

The Palestine Strategic Report
2016 – 2017
Ch.4



The Courses of Aggression, Resistance and the Peace Process

2016 – 2017

NOTE:
The complete volume of
The Palestine Strategic Report 2016 – 2017
will be published soon



The Courses of Aggression, Resistance and the Peace Process¹

Introduction

Aggressive behaviour has always been associated with the Zionist project in Palestine, just as resistance has been part of the response of the Palestinian people, as part of their right to defend their identity, land, and holy sites.

In 2016–2017, the patterns of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict did not change from those of previous years. In general, the conflict has been characterized by:

1. Continuation of the Israeli occupation and the Israeli-Palestinian imbalance of power. This has resulted in far greater losses for the Palestinian people who have been the target of aggression.
2. Continued Palestinian steadfastness and resistance, where Palestinians invent new means to resist despite the broad range of tools of oppression at Israel's disposal.
3. The ability of the Palestinian people to thwart Israeli plans and achieve gains, albeit partial, forcing the Israeli side to backtrack, as happened after the Lion's Gate uprising in recent years.
4. Israel's continued use of detention and arrest as a tool of repression and subjugation, including arbitrary administrative detention, and the detention of women and children. However, the Palestinian people turned prisons into strongholds of resistance, mobilization, and preparation for struggle; the prisoners often succeeded in imposing their will on their jailers using hunger strikes.
5. The Israeli side exploited the peace process to "manage" it rather than to reach a solution. It approached the peace process as a cover for its continuous Judaization of the land and population, taking advantage of the state of fragmentation present in the Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim countries, and of the existence of a pro-Israel US administrations that enabled it to impose new realities on the ground.

¹ This study is the approved English translation of chapter four of *The Palestine Strategic Report 2016–2017*, edited by Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh. It is an analytical study of the courses of Israeli aggression, Palestinian resistance and the peace process in 2016–2017. The Arabic version of this Report was recently released in 2018, and the draft of this chapter was written by Rabi' al-Dannan and Hani al-Masri.

6. President Trump's decision to transfer the US Embassy to Jerusalem ended any likelihood of a real US role in the peace process; in effect, it put an end to the PA's hopes of transforming into a real and sovereign state. In addition, if we consider the Israeli actions on the ground, the decision also resulted in the complete collapse of the "two-state" project.
7. What is known as "the deal of the century" was part of the "elimination" of the Palestine issue, rather than part of its "solution." The Arab environment, despite its weakness and the attempts by some of its states to normalize relations with Israel, is still not mature enough for such deals, and still faces real difficulties.

First: Israeli Aggression and Palestinian Resistance

Israel continued its aggression against the Palestinian people and the holy sites in 2016 and 2017; also, the popular Palestinian *Intifadah* continued in WB. It started in October 2015 and was characterised by individual resistance operations, since security coordination between the PA security forces and the Israeli army has increased and reduced opportunities for large-scale resistance. In addition, Israeli incursions and arrests in WB continued.

On 14/7/2017, three 1948 Palestinians from the city of Umm al-Fahm carried out an operation at Lion's Gate that resulted in the killing of two Israeli soldiers stationed at the gate and the death of the perpetrators. This brought the Jerusalem *Intifadah* to the forefront again, and the rate of attacks against Israel significantly increased; from 94 operations (of which 21 were in East Jerusalem) during June 2017 to 222 operations (of which 87 were in East Jerusalem) during July 2017. It also re-involved the Palestinians in Jerusalem and the 1948 territories in resistance, emphasizing their integral role in defending the holy sites, in general, and the *al-Aqsa* Mosque in particular. Confrontations with the Israeli army intensified after US President Donald Trump announced his decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel; the attacks increased from 84 during November 2017 to 249 during December 2017.

As for GS, it continued to witness de-escalation throughout 2016 and 2017, despite the "limited" Israeli violations, which were met by a sharp decline in the number of Palestinian rockets fired from GS towards Israeli towns and cities in the 1948 Palestinian occupied territories. 40 rocket and mortar attacks were

launched from GS in 2016, compared to 27 in the following year, according to the Israel Security Agency (*Shabak*).² In 2016 and 2017, Israel continued to impose a policy of land and sea blockade on GS, to establish an unprecedented economic and social strangulation of the GS population. It tightened its restrictions on the freedom of movement of individuals and imposed measures that undermined freedom of trade and reduce its volume, including imports of basic items essential for the lives of the population, as well as exports of agricultural and industrial products.

Resistance operations maintained their average rate during 2016-2017. The Shabak registered 1,415 attacks in 2016 compared to 1516 in 2017 in the WB, including East Jerusalem, GS and the 1948 occupied territories. With this, the monthly rate in 2016 was close to that of 2017. The Shabak recorded 1,033 attacks in WB (excluding Jerusalem) in 2016, compared to 1,096 in 2017, and recorded 327 in East Jerusalem in 2016, compared to 368 recorded in 2017. It also recorded 12 attacks in the 1948 occupied territories, compared to 13 in 2017. In GS, the Shabak recorded 43 attacks in 2016, compared with 39 recorded in 2017, noting that the Shabak reports document the attacks that are launched from the Egyptian Sinai, with those of GS, although the former number very few compared to the latter. It should also be noted that most of the attacks that were registered during the two years in WB amounted to throwing stones and Molotov cocktails.³

The Israeli security forces announced the thwarting of Palestinian resistance operations in 2016–2017, and the detection of resistance cells, in coordination with the Palestinian security forces. Avi Issacharoff, Palestinian Affairs analyst at Israel's *Walla!* news website, reported that Israeli security forces detected about 100 armed cells in WB in 2016, most of them belonging to Hamas. On 27/6/2017, the Shabak Director Nadav Argaman revealed that since the beginning of 2016, Shabak had managed to learn about more than 2,000 plans of attacks against Israel. On 24/12/2017, Argaman announced that 400 high-level attacks had been thwarted since the beginning of 2017, and that the Shabak had thwarted 1,100 attacks that were likely to be carried out by individuals.⁴

² For more see Monthly Reports of Israel Security Agency (*Shabak*), <https://www.shabak.gov.il/english/publications/Pages/monthlyreports.aspx>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Site of Aljazeera.net, 17/1/2017 (in Arabic); and site of Felesteen Online, 24/12/2017. See also *Israel Hayom* newspaper, 27/6/2017 (in English); and site of Ynetnews, 24/12/2017 (in English).

**Table 1/4: Geographical Distribution of Palestinian Resistance Operations
2016–2017⁵**

Year	WB (Jerusalem excluded)	East Jerusalem	The 1948 occupied territories	GS*	Total
2016	1,033	327	12	43	1,415
2017	1,096	368	13	39	1,516
Total	2,129	695	25	82	2,931

* Including the Sinai Peninsula.

1. The Jerusalem *Intifadah* 2016–2017

From its outbreak in October 2015, the Jerusalem *Intifadah* was one of the most important developments for Israel, for despite the various measures and policies it applied to prevent individual resistance operations, Israel was unable to end what it called a “wave of terrorism.”

The individual resistance operations in WB and GS varied, but were mainly stabbings and ramming attacks, in addition to stone-throwing activities and clashes with the Israeli army.

The most notable Israeli measures to confront the *Intifadah* were:⁶

- Authorizing the Israeli police to seal off “centers of friction and incitement in Jerusalem,” for security considerations.
- Demolishing the houses of attackers and preventing their re-building.
- Confiscating the property of attackers.
- Withdrawal of the permanent residency cards (Jerusalem ID) from Jerusalemite attackers.
- Refusal to hand over the bodies of attackers to their families.
- Reinforcing the police force based in Jerusalem.
- Employing 300 additional security guards for public transportation at a cost of 80 million shekels (about ⁷\$20.1 million).
- Authorizing police to frisk any Palestinian, even without prior suspicion of them possessing a weapon.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For more Al-Quds International Institution, Information and Research Department, “The Jerusalem Scene June 2016,” site of al-Quds City, 2/6/2016, <http://www.alquds-online.org/items/653> (in Arabic)

⁷ US Dollar.



- Netanyahu requested the legal opinion of Attorney-General and Legal Advisor to the Israeli government, Avichai Mandelblit, to allow the procedure of transferring Palestinian families, who encourage and abet the activities of their relatives, to GS.
- Installation of mobile concrete panels (a wall) to isolate several illegal Jewish settlements.
- On 2/11/2015, the Knesset approved an interim law that would make the penalty for stone and Molotov cocktail throwing a minimum of three-years imprisonment, as well as denying perpetrators the benefit of National Insurance.

Throughout 2016 and 2017, 472 checkpoints were erected to besiege towns and villages, and restrict the movement of Palestinian citizens in WB and Jerusalem. Israeli forces executed young people and children at checkpoints daily, as well as making arrests and intimidating citizens, confiscating land, demolishing houses, and displacing hundreds of citizens. A statistical study prepared by the PLO's Abdullah Al-Hourani Centre for Studies and Documentation issued on the second anniversary of the *Intifadah*, on 6/10/2017, reported that the total number killed during the Jerusalem *Intifadah* reached 347, including 79 children and 17 women.

A policy of execution and murder under false pretexts prevailed at checkpoints; Israel killed more than 180 Palestinians during the two years of the *Intifadah*. At times, it refused to hand over the bodies of the dead to their families, and sometimes it stalled before handing them over. At the time of writing, Israel retains the bodies of 15 Palestinians in mortuary fridges. It buried four Palestinians in cemeteries using numbers not names, in flagrant violation of international laws and treaties. As part of its collective punishment policy, 41 houses belonging to the families of those killed or imprisoned were demolished or bombed.⁸

However, the two-year old Jerusalem *Intifadah* maintained its momentum and diversity of operations; the number of attacks against the Israeli forces reached

⁸ The page of Abdullah Al-Hourani Centre for Studies and Documentation/ PLO, site of Facebook, 6/10/2017 and 3/1/2018,
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=834717933356502&id=720444011450562
https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=881855495309412&id=720444011450562

3,719 in WB including East Jerusalem, GS, and inside the 1948 Palestinian occupied territories. They led to the deaths of 57 Israelis and the injuring of 416 others, according to Shabak. It should be noted that most of the attacks recorded during this period in WB consisted of stone and Molotov cocktail throwing.⁹

a. Lions' Gate Uprising

On 14/7/2017, three 1948 Palestinians from the city of Umm al-Fahm carried out an operation at Lion's Gate that resulted in the killing of two Israeli soldiers stationed at the gate, as well as the deaths of the perpetrators. Minister of Public Security Gilad Erdan said that the operation was "dangerous" enough to warrant re-examination of security arrangements within the *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its surroundings.¹⁰ Israel considered that the moment has come to wrest the full powers of the Mosque's administration from the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places. Consequently, they installed electronic gates at the doors of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, along with surveillance cameras. They also seized the keys to the rooms and offices that were used by the Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf, and tightened restrictions on the roads leading to *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Thousands of Palestinians were forced to perform Friday prayer in the streets near the walls of the Old City, mainly in Salah al-Din street, at the Damascus Gate, the Lions' Gate, and in Wadi al-Joz.

In return, Palestinians refused to enter the mosque under these conditions; they gathered and garrisoned themselves at its doors and waited for the Israeli measures to be lifted. Following a meeting with the Islamic Fatwa Council of Jerusalem, Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine, Sheikh Muhammad Hussein declared that "it has been unanimously decided that entry into the al-Aqsa through the electronic gates is forbidden [religiously speaking]," and that whoever enters through them, "will have his prayer invalidated."¹¹ Choosing this form of protest reflected the public's realization of the true balance of power, and it left the Israelis alone in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, with the need to get out of an awkward situation. It formed the basis for the expansion of internal confrontations and external interaction.

⁹ For more see Shabak Monthly Reports.

¹⁰ For more see site of The Palestinian Information Center (PIC), Palestinian Press Agency (Safa), and Quds Press International News Agency, London, 14/7/2017 (in Arabic); and *al-Ayyam* newspaper, Ramallah, 15/7/2017.

¹¹ For more see *al-Ayyam*, 16/7/2017; Aljazeera.net, 17/7/2017 (in Arabic); and *al-Hayat* newspaper, London, 18/7/2017.



During the first days of the uprising, the Israeli authorities tried to escalate their measures by setting up crowd control barriers in front of the gates. The first Friday was, as expected, a day of public anger, and the Israeli army avoided causing fatal injuries among Palestinians, fearing the outbreak of a vicious cycle of retribution. However, two settlement security guards in Jerusalem did not follow instructions and shot at the necks of three demonstrators, killing them. As the Israeli forces went after the bodies of those killed to confiscate them, their fellow demonstrators jumped over the walls and gates in order to bury them. Despite this intense scene, a solo attack was carried out by the now prisoner ‘Umar al-‘Abd from Kobar village, north of Ramallah. He planned and executed his own incursion into the Halamish Settlement, entering one of its houses and stabbing three members of the Salomon family, killing three of them.

On the same Friday, mass demonstrations had taken place in various Jordanian governorates, and by Sunday evening, 23/7/2017, news spread of an individual attack at the Israeli embassy in Amman. A Jordanian boy named Muhammad Jawawdeh tried to stab an Israeli officer from the Israeli embassy. He was slightly injured, but in response he killed Jawawdeh. The incident put the Jordanian authorities in grave embarrassment, and all Jordanian politicians opted for absolute silence, and the authorities absolved themselves of responsibility for dealing with the murderer,, permitting the embassy staff to leave the following evening.

When they arrived in Israel, Netanyahu was not interested in making a deal to break the impasse or to save the Jordanian State’s face—the State which Israel enjoys a warm relationship with. Rather, he focused his efforts on appearing victorious amid the tension. His office staff leaked his call with the officer who killed Jawawdeh, before receiving him and the rest of the embassy staff the next day.

On the Tuesday night (24–25/7/2017), the Israeli forces dismantled the electronic gates at the doors of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, installing overhead horizontal metal bridges, with surveillance cameras affixed to them.

However, the crowds did not accept those measures and consolidated their demands through an intensive campaign on social media. They demanded a full return to the pre-14 July status quo, and the crowds in the streets shouted out “No Compromise” and asserted that the uprising would continue until it achieved its objectives. The Israeli cabinet met with army and Shabak leaders, reiterating its

recommendation, submitted also the week before, that all measures must be undone, requesting this time to hear the opinion of the army leadership, who supported the recommendation. The two sides agreed on the need to perform a clean withdrawal that would leave no trace and would stop the public uprising. This decision came after the PA had announced the suspension of security coordination the day before the meeting; and it was also announced that mosques would be closed in WB, and the public was called for a mass Friday prayer around *al-Aqsa* Mosque. This meant that the situation was likely to explode and be beyond Israel's control. Therefore, the withdrawal had to be made on Thursday.

On 27/7/2017, Israeli forces removed the metal barriers and bridges at the Lions' Gate near the *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and kept the Gate of Remission closed. However, the crowds gathered, insisting on entering through this gate first and the Israeli police had to accede. The victorious Jerusalemites entered the mosque chanting "*Takbirat al-Eid*" [traditional chants made during Eid].

The religious authorities in Jerusalem gave worshippers the green light to enter *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The Administration of Jerusalem's Awqaf and al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs stated that the permission was issued after the Israeli authorities had lifted all the measures at the gates. On 30/7/2017, the Israeli authorities reopened al-Mat-hara Gate. With the opening of the Ablution Gate, all the gates of *al-Aqsa* Mosque returned to their pre-14/7/2017 status.

b. Repercussions and Indications

The Israeli withdrawal during the Lions' Gate Uprising was attained by the willpower of the Palestinian people, and despite the absence of support from Arab states.

A report released by the PLO's Abdullah Al-Hourani Centre for Studies and Documentation revealed that 20 Palestinians were killed in July 2017, and of those 15 were killed as a result of events at *al-Aqsa* Mosque, in addition, more than 1,400 Palestinians were injured. Israeli authorities also arrested more than 600 Palestinians in WB, including Jerusalem, and GS. However, most of the injuries and arrests took place in Jerusalem.¹²

¹² The page of Abdullah Al-Hourani Centre for Studies and Documentation, Facebook, 6/8/2017, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=806652466163049&id=720444011450562

The Shabak recorded 222 attacks in July 2017 compared to 94 in June 2017 in WB, including East Jerusalem, GS, and the 1948 Occupied Territories. The attacks resulted in the deaths of five Israelis, and the injuring of seven others.¹³

2. The Killed and Wounded

A total of 134 Palestinians were killed by Israelis in 2016 (see table 2/4), including 35 children,¹⁴ while a total of 94 Palestinians were killed in 2017, including 16 children, by Israeli forces and settlers in both GS and WB, including Jerusalem.¹⁵ 3,230 Palestinians were injured in 2016, including 1,040 children,¹⁶ while 8,300 Palestinians were injured in 2017. The rise in the number of wounded in 2017 was due to the increased demonstrations and clashes in the field, especially during the Lions' Gate Uprising in the summer of 2017 and following Trump's decision on 6/12/2017 to transfer the US Embassy to Jerusalem. December recorded the highest number of wounded, about 5,400 people, followed by July, when about 1,400 people were injured.¹⁷

The Shabak recorded the killing of 17 Israelis in 2016, and 18 in 2017, because of Palestinian attacks. 170 Israelis were injured in 2016, compared to 66 up to the end of November 2017 (see table 2/4).¹⁸

Tunnels, dug mostly by the Palestinian resistance factions in GS—particularly Ezzedeen Al Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas—played an important role during the Israeli war on GS. The factions made efforts to expand these tunnels and increase their numbers, taking advantage of the ceasefire. 26 resistance fighters were killed in GS in 2016 during training and the digging of tunnels; the same number of fighters was killed in the following year.¹⁹

¹³ For more see the Shabak Monthly Summary – July 2017, <https://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionDocuments/Monthly%20Summary%20EN/Monthly%20Summary/Monthly%20Summary%20%E2%80%93%20July%202017.pdf>

¹⁴ For more see the page of Abdullah Al-Hourani Centre for Studies and Documentation/ PLO, Facebook, 1/1/2017, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1896849493878298&id=1455770057986246&substory_index=; and site of Defense for Children International–Palestine, 31/12/2016, <http://bit.ly/2hVGvqc>

Note: A statistics report by Hamas stated that in 2016, 117 Palestinians were killed, while the monthly reports by Wafa stated that 122 were killed in 2016.

¹⁵ Page of Abdullah Al-Hourani Centre for Studies and Documentation/ PLO, Facebook, 3/1/2018.

¹⁶ Page of Abdullah Al-Hourani Centre for Studies and Documentation/ PLO, Facebook, 1/1/2017.

¹⁷ Page of Abdullah Al-Hourani Centre for Studies and Documentation/ PLO, Facebook, 3/1/2018.

¹⁸ For more see Shabak Monthly Reports.

¹⁹ Quds Press, 3/11/2017; and Palestine News and Information Agency (Wafa), 12/12/2017.

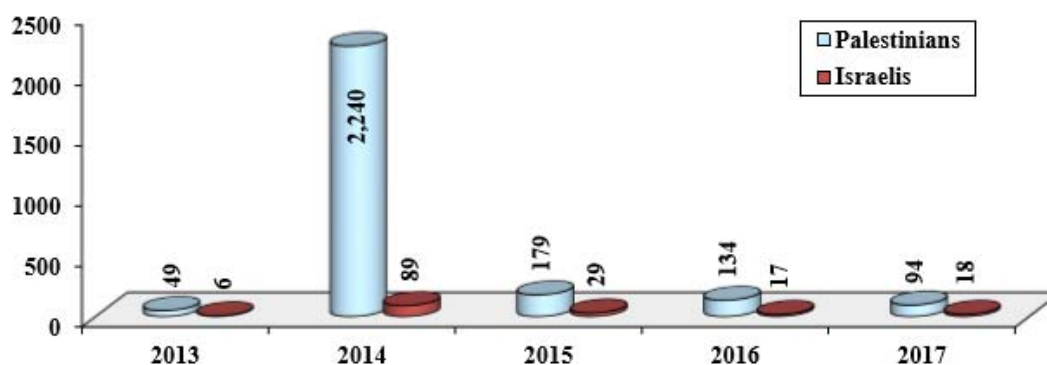
As a result, Israel made serious efforts in 2016–2017 to limit the effectiveness of these tunnels. Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman approved a budget allocating 3.34 billion shekels (about \$867.5 million) for the construction of a barrier on the GS border. The project is one of the biggest and most expensive Israel has undertaken and is meant to be combined with several other measures along the 64 kilometer border. The Gaza Division has already begun preparing for construction, which is expected to be completed within two years and bring large amounts of equipment and workers to the area. A “smart” fence—similar to the fence on the border with Egypt—with concrete walls extending underground, will also be able to detect tunnels and will be equipped with offensive and defensive capabilities.²⁰ Israel also formed a new brigade to respond to the tunnel threats to the settlements adjacent to GS.²¹

Table 2/4: The Killed and Wounded Among Palestinians and Israelis in WB and GS 2013–2017²²

Year	Killed		Wounded	
	Palestinians	Israelis	Palestinians	Israelis
2013	49	6	171	44
2014	2,240	89	11,449	375
2015	179	29	1,618	249
2016	134	17	3,230	170
2017	94	18	8,300	66*

* Israeli wounded until the end of November 2017.

Palestinians and Israelis Killed in WB and GS 2013–2017

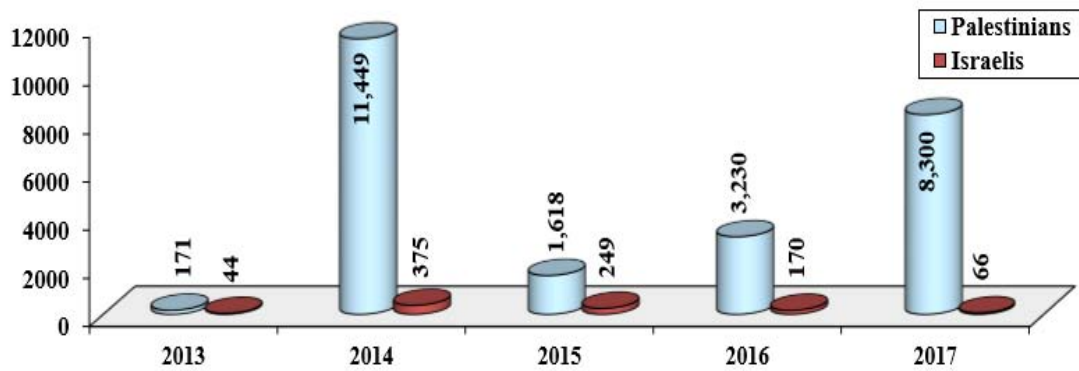


²⁰ Ynetnews, 9/1/2017, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4905032,00.html> (in English)

²¹ PIC, 3/3/2017. (in Arabic)

²² For the killed and wounded among Palestinians and Israelis during 2013–2015, see Mohsen Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014–2015* (Beirut: al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2016), p. 117. As for the number of Israelis killed and wounded, see Shabak Monthly Reports, whereas for the number of Palestinians killed and wounded, see Page of Abdullah Al-Hourani Centre for Studies and Documentation/ PLO, Facebook, 1/1/2017 and 3/1/2018.

Palestinians and Israelis Wounded in WB and GS 2013–2017



3. Prisoners and Detainees

In 2016 and 2017 the suffering of Palestinian prisoners continued. By the end of 2016, the number of prisoners in Israeli prisons reached approximately 6,500, of whom 53 were women, 300 children, and four PLC members. There were 6,080 prisoners from WB, of whom 510 were from East Jerusalem, 350 from GS and 70 from the 1948 territories, in addition to dozens of Arab detainees of different nationalities. 536 of the prisoners were classified as administrative detainees (see table 3/4).

At the end of 2017, there were 6,119 in Israeli prisons, including 59 women and 330 children, as well as 11 PLC members. There were 5,729 from WB—of which 550 were from East Jerusalem—320 from GS and 70 from the 1948 territories, in addition to dozens of Arab detainees of different nationalities. 450 of the prisoners were classified as either administrative detainees or detainees pending trial, or what Israel calls “unlawful combatants” (see table 3/4).

Palestinian Prisoners Centre for Studies monitored the arrest of 6,170 Palestinians by Israel in 2016, including 1,250 children and 208 women and girls. However, the frequency of those arrests fluctuated throughout 2016, averaging 510 arrests per month, 17 cases a day. Thus, the number of arrests in 2016 was lower than the number of arrests in 2017, which amounted to 6,500, including 1,600 children, and 170 women and girls.²³

²³ See site of Palestinian Prisoners Center for Studies, 1/1/2017 and 31/12/2017, <http://www.asrapal.net/index.php?action=detail&id=8910>
<http://www.asrapal.net/index.php?action=detail&id=9757>

The arrests in 2016 and 2017, as in previous years, affected all segments and groups of Palestinian society, without exception, including children, women, academics, former prisoners, patients, the elderly, human rights activists, journalists, and MPs. They were carried out in ways that included storming into homes or hospitals, abduction from the street and the workplace, the kidnapping of the sick and injured, or via the “Arabized undercover security units,” or at the crossings and checkpoints, not to mention that dozens of fishermen were arrested at sea in the GS.

The highest number of arrests during 2016 took place in Jerusalem, with 2,000 cases, while Hebron witnessed 1,500 cases, Ramallah 900, and Nablus 700, whereas 223 cases were from GS. Of those detained, 1,230 were children, 208 women, 1,220 former prisoners, and 190 sick. Furthermore, five PLC members were detained, three of whom were released after being placed in administrative detention for several months. The same year witnessed 135 arrests, summonses, and detentions that would last for several hours, or administrative orders were issued to Palestinian journalists.

The highest number of arrests during 2017 took place in Jerusalem, with 2,100 cases, while Hebron witnessed 1,400 cases, and GS 18. Of those detained, 1,600 were children, 170 women, 1,400 former prisoners, and 185 sick. Furthermore, 13 PLC members were detained, four of whom were released after being placed in administrative detention for several months.²⁴

In 2016, the rate of administrative orders increased, reaching 1,658, the majority of which were extensions of detention. These figures were 30% higher than in 2015, during which 1,261 administrative orders were issued, whereas in 2017, 1,086 were issued. Israeli courts issued 11 and 16 life sentences in 2016 and 2017 respectively. The Israeli Prison Service carried out 156 and 145 prison raids in 2016 and 2017 respectively. The number of Palestinian prisoners who died rose to 212 with the deaths of two in 2016 and three in 2017.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Table 3/4: Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Prisons 2013–2017²⁶

Year	Total no. of detainees	WB*	GS	Serving life sentences	Women	Children
2013	5,023	4,408	389	476	17	154
2014	6,200	5,729	371	481	23	152
2015	6,900	6,482	328	502	55	450
2016	6,500	6,080	350	459	53	300
2017	6,119	5,729	320	525	59	330

* Approximate numbers according to the Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association—Addameer.

Throughout 2016 and 2017, Israel issued several racist laws and decisions against prisoners, most notably the law on prisoner execution, which aims to impose the death penalty on Palestinian prisoners who participated in the killing of Israelis. As for the counter-terrorism act, it aimed to push for severe punishment of those who take part in resistance actions. Other laws included: the law granting the Israeli police and Shabak exemption from the documentation of security investigations; the law on punishing minors with effective imprisonment before reaching the age of 14; the law on denying prisoners from Jerusalem and the 1948 territories their financial dues; the decision to equip prisons with cutting-edge surveillance systems; the law authorizing Israeli civil courts to recognize the decisions of military courts in Israel; the bill denying prisoners education; and the bill on the confiscation of part of the PA's financial entitlements.²⁷

a. Administrative Detention

Although administrative detention is prohibited under international law and violates the most basic human rights, Israel continued to issue such orders in 2016 against various segments of Palestinian society, including PLC members, human rights activists, workers, students, lawyers and traders, etc. The number of

²⁶ See Addameer Monthly Detention Reports of January for the years 2013–2018, site of Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association—Addameer, <http://www.addameer.org/ar/statistics>

²⁷ For more Palestinian Prisoners Center for Studies, 1/1/2017; site of The Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies (Madar), 6/6/2017, <http://cutt.us/KKUe>; and site of Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs, 2/10/2017, <http://cda.gov.ps/index.php/ar/ar-enthakat/ar-israel-racist-laws/4770-2017-12-26-10-01-30>

administrative detainees held by Israel without specific charges or trial reached 450 at the end of 2017, including seven PLC members, whereas the number was 536 at the end of 2016, including four PLC members, 650 by the end of 2015, 450 by the end of 2014, and 155 by the end of 2013.²⁸

Israel dramatically increased administrative detention orders during the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, which began in October 2015, whether against new prisoners, or to extend already-in-place administrative detentions. Israeli courts issued 2,860 administrative detention orders over the period two years of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* (October 2015–October 2017), including 1,178 new orders, most of them against former prisoners. By the end of April 2016, the number of administrative detainees in Israeli prisons rose to approximately 750, for the highest figure since 2009. In the first year, 1,817 administrative detention orders were issued, while the second year witnessed 1,043 orders.²⁹

The orders included, for the first time in years, Palestinian women and girls, with 17 issued against them, with one, Sabah Fir'on from Jerusalem, detained since June 2016, receiving five extensions in a row. Among them was PLC member Khalida Jarrar. Israel issued 15 administrative orders against PLC members. Minors were also no exception, where, during the two years of *Intifadah*, 42 orders were issued against them, in addition to 55 administrative detention orders for posts on social media.³⁰

Table 4/4: Administrative Detainees 2013–2017³¹

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Administrative Detainees	155	450	650	536	450

²⁸ See the number of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, January 2013–2018, Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association—Addameer.

²⁹ *Al-Hayat*, 2/3/2016; and see the number of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, April 2016, Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association—Addameer, <http://www.addameer.org/ar/statistics/20160430> ; and Palestinian Prisoners Center for Studies, 2/10/2017, <http://www.asrapal.net/index.php?action=detail&id=9486>

³⁰ Palestinian Prisoners Center for Studies, 2/10/2017.

³¹ See the number of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, January 2013–2018, Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association—Addameer.



b. Prisoners' Hunger Strike

As a result of the Israeli Prison Service's policy towards prisoners, including medical negligence, physical violations, administrative detention, unfair trials, and the ban on prison visits, prisoners went on a number of individual and collective hunger strikes during 2016–2017. Prisoners' strikes were an important step towards alleviating unjust and arbitrary policies, prompting the Israeli authorities to pass a law allowing the force-feeding of hunger strikers. The Israeli authorities enforced the law for the first time on administrative detainee Muhammad al-Qiq on 12/1/2016 through inserting solutions into his body against his will, even though force-feeding strikers is prohibited under international law.³²

On 6/8/2016, 365 prisoners from Hamas announced that they had suspended their open-ended hunger strike, which had started two days earlier, following the agreement of the Israeli Prison Service on responding to most of their demands. Over the two days, Hamas' prisoners had successively announced they were going on hunger strike in protest against the large-scale repression they had been subjected to. More than 300 prisoners had been transferred to other prisons, many had been physically assaulted, in addition to putting the head of the Hamas Prisoners Senior Leadership Body, Muhammad 'Araman, in solitary confinement at the Hadarim Prison. The agreement included the suspension of the humiliating strip search, the return of some of the prisoners who had been transferred, and the fulfilment of a range of life requirements. On 26/9/2016, more than six thousand Palestinian prisoners went on an open-ended hunger strike to protest the death of Yasir Hamdunah due to deliberate medical negligence.³³

After a 41-day hunger strike, around 1,600 Palestinian prisoners suspended their strike on 27/5/2017 after reaching an agreement with the Israeli Prison Service, providing for the fulfilment of their humanitarian demands. The most notable prisoner demands which the strikers sought to achieve were: Ending administrative detention; ending solitary confinement; ending the ban on family visits; ending irregular visiting times; ending medical negligence, as well as other basic and legitimate demands. The head of the Commission of Detainees' & Ex-Detainees' Affairs, Issa Qaraq, said that 80% of the demands regarding the humanitarian and living conditions were met.³⁴

³² PIC, 12/1/2016, <http://bit.ly/22BMgJj> (in Arabic)

³³ For more see *Al-Khaleej* newspaper, al-Shariqa, 7/8/2016; and *Alghad* newspaper, Amman, 27/9/2016.

³⁴ Wafa, 27–28/5/2017, <http://bit.ly/2p6ojzG> and <http://bit.ly/2Doo8UF>

Starting with Sheikh Khodor Adnan's strike in 2012, more than 140 Palestinian prisoners were individually involved in the "battle of empty stomachs," after which they were able to gain their freedom and rights. The Prisoner Muhammed al-Qiq went on two open-ended hunger strikes in 2016 and 2017, and ended his first strike after 94 days on 26/2/2016, following an Israeli pledge to end his administrative detention on 21/5/2016 with a substantive, non-extendible decision, and on 19/5/2016, al-Qiq was released. As for his second strike, he started it on 6/2/2017 to protest his re-arrest on 15/1/2017 and conversion to administrative detention for three months without charge or trial, then he suspended it on 10/3/2017 after reaching an agreement with the Israeli authorities that provided for his release on 14/4/2017³⁵; although they deferred his release until 9/11/2017.

The leading PFLP prisoner, Bilal Kayed, started an open-ended hunger strike in protest against his conversion to administrative detention after completing his prison sentence. After 71 days, on 24/8/2016, he suspended his strike after reaching an agreement to set his administrative detention sentence until 1/12/2016, after which he would be released.³⁶ In turn, prisoners Muhammed and Mahmoud al-Balboul, as well as Malik al-Qadi, suspended their hunger strike on 21/9/2016—al-Balboul brothers' strike lasted for 82 days, while al-Qadi's lasted for 70—after reaching an agreement to determine their administrative detention sentence and ensure it would not be extended.³⁷

The head of the Islamic Movement inside the Green Line Sheikh Raed Salah declared an open-ended hunger strike on 13/11/2016 in protest against his transfer to the Nafha prison, located in the desert, which had isolated him. However, he declared the suspension of his strike on 17/11/2016 in response to a request by the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel, according to the chairman of the Committee on Freedoms of the Follow-Up Committee, Sheikh Kamal Khatib.³⁸ On 22/12/2016, detainees Anas Shadid and

³⁵ For more see *Al-Ayyam*, 27/2/2016; *Al-Hayat al-Jadida* newspaper, Ramallah, 19/5/2016; Aljazeera.net, 16/12/2016, <http://bit.ly/2Gm8agW> (in Arabic); Alray– Palestinian Media Agency, 10/3/2017, <http://bit.ly/2p3CKof>

³⁶ *Alquds* newspaper, Jerusalem, 24/8/2016.

³⁷ *Al-Ayyam*, 22/9/2016.

³⁸ Aljazeera.net, 13/11/2016, <http://bit.ly/2jFAwqF> (in Arabic); and Anadolu Agency, 17/11/2016, <http://bit.ly/2tGfuS5>



Ahmad Abu Farah declared the suspension of their 90-day open-ended hunger strike after getting an order providing for a one-time, four-month extension of their administrative detention.³⁹

4. Israeli GS Siege

Israel continued to impose a siege on GS for the 11th year in a row—the longest in modern history. It imposed further siege measures on the population, as well as persisting in imposing severe restrictions on commercial traffic through the crossings, in addition to its restrictions on the movement of individuals. Throughout 2016 and 2017, there was no structural change to the siege measures, as the facilitation of greater freedoms that Israel had claimed to be implementing did not affect the restrictions on the freedom of movement of individuals and goods.

Regarding the movement of individuals, Israel continued to impose severe restrictions on the movement of Gazans through the Erez Crossing, their only access to WB. These restrictions meant that about two million Palestinians were denied the right to free movement. The semi-permanent closure of the Rafah border crossing by the Egyptian authorities deprived Gazans of their right to free movement and travel to and from GS. During 2016 and 2017, the Rafah crossing was almost completely closed, according to the Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK, which said that the Egyptian authorities opened it for only 41 days in 2016 and 21 days in 2017—the crossing's worst operational record during the 11 years of siege. Furthermore, it was opened at specific hours, at intervals, and for humanitarian cases only. The number of citizens registered for travel, who urgently needed to use the Rafah crossing to travel, reached over 15 thousand people, including humanitarian cases, residency holders, and students.⁴⁰ Humanitarian aid convoys continued to be denied access to the besieged Strip, not to mention that Umrah pilgrims were not permitted to travel for the third consecutive year.

³⁹ *Al-Ayyam*, 23/12/2016.

⁴⁰ Site of Ministry of Interior and National Security – State of Palestine, 26/1/2017, <https://moi.gov.ps/Home/Post/111788>; and Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK, 19/1/2017, 10/7/2017 and 28/1/2018, <http://bit.ly/2HuaW3f>, <http://bit.ly/2IlcFJr> and <http://bit.ly/2Hw3tke>
Note: Some reports stated that the Egyptian authorities opened the Rafah crossing 29 days during 2017, out of which 8 days were for the departure and return of hajj pilgrims.

With respect to the movement of goods and merchandise, the Israeli authorities closed the Karm Abu Salem crossing, the only GS commercial crossing, for 132 days during 2016 (36.1% of the year), and for 123 days during 2017 (29.6 % of the year). This resulted in shortages of many basic goods and commodities needed by the residents, including most kinds of fuels, notably cooking gas, as well as all types of construction materials. Israeli authorities continued to ban the export of all GS products for the tenth consecutive year, with limited exception of some products, mostly agricultural commodities, which were allowed to be exported, mostly to WB, and few other amounts were exported to Israel and other countries of the world. The GS rate of exports reached about 6 trucks per day during 2016 and 2017, whereas before the siege, it used to reach 150 trucks per day. In return about 500 trucks per day were imported.⁴¹

Human rights organizations and economic reports have revealed that all aspects of life in GS and the humanitarian situation are deteriorating. The UN has warned that the GS has absolutely become “unfit for life.” The UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Aid and Development Activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Robert Piper, warned that “All the indicators are going in the wrong direction.” An economic report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) confirmed that the private sector in GS was suffering a decline caused by the blockade, restrictions on movement and a lack of access to natural resources and markets, as well as destructive wars. Roberto Valent, Special Representative of the Administrator of the UNDP, stated that the GS unemployment rate was one of the highest in the world, and that about 60% of Gaza youth are unemployed.⁴²

In addition, The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) approved a report accusing Israel of “systematic unlawful killing” in GS, stating that Israel was behind the deteriorating humanitarian situation in GS.⁴³ A report by the Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK stated that the Egyptian authorities

⁴¹ For more see Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), *Annual Report 2016*, http://pchr.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/PCHR-Annual_2016.pdf

⁴² *Asharq Alawsat*, 12/7/2017; and Gaza Economy - Nearing Total Collapse: A UNDP Report on Challenges to Economic Recovery and Long-Term Development in Gaza, site of UNDP in the Arab States, 12/7/2017, <http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2017/07/12/gaza-economy-nearing-total-collapse-a-undp-report-on-challenges-to-economic-recovery-and-long-term-development-in-gaza.html>

⁴³ Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, The humanitarian crisis in Gaza, RES 2142, 24/1/2017, <http://bit.ly/2Imca1B>; and Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, The humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Doc. 14224 Report, 4/1/2017, <http://bit.ly/2p3QVcX>



played a key role in intensifying the siege after mid-2007 by closing the Rafah Border Crossing. The report found that the continued arbitrary closure of the crossing opened the door to the black market to profit from the movement of people, through officers of the Egyptian intelligence and army, in coordination with Palestinian traffickers, and in secret, for amounts of up to five thousand US dollars.⁴⁴

The Head of the Popular Committee Against the Siege MP Jamal al-Khudari stated that the GS siege affects all aspects of life. He said that 80% of the Strip's population live below the poverty line, and that more than 5,000 factories and economic facilities had been partially or completely closed, with estimated direct and indirect losses of \$284 million. Al-Khudari added that the number of items on the lists of goods prohibited from entering the Strip amounted to 500 categories.⁴⁵

Al-Khudari added that 50% of the GS houses that were destroyed in the 2014 Israeli war were still in need of reconstruction, i.e., 5,500 housing units, but he explained that 4,000 of these lacked sufficient funding. Al-Khudari attributed the slow pace of the reconstruction process to several factors, most notably Israeli restrictions on the entry of construction materials, and the lack of funding necessary to rebuild the rest of the destroyed homes at a cost of about \$200 million, due to the fact that donors had not honoured their funding pledges made at the GS Reconstruction Conference in Cairo in 2014.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor warned of the unprecedented sharp deterioration in the humanitarian situation in GS, stating that poverty and extreme poverty rates had risen to more than 65%, while food insecurity exceeded 72% among households, and that 80% of the GS population depended on international aid. In June 2017, the total number of medicines becoming totally unavailable at the "Central Drugstore Gaza" reached 170 items, representing 33% of the total number of essential medicines, while 37 anti-cancer drugs out of 67 remained totally unavailable, which meant that about 70% of the medical care and services provided to cancer patients had become almost completely inaccessible.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK, 19/1/2017, <http://aohr.org.uk/index.php/ar/reports.html?limitstart=0>

⁴⁵ For more see *Alquds*, 26/2/2017; *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 19/5/2016; and Ma'an News Agency, 2/10/2017, <https://maannews.net/Content.aspx?id=924233>

⁴⁶ Site of Popular Committee Against Siege, 2/8/2017, <http://www.freegaza.ps/index.php?page=newsdetails&id=375>

⁴⁷ Site of Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 25/1/2017 and 27/6/2017, <http://bit.ly/2khODD5> and <http://bit.ly/2p43jtt>

Second: The Peace Process

The peace process did not see any significant developments during the reporting period, having been halted following the failure of the plan of former US Secretary of State John Kerry in 2014. His plan focused on key issues in the conflict, including borders, settlements, Palestinian refugees, and the status of Jerusalem. The plan also included land swaps, recognition of the “Jewishness of Israel,” as well as the establishment of an Israeli security zone in WB, along the Jordan River.⁴⁸ Such a plan did not meet the minimum the PLO and the PA had demanded.

Kerry’s plan failed due to Israeli intransigence, and Kerry admitted that in a recording that was made at a conference in Dubai and leaked by Israeli Channel 10. He blamed the Israeli government’s resistance to the establishment of a Palestinian state for harming the prospects of a peace deal, adding that, “If you don’t have leaders who want to make peace, if the equation doesn’t change, I’ll be amazed if within the next 10 years if we don’t see some young [Palestinian] leader come along who says we have tried non-violence for the last 30 years and look, it hasn’t gotten us anything.”⁴⁹ The Obama administration tried, during its last year in office, to work with the Israeli proposal, long promoted by Netanyahu, which suggested the scenario that Arab-Israeli negotiations replace the bilateral Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. He claimed that the Palestinians were unwilling and unable to pay the price of “peace,” and that the Arabs could offer what the Palestinians had failed to, or they could persuade the Palestinians or pressure them to acquiesce—with Arabic encouragement and under Arabic cover—to what they had refused or failed to do on their own.

Prime Minister Netanyahu was optimistic about his “best-ever ties” to Arab States, describing the relations as “unprecedented.”⁵⁰ Netanyahu’s strategy was to market Israel as a potential ally of the Gulf states in the face of Iran, joined together in rejecting the agreement on the Iranian nuclear program. This enabled him to normalize relations’ with the Arab states without having to make any

⁴⁸ *Al-Ayyam*, 1/2/2014.

⁴⁹ Site of The Times of Israel, 7/11/2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-recording-john-kerry-says-israeli-government-doesnt-want-peace/>

⁵⁰ The Times of Israel, 6/9/2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-hails-best-ever-ties-to-arab-world/>; *The Jerusalem Post*, 4/12/2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Breaking-News/Netanyahu-hails-unprecedented-changes-in-Arab-states-attitude-to-Israel-516945>; and Ynetnews, 28/12/2017, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5063320,00.html> (in English)



political commitments and isolate the Palestinians and make them yet more vulnerable. Thus, Netanyahu's vision, the reality of the conflict is distorted, for instead of being against the Israeli enemy, Arab leaders would turn to sectarian and ethnic conflicts, which are in the interest Israel.

Despite the fact that the US administration under Obama made several steps in an attempt to appease Israel, there was sometimes unannounced tension or dissatisfaction between the two sides, leading to some strain that ended up with the US administration refraining from using the veto on a draft resolution against illegal settlements. It opted for abstention, which allowed the passing of Resolution 2334 at the end of 2016.⁵¹ The US' abstention might be explained by the fact that it feared the elimination of the "two-state solution" in light of the Israeli government's settlement expansion at very high rates. The number of settlers reached more than 800 thousand, according to a study by the Applied Research Institute - Jerusalem (ARIJ),⁵² in addition to Israel's approval of plans to raise this number to one million within a short period of time. It could also mean the US wanted to safeguard its and Israel's interests, as this issue could have had serious implications for security and stability in the region and the world. Obama, during his first term, attempted to put pressure on the Israeli government, calling for a real settlement freeze, but he failed; rather, he backed down from his demand, after pro-Israel groups in the US voiced their opposition.

It is necessary to note that the above-mentioned dispute did not affect the US' commitment to Israel, nor the fundamental relations between them, as evidenced when Obama finalized a \$38 billion package of military aid over a period of 10 years.⁵³ This was in addition to Obama's adoption of Israel's statement that it is a "Jewish state." He also supported the view of Jerusalem as a unified and eternal capital of Israel.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Security Council, SC/12657, 23/12/2016, site of United Nations, Meeting Coverage and Press Releases, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sc12657.doc.htm>

⁵² Site of The Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ), <http://www.arij.org/latest-news/611-eu2014oct.html>

⁵³ *The New York Times* newspaper, 13/9/2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/14/world/middleeast/israel-benjamin-netanyahu-military-aid.html>

⁵⁴ President Obama at 2011 AIPAC Policy Conference, The Obama White House Channel, site of YouTube, 22/5/2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tib11YIsdk>

1. Post Kerry's Plan Initiatives

The period which followed the failure of Kerry's plan in 2014 saw several futile initiatives and proposals aimed at reviving the political process, which were exploited by Israel to implement its settlement expansion, with the purpose of creating a fait accompli on the ground. The initiatives and proposals included:

a. The Aqaba Four-Party Summit – February 2016

A US-Israeli-Jordanian-Egyptian meeting was held in the Jordanian city of Aqaba on 21/2/2016, during which Netanyahu presented his “five-point plan.” It was a series of steps aimed at building trust with the Palestinians, and in return, Netanyahu asked that negotiations with the Palestinians be resumed and that a regional peace summit be convened that would include attendance by senior representatives from KSA, UAE and other Sunni Muslim countries. He also asked that in exchange Washington recognize that Israel could build in the large Jewish settlement blocs in WB, whereas he gave only a vague approval of the Arab Peace Initiative.

Kerry introduced a regional peace initiative during the same meeting, which included recognition of Israel as a “Jewish state” and the resumption of negotiations with the Palestinians. However, Netanyahu rejected Kerry's proposal, even though it did not constitute a fundamental change in his Government's policy.⁵⁵ Despite the advantages enjoyed by the Israeli side because of the wealth of ideas proposed, and the absence of the Palestinian side from the summit, Netanyahu rendered the meeting a failure, along with all other efforts and initiatives. Efforts at the time focused on changing the ruling coalition in Israel, to empower the Zionist Camp, at the expense of Jewish Home (*HaBayit HaYehudi*); in this way, the Israeli Government would be flexible concerning resumption of negotiations. It must be noted that the absence of the Palestinian side was a negative, and also highly significant, as Israel and the US were discussing the Palestinian cause with two Arab parties, in the absence of its legitimate representative.

⁵⁵ *Haaretz* newspaper, 19/2/2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-kerry-offered-netanyahu-peace-plan-in-secret-2016-summit-with-al-sissi-abdullah-1.5437934>

b. Biden's Proposals – March 2016

Joe Biden, then US Vice President, put forward several proposals, during his visit to the region in March 2016, to the Palestinian President, which were more a matter of diplomatic “obligation” than serious initiatives. They included the approval of the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in return for the Palestinians’ recognition of Israel as a “Jewish state”, as well as giving up the right of refugees to return to their homes.

c. The French Initiative

In June 2016, France held a meeting of foreign ministers and representatives of 28 states, in addition to the European Union (EU) and the United Nations, as a manifestation of its previously proposed “peace initiative,” and its annoyance at the one-sided US role. The initiative was based on the two-state solution and included deadlines for negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, explanation of each stage of negotiations, with agreement on a deadline and duration for each stage, determination of the negotiating agenda, resolution of controversial issues, setting international standards to be committed to by both parties, and even reaching a final agreement on the details of the two-state solution. They also agreed that an international conference on a peaceful settlement would be held at the end of the year.⁵⁶

The “Paris Peace Conference” was held on 15/1/2017 and was boycotted by Israel. However, Israel was present through the US administration which defended Israel’s positions, and many of its reservations concerning the French initiative were taken into consideration. Hence, the initiative was to be amended, after initially including a French promise to recognize the Palestinian state, if the initiative failed. The promise was left out because Israel considered it an encouragement to the Palestinians to be inflexible, because they would gain a French recognition of their state in case the initiative failed. The French initiative hinted at holding another international conference, with multiple participants in the fostering of negotiations, similar to international diplomacy during negotiations with Iran through the P5+1 format; however, a new French president took office, and the conference was never held.

⁵⁶ Site of France Diplomatie, 2–3/6/2016, <http://bit.ly/2p3Wecs>

The French activity, at a time when the US administration was static, aimed to buy time and prevent the emergence of a vacuum that could be exploited by “extremist” parties, views, and states, according to Western standards.

d. The Russian Initiative

Moscow put forward a peaceful settlement initiative, expressing its readiness to become an “an honest broker,” and to host direct talks between the parties, reiterating, several times, its invitation to host a meeting between Netanyahu and Mahmud ‘Abbas; however, to date such a summit has not taken place, although it has been offered on several occasions.⁵⁷

Vladimir Putin addressed a letter to the Mauritania Summit in July 2016, explaining that Moscow considered the current situation in Palestine unacceptable. It called for conditions conducive to the relaunch of the negotiation process as soon as possible, with a view to establishing an independent, viable, and territorially contiguous Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace with its neighbours.⁵⁸

e. Al-Sisi’s Initiative

In May 2016, Egyptian President ‘Abdul Fattah al-Sisi put forward an initiative to turn the “cold peace” into a “warm peace,” and to resume Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. He proposed a similar initiative during his speech at the UN in September 2017.⁵⁹

President al-Sisi called on the Palestinians to unite, expressing his country’s willingness to act as a mediator between the Palestinian factions. He also called on the Israeli parties and forces to agree among each other to reach a solution to the crisis, resulting in a reality where only good things can happen for future generations, as well as creating hope and a better future for them, coupled with real stability and cooperation. Al-Sisi stressed that there was a real chance to

⁵⁷ Reuters News Agency, 1/2/2017 (in English); and site of Russia Today (RT), 18/12/2017, <https://www.rt.com/news/413566-russia-mediator-israel-palestine/> (in English)

See also: Russia Renews its Invitation to Host a Abbas-Netanyahu Meeting, Aljazeera.net, 13/1/2017, <http://bit.ly/2kOk7m2> (in Arabic); and The Russian Initiative for Peace Between the Palestinians and Israelis, Levant Research Institute, 27/1/2017, <http://bit.ly/2pncKGV> (in Arabic)

⁵⁸ Putin Addresses the Arab Summit in Nouakchott, site of Russia-now.com, 25/7/2016, <http://bit.ly/2kOxdjm> (in Arabic)

⁵⁹ Al-Sisi Calls the Israeli to Stand Behind Their Leadership, Aljazeera.net, 20/9/2017, <http://bit.ly/2ImJBks> (in Arabic)



achieve “peace” in the presence of several regional and international initiatives, most importantly the Arab Peace Initiative and the French “peace” initiative.⁶⁰

f. The Chinese Initiative – August 2017

Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward a four-point proposal on promoting a peaceful settlement. The initiative aimed to tangibly advance the political settlement on the basis of the “two-state solution,” with East Jerusalem as the capital of a new Palestinian state. The settlement would uphold a common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security concept, and would immediately end the construction of Israeli settlements, take immediate measures to prevent violence against civilians, and call for an early resumption of “peace” talks. In addition, it called for coordinating international efforts to develop measures to promote “peace” through development and cooperation between the Palestinians and Israel.⁶¹

2. Threats by the Palestinian Leadership in Light of the Deadlock

In light of the deadlock of the peace process, the Palestinian leadership threatened to adopt a new approach. In March 2015, the PCC adopted several resolutions, including:

The occupying Power (Israel) shall assume all its responsibilities towards the Palestinian people in the occupied State of Palestine, being an occupying Power, in accordance with international law; suspension of all forms of security coordination with the Israeli occupying Power; emphasizing that any new Security Council resolution must ensure a renewed commitment to the resolutions of international legitimacy relating to the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in a manner that will ensure the specification of a time frame for ending the occupation and enabling the State of Palestine to exercise its sovereignty over its territory occupied in 1967, including the capital Jerusalem; resolution of the refugee issue in accordance with Resolution 194; rejection of the concept of a Jewish state and that of a state with temporary borders, as well as refusal of any formulas that would maintain any Israeli military or settlement presence on any part

⁶⁰ Al-Sisi: A True Chance for Peace Between Palestine and Israel, Aljazeera.net, 17/5/2016, <http://bit.ly/2BWRgTP> (in Arabic)

⁶¹ Site of Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the State of Israel, 22/12/2017, http://il.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/thethird_palestinian/t1522624.htm; and The Times of Israel, 1/8/2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/china-pushes-four-point-israeli-palestinian-peace-plan/>

of the territory of the State of Palestine; and continuation of the campaign aimed at boycotting Israeli products as a form of popular resistance.⁶²

However, these decisions remained mere ink on paper.

The political, economic, and security commitments entailed by the Oslo Accords remained as they had been before the PCC's decisions, except for the suspension of security coordination, which continued for a short period of time⁶³ during the Lions' Gate uprising in Jerusalem in July 2017, due to the installation of electronic gates at the doors of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, as well as surveillance cameras. The crisis ended when these were removed for fear of further escalation of the uprising, which could turn into a new massive popular uprising. All the developments, events, and outcomes outlined above emphasize the importance of adopting a new approach different from that of the Oslo Accords, which focused on diplomacy and negotiations as the sole or main method and relies on the US as mediator. With such a method there remains no way of breaking the impasse of the Palestine issue.

3. The Trump Administration and “Deal of the Century”

During the Obama term, the Palestine issue was neglected, after a failed peace process in his first term, and the failure of his Secretary of State in his second term, despite Kerry making about 50 shuttle diplomacy trips to re-establish negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. However, the situation became worse following the success of Donald Trump, who, during the electoral period, expressed even more biased positions in favour of Israel than did his predecessors; pledging to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and to start a new chapter in US-Israeli relations. This is what indeed happened, as he made his decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and to transfer the US embassy to it on 6/12/2017,⁶⁴ after he had postponed this decision for six months, as former US presidents had.

⁶² Statement of the Central Council of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Aljazeera.net, 5/3/2015, <http://bit.ly/2BYeQjb> (in Arabic)

⁶³ Officials: Halt of Security Coordination Continues Under the Order President Abbas and Conditions on Its Resumption, Sama News Agency, 29/7/2017, <http://bit.ly/2zoE47q> (in Arabic)

⁶⁴ Statement by President Trump on Jerusalem, Foreign policy, Diplomatic Reception Room, The White House, 6/12/2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-trump-jerusalem/>



Trump faced many difficulties and internal crises in various internal and external issues, including the inability to keep most of his promises, the investigations into his administration regarding alleged Russian interference in the US presidential elections, and the pressure of pro-Israel groups, which include Christian Zionist evangelicals who played a key role in his ascent to the White House.

After taking office, Trump promised to achieve what his predecessors had not accomplished concerning the peace process. He pledged to reach a deal described at times as “the ultimate deal,” and at other times as “the deal that can’t be made,” and praising his son-in-law Jared Kushner, whom he appointed as Middle East peacemaker, by telling him, “If you can’t produce peace in the Middle East, nobody can.”⁶⁵

Even though the Palestinian president welcomed the US pledge, the successive and fast-moving US positions raised more and more fears that the deal either did not exist, and was merely an illusion, or it actually aimed to eliminate the Palestine issue in all its aspects, under Israeli conditions and impositions. Alternatively, it might be intended as a regional solution aimed at achieving Arab normalization of relations with Israel, especially for KSA and the rest of the Gulf States, as a prelude to a peace agreement. In other word, using the Arab Peace Initiative as a bridge to establishing a US-Arab-Israeli alliance against Iran.

During 2016–2017, there were indications of some “informal” communication between KSA and Israel. This was confirmed by the journalist Thomas L. Friedman at the Saban Forum, a few days before Trump’s decision to transfer the US Embassy to Jerusalem; he mentioned that the Energy Minister of Israel, Yuval Steinitz, had told him that they were in talks with Saudi Arabia. Friedman said, “For any Israel minister to talk publicly about Israel’s relations with Saudi Arabia is just bloody stupid,” adding, “if Israelis have any interest in seeing his reforms [Muhammad bin Salman’s] succeed, how about shutting up? You’re not doing him any favor to get a headline out on that.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ *The Jerusalem Post*, 12/11/2016, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Trump-Israeli-Palestinian-peace-would-be-ultimate-deal-472404>; and *The Times of Israel*, 20/1/2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-to-kushner-if-you-cant-make-mideast-peace-no-one-can/>

⁶⁶ The Brookings Institution Center For Middle East Policy, SABAN Forum 2017: “America First” and the Middle East, Washington, 3/12/2017, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/fp_20171205_future_saudi_arabia.pdf

However, it is too early to talk about Gulf-Israeli public relations, as they still face many internal obstacles, both within the ruling political system itself, and within the wider popular system. US and Israeli policies have gone too far in their intransigence and violation of the basic rights of the Palestinian people, complicating the process of building political relations and normalization with some Arab states that are eager to confront the Iranian influence, or confront “political Islam” movements.

During a press conference with Netanyahu, President Trump expressed his willingness to give up the “two-state solution,” and accept what “both parties like.”⁶⁷ This left the determination of the whole issue to Israel, which does not want a Palestinian state to be established. It should be noted that the “two-state solution,” based on the peace process terms, considering the existing balance of power, did not really exist at any stage. The trend in Israeli politics, left, right and centre, is to not agree to the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. When Netanyahu accepted the establishment of the state in his speech at the Bar-Ilan University in 2009, and on many other occasions, it was a cover for what his government was doing on the ground, which destroys any possibility of the establishment a Palestinian state worthy of the name. Despite his call for direct, unconditional negotiations, he is the one who insists on imposing conditions, such as demanding the recognition of Israel as a “Jewish state,” even as a prerequisite for the resumption of negotiations. He insists that any final solution must ensure full Israeli control over the airspace, territorial waters, and borders from the river to the sea, as well as keeping Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel, refusing to solve the refugee issue, and subjecting everything to what Israel deems part of its security.

Trump’s administration also dropped the recognition of settlement activities as unlawful, to the extent that it did not criticise Israeli decisions to construct thousands of Israeli housing units. However, the Americans stressed, in their meetings with the Palestinian leadership, the need to combat “terrorism,” enhance security cooperation, and also demanded that Palestinian leaders speak out against incitement of violence voiced by some of their constituents and media

⁶⁷ Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel in Joint Press Conference, Foreign policy, East Room, The White House, 15/2/2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-prime-minister-netanyahu-israel-joint-press-conference/>

outlets. Trump urged ‘Abbas “to end the payments to families of Palestinians imprisoned in Israeli jails.”⁶⁸

The Trump administration has questioned the Palestinian position concerning the non-recognition of Israel as a “Jewish state,” the adherence to the right of return and to East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital; whereas, it supported Israeli conditions concerning the achievement of the Palestinian reconciliation. And even when the US administration backed Egyptian efforts at Palestinian reconciliation, it “reiterated the importance of any Palestinian government adhering to the Quartet principles, unambiguously and explicitly committing to nonviolence, recognizing the State of Israel, accepting previous agreements and obligations between the parties—including to disarm terrorists—and committing to peaceful negotiations,” with no expectation that the disarmament will happen by tomorrow!⁶⁹

As for the “deal of the century,” the term had been circulated in 2006, through what was known as “[Ehud] Olmert’s offer” or “Olmert-Abbas understandings,” during which time they were leaked and branded as “shelf agreements” awaiting the Israeli elections and their results.

One of the most important reports in this regard was a study prepared by former Israeli National Security Advisor Giora Eiland in 2010.⁷⁰ He proposed that Egypt transfers a territory of 720 km² to GS, where this territory is a rectangle built from a ridge of 24 km along the Mediterranean coast from Rafah westward toward al-Arish and a ridge from Karm Abu Salem crossing southward along the Israel-Egyptian border. In return, Egypt would receive from Israel a territory in the southwestern Negev (the Paran region). In addition, Egypt and Jordan would receive economic benefits and incentives. As for WB, 12% of it will be annexed to Israel, an area equal in size to the 720 km² mentioned above.

⁶⁸ Site of USA Today, 3/5/2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/05/03/donald-j-trump-mahmoud-abbas-palestinian-authority-israel/101237076>; The Times of Israel, 1/6/2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-acknowledges-trump-yelled-at-him-over-incitement/>; and The Times of Israel, 4/5/2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/white-house-trump-told-abbas-to-resolve-issue-of-pa-terrorist-cash-payments/>

⁶⁹ *Haaretz*, 22/10/2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-1.818435>

⁷⁰ Giora Eiland, Regional Alternatives to the Two-State Solution, The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, January 2010, <https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=http://besacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/alternatives.pdf&hl=en>

After Trump was elected president, the pre-Oslo atmosphere returned to reproduce or evoke the scenario Israel had hoped for through resettlement projects since the 1950s, including a project to resettle Palestinians in the Sinai. A four-party summit was held in Jordan's Aqaba on 21/2/2016 between Benjamin Netanyahu, John Kerry, 'Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, and Abdullah II, discussing new ideas for a final solution based on the "Jewishness of the state" and land swaps.⁷¹ After about a year, on 14/2/2017, a member of the Likud Party, Ayoob Kara, announced that "Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump will discuss a plan to establish a Palestinian state in Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula and not in the West Bank," a proposal reportedly put forward by al-Sisi.⁷² On 20/9/2017, *The Washington Times* newspaper quoted Mahmud 'Abbas as saying that the next "peace" on which the US is working will be the "deal of the century," and that the Trump administration's negotiators, including White House Senior Adviser Jared Kushner and Special Envoy Jason Greenblatt, had met the Palestinians more than 20 times in eight months.⁷³

On 29/10/2017, *Politico* newspaper revealed an unannounced visit by Kushner to KSA, accompanied by Deputy National Security Advisor Dina Powell, and Middle East Envoy Jason Greenblatt; the third visit by Kushner in 2017. Greenblatt left KSA to Amman and Cairo, then to Ramallah, and next to Jerusalem, in an effort described by the Trump administration as a "strategy is to try to draw in neighbouring Arab leaders to play a role in Middle East peace." Furthermore, the US administration officially announced that "The Senior Advisor to the President, the Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategy, and the Special Representative for International Negotiations recently returned from Saudi Arabia," adding that "The Senior Advisor has also been in frequent contact with officials from Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Saudi Arabia."⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Haaretz*, 19/2/2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-kerry-offered-netanyahu-peace-plan-in-secret-2016-summit-with-al-sissi-abdullah-1.5437934>

⁷² *The Times of Israel*, 14/2/2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/minister-claims-netanyahu-trump-will-push-for-palestinian-state-in-sinai/>

⁷³ *The Washington Times* newspaper, 20/9/2017, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/sep/20/trump-giving-heart-and-soul-middle-east-peace-deal/>

⁷⁴ *Politico* newspaper, 29/10/2017, <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/10/29/jared-kushner-saudi-arabia-244291>

There remains lots of speculation about the nature of the new US plan, but any of its details or terms are still unconfirmed. Reportedly, the “deal of the century” includes:⁷⁵

Stage One: Being launched under US auspices in order to bring a guarantor and regain trust to the peace process. There would be a full commitment to the principle of the two-state solution and recognition of Israel’s border wall as a first step. Borders and the land-swap project are to be reviewed according to Ehud Barak’s plan (1.9%), Olmert’s plan (6.5%), or a new map that could reach 12%. In return, there would be an Israeli commitment to stop settlement building outside the “settlement blocs,” and an international and Arab commitment to support the Palestinian economy with a review of the Paris Economic Protocol. The PA commits to preventing violence and incitement, continues security coordination under the supervision of a third party (the US), and allows the Israeli army to operate in WB.

The PA would seek to unite the Palestinians; the process of Gaza reconstruction would continue, with the construction of a port (possibly floating) with security guarantees; and measures would be taken to disarm GS and destroy the tunnels.

If the PA meets these conditions, it may be allowed to declare a state within provisional borders, while extending control over new areas in WB. Israel would allow vital projects in WB, for example an airport, to pave the way for direct negotiations with a 10-year deadline, leading to a final “peace.”

During this period (the first stage), the states of the region are supposed to declare that they are part of this project, and initiate Middle Eastern cooperation in various vital fields, particularly security within a unified framework. These are necessary steps that the US sees as a prelude to the “deal of the century.”

Stage Two: Land swaps: the Palestinians would give up an agreed WB area (settlement blocs) and part of the Jordan Valley in exchange for land in the Sinai, along the Gaza-Sinai border; Egypt gains from Israel an equivalent area of the Paran region, south of the Negev desert.

⁷⁵ Aljazeera.net, 14/6/2017. (in Arabic)

Despite the frequent talk about this deal, to date it has not been officially presented, with the US administration postponing its unveiling several times, because it has found that the two sides are not ready, and that it is skeptical of the chances of success. In a leaked conversation with Congressional interns, Kushner said, “So, what do we offer that’s unique? I don’t know.” “And we’re trying to work with the parties very quietly to see if there’s a solution, and there may be no solution.”⁷⁶

What was published about the deal in the media—mostly US and Israeli—showed that, if predictions were to prove accurate, it is not a settlement between two opponents, but an attempt to eliminate the Palestine issue by imposing the conditions and dictates of one side on the other. In all that was been published about the mooted deal, there was nothing about a sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital on the 1967 borders. Formulas range between a new form of a “sovereign” state, as Netanyahu said in a closed session held at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) in London⁷⁷ on the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. It might be a confederation with Jordan, or a “state” in GS that includes the non-contiguous islands in WB and excludes Jerusalem, with Abu Dis as a potential Palestinian capital, and the annexation of the populated neighbourhoods in Jerusalem, excluding the Old City. These peace settlements do not include the right of return for refugees, nor even a compromise solution to the refugee issue. In addition, Israel will annex or control most of WB, illegal settlement expansion will not stop, and illegal settlements will not be removed, even the outposts.

President Trump’s decision on Jerusalem is either proof he has ended his pursuit of the “deal of the century,” instead replacing it with a policy of forceful solution and of creation of facts on the ground; or the deal did not exist at all and was used to trick the Arabs into thinking that the solution was on the way, so as to reward Trump generously, which they did; or to proceed with normalization with Israel and establish a tripartite alliance against Iran.

⁷⁶ Site of Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 1/8/2017, <https://www.jta.org/2017/08/01/news-opinion/united-states/jared-kushner-on-israeli-palestinian-peace-there-may-be-no-solution>

⁷⁷ In Conversation with Benjamin Netanyahu, site of Chatham House, 3/11/2017, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/file/conversation-benjamin-netanyahu>

Possible Scenarios After the US Decision

With the peace process entering 2018, there seems to be three possible paths:

First Scenario: Expansion of Reaction

The Palestinian, Arab, and international reaction could develop to introduce a new political initiative, which not only talks about replacing the US as a guarantor or about preventing total US control of the “political process,” but also demands a new political process, different from the one seen since the Oslo Accords. For the latter has practically fallen apart since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the subsequent right-wing resurgence led by Netanyahu, which took over the government in 1996. Such an approach would focus on transferring the Palestine issue, in all its aspects, to the UN, so that it becomes the guarantor, and by holding a continuous and full-fledged international conference, whose reference would be international law and UN resolutions; thus, negotiations would be about their implementation rather than themselves.

This scenario is not likely—but it is on the table—because it needs a fundamental change in the local, Arab, regional, and international conditions, as well as Palestinian vision, conviction, will, and a plan that shows readiness to pay the price that will arise from an insistence on adopting a new approach.

Second Scenario: Decline in Reaction

The reaction to the US decision could decline, following US amends, and Arab, European, and international efforts, claiming that the US administration will later do better than it has done up to now, especially regarding recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. After a while, there would be a return to the same political process, despite Trump administering the coup de grâce to it.

Third Scenario: Time-Wasting

A phase of time-wasting could come, awaiting changes, and looking for new guarantor(s), without adopting a new approach, that is, a complete return to the old approach.

The guarantor(s) of any political process need the approval of both parties, and the availability of certain conditions to enable them to have influence. The imbalance in the adopted political process is not limited to the bias of the US guarantor and its recent position of full alignment with the occupation; it is due

to the imbalance of power, and the fact that the process is completely flawed. It is without a clear and binding reference, without an effective international framework, a timetable, nor a binding implementation mechanism, turning it into open-ended negotiations going on forever; negotiations for the sake of negotiations. It is exploited by Israel to impose a *fait accompli*, which gradually makes the Israeli solution appear possible and feasible.

Conclusion

Even though Israel has persisted in its arbitrary and oppressive practices against the Palestinian people, and despite the enormous difference in armaments and capabilities, the latter have continued to hold on to their land and continued to resist using their limited capabilities. They have even succeeded in forcing the Israelis to undo the measures taken at the entrances of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

For the foreseeable future, Israel is expected to continue its aggression against the Palestinian people, and its attempts to subjugate them, within a fragmented Arab environment, and within an international environment that provides cover for it, or that is unable to do something real in support of the Palestinian people.

However, the internal Palestinian environment, which is full of anger against Israel and its practices, and with the failure of the peace process, is headed towards an escalation of resistance and uprising. In addition, the strategic environment surrounding Palestine, despite its current weakness, is unpredictable and in the medium term, it could transform into a supportive environment for the resistance movement. This means that Israel do not have the stable environment they desire; and that what it deems breakthroughs and victories may contain the seeds of future strategic losses to it.

The peace process in accordance with the Oslo Accords has collapsed or at least is in the process of collapsing, and the “two-state solution” is no longer possible in accordance with these accords. Israel, with US support, has rendered them devoid of their content.

Therefore, Palestinians must quickly review this experience, rebuild their internal structure, and re-discover and invest in their strengths, in order to restore their vitality and impose their agenda on the course of events.

التقرير الإستراتيجي الفلسطيني

2017-2016

الفصل الرابع

مسارات العدوان والمقاومة

والتسوية السلمية

2017-2016

