



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(August 22 – 28, 2018)

Overview

- ▶ The "return marches" were held at the Israeli-Gaza Strip border this past Friday with a relatively small number of participants (about 5,000, half the number of the previous weeks). The level and intensity of violence were relatively low, and the scope of arson terrorism has lessened. Therefore, Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman decided to reopen the Erez Crossing (northern Gaza Strip), which is used by pedestrians.
- ▶ A Fatah delegation arrived in Cairo and held a short round of talks with the Egyptians. The talks again illustrated **the negative role played by the Palestinian Authority (PA)**, which links the arrangement with Israel with the internal Palestinian reconciliation. The PA has also threatened to impose additional sanctions on Hamas if it reaches an arrangement with Israel without PA participation. A Hamas spokesman said **the talks in Egypt were being postponed for a few days**. According to the Egyptians, the postponement is meant to give the Fatah leadership time to consult with Mahmoud Abbas about the proposals that had been made.
- ▶ In Judea and Samaria Palestinians rioted while Jews prayed at the Tomb of Joseph. The events included a possible vehicular attack and throwing a Molotov cocktail at the Israeli force securing the worshippers. In addition, a pipe bomb was thrown at an IDF post near al-Bireh (northeast of Ramallah). No casualties were reported. The Palestinian media reported that the PA security forces had prevented an IED from being detonated on a road used by the Israeli security forces.

Israel's South

The "return march"

► On Friday, August 24, 2018, the 22nd "return march" was held at the Israeli-Gaza border. Its theme was "loyalty to the medical teams and the media." **Participation was relatively low, with an estimated 5,000 Gazans**, about half the number that had arrived in previous weeks. They gathered near the border at five sites, threw stones and Molotov cocktails, and sabotaged the security fence.



Attempts to sabotage the security fence in the eastern Gaza Strip during a "return march" (Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March, August 25, 2018).



Right: A Gazan hangs a Palestinian flag on the security fence east of Gaza City. Left: Rioters sabotage the security fence (Facebook page Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March, August 24, 2018).

► Senior Hamas figures came to the events, among them Khalil al-Haya, Rawhi Mushtaha, and Fathi Hamad. **Fathi Hamad** gave a speech in which he said that the "return marches" had achieved a number of their objectives, including uniting the Palestinians and restoring the Palestinian cause to the Arab, Islamic and international agendas (al-Aqsa TV, August 25, 2018). **Ahmed Bahar, deputy chairman of the Legislative Council**, appealed to Israel, saying that the blood of the members of the medial teams and the correspondents killed

during the "return marches" had not been shed in vain. He promised the Palestinians would continue documenting the "truth" to expose "Israel's deception" to the world (al-Aqsa, August 24, 2018). **Isma'il Radwan** welcomed the participants at the camp east of Gaza City, and called on the public to participate in the "return march" the following Friday (al-Aqsa TV, August 24, 2018).



Right: Fathi Hamad (center, in white) visits the "return march" east of the refugee camps in the central Gaza Strip. Left: Senior Hamas figures Rawhi Mushtaha and Khalil al-Haya visit a "return camp" in the eastern Gaza Strip (Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March, August 24 and 25, 2018).

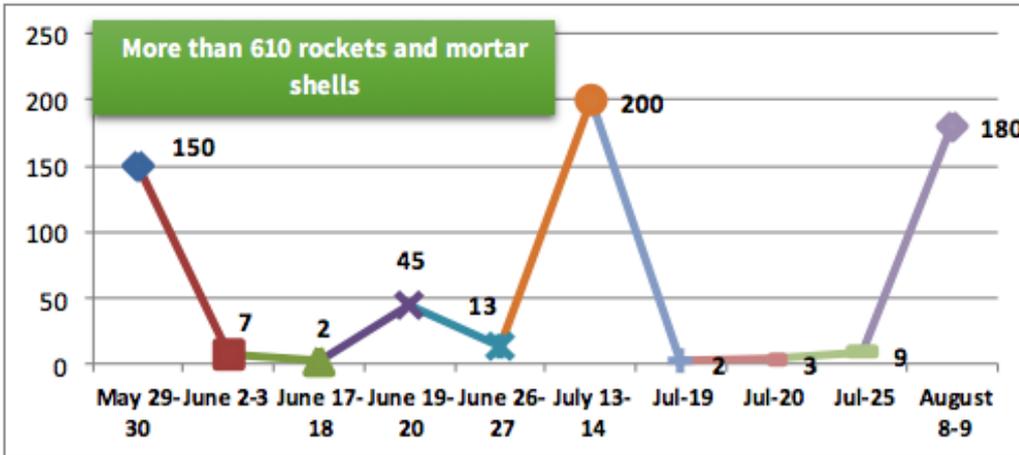
► Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the Hamas ministry of health in the Gaza Strip, reported that 189 Gazans had been injured during the "return march," 116 of whom were treated on site (Facebook page of Ashraf al-Qidra, August 24, 2018). Reportedly, one of those injured was **a son of Fathi Hamad**, a senior Hamas figure. He was injured during the riots east of the Jabalia refugee camp (Paldf Twitter account, August 24, 2018). The Palestinian legal committee of the Supreme National Authority of the Return March called on the international community to support the demonstrators and provide them with protection from Israel's "attacks" during the "return marches" (Safa, August 26, 2018).

► The organizing committee said the "return marches" would continue until their objectives had been achieved. The committee called on the Palestinians to participate in the events on Friday, August 31, 2018, when the theme will be **"Our marches continue"** (al-Aqsa TV, August 24, 2018).

Rocket and mortar shell fire

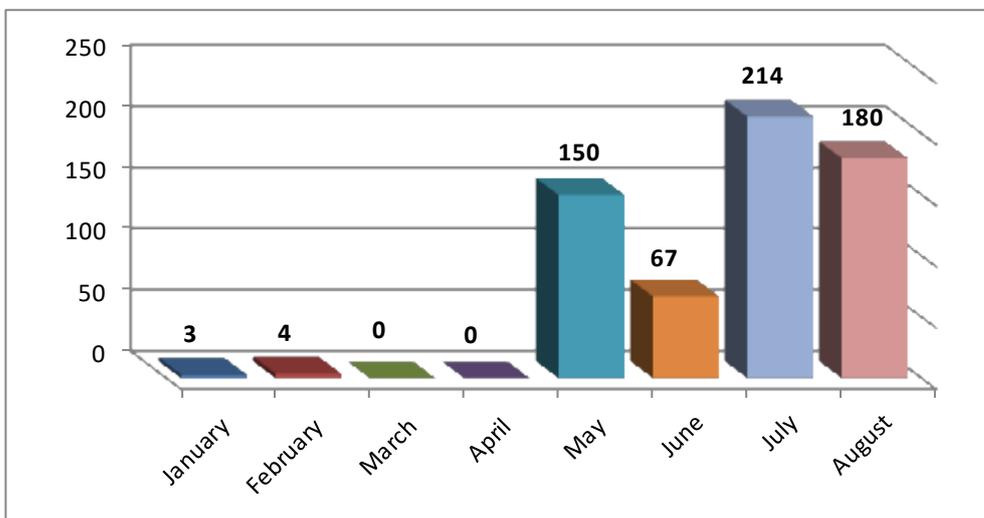
► This past week no rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory.

Rocket and mortar shell fire during and between the recent rounds of escalation¹



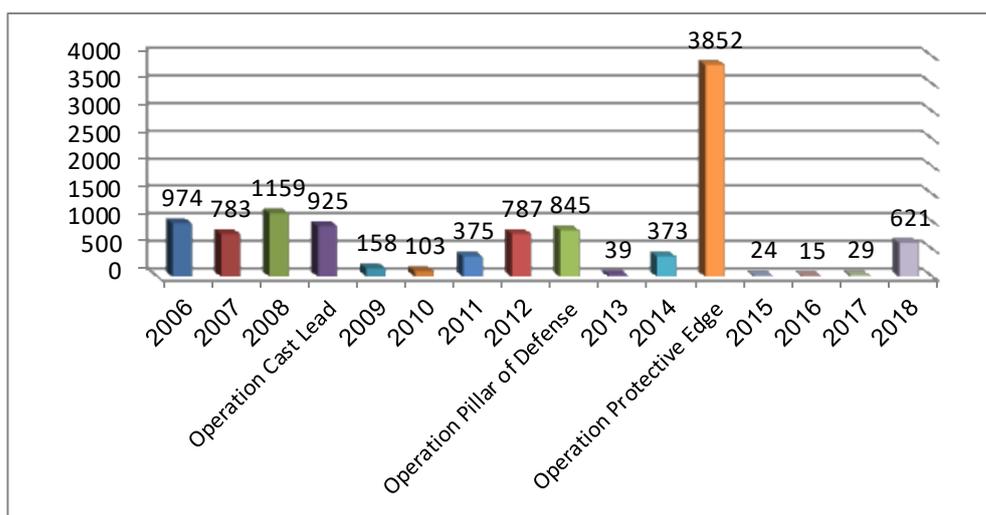
Minimum number of rockets and mortar shells fired in May, June and July. At this stage the ITIC cannot distinguish between rocket and mortar shell fire.

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire since January 2018



¹ The statistics do not include rockets that fell inside the Gaza Strip.

Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Arson terrorism

► There has been a significant decrease in arson terrorism and in the number of fires caused by incendiary kites and balloons from the Gaza Strip. During Eid al-Adha (the Feast of the Sacrifice) the Sons of al-Zouari Balloon Unit continued its activity and posted pictures and videos documenting the launching of dozens of incendiary balloons into Israeli territory (Facebook page of the Sons of al-Zouari in the Gaza Strip, August 21, 2018).



A Gaza Strip "balloon unit" operative launches incendiary balloons at the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of the Sons of al-Zouari in the Gaza Strip, August 25, 2018).

Other events

► General Kamil Abu Rokon, the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, revealed on his Facebook page that **Hani al-Majdalawi**, who shot at IDF forces on

August 20, 2018,² **worked for Doctors Without Borders**. Al-Majdalawi's brother wrote on his Facebook page that Hani had not belonged to any organization and that he had been employed by Doctors Without Borders. He also wrote that Hani al-Majdalawi had purchased the gun he used with his own money (Facebook page in Hebrew of the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, August 23, 2018). **Israel asked Doctors Without Borders for clarifications and was told that the matter was being examined.**

Cairo talks for an arrangement

► After the end of Eid al-Adha the Palestinians renewed the Egyptian-mediated talks in Cairo for an arrangement and an internal Palestinian reconciliation. Unlike the previous rounds, **a Fatah delegation headed by Azzam al-Ahmed** arrived and held a short, separate round of talks with the Egyptians. During the talks, PA and Hamas representatives raised their conflicting interests regarding the arrangement. Senior PA figures link the arrangement with the internal Palestinian reconciliation and **threatened to impose additional sanctions on Hamas if it reached an arrangement with Israel without PA participation.**

► **Saeb Erekat, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee**, said in an interview **that Hamas' signing an agreement with Israel was a red line, whether it included a lull or humanitarian projects.** He said an agreement had to be reached in a way similar to the understandings of Operation Protective Edge in 2014, agreed upon as part of an Egyptian initiative and with the participation of representatives from Fatah, Hamas and the other organizations. He threatened that if Hamas signed an arrangement with Israel, the PA would abdicate its responsibility for the Gaza Strip. However, he said, Mahmoud Abbas' hand was extended in reconciliation (al-Mayadeen, August 25, 2018).

► According to "reliable sources," Mahmoud Abbas instructed the Palestinian national consensus government **to formulate a plan for stopping the funding to the Gaza Strip.** In the meantime **Azzam al-Ahmed**, a member of Fatah's Central Committee, told Egyptian General Intelligence that Mahmoud Abbas planned to impose new sanctions if an arrangement with Israel was reached without PA participation. The "reliable sources" said that in addition to stopping the payment of salaries and the funding of government ministries in the Gaza Strip, the Monetary Authority would suspend its activities. The result would be

² On August 20, 2018, an armed Palestinian approached the border security fence in the northern Gaza Strip and opened fire at an IDF force from a distance of about 20-30 meters. The force returned his fire, killing him.

that the banks in the Gaza Strip would close their doors and commerce would come to a standstill. The PA is also planning to stop the social support it gives to more than 80,000 families, freeze the medical aid it gives to the sick, cut off the supply of electricity and stop paying for the water Israel supplies to the Gaza Strip (al-Akhbar, August 27, 2018).

► On August 26, 2018, **Hamas spokesman Husam Badran** tweeted that the **talks in Egypt about an arrangement and reconciliation had been postponed for a few days** (Twitter account of Husam Badran, August 26, 2018). According to the Egyptians, the talks were postponed to give senior Fatah figures time to consult with Mahmoud Abbas about the issues that had been presented to them (Filastin al-Yawm, August 27, 2018).



Right: An ironic cartoon critical of both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, each working separately to reach an arrangement with Israel. The Arabic reads, "It's easier to reach an agreement with Israel!" (Isma'il al-Bazam's Facebook page, August 25, 2018). Left: The cartoon shows the fragility of any arrangement, if one is reached (al-Arabi al-Jadeed, London, August 22, 2018).

Judea and Samaria

Events on the ground

► Israeli security forces carried out counterterrorism activities throughout Judea and Samaria, detaining Palestinians suspected of terrorist activity and seizing improvised and military-grade weapons. The more prominent events were the following:

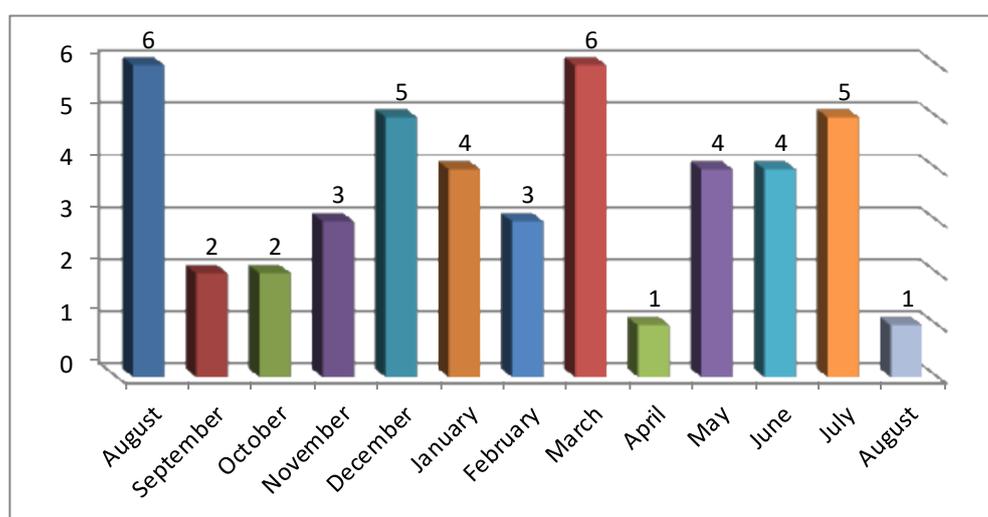
- ◆ In an Israeli security force activity in Hebron, **flysheets and other materials inciting terrorist activities were taken from a printing house**. In a similar Israeli security force activity in Nablus equipment was taken that had been used in the preparation of Hamas incitement materials. A number of Palestinians were detained in Nablus,

including the owner of the printing house, on suspicion of attempting to reestablish Nablus' Hamas network (IDF spokesperson, August 26, 2018).

◆ **A pipe bomb was thrown at an IDF post near al-Bireh (northeast of Ramallah).** No casualties or damage were reported (Red Alert Facebook page, August 26, 2018).

◆ The Israeli security forces **securing the entrance of the worshippers into the Tomb of Joseph (in Nablus)** noticed a Palestinian vehicle speeding towards them. They opened fire at the vehicle. During the prayers there were riots where **a Molotov cocktail was thrown at the force securing the path used by the worshippers** (Red Alert Facebook page, August 27, 2018).

Significant terrorist attacks during the past year ³



Terrorist attack prevented by the Palestinian Authority

► The Israeli media reported that the PA security forces found an IED made of two gas balloons attached to explosives and a large quantity of nails. **The IED was found on a road used by the Israeli security forces**, which connects the villages of Bayt Liqya and Bayt 'Anan (south of route 443, the Modi'in-Jerusalem road). The device was defused by the Palestinian national security forces. Its discovery apparently prevented an attack that could have resulted in a large number of casualties (Ynet, August 23, 2018).

³ 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.

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The situation at the crossings

The Erez Crossing

► Given the relative quiet in the Gaza Strip over the past few days and the decrease in the number of violent events, Avigdor Lieberman, the Israeli Defense Minister, after consulting with Israeli security figures, **decided to reopen the Erez Crossing in the northern Gaza Strip on August 27, 2018**. The crossing, which is mostly used by pedestrians, was closed a week ago because of the violence employed by the Palestinians.



The Erez Crossing
(the Crossings Authority of the Israeli Ministry of Defense)

The Rafah Crossing

► The management of the Rafah Crossing announced that Egypt would open the crossing in one direction on August 26 and 27, 2018, to allow pilgrims to return to the Gaza Strip (al-Quds, August 24, 2018). The president of Egypt instructed the Egyptian prime minister and the governor of North Sinai to facilitate the passage of Palestinians through the Rafah Crossing (Fateh Voice website, August 27, 2018).



Travelers leave the Gaza Strip through the Rafah Crossing (Shehab Twitter account, August 26, 2018).

Provision of vital services

- ▶ According to **Muhammad Thabet, spokesman for the Gazan electric company**, during Eid al-Adha **there was a significant improvement in the provision of electricity to homes**. That was because the holiday meant companies and factories were closed, so more electricity could be provided to private homes (Filastin al-Yawm, August 20, 2018).
- ▶ **Rosemary DiCarlo**, UN under secretary general for political affairs, told the Security Council that **the UN's budget for fuel used by the desalination plants and other vital facilities in the Gaza Strip had run out**. She asked for the sum of \$4.5 million to ensure the continuing functioning of vital services until the end of the current calendar year. She also expressed worry over the lack of basic medicines in the Gaza Strip after 40% of the stock of drugs had been used (Daily Sabah, August 23, 2018).
- ▶ **Farid Abu Athra, Chief of UNRWA's Education Programme in Gaza**, announced that in accordance with the decision of Pierre Krähenbühl, UNRWA Commissioner-General, the agency's schools would open on schedule, despite the agency's \$270 million deficit. He said that in the coming school year, 281,000 Gazan children would study in UNRWA schools. He added that so far, 90% of the textbooks had been distributed (Ma'an, August 28, 2018).
- ▶ The Japanese government announcement that towards the end of the week it would transfer \$5.4 million to UNRWA. The money will be used for **food for refugees** in the Gaza Strip (Ma'an, August 28, 2018).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Palestinians enraged by measures taken by President Trump

- ▶ At an election rally held in North Virginia, Donald Trump said that when the United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and relocated its embassy, it **took the issue of**

Jerusalem "off the table." Israel, he said would have to pay a higher price in negotiation with the Palestinians (Fox News, August 21, 2018). **John Bolton**, the president's national security advisor, made a similar statement during his visit to Israel (Reuters, August 22, 2018).

► Senior Palestinians denounced the remarks made by Trump and Bolton, especially regarding taking the issue of Jerusalem off the table. Senior Hamas figures called on the PA to revoke its recognition of Israel and stop its security coordination (Palinfo, August 22, 2018).

► Some of the Palestinian statements were the following:

◆ **Saab Erekat, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee**, claimed that Jerusalem had no price and a Palestinian state was pointless without Jerusalem, the Temple Mount, the Church of the Sepulcher, the Old City and its walls as the Palestinian capital. He said Trump, Bolton and Netanyahu had to understand that without a return to the 1967 borders and the recognition of east Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, there would be no peace (Ma'an August 22, 2018).

◆ **Fatah spokesman Usama al-Qawasmeh** said the president of the United States had made a terrible mistake when he thought the Palestinian leadership, headed by Mahmoud Abbas, would accept partial solutions. He said the Palestinians would not accept any solution that did not include the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital (Dunia al-Watan, August 22, 2018).

◆ **Ahmed al-Tamimi, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee**, said Trump's statements show he is continuing America's pro-Israeli policy and the United States' delusion that it can implement the "deal of the century" without recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine (Wafa, August 22, 2018).

◆ **Nabil Shaath, advisor to Mahmoud Abbas for foreign and international relations**, said the Palestinians would not give up Jerusalem, the rights of the refugees or the payment of salaries to prisoners for the sake of money. He added that exerting that kind of pressure would not make the Palestinians accept a joint American-Israeli program (Palestinian TV, August 25, 2018).

A number of days after Trump's declaration regarding Jerusalem, the American State Department said that after a review the situation, **the United States had decided to "redirect" \$200 million of Economic Support Fund aid from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to "high priority projects elsewhere."** The funds, according to the report, would be spent in accordance with American national interests (Reuters, August 24, 2018). That is in addition to the steps taken by the United States at the beginning of the year to cut 50% of its funding to UNRWA.

► **The announcement was met with rage in the PA.** Senior Palestinian figures called it extortion which showed the United States had abdicated its part in the two-state solution. **Husam Zomlot**, the PLO representative in the United States, raised an objection to the misuse the United States was making of humanitarian and foreign aid for the PA as a weapon for political extortion. He said the United States is committed to implementing the two-state solution with east Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital (Wafa, August 25, 2018).

► Additional comments were the following:

◆ The **Palestinian National Council (PNC)** said that the budget cut was a continuation of the war of financial sanctions led by the Trump administration against the Palestinian people and leadership to make them accept the "deal of the century." According to the PNC's announcement, the Palestinian people and leadership were firm in their adherence to their principles, the foremost of which were the [so-called] "right of return" and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the "occupied lands," with Jerusalem as its capital (Ma'an, August 25, 2018).

◆ **According to Saeb Erekat**, the decision revealed the true significance of American foreign aid, which is intervention in the internal affairs of other nations and influencing their national freedom of choice (Wafa, August 25, 2018). On August 25, 2018, in an interview with al-Mayadeen, he claimed that the American decision to cut its foreign aid was an attempt to blackmail the Palestinians, and that the United States and Israel were trying to exploit the situation in the Gaza Strip to harm them.



Saeb Erekat during an interview with the Lebanese al-Mayadeen TV station (al-Mayadeen TV YouTube channel, August 25, 2018).

◆ **Yusuf al-Mahmoud, spokesman for the PA government**, said the American administration had not met its financial commitments to the Palestinians for more than a year, and that the announcement about reducing foreign aid was not new. He added that the announcement had been issued as part of the American policy of "theft" and of the pressure the president exerted on the Palestinian leadership to force it to accept the "deal of the century" (Wafa, August 25, 2018).

The international arena

► **Riyad Mansour, permanent observer of Palestine to the United Nations**, sent three communiqués, one to the UN secretary general, one to the current president of the Security Council and one to the president of the General Assembly. They described the recent events in Palestine and east Jerusalem, and the events in the Gaza Strip. He said the communiqués also included the names and number of those killed and the number of wounded since the "return marches" began. He said Israel had to be made to follow international law and UN resolutions and to stop its "crimes." He demanded the UN and the Security Council take responsibility for the situation of the Palestinians and end the Israel "occupation" (Wafa, August 25, 2018).

Participation of Palestinian representatives in international forums

► **Omar Hijazi, aide to the Palestinian foreign minister for multilateral relations**, participated for the first time as the representative of "Palestine" at the UN's Conference for the Arms Trade Treaty. The event was held in Tokyo. "Palestine" has been a member of the Conference since March 2018 (Wafa, August 21, 2018).