



**Intelligence and Terrorism
Information Center
at the Israel Intelligence Heritage &
Commemoration Center**

November 5, 2008

Escalation in the Gaza Strip: the IDF operated inside the Gaza Strip near the security fence to prevent the abduction of soldiers. In response several dozen rockets and mortar shells were fired. Spokesmen for Hamas condemned Israel but did not announce its cancellation of the lull arrangement.



Aerial photo of the region where the IDF forces operated. It shows the distance (245 meters, less than 2/10 of a mile) between the opening of the tunnel and the Israel border. The tunnel was planned to be used for the abduction of Israeli soldiers (Photo courtesy of the IDF Spokesman, November 5).

The Situation on the Ground (As of November 5, 1700 hours)

1. Following intelligence information, on the night of November 4 an IDF force operated inside the Gaza Strip. The action's objective was **to prevent an abduction** by Hamas of Israeli soldiers from Israeli soil. The IDF force operated near the security fence, about 250 meters (less than 2/10 of a mile) inside the Gaza Strip (about 3 kilometers, or less than 2 miles, northeast of the Kissufim army post). Six IDF soldiers were wounded, two of them seriously. Six or seven **Hamas** terrorist operatives were killed and a number were wounded.

2. The IDF's preventive strike was the first of its kind since the lull arrangement went into effect five months ago (June 19, 2008). The decision to carry out the strike was made after it was learned that a tunnel intended for the abduction of Israeli soldiers had become operative was ready for immediate use.¹ The IDF Spokesman reported that the activity was undertaken to prevent an abduction, which was a gross violation of the lull arrangement, and that the IDF attack was **pinpointed and limited** and meant to remove a **serious immediate threat posed by Hamas** (IDF Spokesman, November 5).

3. The Palestinian terrorist organizations headed by Hamas responded by firing several dozen rockets and mortar shells at western Negev towns and villages, a serious violation of the lull arrangement. The shelling ended at around noon on November 5. The terrorist organization spokesmen represented the IDF action as an Israeli violation of the lull arrangement. They repeatedly stated that they would respond to the IDF violations **but did not announce the end of the lull**. Israel closed the Gaza Strip crossings in response to the rocket attacks.

IDF Counterterrorism Activities near the Border Fence

4. The IDF's preventive operation in proximity to the border fence was based on information received regarding the digging of a tunnel near the security fence **for the purpose of abducting soldiers** (on the model of the attack in which Gilad Shalit was abducted almost 2 ½ years ago). On the night of November 4 IDF forces entered the Gaza Strip to locate and destroy the tunnel.

5. The soldiers located the building under which the tunnel had been excavated. When the soldiers reached it they discovered armed terrorists inside. The terrorists opened fire at the soldiers. The IDF soldiers returned fire, and during the ensuing firefight there was an

¹ A senior IDF source called it "a ticking tunnel" (Ynet, November 5).

explosion inside the building, which had apparently been booby-trapped, and it collapsed. A number of terrorists were harmed and some fled the scene (IDF Spokesman, November 5).

6. Hamas announced that six [seven, according to another version] Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operatives had been killed in the incident, and that several more had been wounded. Those killed belonged to the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades' artillery unit. Prominent among those killed was Mazen Sa'adeh, an Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades commander (Al-Aqsa TV, November 4). Also killed was Mazen Nazimi Abbas, one of the commanders of Hamas's "special unit" (Palestine-info website, and other Palestinian media, November 5).



Mazen Sa'adeh, Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades commander, killed during an IDF action (Hamas's PALDF Forum, November 4, 2008).

7. The IDF action which took place on November 4 was the **first of its kind since the lull arrangement went into effect**. Security sources reported that it was necessary in light of the alarming intelligence received. Following the events, on the morning of November 5 the defense minister held a meeting of senior defense officials to evaluate the situation. Matan Vilnai, deputy Defense Minister, said Israel had no interest in violating the lull arrangement and that the IDF had acted to neutralize an immediate threat which was liable to lead to the abduction of an Israeli soldier or to another type of terrorist attack in Israeli territory (Ynet, November 5).

Reactions from the Terrorist Organizations

Reactions on the ground

8. In response to the IDF's preventive operation several dozen rockets and mortar shells were fired at western Negev towns and villages, most of them by Hamas. A total of **46 rockets** (including two which fell in the Gaza Strip) and **16 mortar shells were fired**, some of them aimed at the IDF force during the action. **Three of the rockets fell in the Ashqelon area**

and on in the center of a residential neighborhood. Three women were treated for shock. One rocket fell on the greenhouses of an Israeli village, causing property damage. The Israeli Air Force attacked several squads firing rockets and mortar shells in the Khan Yunis region. The rocket and mortar fire ended around noon on November 5.



Police explosives expert carrying the remains of a rocket fired at Ashqelon (Amir Cohen for Reuters, November 5).

1. 9. It was the **first time** since the lull arrangement went into effect that Hamas participated in firing rockets into Israel. It was also the **first time** that the terrorist organizations attacked Israel with **massive amounts** of rocket and mortar shell fire (until now there were occasional violations of single rockets or mortar shells being fired).

Media Reactions

10. Hamas spokesmen **publicly** claimed responsibility for most of the rockets and mortar shells fired into Israel. However, they avoided presenting the escalation as the end of the lull arrangement, rather representing them as a reaction to the IDF action, which they called a "gross violation" of the lull arrangement.

11. Some of the reactions were the following:

i) **Taher al-Nunu**, Hamas administration spokesman, told the newspapers that the IDF action was Israel's most dangerous violation of the lull arrangement (Palestine-info website, November 5).

ii) **Abu Obeida**, Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades spokesman, said that the Israeli action was "a gross violation of the lull arrangement" and that Hamas would "repel all Israeli actions." He also said that Hamas would deliberate over whether to cancel the lull arrangement (Qudspress, November 5).

iii) **Sami Abu Zuhri**, Hamas spokesman, said that the action showed that Israel was not interested in the lull arrangement's continuation. He also said that the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades would respond to the IDF action should it be repeated and that the battle field "would not be limited to the central Gaza Strip" (Al-Aqsa TV, November 5).

iv) **Fawzi Barhoum** said it was a question of a "gross violation" of the lull arrangement and that Israel would bear the results. He said the arrangement would not deter the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades from responding (Palestine-info website, November 5).

v) **The Palestinian Islamic Jihad** issued a statement to the effect that the lull arrangement would not prevent the various organizations, headed by the Jerusalem Battalions, from responding to [Israel's] "aggression and constant escalation" (Nidaa al-Quds website, November 5). According to the statement, "Barak and Livni will not increase their chances in the Israeli elections at the expense of the Gaza Strip..." (Ynet, November 5).

vi) **Abu Salim**, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine spokesman, said that by its actions "the Zionist enemy began hinting at the end of the lull arrangement" (Pal-today website, November 5).

Appendix

Terrorist Organization Violations of the Lull Arrangement before November 4-5

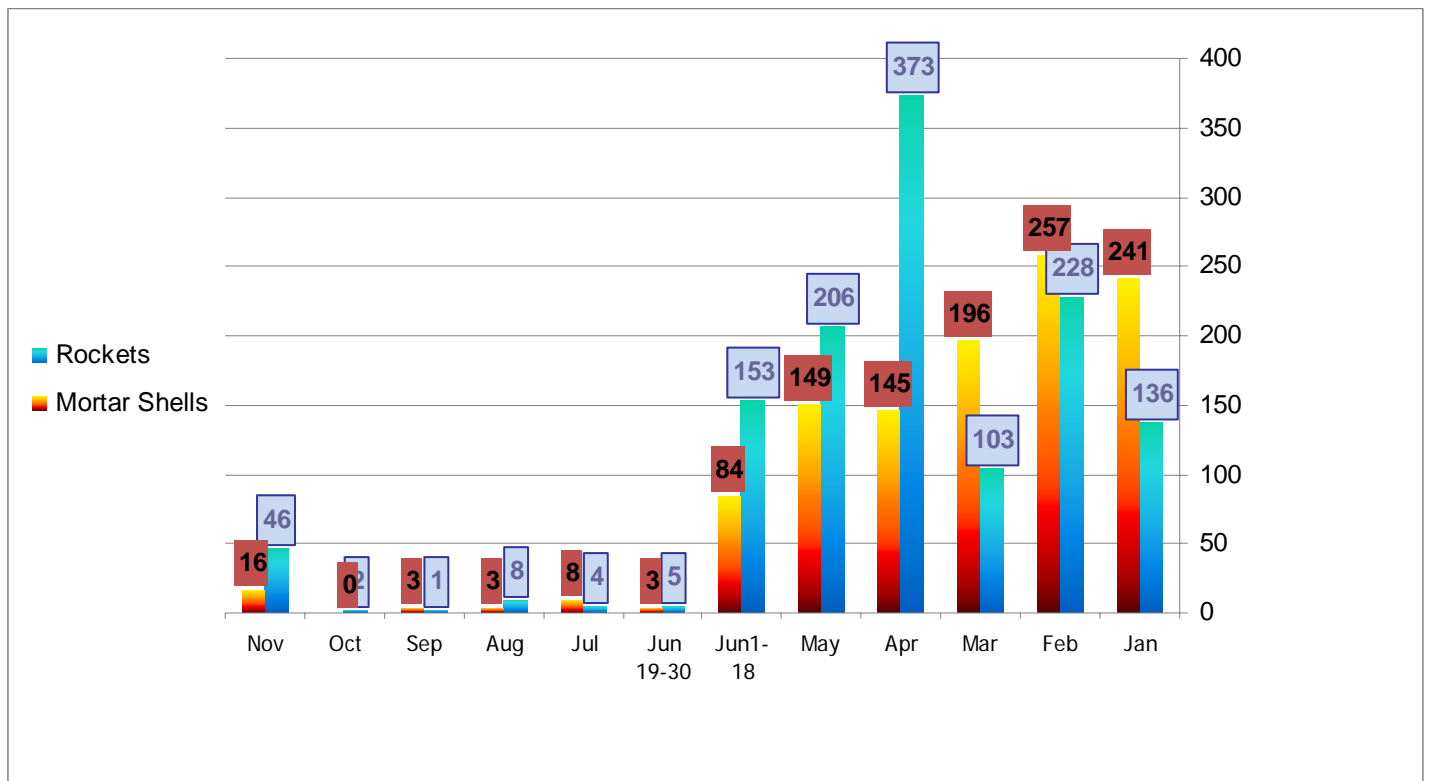
12. Since the lull arrangement went into effect on June 19, 2008, the Palestinian terrorist organizations have **violated it scores of times**, primarily by firing rockets and mortar shells. Occasionally rogue terrorist organizations have been responsible for the violations, among them networks belonging to Fatah, the PIJ and the Army of Islam. Hamas, for its part, did not take part in rocket and mortar shell fire and sometimes prevented other organizations from attacking, although it did not confront them directly and massively or end their continued violations.

13. Before the events of November 4-5 there were three types of violations:

- i) **Rocket and mortar shell fire at the western Negev population centers:** a total of **21 rockets** during the lull arrangement, three of which fell inside the Gaza Strip, and **26 mortar shells** for a total of 47 violations .
- ii) **IEDs, light arms fire and anti-tank missiles:** the attacks were aimed at IDF forces near the security fence. One prominent incident occurred on October 31, when an IDF force saw a terrorist squad deploying an IED near the security fence north of the Sufa crossing. The terrorists opened fire and shot **two anti-tank missiles** at the Israeli soldiers (IDF Spokesman's website, October 31).
- iii) **Attempted abductions:** on December 21 the Israeli security forces detained a Rafah resident who had tried to infiltrate into Israel through the Egyptian border with the intention of abducting IDF soldiers from Israeli territory into the Gaza Strip. Hamas was behind the attempted attack.² The tunnel dug near the border fence in the Kissufim region was also meant to be used by Hamas to abduct Israeli soldiers into the Gaza Strip.

² For further information see our October 26, 2008 Bulletin entitled "The Israeli security forces detained a terrorist from Rafah who infiltrated into Israel through Egypt" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ct_e008.pdf.

Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire during the Lull Period Compared with the First Half of 2008



14. Dispatching the squad through the Egyptian border and digging the tunnel in the Kissufim region show that **Hamas regards abducting IDF soldiers as an important operation** for acquiring bargaining chips to be used in the release of releasing Palestinian terrorist prisoners from Israeli jails. In our assessment, however, Hamas should take into consideration that a successful abduction clearly brings with it **the potential for escalation and sabotaging the lull arrangement**, even causing Hamas political damage by violating understandings with Egypt and sabotaging the chances of the Palestinian national dialogue. The importance of the abductions is reflected in statements made by Hamas spokesmen and those of other terrorist organizations. They repeatedly say that more soldiers are necessary and that they plan to abduct them (possibly to prepare Palestinian public opinion). Practically the terrorist organizations have used the lull period to carry out training exercises in attacking IDF posts to abduct soldiers.

15. The lull arrangement has been intensively exploited by the Palestinian terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip to continue their military buildup. They have carried out training exercises which include attacking and taking over army posts and abducting

soldiers. For example, on October 30 Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operative underwent training at the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. The training included taking over an Israeli army post, and live ammunition and hand grenades were used. (Al-Aqsa TV, October 30).



Hamas/Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operatives undergoing military training at the Nuseirat refugee camp (Al-Aqsa TV, October 30).