



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
at the Israel Intelligence' Heritage
& Commemoration Center (IICC)

News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation March 1-15

Agreement on the establishment of the
Palestinian national unity government is
announced...



Abu Mazen and Ismail Haniya making
the announcement (Hamas Website,
March 15)

...and rocket fire continues from the Gaza
Strip, although the number of hits declined.



The Palestinian Islamic Jihad fires
rockets at Ashqelon (Al-Jazeera TV,
March 1)

Content

Overview

Important Even

Statistical Data

Olmert-Abu Mazen
Meeting

Internal
Palestinian Arena

Overview

- In the internal Palestinian arena the main event was the agreement reached by Palestinian chairman Abu Mazen and designated Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya regarding the establishment of a Palestinian national unity government based on the Mecca Accord of February 9. The new government received a vote of confidence on March 17.
- An initial analysis of the new government's proposed platform shows it is clearly based on Hamas ideology, despite the rhetorical acrobatics of the platform's drafters, who hope to be able to market the new government to the West. A careful reading shows that two of the basic demands made by Israel and the Quartet have not been met:
 - ❖ **The commitment to abandon violence and terrorism:** the platform defines "resistance" (i.e., violence and terrorism) as the Palestinians' "**legitimate right**," which will only be abandoned when all of the Palestinians' demands have been met, including the right to return.
 - ❖ **Recognition of the right of the State of Israel to exist:** no mention is made of the right of Israel to exist (not even within the 1967 borders) nor of the concept of two states for two people as the basis for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. It does, however, contain far-reaching demands, including the refugees' return to their lands and property (i.e., destruction of the State of Israel).

Important Events

Rocket fire at Israel

- During the first two weeks of March there was a decline in the number of rockets fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip, and 12 hits were identified. On March 6 a long-range rocket hit Ashqelon's industrial zone. Four people went into shock and a building was damaged. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the incident (Palestinian daily newspaper Nidaa al-Quds, March 6)

Stabbing prevented in Hebron

- On March 11 the Israeli security forces stationed in Hebron at the entrance to the Cave of the Patriarchs (Cave of the Machpelah) detained a 25 year old Palestinian woman from Tulkarm, who had a 25 cm (10") knife in her possession. During interrogation she stated that she had come to stab Israeli soldiers at a roadblock.

IDF force raids Palestinian military intelligence headquarters in Ramallah

- On March 4 an IDF force raided Palestinian military intelligence headquarters in one of Ramallah's neighborhoods. Eighteen Fatah terrorist-operatives were detained, all wanted for their involvement in terrorist activities and all hiding at the headquarters for a long time. Weapons were also found.
- During the past few years Palestinian terrorist-operatives have often hidden in Palestinian Authority security apparatus buildings. Such structures also serve as bases from which terrorists leave to carry out attacks and to which they return. The PA has turned a deaf ear to Israel's constant appeals not to allow wanted terrorists to seek refuge in its buildings and to turn them over to the Israeli security forces (IDF Spokesperson, March 7).



Weapons seized during IDF raid in Ramallah (Photo courtesy of the IDF spokesperson, March 7)

Detention of scrap metal dealer who sold pipes used rocket manufacture

- It was recently reported that on February 6 the Israeli security forces detained Omar **Muhammad Mustafa Zaq**, a scrap metal dealer from the Gaza Strip. He customarily sold pipes, iron and other scrap metal to terrorist-operatives and lathe owners in the Gaza Strip, which were used in the manufacture of rockets. The metal entered the Gaza Strip through the Erez crossing and was intended for civilian use (ISA report, March 4).



Pipes not allowed into the Gaza Strip (ISA, March 4)

Lebanon

Seizure of weapons intended for Jibril's Popular Front (PFLP-GC)

- The Lebanese television network NTV broadcast pictures of anti-aircraft SAM 7 missiles seized by the Lebanese security forces in the region of Nabatiyeh in south Lebanon. The missiles were seized following information obtained by Lebanese intelligence about an arms dealer operating in the area. The dealer, who was on his way to Na'ame (south of Beirut), had a large quantity of arms in his possession and was planning to deliver them to the PFLP-GC, Ahmad Jibril's Palestinian pro-Syrian organization.



Weapons seized by the Lebanese security forces (NTV, March 2)

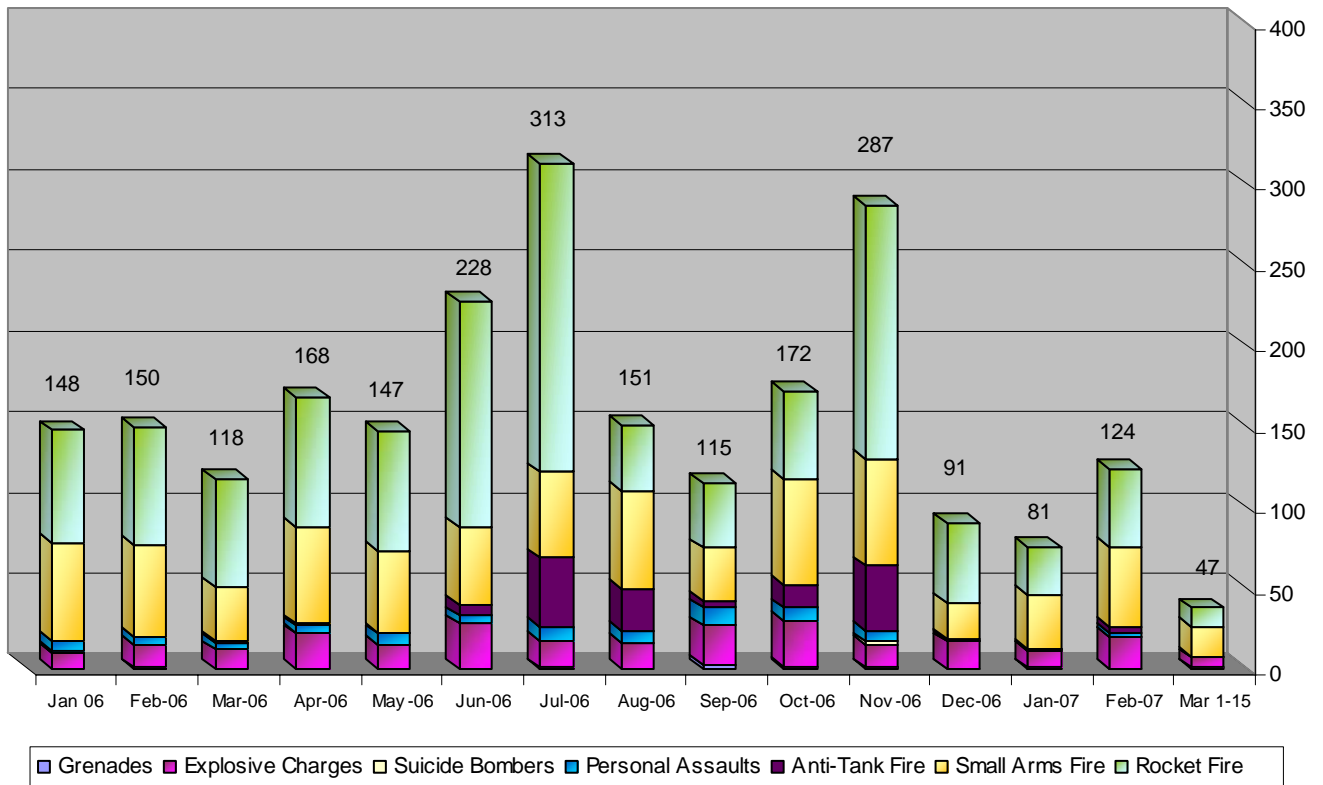
Capture of a squad belonging to the global jihad

- The Lebanese security forces uncovered a storehouse of weapons and explosives in the Ashrafiya quarter of Beirut. They also detained eight men who belonged to a radical Islamic Palestinian group called **Fatah al-Islam**, which belongs to the global jihad. Those detained are suspected of carrying out an attack at Ain Alaq (northeast of Beirut) a few weeks ago, in which three people were killed and several dozen wounded. Under interrogation those detained related that they had planned to carry out other attacks, including political assassinations and attacks against UNIFIL forces in south Lebanon (Al-Arabiya TV, March 13).
- Palestinian sources denied that Fatah al-Islam was a Palestinian organization. Abbas Zaki, a PLO representative in Lebanon, stated that the group called Fatah al-Islam had no

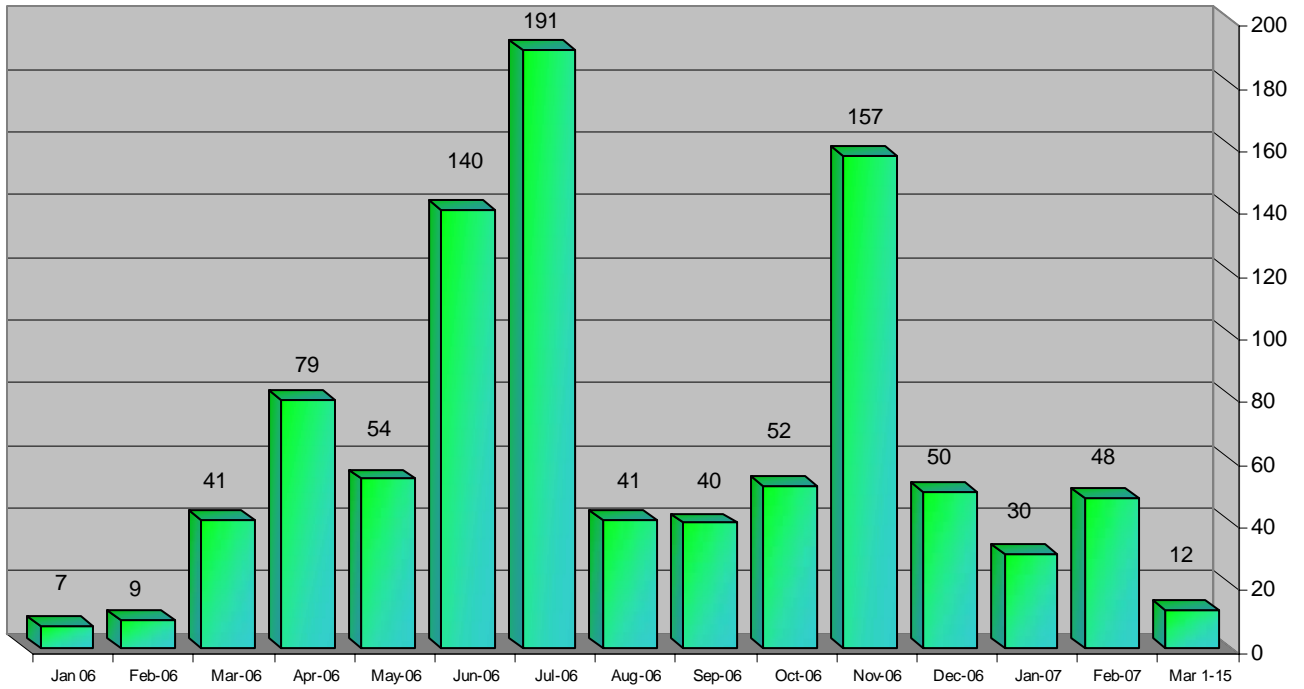
Palestinian connection and that he condemned interference in internal Lebanese affairs (LBC TV, March 13).

Statistical Data

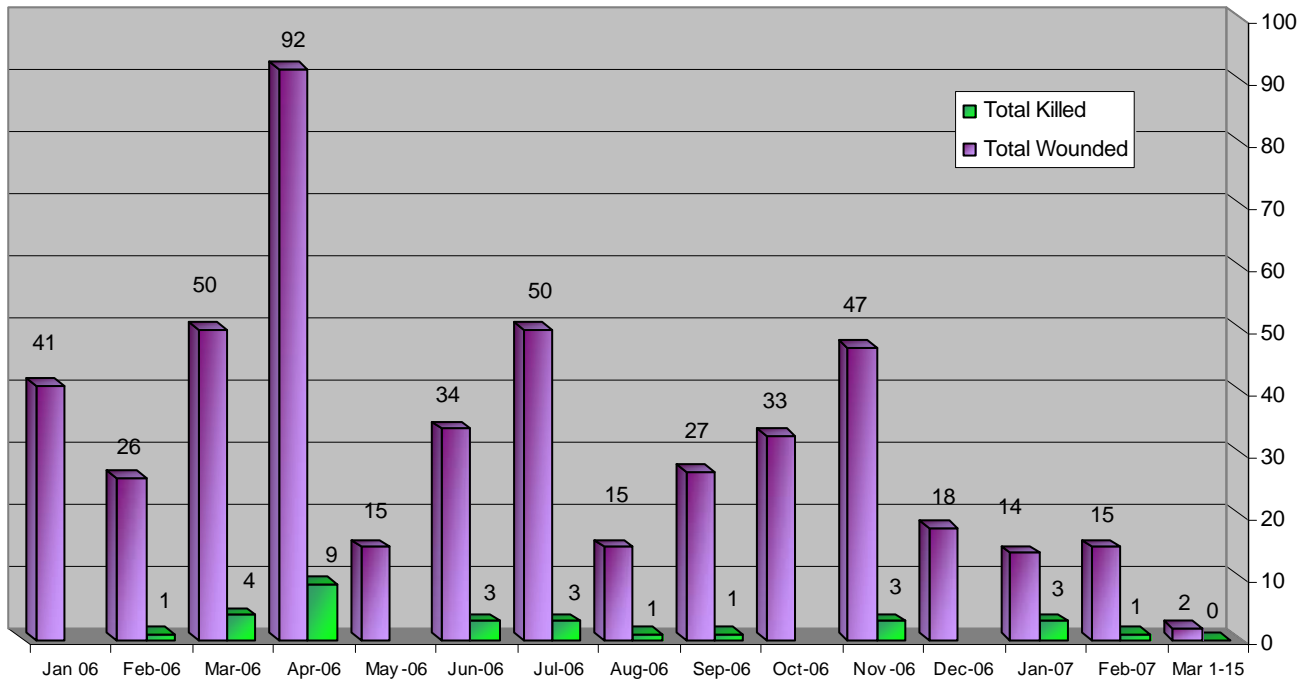
Monthly distribution of attacks



Monthly distribution of rocket hits



Monthly distribution of Israeli casualties



Olmert-Abu Mazen Meeting

- Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert hosted a meeting with Abu Mazen at his home in Jerusalem. The two discussed political developments following the Mecca Accord, as well as the release of Gilad Shalit, the abducted Israeli soldier, and additional measures to ease the conditions of the Palestinian population. It was reported that both sides agreed that the Saudi Arabian initiative provided a basis for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and for the implementation of the Road Map.¹ The two agreed to meet again (Ynet, March 11).



The Olmert-Abu Mazen meeting (Palestinian TV, March 11)

The Internal Palestinian Arena

A Palestinian national unity government is agreed on

- After negotiations which lasted a number of weeks, designated Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya and PA chairman Abu Mazen agreed on the details for the establishment of a Palestinian national unity government based on the February 9 Mecca Accord. The Palestinian Legislative Council gave a vote of confidence to the government's

¹ The Saudi Arabian initiative is essentially an announcement of the agreements reached at the Arab summit meeting held on March 28, 2002, which became the Saudi peace plan for a pan-Arab initiative. It includes Israel's withdrawal to its June 4, 1967 borders, a solution for the refugees according to UN General Assembly Resolution 194 and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state whose capital would be East Jerusalem. In return, the Arab states would reexamine the Arab-Israeli conflict and sign peace agreements with Israel.

Olmert-Abu Mazen Meeting

- Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert hosted a meeting with Abu Mazen at his home in Jerusalem. The two discussed political developments following the Mecca Accord, as well as the release of Gilad Shalit, the abducted Israeli soldier, and additional measures to ease the conditions of the Palestinian population. It was reported that both sides agreed that the Saudi Arabian initiative provided a basis for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and for the implementation of the Road Map.¹ The two agreed to meet again (Ynet, March 11).



The Olmert-Abu Mazen meeting (Palestinian TV, March 11)

The Internal Palestinian Arena

A Palestinian national unity government is agreed on

After negotiations which lasted a number of weeks, designated Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya and PA chairman Abu Mazen agreed on the details for the establishment of a Palestinian national unity government based on the February 9 Mecca Accord. The Palestinian Legislative Council gave a vote of confidence to the government's establishment and platform, and the members of the government were sworn in on Saturday, March 17.

¹ The Saudi Arabian initiative is essentially an announcement of the agreements reached at the Arab summit meeting held on March 28, 2002, which became the Saudi peace plan for a pan-Arab initiative. It includes Israel's withdrawal to its June 4, 1967 borders, a solution for the refugees according to UN General Assembly Resolution 194 and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state whose capital would be East Jerusalem. In return, the Arab states would reexamine the Arab-Israeli conflict and sign peace agreements with Israel.

- The proposed platform of the future Palestinian government deals with the following issues: politics, the “[Israeli] occupation,” internal Palestinian security, the Palestinian legal system, “the Palestinian value system,” the economic situation, PA reforms and international relations. The following are the main issues of the national unity government’s proposed platform **which relate to the conflict with Israel**, according to the **first draft** which was sent to the various factions before the vote of confidence. The proposed platform was also posted on Hamas’s Website and the Hamas-affiliated Pal-media news site (both on March 15):

- ✿ The key to regional security and stability is the end of the “Israeli occupation” of “Palestinian territories,” and the recognition of the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination [the term “Palestinian territories” is deliberately not defined and no mention is made of the 1967 borders, so that it may be understood by a Palestinian or Arab reader that Israel is included within the Palestinian territories].

- ✿ The government is committed to protecting the national interests of the Palestinian people as ratified by previous Palestinian national councils and according to basic Palestinian law, the document of national reconciliation (i.e., the prisoners’ document) and decisions reached by Arab summit committees. According to the platform, “on that basis the government honors legitimate international decisions and the agreements signed by the PLO”² (Paragraph 2 of the political section) [the platform uses the term “honors” and **not** “is committed to accept”].

- ✿ The government rejects the idea of the establishment of a Palestinian state with temporary borders because that would decrease the Palestinian people’s legitimate rights.

² The wording is similar to that of the Mecca accord, in which Abu Mazen appealed to Ismail Haniya to honor legitimate international decision and the agreements signed by the PLO, including the decisions made by previous [Palestinian] national councils, the document of national reconciliation (the prisoners’ document) and decisions made at Arab summit meetings. For further information see our February 12 Bulletin entitled “Initial analysis of the agreement reached at Mecca between Fatah and Hamas for the establishment of a Palestinian national unity government,” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/mecca_agreement.pdf.

Initial assessment of paragraphs dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict

- The main purpose of the Palestinian national unity government is to put an end to the violent clashes and anarchy from which the PA has suffered for the last year and to enable a stable, functioning Palestinian government to be formed. Although Hamas continues to control the government, it agreed to give up several key portfolios and allow them to be held by individuals perceived as “independent,” and to give Fatah less important ministries. Politically and ideological, Hamas’s influence is evident in that the new government continues its policies of violence and terrorism and refuses to recognize the right of the State of Israel to exist.
- With relation to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, an initial analysis of the platform (the first, informal version) points up the rhetorical acrobatics and occasional internal contradictions intended to bridge the gaps in the opposing fundamental positions held by Hamas and Abu Mazen. There is also an obvious attempt to end the political and economic pressures exerted by the international community on the new government and at the same time to pacify Hamas supporters in the PA-administered territories, as well as Iran and Syria, both of which support Hamas.
- Despite its convoluted language, **it is clear that two basic demands made by Israel and the International Quartet are not met by the new government’s platform:**⁴

✿ **The end of violence and terrorism:** “resistance” (i.e., violence and terrorism) is defined by the platform as the “legitimate right” of the Palestinians, and will only end when all Palestinian demands have been met, including the most radical and far-reaching, among them the right of the Palestinian refugees to return. That gives for the use of violence and terrorism as permanent, long-term tools in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

✿ **Recognizing the right of the State of Israel to exist:** The new government’s platform goes into detail regarding Palestinian demands from Israel (and the international community), from the release of prisoners to the “end of the occupation” [which may be

⁴ Hamas spokesmen, among them Khaled Mashaal, head of its political bureau, have made it clear that Hamas has no intention of abandoning “resistance” and recognizing Israel.

understood as the “occupation” of all Palestine, i.e., also Israel] and the return of the Palestinian refugees to their lands and property. However, it does not recognize the State of Israel’s right to exist (not even within the 1967 borders) and no mention is made of the concept of two states for two peoples as a basis for all negotiation between Israel and the Palestinians.

✿ **In addition, the platform places heavy constraints on Abu Mazen’s ability to reach agreements and arrangements with Israel and in effect it gives Hamas the ability to sabotage agreements Abu Mazen does reach.** While it determines that the PLO and Abu Mazen have the authority to conduct negotiations with Israel, it also states that any agreement must be ratified by the “new Palestinian national council” or that a referendum be held including Palestinian living in the PA-administered territories and abroad (that is, among Palestinian refugees living in the Arab countries who, it can be assumed, will oppose any agreement that does not include their return to Israel.)

Forming the government

■ The three highest government offices will be held by “independents” who do not formally belong to either Fatah or Hamas. The proposed **foreign minister** is Ziyad Abu Amre, the proposed **finance minister** is Salam Fayyadh (an independent who was previously finance minister and is acceptable to the United States) and the proposed **interior minister** is Hani al-Qawasmi.

■ The post of interior minister (the ministry with control over some of the security forces) was the subject of stubborn negotiations and a central focus of disagreement between Abu Mazen and Hamas. The most probable candidate is Hani Talab al-Qawasmi, whose family comes from Hebron but who was born in the Gaza Strip in 1958. He went to elementary and high school in the Gaza Strip and studied law at Cairo University. He worked in the office of the chief justice of the Shari’ (Islamic) law courts and after that was nominated as head of the department of administrative affairs of the interior ministry.



Hani Talab al-Qawasmi (Pal-media, March 14)

The renewal of violent clashes

- During the period between the signing of the Mecca Accord and the announcement that a national unity government would be established, there was a renewal of violent clashes between Hamas and Fatah in the Gaza Strip. They continued almost until the establishment of the government was announced. Conspicuous among them was the killing of Muhammad Kafarneh, a senior Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades operative who was killed in crossfire with Fatah operatives in Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip on March 11. Following his death violent clashes broke out between operatives of the Executive Force (and Hamas's operative wing on one hand) and Fatah operatives (and the national security forces). At the same time the propaganda war between the rival sides was reinstated, each accusing the other of responsibility for the violence and of attempting to destroy the Mecca Accord.

BBC correspondent abducted in Gaza City

- Alan Johnston, a BBC correspondent who has been covering the PA for the past three years, was abducted in Gaza City by four armed men who waited in their car to ambush him. He was apparently abducted as the result of internal quarrels between rival groups which wanted to use him as bargaining chip in their dealings with the PA. Ismail Haniya spoke to the head of the BBC for the Middle East and assured him that the security apparatus was working to find Johnson (Nidaa al-Quds Website, March 13)

Khaled Mashaal's travels

- Khaled Mashaal, Damascus-based head of Hamas's political bureau, continued his travels to market the Mecca Accord and went from Malaysia to Iran. During his visit there Iranian president Ahmadinejad appealed to him to put an end to the PA's internal strife and to

continue with the “resistance” (i.e., violence and terrorism) against Israel (Reuters, March 6). However, he also noted that Hamas had not abandoned the “resistance” and that Hamas had no commitment to stop launching rockets at Israeli settlements in the western Negev. From Tehran Khaled Mashaal went to Yemen on March 10, where he met with the Yemen’s president and prime minister.



Left: Khaled Mashaal and Ahmadinejad (Al-‘Alam TV, March 6); right: Khaled Mashaal and the president of Yemen (Yemenite News Agency, March 10)

Hamas: take hostages

- At a meeting of *Wa’ed*, the association of released prisoners, held at a mosque in Khan Yunis, **Fathi Hamad**, a Hamas member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, **called for the abduction of Israeli soldiers to force Israel to release Palestinian prisoners**. He said that the abduction of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit had sent shock waves through Israel (Ma’an News Agency, March 9). His statement and the attempts made by Hamas squads to abduct Israeli civilians at the ‘Eli junction north of Ramallah,⁵ illustrate that for Hamas abductions are “justified” and that other such attempts may be made while negotiations are being held for the release of Gilad Shalit, abducted from Kerem Shalom nine months ago.

⁵ For further information see our March 13 Bulletin entitled “Attempts to abduct Israelis continue: at the ‘Eli junction, north of Ramallah, a Hamas squad’s attempt to abduct Israelis was prevented,” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ct_e12mar07.pdf.