



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(March 18 – 24, 2020)

Overview

Quiet continues along the **Gaza Strip** border due to Hamas' focusing its efforts and attention on dealing with coronavirus. In **Judea and Samaria** an IDF force killed a Palestinian from Ni'lin who was throwing rocks at Israeli vehicles. It was reported that rocks were found in his vehicle ready for throwing. The "routine" throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli vehicles, including buses, on the roads in Judea and Samaria continues.

▶Another Palestinian was found to have coronavirus, a woman who returned from the United States. **The number of Palestinians coronavirus patients has risen to 60, 58 in Judea and Samaria and two in the Gaza Strip (no change)**. So far 17 Palestinians have been discharged from hospitals.

▶The lockdown declared by **Palestinian Authority** (PA) Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh is enforced by the Palestinian security forces. According to reports, in the PA the streets are almost completely empty, and stores and businesses are closed. Despite warnings issued to vendors, many Palestinians complained of exorbitant prices charged for basic commodities and face masks. The PA announced that stores would remain open and that there was no lack of goods.

▶Following are some developments related to the PA's relations with Israel in the face of the coronavirus threat:

◆On March 22, 2020, the Palestinian ministry of the treasury received 120 million shekels (a little over \$33 million) from Israel as payment of funds which had been the subject of long negotiations and accounting. The PA demanded the release of an additional 650 million shekels (about \$180 million), tax revenues deducted by Israel. Moshe Kahlon, the Israeli minister of the treasury, refused to transfer the additional funds.

◆Senior Palestinian figures strongly demanded that Israel release the Palestinian security prisoners, or at least the ones with chronic ailments, and the young prisoners. Senior Palestinian figures, on behalf of Mahmoud Abbas, appealed to the International

Red Cross and the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding the Palestinians' demands.

◆Israeli media reports about the lack of sleeping arrangements in Israel for Palestinian workers have led to strong criticism and protests from the PA government. The government spokesman also claimed that the Palestinian workers' places of employment in Israel had turned into "coronavirus incubation centers" (a claim with no basis in fact).

►In **the Gaza Strip** the number of Palestinians with coronavirus remains steady at two. According to reports they have mild cases and are in a quarantine center. The Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip and Hamas operatives continue implementing a variety of preventive measures: the crossings are closed, public places are disinfected, 400 prisoners were released from jail, quarantine units are being constructed (200 units in the northern Gaza Strip have been completed), and there is coordination between Hamas and Egypt (including the exchange of information about coronavirus patients). However, Hamas has not yet imposed a complete lockdown on the Gaza Strip as planned by the PA.

In view of the coronavirus, two recent statements assign Israel responsibility for the situation in the Gaza Strip: **Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the Gazan ministry of health**, claimed Israel is responsible for the health and humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, and called on the UN as well to accept responsibility (Palestine Online, March 22, 2020); **Khalil al-Haya, deputy chairman of the Hamas political bureau**, claimed Israel would be responsible if the coronavirus spread in the Gaza Strip (Hamas website, March 23, 2020). In ITIC assessment, such claims are liable to provide justification for the use of violent measures against Israel if Hamas loses control of the spread of the coronavirus in the Gaza Strip (which has not yet happened).¹

Israel's South

The examination of possible alternatives for the return march of March 30, 2020

►The Supreme National Authority for the Return Marches and the Struggle Against the Deal of the Century discussed the return march planned for March 30, 2020. **Alternatives were examined** in view of the spread of coronavirus, including "symbolic activities" to express their

¹ For further information about the spread of coronavirus see the March 24, ITIC bulletin, "The Palestinians and the Spread of Coronavirus."

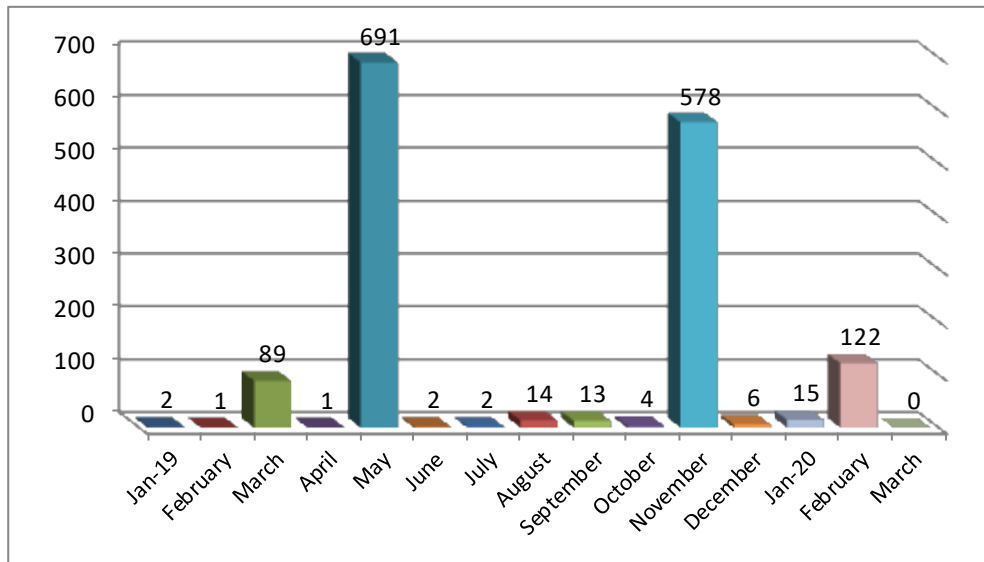
objections to the "deal of the century" (for example, planting black flags on the ground and on the roofs of houses, using the electronic media to disseminate information). **Senior Hamas figure Mahmoud al-Zahar** stressed that the activities had to be held under "the proper sanitary conditions, without crowding, to protect the lives of the residents" (website of the Legislative Council in the Gaza Strip, March 16, 2020).

Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

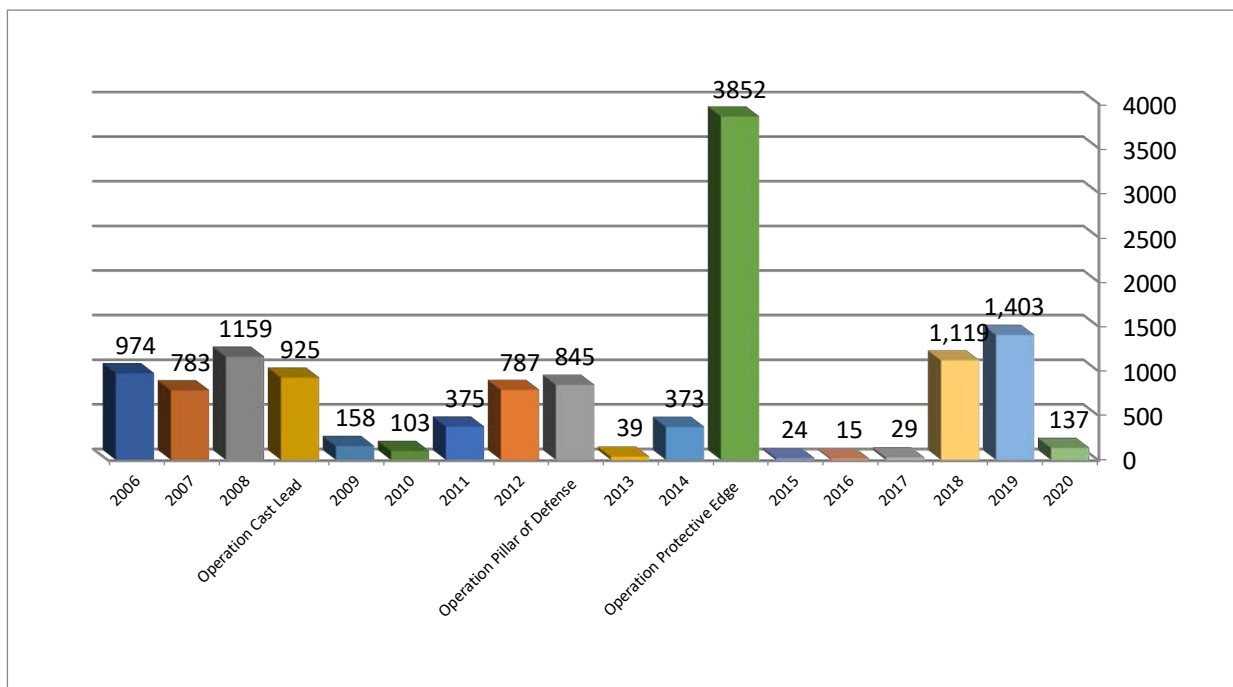
Rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel

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

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Judea and Samaria

Palestinian who threw rocks at Israeli vehicles killed

►The IDF spokesman reported that on the night of March 22, 2020, rock-throwing was prevented near the Ni'lin Junction (west of Ramallah). IDF forces identified a number of suspects throwing rocks at Israeli vehicles on the highway. The soldiers shot at the suspects after they threw a rock and were apparently planning to continue throwing more. One of the suspects was killed by the IDF fire and another was wounded and fled. IDF forces initiated a search for the wounded Palestinian (IDF Twitter account, March 23, 2020). It was reported that, the terrorist who was killed drove a vehicle full of rocks for throwing at passing Israeli vehicles (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 22, 2020).



**A rock that hit an Israeli vehicle
(IDF Twitter account, March 23, 2020).**

►The Palestinian media reported that the Palestinian fatality was **Sufiyan Nawaf Abd al-Halim al-Khawaja**, 31, from Ni'lin (Wafa, March 22, 2020; Nilin.Ramallah.Palestine Facebook page, March 23, 2020). His uncle, Jamal al-Khawaja, claimed Sufiyan was not wanted [by law enforcement agencies], there was nothing in his vehicle and he had not thrown rocks, all he had done was drive on the highway to go shopping (Watan News Agency, March 23, 2020).



Right: Sufiyan Nawaf Abd al-Halim al-Khawaja (Facebook page of his uncle, Jamal al-Khawaja, March 23, 2020). Left: The Palestinian terrorist who was shot and wounded, Mahmoud Bader al-Khawaja (Nilin.Ramallah.Palestine Facebook page, March 23, 2020).

Capture of terrorist squad that placed IEDs

► On March 18, 2020, the Israeli security forces captured a squad of Palestinian terrorists that had placed IEDs near IDF posts in the Ramallah area in recent months. The squad leader was responsible for **riots and throwing a large number of stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli vehicles in the region of Ramallah** (Field Security News, March 18, 2020).

Other events in Judea and Samaria

► **March 23, 2020** – An IED composed of a burning tire with a gas balloon inside was placed near an Israel community west of Ramallah. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 23, 2020).

► **March 23, 2020** – Stones were thrown at Israeli vehicles on the road southeast of Nablus. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 23, 2020).

► **March 22, 2020** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle east of Qalqilya. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 22, 2020).

► **March 22, 2020** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli bus west of Ariel. No casualties were reported; the front windshield of the bus was damaged.

► **March 21, 2020** – Molotov cocktails were thrown east of Qalqilya. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 21, 2020)

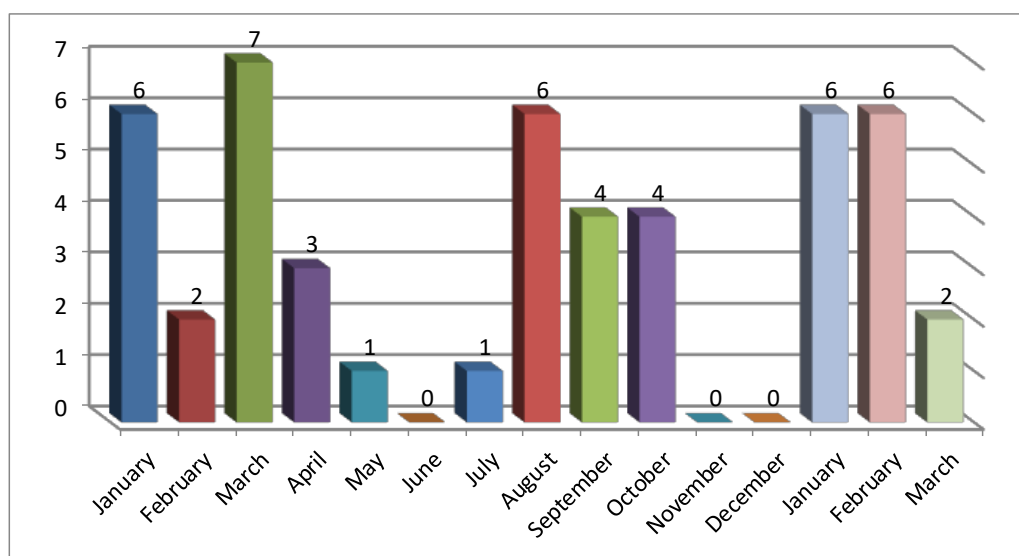
► **March 20, 2020** – Molotov cocktails were thrown at an Israeli bus east of Qalqilya. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 20, 2020).

► **March 19, 2020** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli bus north of Hebron. No casualties were reported; the front windshield of the bus was damaged.

► **March 19, 2020** – Molotov cocktails were thrown from a passing car at an IDF guard post near the Halhul Bridge (which joins Hebron and West Tarqumia). No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 19, 2020).

► **March 18, 2020** – Molotov cocktails were thrown at the security fence of an Israeli community southwest of Gush Etzion. No casualties were reported (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, March 18, 2020).

Significant terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria since January 2019²



Developments in the Gaza Strip

A new commissioner appointed to UNRWA

► On March 19, 2020, **UNRWA announced the appointment of Swiss national Philippe Lazzarini to the post of commissioner-general of UNRWA.** According to UNRWA's announcement, Philippe Lazzarini more than thirty years of experience in humanitarian assistance and international coordination in conflict and post-conflict areas. That includes in Gaza and East Jerusalem; in the United Nations; the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the private sector. He joined the United Nations in 2003 and has served the organization in various capacities. The last post he held prior to his appointment as UNRWA

²A 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.

commissioner-general was the position of deputy special coordinator, resident and humanitarian coordinator for Lebanon in the office of the United Nations special coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) (UNRWA website, March 19, 2020).



Philippe Lazzarini
(UNRWA website, March 19, 2020)

►Philippe Lazzarini replaced Christian Saunders, who was appointed to the post temporarily by UNRWA in 2019, after replacing Pierre Krähenbühl (the previous commissioner-general). Pierre Krähenbühl retired after having been put on administrative leave by the UN secretary general after an investigation was conducted into his abuses of authority.