



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(May 16-22, 2018)

Overview

- ▶ The "return marches" continue, also after the events of May 14, 2018. However, this past Friday (May 18) there was a decline in the number of rioters (a few thousand) and in the level of violence. The events ended without fatalities. In Judea and Samaria there has still been a poor response to Hamas' calls to join the marches and the violence that accompanies them, even after the beginning of the Muslim religious month of Ramadan.
- ▶ Senior Hamas figures encourage the demonstrators to continue holding demonstrations and riots and **even to die as shaheeds. Yahya al-Sinwar, head of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip**, said that in addition to the "routine" Friday marches there would be special events for **Naksa Day** (June 5, the day that marks the defeat of the Arab countries in the Six Day War) and **Jerusalem Day** (June 8, declared by Iran for the last Friday of Ramadan). On May 18, 2018, the UN Human Rights Council voted in favor of appointing a commission of inquiry to investigate Israel's actions during the recent events in the Gaza Strip. The commission will be appointed by the UN commissioner for human rights, and is expected to submit its report by March 2019.
- ▶ **Mahmoud Abbas, chairman of the Palestinian Authority (PA), was hospitalized in Ramallah.** According to reports from people close to him, he is suffering from pneumonia, but according to rumors on the Palestinian street the real information is being kept hidden from the public. Mahmoud Abbas' failing health has increased uncertainty about "the morning after," and **may encourage a power struggle among senior Fatah figures who see themselves as his heirs.**

Events of May 18, 2018

- ▶ The "return marches" to the border fence continue. However, on Friday, May 18, 2018, the first Friday of Ramadan, after events peaked on May 14, 2018, **there was a significant decline in the number of demonstrators and rioters and in the accompanying violence.** A few thousand Palestinian demonstrators gathered at five focal points along the Israel-

Gaza Strip border. A few thousand more gathered in the tent camps to the rear of the front lines, prayed and did not confront the IDF forces. The main focus of the demonstrations was near the Sajaiya neighborhood in Gaza City. The rioters were calmer than previously. They mainly threw stones and burned tires near the fence, but no attempts were made to cross the border. IDF forces responded with riot control measures and by shooting at rioters. Several fires broke out in Israeli territory, caused by incendiary kites flown from the Gaza Strip (Israeli media and the IDF spokesperson, May 18, 2018).



**Palestinians riot near the security fence on May 18, 2018
(Shehab Facebook page, May 18, 2018).**

Casualties

- ▶ **No one was killed during the events of May 18, 2018.** According to **Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip**, 56 Palestinians were wounded by gunfire and inhaling tear gas (Facebook page of Ashraf al-Qidra, May 18, 2018).
- ▶ The IDF reported the transfer of seven wounded Palestinians, who had Jordanian citizenship, from the Gaza Strip to Jordan for medical treatment. They were taken by Jordanian ambulances through the Erez crossing to Israeli territory and from there to Jordan via the Allenby crossing. The transfer of the wounded was at the request of King Abdallah of Jordan in coordination with the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories. In the meantime, during the past few days a number of trucks entered the Gaza Strip through the Erez crossing. They carried medical equipment for the residents of the Gaza Strip. Some of the Israeli equipment was returned by Hamas (IDF spokesperson, May 18, 2018).

Statements from senior Hamas figures

► Senior Hamas figures **Isma'il Haniyeh**, head of Hamas' political bureau, **Yahya al-Sinwar**, head of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip, **Khalil al-Haya** and **Ahmed Bahar** went to the main locations of the riots to encourage activists. **They gave speeches encouraging them to continue the riots and even to die as shaheeds.** In his noon sermon **Isma'il Haniyeh** praised the shaheeds, saying that to die as a shaheed is an honor from Allah and brings esteem to their parents and to Palestine. He denied a rumor that the organizations called for the marches to end, saying the "return march" would continue "peacefully" until its main objective had been achieved. He also said that **the deaths of the shaheeds had led to international reactions supporting the lifting of the "siege,"** and stressed that the marches had united the people (Watan TV, May 18, 2018). On May 18, 2018, **Yahya al-Sinwar** gave a speech calling on the demonstrators to continue their protest, saying the marches would continue until all the objectives had been achieved.



Isma'il Haniyeh attends the "great return march" in the eastern Gaza Strip (YouTube, May 18, 2018).

► **Maher Salah, senior "external" Hamas figure**, said the "great return march" had sent a message to the entire world that the Palestinian people had a "legal right" to return to their land. He said entering Israeli territory, even for a limited time, **was a symbol of that right** (al-Quds, May 17, 2018).

Poor response in Judea and Samaria continues

► **In Judea and Samaria response to the calls for residents to demonstrate remains poor.** On Friday May 18 about 40,000 Palestinians from Judea and Samaria passed through the various border crossings to pray in Jerusalem. The first Friday prayers of Ramadan on the Temple Mount, attended by tens of thousands of worshippers, were dedicated to the Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip. The prayers were peaceful and without exceptional

incident. Prayers held at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron were also without incident (IDF spokesperson and the Israeli media, May 18, 2018).



First Friday prayer of Ramadan, dedicated to the Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip (Wafa, May 17, 2018).

Forecast of future events

► The so-called National Authority for the "Great Return March" issued a public call to Palestinians to participate in the events of Friday, May 25, 2018, whose theme will be "We continue despite the siege." According to the call, activities will continue throughout the month of Ramadan (Safa, May 19, 2018). **Yahya al-Sinwar**, head of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip, said that there would also be special events held on Naksa Day (June 5, the day marking the defeat of the Arab states in the Six Day War) and on Jerusalem Day (June 8, initiated by Iran) (al-Mayadeen, May 21, 2018).

International reactions

► After the events of May 14, 2018, on May 18, 2018, the UN Human Rights Council voted to appoint a commission of inquiry to investigate Israel's recent actions in the Gaza Strip. There were 29 votes in favor, two against and 14 abstentions. The commission will be appointed by the UN commissioner for human rights and is **expected to submit its report by March 2019**. The meeting ended with a call to Israel to act in accordance with its international commitments, and respect and defend the rights of the Palestinians to life, security and freedom of expression and the right of assembly (Wafa, May 18, 2018).

YES	ABST	NO	ABST	NO	ABST
AFGHANISTAN	ABST	GERMANY	ABST	BERMUDA	
ALGERIA	ABST	HUNGARY	YES	SRI LANKA	
AUSTRALIA	YES	IRAQ	YES	SAUDI ARABIA	
BELGIUM	ABST	JAPAN	ABST	SENEGAL	
BRAZIL	ABST	KENYA	YES	SLOVAKIA	
BURUNDI	YES	KYRGYZSTAN	YES	SOUTH AFRICA	
CHINA	YES	MEXICO	YES	SPAIN	
COTE D'IVOIRE	YES	MONGOLIA	ABST	SWEDEN	
CUBA	ABST	NETHERLANDS	ABST	THAI	
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO	ABST	PERU	ABST	TURKEY	
ECUADOR	YES	PANAMA	YES	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	
EGYPT	YES	PARAGUAY	ABST	UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND	
ETHIOPIA	YES	PHILIPPINES	ABST	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	
GEORGIA	ABST	QATAR	YES	VENEZUELA (BOLEIVARIAN REPUBLIC)	
		REPUBLIC OF KOREA	NO		
	YES 29	ABST 14		NO 2	



Right: Meeting of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. Left: Results of the vote for the appointment of a commission of inquiry to investigate Israel's recent actions in the Gaza Strip (al-Mayadeen YouTube channel, May 20, 2018).

- ▶ A meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation held in Istanbul was attended by **Rami Hamdallah, prime minister of the Palestinian national consensus government** (replacing Mahmoud Abbas, whose health prevented him from attending). The meeting was also used as a forum for harsh propaganda attacks against Israel. Turkish President Erdogan gave a speech calling Israel's actions "atrocious and hooliganism," claiming Israel should be tried in a court of law for its "slaughter" of innocent people (al-Anadolu News, May 18, 2018).
- ▶ The final statement issued by the meeting called for a strong condemnation of Israel's "criminal activities" against unarmed civilians who were using their right to hold "**a [so-called] peaceful protest.**" It was decided to appeal to the UN Security Council and Human Rights Council to appoint an international commission of inquiry into the events in the Gaza Strip and to establish a mechanism for allotting blame to the relevant Israeli leaders (Jordanian new agency, May 18, 2018). At the same time, thousands gathered in Istanbul for a mass solidarity rally in support of the Palestinian people. President Erdogan spoke at the rally (al-Anadolu News, May 18, 2018).



PA Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah and Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan hold a joint press conference at an "extraordinary summit" of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (Wafa, May 19, 2018).

Judea and Samaria

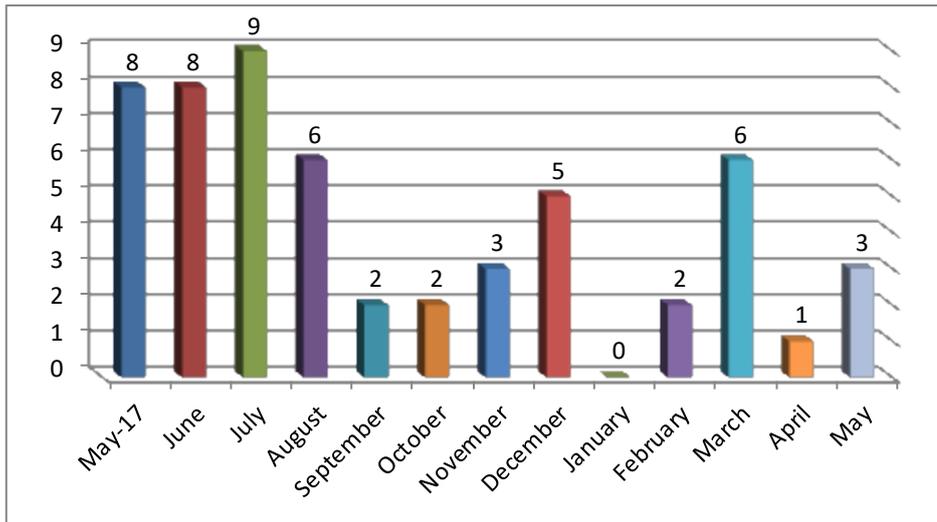
Terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria

- ▶ **Shooting attack** – On **May 22, 2018**, a shooting attack targeted an Israeli vehicle near **village of Naame (west of Ramallah)**. No casualties were reported. IDF forces searched the area (IDF spokesperson, May 22, 2018).
- ▶ Other prominent events in Judea and Samaria were the following:
 - ◆ **May 20, 2018** – Stones were thrown at Israeli policemen stationed at the **Nablus Gate on the Old City of Jerusalem**. A policeman was wounded and taken for medical treatment. An object was thrown at a bus, injuring a passenger. The police are looking for suspects (Facebook page of Red Alert, May 20, 2018).
 - ◆ **May 18, 2018** – There were violent clashes between IDF forces and Palestinians who threw stones and Molotov cocktails in **the Issawiya neighborhood of east Jerusalem**. IDF forces responded with riot control measures. No casualties were reported (Facebook page of Red Alert, May 20, 2018).
 - ◆ **May 18, 2018** – A number of Molotov cocktails were thrown at the security fence of **the community of Beit El (north of Ramallah)**. No casualties were reported. The fence was damaged.(Facebook page of Red Alert, May 18, 2018).



Car damaged by stones thrown near Beit El (INN, May 16, 2018).

Significant terrorist attacks during the past year ¹



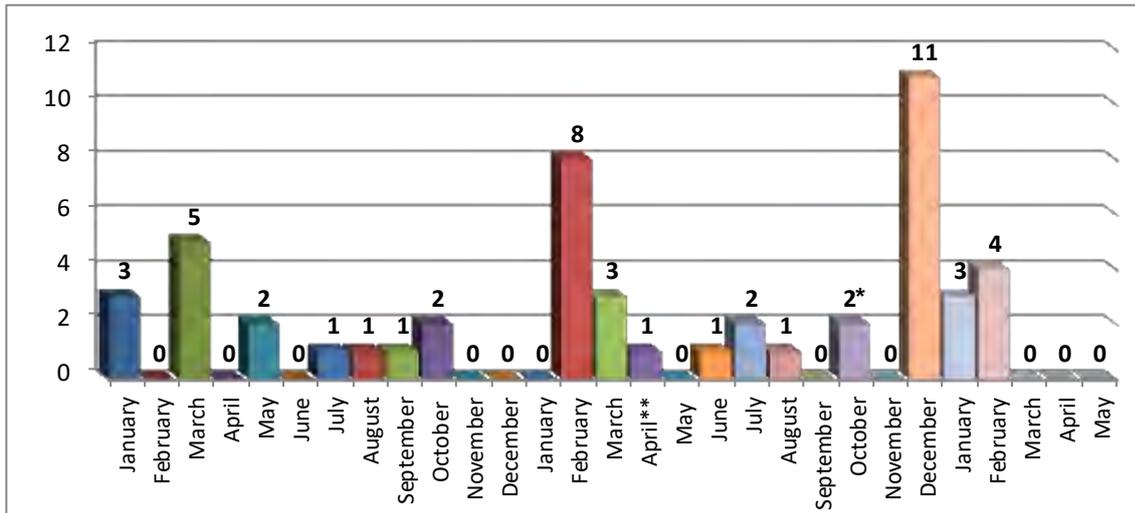
Israel's South

Rocket fire

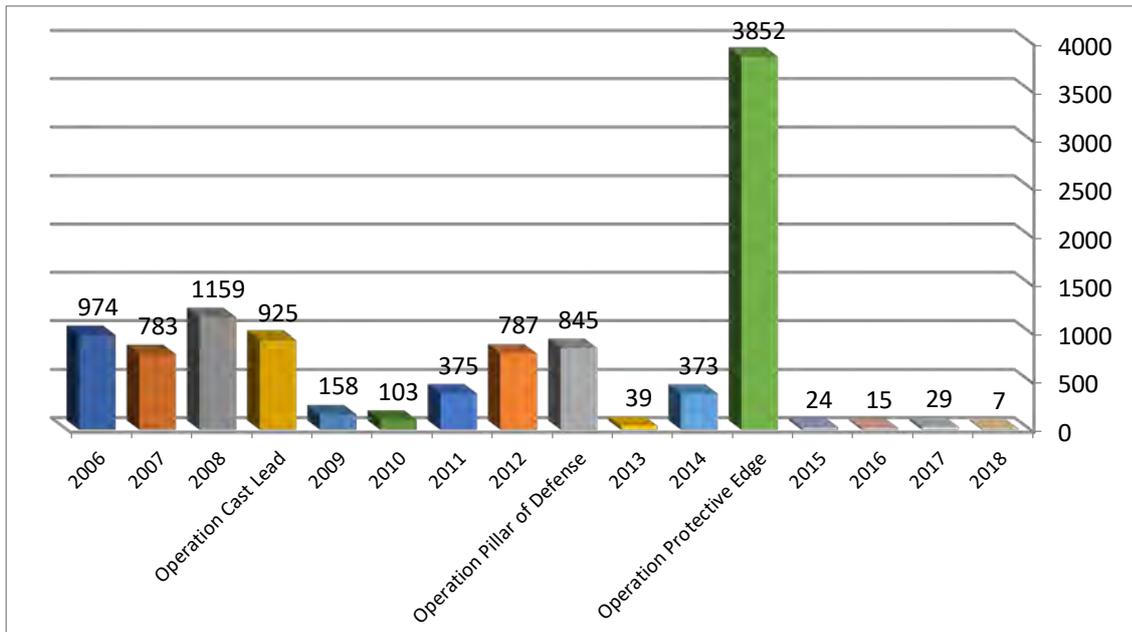
► This past week no rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory. So far "great return march" events have not been accompanied by rocket or mortar shell fire.

¹ 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.

Monthly Distribution of Rocket Hits in Israel since January 2016²



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Terrorist attacks carried out under the cover of demonstrations

► Under the cover of the demonstrations at the Gaza Strip border there have been a number of attempted terrorist attacks this past week. Incendiary kites were flown from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory, causing fires in the fields of the communities in the western Negev near the Gaza Strip.

² 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.



Fire near the community of Kissufim caused by an incendiary kite flown into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip (Shehab Facebook page, May 19, 2018).

► A number of prominent incidents were the following:

- ◆ **On May 22, 2018**, a number of Palestinians approached the security fence in the region of the al-Bureij refugee camp (central Gaza Strip) **near the community of Kissufim**. They apparently cut through the fence and set fire to an abandoned IDF post. An IDF force shot at them and they returned to the Gaza Strip. In response an IDF tank fired at a Hamas observation post in the southern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, May 22, 2018).



A squad of Palestinian operatives before they penetrate into the western Negev from the central Gaza Strip. One of them holds a barbed-wire cutter (Shehab Facebook page, May 18, 2018).

- ◆ **On May 16, 2018**, Palestinians shot at IDF soldiers. No casualties were reported. In response to the tank fire (following the infiltration into Israeli territory) **there was heavy machine gun fire at the southern Israeli city of Sderot and a number of times at IDF soldiers**. A number of bullet hit buildings in Sderot. The Palestinian media reported that the "resistance" had shot heavy machine guns at Sderot (Palinfo Twitter account, May 17, 2018). In response an IDF tank shot at a Hamas post in the northern

Gaza Strip. The Palestinian media reported that two observation posts east of Jabalia had been attacked. No casualties were reported.

- ◆ **On May 17, 2018**, in response to the attack on Sderot, Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a number of Hamas terrorist targets in the northern Gaza Strip and in Gaza City. According to the IDF spokesperson, four targets were attacked, including a facility for the production of weapons (IDF spokesperson, May 17, 2018). The Palestinian media reported attacks on a number of posts in the northern Gaza Strip and in the western part of Gaza City (Palinfo and Dunia al-Watan, May 17, 2018)

- ◆ **On May 16, 2018**, under cover of the demonstrations, a number of IEDs were placed near **the security fence near the community of Kfar Aza**. An IDF force neutralized the IEDs.

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The Kerem Shalom crossing

- ▶ **On May 17, 2018, supplies of gas and diesel fuel were renewed to the Gaza Strip through the Kerem Shalom crossing.** The crossing had ceased operations because of the severe damage inflicted three times by rioters, especially to the pipes bringing fuel and gas to the residents of the Gaza Strip. **The facilities are still under repair and the pipes are only partially operative.**

- ▶ On May 16, 2018, Hamas refused to allow two truckloads of Israeli medical equipment to enter the Gaza Strip through the Kerem Shalom crossing. The equipment was intended for hospitals in the Gaza Strip treating the many Palestinians wounded in the demonstrations. The two trucks returned to Israel (alresala.net, May 16, 2018).

The Rafah crossing

- ▶ **Egyptian sources reported that the Rafah crossing would remain open until further notice.** The crossing was supposed to close on May 17, 2018, but so far no date has been set. Egypt also allowed a convoy of medical equipment and food to enter the Gaza Strip (Wafa, May 19, 2018). The information office of the Rafah crossing reported that Egypt had raised the fee for people passing through the Rafah crossing to 300 Egyptian pounds [about \$17] (Dunia al-Watan, May 21, 2018).

Interview with Yahya al-Sinwar

► **Yahya al-Sinwar, head of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip, was interviewed by al-Mayadeen TV and related to a number of current topics** (al-Mayadeen, May 21, 2018):

- ◆ **The return marches in the Gaza Strip:** The marches are being held under Hamas direction and **will continue in their present format**. Al-Sinwar also repeated the lie that the marches will continue to be "peaceful" because, he said, **all the Palestinian organizations agree that it is the best "resistance" possible under the present circumstances**. He claimed that the objective of the marches had been achieved since they had successfully made the Palestinian cause the top of global priority. He claimed the high number of Palestinian casualties had sent a message to the international community that the Palestinian people had to be protected and enabled to realize their aspirations. He also said the marches had retained their nature as a "popular uprising" and had achieved **most of the strategic objectives Hamas had initially designated**. As for those killed, he said the Palestinians "sanctify death" the way Israelis sanctify life.
- ◆ **Continuation of the demonstrations and riots:** According to al-Sinwar, **all the organizations involved have formulated a working program for the next month to continue the activities near the security fence**. In addition to the Friday marches he mentioned two dates for large demonstrations: **Naksa Day** (June 5, the day marking the defeat of the Arab states in the Six Day War) and **Global Jerusalem Day** (June 8, and event initiated by Iran for the last Friday of Ramadan).
- ◆ **Agreement with Egypt regarding limiting the demonstrations: Yahya al-Sinwar denied the existence of such an agreement.** He claimed the massive participation in the recent marches proved that no such agreement had been reached.
- ◆ **The option of armed "resistance:"** Yahya al-Sinwar stressed that the **option of armed "resistance" is still on the table** but that because of current circumstances **for the time being it is not a preferable option**. However, he said Hamas would **return to armed activity and the use of force**. He said that since Operation Protective Edge they had been stockpiling weapons and had developed dramatically, achieving significant capabilities. He said the military formations, led by Hamas' military wing [the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades], had the ability to defend the Palestinian people.

◆ **Hamas' relations with Iran:** Regarding a question about relations with Qassem Soleimani, **Yahya al-Sinwar said Hamas coordinated with Hezbollah on a daily basis.** He said Hamas' relations with Iran were firm and that **Iran provided funds, weapons and the know-how of its experts to Hamas and other organizations.** He **said Hamas also maintained relations with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps and especially with Qassem Soleimani.** He said everyone was working against Israel ("the occupation") and for the sake of realizing the interests of the Palestinians.



Yahya al-Sinwar in a special interview with the Lebanese al-Mayadeen TV station (al-Mayadeen YouTube channel, date, 2018).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

PA activity in the International Criminal Court and international organizations

► **Wasel Abu Yusuf, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee,** said that decisions made by the PLO's Central Council and the Palestinian National Council would become operative in the coming days. He said the **Palestinians had already begun the process of joining a number of organizations the United States warned them not to join.** In addition, an appeal had been made to the International Criminal Court (ICC) regarding a number of files, among them the **"settlements file"** (Dunia al-Watan, May 19, 2018). On May 22, 2018, **Riyadh al-Maliki, foreign minister in the national consensus government,** met in The Hague with Fatou Bensouda, chief prosecutor of the ICC, and gave her the Palestinian appeal to the ICC regarding an investigation of the settlements and of Israel's activities in the territories. He asked that the Court fulfill its role as the body authorized to investigate the crimes connected to the settlements (Wafa, May 21, 2018).



Right: Riyadh al-Maliki meets with Fatou Bensouda and submits the Palestinian appeal regarding the settlements and Israel's actions in the territories. Left: al-Maliki holds a press conference in the The Hague after meeting with Fatou Bensouda (Palestinian TV, May 22, 2018).

Flotilla to the Gaza Strip – update

► At least **four boats, set sail for the Gaza Strip on May 20, 2018, part of the "Freedom Flotilla."** Among them were a fishing vessel called *al-Awda* ("the return") and flying the Norwegian flag, and three others flying the Swedish flag (the sailboats *Huria* ("freedom"), *Palestine* and the *Mairead*), According to the plan, they are supposed to anchor at several ports in Europe along the way and reach the Gaza Strip on July 27, 2018. They arrived in Copenhagen and sailed on May 22, 2018 to their next stop, Kiel in Germany (Facebook page of the International Committee for Breaking the Siege on the Gaza Strip," May 22, 2018).



The ships before they set sail from Copenhagen (Facebook page of Zaher Birawi, May 22, 2018).

► **Zaher Birawi accompanied the ships as they left the Copenhagen harbor,** having stayed in the city for several days (Facebook page of Zaher Birawi, May 22, 2018). Zaher Birawi is a Hamas- and Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated activist living in Britain. He has extensive experience in organizing marches and flotillas, and his title is "coordinator for the international committee for breaking the siege of the Gaza Strip." He was involved in the committee that prepared the "great return march" in the Gaza Strip. He also provided a platform for the demonstrations and riots in the Gaza Strip on the al-Hiwar TV channel

(affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood), which broadcasts from London, and where he is programming director (Facebook page of al-Hiwar TV, March 9, 2018).



Right: Zaher Birawi parts from the flotilla participants. Left: The vessel Huria ("freedom") (Facebook page of the Malaysian organization MyCARE, May 21, 2018).