



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(March 20– March 26, 2019)

Overview

- ▶ This past week events focused on another round of escalation. It began following a rocket fired by Hamas (which claimed it had been launched by mistake), that hit a house in a community north of Tel Aviv (seven injured). The IDF responded by attacking dozens of targets in the northern and central Gaza Strip. Hamas then attacked the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip with rocket and mortar fire. The round ended, possibly due to Egyptian pressure causing a unilateral ceasefire of Hamas and the other terrorist organizations.
- ▶ The rocket launch and the subsequent round of escalation climaxed the events this past week, during which the level of violence from the Gaza Strip was particularly high. The Night Harassment Units operated every night and threw IEDs at IDF soldiers. Many IED balloons were launched, some of which landed in Israel. The March 22, 2019, "return march" was attended by about **9,500 Palestinians**, and was accompanied by a particularly high the level of violence. IDF forces responded to the violence with artillery fire and Israeli Air Force aircraft attacks. **The next date for a rise in violence is this coming Saturday, March 30, 2019, the first anniversary of the "return marches" and Palestinian Land Day** (ten days before Israel's general elections.)
- ▶ In **Judea and Samaria** the routine throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails at Israel vehicles continued. In the Ktsiot Prison (in Israel's south) Hamas prisoners stabbed two guards, wounding one seriously and the other slightly (March 24, 2019). The following day there was another attempted stabbing in the prison. The Palestinian Authority (PA), Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) strongly criticized what they called "Israel's escalation against Palestinian prisoners" and said Israel was responsible for their safety.

Rocket Fire

Rocket and mortar shell fire into Israeli territory

- ▶ Before dawn on March 25, 2019, a rocket was fired from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territorial. Sirens were sounded north of Tel Aviv. **The rocket hit a house in one of the local**

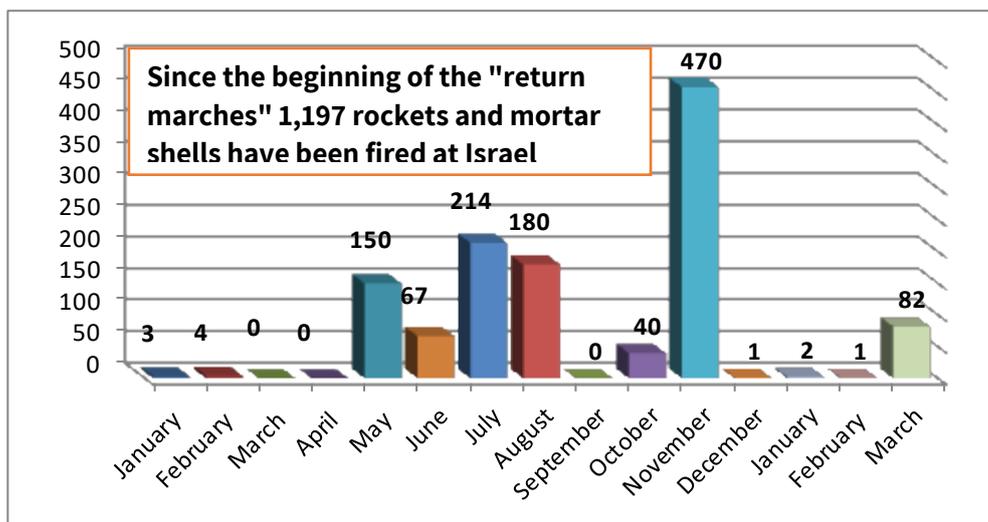
communities. Seven people were wounded, including two small children. The house was extensively damaged. It was the first time the sirens were sounded in the area since Operation Protective Edge (July-August 2014). **The rocket was apparently launched from Rafah, a distance of 120 kilometers (about 75 miles) from where it landed.**

► The rocket launch led to a strong Israeli response, which included attacks on dozens of Hamas and PIJ targets in the Gaza Strip. In response **the terrorist organizations launched about 70 rockets and mortar shells into Israeli territory.** No casualties were reported. A house in the southern Israeli city of Sderot was hit.¹



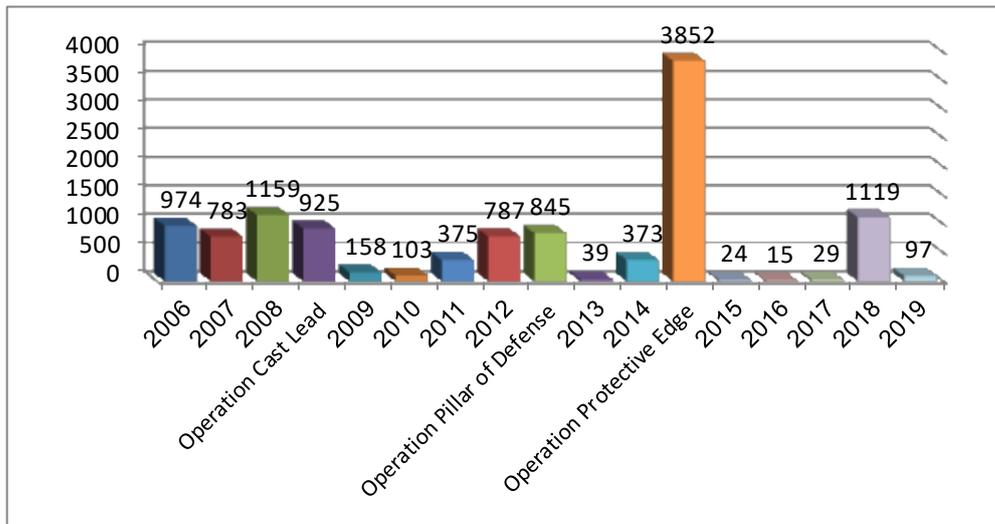
The damage to the house caused by the rocket (Right: Israel Police Force. Left: Israel Fire and Rescue Services, March 25, 2018).

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire since January 2018



¹ For further information, see the separate bulletin about the most recent round of escalation.

Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Israel's South

The rocket launch was the climax of a particularly stormy, tense week on the Gaza Strip border, during which especially violent "return march" events were held. During the entire week the Night Harassment Units operated along the border, launching a large number of IED balloons, some of which landed in Israeli territory.

The "return march" of March 22, 2019

► On March 22, 2019, the 51st "return march" was held with the theme, "the marches are our freedom." **About 9,500 Palestinians participated**, gathering at the five traditional sites. The previous week the march was cancelled because of security tensions. During the march the level of violence was high, and IEDs were thrown at IDF forces. Groups of Palestinians cut through the border fence east of Gaza City (Palinfo, March 22, 2019).



Right: "Return march" participants in eastern Gaza City. Left: March participants in the Khan Yunis region (Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March Facebook page, March 22, 2019).



**Rioters climb the border fence east of Gaza City
(Supreme National Authority Facebook page, March 22, 2019).**

► Unlike previous weeks, many senior terrorist organization figures participated in the events, including **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, who was present at the "Malka" "return camp" (al-Mayadeen, March 22, 2019). He said the Palestinian people would continue participating in the marches until they had achieved all their objectives. To Israel he said that if it did not meet the Palestinians' demands, what would happen in the future would be worse and everyone would have to bear responsibility for it (al-Aqsa TV, March 22, 2019).



**Isma'il Haniyeh at the 51st "return march" east of Gaza City
(Supreme National Authority Facebook page, March 22, 2019).**



Right: Khaled al-Batash, chairman of the Supreme National Authority and Isma'il Radwan, senior Hamas figure, at the "return march" events. Left: Senior Hamas figure Khalil al-Haya at a "return march" event (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, March 22, 2019).

► **Ahmed Bahar, Hamas chairman of the Palestinian Legislative Council**, who was in the Rafah area, said the Palestinian people would continue the marches until they achieved their objectives. He also said the Palestinians would not give up the [so-called] "right of return" (al-Aqsa TV, March 22, 2019). **Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri** said the broad participation in the march was a message to everyone that the Gaza Strip would continue to support the "resistance" project (Sami Abu Zuhri's Twitter account, March 22, 2019).

► **Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the ministry of health**, said that during the activities two Palestinians were killed and 62 were injured (Ashraf al-Qidra's Twitter account, March 22, 2019). **PIJ spokesman Musab al-Brim** claimed Israel had wounded "demonstrators" at the "return marches" (Filastin al-Yawm, March 22, 2019).

Activities of the Night Harassment Units

► The Night Harassment Units announced that because of the harm done to march demonstrators, they would escalate their activities. They said their activities would begin every night at 1900 hours, and continue until the morning. **They also said they would double the daily number of IED balloons they launched into Israel. The escalation is part of their program to turn the lives of the Israeli civilians living near the Gaza Strip border and the IDF soldiers into a living hell.** Their stated intention is to send the Israeli leadership the message that either the "siege" of the Gaza Strip is lifted or the Israeli civilians living near the Gaza Strip will be forced to leave [their homes] (Sawa, March 23, 2019).

► In point of fact, **for several nights in a row after the most recent "return march" the Night Harassment Units intensified their activities.** Several hundred Palestinians participated in events at a number of sites. They burned tires, threw shock grenades at IDF forces and tossed a large number of IEDs at the security fence. One of the IEDs thrown at the

fence caused the sounding of a Red Alert in the western Negev (IDF spokesman, March 24, 2018).



IEDs thrown by the Night Harassment Units from the Gaza Strip into Israel. The IEDs are inscribed in Arabic, "Death to Israel."



IEDs thrown by the Night Harassment Units from the Gaza Strip into Israel. The Arabic reads "Night harassment. Dynamo border groups March 19, 2019, al-Zouari unit, Dynamo group).



Right: Activities of the Night Harassment Units east of Khan Yunis (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, March 24, 2019) Left: Press conference held by a Night Harassment Unit (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, March 20, 2019).

► **IDF forces responded to the night activities with artillery fire and aerial attacks:**

- ◆ On **March 24, 2019**, Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked two Hamas observation posts in the southern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, March 24, 2019). In the evening an IDF tank

attacked a Hamas post in the northern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, March 24, 2019). The Palestinian media reported one fatality caused by IDF fire (Palinfo, March 24, 2019).

◆ On **March 21, 2019**, it was reported that IDF artillery forces attacked a group of Palestinians participating in the night harassment activities east of Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. Eye witnesses reported that one Palestinian was seriously wounded (Amad, March 21, 2019). It was also reported that an IAF drone fired a missile at a post of Hamas' restraint force in eastern Rafah (Shehab Twitter account, March 21, 2019). The spokesman for the ministry of health reported that at least seven Palestinians had been wounded in the attack in eastern Rafah (Ashraf al-Qidra's Twitter account, March 21, 2019).

◆ On **March 19, 2019**, an IAF drone attacked a concentration of Palestinian rioters in the northern Gaza Strip (al-Andalou News, March 19, 2019).

Launching of IED balloons

► **In the meantime, during the week there was an increase in the number of balloons launched, especially IED balloons, into Israeli territory.** A number of IEDs attached to the balloons exploded. The IDF responded by shooting at the squads launching the balloons. Some of the prominent events were the following:

◆ On **March 25, 2019**, a cluster of balloons with a suspicious object attached was located in an agricultural field in the western Negev. A demolitions expert was summoned to the site (western Negev spokesperson's unit, March 25, 2019).

◆ On **March 24, 2019**, an IED balloon fell in an open area near a community in the western Negev. A man was injured, apparently after he picked up the IED attached to the balloon (western Negev spokesperson's unit, March 24, 2019). Earlier, a western Negev resident saw an incendiary balloon in the air, and a few minutes later a fire broke out.

◆ On **March 23, 2019**, clusters of balloons were launched into Israeli territory throughout the day. In response Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked the squad launching IED balloons in the southern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, March 23, 2019). The Palestinians reported an attack on a group of balloon launchers near the al-Bureij refugee camp (Palinfo, March 23, 2019). The ministry of health reported that three Palestinians had been injured (Shehab Twitter account, March 23, 2019).

- ◆ On the evening of **March 21, 2019**, an explosion was heard in the western Negev. The next morning the remains of an IED balloon that had exploded were found in the yard of a house in one of the communities. No casualties or damage were reported (western Negev spokesperson's unit, March 22, 2019). An explosion was also heard in another community in the western Negev. The source of the explosion was found to be a rubber pipe carried by a cluster of balloons. The pipe disconnected from the balloons, fell on the ground and exploded (western Negev spokesperson's unit, March 21, 2019).
- ◆ On **March 20, 2019**, local sources reported that Israeli drones launched at least one missile at a group of young Palestinians who were launching incendiary balloons east of the al-Bureij refugee camp. No casualties were reported (Amad, March 20, 2019).
- ◆ On **March 19, 2019**, Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a squad of incendiary balloon launchers in the northern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, March 19, 2019).



Right: Explosives prepared by the operatives of the "sons of al-Zouari in Rafah" unit. Left: Launching IED balloons into Israeli territory from the region east of the al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip ("sons of al-Zouari in the Gaza Strip" Facebook page, March 24, 2019).

Mini-flotilla events

- On the afternoon of March 19, 2019, the events of the 26th mini-flotilla were held. About ten small boats set sail from the Gaza Strip towards the Israeli-Gaza Strip naval border. At the same time about 1,000 Palestinians demonstrated on the beach. Rioters burned tires, threw IEDs and tried to sabotage the security fence. According to reports, 29 Palestinians were injured (Ma'an, March 19, 2019). The mini-flotilla events that were supposed to be held on March 26, 2019, were canceled (following the round of escalation).



Right: Demonstrators gather during the mini-flotilla events. Left: Rioters try to climb the fence (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, March 20, 2019).

Preparations for the March 30, 2019 march

► Despite the tension in the south, preparations continue for the events planned for Saturday, March 30, 2019, to mark Land Day and the first anniversary of the "return marches." The Palestinian organizations formally called for extensive participation in the Land Day events at the five "return camps." They also called on Palestinians in Judea and Samaria, Jerusalem and Israeli to mark Land Day and **to turn it into a day of clashes with IDF forces** (Filastin al-Yawm, March 23, 2019).



The Supreme National Authority Facebook page notice for "the million-man march of land and return" (Supreme National Authority Facebook page, March 24, 2019).

► At the end of the "return march" of March 22, 2019, **Khaled al-Batash, a member of the PIJ's political bureau** and a member of the Supreme National Authority, read an announcement from the Authority, with **Isma'il Haniyeh** standing next to him. He said "a million Palestinians" would come to the march on March 30, 2019. He threatened Israel, saying that if Israel continued harming the Palestinian people it would be responsible for the consequences. **Suheil al-Hindi, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said that

preparations were being made by the Supreme National Authority for the march. He said hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expected to participate, in the West Bank, inside Israel and in the refugee camps in the dispersal. He also threatened that the joint situation room of the Palestinian organizations would respond with great force if Israel harmed the participants during the events (Sawa, March 22, 2019).

► **Muhammad al-Harazin, senior PIJ figure and member of the Supreme National Authority**, said that on the afternoon of March 30 various activities would be held at the five "return camps" in the eastern Gaza Strip. He said this coming week there would be extensive media coverage and an Internet campaign would be held on the social networks in preparation for the events (Filastin al-Yawm, March 23, 2019).

Judea and Samaria

Shooting attack in Beit El

► On the evening of March 25, 2019 (during the round of escalation from the Gaza Strip), shots were fired at the community of Beit El (north of Jerusalem) from the direction of the village of Dura. A child was wounded in the arm. The Israeli security forces instituted a search of the region (IDF spokesman, March 25, 2019).

Stabbing attack in the Ktsiot Prison (in southern Israel)

On March 24, 2019, during the transfer of Hamas security prisoners from one wing of the Ktsiot Prison to another, two prisoners attacked officers of the prison service with a improvised weapons. One of the officers was stabbed in the neck and seriously wounded and the other was stabbed in the arm. In an attempt to control the prisoners, 11 were injured, three critically. The following day there was another attempted stabbing targeting a guard.

► Following the events in the prison, Palestinians in a number of locations, among them Ramallah and Nablus, called for rallies in solidarity with the prisoners (Shehab, March 25, 2019). Mahmoud Abbas' office severely criticized "Israel's escalation against the prisoners" and said Israel was responsible for their safety (Wafa, March 25, 2019). **Riyad al-Maliki, foreign minister in the interim Palestinian government**, said they were arranging a diplomatic activity with international institutions to expose Israel's escalation against the Palestinian prisoners. He said that the issue of the prisoners was a red line for Mahmoud Abbas (Wafa, March 25, 2019). Hamas called the actions of the prisoners "acts of heroism"

and strongly criticized Israel's activities against them (Shehab, March 25, 2019). The PIJ said Israel was responsible for the safety of the prisoners (Filastin al-Yawm, March 25, 2019).

Other 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 throughout Judea and Samaria, detaining Palestinians suspected of terrorist activity, confiscating funds used to finance terrorist activities, and seizing military grade and improvised weapons. The more prominent events were the following:

- ◆ **March 25, 2019** – During Israeli security force searches in **Bayt Fajjar and Abu Dis**, improvised and military-grade weapons were seized (IDF spokesman, March 26, 2019).
- ◆ **March 24, 2019** – Four Molotov cocktails were thrown at vehicles on the **Gush Etzion-Hebron road** near the al-Aroub refugee camp. No casualties or damage were reported (Rescue Without Borders, March 24, 2019).
- ◆ **March 24, 2019** – During Israeli security force searches in **Hebron** several thousands of shekels were seized which were meant to finance terrorist activities (IDF spokesman, March 24, 2019).
- ◆ **March 22, 2019** – Stones were thrown at an ambulance near **Hebron**. No casualties were reported. The ambulance was damaged (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 22, 2019).
- ◆ **March 21, 2019** – A Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Israeli vehicle between the communities of **Itamar and Alon Moreh near Bayt Furik (southeast of Nablus)** (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 21, 2019).
- ◆ **March 21, 2019** – Stones were thrown at an IDF force on **the Gush Etzion road, between Bayt Umar and Ayn Aroub**. No casualties or damage were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 21, 2019)
- ◆ **March 20, 2019** – Stones were thrown at an IDF post at the **Efrat Junction (south of Jerusalem)**. An IDF force returned fire. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders, March 20, 2019).
- ◆ **March 20, 2019** – Stones were thrown at a bus near **Ma'aleh Amos (southeast of Jerusalem)**. The bus driver was slightly injured (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 20, 2019).

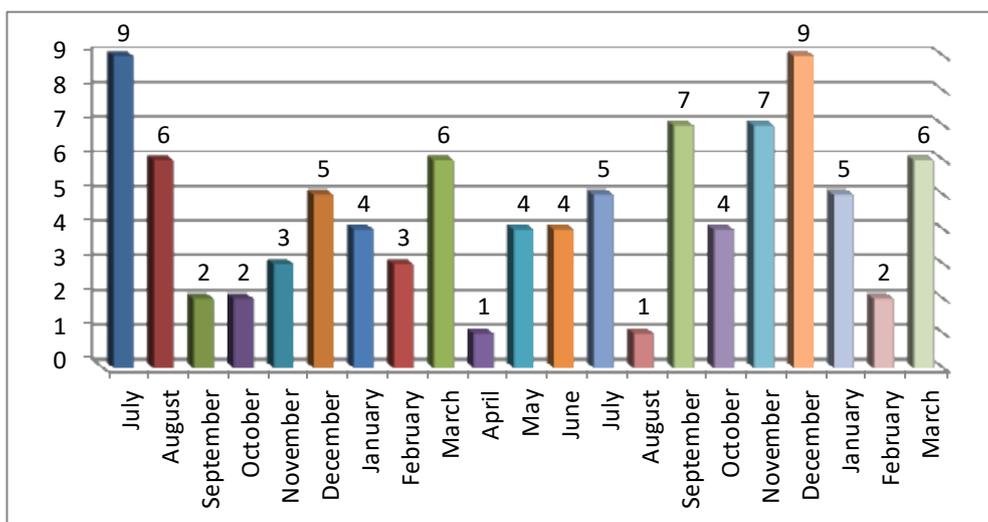
◆ **March 20, 2019** – IDF forces shot at a suspicious vehicle at the entrance to **Bethlehem**. The Palestinian in the vehicle was killed. The circumstances of the event are under examination (IDF spokesman, March 20, 2019). The Palestinian media reported the Palestinian was Ahmed Jamal Munsara. It was also reported that three other Palestinians were wounded, one of them critically (Paldf, March 20, 2019). The PA held a military-style funeral for the Palestinian who was killed. His body was wrapped in Palestinian and Fatah flags (Wafa, March 21, 2019). The PA foreign ministry said the "crime" of the IDF's killing of Munsara was a test case for the international courts and their ability to do their jobs (Wafa, March 21, 2019).



Right: The military-style funeral held for Ahmed Jamal Munsara, whose body was carried on the shoulders of operatives of the PA's national security force (Wafa, March 21, 2019). Left: The banner of Fatah in the Bethlehem/wadi Fukin region mourning the death of "the shaheed hero" (Wafa, March 21, 2019).

◆ **March 19, 2019** – Two Palestinians were killed by Israeli security force fire when they threw stones at the forces near the **Tomb of Joseph in Nablus** (IDF spokesman, March 21, 2019).

Significant terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria since July 2017²



Killing of terrorist who carried out the attack in Ariel

► On March 19, 2019, **Omar Abu Layla, the terrorist who carried out the attack in Ariel**, was killed after Israeli security forces surrounded the house where he hid in the village of Abuyan in the Ramallah region (Filastin al-Yawm, March 20, 2019). Amin Abu Layla, the terrorist's father, posted praise for his son on his Facebook page and blessed him (Palinfo Twitter account, March 20, 2019).



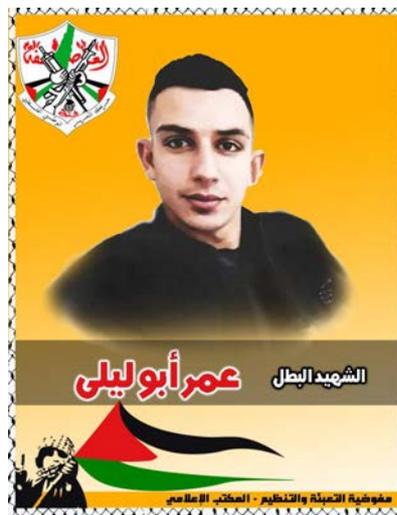
The house where Omar Abu Layla hid in the village of Abuyan (Wafa, March 20, 2019).

² 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.



Right: Death notice issued by Fatah's Shabiba movement for its "son, the shaheed, the hero" Omar Abu Layla (official Fatah Facebook page, March 20, 2019). Left: Omar Abu Layla in a post on his father's Facebook page where he praised his son for his sacrifice for the sake of Allah (Palinfo Twitter account, March 20, 2019).

► The Palestinian National Council expressed its sorrow at the death of Omar Abu Layla. It called on the UN to implement the UN General Assembly resolution of June 2018 dealing with protecting the Palestinian people from Israeli aggression (Wafa, March 20, 2019). On March 23, 2019, **Mahmoud al-'Alul, a member of Fatah's Central Committee**, came to offer his condolences to the family in the mourning tent opened in the village of al-Zawiya. He said Fatah was proud of the shaheed Omar Abu Layla (official Fatah Facebook page, March 23, 2019).



Right: Official Fatah Facebook page glorifying terrorist Omar Abu Layla. The Arabic reads, "the shaheed, the hero, Omar Abu Layla" (official Fatah Facebook page, March 20, 2019). Left: Senior Fatah figure Mahmoud al-'Alul speaking in the mourning tent (official Fatah Facebook page, March 23, 2019).

► A mourning tent was also opened in the Gaza Strip (Shehab, March 20, 2019). Hamas condemned the killing. It said the terrorist attack had "confused the Israeli security system" because it was an example of the "resistance" in the West Bank (Hamas website, March 20, 2019). A march was held in his memory in the Jabalia refugee camp where marchers held pictures of Abu Layla and Hamas flags. **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** said the "occupation" took his freedom by force and the West Bank would expel the "occupation" from all the Palestinian territories. He said the West Bank was a center of strength for the "resistance" (Hazem Qassem's Twitter account, March 19, 2019). **Senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan** praised the terrorist who carried out the attack in Ariel and accused the PA's security forces of collaborating with Israel, which led to his killing, he said without collaboration many more attacks would be carried out (al-Jazeera, March 20, 2019).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip

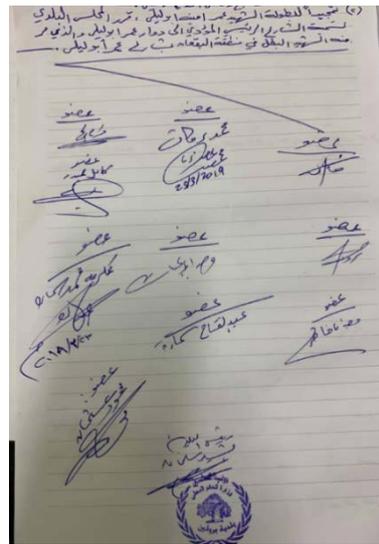
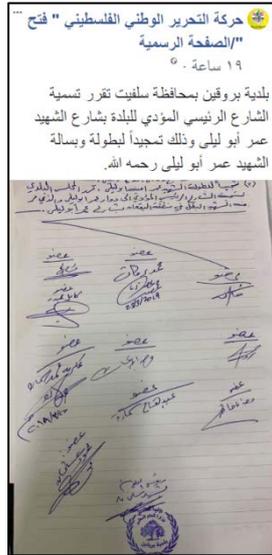
► Hamas' alresala.net published a report called "In numbers – the economic and humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip." According to the report, during 2018 there was a rise in the rate of poverty and unemployment in the Gaza Strip. As of 2018, the number of unemployed was 300,000, most of them between 20 and 29 years of age who had recently finished their studies, and 68% of families suffered from a lack of food. More than a million civilians received support from UNRWA and the other international charitable institutions operating in the Gaza Strip (alresala.net, March 24, 2019).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Perpetuating the memory of Palestinian terrorists

A street in Burqin named for the terrorist who carried out the attack in Ariel

► The town of Burqin (west of Salfit) decided to rename the main street, where Omar Abu Layla passed on his way to carry out the attack at the Ariel Junction, as a sign of respect for his "heroism." In response many surfers posted responses of satisfaction, praise and esteem on the town's Facebook page. They wrote "Congratulations and esteem," "An honorable move, congratulations," "Honor and esteem to all the residents of Burqin" (Burqin Facebook page, March 23, 2019). Fatah also posted Burqin's decision to its official Facebook page (official Fatah Facebook page, March 23, 2019).



Right: The decision of the Burqin municipality to rename the town's main street for Omar Abu Layla (Burqin municipality Facebook page, March 23, 2019). Left: Official Fatah Facebook page reprints the decision, March 23, 2019).

► On March 26, 2019, the residents of the village of Burqin (Ramallah district) also named a street for Omar Abu Layla (QudsN Twitter account, March 26, 2019). On March 20, 2019, the Israeli security forces found Omar Abu Layla hiding in the village.



Residents of the village of Burqin (Ramallah district) rename a street for Omar Abu Layla (QudsN Twitter account, March 26, 2019).

Reconstruction of the house of the terrorist who carried out the shooting attack in the Barkan industrial zone

► The official Fatah Facebook page posted pictures of the reconstruction of the house of Ashraf al-Na'alwa (who carried out the shooting attack in the Barkan industrial zone, killing two people) in Tulkarm (official Fatah Facebook page, March 23, 2019). It is a new house built near the site of the former one, which was destroyed by IDF forces a number a months ago.



Official Fatah Facebook page with pictures of the house being built for the family of Ashraf al-Na'alwa in Tulkarm (official Fatah Facebook page, March 23, 2019).

Palestinian public opinion poll

► The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, headed by Khalil Shqaqi, published the results of a public opinion poll held between March 13 and 16, 2019, in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria of 1,270 Palestinians. The main results were the following (PSR website, March 20, 2019).

- ◆ Asked whom they would vote for to head the PA if elections were held, **51% said Mahmoud Abbas and 41% said Isma'il Haniyeh** (as opposed to the last poll, which indicated Isma'il Haniyeh would win).
- ◆ If elections were held for the Palestinian Legislative Council, **39% would vote for Fatah, 32% for Hamas.**
- ◆ 34% are satisfied with the performance of Mahmoud Abbas, and **62% are dissatisfied.**
- ◆ **60% think Mahmoud Abbas should resign**, and 35% want him to remain in office.
- ◆ **69% are worried the PA will be unable to pay the salaries to the public sector**, after Israel deducted part of the custom revenues it transfers to the PA.
- ◆ **54% are worried that the PA's inability to pay salaries to the public sector will lead to the collapse of the PA;** 40% are not worried.
- ◆ 37% think that negotiation is the most effective means of establishing a Palestinian state while **36% think armed struggle is the most effective means**, while 22% believe that non-violent resistance is the most effective