



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

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

**February 5-12, 2008**



**The 8-year old boy from Sderot who was critically wounded in the February 9 rocket attack, on his way to the operating room (The Israel Project, February 9).**

### **Overview**

- The week ended with a five-day escalation of rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. More than 60 hits were identified in Israel territory, most of them in Sderot. A number of rockets were also fired at Ashqelon. Like the previous escalation, most of the rockets were launched by Hamas. Two brothers were critically injured and dozens of Sderot residents were treated for shock.
- Tension increased between Hamas and Egypt, even after the border fence was resealed. The Egyptians regard the recent events as a threat to national security and an infringement on their sovereignty. The Egyptian foreign minister warned that Egypt would not allow its border to be violated a second time. "Anyone who crosses the border," he said, "will have his legs broken." The Egyptians seek to regulate movement through the Rafah Crossing according to the Crossings Agreement, while Hamas seeks to turn it into a Palestinian-Egyptian crossing under its own control with no Israeli interference. Senior Hamas figures expressed displeasure over Egyptian policy and threatened another eruption if the Rafah problem were not solved.

## Important Events

### Another round of escalated rocket attacks ended

■ Between February 5-9 rocket fire escalated again.<sup>1</sup> After five days of increased fire the numbers sank to the “routine” level of 2-3 rockets a day. During the past week there were **66** identified rocket hits, **63 during the five days of escalation**. In addition, during the past week **35 mortar shells** were fired at IDF forces and at the Israeli towns and villages close to the security fence.

■ **Hamas** was responsible for most of the escalated rocket fire, as it was during the previous round (January 15-18). Hamas claimed responsibility for the rockets targeting **the power station in Ashqelon** on February 8, which provides the Gaza Strip with most of its electricity (Al-Qassam Website, February 8). The Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Popular Resistance Committees also claimed responsibility for some of the attacks.

■ An exceptional incident was the **barrage of 40 rockets which targeted Sderot and the western Negev towns and villages on February 8-9**. Two rockets landed in the center of the city on the evening of February 9. Two brothers were wounded, one of them, an 8-year old, had one of his legs amputated as a result. His 18-year old brother was also critically wounded. The two heard the alarm but did not have time to reach shelter (Noam Badin, Sderot



Direct rocket hit on a home in Sderot, February 8 (The Israel Project, February 9).

<sup>1</sup> For further information see our February 10 Bulletin entitled “Renewed escalation of Hamas rocket fire at western Negev towns and villages (Summary of events, February 5-7)” at [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/html/ct\\_070208e.htm](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/ct_070208e.htm).

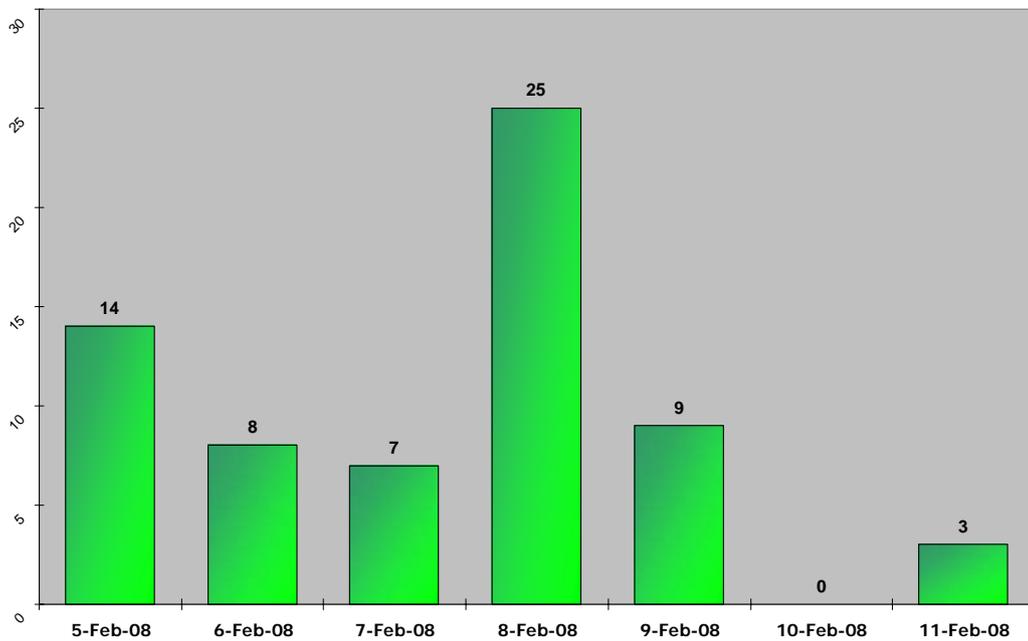
Media Center, February 10). Eleven civilians were treated for shock. The previous day, there was a direct rocket hit on a home while a family families were eating dinner; six of them were treated for shock.



The 18-year brother injured in the rocket attack on February 9 (The Israel Project, February 9).

[Click to watch the video of the attack which wounded the two brothers \( Courtesy of the Sderot Media Center\).](#)

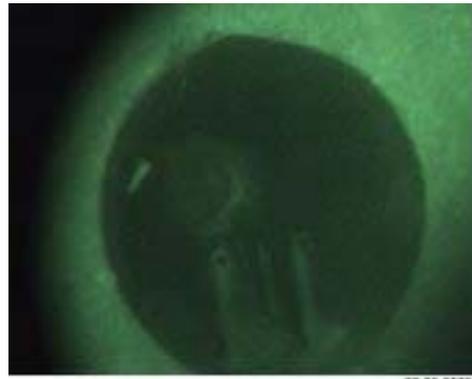
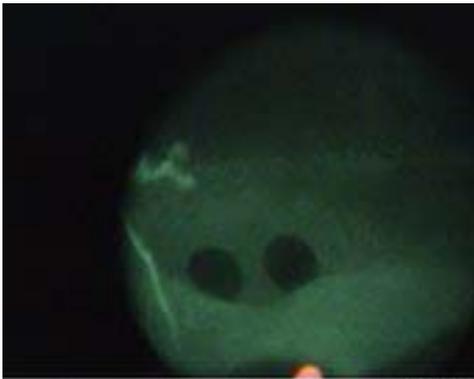
### Identified rocket fire into Israeli territory during the past week



### Exposure of underground concrete positions for launching rockets

■ On February 7, during IDF counterterrorist activities in the Gaza Strip, camouflaged concrete positions for launching rockets were exposed in an open area in the northern

Gaza Strip. They were one to two meters square and were designed to allow the terrorists to hide and launch rockets in an open area, making it difficult for the IDF to locate them (IDF Spokesman, February 7). In our assessment, they were inspired by Hezbollah's positions and bunkers outside populated areas in south Lebanon. **Abu Obeida, a spokesman for Hamas's Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades**, denied that Hamas used underground positions to fire rockets and said that "the photographs were retouched" (Al-Aqsa TV, February 9).



Launching sites in open areas (IDF Spokesman, February 7)

[Click here for the video.](#)

## Counterterrorist Activities

### The Gaza Strip

#### Counterterrorist Activities Continue in the Gaza Strip

■ While the rockets fell on western Negev towns and villages, the Israeli security forces continued their counterterrorist activities in the Gaza Strip. IDF forces attacked launching sites, buildings belonging to Hamas and terrorist operatives:

- **February 11:** The Israeli Air Force struck a vehicle in Rafah. The Palestinian media reported that it had been carrying a squad of Hamas's Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades who, according to the reports, managed to escape. The IDF followed up with counterterrorist activities against the terrorist organizations in the northern Gaza Strip, during which an IDF soldier was slightly wounded in an exchange of fire (IDF Spokesman, February 12).

- **February 10:** The IDF encountered and killed an armed terrorist operative. According to the Palestinian media, he belonged to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Abu Ali Mustafa Website, February 10). In Rafah the IDF attacked a Hamas operative who was involved in smuggling (IDF Spokesman's Website, February 10).
- **February 10:** IAF fighter planes attacked two buildings belonging to Hamas. One was a workshop in Gaza City for manufacturing weapons and the other was a weapons storehouse in Rafah in the southern Gaza strip (IDF Spokesman's Website, February 10). According to Palestinian reports, one building was a lathe-shop (Pal-today Website, February 10).
- **February 9:** The IAF successfully attacked four rocket launchers ready for firing in the northern Gaza Strip. Beforehand, the IDF hit a terrorist squad near rocket launchers, also in the northern Gaza Strip (IDF Spokesman's Website, February 10). According to Palestinian reports, two PRC operatives were wounded (Palestinian media, February 9).
- **February 7:** The IAF carried out a number of strikes. According to Palestinian reports five Hamas operatives were killed, among them a senior rocket launcher, as well as a PIJ operative and a civilian (Al-Qassam Website, February 7).

## Judea and Samaria

### Fatah-Tanzim operative detained

- On February 11 the Israeli security forces detained Fatah-Tanzim operative **Salem Hamad al-'Abayat**, who was involved in an attempted attack on the Tunnel Road leading from Jerusalem to Bethlehem in December 2005. He was detained near Beit Sahour, east of Bethlehem. He was involved in placing a car bomb on the Tunnel Road, in planning and carrying out shootings at Har Homa and in planning side charge attacks. **His activities were financed by PRC activists in the Gaza Strip** (IDF Spokesman's Website, February 12).

## Increase in Molotov cocktail attacks

■ During the past week the terrorist organizations in Judea and Samaria once again attacked using Molotov cocktails. On February 6 a Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Israeli bus near the village of Burqin, southeast of Qalqilya; no one was harmed and the bus was not damaged. Earlier in the day a Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Israeli bus south of Qalqilya. In the late morning an IDF force detained a Palestinian holding a Molotov cocktail ready for throwing near Surif, southwest of Bethlehem (IDF Spokesman's Website, February 11).

## IDF confiscates three million shekels earmarked for terrorist activities

■ During the night of February 11 in a combined Israeli security forces activity, searches were conducted in the offices and homes of **14 money changers** in Jenin, Tulkarm, Nablus, Hebron and Ramallah who were suspected of transferring funds for terrorist activities. Five were detained and were found to have three million shekels in their possession; the funds sent to the Bank of Israel for safekeeping. Four of them were found to have three guns in their possession; the guns were confiscated by the Israeli security forces.

■ In recent years the Palestinian terrorist organizations have smuggled millions of dollars into the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria to fund their activities. The money is brought in in various ways, **the most popular of which is through money changers**. They are in direct contact with their professional colleagues in the Arab countries, who are in turn linked to the terrorist organizations' headquarters. Money changers outside the PA transfer enormous sums to the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria, where they are passed on to local terrorist operatives. Since money changing in the Palestinian Authority is unsupervised, funds can routinely be transferred to support terrorist activity without interference.

■ In the past year there was an increase in the amount of money passed into the hands of the terrorist organizations. During the third quarter of 2007 **money changers**

transferred 12 million shekels to the various terrorist organizations. **Most of the money (about eight million shekels) found its way to the Hamas network in Judea and Samaria.** It was used by Hamas principally to expand its organizational infrastructure, to make payments, finance training and buy and manufacture weapons (IDF Spokesman's Website, February 12).

■ The aforementioned activity was one of many carried out in recent years by the security forces to deal with the sources of terrorist organization funding. One noteworthy action was carried out in 2004, during which 37 million shekels were confiscated which belonged to the terrorist organizations and had been deposited in banks in the PA.

## The Gaza Strip Crossings

### The crossings between the Gaza Strip and Egypt: the situation on the ground

■ After the resealing of the Egypt-Gaza Strip border, the Egyptians allowed Palestinians still on their territory to return to the Gaza Strip. On February 9 and 10 several thousand Palestinians returned from El-Arish to the Gaza Strip, and about 100 Egyptians who were in Gaza returned to Egypt. Both groups passed through the Salah al-Din gate near the Rafah Crossing in coordination with the Egyptian security forces and Hamas operatives positioned at the border.

### Tension between Egypt and Hamas

#### The Egyptian aspect

■ The breaching of the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip and the events occurring afterwards were viewed by the Egyptians as extremely serious. They were considered **a threat to national security, a violation of Egyptian sovereignty and a blow to its honor.** The Egyptian administration is trying to coordinate the issue of the

Rafah Crossing and at the same time to weaken and deter Hamas and put a stop to its buildup, even if they pay the price both internally and with the Arab world.

■ The Egyptian anger with Hamas was recently manifested by statements made by senior officials. Conspicuous among them was Egyptian Foreign Minister **Ahmed Abu al-Gheit**, He attacked Hamas and its policies, stressing that Egypt would continue to defend Palestinian interests but that **its own national security had priority**:

- Hamas made the decision to enter into a confrontation with Israel by firing rockets into its territory. **The confrontation is ridiculous**, and the rocket fire gives Israel the opportunity to kill Palestinians while the rockets fall in the sand.<sup>2</sup> (Egyptian TV, February 6)
- **The rocket fire targeting the power station in Ashqelon is ridiculous**, because that is the same station which supplies the Gaza Strip with electricity.<sup>3</sup> However, he condemned Israel's intention to continue cutting power supplies to the Gaza Strip, claiming that would worsen the humanitarian situation (Al-Ahram, February 10).
- **Egypt does not recognize Hamas control of the Rafah Crossing**. Egypt is determined to work with Israel and the European Union to open the crossing legally, once the PA officials and EU observers return. A Hamas rejection of the return of the observers will punish the Palestinian people.
- **Egypt will not allow its borders to be violated again**. The border fence between Egypt and the Gaza Strip will be rebuilt and anyone who tries to breach it will be punished. "Anyone crossing the border will have his legs broken" (a repetition of the threat was expressed in Al-Hayat, February 11).

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<sup>2</sup> The rockets are not exact weapons. Some of the hit unpopulated areas or even fall within the Gaza Strip.

<sup>3</sup> The Palestinian terrorist organizations, including Hamas, continue to claim responsibility for the rocket attacks on the power station. For example, on February 8 Hamas's Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades claimed responsibility for rocket fire targeting the Ashqelon power station, which **supplies 60% of the electricity consumed by the Gaza Strip**.

■ In addition, Egyptian sources accused the Muslim Brotherhood of providing support for Hamas:

- The governor of the northern Sinai district, **Ahmed Abd al-Hamid**, said that **more than 9,000 Palestinians** from the Gaza Strip, among them Hamas operatives, infiltrated into Egyptian cities after the border fence was breached. He said that senior Muslim Brotherhood officials had hidden the Hamas operatives, and accused Hamas of using Muslim Brotherhood support to attempt to “export the Gazan crisis to the Egyptian people”(Al-Itihad, United Arab Emirates, February 8).
- On February 6 Egyptian daily Al-Masri Al-Youm quoted a “reliable source” of the Muslim Brotherhood saying the organization was transferring funds to Hamas for the purchase of weapons, mentioning the sum of half a million Egyptian pounds. The Muslim Brotherhood denied the allegation.

■ In our assessment, Egypt is interested in reopening the Rafah Crossing according to the Crossings Agreement of 2005. However, in the meantime it allows a controlled passage of Gazans from time to time in response to Hamas’s demands, and to release pressure from the Gaza Strip while demonstrating support for the Palestinians. Hamas, on the other hand, opposes a return to the status quo ante and **seeks to impose joint Palestinian-Egyptian control on the Rafah Crossing, which in practical terms would mean Hamas control with no Israeli intervention**. The opposing Hamas-Egyptian positions preserve and even potentially worsen the tensions between the two sides.

### Hamas’s displeasure with Egypt

■ Hamas expressed its displeasure with Egyptian remarks, the lack of contacts regarding the opening of the Rafah Crossing and the detention of Hamas operatives in Egypt. **Sayid Siyyam**, a senior Hamas official in the Gaza Strip, made his opinions particularly clear (Al-Risala, February 11):

- **He issued a warning that there would be another outburst if the problem of the Rafah Crossing were not solved**. In answer to the question of whether the

crossing might be breached again he answered that “The issue is clear: If the problem of the crossing is not solved and the blockage continues, **it is possible** that the situation may explode from within again. That is not what we seek, but we cannot prevent it.”

- **He called the statements made by the Egyptian foreign minister “strange.”** Accusing Hamas of threatening Egyptian national security was a “big lie,” and the foreign minister apparently spoke, he said, without thinking. The Egyptian media, he claimed, was conducting a campaign of incitement against Hamas to exert pressure on the movement.
- **He called for the Egyptians to release the “jihad fighters** who entered Egypt to go shopping.” **Ayman Taha**, a senior Hamas official, said that the Egyptians had detained more than 100 men who were being interrogated and possibly tortured. Hamas, he said, had on-going contacts with the Egyptians about their release (Ma’an News Agency, February 11).

### The crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip

■ The transfer of fuel and cooking gas from Israel to the Gaza Strip continues through the Nahal Oz Crossing. Gas station owners in the Gaza Strip who refused to receive gas from Israel in protest of the cutbacks in supplies (only humanitarian supplies were transferred) began accepting gas from the Nahal Oz terminal on February 5, after a break of 23 days (Al-Quds, February 5).

### Israel will gradually reduce supplies of electricity to the Gaza Strip

■ On February 8 Israel began reducing the amount of electricity it supplies to the Gaza Strip by **one percent** every week until the amount has been reduced by 5% (the Ashqelon power station supplies about 60% of Gazan electricity consumption). The move is being made to gradually reduce the Gaza Strip’s dependence on Israel, while preserving the minimum level necessary to prevent a humanitarian crisis.

## The Internal Palestinian Arena

### Senior Hamas operatives in Nablus surrender their weapons to the Palestinian security services

■ Palestinian TV broadcast a press conference with three senior Hamas figures in Nablus, Musa al-Kharaz, Zuheir Labada and Ramaz Abu Salha. They said that Hamas should reverse the “military coup,” surrender its arms to the security services and recognize the PA as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Al-Kharaz, speaking for all three, said that Hamas and the PA had reached an agreement in Nablus according to which the security services would stop the detentions so that Hamas could surrender its weapons (Palestinian TV, February 5).



Musa al-Kharaz, senior Hamas official in Nablus at a press conference, February 5 (Palestinian TV, February 5).

■ PA chairman Abu Mazen said that the Hamas operatives in Nablus who had surrendered their weapons understood that the PA was the only entity which was entitled to bear arms and that their actions motivated others to do the same (Wafa News Agency, February 6). The Qudsnet Website reported that according to security sources in Hebron, Hamas activists in the city also expressed their willingness to surrender their weapons to the PA in return for a cessation of the detentions (February 6).

■ The Hamas press conference in Nablus was repudiated by Hamas. Hamas spokesman **Sami Abu Zuhri** said that the three were prisoners released by the PA after they had been coerced into making their statements (PalMedia Website, February 5). **Osama Hamdan**, a member of the Hamas’s “political bureau” and the movement’s representative in Lebanon said that statements were a “journalistic fabrication” and claimed that the three did not belong to Hamas military or political leadership (Palestine-info Website, February 5). On February 7 the newspaper Al-Sharq Al-Awsat quoted Hamas sources in Judea and Samaria as saying that the Hamas leadership in

Nablu was part of the principle of *taqiyyah* (originally a Shi'ite principle adopted by radical Sunni groups such as Al-Qaeda. According to it, an individual may hide his genuine world view to save himself if he is being persecuted.).