



Intelligence and Terrorism
Information Center
Israel Intelligence Heritage

News of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

October 6-12, 2008



Hamas spokesman Musheir al-Masri speaking at a rally in support of Acre's Arab population. Hamas exploited the events for spiteful anti-Israeli incitement and propaganda (Al-Aqsa TV, October 11).



Hamas leaders on their way to Egypt for a national dialogue. Left to right: Mahmoud al-Zahar, Sayid Siyan, Khalil al-Hayya (Ibrahim Abu Mustafa for Reuters, October 7).

Overview

- Generally speaking, the lull arrangement was observed in the Gaza Strip and no exceptional events were reported during the Jewish High Holidays. The average amount of merchandise delivered into the Gaza Strip from Israel declined owing to the smaller number of working days caused by the holidays, but there was no shortage of goods or fuel. The issue of abducted Israel soldier Gilad Shalit was discussed during the Fatah-Hamas dialogue held in Egypt.
- The "internal" and "external" Hamas delegations met with Omar Suleiman and other high-ranking Egyptians. Senior Hamas figures expressed satisfaction with the talks, which dealt with a "package" of core issues pending between Fatah and Hamas, including the end of Mahmoud Abbas' term of office. Hamas spokesmen hinted that they might agree to extending the term, after the Hamas Legislative Council unanimously decided to put an end to it as of midnight, January 8, 2009.

Important Events

Gaza Strip

■ In general this past week the lull arrangement was observed. On October 6 a network calling itself the Hezbollah Brigades in Palestine announced that it had fired a rocket at Sderot (Qudsnet website, October 7), but no hit was identified in Israel territory. It is a new (and in our assessment, nonexistent) network which announced its establishment recently, and whose spokesman, **Abu Hassan**, said that it had the capability to fire rockets into Israel.

■ However, Hamas continues its attempts to prevent the “rogue” terrorist organizations from violating the lull arrangement. On October 9 the media reported that the Hamas police force had arrested four Palestinian Islamic Jihad operations who tried to fire rockets from Beit Lahiya (in the northern Gaza Strip) into Israel.

Counterterrorism Activities

Judea and Samaria

■ Israeli security forces counterterrorism activities continue in Judea and Samaria, reflected primarily by the detention of Palestinians suspected of terrorist activity.

The lull arrangement – update

The crossings

■ The average amount of merchandise delivered into the Gaza Strip from Israel declined owing to the smaller number of working days caused by the holidays, but no shortage of goods or fuel was reported.

Opening the Rafah crossing

■ Three buses of Palestinian pilgrims returning to the Gaza Strip passed through the Rafah crossing on October 11 (Pal-today website, October 11). The crossing was supposed to open again on October 12 to enable ill Palestinians and those delayed on the Egyptian side to return to the Gaza Strip. At the same time, Egyptian-Palestinian contacts have been held to enable regular openings of the crossing (Pal-today website, October 12).

Detention of Bedouin smugglers

■ The Egyptian security forces detained 31 Bedouins in the northern Sinai peninsula to prevent smuggling and arms dealing. During the detentions large quantities of fuel and food were confiscated which were about to be smuggled into the Gaza Strip through the tunnels (Al-Hayat, October 10).

The issue of Gilad Shalit, the abducted Israeli soldier

■ During the Hamas-Egypt dialogue (See below) one of the issues raised was Gilad Shalit, the Israeli soldier abducted more than two years ago. Hamas representatives claimed that Israel had ignored a previous agreement with Egypt to release Gilad Shalit in return for 450 prisoners chosen by Hamas, and 550 to be chosen by Israel, including children, women and ill prisoners. Members of the Hamas delegation said they still regarded Egypt as the only mediator in the Gilad Shalit issue and that they would not agree to the appointment of another one (Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda, October 10).

■ Throughout it all senior Hamas figures continue making harsh statements regarding Gilad Shalit, accusing Israel of not meeting Hamas's conditions. **Khaled Mashal**, head of Hamas's political bureau in Damascus, said that the negotiations regarding the abducted soldier were "stuck" because Israel adhered to its original positions and "was unreliable" (Le Figaro, October 6).

Institutionalizing the tunnel activities

■ Hamas continues **institutionalizing** the vast network of tunnels under the Gaza Strip-Egypt border. Focus is put on inspecting goods entering, levying taxes and improving safety. The interior ministry of Ismail Haniya's administration leads this activity.

■ The following steps were recently taken:

- In accordance with an interior ministry demand, every tunnel owner must **register** it and pay a **registry fee of 150,000 shekels for a new tunnel and 50,000 shekels for an existing one**. In return Hamas is supposed to **supply electricity** for the tunnels, provided by the Palestinian electric company. In addition, Hamas levies a relatively high tax on tunnel owners (Al-Kawfieh website, October 7).
- Hamas has demanded that tunnel owners institute **security precautions** and every tunnel must receive a "stamp of approval" to prevent the deaths of the civilians operating them. Those working in the tunnels must be at least 20 years old (because of the large numbers of youths killed in the tunnels). The interior ministry also requires the tunnel owners to pay reparations to the families of individuals killed in tunnel accidents.

Hamas statements relating to extending the lull arrangement

- The lull arrangement, supposed to last for a period of half a year, is due to expire on December 19. In an interview **Khaled Mashal** said that close to the expiration date Hamas would review its position and made its decision. He claimed that Hamas had met all its commitments so far, while Israel had not (interview with an Italian network, October 11). Sheikh **Khalil Nafez Azzam**, one of the PIJ's heads, said that the lull arrangement had to be reexamined and that it did not meet Palestinian requirements (Nidaa al-Quds website, October 11).

- An investigative report by Hamas's journal Al-Risala (October 7) dealing with the morning after the lull arrangement expires gave **three possible scenarios**:
 - **A de facto lull arrangement which would continue** without an official agreement between Israel and Hamas. It was possible, according to the report, in light of the fact that both Israel and Hamas are interested in continuing the quiet.

 - The lull arrangement would collapse and the violence would be renewed in light of what Al-Risala called "Israel's violations" [completely ignoring the violations carried out by the terrorist organizations].

 - **The lull arrangement would be renewed** following a success of the internal Palestinian dialogue and the mending of the rift between Hamas and Fatah, and it would be extended to Judea and Samaria.

- Khalil al-Hayya, a senior Hamas official in the Gaza Strip and a member of the Hamas delegation to Cairo, said that the delegation had presented Omar Suleiman, head of Egyptian general intelligence, with a list of 172 Israeli violations of the lull arrangement.¹ He noted that Israel had not met its commitments regarding opening the crossings and lifting the "blockade." He also claimed that Israel's continued violations would lead to the collapse of the lull arrangement (Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda, October 10).

¹ In effect, while Hamas does observe the lull arrangement, the other terrorist organizations have violated it on occasion, and Israel responded by limited closings of the Gaza Strip crossings. Since the lull arrangement went into effect 21 rocket hits were identified (three of them landing in the Gaza Strip) and 18 mortar shell hits. In addition, a number of IEDs were planted along the border fence.

The Internal Palestinian Arena

The Fatah-Palestinian National Dialogue

■ On October 8 the “internal” and “external” Hamas delegation met with Omar Suleiman, head of Egyptian general intelligence, and other high-ranking Egyptian officials. The Hamas delegation included Musa Abu Marzuq, Mahmoud al-Zahar, Sayed Siyam, Khalil al-Hayya and others. On October 9 Musa Abu Marzuq and several other senior Hamas figures met with Nabil Amru, a high-ranking Fatah activist who serves as Palestine ambassador to Egypt. The meeting was described as cordial. According to media reports Hamas and Egypt agreed to a trilateral meeting of Fatah, Hamas and Egypt, which would be held on October 25.



Mahmoud al-Zahar leaving for a meeting in Egypt (Al-Jazeera TV, October 10).

■ There is a series **core issues** to be discussed in the national dialogue through Egyptian mediation, including the end of Mahmoud Abbas’ term of office, the establishment of a transition government and elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council and presidency, reorganizing the Palestinian security services in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria, and reorganizing the PLO. Except for the bilateral issues between Fatah-PLO and Hamas there are matters relating to **Israel**, such as the release of Gilad Shalit, opening the Rafah crossing and perhaps also the lull arrangement and the future of the peace process.

■ **Senior Hamas figures** expressed their satisfaction with the understandings reached with Egypt, alongside cautious optimism mixed with suspicion from the **Fatah spokesmen**:

- **Musa Abu Marzuq**, head of the Hamas delegation, claimed that they were in agreement with Egypt. He said that Hamas was in favor of appointing a “government of national consensus” and did not strongly object to extending Mahmoud Abbas’ term of office (other Hamas spokesmen also hinted to the media that Hamas would agree to an extension). Abu Marzuq claimed that the entire body of issues had to be addressed as “one package” (Al-Hayat, October 10).

- **Mahmoud Abbas**, speaking for Fatah, said that the Hamas meeting with Egypt had shown “positive signs” and expressed his hope that progress would be made in the right direction. He also said that he did not know how serious the proposal was to hold a bilateral dialogue in Egypt with Hamas at the end of the month (Palestinian TV, October 11). In any event, so far Fatah has not confirmed that its delegation will go to Cairo for the trilateral meeting with Hamas and Egypt, using the excuse that it has not yet been officially invited.

Palestinian Authority Security Force Activities

■ Intensive activities continued to be carried out against Hamas networks in Judea and Samaria by the PA security services. Conspicuous were the detentions of Hamas operatives in Hebron, including two senior Hamas operatives who may have been planning to carry out a terrorist attack. The two were detained with weapons in their possession, explosive belts and large amounts of money. Both had been involved in the suicide bombing attack carried out in Dimona on February 4, 2008.² In addition, the Palestinian security services in Hebron seized two arms caches and a Hamas **explosives laboratory** located close to a **residential area** of the city (Ma’an News Agency October 10).

■ In response to the detentions, senior Hamas figure **Sami Abu Zuhri** said the action carried out by the Palestinian security forces was additional proof of their collaboration with Israel (Radio Al-Aqsa, October 6). **Fawzi Barhoum**, Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, called for a “public uprising” against the PA security services (Al-Aqsa TV, October 11). **Abu Obeida**, Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades spokesman, warned that Hamas would use all the means at its disposal to protect its men (Radio Al-Aqsa, October 6). As to the seizure of the explosives laboratory, **Fawzi Barhoum** denied the truth of the information and accused the PA of “destroying any Palestinian national consensus.” He demanded that Egypt take a stand regarding the issue (Al-Aqsa TV, October 10).

■ At the same time, it was reported that the Palestinian security forces were interested in deploying more men in Hebron, in coordination with Israel. Sources within the PA expressed uneasiness regarding the step because of the complex nature of the city, in which there are Israel settlers and a strong Hamas presence. According to those sources, implementing the security program in Hebron will be a difficult test case for the Palestinian security services, but they are determined to succeed (AKI, an Italian news agency, October 9).

² For further information see our February 5, 2008 Bulletin entitled “Suicide bombing attack in the Dimona commercial center kills one city resident and wounds many” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ct_040208e.pdf.

Meetings in Damascus

- On October 11 Mahmoud Abbas arrived in Syria for a visit. Before he left he was updated in Amman by Nabil Amru, Palestinian ambassador to Cairo, regarding the results of the talks in Egypt. As to whether Mahmoud Abbas would meet Hamas representatives in Damascus, presidential spokesman **Nabil Abu Rudeina** told the BBC in Damascus that "Mahmoud Abbas will meet with high-ranking Syrians."
- The Hamas delegation which had gone to Cairo also arrived in Damascus on October 11 to meet with the "external" Hamas leadership (i.e., Khaled Mashal). Its goal is to assess the situation after the talks in Cairo and in preparation for continuing the dialogue with Fatah.

The Fatah Central Committee Convenes

- The Fatah Central Committee met in Jordan on October 11 as part of preparations for the sixth general Fatah convention (the movement's broadest forum). Mahmoud Abbas participated in some of the deliberations, regarding the convention as a vital step in rehabilitating Fatah. The Central Committee is supposed to determine the time and place for the sixth general convention. In addition, basic issues on the agenda were discussed, especially the negotiations between the PA and Israel and the Fatah-Hamas dialogue.

Hamas Decision to End Mahmoud Abbas' Term of Office

- On October 6 Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council met in Gaza and unanimously decided to **put an end** Mahmoud Abbas' term of office as president of the Palestinian as of **midnight, January 8, 2009**. According to the decision, at that time Mahmoud Abbas' rule will no longer be considered legitimate. According to the decision, Hamas activist and acting head of parliament **Ahmed Bahr** is the Hamas candidate for PA president.
- The meeting of the Legislative Council was held because the date for Mahmoud Abbas to issue an order for elections to the presidency had come and gone (no later than October 9, three months before the end of his term of office). Apparently Mahmoud Abbas would like to **extend** his term of office, and in any case the entire matter is one of the main topics of discussion in the dialogue between Fatah and Hamas being held in Egypt .

Anti-Israeli Incitement in Support of the Arabs of Acre

- With the violent confrontations between Jewish and Arab youths in the northern city of Acre, Palestinian sources expressed solidarity with Israeli Arabs, exploiting the events for anti-Israeli incitement and propaganda. Hamas held a procession in the northern Gaza Strip to support "the

Palestinian residents of Acre.” **Musheir al-Masri**, senior Hamas activist, expressed Hamas’s support for the residents of Acre, saying that the day would come when troops of Hamas and the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades **would enter Acre** (PalMedia website, October 11).



Musheir al-Masri speaking at a rally in support of Acre’s Arab population (Al-Aqsa TV, October 11).

- Some of the remarks made regarding to the events in Acre were the following:
 - **Sami Abu Zuhri**, Hamas spokesman, said that the events proved the increase in “Zionist racism against the Arab residents” and were the result of the Annapolis meeting. He said that Hamas stood firmly with Israeli Arabs “who are the victims of recurring Zionist attacks” (Palestine-info website, October 9).
 - **Walid Hilles**, a PIJ spokesman in the Gaza Strip, said that the attacks showed “the barbarity of the occupation and its racism.” He called upon Palestinians to stand firm in face of “the Israeli plan to expel them from their country” (Pal-today website, October 10).
 - **Jamal al-Hudari** said that Israel’s goal was to destroy the Palestinian people in a new way, by attacking Palestinians in Acre (Qudsnet website, October 10).



Rally in the northern Gaza Strip in support of the Arab population in Acre (Al-Aqsa TV, October 11).

Inculcating the Culture of Terrorism and “Resistance” [i.e., Terrorism and Violence]

■ The Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades website posted an article according to which during the Muslim holidays many children were seen in the refugee camps wearing uniforms and playing with weapons and mortar shells made of plastic. According to the article, stores that sell such toys are thriving and playing with weapons is the **children’s favorite game**. According to one child, he got the weapon to “**kill the Jew in the [watch] tower...**” (Al-Qassam website, October 5). Children playing with plastic weapons in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip is an expression of the education for hatred and violence against Israel they receive from kindergarten.³

³ For further information about educating children for “resistance” see our August 24, 2008 and November 8, 2007 Bulletins entitled “Summer camps in the Gaza Strip run by Hamas and other terrorist organizations inculcate youngsters with radical Islamic ideology and the culture of terrorism” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hamas_e004.pdf and “Palestinian children playing with plastic weapons, copying the fighting methods of the terrorist organizations” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/h_i_1107.pdf.