



November 15, 2007

**Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
at the Israel Intelligence Heritage
& Commemoration Center (IICC)**

A record in Hamas' violent suppression of Fatah in the Gaza Strip: during a memorial rally for Yasser Arafat in Gaza City, Hamas security personnel opened fire on the crowd. Seven Palestinians were killed. The rally was a demonstration of Fatah strength and a public outcry against Hamas.



The memorial rally for Yasser Arafat held in Gaza City, attended by hundreds of thousands (Al-Arabiya TV, November 12).

Overview

1. On November 12 a rally commemorating the third anniversary of Yasser Arafat's death was held in a central square in Gaza City, attended by **hundreds of thousands** of Palestinians. After the rally confrontations broke out between members of Hamas' security forces and rally participants. **Hamas opened fire** on the crowd, killing seven pro-Fatah Palestinians and wounding 150, some of them critically.



The rally in Gaza City commemorating the third anniversary of Yasser Arafat's death (Al-Ayyam, November 13).

2. The rally was **an impressive show of strength** for Fatah in the Gaza Strip and **an opportunity to express lack of confidence in the repressive Hamas regime**. In an attempt to limit the rally, Hamas deployed hundreds of police in Gaza City and set up many road blocks throughout the Gaza Strip. Hamas security personnel prevented thousands of Palestinians from reaching the rally and **confiscated flags and pictures of Arafat and Abu Mazen** sent from the West Bank to Gaza through the Kerem Shalom Crossing. Abu Mazen and Fatah strongly condemned Hamas and proclaimed three days of national mourning.

3. In our assessment, it was the **most serious** in the series of continuing confrontations between Fatah and Hamas which began when Hamas took over the Gaza Strip this past June. Since then Hamas has tried to hamper the activities of all those affiliated with Fatah in the Gaza Strip and to use force to suppress all signs of opposition, while **Fatah has shown its steadfastness**

and survivability.¹ A well-organized rally attended by hundreds of thousands of people is an impressive show of strength and was an expression of public protest against the Hamas regime. Holding the rally showed that despite the severe blow dealt by Hamas, Fatah still exists in the Gaza Strip, has support from large sections of the populace which oppose Hamas and its allies, and can organize mass rallies in the face of Hamas attempts to suppress them.

Development of events

4. On November 11 memorial services were held on the eve of the third anniversary of the death of Yasser Arafat. They were exploited **to express support for Abu Mazen and Fatah and to protest the Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip**. The main ceremony in the West Bank was in Ramallah and it was attended by tens of thousands of Palestinians. The memorial services in the Gaza Strip also began on November 11. There was a procession in Rafah, a service at Al-Quds Open University in Khan Yunis, and processions in the Nuseirat refugee camp (about 8 km south of Gaza City) and the northern Gaza Strip (*Al-Hayat al-Jadeeda*, November 12). The main service was held in a central square of Gaza City on November 12.

5. **Hamas tried to disrupt the memorial events.** Its operatives confiscated thousands of Fatah flags and pictures of Abu Mazen and Arafat, which had been brought into the Gaza Strip through the Kerem Shalom Crossing and which were to have been distributed at the rally (*Al-Hayat al-Jadeeda*, November 12). Hamas operatives and police deployed at the main crossroads and streets and closed the routes leading to the square where the rally was held. Roadblocks were erected along the roads leading to Gaza City to examine IDs and confiscate Fatah flags and pictures (Wafa News Agency, November 12).

¹ Manifestations of the Hamas-Fatah struggle policy were the events during the holy Muslim month of Ramadan concerning Fatah's mass prayer sessions throughout the Gaza Strip which Hamas suppressed by force (August and September 2007).



Aerial view of the rally (Palestinian TV, November 12).



Rally participants (Al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, November 13).

6. The main rally in the Gaza Strip was held on November 12 at Al-Qutaibah Square (a central square in Gaza City) in the afternoon. According to minimal estimations, it was attended by at least **250,000-300,000 Palestinians** (Fatah spokesman estimate the number at half a million).² Thousands of Palestinians came from the northern and southern Gaza Strip. During the rally **yellow Fatah flags were waved, slogans praising Arafat were shouted and pictures of Arafat and Abu Mazen were displayed. The main speakers were members of the Fatah leadership in the Gaza Strip**, who denounced Hamas and called for the movement to reverse its position regarding its coup. Hamas deployed hundreds of its security forces around the square, who were later involved in the clashes which began when the rally ended.

² The large number of participants is a sharp contrast to the smaller number of those at the rally in Ramallah, where there were tens of thousands, somewhat less than last year.

7. Among the speakers were the following:

1) **Ibrahim Abu al-Naja**, a member of the revolutionary council, warned that the Palestinian people would not agree to a divided homeland and stressed that Abu Mazen was the legal president of the Palestinian people.

2) **Ahmad Khilles**,³ a member of Fatah's steering committee in the Gaza Strip, said that Yasser Arafat left the Palestinian people a legacy of unity and that all Gaza identifies with Yasser Arafat.

3) **Zakharia al-Agha'**, a member of the PLO executive, spoke for Abu Mazen and said that despite the difficulties facing them, the Palestinians had to continue the legacy of Yasser Arafat. He appealed to Hamas to stop its crimes against the Palestinian people, to preserve Palestinian unity and to turn all its resources against Israel.

8. At the end of the rally there were violent clashes between Fatah activists and Hamas' security forces. People who were there reported that shots were fired, stones were thrown and there were heavy exchanges of fire between Hamas and Fatah. **During the clashes the Hamas security forces opened fire on the crowd**, killing seven Fatah-affiliated individuals and wounding 150, about ten of them critically (Wafa News Agency, November 12). Additional confrontations broke out at the funeral of one of the victims and six Palestinians were wounded by police gunfire (Ma'an News Agency, November 12).

³ Between October 17 and 21 there were violent clashes between the Hamas police and the Khilles clan, one of whose members is Ahmad Khilles, and which is affiliated with Fatah. The clashes led the deaths of seven Palestinians and the wounding of more than 50.



Right: Evacuating the wounded (Palestinian TV, November 12). Left: Participants evacuating a man wounded by Hamas fire (Al-Ayyam, November 13).

9. Following the violent events, the Hamas police carried out a wave of arrests of Fatah activists throughout the Gaza Strip. A Fatah spokesman claimed that 400 activists were detained and dozens more were ordered to present themselves at police stations for interrogation (Reuters, November 13). According to the Hamas Executive Force, no more than 250 were detained (Agence France Presse, November 13). According to Fatah sources, among the detainees were high-ranking former members of the security services, senior Fatah members, and important figures affiliated with Fatah such as mayors, journalists, sheikhs and mosque imams (Firas Website and Wafa News Agency, November 13).

Reactions to the event

10. Immediately after the event Fatah and Hamas accused one another of responsibility. Fatah members claimed that the confrontations began when armed Hamas operatives took to the roofs of the Islamic University and opened fire on the crowd. Hamas members claimed that the gunfire was a response to the provocations of Fatah activists who were carrying weapons in violation of promises expressly made. **In any case, it is clear that the casualties resulted from the shooting to participants attending a rally which was Fatah-affiliated and non-violent.**

10. Abu Mazen called the event “a cruel crime” and proclaimed three days of national mourning. His office issued a statement deploring the shootings and emphasizing that the rally had been a kind of referendum against Hamas (Wafa News Agency, November 12). Salaam Fayyad’s government issued a statement expressing its shock at “the barbaric violence and oppressive mindset and wicked deeds which were seen today by the whole world.” He said that the criminal acts had been carried out in accordance with an official decision made by the high echelons of Hamas and that their purpose had been to frighten civilians, to silence the opposition and impose a repressive, dictatorial regime (Wafa News Agency, November 12).