

# The Palestine Strategic Report 2020 – 2021



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# **Chapter Four**

*The Courses of Aggression, Resistance  
and the Peace Process*

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# **The Courses of Aggression, Resistance and the Peace Process**

## ***Introduction***

In 2020 and 2021, the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people persisted, while resistance to the occupation escalated. In May 2021, the Sword of Jerusalem Battle marked the peak of Palestinian resistance during the period covered by the report, as resistance multiplied in WB. The PA's security coordination with Israel continued its obstructive role to the resistance in WB, and was halted only for a period of six months. As for the stalemate peace process, it was compounded by the practical failure of the two-state solution, while Israel continued to change facts on the ground, imposing its own vision of the final settlement.

## ***First: The Israeli Aggression and Palestinian Resistance***

Throughout 2020 and 2021, Israel continued its aggression against the Palestinian people, who persisted in their resistance. Despite the security coordination between the PA and the Israeli army in WB, individual resistance operations and other forms of popular resistance continued.

In GS, Palestinian resistance adopted an attack strategy to defend Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque. This was manifested in the Sword of Jerusalem Battle (dubbed *Operation Guardian of the Walls* by Israel), launched in May 2021 and led by the Hamas movement, along with the Palestinian resistance factions. In 2021, in the aftermath of this operation, GS witnessed a sharp increase in Palestinian rocket fire aimed at Israeli towns and cities; according to Shabak, 4,575 rockets were launched in 2021, most of them during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle (4,500 rockets), compared to 197 rockets and mortars shells launched in 2020.<sup>1</sup> In 2020 and 2021, Israel also continued to close the GS's crossings and tighten the blockade.

While 2020 marked a decrease in resistance operations compared to 2019, 2021 saw a significant increase. The Shabak recorded 1,513 attacks in 2020, compared



to 4,386 in 2021 in WB, including East Jerusalem, GS, and inside the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948. Consequently, the monthly average of attacks during 2021 was three times that of 2020. The Shabak recorded 912 attacks in WB (excluding Jerusalem) in 2020, compared to 1,539 throughout 2021. It recorded 336 attacks in East Jerusalem and inside the 1948 occupied territories, in 2020, compared to 524 in 2021. It should be noted that most of the attacks in 2021 in WB consisted of throwing firebombs (1,516), 245 arson attacks, 142 pipe bombs, 93 small-arms fire, and 8 vehicular attacks, among others. However, this number should always be viewed as an indication of the rising resistance in a difficult and complex security environment, where the resistance has been systematically persecuted for many years, with full coordination between the PA and Israel. In GS, the Shabak recorded 265 attacks in 2020, compared to 2,323 in 2021. Most of the attacks recorded in 2021 were in GS: with 2,256 rocket launches (mostly in the Sword of Jerusalem Battle), 37 arson attacks and 11 small-arms fire incidents. It should be noted that the Shabak reports count operations that come from the Egyptian Sinai under its GS records, although these are few in number compared to those originating from the GS.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1/4: Geographical Distribution of Palestinian Resistance Operations 2020–2021, According to Shabak<sup>3</sup>**

Year	WB (Jerusalem excluded)	The 1948 occupied territories and East Jerusalem*	GS**	Total
2020	912	336	265	1,513
2021	1,539	524	2,323	4,386
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,451</b>	<b>860</b>	<b>2,588</b>	<b>5,899</b>

\* Reports by the Israeli Shabak included the operations of East Jerusalem with those in the 1948 occupied territories.

\*\* Including the Sinai Peninsula.

It seems there are discrepancies in the Israeli reports themselves regarding the number of attacks and the way they are categorized; especially those associated with popular resistance. For example, the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) and the *Jerusalem Post* published statistics that showed the Israeli army reported 5,532 stone-throwing incidents in 2021; while the Shabak mentioned only 10.

As for Hamas, it reported 10,850 resistance acts in 2021 in WB, including East Jerusalem, among them 441 effective (armed) operations. It stated that effective operations quadrupled compared to the previous year; while the total number of operations, including popular resistance, was double that of 2020.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 2/4: Palestinian Resistance Operations in WB 2018–2021, According to Hamas<sup>5</sup>**

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021
Acts of popular resistance*	5,930	5,236	5,433	10,409
Effective operations**	187	167	97	441
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,117</b>	<b>5,402</b>	<b>5,530</b>	<b>10,850</b>

\*Including confrontations, throwing stones and firebombs, strikes, demonstrations...

\*\*Including small-arms fire, stabbing, vehicular assault...

**Table 3/4: Development of Effective Resistance Acts 2018–2021, According to Hamas<sup>6</sup>**

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021
Shooting	51	38	29	191
Stabbing or attempted stabbing	39	30	27	41
Vehicular assault or attempted vehicular assault	22	11	11	21
Deployed or dropped improvised explosive device (IED)	74	87	30	55
Arson targeting military facilities, vehicles and posts	1	–	–	112
Downing a drone	–	–	–	3
Other	–	1	–	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>441</b>

The security coordination in WB, despite its suspension for about six months (May–November 2020), detected many resistance cells and thwarted many resistance operations.

Several Israeli security and military sources indicated that security coordination, which has witnessed a significant expansion during PA presidency of Mahmud ‘Abbas, has significantly helped in eliminating the organizational structures of Hamas and prevented the development of resistance operations in WB.<sup>7</sup> In a report, the *New York Times* stated that the task of the Palestinian police forces is difficult; they are called collaborators, doing the dirty work for Israel’s occupation, while the Israelis routinely treated them with highhandedness and disdain.<sup>8</sup>

In November 2020, the PA announced the return of security coordination after a six-month hiatus. The Palestinian factions labelled it more “subjugation to the Zionist-US hegemony and re-promotion of the illusion,” adding that it was a stab in the back of our people’s hopes for real unity, and a blow to national efforts to build national partnership to confront Israel and its decision regarding the annexation of WB, the Deal of the Century and normalization.<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the PA was keen to clarify that suspending security coordination did not mean holding back from “fighting terrorism.” The Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation (Kan) stated that the PA, in an official letter to the Israeli government, stressed that it “has nothing to do with the chaos and violence, and will not allow any breach to public order and the rule of law on its territory,” even during the period of suspended security coordination. This was confirmed by the Secretary of the PLO Executive Committee Saeb Erekat, and the PA Presidency Spokesperson Nabil Abu Rudeineh.<sup>10</sup>

In June 2020, in his comment on the Palestinian security forces’ thwarting of an operation targeting Israeli soldiers in the outskirts of Jenin, the Palestinian General Political Commissioner and the Spokesperson for the security forces ‘Adnan al-Dumairi confirmed that “the Palestinian state is committed to international agreements against terrorism, and we are not afraid of that. We consider ourselves part of the international and Arab framework against terrorism.”<sup>11</sup> In the same vein, the Governor of Jenin, Major General Akram Rajoub, stressed that the security coordination with the Israel was continuing and developing, reiterating that the PA would not allow the presence of resistance factions and weapons because such weapons harm the PA’s relationship with Israel.<sup>12</sup>

In turn, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid noted, during an interview with Israeli Channel 12, that 90% of Israel’s relationship with the PA concerned security coordination.<sup>13</sup> Israeli General Moshe Elad stated in an interview with

Makan—Israeli Broadcasting Corporation, that the “coordination has been going on since 1995, has never been interrupted, and has not stopped. And when it is announced by the PA that the coordination has been suspended, we must ask ourselves, ‘what does that mean?’” Elad added, “Coordination exists 24 hours a day between the officers on both sides; therefore, when we hear a declaration from the PA, it is a political move, and has no roots on the ground.”<sup>14</sup>

### **1. GS Between Aggression and Calm**

In 2020–2021, many rounds of fighting and escalation took place, ranging between short bursts lasting for hours and longer bouts that persisted for 12 days in GS. During these incidents, 4,772 rockets and mortars were fired from GS, killing 17 Israelis and wounding dozens, according to Shabak.<sup>15</sup> The most significant of these rounds was the Sword of Jerusalem Battle.

Contrary to the three major confrontations undertaken by the Palestinian resistance in GS in 2008, 2012, and 2014, this time the resistance took the initiative in military escalation in response to Israel’s violations of the *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and the attempts to evict the Palestinian residents from Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in Jerusalem. This was the prelude to several new equations, most notably:<sup>16</sup>

- a. The mission of the resistance forces in GS, and the motives for using their weapons, are no longer confined to the Strip; what happened is that the Gaza weapons were used to intervene in support of Jerusalem, *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah, a new development.
- b. Re-establishing the Palestinian right to Jerusalem and refuting Israel’s narrative of its right to Judaize Jerusalem and its neighbourhoods.
- c. The resistance took the initiative this time, and its intervention was not restricted to responding to a direct aggression against it on defensive grounds. A development of this type has important repercussions on the conflict; it shows the boldness of the resistance, and its self-confidence and increased capabilities. It brings back to memory the foundations and essence of the cause: that Israel, even if it is not attacking GS, it is still an occupying, oppressive and racist power, and this makes resistance a duty, not just a right.
- d. Imposing the equation that targeting civilians in GS with hundreds of missiles will mean bombing Tel Aviv in return.



- e. The targeting of the Ramon Airport in southern Palestine, about 220 km from Gaza, with an Ayash 250 missile, covering a range greater than 250 km, indicated that the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 are within the range of the Palestinian resistance's fire. This came as a surprise to the Israeli army and air force, who believed that the maximum range of the rockets in possession of Hamas did not exceed 160 km.
- f. Unifying all Palestinians across all historic Palestine, including the 1948 occupied territories, and the Diaspora. This was in addition to the major demonstrations of solidarity in Jordan, Lebanon, the Arab and Muslim world, and countries all over the world.
- g. The return of the Palestine issue to the fore of Arab, regional and international attention; particularly regarding promoting the Palestinian narrative and refuting Israeli propaganda.

Despite the achievements that Israel claimed, it incurred tangible losses in that confrontation. During and after the stand-off, the debate arose in its political, military and media circles about its failure, and the eventual upper hand of the Palestinians after the successes achieved by the resistance.<sup>17</sup>

On Monday, 10/5/2021, at six o'clock in the evening, Ezzedeem al-Qassam Brigades launched a missile strike on the occupied Palestinian territories in Jerusalem, in response to Israel's aggression against the Holy City. They first issued an ultimatum to Israel to withdraw its soldiers and those who had stormed the *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah, and to release all detainees held in the aftermath of the last Jerusalem uprising by six o'clock that evening.<sup>18</sup>

The Sword of Jerusalem Battle continued until dawn on Friday, 21/5/2021, after Egypt had informed the Palestinian factions that a mutual and simultaneous ceasefire agreement had been reached in GS on 20/5/2021. The Israeli Ministerial Council for Political and Security Affairs (Cabinet) announced the unanimous endorsement of a ceasefire in GS, and said that it had agreed to an "unconditional, mutual cease-fire," which meant that both Tel Aviv and Hamas would be absolved of any mutual obligations. The Hamas leader's Media Advisor Taher al-Nono, stressed that the Palestinian resistance would abide by this agreement as long as the occupation did. This was confirmed by the al-Qassam Brigades Spokesperson Abu 'Ubeida, who said, "We fought the battle with honour, will and power on behalf of an entire nation, and the massacres have not been able to stem the tide

of our resistance, nor did it manage to silence our guns and launchers.” He added, “We have accepted the proposed Arab mediation and suspended the missile strike until two o’clock Friday morning,” adding, “The occupation’s leadership is facing a real test, and the decision to launch a missile strike is on the table until two in the morning.”<sup>19</sup>

Assessing the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, Amos Harel, a military expert, wrote in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* that Hamas secured an important military achievement during the battle, showing that the balance of power had begun to somehow change between the two parties. Harel said that the marked improvement of the Palestinian resistance in its long-range shooting, and the significant number of rockets and mortar shells it fired at Israel, was remarkable.<sup>20</sup>

According to an assessment by the Israeli intelligence services, following the announcement of the ceasefire agreement, Hamas maintained its ability to launch large numbers of rockets at Israel, and the frequency of rocket fire and the intensity of shells recorded during the escalation were the highest ever. According to Shabak, the resistance fired 4,500 rockets and mortar shells from GS, of which 3,400 reached inside Israel.<sup>21</sup> Israeli estimates indicate that the resistance factions retain about 10 thousand missiles, including hundreds of long-range missiles.<sup>22</sup> The editor-in-chief of the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Aluf Benn, described the battle as “Israel’s most failed and pointless border war ever, even when measured against the tough competition from the Champions league of the Second Lebanon War” and previous Gaza wars, stressing that what happened was a serious military and diplomatic failure.<sup>23</sup> The official Israeli TV channel revealed that the Israeli army failed to achieve its goal during the first days of the GS battle, which was to kill Hamas’ leaders.<sup>24</sup>

Thomas Friedman, in an article in *The New York Times*, stated that the war in GS revealed the weakness of Israel and exposed it to world public opinion. Friedman said that Israel’s use of advanced air power, regardless of what he saw as its justified use and accuracy, was the reason for the release of photos and videos on social media, igniting Israel’s critics around the world.<sup>25</sup>

Al-Qassam Brigades published pictures and information about its new weapons used during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, including SH85 missile, named after the martyr Muhammad Abu Shammala. It has a range of 85 km and significant destructive power. Al-Qassam also introduced the locally manufactured



Shehab kamikaze unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), and the locally manufactured Al-Zawari reconnaissance UAV.<sup>26</sup> The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander, Esmail Qaani, said that most of the missiles fired by the Palestinian factions during the battle were made by the fighters themselves.<sup>27</sup>

During the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, 258 Palestinians were killed,<sup>28</sup> including 66 children, 39 women (four pregnant) and 17 elderly people, while 1,948 were wounded, of which 90 were “serious injuries.”<sup>29</sup> The Palestinian Ministry of Health in GS revealed that Israel targeted 19 families, thus committing massacres. Israel’s 1,800 raids led to the killing of 91 Palestinians, including 41 children and 25 women.<sup>30</sup> Photos published by the al-Qassam Brigades showed that 61 of its members were killed in the battle, including 8 commanders,<sup>31</sup> while 22 al-Quds Brigades members were killed. The Palestinian Prisoner Club declared that Israeli forces arrested more than 2,400 Palestinians during the battle in WB and the Arab towns of the 1948 occupied territories, pointing to the noticeably high cases of administrative detention.<sup>32</sup>

The Ministry of Public Works and Housing in GS announced that the escalation destroyed 1,800 housing units, while 16,800 were partially damaged. It added that five large residential towers were destroyed, in addition to 74 government facilities and headquarters; 66 schools were damaged, three mosques were destroyed and about 40 others were slightly damaged.<sup>33</sup> The Under-Secretary of the Ministry of National Economy in the GS, Rushdi Wadi, announced that Israeli planes had targeted 16 factories in an industrial town, east of Gaza City; half of them were completely destroyed, and the others were partially damaged.<sup>34</sup>

As for the Israelis, 13 were killed,<sup>35</sup> and the Shabak website stated that 168 Israelis were injured in May 2021, but it did not specify the casualties that resulted from the Sword of Jerusalem Battle.<sup>36</sup> The *Haaretz* newspaper reported that the number of settlers of the Gaza envelope, including Ashkelon, who requested psychological support during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle was 54% higher than that during the 2014 aggression. It added that psychological treatment was provided to 3,409 people, who had experienced anxiety, fear and trauma in the five centres in the Gaza envelope, while 666 settlers were treated in Ashkelon. Compared to the 2014 GS war, 2,200 settlers were provided with this treatment.<sup>37</sup>

Following the announcement of the ceasefire, Israel’s economic losses amounted to about 7 billion shekels (roughly \$2.14 billion) according to preliminary

unofficial estimates of an official source at the Israeli Ministry of Finance.<sup>38</sup> The Manufacturers Association of Israel, which represents about 1,500 companies and 400 thousand workers, said that Israeli companies lost 1.2 billion shekels (about \$369 million).<sup>39</sup>

### **GS Tunnels**

The GS tunnels played a pivotal role in the resistance's steadfastness, despite the consecutive wars waged by Israel. Every time, the resistance has emerged with minimal losses in its ranks, while also managing to maintain its military capacity. In his book, *The Subterranean War and Critical Challenges for Our Forces*, former deputy head of the Israel National Security Council (NSC), and former head of the military history department of the Israeli army, Shaul Shay, talked about the "tunnel dilemma," which will turn into a fundamental problem to the Israeli army in any war with the resistance in GS, citing the historical experience in Vietnam for US forces who failed to overcome the tunnel challenge.<sup>40</sup>

During the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, an internal investigation in the Israeli army revealed that the manoeuvre carried out by the Air Force, in which at least 160 combat aircraft were used within hours, failed to achieve its objectives. According to the *Maariv* newspaper, the plan succeeded in destroying a few tunnels, but it failed to debilitate the resistance, where only a few of its men were killed in the operation.<sup>41</sup> Five Israeli officers of the southern command admitted to the failure of a plan developed to eliminate Hamas' tunnel network, where only a small part of the tunnel network was destroyed, killing only few al-Qassam Brigades fighters. In this context, the head of the Hamas movement in GS, Yahya al-Sinwar, confirmed after the battle that the Israeli army destroyed no more than 3% of tunnels in GS.<sup>42</sup>

In 2020–2021, the Israeli forces sought to limit the efficiency of the tunnels, searching for them. In this regard, in early December 2021 the Israeli army announced that it had completed the construction of a massive iron barrier, a project that had taken about three and a half years to complete. The 65 km barrier lies along the Gaza border and extends out to sea, a 6 m steel fence and an unknown number of meters underground. Construction of the barrier was a massive industrial undertaking, requiring two million cubic meters of concrete and 140 tons of iron and steel plates. A network of radar arrays and other surveillance sensors were installed, and the project required 1,200 workers.<sup>43</sup>



The cost of the wall was 3.5 billion shekels (about \$1.1 billion). The head of the Israeli army-Defense Ministry security-fence project, Eran Ophir, described the installation as a very complex process in operational, engineering and performance terms, but it had created another means of fencing in the Palestinians, as the wall will surround the entire GS. To the north of the GS, the wall will continue into the sea.<sup>44</sup> Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz said, “This barrier, a creative, technological project of the first order, denies Hamas one of the capabilities that it tried to develop and puts a wall of iron, sensors and concrete between it and the residents of the south.”<sup>45</sup>

## 2. The Killed and Wounded

In 2020, a total of 48 Palestinians were killed by the Israelis (see table 4/4), including 9 children, a breastfeeding woman, 2 people with special needs, and 4 prisoners.<sup>46</sup> In 2021, a total of 365 Palestinians from various cities and towns of Palestine were killed (including 258 during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle); 264 were killed in GS, most of them during the war on Gaza in May 2021, while Nablus witnessed the highest number of those killed among WB governorates: 22, followed by Jenin with 20, then Ramallah with 16, Hebron with 10, and Jerusalem with nine. Also, two were killed in the 1948 occupied territories. Among those killed were 18 children and 61 Palestinian women, who were shot by the Israeli forces and settlers in both the GS and WB, including Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> 2,614 Palestinians were injured in 2020, compared to more than 17,042 in 2021.<sup>48</sup>

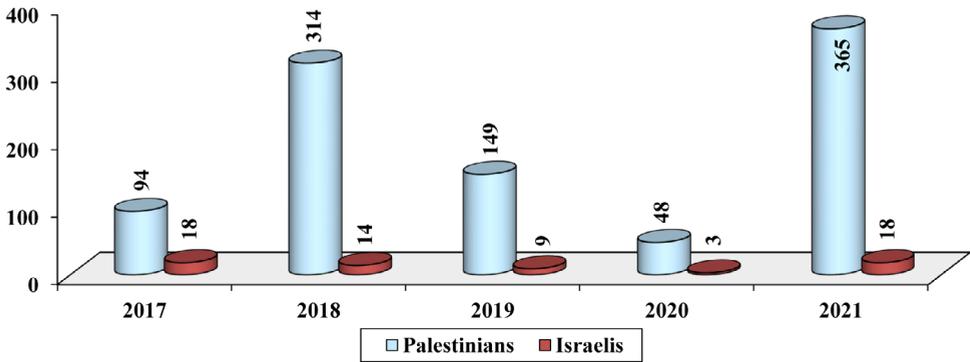
The Shabak recorded the killing of 3 Israelis in 2020, while in 2021, it recorded the killing of 18 Israelis (including 15 during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle) because of Palestinian operations. In addition, 46 Israelis were wounded in 2020, compared to 190 (including 168 in May 2021 during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle) in 2021 (see table 4/4).<sup>49</sup>

The policy of extrajudicial killings at the checkpoints continued using false pretexts. In 2016, Israel returned to the policy of withholding Palestinian bodies, and in 2020–2021 it continued with this, delaying handing them over to their families for burial. It is still withholding 90 bodies in morgues, and has long withheld the remains of 250 Palestinians in the so called “cemeteries of numbers.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, as part of the Israeli collective punishment policy, 6 Palestinian houses were blown up and demolished in 2020, and 3 in 2021, where these houses belong to the families of Palestinians killed or imprisoned by Israel and accused of carrying out attacks against the Israelis.<sup>51</sup>

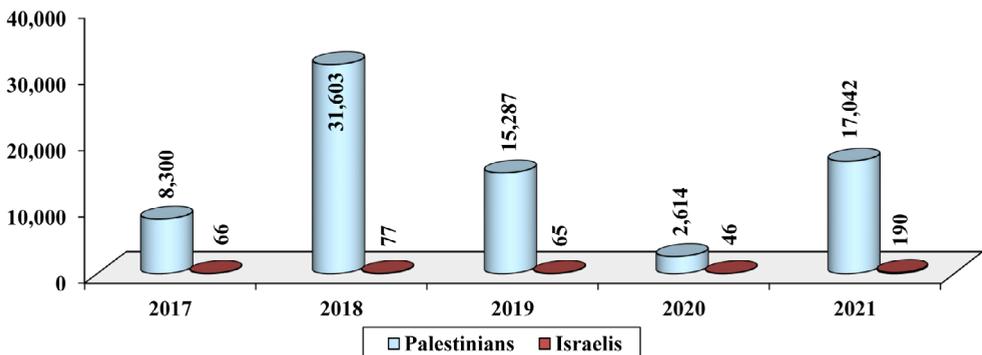
**Table 4/4: The Killed and Wounded Among Palestinians and Israelis in WB and GS 2017–2021<sup>52</sup>**

Year	Killed		Wounded	
	Palestinian	Israeli	Palestinian	Israeli
2017	94	18	8,300	66
2018	314	14	31,603	77
2019	149	9	15,287	65
2020	48	3	2,614	46
2021	365	18	17,042	190

**Palestinians and Israelis Killed in WB and GS 2017–2021**



**Palestinians and Israelis Wounded in WB and GS 2017–2021**



### 3. Prisoners and Detainees

In 2020 and 2021 the suffering of Palestinian prisoners continued. By the end of December 2021, the number of prisoners in Israeli prisons reached approximately 4,550, of whom 32 were women, 170 children, and 8 PLC members. There were 4,250 prisoners from WB, of whom 350 were from East Jerusalem, 230 from GS and 70 from the 1948 territories, in addition to dozens of Arab detainees of different nationalities. 500 of the prisoners were classified as administrative detainees, or detainees pending trial, or what Israel calls “unlawful combatants” (see table 5/4).

In December 2020, there were 4,400 in Israeli prisons, including 41 women, 170 children, and 8 PLC members. There were 4,075 prisoners from WB, of whom 310 were from East Jerusalem, 255 from GS and 70 from the 1948 occupied territories, in addition to dozens of Arab detainees of different nationalities. 380 were classified as administrative detainees among the prisoners (see table 5/4).

The Palestine Center for Prisoners Studies monitored the increase in arrests in 2021 and indicated that it had been the highest for 18 years. The centre recorded 8 thousand arrests, including of 1,266 children and 118 women and girls.<sup>53</sup> This marked an increase of 60% over 2020, where 4,700 were arrested, including 550 children and 178 women and girls.<sup>54</sup>

The arrests in 2020 and 2021, as in previous years, affected all segments and groups of Palestinian society, including children, women, academics, released prisoners, patients, the elderly, human rights activists, journalists, and parliamentarians. 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, via the “Arabized undercover security units,” or at the crossings and checkpoints; plus there were dozens of fishermen arrested at sea in GS.

However, the pattern of arrests was non-linear throughout 2020, with an average of 392 detentions per month, about 13 per day. In 2021, the average number of arrests increased significantly, reaching 667 detainees per month, and an average of about 22 cases daily.

The highest number of arrests during 2020 took place in Jerusalem, with 2,000 cases (42% of total arrests), while Hebron witnessed 700 cases and GS 88 cases. Of those detained, 1,200 were former prisoners and 145 suffering illness or injury.

Furthermore, 9 PLC members were detained. The same year witnessed 72 arrests, summonses, and detentions that would last for several hours, plus administrative orders were issued to Palestinian journalists.<sup>55</sup>

Jerusalem had the largest share of arrests in 2021 as well, with 2,784 arrests.<sup>56</sup> The Palestine Center for Prisoners Studies indicated that the campaign of arrests that took place in the cities and villages of the Palestinian interior during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle in May 2021 was the fiercest and largest in many years; thousands of Israeli police, border guards and reservists participated in it, and it lasted for several days. The arrests affected more than 1,700 Palestinians, which significantly increased the number of detainees that year. Of those arrested, 1,750 were released prisoners, 196 sick and 7 PLC members.<sup>57</sup>

In 2020, Israel issued 1,100 administrative orders, the majority of which were extensions of detention, while in 2021, they reached 1,600 orders. Israeli courts issued 5 life sentences in 2020 and another 3 in 2021. The number of Palestinian prisoners who died rose to 227 with the deaths of four in 2020 and one in 2021.<sup>58</sup>

The years 2020 and 2021 witnessed increased prison raids carried out by the special units against the prisoner sections at Israeli prisons and detention centers. Prisoner advocacy groups documented many prisoner testimonies about attacks and abuse by the special prison forces, with beatings and severe ill-treatment amounting to torture.

In 2020–2021, the Israeli Prison Service adopted harsh policies towards prisoners, including medical negligence, administrative detention, unfair trials and the prevention of visits, consequently the prisoners held a number of hunger strikes, collectively and individually. Prisoners' strikes and "empty stomach battles" were weapons to urge the alleviation of unfair and arbitrary policies, and to restore usurped rights.

In 2020 and 2021, Israeli authorities discussed and issued several discriminatory laws and decisions against Palestinian prisoners, most importantly the Defense Service Bill (Temporary Provision) (Placement of Soldiers in Israel Prison Service) (Amendment No. 9), which was approved by the Israeli Knesset in three readings in December 2021. It aims to heighten the repression of prisoners, legitimising their oppression, and stripping them of their most basic rights. After the six prisoners' escape from the Gilboa Prison in September 2021, this new legal amendment

provided for extending the option to assign soldiers from combat units and reserve units to certain units of the Israel Prison Service, provided this amendment would be extended until December 2022.<sup>59</sup>

On 6/9/2021, six Palestinian prisoners escaped from Gilboa Prison, a high-security facility in northern Israel known as “The Safe.” They are believed to have dug a hole in the floor of their cell, then crawled through a cavity and tunnelled beneath the outer wall. This constituted a blow to the Israeli security system and to the image of Israel. On 19/9/2021, the Israeli army announced the re-arrest of the six prisoners at different times.<sup>60</sup>

**Table 5/4: Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Prisons 2017–2021<sup>61</sup>**

Year	Total no. of detainees	WB*	GS	Serving life sentences	Women	Children
2017	6,119	5,729	320	525	59	330
2018	5,450	5,082	298	540	53	215
2019	5,000	4,634	296	541	41	180
2020	4,400	4,075	255	543	41	170
2021	4,550	4,250	230	544	32	170

\* Approximate figures according to Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association—Addameer.

### Administrative Detention

Although administrative detention is prohibited under international law and violates the most basic human rights, Israel continued to issue such orders in 2020 and 2021, to issue administrative detention orders against various segments of Palestinian society, including PLC members, human rights activists, workers, students, lawyers, merchants, etc. The number of administrative detainees held by Israel without specific charges or trial reached 500 in December 2021, including 6 PLC members, compared to 380 at the end of 2020, including 6 PLC members; 461 by the end of 2019, 495 by the end of 2018, and 450 by the end of 2017.<sup>62</sup>

**Table 6/4: Administrative Detainees 2017–2021<sup>63</sup>**

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Administrative detainees	450	495	461	380	500

### **The Hunger Strike of Prisoners**

Since the beginning of the occupation, many Palestinian prisoners have been going on hunger strikes as a result of the arbitrary rules of the Israel Prison Service. Strikes were either to grant the prisoners some demands or to protest against poor conditions or mistreatment, collectively and individually. During 2020–2021, the prisoners staged several such strikes.

Among the most significant strikes, in 2020–2021, those called the “empty stomach battle,” undertaken individually by the prisoners, specifically against administrative detention. Most prominent of which was prisoner Maher al-Akhras, whose strike lasted 103 days and ended on 6/11/2020, following an agreement stipulating his release on 26/11/2020; Sheikh Khader ‘Adnan, who went on his sixth strike, during May and June 2021, for 25 days to reject his arbitrary detention; Ghadanfar Abu ‘Atwan, 65 days, ended on 8/7/2021; Nahid al-Fakhouri’s, 113 days, ended on 11/11/2021; Kayed al-Fasfous, 131 days, ended on 22/11/2021; Lo’ai al-Ashqar, 49 days, ended on 28/11/2021; and Nidal Ballout, 32 days, ended on 29/11/2021.<sup>64</sup> Also Hisham Abu Hawash, whose hunger strike lasted 141 days, in rejection of administrative detention. It ended on 4/1/2022 after the Israel Prison Service announced that the current administrative order of prisoner Abu Hawash would expire on 26/2/2022 and would not be renewed.<sup>65</sup>

Another major “empty-stomach battle” that the prisoners took part in en masse in 2020–2021 was the announcement of the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs, on 12/9/2021, that started on 17/9/2021, under the slogan “The Battle of Defending Rights,” the prisoner movement is organizing an indefinite hunger strike divided among groups, to protest against the continuous attacks against the detainees, which came as a result of the escape of the six detainees from Gilboa Prison. On 13/10/2021, about 250 PIJ prisoners declared an indefinite hunger strike in protest at the “abusive measures” taken against them, after the Gilboa Prison break on 6/9/2021. On 26/12/2021, the Supreme Leadership Body of Hamas Prisoners announced that the first group of its prisoners, “led by leading figures,” went on a hunger strike, in protest against the continuous violations of the Israel Prison Service against the prisoners.<sup>66</sup>

### **4. Israeli GS Siege**

Israel continued to impose a siege on GS for the 15th 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 passing through the crossings, in addition to its restrictions on the movement of individuals. Throughout 2020 and 2021, there were no structural changes to the siege measures, as the facilitations that Israel had claimed to be implementing did not affect the restrictions on the freedom of movement of individuals and goods. Consequently, there has been a serious deterioration in the humanitarian, economic and social conditions of more than two million Palestinians living in the Strip.

Regarding the movement of individuals, Israel continued to impose severe restrictions on the movement of Gazans through the Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing, their only access to WB. Israel permitted the passage of some groups, albeit very specific cases, such as patients with serious medical conditions and their companions, Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, foreign journalists, workers in international humanitarian organizations, merchants and businessmen, families of detainees in Israeli prisons, and persons travelling via al-Karamah border crossing.<sup>67</sup>

Israel even imposed restrictions on those wishing to travel under the limited exception policy during lockdowns, and most GS residents did not fall under these exceptions. According to Gisha–Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, the average monthly number of exits by Palestinians through the Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing in the first half of 2021 was about 6% of what it was in the months prior to the “COVID-19 closure” (January and February 2021), which reached 14,960 per month in 2019. In August 2021, following a year and a half ban, Israel began to allow traders to exit GS via Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing.<sup>68</sup> Israel also prevented young Christian Palestinians from GS from entering Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth during the Christmas and Easter holidays to practice their religious rites. They imposed restrictions on the freedom of movement and entry to the holy sites for hundreds of Christians in the Strip.

In addition to the significant restrictions imposed by Israel on the movement of Palestinians on normal days, the closure of crossings is often used as a punitive measure. For example, during the aggression on GS in May 2021, Israel completely closed the Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing, and even though a ceasefire was reached, it continued to impose additional restrictions on the movement of people.<sup>69</sup>

In 2020 and 2021, the Rafah Crossing continued to open for the evacuation of humanitarian cases and the return of the stranded, however, the crossing’s operation was limited and very slow in 2020, with 21,961 travellers leaving the

GS and 24,256 returning to it, during the same period. On 9/2/2021, the Egyptian authorities announced the daily opening of the Rafah Crossing for the travel of humanitarian cases, including students, patients, and residency holders (except for weekly and annual vacations) for an indefinite period; a precedent in years. 85,642 passengers managed to leave GS from the beginning of 2021 until the end of November 2021, while 78,784 returned during the same period. Travellers returning to the Strip usually endure inspection procedures carried out by the Egyptian authorities, which are long, repetitive, and arbitrary.<sup>70</sup>

Regarding the movement of commercial goods, in 2020 and 2021, Israel continued to impose tightened restrictions on the list of items classified as “dual-use”; which Israel claims that despite being used for civilian purposes, can be used to develop the combat capabilities of the Palestinian resistance. The dual-use items include 62 categories and hundreds of goods and commodities that are essential to the life of the population, and whose restriction contributes to the deterioration of infrastructure conditions, and the deterioration of economic, health, and educational conditions. The list includes, communications equipment, pumps, big generators, iron bars, iron pipes in all diameters, welding equipment and welding rods, various types of wood, X-ray machines, cranes and heavy vehicles, types of batteries, and many types of fertilizers.<sup>71</sup>

For the fifteenth consecutive year, Israeli authorities continued to ban the export of all GS products to WB, the 1948 occupied territories, and the world. There was only a limited exception, where they allowed the export of very limited quantities of Gazan products, mostly agricultural commodities. In 2020–2021, the exports constituted only 7% of the Strip’s total monthly exports before closure was imposed in June 2007 (4,500 truckloads/month). The ban on the exportation of the Strip’s products led to the deterioration of economic conditions and the closure of thousands of factories, therefore contributing to the increase of unemployment and poverty rates.<sup>72</sup>

Israel continued tightening its closure of the Gaza Sea and denying fishermen access to fishing areas, despite the proclaimed authorization for fishermen to fish at a distance between 3–15 nautical miles. It decreased the fishing area or closed the sea completely dozens of times claiming the decisions to be in response to the launch of incendiary balloons and projectiles into Israeli areas adjacent to GS.<sup>73</sup>



## ***Second: The Peace Process***

2020–2021 was a period of stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which has been largely moribund. It reached a deadlock a long time ago, starting with the Camp David Summit in 2000, or, at the latest, in 2014, when US Secretary of State John Kerry made a failed attempt at progress during the Obama presidency. However, the Israeli side saw concrete developments as the Netanyahu-led Israeli government made speedy progress towards its goals, with the full support of the Trump administration. It acted as if it had a historic opportunity to unilaterally resolve the conflict and achieve the Israeli solution, over the corpse of the Palestine issue, by eliminating its different aspects; the right of return and compensation for refugees, self-determination, ending the occupation, attaining national independence, and individual and national equality.

An example of the above was the announcement of the Trump Deal in January 2020, which was a joint US-Israeli plan to phase out the Palestine issue through dismantling and invalidating the various final status issues; Jerusalem, the settlements, borders, security, and water.<sup>74</sup> It adopted the approach of having Arab normalization with Israel first, before withdrawing from the occupied Palestinian and Arab lands as per the Arab Peace Initiative. The proposed deal went so far that it dealt with the West Bank as a “liberated” land with which Israel can do what it wishes, including the confiscation of Palestinian land, the expulsion of its residents, and the establishment of settlements on it, on the grounds that it is part of the “Promised Land” of Israel, not even a disputed land as stated in the Oslo Accords.

Trump endorsed his predecessors’ policy of recognizing Israel as a “homeland for the Jewish people,” and this encouraged the Israeli government to push for the passing of the racist Jewish Nation-State Law in 2018, that made racism constitutional. He also did what the previous US presidents dared not to do, when he moved the US embassy to Jerusalem and recognized the city as the capital of Israel, closed the 144-year-old US Consulate in Jerusalem, recognized the annexation of the Golan Heights, and ceased US funding for the PA and the UNRWA, which he demanded to be dissolved. He had a plan to redefine the Palestinian refugee so that it would only include the thousands of Palestinians who had been living in Palestine until the *Nakbah*, thus disregarding their children and grandchildren.

The deal also included a clause allowing the annexation of 30% of the WB to Israel, and a clause stating “the possibility, subject to agreement of the parties that the borders of Israel will be redrawn such that the Triangle Communities become part of the State of Palestine,” which the plan included a provision for its establishment,<sup>75</sup> but only after a years-long test, and after meeting conditions that are impossible to meet.

Despite the plan’s full adoption of the Israeli vision, it was not submitted to the government and the Knesset for approval. Large numbers of the ruling right would not endorse it, rather they would oppose some of its clauses, especially the reference to the Palestinian state, even if it lacks any of the characteristics of a state, particularly its lack of sovereignty; the essential element that gives the existence of states a meaning.

The 2020–2021 period (as with many years prior to it) did not witness any negotiations or political or summit-level meetings, despite the constant calls of President Mahmud ‘Abbas for their resumption. He expressed his approval of French and Russian initiatives to hold meetings with Netanyahu,<sup>76</sup> but the latter constantly thwarted them.

President ‘Abbas repeated his calls for the resumption of bilateral negotiations, on the basis of reconsidering the signed agreements, and by requesting the activation of the Quartet on the Middle East<sup>77</sup> at times and by calling for its expansion at other times. ‘Abbas also called for an international conference<sup>78</sup> with a new proposal rejecting unilateral US sponsorship, in response to Trump’s plan, which ‘Abbas and most states rejected. The US administration faced international isolation and great difficulty in passing the deal, especially regarding the annexation clause, which included deadlines that were not met. The deal was exchanged for a strategy of normalization that has succeeded in securing an unquestioning following of Israel by some Arab states.

The legal annexation was postponed mainly due to the unanimous Palestinian rejection that could not be overlooked.<sup>79</sup> In other words, undertaking the annexation would lead to a large-scale *Intifadah* preceded by continuous uprisings and popular waves of protests, in addition to the various forms of resistance and boycott campaigns. It would also have major repercussions on security and stability in the region.



From the outset, the peace process bore the seeds of its own failure. The Israeli government was never ready or willing to reach a settlement, and has been primarily concerned with ending the Palestine issue. The settlement that was proposed in the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 was not based on a clear and binding reference, and was neither fair nor balanced. The balance of power was always tipped in favour of US-backed Israel. The Oslo Accords were also a major failure due to the substantial concessions made by the Palestinian negotiators, most significantly the recognition of Israel over most of Palestine's land, and the cessation of resistance, without any guarantees of fulfilling any basic Palestinian rights.

Instead of renouncing the peace process at the end of the transitional period in May 1999, and following the failure of the Camp David negotiations in 2000, the Palestinian ceiling was lowered, and the "road map" was accepted. Its main framework was built on Israel's security. Under President 'Abbas, a much worse approach has been adopted; it entails fulfilling Palestinian obligations regardless of the failures of the Israeli side, which continued to "manage" the peace process and establish new realities on the ground. Israel has continued its attempts to annex the largest areas of land, with the smallest possible population.

The trend in Israel, particularly since Netanyahu assumed the presidency of the Israeli government in 2009, has been the refusal to continue or revive the "peace process," and to thwart any attempts to boost the PA's legitimacy. The search for a settlement has ended, as Netanyahu refused to revive it, and instead he proposed an "economic peace" with the Palestinians that did not recognize their rights, but rather legitimized the occupation and aimed to make it permanent. The other solution is a regional one, which skips the Palestinians and goes straight to the other Arabs, with the aim of using the Arabs to subjugate the Palestinians, whereas previously the Palestinians were used to break the ice with the Arabs. This is because Israel has been relieved of the conditions that would make it accept a settlement, especially after the Arab Spring, and in the context of Israeli society moving increasingly towards extremism, religiosity and racism. A new Zionism has developed, which enjoys a stable large right-wing Israeli majority, while the left and centre remain a diminishing minority; to the extent that the Palestine issue is no longer at the forefront of the Israeli governments' concerns, and has become a security and internal issue. This has manifested in Israel's dealings with the Palestinian side; from being at the highest, most official level down to ministerial, then administrative, economic and now primarily at the security level.

The evidence for the above is that, like Netanyahu, the current Prime Minister Naftali Bennett refuses to meet President ‘Abbas. When meetings are held at lower levels, whether between ‘Abbas and Israeli ministers or with security leaders; or between security leaders from both sides; or between the Area Coordinator and the minister of civil affairs, meetings focus on economic and security matters, as well as on reducing tension and preventing potential deterioration of the security situation. This means that they want to prevent any escalation of resistance, whether into a popular movement that might develop into an *Intifadah*, or into armed action. They also want to contain the situation in GS, based on a formula in which calm is good for the Israeli economy. The ultimate yet unattainable goal is to reach a total long-term quiet in exchange for easing or lifting the blockade.

If we take, for example, the meeting between ‘Abbas and Benny Gantz on 29/12/2021, we note that the latter demanded an increase in the PA’s efforts to thwart the resistance, suspend paying the monthly stipends to prisoners and families of killed Palestinians, and “end the proceedings launched by the Palestinian Authority against Israel in the International Criminal Court.” He also refused to discuss any political issues. ‘Abbas demanded a return to the political process, resumption of stalled negotiations and the implementation of the signed agreements.<sup>80</sup> He had forgotten that the more intractable obstacles cannot be overcome by the same methods that failed in the past and have no prospect in the present.

Given the unlikelihood of a political process with Bennett’s government, the PA has adopted a new approach. This meant it crossing into the previously prohibited zone of dealing with economic “peace.” For this would make it more difficult to resume the political path, if not eliminate it. The economic “peace” does not achieve actual peace or real economic growth, and its true goal is to keep the PA weak but alive, in order to fulfil its security function for Israel.

In 2020–2021, it can be noted that the PA was initially very optimistic about Trump’s loss in the elections and the failure of his deal. The PA revived its bets on the US administration, anticipating changes in Israel, to the extent that it retracted the May 2020 decision to terminate all agreements with Israel in response to the hostile US policy during Trump’s tenure. In November 2020, it hastened to withdraw its decision (before the official results of the US presidential elections were announced, which indicated Joe Biden’s victory) and unilaterally re-established the agreements, knowing that there was no truth to the Israeli government’s claim that



it was still committed to the Oslo Accords. This shift by the PA can be clearly seen in its seeking to convince the Israeli side to implement what the PA has claimed it had achieved, namely a return to the political process, fulfilment of previous commitments, and going back to pre-second *Intifadah* conditions, in addition to implementing 33 terms presented by the PA to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Israel and Palestinian Affairs Hady ‘Amr in his repeated tours. The fulfilment of these means returning to the Oslo Accords.<sup>81</sup>

History and the current context of events indicate that there is no chance of returning to the Oslo Accords; for, despite its misery, it is behind us, and the current ceiling is significantly lower than that established in Oslo. The Bennett government has continued the policy of creeping annexation of land, rights and holy sites, i.e., quiet implementation of the Trump deal, without legal annexation at the present time. This process combines conflict management, currently called “conflict reduction,” and gradual conflict resolution; piece by piece, whenever and wherever possible. The current Israeli government has realized that the legal annexation of the occupied lands or parts of it is impossible at the moment and would have major repercussions. The Netanyahu government and Trump administration reached a similar conclusion, as evidenced by the fact they postponed the annexation in return for normalization, a policy carried out by the current government, which is also encouraged by continued Palestinian weakness, division and confusion.

Biden’s victory had major repercussions. These started before his victory, with the Palestinian leadership returning to the agreements and restoring relations with Israel for nothing in return.<sup>82</sup> Such a move is a continuation of PA policy despite the fact that each time it is disappointed with the lack of reciprocal goodwill gestures from Israel and her allies. This time Biden did not fulfil his promises; the US consulate in Jerusalem was not opened, the PLO office in Washington was not reopened, the majority of US aid had not resumed, at the time of writing this report, due to legal complications, while the aid provided to UNRWA had resumed between the two sides within an agreement that changes the mandate granted to the international agency. In addition, the peace process did not resume, with the US adopting the two-state solution without doing anything to make it a reality. Actually, it froze any movement in this regard until further notice, for fear the Bennett government might fall, allowing the return of Netanyahu, hence the PA was advised and pressured to deal with the matters in hand and postpone any negotiations until further notice.

Therefore, a US-Israeli agreement has been reached in which discussions about political negotiations and reviving the political process are set aside, and the focus is on “confidence-building,” avoiding the PA’s collapse and preventing the escalation of all forms of resistance to uncontrollable levels. This applies to the situation in WB and GS.

The PA was disappointed with the US-Israeli accord. However, due to its sense of helplessness, defeat, despair, and lack of other alternatives, and its unwillingness to pay the price of national unity in the form of true partnership, it hastily held meetings between ‘Abbas and Israeli ministers, most importantly, the two meetings with Defense Minister Benny Gantz. The PA has been trying to combine two contradictory policies, the first is its call for adherence to the negotiations and political process, activating the Quartet, holding an international conference, and continuing efforts to activate international institutions, especially the ICC. The second is its practical dealing with the “peace” plan, which would hinder any potential resumption of the political process. Currently, there are no active forces pushing to resume the political process, and there will be no one “more royal than the king,” i.e., the Palestinians. There exist deep divisions despite the popular uprisings in Jerusalem and their spread to all Palestinian communities, and despite the Sword of Jerusalem Battle (dubbed by Israel Operation Guardian of the Walls), which offered an inspiring model of steadfastness and resistance, but was not invested politically, even in terms of seriously lifting or easing the GS siege. In addition, Israeli, regional and US efforts to strengthen the PA and weaken its opponents have continued.<sup>83</sup>

What put the PA in a more critical situation was that its hopes in alternate prime minister Yair Lapid, who is set to assume power in 2023, have faded early, as he does not carry hope for the resumption of political negotiations. Contrary to his previous announcements, he stated in October 2021 that he does not plan to resume political talks; so much so that he refused a request from the Palestinian president to meet him.<sup>84</sup>

Even if we assumed for the sake of argument that he changed his mind and wished to hold negotiations, his partners in the government from the right and extreme right would prevent it. Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked announced that political negotiations will not resume during Bennett’s term nor during Lapid’s term, nor after them. The coalition agreement stipulates taking no unilateral steps without prior agreement.



Even if negotiations somehow resume, they are likely to be as futile as previous iterations, possibly even worse, because Israel has become more extremist, and the US administration is weak, retreating and repositioning its forces, reshaping its role in the region, and is preoccupied with other internal and external issues. Many developments in the region and the world favor Israeli interests, and according to the Arij Institute, the number of settlers in WB, including East Jerusalem, has reached 913 thousand.<sup>85</sup> The Israeli government has announced settlements and is planning more, which would make any negotiations, if they ever took place, another major deception. Negotiations in these conditions would amount to covering up the completion of a fait accompli occupation, before it is legitimized in Israel, then the US, and then at the international and Arab levels.

The likely scenarios and courses of action in the coming two years can be summarized as follows:

### **First Scenario: Maintaining the Status Quo**

The negotiations, though aimless, remain stalled, while the plans of building trust and developing the economy in exchange for security in WB and GS would continue. Also, attempts will be made to prevent the PA's collapse and the associated progression of Hamas and PIJ, in addition to other resistance factions in GS. The potential outbreak of an *Intifadah* will be prevented in WB, as well as any major military confrontations between the occupation and the resistance in GS, which means the PA will play a new role that is further restricted by Israel. It will lose more and more Palestinian national legitimacy.

### **Second Scenario: Deterioration of the Situation in WB and GS**

This scenario involves the deterioration of the situation in WB and GS, as the correlation between the two seemed greater after May 2021, when rockets were launched in support of Jerusalem. Israel is trying to link any lull agreement in GS to another one in WB, due to the fact that we may witness an escalation and recurrence of popular uprisings and armed resistance in WB, and military confrontation in GS.

There is another sub-scenario here involving the possibility of chaos and more security, instability due to the conflict between the centres of power within Fatah, the PA, and the community, especially given the competition and struggle over the succession to the presidency that combines all the powers, authorities and potentials.

### **Third Scenario: Continued Steadfastness and Attempts to Achieve Unity**

This scenario revolves around the continuation of steadfastness and the escalation of resistance, with renewed attempts to end the internal schism and achieve unity. This can be considered possible on the battlefield where field unity is ripe, especially considering the failed hope in reviving political negotiations and achieving something for the Palestinians that might renew the legitimacy of the PA. Also, if negotiations were to resume, they would not lead to a solution or satisfactory settlement without a fundamental change in the balance of power. This cannot take place without constructing a comprehensive picture of what has happened, drawing lessons from history, developing strategies for struggle, forming a unified leadership stemming from true partnership, all underpinned by having the necessary willpower.

### ***Conclusion***

In 2020 and 2021, Israel continued its occupation and aggression against the Palestinian people, who continued their resistance. In WB—despite the security coordination—individual operations multiplied, as did daily confrontations and the various forms of popular resistance. This coordination was suspended for only about six months (May–November 2020), and then continued leading to the detection of many resistance cells and thwarted many resistance operations and popular confrontations.

As for the GS, resistance action marked new developments, namely the adoption of assault strategy in defence of Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque. This was manifested in the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, which showed the increasing power of resistance, despite the severity of the siege. It forced millions of Israelis to go to bomb shelters to escape the resistance missiles, which were able to cover all parts of the 1948 occupied territories and penetrate the Iron Dome and the Israeli defence systems, by the hundreds. The resistance received more popular support, clearly manifested in the wider Palestinian positive response of WB, GS, the 1948 occupied territories and Palestinians abroad. This was in addition to the Arab, Islamic and international solidarity.



2020 and 2021 were a continuation of preceding years in terms of the continued suffering of prisoners. The escape of six prisoners from the Gilboa Prison drew attention to the prisoners issue and their defiance. The long hunger strikes carried out by several administrative detainees, and the fact they were freed, also showed the magnitude of the prisoners' persistence in gaining their rights, while also effectively challenging the Israelis' power.

In general, the outlook suggests the possibility of an escalation of resistance acts in the next two years, with a greater Israeli ferocity pushing back against the resistance.

It is clear that the reconciliation or peace process has reached a deadlock, given the failure of negotiations over three decades; the de facto failure and Israeli negligence of the two-state solution; Israel's attempts to impose its vision of a settlement on the ground, by annexing the largest swaths of land that contain the smallest number of Palestinian residents possible; and the resolution of the final issues in Israel's favour, namely Jerusalem, the refugees, settlement building, the area of the promised Palestinian state and the extent of its sovereignty, effectively turning it into "Bantustans" or self-governing authorities in the midst of a sea of occupation.

The implementation of the Deal of the Century or "Trump's Plan" made significant progress; the US provided a cover to decide the future of Jerusalem by transferring the US embassy there, recognized the annexation of the Golan, legalized settlements in WB, and pushed a number of Arab states to normalize relations with Israel, which represents a real danger. However, the Palestinian people and their leaders have stood against the "deal," making it lose a considerable part of its value. For they are the concerned party in the first place. Also, the fact that President Trump focused on his second presidential election caused the deal to lose its momentum.

Therefore, the reconciliation process will most likely remain frozen due to the existence of an occupation state that insists on imposing its own vision on the ground; a powerless Palestinian leadership; a weak and divided Arab and Muslim environment that is infiltrated with normalization; and an international system that supports Israel or fails to prevent it from continuing its aggression against Palestinian land and people.

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## This Report

Al-Zaytouna Centre is pleased to present to its readers the Palestine Strategic Report (PSR) 2020–2021, the 12th PSR to be published.

With an academic methodology and comprehensive objective approach, the report details the developments concerning the Palestine issue and provides the latest information and data available at the end of 2021, along with analyses and forecasts.

This report is the result of collaborative work of 15 experts and researchers. In eight chapters, it addresses the internal Palestinian scene; Palestinian demographic and economic indicators; the situation in Jerusalem and the holy sites; the specifics of Israeli aggression, Palestinian resistance and the peace process; the internal situation in Israel, politically, economically and militarily; and Palestine's Arab, Islamic, and international relations.

The PSR now occupies a prominent position as an indispensable reference, integral to Palestine studies and research. Al-Zaytouna Centre hopes the PSR will continue to make valuable contributions in this field.

Prof. Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh

# The Palestine Strategic Report 2020 – 2021



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