



# Spotlight on the Israel-Palestinian Conflict

August 20-27 , 2024

## Overview<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ **The southern arena:** IDF forces continued their activity in Rafah and the central Gaza Strip, ending activity in Khan Yunis and Deir al-Balah. Two IDF soldiers were killed during the fighting.
- ▶ **The hostages and a ceasefire agreement:** The bodies of seven Israeli hostages were located in Rafah. Six had been kidnapped alive and were murdered shortly before their bodies were discovered. The head of the Hamas military wing actually admitted that the hostages had been executed. Senior Hamas figures blamed Israel for the failure of the ceasefire negotiations and the release of hostages because the Security Cabinet had decided to keep IDF forces deployed along the Philadelphia Axis.
- ▶ **The situation in the Gaza Strip:** An extensive operation began to vaccinate Gazan children against polio. The Shifa Hospital in Gaza reopened its emergency room for the first time since it was closed by the fighting.
- ▶ **Israel, Judea and Samaria:** Palestinian operatives carried out two terrorist attacks. Three Israeli policemen were shot to death in a drive-by shooting south of Mount Hebron, and three IDF officers were injured when two car bombs exploded in Gush Etzion. A car bomb was located and defused near the community of Ateret in Binyamin. The Israeli security forces launched an extensive counterterrorism operation in northern Samaria; an IDF soldier was killed.
- ▶ A new study found that since the October 7, 2023 terrorist attack and massacre, Hamas has increased its "diplomatic" activity in an attempt to garner international support and preserve its position in the Gaza Strip after the end of the war.
- ▶ **The Palestinian Authority:** Mahmoud Abbas met with the Saudi crown prince.

## The Southern Arena

### IDF operations in the Gaza Strip

- ▶ This past week IDF forces focused their activity on the Rafah region and the central Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, they completed their activity in Khan Yunis and Deir al-Balah. The forces

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

eliminated large numbers of terrorist operatives, destroyed terrorist facilities and tunnels, and located weapons. Two IDF fighters were killed during the fighting.

►**Rafah:** The forces eliminated dozens of terrorist operatives on the ground from the air and destroyed terrorist facilities. On August 27, 2024, an IDF soldier was killed by an IED (IDF spokesperson, August 27-September 3, 2024). According to reports, IDF forces caused the collapse of Hamas' Rafah Brigade and 80% of the tunnels on the Philadelphia Axis were destroyed (Israeli media, August 29, 2024).

►**Khan Yunis and Deir al-Balah:** On August 30, 2024, the IDF forces completed a month-long operation in Khan Yunis and Deir al-Balah. They eliminated more than 250 terrorist operatives underground and above ground and destroyed dozens of terrorist facilities. They located and destroyed kilometers of tunnels, in some of which they eliminated terrorist operatives and found residence areas and weapons. The forces raided the Hamas post in Deir al-Balah and located weapons, a rocket launcher and documents, and destroyed a tunnel (IDF spokesperson, August 30, 2024).



**Weapons found during operations in Khan Yunis and Deir al-Balah (IDF spokesperson, August 30, 2024)**

►**Central Gaza Strip:** IDF forces continued targeted raids along the Netzarim Corridor, eliminated terrorist operatives with ground and air strikes and destroyed terrorist facilities. During the operation, the forces located and destroyed a three-kilometer-long offensive tunnel. On August 28, 2024, an IDF soldier was killed by sniper fire (IDF spokesperson, August 27-September 3, 2024).



**Destruction of the tunnel in the central Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, August 28, 2024)**

## Attacks on Hamas facilities in civilian installations

► On September 1, 2024, Israeli Air Force fighter jets attacked Hamas terrorist operatives in a command and control complex located on the site which had previously been the Safed school in the al-Zeitoun neighborhood of Gaza City. The school site was used to plan and carry out terrorist attacks on IDF forces and Israeli territory. Measures were taken before the Israeli Air Force attack to reduce possible harm to civilians, including the use of precision weapons (IDF spokesperson, September 1, 2024). Palestinian media reported 11 deaths in an attack on the Safed school in the central al-Zeitoun neighborhood in northeastern Gaza City (Quds Agency, September 2, 2024).

## Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip

► On August 29, 2024, Palestinian terrorists fired two rockets from the Gaza Strip into the western Negev. No casualties or damage were reported (Israeli media, August 29, 2024). The Salah al-Din Brigades of the Oneness of Allah Brigade, a Salafi-jihadist faction of the Popular Committees, affiliated with the global jihad, announced that they fired a barrage of rockets at the western Negev (BURAQPal Telegram channel of the Salah al-Din Brigades, August 29, 2024).

## The hostages and a ceasefire agreement

► On August 27, 2024, the Israeli security forces rescued the body of an IDF soldier who was killed during the fighting on October 7, 2023, and whose body was abducted to the Gaza Strip. The body was found buried in the ground in the southern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, August 27, 2024).

► On August 31, 2024, Israeli security forces operating in Rafah found the bodies of six Israelis in a tunnel. The Israelis had been abducted alive during the Hamas terrorist attack and massacre of October 7, 2023. The bodies were returned to Israel and forensic tests showed that Hamas terrorists had executed the hostages, shooting them about two days before their bodies were discovered (IDF spokesperson and Israeli media, August 31-September 1, 2024). Initially,

Hamas lied and falsely claimed the six hostages had been shot by Israeli forces (al-Mayadeen, September 1, 2024)

► On September 2, 2024, Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military wing, confirmed that the six hostages had been executed. He said that after the Israeli operation in which four hostages were rescued alive from the Nuseirat refugee camp on June 8, 2024, the operatives guarding the hostages received "new instructions" in case Israeli forces approached. He threatened that if an agreement for a ceasefire and a prisoner-hostage exchange deal were not reached, the remaining hostages would also return to Israel "in coffins" (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades Telegram channel, September 2, 2024).

► On the night of August 29, 2024, the Israeli Defense Cabinet approved the continued deployment of IDF forces on the Philadelphia Axis as part of a ceasefire agreement (Israeli media, August 30, 2024). On September 2, 2024, Prime Minister Netanyahu said that the presence of the IDF on the Philadelphia Axis was necessary to prevent weapons from being smuggled to Hamas (Israeli media, September 2, 2024). Hamas continued to blame Israel for the failure of the negotiations and reiterated their claim that the movement had already agreed to the proposal for an agreement on July 2, 2024:

◆ Khalil al-Haya, deputy chairman of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip, who is conducting the negotiations on behalf of the movement, said there would be no agreement without a full Israeli withdrawal, including from the Philadelphia Axis and the Netzarim Corridor. He accused Israel of setting new conditions, including the deportation of 150 Palestinian prisoners who would be released instead of the deportation of 50 prisoners who were sentenced to life imprisonment. On the other hand, he claimed Hamas was "flexible" and had agreed on the release of 50 prisoners for each kidnapped female soldier instead of 500. He also blamed the United States for not exerting pressure on Israel (al-Jazeera, September 1, 2024).

◆ Izzat al-Rishq, a member of Hamas' political bureau, accused Prime Minister Netanyahu of preventing an agreement which would end the war and release hostages. He warned that any delay in reaching the terms agreed to by Hamas on July 2, 2024 endangered the lives of the "captives" (Izzat al-Rishq's Telegram channel, September 2, 2024).

◆ A "senior source in the Palestinian resistance" stated that after Netanyahu's speech, Hamas made it clear to the mediators that it was a "clear confirmation of his refusal to reach an agreement with Hamas" (al-Mayadeen, September 2, 2024).

## The Gaza Strip

### Palestinian casualties

► **The Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip** reported that since the beginning of the war, 40,819 Palestinians had been killed and 94,291 injured (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, September 3, 2024).

► The Israeli Air Force carried out targeted attacks on senior terrorist operatives:

◆ On September 3, 2024, Ahmed Fawzi Nasser Muhammad Wadia was killed in an attack on the Hamas compound near al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City. Wadia was the commander of the nukhba company of the Daraj-Tufah Battalion and was a Hamas paraglider operative. During the Hamas terrorist attack and massacre on October 7, 2023, he entered Israel with a paraglider and commanded the massacre in the village of Netiv HaAsara to the north of the Gaza Strip. He was also videoed in a house in the village, drinking Coca Cola in front of children who had just watched The murder of her father. Seven other Hamas terrorist operatives from the Daraj-Tufah Battalion were killed in the attack, one who supplied the explosives to blow up the border fence in the October 7 attack (IDF spokesperson, September 3, 2024).

◆ On August 29, 2024, the commander of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's (PIJ) central Gaza Strip refugee camps' brigade, Muhammad Qatrawi, was killed in an attack in the central Gaza Strip. He led rocket fire attacking Israeli territory from the central Gaza Strip and was responsible for planning and carrying out terrorist attacks against IDF forces and Israeli territory. Prior to his appointment as commander he held other positions in the PIJ, including deputy brigade commander and intelligence officer (IDF spokesperson, August 31, 2024). Palestinian social media reported the death of Muhammad Ibrahim al-Qatrawi, aka Abu Malek, from the al-Nuseirat refugee camp, who was killed in an attack in Deir al-Balah (SND website X account, August 30, 2024).



**Muhammad Qatrawi (IDF Telegram channel, August 31, 2024)**

- ◆ On August 29, 2024, Osama Jadallah, who was a commander in PIJ military intelligence, was killed in an airstrike in the Rafah area. He also participated in the terrorist attack and massacre on October 7, 2023 (IDF spokesperson, August 29, 2024).

## The situation in the Gaza Strip

- ▶ On August 28, 2024, Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant, and Chief of Staff Major General Herzi Halevi, appointed of Major General Elad Goren as the head of the humanitarian-civilian effort in the Gaza Strip, a new position within the Government Activities in the Territories Operations Coordination (COGAT) Unit. He will lead the humanitarian effort in the Gaza Strip while coordinating with the international community and safeguarding Israeli interests (IDF spokesperson and Israeli media, August 28, 2024).
- ▶ On September 1, 2024, teams from the World Health Organization and UNICEF, in coordination with the IDF, began an operation to vaccinate children in the Gaza Strip against polio. The first phase began in Deir al-Balah and the refugee camps in the central Gaza Strip, the second phase (September 4-6) will take place in Khan Yunis and the southern Gaza Strip, and in the third phase (September 7-9) in the northern Gaza Strip. According to the COGAT, since the beginning of the war more than 282,000 vials of polio vaccine, sufficient for more than 2.8 million people, have been delivered to the Strip (COGAT X account, August 31 to September 2, 2024). The Hamas-controlled ministry of health in Gaza reported that approximately 159,000 children were vaccinated in the first two days (ministry of health in Gaza Telegram channel, September 2, 2024).



**The polio vaccination campaign in the Gaza Strip (Theodoros Adhanom Gebra-Yesos' X account, September 1, 2024)**

- ▶ On September 1, 2024, the ministry of health in Gaza reopened the emergency room at Shifa Hospital, after it had been closed by IDF activities. It will operate with 35 beds, half its pre-war number, and will receive patients for all forms of specialized medical treatments, as well as the injured (Aljazeera.net, September 2, 2024).
- ▶ On August 31, 2024, the ministry of health in Gaza, in cooperation with the Belgian branch of Doctors Without Borders, announced the opening of a field hospital in al-Zuweida, in the Deir al-Balah region. The hospital will deal with life-threatening emergencies, injuries, urgent surgeries, orthopedics, fractures, burns and wounds (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, August 31, 2024).
- ▶ The Beit Lahia municipality reopened its water desalination facility, which is being restored with funding from the Iranian Afaq organization (Cultural Organization for al-Aqsa) (Beit Lahia municipality Facebook page, August 28, 2024). The Beit Lahia municipality also reopened the al-Shimaa' well after it had been restored with help from the Turkish Solidarity Initiative. According to reports, the well will supply water to 20,000 residents in three neighborhoods (Beit Lahia municipality Facebook page, August 29, 2024).



**Opening of the water desalination facility financed by the Iranian Afaq organization (Beit Lahia municipality Facebook page, August 28, 2024)**

## **Armed terrorist operatives attempt to take control of an aid convoy**

►August 29, 2024, the IDF spokesperson reported that during the coordinated entry of a humanitarian aid convoy from the aid organization Anera into southern Rafah, Palestinian terrorist operatives took control of the lead vehicle, which was subsequently attacked by the IDF. There was no damage to the other vehicles and the convoy continued to its destination. COGAT representatives spoke with Anera representatives, who confirmed that there were no casualties among their men and that they had arrived safely at their destination (IDF spokesperson, August 29, 2024). Hamas accused Israel of committing a "war crime" and denied that the four killed in the attack had been armed (Hamas website, August 30, 2024).

## **Hamas governance in the Gaza Strip**

►Isma'il al-Thawabta, director general of the Hamas government media office, said the civilian part of Hamas interior and national security ministry continued providing services to the Palestinian population despite the Israeli attacks, which he claimed destroyed the headquarters and resulted in the death or detention of ministry employees. He noted that the ministry performed more than 30,000 procedures every month, including issuing birth certificates, temporary identity cards, "certificates of integrity," change of marital status and death certificates (Ismail al-Thawabata's X account, August 28, 2024).

## **Khaled Mashal calls for a return to suicide bombing attacks**

►Khaled Mashal, head of the "external" Hamas leadership, called for a return to suicide bombing attacks to deal with the activities of the Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria. In a videotaped speech screened at an event of the al-Quds International Foundation in Turkey, he said that Hamas wanted to return to "martyrdom operations" because Israel was waging an "open conflict" against the Palestinians "on all fronts." He called on "everyone to participate in the real resistance to the Zionist entity." He also accused the United States of complicity in the "aggression" against the Palestinians and claimed that its calling for a ceasefire was motivated by electoral considerations and fear of involvement in a regional war, while continuing to supply Israel with weapons (Hamas website, August 28, 2024).



# Hamas' battle for hearts and minds

►The IDF spokesperson revealed documents of the Hamas general security apparatus which were discovered in the Gaza Strip, and which showed how Hamas falsified the results of polls conducted by Dr. Khalil Shkaki's Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, in order to hide the significant decrease in public support for Hamas. According to the documents, in a survey conducted in March 2024, 71.3% support was shown for the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, but in practice only 30.7% expressed support. It was also shown that 56% believed that Hamas would win the war, but the actual result was 30% versus 51.2% who said Israel would win (August 29, 2024).

Falsification of PSR Palestinian public opinion poll results by the Hamas terrorist organization

**How would you rate your satisfaction with the performance of the Palestinian authorities? Are you satisfied or not?**

	Faked Result	Actual Result
Hamas	62%	31.9%
Yahya Sinwar	52%	22.1%
Fatah	32%	30.7%
Mahmoud Abbas	22%	21%

\*Based on Hamas documents found in the Gaza Strip

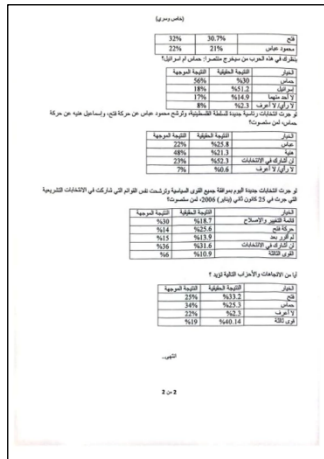
Falsification of PSR Palestinian public opinion poll results by the Hamas terrorist organization

**In your opinion, was Hamas' decision to attack Israel on October 7th correct?**

	Faked Result	Actual Result
Correct	71.3%	30.7%
Incorrect	23%	64.4%
I have no opinion/ I don't know	6%	4.7%

\*Based on Hamas documents found in the Gaza Strip

Examples of fake results presented by Hamas versus real poll results (IDF spokesperson, August 29, 2024)



Photographs of two of the original documents (IDF spokesperson, August 29, 2024)

## The Issue of the Day After

►With the failure of the current negotiations for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, in the assessment of "Western diplomatic sources," United States Secretary of State Blinken can be expected to move to an alternative plan. According to the report, he would initially publicly accuse Hamas of refusing to negotiate and not accepting the mediators' amended proposal, after which he would work with five Arab countries and Turkey to establish a new political and security entity

"that would require the removal of Hamas from the equation in the Gaza Strip for urgent humanitarian reasons" (Ra'i al-Youm, August 28, 2024).

►A new study found that since the October 7, 2023 attack and massacre, Hamas has increased its "diplomatic" activity in an attempt to garner international support and preserve the movement's position in the Gaza Strip after the end of the war. According to the study, between October 7, 2023 and August 28, 2024, senior Hamas officials held 128 direct meetings or phone calls, compared to 37 diplomatic contacts in the year preceding the attack. The contacts took place with senior foreign officials, political parties, non-governmental organizations and others. Twenty-three of the meetings were held with Iranian representatives and focused on strategic issues and responses to Israeli activity. Twenty meetings were held with Turkish officials, 13 with Egyptian officials, ten with Lebanese officials and nine with Qatari officials. Only two meetings were held with representatives of the Palestinian Authority. According to the study, the killing of Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau and replacing him with Yahya al-Sinwar, who is still in the tunnels in the Gaza Strip, is expected to have a negative effect on Hamas diplomatic activity (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 28, 2024).

►Josep Borrell, the EU foreign minister, said the European Union was prepared to participate in managing the Rafah crossing with the PA, if Israel agreed (al-Arabi TV, August 29, 2024).

## Israel, Judea and Samaria

### Terrorist attacks

►This past week Palestinian terrorist operatives carried out two attacks, killing three policemen and injuring three IDF officers:

- ◆ Double car bomb attack in Gush Etzion: On the night of August 30, 2024, a car bomb exploded at a gas station at the Gush Etzion Junction. Another car bomb exploded inside the Jewish community of Karmeit Zzur. The two perpetrators of the attacks were killed; three IDF officers were wounded. During the investigation the Israeli security forces located an improvised explosives laboratory in Hebron, where the IEDs used in the attack had been assembled (IDF spokesperson, August 31, 2024). The al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (AAMB) and the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing, separately claimed responsibility for the attacks (AAMB Telegram channel, September 1, 2024; Hamas' in Judea and Samaria Telegram channel, September 2, 2024).

- ◆ Drive-by shooting in the south of Mount Hebron: On September 1, 2024, a Palestinian terrorist opened fire from a passing vehicle at a police car on Route 35, near the Tarqumiya checkpoint in the south of Mount Hebron, killing three Israeli policemen. The terrorist who carried out the attack fled to Hebron where IDF forces located and killed him (IDF spokesperson, September 1, 2024). The AAMB claimed responsibility for the attack (AAMB Telegram channel, September 2, 2024).

### **Attempted car bomb attack at Ateret, north of Ramallah**

► Before dawn on September 2, 2024, a report was received of a suspicious vehicle near the Jewish community of Ateret in the Binyamin region, north of Ramallah. IDF forces and demolitions experts searched the vehicle and found two gas balloons connected to a detonator. There were no casualties (IDF spokesperson, Israel Police Force X account and Israeli media, September 2, 2024).

### **Counterterrorism activities**

► On the night of August 27, 2024, the Israeli security forces launched three extensive counterterrorism operations in northern Samaria: one in Jenin, one in Tulkarm and one in the al-Faraa refugee camp in the Tubas area. At least 27 terrorist operatives were killed, including Wassam Hazem, the commander of the Hamas military wing in Jenin, and Muhammad Jaber (Abu Shajaa – "The Brave"), the commander of the PIJ Tulkarm Battalion in Nur Shams. The forces also destroyed dozens of IEDs planted under the streets, confiscated large quantities of weapons and detained more than 20 wanted persons suspected of terrorist activity. During the operations an IDF soldier was killed in Jenin and at least ten other security forces personnel were injured (IDF spokesperson, August 28 to September 3, 2024).<sup>2</sup> The ministry of health in Ramallah reported that during the security forces' activities 18 people were killed in Jenin, five in Tulkarm and four in Tubas (Wafa, September 2, 2024).

► On September 2, 2024, Israeli security forces began a counterterrorism operation in Tulkarm and the Tulkarm refugee camp. During the operation, an Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a squad of armed terrorist operatives who were shooting at the security forces (IDF spokesperson, September 2, 2024). Palestinian media reported that military forces entered the city and imposed a blockade on the refugee camp, preventing residents from leaving or entering. A boy was also reportedly shot and killed (Wafa, September 3, 2024).

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<sup>2</sup> For further information, see the September 2024 ITIC report, "[Escalation and Counterterrorism in northern Samaria](#)."

## Activities of the Palestinian security forces

► Hamas condemned the Palestinian Authority's (PA) "persecution" of "resistance fighters in the West Bank" and its "slander campaign" against them. The movement stated that "at a time when the aggression of the occupation in the West Bank is escalating, the [PA security forces] continue to damage Palestinian social fabric, while completely aligning with the occupation and its crimes." Hamas called on the PA to stop the detentions, release all "political detainees" and "push its forces to join the confrontation in defense of our people and our country" (Hamas Telegram channel, August 29, 2024).

► "Local sources" in Nablus said that on the evening of August 27, 2024, masked operatives from the Palestinian security forces operating in the old city of Nablus, shot, wounded and detained Azhar Masroujeh, a "resistance activist" wanted by Israel. Following the detention, Masroujeh's friend, Abd al-Hakim Shahin, a released prisoner and the founder of the Nablus Battalion, said that "every rifle against the resistance is a rifle of the occupation, no matter what" (al-Araby al-Jadeed, August 28, 2024; al-Shahed website, August 28 2024).

► According to reports, on August 31, 2024, Palestinian security forces raided the old city of Nablus and removed awnings which the "resistance" had hung to hide the alleys from the Israeli patrol planes. "Local sources" said that a wanted person had been detained while hanging awnings (QudsN X account, August 31, 2024; al-Shahed website, August 31, 2024).

## The Palestinian Authority (PA)

### Mahmoud Abbas visits Saudi Arabia

► On August 27, 2024, Mahmoud Abbas, PA chairman, met in Riyadh with Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi Arabian crown prince. They discussed the latest developments in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria and the region in general, and the importance of Arab and international aid to end the war in the Gaza Strip and the withdrawal of Israeli forces. Mahmoud Abbas informed bin Salman of his intention to visit the Palestinian leadership in the Gaza Strip, and which was welcomed by the Saudi crown prince. Bin Salman also reiterated Saudi Arabia's commitment to support and protect the rights of the Palestinian people. Also present at the meeting were Hussein al-Sheikh, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee; Majed Faraj, commander of Palestinian General Intelligence; Majdi al-Khaldi, Mahmoud Abbas'

diplomatic advisor; and Bassam al-Agha, PA representative in Saudi Arabia (Wafa, August 27, 2024).



**Mahmoud Abbas and the Saudi crown prince (Wafa, August 27, 2024)**

### **Muhammad Mustafa meets with the Dutch foreign minister**

► On September 1, 2024, Muhammad Mustafa, PA prime minister, met in his office in Ramallah with Caspar Feldcamp, the Dutch foreign minister, to discuss promoting efforts to stop the fighting in the Gaza Strip and the activities of the Israeli security forces in Judea and Samaria. Mustafa said EU and its member states to take concrete measures against the "colonial activity and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank." He said he hoped the Netherlands would recognize the [so-called] "State of Palestine." Feldcamp noted the importance of a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, the introduction of emergency aid and food, the cessation of Israeli "aggression" in Judea and Samaria and the importance of maintaining the status quo on the Temple Mount (Wafa, September 1, 2024).