



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (July 29 – August 4, 2020)

Overview

► **This past week a rocket was fired from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory. It targeted the southern city of Sderot** at a time when many residents were at a drive-in movie. The rocket was intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system. In response, IDF aircraft attacked Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip. The rocket attack came after a month of quiet, and in all probability the rocket was launched by a rogue terrorist organization and not by Hamas, which is busy (successfully) coping with the COVID-19 crisis.

► **In Judea and Samaria** no significant popular terrorism attacks were carried out, but the daily throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli vehicles continued.

► At the weekly Palestinian government meeting **PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** announced that the PA stood by the termination of its relations with Israel and its refusal to accept tax revenues. **Khaled al-Asili, PA minister of the economy**, called for the removal of every trace of Israel's complete domination over the Palestinian economy. However, a columnist in the daily al-Quds criticized the PA's decision to stop civilian cooperation with Israel, claiming that it harmed the PA's economic functioning and was a burden on the Palestinian people, especially during the COVID-19 crisis.

► **In Judea and Samaria the number of active COVID-19 cases stands at 5,993** (as of August 3, 2020), most of them in the Hebron district. The data regarding COVID-19 infection indicate a possible trend towards stability, but it is still too early to state the second wave has been halted. **The Gaza Strip is conspicuous for the success of the Hamas administration's dealing with the pandemic** (with seven active cases as of August 4, 2020).

COVID-19 Infection in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip – Overview

Judea and Samaria¹

►In the PA territories **the trend toward stability in infection continues**, but it is still too early to state that the second wave has been halted. According to the PA ministry of health in Ramallah, **in the past 24 hours 502 patients recovered and 229 new infections were detected.**

►**The total number of active cases in Judea and Samaria stood at 5,993 on August 3, 2020**, 3,960 in the Hebron district, making up 65% of the total number. In east Jerusalem the number of active cases stands at 2,003, about 33% of the total number (Facebook page of the PA ministry of health in Ramallah, August 4, 2020).

►Of the active cases, nine are in ICUs and two are on ventilators. **There have been 87 deaths** as of August 4, 2020. Since the outbreak of the virus 12,892 Palestinians have contracted the disease.

The Gaza Strip

►As opposed to the spread of the infection in the PA, the **Hamas administration has been conspicuously successful in dealing with the pandemic in the Gaza Strip.** Two new active cases were detected, Palestinians who returned to Gaza through the Erez Crossing. There are currently seven active cases in Gaza, all of them hospitalized in the quarantine center at the Rafah Crossing (as of August 4, 2020).

Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

Rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel

►On the evening of August 2, 2020 a rocket was fired from the Gaza Strip at the southern Israeli city of Sderot. It was fired at a time when many local residents were watching a movie at the new drive-in. The rocket was intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system. No casualties were reported; fragments from the intercepted rocket damaged a vehicle (Spokesperson's unit of the Sderot municipality, August 2, 2020)

¹ For further information, see the August 3, 2020 bulletin, "The Spread of COVID-19 in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip."



**The vehicle damaged by fragments of the intercepted rocket
(Twitter account of Almog Boker, August 2, 2020).**

► **In response to the rocket fire IDF aircraft attacked Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip.**

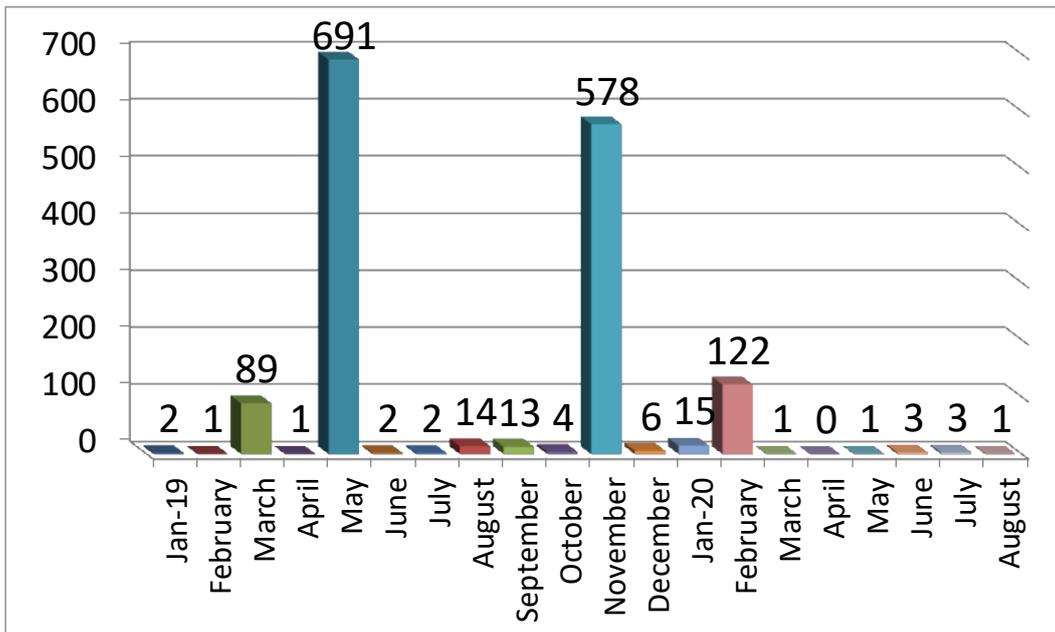
Among the targets were a site for the manufacture of concrete used in the construction of Hamas' underground military infrastructure and the infrastructure itself (IDF spokesman, August 2, 2020). The Palestinian media reported that IDF UAVs attacked "resistance" [i.e., terrorist organization] targets in western Khan Yunis, western Deir al-Balah and western Rafah. No casualties were reported (Shehab, August 3, 2020).



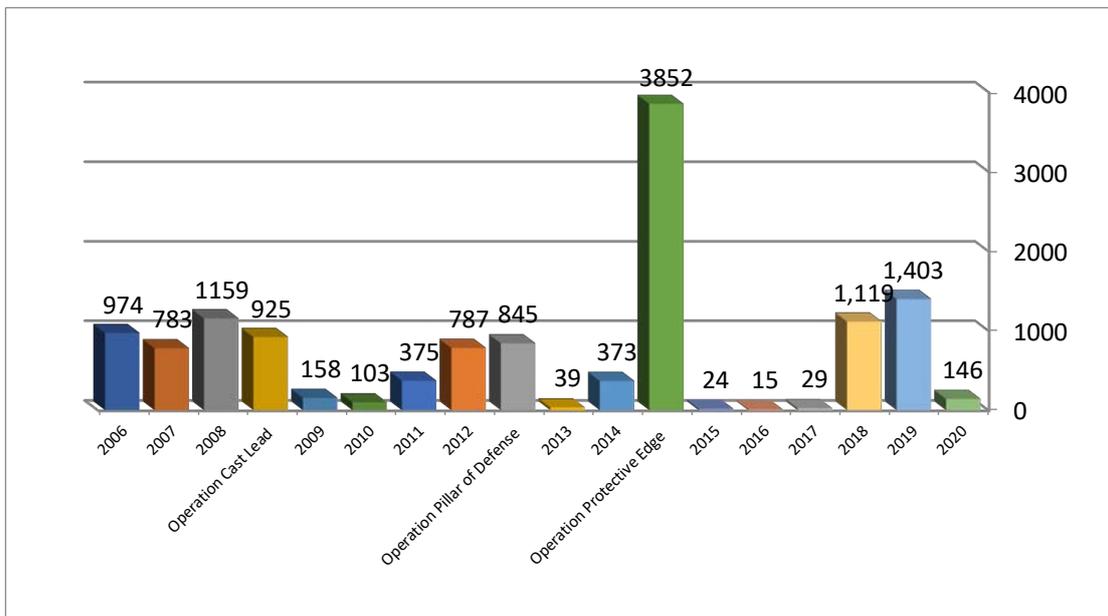
IDF attack in western Rafah (YouTube, August 3, 2020).

► Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said Israel's attacks on the "resistance" posts sent a "message of escalation and aggression." He claimed their objective was to export Israel's internal crises to the inhabitants of Gaza and to draw attention away from Israel's serious political crisis. He claimed the "resistance" would not allow the Gaza Strip to be turned into an target for the export of Israel's crises (Hamas' Telegram account, August 3, 2020).

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Attempted infiltration into Israeli territory prevented

►The Palestinian media in the Gaza Strip reported that Hamas' security forces detained a youth who had tried to infiltrate into Israeli territory from the eastern part of Gaza City. They took him for interrogation and from there to a quarantine center for 21 days (Amad, July 30, 2020).

Information about Hamas military-terrorist wing operative who infiltrated into Israel

►According to a report from the Israel Security Agency, on July 28, 2020, Izz al-Din Hussein, a Palestinian from Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip, swam across the border and reached Israeli territory. As soon as he came on shore he was detained by an IDF force and taken for interrogation. He said he had decided to reach Israel because of family difficulties and persecution he suffered at the hands of senior Hamas figures.

►Interrogation revealed that in 2013 he had enlisted in Hamas' military wing. **Since 2018 he had been an operative in Hamas' aerial defense system.** He was responsible for a squad of operatives whose role was to launch shoulder missiles. He had an anti-aircraft missile in his home and had been instructed to fire it at an Israeli helicopter if one landed nearby. He underwent various forms of training during his time in the ranks of Hamas' military wing. While in the aerial defense system he studied Israeli aircraft and their functions, and learned about anti-aircraft missiles, binoculars and surveillance cameras (Israel Security Agency, July 30, 2020).

Judea and Samaria

Stone- and Molotov cocktail-throwing

►In Judea and Samaria Palestinians continued throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at civilian Israeli vehicles and Israeli security forces. The more prominent events were the following (all reports from Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria unless otherwise noted):

- ◆**August 3, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle southeast of Modi'in Illit. No casualties were reported. The front windshield of the vehicle was damaged.
- ◆**August 2, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle north of Modi'in Illit. No casualties were reported. The front windshield of the vehicle was damaged.

◆ **August 2, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus southeast of Ramallah. No casualties were reported.

◆ **August 2, 2020** – A burning tire containing a gas balloon was placed on the road southwest of Ariel. No casualties were reported; it set fire to the dry underbrush.

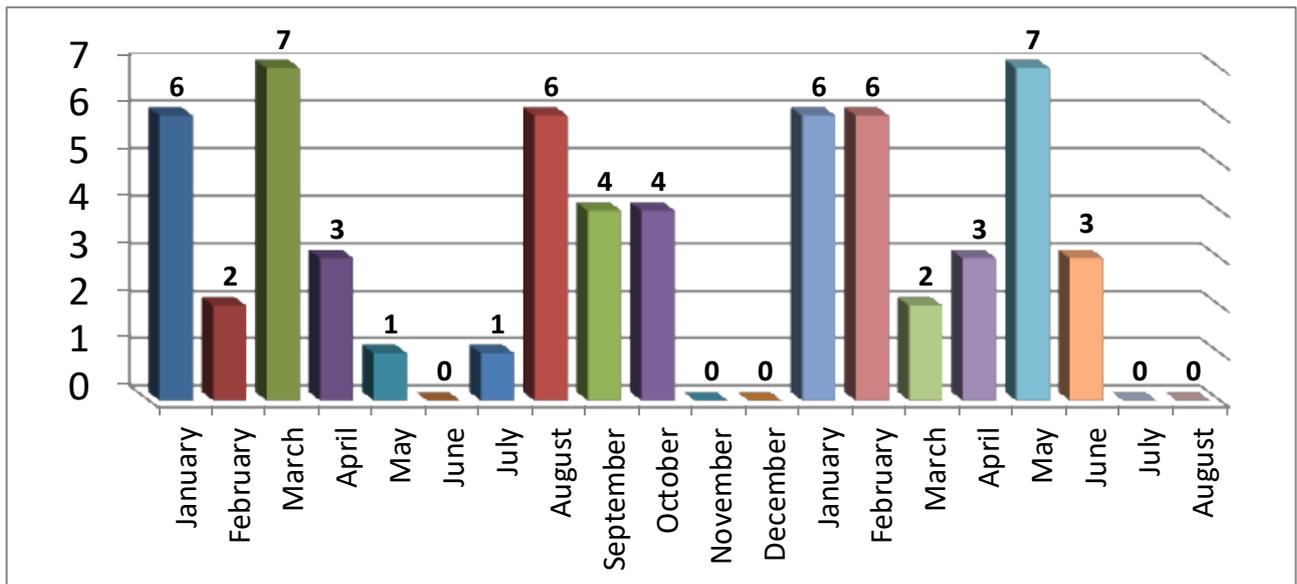
◆ **August 2, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle near Mt. Hebron. No casualties were reported. The front windshield of the vehicle was damaged.

◆ **July 31, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus north of Hebron. No casualties were reported.

◆ **July 29, 2020** – A Molotov cocktail was thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle northwest of Ramallah. No casualties were reported.

◆ **July 29, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli truck east of Ariel. No casualties were reported. The truck was damaged.

Significant terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria since January 2019²



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.

Developments in the Gaza Strip

Senior Hamas figure Khalil al-Haya gives a sermon for Eid al-Adha

► **Khalil al-Haya, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, gave a sermon for Eid al-Adha, saying a jihad had to be declared and it was forbidden to wait until the post-Netanyahu era in Israel. He said the Palestinian people was united in opposition to Israeli and American plans, at the center of which was the "deal of the century." If Israel annexes territories the Palestinian people will be prepared for a confrontation "of every form" (Hamas website, July 31, 2020).



Khalil al-Haya at the Eid al-Adha prayers in the Filastin mosque in Gaza City (Safa, July 31, 2020).

Additional comments on Isma'il Haniyeh's interview³

► Senior Hamas figures continue commenting on the remarks made by Isma'il Haniyeh, who claimed he had rejected an offer of \$15 billion because in return Hamas would be asked to disband its military wing. **Salah al-Bardawil**, a member of Hamas' political bureau, said the offer was a trial balloon. He added that financial donations to Hamas from the Arab states were "natural," and that for example, Qatar did not ask for anything in return for the money it sent. That was different from "political money," in return for which Hamas would be required to abandon the Palestinian cause and give up some of Palestine. Asked if the money offered to Hamas was not an opportunity to improve the standard of living in Gaza, he said that **under no circumstances would Hamas agree to the offer**. He said a solution exists for hunger and poverty in the Gaza Strip, and Hamas would know how to deal with turning starvation into political blackmail (al-Aqsa, July 29, 2020).

³ For further information, see the July 30, 2020 bulletin, "Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, reiterated Hamas' position that military buildup and the campaign against Israel are its top priorities, even at the expense of the economic development and welfare of the local population."

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

PA activity against Israel's planned annexation of territory and the "deal of the century"

►The PA's activity against Israel's plan to annex territories in Judea and Samaria and the "deal of the century" continues, despite the fact that Israel has not given a date for the annexation. A committee for resolving the crisis held a meeting chaired by Mahmoud Abbas and attended by representatives from the PLO's Executive Committee and Fatah's Central Committee. The committee declared its support for the unity of the Palestinian position and the escalation of the "popular resistance" [i.e., popular terrorism], stressing that there was no solution except for the cancellation of the annexation plan and reviving the peace process under UN sponsorship (Wafa, July 29, 2020).

Diplomatic activity

►Senior PA figures continued their diplomatic activity to keep Israel from annexing territories in Judea and Samaria. **Saeb Erekat, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee**, sent communiqués to several international figures and institutions, among them the UN secretary general, UNESCO, the UN's Human Rights Council, the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. He reiterated his call to prevent Israel from taking illegal steps and to provide the Palestinians with international protection for "Israel's aggression" against the Palestinian people and their holy places. He said that while the world was fighting the spread of the coronavirus, Israel continued its attempts to eradicate the PA's identity and legacy (Wafa, July 29, 2020).

Consequences of the separation from Israel

►At the weekly PA government meeting PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh said **the PA continued its separation from Israel and its refusal to accept the tax revenues Israel collected for it** (Ma'an, July 27, 2020). **Khaled al-Asili, PA minister of the economy**, said that economic separation from Israel was a **prime interest for the Palestinians**, who wanted to remove every trace of Israel's complete domination of the Palestinian economy. **He said Israel controlled 60% of the imports and 80% of the exports**. He said that to gradually separate from Israel they were appealing to Arab, Islamic and international agencies, and seeking to increase trade and investments along with enlisting financial aid from local and foreign sources (al-Quds, July 29, 2020).

► **On the other hand, Palestinian columnists criticized the PA decision to terminate all cooperation with Israel, claiming it mainly hurt the PA's economic functioning, especially given the coronavirus crisis.** Some of the criticism was the following:

◆ **Ziyad Abu Ziyad**,⁴ a columnist for the daily newspaper al-Quds, wrote that without a doubt, everyone opposes surrendering to [Israel's] blackmail. However, before the PA made the decision to stop the transfer of tax revenues, alternative sources of money should have been found to ensure the continued payment of public sector employees' salaries. He said the decision to terminate civilian cooperation was an excuse for Israel to stop the transfer of the tax revenues, and it had been made too early, without a backup plan. In addition, the decision had not been made as part of the plan to escalate pressure on Israel. Therefore, **the termination of civilian cooperation did not harm essential interests of Israel or the Israelis, but it was a burden on the Palestinian people** (al-Quds, July 19, 2020).

◆ **Hani al-Masri**,⁵ also a columnist for al-Quds, wrote an article in which he related to the PA's failure in the fight against the coronavirus. He said **it was unclear why civilian cooperation with Israel had been terminated**. He said only security cooperation should have ended, because now the PLO, the PA and all Palestinians had been harmed. He also said that terminating security cooperation could have been far more beneficial had it been carried out as part of a full strategic program to get rid of the occupation and dismantle the settlements, and not as a response and a kind of anger, gambling that Israel would not be able to get along without the PA (al-Quds, July 14, 2020).

Joint Fatah-Hamas rally postponed

► Isma'il Haniyeh called Mahmoud Abbas to wish him a happy Eid al-Adha. They discussed developments in the Palestinian arena, stressing their joint position against the "deal of the century" and Israel's annexation plan. They agreed that the steps towards rapprochement between Fatah and Hamas would continue and that the leaderships of both movements would keep in contact (Hamas website, July 30, 2020).

⁴ **Ziyad Abu Ziyad** is a veteran Fatah activist from Jerusalem. In 1996 he was elected to represent Jerusalem in the Palestinian Legislative Council, a position he held until 2006. In 1998 he was appointed minister of Jerusalem affairs in the PA government.

⁵ **Hani al-Masri** is one of the founders of the Masarat – the Palestinian Center for Policy Research, and is its director general. He is on the board of trustees of the Yasser Arafat Foundation. Between 1995 and 2005 he was head of the general media department in the PA's ministry of information.

►However, **despite the rhetoric about rapprochement, Fatah and Hamas have not yet succeeded in agreeing on the joint rally they decided to hold as a first step towards reconciliation.** They are still discussing and disagreeing about issues such as where the rally will be held and who the speakers will be. Hamas sources stressed that despite the difficulties, they have not cancelled the rally and warned they might fail.

Meeting to discuss escalating the "popular resistance"

►On July 28, 2020, a meeting to discuss "**escalating the popular resistance until the elimination of the occupation and the achievement of independence**" was held in al-Bireh. It was attended by members of the PLO's Executive Committee and other senior PLO figures, and senior figures from Fatah and the Popular Resistance Committees. They discussed ways to escalate the so-called "popular resistance" [i.e., popular terrorism]. **Mahmoud al-'Alul, deputy Fatah chairman**, said the "popular resistance" had to be revived and supported. **Walid Assaf, chairman of the Authority for Resistance to the Fence and the Settlements**, called for the Palestinians to prevent the establishment of new settlements, to remove the fences constructed by the settlers around the settlements, to oppose the attacks carried out by settlers and to appoint a committee to boycott Israel ("the occupation") and its products.



The meeting in al-Bireh to discuss the escalation of the "popular resistance" (Facebook page of the Authority for Resistance to the Fence and the Settlements, July 28, 2020).

►The meeting ended with a discussion for a program that would include ways to gradually escalate the "popular resistance." The following points were decided on (Wafa, al-Quds, July 28, 2020).

- ◆ **Increasing cooperation between all the "popular resistance" operatives and establishing a united front of "popular resistance" operatives.**
- ◆ **Supporting the firm position of the residents of Jerusalem and its environs.**

- ◆ **Formulating a plan for escalating the struggle in a way that would link "popular resistance" activities with the political, diplomatic and legal struggle against Israel.**
- ◆ **Boycotting products manufactured in Israel**, locally and internationally.
- ◆ **Launching a website in a number of languages** that would serve as a forum for studies and publications, and for information about the activities of the various organizations.
- ◆ **Launching campaigns for international solidarity with the Palestinian cause** and exposing Israel's activity preventing foreign activists from visiting the West Bank.

Responses to the American call to impose sanctions on Mahmoud Abbas

- ▶ According to the Israeli media, Congressman Doug Lamborn (R-CO) sent a letter to Trump **calling for sanctions to be imposed personally on Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian leadership. It was in response to the PA's continuing payments to the prisoners and families of the shaheeds in violation of the Taylor Force Act.** The Act orders the cessation of the transfer of funds from the United States to the PA as long as the money is used to pay the salaries of terrorists and their families (Israel Today, the Jerusalem Post, August 2, 2018). Representative Lamborn tweeted that he had specifically asked for sanctions on the Authority for Prisoners and Released Prisoners' Affairs and on its chairman, Qudri Abu Bakri.
- ▶ Representative Lamborn's appeal to the president was **condemned by senior PA, Fatah and PLO figures**, as follows:
 - ◆ **Saeb Erekat, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee**, condemned "America's ongoing incitement against Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian leadership." He said the United States acted like a bully, and he was of the opinion that the congressman's request was intended to punish the PA for its opposition to the "deal of the century" (al-Ayam, August 2, 2020).
 - ◆ **Mahmoud al-Batash, advisor to Mahmoud Abbas**, said that American incitement against the Palestinian leadership exposed its real intentions regarding the Palestinian cause, and proved that Mahmoud Abbas was leading the Palestinian along the right path (Ma'an, August 2, 2020).
 - ◆ **Fayiz Abu Itta, deputy secretary of Fatah's Revolutionary Council**, said the PA would not abandon the prisoners and the families of the shaheeds after they had

sacrificed their lives for the Palestinian people and because they were the symbol at the head of the struggle. He said the PA would not change its mind about its decision to terminate relations with Israel and the United States as long as [the American] leader was an extremist full of hatred for Arabs and Muslims, and biased towards Israel (Dunia al-Watan, August 2, 2020).

◆ **Ahmed Majdalani, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee**, said Lamborn's statement was racist and showed "political shamelessness." He said it was direct incitement to assassinate Mahmoud Abbas and was support for Israel's [alleged] "organized terrorism" (Dunia al-Watan, August 2, 2020).