



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(July 22 – 28, 2020)

Overview

► This past week the Gaza Strip remained relatively quiet. In Judea and Samaria a mosque was set on fire and Hebrew graffiti were written on the walls. The Palestinian Authority (PA) prime minister and other senior figures condemned Israel and considered it responsible for a "racist hate crime" and "aggression" against the Palestinians. Palestinians continue the constant throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli vehicles on the roads in Judea and Samaria.

► **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, said that as part of the "deal of the century" Hamas had been offered **\$15 billion** for the construction of a sea port, and airport and other economic projects. However, he said, Hamas rejected the offer because it did not want to pay what would be required in return, mainly dismantling the military wings and disarming the Gaza Strip (including rockets). It was another example showing that **its military buildup and the campaign against Israel are Hamas' top priorities**, and not the economic development of the Gaza Strip and the welfare of the people who live there.

The Palestinian Fight against COVID-19

Judea and Samaria¹

The increase in the number of active COVID-19 cases in Judea and Samaria continues. However, **the increase in the number of recoveries has recently become larger than the number of new cases**. During the past 24 hours 481 new cases were detected and 537 patients recovered. The number of active cases now stands at 6,091 (as of the afternoon of July 28, 2020). There are 3,653 active cases in the Hebron district, making up 60% of the total number of active cases in Judea and Samaria. Infections continue to rise in east Jerusalem, where the number of active cases stands at 1,729, which is 28% of the total number (according to reports from the PA). Fourteen cases are serious or critical, three are on

¹ For further information, see the July 27, 2020 bulletin, "The Spread of COVID-19 in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip (Updated to July 27, 2020)."

ventilators and **there have been 81 deaths**. Since the initial outbreak of the disease, 10,853 active cases have been verified. **The number of active cases in the Gaza Strip stands at five** (Facebook page of the PA ministry of health, July 27 and 28, 2020).

- ▶ Preventive measures for the Eid al-Adha holiday were announced at the weekly Palestinian government meeting (Palestinian TV, July 27, 2020).
- ▶ The stores will remain open until the holiday. **The lockdown will continue** in all the villages, refugee camps and neighborhoods where there are active coronavirus cases. **From Friday, July 31, until Sunday, August 2, there will be a general lockdown.**
- ▶ Prayers in enclosed areas will be banned. Prayers will be held in public locations, outside, with masks and social distancing.
- ▶ **Palestinians living in Israeli territory are asked not to visit the PA territories.**
- ▶ Palestinian workers returning from Israel will have to follow public health guidelines and **self-isolate at home**. Working in the settlements is forbidden.
- ▶ **The holding of weddings and the erection of mourning tents is forbidden**, as are going to restaurants and all other gatherings.



Right: The weekly PA government meeting chaired by Muhammad Shtayyeh (Wafa, July 27, 2020). Left: Taysir Abu Sneina, Hebron mayor, warns local residents to follow government instructions during the Eid al-Adha holiday (Palestinian TV Facebook page, July 27, 2020).

The Gaza Strip

- ▶ As opposed to the situation in the PA, the Hamas administration has been prominently successful in dealing with the pandemic. **This past week two new active cases were detected in Gaza**, both Palestinians who returned to the Gaza Strip through the Erez Crossing. **The number of active cases stands at five.**

►Given the relatively favorable situation in Gaza, preparations are being made to deal with thousands of Palestinians expected to leave or return to the Gaza Strip. Tawfiq al-Na'im, secretary general of the ministry of the interior in Gaza, said **the Rafah Crossing may open after Eid al-Adha** to allow Gaza Strip residents to return. Opening the crossing, he said, depends on circumstances and timing, and demands planning. He added they were currently constructing a quarantine camp in the central Gaza Strip which will be able to house 500 people. Its construction is expected to be completed in the near future (al-Ra'i news agency, July 27, 2020).

Postponement of planned flotilla to Gaza

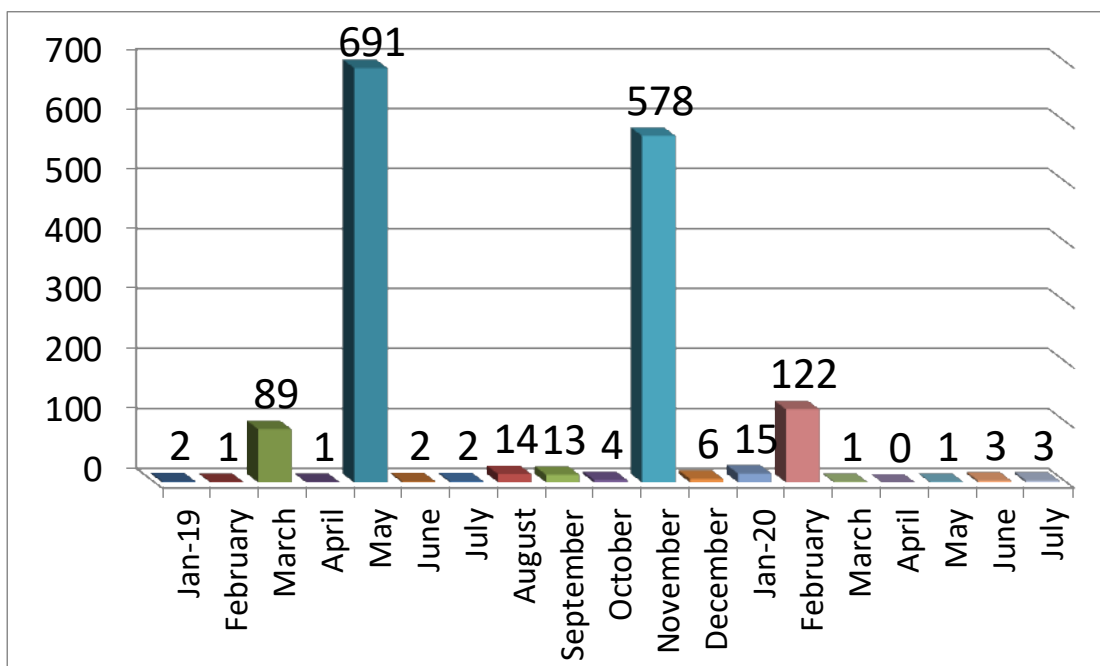
►The International Committee for Breaking the Siege, headed by Zaher Birawi, announced it was postponing the flotilla to the Gaza Strip scheduled for this summer because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global restrictions on travel and gatherings (Dunia al-Watan, July 24, 2020). The Freedom Flotilla Coalition also announced the postponement of its planned flotilla (Freedom Flotilla Coalition website, July 22, 2020).

Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

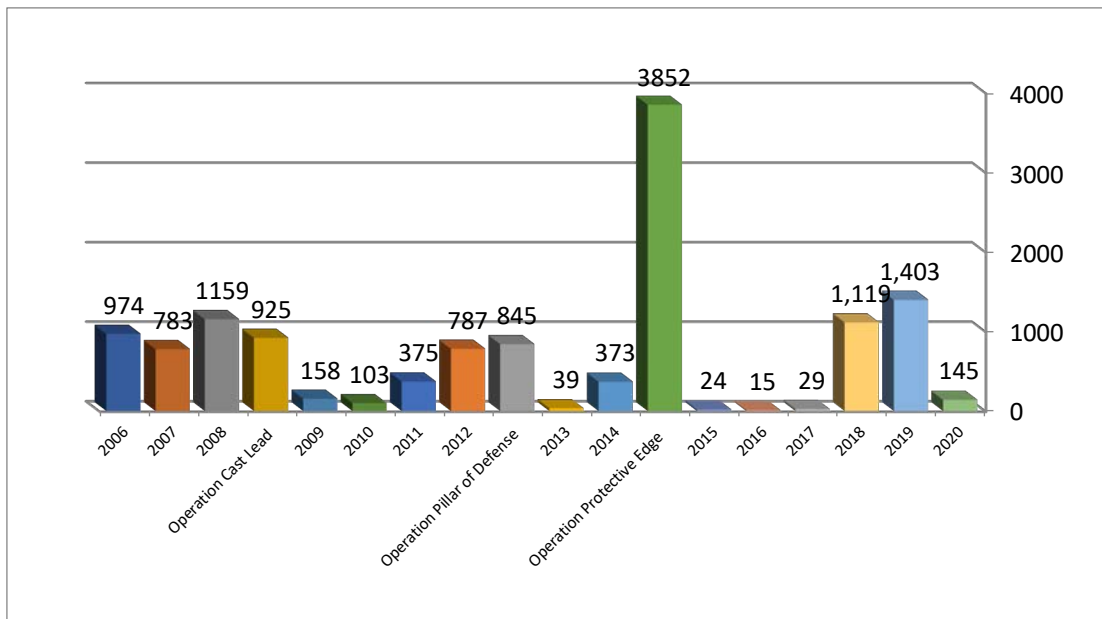
Rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel

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

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Balloon launched from Gaza into Israeli territory

►The Israeli police received a report of a balloon with a suspicion object attached to it found in an open area in the western Negev. Police and a demolitions expert examined the object, which **turned out to be an IED** (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, July 27, 2020).



Balloon with suspicious object attached found in the western Negev
(Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, July 27, 2020).

Judea and Samaria

Condemnation of Israel after mosque in al-Bireh set on fire

►On the night of July 26, 2020, a mosque in al-Bireh, near Ramallah, was set on fire by unknown persons. Hebrew graffiti were written on the walls. According to Palestinian

sources, the arsonists were settlers. The Palestinian ministry of Muslim endowments called the event a "racist hate" crime, adding that the Israeli government was fully responsible for it. At the beginning of the weekly government meeting PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh condemned the arson, calling it "despicable and racist." He accused Israel of responsibility for the settlers' [alleged] increased violence (Wafa, July 27, 2020).

► **The PA foreign ministry accused the Israeli government and prime minister of full and direct responsibility for the "act of aggression"** and all the [alleged] acts of aggression against the Palestinians, their rights and property. He called on the UN and Security Council to provide the Palestinians with international protection, and called on the countries around the globe to put the settlers on their lists of terrorist organizations and prevent them from entering their territories (Wafa, July 27, 2020).

► **Saeb Erekat, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee**, said setting fire to the mosque was "racism" and "apartheid" (Saeb Erekat's Twitter account, July 27, 2020). **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** condemned the arson and said it was the result of incitement from "Zionist bodies" and "racist policies" against the Palestinians. He called on the residents of Judea and Samaria to resist the crimes and to confront [those who carried them out] (Hamas website, July 27, 2020).



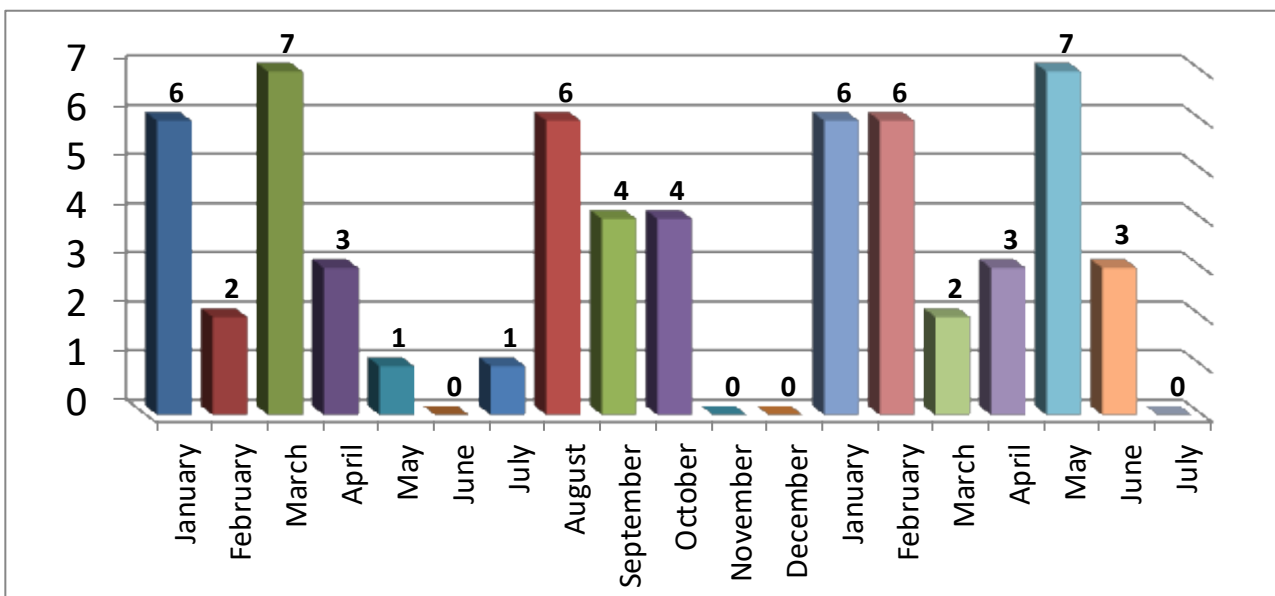
**Results of the fire in the mosque and graffiti on the mosque wall
(Facebook page of the al-Hadath website, July 27, 2020).**

Other events

► In Judea and Samaria Palestinians continued throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at civilian Israeli vehicles and the Israeli security forces. The more prominent events were the following (all reported by Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria unless noted otherwise):

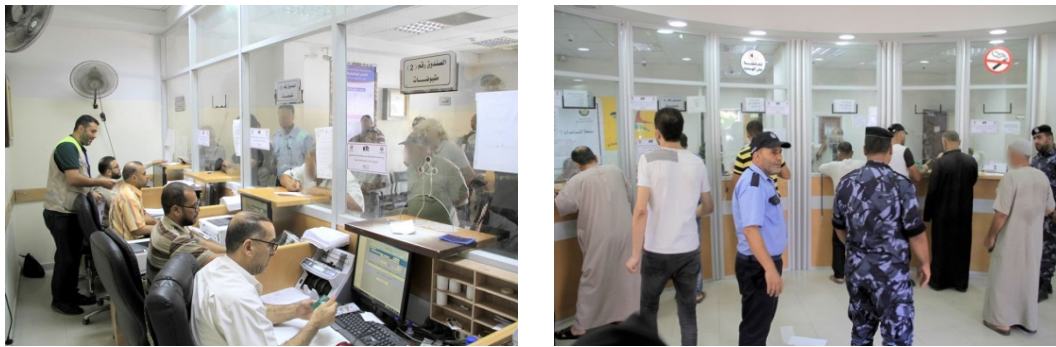
- ◆ **July 27, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus northeast of Hebron. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **July 26, 2020** – Traffic police stopped a Palestinian car southwest of Bethlehem. While the police were writing a citation for a moving violation a passenger exited the car and tried to grab the gun of one of the policemen. The police overcame and detained him (Judea and Samaria police spokesman's unit, July 26, 2020).
- ◆ **July 26, 2020** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli school bus north of Hebron. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **July 26, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle southwest of Nablus. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **July 26, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus northwest of Ariel. The bus driver was injured in the eye by flying glass.
- ◆ **July 22, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle south of Nablus, no casualties were reported.
- ◆ **July 21, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle northeast of Ramallah. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **July 21, 2020** – Palestinians from Bayt Umar threw four Molotov cocktails at the fence of the community of Karnei Tsur (north of Hebron). no casualties were reported.
- ◆ **July 21, 2020** – Palestinians threw a Molotov cocktail at a civilian Israeli vehicle southeast of Ariel. No casualties were reported.

Significant terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria since January 2019²



Distribution of money donated by Qatar

► **Mohammed al-Emadi, chairman of Qatar's National Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza**, said the relief funds for needy families had reached the Gaza Strip and they would be available at all the post office branches beginning on July 25, 2020. **The sum of \$100 per family will be delivered to 100,000 needy families between July 25 and 29, 2020** (Sawa, July 23, 2020). Al-Emadi said the Qatari committee and its teams have been deployed at the distribution centers and supervise the payment of the funds (website of the Qatari committee, July 25, 2020). The ministry of social development in Gaza issued instructions for the conditions for the receipt of the funds, noting money would not be given to families not on the list (Dunia al-Watan, July 24, 2020).



Distribution of money from Qatar at the branches of the post office bank in Gaza (Facebook page of Qatar's National Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza, July 25, 2020).

► The ministry of social development in Gaza announced that on **July 28, 2020, allotments would be paid to the wounded and families of those killed in the return marches.**³ Payments will be made at the branches of the post office bank (Facebook page of the ministry of social development in Gaza, July 27, 2020). A similar announcement was made by the ministry of the treasury in Gaza (Facebook page of the ministry of the treasury in Gaza, July 28, 2020). In response to the announcements surfers complained that no link was posted to the website for verifying eligibility for the receipt of funds.

Interview with Isma'il Haniyeh

► **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, was interviewed by the Qatari daily newspaper *Lusail*. He said that as part of the "**deal of the century**" **Hamas had been offered** by "various [unspecified] agents" supported by the great powers, **\$15 billion for the**

³ Apparently the monthly allotment paid by the ministry of the treasury in the Gaza Strip.

construction of a sea port, an airport and other economic projects. In return, Hamas would have to **dismantle the military wings of the various organizations operating in the Gaza Strip, integrate them into the police force and disarm the Gaza Strip.** He said Hamas had **rejected the offer** because Hamas wanted to lift the [so-called] "siege" of the Gaza Strip, **but not at the price of giving up its weapons or the "resistance" [i.e., terrorism against Israel],** recognizing Israel, giving up Palestine "from the [Jordan] river to the [Mediterranean] sea, the [so-called] "right of return," the release of the prisoners and the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital (Lusail, July 27, 2020).

►At a rally held in the Gaza Strip, **Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua** said the public had come to the rally to show its support of the "resistance," and Hamas' positions and decisions, whose objective was to preserve the Palestinians' rights and principles. He said **Hamas would not allow the Palestinian cause to be harmed and Hamas would not waive its rights, its capabilities or the "weapons of the resistance."** Hamas, he said, adhered to the "resistance project" and referred to itself as "the return and liberation project" (al-Aqsa TV, July 27, 2020).

Haniyeh praises the children of the shaheeds

►The Association of Shaheed Families⁴ held an event for the children of shaheeds who had passed their matriculation exams. A recorded speech by Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, was shown on video, giving Hamas sponsorship to the event. He congratulated the students for passing their exams and said he promised the shaheeds to follow their path until the "liberation of the Palestinian lands and holy places." Haniyeh also announced that every child of a shaheed whose final grade was 90 would receive 500 shekels (about \$145) (al-Aqsa, July 21, 2020).

⁴ The Association of Shaheed Families was established in the Gaza Strip in 2019. Its chairman is Muhammad, the son of Abd al-Aziz Rantisi. The deputy chairman is Hamza, the son of Isma'il Abu Shanab (Palinfo, September 14, 2019).



Ceremony held for children of shaheeds who passed their matriculation exams. Left: Isma'il Haniyeh gives a recorded speech (Hamas website, July 22, 2020).

Senior Hamas figures visit the offices of the Ma'an TV station

►A delegation from Hamas' information bureau, including Musheir al-Masri, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and Taher al-Nunu, an advisor to Isma'il Haniyeh, **paid a visit to the Gaza offices of the Bethlehem-based Ma'an TV channel and the Nablus-based al-Najah al-Akhbari**. Musheir al-Masri thanked them for their contribution and the role they play in national strategy regarding the annexation and the "deal of the century" (Ma'an, July 23, 2020).



Delegation from Hamas' information department visits the offices of Ma'an TV in Gaza City (Safa, July 23, 2020).

►In ITIC assessment the visit was part of **an effort to soften the recent criticism of Hamas because of its attacks on journalists and the media outlets operating in the Gaza Strip**. The week before the visit the Saudi Arabian al-Arabiya channel reported that Hamas prevented Gazans from watching al-Arabiya and al-Hadath after they had aired exclusive information about the defection of a senior Hamas figure to Israel. The channel's management in Gaza was informed of the closing of its offices and those of al-Hadath. Ad agencies in the Gaza Strip were warned not to advertise on either channel (al-Arabiya Twitter account, July 15, 2020).

Senior Hamas figure tested positive for COVID-19

► Hamas announced that **Maher Salah, responsible for Hamas abroad and head of its international relations office**, who lives outside the Gaza Strip, tested positive for the virus. He was tested after coming in contact with several active cases. Hamas said Salah was taking all medical precautions and self-isolating, continuing his activities from home, and that he felt well (Hamas website, July 26, 2020).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

The PA's economy

► The PA is working to restart its economy, which has suffered a blow from the coronavirus. **Khaled al-Asili, PA minister of the economy**, reported on a number of measures the government had decided to implement for private businesses to enable them to return to operations. He said the measures would cost several hundred million dollars, which the government had obtained from local and international groups. He said the government had also obtained sources for loans on easy terms. In addition, the Islamic Development Bank is providing \$25 million, as is the Palestinian Investment Foundation, and there is also money from the EU. He said the government intends to operate a large number of businesses which are producing at less than 50%, including businesses which produce for export, noting that exports do not need to be coordinated with Israel (al-Ayam, July 26, 2020)

► EU spokesman Shadi Othman said the **EU would give the PA €23.5 million in economic aid** to enable it to give payments to needy families in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip (Sawa, July 23, 2020).

► The difficult economic situation caused vendors in the sheep market in Hebron to complain. They said the coronavirus crisis had seriously influenced the economic situation of the local residents, and their financial hardships kept them from purchasing sheep for Eid al-Adha, even though prices were lower than last year (Wafa, July 24, 2020).



The sheep market in Hebron in preparation for Eid al-Adha (Wafa, July 24, 2020).

The PA's ongoing campaign against Israel's intention to annex territories in Judea and Samaria

Despite the postponement of Israel's intention to annex territories in Judea and Samaria, and despite the fact that most of the PA's attention is devoted to dealing with COVID-19, the PA continues its campaign against the annexation. Hamas and Fatah are making an effort to show a united front, whose main expression will be a joint rally in Gaza.

Diplomatic meetings and contacts

►Mahmoud Abbas continues his diplomatic activity with the heads of state around the globe. This past week he spoke with the Norwegian prime minister. He told her that if Israel abandons its plan to annex territories, **the PA will be prepared to return to the negotiating table based on decisions of international organizations and with the sponsorship of the International Quartet.** He thanked her for Norway's support for the two-state solution and its opposition to Israel's annexation plan (Sawa, July 23, 2020). Mahmoud Abbas also spoke with the president of Turkey, and thanked him for Turkey's position against Israel's annexation plan and its work with international groups (Wafa, July 26, 2020).

►**Ziyad al-Nakhalah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) leader,** held a series of meetings in Lebanon with representatives of the Palestinian organizations. All those who attended the meetings expressed their opposition to Israeli's annexation plan and the need to unite their efforts and positions against it (Filastin al-Yawm, July 22, 2020; Dunia al-Watan, July 23, 2020).

Organizing a joint Fatah-Hamas rally

► **Fatah and Hamas are in contact with one another to organize a joint rally in Gaza (a date has yet to be set).** Jibril Rajoub, secretary of Fatah's Central Committee, said they expect to hold the rally in the near future and that it will be held in Gaza because of the spread of COVID-19 in the West Bank, not for any other reason (al-Hawar, July 22, 2020). Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said talks with Fatah were continuing regarding a "national display" that would be held in the near future (Sawa, July 22, 2020).

► According to Jibril Rajoub, the joint rally will send two main messages: one, the end of the internal Palestinian schism, and two, a message to the international community that the Palestinians are united against attempts to destroy the Palestinian cause as a political cause (Palestinian TV, July 20, 2020). Fatah spokesman Usama al-Qawasmeh said the display will send positive messages about Palestinian reconciliation and during the display they will announcement a plan of "popular struggle" against the "deal of the century" and the annexation plan (Dunia al-Watan, July 23, 2020).

► **However, despite the optimistic declarations, Fatah and Hamas seem to find it difficult to reach agreements.** The Palestinian media reported that the organizations face **two main obstacles that make it difficult to hold the rally. One is the disagreement over its venue.** Hamas representatives insist the rally be held in a closed area, while Fatah wants it held in an open area so that the general public will be able to attend. **The other obstacle is the issue of speakers.** Fatah demands that Mahmoud Abbas speak as the representative of the Palestinian people, while Hamas demands that Isma'il Haniyeh speak as well (al-Ayam, July 27, 2020).

► Local attempts for a rapprochement between Hamas and Fatah could be seen last when a delegation of senior PLO and Fatah figures paid a visit to senior Hamas figure Sheikh Hassan Yousef, who was released after 15 months of administrative detention (Safa, July 23, 2020). Among his visitors were Azzam al-Ahmed, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee and of Fatah's Central Committee; and Wasel Abu Yusuf, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee (Dunia al-Watan, July 25, 2020). Another delegation, this one headed by Jibril Rajoub, secretary of Fatah's Central Committee; and Qudri Abu Bakr, chairman of the PA's authority for prisoners and released prisoners, also visited Sheikh Hassan Yousef (Jibril Rajoub's Facebook page, July 25, 2020). During the visits the delegations stressed the need for unity to fight the annexation plan.



Right: Delegation of senior PLO and Fatah figures meet with Sheikh Hassan Yousef (second from left) (official Fatah Facebook page, July 25, 2020). Left: Jibril Rajoub (second from left) and Qudri Abu Bakr meet with Sheikh Hassan Yousef (extreme left) (Jibril Rajoub's Facebook page, July 25, 2020).