



Summary of Events on the Gaza Strip Border

November 18, 2018

Overview

- ▶ The Friday "return march" of November 16, 2018, was held under the shadow of the ceasefire that ended the most recent round of escalation. Before the march, senior Hamas figures they would prevent violence in the coming march. **About 9,000 demonstrators and rioters participated, burning tires and throwing stones, but did not approach the border fence**, following demands from Hamas and the march organizers. Incendiary kites and balloons were not identified.
- ▶ The events were attended by senior figures from Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and other organizations. Speeches were given boasting about the achievements of the most recent round of escalation. Most of the speakers stressed that **the marches would continue until the "lifting of the siege."** Some of them expressed objection to the Arab states' normalization with Israel, which was the slogan of the march.
- ▶ During the most recent round of escalation (November 12-13, 2018), **about 460 rockets and mortar shells were fired at Israel** (the communities near the Gaza Strip and the southern cities of Ashqelon, Sderot and Netivot). After the round spokesmen for the terrorist organizations stressed the "achievements of the resistance," building a narrative of victory. However, the results of Israel's attacks were minimized, including the destruction of multi-storied buildings in Gaza. Special attention was given to the resignation of Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, which was represented as one of the achievements of the escalation. Spokesmen for Hamas and the other terrorist organizations insisted they had enforced a "new equation" on Israel, and **threatened they would not hesitate to extend the rocket fire to Beersheba and Tel Aviv.**
- ▶ Senior Hamas figures and the organizers of the "return marches" said they were committed to obeying the Egyptian demand to distance the marchers from the security fence and stop the incendiary kites and balloons. In the meantime, contacts continued with the Egyptian General Intelligence delegation, which arrived in the Gaza Strip on November 15, 2018. Apparently on the agenda is an arrangement based on the agreements and understandings

that ended Operation Protective Edge (a cessation of hostile activity in return for humanitarian aid and the opening of the crossings).

The "Return March"

► On Friday, November 16, 2018, the 34th march was held; its slogan was "Normalization is a crime and treason." **About 9,000 demonstrators and rioters participated**, gathering at five sites along the security fence. They burned tires and threw stones, but **the level of violence was relatively low compared with previous weeks. No incendiary kites and balloons were identified during the march. In addition, demonstrators avoided approaching the security fence. Thus apparently Hamas made an effort to control the events and prevent the demonstrators from reaching the security fence.**



Picture posted to the Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March for the Friday march, whose slogan was "Normalization is a crime and treason" (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, November 16, 2018).

► Issam Hamed, a member of the Supreme National Authority's legal committee, said the Authority and Hamas were committed to obeying the Egyptian demand to **keep demonstrators away from the fence, put an end to the launching of incendiary kites and balloons, and ending the activity of the "night harassment group" for three weeks.** He said the joint operations room of the Palestinian organizations monitored the situation on the ground and if the demonstrators were in danger, they would act accordingly (al-Mayadeen, al-Akhbar, November 16, 2018). Senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan said they were keeping the marches non-violent and popular, and that the marchers were completely disciplined (Agence France-Presse, November 16, 2018; almayadeen.net, November 16, 2018).



Right: Demonstrators burn a picture of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during the "return march" (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, November 16, 2018). Left: Demonstrators burn an Israeli flag (Palinfo Twitter account, November 16, 2018).



Demonstrators step on a picture of former Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, and afterwards burn the picture (Palinfo Twitter account, November 16, 2018).



Palestinians en route to the march sites (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, November 18, 2018).

► **Senior PIJ figure Khaled al-Batash** called on the marchers to watch out for IDF snipers and be careful not to give Israel a chance to retaliate against the Palestinians. He said the march had to be held only by peaceful means (al-Aqsa TV, November 15, 2018). PIJ spokesman Musab

al-Brem said operatives of the organization's military wing were still on high alert, and they would be present at the march to protect the demonstrators (al-Mayadeen, November 16, 2018). **Representatives of Egyptian General Intelligence stayed in the Gaza Strip during the events. After the events had been conducted in accordance with their demands, the Egyptian delegation returned to Cairo.**

► Senior figures from Hamas, the PIJ and other organizations participated in the events, among them Ahmed Bahar, deputy speaker of the Legislative Council; senior PIJ figure Khaled al-Batash and others. **The speakers expressed satisfaction with the results of the most recent round of escalation.** Most stressed **that the marches would continue until the "lifting of the siege."** Some spoke about their objections to normalization with Israel, which was the march slogan.



Right: Ahmed Bahar in the "return camp" in eastern Khan Yunis. Left: Khader Habib interviewed during his participation in the "return march" in eastern Gaza (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, November 16, 2018).

► Some of the issues related to were the following:

- ◆ **Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua** said the slogan of the march was that [Arab] normalization [with Israel] was a crime and treason. He claimed the regimes that had relations with Israel were stabbing the Palestinian people in the back and providing legitimization for the rule of the [Israeli] "occupation" (Safa, November 16, 2018).
- ◆ **Senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan** called on the Arab states to pass laws forbidding relations with Israel, and he called on the people of Egypt to object to normalization and not recognize the State of Israel (al-Mayadeen, November 16, 2018).
- ◆ Ahmed Bahar said the "resistance" had been victorious over Israel in the most recent round of fighting. He praised the commander killed in Khan Yunis and condemned the Arab policy of normalizing relations with Israel (al-Aqsa, November 16, 2018).

- ◆ **Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** said the Palestinian people would be responsible for the path of their struggle until the "siege" of the Gaza Strip had been lifted and objectives of the struggle had been realized. He added that the "resistance" could cause every enemy plot to fail (Fawzi Barhoum's Twitter account, November 16, 2018).
 - ◆ **Hamas spokesman Musheir al-Masri said the "great return march" would not stop because of understandings reached through Egyptian mediation, but rather the [violent] measures taken during them would be reduced.** He said the achievements of the march had been given in return for an end to the use of incendiary kites and balloons. Asked if Hamas would encourage demonstrators to use them again, he said **if Israel changed its mind about the measures it had instituted to ease the situation in the Gaza Strip, it could expect [the Palestinians to use] "other inventions"** (Paltoday, November 16, 2018).
 - ◆ **Senior PIJ figure Ahmed al-Mudallal** said the most recent round of "resistance" had not yet ended and that the IDF facing demonstrators today was not the same IDF that had occupied the Palestinian territories.
- ▶ A spokesman for the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip reported that 40 demonstrators had been wounded in the events, three of them critically (Ashraf al-Qidra's Facebook page, November 16, 2018). After the events the Supreme National Authority said the "return marches" **would continue to be non-violent until all their objectives** had been achieved, the most important of which was the breaking of the "siege" on the Gaza Strip. The Authority called on Palestinians to participate in the following "return march" on Friday, November 23, 2018, whose slogan would be "The resistance unites us and is victorious" (Ma'an, November 16, 2018).

The Egyptian Delegation in Gaza

- ▶ **A delegation of Egyptian General Intelligence has recently stayed in the Gaza Strip. It is headed by Ahmed Abdel Khaleq, who holds the General Intelligence's Palestinian portfolio.** The delegation arrived on November 15, 2018, and met with Yahya al-Sinwar, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, in his office. Also present were Khalil al-Haya, Rawhi Mushtaha and Tawfiq Abu Na'im, all members of Hamas' political bureau. Al-Sinwar praised the Egyptian efforts, reviewed the "crimes of the occupation," and stressed that Hamas and the other organizations would not allow Israel to attack the Gaza Strip again. He said it

was important to break the "siege" of the Gaza Strip, and that the "return marches" would continue according to the decisions of the Supreme Leadership of the marches.

► Abdel Khaleq stressed the efforts of Egypt to stabilize a ceasefire and Egypt's ongoing actions to lift the "siege" (Hamas movement website, November 15, 2018). The delegation also met with senior Hamas figure Mahmoud al-Zahar at his home in western Gaza City; Khaled al-Batash, a member of the PIJ's political bureau; and Jamil Muzher, a member of the political bureau of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) (Quds Press, November 17, 2018; Dunia al-Watan, November 17, 2018).



Right: Yahya al-Sinwar (white hair) meets with the head of the Egyptian delegation (Hamas movement website, November 15, 2018).

► The following day Ahmed Abdel Khaleq went to the southern Gaza Strip accompanied by senior Hamas figures. **He visited the region where the confrontation between Hamas' military wing and an IDF force had occurred on November 11, 2018.** He also visited the homes of the families of the operatives who had been killed in the event. The first house he visited was that of Nur Barakah, a senior operative in Hamas military wing (Quds Press, November 16, 2018). That evening he attended a Hamas memorial service in Khan Yunis for the operatives who had been killed. He reportedly shook hands with the senior Hamas figures at the service and then left quickly (al-Andalou News, November 16, 2018). **On November 17, 2018, the Egyptian delegation left the Gaza Strip and returned to Egypt.**



Ahmed Abdel Khaleq kisses the hands of one of the sons of a Hamas operative killed in the clash on November 11, 2018 (Paldf Twitter account, November 16, 2018).

Summary of the Round of Escalation (November 12-13, 2018)

- ▶ On the afternoon of November 13, 2018, the Palestinian terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip announced a ceasefire would go into effect with Israel. According to the IDF spokesman, during the most recent round of escalation (November 12-13, 2018), **about 460 rockets and mortar shells were fired at Israel**. The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted about 100 of them. Most of rockets and mortar shells were fired by Hamas and the PIJ. IDF aerial, naval and land forces attacked more than 160 Hamas and PIJ terrorist targets. Four of them were assets of great value to Hamas. Seven Palestinians were reported killed.
- ▶ With the end of the most recent round of escalation, the sources of power within the Gaza Strip **focused on the "achievements of the resistance," on which they based a narrative of victory, while minimizing the hits they had suffered**. They represented the resignation of Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman as one of their achievements. Spokesmen for Hamas and the other terrorist organizations stress that **they have enforced a "new equation" on Israel, of "blood in return for blood and a building in return for a building."** The PIJ's military wing said in an announcement that during the round of escalation a new rocket had been fired at Ashqelon with a larger than average warhead (Shabakat al-Quds, November 15, 2018). Popular Resistance Committees spokesman Abu Mujahed **thanked Iran, Hezbollah and all the supporters of the "resistance" as partners in the victory** (Paltoday, November 16, 2018).
- ▶ Victory marches and rallies were held throughout the Gaza Strip and calls were heard for victory marches in Judea and Samaria (Palinfo, November 16, 2018). However, the call apparently did not generate a significant response. Many Palestinians gathered in the town

squares and in front of buildings that had been hit by Israel. Hamas spokesmen stressed their commitment to the ceasefire, on condition that Israel was also committed to it:

- ◆ **Senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan** gave a speech to Palestinians who had gathered in front of the rubble of the al-Aqsa TV building in the western Gaza City. He said the "Palestinian resistance" had established a "deterrent equation" in the most recent round of escalation: **"A rocket in return for a rocket, killing in return for killing, blood in return for blood."** He said the Gaza Strip would not fall like a ripe fruit. Radwan stressed that no "Zionist crime" against the Gaza Strip and the "resistance" would go unpunished, because the "return marches" would continue until they had achieved all their objectives (al-Andalou News, November 13, 2018; Isma'il Radwan's Facebook page, November 13, 2018). On another occasion Radwan said the "resistance" was committed to the ceasefire if Israel ("the enemy") were committed to it. He said every act of "treason or aggression" would be responded to. **He also said it was not a new lull, but rather a stabilization of the ceasefire and a return to the status quo agreed on in 2014** (alresala.net, November 13, 2018).



Right: Crowds gather near the rubble of the al-Aqsa TV building. Left: Isma'il Radwan gives a speech (Facebook page of al-Karamah Media, November 14, 2018).

- ◆ According to Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, the "resistance" had defended the Palestinian people and itself from Israeli aggression, and the Palestinians had embraced the "resistance" with patience and pride (Hamas movement website, November 13, 2018).



Right: The Palestinian terrorist organizations take the ladder Netanyahu could use to come down from the tree (Felesteen, November 14, 2018). Left: Gaza gets rid of the IDF (al-Quds, November 14, 2018).

Memorial service for Palestinians killed in the confrontation of November 11, 2018

► On November 16, 2018, Hamas' military wing held a memorial service for six of its operatives who were killed in the confrontation with the IDF in Khan Yunis on November 11, 2018. The main spokesman was Yahya al-Sinwar, Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, who **transmitted an exceptional message from Muhammad Deif (the commander of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing)**. According to Haniyeh, the two met before the service. The members of the Egyptian General Intelligence delegation were present at the beginning of the service (al-Andalou News, November 16, 2018). During his speech al-Sinwar waved a gun which he claimed had been left behind by the IDF special force unit which had infiltrated into the Gaza Strip. He claimed Hamas had information about the IDF activity, including details about the officer who had been killed, and intended to make them public.



Right: Yahya al-Sinwar speaks at the memorial service (Facebook page of photographer Mariam Riyad DaGga, November 16, 2018). Left: al-Sinwar waves the gun allegedly left in the Gaza Strip (Shehab, November 17, 2018).

► Al-Sinwar summarized the most recent round of fighting, making the following main points (al-Mayadeen, November 16, 2018):

- ◆ **Praise for the military wings of the Palestinian organizations** (claiming they claimed numbered 13) which had participated in the joint operations room. He said they had begun and ended firing rockets together. He called on the PA and the organizations [in Judea and Samaria] to join them in making decisions and to be "blood brothers." He said this time the rocket fire was more massive and that undermined the effectiveness of the Iron Dome aerial defense system. He also said that the missiles were more precise and carried more deadly warheads.
- ◆ **The "resistance" is willing to preserve the lull in order to "break the siege,"** however, Hamas is prepared to resolve the crisis through continuing the protests at the fence and even entering into another extensive round of fighting if necessary. **He said Deif had told him that Hamas' military wing would maintain its current policy of response, according to which Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip would be answered with a response from Hamas, which would extend the rocket fire to Beersheba, and the next stage would be Tel Aviv.**
- ◆ Al-Sinwar called on all the organizations, especially Fatah, to join and unite with Hamas for the sake of the Palestinian interests. He appealed to the residents of Judea and Samaria and **praised the attacks that have been carried out from there.** He said that if they had a supportive leadership behind them, one that provided them with money and weapons, the current situation of the Palestinians would be different.

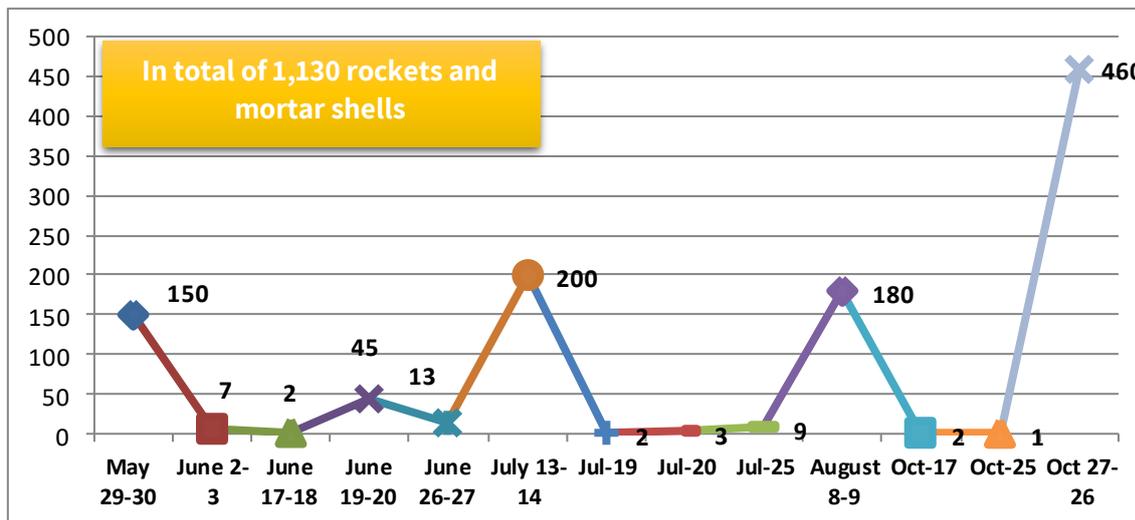


Hamas cartoon. The Arabic reads, "We are watching you...The resistance [i.e., Hamas] and the [other] organizations (Palinfo Twitter account, November 17, 2018).

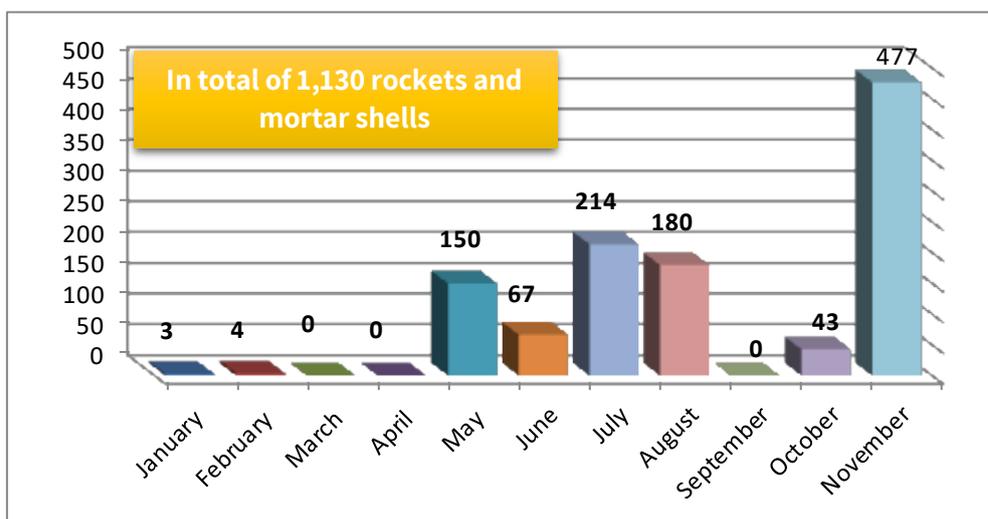
Appendix

Statistical Data

Rocket and mortar shell fire during and between the recent rounds of escalation¹ (as of noon, November 13, 2018)



Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire since January 2018



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

Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits

