



Spotlight on Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

(April 19-23, 2023)

Overview

- ▶ During the past five days Palestinians carried out one terrorist attack, shooting at a bus on the road between the Tapuah Junction and the settlement of Migdalim (southeast of Nablus). No casualties were reported but the bus was damaged. The Israeli security forces continued intensive counterterrorism activities in Judea and Samaria, focusing on Nablus, where they detained the shooter of the Sheikh Jarrah attack, and Jenin, where they detained three Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) terrorist operatives who were planning an terrorist attack inside Israel. The number of rock- and Molotov cocktail-throwing attacks decreased significantly.
- ▶ The Palestinians, like the rest of the Arab-Muslim world, celebrate Eid al-Fitr, which ends the month of Ramadan. The Palestinian Authority (PA) declared April 20 to 24, 2023, a holiday. About 120,000 worshippers participated in the morning holiday prayer on the Temple Mount. Then they chanted slogans in support of Hamas and the "resistance" [violence and terrorism directed against Israel]. The Israeli police were forced to take down several signs hung on the Temple Mount. The Palestinians accused the Israel Police Force of desecrating the Bab al-Rahma mosque, also on the Temple Mount.
- ▶ The Gaza Strip remained relatively calm. UNRWA distributed funds to families whose houses were destroyed during Operation Breaking Dawn (August 2022).
- ▶ Mahmoud Abbas paid a visit to Saudi Arabia, where he met with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman al-Saud. A Hamas delegation visited Saudi Arabia at the same time, having gone to Mecca to perform the Umrah, the lesser pilgrimage,¹ for the first time in several years. Apparently the delegation did not meet with representatives of the Saudi Arabian government.
- ▶ In preparation for the May 2023 Brussels Ad Hoc Liaison Committee conference (a meeting of the countries which donate money to the PA), the PA has again called on the international

¹ A pilgrimage to Mecca which can be undertaken at any time during the year.

community to exert pressure on Israel to stop deducting funds from the taxes it collects for the PA and to keep its promises.

Judea and Samaria

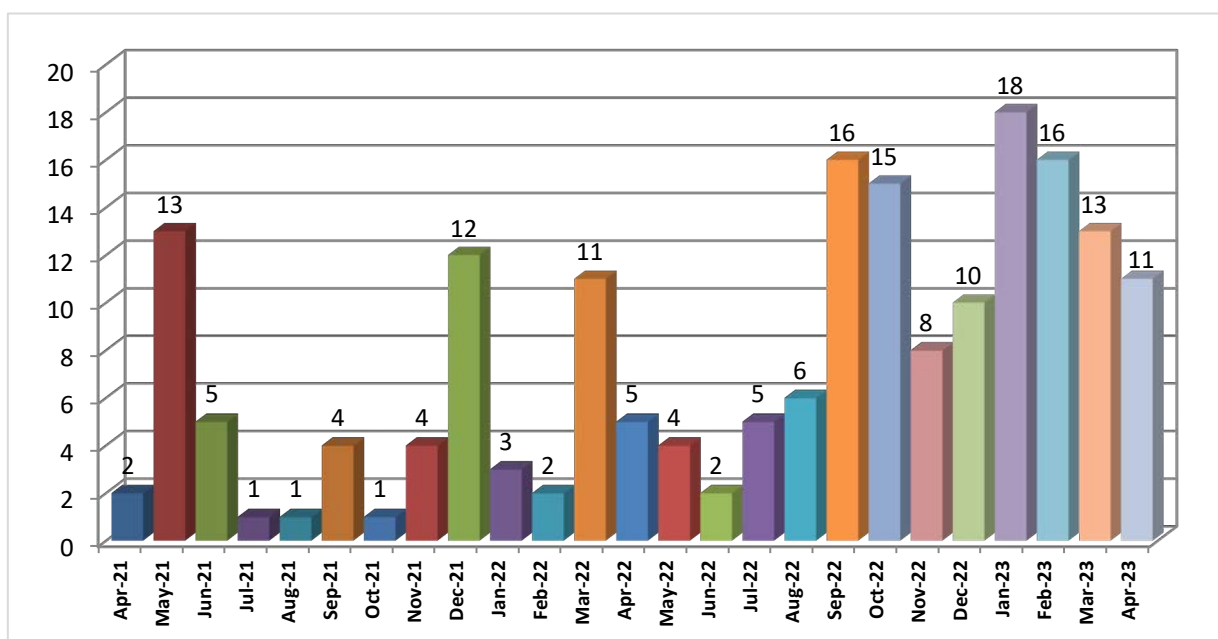
Shooting attack near the Tapuah Junction

► On the evening of April 19, 2023, shots were fired at an Israeli bus between the Tapuah Junction and the settlement of Migdalim (southeast of Nablus). No casualties were reported; bullet holes were found in the side of the bus. IDF forces searched the region for the shooters (IDF spokesman's Twitter account, April 19, 2023).



A bullet hole in the side of the bus (Rescue Without Borders in Judea and Samaria, April 19, 2023).

Critical Terrorist Attacks in Judea and Samaria since April 2021²



Counterterrorism Activities

► This past week the Israeli security forces continued intensive counterterrorism activities in Judea and Samaria, detaining Palestinians suspected of involvement in terrorism and confiscating large quantities of weapons. Their activities focused on Nablus and Jenin.

The Askar refugee camp in Nablus

► Before dawn on April 19, 2023, Israeli security forces operating in the Askar refugee camp in Nablus detained Ibrahim al-Zumour, 15 years old, who carried out the shooting attack in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem on April 18, 2023, wounding two Israelis. During interrogation he confessed. Several hours after the attack he posted documentation to his Facebook page (Israeli medial April 19, 2023). Immediately after the attack Hamas issued a call to the residents of east Jerusalem to protect the shooter and provide him with support.

² A critical 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.



Ibrahim al-Zumour, the 15 year-old shooter (Paldf Twitter account, April 19, 2023).

The Jenin refugee camp

► On the afternoon of April 18, 2023, Israeli security forces operated in the Jenin refugee camp to detain three wanted PIJ terrorist operatives who planned to carry out a terrorist attack inside Israel in the immediate future. Two of the operatives had prepared IEDs and one was an escort who was supposed to take them from the refugee camp to the site of the attack. The detainees were Abd al-Karim Alaa al-Din Ibrahim Ahmed, and two brothers, Ahmed Muhammad Ahmed Jaradat and Amjad Muhammad Ahmed Jaradat. After they were detained armed Palestinians shot at the Israeli forces and threw hand grenades and Molotov cocktails at them. Some of them positioned themselves close to the refugee camp's UNRWA building. The ministry of health in Ramallah claimed that eight Palestinians were wounded in the exchange of fire (Israeli media, April 18 and 19, 2023).



Israeli security force activity in the Jenin refugee camp. Left: Evacuating a wounded Palestinian (Facebook page of Uday Diabas, Wafa News Agency photographer, April 18, 2023).



**Brothers Amjad (left) and Ahmed (right) Jaradat
(Facebook page of Ashraf Abu al-Rakaz, April 18, 2023).**

The Temple Mount

► The Temple Mount waqf reported that on the morning of April 21, 2023, about 120,000 Muslims came to the Eid al-Fitr prayer on the Temple Mount. After the prayer thousands of Muslims began chanting praise for the "resistance" [terrorist activities] and the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military-terrorist wing, waving Palestinian and Hamas flags. A giant sign bearing a shadow image of Muhammed Deif, the commander of Hamas' military-terrorist wing, blessing the Palestinians on the holiday, was hung on an arch (al-Jazeera, April 21, 2023). A giant Fatah sign was also hung and later removed by the Israeli police.



The prayer on the Temple Mount (Wafa Facebook page, April 21, 2023).



**Palestinians on the Temple Mount chant praise for the "resistance"
(Paldf Twitter account, April 21, 2023).**



Right: The Hamas sign (Omaima Mil's Twitter account, April 21, 2023). Left: The Fatah sign, also hung on an arch and later removed by Israeli police (@elthwrah Telegram channel, April 21, 2023).

► According to an Islamic waqf official, on April 22, 2023, six Israeli policemen entered the Bab al-Rahma mosque (to the east of al-Aqsa) on the Temple Mount, prevented the mosque guard from entering, and vandalized the electric and lighting systems. The official condemned the alleged event, claiming the mosque was an integral part of al-Aqsa (Ma'an, April 22, 2023). The Palestinians strongly condemned the report and showed pictures purporting to be evidence of the vandalism.

► Some of the reactions were the following:

◆ **Muhammad Hamada, Hamas spokesman for Jerusalem**, said the "aggression" against the mosque crossed a new red line and continued the "occupation's" war on the mosques and its methodical desecration of their sanctity, especially of al-Aqsa mosque. He called on the Palestinians to continue guarding and defending the areas around the mosque (Shehab, April 22, 2023).

◆ **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** claimed "storming" and vandalizing the mosque were evidence of Israel's determination to escalate its "religious war" against the holy places in Jerusalem, which meant the battle for the identity of al-Aqsa mosque was open and the "struggle" would continue until the battle had been won by establishing its identity as Palestinian, Arabic and Islamic (Hazem Qassem's Twitter account, April 22, 2023).

◆ **PIJ spokesman Tareq Salami** claimed the alleged attack and deliberate destruction were part of the methodical war waged by Israel against al-Aqsa mosque. He threatened that the attack on al-Aqsa and the holy places would have consequences (Daffa_media Telegram channel [the PIJ Telegram channel in Judea and Samaria], April 22, 2023).

◆ **Fatah spokesman Manzar al-Haik** called it a "new aggression against the holy places" that would lead to a new confrontation. He advised the Netanyahu government to preserve the status quo in Jerusalem and not drag the Middle East into a war it would not be able to stop (palsawa, April 22, 2023).



The vandalism in the Bab al-Rahma mosque attributed to Israel (Right: Wafa, April 22, 2023. Left: al-Qastel website Twitter account, April 22, 2023).

Reactions to the possibility of a return to targeted killings

► The Israeli media reported that Israeli security was preparing for the days after the Independence Day festivities by planning to change its policies in response to the wave of Palestinian terrorism. According to the report, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the government ministers that after Independence Day the level of Israel's response to terrorist attacks in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip would rise (Israeli media, April 23, 2023).

► The Palestinians interpreted his statements as referring to a return to targeted killings.

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem claimed the threats of the "Zionist enemy" to kill the

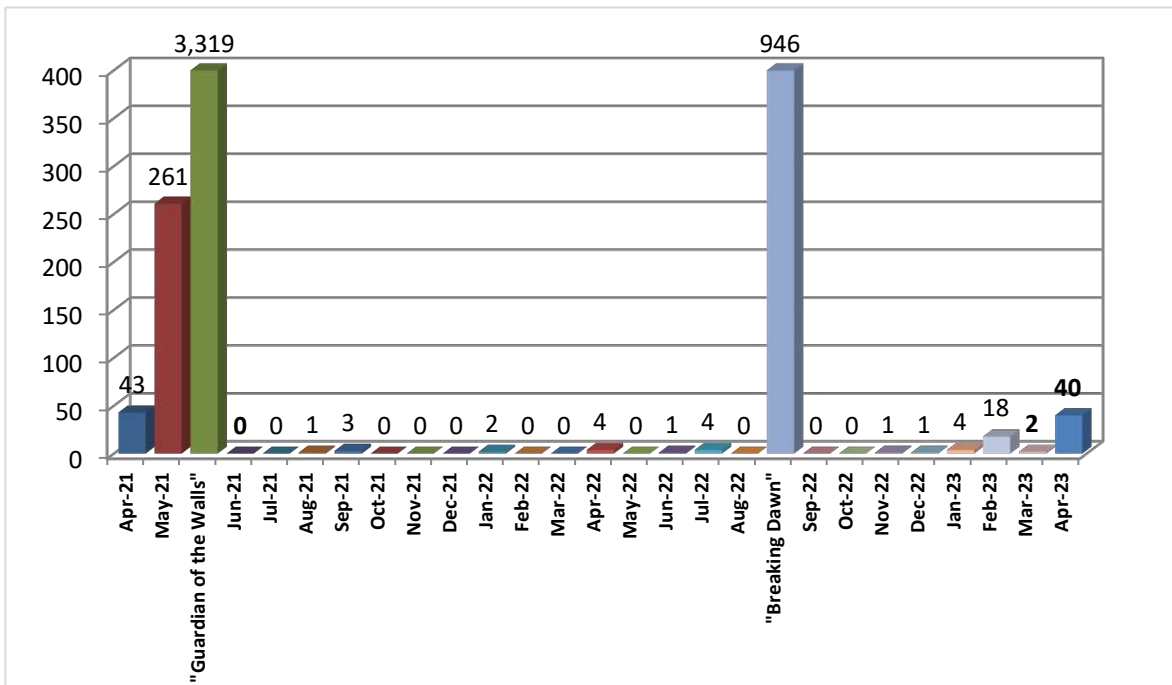
leaders of the Hamas movement would not deter them. He called the threats an unsuccessful Israeli attempt to improve its image after the "increase in the power of the Palestinian revolution" and in the number of "resistance" fronts. He claimed Israel did not have a free hand to employ its terrorism, and the resistance's" response would be larger than what Israel expected (Hazem Qassem's Twitter account, April 23, 2023).

Israel's South

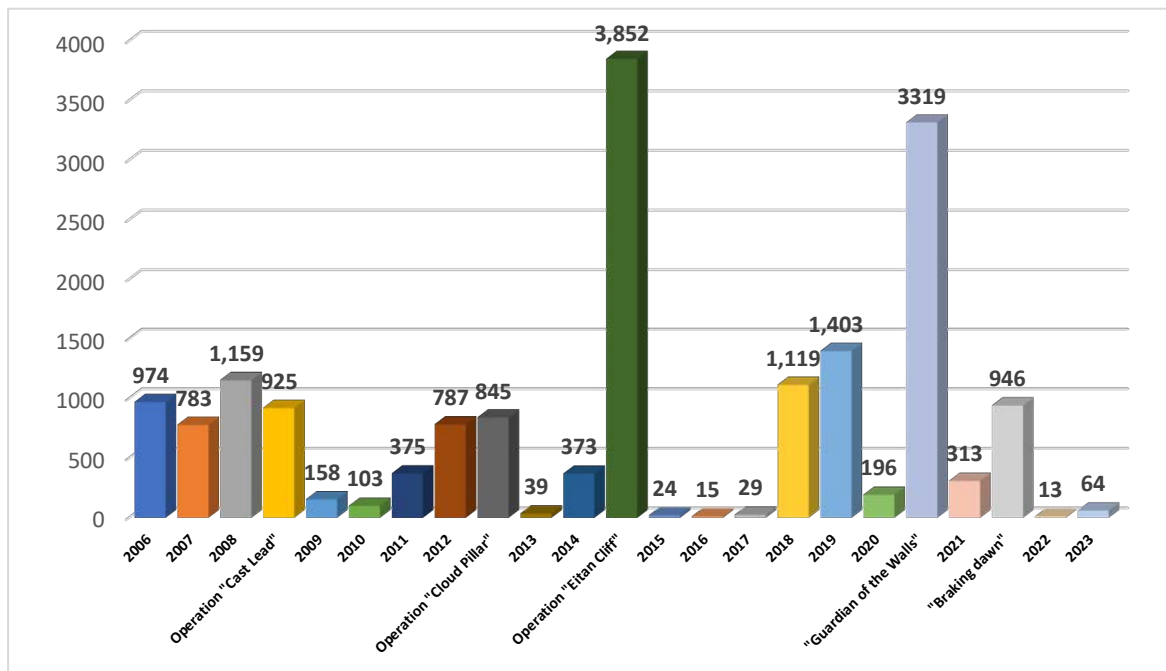
Rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel

- ▶ This past week no rocket or mortar shell hits were identified in Israeli territory.

Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire since April 2021



Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits since 2006



Developments in the Gaza Strip

UNRWA aid for families whose houses were destroyed in Operation Breaking Dawn

► UNRWA announced that beginning in April 2023 it would give money to 35 families whose houses were completely destroyed in Operation Breaking Dawn (August 2022). According to the agency, the families had already begun rebuilding. In addition, UNRWA had given financial aid to about 50 additional families whose houses were destroyed during the operation, to pay rent for alternative housing (al-Andalou News, April 20, 2023).

Eid al-Fitr

► In the Gaza Strip the Eid al-Fitr prayer was held in the mosques and public squares. **Iyad Abu Fanuna, a former prisoner and Hamas operative**, gave the holiday sermon in the al-Saraya Squad. He claimed the time for surrender was over and al-Aqsa mosque would be "liberated" in the near future (al-Andalou News, April 21, 2023).



**The Eid al-Fitr prayer in the al-Saraya Squad in Gaza City
(Shehab Telegram channel, April 21, 2023).**

► **Amir Abdollahian, the Iranian foreign minister**, spoke on the phone with PIJ leader Ziyad al-Nakhalah to commend the "resistance" and Palestinian people for Eid al-Fitr. He stressed Iran's support for the Palestinian people and its "resistance," which, he claimed, would liberate "Palestine." Al-Nakhalah expressed his appreciation for Iran's support (al-Alam, April 21, 2023).

Hamas delegation visits Saudi Arabia

► On April 17, 2023, a delegation of the Hamas leadership arrived in Saudi Arabia after years of a break in relations,³ during which Saudi Arabia detained dozens of Palestinians, among them Hamas representative Muhammad al-Khudri, charging them with collecting money for the "resistance" and Hamas. The delegation was composed of Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, Khaled Mashaal, chairman of the "external" Hamas movement, and Musa Abu Marzouq, Zaher Jabarin and Khalil al-Haya, all members of Hamas' political bureau. The visit took place after Saudi Arabia permitted them to enter the country to perform the religious duty of the Umrah during the last ten days of Ramadan. Saudi Arabia refused the delegation's request to meet with senior members of the Saudi Arabian government (al-Andalou News and al-Araby al-Jadeed, April 18, 2023). **Neither the Hamas website nor the Saudi Arabian news agencies reported the visit.**

³ The last time a Hamas delegation went to Saudi Arabia was in 2015 when it was headed by Khaled Mashaal, who at the time was head of the political bureau. During the visit the delegation met in Mecca with the king of Saudi Arabia, Suliman al-Aziz.



The Hamas leadership at the Umrah in Saudi Arabia (al-Jazeera TV website, April 18, 2023).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Mahmoud Abbas visits Saudi Arabia

► On April 17, 2023, Mahmoud Abbas paid an official visit to Saudi Arabia. He was accompanied by Hussein al-Sheikh, general secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee, General Majed Faraj, head of Palestinian general intelligence, Majdi al-Khaldi, Mahmoud Abbas' advisor for diplomatic matters and Bassem al-Agha, the Palestinian ambassador to Saudi Arabia (Wafa, April 17, 2023). On April 19, 2023, Mahmoud Abbas met with Mohammed bin Salman al-Saud, the Saudi Arabian crown prince. Mahmoud Abbas praised Saudi Arabia's achievements and the strengthening of its regional and international standing. They discussed bilateral relations and ways to reinforce them, and agreed to continue coordinating at all levels. The crown prince noted Saudi Arabia's support for the Palestinian issue (Saudi Arabian News Agency, April 19, 2023).



Mahmoud Abbas meets with the crown prince (Wafa, April 19, 2023).

Preparations for the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC) conference

► On April 18, 2023, **PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh** met with several ambassadors and consuls from the countries which donate money to the PA to discuss recent

developments in the Palestinian arena and the PA's financial aid and economic situation. The meeting was held in preparation for the AHLC's May 2023 conference, which will be held in Brussels. Shtayyeh called on the assembly to exert pressure on Israel, he claimed, Israel had not met its commitments at previous AHLC meetings, and continued deducting funds from the tax revenues it collects for the Palestinians (Wafa, April 18, 2023).



Muhammad Shtayyeh meets with AHLC ambassadors and consuls (Wafa, April 18, 2023).

The TIKA⁴ president visits the PA territories and east Jerusalem

► Muhammad Shtayyeh met with **Serkan Kayalar, the president of TIKA**. Also present were Ahmet Demirer, the Turkish consul general in Jerusalem, and Nasser Qatami, Muhammad Shtayyeh's advisor for Islamic funds and guarantees. Kayalar briefed them on projects TIKA had recently undertaken and projects it was currently undertaking, especially the reconstruction of houses and stores in Jerusalem, the Old City of Hebron, Jenin and the Gaza Strip, and a project for building student housing at al-Quds University. Shtayyeh discussed support for projects in the area of clean and solar energy for the Palestinian refugee camps. They also discussed help for building dams, a project for computer programming for young Palestinians, the construction of a school for gifted children and a hospitality-industry school in Jericho. Shtayyeh praised Turkey for its ongoing support of the Palestinians based on the spirit of partnership and cooperation (Wafa, April 17, 2023).

⁴ TIKA, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency is a department subordinate to the Turkish government. Focusing on development cooperation, TIKA works in more than 150 countries. It is responsible for the organization of the bulk of Turkey's official development assistance to developing countries, with a particular focus on Turkic and African countries and communities, the PA among them.



Shtayyeh and Kayalar, TIKA president (Wafa, April 17, 2023).

Hamas operative escapes from the PA jail

► According to reports on the Palestinian social networks, on April 22, 2023, Amin Khaled al-Qoqa, 48 years old, escaped from the PA jail. He was an important operative in Hamas military-terrorist wing in Nablus and had been imprisoned since 2007 for killing settlers (Facebook page of Jamal al-Qoqa and the Twitter account of Hamas-affiliated @m_ed02's, April 22, 2023). According to several sources, he was allowed out of jail for two hours for Eid al-Fitr, but instead of returning he disappeared into the Jenin refugee camp, informing PA officers he would continue his struggle from there (Twitter account or @ytirawi, who represents himself as an "independent Palestinian journalist," April 22, 2023).

► Following reports of al-Qoqa's escape the Palestinian security services raided his relatives' houses, carried out searches and detained his two sons and a number of family members (Palinfo and the QudsN Twitter account, April 22, 2023). According to previous information, the PA claimed he had been put in "protective custody" to prevent Israel from detaining him (alresala.net, August 8, 2013). He was an operative in the Hamas squad in Nablus exposed in October 2007 which carried out a number of shooting attacks against Israeli targets in and around Nablus. In January 2005 the squad carried out a shooting attack near the settlement of Migdalim and killed two IDF soldiers, and a shooting attack at the Ariel Junction on October 24, 2007, wounding an IDF soldier and an Israeli civilian.⁵

⁵ For further information see the December 26, 2007 report, "Nablus continues the focus for terrorist activity." <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/19110/>.



Amin Khaled al-Qoqa (Facebook page of Jamal al-Qoqa, April 22, 2023).

Confrontation between Hamas and Fatah

- ▶ Hamas-affiliated websites reported that operatives of the PA's security services and Fatah operatives pursued the vehicle of Baraa Balout and his cousin Bahaa Balout in Bani Na'im, east of Hebron, during a visit to the families of shaheeds and prisoners for Eid al-Fitr. They claimed it was because they waved a Hamas flag. The operatives allegedly set fire to the vehicle and confiscated the flags.
- ▶ When relatives demanded information about the two, PA security service and Fatah operatives shot at the Balout family house, raided their houses and attacked them. The Palestinian police reported that Bahaa's fate was unknown and they had no information about where he was or what his condition was (Safa and Shehab, April 21, 2023). Hamas strongly condemned the PA security services' actions (headquarters, April 22, 2023).



Right: The vehicle goes up in flames. Left: Hamas signs and flags found in the vehicle (Paldf Twitter account, April 21, 2023).