



## Summary of Events Along the Gaza Strip Border

October 21, 2018

### Overview

- ▶ On October 17, 2018, two rockets were launched at Israel from the Gaza Strip. One, **with a large warhead, hit a house in the southern Israeli city of Beersheba and caused extensive damage.** There were no casualties. The other rocket fell into the sea off the coast of one of the cities in central Israel. So far it is unclear which organization launched the rockets. **Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), both of which have such rockets, denied involvement.** In response Israeli Air Force (IAF) aircraft attacked Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip. According to the Israeli media, the Israeli government political-security cabinet decided to intensify the IDF's responses to events in the Gaza Strip. Hamas and the PIJ threatened to intensify their attacks.
- ▶ Despite the Israeli threat, the "return march" activities of Friday, October 19, 2018, were held as usual. About 10,000 Gazans participated, **who were requested by the organizers not to approach the security fence.** Therefore **the level of clashes with IDF forces was relatively lower than in recent weeks** with the result that no Gazans were killed and relatively fewer were wounded.
- ▶ Israel's political-security cabinet met in the wake of the rocket attacks. The Israeli media reported that the cabinet had instructed the IDF to intensify its responses. Reinforcements were deployed near the Gaza Strip border. **Apparently that convinced Hamas to decrease the violence of the "return march" activities on Friday** (proving that Hamas can control the rioters and the level of violence they employ).
- ▶ Israel responded to the decrease in the violence by opening the Erez and Kerem Shalom Crossings on the morning of October 21, 2018. The delivery of fuel to the Gaza Strip from Qatar was postponed for the time being and the issue will be reexamined in a number of days, depending on events on the ground.

## Rocket Fire

### Rocket fire targeting Beersheba and central Israel

- ▶ On the morning of October 17, 2018, at 03:39 hours, two rockets were launched at Israel from the Gaza Strip. **One landed in the southern Israeli city of Beersheba with a direct hit on a house. The other fell into the sea off the coast of a city in central Israel.** Because of size of the warhead, the rocket that hit Beersheba caused extensive damage to the house, where a woman and her three children were sleeping. They managed to reach the house's security room in time. Seven civilians were treated for shock.
- ▶ It was the first rocket that hit Beersheba since Operation Protective Edge (2014). So far it is not clear which organization fired the rockets. The IDF spokesperson reported that only Hamas and the PIJ are in possession of such rockets. Both organizations denied involvement in the rocket fire (see below).



**Right: Firing rockets from the Gaza Strip (video posted to the Facebook page of photographer Abd al-Rahman al-Kahlut, October 17, 2018). Left: The house in Beersheba that took a direct hit (Palinfo Twitter account, October 19, 2018).**

### Israel's response

- ▶ Israel announced it regarded the event as particularly grave and accused Hamas of responsibility. **In response IAF aircraft attacked more than 20 Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip.** The attacks focused on a Hamas attack tunnel in the Khan Yunis region which had crossed the border into Israeli territory. Other sites included locations where tunnels were being dug in al-Zeitun and Khan Yunis; the shaft of a naval terrorist tunnel on the Khan Yunis coast; a workshop for the manufacture of components and concrete slabs for building tunnels; workshops for the manufacture of aerial weapons in Rafah and Tel al-Hawa; a military compound of Hamas' naval force in Khan Yunis; terrorist targets in a number of military compounds, including a site for the manufacture of weapons and rockets. In addition, the aircraft attacked a squad of terrorist operatives in the northern Gaza Strip who were about to fire rockets into Israeli territory (IDF website, October 17, 2018).

► The Palestinian media reported that among the sites attacked were several posts: in the southern part of Gaza City, western Beit Lahia, the al-Zeitun neighborhood of Gaza City, the al-Sultan neighborhood in western Rafah and a field nearby, the al-Bahar post of the national security force on the Gaza Strip-Egypt border in Rafah, and the al-Tel post in western Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip (Palinfo and Safa, October 17, 2018). The spokesman for the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip reported one Gazan killed in the attacks and several wounded (Twitter account of Ashraf al-Qidra, October 17, 2018).



**Right: The commander of the national security forces in the Gaza Strip and his deputy visit the al-Bahar post after the attack (Facebook page of the national security forces in the Gaza Strip, October 17, 2018). Left: Smoke from a post in Beit Lahia after the attack (Palinfo Twitter account, October 17, 2018).**

► Following the rocket fire the Israeli government political-security cabinet held an ad hoc meeting. The Israeli media reported that the cabinet decided to change the rules of engagement in view of the violence along the Gaza Strip border and the arson terrorism. According to reports, the cabinet instructed the IDF to gradually intensify its response and employ a policy of zero tolerance towards any violation. However, the cabinet also decided that efforts would continue to reach an arrangement through the mediation of Egypt and Nikolay Mladenov, the UN envoy to the Middle East.

### **Responsibility for the rocket fire**

► **So far it is unclear which terrorist organization in the Gaza Strip was behind the rocket fire.** The joint operations room of the Palestinian resistance organizations, the coordinating body for the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, **rushed to issue a formal condemnation of the rocket fire** ( Hamas military wing website, October 17, 2018).



**The condemnation of the rocket fire issued by the so-called  
"joint operations room of the Palestinian resistance organizations"  
(Hamis military wing website, October 17, 2018).**

► **Mahmoud al-Zahar, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said the accusations against Hamas and the PIJ of firing the rockets were baseless. **He claimed Hamas was not responsible**, but rather "someone wanting to disrupt regional stability." He said it was forbidden for the "event" to harm Israel's commitments regarding water and electricity to the Gaza Strip (Shabakat Quds, October 18, 2018). **Hamis and the PIJ issued announcements stating they did not want a war and opposed rocket fire, which harmed the Egyptian efforts to lift the siege of the Gaza Strip** (Paltoday, October 17, 2018).

► According to **senior Hamas figure Bassam Na'im**, the security forces in the Gaza Strip are investigating to find out who was responsible for the rocket fire. He also claimed serious steps would be taken against anyone who tried to drag the Palestinians into a confrontation, adding that Hamas, like the other organizations, was working to prevent escalation (al-Araby al-Jadeed, October 19, 2018).

## Threats to Israel

► Following the visit of the Israeli prime minister to the communities near the Gaza Strip and an assessment of the situation, a meeting was held of the joint operations room of the Palestinian resistance organizations. A threat was issued to Israel, warning that in response to its "repeated crimes against the Palestinians, Israel would receive a devastating, violent response from the Palestinians and the 'resistance' [i.e., the terrorist organizations]" (Palinfo, October 17, 2018; Ma'an, October 18, 2018).

► The military wings of Hamas and the PIJ issued videos **threatening Israel and warning it not to test them**. The Hamas video shows its operatives preparing rockets for launching, ending with a caption in Arabic reading, "Be careful of making a mistake in judging [us]," and

in Hebrew, "It is recommended [you] read us correctly. A mistake will not be good [for you]" (website of Hamas' military wing, October 18, 2018).



**Scenes from the video issued by Hamas' military wing and the warnings in Hebrew and Arabic (website of Hamas' military wing, October 18, 2018).**

► The video issued by the PIJ's military wing shows rockets being launched during the round of escalation in August 2018, with the caption, "We told you so and we were right." Operatives of the Jerusalem Battalions, the PIJ's military-terrorist wing, are shown preparing rockets for launching, including a new model rocket shown at the most recent military display. The video ends with the caption, "The enemy knows us well from [his own] experience" (website of the PIJ's military wing, October 18, 2018).



**Scenes from the video threatening Israel issued by the PIJ's military wing and the caption in Hebrew and Arabic threatening Israel (website of the PIJ's military wing, October 18, 2018).**

## The "Return Marches"

### Deployment for the "return march" of October 19, 2018

#### Israel

► Following the Israeli cabinet decision to raise the level of response to the riots along the Gaza Strip border, **the IDF began concentrating forces along Israel's southern border**, and made the preparations public. According to reports, IDF forces in Israel's south were reinforced with hundreds of soldiers and dozens of tanks, cannons, APCs and engineering equipment. They arrived at assembly areas near the Gazan border.



**Report from the Hamas media on IDF reinforcements near the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March, October 20, 2018).**

#### The Gaza Strip

► In the wake of public threats from Israel, the organizers of the march, under Hamas direction, tried to hold the march as planned but at the same time **to prevent the situation from deteriorating, which was tense in any case**. Before the riots the Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March issued an exceptional call to the public, requesting they not approach the security fence and hold only "popular" demonstrations, not those of a military nature, **without using hand grenades or guns** (al-Araby al-Jadeed, October 18, 2018). According to Hamas sources, **they would take steps to reduce the violence accompanying the march to prevent a military escalation**. The sources also reported that there might be a reduction in the quantity of incendiary balloons launched into Israeli territory (Ma'an, October 18, 2018).

#### The Friday march, October 19, 2018

► The slogan of the "return march" held on October 19, 2018 (the 30<sup>th</sup> since March 30, 2018) was "Together, the Gaza Strip rises up and the West Bank joins it." About 10,000 Gazans (about 5,000 fewer than in previous weeks) participated. According to the IDF spokesperson, as opposed to previous weeks, most of the Gazans did not approach the border but remained

behind and did not try to reach the security fence. However, there were still **instances of Gazans throwing IEDs and hand grenades at the IDF forces**. There were also **at least three attempts to cross the fence**. The Gazans who tried to cross the fence returned immediately to the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, October 19, 2018). No Israeli casualties were reported.



**Gazan demonstrators at the "return march" in eastern Gaza City (Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March, October 20 2018).**



**Gazan rioters sabotaging the security fence in an attempt to forcibly break through into Israeli territory during the "return march" (Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March, October 20, 2018).**

► The events give the impression that Hamas is at least partially lowering the degree of **violence during the riots**. Sources within the IDF said it was the calmest riot since they began in March, and that Hamas had restrained the violence. According to the sources, very few hand grenades and IEDs were thrown at the IDF forces. In security source assessment Hamas stationed armed operatives along the fence to keep the violence under control (Ynet, October 19, 2018).

► In addition, the number of Gazan casualties during the riots may indicate a decrease in the level of violence. The spokesman for the ministry of health reported that 130 demonstrators had been injured. There were no fatalities. Speaking about the relatively small number of Gazan casualties, **Talal Abu Zarifa, a member of the political bureau of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)**, said the Gazans had employed the same

"popular resistance" measures as they had in recent weeks. However, **they had employed them in moderation, responsibly and wisely, thereby not giving Israel an excuse to kill them.** He said such behavior should serve as an example [for future marches] (al-Aqsa, October 19, 2018).

### Israel's reaction

► Following the decrease in the violence on October 19 and 20, 2018, and in view of Hamas' efforts at restraint, on the morning of October 21, 2018, Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman ordered **the opening of the Erez and Kerem Shalom Crossings.** The decision about the continuation of the **delivery of fuel from Qatar was postponed and will be reexamined in a few days, depending on the situation on the ground** (Note: On October 17, 2018, after the rocket fire attacking Israel, the Israeli defense minister ordered the closing of the crossings. In response to attempts to break into Israeli territory, the defense minister banned the delivery of fuel and cooking gas into the Gaza Strip beginning October 14, 2018, until further notice.)

### Statements from senior Hamas figures

► Hamas spokesmen **expressed satisfaction with the public participation in the "return march" despite Israel's threats, and promised to continue the demonstrations.** Some of the statements were the following:

- ◆ **Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** said the perseverance of the Palestinian people, who came out en masse for the 30<sup>th</sup> "return march," was the most important response of the public to the threats from Israel ["the enemy"], and motivated the Gazans to continue (Hamas website, October 19, 2018).
- ◆ **Senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan** claimed Egypt had not made any request to stop the "return marches." He added they would not stop in return for the entrance of fuel to the Gaza Strip. He said no one had exerted pressure on Hamas to stop the marches (al-Mayadeen, October 18, 2018). On another occasion he said the "return marches" would continue until the siege of the Gaza Strip had been unconditionally lifted, adding that the "resistance" [i.e., terrorist operatives] would protect the marchers. He called on the residents of the West Bank to continue carrying out attacks like the recent ones (al-Aqsa, October 19, 2018).
- ◆ **Ahmed Bahar, deputy chairman on the Palestinian Legislative Council,** said during the march in which he said that the [Israeli] "settlements" near the Gaza Strip

would never feel secure until the siege of the Gaza Strip had been lifted. He added that the "return marches" would continue until they had achieved their objectives. He also stressed that the "resistance" would respond with force to "any stupid behavior" on the part Israel (Wafa, October 19, 2018).

- The Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March said the slogan for the activities that would be held on Friday, October 26, 2018, would be "The Gaza Strip stands firm and does not surrender." The Authority called on Gazans to participate in the events (al-Aqsa, October 19, 2018).



**A notice posted to the Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March on October 20, 2018, stating that the "return marches" would continue until they had achieved their objectives.**

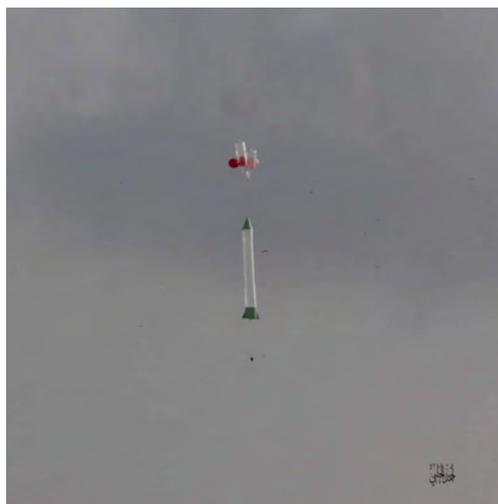
## Arson Terrorism and Palestinian Attempts to Cross the Border

- In the meantime, during and between the Friday marches clashes and violence continued along the Gaza Strip border. They included attempts to cross the security fence and the **launching of incendiary kites and balloons into Israeli territory:**

- ◆ On **October 20, 2018**, a group of Gazan rioters succeeded in crossing the security fence east of the al-Bureij refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. On an abandoned IDF sniper post they hung a picture of one of the rioters who had been killed and returned to the Gaza Strip. The events were videoed by the Gazans and uploaded to the social networks.
- ◆ On **October 20, 2018**, a balloon flying at a height of five meters (about five and a half yards) was located over one of the communities in the western Negev. It was

attached to a hand grenade. A police demolitions expert neutralized it (Red Alert Facebook page, October 20, 2018).

- ◆ On **October 19, 2018**, a cluster of balloons attached to an IED was neutralized to the north of the Gaza Strip. Two balloons attached to IEDs were neutralized in the western Negev
- ◆ On **October 18, 2018**, Gazan rioters from Hamas' night harassment group detonated an IED attached to a balloon near the security fence (east of al-Bureij in the central Gaza Strip). The explosion was videoed and posted to the social networks.



**Right: Launching a rocket-shaped incendiary balloon (Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March, October 20 2018). Left: Preparations for launching incendiary balloons during the "return march" in the eastern Gaza Strip (Shehab Facebook page, October 19, 2018).**

► **In accordance with cabinet's decision, Israel responded to the launching of incendiary balloons by shooting at the squads launching them:**

- ◆ On **October 19, 2018**, during the Friday riots, IAF aircraft attacked a squad of terrorists launching incendiary balloons east of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. According to Gazan reports, at least three operatives were seriously injured (Shehab, October 19, 2018).
- ◆ On **October 20, 2018**, IAF aircraft attacked a squad of terrorist operatives launching incendiary balloons in the southern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, October 20, 2018). The Palestinian media reported a motorcycle had been hit east of Rafah (Shabakat Quds Twitter account, October 20, 2018).



**The motorcycle attacked by the IAF east of Rafah  
(Palinfo Twitter account, October 20 2018).**