



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (March 28 – April 10, 2018)

Overview

► On March 30, 2018, **Gazans** began the events of the "great return march." In **Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem** there were limited protests and riots despite Land Day and the "great return march." In **popular terrorism** as well there was no exceptional escalation caused by the events in the Gaza Strip (there was an attempted stabbing attack at a gas station in Mishor Adumim). The Palestinian Authority (PA) media did not back the events in the Gaza Strip. Mahmoud Abbas' advisor for religious affairs accused Hamas of deliberately encouraging Palestinian civilians to risk their lives so that Hamas could have media coverage.

The "great return march:" the situation on the ground (overview)¹

► After about two months of logistic, organizational and media preparations, events for the "great return march" began. So far there have been **two mass Friday demonstrations** on the Gaza Strip-Israeli border. Both demonstrations were attended by **tens of thousands of Palestinians** (almost 40,000 on the first Friday and almost 20,000 on the second). On weekdays the numbers dwindled to between several hundred and 1,000). **The violence served as an opportunity for Hamas and the other terrorist organizations to attempt to cross the security fence and damage the Israeli security installations along the border.**

► The events of the "great return march" began on March 30, 2018, the date Palestinians mark Land Day. Beginning in the early morning, almost 40,000 demonstrators, among them women and children, arrived at the tents that had been erected at eight main locations. Rioters burned tires and threw stones at the Israeli security forces and at the security fence. Towards evening most of the demonstrators left and only a few dozen remained at the site (IDF Spokesman and the Israeli media, March 31, 2018). During the rioting **19 Palestinians were killed, most of them while attempting to enter Israeli territory.**

► On April 6, 2018, **almost 20,000 demonstrators and rioters participated in "tire Friday" at five locations.** The main sites were in **Gaza City and Khan Yunis.** The IDF declared the

¹ For further information see the April 9, 2018 bulletin, The "Great Return March," Interim Report: The Situation on the Ground and Forecast for Future Developments."

area a closed military zone. In IDF assessment the smaller number of demonstrators was the result of IDF deterrence. According to the IDF Spokesman, many Palestinians decided not to participate and those who did arrive were careful not to confront the soldiers. However, the IDF Spokesman noted that **Palestinians sent children to the front lines, and said the IDF was careful not to harm them** (IDF Spokesman, April 6, 2018). The soldiers used less live fire and more riot control measures (Haaretz, April 8, 2018).



Right: Rioters prepare catapults to heave rocks at IDF forces (Facebook page of al-Risalah, April 6, 2018). Left: Gazans prepare mirrors to dazzle IDF forces (Facebook page of al-Risalah, April 2, 2018).

► **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, said the strategic goals of the march had already been achieved, among them **restoring the international status of the Palestinian cause**. He said the Gaza Strip had entered a new phase, without negotiations or security coordination (hinting at the Palestinian Authority). He also said the march was exerting a great deal of pressure on the international community, despite American intervention. **He said the march would grow in strength until it peaked on May 15, 2018**. Haniyeh again raised the false claim that the march was being conducted peacefully (al-Aqsa, April 9, 2018).

► Hamas has expressed satisfaction with the events. **However, there is an understanding between Hamas and the organizers of the march that tension between Israel and the Gaza Strip has to be preserved at least until the events reach their planned peak on May 15, Nakba Day, and that the Palestinian public should not become exhausted by the events**. Therefore Hamas and the organizers will attempt to motivate large crowds to gather at the border fence and prevent the general tension from dissipating. Demonstrations will continue on Fridays and specially designated days (such as "prisoners' day," At the same time, violent provocations of the IDF will continue along the fence, as will efforts to be creative to find new issues for media and propaganda activities, such as massive burnings of

Israeli flags, displaying thousands of large copies of the "key of return," using loudspeakers to sound sirens, fireworks, bussing in women, children and the elderly, and holding torchlight parades along the border.



Tent camp erected in the eastern Gaza Strip for the beginning of the march (Wafa, March 30, 2018).



Right: Palestinian demonstrators near the border security fence. Left: Palestinians riot against IDF soldiers near the border security fence (Facebook page of al-Risalah, March 30, 2018).



Palestinians vandalize the border security fence (Palinfo Twitter account, April 7, 2018).

► **Mahmoud al-Habash, advisor to Mahmoud Abbas for religious affairs and a high Sharia judge in the PA, gave a sermon in a mosque in Ramallah attended by Mahmoud Abbas. In it he accused Hamas of deliberately encouraging Palestinian civilians to risk their lives on the Israel-Gaza Strip border.** He said Hamas' motive was to provide journalists with pictures of dead Palestinians to win more media coverage (Palestinian TV, April 6, 2018). **A similar, although lower-key criticism was voiced by Palestinian activists in the Gaza Strip.**



Right: Mahmoud al-Habash attacks Hamas in a sermon given at the Muqata'a in Ramallah on Friday. Left: Mahmoud Abbas and other senior Fatah figures listen to the sermon (Palestinian TV YouTube channel, April 6 2018).

Attacks and attempted attacks

► On the afternoon of **April 8, 2018**, a report was received of an attempted **stabbing attack** near the gas station in Mishor Adumim. According to the initial investigation, a Palestinian noticed an Israeli civilian, crossed the road and ran towards him holding a screwdriver, which he used to try to stab him. A man who was in his car with his family at the time witnessed the event, stopped the car, ran towards the Palestinian and shot him, critically wounding him. The Palestinian was evacuated to a hospital. He was Muhammad Abd al-Karim Marshud, 30, from the Balata refugee camp in Nablus, married and father of three (Dunia al-Watan, April 9, 2018).



**Right: The screwdriver used in the attempted stabbing attack (Israel Police Force, April 8, 2018).
Left: Muhammad Abd al-Karim Marshud (Dunia al-Watan, April 9, 2018).**

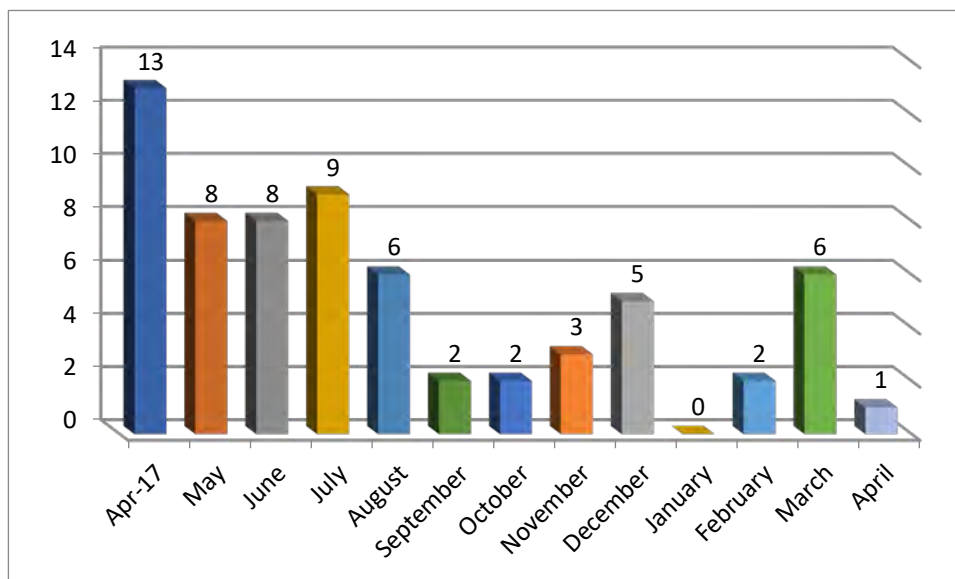
- ▶ On **April 5, 2018**, Border Policemen detained a Palestinian who went to one of the entrances to the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron. A knife was found in his possession. He was detained and taken for interrogation (Israel Police Force Spokesman's unit, April 5, 2018).

Demonstrations, clashes and riots

- ▶ This past week demonstrations and riots continued in Judea, Samaria, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Several hundred Palestinians clashed with the Israeli security forces at a number of locations in Judea and Samaria. The riots were relatively limited in scope despite the fact that they marked Land Day (March 30) and the events associated with the "great return march."
- ▶ 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:
 - ◆ **April 9, 2018** – Stones were thrown at a vehicle in the **Hizma region north of Ramallah**. No casualties were reported. The windshield of the vehicle was damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, April 9, 2018).
 - ◆ **April 9, 2018** – Stones were thrown at a bus on the **Gush Etzion road near al-Aroub**. No casualties were reported. The windshield of the bus was damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, April 9, 2018).

- ◆ **April 9, 2018** – Stones were thrown at a vehicle **between Havat Gilad and the Yitzhar Junction in Samaria**. No casualties were reported. The windshield of the vehicle was damaged (Facebook page of Red Alert, April 9, 2018).
- ◆ **April 8, 2018** – Molotov cocktails were thrown at a vehicle near **Deir Abu Mishal** (near Ramallah). No casualties were reported (Facebook page of Red Alert, April 8, 2018).
- ◆ **April 7, 2018** – During an Israeli security force activity in **Issawiya (east of Mt. Scopus in east Jerusalem)** three Palestinians threw Molotov cocktails and burning tires at the forces. They were detained and taken for interrogation (Facebook page of Red Alert, April 7, 2018).
- ◆ **April 6, 2018** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle **north of Ramallah**. There were no casualties and no damage was reported (Facebook page of Red Alert, April 6, 2018).
- ◆ **April 5, 2018** – An IED was thrown at Israeli security forces securing worshippers at **the Tomb of Joseph in Nablus**. Three Palestinians were detained. Weapons were found in their possession. When the forces left the city local Palestinians clashed with them (Facebook page of Red Alert, April 5, 2018).
- ◆ **April 4, 2018** – The Israeli security forces detained three Palestinians who threw stones at cars on **route 443 (the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road)**. During interrogation they three confessed to having carried out other attacks (Facebook page of Red Alert, April 4, 2018).

Significant terrorist attacks during the past year ²

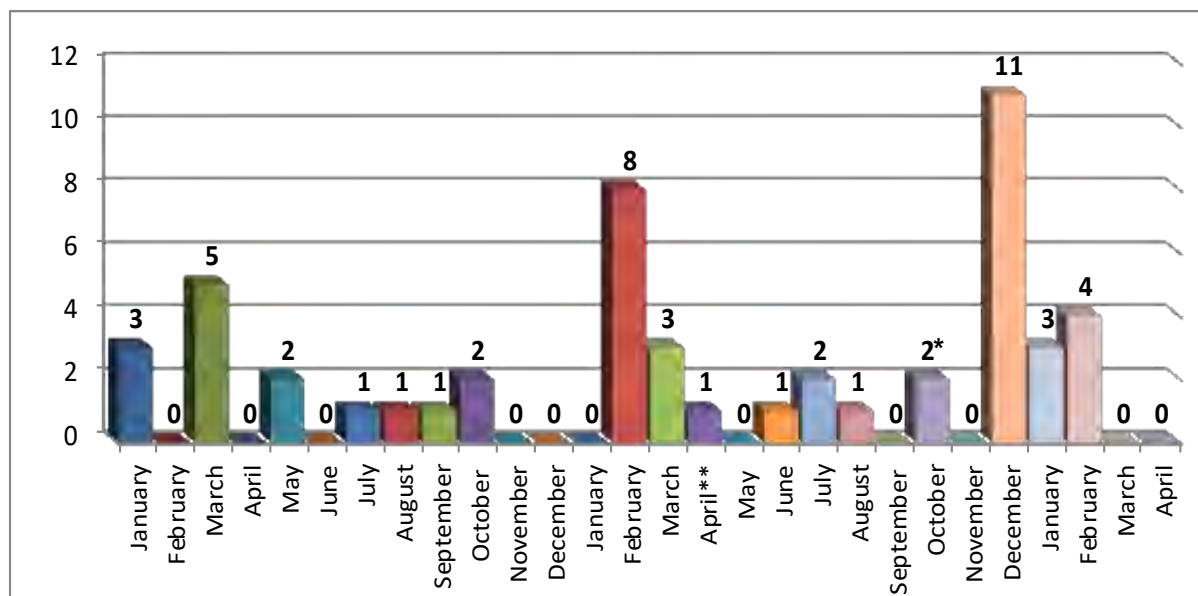


Israel's South

Rocket fire

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

Monthly Distribution of Rocket Hits in Israel since January 2016



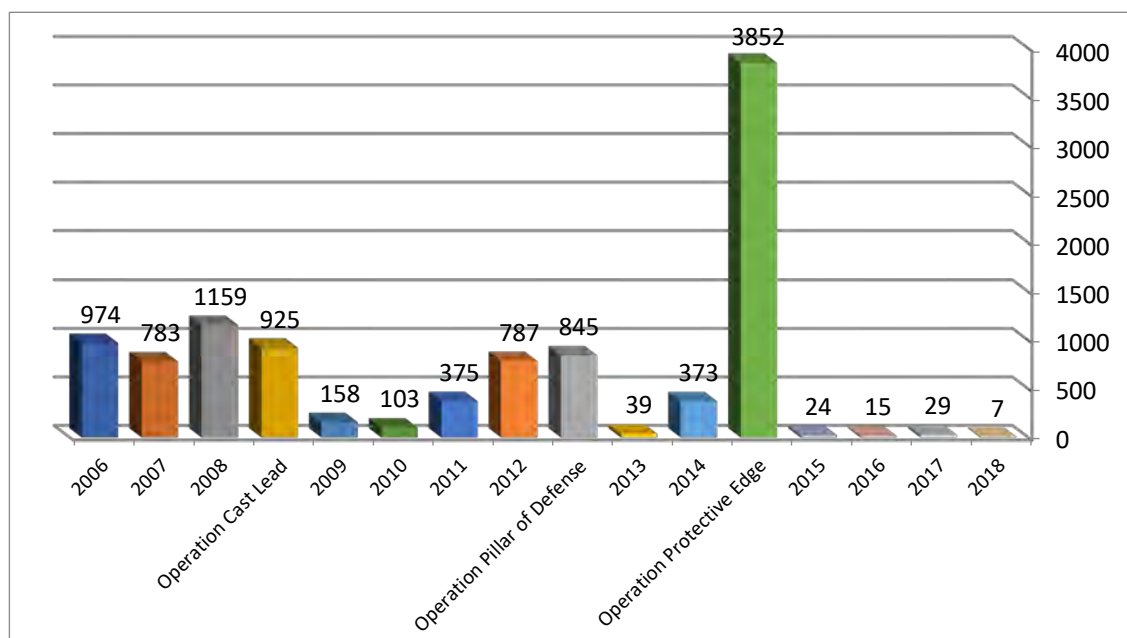
² A significant attack is defined by the ITIC as involving shooting, a vehicular attack, the use of IEDs, shooting, or a combination of the above. Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown by Palestinians are not included.

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



Events on the Gaza Strip border

- ▶ On the afternoon of **April 8, 2018**, **three Palestinians crossed the border security fence in the northern Gaza Strip**. After a short time in Israeli territory they returned. IDF tanks shot at them, and when a search was conducted **two IEDs were found**, planted by the Palestinians. In response to the infiltration of terrorist operatives Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a terrorist target in a Hamas military compound in the northern Gaza Strip (IDF Spokesman, April 9, 2018). The Palestinian media reported that a Hamas military wing post in Beit Lahia, in the northern Gaza Strip, had been attacked (Paldf, April 9, 2016).
- ▶ On **April 7, 2018**, and IDF force found a hand grenade in the region of the Karni crossing in the central Gaza Strip. **It had been thrown from the Gaza Strip on April 6, 2018**, during a riot near the border security fence as an attack on IDF forces (IDF Spokesman, April 7, 2018).

Attempted attack on an Israeli navy boat

► The Israeli security forces detained ten Palestinians from Rafah for interrogation on suspicion of having gathered information for **an attack on an Israeli navy boat**. On March 12, 2018, during a navy exercise in southern Israel, a Gazan fishing boat was halted after it crossed the boundary of permitted fishing waters. The men on the boat had been collecting information about IDF forces. One of them, from Rafah, was **a Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) operative** who participated in planning the attack. It was supposed to have been carried out by three boats. One boat was supposed to have been used as a lure, and when the Israeli navy boat went after it, another would attack it with a Kornet missile. A third boat would then approach the Israeli boat to abduct soldiers. In preparation for the attack surveillance was conducted on Israeli navy boats and information was gathered about their location, the number of soldiers on board and their weapons (IDF Spokesman, April 4, 2018).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The Rafah crossing

► Recently trucks have continued to enter the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing, bringing mostly fuel for the power plant (Ma'an, March 30, 2018). On April 3, 2018, 43 trucks reportedly entered the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing bringing fuel, fruit, steel and cell phones (Twitter account of Shabakat Quds, April 2, 2018).

Statement from a senior Hamas figure regarding fighting with Israel

► **Senior Hamas figure Ghazi Hamad**, general director of the Palestinian foreign ministry, interviewed by the daily al-Hayat, said that **after Operation Protective Edge the Hamas leadership had decided not to enter into a general confrontation with Israel**. He said it had been agreed on by both the political and military leaderships. He said the reasons for the decision were the unreserved American and international support for Israel, Israel's deliberate attacks on civilians without fear of investigations from international legal institutions, and Hamas' inability to deal with the Israeli Air Force. He also emphasized that Hamas would not initiate a long war before it had weapons that would enable it to confront Israel. He said that in his assessment Hamas could not yet deter Israel (al-Hayat, April 8, 2018).

Official visit of Hamas delegation to Russia

► A Hamas delegation headed by **Musa Abu Marzuq, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, arrived in Russia for a state visit. The delegation met with **Mikhail Bogdanov, deputy Russian foreign minister** and special Russian envoy to the Middle East. They updated him on a number of issues, among them developments in the "great return march," the internal Palestinian reconciliation and obstacles preventing its implementation, and the increase in sanctions imposed on the Gaza Strip by Mahmoud Abbas (Hamas website, March 30, 2018).



Musa Abu Marzuq (right) presents Mikhail Bogdanov with a bas-relief map of "Palestine," at the center of which is al-Aqsa mosque (Twitter account of Musa Abu Marzuq, March 30, 2018).

Plans for a flotilla from Europe to the Gaza Strip

► **Hamas announced that preparations were being made in a number of European countries to send a flotilla to the Gaza Strip** (Palinfo Twitter account, April 9, 2018). According to **Hafez al-Karmi, president of the Palestinian Forum in Europe**, the plan is to send the ships during **June 2018, at the end of Ramadan**. He said aboard the ships there would be European and international passengers (alresala.net, April 7, 2018).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Activity in the International Criminal Court (ICC)

► In the wake of the riots along the Israel-Gaza Strip border, **Fatou Bensouda, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC)**, issued an announcement about the situation in the Gaza Strip, calling on both sides to avoid violence. She said violence against civilians and the use of live ammunition was liable to be considered a crime according to the Rome Statue of the ICC. She also said that the use of civilians to shield military operatives [a hint at Hamas] was also liable to be considered a crime for which an initial investigation could be begun. She noted that the situation in Palestine was under inspection and that any alleged new crime could be a target for investigation, including recent events and events planned for the near future. She also noted that her office would document any use of illegal force and stressed her authority to bring perpetrators to trial (Reuters, April 8, 2018).

► **Riyadh al-Maliki, Palestinian foreign minister**, welcomed the announcement, saying it heralded the beginning of an official investigation into the events in the Gaza Strip. He said all the evidence would be sent to her office (Voice of Palestine radio, April 9, 2018). On another occasion, al-Maliki called for an immediate investigation into Israel's "crimes" to condemn those responsible, saying that was the function of the ICC (Wafa, April 9, 2018).

Delegation of Egyptian General Intelligence visits the PA

► **A delegation of Egyptian General Intelligence led by its chief, Abbas Kamel**, visited Ramallah and met with senior PA figures. The visit, prompted by Mahmoud Abbas' threat to end funding to the Gaza Strip, focused on attempts to promote the internal Palestinian reconciliation. During the meeting Kamel gave Mahmoud Abbas two communiqués, one dealing with the American peace initiative and the other with the Gaza Strip, the "great return march" events and the internal Palestinian reconciliation (al-Jazeera, April 6, 2018).



Mahmoud Abbas meets with the chief of Egyptian General Intelligence at his office in Ramallah (Wafa, April 3, 2018).

Census taken in the PA

► The PA released initial data from its third census, taken in 2017. A census has been conducted by the central bureau of statistics every ten years since 1997. The results are used by the PA for making decisions and for strategic planning. This year it was conducted between December 1 and 24, 2017, and funded by the PA with the help of foreign governments and international organizations.



Right: 'Ala Awad, head of the central bureau of statistics, in Mahmoud Abbas' office in Ramallah, presents the results of the census. Left: 'Ala Awad receives an award for the activities of the bureau. At the left is Rami Hamdallah, prime minister of the national consensus government (Facebook page of Palestinian central bureau of statistics, March 29, 2018).

► The following are some of the census results (website of the Palestinian central bureau of statistics, March 2018):

- ◆ **The population of Judea and Samaria** (including east Jerusalem) **and the Gaza Strip is 4,780,978**. In Judea and Samaria, 2,881,687; in the Gaza Strip, 1,899,291.
 - ◆ Muslims make up 97.9% of the population.
 - ◆ Children and adolescents under the age of 18 make up 47% of the population.
 - ◆ The number of refugees in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip is 1,980,000.
 - ◆ Unemployment of people over the age of 15 stands at 13.2% in Judea and Samaria and 48.2% in the Gaza Strip.
- In the past it was claimed that the data of the central bureau of statistics were biased and unreliable. Given the political significance of statistical data, they should be considered with great care.