



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (May 2-8, 2018)

Overview



[Click here to watch the video](#)

► This week as well, the violent incidents initiated by the Palestinians, mainly Hamas, continued along the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel. The climax was on Friday, May 4, 2018, when dozens of Palestinian rioters broke into the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom border crossing, which serves as the Gazans' lifeline, damaging equipment and gas and fuel storage facilities.

► The organizers of the marches are preparing for this Friday's events (May 11, 2018), and at the same time are preparing for the climax of the events in mid-May: **May 14** (the transfer of the US Embassy to Jerusalem) and **May 15** (Nakba Day). **The intention is to organize a large mob (tens or hundreds of thousands) that will break into Israeli territory. This will be accompanied by violent events, even at the cost of many losses** (which will increase the international media impact of the event).

► Hamas media **repeatedly calls on residents of Judea and Samaria** to join the marches and **invent new fighting tactics to be used against the settlements** (such as the Molotov kites). In practice, **the relative calm in Judea and Samaria** and among Israeli Arabs continues, but **this is liable to change** due to the accumulation of events in mid-May.

“The Great Return March:” increasing violence on the fifth Friday of the demonstrations

► The acts of violence of the “Great Return March” continued on Friday, May 4, 2018, the sixth Friday since the violent demonstrations began on March 30, 2018. **Around 10,000 demonstrators** (similar to the number of participants last week) **participated in the Friday demonstrations in six locations** near the security fence on the border between Israel and

the Gaza Strip¹. During the demonstrations, **the violent incidents continued:** burning tires, throwing stones and IEDs, attempting to sabotage the security fence, and sending Molotov kites into Israeli territory (IDF Spokesperson's Office, May 5, 2018). During the demonstrations, a hand grenade was thrown at an IDF force near the Karni crossing (northern Gaza Strip). In addition, two attempts by Palestinians to sabotage the security fence and cross over into Israeli territory were thwarted. According to reports by the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip, there were no fatalities during Friday's events and 1,143 people were injured (mainly from smoke inhalation, in the ITIC's assessment).



Burning tires during the “Return March” east of Jabalia (Al-Jazeera Net, May 4, 2018)

► The climax of the violent events was when **dozens of rioters broke into the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing, damaging equipment and gas and fuel storage facilities.** The Kerem Shalom border crossing is a **critical lifeline** used for the passage of goods, gasoline, diesel fuel and gas intended for **residents of the Gaza Strip.**

¹For a summary of last Friday's events, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from May 8, 2018: “The “Great Return March:” Demonstrations of May 4, 2018, and continuation to be expected.”



Palestinian rioters breaking into the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing and setting fire to a “security position” there (PALINFO Twitter account, May 4, 2018)

► **Friday’s events included extensive use of Molotov kites.** This is because the organizers of the events, led by Hamas, fully understood the media impact and the considerable material damage caused to Israel by the use of Molotov kites. Before the start of the demonstrations on Friday, May 4, 2018, **Hamas called on the demonstrators to make extensive use of kites.** The Quds News Network posted a video on its Facebook page showing a group of youngsters calling themselves the “kite unit” (Quds News Network, May 4, 2018)².



Making a Molotov kite east of Gaza (PALINFO Twitter account, May 4, 2018)

► **Ziyad al-Nakhleh, the Deputy Secretary General of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ),** said that the marches opened the door to “**new methods of struggle against Israel,**” through which the Palestinian people expresses its objection to the “siege” imposed on it (Al-Quds, May 5, 2018). Senior PIJ figure **Ahmed Mudallal** praised the young Palestinians in the Gaza Strip **and called for similar marches in Judea and Samaria and in Israeli territory. Mudallal also called** on Palestinians in Judea and Samaria to “**storm the**

² For further information about the use of kites, see the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from May 7, 2018: “Molotov kites” – a new means of causing damage to Israel as part of the violent demonstrations of the “Great Return March.”

settlements en masse” and invent new combat tactics against them, such as the kites in the Gaza Strip (Al-Aqsa, May 5, 2018).

► The organizers of the “Great Return March” **again called on all Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Jerusalem, and on Israeli Arabs and refugee camp residents to take part in the activities this Friday** (“Friday of preparation and a warning signal”). In addition, they **called for preparations for a larger-scale event on May 14** (the day of the transfer of the US Embassy to Jerusalem) (Great Return March Facebook page, May 7, 2018). **Hamas Spokesman Abdel Latif al-Qanua said that an unprecedented large-scale march would take place in mid-May**, which, according to him, would be a “decisive day in the history of the Palestinian people” (Abdel Latif al-Qanua’s Twitter account, May 7, 2018).

Attacks foiled in Judea and Samaria

► On May 6, 2018, Israeli security forces at the Kalandia checkpoint stopped a 47-year-old Palestinian resident of Al-Eizariya. A search of her bag revealed **a knife**. She was arrested and taken for questioning (Israel Police Spokesperson’s Office, May 6, 2018).



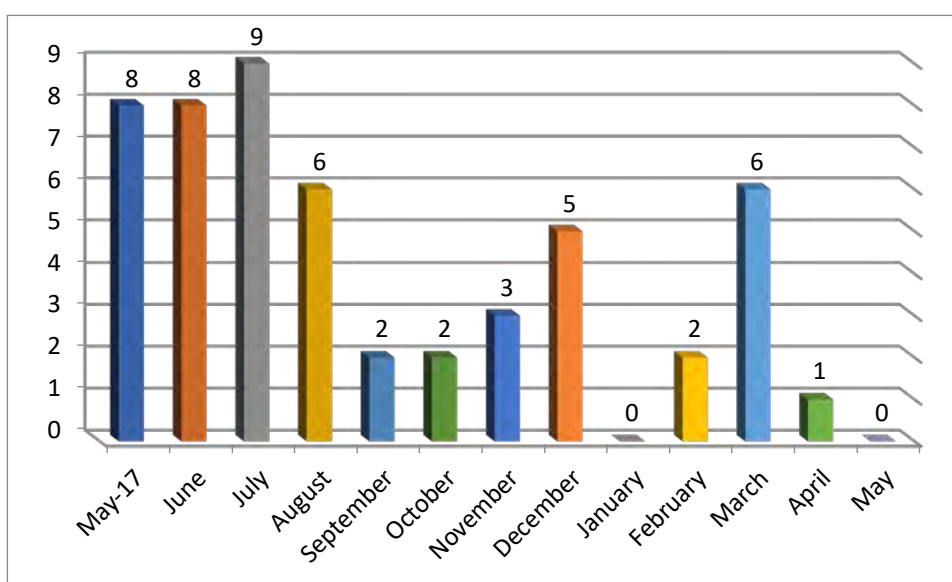
Knife found in the possession of a Palestinian woman from Al-Eizariya at the Kalandia crossing (May 6, 2018)

► On May 1, 2018, Border Police soldiers arrested two Palestinian youths who had come to the **Salem Military Court** (northern Samaria). The two youths had **three pipe bombs hidden in their clothing** and cigarette lighters were also found in their possession. In the past year, there have been a number of cases in which young Palestinians came to the military court with IEDs.



The three pipe bombs seized from the two Palestinians (Israel Police, May 2, 2018)

Significant attacks carried out in the past year³



Hamas support for the chairman of the Islamic Bloc at Birzeit University

► On March 7, 2018, Israeli security forces arrested **Omar Kiswani**, 24, a resident of Beit Iksa (northwest of Jerusalem), who served as chairman of the Student Union and head of the Islamic Bloc cell (the Hamas faction) at the Birzeit University. Kiswani was arrested on suspicion of involvement in terrorist activity. His arrest, which took place at the university, led to a series of condemnations by the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian organizations calling for international intervention.

³ “Significant terrorist attacks” are defined by the ITIC as shooting attacks, stabbing attacks, ramming attacks, the planting of IEDs or combined attacks. They do not include incidents in which stones or Molotov cocktails are thrown.

► His interrogation revealed that **Kiswani had contacted Yassin Rabi'a, a Hamas operative in the Gaza Strip, as well as Hamas operatives in Turkey. He had received money from them to promote Hamas activity at the university.** Kiswani received **the sum of EUR 150,000**, which was hidden in a number of hiding places throughout Judea and Samaria. The money that he received was used to promote Hamas activity (Israeli press, May 3, 2018).

► **Yassin Rabi'a**, who was contacted by Kiswani, was born in 1971. He lives in the village of Al-Mazraa al-Qabaliya in the Ramallah area (Hamas website, May 7, 2018). **Yassin Rabi'a is a Hamas operative who was arrested in 2005 and sentenced to two cumulative life sentences and another 20 years in prison** (Wafa News Agency, April 13, 2005). He was convicted of intentional manslaughter, military training, attempted murder, and shooting at people. **Rabi'a was released in the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal and deported to the Gaza Strip.** He is currently in charge of the Islamic Bloc (Hamas faction) at the universities in Judea and Samaria (Al-Resalah Net, November 12, 2016).



Right: Omar Kiswani, who served until recently as chairman of the Hamas student council at Birzeit University (Shehab Facebook page, May 3, 2018). Left: Yassin Rabi'a, Hamas operative who was released and deported to Gaza in the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange deal (Hamas website, May 7, 2018)

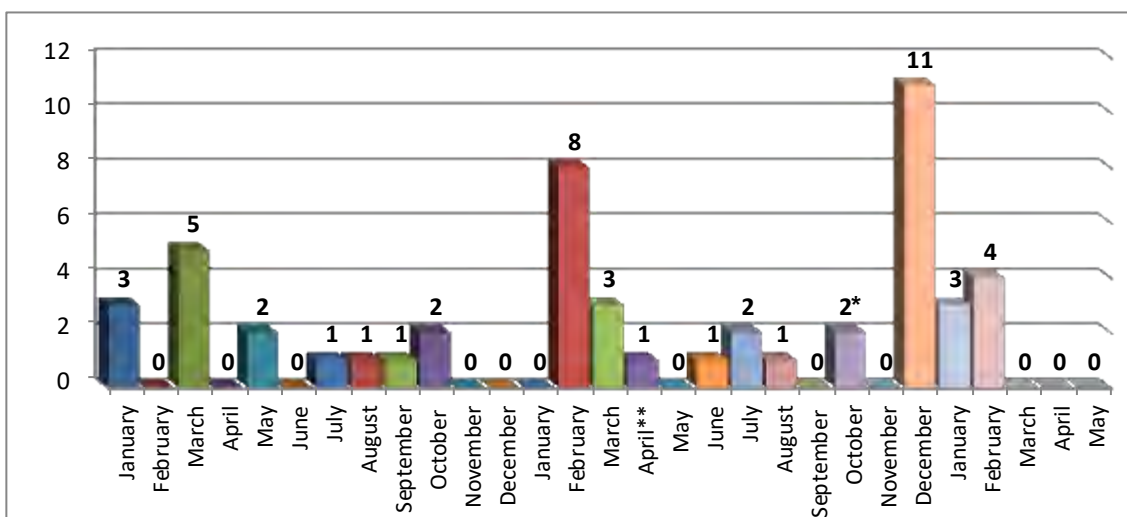
Israel's South

Rocket Fire⁴

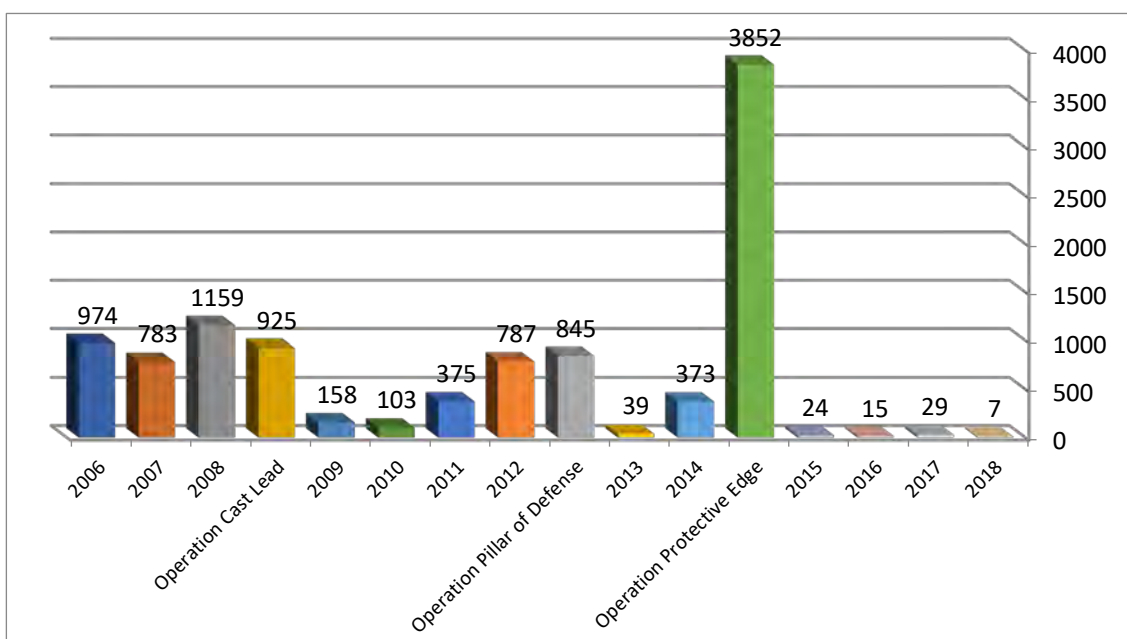
► During the week, no rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory. So far, the events of the "Great Return March" have not been accompanied by rocket or mortar shell fire.

⁴ **The statistics do not include rockets which fell inside the Gaza Strip or mortar shell fire at Israel.**

Monthly Distribution of Rocket Hits in Israel



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Attempts to cross the fence and arson

► During the week, **daily demonstrations by several hundred Palestinians continued in various locations near the security fence. Under the cover of these demonstrations, a number of Palestinians tried to cross the fence and entered Israeli territory.** In addition, a large number of Molotov kites and incendiary helium balloons were sent into Israeli territory. They caused fires in the fields and woods in the communities surrounding the Gaza Strip.

Arson

► **On May 2, 2018, a huge fire broke out in Be'eri Forest, the largest since the start of the Molotov kite terrorism.** Hundreds of dunams of forestland were burned down. Additional arson of wheat fields caused heavy damage. The IDF began to adopt a new response to the use of Molotov kites. On May 6, 2018, Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked Hamas terrorist positions in the northern Gaza Strip near the security fence, from where Palestinians sent burning objects in an attempt to set fire to areas in Israel (IDF Spokesperson's Office, May 6, 2018).



Fire in the fields of Kibbutz Be'eri, caused by a Molotov kite sent from the Gaza Strip (Al-Resalah Facebook page, May 2, 2018)

► On May 7, 2018, Palestinians from **the Gaza Strip released a number of helium balloons to which they had attached incendiary materials.** The balloons that landed in Israeli territory caused fires in several locations simultaneously, including a wheat field near the community of Mefalsim, Be'eri Forest, and elsewhere. According to farmers in the area, heavy financial damage was caused (Ynet, May 7, 2018).

Attempts to cross the security fence

► **On May 6, 2018, a squad of four Palestinians arrived at the security fence in order to infiltrate into Israeli territory and carry out terrorist activities.** The squad was under surveillance by the IDF. After the squad operatives reached the fence and began to damage it, an IDF force arrived at the scene and fired at them. Three of the squad operatives were killed. One of the Palestinians was caught with a bag containing a camera, an axe, wire cutters, an oxygen mask, and gloves. Two bottles of gasoline were found next to another body (Israeli press, May 6, 2018).



**Equipment seized from the squad operatives who tried to infiltrate into Israel
(IDF Spokesperson's Office, May 6, 2018)**

► A spokesman for the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip said that **Bahaa Abdul Rahman Qudeih**, 23, from Abasan al-Kabira, and **Mohammad Khaled Abu Rayda**, 20, from Khan Yunis, were killed in the incident (Ashraf al-Qudra's Twitter account, May 6, 2018). Their funerals were held in Khan Yunis (Anatolia News Agency, May 6, 2018). **Their bodies were wrapped in Hamas flags and their funerals were attended by Hamas military wing operatives.** The last posts on Mohammad Abu Rayda's Facebook page were words of farewell to Hamas military wing operatives killed in an explosion in central Gaza on May 5, 2018 (Mohammad Abu Rayda's Facebook page, May 6, 2018). **This is an indication that the Palestinians who attempted to infiltrate into Israeli territory were Hamas operatives.**



Photos of Bahaa Qudeih's funeral. His body is wrapped in a Hamas flag and operatives of the military wing are beside him (Facebook page of the Qudeih family, May 6, 2018)



The last posts on Mohammad Abu Rayda's Facebook page
(Mohammad Abu Rayda's Facebook page, May 6, 2018)

The Gaza Strip

Palestinian Authority aid for the Gaza Strip

The PA Finance Ministry announced that **Mahmoud Abbas had instructed to ease the sanctions** imposed on the Gaza Strip. In this context, **Mahmoud Abbas ordered the transfer of half the salaries for PA officials, the transfer of salaries to the families of the shaheeds and the wounded** (25,000 families); the distribution of welfare pensions and further payments for electricity and water (Al-Quds, May 6, 2018).

► In accordance with Mahmoud Abbas's instructions, Palestinian Health Minister Jawad Awwad issued an order to send 20 trucks of medicines worth USD 3 million to the Health Ministry warehouses in the Gaza Strip. The trucks are due to arrive in the Gaza Strip in a matter of days (WAFA News Agency, May 7, 2018).

Hamas denies reports that it is ready to negotiate a long-term ceasefire

► According to Israeli daily Haaretz, in recent months the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip has conveyed to Israel through various channels messages, according to which **it is ready to conduct indirect negotiations on a long-term ceasefire (*hudna*) in the Gaza Strip**. As part of the deal, Hamas seeks to receive concessions in the siege over the Gaza Strip, permissions to establish infrastructure projects, and maybe even a deal to exchange prisoners and bodies (report by Amos Harel, Haaretz, May 7, 2018). **Hamas spokesman**

Abdel Latif al-Qanua denied the information published on Israeli media. According to him, talks on a lull agreement are not on the agenda now (Shehab, May 7, 2018).

Six Hamas military wing operatives killed

► On May 5, 2018, there was an explosion in a house in the Al-Zuweida area (Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip). **Six operatives of the Hamas military wing were killed in the blast, and three others were wounded.** The fatalities were reportedly **operatives of the engineering unit of the Hamas military wing.** According to reports, the fatalities included the commander of the communications unit and the commander of the engineering unit in Deir al-Balah. **Iyad al-Bazm**, spokesman of Hamas’s Interior Ministry in the Gaza Strip, said that the security services had started to investigate the incident (website of the Gaza Strip Interior Ministry, May 6, 2018).



Photos of the explosion (Ghazza Al-A’an Twitter account, May 5, 2018)

► There were contradictory reports on the circumstances in which the six operatives died. According to information published on social media, they were killed in an explosion of a booby-trapped telephone exchange (Twitter account of Mahmoud Al-Tartouri in Gaza, May 5, 2018; Firas, May 5, 2018). According to another version, they were killed in an explosion while they were dismantling a wiretapping device planted by Israel’s agents in a telephone exchange of Hamas’s military wing (Facebook page of Abdel Qader Abu Islam from Gaza, May 5, 2018; Gaza 4 All Facebook page, May 5, 2018).

► **The following day, Hamas’s military wing released an official announcement in accusing Israel of responsibility for their death.** According to the announcement, the military wing operatives were killed carrying out an “important security mission on the ground”, in which they were monitoring a “booby-trapped technological espionage device

planted by Israel in the Gaza Strip.” The announcement claimed that in their action, they thwarted the plan of the Israeli intelligence agencies. The announcement further warned that “settling the account was inevitably imminent and that the results will be painful for Israel” (website of the Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, May 6, 2018).



Poster published by Hamas's military wing in memory of the six operatives, containing a threat to Israel (website of the Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades, May 6, 2018)

► Hamas's senior figures participated in the funeral of the military wing operatives. **According to Ismail Haniya**, head of Hamas's Political Bureau, **Hamas is positioned today at a significant milestone in the history of jihad, "resistance" and the struggle against Israel.** He said that "Palestinian resistance," headed by Hamas's military wing, was running a continuous "battle of minds" with Israel in a number of fronts, including the armed front, the security, political and media fronts. Haniya praised the six operatives who were killed and said that they had been killed during a "jihad activity which has lasted for years" and that they had been the pillars of the military wing's special activity. He further noted that **they had operated to thwart Israeli security and intelligence operations.** Haniya pointed out that the Palestinian people was now putting all its efforts into the "Return Marches", but at the same time it continued its intelligence and military campaign against Israel (Al-Aqsa, May 6, 2018).



Ismail Haniya, Khalil al-Hayya and other Hamas senior figures at the funeral of the killed operatives in Deir al-Balah (Right: Hamas website, May 6, 2018; Left: Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades website, May 6, 2018)



Poster created by Omayya Joha following the death of the six Hamas operatives: “Gaza will not forget the blood of its six sons” (Filastin Al-Aan Twitter account, May 6, 2018)

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

The Palestinian National Congress in Ramallah

► The Palestinian National Congress (PNC) ended on May 4, 2018. The Congress dealt mainly with internal organizational matters. The last day of deliberations was dedicated to **elections for the Executive Committee and the Central Council and for strengthening the powers of the PLO’s Central Council** (Wafa, May 4, 2018). The Congress reaffirmed **Mahmoud Abbas’s appointment as the Palestinian president and the PLO chairman**. Members of the PLO’s Executive Committee were reelected – most of them have served in the Executive Committee before. According to **Ahmad Majdalani**, member of the PLO’s Executive Committee, it was decided to add 103 new delegates to the PNC, including 83 delegates who will replace deceased delegates and 20 new delegates (Wafa, May 4, 2018).



Right: Mahmoud Abbas at the closing ceremony of the Palestinian National Congress in Ramallah (WAFA, May 4, 2018). Left: Mahmoud Abbas in his office with elected Executive Committee members (WAFA, May 4, 2018)

- ▶ The conclusion announcement published at the end of the Congress **focuses on issues relating to the Palestinian Authority's foreign policy and represents an affirmation of its current policy in the international arena, mainly vis-à-vis Israel and the US.** The announcement underlines the Palestinian Authority's ongoing attempts to threaten relations with Israel. Among other things, it was decided to reject proposals which are not in line with the Palestinian basic principles for political negotiations; to act toward strengthening the Palestinian Authority's status in the international arena; and to intensify resistance to Israel's policy in the legal and international spheres. In addition, it was decided to suspend the recognition of Israel and relations with it, including economic and security ties.
- ▶ Following are details about several topics included in the conclusion announcement (WAFA, May 4, 2018):

- ◆ **Relations with Israel:** The Palestinians' relations with Israel **are based on the existence of a [permanent] struggle.** Agreements contradicting it should be reexamined. Interim solutions for a state with interim borders should be declined. Compromising the issue of Jerusalem, the refugees and the settlements should be rejected. In view of Israel's shirking the commitments and the agreements that it has signed, it is necessary to move from autonomous rule **to a state whose capital is East Jerusalem, in the 1967 borders. The Executive Committee should suspend recognition of Israel until the latter recognizes the State of Palestine in the 1967 borders, cancels the decision to annex Jerusalem, and stops building in the settlements. The BDS movement should be supported,** and the countries of the world should be called upon to impose sanctions on Israel.
- ◆ **The United States:** The US president's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel should be rejected **and actions should be taken to thwart it.** At the

same time, Trump's policy which includes proposals for resolving the conflict should be declined.

- ◆ **Decisions in the international sphere:** The international status of the "State of Palestine" should be strengthened by **acquiring further recognition, especially from the superpowers**. Actions should be pursued **to acquire full membership in the UN and apply to join international organizations**. All international legal bodies should be approached **in order to put Israel on trial**.

- ◆ **"Popular resistance:"** The consensus recently achieved on "popular resistance" should be welcomed, but at the same time it should be understood **that it is not an alternative to the other forms of struggle** (allusion to the armed struggle), allowed by international law. "Popular resistance by peaceful means" has proved its usefulness and raised international support. The Jerusalem intifada and the "Great Return March" are only part of the Palestinian resistance.

"History lecture" – Mahmoud Abbas's speech

► In a speech delivered by Mahmoud Abbas in the opening ceremony of the Palestinian National Congress, he devoted 20 minutes to what he called "history lecture." **This part of the speech was dedicated to denying the Jews' connection to the Land of Israel**. It was replete with inaccuracies, distorted names and dates, and was intended to refute the existence of a Jewish people, **deny its connection to the Land of Israel, and thus strengthen** (in his opinion) **Palestinian nationalism**. The speech included **anti-Semitic elements** in the service of Mahmoud Abbas's political arguments, such as the claim that Jews were hated in Europe only because of their social function and engagement in usury and banking.⁵

► This chapter in Mahmoud Abbas's speech was strongly criticized by senior figures in Israel, by the United States, the European Union, and many Western leaders. In view of the criticism, two days after the speech, an apology was published on behalf of Mahmoud Abbas's office in Ramallah. According to the statement, if people were offended by Abbas's speech, especially people of the Jewish faith, Abbas apologizes to them. He would like to assure that it wasn't his intention to do so, because he has full respect for the Jewish faith,

⁵ For details on Mahmoud Abbas's speech, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from May 7, 2018: "History lecture by Mahmoud Abbas: At the opening of the PNC session, Mahmoud Abbas delivered a speech of fake history and anti-Semitism."

as well as other monotheistic faiths. The apology goes on to state that “the Holocaust was the most heinous crime in history,” and that they condemn anti-Semitism in all its forms, and confirm their commitment to the two-state solution, and to live side by side in peace and security (WAFA, May 4, 2018). **The apology did not include parts of the speech which denied the existence of the Jewish People and its connection to the Land of Israel.**⁶

Palestinian calls to boycott the opening ceremony of the US Embassy in Jerusalem

► **Saeb Erekat**, the secretary of the PLO’s Executive Committee, called on all representatives of the world countries, including members of the diplomatic corps, civil society organizations and clerics to boycott the opening ceremony of the US Embassy in Jerusalem. According to Erekat, taking part in the ceremony grants legitimacy to an illegitimate and illegal decision and encourages turning a blind eye to Israel’s policy of annexation. He further noted that participating in the ceremony would be tantamount to taking part in a “crime” that violates the Palestinian people’s right and would prevent making peace between Israel and the Palestinians (WAFA, May 7, 2018).

Jibril Rajoub condemns participation by groups from Bahrain and the UAE in the Giro d’Italia bicycle race

► **Palestine Olympic Committee Chairman Jibril Rajoub** condemned the participation of groups from Bahrain and the UAE in the Giro d’Italia bicycle race held in Israel. According to Rajoub, this participation is contrary to international will, the Olympic Charter and the UN resolutions, violated by Israel in its conduct vis-à-vis the Palestinian national sports association. Rajoub called on the Olympic committees in Bahrain and the UAE to take a clear stance against this participation. He said that he would send letters of protest and condemnation to these committees, to the chairman of the Arab Olympic Committee, to Islamic Olympic committees, and to the Arab League secretary-general (Raya, May 5, 2018).

⁶ The apology statement was also published on the websites of the official WAFA Palestinian News Agency in English and French. However, so far, Mahmoud Abbas himself has not apologized and has not even posted the apology statement on his official Facebook page.