



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

October 27, 2008

The Palestinian security services carry out intensive security activity in the Hebron district (Update and implications)



The Palestinian security services deploying in Hebron (Nayef Hashalmon for Reuters, October 25).

Palestinian security services' deployment in Hebron

1. In recent weeks the Palestinian security services have carried out intensive security activity in the Hebron district, one part of a broad three-stage security operation. Israel and the Palestinian Authority agreed that the hundreds of Palestinians routinely deployed in the **Hebron district** would be reinforced with 600 operatives from the various Palestinian services. They would initially be deployed around the rural area south of Mt. Hebron, and later within the city of Hebron itself.

2. After coordination with Israel, the deployment began on the morning of October 25. According to Hebron police chief **Ramadan Awad**, the force would be composed of **585 operatives from all the security services**: the presidential guard, the Special Second Battalion of National Security, military intelligence, the police, and the executive forces of both preventive security and general intelligence (AP, and the Palestinian media, October 25). Commander of the reinforcements **Sayid al-Najar** said that the PA force would have 145 vehicles at its disposal, acquired with American aid.



The Palestinian security services deploying in Hebron (Nayef Hashalmon for Reuters, October 25).

3. The **official objective** of the operations, as represented by high-ranking Palestinians, is to ensure public order and fight crime. The security forces are also expected to **continue activities designed to weaken Hamas's civilian and military infrastructure**. In recent weeks the Palestinian security services moved against dozens of institutions belonging to Hamas's civilian and military infrastructure (the *da'wah*) in the Hebron district. They also moved against Hamas's military-terrorist networks, seizing large quantities of weapons (including explosive belts) and detaining terrorist operatives, two of whom had been involved in the suicide bombing attack in Dimona at the beginning of the year (See Appendix).

4. The Palestinian security services' activity in Hebron is one facet of a broad program instituted this past year by **Salam Fayyad's** government. It focuses on enforcing law and order, imposing the PA's authority and weakening the networks of Hamas and the other terrorist organizations in Judea and Samaria. The activity in the Hebron district was preceded this past year by intensive security activities in the Nablus and Jenin districts, which were reasonably successful. In our assessment the PA and its security services view the activities as an **important test of their capabilities** and have invested a great deal of effort in them. That was done with an awareness of the sensitive and problematic nature of the Hebron district, caused by both the strength of Hamas and the local clans, and the proximity of the Jewish settlement in Hebron to the areas of Palestinian security service activity.

PA and Hamas Reactions

5. Prime Minister **Salam Fayyad** held an impromptu press conference in Bethlehem on October 21, where he said that the deployment was part of a security program which began this past year. He said its objectives were to enforce the law, protect the honor of the PA regime and to allow Palestinian civilians to live peaceful lives in their cities, villages and refugee camps without anarchy. He noted that the PA was determined to provide its citizens with security and gave favorable mention to the security services' level of training, praising the support of the local populations.

6. **Samih al-Sifi**, commander of the national security services in Hebron, held a press conference to announce the deployment. He said the services would detain anyone who acted unlawfully and that after the campaign no crime or disorder would be tolerated. He also said that illegal arms would be confiscated "without consideration for the identity of the possessor" [i.e., arms would also be confiscated from Palestinian terrorist operatives]. When asked if the campaign's objective was to attack the Hamas movement, he denied it and said that Hamas's armed groups, such as the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades and the Executive Force would be the targets (PNN, October 25).

7. Hebron governor **Hussein al-'Araj** said that the goal of the move was to coordinate the size of the force deployed in the large, densely populated district of Hebron with its security challenges. He noted that the goal would be to safeguard security and order and to end anarchy, the possession of illegal weapons, damage to public institutions and the use of stolen vehicles (BBC, October 25).

8. **Hamas**, fearing the new deployment would weaken its hold in the Hebron district, **severely criticized** the activities of the Palestinian security services. The other Palestinian terrorist organizations were more careful in their comments. Some of the first responses by terrorist organization spokesmen were the following:

i) **Hamas** spokesman **Fawzi Barhoum** said that the permission given by the IDF to the Palestinian security services to deploy its forces was part of the dangerous coordination between the PA and Israel, whose goal was to “preserve the occupation.” He said that it an attempt to destroy Hamas and to persecute “the men of the resistance and the jihad fighters.” He added that the campaign pointed to an “unpatriotic Zionist-American agenda” whose objective was to “destroy the resistance [i.e., the terrorist organizations], preserve the occupation and guard the settlers” (Sawt al-Quds, October 25).

ii) **Palestinian Islamic Jihad** leader **Nafez Azzam** said that the Palestinian security services would succeed only if Israel put pressure on them. He added that he hoped the security services would refuse to be party to the “destruction of the resistance” [i.e., attack the terrorist organizations] because that would increase the tension in the Palestinian arena (Pal-today website, October 25).

iii) **Popular Resistance Committees** spokesman **Kamal Nirab** said that he hoped the Palestinian security services would protect public safety and not harm the “resistance and its fighters” (Pal-today website, October 25).

In conclusion

9. The Palestinian security services’ activity in the Hebron district is the continuation and possibly the high point of the PA’s attempts to enforce law and order in Judea and Samaria. Their efforts began in the Nablus district in November 2007 and progressed to the Jenin district in May 2008. The willingness of the Salam Fayyad government to undertake intensive security activity in the Hebron district, a stronghold of Hamas power and rife with tension with the Jewish settlement, indicates the increasing self confidence of the PA and its security services. It also indicates its higher motivation than in the past to deal with the security and government challenges posed by the problematic district of Hebron.

10. The PA seems to view its activity in Hebron as an **important test** and an opportunity to demonstrate its security capabilities to the local population, its internal rivals (especially Hamas), and Israel, the United States and the international community. However, it also may feel it faces **potential dangers**: the most serious is the possibility that it will deepen the hostility of Hamas and possibly of the local population in a way that could harm the chances for success of the national dialogue currently being held. In addition, the security services’

activity is also liable to cause friction with the IDF and the Jewish settlers in Hebron and possibly even lead to violent incidents.

Appendix

Recent Palestinian security service activity in Hebron

11. In recent weeks the Palestinian security services have carried out intensive activity in the **Hebron district**. The region, which is strongly influenced by tradition and religion, is a Hamas stronghold in Judea and Samaria, where it holds a firm political, social and operative position. In addition, the Hebron district has dominant clans which enjoy greater influence than clans in other districts, and they may oppose the PA's attempts to enforce its authority.¹ Thus the Palestinian security services have recently avoided carrying out comprehensive activities in Hebron of the sort they carried out in the Nablus and Jenin districts, and have made no real effort to uproot the Hamas infrastructure.

12. The Palestinian security services' activity before the current deployment included the following:

i) **Enforcing law and order and fighting anarchy:** The security services acted to **enforce public order** and deal with crime within the villages and the city of Hebron itself. National security commander for the district, **Samih al-Sifi**, said the intensive activity in Hebron would "stop lawbreakers, including wanted criminals and armed groups" (Voice of Palestine Radio, October 13). For example, the Palestinian police in Hebron detained seven criminals wanted for various crimes, including murder, and seized 40 illegal vehicles (Al-Ayyam, October 23).

ii) **Activity directed against Hamas's civilian institutions:** The security services recently raided dozens of civilian institutions in Hebron and the neighboring villages, especially "charitable societies" belonging to Hamas's *da'wah*.

iii) **The detention of Hamas operatives in the Hebron region:** Particularly prominent was the detention of two senior Hamas terrorist operatives (Wa'el Beitar and Ahmed Awiwi) who were possibly planning to carry out a terrorist attack against Israel. Weapons were found in their possession, as were an explosive belt and large sums of money.

¹ For example, on November 2, 2006, hundreds of members of the Ja'abri clan, one of the largest in Hebron, burned a police station in Hebron to protest the death of one of their clansmen, killed by police gunfire.

The two were also involved in carrying out the suicide bombing attack in Dimona on February 4, 2008.²

iv) **Seizing weapons, military equipment and propaganda and incitement material:** In Hebron the Palestinian security services seized three Hamas arms caches and a **laboratory for the manufacture of explosives** located in the center of a **residential area** in Hebron (Ma'an News Agency, October 10). The heads of the Palestinian general intelligence service held a press conference in Hebron on October 12 where they displayed the weapons and equipment confiscated. During the press conference of **General Sa'di Aqel**, a senior general intelligence officer, attacked Hamas and accused it of subversion, endangering the population and attempting to destabilize the area.



Weapons, uniforms and chemicals for manufacturing weapons seized by the Palestinian security services (Al-Jazeera TV, October 12).



Ammunition belonging to Hamas seized by the Palestinian security services (Al-Jazeera TV, October 12).



Chemicals for manufacturing explosives captured by the Palestinian security services (Al-Jazeera TV, October 12).

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.

v) **Exposing a tunnel:** The Palestinian security services exposed a tunnel in the Farsh al-Hawa neighborhood of Hebron. It had been dug under the house of the Qawasmeh famil and was part of a network of tunnels linking the neighborhood to the Tarqumya roadblock (Ma'an News Agency, October 14).



The tunnel exposed in Hebron (PALDF Forum October 14).

Reactions to the Palestinian Security Services' Activity in Hebron

13. Hamas strongly condemned the activity of the Palestinian security services in the Hebron district and throughout the West Bank, noting that the PA was cooperating with the Israel enemy. That cooperation, according to Hamas, might sabotage the efforts of the current national Palestinian dialogue:

i) Hamas prime minister **Ismail Haniya** condemned the increase in Palestinian security service activity in the West Bank, claiming that Hamas was being attacked by the anarchist faction in Fatah which was not interested in national reconciliation (Al-Aqsa TV, October 17).

ii) The **Haniya administration** issued a statement condemning the detention of Hamas operatives and the closing of "charitable societies" in the West Bank, claiming the actions had been agreed to by Egypt with American and Israeli intervention (Palestine-info website, October 15).

iii) Hamas leader **Sámi Abu Zuhri** said that the Palestinian security services' activity was further proof of the PA's collaboration with Israel (Radio Al-Aqsa, October 6).

iv) Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, **Fawzi Barhoum**, called for a “popular uprising” in the West Bank against the security services (Al-Aqsa TV, October 11). Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades spokesman **Abu Obeida** warned that Hamas would use all the means at its disposal to protect its operatives (Radio Al-Aqsa, October 6).

Conclusions

14. Reinforcing the Palestinian security services in Hebron is an additional measure in the broad security program undertaken by the PA in the Hebron district (and throughout Judea and Samaria in general). Its primary objective is to enforce law and order, end anarchy and strengthen the PA's control and position. At the same time it is meant to impair **Hamas's** civilian and military capabilities, which are regarded as the main threat to PA control, to weaken Hamas's hold on the local population and to prevent a Judea and Samaria repetition of the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip.

15. Moreover, the PA is interested in demonstrating to the United States and Israel that its security services are capable of bearing responsibility for the security of Judea and Samaria. The commander of national security there, **Diyab al-Ali**, said that the services would be capable of control and of taking responsibility for the security of West Bank if Israel withdrew. He said that all they needed was to increase the security force to 15,000 men and to improve their weapons. He noted that all means had to be employed against Hamas forces should they try to take over the West Bank, and said that an internal Palestinian civil war was unlikely (Al-Quds Al Arabi, October 9).

16. The oppressive steps taken by Hamas in the Gaza Strip to suppress Fatah in recently months were a catalyst for the increased retaliation against Hamas by the Palestinian security services in Judea and Samaria. The PA's security measures may continue and even increase as January 9, 2009 approaches and Mahmoud Abbas' term as PA president ends.³ The real test of the Palestinian security services will be its success in preserving its control and in weakening Hamas in Judea and Samaria **continuously and over a long period of time**. As long as no significant progress is made in Fatah-Hamas relations the security services may continue at least their current level of strenuous security activity against Hamas. However, if the current Fatah-Hamas national dialogue results in an internal Palestinian agreement, the situation may change, and the PA may be required to reduce the its pressure on Hamas in Judea and Samaria.

³ On October 6, 2008, the Hamas faction of the Palestinian Legislative Council met in the Gaza Strip and decided unanimously on the **end** of Mahmoud Abbas' term of office as president of the PA, as of **midnight, October 8**, when his regime would be considered no longer legal. Hamas activist and **acting parliament chairman Ahmed Bahar** is the Hamas candidate for the PA presidency. The issue is being discussed in the internal Palestinian dialogue.