Overview

This past week the Gaza Strip was quiet, with attention focused on dealing with the coronavirus. In Judea and Samaria an Israeli vehicle was the target of a shooting attack west of Ramallah (no casualties were reported). Palestinians continued throwing stones at Israeli vehicles on the roads in Judea and Samaria.

Most Hamas and Palestinian Authority (PA) attention was focused on providing a response to the spread of the coronavirus. Today 41 people in the PA are infected with the coronavirus, 37 in the Bethlehem district, two in the Tulkarm district, one in Ramallah and one diagnosed at the Allenby Bridge Crossing. According to the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip, so far no one has been diagnosed in the Gaza Strip as being ill with the virus (as of March 17, 2020).

The PA government and the Hamas de facto administration have taken various steps to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, including the following:

- **The PA declared a state of emergency.** A closure was imposed on the Bethlehem district, but so far not on the Tulkarm district. The PA ministry of endowments ordered Palestinians to pray at home rather than in the mosques; the chairman of the PA's monetary authority announced instructions for banks to ensure the continuation of economic activity; the PA's crossings administration announced that anyone crossing the Allenby Bridge would have to remain in quarantine for 14 days; the Palestinian treasury minister reportedly met with his Israeli counterpart and demanded Israel unfreeze for the PA all the funds it holds for the PA, to enable it to deal better with the outbreak of the virus.

- **In the Gaza Strip the Hamas de factor administration** and Hamas movement (including its military wing) **made preparations to prevent the spread of the virus:** the Erez and Rafah Crossings were closed, with the exception of humanitarian and emergency cases (the Kerem Shalom Crossing remains open for the delivery of merchandise); a field hospital was opened at the Rafah Crossing and a school in Rafah.
was converted into a quarantine center (which led to protests from local residents). In addition, it was decided to erect 1,000 quarantine units in Rafah and the northern Gaza Strip to quarantine patients. Hamas’ military wing has already begun constructing them. Schools and universities will remain closed until the end of March; government institutions were forbidden to hold activities or gatherings involving more than 100 people.

► The Supreme National Authority for the Return Marches and the Struggle Against the Deal of the Century continues holding meetings in preparation for planned renewal of the return marches on March 30, 2020. A Supreme National Authority member who is a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) said the march would be held despite the measures being taken to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. However, in ITIC assessment, it is doubtful that a mass march will be held in defiance of prohibition on gatherings and Hamas’ focusing on measures to prevent an outbreak of the coronavirus in the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinians Deal with the Coronavirus

**Judea and Samaria**

PA government spokesman **Ibrahim Melhem** said there are 41 people in the PA who have tested positive for the coronavirus. Twenty-seven are in the **Bethlehem district**, two in the **Tulkarm district**, one in **Ramallah** and one who came over the **Allenby Bridge** and was diagnosed as ill with the virus (Wafa, March 17, 2020). The state of emergency declared by Mahmoud Abbas on March 5, 2020, remains in force. There was little commercial activity in the markets and there were no reports of shortages of food or any other commodity (Wafa, March 14, 2020).

► The full closure of the Bethlehem district continues. On the other hand, the PA prime minister and the governor of the Tulkarm district announced that so far no closure has been imposed there. The Palestinian diagnosed at the Allenby Bridge as carrying the virus is in quarantine in Jericho (Wafa, March 17, 2020).
The Palestinian preventive security forces enforce the closure of Bethlehem (Facebook page of the Palestinian preventive security forces public relations unit, March 14, 2020).

A physician delivers the Friday sermon at one of the mosques in Tulkarm (Wafa, March 13, 2020).

Sanitizing public places in the Old City of Jerusalem as instructed by Adnan Ghaith, the governor of the PA's Jerusalem district (Wafa, March 16, 2020).
At the beginning of the weekly government meeting on March 16, 2020, **PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** said that there was sufficient supply of food for a considerable length of time. He thanked Kuwait for giving the PA $5.5 million to deal with the coronavirus (Wafa, March 16, 2020).

**Azzam al-Shawwa, chairman of the Palestinian monetary authority**, issued instructions for banks and other institutions giving loans, after consultations with bank directors. The main instructions were (website of the Palestinian monetary authority, March 15 and 16, 2020):

- Banks will continue to provide banking services to ensure continued economic activity.
- The monthly repayments of loans will be deferred for four months, which may be extended.
- The monthly repayments of loans in the tourism and hotel industries will be deferred for six months, which may be extended.
- Banks cannot impose charges, fees or interest on payments which have been deferred.
- Direct credit will be given to the health services sector.
- All electronic banking and ATM services will be exempt from charges and fees for six months, which may be extended.
- Following a request from the government and the ministry of health, the banks will be given half a million dollars for the government’s emergency program.

Other measures taken by the PA were the following:

- On March 14, 2020, the PA's ministry of endowments announced that people are to pray at home and not go to the mosques, as a step towards preventing the spread of the virus (Facebook page of the PA’s ministry of endowments, March 14, 2020).
A few worshippers at the mosques in Nablus, in accordance with the decision issued by the ministry of endowments (Wafa, March 14, 2020).

On March 16, 2020, the PA crossings administration announced that anyone crossing the Allenby Bridge in either direction would be quarantined for 14 days (Wafa, March 14, 2020).

On March 16, 2020, Shukri Bshara, the PA’s minister of the treasury, met with Moshe Kahlon, the Israeli minister of the treasury, and demanded the release of all the funds withheld by Israel since 2019, for Palestinian use to fight the coronavirus. He stressed that the funds held by Israel belong to the Palestinians and would help the Palestinian ministry of treasury to cope better with the virus (Wafa, March 16, 2020).

The Gaza Strip

The ministry of health in the Gaza Strip reported that so far no case of the coronavirus has been diagnosed (as of March 17, 2020). The Hamas de facto administration in the Gaza Strip has taken measures to prevent the outbreak and spread of the virus in Gaza. Khalil al-Haya, a member of Hamas’ political bureau, said at a press conference that so far there are no cases of the coronavirus in the Gaza Strip, and called for people to obey the instructions issued by the ministry of health (Facebook page of the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip’ committee to monitor the coronavirus, March 14, 2020; al-Andalou News, March 14, 2020).
The Hamas de facto administration in the Gaza Strip took the following steps:

- On March 14, 2020, the Erez and Rafah Crossings were closed except for urgent and humanitarian cases. On the other hand, the Kerem Shalom Crossing remains open for the delivery of goods.
- The ministry of health in the Gaza Strip erected a field hospital for coronavirus patients at the Rafah Crossing. The head of the preventive medicine department in the ministry of health said the hospital would have 30 beds for ordinary cases and six to eight intensive care beds (al-Ra’i Agency, March 12, 2020).

The ministry of health also converted a school in Rafah into a quarantine facility despite the strong protests from local residents.
Converting the school in Rafah into a quarantine center
(Facebook page of journalist Muthana al-Najar, March 15, 2020).

Protest demonstration of residents of the al-Nasr neighborhood in Rafah
(Al-Nassr.rafah1 Facebook page, March 15, 2020).

♦️ The ministry of endowments in the Gaza Strip announced that people with the flu or contagious diseases, the elderly and people with impaired immune systems could not participate in prayers in the mosques (website of the ministry of endowments in the Gaza Strip, March 16, 2020).

Sanitizing the al-Am’ari mosque in Gaza City, part of a Palestinian Islamic Jihad campaign to disinfect the mosques in the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of senior PIJ figure Khamis al-Hitham, March 12, 2020).
Dr. Muhammad Awad, chairman of the committee monitoring government activities, told a press conference that the Rafah Crossing would be closed, with the exception of emergencies and cases of life or death; all educational facilities, from kindergarten through university, would be closed until the end of March 2020; government and non-government institutions would be forbidden from holding activities and gatherings of more than 100 people (Facebook page of the ministry of health committee to monitor the coronavirus in the Gaza Strip, March 14, 2020; al-Andalou News, March 14, 2020).


On March 17, 2020 work began to construct 500 quarantine units each in the Rafah area and in the northern Gaza Strip. The construction is expected to take ten days and is carried out under the supervision of Yahya al-Sinwar, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, and other senior Hamas figures (Shehab, March 17, 2020).
According to reports, all of the means available to Hamas’ military wing will be employed in constructing the units (Filastin al-A'an, March 17, 2020).

Yahya al-Sinwar visits the construction site near the Rafah Crossing (Twitter account of Muhammad al-Daya, March 17, 2020).

Tractors flying Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades flags participate in leveling the ground (Shehab, March 17, 2020).

Israel's South

Preparations continue in the Gaza Strip for Land Day (March 30)

On March 11, 2020, the Supreme National Authority for the Return Marches and the Struggle Against the Deal of the Century held a meeting to discuss preparations for the renewal of the return marches (in accordance with the decision that declared March 30, 2020, the anniversary of the return marches, as the date for their renewal). It was unanimously decided to enlist the Palestinian public to mark the day (Ma'an, March 11, 2020).
Maher Muzhir, a PFLP operative and Supreme National Authority member, said that there would be no change in the date decided on for the "million-man march," and it would be held on March 30, 2020. He said the march would be held despite the declaration of a state of emergency to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. He claimed the Supreme National Authority was holding ongoing meetings to continue preparations for the "million-man march," which would be held along the eastern border of the Gaza Strip. He added that the Supreme National Authority was taking developments into account. He said the Authority did not ignore the situation and took into account the measures and precautions issued by the World Health Organization (WHO), which would be implemented to protect the participants (Shams News, March 11, 2020).

In ITIC assessment, it is doubtful a mass-participation return march will be held on March 30, 2020. That is because of the attention Hamas is focusing on its preparations for the spread of the coronavirus in the Gaza Strip.

Exposure of an Israeli Arab handled by Hamas

On March 15, 2020, it was cleared for publication that the Israel Security Agency and the Israel Police Force had recently exposed a Arab Israeli woman who had been handled by Hamas' military wing in the Gaza Strip. She was A’iya Khatib, 31, married and mother of two, who lives in the town of ‘Ar’ara in Wadi ‘Ara (central Israel). Interrogation revealed that she had been recruited for Hamas activities by Muhammad Filfil, from Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip, and by Muhammad Halawa, from Jabalia (both operatives in Hamas' military wing). They recruited her when she was involved in humanitarian activities for needy Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Her mission was to finance Hamas activities and facilities. She carried out other
Khatib transferred hundreds of thousands of shekels to Hamas, defrauding humanitarian aid organizations and unsuspecting civilians who donated money they thought would be used for the sick and needy. She exploited the hardships of sick Palestinians who had been given permits to enter Israel for medical treatment out of humanitarian considerations. Some of the money she transferred went to build tunnels, a lathe and structures used for Hamas’ routine activities. In addition, Khatib transferred equipment to Hamas for the use of military wing operatives. She also examined the possibility of transferring sensitive equipment which could have been used to construct tunnels and observation posts to surveille IDF forces. She transferred information to Hamas, including information about the movements of IDF forces during one of the rounds of fighting with the Gaza Strip (Israel Security Agency website, March 15, 2020).
Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

Rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel

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

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits
Shooting attack west of Ramallah

The IDF spokesman reported that on the night of March 12, 2020, a shooting attack targeted an Israeli civilian vehicle west of Ramallah. No casualties were reported; the vehicle was damaged (IDF Twitter account, March 13, 2020).

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum praised the shooting attack, adding it was proof that the "resistance" in the West Bank continued and was escalating (Amama, March 13, 2020).

The scene of the shooting attack west of Ramallah (dafaa_news Twitter account, March 13, 2020).

Significant terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria since January 2019

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.
Other events

- **March 16, 2020** – A bottle of paint was thrown at an Israeli bus north of Hebron. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 16, 2020).

- **March 15, 2020** – A rock was thrown from a Palestinian truck on an Israel vehicle in the Jordan Valley. No casualties were reported; the vehicle was damaged (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 15, 2020).

- **March 15, 2020** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli bus south of Hebron. No casualties were reported. Stones were thrown at an Israel vehicle northwest of Ramallah. The vehicle was damaged (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 15, 2020).

- **March 12, 2020** – An Israeli woman was slightly injured by stones thrown west of Ramallah (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 12, 2020). In addition, stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle near Modi’in. The vehicle was damaged (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 12, 2020).

- **March 11, 2020** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle northwest of Ramallah. No casualties were reported; the vehicle was damaged (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 11, 2020).

Palestinian killed in riot south of Nablus

- On March 11, 2020, about 500 Palestinians near the village of Beita (south of Nablus). They threw stones at IDF forces and burned tires. A Palestinian was allegedly killed and several others wounded. The event is under IDF investigation (IDF Twitter account, March 11, 2020).

- The PA ministry of health reported that the Palestinian fatality was Muhammad Abd al-Karim Hamayl, 15, from the village of Beita. He was [allegedly] killed by IDF fire during a riot that broke out in Jabal al-Arama in Beita, south of Nablus. According to the Palestinian ministry of health, 17 Palestinians were wounded by IDF live fire, rubber bullets and tear gas. One of them the wounded was Walid Assaf, chairman of the Authority for Resisting the Fence and the Settlements (Wafa, March 11, 2020).


Developments in the Gaza Strip

Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) delegation visits Russia

The PIJ reported that a delegation headed by its leader, Ziyad al-Nakhalah, arrived in Moscow on March 11, 2020, having been formally invited by the Russian foreign ministry. According to the report, the delegation included Mahmoud al-Hindi and Abd al-Aziz al-Minawi, both members of the PIJ's political bureau, and Ihsan Ataya, PIJ representative in Lebanon (al-Andalou News, March 11, 2020).

The PIJ delegation met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. According to the PIJ report, their meeting dealt with the "deal of the century" and internal Palestinian unity. The delegation stressed the PIJ rejection of the "deal of the century," saying that the Palestinians would not give up their historic rights or fundamental principles. They added that the opposition of all Palestinians to the "deal of the century" had to be expressed through a working plan to fight against "Israel's plots." The delegation praised the Russian position against the "deal of the century" and Russia's readiness to help achieve Palestinian unity. Before the meeting the delegation met with the deputy foreign minister, Mikhail Bogdanov to deal with the same issues (Paltoday channel website, March 11, 2020).
The meeting of the Russian foreign minister and the PIJ delegation
(Facebook page of the Russian foreign ministry, March 11, 2020).

The Israeli media reported that in the wake of the meeting, a representative of the Israeli embassy in Moscow told Mikhail Bogdanov, the deputy Russian foreign minister, that Israel protested the foreign minister’s meeting with the PIJ delegation in the Russian foreign ministry. Israel, said the representative, protested the reception of the leader of a terrorist organization supported and sponsored by Iran, which does not recognize the right of the State of Israel to exist (Ynet, March 12, 2020).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Palestinian reactions to human rights report issued by the American State Department

On March 11, 2020, the American State Department issued its annual report on the human rights situation around the globe. The section of the report on Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip did not use the term “Palestinians” for the Arabs population living in Jerusalem. They were referred to, for the first time, as “non-Israeli citizens in Jerusalem” (website of the State Department, March 11, 2020; Reuters, March 11, 2020).

In response, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas, said no attempt to distort history and reality would give legitimacy to any one. He added that it was another failed attempt by the American administration to implement the “deal of the century,” and that according to international law east Jerusalem was an integral part of the Palestinian territories (Wafa, March 11, 2020).