



## The “Great Return March:” Demonstrations of May 4, 2018, and continuation to be expected

May 6, 2018

### Events of Friday, May 4, 2018

#### Overview

The acts of violence on Friday, May 4, 2018, **continued for the sixth week since the violent demonstrations (“the Great Return March”) began on March 30, 2018. Around 10,000 demonstrators** (similar to the previous Friday) participated in the Friday demonstrations **in six locations** near the security fence. The climax of the violent events was when **dozens of demonstrators broke into the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing, damaging equipment and gas and fuel storage facilities.** The Kerem Shalom border crossing is an **essential lifeline for the residents of the Gaza Strip.** It is used for the passage of goods, gasoline, diesel fuel and gas intended for residents of the Gaza Strip.

#### Preparations for the events

► As in previous weeks, preparations for the events included filling sandbags and preparing dozens of tires for burning in the area in order to cause a smokescreen **that would make it difficult for the IDF to respond.** Before the demonstrations in the early afternoon, IDF forces called on Palestinians standing near the fence to leave the area so as not to cause the situation to deteriorate. IDF forces also called on adults to keep youngsters and children out of the area (Ynet, May 4, 2018).



**Palestinian youths making sandbags east of Rafah in preparation for the violent activities on Friday, May 4, 2018 (PALINFO Twitter account, May 4, 2018)**



**Right: Palestinian woman with a load of tires for burning near the security fence (PALINFO Twitter account, May 4, 2018). Left: Palestinians taking a load of tires from the city of Khan Yunis to one of the areas of activity in eastern Khan Yunis (Shehab Facebook page, May 4, 2018).**

## Main events

► During the Friday demonstrations, the violent incidents continued with their familiar format: **burning tires, throwing stones and IEDs, attempting to sabotage the security fence, and sending Molotov kites into Israeli territory** (IDF Spokesperson's Office, May 5, 2018). During the demonstrations, **a hand grenade was thrown at an IDF force near the Karni crossing** (northern Gaza Strip). In addition, two attempts by groups of Palestinians **to sabotage the security fence and cross over into Israeli territory were thwarted**. According to reports by the Health Ministry in the Gaza Strip, **there were no fatalities during Friday's events** and 1,143 people were injured (mainly by smoke inhalation, in the ITIC's assessment).



Burning tires during the “Return March” east of Jabalia (Al-Jazeera Net, May 4, 2018)



Right: Palestinians throwing stones at IDF forces east of Khan Yunis (PALINFO Twitter account, May 5, 2018). Left: Palestinians attacking an IDF patrol near the security fence east of Beit Hanoun (Al-Resalah Facebook page, May 5, 2018)



Palestinians dismantling the barbed wire fence near the security fence in the Gaza Strip (Al-Resalah Facebook page, May 4, 2018)

## The climax of the events: breaking into Kerem Shalom

The climax of the events was **when several dozen demonstrators broke through the Kerem Shalom crossing from its Palestinian side. The demonstrators damaged the gas and fuel storage facilities, fences, gates and additional property.** This is a vital lifeline for the residents of the Gaza Strip. Goods, equipment, gasoline, diesel fuel and gas are conveyed from Israel and other countries to the residents of the Gaza Strip through this crossing.



**Palestinian demonstrators breaking into the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing, damaging fences and setting fire to storage facilities for fuel and gas intended for the residents of the Gaza Strip (IDF Spokesman, May 5, 2018)**



**Palestinian demonstrators breaking into the Palestinian side of the Kerem Shalom crossing and setting fire to a "security position" there (PALINFO Twitter account, May 4, 2018)**

► **The Kerem Shalom crossing is the only crossing for goods from Israel to the Gaza Strip. Around 2,370 truckloads of goods, including around 72,000 tons of construction materials, food, agricultural produce and medicines, pass through the crossing every week. This is in addition to 607,000 liters of gasoline, around 3,200 liters of diesel fuel and around 1,500 tons of gas that are piped into the Gaza Strip (Arabic-language Facebook**

page of the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, May 5, 2018).

**Damage to this vital lifeline represents a major blow to the population.**

### Use of kites

► The organizers of the events, led by Hamas, **understood the media impact and the material damage caused by the use of Molotov kites.** Before the start of the demonstrations on Friday, May 4, 2018, **Hamas called on the demonstrators to make extensive use of kites.** As part of preparations for the “Return March” on Friday, the Quds News Network posted a video on its Facebook page showing a group of youngsters calling themselves the **“kite unit.”** The video shows masked Palestinians standing in line holding kites. One of the speakers says that the unit has built many kites in order **to burn many forests in Israel** (Quds News Network, May 4, 2018).



**Palestinians making kites inside the “Camp of Return,” east of the Gaza Strip camps (PALINFO Twitter account, May 4, 2018)**



**Making a Molotov kite east of Gaza (PALINFO Twitter account, May 4, 2018)**

► **The IDF has yet to find an operational solution to the kite problem.** During the Friday demonstrations, **the IDF made attempts to prevent the kites from reaching Israel by means of drones, which were supposed to tear the strings of the kites.** Dozens of

demonstrators threw stones at IDF drones that were attempting to prevent the Molotov kites from reaching Israeli territory. **Two drones fell in the Gaza Strip.** The IDF is investigating what caused them to fall. The demonstrators in the Gaza Strip attributed the fall of the drones to the stones that were thrown at them in order to down them. The IDF expressed concern that **the Molotov kites may soon become kite bombs** (warning Israeli residents of the areas surrounding the Gaza Strip not to touch the kites that land in their area until the arrival of a qualified person).

► On May 6, 2018, the IDF forces intensified their response to the sending of Molotov kites. **Israel Air Force aircraft attacked Hamas positions in the northern Gaza Strip** near the security fence. **The airstrike was carried out in response to the sending of a Molotov kite intended to set fire to land in Israel.** According to the IDF Spokesman, this incident was the latest in a series of **such attempts** (IDF Spokesperson's Office, May 6, 2018).

### Hamas senior leaders staying away from the events

► **Most of the Hamas and PIJ leaders were not present in the events.** According to media reports, they were not present for fear for their safety. **Ahmad Bahar**, deputy speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) headed a delegation on behalf of the PLC to activities that took place east of Gaza City (Dunya Al-Watan, May 4, 2018). **Senior Hamas official Ismail Radwan** greeted the Palestinians who marched toward the border (without marching with them). According to him, the Return March is intended to prove that the Palestinian people is strong and will never give in (Al-Aqsa, May 4, 2018).

► **According to Issam Hamad, member of the legal committee of the Return March, the legal committee of the Supreme National Authority of the Return March documents all the IDF actions allegedly violating international law.** This committee **collects documentation for legal files which are transferred to the International Criminal Court (ICC).** In addition, the committee sends photos and documents to international human rights organizations. According to Hamad, so far, committee members haven't seen any act from the Palestinian side that violated the principle of non-violence (Al-Mayadeen, May 4, 2018).

### Sending women and children to the front line of the violent incidents

► During the Friday events, IDF forces detected **cases of fake injuries and using women and children.** According to the IDF, these actions were intended to **camouflage the acts of terrorism carried out by Palestinians, including the throwing of IEDs and hand grenades and attempts to infiltrate into Israeli territory.** They were also intended to make it difficult

for the IDF to defend itself, **while making false representation for world public opinion** (IDF Spokesperson's Office, May 5, 2018).

► **Using children as a human shield:** The IDF Spokesperson documented several cases in which children were present at the confrontation line **between the rioters and IDF forces** along the security fence, risking their lives (IDF Spokesperson's Office, May 4, 2018).



**Palestinians children at the confrontation line (IDF Spokesperson's Office, May 4, 2018)**

## Hamas's assistance to casualties of the violent events

► On May 3, 2018, Hamas announced **new financial assistance to 187 wounded people** from among the casualties of the "Great Return March." According to the announcement, 61 people who were severely wounded will receive USD 500 each; and 126 people who were moderately wounded will receive USD 200 each. Their names will be determined based on the Health Ministry reports. According to the announcement, **the total amount of payments** for wounded people **will be USD 300,000**. Hamas has made it clear that the payments are being made **in spite of the difficult economic situation** as a token of loyalty to the wounded and as part of Hamas's responsibility for the Palestinian people (Dunya Al-Watan, May 3, 2018).

## Preparations and intentions to be expected

► **Hamas and the other organizations are trying to maintain the demonstrations on the current level at least until May 15, 2018** ("Nakba Day"), when the "Great Return March" demonstrations are expected **to reach their peak**. The Supreme National Authority of the

Return March announced that March 8, 2018, **would be dedicated to the memory of the journalists who were killed during the incidents.** Furthermore, it was reported that the forthcoming Friday (May 11, 2018) would be a “Friday of preparations and warnings” **in preparation for the “Return March of the Million”** (Shehab, May 4, 2018).

► According to **Issam Hamad**, member of the legal committee of the Return March, **on May 11, 2018, a “special week” will start, because on May 14, a great many Palestinians will be gathered to resist the transfer of the US Embassy to Jerusalem, and on May 15, they will protest the Palestinian deportation of 1948.** He added that on that day, **the next steps of the “Great Return March”** would be announced (Al-Mayadeen, May 4, 2018).

According to Palestinian statements, on “Nakba Day” (May 15, 2018) or around that date, the Palestinians plan to organize events **in a larger scope.** The culmination of those events will be **the penetration of Israeli territory by masses of Palestinians** as an “implementation of the right of return.” In the ITIC's assessment, this will be carried out **even at the cost of a larger number of casualties and with a higher level of violence** while breaking into Israel. In addition, the Palestinian statements reveal that **Hamas (and the Palestinians) do not intend to stop the events after May 15, 2018** (the ITIC is still not clear about the format of the forthcoming events).



## Appendix

### Distribution of the identity of the fatalities of the “Great Return March”

- ▶ According to the Hamas Health Ministry, during the events of Friday, May 4, 2018, in the Gaza Strip, **there were no fatalities**. A total of 1,143 people were wounded in the events (in the ITIC's assessment, mainly from inhaling smoke). According to the report of the Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza, **since the beginning of the confrontations, 45 Palestinians were killed** (Ashraf al-Qudra's Twitter account, May 5, 2018). **So far, the Hamas Health Ministry has not released a full report about the details of the fatalities**. According to the ITIC's data, during the events proper (without taking into account fatalities in the attempts to infiltrate into Israel between the marches), **46 Palestinians were killed**.
- ▶ On May 3, 2018, Ashraf al-Qudra, the Hamas Health Ministry's spokesman, reported that **Anas Shawqi Abu Asr**, 19, from the Al-Sabra neighborhood, had died of wounds sustained from IDF fire on April 27, 2018 (Ashraf al-Qudra's Twitter account, May 3, 2018). **During the funeral, his body was wrapped in a Hamas green flag** (QUDSN Facebook page, May 3, 2018).



**The body of Anas Shawqi Abu Asr wrapped in a Hamas green flag (QUDSN Facebook page, May 3, 2018)**

### Summary of the identities of the fatalities of the “Great Return March”

Organization	Membership	Affiliation	Total
Hamas	9 military wing and security force operatives	10 affiliated with Hamas	19
Fatah	2 military operatives	11 affiliated with Fatah	13
PIJ	1 military operative		1
DFLP	1 military operative	1 affiliated	2
PFLP		2 affiliated	2
Without organizational affiliation			9
Total			46 Palestinians killed

**Note:** About 80% of the fatalities of the “Great Return March” (37 people) are terrorist operatives or individuals affiliated with terrorist organizations. About 20% (9 people) are not affiliated with any organization and are presumably civilians.