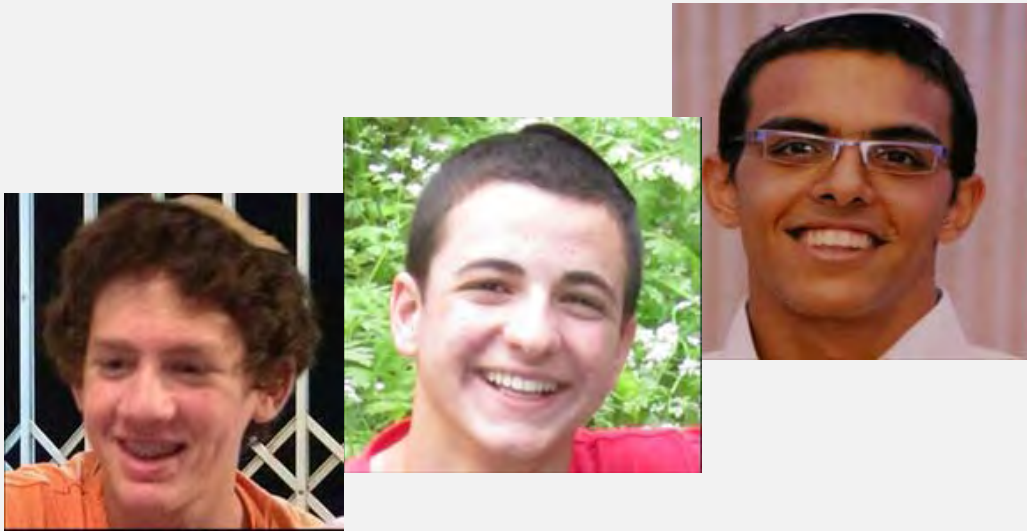




June 15, 2014

## Three Teenage Youths Abducted from the Gush Etzion Junction in Judea (The situation as of June 15, 2014, 1400 hours)



The three youths who were abducted (left to right): Naftali Frenkel, Gil-Ad Shaer and Eyal Yifrah

### Overview

1. At 2200 hours on Thursday, June 12, 2014, three teenage youths left the Gush Etzion yeshiva where they were students and headed for home; they did not arrive. The Israeli security forces began searching for them on the following morning, Friday, June 13, 2014. The working assumption of the Israeli security forces is that **they were abducted when they hitched a ride at the Gush Etzion junction.**
2. The three are **Eyal Yifrah, 19**, from the village of Elad, who studied at the Shavei Hebron yeshiva; **Naftali Frenkel, 16**, from the village of Nof Ayalon, who **also holds American citizenship**; and **Gil-Ad Shear, 16**, from the village of Talmon, both of whom studied at the Mekor Chaim yeshiva in Kfar Etzion.
3. On the morning of Friday, June 13, 2014, a **burned-out Hyundai** was found near the village of Dura (near Hebron), and according to security sources, the vehicle is **linked to the abduction.** The Israeli security forces initiated a broad search focusing on the Hebron region, which is still ongoing.



The burned-out vehicle assumed to be linked to the abduction (Paltimes.net, June 13, 2014).

## Claiming Responsibility

4. So far **no organization has claimed responsibility** and the abductors have not contacted anyone in Israel. Two claims of responsibility reported by the media were apparently false. At the beginning of the weekly government meeting on June 15, 2014, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said "**Those who perpetrated the abduction of our youths were members of Hamas – the same Hamas that Abu Mazen made a unity government with; this has severe repercussions.**"<sup>1</sup>

## Background

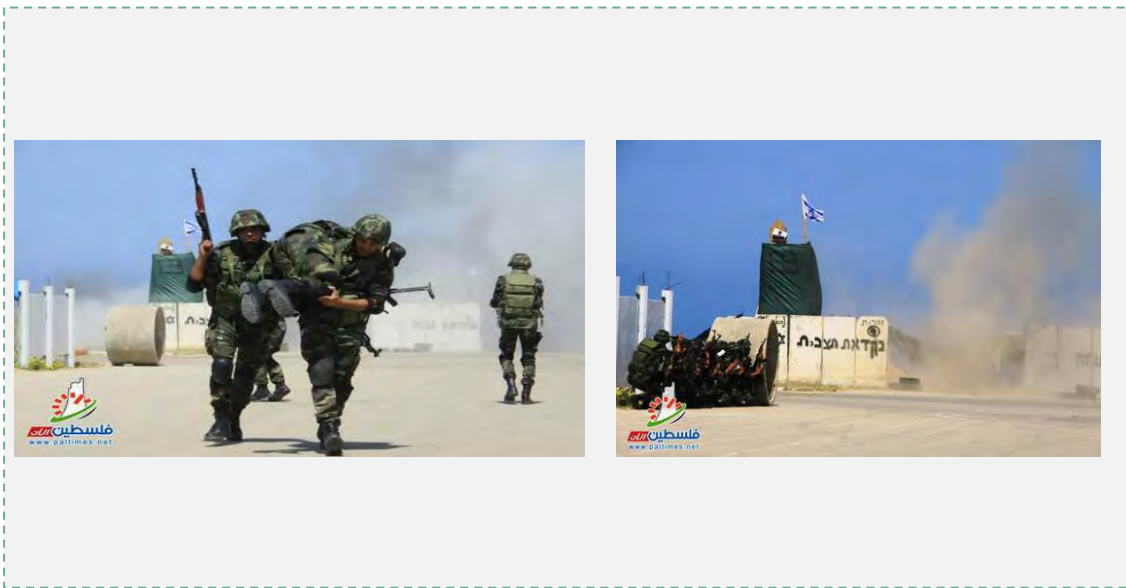
5. The abduction of the three youths is one of the most serious terrorist attacks carried out in Judea and Samaria in recent years. It occurred not long after **the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations came to an end without results and barely two weeks after the formation of a Fatah-Hamas national agreement government** (following the internal Palestinian reconciliation). In the Palestinian street, there are signs of unrest and frustration over the **ongoing hunger strike of the Palestinian administration detainees** in Israeli jails.

6. The abduction of the three youths was preceded by dozens attempted abductions, which were prevented by the Israeli security forces. **The attempts were the result of**

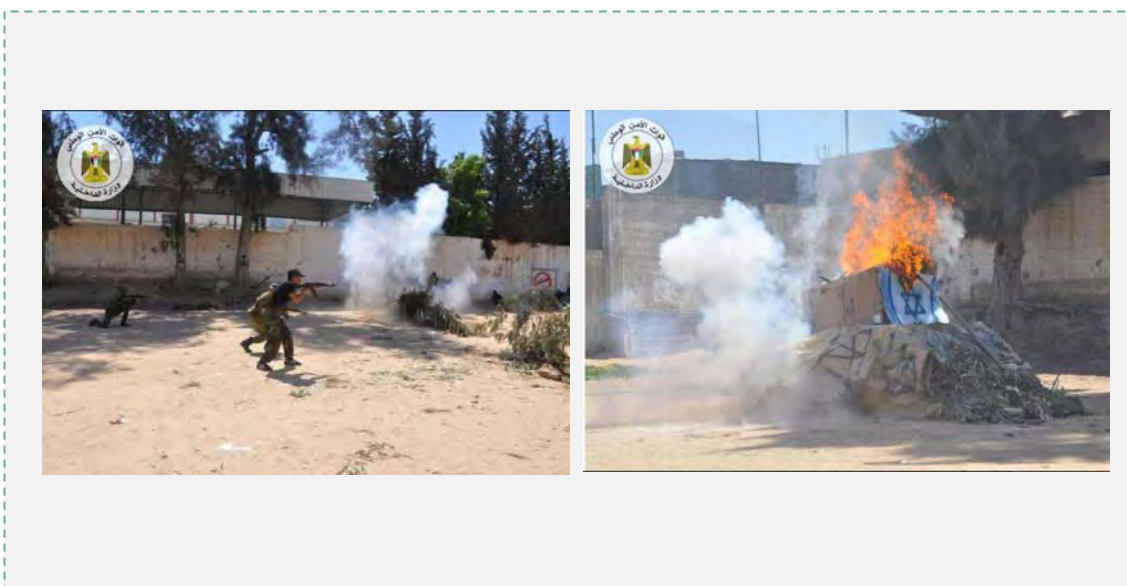
<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Spokesman/Pages/spokestart150614.aspx>

continual Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) incitement to abduct Israelis to secure the release of more Palestinian terrorist operatives from Israeli jails, inspired by Hamas' success of the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal, which is regarded as a model. Hamas also simulates the abduction of IDF soldiers in its public displays. Abducting Israelis as bargaining chips enjoys the support of the Palestinian street in the Gaza Strip and in Judea and Samaria as well.

## Hamas Terrorist Operatives Undergo Training to Abduct Israeli Soldiers and Civilians



Graduation exercises of a Hamas national security service officers' training course in the Gaza Strip. The graduates simulate the storming of an IDF post and the abduction of a soldier (Paltimes.net, April 17, 2014). (Video: Youtube.com/watchv=3dGPWJAwami)



Participants in the Al-Futuwwa project (a military training program for Gazan school boys) simulate an attack on an IDF post and then abduct an Israeli soldier and publicly proclaim it in the media (Al-Futuwwa Facebook page, March 28, 2013).

7. According to Israel Security Agency data, since Operation Pillar of Defense (November 2012) **there has been an increase in attempts to abduct Israeli civilians and soldiers in Judea and Samaria.** The efforts are orchestrated by **operatives abroad, operatives in the Gaza Strip and by Palestinian terrorists imprisoned in Israeli jails.** Most prominent among the organizations are Hamas, the PIJ and Fatah. **Since January 2013, 49 intentions and attempts to abduct Israelis have been discovered and prevented** (11 so far in 2014). One abduction was carried out and exposed before negotiations and bargaining could begin (the abduction and murder of Tomer Hazan on September 20, 2013) (Israel Security Agency website, June 5, 2014).<sup>2</sup>

8. Abducting Israeli civilians and soldiers in Judea and Samaria for use as bargaining chips is a routine terrorist organization modus operandi unrelated to political exigencies. **Jews living in Judea and Samaria are desirable, readily available targets** because they routinely wait at junction bus stops<sup>3</sup> and are in constant friction with the Palestinians. Their proximity to areas settled by Palestinians makes it possible for abductors to transport their victims quickly, to hide them and keep them hidden within the local population.

## Israeli Security Force Activity after the Abduction

### Judea and Samaria

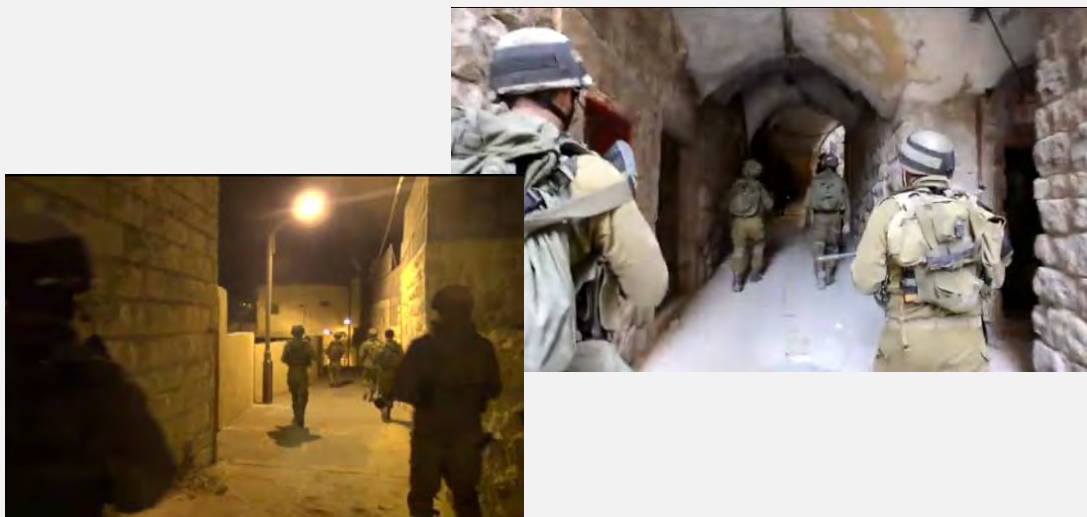
9. After it became apparent that the three youths had disappeared, the Israeli security forces began intensive activity to locate them. On Friday morning they began searching the areas around Hebron and Bethlehem. At the same time, they began collecting intelligence to locate the abducted youths and those involved in their abduction. The IDF increased the number of forces on the ground, including the deployment of elite units and the Border Police. In some of the villages where the IDF conducted its activities there were clashes with the local residents, who threw stones at the soldiers.

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<sup>2</sup> For further information about abductions in 2013 see the February 26, 2014 bulletin "[Violence and Terrorism in Judea and Samaria, 2013: Data, Characteristics and Trends.](#)"

<sup>3</sup> The bus stops at the junctions in Judea and Samaria have been targets for various types of terrorist attacks. For example, on June 3, 2014, a Palestinian terrorist operative who opened fire on the security forces at the Tapuah junctions was shot and killed. On May 30, 2014, the Israeli security forces detained a Palestinian wearing an explosive belt. In the past there were several attempts to abduct Israelis from bus stops in Judea and Samaria.

10. Security measures were also taken at the Allenby Bridge, at the border crossings between Israel and Judea and Samaria, and at the crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip to prevent the abductees from being transferred to Jordan or the Gaza Strip, or into Israel.



IDF forces work day and night looking for the missing youths (IDF Spokesman, June 14, 2014).



The Israeli security forces conduct searches in the Hebron region (Moshe Butavya for Tazpit News Agency, June 13, 2014)

11. A closure was imposed on southern Judea and the Hebron region. On the night of June 14, 2014, **the Israeli security forces detained dozens of Palestinian suspects in Hebron, Ramallah and Tubas**. According to Palestinian reports, among the detainees were senior Hamas and PIJ figures, and activists from the Al-Najah University (Nablus) student union (Ynetnews.co.il, June 15, 2014). On the morning of

June 15, 2014, senior Palestinian sources reported that their own intelligence activity focused on an attempt to trace two Hamas operatives from Hebron known as having ties to Hamas' military wing and absent from their homes since Thursday (Avi Issaharoff for Walla.co.il, June 15, 2014).



**Israel security forces detain a wanted Palestinian in the Hebron sector (Maannews.net, June 14, 2014).**

12. According to the Israeli media, on June 15, 2014, the Israeli security forces made preparations to encircle Hebron. The Palestinian media reported that IDF forces set up roadblocks at the roadblocks at the northern entrance of the city and deployed bulldozers (Maannews.net, June 15, 2014).



**IDF forces close the entrances to Hebron (Maannews.net, June 15, 2014).**

## Rocket Fire from the Gaza Strip

13. While the Israeli security forces were searching for the missing youths in Judea and Samaria, rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel. Before dawn on June 14, 2014, two rocket hits were identified in the western Negev. Their remains were found near the security fence. On the afternoon of June 14, 2014 a rocket hit was identified in the yard of a home in the Ashqelon region. There were no casualties and no damage was reported.

14. In response to the rocket fire Israeli aircraft struck a number of terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip:

- 1) On **June 13, 2014**, a terrorist target and a site for the storage of weapons were struck in the southern Gaza Strip.
- 2) On **June 14, 2014**, three terrorist targets and two locations for the storage and manufacture of weapons were struck in the southern Gaza Strip. A terrorist target in the central Gaza Strip was also struck. The Palestinian media reported that two people had incurred minor shrapnel wounds (Safa.ps, Maannews.net, June 14, 2014).

## Responses to the Abduction of the Youths

### Israel

15. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said [ITIC emphasis] **"Our young people have been abducted by a terrorist organization. This is absolutely clear; there is no doubt about this. They were abducted by a terrorist organization...[We] demand that the Palestinian Authority and its leader, Abu Mazen...do whatever is necessary to assist in bring the abductees back home. This is the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority.** We hold Abu Mazen and the Palestinian Authority responsible for all attacks against Israel that originate from their territory, whether this is Judea and Samaria or the Gaza Strip... Now, Abu Mazen's pact with Hamas has opened the door to a possible Hamas takeover of the Palestinian Authority areas in Judea and Samaria. I have said this before and I reiterate it tonight: There is no possibility of talking peace with Israel while, at the same time, establishing a unity government with Hamas, a terrorist organization that aspires to destroy Israel..."<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Events/Pages/eventstate140614.aspx>

16. Speaking with American Secretary of State John Kerry, Benjamin Netanyahu again stressed that **Mahmoud Abbas was responsible for the safety of the missing youths**. He said that what had happened since Hamas joined the Palestinian government had been destructive, and that the abduction of the youths was the result of a murderous terrorist organization becoming part of the Palestinian government (Israeli foreign ministry website, June 14, 2014).

17. **IDF General Benny Gantz** said that [the abduction] was a serious affair, another in a series of such events. He said the IDF was increasing its activity according to the instructions of the political leadership, with close cooperation with all the security forces. He said the IDF would do everything necessary to end the affair as quickly as possible. He added that the IDF was also monitoring events in other arenas [i.e., the Gaza Strip and northern Israel] (IDF Spokesman, June 14, 2014). Israeli Minister of Defense **Moshe Yaalon** said that as long as no other information had been obtained, **the working assumption was that the youths were alive**. He said all the security forces were making a joint effort to find them (Ynetnews.co.il, June 14, 2014).



The Israeli Chief of Staff holds a meeting to assess the situation (IDF Spokesman, June 14, 2014).

## The Palestinian Authority

18. Mahmoud Abbas and senior PA figures **did not issue formal statements regarding the abduction of the three youths**. Less senior figures did issue statements rejecting **Israel's blaming the PA for responsibility**. They claimed that the event had occurred in Area C, which is under full Israeli control.



19. Examples follow:

1) **Adnan al-Dmeiri**, spokesman for the PA's security services, rejected the Israeli claim that the PA was responsible for the event because He said, that the abduction occurred in an area which, according to the Oslo Accords, was under Israeli control [Area C]. Asked if the Palestinian security services would help look for the abductees, he said that they were responsible for Palestinian security in Area A. He said Gush Etzion, where the abduction occurred, was in the "settlement area" controlled by Israeli security and the PA had no responsibility for the safety of the settlers (Aa.com.tr, Maannews.net, June 14, 2014).

2) **Ihab Bsiso**, spokesman for the national agreement government, told a press conference in Ramallah that Israel could not hold the PA responsible for security in areas it did not control. He called the Israeli security effort to find the three abducted teenagers "Israeli escalation" against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, saying it was "collective punishment" imposed by Israel (Wafa.ps, June 15, 2014).

3) **Muhammad al-Madani**, a member of Fatah's Central Committee and also chairman of the Palestinian committee for ties to Israeli society, strongly condemned Israel's accusations against the PA and Mahmoud Abbas. He said that the youths had been abducted in Area C, for whose security Israel is fully responsible and that there was no Palestinian security presence there at all (Fatah media website, June 14, 2014).

## The Palestinian Public in Judea and Samaria

20. Generally speaking, the Palestinian public expressed broad support for the abduction, which they felt was legitimate because its objective was to secure the release of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails (there is a consensus for the release of the prisoners on the Palestinian street). The timing of the abduction, which occurred at the height of the hunger strike of the administrative prisoners, gave the attack greater prominence. However, there was also concern that the IDF's intensive activity might disrupt the daily lives of Palestinians in Judea and Samaria.

21. The abduction again raised the issue of Israel's security coordination with the PA, to which Hamas is strongly opposed. The media items related to the PA security

services' help in looking for the abductees led to notices posted on the social networks warning the members of the security services not to help the Israeli security forces.

22. Fatah's official Facebook page posted a cartoon likening the Israelis to three mice who had been baited into a trap. Palestinian web surfers responded that it was the only way to secure the release of Palestinians imprisoned in Israel. Another Fatah Facebook page called for extensive feedback for the fact that as of June 2014 the number of "Palestinians abducted" [i.e., terrorist operatives imprisoned in Israel for the crimes they committed] was 5,271 (Fatah Facebook page, June 15, 2014).



Left: Asking for spreading the fact that the number of "Palestinians abducted" by Israel was 5, 271.  
Right: The cartoon showing the three Israeli youths as trapped mice  
(Fatah's Facebook page, June 15, 2014).

## The Palestinian Public in the Gaza Strip

23. In the Gaza Strip there were outpourings of joy and the abduction was greeted as a great achievement. Pastries were handed out in the streets, shots were fired into the air and fireworks were set off, and convoys of vehicles honked to show their happiness.



Pastries handed out in the Gaza Strip at a protest tent erected in support of the administrative detainees holding a hunger strike in Israeli jails (Paltimes.net, June 4 2014).

## Hamas

24. **Hamas spokesmen praised the abduction but did not take responsibility for it.** **Sami Abu Zuhri**, Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, rejected Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's claim that Hamas was responsible for abducting the three youths. He called the claims "foolish" (Paltimes.net, June 15, 2014).

25. Other comments from Hamas were the following:

**Fawzi Barhoum**, Hamas spokesman, said on his Twitter account that he praised "fighting Hebron." Every Palestinian, he said, who could abduct a settler should do so to release prisoners (Fawzi Barhoum's Twitter account, June 13, 2014).

**Husam Badran**, Hamas spokesman, said that there was no doubt that the West Bank had recently begun to change regarding "the resistance and the struggle against Israel," and that that was evident in the many clashes and "resistance [i.e., terrorist] activities." He said the abduction ("the Hebron operation") was a great success for the resistance in the West Bank (Al-Aqsa TV, June 13, 2014). He used his Facebook page to call on Palestinians to confront Israel in the West Bank with mass clashes or individual actions (Husam Badran's Facebook page, June 13, 2014).

**Abu Obeida**, spokesman for Hamas' military-terrorist wing, said that as long as there were men of the resistance in the West Bank "the tyrannical occupier will not be calm and the Zionists will burn in the fire of their crimes against the prisoners" (Abu Obeida's Twitter account, June 13, 2014).

26. In response to the wave of detentions of Hamas and PIJ operatives carried out by IDF forces in Judea and Samaria, sources in Hamas and the PIJ said that they showed Israel's embarrassment over the abduction of the three young men. They appealed to the international community to put an end to the detentions (Paltoday.ps, June 15, 2014).

27. **Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV broadcast** an open monitor most of the day. The broadcasts were exploited to send messages to the residents of Hebron via the TV screen. They asked store owners in Hebron to erase the last 24 hours of recordings on their security cameras so that Israel would not be able to use them in its search (Al-Aqsa TV, June 14, 2014). Hamas also used the opportunity to criticize the PA's cooperation with Israel.

## The Palestinian Islamic Jihad

28. The **PIJ** also received the news of the abduction with joy. **Daoud Shihab**, PIJ spokesman, praised the "resistance" in the West Bank. He also condemned the PA for "persecuting" the "men of the resistance" and helping in the search for the abductees (Alresala.net, June 13, 2014). **Khaled al-Batash**, senior PIJ figure, called on all Palestinians to formulate a unified strategy to secure the immediate release of the prisoners from Israeli jails. He said Israel only understood force, as was shown in the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal and other deals in which prisoners were released (Paltoday.ps, June 13, 2014).