



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(February 13 - 19, 2019)

Overview

- ▶ This past week the Friday "return march" was again characterized by a high level of violence. Palestinians threw hand grenades and IEDs, launched incendiary balloons and tried to cross the border fence. During the rest of the week violent activities were also carried out. Palestinian rioters threw IEDs and hand grenades into Israeli territory. An IDF soldier was wounded by an IED that exploded nearby. IDF tanks responded by firing at two Hamas observation posts in the northern Gaza Strip. In addition, a soldier was wounded during the Friday "return march."
- ▶ The event illustrates Hamas' warning that it would raise the level of violence if its demands were not met. In ITIC assessment, behind the rise in violence are Hamas' disappointments and difficulties: Hamas' expectations for a fundamental change in the economic situation and the lifting of the siege have not been realized; the recent Egyptian mediation failed; the rift with Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA) is widening and there are differences of opinion with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), whose position is more belligerent. So far Hamas continues to regulate the violence but the situation on the ground is more explosive and may deteriorate.
- ▶ After friction and a series of confrontations with PA officials, Hamas completed its takeover of the Gazan side of the Kerem Shalom Crossing. Hamas operatives expelled officials employed by the PA and prevented them from approaching the crossing. Given the increasing tension, "Hamas sources" threatened to initiate a broad "security" operation against Fatah in the Gaza Strip.
- ▶ The Israeli political-security cabinet decided to implement the law allowing Israel to deduct about 502 million shekels (about \$139 million), transferred to the Palestinian prisoners and their families from the tax revenues Israel collects for the PA (according to the Paris Protocol.) However, the PA does not intend to stop payments to prisoners, their families and the families of shaheeds. Fatah and PA spokesmen threatened their first response would be to leave the Paris Protocol and appeal to international courts, especially the International

Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. In ITIC assessment the PA is still examining the Israeli decision and its possible ramifications, so far without a formal decision about how to respond.

Israel's South

The "return march" of February 15, 2019

- ▶ On February 15, 2019, the 47th "return march" was held in the Gaza Strip. Its theme was "the Gaza Strip cannot be separated or defeated." **About 11,500 Palestinians participated**, slightly more than in previous weeks. Demonstrators gathered at five locations. **The level of violence was relatively high. Rioters burned tires and threw hand grenades, IEDs and stones at IDF soldiers. Incendiary balloons were launched and there were a number of attempts to cross the border.** IDF forces detained a Palestinian who crossed the fence in the northern Gaza Strip. He was taken for interrogation (IDF spokesman, February 15, 2019).
- ▶ During the "return march" an Israeli Border Police Force officer was wounded by shrapnel from an IED that exploded nearby. Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip, reported that during the march events 20 Palestinians were wounded by IDF fire (Ashraf al-Qidra's Twitter account, February 15, 2019).



Right: "Return march" demonstrators in eastern Gaza City. Left: "Return march" rioters east of Khan Yunis (Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March Facebook page, February 15, 2019).



Right: Rioters gather near the security fence. Left: Demonstrators with headbands reading "Break the siege" (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, February 15, 2019).



"Return march" rioters burn tires and an Israeli flag near the security fence in eastern Gaza City (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, February 15, 2019).

- ▶ Senior figures from Hamas and other organizations attended the march events. They all said the marches would continue. Some of them criticized the countries participating in the Warsaw Conference and the Arab countries that collaborate with Israel and the United States (al-Mayadeen, al-Aqsa TV, February 15, 2019).
- ▶ Some of the statements were the following:

- ◆ **Senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan** called for the continuation of the "return marches" until the "siege" had been lifted. He criticized the Warsaw Conference and the countries participating in the "deal of the century" (Isma'il Radwan's Facebook page, February 16, 2019).
- ◆ **PIJ operative Khadr Habib** called on the international community, the UN and European countries to lift the "siege." He criticized the Warsaw Conference and the Arab countries' normalizing relations with Israel (al-Aqsa TV, February 15, 2019).
- ◆ **PIJ spokesman Da'ud Shehab** also criticized the Warsaw Conference and its participating countries, and warned of a possible response from the joint operations

room of the Palestinian organizations in the Gaza Strip (al-Mayadeen TV, February 15, 2019).

► The Supreme National Authority called on the Palestinian public to participate in the February 22, 2019 "return march," whose theme will be "the return marches and lifting the siege are our choice" (Filastin al-Yawm, February 15, 2019).

Senior Hamas figures continue threatening a rise in violence

► Before the "return march" senior Hamas figures and organizers of the march said it **would be a "test" to see if Israel would harm the demonstrators** (Shehab, February 14, 2019). Two days before the march the joint operations room announced that on February 13, 2019, representatives of the military wings had met and decided unanimously that any Israeli escalation or harm to demonstrators on Friday **would be answered in kind** (Dunia al-Watan, February 14, 2019). The response from the joint operations room would be based on the equation of "**blood in return for blood and a response according to the degree of [Israeli] aggression**" (al-Wataniya, February 14, 2019).

► The previous day, **senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan** said that the "resistance" [i.e., the terrorist organizations] did not want a war or a rise in violence, but would respond to Israeli aggression if necessary. He said the Supreme National Authority had the right to use "**peaceful means**" to exert pressure on Israel. He added that the night harassment unit acted in a "peaceful" way and that its activities are determined by the Supreme National Authority. He reminded Israel that whenever it carried out "crimes," the "resistance" responded (al-Aqsa, February 14, 2019).

Mini-flotilla events

► On February 12, 2019 the events of the 23rd mini-flotilla took place. About 20 small boats participated. In the meantime about 2,000 demonstrators and rioters gathered in the northern Gaza Strip near the Israeli border (Ma'an, February 13, 2019). Thirty-five Palestinians were reported wounded (al-Quds, February 12, 2019).

► The Supreme National Authority held a press conference where it announced that the next mini-flotilla would be held on February 19, 2019 and would sail from the Gaza port to the northern border of the Gaza Strip. The theme of the mini-flotilla would be "**continuing the siege, or explosion warning**," and a demonstration would be held. The spokesmen also said **the activities of the night harassment unit would increase** (al-Aqsa, February 18, 2019).



The 23rd mini-flotilla
(Supreme National Authority Facebook page, February 12, 2019).



Demonstrators and rioters on the shore during the 23rd mini-flotilla
(Supreme National Authority Facebook page, February 12, 2019).

Violent activities between the Friday marches

► The Palestinian media reported the renewal of the activities of the night harassment unit. In addition, during the past week several hundred Palestinian rioters gathered at various locations near the fence, burned tires and threw hand grenades and IEDs into Israeli territory (night harassment unit of the Supreme National Authority Facebook page, February 13-19, 2019). Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip, reported that during the week 26 Palestinians had been wounded in demonstrations (Ashraf al-Qidra's Twitter account, February 17-18, 2019).

► Some prominent events were the following:

- ◆ **On February 12, 2019**, during the mini-flotilla events, night harassment unit operatives east of the al-Bureij refugee camp burned tires and "caused explosions" (i.e., with IEDs and/or hand grenades) (Shehab Twitter account, February 12, 2019).
- ◆ **On February 17, 2019**, there were riots in the northern Gaza Strip where **Palestinians burned tires and threw IEDs at IDF soldiers. An IDF soldier was**

wounded by an IED that exploded nearby. In response IDF tanks attacked two Hamas observation posts in the northern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, February 17, 2019). The Palestinian media reported that IDF fire hit a post of Hamas' restraint force in the northern Gaza Strip (Shehab, February 17, 2019). Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the ministry of health, reported that 19 Palestinians had been wounded in IDF attacks in the northern Gaza Strip (Ashraf al-Qidra's Twitter account, February 17, 2019).

◆ **On February 18, 2019,** the night harassment unit operated east of Gaza City (Dunia al-Watan, February 18, 2019). Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the ministry of health, reported that five Palestinians were wounded by IDF fire in eastern Gaza City (Ashraf al-Qidra's Twitter account, February 18, 2019).



Night harassment unit operatives collect tires for burning
(night harassment unit Facebook page, February 13, 2019).



Activities of the night harassment unit
(night harassment unit Facebook page, February 13, 2019).

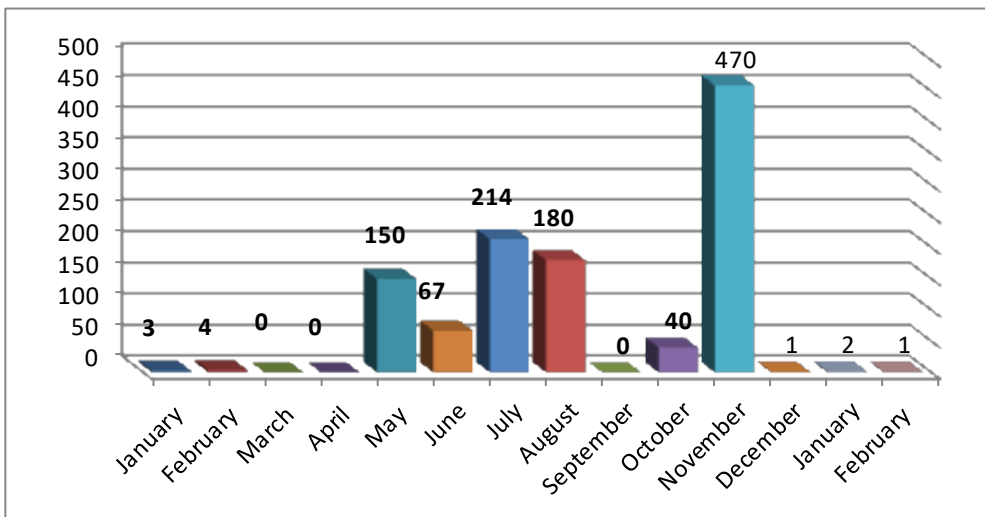


Activities of the night harassment unit
(Supreme National Authority Facebook page, February 19, 2019).

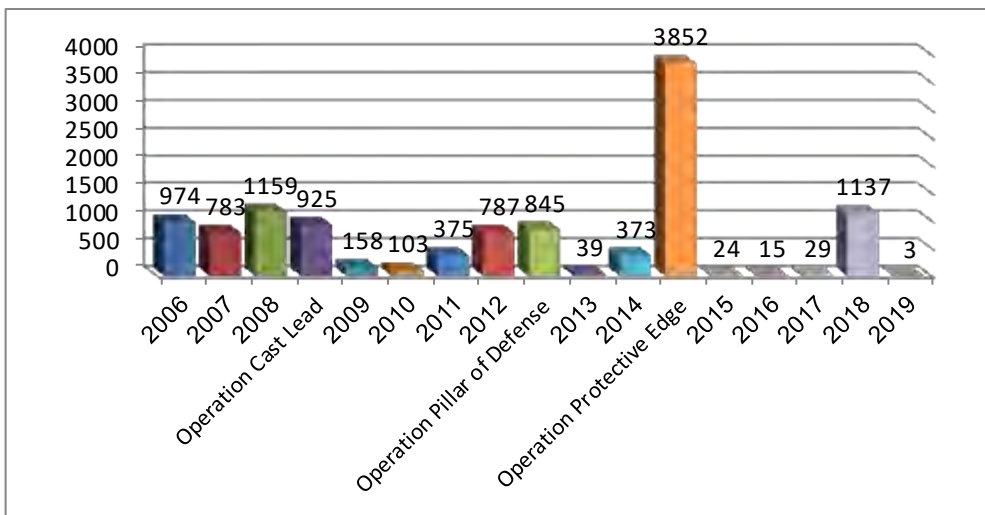
Rocket Fire

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

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire since January 2018



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



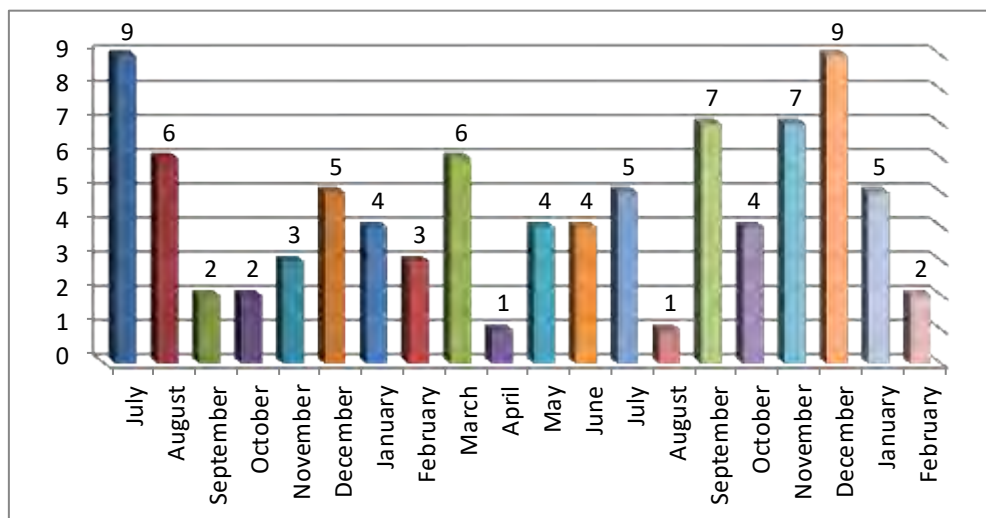
Judea and Samaria

Events on the ground

► In Judea and Samaria Palestinians continued throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli security forces and civilian targets. Israeli security forces carried out counterterrorism activities, detaining Palestinians suspected of terrorist activity, confiscating weapons and funds used to finance terrorist activities. Some prominent events were the following:

- ◆ **February 18, 2019** – During searches for illegal weapons in **the village of Salem (east of Nablus) and in Hebron** two M-16 assault rifles and two handguns were seized (IDF spokesman, February 19, 2019).
- ◆ **February 17, 2019** – Stones were thrown at a vehicle on the **Jerusalem-Gush Etzion road**. No casualties or damage was reported (Rescue Union, February 17, 2019).
- ◆ **February 16, 2019** – Stones were thrown at a bus near **Hizma (near Jerusalem)**. The driver and a passenger were slightly injured. The front windshield of the bus was damaged (Rescue Without Borders, February 16, 2019).
- ◆ **February 15, 2019** – Stones were thrown at a vehicle on the **Tekoa-Har Homa road (south of Jerusalem)**. No casualties were reported. The vehicle was damaged (Rescue Union, February 15, 2019).
- ◆ **February 14, 2019** – During an Israeli security forces' activity two underage Palestinians were detained in **one of the villages in the Benyamin region (north of Jerusalem)** on suspicion of throwing stones and shooting fireworks **at the community of Beit El and at IDF posts** in the area. After interrogation they were brought to a military court where their detention was extended (Judea and Samaria district police spokesman's unit, February 14, 2019).
- ◆ **February 14, 2019** – An IDF ambush near **Deir Abu Mash'al (west of Ramallah)** saw several suspicious figures. They approached the road and placed an IED. The soldiers responded with gunfire and the Palestinians fled. No casualties or damage were reported (IDF spokesman, February 14, 2019).
- ◆ **February 14, 2019** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle on **route 443 west of Beit Horon**. No casualties were reported. The front windshield of the vehicle was damaged (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, February 14, 2019).

Significant terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria during the past year and a half ¹



Tension in the Temple Mount compound in Jerusalem

► The waqf (the Muslim endowment) recently tried to reopen a small compound called Bab al-Rahma, located on the eastern side of the Temple Mount (the internal side of the Golden Gate). It was closed in recent years because the Israeli Islamic Movement, which is outlawed by Israel, customarily held its activities there. The *waqf* held prayers at the site, thereby violating the closing order issued by the local Israeli court. Following the violation of the closing order, the Israel Police Force locked the Bab al-Rahma compound. Palestinians gathered and tried to destroy the gate. The police detained several suspects.



Palestinians clash with the Israeli security forces on the Temple Mount (Ma'an, February 18, 2019).

¹ 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.

► Palestinians criticized Israel for closing the gate and detaining several Palestinians. **Yusuf al-Mahmoud, spokesman for the PA interim government**, called on all the countries that recognize Palestine to act at all levels to stop the [alleged] "Israeli aggression." He also appealed to all the Arab and Islamic governments to take responsibility for "Israel's crimes" (Wafa, February 18, 2019).

► Hamas also criticized Israel for closing the gate, claiming that al-Aqsa mosque is a red line and that the Palestinian people will not allow anyone to violate its Islamic identity. Hamas also warned that closing the gate could blow up in Israel's face in the near future (Shehab, February 18, 2019).

Exposure of terrorist network in Judea and Samaria handled by Hamas operatives in the Gaza Strip

► During the past two months the Israel Security Agency exposed attempts made by a covert Hamas unit in the Gaza Strip to recruit Palestinians from Judea and Samaria and a resident of east Jerusalem (who had an Israeli ID card). They were recruited to be handled for carrying out terrorist attacks against Israel. According to the Israel Security Agency, in recent years the Israeli security forces detained dozens of young Palestinians, some of them women, from Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem who were in contact with the Hamas covert unit and followed its instructions to carry out terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria.

► The investigation led to the detention of a number of operatives who revealed the means used by the Hamas operatives to recruit them. The initial contact between the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria and the Hamas operatives was through Facebook. Some of the Hamas operatives were **journalists**. Al-Aqsa TV was also enlisted to send messages from the Gaza Strip to the recruits in Judea and Samaria. Using al-Aqsa TV for terrorist purposes was known to the Israel Security Agency and was one of the considerations in the decision to attack the building (during the most recent round of escalation, November 13, 2018). It is also known of broadcasters and reporters working for Hamas' military wing use al-Aqsa TV to transmit hidden messages (Israel Security Agency website, February 13, 2019).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

Hamas takes control of the Kerem Shalom Crossing

► After friction and a series of confrontations with PA officials, **Hamas took control of the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom Crossing**. The confrontations began on February 13,

2019, when Hamas' security forces delayed PA officials at the Kerem Shalom Crossing on the grounds that a security check was necessary. They also demanded the PA officials fill out forms and be fingerprinted.

► On February 17, 2019, the management of the Kerem Shalom Crossing reported that Hamas operatives in civilian and military dress expelled the officials from the PA crossings authority at the Kerem Shalom Crossing and prevented them from approaching. It was also reported that Hamas operatives have the rubber stamps of the PA officials and they stamp forms despite the PA officials' objections (Wafa, February 17, 2019). **Iyad al-Bazam, spokesman for the ministry of the interior in the Gaza Strip**, said that the steps recently taken in the Gaza Strip and the refusal of the PA officials at the crossing to cooperate led to the officials' leaving. Therefore, he said, the security forces and other relevant officials overseeing the crossing had to take action. He said security and other relevant officials protect the Kerem Shalom Crossing and it is operating as usual (Shehab, February 17, 2019).

► **Hussein al-Sheikh, chairman of the Palestinian authority for civilian affairs**, said that the PA had not removed its officials from the Kerem Shalom Crossing. Rather, **Hamas had forcefully expelled them** (Hussein al-Sheikh's Twitter account, February 17, 2019). **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, said in response that the officials had carried out their work freely and that Hamas would not interfere, but there are no understandings regarding the security forces and civilian mechanisms in the Gaza Strip (al-Masry al-Youm, February 15, 2019).

► "Hamas sources" reported that after Hamas has restored control of the Kerem Shalom Crossing **it plans to begin a broad security operation against Fatah activists in the Gaza Strip**. According to the sources, Hamas security forces plan to begin extensive investigations into Fatah activists and to exert pressure on supporters of Mahmoud Abbas. Government sources in the Gaza Strip claimed that the PA exploited the crossing to impose taxes on imported merchandise and that the security vacuum at the crossing following the separation of PA officials from the security forces made it easy for Israel to carry out military operations in the area (al-Akhbar, February 18, 2019).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Palestinian terrorist organizations meet in Moscow

► On February 11, 2019, delegations of the Palestinian organizations held a meeting in Moscow under the aegis of the Russian foreign ministry. The meeting lasted three days and participants included representatives from 12 organizations. At the opening meeting, Vitaly Naumkin, head of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which hosted the meeting, said that **Russia intended to bridge between the Palestinian organizations**, but would not interfere in their affairs.

► **The meeting ended with no result** and the differences of opinion between the organizations made it impossible to issue a "Moscow declaration." According to reports, the main disagreement was over the PLO's insistence that it was the "exclusive legitimate representative" of the Palestinians, and that the borders of the Palestinian state would be those of 1967 (al-Sharq al-Awsat, February 12, 14, 2019).



Meeting of the Palestinian organizations in Moscow
(website of the Russian foreign ministry, February 12, 2019).

Response to Israel's deduction of tax revenues paid to the PA

► On February 17, 2019, the Israeli political-security cabinet decided to implement the "deduction law." According to the law, Palestinian payments to prisoners and the families of shaheeds are deducted from the payments transferred to the Palestinians according to the Paris Protocol. The law was passed in July 2018 and not put into practice. **The sum deducted stands at about 502 million shekels (about \$139 million)**. In addition, the Israeli prime minister instructed the security agencies to broaden the examination of payments to

terrorists or their families. The additional amount to be deducted will be updated according to information gathered by the examination (Israeli media).



Cartoon in the Palestinian daily al-Quds after Israel's decision to deduct the salaries of terrorist operatives from the tax revenues transferred to the PA. The Arabic reads, "Theft of tax money" (al-Quds, February 19, 2019).

- ▶ The Palestinian ministry of the treasury and planning said it was not surprised. According to the ministry, since July 2018 it has taken the necessary steps to deal with the decision. The ministry added **that it was time for the PA to begin activities towards leaving the Paris Protocol** (Sawa, February 18, 2019).
- ▶ Senior figures in the PA strongly criticized the Israeli decision. **Nabil Abu Rudeina, spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas**, said the decision would have serious consequences and it would be at the top of the agenda at a meeting Mahmoud Abbas would hold in the near future (Wafa, February 17, 2019). The foreign ministry announced **it was planning to appeal to international courts, especially the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague and to the national courts of the signers of the Geneva Conventions**. They would ask for Israel to be tried for its "war crimes" and for international legal protection to the Palestinian people, its rights and its money (Dunia al-Watan, February 18, 2019).
- ▶ **Ibrahim Khreisha, PA representative to the Human Rights Council in Geneva**, said the issue would be raised, apparently by the PA legation at the council meeting on February 25, 2019. The issue would also be raised, he said, at talks with the ambassadors of the council's member states and as part of preparations for the council's next meeting. He said the PA also planned to appeal to the high commissioner of the Human Rights Council and to the International Red Cross (Dunia al-Watan, February 18, 2019).
- ▶ In the internal Palestinian arena, **Mahmoud al-'Alul, deputy Fatah chairman**, said Fatah's Central Committee would hold an emergency meeting to discuss Israel's decision. He called

for an immediate discussion about the nature of relations with Israel (al-Quds, February 18, 2019). **Wasel Abu Yusuf, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee**, said the committee would meet to discuss a response (al-Quds, February 18, 2019).

► Other Fatah and PA statements were the following:

◆ **Fatah spokesman Usama al-Qawasmeh** criticized the decision of the Israeli government claiming it was "theft" and reflected Israel's "bullying" policy. He said Israel and the United States were making a mistake by thinking that exerting pressure on the Palestinian people and its leadership would bring about a change in their position regarding the rights of the Palestinian people and Jerusalem. That was because the Palestinians, he said, adhered more closely than ever before to their full rights and because exerting pressure might lead to an explosion (Dunia al-Watan, February 17, 2019).

◆ **Rami Hamdallah, prime minister of the interim government**, called the decision a declaration of war on the Palestinian people. He said it endangered the PA economy and threatened its ability to pay the salaries of its officials on time (Ma'an, February 17, 2019).

◆ **Qadri Abu Bakr, chairman of the Released Prisoners Commission**, criticized the decision, calling it "deliberate economic terrorism against the Palestinians." He called on the international community to bring Israel to trial for its ongoing crimes (Safa, February 17, 2019).

◆ **Qadoura Fares, chairman of the Palestinian prisoners' club**, said taking care of the families of shaheeds and prisoners was a right the national Palestinian movement took upon itself and its policy had not changed. He said there would be no surrender to pressure and [the PA] would **continue to meet its responsibilities** (al-Watan TV, February 17, 2019).