



## Statements about Operation Shield and Arrow from Palestinian terrorist organization and Hezbollah leaders

June 1, 2023

### Overview

- ▶ The five days of Operation Shield and Arrow ended when the ceasefire went into effect at 10 p.m. on May 13, 2023. **During the operation 1,469 rockets and mortar shells were fired at Israel, 1,131 falling in Israeli territory. Two people were killed and several dozen were wounded; considerable damage was done to property.** IDF forces killed six senior operatives of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's military-terrorist wing in targeted attacks and struck 422 terrorist targets.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ As soon as the ceasefire went into effect, the leadership of the Palestinian terrorist organizations, especially Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), declared a "victory," claiming one of its signs was the fact they had dictated the terms for the ceasefire. The PIJ and the Palestinian organizations' joint operations room described the rocket attacks as a "united reaction" to the targeted killings of the PIJ leaders. Media commentators in the Gaza Strip claimed Israel had been "surprised" by the united Palestinian reaction conducted by the joint operations room, as well as by the tactic of a late reaction, which "caused confusion and insecurity in Israel." Hamas, Iran and Hezbollah also touted the "achievements" of the operation, which, in their version, strengthened the "resistance axis" and the "equation of deterrence" against Israel.
- ▶ Despite endless repetitions of the joint operations room's united activity, in reality almost all the rockets and mortar shells were fired by PIJ operatives, for whom the targeted killings of three of its leaders were the excuse for the attacks. Smaller terrorist organizations also fired rockets, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Mujahedeen Brigades. **Hamas was careful, at least publicly, not to take an active part in the fighting or to use its military capabilities against Israel.** Musa Abu Marzouq, deputy "external" Hamas leader and a member of Hamas' political bureau, said Hamas had not entered the fighting because of the "equation," according to which if Hamas participated it

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<sup>1</sup> For further information see the May 14, 2023, report, "Operation Shield and Arrow in the Gaza Strip – Summary."

would change a "partial military campaign" into a "comprehensive war," which would have serious consequences for the Gaza Strip.

► Recently, interviews were held and speeches were made about the Palestinian "achievements" in the operation, but some revealed the Palestinians' weak spots. Prominent was the interview with **Ziyad al-Nakhalah, PIJ secretary general**, who said the organization's leaders were killed as a result of Israel's high technical capabilities, but also as a result of the lack of attention, not following instructions and negligence in carrying telephones (al-Hayat Washington, May 23 and 24, 2023). Hamas leader Musa Abu Marzouq criticized the joint operations room, stating that **the integration of the arenas should have been better and there were arenas which could have done more but remained inactive.**

► The statements made after Operation Shield and Arrow were different from those made after Operation Breaking Dawn (August 2022), when the PIJ also found itself fighting alone. After Operation Breaking Dawn the PIJ was harshly critical of Hamas for its lack of active support and even threatened to leave the joint operations room. After Operation Shield and Arrow, however, the reactions were more moderate. Ziyad al-Nakhalah claimed there was a "communal atmosphere" of all the organizations, although in reality very few participated in the fighting. Regarding Hamas he said it had not taken an active part but "our brothers in Hamas played an important role in defending society, services and the civilian authority" (al-Hayat Washington, May 23 and 24, 2023).

► In addition, after Operation Breaking Dawn the PIJ was criticized in the Gaza Strip for beginning a round of fighting on its own initiative, operating alone and firing defective rockets which killed people in Gaza. This time, despite the destruction and loss of life, almost no criticism was heard.

## Statements Made after the Operation

### Palestinian Islamic Jihad

#### Ziyad al-Nakhalah, PIJ secretary general

► On May 24, 2023, Ziyad al-Nakhalah was interviewed by Jihan al-Husseini, who administers the al-Hayat Washington website,<sup>2</sup> and spoke at length about Operation Shield and Arrow.

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<sup>2</sup> Al-Hayat Washington represents itself as an independent news website founded in Washington, DC, in March 2019. It follows world events, focusing on Arab affairs, especially affairs related to the Palestinian issue. It sheds light on the hardships of the Palestinians and documents Israel's "violations," and reports on the activities of the Palestinian communities abroad. Jihan al-Husseini,

He was introspective and even related to the organization's weaknesses exposed by the fighting. Some of his points were the following (al-Hayat Washington, May 23 and 24, 2023):

◆ **The targeted killings of the three senior operatives:** Asked if [intelligence] infiltration of the organization had led to Israel's locating three PIJ commanders in the Gaza Strip and killing them in one attack, he said Israel had relied on technology and monitoring capabilities. The three, he claimed, had made mistakes which worked to Israel's benefit, so that despite all the measures taken by the organization's fighters and commanders who did not use telephones to communicate, many did not follow instructions. They did not correctly assess the situation or realize how Israel would monitor their communications, and all the operatives who died in targeted killings had their cell phones with them. He warned all fighters not to use communications equipment, especially cell phones, which gave Israel their coordinates and made it possible to attack them. He said it was a fatal weakness in the "struggle" against Israel, and therefore cell phones should not be used, at least during confrontations.

◆ **The targeted killings' influence on the organization's capabilities:** Asked if killing the commanders had influenced the PIJ's functioning, he answered that every commander had his own special, important "signature" and presence. However, they all had deputies and headquarters, so if one was killed activity did not cease, proof of which was that the organization continued functioning on the ground until the last minute. He claimed that even if a commander was killed in battle, his authority was passed on to his deputy, and the military structure filled vacuums immediately.

◆ **Operational achievements:** Asked if the PIJ had attained its objectives during the operation, he said they had not, because they were conducting a "long struggle" against the "Zionist project," but their situation was better than it had been in past confrontations and their fighters had fought better than in the past thanks to the experience they had gained. He said that after every confrontation there was an assessment and examination of strengths and weaknesses, and they reinforced the strengths and avoided the weaknesses. Therefore, in the most recent confrontation their situation was better than in all previous ones, and in the next one they would

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who is represented as the site administrator, was the Washington correspondent for the al-Hayat website whose offices are in London.

benefit from having dealt with the weaknesses recently revealed, and their performance and preparedness would be improved.

◆ **Assessment for a long military engagement:** Asked if the PIJ was prepared for a long military engagement, **he claimed he was certain if there was a long engagement all the Palestinian forces would join it.** He said, "The PIJ's military wing took the entire battle on itself with the limited participation of other organizations, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Mujahedeen Brigades, which also lost fighters, but there was a serious communal environment of all the Palestinian forces."

◆ **Hamas participation:** Asked about Hamas' lack of participation, he answered that it might have positive aspects, because it meant the targets hit by Israel were "less valuable." He said their "Hamas brothers" had played an important role by protecting society, services and the civilian administration. However, he said if the fighting had continued, Hamas and all the forces and organizations would have joined, and even Hassan Nasrallah hinted Hezbollah might join the fighting. Moreover, he claimed, Israel's considerations regarding the intervention of Hezbollah and the Palestinian forces kept it from continuing the fighting. He claimed the PIJ and its Jerusalem Brigades [the PIJ's military-terrorist wing] had the capabilities and had been prepared to continue the hostilities for weeks.



**Hamas police forces deployed in the streets of Gaza during Operation Shield and Arrow (ministry of the interior in Gaza Facebook page, May 10, 2023).**

### Ahmed al-Mudallal, PIJ leader

► On May 30, 2023, Ahmed al-Mudallal was interviewed by Iranian al-Alam TV in Arabic, where he praised the Palestinian achievements in Operation Shield and Arrow. He said it had created new "equations" for the next stage in the confrontation with Israel. He claimed the

most recent battle in the Gaza Strip had "embarrassed" Israel and "proved" the PIJ operated with great intelligence. Israel had not expected the intensity of the attack, which forced it to conduct targeted killings of senior PIJ fighters [sic]. He also claimed Israel thought killing the PIJ commanders would have a negative effect on the Jerusalem Brigades, but that had not happened. He also said that thanks to the confrontation with Israel, the PIJ had acquired additional military experience and improved its capabilities, in addition to developing weapons (al-Alam TV in Arabic, May 30, 2023).



**Ahmed al-Mudallal interviewed by Iranian al-Alam TV, May 30, 2023.**

### **Walid al-Qutati, a member of the PIJ's political bureau**

► Walid al-Qutati wrote an article entitled, "The Jerusalem Brigades' combat ideology," analyzing the concepts of the PIJ's military-terrorist wing. The article was posted to Palestinian websites (Shams News, Filastin al-Yawm) and Arab websites (al-Mayadeen, al-Wafaq). Some of his points were the following (al-Mayadeen website, May 25, 2023).

- ◆ Israel did to expect the PIJ's military wing to fight "Operation Free Men's Revenge" [i.e., Operation Shield and Arrow] for more than two days, and it in fact lasted for five days. Israel's "failed" because it did not understand the combat theory of the military wing fighters and of the Palestinian "resistance," whose roots were in Islam and based on faith and the concept of shahada [death as a martyr].
- ◆ At the heart of the Jerusalem Brigades' combat theory is a strategy based on the concept of the liberation of "Palestine," a project greater than the individual capabilities of the PIJ, the "Palestinian resistance" and the Palestinians because of the organic connection between the "Zionist entity" and the Western colonial project against the [Muslim] nation. Therefore, the project to liberate "Palestine" belongs to the entire [Muslim] nation, especially the "resistance axis." The role of the PIJ fighters,

headed by the Jerusalem Brigades, is only to preserve the "ember of jihad" and the remain the trigger finger of the "resistance" against the "Zionist entity."

◆ Until the final victory, there will be relative and partial victories on the path to liberation, allowing the Palestinians to amass strength by exploiting the weaknesses of Israel and its army. They include preventing Israel from achieving its military and political objectives, especially in confrontations and wars; preventing Israel from attaining its stated and non-stated political and military goals; raising the price Israel has to pay for its "crimes" to deter it from repeating them; making the "occupation and settlements" expensive at the economic, human and morale levels; increasing Israel's security and existential hardships by means of "resistance" [terrorism]; firing rockets, mortar shells and guided missiles; and fighting to deaths as martyrs wherever jihad fighters can choose between surrender and shahada, and then the choice will be to fight until the last bullet.

◆ The concept is expressed in "quality" [mass Israeli casualty] operations despite their paucity of and inferiority to Israel's means. They include relying of fighters who choose shahada missions [suicide bombers] during battles; firing rockets, mortar shells and guided missiles, etc.

## Hamas

### Musa Abu Marzouq, deputy "external" Hamas leader and a member of the political bureau

► Interviewed by QudsN, Musa Abu Marzouq related to a number of aspects of the most recent confrontation, especially the integration of "all the organizations;" the coordination between the civilian, police, civil defense and "resistance" mechanisms; and the unity of the "resistance" in its reaction to Israel with a collective decision made by the joint operations room. However, he said **the integration of the arenas should have been better and there were arenas that could have done better but remained inactive.**

► Regarding the accusations that Hamas abandoned the PIJ, he said the PIJ had to answer the question, because without a doubt it knew exactly what had to be said and what it was forbidden to say. He also said Israel planned to sow dissension among the Palestinians, especially among the organizations, and that when Israel said the PIJ was its target, it meant to isolate it from the other organizations, but on the ground the situation was different.



► Asked why Hamas had not actively participated in the confrontation, Musa Abu Marzouq said an "equation" was in place, according to which if Hamas had participated, the confrontation, which was partial, would have turned into a long war which would have had a serious influence on the Gaza Strip. He said since Israel engaged the Palestinians in a confrontation every year and Hamas was deploying for a comprehensive war, it was out of the question that they would engage daily in fighting that would exhaust the "resistance" militarily and economically (Sama, the QudsN YouTube channel and the QudsN Facebook page, May 22, 2023).



**Mahmoud Abbas interviewed by QudsN (QudsN YouTube channel, May 22, 2023).**

## Hezbollah

► On May 25, 2023, Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah secretary general, gave a speech for the organization's annual "Resistance and Liberation Day," the withdrawal of the IDF from Lebanon in 2000. He related to the situation in Israel on the eve of Operation Shield and Arrow, claiming that before the operation the Israeli prime minister, the military leadership, a former IDF Chief of Staff, the opposition and the coalition all agreed that Israel's deterrent power had weakened, and called it a very important strategic change. They said the objective of the confrontation in the Gaza Strip was to rehabilitate Israel's deterrent image. Israel killed senior PIJ operatives and when the PIJ reacted Israel asked for a ceasefire, but its terms were dictated by the "Palestinian resistance," the joint operations room of the Palestinian organizations and the PIJ. Israel did not deter the "resistance" forces.

► Israel also learned that any attack on a leader or civilians would cause a reaction and therefore the ["resistance's"] achievement was great and important and had to be reinforced. He also claimed Israel would not be able to restore its deterrence after Operation Shield and Arrow. Thanks to the efforts of the "resistance," he claimed, Greater Israel no longer existed and Israel was no longer a regional power, but hid behind fences. He also

claimed that the PIJ, Hezbollah and the other organizations supported by Iran were not Iranian proxies but made their own decisions independently, and worked for the sake of the people and their land (al-Mayadeen, May 25, 2023).

► He also related to the unity of the "resistance axis" countries, the "deterrent equation" between Hezbollah and Israel, Israel's most recent statements and the political situation in Lebanon. Regarding the unity of the "resistance axis," today it had the capability to conduct activities in Lebanon, Syria, "Palestine" and Iran which would "explode" the entire Middle East. Regarding deterrence, he said Israel did not threaten war, the "axis" did. He claimed the "deterrent equation" prevented fighting in the northern arena, and that the IDF's combat units had problems of motivation, as opposed to the "resistance axis' " high motivation. If Israel thought it was facing only Hezbollah and the Palestinians it was making a mistake, because there were hundreds of thousands of [jihad] fighters, and the "resistance axis" had an enormous numerical advantage, a change that worked to the advantage of the "resistance." All of Israeli society was depressed and could not bear loss of life despite the Iron Dome and David's Sling aerial defense systems, and Israeli civilians were forced to run to bomb shelters, and therefore Israel society was weak and always prepared to back its bags and leave. There was another change regarding the power of the "resistance," a change in its military capabilities, missiles, drones, weapons, ammunition, and quantity and quality, and it had high hopes of further development (al-Mayadeen, May 25, 2023).



**Hassan Nasrallah (al-Mayadeen, May 25, 2023).**