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This poll is part of PSR series of regular polls.

*This poll has been conducted in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung in Ramallah*



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## PRESS RELEASE

### Public Opinion Poll No (66)

## **The American step increases Abbas' weakness, raises further suspicion concerning the role of regional powers, and increases calls for armed action:**

**More than 90% view the US recognition of Jerusalem as capital of Israel as a threat to Palestinian interests and the largest percentage demands a strong response that includes a return to an armed intifada. Moreover, the overwhelming majority does not trust Trump's peace intentions, nor trust the major Arab allies of the US, and 70% demand Abbas' resignation, and a majority demands the resignation of the reconciliation government if it does not immediately lift the PA sanctions imposed on the Gaza Strip**

7-10 December 2017

These are the results of the latest poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip between 7-10 December 2017. The poll was conducted one day after the announcement by President Trump that he is recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and during a period in which limited clashes occurred between Palestinian protesters and Israeli soldiers throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. By then, the Palestinian Authority has already publicly condemned the US measure and announced cessation of peace-related contacts with Washington. On the domestic front, reconciliation efforts continued to produce slow progress and a meeting held in Cairo declared that elections will take place before the end of 2018. This press release addresses these issues and covers other matters such as general conditions in the Palestinian territories and certain aspects of the peace process. Total size of the sample is 1270 adults interviewed face to face in 127 randomly selected locations. Margin of error is 3%.

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### **Main Findings:**

Findings of the last quarter of 2017 show that the overwhelming majority of the Palestinians view the decision by US President Donald Trump as a threat to Palestinian interests, one that requires an appropriate response. But the public is divided on what would be considered appropriate. While the largest percentage favors ending contacts with the US, submitting a formal complaint to the International Criminal Court, and a resumption of an armed intifada, the majority continues to favor responses that exclude armed struggle, despite the rise in support for such struggle during the past three months. Furthermore, it seems obvious that the public does not think that its leadership shares its view on what is considered to be an appropriate response to the American step.

In light of the US step, findings show an almost total public distrust of the role of regional powers, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan and Qatar, in the peace efforts organized by the US Administration. More than three quarters believe that Palestine is no longer the Arab's first cause. Indeed, more than 70% believe that despite the continuation of Israeli occupation, an alliance already exists between Sunni Arab states and Israel.

On top of that there is little or no confidence in the US Administration and its peace intentions. An overwhelming majority believes that any Trump peace plan will not meet the basic Palestinian need to end occupation and build an independent state. But here too one can see the gap between the position of the public and the public assessment of the position of the Palestinian leadership. Despite public confidence that the Trump ideas cannot serve as a basis for negotiations, about half of the public believes that President Abbas might accept the American ideas. Furthermore, more than 70% of the public believe that major Arab countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt will also accept the Trump ideas.

Findings show that the public fully supports the assumption of security control by the reconciliation government in the Gaza Strip. In return, the public demands that the reconciliation government pay the salaries of the civil and security sectors which worked in the past under Hamas' government. The public is also firmly opposed to the disarmament of the various armed groups in the Gaza Strip. Moreover, a majority demands the resignation of the reconciliation government if it does not lift the sanctions imposed by the PA over the Strip. If a national unity government is established, about half of the public rejects the idea that such a government should follow the peace program of President Abbas; only a minority wants the unity government to embrace Abbas' peace program.

Finally, findings show how the US step has harmed Abbas' popularity with further decline in his standing and increased demand for his resignation. Demand for Abbas resignation stands today at 70%, a first since such demand became high three years ago. If new presidential elections, in which Abbas competes against Hamas' Ismail Haniyeh, are held today, the latter could easily win. Even if the candidate against Abbas came from the small third parties (such as Mustafa Barghouti from al Mubadara), findings show that it is doubtful that Abbas could win. On the other hand, the party balance remains relatively stable, compared to the findings three months ago, with Fatah having an edge against Hamas. Hamas is more popular than Fatah in the Gaza Strip while Fatah is more popular than Hamas in the West Bank.

### **(1) Presidential and parliamentary elections:**

- 70% of the public want president Abbas to resign while 26% want him to remain in office. Three months ago, 67% said they want Abbas to resign. Demand for Abbas' resignation stands at 64% in the West Bank and 80% in the Gaza Strip. Three months ago demand for Abbas resignation stood at 60% in the West Bank and 80% in the Gaza Strip.
- If president Abbas does not nominate himself in a new election, 35% prefer to see Marwan Barghouti replacing him, while 22% prefer Ismail Haniyeh; Mohammad Dahlan 7% (1% in the West Bank and 15% in the Gaza Strip); Mustapha Barghouti (5%); Rami al Hamdallah (5%), Khalid Mishal (3%), and Salam Fayyad (2%).
- Level of satisfaction with the performance of president Abbas stands at 31% and dissatisfaction at 66%. Level of satisfaction with Abbas stands at 36% in the West Bank and 22% in the Gaza Strip. Three months ago, satisfaction with Abbas stood at 31% (38% in the West Bank and 21% in the Gaza Strip).
- If new presidential elections were held today and only two were nominated, Ismail Haniyeh and Mahmoud Abbas, the former would receive 53% and the latter 41% of the vote (compared to 50% for Haniyeh and 42% for Abbas three months ago). In the Gaza Strip, Abbas receives 33% of the vote (compared to 36% three months ago) and Haniyeh receives 66% (compared to 62% three months ago). In the West Bank Abbas receives 47% (compared to 45% three months ago) and Haniyeh 43% (compared to 42% three months ago). If the competition was between President Abbas from Fatah and Mustafa Barghouti from al Mubadara (Initiative), the two receive an identical percentage of 45%. Mustafa Barghouti receives 57% of the vote in the Gaza Strip and 36% in the West Bank.
- If presidential elections were between three: Mahmud Abbas, Marwan Barghouti and Ismail Haniyeh, Abbas would receive 18%, Barghouti 41% and Haniyeh 36%. If presidential elections were between two: Marwan Barghouti and Ismail Haniyeh, Barghouti receives 58% and Haniyeh 37%.
- If presidential elections are held soon, 42% want Hamas to nominate one of its leader while 45% prefer to see Hamas supporting a third party or an independent candidate.

- If new legislative elections were held today with the participation of all factions, 66% say they would participate in such elections. Of those who would participate, 30% say they would vote for Hamas and 36% say they would vote for Fatah, 6% would vote for all other third parties combined, and 27% are undecided. Three months ago, vote for Hamas stood at 29% and Fatah at 36%. Vote for Hamas in the Gaza Strip stands today at 36% (compared to 31% three months ago) and for Fatah at 30% (compared to 28% three months ago). In the West Bank, vote for Hamas stands at 26% (compared to 28% three months ago) and Fatah at 41% (compared to 42% three months ago).

## **(2) Domestic conditions:**

- Only 34% of the Palestinian public say people in the West Bank can criticize the PA without fear; 61% of the public say that people cannot criticize the PA without fear.
- Positive evaluation of conditions in the Gaza Strip stands at 5% and positive evaluation of conditions in the West Bank stands at 12%.
- Perception of safety and security in the Gaza Strip stands at 53%. In the West Bank perception of safety and security stands at 45%. Three months ago, perception of safety and security in the Gaza Strip stood at 49% and in the West Bank at 50%.
- Findings show that the percentage of Gazans who say they seek to immigrate to other countries stands at 41%; in the West Bank, the percentage stands at 22%. Three months ago, 43% of Gazans and 22% of West Bankers indicated that they seek to immigrate.
- We asked the public about its viewership habits in the last two months. Findings indicate that Al Jazeera TV viewership remains the highest, standing at 20%, followed by Maan TV (15%), al Aqsa TV (14%), Filasteen al Youm/Palestine Today (14%), Palestine TV (11%), Al Arabiya (6%) al Quds TV (6%), and al Mayadeen (3%).
- Perception of corruption in PA institutions stands at 77%.

## **(3) Reconciliation and the reconciliation government:**

- 81% want the reconciliation government to pay the salaries of the civil employees of the former Hamas government but 14% do not want it to do so.
- Similarly, 81% of the public want the reconciliation government to pay the salaries of the security sector employees of the former Hamas government and 14% do not want it to do so.
- 78% support placing the police department in the Gaza Strip, which is currently under the control of Hamas, to come under the control of the reconciliation government so that the police departments in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would come under the one command and control center; 19% are opposed to that and prefer to maintain the current status quo.
- Now that it has taken control of the border crossings and the headquarters of the ministries and other public agencies, 38% are satisfied and 55% are dissatisfied with the performance of the reconciliation government.
- 50% are optimistic and 45% are pessimistic about the success of reconciliation. Three months ago, optimism stood at 31% and pessimism at 61%.
- Despite the rise in optimism, only 43% expect the reconciliation government to take real control of the security conditions in the Gaza Strip; 47% do not expect that to happen.
- 78% support the formation of a national unity government composed of Fatah, Hamas, and other faction while only 17% prefer to keep the current reconciliation government.
- If a national unity government is established, the public is divided over its peace program: 43% want it to adhere to Abbas policy but 49% does not want to do so.
- Responding to Abbas' call for "one government, one gun," only 22% support disbanding the armed wings of the various Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip and 72% want these armed groups to remain in place.
- Only 43% believe that the date set for elections in the latest factional meeting in Cairo is appropriate while 33% think it is late and 16% think it is too early.

- 70% support holding legislative and presidential elections but only after resolving all remaining issues such as control over security, PLO, and the armed factions; 26% support holding elections immediately, without resolving these other issues.
- The largest percentage (45%) believes that the reason behind Abbas' decision not to remove the sanctions he had imposed on the Gaza Strip is to pressure Hamas to make more concessions that would remove the obstacles to reconciliation. On the other hand, 23% believe that he has not removed the sanctions in order to insure a slow process of reconciliation and 22% think he seeks to bring about the collapse of the process of reconciliation.
- 51% support and 38% oppose the resignation of the reconciliation government led by Rami al Hamdallah if it does not immediately remove the Abbas-imposed sanctions on the Gaza Strip.
- 45% of the public believe the latest factional meeting in Cairo has been neither a success nor a failure while 19% view it as a success and 27% as a failure.
- For the next three months, the top priority of the reconciliation government in the eyes of 42% of the public should be the delivery of electricity and water to Gazans on daily basis while 30% believe it should be the opening of the crossings, 10% think it should be the resolution of the problem of the payment to the employees of the former Hamas government, 9% believe it should be the holding of elections, 6% the imposition of control over security matters in the Gaza Strip, and 2% the convening of the existing Palestinian Legislative Council.
- For the next year, the top priority of the reconciliation government in the eyes of 41% of the public should be the opening of the crossings; delivery of electricity and water to Gazans on daily basis (31%), while 11% think it should be the holding of elections, 7% think it should be the resolution of the problem of the payment to the employees of the former Hamas government, 7% believe it should be the imposition of control over security matters in the Gaza Strip, and 3% the convening of the existing Palestinian Legislative Council.
- 51% believe that the reconciliation effort is not linked to the restoration of negotiations and the peace process while 43% think that it is indeed linked.
- 24% think Fatah and Abbas came out of reconciliation winners and 20% think Hamas came out a winner. But 48% believe that Fatah and Hamas have come out neither winners nor losers.
- With regard to regional players, the largest percentage (51%) believes that Egypt came out of reconciliation a winner while only 34% described Saudi Arabia as a winner (and 25% as a loser), 33% said Qatar came out a winner (and 26% as a loser), and 27% said Iran came out a winner (and 26% as a loser). Although 33% characterized Israel as a winner, 46% characterized it as a loser.

#### **(4) The peace process:**

- 91% characterize Trump's declaration recognizing Jerusalem as a capital of Israel as a threat to Palestinian interests (79% as a great threat and 12% as a limited threat) while only 7% saw no threat in the declaration.
- The largest percentage (45%) believes that the most appropriate Palestinian measure against the US step is to stop all contacts with the American Administration, submit a formal complaint to the International Criminal Court (ICC), and resort to an armed intifada. But 27% think it should stop the contacts and submit a complaint to the ICC, but should resort to non-violent resistance. Still, 12% want the PA to only denounce the US step and stop the contacts with the US Administration and an identical percentage wants it to denounce the step while maintaining contacts with the US toward reaching a permanent peace.
- On the other hand, only 27% of the public believe that the Palestinian leadership will actually stop contacts with the US, submit an ICC complaint, and resort to an armed intifada while 24% believe the PA will denounce the US step but will maintain contacts with the Trump Administration.
- The largest percentage (44%) believes that armed resistance is the most effective means of establishing a Palestinian state next to the state of Israel while 27% think negotiation is the most effective means and 23% think non-violent resistance is the most effective. Three months ago, only 35% indicated that armed resistance is the answer and 33% sided with negotiation.
- An overwhelming majority of 72% believes that the Trump Administration will not submit any ideas or plans for Palestinian-Israeli peace while 24% think it will do so.

- But even if the US does submit a peace proposal, an even larger majority of 86% believes that such a proposal will not meet Palestinian need to end occupation and build a state; only 11% think the proposal will indeed meet such needs.
- Nonetheless, 49% believe that president Abbas might accept the American peace plan if one is indeed submitted to him while 42% believe he will not accept it.
- On the other hand, 65% think the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu will accept such American peace plan; only 26% think he will not accept it.
- Moreover, 72% of the public believe that major Arab countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia (or at least one of them) will accept this American plan if submitted; only 20% think they will not accept it.
- Regarding public trust in the roles and positions of major Arab countries in the peace process and the US efforts to develop a regional agreement in the context of Palestinian-Israeli peace, an overwhelming majority of 82% says that it does not trust the Saudi role, 75% do not trust the Emirati role, 70% do not trust the Egyptian role, and 59% do not trust the Jordanian or the Qatari roles.
- Moreover, 76% say the Arab World is too preoccupied with its own concerns, internal conflicts, and the conflict with Iran and that Palestine is no longer the Arab's principal or primary issue or cause. Only 23% think Palestine remains the Arab's principle cause.
- In fact, 71% believe that there is already an Arab Sunni alliance with Israel against Iran despite the continued Israeli occupation of Arab land while 21% believe that the Arabs would not ally themselves with Israel until it ends its occupation and allows the creation of a Palestinian state. Three months ago, only 64% said that an Arab Sunni alliance already exists with Israel.

**(5) Most vital Palestinian goals and the main problems confronting Palestinians today:**

- 48% believe that the *first* most vital Palestinian goal should be to end Israeli occupation in the areas occupied in 1967 and build a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with East Jerusalem as its capital. By contrast, 28% believe the first most vital goal should be to obtain the right of return of refugees to their 1948 towns and villages, 14% believe that it should be to build a pious or moral individual and a religious society, one that applies all Islamic teachings, and 9% believe that the first and most vital goal should be to establish a democratic political system that respects freedoms and rights of Palestinians.
- The most serious problem confronting Palestinian society today in the eyes of 29% of the public is the continuation of occupation and settlement activities while 26% say it is poverty and unemployment; 20% say it is the spread of corruption in public institutions; 17% say it is the siege of the Gaza Strip and the closure of its crossings; and 4% say it is the absence of national unity.