



Threatening Messages Sent to Israel in an interview with Palestinian Islamic Jihad Secretary General Ziyad al-Nakhalah

May 12, 2019

Overview

► On May 7, 2019, the day after the end of the most recent round of escalation in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) Secretary General Ziyad al-Nakhalah was interviewed by the Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen TV station in Lebanon. He exploited the interview to **send threatening messages to Israel** and at the same time to deflect claims made against the PIJ which generated the recent escalation.



PIJ secretary general Ziyad al-Nakhalah interviewed by the Lebanese al-Mayadeen TV channel (al-Mayadeen YouTube channel, May 7, 2019).

► **Ziyad al-Nakhalah claimed Israel initiated the round of escalation by "attacking" civilians participating in the return marches.** He claimed an agreement was reached under Egyptian aegis, according to which the IDF would not fire live ammunition at demonstrators (**Note:** There is no information about any such agreement). **Therefore, he claimed, when the IDF shot at demonstrators the PIJ was forced to respond, and that led to the escalation.** He added that **if Israel uses violence or opens fire during the return march on Nakba Day** (May 15, 2019), during which, he said, tens of thousands of Palestinians will participate, **the "resistance" [i.e., the terrorist organizations] will defend the Palestinian people.**

► In ITIC assessment, that description of the event was made by al-Nakhalah was aimed at **justifying more PIJ military initiatives, preventing attempts to reach a viable arrangement and exploiting the return marches to make the situation on the ground**

deteriorate. That is because violent activities are routinely part of the return marches (throwing IEDs, attempts to penetrate into Israeli territory, launching IED and incendiary balloons), require IDF reprisals that cause Palestinian casualties. The casualties, according to Ziyad al-Nakhalah, force the PIJ and the other terrorist organizations to respond. **Thus he presents a concept aimed at protecting the rioting Palestinians carrying out acts of violence during the return marches and to deter Israel from responding to them.**

► In ITIC assessment, Ziyad al-Nakhalah (with Iranian backing) is **well aware that the methods used by the PIJ are liable to lead to a broad military confrontation in the Gaza Strip this coming summer.** In the interview, al-Nakhalah sent Israel the message that **the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip are ready for the confrontation**, which he claims will be initiated by Israel. He repeatedly stated that during the most recent round of escalation **Tel Aviv would have been attacked within a number of hours.** By implication, **Tel Aviv and other central Israeli cities will be attacked during the next round of escalation, or during one of the following rounds**, despite the fact that he is fully aware that Israel will respond harshly and strongly.

Al-Nakhalah admitted that at the beginning of the most recent round of escalation there was no agreement between the PIJ on the one hand and Hamas and Egypt on the other. However, as the escalation progressed Hamas took part in fighting Israel and the two organizations cooperated, according to al-Nakhalah, at a very high level. **He avoided clarifying the PIJ's escalation strategy (behind which, in ITIC assessment, stood Iran), undermining Hamas' interest to promote an arrangement** which would provide a response for the severe economic hardships of the Gaza Strip population. The PIJ's strategy **challenges the Egyptian mediation efforts to calm the situation in the Gaza Strip and prevent an escalation that could lead to a broad military campaign serving the interests of Iran, the PIJ's sponsor.**

Main Topics Discussed in the Interview

► On May 7, 2019, Ziyad al-Nakhalah was interviewed by the Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen TV in Lebanon. The interview was conducted the day after the most recent round of escalation ended, when al-Nakhalah returned to Beirut from Egypt, where delegations of senior Hamas and PIJ figures had stayed during the fighting.

- The main topics discussed raised by al-Nakhalah during the interview were the following:
- ◆ **The terrorist organizations [the "resistance"] demonstrated their capabilities during the most recent round of escalation in preparation for a large future campaign:** According to al-Nakhalah, **the "resistance" revealed only part of its power and showed it could wage an ongoing confrontation.** The "resistance" regarded the fighting as a kind of **exercise using live ammunition in preparation for a broad campaign with the Zionist entity**, which is expected to take place. He praised the weapons the "resistance" manufactures in the Gaza Strip as part of its military buildup.
 - ◆ **Israel that the side that initiated the most recent round of escalation and not the PIJ:** al-Nakhalah **rejected the accusation that the PIJ initiated the recent r escalation and blamed Israel.** He [falsely] claimed that Israel deliberately caused the round of escalation by attacking a number of return march participants on Friday, May 3, 2019. He claimed that the Israel attack forced the PIJ to respond with sniper fire at an Israeli officer and soldier, which led to the escalation.
 - ◆ **Was the PIJ's sniper fire attack agreed upon by all the terrorist organizations [the "resistance"]?:** al-Nakhalah claimed there were **agreements reached through Egyptian mediation according to which the IDF would not attack return march demonstrators with live fire.** Israel, he claimed, had nothing but contempt for the agreements, **thus the "resistance" had no option but to respond to Israeli fire at the demonstrators.** The PIJ responded and that led to the escalation. The PIJ, he said, will not agree to accept a concept in which Israel can act "aggressively" towards the return marches and the civilians in the Gaza Strip, and **will continue to oppose it.**
 - ◆ **Hamas' joining the rocket fire at Israel:** Although initially there was a general atmosphere of disagreement with the PIJ's position, **in the end all [the organizations] participated in the confrontation against Israel.** Al-Nakhalah thanked Yahya al-Sinwar, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, for the joint decision to respond to Israeli aggression and for **the significant cooperation between them.**
 - ◆ **Egyptian lack of satisfaction with the most recent round of escalation:** Asked if the PIJ had reported to Egypt they were going to respond [i.e., to initiate rocket and mortar fire], he answered that they had not updated the Egyptians but had responded on the ground [to the Israeli attack]. He said that on the first day of the escalation Egypt

was displeased with the confrontation, which took place while a PIJ delegation was in Cairo. However, Egypt later intervened and gave its support to the understandings reached (See below).

◆ **The rocket fire at Israel during the most recent escalation almost included Tel Aviv:** According to al-Nakhalah, Israel attacked civilian buildings in the Gaza Strip, and therefore the decision was made to attack Israeli cities. According to al-Nakhalah, "**a few hours separated us from an attack on Tel Aviv in this round.**" He added that the decision had already been made and the attack would have been carried out if the sides [i.e., Egypt] had not dealt with the matter and worked to achieve a ceasefire at the last moment. Later on he repeated that within a few hours Tel Aviv would have been attacked.

◆ **The understandings that led to the ceasefire:** According to al-Nakhalah, it was agreed that **the return marches would not end and that Israel had to meet its commitments towards Egypt.** He claimed the commitments included extending the fishing zone; easing passage through the crossings; [support for] the needs of the population and Israel's commitment not to shoot at the return march participants. [Note: There is no information about such an Israeli commitment. Al-Nakhalah's raising it was meant to justify PIJ fire during the coming return marches.] However, on the other hand, the "resistance" [i.e., the terrorist organizations] committed themselves to stopping the [rocket and mortar shell] fire on the condition that those understandings be met.

◆ **This coming summer a significant campaign [i.e., initiated by Israel] can be expected:** According to al-Nakhalah, there are many signs indicating that in the coming months attempts will be made to disarm the "resistance" [i.e., the terrorist organizations] as part of [Trump's] "deal of the century." **He added that he believes a significant campaign will be waged this coming summer.** The "resistance" has made sufficient preparations [to deal with Israel's "aggression" against the Gaza Strip] and **constructed its military infrastructure** on the assumption that such a campaign will occur in the future.

◆ **The place of the Gaza Strip in the "axis of resistance:"** al-Nakhalah was asked if such a scenario [a military campaign against the Gaza Strip] **was part** [of the American-Israeli] **plan against the countries of the "axis" (from Tehran to "occupied**

Palestine"). He answered that the United States was acting against Iran and the "axis of resistance." He said that most likely, implementing the plan would begin in the Gaza Strip, which posed a serious threat to Israel. He said that the "axis of resistance" had to be enlisted to protect the Gaza Strip. **Asked if the PIJ was in contact with Iran during the escalation, he said they were always ongoing contacts with Iran, which supported the Palestinian "resistance." However, he added, during their stay in Cairo** [i.e., during the round of escalation] **they were not in contact.** [Note: The remark was made to refute the claims that Iran is behind the PIJ's provocative behavior.]

The Nakba Day events will be a test case for Israel. According to al-Nakhalah, on May 15, 2019, Nakba Day¹ events are expected to take place, and will attract **tens of thousands of Palestinians**. He said the day would be a test case for Israeli behavior: if Israel demonstrates violence or shoots at demonstrators, **the "resistance" will take a stand**. He added that the PIJ, Hamas and the other organizations have a clear position towards [Israeli] attacks during the return marches. He claimed that that is what he believes and what was agreed on with Hamas. Therefore, he said, the positions of the PIJ and Hamas are completely coordinated regarding any Israeli attack. He added that the two organizations have an understanding about using the joint operations room for everything that has to be done to defend the Palestinian people.

◆ **Refuting the Israeli claim of disputes between the PIJ and Hamas:** According to al-Nakhalah, the Israeli media always tries to cause disagreements between the PIJ and Hamas. He said his organization is aware of Hamas' responsibility for the Gaza Strip and respects it. He added that the coordination between them is at a very high level, and that there was no disagreement between him and his "friend" Yahya al-Sinwar.

◆ **Mahmoud Abbas cannot force the organizations in the Gaza Strip to disarm:** al-Nakhalah noted that Mahmoud Abbas, who regards the "resistance" organizations as militias, asked them to disarm. He said it was a message from the Arab regimes and not from Mahmoud Abbas himself. He added that **Mahmoud Abbas does not have the power to force the Gaza Strip to disarm, and therefore the internal Palestinian reconciliation has once again reached a stalemate.** Al-Nakhalah claimed that Egypt

¹ Nakba Day marks the Palestinian catastrophe of the Israeli War of Independence, and is marked every year on May 15.

was not monitoring the internal Palestinian reconciliation because it had begun to understand that Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority does not want to return to the Gaza Strip.