



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

News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation

March 11-18, 2008



The funeral procession of the four wanted Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist operatives killed by the Israeli security forces in Bethlehem. The body of the most senior, Muhammad Shehadeh, is wrapped in the Hezbollah flag (Al-Jazeera TV, March 13).

Overview

- The most significant event of the past week was the killing of five Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist operatives, four of them from Bethlehem and one from the region of Jenin. The five had been involved in terrorist activities over a period of years, including mass-casualty attacks which killed and wounded many Israeli civilians.
- The PIJ and other terrorist organizations escalated rocket attacks on Sderot and western Negev population centers following a few days of relative quiet. That was done to determine a set of rules that will limit the IDF's counterterrorist activities against the terrorist organizations operating in Judea and Samaria.

Important Events

Rocket fire escalates

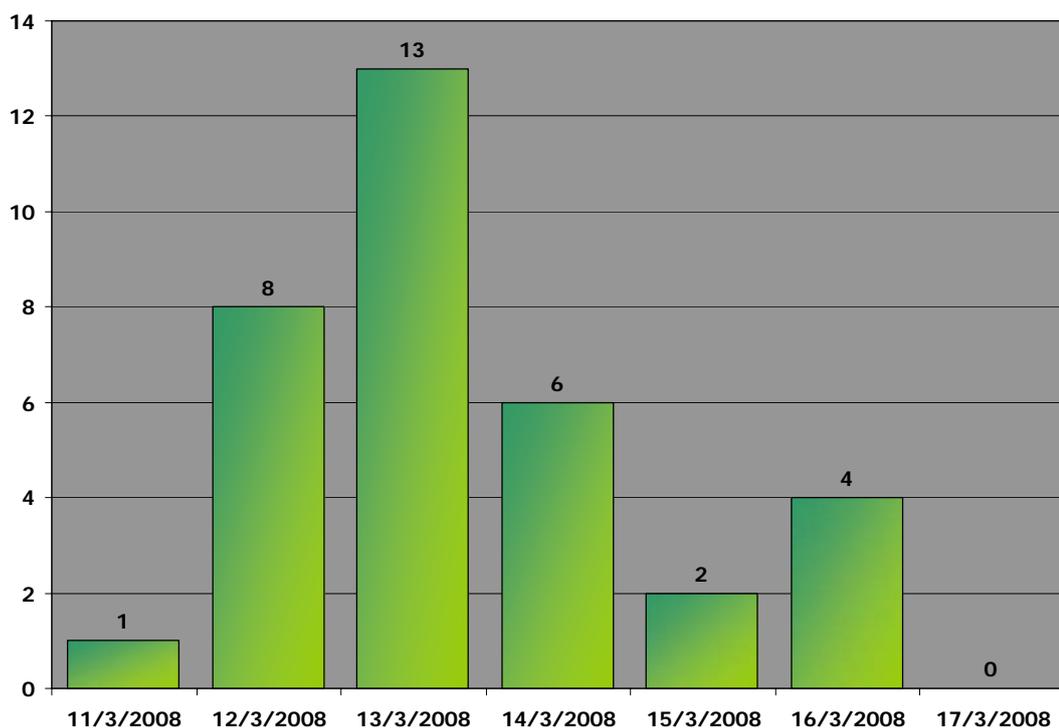
- After a few days of relative quiet during which a small number of rockets were fired, on March 12 **a barrage of eight rockets** attacked Sderot and the western Negev populations centers. Three fell in Sderot and caused damage to a number of buildings. On March 13 there were **13 identified rocket hits** in Sderot and the western Negev populations centers. During the past week of total of **34 rockets** hit Israeli territory, compared with 26 the previous week. In addition 15 mortar shells were fired, compared with 20 the previous week.

- The alleged reason for the new escalation in rocket fire was the killing of five PIJ terrorist operatives in Judea and Samaria (see below). Most of the responsibility for the rocket fire was claimed by the **PIJ**, the rest by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Resistance Committees. **Hamas abstained from rocket fire** but did claim responsibility for firing mortar shells at IDF forces near the security fence.



The Palestinian Islamic Jihad fires rockets into Israel (Al-Jazeera TV, March 13).

Daily Distribution of Rocket Fire into Israel



IDF helicopter attacked over Gaza Strip

■ During an Israeli Air Force action carried out in the Gaza Strip on March 14 a helicopter was slightly damaged by machine gun fire from the ground. Hamas claimed responsibility for the fire (Al-Qassam Website, March 14). Hamas spokesman **Abu Obeida** said that the weapon used was a machine gun taken from the Palestinian Authority security forces headquarters [after the Hamas putsch in the Gaza Strip]. He added that Hamas would continue attacking Israeli aircraft (AP, March 15).

Stabbing near the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem

■ On March 18 a rabbi from the Ateret Cohanim yeshiva in the Old City in Jerusalem near the Damascus Gate was stabbed and moderately wounded. His attacker fled the scene (Ynet, March 18).

Counterterrorist Activities

Gaza Strip

■ The Israeli security forces carried out preventive attacks against rocket fire and other attacks:

- **March 15** – The IDF attacked three terrorist operatives armed with rockets on their way to launch them from the northern Gaza Strip. The three belonged to the PIJ and had previously been involved in firing rockets at Sderot (IDF Spokesman's Website, March 15).
- March 15 – IDF forces discovered two IEDs near the security fence in the northern Gaza Strip. The devices were exploded in a monitored detonation. Two days previously an IED exploded near an IDF force in the region of Kissufim; the force was engaged in engineering activities near the security fence.

Judea and Samaria

Four wanted PIJ terrorist operatives killed in Bethlehem

■ On March 12, 2008, four wanted PIJ terrorists were shot and killed in Bethlehem by the Israeli security forces. The four comprised the PIJ operative leadership in Bethlehem **and were armed with rifles and hand guns when the Israeli security forces attempted to arrest them.** The four had taken part in **mass-casualty attacks** which killed many Israeli civilians.¹ Muhammad Shehadeh and the network he headed **had had direct contact with PIJ headquarters in Syria and received instructions from them.**

■ The four wanted terrorists were:

- **Muhammad Shehadeh Abed Ta'amri;**
- **Ahmed Khalil Salem Balboul;**
- **Imad Hussein Mahmoud Kamel;**
- **Issa Marzouq Saleh Zawahira.**

■ **Muhammad Shehadeh** was the head of the PIJ terrorist-operative network in Bethlehem (Jerusalem Battalions). He had been wanted for more than eight years for his participation in several mass-casualty terrorist attacks which killed and wounded many Israelis. The PIJ terrorist-operative network to which Shehadeh and the three other wanted terrorists belonged had been involved in extensive terrorist activity since the beginning of the Palestinian terrorism campaign against Israel (the second intifada). **In recent years, the network continued its activities.**

Senior PIJ terrorist organization killed in northern Samaria

■ On March 12 the Israeli security forces killed **Saleh Omar Karkour**, a senior PIJ terrorist operative in the village of Saida near Jenin, in northern Samaria. During the action fire was opened on the soldiers and IEDs were thrown at them. The soldiers returned fire, killing the

¹ For further information see our March 18 Bulletin entitled “Four wanted terrorists belonging to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad killed in Bethlehem” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/ct_160308e.htm.

terrorist operative. A Kalashnikov assault rifle, IEDs and several rifle magazines were found on the body (IDF Spokesman, March 12).

■ Saleh Karkour had been a PIJ operative since the 1990s. In 2002, a short time after the Neveh Sha'anun Street suicide bombing attack Tel Aviv which killed 23 civilians, he was detained on suspicion of being involved in aiding and abetting the attack. During interrogation he said that he had let the two terrorists sleep in his home and admitted involvement in recruiting suicide bombers. During recent weeks he and other PIJ terrorist operatives had been involved in planning additional suicide bombing attacks (IDF Spokesman, March 12)

The Gaza Strip Crossings

Humanitarian aid continues to pass from Israel and Egypt into the Gaza Strip

■ During the past week the transfer of humanitarian aid continued through the crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip, including fuel, oil and heating gas, foodstuffs and humanitarian equipment. In addition, patients and other individuals with humanitarian needs passed from the Gaza Strip into Israel.

■ Senior Hamas figure Mahmoud al-Zahar tried to send the message of a “return to normal” by stating that the Rafah Crossing would soon open “on the basis of new conditions and criteria, different from those operative in the past” (PalMedia Website, March 14). In reality, it is doubtful whether any progress has been made in the Hamas-Egyptian talks which deal, among other things, with the operation of the Rafah Crossing.

The Annapolis Process

Talks between Israel and the PA renewed

■ On March 17 Israeli Foreign Minister **Tsippi Livni** met with **Abu Alaa'**, head of the Palestinian negotiating team, after two weeks during which meeting were not held because of the escalation in the Gaza Strip (Haaretz, March 18). Abu Alaa' called the meeting “unofficial” to

express the Palestinians' continuing dissatisfaction with the construction of residential units in the Pisgat Zeev neighborhood of northeast Jerusalem (AP, March 17).

■ PA Chairman **Abu Mazen** told the Islamic Summit Meeting in Dakar that the Palestinians were committed to the Annapolis process. He said that the "blockade of the Gaza Strip" and the IDF's continued actions violated the process. With regard to the East Jerusalem Arabs, he said that "our people in the city face an **ethnic cleansing** carried out by a series decisions taken by Israel..." (Al-Manar TV, March 13).

Israeli decision determines that the PA is not immune to legal actions dealing with involvement in terrorism

■ On March 16 the Israeli foreign minister issued a decision to the effect that based on an opinion from the ministry's legal counsel, the PA was not immune to legal actions dealing with involvement in terrorism. The decision relates to 55 open files waiting for attention in court (Foreign Ministry, March 16). PA Minister of Information Riyadh al-Maliki responded by saying that Israeli courts were not authorized to deal with PA matters and that "it is a political issue and not a legal or judicial one" (Wafa News Agency, March 17).