



# News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(August 8 – 14, 2018)

## Overview

- ▶ This past week events focused on the fifth round of escalation between Hamas and the IDF, during which Hamas and the other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip launched approximately **180 rocket and mortar shells**. The IDF responded by **attacking about 150 targets**, most of them Hamas terrorist infrastructure and assets. The escalation ended after 24 hours with a ceasefire unilaterally decided by Hamas, with no formal Israeli participation.
- ▶ The fifth round of escalation and the "return march," which was held as usual on Friday, clearly illustrated **Hamas' determination to continue its policy of controlled violence**, implemented since March 30, 2018. As far as Hamas is concerned, as part of its policy, it is Hamas that **has determined new rules of engagement with Israel, and dictates the timing and nature of the rounds of escalation and how they end**. At the same time Hamas participates in the contacts for an agreement brokered by Egypt and the UN, and in talks for an internal Palestinian reconciliation, so far without significant progress.

## Israel's South

### The fifth round of escalation in the Gaza Strip

- ▶ **The fifth round of escalation between Hamas and the IDF took place on August 8 and 9, 2018**. The round began on August 7, 2018, after shots were fired from a Hamas post near Beit Lahia (northern Gaza Strip). Given previous sniper fire, the shots were interpreted by the IDF as sniper fire attacking an IDF force. In response an IDF tank shot a number of shells at the post from which the shots were fired, killing two Hamas terrorist operatives (Hamas military wing website, August 7, 2018). Hamas later announced that the shots had been fired as part of a display which had not targeted IDF forces. Hamas, adhering to its equation of "an attack in return for an attack and blood in return for blood," promised it would respond to the killing of its two military operatives.
- ▶ The response came after a delegation of the Hamas leadership, headed by Saleh al-Arouri, left the Gaza Strip. On August 8, 2018, an intensive barrage of rocket and mortar shell fire

began, attacking the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip. The attacks continued through the night of August 8 into the afternoon of August 9, 2018. The unusually large number of rockets and mortar shells (about 180) and **the deliberate hits inside the communities near the Gaza Strip showed Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) are intent upon determining the rules of engagement on the ground and to dictate to Israel the timing, nature and type of ending for the rounds of escalation.**

► The IDF responded by **attacking about 150 targets, primarily belonging to Hamas' infrastructure and its assets in the Gaza Strip.** After 24 hours of exchanging blows, **Hamas unilaterally decided to stop the rocket fire.** However, the Israeli prime minister's office denied that Israel had committed itself to the ceasefire (Haaretz, August 12, 2018).<sup>1</sup>

### Massive rocket and mortar shell fire

► **The fifth round of escalation was accompanied by about 180 rockets and mortar shells into Israeli territory.** The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted about 30 (IDF spokesperson, August 9, 2018). Most of the rockets and mortar shells were fired on the night of August 8, 2018. After a night of continual shelling, rockets and mortar shells were fired less frequently but continued until the following evening.

► Unlike the previous rounds, the rate of rocket and mortar shell fire was higher and was aimed at communities near the Gaza Strip. The range of rocket fire was also increased to include Ashqelon and Netivot, and one rocket even targeted Beersheba (40 kilometers from the Gaza Strip). **Twenty-three Israelis were evacuated to hospitals,** one in serious condition. In various locations homes and industrial structures were damaged. On August 13, 2018, a Grad 122mm rocket was found at a construction site in Netivot, having been fired during the round of escalation.

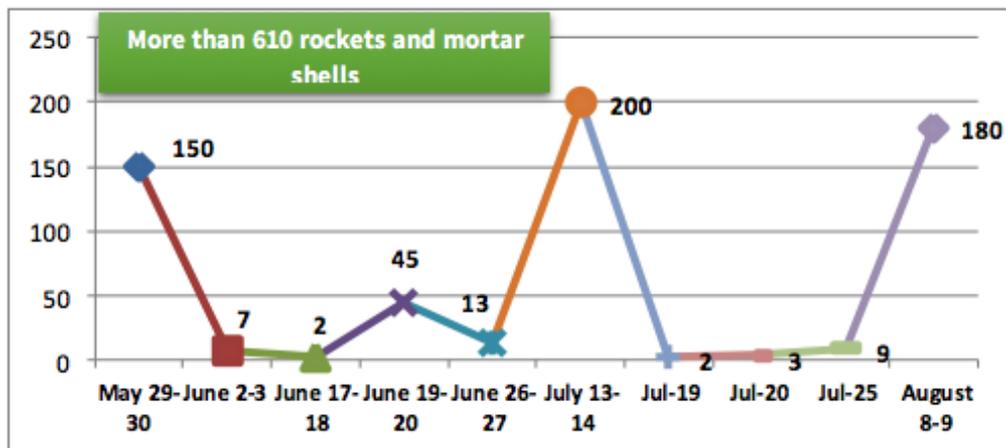
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<sup>1</sup> For further information, see the August 13, 2018, bulletin, "The fifth round of escalation between Israel and Hamas, August 8-9, 2018."



The Israeli security forces deal with a rocket that landed in the southern Israeli city of Sderot (Israel Police Force spokesperson's unit, August 8, 2018).

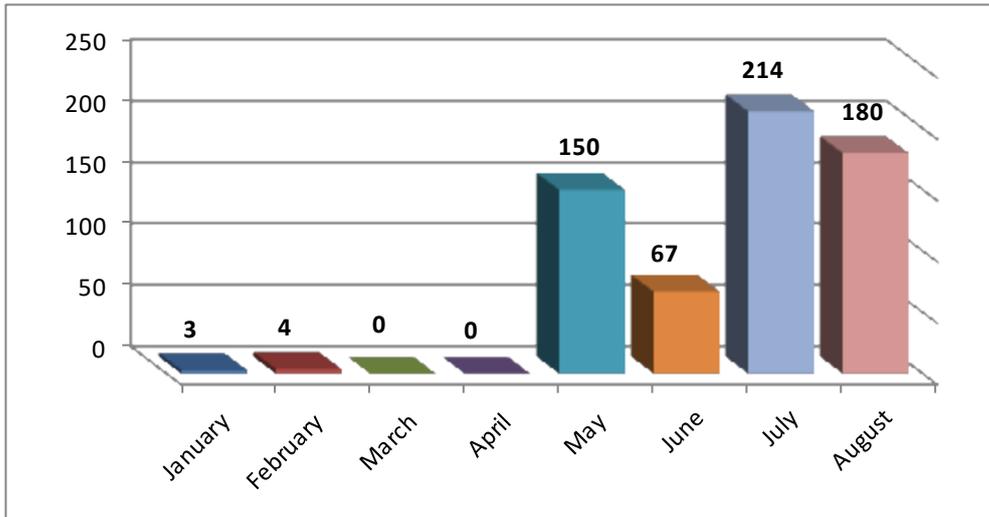
## Rocket and mortar shell fire during and between the recent rounds of escalation<sup>2</sup>



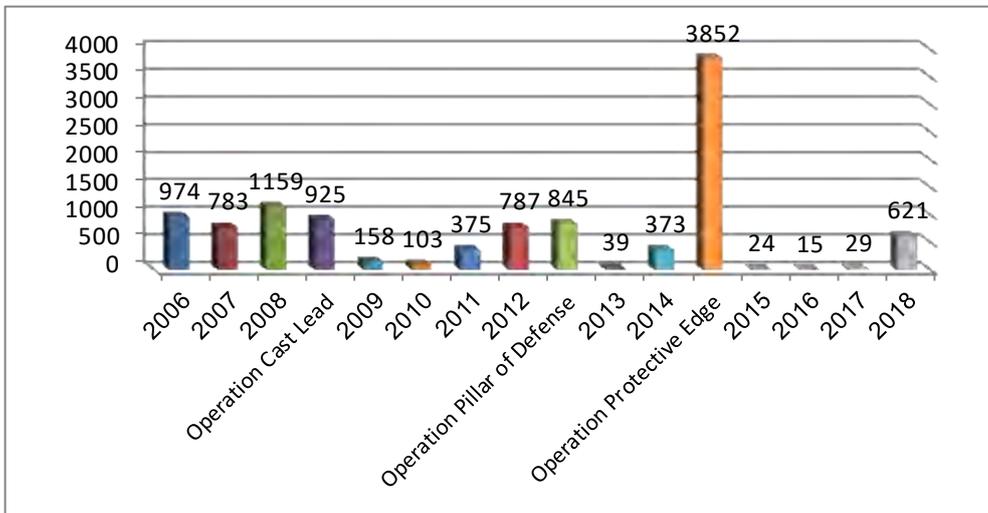
Minimum number of rockets and mortar shells fired in May, June and July. At this stage the ITIC cannot distinguish between rocket and mortar shell fire.

<sup>2</sup> The statistics do not include rockets that fell inside the Gaza Strip.

## Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire since January 2018



## Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



- In response to the rocket fire **Israeli Air Force fighter planes attacked about 150 targets in the Gaza Strip, including military and infrastructure targets and assets** belonging to the terrorist organizations, primarily Hamas.



**IDF attack on Gaza's port (Palinfo Facebook page, August 8, 2018).**

## The "return march"

► Despite the events, the Supreme National Authority of the Return March announced the "return marches" would take place as planned and called on the Gazan public to attend (Shabakat Quds, August 9, 2018). Hamas also encouraged broad participation (Shehab, August 9, 2018). The theme of the "return march" was "Freedom and life in the Gaza Strip." On August 10, 2018, about 9,000 Gazans gathered at the traditional friction points along the border with Israel (IDF spokesperson, August 10, 2018). During the events rioters clashed with IDF forces, burning tires near the fence and throwing stones at IDF soldiers; a hand grenade and an IED were thrown at the soldiers. An IDF force also identified an attempt to cross the fence. In response an IDF tank attacked a Hamas post in the southern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, August 10, 2018).

## Arson terrorism

► With the end of the fifth round of escalation arson terrorism returned, although to a lesser degree. Over the weekend incendiary kites and balloons were launched into Israeli territory and caused a number of fires. The Israeli Air Force operated a number of times against the squads launching incendiary balloons in the northern and central Gaza Strip. According to data from Israel's Fire and Rescue service, **since arson terrorism began it has caused 1,364 fires.** According to data from the Jewish National Fund, **as of August 13, 2018, 2,656 acres of open land and 2965 acres of nature preserves have been burned.**



**Launching incendiary balloons in eastern Gaza City during a "return march" (Palinfo Twitter account, August 10, 2018).**

## Judea and Samaria

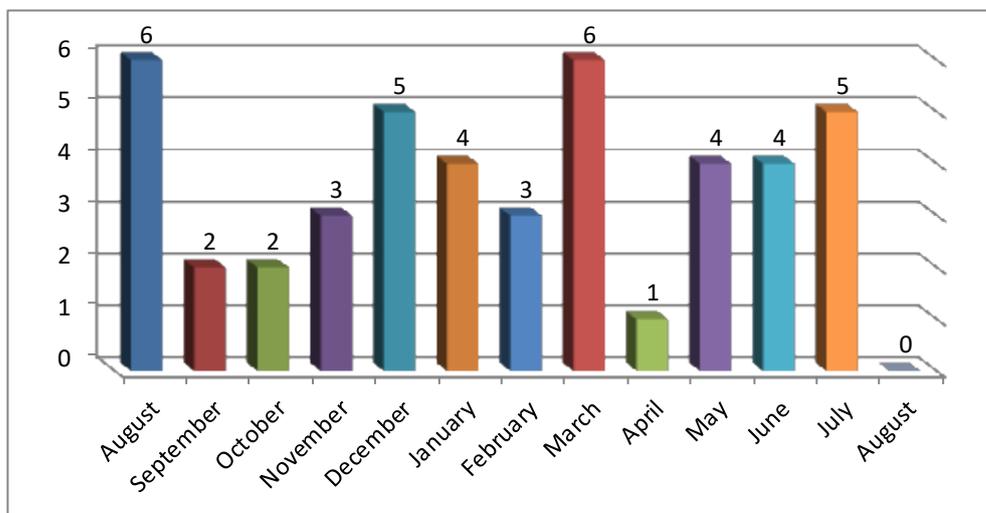
### Events on the ground

► The Israeli security forces carried out counterterrorism activities throughout Judea and Samaria, detaining Palestinians suspected of terrorist activity and seizing improvised weapons, as well as funds intended for the financing of terrorism. The main security force activities were the following:

- ◆ Soldiers in an observation post identified three suspicious persons approaching the gate of the community of **Alon Moreh (Gush Etzion)**. IDF forces pursued the three, who were observed throwing objects into the bushes. The suspects were captured, and a search of the area revealed four pipe bombs they had tossed away (IDF spokesperson, August 14, 2018).
- ◆ In a security force activity aimed at preventing arms dealing, two Palestinians suspected of manufacturing and selling weapons were detained, and an improvised Carlo rifle was seized. On the night of August 13, 2018, during an IDF activity in **the village of Yatta (south of Hebron), a workshop for the manufacture of weapons was found**. A number of machines used in the manufacture of weapons were seized (IDF spokesperson, August 14, 2018).
- ◆ IDF security forces detained four Palestinians suspected of setting a fire near the **community of Bat Ayin (western Gush Etzion)**. After they were detained Palestinians rioted in the region of Bayt Umar, during which an IED was thrown at the Israeli forces. The rioters also burned tires, threw stones and Molotov cocktails, and shot fireworks. No casualties were reported.

- ◆ During a security force operation in **Bayt Rima (east of Beit Arieh)** local residents clashed with the forces, throwing a pipe bomb (IDF spokesperson, August 13, 2018).

### Significant terrorist attacks during the past year<sup>3</sup>



## Developments in the Gaza Strip

### The humanitarian situation in Gaza

#### The supply of electricity

- The electric company in the Gaza Strip announced that power would be supplied in cycles of four hours with a 16-hour hiatus. The Gaza Strip currently produces 143 of the 500 required megawatts (Dunia al-Watan, August 11, 2018).

#### Health services

- It was reported that the **conditions of the health services in the Gaza Strip continue to worsen**. A spokesman for the ministry of health warned that the fuel crisis seriously endangered the activity of the medical centers in the Gaza Strip.<sup>4</sup> He said that despite various ongoing contacts, the ministry has not had success in finding readiness to resolve the fuel crisis threatening the medical services and facilities in Gaza (Facebook page of the spokesman for the ministry of health, August 13, 2018). The ministry also reported that 80% of the oncological drugs had run out and that they could no longer treat patients (Paltoday, August 12, 2018). **Palestinian minister of health Jawad 'Awad** said in response that

<sup>3</sup> A significant attack is defined by the ITIC as involving shooting, a vehicular attack, the use of IEDs, or a combination of the above. Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown by Palestinians are not included.

<sup>4</sup> The reference is to 13 hospitals and 53 first aid centers subordinate to the ministry of health (palsawa, August 6, 2018).

Mahmoud Abbas and Rami Hamdallah had given instructions that the drugs necessary to treat cancer patients be sent to the Gaza Strip (Wafa, August 12, 2018).

### **Economy and employment**

► With the approach of Eid al-Adha (August 21, 2018) and the beginning of the new school year, **Ali al-Haik, head of Gaza's businessmen's union**, called for all Gazan groups and organizations to exert pressure on Israel to open the Kerem Shalom Crossing and allow merchandise and fuel to enter the Gaza Strip. He claimed that the closing of the crossing had led to the loss of 75,000 jobs. Closing the crossing, he claimed, caused the stoppage of work and the closing of more than 95% of the production facilities and factories in Gaza (website of the Palestinian businessmen's union in the Gaza Strip, August 11, 2018).

► The World Bank announced a new program which would ensure short-term income for unemployed young people in the Gaza Strip. According to the program, 4,400 Gazans between the ages of 18 and 34, half of them women, will be recruited to work in NGOs. That will help provide services in vital areas, such as health, education, and care for the handicapped and the aged. The program, which will be carried out with a grant of \$17 million, will also fund instruction and support through the internet for an additional 750 young Gazans (World Bank website, August 13, 2018).

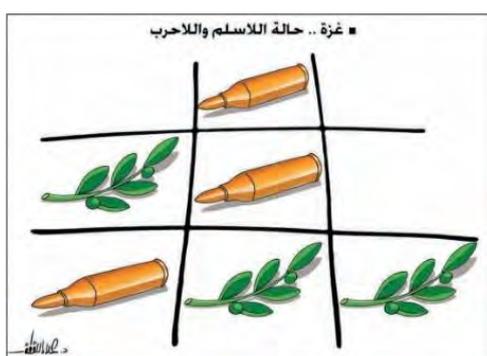
### **Attempts to reach an agreement**

► Despite and during the recent escalation, **contacts continued, with the mediation of Egypt and the UN envoy**, to reach a lull agreement that would be acceptable to both sides. **Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri** said a Hamas delegation headed by **Saleh al-Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau**, had left the Gaza Strip on August 8 for Cairo to complete talks with senior Egyptian officials (palsawa, August 12, 2018). On August 13, 2018, **senior Hamas figure Izzat al-Rishq** tweeted that Hamas was meeting in Cairo for consultations with the Palestinian organizations regarding a lull and the internal Palestinian reconciliation (Ma'an, August 13, 2018).

► Sources within Hamas reported that Hamas and Egypt agreed about a number of suggestions regarding a lull. The sources reported that Hamas supports increasing Egypt's role and will agree to its supervision of the Gaza Strip, if that makes it possible to lift the "siege." However, that is on the condition that Israel accept the conditions imposed by Hamas' military wing (al-Arabi al-Jadeed, August 10, 2018). According to Egyptian sources,

**Hamas demands the opening of all the crossings and a return to the status quo ante of 2007**, i.e., before Hamas took over the Gaza Strip (al-Arabi al-Jadeed August 13, 2018).

► On August 11, 2018, a delegation headed by the deputy of Nikolay Mladenov, the UN envoy to the Middle East, and three of his aides, arrived in the Gaza Strip. The visit lasted a number of hours, during which they discussed the lull agreement with the Hamas leadership. According to reports, the delegation demanded that Hamas stop its provocations at the border. It was also reported that the delegation had an interest in putting a stop to the launching of incendiary kites to reach a full agreement and prevent Israel from exploiting the launchings to attack the Gaza Strip (al-Quds, August 11, 2018).



**"Gaza...neither peace nor war" (Felesteen, August 11, 2018).**

### **End of the summer camp season**

► August 12, 2018, marked the end of the various summer camps organized every year by Hamas for the children of the Gaza Strip. The theme of the camps' final ceremonies was "I return to my homeland." The camps were held in the "return camps" of the various Gazan districts. For example, the central committee of the summer camps in the Khan Yunis district held a ceremony at the "return camp" in eastern (Khirbat) Ikhza'a. Representatives of the Hamas leadership attended (Facebook page of the central summer camp committee in the Khan Yunis district, August 12, 2018). During the ceremony the youths, most of them in uniform, carried out exercises of order and courage, launched balloons and burned a structure apparently representing an Israeli facility.



**Displays put on by campers during the final ceremony (Facebook page of the central summer camp committee in the Khan Yunis district, August 12, 2018).**



**Launching balloons at the final ceremony. The signs read, "I return to my homeland," with the name of the Israeli community they plan to return to (Facebook page of the central summer camp committee in the Khan Yunis district, August 12, 2018).**



**Simulation of burning an Israeli facility (Facebook page of the central summer camp committee in the Khan Yunis district, August 12, 2018).**

### **Summer activity of the [so-called] "tire-burning unit"**

► The [so-called] "tire unit" also held summer activities for its members, with the theme "I return to my homeland." The Facebook page of the [so-called] "tire unit – the Rafah revolutionaries" posted pictures of the activities it held for its teams operating in eastern Rafah.



**Pictures of the [so-called] "tire unit's" activities. Bottom: Summer campers with Firas Abu Sharakh, who represents himself as a media person from Rafah who took the pictures (Facebook page of Firas Abu Sharakh, August 9, 2018).**

► The [so-called] "tire unit" was established and institutionalized during the "return marches," and its function is mainly to provide tires for rioters to set on fire to create smokescreens. The unit in Rafah is headed by Mahmoud al-Mu'asher Abu Ayman (Facebook page of the "the tire unit – the Rafah revolutionaries," August 9, 2018). Another operative is Yaqoub al-Natour (Facebook page of Mahmoud al-Mu'asher Abu Ayman, whose Facebook name is "Ayman Mahmoud," August 13, 2018). **Note:** A number of the unit's members who were killed during the "return marches" were wrapped in Hamas flags for burial. In ITIC assessment that indicates a connection between the unit and Hamas, which organizes the events.



**Right: Mahmoud al-Mu'asher Abu Ayman standing in front of a tire unit's sign (Facebook page of the "the tire unit – the Rafah revolutionaries," August 9, 2018). Left: Yaqoub al-Natour wearing a T-shirt of "The direct engagement brigade – the tire unit – Rafah" (Facebook page of Yaqoub al-Natour, June 2, 2018).**

## The Palestinian Authority (PA)

### The internal Palestinian reconciliation

- ▶ According to reports, Egypt offered a new reconciliation document, which includes amendments and changes introduced in response to the demands of the two sides. It was also reported that in the near future a meeting between the sides will be held in Egypt to discuss the issue (Twitter account of Izzat al-Rishq, August 13, 2018).
- ▶ Senior Fatah figures said they are examining the new reconciliation document, with its various amendments, including a change in the schedule for implementing the agreement. They said that according to the new document, 80% of the authorities and ministries in the Gaza Strip will be transferred to the PA. That is with the exception of the security forces, which will be controlled by Egypt until the other articles of the agreement have been implemented. Egypt also committed itself to provide funding necessary to pay the salaries of the operatives in the forces until they have been reorganized. The senior Fatah figures said that further amendments were necessary because the document did not relate to of the issue of Hamas' military wing (al-Arabi al-Jadeed, August 13, 2018).

### Hamdallah meets with the chairman of the Committee for Prisoners' Affairs

- ▶ Rami Hamdallah, prime minister of the Palestinian national consensus government, met in Ramallah with a delegation headed by Qadri Abu Bakr, the new chairman of the Committee for Prisoners' Affairs. Also present at the meeting were members of the PA's new committee for prisoners' affairs, Jamal Huweil, Abd al-Fatah Doula (a former prisoner) and

Zakariya Zubeidi. During the meeting Hamdallah stressed that **the Palestinian government and leadership support the continuation of paying salaries to the families of shaheeds and prisoners** despite Israel's threats to deduct the money for the salaries from the taxes Israel collects and transfers to the PA (Wafa, August 13, 2018).



**Rami Hamdallah meets with a delegation headed by Qadri Abu Bakr (Wafa, August 13, 2018; website of the Committee for Prisoners' Affairs, August 13, 2018).**

## The Battle for Hearts and Minds

### Flotilla from the Gaza Strip

- ▶ On the afternoon of August 11, 2018, a **"protest flotilla" of "Lift the Siege" boats** set sail from the Gaza Strip. Before the voyage a press conference was held in the port of Gaza by Adham Abu Salmiya, spokesman for the Supreme National Authority of the Return March. He said the flotilla's objectives were to break through the new security zone which limits the Gaza Strip [i.e., the marine barrier Israel constructed near the Zikim shore to the north of the Gaza Strip border] and to lift the naval siege Israel had imposed. He appealed to all those attempting to secure a lull, saying the Gazans would not accept less than a comprehensive, permanent lifting of the "siege" (al-Aqsa, August 11, 2018).
- ▶ The five boats **sailed from the port of Gaza towards Israel**. One passenger was Shadi Asfour, a correspondent for al-Aqsa TV, who provided a live report of the events (al-Aqsa TV, August 11, 2018). Israeli navy boats approached and fired warning shots to drive the boats away. They returned to Gaza port.



**The boats that set sail from the Gaza Strip  
(Facebook page of Supreme National Authority of the Return March, August 11, 2018).**