The following are the main developments in the PA's fight against the spread of COVID-19 in Judea and Samaria:

- **The number of reported COVID-19 cases in Judea and Samaria has risen to 259.** The rate of infection has recently been mitigated. On April 10, 2020, a resident of Tulkarm died, bringing the reported number of Palestinians who succumbed to the disease to two.

- The highest incidence of infection is in the villages surrounding Jerusalem (110 cases), followed by Ramallah (58), Bethlehem (54) and Hebron (24). A PA government spokesman reported 36 cases in east Jerusalem (as of April 13, 2020). However, according to data based on the Israeli Jerusalem municipality, the number of cases in east Jerusalem is 65.

- So far the PA has managed to cope with the current rate of infection using the medical equipment in its possession. Apparently there is still no shortage of medical equipment, including test kits and ventilators. However, an increase in the number of cases and the need to increase the number of tests are liable to lead to a shortage of equipment.

- **The Muslim religious month of Ramadan** begins on April 24, 2020, and could lead to an increase in the rate of infection. The PA is concerned, and the PA government spokesman announced it is planning to increase the preventive measures during Ramadan.

- **The PA is continuing and even intensifying its smear campaign against Israel.** PA officials accuse Israel of deliberately infiltrating sick workers into the PA territories; continuing to detain Palestinians while they are fighting the virus; preventing the PA government from providing medical services to the residents of east Jerusalem, etc.
According to the PA government spokesman, Israel is acting to weaken the Palestinians’ national strength and health.

Right: IDF vehicle disinfected by Palestinians at the entrance to the village of Yatta (south of Nablus) (Israeli TV channel Kan 11, April 12, 2020). The disinfection is meant to send the message that IDF vehicles carry the coronavirus. Left: Anti-Israeli propaganda and incitement in al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, the PA’s official newspaper. An IDF soldier shoots “corona bullets” at Palestinian towns and villages [from an Israeli settlement] (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, April 7, 2020).

- The PA is waging a diplomatic campaign for financial aid to fight COVID-19 and to ease its difficult economic situation. So far, its main achievement has been an announcement from an EU representative that the PA will receive a donation of €71 million to fight the virus. Hamas, on the other hand, has complained that only a negligible amount of the funds received by the PA reaches the Gaza Strip.

The Extent of [Reported] COVID-19 Infection in Judea and Samaria

In Judea and Samaria the number of COVID-19 cases reportedly reached 259. The number of people who have recovered is reported at 59 (as of April 13, 2020). An examination of the number of new cases reported over the past few days would seem to indicate a slowing in the spread of the disease. However, the Muslim religious month of Ramadan, which begins on April 24, 2020, is liable to cause an increase in the speed of infection because of the fast-breaking meals (iftar). For that reason Ibrahim Milhem, PA government spokesman, announced that the PA has no intention of easing the preventive measures for Ramadan, and on the contrary, will increase them (Safa, April 11, 2020).
On April 10, 2020, a resident of Tulkarm died, bringing the number of deaths from COVID-19 to two (Corona Map portal, April 12, 2020). The ITIC has no reliable information about the seriousness of the disease among patients in Judea and Samaria, or the number of patients on ventilators. So far 57 patients have recovered (Twitter account of Ibrahim Melhem, April 11, 2020; Corona Map portal, April 12, 2020).

**Geographical distribution of COVID-19 hotspots**

Cases of COVID-19 continue to be concentrated in the towns and villages surrounding Jerusalem, and the districts of Ramallah and Bethlehem (about 90% of all cases). The highest incidence of infection is in east Jerusalem and the PA towns and villages surrounding the city (110 cases); second is Ramallah (58) and third is Bethlehem (54). They are followed by the districts of Hebron (24), Nablus (6), Tulkarm (5), Salfit (1) and Jenin (1).
Distribution of COVID-19 concentrations in Judea and Samaria. The main hotspots (north to south) are the Ramallah district, the towns and villages surrounding Jerusalem and the Bethlehem district. They are followed by the Hebron district, where the number of COVID-19 cases is increasing (Corona Map portal, April 12, 2020).

The Jerusalem District and the Villages Surrounding Jerusalem

According to data from the Israeli Jerusalem municipality, the number of [reported] COVID-19 cases in east Jerusalem is 65. Two other main hotspots are Silwan (40) and Beit Hanina (15), with the rest spread among the other neighborhoods. On the other hand,
according to Ibrahim Milhem, PA government spokesman, 19 additional cases have been diagnosed in the neighborhoods in east Jerusalem, including Silwan and Ras al-Amoud, bringing the number of cases in east Jerusalem to 36. Milhem assigned Israel full responsibility for the health of the residents of east Jerusalem. He accused Israel of disrupting the activities of Adnan al-Ghaith, the governor of the PA Jerusalem district, by detaining him (Ma'an, April 12, 2020).

Dr. Mai al-Kaila, the Palestinian minister of health, recently met with the deputy governor of the PA Jerusalem district and senior members of the security forces and Fatah to examine the needs of the towns and villages surrounding Jerusalem. In their company she visited many towns and villages, distributing symbolic aid and medical equipment. She called the villages "the lung of Jerusalem" and said they were an integral part of the Palestinian territories. She emphasized the need to strengthen their firm stance in the face of COVID-19 through the presence of the Palestinian security forces (Facebook page of Fatah's Jerusalem branch, April 12, 2020).

A senior figure in the office of the governor of the PA Jerusalem district gives medical materials and sanitizers to the head of the Bidu municipality (COVID-19 Facebook page, PA's Jerusalem district, April 9, 2020).

Operatives of Fatah's emergency committee in Bayt Surik (Facebook page of Fatah's Jerusalem branch, April 10, 2020).
The PA, with the support of Fatah, continues its preventive measures in the various districts in Judea and Samaria:

- On April 12, 2020, Jibrin al-Bakri, the governor of the Hebron district, ordered a full lockdown of Yatta and al-Shuyukh, two villages southeast of Hebron. He also ordered the closing of all their stores. That was after two more COVID-19 patients were diagnosed in the villages (Ma’an, April 12, 2020).

The Palestinian security forces continue to deploy in the cities to limit the residents' movement (Wafa, April 7, 2020). Issam Abu Bakr, governor of the Tulkarm district, accompanied by teams from the Palestinian ministry of health, visited the district's roadblocks, which were disinfected by the teams (Wafa, April 7, 2020).
Palestinian security forces deployed in the center of Nablus
(Wafa, April 7, 2020).

- The Palestinian security forces increased their presence at the crossings to receive and examine Palestinian workers returning from Israel (Wafa, April 7, 2020).

Jibrin al-Bakri, governor of the Hebron district, visits the Palestinian side of the Meitar Crossing (south Mt. Hebron) and meets with Palestinian workers returning from Israel (Facebook page of the Hebron district, April 7, 2020).

Receiving Palestinian workers returning from Israel, in south Mt. Hebron (Gazan journalist Hassan Aslih, April 7, 2020).
Examining and disinfecting Palestinian workers returning from Israel, at the entrance to Yatta (Palinfo Twitter account, April 7, 2020).

- The activities of Fatah’s emergency committees continue. Fatah operatives continue manning posts and roadblocks to prevent the passage of residents between areas (Facebook page of Layla Ghnam, April 11, 2020).

Fatah’s emergency committees in the village of Bayt Umar (north of Hebron) (Fatah Facebook page, April 11, 2020).

In ITIC assessment there is a gap between the many instructions and intensive activities of PA employees and operatives of the security forces reported in the media on one hand, and their actual implementation by the population at large on the other. For example, pictures of the crowded market in Tulkarm led to criticism in the social media and to preventive measures of the Tulkarm municipality. The PA media published pictures of the open vegetable market in the center of Tulkarm and crowding beyond what was allowed. As a result, the Tulkarm municipality, along with the Palestinian police, decided to immediately close the market. Barriers were put in place, police were deployed and the stalls were closed (al-Fajr TV, Tulkarm, April 12, 2020).
Opening the vegetable market in Tulkarm in violation of instructions (Dooz website, April 12, 2020).

Teams from the Tulkarm municipality and Palestinian policemen close the vegetable market and erect barriers to prevent it from reopening (al-Fajr TV in Tulkarm, April 12, 2020).

The PA's Smear Campaign against Israel

About 30,000 Palestinians still work in Israel, to whom the illegal workers can be added. About half of the workers come from the districts of Hebron and Bethlehem. The PA claims that about one third of verified COVID-19 cases in its territory are workers who returned from Israel and infected their nuclear families (despite the PA's order for them to self-isolate upon their return1).

Infection by returning workers who were in Israel, legally or illegally, has been exploited by senior PA figures for a smear campaign against Israel, which has accompanied the PA's fight against the virus from the beginning. The objective of the campaign, which is being waged at the same time as the PA cooperates with Israel in fighting the virus, is to establish the false narrative that Israel is deliberately spreading the disease and undermining the PA's fight against it.

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1 Dr. Ghassan Nimr, spokesman for the PA's ministry of the interior, ordered workers returning from Israel to self-isolate at home for two weeks, because the PA does not believe Israel examined them (Facebook page of Dr. Ghassan Nimr, April 1, 2020).
The Israeli media reported that Israel sent a threatening message to the PA's senior figures through the heads of the security forces. Israel threatened that if the PA does not stop its smear campaign, it will limit the freedom of movement and presence of the Palestinian security forces, which was extended after the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis (Israeli TV channel Kan 11, April 12, 2020).

**Recent examples of the smear campaign**

- **Ibrahim Melhem, PA government spokesman**, vilified Israel, claiming it was trying to harm the Palestinian people's "national strength and health." His main points were the following (Wafa, April 13, 2020):
  - In response to an Israeli accusation of a PA smear campaign, while in effect Israel is helping the PA in the fight against the coronavirus, Melhem claimed Israel's "help" was expressed by "invading" Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps during the COVID-19 crisis. Israel, he claimed, infiltrates [Palestinian] workers through crossings, leaves sick workers at the side of the road and carries out detentions, while IDF soldiers in the streets spit on Palestinian property.
  - The Palestinian leadership maintains contacts with many [countries/ international organizations] and explains that Israel considers the spread of COVID-19 an opportunity to use violence against the Palestinian people.
  - Israel bears responsibility for the residents of east Jerusalem, and does not allow the Palestinian government to provide services to its residents.

- **Rafa' Rawajbeh, governor of the Qalqilya district**, accused the IDF of opening sewage and water channels to allow Palestinian workers to return to the PA. He claimed the IDF thereby harms the PA's efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the PA territories, by preventing the PA from properly examining workers returning from Israel (Ma’an, April 9, 2020). Interviewed by al-Arabiya TV, he again accused Israel of opening sewage and water channels in the Qalqilya district, and denied Israel's claims that it was because of the heavy rains during the previous weekend (Facebook page of the governor of the Qalqilya district, April 10, 2020).
Rafa' Rawajbeh, governor of the Qalqilya district, interviewed by al-Arabiya TV, accuses Israel of opening sewage and water channels to allow Palestinian workers to return to the PA without Palestinian inspection (Facebook page of the governor of the Qalqilya district, April 10, 2020).

Layla Ghnam, governor of the Ramallah district, posted a direct appeal on her Facebook page to Palestinian workers returning from Israel, asking them to protect the health of their families and obey instructions. She asked them not to enter the PA territories through holes in the [security] fence, and posted pictures.

Pictures of holes in the security fence made, according to the governor of the Ramallah district, by Palestinian workers (Facebook page of Layla Ghanam, April 11, 2020).

In response to the Facebook post of the governor of the Ramallah district, the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) issued a denial in Arabic of the claims, calling them false. According to the post, the channels were opened to prevent the heavy rains from causing floods and would be closed the following Friday, that is, April 10, 2020 (Facebook page of the COGAT in Arabic, April 9, 2020).
PA Appeals for Help from Abroad to fight COVID-19

PA appeals to various countries

On April 9, 2020, PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh held a video conference with the consuls and ambassadors of the countries with representatives in the PA, and discussed what the PA needed to fight COVID-19. He presented the emergency program formulated by PA to fight the virus, which will cost $137 million. He claimed the Palestinians were finding it difficult to deal with the disease, mainly because of the "conditions of the occupation," and because of the limitations Israel placed on the Palestinian territories. He stressed that the PA's deficit would reach $1.4 billion this year, and that the Palestinians' economic losses caused by the COVID-19 crisis would reach $3.8 billion. For that reason he called on the various countries to donate money to the PA.

The EU

The EU's representative in east Jerusalem said the organization would give the Palestinians €71 million to fight the spread of the coronavirus (Ma'an, April 9, 2020). Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh thanked the EU for its response to the PA’s demands (Ma'an, April 9, 2020).

Other countries

The following are the PA leadership's activities to get help from other countries to fight COVID-19:

- On April 10, 2020, Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh held a telephone conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to discuss Russian aid to
implement the PA’s program for fighting the spread of the coronavirus (Facebook page of Muhammad Shtayyeh, April 10, 2020).

Recently, Mahmoud Abbas spoke with the **emir of Qatar, the king of Bahrain, the emir of Kuwait and the king of Saudi Arabia** to discuss the issue of aid for the PA to fight the virus (Wafa, April 10, 2020). Muhammad Shtayyeh spoke with **French Prime Minister Édouard Philippe** and expressed his solidarity with France in its fight against COVID-19. He called on France and the other world states to cooperate with the PA in its struggle against the virus (Dunia al-Watan, April 9, 2020).

**Hamas**

Hamas has criticized the PA because of claims that only a negligible amount of the financial donations the PA receives for the fight against COVID-19 is in effect transferred to the Gaza Strip. Hamas claims that of the $133 million the PA received, only $4,000 were transferred to Gaza. Hamas issued an infographic showing where the funds came from:

- $71 [sic] million from the EU [as far as the ITIC knows, the funds were contributed in euros]
- $10 million from Qatar
- $5 million from Kuwait
- $250,000 from Austria
- 3 million shekels (about $840,000) from the al-Quds Bank
- $6 million from the Waqpet Izz fund (a fund recently established by the Palestinian private sector to enlist donations for supporting the unemployed and needy families hurt by the COVID-19 outbreak)
- $1 million from the Arab Bank
- $1 million from businessman Muneib al-Masri
- 2 million shekels (about $560,000) from the Palestinian National Islamic Bank
- $6.8 million from the World Bank
- $800,000 from the Palestinian Communications Company
- $18 million from other institutions and international organizations

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2 On April 12, 2020, PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh met with members of the Waqpet Izz fund, headed by businessman Talal Nasser al-Din. Nasser al-Din said that so far the fund has raised $8.5 million and its goal is to reach 20 million Jordanian dinars (about $28 million) (Wafa, April 12, 2020).
Infographic of the donations received to fight COVID-19 transferred, according to Hamas, to the PA ($133 million). Of that sum, only a negligible amount ($4,000) was transferred to Gaza (Hamas-affiliated Palinfo Twitter account, April 12, 2020).