



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(March 1 – 7, 2017)



Left: Hamas cartoon of what will happen to Israel if security in the Gaza Strip deteriorates. The Arabic reads, "Israeli escalation [along] the Gaza border" (Twitter account of Palinfo, March 4, 2017). Right: IED placed on the border security fence in the northern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, March 7, 2017).

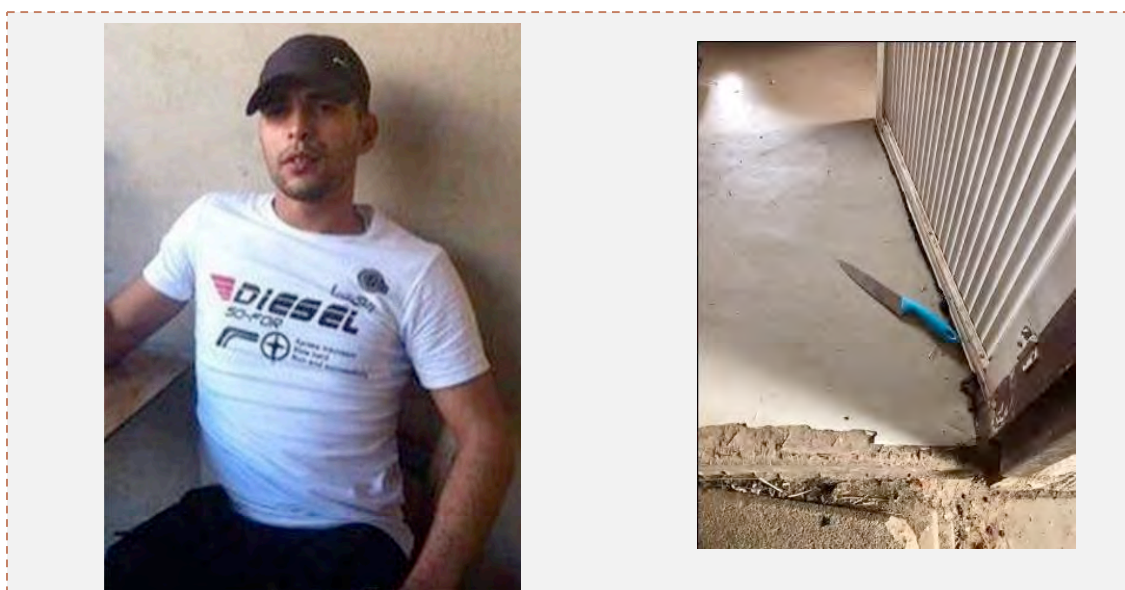
Overview

- Terrorist attacks and preparations for terrorist attacks continue in Judea and Samaria. In **South Mt. Hebron** a Palestinian terrorist who attempted to carry out a stabbing attack at an Israeli farm was shot and killed. In an exchange of fire in **Ramallah** a Palestinian terrorist planning attacks on Israeli targets was shot and killed. In various locations in Judea and Samaria riots and attacks involving stones and Molotov cocktails continued.
- In the **Gaza Strip** a rocket was fired into Israeli territory, Palestinians in the northern Gaza Strip shot at an Israeli tractor, and IEDs were placed near the border security fence. Since the beginning of February 2017 **nine rocket hits have been identified in Israeli territory**, the largest number in one month since Operation Protective Edge.
- Following the Israeli Air Force response to rocket fire from the Gaza Strip on February 27, 2017, Hamas spokesmen and Hamas-affiliated media threatened **Hamas would change its policy and react strongly to future Israeli attacks**. According to Hamas spokesmen, Israel's response was "disproportionate" and meant to force new rules of engagement on Hamas, which Hamas was not prepared to accept.

Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem

Terrorist Attacks and Attempted Terrorists Attacks

- On March 1, 2017 a Palestinian terrorist operative carried out a stabbing attack in an Israeli farm in South Mt. Hebron. Armed with a knife, the Palestinian entered one of the homes in the community and stabbed the man living there, wounding him. The man shot and killed the attacker.
- Palestinian sources reported the terrorist was **Saad Muhammad Ali Qaisieh**, 24, from **the town of al-Dhahiriya** in South Mt. Hebron. He may have been affiliated with Fatah operative, since his death was reported on the official Fatah Facebook page. It was also reported that Fatah in al-Dhahiriya had joined the family in trying to recover the body (Wafa, March 1, 2017; Facebook page of Radio al-Dhahiriya, March 2, 2017). A picture of the terrorist posted to Fatah's official Facebook page was welcomed by Palestinian Facebook users, and was later removed.

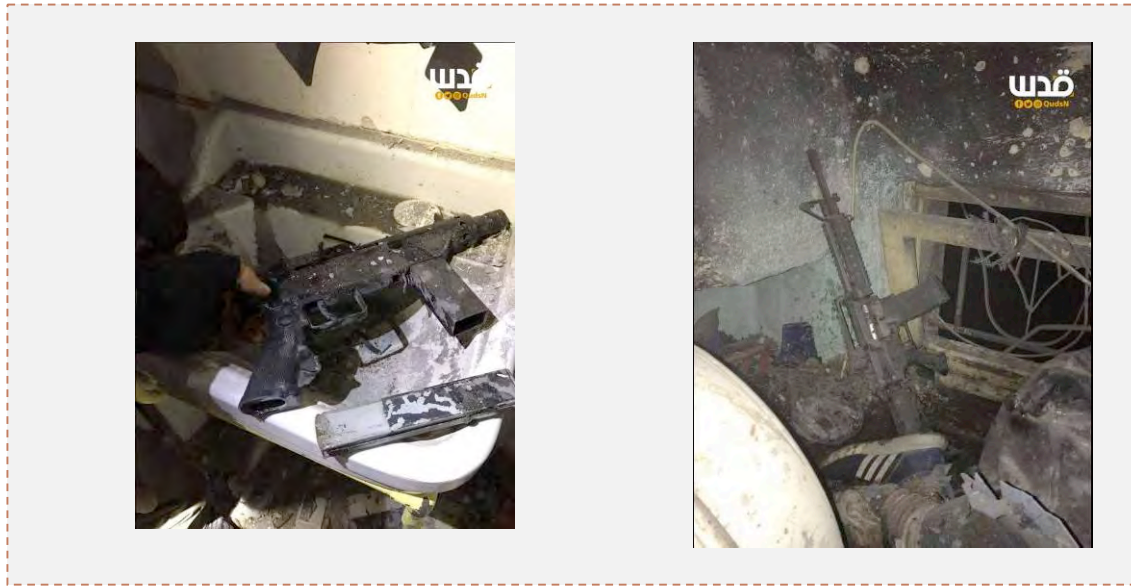


Left: Picture posted to the Fatah Facebook page in memory of Saad Qaisieh, received with support from users. It was deleted after a number of days (Facebook page of Fatah, March 1, 2017). Right: The knife used by Saad Qaisieh (Twitter account of Palinfo, March 1, 2017).

Terrorist Operative Killed during Detention

- On March 6, 2017, Israeli security forces entered Ramallah to detain **Basel al-A'araj**, head of a terrorist squad planning to attack Israeli targets. He opened fire on the Israeli security forces when they entered the house he was in. He was shot and killed in the exchange of fire. Two M-16 assault rifles and an improvised Carlo submachine gun were found (IDF spokesman and the Facebook page of the Israel

Police Force, March 6, 2017). After the shooting Palestinians clashed with the Israeli security forces, throwing stones at them. The soldiers shot at them, wounding two.



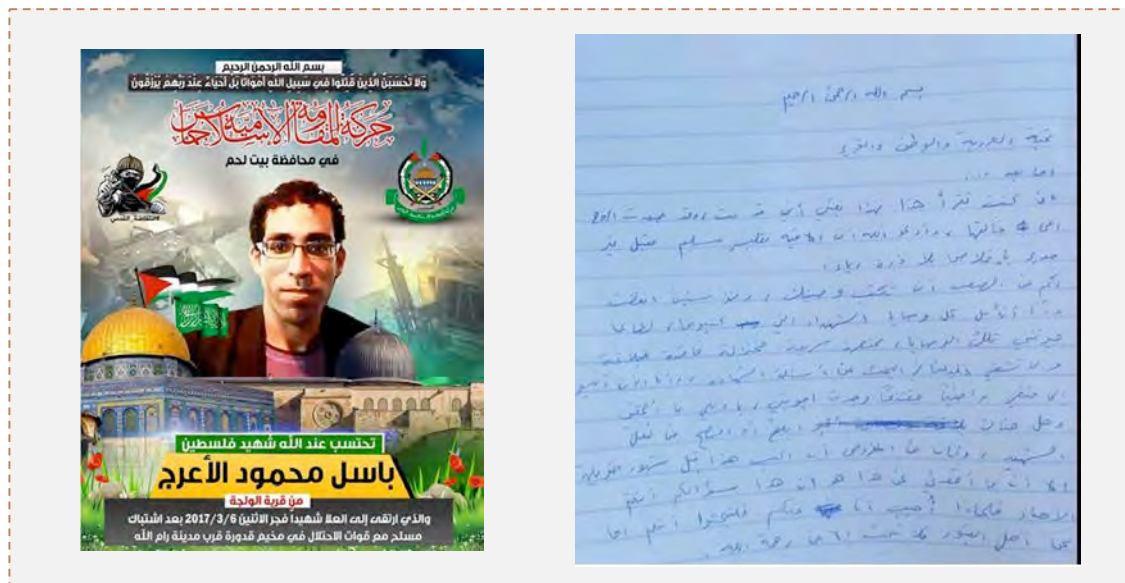
Weapons found in the house where the terrorist operative was killed (Facebook page of QudsN, March 5, 2017).

■ **Basel Muhammad al-A'araj**, 31, came from **the village of al-Walaja in the Bethlehem region**. He studied to become a pharmacist in Egypt and worked for a short time in a pharmacy in the Shuafat refugee camp in east Jerusalem. He led "popular activities" calling for a boycott of Israel. He was very active on the social media and had a number of blogs, including one on the Palestinian Quds news network. He wrote articles calling for "resistance to the [Israeli] occupation" and for a boycott of Israel. He documented the history of the "Palestinian revolution" since the 1930s and organized group tours of Palestinian heritage sites.

■ At the end of March 2016 al-A'araj and some of his friends dropped out of sight for a number of weeks. He was later detained with five other men by the Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces on the charge of planning to attack IDF forces. They were released on September 9, 2016. Everyone except al-A'araj was detained by the Israeli security forces, but he remained free (QudsN website, Raya News and daily 48, March 6, 2017).

■ The social networks gave extensive coverage to the death of Basel al-A'araj. The will he left in the house where he was killed was posted to the Internet. In it he wrote that "there is nothing more exalted than the act of the shaheed" (al-Araby al-Jadeed, March 6, 2017). Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) issued notices describing him as a role model for young Palestinians who resisted the occupation and

proof that the intifada continued. They also criticized the PA for its security cooperation with Israel which, they claimed, had led, in the end, to the death of Basel al-A'araj.



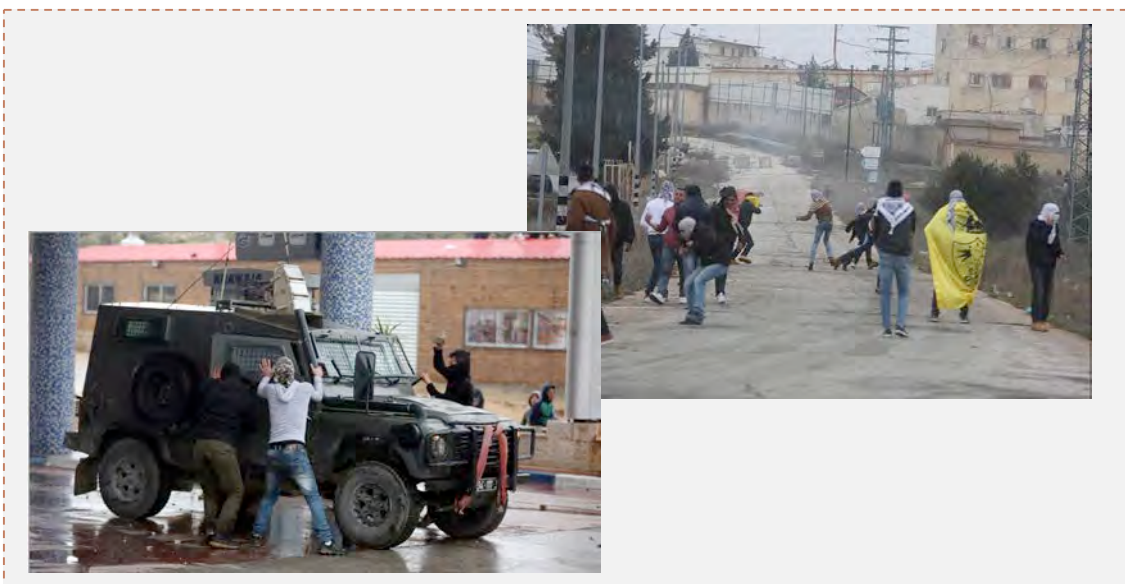
Left: Death notice issued by Hamas for Basel al-A'araj, (Facebook page of al-Risalah, March 6, 2017). Right: The will left by Basel al-A'araj, (Ma'an, March 6, 2017).

Riots, Clashes and Popular Terrorism

■ In the meantime, demonstrations, clashes and riots continued throughout Judea and Samaria, primarily the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails. The Israeli security forces detained a series of suspects and confiscated weapons. The more prominent occurrences were the following:

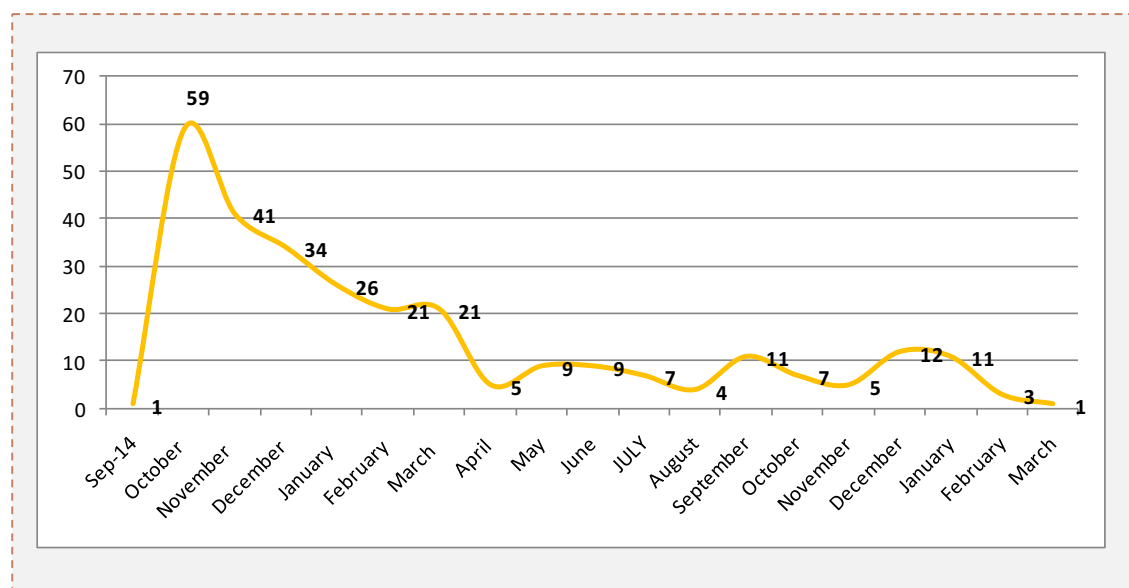
- **March 6, 2017** – Three Palestinians were detained in an Israeli security force action. Weapons and funds for financing terrorist activities were confiscated (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 6, 2017).
- **March 5, 2017** – At the **Tapuah Junction south of Nablus**, Border Policemen noticed two suspicious Palestinians. They approached and asked for identification. The two were searched and one was found to be carrying a knife. Both suspects, who came from Nablus, were taken for interrogation (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, March 5, 2017).
- **March 5, 2017** – Palestinians threw stones at an Israeli bus on the **Gush Etzion-Hebron road near Bayt Ummar**. There were no casualties; the bus was damaged. Palestinians also threw stones at an Israeli bus on the road **between the community of Adam and the village of Hizma in the Benyamin district**, damaging it (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 5, 2017).

- **March 5, 2017** – Palestinians threw stones and shot fireworks at Israeli security forces in **Silwan (east Jerusalem)**, wounding a policeman (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 5 2017).
- **March 4, 2017** – A Palestinian went to the roadblock at **the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron**. A search revealed he was in possession of a knife. During interrogation he confessed he was planning to carry out a stabbing attack (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 4, 2017).
- **March 4, 2017** – During a riot in **Nebi Saleh (northwest of Jerusalem)** Palestinians attacked an Israeli jeep with stones. The jeep drove away. There were no casualties (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 4, 2017).
- **March 2, 2017** – Palestinians threw stones at an Israeli bus **near Hizma in the Benyamin district**. A woman was injured by flying glass and several passengers were treated for shock. The bus was damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 2, 2017).
- **March 1, 2017** – The student council at **Bir Zeit University** organized a protest march from the university to the community of Beit El. They were protesting the detention of students by IDF forces during a demonstration in support of Palestinian prisoners held near the Ofer jail. The PA security forces confronted the students and tried to prevent them from going to Beit El. Some of the students managed to reach the roadblock at the entrance to the community, where they clashed with IDF forces (Ma'an and Safa, March 1, 2017).



Left: Palestinians attack an Israeli security vehicle with stones in the village of Nebi Saleh (Wafa, March 3, 2017). Right: Bir Zeit University students clash with IDF forces near Beit El (Wafa, March 1, 2017).

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



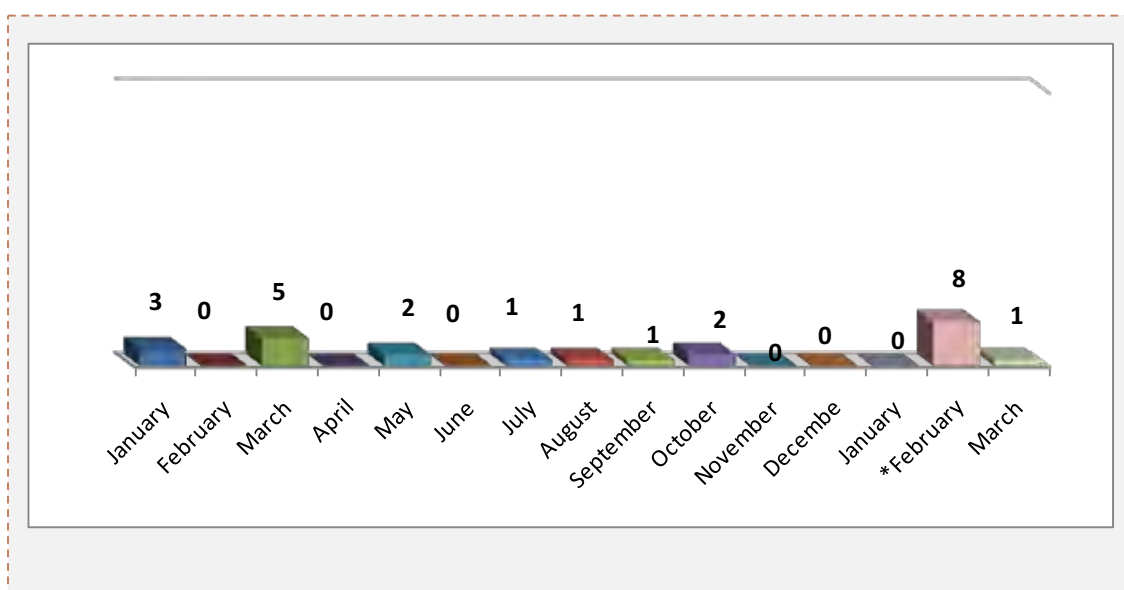
¹ A significant attack is defined by the ITIC as involving shooting, stabbing, a vehicle, the use of IEDs, or a combination of the above. Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown by Palestinians are not included.

Israel's South

Rocket Fire Attacking Israel

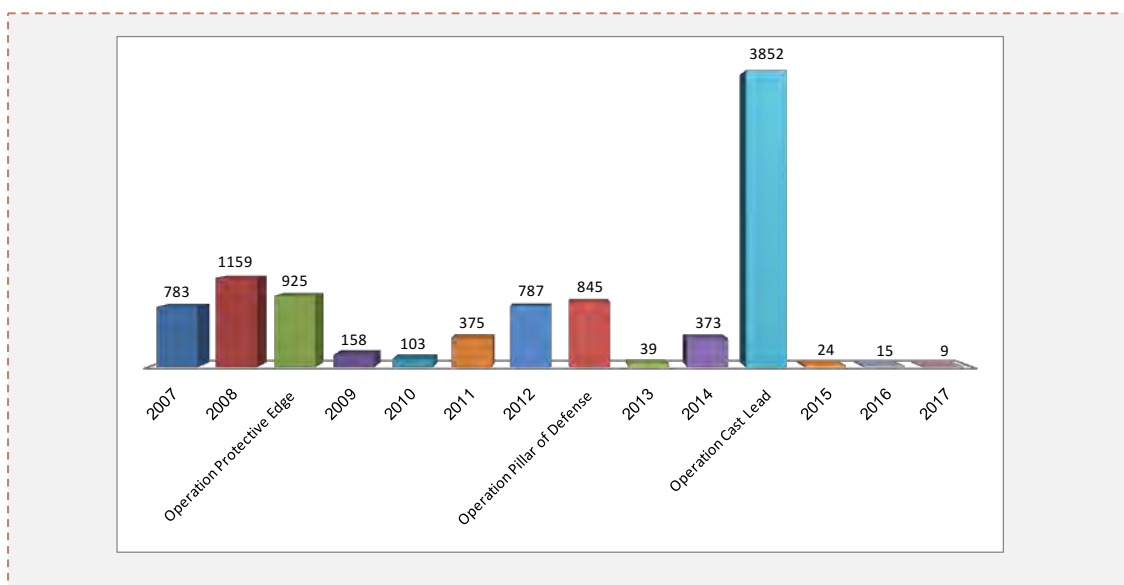
■ On March 1, 2017, a rocket was fired into Israeli territory from the area of Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip. It fell in an open area in the western Negev. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. It is not known which group was behind the attack. Salafists in the Gaza Strip posted praise for the attack on the social networks.

Monthly Distribution of Rocket Fire, 2016



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

Annual Distribution of Rocket Fire in Israel's South²



Israeli Tractor Attacked by Gunfire

■ On March 2, 2017, **Palestinians fired light arms at an Israeli tractor east of the border security fence** near one of the communities in the western Negev. There were no casualties; the tractor was damaged. In response to the attack on the tractor and the rocket fired on March 1, 2017, Israeli Air Force aircraft and IDF tanks attacked two Hamas posts in the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 2, 2017). The Palestinian media reported that an observation post in Beit Lahia (northern Gaza Strip) had been hit (al-Jazeera, March 2, 2017).

IEDs Placed near the Border Security Fence

■ On March 3, 2017, Israeli security forces saw two Palestinians placing a suspicious object, possibly an IED, near the border security fence in the northern Gaza Strip. They shot and wounded the two Palestinians, who were taken to a hospital in the Gaza Strip.

■ On March 7, 2017, during an IDF operation near the border security fence in the northern Gaza Strip, an IDF force neutralized two IEDs placed near the fence (IDF spokesman, March 7, 2017). The Palestinian media reported that the IDF force had shot at a number of Hamas operatives and wounded one of them.

² The statistics do not include mortar shell fire or rockets which misfired and fell inside the Gaza Strip.

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The Rafah Crossing

- On March 6, 2017, the Egyptian authorities opened the Rafah crossing for three days in both directions.

Hamas Threatens to React Strongly in Response to IDF Attacks following Rocket Fire

- **Senior Hamas figures** reacted strongly to the Israeli Air Force response to the rocket fired on February 27, 2017, stating that Hamas would respond strongly to such attacks in the future. According to Hamas spokesmen, the Israeli response was disproportionate and intended to force "new rules of engagement" on Hamas. **The al-Majid website**, affiliated with Hamas' security forces, published an article which threatened that Hamas would abandon its policy of restraint and choose a new policy of "a mortar shell for a mortar shell, [an attack on] a military post for [an attack on] a military post, a target for a target (al-Majid, February 28, 2017).
- **Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military wing**, issued a direct threat to Israel. **He said the next time Israel attacked Hamas would respond and not remain silent.** He added that Israel understood only force and that "when the resistance [i.e., Hamas] promises, it keeps its promise." According to Hamas-affiliated commentaries, Abu Obeida's reaction **indicated a new Hamas approach**, different from the one in place since the end of Operation Protective Edge. He said the next time an Israeli attack was considered "disproportionate" Hamas would not allow Israel to continue its attacks and would **respond differently from the way it had responded so far** (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades website, February 18, 2017).

النلاءء، 28 فبراير، 2017، 16:39 بتوقيت القدس
أبو عبيدة للعدو: سكوتنا ليس ضعفاً والأيام بيننا

القسام - خاص :

أكدت كتائب الشهيد عز الدين القسام الجناح العسكري لحركة المقاومة الإسلامية "حماس" أن العدو لا يفهم سوى لغة القوة، والسكوت أحياناً يفسر من العدو على أنه ضعف.

وشدد الناطق العسكري باسم القسام أبو عبيدة في تغريدة له على حسابه على تويتر: "إن أي عدوان قادم على غرار ما حصل بالأمس سيكون للمقاومة وعلى رأسها كتائب القسام كلمتها فيه".

وتوعد العدو قائلاً: "للمقاومة إذا وعدت أوفت والأيام بيننا".
وشنت الطائرات الحربية الصهيونية أول أمس الاثنين عدة غارات استهدفت مواقع للمقاومة الفلسطينية في قطاع غزة.

Statement issued by Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military wing in the Gaza Strip (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades website, February 28, 2017).

Choosing a New Hamas Leadership and Formulating a New Fundamental Political Document

- Palestinian sources close to the Hamas leadership reported that **Ismail Haniyeh would leave the Gaza Strip** in the near future to complete the elections for the Hamas movement political bureau. An official announcement about the completion of elections would be made public at the end of March 2017 after the "external" elections and those in Judea and Samaria had been held (al-Arab Post, March 2, 2017).
- According to **Khaled Mashaal**, Hamas spent a year formulating a **new fundamental political document** for the movement which would soon be made public. **Senior Hamas figure Salah al-Bardawil** said the document was undergoing its final editing. He said it would be made public as soon as a new head had been chosen for the movement's political bureau to replace Khaled Mashaal (al-Quds al-Arabi, March 6, 2017). **Senior Hamas figure Dr. Ahmed Yusuf** said the new program included "positive changes" in Hamas' positions on such issues as the "popular resistance," the Palestinian state, the international community, Arab states, Muslim states and the difference between Judaism as a religion and "the occupation [i.e., Israel] and the Zionist project." **In Dr. Yusuf's assessment** the new political document also included Hamas' agreement to the establishment of a Palestinian state with the 1967 borders and Jerusalem as its capital, without the recognition of Israel and without giving up some of the land of "Palestine." The new program also stresses the "right of return" of the Palestinians (Ma'an, March 5, 2017). **Senior Hamas figure Musheir al-**

Masri said the document would not replace the 1987 Hamas Charter (Dunia al-Watan, March 4, 2017).

Hamas Activity against Salafists in the Gaza Strip

■ Tension continues between Hamas and the Salafists in the Gaza Strip. Palestinian sources in Gaza reported that **Hamas security forces sent hundreds of extremists who opposed Hamas to be dealt with by military courts**. Most of the extremists were accused to supporting ISIS and manufacturing and firing rockets into Israeli territory. It was also reported that the Hamas security forces were still looking for a number of wanted operatives, among them **Nur Issa, a senior operative in the Descendants of the Prophet**, a network responsible for some of the rockets recently fired into Israel. Senior Salafists accused Hamas of carrying out detentions to satisfy Egypt, and demanded the release of their operatives (al-Sharq al-Awsat, March 2, 2017).

■ **Iyad al-Bazam, spokesman for the ministry of the interior in the Gaza Strip**, said that the media reports claiming Hamas security forces had detained dozens of radical operatives were untrue and exaggerated. However, he said anyone harming the security and stability of the Gaza Strip would be tried in a military court (Quds.net, March 2, 2017).

Hamas Issues False Information about Death of Senior ISIS Operative

■ On February 20, 2017, the Palestinian media reported the death of **Bilal Barhoum (aka Abu Bakr al-Maqdisi)** from Rafah, a senior operative in ISIS's Sinai Province. He was allegedly killed in an Israeli drone attack on his car in the Sinai Peninsula. Three other operatives were reportedly killed in the same attack. According to claims, Bilal Barhoum was behind the rocket fire attacking Eilat on February 9, 2017 (Kinan network, February 20, 2017).

■ Shortly after the announcement of his death, according to the Facebook page of General Yoav Mordechai, the Israeli Coordinator for Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), **Bilal Barhoum was alive and undergoing medical treatment in the Gaza Strip**. According to the COGAT website, Hamas erected a mourning tent for Barhoum, although in fact he was alive and receiving a salary from Hamas' military wing. Also according to the website, he was being dealt with in Gaza by **Jihad Kahalut, an Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades operative, responsible for liaisons with**

ISIS operatives in the Sinai Province (Facebook page of the Israeli coordinator for government activities in the territories, March 2, 2017).



Bilal Barhoum (aka Abu Bakr al-Maqdisi) from Rafah, senior ISIS Sinai Province operative, claimed killed in an Israeli airstrike on his vehicle in the Sinai Peninsula (Kinan network).

The Palestinian Authority

PA Relations with the United States

■ In a number of interviews, senior PA figures dealt with the issue of the PA's relations with the new American administration.

- Interviewed during a visit to Cairo, **Saeb Erekat, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee**, said contacts with the Americans had not stopped and were ongoing on several levels. He said the Palestinians had raised the issue of their position before the American administration and that the king of Jordan and president of Egypt had, in the name of the Palestinians, done the same. **He said the Americans had asked them to act with moderation and give the Trump administration a chance** (al-Ahram, February 27, 2017).
- **Mahmoud al-Alul, Mahmoud Abbas' deputy**, said that in the issue of relations with the United States, the Palestinians' situation was unclear and a little frustrating. He said they were in contact with the administration and had even sent messages via Arab leaders to make the American leadership understand the situation and not make hasty decisions. He said the Palestinians wanted good, easygoing relations, but adhered to their rights and principles, and would not be dictated to. He added that the "resistance" was "legitimate" but

every stage had its own appropriate policy, and at the present time the most suitable was the "popular resistance" (al-Sharq al-Awsat, March 1, 2017).

- **Nabil Shaath, advisor to Mahmoud Abbas for foreign affairs and international relations**, criticized Trump's position on the settlements, saying that **the Palestinians' top priority was currently the struggle against the settlements**. He said that without the two-state solution the peace process would end and the region would enter a dead-end struggle. He said the Trump administration was still limiting its talks with the Palestinian leadership to matters of security, but the Palestinians were ready to discuss the entire issue, on the condition that the United States did not relocate its embassy to Jerusalem and did not change its mind about the two-state solution (Chinese news agency Xinhua, March 3, 2017).

Palestinian Reactions to the Israeli Comptroller's Report on Operation Protective Edge

- In response to the report issued by the Israeli comptroller on Operation Protective Edge, the PA's foreign ministry issued a formal announcement. It stated that the report ignored the "crimes" carried out by Israel against Palestinian children and old women in the Gaza Strip and the unprecedented destruction of houses and institutions, factories and agricultural lands because of Israel's actions. It also ignored, according to the statement, the issue at the foundation of Israel's aggression, which was political, and that the reasons for the conflict were the continuation of the occupation, the siege of the Gaza Strip and the economic, humanitarian and political strangulation of the Palestinian public (Wafa, March 1, 2017).
- **Hamis spokesman Hazem Qassem** said the Palestinians and the "resistance" [i.e., Palestinian terrorism] had "proved" to one and all that Israel could be defeated despite previous claims that its army was invincible. He added that the "resistance," especially the "armed resistance," was the option that could defend the Palestinians and restore their rights (Dunia al-Watan, February 28, 2017).
- **Ibrahim al-Madhoun, Hamas-affiliated political analyst**, wrote that the comptroller's report did not come as a surprise to anyone, but officially attested to what had been made clear in Operation Protective Edge and afterwards. He said Israel's military strength had weakened and there was a vacuum in the political leadership. He said he was of the opinion that the publication of the report would moderate Israel's motivation for another operation in the Gaza Strip. He also said the report exposed

Israel's concerns about the tunnels, which had proven their effectiveness in the most recent confrontation and for which Israel still had not found an effective response. He added that the report showed Israel had no way of dealing with the Gaza Strip, which would make it difficult for Israel to undertake another operation (alresala.net, March 2, 2017).



Hamas cartoon. The Arabic reads, "The report [issued by Israeli Comptroller Yosef] Shapira confirms the victory of the resistance in Gaza. Those who doubt it. Go hide in your houses..." (Twitter account of Palinfo, March 2, 2017).