



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (August 19 – 25, 2020)

Overview

► This past week Hamas-initiated tension and the deterioration of the security situation in the Gaza Strip continued. The events focused on the launching of IED and incendiary balloons which daily cause dozens of fires near Israeli communities. The IDF responded to balloon terrorism with aerial attacks and tank fire targeting Hamas posts and facilities. Hamas and the other terrorist organizations responded to the IDF attacks with sporadic rocket fire. Prominent was a barrage of at least seven rockets fired on the night of August 21, 2020, six of which were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system. One rocket hit a house in the southern Israeli city of Sderot.

► **On August 24, 2020 four active cases of Covid-19 were detected in the al-Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip; all four were members of the same family.** They were the **first Covid-19 cases detected inside the Gaza Strip which were not brought in through the crossings.** A 48-hour general curfew was imposed on the Gaza Strip and security operatives were deployed in public places to enforce it. So far the Hamas administration has successfully controlled the spread of Covid-19 in the Gaza Strip by allowing Palestinians to enter only through the Erez and Rafah Crossings and immediately quarantining them without allowing them to come into contact with the local population.

► The discovery of active cases inside Gaza poses **two challenges** for the Hamas administration:

- ◆ **A medical challenge:** There is a risk of **loss of control over the prevention of the spread of the virus** because of the Gaza Strip's overcrowding, poor sanitation and low public health system's capabilities.

- ◆ **A political-security challenge:** Three weeks ago Hamas initiated tensions and the deterioration of the security situation along the Gaza Strip border, which have continued. So far Hamas has not succeeded in using the tensions to wrest concessions from Israel.

►Will the worsening of the Covid-19 crisis in Gaza relax the current tension or increase Hamas pressure on Israel to the point of escalation? So far there is no answer. At this stage routine balloon terrorism continues, even though four active cases of Covid-19 have been detected inside Gaza (as of August 24, 2020¹).

The Covid-19 Infection: Overview

Judea and Samaria²

►**This past week there was an increase in the number of active Covid-19 cases in the Palestinian Authority (PA) territories, but nevertheless the trend towards stability in infection continues.** The number of active cases stands at 6,429 (as of August 25, 2020). There are 2,927 active cases in the Hebron district, 46% of the total number. Of the total number, 28 are in ICUs and five are on ventilators. There have been 150 deaths. In her daily briefing, Mai al-Kayla, PA minister of health, reported that during the past 24 hours 1,459 patients had recovered, 793 of them from the Hebron district, the largest number of recoveries since Covid-19 broke out in the PA territories (Facebook page of the minister of health in Ramallah, August 25, 2020).

►At the beginning of the weekly government meeting, PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh said the number of infections in the PA remained stable and was not declining. He said the important thing was that the number of recoveries exceeded the number of new infections. The number of patients in ICUs and those on ventilators is very low, he said. He added that a study carried out by the W.H.O. determined that without the steps taken by the PA, 65% of the population would have been infected and the number of deaths would have been far greater. He said the PA had allotted four million shekels (a little over \$1 million) for a medical infrastructure for the school system. As for the universities, he said most of the classes would be held online (al-Jazeera, August 24, 2020).

¹ Throughout the Covid-19 crisis Hamas has accompanied its dealing with the disease with a campaign of threats against Israel, accusing it of destroying the public health system in the Gaza Strip. Senior Hamas figures, among them Yahya al-Sinwar, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, have threatened that if a shortage of ventilators or other medical equipment develops, Hamas will exert pressure on Israel and "make six million Israeli settlers stop breathing." For further information, see the April 23, 2020, bulletin, "What is the true reason for the shortcomings of the medical system in the Gaza Strip?"

² For further information, see the August 24, 2020, bulletin, "The Spread of Covid-19 in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip."

The Gaza Strip

This past week the Gaza Strip had the highest number of new Covid-19 cases recorded so far, after two months of only a few cases. **The number of active cases in the Gaza Strip currently stands at 41**, after 30 new cases were detected last week. **On August 24, 2020, Covid-19 infections were reported inside the Gaza Strip for the first time, outside the quarantine centers.** A woman and three men from the same family in the al-Maghazi refugee camp were found to be infected with the virus. Since the outbreak of the epidemic, all the active cases detected in the Gaza Strip have arrived through the crossings (most through the Rafah Crossing and a few through the Erez Crossing), and they were immediately taken to quarantine centers without coming into contact with the local population.³

►Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip, said the entire al-Maghazi refugee camp had been isolated and that teams had arrived for epidemiological research and contact tracing. According to Salama Maarouf, head of the government information bureau, the spread of the infection to the Gaza Strip proper was **a scenario they had taken into consideration as soon as the disease broke out.** Therefore, he said, a 48-hour general curfew had been imposed on the Gaza Strip. It would be in force for all places of employment and educational institutions, mosques and markets would close and public prayers and gatherings were banned. He called on the public not to leave their homes until new instructions had been issued (al-Aqsa, August 24, 2020).

►Iyad al-Buzum, spokesman for the ministry of the interior in Gaza, said **security force personnel and police had been deployed throughout the streets and public areas to enforce the curfew.** He said his ministry had all the means necessary to cope with the situation. **He also accused Israel of responsibility for the situation in the Gaza Strip** (al-Aqsa August 24, 2020).

►A spokesman for the ministry of the interior and national security called for calm, saying that all basic staples were available in the markets, and the authorities in charge would continue supplying them. He said the authorities were prepared to deal with all the scenarios of an outbreak of Covid-19 inside the Gaza Strip. The ministry of national economy said there were

³ The first two Covid-19 cases in the Gaza Strip were detected on March 21, 2020. They had arrived from Pakistan two days previously. Until the four cases were detected in the refugee camp, all Covid-19 patients arrived through the crossings and were taken to quarantine centers, thereby preventing the spread of the coronavirus inside the Gaza Strip.

reserves and supplies of foodstuffs and other merchandise for a number of months and that they were available in the markets and stores. Gazans were asked not to crowd into stores and store owners and businessmen were asked not to hoard merchandise (al-Ra'i news agency, August 25, 2020).



Local residents crowd stores after the declaration of a curfew in the Gaza Strip (Telegram channel of the Palestine al-Hadath news agency, August 25, 2020).



Hamas police enforce the curfew (Twitter account of the ministry of the interior in Gaza, August 25, 2020).



**Right: Empty streets during the curfew in Gaza City (Shehab Facebook page, August 25, 2020).
Left: An empty market (al-Hadath Facebook page, August 25, 2020).**

Increase in Tension and Deterioration of Security along the Gaza Strip Border⁴

► **This past week the deterioration of security initiated by Hamas along the Gaza border continued.** It was manifested mainly by the launching of IED and incendiary balloons (causing dozens of fires daily), the IDF response to balloon terrorism with aerial attacks and tank fire at Hamas facilities and posts. Hamas and the other terrorist organizations responded to the IDF attacks with sporadic rocket fire (24 rockets have been fired since the beginning of August).

► The restrictions Israel imposed on the Gaza Strip remain in place: the Kerem Shalom Crossing is closed to the transfer of goods and fuel (with exceptions for humanitarian considerations), the fishing zone is closed and the supply of electricity was reduced because there has been no transfer of fuel to run the power plant. **Mediation attempts, focusing on the arrival of an Egyptian delegation to Gaza, were unsuccessful, and Hamas continues its balloon terrorism accompanied by sporadic rocket fire.**

► **The joint operations room of the Palestinian terrorist organizations in Gaza issued a statement threatening Israel after it closed the fishing zone off the coast of the Gaza Strip.** According to the statement, given "Israel's crimes" along the coast, the organizations will not allow Israel to enter the area of the Palestinian fishermen, attack them or act aggressively. **The organizations, according to the statement, have all the means necessary to protect the fishermen** (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades website, August 24, 2020).

Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

Rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel

The increase in tension in the Gaza Strip has been accompanied by sporadic rocket fire into Israeli territory. This past week 21 rockets were fired at Israel during the past week, five of which fell inside the Gaza Strip. On the night of August 21, 2020 a barrage of at least seven rockets was fired into Israeli territory. Six were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system and one fell on a house in the southern Israeli city of Sderot. No organization claimed responsibility for the rocket fire. In ITIC assessment, the rockets were fired by Hamas

⁴ For further information, see the August 24, 2020 bulletin, "Continuing deterioration of the security situation along the Gaza Strip border (updated to August 24, 2020)."

operatives and operatives from other organizations to deter Israel from responding to balloon launches.

►The rocket fire this past week was the following:

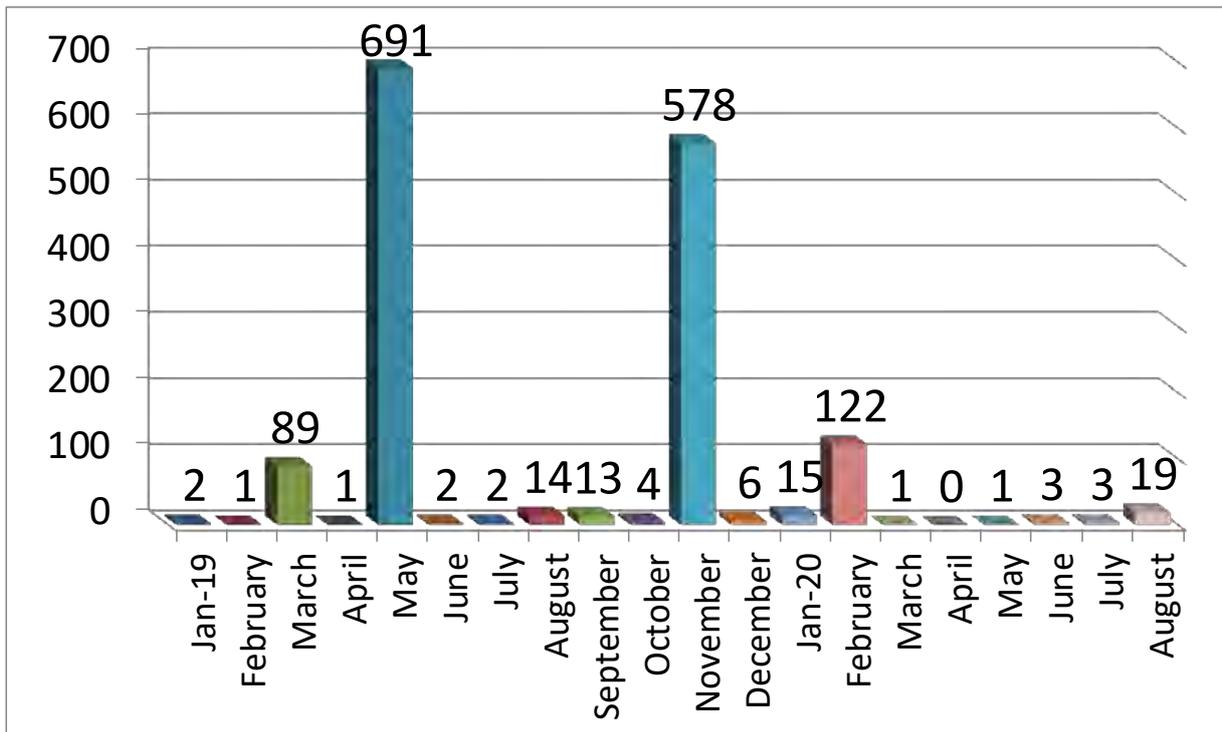
◆**August 18, 2020:** A rocket was fired at the region of the southern Israeli coastal city of Ashqelon and exploded in an open area. Two girls were slightly injured while running for shelter. In response IDF aircraft attacked a special Hamas military facility (IDF spokesman, August 18, 2020). The Palestinian media reported that Israeli aircraft attacked the Obeida Post in the al-Zeitoun neighborhood in the southwestern part of Gaza City (Shehab, August 18, 2020).

◆**August 20, 2020:** Three rockets were fired. They were intercepted by the Iron Dome. Two additional rockets were fired and fell inside the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian media reported that Israeli aircraft attacked the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades' al-Quds post in western Khan Yunis (Palinfo, August 21, 2020; Ma'an, August 20, 2020). It was also reported that IDF tanks shelled "resistance" [i.e., terrorist organization] posts in various locations in the Gaza Strip (Shehab, August 20, 2020).

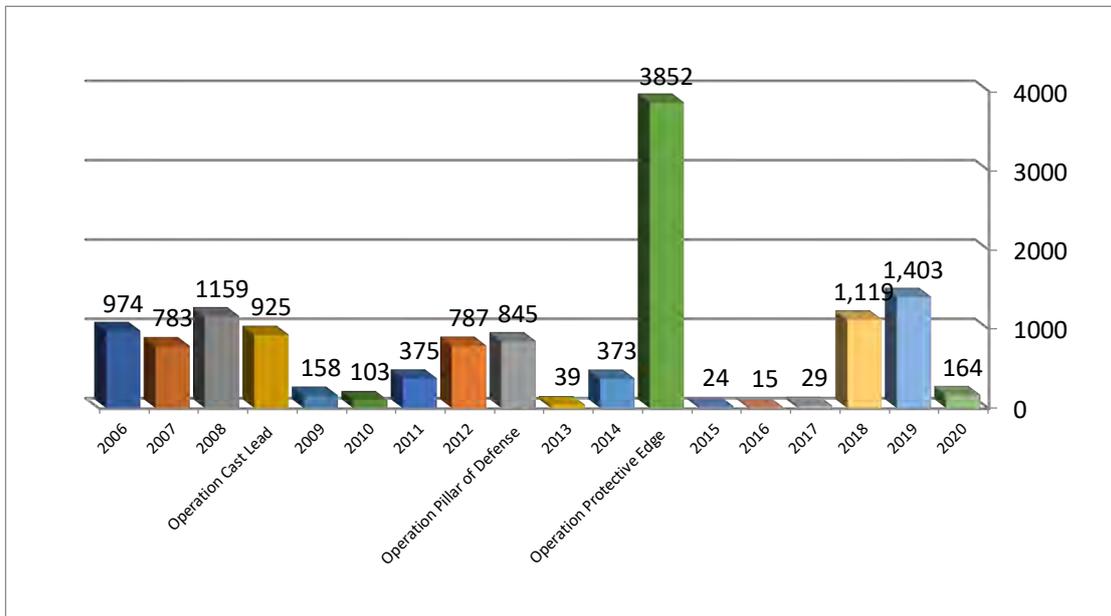
◆**August 21, 2020:** During the night a barrage of seven rockets was fired. Six were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system. One hit the roof of a fortified room in Sderot while the family was inside; no casualties were reported. The house was damaged. A woman was injured while running to a shelter and three women were treated for shock. Two additional rockets were later fired at Sderot from the northern Gaza Strip, and were intercepted by the Iron Dome.

◆**August 22, 2020:** Three rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip and were intercepted by the Iron Dome. Three more rockets (fired in two separate events) fell inside the Gaza Strip. In response IDF tanks attacked Hamas military posts in the southern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, August 22, 2020).

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire



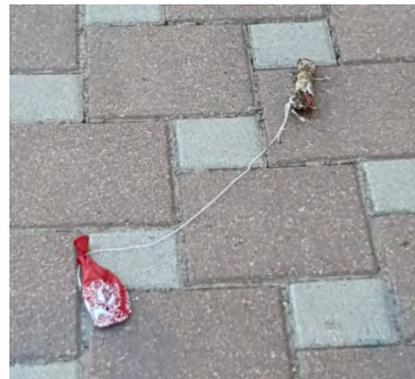
Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Balloon terrorism

This past week daily balloon launchings continued, mostly incendiary balloons with some IED balloons. They caused dozens of fires in and around the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip. The operatives launching the balloons threatened to escalate their activity but so far the numbers have remained stable (al-Ayam, August 23, 2020).

► **On August 24, 2020 more than 30 fire epicenters caused by incendiary balloons were located** (Israeli 13 News channel, August 24, 2020). They included fires near Sderot and in the Be'eri and Nir'am forests. No casualties were reported (0404 News, August 24, 2020). On August 24, 2020, a suspicious object was found attached to a balloon in Sderot. It was neutralized by police demolitions experts. No casualties or damage were reported (Ma'ariv, August 24, 2020). Several IED balloons which landed near the border fence and in one of the communities north of the Gaza Strip were neutralized (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, 0404 News, August 24, 2020).



Right: IED balloon in Sderot neutralized by a police demolitions expert. Left: IED attached to a balloon in one of the Israeli communities in the Ashqelon region (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, August 24, 2020).



Right: Operatives of the Hamas-affiliated Sons of al-Zawari unit launch balloons (Facebook page of the Sons of al-Zawari units in eastern Khan Yunis, August 24, 2020). Left: Operatives of the Sons of al-Qoqa units of the Popular Resistance Movement in the southern Gaza Strip launch balloons (Abrar forum, August 24, 2020).

►In response, IDF tanks and aircraft attacked Hamas posts and underground facilities in the southern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, August 25, 2020). The Palestinian media reported that Israeli aircraft attacked a field in the eastern Rafah district, and that Israeli tanks shelled [Hamas] restraint force posts near the Sufa post in the northeastern Rafah district. The posts were damaged but no casualties were reported (Palinfo, Ma'an, August 25, 2020).

►**Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said Israel's attacks, despite the state of emergency in Gaza because of the fight against Covid-19**, reflected "the barbaric behavior of the Zionist enemy." He added that Israel's "aggression" was the continuation of the "siege" and its severe measures in imposing a closure on the Gaza Strip. He claimed all the pressure Israel exerts on Gaza will not stop the Palestinians' "legitimate struggle" to lift the "oppressive siege" (Dunia al-Watan, August 25, 2020).

►After a curfew was imposed to prevent further spread of Covid-19 inside the Gaza Strip, the Ahfad al-Nasser network issued a statement reading, "With or without Covid-19, Ahfad al-Nasser will burn [the communities near the Gaza Strip] today. Despite the curfew after a Covid-19 infection was found, the Ahfad al-Nasser units in the battlefield will continue to strike [Israelis] near the Gazan border with incendiary balloons, because the epidemic of the occupation and siege is more dangerous to our people than the coronavirus" (Ahfad al-Nasser Telegram channel, August 25, 2020). **At this point, given the detection of Covid-19 inside the Gaza Strip, it is unclear if Hamas intends to cause the security situation to deteriorate further or to lower the tension.**



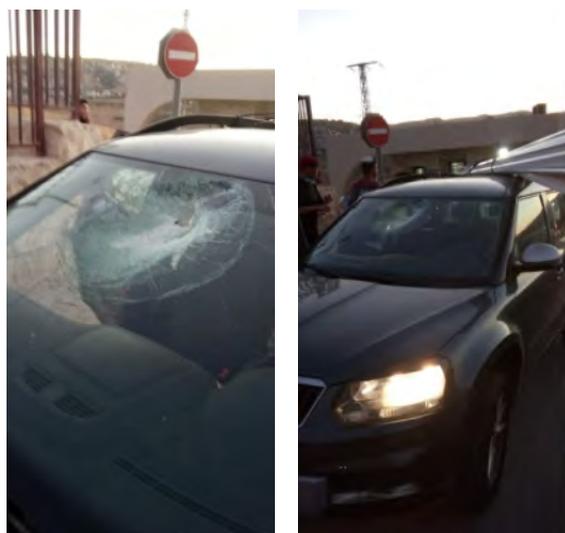
Incendiary balloons launched from eastern Rafah by Ahfad al-Nasser operatives (Ahfad al-Nasser Facebook page, August 24, 2020).

Judea and Samaria

Events

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

- ◆ **August 25, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle north of Ramallah. Three people were slightly wounded. The vehicle's front windshield was damaged.
- ◆ **August 24, 2020:** Three Molotov cocktails were thrown at the fence of the Israeli community of Psagot (to the east of Ramallah). No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **August 24, 2020:** Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle southwest of Hebron. An IDF soldier was slightly wounded.
- ◆ **August 24, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle southeast of Ramallah. No casualties were reported; the vehicle was damaged.
- ◆ **August 23, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus north of Hebron. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **August 23, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle establish of Hebron. No casualties were reported; the vehicle was damaged.
- ◆ **August 21, 2020:** Stones were thrown on the road north of Modi'in Illit. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **August 20, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle north of Gush Etzion. No casualties were reported. The vehicle's front windshield was damaged.



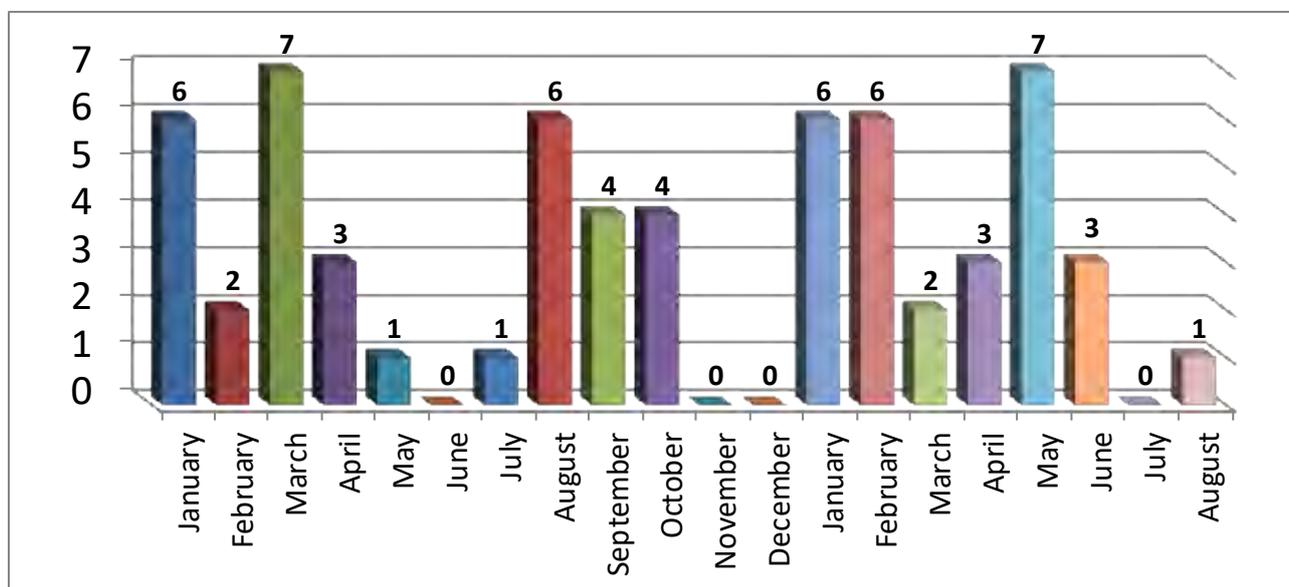
**Front windshield damaged by stones
(Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, August 20, 2020).**

- ◆ **August 20, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle northeast of Modi'in Illit. No casualties were reported; the vehicle was damaged.
- ◆ **August 20, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle near Kiryat Arba. No casualties were reported; the vehicle's front windshield was damaged.
- ◆ **August 20, 2020:** A rock was thrown from a passing car at a civilian Israeli vehicle north of Modi'in Illit, penetrating the front windshield and hitting a young woman sitting in the back seat, injuring him.
- ◆ **August 19, 2020:** An IDF force saw three Palestinians rolling burning tires towards the road north of Modi'in Illit, apparently to attack passing vehicles. The force followed the procedures for halting suspects, which included gunfire. Two of the Palestinians fled (one of them apparently wounded). The third was mortally wounded and died at the scene.
- ◆ **August 19, 2020:** Molotov cocktails were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus west of Nablus. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **August 19, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle northwest of Ariel. No casualties were reported; the vehicle was damaged.
- ◆ **August 19, 2020:** Stones were thrown, apparently from inside a Palestinian bus, at a civilian Israeli vehicle southwest of Nablus. No casualties were reported; the vehicle was damaged.
- ◆ **August 19, 2020:** An object (most likely a pipe bomb) was thrown at the fence of the Israeli community of Psagot (to the east of Ramallah). No casualties were reported.

◆ **August 19, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus southeast of Ramallah.

No casualties were reported; the bus was damaged.

Significant terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria since January 2019⁵



Developments in the Gaza Strip

The power plant in Gaza shuts down

► Closing the Kerem Shalom Crossing and stopping the transfer of fuel to the Gaza Strip caused the almost immediate drop in the electricity supplied to local residents. **At 10:00 in the morning on August 18, 2020, the power plant's diesel fuel ran out and it shut down.**

The electric company in Gaza said that electricity would now be supplied in a rolling schedule of eight hours of electricity and 16-hour power outages (Filastin al-Yawm, August 21, 2020).

► Jamal al-Khudri, chairman of the popular committee to fight the siege, said that because of the power cuts workshops had limited their hours and reduced production by 25%. He said that had caused a rise in unemployment, and there were now more than 320,000 unemployed in Gaza (Dunia al-Watan, August 21, 2020). The Gazan energy authority said Israel would be responsible for the consequences of the power outages (Dunia al-Watan, August 16, 2020). Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip, warned there would be dangerous consequences for hospitals because of the lack of

⁵A 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.

electricity (al-Aqsa, August 18, 2020). **Al-Qidra repeated this warning after four Covid-19 cases were detected inside the Gaza Strip.** Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum claimed the "siege" of the Gaza Strip, the reduction in the supply of electricity and the shutdown of daily life were "crimes against humanity." He added that Hamas would not allow the situation to continue and would not remain silent (Hamas website, August 18, 2020).



Right: The idle power plant (Safa, August 18, 2020). Left: Local residents wait in line for water from a public source after the power plant stopped providing electricity for the water system pumps (Facebook page of photojournalist Usama al-Kahlut, August 24,2020).

Hamas delegation headed by Isma'il Haniyeh meets with the president of Turkey

► **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, led a delegation of senior Hamas figures who met with the Turkish president in Istanbul.** The delegation included Saleh al-'Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau; Maher Salah, head of Hamas "in the Palestinian dispersal;" Izzat al-Rishq, a member of Hamas' political bureau and Jihad Yaghmour, Hamas representative in Turkey. The delegation updated the president on developments in the Palestinian arena, especially the normalization of Israel-UAE relations. The members of the delegation praised the role played by Turkey in supporting the Palestinian people (Hamas website, August 22, 2020).



The Hamas delegation, led by Isma'il Haniyeh, meets with the Turkish president in Istanbul (Hamas website, August 22, 2020).

Four Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) operatives killed in a "work accident"

►The Jerusalem Brigades, the PIJ's military wing, reported the deaths of four operatives of the Gaza Brigade in the Sajaiya neighborhood in eastern Gaza City. They were killed in an explosion in what was apparently a "work accident." The social networks claimed they were killed when a booby-trapped Israeli UAV blew up near them (Twitter account of journalist Sami Abu Yahya, August 25, 2020). According to Ahmed al-Mudallal, senior PIJ figure, the military wing is investigating the incident (Paltoday, August 25, 2020).



Right: The four PIJ operatives who were killed (Jerusalem Brigades website, August 25, 2020).
Left: The site of the explosion (Palinfo Twitter account, August 25, 2020).



The funeral for the PIJ operatives held in the Sajaiya neighborhood in eastern Gaza City, violating the curfew imposed on the Gaza Strip (Ma'an, August 25, 2020).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Responses to Israel-UAE agreement

► This past week the Palestinians continued dealing with the agreement signed by Israel and the UAE. Jibril Rajoub, secretary of Fatah's Central Committee, said Fatah was working to promote cooperation for the joint action of all the Palestinian organizations. He said a meeting of the Palestinian leadership had been held where **they stressed the need for participation in the "popular resistance"** [i.e., popular terrorism]. He also said they were considering a reexamination of the rules of engagement in the conflict with Israel (Dunia al-Watan, August 18, 2020). Participants at a meeting of the PLO's Executive Committee called on the UAE to reverse its "historic mistake" and affirm its commitment to the Arab peace plan (Wafa, August 19, 2020)

► On **August 23, 2020**, Fatah held a protest rally in the Askar refugee camp in Nablus, attended by masked, armed Fatah operatives as well as civilians. Signs were hung protesting the normalization of relations, claiming "Normalization is betrayal" (al-Quds, August 23, 2020).



A Fatah demonstration in the Askar refugee camp protesting the normalization of Israel-UAE relations (al-Quds, August 23, 2020).

► On **August 19, 2020**, the Palestinians organizations held a rally in the village of Turmus Ayya (north of Ramallah) to protest the normalization of Israel-UAE relations and Israel's "annexation plan." The rally was attended by PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh, members of Fatah's Central Committee, senior Hamas figure in Judea and Samaria Hussein Yusuf and representatives from other organizations. Online participants included the South African president and the Malaysian prime minister. The event ended with the burning of Israeli flags. Riots developed between Palestinians and IDF forces, who dispersed the rioters with tear gas (al-Quds, August 19, 2020).



Right: Palestinian terrorist organization rally in Turmus Ayya protesting the normalization of Israel-UAE relations and Israel's "annexation plan." Left: Burning the Israeli flag (al-Quds, August 19, 2020).

► Hamas and the PIJ also continued condemning the agreement:

◆ **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, called the normalization agreement a blow to the Palestinians, the Arab nations and the rest of the world. He said he hoped the UAE would change its mind, because normalization served only the "Zionist enemy" (RTR, August 20, 2020). **Khalil al-Haya, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said all the Palestinian people were behind the struggle against normalization, which he called "a stab in the Palestinians' back" (al-Aqsa, August 19, 2020).

◆ **Ziyad al-Nakhalah, PIJ leader**, said today they had a responsibility greater than ever before to fight against those who spread the "revolting act of a false peace with the enemy." He praised those bearing weapons in the struggle against Israel, and the Palestinian people who stood firm (Filastin al-Yawm, August 19, 2020).



Right: The Israel-UAE normalization agreement as a knife in the back of Mahmoud Abbas. The Arabic reads, "Don't be sad, because Allah is with us" (Facebook page of Isma'il al-Bazam, August 14, 2020). Left: A Palestinian child changes the sign from "Normalization is our choice" to "Normalization is betrayal" (a play on words in Arabic) (Shehab Facebook page, August 23, 2020).