

trast, want the Palestinians to think that their stock value is declining—a strategy advocated by Netanyahu and his US ambassador Ron Dermer. The goal is to get the Palestinian leadership to accept more ‘realistic’ proposals than had been offered to them by former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, in 2000, and by Ehud Olmert, in 2008. One senior Trump Administration official used stock prices as an analogy: ‘Like in life—Oh, I wish I bought Google twenty years ago. Now I can’t. I have to pay this amount of money. It’s not that I’m being punished. I just missed the opportunity.’⁶³

Netanyahu and Trump hold similar positions and personalities. They are unapologetically nationalist, strongly oppose progressive views and advocate for a neoliberal socio-economic order. They also are obsessed with holding power and securing media coverage of their activities. Trump rejected UN Security Council Resolution 2334, which reaffirmed the international understanding of the borders of 4 June 1967 as the future border between Israel and a sovereign Palestinian state, and condemned Obama’s decision to let it pass.⁶⁴ Moreover, Trump denounced Kerry’s end-of-mission speech in which he portrayed Israel’s policy as an attitude of ‘separate but unequal,’ referring to the racist regime that formerly prevailed in the US.⁶⁵ According to Kerry, such a regime is in opposition to America’s democratic principles, and therefore the US could not support it. Trump’s tweets and executive orders, however, have shown that he has a different understanding of American democracy and minority rights.⁶⁶

By supporting Netanyahu in implementing his state-minus goal, Trump is helping Israel to shift the occupation from being a global issue where international law matters, to a domestic policy in which foreign countries and international institutions need not intervene.

Besieged Abbas Reclaims the Leadership

Conferences around the Arab world in 2017 marking the centenary of British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour’s statement ‘viewing with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish People,’ had just concluded before President Trump gave a mini Balfour statement of his own, handing occupied Jerusalem to Israel on a silver platter. Naturally, there are myriad political and social differences between today and 100 years ago: the US under Trump is not imperial Britain, and the young Zionist movement is a far cry from today’s strong state of Israel. Nevertheless, what inflamed Palestinian and Arab political opinion was not the historical reality, but the image, context, and framing that connected Balfour’s declaration to the present day. For the first time Abbas felt under siege. Whereas Arafat experienced physical sieges by the Israelis in Beirut (1982) and Ramallah (2002–4), the Syrians in Tripoli, Lebanon (1983), and the Jordanians in Amman (1970), and since the mid-1960s had escaped many Israeli assassination attempts, Abbas’ siege is political. Like Arafat in his last years, a weakened Abbas is facing a similar experience.

Abbas senses that the United States has betrayed him and his nation. It did not matter how much he strove to maintain security coordination with Israel despite his falling public support (see Chapter Three), whether he tried to place obstacles to the reconciliation process with Hamas, or if he supported a peaceful two-state solution to the conflict. For Palestinians, as well as Arabs and Muslims worldwide, Trump recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel; his decision to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; and his declaration that Jerusalem had therefore been taken off the Israeli–Palestinian negotiation table, all signify that the US has sided unequivocally with Israel not only on the issue of Jerusalem, but also on maintaining the

occupation of the 1967 territories. Trump emphasised that the US would support two states 'if agreed to by both sides,' thus giving Israel the right to veto any solution it deems unsuitable. Netanyahu, as mentioned above, is willing to grant the Palestinians a 'state minus,' and only in part of the West Bank. After eight years of debate between the Obama administration and Netanyahu, an American-Israeli consensus has now been created. This stands opposed to the Palestinian and Arab consensus, which continues to support the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with its capital in East Jerusalem.

Indeed, in the past the US was always closer to Israel than to the Palestinians, but it had always been openly committed to the principles of a peace process based on international law and previous UN resolutions. This commitment allowed the Palestinians to accept the US as broker, despite its clear support for the Israel side, since it accepted a legal and international framework that also provided support for the Palestinian position. Trump has exempted the US and Israel from all commitments to international law and UN Security Council resolutions, which had established that annexing Jerusalem and the settlements were both illegitimate and unlawful acts. Abbas' inevitable conclusion was clear: the US had moved from acting as mediator to blind, open support for the Israeli right. Any opportunity to progress from interim agreement to comprehensive peace, since such an intention was ceremoniously signalled on the White House lawn in September 1993, was no more.

The rift between Abbas and the Trump administration widened when Trump worked to remove the issue of Palestinian refugees from the agenda by cutting financial support for the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA). In January 2018, Trump cut \$60 million of the US' aid to UNRWA, an agency already operating

with a deficit. 'It is important to have an honest and sincere effort to disrupt UNRWA,' Special Advisor Jared Kushner emailed on January 11 2018. 'This [agency] perpetuates a status quo, is corrupt, inefficient and doesn't help peace,' he wrote. Victoria Coates, a senior advisor to Jason Greenblatt, sent an email to the White House's national security staff indicating that 'UNRWA should come up with a plan to unwind itself and become part of the UNHCR [UN High Commissioner for Refugees] by the time its charter comes up again in 2019.'⁶⁷ Eight months later, following Netanyahu's request, Trump decided to cut US funding to the agency completely.⁶⁸ The assumption was that by weakening UNRWA, or even forcing it to close, the question of the Palestinian refugees would disappear. Responsibility for the Palestinian refugees could be transferred to the UN commission on refugees, which deals with an array of human tragedies around the globe. Refugees' living conditions in Syria, Iraq, and Myanmar (where the persecuted Rohingya Muslim minority live) are far worse than for the Palestinians, who would fall to the bottom of the list. Without an international agency to deal with them, Washington and Jerusalem assumed that the issue of the Palestinian refugees would disappear. So far, this scenario has not materialised. UNRWA has managed to survive by cutting jobs and receiving extra budgetary allowances from its other donors.⁶⁹

The PA learned of further close coordination between Jerusalem and Washington regarding other final status issues to be included in Trump's deal, each contrasting with the Palestinian national interest.⁷⁰ There would be no territorial component in the plan. Trump's deal would not include the evacuation of settlements, nor mention the pre-1967 border as a term of reference for solving the territorial dispute. Similarly, the plan would not support establishing the Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem. At most, only four neighbourhoods outside

the Old City: Jabel Mukabar, Isawiya, Shuafat refugee camp and Abu Dis, would form the capital.⁷¹ The plan would not recognise any right of return for the refugees or suggest practical solutions for their plight. UNRWA would be dismantled, to be replaced by a new endowment for hosting countries to settle Palestinian refugees wherever they live. No constraints would be put on Israeli security operations or limits to army deployments, and as such the proposed security arrangements would severely compromise Palestinian sovereignty. Israeli forces would deploy along the Jordan River and on the hills looking over it, and enjoy overriding responsibilities and power over the limited Palestinian security forces. Israel would also control Palestine's water resources, border crossings, airspace and electromagnetic sphere. The Gaza Strip would have a separate local administration, without a territorial corridor to the West Bank. Unlike previous peace plans, including the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, that allocated a secondary role to the Arab countries and started with a bilateral Israeli-Palestinian agreement, the Trump administration's plan involves only Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states as sponsors and enforcers. Moreover, while in previous plans, and in PA political discourse, the Palestinians claim that they hold the key to overall Arab peace relations with Israel, the Trump administration and Israel think that the unresolved Palestinian issue has stood in the way of founding a strong anti-Iranian and pro-American regional front. The anti-Iran alliance is the key element, and therefore, the Trump administration has encouraged Arab leaders who prioritise the Iranian threat to pressure Abbas (see below). Abbas, for them, is part of the problem, not the solution.

The benefits that the Trump plan offers to the Palestinians are limited. They would not receive state sovereignty, independence, territorial continuity or an end to Israeli military operations. They would continue to live as an unwanted second-class ethnicity next to the powerful Jewish lords of the land. Instead,

Trump supposes he can offer them an improved life-style via some rather thin political make-up. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have pledged to invest \$10–20 billion to rebuild and develop the Palestinian territories if Abbas accepts Trump's deal. Much of it could go to the Gaza Strip if Hamas were to renounce terror. In addition, Trump may rhetorically recognise the scattered PA areas as a state, but it will not determine any changes on the ground, nor bring the American president to clarify within which borders his recognition is granted. Finally, Trump's deal will be a 'take it or leave it' offer, with no bargain on its components allowed. If Abbas rejects the deal, the Trump administration may punish him. The Israeli-American discourse on possible recriminations includes letting Israel unilaterally annex between 10 to 15 per cent of the West Bank settlement areas.

Indeed, Trump started to punish Abbas prior to the official publication of his plan. Following Abbas' decisive rejection of what he had heard of its components, the campaign he initiated to undermine the plan's forthcoming publication (see below), and his boycotting of US representatives, Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and special advisor on the peace process, stated in June 2018: 'I do question how much President Abbas has the ability to, or is willing to, lean into finishing a deal. He has his talking points which have not changed in the last 25 years. There has been no peace deal achieved in that time. To make a deal both sides will have to take a leap and meet somewhere between their stated positions. I am not sure President Abbas has the ability to do that.' Pretending to speak on behalf of the international community, he added: 'The global community is getting frustrated with the Palestinian leadership and is not seeing many constructive actions towards achieving peace.'

Since Abbas burned his bridges with the Trump administration, in September 2018 Trump ordered the closure of the PLO diplo-

matic mission office in Washington, DC.⁷³ In October, the state department decided to downgrade the status of its diplomatic mission to the Palestinians by placing it under the authority of the US Embassy to Israel. The Jerusalem consulate had for years served as a de facto embassy to the Palestinians. The Palestinian Affairs Unit of the embassy to Israel opened in March 2019.⁷⁴

In addition, the Trump administration has cut off all funding to the Palestinians, including that from the US Agency for International Development (USAID), which in 2017 transferred \$268 million to Palestinian civil society. The US also financed the Palestinian security forces to the tune of \$60 million every year for training and equipment. The cuts in funding started in June 2018, when the US administration froze its aid budget of \$1.3 trillion following the Taylor-Force Act. The Act orders that no funds are disbursed unless the Secretary of State certifies that the Palestinian Authority has met four conditions: terminating payments to terrorists' families (see below), revoking laws authorising this compensation, taking 'credible steps' to end Palestinian terrorism, and 'publicly condemning' and investigating such acts of violence.⁷⁵ The American aid stopped completely when the Anti-Terrorism Clarification Act (ATCA) went into effect in February 2019. The law, drafted in cooperation with Israeli officials and right-wing civil society activists, forced foreign organisations to be subject to the jurisdiction of US courts if they accept certain forms of assistance from the US government. The ATCA obliges the PA to pay compensation to terror victims who have won civil suits against the PLO in US courts, and paves the way to suing it in similar cases. Consequently, the PA declined to receive any further US funding.⁷⁶ Abbas also rejected the monthly tax transfer that Israel collects from Palestinians working in Israel, saying 'we shall not accept the [tax] money if it is not paid in full.' This came in February 2019, following Israel's decision to withhold \$138 million, of \$222 mil-

lion, citing the PA's payments to families of those killed, wounded or jailed in Israel after attacking Israelis.⁷⁷

The American ideas stand on three pillars. First, imposition: the powerful side wishes to force the weak to accept its terms and conditions and reproduce the present imbalance rather than minimising it. Second, it is based on the American alliance with authoritarian leaders, and their regional interests and power struggles. The plan ignores popular Arab and Muslim rejection of Israeli sovereignty over al-Aqsa, and the Palestinian popular mythos of the 1948 refugees. Third, the Trump administration assumes that money and material benefits can buy national principles and postpone the liberation struggle. Possibly, Trump and Netanyahu have wrongly concluded that only Jews feel attached to the land. Having a fake national identity, the Palestinians ought to be ready to exchange their national goals for a good price.

Abbas' Worldwide Campaign

The Palestinian Authority views Trump's parameters as offering them eternal limited autonomy and creating one state with two ruling systems. In doing so, Trump actually formalises and legitimises Israeli apartheid.⁷⁸ 'We do not want peace at any cost,' Abbas stated in the al-Azhar conference.⁷⁹ To oppose these threats, considered very serious by Abbas, he has transformed into a serial policy initiator, a task that he had not taken upon himself for many years. Abbas initiated far-reaching campaigns inside and outside Palestine to limit Trump's damage, regain domestic and international support and unite the nation in its conflict with the US administration.

Already under Arafat, the PLO made its historical compromise and pinned its hopes on American mediation. In 1988, the PLO accepted UN Resolution 181 of 1947, and agreed to establish Palestine alongside the Jewish state of Israel. In 1993, the

PLO unilaterally recognised Israel (although Israel recognised merely the existence of the Palestinian people and the PLO as its representative, rather than the Palestinian right to self-determination) and accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242. Abbas strongly rejects calls to complement the political track through either popular non-violent protests or terror. He has ruled out stepping back from his stated goal of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a return of Palestinian refugees based on UN Resolution 194 and the Arab Peace Initiative. He rejected PLO Executive Committee Secretary General Saeb Erekat's remark that in reaction to Trump's policy the Palestinians will switch toward waging a civil rights struggle and start demanding one state with equal rights for all within. Moreover, in none of Abbas's speeches since Trump's Jerusalem declaration has he said that he intends to dissolve the PA. On the contrary, he has praised the PA as a realisation, however partial, of national aspirations and as the nucleus for an eventual fully sovereign state along the 1967 lines.

The Trump administration has enlisted Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Egypt into pressuring Abbas to accept the American diktats. The Saudi crown prince and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi made it clear to Abbas that the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative is now all but dead. It would be better for Abbas to take what Trump is about to offer, with the hopes that one day the regional balance of power would shift and Abbas would be able to realise his dream of establishing a fully sovereign state within the 1967 borders, including East Jerusalem. The Saudi establishment feels threatened by Iran and wants help from Israel and the US to combat that threat—as such, the Palestinians will have to wait.⁸⁰ Hearing Muhammed bin Salman's proposal, Abbas went to see the millennial prince's father, the aging King Salman. Abbas succeeded in January 2018 to bring the king to reiterate Saudi commitment to the 2002

Arab Peace Initiative's principles during the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation conference. The young crown prince had then no choice but to tell Abbas in February 2019 that he follows his father in supporting the Arab consensus.⁸¹

Unlike the Saudis, Jordan has never spoken with two voices. The 'state minus' plan endangers Jordan's Hashemite identity. Jordan is afraid that this American/Israeli policy will push many West Bank Palestinians to immigrate to Jordan, which has already absorbed many Palestinians and now hosts increasing numbers of Iraqi and Syrian refugees. In June 2018, Abbas coordinated with King Abdullah of Jordan a joint rejection of the initial American ideas. Netanyahu and the American envoys Greenblatt and Kushner met separately with the King, but failed to bring him over to their side and isolate Abbas.

Abbas acknowledged that he must turn to the masses in order to scupper Trump's plan, and Jerusalem is the vehicle to get there. Abbas, therefore, approached both his own constituency and the wider Muslim world. Abbas' office in Ramallah had earlier information on Trump's decision to move the US embassy and recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Twelve hours prior to Trump's statement, Voice of Palestine, the official radio station, broadcasted protest directives on behalf of the government in the run-up to Trump's announcement. Abbas permitted the Fatah apparatus to organise Days of Rage demonstrations against Israel and Trump's Jerusalem declaration. Criticism of Abbas within Fatah and from Hamas was less strident than it had been in the near past, and Hamas permitted Gaza residents to face-off with IDF soldiers along the border fence with Israel. Voice of Palestine broadcasted live on 16 January 2018 from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, recording the whole day of the conference, and not just President Abbas and Sisi's speeches. Fatah demonstrations, however, were poorly organised. They each lasted just a week and remained sporadic, either due to Fatah's lack of organisational

skills and experience, or rank and file mistrust of Abbas. In truth, anti-American demonstrations in Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Morocco and Jordan attracted the masses, but much less so in the West Bank. According to UN, twenty Palestinians and one Israeli were killed in the first month following Trump's declaration. Another 500 Palestinians and 17 Israelis were wounded. In addition, Israel arrested many Palestinians in order to prevent further escalation. According to the Palestinian 'Addameer' Prisoners and Liberties Affairs Association, in the first two months of 2018, Israel detained 1,319 people, including 274 children. Jerusalemites represented the highest number of detainees, at 381.⁸²

In December 2017, Abbas addressed the conference of Arab foreign ministers where his foreign minister unsuccessfully asked his Arab colleagues to join the PA in suspending their countries, relations with the Trump administration. However, in the same month Abbas succeeded in humiliating the American government. The Palestinian delegation brought to the UN General Assembly a resolution that opposed Trump's policies regarding Jerusalem. 128 countries supported it, 39 abstained and only nine stood with the US and Israel in opposing the Palestinian resolution.

Abbas tried to block Trump's forthcoming 'deal of the century' with his preemptive counter proposal. In February 2018, he presented the Security Council with his peace plan.⁸³ Based on international law, a broad international conference was to facilitate a new peace process. At the outset, the conference would recognise Palestine on the 4 June 1967 borders and ask the UN to accept it as a full member. After achieving equal international status to that of Israel, Palestine and Israel would exchange recognition. Then the international conference would appoint a multilateral mediation committee to help the two states achieve a final status agreement and implement it within a short period.

No unilateral actions will be taken during the negotiations, including the implementation of the American recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. In his plan, Abbas presented new elements as alternatives to the forthcoming 'deal of the century' and the failed Oslo process. These included expanding the mediation team instead of relying on an exclusively American one, solving statehood and border disputes first, and narrowing the power imbalance with Israel by internationalising the process and achieving equal international status with the occupier before the negotiations started.

Abbas shopped unsuccessfully around for new mediators instead of, or alongside, the Americans. He asked the presidents of China, France and Russia and the heads of the EU not to leave him alone in the negotiation room with the US and Israel. He suggested to them basing the new negotiation phase on international resolutions and international law, besides fixing a short deadline for its conclusion.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, his hopes were dashed. Each of them recommended that Abbas wait until Trump had presented his plan, and not to reject it out of hand. They also made it clear that they did not intend to enter into a spat with the Trump administration on the Palestinian question, and told Abbas that it is politically impossible to continue boycotting the US. With urgent problems to deal with and the schisms inside the European Union between pro-Israeli and pro-Trump right wing centralist regimes and western European democracies, European Union leaders have been prevented from taking unified stands on Trump's decision nor have they accepted Abbas' request to recognise Palestine as an occupied state. Despite failing to bring in world powers to replace the US, he succeeded in deterring Arab leaders from publicly accepting Trump's policy. Facing public anger and de-legitimation due to the US decision to recognise Israel's annexation of Jerusalem, Egypt and Saudi Arabia recommended that the US postpone the

publication of the plan.⁸⁵ Facing failure and total rejection, the American administration followed suit.

Abbas reclaimed his leadership and expressed his updated worldview in a series of speeches,⁸⁶ among which the most detailed was in the PLO's Central Council session on 14 January 2018. The PA built it up as a national event and it was broadcast live (the quotations below are from this speech unless otherwise stated).⁸⁷ Abbas was untypically angry, emotional and bitter, using strong language against Trump. Also untypically, Abbas based the Palestinian claim of sovereignty in Jerusalem upon Islam. It was not just his rivalry with Hamas (see Chapters Three and Four), who refused to participate in the meeting as long as it was held in Ramallah, that had driven him to employ religious arguments. Abbas is a true believer who, in principle, is against mixing politics and religion. Islam, Abbas believes, provides a spiritual safe network but is not a political action plan. His direct confrontation with the US had evoked in him a siege mentality. Approaching his listeners in Arafat's style, liberally quoting the Qur'an, Abbas integrated into his speech a Qur'anic verse promising victory and God's help to steadfast believers: 'God chose you for this mission' and secures you. 'We do not trust anyone, just God.' Abbas also adopted the Qur'anic motto 'Allah is with the patient,' which was used by Hamas at the end of the 1990s to give the Palestinian public hope that Israel would, one day, be vanquished through armed struggle. Now Abbas deploys this motto for the purpose of gradually building Palestine through political means. Abbas acknowledged that a Palestinian state was not likely anytime soon. He recognised that neither is the current Israeli government a partner for an agreement on the establishment of a Palestinian state, nor is the Trump administration an honest broker that will bring about its creation. The Palestinians would have to move slowly toward statehood, preserving what they had, and turn directly to inter-

national institutions to accept the State of Palestine as a member. Thus, if not through negotiation or functioning institutions on the ground, Palestinians could achieve state symbols and international recognition.

Abbas further channelled Arafat in defining Trump's decision as a 'dangerous turning point.' 'We are facing a historical moment either to be or not to be... We stand united in one trench to defend our dream... we will remain steadfast on our land,' Abbas said to the PLO Central Committee on 28 October 2018.⁸⁸ Interestingly, in his speeches Abbas moves between two poles. On the one hand, he described Trump's policy as a dangerous conspiracy aimed at shattering Palestinians' dreams and their future. 'We made a great concession, we are ready to get only 22 per cent of our land and enjoy the backing of international law, so why is the international community unable to impose its law and give us our rights,' Abbas wondered at Al-Azhar's international conference.⁸⁹ On the other hand, based on his international and national achievements, Abbas expressed his confidence that the Palestinian Authority could overcome Trump and Netanyahu.

Abbas warned against repeating the mistake of 1948—leaving the land—pledging that 'we will remain in Palestine.' Abbas' mission as president, so his speech reads, has been to stick to what exists. 'We refuse to remain an authority without authority,' Abbas said, pointing to his international policy achievements. 'We will not accept the deal the US wants to impose on us, and following its crime against our rights in Jerusalem, we reject it remaining the exclusive mediator.' Hinting at the Saudi pressure on him to accept Trump's deal, Abbas said 'leave us, we know and understand what we are doing just as you are. We are educated and learned people as you are... capable of managing our affairs on our own.'

Abbas' principles for achieving national liberation are: first, operate the Palestinian Authority as a responsible and rational

state; second, expand international support for its status as a state in the making; and third, impose upon Israel a peace agreement: 'We see ourselves as a state and therefore we must operate like a state.' This includes fighting terror, encouraging popular non-violent struggle (*Muqawima al-Sha'abiya al-Silmiyyah*), maintaining dialogue and cooperation with the Israeli peace camp rather than boycotting it, and expanding mediation efforts to include other powers instead of the US.

Following Abbas' request, the Central Council resolved that the Oslo Accord interim period had ended. It authorised the Executive Committee to suspend the PLO's recognition until Israel recognises Palestine within the 1967 borders, cancels East Jerusalem's annexation, and stops settlement expansion.⁹⁰ The decision to terminate the Oslo Agreement is a symbolic rather than practical act since Abbas refuses to dissolve the Palestinian Authority and continues security cooperation and civil affairs coordination with Israel. In addition, his commitment to popular non-violent struggle is limited to international diplomacy.

Out of anger, Abbas spontaneously cursed Trump, 'Yekhreb beitak!' (a saying in colloquial Arabic: literally, 'May your house be demolished'). The outburst was excluded from the official text of Abbas' speech. In addition, in March 2018, at a meeting of the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah, Abbas assailed the US ambassador David Friedman. Referring to Friedman's statement that the settlements are part of Israel, Abbas said, 'Son of a bitch, they [the settlers] are building on their land? You are a settler and your family are settlers.' He added, 'I did not agree and would never agree to give up our principles or the rights of the Palestinian people.'⁹¹

In speeches to the Central Committee, Abbas rarely addressed domestic affairs. He mentioned his three conditions for a successful reconciliation with Hamas: resolving the issue of Hamas' governance in Gaza, allowing the national unity government to

operate all Gaza Strip offices and agencies, and putting Hamas' armed entities under government command. 'I acknowledge that Hamas' leadership is interested in reconciliation,' he offered, but emphasised that due to these three conditions it would 'take time.' Unsurprisingly, in his speech Abbas totally ignored the domestic issues that had been at the root of noisy public criticism of his rule, including the extension of his and the Legislative Council's terms without seeking new elections, the general democratic deficit of his PA, and human rights violations by PA agencies. Abbas opted to bring Palestinians in line behind him against Trump and to bypass public concerns. These are the subjects of the next chapter. While Abbas strives to keep his public mainly passive, civil society organisations outside Palestine and in the Gaza Strip, encouraged and helped by Hamas, decided to act. From the end of March 2018 until 15 May, Nakba Day, they initiated the recurring 'Great March of Return'—weekly mass demonstrations next to the Gaza Strip's border with Israel.

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