



**Intelligence and Terrorism  
Information Center  
Israel Intelligence Heritage  
and Commemoration Center**

## **News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation**

**January 9-15, 2008**



**Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and President Shimon Peres welcoming American President George Bush (Israeli Government Press Office, January).**

### **OVERVIEW**

- This past week events focused on American President George Bush's visit to Israel and the Palestinian Authority to accelerate the Annapolis process. President Bush repeated his positions regarding the final status agreement. He said he expected a peace agreement by the end of the year, promising to return to the region in May to examine the progress of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. The president's visit was accompanied by a Hamas propaganda campaign which included personal slurs.
- During the visit Sderot suffered a massive rocket attack. One rocket hit on a residential dwelling, falling close to the crib of a sleeping infant. In addition, a volunteer working in the fields of Kibbutz Ein Hashlosha in the western Negev was murdered by a Palestinian sniper (January 15). Israel security force counterterrorist activities included attacks from the air and on land against a number of terrorist operative squads (January 15). Palestinian sources reported that at least 18 had been killed, most of them terrorist operatives, one of them the son of Hamas senior activist Mahmoud al-Zahar. Hamas responded with a massive rocket attack aimed at Sderot and other western Negev towns and villages (details will appear in a separate Bulletin).

## IMPORTANT EVENTS

### **Palestinian sniper murders volunteer in fields of Kibbutz Ein Hashlosha**

- An Ecuadorian volunteer, Carlos Andrés Muscara Chavez, 20, was murdered by a Palestinian sniper. Chavez had been working in the fields of Kibbutz Ein Hashlosha (in the western Negev) near the security fence. Hamas's Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack (Al-Qassam Website, January 15).

### **A heavy barrage of rockets the day of Bush's arrival**

- Rocket fire at the western Negev towns and villages continued, although there was a slight drop in the number of rockets. During the week there were 16 identified rocket hits (compared with 26 the previous week), of which ten were fired the day Bush landed in Israel (January 9). Most of the rockets were fired at Sderot. One of them hit a house and fell close to the crib of a sleeping infant and another in the center of the city. Four civilians were injured, two of them children. Another rocket hit a chicken run on Kibbutz Nahal Oz and caused property damage. In addition, 25 mortar shell hits were fired during the week.
- The Popular Resistance Committees claimed responsibility for the rocket fire of the day Bush arrived. According to PRC spokesmen, it was the Palestinian people's way of telling him they would not agree to stop the "resistance" (i.e., terrorism and violence) but would ratchet up the attacks. Responsibility for a rocket fired at Kibbutz Yad Mordechai was claimed by an organization calling itself Fatah al-Islam in the Land of Ribat (Ana al-Muslim Forum Website, January 12).<sup>1</sup>

### **Hamas's rocket fire policy**

- As in the past few months, Hamas did not directly participate in the rocket fire. However, on January 6, an article in a Hamas periodical about the IDF's activity in Al-Bureij refugee camp detailed the strategy Hamas's terrorist operative wing, the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades, had adopted against IDF forces: in addition to mortar shells, Hamas has gone back to using Qassam rockets to attack IDF forces operating in the Gaza Strip (Al-Risala, January 10).
- Israel Security Agency Chief Yuval Diskin told a government meeting that there was **increased coordination** between Hamas and the other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip regarding attacks and rocket fire. He said that Hamas had been directly involved

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<sup>1</sup> For further information about the organization 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](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](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/t31dec_07e.pdf).

in the rocket attacks carried over the past few weeks by the PRC and Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (Barak Ravid, Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff in Haaretz, January 14).

### Explosive material revealed in a shipment of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip

- An IDF force checking a truck carrying humanitarian aid (flour, sugar, etc.) about to go through the Kerem Shalom Crossing into the Gaza Strip found two tons of dual-purpose fertilizer, also used in the manufacture of explosives for rockets and bombs.<sup>2</sup> It was not the first time that the terrorist organizations had tried to smuggle explosives into the Gaza Strip by disguising them as humanitarian aid (Ynet, January 15).

## COUNTERTERRORIST ACTIVITIES

### The Gaza Strip

- During the past week the IDF continued its counterterrorist activities in the Gaza Strip, attacking rocket- and mortar shell-launching terrorist squads, terrorist operatives and training camps. A broad-scale operation was carried out on January 15 during which a number of terrorist squads were attacked. Palestinian sources reported that **18 Palestinians were killed, most of them Hamas terrorist operatives. Among them was Hussam al-Zahar, the son of senior Hamas activist Mahmoud al-Zahar.**



Muhammad al-Zahar arriving at the hospital after having learned of his son's death (Al-Jazeera TV, January 15).

- Following the IDF's operation in the Gaza Strip, senior Hamas officials denounced what they called "the Israeli massacre." Hamas prime minister **Ismail Haniya** said that the

<sup>2</sup> For further information see our December 30, 2007 Bulletin entitled "The Israeli security forces seized six and a half tons of potassium nitrate at a West Bank crossing a few weeks ago" at [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/html/ct\\_301207e.htm](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/ct_301207e.htm) and [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/pdf/ct\\_301207e.pdf](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ct_301207e.pdf).

operation was one of “a series of assassinations and slaughters” carried out by Israel in the Gaza Strip (Palestine-info Website, January 15). **Abu Obeida**, spokesman for Hamas’s terrorist operative wing, warned that Israel would receive “painful blows” and that in the war against Israel they would use “all the forces and means at [their] disposal.” **Mahmoud al-Zahar** said that the PA was also responsible for the escalation and that Hamas would respond in every way it could (Al-Aqsa TV, January 15).

- PA chairman **Abu Mazen** also issued a statement, exceptional in its acerbity, denouncing the IDF’s operation in the Gaza Strip, calling it “slaughter and a massacre of the Palestinian people” (with no mention of the rockets and continued terrorist attacks carried out by the Palestinians and the fact that most of the dead terrorists were Hamas operatives). He said that the Palestinians would not remain silent in the face of such incidents and that they would not lead to peace (Wafa News Agency, January 15).
  
- Other IDF activities during the week included:
  - **January 13:** A combined force attack was carried out in the Shati refugee camp near the home of Ismail Haniya. The attack resulted in the death of **Nidal Amudi**, a PRC operative, and **Maher Mabhuh**, an Army of Islam operative, who were involved in launching rockets at western Negev towns and villages.



The remains of the car struck near the home of Ismail Haniya (Al-Jazeera TV, January 14).

- **January 12:** An IDF force attacked a Hamas training camp near Khan Yunis. Palestinian sources reported the deaths of two Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades operatives. Five other Palestinians were wounded.

- **January 9:** An IDF force attacked a mortar shell-launching squad in the region of Beit Hanoun (northern Gaza Strip) a short time after the operatives launched five shells into Israel. According to Palestinian reports two Fatah operatives were killed (Wafa News Agency, January 9).

### Judea and Samaria

■ The Israeli security forces continued their counterterrorist activities in Judea and Samaria:

- **January 15:** During the night security forces detained 13 terrorist operatives, most of them around Nablus (IDF Spokesman).
- **January 14:** A 60 mm mortar shell was found in the possession of a Palestinian youth at the IDF checkpoint at Beit Fureiq (southeast of Nablus) (IDF Spokesman).

## THE ANNAPOLIS PROCESS

### President Bush visits Israel and the PA

■ Between January 9 and 11 American president George Bush visited Israel and the PA to encourage the acceleration of the Annapolis process. He met with the Israeli prime minister and PA chairman as well as senior officials of both sides. He said that he expected a peace agreement to be signed by the end of 2008 and that he would return in May to see what progress had been made in the negotiations and to participate in the celebrations of Israel's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



President Bush and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert (Israeli Government Press Office, January 9).

■ President Bush called upon both Israelis and Palestinians to draw up an agreement which would enable Abu Mazen to present his people with a clear alternative to the vision of suffering which Hamas had to offer. On January 10, in a special statement to sum up his visit to Israel and the PA, the president repeated his familiar positions regarding the guidelines for the

negotiations regarding permanent issues. The gist of his statement was as follows (Haaretz, January 11): The foundation of two nation states, Palestine as a homeland for the Palestinians as Israel is the homeland of the Jews; an end to the Israeli occupation of 1967 with an exchange of territories and mutually agreed adjustments of the 1949 cease-fire lines; defensible borders for Israel; ensuring a Palestinian territorial contiguity; a solution for the Palestinian refugees within the state of Palestine with the foundation of an international compensation mechanism; recognition of the problematic nature of finding a solution for Jerusalem (and by implication, delaying it to a later stage) (White House News Release Website, January 10).

■ As for day-to-day security issues, President Bush said that there would be no Palestinian state as long as terrorism continued and that the United States was committed to Israel's security. He also said that any agreement would be implemented only after both sides had fulfilled their commitments as detailed by the road map, especially the Palestinian fight against terrorism, freezing the construction of settlements and evacuating unauthorized outposts (*Ibid.*)

## Palestinian reactions to Bush's visit

### The PA

■ After President Bush's visit to Ramallah, **Abu Mazen** held a press conference broadcast by Palestinian TV (January 10). He thanked President Bush for coming and expressed his satisfaction with the results of his visits, which he called "historic." He said that under direct American supervision the Palestinians had begun negotiations with the Israelis about the final status agreement. He also expressed his hope that the negotiations would be successful and lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state and the end of the Israeli occupation while Bush was still president.



PA security forces using clubs to disperse demonstrators during Bush's visit to Ramallah (Al-Aqsa TV, January 19).

■ **Saeb Erekat**, head of the PLO negotiations department, remarked on President Bush's commitment to support Israel as a Jewish state. On January 9 he told the pan-Arab newspaper Al-Sharq al-Awsat that "Bush's statements are completely unacceptable. They

reflect his subjective view and do not commit the Palestinians... He knows full well what the position of the PA is on the issue, since Abu Mazen personally told him what it was." Erekat said that the PA referred to Israel only as "Israel." "More than 20% of the populace are not Israelis but Palestinian Arabs," he said.

- Thousands of Palestinian security force members secured Bush's visit to Ramallah and used force to disperse two protest processions in Ramallah on January 10. They also detained several dozen activists of the **Liberation Party**, a radical Islamic party which was conspicuous during anti-PA demonstrations during the Annapolis meeting. The Liberation Party claimed the detentions were a reaction to the distribution of a flyer denouncing Bush's visit. According to the flyer, Bush had Muslim blood on his hands and was motivated by his hatred for Islam and his desire to preserve Jewish interests ( Hamas Website Palestine-info Website, January 11).

### Hamas and the other terrorist organizations

- Hamas organized a propaganda campaign against President Bush's visit, reviling the United States and making personal remarks against the president (e.g., calling his a "war criminal" and "protector of terrorism"). Hamas activists organized protest rallies in the Gaza Strip and its media and spokesmen ceaselessly attacked the United States, Israel and Abu Mazen's PA.<sup>3</sup> Tens of thousands of Hamas supporters participated in the main rally in Gaza City carrying signs calling Bush a murderer and burning Israeli and American flags.



Palestinian children holding Hamas signs calling Bush a war criminal  
(Palestine-info Website, January 14).

<sup>3</sup> **Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah** joined the hate campaign by giving a speech attacking President Bush's visit, who, he said, represented "Satans' camp," based on force and misleading public opinion. He represented the visit as a dark day in the history of the Arab nation. His speech, which was broadcast on a giant screen in the Sayed al-Shuhada auditorium in the Shi'ite neighborhood of Al-Ruies was, as usual, accompanied by audience shouts of "Death to America, death to Israel" (Al-Manar TV, January 10).

■ The following events were part of the campaign:

- **Hamas government prime minister Ismail Haniya** said that the objectives of the visit were to try to revoke the “right to return,” to exclude the issue of Jerusalem from a solution, to leave the settlements in place and to assure the construction of the security fence. He said that the Palestinians rejected the principle of compensation for the refugees (referred to by Bush in his speech). He also said that the visit would make the division of the Palestinian people permanent and ensure “American-Israeli hegemony in the region” (Al-Jazeera TV, Ma’an News Agency, January 11).
- **The Hamas Website** posted a strongly-worded statement calling President Bush “the evil head of the world” and “the greatest Satan in the American administration.” It said that his visit to the West Bank was meant to put an end to the Palestinian problem, to reinforce Israeli control of the Palestinian homeland and to save the “Zionist terrorist government from its current malaise. It called upon Abu Mazen’s government (which it referred to as “the Muqataa regime”) not to trust the American administration “and to join ranks with the resistance opposition” (i.e., terrorism and violence) (Palestine-info Website, January 9).
- **Osama Hamdan**, Hamas representative in Lebanon, said that Bush’s stressing that Israel was a Jewish state meant that “there will be no peace during his administration.” He said that Bush was a war criminal and called upon the international community to bring him to trial for the crimes his administration had committed in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan and other places around the world (Palestine-info Website, January 10).



**Hamas-organized anti-Bush demonstration in Gaza City (Felesteen, January 10).**



Bush's picture burned during the demonstration (Al-Aqsa TV, January 9).

### General William Fraser appointed to monitor the implementation of the roadmap

- On January 10 President Bush appointed Air Force General Willam Fraser to head the team monitoring the implementation of the road map. General Frazer is assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and will be the main liaison with the American State Department. The monitoring mechanism is intended as an independent tool in the hands of the administration to bridge the gaps in the Israeli and Palestinian positions and to provide an objective analysis of the progress both sides are making in their commitment to implement the first phase of the road map.
- General Fraser will join two other American generals involved in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations: Infantry General Keith Dayton, the security coordinator, and Marine General James Jones, an advisor for setting up the PA's security institutions following the Annapolis meeting.

### Negotiation team meetings

- On January 8, the eve of President Bush's visit, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert meet with PA chairman Abu Mazen. After the meeting Saeb Erekat announced that it had been serious and sincere and that the atmosphere had been positive. On January 14 negotiations about the core issues began when the Israeli team, led by Foreign Minister Tsippi Livni, met with the Palestinian team, led by Abu Alaa. After the meeting Abu Alaa said that he was hopeful that it would lead to intensive negotiations about the core issues: border, the settlements, Jerusalem, water, the refugees and security, and a committee for prisoner release.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> PLO negotiations head **Saeb Ereket** said that a steering committee meeting on January 7, the Palestinians asked that a prisoners' affairs committee be established as part of the issue of deliberations on the core issues of the final status agreement (Al-Ayyam, January 8).

## THE INTERNAL PALESTINIAN ARENA

### Palestinian security force activity in Nablus

- Nine commanders of Fatah's terrorist operative wing, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, operatives of the so-called "Night Riders" group in Nablus, surrendered to the Palestinian security forces on January 7. A wanted terrorist operative surrendered on January 8 (Ma'an News Agency, January 8). They turned themselves in two days after the Israeli security forces ended a broad-scale action against terrorist networks in Nablus, during which 23 wanted terrorists were detained. The activities of the Israeli security forces against the terrorist networks in Nablus continue (See above, **Counterterrorist Activities**).
  
- **Mahdi Abu Ghazala**, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade spokesman, claimed that no pressure had been exerted on the nine and that their decision came from the desire not to provide Israel with an excuse to invade Nablus. He added that they would remain at the [security force] headquarters at Al-Juneid for three months, would turn over their weapons and sign a statement committing themselves to stop activities against Israel and to place themselves under the PA's authority (Ma'an News Agency, January 8).
  
- **Jamal al-Mohessein, Nablus governor**, described the act as "a brave step" and said he hoped others would follow it (PalMedia Website, January 8). The Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades, the Popular Front's terrorist operative wing, were quick to announce that they would not turn over their weapons ("the weapons of resistance") and that they would continue "armed resistance in every form" (Abu Ali Mustafa Website, January 10).
  
- **Colonel Abu al-Abbas, head of military intelligence in Nablus**, told a Ma'an News Agency correspondent on January 14 about the discovery of a bag holding 16 kilograms (33.2 lbs) of explosives and a rocket without a warhead. The bag was found in the Old City in Nablus. The Palestinian security services began an inquiry to discover to whom the bag belonged. A spokesman for an unknown group calling itself the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade – the Battalions of Truth and Freedom claimed that the equipment belonged to them and that they had the components for other rockets (Ma'an News Agency, Bethlehem, January 14).

### Bethlehem

- **The commander of Palestinian national security in Bethlehem** said that the Palestinian security forces had detained members of three squads belonging to Hamas's

Executive Force. In their possession they had cold weapons and anti-PA propaganda material (PNN Website, January 7). Hamas denied that there were Executive Force cells on the West Bank and called the announcement a lie (Palestine-info Website, January 8).

### **The Jenin district**

- On January 10 the Palestinian security services began enforcing law and order in the Jenin district as part of their struggle against anarchy. The security services were successful in pursuing wanted criminals (drug and arms dealers) and found stolen cars (PPN Website, January 10). No mention was made in Palestinian media reports that the actions were directed against terrorist organization operational networks.

### **Hamas smuggles money and weapons into the Gaza Strip**

- On January 13 ISA head Yuval Diskin told a government meeting that during the past few weeks Hamas had managed to smuggle about \$100 million into the Gaza Strip through the crossings. In ISA assessment, senior Hamas activists who returned to the Gaza Strip after a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia brought large sums of money back which were poured into the pockets of Hamas and will do nothing to benefit the local residents. Regarding the smuggling of weapons through tunnels under the Philadelphi Route, Diskin said that it continued and that there had been no improvement in Egyptian activity, it was all business as usual (Barak Ravid, Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, Haaretz, January 14).