



## News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict January 15 – 21, 2014



**Left: The Iron Dome aerial defense system, which intercepted rockets fired from the Gaza Strip targeting Ashqelon. Right: A rocket-launching pit in the Gaza Strip struck by the IDF (IDF Spokesman, January 16, 2014).**

### Overview

- Escalation in attacks on Israel's south continues. This past week 13 rocket hits were identified in the western Negev, including a simultaneous barrage of five rockets targeting the region of the southern city of Ashqelon. In addition, two rockets were fired from the Sinai Peninsula at Eilat, Israel's southernmost city, by a terrorist organization affiliated with the global jihad. In response Israeli aircraft struck a number of terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip. Hamas spokesmen condemned the Israeli strikes, although they implied that they did not want the situation to deteriorate with further escalation.
- During December the Israeli security forces prevented the formation of a squad in Judea and Samaria planning to abduct Israeli soldiers. The attempt to form the squad was made by a network in the Gaza Strip called the Jihad Fighters Battalions. The attempted formation was directed by terrorist prisoners in Israeli jails (Israel Security Agency website, January 16, 2014).

## Rocket Fire

■ **This past week there was a significant escalation in rocket fire from the Gaza Strip targeting populated areas in Israel's south. Thirteen rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory. The rocket fire continued the escalation in attacks along Israel's border with the Gaza Strip which began about six weeks ago.** The peak was a barrage of five rockets fired at the region of the southern coastal city of Ashqelon, a number of simultaneous rocket hits not seen since Operation Pillar of Defense (November 2012). Since the beginning of January 2014 16 rocket hits have been identified in Israeli territory, more than the total number for 2013 (See graph below).

■ The rocket attacks this past week:

- On the night of **January 15, 2014**, a barrage of rockets was fired at Ashqelon. Five of them were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system. An additional rocket may have fallen in an open area. There were no casualties and no damage was reported.
- On **January 18, 2014**, a rocket hit was identified in the western Negev. It fell in an open area; there were no casualties and no damage was reported.
- On **January 19, 2014**, a rocket hit was identified in an open area between two villages in the western Negev. There were no casualties and no damage was reported.
- On **January 20, 2014**, three rocket hits were identified in the western Negev; there were no casualties and no damage was reported.

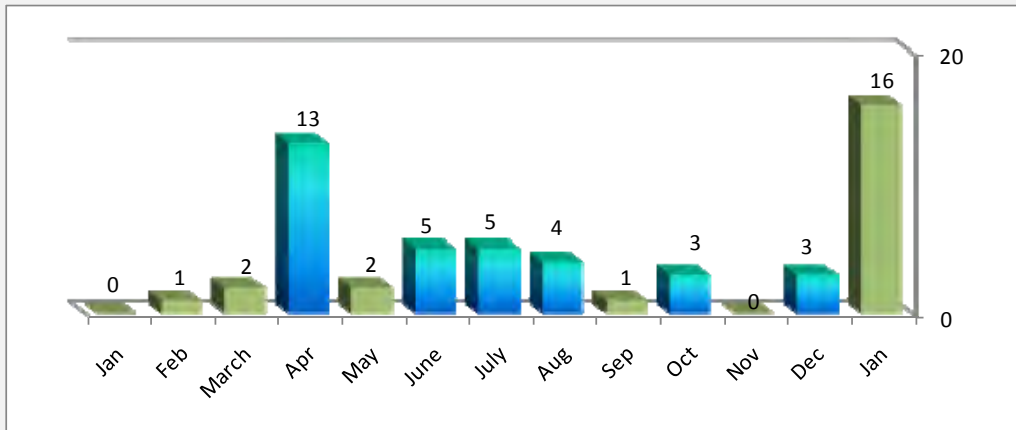
## Rocket Fire Targeting Eilat

■ On the evening of **January 20, 2014**, two rockets were fired at Eilat, Israel's southernmost city. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. The last time rockets were fired at Eilat was August 13, 2013. **Responsibility for the current attack was claimed by Ansar Bayt al-Maqdas, a terrorist organization affiliated with the global jihad operating from the Sinai Peninsula.**



**Formal Ansar Bayt al-Maqdas claim of the rocket fire attacking Eilat (Albaladonline.com website, January 21, 2014)**

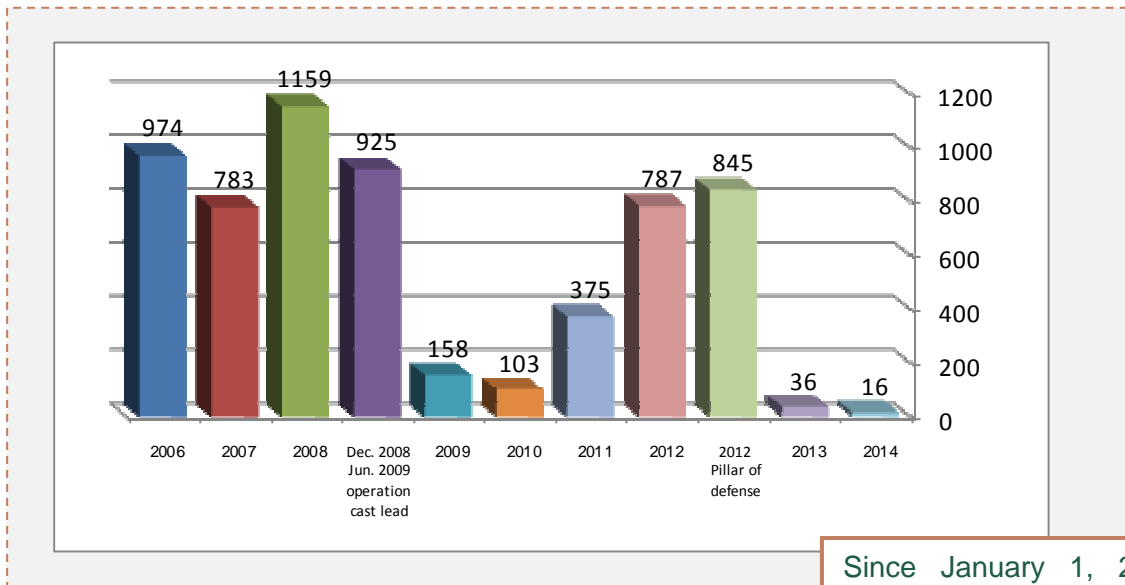
**Rocket Hits in Israeli Territory since January 1, 2013<sup>1</sup>**



Since the end of Operation Pillar of Defense (November 2012), 55 rocket hits have been identified in Israeli territory, including seven rockets fired at the southern Israeli city of Eilat.

<sup>1</sup> As January 21, 2014. The statistics do not include mortar shell fire and rocket hits inside the Gaza Strip.

## Annual Distribution of Rocket Fire<sup>2</sup>



Since January 1, 2013, 55 rocket hits have been identified.

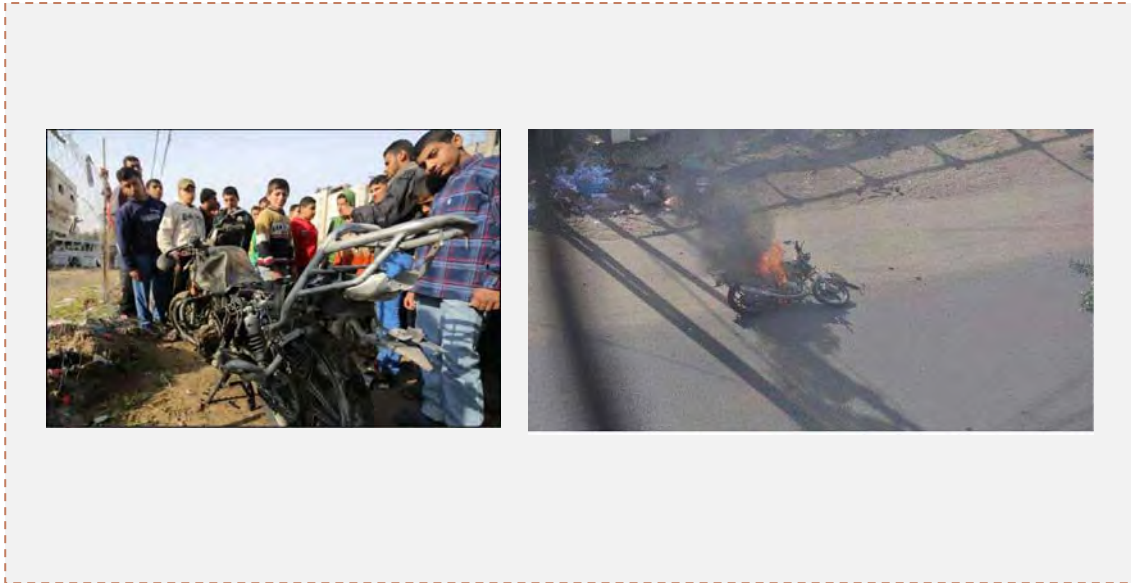
## Israeli Air Force Response

■ In response to the rocket and mortar shell fire **Israeli Air Force (IAF) aircraft struck terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip:**

- On **January 16, 2014**, IAF aircraft struck an underground rocket launcher, a site for the storage of weapons and a focal point for terrorist activity in the northern Gaza Strip (IDF Spokesman, January 16, 2014). The Palestinian media reported a strike on a post of Hamas' military-terrorist wing in the western Gaza Strip and another in the northern part of the Nuseirat refugee camp. According to the Palestinian media a woman and four children were injured (Safa News Agency and the alresala.net website, January 16, 2014). In response to the strike **Ahmed al-Mudallal**, a senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) figure, said that his organization would respond to the attacks at a time of its choosing (Paltoday website, January 16, 2014).
- On the morning of **January 19, 2014**, IAF aircraft operating in the northern Gaza Strip struck **Ahmed Sa'ad, 22, a PIJ terrorist operative**, who was riding a motorbike in Gaza City. One of the attacks he was **responsible for was the barrage of five rockets fired at the city of Ashqelon on January 16, 2014** (IDF Spokesman, January 19, 2014). The Palestinian media reported that he had been seriously wounded. A 12 year-old boy was also

<sup>2</sup> The statistics do not include mortar shell fire.

wounded (Safa News Agency and the Paltoday website, January 19, 2014). After the strike the PIJ issued a notice warning Israel not to escalate.



The motorbike ridden by Ahmed Sa'ad after the IAF strike in Gaza City (Filastin Al-'Aan and the Wafa News Agency, date, 2014)

- On **January 19, 2014**, IAF aircraft struck two focal points of terrorist activity in the southern and central Gaza Strip (IDF Spokesman, January 19, 2014).
- **Senior Hamas figures** reacted strongly to the Israeli strikes. However, their statements implied they did not want the situation to deteriorate:
  - **Salah al-Bardawil** said that the "resistance" [i.e., terrorist organizations] would not remain silent about the "crimes" committed by Israel. He said bloodshed would only bring more bloodshed. However, he emphasized that Hamas refused to escalate (Alresala.net website, January 19, 2014).
  - **Taher al-Nunu**, government spokesman, warned Israel not to continue its military escalation and called on it to reaffirm what had been agreed on in the lull agreement (Safa News Agency, January 19, 2014).
- According to a **senior Egyptian source**, Hamas had promised Egypt it would enforce the lull in the Gaza Strip to prevent Israeli military activity (Qudsnet website, January 19, 2014). It was reported that on the ground Hamas was taking measures to prevent rocket fire, among them deploying its national security force along the roads leading to the security fence. Hamas also appealed to the Palestinian terrorist organizations, especially the PIJ, not to fire rockets into Israel (PalPress website, January 20, 2014; Paltoday website, January 21, 2014).

## Judea and Samaria

### Formation of Terrorist Network Prevented<sup>3</sup>

- In December 2013 the Israeli security forces prevented operatives from a network called the Jihad Fighters Battalions from establishing a squad in Judea and Samaria aimed at abducting Israelis. Terrorist operatives imprisoned in Israeli jails directed its formation and it was exposed in its first planning stage.
- The planners were three terrorist operatives serving time in Israel:
  - **Muhammad Bel**, the leader, 24, from Zeitoun in the Gaza Strip, imprisoned since 2008. He enlisted the help of two other prisoners, both from Judea and Samaria.
  - **Ali Kharoub**, 21, from Dura (southwest of Hebron), imprisoned in Israel for membership in a terrorist squad that planned to carry out terrorist attacks, and for his involvement in preparing bombs and Molotov cocktails.
  - **Rajeb Salah al-Din**, 53, from Hazma (near Ramallah). Former Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine operative, detained in May 2012 for having attempted three abductions of Israelis.



The prisoner squad (left to right): Muhammad Bel, Ali Kharoub, Rajeb Salah al-Din (ISA, January 16, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> According to the ISA website, January 16, 2014.

■ Interrogation of the three revealed that high-ranking operatives in the Gazan network called the Jihad Fighters Battalions had been involved in establishing the squad. The network split from Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and adopted radical Islamist ideology. It is headed by **Assad Atiya Ibrahim Abu Sharia'**. The contact person for Muhammad Bel, head of the squad in Judea and Samaria, was **Omar Mustafa Khalil Qassem**. Omar Qassem is a resident of the Gaza Strip and a senior Jihad Fighters Battalions figure, responsible for the prisoners' affairs portfolio.

■ The Jihad Fighters Battalions have **close relations with Hamas**, from which they receive **military support, funding and weapons**. They also collaborate in **smuggling weapons into the Gaza Strip**. In recent years Jihad Fighters Battalions operatives have been involved in **carrying out terrorist attacks against Israeli targets, including firing rockets at towns and villages in the western Negev, shooting at IDF forces and planting IEDs near the security fence on the Israeli-Gaza Strip border**. In the past the ISA prevented the network from carrying out the following terrorist attacks:

- In **May 2012**, **Ramzi Awda Tim Arar**, in Israel illegally, was detained. Following instructions from senior members of the network, he was planning to abduct an Israeli civilian.
- In **January 2013** four residents of Judea and Samaria were detained, some of them studying in Egypt. The four had been recruited by the network and had had military training in the Gaza Strip to prepare them to carry out attacks on IDF forces and Jewish settlers in Judea and Samaria.

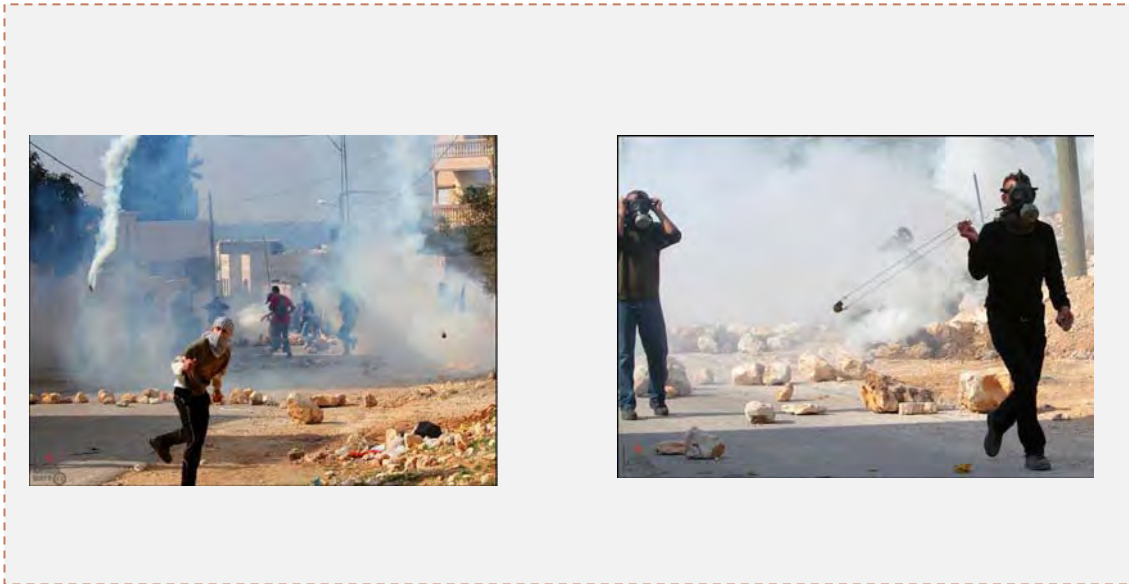
### **Palestinian Violence Continues**

■ This past week violent incidents continued in Judea and Samaria, part of the so-called popular resistance. Stones and Molotov cocktails were thrown at Israeli civilians and Israeli security forces. In addition, a number of attacks were carried out on the main roads.

- On **January 17, 2014**, a Palestinian threw a Molotov cocktail at Beit Hadassah in Hebron (Tazpit News Agency, January 17, 2014).
- On **January 17, 2014**, stones were thrown at Israeli vehicles on a main road in Samaria near the village of Deir Nizam. Several vehicles were damaged.



- On **January 20, 2014**, a Palestinian was shot by an IDF soldier near Hebron. The Palestinian approached the gate of a Border Police base in Mt. Hebron and refused to heed calls to halt (NRG website, January 20, 2014).



Palestinians throw stones at IDF forces in the village of Qadoum (near Qalqiliya) during the weekly riot (Wafa News Agency, January 17, 2014).

## Developments in the Gaza Strip

### The Rafah Crossing

- The Rafah crossing has been closed for 11 days. **Maher Abu Subha**, head of the Hamas border crossing authority, announced the end of registration to use the crossing after 5,000 Gazans had registered in three days. He warned of a humanitarian catastrophe resulting from the closing of the crossing (PalPress website, January 19, 2014). Moreover, in order to change the situation, he said Hamas was prepared to man the crossing with members of the Palestinian presidential guard, based on the crossings agreement of 2005 (Sama News Agency, January 14, 2014), a solution so far rejected by Hamas.

### Hamas-Egypt Relations

- **Tension continues between Hamas and Egypt.** Egyptian security forces continue their operations against the tunnels in the Rafah region. Hamas spokesman **Sami Abu Zuhri** held a press conference where he said that Egyptian statements and warnings against the Gaza Strip indicated that the goal of Egypt and Fatah was



to destroy the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip in any way they could (Safa News Agency, January 15, 2014).

### Senior PIJ Figure Advocates Abducting Israeli Soldiers

■ **Ahmed al-Mudallal**, a senior PIJ operative, gave a speech at a rally organized by the families of the Palestinian prisoners in front of Red Cross headquarters in the Gaza Strip. He called on the "resistance" to abduct Israeli soldiers who would be exchanged for Palestinian prisoners. He said that "the enemy [i.e., Israel] only understands the language of the resistance, blood and abducting soldiers" (Paltoday website, January 20, 2014).



Ahmed al-Mudallal calls for the abduction of Israeli soldiers  
(Paltoday website, January 20, 2014)

## The Palestinian Authority

### The Peace Negotiations

■ **Mahmoud Abbas**, as head of a delegation of senior Palestinian Authority (PA) figures, participated in a Jerusalem Committee meeting in Marrakech, Morocco, where **he gave a speech severely criticizing Israel**. He warned of the so-called dangers threatening Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa mosque, and said that it was the responsibility of the Muslim countries to protect the holy city. He said Israel ("the occupation authorities") was working towards its final goal of Judaizing Jerusalem by changing structures and rebuilding the Temple. He claimed Israel meant to

implement a plan of the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and make them leave the city (Al-Ayam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda, January 17, 2014).

■ The PA-affiliated Palestinian daily newspaper Al-Ayam published a cartoon of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu using the Jewish settlements and issues such as Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley to threaten peace (Al-Ayam, January 21, 2014).



"Threats to peace! Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley, the settlements, the Judaization" (Al-Ayam, January 21, 2014).

## The Northern Front

### Iranian Foreign Minister Visits Grave of Imad Mughnieh in South Beirut

■ **Ramadan Shallah**, secretary general of the PIJ, heading a delegation of senior organization figures, met with **Mohammad Javad Zarif**, foreign minister of Iran, who paid a formal visit to Lebanon. The Iranians announced that the visit had been held in the Iranian embassy in Beirut, and that developments in the Palestinian and regional arenas had been discussed, as well as the role of the "resistance" [i.e., the terrorist organizations] in the struggle against the "Zionist occupation" (Website of the Iranian foreign ministry and Naba Press, January 14, 2014).

■ While in Lebanon the Iranian Foreign Minister went to the Shaheed Garden Cemetery in the southern suburb of Beirut. His objective was to visit the grave of senior Hezbollah terrorist operative **Imad Mughnieh** and the graves of the Iranians killed in the explosion at the Iranian embassy. The Shaheed Garden Cemetery is

where senior Hezbollah terrorist operatives are buried. Zarif was accompanied by a delegation of senior Hezbollah figures. He placed a wreath on the grave of Imad Mughnieh (Iranian TV channel Al-Ayam, January 13, 2014).



**Left: The Iranian foreign minister visits the grave of Imad Mughnieh in the Shaheed Garden cemetery in Beirut (Iranian TV channel Al-Ayam, January 13, 2014).  
Right: The Iranian foreign minister meets with Ramadan Shallah (Iranian foreign ministry and Naba Press, January 14, 2014).**

## Propaganda Events

### "Intifada Youth Coalition" Activity

■ On January 17, 2014, as part of the activities of a network called the Intifada Youth Coalition, several dozen Palestinians gathered in eastern Gaza City planning to leave together to break into the access restricted perimeter (the area near the security fence between Israel and the Gaza Strip). When they approached the security fence IDF forces shot at them. The Palestinian media reported that two Palestinians had been wounded. They claimed the Palestinians had succeeded in hanging a Palestinian flag on the security fence (Safa and Wafa news agencies, January 17, 2014)



**Left: Palestinians on their way to the security fence along the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip (January 17, 2014). Right: One of the wounded Palestinians. He wears a shirt bearing the insignia of Al-Futuwwa, which provides military training for high school children (Paltoday website, January 18, 2014).<sup>4</sup>**

### **Rally in the Gaza Strip against the Negotiations with Israel**

■ On January 17, 2014, Hamas held a rally in Gaza City attended by representatives of the Palestinian terrorist organizations. It was held to protest the Kerry plan and the negotiations between Israeli and the PA, and in support of the residents of the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp in Syria. During the rally Hamas activists burned two "coffins" draped with the Israeli and American flags. On the coffins were signs reading "No to the Kerry plan" and "No to the negotiations" (Filastin Al-'Aan, January 17, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> For information about Al-Futuwwa, see the January 19, 2014 bulletin ["Military Training as Part of the School Curriculum: The Al-Futuwwa Program in the Gaza Strip Schools Provides Military Training for Students. Its Objective Is to Raise a New Generation of Military-Terrorist Operatives for the De-Facto Hamas Administration."](#)



Hamis activists set fire to coffins decorated with American and Israeli flags. The signs read "No to the Kerry plan" and "No to the negotiations" (Filastin Al-'Aan, January 17, 2014).