



# News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(Aug 15 – 21, 2018)

## Overview

- ▶ This past week talks were held in Cairo attended by Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and several small terrorist organizations in order to reach an arrangement that would lead to the end of the hostilities in the Gaza Strip. The arrangement currently under discussion is based on the agreement and understanding reached at the end of Operation Protective Edge (2014) and Operation Pillar of Defense (2012).
- ▶ The arrangement under discussion is minimalist and includes a cessation of the hostilities, the opening of the crossings, increasing the fishing range and the entrance of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. A Fatah delegation did not attend the Cairo talks because of Mahmoud Abbas' objection, in principle, to any arrangement that is not reached through the Palestinian Authority (PA).
- ▶ While the arrangement is being discussed **Hamas continues to implement its policy of controlled violence on the ground**. On Friday, August 17, 2018, IEDs and Molotov cocktails were thrown at IDF forces. In addition, a number of Gazans broke into Israeli territory. In response Israel closed the Erez Crossing. Another "return march" is expected to be held on this coming Friday, August 26, 2018. The continuing violence is intended to exert pressure on Israel which will help Hamas reach an arrangement with improved conditions, but may cause **the situation on the ground to deteriorate**, even if Hamas has no interest in having that happen.
- ▶ The most prominent event in Judea and Samaria was **a stabbing attack** in the Old City of Jerusalem, carried out by an Israeli Arab from the central city of Umm al-Fahm.

## Israel's South

### Attempts to reach an arrangement

- ▶ After more than four and half months of riots at the Israeli-Gaza border and five rounds of escalation during which more than 600 rockets and mortar shells were fired into Israeli territory, talks are currently being held in Cairo for an arrangement that will lead to an end to

the hostilities. Participating in the talks are delegations of Hamas and the PIJ, and representatives of several small terrorist organizations. Conspicuous by its absence (so far) is the Fatah delegation, which refused to go to Egypt because of Mahmoud Abbas' strong objection to any arrangement not reached through the PA.

► Statements made by senior Hamas and PIJ figures indicate that the arrangement currently under discussion includes a ceasefire based on the agreement and understanding reached at the end of Operation Protective Edge (2014) and Operation Pillar of Defense (2012). The components of the arrangement include stopping the hostilities, opening the crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip for the passage of individuals and merchandise, increasing the range of fishing waters and the entrance of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. Those are the minimum requirements, far from the expectations of both Hamas and Israel. However, they have the advantage of being implemented relatively easily on a short schedule (in any case, Israel has already opened the Kerem Shalom Crossing and increased the fishing range).<sup>1</sup> The talks in Egypt were suspended for Eid al-Adha (the Feast of the Sacrifice), and will be resumed immediately after the holiday.

► Mahmoud al-Zahar, a member of Hamas' political bureau, said in an interview that two parallel courses of talks were being held, one with Egypt and the other with UN representatives. He said that both dealt with the arrangement, the internal Palestinian reconciliation and the issues linked to the "siege" of the Gaza Strip. He said that progress had been made in the talks regarding the right of the Palestinians to a secure passageway out of the Gaza Strip. He added that Hamas was focusing on opening a civilian sea lane between Gaza and Turkish Cyprus, which would be used for commerce and transportation. Discussions about the issue of the exchange of prisoners were entirely separate from those dealing with the arrangement, he added, and Hamas would present its conditions regarding that issue and allow for progress only after its conditions had been met (alkhaleejonline.net, August 19, 2018).

### **The position of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Fatah**

► The PA and Fatah object to any arrangement reached with Hamas **without PA participation and without an internal Palestinian reconciliation**. According to Palestinian

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<sup>1</sup> For further information, see the August 20, 2018 bulletin, "Contacts for an Arrangement (Updated to August 20, 2018)."

sources that has caused **a great deal of tension between the PA and Egypt** (al-Hayat, August 18, 2018). Some statements from senior PA and Fatah figures were the following:

- ◆ **Mahmoud Abbas**, in his speech at the opening session of the PLO's Central Council conference, said that the [internal Palestinian] reconciliation would occur only "under one government, one law and one legitimate set of arms" (Mahmoud Abbas' Facebook page, August 15, 2018).
- ◆ **Saeb Erekat**, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee, said an arrangement with Israel without PLO involvement would be the basis for [Trump's] "deal of the century," whose objective was to eliminate the Palestinian national project (Dunia al-Watan, August 18, 2018). On a different occasion he said that no Palestinian state would be established in the Gaza Strip and no Palestinian state would be established without the Gaza Strip and without one legitimate set of arms and one governing body (Palestinian TV, August 19, 2018). He also said that the Palestinians' greatest reservation regarding an arrangement including a long-term ceasefire between Israel and Hamas was that such an agreement was liable to set a precedent. That meant, theoretically, that other organizations in the West Bank could reach agreements with Israel and separate Palestinian territories from PA control. However, Erekat made it clear that **an arrangement in the Gaza Strip was a national need supported by the PA** (al-Arabiya al-Hadath, August 19, 2018).
- ◆ Fatah spokesman **Usama al-Qawasmeh** said that **only the PLO had the responsibility for solving the humanitarian problems of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and especially of Jerusalem**. He also said that the national consensus government and other official institutions were the ones that would solve the problems, and not organizations and committees whose objective is to carry out the programs of Israel and the United States. He also said that a ceasefire (*hudna*) was a national issue and not an issue for the organizations, and therefore it was the PLO that had to deal with it.



Hamas cartoons criticizing Mahmoud Abbas' objections to the efforts held under Egyptian aegis. Right: "An arrangement is treason" Left: Mahmoud Abbas, the genie in a lamp marked "Security coordination." The Arabic reads, "We will not accept any arrangement in Gaza [made] with the occupation..." (Palinfo Twitter account, August 16, 2018).

## The "return marches"

► On Friday, August 17, 2018, **the 21<sup>st</sup> "return march"** was held (since March 30, 2018). Its theme was "Revolutionaries for the sake of Jerusalem and al-Aqsa mosque." Many thousands of demonstrators and rioters gathered along the border, most of them deep inside Gazan territory. Riots continued, during which Gazans threw IEDs and Molotov cocktails at IDF soldiers. A number of Palestinians penetrated into Israeli territory but immediately returned to the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, August 17, 2018). The Palestinians reported that an IDF force shot at two demonstrators who sabotaged the security fence near Nahal Oz. One of them was seriously wounded (Facebook page of Red Alert, August 17, 2018).



**Gazan rioters try to break through the security fence during a "return march" (Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March Facebook page, August 17, 2018).**



**Right: Gazans burn tires near the security fence. Left: Gazans go to a "return march" site in eastern Gaza City (August 17, 2018) (Palinfo Twitter account, August 17, 2018).**

- Prominent during the events was the presence of senior Hamas figures. **Isma'il Haniyeh**, head of Hamas' political bureau, visited a "return camp" in eastern Gaza City; **Yahya al-Sinwar**, head of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip, and senior Hamas figure **Fathi Hamad** visited a "return march" in eastern Khan Yunis (Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March Facebook page, August 17, 2018).



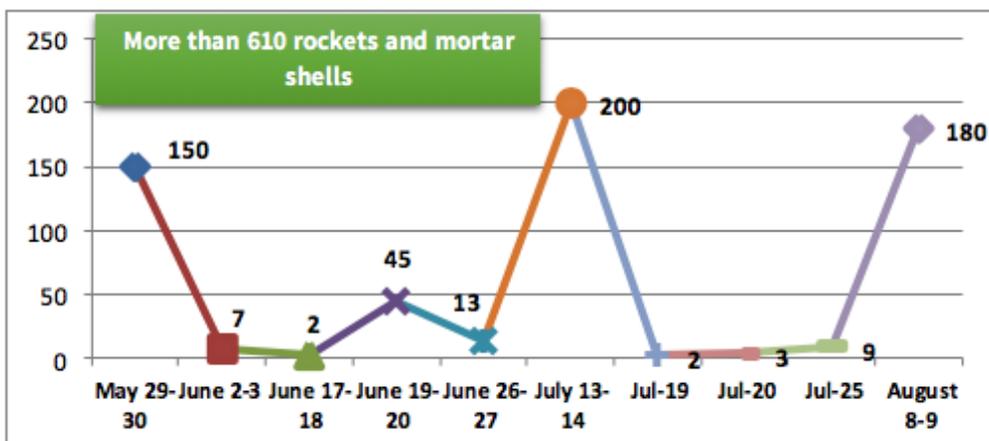
**Right: Yahya al-Sinwar (upraised arm) participating in a "return march" in eastern Khan Yunis. Left: Isma'il Haniyeh at a "return camp" in eastern Gaza City (Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March Facebook page, August 17, 2018).**

- ▶ The ministry of health in the Gaza Strip reported that **two Palestinians** were killed and 270 wounded (Ma'an, August 17, 2018). The Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March said **the return marches would be held next Friday, August 26, 2018, and would have as their theme "A tribute to the medical teams and journalists."**
- ▶ In response to the violence during the "return march" on Friday, **Israel partially closed the Erez Crossing**, and only humanitarian cases were allowed passage. Apparently the crossing was closed on the assumption that it would not significantly affect daily life in the Gaza Strip, as opposed to closing Kerem Shalom Crossing, where merchandise enters the Gaza Strip, which would have more difficult consequences. In ITIC assessment, that was done to calm the situation, contribute to the arrangement and make it possible for the talks for an arrangement to progress.

## Rocket fire

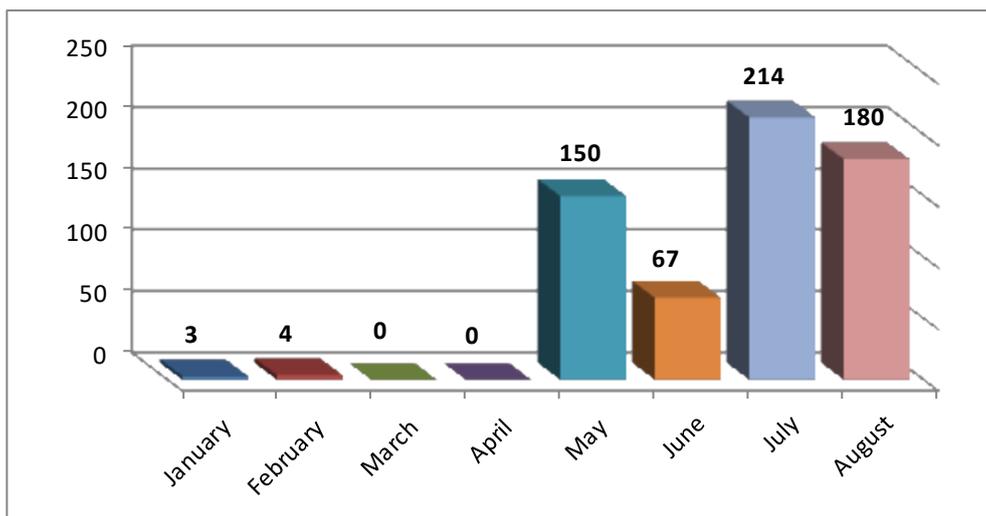
- This past week no rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory.

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



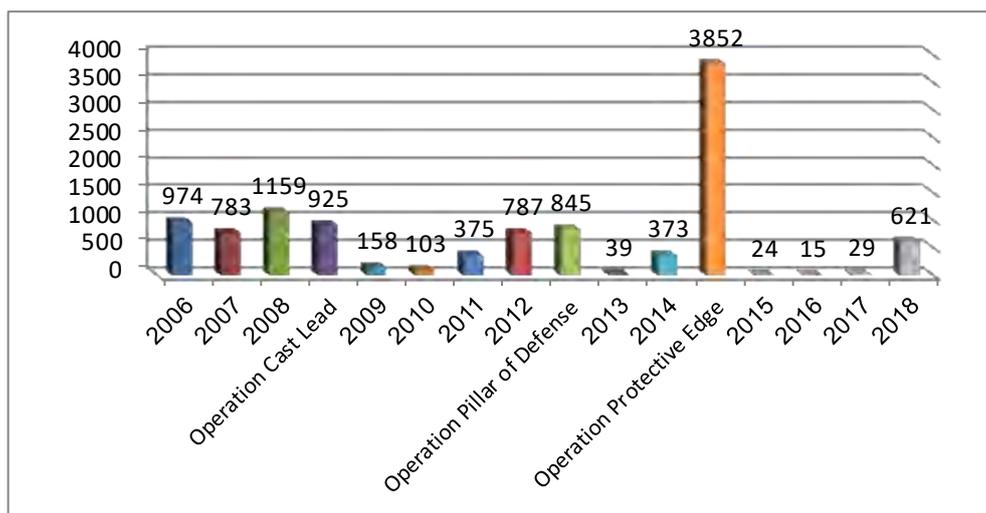
Minimum number of rockets and mortar shells fired in May, June and July. At this stage the ITIC cannot distinguish between rocket and mortar shell fire.

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



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

## Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



## Arson terrorism

► Arson terrorism continues, but **there has been a significant reduction in the number of incendiary kites and balloons launched into Israeli territory**. On August 19, 2018, there were fires in three locations in the communities near the Gaza Strip, the result of incendiary balloons from the Gaza Strip (Israel Fire and Rescue spokesman's unit, August 19, 2018).



**Aftermath of a fire in the Be'eri Forest, caused by an incendiary balloon launched from the Gaza Strip (Palinfo Twitter account, August 17, 2018).**

## Other events

► On the morning of August 20, 2018, **an armed Palestinian went to a location between 10 and 20 meters from the security fence in the northern Gaza Strip. He opened fire at an IDF force** carrying out routine security activities near the fence. The soldiers returned fire and shot and apparently killed him (Haaretz, August 20, 2018). A member of the al-Majdalawi clan

reported that he was Hani Muhammad Awda al-Majdalawi, 24, from the Jabalia refugee camp (Ma'an, August 21, 2018).



**Hani Muhammad Awda al-Majdalawi, 24, from the Jabalia refugee camp (Ma'an, August 21, 2018).**

## Judea and Samaria

### Stabbing attack in Jerusalem

► On the afternoon of August 17, 2018, a Muslim who had come to pray in Jerusalem left the Temple Mount compound and went to Hagai Street, near the Nablus Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem. He met a squad of policemen stationed at the location, approached one of them and tried to stab him with a knife. The stabber was shot and killed. The police closed all the alleys in the area and conducted a search. All the Muslims who had been in the Temple Mount compound left the area. The terrorist was **Ahmed Muhammad Mahamid**, 30, an Israeli Arab from Umm al-Fahm.

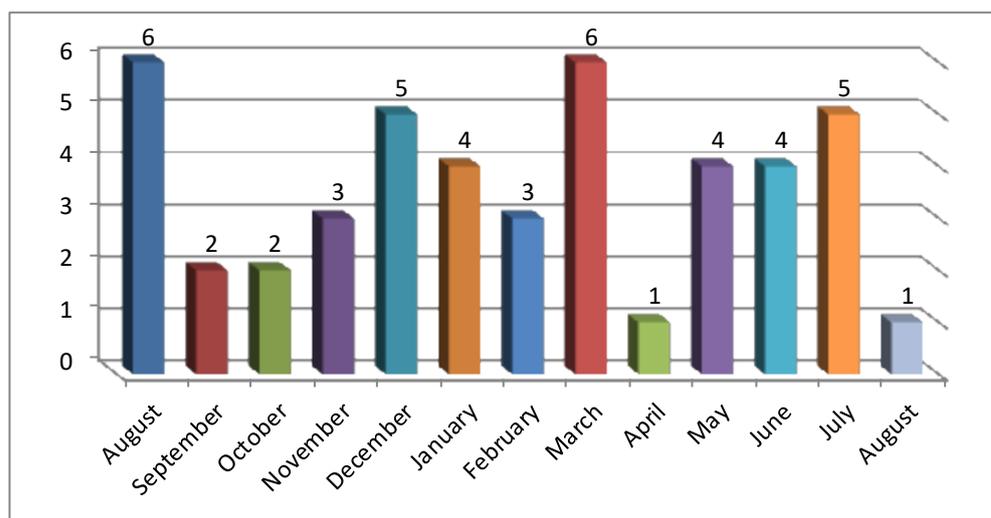


**Right: The terrorist stabs an Israeli policeman. The attack was carried out in the Old City of Jerusalem. Left: The knife used by the terrorist in the stabbing attack (Israel Police Force Facebook page, August 17, 2018).**

### Events on the ground

- ▶ Israeli security forces continued carrying out counterterrorism activities throughout Judea and Samaria, detaining Palestinians suspected of terrorist activity and seizing improvised weapons and funds for financing terrorism.
- ▶ Near the Shuafat refugee camp Border Policemen detained a Palestinian suspected of having received 30,000 shekels (about \$8,260) sent from the Gaza Strip for his brother, a Hamas operative, currently in an Israeli prison. The Palestinian was taken for interrogation (Red Alert Facebook page, August 20, 2018).
- ▶ This past week the Palestinians reported at least two instances of stones thrown at Palestinian vehicles near the community of Yitzhar (south of Nablus) and Bayt Umar (north of Hebron). The windshield of the car of a villager from Hawwara was shattered and he was injured by flying glass (Red Alert Facebook page, August 19, 2018).

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



## Developments in the Gaza Strip

### The crossings

► On August 15, 2018, Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, after consultations with the IDF Chief of Staff, announced **the full reopening of the Kerem Shalom Crossing**. The extension of the fishing waters off the Gaza Strip coast to nine nautical miles was also announced. According to Israeli Defense Minister Lieberman, opening the crossing after three days of relative quiet was meant to signal the Gazans that preserving the quiet was in their own best interests (Ynet, August 15, 2018). However, in response to the violence during the "return marches" on Friday, Israel partially closed the Erez Crossing and allowed only for the passage of humanitarian cases.

### The Rafah Crossing

► On August 20, 2018, the Rafah Crossing closed for six days for the Eid al-Adha holiday. Before it closed the Egyptians allowed the entrance into the Gaza Strip of trucks carrying merchandise, cooking gas, diesel oil and fuel. About a thousand Gazans returned to the Strip, including 49 senior members of the Palestinian terrorist organizations who had participated in the talks in Cairo. Among those who returned were the members of the Hamas delegation headed by **Rawhi Mushtaha and Khalil al-Haya**, members of the PIJ delegation headed by

<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.

**Khaled al-Batsh**, and the members of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine delegations (al-Masrawi, August 20 2018).

### The new school year

► The ministry of education in the Gaza Strip has completed its preparations for opening the new school year in the Gaza Strip on August 29, 2018. The ministry reported that nine new schools had opened and that 24 more schools would be built during the coming year. The ministry also reported that solar energy panels were installed in 32 schools. **According to the ministry, 267,000 students from the first to the twelfth grades will study this year.** The high school curriculum was changed and for the first time new textbooks were printed (Filastin Online, August 14, 2018).

► Pierre Krähenbühl, the UNRWA commissioner general, announced at a meeting in Amman, Jordan, that despite the agency's financial problem, UNRWA will begin the new school year as planned in Judea, Samaria, Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian dispersal. However, he said that UNRWA has sufficient funds to finance activities only until the end of the month. He called on the donor states to continue supporting UNRWA's budget to cover the deficit of \$217 million and ensure the activity of the schools until the end of the year (Jordan Times, August 16, 2018).

## The Palestinian Authority (PA)

### Conference of the PLO's Central Council

► On August 15, 2018, the PLO's Central Council (which has 154 members) met for an ad hoc conference for "the transition from an authority to a state." Its objective was to try to implement the decisions made four months ago (April 30, 2018). Internal and organizational issues were discussed, as well as the question of the American plan for an Israeli-Palestinian agreement ("the deal of the century") and relations with Israel. According to **Jibril Rajoub**, secretary of Fatah's Central Committee, the conference was a watershed for constructing a "national strategy" enabling the Palestinians to deal with "the deal of the century" and to prevent attempts to harm the Palestinian cause and delegitimize the Palestinians (Palestinian TV, August 13, 2018).



**Mahmoud Abbas gives the speech opening the PLO's Central Council conference (Mahmoud Abbas' Facebook page, August 15, 2018).**

- ▶ **Hamas, the PIJ, the PFLP and the DFLP boycotted the conference**, with the result that **most of the attendees were Fatah members**. At the opening session Mahmoud Abbas gave a speech in which he said that "**even if it means we cut into our flesh we will continue to pay the families of the shaheeds and the prisoners.**" He also said that reconciliation with Hamas will be achieved only under one government, one law and one legitimate set of arms (Mahmoud Abbas' Facebook page, August 15, 2018).
- ▶ On August 18, 2018, when the conference ended, a number of its decisions were made public, among them the following:
  - ◆ **Redefining relations with Israel.** The Central Council stressed that relations between the Palestinian people and Israel were based on the struggle between an occupied people and country and an occupying power. The council authorized a **decision to end all forms of security coordination with Israel and for a gradual economic separation from Israel.**
  - ◆ **Objection to "the deal of the century."** Members of the council made it clear that they refused to accept "the deal of the century" or any solution that included temporary borders or the separation of sovereignty between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.
  - ◆ According to **Saeb Erekat**, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee, the council made decisions regarding a formal appeal to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. The appeal includes the issues of the prisoners, the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem and the construction in the settlements (Palestinian TV, August 19, 2018).



**The conference of the PLO's Central Council in the Muqata'a in Ramallah as Mahmoud Abbas gives the closing speech. Apparently attendance was poor (Palestinian TV YouTube channel, August 18, 2018).**

## The Battle for Hearts and Minds

### Another flotilla from the Gaza Strip

► On August 18, 2018, the day after the "return marches," a flotilla of about 40 small boats sailed from Gaza in the direction of the naval border north of the Gaza Strip. The IDF fired warning shots and the boats returned to port. The objective of the flotillas is to keep the the naval "siege" in the international and Arab public eye, thereby reinforcing Hamas' demand to "lift the siege" on the Gaza Strip. A spokesman for the organizers of the flotilla said they had decided to **repeat the activity every week** and would "surprise the Israeli occupation" with similar activities (al-Aqsa TV, August 19, 2018).

► **Mahmoud Masoud**, spokesman for the authority of the national organization to lift the siege and for reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, said the flotilla was a continuation of Gazan naval activity and a clear message that as long as the "occupation" exists, the "resistance" [i.e., terrorist organizations] will exist. He said Israel surrenders easily after that kind of flotilla, proof of which is that after the first flotilla Israel allowed the Gazan fishermen to fish in the sea at a distance of nine miles from shore, which had previously been forbidden. He stressed that as long as the "siege" exists, the [flotilla] activity will continue, but avoided answering when asked if a flotilla would sail every week (al-Aqsa, August 10, 2018).



**The flotilla from Gaza to Israel's naval border to the north of the Gaza Strip (Palinfo Twitter account, August 18, 2018).**