



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (September 5-16, 2018)

Overview¹

- ▶ While contacts for arrangement are bogged down, **Hamas recently stepped up the level of violence against Israel**. In the "return march" events (September 14, 2018), there was more violence than last week; During the march, hand grenades and pipe bombs were thrown at IDF soldiers; In the following days, hand grenades and pipe bombs were thrown, and IEDs were planted near the security fence. In addition, arson terrorism continued (incendiary balloons were found in a playground in the Israeli city of Kiryat Gat, about 50 km from the Gaza Strip).
- ▶ At the same time, the Palestinians **initiate provocations** and display "creative thinking" in developing tactics of **disturbing and wearing down the IDF soldiers**. Thus, a designated unit was established, engaging in disturbing the IDF at night (burning tires, throwing Molotov cocktails at IDF positions, operating sirens). Furthermore, in the background, there are extra weekly events in addition to the "return marches" (protest flotilla and demonstrations on the beach on Mondays, demonstrations in the area of the Erez crossing on Tuesdays). **These provocations, in the ITIC's assessment, have the potential for renewed escalation**, even if Hamas's intention is to keep the increased tension in control as long as an arrangement has not been reached.
- ▶ The main event in Judea and Samaria was **a stabbing attack** at the entrance to a mall in the Gush Etzion Junction. The man who was stabbed, Ari Fuld, a US citizen, died of his wounds. The perpetrator was shot and detained by the Israeli security forces. Other weekly attacks were also carried out: throwing IEDs, shooting attacks and throwing stones at Israeli vehicles.
- ▶ The spokesman for the Hamas-controlled Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip warned (September 9, 2018) that the fuel in the hospitals would be sufficient for only 10 days, and afterwards the population would be deprived of medical services. The spokesman for the

¹ Due to the holidays, the next News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict will appear on October 3, 2018.

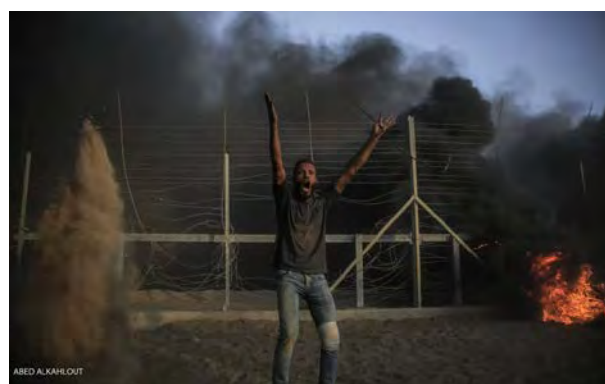
Palestinian Authority's Health Ministry responded that the PA government had no control over the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip managed by Hamas, and it would not serve as an "ATM" for it.

► As yet another step in the series of measures taken by the United States against the Palestinians, it was recently decided in the US **to close the PLO office in Washington**. This evoked reactions of rage from the PA, and threats **to resort to the UN and the ICC in The Hague**.

Israel's South

The "return march"

As on every Friday since March 30, 2018, **on Friday, September 14, 2018**, the Gazans held a "return march", the 25th. The march, entitled "Resistance [i.e., terrorism] is our choice," **was attended by 13,000 Palestinians**, a relatively large number of participants in relation to the recent demonstrations. The demonstrators gathered in several sites along the security fence. The "return march" events **this week were characterized by unusual violence**. The rioters burned tires, threw stones, pipe bombs and Molotov cocktails, and broke through the border fence into Israeli territory. In addition, several incendiary kites and balloons were launched. Fire broke out in the Be'eri forest due to an incendiary balloon sent from the Gaza Strip. Incendiary balloons were found in a playground in the Israeli city of Kiryat Gat (about 50 km from the Gaza Strip).



Clashes during the "return march" in eastern Gaza City. Breaking through the security fence, and a Palestinian holding a Molotov cocktail (Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Return March, September 14, 2018)



Photos from a video documenting an attempted entry to Israeli territory in the eastern Al-Bureij refugee camp (video on the QUDSN Twitter account, September 14, 2018)

To watch the video:

<https://twitter.com/qudsn/status/1040657278154797056>



Launching incendiary kites in eastern Khan Younes (QUDSN Twitter account, September 14, 2018)

- ▶ Dr. Ashraf al-Qudra, spokesman for the Gaza Strip Ministry of Health, said that in the “return march,” **three Palestinians were killed, including a child**, and 248 were wounded, of whom 120 were rushed to the hospitals (Facebook page of the spokesman for the Gaza Strip Health Ministry, September 14, 2018).
- ▶ Like every week, Hamas senior officials attended the events, including Ahmad Bahar, Fathi Hamad and Khalil al-Hayya. **Fathi Hamad, member of the Hamas Political Bureau**, spoke in the “return camp” in eastern Gaza City. He said that if the “siege” was not lifted from Gaza, **the Palestinians would invent new ways [to fight] against the “occupation” on land, at sea and in the air** (QdsTvBreaking Twitter account, September 14, 2018). **He called on the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria to join the Gazans in the campaign** (palsawa.com, September 14, 2018).



Right: Fathi Hamad speaking in eastern Gaza City (palsawa.com, September 14, 2018). Left: Ahmad Bahar in the “return camp” in eastern Khan Younes (Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Return March, September 14, 2018)

- In the “return camp” in the central Gaza Strip, there was **an exhibition on the development of the “resistance”** (i.e., the terrorist/military wing of the terrorist organizations). It displayed weapons used throughout the years. The “march” organizers announced that **next week, the “return march” would be held under the slogan “Breaking the Siege”** (PALINFO, September 14, 2018).



Display of weapons in the “return camp” in the central Gaza Strip, presenting the development of the “resistance” (Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Return March, September 14, 2018)

Unusual events during the “return march”

- ▶ During the demonstrations, **the rioters threw two hand grenades at a military vehicle in the northern Gaza Strip, and several pipe bombs at IDF soldiers.** An IDF officer was lightly wounded from pipe bomb shrapnel. The IDF soldiers spotted **nine Palestinians who crossed the security fence in the southern Gaza Strip.** They immediately returned to the Gaza Strip territory (IDF Spokesperson, September 14, 2018).
- ▶ In response to the throwing of the hand grenades and the IEDs, an **IDF tank and aircraft attacked Hamas positions around the Gaza Strip** (IDF Spokesperson, September 14, 2018). According to the Palestinian media, several **observation posts** of the “resistance” were hit east of Shejaiya, east of Al-Tuffah, in the eastern Zeitoun neighborhood, in southern Gaza City and in an agricultural area east of Khan Younes (PALINFO; Shabakat Quds; Dunya Al-Watan, September 14, 2018).

Night activity aimed at wearing down the IDF

- ▶ In the past few days, Palestinian media reports on the activity of new units of young Palestinians, called **“Night Disturbance Units.”** According to their operatives, their purpose is **to keep the IDF soldiers on the Gaza Strip border constantly alert, wear them down and prevent them from resting by various means, mainly:** burning tires under cover of darkness in areas close to the security fence along the Gaza Strip border; throwing Molotov cocktails at IDF positions along the border; sounding sirens in order to make the IDF soldiers declare a state of alert (SAFA, September 16, 2018; Palestine Online, September 16, 2018).
- ▶ **Ahmad Bahar, deputy speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council,** gave a speech in the “return camp” in Khan Younes, in which he announced the establishment of the “Night Disturbance Unit”, which was designed to act vis-à-vis the IDF forces near the security fence (Al-Aqsa, September 14, 2018). Maher Mazhar, PFLP senior official and member of the Supreme National Authority of the Return March, also addressed this issue. According to him, everything that is now taking place is carried out as part of **inventing new ways to deal with Israel’s steps and the “siege” that it imposes on the Gaza Strip.** In the next phase, **there will be further escalation in the “popular activity,”** and additional units similar to the “Night Disturbance Unit” will be established (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, September 14, 2018).

This is the setting for **burning tires near the security fence, east of the Al-Bureij refugee camp on September 13, 2018, during the night, which was intended “to mislead the IDF forces”** (Shabakat Quds, September 14, 2018). In the ITIC's assessment, **these actions were intended to expand the variety of propaganda events in the Gaza Strip in addition to the “return marches”, in order to keep “controlled tension” vis-à-vis Israel as long as no progress is seen in the arrangement talks.**

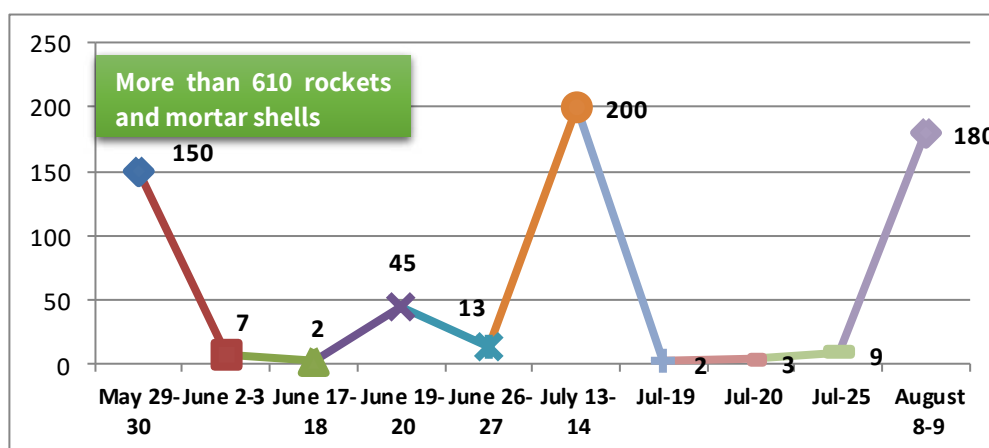


Activity of the “Night Peasuring Unit” in eastern Rafah (Rafah24 Facebook page, September 16, 2018). Left: The unit in action in the central Gaza Strip (Facebook page of Iyad al-Baz, Abu al-Mushir, September 13, 2018)

Rocket and mortar shell fire

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

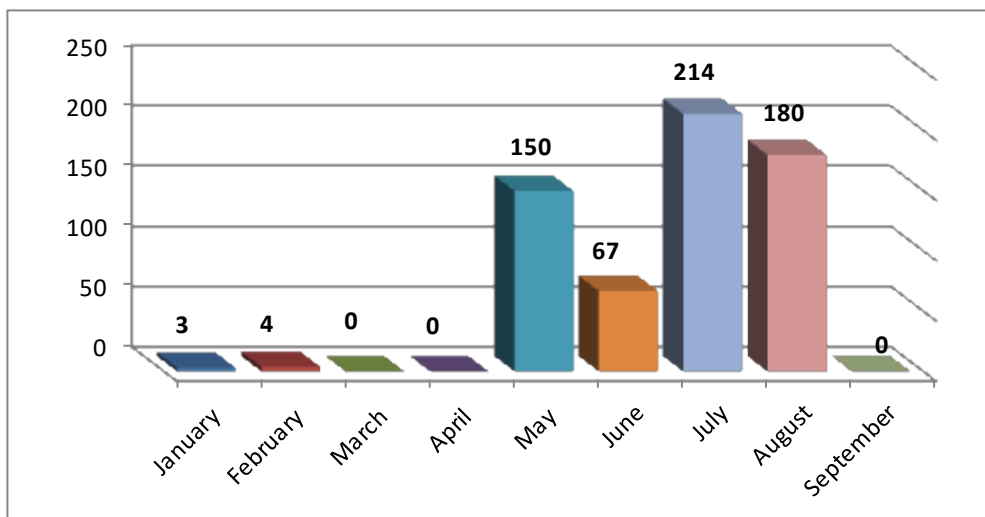
Rocket and mortar shell fire during and between the recent rounds of escalation²



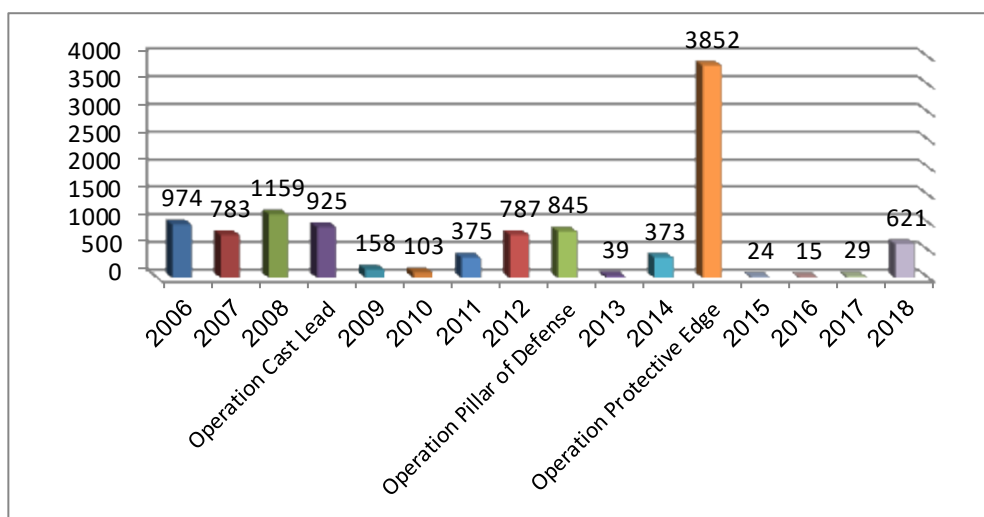
Minimum number of rockets and mortar shells fired in May, June and July 2018. At this stage, the ITIC cannot distinguish between rocket and mortar shell fire.

²The 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



No progress in the talks for arrangement

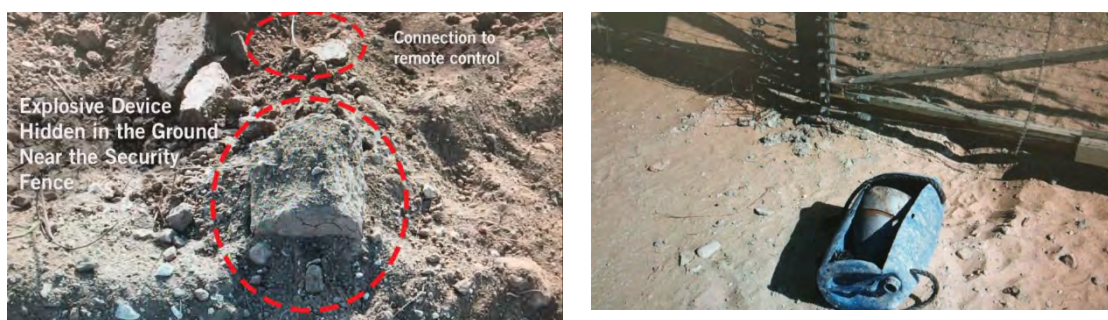
► **For the time being, there is no progress in contacts for arrangement and internal Palestinian reconciliation.** On September 15, 2018, Nikolay Mladenov, the UN Special Envoy for the Middle East Peace Process, and the UN deputy coordinator for the Middle East peace process made a short visit to the Gaza Strip (Al-Quds, September 15, 2018). According to Egyptian sources, **Egypt asked the Hamas delegation to postpone its visit to Cairo at least in one week** in order to allow the Egyptians to make preparations and conduct further consultations mainly with Fatah (Al-Hayat, September 13, 2018). According to a Palestinian source, in response to the Fatah's request not to increase the number of participants in the

talks, the Egyptian General Intelligence decided **to limit the round of reconciliation and talks for arrangement with Israel to five organizations only**. This, in contrast to the previous round of talks, where representatives of all the organizations took part. Sources in Hamas denied that Hamas gave in to Fatah's request (Araby 21, September 11, 2018).

- ▶ Senior Hamas officials gave the following statement on this issue:
 - ◆ **Hussam Badran, member of Hamas's Political Bureau**, said that during the talks, several creative ideas to handle the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip were raised, and a maritime crossing was also discussed. Badran denied that the efforts to bring about a lull had been stopped (Asharq Al-Awsat, September 14, 2018).
 - ◆ **According to Hazem Qassem, Hamas spokesman**, the lull with Israel hasn't failed, and efforts are still being made to achieve it (MAAN, September 10, 2018).
 - ◆ In an interview granted by **Khaled Mash'al, formerly chairman of Hamas's Political Bureau**, he said that Hamas had created new bargaining chips in the form of the "return marches" and the incendiary balloons, through which pressure has been applied on Israel, and they allow carrying out the negotiations for the lull (Al-Jazeera, September 10, 2018).

Additional events in the Gaza Strip

- ▶ **On the night of September 15-16, several hundred Palestinians gathered in several sites along the security fence. Three hand grenades and pipe bombs were thrown.** There were no casualties (Red Alert Facebook page, September 16, 2018).
- ▶ On September 10, 2018, the IDF forces exposed an **IED planted near the security fence in the southern Gaza Strip**. On September 13, 2018, the IED was neutralized by the IDF in a controlled manner. **Another IED was uncovered in the same place several days afterwards, and neutralized by the IDF forces** (IDF Spokesperson, September 14, 2018). The IEDs were apparently planted by a squad which approached the security fence under the cover of the violent disturbances in the Gaza Strip.



Right: IED which was found and neutralized on September 13, 2018, near the border fence in the southern Gaza Strip. Left: IED uncovered on September 14, 2018 (IDF Spokesperson, September 13, 14, 2018)

► **On September 9, 2018, an IDF force spotted a suspect approaching the security fence and trying to sabotage it.** He was shot at and taken for medical treatment by the IDF soldiers. Later, he died of his wounds. Several hours earlier, an IDF force spotted **four Palestinians trying to cross the security fence** in the northern Gaza Strip and penetrate into Israeli territory. The soldiers detained them. A knife and an axe were found in their possession (IDF Spokesperson, September 9, 2018).

Judea and Samaria

Attacks and attempted attacks

Stabbing attack in the Gush Etzion junction

► **On September 16, 2018, a stabbing attack was carried out at the entrance to a mall in the Gush Etzion Junction.** Ari Fuld, a 40-year-old US citizen, was fatally wounded and later died of his wounds in the hospital. After he was wounded, he chased the stabbing terrorist and even shot at him before collapsing. The terrorist was shot by civilians. He was wounded and arrested by the Israeli security forces (Magen David Adom Spokesperson's Office, September 16, 2018).

► The Palestinian media reported that the stabber is **Khalil Yusuf al-Jabarin**, 17, from Yatta, south of Hebron (Yatta Yatta Facebook page, September 16, 2018).



Right: Scene of the stabbing attack in Gush Etzion (PALINFO Twitter account, September 16, 2018). Left: The terrorist, Khalil Yusuf al-Jabarin (Yatta Yatta Facebook page, September 16, 2018)

Additional attacks

- ▶ **On September 11, 2018**, a pipe bomb was thrown at a **Border Police base in Abu Dis** (Jerusalem). It exploded outside the base, near one of the gates. There were no casualties. The gate sustained minor damage (Red Alert Facebook page, September 12, 2018).
- ▶ **On September 11, 2018**, a self-manufactured IED exploded **near an Israeli community north of Ramallah**. There were no casualties. Following the attack, the Israeli security forces operated in the nearby village of Al-Mouir (north of Ramallah) to find the shooters (IDF Spokesperson, September 12, 2018).
- ▶ **On September 9, 2018**, there was shooting **near Kochav Yaakov** (north of Jerusalem). There were no casualties, but vehicles sustained damage (IDF Spokesperson, September 9, 2018).

Events on the ground

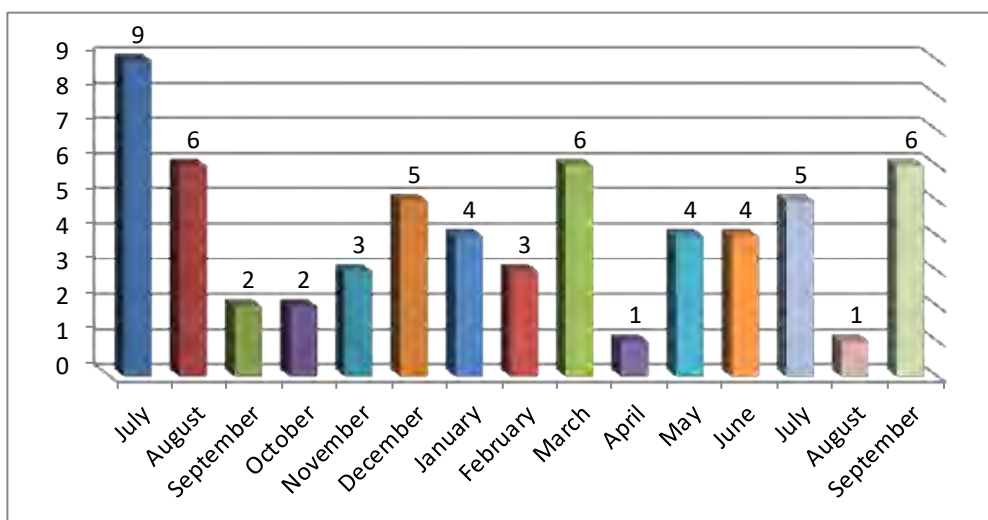
- ▶ Concurrently with the terrorist attacks, throwing stones continued throughout Judea and Samaria. Israeli security forces continued their preventive and counterterrorist activity. They detained Palestinians suspected of terrorist activity, confiscated funds intended to finance terrorist activity, and seized improvised and military grade weapons. The more prominent events were the following:

- ◆ **September 13, 2018** – Following the many cases of stone throwing in recent weeks on **Road 443** (Jerusalem-Modiin), the Israeli security forces entered the village of Beit Or al-Tahta and detained several Palestinians suspected of throwing stones at the road (Red Alert Facebook page, September 13, 2018).

◆ **September 13, 2018** – Following searches carried out by the Israeli security forces in the village of Beitunia (north of Ramallah), they seized a hand gun and four Molotov cocktails ready for use (IDF Spokesperson, September 13, 2018).

◆ **September 12, 2018** – Stones were thrown at a vehicle on the Hebron-Gush Etzion road, between Beit Omar and Karmeit Junction. There were no casualties. The vehicle windshield was damaged (Red Alert Facebook page, September 12, 2018).

Significant terrorist attacks carried out in Judea and Samaria³



Developments in the Gaza Strip

The crossings

The Rafah Crossing

► **The Rafah crossing is continuously open for those entering or leaving the Gaza Strip, based on lists received in advance** (website of the Ministry of the Interior in Gaza, September 12, 2018). Egypt sent to the Gaza Strip trucks with fuel products and goods through the Salah al-Din crossing (Filastin al-Yawm, September 12, 2018).

The Erez Crossing

► **On September 4, 2018**, around 1,000 people gathered opposite the Erez Crossing in the northern Gaza Strip. This demonstration was organized by the Supreme National Authority of the Return March and Breaking the Siege, in protest against the US president's decision to cut aid to UNRWA. **The demonstrations were accompanied by violent disturbances.** The

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.

demonstrators advanced towards the crossing, threw Molotov cocktails and sabotaged security devices. IDF forces fired at the demonstrators. According to the Palestinian media, one person was severely wounded (PALINFO Twitter account, September 4, 2018).

► In response to the riots, **Israel announced that it was closing the Erez Crossing until the damage was completely repaired.** Use of the crossing was approved only for humanitarian cases (IDF Spokesman, September 4, 2018). The crossing was reopened on September 13, 2018.

Fuel shortage threatens to disrupt hospital activity

Speaking at a press conference, **Dr. Ashraf al-Qudra, spokesman for the Palestinian Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip,** warned about the grave situation in the hospitals in the Gaza Strip. Dr. al-Qudra noted that **the “countdown” has begun, i.e., the hospitals in the Gaza Strip will soon cease operation and the residents will be deprived of medical services** (Filastin Al-Yawm, September 9, 2018). **Abu Yusuf al-Najjar Hospital Director Atef al-Hut said that the hospital’s fuel supply would be sufficient for 10 days.** According to him, due to the shortage, they are postponing operations, dialysis patients are not receiving treatment, and laboratory and x-ray services have been terminated. Al-Hut **called on all parties to intervene in order to prevent a “humanitarian disaster”** (Dunia Al-Watan, September 12, 2018).

► According to Osama al-Najjar, spokesman for the PA’s Health Ministry, the Health Ministry is not responsible for the fuel crisis at the hospitals in the Gaza Strip, since **the government has no control over the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip, which is run by Hamas.** Al-Najjar stressed that they would not serve as “ATMs” for the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip (Shehab, September 9, 2018). However, he noted that in the past, the PA had provided fuel and also sent free medicines to hospitals (Shabakat Quds, September 9, 2018). **Salah Bardawil, member of the Hamas Political Bureau,** condemned the response of the PA’s Health Ministry (Salah Bardawil’s Twitter account, September 9, 2018).

The Palestinian Authority

Further deterioration in relations between the United States and the Palestinian Authority

► Recently, there has been **further deterioration in relations between the United States and the Palestinian Authority**. This was after the US **took several additional steps to intensify the pressure on the PA**:

◆ On September 10, 2018, **Spokesperson for the US Department of State Heather Nauert** issued a statement that after an in-depth examination, **the State Department had decided to close the PLO office in Washington**. According to the announcement, the United States allowed the office to operate in order to establish a comprehensive and long-term peace with Israel. However, the PLO did not take concrete steps towards negotiating with Israel. Instead, its leadership condemned the American peace plan and refused to cooperate with the US government. Therefore, **the government decided that the Washington office would be shut down** (US Department of State website, September 10, 2018).

◆ That same day, **US National Security Adviser John Bolton** delivered a speech **strongly criticizing the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague**. Bolton presented the ICC as an institution that undermines state sovereignty, contradicts the US Constitution, and is ineffective and even dangerous. He noted that the United States would not cooperate with the ICC and would not join it, **and would take all necessary measures to protect the citizens of the US and its allies from unjustified claims**. In his speech, **Bolton presented the case of Israel as a prominent case in which a liberal democratic state is under investigation for actions that it had taken in order to defend itself** (Reuters, September 10, 2018).

◆ A few days later, it was reported that acting on instructions from the White House, **the US would not renew the funding of the Conflict Management and Mitigation Program, whose goal is to strengthen relations between Israel and the Palestinians**. Up to now, the program has received funding in the amount of \$26 million a year. The US Agency for International Development issued a statement that it cannot assist the Palestinians in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip as a result of a US government decision (The New York Times, September 14, 2018).

► The PA **reacted with rage to the steps taken by the US**, especially the decision to close the PLO's representative office.

◆ In a speech to the Arab League foreign ministers, **PA Foreign Affairs Minister Riyad al-Maliki** said that the US only claims that it is trying to help resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. According to him, the US actually supports the Israeli position and uses its power to serve its interests (Wafa News Agency, September 11, 2018).

◆ **PLO Executive Committee Secretary Saeb Erekat** said that this move would have serious political implications and would “destroy the world order.” Erekat made it clear that steps would be taken to protect the Palestinian people in the US and that the people would not surrender to threats and would fight for its liberty and its independence. Palestinian sources said **that in response to the US activity, the PA was examining the possibility of obtaining international recognition of its status as a UN member state** (Al-Quds Al-Arabi, September 11, 2018).

◆ **Nabil Shaath, Mahmoud Abbas's advisor on foreign affairs**, called the US decision a “foolish decision” designed to eliminate the Palestinian issue. He noted that the decision would not succeed in removing the Palestinians from their land (Al-Arabi Al-Yawm TV, September 11, 2018).

◆ **Husam Zomlot, PLO representative in Washington**, who has been in Ramallah for the past few months, said that the Palestinians were not surprised by the US government's decision. Zomlot noted that this was a “black day” in the Middle East peace process and added that nevertheless, they would not stop fighting for their rights (PNN website in English, September 11, 2018).



Husam Zomlot, PLO representative in Washington, being interviewed by Al-Jazeera in Ramallah (Husam Zomlot's Facebook page, September 10, 2018)



Cartoon published in Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda, the official organ of the PA, equating the closure of the mission with the death of the peace process (Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda, September 11, 2018)

PA turns to the International Court in The Hague

- ▶ **Israel's Supreme Court justices rejected the Palestinian petition regarding the evacuation of Khan al-Ahmar and ruled that there was no reason not to evacuate the site.** In response, **Fatah Spokesman Osama al-Qawasmi** claimed that Israel's decision on the evacuation constituted a flagrant violation of international law. He called on the Palestinian public and organizations to hold demonstrations to prevent it.
- ▶ In the wake of the Israeli decision, **Saeb Erekat announced that the PA had filed a complaint with the office of International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda.** According to him, the PA has asked the prosecutor to mount an investigation into the Khan al-Ahmar case. This is in addition to three other official cases filed with the prosecutor in the past regarding so-called Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip, the settlements and Jerusalem, and the Palestinian prisoners (Palestinian TV, September 11, 2018). According to **PA Representative to the UN Riyad Mansour**, the ICC Prosecutor is currently conducting a preliminary inquiry into the Palestinian complaints that were filed with the court. He expressed the hope that they would result in an official investigation. Mansour noted that the PA is in frequent contact with the Prosecutor in this regard (Palestinian TV, September 5, 2018).

At a meeting of the PLO Executive Committee, Mahmoud Abbas revealed that in addition to the filing of the claim on the subject of Khan al-Ahmar, **contacts are underway with Jordan to turn to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICI) in The Hague in order to formulate a position regarding the filing of a claim against Israel regarding the Al-Aqsa Mosque** (Mahmoud Abbas's YouTube channel, September 15, 2018).



Right: Mahmoud Abbas speaking at a meeting of the PLO Executive Committee in his office in Ramallah (Mahmoud Abbas's YouTube channel, September 15, 2018). Left: Saeb Erekat at a press conference in Ramallah in which he announced the filing of a complaint against Israel (Al-Jazeera TV, September 11, 2018)

Paraguay decides not to move its embassy to Jerusalem

► After Paraguay announced in May 2018 its intention to relocate its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem and inaugurated its new embassy, its government retracted the move and returned its embassy to Tel Aviv. **Senior PA officials, including Saeb Erekat and Riyad al-Maliki, congratulated Paraguay on its decision**, presenting it as a courageous decision in compliance with international law. The two officials called on other countries to follow suit. According to them, Paraguay took this step after having promised to do so during the Palestinian foreign minister's visit to Paraguay. Fatah Spokesman Osama al-Qawasmi welcomed the decision and said that it was a victory for the Palestinians, international law and Palestinian diplomacy (Wafa News Agency, September 5, 2018).