



Spotlight on the Israel-Palestinian Conflict March 14 – 19, 2024

Overview

- ▶ **The southern arena:** IDF forces continue operating in the Gaza Strip, focusing on three main areas, the northern Gaza Strip and Gaza City, where the forces returned to Shifa Hospital; the central Gaza Strip, where they are establishing a security buffer zone near the border fence and fighting terrorist operatives in the refugee camps; and Khan Yunis, where they continue operations in the Hamad neighborhood and eastern Khan Yunis. During the week, several rockets were fired at the cities, towns and villages surrounding the Gaza Strip.
- ▶ **Negotiations for a hostage deal:** The Israeli delegation left for Qatar to begin indirect negotiations with Hamas for a hostage deal. It is estimated that the negotiations will last for about two weeks. The delegation departed after Hamas presented the mediators with a more reasonable position.
- ▶ **Aid for the Gaza Strip:** On March 16, 2024, trucks carrying humanitarian aid entered the Gaza Strip for the first time since November 2023, the result of coordination and supervision of clans and dignitaries of local families. A Spanish aid ship unloaded a cargo of 200 tons of humanitarian aid. Palestinian figures falsely accused IDF forces of killing Gazans waiting for an aid convoy; the IDF spokesperson denied the reports. Meanwhile, the representatives of the Palestinian "organizations" met to discuss the best ways to manage the distribution of the humanitarian aid. Hamas and the Palestinian Authority (PA) continue to trade accusations on the issue of managing the Strip "the day after."
- ▶ **Connections with pro-Iranian organizations:** According to reports, a meeting was recently held in Beirut by the Palestinian "organizations" and Houthi representatives to coordinate the Houthis' continued fighting "in support of the Palestinians."

- ▶ **Israel, Judea and Samaria:** Two terrorist attacks were carried out, one in Hebron and the other at the Beit Kama junction. Both terrorists were killed. An IDF Chief warrant officer was killed.
- ▶ **Ramadan:** The prayer of the first Friday of Ramadan passed with relative calm. Reportedly, 80,000 Muslims came to pray at al-Aqsa mosque. Sheikh Akrame Sabri, preacher of al-Aqsa Mosque, called on the Palestinian public to come en masse to the mosque and remain there.
- ▶ **The Palestinian Authority:** Mahmoud Abbas appointed Dr. Muhammad Mustafa as the new prime minister and instructed him to form the new government. On March 17, 2024, the foreign minister of Brazil visited Ramallah and met with Mahmoud Abbas, Muhammad Shtayyeh, outgoing PA prime minister, and the Palestinian foreign minister.

The Southern Arena

IDF activities

- ▶ IDF forces continued their operations in the Gaza Strip. In the **southern Gaza Strip** they continued operating mainly in the Khan Yunis area. In the **central Gaza Strip** they operated in the Netzarim area, carrying out targeted raids on armed operatives and terrorist targets. In the **northern Gaza Strip**, they operated in Shifa Hospital and destroyed the longest tunnel route in the northern Gaza Strip. The main events were the following:
 - ▶ **Shifa Hospital:** On the night of March 18, 2024, IDF forces launched a targeted operation in Shifa Hospital in Gaza City after receiving intelligence information that Hamas operatives, including senior terrorists, were hiding there and using it as a headquarters from which to conduct combat and terrorist operations against IDF forces. Special forces took over the hospital complex and specific buildings within the complex. Additional forces surrounded the area to prevent terrorists from escaping. The forces were attacked and an exchange of fire developed. More than 200 Gazans suspected of terrorist activities were detained and more than 50 terrorist operatives

were killed. Among the dead was Faeq Mabhouh, head of special operations of the Hamas internal security forces (IDF spokesperson, March 18, 19, 2024).



Faeq Mabhouh (Ma'an, March 17, 2024)

► **Anas al-Sharif, an al-Jazeera correspondent** who reported from the Shifa Hospital region, stated that the IDF placed snipers on the roofs of buildings near the hospital and they [allegedly] shot at "everyone in the area." He also reported on the evacuation of residents from the hospital region (al-Jazeera TV, March 18, 2024).



Right: Shooting at IDF forces from Shifa Hospital. Left: Attacking the forces with an IED (IDF spokesperson, March 18, 2024)



Weapons and money found in the office of Shifa Hospital director (IDF spokesperson, March 18, 2024)



Right: Smoke rising from the Shifa Hospital complex in Gaza following the activity of IDF forces (QudsN X account, March 19, 2024). Left: The Shifa Hospital complex at night (Shehab X account, March 19, 2024)



Gazans leave the Shifa Hospital complex (QudsN X account, March 19, 2024)

- ▶ The Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip condemned the activity of the IDF forces at the hospital, claiming it was a "war crime" and violated international law. The ministry assigned Israel responsibility for the lives of the hospital's patients and medical staff (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, March 18, 2024).
- ▶ Hamas condemned the "Zionist occupation's aggression" in Shifa Hospital, calling it a "new crime" and claiming that Israel directly attacked the hospital buildings (Hamas Telegram channel, March 18, 2024). It also condemned the killing of Faeq Mabhouh and claimed he had been in charge of coordinating with the clans and with UNRWA for the transfer of humanitarian aid to the northern Gaza Strip (Hamas Telegram channel, March 19, 2024). The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) claimed it was "another cruel Nazi occupation crime," and would not deter them (PIJ Telegram channel, March 19, 2024).
- ▶ **Destruction of a tunnel in the northern Gaza Strip:** On March 17, 2024, IDF forces destroyed the longest Hamas terrorist tunnel found to date in the northern Gaza Strip.

It was 2.5 km (1.6 miles) long, connected the northern and southern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, March 17, 2024).



Right: Destroying the terrorist tunnel. Left: Inside the tunnel
(IDF spokesperson, March 17, 2024)

► In **the southern Gaza Strip**, IDF forces continued fighting in the Hamad neighborhood in Khan Yunis, where they located and destroyed tunnels. In **the central Gaza Strip**, IDF activity continued mainly against armed terrorist squads (IDF spokesperson, March 17-18, 2024).

The Palestinian perception of the IDF's activities

► The Palestinian media reported on IDF activity in several locations: in **the northern Gaza Strip**, the Israeli Air Force attacked areas from which terrorists fired rockets at the cities, towns and villages surrounding the Gaza Strip. In **Gaza City**, in addition to the activity in Shifa Hospital, the forces attacked in the Tel al-Hawa, al-Nasr and al-Rimal neighborhoods. In **the central Gaza Strip**, IDF forces are establishing a security buffer zone near the border fence, and also attacked in the Deir al-Balah and Nuseirat regions. In **Khan Yunis**, the IDF attacked in the Hamad neighborhood in the northwest of the city, and in the Bani Suheila region east of Khan Yunis. In **Rafah**, the IDF attacked in several areas of the city (Ma'an, al-Jazeera channel, March 15, 16, 17, 2024).



An al-Jazeera TV presenter describes the activities of the IDF forces in the central Gaza Strip (right) and in the Hamad neighborhood (left) (al-Jazeera YouTube channel, March 15, 2024)



Right: IDF attacks south Gaza City (Wafa YouTube channel, March 16, 2024). Left: Israeli Air Force attacks in the Shati refugee camp in Gaza City (Shehab X account, March 16, 2024)

► A correspondent for the al-Araby channel reported considerable destruction in the Hamad neighborhood, where approximately 2,300 apartments were completely or partially destroyed. With the departure of the IDF forces from the neighborhood, medical teams began removing bodies (al-Araby YouTube channel, 17 in March 2024).



The destruction in the Hamad neighborhood in Khan Yunis (al-Araby YouTube channel, March 17, 2024)

- ▶ On the evening of March 14, 2024, Palestinian media began reporting that IDF forces had attacked Gazans gathered near Kuwait Square in the south of Gaza City to wait for the arrival of humanitarian aid, and claimed the Gazans had been "massacred." The ministry of health in the Gaza Strip alleged 20 dead and 155 injured (ministry of health in Gaza Telegram channel, March 15, 2024). The Hamas government media information office claimed there were more than 30 dead and more than a hundred wounded in the [alleged] incident (Hamas government media office Telegram channel, March 15, 2024). Hamas rushed to condemn the Israeli "slaughter," and accused the international community of inaction and the United States of aiding Israel and allowing it to continue its "massacres" (Hamas Telegram channel in Judea and Samaria, March 15, 2024).
- ▶ The IDF spokesperson stated in response that the IDF had allowed the passage of a convoy of 31 aid trucks containing food and supplies intended for distribution to the residents of the northern Gaza Strip. He reported that about an hour before the aid convoy arrived at the humanitarian corridor, Palestinian gunmen were seen shooting in the vicinity of civilians who were waiting for the convoy. As the trucks entered, the gunmen fired as the mob began looting the trucks; civilians were also trampled. Based on an in-depth IDF investigation, it was categorically stated that that there was no shooting of any kind at Gazans in the area of the aid convoy in Kuwait Square (IDF Telegram channel, March 15, 2024).



Palestinian terrorists fire their weapons near civilians (IDF Telegram channel, March 15, 2024)

Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip

► Sporadic rocket fire from the Gaza Strip continues, mainly targeting the towns and villages near the Gaza Strip:

- ◆ On March 14, 2024, at 9:05 p.m., it was reported that rockets had been launched at Netiv HaAsara, immediately to the north of the Gaza Strip. The Jerusalem Brigades, the PIJ's military-terrorist wing, claimed responsibility for launching a barrage of rockets at towns and villages surrounding Gaza in response to Israel's [alleged] "crimes" against the Palestinian people (Paltoday's Telegram channel, March 14, 2024).
- ◆ On March 15, 2024 at 9:00 p.m., it was reported that rockets had been launched at Sderot, Ibim and Nir Am. The Jerusalem Brigades announced that at 9:00 p.m. [9 o'clock Bahaa time, the hour when the PIJ under the command of Bahaa Abu al-Atta used to launch rockets] rockets were launched at the cities, towns and villages surrounding the Gaza Strip, including Sderot (Paltoday Telegram channel, March 15, 2024). Immediately after the launch, IDF aircraft and artillery attacked and destroyed the rocket launcher (IDF website, March 15, 2024).
- ◆ On March 16, 2024 at 8:59 a.m., rockets were launched at Nahal Oz. The Mujahideen Brigades, the military wing of the Mujahideen organization (which split from the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades), announced they had launched rockets at towns and villages surrounding Gaza in response to Israel's "ongoing crimes" against civilians (Mujahideen Brigades Telegram channel, March 16, 2024).

The issue of the hostages and an agreement for a ceasefire

► The Israeli delegation left for Qatar to begin indirect negotiations with Hamas for the terms of a hostage deal. The negotiations are expected to last about two weeks. The delegation departed after Hamas presented the mediators with a more reasonable position.

► Senior Hamas members interviewed by the media about the new proposal said it had three stages. They reiterated yet again that Hamas' demands remained unchanged: a complete cease-fire, a complete withdrawal of IDF forces and the return of the displaced residents to their previous places of residence (al-Araby TV YouTube channel, March 15, 2024). **Bassem Na'im, a senior Hamas member**, reiterated yet again that the demands were Hamas' red lines and they would not agree to anything less (al-Jazeera Mubasher TV YouTube channel, March 15, 2024). Some of the speakers also added the introduction of aid and the rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip to the conditions.

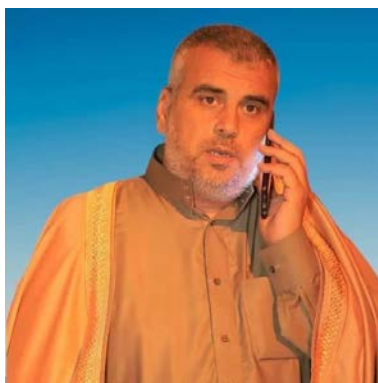
► The speakers stated that the "flexibility" shown by Hamas in the proposal and the addition of numbers, "keys" and categories for the hostage deal were mainly in response to Israel's requests. So far Hamas has refused to provide numbers and will not until Israel has committed to a complete ceasefire, a full withdrawal from the Strip and the return of the displaced persons to their previous places of residence. In addition, according to **Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas member**, the new document contains details for the conditions of the Israeli withdrawal demanded by Hamas, which has agreed it will be carried out in two stages (al-Manar TV website, March 18, 2024).

► Some of the speakers referred to the response of **John Kirby, spokesman for the White House National Security Council**, who said Hamas' latest answer falls within the limits of the outline they have been working on for several months, and said it showed that Hamas' position was "serious and positive." They also reiterated yet again that the ball was in Israel's court (al-Araby TV, March 15, 2024). Some of them referred to the response of Netanyahu's office stating that Hamas' demands were still delusional, and said they were waiting for an official, final answer from Israel through the mediators.

The Gaza Strip

Palestinian casualties

- ▶ **The Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip** reported at 10:15 a.m., March 18, 2024, since the beginning of the war 31,726 Gazans had been killed and 73,792 injured (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, March 18, 2024).
- ▶ On March 16, 2024, the death of Colonel Yusuf Muhammad Abu Jazar was reported. He was 45 years old and died of his wounds at the European Hospital in Khan Yunis. Abu Jazar was injured in an Israeli airstrike on a vehicle near the Rafah crossing, in which a number of senior Hamas members were riding. Abu Jazar was a senior officer in the Rafah police (Palinfo , March 16, 2024; Safa X account, March 16, 2024).



Yusuf Muhammad Abu Jazar (Husam Abu Jazar's Facebook page, March 16, 2024)

- ▶ **Hamas has not yet issued a formal statement regarding the death of Marwan Issa, the deputy head of Hamas' military-terrorist wing.** "Knowledgeable" Palestinians sources in the Gaza Strip confirmed that he was in fact in the area attacked by IDF forces in the Nuseirat refugee camp on March 11, 2024 and that he was wounded, but his fate was unclear. According to the sources, his circumstances are currently unknown (al-Sharq al-Awsat, March 16, 2024).
- ▶ According to an article in British Guardian, all Hamas communication systems between senior leaders, which rely on encrypted applications and messengers, went silent for more than 72 hours after the attack on a complex of tunnels under the Nuseirat refugee camp, where Marwan Issa was staying, as had happened on several previous occasions when Hamas leaders were killed (The Guardian, March 16, 2024).

► Israel's Kan News announced that in closed conversations Hamas confirmed Marwan Issa had been killed in the Israeli Air Force attack. He was reportedly buried under the rubble in the tunnel where he was attacked, along with Ghazi Abu Tu'ama, commander of the Hamas Central Camps Brigade, who was killed along with him. According to the report "Palestinian sources informed of the details" said Issa was killed in an attack in Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip while hiding in a Hamas tunnel, and that the commander of the Center Camp Brigade was killed in the same attack (Elior Levy's X account, March 17, 2024; Kan TV website, March 17, 2024). **Jake Sullivan, the United States national security advisor**, also confirmed that Hamas' number three, Marwan Issa, was killed in an Israeli operation last week.

The situation in the Gaza Strip

► The Wafa news agency reported that families from the northern Gaza Strip and Gaza City had evacuated to the central and southern Gaza Strip because of the lack of food and basic necessities in the north (Wafa, March 15, 2024).



Families from the northern Gaza Strip and Gaza City leave for the central and southern Gaza Strip (Wafa, March 15, 2024)

► Displaced persons in a tent camp in Rafah complained about poor sanitary conditions in the camp. They said garbage was piled in the camp, the smell was unbearable and there were no toilets or water nearby (Wafa YouTube channel, March 18, 2024).



**Piles of uncollected garbage in a tent camp of displaced persons in Rafah
(Wafa YouTube channel, March 18, 2024)**

► According to a UN report, a famine can be expected in the northern Gaza Strip from mid-March to May unless additional aid arrives. It was also reported that from mid-March to mid-July, in the most likely scenario and assuming that the conflict escalates, including a ground attack in Rafah, half of the population of the Strip (1.11 million people) could be expected to face "catastrophic conditions." The report claims that to prevent famine, a ceasefire must be reached and aid must be significantly increased. In response to the report, **Antonio Guterres, the UN secretary general**, said it was a "shocking indication" of the conditions in the Gaza Strip. He noted that the situation in the Gaza Strip was man-made and could be altered. He called on Israel to ensure full access to humanitarian goods throughout the Strip (Reuters, March 19, 2024).

Appeal to the International Criminal

► **Ammar Dwaik, director general of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights**,¹ said that on March 20, 2024, his organization would hand over a file to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague dealing with the "crime of genocide," which he claimed Israel was committing in the Gaza Strip through starvation, preventing the entry of aid and harming civilians and all the necessities of life [sic]. According to him, the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the International

¹ An official body in the Palestinian Authority set up by Yasser Arafat and later amended by the Palestinian Basic Law (the Palestinian Constitution). Dweik lives in Ramallah.

Criminal Court, clearly considers starvation and preventing the arrival of aid to conflict zones a war crime (Arab World Press News Agency (AWP), March 19, 2024).

Support for the Gaza Strip

- ▶ **Anas al-Sharif, a correspondent for al-Jazeera TV in the northern Gaza Strip,** reported that before dawn on March 17, 2024, for the first time, six trucks loaded with sacks of flour entered the northern Gaza Strip and seven carrying humanitarian aid entered Gaza City without any reports of casualties during the distribution of the aid. He reported it was supervised by the committee of the large clans, the mukhtars and family dignitaries, after the sacks had been divided into bags so that more residents could qualify for aid (al-Jazeera YouTube channel, March 17, 2024). Later, it was reported that nine more trucks entered the Jebalya refugee camp (Telegram channel of the home front platform of the ministry of the interior in the Gaza Strip, March 17, 2024).
- ▶ Before the trucks arrived, the Hamas government media office distributed a notice forbidding residents to congregate in Kuwait Square (in southern Gaza City) and Salah al-Din Street while waiting for the trucks (X account of Isma'il al-Thawabta, the director general of the government media office, March 16, 2024). The Hamas-controlled ministry of the interior in the Gaza Strip claimed the aid had been delivered thanks to the security provided by the security forces and in cooperation with the clan elders (Anadolu Agency, March 17, 2024).



**Trucks carrying humanitarian aid enter the northern Gaza Strip for the first time
(al-Jazeera YouTube channel, March 17, 2024)**

► Raed al-Nims, spokesman for the Palestinian Red Crescent in the Gaza Strip, told al-Jazeera that the aid which arrived in Gaza City and the northern Gaza Strip did not meet the needs of the residents and that there was still a great shortage. He called for opening another safe axis for the delivery of aid (al-Jazeera YouTube channel, March 17, 2024).



Gazans wait in line for the distribution of flour (al-Jazeera YouTube channel, March 17, 2024)

► On March 15, 2024, the Spanish humanitarian aid ship OPEN ARMS arrived at the shore of the Gaza Strip with 200 tons of food. The ship was docked across from the pier currently being built in Gaza City. Its cargo was unloaded at sea and transported by boats to the pier (al-Hadath TV, March 15, 2024).



The Spanish aid ship unloads its cargo on a floating platform at sea with the help of boats which bring it to the pier under construction in Gaza (al-Hadath TV, March 15, 2024), (Nimetullahcigrim's X account, March 15, 2024)

► **Adnan Abu Hasna, UNRWA communications consultant**, said living conditions in Gaza City and the northern Gaza Strip were extremely difficult and the Gazans were running out of feed for the domestic animals they used as food. He said the humanitarian aid airlifted in was insufficient and did not reach all the needy people,

and there was an immediate demand for flour and drinking water. Furthermore, he claimed, there was serious malnutrition, which had begun to spread in the southern Gaza Strip, and they were facing a catastrophe (al-Jazeera TV, March 16, 2024).

The distribution of humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip

► The representatives of the Palestinian "organizations" recently met in the Rafah region to discuss the best ways to distribute humanitarian aid throughout the Gaza Strip. They agreed to establish a "Palestinian national framework" from which people's committees would be formed in all regions and would deal with storing and distributing the aid. They also agreed that UNRWA headquarters would serve as storage centers even in the absence of UNRWA employees, and to establish an operative mechanism which would eliminate the pretext for the IDF forces to [allegedly] attack gathering points of Gazans who had come to receive aid. They decided not to contact the police after, they falsely claimed, Israel had informed international and local officials that it would shoot all the policemen because they belonged to Hamas. According to [allegedly] "informed Palestinian sources," the meeting in Rafah was attended for the first time by representatives from Muhammad Dahlan's faction, after talks between him and the "external" Hamas leadership, in which he said he wanted to contribute to the arrival of aid [for humanitarian] and not political reasons.

► According to the "sources," the presence of the Dahlan's people provided a necessary line of communication on the ground with the IDF forces, the Egyptians or the international groups responsible for the delivery of humanitarian aid, but coordination would be dealt with exclusively under the supervision of the national framework. As for the northern Gaza Strip, the organizations reached an agreement based on Hamas, the PIJ and the PFLP, and several hundred civilian and social teams from those forces which were authorized to manage the distribution of humanitarian in the north in coordination with other parties (al-Akhbar, Lebanon, March 18, 2024).

Mukhtars and clan heads

- ▶ Following the reports that Israel was trying to recruit mukhtars and clan heads in the Gaza Strip to manage the Gaza Strip instead of Hamas, and given the news about the murder of mukhtar of the Doghmush clan following his cooperation with Israel on the issue of aid, **Salama Ma'ruf,² the chairman of Hamas' government media information office**, published a statement denying the reports of the execution of clansmen by Hamas security forces. He claimed that publicizing the murder was part of Israel's ongoing attempts to "undermine the home front and cause chaos," adding that the security forces performed their duty in accordance with the law and had "close ties" with all the clans, based on upholding the law, friendship and mutual respect (Hamas government media information office, March 14, 2024).
- ▶ The Doghmush clan also published a statement disavowing a fake message published on the clan's behalf which accused Hamas of killing the mukhtar. The clan said that the mukhtar, Hajj Saleh Ashur Doghmush, along with a group of dignitaries, was killed on November 16, 2023, in an Israeli attack on the family's Ihyaa al-Sunnah Mosque. According to the claim, none of its members had questionable contacts outside of the national consensus (Facebook page of the Central Council of the Doghmush clan, March 15, 2024).

² Salama Ma'ruf, from whom no one had heard since November 26, 2023, returned to post messages on the Hamas government media information office and on his Facebook page on March 12, 2024. He is apparently in the northern Gaza Strip, as he signs his messages "Salama Maaruf; Northern Gaza Strip."



Announcement issued by the Doghmush clan
(Facebook page of the Central Council of the Doghmush clan, March 15, 2024)

"The day after"

- During an interview, **Fatah spokesman Hossein Hamail** related to the PA's presence "the day after" the war in the Gaza Strip and said Hamas rejected the PA's presence in the Gaza Strip. He called on Hamas to put the national Palestinian interest above the interests of the movement and asked it to give the PA the opportunity to provide the Gazans with aid. Furthermore, he claimed that the international community accepted the PA's presence in the Gaza Strip (al-Arabiya TV, March 15, 2024).
- At the weekly government meeting, **Muhammad Shtayyeh, outgoing PA prime minister**, said that they rejected any foreign presence in the Gaza Strip, no matter what nationality, which imposed a new situation. He said some people wanted autonomy for the Gaza Strip while others were working to bring in private security companies. He called it an attack on the will of the Palestinian people. He also said they would defend their "national project," led by Mahmoud Abbas together with the Palestinian organizations, because there some people who wanted to replace the system. He said that since they were the pioneers of the PA reform plan, they would work to reform all Palestinian institutions. He warned that the temporary pier in the Gaza Strip would turn from a passage to bring in bread to an exit for civilian displacement. He also attacked the IDF's activities at Shifa Hospital and called for saving Rafah and what was left of the Gaza Strip (Wafa, March 18, 2024).

Possibility that the spokesman of the ministry of health in Gaza left the Gaza Strip

► **Safaa Subhi, a Palestinian journalist who lives in London**, relying on Fatah-affiliated media channels, reported that the name of Dr. Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip, was on the list of those leaving the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing, so in all probability he had left, despite the fact that he had stated that the medical teams would not leave their place of work no matter what happened (Safa Subhi's X account, March 19, 2024).

2005-7-2	محمد حسام الدين يونس ابو زايد	240.
1993-10-7	رولا حسام الدين يونس ابو عيسي	241.
2021-1-17	سيدرا علاء عبد الله ابو عيسي	242.
1973-5-23	اشرف اسماعيل مبروك القدره	243.
2022-11-4	سيلين هيثم محمد الشاعر	244.

Number 243, Ashraf al-Qidra, on the list of those leaving the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing (Safa Subhi's X account, March 19, 2024)

Isma'il Haniyeh meets with a senior Chinese diplomat

► **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, and a delegation of the Hamas leadership met in Qatar with the ambassador of the West Asia and North Africa department of the Chinese foreign ministry; the Chinese ambassador to Qatar was present at the meeting. Yet again Haniyeh reiterated Hamas' demands for the end of the war in the Gaza Strip, the withdrawal of the IDF, the return of the displaced persons to their former places of residence, shelter and reconstruction, and the realization of the Palestinians' aspirations for an independent state. He praised the role played by China in the UN Security Council and the International Court of Justice, and the humanitarian aid it sent to the Gaza Strip (Telegram channel of Hamas in Judea and Samaria, March 17, 2024).



The Hamas leadership meets with the Chinese ambassador. Also present were Musa Abu Marzouq, Husam Badran, Sami Khater, and Taher al-Nunu, Haniyeh's communications advisor (Hamas Telegram channel in Judea and Samaria, March 17, 2024)

The Palestinian terrorist organizations meet with Houthi representatives

► "Sources" told Lebanese Hezbollah-affiliated al-Mayadeen TV that senior representatives of Hamas, the PIJ and the PFLP had recently met with members of the Yemeni Ansar Allah movement [the Houthis]. Their objective was to coordinate positions regarding the next phase of the fighting. The Houthis told the Palestinian organizations that they were continuing their "support operations" in the Red Sea. They also stated that the United States and British attacks would not make them change their activities. The representatives of the Palestinian "organizations" expressed their great appreciation for the "important central role" played by the Houthis and noted the "depth of the relationship" between them. They also reiterated yet again their demands that the IDF withdraw from the Gaza Strip, the displaced persons return to their previous places of residence, especially in the northern Gaza Strip, and the achievement of a "respectable" hostage deal (al-Mayadeen TV Telegram channel, March 15, 2024).

► A "senior Houthi figure," who asked to remain anonymous, **confirmed that the meeting had been held in Beirut and dealt with the expansion of the conflict and siege of Israel**, as announced by Abd al-Malek al-Houthi, the leader of the Houthis, on March 14, 2024, who said that **the scope of the attacks on ships connected to Israel would be expanded to include ships sailing in the Indian Ocean**. The "senior Houthi figure" added that they had been coordinating with the Palestinian "resistance" since the start of the Operation al-Aqsa Flood. According to a Palestinian source, who also

asked not to be named, the meeting also discussed coordination between the Houthi movement and the Palestinian organizations, especially in view of the possibility of Israel's entering Rafah (Moroccan Hesperess website, March 16, 2024).

Israel, Judea and Samaria

Terrorist attacks

► On the afternoon of March 16, 2024, a Palestinian armed with a Kalashnikov rifle arrived from the Abu Sanina Hill region in Hebron and began shooting at the Jewish settlement in Hebron. IDF surveillance identified him and called IDF forces to the scene. The forces shot and killed him. No casualties or damage were reported (Israeli media, March 16, 2024).

- Palestinian media reported that the shooter was **Mahmoud Abd al-Hafez Yosef Nofal, 42 years old**, imam of the al-Qassem Mosque in Hebron (Wafa, March 16, 2024). It was also reported that he was a released prisoner (Safa, March 16, 2024). Hamas issued a mourning notice for his death, stating that he was a Hamas "activist" and had been killed while "carrying out a heroic shooting operation" from the Karantina Cemetery at IDF soldiers on al-Shuhadaa Street in the Old City of Hebron, as part of Operation al-Aqsa Flood (Hamas' Telegram channel in Judea and Samaria, March 16, 2024).



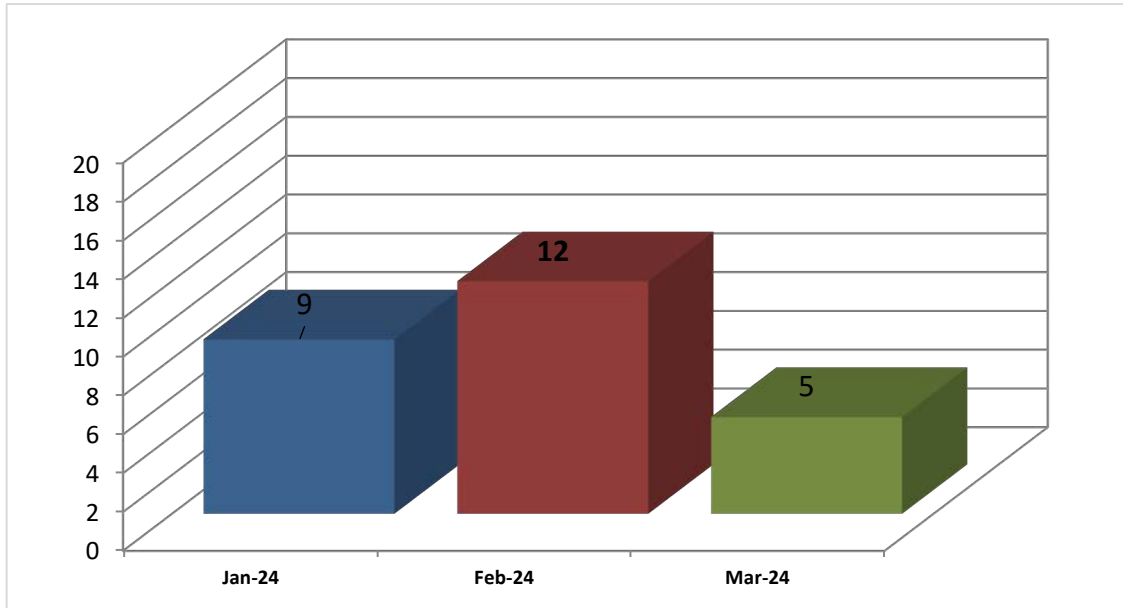
Right: Mahmoud Nofal in the cemetery during the shooting attack (Palinfo X account, March 16, 2024). Left: Hamas's mourning notice for its martyr and jihadist, Mahmoud Nofal (Hamas' Telegram channel in Judea and Samaria, March 16, 2024)

- ▶ On the afternoon of March 14, 2024, a terrorist went to the shopping center at the Beit Kama intersection, north of Beer Sheva, and began stabbing a man. The victim, an IDF chief warrant officer, shot and killed the terrorist, but was taken to Soroka Hospital in critical condition and later died (Israeli media, March 14, 2024). The terrorist was Fadi Abu Latif, 22 years old, an Israeli citizen, with no security record. He was born in the Gaza Strip; his mother was from Rahat and his father from the Gaza Strip. As part of family reunification, he became an Israeli citizen and had lived in Rahat since 2019. He became engaged and continued living in Israel (Israeli media, March 14, 2024).
- ▶ The PIJ welcomed the attack, adding in its mourning notice that pinned its hope on the Palestinian people in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the territory of Israel, and was certain they were committed to fulfilling their "national and moral duty" despite intimidation and harassment from Israel (PIJ media info office Telegram channel, March 14, 2024).



The scene of the attack at the Beit Kama intersection (Arabs48 website, March 14, 2024)

Critical Terrorist Attacks, 2024³



Counterterrorism activities

► The Israeli security forces continued their counterterrorism activities in Judea and Samaria. Since the beginning of the war, approximately 3,500 wanted persons have been detained, of whom more than 1,500 have been Hamas terrorist operatives. During the week, the detentions of dozens of wanted persons and the confiscation of weapons were reported. The centers of activity were Hebron, Ya'bed, the Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem, Tulkarm and Arabeh. At the Tzufim Crossing (near Qalqilya) the security forces stopped a suspicious vehicle with four passengers. A search revealed an IED hidden in one of the doors (IDF spokesperson's X account, March 15, 16, 17, 2024).

³ A critical attack is defined by the ITIC as involving shooting, stabbing, a vehicular attack, the use of IEDs, or a combination of the above. Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown by Palestinians at IDF forces carrying out counterterrorism activities are not included.



IDF forces in Judea and Samaria (IDF spokesperson, March 17, 2024)

Ramadan

The Friday prayer on the Temple Mount

- ▶ On March 15, 2024, the first Friday prayer of Ramadan was held. Hamas issued a statement beforehand calling on Palestinians throughout Judea and Samaria, residents of East Jerusalem and Israeli Arabs to barricade themselves in al-Aqsa Mosque and prevent Israel (the "occupation") from desecrating it and implementing its plans. It also called on the young people to "come out en masse, noisy, shake the ground under the feet of the occupation and clash with its soldiers" (Hamas Telegram channel in Judea and Samaria, March 15, 2024).
- ▶ The Muslim waqf reported that about 80,000 worshippers participated in the prayer on the first Friday of Ramadan at al-Aqsa Mosque (Wafa, March 15, 2024). According to reports, despite calls from Hamas, in Israel the prayers passed quietly and no special events were recorded. According to the Palestinians, the security forces prevented teams of the Palestinian Red Crescent and other medical institutions from entering the Temple Mount despite prior coordination carried out by the waqf.
- ▶ **Sheikh Akrame Sabri, preacher of al-Aqsa Mosque**, referred to the war in the Gaza Strip in his sermon, condemning the international silence on the "crimes" against "civilians" and the inability of the international community to stop it. He also referred to the restrictions placed on the entry of worshippers, and called on the Palestinians to be make sure they prayed at al-Aqsa Mosque. He reiterated the general position

regarding al-Aqsa Mosque, which is that it cannot be bought or sold, is a Muslim "right" not subject to negotiation (Wafa, March 15, 2024; al-Araby al-Jadeed, March 15, 2024).



The prayer of the first Friday of Ramadan on the Temple Mount (Wafa, March 15, 2024)

► Hamas issued a statement praising the crowds who responded to the call, broke the "siege" imposed on al-Aqsa Mosque and went there on the first Friday of Ramadan. Hamas called the masses of worshipers the first "line of defense" for Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque, who do not allow Israel to realize its "plots" to desecrate or divide the mosque (Hamas Telegram channel in Judea and Samaria, March 15, 2024).

Demonstrations in support of the Gazans

► On March 15, 2024, after the Tarawih Ramadan prayer, a procession was held in Tulkarm and a demonstration in al-Manara Square in Ramallah to protest the war in Gaza and support the "resistance" [Palestinian terrorism] (Huriya News, March 15, 2024).



The procession in Tulkarm (right) and the demonstration in Ramallah (left) (QudsN X account, March 15, 2024)

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Appointing a new prime minister

► Mahmoud Abbas, the PA chairman, announced he had appointed Dr. Muhammad Mustafa as Palestinian prime minister, replacing Muhammad Shtayyeh (Palestinian TV, March 14, 2024). He then instructed Mustafa to form the 19th PA government, in accordance with the revised PA Basic Law of 2003 (Wafa, March 14, 2024), whose Section 65 gives the appointed prime minister three weeks to form the new government and an additional extension of two weeks if necessary. If he then fails to form a new government, the PA chairman must find another candidate within two weeks (maqam.najah.edu website, March 17, 2024).



Mahmoud Abbas gives Dr. Muhammad Mustafa the order to form the government (Wafa, March 14, 2024)

► The new government is supposed to be one of "technocrats." According to Rai al-Youm, the government's first task will be to establish a temporary committee to manage the Gaza Strip, oversee services and the distribution of humanitarian aid, and maintain security. According to the report, the committee will coordinate its work with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. In addition, the United States believes the new government will be able to end the influence of Qatar, Iran and Turkey in the Gaza Strip and the rule of the Hamas movement. Reportedly, Hussein al-Sheikh, secretary of the PLO Executive Committee, went to the UAE on March 13, 2024, to promote the issue and hold meetings (Rai al-Youm, March 15, 2024).

► Following Mahmoud Abbas' appointment of Muhammad Mustafa, Hamas issued a statement on behalf of the Palestinian "organizations" stating that "making unilateral

decisions," such as forming a government without national consensus, exacerbated the division at a time when the Palestinians needed unity. According to Hamas, it indicated the extent of the crisis in the PA leadership and the scope of the gap between the leadership and the Palestinian public. The declaration was signed by Hamas, the PIJ, the PFLP and the Palestinian National Initiative (Hamas' Telegram channel, March 14, 2024). Following the announcement, the Fatah movement published a particularly harsh counter-proclamation, the harshest Fatah expression against Hamas since the coup in the Gaza Strip in 2007.

► Following the round of appointments, Mahmoud Abbas appointed **Judge Muhammad Abd al-Ghani al-Awiwi** as president of the Supreme Court (Wafa, March 17, 2024).

The Brazilian foreign minister visits Ramallah

► **Mauro Vieira, the Brazilian foreign minister**, paid a visit to the PA. He met with Mahmoud Abbas, who praised the support given by Brazil and its president, Lula da Silva, to the Palestinian people and their cause in international forums, and especially the president's recent statements regarding the need to stop the war (Wafa, March 17, 2024). Muhammad Shtayyeh, outgoing PA prime minister, also met with Mauro Vieira and participated with him in the recognition ceremony of the Yasser Arafat Foundation for the president of Brazil, during which the president of Brazil was awarded honorary membership on the foundation's board of trustees. Vieira also met with the PA foreign minister, Riyadh al-Maliki (Wafa, March 17, 2024).



Right: Mahmoud Abbas meets with Mauro Vieira. Left: Shtayyeh meets with Mauro Vieira (Wafa, March 17, 2024)