



Policy Paper

Resistance in the West Bank

Tracks and Prospects



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Resistance in the West Bank: Tracks and Prospects

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Summary

This paper studies the resistance in the West Bank (WB), by scrutinizing the current wave of resistance, then by putting it within the context of the series of resistance waves and uprisings since 2014. It evaluates the current wave, studies the four central factors of reinforcing the resistance, and the four ones that would hinder it, and it also studies its prospects. It analyzes three possible scenarios, where the most likely one is that other waves of resistance will come, taking various forms, consistent with the previous ones in the last eight years. However, they would not turn into a broad uprising given the absence of the most important condition, which is the position of the Palestinian Authority (PA). The paper excludes the scenario of a complete resistance cessation, summarizes the expected policies of the most important actors: the Israeli government, PA and the Palestinian resistance, and provides recommendations.



First: The Current Wave of Resistance

This paper argues that the current wave of resistance in WB is a part of a chain, since 2014. However, this wave can be seen as part of the May 2021 event, and the Sword of Jerusalem Battle (dubbed by Israel Operation Guardian of the Walls). While acts of resistance in WB and the 1948 occupied territories, including Jerusalem, reached a peak of 592 in May 2021,² 141 acts of resistance were recorded in July 2021, 104 in April 2021 and 241 in September 2021, including five stabbing attacks, a vehicular attack and nine small-arms attacks, wounding



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² These figures are based on the monthly statistics issued by the Israeli Internal Security Agency (Shabak), and they do not include stone-throwing attacks, unless they cause casualties among Israeli soldiers or settlers. Statistics include throwing grenades, stabbing, vehicular attack, arson, small-arms fire, pipe bombs, and firebomb, which makes the numbers related to specific actions regardless of their results. However, if stone-throwing incidents are added to them, the numbers will multiply greatly.



six Israelis. Operations continued to fluctuate within the limits of 140 operations. In October 2021, an Israeli policeman was injured in a vehicular attack, and in November 2021 an Israeli was killed and eight others were wounded in shooting, stabbing and firebomb attacks. In December 2021, an Israeli was killed and six others were wounded in shooting and stabbing attacks. Resistance increased in February 2022 reaching 187 attacks, and assumed more radical curve in March 2022, preluding the current wave.

In March, 11 Israelis were killed and 27 wounded in 10 attacks out of 190. While two operations were carried out by Palestinians from the occupied interior (in the Negev and al-Khudeira), an attack took place in “Bnei Brak” and was carried out by Dia’ Hamarsha, who infiltrated Israel from the village of Ya’bad in the Jenin Governorate. This affected the number of resistance acts in April, which amounted to 259, killing four Israelis and wounding 11, in six shooting and stabbing attacks. The most prominent of these operations was a shooting attack in “Tel Aviv” that left three dead and six wounded. This operation was especially important not only because its perpetrator, Ra’d Khazem, had infiltrated “Tel Aviv” from Jenin, but also because his father, Fathi Khazem, has become a symbol of resistance in WB, particularly since his other son, ‘Abdul Rahman, was killed in September 2022, when the Israeli forces stormed the Jenin Refugee Camp.



In May 2022, four Israelis were killed and six others were wounded in stabbing and shooting attacks out of 208 acts of resistance, the most prominent of which was a stabbing attack in “Elad” settlement in the occupied interior. The operation was carried out by two Palestinians, As’ad al-Rifa’i and Subhi Sbeihat, who infiltrated the settlement from Rummana village, Jenin Governorate. Another prominent operation was a shooting attack near “Ariel” settlement by the two Palestinians, Yusuf ‘Assi and Yahya Mer’i, from the village of Qarawat Bani Hassan in the Salfit Governorate.

The May attacks took place after Operation Breakwater was launched (in late March) by Israel to curb resistance acts in WB. This operation aimed at securing cities, guarding the seam line and the Separation Wall, and conducting—based on intelligence alerts—raids in the heart of “terrorist hornet’s nests” in Palestinian cities and villages, mainly within Jenin.³

³ Operation Breakwater, An analytical reading, site of al-Hodhod News Network, 23/4/2022, <https://hodhodpal.com/post/52827>



It has been concerned also with closing what Palestinians call “the openings,” which are gaps in the Separation Wall. To this end, the Israeli army mobilized 25 battalions from the ground forces to help close these openings, which means more than double the number of battalions deployed in WB areas under routine conditions. Special units were also mobilized to carry out arrest missions and confront resistance cells, thus making the total mobilized forces about five thousand army soldiers and eight thousand police personnel. In addition, Unit 8200 and the Air Force aided in surveillance and monitoring, and so did the Combat Intelligence Collection Corps operating permanently in WB.⁴



Despite the decline in infiltration into the occupied 1948 territories, following this Israeli military and intelligence effort, June 2022 witnessed the escalation of another form of resistance which confused Israel. Armed formations in some WB areas have appeared with an unconventional organization, thus the resistance situation in WB emerged with a new more organized pattern. It expresses the desire to transform successive uprisings and individual operations to what is more sustainable, inspiring and capable of imposing realities in WB.

In June 2022, the Israelis who stormed the so-called “Yusuf Tomb” in Nablus were shot at and three were wounded, including the commander of the Israeli forces in the northern WB Roy Zweig. This was a painful blow to the Israeli security efforts and presented a new challenge to the Israeli effort aimed at encircling and assimilating the resistance in WB.

This clash in Nablus was nothing but an extension to the organized resistance in the city of Jenin, its refugee camp and countryside, known as the “Jenin Brigade,” founded in September 2021, after the “Freedom Tunnel” incident in which six Palestinian prisoners hailing from Jenin, escaped from Gilboa prison, but were arrested later. Also, this founding, which came three months after the end of the Battle of Sword of Jerusalem, was, in some way, a reflection of that battle, especially since the founders the battalion refer its establishment to Jamil al-‘Amuri, who was killed in June 2021 during the aforementioned battle.



⁴ Ibid.



Despite the Brigade's association with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Movement (PIJ), the model was able to establish for a state of trans-factional resistance, including youths from communities close to Fatah movement, and members of Hamas. Hence the "Nablus Brigade" was established, and some of its members were killed; in February 2022, Adham Mabruka "al-Shishani", Muhammad al-Dakhil and Ashraf Mubaslat, were killed in Nablus in a special Israeli operation; and in July 2022, Muhammad 'Azizi and 'Abdul Rahman Sobh, were killed in the Old City of Nablus, after the Israeli forces targeted a hideout for resistance fighters from several factions. Conditions escalated with the assassination of the fugitive Ibrahim al-Nabulsi, where there was a huge public reaction, followed by the formation of the "Lions' Den" in the Old City of Nablus.

Second: The Broader Context of the Ongoing Resistance

Many observers analyzed the ongoing resistance in WB, by focusing on the relatively new "Lions' Den" phenomenon, without taking into consideration the broader context, whether the current wave as presented in this paper or the broader general Palestinian situation since 2014. However, reading the scene through the "Lions' Den" indicates that it has a great impact, and this can be for several reasons: The consecutive killing of its members has proved its high credibility; the difficulty of classifying it according to the classical factional classification, for it includes members from different organizations; and having a mature discourse reflected in the public response in WB, and Nablus in particular, to its calls, whether for a strike,⁵ or for the people to go into the streets or stand on the rooftops of their houses or buildings in solidarity with it,⁶ or for protests against the PA's arrest of some of its members.⁷ However, the challenges this phenomenon has faced, including the attempts to dismantle it or contain it, by using hard and soft power, and the related siege of Nablus city, make people wonder about the future of the resistance in WB. For this relatively small phenomenon is related to the broader state of resistance, hence the latter must be studied before addressing the



⁵ In response to the call of the Lions' Den.. A strike in the West Bank and Jerusalem in solidarity with Shuafat, *Felesteen* newspaper, 12/10/2022, <https://felesteen.news/post/119308>

⁶ This is how Nablus responded to the call of the Lions' Den, Maan News Agency, 18/10/2022, <https://www.maannews.net/news/2079357.html>

⁷ Nablus: One killed and others wounded in protests against the PA arrest of fugitives Shtayyeh and Tbeileh, site of Arab48, 20/9/2022, <https://www.arab48.com/>



challenges faced by the various forms of resistance in WB, especially the armed formations and their future.

Statistics by the Israel Security Agency (*Shabak*)⁸ indicate an increase in resistance activities in 2012 compared to 2011. Resistance actions in WB and Jerusalem reached 610 in 2012, compared to 473 in 2011. This increase was directly related to the escalation in Gaza Strip (GS), i.e., the battle of Stones of Baked Clay (dubbed by Israel Pillar of Cloud). At that time, a bus bombing in “Tel Aviv” was carried out by Palestinians from the village of Beit Liqya in Ramallah Governorate. According to Shabak, that year saw the detention of 2,300 Palestinians and the filing of 2,170 indictments. Shabak claimed thwarting 100 operations, a third of which were aimed at kidnapping soldiers or settlers, and half were planning explosions or shooting attacks.



Afterwards, resistance activities in WB and Jerusalem increased, recording 1,271 attacks in 2013 and 1,793 in 2014, where the latter were during the war on GS in the Eaten Straw Battle (dubbed by Israel Protective Edge Operation). In October 2015, the “Jerusalem Uprising” started in October; thus, the escalation started with the end of the year. Despite that, resistance actions reached 1,719, with an increase in intensity according to the data of the Israeli Shabak,⁹ as 14 Israelis were killed compared to five in the previous year. Therefore, 2015 represented a fundamental shift in the course of the resistance in WB.

Third: Triggering Factors

The triggering factors to have resistance in WB are as follows:

► **1.The resistance in GS:** Since 2012, the conditions of the resistance in GS have been encouraging to the masses of WB and Jerusalem, where it is noticed that the resistance actions concomitantly increase with the battles in GS, or sometimes they come afterwards albeit with a special nature. Therefore, the wars of 2014 and 2021 had a decisive impact on the escalation of resistance in WB, as the uprising of Jerusalem in 2015 cannot be separated from GS resistance scene in 2014. Matters became clearer after the GS war in 2021, which

⁸ In annual reports published on its website.

⁹ The Annual Summary 2015, Terrorism Data and Trends, and Countermeasures, p. 15, <https://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionDocuments/Monthly%20Summary%20HE/%D7%93%D7%95%D7%97%D7%95%D7%AA%20%D7%A9%D7%A0%D7%AA%D7%99%D7%99%D7%9D/%D7%A1%D7%99%D7%9B%D7%95%D7%9D%20%D7%A9%D7%A0%D7%AA%D7%99%202015.pdf>



united the people across Palestine and had a direct impact on the general state of resistance in WB.

The moral value of the GS resistance is evident in WB, where the symbols of GS resistance are mentioned in the chants of the masses, or in the speeches of the resistance fighters, particularly among the members of the “Lions’ Den,” especially the leader of al-Qassam Brigades Muhammad al-Deif. Its impact is also evident in the recategorization of the Palestinian factions by the WB masses, which was evident in the victory of the Islamic Bloc (the student arm of Hamas) in the student elections at Birzeit University, with unprecedented win of 26 seats compared to 19 seats for the Student Youth Movement (Fatah student arm) in 2015, and 28 seats compared to 18 seats for the Student Youth Movement in 2022. It should be noted here that the public status of the Islamic Bloc in WB, including Birzeit, began to deteriorate in 2007 due to the internal conflict in GS, which Hamas calls a military decisiveness and Fatah calls it a coup, and due to the systematic dismantling operations against Hamas in WB. Thus, the Islamic Bloc continued to lose in Birzeit University since 2008 until it regained victory by an unprecedented percentage in 2014, in addition to its boycott of the elections in 2010 and 2011.¹⁰ This leaves no doubt that the GS wars have an impact on the collective consciousness in WB and Jerusalem.



► **2. The personal motivating factors for having resistance in WB:** It is related to the militant personality of the Palestinians, which, regardless of time, reappears when there is a possibility of confrontation. Based on the above 2012 statistics, it is clear that the masses sought to mobilize resistance in WB, and the factions too, had a central role in pushing towards having multiple patterns and forms of resistance action. Two important resistance operations can be given here as an example; the first is the capture of three settlers by a Hamas group in Hebron in June 2014, prompting the Israeli forces to expand their security campaigns in WB, which increased friction with the Palestinian masses. The Israeli campaign was then reflected in the major aggression against GS; and in the meantime, an uprising erupted in Jerusalem after a group of settlers kidnapped and killed Muhammad Abu Khudeir. The other operation was Beit Furik operation (Itamar), which was carried out by a Hamas group, on 1/10/2015,



¹⁰ Sari Orabi: Analytical Papers.. A reading of the victory of the Islamic Bloc in the 2022 Birzeit University elections, site of Al-Quds Studies Center, 19/5/2022, <https://alqudscenter.info>



followed by the stabbing attack in *al-Aqsa* Mosque executed by a PIJ member, Muhannad al-Halabi.

These operations were mentioned because of their direct connection to the major events of 2014 and 2015. However, many of the operations that were called individual and intensified in 2015 and 2016, or the specific operations that were carried out by members of Palestinian factions during those past eight years since 2014, were inspiring and had a fundamental role in renewing the motivation for confrontation. Therefore, the new cases of resistance should not be addressed as if they are separate from the other operations during the past years, including the many major operations that were carried out by Palestinian youths, during which the example of being fugitive re-emerged. Examples here include Hamza Abu al-Haija, who was killed in March 2014; Muhammad al-Faqih, killed in the village of Surif in al-Khalil in July 2016; the two Barghouthi brothers, Saleh (killed) and 'Asim (arrested), who carried out their operations in late 2018; Ahmad Nasr Jarrar was killed in February 2018; Ashraf Na'alweh was killed in December 2018; and 'Umar Abu Laila was killed in March 2019. These are examples of the return of the fugitive model before the recent armed formations in northern WB, and many other names can be added, who carried out shooting, stabbing or a vehicular attack. Thus, the most accurate description of what is happening in WB is that it is an open struggle since a few years.

► **3. Objective factors of revolutionization:** The most important among this kind of factors is the centrality of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Jerusalem. The 2014 uprising was somehow linked to settler aggression in Jerusalem (the killing of the child Muhammad Abu Khdeir), and the 2015 uprising was called the Jerusalem Uprising although its detonator came from WB (Muhannad al-Halabi). The Lions' Gate uprising in Jerusalem in 2017, Mercy Gate Uprising in 2019 and the Sword of Jerusalem Battle in 2021 began in a complex and gradual scene in Jerusalem (Damascus Gate, Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and Israeli storming of *al-Aqsa* at the end of Ramadan). In addition, there was the funeral scene of al-Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu 'Akleh in Jerusalem, who was assassinated by an Israeli soldier in May 2022, while she was covering one of the Israeli incursions into the Jenin refugee camp. This shows that *al-Aqsa* Mosque is the most important revolutionizing factor, also evident in those who executed individual operations or belonged to armed formations and were killed. It can be more understood when observing first the emotional attachment of the masses in WB to *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and second, the masses in Jerusalem are not controlled by the PA security forces, although the PA itself has other tools to influence their conditions. As



for Israel, it uses hard and soft power to dismantle and absorb the Palestinian uprisings in Jerusalem.

Added to *al-Aqsa* Mosque, is the expansion of settler dominance, not only in terms of infrastructure, but also in terms of direct settler attacks on the Palestinians and their properties. In 2014, the child Muhammad Abu Khdeir was killed, and in 2015, the Dawabsheh family was burned in the village of Duma in Nablus Governorate. Other incidences include the continuous settler attacks in the village of Burqa, east of Ramallah; burning mosques and farms; attacking farmers in many Palestinian villages and areas; in addition to attacking Palestinian cars, all under the protection of the Israeli army. Palestinians did not encounter such incidences when the resistance managed to limit settlers' presence in WB, as happened in the second *Intifadah*.



In addition, the infrastructure of settlers has created new hotbeds of resistance, and gave popular resistance more meaning, as in the village of Beita in Nablus. Coupled with the continuous heavy Israeli presence across WB, there are Israeli checkpoints and roads, and the killing of Palestinians increased, whether killing for no apparent reason at checkpoints, inside homes, and during raids on villages, or the killing of resistance fighters, as Israel killed 132 Palestinians as of 25/10/2022. All these factors are renewing the causes of resistance.

► **4. Erosion of the PA legitimacy:** The PA, its anti-confrontation policies, and the fact that broad social segments are economically, socially and security-wise dependent on it, are all important factors that inhibit the possibilities of confrontation in WB.

The PA's legitimacy has been eroded at all political levels, for the peace process has ended while having a weak authority that Israel uses as a mere security tool. Proceeding with the same course without having another option, reinforces this kind of image among the masses, especially that there have been no negotiations for more than ten years, and that there are colonial realities on the ground that would make it impossible for the Palestinians to establish a contiguous Palestinian state in WB. In addition, Hamas (the political opponent of the PA) has restored popular support after its battles in GS, thus weakening more the political project of the PA, which has become a goal by itself, without any prospects or political promises, while its arrangements with Israel are limited to the economic and security aspects.



Besides, the PA's rentier economic capabilities have declined with its successive financial crises. Since November 2021, the PA has been paying incomplete salaries to its employees, seeking contracting law that reduces its cadre, and increasing tax collection procedures. These steps have made the PA gradually become burden for citizens, reduced the social segments benefitting from it, and prompted circles—once considered among its popular covers—to abandon it. This partially explains why members of the security forces or some communities affiliated with Fatah have become more aligned with the resistance. For when the PA loses its political project, it becomes the objective of a confined elite, protected by security force and external support.

Moreover, the PA's political future is ambiguous, with the escalating disputes within the Fatah movement about the post-'Abbas phase. This may, on one hand, create outlets for the potential of resistance action, and on the other hand erode the popular cover of the PA, which continues without elections that may renew its legitimacy, and without offering solutions to the masses to arrange the post-'Abbas era.¹¹



The aforementioned factors show that the current wave of resistance in WB is part of a long state of struggle since 2014. It has gained its greatest momentum in successive waves since the “Jerusalem Uprising” (2015) and has continued to renew in multiple patterns and forms, suitable to the political, security, economic and social WB conditions. Therefore, it is a mistake to read the ongoing resistance events in isolation from this long context and the mobilization, renewal and inspiration processes. The continuation of such factors means the continuation of resistance, as will be explained later.

Fourth: Inhibiting Factors

It has already been said that the current wave of resistance in WB is part of a broader situation that has been going on for a few years, and that it has self-revolutionizing elements, objective mobilization motives and reasons for its renewal. However, there are factors that may limit its scope, making it a collection of successive waves, or separate operations. These subjective and objective factors are as follows:

► **1. The position of the local authority:** One of the reasons that prevents an accurate reading of the resistance conditions in WB, or prompts questions about the possibility

¹¹ For more on the erosion of the PA legitimacy, see Sari Orabi, Academic Paper: Transformations of the Pillars of Legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority from the Political Promise to the External Factor, site of Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, October 2021, <https://eng.alzaytouna.net/2021/10/11/academic-paper-the-transformations-of-the-pillars-of-legitimacy-of-the-palestinian-authority-from-the-political-promise-to-the-external-factor/#.Y5hJ-3ZByUk>



of its transformation into a comprehensive *Intifadah*, is not taking into account the position of the PA, which is the most important objective condition for the growth, continuity and influence of the resistance. Here, it is necessary to recall that the First *Intifadah* benefited from the absence of a local authority, meaning it allowed the daily direct contact with the occupation in the Palestinian gatherings, without having a local authority that would isolate them from each other. This situation ended by virtue of the “redeployment” clause in the Oslo Accords, which maintained Israel’s occupation of WB, while distancing it from direct confrontation with the Palestinians, thus making the capabilities of popular resistance more difficult. The Second *Intifadah* benefited from a PA political decision (by Yasir ‘Arafat) to let the masses clash with the occupation, which quickly got out of control, in addition, large segments of the Fatah movement and members of the security forces participated in that *Intifadah*.



It is quite clear that the current PA elite are organically linked to the PA, which depends on external, Israeli, regional and international conditions for its continuity. Throughout the past period, which revealed that the PA project has failed (particularly the period of Benjamin Netanyahu, the annexation plan, Donald Trump’s plan, and related policies of besieging Palestinian institutions), the PA leadership did nothing to exit or modify the course. It accepted that its contacts with the Bennett/ Lapid government be limited to economic and security dimensions.¹² It has even recently adopted dismantling and containment measures against the armed formations in northern WB, by arresting, drying up funding sources and reactivating amnesty policies.

However, despite the erosion of its legitimacy and hegemony, this does not necessarily mean the quick end of the PA, which is still the most important economic and social regulator of WB. Palestinians in general are attached to it, it enjoys security power, and it is still an international and regional demand. Hence, the expansion of the current resistance, or its decline, is conditioned on the position of the PA. Nevertheless, there may be surprises from Israel or the resistance, which makes the possibilities open. However, putting surprises aside, the PA will remain the most capable of curbing the current state of resistance.

► **2. Organization participation in the ongoing resistance:** as stated earlier, the role of organizations was essential in fueling the state of continuous resistance a few years ago. Despite being criticized, these organizations have contributed to the depletion of Israeli security capabilities. The successive waves of resistance have

¹² Source Close to Bennett: No political solution with the PA; Gantz-Abu Mazen meet for security purposes, Maan News Agency, 30/8/2021, <https://www.maannews.net/news/2048474.html>



finally taken their organizational forms in northern WB, where the “Jenin Brigade” and the “Lions’ Den” are special organizational frames inseparable from traditional organizations. The “Jenin Brigade” is affiliated with the PIJ, while providing cover to the resistance fighters from other organizations, through coordination bodies inside Jenin, while Israel accuses Hamas of financing and sponsoring the “Lions’ Den” in Nablus.¹³ The PA arrested prominent Hamas member, Musab Shtayyeh, and accused him of financing the “Lions’ Den.”¹⁴



The weakness of the organizational aspect prevents the sustainability of the successive uprisings. The masses, which may emerge once, cannot continue without an organizational structure that keeps the action ongoing. They also need forces to strengthen their steadfastness against dismantling campaigns. Spontaneous uprisings and unorganized operations confuse the Israeli security apparatus and the PA cannot classify them politically, thus, it cannot strike them quickly. Such uprisings and operations are unable to continue by themselves, and naturally do not have political agenda that can be transformed into public discourse.

This was one of the most important problems of the successive uprisings in WB since 2015. However, this problem is not caused by self-organizational insufficiency as much as by two huge factors. The first is the exhaustion of the Palestinian factions after the Second *Intifadah*, especially after they poured their cadres who have expertise into that *Intifadah*, and faced unsupported massive dismantling operations with the Israeli Operation Defensive Shield. The second factor is the PA policies following the victory of Hamas in the legislative elections and the ensuing schism (2007). The core of these policies tackled the security aspect in addition to having political, economic, cultural and social programs seeking to isolate the masses from the struggle, while supported by regional and foreign states. These states sought to invest



¹³ Hebrew media: “Hamas” sponsors the “Lions’ Den” in Nablus, site of the Palestinian Information Center (PIC), 13/10/2022, <https://www.palinfo.com/>

¹⁴ “The Lions’ Den..” Embracing the idea of resistance despite the targeting by the occupation and the PA, site of *Al-‘Arabi al-Jadid* newspaper (The New Arab), London, 27/10/2022, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk>



in Palestinian schism and pushed the PA to adopt irreversible policies that would abandon the Palestinian struggle path, and even confront it. It was evident starting from the Annapolis Conference in November 2007, and the restructuring of the Palestinian security forces by US Lieutenant General Keith Dayton.

Not only did these policies weaken Hamas and remove it from the public sphere, but they also lead to the erosion of the entire national movement and having a tight connection between the Fatah movement and the PA, its structure, path and project. They made the rivalry with Hamas a priority for the PA and Fatah, at the expense of the conflict with Israel, and they dominated the public sphere. These matters began to clearly change after the 2014 war and then had a major shift after the 2021 war. However, the organizations are still unable to be restructured and adapt to the security conditions in WB.

► **3. Policies for engineering the Palestinian society:** These policies, that were established on Palestinian schism basis, were also engineered to strengthen the dependence of society on the PA and impose consumer economic models that contradict the necessities of confronting the occupation. This was obvious in the term of former Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who set economic policies harmonious with the Israeli right's vision of "economic peace." Consequently, deep cultural penetration into social structures was noticed, where media and academic bodies, non-governmental organizations and development projects spread values, ideas, and visions consistent with the goals of the dominant political-economic actors.¹⁵ Although Fayyad did not belong to the Fatah movement, and the latter removed him from premiership, his economic approach was consistent with the PA's vision, which has no political prospect. Thus, its continuation will be based on economy and security, in accordance with the Israeli right's view of the conflict.



Salam Fayyad

Matters did not change with the departure of Netanyahu and the advent of the Bennett/ Lapid government. It had the same policy and even developed it to what was termed "shrinking the conflict,"¹⁶ which means the continuation of the



¹⁵ Tareq Daana, *Between the Third Way and Economic Peace: An Ideological Consensus?*, Palestinian Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights- BADIL, <https://www.badil.org/ar/publications/haq-al-awda/issues/items/2965.html>

¹⁶ Walid Habbas, *What does Bennett mean by "shrinking the conflict" with the Palestinians, and how does this concept meet with the Religious Zionist agenda?*, site of Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies (MADAR), 2/8/2021, <https://www.madarceneter.org>



occupation while mitigating its impact. This approach was primarily concerned with reaching a compromise between the various Israeli factions regarding the pattern of WB occupation. It alleviates the PA's embarrassment by easing the manifestations of the occupation, providing better conditions for the internal, external and commercial movement of Palestinians, improving economic conditions, including a number of Palestinian workers inside the occupied interior and settlements, where in the first quarter of 2022, there were 173.4 thousand Palestinian workers in the occupied territories, in addition to 31 thousand working in the settlements.¹⁷ This means that the economies of no less than 200 thousand Palestinian families are linked to this labor, in addition to the role of this labor in the overall economic movement in WB (their transfers constitute 16% of the national income).¹⁸ Thus, the meetings of various levels of the PA with the Bennett/ Lapid government focused on economic and security issues, without any political proposals, despite the escalation of the security situation.

This long line of complex policies, based primarily on economic issues, made a deep impact in the Palestinian society, concerted with the overall political and security situation, thus, making the development of resistance in broader and more comprehensive patterns slower.

► **4. The sweeping security superiority of the Israeli occupation:** Since the end of *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, Israel has developed a security system that meets its political and strategic goals. It cut off WB areas, tightened its grip on them, and took measures to control Palestinian movement, through the Separation Wall, bypass roads, watchtowers, cement blocks and iron gates. Such measures enabled Israel to besiege and control Palestinian areas based on its security needs, separating them for political goals. They also helped Israel prevent resistance fighters from moving or hiding or transferring expertise, where the control of the movement was supported by a system of cameras along the bypass roads, junctions, sections and entrances of cities and villages. This explains Israel's quick reveal of the perpetrators of resistance operations; hence they were unable to accumulate experience. As a result, many Palestinians refrain from carrying out operations for the difficulty of building on them.

Only well-informed well-organized plans would overcome the above measures. However, organizational weakness, the PA position and the lack of security awareness among the new formations help Israel to maintain its security superiority.

This is evident in Israel's endeavor to dismantle the new formations, whether through mysterious assassinations, as happened with Tamer Kilani, the member of the "Lions' Den," who was mysteriously assassinated by an explosive device in Nablus on

¹⁷ Their remittances constitute 16% of the national income.. A study by "MAS": The number of Palestinian workers in Israel reflects the policy of control not market forces, site of *al-Ayyam* newspaper, Ramallah, 28/7/2022, https://www.al-ayyam.ps/ar_page.php?id=156d8fcfy359501775Y156d8fcf

¹⁸ Ibid.



23/10/2022. Israel also made raids to kill or arrest the formations' fighters and leaders, as in the complex joint operation by the Israeli army and Shabak agents that led to the killing of one of the commanders of the "Lions' Den" Wadih al-Houh on 25/10/2022, or when the commander of the "Jenin Brigade" Muhammad Ayman al-Sa'adi and member Na'im Jamal Zubaidi, were killed, on 1/12/2022.¹⁹ Other Israeli policies include the siege of Nablus and urging the PA to provide amnesty and welcome the surrender of the fighters, as Israeli sources claim that more than 60 fighters from the "Lions' Den" surrendered to the PA, a claim which Palestinian sources question.²⁰ What is said about the "Lions' Den" can be said about the formations in Jenin and others.

Fifth: Future Prospects

After analyzing the above factors, we can chart the following scenarios:

► **1. The likely scenario:** This scenario considers the resistance in WB is in the process of consolidation rather than deterioration. Yet, it is difficult to say that it will develop into a comprehensive *Intifadah*, given the lack of the most important objective condition, i.e., the position of the PA. This means it will renew in waves, taking multiple forms, but not necessarily linked to new military formations.



The new military formations, in their open nature, were useful in reviving the culture of resistance, linking new generations to it and imposing facts that contribute to eroding the PA's security control. Also, as these formations do not blatantly belong to the traditional organizations, it is difficult for the PA to besiege and strike them quickly under the pretext of political aspirations, political rivalry, or waving the Hamas scarecrow. However, the human and geographical confinement with the lack of security awareness, as well as the aforementioned inhibiting factors, make betting on these formations and linking the scene of resistance to them a grave mistake.

The most important and influential recent resistance operations were not organically linked to these formations, despite their extreme moral importance.

Among the most important of these operations was the operation of 'Uday al-Tamimi from Shuafat refugee camp, who carried out his first operation at the Shuafat checkpoint on 8/10/2022, and the second on 19/10/2022 near "Ma'ale Adumim" settlement, where

¹⁹ Israel assassinates the commander of the Jenin Brigade and his assistant by storming the camp (witness), site of Arabi21, 1/12/2021, <https://arabi21.com>

²⁰ Did 60 militants from the "Lions' Den" turn themselves in to the Palestinian security forces? Site of *al-Quds* newspaper, 14/11/2022, <https://www.alquds.com/ar/posts/6c64edb2-3be9-446c-b987-a66c3b426bfe>



he was killed. Other resistance operations include the one on 29/10/2022 near “Kiryat Arba” settlement in Hebron by Muhammad Kamel al-Ja’bari, who was killed there; the car-ramming in Jericho on 30/10/2022, by Barakat Musa Odeh; the double car-ramming near the “Ariel” settlement on 15/11/2022, by the Muhammad Murad Sami Souf; and the double bombing operation in Jerusalem on 23/11/2022.



All these operations, which took place at close times, are not organizationally linked to the armed formations in northern WB. They are similar to the individual operations that began to escalate after the “Jerusalem Uprising” in 2015, with the exception of the double bombing operation in Jerusalem, which may have been carried out by an organizational cell.²¹ This means, firstly, that the current wave is part of the aforementioned long state of struggle, and secondly, that the morally and realistically continuation factors of resistance still exist. This reinforces what the scenario suggests; the next stage will witness various forms of resistance action, ranging from intermittent operations to confined uprisings and limited armed formations, without turning into a comprehensive uprising.

► **2. The turning into a comprehensive uprising scenario:** It is a scenario dependent on unexpected surprises leading to events getting out of the control of the dominant forces (the occupation and the PA). Based on the current situation, it is difficult to give preponderance to this scenario unless the erosion of the PA’s control increases.

In any case, the comparison to the two previous *Intifadahs* or the wars in GS prevents giving the successive waves of resistance in WB their real weight. For they are the daily Palestinian struggle with the occupation, with the highest impact on the occupation, leading to daily exhaustion of Israeli forces, due to their deployment in WB. Actually, the struggle history of Palestinians was not limited to comprehensive uprisings. Therefore, the current waves are



²¹ This paper was written before any clear information regarding the perpetrators of this operation.



suitable to the aforementioned circumstances, and their expansion will adapt to the emerging conditions, which did not exist in the two previous *Intifadahs*.

► **3. The complete cessation of resistance waves:** This is the unlikely scenario given the constant factors of escalation, which include: firstly being a long path, secondly the erosion of the PA's legitimacy, thirdly the elements of inspiration in the successive resistance operations, fourthly the escalation of the culture of resistance due to the new formations and the state of resistance in GS, fifthly the ability of the resistance in GS to mobilize the WB masses, and sixthly the occupation policies that nurture the Palestinians' will to revenge.

When all of these factors are taken into account, the outcome is that any period of calm will be temporary and not for long.

Sixth: Expected Policies of all Actors

In light of the above, it is possible to predict the policies of the actors vis-à-vis the scene of the ongoing resistance and their prospects, however, we'll focus on Israel's policies, because it is the strongest and most capable actor.

1. The Israeli Occupation

Since the end of the *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, Israeli policies towards WB were based on three elements:

- a. Keeping the Israeli security forces in all areas, which proved their effectiveness in Area A, particularly during Operation Defensive Shield. One of the most important Israeli results during *al-Aqsa Intifadah* was reformulating the concept of security coordination with the PA through full self-reliance, including in Area A. Then, after the "Palestinian schism," Israel pushed the PA to fulfil its security needs but without actually relying on it. This is because, at the beginning of *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, Area A has turned into focal points for rebuilding and sheltering the formations of the Palestinian resistance, and a base for launching resistance action. In addition, some members of the Palestinian security forces participated in that *Intifadah*, which made Israel reconsider the status of Area A and the PA's security role. Therefore, the Israeli security forces, which has the best relationship with the PA, is convinced of the necessity of having direct Israeli security presence in Area A.²²

²² Israel discusses the transfer of security to the PA in areas in WB, site of Aljazeera.net, 20/4/2016, <https://www.aljazeera.net>, where the news read that the Shabak opposed the reduction of Israeli security activities in the areas under Palestinian control, warning that this would make it difficult to thwart Palestinian attacks.



- ▶ b. Developing a dual security structure, including colonial and technical infrastructure (barriers, roads, cameras, etc.), and waging aggressive night security campaigns throughout the WB. Therefore, the campaigns of “digging up the roots” and “mowing the grass”²³ have not stopped since *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, as Israel realized that the slightest security inattention would lead towards sudden organizational structures, besides its desire to establish its active presence in the Palestinian consciousness continuously.
- ▶ c. Economic and social policies which would establish a high cultural and social structure diverting the Palestinian masses from struggle. This has been perpetuated, as previously stated, in the congruence between the policies of the occupation and the response of the PA, as was evident in the policies of “economic peace” with the government of Benjamin Netanyahu and “shrinking the conflict” with the Bennett/Lapid government.

With the escalation of resistance action, Israel launched Operation Breakwater. Israel did not limit the “legal” entry of Palestinians into the 1948 occupied territories, meaning it continued to increase the Palestinian labor there, while limiting “illegal” employment by closing the “openings” in the Separation Wall. However, it followed urgent security policies that partially contradict the theory of shrinking the conflict. This is as follows:



- ▶ a. Intensification of the Israeli army presence in WB, by increasing their numbers in bypass roads, and increasing the arrest operations that are always protected by the army, which means a daily presence of the army in various Palestinian areas.
- ▶ b. Facilitating killing operations, by giving orders to quickly kill Palestinian activists, including those who throw stones, even after withdrawing from the place. This explains the relative increase of killings in 2022, as the Israeli Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi granted his soldiers such authority, as of December 2021.²⁴
- ▶ c. The siege of cities, as happened for a period of time in Nablus. The return of intensive security policies, employed during *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, by besieging areas and isolating them from each other, has been constantly present in the vision of the Israeli security establishment. In this context, the Shabak suggested to the rest of the Israeli security forces to impose partial blockades; close Palestinian villages and towns that Israeli

²³ Sari Orabi, The problem of self-consumption among the Palestinian factions, site of Capital Forum, 12/6/2022, <https://capitalforum.net>

²⁴ New instructions for the occupation army allow shooting at stone-throwers, Palestinian News and Information Agency (WAFA), 20/12/2021, <https://www.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/38207>



intelligence report that they contain Palestinians who would carry out resistance operations; and withdraw Israeli work permits from the residents of such villages.²⁵ As much as it reveals the Israeli distress over the escalation of resistance in WB, this proposal also shows that the security aspect is the decisive one in the Israeli vision of WB, no matter how many visions there are regarding WB's economic and social absorption. This means two things: First, the political and security levels of the Israeli establishment, will not accept from the PA but to meet Israel's security needs, and the second is that the centralization of the security vision may coincide with that of the most extreme political parties, i.e., in case the latter (such as the Religious Zionist Party (RZP)) have the influence they demand in the next Netanyahu government, which is expected.

In view of these Israeli policies, and despite Benjamin Netanyahu's adoption of "economic peace" policies, the escalation of resistance or its continued disturbance of Israeli security may be faced with an increased Israeli oppression. Thus, direct killings may increase, which is a policy adopted before Netanyahu's expected government and must not be linked to it. An example in this respect is the recent killing of 'Ammar Mufleh on the Hawwara-Nablus road, where an Israeli soldier killed him without the slightest apparent reason.²⁶ These incidents are expected to increase, as the influence of the RZP and Kahanist party in the Netanyahu government increase.

Benjamin Netanyahu agreed with RZP leader Bezalel Smotrich, to place the Civil Administration under the responsibility of this party.²⁷ The "Civil Administration" is an executive arm that, after the signing of the Oslo Accords, became subordinate to the "Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT)," and it operates under the orders of the Central Command/Military Governor of WB.²⁸ However, Netanyahu agreed with Smotrich to separate responsibilities in WB, so that the Commander of the Central Region of the Israeli army, i.e., the military commander of WB, reports to the defense minister, while the "Civil Administration" is subject to a



Benjamin Netanyahu



Bezalel Smotrich

²⁵ The Israeli "Shabak" proposes a partial closure of WB villages to prevent attacks, *Al-'Arabi al-Jadid*, 14/9/2022.

²⁶ Israel executes the Palestinian youth Muflih.. A European call for investigation and an international condemnation, *Aljazeera.net*, 3/12/2022.

²⁷ Former Israeli officers: Smotrich is seeking to annex the WB, *Arab 48*, 6/12/2022.

²⁸ What does the distribution of the civil administration powers mean? An Israeli answer, site of Ultra Sawt, 5/12/2022, <https://ultrapal.ultrasawt.com>



minister from RZP within the Defense Ministry. This prompted former “Civil Administration” leaders to expect an increase in targeting the Palestinians, or even the annexation of WB, which necessarily means an increase in Israeli clashes with the Palestinians, thus fueling more resistance. Former head of the “Civil Administration” Ilan Paz said that separating the “Civil Administration” from the army and Defense Ministry will cause chaos, which will lead, in the aftermath of the demolition of Palestinian homes, to armed operations carried out by Palestinians, because the talk here is about the most sensitive issue—lands and settlements.²⁹

Netanyahu also promised Itamar Ben-Gvir, the leader of Otzma Yehudit party, to appoint him as Minister of National Security (new ministry), with expanded powers over the Israeli police in WB, including the border police. Former Israeli military leaders warn that this could increase attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque.³⁰

Hence, the increasing violent Israeli policies due to the escalating resistance, the violent aspect of the Israeli security establishment, and the increased influence of the Kahanist party and RZP, will reflect on WB, whether in terms of security, annexations, settlement escalation and assaults on *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

2. The PA

In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly at its 76th session, in September 2021, Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas gave the world a one-year deadline for the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967.³¹ As of the end of 2022, more than a year has passed, yet without the PA pushing for any new policies. In his recent speech to the Fatah Revolutionary Council, ‘Abbas talked again about the impasse in the political path and about “the fierce Zionist extremists joining the new Israeli government.” However, he didn’t introduce any alternative plan for the Fatah movement, the PLO or the PA. Rather, he again required the recognition of international legitimacy to complete the Palestinian reconciliation.³²



Mahmud ‘Abbas

²⁹ Former Israeli officers: Smotrich is seeking to annex the WB, Arab 48, 6/12/2022.

³⁰ What did the occupation generals say about appointing Ben-Gvir as minister of national security? site of Sama News Agency, 28/11/2022, <https://samanews.ps/ar/post/538875>

³¹ Abbas gives a one-year deadline before withdrawing recognition of Israel.. Israel’s ambassador responds (video), site of *al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, 24/9/2021, <https://www.alquds.co.uk>

³² Headed by President Abbas.. Fatah Revolutionary Council inaugurates its 10th session, site of *al-Hadath* newspaper, 4/12/2022, <https://www.alhadath.ps/article/161489>



This means that the PA will proceed with the same policies, trying to keep or improve the status quo, without any plans for confrontation or strengthening the resistance.

The changes in the PA have already been discussed, where it has lost the foundations of its legitimacy, and became a goal in itself without any political prospect, thus becoming a security force that depends on external support. In the coming period, and in its search for political cover, the PA might claim that preventing ploys by the “extreme right-wing government,” can be achieved by increasing political arrests,³³ and dismantling the resistance structures, especially the armed ones in the northern WB. Moreover, the PA containment and amnesty policies have been discussed earlier in this paper, and in this context Fathi Khazem, the father of the two killed fighters Ra‘d and ‘Abdul Rahman, was transferred to Ramallah,³⁴ after he had become an inspiring model for resistance fighters in the Jenin camp.

However, surprises may decide new paths for the PA action, and this depends on the ‘Abbas’ succession process. Would it be governed by a Fatah agreement or dispute, or by a temporary agreement between Fatah and Hamas to cross the stage, as it did after the death of President ‘Arafat, or would the resistance witness developments that may or may not get out of control. All these possibilities have been previously discussed.

3. The Palestinian Resistance

It is difficult to talk about the Palestinian resistance in WB as a clear structure, demanding it to follow specific policies in the next stage. For this resistance is to a great extent decentralized and doesn’t have traditional organizational structures.

If the resistance is expected to continue with significant operations of separate patterns, having daily confrontations that might escalate if Israel increases its oppression and assault, then the forces of organized and traditional resistance have responsibilities rather than options, including:

- ▶ a. The need to urgently overcome the obstacles that prevent these forces from rebuilding themselves and bypassing the Israeli security system.
- ▶ b. Depriving the PA of pretexts to restore the rhetoric of schism so that it would contain the resistance. Also, caution must prevail in case any political steps were taken at the expense of resistance, where the PA elite may go for reconciliation to overcome a temporary stage, such as the post-‘Abbas stage, or to fill the political void, as was the case during the term of US President Donald Trump.

³³ PA forces continue kidnappings and political arrests, PIC, 6/12/2022.

³⁴ Fathi Khazem: The End of a Brave Man... at the Hand of the PA?, site of *al-Akhbar* newspaper, Beirut, 3/12/2022, <https://al-akhbar.com/Palestine/350403>



- ▶ c. Supporting the steadfastness of the Palestinians in WB and Jerusalem, especially the working cadres, and developing the armed formations in northern WB, by becoming more security-sensitive and abandoning overt action, or by developing the confrontation tools with the occupation.
- ▶ d. Developing the resistance rather than focusing on organizational gains, in order to make it difficult for the PA to target resistance formations under the pretext of political rivalry. This way mobilizing the masses would be for resistance action rather than being based on partisan bias, and there would be no competitive discourse that would distract resistance cadres from the central duty.
- ▶ e. The need for the resistance in GS to develop its discourse in order to boost its influence and raise the morale of the WB masses, while being always ready to intervene in a timely manner. It needs also to impose new rules that would prevent the occupation from implementing the “mowing the grass” strategy that would cut back the resistance capabilities in GS, as happened recently by bombing sites of al-Qassam Brigades after reports that rockets of unknown origin had been fired toward Israel from GS.³⁵
- ▶ f. In addition to renewing the means of financial support, various resistance factions need to put integrated mobilization and media plans to implement in the Arab world, raising awareness for the situation in Palestine, and clarifying the daily state of resistance in WB, while trying to improvise new forms of support.



Seventh: Summary and Recommendations

This paper depicted the current state of resistance in WB and analyzed its current and near future progress, considering it an open and continuous struggle since 2014. It received new impetus after the Sword of Jerusalem Battle in May 2021, and after a series of resistance operations in March,



³⁵ Israeli planes bomb Gaza after firing a missile at a border area, *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 4/4/2022.



April and May 2022, leading to new patterns of resistance action which the Israel faced with more brutality.

Then, the paper presented the most important subjective and objective triggering and inhibiting factors of resistance, in addition to its prospects. It concluded that the resistance would continue in a medium pattern of action, similar to the ongoing sporadic operations, while the attempts to develop resistance action would continue. However, events would not expand into a comprehensive uprising because of the PA position. Nevertheless, surprises related to the position of the PA or the policies of the next Israeli government may contribute to the shaping the ongoing resistance.

In light of this, the paper discussed the policies expected from all actors in the Palestinian scene, including the Israeli security and military apparatus and the next Benjamin Netanyahu's government. Also, it displayed the options of the PA and discussed the responsibilities of the Palestinian resistance towards all of this.

In this context, the most important recommendations included in this paper can be summarized as follows:

- ▶ 1. The need for the PA to leave its current policies, which have brought the Palestine issue to a dead end, by halting security coordination and political arrests, and relying on national unity to confront the Israeli occupation. If the PA does not change its policies, which is expected, the resistance factions should be aware of the PA policies to contain the existing state of resistance with soft or hard power.
- ▶ 2. Intensify efforts to strengthen the steadfastness of the Palestinian people in WB, especially with the potential policies of oppression and settlement expansion by the next Netanyahu government, in which the influence of Kahanist party and RZP is deepening.
- ▶ 3. The resistance factions need to overcome the obstacles facing the development of their structures in WB, increase the support of their cadres, develop mobilization and media tools, and mobilize popular masses in support of the Palestine issue.

