Hamas' Battle for Hearts and Minds after the Ceasefire Agreement in the Gaza Strip

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Overview[1]

- After previous rounds of fighting conducted by Hamas, the movement made sure to promote a **"victory narrative"** and to emphasize its achievements, usually through ostentatious public ceremonies, such as those held for the release of the Israeli hostages during the ceasefire that between January and March 2025.
- However, since the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip went into effect on October 10, 2025, Hamas has used other media tactics, showing relative restraint and without unequivocal claims of "victory."
- An examination of the Hamas' narrative promoted by its spokesmen and its affiliated media indicates an **ongoing effort to market a series of achievements**, including the shock generated in Israel by the October 7, 2023 attack and massacre and the damage caused to Israel's international standing, Hamas' survival as a governing and military presence in the Strip, Israel's failure to disarm the "resistance," the release of Palestinian prisoners who had murdered Israelis and the new regional era initiated by Yahya al-Sinwar.
- **In ITIC assessment, Hamas' relatively moderate and cautious media products are the result of its desire to tiptoe through this period, which is sensitive for it, while continuing to wage a narrative offensive for three reasons: one, strengthening civilian and security governance in the Strip before progressing to the next stages of the ceasefire agreement. According to public statements made by senior Hamas figures they want to move forward, but it is still unclear to what extent that will be translated into action on the ground, at least in the foreseeable future. Two, the movement's desire to prevent a confrontation with the states supervising the implementation of the agreement. Three, Hamas' understanding that after two years of war, the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is incompatible with "victory celebrations," which could damage its image at a time**

[1] Click https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

when it has to struggle for its existence in general and for its future as a controlling and influential actor in the Gaza Strip in particular.

Background

- According to the American 20-point plan for the future of the Gaza Strip, which was also adopted by the United Nations in Security Council Resolution 2803, a temporary transitional government, based on a non-political Palestinian technocratic committee, would manage the daily affairs in the Strip as part of the second stage of the ceasefire agreement and the end of the war, while Hamas would not be part of the government and would be required to disarm.
- Immediately after the ceasefire agreement went into effect on October 10, 2025, Hamas rushed to demonstrate and solidify its security and civilian governance in the Gaza Strip. However, contrary to previous rounds of fighting, or to the previous ceasefire which was in effect from January 19, 2025 to March 18, 2025, Hamas refrained from holding ostentatious public "victory ceremonies" or repeating the "victory narrative" in its media.
- Instead, through its spokesmen and members of its leadership and via its affiliated media outlets, Hamas promoted themes highlighting the main "achievements" of Hamas and the Gaza Strip from the October 7, 2023 attack and massacre (Operation al-Aqsa Flood) until the current ceasefire, without unequivocal mention of "victory."

Hamas' Themes

The Importance of Operation al-Aqsa Flood

- Even before the ceasefire was declared, when the indirect negotiations over the agreement were still in progress, Hamas marked the second anniversary of the October 7, 2023 attack and massacre. Hamas' publication al-Risalah issued a special supplement with the headline "Two years since the Flood of the Free Men" (*tufan al-ahrar*), with a selection of articles, reviews and visual materials promoting the "achievements" of Operation al-Aqsa Flood as opposed to Israel's failures and shortcomings.

The banner headline of the special supplement "Two years since the Flood of the Free Men" (al-Risalah, October 5, 2025)

- The supplement presented the main points of an article by the cleric Dr. Hussein Abd al-Aal, a member of the board of trustees of the Global Organization of the Supporters of the Prophet (an organization which supports Hamas), in a Kuwaiti magazine, in which he claimed that the October 7, 2023 attack and massacre was "a religious and historical turning point that restored the nation's confidence in its ability to resist [*sic*] and preserve itself." According to Abd al-Aal, Operation al-Aqsa Flood brought eight significant achievements, including the return of the Palestinian issue to the global stage, the collapse of the normalization project [with Saudi Arabia and other Muslim states], exposing the myth of the "invincible army," exposing "America's true face" and the raising of awareness in the Islamic nation (al-Risalah, October 5, 2025).
- In a speech delivered by Khalil al-Hayya, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, before the Arab National Conference in Beirut, he said that the objective of October 7 was to declare that "without the rights of the Palestinian people, there will be no security or stability," and that the region would not find calm unless a Palestinian state was established and the "right of return"[2] was implemented. In the speech, which was Hamas' closest expression to a declaration of "victory," al-Hayya boasted that October 7 witnessed a spirit of heroism within "Palestine" and beyond its borders when the entire nation participated in confronting "aggression," and that it showed that "when the entire nation is united, Palestine can be liberated." He also warned that if the Islamic nation did not take advantage of the responsibility imposed upon it by the attack and chart the path to the "liberation of Palestine" and the establishment of a state, it would once again "disappoint" the people (Hamas Telegram channel, November 7, 2025).

Operation al-Aqsa Flood Shocked Israel and Undermined Its International Standing

- The main "achievement" consistently highlighted in Hamas media, and even further amplified after the ceasefire agreement, was the shock waves the attack and massacre sent through the State of Israel. Hamas media gave extensive coverage to the discourse in the Israeli media regarding the series of failures and shortcomings that led to the attack and massacre,

[2] The so-called Palestinian "right" to return to their pre-1948 homes, that is, the destruction of the State of Israel.

persistently published the IDF investigations regarding its failures, and emphasized that the publication of the investigations and their findings was an "admission of failure by the enemy army." Hamas media also devoted significant space to covering the growing voices in the Israeli public calling for the establishment of a state commission of inquiry and the controversy surrounding the appointment and composition of the inquiry committee.

▶ The lead article of the special supplement in Hamas' bulletin was entitled "From the October War to al-Aqsa Flood… Israel continues to lie and deny failure." It stated that Operation al-Aqsa Flood was not an isolated event, but "the continuation of a long series of lies that accompanied every Israeli defeat since the establishment of the Jewish state." It claimed that just as the documents of the 1973 Yom Kippur War shattered the myth of the "invincible army," so did the October 7, 2023 attack and massacre expose the extent of the "military-political collapse that Tel Aviv tried to hide behind a screen of propaganda and disinformation" (al-Risalah, October 5, 2025). Other articles examined "How did Operation al-Aqsa Flood destroy the Israeli media machine and its anti-Semitic core?!" and "Israel, two years after the war: an economy reeling between shock and collapse" (al-Risalah, October 7, 2025).

Articles in al-Risalah's special supplement Right: "How did the Palestinian resistance change the equations of power?" Center: "Two years since Operation al-Aqsa Flood: the collapse of Israeli trust and negative migration shake the entity from within" (al-Risalah, October 2025). Left: "The earthquake of October 7 again shakes Israel: the army admits failure and the Supreme Court pressures to investigate" (al-Risalah, October 16, 2025)

▶ Throughout the war, Hamas' media conducted a campaign for the international isolation of Israel. It consistently used reports, articles, op-ed pieces and research summaries, almost all of them based on reports from the Israeli media, regarding the extensive damage caused to Israel and its international standing following the prolonged war.

▶ Even after the ceasefire, Hamas' media continued to leverage almost every report dealing with damage to Israel's international standing in the political, economic, industrial, security

and even academic spheres. In particular, reports highlighted arms embargoes on Israel, the cancellation of arms sales deals to Israel by European states and the cancellation of Israel's participation in security exhibitions.

Right: Review of a report by Pnina Sharbiv on Israeli TV Channel 12 headlines, "Israeli writer: Netanyahu's government caused a global diplomatic defeat" (al-Risalah, October 11, 2025). Left: "Even after the ceasefire… Denmark cancels a weapons purchase deal from the occupation" (Quds Network, October 25, 2025)

Hamas Remained Sovereign and Did Not Surrender

- Another theme in Hamas media even more heavily emphasized after the ceasefire was that Israel failed to achieve its main objective: the destruction of Hamas. Hamas claimed it remained the exclusive sovereign in the Gaza Strip and that only its representatives were conducting the negotiations with the mediators, even with the American envoy to the Middle East, directly and without intermediaries.
- Ending the fighting, remaining sovereign and not surrendering were reflected in the statement of Osama Hamdan, senior Hamas figure in Lebanon, who said that October 7 would remain a "historic milestone in the history of the Palestinian people" and also in the history of the "temporary entity," and that even though the "occupation" sought to drive the resistance to surrender, there was not a single fighter who raised a white flag, threw down his weapon or stopped fighting during two years of war. He claimed the first stage of the ceasefire was a declaration of the end of the war, contrary to what the "occupation" sought to achieve (Quds Network, November 11, 2025).
- The claim of Hamas sovereignty and governance in the Strip was reiterated in its affiliated media with the return of the hostages and fallen soldiers in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners and bodies, as required under the agreement. Hamas claimed that the operations to locate and recover the bodies continued despite the difficult conditions of the terrain and the lack of suitable equipment and means. Thus Hamas seeks to program the

Gazans to believe not only has it not ceased to exist, but it continues to serve as the exclusive factor in the Strip both for conducting negotiations and implementing of the clauses of the ceasefire agreement.

- In addition, the combat information unit of Hamas' military wing emphasizes the notion that it continues to function and carry out its missions on a regular basis, and is managing the "organized, meticulous processes" of locating the hostages and the bodies of the Israeli fallen soldiers and handing them over to representatives of the Red Cross. Returning the body of murdered Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, which had been held by Hamas since Operation Protective Edge in August 2014, is provocation, and insinuates that the IDF's efforts to locate and recover bodies of fallen soldiers over the years, including during the time they were in the Gaza Strip during the war, failed, thanks to the measures taken to deceive the IDF and conceal the locations of the bodies. For example, Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem said that "the security ingenuity [*sic*] of the al-Qassam Brigades foiled the efforts of Israeli intelligence in Gaza" (al-Risalah, November 6, 2025).
- Hamas also strives to present itself as negotiating on behalf of the entire Palestinian people, concluding that the fruits of Operation al-Aqsa Flood are being harvested by the entire Palestinian people and not only by the Hamas movement or the Gazans. Khalil al-Hayya, who headed Hamas' negotiating team, stated on the occasion of the ceasefire agreement that "your brothers were men at the negotiating table, they kept their eyes on the interests of our people and the preservation of its blood from the first moment of the battle" (Hamas Telegram channel, October 9, 2025). It is apparently a Hamas attempt to continue challenging the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and to reestablish its familiar argument that the Authority does not faithfully represent the Palestinian people and does not defend its rights, in contrast to Hamas which fights for the realization of their rights. In addition, the visual messages distributed by Hamas during the modest, supposedly improvised local "victory celebrations," which took place immediately after the announcement of the ceasefire agreement, showed Gazans waving only Palestinian flags.

From the photo album of al-Risalah's special supplement "Two years since the Flood of the Free:" celebrations in the Nuseirat refugee camp following the ceasefire agreement, waving Palestinian and not Hamas flags (al-Risalah, November 16, 2025)

Israel's Failure to Disarm the "Resistance"

- Hamas claimed that not only did Israel not annihilate the movement, it also did not disarm the "resistance," even though that was part of the second stage of the ceasefire agreement.[3]
- Hamas is attempting to emphasize the theme of "Israel's failure to disarm the resistance" by incorporating the concept of "unity of the arenas," therefore linking Hezbollah to the narrative as well, as it too is facing the demand to disarm and adheres to its refusal. Hamas notes that both for the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese "resistance,"[4] its weapons remain a red line.
- To amplify the theme, Hamas media cherry-pick statements by Israeli commentators and spokespersons who home in on the difficulty of disarming Hamas and Hezbollah. For example, Hamas' Quds Network translated and disseminated an article by the Middle East researcher Dr Haim Golovenzits, who claimed that the "resistance" had become a collective consciousness threatening Israel's security and the most urgent issue in Israel's national security equation today was to disarm Hezbollah and Hamas. According to him, Israel's failure to disarm Hezbollah would sabotage the possibility of disarming Hamas, which was deeply concerning to both the security and political echelons in Israel (Quds Network, October 28, 2025). In addition, allegedly according to Minister Avi Dichter, it would be easier for Israel to win the World Cup than to demilitarize the Gaza Strip (Quds Network, November 7, 2025).

[3] For further information, see the October 2025 ITIC report, **The future of Hamas' weapons and its efforts to rebuild the military wing**

[4] Hezbollah and the Palestinian and Shi'ite terrorist organizations operating in Lebanon.

"Regarding the failure to disarm Hamas and Hezbollah: the resistance as a collective consciousness threatening the security of the occupation:" headline based on the article by the Dr Haim Golovenzits (Quds Network, October 28, 2025)

- Hamas also defines the weapons of the "resistance" as a red line which cannot be crossed, a way of attacking the PA and its head and mobilizing support in the Gazan public and among the Palestinians in general. For example, Hamas media related to a report that during the talks between the Palestinian factions held in Cairo between October 22 and 24, 2025, Hussein al-Sheikh, deputy PA chairman, and Majed Faraj, head of Palestinian General Intelligence, told the Egyptian officials that the PA supported making disarming the "resistance" a condition for implementing the next stage of the agreement and even asked Egypt to work towards it (Quds Network, October 27, 2025).
- Hamas media also occasionally publishes data from opinion polls conducted by Palestinian polling institutes, according to which a majority of the Palestinian public allegedly opposes disarming Hamas and regards the weapons of the "resistance" as a red line, even if disarmament is defined as a condition for ending the war. In that way Hamas uses indirect means to shore up its position and to provide validation for its position on disarmament.

A poll conducted by an institute in Ramallah according to which 69% of Palestinians opposed disarming the "resistance" (al-Risalah, November 1, 2025)

▶ To promote its themes, Hamas' al-Risalah published a video titled "My weapon is my honor and the covenant of my fathers." It was a hymn of praise for the weapons of the "resistance" and showed Hamas' military wing using various types of weapons, firing rockets and using UAVs, including extensive footage from October 7, 2023, including pictures of the victims murdered in the attack and massacre.[5]

▶ Regarding the weapons of the "resistance," Hamas also attempted to discourage its target audiences from trying to use force to disarm the "resistance" or to assign the task to an international force. Dr Diaa Rashwan, head of Egypt's State Information Service, claimed assigning the task of disarming Hamas to an international force would lead to bloody clashes in the Strip. Rashwan claimed that no "rational country" would agree to participate in a force to confront the "Palestinian resistance."

A frame around the remarks of Diaa Rashwan, who claimed disarming Hamas was a recipe for bloody clashes (al-Risalah, November 10, 2025)

▶ Hamas also rejected the international framework for governing the Strip and is prepared to adopt the Egyptian model, which supports an Arab Islamic force for administering the Strip, clearly trying to deflect the focus from the issue of disarmament. Osama Hamdan, senior Hamas figure in Lebanon, said the Arab-Islamic model for administering the Strip proposed by Egypt was the best and claimed that in the negotiations held in Sharm al-Sheikh no mention was made of disarming the "resistance" (Quds Network, November 17, 2025).

Commitment to Implementing the Ceasefire

▶ In addition to sovereignty and governance, Hamas tries to present the image of a responsible actor that respects its part of the agreement, while representing Israel in the opposite light in

[5] For the full video, click https://tinyurl.com/yc7mxcyk. The images are extremely graphic.

an effort to make points with the mediating and guarantor states. Its efforts are backed by states involved in the agreement with a bias toward Hamas, led by Turkey, whose president gives Hamas unconditional support and claims, at every opportunity, that "Hamas is fulfilling its commitments under the agreement despite the provocations of the Netanyahu government" (Quds Press, November 18, 2025).

- That was evident after the Israeli strikes and targeted killings of senior Hamas operatives on November 22, 2025, in response to Hamas' violations of the ceasefire, when Hamas reportedly announced that it was no longer committed to the ceasefire and ready to return to fighting (al-Arabiya, November 22, 2025). Within a short time, senior figures in the movement, including political bureau member Izzat al-Rishq and deputy head of Hamas abroad Musa Abu Marzouq, came forward to deny the report and claim that they were committed to the success of the agreement (al-Aqsa TV and al Jazeera, November 22, 2025).
- An example of Hamas' attempt to represent its commitment to the agreement was the announcement that it was doing everything it could to return the bodies of the murdered hostages while accusing Israel of putting obstacles in the way of the search and recovery operations. Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem claimed they were still looking for the remaining bodies of the Israeli "deceased" despite the difficulties and complexities, reflecting Hamas' full commitment to the agreement to end the war in accordance with the American plan. Hamas called on the mediators "to pressure the occupation to allow the requirements necessary for these efforts" (al-Sharq, November 16, 2025).

Hamas announces that it continues searching for the bodies of the murdered Israeli hostages despite the "challenges" (Palinfo, November 16, 2025)

The "Steadfastness" of the Gaza Strip

- Another component of Hamas' themes was the "steadfastness" (*sumud*) of the residents of the Gaza Strip who survived the war, despite enormous sacrifices. The objective was to raise

the Gazans' morale but also to soften internal criticism in view of the high price exacted by the war, both in the number of dead and in the massive destruction.

- Khalil al-Hayya, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, delivered a speech upon the declaration of the ceasefire in which he said that "the world stood amazed at what you gave and sacrificed, as you remained steadfast, patient and devoted while you fought a war the world had never seen before." He added that for two years, the Gaza Strip "created miracles on its own and healed wounds" and that it "defended Jerusalem and al-Aqsa and fought the enemy with unparalleled heroism and courage, and proved that Gaza is forbidden to its enemies and that its men do not break and are not harmed by those who abandoned them" (Hamas Telegram channel, October 9, 2025).

Yahya al-Sinwar Initiated a New Regional Era

- The Hamas media invests serious efforts to glorify the name of the movement's former leader and planner of the Operation al-Aqsa Flood, Yahya al-Sinwar, as a symbol and super hero, to the point of mythologizing al-Sinwar after his death and representing him as a timeless symbol of "resistance," sacrifice and leadership. Even the scene of the final moments before his death, which was documented by the IDF and published in the media, when he raised a stick toward an Israeli UAV circling near him, was described by Hamas as an "iconic martyrdom of a leader who clung to the resistance until his last breath." In this way, Hamas seeks to have al-Sinwar remembered as an inspiring leader and a role model for future generations.
- On the anniversary of al-Sinwar's death on October 16, 2025, Hamas' media outlets published articles and op-ed pieces glorifying him. The articles told the story of a man who born and raised in the Khan Yunis refugee camp after his family was expelled by Israeli forces from Majdal, Ashkelon, in 1948. It was an attempt by Hamas to turn Yahya al-Sinwar into a hero, noting that he was born and raised as an "entirely ordinary Palestinian youth," but did not remain indifferent to the environment saturated with the spirit of "resistance" and longing for the "homeland" in which he grew up,[6] and that he was a prisoner in Israel for 23 years until his release in 2011 as part of the Gilad Shalit exchange deal, which he helped orchestrate.
- According to Hamas, al-Sinwar was a leader who initiated a new era in the history of the conflict and overturned turned Israel's perception of its security. Moreover, Hamas seeks to leverage al-Sinwar's death for propaganda purposes, therefore his death is not presented as the end of his path but as new fuel for the "resistance" and as a facet of the myth emerging

[6] Born in the Gaza Strip in 1962, longing for a homeland he never knew is a little far-fetched.

around him, which includes the three things that shaped his image as a "great leader:" the refugee camp in which he grew up and where his character was formed, Operation al-Aqsa Flood, the peak point of his activity, and the stick with which he ended his life as an uncompromising "resistance" fighter.

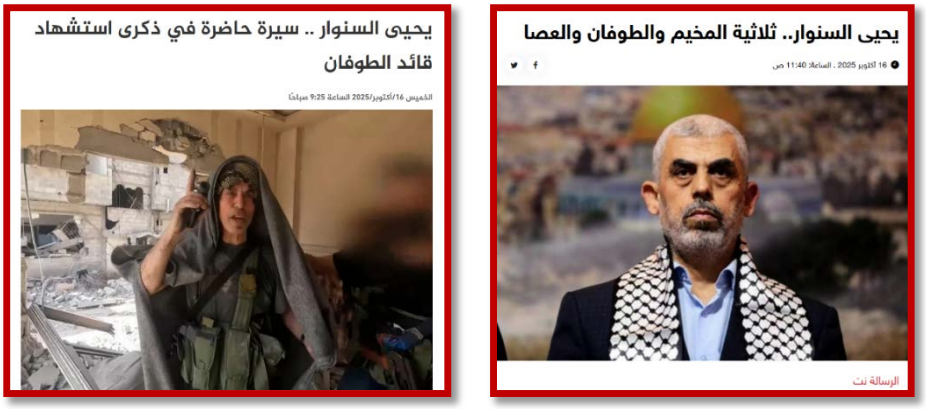
- These themes and the great devastation of Operation al-Aqsa Flood, which is attributed to al-Sinwar, were reflected in a special article glorifying his name on Hamas' website (al-Risalah, October 16, 2025):

> "In the path of the martyr Abd al-Qader al-Husseini and the martyr Izz al-Din al-Qassam, fell the commander of the blessed operation of al-Aqsa Flood, the great commander Yahya al-Sinwar, Abu Ibrahim, falling as a martyr and a fighter, holding his weapon until the last moment, defending his land and homeland. From the Jenin of al-Qassam to the Rafah of al-Sinwar, a journey of resistance and the story of a people charting with its body and its steadfastness its path until the expulsion of the occupation from all our Palestinian land. A man who emerged from the Khan Yunis camp to lead the Flood on October 7 and then stood facing an armed UAV while holding a stick, before falling as a martyr in Tel al-Sultan in Rafah… This day turned a new leaf in the chronicles of the conflict in Palestinian and global consciousness and turned Abu Ibrahim into a symbol of a leader who emerges from siege and overturned Israel's security equations… In his speeches and interviews, al-Sinwar presented a concept that sees the world through an equation of power and deterrence. In his view, resistance was an existential choice, not a tactical one, and the Palestinian people will not be silent victims. He spoke about deterrence through weapons but also about image and memory as two no less dangerous weapons. The fusion between thought and organization turned his activity into a theory documenting an important stage in the development of the Palestinian conflict."

- A similar article was dedicated to al-Sinwar on the website of the Palestinian Information Center (Palinfo, October 16, 2025):

> "With the uncertain agreement to end the war in Gaza, the discussion returns to the man who led the al-Aqsa Flood and stood before one of the most formidable war machines in the world with unbreakable strength. Yahya al-

Sinwar, who moved from isolation cell in prison to the decision-making center of Hamas leadership, and from the classrooms at the Islamic University to planning operations in the field, charted the course of his life with stubbornness and deep faith in the resistance. He carried with him a vision that did not change with the passage of time until he fell as a martyr in battle… Wearing his military vest, fighting, charging rather than fleeing, the martyr commander Yahya al-Sinwar met his death on October 16, 2024. An ending full of heroism and pride, tracing the line of confrontation between the 'people of truth' and their enemy. In his final image, which marks the beginning of a new stage, al-Sinwar is seen wearing his military vest and a face covering, and with courage, after being wounded in the arm, tying it with wire and continuing to fight until his last breath. Thus he fell as a martyr, standing upright like his people who remain steadfast and like the steadfast mountains of Gaza."



Right: "Yahya al Sinwar… the trilogy of the refugee camp, the Flood and the stick" (al-Risalah, November 16, 2025). Left: "Yahya al Sinwar… a living legacy on the anniversary of the martyrdom of the commander of the Flood" (Palinfo, November 16, 2025)

The Release of the Prisoners as a Historic Achievement

▶ Hamas called the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli prisons in exchange for the Israeli hostages, alive and murdered, and fallen soldiers a "historic achievement" and presented "proof" to show why, in its view, it was a historic and unprecedented achievement. Hamas emphasized that the deal "thwarted Israel's schemes to engineer the story of the prisoners [to its own ends] and thereby deter the resistance." It was also stated that the release of prisoners was a significant achievement in view of what it defined as "breaking the arrogance of the occupation and its policy of mass imprisonment of Palestinian prisoners." More of the

historic achievement, according to Hamas, was restoring hope for freedom despite imprisonment and oppression.

The Arabic reads, "The proof of the historic achievement in the prisoners' release deal" (Hamas website, October 16, 2025)

- Hamas regards not only in the number of prisoners released as an achievement, but also in the fact that many of them had been in jail for a long time. To emphasize that, the media office of Hamas prisoners' affairs produced infographics with data to illustrate the achievement.

Right: 80% of veteran prisoners were released within the exchange deals in Operation al-Aqsa Flood (al-Risalah, October 16, 2025). Left: 3,985 released prisoners, of them serving 486 life sentences, 319 sentenced to long prison terms, 33 who were facing life sentences and long prison terms, 144 women and 297 children (al-Risalah, October 16, 2025).