



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(March 15 – 21, 2017)



Israel attacked by rocket fire. Left: Cartoon in Hamas' newspaper Felesteen criticizing the rockets fired by "rogue" organizations, which hurts two million [sic] Palestinians in the Gaza Strip (the inscription on the paper plane reads "Damage 5: (Felesteen, March 19, 2017). Right: The Ibn Taymiyyah Media Center, affiliated with Salafist networks in the Gaza Strip, reports the "blessed rocket" fired from the Gaza Strip at the western Negev (Facebook page of Khan Yunis al-A'an, March 15, 2017)

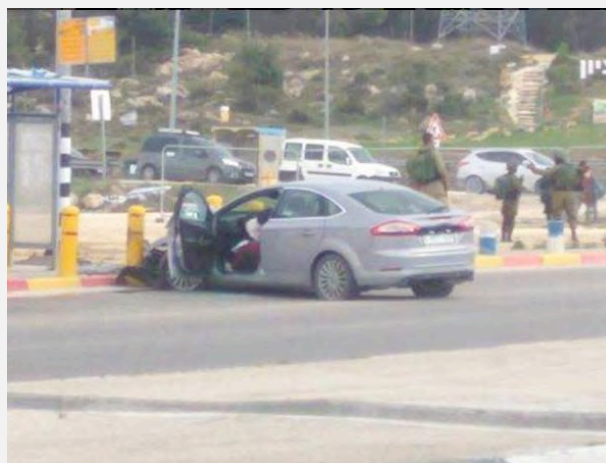
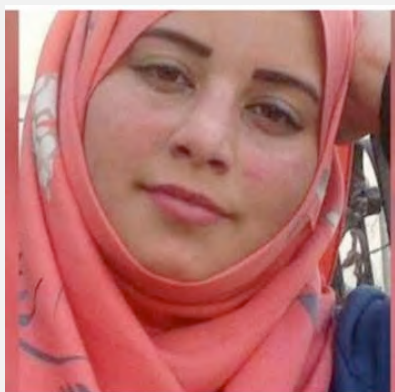
Overview

- In **Judea and Samaria**, popular terrorism continues. A Palestinian woman carried out a **vehicular attack** at the Gush Etzion Junction. She was shot and seriously wounded. An IDF soldier incurred minor injuries. Riots continue throughout Judea and Samaria, with Palestinians throwing stones and Molotov cocktails.
- **Two rockets were fired** into Israeli territory **from the Gaza Strip**. In response Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked two Hamas targets. A Salafist network claimed responsibility for the rocket fire and demanded the release of its operatives detained by Hamas. The Palestinian media reported that **the Hamas leadership ordered broader deployment of its security forces and greater inspection along the border with Israel**.
- The Israel Security Agency revealed that in February 2017 Israeli security forces had detained **Muhammad Murtaja**, head of the Gaza Strip branch of the Turkish TIKA organization. His interrogation revealed that he had undergone military training and had been an operative in Hamas' military wing. He defrauded the Turkish government and **transferred humanitarian aid funds to Hamas' military wing**.

Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem

Terrorist Attacks and Attempted Terrorists Attacks

- On **March 15, 2017**, a young Palestinian woman carried out a vehicular attack at the **Gush Etzion Junction**. She veered out of her lane, drove at great speed towards the bus stop at the junction and tried to run over soldiers standing there. The soldiers guarding the location shot at the car and wounded her. She was **Fatma Jubrin A'id Abd al-Aziz Takatka**, 16, from Beit Fajjar. A soldier incurred minor injuries. The Palestinian media claimed she was driving without a license and for that reason lost control of the car (Ma'an, March 15, 2017).
- On **March 17, 2016**, a Palestinian named **Ali Jamal Takatka**, from Beit Fajjar, and a friend, carried out a **stabbing attack at the Ariel Junction; both were killed**. Thus the vehicular attack may have been a revenge attack, a type of attack carried out in the past.¹



Left: Fatma Takatka (al-Quds, March 18, 2017). Right: The scene of the vehicular attack at the Gush Etzion Junction (Twitter account of Palinfo, March 15, 2017).

Riots, Clashes and Popular Terrorism

- In the meantime, demonstrations, clashes and riots continued, for the most part involving the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails. The Israeli security forces carried out a series of detentions of wanted Palestinians in Judea and Samaria, and confiscated weapons. Prominent occurrences were the following:

¹ For further information, see the February 5, 2017 bulletin, "Vehicular attack at a bus stop near Kokhav Ya'akov (east of Ramallah): another illustration of revenge attacks carried out by friends and relatives of Palestinian terrorists killed in previous attacks."

- **March 20, 2017** – Palestinians threw a pipe bomb at IDF forces operating near **Jenin**. There were no casualties (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 20, 2017).
- **March 19, 2017** – Palestinians threw a Molotov cocktail at an IDF force at **the Nil'in roadblock**. There were no casualties (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 19, 2017).
- **March 19, 2017** – Palestinians threw stones at an Israeli vehicle near **al-Khader in Gush Etzion**. The front windshield of the car was damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 19, 2017).
- **March 17, 2017** – Palestinians threw Molotov cocktails on the road near **the al-Aroub refugee camp (near Gush Etzion)**. An IDF force responded with gunfire. The Palestinians reported that **Murad Yusuf Abu Ghazi**, 16, from al-Aroub, had been killed, and that another Palestinian had been seriously wounded. According to reports Abu Ghazi was formerly a security prisoner who spent a year in an Israeli jail and that he belonged to Fatah (Wafa, al-Quds and Ynet, March 17, 2017). The following day, during Abu Ghazi's funeral, Palestinians clashed with Israeli security forces. An Israeli incurred minor injuries (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 18, 2017).

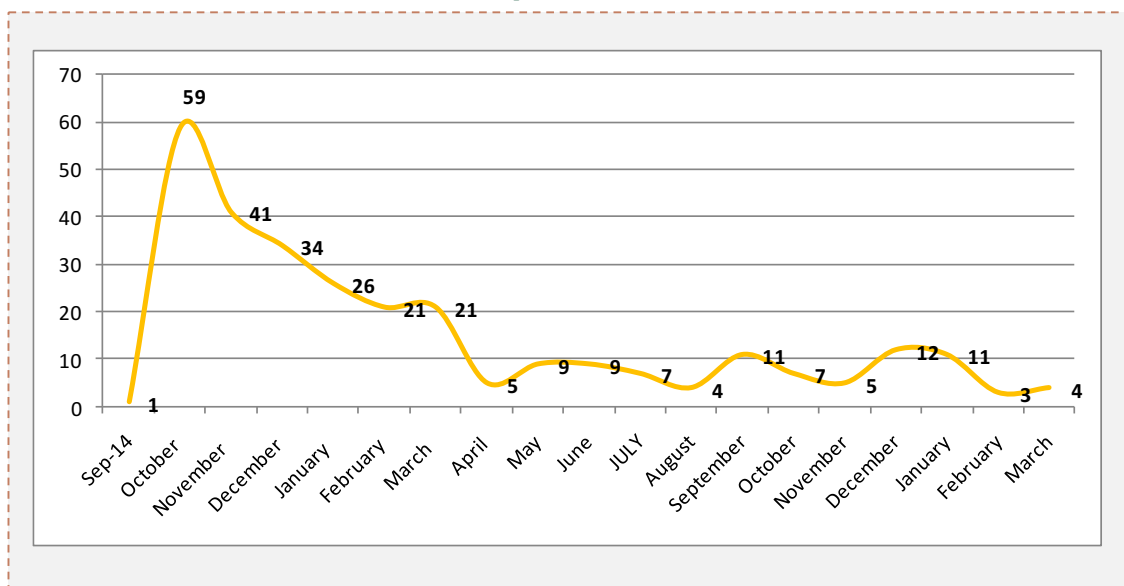


Mourning tent erected for Murad Abu Ghazi decorated with Fatah flags and notices (Twitter account of Paltodaytv, March 21, 2017)

- **March 16, 2017** – Palestinians threw stones at an IDF force near **Tekoa (Gush Etzion)**. There were no casualties. A vehicle was damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 16, 2017).

- **March 16, 2017** – Palestinians threw stones at an Israeli school bus near **Otniel (Mt. Hebron)**. There were no casualties; the front windshield of the bus was damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 16, 2017).
- **March 15, 2017** – Border Policemen detained a Palestinian near **the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron**. He was carrying a knife. He was detained after revealing his intention to carry out a stabbing attack (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 15, 2017).

Significant Terrorist Attacks in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem since September 2015²



Terrorist Squad Exposed

- In January 2017 the Israeli security forces detained a number of Palestinians who had been involved in terrorist attacks in **the region of the village of A-Ram, near Jerusalem**. They had thrown stones and Molotov cocktails, and placed IEDs. The squad, which operated in the name of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Fatah's military wing, also planned to carry out shooting attacks. In addition, a squad of Hamas terrorist operatives was detained near **al-Aroub in Gush Etzion**. The members of the squad had carried out attacks and were planning shooting attacks targeting IDF forces (Israel Security Agency website, March 15, 2017).

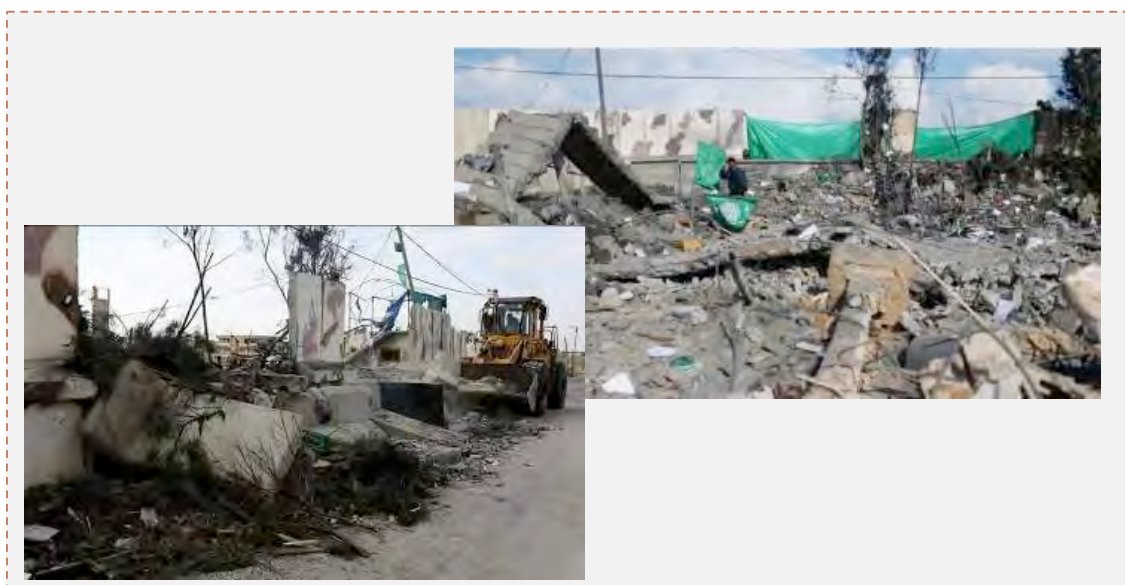
² A significant attack is defined by the ITIC as involving shooting, stabbing, a vehicle, the use of IEDs, or a combination of the above. Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown by Palestinians are not included.

Israel's South

Rocket Fire Attacking Israel

■ **On March 15, 2017, Palestinians fired a rocket into Israeli territory.** It fell in an open area in the western Negev. There were no casualties and no damage was reported.

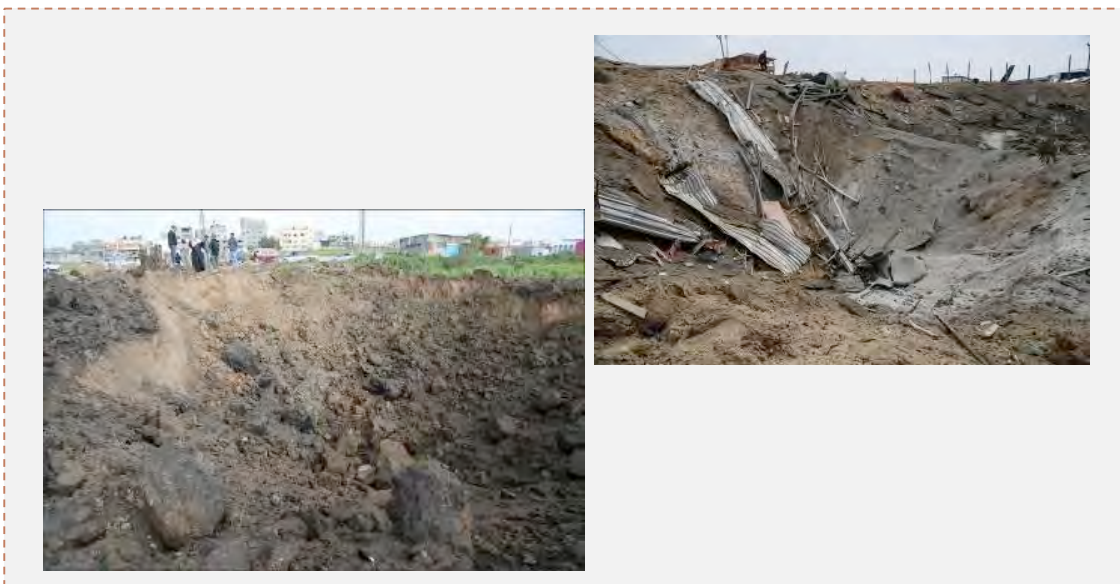
- In response to the rocket fire Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked two Hamas terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, March 16, 2017). The Palestinian media reported attacks on a Hamas military post, called the [Force] 17 Post, in western Deir al-Balah, and an antenna near the Karni crossing east of Gaza City. According to reports, the attack caused a power outage in the Sajaiya neighborhood in the eastern part of Gaza City (Shehab and Quds Press, March 15, 2017; BBC in Arabic, March 16, 2017).



Damage caused by the attack in Deir al-Balah
(al-Anadolu News, March 16, 2017).

- **A Salafist network claimed responsibility** for the rocket attack and demanded the release of its operative held in jails in the Gaza Strip (Paldf, March 16, 2017). Several Twitter accounts posted a notice from the **Ibn Taymiyyah Media Center stating that two "blessed" rockets had hit the "occupied city" of Ashqelon.** According to the announcement, the enemy [i.e. Israel] attacked a Hamas observation point in the northern Gaza Strip.
- **On March 18, 2017, a rocket hit was identified in an open area in the western Negev.** There were no casualties and no damage was reported. In response, IDF tanks and an Israeli Air Force helicopter attacked two Hamas terrorist targets in the

northern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, March 18, 2017). The Palestinian media reported that shells were fired at an observation post of the "resistance" in the town of Beit Lahia, and that three missiles were fired at a naval police post in the region of al-Sudaniya in the western part of Beit Lahia (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades website and the Facebook page of the information department, March 18, 2017)

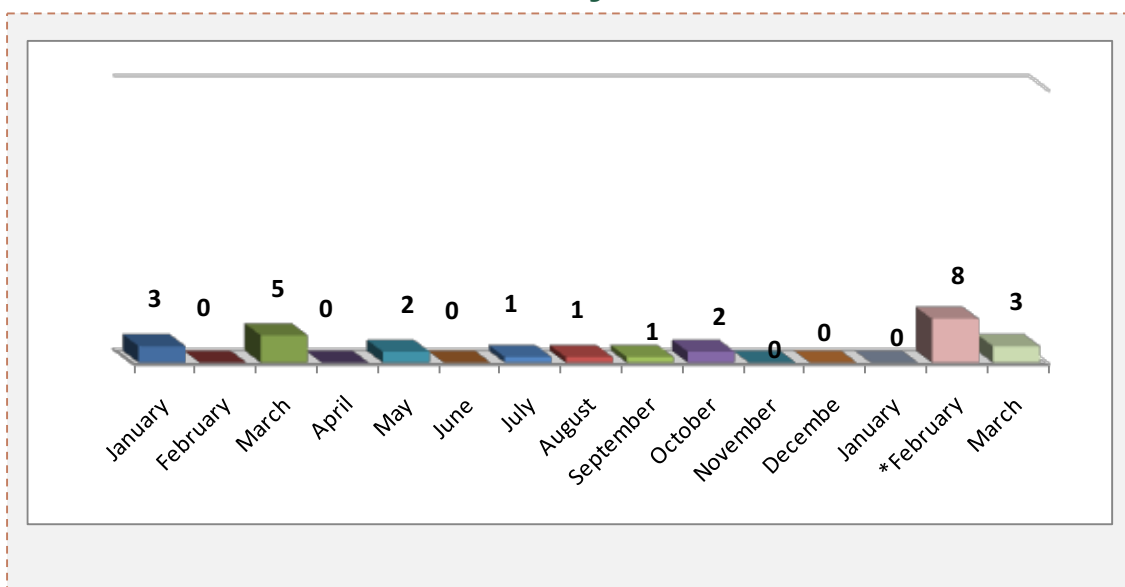


Left: The results of the attack east of Gaza City. Right: Aftermath of an attack on a Hamas naval police post in the northern Gaza Strip (Paltoday, March 18, 2017).

■ In view of the attacks and the ability of the Salafist networks to continue firing rockets, it was reported that after internal consultations, the Hamas leadership order the deployment of operatives and inspections along the border with Israel (Karamah Press, March 16, 2017).

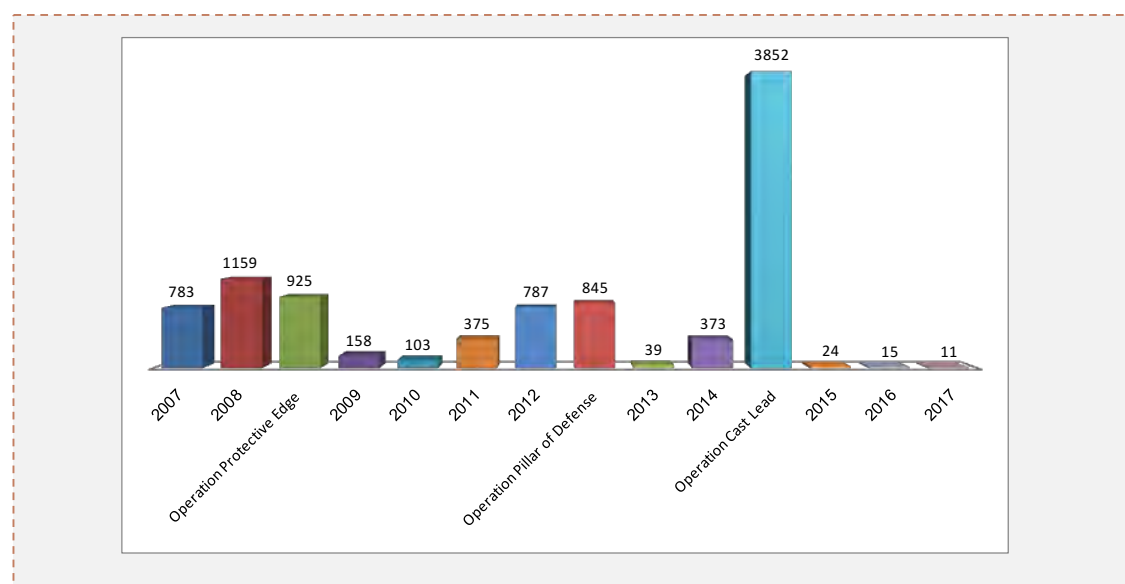
■ **Khalil al-Haya, a member of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip**, said Hamas did not seek a new war and that it was committed to the principles of the ceasefire of 2014 [that ended Operation Protective Edge]. However, he warned Israel not to attack the Gaza Strip again and said if Israel began a war the "resistance" would respond strongly (al-Aqsa TV, March 14, 2017). **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** said in an announcement that Israel would be responsible for the outcome of attacks in the Gaza Strip (Majal Press, March 18, 2017). **Mahmoud al-Zahar, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said Israel's attacks reflected the crisis in Israel resulting from the report of the state comptroller on the conduct of Operation Protective Edge (Palinfo, March 18, 2017).

Monthly Distribution of Rocket Hits in Israel since January 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 Hits in Israel's South³



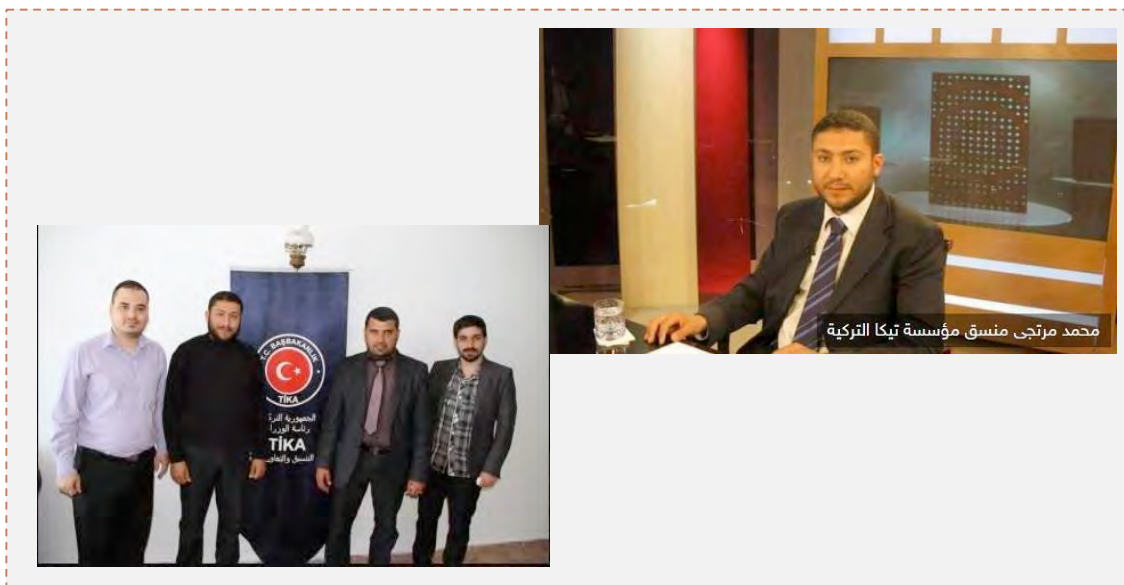
Israeli Drone Falls Inside the Gaza Strip

- On March 15, 2017, an IDF drone fell inside the Gaza Strip (near Sajaiya in the northern Gaza Strip) during routine security activities. The IDF is examining if it fell because of technical difficulties, and said that no security damage had occurred (Ynet, March 15, 2017).

³ The statistics do not include mortar shell fire or rockets which misfired and fell inside the Gaza Strip.

Developments in the Gaza Strip

Head of TIKA Branch in Gaza Detained



Left: Muhammad Murtaja (second from left) meets with the heads of the Hamas-affiliated Dar al-Quran al-Karim wal-Sunnah organization, part of activities to strengthen ties between the two organizations (website of Dar al-Quran al-Karim wal-Sunnah, April 23, 2014). Right: Muhammad Murtaja, TIKA coordinator in the Gaza Strip (palsawa.com, February 13, 2017).

■ In February 2017 the Israeli security forces detained **Muhammad Murtaja** for questioning. Murtaja, who lives in the Gaza Strip, **was head of the Gaza branch of the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA)**, a humanitarian aid organization funded by the Turkish government to promote humanitarian projects. During interrogation he revealed that **he had been recruited to Hamas in 2008 and had been an operative in its military wing since 2009**. He received military training and participated in military exercises, and stored weapons in his house.

■ In 2012 he became head of the Gaza Strip branch of TIKA. **He defrauded the Turkish government and transferred humanitarian funds to the needs of Hamas' military wing**. For example, he sent TIKA lists of Gazans in need of humanitarian aid. The lists had been given to him by senior Hamas figures and **most of the names on it were of terrorist operatives**. He also **transferred to Hamas operatives** food packages donated by the organization during Operation Protective Edge. His interrogation revealed that **his trip to Turkey for TIKA in-service training**, which led to his detention, **was intended to acquire information that would help Hamas improve the precision of its rockets** (Israel Security Agency website, March 21, 2017).

■ **Hamas customarily exploits foreign aid workers in the Gaza Strip for the purposes of its military wing**, as has been shown in the past. For example, in June 2016 the Israeli security forces detained **Muhammad Halabi**, a senior figure in **World Vision**, a "global Christian humanitarian organization," who was also a Hamas terrorist operative. According to his indictment, over a period of six years he transferred to Hamas' military wing tens of millions of dollars donated to the organization in the United States and European countries. In July 2016 **Wahid Abdallah Bursh** was detained on suspicion of having exploited his position in the **UN Development Programme (UNDP)** to fund the activities of Hamas' military wing (Israel Security Agency website, Southern District Prosecution Office, August 4, 2016).

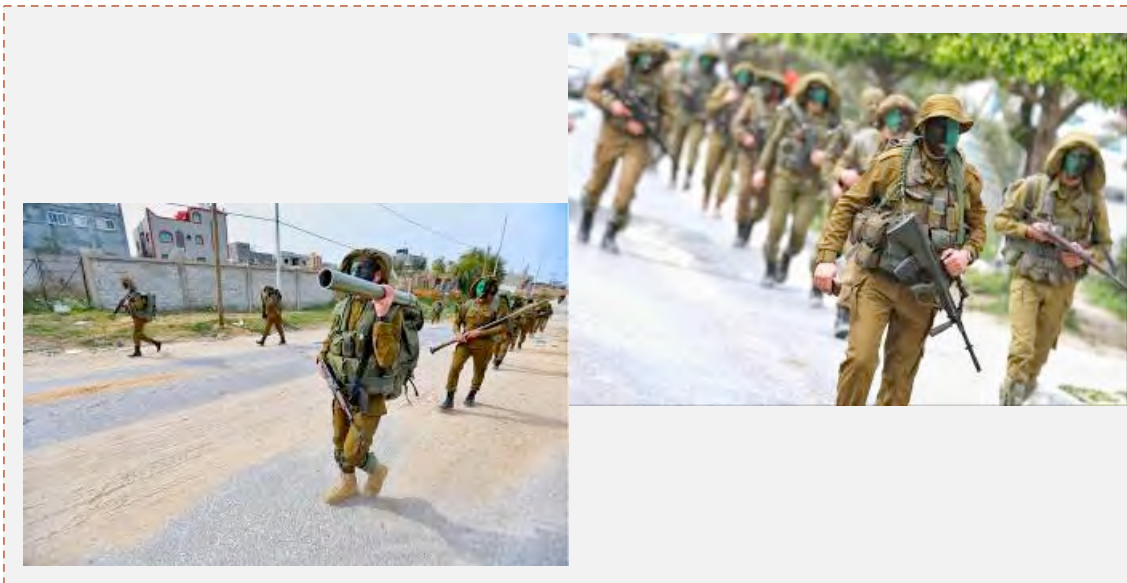
Hamas Holds Military Displays in the Northern Gaza Strip

■ Battalion 5 of the northern brigade of Hamas' national security forces held a military display in Jabalia that ended at battalion headquarters. According to battalion commanders, the display was part of a "routine activity" intended to stress the preparedness of the national security forces to "defend the borders" (Facebook page of Hamas' national security forces in the Gaza Strip, March 17, 2017; website of the Hamas ministry of the interior in the Gaza Strip, March 19, 2017).



Military display held by Hamas' national security forces in Jabalia (Facebook page of Hamas' national security forces in the Gaza Strip, March 17, 2017).

■ On March 18, 2017, Hamas' military wing held a military display in the northern Gaza Strip (Shehab and the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades' information unit, March 19, 2017).



Military display held by Hamas' Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades in the northern Gaza Strip (Shehab, March 19, 2017).

The military displays may have been held to send the message to the jihadist networks that Hamas would not permit rocket fire that violated its policies. That may be the result of the many attempts of the Salafist networks to challenge Hamas' policy of restraint.

The Palestinian Authority

The PA in the International Arena

■ **Jason Greenblatt, Trump's special representative for international negotiations**, paid a visit to the PA and met with Mahmoud Abbas. According to **Nabil Abu Rudeina, spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas**, they discussed joint programs for fighting violence and terrorism, and stressed their commitment to advancing the peace process (Safa, March 15, 2017). The Palestinian foreign ministry said in an announcement that the United States was working on kick-starting serious Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and that the PA had expressed willingness to cooperate with the efforts of the American administration and president to end the conflict on the basis of the two-state solution (Majal Press, March 15, 2017).



Mahmoud Abbas meets with Jason Greenblatt, Trump's special representative for international negotiations (Wafa, March 14, 2017).

- The Palestinian media reported that **Mahmoud Abbas had been invited to meet with Trump in the White House in the middle of April** (Ma'an, March 18, 2017). According to **Mahmoud al-Alul, deputy chairman of Fatah**, Mahmoud Abbas will present to Trump the Palestinian positions, which support the two-state solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with the 1967 borders, the removal of the settlements, the release of the Palestinian prisoners and the return of the refugees. He will also present what he refers to as "the Israeli violations." He said the PA would not object to negotiations, but renewing them without sources of authority would be absurd and lead nowhere (al-Anadolu News, March 18, 2017).

Responses to Israeli Declaration of the Palestinian National Fund as a Terrorist Organization

- On March 16, 2017, **Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman declared the Palestinian National Fund a terrorist organization**. That was because it is used as a pipeline for transferring millions of shekels every month to security prisoners in Israeli jails for terrorist attacks and to the families of terrorist operatives killed or wounded during attacks. Therefore, action may now be taken to seize and confiscate the property and funds designated for or belonging to the fund.
- The Palestinian leadership was harshly critical of the declaration. Mahmoud Abbas' office said in a statement that calling the Palestinian National Fund, which was one of the PLO's institutions, a terrorist organization, was a fundamental violation of the Oslo Accords. According to the statement, at a time when the American administration was trying to create an atmosphere that would contribute to peace,

Israel was using the declaration to undermine America's efforts. The Palestinians also demanded the Israeli government deal with the issue immediately and revoke the declaration, because it would destroy the foundation of the Accords and the legal connection with Israel. An appeal was also made to the countries around the globe to object to the declaration so that the Oslo Accords could be preserved (Wafa, March 16, 2017).

The United Nations Economic and Social Council Report

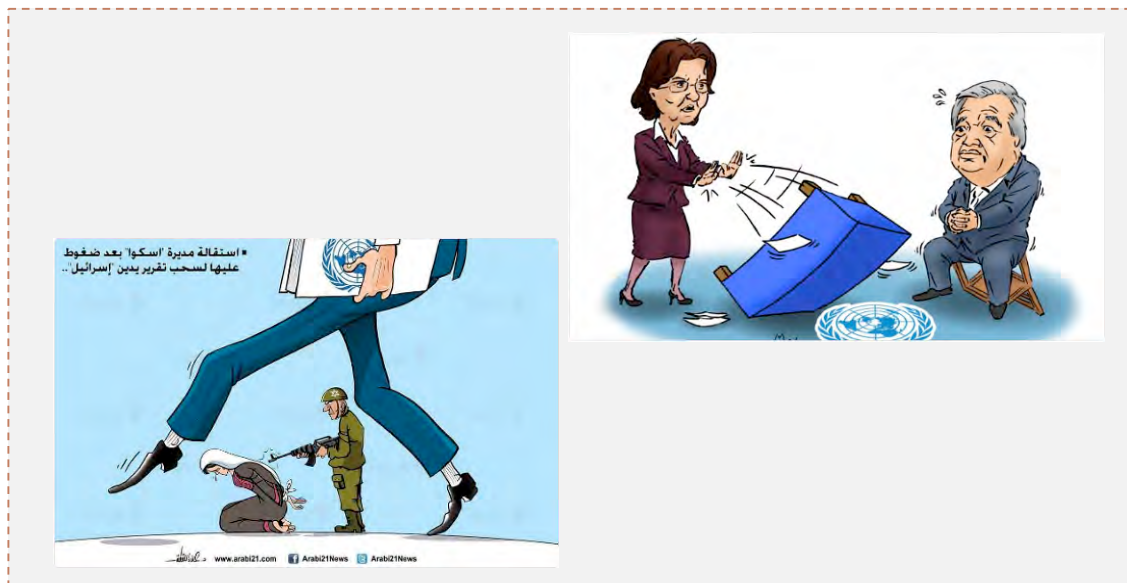
- The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) issued a report hostile to Israel entitled "Israeli Practices Toward the Palestinian People and the Question of Apartheid Palestine and the Israeli Occupation." It claimed sufficient evidence existed to determine that according to international law, the State of Israel could be defined as an "apartheid regime." According to the report the basic laws of Israel define it as an apartheid state because it gives preference to Jewish citizens. The report also dealt with certain laws Israel enforces on the Palestinian population in various locations. It ends with a number of recommendations for the UN, various national governments, the civilian population and the private sector and proposes a series of steps for them to take.

- The report was roundly criticized and led to demands that it be removed from the ECOSOC website. A spokesman for the UN Secretary General said the report had been composed without previous consultations with the Secretary General and that it did not reflect his opinions. The spokesman also said the report had been removed from the website because it had not been subject to the authorization processes customarily used at the UN, with no relation to its contents (UN website, March 15, 2017). **Nikki Haley, the American representative to the UN**, welcomed the statement of the spokesman, saying the report was scandalous, and that the UN Secretary General had acted appropriately when he said it did not represent him. She said it was the duty of the UN to remove the report (Independent, March 15, 2017). **In response, Rima Khalaf, ECOSOC secretary for western Asia, resigned** (Twitter account of Felesteen, March 17, 2017)

- **Senior Palestinian figures praised the report and the fact that Rima Khalaf had resigned** because of pressure exerted on her to retract it. **Mahmoud Abbas** decided to award her the highest Palestinian decoration, "in appreciation for courage and solidarity with the Palestinians." He telephoned Khalaf and praised her "humane" position, "which refused to support the crimes carried out against the Palestinian

people by the authorities of the Israeli occupation" (Wafa, March 18, 2017). The Palestinian foreign ministry issued a statement praising the report and stressing its importance, although it was late in coming, he said (quds.net, March 15, 2017).

■ **Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** praised the report, saying it clearly revealed Israel's dangerous acts, its crimes, and terrorism and violence against the Palestinian people, which required an official response from the international community (Hamas website, March 15, 2017). **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** condemned the UN's request to remove the report from the Internet. He claimed removing it would encourage Israel to continue its "racist policies" and ignore the rights of the Palestinian people. He called on international human rights organizations to continue working against Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people (alresala.net, March 17, 2017).



Cartoons from Hamas websites about the resignation of Rima Khalaf. The Arabic reads, "The resignation of the head of ECOSOC after pressure exerted on her to remove a report condemning Israel" (Facebook page of al-Risalah, March 20, 2017; Twitter account of Paldf, March 18, 2017).

Findings of New Palestinian Public Opinion Survey

■ Between March 8 and 11, 2017, the **Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR)**, headed by **Khalil Shqaqi**, conducted a survey of 1,270 adult Palestinians.⁴ They were interviewed face to face at 127 randomly selected locations in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. The survey addresses a variety of issues, including "the 50th anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip." Some of the results were the following:

⁴ <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/686>

- 32% believe the occupation will last for another 50 years, 24% believe it will end soon, and 29% believe it will end after five to ten years or more.
- 64% of the public want president Abbas to resign while 31% want him to remain in office.
- If new presidential elections were held today and only two were nominated, both Ismail Haniyeh and Mahmoud Abbas would receive 47. If president Abbas does not nominate himself in a new election, 33% prefer to see Marwan Barghouti replacing him, while 20% prefer Ismail Haniyeh; Mohammad Dahlan 7%.
- Perception of corruption in PA institutions stands at 77%. 47% view the Palestinian Authority as a burden on the Palestinians while 48% view it as an asset.
- **Most of those polled do not believe the two-state solution is viable due to the expansion of the settlements.** Many are dissatisfied with the response of the Palestinian leadership to the settlements. Asked about the best way of responding to the plans to expand the settlements, 25% think it is the suspension of security coordination with Israel; 24% think it is the submission of a formal complaint to the International Criminal Court; 19% think it is the resumption of armed attacks (ITIC emphasis).

Reactions to an American Request for the Extradition of a Female Terrorist from Jordan

- The American Department of Justice said in an announcement that it demanded the Jordan government extradite **Ahlam al-Tamimi**, who escorted the suicide bomber who carried out the attack at the Sbarro restaurant in Jerusalem on August 9, 2001, in which 15 people were killed, two of them American nationals.⁵ She was sentenced to 16 terms of life imprisonment, released in the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal, and expelled to Jordan.
- In response, a senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) figure said they objected to the demand for her extradition. He said it proved the United States was not objective regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and that it was clearly biased in favor of Israel. He said al-Tamimi, who had spent many years in jail, **was a Palestinian**

⁵ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/individual-charged-connection-2001-terrorist-attack-jerusalem-resulted-death-americans>

national symbol, and they were not prepared to hand her over to their enemies (Paltoday, March 15, 2017).