



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center  
at the Israel Intelligence' Heritage  
& Commemoration Center (IICC)

## News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation

April 16-30, 2007

### Massive rocket and mortar shelling



Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades ( Hamas) prepare for attack during a massive shelling probably designed as a distraction for an abduction attempt (the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, April 24)

### Encouragement of additional abductions



A poster published by Hamas on the occasion of Prisoner's Day. The text in the upper part reads: "Our heroic prisoners. Each year, a new Gilad [Shalit]" (the Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad websites, April 17)

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## Overview

■ The focus of these last two weeks' events was a massive rocket and mortar shelling by Hamas on Israel's Independence Day, the first such attack since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip in November 2006. The shelling was probably designed as a distraction during an attempt to perpetrate a terrorist attack against an IDF force in the southern Gaza Strip, possibly to abduct a soldier. After the incident, Hamas spokesmen reiterated their intent to continue perpetrating acts of terrorism ("resistance"), with an emphasis on abducting soldiers to be used as bargaining chips for the release of Palestinian terrorist prisoners.

■ The Chairman of the Palestinian Authority and the Finance Minister completed series of trips to Western and Arab countries as part of the effort to "market" the Palestinian unity government. It seems that the promises they received did not meet Palestinian expectations. Against this background, more and more public threats are made (particularly by Hamas spokesmen) to have the Palestinian Authority disbanded and increase violence and terrorism if the economic assistance does not resume and if the blockade on the Palestinian Authority is not lifted.

## Important Events

### Attempt to abduct a soldier under the cover of a massive rocket and mortar shelling

■ On the morning of April 24, Israel's Independence Day, Hamas operatives in the Gaza Strip launched a massive mortar shelling in the southern part of the security road surrounding the Gaza Strip. The IDF identified a total of 25-30 mortar shells fired on IDF forces in the southern Gaza Strip.

■ As the mortar shelling was taking place, several Qassam rockets were fired from the northern Gaza Strip to Israel. Five rockets hit uninhabited territories in the western Negev desert and three dropped in the Gaza Strip. The rocket fire was probably targeted at uninhabited areas rather than population centers. IDF helicopters returned fire.



**Rocket fire on Israel (the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades website, April 24)**

■ In the assessment of the IDF, the massive shelling was probably a distraction by Hamas in an attempt to perpetrate a terrorist attack against an IDF force, possibly for abducting a soldier.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For details on the incident, see Information Bulletin published by the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center: [“On Israel’s Independence Day, the IDF thwarted a terrorist attack \(possibly an abduction attempt\) by Hamas against a military target in the southern Gaza Strip, under the cover of massive mortar and rocket fire”](#) (April 25, 2007).

- Hamas spokesmen publicly claimed responsibility for the massive rocket and mortar shelling, although they denied that it was an abduction attempt. They placed the responsibility for the escalation on Israel's "aggressive" acts in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

- It is the first such attack perpetrated by Hamas since Ehud Olmert and Abu Mazen achieved a ceasefire agreement in the Gaza Strip on November 26, 2006. Up until now, Hamas avoided firing rockets on Israel and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad was responsible for most such incidents. After the incident, Hamas reiterated its intention to continue terrorist activities, particularly abducting Israeli soldiers (see below).

### **Israel's response**

- Israel's Prime Minister held a security consultation following Hamas's terrorist attack. The announcement issued at the end of the consultation stated that Israel was highly concerned about the Hamas activity and that it would not hesitate taking serious measures against those who compromise Israel's sovereignty by firing rockets, attempting to hit soldiers, and through other means (the Prime Minister's website, April 25). According to a press report, it was decided that Israel would not change its policy of response at this time and that IDF activity would continue according to the principles currently in place (Haaretz daily, April 26).

### **Egyptians attempt to defuse the situation**

- Following Hamas's massive shelling, the Egyptian defense delegation in the Gaza Strip made an attempt to reestablish the ceasefire. Members of the delegation stated that the Palestinian organizations would not fire rockets again and asked Israel to restrain itself. According to media reports, delegation members approached the operative wings of the Palestinian organizations in a request to sign a memorandum stressing their commitment to stop firing rockets on Israeli population centers. According to the same report, the organizations

refused to sign such a memorandum, stressing that “such an agreement requires something in return” (Firas website, April 25).

### **Firing rockets and mortar shells**

■ After several weeks of relatively sporadic fire, there was a sharp increase in the extent of rocket fire on western Negev population centers in the second half of April. Sixty-eight rocket drops in Israeli territory were identified in April, compared to 34 in March. One of the rockets directly hit a residential building in the town of Sderot. Six people suffered post-traumatic stress disorder and the building was damaged (April 22). Another rocket dropped in the Ashkelon industrial zone. There were no casualties or structural damage (April 29).

### **Terrorist attack near Modiin**

■ A car-to-car shooting near the settlement of Na’ale (south-west Samaria, in the vicinity of Modiin) left three Israeli civilians lightly injured. The Fatah/Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack (April 17).

### **Shooting attack near the Shuafat Refugee Camp**

■ An Israeli civilian suffered light to medium injuries after having been shot by a Palestinian youth at the Hazme junction (on the Shuafat road) north of Jerusalem (April 22). The civilian was standing near his car, parked at the junction. A Palestinian youth standing nearby pointed his gun at him and shot him. The suspect managed to escape into the nearby village of Beit Hanina.

# **IDF Counterterrorist activities**

## **The Gaza Strip**

### **Three Hamas operatives killed while trying to set an explosive charge**

■ Three members of Hamas's terrorist-operative wing were killed and one was seriously injured by an IDF force. The three were part of a squad that included five terrorists who attempted to set an explosive charge near the fence north of the Kissufim road. The killing of the three operatives triggered strong reactions by Hamas spokesmen, who threatened to react to what they referred to as the Israeli "violations" (Sama News Agency, April 28).

## **Judea and Samaria**

■ During an arrest operation in Jenin and Nablus (April 21), exchanges of fire took place between Israeli security forces and terrorists, in which eight Palestinians were killed. Those killed included senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Fatah operatives involved in planning and perpetrating terrorist attacks.

# **Hamas's policy of terrorist attacks**

## **Hamas spokesmen: we will continue the "resistance" (terrorism), focusing on abducting Israelis**

■ Hamas spokesmen continue making statements on their intent to continue the "resistance" (acts of terrorism) against Israel, which does not contradict, in their view, Hamas's being part of the Palestinian unity government. Within this context, more and more statements have been made on Hamas's intent to abduct Israeli soldiers to be used as bargaining chips for the release of Palestinian

prisoners. Other terrorist organizations also expressed their intent to abduct Israelis.

■ What follows is a selection of statements about abducting Israelis:<sup>2</sup>

✿ **Khalil Abu Leilah**, one of the Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip, called upon the Hamas operative wing and other terrorist organizations to try to abduct Israeli soldiers. “Abducting soldiers is not Hamas’s threat—it is its strategy,” he said. He added that there was a broad consensus in the Palestinian society and government over the need for abducting soldiers to release Palestinian prisoners (Saraj al-Aqsa, April 27).

✿ In a rally held in Khan Yunis on the occasion of Prisoner’s Day, **Yahya Moussa**, a member of the Legislative Council, issued a call to carry out “bargaining chip” abductions **even outside the Palestinian Authority-administered territories**. He said that “the only strategy” to empty the prisons was “resistance and abduction of soldiers” (Al-Risala, April 19).

✿ In a speech given at a Hamas rally held in the University of Al-Aqsa in the Gaza Strip, **Fathi Hamad**, a Hamas representative in the Legislative Council, stressed that the abduction of Gilad Shalit was not Hamas’s last (Qudsnet, April 24).

✿ **Osama Hamdan**, the Hamas representative in Lebanon, said in an interview granted to a Lebanese TV station that abducting Israeli officers might prove more useful in negotiations than abducting ordinary soldiers (April 26).

✿ In a statement issued by Hamas/Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, they said they had completed a detailed plan for abducting soldiers in case Israel

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<sup>2</sup> For other statements made on that issue, see Information Bulletin published by the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center: [“On Israel’s Independence Day, the IDF thwarted a terrorist attack \(possibly an abduction attempt\) by Hamas against a military target in the southern Gaza Strip...”](#) (April 25, 2007).

should attempt a land offensive in the Gaza Strip. The statement stressed that the abductions would also take place in Judea and Samaria (the Hamas website, April 29).

✿ In addition to the emphasis placed on abducting Israeli soldiers, Hamas spokesmen also stressed the movement's intention to continue the "resistance" (i.e., violence and terrorism):

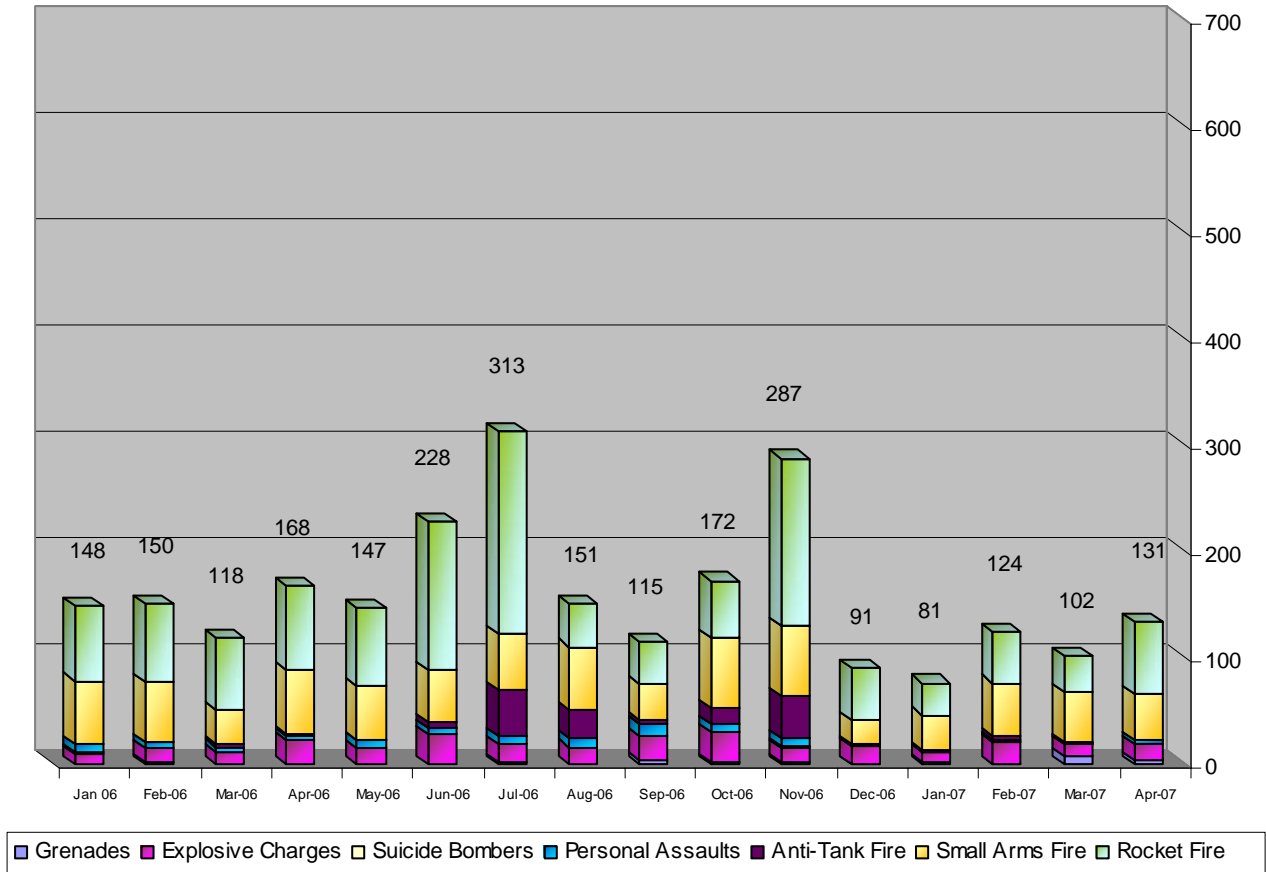
✿ In a political symposium held at the Al-Umari Mosque in Gaza City (April 24), **Mahmoud al-Zahar** said that the "resistance" and being in the government were not contradictory since resistance was the strategic solution. "Jews have no historical or religious right on Palestine, and Hamas will fight the Jews until the homeland is free of their affliction" (Palmedia website, April 25).

✿ In a lecture given by **Khaled Mash'al** to students and lecturers in Syria, he said that Hamas adhered to the option of "resistance" as a strategic option, being both a privilege and a duty (Al-Jazeera TV, April 21).

✿ In an interview granted by Hamas spokesman **Sami Abu Zuhri**, he said that the "resistance" is a direct response to the actions committed by Israel. He added that the actions carried out as part of the "resistance" prove to the international community that Hamas still has options. He further stated that Hamas's participation in the government did not affect its role in the "resistance", which was a "natural right" (Al-Aqsa TV, April 26).

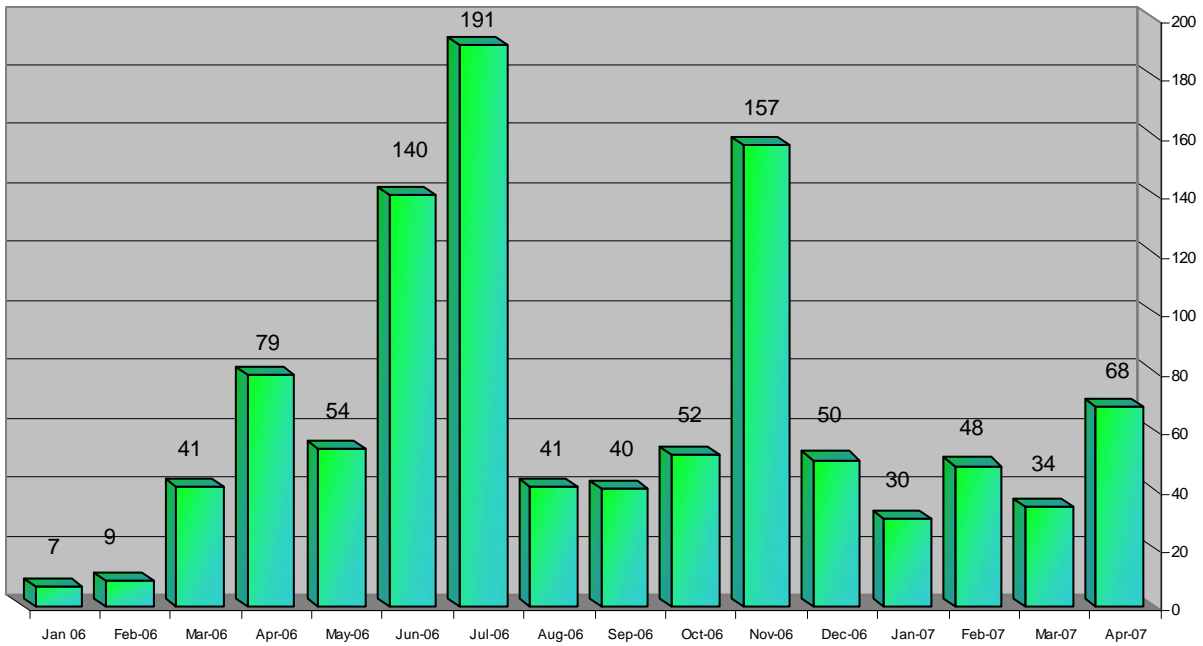
# Statistical Data

## Monthly distribution of attacks

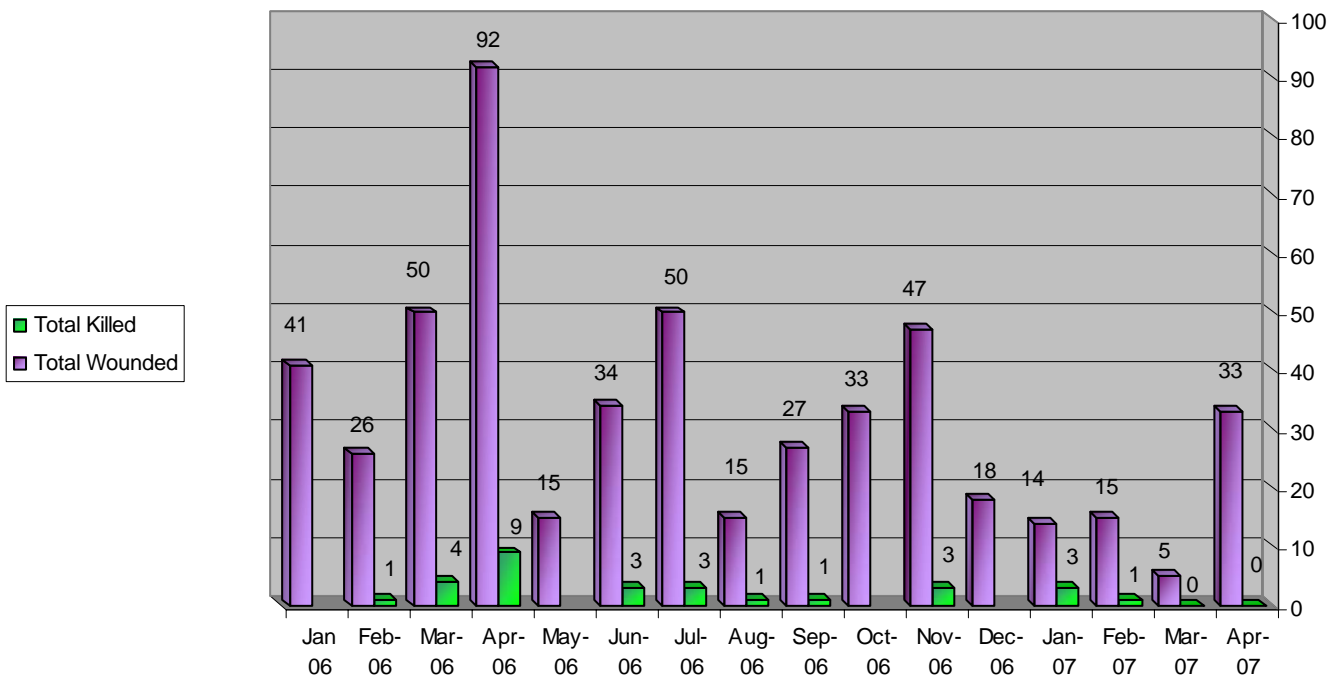




## Monthly distribution of rocket hits



## Monthly distribution of Israeli casualties



# The Internal Palestinian Arena

## Abu Mazen's trips in Europe

■ In recent weeks, PA Chairman Abu Mazen and Palestinian Finance Minister Salam Fayad held a series of trips to Western and Arab countries. They attempted to secure financial assistance and lift the economic blockade on the Palestinian Authority, strengthen its ties with Western countries (Europe, US), “market” the Palestinian unity government, and encourage Western countries to hold direct contacts with it. Within this framework, Abu Mazen visited some European countries: France, Poland, Sweden, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, the Vatican, and Switzerland. In most of those countries, Abu Mazen met with senior government officials. Furthermore, he met with the Pope in the Vatican.

■ It appears that the promises of assistance Abu Mazen and Salam Fayad received from the officials they met were inconsequential and **failed to meet Palestinian expectations**. Against this backdrop, Mustafa al-Barghouti, the Information Minister, warned that the Palestinian Authority could collapse if the economic blockade was not lifted (Al-Ayyam, April 17). Khaled Mash'al, Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, announced that if the blockade on the Palestinian Authority continued, it would result in an outburst directed at Israel (Al-Ayyam, April 30). The Hamas website published an article calling for a disbandment of the Palestinian Authority and an increase of the violence and terrorism if the economic blockade continued (April 21).

## Abu Mazen's meeting with Khaled Mash'al

■ Following his trip, Abu Mazen arrived in Cairo where he held two meetings with Khaled Mash'al (April 27). They discussed the re-establishment of the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, the rebuilding of PLO, and the deal to release the abducted soldier, Gilad Shalit. They stressed their commitment to promote the ceasefire and broaden it to include the West Bank as well. During the meeting,

they once again reaffirmed their commitment to the Mecca Agreement (Middle East News Agency, April 27).



**Abu Mazen's meeting with Khaled Mash'al in Egypt (Palestinian TV, April 28)**

■ At a press conference held after the meeting with Abu Mazen, **Khaled Mash'al justified the massive shelling launched by Hamas on Independence Day**, for, as he put it, “it is part of the Palestinian people’s right to defend themselves and retaliate against the Israeli crimes and violations”. As for the prisoners’ exchange deal, he said that the ball was in Israel’s court and that Israel was responsible for delaying the deal (Middle East News Agency, April 28).

### **Anarchy continues**

■ Anarchy continues in the Palestinian Authority, as does the media war between Abu Mazen and Fatah on one hand and Hamas on the other. Thus, for example:

✿ During a meeting of the Legislative Council in which the anarchy in the Palestinian Authority-administered territories was discussed, dozens of angry teachers broke into the conference hall in protest of unpaid wages (Palestinian News Agency, April 25).



**Teachers break into a Legislative Council meeting (Palestinian TV, April 25)**

- ✿ Armed gunmen took control of the Deputy Public Works Minister in the Gaza Strip, forced those inside out of the vehicle, and stole it (April 17).
- ✿ Masked gunmen detonated explosive charges at the American school in Beit Lahiya (April 21).
- ✿ The Rafah crossing was closed down after armed gunmen broke into the crossing and the European observers left the scene (April 26).
- ✿ An armed squad abducted a member of the Presidential Guard in the vicinity of Beit Lahiya (April 27).
- ✿ Some 20 students were injured in the University of Al-Quds in Abu Dis during confrontations between students belonging to Fatah and those belonging to Hamas (Maan News Agency, April 29).

## **Difficulties in implementing the Interior Minister's security program**

■ Hani al-Qawasmi, the Palestinian Interior Minister, formulated a security program to deal with the anarchy, a program approved by the Legislative Council and the unity government. The program was supposed to be implemented first in Gaza City and in the northern Gaza Strip, followed by its implementation

elsewhere in the Gaza Strip. The main goals of the program are collecting illegal arms and combating crime. The program is supposed to include deploying roadblocks, conducting foot patrols, and bolstering police presence along the roads (Palestinian News Agency, April 17).

■ The security program came under harsh criticism. The various terrorist organizations refused to cooperate with the Interior Ministry, claiming that they were not informed of the program in advance (Al-Hayat, April 18). Jibril Rajoub, a senior Fatah member and former National Security Advisor for the Palestinian Authority, said the program was “inadequate, pathetic, and perverted” (AFP, April 15).

### **Interior Minister resigns over difficulties carrying out his missions**

■ Faced with the difficulties in implementing the security program and a conflict with Rashid Abu Shubak, in charge of interior security in the ministry, Interior Minister Hani al-Qawasmi postponed the implementation of the security program **and even submitted his resignation** (Al-Hayat, April 27).

■ After meeting with Hani al-Qawasmi, Palestinian PM Ismail Haniyah said that while Qawasmi did, in fact, resign, **in practice he was still the Interior Minister**. Ismail Haniyah clarified that Qawasmi’s resignation would be discussed in a meeting he would hold with Abu Mazen (Filastin al-Aan website, April 28). The Palestinian media reported that in the meeting, Abu Mazen undertook to return to the Interior Minister his full authority (Quds Press website, April 29). On the other hand, it was reported that Hamas seniors were considering approaching Abu Mazen with a request to dismiss Rashid Abu Shubak (Al-Hayat, April 27).

## **PM Ismail Haniyah to visit Switzerland**

■ A senior source in the Palestinian Foreign Ministry announced that PM Ismail Haniyah would visit Switzerland in May. If such a visit is held, it will be Ismail Haniyah's first visit to a European country since assuming office over a year ago (AFP, April 27).