



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (March 14 – 20, 2018)

Overview



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- ▶ This past week two deadly terrorist attacks were carried out **killing a civilian and two IDF soldiers: a vehicular attack** was carried out **in northern Samaria** targeting a group of soldiers standing at the side of the road near a guard post. **A stabbing attack** was carried out **in the Old City of Jerusalem** targeting a civilian pedestrian on Hagai Street.
- ▶ **In the northern Gaza Strip** a number of IEDs exploded near the border security fence. The targets were IDF forces patrolling the area. No casualties were reported. During recent weeks there has been **an increase in the number of IEDs exploded near the fence**. The most serious injured four IDF soldiers (February 17, 2018). **In ITIC assessment it is another expression of Hamas' decreasing motivation to preserve security along the border with Israel**. In response, Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a tunnel in the central Gaza Strip and destroyed a tunnel Hamas was attempting to renew. The tunnel crossed the border and had been dug during Operation Protective Edge,.
- ▶ Preparations continue for the "great return march." Apparently the organizers are planning **a continuous event**. It will begin on **March 30, 2018** (Land Day) with the erection of tents along the border and the arrival of people to stay in them, and **end on May 15, 2018** (Nakba Day) **with a mass march to the border security fence, with a possible attempt to cross into Israeli territory**. The organizers repeatedly declare that the events will be non-violent, but take into consideration that **an attempt to cross the border may lead to violent clashes with IDF forces**. The "great return march" is perceived as an **important event in the battle for hearts and minds** and will bring to the fore the so-called "right of return." The organizers are making an **effort to recruit the international media to cover the events**.

► Mahmoud Abbas gave a belligerent, blunt speech at the opening session of the PLO's Executive Committee in which he accused Hamas of the attempted assassination of Rami Hamdallah and Majed Faraj and attacked the American ambassador to Israel, calling him "a son of a dog" [an Arabic curse]. He also said he had decided to take national, economic and legal measures against the Gaza Strip, but did not elaborate. In response to the speech Hamas began a campaign against Mahmoud Abbas, representing him as dividing the West Bank from the Gaza Strip and as planning to starve the two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

Vehicular attack in northwestern Samaria

► On March 16, 2018, a Palestinian carried out **a vehicular attack near the community of Mevo Dotan (northwestern Samaria). Two IDF soldiers were killed** and two were critically wounded. The terrorist drove his car into a group of soldiers standing close to a guard post near the community of Mevo Dotan, killing two of them. He continued driving and ran over two more. The soldiers had been deployed to reinforce security on the road because of the increasing number of stones and Molotov cocktails thrown in the region. The time between the two attacks was too short for the soldiers to respond. The terrorist was shot and wounded, and evacuated to a hospital (Israeli media, March 16, 2018).



The vehicle used by the Palestinian in the vehicular attack in northern Samaria (Palinfo Twitter account, March 16, 2018).

► The Palestinian terrorist was **Alaa' Rateb Qabha**, 25, from **the village of Barta'a in northern Samaria**.¹ He had been imprisoned in Israel for a year and a half for throwing stones and Molotov cocktails, and was released in April 2017 (Ma'an, March 16, 2018). Initially he claimed it was an accident, but later **admitted he had intended to kill the soldiers**. It is not known if he is an operative of an established terrorist organization. IDF forces operated in Barta'a, the village he lived in, and located weapons and detained a number of suspects.



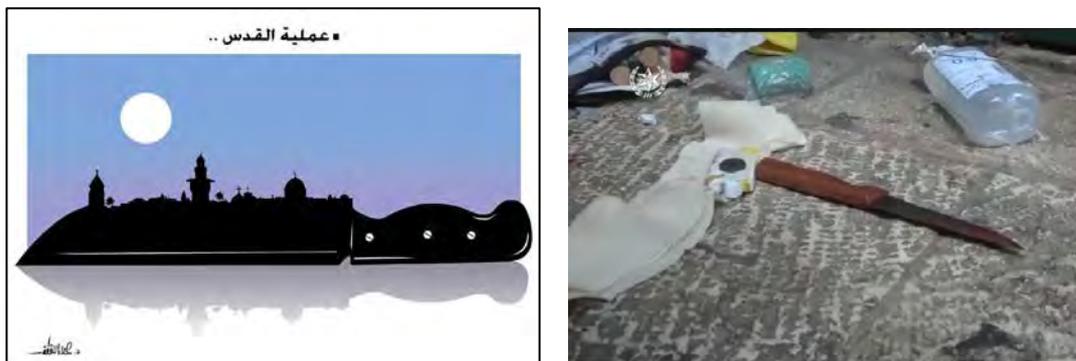
Right: A portrait of the Palestinian who carried out the vehicular attack representing him as a hero. Left: Cartoon issued after the vehicular attack in northern Samaria, #attack_Jenin (Palinfo Twitter account, March 17, 2018).

► **Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) welcomed and praised the attack** (as usual). **Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** said the attack proved the Palestinian people adhered to the path of "resistance" using all means available and was prepared to defend itself and struggle against the occupation. He called on the Palestinian people to continue the "resistance," escalate the Jerusalem intifada and raise the cost paid by the occupation (Hamas website, March 16, 2018). **Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri** said the attack sent the message that the weapon of "resistance" was the most important. He added that weapons serving security coordination between Israel and the PA and defending Israel had no future (Twitter account of Amama, March 16, 2018).

Stabbing attack in the Old City of Jerusalem

► On March 18, 2018, a **stabbing attack** was carried out on Hagai Street in the Old City of Jerusalem. A Palestinian stabbed and critically wounded a 30 year-old Israeli man. A policeman nearby shot and killed the Palestinian. The Israeli was evacuated to a hospital, where he later died.

¹ A village on the Israeli-Palestinian Authority border, half in Palestinian territory and half in Israeli territory.



Right: The knife used by Palestinian to carry out the stabbing attack (Facebook page of the Israel Police Force, March 18, 2018). Left: Hamas notice issued after the stabbing attack in the Old City of Jerusalem (Palinfo Twitter account, March 18, 2018).

- ▶ The Palestinian media reported the stabber was **Abd al-Rahman Maher Bani Fadhel**, 28, from the village of **Aqraba, south of Nablus** (Ma'an, March 18, 2018). It is not known if he was an operative of one of the established terrorist organizations. On the morning of the attack he had received a permit to enter Israel to look for work.
- ▶ **The Palestinian Authority (PA) did not officially respond to the attack.** The Palestinian news agency Wafa, which is directly subordinate to the office of PA chairman Mahmoud Abbas, issued a vague, misleading report about 45 minutes after the attack, referring to "the death of a person by occupation gunfire in the Old City of Jerusalem" (Wafa, March 18, 2018). No mention was made of the fact that he had stabbed an Israeli civilian to death. **Fatah's official Facebook page** posted a picture of the stabber, with **messages of support and encouragement** from Facebook users, such as, "Allah is with you and will preserve you," "May Allah have mercy on you, oh, hero," and "honor and glory to the shaheeds" (official Fatah Facebook page, March 18, 2018). The Aqraba municipality issued a death notice and condolences for the family, in which it mourned "the death of her heroic shaheed" (Facebook page of Aqra Online, March 19, 2018).



Right: Hamas death notice mourning its "son, the heroic shaheed" Abd al-Rahman Maher Sa'ada (Bani Fadhel), who "carried out the heroic stabbing attack in Jerusalem" (Palinfo Twitter account, March 18, 2018). Left: Death notice and condolences for the family, issued by the Aqraba municipality, subordinate to the PA ministry of local authorities (Facebook page of Aqra Online, March 19, 2018).

Demonstrations, clashes and riots

- ▶ **This past week demonstrations and riots continued in Judea, Samaria, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.** Hamas called on the Palestinian public to participate in a "day of rage" to mark 100 days since the Trump declaration regarding Jerusalem. Palestinians were called on to go to the friction points with Israel and the settlements in Palestinian cities and villages after the Friday prayer (March 16, 2018). They were asked to clash with IDF soldiers and demonstrate the refusal of the Palestinian people to accept the Trump declaration (Hamas website, March 15, 2018). Other organizations made similar statements (Palestine Online, March 15, 2018).
- ▶ **In Judea and Samaria** demonstrations were held at a number of locations, **attended by about 900 Palestinians.** A number of Palestinians were reported wounded. Palestinian organizations continue encouraging the Palestinian public to participate in the demonstrations. **Friday, March 23, 2018, was declared a "day of escalation" at all the friction points** (Ma'an, March 17, 2018).

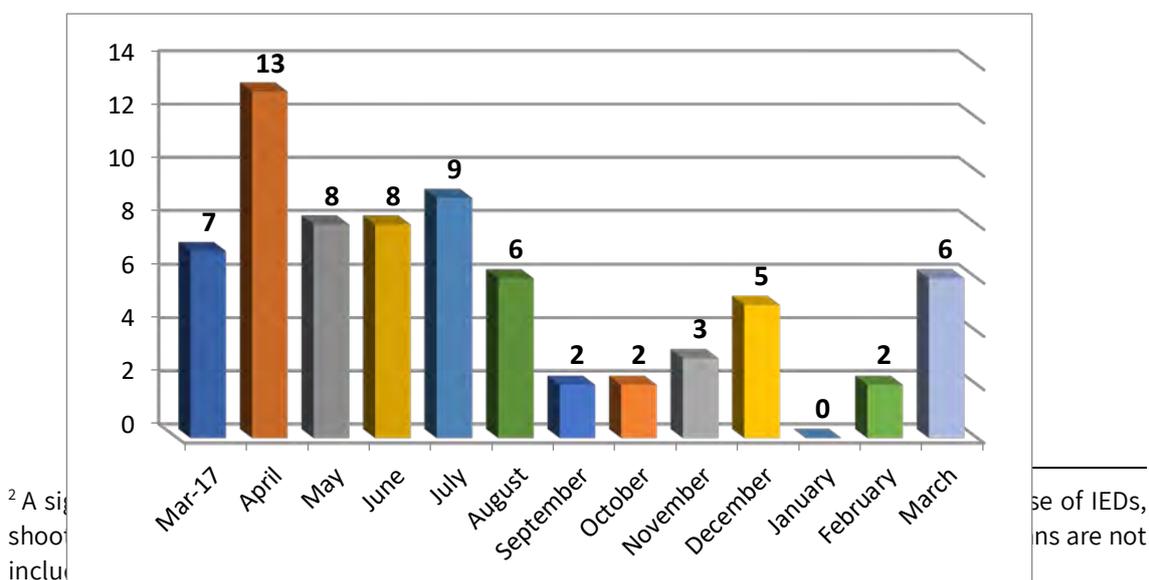


Right: A masked Palestinian burns the Israeli flag during a riot in Judea and Samaria (Palinfo Twitter account, March 17, 2018). Left: Rioters at the border security fence in the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of Shehab, March 16, 2018).

- ▶ In the Gaza Strip demonstrations were held on Friday, March 16, 2018, at a number of locations near the border security fence, with a total of about **500 demonstrators**. They threw stones and other objects at IDF forces and burned tires (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 16, 2018).
- ▶ Palestinians continued throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli security forces and civilian targets. Israeli security forces carried out counterterrorism activities throughout Judea and Samaria, detaining Palestinians suspected of terrorist activity and seizing weapons. The more prominent events were the following:
 - ◆ **March 20, 2018** – An IED was thrown at Israeli security forces operating in **the region of Abu Dis (east Jerusalem)**. No casualties were reported (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 20, 2018).
 - ◆ **March 18, 2018** – Stones were thrown at Israeli vehicles near **the Kochav Hashachar quarries (north of Ramallah)**. One man was injured and the front windshield of his vehicle was damaged. (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 18, 2018).
 - ◆ **March 18, 2018** – An Israeli civilian lost his way and mistakenly entered the **village of Husan (southwest of Bethlehem)**. His car was stoned and he was injured. He was rescued by an IDF force that arrived in the village (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 18, 2018).

- ◆ **March 17, 2018** – Two Molotov cocktails were thrown at **the community of Karmeit Tsur in Gush Etzion**. No casualties were reported (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 17, 2018).
- ◆ **March 17, 2018** – Stones were thrown at an Israel vehicle on the road **near the village of Nil'in (north of Ramallah)**. No casualties were reported. The vehicle was damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 17, 2018).
- ◆ **March 17, 2018** – Stones were thrown at the light railway in Jerusalem in **the Shuafat area**. No casualties were reported. A window and door of a railroad car were damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 17, 2018).
- ◆ **March 16, 2018** – Stones were thrown at Israeli security forces near **the Tulkarm roadblock (western Samaria)**. An IDF soldier was wounded (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 16, 2018).
- ◆ **March 16, 2018** – Stones were thrown at a vehicle on **the road between Kiryat Arba and the Harsina neighborhood in the Hebron region**. No casualties were reported. The vehicle was damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 16, 2018).
- ◆ **March 15, 2018** – Stones were thrown at a vehicle **near Azoun (between Nablus and Qalqilya in Samaria)**. No casualties were reported. The vehicle was damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 15, 2018).
- ◆ **March 15, 2018** – Stones were thrown at a bus at **the al-Fawwar Junction in Mt. Hebron**. No casualties were reported. The bus was damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, March 15, 2018).

Significant terrorist attacks during the past year ²



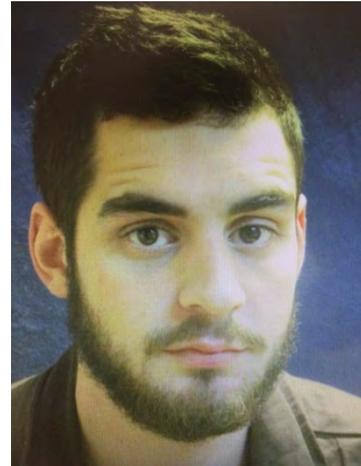
Capture of terrorist who carried out the stabbing attack at the Ariel Junction

► After considerable activity and an intelligence effort, on March 18, 2018, the Israeli security forces detained **Abd al-Hakim 'Asi**, the terrorist who, on February 5, 2018, killed **Rabbi Itamar Ben-Gal** at the Ariel Junction (Israel Security Agency, March 18, 2018). The terrorist was detained in a house north of the casbah in Nablus and taken for interrogation. He was wounded during detention. Interrogation revealed that between the attack and his apprehension **he had hidden in several different places**. Abd al-Hakim 'Asi, 19, is an Israeli Arab who carries an Israeli ID card. His mother is Israeli and his father is a Palestinian from Nablus (Israeli media).

Exposure of arms smuggling to Palestinians by French consulate employee

► The Israeli security forces exposed **Palestinian operatives from the Gaza Strip, Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem who in recent months smuggled standard-grade weapons from the Gaza Strip to Judea and Samaria**. The smuggling was carried out by **Roman Franck, a French national who worked as a driver for the French consulate in Jerusalem**. Over the past months he smuggled weapons a number of times from the Gaza Strip to Judea and Samaria through the Erez crossing. He exploited his consular vehicle, which was not examined thoroughly during the security inspection at the crossing.

► **Roman Franck smuggled weapons five times before his capture, bringing in 70 hand guns and two assault rifles**. He is suspected of having received the weapons from a Gazan employed by the French Cultural Center in Gaza City. Franck transferred the weapons to a Palestinian in Judea and Samaria who sold them to arms dealers. According to the investigation, **Franck operated alone, for financial profit, and without the knowledge of his superiors**. Eight others were detained with him, some of them suspected of smuggling money from the Gaza Strip to Judea and Samaria (Israel Security Agency, March 18, 2018).



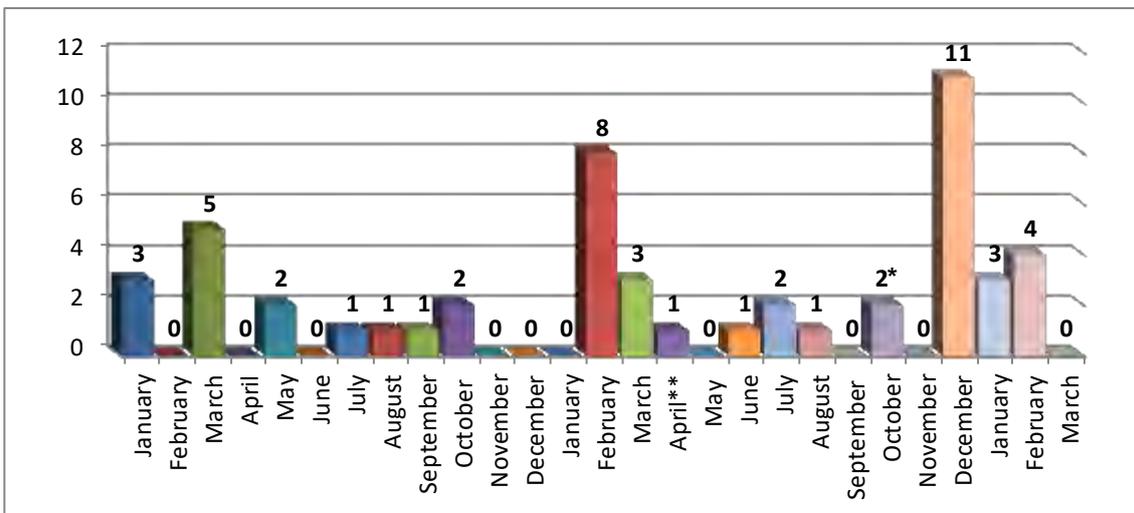
Right: Roman Franck, employee of the French consulate in Jerusalem, who smuggled weapons from the Gaza Strip. Left: The consular vehicle Roman Franck used to smuggle the weapons (Israel Security Agency media information, March 19, 2018).

Israel's South

Rocket Fire Attacking Israel

- ▶ This past week no rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory.

Monthly Distribution of Rocket Hits in Israel since January 2016



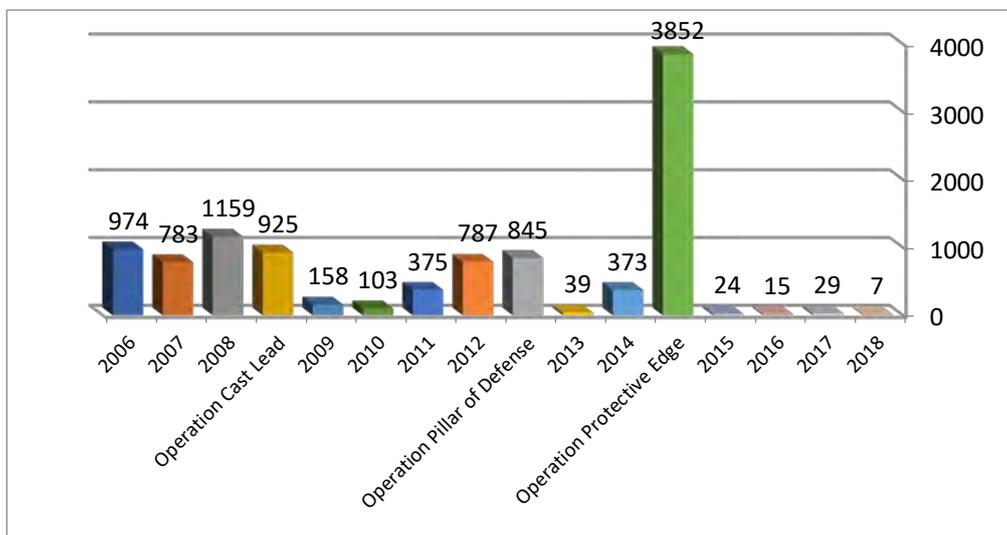
Notes:

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

** Six of the rockets fired in February 2017 were launched from the Sinai Peninsula at Israeli territory, apparently by ISIS's Sinai Province. In April a rocket was launched from the Sinai

Peninsula by ISIS's Sinai Province. In October 2017 two rockets were fired from the northern Sinai Peninsula by ISIS's Sinai Province. They fell in an open area in the western Negev.

Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



IEDs placed near the border security fence

► **On March 15, 2018, a number of IEDs (between three and four) exploded near the border security fence in the northern Gaza Strip** while IDF forces were patrolling the area. The soldiers were about a hundred meters from the explosion. No casualties or damage were reported. The region where the explosion took place, between the Sajaiya neighborhood and the Israeli community of Nahal Oz, **is a location where Palestinians customarily demonstrate at the end of the week.**

► In response the IDF fired from tanks and from the air at Hamas targets east of Jabalia. The Palestinian media reported that missiles were fired at a "resistance" post in the northern part of Beit Hanoun (Palinfo, March 15, 2018). There were also reports of IDF attacks on targets in the eastern part of Gaza City and the region of Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip (Palestinian TV, March 15, 2018).

► **On November 17, 2018, another IED exploded near the border security fence in the northern Gaza Strip.** No casualties or damage were reported. In response IDF tanks fired shells at a Hamas observation post. The Palestinian media reported that five missiles had been fired at a factory southeast of Gaza City, and that a number of residential dwellings had been damaged. No casualties were reported (Paldf Twitter account, March 18, 2018). In

addition, on February 17, 2018, four IDF soldiers were injured as a result of an IED explosion near the fence. The Israeli media reported that according to a senior officer in the IDF's Southern Command, the IEDs had been placed during riots along the Gaza Strip border.



**Result of the IDF attack in the eastern Gaza Strip
(Twitter account of Shehab, March 18, 2018).**

IDF destroys to Hamas terrorist tunnels

► In response to the IED attacks, **on the night of March 17, 2018, Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a tunnel in the central Gaza Strip.** On the morning of March 18, 2018, **IDF forces destroyed another Hamas terrorist tunnel in the Rafah region which penetrated into Israeli territory.** The tunnel had originally been dug during Operation Protective Edge and Hamas wanted to renew it. The tunnel was neutralized from Israeli territory through the introduction of substances that prevented it from being used. According to the IDF spokesperson, for a number of weeks Israeli security forces had followed Hamas attempts to restore the underground infrastructure that was active during Operation Protective Edge. The IDF spokesperson said the Israeli security forces had been monitoring Hamas' activities and the decision had been made to act before Hamas could access the old infrastructure and before the tunnel could cross the border into Israel and become a threat (IDF spokesperson, March 18, 2018). **Note:** During the past half year IDF forces have exposed and neutralized three terrorist tunnels that penetrated into Israeli territory. An additional tunnel near Rafah, deep inside the Gaza Strip, was attacked before it could reach Israeli territory.



**Location of the Hamas terrorist tunnel attacked by the IDF
(IDF spokesperson, March 18, 2018).**



**Hamas continues reporting that IDF forces are digging to locate tunnels
in the eastern Gaza Strip (Palinfo Twitter account, March 19, 2018).**

- ▶ Senior Hamas figures criticized the IDF's activity and said Israel would be responsible for the outcome. Some of them claimed the IDF activity had been caused by Israeli concerns regarding the "great return march" (See below). Hamas issued an announcement emphasizing that "Israel's ongoing escalation" against the Gaza Strip and its attack on the "resistance" posts were intended to lead to other steps whose objectives were to "shuffle the deck," deter the "resistance" and cause the failure of the activities of the "great return march" (Hamas website, March 18, 2018).
- ▶ Various Hamas spokesmen said the following:

- ◆ **Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military-terrorist wing**, said the Israeli announcement regarding the exposure of the tunnel was a red herring. That was because the tunnel in question was old and had been used by operatives of the military wing for attack during Operation Protective Edge. He said the tunnel had been attacked in the past and had not been used since (Shehab, March 18, 2018).
- ◆ **Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** said [Israel's] escalation would not achieve anything but would only increase the motivation of the Palestinian people to insist on a confrontation strategy during the march to cause Israel's plans to fail. He said Israel was mistaken if it thought escalation would achieve goals or break the will of the Palestinian people (Hamas website, March 18, 2018).
- ◆ **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassam** said Israel's escalation against the Gaza Strip was an attempt to hide its failure to end the Jerusalem intifada, especially after the attack in Jenin (Filastin al-Yawm, March 18, 2018).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The electricity crisis

► This past week, with the authorization of the Egyptian authorities, the Rafah crossing opened a number of times in one direction, mainly for the entrance of fuel tankers into the Gaza Strip (Ma'an, March 16, 2018; Shabaka Quds, March 18, 2018). **Muhammad Thabet, spokesman for the Gazan electric company**, said currently power was being provided in cycles of four hours, with a twelve-hour hiatus, and that there might be a slight improvement in the supply of electricity (Palinfo, March 17, 2018).

Status of preparations for the "great return march"³

► **In the Gaza Strip preparations are continuing for the "great return march."** It is apparently **the intention of the organizers to erect tent camps at various sites along the Gaza Strip border** (at a distance of several hundred meters from the border). Many Palestinians will stay in the tents, including entire families. The highlight of the events will apparently be on May 15, 2018 (Nakba Day), when thousands of Gazans march to the border with Israel (the so-called "march of the millions"). **The organizers expect broad coverage of the events by local and international media.** **Issam Hamdan**, head of the march's

³ Update to the ITIC's two previous reports on the march.

international relations committee, said **the march would draw worldwide attention and be covered by hundreds of international media** (alresala.net, March 18, 2018).



Local Gazan radio station broadcast about the "great return march" (website of Radio Sawt al-Aqsa, March 16, 2018).

► **Organizing the events:** Senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan said **all the Palestinian organizations agreed on the appointment of a committee to operate as a sponsor and source of authority for the march of return and the lifting of the siege of the Gaza Strip** (al-Quds TV, March 16, 2018). On March 17, 2018, the coordinating committee held a press conference in the eastern Gaza Strip (near the Karni crossing), attended by representatives of the organizations. An announcement was made regarding the beginning of preparations and defining the march's objectives (Palinfo Twitter account and the al-Ghad YouTube channel, March 17, 2018).



Right: Press conference announcing the beginning of preparations. Left: Closeup of the sign hung at the press conference. It states that the "great return march" will begin on March 30, 2018 (Palinfo Twitter account, March 17, 2018).

► **The objectives of the march:** On March 14, 2018, the "general principles of the 'great return march' " were made public. The objective of the March is to implement Article 11 of UN

General Assembly Resolution 194 to realize **the immediate return of the refugees to their lands, homes and property in a non-violent way** without clashing with any army.



"General principles of the 'great return march' "
(Facebook page of the "great return march," March 14, 2018).

► **Extending activities beyond the Gaza Strip:** The march's organizers have emphasized that **they expect similar activities to occur in Judea and Samaria, the Palestinian refugee camps in the Arab countries, and even among Israeli Arabs. Musheir al-Masri, Hamas spokesman in the Palestinian Legislative Council, said he expects similar gatherings in the West Bank, the territories occupied in 1948 [i.e., Israel] and in the refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria.** He said the march would be a clear response to the attempts to destroy the refugees' cause. He called on the Palestinian public to prepare for "the day of the great gathering" (al-Aqsa, March 17, 2018).

► **The stages of the events:**

◆ According to **Ahmed Abu Ratima, spokesman for the march**, events will begin on March 30, 2018, with demonstrations and marches at **a distance of about 700 meters (.4 miles) from the border. The tents will be erected along the ceasefire line from Rafah in the south to Beit Hanoun in the north.** He said that later steps would be taken to escalate, because the Palestinians would not agree to anything except **returning to their homes** (al-Aqsa TV, March 17, 2018).

◆ According to **Hani al-Thawabta, a member of the Central Committee of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)**, during the first stage people

would stay in the tents near the ceasefire line. That will be part of the effort to recruit people and as a step towards the "great return march" that will be held on May 15, 2018 (al-Aqsa, May 17, 2018).

◆ According to **senior PIJ figure Khader Habib**, the event will be continuous and consist of three stages: the first will be transferring activity to the region near the border; the second will be erecting tent camps in the Gaza Strip and holding mass activities to stress the "right of return." **The third stage will be breaking through the ceasefire line and marching to the lands the Palestinians were expelled from.** He said there was no set timetable for the various stages, and they could last for two years (alresala.net, March 19, 2018).

► **Avoiding violence:** The organizers of the march consistently stress that **the event will be non-violent** and that there is no intention of confronting the Israeli security forces.

◆ According to **Talal Abu Zarifa, a member of the political bureau of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)**, the organizations will not allow demonstrators to approach the fence **unless a decision has been made to cross the fence and escalate the activity** (al-Aqsa TV, March 17, 2018).

◆ According to **senior PIJ figure Khaled al-Batash**, the "great return march" will not mean a direct confrontation with the occupation, but rather the intention is **to fight Israel with "the camera and a non-violent mass of people."** He said **people would remain in the tents for at least a month** in order to recruit more people and to exhaust Israel politically and with regard to security and the media (website of the Atlas research center, March 18, 2018).

◆ According to **Ahmed Abu Ratima**, the decision to cross the fence will not be made by one person but it will be a **collective decision determined by people on the ground.** He said the decision would be a means **to exert pressure to enlist the media and the world** (website of the Atlas research center, Safa and Paltoday, March 18, 2018).



**Khaled al-Batash (left) and Ahmed Abu Ratima (right)
(website of the Atlas research center, March 18, 2018).**

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Belligerent, blunt speech given by Mahmoud Abbas

► Mahmoud Abbas gave a belligerent, blunt speech at the beginning of a meeting of the PLO's Executive Committee. **He accused Hamas of responsibility for the failure of the internal Palestinian reconciliation and made an unrestrained attack on American policy towards the Palestinians** (Palestinian TV, March 19, 2018). The main points of the speech were the following:

- ◆ **Hamas:** Mahmoud Abbas accused **Hamas** of the attempted assassination of Rami Hamdallah, prime minister of the national consensus government, and Majed Faraj, head of Palestinian General Intelligence. He said it had not been an exceptional event but rather **part of a policy systematically pursued by Hamas for several years**. He also said the attempted assassination proved that Hamas was not interested in reconciliation. He said the PA had to control all the Palestinians, in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. **"One authority," he said, "one set of weapons and one people."** He also said that **he had decided to take national, economic and legal measures against the Gaza Strip**, but did not elaborate.
- ◆ **The United States:** Mahmoud Abbas criticized the conduct of the **American administration** in declaring Jerusalem the capital of Israel and deciding to relocate its embassy. He strongly attacked **David Friedman, American ambassador to Israel, calling him "a son of a dog" [an Arabic curse] and "a settler."**



Mahmoud Abbas speaking at the meeting of the PLO's Executive Committee in Ramallah (Wafa, March 19, 2018).

- ▶ Hamas denounced Mahmoud Abbas' speech, calling it "irresponsible." Hamas claimed the speech deepened the internal Palestinian rift and paved the way for the realization of the American and Israeli program regarding the Palestinian cause (Ma'an, March 19, 2018). **After the speech Hamas began an anti-Mahmoud Abbas campaign.**



Right: Cartoon claiming Mahmoud Abbas' speech deepened the internal Palestinian rift and increased the separation of the Gaza Strip from Judea and Samaria (Twitter account of Gazan cartoonist Hashem Shamali, March 19, 2018). Left: Cartoon from the Gaza Strip denouncing Mahmoud Abbas (the Hamas-affiliated Felesteen, March 20, 2018).

Conference in support of UNRWA held in Rome

- ▶ **Rami Hamdallah, prime minister of the Palestinian national consensus government, and Riyadh al-Maliki, PA representative to the UN,** left for Rome to participate in the UNRWA conference (Emad, March 14, 2018). In a speech given at the conference, Rami Hamdallah called for the reinforcing of the political commitment to find a find a solution for the difficult situation of the Palestinian refugees. He said UNRWA's support was an integral part of international efforts to ease the hardships of the Palestinian people and part of the UN's responsibility regarding the Palestinian issue (Palestinian TV, March 15, 2018).



PA Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah arriving at the UNRWA ministers conference in Rome (Facebook page of Rami Hamdallah, March 15, 2018).

► During the conference a number of countries announced financial support for UNRWA. **Rami Hamdallah said \$100 million had been pledged to cover part of UNRWA's deficit, which stood at \$466 million** (Wafa, March 15, 2018). Qatar announced a donation of \$50 million (Shehab, March 15, 2018). The British minister of Middle East affairs said the British government would transfer £28 million (about \$39 million) to UNRWA in June 2018. He said it was part of a government plan to increase increase its contributions to UNRWA (Wafa, March 15, 2018). The EU announced a donation of €82 million (about \$100.5 million) (Shehab, March 15, 2018). According to **Federica Mogherini, high representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy**, the EU is committed to continuing the contribution of similar sums during the next two years (EU website, March 15, 2018).