



Summary of Events Along the Gaza Strip Border

Overview

- ▶ On Friday, October 26, 2018, another “return march” was held in the Gaza Strip with **the participation of 16,000 demonstrators and rioters** (10,000 the previous week). The riots were particularly violent. **An exceptionally large number of IEDs and hand grenades were thrown at IDF forces. In two instances rioters tried to cross the security fence.** During the riots the Israeli Air Force attacked three Hamas posts in the northern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, October 26, 2018). Five rioters were killed and 170 wounded.
- ▶ The night after the riots a massive barrages of rocket and mortar shell fire attacked the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip (close to 40 rockets and mortar shells). The rocket fire continued throughout the night and into the following day. Several people were treated for shock. The IDF responded by attacking about eighty Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) military targets.

The PIJ claimed responsibility for the rocket fire, claiming it was retaliation for the deaths of five Gazans killed in the demonstrations. The PIJ rocket fire, like its declaration of a ceasefire, was **apparently carried out without coordinating with Hamas**. The rocket fire was the first significant action undertaken by the PIJ since Ziyad al-Nakhalah was elected the leader of the organization. In ITIC assessment, one objective of the rocket fire was to send a message to Hamas and Egypt regarding the PIJ’s importance in any talks of arrangement. Another objective was to illustrate to the Iranians the important role of the PIJ under Ziyad al-Nakhalah’s leadership, and to show them that the PIJ continued to be an important asset for Iran (making it possible for the PIJ to continue receiving generous financial and military support from Iran).¹

¹ For further information, see the October 28, 2018 bulletin, “Portrait of Ziyad al-Nakhalah, the new Palestinian Islamic Jihad leader” [Hebrew]. Note: the document is currently being translated into English and will shortly be available on our website.

The “Return March”

► The 31st march (since March 30, 2018) was held on Friday, October 26, 2018. About 16,000 demonstrators and rioters participated (up from 10,000 last week), gathering at a number of locations along the border fence. As they have every Friday, they burned tires and threw stones. This past week the riots were particularly violent, with an exceptionally large number of IEDs and hand grenades thrown at IDF forces. There were also two attempts to cross the security fence (IDF spokesman, October 26, 2018).



Right: Gazans at the “return march” in eastern Jabalia. Left: Palestinians sabotage the security fence in eastern Jabalia (Palinfo Twitter account, October 26, 2018).



Gazan women carry an Israeli flag with the inscription, “Israel will fall. Death to Israel” (the Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March Facebook page, October 26, 2018).

► During the riots the Israeli Air Force attacked three Hamas posts in the northern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, October 26, 2018). According to the Palestinian media, an Israeli helicopter attacked a “resistance” observation post in the al-Bureij region in the central Gaza Strip (Shabakat Quds, October 26, 2018).

- ▶ The day before the Friday march, Egypt had reportedly succeeded in reaching understandings between Israel and Hamas. According to the understandings, the “siege” of the Gaza Strip will be eased in return for a cessation of the violence along the border, and incendiary kites and balloons will no longer be launched. Israel will enable the delivery of fuel to the Gaza Strip, enlarge the fishing area and increase the hours of electricity. Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman held a press conference at Kerem Shalom, where he said he hoped that in light of the fuel delivered to the Gaza Strip, the Friday events would pass relatively quietly (Israeli TV Channel 10, October 26, 2018).
- ▶ Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the Hamas ministry of health in the Gaza Strip, said five Gazans had been killed in the events and 170 wounded. He said four had been killed by IDF fire during “return march” activities and the fifth during “a certain event” in eastern al-Bureij (Ashraf al-Qidra’s Facebook page, October 26, 2018).
- ▶ Senior Hamas figures who participated in the events expressed **their determination to continue the marches**:
 - ◆ **Ahmed Bahar, deputy head of the Legislative Council**, said the Gaza Strip stood firm and would continue the “return marches” until the lifting of the “siege” and the liberation of Palestine (al-Aqsa, October 26, 2018).
 - ◆ **Khalil al-Haya, a member of Hamas’ political bureau**, called on all those involved to exert pressure on Israel to revoke the ceasefire signed in 2014. He also warned that if the sanctions imposed on the Gaza Strip were not lifted, there would be a reaction on the ground (Safa, October 26, 2018).
 - ◆ **Senior Hamas figure Isma’il Radwan** said the “return marches” would not stop until the “siege” on the Gaza Strip had been lifted and the [Palestinian] refugees returned to their homes. He said **he hoped the Zionists disappeared off the face of the earth** (al-Mayadeen, October 26, 2018).
- ▶ The Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March and the Lifting of the Siege said the slogan for the march this coming Friday, November 2, 2018 (the 101st anniversary of the Balfour Declaration) would be “Our people will defeat the wretched decision” (Palinfo Twitter account, October 26, 2018).

Encouraging participation in the march

► On the eve of the march the leaders of the terrorist organizations, **especially the PIJ**, called on the Gazans to participate in the events, stressing that the marches would continue:

◆ **Muhammad al-Hindi, a member of the PIJ's political bureau**, during an event commemorating the death of the organization's founder, Fathi Shqaqi, called on the Palestinian people to actively participate in the "return march." He said the marches had not yet achieved their objective and no results were evident. He said it was not an issue of fuel from Qatar or fishing waters, but **the desire to completely lift the "siege" of the Gaza Strip**. He also said the marches would continue until the Palestinian people achieved its objectives (Filastin al-Yawm, October 25, 2018).

◆ **Senior PIJ figure Khaled al-Batash** said the marches could continue for several years until the "siege" was lifted. He added the marches were the Palestinians' most effective measure and therefore it was not logical for them to give them up (Palinfo, October 25, 2018).

◆ **Senior PIJ figure Khader Habib** said the "return marches" were the implementation of Fathi Shqaqi's **concept of confronting and destabilizing Israel**. He said the PIJ would not permit the Zionist enemy to enjoy stability on the lands of the Palestinian homeland. He said the "return marches" would continue until their objectives had been achieved, the closest of which was the "lifting of the siege" and the more distant was realizing the Palestinian people's "right of return." He said the Palestinian people had the right to use all forms of "resistance," the first of which was the armed struggle. He added that when the time came when the Palestinians had to use weapons against the Zionist enemy, they would (Filastin al-Yawm, October 26, 2018).



Right: Driving demonstrators to the “return camp” in the central Gaza Strip (Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March Facebook page, October 26, 2018). Left: Collecting tires for burning at the “return camp” in eastern Khan Yunis (Palinfo Twitter account, October 26, 2018).

In retrospect, apparently the PIJ calls for broad participation in the Friday march was **a way of preparing the ground for the rocket fire**. That is because massive participation increases the degree of the violence, **leading to more deaths of rioters near the fence. Deaths of rioters provides the PIJ with an excuse to fire rockets into Israeli territory, and to represent itself as the “protector” of the marches and the residents of the Gaza Strip.**

Rocket Fire into Israel

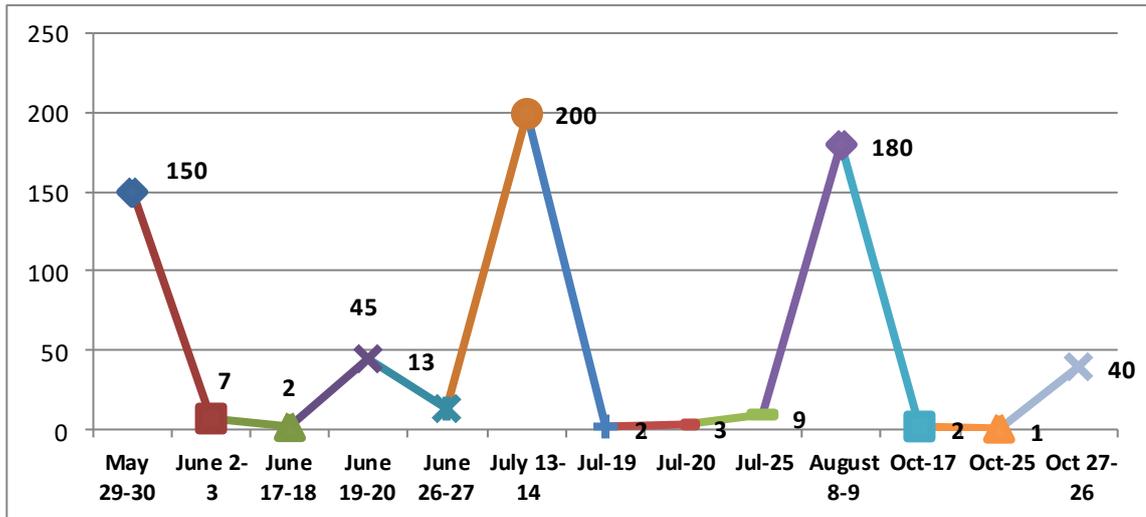
► **At about 22:30 of the night following the “return march” a massive barrage of rocket fire began attacking Israel.** It was the heaviest rocket fire attack since August 2018. During the night of October 26 and into October 27 **about 40 rockets and mortar shells** were launched into Israeli territory. The targets were the city of Sderot, and the communities in the western Negev and south of Ashqelon. The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted about 15 of the rockets, all those targeting built-up areas. The other rockets fell in open areas and were not intercepted (IDF spokesman, October 28, 2018). Two rockets fell inside the Gaza Strip.



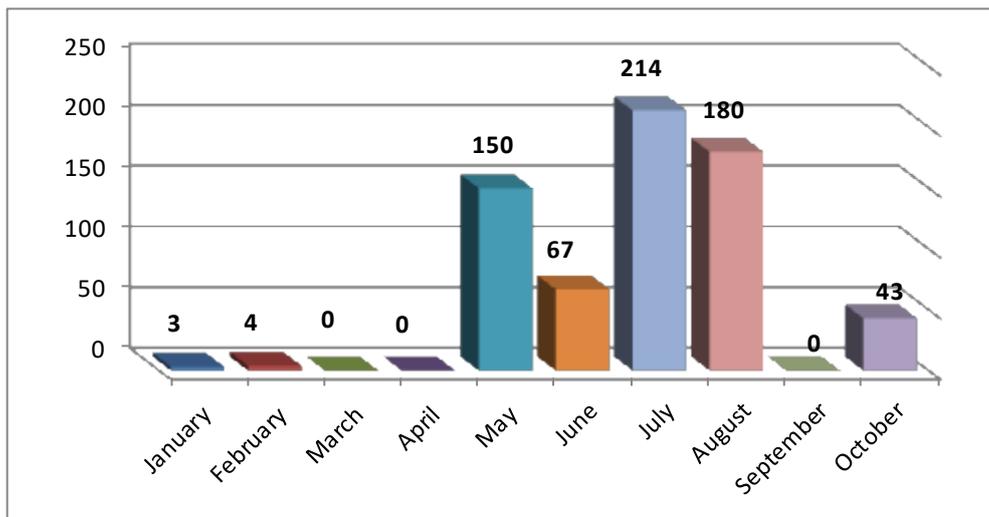
**The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepts rockets over the northern Gaza Strip
(Palinfo Twitter account, October 27, 2018)**

- ▶ The rocket and mortar shell fire caused seven people to go into shock. Others were slightly injured while running to take cover. There was a small amount of property damage. On October 28, 2018, an unexploded rocket was found in a high school yard in the western Negev (Ynet, October 28, 2018).
- ▶ On October 25, 2018, less than a day after the decision to deliver fuel from Qatar to the Gaza Strip, a rocket was fired from the Gaza Strip at the western Negev. It fell in an empty area, and no casualties or damage were reported. In response Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked eight terrorist targets in three Hamas compounds in the northern and southern Gaza Strip. Among the sites hit were a training camp and a site for manufacturing and storing weapons (IDF spokesman, October 25, 2018). In Israeli security assessment, the rockets were not fired by Hamas operatives.

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

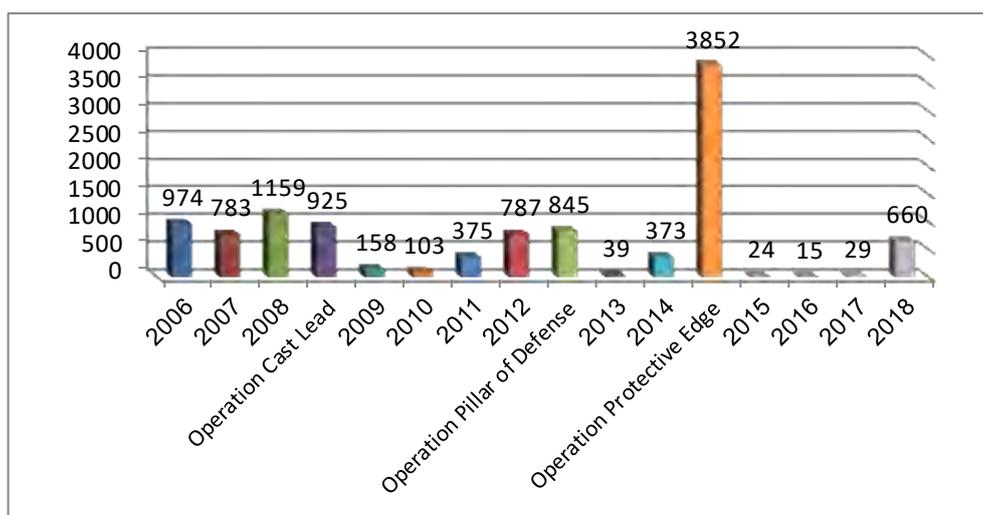


Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire since January 2018



* 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.

Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Claim of responsibility for the rocket fire

- **The rocket fire was carried out by the Jerusalem Brigades, the PIJ’s military wing,** apparently **without any coordination with Hamas.** The PIJ claimed it was retaliation for the deaths of five Gazans during the “return march” on Friday, October 26, 2018. The Jerusalem Brigades issued an announcement calling the rocket fire the “October revenge.” They said they could not sit idly by when “innocents are being killed in cold blood” and Israel “finds it necessary to shed the blood of peace-loving Gazans.” According to the announcement, despite the fact that the “resistance” warned Israel several times not to harm civilians, the “occupation” did not respect law or convention. Instead, Israel continued to “pay with people’s lives” while maintaining the “ongoing siege” [of the Gaza Strip] (website of the PIJ’s military wing, October 27, 2018).
- In another announcement the PIJ claimed Israel continued its policy of killing and aggression, and had killed seven shaheeds in cold blood, five in the Gaza Strip and two in the West Bank, and wounded more than 200 people. That was after the PIJ and the “resistance” forces [i.e., the terrorist organizations] had warned Israel during recent weeks that if the “enemy” continued its killing and methodical attacks on unarmed civilians, they would use the “clear equation of **a rocket in return for a rocket and blood in return for blood.**” According to the announcement, the PIJ would commit itself to a ceasefire if Israel committed itself as well, but if the attacks and aggression continued, the “resistance” would respond accordingly (Sawa, October 27, 2018).



Pictures from a video of Jerusalem Brigades operatives launching rockets and mortar shells (Jerusalem Brigades website, October 27, 2018).

Israel's response

► The Palestinians immediately announced a general call-up and raised the alert level (Emad, October 26, 2018). According to reports, government and UNRWA schools were evacuated (Palinfo Twitter account, October 27, 2018). **In response to the rocket fire dozens of Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked about 80 Hamas and PIJ targets.** Most of them belonged to Hamas, which Israel regards as responsible for everything that happens in the Gaza Strip. Among the targets attacked (Ynet, October 26 and 27, 2018):

- ◆ The new headquarters of Hamas' general security apparatus.
- ◆ Two sites for the manufacture of weapons in al-Atatra and the Nuseirat region.
- ◆ Five military compounds, including a joint training compound in Rafah.
- ◆ A tunnel shaft in Khan Yunis.
- ◆ An observation post in Beit Lahia.
- ◆ Eight terrorist targets in three PIJ military compounds. Among them were a location for the manufacture of weapons and a location for the manufacture of equipment for lining tunnel walls.



**The Israeli Air Force attacks terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip
(Palinfo Twitter account, October 26, 2018).**

► According to the Palestinian media, no casualties were reported but buildings and property were heavily damaged. That included “resistance” posts in the northern Gaza Strip, a post near the American School in Beit Lahia, a naval police post in Khan Yunis and the “al-Jadar post” (an attack which allegedly caused damage to the nearby Indonesian Hospital and a power outage in houses in Beit Lahia). Also hit was [the four-story new headquarters of Hamas’ general security apparatus] located in the center of Gaza City. The building had been evacuated before the attack (Shabakat Quds, Palinfo and Paldf Twitter accounts, October 27, 2018).



Attack in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip (Twitter account of al-Ra'i, an agency established by the Hamas administration, October 27, 2018).



The aftermath of the attack on the new headquarters of Hamas' general security apparatus in Gaza City (Palinfo Twitter account, October 27, 2018).

Ceasefire announced by the PIJ

► Palestinian sources reported **Egypt had contacted the PIJ leadership to renew the agreement**. Reportedly the PIJ told the Egyptians the organization was committed to a ceasefire with Israel if Israel was committed (Filastin al-Yawm, October 27, 2018). Statements from senior PIJ figure were the following:

- ◆ **PIJ spokesman Da'ud Shehab** said they agreed to a ceasefire and a return to the lull after Egypt had negotiated with the organization leadership. He said the ceasefire depended on Israel's commitment to it (al-Ghad, October 27, 2018).
- ◆ **Senior PIJ figure Ahmed al-Mudallal** said the fact the Jerusalem Brigades had enabled Egypt to negotiate a ceasefire with Israel showed the PIJ did not allow Israel to "wildly exaggerate" its activities against the Palestinian people. He also claimed the "resistance" movements had many methods of inflicting great suffering on Israel (Filastin al-Yawm, October 27, 2018).
- ◆ **Senior PIJ figure Khaled al-Batash** said the responses of the Jerusalem Brigades and "Palestinian resistance" showed they were keeping the promise they made to themselves to defend the "return marches" with rifles. He claimed Israel's killing of non-violent participants in the "return marches" was a crime Israel planned to exploit in order to force "new military equations" on the ground. He also claimed the PIJ would continue to be committed to a ceasefire as long as Israel was (Filastin al-Yawm, October 27, 2018).
- ◆ **Walid al-Qutati, a member of the PIJ political bureau**, said the "Palestinian resistance" with the Jerusalem Brigades at its head wanted to send the message that Palestinian blood could not be shed lightly. He said the "resistance" could punish Israel and the **turn area near the Gaza Strip into a place where it would be impossible to**

live, and it would pay the price for the crimes the IDF committed against the Palestinian people. He said Israel wanted to create an equation of killing in return for silence. He added the “resistance” would not accept such an equation and would not allow it to come into existence. However, he said the organizations in the Gaza Strip wanted a lull, not war, especially in view of the difficult situation of the Palestinian people (Filastin al-Yawm, October 28, 2018).

Hamas responses

► The rocket fire, as well as the declaration of a ceasefire, were apparently carried out **without previous coordination with Hamas**. However, senior Hamas figures related mainly to the blows Hamas suffered from the Israeli Air Force attacks:

◆ Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum called the events in the Gaza Strip “despicable acts of aggression” that Israel was trying to exploit to avoid its commitments regarding the “siege” and the lull (Palinfo Twitter account, October 27, 2018). On another occasion he called the attacks and destruction in the Gaza Strip serious “aggression” on the part of Israel, adding that the events were part of political struggles in Israel and of Israel’s attempts to project its internal crises onto the residents of the Gaza Strip. He also called the escalation an Israeli attempt to avoid its commitments to the ceasefire agreement signed in 2014, according to which the “siege” is to be lifted from the Gaza Strip (Hamas website, October 27, 2018).

◆ **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** said Israel was trying to suppress participants in the “return marches” by methodically attacking the Gaza Strip and killing six Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Shabakat Quds Twitter account, October 27, 2018).