News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
(February 20 - 26, 2019)

Overview

- This past week during the Friday "return march" and the following days there again was **a high level of violence**: rioters, some of them children, were on the front lines and clashed with IDF soldiers, threw Molotov cocktails and hand grenades, and climbed on the security fence. Violent events continued into the days and nights after the Friday march and the launching of incendiary balloons into Israeli territory was renewed. In the meantime Hamas continued its belligerent rhetoric, which included threats it would increase the level of violence.
- An Iranian Arabic TV channel broadcast a program about the military capabilities of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Iran's preferred terrorist organization. According to the program, **the PIJ has successfully developed "precise missiles" and has the capability to launch rockets and missiles at the central Israeli cities of Tel Aviv, Netanya and Jerusalem**.
- Palestinians continue to react with anger to the deduction of funds from the tax revenues collected for the Palestinian Authority (PA) by Israel: Mahmoud Abbas said the PA would not agree to receive any funds from Israel after deductions had been made; the Palestinians would appeal to international courts, including the International Criminal Court and to the president of France (in view of the Paris Protocol); and Israeli goods would be boycotted. A "senior PA source" also **threatened to stop paying Hamas government officials**, which may lead to another round of escalation with Israel.

Israel's South

The "return march" of February 22, 2019

- On February 22, 2019, the 48th "return march" was held with the theme "Loyalty to the shaheeds of the massacre at the Cave of the Patriarchs" (to mark the 25th anniversary of the killing of 29 Palestinians by Baruch Goldstein). **About 8,000 Palestinians participated in the events**, slightly fewer than the previous week. Some of them clashed with the Israeli security

forces. They threw Molotov cocktails, hand grenades and stones at the Israeli security forces, who responded with crowd dispersal tactics and live fire. Palestinian sources reported that several times **demonstrators succeeded in climbing on the security fence east of Gaza City and waving a Palestinian flag** (Palinfo, February 22, 2019).

Participants in the "return march" in eastern Gaza City (Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March Facebook page, February 22, 2019).

Palestinian rioters burn tires and throw stones near the security fence (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, February 22, 2019).

Right: "Return march" rioters at the security fence. Left: Children climb on the border fence (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, February 23, 2019).

Young Palestinians sling throw near the security fence during the "return march" (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, February 23, 2019).

- The Palestinian ministry of health reported that a 15-year-old boy was killed and 41 Palestinians were wounded. According to Palestinian reports the boy was Yusuf Sayid Hussein al-Daya (Ashraf al-Qidra's Twitter account, February 22, 2019). The joint operations room of the Palestinian terrorist organizations claimed Israel was fully responsible for his death. It also threatened that Israel's [so-called] "crimes" would explode the situation for the [Israeli] communities near the Gaza Strip. According to reports the "resistance" forces had called for a meeting to discuss how to respond to the boy's death and the operations room was holding intensive contacts with UN and Egyptian mediators. In addition, "resistance" forces were on continuous alert for any escalation or confrontation with IDF forces (Dunia al-Watan, February 22, 2019).
- As they have every week, **senior figures from Hamas and the other terrorist organizations attended the "return march" events**. Many of the spoke about the events on the Temple Mount (see below). Some of them threatened Israel:
  - **Fathi Hamad, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said the events at al-Aqsa mosque were good news and proved the Palestinian people adhered to their rights and to the "resistance." He called on the Palestinians to unite and continue their struggle against Israel. He claimed **that young Palestinians were waiting for the signal to break through the eastern security fence in the Gaza Strip** (Dunia al-Watan, February 22, 2019).
  - **PIJ spokesman Da'ud Shehab** said the struggle of the Palestinian people for al-Aqsa mosque had been raised to a higher level (al-Aqsa TV, February 22, 2019).
  - **Senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan, spokesman for the Supreme National Authority**, called on the "Palestinian resistance" [i.e., the terrorist organizations] to go on full alert to respond to every act of aggression against al-Aqsa mosque. He called for

a general recruitment of the the Palestinian public to defend the mosque (Dunia al-Watan, February 22, 2019).

- The Supreme National Authority called on the Palestinian public to participate in **the "return march" events on March 1, 2019, whose theme would be "the Golden Gate."** They declared a "day of rage" for damage done to mosques and shrines. The Authority also called on Palestinians to prepare for the events of the first anniversary of the marches, which will be held on March 30, 2019 (al-Aqsa, February 22, 2019).

Mini-flotilla events

- On February 19, 2019, **the 25th mini-flotilla was held, with the participation of about 12 small boats**. The mini-flotilla had its own theme, which was "the continuation of the siege will cause an explosion." During the flotilla about 1,500 Palestinians rioted on the shore (Shehab, February 19, 2019). According to reports, about 20 Palestinians were wounded (Ashraf al-Qidra's Twitter account, February 19, 2019). Fathi Hamad, a member of Hamas' political bureau, said the Palestinian people were **"on the brink of an explosion."** He emphasized that if Israel did not implement the understandings that had been reached, **the Palestinians would intensify the activities of the night harassment unit until they had broken through the borders** (al-Aqsa, February 19, 2019).

Mini-flotilla events at sea and on land (Supreme National Authority Facebook, February 19, 2019).

Children climb on the security fence in the northern Gaza Strip during the riots accompanying the mini-flotilla (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, February 20, 2019).

- The Supreme National Authority announced that the next mini-flotilla would be held on February 26, 2019, with the theme "the Gaza Strip overcomes those that encircle it" (al-Aqsa, February 25, 2019). It was later announced that the mini-flotilla had been cancelled, apparently because of the weather.

Launching incendiary balloons

- The "sons of al-Zouari" unit announced the **renewal of launching incendiary balloons into Israel** ("sons of al-Zouari" Facebook page, February 22, 2019). On February 19, 2019, **two fires broke out in the Kissufim forest near the Gaza Strip**, set by incendiary balloons. **Explosives were found attached to a balloon that landed in the western Negev**. They were the first fires that had broken out since October 2018. The following day, February 20, 2019, a number of incendiary balloons were launched into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip. Some of them exploded in the air. A cluster of balloons was found in an open area in the western Negev (spokesman for the local western Negev regional council, February 20, 2019). In response Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a Hamas post in the southern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, February 20, 2019). The Palestinian media reported that there were no casualties.

Preparing and launching a cluster of balloons with an incendiary device attached. It was flown into Israeli territory east of al-Bureij ("sons of al-Zouari in Rafah" Facebook page, February 20, 2019).

Violent activities on weekdays between the Friday marches

- On the days between the Friday marches violent activities continue, carried out by the night harassment units and the tire-burning units at a number of locations along the border near the security fence. Palestinians were reported as trying to cross the fence at a number of locations along the border (Shehab, February 21, 2019). The Palestinians also reported the IDF had wounded a number of people during the activities (Shabakat Quds, February 20, 2019).
- On February 23, 2019, the activities of the night harassment units were reportedly cancelled because of "the security situation along the border" ("sons of al-Zouari" Facebook page, February 23, 2019). The next day they announced the renewal of their activities (Amama, February 24, 2019). **Senior PIJ figure Ahmed al-Mudallal** said the objective of the night harassment units was **to make the Israelis living near the Gaza Strip feel the same anxiety as the residents of the Gaza Strip** because of the security situation caused by Israel (al-Aqsa TV, February 23, 2019).

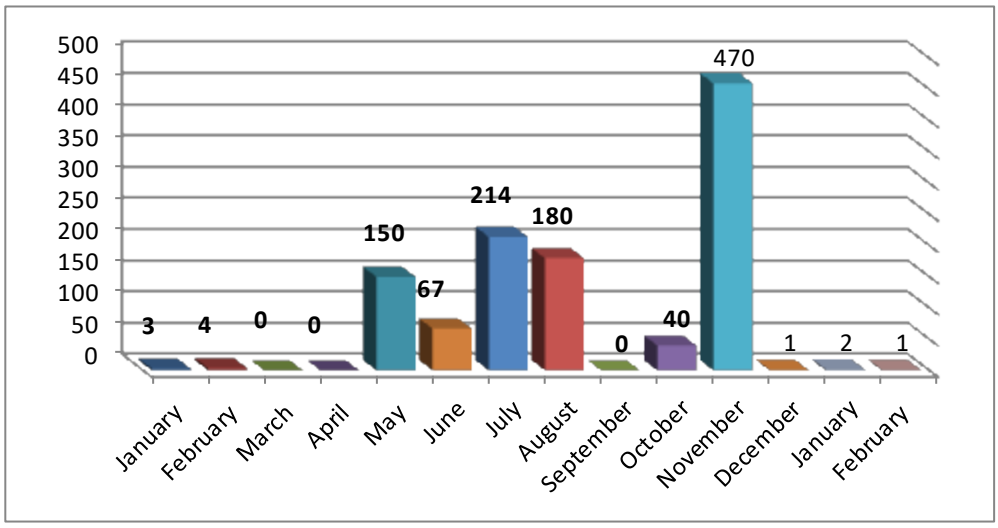
Activities of the night harassment unit (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, February 23, 2019).

Implements for the activities of the "sons of al-Zouari in Rafah" night harassment unit ("sons of al-Zouari in Rafah Facebook page, February 21, 24, 2019).

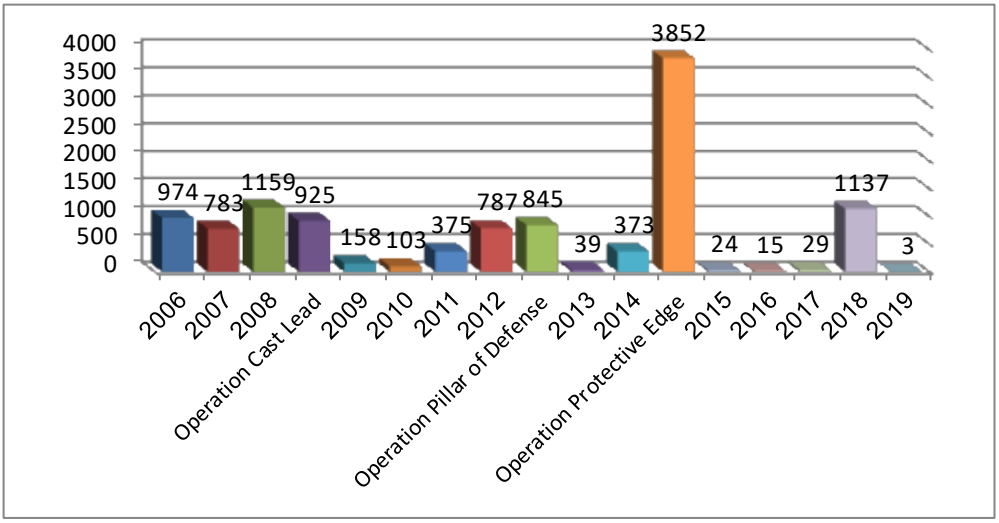
Rocket Fire

- This past week no rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory.

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire since January 2018



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Prevention of smuggling of military equipment into the Gaza Strip

▶ Israel prevented equipment from being smuggled into the Gaza Strip that could be used for military purposes. The equipment was exposed at the Erez Crossing when ten bags of mail delivered from Israel were found to contain 11 packages of suspicious objects which were designated as "dual-purpose." The equipment had been ordered from the Internet and included two digital microscopes, gunsights, biometric equipment, field telephones, underwater flashlights, two packages of electronic components, fiber optic wires and electronic adapters and welders. The head of the Coordination and Liaison Authority in the Gaza Strip said they regarded the attempt to exploit Israel's mail service to the Gaza Strip as a very serious event. He said the merchandise could be used by the terrorist organizations in attacks against Israel (Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories spokesman's unit, February 20, 2019).

Some of the dual-purpose equipment seized at the Erez Crossing (Hebrew Twitter account of the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, February 20, 2019).

Judea and Samaria

Tension continues at the Golden Gate in Jerusalem

▶ This past week tension continued on the Temple Mount after the *waqf* opened a gate in the Golden Gate compound ("Bab al-Rahma" in Arabic). It was closed by a court order in 2003 after activities had been held by an outlawed Hamas-affiliated association. Palestinian groups strongly protested the Israeli decision to close the Golden Gate and called on the Palestinian public to come out en masse to defend the mosque.

▶ Increased Israeli police forces were deployed at the site but the prayer area was not closed. To prevent riots, on the night of February 21, 2019 before the prayer, the police detained about 60 Palestinians suspected of incitement to riot, most of them residents of east Jerusalem (in addition to 34 Palestinians who were detained the previous day). Among those detained was **Sheikh Abd al-Azeem Salhab, chairman of the Jordanian *waqf***, who called on Palestinians to go to al-Aqsa at noon on Friday to hold the prayer (Dunia al-Watan, February 22, 2019).

▶ The minister of endowments and the Jordanian foreign ministry condemned Salhab's detention and demanded his release. The minister of endowments called it "a serious escalation and playing with fire." The *waqf* directorate, in an exceptional act, appealed to the Israeli government's attorney general, asking him to intervene in the decision to close the Golden Gate structure. However, Salhab was released on February 24, 2019. The police

demanded he sign an order forbidding him to enter the Temple Mount compound for a week, but he refused (Haaretz, February 25, 2019).

Left: Muslims break through into the Golden Gate precinct (Ma'an, February 23, 2019). Right: Sheik Abd al-Azeem Salhab, chairman of the waqf council, breaks into the Golden gate precinct along with the crowd (Palinfo Twitter account, February 22, 2019).

Palestinian flag waved in the Golden Gate precinct (Palinfo Twitter account, February 23, 2019).

- The Palestinian media and the social networks **represented the event as a Palestinian victory** after a determined struggle waged during the past week. In ITIC assessment, representing the events as a Palestinian "victory" by Sheikh Ikrima Sabri helped calm the situation. On the other hand, **Hamas continued its campaign to incite violence and called on the Palestinian public to continue protesting**. Some of the statements were the following:
  - **Nabil Sha'ath, advisor to Mahmoud Abbas for foreign affairs and international relations**, said the Palestinians had been successful by coming out into the street, as they had in the past to prevent Israel from installing security cameras at the entrances to al-Aqsa mosque. This time as well, he claimed, the Palestinian people had successfully resisted Israel's plan to take control of the Golden Gate (Wafa, February 22, 2019).

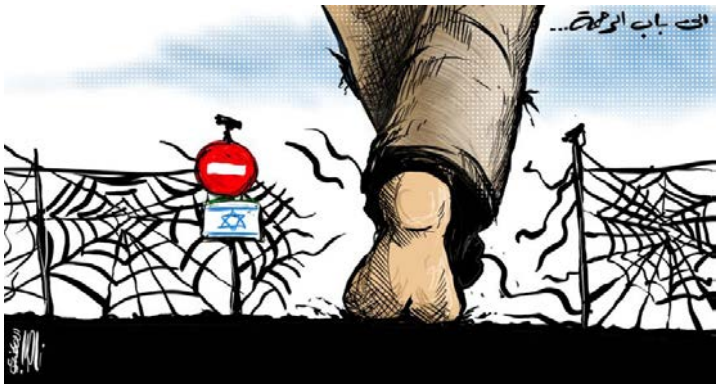
◆ **Fatah spokesman Usama Qawasmeh** said Israel was "playing with fire" and would be responsible for the consequences of its [alleged] "crimes." Mahmoud Abbas' office claimed Israel's activities and decisions were destroying the agreements signed in the past and violated international law.

◆ **Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, chairman of the Supreme Muslim Council and who gives sermons in al-Aqsa mosque**, claimed the Golden Gate was an integral part of al-Aqsa mosque. He claimed Israel had a plan to turn the area into a synagogue and that Muslim worshippers and foiled the plan by breaking into the precinct. He said the precinct needed renovation and maintenance, and they were about to undertake them (al-Ghad TV Facebook page, February 22, 2019)

Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, chairman of the Supreme Islamic Council, who delivers sermons in al-Aqsa mosque (al-Ghad TV Facebook page, February 22, 2019).

◆ **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, said closing the Golden Gate and other measures Israel had taken in Jerusalem indicated its intention to divide and gradually take control of the site. He called on Palestinians throughout the territories to consider Friday February 22, 2019, a day to rebel and take a firm stance for the sake of al-Aqsa mosque and to thwart the steps taken by Israel.

◆ **Husam Badran, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, criticized the detention of the chairman of the *waqf* council Abd al-Azeem Salhab, claiming that such detentions would increase resistance to Israel from the Palestinians in Jerusalem (Hamas website, February 24, 2019).



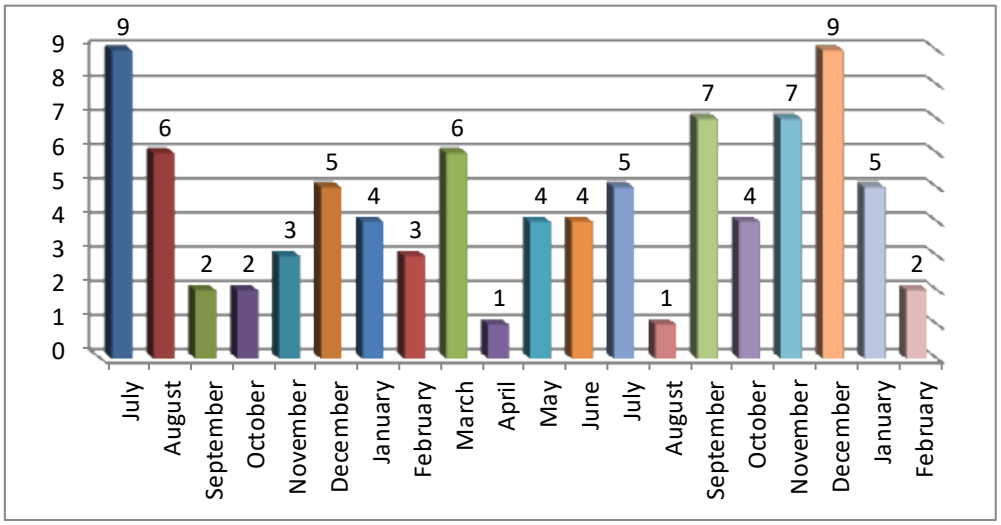
Right: Cartoon in al-Quds: "To the Golden Gate..." (al-Quds, February 23, 2019). Left: Breaking into the Golden Gate precinct (Alaa' al-Laqta's Facebook page, February 22, 2019).

Other events on the ground

▶ Palestinians continued throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli security forces and civilian targets. Israeli security forces carried out counterterrorism activities throughout Judea and Samaria, detaining Palestinians suspected of terrorist activity, seizing weapons and confiscating funds used to finance terrorist activities. Some prominent events were the following:

- **February 26, 2019** – In searches carried out by the Israeli security forces at a number of sites in Judea and Samaria several thousand shekels meant for terrorist purposes were confiscated (IDF spokesman, February 26, 2019).
- **February 25, 2019** – During an Israeli security forces' activity in **Bayt Umar (northwest of Hebron)** a Carlo improvised assault rifle was seized (IDF spokesman, February 25, 2019).
- **February 22, 2019** – A Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Israeli security vehicle carrying several passengers in **the Silwan neighborhood in east Jerusalem**. The vehicle burned to the ground. No casualties were reported among the passengers. Israeli police forces opened an investigation to find the perpetrators (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, February 22, 2019).
- **February 21, 2019** – During an Israeli security forces' activity in the village of **Luban al-Sharqia (near Ramallah)** five Palestinians suspected of throwing stones were detained (IDF spokesman, February 21, 2019).

Significant terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria during the past year and a half [1]



Developments in the Gaza Strip

Hamas establishes itself on the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom Crossing

▶**Hamas' security forces still encircle the area around the Kerem Shalom Crossing and imposed their full control on it after declaring it a closed military-security zone**. Hamas employees of the ministry of the treasury in the Gaza Strip supervise the movement of goods through the crossing. Hamas operatives also changed the route of the trucks, which now drive to the recently-prepared customs plaza. After the PA received the management of the crossing (November 2017, as a result of the reconciliation agreement signed in Cairo), 82 officials of the PA's crossings authority worked there (al-Jazeera, February 21, 2019).

Protests in the Gaza Strip against Mahmoud Abbas

▶**A media campaign was launched to demand the resignation of Mahmoud Abbas** to protest his punishment of the Gaza Strip. The social networks posted notices calling for him to be removed, and thousands of Palestinians held a protest demonstration in the al-Saraya Square in Gaza City. They called on Mahmoud Abbas to resign, waved signs reading "#resign" and waved Palestinian flags. A front group calling itself "The popular movement for national rescue," which organized the demonstration, said its objective was to call for the removal of

[1] A significant attack is defined by the ITIC as involving shooting, a vehicular attack, the use of IEDs, or a combination of the above. Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown by Palestinians are not included.

Mahmoud Abbas "who damages the Palestinian people and undermines the Palestinian national cause."

▶**In ITIC assessment, Hamas is behind the protest campaign**. **Musheir al-Masri, spokesman for the Hamas faction in the Palestinian Legislative Council**, said that **Mahmoud Abbas was a clear and present danger to the Palestinian cause and an enemy of the Palestinian people** (al-Aqsa, February 23, 2019). However, thousands of Palestinians participated in rallies in support of Mahmoud Abbas in Judea and Samaria, and events were held in a number of cities, including Hebron, Tubas, Jenin and Tulkarm (Wafa, February 23, 2019).

Right: Protesters in Gaza wave signs calling for the resignation of Mahmoud Abbas. Left: Fatah march in support of Mahmoud Abbas in the center of Nablus (Wafa, February 25, 2019).

PIJ military wing capabilities shown on Iranian TV program

▶The Iranian al-Alam TV channel broadcast a program about the military capabilities of the PIJ's military wing. **Jerusalem Brigades spokesman Abu Hamza** and other senior figures revealed information about the workings of the military wing, the weapons in its arsenal and its intentions.

▶During the program Abu Hamza alleged that they had successfully developed "precise missiles," and that **they could launch missiles/rockets at Tel Aviv, Netanya and Jerusalem**. The program also showed PIJ tunnels which, according to claims, would support actions to take Israeli soldiers prison to exchange them for Palestinian prisoners. A PIJ-manufactured rocket recently revealed was shown. It was called "hell for Ashqelon" (al-Alam, February 24, 2019).

A Jerusalem Brigades site for the manufacture of rockets (al-Alam TV, Iran, February 24, 2019).

Israa' al-Bhiesi, a reporter for al-Alam TV in the Gaza Strip, visits a PIJ terrorist tunnel (al-Alam TV, Iran, February 24, 2019).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Reactions to the Israeli law to deduct Palestinian tax revenue funds

▶Senior Palestinian figures continue to protest the Israeli law deducting money from the tax revenue funds Israel transfers to the Palestinians. The deducted funds are used by the PA to pay the salaries of the families of shaheeds and prisoners. According to **Shukri Bshara, PA minister of the treasury**, the Israeli decision will influence the 2019 budget, which is **expected to be significantly reduced**, directly impacting economic growth. However, he

said the [monthly] loss of 40 million shekels (about $11 million) would not break the Palestinians. The government, he claimed, had no intention of raising taxes, and would in fact look for ways to lower them. He also said **the prisoners and released prisoners would receive 100% of their pensions and salaries** (Palestinian TV, February 21, 2019).

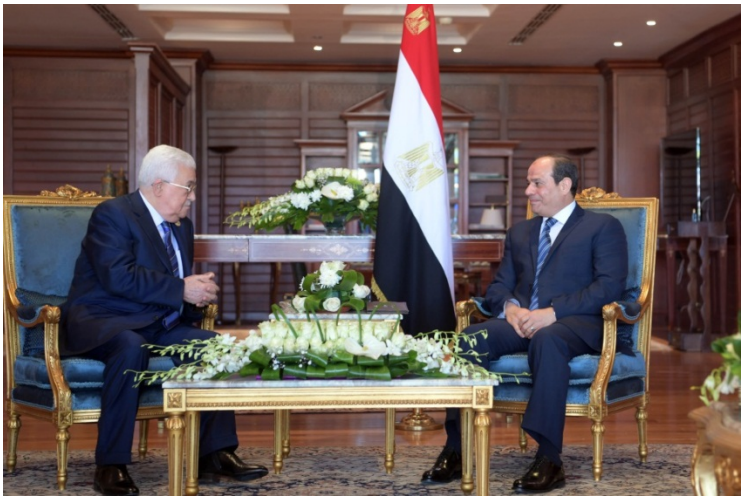
- **Mahmoud Abbas said they would not agree to accept funds from Israel after the deductions**. He also said the families of the prisoners and shaheeds were their top priority and would receive their entire sums (Palestinian TV, February 20, 2019). According to **Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki**, the Palestinians had decided to send a formal letter to Israel **refusing to receive any amount of money from which funds had been deducted.** He said Israel had already received the letter (Palestinian TV, February 21, 2019). The weekly meeting of the Palestinian interim government strongly criticized the Israeli decision and announced it would examine all possible ways of dealing with it (Wafa, February 19, 2019).
- The PA intends to take a number of steps, including the following:
  - **An appeal to international groups**:
    - **Mahmoud Abbas** related to the issue at length during his speech at the European Union – Arab League States Summit meeting held in Sharm el-Sheikh. He also plans to discuss the matter with Chinese and Russian leaders.
    - **Riyad al-Maliki, foreign minister**, said they were **considering an appeal to international courts** and that at the moment they were discussing the legal arguments they would make. He also said his office had appealed to European countries to have them bear responsibility and decide how to act with Israel's decision which was, he claimed, in violation of the law (Palestinian TV, February 21, 2019).
    - **Mahmoud al-'Alul, deputy Fatah chairman**, said they had decided to meet with European representatives and **send a message to French President Emanuel Macron**, given the connection between France and the Paris Protocol. They had also decided, he claimed, to appeal to the International Criminal Court (Dunia al-Watan, February 21, 2019).
  - **Exerting pressure on Israel**: A "senior figure" in the PA said that following the passage of the law Rami Hamdallah's government would use the Gaza Strip as a way of "leveraging pressure" on Israel to repeal it. The source added that **the PA government would stop paying the salaries of the officials in the Gaza Strip, which would**

worsen the humanitarian situation and could lead to another round of escalation with Israel (al-Akhbar, February 22, 2019).

- **Boycotting Israeli products**: The PA treasury minister said one of the measures would be to **boycott Israeli products**. They would be replaced, he claimed with local or imported products (Palestinian TV, February 21, 2019). According to reports, the government appointed a team to deal with boycotting Israeli products that had replacements and prevent them from entering the Palestinian market (Dunia al-Watan, February 21, 2019).

Sharm el-Sheikh summit

- Mahmoud Abbas headed the Palestinian delegation to the European Union – League of Arab States Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh (Wafa, February 23, 2019). He spoke at length before the summit participants about the Israeli law to deduct funds from the tax revenues it transfers to the Palestinians. He criticized the Israeli measures which, he said, violated agreements with the PA and stole money that belongs to the Palestinians . He called for international arbitration, and for the European countries to set up an economic safety net for the PA's budget so it could cope with the measures taken by Israel against the Palestinians (Palestinian TV, February 24,2019).
- Regarding the United States, Mahmoud Abbas said America exceptionally encouraged Israel to act like a country above the law, and **was not fit for a role as a mediator in the peace process**. He said "the deal of the century" or any other program not based on decisions made by legitimate international agencies would not succeed as long as they did not lead to an independent Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital. He called for an international Arab-European peace conference, and for the establishment of an international mechanism to supervise negotiations with Israel (Palestinian TV, February 24, 2019).



Mahmoud Abbas meets with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on the sidelines of the summit in Sharm el-Sheikh (Wafa, February 12, 2019).