



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

December 7, 2008

Weekend escalation in the Gaza Strip: on December 5 and 6 seven rockets and eight mortar shells were fired, continuing the erosion of the lull arrangement, consistently violated by the Palestinian terrorist organizations since the beginning of November.



**Israeli police demolitions expert removing a rocket from an open field
(Photo: Zeev Trachtman, December 5).**

1. Over the weekend of December 5-6, rocket and mortar shell fire from the Gaza Strip into Israel **escalated**. Seven rockets were fired (one of which fell in the Gaza Strip), one hitting Ashqelon's industrial zone. Eight mortar shells landed in Israeli territory. Four of the shells, of the nine fired at Kerem Shalom, landed in Egyptian territory. The Egyptian security forces warned Hamas and placed responsibility for the event on it (Al-Yawm al-Sabaa website, December 6). None of the rockets or mortar shells caused casualties or property damage.

2. **Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade** claimed responsibility for most of the attacks, representing them as a response to the events in Hebron (Qudsnet website, December 8). The Popular Resistance Committees also claimed responsibility (Ma'an News Agency, December 6), as did the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Pal-today website, December 5) and a number of other terrorist organizations. Hamas, which has not yet formally announced the end of the lull arrangement, did not prevent the attacks from taking place. The Palestinian media reported that Hamas had consulted with representatives of the various other terrorist organizations regarding the continuation of the lull arrangement, which according to Hamas will end on December 19.

3. In response to the rocket and mortar shell attacks the Israeli Air Force attacked squads of rocket launchers south of Beit Hanoun and in the Jabaliya refugee camp (December 6). According to the Palestinian media, Hamza Shahin, an Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operative, was killed in the attack on Jabaliya (PalMedia website, December 7). Following the rocket and mortar attacks, the Israeli defense minister ordered the Gaza Strip crossings to remain close.

Conclusion and Evaluation

4. **The massive rocket and mortar shell fire is part of a dynamic created on the ground as of November 4:** Hamas and the other terrorist organizations attempt to carry out attacks (placing IEDs, firing rockets and mortar shells), the IDF takes preventive action (IAF attacks, shooting at terrorist squads near the border security fence), the terrorist organizations react to the IDF activities and continue sporadic daily rocket and mortar shell fire, and Israel responds by closing the crossings. Hamas does not force the other organizations to stop attacking (which would lead to a reopening of the crossings), but instead launches propaganda campaigns designed to exert international pressure on Israel to reopen them.

5. **The current round of escalation is the fifth** since early November, which began with the terrorist organizations' response to IDF preventive activities. This time, Fatah in the Gaza Strip (which operates under close Hamas supervision) used the events in Hebron as an excuse to attack. The first four rounds of escalation were the following:

i) On the night of **November 4**, following early information, the IDF operated in the Gaza Strip to **prevent Hamas from abducting an Israeli** through a tunnel dug under the border security fence. The IDF operated about 250 meters (about 275 yards) inside the Gaza Strip, close to the fence in the central Gaza Strip. Six Israeli soldiers were wounded, two of them critically. Seven Hamas terrorist operatives were killed and a number were wounded. The Palestinian terrorist organizations, led by Hamas,

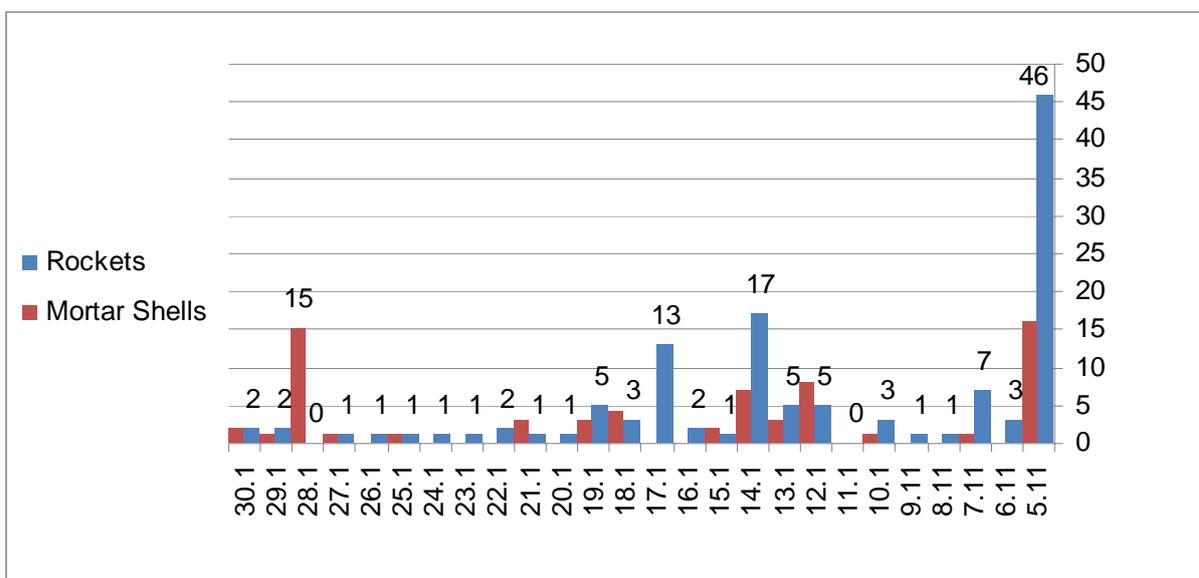
responded by attacking the western Negev towns and villages with several dozen rockets and mortar shells, a gross violation of the lull arrangement. The shelling stopped on the afternoon of November 5.

ii) On **November 12** an IDF force killed four armed Hamas operatives **who were placing an IED** near the border security fence near the Kissufim crossing in the central Gaza Strip. A firefight developed and the IED was detonated as an attack against the soldiers. In response five rockets and eight mortar shells were fired at Israeli towns and villages near the Gaza Strip border and at IDF forces.

iii) On the morning of **November 14** the IAF attacked a rocket-launching squad **on its way to fire rockets into Israel**, wounding a number of Hamas operatives. In response, 17 rockets were fired at Israeli population centers. Four of them were 122mm standard Grad rockets, **fired at Ashqelon**, one falling in the city center. Earlier in the day, a rocket hit a house in Sderot. Seven mortar shells were also fired.

iv) On November 28 an IDF force on a routine patrol sighted suspicious figures apparently **placing an IED** near the border security fence in the region of Abasan, near Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. In the firefight that developed, a PRC terrorist operative was killed and four were wounded. In immediate response hours the terrorist organizations launched a massive barrage of 17 mortar shells from the northern Gaza Strip at the Nahal Oz region. One rocket was also fired and fell in an open field. One of the mortar shells hit an IDF base nearby, **wounding eight soldiers, one of them critically**. Hamas claimed responsibility for most of the incidents.

Daily Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire, November 2008



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