



News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

October 9 – 15, 2013



The terrorist tunnel excavated from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory. Left: The tunnel shaft. Right: A view of the inside of the tunnel (IDF spokesman, October 13, 2013).

Overview

- This past week one rocket hit was identified in Israeli territory, launched from the Gaza Strip. IDF forces uncovered a well-constructed, sophisticated terrorist tunnel originating from the southern Gaza Strip. It would have enabled terrorists to carry out mass killing attacks or abduct Israelis to the Gaza Strip. The tunnel was constructed with building materials delivered to the Gaza Strip for civilian use. In response Israel halted the delivery of building materials to the Gaza Strip until the situation was reevaluated.
- Seraya Ofer, an Israeli civilian, was murdered near his home in the northern Jordan Valley. The Israel Security Agency detained two Palestinians from the Hebron area as suspects. The investigation is still being conducted and it is not yet clear if the murder was committed because of criminal or nationalistic motives, or a combination of the two.

The Situation in Israel's South

IDF Uncovers a Terrorist Tunnel

■ IDF forces recently uncovered a terrorist tunnel dug from the southern Gaza Strip into Israeli territory. It originated near the town of Abasan al-Saghir (east of Khan Yunis) and ended in a field close to **the Israeli village of Ein Hasheloshah**. The tunnel was dug to **a depth of 15 meters, or 50 feet, and was 2.5 kilometers, or about 1.5 miles long**. It had electric lights and a rail for transporting a small cart; tools and the remains of food were also found. It had taken at least a year to build the tunnel, **which would apparently have been used to infiltrate terrorist operatives into Israeli territory or to bring abducted IDF soldiers into the Gaza Strip**, for which the cart would have provided rapid transportation. According to Israeli security sources, **the delivery of the building materials used to construct the tunnel had been authorized by Israel for civilian use** (IDF spokesman, October 13, 2013).

■ **It was the third exposure in the past year of a Gaza Strip tunnel built for terrorist purposes** (IDF spokesman, October 13, 2013):

- In **November 2012**, about a week before Operation Pillar of Defense, a large IED exploded near an IDF force engaged in repairing the security fence. The source of the explosion was a booby-trapped tunnel near the Israeli village of Nirim, close to the Gaza Strip border.
- In **January 2013**, following a heavy rainstorm, the shaft of a tunnel was discovered near the security fence in the southern Gaza Strip near the village of Nahal Oz.

■ Following the discovery of the tunnel **the Coordinator for Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) halted delivery of building materials to the Gaza Strip through the Kerem Shalom crossing until a reevaluation of the situation could be carried out**. Until recently hundreds of trucks carrying building materials entered the Gaza Strip through the Kerem Shalom crossing every week (COGAT website, October 15, 2013). Hamas spokesman **Sami Abu Zuhri** said that the Israeli decision to freeze the delivery of building materials was more proof of the mistake the Egyptians had made in closing the tunnels along the Gaza-Egypt border before an Arab alternative could be found. He said that current conditions allowed Israel to "blackmail" the Gaza Strip and control the lives of its residents (Filastin Al-'Aan, October 13, 2013).

■ **Israeli Minister of Defense Moshe Ya'alon** praised the IDF soldiers who had uncovered the tunnel, saying they had prevented attacks on Israeli civilians and

soldiers. He said the discovery of the tunnel was more proof that Hamas, despite the current lull in the fighting forced on it by the IDF's deterrent capabilities, continued to make preparations for further confrontations and terrorist attacks (IDF spokesman, October 13, 2013).

■ **Musheir al-Masri**, a Hamas representative in the Palestinian Legislative Council, said that Israel was trying to inflame regional tensions with reports of the tunnel in order to tighten the closure of the Gaza Strip (Qudsnet website, October 13, 2013).

Abu Obeida, spokesman for Hamas' military-terrorist wing, said in a Tweet that the "resistance" [i.e., terrorist organizations] could dig thousands of tunnels and that the determination of the men of the "resistance" [i.e., terrorist operatives] was more important than the tunnels themselves.

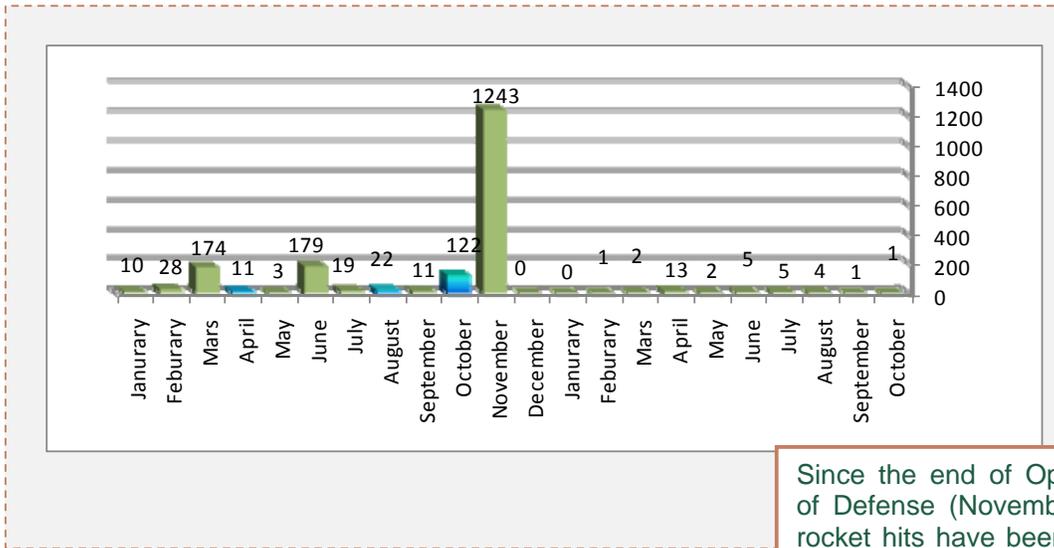


IDF soldiers examine the tunnel entrance (Photo by Edi Israel for NRG, October 13, 2013).

Rocket Fire

■ On October 8, 2013, a rocket hit was identified in Israeli territory. The rocket fell in an open area; there were no casualties and no damage was reported.

Rocket Hits in Israeli Territory since January 1, 2012¹



Since the end of Operation Pillar of Defense (November 2012), 34 rocket hits have been identified in Israeli territory, including five rockets fired at the southern Israeli city of Eilat.

Annual Distribution of Rocket Fire²



Since January 1, 2013, 34 rocket hits have been identified.

¹ As of October 15, 2013. The statistics do not include mortar shell fire.

² The statistics do not include mortar shell fire.

Judea and Samaria

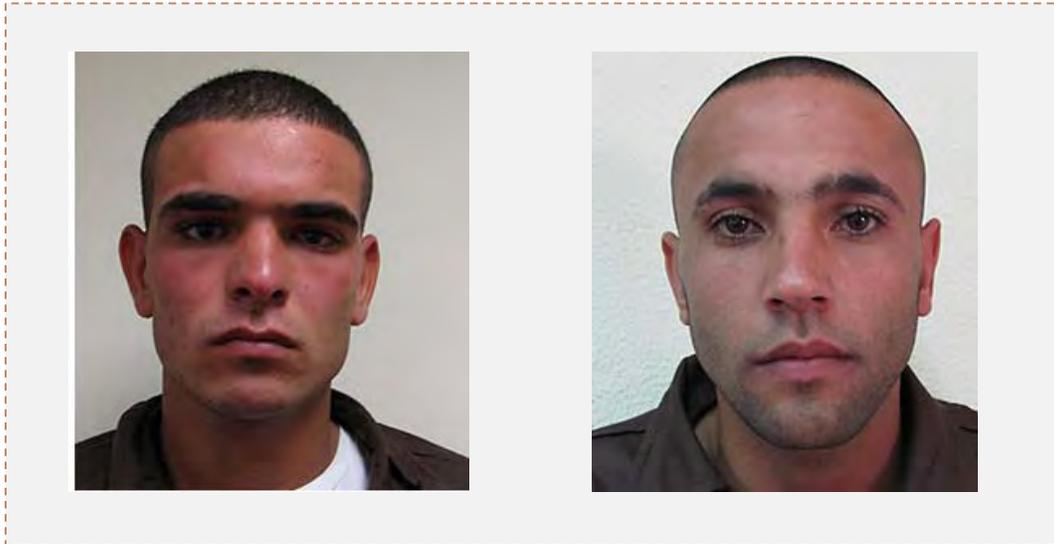
Israeli Murdered near His Home in the Jordan Valley

■ On the night of October 11 an Israeli civilian, Seraya Ofer was murdered just outside his home in the village of Brosh Habiqa in the northern Jordan Valley. At home with his wife, at about 0100 hours they heard barking dogs and noises coming from their yard. Ofer went outside and was attacked and murdered with iron bars and an axe. His wife, who witnessed the attack, escaped and called for help. She managed to reach the road and from there was taken to a hospital.

■ Large IDF forces arrived and searched the area, finding the murder weapons. The Israel Security Agency (ISA) initiated intelligence activities to locate the killers. On October 12 two Palestinians suspected of involvement in the murder were detained. They are **Oudeh Farid Taleb Haroub**, 18, and **Bashir Ahmed Oudeh Haroub**, 21, both residents of the village of Deir Samet (Hebron region). During interrogation they admitted that two weeks previously they had gone to the Ofer home late at night but denied killing Seraya Ofer. The information was verified by Ofer's wife, who said that they had in fact previously visited the house under suspicious circumstances. **The investigation is still ongoing and it is not yet clear if the motive for the murder was criminal, nationalistic or a combination of the two** (ISA website, October 13, 2013).



Seraya Ofer (Photo by Eli Dasa for NRG)



The two murder suspects. Left: **Bashir Ahmed Oudeh Haroub**. Right: **Oudeh Taleb Haroub** (ISA website, October 13, 2013)

- The Palestinian Authority (PA) leadership did not condemn the murder. **Nabil Shaath**, a member of Fatah's Central Committee, even cast doubt on the Israeli version of the recent killings of Israelis. He said that the PA was considering asking for international oversight of Israel's investigation because in some instances Israel attempted to whitewash criminal activities (Voice of Palestine Radio, October 12, 2013).
- Several statements were issued by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and by the so-called special units of the Free Sons of the Galilee Brigades, the Cavalry of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and the Asadullah al-Ghalb Companies claiming responsibility for the murder (Dunia Al-Watan, October, 2013). **The veracity of the claims is doubtful.**

Four Israelis Detained on Suspicion of "Price Tag" Activities

- On the afternoon of October 9, 2013, a complaint of property damage was received from the village of Ghalud, north of Ramallah. The Israeli security forces conducted a search which revealed that a village school and seven vehicles had been damaged and an olive grove had been set on fire. The Israeli security forces detained four Israelis suspected of responsibility for the damage. During the events an IDF soldier sustained minor injuries when a stone was thrown at him (IDF spokesman, October 9, 2013).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The Rafah Crossing

■ This past week the Rafah crossing was open to limited activities. Several hundred people crossed through it, most of them pilgrims of their way to Mecca. On October 12, 2013, 60 trucks entered the Gaza Strip, most of them carrying building materials, a donation from Qatar. The Egyptian authorities announced the crossing would be closed to foot traffic between October 14 and 19, 2013 on the occasion of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha (Safa News Agency, October 14, 2013).

Hamas-Egypt Tension Continues

■ The Egyptian security forces, continuing their determined aggressive actions against the smuggling tunnels, blew up a two-story house on the Egyptian side of Rafah. They did so after a tunnel had been discovered leading from it to the Gaza Strip. According to eyewitnesses, the Egyptian army evacuated the house first (Alresala.net website, October 13, 2013). However, senior Hamas figures continue to claim that Hamas does not involve itself in Egypt's internal affairs. **Ismail Haniya**, head of the de-facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip, has repeatedly stated that Hamas is not involved in Egypt's internal affair and that Hamas seeks to preserve Egypt's national security (Safa News Agency, October 13, 2013).

■ **In the meantime, Hamas continues criticizing the Egyptian regime.** In an interview **Salah al-Bardawil**, a senior Hamas figure, said that Egypt had decided to boycott the Gaza Strip and that contacts between Hamas and Egypt were limited and were conducted only with Egyptian general intelligence. He evaded answering when asked if Hamas recognized the new Egyptian regime, saying only that Hamas was not required to congratulate the temporary Egyptian president because he had not been chosen by a democratic process. He said that when matters in Egypt stabilized, Hamas would send its congratulations (Xinhua News Agency, October 8, 2013).

Palestinian Islamic Jihad Events

■ The **Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)**, currently marking **the 26th anniversary of its founding**, held a number of events in the Gaza Strip:

- In **Khan Yunis** a march was held in support of Jerusalem, attended by senior PIJ figures in the Gaza Strip. The participants marched through the main streets of Gaza City holding signs expressing their solidarity with Al-Aqsa mosque and Jerusalem. A rally was held after the march, where a speech was given by **Ahmed al-Mudallal**, a senior PIJ figure. He said that the option of "resistance"

[i.e., terrorism] and jihad was the only way to liberate Al-Aqsa mosque and Jerusalem (Paltoday website, October 11, 2013).

- In **Sajaiya** a rally was held where **Ahmed al-Mudallal** noted the achievements of the organization's military wing during Operation Pillar of Defense. He said the Jerusalem Brigades [the PIJ's military-terrorist wing] could turn the land of Palestine into "a graveyard for the Zionist enemy" (Paltoday website, October 11, 2013).



The PIJ march and rally in Khan Yunis (Paltoday website, October 11, 2013).

Hamas and the Salafist Organizations in the Gaza Strip Attempt Reconciliation

■ **Abu Abdallah al-Maqqdisi**, a senior Salafist in the Gaza Strip, revealed that for several months intensive contacts have been held to reach an agreement which would end the disputes between the Salafist organizations and Hamas. He said the contacts were being mediated by Muslim elements and that it was possible that in the near future an agreement would be announced (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, October 9, 2013). He said that the sides were discussing an eight-point initiative, the main points of which were the following (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, October 9, 2013):

- Allowing the Salafists in the Gaza Strip freedom of political, military and societal action.
- Stopping the detentions.
- Establishing a joint authority to monitor problem and crises.

- The Salafists will commit to accepting the conditions of the lull in the fighting, to implementing the decisions of the Hamas administration and not carrying out terrorist attacks inside the Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian Authority

Mahmoud Abbas Interview

■ Mahmoud Abbas was interviewed at length by the PA's official TV channel. He discussed a number of issues, among them the peace process and the security situation. The highlights were the following (Palestinian TV, October 10, 2013):

- **The peace process:** He said it had been agreed on with the Americans that the negotiations would be based on the 1967 borders with limited and agreed on exchanges of territory. He also said that there would be no compromise on the issue of Jerusalem, and that any agreement would be put to a referendum. He added that the PA had agreed not to appeal to international organizations during the negotiations on condition Israel release Palestinian prisoners incarcerated before the Oslo Accords. He said that if Israel did not release them the negotiations would continue, but the PA would then regard itself as free to appeal to international organizations.
- **The security situation:** Mahmoud Abbas condemned what he called the incursions carried out by Israel in Area A and the IDF's frequent so-called "attacks" against the Palestinians. He also attacked the activities of the Jewish settlers against the Palestinians, which he claimed were carried out under the aegis of the IDF. On the other hand, he did not condemn the recent attacks in which three Israelis were killed, two soldiers and a civilian.



Mahmoud Abbas interviewed by Palestinian TV (Palestinian TV, October 10, 2013).

Palestinian Reactions to Benjamin Netanyahu's Speech at Bar Ilan University

■ Palestinians severely criticized the speech given by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at Bar Ilan University, claiming he had made it clear he wanted to sabotage the peace process (October 6, 2013):

- **Mahmoud Abbas** criticized Netanyahu's remarks mainly about Jerusalem, the 1967 borders and the Jewish character of the State of Israel. He said if Israel wanted recognition as a Jewish state it should appeal to the UN (Palestinian TV, October 10, 2013).
- **Yasser Abd Rabbo**, secretary of the PLO's Executive Committee, called Netanyahu a racist and a symbol of extremism, and claimed that his policies were aimed at destroying the negotiations. He said that the Palestinian leadership refused to recognize historical Palestine as the homeland of the Jewish people (Al-Quds Al-Arabi, October 8, 2013).
- **Tawfiq al-Tirawi**, a member of Fatah's Central Committee, reacted mainly to Netanyahu's statement that there would be no "return" of the Palestinian refugees. He said that Fatah **had never laid down the gun and the stone** or abandoned the struggle. He added that "Kiryat Arba and Gush Etzion do not belong to Israel, and Nazareth, Jaffa and Haifa will remain Palestinian" (Ma'an News Agency, October 9, 2013).

Propaganda Events

Intensive Palestinian Activity regarding Jerusalem and the Temple Mount

- In recent weeks Palestinian activity regarding the issues of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount have increased because of Palestinian claims that Israel is carrying out activities liable to upset the status quo. To that end marches, rallies and demonstrations have been held in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, and senior Palestinian figures have frequently spoken on the issues.
- For example, during an international Al-Quds Foundation conference held in Beirut, **Khaled Mashaal**, head of Hamas' political bureau made a speech broadcast live, apparently from his current location in Turkey. He warned of Israeli activity in Jerusalem and called for steps to be taken to "rescue Jerusalem." He also called for diplomatic efforts to strengthen the firm stance of the Palestinians in Jerusalem, and appealed to Palestinians to visit Al-Aqsa mosque more often (Al-Quds TV, October 9, 2013). On the other hand, **Fatah spokesman Ahmed Assaf** criticized Khaled Mashaal's speech, saying that Hamas was trading in Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa mosque to extricate itself from its crisis with Egypt (Wafa News Agency, October 9, 2013).



Khaled Mashaal speaks at the Al-Aqsa conference in Beirut (Eyn al-Hilweh website, October 9, 2013).

- Hamas issued a statement warning of the intention of "Jews" to establish a synagogue in the Al-Aqsa mosque precinct. The statement called the plan a "Zionist

crime" and a desperate attempt to obliterate the mosque's Islamic character (Palinfo website, October 12, 2013).

Fatah Propaganda Activity with Foreign Diplomats in Beit Jala

■ **Nabil Shaath**, a member of Fatah's Central Committee and responsible for Fatah's external relations, along with the Popular Committees Against the Wall and the Settlements, held a propaganda event near Beit Jala, **attended by European ambassadors and consuls**. The event included a visit to Beit Jala and participation in the olive harvest. Nabil Shaath called for "a popular resistance to the Israeli occupation" (Quds News website, October 11 and Mawtini Radio, October 12, 2013). During the event a number of activists vandalized the fence around the Jewish village of Har Gilo, which **they claimed was located on territory belonging to Beit Jala** (PNN, October 11, 2013).

■ **The PA and Fatah encourage the participation of European diplomats and foreign anti-Israeli in "popular resistance" events**, which they regard as a tool for reinforcing the legitimacy of the struggle, a way of protecting Palestinian farmers from Jewish settlers and an instrument for international diplomatic action against Israel, especially in European countries.



Left: Nabil Shaath interviewed by the media during the activity near Beit Jala. Right: Foreign diplomats at the activity near Beit Jala (PNN, October 11, 2013).



Palestinians vandalize the security fence around the Jewish village of Har Gilo during a tour of foreign diplomats in the area (Wafa News Agency, October 11, 2013).

More on the Mavi Marmara Legal Issues

■ On October 10, 2013, the court in Istanbul held its fourth round of deliberations regarding the former senior Israeli officers involved in the events aboard the *Mavi Marmara* (May 2010). During the deliberations testimonies were heard from international activists who participated in the flotilla. The deliberations will continue on March 27, 2014 (Reuters, October 10, 2013). The prosecution asked that an appeal be made through Interpol to require the Israelis to appear at the deliberations; **the court rejected the request** (Zaman, Turkey, October 11, 2013).