



**Intelligence and Terrorism
Information Center**

News of Terrorism and the Israeli- Palestinian Conflict

February 24 – March 2, 2010



Syrian President Bashar Assad, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hezbollah General Secretary Hassan Nasrallah meet in Damascus (Al-Alam TV, February 25, 2010).

Overview

- Riots and public disturbances continued in Hebron this past week, a response to the Israeli government's declaration of the Cave of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb as national heritage sites. The riots spread to the Temple Mount and various neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. The Palestinian Authority encouraged them and its spokesmen denounced Israel. However, at the same time the PA tried to contain the events and prevent them from turning into large-scale violent outbreaks. The Israeli government tried to calm the situation by announcing that Israel was committed to freedom of worship of all religions at all holy sites and that it was doing its utmost to ensure suitable conditions to hold both Jewish and Muslim prayers.
- The leaders of Hezbollah and Hamas met with top-ranking Iranian and Syrian figures during Iranian President Ahmadinejad's visit to Damascus and during the Palestinian solidarity conference held in Tehran. Ahmadinejad exploited the events to call for the destruction of the State of Israel ("the Zionist entity") and the establishment of a "Middle East without Zionism."

Important Events

Gaza Strip

Rocket and Mortar Fire

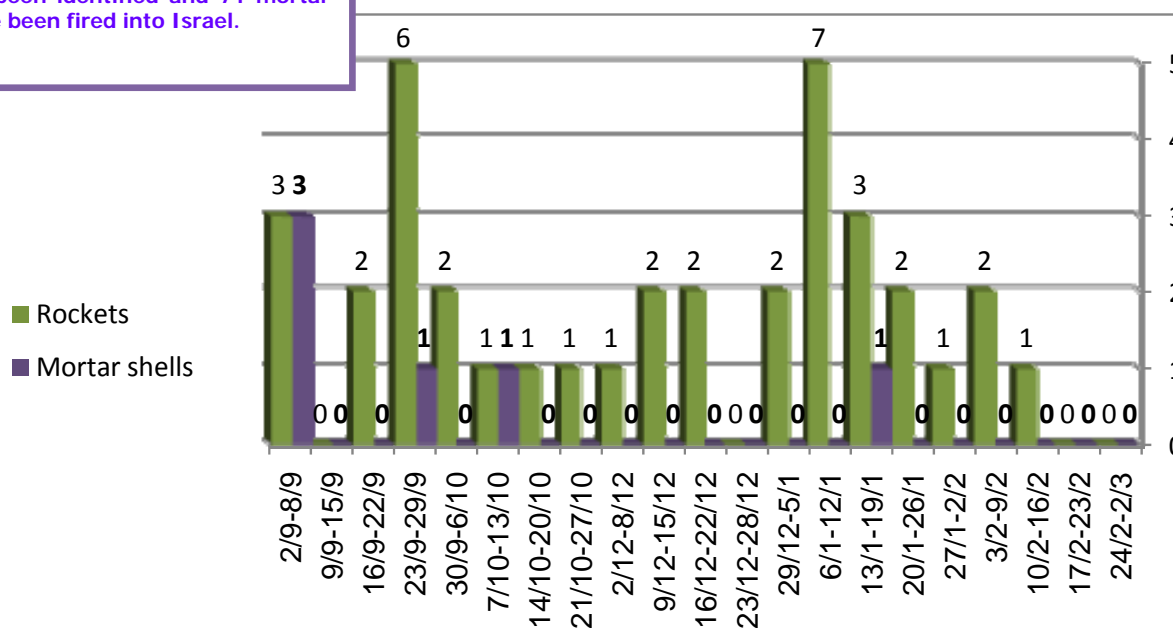
■ This past week the quiet in the western Negev continued, and no rocket or mortar shell hits were identified in Israel territory.

■ **On March 1 an IDF tank shot** at a squad of Palestinians who approached the security fence near Beit Lahiya in the northern Gaza Strip, killing one terrorist and wounding others. A search of the area revealed a mortar and detonation system. An anti-tank missile was fired at the searchers. There were no casualties reported. The Salah al-Din Brigades, the military-terrorist wing of the Popular Resistance Committees, claimed responsibility for firing the anti-tank weapon (Muqawama website, March 2, 2010).

■ **On February 25** an IDF patrol found a rocket launcher and rocket near the security fence. The launcher was detonated in a controlled explosion by IDF experts.

Rockets and Mortar Shells Fired into Israeli Territory¹

Since the end of Operation Cast Lead 145 hits have been identified and 71 mortar shells have been fired into Israel.



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

Judea and Samaria

Counterterrorism Activities

■ Israeli security forces continued their preventive counterterrorism activities this past week, detaining Palestinians suspected of terrorist activities and confiscating weapons. **Violent riots and public disturbances continued because of the Israeli announcement to include the Cave of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb in the national heritage project.** There were also many attacks on Israeli vehicles (stones and Molotov cocktails). Three Israeli civilians sustained minor injuries.

■ Among the incidents were the following;

- **March 1** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle southwest of Bethlehem. There were no casualties but the vehicle was damaged.

- **February 27** – A Kalashnikov assault rifle and two submachine guns were found in a Palestinian vehicle at a checkpoint south of Tulkarm (IDF Spokesman, February 27, 2010).

- **February 25** – Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle southeast of Qalqiliya, causing the driver to lose control. The vehicle overturned and the driver sustained minor injuries (IDF Spokesman, February 25, 2010).

- **February 24** – Several Israeli vehicles were attacked: Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle southeast of Qalqiliya. There were no casualties but the vehicle was damaged. Two Molotov cocktails were thrown at an Israeli vehicle west of Ramallah. There were no casualties and no damage was done. A Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Israeli bus southwest of Bethlehem. There were no casualties but the bus was damaged. Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle south of Bethlehem. An Israeli civilian woman sustained minor injuries and the vehicle was damaged. Stones were thrown at an Israeli vehicle north of Hebron. There were no casualties but the vehicle was damaged (IDF Spokesman, February 24, 2010).

- **February 23** – Stones were thrown at Israeli vehicles west of Bethlehem. There were no casualties but five vehicles were damaged (IDF Spokesman, February 23, 2010).

■ On the night of February 28 a security guard sustained minor wounds to his leg when his jeep was shot at near the village of Silwan in East Jerusalem. An examination of the vehicle showed that six pistol bullets had hit it. The shooter escaped.

Riots Continue Following the Inclusion of the Cave of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb in the National Heritage Project

Overview

■ The protests and riots which spread this past week from Hebron to the Temple Mount and other locations in Judea and Samaria **were encouraged by the Palestinian Authority**. At the same time the PA acted to contain the events and prevent them from turning into a broad-scale violent outbreak. **Hamas** called for a “popular intifada” to “protect” the holy places.

■ **The Israeli government tried to calm the situation**. The head of National Information Directorate in the Prime Minister's Office issued a statement from Benyamin Netanyahu, who again stressed that **Israel was committed to the freedom of worship of people of all faiths at all the holy places**. He said the policy included Cave of the Patriarchs, where Israel did its utmost to ensure suitable conditions for both Jews and Muslims worshippers. He added that any other claim was an attempt to distort the truth and encourage quarrels and strife, and “a mendacious and hypocritical campaign”² (Prime minister's website, February 24, 2010).

Events on the Ground

■ This week as well there were violent demonstrations and riots following the inclusion of the Cave of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb in the list of national heritage sites. Most of the riots and demonstrations took place in Hebron but there were demonstrations in a number of cities in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. The main incidents in Hebron were the following:



Protestor in Hebron throws rocks at an IDF vehicle (Wafa News Agency, February 22, 2010).

● **February 23** – A violent demonstration was held near the Jewish settlement. Several dozen Palestinian demonstrators set fire to tires and threw stones at IDF forces.

² <http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/Communication/Spokesman/2010/02/spoketguva240210.htm>.

- **February 24** – There were riots during which tires were burned and stones were thrown at IDF forces.
- **February 26** – Dozens of demonstrators threw stones at IDF forces and there were riots in a number of locations in the city. Some of the demonstrators waved Hamas flags (IDF Spokesman, February 26, 2010). **The Friday sermon at the Cave of the Patriarchs was given by the Palestinian Authority’s minister of religious endowments with Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in attendance.** After the sermon Salam Fayyad held an improvised press conference at which he said that the Palestinians were aware of the implications of the Israeli decision but were still determined not to be drawn into violence, and would continue the “quiet revolution”³ (Ma’an News Agency, February 26, 2010).
- **February 28** – The residents of the Jewish settlement in Hebron held the traditional Purim parade, which passed with relatively little incident.



Salam Fayyad participates in the Friday prayers at the mosque in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron (Wafa News Agency, February 26, 2010)

- **March 1** – The Salam Fayyad government held its weekly meeting in Hebron. It denounced the Israeli decision and warned that Israel’s so-called “escalation” was liable to lead to violence and undermine the stability of the Palestinian Authority.
- **The events reached their peak on February 28 (the Jewish holiday of Purim) on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.** During the day riots broke out when Palestinians claimed that Jewish organizations were planning to go to the Temple Mount to lay the cornerstone for the new Temple. Dozens of Arab youths threw stones at tourists on the Temple Mount compound, following which the police arrived. Several dozen Muslim worshippers barricaded themselves inside Al-Aqsa mosque and confronted the Israeli police. The riots later spread to other neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, including Ras al-Amoud and Sur Baher. Four police were wounded when stones were thrown at them, 18 demonstrators were wounded and seven were detained.

³ Another manifestation of Salam Fayyad’s policy of “popular resistance,” proclaimed by Mahmoud Abbas at the Fatah convention in August 2009.



Protestors confront the Israeli police in East Jerusalem (Wafa News Agency, February 28, 2010).

Reactions from the Palestinian Authority

■ Senior figures in the Palestinian Authority heatedly denounced the Israeli decision, claiming that its objective was to sabotage the relaunching of negotiations:

- **Mahmoud Abbas, chairman of the Palestinian Authority**, on a visit to Jordan, called on the international community, especially the United States, to denounce Israel and take steps to stop its activity at the holy places (Wafa News Agency, February 28, 2010).

- **Nabil Abu Rudeina, presidential spokesman**, criticized the Israeli activities in Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa mosque. He said Jerusalem and the mosque were a line in the sand that could not be crossed. He added that by taking such action, Israel was destroying the foundations of the negotiations (Wafa News Agency, February 28, 2010).

- **Saeb Erekat, chief PLO negotiator**, interviewed by the Voice of Palestine Radio on February 28, said that it was an organized Israeli policy whose intention was to make sure the peace process negotiations were not resumed. Interviewed by Radio Sawa on the same day, he assigned responsibility for the riots to Israel, saying that the Palestinian Authority had appealed to the United States and asked it to intervene.

- **Muhammad al-Habash, Palestinian Authority minister of religious endowments**, denounced the so-called Israeli policy, which he said was an attempt to “get possession of Rachel’s Tomb and the Cave of the Patriarchs and to gain control over the holy places of Islam.” He said that the Palestinian Authority was exerting great effort to preserve the two sites and to strengthen the “strong stance” of the Palestinians (PNN website, February 28, 2010).

- **Taysir al-Tamimi, High Shari’a Court judge**, called on the Palestinians, and especially Israeli Arabs and residents of Jerusalem not to sit idly by and ignore the Israeli groups trying to break into the Temple Mount. He said Israel would bear the responsibility for anything that endangered the mosque (Wafa News Agency, February 28, 2010).

Reactions from Hamas and the Other Terrorist Organizations

■ **Hamas and the other terrorist organizations** called for an intensification of the “popular resistance” to protect the holy places. Hamas’ “information” office issued a call “to light the spark of a popular intifada” to protect the holy places (Hamas’ Palestine-Info website, February 25, 2010). The **Palestinian Islamic Jihad** announced that February 26 would be “Popular Rage Day” and organized demonstrations and processions. The Army of the Nation and the Popular Resistance Committees also issued strong statements and threatened to increase their attacks on Israel (Official organization websites, February 25, 2010).

■ Other Hamas reactions included the following:

- **The Hamas faction in the Palestinian Legislative Council** issued a press release denouncing the events in the Al-Aqsa mosque compound. It called them “proof” of the danger threatening Islam’s holy places, and accused the Arab countries, the West and the United States of not denouncing the Israeli announcement. It also criticized the Palestinian Authority’s security services, which “made it easy for the settlers to defile the holy places” (Hamas faction website, February 28, 2010).

- **Taleb Abu Shaer, minister of religious endowments in the de facto Hamas administration**, denounced the events and demanded that the UN Security Council hold an emergency session to discuss the events in Jerusalem and to impose sanctions on Israel. He also called on the Arab League and the Islamic Conference to join the call to defend Al-Aqsa mosque and the holy places of Islam (Shihab Agency website, February 28, 2010). He said he was afraid Israel would also include Al-Aqsa mosque on its list of national heritage sites and called for a permanent Arab presence at the mosque to prevent it (Hamas’ Palestine-Info website, February 26, 2010).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

The Crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip

■ This past week the crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip were open, allowing for the **passage of 595 trucks**.

Egypt Continues Building the Barrier along Its Border with the Gaza Strip

■ The Hamas media reported that on February 24 the Egyptian border police began erecting steel watch towers along the Egyptian-Gaza Strip border. They will be built east to west for a distance of 14 kilometers, or 8.7 miles, and in the area near Kerem Shalom (Sawt Al-Aqsa, February 25, 2010).

The Political Struggle

Palestinian Reactions to the UN General Assembly's Decision regarding the Goldstone Report

■ On February 26 the UN General Assembly ratified by a 98-vote majority the Arab League's decision calling on Israel and the Palestinians to carry out a comprehensive investigation of the findings of the Goldstone Report. The decision also gives the UN Secretary General five months to report on the progress of the investigations being made by Israel and the Palestinian Authority regarding the events of Operation Cast Lead.

■ **The Palestinian Authority's permanent observer** at the UN praised the decision, saying that if Israel did not carry out an investigation in accordance with the criteria, the trend to move the issue to the Security Council would grow.

■ **Hamas spokesmen criticized the decision:**

● **Muhammad Faraj al-Ghoul, justice minister in the de facto Hamas administration**, said that the decision served Israeli interests and allowed it to escape punishment (Al-Quds TV, February 27, 2010).

● **Taher al-Nunu, de facto Hamas administration spokesman**, said that the decision to postpone the deliberation was another attempt to give Israel a chance to evade it. He said he hoped an unambiguous decision would be adopted to try the "Zionist war criminals" in court, adding that Hamas was doing everything the Goldstone Report demanded of it (Sawt Al-Aqsa, February 27, 2010).

Another Aid Convoy for the De Facto Hamas Administration Organizes in Britain

■ **George Galloway**, a pro-Hamas member of the British Parliament, announced yesterday that the British organization **Viva Palestina**, which sends aid convoys to the Gaza Strip, **was preparing to send an international convoy by sea. It would be a large convoy of ships from various countries and would sail for the Gaza Strip in June 2010** (International Middle East Media Center News, February 25, 2010).

■ According to the Arab media, it will be an international convoy with activists from many countries, and will sail to the Gaza Strip from **Turkey**. George Galloway announced that a branch

of Viva Palestina had been opened in Beirut, the first in the Arab world (*Al-Thawra*, Syria, February 25; and quoting an Al-Jazeera TV interview with George Galloway, February 25, 2010).

The Northern Front

Iranian President Ahmadinejad Visits Syria and Meets with Terrorist Organization Heads

■ **Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** paid a state visit to Syria on February 25 and met with **Syrian President Bashar Assad and Hezbollah General Secretary Hassan Nasrallah**. During the visit an agreement was signed by the Syrian and Iranian foreign ministers, waiving the necessity for entrance visas between Iran and Syria (Syrian News Station, February 25, 2010).

■ **During the visit Ahmadinejad met with representatives of the Palestinian terrorist organizations, led by Khaled Mashaal, head of Hamas' political bureau in Damascus**. He and Mashaal discussed coordination between Iran and the Palestinian organizations following events after the decision of the Israel government to include the Cave of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb in the project to preserve national heritage sites. Khaled Mashaal emphasized the importance of Ahmadinejad's visit to Syria in uniting the efforts of the so-called "resistance [i.e., terrorist] elements in the region" to confront Israel (Al-Manar TV, February 25, 2010).

■ **When in Syria, Ahmadinejad again called for the destruction of the State of Israel**. At a joint press conference with Assad, he said that "a Middle East without Zionism is a divine promise. Time is on the side of the people of the region. **The Zionist entity is on the brink of dissolution**. If Israel wants to repeat the mistakes of the past, **the death of the Zionist entity is certain**. **This time all the peoples of the region will enlist, stand up to the Zionist regime and eradicate it**" (Mehr News Agency, Iran, February 25, 2010).

■ **Syrian President Bashar Assad** gave a speech during the press conference, whose main themes were the following:

- **Rapprochement between Syria and Iran:** "This agreement will strengthen the relations in every facet and sector, without exception." Assad related to the statement made by American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to the effect that Syria needed to distance itself from Iran, asking "how can there be talk about stability in the Middle East and peace

and other beautiful principles at the same time there is talk about two countries distancing themselves from one another? We ask that others not try to teach us about our region and history."

- **Israel's threats:** "We spoke about Israel's crimes, its terrorism and how to deal with it." He related to what he called Israel's "threats," saying that "Israeli statements do not express Israeli aggression, and lack of Israeli statements does not express lack of Israeli aggression." He added that "Israeli aggression" had to be prepared for at all times, because anything might motivate it.

- **The issue of a nuclear Iran:** "Forbidding an independent country, a member of the United Nations [i.e., Iran], to use knowhow to acquire nuclear energy for peaceful purposes is regional neo-colonialism. That right has been taken away from Muslims, and what is done to Iran today will be done tomorrow to other countries" (Radio Damascus, February 25, 2010).

The Heads of the Palestinian Terrorist Organizations Meet with the Upper Echelons of Iran

- On February 28 a body calling itself the **National Islamic Solidarity Conference for the Future of Palestine** met in Iran. The meeting was attended by **Khaled Mashaal**, head of Hamas's political bureau, **Ramadan Shalah**, secretary general of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and **Ahmed Jibril**, head of the Popular Front/General Command. The three met with **Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei**. During the meeting Ahmadinejad said that "an Israeli presence, on even one inch of land in the Middle East, causes threats, crisis and war" (Agence France-Presse, February 28, 2010).



Iranian President Ahmadinejad holds a press conference with Khaled Mashaal, head of the Hamas' political bureau, at the National Islamic Solidarity Conference for the Future of Palestine (Hamas' Palestine-info website, February 28, 2010).

- During the conference **Heydar Moslehi**, Iranian minister of intelligence, called on Muslims to begin an electronic intifada against the "Zionist regime" using the Internet. He said that relying on

Iran's experience, it was possible to "expose the Zionists" by founding a social network and waging an electronic war against the "plots of the Israeli regime and America." He also said his ministry was willing to help the Palestinian people conduct an electronic intifada (IRNA, February 28, 2010).