



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(February 15 – 21, 2017)



Cartoon in the Palestinian daily al-Quds after Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's visit to the United States. Israeli locks the idea of the two-state solution in a coffin (al-Quds, February 16, 2017).

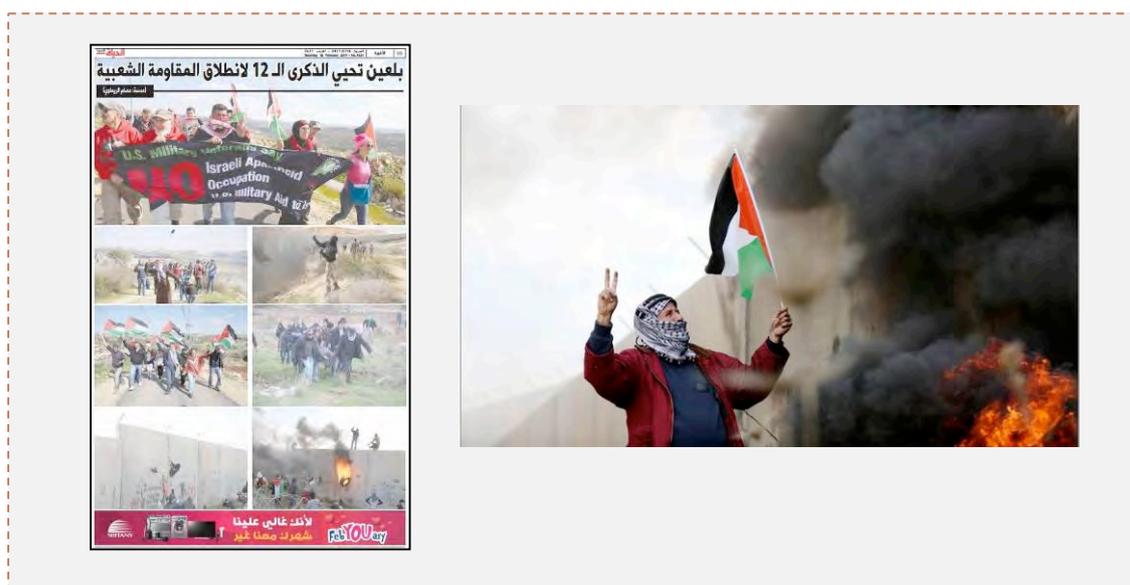
Overview

- This past week no significant terrorist attacks were carried out in Judea and Samaria. However, popular terrorism continued with riots and stones thrown at Israeli vehicles. The Israeli-Gaza Strip border was quiet.
- On February 20, 2017, two rockets were fired at Israeli territory from the Sinai Peninsula. They fell near the Israel-Sinai Peninsula border; there were no casualties and no damage was reported. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack. It was the second ISIS rocket attack against Israel this month. That may indicate a desire in ISIS's part to deter Israel from what it considers collaboration between Israel and Egypt in the Egyptian campaign against the organization in the Sinai Peninsula. The day before the attack ISIS's Sinai Province issued a statement claiming that an Israeli drone had hit a vehicle south of Rafah, killing five of its operatives.

Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem

Riots, Clashes and Popular Terrorism

- In the meantime, demonstrations, clashes and riots continue throughout Judea and Samaria, including the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails. The Israeli security forces carried out a series of detentions of suspects in Judea and Samaria and seized weapons. They also uncovered a workshop for manufacturing arms.
- The routine Friday riot in Bila'in (west of Ramallah) on February 17, 2017, marked the 12th anniversary of the "popular resistance" against the border security fence. There were about 500 participants, among them **Fatah chairman Mahmoud al-Alul**. Palestinians threw Molotov cocktails and burned tires, and made attempts to scale the fence and cut through the barbed wire topping it (Wafa, February 17, 2017). The daily Palestinian newspaper al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, the official organ of the Palestinian Authority (PA), devoted a full page to the event (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, February 18, 2017).

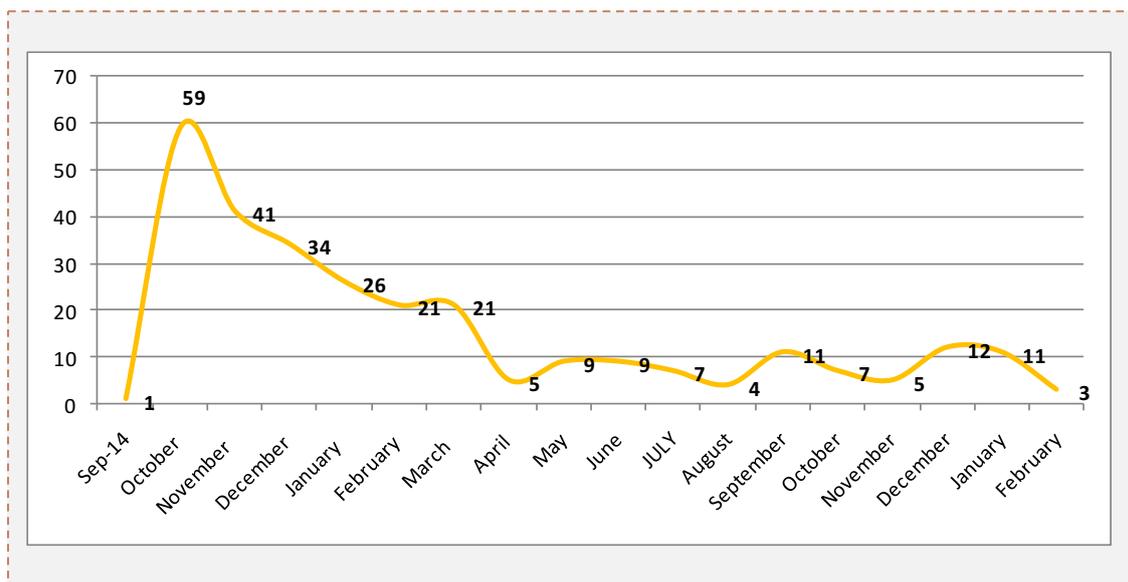


Left: A page from the Palestinian newspaper al-Hayat al-Jadeeda devoted to the 12th anniversary of the "popular resistance" in Bila'in (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, February 18, 2017). Right: Palestinians burn tires near the border security fence in Bila'in (Wafa, February 17, 2017).

- The more prominent occurrences were the following:
 - **February 21, 2017** – Palestinians threw stones at an Israeli bus near **Anata (north of Jerusalem)**. One man was injured. The bus was damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, February 20, 2017).

- **February 20, 2017** – Two 17 year-old Palestinians were detained by the Israeli security forces in the village of **Deir Abu Mishaal (northwest Samaria)**. They had carried out a number of **shooting attacks near the community of Halamish**. The two surrendered Carlo submachine guns (Israel Security Agency, February 20, 2017).
- **February 19, 2017** – Palestinians threw stones at two Israeli buses near **the Kiryat Arba industrial zone**. There were no casualties. Both buses were damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, February 19, 2017).
- **February 19, 2017** – Israeli security forces detained **Ihab Salameh Daoud al-Shaibat**, 45, a Fatah operative, from Bayt Sahour. In recent weeks he was involved in throwing stones at Israeli vehicles while driving his car in the oncoming lane. In some instances the stones damaged the vehicles (Israel Security Agency, February 19, 2017).
- **February 17, 2017** – Palestinians threw two Molotov cocktails at an Israeli bus **north of Ofra (north of Ramallah)** (Facebook page of Red Alert, February 20, 2017).
- **February 17, 2017** – Palestinians threw stones at an Israeli bus carrying soldiers between **Kfar Tapuah and Migdalim in Samaria**. One soldier was injured. The bus was damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, February 17, 2017).
- **February 16, 2017** – Israeli security forces exposed a workshop for the manufacture of weapons in **Beit Leqia, southwest of Ramallah** (Facebook page of Red Alert, February 20, 2017).

Significant Terrorist Attacks in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem since September 2015¹



Israeli Arab from Taybeh Detained on Suspicion of ISIS Activity

■ At the beginning of January 2017, following intelligence information, the Israeli security forces detained **Anas Hajj Yahya**, 35, an Israeli Arab from the town of Taybeh, on suspicion of **planning to engage in terrorist activity in Israel**. According to the investigation, **he swore allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and considered going to Syria to fight in the ranks of the organization**. The investigation also revealed that he planned to set up an ISIS terrorist squad **to carry out attacks in Israel**, and tried to recruit additional operatives. **He was asked to carry out a terrorist attack on a bus in Tel Aviv** and to attack IDF soldiers, but the attacks were not carried out.

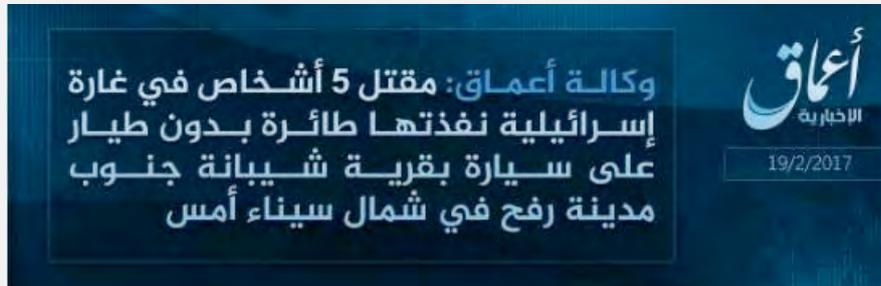
■ In addition, according to the investigation he participated in an Internet group with other ISIS operatives. **He shared information with the group about making explosive belts, assembling IEDs detonated remotely with cellphones, and adding poisons to IEDs**. He also provided instructions for the preparation of dangerous substances, such as sarin gas. Among the evidence collected against him were pictures of IEDs and a manual for the jihadi fighter used by operatives affiliated with ISIS. An indictment was handed down against him (Israel Security Agency website, February 20, 2017).

¹ A significant attack is defined by the ITIC as involving shooting, stabbing, a vehicle, the use of IEDs, or a combination of the above. Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown by Palestinians are not included.

Israel's South

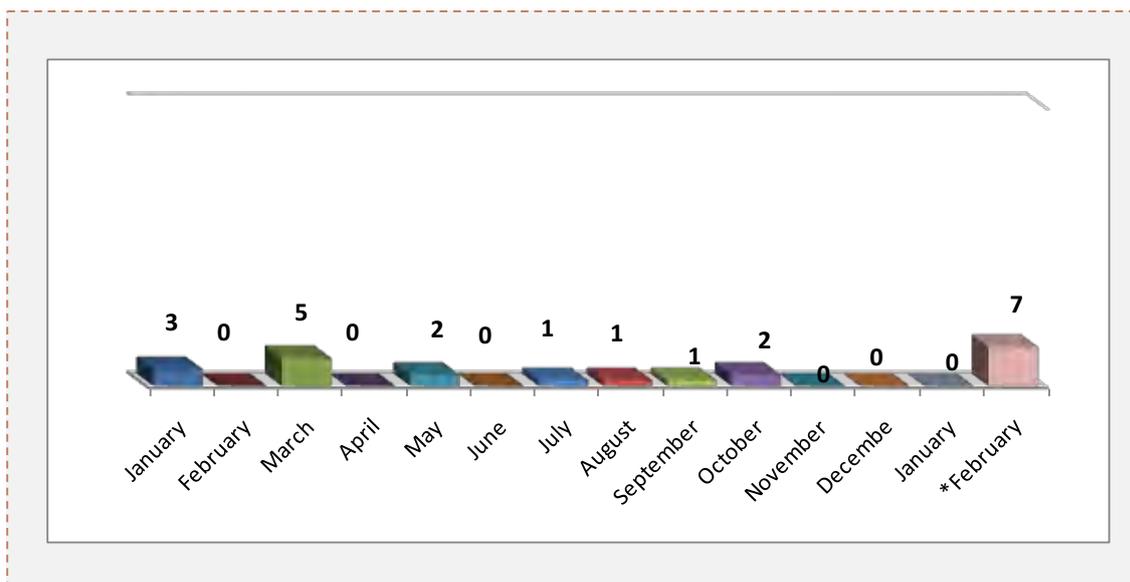
Rocket Fire Attacking Israel

- On February 20, 2017, two rockets were launched at Israeli territory from the Sinai Peninsula. They fell in an open area near the Israel-Egypt border in the western Negev. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. On February 21, 2017, ISIS claimed responsibility for firing two Grad missiles at Israel (Amaq, February 21, 2017). The day before the attack ISIS's Sinai Province said in a statement that an Israeli drone struck a vehicle in a village south of Rafah, killing five ISIS operatives (Amaq, February 19, 2017).
- In ITIC assessment, the rocket fire may have been in retaliation for the attack south of Rafah, which ISIS attributed to Israel. It was the second time this month that ISIS's Sinai Province **launched rockets from the Sinai Peninsula**. ISIS's objective was to deter Israel from what it considers collaboration with Egypt in a campaign against the organization.



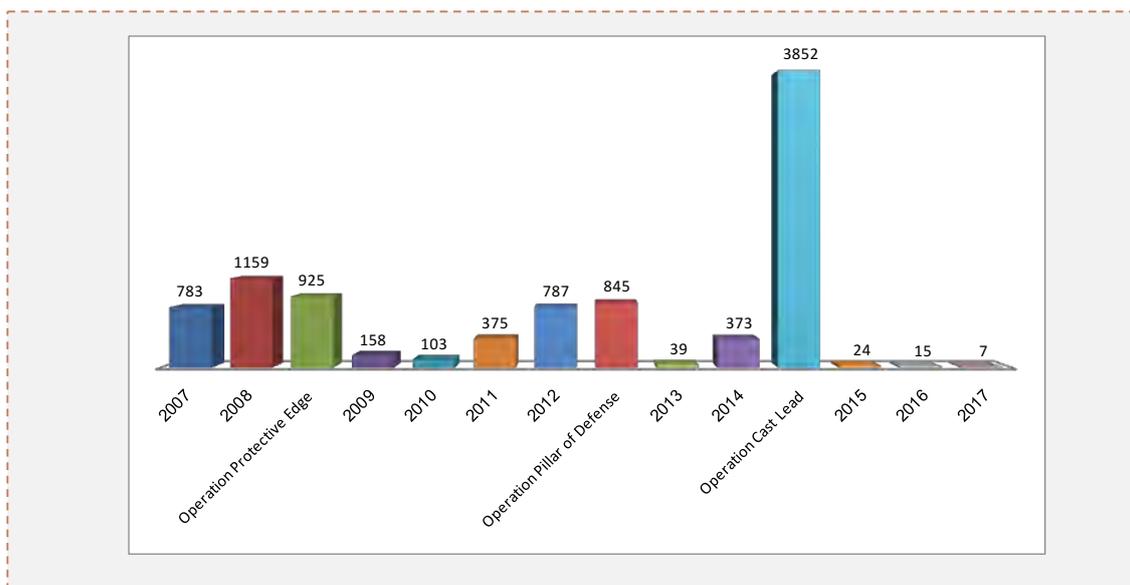
ISIS's Sinai Province claims Israel killed five of its operatives south of Rafah (Haq, February 29, 2017)

Monthly Distribution of Rocket Fire, 2016



*Six of the rockets fired into Israeli territory in February were launched from the Sinai Peninsula apparently by operatives of ISIS's Sinai Province.

Annual Distribution of Rocket Fire in Israel's South



Developments in the Gaza Strip

Electing the New Hamas Leadership

■ **Ismail Haniyeh** met with **Yahya Sinwar**, newly-elected chairman of the political bureau in the Gaza Strip, and with **senior Hamas figure Rawhi Mushtaha**, also elected to the new political bureau. The meeting was held in preparation for replacing the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip. The three stressed that all the elections to the Hamas institutions had been democratic and that they reflected the unity of the

movement's various parts. They also noted that the leadership members who had been replaced would not stop serving the Palestinian people. The meeting ended with the declaration that Palestine was Hamas' top priority and that its "compass pointed to Jerusalem" (Hamas website, February 20, 2017).



Left to right: Rawhi Mushtaha, Yahya Sinwar, Ismail Haniyeh (Hamas website, February 20, 2017)

The Rafah Crossing

■ On February 18, 2017, the Rafah crossing opened, exceptionally, for a number of hours in one direction only, towards Egypt. About 500 people exited the Gaza Strip, most of them members of the Dahlan delegation, who were on their way to attend a conference in Cairo (Hamas ministry of the interior, February 18, 2017).

Statements from Senior Hamas Figures about the Struggle against Israel

■ Khaled **Mashaal, head of Hamas' political bureau**, gave a speech at a conference held by the al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations in Beirut. **He said that the PA and Hamas had different approaches to the "resistance." Hamas, he said, supported "resistance" in every form, i.e., supported military-type terrorism, to which the PA objected.** However, the "popular resistance," he claimed, was a form of action shared by the PA and Hamas. He called on all Palestinians to participate in the "popular resistance" because, he said, if all Palestinian forces united in the "popular resistance" in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, Israel would disappear (al-Aqsa, February 16, 2017).



Khaled Mashaal, head of Hamas' political bureau, speaks at a conference held by the al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations in Beirut (YouTube, February 15, 2017)

- **Senior Hamas figure Musheir al-Masri** gave a speech at a memorial rally held by Hamas' military wing in Khan Yunis for one of its operatives killed when a tunnel collapsed. He said that the message of "martyrs of the preparations" [operatives making preparations for a future military conflict with Israel] was clear. He said that in **the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades lexicon, the "lull in the fighting"** did not mean sitting idly by, but rather **enlisting tens of thousands of operatives for activities above and below ground, on land and at sea**. The message for Israel, he said, was that the land of the Gaza Strip was taboo as far for Israel (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades and al-Aqsa TV websites, February 19, 2017).



Musheir al-Masri speaking at the rally in Khan Yunis (Facebook page of khnmedia, February 19, 2017)

Formulating a Fundamental Political Document by Hamas

■ During the "Strategic Assessment Conference for 2016-2017" held in Beirut Khaled Mashaal revealed that **for the past year Hamas had been formulating a document of its basic political foundations, including its positions and legacy.** He claimed the document had been completed and the final version was being edited, and **it would be made public in the next few weeks.** He said its principles were not essentially different from Hamas' previous principles and strategy (Hamas website and YouTube, February 15, 2017)

■ According to senior Hamas sources, the document, put together by the movement's leadership abroad, would include Hamas' political ideas and principles; define the nature of Hamas' ties with Palestinian, regional and international parties; and define the practical means used to implement the movement's objectives. According to the sources, the document would not replace the Hamas charter, but would be more of a realistic political plan to regulate the movement's methods. **Senior Hamas figure Yusuf Rizqa** said the new document was more flexible, would take developments into consideration, deal less with ideology and was "less emotional" than the Hamas charter (alresala.net, February 19, 2017).

Conference to Discuss Security Coordination with Israel

■ Representatives of various Palestinian organizations met in the Gaza Strip to discuss the PA's security coordination with Israel. There were representatives from Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and other organizations, all of which strongly objected to its continuation (Twitter account of Paldf, February 18, 2017). Remarks made by the representatives included the following:

- **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** said dozens of attacks had been prevented by the PA's security forces, which proved **the security coordination harmed the "resistance."** He added that dozens of posts in the Gaza Strip had been damaged, lives had been lost and property had been damaged because of information workers in the Gaza Strip passed to the PA's general intelligence.
- Senior **PIJ figure Khader Habib** called the **security coordination "an unforgiveable crime"** that hurt the Palestinian people, but, he said, the PA could not end it because it was the foundation of its existence.

Palestinian Responses to an Interview with Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman

■ **Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman** was interviewed by the Israeli coordinator for government activities in the territories' Arabic website. He appealed to Hamas saying "let's talk." **According to Lieberman, if Hamas in the Gaza Strip agreed to laid down its arms, gave up the tunnels and stopped trying to carry out terrorist attacks against Israel, Israel would invest in the construction of a sea port, an airport and an industrial zone in the Gaza Strip.** He also appealed to Hamas to return the bodies of the Israeli soldiers it holds.

■ **The interview was met with negative responses**, mainly from senior Hamas figures:

- **Mahmoud al-Zahar** said that if Hamas wanted to turn the Gaza Strip into Singapore, it would do so by itself and without favors from anyone. He claimed [Hamas] was dealing with releasing its prisoners more than Lieberman with releasing his soldiers. The "liberation of the Israelis held by Hamas" would be effected only after Israel released the "heroic Palestinian freedom fighters" (Filastin al-Yawm, February 16, 2017).

- **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** claimed Israel evaded the issue of the captured Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip and showed it was not serious about completing the prisoner exchange deal. He added that Israel imposed a siege on the Gaza Strip in violation of international and humanitarian law, and trading with the natural right of a people because of politics was forbidden (Ma'an, February 17, 2017).

■ **A "senior source" in the PA's ministry of the interior** claimed that Israel's attempts to shuffle the cards would fail in the end. He claimed Lieberman was trying to use "lies" to raise doubts about the fact that the Palestinian cause was a key issue in the Middle East. "The source" added that it was the responsibility of the UN agencies to demand that the international community, and especially the Security Council, defend their decisions to preserve peace and security (Wafa, February 20, 2017).

The Palestinian Authority

Reactions to Netanyahu-Trump Press Conference

■ The joint press conference held by President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during the prime minister's visit to the United States, especially remarks about the two-state solution, led to **a wave of negative reactions from the heads of the PA and Fatah:**

- **The PA** issued a statement calling it an attempt to establish facts on the ground and undermine the idea of the two-state solution, and replace it with one state with two regimes. The PA, according to the statement, adhered to the two-state solution, to international law and international legitimacy, as well as to the end of the occupation and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital. The PA claimed willingness to cooperate with the American administration to bring peace (Wafa, February 16, 2017).

- **The PA foreign ministry** said in a statement that the American administration was still learning and evaluating the two parties in the conflict in order to formulate a position on the issue. However, Netanyahu's public claim that the American and Israeli positions overlapped was a lie. The PA foreign ministry statement called comments about new directions for a solution "a waste of time and an Israeli attempt to escape from a commitment to peace" (Wafa, February 16, 2017).

- **Azzam al-Hamed, a member of Fatah's Central Committee**, said the remarks made by the American president encouraged the Israeli prime minister to continue ignoring international law and thereby make the situation more complicated than it was now. As to Trump's remark about two states, he said Trump had not been clear and had created confusion, which Israel interpreted as support for its position. He said the United States had weakened its commitments to the UN and its agencies, and encouraged Israel to ignore them. He said that in view of Trump's remarks the Palestinian leadership had decided on a series of steps, among them reneging on recognition of Israel and an appeal to the International Criminal Court in The Hague (ICC) (Majal Press, February 19, 2017).

- **Ahmed Majdalani, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee**, said the idea to abandon the two-state solution and the discourse about other options

were an expression of the new administration's adoption of the Israeli point of view. He said the American administration regarded the settlements as "a real estate deal" and not as land that belonged to the Palestinian people. That, he said, encouraged Israel "to steal Palestinian lands" on a daily basis (Quds.net, February 16, 2017).



Cartoon by Hamas-affiliated Omayya Joha. The Arabic reads, "Netanyahu's nice reception from Trump during his visit [to the United States]" (Twitter account of Palinfo, February 16, 2017)