

Violent Riots between Gaza and Israel

Background and Description of Events

Version 3.0

Hamas has failed in its regime project. Its operational options, such as terror tunnels, are quickly disappearing. Consequently, Hamas chooses to channel the anger and distress of the people of Gaza against the State of Israel. In actuality, and under the cover of "peaceful demonstrations" in the area between Gaza and Israel, Hamas promotes terrorist and other violent activities. Accordingly, the IDF warns the participants of these "demonstrations" not to take part in the violent riots, and when necessary, acts in a measured and precise manner against violent threats, in accordance with the rules of engagement and international law.

Background

1. In the summer of 2005, the State of Israel implemented the "Disengagement Plan", in which it unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip. After Israel withdrew all its forces and citizens from the Gaza Strip, the Hamas terrorist organization took control and established a regime of terror over the Palestinian population of Gaza, a regime that continually violates the human rights of its own people.
2. During the last decade of its rule, Hamas, in accordance with its worldview, invests considerable resources in military buildup and terrorist activity, rather than improving the welfare of its residents and their living conditions. Simultaneously, Hamas continues in its attempts to penetrate the territory of the State of Israel and harm its citizens – through terror tunnels, infiltration of land and sea fences, and by firing tens of thousands of rockets in multiple violent rounds of hostilities. It does this by exploiting the proximity of the Israeli settlements and infrastructure to Gaza.
3. In recent weeks there has been an increase in activity in the area of the fence, in which, unlike previous months, there have been more and more attacks and attempted attacks. IDF forces have encountered the placing of improvised explosive devices along the fence, attempts to steal military technological equipment in its vicinity (used to expose Hamas' terror tunnels), burning parts of the fence, infiltration into Israeli territory under the direct direction of Hamas, and more. The number of concrete intelligence warnings of attacks has also increased. The general atmosphere, in this sense, is of volatility – with growing support for terrorism.
4. After witnessing the inefficiency of its terror tunnels project, Hamas is now trying its luck above ground. Hamas is promoting a new tactic of terrorist activity under the cover of national commemoration events and protests that are ostensibly popular in nature. In doing so, Hamas compares its behaviors to a peaceful, non-violent demonstration around the fence, in order to camouflage and conduct terrorist activities. This is done, as has been the case in the past, by civilians cynically exploited for the ultimate goals of the terrorist organization. Simultaneously, Hamas incites the Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria, and plans terror activities against civilians and soldiers alike.

5. The reasons for Hamas' shifting policy are varied. The central reason is its failure as the ruler of the Gaza Strip, the deterioration in its economic situation, the difficulties of the reconciliation process with the Palestinian Authority, and the loss of operational capabilities. All this, in addition to the relative success of the Iron Dome defense system against the steep-trajectory threats. At the same time, Hamas works to promote condemnation of Israel and increased pressure in the international arena, by shaping a context in which it is made to appear that the IDF is using force where it is unwarranted.

In preparation for the violent riots and attacks on Friday, March 30, 2018

6. The events that began on Friday, March 30, 18, embodied the opening shot of the Hamas movement described above.
7. On January 29, 2018, a dedicated Facebook page was opened for the "March of Return" to take place on March 30. This date was chosen against the background of "Land Day", also set for that day.
8. The march was organized by the "Committee of Return", which includes representatives from all the Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip. Among them: Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Palestinian Authority, and others. Officially, Hamas did not appear to be in charge of the riots. Substantively however, it served as its main engine and driving force. It should be noted that the intention of the organizers was not to hold a single, one-time event, but rather a series of demonstrations, culminating in the "Nakba Day", on May 15, 2018.
9. The organizers of the "March of Return" have attempted to give it an innocent character. Accordingly, on the official march page there was no violent content published, matching the "peaceful" character they wished to project. The march, therefore, was presented as nonviolent, and a way to mark the "right of return".
10. Nevertheless, in various sources on the social media, violent content was distributed for the march. Sermons in mosques in Gaza called for "a march to Jerusalem" as well as calls for violence. Israel also had specific information about Hamas' concrete intentions to carry out terrorist activities masked by riots along the fenced border area.
11. The incitement by Hamas occurred side by side with increased terrorist activity by their operatives:
 - a. On February 17, 2018, two soldiers were seriously injured when an explosive device was triggered on the Gaza Strip fence, and two others were moderately and lightly injured.
 - b. On March 17, 2018, an explosive device was detonated on the fence; the fourth since the start of February, intended to harm IDF soldiers in the area.
 - c. On March 24, 2018, four Palestinians breached the fence into Israel carrying improvised explosive devices. Before they fled back towards Gaza, the four attempted to set fire to an IDF vehicle in Israeli territory.
 - d. Four days later, on March 28, 2018, three Palestinians, armed with grenades and knives, entered Israel by breaching the fence. The three were caught before they could carry out a terror attack.

12. This pattern of action as analyzed by the IDF, accordingly, is viewed as a precursor to mass infiltration – which would be followed by terrorist attacks (including placing explosive charges, murdering civilians, kidnappings, etc.) quickly and easily against civilian infrastructure and towns only hundreds of meters away from the border.
13. According to the IDF, there were explicit statements made by Hamas officials within social networks encouraging the population towards this same scenario. Still, the IDF sent warning messages to the general public in Gaza in order to prevent residents from approaching the border. The IDF also held a direct dialogue with the bus companies in Gaza who had been hired by Hamas to transport the residents to the fence, all in an effort to prevent their use and thus placing them at risk by Hamas.
14. It should be emphasized that it is extremely difficult to stop people from massing on the border, and therefore there is a direct need to stop it before it reaches the border's outer edge. This is compounded by the even greater difficulty in distinguishing between the rioters who are civilians and terrorist operatives who seek to infiltrate Israel or carry out terrorist attacks – for example, by placing explosive charges along the security barrier. This, also, is in light of the fact that terrorist operatives deliberately blend into civilian crowds.
15. In preparation for these events, IDF forces in the field, and supported by additional entities, were given appropriate instructions for dealing with the enemy scenario as was presented by Hamas. Naturally, operational rules of engagement are classified, but it should be noted that the rules of engagement distinguish between dealing with the dangers of terrorist activity and dealing with the dangers of violent riots. When acts of terror are identified, the IDF uses all means necessary to prevent them. In cases of violent riots, the rules of engagement establish a hierarchy, by which IDF forces will make use of appropriate dispersal methods of such demonstrations. The use of live fire, accurate and measured, is always as a last resort. Since the assessment involved the gathering of thousands of people at numerous locations along the border, it was decided in advance to use only precision sharpshooter fire (as opposed to regular rifle fire). This was to ensure accuracy. The IDF has also developed new methods to prevent crowds from approaching the security barrier and causing friction with the civilian population, including the use of a drone that splashes tear gas above the demonstrators.

The riots on Friday, March 30, 2018

16. Around 35,000 Palestinians participated in this march, which was spread over five centers of rioting. These centers included Jabalya, Shaja'ia, Dir al-Balah, Khan Yunis and Rafiah. A large number of those present were Hamas activists and their families, specifically recruited to the event in order to increase its size and give it a more authentic touch. It should be noted that during that same day, some 1,200 rioters were registered in 21 different locations in Judea and Samaria, during which 14 Palestinians were injured.
17. The riots themselves began from the early afternoon and lasted until late in the evening.
18. During the riots, and simultaneously with them, Hamas armed cells attempted to penetrate into Israeli territory, while the rioters took violent actions along the fence, such as throwing Molotov cocktails, throwing rocks and burning hundreds of tires.

- a. At 12:40, near Shaja'ia, a suspicious object was placed during riots in the area.
 - b. 16:39, West of Jabalya – arson was committed against the perimeter fence.
 - c. 17:25, Netzirat, in central Gaza Strip – Hamas operatives and Al Aqsa Brigades approached the fence, fired live ammunition at IDF forces and threw grenades.
 - d. 17:50, Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza Strip - Hamas' al-Nakhba operatives breached the fence, apparently to prepare for terrorist activity.
 - e. 18:00, Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza Strip. Three hostile individuals approached the fence suspiciously while carrying fuel tanks, apparently in order to create a fire in the area.
19. Hamas leaders riled passions and encouraged residents to increase the level of violence. For example, Yahya Sinwar said that the disturbances would continue "until the fence is erased." He told the rioters that "if you are hungry, go eat the livers of the Israeli residents." The head of Hamas' political wing, Ismail Haniyeh, said during the demonstration that "on Friday we stopped at the border - next time, we will not know where the border is."
 20. Hamas even cynically used its own population. A prominent example of this was the sending of a 7-year-old girl across the border fence, in order to cause an incident that may lead to her being injured by IDF forces due to a mistake in identification. IDF soldiers located the girl and prevented any harm to her.
 21. In the course of the event, the IDF sought to prevent any danger to the residents of Israel, to stop a mass infiltration attempt, and to try to prevent any attempt to attack, in a controlled manner and in accordance with aforementioned directives. There was widespread use of riot control measures. This was done in order to minimize harm to the residents of Gaza as much as was possible; to prevent risks to them and to the State of Israel; as well as mitigate the need to use more lethal means to remove potential threats.
 22. Despite this however, according to various reports, 17 people were killed as a result of the day's events. All were men between the ages of 18-30. Some of them were killed during actual shooting incidents against Israeli forces. Of these, at least fourteen have been identified as known terrorist operatives of Hamas and other organizations (Global Jihad, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, etc.). Reports published by the Palestinian Authority also refer to higher numbers. This is a clear indication that the nature of the riots was a staged move, in which military personnel and their families were recruited for participation, mainly by the direct leadership of Hamas.
 23. Information on the number of wounded was also published by the authorities in Gaza, including the Ministry of Health, which is controlled by Hamas. Naturally, they cannot be fully verified. It should be emphasized that past experience has proven that Hamas manipulates data about casualties in order to serve its political purposes, and deals in fraud in presenting testimonies on the subject matter.
 24. As routine, the IDF is an army that investigates and studies, and issues are examined in depth. In contrast to Hamas, the IDF does not engage in propaganda, and therefore a thorough examination, as a rule, takes time.
 25. Hamas has made it clear that it intends to carry out additional violent incidents in the period immediately following the events of March 30, 2018. In particular, disturbances were planned as early as the following Friday, April 6, 2018. Hamas called on its social networks

to prepare Molotov cocktails and collect tires for burning. Simultaneously, there were calls for sniper fire against IDF forces, in addition to the call for a mass infiltration through the fence.

26. The IDF is not interested in harming innocent people, and takes no issue with peaceful demonstrations, but the events of March 30, 2018 and April 6, 2018 (as will be discussed below) did not constitute such a demonstration. As an army committed to protecting the sovereign border of Israel and its citizens, the IDF makes clear that it will continue this work which is based on lengthy experience in avoiding civilian casualties.
27. Ultimately, the IDF prevented a serious incident on the eve of the Passover Seder, during which a mass infiltration event was planned, under which Hamas could have carried out murderous terrorist activities in Israeli communities along the border.

In preparation for the riots on Friday, April 6, 2018

28. Hamas was encouraged by the widespread media coverage it received following the riots on Friday, March 30, 2018, and subsequently called on the residents of the Gaza Strip to come and "demonstrate" again on Friday, April 6, 2018. In order to encourage as many residents as possible to come out and intensify the friction with the IDF, Hamas paid hundreds of dollars to every injured person during the demonstrations on Friday, March 30, 2018. For example, each injured person received between \$200 and \$500 as compensation. Each family of an individual killed received \$3000.
29. Alongside the declared goal of the mass crossing of the fence – which remained the same – riot organizers called on residents to light tires on fire in order to make it harder for IDF forces to see what was occurring, and to allow hostile individuals to cross the fence under the cover of a smokescreen. It should be emphasized that the burning of the tires became a central issue for the disruptions on the day of April 6, 2018, and preparations for them included the placing of thousands of tires along the border in advance. Accordingly, the nickname given by the organizers to the demonstrations is "Friday of mourning of the martyrs," as well as "Friday of the tires."
30. Hamas continued to try to equate civil disobedience with the riots. For example, the tires were painted in different colors (often in bright and "happy" colors), in order to give things a civilian appearance. This is also reflected in the funerals of some of those killed. For example, unlike in the past, Hamas instructed its followers to minimize the presence of the organization's symbols at funerals (when those who appeared were mostly dressed in civilian clothes, without weapons) and even at the demonstrations themselves.
31. Israel, for its part, made it clear that the rules of engagement remained identical to those implemented on Friday, March 30, 2018, distinguishing between situations of violent riots and clear terrorist activity. Accordingly, the IDF warned that approaching the fence constitutes an entry into a dangerous area, and that the IDF is prepared to act if necessary. In addition, throughout the week the IDF prepared its assessments based on the events of the previous week, and new means were brought in to help disperse the riots.

The riots on Friday, April 6, 2018

32. Approximately 20,000 participants took part in the riots, which spread over five different points along the fence. Like in the previous week, the main centers of activity were Jabalya, Shaja'iyah, Deir al-Balah, Khan Yunis and Rafiah. This time, too, under the guise of the riots, attempts were made to violently penetrate the fence, under heavy, thick smoke from the burning of thousands of tires. Grenades, Molotov cocktails and explosive devices were also thrown at the fence to sabotage it, as well at IDF soldiers who stood guard on the opposite side. Also this time, there was a cynical use of children in the vicinity of the fence, which was meant to make it difficult for IDF soldiers to act.
33. In fact, the heating up of the sector was already evident the day before. For example, on April 5, at 10:55, a small boat with four individuals was identified approaching the maritime area between Israel and Gaza. Later that day, at 15:45, a pipe bomb was thrown at IDF forces. Following this, at approximately 16:36, an assembly of approximately 375 individuals threw rocks and burning tires near Deir al-Balah. A sample of the violent scenarios taken during the riots themselves included:
 - a. At 8:44, near Jabalya and near Shaja'iyah, thousands of people burned tires, threw rocks, and threw Molotov cocktails at IDF forces.
 - b. At 8:50, near Deir al-Balah and near Khan Yunis, thousands of people burned tires, threw rocks, threw Molotov cocktails at IDF forces, and cut the perimeter fence near Deir al-Balah.
 - c. At 9:25, near Rafiah - a crowd of thousands who burned tires, threw rocks, and threw Molotov cocktails at IDF forces.
 - d. At 15:17, near Shaja'iyah - throwing two pipe bombs.
 - e. At 15:55, near Rafiah - throwing of a Molotov cocktail.
 - f. At 17:20, near Rafiah - throwing of two pipe bombs at IDF forces.
 - g. On April 8, 2018, at 2:13, near Khan Yunis, seven suspects were identified who burned an object 50 meters from the fence.
34. Even in this "march," it appears that a significant portion of the participants were supporters of Hamas. Accordingly, several senior Hamas officials were seen at the gathering centers of the participants. "The siege and starvation have failed in their attempt to cause the people of Gaza to oppose the resistance movement," the Gaza Strip's leader, Yahya Sinwar, said in a statement. Senior Hamas official Mahmoud al-Zahar said that "if Israel hits the heart of the Gaza Strip, it will be hit in response in the heart of the settlements." Other signs of blatant incitement were, among other things, the burning of Israeli and U.S. flags, and the placing of a flag with a swastika near the border fence.
35. IDF forces, however, prevented any attempt to infiltrate, using balanced means to disperse riots, and live fire in a measured and precise manner, when absolutely necessary. New riot control measures were integrated into the IDF's defense system, such as massive fans to divert smoke from the tires and water hoses designed to extinguish the fires along the fence. One of the claims raised against the IDF in this context concerned the use of non-standard ammunition, which are, of course, false accusations, since the IDF uses only legal ammunition in accordance with international law.

April 10, 2018 - 18:05

36. According to Palestinian media reports, at the end of the day of the riots, around 10 individuals were killed and another 150 wounded. Of these, one of the fatalities died of his wounds following participation in the previous demonstrations on March 30, 2018. It was also reported that a journalist and a Palestinian youth were among those killed. In this regard, the Israeli Minister of Defense was cited as stating, “about the photographer, he was a terrorist, tenured in the military wing of Hamas, carrying an equivalent rank of captain, and received a salary since 2011...” As a matter of routine, the IDF investigates and studies the events it is involved in, and for this purpose is also using the General Staff Fact Finding Assessment Mechanism.