



Events of the “Great Return March” are expected to reach their peak on May 14 and 15, 2018, with mass penetration into Israel, accompanied by violence and terrorism

May10, 2018

Overview

The events of the “Great Return March”, which started on March 30, 2018, **are expected to reach their peak on two consecutive dates: May 14**, the day on which the US Embassy will be transferred from Tel Aviv to its new location in Jerusalem; **and May 15**, on which Palestinians mark Nakba Day. **The month of Ramadan**, which will probably begin on May 16 (depending on the new moon), may also contribute to the expected violence. The culmination of the events, **according to Hamas, the dominant player**, is expected to be **Palestinian mass penetration into Israel (as an implementation of the “right of return”)**. **The mass penetration is expected to be accompanied by acts of violence and maybe even terrorist attacks exceeding what has been seen so far.**

► Statements by Hamas (the dominant organization behind the events) and the Supreme National Authority for the Return March (the front organization organizing the events) reveal that **the Palestinians aspire to bring hundreds of thousands of Palestinian demonstrators to the border area on the peak days of the march.** This past Friday, May 11, 2018, was designated by the organizing body as “Friday of preparations and warnings” and was supposed to serve as preparation for a larger event called **“the Return March of the Millions,” which will take place on May 14, 2018** (Shehab, May 4, 2018).¹ The organizers **call on Palestinians in Judea and Samaria, Israeli Arabs and Palestinians in the Arab countries to join the protests.** In addition, **anti-Israeli demonstrations are planned to take place in Western countries**, including **in London** (protest demonstration in front of Israel’s Embassy, May 11, 2018), **in Athens** (demonstration in front of Israel’s Embassy, May 15, 2018), **and in Vienna** (demonstration on May 13, 2018).

¹ Although Nakba Day is marked on May 15, 2018, it seems that a decision was made that events would culminate on May 14, 2018 (the date on which the US Embassy is transferred to Jerusalem). It should be taken into account, however, that large-scale events will continue on Nakba Day (May 15, 2018) and maybe even **afterwards**.



Call on residents of the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria, Jerusalem, Israeli Arabs and residents of the refugee camps to take part en masse on the coming Friday and prepare for the culmination of the events on May 14, 2018 (Facebook page of the “Great Return March,” May 7, 2018)

► **Yahya Sinwar, head of Hamas’s Political Bureau in the Gaza Strip**, called on Palestinian youngsters **to carry out the protest activity “at all costs,”** saying that **they would rather die as shaheeds.** In the ITIC's assessment, Hamas and the other organizers take into account that a mass penetration into Israeli territory may **result in a large number of dead and wounded Palestinians among the rioters.** However, the ITIC believes that the **great number of expected casualties does not deter them. On the contrary** – at a time when world media is focused on the confrontation between Israel and Iran and the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement, **a large number of casualties, from Hamas’s perspective, may help raise the Palestinian case once again to the forefront of public attention, after it had been pushed aside.** A great number of casualties and the opening of new fronts of violent friction between the Israeli security forces and demonstrators in Judea and Samaria and other arenas **may, from Hamas’s perspective, increase the media impact and return the Palestinian issue to the headlines.**

Preparations, logistics, and formation of fighting tactics

On the logistical and tactical spheres, preparations for May 14 have been taking place for quite a while. The main challenge Hamas and the other organizers are facing is **how to mobilize and move masses of people to the fence**. For this purpose, they plan **to use public address systems in mosques and on the streets, starting May 13**. In addition, logistical preparations also take place, such as preparing hospitals to receive casualties and organizing transportation to the gathering sites. At the same time, **various confrontation tactics are being examined**, such as **breaking through the fence in many places so as to wear out the IDF forces; using bulldozers** to remove the fence and create a breach through which masses of demonstrators could pour into Israel; **preparing gathering sites for those who will be able to break into Israeli territory**.

► Back on May 7, 2018, the organizers of the "Great Return March" published a post on the Facebook page, asking web surfers to post their suggestions regarding the nature of the events "before and after crossing the fence." **Surfers' suggestions included the following: move in groups from one place to another so as to force IDF troops to spread out along the entire fence** (so far, Friday events were focused on five or six locations); provide barrels and buckets of water to help cope with the tear gas; provide sandbags; organize mass gathering **and mass penetration, hand in hand, into Israeli territory**; prepare signs stressing UN Resolution 194 (on the Palestinian refugees) thereby emphasizing the legitimacy of crossing the fence; **make use of cars, donkeys, horses and more** (Facebook page of the "Great Return March," May 7, 2018).

► According to the plan published by the supervisory authority of the "Great Return March" to encourage participants in the Nakba Day march, **starting on Sunday, May 13, 2018, public address systems will be used in mosques and on the streets. The public address systems will be used starting at noon and continue until Monday morning. On Monday, masses of people will arrive in the camps of return set up a few hundred meters from the fence, and from there they will start marching towards the security fence with the objective of crossing it** (Al-Quds Al-Araby, May 9, 2018). As part of the preparations, the Supreme National Authority for the "Great Return March" set up the **"Main World Return Tent"** in a camp east of Gaza City (Al-Aqsa, May 8, 2018).

► **Yahya Sinwar, head of Hamas’s Political Bureau in the Gaza Strip, is personally involved in the preparations.** He held a preparatory meeting for the events called “**the March of the Millions**” with representatives of the various organizations, activists of the “Return March” and young Palestinians from the Gaza Strip. The meeting was also attended by **senior media figures** (Filastin al-Youm, May 8, 2018). At the meeting, he called for extensive participation in the forthcoming events. **He called on his audience to carry out the protest actions at all costs, saying that they would rather die as shaheeds; or die hungry and respected rather than humiliated and oppressed** (PALINFO, May 9, 2018). Sinwar further noted in his encouragement statement to the youth that “he is afraid of dying in bed, and **is hoping to die as a shaheed in the Return marches**” (SAMA News; PalToday, May 9, 2018).



Right: Yahya Sinwar in the preparatory meeting in Gaza (Hamas’s website, May 9, 2018). Left: Young Palestinians who took part in the meeting with Sinwar waving wire cutters, tires, and a kite. Some of the participants are wounded, maybe from previous demonstrations (Shehab Facebook page, May 9, 2018)

► In an interview by **Ahmad Abu Ruteima, spokesman of the “Great Return March,”** he said that during the last week before Nakba Day, actions of the “Great Return March” would be enhanced, **reaching their culmination on May 14 and 15.** When asked whether, on May 15, the demonstrators will break through the security fence, he gave an evasive answer, saying that no decision to break through the fence was made. However, he noted, the “Great Return March” has no orderly “decision-making center” and “**it is the participating youngsters** who will decide.” Therefore, he added, the organizing committee members cannot guarantee that this will not happen. He also noted that **breaking through the fence was the right of the Palestinian refugees, as “they will anyhow return to their homes one day”** (Al-Aqsa, May 8, 2018).



Meeting of the PFLP student faction on the subject of “Popular Resistance,” as part of the preparations for the “March of the Millions” (Facebook page of the “Great Return March,” May 8, 2018)

One of the surfers on Hamas’s forum published “operational guidelines” in advance of Nakba Day for those who intended to penetrate into Israeli territory. Following are some of the guidelines (Hama’s forum, May 9, 2018):

- ◆ Prepare a backpack containing dates, a bottle of water, wire cutters (for cutting the fence), bandage and iodine.
- ◆ **You should break the fence in more than one place and far from the five demonstration sites of the Gaza Strip, in order to wear out the IDF.**
- ◆ You must study the map of Israel and know it in advance. This can be done through the Internet. You should designate a certain place on the map [at which you intend to arrive] and memorize the directions. **In addition, you should learn how to use weapons, especially M-16 [assault rifle].**
- ◆ **You should be careful not to move in open places.** Move carefully near fences or buildings.
- ◆ It is recommended **to try to move in groups of at least three people.**
- ◆ **You should not carry a cellphone.** Instead, carry a cigarette lighter and a small flashlight.
- ◆ You should stay away from police dogs; you should know that throwing sand in their eyes disorients them.
- ◆ **You should watch out for cameras and try to sabotage them or pull them out.**

► The Facebook page of the “Great Return March” published a post (May 9, 2018) with answers to the surfers’ questions, “What [will happen] after the breaking through on May 14 and 15? **What should they do; and where should Palestinians who entered Israeli**

territory on Nakba Day go.” Following are several suggestions and answers given by surfers on the Facebook page (Facebook page of the “Great Return March”, May 9, 2018):

- ◆ **Bulldozers should be provided in order to remove the fence between Israel and the Gaza Strip** and pave the way for the demonstrators.
- ◆ **[The rioters who succeed in penetrating into Israel] may stay in Israeli territory and inside IDF outposts without sabotaging them.**
- ◆ **Gathering points should be established inside Israeli territory** near the fence; people should not return to the Gaza Strip.
- ◆ **Information on the media should be increased** so that Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank **arrive at the friction sites with Israel on May 14 and 15 to exercise the right of return.**

Statements by senior figures of Hamas and other organizations involved in the march

► Following are statements by senior officials and spokesmen of Hamas and other organizations involved in organizing the march:

- ◆ According to **Abdel Latif al-Qanua, Hamas’s spokesman**, in mid-May, a large, unprecedented march is expected to take place. According to him, it will be **“a decisive day in the history of the Palestinian people”** (Abdel Latif al-Qanua’s Twitter account, May 7, 2018).
- ◆ **Ismail Radwan, senior Hamas figure and member of the Supreme National Authority for the Return March**, called for general mobilization and **storming en masse on May 14** in order to emphasize the Palestinians’ objection to the transfer of the US Embassy to Jerusalem. According to him, **May 14 will be an “extraordinary” day** in the confrontation with Israel (Al-Aqsa, May 8, 2018).
- ◆ **Ahmad Mudallal, PIJ senior figure**, 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 settlements en masse” and invent new fighting tactics against them, similar to the kites of the Gaza Strip** (Al-Aqsa, May 5, 2018).
- ◆ **Issam Hamad, member of the Legal Committee of the Return March**, said that Friday, May 11, 2018, would represent the opening of a “special week,” because on May

14, a great many Palestinians will be gathering to object to the transfer of the US Embassy to Jerusalem, and on May 15 they will protest the Palestinian deportation of 1948. He also added that on that day, **the next steps of the “Great Return March” would be announced** (Al-Mayadeen, May 4, 2018).

Call for solidarity events in Judea and Samaria and in other arenas

Judea and Samaria

The organizers of the “Great Return March” are also trying to recruit **the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria and even Israeli Arabs to join** the Return march events. **As part of that, they reiterated their call on all Palestinians, including residents of the refugee camps, to take part in the Friday activities** (May 11, 2018: “Friday of preparation and a warning signal”). In addition, they called on them **to prepare for a larger event on May 14, the day on which the US Embassy will be transferred to Jerusalem** (Facebook page of the “Great Return March,” May 7, 2018).

► **Mohammad Alyan, chairman of the National Committee for Defending the Right of Return**, held a press conference in Ramallah, in which he updated on activities planned in advance of Nakba Day. According to Alyan, **a main procession is scheduled to take place on May 14, 2018, in Ramallah, around the time of the transfer of the US Embassy to Jerusalem**. In addition, according to him, **additional processions will be held at the friction sites in Judea and Samaria**. In schools, lessons will be dedicated to the issue, and the Friday sermon will be focused on Nakba Day (Ma'an News Agency, May 9, 2018).

Calls on Palestinians in Arab countries to hold their own events at the same time as the events of the Return March

► **Hisham Abu Mahfouz, Deputy Secretary-General of the Popular Conference of Palestinians Abroad**, said that **Palestinians in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Europe would hold parallel activity on May 15** (Safa, May 8, 2018). Khaled al-Batsh, PIJ senior figure, said that tents had been set up in more than 50 countries as a token of solidarity with the Palestinians.

► In response to the events in Syria, the Facebook page of the “Great Return March” published a post (May 10, 2018), in which it calls on the Syrian government and Hezbollah to

respond to “Israeli aggression” **and allow all Palestinian refugees in Syria and Lebanon to arrive in Palestine at the same time, as part of the “Great Return March”** (Facebook page of the “Great Return March,” May 10, 2018).

European countries

Britain

► **An invitation by the Palestinian Forum in Britain** was posted on the Facebook page of the “Great Return March” **to participate in a protest demonstration in front of Israel’s Embassy in London. The demonstration is due to take place on May 11, 2018, at 17:30, to mark the 70th anniversary of the Nakba and in protest against the transfer of the US Embassy to Jerusalem** (Facebook page of the “Great Return March,” May 9, 2018).



Poster released by the Palestinian Forum in Britain, calling for participation in a protest demonstration in front of Israel’s Embassy in London on May 11 (Facebook page of the “Great Return March,” May 9, 2018)

Greece

► The Facebook page of the “Great Return March” published a call by pro-Palestinian organizations **in Greece to hold a protest demonstration marking Nakba Day in front of Israel’s Embassy in Athens on May 15, 2018, at 18:00. According to the message, a massive march to the US Embassy will be held afterwards** (Facebook page of the “Great Return March,” May 10, 2018).



The invitation to hold a protest demonstration marking Nakba Day in front of Israel's Embassy in Athens (Facebook page of the "Great Return March," May 10, 2018)

Austria



The Facebook page of the "Great Return March" published an invitation by Palestinian organizations in Austria to participate in a demonstration in Vienna marking the 70th anniversary of the Nakba on May 13, 2018, between 15:00-18:00 (Facebook page of the "Great Return March," May 10, 2018)