



Intelligence and Terrorism
Information Center
Israel Intelligence Heritage
and Commemoration Center

News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation

January 1-8, 2008



An IDF soldier standing in an arms store in the Old City in Nablus, which contained a weapons laboratory (Photo courtesy of the IDF spokesman, January 5, 2008).

OVERVIEW

- With President Bush's visit approaching, there has been a rise in the quantity of rocket fire into Israel. In one instance a standard 122 mm rocket fell **in northern Ashqelon**, the farthest a terrorist rocket has hit Israel from the Gaza Strip since rocket fire began seven years ago. The attempt made by a male and female Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist operatives to lay a charge north of the Strip near the security fence was prevented by the IDF. Two rockets were fired from Lebanon at Shlomi in the Western Galilee, the second time since the end of the second Lebanon war.
- The Israeli security forces continued their counterterrorist activities in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria. A broad operation was carried out in **Nablus** during which wanted terrorist operatives were detained and a laboratory was uncovered in the Old City (Kasbah). It contained an explosive belt, rockets in the first stages of preparation and weapons. The results of the operation make it clear that **Nablus continues as a focal point of anti-Israel terrorist activity** despite the security activities of the Palestinian services, which to a certain extent have managed to enforce law and order.

IMPORTANT EVENTS

Rocket fire increases

- The new year began with **a rise in rocket fire**. Over the January 4-5 weekend a barrage of **18 rockets** was fired, 13 of which fell in Israeli territory. On January 5 five hits were identified in Sderot, one of them in the city cemetery. The total for the past week was 26 identified hits.
- On the morning of January 3 a rocket was launched from the northern Gaza Strip at the **northern part of Ashqelon**. It was the **longest range any** rocket fired by a terrorist organization in the Gaza Strip had ever achieved. It was a **standard 122 mm rocket** with an unusual structure and had a maximum range of 20 kilometers (12.4 miles). It was equipped with an impact fuse manufactured in 2007, indicating that **it had been smuggled into the Gaza Strip last year**.
- The terrorist operative wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command, the Jihad Jibril Brigades, claimed responsibility for the rocket (Al-Aqsa TV, January 3). The PFLP-GC is a small, **Syrian-oriented** organization whose leader, Ahmed Jibril, operates from Damascus. The organization does not enjoy a strong foothold in the Gaza Strip. The PIJ and the Popular Resistance Committees also claimed joint responsibility for the rocket. They issued a statement claiming that they would “not be satisfied with Ashqelon and Sderot” (Sawt al-Haq Website, January 3).



The rocket fired at Ashqelon, from a PFLP-Gaza City video clip claiming responsibility (Al-Aqsa TV, January 3).

Mortar shell fire

- On January 5, 20 mortar shells were fired at the Karni Crossing. One hit was identified near the security fence. Hamas' Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades claimed responsibility (Al-Qassam Website, January 5). Two days previously, the

organization claimed responsibility for firing 10 mortar shells aimed at the Karni Crossing (Al-Qaeda, January 3).

Laying of explosive charge prevented

■ On the morning of January 7 an IDF observation point to the north of the Gaza Strip identified two terrorist operatives, one male and one female, wearing civilian clothing and approaching the security fence near the Erez Crossing, armed and carrying an explosive charge in a bag. The terrorists opened fire at the IDF force which arrived at the scene. The force returned fire, killing them (IDF spokesman, January 7). The PIJ claimed responsibility for the incident (PalMedia Website, January 7).

[Click here for a video of the two terrorists' attempt to lay an explosive charge](#)

Lebanon

Rocket fire from Lebanon at the Israeli town of Shlomi

■ In the early morning of January 8 two rockets hit the town of Shlomi in the Western Galilee near the Lebanese border. So far, no organization has claimed responsibility for the rockets. It was the **second time** rockets were fired into Israel from Lebanon since the second Lebanon war. (On June 17, 2007, three rockets were launched from the Taibeh-Adeissa region at Kiryat Shemonah. The attack was apparently carried out by a group linked to Fatah al-Islam, Al-Qaeda's branch in Lebanon.¹)

COUNTERTERRORIST ACTIVITIES

Counterterrorist Activities

The Gaza Strip

■ The Israeli security forces continued intensive counterterrorist activities around the Gaza Strip. During the past week the IDF attacked a large number of terrorist

¹ For further information see our date Bulletin entitled "Rockets fired on Kiryat Shmona for the first time since the second Lebanon war" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/lebanon_180607e.htm and http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/lebanon_180607e.pdf.

operatives in both ground and air activities. Among the more prominent incidents were the following:

- **January 6:** During an IDF operation against terrorist networks in the central Gaza Strip a soldier was wounded by an anti-tank missile. Four other soldiers were slightly wounded (IDF spokesman's Website, January 6). Hamas' Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades claimed responsibility for the missile attack (Al-Qassam Website, January 6).
- **January 3:** The Israeli Air Force struck a number of targets in the Gaza Strip following rocket fire at north Ashqelon. The targets included a PIJ weapons storehouse, a building belonging to the organization in Gaza City, and a building and post belonging to Hamas in the southern Gaza strip (IDF spokesman's Website, January 6).
- **January 3:** During IDF counterterrorist activities in the southern Gaza strip rifles and anti-tank missiles were fired at the soldiers. They returned shell fire at the sources, killing two terrorist operatives and two Palestinian civilians who were with the terrorists in the house from which the attack came (IDF spokesman's Website, January 6). One of those killed was a Hamas operative (Al-Qassam Website, January 3).
- **January 2:** During an IDF operation in the northern Gaza Strip the force was attacked with anti-tank missiles. Fire was returned from the ground and air, killing six terrorist operatives (IDF spokesman's Website, January 2). During the operation the force hit a vehicle carrying an anti-aircraft cannon. According to Palestinian reports, a senior Hamas operator was killed and an operative from the PRC was critically wounded.
- **January 1:** An IDF force identified a number of armed terrorists near the security fence in the central Gaza Strip and opened fire. A suspicious figure was later identified trying to cross the security fence in the northern Gaza Strip and the soldiers opened fire (IDF spokesman's Website, January 1). According to Palestinian reports two Hamas operatives were killed and four wounded. One of those killed was the commander of the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades' communications unit (Palestinian media, January 1).

Judea and Samaria

Explosives laboratory and weapons uncovered in Nablus

■ On January 5, 2008, IDF and Israel Security Agency forces completed a broad, four-day operation against terrorist organization networks in the Kasbah (the Old City) of Nablus. During the operation **23 wanted terrorists** were detained, most of them belonging to Hamas and Fatah, and a laboratory containing many weapons was discovered.

■ The laboratory was discovered in an arms store and contained **two rockets in the first stages of manufacture and an explosive belt**. There were also two hand guns, materials used in the preparation of explosive charges (explosives, steel balls), cables and patterns for laying explosives, ammunition and military equipment. The weapons were destroyed by the IDF's engineering corps (IDF spokesman's Website, January 3).

■ The Palestinian security services, which during the past two months carried out intensive security operations in Nablus, managed to impose a considerable measure of law and order on the city and to remove the gunmen from the streets. However, **they did not dismantle the terrorist organizations' operational infrastructures**, including those of Hamas, and Fatah operatives who were not included in the "wanted



IDF forces during the operation in Nablus (IDF spokesman, January 5, 2008).

terrorists agreement." The terrorist operatives who were detained by the Israeli security forces and the weapons found in the Kasbah make it clear that **Nablus continues as a focal point for anti-Israeli terrorist activity in Judea and Samaria.**

The terrorist laboratory discovered within an arms store in the Kasbah in Nablus (Photos courtesy of the IDF spokesman, January 5).



The entrance to the arms store.



The laboratory, a view from inside



Ammunition and weapons.



Rockets in preparation.

Palestinian Authority responses

- Senior PA figures expressed harsh criticism of Israel while ignoring the fact that terrorist networks continue their operations in the Kasbah of Nablus three weeks after the Palestinian security services entered it:

- **Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad** condemned the activities of the Israeli security forces, claiming that they were destroying the efforts of the Palestinian security services, "which recently had results Palestinian civilians could feel." He said that "the unexplained violations" damage agreements and the chances of renewing the peace process (Al-Hayat, January 4).

- **Nablus district governor Jamal Muheisen** claimed that the Israeli goal was to hamper negotiations and the Palestinian security services' security

program, and to turn Nablus from the capital of Palestinian economy into “a disaster area” (Wafa News Agency and other media, January 3).

- **Commander of Nablus General Intelligence Abdallah Kamil** claimed that the Israeli operation “destroyed all the successes and achievements made by the Palestinian security services in Nablus... (Ma’an News Agency, January 5).

- To balance the Israeli operation, and to show that the PA was itself working against Hamas, **Abdallah Kamil** boasted of the successes of the Palestinian security services in Nablus during the past month. He said that explosives which apparently belonged to Hamas had been found in a building in Nablus and had been used in the manufacture of explosive devices intended for Israeli and PA targets. He also claimed the security services had uncovered Hamas sleeper cells which had planned to carry out a coup against the PA (Ma’an News Agency, January 4).

Other counterterrorist activities in Judea and Samaria

- Senior Hamas figures detained:

- On January 8, in a combined IDF-ISA operation in Ramallah, two senior Hamas figures in Judea and Samaria were detained. One, **Hussein Abu Kuwiek**, 51, was imprisoned in Israel between 2002 and 2007 as a Hamas leader in Ramallah and for his involvement in the establishment of a squad which planned terrorist attacks. The other, **Faraj Rumana**, 35, was also imprisoned in Israel between 2002 and 2007 for his involvement in shootings and for recruiting a terrorist squad and linking it to Hamas headquarters in Ramallah.

- When the two were released from prison in April and May 2007 they returned to Hamas activities and within a short time established their position as heads of the organization in Ramallah and its spokesmen in Judea and Samaria. As part of their activity they were responsible for the contact between Hamas in Judea and Samaria and the PA, met several times with members of the PA’s administration and worked for the release of Hamas prisoners detained by the PA (IDF spokesman’s Website, January 8).

- On January 7, during Israeli security force activities near the village of Burqin west of Jenin, a number of armed Palestinians approached an IDF roadblock. The

IDF force identified the armed Palestinians, fired at them and hit one. On his body an improvised weapon and ammunition were found. The Palestinian was identified as a PIJ operative (IDF spokesman's Website, January 7).



An improvised weapon, ammunition and a knife found on the body of a PIJ terrorist operative near Burqin (west of Jenin) (IDF spokesman, January 7).

THE INTERNAL PALESTINIAN ARENA

Khaled Mashal's speech on the 20 anniversary of Hamas' founding

On January 5, Khaled Mashal, chairman of Hamas' political bureau in Damascus, gave a speech on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the organization's founding. Some of the topics covered were (Al-Aqsa TV, January 5):

- **Determination to continue terrorism as the strategic solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:** He praised Hamas for its adherence to the resistance [i.e., terrorism and violence] and its commitment to continue "until the last Zionist soldier has withdrawn from the land of Palestine." He boasted that Hamas had left its mark on suicide bombing attacks and rocket launchings ("Israel fears they [the rockets] will hit Ashqelon, and thanks to the rockets of Ahmed Jibril, they have already reached Ashqelon...²").
- **Hamas has no intention of agreeing to a lull in the fighting:** Any remarks made to the contrary were incorrect. He claimed that a number of

² He was referring to the firing of a 122 mm rocket which hit north of Ashqelon; Jibril's organization claimed responsibility. Other organizations also claimed responsibility but Khaled Mashal chose to give Jibril's the "credit."

Europeans called upon Hamas to meet with Israel in Europe through mediators to talk about a lull, but Hamas gave a negative response.

- **Praise for Egypt for its resolution of the pilgrim crisis:** (“Egypt is an outstanding country.”) According to Khaled Mashal, the time has come for the Arab world and the Palestinian people to “restore Rafah as an Egyptian-Palestinian crossing where Israel and the United States will have no place.” He appealed to the Europeans to disengage themselves from the Rafah Crossing so that they would not be party to “a felony.”
- **A call for the resignation of Salaam Fayyad’s government:** He accused **Salaam Fayyad’s** government of carrying out detentions among the “resistance” [i.e., terrorist organizations], confiscating weapons, closing the “charitable societies” and using state funds and contributions to implement the road map.



Khaled Mashal speaking at a rally in Damascus to mark the 20th anniversary of Hamas’ founding (Al-Aqsa TV, January 5).

- **An appeal to Abu Mazen to hold a dialogue with Hamas with no preconditions:** According to Khaled Mashal, after the “Annapolis failure” there was no reason for such a dialogue not to be held based on past agreements between Hamas and the PA. He said that the “national committee” [of those who rejected the Annapolis meeting] which would be held at the end of January 2008 would be an opportunity to restore national Palestinian unity.

Pilgrims delayed in Sinai return through the Rafah Crossing

- On January 20 Egypt allowed 2,200 Gazan pilgrims who had been delayed in Sinai to cross into the Gaza Strip through the Rafah Crossing, violating the agreement regulating the crossing’s operation. The pilgrims had only their passports and names checked (Palestine-info Website, January 2). The arriving pilgrims were greeted with celebratory parades and praise for the heads of Hamas for having arranged their passage through the crossing.

■ Hamas has represented the end of the affair as a victory on the way to a full opening of the Rafah Crossing. Hamas spokesman **Salah al-Bardawil** said that the entrance of the pilgrims “was a victory for President Mubarak over the pressures of the Americans and Israelis” (Filisteen Mubasher Website, January 2). **Fathi Hamad**, a member of the legislative council, expressed his high estimation of the Egyptian regime, saying that the Arab nation had begun “to wake up” and that the Arab states had to “liberate themselves from the chains of the Zionist entity” (Al-Aqsa TV, January 2).

Hamas continues its violent suppression of Fatah in the Gaza Strip

■ During the anniversary of the founding of Fatah (January 1) Hamas continued its violent suppression of Fatah activists in the Gaza Strip: Hamas operatives invaded the homes of members of the PA's security services, detained them and even their families (Wafa News Agency, January 1). The events followed violent confrontations between the Hamas police force (which incorporated the Executive Force) and Fatah activists on December 31 because of Hamas' refusal to allow Fatah to hold rallies to mark the 43rd anniversary of its founding.³

■ According to the Wafa News Agency, some of the prominent events were the following: the Hamas takeover of the headquarters of the PLO executive committee in the Gaza Strip and looting its property, blowing up a six-story residential dwelling belonging to the Dughmush clan in the Sabra neighborhood of Gaza City, and abducting senior Fatah figure **Ibrahim Abu al-Naja** and shaving his hair and moustache to humiliate him.

³ For further information see our January 3, 2008 Bulletin entitled “News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation December 15-31, 2007” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/t31dec_07e.htm and http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/t31dec_07e.pdf.