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

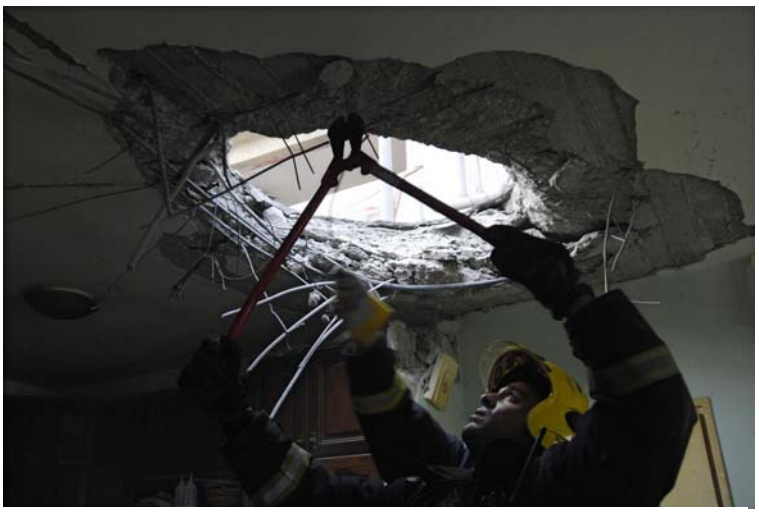
March 3, 2008

Five days of escalation in the Gaza Strip: a total of 180 rockets fired. Greater numbers of standard, factory-manufactured Grad rockets continuously hit Ashqelon. IDF forces operate in the northern Gaza Strip and air strikes against terrorist targets continue. Two IDF soldiers and 80 Palestinians (most of them terrorists) killed.

The Threat…

A poster from a Hamas's Website (Palestine-info Website, March 2)

…Carried Out



An Israeli fireman in Ashqelon examining the hole made by a Grad missile fired from the Gaza Strip (Amir Cohen for Reuters, March 1).

The Current Escalation -- Overview

1. The round of escalation from the Gaza Strip begun on February 27 continues.[1] **One hundred and eighty rockets** have been fired in the past five days, **20 of them standard long-range factory-manufactured 122mm Grad rockets**. The use of such rockets is a serious step-up of the escalation, the first time such an intense barrage of Grad rockets has hit Ashqelon (a city of 120,000 residents), reaching its northern neighborhoods.[2] Additional rockets, possibly larger caliber, **were fired at Netivot** (a city of more than 25,000).

2. Most of the responsibility for the rocket fire was claimed by **Hamas**. It wounded a number of civilians, many others went into shock and property was damaged (especially residential housing which suffered direct hits).

3. Following the increase in the radius of the rocket fire north and east to include more populated areas, the government decided to connect more of them in the Ashqelon district to the early warning system; that was done on March 1. In addition, the Home Front Command ordered the public bomb shelters in Ashqelon to be opened.

Technical Specifications for Grad Rockets

Weight – 62-66 kg (136.4-145.2 lbs)

Length – 280 cm (9.2')

Caliber – 122mm

Maximum Range – 20.4 km (12.67 miles)[3]

Weight of War Head – 18 kg

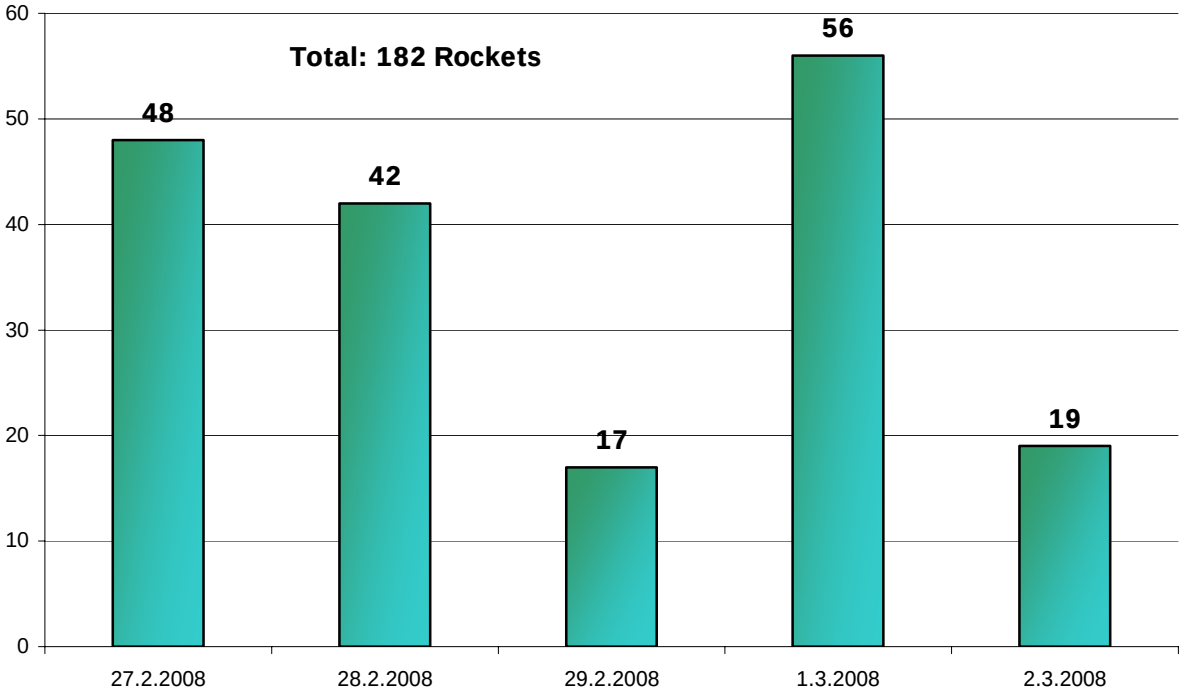
Fragment of a Grad rocket which hit Ashqelon in May 2006.

[1] For information about the first two days of the escalation, see out February 29 Bulletin entitled "A new round of escalation in rocket attacks launched by Hamas and the other terrorist organizations against Israel" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/ct_280208e.htm.

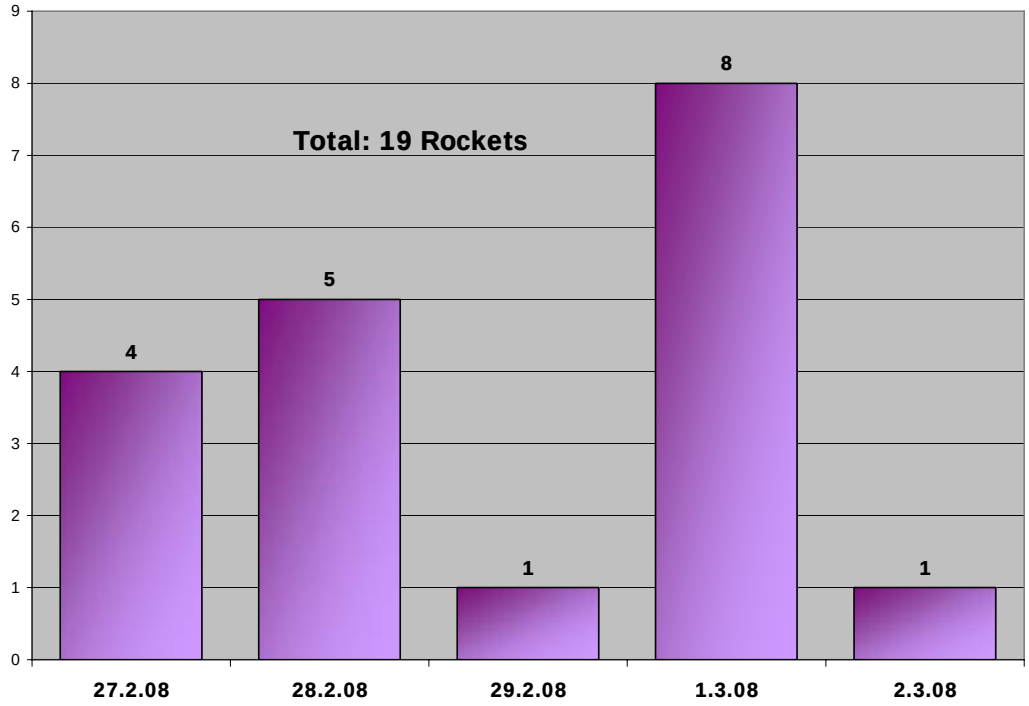
[2] Until now occasional Grad rockets were fired at Ashqelon, beginning with March 28, 2006 the day the 17th Israeli Parliament was elected.

[3] There are improved Grad rockets whose maximum range is 30 and 40 km (18.65 and 24.85 miles). The rockets which hit Ashqelon were of the 20.4 km range type.

Daily Distribution of Rocket Hits over the Past Five Days[4]



122mm Grad Rocket Hits Since the Beginning of the Current Escalation



[4] As of 12 noon, March 2.

4. On the morning of Sunday, March 2, the fifth day of the current round of escalation, **rocket fire was renewed**. So far (12 noon, March 2), 20 rocket hits have been identified in the western Negev cities and towns. One of them (a Grad rocket) hit an open area not far from Netivot, near a site holy to many Jews (the grave of the Baba Sali).

5. **During IDF operations two Givati Brigade soldiers were killed** and seven others were wounded, one of them seriously. The two were Staff Sergeant Eran Dan-Gur, 20, from Jerusalem, and Staff Sergeant Doron Asulin, 20, from Beersheva (IDF Spokesman, March 1).

Eran Dan-Gur **Doron Asulin**

IDF Operations

6. Over the weekend the IDF operated in the Gaza Strip on the ground and from the air. Large infantry, armored and engineering forces with aerial backup began their activities in the **northern Gaza Strip** on the night of February 29 and took control of areas from which rockets were launched into Israel.

7. The first part of the operation included a thorough search of the neighborhood of **Sajaiya** in Gaza City and the outskirts of the **Jabaliya** refugee camp. The second part included searching the built-up areas (including private homes) to locate hidden weapons. The IDF made it clear that the forces entering the northern Gaza Strip were limited to a specific area and that it was not the “large operation” the IDF is planning (Ynet, March 1).

8. At the same time the Israeli Air Force carried out **a series of air strikes** against terrorist targets, primarily Hamas. On February 28 there were 23 such strikes and more during the following days. One of the strikes hit a **truck carrying 160 rockets**.

Click here to view video clip

(Video courtesy of the IDF Spokesman)

9. The following were also targeted:

1) Terrorist operative squads on their way to launch rockets.

2) A terrorist operative armed with an anti-tank missile identified near IDF forces.

3) Lathes for the manufacture of weapons.

4) Hamas posts and positions.

10. At the same time, **Hamas government institutions** were struck from the air. Among the targets were the building which housed the offices of Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya in Gaza City and police stations in Beit Lahia, the Shati refugee camp and other locations.

Palestinians Killed

11. Over the past five days, in our assessment **more than 80 Palestinians were killed**. Most of them were **terrorist operatives**, primarily belonging to Hamas's Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades, who were killed in battle or in IDF attacks on terrorist targets. Among the operatives killed were the sons of two senior Hamas figures, the son of Khalil al-Hiye and the son of Muhammad Shihab, both Hamas-faction members of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Rocket fire into Israeli territory from within residential Beit Lahia (Courtesy of Israeli Channel 10 TV, February 27).

12. **Civilians were accidentally killed during the fighting**, since terrorist bases, positions and buildings from which the terrorist organization conduct their battles against the IDF were built close to their homes, and rockets were also fired from nearby. Among those killed were a number of children.

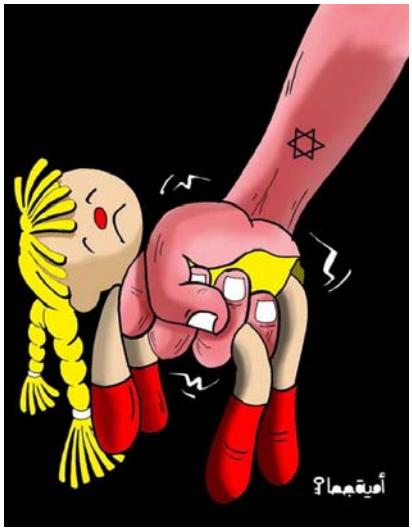
13. On February 29 Hamas's Palestine-info Website posted a table with data about the 34 Palestinians killed during the first two days of the escalation (February 27 and 28). Eleven of

the names were of Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades operatives, eight belonging to other terrorist organizations (the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade), a policeman, a guard and 13 civilians, some of them children.

Exploiting the Civilians Killed for Palestinian Propaganda Campaign

14. The propaganda machine of Hamas and the other terrorist organizations, backed up by the Palestinian Authority and Al-Jazeera's Arab TV channel, broadcast horrific picture of children who had died during the fighting and blamed Israel for deliberately targeting women and children. The propaganda, which focused on civilians, ignored the fact that most of those killed were terrorist operatives, and that the fighting took place within the terrorist infrastructure rooted in the heart of the civilian population.

15. The Palestinian propaganda machine used the expressions "genocide," "slaughter" and even "holocaust." It was not the first time senior Palestinian figures and the Palestinian and Arab media issued **exaggerated and false descriptions** of attacks on civilians, using pictures of civilians who had been killed and houses which had been destroyed. The tactical propaganda ploys are intended to defame Israel, garner support in the Arab world and the international community, and to tie Israel's hands and prevent it from continuing its activities on the ground against terrorist elements. Examples of propaganda manipulation were also found in descriptions of the fighting during Operation Defensive Shield (April 2002).[5]



A cartoon by Hamas-affiliated Omaya Joha: Israelis kill children (Palestine-info Website, March 2).

[5] For further information see our August 2003 Bulletin entitled "Coping with Incitement / August 2003 A high-ranking Palestinian academician's scathing indictment of Palestinian media coverage of the fighting in Jenin during Operation Defensive Shield" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/html/final/eng/bu/media/pl_media.htm.

The PA Sharpens Its Criticism of Israel

16. In the past few days Abu Mazen and senior figures of the PA have **sharpened** their criticism of Israel, pulling out the stops and using the expressions "holocaust," "ethnic cleansing" and "the slaughter of civilians." They also stated their intentions to suspend the negotiations, **clearly playing into the hands of Hamas**, which also exploits terrorism to obstruct the Israeli-PA negotiations. The PA's spokesmen pointed the finger of guilt at Israel while **ignoring or making an attempt to minimize Hamas's responsibility** for the unending rocket fire which is at the foundation of the escalation.

17. Some of the Palestinian criticism was the following:

1) **Abu Mazen,** chairman of the PA, claimed that Israeli Deputy Defense Minister, Matan Vilnai, threatened the Palestinians with a Holocaust in the Gaza Strip and that Israel had already begun carrying it out by deliberately targeting women, children and sheikhs,[6] without mentioning the terrorist operatives against whom the IDF activities were directed. He added that "**what was happening was more than a holocaust**,"[7] stating that more than 62 *shaheeds* had been killed in the Gaza Strip. (The comparison between the fighting in the Gaza Strip and the Holocaust in Europe that killed 6 million Jews is both **false and ridiculous**.) Abu Mazen again condemned the rocket fire but claimed that the reaction should not be so terrible (Abu Mazen's speech before a committee of the Palestinian National Council, Palestinian TV, March 1).

Abu Mazen talks about a holocaust: "To my great sorrow, what is happening now is worse than a holocaust, and for that reason we are appealing to the international community…" (Palestinian TV, March 1).

[6] Deputy Defense Minister Vilnai said that as rocket fire increased, the Palestinians were bringing a greater catastrophe on themselves because Israel would use all the power at its disposal (Israeli Army Radio, February 29). He used the Hebrew word *shoah*, in its wider, usual meaning, to describe a catastrophe. His statement was **completely distorted** by Abu Mazen and other Palestinian spokesmen and exploited for a propaganda campaign as if Israel were threatening the Palestinians with a holocaust in the meaning of extinction (**which was never said and never intended**).

[7] Abu Mazen used the Arabic word *mahraka*, the Arab term used to describe the Holocaust of the Jews in the Second World War, claiming that the Israeli action in the Gaza Strip was "more than a Holocaust." Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hezbollah's second in command, used the same expression (Lebanese News Agency, March 1).

2) **Abu Alaa**, head of the Palestinian negotiating team, said that Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip were a "slaughter" and "crimes" whose objective was to sabotage all peace efforts. When asked how far the talks between the PA and Israel had gone he replied, "Are there any negotiations in such an atmosphere?" (Al-Arabiya TV, March 1). In a different interview he said that he was of the opinion that the talks would be suspended and that what was happening in the Gaza Strip was the "slaughter of civilians" (AP, March 1).

3) **Saeb Erekat**, the PLO's chief negotiator, said that "the negotiations with the Israeli side have been buried under the ruins of the buildings in the Gaza Strip." He said that the peace process had been buried there as well (March 1).

4) **Riyad al-Maliki**, minister of information for the Salam Fayyad government, held a press conference in Ramallah where he condemned Israel's "ethnic cleansing" and "war crimes against humanity." He also demanded that Hamas stop the rocket fire because it provided Israel with an excuse and caused the deaths of hundreds of Palestinian civilians (March 1).

Statements from Khaled Mashal

18. Khaled Mashal, chairman of Hamas's political bureau in Damascus held a press conference which dealt with two main issues (Syrian Satellite TV, March 1):

1) **Blaming Israel for a "holocaust" in the Gaza Strip, while denying the Holocaust of the Jewish people**: Khaled Mashal said that what Israel was doing in the Gaza Strip was a "genuine holocaust," a continuation of the "holocaust" carried out against the Palestinian people for the past 60 years. He added that Israel "inflated" the issue of the Holocaust of the Jewish people and painted it as a "tragedy" to "extort money from the world," and used the Holocaust as a "cover" to do as it pleased (at the press conference he said Israel was trying to take over the Middle East to turn the Arabs and Muslims into servants and slaves).

Khaled Mashal speaking about a holocaust and promising to fight like lions against Israel.

2) **Claiming Israel is responsible for the escalation by blaming it for being behind both the battles and the blockade of the Palestinians, saying that the rockets are nothing more than an excuse**: As to those who blame Hamas for the

escalation, he said that "please, anyone who can come to us with an Israeli commitment to stop its aggression in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, we are willing to act seriously in this matter and for our part, to stop..." He claimed that in the past Israel had continually violated the cease fire arrangements it had been a party to. He repeated, "...whoever thinks we are the reason, please, try us, send the ball into our court..."

Deliberate Use of Civilians as Human Shields

19. During the IDF activity in the Gaza Strip both Hamas and the PIJ called upon Palestinian civilians to gather in places where, they claimed, the IDF was about to attack. That was done to have them serve as human shields, exploiting the fact that the IDF avoids deliberately harming Palestinian civilians. The terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip have used the tactic before.[8]

20. The following are examples of calls in the Palestinian media for Palestinians civilians to serve as human shields:

1) Hamas's Al-Aqsa TV and PalMedia Website called upon civilians to form a human shield at the home of Abu al-Hatal in the Sajaiya neighborhood (in Al-Sha'af according to other version) because the IDF had threatened to blow it up (March 1).

The inscription reads: "Hamas calls upon on [the Palestinian] public to come to the house of Abu al-Hatal in al-Sha'af [neighborhood] to act as human shields" (Al-Aqsa TV, March 1).

2) Al-Aqsa TV called upon the Palestinians in the northern Gaza Strip to go to the house of *shaheed* Othman al-Ruziana to protect it because the IDF was threatening to blow it up (February 29).

3) Al-Aqsa TV called upon the residents of Khan Yunis to gather at the house of Ma'amoun Abu 'Amer because the IDF was threatening to blow it up (February 28). **An hour later dozens of Palestinians from Khan Yunis were reported to have gathered on the roof of Abu 'Amer's house to serve as human shields to prevent the house from being hit (Pal-today Website, February 28)**.

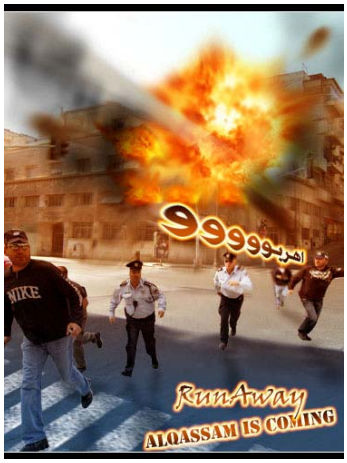
[8] For further information see pages 29-34 our March 11, 2007 Bulletin entitled "Anti-Israeli Terrorism, 2006: Data, Analysis and Trends" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/terrorism_2006e.pdf.

4) Al-Aqsa TV called upon Palestinians in the northern Gaza Strip to go to the house of *shaheed* Musab al-Ja'abir to protect it because Israel was threatening to blow it up (February 29).

5) The PIJ's Radio Sawt al-Quds called upon civilian to gather around the house of Fawzi Abu al-Hamed in the Absan al-Kabira region to prevent it from being blown up by the IDF (March 1).

21. **Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya** boasted to Al-Jazeera TV of the "firm stance" of the Palestinians. As an example he said that the "occupation" had threatened to blow up buildings but nevertheless **hundreds and thousands of Palestinians had left their homes "in the middle of the night" and gone up on the roofs of the houses the Israelis had threatened to blow up** (Al-Jazeera TV, February 29).

Posters from Hamas's Website



Posters threatening death and destruction