



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (June 24 – 30, 2020)

Overview

- ▶The situation in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria heated up this past week. Two rockets were launched at Israeli territory from the **Gaza Strip**. In response Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked Hamas terrorist targets in the southern Gaza Strip. A **vehicular attack** was carried out in **Judea and Samaria** and a **stabbing attack** was prevented. Palestinians continue throwing stones and Molotov cocktail at civilian Israeli vehicles.
- ▶In Judea and Samaria the number **active COVID-19 cases** continues to spike, and **reached 1,924** (as of June 30, 2020), most of them in the Hebron district. **A spokesman for the Palestinian ministry of health warned of a possible catastrophe**. In the Gaza Strip, on the other hand, **there is a small, so far stable number of active cases (14), and the situation is under control**.
- ▶As July 1 approaches, the date on which Israeli law will be imposed on parts of Judea and Samaria, **the volume of threats from Hamas and the other terrorist organizations is increasing**. A Hamas spokesman called Israel's move "a declaration of war on the Palestinian people." However, Palestinian commentators in Gaza are of the opinion that Hamas is not interested in a broad military confrontation, and that its response will be measured and employ only limited force (the launching of IED/incendiary balloons, sporadic rocket fire into Israeli territory). Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the other terrorist organizations are currently coordinating to formulate a joint response. On the other hand, **Hamas continues its incitement propaganda campaign calling for armed terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria**.
- ▶In the Gaza Strip preparations are being made **for "popular activities" as part of a "day of rage" on July 1, 2020**. The organizers of the events will provide organized transportation and have prepared a propaganda video to inflame emotions (the video includes pictures of violence during the return marches). The "day of rage" activities are expected to be held inside the Gaza Strip, but in ITIC assessment **controlled violent activity may well extend to**

the area near the border fence and into Israel as well, even if Hamas wants to prevent a broad confrontation with Israel.

► **The Palestinian Authority (PA) continues its diplomatic activity in the international arena** to deter Israel from implementing its annexation intentions. Protest activities have been held in the Jordan Valley, so far without enlisting much public support. Senior PA figures repeatedly warn that annexation of territories by Israel will lead to the PA's collapse and obligate Israel to take full responsibility for all the West Bank territories as the occupying power (Saeb Erekat, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee, said "If Israel carries out its annexation program, the Netanyahu government will be responsible for collecting the garbage from the streets of the West Bank and for paying the salaries of government officials..." (I24News TV channel, June 28, 2020).)

The Palestinian Fight Against COVID-19

Judea and Samaria¹

The PA ministry of health reported **the number of active COVID-19 cases rose and as of June 30, 2020, the total stands at 1,924.**² Most of the active cases (**1,586**) are in the **Hebron district**, about 82% of the total number. The total number of cases in Judea and Samaria, as of June 30, is 2,315. Nine have died. **The number of active cases in east Jerusalem is trending upward and now stands at 131.**

► The Palestinian minister of health reported that there are 13 ICU patients, **three of them on ventilators in serious condition** (Facebook page of the Palestinian ministry of health, June 30, 2020). Among the active cases are **40 medical personnel** (Dunia al-Watan, June 29, 2020). The minister of health said that **the hospitals in the PA have a total of 305 ventilators and the PA is waiting for the arrival of 100 more** (Newpal website, June 25, 2020).

► Dr. Kamal al-Shakhra, spokesman for the Palestinian ministry of health, said the main reason for the mass outbreak was **people gathering at weddings and mourning tents** while disregarding public health guidelines and instructions. He said another contributing factor was **the family relations between Palestinians in Hebron and Arabs in [the Israeli Bedouin city of] Rahat and Beersheba**. He warned of a **possible medical catastrophe** and

¹ For further information see the June 30, 2020 bulletin, "The number of new coronavirus cases in Judea and Samaria continues to spike while in the Gaza Strip the numbers are low and the situation is so far under control."

² According to ITIC calculations, the number is 1,920.

stressed the importance of public compliance with ministry of health instructions. **He said they expected more coronavirus infections and more deaths** (Palestinian TV's Facebook page, June 28, 2020).



Mutual danger of infection: Palestinian workers enter Israel through a hole in the fence in southern Mt. Hebron (Facebook page of Yusuf Amru, June 28, 2020)

The Gaza Strip

►As opposed to the spike in cases in Judea and Samaria, and despite the enormous potential for the spread of coronavirus inside the Gaza Strip, **Hamas has so far managed to prevent an uncontrolled spread of the virus.** The number of active cases remains unchanged at **14**. There are still 252 people in the five quarantine centers (Dunia al-Watan, June 29, 2020). While the situation is currently under control, medical sources in Gaza warn that the virus could enter through loopholes, such as the tunnels or smuggling activity.

Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

Rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel

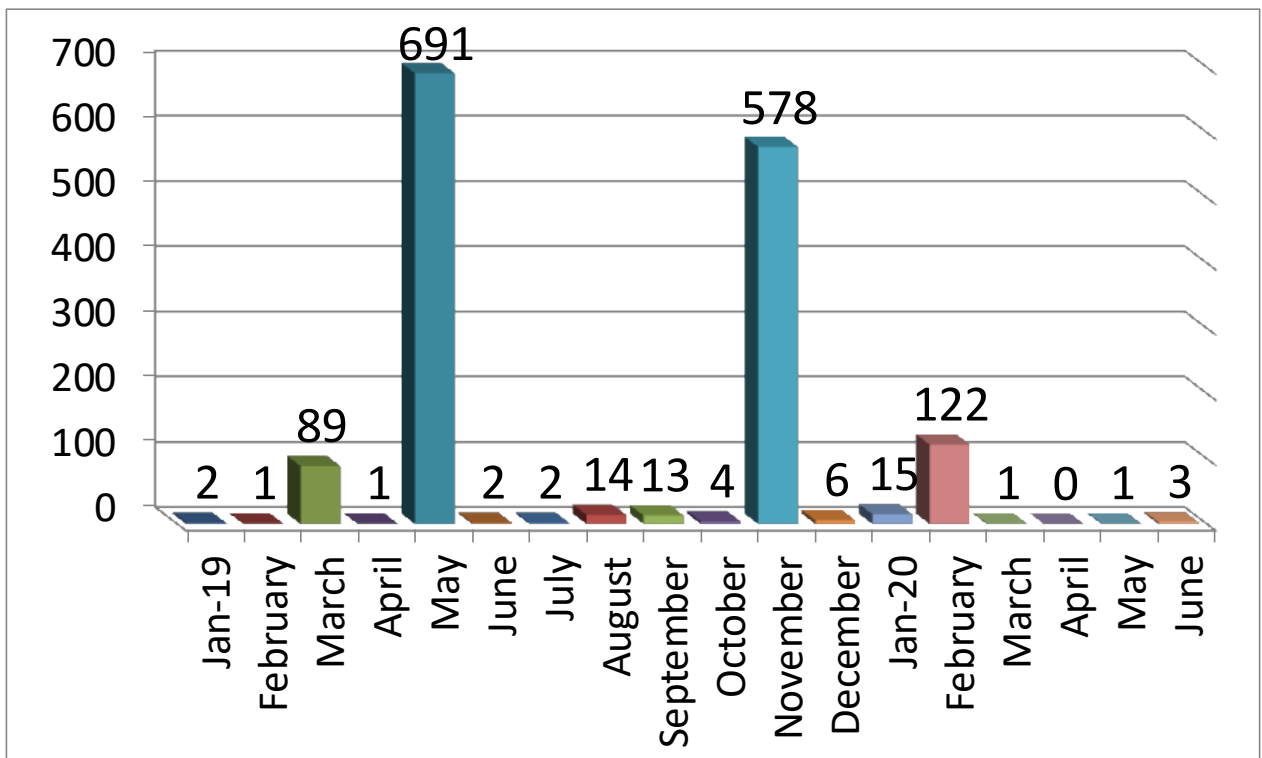
►On June 26, 2020 two rockets were fired from the southern Gaza Strip at Israeli territory. One exploded in an open area in the western Negev and the other fell inside Gazan territory. No casualties or damage were reported. In response Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked Hamas terrorist targets in the southern Gaza Strip, among them workshops for the manufacture of rockets and other weapons (IDF spokesman, June 26, 2020).

►A Hamas source reported that the planes attacked three Hamas military wing posts and PIJ military posts in Deir al-Balah and Khan Yunis (france24 website, June 27, 2020). Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem called the attacks "renewed aggression" against Gaza, and the continuation of the aggression against the Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank (Hazem Qassem's Twitter account, June 27, 2020).

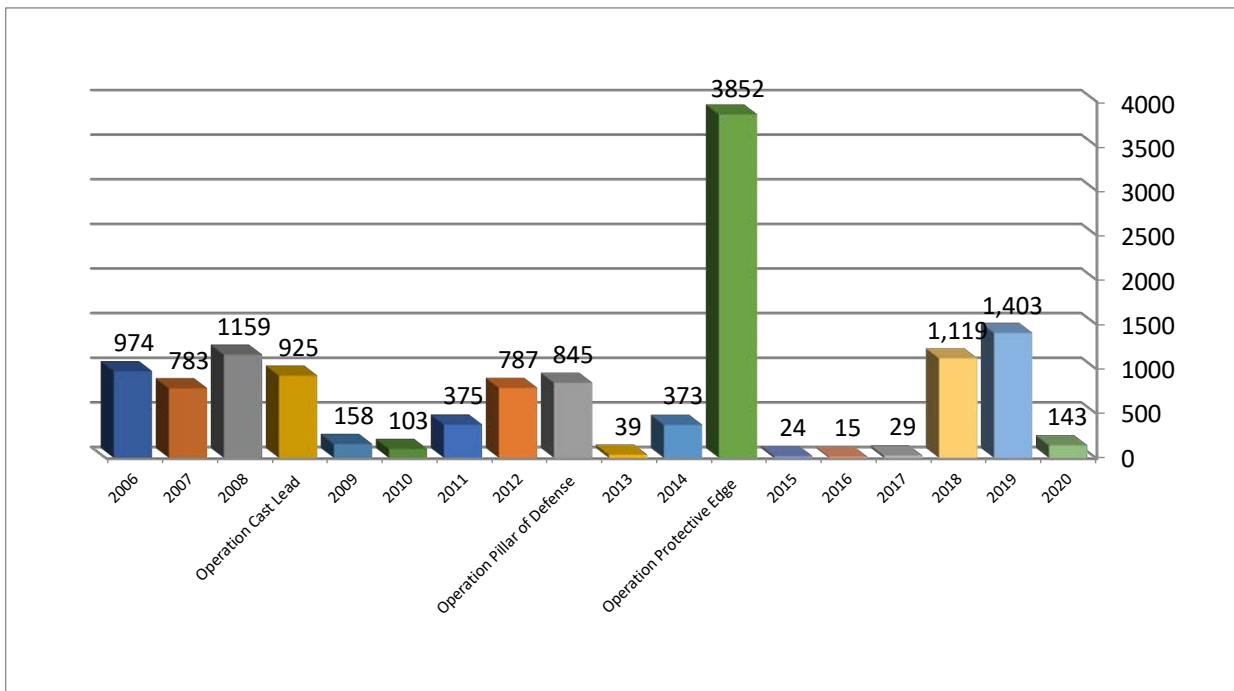


IDF attacks in Khan Yunis
(Shehab Twitter account, June 27, 2020).

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Attempted infiltration into Israeli territory by sea

► On June 28, 2020, a suspicious figure was identified crossing the Gaza Strip's northern naval border into Israeli territory. An Israeli navy vessel was sent to the location. The suspect, who was not armed, was apprehended and taken for interrogation (IDF spokesman, June 28, 2020).

Judea and Samaria

Vehicular attack

► On June 24, 2020, a Palestinian drove his car to a Border Police roadblock in Abu Dis (east of Jerusalem). He veered out of his lane, drove up onto the sidewalk and tried to run over a female Border Police fighter who was securing the roadblock. He hit her, injuring her slightly. The Palestinian exited his vehicle, and Border Police fighters stationed at the site shot and mortally wounded him (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, June 23, 2020).



Right: The car involved in the vehicular attack. Left: Security camera footage of the attack (Border Police Facebook page, June 23 and 24, 2020).

►The Palestinian who carried out the attack was **Ahmed Mustafa Erekat**, 27, from Abu Dis (Fatah Twitter account, June 23, 2020; Facebook page of the Abu Dis municipality, June 23, 2020). **Apparently the motivation for the attack was personal or familial** (a common motive behind popular terrorism attacks).

►The death of Ahmed Erekat, who was a nephew of Saeb Erekat, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee, led to the condemnation of Israel from senior PA figures. Despite the security camera video issued by the Israel Police Force, which clearly shows the event was a vehicular attack, senior PA sources claimed (the usual response to vehicular attacks) it was **"an [Israeli] execution."** According to Palestinian claims, that evening Erekat was supposed to attend his sister's wedding and it was unlikely he would carry out a vehicular attack, but rather he simply lost control of the wheel. Some Palestinian remarks were the following:

►**PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** wrote on his Facebook page, "Glory and eternity for the soul of the shaheed Ahmed Erekat, **executed by the occupation yesterday. They still hold his body**" (Facebook page of Muhammad Shtayyeh, June 24, 2020). **Saeb Erekat, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee** said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was responsible for his soldiers' **"executing"** Ahmed Erekat (Wafa, June 23, 2020). **Jibril Rajoub, secretary of Fatah's Executive Committee**, claimed Ahmed Erekat had been "executed" by the [Israeli Border Police] forces at the roadblock (Voice of Palestine, June 25, 2020).

►The PA foreign ministry condemned the death of Ahmed Erekat and said it would not be denied a response. The ministry announced it would collaborate with international legal institutions and the UN to investigate the [so-called] "crimes" committed by Israel, including the death of Erekat (Safa, June 24, 2020). **The Palestinian Center for Human Rights sent a formal complaint to the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC)**

regarding the death of **Ahmed Erekat** (Dunia al-Watan, June 24, 2020). Hamas and the other terrorist organizations also issued condemnations.



Right: **Muhammad Erekat**, nephew of Saeb Erekat (Ahmed Erekat's Facebook page, Saeb Erekat 27, 2017). Left: **Ahmed Erekat** at the reception held in Abu Dis for released Hamas operative **Musheir Halabiya**, (Ahmed Erekat's Facebook page, July 11, 2019).



Fatah's Facebook page posted the cartoon reading, "The crime of killing Ahmed Erekat" (June 25, 2020).

Stabbing attack prevented

►A Palestinian who came on foot to the Qalandia Crossing (north of Jerusalem) aroused the suspicions of the security forces securing the location. They ordered him to halt, and when he did not they fired their guns into the air. The Palestinian ran away, and after a short chase was apprehended. **During his apprehension a knife fell out of his pocket.** He was detained and taken for interrogation (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, June 27, 2020). The Palestinian media reported he was **Ahmed Waji' Wahadan**, 22, from the Qalandia refugee camp (kalandiaMC Facebook page, June 27, 2020).



Right: The knife found in the suspect's possession (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, June 27, 2020). Left: Ahmed Waji' Wahadan (kalandiaMC Facebook page, June 27, 2020).

Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown at Israeli vehicles

► In Judea and Samaria Palestinians continued throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli vehicles and at the Israeli security forces. The more notable events were the following:

- ◆ **June 29, 2020** – Two Molotov cocktails were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle southeast of Alfei Menashe. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, June 29, 2020).
- ◆ **June 29, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus southeast of Ramallah. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, June 29, 2020).
- ◆ **June 29, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle near Pisgat Ze'ev. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, June 29, 2020).
- ◆ **June 28, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle near Ariel. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, June 28, 2020).
- ◆ **June 28, 2020** – Two Molotov cocktails were thrown at a security fence southwest of Ramallah. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, June 28, 2020).
- ◆ **June 28, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle northwest of Beit El. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, June 28, 2020).

◆ **June 26, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle northeast of Hebron. No casualties were reported. The front windshield of the vehicle was damaged (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, June 26, 2020).

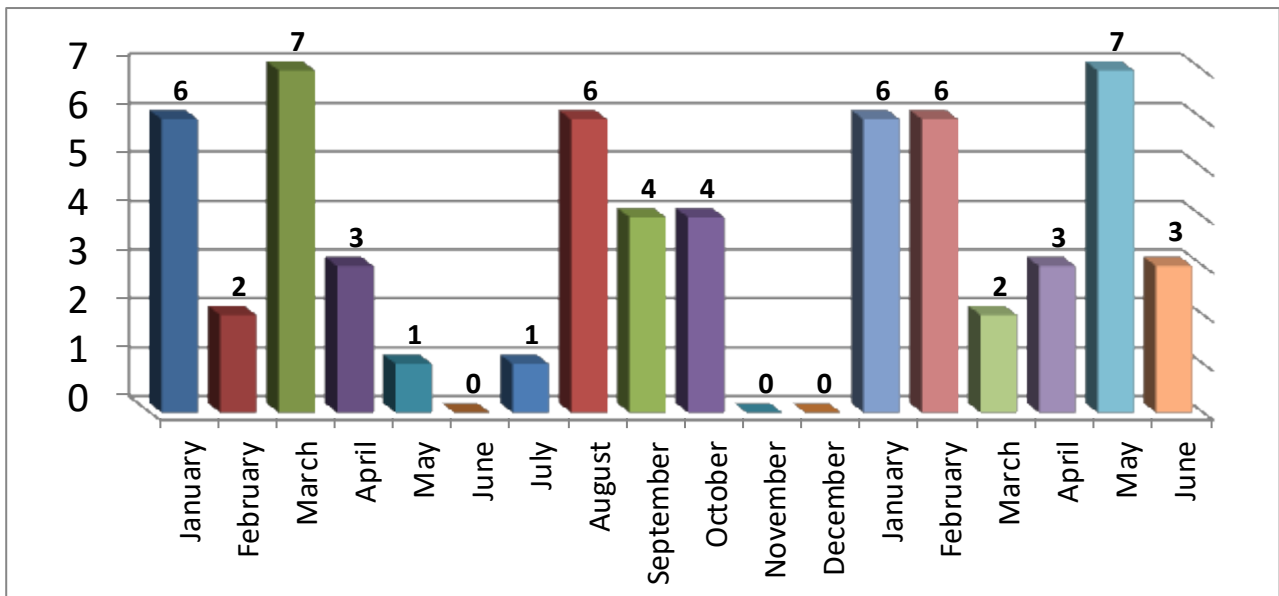
◆ **June 25, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle southeast of Ariel. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, June 25, 2020).

◆ **June 24, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus southwest of Modi'in Illit. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, June 24, 2020).

◆ **June 24, 2020** – During an IDF activity in the Ramallah region the soldiers identified several Palestinians throwing Molotov cocktails. They responded with live fire, wounding a Palestinian who was evacuated for medical treatment. Another Palestinian was detained and the others were chased but escaped (IDF spokesman, June 24, 2020).

◆ **June 23, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle near Kiryat Arba. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, June 23, 2020).

Significant terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria since January 2019³



³A 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.

Developments in the Gaza Strip

Distribution of the funds donated by Qatar

► **Mohammed al-Emadi, chairman of Qatar's National Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza**, said the Committee, in collaboration with Qatar's Development Fund, had begun the distribution of financial aid to **100,000 needy Gazan families**. Every family will receive \$100 in cash. He said the distribution would continue until July 4, 2020, through the branches of the post office bank. He added that Qatar's Committee and its teams would be present at the sites to supervise the distribution (Facebook page of Qatar's National Committee, June 27, 2020). Qatar also announced it would donate \$1.5 million to UNRWA for food for the Gaza Strip (al-Quds, June 23, 2020).



Distribution of the funds from Qatar at the branches of the post office bank under the supervision of Qatar's National Committee (Facebook page of Qatar's National Committee, June 27, 2020).

Hamas and the other terrorist organizations threaten reprisals if Israel annexes Palestinian territories

This past week Hamas and the other terrorist organizations in Gaza increased the volume of their threats against Israel's annexation of Palestinian territories. A spokesman for Hamas' military wing called the annexation "a declaration of war against the Palestinian people," adding that **the [terrorist] organizations would do everything in their power to protect the Palestinian people.** They also said the organizations had formulated joint coordinated plans in preparation for the implementation of Israel's plans. However, Palestinian commentators in Gaza are of the opinion that Hamas is not interested in a broad military confrontation with Israel and say its response will be "**considered and pragmatic,**" for example, the launching of IED/incendiary balloons and sporadic rocket fire, carried out by the various organizations, without Hamas participation. On the other hand, **senior Hamas**

figures continue calling for a wave of "military" [i.e., terrorist] attack in Judea and Samaria, including a renewal of the intifada.

►Some of the prominent remarks were the following:

◆**Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military wing**, said the "resistance" [i.e., terrorist organizations] regarded Israel's decision to annex Palestinian territories as "a declaration of war against the Palestinian people" and Hamas would "do everything in their power to protect the Palestinian people, its land and holy sites." **He said the "resistance" would make Israel regret its decision** (al-Aqsa, June 25, 2020). Relating to Abu Obeida's remarks, **Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** said Abu Obeida had sent a clear message to Israel that if it carried out its plans **the situation could not return to the status quo ante** (alresala.net, June 25, 2020).



Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades spokesman Abu Obeida, "Annexation is a declaration of war against the Palestinian people" (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades website, June 25, 2020).

◆**Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem**, said the "resistance" in the Gaza Strip was planning, **training and building up to the moment of truth when it would have to take action**. He said the "resistance" now confronted a new stage in its "struggle" against Israel, and it would determine of the nature of the "struggle", according to its capabilities and its priorities (Filastin al-Yawm, June 26, 2020). On another occasion Hazem Qassem said **all the jihad activities and struggle in the West Bank had to be concentrated on stopping the annexation** (al-Manar, June 26, 2020).

◆As to Abu Obeida's statement regarding "a declaration of war," Palestinian commentators in Gaza are of the opinion that Hamas response will be **harsh but pragmatic**, and **not initiate a broad military confrontation with Israel**. Hamas might allow the launching of IED/incendiary balloons or the occasional firing of a rocket by one of the various organizations, but **apparently Hamas itself will not participate**, in

order **not to drag Israel into a broad response** against the Gaza Strip (al-Ghad, June 28, 2020).

Hamas' political activity

► **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, spoke on the phone with Nikolay Mladenov, the UN envoy to the peace process in the Middle East. Haniyeh stressed the objection of UN Secretary General Antonito Guterres to Israel's annexation plan, which he said violated UN resolutions (Hamas website, June 25, 2020).

► A delegation of the Hamas leadership, headed by Isma'il Haniyeh, met in Doha on June 23, 2020, with Russia's deputy foreign minister, Mikhail Bogdanov, who is the Russian president's special representative for Middle Eastern affairs. The members of the delegation briefed Bogdanov on political developments in the Palestinian cause, especially Israel's intention to annex Palestinian territories (Hamas website, June 23, 2020).



**The Hamas delegation meets with Bogdanov
(Hamas website, June 23, 2020).**

Activities to coordinate a response to Israel's plans

► Activities are currently being held in Gaza to reach an agreement about a joint response of all the organizations. Hamas and the PIJ held a meeting to discuss their position. After the meeting they issued a statement noting the readiness of the "resistance" to respond to Israel's aggression against the Palestinian people and **stressing the strong coordination of the "forces or resistance"** (Sawa, June 27, 2020)

► On June 28, 2020, a conference was held of the terrorist organizations operating in Gaza with the theme, "Unity in the struggle against the annexation and the deal of the century." The summation announcement of the conference included encouragement for a "comprehensive resistance" [i.e., violence and terrorist attacks] as the most effective way to conduct the

conflict and deal with the occupation. **Jibril Rajoub, secretary of Fatah's Executive Committee**, welcomed the call of the organizations in Gaza for unity (Wafa, June 28, 2020).

Protest rallies

► **Protest rallies were held in various locations in the Gaza Strip**, where senior Hamas figures said they embraced the remarks made by Abu Obeida regarding using the "resistance" against Israel's annexation. Hamas organized a "march of rage" in Khan Yunis to stress their objection to the "annexation of the West Bank and Jordan Valley" (al-Aqsa, June 26, 2020).

► Popular activities are planned for the Gaza Strip as part of the "day of rage," which will be held on Wednesday, July 1, 2020. Their theme will be "**united against annexation**" (Wafa, June 29, 2020). The activities will be held in Gaza City and the organizers are preparing to bus people in from all over the Gaza Strip. They issued a video for the "day of rage" which had pictures and videos of the violence carried out in the past during the return marches.



"March of rage," organized by Hamas in the Khan Yunis district, to protest Israel's annexation intentions (Hamas website, June 26, 2020).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

The PA campaign against Israel's annexation intentions continues

Overview

The PA continues using **diplomatic activities in an attempt deter Israel** from its intention to annex parts of Judea and Samaria. On the ground the **protest activities have focused mainly in the Jordan Valley**. In the meantime the PA continues taking steps to implement Mahmoud Abbas' declaration about ending agreements with Israel. Senior PA spokesmen have reiterated their threats that **if Israel carries out the annexation the PA will collapse**.

The international arena

► **Riyad al-Maliki, Palestinian foreign minister**, said intensive contacts were being held to draft a proposed resolution against the annexation **and to present it to the UN General Assembly**. Its aim will be to determine measures and **sanctions to impose on Israel** if it annexes territories. According to al-Maliki, the Palestinians are working towards to having **UN General Assembly** meet to discuss the issue (al-Quds, June 25, 2020).

► On June 24, 2020, the UN Security Council held a meeting to discuss the situation in the Middle East. Riyad al-Maliki told the Council that Israel was continuing its policy of "occupation and discrimination," which would lead to a worsening of the regional conflict. He called on the international community to make it clear to Israel that annexation would have immediate consequences, **and demanded that practical steps be taken against it** (Dunia al-Watan, June 24, 2020).

► During the deliberations UN Secretary General Antonito Guterres called on Israel to abandon its plan to annex Palestinian territories because imposing Israeli law [on Judea and Samaria] would be in violation of international law. It would also damage chances for the two-state solution and make it impossible to renew negotiations between the two sides (UN website, June 24, 2020). After the meeting the representatives of the European Security Council member states, among them France, Britain and Germany, issued a statement saying that **imposing Israeli law would be a violation of international law and there would be consequences** regarding their relations with Israel (al-Andalou News, June 24, 2020).

► **Saeb Erekat, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee**, had three individual meetings with UNRWA's general representative, Greece's general consul and the head of Cyprus' diplomatic mission to the PA. At the meetings he said that both partial annexation and complete annexation violated international law and agreements, and would harm regional peace and stability (Wafa, June 25, 2020).

► **Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** held a video conference with **40 British members of Parliament and journalists**. He called on the British government to implement the Parliament's decision to recognize the Palestinian state (Wafa, June 29, 2020).



Muhammad Shtayyeh holds a video conference with British members of Parliament and journalists (Wafa, June 29, 2020).

Protest activity on the ground

►Protest activities have been held at various locations, mainly in the **Jordan Valley**. The Palestinian public has been called on to participate but turnout has not been large. On June 30, 2020 the PA ministry of communications and culture started broadcasting special programs on all the media in Judea and Samaria about "the aggression of annexation" to draw public attention to the struggle against annexation and to encourage people to participate in the protest activities (Wafa, June 29, 2020).

►On June 24, 2020, a demonstration protesting the annexation was held in the village of Fasa'el in the Jordan Valley, with the participation of members of the PLO's Executive Committee, Fatah's Central Committee and senior PA figures. On June 27, 2020, a conference was held in the village of Bardala in the northern Jordan Valley to protest the annexation (Wafa, June 29, 2020).



PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh participates in a meeting held in the village of Fasa'el in the Jordan Valley (Wafa, June 24, 2020).

Danger of a PA collapse and the end of relations with Israel

►Senior figures in the PA, the PLO and Fatah have repeatedly **warned Israel that annexation will cause the collapse of the PA, forcing Israel to take full responsibility for all of the West Bank:**

◆**Mahmoud Abbas** gave a speech to the Arab Parliament, threatening that the PA would dissolve in response to the imposition of Israeli law on the West Bank. He said the annexation was illegal and would force Israel to **take full responsibility for the West Bank as its occupying power** (Palestinian TV, June 24, 2020).

◆**Sabri Sidam, member of Fatah's Central Committee**, warned the PA would collapse if Israel annexed territories and the PA continued its economic and political measures. He said the Palestinian leadership had not decided to dissolve the PA but if Israel continues its present course the collapse of the PA would be impossible to stop (al-Quds, June 28, 2020).

◆**Saeb Erekat, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee**, said Israel's annexation of "even one centimeter of the West Bank" would lead to the destruction of the PA and Israel would become fully responsible as the occupying ruler. As to the economic consequences of ending the agreements signed with Israel and the **PA's inability to pay its employees salaries**,⁴ Erekat said that the PA had asked for a loan of \$100 million from Arab countries, which it would repay when it received the money now in the hands of Israel (al-Andalou News, June 27, 2020).

Results of the latest Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) poll

►On June 30, 2020, the PCPSR, headed by Khalil Shqaqi, published the results of its quarterly public opinion poll, held in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip between June 17 and 20, 2020. Some of the questions dealt with Israel's intention to annex Palestinian territories. According to the findings:⁵

⁴ The PA postponed payment of salaries and said it would pay one salary before Eid al-Adha, which will fall on July 31, 2020, and to delay the payment of other salaries (alresala.net, June 28, 2020). Regarding salaries, **Hussein al-Sheikh**, chairman of the authority for civilian affairs, said the issue of tax revenue payments caused a serious economy crisis for the PA (Dunia al-Watan, June 24, 2020).

⁵http://www.pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/Poll%2076%20English%20fulltext%20%D9%8D_June%202020.pdf

- ◆ Two-thirds (66%) believe that the new Israeli government will indeed annex the Jordan Valley and the settlement areas in the occupied West Bank...
- ◆ 71% want the PA to stop implementing the Oslo agreement and to sever relations with Israel while 52% support a return to armed struggle in a response to annexation.
- ◆ Large majorities believe that Arab and non-Arab countries will not impose sanctions on Israel because of the annexation.
- ◆ The public is highly worried about the consequences of the annexation and the PA response, such as the inability to pay salaries to the public sector or even the collapse of the PA.