



April 17, 2008

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

Three IDF soldiers killed by Hamas gunfire in renewed escalation in the Gaza Strip (Update April 17, 2008)



**Sergeant Matan Ovdati, one of the
three IDF soldiers killed April 16
(IDF Spokesman, April 16).**



**IDF action in the
northern Gaza
Strip (near Nahal
Oz) on the night
of April 15**

**Site of April 16
clash where three
IDF soldiers were
killed**

**Site of April 17 clash
(no casualties)**

Events of April 16-17

1. On the morning of April 16 an IDF force operating along the border fence near Kibbutz Be'eri (4 km, or about 2 ½ miles, southwest of the Karni Crossing) observed **two armed Palestinians attempting to place IEDs** near the security fence. In trying to prevent their actions the force entered the Gaza Strip and was ambushed by a squad of six terrorists. The squad, which had been in hiding, shot at the IDF force, exploiting the fog covering the area. **In the exchange of fire three IDF soldiers were killed and three more were wounded.** The terrorist operatives apparently managed to escape into the Gaza Strip. **Hamas** claimed responsible for the killings (Al-Qassam Website, April 16).

2. The three IDF soldiers killed were Sergeant Matan Ovdati, 19, from Moshav Patish in the western Negev; Corporal Menhash al-Banyat, 20, from the Negev town of Kuseife; and Corporal David Papiian, 21, from Tel Aviv. **Since the beginning of 2008 eight IDF soldiers have been killed in the Gaza Strip, compared with three during 2007.** In our assessment the rise in the number of soldiers killed is a result of the terrorist organizations' improved operative capabilities, especially Hamas.

3. On the same day, during an action in the northern Gaza Strip in the Nahal Oz area, an IDF force identified and attacked ten armed Palestinian terrorists. During the exchange of fire mortar shells and anti-tank missiles were fired at the IDF soldiers, from, among other places, inside a mosque on the outskirts of Sajaiya,¹ where large quantities of explosive devices and weapons had been hidden. During the attack an IDF soldier was moderately wounded (IDF Spokesman, April 16).



Weapons found during the IDF action in the northern Gaza Strip. Right: Weapons found in a mosque on the outskirts of Sajaiya (IDF Spokesman, April 16).

¹ Palestinian terrorists often fire from and store weapons in mosques.

4. After the clash the Israeli Air Force carried out a number of strikes against suspicious vehicles and individuals suspected of being terrorist operatives. The Palestinian media reported that the strikes had killed 12 Palestinians and wounded 25. Among those killed was **Fadel Shana'a**, a Reuters photographer, who went to the area to document the events and was **killed by mistake**. The IDF expressed regret and examined the circumstances of his death.

5. On the afternoon of April 17 an IDF force identified a three-man Palestinian observation squad near the security fence in the region of the Kerem Shalom Crossing (southeast Gaza Strip). One of the operatives of the squad was shot and killed, another was wounded and the third escaped.

Rocket and mortar shell fire into Israel

6. At the same time as the aforementioned attacks, the terrorist organizations fired **massive barrages of rockets** at the western Negev towns. On April 16 and 17 **more than 30 rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory**. One of the rockets fell in an open field near **Ashqelon** and another fell to the south of the city of **Netivot**. The **Palestinian Islamic Jihad** claimed responsibility for most of the attacks. In addition, more than 20 mortar shells were fired.

Supplies of diesel fuel and crude oil are renewed

1.7. Despite the exceptional incidents, on the afternoon of April 16 Israel renewed supplies of diesel fuel to the Gaza Strip power plant through the Nahal Oz fuel terminal. The terminal was closed on April 10 after a terrorist attack in which two Israeli civilians who worked there were murdered. On April 15, after an appeal from Egypt, and after a security analysis of the incident had been performed, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak instructed the renewal of fuel supplies to the Gaza Strip. Cooking gas was also delivered, as was gasoline for emergency and rescue vehicles.

Palestinian reactions

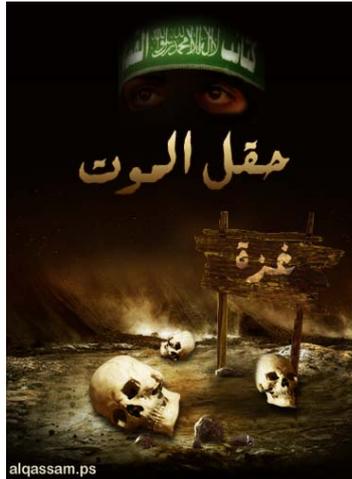
8. There was extensive coverage of the events by the Palestinian media. Palestinian spokesmen reacted harshly to Israel's response to the terrorist attack, using terms such as "slaughter," "Nazis" and "holocaust." Most of the Palestinian spokesmen also mentioned the unintentional killing of Reuters' photographer Fadel Shana'a. The Hamas movement called upon the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades to attack Israel "everywhere and by all available means" (Palestine-info Website, April 16).

9. The Hamas government issued an official statement to the newspapers demanding the immediate opening of the Rafah Crossing and calling the "violence and terrorism carried out by Israel" a "holocaust of the Palestinian people" (Palestine-info Website, April 16).



Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades press conference (Palestine-info Website, April 16).

10. **Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri** said that what had happened in the eastern Gaza Strip was a continuation of Israeli violence and an attempt to whitewash the Israeli failure to cope with the capabilities of the "resistance," which had killed three Israeli soldiers. He said that Hamas had decided to use any and all means to break out of the blockade and would respond with all its force to an Israeli escalation in the Gaza Strip (Ramattan News Agency, April 16).



"Fields of Death" poster, the Hamas nickname for the clash in which three IDF soldiers were killed (Al-Qassam Website , April 17).

11. **Abu Mazen** condemned the IDF actions and said that they illustrated "the enemy's moral bankruptcy." He called upon the international community and the Western countries to take action to stop "Israeli aggression" and to lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip (Wafa News Agency, April 16). The Salam Fayyad government strongly denounced the Israel action. The government's secretary general proclaimed a day of national mourning during which all flags flying over official Palestinian Authority institutions would be lowered to half mast (Wafa News Agency, April 16).