



May 18, 2007

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

**Hamas rocket attacks on Sderot and the  
western Negev continue on the  
backdrop of the extremely violent  
confrontations between Hamas and  
Fatah in the Gaza Strip<sup>1</sup>  
(Update for the May 16 “News of the  
Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”)**

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**A house in Sderot destroyed by a direct rocket hit (Photo courtesy of Sderot security staff, May 16)**

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<sup>1</sup> As of 3 p.m., Thursday, May 17, 2007.

## Overview

1.  **Hamas' rocket attack against Sderot and the western Negev settlements which began on May 15 continues. So far 74 hits** have been identified, causing scores of injuries (most of them slight or shock-related). The attack has been accompanied by Hamas boasts of having “successfully pulverized” the Israeli settlements and seriously upset the daily lives of the local population.

2. Behind the rocket attack is the **significant increase in the violent clashes between Hamas and Fatah**, which have caused approximately 50 deaths since May 13. Hamas dominance has been obvious and there has been a loss of the leadership's control over the operatives in the field on both sides. Hamas' provocative attack on Israel is **clearly an attempt to draw attention away from the violent internal Palestinian conflict and turn it toward the confrontation with Israel**, as Hamas has **admitted** in its public statements.

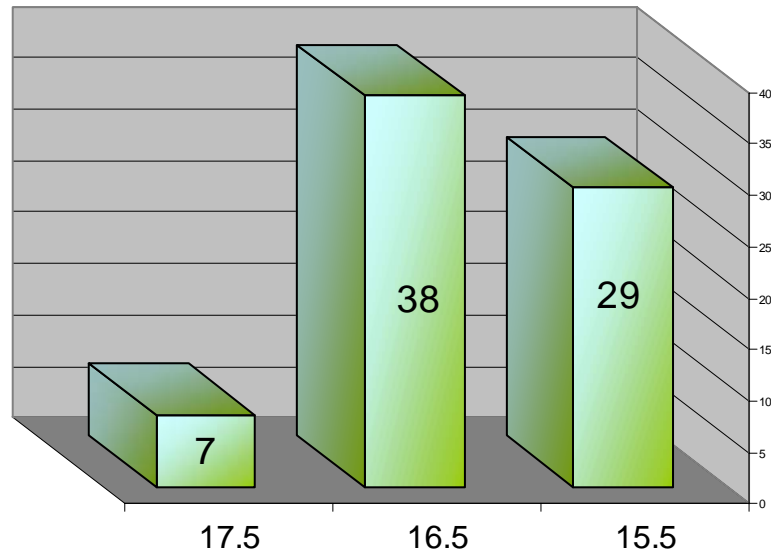
3. So far, Israel's military response has been limited to pin-point attacks on rocket fire and rocket launchers, and against the terrorist infrastructure, avoiding any broad ground operation in the Gaza Strip. At the same time efforts are being made to aid and support Sderot residents, including temporarily moving them out of the city as a break from the attacks.

## The current situation

4. On May 16 and during the morning of May 17 Hamas' rocket and mortar attacks on the western Negev settlements continued. Most of the fire was directed at the city of **Sderot** and the rest at other settlements in the western Negev. On May 16 and 17 (as of 3 p.m.) **45** hits had been identified in Israeli

territory. Since the attack began on May 15, there has been **a total of 74 identified hits.**<sup>2</sup>

## The daily distribution of identified hits



5. On May 16 one woman in Sderot was injured by rocket fire and a number of residents were treated for shock. Property was also damaged. A rocket fired on May 17 hit a schoolroom in one of the western Negev settlements during an exam. Two civilians were slightly injured and several were treated for shock. The Defense Ministry is making arrangements for Sderot residents interested in leaving the city for a vacation to do so, as is Israeli businessman Arkady Gaydamak.

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<sup>2</sup> The number refers to identified hits only. In our assessment, the actual number of rockets fired was greater.



**Evacuating the wounded from Sderot (Photo courtesy of Sderot security staff, May 16)**

## **Hamas' Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades claim responsibility**

**6. Hamas' Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades claimed responsibility for most of the attacks.** The movement issued statements saying it had fired 60 rockets during previous 24 hours. Some of the other Palestinian terrorist organizations claimed responsibility for launching a few of the rockets.

7. The Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades statements **boasted of the “successful pulverization” of the Israeli settlements and of having brought daily life in Sderot and other western Negev settlements to a standstill.** One statement boasted that the rocket fire had injured dozens of Israelis and that as a result schools in the “Sderot settlement” had been closed (Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades Website, May 16). **The statements proclaimed the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades' intention to continue and even escalate its rocket fire** (Siraj Al-Aqsa TV, May 15; Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades Website, May 17).

**8. One Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades statement distinctly linked the rocket fire into Israeli territory with the Hamas-Fatah confrontation in the Gaza Strip:** “While the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades

are pulverizing the Zionist settlements...the unbridled criminal mercenaries in the Palestinian arena [i.e., Fatah and the security forces] are sowing death, destruction and ruin..." (Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades Website, May 16). Another statement called upon the "agents" (i.e., Fatah) to focus their efforts "against those who derive benefit from the events in Gaza [i.e., Israel]" (*Ibid.*).

## **Israel's response**

9. On the afternoon of May 16 Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert held security consultations to discuss the deterioration of the situation in the Gaza Strip. Present were Defense Minister Amir Peretz, Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh, Foreign Minister Tsipi Livni and the heads of the defense establishment. **It was decided "to allow the IDF and the security forces to carry out a series of counterterrorist activities and to hit those firing the rockets and their commanders, to disrupt launch capabilities and to strike at the terrorist infrastructure.** The prime minister made it clear that Israel cannot continue to show restraint when its citizens are being attacked" (Prime Minister's Office Website, May 17).

10. **On the ground:** On May 16 the Israeli Air Force struck an Executive Force headquarters near Rafah, killing four terrorist-operatives and wounding approximately 20. Considerable damage was done to the building. On the same day, two members of an Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades rocket-launching squad were killed near the Jabaliya refugee camp (north of Gaza City). In the afternoon of May 17, an Executive Force building in Gaza City was struck from the air, as were vehicles belonging to terrorist-operatives.

## **The internal Palestinian arena**

11. The rocket attack on Sderot and western Negev settlements was carried out on the backdrop of **the continuing violent confrontations between Hamas and Fatah in the Gaza Strip**. They include are mutual assassinations; exchanges of fire; raids on buildings; and ambushes of vehicles. **The worsening violence has led to a sharp increase in the number of casualties**: since the morning of May 16, 30 operatives have been killed, **50 since May 13**, most of them Fatah and security services members. During the past 24 hours the violence has focused on Gaza City, and throughout, it has been clear that **Hamas has the upper hand**.



**A masked Palestinian shooting at a building Hamas operatives are located (beirut.indymedia Website, May 17).**

12. The following were the most prominent events of the past 24 hours:

**A. Mortars and machine gun fire was directed at the home of Rashid Abi Shbaq**, the commander of internal security, in Gaza City. Squads of armed Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades and Executive Force operatives then broke into the house. At least four of Shbaq's bodyguards were killed and eight wounded. Rashid Abu Shbaq was not there at the time.

**B. Four members of Palestinian National Security were killed** during exchanges of fire in the Saraya security compound of Gaza City.

C. **Five Hamas operatives were mistakenly killed** by Izzedine al-Qassam Brigade fire after they had been arrested and taken in a Fatah vehicle. Two Fatah operatives were also killed in the incident.

D. **Dozens of foreign correspondents were trapped** in a media center in Gaza City **by the Hamas-Fatah gunfire**. According to one version, the building was attacked to prevent Hamas from holding a press conference.



**The trapped correspondents (Al-Jazeera TV, May 16)**

E. On the night of May 15 **a convoy of the Egyptian security delegation and the committee monitoring the implementation of the unsuccessful ceasefire agreement between Fatah and Hamas was attacked**. There were activists from both Hamas and Fatah in the convoy. Hamas accused Hamas and the Presidential Guard of being responsible for the attack.

F. **The Islamic University in Gaza City** again became a focus for gunfire. A Presidential Guard spokesman accused the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades of having fired mortars from the university at the presidential residence. He accused Hamas of having “turned the Islamic University into a military camp” (Dunya al-Wattan Website, May 16).

**13. During the confrontations, the helplessness of the political leadership of both sides in dealing with events on the ground was made evident.** The calls of both Palestinian Authority Chairman Abu Mazen,

Hamas political bureau chief Khaled Mashaal and prime minister Ismail Haniya for a cease fire had no real effect on the operatives in the field. In addition, the efforts of the Egyptian security delegation in the Gaza Strip failed to calm the situation and bring about a ceasefire. At 8 p.m. on May 16 Hamas announced a unilateral ceasefire, but it was violated immediately and the clashes continued. At the same time the rival sides are **waging a mutual mud-slinging campaign**, each accusing the other of being responsible for the violence (including personal accusations against both Abu Mazen and Ismail Haniya).



**An Omayya Joha cartoon (Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda, May 17)**