



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

February 28, 2008

A new round of escalation in rocket attacks launched by Hamas and the other terrorist organizations against Israel: 70 rockets fired at Sderot, Ashqelon and villages in the western Negev, most of them at Sderot. On February 27 a student at Sapir College was killed by one of the rockets.

(Updated noon, February 28)



A rocket hit near a school in Sderot. A number of shock victims were evacuated by the Red Magen David (Sderot Media Center, February 28).



The rocket which hit the parking lot at Sapir College and killed student Roni Yihye (Moran Almaliah for the Israel Project, February 27).



Roni Yihye, victim of the rocket attack (Photo courtesy of Israel's Channel 10 TV, February 27).

Overview

1. On February 27 a new round of escalation began in the rocket campaign waged against Israel by Hamas and the other terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip. It came after the killing of five Hamas terrorist operatives by the Israeli Air Force in Khan Yunis, with rockets launched by Hamas at Sderot, Ashqelon and the western Negev towns and villages. The IAF responded with massive actions against terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip, including the Hamas interior ministry building.

2. On February 27 a total of 50 rockets were fired, half of them at Sderot. Nineteen more hit on the morning of February 28, one of them landing in the parking lot of Sapir College and killing Roni Yihye,¹ a college student, married and father of four. Five long-range rockets were fired at Ashqelon; four hits were identified on the ground. One hit the Barzilai Hospital's helipad and two landed near the Rutenberg power station (which provides the Gaza Strip with electricity). **Most of the rockets were launched by Hamas.**²



The rocket which hit a residential area in Sderot (Hamutal Ben-Sheetrit for the Sderot Media Center, February 28).

3. The current round of escalation is the **third** of 2008 and is a manifestation of **Hamas's new rocket policy**. Hamas now responds with massive rocket attacks every time Israel significantly hits its operatives in the Gaza Strip. Hamas's objective is to create a balance of deterrence which will **tie Israel's hands** and at the same time allow the terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip to **continue their**

¹ The eleventh Israel killed by rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. All of them were civilians, and nine of them either lived or were visiting Sderot.

² Hamas rocket attacks continued during the following days as well. Detailed information will appear shortly in a separate Information Bulletin.

“routine” rocket fire. In the **first two months of 2008** there were **425 identified rocket hits** in Israeli territory (as of February 28). Most of the hits were in and around Sderot, but during the current round Ashqelon joined as a preferred target. **That indicates a significant increase in rocket fire in 2008 in comparison to the past two years, when the number of rockets also increased significantly.**



The wounded receiving first aid after a rocket hit a residential area in Sderot (Alex Zeger for the Sderot Media Center, February 28).

The Events

Hamas Terrorist Operatives Killed

4. On the morning of February 27 the IDF attacked two vehicles in Khan Yunis carrying members of **Hamas’s terrorist operative wing, the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades**. In the first attack an IAF helicopter fired two missiles at a bus, hitting it directly and **killing five terrorists**, one of them senior. Another operative was badly wounded. A few minutes later another attack was carried out in the same area, hitting a vehicle carrying Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades terrorist operatives and weapons. The squad apparently managed to flee. Three terrorist operatives were slightly injured (Ma’an News Agency, February 27).



One of the vehicles attacked by the IAF in Khan Yunis (Al-Qasbiya TV, February 27).

5. The five Hamas operatives killed returned to the Gaza Strip after the collapse of the Egyptian-Gaza Strip border fence, **having undergone training in Iran and Syria** (Amos Harel, Haaretz, February 27).

Hamas Retaliates with Massive Rocket Attack

6. On February 27 Hamas responded to the deaths of the five operatives with a barrage of **50 rockets** targeting western Negev towns and villages. Twenty more rockets were launched on February 28, most of them landing in and around Sderot, hitting homes, near a school and parked cars. One of them hit the parking lot of **Sapir College**, located on the outskirts of Sderot, and killed Roni Yihye, a 47-year old student, married with four children. A rocket landed in the dining room of a chicken processing plant in Sderot's industrial zone, causing extensive damage. On the morning of February 28 another rocket landed at Sapir College, injuring a member of Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter's security detail. The man was making a preliminary inspection of the area in preparation for the minister's visit to the college (Ynet, February 28).



A rocket which hit Sapir College, wounding a member of Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter's security detail (Alex Zeger for the Sderot Media Center, February 28).

[Click for the video of the rocket hit at Sapir College](#) (Courtesy of the Sderot Media Center, February 28. Camera: Meital Ohion).

[Click for the video of the damage done to the chicken processing plant](#) (Courtesy of the Sderot Media Center, February 28. Camera: Meital Ohion).

7. **Five long-range Grad 122mm rockets were fired as Ashqelon.** No organization claimed responsibility for the attack, but it is reasonable to assume that Hamas was behind it, since it is the organization possessing the largest stock of standard long-range rockets. One of the rockets landed near the helipad of Ashqelon's Barzilai Hospital as the hospital was admitting shock victims from the attack on Sapir College. Another rocket landed in the heart of a residential area, and a third in the southern part of the city near the Rutenberg power station, which provides the Gaza Strip with electricity. Seven people were treated for shock and evacuated to Barzilai Hospital (Haaretz, February 28).

IDF Counterterrorist Activities in the Gaza Strip

8. Following the rocket attack, the IDF increased its pressure on Palestinian terrorist operatives in the Gaza Strip by carrying out a series of air strikes. One of the targets was the Hamas government's interior ministry building in the Sajaiya neighborhood of Gaza City, where the offices of Hamas's security forces are located. Palestinian sources reported that the strike killed a baby and wounded more than 20 civilians. A

spokesman for the Hamas interior ministry said that serious damage was done to the building and to those surrounding it (Wafa News Agency, February 27).



Hamas government's interior ministry building after the Israeli Air Force attack (Al-Aqsa TV, February 27).

9. Additional terrorist targets were hit:

1) **A lathe in the Zeitun neighborhood, in the eastern part of Gaza City,** was completely destroyed (PalMedia Website, February 27).

2) **A lathe in the Al-Katiba district of Khan Yunis** was destroyed and two people were injured (PalMedia Website, February 27).

3) **A lathe in the Bani Suhaylah district east of Khan Yunis** underwent extensive damage, large parts of it being destroyed. There were no injuries (Pal-today Website, February 27).

Hamas's Rocket Firing Policy

10. Hamas's Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades claimed responsibility for most of the rocket launches of the current escalation. Some of the claims stated that the rocket attack was in retaliation for the deaths of five Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades operatives in an IAF air strike in Khan Yunis.

11. The current escalation is the **third** in the **past two months**:³

³ For further information see our January 16 and February 10 Bulletins entitled "Two days of hard fighting in the south: Israeli counterterrorist activities and Hamas rocket attacks (January 15-16)" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/jan15_16_08e.htm and

1) **January 15-18:** There was an increase in rocket fire following intensive IDF actions targeting mortar shell squads, during which 19 Hamas terrorist operatives were killed, among them the son of senior Hamas figure Mahmoud al-Zahar. Hamas participated directly in the massive rocket attack for the first time since it took over the Gaza Strip in June 2007. **During the four days of the attack 150 rockets landed in Israeli territory.**

2) **February 5-9:** After the suicide bombing attack in Dimona carried out by a Hamas squad from Hebron, the IDF carried out intensive counterterrorist activities in the Gaza Strip, attacking launch sites, launch squads and Hamas targets. In retaliation Hamas initiated a rocket attack in which **63 rockets** were identified as landing in Israeli territory. In addition, **35 mortar shells** were fired at IDF forces and the Israeli villages near the security fence. Hamas also claimed responsibility for the attack on the power station in Ashqelon, which supplies the Gaza Strip with electricity.

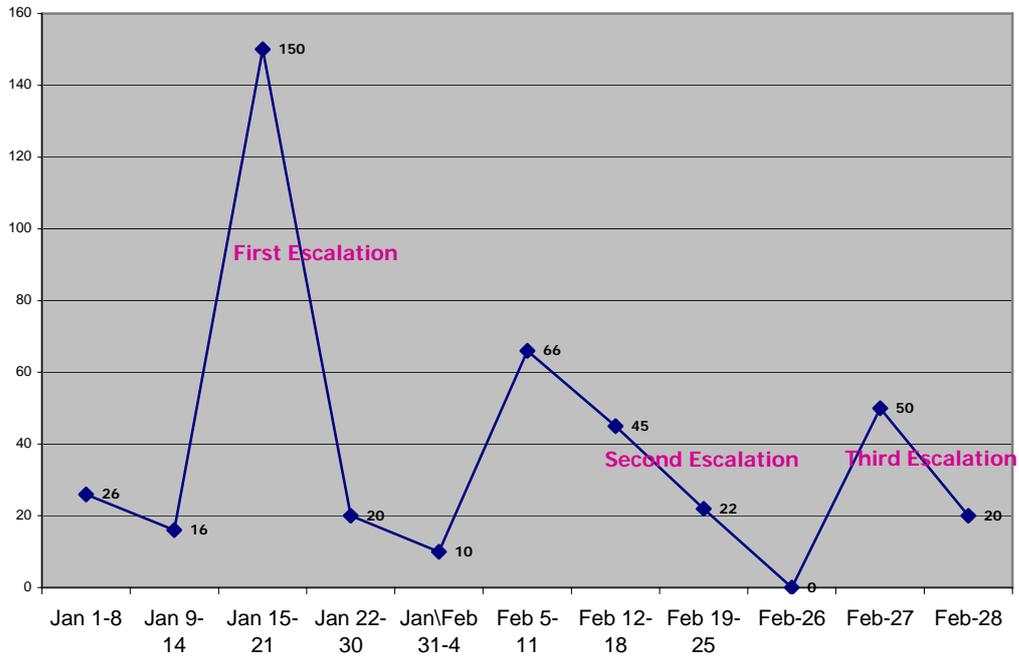
12. The three rounds of escalation manifest Hamas's **new rocket launching policy of carrying out massive rocket attacks every time Israel makes a significant hit against terrorist operatives in the Gaza Strip.** From its takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007 until the beginning of 2008 Hamas avoided direct participation in rocket attacks against Israel, but enabled and even encouraged the other terrorist organizations to carry them out.

13. In our assessment, the objective of Hamas's new rocket launching policy is to deter Israel from acting against rockets launched from the Gaza Strip and to create a kind of **balance of deterrence** which will allow the terrorist organizations with freedom of action in the Gaza Strip and enable them to continue their "routine" rocket attacks against Israeli civilians. The Hamas's direct involvement signals a sharp increase in the amount and **range of rocket fire** because it has the advanced technological and operational capabilities to manufacture, smuggle and launch rockets (including smuggling standard, factory-manufactured Grad rockets) . That increases its potential for escalating the daily attacks it and the other terrorist organizations carry out against Israel.

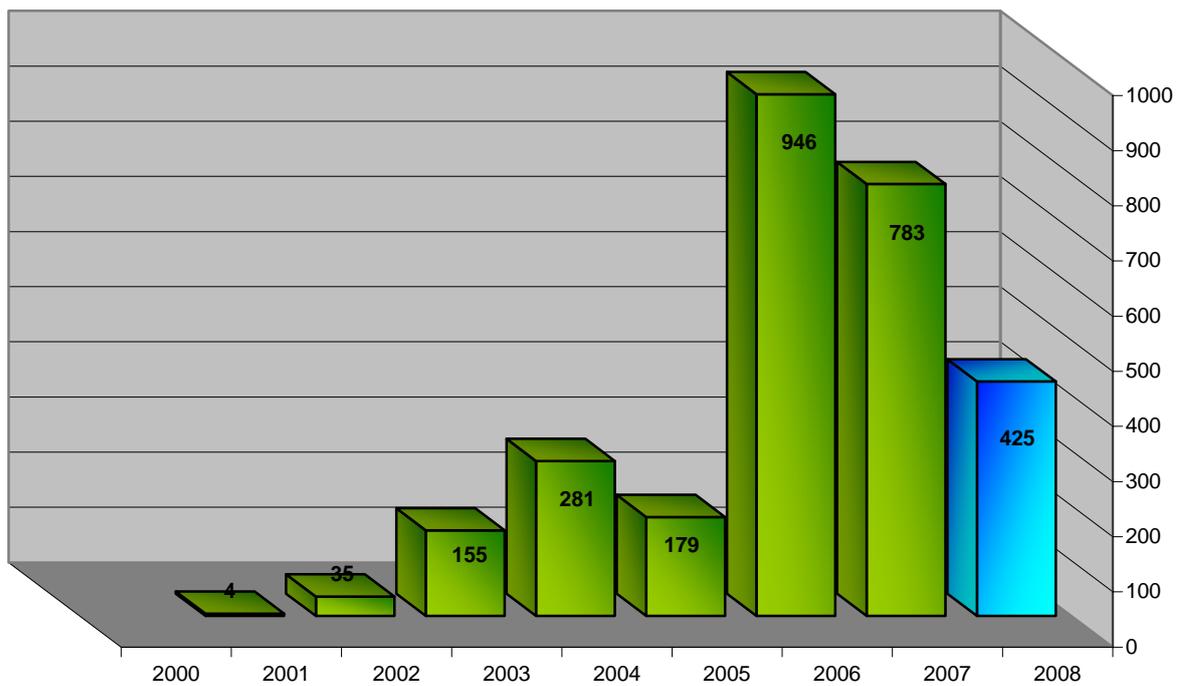
"Renewed escalation of Hamas rocket fire at western Negev towns and villages (Summary of events, February 5-7)" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/ct_070208e.htm.

Rocket Fire Statistics, 2008

14. Since the beginning of the year **425 rockets** have been fired, most of them during the third round of escalation:



Rocket Fire During the Past Seven Years



Palestinian Reactions to the Escalation

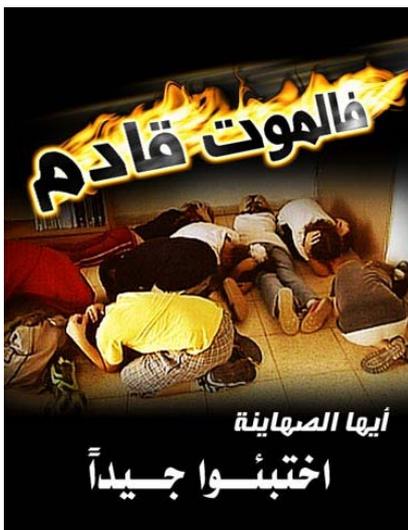
Hammas

15. So far senior Hamas figures have not reacted. However, **Abu Obeida**, Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades spokesman, again stated that the rocket fire was a “response to the occupation” and threatened more rocket fire following the killing of Hamas operatives in Khan Yunis. Spokesmen for the other terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip announced their intentions to continue firing rockets at Israel.

16. **Ihab al-Ghussun**, spokesman for the Hamas interior ministry, said that the Israeli attack on the building housing the interior ministry where the security forces had their offices was intended to send the message to the forces to end the “resistance” [i.e., terrorism]. He said that Hamas’s security forces “would continue serving the Palestinian resistance” [i.e., Hamas and the other terrorist organizations].

Hammas’s Website: Posters Promising Death to Israelis

(Palestine-info Website, February 28)



Upper inscription: “Death is coming for you;” lower inscription: “Hide, Zionists, hide!”



The Palestinian Authority

17. **Nabil Abu Rudeina**, spokesman for the president's office, condemned the escalation, the Israeli killings in the Gaza Strip and the "invasion" of Israeli security forces into the West Bank. He called for Israel to stop its "aggression," which endangered the peace process (Wafa News Agency, February 27). **He made no reference whatsoever to the continued rocket attacks carried out by Hamas and the other terrorist organizations.**

18. **Abu Mazen** told the Palestinian daily newspaper Al-Hayat that rockets fired at Israel were "useless" and had no influence. He called for an end to the rocket fire on the grounds that Israel used it as a pretext for its "continued aggression" and for closing the Gaza Strip crossings (Al-Hayat, February 27).