



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

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**Hamas Invites Foreign Correspondents to the
Egyptian Border to Prove Some Smuggling Tunnels
Still Operating after Operation Cast Lead.
The move was made to defy Israel, Egypt and the
international community, and is part of Hamas's
battle for hearts and minds and to produce a
victory narrative**



Fixing the smuggling tunnels near Rafah (Photo: Ibrahim Abu Mousa for Reuters, January 22, 2009).

1. During Operation Cast Lead the Israeli Air Force attacked the smuggling tunnel system in the Rafah region hundreds of times, striking the tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border. Despite the many attacks, some of the tunnels were not damaged and were used both during and after the fighting.¹ Now that the operation is over, Hamas is working energetically to renew the tunnels' activity and has stated that fact publicly in the Arab and Western media.



Destruction to tunnels in Rafah region: pictures posted by a surfer on a Hamas forum (PALDF Forum, January 14, 2009).

2. As part of producing the "victory narrative" for Operation Cast Lead, Hamas invited foreign correspondents, mainly from the West, to the Gaza-Rafah border. The objective was to let them see for themselves that **the tunnels continued operating as usual and that Israel had not achieved one of the main goals of Operation Cast Lead: to stop weapons from entering the Gaza Strip through the tunnels.**²

3. According to the reports of the correspondents who visited the region, during Operation Cast Lead only half of the tunnels were destroyed by the Israeli Air Force. The tunnel operators told the correspondents that some of them functioned during the days of the fighting itself. According to the reports, the Egyptian police are aware of the existence of the tunnels on the Egyptian side but do not prevent them from operating (Der Spiegel, January 20, 2009).

4. Beyond Hamas's propaganda gains, it is also clearly a defiant act taken against **Israel** (which is trying to get the international community to agree to a way of dealing with the smuggling), **Egypt** (which signaled its intentions of dealing with the tunnels more effectively), the **United States** and the **international community**, which expressed willingness to support an effort to stop the smuggling.

¹ According to a newspaper report, even a delegation of foreign doctors reached the Gaza Strip during Operation Cast Lead through one of the tunnels (Haaretz, January 22, 2009).

² The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center Hebrew Bulletin dealing with Hamas's effort to produce a "victory narrative" will shortly be available in English on this website.



Al-Arabiya TV correspondent examines the entrance to a tunnel which went back into operation after Operation Cast Lead (Al-Aqsa TV, January 20, 2009).



Tunnel which went back into operation immediately following Operation Cast Lead (Al-Arabiya TV, January 20, 2009).

Appendix

Hamas's smuggling tunnels

5. Hamas and the other Palestinian terrorist organizations exploited the lull arrangement to **develop and institutionalize the extensive tunnel network in the Rafah region used for smuggling**. In our assessment, there were several hundred tunnels in existence before Operation Cast Lead,³ many of which were used to smuggle weapons and military equipment into the Gaza Strip. According to the IDF's initial assessment, a large number of those tunnels were destroyed or damaged during Operation Cast Lead.

6. The tunnel network was constructed to facilitate the orderly, uninterrupted flow of weapons, terrorist operatives and funds into the Gaza Strip, and at the same time to provide a supply of food, manufactured goods and fuel, thus providing a partial response to the difficulties created when Israel and Egypt closed the crossings. Hamas makes no particular effort to hide the smuggling activities,⁴ which **increased and became institutionalized during the lull arrangement**, until they became not only a major factor in the military buildup of Hamas and the other terrorist organizations, but also an integral part of the Gaza Strip's economy.

7. The tunnel industry is based on the needs of Hamas and the other terrorist organizations to smuggle weapons, food and fuel into the Gaza Strip from Egypt. It is a partial response to the closing of the crossings, including the Rafah crossing. The lull arrangement, during which the IDF ceased its activities in the Gaza Strip, led to the tunnel industry's flourishing, which could thus be carried out without interference from Israel. Before Operation Cast Lead, the Egypt security forces did in fact carry out increased activity against the smugglers, and from time to time exposed tunnels, detained smugglers and confiscated the merchandise. However, their activities were **not sufficiently effective** and did not put an end to the smuggling or **even limit its dimensions**.

8. During the lull arrangement the tunnel network was **institutionalized** by the Hamas administration and came under its jurisdiction (to the point at which there were calls for it to be nationalized). Hamas oversaw the incoming merchandise, collected taxes and improved safety in the tunnels. The activity was led by the **interior ministry of Ismail Haniya's administration** to increase Hamas supervision of the tunnel industry, increase profits and

³ British journalists estimated their number and between 400 and 600 (Guardian, October 22, 2008, Independent, October 25, 2008).

⁴ Even before Operation Cast Lead, Hamas was open about the smuggling and allowed British correspondents to interview activists involved in it. However, Hamas propaganda falsely represented the smuggling as relating only to various types of merchandise needed to ease the so-called siege, never referring to the weapons, terrorist operatives or money.

ensure greater worker safety (after there had been frequent deaths and injuries resulting from tunnel collapses and other mishaps).⁵ **Hamas thus improved its ability to provide for its military needs** while also providing a partial solution for the shortages of goods and fuel which plagued the civilian population.

9. It is estimated that before Operation Cast Lead, **thousands of workers and terrorist organization activists** were involved in digging the tunnels and using them for smuggling. According to British Guardian and Independent articles (October 22 and October 25, 2008, respectively), there are about 6,000 workers in the tunnel industry in Rafah. Estimates for digging range from \$60,000 to \$70,000 per tunnel, half the sum paid to the owner of the house under whose floor the tunnel is dug, while the other half goes for the excavating equipment, and the salaries paid to the tunnel engineer and the workers. Profits per tunnel are estimated at from \$30,000 to \$50,000 a month. According to the Independent, an active tunnel is sold for about \$150,000.



Laying phone lines in the tunnels (Hamas's PALDF Forum, October 23, 2008).

10. In our assessment, Hamas will work as fast as it can **to restore** the tunnels damaged or destroyed during Operation Cast Lead, demonstrating a certain amount of **self confidence** toward Israel and Egypt. The tunnels play an extremely important role in the restoration of Hamas military infrastructure, since they make it possible for large quantities of weapons to flow regularly into the Gaza Strip.

⁵ The tunnel industry often claimed victims during both digging and day-to-day operation. The deaths of Palestinians working in the tunnels worried the Hamas administration and it tried to reduce the number. The interior ministry was reported to have required tunnel owners to compensate the families of those killed in an effort to induce them to maintain a higher level of worker safety (Paltoday website, October 5, 2008).