



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(April 20-27, 2021)

Overview

► **Coronavirus:** The incidence of active coronavirus cases in the **Gaza Strip** declined this past week although the rate of infection remains high. Medical sources say they can cope with the situation and call on Gazans to be vaccinated. In **Judea and Samaria** the decline in the number of coronavirus cases continues.

► **Clashes in Jerusalem:** This past week tension in east Jerusalem between the Palestinians and Israeli security forces rose, mainly near the Damascus Gate. The main cause was Israel's erection of barriers near the entrance to the gate, preventing Palestinians from sitting on the steps. A riot developed and spread to other east Jerusalem neighborhoods and then throughout Judea and Samaria. The tension also spread to the **Gaza Strip**, and between April 23 and 25, 41 rockets were fired at the Israeli communities near the border.

► **On April 25, 2021**, the Israeli police announced they would remove the barriers; since then relative quiet has prevailed, although the situation is still volatile. The Palestinian terrorist organizations, especially Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), encourage continuing the confrontations and turning them into an **intifada**. Palestinians sources also say violence will continue if the elections in the Palestinian Authority (PA) are postponed because Israel refuses to allow them to be held in east Jerusalem. Palestinians have also given Israel's Jerusalem Day (May 10, 2021) as a possible date for more confrontations. May 7, 2021, the last Friday of Ramadan, when the Iranian-inspired World Jerusalem Day is marked, may also be a date for confrontations.

► **Palestinian Authority (PA) elections:** After Fatah splintered into three political factions with separate election slates, and the public opinion polls do not predict a landslide victory for any candidate put forward by Mahmoud Abbas, the PA is currently weighing the possibility of cancelling the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections. The pretext will be Israel's refusal to allow the elections to be held in east Jerusalem, as will be formally announced by the Palestinian leadership on April 29, 2021. In the meantime, the PA continues its diplomatic activity to have the international community exert pressure on Israel. Hamas and other

terrorist organizations oppose postponing the elections, regarded as an emergency exit for the PA which is worried it will lose the PLC elections to Hamas.

The Spread of Covid-19

The Gaza Strip

In the **Gaza Strip there was a decline** in the extent of coronavirus infection but the percentage of positive test results is still high. This past week 6,245 additional active cases were detected, down from 8,063 a week ago. During the 24 hours between April 25 and April 26 an additional 1,038 cases were detected and 3,284 tests were administered with a positive rate of 32%, down from 37% a week ago. The current number of active cases in the Gaza Strip is 14,846, down from 19,645 on April 20, 2021. There are 355 Gazans in ICUs, 269 of them in serious or critical condition. This past week 71 Gazans died from coronavirus-related complications, bringing the number of fatalities to 869. So far 36,033 people have been vaccinated from a reserve of 110,400 doses of vaccine (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page and Twitter account of Dr. Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the ministry of health).

The overall situation

► **Dr. Majdi Dheir**, director of preventive medicine in the ministry of health in Gaza, said they were still in the middle of the second wave of Covid-19 and he did not foresee a decline in the extent of the infection in the near future. He said the occupancy of the coronavirus wards in the hospitals was 70%. He also said the current wave had killed a large number of elderly and chronically ill people, and called on the public to be vaccinated (Felesteen, April 25, 2021).

The situation in the hospitals

► **Dr. Yusuf Abu al-Rish**, deputy minister of health, launched a new oxygen station in the European Hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. The station was erected under the aegis and with the funding of the Norwegian agency NORWAC. Dr. Abu al-Rish said the ministry of health in Gaza was completely prepared to deal with the coronavirus epidemic, and no patient had ever been turned away or been denied a bed or oxygen (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, April 22, 2021).

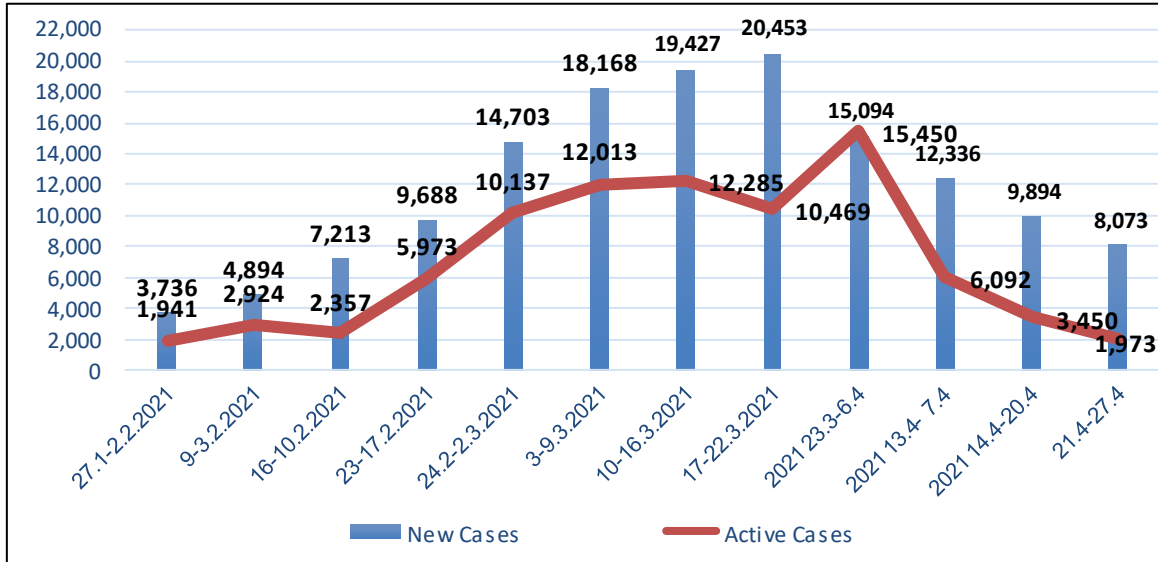


Right: Launching an oxygen station in the European Hospital in the Gaza Strip (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, April 22, 2021). Left: Administering the Pfizer vaccine for the first time (Twitter account of photojournalist Ashraf Abu Amra, April 22, 2021).

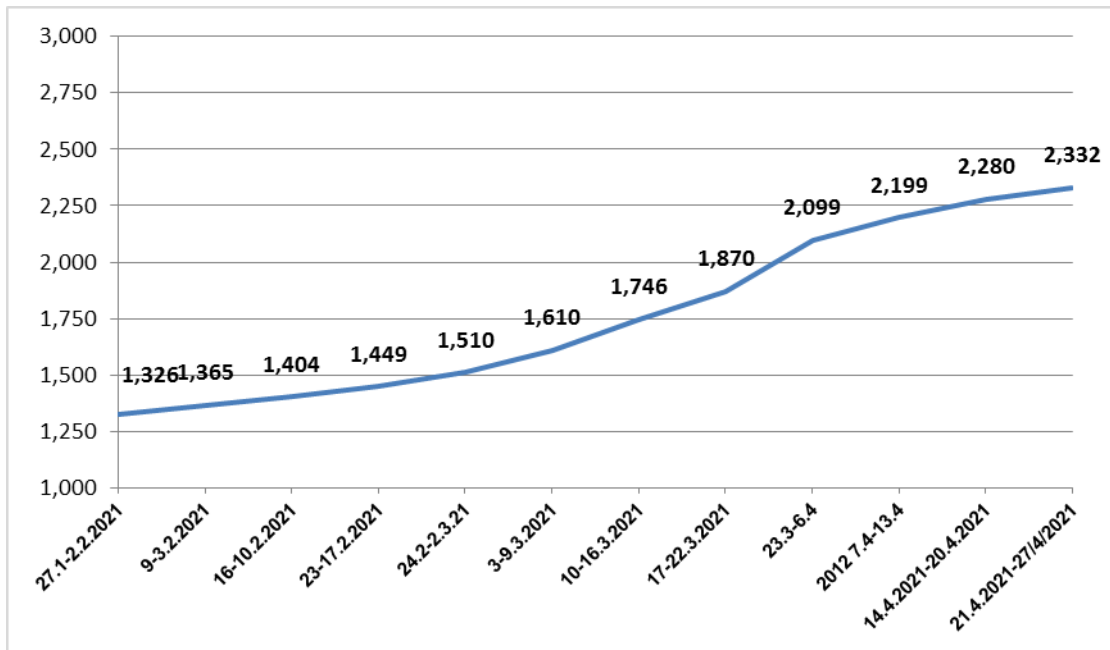
Judea and Samaria

The number of active cases in **Judea and Samaria continues to decline**. During the past week 1,973 new active cases were detected, down from 3,450 on April 20, 2021. During the 24 hours between April 25 and 26, there were 376 new cases, and 2,412 tests were administered with a positive rate of 16%. The number of active cases stands at 8,073, down from 9,894 on April 20, 2021. There are 140 ICU patients, 41 of whom are on ventilators. This past week 52 Palestinians died of coronavirus-related conditions, bringing the number of fatalities to 3,332. In east Jerusalem the number of active cases continues to decline, with 164 active cases; the Nablus district continues as the epicenter of the virus. So far 215,591 Palestinians in Judea and Samaria have been vaccinated (ministry of health in Ramallah Facebook page, April 27, 2021).

**The increase in coronavirus infection in Judea and Samaria
(According to the ministry of health in Ramallah)**



**Number of coronavirus-related death
(According to the ministry of health in Ramallah)**



The overall situation

- ▶ **Dr. Kamal al-Shakhra, spokesman for the ministry of health**, said that despite the ban on travel between the districts most of the Palestinian public did not obey the public health guidelines. He added that his ministry was working with the W.H.O. to acquire equipment that would enable them to locate new variants of the coronavirus (al-Fajr TV, April 26, 2021).

Clashes in east Jerusalem

- ▶ Events peaked on April 22, 2021, when **a large, violent demonstration was held near the Damascus Gate** by activists from a far-right Israeli organization called Lehava. Hundreds of the organization's members marched to the Gate and tried to break through the police barriers. The police used riot control measures to disperse them. On the other side of the street the police confronted hundreds of Palestinians who had come to the site of the demonstration. **They threw rocks and Molotov cocktails, shot fireworks and attacked the police.**



Palestinians stream towards the Damascus Gate to confront far-right activists (QudsN Facebook page, April 22, 2021).

- ▶ The tension in Jerusalem spread to the Gaza Strip, and 41 rockets were fired at the Israeli communities near the border (36 on April 23, 2021, two on April 24, 2021, and three on April 25, 2021). Ten rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system and 31 rockets fell in open areas. The rocket fire was preceded by formal announcements from most of the Palestinian organizations in the Gaza Strip expressing solidarity with the residents of

east Jerusalem in their struggle against Israel ("the occupation") and an announcement with a warning from the joint operations room of 15 terrorist organizations subservient to Hamas.¹

► On the evening of April 25, 2021, **the police removed the barriers** keeping Palestinians from the steps near the Damascus Gate. In Israel the move was explained as allowing the level of violence and incitement to subside, and the announcement was followed by relative quiet, despite the hundreds of Palestinians who gathered at the site to celebrate. They chanted slogans, such as "With our souls and blood we will redeem you, al-Aqsa mosque." The following day was also relatively calm, although in the late evening there were clashes between Palestinians and police in various locations. The Palestinians threw rocks and a Molotov cocktail, slightly injuring two policemen.

► The Palestinians viewed the removal of the barriers as a "victory," an "achievement" and as Israel's "surrender." Hamas said the removal of the barriers was the result of a revolution of the younger generation of east Jerusalemites, and an example of the ability of the Palestinians to stand firm and enforce their will on Israel. Hamas spokesman **Abd al-Latif al-Qanua** said Israel's bending to the will of the young Palestinians in east Jerusalem was a "new victory for the Palestinian people." The PIJ said the residents of east Jerusalem had chalked up an achievement and proved again that will power was stronger than gangsterism and that their model could bring victories.



Right: Mass prayer in front of the Damascus Gate after the barriers were removed (Wafa, April 26, 2021). Left: Palestinians in east Jerusalem celebrate the removal of the barriers (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, April 26, 2021).

¹ For further information, see the April 25, 2021 bulletin, "Tensions peak during Ramadan, including confrontations in Jerusalem and rocket fire from the Gaza Strip targeting Israel's south."



Right: Cartoon of the east Jerusalemites' "victory," the removal of the barriers at the Damascus Gate (al-Araby al-Jadeed, April 25, 2021). Right: The Arabic reads, "[East] Jerusalemites forced the occupation to remove the barriers at the Damascus Gate" (Alaa' al-Laqta's Facebook page, April 26, 2021).



The east Jerusalemites carry the burden of the struggle for al-Aqsa and all "Palestine." The Arabic reads, "East Jerusalemites..." (al-Quds, April 26, 2021).

- ▶ Some Palestinians viewed the events as revealing a weakness of Israel that could be exploited. For example, **Khalil al-Haya**, deputy chairman of the Hamas political bureau and head of the Hamas slate in the elections, said the victory was proof the Palestinians could force Israel to allow elections to be held in Jerusalem (Shabakat al-Quds, April 26, 2021).
- ▶ The Palestinian terrorist organizations, especially Hamas and the PIJ, encourage the continuation of the confrontations and want to see them turned into an intifada. The Palestinians also say the confrontations will continue if the elections are postponed because Israeli refuses to allow them to be held in east Jerusalem. Palestinians have also given Israel's Jerusalem Day (May 10, 2021) as a possible date for more confrontations. May 7, 2021, the last Friday of Ramadan, when the Iranian-inspired World Jerusalem Day is marked, may also be a date for confrontations.
- ▶ Other remarks were the following:

- ◆ **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, said there would be no lull if Israel continued its aggressive policies in Jerusalem. He added that Hamas would not agree to anything except the continuation of the intifada. He said the battle in Jerusalem was being fought for the Arab and Muslim nations (Hamas website, April 25, 2021).
- ◆ **Isma'il Radwan, senior Hamas figure and a member of the Supreme National Authority**, said Hamas was on full alert to defend Jerusalem, and he hoped a new intifada would break out if Israel prevented elections from being held there (al-Aqsa TV, April 26, 2021).
- ◆ **Muhammad al-Hindi, head of the PIJ's political bureau**, said firing rockets at Israel was an expression of support for Jerusalem. It sent the message that Jerusalem was an issue uniting all Palestinians, and that the "resistance" [i.e., the terrorist organizations] in the Gaza Strip would defend it. He said he hoped the protests in Jerusalem would turn into an intifada "everywhere" (al-Mayadeen, April 25, 2021).
- ◆ **Ihsan Atiya, PIJ representative in Lebanon**, said the "Ramadan intifada" had to become a comprehensive uprising against Israel and the Palestinian political leadership should be quick to provide a serious plan for its development (Filastin al-Yawm, April 26, 2021).
- ◆ **The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)** called for the formation of a national leadership to escalate the intifada and extend the struggle against Israel (Filastin al-Yawm, April 26, 2021). **Hamas** called on Palestinians to go to al-Aqsa mosque and pray near the barriers Israel had erected. It also called for rocket fire attacking Israeli military and civilian targets (Hamas website, April 25, 2021).

Israel's South

Rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel

- ▶ (April 23-25, 2021), during which 41 rockets were fired, 36 on the night of April 23, two on April 24 and three on April 25. Ten rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system and 31 fell in open areas. Several people were slightly injured while running to shelters, and in a number of locations property damage was reported. An analysis of the rocket fire carried out on the night of April 23, 2021 indicates it was probably orchestrated, and possibly by Hamas even if Hamas terrorist operatives did not actively participate. The rockets were fired according to a schedule and targeted several areas, with care taken not to extend the fire

beyond the communities near the border. Two organizations claimed responsibility for the rocket fire. The organizations belong **to the joint operations room**, which unites 15 terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip under Hamas command, **claimed responsibility for the rocket fire**.

► In response IDF aircraft and tanks attacked a number of Hamas terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip. In addition, the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories reduced the fishing zone off the Gaza Strip coast from 15 to nine miles, and later closed it completely. Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua condemned the closure and called it another aspect of "Israeli aggression" and a gross violation of the rights of Palestinian fishermen (alresala.net, April 26, 2021).

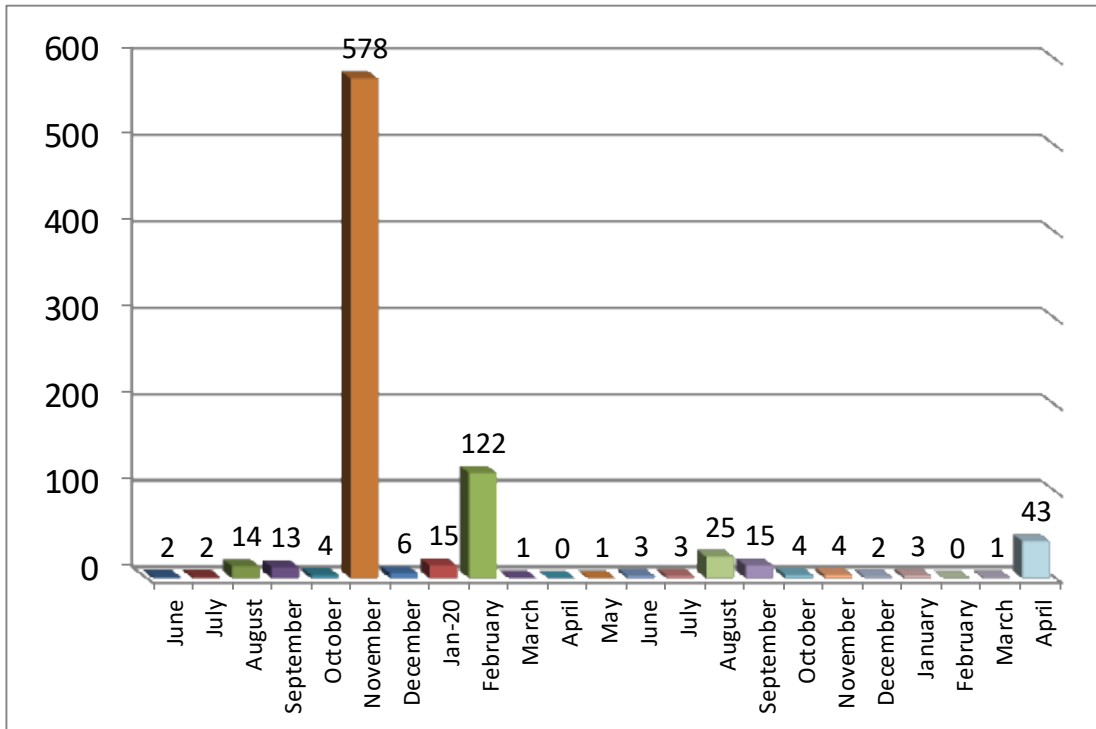


Right: The closure of the fishing zone off the Gaza Strip coast (Palinfo Twitter account, April 26, 2021). Left: IDF forces reinforce the area near the Gaza Strip (Twitter account of journalist Hassan Aslih, April 27, 2021).

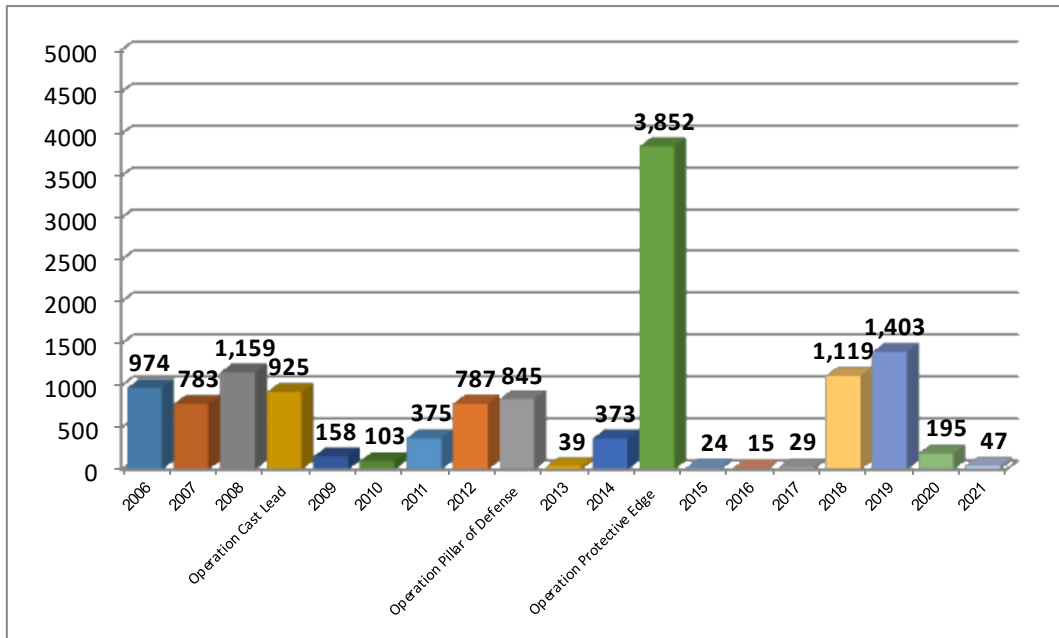
► The Palestinian media reported the IDF had sent more forces to the area and that the Israeli political cabinet had given the prime minister and defense minister the authority to order a harsh reprisal if the rocket fire continued. They also reported that Israel did not want an escalation but was prepared for every scenario (al-Alam, April 25, 2021).

► **Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua** said the organizations of the "resistance" were prepared to repel any act of aggression against the Gaza Strip and maintained the equation of "an attack in response to an attack." **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** said that Jerusalem was a red line for the Palestinians and Hamas promised it would not make it possible for calm to be restored before the tension in Jerusalem had abated (al-Mayadeen, April 24, 2021).

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Demonstrations along the Israel-Gaza Strip border

► On the evening of April 26, 2021 Gazans held several demonstrations near the border security fence. They shouted slogans in support of the Arabs in east Jerusalem and the Night Harassment Units detonated IEDs and made loud noise near the fence.



Palestinian demonstrators near the border security fence east of Gaza City (Palinfo Twitter account, April 26, 2021).

Judea and Samaria

Rock- and Molotov cocktail-throwing, and other events

► In Judea and Samaria Palestinians continued throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli vehicles driving on the roads. This past week a large number of tires were burned. There was also a sharp increase in the number of events, especially during the days of rioting in Jerusalem. The more prominent events were the following:²

- ◆ **April 26, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle northeast of Ramallah. No casualties or damage were reported.
- ◆ **April 26, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle in a drive-by attack east of Nablus. No casualties or damage were reported.
- ◆ **April 26, 2021:** Molotov cocktails were thrown at an Israeli vehicle on the Gush Etzion-Hebron road. They exploded on the road. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **April 25, 2021:** A Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Israeli bus south of Nablus. No casualties were reported. The bus was damaged.

² All information and reports are from Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria unless otherwise noted.

- ◆ **April 25, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at an Israeli bus west of Hebron. No casualties or damage were reported.
- ◆ **April 25, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at an Israeli bus southeast of Nablus. No casualties were reported. The front windshield of the bus was damaged.
- ◆ **April 25, 2021:** Molotov cocktails were thrown at a bus on the Gush Etzion-Hebron road. No casualties or damage were reported.
- ◆ **April 25, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle, the houses of Jewish residents and IDF posts in Hebron. One Jewish resident confronted young Palestinians who damaged his vehicle and injured him; he was evacuated to a hospital. Two Palestinians were detained.
- ◆ **April 25, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at Israeli vehicles northeast of neb. No casualties were reported. The vehicles were damaged.
- ◆ **April 24, 2021:** A group of about ten children threw rocks at an Israeli vehicle north of Jerusalem. No casualties were reported. The vehicle was damaged.
- ◆ **April 24, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at Israeli vehicles and tires were burned northeast of Nablus. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **April 24, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at Israeli vehicles and tires were burned north of Ramallah. No casualties or damage were reported.
- ◆ **April 24, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle north of Hebron. No casualties or damage were reported.
- ◆ **April 24, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at IDF forces and tires were burned southwest of Hebron. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **April 24, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle northeast of Ramallah. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **April 23, 2021:** Border Police fighters at the Cave of the Patriarchs detained a suspicious young Palestinian. A knife was found in his possession.



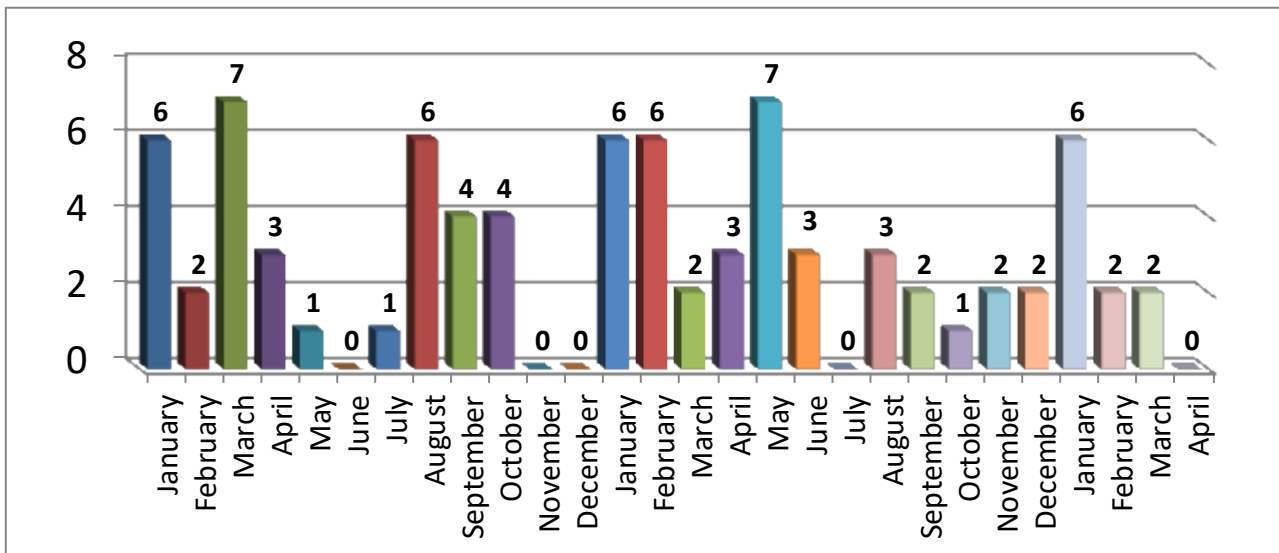
**The knife found in the suspect's possession
(Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, April 23, 2021).**

- ◆ **April 22, 2021:** Molotov cocktails were thrown at an Israeli vehicle driven by an IDF soldier southeast of Jenin. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **April 22, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle northeast of Jerusalem. No casualties or damage were reported.
- ◆ **April 22, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle that entered Hizma, northeast of Jerusalem. No casualties were reported. The vehicle was damaged.
- ◆ **April 22, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at an Israeli bus northeast of Jerusalem. No casualties or damage were reported.
- ◆ **April 21, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at an Israeli bus north of Hebron. No casualties were reported. The front windshield of the bus was damaged.
- ◆ **April 21, 2021:** Rocks were thrown at an Israeli bus north of Hebron. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **April 20, 2021:** A Palestinian was detained by Israeli police near Hebron. A search of his vehicle revealed an improvised Carlo gun. Two Palestinians from Hebron were taken for interrogation.



The gun found in the suspect's possession
(Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, April 20, 2021)

Significant Terrorist Attacks in Judea and Samaria since January 2020³



Developments in the Gaza Strip

Anti-Israel incitement on Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) media

► On several occasions during its April 26, 2021 broadcasts, Filastin al-Yawm, the PIJ's TV channel, showed a one-minute video entitled "#Jerusalem rises in rebellion #Ramadan intifada." It documented Palestinians in Jerusalem attacking Jews, especially the ultra-

³A significant attack is defined by the ITIC as involving shooting, stabbing, a vehicular attack, the use of IEDs, or a combination of the above. Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown by Palestinians are not included.

Orthodox, during the past few days. The objective of broadcasting the video was apparently to incite the Palestinians to carry out similar attacks.



Pictures inciting violence against Israelis, part of a PIJ video (Filastin al-Yawm, April 26, 2021).

Terrorist organization training in the Gaza Strip

► On April 24, 2021, the **Mujahadeen Brigades**⁴ conducted a military exercise on the Gaza Strip shore to mark the 20th anniversary of the organization's founding. The exercise was widely covered by the Palestinian media, and included firing rockets towards the sea, and simulations of an attack on Israeli naval forces landing on the shore, storming Israeli positions and carrying out abductions, and booby-trapping and blowing up an Israeli tank (Safa, Twitter account of photojournalist Ashraf Abu Twitter account of photojournalist Ashraf Abu Amra, April 24, 2021).



Right: Launching a rocket. Left: A simulation of preventing Israel's naval forces from landing on the Gaza Strip shore (Twitter account of photojournalist Ashraf Abu Twitter account of photojournalist Ashraf Abu Amra, April 24, 2021).



Right: A simulation of abducting the body of an IDF soldier. Left: A simulation of booby-trapping and blowing up an IDF tank (Twitter account of photojournalist Ashraf Abu Amra, April 24, 2021).

Prisoner exchange deals

⁴ The Mujahadeen Brigades are the military-terrorist wing of the Mujahadeen movement, a Fatah splinter organization founded in 2001. It is affiliated with the PIJ. In the past its operatives fired rockets at Israel.

► This past week another episode was shown of the program "The shaheed of Jerusalem," which deals with the activities of **Qassem Soleimani**, former commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps' Qods Force. **Saleh al-'Arouri**,⁵ deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, appeared in the program and for the most part discussed the issue of the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. He said the issue of the prisoners has always been of interest to Hamas and throughout its history Hamas had abducted Israelis to use them as bargaining chips for the release of Palestinian prisoners. He admitted that most of their abduction attempts had failed and when they had succeeded, their exchange deals had failed. He said that anyone who went to confront Israel ("the occupation") had to know that if he was taken captive there would be someone who would fight for his release (al-Mayadeen, April 23, 2021).

Hamas-PIJ meeting

► A **PIJ delegation** headed by senior organization figure **Khaled al-Batash** met in the Gaza Strip with senior Hamas figures, among them **Fathi Hamad and Suheil al-Hindi**, members of **Hamas' political bureau**. Also present were operatives from the military-terrorist wings of both organizations. They discussed issues including the "resistance" [i.e., violence and terrorism targeting Israel] and the struggle against Israel's plans, normalization, the current political situation, improving relations between the two organizations and the issue of the prisoners (alresala.net, April 20, 2021).

Remarks from Khaled Mashaal

► **Khaled Mashaal**, Hamas leader abroad, was interviewed by al-Aqsa TV on April 25, 2021, and related to the following issues:

- ◆ **The events in Jerusalem: Israel, he said, was battling the Palestinians** for Jerusalem, wanting to Judaize and take control of the city. Today the Palestinians were involved in a great battle and Israel was making efforts to harm them. Israel, he continued, was surprised when the residents of Jerusalem rose up and acted without personal interest because the salvation of Jerusalem and al-Aqsa mosque came before everything. He also said they were living in a historic moment and the struggle would not be temporary.

⁵ **Saleh al-'Arouri** was the first to report, on August 20, 2014, that Hamas military-terrorist wing had been behind the abduction and murder of the three Jewish youths (August 12, 2014). The report was read in his name by Hamas leader **Khaled Mashaal** ("who headed the resistance"). The remarks were apparently recorded without al-Arouri's knowledge, uploaded to YouTube and widely discussed.

- ◆ **The elections:** The elections, he said, were part of solving the problem of the [internal Palestinian] schism and restoring "national unity." The other part of unity was facing Israel ("the occupation") together in every way, whether through popular or armed "resistance." As for postponing the elections, he said any thought of postponing them was a mistake.
- ◆ **His appointment as Hamas leader abroad:** He said he felt responsibility towards the Palestinian people and cause. He said all the issues were at the top of his priority list, especially **escalating the resistance** and an **open confrontation** with Israel

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Possibility of postponing or cancelling Palestinian Legislative Council elections

► In light of Fatah's split into three slates competing in the elections, and the fact that the opinion polls do not predict an overwhelming victory for Mahmoud Abbas' candidates, the PA is currently considering postponing the PLC elections, which are supposed to be held on May 22, 2021. The pretext for the postponement will be Israel's lack of agreement to allow elections to be held in east Jerusalem. Apparently a formal announcement will be made after the Palestinian leadership meets on April 29, 2021. According to **Wasel Abu Yusuf**, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee, representatives from Hamas and the PIJ will attend the meeting (al-Andalou News, April 26, 2021).

► According to an article in the Lebanese newspaper al-Akhbar, "Fatah sources" revealed that while no official final decision had been made regarding the postponement of the elections, there was an unspoken agreement within Fatah's Central Committee. What would happen now would only be an attempt to find a way out that would have the minimum number of consequences. The sources also revealed that recent deliberations in Fatah's Central Committee and the PLO's Executive Committee led to presenting Mahmoud Abbas with two possible scenarios: one would be to hold the elections while making diplomatic efforts to pressure Israel into allowing them to be held in east Jerusalem, the other would be to cancel or postpone them in light of Fatah's shaky position and the high risk of losing to Hamas. So far, according to the sources, no official decision had been made, but there was a kind of a general unspoken agreement within Fatah's Central Committee to postpone the elections (al-Akhbar, Lebanon, April 22, 2021).

► The newspaper later reported that Mahmoud Abbas had already told the EU, Jordan and Egypt that he had decided to postpone the elections. The EU advised him to wait with an announcement until Thursday (April 29, 2021) and promised they would try to pressure Israel into agreeing to allow them be held (al-Akhbar, Lebanon, April 27, 2021). Al-Ghad TV reported that the PA had begun updating the relevant regional and Arab personnel of the decision to cancel the elections, on the grounds that Israel was unresponsive to the demand to hold them in east Jerusalem.

► The daily newspaper al-Quds reported on April 27, 2021 that the PA had decided to cancel the elections because of pressure from the Arab countries and the United States on the grounds that the results were liable to be bad for Fatah. The claim was that the United States preferred to hold elections at the end of 2021, after providing the PA with a series of goodwill gestures which would improve the PA's public image (al-Quds, April 27, 2021).



The front page of the Palestinian daily newspaper al-Quds, April 27, 2021.

► **Hamas opposes** postponing the elections. According to an op-ed piece in Hamas' organ al-Risalah, delaying the elections was an escape hatch for Fatah, which feared a loss to Hamas in the PLC and "presidential" elections, which would be held at a later date. According to the article, a postponement should not be a partisan or personal decision, but rather the result of deliberations and a national consensus.

► Senior Hamas figures had the following to say:

- ◆ **Khalil al-Haya**, deputy chairman of the Hamas political bureau and who is also running as a PLC candidate at the head of the Hamas ticket, warned of the consequences of postponing the elections "by even one day." He said it would push the Palestinian

people into "the unknown" and cause enormous frustration, complicate the situation and perpetuate the internal Palestinian schism (al-Quds, April 22, 2021).

- ◆ Hamas spokesman **Abd al-Latif al-Qanua** said that Hamas would not be party to a decision to postpone the elections, but was prepared to be part of a process to decide what measures should be taken to force Israel to accept their being held in east Jerusalem. He called on Mahmoud Abbas and Fatah to examine the election process according to what had been agreed on in the talks among the organizations which took place in Cairo (Abd al-Latif al-Qanua's Twitter account, April 23, 2021).

- ◆ Senior Fatah figure **Muhammad Dahlan**, who is running for office on a separate ticket, criticized the possibility of postponing the elections. He said using the pretext that Israel did not want them held was a way to escape from the political campaign and that they had to be held on their appointed day (Sawa, April 25, 2021).

- ◆ Senior PIJ figure **Khader Habib** said that according to the current data a scenario in which the elections would be postponed was reasonable but would have dire consequences for the entire Palestinian political arena. He said what had to be done was to turn holding the elections in Jerusalem to a [Palestinian] national confrontation with Israel (Shabakat Quds, April 26, 2021).

Israel's position on the elections in east Jerusalem

▶ Alongside reports on postponing the elections, the PA continues its international activity to convince Israel to allow them to be held in east Jerusalem. Speaking at a meeting of Fatah's Central Committee, **Mahmoud Abbas** said they would not agree to hold the elections without the residents of east Jerusalem, as candidates, voters and participants in the election propaganda campaign. Appealing to the international community he said the Palestinians demanded pressure be exerted on Israel to meet the commitments of signed agreements with regard to everything related to holding elections. An announcement issued at the end of the meeting stated that if elections were not held in east Jerusalem they would not be held at all, because the Palestinian people would not agree to general elections at the expense of the rights of the Palestinians in east Jerusalem (Wafa, April 25, 2021).

▶ Palestinian foreign minister **Riyad al-Maliki** continued his round of meetings in Europe for pressure to be brought on Israel. In **Britain** he met with the foreign minister and Labour MPs. He asked Britain to exert pressure on Israel to allow elections to be held in east Jerusalem. He also invited Britain to participate in the election process by sending observers (Wafa, April 21

and 22, 2021). In **Spain** he met with the foreign minister and they agreed to remain in contact and to continue investing efforts to have the elections held (Sawa, April 23, 2021)

► In the meantime, **Hussein al-Sheikh**, chairman of the PA civilian authority, met with British Cabinet Minister **Michael Gove**. They discussed the political developments related to the Palestinian cause and the elections. At a reception held for Gove, PA Prime Minister **Muhammad Shtayyeh** asked Britain to pressure Israel to allow the elections to be held in Jerusalem (Wafa, April 22, 2021).

Public opinion polls

► The Jerusalem Media and Communications Center, in collaboration with the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation, conducted a public opinion poll between April 3 and 13, 2021, contacting 1,200 Palestinians in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. According to the results, most of those questioned (33.5%) would vote **for Marwan Barghouti**, a member of Fatah's Central Committee imprisoned in Israel, and **not for Mahmoud Abbas** (24.5%). Fatah would win 25.3% of the votes for the PLC as opposed to Hamas' 8%. A relatively large percentage (74.2%) of those interviewed said they were planning to vote and 44.4% said they supported postponing the elections (al-Araby al-Jadeed, April 21, 2021).

► The Palestine Ahliya University in Bethlehem conducted a public opinion poll on the PLC elections. Between April 17 and 24, 2021, the university contacted 4,055 Palestinians, 69% in the West Bank and 31% in the Gaza Strip. Results showed **Fatah** would win 32.57% of the votes while the **PFLP** ticket, the "National Heartbeat," would win 10.5%, and **Hamas** would win 10.3%.

► The Palestinian Research Center issued the results of a public opinion poll held between April 15 and 25, 2021, contacting 883 Palestinians between the ages of 18 and 61 in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. Results showed **Fatah** would win 41.9% of the votes and **Hamas** 20.9%. However, 74.1% of the respondents said they might change their minds before the election. As to elections in east Jerusalem, 51.8% opposed holding elections outside of Jerusalem (Dunia al-Watan, April 21, 2021).

PA-Jordanian relations

► **Ayman al-Safadi**, the Jordanian foreign minister, arrived in Ramallah on April 21, 2021 for a meeting with Mahmoud Abbas, bringing a communiqué from the King of Jordan, Abdallah II.

They discussed efforts for renewing the negotiations to reach a solution. Al-Safadi said Jerusalem was a red line for Jordan as it was for the Palestinians (Filastin al-Yawm, Wafa, April 21, 2021).