



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (March 12 – 18, 2014)



Another round of escalation in Israel's south, the largest since Operation Pillar of Defense. Left: A rocket that hit Israel's south (Photo by Edi Israel, reprinted courtesy of NRG, March 12, 2014). Right: Rocket fire into Israeli territory from within a populated area in Gaza (Wataniya TV, March 12, 2014).

Overview

- This past week terrorist events focused on the latest round of escalation in Israel's south, the most serious since Operation Pillar of Defense (November 2012). A massive barrage of rockets and mortar shells was fired, mostly by the PIJ (80 hits were identified in Israeli territory, primarily in the western Negev). The escalation ended with an agreement to return to the lull reached by direct contacts between the PIJ and Egypt (to Hamas' dissatisfaction).
- This past week Mahmoud Abbas met with Barack Obama in the White House. Spokesmen for Mahmoud Abbas said that no official version of the framework for an agreement had been presented at the meeting, only a number of ideas. They also said that Mahmoud Abbas had repeated his refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, adding that he told Obama it was necessary to execute the next phase of prisoner release and to freeze construction in the settlements. Mahmoud Abbas' visit to Washington was accompanied by an orchestrated campaign orchestrated throughout the PA to support him.

The Situation in Israel's South

Another Round of Rocket Fire¹

■ Between March 11 and 13, 2014, there was a round of escalation in rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip targeting Israel's south, **the most serious since Operation Pillar of Defense** (November 2012). It began with PIJ mortar shell fire that attacked an IDF force engaged in security activities near the border fence between Israel and the Gaza Strip. In response Israeli Air Force (IAF) aircraft struck the squad firing the shells, killing three terrorist operatives. **In retaliation, the following two days the PIJ launched massive barrages of rockets into southern Israel. More than 80 rockets and mortar shells** fell in Israeli territory (most of them in the western Negev), more than the total number of rocket hits identified since Operation Pillar of Defense (between November 2012 and the current escalation, 63 rocket hits were identified).



PIJ announcement claiming responsibility for firing 130 rockets and mortar shells into Israeli territory (Jerusalem Brigades website, March 12, 2014). The number of rockets and mortar shells noted in the announcement is exaggerated, in our assessment to glorify the PIJ's military capabilities.

■ The latest round of escalation ended with a return to the lull established through direct contacts between the PIJ and Egypt. According to PIJ leader **Ramadan Shallah**, it was the Egyptians who opened the channel and the PIJ responded to the Egyptian appeal to keep the situation from spinning out of control. Hamas expressed criticism

¹ For further information see the March 16, 2014 [bulletin "Another Round of Escalation in Southern Israel. During It, the Largest Barrage of Rockets since Operation Pillar of Defense Was Fired by the PIJ."](#)

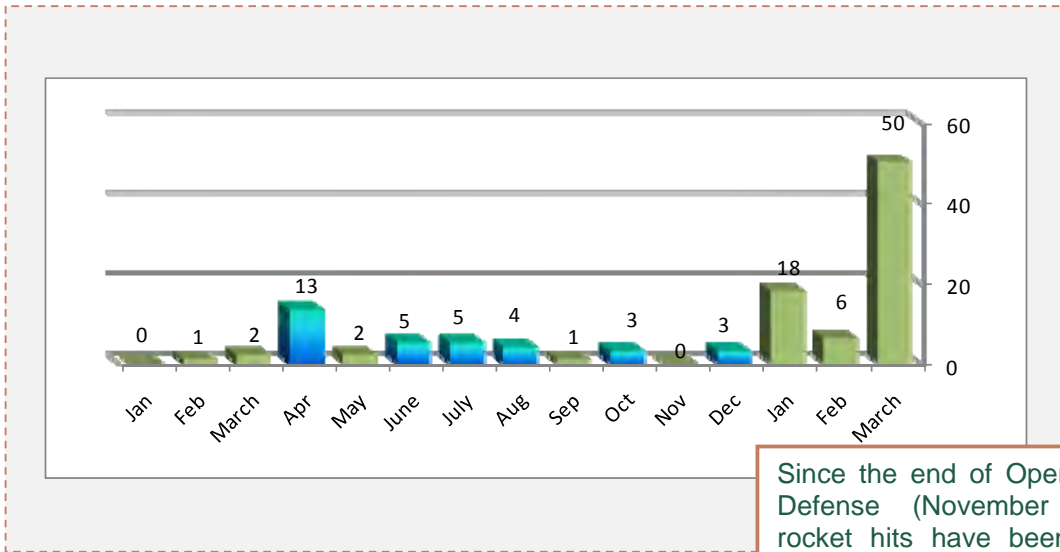
that the agreement had been reached "through unjust circumvention" of Hamas (Al-Jazeera, March 14, 2014).

■ The latest round of escalation showed **the importance of the PIJ**, the second largest Palestinian terrorist organization in the Gaza Strip. **The PIJ is supported by Iran** and is not limited by the considerations of governance that restrain Hamas. The massive barrage of rocket fire shows that the PIJ is occasionally prepared **to challenge Israel and Hamas**, exploiting Hamas' political weakness in the post-Morsi era. However, the rapid end of the escalation, the PIJ's contacts with Egypt for renewing the lull and the fact that most of the rockets targeted the western Negev and not beyond – **all indicate, in our assessment, that at this stage the PIJ does not seek an escalation, despite its militant rhetoric. Rather, the PIJ is trying to institute stricter game rules in its engagement on the ground with Israel while not allowing the situation to deteriorate and spin out of control.**



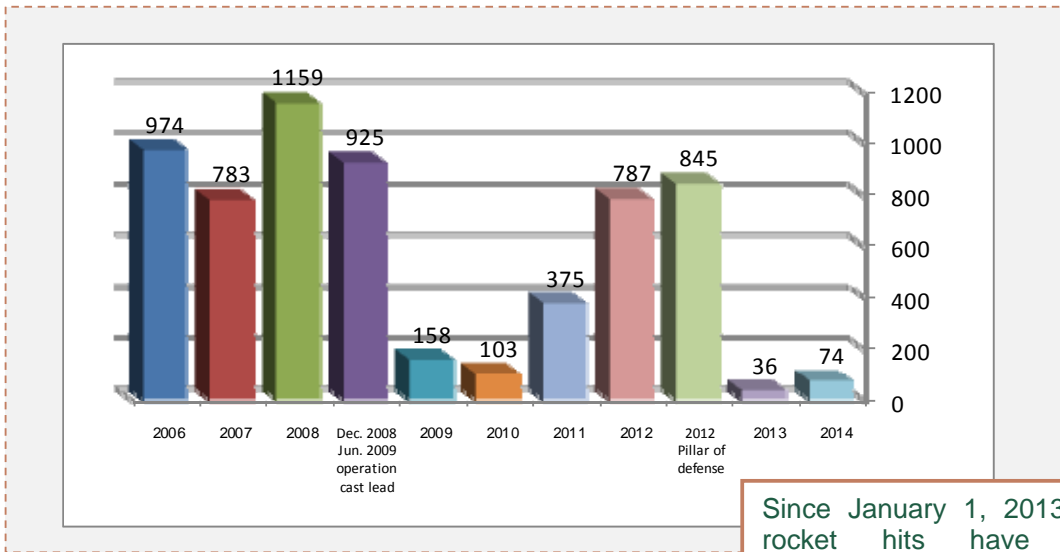
During the round of escalation the PIJ revealed a new rocket launcher which it claimed to have used for the first time (Hamas forum, March 13, 2014).

Rocket Hits in Israeli Territory since January 1, 2013²



Since the end of Operation Pillar of Defense (November 2012), 113 rocket hits have been identified in Israeli territory, including eight rockets fired at the southern Israeli city of Eilat.

Annual Distribution of Rocket Fire³



Since January 1, 2013, 113 rocket hits have been identified.

² As March 18, 2014. The statistics do not include mortar shell fire and rocket hits inside the Gaza Strip.

³ The statistics do not include mortar shell fire.

Judea and Samaria

Detention of Palestinian Planning to Attack Buildings in Jerusalem⁴

- An Israeli security force action led to the detention of a **Palestinian suspected of sabotaging gas lines in apartment buildings in Jerusalem over the past few months**. He was also involved in a stabbing attack in 2012.
- The Palestinian was **Aziz Salam Uwisat**, born in 1965, a resident of Jabal Mukaber with an Israeli identity card. During interrogation he admitted that two months ago he heard about a catastrophe in which a building in the Har Gilo neighborhood of Jerusalem collapsed because of an explosion caused by a gas leak. He decided to carry out a terrorist attack by sabotaging gas lines to cause buildings to collapse and thereby kill the people living there:
 - On **February 23, 2014**, he went to the Jerusalem neighborhood of Armon Hanatziv and sabotaged the gas line of one of the buildings with the intention of causing a fire.
 - At the **beginning of March 2014** he sabotaged the gas lines of a number of buildings in the neighborhood of Armon Hanatziv and lit a candle which he left near one of the buildings' gas bottles.
- During interrogation he also confessed that in April 2012 **he decided to carry out a stabbing attack**. He acquired an axe and went to the Nablus Gate plaza in east Jerusalem. He attacked an ultra-Orthodox Jew with the axe, striking him on the head a number of times, injuring him.⁵

Terrorist Attacks in February

- According to an Israel Security Agency (ISA) report, in February 2014 **the number of terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria declined, compared with January 2014**. In February **101 terrorist attacks were carried out** in Judea and Samaria **compared with 164** in January 2014. However, there **was an increase in attacks in the city of Jerusalem**, where nine were carried out, compared with seven in January. Most of the attacks in February involved Molotov cocktails (99 attacks in Judea and Samaria, eight of them in the city of Jerusalem). Seven involved planting IEDs, **three involved shots**

⁴ Israel Security Agency website, March 16, 2014

⁵ For further information about stabbing attacks, see the November 19, 2013 [bulletin "The Fatal Stabbing Attack of an Israeli Soldier at the Afula Central Bus Station is a Widespread Modus Operandi that is Relatively Easy to Carry Out, Constituting Part of the Palestinian "Popular Resistance" Attacks. The PA and Fatah Support the "Popular Resistance Falsely Representing It as Non-Violent."](#)

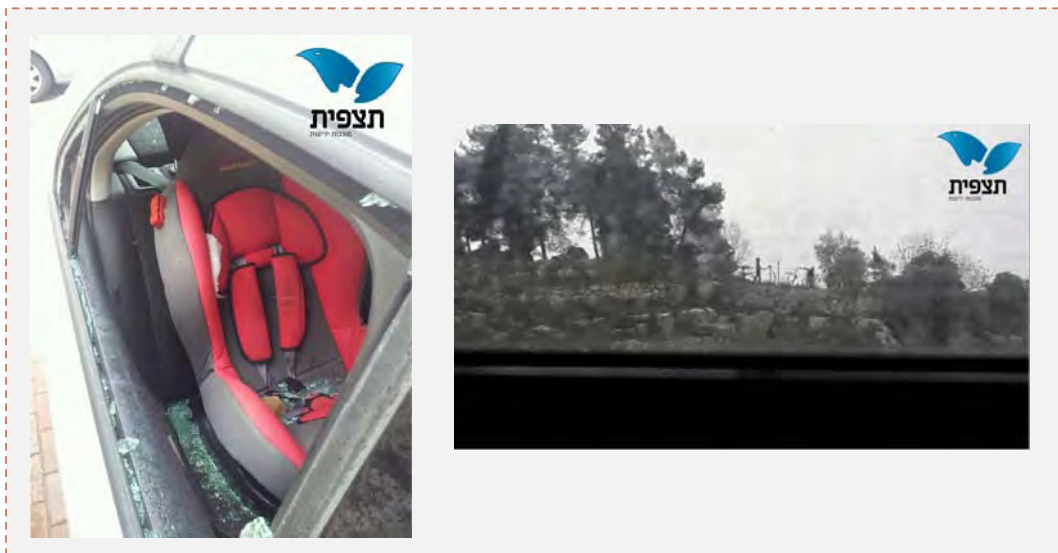
fired from light arms and there was one stabbing attack.⁶ Four Israelis incurred minor injuries in the attacks, three of them IDF soldiers (ISA website).

Palestinian Violence Continues

■ This past week violent incidents continued in Judea and Samaria, part of the so-called "popular resistance." Stones were thrown at Israeli civilians and Israeli security forces and Molotov cocktails were thrown at vehicles on main roads. Friday riots were held at the traditional friction points (Bill'in, Ni'llin, Nebi Saleh, Qadoum, Beit Umar, Bethlehem etc.).

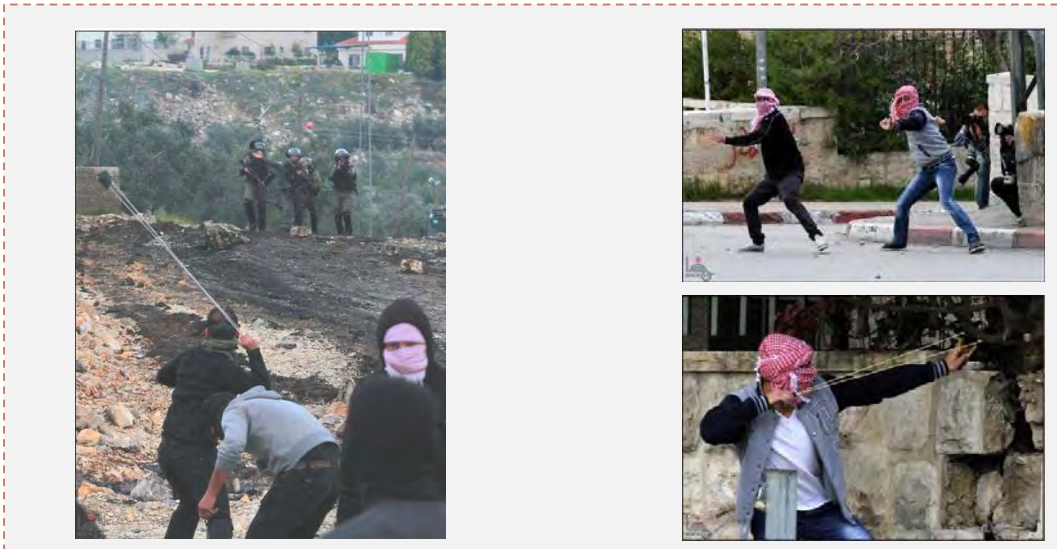
■ The most prominent events were the following:

- **March 11, 2014** – Stones were thrown from the Jelazoun refugee camp at the outlying neighborhoods of Beit El (Tazpit News Agency, March 11, 2014).
- **March 11, 2014** – Five Palestinians threw stones one kilometer south of the Jewish village of Karmeit Zzur in the Etzion Bloc. There were no casualties and no damage was reported (Tazpit News Agency, March 11, 2014).
- **March 14, 2014** – Stones were thrown at Israeli vehicles on the trans-Benjamin highway near the Arab village of Deir Nizam. A number of vehicles were damaged (Tazpit News Agency, March 14, 2014).



Left: A stone that hit a baby seat in an Israeli civilian vehicle (Photo by Ehud Amitun for the Tazpit News Agency, March 14, 2014). Right: Palestinians throw stones at Karmeit Zzur (Photo by Dina Rapp for the Tazpit News Agency, March 11, 2014)

⁶ Scores of incidents of stone-throwing are not included in the statistics.



Left: Palestinians throw stones at Israeli security forces in the village of Qadoum (Wafa News Agency, March 14, 2014). Right: Palestinians confront IDF forces near the Tomb of Rachel in Bethlehem (Wafa News Agency, March 11, 2014).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The Rafah Crossing

■ **The Rafah crossing remains closed.** The de-facto Hamas administration's national committee for breaking the "siege" of the Gaza Strip announced the erection of a protest tent in front of the Egyptian embassy in Gaza City (Al-Aqsa, date, 2014). On March 17, 2014, the student union of the Gaza Strip universities held a protest rally near the tent. **Ghazi Hamad**, deputy foreign minister in the Hamas administration, criticized Egypt's actions regarding the Rafah crossing, which, he said, ignored the appeals of the Palestinians to open it. He called Egyptian policy "painful, sad" and unjust (Alresala.net, March 17, 2014).



Left: Young Palestinians launch a media campaign in the center of Gaza City demanding the opening of the Rafah crossing (Paltoday.ps, March 11, 2014). Right: Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council in the protest tent in front of the Egyptian embassy in Gaza City (Filastin Al-'Aan, March 12, 2014).

The Energy Crisis

- On March 15, 2014, the energy authority of the Gaza Strip announced the cessation of the Gaza power plant's operations because its supplies of diesel fuel had run out. **Fathi al-Sheikh Khalil**, head of the energy authority of the Hamas administration, blamed Israel for the lack of fuel because it had closed the Kerem Shalom crossing.⁷ The energy authority announced that the plant would return to supplying electricity six hours a day.
- On March 16, 2014, **Nazmi Muhanna**, responsible for the crossings and borders of the PA, said that fuel would be delivered to the Gaza Strip power plant after a solution had been found for a problem related to transferring funds from Qatar to the PA (Paltoday.ps, March 16, 2014). On March 17, 2014, a senior figure in the Hamas administration's energy authority announced that **the power plant was again operating**, after having been idle for two days. **Its operation was made possible because the necessary fuel had been delivered through the Kerem Shalom crossing** (Agence France-Presse, March 17, 2014).

⁷ In view of the latest round of escalation in Israeli's south, the Israeli defense minister ordered the closing of the Kerem Shalom crossing. On March 16 the crossing was reopened because of the lack of fuel in the Gaza Strip.

Work Accident in Beit Hanoun

■ Medical sources in the Gaza Strip reported three deaths, one of them of an operative of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military-terrorist wing, and six wounded resulting from an explosion in a house in Beit Hanoun (northern Gaza Strip). According to eyewitnesses, the explosion caused extensive damage to surrounding buildings as well. In the assessment of local sources, **the explosion was caused by a rocket stored in a house** (Al-Ayam, March 12, 2014). **The incident again illustrates the danger to the Gazan civilian population caused by the military infrastructure of the Palestinian terrorist organizations located within densely populated areas.**



Formal death announcement issued by the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military-terrorist wing. According to the announcement, the Hamas operative was hurt when he worked near the place of the explosion.

The Palestinian Authority

Mahmoud Abbas Meets with the President of the United States

■ Mahmoud Abbas paid a visit to the United States to promote the negotiations, and to that end met with American President Barack Obama. At a joint press conference held before the meeting, the president expressed his hope for progress in the negotiations in the coming weeks. He also said that the process would be difficult and challenging and **demand that both sides take political risks and make difficult political decisions**. Mahmoud Abbas expressed his hope that the opportunity would be seized because there was "no time to waste" (White House website, March 17, 2014).

■ Afterwards **Saeb Erekat**, head of the Palestinian negotiating team, said that the meeting had been thorough, serious and open, and that **Mahmoud Abbas had stressed the Palestinian position to President Obama, especially regarding the refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state** (Agence France-Presse, March 17, 2014). Presidential spokesman **Nabil Abu Rudeina** said that Mahmoud Abbas had stressed **the need to execute the fourth phase of the release of Palestinian prisoners, to freeze construction in the settlements and to reach a solution** based on the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with the 1967 borders and Jerusalem as its capital. He added that during the meeting no formal version of the framework for agreement had been proposed to Mahmoud Abbas, **only a number of ideas**. According to Mahmoud Abbas, the meetings would continue in the coming weeks (Agence France-Presse, March 17, 2014).



Left: Rally in Ramallah supporting Mahmoud Abbas. Right: Mahmoud Abbas meets American President Barack Obama in Washington (Wafa News Agency, March 17, 2014).

■ While Mahmoud Abbas was in the United States, **a campaign was orchestrated in the PA to support him. Its slogan was "We are with you."** The campaign included marches in Ramallah, Hebron, Nablus, Tulkarm and other main PA cities. Demonstrators expressed their support for Mahmoud Abbas for his assertive positions. PA Prime Minister **Rami Hamdallah** gave the keynote speech in the Manara Square in Ramallah (Wafa News Agency, March 16, 2014). However, the Hamas security services prevented a rally in support of Mahmoud Abbas from being held in Gaza City (Palpress.ps and Al-Ayam, March 16, 2014).

The Northern Arena

Attempted Terrorist Attack on the Israeli-Lebanese Border

- On the evening of March 1, 2014, an IED was detonated near an IDF patrol in the Har Dov region. The patrol, using armored vehicles, was carrying out routine security measures in the area of the Sion Wadi. One of the vehicles hit the IED. There were no casualties. Three soldiers were evacuated to a hospital to rule out concussions.
- **The IDF responded with artillery fire targeting a Hezbollah position located near the border north of Metulla.** No organization claimed responsibility for the attack. The Israeli media, basing their information on military sources, raised the possibility that Hezbollah terrorist operatives had planted the device (Haaretz and Yedioth Aharonoth, March 16, 2014).
- According to initial reports in the Israel media, on the afternoon of March 18, 2014, an IED exploded close to an IDF patrol in the northern Golan Heights, south of Majdal Shams. The explosion wounded four IDF soldiers. In response the IDF attacked targets in Syrian territory (Ynet, March 18, 2014).

The Global Jihad

Death of Senior Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis Operative Announced

- According to the Islamic jihadist websites, the **Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis**, a Salafist-jihadi organization operating in the Sinai Peninsula and other locations in Egypt, announced the death of **Tawfiq Muhammad Freij, aka Abu Abdallah**. Tawfiq Muhammad Freij, a terrorist operative, was one of the organization's founders and leaders. According to the announcement, he was killed in a crash on March 11, 2014, that led to the detonation of a bomb he was carrying in his car (Smc.sd, Sudan, March 14, 2014).
- Egyptian security sources **claimed that they had killed him**, representing him as **commander of the Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis in Egypt**. At a press conference the Egyptian minister of the interior held in January 2014, he reported Freij's full name and announced he was a criminal and a fugitive. He asked the public to report immediately to the security authorities if they had any information about him (Longwarjournal.org, March 14, 2014).

■ **Tawfiq Muhammad Freij** participated in most of the terrorist attacks attributed to the organization carried out from the Sinai Peninsula targeting Israel and Egypt, even commanding some of them. Among the terrorist attacks for which he was responsible, the organization's announcement noted the following: **the attack on Route 12 on August 18, 2011, in which eight Israelis were killed; the attack near the Egyptian-Israeli border on September 21, 2012, in which one Israeli civilian was killed; the attack on the Israeli-Egyptian gas pipe and rocket fire north of Eilat.**



Left: The death notice issued by Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. Right: Tawfiq Muhammad Freij (Smc.sd, Sudan, March 14, 2014).

The Battle for Hearts and Minds

Fatah Holds a Rally in Memory of Terrorist Operative Dalal al-Mughrabi

■ On March 11, 2014, Fatah held a rally in the al-Mari refugee camp in memory of terrorist operative **Dalal al-Mughrabi, who participated in the mass-murder Coastal Road massacre in 1978.**⁸ The rally was attended by senior Fatah personnel, among them **Ziyad Abu Eyn**, deputy minister of prisoner affairs in the PA and a member of Fatah's revolutionary council. Also present was **Rashida al-Mughrabi**, Dalal's sister, who holds the rank of brigadier general in the Palestinian security services. The

⁸ The Coastal Road massacre took place on March 11, 1978, and was carried out by a squad of Fatah terrorist operatives who came from Lebanon. An 11-man terrorist squad landed on the shore of the village of Maagan Michael, arriving in inflatable rubber dinghies. **They killed 38 Israeli civilians, 13 of them children, and wounded 71.** In response Israel initiated Operation Litani in south Lebanon. Dalal al-Mughrabi, a terrorist killed in the attack, **was made a heroine and role model** for the Palestinians by the PA and Fatah.

speeches given at the rally praised Dalal Mughrabi's "heroism and sacrifice," and stressed that she would not be forgotten. On March 11, 2014, Fatah's official Facebook page posted notices in her memory (Official Fatah Facebook page, March 11, 2014).



Left: Notice posted in memory of Dalal al-Mughrabi. Right: Rally in memory of terrorist operative Dalal al-Mughrabi.