



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
at the Center for Special Studies

The Palestinian-Israel Conflict -- Update October 1-16, 2005



The reality: Growing anarchy during the post-disengagement period, as the terrorist organizations continue acquiring arms and violating the lull; the Palestinian Authority takes no effective steps to stop them. Above: a display of Qassam rockets in the Gaza Strip (from the Hamas children's Website).



The vision of the Sharm el-Sheikh summit: the end of terrorism and the return to an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue

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Overview

The most jarring events were the two terrorist shooting attacks at the Gush Etzion and Eli junctions, which left three Israelis dead and four wounded. The attacks, carried out as Abu Mazen was on his way to the United States, showed that as expected, the Palestinian terrorist organizations were doing their utmost to move the focus of the terrorism from the Gaza Strip (where relative quiet has prevailed) to the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority, which was quick to condemn the attacks, continues to demonstrate its helplessness in dealing with the terrorist organizations, which repeatedly violate the lull.

During recent weeks the Israel Security Agency (ISA) exposed a Hamas terrorist infrastructure in the Hebron-Ramallah district. Also exposed were the squads behind the suicide bombing attacks in Beersheba and the abduction and murder of Sasson Nuriel. Interrogations of detained Hamas operatives proved that the organization continues its activities during the lull, in contravention of the pronouncements of its senior members.

In the internal Palestinian arena, signs of anarchy continue and grow. Violent power struggles are being held in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, spurred on by the approaching Palestinian Legislative Council elections. Although Abu Mazen has repeatedly called for an end to the carrying of arms in the streets, the PA's inability to enforce its policies on the terrorist organizations, which have their own agenda, particularly Hamas, is conspicuous.

Important events on the ground

Two shooting attacks at the Gush Etzion and Eli junctions

- **Attack at the Gush Etzion junction (October 16, 2005):** Palestinian terrorists opened fire from a passing car at Israeli civilians waiting for rides at the southern Gush Etzion junction; the car then fled the scene. Three civilians were killed and three wounded (one suffered minor injuries and two were moderately wounded).



The site of the attack (Map from the IDF spokesman)

- **Attack at the Eli junction (October 16, 2005):** The attack at the Gush Etzion junction was followed by another approximately an hour later, this one at the Eli junction (north of Ramallah). Two Israeli youths walking along the road were shot from a passing car. One of them was moderately wounded while the other was seriously injured.

Responses to the attacks

- So far we cannot determine with certainty which organization was responsible for the attacks, although Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades/Fatah claimed responsibility. However, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades commander in Jenin, Zakariya Zubeidi, was quick to deny any connection to the attacks, saying the Brigades were committed to the lull (Al-Jazeera TV, October 16, 2005). "Accessible" Palestinian sources told a journalist for the London-based Ilaf Internet site (October 17, 2005) that the attack at the Gush Etzion junction was carried out by a Fatah/Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades splinter group in coordination with and financed by Hezbollah.

The Izzedine al-Qassam Battalions/Hamas also claimed responsibility for the attack at the Gush Etzion junction (Al-Jazeera TV, October 16, 2005).

■ A spokesman for the PA hurried to condemn the attacks (which were carried out as Abu Mazen left for the United States), calling them “a terrorist action causing immense damage to our people’s image and credibility.” The announcement also called for the lull to be adhered to (Palestinian News Agency, October 16, 2005).

■ In response to the events, the Israeli security services decided to take the following steps: a renewal of the closures of Hebron and Bethlehem; a repositioning of road blocks which had been removed; limiting the movements of private Palestinian vehicles on West Bank roads. Israel also postponed security deliberations with the joint Palestinian-Israeli committees.

Exposure of Hamas infrastructures in the West Bank

■ During recent weeks the ISA exposed several Hamas terrorist-operative squads in the Hebron-Ramallah district. They had carried out a large number of terrorist actions, causing the death and wounding of many Israeli civilians. It should be noted that their activities, which began during Arafat’s régime, **continued under Abu Mazen during the lull, in direct contradiction** of the public statements made by Hamas heads regarding **the movement’s acceptance of the lull**.¹

■ Most of the terrorist activities carried out by the exposed squads (including the suicide bombing attacks in Beersheba in August 2005) were not publicly claimed by any organization. That enabled Hamas to continue its terrorist activities on the West Bank during the lull while presenting itself to the PA and Palestinian public opinion as maintaining the lull and even distancing itself from Israeli targeted killings and preventative operations.

¹ The document detailing the exposure has already appeared in Hebrew and will shortly appear in English.

■ The following were exposed:

- ⌘ **Two squads operating in the Hebron district** which carried out a large number of attacks, mainly shooting attacks: their most “important” were the suicide bombing attacks at the Beersheba central bus station (for which the Palestinian Islamic Jihad falsely claimed responsibility.)
- ⌘ **A squad of terrorists operating in Ramallah** (directed by Hamas’ operational infrastructure in Gaza): one of its members was **Yasser Salah**, son of the Ramallah chief of police. **Samar Ibrahim** a resident of the Jabaliya refugee camp, was sent from Gaza to train the squad in the preparation of explosive charges. **It was members of this squad who abducted and murdered Sasson Nuriel.**

Trainer



Samar Ibrahim, sent from Gaza to train the squad.

Terrorist



Yasser Salah, son of the Ramallah chief of police

Handler



Muhammad Tharya, Hamas handler from Gaza

■ In addition, during the past two weeks a number of terrorist-operatives were detained. They had long been on the wanted list because of their involvement in the perpetration of terrorist attacks. The following should be noted:

- ⌘ On October 11, during operations in the village of Surif, north-west of Hebron, the Israeli security forces detained **Ibrahim Ghanimat**, 47, a Hamas terrorist-operative from the Hebron district. He had been on the wanted list since 1995 and was the last member of the Surif squad (a deadly group active between 1995-1997) to be detained.
- ⌘ On October 8, 2005, ‘Abd al-Muiz Ju’ba, a resident of Hebron, married and father of two, who **murdered Jerusalem yeshiva student Shmuel**

Eliahu Matt, was detained. Under interrogation he said that on August 24, 2005, he went from Hebron to Abu Dis and from there to Jerusalem **through an area where there was no security fence**. He reached the Old City, bought a knife and lay in wait for Jewish worshippers on their way to the Wailing Wall. In one of the alleys he attacked three yeshiva students, stabbing and killing Shmuel Eliahu Matt and wounding one other.

The arrest of a minor who was forced to agree to committing a suicide bombing attack

■ On October 12 Israeli security forces arrested a 14-year old boy in his home in Nablus after information had been received that he was going to carry out a suicide bombing attack. Under interrogation he said that Fatah/Tanzin operatives from the **Balata refugee camp in Nablus** had ordered him to carry out the attack. They were Rabi' Farid Musa Abu Lail, 23, and Jamal 'Abd al-Hamid Muhammad Tirawi, 39.

■ The boy related that the two threatened to kill him and to spread rumors that he had collaborated with Israel. He also related that he tried to avoid the mission on the grounds that he was his parents' only son, but they only exerted more pressure on him. They took him to a room where he was required to write a will and then photographed him wearing a vest (explosive ?) and carrying a rifle and a copy of the Qur'an.

■ It should be noted that throughout 2005 there has been a significant increase in attempts to enlist minors in the perpetration of terrorist attacks, including suicide bombing attacks.² Enlisting youths is common **among Fatah operatives in Nablus**. In our assessment, it shows that the organization is finding it difficult to enlist mature individuals to undertake such missions.

² See our bulletin at http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/sib/6_05/teenagers_b.htm for further information.

■ Fatah/Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades usually denies involvement in enlisting minors for terrorist activities because of harsh public criticism of the practice. In this instance as well, the organization issued a false statement denying sending a minor on a terrorist mission and claimed that the IDF forced the youth to blame Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades “to sully the resistance’s good name” (Ma’a News Agency, October 12, 2005).

Increase in attacks at IDF roadblocks

■ In recent weeks there were eight attempted stabbing attacks at roadblocks and checkpoints, directed primarily against Israeli security forces. Among them were the following:

⌘ On October 2 an attempted attack was foiled at an IDF checkpoint at the Beit Furiq roadblock outside Nablus. A terrorist armed with a knife approached the checkpoint yelling “Allahu akbar.” He was detained.



The knife used in the attack (Picture: IDF Spokesman, October 2, 2005)

⌘ On October 4 a Palestinian woman came to the Hawarah checkpoint south of Nablus and stabbed a female soldier, wounding her slightly. The Palestinian attacker was shot and killed.

⌘ On October 5 a Palestinian youth about 18 years old arrived at the Beit Furiq checkpoint and attempted unsuccessfully to stab a female soldier.

⌘ On October 9 an attempted attack was foiled at the checkpoint at the Tunnel Road south of Jerusalem, when soldiers detained a Palestinian in possession of a knife.

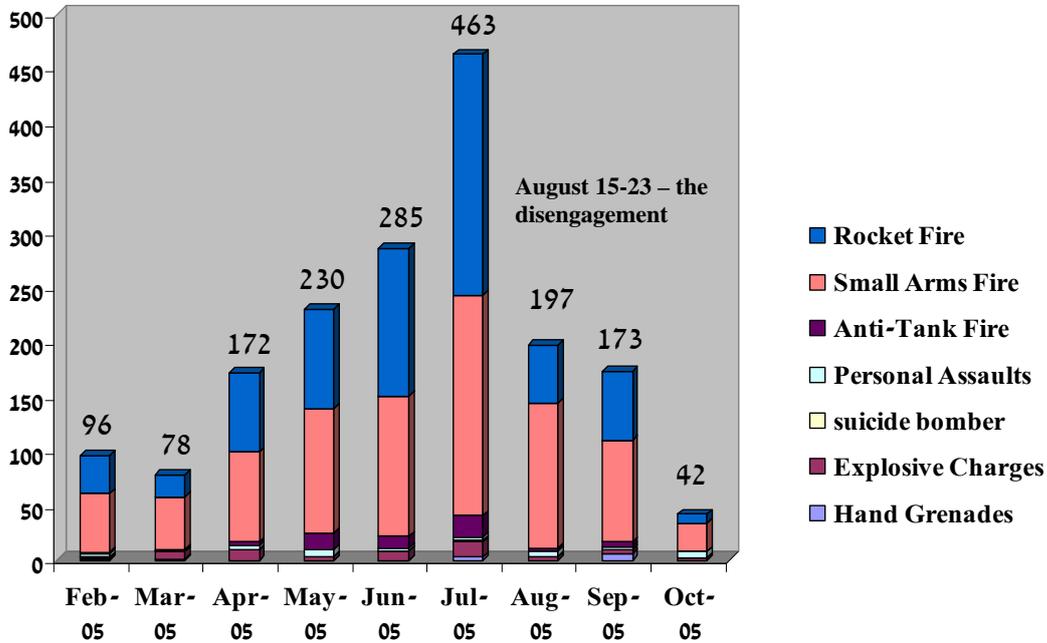
⌘ On October 12 a Palestinian arrived at the roadblock at the village of Khalhoul, north of Hebron, and attempted to stab the soldiers manning the post. He was overcome and detained.

Dud Qassam rocket found at Ariel Sharon's farm

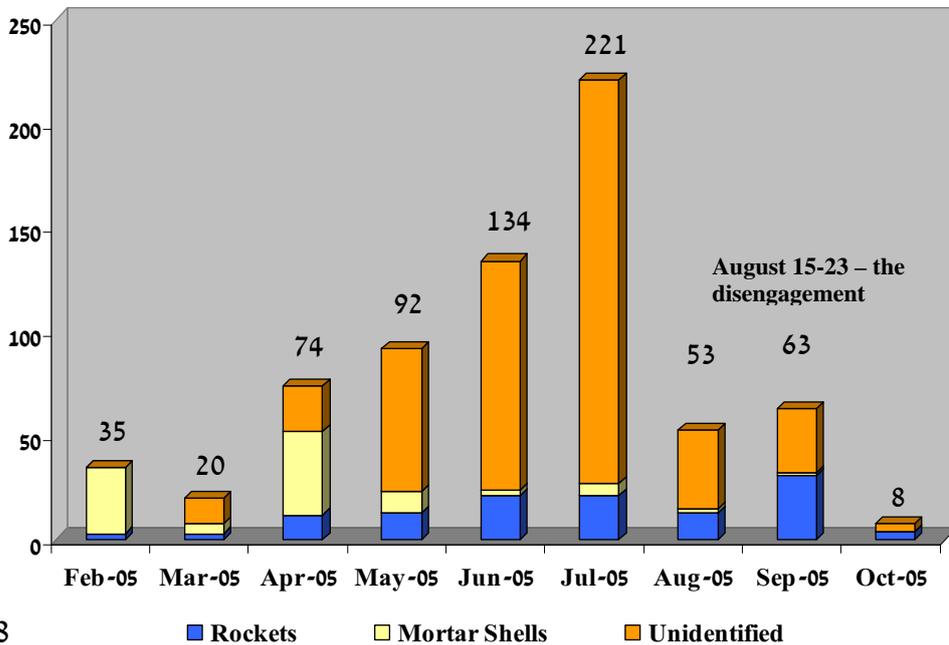
■ On October 15 a dud Qassam rocket was found at the Shikmim Ranch in the Western Negev, close to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's home. Apparently the rocket was fired about three weeks ago during the barrage launched at Western Negev settlements. It should be noted that the farm, which is not far from the city of Sderot, is about 9 kilometers (about 5 ½ miles, the maximum Qassam range) from the town of Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip, where the rockets were launched.

Statistical Data

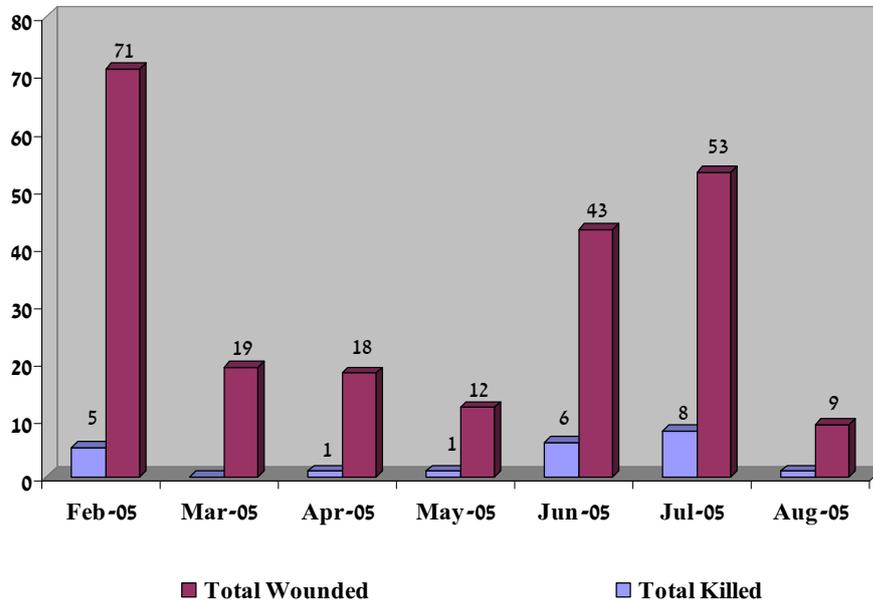
Attacks carried out during the nine months since the Sharm el-Sheikh summit meeting



Monthly distribution of rocket shells found since the Sharm el-Sheikh summit meeting



Israeli casualties since February 2005



Al-Qaeda terrorist base in Sinai: international terrorism begins to threaten Israel

■ In an intelligence survey presented at a government meeting, the head of Army Military Intelligence, Aharon Ze'evi, reported that Al-Qaeda terrorists were active in the Sinai. He noted that they had taken over an entire area, encircling it with land mines around it to keep Egyptian security personnel away. He also reported that the Egyptian authorities were acting with caution: while they understood the danger presented by terrorist elements active in the Sinai, they were wary lest decisive action taken against them bring about an escalation of terrorist attacks within Egypt.³

³ Yedioth Acharonot, (Hebrew), October 10, 2005.

■ The same report also mentioned the attack in the Sinai carried out by Al-Qaeda terrorists and the Katyusha rockets fired from Jordan at the Gulf of Eilat and at American vessels in the Gulf of Aqaba. It called them “signs showing” that international Islamic terrorism was nearing Israel.⁴



Damage done in Aqaba by one of the rockets fired by Al-Qaeda on August 19
(Al-Jazeera TV, August 19, 2005)

⁴ *Ibid.*

Continued anarchy in the Palestinian Authority: continued anarchy and violent power struggles in the Gaza Strip and West Bank

■ Although PA chairman Abu Mazen repeatedly calls for an end to armed gunmen's roaming the streets, and despite a certain increase in law enforcement by the Palestinian security apparatuses, and despite the treaty signed by the various terrorist organizations to prevent a civil war, **signs of anarchy and violent power struggles are increasing in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.**

■ Concurrently, there is growing public criticism of the situation directed **at both Hamas** (accused of preventing a return to post-disengagement normality) **and the PA** (accused of helplessness and lack of determination to enforce law and order).

■ The following events – examples of the growing anarchy -- took place during the first half of October and the various terrorist organizations were involved in them:

⌘ **The abduction of two journalists:** On October 12 two journalists, one American, one British, were abducted in Khan Yunis. The Palestinian Interior Ministry claimed that a Fatah squad was responsible. Both were released a few hours later.

⌘ **The killing of a terrorist operative:** On October 12 Ismail Musa al-'Arja, one of the local commanders of the Jerusalem Battalions (the terrorist-operative wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad) was killed. As a result dozens of armed men from the dead man's family attacked the houses of other extended families, suspecting them of involvement in the killing. A Hamas-affiliated radio station claimed that the killing was a

result of an internal PIJ conflict. A PIJ source vigorously denied the allegation.

- ⌘ **An attack on the president of Al-Azhar University:** On October 12 a group of armed men identified with Fatah broke into Al-Azhar University in Gaza. They attacked the university president, Dr. ‘Adnan al-Khalidi, and two deans, and chased them off the campus. Classes have been suspended until the PA takes steps to protect the faculty and students.

- ⌘ **The abduction of Hamas activists in the West Bank:** On October 6 and 7 a number of Hamas activists were abducted in Judea and Samaria. The goal of the abductions, which according to Hamas were carried out by Palestinian General Security, was to send Hamas a warning.⁵ Among those abducted (most of whom have since been released) were Dr. Riad ‘Abd al-Karim al-Ras, head of the engineering department at Al-Najah University, and sheikh Hassan al-Safi, a member of the Bethlehem municipal council. Hamas spokesmen repeatedly accused the PA and its general security apparatuses of have carried out the abductions.

- ⌘ **An attempt to kill a terrorist-operative:** On October 6 armed men fired shots at the home of Yussuf al-Qoqa, head of the Popular Resistance Committees terrorist-operative wing. A spokesman for the organization claimed it was an attempted killing.

- ⌘ **Violent protest by police at a Palestinian Legislative Council meeting:** a group of armed policemen broke into the legislative council building in Gaza during a council meeting and opened fire. It was their way of protesting the feeble stance taken by the PA against Hamas’ continued

⁵ The immediate reason might have been the attack and abduction of Sami ‘Ajour, a Palestinian General Security officer, on October 6, 2005.

disorderly disturbances (Al-Jazeera TV, October 3, 2005). They may also have wanted to express their anger at the murder of a police officer by Hamas.⁶ The entire event was broadcast live by Palestinian TV.

■ The mounting tension between Hamas and the PA led Khaled Mashal, chairman of Hamas' political office, to deliver a pessimistic speech on the eve of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan (Radio Sawt Al-Aqsa, October 13). He called for Palestinian unity and cooperation in the "post-liberation" Gaza Strip. In addition, he claimed that reports of the events in the Strip were inflated and tried to belittle the importance of the signs of anarchy. He also claimed that Hamas was not trying to undermine the PA and did not consider itself above the law, but rather wanted equality before the law and to be a "real partner" in the decision-making process. **In reality, Hamas refuses to accept the PA's authority and is the leading terrorist organization responsible for the anarchy in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.**

Sharon-Abu-Mazen Meeting Postponed

■ The summit meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and PA chairman Abu Mazen, which was supposed to take place during the first half of October, has been postponed till November, when Abu Mazen returns from his visit to Washington. The reason for the postponement was the gap in expectations on both sides: The Palestinians want concrete concessions from Israel (the release of prisoners, the evacuation of cities in the West Bank) while the Israelis refuse to make immediate concessions and propose a series of talks about the matters at hand (particularly the PA's inability to overcome terrorism).

■ In the meantime the joint committees will renew their activities and deliberations will be held regarding the Palestinian requests and topics which remain open in the

⁶ According to a Palestinian Interior Ministry statement, the cause for the incident was "bitterness and anger over Hamas' killing of major 'Ali Hassan Makawi during a violent police-Hamas confrontation (Palestinian News Agency, October 3, 2005). 'Alaa Husni, chief of the Palestinian police, accused Hamas of killing both major 'Ali Makawi and Musa Arafat (Dunia al-Watan Internet site, October 14, 2005).

wake of the disengagement (in the meantime, as noted above, Israel has postponed meetings with the PA in the wake of the shooting attacks at the Gush Etzion and Eli junctions)..