rahma** said that the popular resistance was not subordinate to any external political agenda and as long as the Israeli occupation continued **the popular resistance would continue without considering external pressure** [i.e., the popular resistance should continue even as peace negotiations were taking place]. He said that the Palestinian population should be enlisted as leverage for national activity, for example, **farmers should be enlisted** through issues connected with farming and **students should be enlisted** to convince people to boycott Israeli-manufactured goods (Paltoday website, October 8, 2013). **Salah al-Khawaja**, another leading popular resistance activist, who serves as a coordinator for the Committee Against the Wall and the Settlements, said that **the conference stressed improving coordination between activists and campaigns, uniting efforts and varying campaign activities** (Palestinian TV, October 8, 2013). Both Abdallah Abu Rahma and Salah al-Khawaja noted **the importance of enlisting university and school students for popular resistance activities**.



Salah al-Khawaja, prominent popular resistance activist in Judea and Samaria, interviewed by PNN TV during a protest against the security fence held near Beit Jala and attended by foreign diplomats (PNN TV, October 11, 2013)

The PA's Position

12. At its weekly meeting, the PA government congratulated the 8th Bil'in International Conference and urged wide participation of ministers and the general Palestinian population. The government also stressed its support for what it

called "the peaceful popular resistance"⁴ and the right of the Palestinians to defend their lands. According to the PA government, the 8th Bil'in Conference was held at a time when the government of Israel was escalating its "oppression" of the Palestinian people (Wafa News Agency, October 1, 2013). The conference was well attended by members of the PA government and Fatah; Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah attended the opening session, as noted above.

13. The popular resistance is (falsely) represented as a non-violent struggle (*muqawama silmiya*, according to PA officials). The support offered by the PA includes funds and logistic support for the groups waging the popular resistance, even if the support is not always what was expected. The PA also sponsors political events, such as the International Bil'in Conferences, that encourage the popular resistance and international support for it. In addition, the PA's security forces do not take effective measures to prevent the use of cold weapons at popular resistance events as they do against military-terrorist attacks. They also take measures to **contain violent friction and to maintain control of the events**. The PA and Fatah do not condemn popular resistance activities, including those involving Israeli casualties.

The Situation on the Ground

14. Participation in popular resistance events waxes and wanes, but **it has not yet turned into a widespread popular uprising. However, in the past few weeks there has been an increase in its activities in Judea and Samaria alongside worsening military-terrorist attacks unconnected to the popular resistance**. According to an Israel Security Agency (ISA) report, during September there were **129 terrorist attacks**.⁵ Of them 104 were carried out in Judea and Samaria (compared with 68 in August 2013) and 25 in Jerusalem (similar to the August figure). **Most of the attacks involved Molotov cocktails (117) and the other involved IEDs (seven) and light-arms fire (four)** (ISA website).

15. On **October 3, 2013**, during the Bil'in International Conference, Palestinians belonging to the Committee Against the Wall and the Settlements **in the Bethlehem**

⁴ The popular resistance is not a non-violent, peaceful protest as it is represented as by the PA. It makes massive use of cold weapons, especially stones and Molotov cocktails. For the violent nature of the popular resistance, see the May 20, 2013 ITIC bulletin, "The Palestinian Popular Resistance and its Built-In Violence."

⁵ The number does not include the scores of incidences of stone throwing.

district joined forces with with pro-Palestinian foreign activists. They destroyed an iron gate erected by the IDF in the **village of Al-Walaja** (south of Jerusalem near Har Gilo), which they claimed cut the villagers off from the town **of Beit Jala** (Pal24 website and Wafa News Agency, October 3, 2013). They sprayed "Down with the occupation" on a concrete block supporting the gate and drew a Magen David equaling a swastika (Shihab website, October 3, 2013). In addition, senior Fatah figure **Nabil Shaath** paid a visit to the town of Beit Jala in a show of solidarity, accompanied by European ambassadors and consuls (Mawtini Radio, October 12, 2013).



Palestinians destroy the gate erected by the IDF at the village of Al-Walaja
(Pal24 website, October 3, 2013)



Graffiti reading "Down with the occupation" and a Magen David equaling a swastika
(Shihab website, October 3, 2013)

16. In addition to an increase in popular resistance activity, during the past few weeks there have been **a number of military-terrorist activities**, some of them nationalistically motivated and others apparently either criminal or a combination of the two. Three attacks were carried out in which Israelis were killed, two soldiers and a civilian: a soldier was abducted and murdered in Samaria, a soldier was killed by sniper fire in Hebron and an Israeli civilian was murdered in the northern Jordan Valley. **The armed attacks were not connected to one another or related to the popular resistance.** However, in our assessment, they did not occur in a vacuum and **should be considered in the context of the overall situation and general atmosphere in Judea and Samaria.** In our opinion, the continuing popular resistance violence against Israel, the support it receives from the PA, the ongoing anti-Israeli incitement and the way the PA condones deadly attacks on Israelis – **all encourage the Palestinian activists (at this stage only a few) to initiate military-terrorist attacks against Israelis in Judea and Samaria, and are liable to lead to more.** In addition, there is also Hamas' current vicious propaganda campaign, a backlash to the peace process, which also encourages popular protest and terrorism in Judea and Samaria.

Appendix

The Bil'in International Conferences for Encouraging the Popular Resistance

1. The annual Bil'in International Conference for Popular Resistance is a manifestation of the efforts of the PA, Fatah and the popular resistance activists to put the issue on the Palestinian and international agendas. The conferences, held in Bil'in and other locations in Judea and Samaria, are attended by representatives of the PA, Fatah and other organizations, and activists promoting the popular resistance. They are also attended by foreign diplomats (especially from European countries and the EU) and representatives of foreign NGOs who participate in anti-Israeli popular resistance activities and in the campaign being waged to delegitimize Israel. The conferences discuss ways to expand the popular resistance, make it more effective, increase international support and expand it to the international arena.

2. An example of international involvement was the April 21-23, 2010, **5th Bil'in Annual International Conference for Palestinian Popular Resistance**, which met in an elementary school in Bil'in. It was attended by representatives from the PA and abroad, including **diplomats from various countries**. Among the participants were **Salam Fayyad**, at that time Palestinian prime minister, senior Fatah and PLO figures, representatives of various political parties, Arab and foreign ambassadors and consuls, **Robert Serry, personal representative of the UN secretary general, former deputy head of the European parliament and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Luisa Morgantini**, members of European parliaments and European and Israeli representatives (Ma'an News Agency, April 24, 2010).

3. Salam Fayyad spoke at the conference about the popular resistance. So did **Abdallah Abu Rahmah**, head of the Bil'in popular committee, who at the time was imprisoned in Israel, and who spoke from his cell in the Ofer jail. He called for a "**third popular intifada**" with the aid of foreigners and Israelis. Among the speakers were representatives from **Spain, Ireland and France. Letters from Desmond, Tutu, Jimmy Carter and the European Parliament were read** (Bil'in website). Workshops were held on the second day to discuss the **boycott** of Israeli products, the **divestment of foreign interests** in Israel and the **imposition of international sanctions** on Israel for its so-called violations of international law. **The conference participants voted to use an overall strategy of international boycott of Israeli products, a cultural boycott which would include Israeli universities, the use of international law**

against companies profiting from the occupation and the establishment of an international network to support the popular resistance (Ma'an News Agency, April 24, 2010).



Salam Fayyad speaks at the 5th Bil'in Annual International Conference for Palestinian Popular Resistance (Al-Ayam, April 22, 2010)

4. Another example of international involvement in the popular resistance was the **7th Bil'in Annual International Conference for Palestinian Popular Resistance, held on April 10 to 13, 2012**. It was opened in Bil'in by the then Palestinian prime minister, Salam Fayyad, and attended by senior Palestinian figures, leftist Israeli and foreign activists (among them Luisa Morgantini). The second day of the conference was held in the **Old City of Hebron**, and the third in the **Silwan neighborhood of east Jerusalem** (Palestinian TV, April 14, 2012). The closing session of the conference decided to **encourage the popular resistance and increase the following: coordination with the popular resistance committees, coordination between Palestinian institutions and legal bodies in the United States and Europe, the use of the media to increase the support of the popular resistance and the support for Palestinian activity in Area C, especially at hotspots of friction with Israel** (Ma'an News Agency, April 13, 2012).



Foreigners wave EU and French flags during the Seventh Bila'in Conference (Arabs of '48 website, April 11, 2013).



Salam Fayyad, PA prime minister, speaks at the opening ceremony of the Seventh Annual Bila'in Conference (Palestinian TV, April 14, 2012).



Luisa Morgantini, European Parliament member and former Parliament vice president, and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, participates in the Seventh Annual Bila'in Conference (Silvanic.net website, April 12, 2012).