



**The Fight in the Deal of the Century and the Annexation Plan:  
“The world Forum of Islamic Clerics” as a Tool for the Palestinian  
Terrorist Factions**

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On the backdrop of Israel’s intention to declare sovereignty and annex parts of Judea and Samaria, 64 pro-Palestinian organizations from 19 states as well as Palestinian factions such as Fatah, Hamas and PIJ, gathered on an online Zoom conference which was broadcasted on social media in an attempt to put the above issue to the top of the Muslim world’s agenda and examine ways to cooperate in the fight against Israel’s policy in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, including the Plan of the Century<sup>1</sup>. Whereas some of the participants stressed the importance of reinforcing the propaganda around the religious importance of Palestine and Jerusalem in Islam to form a global Muslim front against the Deal of the Century, others called for a jihad against Israel and liberate Palestine from the hands of the Jews. Though the conference expresses a desire to form a unified Muslim front vis a vis Israel’s annexation plan and strengthen the view that this was a religious conflict, it also reflects distress and dismay at the division in the Muslim world that enables the annexation.

The online forum, held under the title “**The world Forum of Muslim Clerics to Aid Jerusalem and al-Masra**”<sup>2</sup>, was attended by a cadre of leading Muslim clerics such as sheikh **Ahmad al-Risoni**, the leader of the World Organization of Muslim Clerics; sheikh **Muhammad Hassan al-Dado**, a senior Mauritanian cleric; sheikh **Ikrima Sabri**, the former Mufti of Jerusalem as well as **Ismail Haniyyah**, the head of the political bureau of Hamas and **Muhammad al-Hindi** the leader of PIJ.

The conference was organized by the Palestine Scholars Association in the Diaspora<sup>3</sup> which disseminates anti-Israeli propaganda and promotes the issue of the Muslim identity of Jerusalem since its inception in 2009. Its main office is in Istanbul and two other branches are in Malesia and Lebanon. Per the organizers the conference was held to “commemorate 53 years to the occupation of al-Aqsa and the territories of Palestine, to condemn all the plans to settle Jews, annexation and in solidarity with our people who defend [Jerusalem]”

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<sup>1</sup> 13.6.20. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKHeqwOgBZY&feature=youtu.be>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGRYKFA1Is>; <https://www.facebook.com/palscholars/videos/1592324920919838/>

<sup>2</sup> Per the Muslim belief, al-Masra is the spot where Muhammad rose to the heavens after his night journey from Mecca to al-Aqsa, which per most of the Muslim theology is identified with Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> Formed in 2009 and has three branches: Turkey, Lebanon and Malesia.



A banner on the Zoom conference of the world Forum of Muslim Clerics

Generally speaking, the participants expressed their concerns of strengthening the Jewish identity of Palestine, Jerusalem and said that propaganda needs to be augmented. Ahmad al-Risoni mentioned that “the issue of Palestine is a problem to Muslims everywhere” and that the clerics need to prioritize Palestine and Jerusalem in their propaganda. Sheikh al-Dado clarified that the entire territory of Palestine is a Wakf land that cannot be given away. **Ali Arbash**, the head of religious affairs in Turkey mentioned that Turkey managed to raise the Palestinian issue on every international forum thanks to president **Erdogan**. He stressed that the “Zionist Conqueror” doesn’t only want to take Palestine and Jerusalem from the Muslims but also divide the Islamic world therefore they must find ways to bring Jerusalem back into the Muslim fold and find ways to contend with the “Israeli occupation”.



Ali Arbash, the head of religious affairs in Turkey

Other clerics condemned the normalization with Israel and called to boycott anyone who wishes to promote such normalization. For example, **Said Bin Nasr al-Imadi**, a Saudi cleric in exile, called to take the leadership of the Muslim World League from KSA and pass it to another country who opposes normalization. **Sheikh Khaled Seif Allah al-Rahmani**, an Indian cleric clarified that Muslims in India wish to issue a fatwa that will compel Muslims to enlist for the al-Aqsa cause and stressed that normalization with Israel is a crime.

Some participants attributed importance to the economic aspect of the campaign against Israel. **Hatm Abd al-Kadr**, the leader of Fatah in Jerusalem and former PA minister for Jerusalem affairs, called to form a fund

led by Ikrima Sa'id Sabri to finance the activity for the Jerusalem cause. **Al-Sadiq al-Ghariani**, the Mufti of Libya, described the financial assistance to anyone enlisting to the Jerusalem cause as an economic jihad and even said that every Muslim has an individual duty to embark on a jihad against Israel until the liberation of Palestine.

The Palestinian terrorist factions, among them Hamas and PIJ, clarified that the Palestinian and the Islamic holy sites are facing a real danger. Ismail Haniyyah, the head of the political bureau of Hamas, said that *“the west bank and Gaza are facing an unprecedented danger. We are now facing the Deal of the Century, a plan to settle Jews and limiting al-Aqsa to times and zones [...] the Palestinian people in Jerusalem, Gaza and the territories under Israeli rule, in the refugee camps and the diaspora are facing a political, military and economic campaign striving to sever anything that can strengthen standing the Palestinian ground”*. He called for the formation of committee of clerics that will act to end the division in the Muslim world and reunite it around the issues of Jerusalem and Palestine. Per him, the right deployment vis a vis Israel should be based on a four tiers strategic plan:

1. Striving to unite the Palestinian people.
2. Extensive military campaign for the entire territory of Palestine; *“the political, propaganda, economic and financial jihad is a need and a religious duty for all Muslims to fight the American [Deal of the Century] plan”*.
3. Strengthening the cooperation, consultation and coordination with the Arab and Islamic world to stand tall as a united front against the US-Israeli threat.
4. Cooperation of with all the nations and free people of the world to thwart the Deal of the Century



Ismail Haniyyah at the online conference

In summation, it is evident that the Israeli annexation plan evokes deep worries within Islamic elements, particularly within the Palestinian terrorist factions Hamas and PIJ. Hamas' wishes to form a global alliance of clerics to augment the propaganda on Jerusalem and Palestine and finance the Palestinian struggle reflects a growing acknowledgement that the Arab nation states can neither assist the Palestinians nor they are interested in doing so, hence the clerics should take that position. This acknowledgement is also a sign of distress, however despite the above it seems that Turkey is taking the place of the Arab nation states in

the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. **Ali Arbash**, the senior Turkish cleric's call to bring Jerusalem back into the Islamic fold and find ways to contend with the "Israeli occupation" points to a continued Turkish involvement in the Palestinian issue and its attempt to undermine Israeli sovereignty<sup>4</sup>. In addition, one must examine the calls for an armed struggle against Israel in light of the annexation plan and see if Turkey and other actors are legitimizing it, so that the appropriate preparations can be made.

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<sup>4</sup> For expansion on the Turkish involvement in the Palestinian issue and its support of Hamas see: Michael Barak and Karmon, Eli. "Erdogan's Turkey and the Palestinian Issue", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 12, Issue 2, pp.74-85.

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