



Spotlight on the Israel-Palestinian Conflict

March 11 – 18, 2025

Overview¹

- ▶ On March 18, 2025, the IDF attacked Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) terrorist operatives and facilities in the Gaza Strip for the first time since the ceasefire went into effect on January 19, 2025. Hamas claimed that more than 400 people were killed, including senior figures in its political bureau, and accused Israel of renewing the "war of extermination" and endangering the lives of the hostages. Hamas claimed they remained committed to continuing negotiations on the second phase of the ceasefire agreement. The spokesman for the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's military wing was reportedly killed in an attack on the central Gaza Strip.
- ▶ In the United States there was support for the Israeli operation, placing the responsibility on Hamas, while the Arab world and some Western countries condemned the attacks and called for a return to the ceasefire.
- ▶ The Palestinian Authority accused Hamas of engaging in unauthorized contacts with "foreign entities" regarding the future of the Gaza Strip. In response, Hamas demanded that the Palestinian Authority cease security coordination with Israel.
- ▶ Palestinians welcomed the American president's statement that "no one is expelling Palestinians from Gaza."
- ▶ An Israeli civilian was injured in a shooting near Ariel. Israeli security forces continued their counterterrorism operation in northern Samaria and expanded it to Nablus.
- ▶ Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas visited the king of Jordan and noted the importance of Arab coordination in implementing the Arab-Islamic initiative for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.

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The War in the Gaza Strip Continues

IDF operations in the Gaza Strip

► Before dawn on March 18, 2025, the IDF and the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) launched Operation Strength and Sword, attacking Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) targets throughout the Gaza Strip. The targets included senior figures in the Hamas political bureau, commanders and field operatives of the organization's military wing, rocket launch sites, weapons and other military facilities. The Rafah crossing² was closed (IDF Spokesperson and Israeli media, March 18, 2025). The IDF Spokesperson in Arabic ordered the evacuation of all residents from areas close to the buffer zone along the Israeli border, from the north of the Strip to the south, particularly in the neighborhoods of Beit Hanoun, Khirbat Khiza'a, Abasan al-Kabira and Abasan al-Jadeeda. According to the IDF Spokesperson in Arabic they are dangerous combat zones and residents were urged to relocate to shelters in western Gaza City and Khan Yunis (Avichay Adraee's X account, March 18, 2025).



IDF Spokesperson's announcement in Arabic (IDF Spokesperson in Arabic, March 18, 2025)

Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)

► "Palestinian sources" reported that the IDF targets were [allegedly] residential buildings, refugee camps and shelter centers, and that there was a mass exodus from various areas in the southern Gaza Strip and from Rafah (Quds News Agency and al-Aqsa TV, March 18, 2025). The Hamas-controlled ministry of health in Gaza claimed that since the resumption of IDF operations, 404 fatalities and 562 injuries were recorded in Gazan hospitals. The ministry also claimed that many casualties remained under the rubble and that efforts were underway to rescue them (ministry of health in Gaza Telegram channel, March 18, 2025).

² The Rafah Crossing was open throughout the ceasefire for the passage of wounded Gazans seeking medical treatment abroad.

► The Hamas government media information office confirmed the deaths of six senior figures: Issam al-Da'alis; chairman of the government monitoring committee and member of the political bureau; Yasser Harb, a member of the political bureau; Muhammad al-Jamasi, a member of the political bureau and head of the emergency committee; Ahmed al-Hatta, deputy minister of justice; Mahmoud Abu Watfa, deputy minister of the interior; and Bahjat Abu Sultan, head of the central operations directorate at the interior ministry (Filastin al-Yawm Telegram channel, March 18, 2025). "Local sources" in Gaza reported that Naji Abu Seif, aka Abu Hamza, spokesman of the PIJ's military wing, was killed in an Israeli attack on the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza (Quds News Agency, March 18, 2025).

► Hamas condemned the renewal of Israel's attacks and warned they would endanger the Israeli hostages. Hamas reiterated its claim that it remained committed to continuing negotiations and called on the international community to stop what it referred to as Israel's "war of extermination:"

◆ Hamas accused Prime Minister Netanyahu and his "Nazi government" [sic] of carrying out a "war of extermination against 'defenseless civilians'" in Gaza. Hamas placed full responsibility on Israel for the consequences, including harm to "civilians" and the dire humanitarian situation. Hamas also called on mediators to hold Israel accountable for "violating the agreement" and urged the Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to take action to lift the "siege" on Gaza. Hamas demanded that the UN and the Security Council convene an urgent session (Hamas Telegram channel, March 18, 2025). Hamas denied it was preparing to resume attacks against IDF forces and accused "the occupation" of trying to mislead global public opinion to hide its decision to resume [alleged] "genocide" (Hamas Telegram channel, March 18, 2025).

◆ Hamas' Izzat al-Rishq warned that Israel's decision to return to fighting meant "a sacrifice of its prisoners and their death sentence." He accused Israel of failing to meet its commitments to mediators and the international community and called on the mediators to hold Israel accountable for canceling the ceasefire agreement. He said "the enemy" would not achieve through war what it had failed to achieve through negotiations (Izzat al-Rishq's Telegram channel, March 18, 2025).

◆ Hamas claimed that one Israeli hostage had been killed and two injured in the attacks and accused Prime Minister Netanyahu of trying to "get rid of the Israeli prisoners." The

" Hamas figure " added that Hamas had met its commitments since the beginning of the ceasefire agreement (al-Araby al-Jadeed, March 18, 2025).

International reactions

► The renewal of Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip received support from the American administration but was condemned by Arab states and some Western countries:

◆ The United States State Department reported Hamas bore responsibility for the renewal of the war and it was forcing the Palestinians to suffer the consequences. According to the State Department the fighting could have been avoided if Hamas had accepted the proposal of United States Special Envoy Steven Witkoff (al-Sharq, March 18, 2025).

◆ Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas, condemned "the aggression of the Israeli occupation" and accused Israel of "massacring the Palestinian people." He called on the international community to compel "the occupation" to halt its "aggression" but also condemned Hamas' "irresponsible conduct" (Wafa, March 18, 2025).

◆ The Egyptian foreign ministry condemned the Israeli attacks on Gaza, accusing Israel of a "blatant violation" of the ceasefire agreement and calling on the international community to intervene immediately to stop the "Israeli aggression" and prevent the return to a cycle of violence (Egyptian foreign ministry Facebook page, March 18, 2025).

◆ On its X account, the Saudi Arabian foreign ministry condemned "the renewal of aggression by the Israeli occupation forces in the Gaza Strip and their direct bombardment of areas populated by 'defenseless civilians' without regard for international humanitarian law." The ministry noted the importance of "an immediate cessation of killing, violence and destruction by Israel" and the protection of Palestinian civilians "from Israel's war machine."

◆ The French foreign ministry condemned the Israeli attacks and called for their immediate cessation. According to the ministry, the attacks jeopardize efforts to free the Israeli hostages held by Hamas and threaten the lives of Palestinian civilians (Agence France-Presse, March 18, 2025).

◆ The office of the British Prime Minister said Israel and Hamas had to fully implement the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip and urged the parties to return to dialogue to

end the war. Reports claimed the civilian casualties from the overnight attacks were "horrific" (Agence France-Presse, March 18, 2025).

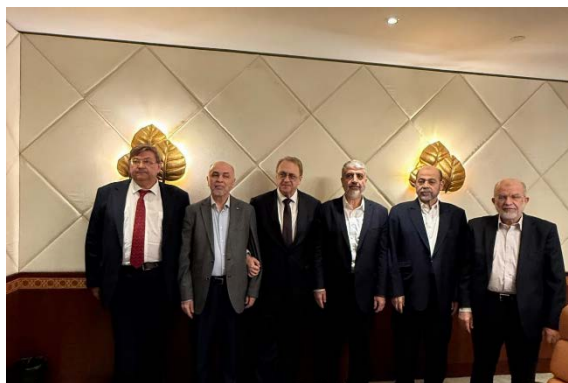
The Ceasefire (Before Operation Strength and Sword)

- ▶ On March 14, 2025, Hamas announced it had agreed to release an Israeli hostage with American citizenship and four bodies of hostages with dual citizenship. Hamas claimed it was "completely prepared" to begin negotiations and reach a comprehensive agreement on the second phase of the ceasefire agreement, calling for Israel to fully implement its commitments (Hamas Telegram channel, March 14, 2025).
- ▶ Hamas spokesman Abd al-Latif al-Qanua said the movement's agreement to release the Israeli-American hostage was part of a "push" to complete the implementation of the ceasefire agreement with "the Israeli occupation." He claimed Hamas was working with mediators to force Israel to complete all three phases of the agreement, ensuring a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip, a permanent ceasefire and Gaza's reconstruction (al-Araby al-Jadeed, March 14, 2025). He added that Hamas' agreement to the mediators' proposal was not a substitute for the second phase but rather paved the way for negotiations to begin. He claimed Hamas had not set impossible conditions but rather agreed-upon terms, guaranteed by the mediators, including the United States, adding that the ball was now in Israel's court (al-Araby website, March 15, 2025; Abd al-Latif al-Qanua's Telegram channel, March 15, 2025).
- ▶ Hamas claimed its agreement was an "exceptional deal" whose objective was to restore the ceasefire. However, no hostage would be released unless Israel implemented the ceasefire agreement. Hamas demanded that negotiations on the second phase begin on the day of the release and last no longer than fifty days, with the mediators serving as guarantors. Hamas also demanded that Israel be prevented from blocking humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip and that Israeli forces withdraw from the Philadelphi Axis. Hamas further demanded the release of more Palestinian prisoners in exchange for the release of Israeli hostages (al-Quds X account, March 15, 2025; AP, March 15, 2025; Agence France-Presse, March 15, 2025). "Sources in Hamas" stated that the movement had added the demand to open the Rafah Crossing in both directions to counter Israeli attempts to "empty" the Strip of its residents, as tens of thousands of Palestinians were living under harsh conditions outside Gaza, with some wanting to return (al-Sharq al-Awsat, March 15, 2025).

► On March 14, 2025, Hamas reported that a delegation led by Khalil al-Haya, head of the political bureau, went to Cairo to meet with senior Egyptians and monitor developments in the negotiations and ceasefire agreement (Hamas Telegram channel, March 14, 2025). A "Hamas source" reported that the delegation returned to Doha on March 16, 2025, where it held "productive discussions" with senior Egyptian officials, focusing on ways to advance the implementation of the ceasefire agreement in light of Hamas' agreement to the American proposal. The source added that the delegation had asked the mediators and Americans involved in the agreement to force Israel to implement the humanitarian protocol, immediately allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, and begin negotiations for the second phase (aljazeera.net, March 16, 2025).

► United States Special Envoy Steven Witkoff called Hamas' response "unacceptable." He warned that the window of opportunity was closing and Hamas should observe how the United States had begun attacking the Houthis in Yemen (CNN, March 16, 2025). In response, Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem claimed they should focus on addressing the demands of the second phase rather than formulating new and secondary agreements. He added that threats produced nothing positive but only complicated matters and did not promote the agreement's goals (Anadolu Agency, March 16, 2025).

► On March 16, 2025, a Hamas delegation led by Muhammad Darwish, head of the Shura Council, met in Qatar with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, the Russian president's envoy for the Middle East and Africa. They discussed the status of the ceasefire negotiations, the [alleged] "ongoing Israeli violations" of the agreement and delays in its implementation, including the failure to allow humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip and the reconstruction of infrastructure. Darwish claimed Hamas was committed to implementing the agreement and called on Israel to abide by its terms. He noted the importance of Russian involvement in supporting Palestinian rights and preventing "forced changes through siege or expulsion." Bogdanov reiterated Russia's support for Palestinian rights, reaffirmed Moscow's commitment to the ceasefire and the unrestricted entry of humanitarian aid and clarified Russia's opposition to imposing solutions on the Palestinian people (Hamas Telegram channel, March 16, 2025).



Hamas figures meet with Bogdanov (Hamas Telegram channel, March 16, 2025)

The IDF in the Gaza Strip (before the fighting resumed)

► IDF forces attacked Gazans suspected of being terrorist operatives seen in restricted areas or planting explosives devices. Hamas and PIJ terrorists who operated a drone posing a threat to the forces in the Beit Lahia area in the northern Gaza Strip were attacked. Some of the terrorist operatives were disguised as correspondents, including a PIJ operative who had been released from Israeli prison as part of the ceasefire agreement (IDF Spokesperson, March 11–18, 2025). "Palestinian sources" rejected the Israeli claim that the targeted Gazans were terrorist operatives and claimed that ten people had been killed in the attack in Beit Lahia, some of whom were working as correspondents and photographers (RT Arabic, March 15, 2025). Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qassem accused Israel of committing a "brutal massacre" (Hamas official Telegram channel, March 15, 2025).

The Gaza Strip

The situation in the Gaza Strip

► Bassam al-Hamadin, Hamas deputy assistant minister of health in Gaza, claimed Israel had completely destroyed ten oxygen production stations for critical hospital departments. As a result, hospitals in Gaza urgently needed oxygen production stations to continue providing healthcare services in various departments (ministry of health in Gaza Telegram channel, March 13, 2025).

► Mundhir Shblaq, director-general of the Gazan coastal municipalities water commission, claimed Israel's decision to stop providing electricity to the desalination plant had drastically reduced its output, from 18,000 to 3,000 cubic meters of water per day, severely affecting the supply of drinking water of the residents in central Gaza and Khan Yunis, including the displaced population. He said that while there were no precise data on the lack of water,

estimates suggested that each person in northern Gaza and Gaza City required between three and nine liters of water per day (Safa News Agency Telegram channel, March 13, 2025).

► UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric claimed humanitarian organizations were forced to reduce food rations to prioritize assistance for as many people as possible. He warned of a sharp deterioration in food security if aid deliveries were not resumed quickly. The World Health Organization noted that by the end of February 2025, 24 out of 32 environmental samples collected indicated the presence of polio virus type 2 (Wafa, March 13, 2025).

► The Hamas government media information office in Gaza reported severe shortages of food, water and fuel, leading to the risk of famine and the collapse of basic services. According to published data, 80% of the population had lost their food sources, 25% of bakeries had ceased operation because of fuel shortages and 90% of residents could not find accessible water sources. Municipal infrastructure had collapsed, halting waste and debris removal efforts. Hamas accused Prime Minister Netanyahu of committing "war crimes" and called on Arab and Islamic nations to act to lift the "siege" and open the Rafah Crossing for civilian passage (Safa, March 14, 2025).

► Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA commissioner general, reported that more than 270,000 boys and girls had enrolled in UNRWA's education programs, receiving basic education in Arabic, English, mathematics and sciences. He added that UNRWA teams had recently opened 130 temporary learning spaces in shelters and schools across Gaza, reaching approximately 47,000 children with frontal education (Philippe Lazzarini's X account, March 15, 2025).

Hamas governance

► The Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing, held a mass funeral in Gaza City for senior figures and operatives of the "resistance"³ who were killed in fighting Israel. Many local residents participated in the funerals alongside members of the military wing (al-Aqsa TV Telegram channel, March 13, 2025).

³ The terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip.



The mass funeral in Gaza (al-Aqsa TV Telegram channel, March 13, 2025).

"The Day After"

- ▶ Nabil Abu Rudeineh, spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas, condemned Hamas for conducting communication channels, without authorization, with "foreign entities" [the American administration] regarding the future of the Gaza Strip. He said the exposure of such contacts before the emergency summit of the Arab League, where the Egyptian-Palestinian plan for the reconstruction of the Strip was approved, bypassed the summit's decisions. He called on Hamas to return to the national course, end the division and transfer control of the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian Authority (PA), based on the principle of one national government, law, arms and legitimate political representation (Wafa, March 11, 2025). Abdul Hakim Hanini of Hamas denied the claims that Hamas was engaging with "foreign entities" and called such accusations unacceptable. He called on the PA to end its security coordination with the "occupation" before accusing Hamas of engaging with "foreign entities" (Al Jazeera Mubasher, March 11, 2025).
- ▶ On March 12, 2025, President Trump said "no one is expelling Palestinians from Gaza" (CBS News, March 12, 2025). Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem responded that if the statement indicated a retreat from any idea of displacing Gazans then it was welcome. He added that they called for forcing Israel to implement all aspects of the ceasefire agreement, and urged the American president to translate his statements into action and force Israel to abide by the ceasefire agreement (Reuters, March 12, 2025).



Trump's shift in stance, plucking petals and thinking, "migration," "no migration." A Hamas terrorist is also plucking petals, thinking, "fool," "crazy" (Salim Assi's Instagram account, March 13, 2025)

► Hussein al-Sheikh, secretary general of the PLO Executive Committee, participated in a meeting in Qatar to discuss the Gaza Strip reconstruction plan with the foreign ministers of Qatar, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE, and Steven Witkoff, the United States special envoy to the Middle East. The ministers presented the plan to Witkoff and agreed to continue coordinating with the American administration. They also noted the importance of consolidating the ceasefire and promoting a two-state solution while calling for continued dialogue and regional cooperation to achieve stability and security (Wafa, March 12, 2025).



Meeting of the ministers and Hussein al-Sheikh with Witkoff (Egyptian foreign ministry Facebook page, March 12, 2025)

► Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty said that under the Arab-Islamic plan for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, security responsibility would be assigned to the PA. He said that there were Palestinian police forces in the Strip receiving salaries from the PA and they only needed retraining to enforce the law and maintain stability. A list of new recruits who underwent security screening was also prepared and they would be trained to reinforce the forces. Furthermore, a management committee for the Strip would be established of 15

Palestinian technocrats from Gaza without political factional affiliation (al-Sharq Channel website, March 14, 2025).

► A survey conducted by the "International Academic Campaign Against Occupation and Apartheid"⁴ examined opinions regarding the day after the war in the Gaza Strip.⁵ According to the survey, 45.2% expressed some satisfaction with the results of the Arab summit in Cairo, which adopted the Egyptian reconstruction plan for the Strip, compared to 27.1% who expressed dissatisfaction; 42.4% believed that the chances of implementing the summit's decisions were low, and 52.8% saw Israel as the main obstacle to implementing the plan; 69.5% estimated that there was little likelihood of Hamas disarming, and 65.9% doubted that Hamas would allow the PA to take control of the Strip. Regarding future governance in Gaza, 42% supported a national unity government, 26.4% saw the PA as the most suitable candidate, while only 14.2% believed Hamas would continue to rule (Watan, March 16, 2025).

Israel, Judea and Samaria

Terrorist attack

► **Shooting near Ariel:** On March 12, 2025, an Israeli civilian drove to the Ariel industrial zone where his vehicle was shot at; he was wounded. Israeli security forces initiated a search for the terrorists (IDF Spokesperson, March 12, 2025).

Counterterrorism activities

► This past week, Israeli security forces continued Operation Iron Wall in northern Samaria and expanded it to Nablus. They eliminated terrorist operatives, including a commander of the PIJ's military wing in Tubas, detained dozens of wanted individuals, and uncovered explosive devices, weapons and other terrorist facilities, including two vehicles containing weapons planned to be used in attacks. An UNRWA vest was found in a bag containing weapons in a warehouse in the Nur Shams refugee camp,. Meanwhile, Israeli security forces continued routine operations in Judea and Samaria detaining wanted individuals and seizing weapons and funds for financing terrorist activity (IDF Spokesperson, March 11-18, 2025).

⁴ "The International Academic Campaign Against Occupation and Apartheid" is an independent academic campaign founded in 2020. It consists of academics and researchers from Palestinian, Arab and international universities and research institutes, declaring its mission "to end the Israeli occupation and dismantle the 'apartheid regime,' while supporting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people" (campaign website).

⁵ The survey was conducted among 557 participants from Judea and Samaria (49.9%), the Gaza Strip (13.3%), Arab countries (25%), and foreign countries (11.8%).

► Palestinian media reported that at least 24,000 residents were displaced from their homes in refugee camps in the Tulkarm area and that extensive damage was caused (Quds, March 15, 2025). "Palestinian sources" claimed Israeli security force operations, ongoing since January 21, 2025, had paralyzed commercial activity, and according to the communications committee of the Jenin refugee camp, approximately 90% of the camp's population, about 20,000 people, had been forced to leave their homes (Sanad, March 12, 2025). Israeli security forces raided the village of Azzun, near Qalqilya, in the most extensive operation in the village in 23 years, interrogating approximately 200 local residents, detaining ten, and causing significant property damage (al-Araby al-Jadeed, March 13, 2025).



Military equipment and an UNRWA vest found in Nur Shams (IDF Spokesperson, March 16, 2025)

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

International activity

► On March 11, 2025, King Abdullah II of Jordan hosted PA chairman Mahmoud Abbas, representatives of the Islamic Waqf of Jerusalem, church leaders and other Palestinian figures for an iftar [Ramadan fast-breaking meal] in Amman (Jordanian royal palace X account, March 12, 2025). Abbas noted the importance of the king's role in safeguarding the Islamic and Christian holy sites, supporting Palestinian efforts to protect the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people striving for freedom and independence. He also expressed appreciation for the positions of the Jordanian king and his firm rejection of the "expulsion" of Palestinian residents from the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria, and acknowledged Jordan's assistance to the Palestinian people. He also noted the importance of coordinating Arab efforts and positions to implement the decisions of the Arab summit and the Egyptian-Palestinian-Arab initiative for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip while ensuring the Palestinians remained in

place, as well as transferring responsibility for developments in the Gaza Strip to PA institutions (Wafa, March 12, 2025).



Abbas and the king of Jordan (X account of the Jordanian Royal Palace, March 12, 2025)

The Palestinian security forces

- ▶ Operatives of the PA preventive security forces in Jenin reportedly arrested Abd al-Rahman Talal Faiz Oufi and Mahmoud Abdallah Yassin Abu Abed, who were wanted by Israeli security forces, after surrounding them in a house in the town of Silat al-Dhahr in the Jenin District (Jenin News Telegram channel, March 12, 2025).
- ▶ Palestinian security forces neutralized an explosive device planted by "resistance" operatives in the western part of Tubas (Ahrar Tubas Telegram channel, March 12, 2025), and detonated explosive devices prepared by "resistance fighters"⁶ after confiscating them during a raid in Tubas (al-Shahed, March 15, 2025).

⁶ Terrorist operatives.