



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (November 18 – 24, 2020)

Overview

► **In the Gaza Strip the sharp rise in Covid-19 cases continues.** As of November 24, 2020, the number of active cases stood at **6,499**, worsening the situation in the hospitals, which announced they had closed ambulatory clinics, cancelled elective surgeries and would **perform only emergency operations**. Gaza also reports **a shortage of medical equipment**. Nevertheless, Gazans still do not follow health guidelines. On November 24, 2020, of the 2,576 tests administered, **24.85% of the results were positive**.

► **In Judea and Samaria as well, the sharp rise in Covid-19 cases continues**, with 7,843 active cases. On November 24, 2020, of the 4,208 tests administered, **26.76% of the results were positive**. The **Nablus district** still has **the largest number of active cases**, 2,233.

► **This past week two rockets were fired at the southern Israeli coastal city of Ashqelon**. It is unclear which organization fired them. In response IDF aircraft attacked a number of Hamas terrorist targets. Hamas spokesmen represented the attacks as "ongoing Israeli aggression;" Hamas has abstained from a response on the ground.

► Hamas spokesmen began a **campaign to threaten Israel** into delivering medical equipment to bolster the Gaza Strip's dwindling supplies, including ventilators and PRC machines. **Spokesmen for the incendiary balloon launching networks joined the campaign giving Israel an ultimatum** for delivering the equipment.

► In Judea and Samaria Palestinians continued throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli vehicles. Notable this past week was the planting of IEDs on main roads, at the Tomb of Rachel, the Qalandia Crossing and the community of Psagot.

► The most prominent **political event** this past week was the announcement made by Hussein al-Sheikh, a close associate of Mahmoud Abbas, of the Palestinian Authority's **renewal of civilian and security coordination** with Israel, returning to the status quo ante of May 19, 2020. On November 19, 2020, the first meeting was held in Ramallah with the participation of General Kamil Abu Rukun, the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), and Hussein al-Sheikh, responsible for relations with Israel.

Apparently the main issued discussed was **renewing the transfer of the tax revenues from Israel to the Palestinian Authority (PA)**.

Covid-19 Infection

The Gaza Strip

► **The sharp rise in the number of active cases in Gaza continues.** On November 24, 2020, 685 new cases were detected and the number of **active cases stood at 6,499; 72 Gazans have died.** There are 285 patients in ICUs, 109 in serious or critical condition (al-Ra'i news agency, November 24, 2020). **Local residents continue ignoring health guidelines.**

► The sharp rise in infection has caused the situation in the hospitals to worsen, causing the ministry of health in Gaza **to close the ambulatory clinics in all the hospitals for two weeks.** According to Dr. Abd al-Islam Sabah, head of the hospital department in the ministry of health, in order to enlist all possible resources to combat Covid-19, elective surgeries have been canceled and **only emergency operations will be performed** (Dunia al-Watan, November 23, 2020; al-Ra'i news agency, November 24, 2020).

► Dr. Yusuf Abu al-Rish, deputy minister of health, met with representatives of the organizations in Gaza **to harness them to the effort to increase public awareness about health guidelines.** He described the difficult situation in the hospitals, saying that **half of the 500 beds designated by the ministry of health for Covid-19 patients were already occupied. Of the 100 ICU beds, 92 are occupied.** He added that the need for oxygen for 40 ICU Covid-19 patients in the European Gaza Hospital was greater than the oxygen station in the hospital could meet (al-Ra'i news agency, November 24, 2020).



Operatives of the Ahfad al-Nasser network of the Popular Resistance Committees distribute masks to passersby (Telegram channel of Abu Malik, spokesman for the network, November 16 and 17, 2020).



The market in Rafah
(Twitter account of Ahmed al-Nafad, November 20, 2020).

Judea and Samaria

This past week **the sharp rise in active cases in Judea and Samaria continued**. Between November 23 and 24, 2020, 1,126 new cases were detected. As of November 24, 2020, the number of **active cases stood at 7,843**, up from 4,897 a week ago. There are 54 patients in ICUs, nine of them on ventilators. Eight people died during the past 24 hours, bringing the number of deaths in Judea and Samaria to 586 (ministry of health in Ramallah's Facebook page, November 24, 2020).

► **Dr. Kamal al-Shakhra, spokesman for the ministry of health**, said they expected the number of new infections to rise to **3,000 per day** during the winter. That would occur not only because of the weather but because **the general public, businesses and institutions did not follow health guidelines**. However, he added, medical teams were preparing to deal with the situation (Dunia al-Watan, November 24, 2020).

Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

Rocket fire

On the evening of November 21, 2020, two rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip at the southern Israeli coastal city of Ashqelon. One rocket was intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system. **The other exploded, causing damage to a warehouse in the industrial zone south of the city**. No casualties were reported. So far it is unclear which Palestinian terrorist organization fired the rockets. The Palestinian media in the Gaza Strip, following reports in the Israeli media, applauded the damage to the warehouse.

► In response to the rocket fire, IDF aircraft attacked a number of Hamas terrorist targets in Gaza. They included two locations for the manufacture of rockets, underground facilities and

a Hamas naval force training compound (IDF spokesman, not 21, 2020). According to the Palestinian media, the aircraft attacked a naval police post in western Gaza City, a Hamas' restraint force post in central Gaza City, an observation post in eastern Sajaiya and posts in western Gaza City, western Khan Yunis and north of the Rafah Crossing (Shehab, November 21, 2020).



Right: Israeli Air Force attacks in the southern Gaza Strip (Twitter account of photojournalist Ashraf Abu Amra, November 22, 2020). Left: The results of the attacks in western Khan Yunis (Facebook page of journalist Hani al-She'ar, November 22, 2020).

Hamas responses to the Israeli attacks

► **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** said the attacks were part of Israel's [alleged] **"ongoing aggression" against the Palestinians** (with no mention of the rocket fire which prompted the IDF attacks). He called it a "foolish attempt" to determine Israel the winner in the exchange, adding that the Palestinian people would continue its struggle (alresala.net, November 22, 2020).

► **Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** said that by continuing to blame Hamas for responsibility of what occurred in the Gaza Strip, Israel was trying to justify the continuation of the [so-called Israeli] siege, attacks and [alleged] aggression. He claimed Israel was also trying to evade responsibility for the suffering of the two million Palestinians trapped in the Gaza Strip under the shadow of a humanitarian catastrophe and **the spread of the coronavirus**. He accused Israel of being "aggressive," not taking steps to end the siege, and **preventing the delivery of medical equipment and supplies to combat Covid-19** (Hamas Telegram channel, November 22, 2020).

► According to a "Hamas source," Hamas sent Israel a message through Egypt stating that **matters could spin out of control because of the great pressure in the Gaza Strip**. They claimed that in the past Israel had refused to permit the delivery of the equipment, however,

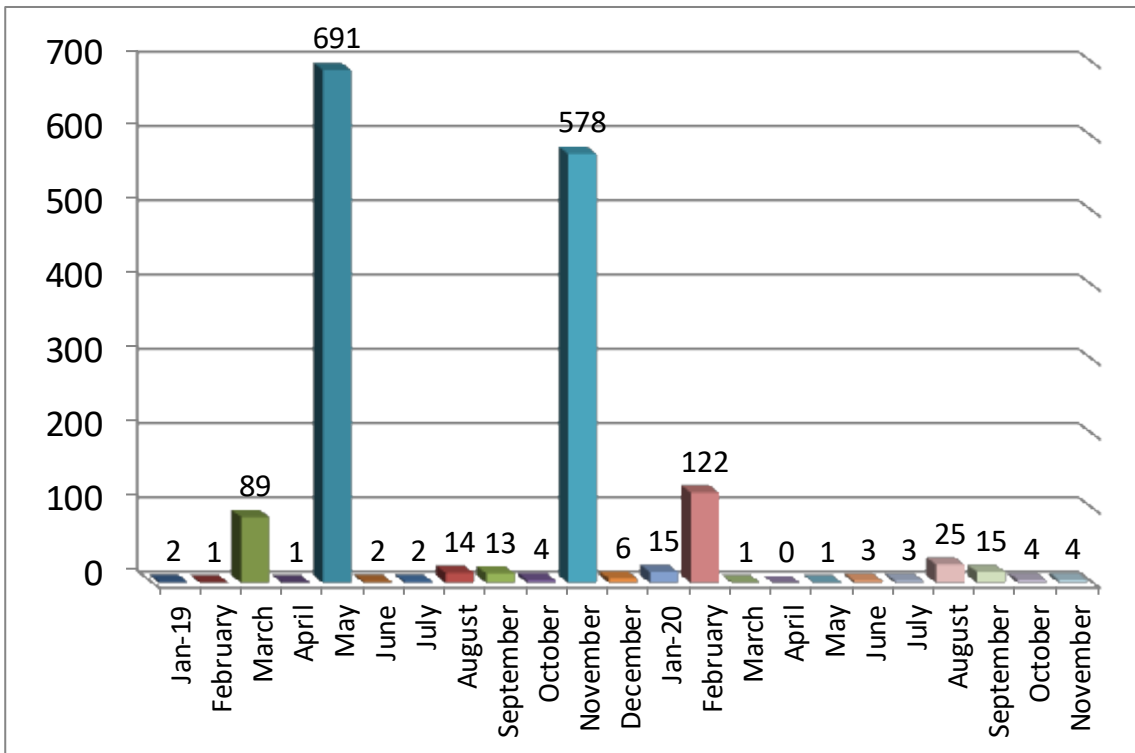
after the rockets were fired at Ashqelon on November 21, Israel agreed to allow the delivery of the equipment the PA sent to the Gaza Strip in return for preserving the lull. However, **" Hamas is not satisfied and demands 40 ventilators and ten new PCR machines "** (al-Akhbar, November 24, 2020).

Threats to renew incendiary balloon launchings

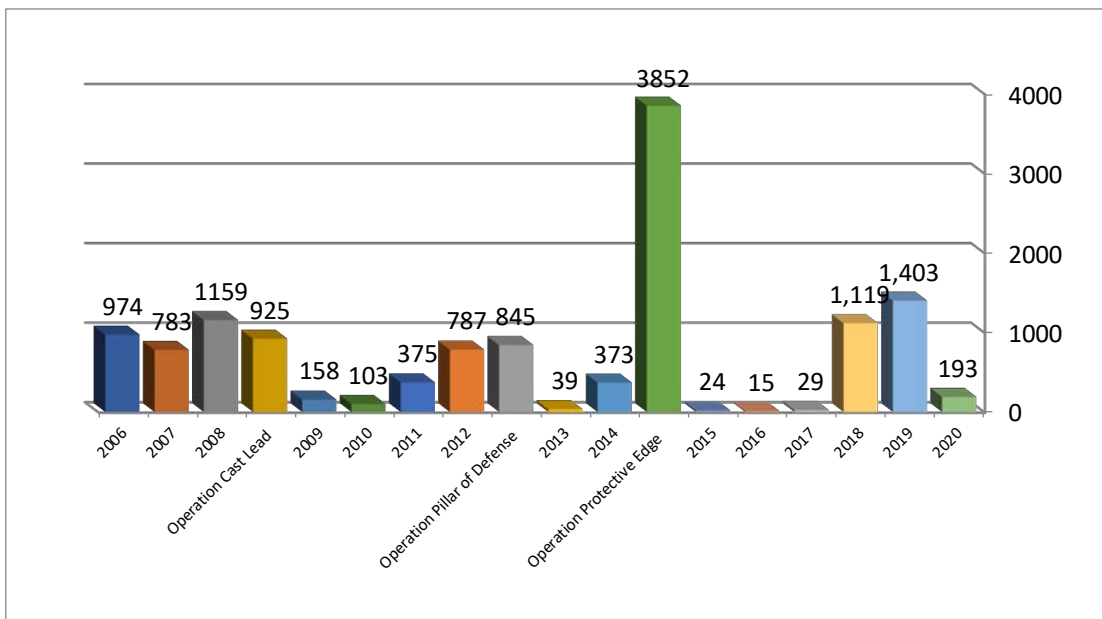
On November 18, 2020, an incendiary balloon launch was reported from the eastern Gaza Strip into Israel territory near the border (Khabar, November 18, 2020). So far no incendiary balloon landing in Israeli territory has been verified. **Meanwhile, the balloon-launching networks, including Hamas' Sons of al-Zawari units, have launched a campaign to threaten Israel**, as follows (Facebook pages of the various networks):

- ▶The Israel enemy continues tightening the siege on the Gaza Strip, **mainly regarding the supply of medical equipment for combatting Covid-19**. The mediators failed to force Israel to implement the [lull] understandings.
- ▶**The medical situation in the Gaza Strip is tragic**. The resources and capabilities of the medical staff are dwindling. The ICUs are almost full. "The time has come for Gaza to speak its mind...**if death is unavoidable...why should we die in the recovery rooms? Let us die there, on our borders.**"
- ▶Israel ("the enemy") has until the evening of November 19, 2020 to **implement the understandings and deliver medical equipment to the Gaza Strip**. If Israel does not comply with the demand, the operatives of the networks will enter the field [i.e., will launch balloons] on the morning of November 20, 2020.

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Information about the exposure of the Hamas tunnel

►The Israeli media reported that a month after the exposure of the Hamas tunnel penetrating into Israeli territory opposite Khan Yunis, the IDF concluded that the tunnel was meant to allow operatives of the *nukhba*, the elite unit of Hamas' military wing, **to penetrate into Israeli territory and attack an IDF post or nearby Israeli community**. The penetration

would be effected under cover of a grove of trees near Kibbutz Kissufim, making it difficult for the IDF observers to spot them. The tunnel, which is about half a kilometer long (about 3/10 of a mile), was **dug at a great depth and is the deepest tunnel to date**. Its sides were reinforced with concrete slabs and steel webbing. Because of the depth it was also fitted with an advanced fan system for providing oxygen.



The location of the terrorist attack tunnel on the Gaza Strip-Israel border (IDF spokesman, October 20, 2020).

Judea and Samaria

Stones, rocks and Molotov cocktails

► In Judea and Samaria Palestinians continued throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli vehicles and the Israeli security forces. Particularly prominent was the number of IEDs planted by Palestinians. The more prominent events were the following:¹

- ◆ **November 23, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle and bus south of Hebron. No casualties were reported. The bus was damaged.
- ◆ **November 23, 2020:** Stones were thrown north of Ariel. No casualties or damage were reported.
- ◆ **November 23, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle near Ariel. No casualties were reported. The front windshield of the vehicle was damaged.
- ◆ **November 22, 2020:** Border Police fighters identified two suspicious Palestinian youths close to a bus station near the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, where an Israeli civilian was waiting. While the two were being examined one threw a knife on the

¹ All information and reports are from Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria unless otherwise noted.

ground. The two were taken for questioning (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, November 22, 2020).



The knife found in the possession of one of the Palestinian youths near the Cave of the Patriarchs (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, November 22, 2020).

November 22, 2020: Two IEDs were thrown at the fence of the community of Psagot, east of Ramallah. No casualties or damage were reported. **Two additional IEDs were found at the side of the road east of Ramallah. They were apparently intended to strike IDF forces** operating in the region, and were safely detonated by a demolitions expert. No casualties were reported.

- ◆ **November 22, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle and bus north of Hebron. No casualties were reported. The front windshield of the be was damaged.
- ◆ **November 20, 2020:** During Israeli security force activity at the al-Za'im roadblock a vehicle with two 50-year-old passengers drove up from the direction of east Jerusalem. A random spot check of the car revealed several ammunition magazines in the trunk. A more thorough inspection revealed an M-16 assault rifle, ten magazines and dozens of bullets. The couple was taken for questioning (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, November 22, 2020).
- ◆ **November 20, 2020:** Two Palestinians went to the Qalandia crossing, planted two IEDs and attempted to flee. One of the IEDs exploded but did not cause damage. The two were detained by Border Police fighters.
- ◆ **November 20, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a Border Police force near the Qalandia roadblock. No casualties were reported.

◆ **November 20, 2020:** A Palestinian was identified planting an IED near the Tomb of Rachel in Bethlehem. He then attempted to flee. A Border Police force detained the suspect, who was 18 and came from the al-Gaza refugee camp in Bethlehem. The IED did not explode.

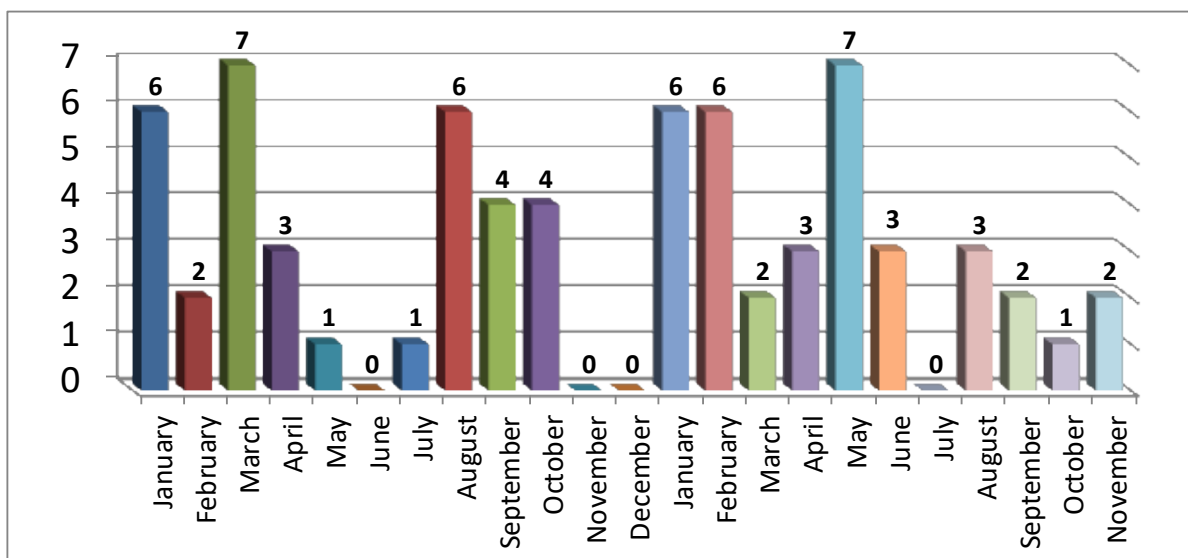
◆ **November 19, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus north of Beit El. No casualties were reported. The bus was damaged.

◆ **November 19, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a bus north of Hebron. No casualties were reported.

◆ **November 18, 2020:** Two Molotov cocktails were thrown at an IDF post east of Hebron. One of them caught fire. No casualties were reported.

◆ **November 18, 2020:** Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle north of Hebron. No casualties or damage were reported.

Significant terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria since January 2019²

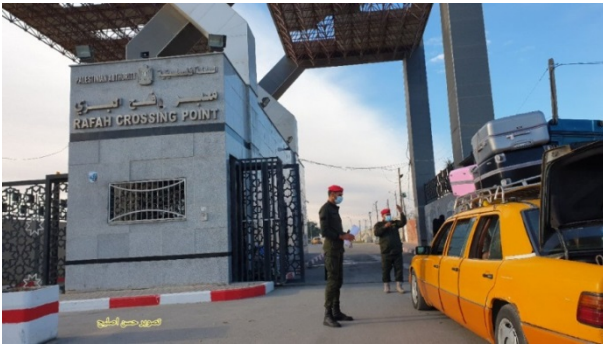


Developments in the Gaza Strip

Opening the Rafah Crossing

► Despite the Gaza Strip's difficulties in combatting Covid-19, Iyad al-Buzum, spokesman for the ministry of the interior in Gaza, announced **the Rafah Crossing would be open for three days, between November 24 and 26, 2020** (Filastin al-Yawm, November 21, 2020).

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.



Opening the Rafah Crossing
(Twitter account of journalist Hassan Aslih, November 24, 2020).

Initial reactions to Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Saudi Arabia

► Hamas and PIJ spokesmen **reacted strongly to the news that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would visit Saudi Arabia:**

◆ **Mahmoud al-Zahar, a member of Hamas political bureau**, called the visit an attempt to exploit Trump's lame duck presidency to impose a new situation before Joe Biden's swearing-in as president. He said Netanyahu's visit on Muslim soil was illegal and that the resistance had the means to pursue him everywhere, not only in "Palestine." He added that the Palestinian resistance [i.e., terrorist organizations] was large enough not to be overcome by normalization or relations and visits (al-Mayadeen, November 23, 2020).

◆ **PIJ spokesman Da'ud Shehab** said Netanyahu's visit to Saudi Arabia was part of an American effort to promote its interests for the good of Israel. He claimed the visit reinforced United States control over the area and created allies in the Arab world in order to threaten Arab security. He claimed Saudi Arabia, as the guardian of the shrines of Islam, has to defend Jerusalem (al-Mayadeen, November 23, 2020).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Renewal of civilian and security coordination with Israel³

► **On November 17, 2020, Hussein al-Sheikh, a close associate of Mahmoud Abbas, announced that the PA's relations with Israel would return to the status quo ante of May 19, 2020** (when Mahmoud Abbas announced he was putting an end to civilian and security coordination with Israel). Interviewed by Palestinian TV, Hussein al-Sheikh called the renewal

³ For further information, see the November 24, 2020, bulletin, "Renewal of Israel-Palestinian Authority Civilian and Security Coordination – Initial update and significance."

of the coordination a "victory for the Palestinian people" because, he said, Israel recognized the agreements it had signed with the PLO, meaning the "deal of the century" was no longer on the agenda. To support his claim he showed a letter from COGAT General Kamil Abu Rukun, in which Israel declared its commitment to the bilateral agreements signed with the Palestinians.



Right: Mahmoud Abbas overturns the table of the internal Palestinian reconciliation by upending the table of security coordination with Israel (Palinfo Twitter account, November 19, 2020). Left: Hussein al-Sheikh praises the achievement of the PA, which led to the renewal of coordination with Israel (Hussein al-Sheikh's Twitter account, November 17, 2020).

►The PA's announcement indicates its **willingness to return to its previous course of security and civilian coordination with Israel, after a disruption (although incomplete) of close to half a year**. There are dozens of issues, from the daily lives and welfare of the Palestinian civilians (health, water, electricity) to security coordination. It can be assumed that the renewal will be gradual, with priority given to urgent matters. **As a function of renewed coordination, the offices of the general authority for civilian affairs reopened** (the authority is responsible for civilian coordination with Israel).

►The Israeli media reported that **on November 19, 2020, a meeting was held in Ramallah, the first one attended by Israeli representatives**. The meeting was attended by COGAT General Kamil Abu Rukun and Hussein al-Sheikh, who is responsible for PA relations with Israel (Kan 11, Walla!, November 19, 2020). According to Hussein al-Sheikh, the Palestinians and Israelis reconfirmed the [existing] agreements. He said they had agreed on the transfer of all the payments [of the tax revenues Israel collects for the Palestinians] and agreed to hold another meeting (Hussein al-Sheikh's Twitter account, November 19, 2020).

►**PA government spokesman Ibrahim Melhem** said that following the renewal of relations with Israel, the salaries of all government employees would be paid on time, beginning in December 2020. He said officials of the PA ministry of the treasury would meet with officials

of the Israeli ministry of the treasury before the end of November to discuss arrangements for transferring the funds from Israel to the PA (Filastin al-Yawm, November 18, 2020).

►The announcement of the renewal of relations with Israel was met not only with condemnation from Hamas and the PIJ, but apparently also with **internal Fatah criticism**. Hussein al-Sheikh posted his response to the criticism, especially the internal Fatah criticism (Facebook page of the general authority for civilian affairs, November 29, 2020). He also met in Ramallah with regional Fatah secretaries to ward off criticism (Hussein al-Sheikh's Facebook page, November 23, 2020).



Right: Posts from minor Fatah functionaries criticizing the PA's move to renew relations with Israel (shamatlyps Facebook page, November 19, 2020). Left: Hussein al-Sheikh meets with regional Fatah secretaries (Hussein al-Sheikh's Facebook page, November 23, 2020).

Reactions to the American secretary of state's visit to Psagot

►On November 18, 2020, America Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, on the eve of his replacement by Biden appointee Antony Blinken, visited the community of Psagot, near Ramallah. It was **the first visit by a representative of the American administration to one of the communities in Judea and Samaria**. During the visit he said that **goods manufactured in Judea and Samaria would be marked "Made in Israel"** (Israeli media).

►The Palestinians harshly condemned the visit and declaration. **Nabil Abu Rudeineh**, spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas, condemned Pompeo's visit to Psagot and the United States decision to mark merchandise manufactured in the settlements as being manufactured in Israel. **A Hamas spokesman** called the decision "aggression" against the rights of the Palestinian people. **A protest march and rally** attended by several dozen demonstrators were held in al-Bireh. During the rally **Mahmoud al-'Alul, deputy Fatah chairman**, stressed the importance of national unity and the struggle against all Israeli and American measures against the Palestinian cause (Wafa, not 18, 2020).



The protest rally in al-Bireh, attended by Mahmoud al-'Alul, deputy Fatah chairman (Facebook page of Sida News, November 18, 2020).