News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict  
(January 28 – February 3, 2015)

The site of the Hezbollah attack at Har Dov where two IDF vehicles were hit by anti-tank missiles, killing two IDF soldiers (Almayadeen.net, January 29, 2015)

Overview

- On January 28, 2015, Hezbollah carried out a combined anti-tank missile and mortar shell attack on IDF forces in the Har Dov region (the so-called Shebaa Farms) in the eastern sector of south Lebanon. Two Israeli soldiers were killed. Hezbollah claimed responsibility, signaling the attack was in retaliation for the attack on its operatives (allegedly carried out by Israel) and that it was not interested in an escalation. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah gave a speech with a deterrent message for Israel, claiming that Hezbollah's activity in Lebanon and Syria could not be separated, i.e., were part of the same campaign against Israel.

- On January 27, 2015, UNRWA announced it had run out of money to rebuild the houses of Gazans damaged in Operation Protective Edge. An entity calling itself the National Movement for Breaking the Siege and Reconstruction of the [Gaza] Strip held a violent demonstration in front of the UNRWA offices in Gaza City, leading to the evacuation of UN employees from the Gaza Strip. UNRWA said in an announcement that it viewed Hamas as solely responsible for the safety of UN personnel and demanded guarantees that there would be no repetition of the violence.
The Northern Arena

Clashes in the Northern Golan Heights and Har Dove (the Shebaa Farms)\textsuperscript{1}

The Sequence of Events

- On the afternoon of January 27, 2015, two rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory in the northern Golan Heights. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. The IDF responded with artillery fire attacking the source of the rocket fire. Israeli Air Force aircraft then attacked Syrian army targets. Hezbollah was apparently behind the rocket fire, even if no organization officially claimed responsibility for it.

- On January 28, 2015, approximately 24 hours after the rocket fire in the Golan Heights, Hezbollah used anti-tank missiles (Kornet missiles, according to the media) and mortar shells to carry out a combined attack on an IDF patrol on the road near the village of Ghajar. The attack was launched from the region of Kafr Shuba, in the eastern sector of south Lebanon (the Shebaa Farms). Two IDF soldiers were killed and seven wounded. Shortly after the attack several more rocket hits were identified in the Har Dove and Mt. Hermon regions. The victims were Captain Yohai Kalangel, 25, from the village of Har Gilo (south of Jerusalem), and First Sergeant Dor Haim Nini, 20, from Shtulim, a village in south-central Israel. A short time after the attack Al-Manar TV broadcast a formal announcement from Hezbollah claiming responsibility for the attack.

- In response the IDF fired artillery at a Hezbollah target in south Lebanon. A Spanish UNIFIL soldier was killed in the attack; Israel issued an apology. A joint UNIFIL-Lebanese army committee has begun examining the circumstances of the death of the Spanish soldier (Assafir.com, January 30, 2015). The UNIFIL commander contacted both sides to prevent an escalation. He condemned the clashes and said they were a violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and urged both sides to show restraint (UNIFIL website, January 28, 2015).

\textsuperscript{1} The clashes came in the wake of an attack on Hezbollah terrorist operatives in the northern Golan Heights on January 18, 2015.
Hassan Nasrallah's Speech

- On January 30, 2015, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah gave a speech in which he mentioned the events for the first time. He gave prominence to two issues:
  
  - The attack at Har Dov was Hezbollah's "fitting response" to Israel's attack, and the organization does not want an escalation. He called the attack "a huge victory" for Hezbollah. He equated the attack on Hezbollah operatives near Quneitra with Hezbollah's subsequent attack on the IDF patrol at Har Dov: two vehicles for two vehicles, the killed and wounded at the Shebaa Farms for those killed at Quneitra, the missiles fired at the IDF force for those fired at the Hezbollah operatives. However, he claimed Hezbollah did not want a war but if forced into one would deal with it and be victorious.
  
  - Lebanon and Syria cannot be separated. Nasrallah linked Hezbollah with Syria and Iran, saying that mingling Iranian blood with Lebanese blood on Syrian soil expressed "the unity of the campaign" against Israel. He claimed that exerting Hezbollah's force against Israel did not necessarily entail a geographical link [that is, Hezbollah regards itself as free to act and respond from Syria as well as well as Lebanon].

Iranian Reactions

- Ali Ja'fari, commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IIRG), claimed that Hezbollah's response was minimalist and hoped it had taught the Israelis a lesson. He claimed Israel acted out of fear of the "resistance's" capabilities. He also claimed that Hezbollah and Iran were one entity and therefore any blood spilled would be met with a unified response. He claimed Hezbollah was stronger today than in the past and that there was no difference between the youth of Iran, Lebanon, Iraq or Syria (Farsnews.com, January 30, 2015). Hussein Salami, acting IIRG commander, said that Hezbollah's response had been "swift and strong" and demonstrated the organization's capabilities. He added Iran did not regard Israel as a threat (Farsnews.com, January 30, 2015).

- The Iranian reactions dealt with Hezbollah, with no specific reference to an Iranian retaliation for the killing of a senior IIRG officer allegedly carried out by Israel. The implication is therefore that from the Iranian point of view, it has the option to retaliate against Israel (for example, through a terrorist attack abroad), even if accounts with Hezbollah have been paid.
Palestinian Responses

- All the Palestinian terrorist organizations praised the attack at Har Dov, calling it a "natural response" to Israel's crimes, especially the killing of six Hezbollah operatives. On January 28, 2015, a rally was held in the Gaza Strip in support of the "Islamic resistance" in Lebanon and the "right to respond." It was attended by representatives of the Palestinian terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip and was also broadcast by Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV and Iran's Al-Alem TV.

- Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) spokesmen said the following:
  - Sami Abu Zuhri, Hamas spokesman, claimed it was Hezbollah's "natural right" to retaliate, especially after the killing of its operatives (Facebook page of Sami Abu Zuhri, January 28, 2015).
  - Musa Abu Marzouq, a member of Hamas' political bureau, stated that his movement praised the attack on Israel. He claimed Israel understood only force and that the "resistance" [i.e., violence and terrorism] was the only way to respond to "Israel's crimes" (Facebook page of Musa Abu Marzouq, January 28, 2015).
  - Abu Imad al-Rifa'i, PIJ representative in Lebanon, claimed the Hezbollah attack was "in response to the crime" committed by Israel. He stressed the capabilities of the "resistance" to face "Israeli aggression" (Nna-leb.gov.lb, January 28, 2015).
America’s Response

- Jen Psaki, spokesperson for the American State Department, said “We support Israel’s legitimate right to self-defense [a statement she reiterated several times] and continue to urge all parties to respect the blue line between Israel and Lebanon, as prescribed by UNSCR 1701. We also, of course, condemn the act of violence and will be watching the situation closely” (Website of the American State Department, January 28, 2015).²

Israel’s South

Rocket Fire Attacking Israel

- This past week no rocket or mortar shell hits were identified in Israel territory.


² http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2015/01/236853.htm
³ As of February 3, 2015. The statistics do not include mortar shell fire or rockets which misfired and fell inside the Gaza Strip.
Clashes on the Gaza Strip Border

- On January 29, 2015, an IDF force detained three Gazans who had crossed the security fence in the southern Gaza Strip. Three hand grenades, a knife and a screwdriver were found in their possession. The Gazans were taken for interrogation (IDF Spokesman, January 29, 2015).

- On February 1, 2015, demonstrations were held in the Gaza Strip near the border fence, organized by an entity calling itself the National Movement for Breaking the Siege and Reconstruction of the [Gaza] Strip. They held demonstrations in 19 different locations, each one attended by several dozen demonstrators. They burned tires and in some instances tried to approach the security fence. The National Movement for Breaking the Siege and Reconstruction of the [Gaza] Strip also organized a violent demonstration in front of UNRWA offices in Gaza City (See below)

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4 The statistics do not include mortar shell fire.
Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria

Additional "Popular Resistance" Terrorism and Violence

- This past week the wave of violence and rioting continued in the traditional friction spots in Judea, Samaria and east Jerusalem, mostly involving the throwing of stones, rocks and Molotov cocktails. On January 31, 2015, an IDF force shot and killed a 19 year-old Palestinian who had thrown a Molotov cocktail at an Israeli vehicle near Kafr Burin (south of Nablus). A Palestinian with him was shot in the leg. The Palestinian media reported the death of Ahmed Ibrahim Jaber al-Najjar (Alresala.net, and Paltoday.ps, January 31, 2015). The Palestinian foreign ministry condemned his death, saying it was "a crime" to be added to the other crimes Israel had committed against the Palestinian people.
Palestinians prepare stones and Molotov cocktails during a riot in the village of Qadoum (Wafa.ps, January 30, 2015).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

Strong Protests against UNRWA for Delays in Gaza Strip Reconstruction

- On January 27, 2015, UNRWA announced that money for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip had run out and it was halting the transfer of funds to Gazans whose houses had been damaged during Operation Protective Edge. The announcement enraged the residents of the Gaza Strip. UNRWA spokesman Abu Hasna claimed UNRWA would not have stopped providing aid if it had not run out of money and hit an impasse in its relations with the donor countries. He added that UNRWA had sent communiqués to all the donor countries informing them that the situation was dire and that they had to come to the rescue of the residents of the Gaza Strip (Al-Aqsa TV, January 29, 2015).

- On January 28, 2015, the National Movement for Breaking the Siege and Reconstruction of the [Gaza] Strip organized a violent demonstration in front of UNRWA offices in Gaza City. It was attended by dozens of Gazans. Some of them climbed the UNRWA fence and broke into the offices, where they burned tires (AFP.com, January 28, 2015). UN personnel in the offices at the time were not harmed, but the UNRWA head expressed deep concern because the Gaza Strip security forces had not taken the necessary measures to protect the building.

- According to UNRWA employees, although responsibility for security has been transferred to the Palestinian Authority (PA), UNRWA regards Hamas as solely
responsible for the safety of UN personnel in the Gaza Strip. They also said that in the wake of the events they would reexamine the office's activities in the Gaza Strip (UNSCO website, January 28, 2015). After the violent demonstration UN personnel were evacuated from the Gaza Strip. They said that before they returned to work, they demanded that Hamas, which is responsible for security in the Gaza Strip, provide them with guarantees for their safety and assurances that there would be no repetition of the violence (Alquds.co.uk, January 29, 2015).

The Palestinian national consensus government condemned the violence at the UNRWA offices in the Gaza Strip. Riyadh al-Maliki, foreign minister in the national consensus government, met with UNRWA's general representative at his office in Ramallah. He expressed concern over UNRWA's decision to halt its financial support and urged the international community to keep its promises and transfer the funds pledged at the conference in Cairo. He stressed the urgency of the situation in the Gaza Strip, especially after the funding stopped (Wafa.ps, January 28, 2015).

A meeting was held by representatives of the Palestinian organizations and UN agencies. Bassem al-Khaldi, advisor to UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Robert Serry, said that Serry had gone to Egypt to promote the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and to raise funds (Al-ayyam.com, February 2, 2015). Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri afterwards claimed that the meeting had been held to express public outrage over the delay in reconstructing the Gaza Strip, but that the Palestinian organizations opposed any attack on UN institutions (Maannews.net, February 1, 2015).
Egyptian Court Outlaws Hamas' Military-Terrorist Wing

- In the wake of a string of terrorist attacks in the Sinai Peninsula, during which an estimated 30 Egyptian civilians and security force personnel were killed, an Egyptian court ruled that the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas military-terrorist wing, was to be considered a terrorist organization. A representative of the prosecution said that the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades had been involved in terrorist attacks in Egypt and exploited the tunnels along the Egypt-Gaza Strip border to send operatives into Egypt to finance their terrorist attacks, to smuggle in the weapons used to kill Egyptian security force personnel, and to frighten civilians with terrorist attacks (Youm7.com, January 31, 2015). An Egyptian jurist said that Hamas had 45 days in which to appeal the decision (Samanews.com, January 31, 2015).

- Hamas condemned the Egyptian ruling, claiming the movement in general and its military wing in particular had no connection to the attacks in the Sinai Peninsula. The Palestinian organizations in the Gaza Strip issued a joint statement expressing amazement at the Egyptian ruling and emphasizing their intention to attempt to get it repealed (Paltoday.tv, February 1, 2015). On February 2, 2015, Hamas held a march in support of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, attended by senior Hamas figure Musheir al-Masri. Marchers held signs reading "Qassam is a [source of] national pride, not terrorism" and "We are all Qassam" (Paltimes.net, February 2, 2015). The initial response to the Egyptian court's ruling, according to a source close to the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, was that from now on Hamas would no longer accept Egypt as a broker between Hamas and Israel (Reuters.com, January 31, 2015). However, the statement was later denied.
Hamas figures made the following comments:

- Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri claimed that Hamas rejected the ruling and was certain it had been made in error. It did not, he said, serve anyone but Israel (Facebook page of Sami Abu Zuhri, January 31, 2015). He also claimed that it was a political, dangerous decision that served "the Zionist occupation" (Reuters.com, January 31, 2015). However, he denied statements made within Hamas that it would not longer be willing to accept Egypt as a negotiator in the lull talks.

- Senior Hamas figure Ismail Radwan claimed that Hamas regarded the Egyptian court ruling with sorrow. He claimed Hamas refused to involve its military wing in Egypt's internal affairs because the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades' only objective was to act against Israel [the so-called "occupation"]'). He also claimed that Hamas did not want "unfortunate events in Egypt" to influence the Gaza Strip or the Palestinians (Al-Jazeera, January 31, 2015).

- Senior Hamas figure Mahmoud al-Zahar claimed that the Egyptian court ruling was "hasty" and not based on fact. He claimed that in the past Egypt had stated that Hamas and its military wing were not linked to events in Egypt. He claimed the "mistaken decision" was intended as a cover-up for Egypt's security failures in the Sinai Peninsula. He called on the Egyptian authorities to repeal the ruling, which was political and had nothing to do with Egypt's judicial system (Paltoday.ps, January 31, 2015).

- Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum claimed that neither Hamas nor the Gaza Strip had any connection to the events in the Sinai Peninsula or anywhere else in Egypt. He condemned the Egyptian news items claiming Hamas was behind the attacks. He called the accusations "a Satanic campaign against the [Hamas] movement" (Alresala.net, January 30, 2015).

- Musa Abu Marzouq, a member of Hamas' political bureau, claimed the Egyptian court did not have the authority to rule on such an issue. He claimed the ruling influenced the role of Egypt in the Palestinian cause. He also claimed that Hamas' military wing had not been involved and would not be involved in Egypt's internal affairs. He denied any involvement of Hamas' military wing in terrorist activities in the Sinai Peninsula, and said that [the Palestinians] were the first to be harmed by regional instability (Facebook page of Musa Abu Marzouq, February 1, 2015).
Graduation Exercises for Gazan Youth Training Camps

On January 29, 2015, there were ceremonies at military camps throughout the Gaza Strip for graduates of the weeklong Pioneers of Liberation camps, held under the aegis of Hamas' military-terrorist wing. According to Hamas, 17,000 Gazan youths participated in the camps. The most important ceremonies, held in Gaza City and Khan Yunis, were attended by Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades commanders and senior Hamas figures. Mahmoud al-Zahar, a member of Hamas' political bureau, gave a speech at the ceremony in Khan Yunis where he said that Hamas and the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades would continue to support the youths participating in the Pioneers of Liberation camps and to train them at military-wing camps. He added that Hamas would continue funding the camps and provide them with weapons so that they could achieve their goals. He claimed in the near future the youths in the camps would stand behind rockets dispatched to all parts of Palestine in the coming campaign against Israel (Al-Aqsa TV, website of the Hamas ministry of the interior, Qassam.ps, January 29, 2015).5

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5 For further information see the February 2, 2015 bulletin "Hamas and the other terrorist organizations based in Gaza are rehabilitating the military capabilities damaged in Operation Protective Edge through extensive recruitment, the establishment of military units and intensive military training."
PIJ Exercise Simulates Hezbollah Attacks

The Iranian Fars News Agency reported that on January 31, 2015 the Jerusalem Brigades, the PIJ's military-terrorist wing, held a military exercise in the Deir al-Balah region (central Gaza Strip) simulating the Hezbollah attack on IDF soldiers at Har Dov. The exercise simulated attacking posts, abducting soldiers, and firing anti-tank missiles, mortar shells and light arms (Farsnews.com, February 1, 2015). Simulating attacking IDF posts and abducting IDF soldiers have become frequent training exercises held by Hamas and other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip.

Distribution of Iranian Aid in the Gaza Strip

On February 2, 2015, the Iranian charitable society Al-Emdad al-Imam Khomeini, which has a branch in the Gaza Strip, began the distribution of aid to families whose houses were destroyed in Operation Protective Edge. According to Sheikh Tahsin al-Vadia, director of the project in the Gaza Strip (and an associate of the PIJ), food will be distributed to 2,000 families in the Shejaiya, Tufah (east of Gaza City), Beit Hanoun, Bani Suheila and Qarara neighborhoods (Alwatanvoice.com, February 1, 2015).
Distribution of Iranian aid east of Gaza City under the aegis of the Al-Emdad al-Imam Khomeini charitable society (Paltoday.ps, February 2, 2015)

ISIS Threats in the Gaza Strip

Media personnel in the Gaza Strip reported that they had received threats signed by "the Islamic State in the Gaza province" telling them to stop publishing articles against ISIS and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, otherwise they would be the object of attacks similar to those recently carried out in the Gaza Strip. It is unclear who was behind the threats and what attacks were referred to (Alqudsnews.net, February 1, 2015).

Notice attributed to ISIS in the province of Gaza threatening media personnel against publishing articles against Islam (Nablus TV channel, February 2, 2015).
The Palestinian Authority

PA Reportedly Planning to Appeal to the International Criminal Court (ICC) regarding the Settlements

On January 29, 2015, the Israeli Ministry of Housing issued tenders for the construction of 450 new dwelling units in the towns and villages in Judea and Samaria. The announcement was strongly criticized by the PA. The Palestinian foreign ministry called it a clear provocation of the international community, saying it forced the Palestinians to appeal to the ICC and open a case file against Israel over the settlements. Saeb Erekat, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee, claimed the only place the matter could be dealt with was the ICC, of which Palestine would become a member on April 1, 2015 (Voice of Palestine Radio, February 1, 2015).

Regarding the appeal to the ICC, Riyadh al-Maliki, foreign minister in the national consensus government, said the Palestinians could not appeal to the ICC before April 1, 2015, when Palestine would become a member of the court. He said it was the first case that had to be tried in the ICC because it was unilateral and could harm only Israel, unlike the cases concerning the events in the Gaza Strip, which could harm the Palestinian side. He claimed it would not be difficult to complete the "settlements file" before April 1, 2015. The first step would be to prepare a short document asking to transfer the issue of the settlements to the ICC. After that the court would conduct a preliminary investigation and decide if there was initial evidence for a suit. In the meantime the Palestinians would provide the court with all the relevant data and documents (Voice of Palestine Radio, February 2, 2015).