



Intelligence and Terrorism
Information Center

News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(March 3-9, 2010)



Abu Mazen at a meeting of the Arab monitoring committee, which decided to “give a chance” to the proximity talks between Israel and the Palestinians for a period of time of four months (Al-Ayyam, March 3, 2010)

Overview

- The western Negev was quiet this week as well. Violent demonstrations continued in several locations in Judea and Samaria, which included throwing stones at IDF forces. The peak of the incidents took place on the Temple Mount, where for the first time in many years stones were thrown at Jewish worshippers at the Wailing Wall. Palestinian Authority and Hamas officials continued making inciting statements, raising false claims on a planned Israeli attack on the Temple Mount.
- On March 8, the US administration announced that Israel and the PA had agreed to resume the political process through proximity talks. Significant disagreements remain between Israel and the Palestinians regarding the nature of the proximity talks: the Palestinians are interested in negotiating on the core issues, while Israel is willing to discuss those in direct talks.

Important Events

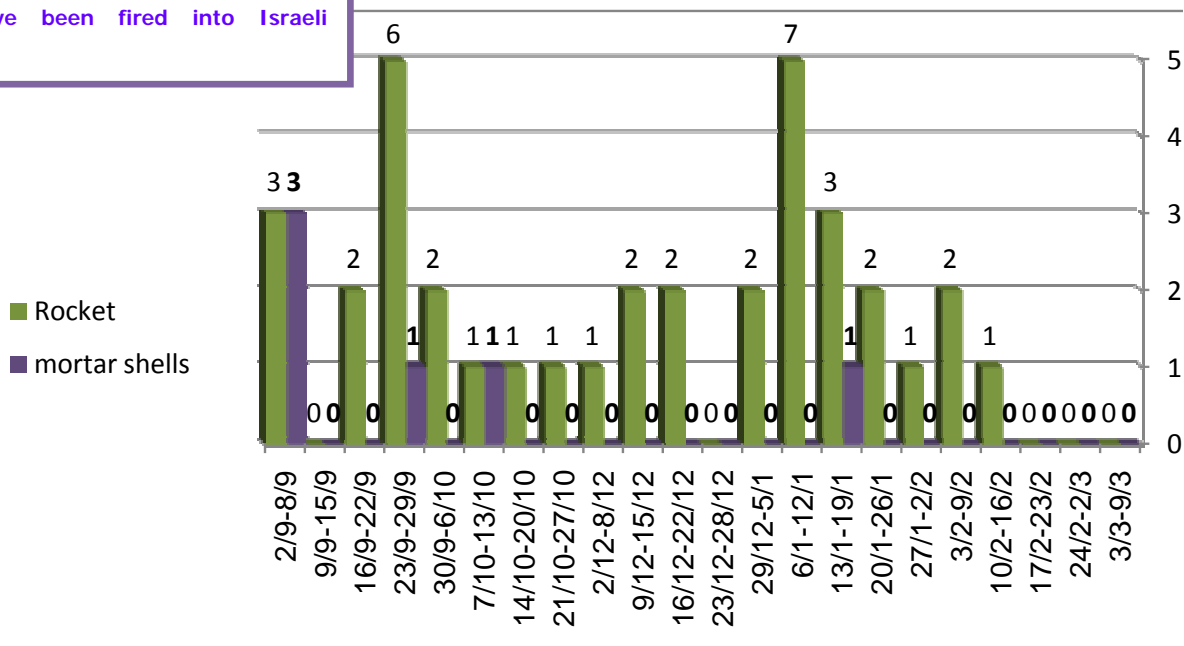
Gaza Strip

Rocket and mortar shell fire

■ This past week the quiet in the western Negev continued, and no rocket or mortar shell hits were identified in Israeli territory.

Rocket and mortar shells fired into Israeli territory¹

Since the end of Operation Cast Lead 145 hits have been identified and 71 mortar shells have been fired into Israeli territory



Judea and Samaria

Violent demonstrations continued in protest of national heritage sites declaration

■ Riots and public disturbances continued this past week, a response to the declaration of the Cave of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb as national heritage sites. On Friday, March 5, violent demonstrations took place in several locations across Judea and Samaria. The incidents included gatherings and throwing stones at IDF forces. At the same time, demonstrations in "traditional" friction sites continue (Bil'in, Sheikh Jarah). The Israeli security forces dispersed the demonstrations.

¹ The statistics do not include the mortar shells fired at IDF soldiers patrolling the border fence which fell inside the Gaza Strip.



Left: women demonstrating in Sheikh Jarah. Right: Palestinian children carrying the flags of Palestine and Fatah in Bil'in (Wafa News Agency, March 3)

■ **The violent demonstrations peaked on the Temple Mount** (March 5), when after the Friday prayers **demonstrators threw stones at Jewish worshippers at the Wailing Wall compound (for the first time in about nine years) and at police officers at the Mugrabi gate.** Police forces removed the stone throwers and took over the Temple Mount compound using stun grenades. About twenty policemen were injured in the incident. According to Palestinian sources, about sixty demonstrators were injured in the incidents.

■ At the same time, PA and Hamas officials continued to **stir up public atmosphere by inciting statements, bringing up false claims on an alleged attack that Israel plans on the Temple Mount.** For example:

- **Taysir Tamimi**, the head of the Palestinian Shari'a court, warned that "radical Jews" supported by the Israeli government started preparing for a "major attack" on Al-Aqsa Mosque. According to Tamimi, the Palestinians will not surrender and protect Al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy sites. He further added that the Palestinians addressed international elements about the issue, including Arab and Muslim countries, which unfortunately did not respond (Sawt al-Arab, March 3).

- Hamas administration spokesman **Taher al-Nunu** issued a press release strongly condemning Israel's actions on the Temple Mount and in the Cave of the Patriarchs. According to the press release, the incidents are a prelude to a "massacre" planned by Israel. Al-Nunu called for national unity to defend the holy sites and strengthen the "resistance" (Palestine-info, March 5).

- **Salah al-Bardawil**, the spokesman of the Hamas faction in the Legislative Council, emphasized during a procession organized in Khan Younes the **need for launching a "third intifada" to support Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem, and the holy sites** (Palestine-info, March 5).

Counterterrorism activities

- Israeli security forces continued their counter-activities, in which terrorism suspects were detained and weapons were seized.

- At the same time, incidents of throwing Molotov cocktails and throwing stones at Israeli vehicles continued. An Israeli civilian was lightly injured. The incidents included:
 - **March 8:** two Molotov cocktails were thrown at an Israeli vehicle north-east of Ramallah. There were no casualties and no damage was caused. Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle near the junction of Tapuach (south of Nablus). There were no casualties. The vehicle was damaged (IDF Spokesman, March 8).
 - **March 7:** stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle and a bus south of Bethlehem. There were no casualties. The vehicle was damaged (IDF Spokesman, March 7).
 - **March 6:** a Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Israeli vehicle south-west of Bethlehem. There were no casualties. The vehicle was damaged (IDF Spokesman, March 6).
 - **March 6:** three pipe charges were found on a Palestinian seeking to pass the Beqaot checkpoint (IDF Spokesman, March 6).
 - **March 4:** stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle south-west of Bethlehem. There were no casualties. The vehicle was damaged (IDF Spokesman, March 4).
 - **March 3:** stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle south-west of Hebron. An Israeli civilian was lightly injured and evacuated to a hospital. Also on March 3, stones were thrown at an Israeli bus south-west of Bethlehem. There were no casualties. The bus was damaged (IDF Spokesman, March 3).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The Crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip

- This past week the crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip were open, allowing for the **passage of 274 trucks**.

Hamas marks 1,000 days of “blockade”

- **Hamas called to mark March 9 as day 1,000 of the “blockade” on the Gaza Strip** (it appears that the count begins from the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, June 2007). Several activities are planned under the title of “1,000 days of blockade and liberty for Gaza”:

- **On March 14**, a procession is scheduled to leave for Erez Crossing, where a demonstration will take place (Al-Quds TV, March 8).
- **On March 18**, a procession is scheduled to take place in which 1,000 candles will be lit and various TV shows from Arab countries dedicated to Gaza Strip residents will be broadcast (Al-Quds TV, March 8).
- **On March 6**, an announcement was posted on Hamas's Palestine-info website on a decision to mark March 9 as the "electronic day against the Zionist blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip". As part of the "electronic day" events, a Facebook group was created named "Gaza under siege for one thousand days", where video and audio clips are uploaded to present "the tragedy of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, particularly during the last Zionist war against Gaza last year". The number of group members has already crossed four thousand (Palestine-info, March 6).



The Gaza support group on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?v=info&gid=329537828907>)

The peace process

Israel and the Palestinians agreed to proximity talks

Overview

- On March 8, the US administration announced that Israel and the PA had agreed to resume the peace process through proximity talks. The talks will take place with the mediation of the US envoy to the Middle East, George Mitchell, who is currently on a visit to the region.
- Israel's PM Benjamin Netanyahu announced several hours after the declaration on the resumption of the talks that he hoped that the talks with the Palestinians "will soon lead to direct talks" (Haaretz, March 9).
- Despite the US announcement on the agreement of both sides, strong disagreements remain about the nature of the proximity talks: while the Palestinians are interested in negotiations on the core issues, Israel is only willing to discuss those in direct negotiations, considering the proximity talks to be a step leading towards direct talks.

The reactions of the Arab League and the PA

- The Arab monitoring committee of the Arab League announced its decision to "give a chance" to indirect talks between Israel and the Palestinians (proximity talks), despite the fact that the committee "is not convinced that Israel takes the peace process seriously". **A time frame of four months was allotted for the talks**, after which another meeting will be held to assess the progress of the negotiations. The committee stressed that the condition for direct negotiations was the complete cessation of settlements in Palestinian territories, including in Jerusalem (Al-Jazeera, March 3).
- **PA Chairman Abu Mazen** granted an interview to Egyptian TV on March 3, in which he expressed his agreement to the proximity talks. Highlights of his statements follows:
 - **Proximity talks are the only way available for the PA.** He said that they would be held in the form of shuttle talks by US envoy George Mitchell, who will meet with the Palestinian and with the Israeli sides alternately and discuss the understandings achieved with the other side.

- **The negotiations will be held according to the outline of the Roadmap and within four months.** After the talks, the US must announce its final position.
- **Ruling out the possibility of resuming the path of armed intifada:** "The armed intifada is like a snowball. Perhaps we can control it now, but one day we will not be able to control it anymore."

The reaction of Hamas

- **Hamas spokesmen strongly criticized the PA's decision:**
 - **Izzat al-Rishq**, member of the Hamas political bureau in Damascus, announced that Hamas rejected the indirect negotiations with Israel, adding that it would give Israel excuses to continue construction in the settlements and turn the holy sites into Jewish (Palestine-info, March 3).
 - Hamas administration spokesman **Taher al-Nunu** called on Arab countries not to support a return to negotiations with Israel following the so-called "escalation" on the part of Israel (i.e., including the Cave of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb in the national heritage sites and settlement construction). He added that the purpose of the negotiations was to improve Israel's image and not to grant rights to the Palestinians (Qudspress, March 3).

The political struggle

The continuing involvement of senior Fatah operatives in the "popular resistance" activities

- **Salam Fayad, the Palestinian PM**, continues to publicly express his support of the "popular resistance" activities against the fence and the settlements. On March 6, he met with activists from the "popular committees for fighting the fence and the settlements" (a body responsible for organizing weekly demonstrations in the traditional clash sites). During the meeting, the Palestinian PM praised the activities of the committees against the "occupation", while strongly criticizing Israel (Palestinian press, March 7).
- **Abbas Zaki**, a senior Fatah member, took part in a demonstration against the fence held in Maasara (north of Bethlehem). He accused Israel of an attempt to "steal the cultural heritage of the Palestinian people and take control of more territories in Judea and Samaria" (Al-Ayyam, March 6).

Palestinian effort to boycott Israeli products from the settlements

■ **Fatah's Office of Organization and Enlistment** started forming "popular committees" in Judea and Samaria that will work to increase awareness of boycotting products made in the Israeli settlements:

- **Sirhan al-Dweikat, a member of the PLO Revolutionary Council** from the Religious Endowment Ministry of the Palestinian Authority, demanded to instruct the preachers in the mosques to address the issue of boycotting products made in the settlements during the Friday prayers. He added that March 15 would be marked as the "national day for boycotting products from the settlements" (Ma'an News Agency, March 3).
- **Mu'az Shtiwi, a spokesman for the Fatah Youth (Shabiba) committees in Nablus**, noted that the movement intended to launch a "house-to-house" operation for increasing public awareness of the boycott. During the operation, Fatah activists intend to visit people's houses and talk to them about the importance of boycotting products made in the Israeli settlements (Ma'an News Agency, March 3).

False representation of a car accident between an Israeli and a Palestinian vehicle

■ On March 5, a severe car accident took place on the Silwad Bridge, near Ramallah, when an army vehicle crashed into a Palestinian vehicle. Six Palestinians from one family were killed in the crash. **Osama al-Qawasmi**, an official Fatah spokesman, portrayed the death of the six Palestinians as "*istishhad*" (martyrdom for the sake of Allah), bringing up the (false) claim that according to findings on the ground, the accident was deliberate. He said that Israel has been trying to drag down the region into violence for some time in order to "avoid the political responsibility" (Ma'an News Agency, March 6).



A stereotypical Jew stealing the Temple Mount, from a cartoon published in the PA daily *Al-Hayat al-Jadeeda* (March 3)