



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

News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation

December 1-15, 2007

Hamas marks its 20th anniversary...



A mass rally in Gaza to mark the 20th anniversary of Hamas' founding (Muhammad Salem for Reuters, December 15).

...and the rocket fire continues.



A house in Sderot hit by a rocket (Amir Cohen for Reuters, December 13).

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Overview

- Rocket fire **increased** during the first half of December, peaking with a barrage of 26 rockets on December 12 aimed at Sderot and western Negev towns and villages. Intensive mortar shell fire also continued. The IDF continued intensive activities against the rocket fire and the terrorist organization infrastructure.
- Hamas held a mass rally in Gaza City to celebrate the 20th anniversary of its founding. Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya and the other speakers stressed that “resistance” (i.e., terrorism) and not negotiations would liberate “Palestine” and return the Palestinian refugees to their houses. Khaled Mashal, chairman of the Hamas “political” bureau in Damascus, referred to the “resistance” as Hamas’ central achievement and noted that the strategy of “resistance” would enable the movement to “liberate” all Palestine and realize “the right to return.”

Important Events

Rocket and mortar shell fire

■ During the first two weeks of December there was a **significant increase** in rocket fire at western Negev towns and villages. Sixty-six rocket hits were identified (compared with 65 during the entire month of November).

■ Most of the rockets were fired between December 12 and 14 (peaking with 26 identified hits on December 12), most of them in and around Sderot. On December 13 a direct rocket hit destroyed a private residence, critically injuring a woman living there. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for most of the rocket launches; the rest were claimed by Fatah-Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and the Popular Resistance Committees.

■ At the same time, mortar fire continued for a total of 68 shells as opposed to 100 during the entire month of November. On December 3 a barrage of several mortar shells was fired, one of which fell close to a military infirmary near Kibbutz Nahal Oz, slightly wounding four IDF soldiers. On December 4 an IDF soldier was slightly wounded near Kissufim by mortar shrapnel (IDF spokesman, December 4).

Stabbing attempt prevented at Gush Etzion junction

■ On December 11 a stabbing was prevented at the Gush Etzion junction southeast of Bethlehem. A Palestinian woman carrying a knife approached the junction and attempted to attack an IDF soldiers. The others soldiers present overcame and detained her. She was transferred to the security forces for interrogation

Counterterrorist Activities

Gaza Strip

■ On December 11 the IDF carried out intensive activities against the terrorist organizations in the region of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza strip. Palestinian operatives opened fire on the forces and launched anti-tank missiles. The soldiers returned fire. Two IDF soldiers were slightly injured and evacuated to a hospital

■ The following events also occurred:

✿ **December 13:** The Israeli Air Force attacked a vehicle carrying a rocket launching squad of four PIJ operatives near the Zeitun neighborhood east of Gaza City.

✿ **December 12:** Anti-tank missiles were fired at an IDF force conducting an action west of the Sufa Crossing, slightly injuring two soldiers. In response, the building from which the missiles were fired was shelled, killing three Palestinian terrorist operatives.

✿ **December 11:** IDF forces attacked an armed terrorist squad in the northern Gaza Strip in response to mortar shell fire at Kibbutz Nahal Oz. The IAF attacked a Hamas position in Dir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip, killing three Hamas operatives.

✿ **December 5:** The IAF attacked a rocket-launching squad north of the town of Beit Lahia, killing three Hamas operatives.

✿ **December 4:** The IAF attacked a Hamas position in Dir al-Balah, killing one Hamas operative and wounding two others.

✿ **December 3:** An IDF force operating in the northern Gaza Strip identified three armed terrorist operatives approaching. The force opened fire.

✿ **December 2:** An IDF armored force attacked a squad launching mortar shells near the security fence in the region of Sajaiya in the northern Gaza Strip.

✿ **December 1:** The IAF attacked a group of armed terrorist operatives east of Khan Yunis, killing two Hamas terrorists.

Judea and Samaria

■ The IDF continued its counterterrorist activities in Judea and Samaria, detaining several dozen terrorist operatives and uncovering weapons. On the night of December 2 an intensive action was carried out, during which 42 individuals suspected of terrorist activities in the regions of Hebron, Nablus and Bethlehem were detained (IDF spokesman, December 3).

During an action to detain wanted terrorists in Bethlehem on December 5, a Palestinian policeman was killed and several others were wounded.



Weapons uncovered during an IDF action at Ras al-Tira southeast of Qalqilya (Photo courtesy of the IDF spokesman, December 5).

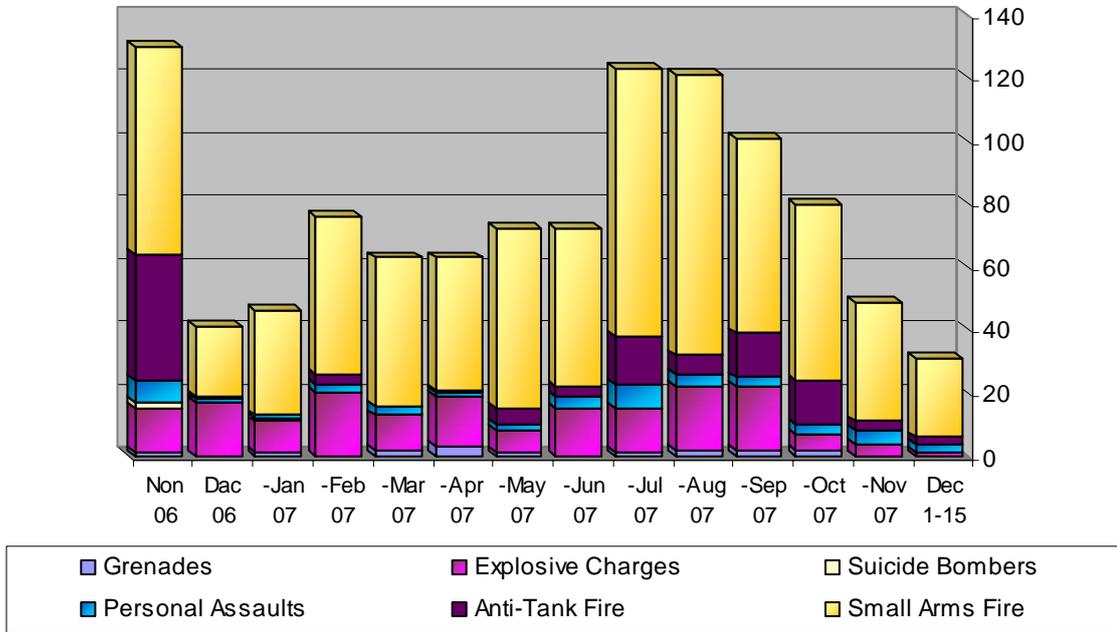
The security forces detain the terrorist squad responsible for the shooting attack near Kedumim which killed Ido Zoldan

■ The security forces detained the terrorist squad responsible for the drive-by shooting near the village of Funduq southwest of Kedumim on November 19. The shooters killed Ido Zoldan, a resident of the settlement of Shavei Shomron. The squad was comprised of three Fatah operatives, two of them members of the Palestinian Authority's National Security Service. Fatah-Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade claimed responsibility for the attack.¹

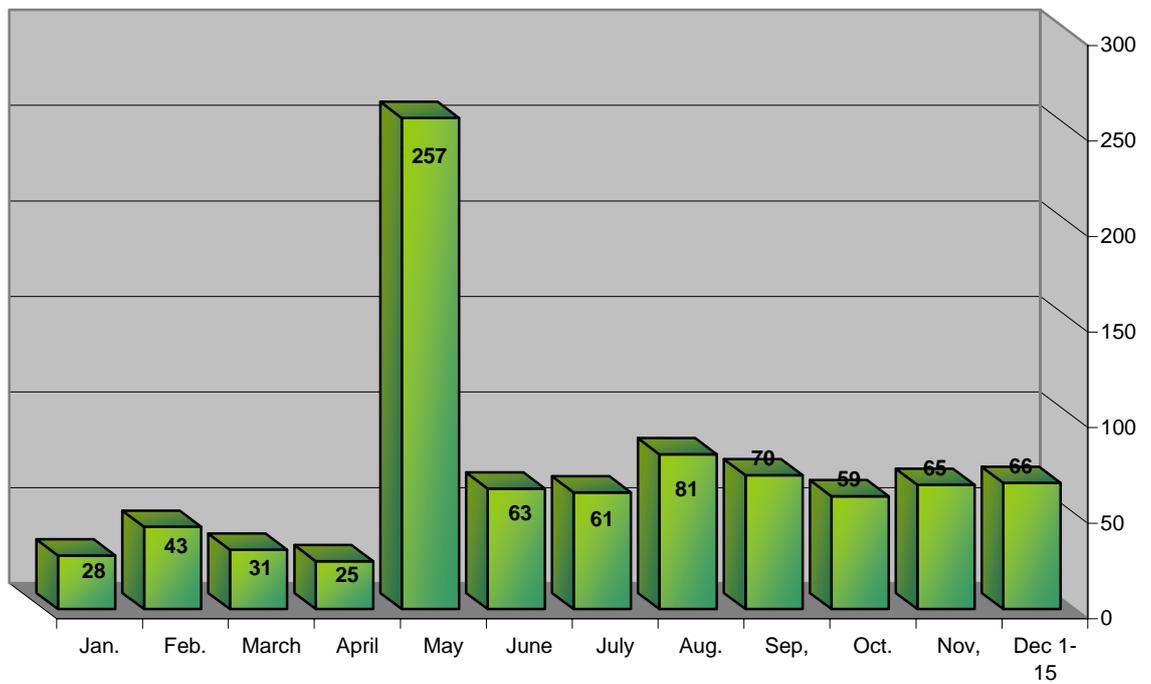
¹ For further information see our December 4, 2007 Bulletin entitled "The Israeli security forces detained a terrorist squad of three Fatah operatives, two of whom were members of the Palestinian national security services" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/ct_31207e.htm and http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ct_31207e.pdf.

Statistical Data

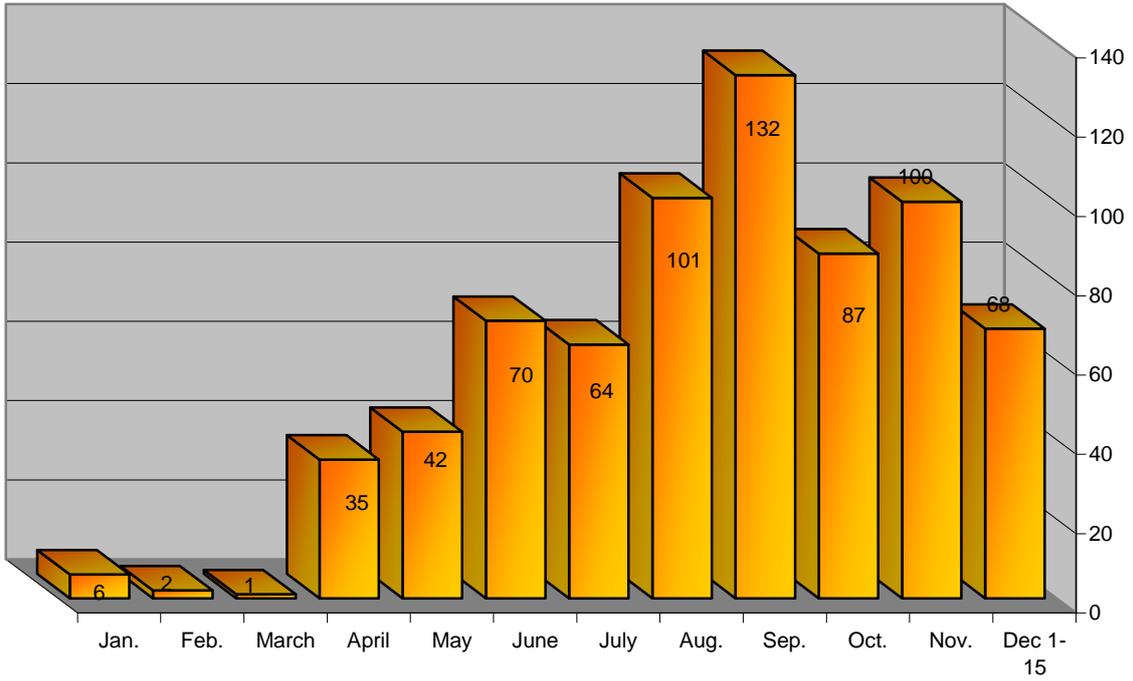
Monthly distribution of attacks



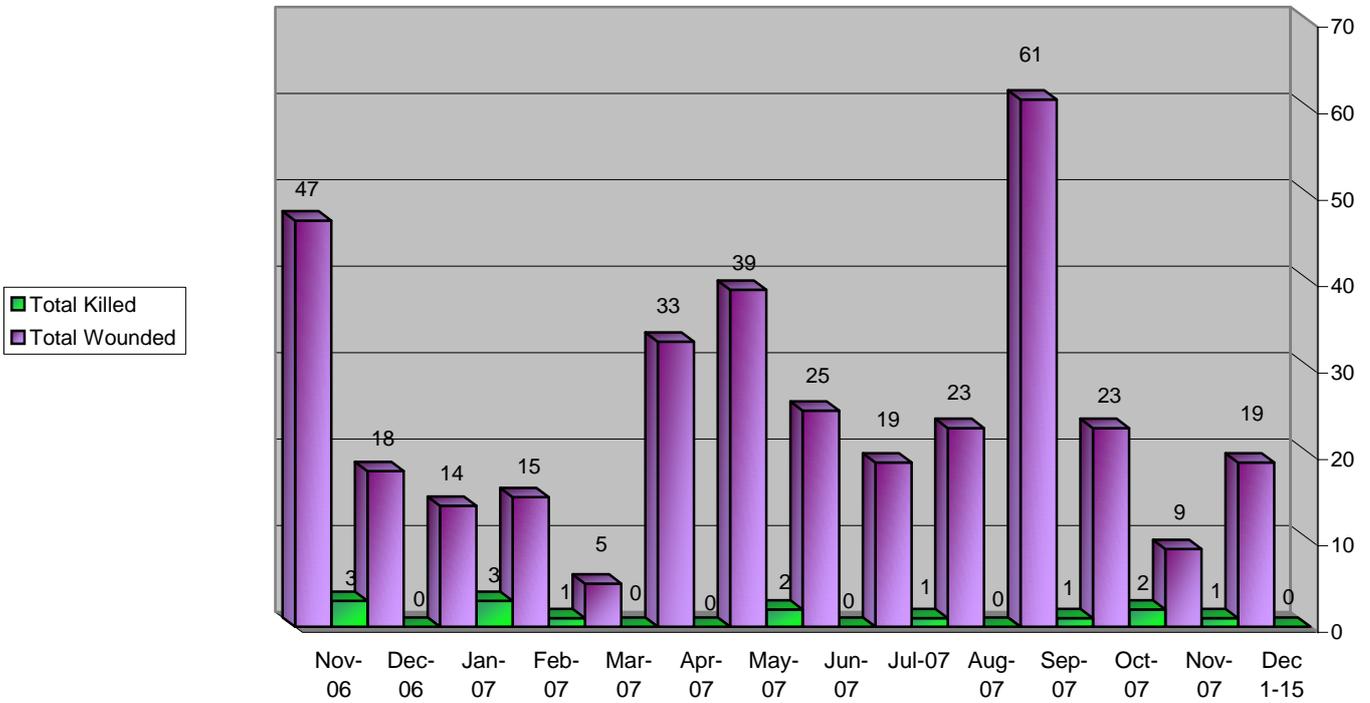
Monthly distribution of identified rocket hits



Monthly distribution of identified mortar shell hits



Monthly distribution of Israeli casualties



The Gaza Strip Crossings

Egypt allows Saudi Arabian-bound pilgrims through the Rafah Crossing

- On December 3 a group of civilians from the Gaza Strip crossed through Rafah into Egypt, as did other groups a few days later. A total of 2,200 Palestinians civilians, among them scores of Hamas operatives, crossed into Egypt. The event was coordinated between Ismail Haniya's government and the Egyptian security authorities. Dozens of buses waiting for the Palestinians on the Egyptian side, where they received visas for Saudi Arabia.
- The Arab media said it set a precedent for the Hamas government since the takeover of the Gaza Strip. Sami Abu Zuhri, Hamas spokesman, said that the pilgrims' exit was an important break out of the "siege" of the Gaza Strip and an important precedent which could be used to effect the permanent opening of the Rafah Crossing (Palestine-info Website, December 4).



Left: Palestinian pilgrims at the Rafah Crossing. Right: Buses on the Egyptian side waiting for them (Al-Aqsa TV, December 4).

Reduction in the fuel supply

- The lack of fuel in the Gaza Strip intensified after the Israeli Dor Alon company reduced its supplies of gasoline and diesel oil by 50% because of the Palestinian fuel authorities' accumulated debts of millions of shekels (November 28-30). Following the reduction, the owners of the fuel and gas companies in the Gaza Strip decided to stop the transfers from storehouses belong to the authority to gas stations throughout the Gaza Strip, beginning at the

end of November, creating a serious shortage. The shortage ended when they announced that they would, in fact, supply fuel to the gas stations (Ramattan News Agency, December 6).

Israel and the Palestinians after the Annapolis Meeting

Palestinian criticism follows the announcement of a tender for construction in the Har Homa neighborhood in south Jerusalem

■ Senior members of the PA were harshly critical of Israel after a tender was issued for the construction of 307 new dwelling units in the Har Homa neighborhood in south Jerusalem. Politically, the PA tried to encourage the international community to exert pressure on Israel. **Abu Mazen** sent a letter to the American administration demanding that Israel be forced to stop construction. **Saeb Erikat**, head of the PLO's negotiating team, sent letters to members of the International Quartet deploring the decision, which he called a dangerous violation of the road map (Al-Hayat Al Jadeeda, December 6).

■ On December 12 the first meeting of Israeli and Palestinian negotiators was held since Annapolis, under the shadow of the rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip. Israeli and Palestinian media reported that the atmosphere was charged. Both sides avoided raising the core issues agreed upon at the Annapolis meeting.

■ The Israeli team, headed by **Foreign Minister Tsippi Livni**, raised the problems of security in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. She said that Israel was extremely concerned about the involvement of activists of Palestinian security service in the drive-by shooting on November 19, who killed an Israeli civilian. She demanded that the Palestinians deal with the security problem (Barak Ravid, *Haaretz*, December 13).

■ **Palestinian Prime Minister Abu Alaa'** said that the Palestinian government demanded the Israelis stop all activity in the settlements, including construction for natural population increase. He added that the Palestinian delegation demanded that Israel repeal the decision to construct 307 new dwelling units in Har Homa. He said the Palestinian demanded that Israel stop its continued attacks in the Gaza Strip (Wafa News Agency, December 12), **completely ignoring the rocket attacks against Israel.**

■ The day after the meeting Israel Defense Minister Ehud Barak met with Palestinian Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad and Tony Blair, the International Quartet envoy to the Middle East, to discuss ways of improving the living standards and economy of the PA. The three expressed support of developing the abilities of the Palestinian municipalities to provide vital services, such as water and electricity (Quartet Envoy Website, December 15).

■ On December 16-17 a conference is expected to be held in Paris to discuss donations to the PA. American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is supposed to attend. Sources in the American administration said that the United States would promise to contribute between \$500 and \$600 million over a period of three years (Reuters, December 15).

Release of prisoners

■ On December 3, as a goodwill gesture to the PA, Israel released 429 Palestinian prisoners, 21 of them Gazans and the others residents of Judea and Samaria. The reactions of the Palestinians were mixed. While satisfaction was expressed, there was criticism of the IDF's continuing detentions and of the small number of prisoners released Al-Tayyib Abd al-Rahim, the general secretary of the presidential bureau, said that "if there is a desire to have regional peace, all the Palestinian prisoners must be released" (Al-Ayyam, December 4).



**Reception for released prisoners at the Muqataa in Ramallah
(Palestinian TV, December 3).**

The Internal Palestinian Arena

Hamas mass rally to mark the anniversary of the movement's founding

■ Hamas marked the 20th anniversary of its founding with a mass rally in Gaza City, attended by between 100,000 and 200,000 Palestinians who had come from all over the Strip. Fifteen potential female suicide bombers also took part, wearing explosive belts (Palestine-info Website, December 16).

■ **Musheir al-Masri**, member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, conducted the rally. In his opening remarks he praised the “resistance” (terrorism) and warned that if the IDF entered the Gaza Strip it would turn into a graveyard for the soldiers. He added that “the Jews have to return to where they came from, we are digging graves for them...We will remain firm until the liberation of Palestine, all Palestine, from the [Mediterranean] sea to the [Jordan] river...” (Al-Aqsa TV, December 14).



Potential female suicide bombers at a Hamas rally in the Gaza Strip (Suhail Salem for Reuters, December 15).

■ Later, speeches were given by Hamas government Prime Minister Ismail Haniya and senior Hamas and PIJ figures. They noted the firm refusal to recognize Israel and their adherence to the “resistance” (terrorism and violence) as the means to liberate all the land of Palestine. Ismail Haniya said the following:

❁ **The Annapolis conference was a fraud:** its objective and that of all such conferences was to harm “Palestinian rights,” especially the “right to return” and the rights to Jerusalem. The Palestinians, he said, were firm in their conviction to continue

the struggle, even if it took decades: “We will never give up our land, Palestine, Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa... We will not stab the resistance in the back.”

❁ **Terrorism is the way to liberate Palestine:** “The option of the resistance and jihad is the shortest way to liberate Palestine, and to restore Jerusalem and Palestinian rights. Not the path of negotiations, not the path of bargaining...” Ismail Haniya related to the “resistance’s” “achievements,” including Israel’s unconditional withdrawal from south Lebanon in 2000 and its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip “under the blows of the resistance” in 2005.

❁ **The “resistance” (terrorism) has also had victories over the Americans:** “In 2007 we saw the genuine beginning of an American defeat in Iraq and Afghanistan..., [caused by] the firm stance of Iraq and the resistance of the Iraqis.” Ismail Haniya said that he was sending a greeting from the land of Palestine to the “heroic resistance” in Iraq and wished the Palestinian people “a victory over the great Satan [i.e., the United States in Iranian terminology], which wanted to pollute the Arab-Muslim region...”

❁ **Hamas’ strategy was based on the refusal to waive “Palestinian rights,” the most important of which were the refugees’ “right to return” and the “right of resistance.”** The right of return meant “the return of millions of our deported people” from all the countries they were living in to their lands and houses.

❁ He said that realizing “the right of resistance” would prevent the implementation of the first stage of the road map.



Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades terrorist operatives undergoing training in the Gaza Strip (Al-Aqsa TV, December 9).

Preventing public events initiated by Hamas in Judea and Samaria

- The Palestinian security services prevented Hamas from holding public events in Judea and Samaria to mark the movement's anniversary. Members of the security services deployed in Nablus, Tulkarm, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron and other cities confiscated signs and flyers and detained Hamas activists. On the morning of December 15 several hundred security service personnel deployed in the Nablus as part of the security program (Ma'an News Agency, December 15). Hamas' response was that "the refusal to allow the ceremonies and main rally of the West Bank are a clear indication that the Fayyad government and its security services have been outlawing the movement for several months" (Palestine-info Website, December 14).

Khaled Mashal's speech marking Hamas' 20th anniversary

- Khaled Mashal, head of Hamas' "political" bureau in Damascus gave a speech in honor of the 20th anniversary of the movement's founding. His main points were the following:
 - ✿ **The resistance, i.e. terrorism, is Hamas' main achievement:** Since the movement was founded in 1987, "it restored the honor of the option of resistance" against many others, who believed in "the option of an arrangement and negotiations." Hamas created "new models" of heroism, sacrifice and suicide bombings, and made its mark on the first and second intifadas. The lesson Hamas taught Israel, the Palestinian people and the world was that "the land [of "Palestine"] will only be liberated by the rifle... and the sacrifices of the jihad fighters..."
 - ✿ **Rejection of negotiations:** The objective of all political initiatives is to rescue Israel from its crises. They are meant to "conspire against the resistance and put down the Palestinian rifle..." The Annapolis meeting was useless. The gaps between Israel and the Palestinians on various core issues cannot be bridged. The danger of the meeting was that Israel viewed it as support for more aggression in the Gaza Strip, more collective sanctions and a way of forcing the PA and the security services to use force to suppress the "resistance" in the West Bank.

✿ **Praise for Hamas' welfare network:** One of Hamas' achievements is the welfare and economic services it provides for the Palestinian people through the money given by Arab and Islamic sources. The money was not stolen [hint to the PA headed by Abu Mazen], but rather used to build universities, mosques, hospitals and clubs and to undertake charity projects.

✿ **Hamas' objectives:** The “Palestinian rights” which Hamas seeks to achieve are the liberation of “Palestine,” full sovereignty over the entire region and its air space, the liberation of Jerusalem and the realization of “the right to return.” Hamas rejects all temporary solutions or the establishment of a country within temporary borders and will not submit to pressure or threats.

✿ He ended with the issue of the **abducted Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit**. He repeated with a demand to release Palestinian prisoners [without mentioning a number] and threatened that “**those who brought Gilad Shalit will bring others, will bring another Gilad Shalit.**” He said Hamas was willing to release Gilad Shalit “today, not tomorrow, but in return for the price asked.”

Attempts to promote a dialogue between Fatah and Hamas

■ Saudi Arabia and Egypt renewed their efforts to rehabilitate the Abu Mazen-Hamas political partnership. The Palestinian media also reported that a number of meetings recently took place between Fatah and Hamas representatives. Abu Mazen and senior figures in the PA repeated that there would be no negotiations with Hamas until it returned to the status quo ante before the military takeover of the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, Ismail Haniya and Khaled Mashal called on Fatah to hold a dialogue with Hamas without preconditions.

■ On the ground the tension between Fatah and Hamas increased when a hand grenade exploded on December 14 during the funeral of a Fatah activist in the Gaza Strip who had been killed by an IAF attack. The grenade killed four of the mourners. Fatah accused Hamas of having thrown the grenade, while Hamas claimed that it fell from the hand of one of the funeral's participants. Abu Mazen denounced the tossing of the grenade and announced a day of national mourning.

The Fayyad government continues to act against the Hamas-affiliated “charitable societies” in Judea and Samaria

- The Salaam Fayyad government continues to exert pressure on the “charitable societies” in Judea and Samaria on which Hamas’ civilian network rests. On December 11 Ma’an News Agency in Nablus reported that Endowments Minister Sheikh Jamal Bowatna had decided to stop the work of all the “charitable society” workers on the West Bank (most of which are affiliated with Hamas) as of December 31, 2007. He declared the board of directors set up by the “charitable societies” as null and void.

- According to another December 11 report from the Ma’an News Agency, Hassan Tahbawab, chairman of the “charitable societies” fund, said that 92 societies had been merged into 11 main ones in the various districts of the West Bank. The Jerusalem suburbs committee, he said, had been transferred directly to the charity fund in the Ministry of Endowments.

- The Hamas movement on the West Bank issued a statement strongly condemning the endowment minister’s decision and his remarks about having uncovered the theft of funds at the “charitable societies.” The statement accused Bowatna of baseless slander and of firing most of the endowments ministry workers. It also said that his decision would stop the work of the “charitable societies” and put an end to the vital services they provide for the Palestinians (Palestine-info Website, December 12).