



**Intelligence and Terrorism
Information Center
Israel Intelligence Heritage
and Commemoration Center**

News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

December 16-23, 2008



The terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip prepare for the end of the lull arrangement: a rocket ready for firing, December 18 (Al-Jazeera TV, December 18).



Intensive rocket fire after the end of the lull arrangement: a rocket lands near an elementary school in Sderot on December 21 (Photo: Zeev Trachtman, December 21).

Overview

- The days after the terrorist organizations announced the end of the lull arrangement were marked by intensive rocket and mortar shell fire which targeted Sderot, Ashqelon and other villages in the western Negev. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for most of the attacks. Hamas claimed responsibility for the mortar shell fire.
- A senior Hamas figure announced that in response to a request from Egypt, the organizations operating in the Gaza Strip had agreed to lay down their arms for 24 hours from the evening of December 21 to the evening of December 22 to enable supplies to be delivered to the Gaza Strip. On the ground there has been a decrease in the extent of rocket fire, although three rockets and one mortar shell were fired on December 22, and on December 23 intensive rocket and mortar shell fire targeted Israel. As a result of the attacks, the crossings remained closed.

Important Events

The Gaza Strip

Intensive Rocket Fire into Israel after the Lull Arrangement Ends

The week was marked by intensive rocket and mortar shell fire which began a few days before the lull ended and continued into the days after. Several rockets landed in Sderot and Ashqelon:¹

- **December 16 – Eight rockets** landed in Israeli territory, one hitting a soccer field of the **Sapir College** near Sderot.
- **December 17 – Eighteen rockets and six mortar shells** landed in Israeli territory. One rocket landed in **Ashqelon's industrial zone**, wounding three civilians. A rocket fell in a commercial center of Sderot, wounding three civilians and causing property damage.
- **December 18 – Seven rockets and one mortar shell** landed in Israeli territory. A cowshed in Kibbutz Nahal Oz was damaged.
- **December 19** – On the last day of the lull arrangement, **seven rockets and six mortar shells** landed in Israeli territory. Light arms fire was directed at farmers working in the fields of the village of Nir Oz, damaging a vehicle.
- **December 20 – Ten rockets and 18 mortar shells** landed in Israeli territory. One rocket landed in the center of Sderot; no casualties or property damage were reported.
- **December 21 – Fifteen rockets and three mortar shells** landed in Israeli territory; a civilian in Moshav Netiv Haasara was wounded. Four rockets landed in Sderot, one of them **a direct hit on a residential building**, wounding a civilian and causing property damage. A rocket landed **near an elementary school in Sderot**, and another in **Ashqelon's industrial zone**. No injuries or damage were reported.

¹ For further information see our December 18 and 21, 2008 Bulletins entitled "Escalation in attacks from the Gaza Strip as Hamas announces the end of the lull arrangement" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/hamas_e016.htm and "Intensive rocket fire attacks against western Negev population centers and the Ashqelon region after Hamas announces the end of the lull arrangement" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/hamas_e018.htm.



A direct rocket hit on a house in Sderot,
December 21
(Photo: Zeev Trachtman, December 21)

- **December 22** – There was a decrease in rocket and mortar shell fire after Hamas and other terrorist organizations agreed to a 24-hour ceasefire to allow goods to be delivered to the Gaza Strip (See below). However, the ceasefire was violated during the day when **three rockets and one mortar shell** landed in Israel, all falling in open areas, and on December 23 intensive rocket and mortar shell fire targeted Israel.
- The **Palestinian Islamic Jihad** claimed responsibility for most of the rocket fire. Responsibility was also claimed by Fatah's military-terrorist wing, and the Popular and Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine. **Hamas** claimed responsibility for the **mortar shell fire**.

Counterterrorism Activities

The Gaza Strip

IDF Response to Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire from the Gaza Strip

- After the lull arrangement ended, IDF actions focused on air strikes against terrorist squads launching rockets. In addition, for the first times since the lull arrangement went into effect, the IDF attacked weapons-manufacturing sites:
 - **December 17** – The IDF attacked a squad of rocket launchers in the northern Gaza Strip. In addition, a weapons store in the **Jabaliya refugee camp** was attacked, as was a workshop for the manufacture of weapons in **Khan Yunis**. PFLP operative **Salah Abu Akel** was killed during the attack on Jabaliya, and two others were wounded (Ma'an News Agency, December 17). The structure attacked in Khan Yunis was completely demolished (Iran's Fars website, December 17).
 - **December 18** – The Israeli Air Force attacked two rocket launchers near the Jabaliya refugee camp.

- **December 20** – The IDF attacked a squad of rocket launchers north of the village of Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip. One Fatah/Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade operative was killed and a number of others were wounded (Al-Aqsa TV, December 20). The IAF attacked another squad of rocket launchers and destroyed their equipment. Apparently several Fatah/Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade operatives were wounded (Qudsnet website, Paltoday website, December 20).
- **December 21** – The IDF attacked a rocket launcher near the village of Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. It later attacked two rocket launchers in the Saja'iyah neighborhood of Gaza City.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Senior Hamas Figure Announces a Short Ceasefire

■ Senior Hamas figure **Ayman Taha** told a Reuters correspondent in the Gaza Strip that the organizations had decided to lay down their arms for 24 hours in response to **a request from Egyptian intermediaries**. He said the ceasefire would begin on the evening of Sunday, December 21, and was expected to end the following evening. He added that Hamas might consider an additional extension of the cease fire if Israel stopped its military activities in the Gaza Strip and lifted the siege (Reuters, December 22). Senior PIJ figure **Khaled al-Batash** announced that his organization did not oppose the temporary ceasefire requested by Egypt, since it would enable supplies to be delivered to the Gaza Strip (Al-Jazeera TV, December 22). PRC spokesman **Abu Mujahad** confirmed that the various organizations had agreed to a 24-hour ceasefire to enable the supplies to arrive, as requested by Egypt.

■ According to the December 22 edition of **Al-Hayat**, on December 21 Egypt asked senior Hamas officials in the Gaza Strip for a 24-hour ceasefire to ensure **the entry of 80 trucks** carrying basic commodities and fuel to the Gaza Strip through the Kerem Shalom crossing. The appeal was made through aides to the head of Egypt's general intelligence service, Omar Suleiman.

■ **On the ground** there has been a significant decrease in rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel; however, three rockets and one mortar shell were fired on December 22. A Fatah network in the Gaza Strip claimed responsibility for the rockets. As a result, the crossings into the Gaza Strip from Israel have remained closed (as of the morning of December 23).

Renewed Egyptian Mediation for a New Lull Arrangement

■ On Thursday, December 25, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni is expected to accept Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's invitation to meet in Cairo. They are expected to discuss ways of stopping the escalation in the Gaza Strip. According to reports in **Al-Quds Al-Arabi**, based on a "reliable source," the Egyptians have increased the frequency of their contacts with the Palestinian terrorist organizations and Israel to formulate a new lull arrangement. According to the same source, the new lull arrangement will be an improvement over the previous one in that it will make it possible for the Gaza Strip crossings to remain continually open (Al-Quds Al-Arabi, December 22).

■ After Hamas's belligerent rhetoric at the end of the lull arrangement, senior Hamas figure Mahmoud al-Zahar signaled that the movement was willing to agree to an "improved" arrangement. In interviews with Israeli TV and the Egyptian paper Al-Ahram, he said that Hamas would "**evaluate the situation**" after the 24-hour ceasefire. He added that if Hamas were favorably impressed, it would consider continuing the ceasefire, on the condition that Israel committed itself not to operate inside the Gaza Strip and to keep the crossings open at all times (Roe Nahmias and Ali Waked for Ynet, December 23).



Mahmoud al-Zahar, interviewed by Channel 10 (Courtesy of Israel's Channel 10 TV, December 22).

Israel Security Agency Head: Hamas Rockets Can Reach Beersheba

■ ISA head Avi Diskin told the government meeting this week that Hamas had rockets which could reach **Kiryat Gat, Ashdod and even the outskirts of Beersheba, 40 kilometers (almost 25 miles) from the Gaza Strip**. In his assessment, Hamas will fire them if Israel attacks one of its "strategic targets" in the Gaza Strip. He said that Hamas's military-terrorist wing had exploited the six-month lull to improve its long- and medium-range rocket capabilities (Barak Ravid, Amos Harel and Yanir Yagna for Haaretz, December 22).

Israel Protests to the United Nations over the Terrorist Organizations' Rocket and Mortar Shell Attacks

■ On December 21 Professor Gabriela Shalev, Israel's ambassador to the UN, sent a letter to the UN Secretary General Ban **Ki-moon** following the rocket and mortar shell attacks from the Gaza Strip:

- The Ambassador stressed that the escalation came within a few days of the UN Security Council adoption of Resolution 1850,² which supports the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.
- She made it clear that Hamas was exclusively responsible for the deterioration of the situation, adding that so far Israel had practiced restraint, but that "...under article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, Israel has the full right to defend itself and the security of its citizens from such attacks. Israel will not tolerate a situation where Israeli citizens become hostages of a terrorist organization."
- She concluded by saying that while it was determined to protect the lives of its citizens, Israel would continue to provide the people of Gaza with their basic humanitarian needs. Hamas, she said, bore sole responsibility for the situation of the inhabitants of Gaza, as it continued to launch rockets from within civilian centers in Gaza, and even attacked the crossings that facilitated the transfer of goods into Gaza Strip.

Other Reactions to the End of the Lull Arrangement³

Hamas

■ Hamas spokesmen continued their slanderous fabrications in a media campaign which accuses Israel of responsibility for ending the lull arrangement and denied that contacts were held to renew it. Some of them even threatened that its operatives would carry out **suicide bombing attacks** as well as firing rockets.

- **Ayman Taha** claimed that Israel had ended the lull by closing the Gaza Strip crossings for more than a month, adding that matters would "return to the [pre-lull arrangement situation] of struggle and resistance" (Al-Arabiya TV, December 20). In a different interview he said that it was the "right" of the "resistance" [i.e., the terrorist organizations] to use all the means available to them in their struggle against Israel, including a return to suicide bombing attacks within Israel (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, December 22).

- **Fawzi Barhoum** accused Israel of sabotaging the lull arrangement by escalating the situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, adding that as far as Hamas was concerned, "the lull arrangement is dead and finished, and it is the fault of the occupation." When asked if another lull could be arranged through European mediation, he answered that the only

² According to UN Security Council resolution 1850, peace has to be based on mutual recognition, abandoning terrorism and incitement and a commitment to the solution of two states, an adoption of Israel's position in the Annapolis process (Israeli Foreign Ministry website, December 16).

³ An update of Hamas's response as reported in our December 21, 2008 bulletin entitled "Intensive rocket fire attacks against western Negev population centers and the Ashqelon region after Hamas announces the end of the lull arrangement" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/hamas_e018.htm.

thing on the agenda at the present time was “defending the Palestinian people” in view of the “Zionist escalation” (Al-Arabiya TV, December 20).

- **Mona Mansour**, a Hamas representative in the Palestinian Legislative Council, accused Egypt of “not fulfilling its true role in the lull arrangement because in recent months it did not expose the actions taken by Israel in the Gaza Strip.” She added that the Israeli escalation against the Gaza Strip would necessarily lead to an escalation of the “resistance,” i.e., terrorism (Felesteen, December 21).
- **Salah Bardawil**, Hamas faction speaker in the Palestinian Legislative Council, denied that there had been Arab or international contacts to renew the lull arrangement. He said Hamas’s agreement to a new lull would be contingent on achieving a consensus of the Palestinian “organizations” [i.e., the terrorist organizations], the complete cessation of “Israeli aggression” [without mentioning the cessation of Palestinian rocket and mortar shell attacks], the end of the “siege” of the Gaza Strip and the extending of the lull arrangement to the West Bank (Felesteen, December 21).
- **Sami Abu Zuhri**, Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, said that the “resistance” fighters [i.e., the terrorist operatives] were entitled to use all the means available to them, including **suicide bombing attacks**, because the international community and is had not left them any other alternative (Tunisian newspaper Al-Shuruk, December 23).



The PIJ’s Jerusalem Battalions train as the lull arrangement approaches its end (Al-Jazeera TV, December 18).

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad

■ **Khaled al-Batash**, senior PIJ figure, claimed that Israel was not interested in a lull but rather in escalation. He called for a return to the “resistance” [terrorism] and even to intensify it. He said that the Palestinians did not have an army or the means available to Hezbollah, and that they possessed limited capabilities to wage an asymmetric war, and they had to use those capabilities properly. He called on Fatah and Hamas to end their “stupid rift,” adding that before contacts with

Israel regarding a lull could be made, a national reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas had to be reached (Egyptian TV, December 20).

The Gaza Strip Crossings

■ This week the Gaza Strip crossings remained closed **following the incessant rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel**. As in the past, the passage of civilians with humanitarian issues continued through the Erez crossing. Hamas continues regarding Egypt as one of the factors responsible for the shortages in the Gaza Strip. On December 20 dozens of Palestinians demonstrated in front of the Egyptian embassy in Gaza City demanding that the Rafah crossing be opened to allow hundreds of Gazans to leave, among them students and Palestinians holding visas for Saudi Arabia (PalMedia website, December 20).

The Tunnel Industry

■ The Palestinians continue methodically smuggling fuel and cooking gas into the Gaza Strip from Egypt. On December 19 Hamas's Qudsnet website reported that one tunnel owner had managed to lay a pipeline for cooking gas. It cost him \$45,000, including **digging the tunnel and laying 500 meters (almost 550 yards) of special pipes**.

■ At the same time, the tunnel industry continued claiming lives and causing heavy property damage. On December 19 a 23-year old Palestinian was killed when a tunnel near Rafah collapsed (Ma'an News Agency, December 19). On December 20 a tanker truck which was supposed to smuggle fuel to the Gaza Strip exploded near El-Arish, destroying four buildings and causing a large fire (Agence France Presse, December 20). In addition, on the same day a fire broke out in a tunnel which was supposed to be used to smuggle fuel from Egypt to the Gaza Strip. Palestinian sources claimed that the Egypt security services which exposed the tunnel were responsible for the fire (German news agency Deutsche Presse Agentur, December 20).

■ The media controlled by Hamas or fed their information by Hamas-controlled sources emphasize the use of the tunnels to smuggle civilian goods in response to the needs of the local population. However, the Palestinian media occasionally provide other information. For example, a radical Islamic group called Jund Ansar Allah announced the death of one of its operatives when a tunnel collapsed near Rafah on December 15. On December 17, Hamas's PALDF Forum website reported that the tunnel had not been intended for commercial use but rather to serve the **jihād** means [i.e., smuggling weapons and terrorist operatives]. In another incident, on December 19 the PIJ's website reported a confrontation between Hamas police and Jerusalem Battalions operatives, one of whom was using the tunnel to **smuggle drugs**.

Security Prisoners Riot in the Ofer Prison

■ On December 20 a riot broke out between dozens of Palestinian security prisoners and guards in the **Ofer prison** south of Ramallah. It began when the guards entered one of the prison wings to conduct a routine search. The prisoners confronted the guards, threw various objects at them and set mattresses on fire. Ten guards and six prisoners were injured. The Ma'an news agency reported that after the riot the prisoners went on strike, demanding an improvement in their conditions and an end to the searches (December 21).

■ The Palestinian media provided biased reports of the events, ignoring the disturbance caused by the prisoners and focusing on what they called the "attack" of the guards on the prisoners. Palestinian chairman Mahmoud Abbas said that such "attacks" did not serve the peace process and linked them to the confrontations between the Palestinians and the settlers in Judea and Samaria, and even to the "siege" of the Gaza Strip (Wafa News Agency, December 20). Hamas spokesman **Fawzi Barhoum** said that the Ofer prison was known as a symbol of "Zionist terrorism," and that most of the prisoners there belonged to Hamas. He called the riot "racist, terrorist revenge" (Al-Aqsa TV, December 20). He also pointed the finger of guilt at the Palestinian Authority and its security coordination with Israel (Palestine-info website, December 20).

The Dignity Arrives in the Gaza Strip Again

■ On December 20 the Dignity docked in the Gaza port for the second time in ten days. It was carrying a delegation from a Qatari charitable society called "Sheikh Eid," bringing medicine and goods for children. Shlomi Eldar, a correspondent for Israel Channel 10 TV was also on board (Al-Jazeera TV, December 20). The boat set sail from Gaza on December 21, carrying a number of Palestinians (Popular Committee to Break the Siege website, December 21).

■ The boat's arrival was part of Hamas's efforts to create a maritime shipping line to the Gaza Strip. Usama al-Isawi, transportation minister in the Hamas administration, said that the port of Gaza would be made ready for boats needing a deep-water harbor, when construction made that possible. He said that Qatari experts were supposed to have arrived on board to help examine the port, but that they had not received entrance visas for Cyprus (Filastin al-'An website, December 20).

■ The Committee of the National Initiative to Break the Siege announced that the Lebanese "solidarity" boat was expected to leave Lebanon and arrive in Gaza via Cyprus on January 3, 2009. It is expected to carry food, medical supplies and pro-Palestinian activists (Al-Mustaqbal website, December 18). A Kuwaiti boat is expected to leave at the end of December carrying medicine, journalists, students and pro-Palestinian activists from Kuwait (Al-Rai, December 21). **The Iranian**

foreign minister announced that Iran would send a boat in the near future carrying 2,000 tons of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, and expressed his hope that the UN and Egypt would make sure it arrived safely in Gaza (ISNA News Agency, December 16).



The Dignity arrives in the Gaza port with a delegation from Qatar (Al-Jazeera TV, December 20).