



Center for Special Studies
Intelligence and Terrorism
Information Center

News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation

December 15-31 2006

Hope for peace ...



**Olmert and Abu Mazen meet
(Al-Jazeera TV, December 23)**

...and reality: increase in rocket launchings
despite the ceasefire.



**Sderot residents standing next to
where a rocket hit, critically
wounding two adolescent boys (Amir
Cohen for Reuters, December 26)**

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Overview

■ During the past two weeks events focused on the meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen). The meeting took place as the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip continued to violate the ceasefire and violent confrontations broke out more frequently between Fatah and Hamas.

■ Ehud Olmert and Abu Mazen agreed to a series of measures to ease the humanitarian conditions of the Palestinians, centering around facilitating the passage of goods and people between Israel and the Gaza Strip, the removal of roadblocks in Judea and Samaria and the transfer to Abu Mazen of \$100 million in tax money held by Israel, to be used for humanitarian purposes. The IDF is preparing to implement the measures even by taking possible security risks.

■ In the meantime, the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip (agreed upon by Olmert and Abu Mazen in late November) has not been maintained. Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory has again become routine, and during December approximately 50 hits were identified, one of which critically wounded two adolescent boys, residents of Sderot. The Palestinian terrorist organization violating the ceasefire most frequently is the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which receives its instructions from its headquarters Damascus. The PIJ has traditionally sought to sabotage every attempt at dialogue and calm between Israeli and the PA.

Important Events

Sharp increase in rocket fire at population centers in the western Negev

- During the second half of December, despite the ceasefire, **there was a significant increase in the number of Qassam rockets launched at population centers in the western Negev.** During December a total of approximately **50 Qassam** rockets hit. One volley, on December 26, critically wounded two adolescent boys.

- **Seventy-six rockets hit Israel from November 25, when the ceasefire went into effect, until December 31 at noon.**¹ However, while the number similar to August, September and October (between 40 and 50 rockets per month), it is less than November's record 157. **Practically speaking, in December rocket attacks reached their former level.**



Launching an Al-Quds rocket: picture from the PIJ's Website (Qudsway, December 28).

- The Palestinian terrorist organization violating the ceasefire most often was the PIJ (which also most often violated the 2005 "lull in the fighting"), whose operatives carried out most

¹ The number of launchings was higher, since some of the rockets fell in the Gaza Strip itself and therefore do not appear in the statistics.

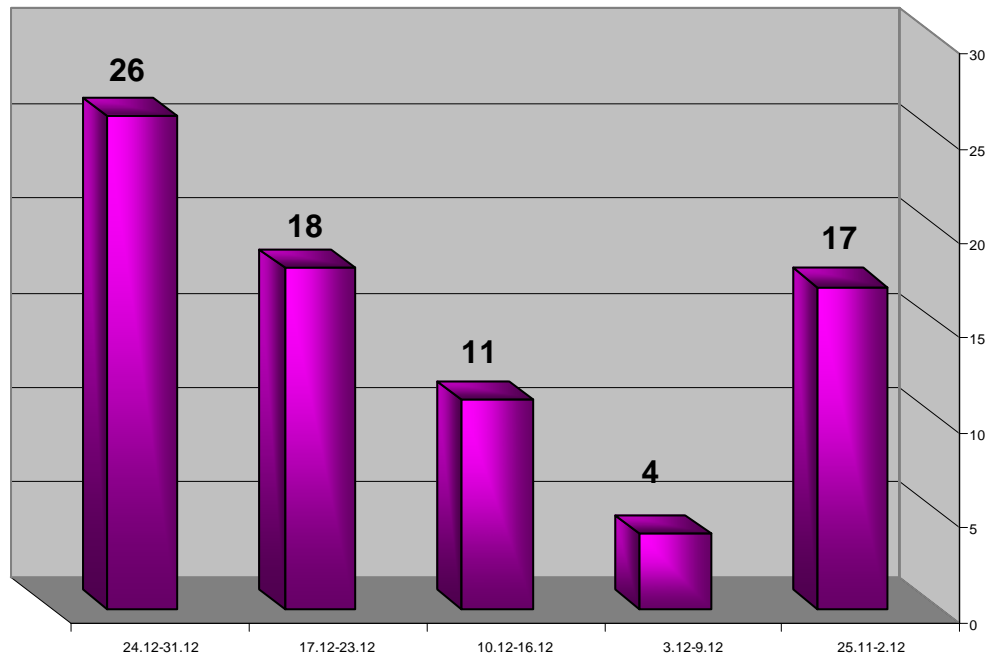
of the rocket launchings. Fatah/Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades also claimed responsibility for some of the rockets. Hamas avoided firing rockets, but took no measures to prevent other organizations from violating the ceasefire.

- The excuse for the rocket fire was usually what the Palestinian terrorist organizations call Israel's "violations of the lull in the fighting" in Judea and Samaria. They trot out that excuse **despite the fact that the ceasefire agreement does not include Judea and Samaria**, and despite the fact that Fatah and the PIJ continue their efforts to use the West Bank as a springboard for their terrorist attacks against Israel. The PIJ again stated its intention to **continue** launching rockets into Israel, saying that it was also preparing a wave of suicide bombing attacks. On the other hand, Ghazi Hamad, a Hamas government spokesman, said that the agreement, which had been accepted by all the Palestinian organizations, was still in force (Al-Quds and Al-Jazeera TV, December 27).

Israeli policy

- On December 27, at the end of security deliberations following the wounding of the two boys in Sderot, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz instructed the IDF to pin point its attacks on Qassam rocket squads trying to launch rockets into Israel. However, broad operations in the Gaza Strip were not authorized, and Israel again noted that its interest was to preserve the ceasefire even though the Palestinians were violating it.
- On the diplomatic front, the increase in rocket fire led Israel to protest to the UN Secretary General and the December president of the Security Council, sending a survey of Palestinian violations of the ceasefire. The protest made it clear that Israel would not be able to prolong its policy of restraint if the rocket fire continued.

Weekly rocket fire since the initiation of the ceasefire agreement



Continued counterterrorism activities in Judea and Samaria

- Following the continued attempts of the Palestinian terrorist organizations to carry out attacks from Judea and Samaria (including suicide bombing attacks within Israel), the IDF continued its counterterrorism activities:

🔴 **December 26** – Israeli security forces detained **Mahmoud al-Saadi**, a senior PIJ operative in Jenin. Al-Saadi was a resident of the Jenin refugee camp. He was previously imprisoned in Israel for his involvement in terrorist activities and was released in May 2005. Upon his release he returned to the PIJ to continue his activities. He dealt, among other things, with the transfer of funds from the organization's headquarters in Damascus to the PA-administered territories to finance terrorist attacks.

🔴 **December 22** – At the Hawara roadblock (south of Nablus) an IDF force uncovered weapons, among them seven hand grenades, a pistol and about one kilogram (2.2 lbs) of explosives.



The weapons and explosives

❁ **December 20** – Heavy exchanges of fire took place during a security force operation in the village of Silat al-Harithiya (in the Jenin district), during which two senior PIJ terrorist-operatives were killed. They had been involved in planning attacks in Israel, including suicide bombing attacks. Their infrastructure was directed and financed by PIJ headquarters in Damascus.²

❁ **December 19** – In the village of Sida (north of Tulkarm) the Israeli security forces killed a senior Fatah/Tanzim operative who specialized in manufacturing explosive devices and car bombs, and was involved in a number of shooting attacks.

Hamas operational infrastructure Judea exposed

■ In recent months the security forces exposed a Hamas terrorist squad operating in Judea. Its members, whose activities were directed by senior terrorist-operatives in the Gaza Strip, planned the abduction of a settler or soldier in the Jerusalem area to be used as a bargaining chip in negotiations for the release of Hamas prisoners in Israeli jails. The infrastructure was

² For further information see our December 21 Bulletin entitled “The killing of two senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad operatives in the village of Silat al-Harithiya,” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/ct_pij_e.htm or http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ct_pij_e.pdf.

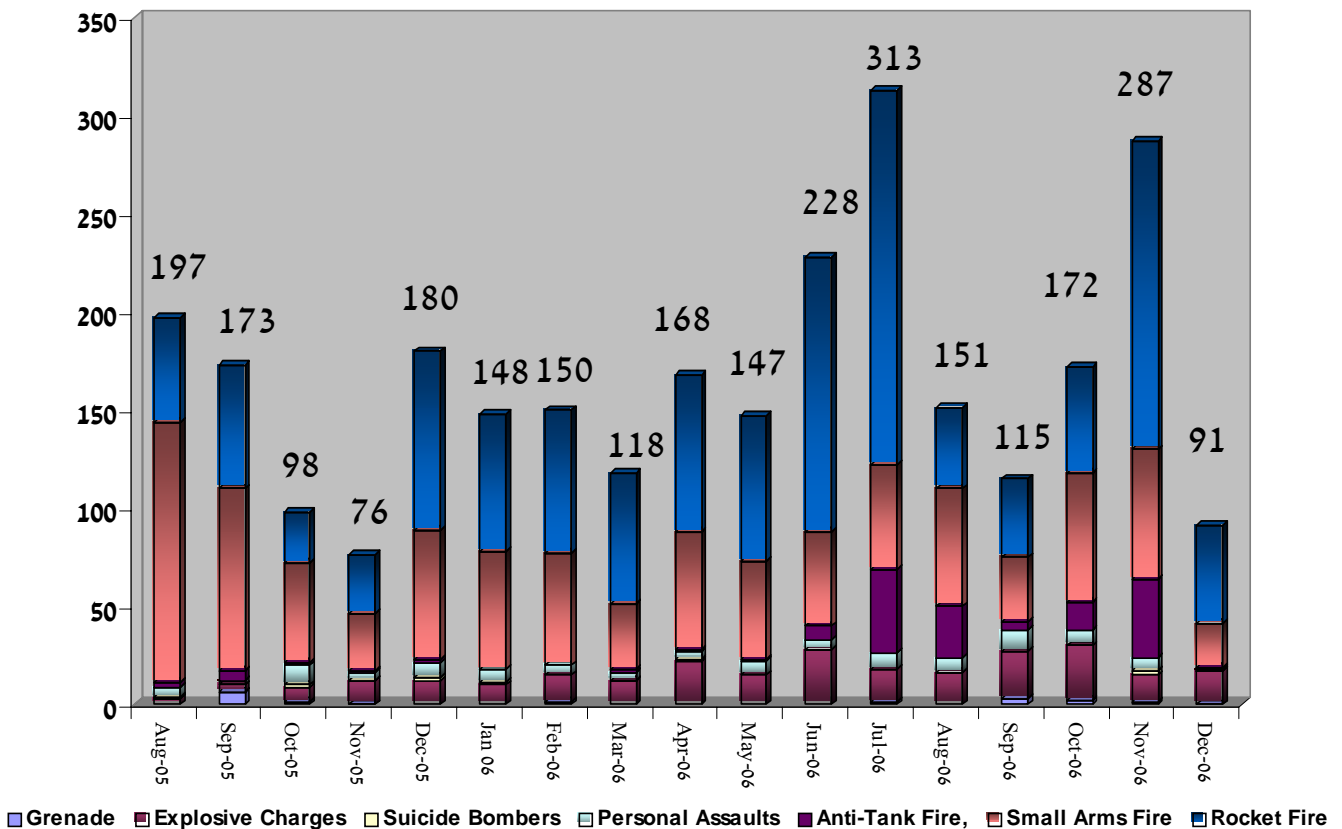
directed and funded by Hamas in the Gaza Strip.³

Detention of Fatah/Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades operative in Ramallah

On November 2 the security forces detained Muhammad Rida Abd Sa'idi, a resident of the Al-Amar'i refugee camp near Ramallah and wanted by Israel. Muhammad Saidi, a Fatah/Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades operative, was involved in the murder of Marik Gavriellov in October 2000, and in shooting attacks directed against IDF forces.

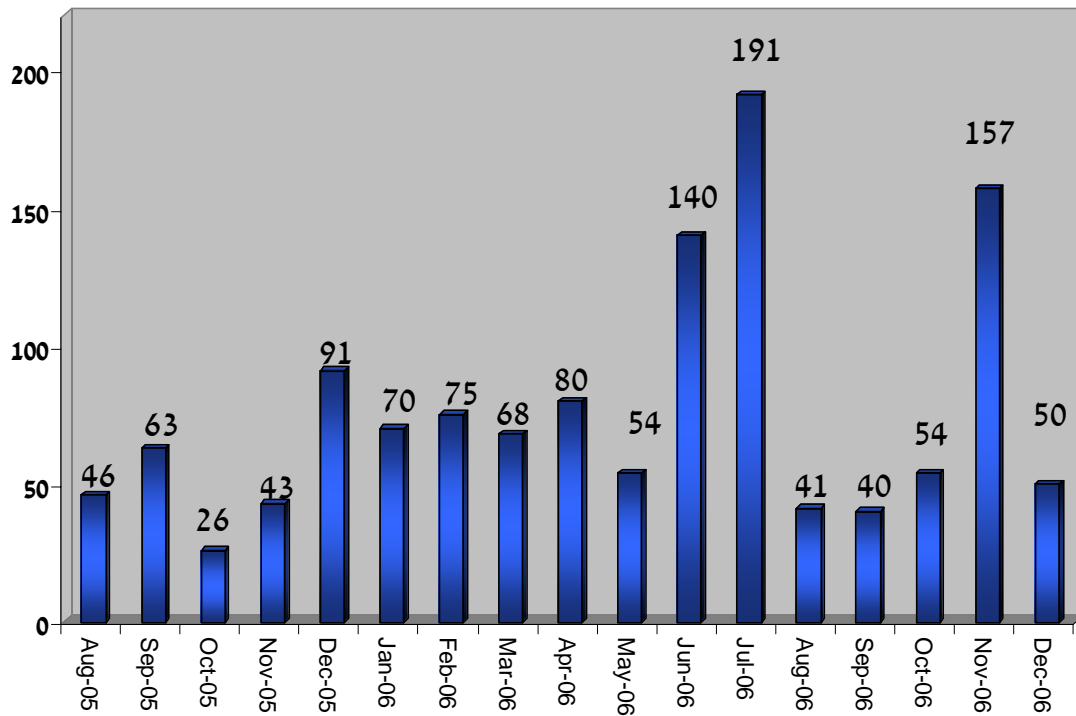
Statistical Data

Monthly distribution of attacks

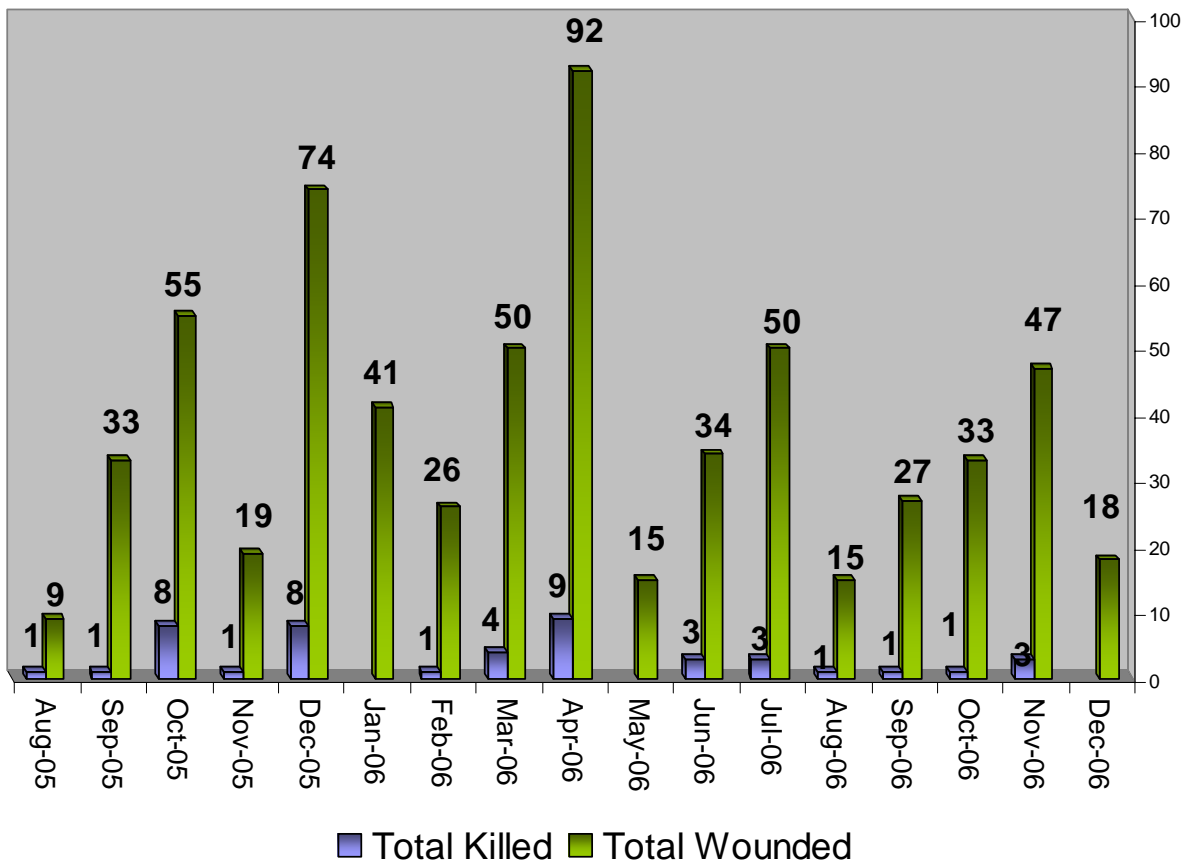


³ For further information see our December 21 Bulletin entitled "The uncovering of an operative infrastructure belonging to Hamas (in Judea) thwarted plans to abduct Israelis and use them as bargaining chips in negotiations for the release of prisoners," at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/ct_hamas_e.htm or http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ct_hamas_e.pdf.

Monthly distribution of rocket hits



Monthly distribution of Israeli casualties



Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert Meets PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas



The meeting (Al-Jazeera TV, December 23)

■ On the evening of December 23 Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert met with Palestinian Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen). At after the meeting it was announced that it had taken place in a “good and friendly atmosphere” and that they both had expressed the wish to take concrete steps to advance the peace process. They stressed the importance of “direct, serious contact” between them and agreed to meet frequently to advance the topics on the current agenda.⁴

■ In practical terms, the following was decided:⁵

✿ **The ceasefire:** To reconsider expanding the ceasefire to the West Bank, in keeping with the February 2005 Sharm el-Sheikh understandings, **if** the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip was maintained. At the same time, the Israeli Prime Minister expressed worry at the continued Qassam rocket fire from the Gaza Strip, saying that “Israel could not show restraint for long if the violations of the ceasefire continue.”

⁴ According to the Israeli Prime Minister’s Website, December 23, <http://www.pmo.gov.il/NR/exeres/A7321C42-DB6C-4E07-AD9A-B330FA254518.frameless.htm?NRMODE=Published>

⁵ *Ibid.*

✿ **Improved humanitarian conditions:** Prime Minister Olmert said that Israel would take “immediate and concrete steps” to ease humanitarian conditions for the Palestinian people. To that end, the Prime Minister decided to transfer \$100 million of the Palestinian tax funds being held by Israel to deal with the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian population, among them to assist in the current operations of a number of Palestinian hospitals. It was made clear that the funds would not be transferred to the Hamas government, but directly to Abu Mazen.

✿ **Facilitating the passage of goods and people between the Gaza Strip and Israel:** It was agreed to make “a genuine effort to upgrade the crossings between the Gaza Strip and Israel in order to facilitate better passage for goods and people.” To that end, it was decided to improve security checks at the crossings to reach a target of 400 trucks a day between the Gaza Strip and Israel and to promote the possibilities of trade between the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Israel.

✿ **The removal of roadblocks in Judea and Samaria:** Prime Minister Olmert told PA Chairman Abbas that in coordination with Defense Minister Amir Peretz, he had instructed the IDF to remove a number of roadblocks and to submit a plan for the removal of additional checkpoints in the West Bank in order to facilitate easier passage for the Palestinian population not engaged in terrorism.

✿ **The renewal of the Israeli-Palestinian joint committees:** The work of the committees would be renewed to deal with all the security and civilian issues mapped out at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit meeting in February 2005,⁶ as well as current issues.⁷ It was also decided to resume the work of the quadripartite security committee of Israel, the PA, Egypt and the US. In addition, Abu Mazen raised the idea of instituting a back channel with Israel to discuss issues relating to a permanent solution,

⁶ The Sharm el-Sheikh summit meeting was held on February 8, 2005, and attended by Ariel Sharon, at that time Israeli Prime Minister, PA chairman Abu Mazen, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and Abdallah, King of Jordan. The agreements reached included a ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians and a series of security measures and steps based on the American roadmap to build mutual trust.

⁷ According to Palestinian sources, economic and security committees will be established. The Palestinian head of the economic committee will be Muhammad Mustafa, the chairman’s economic advisor, and the head of the security committee will be General Ismail Jaber, whose seconds in command will be Rashid Abu Shubaq and Rafiq al-Tirawi (Al-Ayyam, December 26).

with the participation of a representative or representatives of the International Quartet (Middle East News Agency from Cairo, December 27).

✿ **The release of Palestinian prisoners:** The Israeli Prime Minister told Abu Mazen that he understood his sensitivity and that of the Palestinian people to the issue of the prisoners and also said he would be willing to release prisoners through Abu Mazen after the release of Gilad Shalit. In addition, it was decided to renew the activity of the joint committee responsible for determining new criteria for the release of Palestinian prisoners. The committee would begin operating immediately and present its recommendations to Olmert and Abu Mazen as soon as possible. According to Palestinian sources, the Palestinian side would be led by Qadura Fares, who spent many years in Israeli jails and was head of the “Palestinian prisoners’ club” (Al-Ayyam, December 26).

■ Following the meeting with Abu Mazen, on December 25 Prime Minister Olmert convened a meeting attended by heads of Israeli security. They decided in principle on a series of relief measures for the Palestinian population. The IDF is currently examining ways of implementing the decisions, including the following:

✿ **Dismantling several dozen unmanned blocks** in Judea and Samaria separating the villages from the main cities in the district (27 such blocks during the first stage).

✿ **Easing examination procedures at 16 permanent checkpoints** in Judea and Samaria: the IDF will make spot checks instead of following today’s procedures, which call for a thorough examination of every Palestinian vehicle passing through. That will make it easier for residents and goods to pass through.

✿ **Plans are being made to build underpasses** under the main north-south road that runs along the mountain ridge to facilitate movement for Palestinian residents and to minimize friction between them and the IDF.

✿ **Easing passage between the Gaza Strip and Israel:** Improvements will be made by Israel (and the Palestinians) in security at the Karni crossing to keep it open longer every day (as of today, the crossing operates only during daylight hours). There will also be an

increase in the volume of traffic through the Erez crossing (through changes in examination procedures) and the Kerem Shalom crossing will be open for goods (which requires a Palestinian decision).

■ The decisions include a series of facilitations intended to ease the stress of the Palestinians' daily lives even at the price of security risks. Removing blocks and easing examination procedures are liable to enable terrorist-operatives to smuggle weapons and operatives into the various sectors more easily and even to send terrorists into the heart of Israel (as has happened in the past.) Thus implementing the decisions and increasing the Israeli measures are conditional upon the ability of Abu Mazen and the Palestinian side to maintain security calm and put an end to the growing internal anarchy. Otherwise, in spite of the good will of both sides, the agreements reached will remain theoretical this time as well.

Reactions in the Palestinian arena to the Olmert-Abu Mazen meeting

- As expected, there were mixed reactions to the meeting: Abu Mazen and his supporters were satisfied, while Hamas and the PIJ expressed reservations with the meeting itself and its outcome.

- The main reactions were the following:
 - ✿ **Abu Mazen and his supporters:** Abu Mazen noted that the meeting was “a good beginning for the renewal of the peace process” and was optimistic that the Israeli promises would be kept (Al-Jazeera TV, December 25). He said that the Israelis had agreed to all his demands (Palestinian News Agency, December 24). Nabil Abu Rudeina, the presidential spokesman, said that the meeting was “beneficial” and expressed hope that it would be the foundation for new contacts (Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda, December 24, BBC Radio, December 24).

 - ✿ **The Palestinian media:** The Israeli Prime Minister's decision to implement a series of measures to ease the Palestinians' situation made the front pages of the newspapers in

Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. Special mention was given to the promises to ease the situation at the border crossings.

✿ **Hamas:** Musa Abu Marzuk, deputy chairman of Hamas’s political bureau, condemned the meeting, claiming that it “improved the Zionist entity’s image in the eyes of the world” (Hamas Website, December 24). Ghazi Hamad, Hamas government spokesman, belittled the importance of the agreements reached (Hamas Website, December 24) and said that Israel was trying to get good propaganda results in return for insignificant gestures (Ramattan News Agency, December 24).

✿ **The PIJ:** The organization announced that the meeting did not serve the interests of the Palestinian people because it was part of Israel’s efforts to foment civil war. The organization expressed amazement at the positive atmosphere of the meeting and stated that “we hoped for such warmth between President Abu Mazen and Prime Minister Haniya” (Ma’an News Agency, December 24).

The Internal Palestinian Arena

The violent struggles between Fatah and Hamas intensify

- During the past two weeks the **violent struggles** between Fatah (and the security forces loyal to Abu Mazen) and Hamas **have intensified**. The immediate excuse for the new wave of clashes was Abu Mazen’s call on December 16 for early elections. Senior members of both sides and even external factors (Egypt) tried to calm the situation and prevent the clashes from turning in to a civil war.
- On December 19 a ceasefire was reached which included an agreement to remove the security forces’ operatives and the “operational force” from the streets and to stop incitement in the media. Despite the announcement of a ceasefire, there have been sporadic clashes and the tension between the sides threatens new outbreaks.



The violent struggle intensifies (Al-Riadh Website, December 28)

- As in the past, the focus of the violent events was the **Gaza Strip**, where Hamas has a pronounced advantage, although they also spread to a number of locations in Judea and Samaria, where Fatah and the PA security forces have the advantage. The events included shootings, hand grenades thrown into crowds, gunshots fired at the homes of senior government members, gunshots fired at government and security buildings, assassinations attempts, abductions, etc.
- Notable events in the Gaza Strip were:
 - ✿ Shots were fired at the president's office in Gaza, killing a member of the presidential guard and wounding 12 (December 17).
 - ✿ Armed men took over security force installations in Gaza and the Jabaliya refugee camp, killing a security officer and wounding seven (December 17).
 - ✿ Armed men opened fire at Abu Mazen's house in Gaza (AP, December 17), and at the house of Hamas government foreign minister Mahmoud al-Zahar (December 25).
 - ✿ Ten operatives were abducted in a series of mutual Hamas and Fatah kidnappings in the northern Gaza Strip. Most prominent among the abductees was Sofian Abu Zaida, a member of Fatah's Revolutionary Council and formerly minister of prisoners affairs (he was abducted and released).

✿ The deputy commander of preventive security for the Rafah area was shot and critically wounded in an assassination attempt as he rode in his car in Gaza City (December 23).



**Armed men and members of the Palestinian security forces in Gaza
(Palestinian TV, December 20)**

- The most prominent incident in Judea and Samaria occurred in Nablus on December 22, when armed Fatah operatives opened fire on the participants of a rally held to mark the 19th anniversary of the founding of Hamas; a number were wounded. A local agreement to restore calm was brokered by members of the Popular Front in Nablus.

Muhammad Dahlan in Hamas's crosshairs



**Muhammad Dahlan surrounded by bodyguards as he delivers a speech in Jenin
(Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda, December 17).**

- As part of the internecine struggles in the Palestinian Authority, Muhammad Dahlan, the Fatah strongman in the Gaza Strip, has become a prime target for Hamas. He has been accused by Hamas as the senior Fatah member leading the struggle against Hamas in the Gaza Strip and is perceived as a potential heir to Abu Mazen.
- Palestinian sources reported on a number of attempts to assassinate Muhammad Dahlan. It was reported that the Palestinian security forces defused a powerful explosive device (of the sort used by Hamas) on the road to Khan Yunis usually used by Dahlan. It was also reported that PIJ operatives fired at his cavalcade in the refugee camp in Jenin and that armed men fired at his house in Gaza.
- In addition to physical attempts on Dahlan's life, Hamas has carried out a **smear campaign in the media** intended, in our assessment, to prepare the way for his assassination. Hamas holds him responsible for the current anarchy and blamed him for collaborating with Israel (Palmedia Website, December 22). It also holds him responsible for the attempt to assassinate Ismail Haniya at the Rafah crossing (Ma'an News Agency, December 15). Muhammad Dahlan has rejected the accusations and attacked Hamas, calling it "a fascist organization which kills without mercy."



Hamas's smear campaign against Dahlan: postings on the Hamas Website called "The Black Files."

Abu Mazen announces early elections



Abu Mazen (Palestinian TV, December 16)

- On December 16, with the growing anarchy and stalled negotiations for the establishment of a national unity government, Abu Mazen announced he had decided to call for early elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council and presidency. He related how events had developed, severely criticizing the Hamas government and blaming it for the failure of the negotiations to establish a national unity government. He said the Hamas government had failed in its conduct of Palestinian affairs, caused an unnecessary deterioration of relations with Israel, and held unrealistic political positions which had led to an international boycott and internal collapse.
- **Hamas expressed unrelenting criticism** of Abu Mazen’s announcement:
 - ✿ **Khaled Mashaal** said that early elections were illegal and that the president had no authority to call for them, since it meant dissolving the Legislative Council. He said that the announcement was part of an attempt to oust Hamas from the government in the wake of external pressures exerted on Abu Mazen.
 - ✿ Palestinian prime minister **Ismail Haniya** attacked Abu Mazen, accusing Fatah of supporting external elements and trying to subvert the Palestinian government. He also accused Abu Mazen and Fatah of undermining efforts to establish a national unity government, of helping to isolate the Hamas government and of collaborating with the Americans to bring down the Hamas government (Ma’an News Agency, December 19).

Ismail Haniya's latest trip

■ On December 28 Hamas government prime minister Ismail Haniya left for a visit to Saudi Arabia. He was accompanied by internal minister Sa'id Siyam and foreign minister Mahmoud al-Zahar. The trip was the continuation of Haniya's visits to Arab states to raise money and enlist support, which was cut short by the violent incidents in the PA.

■ In Saudi Arabia Ismail Haniya met with Omar al-Bashir, the president of Sudan, and Omar Suleiman, head of Egyptian general intelligence. In an interview with the Saudi Arabian daily newspaper Okaz he said that Omar Suleiman had told him that a "good formula" had been worked out for the release of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Gilad Shalit, the abducted Israeli soldier (Okaz, December 30). On December 31 Haniya was supposed to meet with the Saudi Arabian king, Abdallah ibn Abd al-Aziz (Ramattan News Agency, December 30). From there he is supposed to continue his visits to Jordan and Kuwait.