



Initial Palestinian reactions to the "deal of the century" (Updated to February 2, 2020)

February 3, 2020

Overview

The Palestinian Authority

On **January 28, 2020**, Donald Trump, in the presence of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, revealed his plan to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, called "Peace to Prosperity" (i.e., the "deal of the century"). The plan met with **strong opposition** and (as expected) **led to a wave of Palestinian condemnations**. The Palestinian Authority (PA) began making preparations for **a diplomatic and media campaign to place obstacles** in the path of the plan and **to undermine its legitimacy**. In the meantime the PA encourages demonstrations, protests and friction with IDF soldiers. **So far there has been no broad Palestinian public response in Judea and Samaria to participate in the protests.**

► So far the focus of the PA's diplomatic campaign has been to call an emergency meeting of the Arab League's foreign ministers, which was held in Cairo with Mahmoud Abbas' presence on February 1, 2020. At the meeting he condemned the plan and accused Israel and the United States of violating existing agreements. He said **the PA told the United States and Israel it was halting all connections with them, including security connections**. According to the summary announcement of the Arab League meeting, the foreign ministers rejected the "deal of the century" because **it does not respect the minimal rights of the Palestinian people and contradicts the source of authority of the United Nations.**



Right: The emergency meeting of the foreign ministers of the Arab League in Cairo (Wafa, February 1, 2020). Left: Mahmoud Abbas shows the foreign ministers maps of Israel's [alleged] expansion at the expense of the Palestinians throughout history until the Trump plan (Mahmoud Abbas' Facebook page, February 1, 2020).

► The Arab League's summary announcement was an achievement for the PA, but in ITIC assessment **it is not practical** because it is not clearly supported by pro-American countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Gulf States. It is doubtful if those states will be willing to publicly declare their objection to the plan or actively participate in the Palestinian campaign to make sure the "deal of the century" fails.¹ **In practical terms**, cutting off security and economic relations with Israel is a threat the PA has made several times, but putting it into practice (as far as the PA is concerned) involves many difficulties. Thus it is possible that the PA will prefer to continue dragging its feet and only partially cut off relations that is, it will lower the profile of its relations with Israel but not end them entirely)



Cartoon of Mahmoud Abbas' response to the "deal of the century:" getting rid of the Oslo Accords and other agreements between Israel and the AP (Fatah's Facebook page, February 1, 2020).

¹ **Musa Abu Marzouq**, a member of the Hamas political bureau, said Hamas called on the Arab states to opening and definitively announce their refusal to accept the "deal of the century," and called on those that did accept it to change their minds (al-Khalij online, February 2, 2018).

► As part of the **diplomatic campaign** the **PA called for a meeting of the UN Security Council** to discuss Trump's plan. Riyad Mansour, the PA representative to the UN, said **Mahmoud Abbas would give a speech to the Security Council** on February 11, 2020. The PA also intends to appeal to the UN General Assembly and the unaligned nations to get as much international support as possible for opposition to the plan. Mahmoud Abbas also said he would consider appealing to the International Criminal Court in The Hague (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

► **In Judea and Samaria** the PA and Fatah declared a "**day of rage**" in the **Jordan Valley**. They also organized **protests in cities** and at **the friction points with the Israeli security forces**. Generally speaking a few dozen Palestinians participated in the protests at the various locations, and in some instances they clashed with the Israeli security forces. However, **there were no mass demonstrations and the events did not spin out of control**. Thousands of worshippers went to al-Aqsa mosque to participate in the Friday prayer. There were no riots or other unusual events.

The Gaza Strip

A general strike was declared in **the Gaza Strip** and Hamas-led protest marches were held in the cities and several refugee camps. In the Gaza Strip as well participation was sparse. There was an **increase in violent activity**, including an increase in the frequency of rocket and mortar fire. Since the declaration of the "deal of the century" **11 rockets and mortar shells have been launched from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory, and there has been an increase in the launching of IED balloons**.

► **Thus it is possible that Hamas is trying to ignite the Gaza Strip as a response to the Trump plan**. In ITIC assessment that is doubtful. The sporadic rocket fire has continued since before the most recent round of escalation (November 2019), while the renewal of balloon launching was decided on midway through January 2020. Thus the violence in the Gaza Strip is **not a direct result of the publication of the plan**. However, **since it was made public there has been an increase in the frequency of rocket and mortar fire** and in the scope of the balloon launches. The reason is most likely **a decline in Hamas' motivation to enforce the lull and its interest to slightly increase the amount of controlled violence to allow the Gazans to let off steam. Thus Hamas has increased the potential for escalation from**

the Gaza Strip, although, in ITIC assessment, it has no interest in a broad military confrontation with Israel.

Conclusion

► The Palestinians' political activity and the events since the announcement of Trump's **plan have so far not significantly exceeded the usual responses to American or Israeli measures objected to by the Palestinians**. Apparently, the PA and Hamas are interested in allowing the Palestinians to let off steam and demonstrate their rejection of the "deal of the century." Despite the strong rhetoric against the "deal of the century," **Hamas and the PA, each in its own arena, apparently prefer to control events and avoid a deterioration in the situation**. That can change, for example in a scenario in which Israel unilaterally implements the plan (the decision to annex the Jordan Valley or extend Israeli civil law to the communities in Judea and Samaria).

The PA's Reactions to the Trump Plan

Overview

► **The PA rejected the "deal of the century" even before it had been formally published**, to say nothing of their reaction after Trump presented it. Immediately after the details of the plan were made public Mahmoud Abbas stressed his rejection and announced **his refusal to participate in any negotiations led exclusively by the United States**. He said he was considering an appeal to the International Criminal Court (ICC), and called for a meeting of the UN Security Council to discuss the plan. **He also called for the necessary measures to be taken to change the PA from an authority to a state**, as made obligatory by decisions of the Palestinian National Council and the Central Council. He promised the [Palestinian terrorist] prisoners [in Israeli jails], the wounded and the families of the shaheeds that despite the fact that American aid had been halted, **the PA would not stop paying their salaries as long as the PA had the necessary funds** (Palestinian TV, January 28, 2020).

Emergency meeting of the Arab League foreign ministers

► On February 1, 2020, an emergency meeting of the Arab League's foreign ministers was held, demanded by Mahmoud Abbas. Before the meeting Ahmed Abu al-Ghait, Arab League secretary general, said that **the Palestinian position would have a decisive influence on formulating the Arab position on the deal** (RT, January 28, 2020).

- ▶ In his speech to the Arab League foreign ministers, Mahmoud Abbas **condemned the "deal of the century" and accused Israel and the United States of violating previously signed agreements.** He said the PA had updated Israel and the United States that **it was halting all relations with them, including security connections.**² He said that now Israel, as the "occupying power," would have to bear overall responsibility for all the territories given to the Palestinians as part of the Oslo Accords. He added that the PA would continue its [so-called] "non-violent protests" (Palestinian TV, February 1, 2020).
- ▶ The summary announcement of the meeting noted that the foreign ministers rejected the "deal of the century" because **it does not realize the minimal rights demanded by the Palestinian people and contravenes the sources of authority of the peace process.** They said the United States and Israel would be fully responsible for the consequences of their actions (al-Quds.net, February 1, 2020).
- ▶ After the meeting Riyad al-Maliki, Palestinian foreign minister, said the Arab League's decisions would serve the PA as a point of departure for the futures, and as the first step in rejecting the "deal of the century" (Wafa, February 2, 2020).
- ▶ In the meantime the PA appealed to the UN Security Council, the General Assembly and the block of unaligned nations (Palestinian TV, January 28, 2020). Riyad Mansour, the PA representative to the UN, said that **Mahmoud Abbas would give a speech to the General Assembly on February 11, 2020.** Mahmoud Abbas also said he would consider an appeal to the ICC and the ICJ.

The internal Palestinian arena: presenting a unified appearance against the Trump plan

- ▶ In the internal Palestinian arena the PA and Hamas are trying to show a unified appearance to reject the "deal of the century." Immediately after the Trump plan was published **Mahmoud Abbas spoke by phone with Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau.** Mahmoud Abbas stressed the need to close the Palestinian ranks. As a goodwill **gesture members of the Hamas leadership in Judea and Samaria were invited to a meeting of**

² Regarding the cancellation of agreements with Israel, **PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** said that the PA had sent the message to the Israeli government but that in practical terms it depended on Mahmoud Abbas and his political considerations (BBC, January 31, 2020). That is a possible indication that the PA is dragging its feet. **Muhammad al-Hindi, a member of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's political bureau,** protested the visit of the head of the CIA to Ramallah, calling it "very serious behavior." He said if the security coordination did not stop immediately, the PA would lose its legitimacy with the Palestinian people and international Arab institutions (Quds News, Feb 2, 2020).

the Palestinian leadership, which had been called by Mahmoud Abbas, to discuss ways to respond to the plan (France 24, January 28, 2018). Khalil al-Haya, a member of Hamas' political bureau, said **Hamas appreciated Mahmoud Abbas' invitation** and that its representatives would participate in the meeting (Hamas website, January 28, 2020). Fatah spokesman Usama al-Qawasmeh said that one of the important outcomes of the meeting between Fatah and Hamas representatives **was the decision to act within the framework of a joint [so-called] popular struggle and their agreement on a united struggle program** (Wafa, January 29, 2020).



Right: The emergency meeting of the Palestinian leadership (Wafa, January 28, 2020). Left: Mahmoud Abbas gives a speech condemning the "deal of the century" (Mahmoud Abbas' Facebook page, January 28, 2020).

► In the meantime, following instructions from Mahmoud Abbas, **a PA delegation will go to the Gaza Strip this coming week.** Members will include representatives from the PLO's Executive Committee, Fatah's Central Committee and of the organizations operating in Judea and Samaria. According to Mahmoud Abbas' spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh, the objective of the meeting is to strengthen national unity and the struggle against the "deal of the century" (Sawa, January 29, 2020). Despite those measures, **the fundamental differences of opinion between the PA and Hamas still exist, and in ITIC assessment it is doubtful whether a joint struggle against the "deal of the century" will lead to a genuine closing of ranks.**

Events in Judea and Samaria

► The PA and Fatah initiated a series of public events for the Palestinian public to protest Trump's plan. In the hopes of encouraging the Palestinian public to go out and demonstrate, Hussein al-Sheikh, chairman of the civil affairs authority, said protests were **only the beginning of the Palestinian response** in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem, and in every other place where there were Palestinians. **A "day of rage" was declared for the**

Jordan Valley and protests were organized in city centers and friction spots with the Israeli security forces. A number of events were held in the Jericho and Jordan Valley area, where usually no protests of that sort are held. The events included burning tires and pictures of the American president.

► The events were **not widely attended by the Palestinian public**, and generally speaking were **not massively attended by the Palestinians**. In some instances Palestinians clashed with Israeli security forces. Palestinian commentators claimed that the small number of participants was the result of the PA's lack of an organized program to protest the "deal of the century." However, past experience indicates that **the reasons for the small turnouts to protest Trump's plan and previous American and Israeli measures lie far deeper.**

Protests, marches and riots



Right: Fatah protest demonstration in the center of Hebron (QudsN Facebook page, January 30, 2020). Left: Fatah protest demonstration in Jericho (Wafa, January 30, 2020).



Right: Palestinian protesters march to a roadblock in the northern Jordan Valley and clash with IDF forces (Wafa, January 29, 2020). Right: Female students demonstrate in Tulkarm (Wafa, January 29, 2020).



Demonstration in the center of Ramallah
(Wafa, February 1, 2020).



Palestinians riot at the southern entrance to Jericho
(Wafa, January 31, 2020).

Reactions of Hamas and the Other Terrorist Organizations in the Gaza Strip

► Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and other terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip strongly rejected the "deal of the century." Hamas and PIJ leaders spoke separately with **senior Iranian officials** about the issue. Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, spoke with **Esmail Ghaani, the new commander of the Qods Force**. Ghaani stressed **Iran's willingness to act** to thwart the deal and to cope with it alongside the "resistance forces" (Shehab, February 1, 2020). He made **similar declarations to PIJ leader Ziyad al-Nakhlah** (PIJ website, February 1, 2020).

► In Hamas and the PIJ calls were heard for terrorist attacks against Israel:

- ◆ In his Friday sermon, **Khalil al-Haya, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said the "resistance" had prepared its equipment and its army **to struggle against the "occupation"** [i.e., Israel] **and expel it from Palestine**. He added that the role of the PA had to change and defend the "resistance" (al-Aqsa, January 31, 2020).



Khalil al-Haya delivers the Friday sermon in the al-Am'ari mosque in the Gaza Strip (Twitter account of the Fajr communications Jerusalem, January 31, 2020).

- ◆ **Usama Hamedan, in charge of Hamas' external relations**, said the "resistance" would not allow Israel to disarm it (al-Mayadeen, January 28, 2018).
- ◆ **Ahmed Bahar, chairman of the Legislative Council**, said the deal was "a declaration of war on Israel" (al-Aqsa, January 29, 2020).
- ◆ **Mahmoud al-Zahar, a member of Hamas political bureau**, said the Palestinian people's only option was "resistance." He called for **a free hand to be given to the "resistance"** mechanisms in the West Bank (al-Andalou News, January 30, 2018).
- ◆ **Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** said that to cope with the "deal of the century" a general recruitment had to be declared **and "popular measures" had to be escalated** (al-Masry al-Youm, January 29, 2020).

A rise in the level of violence

There has been **a significant increase in the frequency of rocket and mortar fire** and in the number of IED balloon launches. On January 30, 2020 snipers shot at an IDF observation post. No organization claimed responsibility for the events, but apparently Hamas allows relatively great freedom of action to those who want to protest the deal. **Since the "deal of the century" was announced 11 rockets and mortar shells have been fired at the southern Israeli city of Sderot and the western Negev.** Some of the rockets fell inside the Gaza Strip. The sporadic rocket fire and IED balloon launches began before the deal was made public. However, **since its publication the level of violence from the Gaza Strip has increased with no effective preventive activities taken by Hamas.**

- ▶ The following were the events between January 29 (the day the plan was published) and February 3, 2020 (the time of this writing):

- ◆ **February 1, 2020:** A rocket was launched at the western Negev. It fell between two communities. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **January 31, 2020:** A rocket and mortar shells were fired from the Gaza Strip at Sderot and the western Negev. The rocket was intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system. No casualties were reported. Buildings in Sderot were damaged. Three mortar shells were fired into Israeli territory. The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted one. Two fell in open areas.
- ◆ **January 30, 2020:** Three rockets were fired at Sderot. The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted two of them. The third fell in an open area. **A three-week-old infant girl was injured, hitting her head when her mother fell while running to shelter.** Her mother incurred minor injuries. A fire broke out at the nearby Sapir Academic College.
- ◆ **January 29, 2020:** Three rockets were fired at Israel, two of them falling in the Gaza Strip. The third fell in an open area in the western Negev. No casualties were reported.

IED balloon launches

► The launching of IED balloons into Israeli territory, which began in the middle of January 2020, continues. There was an increase in its scope after the publication of the "deal of the century." The wind carried some of the balloons a considerable distance from the Gaza Strip. The most prominent events were the following (Israeli media):

- ◆ **February 1, 2020:** Balloon clusters with suspicious objects attached to them were located in the Sderot area and in several locations in the western Negev (Israel Police Force, February 1, 2020). Balloons were also located in a farm in the western Negev. Demolitions experts and police were summoned to neutralize them.



**Balloon cluster located near Sderot
(Israel Police Force, February 1, 2020).**

- ◆ **January 31, 2020: An IED balloon exploded** in the sky over Sderot. No casualties or damage were reported.
- ◆ **January 30, 2020:** Balloon clusters with suspicious objects attached to them were located in the western Negev and the southern city of Kiryat Gat. Demolitions experts were summoned to neutralize them (Israel Police Force, January 30, 2020).



**Balloon cluster located in Israeli territory near the Gaza Strip
(Israel Police Force, January 30, 2020).**

- ◆ **January 29, 2020:** A balloon cluster with a suspicious object wrapped like a gift attached to it landed in an agricultural area in the western Negev. Demolitions experts and police forces were summoned to the location. No casualties were reported (Facebook page of Field Security News, January 29, 2020). In the afternoon a balloon cluster with a suspicious object attached to it was found on a main road. Police forces

closed the road until the object had been neutralized (Israel Police Force, January 29, 2020).



**Balloon cluster located in the western Negev
(Facebook page of Western Negev Field Security, January 29, 2020).**

- ◆ **January 28, 2020:** A number of IED balloon clusters were located. They landed near Kiryat Gat, Sderot and the western Negev. Demolitions experts were summoned and neutralized the IEDs (Israel Police Force, January 28, 2020).



Right: A balloon cluster located near Kiryat Gat (Israel Police Force, January 28, 2020). Left: A greenhouse damaged by an IED balloon (western Negev spokesman's unit, January 28, 2020)

Israel's response

► **Israel considers Hamas responsible for the rocket fire and IED balloon launches.** In response **the IDF attacked a large number of terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip, most of them belonging to Hamas.** Among the targets was an underground facility belonging to Hamas' military wing, a building used as an operations room, a facility for the manufacture of weapons, a facility for collecting intelligence and weapons storehouses. According to the IDF spokesman, attacking the targets was a blow to Hamas' military buildup (IDF spokesman, February 1, 2020). After the rocket fire and IED balloon launches, Kamil Abu Rokon, the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, said that until further notice **the import of cement into the Gaza Strip is forbidden and 500 entrance permits into Israel will be cut from the number issued to Gazan businessmen.**

Protest demonstrations in the Gaza Strip

► On **January 29, 2020**, a general strike of public services was called in the Gaza Strip, with the exception of health services (Shehab, January 28, 2020). There were also Hamas-led demonstrations in the center of the cities. **Hamas generally avoids encouraging demonstrations near the border** (although some demonstrators reached the security fence area). **In the Gaza Strip as well public participation in the demonstrations was limited.**

► On **January 30, 2020**, Hamas organized a march to protest the "deal of the century." No unusual events were recorded.

► On **January 31, 2020**, after the Friday prayer, a number of demonstrations were organized and participation was slightly higher. In some regions (mainly in the refugee camps) demonstrations were held after the night prayer (Hamas website, January 31, 2020). Several hundred Palestinians gathered near the security fence but no clashes with IDF forces were recorded.

Demonstrations in various locations in the Gaza Strip



Demonstration of the Popular Committee for Refugee Affairs in Rafah (Facebook page of Gazan journalist Hassan Aslih, January 28, 2020; Shehab Twitter account, January 28, 2020).



American and Israeli flags burned at a Popular Committee for Refugee Affairs demonstration in the al-Bureij refugee camp (Popular Committee Facebook page, January 28, 2020).



Right: Burning pictures of Trump at a demonstration in Gaza City (Shehab Twitter account, January 28, 2020). Left: Khalil al-Haya at a demonstration (website of the al-Ahrar Movement, January 28, 2020).



**Demonstration in Rafah
(Shehab Twitter account, January 30, 2020).**



**March in the northern Gaza Strip
(Hamas website, January 31, 2020).**



**Demonstrations in the Gaza Strip, January 31, 2020
(Palestine Online, January 31, 2020).**

Appendix

The main points of the "deal of the century"

On January 28, 2020, Donald Trump, in the presence of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, revealed his peace plan to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict ("Peace to Prosperity," better known as the "deal of the century"). Trump claimed his plan included solutions that would make prosperity possible for both sides and was a realistic proposal for the two-state solution. He also noted that **the plan included an investment of \$50 billion in the new Palestinian state**. He said that in the next four years the Palestinians could learn about business, negotiate with Israel, meet the conditions required for statehood and become an independent country (White House website, January 28, 2020).

► Trump said that he had done a great deal for Israel, mentioning the relocating of the American embassy to Jerusalem, recognizing the Golan Heights and withdrawing from the nuclear agreement with Iran. Therefore, he said, he had to give the Palestinians recompense so that the plan would be fair. The plan defines the needs for the exchange of territories as part of the solution and thus maps were included in the plan.

► **The following are some of the main articles of the plan (the full version is available on the White House website):**

- ◆ **Israel will have sovereignty over the Jordan Valley** because it is critical for Israel's national security. Negotiations will be held regarding the rights of the Palestinians living there.
- ◆ **No Israeli or Palestinian will be evicted from their home.** Approximately 97% of Israelis in the West Bank will be incorporated into contiguous Israeli territory, and approximately 97% of Palestinians in the West Bank will be incorporated into contiguous Palestinian territory. The Palestinian population located in enclaves that remain inside contiguous Israeli territory but that are part of the State of Palestine shall become citizens of the State of Palestine and shall have the option to remain in place unless they choose otherwise.
- ◆ **The State of Palestine shall be fully demilitarized and remain so.** The State of Palestine will have security forces capable of maintaining internal security and preventing terror attacks. If the State of Palestine succeeds in maintaining the security

criteria in the designated pilot area, then the pilot program will be expanded to other areas within the State of Palestine as well.

◆ **Jerusalem will remain the sovereign capital of the State of Israel, and it should remain an undivided city.** The sovereign capital of the State of Palestine should be in the section of East Jerusalem located in all areas east and north of the existing security barrier, where the United States will build its embassy. **The status quo of the Temple Mount should continue uninterrupted to ensure that all Muslims are able to pray at al-Aqsa mosque.**

◆ **The plan does not include the right of return of Palestinian refugees into the State of Israel** but refugees will be able to return to Palestinian territory (i.e., the territory controlled by the PA) or to receive reparations from an international fund. After the agreement is signed **the status of refugee will be abolished and UNRWA will be dismantled.**

◆ Before negotiations are held the Palestinians will have to meet a number of criteria, among them **recognizing Israel as a Jewish state**, carrying out governance, legal and economic reforms, stop paying salaries to prisoners, stop promoting legal measures against Israel in international courts and **stop incitement in school textbooks**. Israel is required to halt construction in the settlements and to avoid the destruction of Palestinian houses built illegally.

◆ The condition for implementing Israel's commitment as part of the Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement is the disarmament of **Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the other terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip and the full demilitarization of the Gaza Strip.**

◆ **The PA will have to stop financing terrorism and stop the activities of Hamas, the PIJ and other organizations.**