



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (August 12 – 18, 2020)

Overview

- ▶ **The violence near the Gaza Strip border initiated by Hamas continues.** Dozens of IED and incendiary balloons were launched daily and riots were held near the border fence at night. **On August 16, 2020, two rockets were fired at Israel**, one of which blew up near a house in the southern Israeli city of Sderot. In ITIC assessment the rockets were launched to send Israel the message not to overreact to balloon terrorism and other acts of violence.
- ▶ **In response, the IDF attacked targets in the Gaza Strip, most of them belonging to Hamas.** The IDF also attacked the squads launching the balloons. In addition Israel closed the Kerem Shalom Crossing to the transfer of goods and fuel (which led to a reduction in the supply of electricity) and limited the fishing zone off Gaza's coast.
- ▶ In the wake of tension in security, an Egyptian General Intelligence delegation arrived in Gaza and met with the Hamas leadership to prevent an overall escalation. **The visit was apparently a failure.** Hamas (according to media reports) presented **a series of demands accompanied by threats.** Balloon terrorism continued **during the Egyptian delegation's visit (August 17, 2020) and afterwards** as well.
- ▶ There was stabbing attack in the Old City of Jerusalem. **A Palestinian from a nearby town stabbed and wounded a Border Police fighter.** The Palestinian was shot and killed. **The attack received support from the Palestinian leadership:** Ahmed al-Majdalani, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee, condemned the killing of the Palestinian terrorist, calling it a "crime" and adding that the Palestinian file against Israel on the International Criminal Court's desk was growing in size. In the meantime the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails at civilian Israeli vehicles on the roads in Judea and Samaria continues without abatement.
- ▶ **The agreement to normalize Israel-UAE relations has led to a wave of strong protest from the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Palestinian terrorist organizations.** It has been described as "a knife in the Palestinians' backs." The Palestinians are considering how to respond. In the meantime, Mahmoud Abbas ordered **the immediate recall of the**

Palestinian ambassador from the UAE. In its determined rejection of the agreement the PA found itself in the company of Iran and Turkey, which lead the Arab-Muslim world in rejecting it. **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, spoke with Mohammad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister,** who said he had faith in the capabilities of the Palestinians and the Palestinian "resistance" organizations [i.e., terrorist organizations] to cause the agreement to fail.

Covid-19 Infection – Overview

Judea and Samaria¹

This past week there was a rise in the number of new Covid-19 cases in the PA territories. According to a report from the ministry of health in Ramallah, as of August 18, 2020, the number of **active cases stood at 7,233**, of them, 4,315 were in the Hebron district. The number of active cases also rose in the Jerusalem district, to 1,826. Of all the active cases, 24 are in ICUs and seven are on ventilators. So far there have been **116 deaths**.

► **The opening of the high school year in Judea and Samaria on August 9 led to the infection of many students and faculty.** Where active cases were detected, schools closed and students and faculty were quarantined. Nevertheless, elementary school students expect to return to their studies on September 6, 2020, subject to various restrictions announced by the Palestinian ministry of education. Other epicenters of infection are crowded events, especially weddings. The Palestinian minister of health warned that a general lockdown might be imposed because of the rise in the number of active cases, and because about 80% of the population does not follow public health guidelines (Filastin al-Yawm, August 17, 2020).

The Gaza Strip

► On August 17, 2020, the ministry of health in Gaza announced **eight new active Covid-19 cases**, all of them currently isolated in quarantine centers. Five returned to Gaza through the Erez Crossing and three through the Rafah Crossing (Dunia al-Watan, August 17, 2020). **The number of active cases in Gaza now stands at 19**, all being treated in quarantine centers. This past week about 1,800 Palestinians returned to the Gaza Strip through the Rafah Crossing and were sent to quarantine centers which had been prepared to receive them. They will remain in the centers for 21 days. Sources in the Gaza Strip noted the difficulty in

¹ For further information, see the August 17, 2020 bulletin, "The spread of Covid-19 in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip."

receiving large numbers of returning residents since it can be assumed that some of them will carry the virus.

The Deterioration of the Security Situation in the South

After about half a year of relative quiet, since the beginning of August 2020 the security situation along the Gaza Strip border has been deteriorating, the result of a Hamas initiative. Hamas has now shaken off its self-imposed restraint and **renewed its controlled violence against Israel**, so far with the daily launching of **dozens of IED and incendiary balloons**, and recently with nightly riots near the border fence. There were also two instances of rocket fire.²

► Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the other terrorist organizations in Gaza support balloon terrorism and other forms of violence. They describe launching balloons as **the "popular activity" of "young Palestinians" who are determined to continue the "popular resistance"** [i.e., popular terrorism]. Senior Hamas figures publicly stress that Israel is responsible for the deterioration in security because of **its "siege" of the Gaza Strip, manifested by fact that the rehabilitation projects Israel promised have not been implemented.** The senior Hamas figures claim they will defend the balloon launchers and retaliate if harm comes to them.

► Israel, which regards the Hamas administration as responsible for every event in the Gaza Strip, has responded by attacking targets, mainly those belonging to Hamas; firing tank shells at balloon-launching squads; closing the Kerem Shalom Crossing to the transfer of goods and fuel, which has led to a decrease in the supply of electricity (see below) and closing the fishing zone.

Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

Rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel

► **At around one in the morning on August 16, 2020, several rockets were fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip.** Two rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system. One rocket blew up near a house in the southern city of Sderot. A man was wounded by flying

² For further information, see the August 17, 2020, bulletin, "Deterioration of the security situation along the Gaza Strip border (updated to August 17, 2020)."

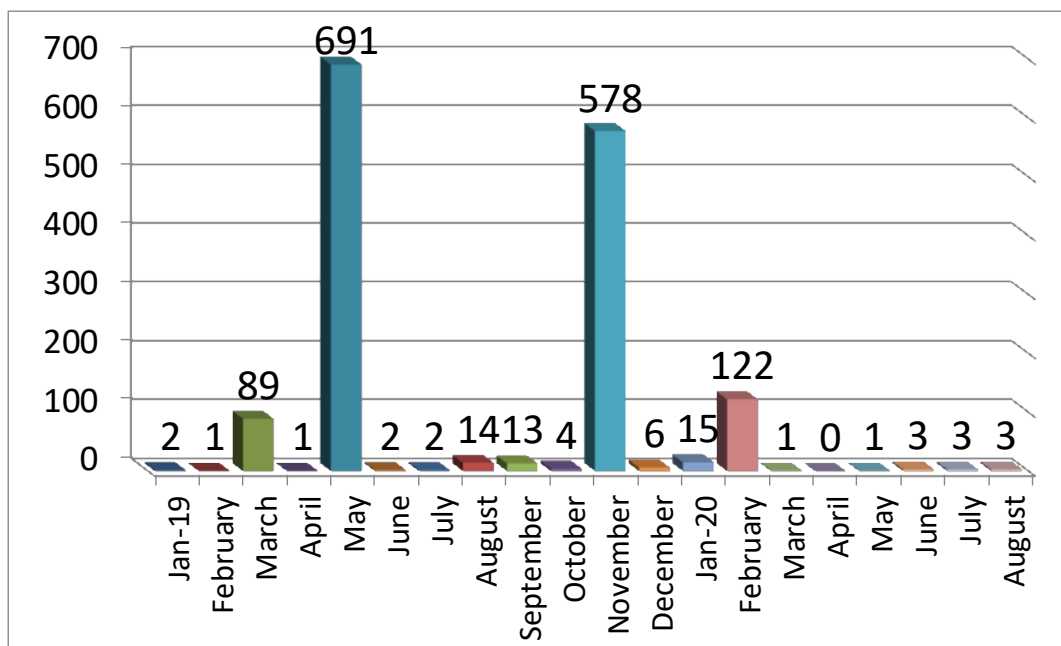
glass, two women were injured while running to a shelter, and two women were treated for shock. The house was damaged (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, August 16, 2020). No organization claimed responsibility for the rocket fire.



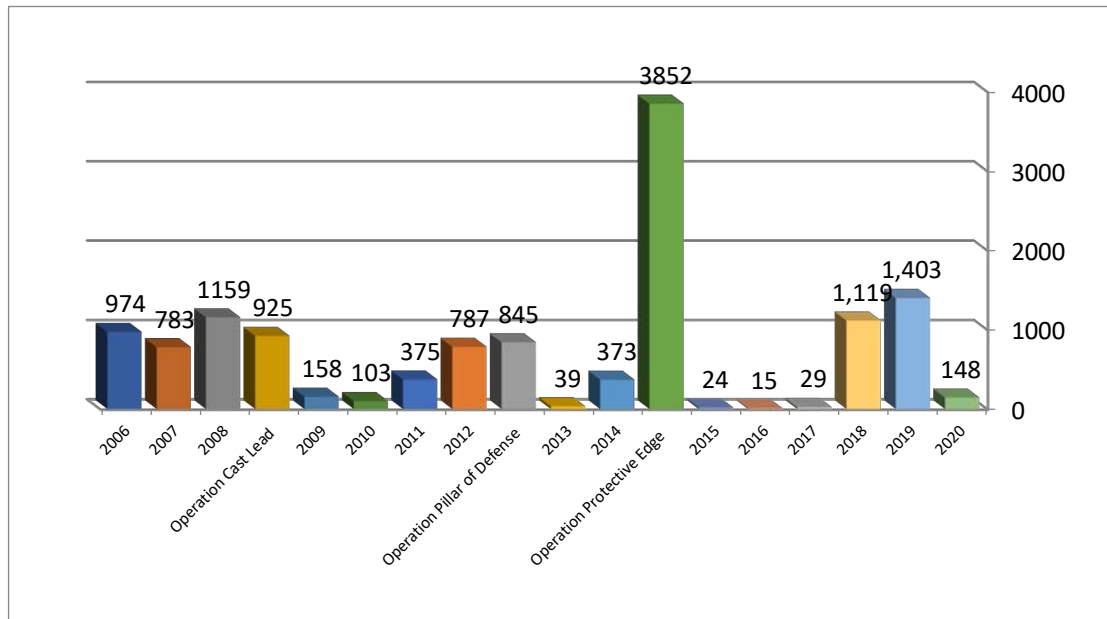
The house damaged by rocket fire in Sderot (Right: Twitter account of Almog Boker. Left: Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, August 16, 2020).

►In response to the rocket fire IDF aircraft attacked a number of Hamas targets, including a military facility for the rocket storage (IDF spokesman, August 16, 2020). The Palestinian media reported that Hamas' al-Qadisiya military wing post (in western Khan Yunis) was attacked, as were the Asqalan post (an observation post of Hamas' naval force, located in western Beit Lahia) and a post of Hamas' restraint force in the eastern part of the al-Zeitoun neighborhood in eastern Gaza City.

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



Balloon terrorism

► On August 17, 2020, incendiary balloons were responsible for about 20 epicenters of fires in the communities near the Gaza Strip border. Most of the fires were in overgrown fields. An incendiary balloon caused a fire in a kindergarten in Sderot. There were no casualties because the building was empty. In response to the ongoing balloon launches IDF aircraft attacked underground Hamas facilities (IDF spokesman, August 17, 2020).



Kindergarten in Sderot where the incendiary balloon landed (Twitter account of Kan News, August 17, 2020).



From a Sons of al-Zawari video documenting the launching of IED and incendiary balloons by the unit's operatives, targeting Israeli communities in the western Negev. The unit is affiliated with Hamas (Sons of al-Zawari in eastern Khan Yunis Facebook page, August 17, 2018).



Right: An operative of the PIJ's Baraq units launches an incendiary balloon cluster (Facebook page of the northern Gaza Strip Baraq unit, August 17, 2020). Left: An operative of the Ahfad al-Nasser network launches balloon clusters. The inscription on the balloon reads, "Not the Egyptian delegation and not anything else" (Paldf, August 17, 2020).

Egyptian mediation attempt

In the wake of the deterioration in the security situation an Egyptian General Intelligence delegation arrived in the Gaza Strip, headed by General Ahmed Abd al-Khalq, who holds the Palestinian portfolio. Before they arrived in Gaza they visited Ramallah and met with members of Fatah's Central Committee and with Majed Faraj, head of PA general intelligence (Wafa, August 17, 2020). In the Gaza Strip they met with senior figures from Hamas and the other terrorist organizations (Shehab Twitter account, August 17, 2020). The following day, while the Egyptian delegation was still in Gaza, **the violence initiated by Hamas and the other terrorist organizations continued unchanged.**



The Egyptian delegation arrives in the Gaza Strip (Palestine Online, August 17, 2020).

►The Palestinian media reported that Hamas told the Egyptian delegation that "**Palestinian patience has run out,**" and that the "popular activities" along the fence would stop only after a new agreement had been reached. In addition, according to reports, **the Palestinians are prepared for an escalation and do not fear a broad confrontation. Hamas noted its demands, which it claimed were part of the lull agreement but never implemented,** including the extension of the fishing zone to 20 nautical miles; a new power cable for the Gaza Strip, funded by Qatar; replacing the diesel fuel used by the power plant in Gaza with gas; facilitating export and import and allowing the import of dual-purpose substances; the establishment of two industrial zones; an increase in the number of trucks entering the Gaza Strip through the Kerem Shalom Crossing to 1,200 a day; and an increase in the number of

work permits given to Palestinians (the Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese newspaper al-Akhbar, August 18, 2020).

►In another report, Palestinian sources said that the talks between Hamas and the Egyptian delegation were tense, and that Hamas demands included doubling the funding the Gaza Strip receives from Qatar every month to money for 200,000 needy families; removing restrictions on exports and imports; increasing the number of work permits for Israel to 100,000; employment programs for university graduates and [unskilled] workers, supervised by the UN; extending the fishing zone to 20 nautical miles; ceasing the harassment of fishermen; and keeping the Kerem Shalom Crossing permanently open (Amad, August 17, 2020).

►After the Egyptian delegation left the Gaza Strip a number of terrorist networks said **they would not only continue but also increase the launching of IED and incendiary balloons** (Telegram channels and Facebook pages of the networks, August 18, 2020).

Judea and Samaria

Stabbing attack in the Old City of Jerusalem

A Palestinian terrorist attacked a Border Police fighter near the Lions' Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem. On the evening of August 17, 2018, the Palestinian went to the Border Police station at the entrance to the Temple Mount and stabbed and seriously wounded a fighter. He was shot and killed. A woman passerby was slightly injured (Israel Police Force Jerusalem district spokesman's unit, August 17, 2020).



Right: The Palestinian terrorist attacks the Border Police fighter. Left: The knife used by the terrorist (Israel Police Force Jerusalem district spokesman's unit, August 17, 2020).

►The Palestinian media reported that the Palestinian was Ashraf Hassan Atallah Halsa, 30, from al-Sawahera al-Sharqia, south of Abu Dis near the east Jerusalem neighborhoods (Wafa, August 17, 2020). **As usual, the terrorist attack received support from the Palestinian leadership.** Ahmed Majdalani, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee, condemned the killing of the terrorist, calling it another crime on the list of the crimes Israel commits against the Palestinians. He also said the Palestinian file against Israel on the International Criminal Court's desk was growing in size (Dunia al-Watan, August 18, 2018).



Ashraf Halsa, Palestinian terrorist
(Anata al-Hadath Facebook page, August 17, 2018).

►**Hamis issued praise for Ashraf Halsa's family and for the inhabitants of al-Sawahera al-Sharqia, who "sacrifice their sons to defend al-Aqsa mosque."** Hamas called the "heroic" stabbing attack a message to those who normalize relations with Israel, who have "forgotten al-Aqsa mosque" and their obligation to defend it (Hamis website, August 18, 2020). **Yusuf al-Hassayna, a member of the PIJ political bureau,** praised the attack, saying that young jihad fighters in Jerusalem prove, despite Israel ("the Zionist entity") and despite the Arabs who normalize relations with Israel, that their spirit cannot be broken (PIJ website, August 17, 2020).

Shots fired at Palestinian at the Qalandia Crossing

►Civilian security guards at the Qalandia Crossing noticed a suspicious-looking Palestinian near the vehicle crossing, a location off limits to pedestrian traffic. They called out to him a number of times, and when he did not halt they shot at his legs. An initial investigation ascertained that the Palestinian was hard of hearing and had a speech impediment, and therefore had not heard the guards (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, August 17, 2020).



**Scene of the incident at the Qalandia Crossing
(QudsN Facebook page, August 17, 2020).**

► Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem said that wounding a Palestinian with special needs at the Qalandia Crossing reflected the "sadism of IDF soldiers" and the extent of the terrorism carried out by Israel ("the occupation") against the Palestinians (Hamas website, August 17, 2018).

Terrorist attack at Rachel's Tomb prevented

► On August 17, 2020, IDF soldiers noticed a Palestinian about to throw a Molotov cocktail at Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem. They shot at him and prevented the attack (IDF spokesman, August 17, 2020).

Other events

► In Judea and Samaria Palestinians continued throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli civilian Israeli vehicles and security forces. The more prominent events were the following (all information and reports from Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria unless otherwise noted):

- ◆ **August 17, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle southeast of Bethlehem. No casualties were reported.

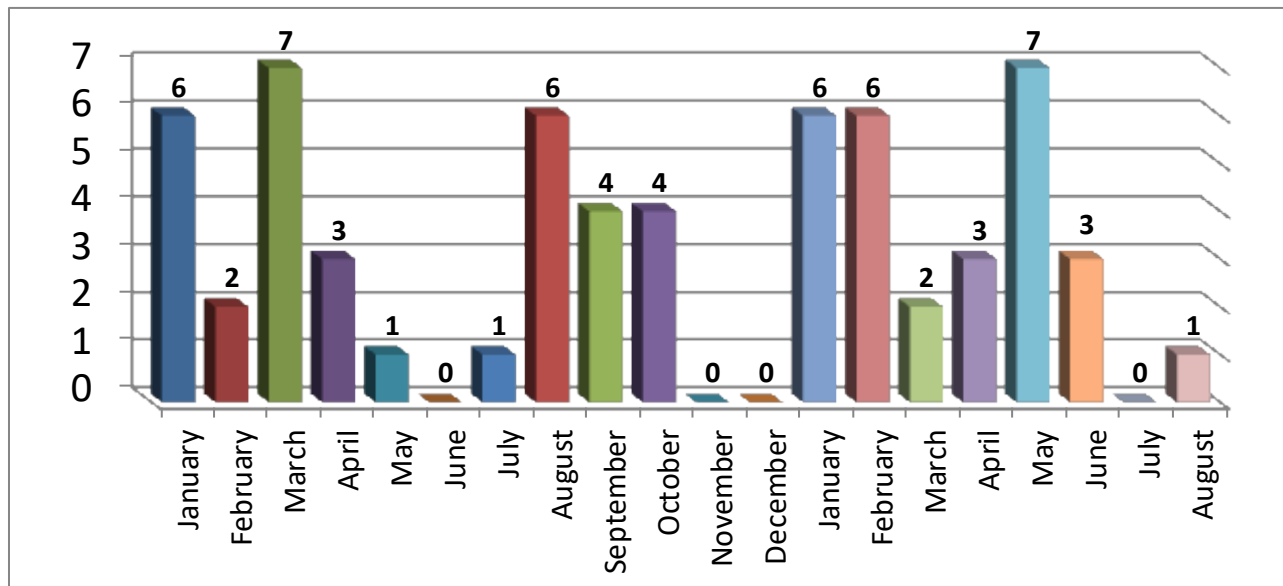
- ◆ **August 17, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus north of Hebron. No casualties were reported.

- ◆ **August 17, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle northwest of Ramallah. No casualties were reported

- ◆ **August 17, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle southeast of Bethlehem. No casualties were reported.

- ◆ **August 16, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle southeast of Tulkarm. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **August 16, 2020** – A pipe bomb was thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle south of Jerusalem. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **August 16, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle north of Hebron. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **August 13, 2020** – Two pipe bombs were placed on the road south of Jerusalem. Demolitions experts neutralized them.
- ◆ **August 12, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle south of Nablus. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **August 12, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli vehicle west of Ariel. No casualties were reported.
- ◆ **August 12, 2020** – Stones were thrown at a civilian Israeli bus southwest of Bethlehem. No casualties were reported.

Significant terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria since January 2019³



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

Developments in the Gaza Strip

Gaza power plant shutdown

►The energy authority in Gaza announced that starting at 10:00 on August 18, 2020, the power plant in Gaza would shut down because there was no longer fuel to operate it, none having been transferred through the Kerem Shalom Crossing since August 12, 2020. The authority said Israel would be responsible for the consequences (Dunia al-Watan, August 16, 2020). The electric company in Gaza said the shutdown of the power plant would influence the supply of electricity and residents would have fewer hours of electric power. The company called on the local population to take the necessary precautionary measures to cope with the expected lack of electricity and to reduce their consumption (Dunia al-Watan, August 16, 2020).

Isma'il Haniyeh's family prevented from leaving the Gaza Strip

►Sources close to Hamas in Doha, Qatar, reported that **Egypt had prevented the wife of Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, and other family members from leaving the Gaza Strip** through the Rafah Crossing (on the days it was open for civilian passage). According to the sources, Haniyeh contacted senior Egyptian officials to gain permission for his wife and family to leave the Gaza Strip, but **his request was denied**. His family was supposed to have flown from Egypt to Turkey and from there to Qatar. According to the sources, Haniyeh is not planning to settle outside Gaza, but he is expected to be absent for many months (al-Quds, August 14, 2020).

Hamas activity in Turkey

►Hamas reported that on August 12, 2020, Isma'il Haniyeh had arrived in Turkey from Doha, where **he planned to hold meetings** (Hamas website, August 12, 2020).

►The Middle East correspondent for **the British daily newspaper The Telegraph** reported that **Turkey was giving citizenship to 12 senior Hamas figures, some of whom were living in Turkey under false names**. A "senior source" said that seven of the 12 had already received Turkish citizenship and passports, and the remaining five were undergoing procedures to receive them. In some instances their families had also received Turkish citizenship. It was also reported that the senior figures deal with raising funds and directing operatives to carry out terrorist attacks [in Israel]. Among the operatives who received Turkish citizenship and passports were **Zakariya Najib**, a senior Hamas operative who in the

past had supervised the plan to assassinate then-Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat and other Israeli public figures; **Jihad Yaghmour**, Hamas representative in Turkey, and **Hisham Hijaz**.

► **A spokesman for the Turkish government** refused to discuss "fabricated claims made against Turkey by a foreign government." A Hamas source rejected the accusations, saying that Hamas operatives did not operate outside the borders of the PA territories and none of them participated in terrorist activity (The Telegraph, August 13, 2020). **Turkey's activity is part of its broad support for the terrorist activity conducted by Hamas on Turkish soil.**⁴

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Initial reactions to the agreement between Israel and the UAE

On August 13, 2020, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and American president Trump announced that an agreement had been signed for normalization and diplomatic relations between Israel and the UAE, in return for Israel's suspension of its plan to impose Israeli law on territories in Judea and Samaria. Despite UAE efforts to represent the agreement as a way of halting Israel's annexation plan, **it led to a wave to strong reactions from the Palestinians, who described it as a "stab in the back."** Protest demonstrations were organized in a number of locations in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, although they were not particularly well-covered by the media and did not draw large numbers of participants. In its objection to the agreement, the PA found itself in league with Iran and Turkey, the leading opponents of the agreement in the Arab-Muslim world.

⁴ For further information, see the December 24, 2019 bulletin, Turkey as a Terrorism-Sponsoring State: Turkey allows Hamas to conduct terrorist activities from its territory, including the handling of terrorist squads in Judea and Samaria and the transfer of funds to Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip to finance terrorism."



Right: UAE flag burned at a demonstration in the village of Yatta (QudsN Facebook page, August 14, 2020). Left: Pictures of the Israeli prime minister Netanyahu, the American president and the Abu Dhabi crown prince "humiliated" with footprints at a march in Nablus (QudsN Facebook page, August 14, 2020).



Right: Pictures of the Israeli prime minister, the American president and the Abu Dhabi crown prince burned at a Hamas rally in the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, where senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan gave a speech (Facebook page of photojournalist Anas al-Sharif, August 15, 2020). Left: Burning pictures at a Hamas demonstration in Deir al-Balah (QudsN Facebook page, August 16, 2020).

►The PA convened an emergency meeting of the leadership to formulate ways to respond. Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas, said the leadership would hold meetings in the coming days to agree on how to proceed regarding the agreement (Sawa, August 16, 2020). In the meantime, **Mahmoud Abbas ordered the immediately recall of Issam Masalha, the Palestinian ambassador to the UAE** who arrived through the Allenby Bridge on August 16, 2020. According to Jibril Rajoub, **he is not expected to return to the UAE** (al-Quds, August 16, 2020).

►In the wake of the agreement the Palestinians are attempting to organize **joint protest activities**. According to Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem all the organizations have agreed on a number of such activities to combat the normalization of relations (Sawa, August 17, 2020). Ahmed al-Mudallal, senior PIJ figure, said they were making preparations for a series of "national activities" of all the Palestinian organizations, including a mass march (Filastin al-

Yawm, August 17, 2020). One of the protest activities was a popular campaign to burn pictures of UAE rulers in Arab countries. Campaign operatives called on Arabs around the globe to participate in the activities and demonstrate their rejection of the UAE's normalization of relations with Israel (Filastin al-Yawm, August 17, 2020).

►According to reports, **Hamas and Fatah are considering holding a joint march and rally in the Gaza Strip** with all the terrorist organizations. They have not yet agreed how to hold it. A previous attempt to organize a joint rally against the imposition of Israeli law on territories in Judea and Samaria failed because Hamas and Fatah could not agree about where it would be held and who would speak.

►The following are reactions to the agreement from the PA, the PLO and Hamas:

◆**Saeb Erekat, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee**, said the UAE was the first Arab state to sign a full peace and normalization agreement with Israel. He said the **PA was saddened by the UAE's encouragement of Israel's actions, including the annexation plan**. He said they had asked the UAE to change its mind, and appealed to the Arab League, since the UAE had deviated from Arab League decisions (Wafa, August 16, 2020).

◆**Hassan al-Sheikh, chairman of the authority for civilian affairs**, called on all the [terrorist] organizations to formulate a "national strategy" to defend the Palestinian cause. He called the agreement signed by the UAE a "knife in the backs of the shaheeds, the wounded and the Palestinian prisoners" (Sawa, August 16, 2020).

◆**Jibril Rajoub, secretary of Fatah's Central Committee**, called for an escalation of the "popular resistance" [i.e., popular terrorism]. He said that following the agreement, and given Israel's determination to annex [territories in Judea and Samaria], the Palestinians had decided to escalate every practical and political form of the struggle (al-Jazeera, August 15, 2020).

◆**Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, spoke with Mahmoud Abbas, PIJ leader Ziyad al-Nakhalah and other senior terrorist organization figures, calling for cooperation against normalization. He also spoke with Mohammad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, who stressed that the Iranians opposed the agreement. Zarif expressed his faith in the capabilities of the Palestinians and the "resistance" to make the agreement fail (Hamas website, August 14, 2020).

◆ **Hamas spokesman Taher al-Nunu** called the agreement a "disaster." He said the UAE's excuse, that signing the agreement was meant to stop Israel's annexation plan, was baseless and misleading. He called on all Palestinians to close ranks, as they had when faced with the "deal of the century," and to strengthen all forms of "resistance." He said Isma'il Haniyeh and Mahmoud Abbas were in contact and that in the coming days several joint activities of all the organizations would be held (al-Jazeera, August 16, 2020).