



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(March 17 – 24, 2015)



Commentary on the elections in Israel from Hamas-affiliated Omayya Joha. A Palestinian woman holding a gun says, "We vote [for the rifle]" (Al-Risala, March 19, 2015)

Overview

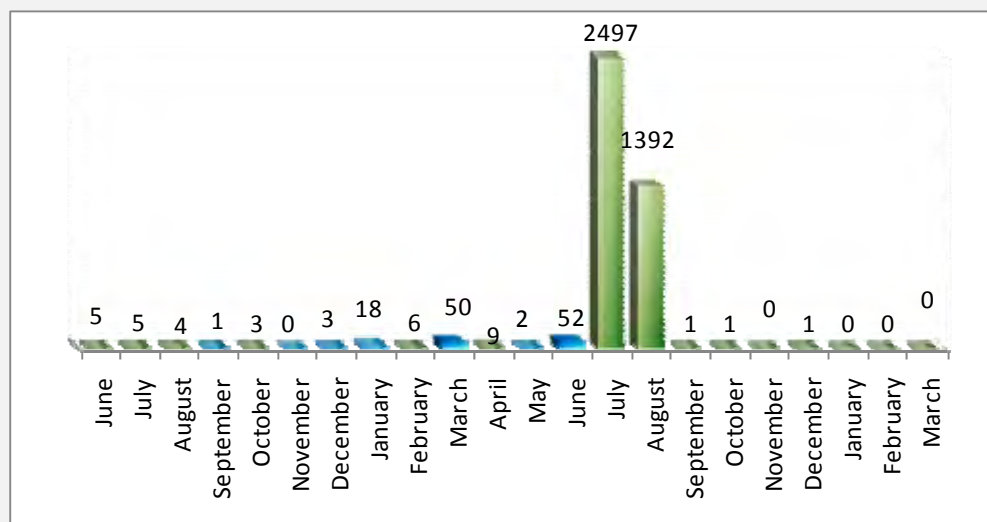
- A Hamas cell was exposed in Qalqiliya, handled by terrorist operatives in the Gaza Strip. It planned to carry out terrorist attacks in Israel. The six operatives of the cell were recruited while in Jordan; Hamas' Jordanian headquarters were involved in their recruitment. The cell had a laboratory in Nablus where materials for the manufacture of weapons were found. Two of the operatives detained were students at Al-Najah University in Nablus, a hotbed of Hamas incitement and terrorism.
- Official spokesmen for the Palestinian Authority (PA) claimed the election in Israel was an internal matter. They claimed the Palestinians would negotiate with any new Israeli government for a two-state solution with east Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state. However, senior PA figures expressed concern at the election results and remarks made during the campaign. They warned that **the Palestinians planned to appeal to international institutions, including the ICC, to realize their "rights."**

Israel's South

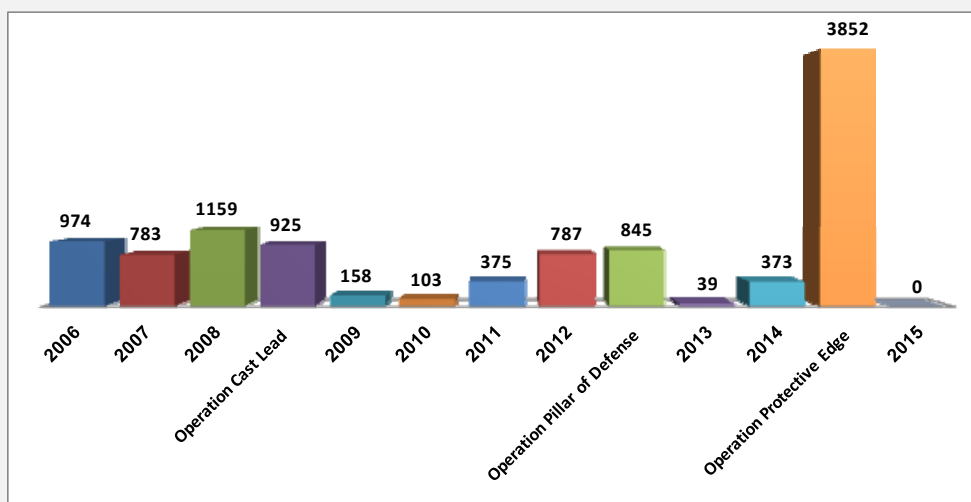
Rocket Fire Attacking Israel

- This past week Israel's south remained quiet, and no rocket or mortar shell hits were identified in Israeli territory.

Monthly Distribution of Rocket Fire (2013 – 2015)¹



Annual Distribution of Rocket Fire in Israel's South²



¹ As of March 24, 2015. The statistics do not include mortar shell fire or rockets which misfired and fell inside the Gaza Strip.

² The statistics do not include mortar shell fire.

IED Neutralized near the Border Security Fence

■ On March 18, 2015, an IDF force neutralized an IED placed on the western side of the border security fence, inside the Gaza Strip. It was several hundred meters from the border, located in the area between Shejaiya and the village of Nahal Oz (IDF Spokesman, March 18, 2015).

Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem

Hamas Terrorist Cell Exposed

■ The Israeli security forces **exposed a six-member Hamas terrorist cell in Qalqiliya. All six operatives were between the ages of 22 and 45, and planned to carry out terrorist attacks in Israeli territory.** In their possession were found tens of kilograms of sulfur (for the manufacture of explosives) and a small quantity of mercury fulminate (used to manufacture detonators).

■ During interrogation the operatives confessed **they had been recruited by Hamas terrorist operatives while in Jordan, and that Hamas' Jordanian headquarters had been involved in their recruitment.** They claimed **they had undergone military training in the Gaza Strip** and were then sent to Judea and Samaria **to recruit other operatives and raise money** for military-terrorist activities. **They received instructions from Hamas handlers in the Gaza Strip.**

■ **The operatives set up a laboratory in an apartment in the center of Nablus,** where they kept raw materials and the equipment necessary to manufacture explosives for terrorist attacks. During Operation Protective Edge they were instructed to carry out terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria, but the instructions were not followed. **Of the six terrorist operatives detained, two were students at Al-Najah University in Nablus** (Israel Security Agency, March 22, 2015). **The Hamas student movement at Al-Najah University is a hotbed of anti-Israeli incitement and terrorism.**³

Attempted Vehicular Attack

■ On **March 17, 2015,** a Palestinian attempted **to run over an IDF soldier at the Gush Etzion junction.** There were no casualties and no damage was reported. The vehicle suspected of being used in the attack was stopped in the region of Halhul

³ For Hamas activity in Al-Najah University, see the March 8, 2015 bulletin "[Incitement to terrorism by the Hamas student association at Al-Najah University in Nablus.](#)"

(near Hebron), and the driver was detained for questioning (IDF Spokesman, March 17, 2015).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The Crossings – Recent Developments

The Rafah Crossing

- **The Rafah crossing remains closed.** In view of its continued closure, the owners of companies that organize pilgrimages to Mecca appealed to Mahmoud Abbas to intervene personally to rescue the pilgrimage season. They noted the heavy financial losses they had incurred from the lack of pilgrimage tourism (Safa.ps, March 18, 2015).

The Kerem Shalom Crossing

- **Nazmi Muhanna**, PA director of the Gaza Strip crossings, reported the **continuation of the work to enlarge the Kerem Shalom crossing.** The crossing would be widened, he said, to allow for the entrance of 25 trucks carrying gas balloons to enter the Gaza Strip every day (Alresala.net, March 19, 2015).

Reconstructing the Gaza Strip

- After a visit to the Gaza Strip, **Mohammed al-Emadi**, chairman of the Qatari committee for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, claimed that **the oversight apparatus put in place by UN Special Coordinator Robert Serry was a failure.** He claimed that 90% of the cement entering the Gaza Strip **was sold on the black market** because it was too expensive for the people to whom it had been consigned. He said that during his visit a plan had been devised for the delivery of building materials for **Qatar's project for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. The plan included the daily delivery of 1,000 tons of building materials through the Kerem Shalom crossing.** He added that would soon result in a sense of relief among Gazans vis-à-vis the reconstruction.

- **Al-Emadi** claimed that Qatar was coordinating directly with Israel and that his committee had provided Israel with reports about its activities. He claimed he felt Israel had a genuine desire to advance the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and improve the Gazans' living conditions (Alresala.net, March 17, 2015).



Mufid Hassayna, PA minister of housing and public works, and Mohammed al-Emadi, chairman of the Qatari committee for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, launch the Sheikh Hamed bin Khalifa housing project. One thousand dwelling units will be built for families whose houses were damaged during Operation Protective Edge (Facebook page of the PA's ministry of housing and public works, March 17, 2015).

- However, **Hamas spokesmen continue accusing the PA of responsibility for the delay in reconstructing the Gaza Strip**. Hamas spokesman **Sami Abu Zuhri** expressed his appreciation for the support of Qatar. He claimed the aid from Qatar exposed the obstacles that the PA raised to the reconstruction process. Senior Hamas figure **Ismail Radwan** claimed the PA was worried by the aid Qatar sent to the Gaza Strip because it exposed the PA's failure to promote the reconstruction (Alwatanvoice.com, March 17, 2015).

Egyptian Security Activity

- During **Egyptian security force activities** to counter jihadist operatives in the Sinai Peninsula, **194 new tunnel openings were reportedly discovered near the Egypt-Gaza Strip border**. The Egyptian media reported that two of the tunnels were large "strategic tunnels," equipped with control rooms with pipes for fuel, electric cables and underground telephone wires. The Egyptians estimated **the length of the tunnels as up to two kilometers**. Other tunnel openings were discovered when the tunnels were blown up, some of them located in agricultural lands and some in residential buildings. Communications equipment and weapons, including anti-tank missiles and explosives, were found in the tunnels (Facebook page of the Egyptian security forces, March 21, 2015).

Hamas Propaganda Targeting Western Public Opinion

- Hamas launched a propaganda campaign on its Twitter account, during which senior Hamas figures responded to people tweeting questions from various foreign countries. Hamas promised direct answers from its senior figures themselves. The campaign was conducted in English and **was aimed at Western audiences**.

- **Ismail Haniya**, former head of the de-facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip and currently deputy head of Hamas' political bureau participated in the campaign. Before he answered tweeted questions, he issued a statement claiming Hamas was a movement that struggled against only Israel [i.e., not against Egypt] and that Hamas had no objection to a "just peace agreement" that included "the liberation of the Palestinian territories" and "the realization of the rights of the Palestinian people [i.e., the "liberation" of all "Palestine" achieved through the destruction of the State of Israel]. **Ismail Haniya** also claimed that Hamas favored moderate rather than radical Islam (Aa.com.tr, March 16, 2015).

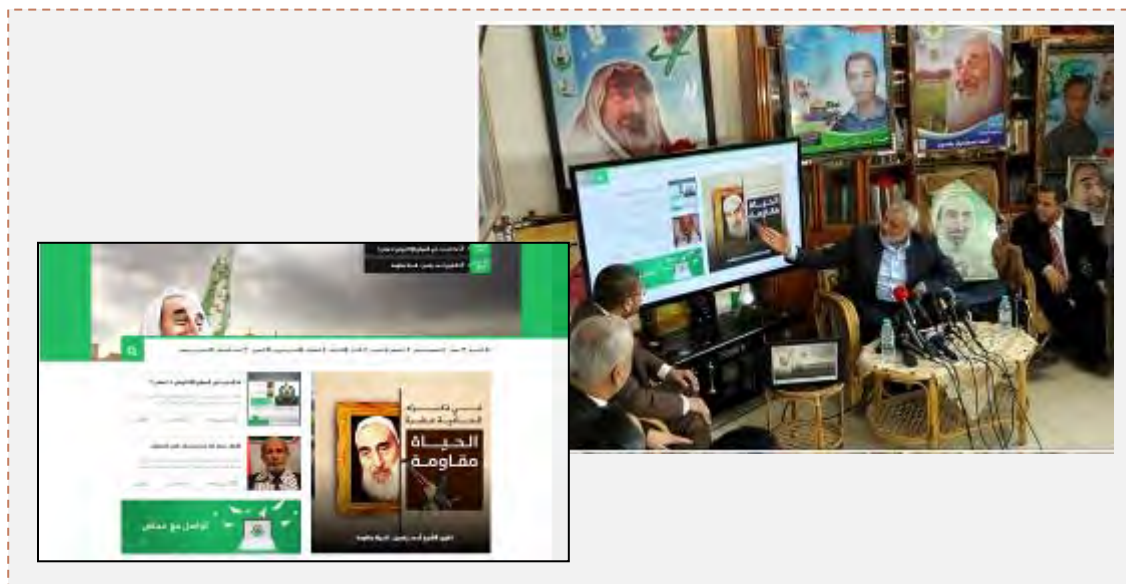
- One of the questions Ismail Haniya was asked was **whether Hamas would accept a lull of five years in the hostilities against Israel in return for an airport and a sea port** (See below). Haniya responded that international agencies had made that proposal but Hamas was still deliberating it (Aa.com.tr, March 16, 2015). As to **Hamas' relations with Egypt**, Haniya claimed Egypt's political leadership had told Hamas that the ruling of the Egyptian Court for Urgent Matters [which designated Hamas as a terrorist organization] would not influence Egypt's relations with Hamas. Haniya also claimed that Hamas' military wing had not intended to harm civilians during Operation Protective Edge (**Note**: The claim is an absurd fabrication, because the thousands of rockets Hamas and the other terrorist organizations fired from the Gaza Strip targeted populated Israeli areas to kill and maim Israeli civilians).

Hamas Launches a New Website

- On March 22, 2015, **Hamas launched its new official website**. The ceremony was held at the house of Hamas movement founder **Ahmed Yassin** and was sponsored by **Ismail Haniya**. Haniya praised **Musa Abu Marzouq**, head of Hamas' information office and responsible for the new website. He said it would be the Hamas movement's official platform and everyone could use it to contact Hamas and learn about its policies (Al-Aqsa TV, March 22, 2015).

- **Hamas considers the battle for heart and minds to be of primary importance, thus the new website was an addition to its already vast propaganda machine.**

The website will feature official Hamas announcements, Hamas-edited news, responses from Hamas spokesmen and information about Hamas operatives killed and imprisoned. Through the website surfers can ask senior Hamas figures questions and receive answers. **The site also has a Facebook page and a Twitter account.**



Left: The homepage of Hamas' new internet site. Right: Ismail Haniya launches the new official website at the house of Hamas founder Ahmed Yassin (Facebook page of the new official Hamas movement website, March 22, 2015).

Proposed Lull in the Hamas-Israel Hostilities

■ Sources within Hamas are still deliberating an international proposal for a long-term lull agreement. The agreement reportedly includes a pause in any armed conflict with Israel and the lifting of the so-called "siege" of the Gaza Strip. According to claims from Hamas, no decision has yet been reached. **Taher al-Nunu**, a member of Hamas' information department, claimed Hamas was deliberating the proposal, which would complete the efforts to stabilize the ceasefire. Al-Nunu claimed Hamas would put the proposal before the other organizations and consult with them to arrive at a unified position (Sawt al-Aqsa Radio, March 18, 2015).

Students in the Al-Futuwwa Program Hold a Military Display

- On March 16, 2015, the Al-Futuwwa Battalions⁴ held a military display in the Gaza Strip, with the participation of the educational administration. The theme of the display was "Prepare to build your homeland." Participants included school children in military uniforms; some of them carried weapons (some of which were made of wood). They performed military exercises, among them the simulated abduction of an IDF soldier. They also simulated the infiltration of Hamas naval commando operatives into the Israeli village of Zikim from the sea during Operation Protective Edge.
- Present at the display were senior Hamas figures and senior members of the Hamas-controlled security forces. Sa'ad al-Asouli, Al-Futuwwa director for the central Gaza Strip, claimed Al-Futuwwa's objective was to create a generation that would take upon itself "to liberate the occupied territories and restore the rights stolen by the Zionist enemy..." (Website of the Palestinian ministry of the interior in the Gaza Strip, March 16, 2015; PALDF, March 18, 2015).



Left: Display in which Al-Futuwwa program participants in diving suits simulate the Hamas naval commando infiltration into the village of Zikim during Operation Protective Edge. Right: Uniformed and armed Al-Futuwwa program participants (PALDF, March 18, 2015).

⁴ Al-Futuwwa is a program instituted in the schools in the Gaza Strip which gives pupils military training. The Al-Futuwwa Battalions are, in ITIC assessment, a semi-military framework composed of graduates of the Al-Futuwwa school program. For further information about Al-Futuwwa, see the May 8, 2013 bulletin ["Hamas has introduced a program in Gaza Strip schools called Al-Futuwwa, which provides military training for tens of thousands of adolescent boys."](#)

The UN Investigation of Operation Protective Edge

■ During a discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict held at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) **Mary Davis**, head of the UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) into the events of Operation Protective Edge, issued a report about the commission's activities to date. She claimed the commission had tried to obtain permission to enter the Gaza Strip from Israel a number of times, but that so far no response had been received. The commission appealed to Egypt and received a positive answer, however the security situation had so far made it impossible for the commission to enter the Gaza Strip. She emphasized that the commission members were still prepared to enter as soon as it was made possible. **She also said that the commission had requested more time to submit its report so the members could study the large amount of information received from both sides and to deal with the complex legal issues raised during the commission's work** (Webtv.un.org, March 23, 2015).

■ **Danny Efroni, Chief Military Advocate General of the IDF, ordered an investigation of the involvement of IDF soldiers in six atypical incidents that occurred during Operation Protective Edge.** Among them were an attack on an UNRWA school in Jabaliya, the alleged beating of detained Gazans and two instances of looting. The six cases are **in addition to the 65 incidents** which have already been transferred to the IDF General Staff's mechanism for inquiries (IDF Spokesman, March 20, 2015).

The Palestinian Authority

Palestinian Reactions to Israel's Elections Results

The Palestinian Authority

■ The Palestinian media gave extensive coverage to the elections in Israel. It was particularly intensive on election day itself, during which Palestinian TV deviated from its usual broadcasting schedule and provided ongoing election coverage. Most of the programs targeted Israel's Arab population and dealt with the Joint Arab List. Commentators in the studio and correspondents on the ground **often repeated the call to Israeli Arabs to exploit the opportunity and use their right to vote in order to strengthen their influence in the Knesset** (the Israeli parliament).

■ Benjamin Netanyahu's landslide victory **surprised the PA**, despite predictions that Israel's right wing would increase in strength. However, **official PA spokesmen**

repeatedly claimed that the elections were an internal Israeli matter. For example, the Palestinian foreign ministry said in a statement that it was an internal Israeli matter and that the foreign ministry was committed to negotiating with whatever Israeli government was formed, without taking the composition of the coalition into consideration. PA spokesman **Nabil Abu Rudeina** claimed the Palestinians had no interest in who would be prime minister but would insist upon their demand that the next government recognize the two-state solution and that east Jerusalem would be the capital of the Palestinian state. It was on that basis that the Palestinians would continue to cooperate with any Israeli government [provided it was] committed to international decisions (QNN, March 18, 2015).

■ Senior PA spokesmen **expressed concern over the election campaign and remarks made during it.** They claimed the Palestinians planned to appeal to international institutions, including the ICC in The Hague, to realize the Palestinians' "rights." Some of the remarks made were the following:

- **Mahmoud Abbas** expressed deep concern over so-called "Israeli statements" made during the election campaign about the end of the two-state solution, although he claimed it was nothing new. He said that the Palestinians had the right to appeal to anywhere in the world they chose to realize their rights according to international law (Wafa.ps, March 19, 2015).
- **Saeb Erekat**, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee, claimed Israelis had voted for the end of the peace process. He claimed that after Benjamin Netanyahu had won the election, the world had to support the Palestinians' efforts to join international conventions and the ICC in The Hague (Al-ayyam.com, March 18, 2015).
- **Nimr Hamad**, political advisor to Mahmoud Abbas, claimed Mahmoud Abbas was completely convinced the Israeli prime minister has not interested a two-state solution and had no faith in it. He claimed the Palestinian leadership was trying to convince world public opinion that Israel was the side preventing a solution from being reached. He added that the Palestinians now had a greater opportunity to appeal to the ICC and/or other international institutions (Palestinian TV, March 19, 2015).
- **The PLO's Executive Committee** condemned Benjamin Netanyahu's so-called "racist campaign." It called on all regional and international agencies to

stop the Israeli right's so-called "destructive program," which harmed the peace process and solidified the "occupation" and "racism" (Wafa.ps, March 19, 2015).



Cartoon from Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda, the PA's official publication. It shows Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu on a winner's podium of dead Palestinians (Alhayat-j.com, March 19, 2015).

Hamas

■ After the election projections had been released, and later, with the final results, senior Hamas figures claimed there was no difference between any of the Israeli political parties, all of which harmed the Palestinian people's "rights" [i.e., from Hamas's perspective, the election results were meaningless]. Hamas spokesman **Sami Abu Zuhri** claimed that all the Israeli political parties harmed the "rights" of the Palestinian people. He claimed no party that came to power could be trusted (Facebook page of Sami Abu Zuhri, March 17, 2015). Hamas spokesman **Husam Badran** claimed that the results of the elections obligated the PA and the Fatah leadership to make a "strategic decision" regarding the implementation of the internal Palestinian reconciliation agreement and the end of all relations with Israel (Facebook page of Husam Badran, March 17, 2015).

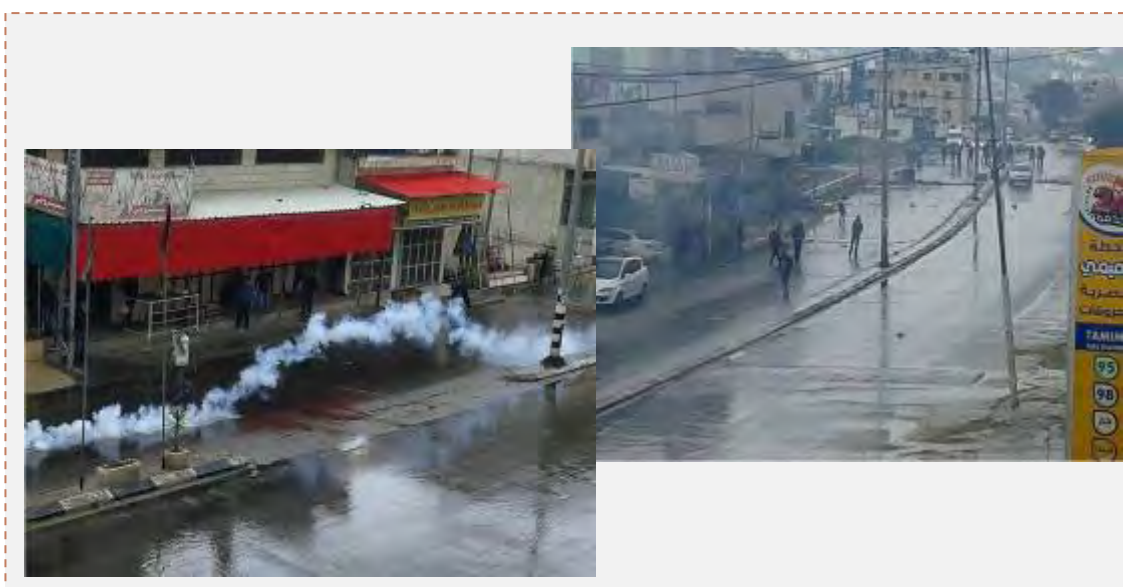
The Issue of Security Coordination with Israel

■ On March 19, 2015, a meeting of the **PLO's Executive Committee** was held in Ramallah, **headed by Mahmoud Abbas**. Under discussion were recommendations made by the PLO's Central Council regarding the PA's security coordination with Israel and a reexamination of relations with Israel. **The Executive Committee voted to appoint a committee**, in collaboration with the PA security forces, **to formulate a program to end security coordination and economic ties with Israel**. In all

probability, at this stage the decision to end security coordination is **not yet operative**.

Clashes Continue in the Refugee Camps in Judea and Samaria

■ This past week clashes continued in the Balata (Nablus) and Jenin refugee camps between camp residents and the Palestinian security forces. The Palestinian media reported that two children were seriously injured during riots held on March 20, 2015 between the Palestinian security forces and residents of the Balata refugee camp. **Jamal al-Tirawi**, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, said that **Mahmoud Abbas** and **Rami Hamdallah** [PA prime minister] had to personally intervene (Maannews.net and Alresala.net, March 20, 2015).



Clashes in the Balata refugee camp between Palestinian residents and the Palestinian security forces (Facebook page of PALDF, March 21, 2015).