



Intelligence and Terrorism
Information Center
Israel Intelligence Heritage
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News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

March 9-17, 2009



Noam Shalit, Gilad Shalit's father, with a picture of his abducted son
(Photo" Yehonatan Shaul for nrg, March 17, 2009).

Overview

- This past week's events focused on the intensive contacts in Cairo through Egyptian mediation between the Israeli negotiating team and the Hamas delegation over the deal to release abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. The contacts, held during the final days of Ehud Olmert's government, ended without an agreement's being reached. **The Israeli prime minister accused Hamas of responsibility for the failure of the talks**, saying that Hamas had "hardened its position" and "raised extreme demands," despite "generous proposals" made by Israel. The discrepancies remaining are the number of prisoners to be released and where they will be released to.
- During the week there was a **decrease** in rocket and mortar shell fire from the Gaza Strip, a trend noticeable since the beginning of March. The Hamas de-facto administration publicly stated that Hamas was not involved in the rocket fire, and the media reported that Hamas's security forces were operating to prevent rocket fire into Israeli territory.

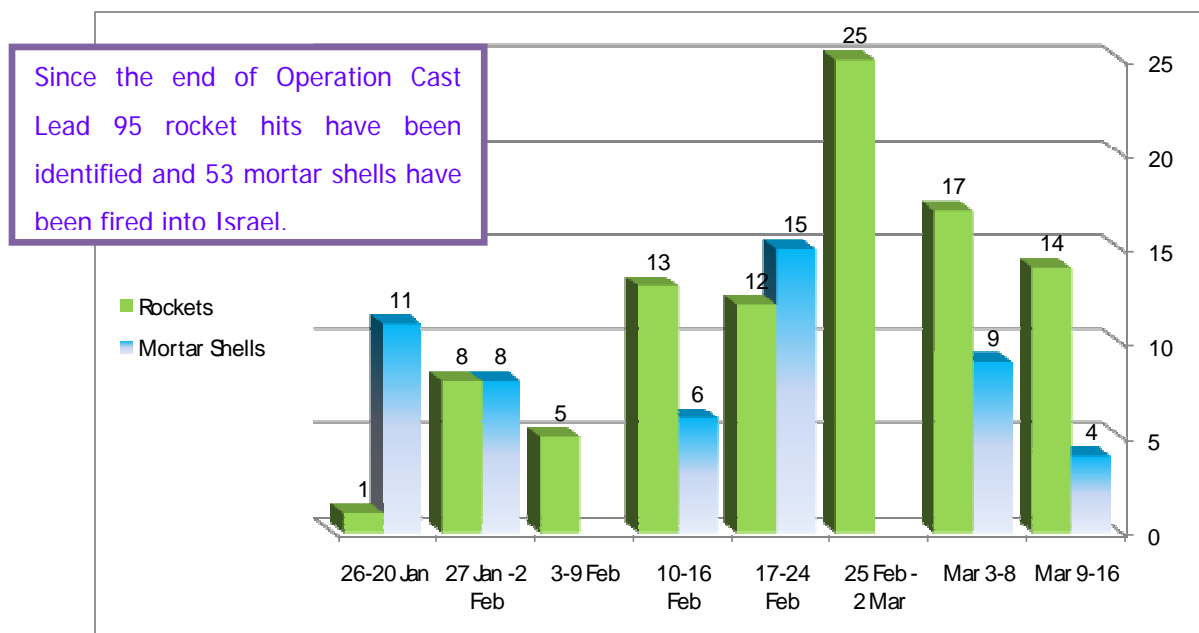
Important Events

Gaza Strip

Fewer rocket and mortar shell fire attacks against the western Negev

■ There was a decrease in the number of rockets and mortar shells fired into the western Negev. **Fourteen** rockets fell in Israel (compared with 17 the previous week), most of them in open areas, causing neither casualties nor property damage. **Four** mortar shells were fired (compared with nine the previous week).

Weekly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire Since Operation Cast Lead



The IDF's response

■ In response to the attacks, the Israeli Air Force struck a number of smuggling tunnels in the Rafah area (March 10 and 11). Palestinian sources reported that two civilians had been injured (Palpress, March 11, 2009). It also attacked a rocket launching squad (March 10). Palestinian sources reported that as a result of the strike three Palestinian police patrolling the area were wounded (suffering slight to moderate injuries), while the members of the squad managed to escape (Ramattan News Agency, March 10, 2009).

Claiming responsibility

■ In almost no instances was responsibility for the attacks claimed. In one instance a **fictitious** organization calling itself "the Hezbollah Battalions in Palestine" claimed responsibility, as it often has in the recent past (Qudsnet website, March 10, 2009).

Hamas Publicly Distances Itself from the Continued Rocket Fire

■ The interior ministry of the Hamas de-facto administration officially stated that Hamas was not involved in the rocket fire and that its security forces were monitoring all those who were behind the launchings (Hamas interior ministry website, March 12, 2009). **Abu Hamza**, spokesman for the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's Jerusalem Battalions, scoffed at the announcement and said that the PIJ would not stop launching rockets unless its political leadership told it to (*Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, March 14, 2009).

■ The media reported that Hamas's security forces were working to prevent rocket attacks on Israel, and patrolling along the border to block the passage of squads on their way to fire rockets (Sky Press website, March 13, 2009). They detained ten operatives in the Khan Yunis region, including Ayman Abu Obeida, a senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad operative, accusing them of involvement in launching rockets into Israel (Al-Ahed website, March 9, 2009). Before their release, the detainees were forced to commit themselves in writing to stop firing rockets into Israel (Ynet, March 9, 2009). PIJ forum surfers reported that the Hamas security forces were preventing squad from firing rockets and that they had detained a squad headed a Palestinian nicknamed Sheikh Abu Harira (Al-Shuraa forum, March 15, 2009).

Judea and Samaria

Two policemen murdered in the central Jordan Valley

■ At about 20:00 hours on March 15 two Israeli policemen were murdered on the road that runs north-south through the Jordan Valley (Route 90) near the community of Masua in the central Jordan Valley. The two, Senior Non-Commissioned Officer Yehezkel Ramzarkar, 50 from the town of Maaleh Ephraim, and Warrant Officer David Rabinowitz, 42, from the town of Rosh Haayin, stopped their car to help a vehicle stuck on the side of the road. The terrorists, who had pretended to change a tire, shot them at close range and fled. So far, the identity of the group behind the attack is unknown. A fictitious group calling itself the "Imad Moughnieh Squads" claimed responsibility, apparently falsely (Qudsnet website, March 15, 2009).¹

¹ For further information see our March 16 bulletin entitled "Two Israeli policemen killed in a terrorist shooting attack in the central Jordan Valley," at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ipc_e017.pdf.



The scene of the terrorist attack near the community of Masua in the central Jordan Valley
(Photo courtesy of Shlomo Gil, ZAKA spokesman, March 15, 2009)

Terrorist attacks continue in Judea and Samaria

- During the past week stone- and Molotov cocktail-throwing attacks continued:
 - **March 13:** Two Molotov cocktails were thrown at an Israeli vehicle near Sinjil, northeast of Ramallah. There were no casualties but the vehicle was damaged.
 - **March 11:** Stones were thrown at an Israeli bus west of Ramallah. There were no casualties but the bus was damaged. Later an IDF soldier suffered minor injuries when a Molotov cocktail was thrown at him during a routine patrol in the village of Far'a northeast of Nablus.
 - **March 10:** Molotov cocktails and stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle east of Qalqilya. There were no casualties but the vehicle was damaged.

Checkpoint removed north of Nablus

- On March 15 the checkpoint of Beit Iba, northwest of Nablus, was opened to the free passage of Palestinians and the process of dismantling it began. In addition, the roadblock was removed at the entrance to the village of Sarrah, west of Nablus. The removal of the checkpoint at Beit Iba, which had been in operation since 2001, enabled free passage between the villages and the city of Nablus. Its removal will make it possible to go from Nablus to the cities of Jenin and Tulkarm. The measure was part of Israel's policy to improve the Palestinians' quality of life in Judea and Samaria and as a result of the significant reduction in the terrorist attacks originating from Nablus (IDF Spokesman's website, March 15, 2009).²

² Removing the checkpoint in the Nablus region was the result of decisions made by Israel in February to ease the conditions of the Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria. For further information see our February 24, 2009 bulletin entitled "[News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict \(February 17-24, 2009\)](#)".

The Gaza Strip after Operation Cast Lead

The crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip

■ The deliveries of fuel and humanitarian aid continue at an average rate of more than 100 trucks a day. Palestinians with humanitarian problems continue using the Erez crossing to leave the Gaza Strip.

The Rafah crossing

■ Deliveries of humanitarian aid and the selective crossing of Palestinians with humanitarian needs continue through the Rafah crossing. On March 18 Egypt is expected to open the Rafah crossing for two days to permit the entrance of Palestinians with visas to Egypt and other countries, as well as students, the wounded, patients and Palestinians with humanitarian needs (Middle East News Agency, March 15, 2009).

Iranian Aid to the Gaza Strip

■ It was recently reported that through the Iranian Shaheed Fund, **Iran** distributed \$1,340,000 to the families of Palestinians who were killed during Operation Cast Lead. According to the report, each family received \$10,000 (*Al-Ayyam*, February 27, 2009).

British MP Expresses Solidarity with Hamas

■ The British convoy "Life Line," which left Britain on February 14, arrived in the Gaza Strip on March 10 and received a public reception at the Rafah crossing. The convoy, headed by British MP **George Galloway**,³ was composed of 100 vehicles and 300 pro-Palestinian activists. At a press conference in Gaza City, attended by senior Hamas figures, Galloway challenged the legitimacy of Salam Fayyad's government, saying that the delegation was delivering the vehicles and their contents to "the elected government of Palestine" (i.e., the Hamas de-facto administration headed by Ismail Haniya). Galloway donated three vehicles and 25,000 British pounds sterling directly to Ismail Haniya (Agence France Presse, March 11, 2009).

■ Galloway publicly expressed his support for Ismail Haniya, saying that despite the fact that the United States, Britain and Israel did not recognize him, he did recognize him as his prime minister, since "we are all Palestinians." He ended a press conference with the delegation with cries in Arabic

³ George Galloway is a controversial British MP known for his Marxist orientation. He holds anti-American views, opposed Israel and calls himself anti-Zionist.

of "revolution till victory," "the revolution will restore Jerusalem," and "long live Palestine" (Al-Aqsa TV, March 9, 2009). On March 11 Ismail Haniya met with the members of the delegation at his home (Al-Aqsa TV, March 11, 2009).



Ismail Haniya meets George Galloway. Right: George Galloway with a map of "Palestine" in the background from which any mention of Israel has been omitted (Hamas's PALDF Forum, March 11, 2009).

- On March 12 most of the members of the delegation left the Gaza Strip via the Rafah crossing on their way back to Britain (Middle East News Agency, March 12, 2009).

The Political Front

A Round of Intensive Talks to Free Gilad Shalit Fails

- During the past week the Egyptians mediated intensive talks between the Israeli negotiating team and the Hamas delegation regarding the deal for the release of Gilad Shalit. The Israeli team was headed by Israel Security Agency chief Yuval Diskin and the prime minister's special envoy, Ofer Dekel. The contacts were held at the end of prime minister Ehud Olmert's term and the expected beginning of the Benyamin Netanyahu's newly elected government. The Hamas delegation included Ahmed al-Jabri, the senior operative in the organization's military-terrorist wing,⁴ Mahmoud al-Zahar and Nizal Awadallah, both senior Hamas figures from the Gaza Strip (*Al-Hayat*, March 16, 2009).

- The talks ended **without an agreement** and the prime minister's office issued a statement that "**given the current situation, there is no deal on the agenda...**" (*Haaretz*, March 17, 2009). A statement from the prime minister **accused Hamas of sabotaging the last round of negotiations**, and that according to the reports of Yuval Diskin and Ofer Dekel, it "...had hardened its position, reneged on understandings that had been formulated over the past year and raised extreme demands despite the generous proposals that had been raised in this round in order to

⁴ It was the first time that Ahmed al-Jabri, the Hamas senior military operative who has control of Gilad Shalit, had gone to Egypt to participate in the negotiations for his release. "Reliable Palestinian sources" told *Al-Hayat* that he arrived in Cairo on March 11 to head the Hamas delegation for the indirect negotiations for Shalit's release. The same sources said that Hamas's military-terrorist wing was "very stubborn" and still demanded the release of all the prisoners on the Hamas list, and was willing to wait another year (*Al-Hayat*, March 16, 2009).

advance and exhaust the negotiations and bring about the soldier's release." On the afternoon of March 17 the prime minister convened a government meeting to report the full details of the meetings held in Cairo (Prime minister's website, March 16, 2009).

■ In response to the announcements issued by the prime minister's office, **Usama Hamdan**, Hamas representative in Lebanon, claimed that the government of Israel was incapable of making decisions about the deal and could not accept Hamas's conditions and demands. He claimed that the Israeli envoys had no new proposals and that Israel was trying to excuse its inability to make decisions by accusing Hamas of changing its mind (Al-Jazeera TV, March 17, 2009). "A source within Hamas" told Ali Waked of Ynet that the Israelis had changed their approach at the last minute, toughened their position and put the negotiations into reverse gear (Ynet, March 17).

■ According to the Arab and Palestinian media, **agreement could not be reached because of the issue of the number of prisoners who would be released and where they would be released to**. *Al-Hayat* reported that the indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas were suspended on March 16 because the Hamas delegation stubbornly asked for the release of the 450 prisoners whose names appeared on the list given to Egypt (*Al-Hayat*, March 16, 2009). There was also a difference of opinion regarding Israel's demand not to allow some of the prisoners [the most dangerous murderers] to return to their places of residence in the Palestinian Authority-administered territories (Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades website, March 16, 2009).

Conference in London to Prevent Arms Smuggling to the Gaza Strip

■ On March 13 a conference was held in London to discuss the prevention of arms smuggling to the Gaza Strip. It was attended by representatives from the United States, Canada, France, Britain, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Holland and Norway. It was the follow-up of the conference held in Copenhagen on February 5. Bill Rammell, Foreign Office Minister for the Middle East, said that the issue of arms smuggling the Gaza Strip was an important factor in achieving a sustainable ceasefire (British Foreign Office website, March 12). The conference decided to meet again in April in Canada. It was also decided to use UN resolutions as the legal foundation for actions to prevent arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip (AP, March 14, 2009).

■ A senior British diplomat who spoke anonymously said that the experts who participated in the conference had agreed on a plan to prevent smuggling. To prevent arms coming in by sea, the various participating countries spoke of sharing intelligence regarding arms sources, transport and routes, and of exerting pressure on the countries involved. The activities would include investigation, search, detention and confiscation (Reuters, March 13).

European Parliamentary Delegation Meets Senior Hamas Figures in Damascus

■ On March 14 a delegation of European parliamentarians and politicians met with senior Hamas figures, among them Khaled Mashaal, head of Hamas's political bureau, and Usama Hamdan, Hamas representative in Lebanon. The members of the delegation came from Britain, Scotland, Ireland, Greece and Italy. It was the first meeting of official British figures with Hamas since the movement took over the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Al-Jazeera TV reported that various political subjects were discussed, among them the situation in the Gaza Strip and the internal Palestinian dialogue (Al-Jazeera TV, March 14, 2009). After the meeting Usama Hamdan said that "it was a step in the right direction" and expressed his hope that it would **exert pressure on the European governments to "take Hamas off the list of terrorist organizations"** (Qudspress News Agency, March 14, 2009).

■ Afterwards, House of Lords member Jenny Tonge said that **it had not been an official meeting authorized by the British government**. She expressed hope that if a large number of British MPs had contacts with Hamas, it would encourage the government to do so openly. Asked about having once said that had she been born in the Gaza Strip she would have considered becoming a suicide bomber, she answered that she had made the statement five years ago. Asked if she felt sympathy for suicide bombers, she said not sympathy, but empathy, adding that if she were a Muslim in their situation, she might volunteer (Al-Jazeera TV, March 15, 2009).

The Internal Palestinian Arena

The Fatah-Hamas dialogue

■ After four days of deliberations (March 10-14), the internal Palestinian dialogue in Cairo bore no fruit and Egypt decided to extend it by a day. After that the committees submitted the reports they had prepared for the steering committee. The reports included details of the agreements reached and the differences of opinion which had yet to be resolved. Within the steering committee, the movement heads were then supposed to deliberate to clarify the issues which were still problematic. At the end of that stage, the Palestinian media reported that despite certain progress which had been made, **there had been no breakthrough on certain fundamental political and governmental matters** (Paltoday website, March 16, 2009).

■ Those matters include:

- **Formation of the government:** There is a serious lack of agreement between the two sides regarding everything concerning the government's basic political agenda. Fatah wants a government based on agreements the PLO previously signed while Hamas wants a government with an agenda similar to that of the former national unity government (Filastin al-'An website, March 15, 2009).

- **The PLO as the source of authority:** There is disagreement over the PLO's authority and how Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad will be integrated into it. Hamas demands a high committee which will be the "national authority" until new elections are held for the Palestinian National Council. Fatah refuses to give up the PLO's traditional role as the source of authority for negotiating with Israel, even temporarily (*Felesteen*, March 16, 2009).
 - **Security forces:** Disagreements surfaced regarding the length of the period of integrating the security forces of the Gaza Strip into those of the West Bank, the political body which will supervise the move and the issue of whether the general intelligence services will be subordinate to the president or the government (i.e., to Mahmoud Abbas or the Hamas administration). Unresolved as well are the issues of the relations between the Palestinian security forces and Israel, and their attitude toward terrorist activities (the "resistance"), and the question of where the reform will be carried out, in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.
 - **National reconciliation:** A Palestinian source reported that there had been important progress made in the reconciliation committee. However, Hamas was dissatisfied with the continued Palestinian Authority detention of Hamas activists in the West Bank (Paltoday website, March 15, 2009).
 - **Elections:** It was decided that elections would be held on January 25, 2010. However, the sides are still far from deciding the appointment of the central elections committee and from resolving questions such as the representation system (relative or mixed) the number of votes required for a representative to have been elected.
- In view of the ongoing dialogue and according to agreements reached in Cairo, the Palestinian Authority leadership ordered the release of 45 Hamas activists (Ma'an News Agency in Nablus, March 12, 2009). Hamas told Omar Suleiman, head of Egyptian general intelligence, that the release of the prisoners was a positive measure but that it was insufficient, and that Hamas demanded the release of all its activists. According to Hamas, more than 400 were still in jails in the PA (*Felesteen*, March 11, 2009). Fatah, however, claimed that there were 50 of its activists imprisoned in the Gaza Strip, and demanded they be released in return for the release of all the Hamas prisoners detained in the West Bank (Al-Jazeera TV, March 12, 2009).
 - However, senior Hamas figures have publicly expressed **pessimism and lack of faith** in the dialogue with Fatah, while clinging the issue of the release of its prisoners from Palestinian Authority jails:
 - **Khaled Mashaal**, head of the Hamas political bureau in Damascus, was pessimistic about the talks in Cairo. He said that Hamas disagreed with Fatah on many points and demanded the release of Hamas prisoners from the PA's jails in the West Bank (Al-Hayat, March 16, 2009).

- **Usama Hamdan**, Hamas representative in Lebanon, accused Fatah representatives of trying to sabotage the reconciliation efforts by continuing the detention of Hamas activists, Fatah's insistence that Hamas recognize the State of Israel and their refusal to accept the proposal of the formation of a national supra-authority to replace the PLO (Filastin al-'An website, March 15, 2009).

- **Musheir al-Masri** said that Hamas was participating in the talks with "an open heart." He said that Fatah was trying to sabotage the talks with preconditions and by not releasing the prisoners. He also said that Mahmoud Abbas was not the legitimate head of the Palestinian Authority (Al-Alam TV, March 14, 2009).

The Northern Arena

Hezbollah denies involvement in rocket fire into Israel

- Following the recent rocket fire from Lebanon into Israel,⁵ Hezbollah made it clear that it is not involved. Hezbollah's deputy chief **Sheikh Naim Qassem**, asked about rockets launched into Israel territory from Lebanon, said that the rockets were fired in a "primitive" fashion, meaning that whoever fired them was weak and not in a position of strength. He said that Hezbollah was of the opinion that rocket fire is harmful and against its policy. He claimed that his organization was not a fully-deployed security apparatus and therefore not responsible for what happened in south Lebanon. He said UNIFIL and the Lebanese security forces were responsible for the region, and therefore Hezbollah could not be called upon to expose the identity of those responsible for the rocket fire. In his assessment, the rockets were fired by small groups which were not part of "active political parties" (Al-Biraq, March 8, 2009).

⁵ Since the beginning of 2009 there were two instances of rocket fire into Israel from the north, one of them during Operation Cast Lead. For a summary of the events see our bulletins, [Rockets hit Western Galilee, initial report](#), and [On February 21 two rockets were fired into Israel from south Lebanon](#).