



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

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Escalation in attacks from the Gaza Strip as Hamas announces the end of the lull arrangement



Damage to a store in the commercial center of Sderot
caused by rocket fire
(Zeev Trachtman, December 17, 2008)



Firing a rocket at Sderot
(Paltoday website, December 18, 2008)

Overview

1. On December 19, 2008, according to Hamas and the other Palestinian terrorist organizations, the lull arrangement will end (Israel's position is that the lull is unlimited in time). A spokesman for the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas's military-terrorist wing, and senior figures in the movement have declared that they will not renew the lull arrangement. **On the ground**, the terrorist organizations, especially the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, have attacked the western Negev population centers with massive rocket and mortar shell fire to heat up the arena even before they are planning to end the lull.

The Current Situation

2. The past two days witnessed an increase in the scope of rocket and mortar shell fire at the western Negev population centers and Ashqelon. **Thirty-two rockets** and **six mortar shells** were fired between December 16 and 18.¹ One rocket hit **Ashqelon's** commercial zone, wounding three civilians. Another rocket hit a shopping center in **Sderot**, wounding three civilians and causing property damage. The PIJ's Jerusalem Battalions claimed responsibility for most of the attacks, some announcements stating that they were in retaliation for the IDF's December 15 killing of senior operative Jihad Nawahda in Nablus (Qudsnet website, December 17). The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and a fictitious organization called the "Hezbollah Battalions in Palestine" claimed responsibility for some of the attacks.



Rocket hit in a Sderot commercial area
(Hamutal Ben-Shitrit for www.sderotmedia.co.il, December 18, 2008)

3. **In response the IDF attacked terrorist targets** four times on December 17. The attacks targeted squads of rocket launchers preparing to fire. In addition, during the night of December 17, Israeli Air Force planes and helicopters attacked two targets inside the Gaza Strip for the first time since the lull arrangement went into effect: a weapons store in the **Jabaliya** refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip and a workshop for manufacturing weapons in the city of **Khan Yunis**, in the southern Gaza strip (IDF Spokesman, December 18). The attack on Jabaliya killed PFLP operative Salah Abu Akel and wounded two. The structure attacked in Khan Yunis was completely destroyed (Iran's Fars website, December 18). In the early afternoon on December 18, the IAF again attacked two rocket launchers near the Jabaliya refugee camp.

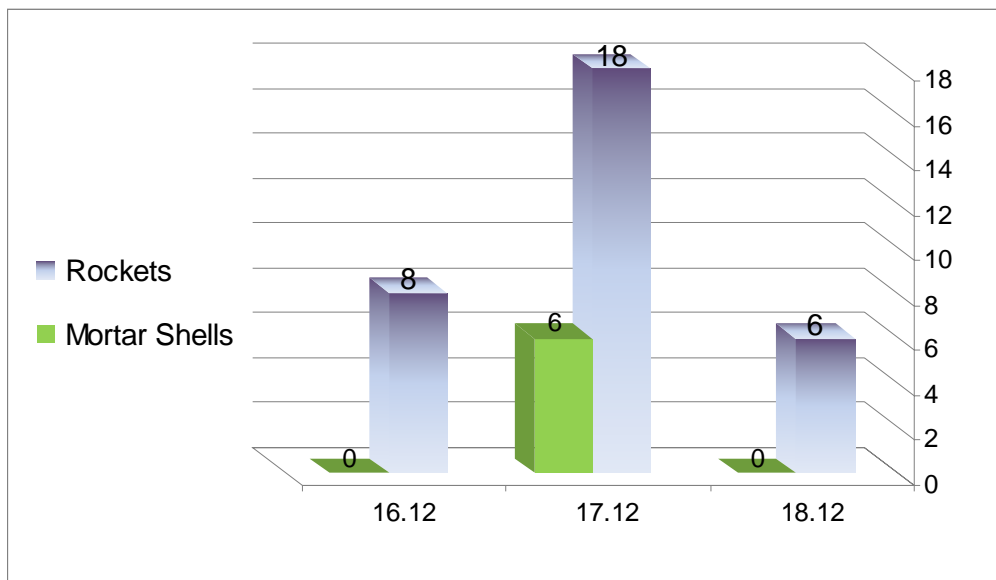
¹ As of 1300 hours, December 18.



Preparing to fire a rocket (Paltoday website, December 18, 2008)

4. The current escalation is a continuation of the series of events which began on November 4 with the prevention of an abduction attack and led to a significant erosion of the lull arrangement. In the past month and a half (as of the pre-dawn hours of December 18), **213 rockets** and **126 mortar** shells have been fired by the Palestinian terrorist organizations into Israel, accompanied by other kinds of attacks, including abductions, IEDs, and sniper fire. Beginning November 4, the lull arrangement has been eroded by the terrorist organizations to the point at which it exists only on paper.

Escalation As the End of the Lull Arrangement Approaches The Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire (December 16-18)



The Terrorist Organizations' Preparations for Ending the Lull

5. As they announce the end of the lull arrangement, the terrorist organizations are apprehensive lest the IDF launch an extensive response to their aggression, "Palestinian security sources" told an Al-Quds Al-Arabi correspondent that the Palestinian organizations in the Gaza Strip had established **a joint operations room**, which included the military wings of Hamas, the PIJ, Fatah, the Popular Resistance Committees and other organizations (Al-Quds Al-Arabi, December 17).



Preparing for the escalation
(Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades website, December 18, 2008)

Hamas Statement Regarding the End of the Lull Arrangement

6. In the early afternoon of December 17, Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades spokesman **Abu Ubeida** said that the lull arrangement would officially end on December 19, 2008, at 0600 hours [i.e., six months after it went into effect]. He added that it would not be renewed with the same conditions and accused Israel ["the occupation"] of responsibility for Hamas's position. (He said that "...we cannot extend the lull while the Palestinian people are under siege," adding that so far the Egyptian mediator had not spoken with Hamas about new terms or on a new arrangement (Radio Sawt al-Aqsa, December 17).



Abu Ubeida: The lull arrangement will not be renewed
(Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades website, December 17)

7. PIJ and Fatah spokesmen in the Gaza Strip also announced that their organizations had no intention of continuing the lull arrangement:

i) **Ziyad al-Nahleh**, deputy PIJ secretary in Damascus, said there was no real justification for continuing the lull arrangement, and that as long as the Gaza Strip crossings remained closed and Israel did not meet its commitments, the Palestinian organizations would reserve the right to find other ways of breaking the siege as part of the “resistance” [i.e., terrorism] (Paltoday website, December 16).

ii) **Ihab Miqdad**, spokesman for the Gazan Fatah’s Ayman Judeh squads, said that the organization’s military wing, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, wanted to emphasize the fact that it refused to renew the lull arrangement. He said that the lull was a failure and served only the interests of the “occupation” [i.e., Israel] (Qudsnet website, December 16).

8. On December 14, **Khaled Mashal**, head of Hamas’s political bureau in Damascus, said the lull arrangement would end on the 19th (Hamas’s Al-Aqsa TV, December 14). Senior Hamas figure **Ismail Radwan** said that “the lull will come to its natural end” on December 19, because Israel had not met its commitments (Filastin al-’An website, December 17).

9. The announcement was preceded by consultations held by Hamas with the other terrorist organizations (among them the PIJ, Fatah, the PFLP, the DFLP) on December 16 and 17^h. Sources within the other terrorist organizations told an Al-Hayat correspondent that “**the lull will not be renewed unless the terms are improved**. Renewing it with the current terms is unacceptable.” One source added that the most important condition would be the opening of the Gaza Strip crossings into Israel and the Rafah crossing, and the receipt of assurances that Israel would not close the crossings as it had during the current lull (Al-Hayat, BBC Radio, December 17).

Initial Responses to the End of the Lull Arrangement Announced by Hamas

Egypt

10. A high ranking Egypt official said that **Egypt would not participate in renewing the lull arrangement between Israel and Hamas** without the agreement of all the relevant parties. He noted that “we are not hanging around waiting for the door to open and some anonymous person to tell us to go into action to renew the [lull] arrangement. Each side must bear responsibility. We do not guarantee the relations between Hamas and Israel.” He

added that " Hamas has gotten on our nerves. We will be patient for the sake of the Palestinian people and their just cause" (UAE-based newspaper Al-Halij, December 17).

The Palestinian Authority

11. At a joint press conference held by Mahmoud Abbas and Austrian President Heinz Fischer at the Muqata' in Ramallah on December 17, Mahmoud Abbas called for the lull arrangement to continue. He said, "we demand a ceasefire [*hudna*] be imposed in the Gaza Strip, and we oppose the claims that the [current] ceasefire is ending, because it is the Palestinian people who suffer. We therefore demand that all sides maintain the lull to ensure that the suffering of the Palestinian people does not worsen" (Wafa News Agency, December 17).