News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(December 22-28, 2021)

Overview

- **Terrorist attacks**: This past week a vehicular ramming attack in northern Samaria and two shooting attacks, one near al-Bireh and the other near Nablus, targeted Israeli security forces. No casualties were reported. Since the fatal shooting attack in Homesh on December 16, 2021, violence in Judea and Samaria has increased. The number of clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli security forces has risen, and friction between Palestinians and Jewish settlers has increased as well. Tension mounted after a traffic accident near Sinjil, north of Ramallah, which resulted in the death of a Palestinian woman. The Palestinians claimed she was deliberately run over by a Jewish settler. Palestinians accused the government of Israel of supporting and defending the settlers. There was also a significant increase in the number of Molotov cocktails and rocks thrown.
- However, relative calm continues in the Gaza Strip, accompanied by threats from Hamas and the other terrorist organizations to gradually escalate the "struggle" against Israel because of Israel's [alleged] delaying tactics in easing the daily lives of the Gazans and in rebuilding the Gaza Strip. Threats were also made because of "Israel's treatment of the [Palestinian terrorist] prisoners." Hamas spokesmen threatened the situation was liable to deteriorate and turn into a new military conflict with Israel.
- The mission of the Egyptian security delegation to the Gaza Strip was reportedly difficult and complicated because of the Israel's demands that the Palestinian organizations stop provoking terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria and return the Israeli soldiers and civilian hostages held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip as a condition for more measures to ease life for the Gazans. "Palestinian organization sources" reported the organizations told the Egyptians they rejected Israel's demands. Sources in Gaza reported the organizations had agreed to implement the program of gradual escalation in the middle of January 2022.
- On **December 26, 2021**, the joint operations room of the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, headed by Hamas, announced the beginning of an exercise of all the military wings. The

operation has not yet ended. Commentators said the exercise was meant to signal Israel they were prepared for a new confrontation.

- **Jake Sullivan, President Biden's national security advisor**, met with Mahmoud Abbas. Sullivan stressed the need to avoid taking steps that could ignite tensions, saying the United States wanted to "strengthen engagement" with the Palestinian Authority and deepen its ties with the Palestinian people.
- The PA, Hamas and the PIJ strongly condemned the remarks made by Knesset Member Mahmoud Abbas, who stated that Israel was a Jewish state and would remain as one.
- **The coronavirus**: There was a slight decrease in the number of active cases in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. In Judea and Samaria 35 Palestinians were found to have contracted the omicron variant; the first case of the variant was detected in the Gaza Strip.

Judea and Samaria

Attacks and attempted attacks

Vehicular ramming attack

- On **December 21, 2021**, a Palestinian carried out a vehicular ramming attack, speeding up as he approached an IDF post next to the community of Mevo Dotan in northern Samaria. The fighters shot at the vehicle and the driver crashed into an IDF jeep near the post. Both vehicles caught fire. There were no Israeli casualties. The driver died and his body was removed from his burning car (IDF spokesman, December 21, 2021).
- The Palestinian media reported the driver was **Abd al-Aziz Hikmet Musa**, 22, from the village of Mirka, south of Jenin (Arab48, December 21, 2021). He was unmarried and worked in construction in Israel. A delegation of senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) figures, including Tareq Qadan and Sheikh Khader Adnan, paid a condolence call at the home of the family in Mirka (Filastin al-Yawm, December 22, 2021).

Right: Abd al-Aziz Musa (Palinfo Twitter account, December 21, 2021). Left: The site of the vehicular ramming attack with the vehicle on fire (Safa Facebook page, December 21, 2021).

▸ **PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** posted condolences to Abd al-Aziz Musa's family on his Facebook page. He accused Israel of killing him while he was driving near a military roadblock. He also claimed it was a manifestation of the updating of IDF orders for opening fire, issued a few days previously (Ma'an, December 22, 2021).[1] **Hamas** praised the attack and the attacker. **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** claimed he had belonged to the "resistance" in Jenin, where young Palestinians were rising up and reacting to the [alleged] "crimes of the occupation," especially those against the prisoners, both male and female (Sabaq24 Telegram channel, December 21, 2021). **Hamas figure Abd al-Hakim Hanini** said the "heroic attack in Jenin" expressed the Palestinians' determination to defend the prisoners (aljazeera.net, December 21, 2021).

Muhammad Shtayyeh's posting to his Facebook page, December 22 2021.

[1] According to the updated orders, IDF soldiers can open fire immediately after rocks and Molotov cocktails are thrown at them even after the attacker has fled. However, the shots have to be fired immediately and near the site of the attack (Israeli media, December 19, 2021).

Shooting attacks

- This past week there were two shooting attacks:
  - On **December 22, 2021**, an IDF force entered the outskirts of al-Bireh after suspicious Palestinians had been seen approaching the community of Psagot, which is directly to the south of al-Bireh. While searching for the Palestinians shots were fired at the fighters from a passing vehicle. They returned fire and killed the shooter. No Israeli casualties were reported. Clashes then developed between the security forces and several dozen Palestinians who arrived at the scene (IDF spokesman, December 24, 2021). The Palestinian who had been killed was identified as **Muhammad Issa Abbas**, 26, from the al-Am'ari refugee camp near Ramallah (Ma'an, December 22, 2021). Both Hamas and Fatah issued formal mourning notices for him. Muhammad Shtayyeh posted condolences to the family on his Facebook page and warned Palestinians about the IDF's new orders for opening fire (Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, December 22, 2021). Dozens of armed, masked terrorist operatives attended the funeral held for Abbas in the refugee camp, shooting into the air. Abbas was buried wearing a yellow Fatah headband and his body was covered with Palestinian and yellow Fatah flags (Filastin al-Yawm, December 22, 2021).

Right: Muhammad Shtayyeh posting to his Facebook page, December 22, 2021. Left: Dozens of armed, masked operatives at the funeral (Filastin al-Yawm, December 22, 2021).

  - On **December 25, 2021**, shots were fired from a passing car at an IDF post at the entrance to Nablus. No casualties or damage were reported. The vehicle sped away. The Israeli security forces conducted a search and found dozens of shell casings (IDF spokesman, December 25, 2021).

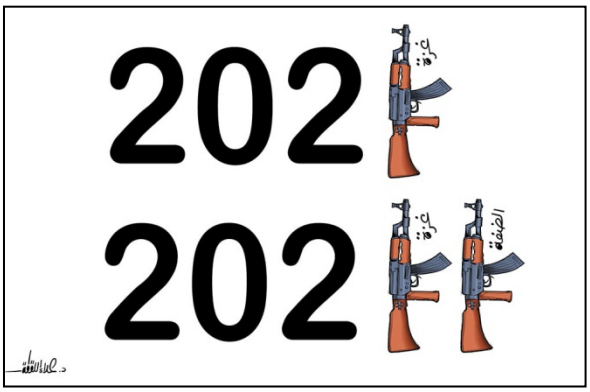
Attempted stabbing attack

On the morning of **December 23, 2021**, a Palestinian drove to the al-Jib roadblock near Givat Ze'ev, north of Jerusalem. As a Border Police fighter was executing a security check, he left the vehicle and began walking towards a policeman manning the roadblock. He took out a knife and continued walking. The police stationed at the site prepared to fire their weapons and he threw the knife on the ground. He was detained (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, December 23, 2021).

The knife carried by the suspect (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, December 23, 2021).

Hamas' strategy of terrorist attacks

According to an article in the Lebanon-based newspaper al-Akhbar, **Hamas recently decided to initiate a wave of attacks** on Israel and the settlers in Judea and Samaria to continue the "struggle" beyond the Gaza Strip, which is subject to the lull understandings. The article claimed that in response Israel had changed its approach and was dealing with the "resistance" [i.e., Palestinian terrorism] as a single unit, that is, without differentiating between Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip. Proof, according to the article, was Israel's threat to kill Saleh al-'Arouri in Turkey in response to the current escalation [of attacks in Judea and Samaria] (al-Akhbar, December 24, 2021).



Hamas call to broaden the armed "struggle" in Judea and Samaria in 2022. The Arabic next to the 2021 rifle reads, "Gaza," and next to the 2022 rifles, "Gaza" and "West Bank" (Alaa' al-Laqta's Facebook page, December 27, 2021).

Friction between Palestinians and Jewish settlers

▸ Since the terrorist attack in Homesh that killed Yehuda Diamantman friction has increased between the Jewish settlers and the Palestinians: on **December 23, 2021**, settlers entered the village of Burqa in northern Samaria, which is near Homesh, and threw rocks at buildings. During violent clashes in Burqa between Palestinians and the Israeli security forces, an IDF fighter was injured. On **December 25, 2021**, hundreds of Palestinians rioted in Burka following calls on the social networks to attack a settlers' march in Homesh. The Palestinians threw rocks and Molotov cocktails at the Israeli security forces. An IDF soldier was wounded. The Palestinian Red Crescent reported that more than 200 Palestinians had been injured in the riots, most of them superficially.

Violent clashes in the village of Burqa (al-Araby al-Jadeed, December 23, 2021, Twitter account of journalist Hassan Aslih, December 25, 2021).

Cartoons commenting on the clashes in Burqa. The Arabic reads (right) "Burqa," and (left), "West Bank uprising" (Palestinian cartoonists' Facebook page, December 26, 2021).

In the wake of the violence, the Palestinian "presidential office" accused the government of Israel of "settler violence" and warned it would cause a conflagration. The international community was called on to intervene (Neo Press, December 23, 2021). **PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** said it was another Israeli terrorist "crime" organized by Israel to use "settler terrorism" to instill fear in the hearts of the original owners of the lands in the [Palestinian] towns and villages, with the protection and help of the IDF ("the occupation soldiers") (Wafa, December 24, 2021). **Mahmoud al-'Alul, deputy Fatah chairman**, said the village of Burqa was under organized settler attack, and that Mahmoud Abbas and the Fatah leadership had decided to activate the "popular resistance" [i.e., popular terrorism] to confront the settlers' aggression against the Palestinians, their property and their lands. He praised the unity of the residents of Burqa, claiming it proved the Palestinian ranks stood together (QudsN, December 25, 2021). According to **Hussein al-Sheikh, PA minister of civilian affairs**, the escalation of "the organized settler terrorism," supported and protected by the Israeli government, came after an official Israeli decision to make the Palestinian people a target (Wafa, December 27, 2018).

Traffic accident killing Palestinian woman leads riots and condemnations

Tension mounted in Judea and Samaria after a traffic accident near Sinjil, north of Ramallah, on December 24, 2021, in which **Ghadir Muslama**, 63, from Sinjil, was killed. The Palestinians claimed she was deliberately run over by a Jewish settler. The Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) announced in response that her death had been caused by a traffic accident between an Israeli vehicle and a Palestinian pedestrian. The COGAT reported that the driver had turned himself in and the Israeli police were investigating the event (COGAT Arabic website, December 24, 2021).

▸All the Palestinian organizations issued condemnations. They called Muslama a "shaheed" and called for the activation of all branches of the "resistance" in Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem to counteract the "attacks of the settlers," adding that the continuation of the "resistance," including the armed "resistance," was the practical response really [necessary]. Muhammad Shtayyeh posted sorrow at her death on his Facebook page and condemned the "settlers' violence," carried out under the aegis of the IDF forces, against the residents of the villages of Qaryout, Sebastia and Burqa (Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, December 24, 2021). **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** warned that the escalation of the [alleged] "crimes of the settlers," specifically in Burqa, and the [alleged] vehicular ramming attack that killed Muslama would be met with deterrence [from the "resistance"] (Hamas website, December 24, 2021).

Picture of Muslama which Muhammad Shtayyeh posted to his Facebook page, December 24, 2021.

▸**Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki** said the Palestinian leadership had sent communiqués to all the countries in the world telling them they had to force Israel to stop its "crimes" before it was too late. He threatened that if the countries around the globe did not take action as he demanded, Fatah's Central Committee would take steps from which "there would be no going back" (Wafa, December 27, 2021).

Rocks, Molotov cocktails and other events

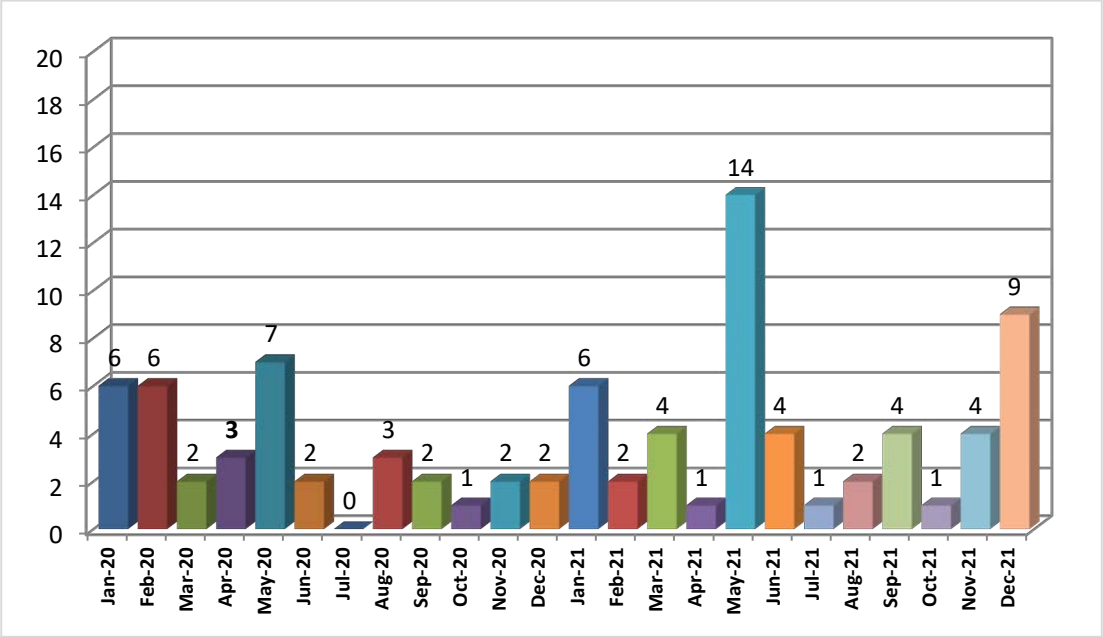
▸In Judea and Samaria Palestinians there was an increase in the number of incidents involving the throwing of rocks and Molotov cocktails at Israeli vehicles driving on the roads. The more prominent events were the following:[2]

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

- **December 28, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle on the Gush Etzion-Hebron road near Halhul. No casualties or damage were reported.
- **December 28, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle near Shaqra (northwest of Ramallah). No casualties were reported; the vehicle was damaged.
- **December 27, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle on the road between Hebron and Kiryat Arba. No casualties were reported; the vehicle was damaged.
- **December 27, 2021**: A Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Israeli vehicle on the Jerusalem-Gush Etzion road west of Bethlehem. No casualties or damage were reported.
- **December 27, 2021**: Tires were burned on the road between Bayt Awa and Hebron. No casualties or damage were reported.
- **December 27, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle on the Gush Etzion-Hebron road between Bayt Ummar and Karmei Tzur. No casualties or damage were reported.
- **December 27, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle near Luban al-Sharqia, northeast of Ramallah. No casualties or damage were reported. The previous day rocks were thrown at the same location, damaging a vehicle.
- **December 27, 2021**: A Molotov cocktail was thrown on the Jerusalem-Gush Etzion road near the Tunnel roadblock. No casualties or damage were reported.
- **December 26, 2021**: Molotov cocktails were thrown at a building in Silwan, east Jerusalem. No casualties or damage were reported. Police forces called to the site detained three suspects, all from Silwan (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, December 26, 2021).
- **December 26, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle between Ariel and Tapuah, southwest of Nablus. No casualties were reported; the vehicle was damaged.
- **December 26, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle near the Palestinian village of Teqoa. No casualties were reported; the vehicle was damaged.
- **December 26, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle Kiryat Arba-Hebron road. No casualties were reported; the windshield of the vehicle was damaged.
- **December 26, 2021**: A Molotov cocktail was thrown at an IDF post near the trans-Judea road north of Hebron. No casualties or damage were reported.
- **December 26, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an Israeli bus between the Israel communities of Yakir and Revava, southwest of Nablus. No casualties were reported; the bus was damaged.

- **December 26, 2021**: A Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Israeli bus in Hawwara, south of Nablus. No casualties were reported; the bus was damaged.
- **December 26, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an Israeli bus near Sinjil, north of Ramallah. No casualties were reported; the windshield of the vehicle was damaged.
- **December 26, 2021**: A Molotov cocktail was thrown at the fence around the Israeli community of Beit El, north of Ramallah. No casualties or damage were reported.
- **December 25, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an Israeli bus near Hizma, northeast of Jerusalem. No casualties were reported; the windshield of the bus was damaged.
- **December 25, 2021**: An IED and three burning tires containing containers of spray paint were placed between Aqraba and Migdalim, south of Nablus. No casualties or damage were reported.
- **December 25, 2021**: About 20 Molotov cocktails were thrown at the houses of Jewish settlers in Kfar HaShiloh, east of Jerusalem. No casualties or damage were reported.
- **December 25, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an IDF post in Hebron. No casualties or damage were reported.
- **December 23, 2021**: A Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Israeli bus on the Gush Etzion-Hebron road near the Karmei Tzur Junction, setting fire to the bus. No casualties were reported.
- **December 23, 2021**: Israeli police forces detained a local resident in the al-Tor neighborhood of east Jerusalem while he was throwing rocks. He was taken for interrogation (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, December 23, 2021).
- **December 22, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an Israeli vehicle on the Gush Etzion-Hebron road between Beit Habrakha and el-Aroub, north of Hebron. No casualties or damage were reported.
- **December 22, 2021**: Rocks were thrown at an Israeli bus near the al-Fawwar pools, southwest of Hebron. No casualties or damage were reported.

Significant Terrorist Attacks in Judea and Samaria since January 2020[3]



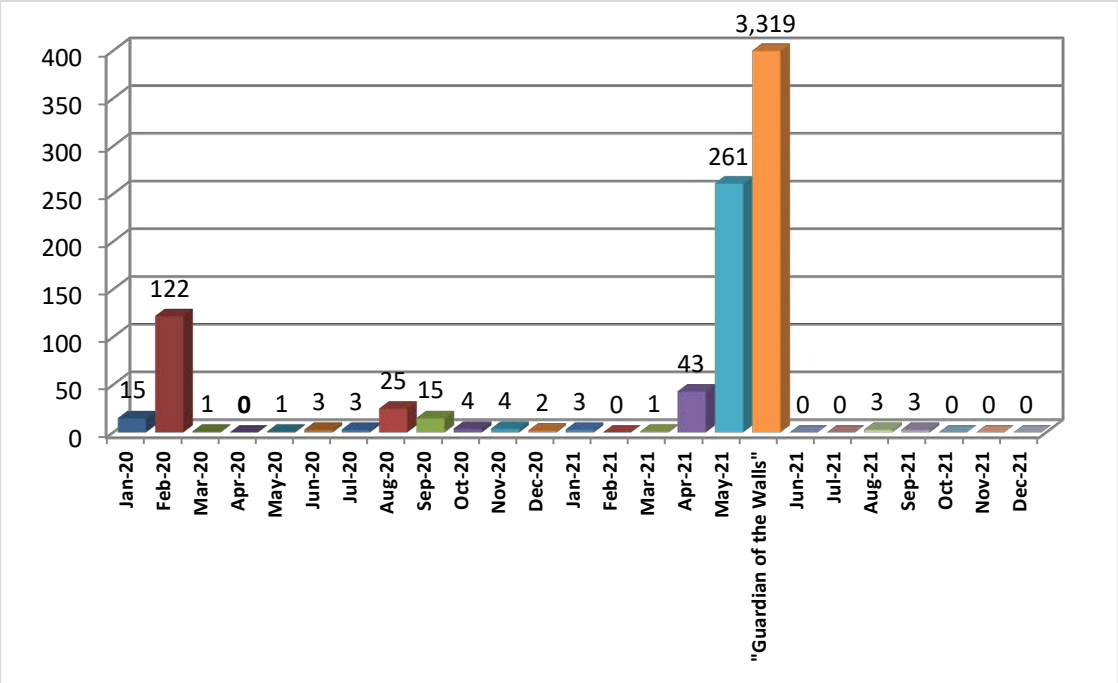
3A significant attack is defined by the ITIC as involving shooting, stabbing, a vehicular attack, the use of IEDs, or a combination of the above. Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown by Palestinians are not included.

Israel's South

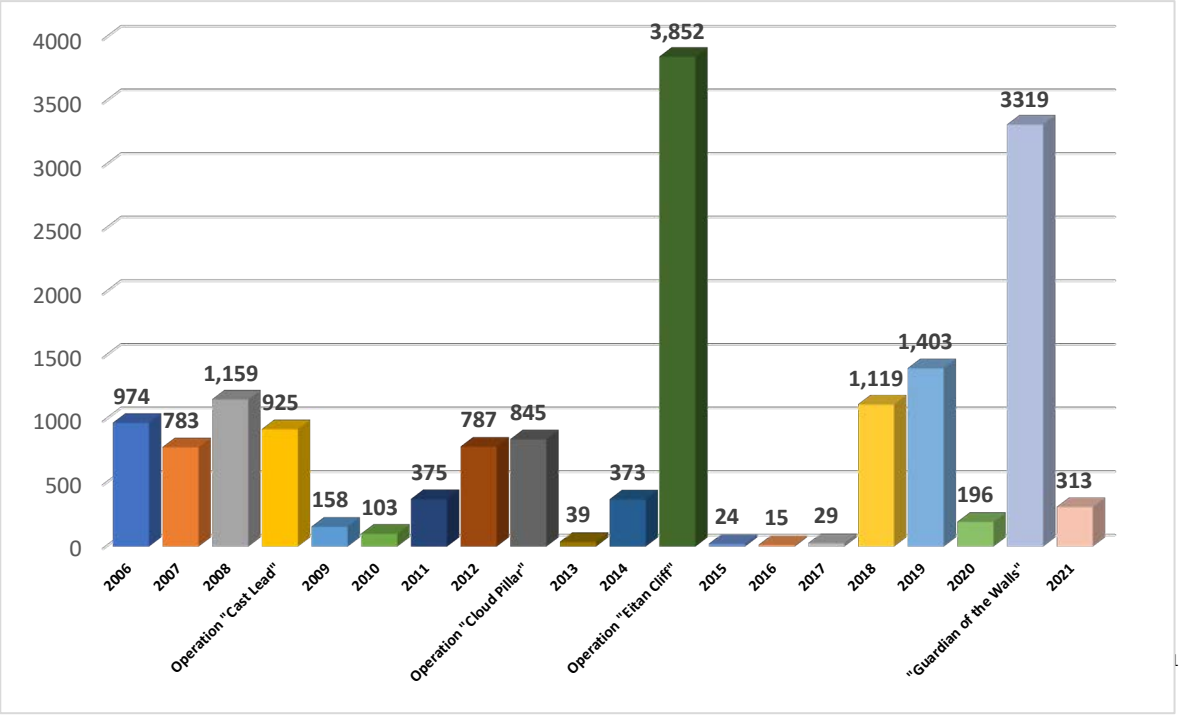
Rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel

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

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire since January 2020



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Developments in the Gaza Strip

Aid from Qatar to increase the supply of electricity

▸ **Mohammed al-Emadi, chairman of Qatar's National Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza**, said a memorandum of understandings had been signed with the Gazan energy commission and electric company regarding the operation of the power plant that provides the Gaza Strip with electricity. The agreement includes the purchase and delivery of gas for operating the power plant. According to the agreement, the Qatari committee will finance laying the gas pipeline to the Gaza Strip, at an estimated cost of $60 million. Al-Emadi said the use of gas would increase the supply of electricity to 500 megawatts (Safa, December 26, 2021).

The lull agreement and Hamas' ultimatum

▸ The London-based newspaper al-Sharq al-Awsat reported that the mission of the Egyptian security delegation that visited the Gaza Strip on December 19, 2021, had been difficult and complicated because of Israel's demands that the Palestinian organizations stop provoking attacks in Judea and Samaria and return the Israeli soldiers and civilian hostages held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip before progress could be made in measures to ease daily life for the Gazans. "Sources in the Palestinian organizations" reported that the organizations told the delegation they rejected all the Israeli demands and that their patience was running out because of the lack of progress. They added they would oppose Israel's demands for Judea and Samaria as long as Israel did not issue a commitment to stop its escalation and had not instituted relief measures for the Gaza Strip (al-Sharq al-Awsat, December 21, 2021).

▸ In addition, according to al-Risalah, the Hamas leadership warned Israel through the Egyptian mediators that military confrontation could be renewed at any time. Sources in Hamas said they had asked for a comprehensive solution which was more than financial donations, they wanted the limitations on the movement of merchandise and people to be lifted and they wanted strategic projects [to be initiated]. Moreover, **Yahya al-Sinwar, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip**, gave Israel until the end of the year (al-Risalah, December 21, 2021). Later on, sources in the Gaza Strip said the organizations had agreed that if the mediators did not force Israel to implement the current lull understandings, they would activate the program of gradual escalation by the middle of January 2022, a postponement of the previous ultimatum (al-Araby al-Jadeed, December 26, 2021).

- In the wake of Hamas' threats, al-Araby al-Jadeed reported that Israel told the Egyptian mediators it was prepared to add 5,000 permits for Gazans to work in Israel, bringing the number to 15,000. According to Egypt, Israel made the gesture after sources in the Israeli government told the Egyptians Israel was planning to implement some of Hamas' demands to defuse tensions and preserve the lull. It was also reported that Israel was prepared to hold a meeting to coordinate the initiation of construction in the Gaza Strip (al-Araby al-Jadeed, December 27, 2021).

The issue of the Palestinian terrorist prisoners

- Hamas also issued threats regarding what it referred to as "how Israel relates to the prisoners." Hamas spokesman threatened that the situation was liable to deteriorate to the point of a new military confrontation. The prisoners' information bureau said there was significant tension in the prisons housing security prisoners, and the condition of **Yusuf al-Mabhuh**, the prisoner who stabbed a guard in the Nafha Prison on December 20, 2021, was unknown, and people feared for his life (al-Ra'i, December 21, 2021). Somewhat later the Hamas leadership in the prisons announced a group hunger strike would be held by prisoners, including the leaders, because of recent friction in the jails (al-Arabiya, December 26, 2021).
- In an interview, **Saleh al-'Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau and holder of the Judea and Samaria portfolio**, related to the tension between Israel and Hamas in view of the situation of the prisoners, male and female, in the jails. He said Hamas had sent Israel a strong message via the Egyptian mediators, warning that the pressure in the jails would lead to an "explosion" because the issue of the prisoners was a red line, and one of the most sensitive and sacred issues of the Palestinian people (al-Aqsa, December 23, 2021).
- A demonstration was held in Jabalia in front of the house of **Yusuf al-Mabhuh**, who stabbed a guard in the Nafha Prison. **Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua** said Hamas was prepared to enforce a new equation on Israel to protect the prisoners as it had enforced the [so-called] "Sheikh Jarrah equation" in May 2021. He confirmed that Hamas had sent a communiqué to Israel through the Egyptian mediators containing a warning about the continuation of the [alleged] "abuse and attacks" in the jails (Sawa, December 21, 2021).
- **Husam Badran, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said the female prisoners were a red line and that Israel should not even think that isolating them would not cause a reaction. He said what Yusuf al-Mabhuh had done and the vehicular ramming attack in Jenin were

messages for Israel from inside and outside prison walls, saying that attacking female prisoners would not go without a response (al-Aqsa, December 23, 2021).

Responses to Israel's threat to assassinate Saleh al-'Arouri

▸ In response to a report in al-Araby al-Jadeed that Israel was planning to assassinate Saleh al-'Arouri, **Hamas leader Isma'il Radwan** said the senior figures of the "resistance" were all potential shaheeds and Israel's threats did not scare Hamas. He said Israel should think "a thousand times" before it did something foolish like assassinating al-'Arouri, because if Israel did in fact kill any senior figure, all Israeli territory would be within range of Hamas' rockets and Israel would pay a steep price (Sawt al-Aqsa, December 23, 2021). Saleh al-'Arouri related to the issue in an interview, claiming he would be happy to die as a shaheed (al-Aqsa, December 23, 2021).

"Military" exercise held by the joint operations room of the Palestinian terrorist organizations

▸ On **December 26, 2021**, the joint operations room of the Palestinian terrorist organizations, headed by Hamas, announced the beginning of its second annual military exercise called "Strong Pillar 2" (a phrase taken from the Qur'an to send a message of unity). The objective of the exercise, which is still ongoing, is to demonstrate the military collaboration of the military-terrorist wings of all the terrorist organizations, to practice military tactics and share information and experience to facilitate the coordination of their activities (al-Risalah, December 26, 2021). Commentators noted that in addition to the military aspect, the exercise is intended to send Israel the message that the organizations are prepared for a new confrontation, in view of what has been described as "the increase of Israeli aggression in east Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and against [Palestinian] prisoners in [Israeli] jails." Hamas held its own military-terrorist exercise before the joint one.

First pictures from the joint exercise (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades website, December 28, 2021).

Simulation of storming an Israeli tank (Safa, December 27, 2021).

Terrorist prisoners invited to meet in Algeria

▸ **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, said they had received an invitation from Algeria to hold a meeting of all the Palestinian organizations at an as yet unset time. He said that at the meeting the organizations would have to agree on holding elections for the "presidency," the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Palestinian National Council, the establishment of a joint leadership and a program for a joint struggle (al-Shuruq, December 23, 2021).

Results of public opinion poll conducted in the Gaza Strip

▸ The Atlas Center for Studies and Research[4] in the Gaza Strip published the results of a public opinion poll conducted in the Gaza Strip between December 5 and 8, 2021, with the participation of 1000 Gazans. Some of the findings of the poll, conducted half a year after Operation Guardian of the Walls, were the following (Atlas Center website, December 23, 2021):

- 59.5% were pleased with the understandings of the lull and the recent measures to ease daily life; 39.9% were displeased.
- 45.4% said they were of the opinion that the PA was responsible for the ongoing crisis in the Gaza Strip, 25.5% said Hamas was responsible, 15.8% said Israel was responsible and 7.7% said Egypt was responsible.

[4] The Atlas Center for Studies and Research was founded in 2012 by released prisoners who were knowledgeable about Israel. The center monitors publications and reports in the Israeli media and translates them into Arabic. The Center is headed by Abd al-Rahman Shehab (Atlas Center website, December 26, 2021). The center is affiliated with the PIJ.

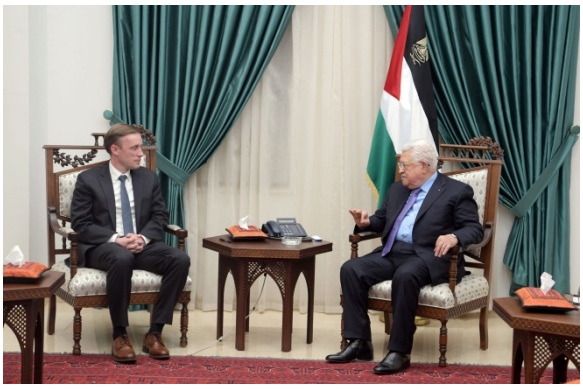
- Regarding the question of who should be the PA leader after Mahmoud Abbas, 33.5% supported Isma'il Haniyeh, 22.4% supported Marwan Barghouti, 12.9% supported Muhammad Dahlan and 8.6% supported Khaled Mashaal.

Abd al-Rahman Shehab reads the results of the poll at a press conference (YouTube, December 23, 2021).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Diplomatic meetings

- **Jake Sullivan, President Biden's national security advisor**, visited Israel and the PA. He met with Mahmoud Abbas and stressed the need to avoid taking steps which could ignite tensions. He said the United States wanted to "strengthen engagement" with the Palestinian Authority and deepen its ties with the Palestinian people. He stressed the American president's commitment to the two-state solution and called for trust-building measures and increased stability and security (The White House, December 22, 2021). Mahmoud Abbas called for the end of the "occupation" of the Palestinian territories and for a stop to be put to constructions in the settlements and the settlers' attacks on Palestinians. He also called for the prevention of the expulsion of Palestinians from neighborhoods in east Jerusalem and for an end to Israel's deductions of the funds it collects for the PA in tax revenues (Mahmoud Abbas' Facebook page, December 24, 2021).
- Mahmoud Abbas met in his office in Ramallah with **Mazin Abdellah Hilal Al Farrayeh**, the Jordanian minister of the interior. They discussed recent bilateral developments, and the Jordanian minister said Jordan would continue to support the Palestinians (Sawa, December 24, 2021).



Right: Mahmoud Abbas meets with Jake Sullivan (Mahmoud Abbas' Facebook page, December 22, 2021). Left: Mahmoud Abbas meets with Mazin Abdellah Hilal Al Farrayeh, the Jordanian minister of the interior (Wafa, December 24, 2021).

▸ **Ayman al-Safadi, the Jordanian foreign minister**; **Samih Shukri, the Egyptian foreign minister; Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki and Hussein al-Sheikh, PA minister of civilian affairs** met in Cairo. Also present were the heads of the various countries' intelligence services and of the PA as well. They discussed ways to strengthen ties given recent developments, and the peace process (Petra, December 27, 2021).

Reactions to a statement made by Knesset Member Mansour Abbas

▸ On **December 21, 2021**, **KM Mansour Abbas, head of the United Arab List faction**, gave a speech to the Israel Business Conference in which he said that Israel had been born as a Jewish state and the question was how to integrate Arab society and Arab citizens into it (Globes, December 21, 2021). His remarks were met with Palestinian outrage. Mahmoud Abbas' office issued an official response, saying that Mansour Abbas did not reflect the Palestinian people and what he had said was a "distorted translation" of the Israeli Nation-State Law. He added that what Mansour Abbas said was consistent with the calls of Israelis extremists for uprooting the Palestinians, attacking al-Aqsa mosque and Palestinian history. Mahmoud Abbas' office expressed sorrow that Mansour Abbas that become part of the trend reinforcing "Zionist imperialism" (Wafa, December 22, 2021).

▸ **Hamas** officially condemned Mansour Abbas, saying he was clearly biased towards the Zionist narrative, confirmed the Nation-State Law and his remarks were in opposition to the national Palestinian position (Hamas website, December 22, 2021). The **PIJ** said that with his remarks Mansour Abbas had rejected his Arab-Muslim identity and instead identified with the "Zionist right wing and [Israel's] extremist fascist government" and did not represent the Palestinian national position. The PIJ called for him to be ostracized because his remarks

were a threat to the identity, principles and interests of the Palestinian people (Filastin al-Yawm December 23, 2021).

Mansour Abbas according to al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, December 26, 2021.

Administrative detainees planning to boycott courts

▸ The Palestinian agencies dealing with the prisoners, including the PLO's commission for released prisoners, announced that beginning in January 2022, the administrative detainees would boycott the Israeli courts in order to confront Israel's policy of administrative detentions. The Palestinian prisoners' organizations called on the public and media to support their move, saying the prisoners might go on a group hunger strike if their demands were not met (al-Ayam, December 21, 2021).

Muhammad Shtayyeh attends Christmas events in Bethlehem

▸ On **December 24, 2021**, Muhammad Shtayyeh attended a Christmas reception held in Bethlehem where he gave a speech, representing Mahmoud Abbas. He praised the Christians and said the PA was facing a number of challenges, the most important of which were getting rid of the [Israeli] "occupation," establishing a Palestinian state whose capital was east Jerusalem and the return of the refugees (Wafa, December 24, 2021)

Expotech, Palestinian high-tech fair in Ramallah

▸ On **December 15, 2021**, Expotech 2021 was opened, a high-tech Palestinian fair held for the 19th time simultaneously in Ramallah and the Gaza Strip. The opening ceremony was attended by Muhammad Shtayyeh and various Palestinian ministers and businessmen. Muhammad Shtayyeh gave a speech in which he emphasized the importance of investing in civilians and the young, and integrating technology in fields such as industry, health and

agriculture. He claimed there were 700 Palestinian technology and communications companies which accounted for only 3% of the Palestinian economy. Every year, he said, 2,300 Palestinians graduated with degrees in technology sciences. He added that the Palestinian technological companies have enormous potential in the era of the coronavirus, which opened new horizons (Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, December 15, 2021).

PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh at the opening of the Expotech fair in Ramallah (Wafa, December 15, 2021).

The Coronavirus

Judea and Samaria

- According to data from the ministry of health in Ramallah, on **December 27, 2021**, there was a slight decrease in the number of active cases, 2,199, down from 2,346 December 21, 2021. There were 53 Palestinians in ICUs, 14 of them on ventilators. So far 2,950 Palestinians have died of coronavirus-related causes. A total of 1,132,149 Palestinians have been vaccinated (ministry of health in Ramallah Facebook page, December 27, 2021).
- **Dr. Kamal al-Shakhra, spokesman for the ministry of health in Ramallah**, said there were 35 Palestinians who had contracted the omicron variant, 90% of whom had returned from abroad. (ministry of health in Ramallah, December 27, 2021).

The Gaza Strip

- **On December 28, 2021**, the ministry of health in Gaza reported 1,620 active cases in the Gaza Strip, down from 1,733 on December 21, 2021. Of the 1,294 tests administered during the 24 hours between December 27 and 28, 107 new cases were detected, an 8% positive rate. So far 1,696 Gazans have died of coronavirus-related causes, up from 1,679 on December 21, 2021. There are 66 hospitalized Gazans, 43 in serious or critical condition. So far 539,340

Gazans have been vaccinated, up from 530,728 on December 21, 2021 (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, December 21, 2021).

- The ministry of health in Gaza held a press conference where it was reported the first case of the omicron variant in the Gaza Strip. The ministry warned the variant spread rapidly (Shehab, December 26, 2018). The ministry accused Israel of preventing the delivery of drugs and medical equipment to combat the virus. It called on the UN agencies and international organizations to exert pressure on Israel to force it to deliver the necessary medical equipment to the Gaza Strip (ministry of health in Gaza, December 26, 2021).

Press conference held to report the identification of the first case of the omicron variant in the Gaza Strip (ministry of health in Gaza, December 26, 2021).