



August 25, 2011

The Meir Amit Intelligence and
Terrorism Information Center

Attacks Renewed in Israel's South Supplement No. 2¹

The Situation on the Ground

Overview

1. The round of escalation between Israel and the terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip which began with the terrorist attack north of Eilat on August 18 was **rekindled** after a temporary lull in the fighting on August 23. Israeli aircraft **attacked and killed a Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist operative who promoted terrorist activity in the Sinai Peninsula** (IDF Spokesman). In retaliation, the terrorist organizations, led by the PIJ, attacked population centers in Israel's south with rockets and mortar shells. (From the morning of August 24 **approximately 20 rockets and a number of mortar shells fell in Israeli territory**.) The IDF responded by attacking terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip. **Since the morning of August 25 the south of Israel has been quiet** (as of 1200 hours).

Palestinian Islamic Jihad Activist Killed

2. On the night of August 24 the Israeli aircraft struck and **killed Ismail Zahdi al-Asmar, a PIJ terrorist operative involved in smuggling weapons and promoting terrorist activity in the Sinai Peninsula** (IDF Spokesman's Website, August 24, 2011).

3. The Palestinian media reported that his car was attacked by the Israeli Air Force in the Tel al-Sultan region of Rafah. Ismail al-Asmar was killed and two other Palestinians were wounded. A Hamas spokesman blamed Israel for the escalation and a PIJ spokesman

¹Supplement to the survey of the latest round of escalation, which appeared in the August 22, 2011 ITIC bulletin "News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, August 17-22" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ipc_e219.pdf, as of noon August 25, 2011.

threatened that the response would be "severe and striking" (Ma'an News Agency, August 24, 2011).



Car of Ismail al-Asmar, hit by the Israeli Air Force (Photo from the Jerusalem Brigades website, August 25, 2011).



Ismail Zahdi al-Asmar, a Jerusalem Battalions commander, killed in an Israeli Air Force attack (Photo from the Jerusalem Battalions website, August 25, 2011).

Rocket Attack Targets Israel

4. Following the killing of Ismail al-Asmar, the terrorist organizations fired approximately **20 rockets at populated areas in Israel**, about half of them long-range rockets which reached cities and villages 40 kilometers (25 miles) away. Some fell **in and around Ashqelon**. Most of them fell on the night of August 24. Two mortar shell hits were identified on the morning of August 24. As of 1200 hours, **since the early morning hours of August 25 there has been neither rocket nor mortar shell fire.**



Left: Baby who sustained minor injuries from a rocket hit in Ashqelon. Right: Car hit directly by a rocket (Photo by Adi Israel, courtesy of NRG, August 25, 2011).

5. A number of terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip claimed responsibility for the rocket fire, especially the **Palestinian Islamic Jihad**. According to the organization's website, the PIJ was responsible for Grad rocket fire targeting **Beersheba, Ashqelon, Ofakim** and other **western Negev population centers** on the night of August 24. According to the Egyptian media, one of the rockets fired from the Gaza Strip fell in Nafura Square in Egyptian Rafah, wounding a woman.

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad Claims Responsibility



Claiming responsibility for the Grad rocket fired on at 2315 hours on August 24 (Jerusalem Brigades website, August 25, 2011).



Claiming responsibility for the Grad rockets fired at Beersheba, Ofakim, Ashqelon and the population centers neat the Gaza Strip on the night of August 24 (Jerusalem Brigades website, August 25, 2011).

IDF Attacks

6. In response to the rocket and mortar shell fire, Israeli aircraft struck terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip. They included a weapons store in the northern Gaza Strip, a site for manufacturing weapons in the southern Gaza Strip and a tunnel used for terrorist purposes in the southern Gaza Strip. They also struck two terrorist squads which were in the process of firing rockets into Israeli territory (IDF Spokesman's Website, August 25, 2011).

7. On August 24 the Israeli Air Force struck two terrorists in the northern Gaza Strip after they had fired rockets into Israeli territory. **Apparently at least one of them, a PIJ operative, was killed.** The Palestinian media reported one killed and at least one wounded in the strike (IDF Spokesman's Website and the alresalah.net website, August 24, 2011).



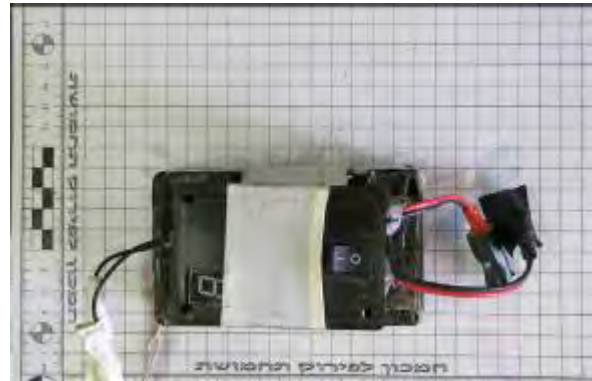
Left: Launch of the first rocket into Israel (IDF Spokesman's Website, August 25, 2011). Right: PIJ terrorist operative killed by the IDF, Atiya Mahmoud Muqat (Photo: website of the Jerusalem Battalions, the PIJ's military wing, August 25, 2011).

Remarks from Mahmoud al-Zahar about the Lull in the Fighting

8. Interviewed by the Ma'an News Agency, **Mahmoud al-Zahar, high-ranking Hamas figure in the Gaza Strip**, was asked what Hamas' role was in establishing a lull in the fighting and preventing escalation after the killing of Ismail al-Asmar. He said that **its role was to broker contacts between the various [terrorist] organizations and "organize the resistance," and not serve as "police" guarding the interests of the State of Israel. The "lull," as far as he was concerned, was based on deterrence and not on capitulation to Israeli dictates by detaining "resistance" operatives and confiscating their weapons.** He said that following the killing of al-Asmar the organizations held a meeting and **agreed on a lull with the proviso that they reserved the "right" "to respond to acts of Israeli aggression."**

The Terrorist Attack North of Eilat – Additional Information

9. The IDF Spokesman and Israeli media issued pictures of the weapons used by the Popular Resistance Committees terrorist operatives who carried out the attack north of Eilat on August 18. The weapons included **explosive belts, plastic ties and homemade hand grenades.** The weapons show that the **objective of the attack was not only to inflict mass casualties but to abduct one or more Israeli captives for use as bargaining chips for the release of Palestinian terrorists held in Israeli jails.**



Weapons used by the terrorist operatives in the attack north of Eilat. Above: Guns, ammunitions magazines and vests. Below: Parts of an explosive belt (IDF Spokesman's Website, August 24, 2011).



Left: Weapons found in the terrorists' possession, including knives and improvised fragmentation grenades. Right: Plastic ties for binding the abductees. (Photo: Tal Englander, courtesy of Walla!, August 23, 2011).

Hamas Activists Again Call for Opacity Regarding the Identity of the Terrorists Who Carried Out the Attack North of Eilat

10. High-ranking Gaza Strip Hamas figure Mahmoud al-Zahar, interviewed on August 24 by the Al-Ma'an Agency, described the terrorist attack as "an veiled action." He said he found it strange that Israel had not revealed the identities of the attackers and accused it of "inventing reasons to attack the Gaza Strip" unjustly.

11. In our assessment, Mahmoud al-Zahar's remarks indicate a fear lest **the revelation of the identity of the perpetrators of the attack entangle Hamas and the Popular Resistance Committees in difficulties with the Egyptian authorities**. Another example of that fear was expressed by **Yussef Rizqa, Ismail Haniya's political advisor**, who in his August 19 column in Hamas' daily paper, Felesteen, praised the opacity of the perpetrators' identity. He wrote that he hoped no group claimed responsibility for the attack and that **"such positive vagueness would become a systematic response"** in the future (Felesteen, August 19, 2011).²

Egyptian Newspaper Article about the Perpetrators of the Terrorist Attack near Eilat

12. According to the Egyptian newspaper Al-Masri Al-Yawm on August 21, "Egyptian security sources" and elements investigating the attacks near Eilat reported that **three Egyptians had participated in planning the attack on the Israeli bus**. One of them was considered **the acting commander of the Islamic terrorist squads operating in the central Sinai Peninsula**, and had been wanted by the Egyptian security forces for a long time.

13. Al-Masri Al-Yawm reported that another terrorist operative who participated in planning the attack had been identified by Egyptian security as **a prisoner who had escaped from jail** during the riots which accompanied the fall of the Mubarak regime. According to the paper, he was **a resident of El Arish**, owner of a workshop which produced ammunition, and was in prison for having joined a jihadist network called Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, which had taken responsibility for the terrorist attacks in Taba (Al-Masri Al-Yawm, August 21, 2011).

14. In addition, on August 24 Al-Masri Al-Yawm reported that the suicide bomber who blew himself up near Egyptian soldiers during the attack had not been identified and that **he did not have Egyptian physiognomy**. According to the paper, DNA tests were being conducted to determine his identity. A picture of his head was published in the paper.

²On August 25 Amira Hass wrote in Haaretz that after the attack near Eilat mourning tents had not yet been pitched in the Gaza Strip and no Gazan families had demanded bodies. In our assessment, that illustrates the **effort being made by Hamas and the Popular Resistance Committees to hide their the identity of the perpetrators of the August 18 terrorist attack**.

تحريات أمنية لكشف شخصية انتحاري فجر نفسه في ٣ جنود مصريين على الحدود

كتبه: الامام خالد وسلاح البلقه

بعد وفاءه انزل برصيفات بحريه
 انه بصحة جيدة معلمة ان الجزيرة الامم برفعت سون حور اس
 شئت الجيوب بعدة ليعمل صدمه ان اكله لثقا تحوز الان
 من قران - اكله بالنسبة المذابة حوزة 1991-1992 انور بالحدود
 الكهوية والاشارة السخنة اديها. وتسير دلايه الانتحاري
 - حسب المصادر - ان سخطه مع ملاحح سكان مدينة على
 حاسر العادون شعوره اذبح اكله وحكمه دلعلم بصوت
 الكهوية مخطا لير لاته المطوبه وماذا انو الانتحاريون
 حذوتهم من الامم. الاشارة لثوق التابة وفرانكلان الحار
 الحاسر التوريه أم الكوش الترخيصة



اسم الانتحاري الماز فاجر نفسه في المتحمن الجسدي لثقتي

عندما كان في الحدود ان الجزيرة الامية بالحدود
 السوية مخطا لشخص ان شخصية انتحاري فجر نفسه
 الكهوية الحاسر ان اكله حثقتين شعور بالحدود من
 الجزيرة الامية 1991 جنوب الكويت. عند اوى لوبه الكهنة
 ابراهيم حسن مخطا. من صحت فجر نتيجة المخطا بالحدود ان
 اذبح حركه السطحة ما كهدا كبره من الكهنة
 وكان حركه الكهنة 1991 من اكله فجر حركه فجر
 الامم. وبهذا الامم حثه الكهنة انه بلغ الكهنة
 الامم وبهذا ان الكهنة حثه فجر حركه فجر حركه

Picture of the suicide bomber