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**Subject:** Mixed official Palestinian reactions to fires in Israel

Bulletin  
Nov. 28, 2016



## Mixed official Palestinian reactions to fires in Israel

by Itamar Marcus

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Last week, over hundreds of fires in forests and cities raged across Israel, aided by strong winds and extremely dry weather conditions. 560 homes were destroyed along with 30,000 dunams (7,400 acres) of national park lands. In all 130,000 dunams (32,000 acres) of natural forests and brush were destroyed. Many countries sent assistance to Israel and the Palestinian Authority sent 8 fire trucks and 40 firefighters to assist in battling the flames.

Israeli police reported that many of the fires were started by arson and 23 people - most of them Israeli Arabs, the rest Palestinians - were arrested as suspects.

There were a range of reactions from official Palestinian Authority sources, which included:

- 1. Support for the decision to help extinguish the fires as a humanitarian gesture (Head of PA Civil Defense Forces)**
- 2. Accusing Israel of racism for reporting that many fires were started by Arabs (PA Foreign Ministry, official PA daily)**
- 3. Denying Israel's existence: "What is burning are our [Palestinian] trees and our historical Palestinian land" (Fatah)**
- 4. Israel's difficulty with the fires is sign of weakness and that "nakedness of the Israeli death state has been exposed." (Op-ed in the official PA daily)**
- 5. Israelis will now emigrate - seeing Israel's weakness in firefighting and since the**

**"Israeli Jew does not adhere to the land" (Op-ed in the official PA daily)**

6. **Accusation that Israelis started some of the fires - "Extremist groups of settlers [set the fires] in order to complete their takeover of these areas." (PA Foreign Ministry)**
7. **Allah is punishing Israel (Fatah-Lebanon)**
8. **Acknowledgment that Israel expressed thanks and credit to Palestinians for helping publicly and widely (Official PA daily)**
9. **Criticism of Israel for supposedly not publicly expressing thanks and credit to Palestinians (PA Foreign Ministry)**

**1 - Support for the decision to help extinguish the fires as a humanitarian gesture (Head of PA Civil Defense Forces)**

"Secretary-General of the Palestinian [PA] Civil Defense Yusuf Nassar expected that the teams that the State of Palestine sent to assist in putting out the fires in Israel would return today (Saturday) [Nov. 26, 2016].

Nassar told [the official PA daily] *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*: 'The Palestinian assistance is an ethical act, and it is given in accordance with the global law of civil defense, according to which every country in the world that is dealing with a natural disaster can request assistance from the countries in the region and from its neighbors.' He emphasized that the civil defense teams responded positively, and that they have the skills and ability to provide active assistance."

[Official PA daily *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Nov. 26, 2016]

**2 - Accusing Israel of racism for reporting that many fires were started by Arabs**

"The [PA] Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated: 'Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the heads of his coalition took advantage of the current wave of fires in Israel to launch an offensive of statements and positions contaminated by racism and full of hatred against the Palestinians and Arabs, while accusing them of being behind [the fires].'

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs clarified yesterday in a statement: 'These accusations were directed even before any investigations were launched. This is part of an inciting and racist systematic Israeli policy, to which the right and extremist right are turning in an attempt to falsely accuse the Palestinians of 'the sabotage and terror,' to divert attention from the internal problems that Netanyahu and his coalition are dealing with, and to increase the extremism in Israeli society and broaden the circle of supporters of the right within Israel.'"

[Official PA daily *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Nov. 28, 2016]

Headline: "An evacuation of tens of thousands from the city of Haifa as a result of the fires, and senior Israeli officials light the fire of racism"

"The Israeli incitement has reached such a level that the [Israeli news] website Yediot

Aharonot chose 'The Fire Intifada' as a main headline for many hours, and afterwards replaced it with a headline no less foolish - 'The Israeli Security Agency is Investigating: Fire Terror.' The incitement was not only on a news website, but rather included most of the Israeli media. What stands out in the announcements and leaks to the Israeli media is the talk not only about perpetrators but rather also about those who are termed 'inciters' to arson (i.e., several Palestinian suspects have been arrested for calling for arson attacks on social media)."

[Official PA daily *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Nov. 25, 2016]

### **3 - "What is burning are our [Palestinian] trees and our historical Palestinian land" (Fatah)**

Headline: "Fatah: What is burning are our trees and our historical Palestinian land" them "In a statement it published today, the Fatah Movement emphasized the Palestinian identity of all the Palestinian trees and stones that are burning right now, which are part of our historical Palestine. The statement warned the Israeli government not to take advantage of this event in a way that serves it by accusing Palestinian bodies of standing behind the fires. Head of the Information Committee of the Fatah [Mobilization and Organization Commission] Munir Al-Jaghoub said that [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu's government must clearly understand the sanctity of the Palestinian's belonging to his land and trees. The statement warned against... the irresponsible responses on the social networks, which include meanings and content as if the Palestinians are dancing over the flames that are spreading within Israel. The statement called on everyone to show historical responsibility and not to use language and terms that are far from the historical heritage and from the Palestinian right to the land that faces fires in the Interior (i.e., Palestinian term for Israel)."

[PNN, independent Palestinian news agency, Nov. 24, 2016]

### **4 - Israel's difficulty with the fires is sign of weakness and that "nakedness of the Israeli death state has been exposed." (Op-ed in the official PA daily)**

*Excerpt of an op-ed by Omar Hilmi Al-Ghoul, regular columnist of the official PA daily*

Headline: "The fragility of the [Israeli] home front"

"The fires that are spreading in the greater part of historical Palestine (i.e. Israel) upon which arose the Israeli colonialist state - have exposed the collapse of the status of the State of Sparta (i.e., Israel, implying violence and militarism).

This is not the first time that the nakedness of the Israeli death state has been exposed. The fires have exposed the fragility of the [Israeli] home front and the helplessness of the state that is armed to the teeth with a military arsenal that surpasses its demographic capabilities. Several years ago (i.e., 2010), when the fires broke out on Mount Carmel in Haifa, it became clear that the [Israeli] Civil Defense Forces have become weak and are unable to carry out the minimum that is demanded of them and that they are charged with. And now, for three days Israel has been witness to a long series of fires - 220 in number - throughout the length and breadth of the land, which have been focused in Haifa and Tel Aviv (sic., Haifa and Jerusalem have been major centers)... An emergency situation has been declared... In an attempt by the Israeli government to calm the anger in the Israeli public, [Israeli] Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu, the Israeli Security Agency, and the minister of public

security claimed that to some of the fires there is a 'deliberate nationalist background.' All those pretending have forgotten that the members of the Palestinian Arab people throughout the land view historical Palestine (i.e., Israel) as their land, and its mountains, valleys, straits, and coasts as theirs. In addition, they constitute a portion of the residents living [throughout] the length and breadth of the land, and this portion, which is firmly rooted in the land of the forefathers, is also suffering from the fires - and not only the Israeli Jews... Every political or security observer who will analyze [the situation] objectively will easily discern that Israel is a most fragile and weak state, whose home front suffers from a deep structural defect, which is in no way consistent with its Spartan military structure."

[Official PA daily *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Nov. 27, 2016]

### **5 - Israelis will now emigrate - seeing Israel's weakness in firefighting and "Israeli Jew does not adhere to the land" (Op-ed in the official PA daily)**

*Excerpt of an op-ed by Omar Hilmi Al-Ghoul, regular columnist of the official PA daily*

"Exposed was the weakness of the home front, which apparently is unfit for this kind of simple coping with the flames, not to mention with a large number of rockets... Some Israelis will turn to the option of reverse migration as a result of the sense of a lack of personal security - not only as a result of war operations (i.e., terror attacks), but also due to a lack of Israeli internal guarantees. This is particularly because the Israeli Jew does not adhere to the land, and is interested in [national] belonging only because of his personal interests."

[Official PA daily *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Nov. 27, 2016]

### **6 - Accusation that Israelis started some of the fires - "Extremist groups of settlers [set the fires] in order to complete their takeover of these areas." (PA Foreign Ministry)**

"It [the Foreign Ministry] noted that the fires in the West Bank broke out in places that from the outset were marked as targets by the occupation and the settlement enterprise, and which are constantly subjected to repeated attacks by the settlers - which testifies to Israel's intentions to get its hands on those places, and helps to link the fires in the West Bank with the daily attacks by the settlers and the occupation army.

The ministry added: 'Likewise, this strengthens the assumption that some of the fires that broke out in the West Bank were deliberately set by people in extremist groups of settlers in order to complete their takeover of these areas.'"

[Official PA daily *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Nov. 28, 2016]

### **7 - Allah is punishing Israel (Fatah-Lebanon)**



Fatah in Lebanon said the fires were divine punishment on Israel for its banning outdoor loudspeakers from religious institutions during the nighttime:

**Text in image:** "They banned [the sounding of] the call to prayer  
'And never think that Allah is unaware of what the wrongdoers do' [Quran, Surah 14:42, Sahih International translation].

Israel at this moment is going up in flames"

[Falestinona, website of Fatah's Information and Culture Commission in Lebanon, Nov. 24, 2016]

### **8 - Acknowledgment that Israel expressed thanks and credit to Palestinians for helping publicly and widely (Official PA daily)**

Headline: "Netanyahu calls the [PA] president and thanks him for the participation of the [PA] Civil Defense teams in putting out the fires - Israelis: We are talking in Hebrew mixed with Arabic and fighting [the fires] through a common language"

"[PA] President Mahmoud Abbas received a phone call last night from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who thanked him for the participation of the Palestinian [PA] Civil Defense teams in putting out the fire that broke out in several areas within the Green Line (i.e., Palestinian term for Israel; the Green Line is the ceasefire line between Israel and the neighboring Arab countries, 1949-1967)..."

The Palestinian Civil Defense [Forces] were welcomed in the Interior (i.e., Palestinian term for Israel) after they volunteered to assist in putting out the fire, and pictures of the Palestinian firefighters, who numbered approximately 40, were published while they were still fighting the fire alongside Israeli firefighters.

Israelis wrote on social media that they appreciate the humanitarian act that the Palestinians did, and said that they were brave men...

Coordinator of Israeli Government Activities [in the Territories Maj. Gen.] Yoav Mordechai praised the Palestinian firefighting teams. Other Israelis expressed thanks to these men, who are endangering their lives...

Council heads of Arab towns and many Arab citizens extended a hand in aid of the needy

Jewish residents in the areas harmed by the fire, and primarily Haifa, as tens of thousands of residents were evacuated from their homes due to the spread of the fires to many neighborhoods in the city...

Photographer and producer Oren Rosenfeld... joined the teams in an attempt to document the cooperation between the Palestinians and Israelis, which was meant to save the city from the fire. He is filming a documentary film on the subject.

He said that at the moment the cause of the outbreak of fires does not matter, nor does whether it is intentional or not. He noted that the most important thing is to fight the fire and continue to work to put it out in cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian firefighters. 'At the moment we are working alongside the Palestinians, there are four Palestinian fire trucks here,' and he added: 'We are talking in Hebrew mixed with Arabic, and fighting the fire through a common language. Therefore, at this time we are not interested in the cause of the outbreak, and we are trying to put it out together!'

The Israeli Foreign Ministry said in the official Twitter account 'Israel in Arabic': 'Your neighbor is your relative. Many thanks to the Egyptians for sending two helicopters, to Jordan for the fire trucks for putting out the fires, and to the PA for eight fire trucks.'

The Israeli Foreign Ministry shared an additional tweet from [Israeli] Police Spokesman Micky Rosenfeld, in which he posted pictures of the efforts to put out the fires and said: 'The Palestinian firefighters are working together with the Israeli firefighters in Haifa in order to assist in putting out the fires.'"

[Official PA daily *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Nov. 27, 2016]

## **9 - Criticism of Israel for supposedly not publicly expressing thanks and credit to Palestinians (PA Foreign Ministry)**

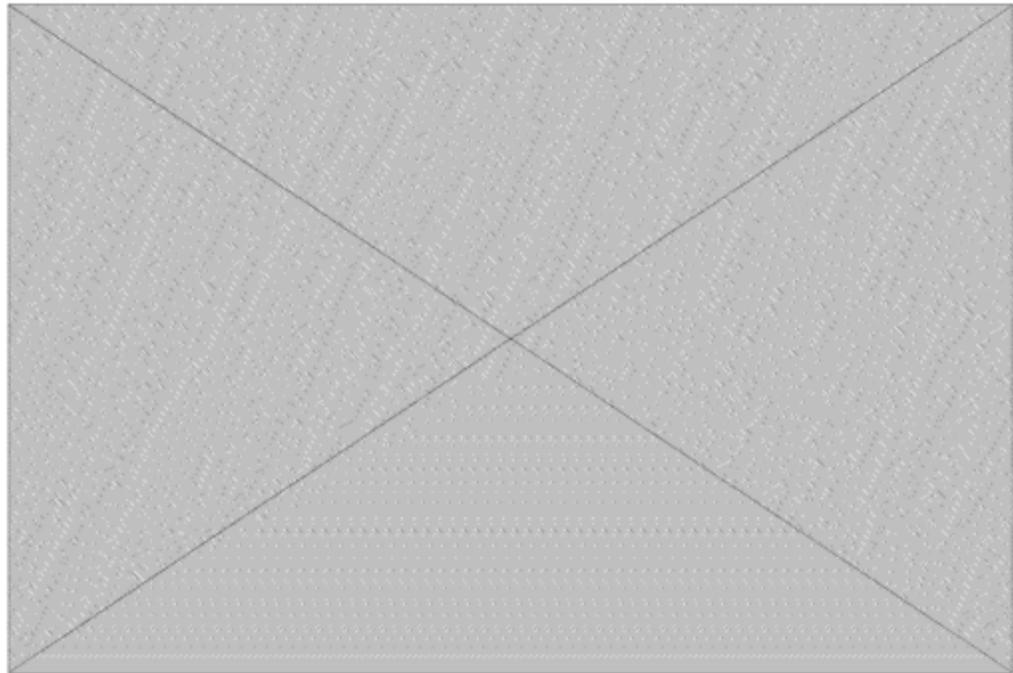
"The Palestinian [PA] Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that despite the historical injustice that the Palestinian people has experienced, its modest means, its great suffering because of the Israeli occupation and its abominable acts and its [Palestinian] constant need for someone to stand by it, aid it, and give it a hand, our people did not hesitate to contribute to the efforts to put out the fires in Israel... The statement added: '...senior [Israeli] officials chose to respond in a lowly and inappropriate way to the Palestinian participation, in an attempt to erase the humanitarian role fulfilled by the State of Palestine before the world.'

In the statement it was noted that the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a statement on its social media pages, in which it thanked the countries that participated in the efforts to put out the fires. However, it did not thank the State of Palestine, and did not put its flag next to the flags of the participating countries and the countries that offered aid, and just made do with a marginal reference at the bottom of the page to 'aid from the PA'... It finished by saying: 'The appreciation of the entire world is enough for us, and living in peace with ourselves is enough for us. However, the international community needs to be more assertive in dealing with the Israeli opportunism, which jumps on the Palestinian land and threatens to increase the illegal settlement in response to a natural disaster.'"

[Donia Al-Watan, independent Palestinian news agency, Nov. 28, 2016]

*Note: The [Facebook post](#) the PA was complaining about thanked countries for sending airplanes and added at the bottom: "Ground assistance received also from the Palestinian Authority." As shown in the previous article, the Israeli government went out of its way to publicly express*

thanks to the PA.



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