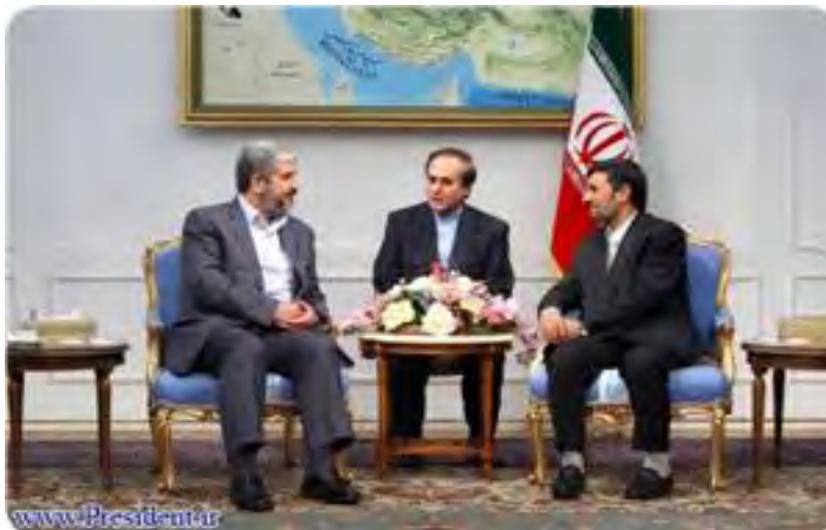




Intelligence and Terrorism
Information Center

News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

December 8-15, 2009



Hamas state visit to Iran: Khaled Mashaal, head of the Hamas political bureau in Damascus, visits Iranian president Ahmadinejad (Ahmadinejad's website, December 13, 2009).

Overview

- This week sporadic rocket fire continued from the Gaza Strip into the western Negev as Hamas continued its policy of restraint.
- The focus of the week's events was the torching of the mosque in the village of Yasuf (south of Nablus), apparently by right-wing extremists from Samaria. It was strongly denounced by both Israel's prime minister and president. The prime minister and defense minister instructed the security forces to find the perpetrators. The arson was also denounced by Mahmoud Abbas, but the Palestinian Authority kept a low profile and did not exploit the event as a pretext for incitement to violence.
- Hamas celebrated the 22nd anniversary of its founding. It held a mass rally in Gaza City, which turned into an impressive show of strength. Ismail Haniya called for "a national salvation program" and the renewal of the Egyptian efforts for an internal Palestinian reconciliation. He opened his speech by declaring that Palestine included all the area "from the [Mediterranean] sea to the [Jordan] river," and that it would never be given up. Hamas spokesmen at various events again stressed the importance of the "resistance" [i.e., terrorism], on condition it was carried out "wisely" and in coordination with Hamas [i.e. according to Hamas dictates].

Important Events

Gaza Strip

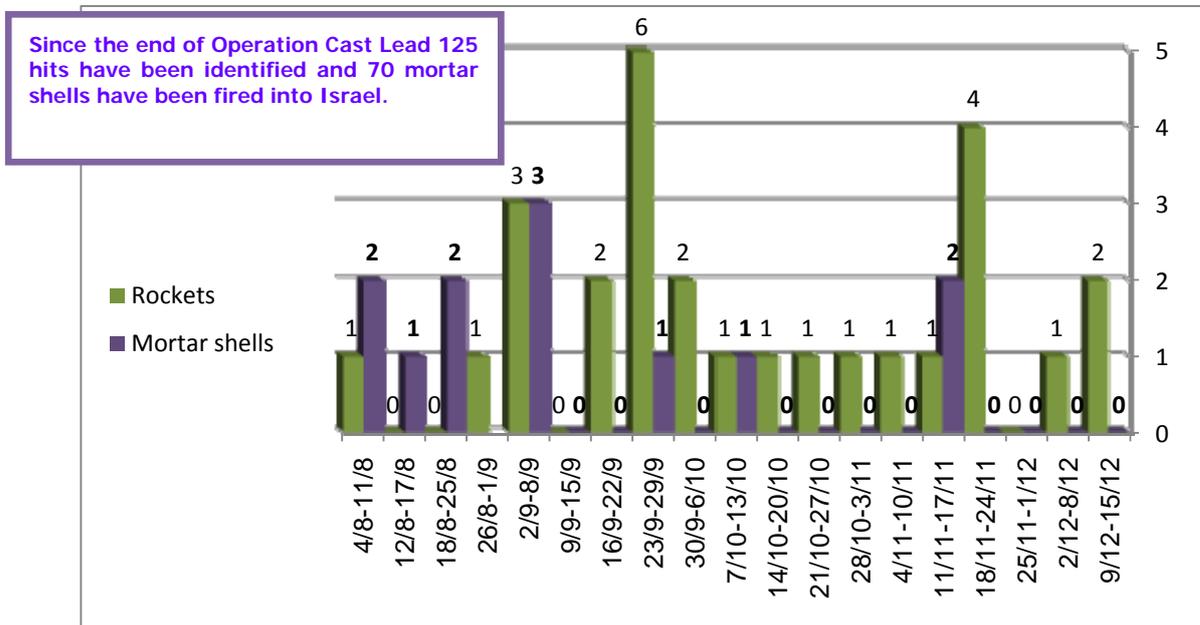
Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

- On December 13 two rocket hits were identified in the western Negev. They fell in open areas, there were no casualties and no damage was done.

- On December 12 Palestinians opened fire with light arms on an IDF force in the Kissufim region. There were no casualties. The force returned fire with light arms and machine guns. The military-terrorist wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine claimed responsibility for the attack, carried out to celebrate the organization's 42nd anniversary (Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades website, December 12, 2009).

- On December 12 an IDF force shot at five Palestinians suspected of terrorist activities sighted in Israel territory. The Palestinian media reported one dead in a confrontation between the IDF and a Palestinian squad after an RPG was fired at an IDF jeep (Hamas' Paltoday website, December 12, 2009). According to an isolated report, the dead Palestinian was an Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operative (Qudsnews website, December 12, 2009).

Rocket and mortar shells fired into Israeli territory¹



¹ The statistics do not include the mortar shells fired at IDF soldiers patrolling the border fence which fell inside the Gaza Strip.

Hamas Continues Its Policy of Restraint

■ The Palestinian media continued to report that Hamas security forces prevented rogue terrorist squads from carrying out attacks to escalate the situation. For example, on December 13 it was reported that in response to the rocket fire, Hamas demanded that the PFLP military operatives hold their fire into Israel and not give it an excuse to attack the Gaza Strip. In addition it was reported that after the rocket fire, the de facto Hamas administration and its security forces announced an alert and ordered the evacuation of headquarters in fear of an Israeli reprisal. It was also reported that the Hamas security forces ordered the detention of the rocket launching squad, and that on the night of December 12 a squad in the region of Al-Bureij in the central Gaza Strip, which was about to fire rockets into Israel, was detained (Qudsnews website, December 14, 2009).

■ Sources in the PFLP strongly criticized Hamas' preventive activities. **Rabah Muhanna**, senior PFLP figure and a member of its political bureau, claimed that **Hamas wanted to enforce its "resistance" policy on the other organizations**, and that it undermined the establishment of the united resistance front that was supposed to be set up in accordance with the national reconciliation document. He said that the heads of the PFLP had sent letters of protest to senior Hamas figures² (*Al-Hayat*, December 14, 2009). He also criticized Hamas for preventing PFLP activists from holding a rally in the Rimal neighborhood of Gaza City to celebrate the 42nd anniversary of its founding, saying it was because Hamas did not believe in "political pluralism" (Ma'an News Agency, November 9, 2009).

Judea and Samaria

Stabbing at the Gush Etzion Junction

■ On the night of December 12 a young Israeli woman waiting at the bus station in Gush Etzion was stabbed in the back by a Palestinian. She was critically wounded and taken to a hospital. A man standing nearby was not injured. The attacker fled on foot.

Counterterrorism Activities

■ This past week the Israeli security forces continued their counterterrorism activities, detaining Palestinians suspected of terrorist activities. In a number of instances improvised weapons were found. Most of the incidents involved the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli vehicles. In one attack an Israeli civilian was wounded.

² Hamas senior figures publicly replied that the actions of the "resistance" had to be wise and coordinated [i.e., in accordance with Hamas policies].

■ Among the incidents were the following:

● **December 14:** Stones were thrown at an Israeli bus southwest of Bethlehem. There were no casualties but the bus was damaged. Stones were also thrown at Israeli vehicles west of Bethlehem and north of Hebron. There were no casualties but the vehicles were damaged (IDF Spokesman, December 14, 2009).

● **December 14:** At the Qalandia checkpoint south of Ramallah a Border Police force discovered an improvised gun and three jackknives among the tools of a 14-year old Palestinian (IDF Spokesman, December 14).

● **December 13:** Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle west of Ramallah, wounding an Israeli civilian (IDF Spokesman, December 13, 2009).

● **December 12:** Stones were thrown at Israeli vehicles near two villages west of Bethlehem. There were no casualties but the vehicles were damaged (IDF Spokesman, December 12, 2009).

● **December 9:** Stones were thrown at Israeli vehicles west of Jenin and south of Nablus. There were no casualties but the vehicles were damaged (IDF Spokesman, December 9, 2009).

● **December 9:** At the checkpoint east of Nablus an IDF force discovered three improvised grenades among the tools of Palestinians (IDF Spokesman, December 9, 2009).

Arson at a Mosque in the Village of Yasuf

■ On December 11 a group of Israelis, apparently extreme right-wing activists from Samaria, set fire to the second floor of the Hassan Khader mosque in the village of Yasuf (south of Nablus).

■ **Shimon Peres**, president of the State of Israel, issued a statement strongly denouncing the act. He said that it was a serious event and opposed to the values of the State of Israel and its commitment to honor all faiths (Foreign Ministry, December 13, 2009). **Benyamin Netanyahu**, Israeli prime minister, also strongly denounced the act. His office reported that the Israeli security forces had been instructed to act with determination to expose the criminals and bring them to justice soon. He also said that violence had no place in Israel, neither that of Jews against Palestinians nor of Palestinians against Jews. He added that the government would act decisively against all forms of violence. **Ehud Barak**, defense minister, instructed the security forces to find and detain those responsible for the attack (*Haaretz*, December 13, 2009).

■ The attack was strongly denounced by the **Palestinian Authority**. However, senior figures did not call for violent reprisals and the Palestinian media's coverage was **relatively modest**. The main Palestinian reactions were the following:

- **Mahmoud Abbas**, Palestinian Authority chairman, denounced the arson at the mosque, calling it aggression and a violation of freedom of religion (Wafa News Agency, December 11, 2009).

- The Palestinian newspaper *Al-Hayat al-Jadeeda* published the statements by Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Peres denouncing the arson (*Al-Hayat al-Jadeeda*, December 13, 2009).

- **Mustafa Barghouti**, chairman of the National Enterprise Party, visiting the village to express solidarity with the residents, said that the government had decided to declare war on the [Palestinian] people, but that the Palestinians would not sit idly by (*Al-Ayam, Al-Hayat al-Jadeeda*, December 12, 2009).



Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad visits the burned mosque in the village of Yasuf (Wafa News Agency, December 13, 2009).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The Crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip

- The crossings were open all week, allowing for the passage of 100 trucks delivering merchandise.

The Political Struggle

The Palestinian Authority Condemns the Proposed Israeli Law for a Referendum before the Transferring Territories

- Senior members of the Palestinian Authority strongly condemned a proposed Israeli law, whose first reading was ratified by the Knesset, which would require a referendum before territories were transferred during future negotiations:

- **Saeb Erekat**, head PLO negotiator, told the BBC's Arabic station that the Israeli decision was completely illegal and a continuation of Israel's policies contravening international law. He appealed to the United States and other Western countries which defend Israel to state

clearly that Israel considers itself “exceptional and beyond the law” (BBC in Arabic, December 9, 2009).

- **Nimer Hamad**, Mahmoud Abbas’ political advisor, told the Russia Today TV channel that the proposed Israeli law ridiculed international decisions and institutions (Russia Today TV, December 12, 2009).

- **Salah Rafat**, senior member of the PLO’s executive committee, told Palestinian radio that the proposed Israeli law put an end to the negotiations and peace process. He said that the referendum was intended as an obstacle to future negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and Syrians (Voice of Palestine Radio, December 10, 2009).

The Palestinian Authority Condemns the Ratification of Israel’s Map of National Priority Areas

- The Israeli government’s decision to ratify the map of national priority areas, which includes settlement in Judea and Samaria, has led to strong condemnation from senior members of the Palestinian Authority:

- **Nabil Abu Rudeina**, presidential spokesman, called the map “the continuation of building and expanding the settlements,” and claimed that it refuted Israel’s claims of having temporarily frozen construction (Wafa News Agency, December 13, 2009).

- **Ahmed al-Rueidi**, responsible for Jerusalem affairs in Mahmoud Abbas’ office, told Egyptian television that Israel was intent on keeping the settlements and that its remarks about freezing them were fraudulent. He said that the Palestinian Authority would adhere to its position that there would be no negotiations with Israel as long as building continued in the settlements. He called on the American administration to exert “real pressure” on Israel (Egyptian TV, December 13, 2009).

The Internal Palestinian Arena

The Events Celebrating the 22nd Anniversary of the Founding of Hamas

- This past week Hamas celebrated the 22nd anniversary of its founding. The festive events included rallies, marches, ceremonies and speeches. At various events the speakers stressed Hamas’ strength, which had stood it in good stead in the face of challenges over the years. The speakers also stressed its adherence to the path of “resistance” [i.e., terrorism] and its striving to take over “all Palestine, from the [Mediterranean] sea to the [Jordan] river.”

- The main rally was held in the Katiba al-Khadraa Square in Gaza Strip on December 14. It turned into an impressive show of strength and was attended by hundreds of thousands of

Palestinians who were brought in especially for the event. One of its features was the traditional burning of a coffin draped with the American flag.³

■ In **Judea and Samaria** the events were suppressed before they began by the intensive preventive activities of the Palestinian security forces. According to the claims of Hamas Internet sites (Palestine-Info, Imama, December 14, 2009), the Palestinian Authority security forces detained more than 150 Hamas activists and ordered more than 1,000 to appear for interrogation. "A source in Ramallah" told the Israeli *Jerusalem Post* that the decision to prevent Hamas' anniversary celebrations had been made by the Palestinian Authority leadership (*Jerusalem Post*, December 12, 2009).



Mass rally at the Katiba al-Khadraa square in Gaza City to celebrate the anniversary of Hamas' founding (Al-Aqsa TV, December 14, 2009).

The Hamas Leadership Visits Iran

■ A Hamas delegation headed by **Khaled Mashaal**, chief of the Hamas political bureau in Damascus, arrived in Iran on December 13 for an official visit expected to last a number of days. The delegation met with Iranian president Ahmadinejad, defense minister Manuchehr Mottaki and other senior figures. It is also expected to meet with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. At a meeting with Sayid Jalili, the secretary of Iran's national security council, Khaled Mashaal thanked Iran for "its continuing support against the occupiers" and said that the Iranian people were partners in the victories of the Palestinian "resistance [i.e., terrorist organizations]" (Hamas' Palestine-Info website, December 14, 2009).

³ An information bulletin dealing with the Hamas celebrations will shortly be available on our website.



Hamas political bureau chief Khaled Mashaal meets Iranian foreign minister Manuchehr Mottaki (IRNA News Agency, December 14, 2009).