



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (May 9-15, 2018)

Overview

- ▶ Events this past week focused on the **violent, pre-planned demonstrations of the "great return march" on May 14, 2018. They were accompanied by mass riots along the Gaza Strip border.** They were held on the same day the ceremony was held marking **the relocation of the United States embassy to Jerusalem.** In the Gaza Strip about **40,000 people** demonstrated and rioted at **13 locations** along the security fence. During the riots **60 Palestinians were killed** (their organizational identities are currently being examined by the ITIC). **IDF sources stressed the violence on the Palestinian side, noting it was higher** than the violence of the past weeks. Under cover of the riots, terrorist operatives carried out and attempted to carry out attacks, placing IEDs and shooting at IDF forces.
- ▶ Hamas and the other terrorist organizations called on the residents of Judea and Samaria to join the demonstrations. **Response was poor.** Prominent was a large demonstration near the Qalandia crossing, attended by about 1,800 people, some of whom clashed with Israeli security forces.
- ▶ **In the political sphere,** the Palestinian Authority (PA) announced a number of measures, including joining international organizations (which the United States threatens to leave if the Palestinians are granted membership); submitting legal suits against Israel in the International Criminal Court in the The Hague (ICC) for its conduct (a "senior Palestinian source" claimed a case was being prepared against several IDF commanders, accusing them of "war crimes" against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip); and calling for emergency meetings of the UN Security Council and the UN Human Rights Council to appoint a committee to investigate Israel's actions.

Large-scale Palestinian riots and attempts to penetrate into Israeli territory during the events of May 14, 2018

► During the morning hours of May 14, 2018, thousands of demonstrators and rioters arrived at the fence along the Israel-Gaza Strip border.¹ In IDF assessment, in the early afternoon at the height of the demonstrations, **there were about 40,000 demonstrators gathered at 13 focal points along the fence.** Thousands of demonstrators remained behind in the region of the tents, at a distance of about 500 meters (about 3/10 of a mile) from the fence.

► **The demonstrators at the fence rioted and clashed with IDF forces.** They burned tires, threw pipe bombs and Molotov cocktails at the fence and IDF forces and launched incendiary kites. Some of them tried to cross the fence (IDF spokesperson, May 14, 2018). **IDF sources described the violence as "unprecedented" and said it was worse than the violence of the previous weeks.** Many women were present in the front lines of demonstrators. Incendiary kites were flown into Israeli territory, causing many fires in the fields of Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip. In the evening, apparently following Hamas instructions, the demonstrators left the area (Haaretz, May 15, 2018).

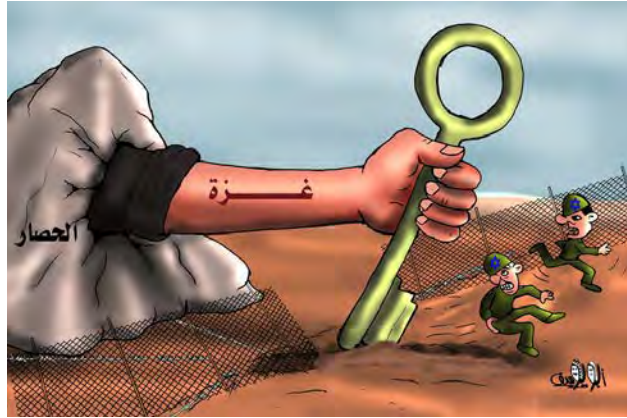


Fire in Mefalsim, one of the communities near the Gaza Strip, caused by an incendiary kite flown from inside the Strip (Safa Twitter account, May 14, 2018)

► During the events it was obvious that **the riots were planned, controlled and supervised by Hamas operatives.** Confirmation of Hamas involvement was ascertained by **information gained by interrogating Palestinians who crossed the fence into Israeli territory.** According to the interrogations, **Hamas encourages and dispatches demonstrators (including children and adolescents)** to the border to carry out violent acts, vandalize

¹ On May 14, 2018, a general strike was called in the Gaza Strip. All public and commercial institutions were closed, apparently to facilitate participation in the march (Filastin al-Yawm, May 13, 2018).

security installations, and even cross the fence. On the other hand, Hamas forbade its operatives to approach the fence, lest they be killed or captured by IDF forces, and therefore when they are present in the field (i.e., among the rioters) they wear civilian clothing. **It is Hamas operatives who supply the tires for burning, the gasoline for the incendiary kites and other measures.** Hamas also ensures that the activity on the ground is represented to the media as "a popular uprising" and not as Hamas-led violent activity (Israel Security Agency information, May 14, 2018).



Cartoon from a Hamas website encouraging Gazans to break through the security fence (Twitter account of the Shehab news agency, May 13, 2018)



Rioters set tires on fire near the security fence in the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of Shehab, May 14, 2018)



Right: Palestinians riot near the security fence east of Gaza City (Safa Twitter account, May 14, 2018). Left: Attempt by Palestinian (who was killed) to cut through the security fence east of Beit Hanoun (Facebook page of Beit Hanoun News, May 14, 2018)



Right: Palestinian rioters cut the barbed wire fence during clashes east of Jabalia (Facebook page of Beit Hanoun News, May 14, 2018). Left: Rioters use a slingshot to attack IDF forces in the eastern part of Rafah (Facebook page of QudsN, May 14, 2018)

Attacks against IDF forces

► Under the cover of the demonstrations, there were incidences of gunfire and IEDs used to attack IDF forces (IDF spokesperson, May 14, 2018).

- ◆ At around noon an IDF force near the fence in the Rafah region, the site of one of the main riots, **prevented a three-man squad of armed terrorists from placing an IED.** The force shot and killed the terrorists.
- ◆ Also during the afternoon, **two shooting attacks were carried out against IDF forces.** In response Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a Hamas post in the Jabalia region (northern Gaza Strip).



Hamas post in the northern Gaza Strip attacked by the IDF (Facebook page of Shehab, May 14, 2018)

- ◆ **At around 1500 hours an IED exploded near the fence in the northern Gaza Strip.** In response Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked 11 Hamas targets. IDF tanks shot at Hamas posts in the northern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, May 14, 2018).
- ◆ **During the evening Palestinians shot at IDF forces in the southern Gaza Strip.** In response IDF tanks shot at a Hamas observation post.
- ◆ **Also during the evening, for the third time, the Gazans set fire to the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing (a lifeline through which goods enter the Gaza Strip).** Despite the act of arson, the Israeli defense minister agreed to the IDF's recommendation to open the crossing for the passage of trucks bringing supplies into the Gaza Strip.



Gazans break into the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing and set fires (Facebook page of Hassan Aslih, May 14, 2018)

IDF activity

- ▶ To cope with the mass riots IDF training was suspended. In addition, the forces along the border were reinforced with additional units and intelligence-collecting measures. **Before the demonstrations began the IDF distributed fliers warning the residents of the Gaza Strip not to approach the fence to damage it, not to attempt to carry out terrorist attacks and not to serve as pawns for Hamas** (IDF spokesperson, May 13, 2018). According to the IDF spokesperson, reinforcements were deployed to cope with a wide variety of scenarios. The IDF, said the spokesperson, does not shoot at demonstrators who come to express solidarity, **but focus specifically on those who come to carry out acts of terrorism** (IDF spokesperson, May 14, 2018).
- ▶ Due to IDF activity and despite their repeated attempts, **the demonstrators did not achieve their objective to force their way through the fence.** Israel warned Hamas that in

the event of attempts to break into Israeli territory continued, Israel would escalate its responses and would not hesitate to attack Hamas' leaders (Ynet, May 14, 2018).



Flysheets in Arabic distributed by the IDF to Gazans. Right: A warning not to approach the security fence. Left: The Arabic reads, "The Gaza Strip in 2025? You will decide" (Facebook page of Hassan Aslih, May 13, 2018)

Casualties

- The Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip reported that **60 Palestinians had been killed and more than 2,000 wounded**, some of them critically. The ministry of the interior in the Gaza Strip reported that **ten security force operatives subordinate to the ministry were among those killed** (Facebook page of the ministry of the interior in the Gaza Strip, May 14, 2018).²
- Among those killed were several Hamas figures, including **Izz al-Din Musa al-Sambak**, 14, from the al-Bureij refugee camp, **son of senior Hamas figure Musa al-Sambak**, deputy minister of labor in the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of Maghazi.news, and al-Mushraq News, May 14, 2018); **Ahmed Mahmoud Muhammad al-Rantisi**, 27, son of **Dr. Mahmoud al-Rantisi (Abu Anas)**, a senior Hamas figure in the western part of Gaza City, (Twitter account of Adham Abu Salmiya, a Hamas activist who is deputy chairman of the Zakat committee in Deir al-Balah and spokesman for the "Authority to break the siege on Gaza, May 14, 2018). **Among the wounded were Muaz, Isma'il Haniyeh's son, and two of his nephews** (al-Mashraq News, May 14, 2018).

² The ITIC is currently examining the names of those killed and will soon issue a report regarding their organizational affiliation.

► The Palestinian ministry of health transferred emergency aid to the Gaza Strip through the Erez crossing (Ma'an, May 14, 2018). It also urged Egypt to assist the hospitals in the Gaza Strip by sending medical teams, medicines and emergency medical equipment. A spokesman for the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip issued an urgent call for Gazans to go blood bank branches to donate blood (Twitter account of Ashraf al-Qidra, May 14, 2018).

Statements from senior Hamas figures

- Many senior Hamas figures were interviewed by the media covering the events:
 - ◆ Senior Hamas figure **Isma'il Radwan** said the message Hamas wanted to send to Israel was that Israel's terrorism would not stop the "great return march." He said the masses that had gathered at the fence to continue the march. He also threatened that if Israel carried out "crimes" against the Palestinian people it would pay the price (al-Mayadeen, May 14, 2018).
 - ◆ **Fathi Hamad**, a member of Hamas' political bureau, said the demonstrations would continue because Israel understood only "the language of force." He called on the youth to continue the intifada and accused Israel of hiding behind its tanks and planes. He ended by saying "better death than humiliation" (al-Aqsa, May 14, 2018).
 - ◆ **Khalil al-Haya**, a member of Hamas' political bureau, said the "peaceful, popular" demonstrations would continue until the goals of the Palestinian people to lift the "siege" and end the [Israeli] "occupation" had been achieved (Shehab, May 14, 2018).



Right: Fathi Hamad, senior Hamas figure in the Gaza Strip, visits the central Gaza Strip (Shehab Facebook page, May 14, 2018). Left: Khalil al-Haya interviewed near the security fence east of Gaza City (al-Jazeera YouTube channel, May 14, 2018)

- ◆ **Muhammad al-Mudallal**, senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) figure, said that the masses that had gone to the fence were a clear message to the government of Israel that the Palestinian people would not waive their rights. He also said that any attempt to

prevent the "great return march" and prevent the masses from going to the border would fail (al-Aqsa, May 14, 2018).

Poor response in Judea and Samaria

► In Judea and Samaria there was a poor response to Hamas' call to participate in demonstrations. There were a number of demonstrations at the "traditional" locations. **The largest was held near the Qalandia crossing, northwest of Jerusalem, where about 1,800 demonstrators arrived.** Some of them clashed with the Israeli security forces. There were also demonstrations in Ramallah, near the Tomb of Rachel in Bethlehem and in Shuafat (east Jerusalem).



Right: Clashes with Israeli security forces at the Qalandia crossing. Left: Nakba Day march in the center of Ramallah (Wafa, May 14, 2018)

International reactions (initial report)

► In the wake of the events in the Gaza Strip, **Turkey and South Africa announced they were recalling their ambassadors from Israel.** Turkey also declared three days of national mourning. **Riyadh Mansour**, PA representative to the UN, held a press conference where he called for a meeting of the UN Security Council. He passed out copies of a letter he had written to the president of the Security Council (al-Jazeera, May 14, 2018). **The request made by Kuwait to hold an emergency Security Council meeting and to begin an independent investigation into the events along the Gaza Strip border was vetoed by the United States** (Agence-France Presse, May 14, 2018).

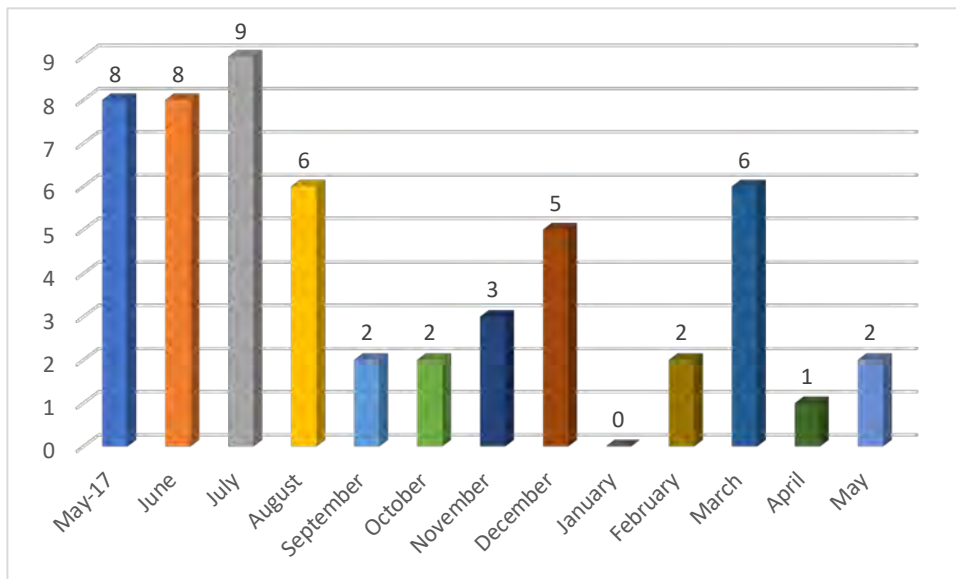
Judea and Samaria

Prevention of terrorist attacks

► On Friday, May 11, 2018, there were **two attempted vehicular attacks:**

- ◆ A vehicle hit an IDF soldier standing at a checkpoint at the Ganot Junction near the community of Shavei Shomron in Samaria. The soldier's legs were injured. The IDF said it was a deliberate attempted vehicular attack.
- ◆ A short time later an attempt was made to run over a soldier standing at a checkpoint in the Hebron region. No casualties were reported. The driver of the vehicle was detained.

Significant terrorist attacks during the past year³

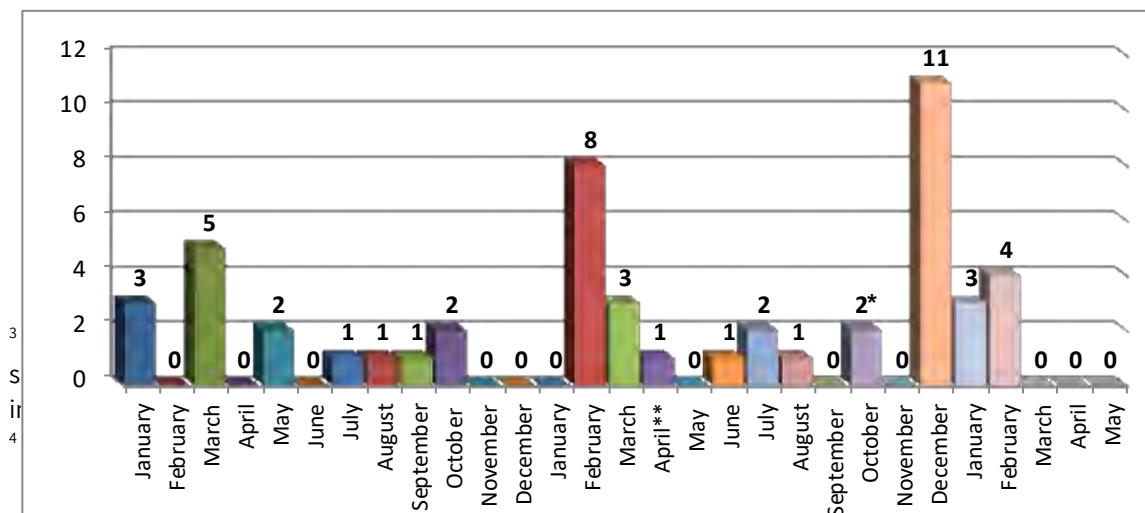


Israel's South

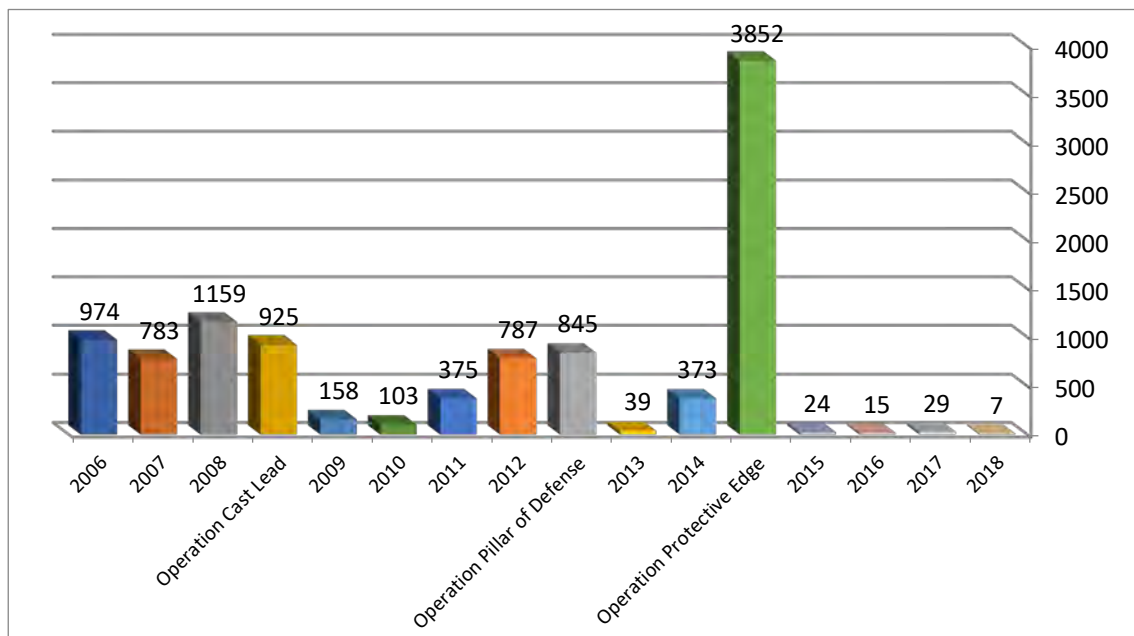
Rocket fire⁴

► This past 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.

Monthly Distribution of Rocket Hits in Israel since January 2016



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Hamas terrorist tunnel neutralized

► **The Israeli Air Force neutralized a Hamas attack tunnel which was being dug to enter Israeli territory near the Erez crossing.** The tunnel, whose progress had been monitored by the IDF for weeks, had not yet reached Israeli territory. The route of the tunnel placed it in Israeli territory, near the Erez crossing, which is used as a passageway for people, especially humanitarian cases. According to the IDF spokesperson, **it was the ninth Hamas tunnel neutralized by the IDF and the first that was destroyed before it reached Israeli territory** (IDF spokesperson, May 12, 2018).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The Rafah crossing

► On May 12, 2018, the Rafah crossing opened for the passage of goods and people in both directions, and it will remain open until May 17, 2018 (Palinfo, May 13, 2018). Among the articles authorized for entrance were steel and cement (Sama, May 13, 2018).

The supply of electricity

► The electric company in the Gaza Strip reported that electricity is supplied in cycles of four hours and a 16-hour hiatus. That is because, according to the report, only power lines from Israel provide the Gaza Strip with electricity (Rafah News, May 13, 2018).

► In view of the situation, the electric company in the Gaza Strip announced that it would face enormous difficulties to provide electricity for all the residents and institutions during Ramadan and the summer season. In the past two months, according to the announcement, the company's payment collection greatly declined, primarily because workers in the public sector were not receiving their salaries. That forced the electric company to halt the operation of the power plant, because it could not find the funds necessary to buy diesel fuel for operating the plant (website of the electric company in the Gaza Strip, May 9, 2018).

Egyptian attempt to restrain Hamas

► On May 13, 2018, the day before the May 14 events, a Hamas delegation, led by **Isma'il Haniyeh**, head of Hamas' political bureau, left the Gaza Strip to meet in Egypt with the head of Egyptian General Intelligence. The delegation, which also included **Khalil al-Haya and Rawhi Mushtaha**, was flown to Cairo in an Egyptian military helicopter (Araby Post, May 13, 2018). The nature of the topics discussed was not reported. **Apparently Egypt tried to restrain Hamas before the events of Nakba Day, but without success** (judging by the results of the events).



The Hamas delegation emerging from an Egyptian military helicopter (Araby Post, May 13, 2018)

Yahya al-Sinwar meets with foreign correspondents in the Gaza Strip

► On May 10, 2018, **Yahya al-Sinwar, head of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip**, held his first press briefing for foreign correspondents in the Gaza Strip. Asked about Israel's "aggression" against Iran, he said Iran supported the "Palestinian resistance" [i.e., Hamas]. He added that Hamas condemned all aggression against an Arab or Islamic country, or any other country, carried out without reason, but Hamas' decision to participate in any given conflict would depend only on the movement's own interests (Hamas website, English version, May 11, 2018).



**Yahya al-Sinwar meets with foreign correspondents
(Hamas website, English version, May 11, 2018)**

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

PA reactions to the relocation of the American Embassy to Jerusalem

► In view of the relocation of the American embassy to Jerusalem and the events in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian leadership held a meeting headed by Mahmoud Abbas (who had returned from a visit to countries in South America) to discuss possible responses (Safa, May 14, 2018). Mahmoud Abbas began the meeting with a moment of silence in memory of the Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip. He declared three days of mourning and a full commercial strike for May 15, 2018, to mark Nakba Day.

► Mahmoud Abbas gave a speech in which **he called the American embassy "a new settlement,"** saying he would reject all American mediation between Israel and the Palestinians. **He continued rewriting history to "prove" that the Palestinians, not the Jews, had the right to the land of Israel.** He said, "We have repeated more than once that it is a historical distortion, **because this Palestinian land was the land of the Canaanites, our**

grandfathers, before it was the land of our father Abraham, thus we have existed on this land without interruption" (Mahmoud Abbas' Facebook page, May 14, 2018).

► **Saeb Erekat, member of Fatah's Central Committee**, said the Palestinians had begun implementing the decisions made by the Palestinian National Council, especially the decision **to reject American administration as a partner in the peace process**. He also referred to the **decisions made during the meeting of the Palestinian leadership**, including the following (Wafa, May 14, 2018):

- ◆ Signing and joining a number of international organizations.
- ◆ Submitting a legal suit against Israel in the ICC because of the settlements.
- ◆ A call for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, and proposing a resolution condemning Israel's actions.
- ◆ A call for an emergency meeting of the Human Rights Council to appoint a committee to investigate Israel's actions.
- ◆ Appointing a committee of members of the PLO's Executive Committee and Fatah's Central Committee to define relations with Israel.



Mahmoud Abbas holds a meeting of the Palestinian leadership in the Muqata'a in Ramallah in response to the events in the Gaza Strip and the opening of the American embassy in Jerusalem (Wafa and Mahmoud Abbas' Facebook page, May 14, 2018).



Cartoon on a Hamas website calling the relocation of the American embassy to Jerusalem "a time bomb" (Palinfo Twitter account, May 13, 2018).

Preparing legal suits against Israelis and plans to join international organizations

► A "senior source" in the PA said **a legal suit had been prepared against several IDF commanders who had carried out "war crimes" against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.** Another suit had been prepared against senior Israeli leaders who had issued decisions to settle in the "occupied territories." According to the source, the suits will be brought against Israel in the ICC. The source also said that **the Palestinians were taking measures to join five international organizations the United States had threatened to leave if the Palestinians were allowed to join.** One of the organizations mentioned was the UN's World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). The source said that if the United States left the organization it would cause extensive financial damage, because the United States worked through the organization to limit the copying and counterfeiting of intellectual property, especially by countries like China and Iran (al-Hayat, May 11, 2018).

Palestinian response to Israel's decision to prevent the transfer of funds to families of shaheeds and prisoners

► On May 7, 2018, the **Israeli Knesset (parliament) passed the first version of a bill that would enable Israel to deduct from the funds it transfers to the PA, according to the Oslo Accords, money paid to imprisoned terrorists and the families of martyrs.** In response, **Issa Qaraqe, chairman of the PA commission of detainees and ex-detainees affairs,** said the Palestinian people and leadership would not comply with Israel's extortion. **He said the PA would continue supporting the prisoners and the wounded, their families and the families of shaheeds.** He called for a struggle against the "aggression" of Israel, which acted under the aegis of racist laws negating to the rights of the Palestinian people and international law. He called on parliaments around the globe to boycott the Knesset (Wafa, May 8, 2018).

The Hamas-affiliated faction wins the student council election in Bir Zeit University

► On May 9, 2018, elections were held for the student councils in universities in Judea and Samaria. At **Bir Zeit University** the Islamic Bloc won for the fourth consecutive year, with a majority of 24 seats. **Isma'il Haniyeh** congratulated the Islamic Bloc, saying the results of the

elections proved that partnership was the best way to build a Palestinian political regime. He said the elections proved that the Islamic Bloc could not be discounted and that Hamas could not be ignored (Hamas website, May 10, 2018).

► **The day before the elections Facebook deleted the account of the Islamic Bloc in Bir Zeit University for the eighth time** (Paldf Twitter account, May 8, 2018). On March 7, 2018, the Israeli security forces detained **Omar Kiswani**, student council chairman and **head of the Islamic Bloc cell in the university**. He was detained on suspicion of involvement in terrorist activity. His interrogation revealed that he had been in contact with **Yassin Rabi'**, a **Hamas operative in the Gaza Strip**, and with Hamas operatives in Turkey, from whom he had received funds to promote Hamas activity in the university.



The Hamas student faction in Bir Zeit University thanks those who voted for it (Islamic Bloc Instagram account at Bir Zeit University, May 10, 2018)

Pictures from the Islamic Bloc campaign at the Palestine Technical University Kadoorie



A display of rocket models as part of the campaign propoganda of the Islamic Bloc, running for election at the Palestine Technical University Kadoorie for the first time (Facebook page of the Islamic Loyalty Bloc at the Pe Technical University Kadoorie, May 12, 2018).