



# Spotlight on the Israel-Palestinian Conflict

February 25 – March 4, 2025

## Overview<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ The first stage of the ceasefire agreement ended without a Hamas-Israel agreement for continuing negotiations for the second stage and the release of the hostages. Hamas accused Israel of committing a "war crime" by halting the entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, and reiterated that they were committed to implementing the agreement. According to reports, Hamas' military wing is preparing to resume fighting against Israel.
- ▶ In preparation for the March 4, 2025 emergency Arab summit in Egypt to discuss the plan for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, Hamas said it would be willing to relinquish control of the Strip as part of an arrangement which had national consensus, but would not agree to the presence of foreign forces in the Strip.
- ▶ This past week there were three terrorist attacks, two of them inside Israeli territory, in which one person was killed and at least 16 others were injured. Israeli security forces continued counterterrorism operations in northern Samaria. Hamas incited anti-Israel violence for the beginning of the Muslim month of Ramadan.

## The Ceasefire

- ▶ On the night of February 26, 2025, the Hamas military wing transferred the bodies of four Israeli hostages to Israel. Hamas held no "ceremony," in accordance with Israel's demand. Israel then released 602 Palestinian prisoners who were supposed to have been released on February 22, 2025, but whose release was delayed by Hamas violations of the ceasefire agreement, holding "ceremonies" during the release of hostages and the return of bodies, and the return of an unidentified body instead of that of an Israeli hostage. Among those released were 47 former prisoners from the Gilad Shalit exchange deal who had been rearrested and 50 terrorist operatives sentenced to life imprisonment (Israeli media, February 27, 2025). The Hamas ministry of martyrs, wounded and prisoners called the deal a significant achievement

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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.

for the "resistance struggle,"<sup>2</sup> which, Hamas claimed, had imposed its will and secured the release of prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment. Hamas claimed the release of the Gilad Shalit exchange deal prisoners was proof that the "resistance" would remain faithful to its promise until all prisoners were released, adding that the second phase would lead to the release of the remaining prisoners (Hamas ministry of martyrs, wounded and prisoners Telegram channel, February 27, 2025).

► On February 28, 2025, the first stage ended according to the ceasefire and hostage release agreement. Hamas presented a list of alleged Israeli "violations" carried out during the first phase, including the claim that that IDF forces did not continue their withdrawal and committed 962 "violations" consisting of airstrikes and shootings which resulted in at least 116 deaths and 490 injuries; the daily entry of only about half the agreed-on number of fuel trucks; the entry of 15 caravans instead of the agreed 60,000; the entry of only nine heavy engineering vehicles; the prevention of the delivery of construction materials for infrastructure repair; preventing the power plant in al-Nuseirat from operating; delays in the release of prisoners; the continued closure of the Rafah Crossing on both sides of the border; and the prevention of the exit of patients and wounded to Egypt (Hamas Telegram channel, March 3, 2025).



**Infographic of Israeli "violations" in the first phase, according to Hamas (Quds Agency Telegram channel, March 3, 2025)**

► On March 2, 2025, Israel announced the halt of humanitarian aid deliveries to the Gaza Strip after accusing Hamas of refusing to accept an American-proposed framework to extend the ceasefire by an additional 40 days and to release more hostages. Hamas accused Israel of violating the ceasefire agreement by refusing to enter into negotiations for the second phase and said they would not release more hostages without an agreement:

<sup>2</sup> Anti-Israeli terrorism and violence.

► Hamas called Israel's decision [to halt humanitarian aid deliveries] a "blatant attempt" to evade the agreement and avoid entering negotiations for the second phase, and claims of Hamas violations were "baseless." Hamas called the halting of the deliveries a "war crime" and violation of the agreement, adding that the mediators and the international community had to pressure Israel to stop its "immoral punitive measures." Hamas reiterated its commitment to implementing all three phases of the agreement and said the only way to return the "captives" was to abide by the agreement and enter negotiations for the second phase (Hamas in Judea and Samaria Telegram channel, March 2, 2025).

► Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem claimed Israel was violating the ceasefire agreement by failing to implement the humanitarian protocol, failing to withdraw from the Philadelphi Axis and failing to enter into negotiations for the second phase. He claimed Israel was exploiting the situation created by President Trump's initiatives while advancing plans to uproot Gazans and impose stricter conditions for the second phase. He said Hamas refused to extend the first phase and demanded immediate serious negotiations on the second phase, including a full withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and an Israeli commitment not to resume fighting (Safa, March 2, 2025).

► Hamas figure Mahmoud Mardawi said Hamas would not agree to extend the first phase of the agreement and demanded its implementation in stages as originally agreed. He said there was no room for renewed negotiations and called on the mediators to ensure that Israel fully adhered to the terms of the agreement. He said Israel would get its "captives" back only as part of a prisoner exchange deal and warned that Israel was mistaken if it thought it could achieve through an economic blockade what it failed to achieve by military means (al-Jazeera, March 2, 2025).

► Hamas representative in Lebanon Osama Hamdan claimed the movement was committed to the second phase of the agreement and accused Israel halt of humanitarian aid of being "occupation blackmail" and a bargaining chip in the negotiations. He added that the "occupation" was pushing to alter the agreement with proposals to extend phase one or create an intermediate phase, and that the proposals were inconsistent with the agreement as signed (Hamas Telegram channel, March 3, 2025).

► Hamas-affiliated commentator Wissam Afifa<sup>3</sup> said the movement might rely on a "multidimensional approach," combining threats of escalation on the ground, political pressure and negotiation maneuvers to force Israel back to the negotiating table while increasing international pressure on it. He added that Hamas might use the threat of completely halting negotiations if Israeli "stubbornness" continued, which could exert internal pressure on the Israeli government, especially as pressure grew from the families of the Israeli hostages. He said Hamas would exploit divisions in Israeli society and apply pressure on the families of Israeli hostages to influence political decision-making, arguing that Israel's option of returning to war, which it threatened, would not achieve new objectives despite the danger (al-Jazeera.net, March 3, 2025).

### **Hamas prepares to renew the fighting**

► Given the deadlock in the negotiations, "senior Arab officials" reported Hamas was reorganizing its military forces in preparation for a possible return to fighting in the Gaza Strip. Reportedly, Hamas' military wing has appointed new commanders and begun mapping locations for deploying fighters in the event of renewed fighting. It has also begun repairing the tunnel network and has distributed pamphlets to new, inexperienced fighters on how to wage guerrilla warfare against Israel. The "officials" noted that the commander of Hamas' military wing in northern Gaza, Izz al-Din Haddad, met with deputies in February 2025 to explain how a renewed Israeli attack might develop and warned that Israel would first act to regain control of the Netzarim Corridor. They added that armed operatives from Hamas' military wing were turning unexploded ordnance into improvised explosive devices and scanning properties to locate listening devices left behind by the IDF to monitor their movements (The Wall Street Journal, February 26, 2025).

### **IDF operations in the Gaza Strip**

► On February 26, 2025, a rocket was fired and fell inside the Gaza Strip. In response, the IDF attacked several rocket-launching positions in the area (IDF spokesperson, February 26, 2025). "Local sources and eyewitnesses" claimed children had been playing with a rocket exposed after a recent Israeli strike in northwestern Rafah, "causing it to fire and fall within the Strip." Israeli aircraft then [allegedly] attacked areas far from the location where the rocket was fired,

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<sup>3</sup> A Hamas-affiliated media figure. Formerly the director of Hamas' al-Aqsa media network, and before that, the editor-in-chief of the movement's magazine, al-Risala.

two strikes targeted open areas in eastern Khan Yunis, and another in eastern central Gaza. No casualties were reported (al-Ayyam, February 27, 2025).

► This past week, IDF forces shot at suspicious Gazans who approached in various areas of the Gaza Strip and posed a threat. On March 2, 2025, an Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked several Gazans operating near IDF forces in northern Gaza and seen planting an explosive device (IDF spokesperson, March 2, 2025). "Palestinian sources" reported that two brothers were killed when an Israeli UAV attacked a group of "civilians" in the al-Bura area, east of Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza (Hassan Aslih's Telegram channel, March 2, 2025; Palestinian Center for Human Rights website, March 2, 2025). In another incident, an Israeli Air Force aircraft struck two Gazans near IDF forces in southern Gaza who posed a threat (IDF spokesperson, March 2, 2025).

► On March 3, 2025, an IDF force attacked a suspicious motorboat in the coastal area of northern Khan Yunis, in violation of security restrictions (IDF spokesperson, March 3, 2025). Palestinian media reported three injuries in an airstrike on the coastal area of al-Mawasi in northwestern Khan Yunis, claiming one of the injured was a child (al-Aqsa TV Telegram channel, March 3, 2025).

## The Gaza Strip

### The situation in the Gaza Strip

► The Palestinian Authority government media center reported on the activities of the government operations room for emergency interventions, in cooperation with local and international partners, between February 18 and 24, 2025. According to reports, six new shelters were built for 914 families; 26,000 food packages were distributed, and financial aid was provided to 39,000 citizens; a polio vaccination campaign was conducted for 592,000 children; a field hospital was relocated from Khan Yunis to the Saraya area in Gaza and began treating hundreds of wounded; a new school year was opened for 300,000 students; damage to 190 schools was mapped, with 60% of them completely destroyed, and coordination was made for debris removal (Wafa, February 26, 2025).

► Mundhir al-Ghamari, director general of the mosques department in the Hamas ministry of endowments, said that in cooperation with charitable organizations the ministry had launched a project to establish alternative places of worship for mosques which were completely destroyed during the fighting. He said so far, 400 prayer compounds had been set up across the Gaza Strip and the number continued to rise to meet the population's needs for Ramadan. According to reports, Israeli attacks destroyed 1,109 of 1,244 mosques in the Gaza Strip (89%),

of which 834 were completely demolished and 275 were severely damaged and unfit for use. Reportedly, the damage to the religious sector is estimated at over \$500 million and has directly impacted the ability to conduct worship and prayers (alresala.net, February 28, 2025).

► Four thousand food packages were distributed to families, donated by the Palestinian community in the United States, in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority (PA) foreign ministry and the Palestinian Aid Fund. According to reports, an additional 6,000 packages are expected to be distributed. The PA foreign ministry praised the commitment of the Palestinian community in the United States to providing aid and strengthening solidarity among Palestinians worldwide (PA foreign ministry Facebook page, February 28, 2025).

► In a video for the Muslim month of Ramadan, several residents of the al-Shejaiya neighborhood in Gaza shared their feelings. The main theme was that this Ramadan was unlike those in previous years. A Gazan named Abu Muhammad said Ramadan could not be observed properly when there was no home, no water and no electricity. Another Gazan said that every year they welcomed Ramadan with love, prayers and worship. This year they would also welcome the holiday, but the joy was incomplete (al-Jazeera Arabic YouTube channel, February 28, 2025).



**A Gazan complains about daily life, saying, "Our lives in Gaza have turned into waiting in line, a line for medicine, a line for bread, a line for water, a line for gas. May Allah save us from these lines" (cartoon by Maher al-Ghag, February 27, 2025)**

## Hamas governance

► A funeral was held in the al-Shati refugee camp in Gaza for 40 terrorist operatives of the local battalion of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, attended by hundreds of local residents, including armed Hamas operatives (Safa Agency, February 28, 2025). In Khan Yunis, a mass funeral was held for four terrorist operatives, also attended by local residents and armed operatives (Shehab Agency, February 28, 2025).



**Mass funeral for Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operatives in the al-Shati refugee camp (Safa Agency, February 28, 2025)**

► Following the halt of aid to the Gaza Strip, Salama Maarouf, head of the Hamas government media office in Gaza, said despite the availability of food in markets, the existing quantity would last at most two weeks. He claimed the trucks entering the Strip carried food supplies sufficient only for daily consumption with no possibility of stockpiling, and not all contained essential items. He also claimed the ministry of economy took legal action against dozens of merchants who raised prices or hoarded goods. He said the ministry confiscated their products and sold them at regulated prices, and published a list of recommended prices (al-Aqsa Network, March 3, 2025). In this context, al-Hares TV, operated by Hamas' military wing, reported that Hamas security forces were operating against merchants who violated the directives by raising prices, creating monopolies or hoarding goods (al-Hares, March 2, 2025). It was also reported that the police investigating supplies in Khan Yunis arrested four



merchants as part of a broad operation to combat price gouging and stockpiling (alresala.net, March 3, 2025).



**Hamis "supply police" and ministry of economy teams on market patrols to monitor prices (Hamis ministry of the interior Telegram channel March 4, 2025)**

► A Gazan posted an angry message to Facebook complaining that the presence of tents in Gaza did not indicate home reconstruction, donkey-drawn carts did not signify the restoration of transportation, the presence of meat for sale did not mean there was no hunger and high prices did not indicate economic recovery. He also criticized al-Jazeera reports portraying Hamas as victorious, saying they were not proof of an overwhelming victory (Iyad Saadi's Facebook page, March 1, 2025).



**Cartoon by Hamas in-house cartoonist Alaa' al-Laqtah. "Ramadan among the ruins - unbreakable steadfastness" (Palestinian Media Center Telegram channel, March 2, 2025)**

## "The day after"

► Ambassador Tamim Khalaf, spokesperson for the Egyptian foreign ministry, said any proposal for the future governance of the Gaza Strip which deviated from the Egyptian and Arab position advocating Israel's withdrawal from the Palestinian territories and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, was unacceptable. His statement came in response to reports suggesting the possibility of Egypt's administering Gaza. He said Gaza was



"inseparable" from Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem, and had to be under full Palestinian sovereignty as part of an independent Palestinian state (al-Qahera News, February 26, 2025).

► Hamas told senior Egyptian officials it was not competing for control over the Gaza Strip but demanded that any Egyptian or Arab plan did not include the introduction of "spies" serving Israel under the guise of administrative committees. Hamas claimed it was willing not to manage Gaza's affairs or interfere in the activities of independent committees focused on humanitarian aid, as long as the infiltration of "hostile elements" was prevented. Meanwhile, in a closed meeting with Egyptian intelligence, Palestinian "resistance" factions insisted the "resistance's weapons" were a "non-negotiable red line," except within a framework of international agreements leading to the establishment of a Palestinian state, to which they would agree to hand over their weapons (Ra'i al-Youm, February 28, 2025).

► Muhammad Darwish, head of the Hamas Shura Council, claimed the movement was prepared to cooperate with any initiative which helped prevent the "expulsion" of the Gazans and supported its reconstruction while preserving Palestinian rights, especially the right to "resist the occupation"<sup>4</sup> and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem [sic] as its capital. He said Hamas demanded a full, permanent ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and the lifting of the "blockade." He also said Hamas opposed any attempt to impose external governance and the presence of foreign forces in Gaza, while supporting the establishment of a technocratic government or a committee to manage the Strip, consistent with Egyptian proposals (Hamas Telegram channel, March 1, 2025).

► Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem claimed the movement would not obstruct any arrangements for managing Gaza as long as they had national consensus. He added that Hamas had already made several concessions on the issue and had agreed to the establishment of a social aid committee without Hamas participation (al-Arabiya, March 3, 2025).

## Israel, Judea and Samaria

### Terrorist attacks

► In the past week, three terrorist attacks were carried out, resulting in one death and at least 16 injuries:

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<sup>4</sup> Attack Israel.

◆ **A vehicle ramming at the Karkur Junction:** On February 27, 2025, a Palestinian driver ran over pedestrians at the Karkur Junction. He then crashed into a police vehicle at the entrance to the Ganei Shmuel shopping center, where he was shot and killed. Twelve people were injured, including a teenage girl in critical condition and two others in serious condition. According to reports, the terrorist lived in the Jenin area, was married to an Israeli woman and was in Israel illegally (Israeli media, February 27, 2025). He apparently sought revenge for the injury of his brother by IDF gunfire (Jenin Battalion Telegram channel discussions, February 28, 2025).

◆ **A shooting near Brukhin:** On February 28, 2025, shots were fired at an Israeli vehicle near the community of Brukhin in Samaria. No injuries were reported; the vehicle was damaged. The shooters fled the scene (IDF spokesperson, February 28, 2025).

◆ **A stabbing in Haifa:** On March 3, 2025, an Israeli Druze armed with a knife stabbed passengers on a bus at the Haifa Central Bus Station, then continued stabbing bystanders on the platform. He killed one civilian and injured four. He was shot and killed by security guards (Israeli media, March 3, 2025).

## Counterterrorism activities

► During operations in February 2025, Israeli security forces eliminated approximately 25 terrorist operatives, detained around 350 wanted Palestinians, confiscated about 120 weapons and destroyed hundreds of explosive devices. Meanwhile, ongoing security operations continued in Judea and Samaria, during which wanted Palestinians were detained, and weapons and funds intended for terrorist activities were located (IDF spokesperson, February 25 – March 4, 2025). Palestinian media reported one fatality from security force gunfire in Nablus (Wafa, February 25, 2025). The al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (AAMB) reported that one of their operatives had been killed in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus (AAMB Telegram channel, February 27, 2025). According to reports, IDF bulldozers demolished homes in the area of the Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Mosque in the Nur Shams refugee camp in Tulkarm. "Palestinian sources" claimed that the IDF had announced the demolition of 11 homes under the pretext of road construction, but in practice, 30 homes were destroyed. "Palestinian sources" in Tulkarm reported that Israeli security force operations led to the deaths of 13 Palestinians, injuries and numerous detentions, and the displacement of 16,000 residents from the Tulkarm and Nur Shams refugee camps (Palestinian Media Center, March 1, 2025).

## Incitement to violence during Ramadan

► On March 1, 2025, the Muslim religious month of Ramadan began. As in previous years, Hamas promoted incitement to terrorism and violence, especially in Judea and Samaria and around Muslim holy sites:

◆ Haroun Nasser al-Din, Hamas political bureau member and head of the movement's Jerusalem office, accused Israel of carrying out demolitions and raids in Jerusalem as part of a "deliberate policy" to implement settlement, dispossession and Judaization. He claimed Jerusalem residents would stand as a solid barrier against attempts to expel them and establish Israeli control, while the Palestinian "resistance" would become stronger. He called for widespread escalation [of activities] during Ramadan, especially an increase in Palestinian presence at al-Aqsa Mosque, "resistance" Israeli "raids" and confrontation of "purification and Judaization projects" (Safa Agency, February 27, 2025).

◆ Hamas figure Abd al-Rahman Shadid called for a mass gathering at al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan and for defying Israeli restrictions in Jerusalem. He claimed "Israeli settlement schemes" would not succeed in emptying al-Aqsa of its "rightful owners" but would instead motivate Jerusalem residents to defend it against "Judaization plans" (Hamas in Judea and Samaria Telegram channel, February 28, 2025).

## Activities of the Palestinian security forces

► According to reports, the Palestinian Authority security forces in Jenin arrested released prisoner Osama Haroub, a senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) member (Filastin al-Yawm X account, February 26, 2025). It was also reported that the PA security forces arrested Kamal al-Khatib, who is wanted by Israeli security forces, in the Nur Shams refugee camp in Tulkarm (al-Aqsa TV Telegram channel, February 27, 2025).

## The Palestinian Authority (PA)

### International activity

► PA chairman Mahmoud Abbas arrived in Egypt to participate in the Arab emergency summit on March 4, 2025. Before the meeting he met with the president of the European Council, António Costa, and the president of Iraq, Abdul Latif Rashid. They discussed the latest developments in the Palestinian arena, including the need to allow the PA to assume responsibility for the Gaza Strip, the entry of humanitarian aid into the Strip, a ceasefire, a full withdrawal of IDF force, and the cessation of Israel's [alleged] unilateral actions in Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem (Wafa, March 3, 2025).

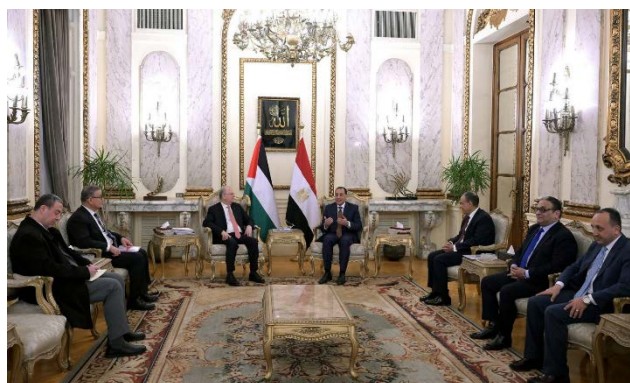


**Abbas with the president of the European Council (Wafa, March 3, 2025)**

► Muhammad Mustafa, PA prime minister, held talks in Egypt in preparation for the Arab emergency summit in Cairo on March 4, 2025, regarding plans for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip following President Trump's proposal to "uproot" all Gazans:

◆ Mustafa met with Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly, who reviewed the Gaza reconstruction plan to be presented during the summit. He said the Egyptian government, under the guidance of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, had formulated a phased plan for Gaza's reconstruction without displacing its residents. Madbouly also emphasized Egypt's unwavering support for legitimate Palestinian rights, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of a Palestinian state with the 1967 borders and east Jerusalem as its capital. Mustafa said that the joint plan with Egypt ensured that the population would not be displaced, and the plan was ready and could be implemented. He claimed the situation in northern Judea and Samaria was just as severe as in Gaza and noted the need to end the "occupation" and establish the Palestinian state (Egyptian prime minister's office Facebook page, March 1, 2025; Wafa, March 1, 2025).

◆ Meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty, Mustafa expressed appreciation for Egypt's president and its leadership for formulating the plan for the Strip's reconstruction. The Egyptian foreign minister said the summit in Cairo would reflect support for the establishment of a Palestinian state and opposition to forced migration (al-Qahera Network, March 1, 2025). In another meeting, the two discussed preparations for the summit, particularly regarding reconstruction efforts without displacing the Gazans (Egyptian foreign ministry Facebook page March 3, 2025).



**Mustafa and the Egyptian Prime Minister (Wafa, March 1, 2025)**

◆ Hussein al-Sheikh, secretary of the PLO Executive Committee, met with Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan and Minister Musaad al-Aiban. They discussed the latest developments and preparations for the Arab summit in Cairo (Hussein al-Sheikh's X account, February 28, 2025). Al-Sheikh also spoke with Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, the Russian special envoy to the Middle East and Africa, to discuss recent developments. They noted the need for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, the entry of humanitarian aid, and the importance of the Arab summit in Cairo (Hussein al-Sheikh's X account, March 1, 2025).

◆ Jibril Rajoub, secretary of Fatah's Central Committee, met in Ankara with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and briefed him on the latest political developments in the Palestinian arena, with an emphasis on [alleged] "Israeli colonial expansion in the West Bank and Gaza Strip." Rajoub praised Turkey's support for the Palestinians during the fighting and noted the need to work toward a permanent ceasefire. Fidan noted the importance of Palestinian national unity under the leadership of Mahmoud Abbas as part of confronting "policies of displacement and annexation" (Wafa, February 27, 2025).

## **Anti-Israel propaganda campaign**

► The PLO launched a digital media platform called PAL-VOICE, which claims to be a "digital media platform... dedicated to fostering international dialogue and communication while

enhancing awareness of Palestinian issues from political, legal, and humanitarian perspectives."