



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

August 12-19, 2008



Palestinian Islamic Jihad operative adjusting rocket aimed at Israel (PALDF Forum, August 14).



The Kerem Shalom crossing, reopened for the first time since the terrorist attack of April 19. The picture was taken before the attack.

Overview

- The lull arrangement was preserved this week as well with the continuation of sporadic rocket fire. Deliveries of goods continued uninterrupted through the Gaza Strip crossings, and the Kerem Shalom crossing was reopened after having been closed in late April following a terrorist attack. No progress was made regarding the release of the Gilad Shalit, the abducted Israeli soldier.
- This week the Israeli government decided to release 200 Palestinian prisoners and detainees, two of them who had been involved in killing Israelis, as a goodwill gesture to Abu Mazen. Fatah and the Palestinian Authority praised the decision; Hamas condemned it.
- In recent weeks a Hamas-affiliated committee and pro-Palestinian activists from all over the world have been organizing a voyage of ships to the Gaza Strip to protest the so-called blockade, despite the fact that following the lull arrangement there has been a constant flow of deliveries of goods and fuel from Israel. Two participating ships are currently anchored off a Greek island. So far their departure date is unknown.

Important Events

Gaza Strip

Two additional violations of the lull arrangement

- Even though the lull arrangement has been maintained, there is sporadic rocket fire almost every week. This past week there were two additional violations of the arrangement:
 - **August 15:** A rocket hit was identified close to the village of Gevaram near Ashqelon.
 - **August 17:** A rocket hit was identified near the village of Re'im in the western Negev.



PIJ operatives posing against an array of dozens of rockets ready for launching into Israeli territory (PALDF Forum, August 14).

- Since the lull arrangement went into effect, there were 13 rocket and 7 mortar shell attacks against Israel. Three additional rockets were fired at Israel but landed within the Gaza Strip.

Counterterrorism Activities

Gaza Strip

- This past week as well the Israeli security forces refrained from undertaking counterterrorism activities in the Gaza Strip and continued routine activities along the border fence. In a number of instances they fired warning shots at suspicious Palestinians approaching the fence.

Judea and Samaria

- The security forces continued their counterterrorism activities in Judea and Samaria:

- **August 13:** An IDF force discovered an M-16 assault rifle hidden in a vehicle near the 'Asira al-Shmaliya roadblock, north of Nablus. The gun was confiscated and the three Palestinians in the car were detained.
- **August 13:** During a routine security check of a young Palestinian at the Hawara checkpoint (south of Nablus), two pipe charges were found strapped to his body. They were detonated in a controlled explosion and the youth was detained for questioning.

Terrorist activist detained in Nablus

- A combined security force action in Nablus on August 5 led to the detention of **Firas Zaki Husni Tashtush**, who a few months previously had been part of the "wanted prisoners amnesty" and had committed himself to abandoning terrorist activity. It recently became clear that he was not meeting his commitments or fulfilling the terms of the agreement, and was planning to supply terrorist operatives in Nablus with IEDs with which to attack IDF forces (IDF Spokesman's website, August 14).

The Lull Arrangement -- Update

The Gaza Strip crossings

- This past week an average of 90 trucks a day passed through the Gaza Strip crossings to deliver goods. Since the lull arrangement went into effect there has been a gradual increase in the amount and types of goods entering the Strip. This past week more heads of cattle were delivered, as were containers of cooking gas (in addition to the gas delivered through the Karni crossing), in preparation for the approaching Muslim holy month of Ramadan.
- On August 17 the recently renovated Kerem Shalom crossing was reopened. It had been closed since April 19 when IDF forces prevented an attempted combined mass-killing attack which almost completely destroyed it.¹ The Kerem Shalom crossing is planned to gradually replace the Sufa crossing, though which scores of trucks pass every day, delivering merchandise and humanitarian aid from Israel to the Gaza Strip.

¹ For further information see our April 22, 2008 Bulletin entitled "On Passover Eve IDF forces prevented a combined mass-casualty attack at the Kerem Shalom Crossing. The attack was carried out by Hamas as part of its campaign against the crossings," at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ct_210408e.pdf.

The Rafah crossing

- According to Palestinian and Egyptian sources, Egypt is expected to open the crossing for the month of Ramadan to allow patients, students and individuals with exit visas into Egypt (Filastin al-Yawm, August 18). **Muhammad Adwan**, Hamas spokesman for the crossings administration, said that it was unconfirmed information, noting it was not the first time Egypt had promised to open the crossing (Sawt al-Quds, August 18).

Gilad Shalit, the abducted Israeli soldier

- Senior Hamas leaders remain intransigent regarding Gilad Shalit:
 - Felesteen editor **Mustafa al-Sawaf** attacked attempts made by Egypt to exert pressure on the Palestinians to accept its positions, including the issue of Gilad Shalit, through its refusal to open the Rafah crossing, and its war on the smuggling tunnels. He said that Egypt's position forced Hamas to disregard it as a broker "because its attitude of superiority and its arrogance will not bring forth edible fruit." He added that Hamas would not compromise on the number of prisoners it demanded from Israel. "Israel should have learned its lesson from [the] Ron Arad [affair]...and if not, the next deal between Israel and Shalit's captors will be for a stinking corpse and bones..." (Filastin al-Yawm, August 14).
 - Senior Hamas official **Osama al-Muzeini** said that "the Zionist enemy has understood that it cannot release Gilad Shalit unless it meets the conditions set by the resistance. The enemy tried the militaristic path and failed...However, Hamas will not retreat and will not abandon its position, the release of prisoners sentenced to long terms..." (Al-Aqsa TV, August 14).

The terrorist organizations continue threats to end the lull arrangement

- Spokesmen for the Palestinian terrorist organizations continue accusing Israel of not meeting its commitments to the lull arrangement and threaten to reevaluate their position regarding it:
 - Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades spokesman **Abu Obeida** said that "the occupation has violated some of the lull conditions, especially everything having to do with lifting the blockade and opening the crossings. The responsibility is first and foremost the occupation's, and then it rests on the shoulders of the Arab countries, especially Egypt, which sponsors the lull agreement" (Quds Press Agency, August 16).

- Senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad figure **Khader Habib** said that “Israel has not met its commitments to the lull, especially opening the crossings and lifting the blockade... We are making a serious study of the lull and its continuation...” (BBC in Arabic, August 12).
- Popular Resistance Committees senior figure **Abu al-Qassem** said that “the lull cannot continue in view of the Zionist thoughtlessness regarding the fate of our people...as long as the Zionists do not meet their commitments regarding the lull, especially the opening of the Rafah and the merchandise crossings” (Filastin al-'An website, August 12).



Hamas operatives on parade, Gaza City, August 17. The terrorist organizations continue training and showing their military strength during the lull (PALDF Forum, August 17).

- The **PIJ in Tulkarm** issued an announcement stating that the organization opposed “talking about a lull in the West Bank” and that it adhered to “the option of resistance” (i.e., terrorism). It also opposed the demand made by the Palestinian Authority to turn over their weapons and that “our weapons will remain in our hands as security whose compass is Jerusalem and all Palestine” (Nidaa al-Quds website, August 16).

Protest voyage of ships to the Gaza Strip orchestrated by Hamas and international pro-Palestinian elements

- During the last few weeks a protest voyage has been organized and is expected to leave for the Gaza Strip. The voyage has been orchestrated by a committee headed by Jamal al-Khudari and affiliated with Hamas, calling itself the “Popular Committee against the Siege,” in partnership with an international organization calling itself “Free Gaza.”² Their objective is to create an international media event over “the blockade of the Gaza Strip.” So far it is not known

² “Free Gaza” is an international organization established this year. Its activists are pro-Palestinians from all over the world whose stated objective is to aid the Gazans, who live “under the Israeli blockade.”

when the ships can be expected to sail (the date deliberately kept vague). They left Crete on August 15 and are currently anchored off a Greek island.

- The two ships are expected to sail with 40 pro-Palestinian activists of various nationalities on board, most of them Americans and Europeans. The vessels will be laden with medical-humanitarian equipment and foodstuffs for the Gaza Strip. They expect to be stopped by the Israeli navy and are prepared for a long delay at sea and to broadcast the events in real time.

- **Hamas** issued a statement to the effect that it blessed the expected arrival of the two ships on the Gaza shore. Hamas further stated that it supported every action intended to “break through the blockade,” and called for efforts to be intensified to save the besieged Palestinian people (Palestine-info website, August 17).

- This media-oriented voyage intends to send a **fundamentally false message**. Since the lull arrangement went into effect on June 19, there have been **continuous, uninterrupted deliveries of goods** into from Israel into the Gaza Strip through the Sufa and Karni crossings, and a gradual increase in the amount and types of merchandise delivered (See above). In certain instances Hamas spokesmen admitted as much.³



The ships waiting to sail (Free Gaza website, August 10).

³ **Muhammad Adwan**, head of public relations for the Hamas crossings administration, admitted that Israel had increased the number of trucks and goods passing from Israel into the Gaza Strip. However, he added that “in view of the strictness of the blockade, the Gaza Strip needs more merchandise...” (Hamas publication Al-Risala, August 14).

The Annapolis Process

Israel to release 200 Palestinian prisoners

■ On August 17 the government of Israel decided, as a good will gesture to PA chairman Abu Mazen, to recommend the release of 200 Palestinian detainees and prisoners. It was consequently decided that the ministers' committee for the release of Palestinian prisoners would decide on their release and release date. The government empowered the committee to deal with the release, an exception, to a certain degree, from criteria established in the past. The committee was empowered to decide on the release of two prisoners who had been involved in killing Israelis (Prime minister's website, August 17).

■ The release of the prisoners, according to the statement issued by the prime minister's office, is meant to promote the peace process with the Palestinians and to strengthen relations with the PA chairman and prime minister. According to the Israeli prime minister's website, the government of Israel is interested in both making it clear that it is aware of the importance of the issue, and showing that Palestinian prisoners can be released through dialogue rather than violence or by abducting soldiers (Prime minister's website, August 17).

■ In concrete terms, there are two prisoners among the 200 who were directly involved in killing Israelis and are serving terms of about 30 years. The release of another, Akram Mansour, who was arrested in 1979 for killing an Israeli reserve soldier, was not authorized.

■ The two prisoners noted above are:

- **Muhammad Abu Ali Yatah** from the Hebron region, who was a Fatah delegate to the Palestinian Legislative Council. He was sentenced to two terms of life imprisonment for killing a yeshiva student, Yehoshua Saloma, in the Old City of Hebron on January 13, 1980. During his incarceration in Israel he also killed another prisoner whom he suspected of collaborating with Israel.

- **Sayid al-Utbah**, a Nablus resident, belonged to the DFLP. He was arrested in 1977, and headed a squad which planted IEDs in the market in Petah Tikva, two buses and the Carmel Market in the heart of Tel Aviv. The bombs killed one and wounded 33 Israelis.

■ **Fatah** praised the decision to release 200 prisoners. PA **Prime Minister Salam Fayyad** said that "it is a victory for the Palestinians," but called upon Israel to change its criteria and release all the Palestinian prisoners, with no exceptions (AP, August 17). Hamas decried the

Israeli decision to release only Fatah prisoners. Hamas spokesman **Sami Abu Zuhri** said that the step had been taken to deepen internal Palestinian disagreement and to support one side at the expense of the other. He added that “our people want all the prisoners of all the organizations to be released, not just Fatah, that is the main condition of the prisoner exchange deal demanded by Hamas” (Palestine-info website, August 17).

The Israeli defense minister meets with the PA prime minister

- On August 16 Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak received PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad at his home in Tel Aviv. The two discussed a series of current political and security issues.

- Defense Minister Barak told the Palestinian prime minister that Israel would continue supporting economic projects in Judea and Samaria and that he regarded them as the key to promoting the peace process. He reviewed the easing of restrictions which had been carried out so far (the removal of roadblocks and barriers, opening roads, increasing the number of work permits, etc.). He said that Israel would continue working to improve the daily lives of the Palestinians at the same time making a special effort to deal effectively with terrorism (Announcement issued by the Defense Ministry, August 16).



Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in Tel Aviv, August 16 (Defense Ministry, August 16).

- Spokesman for the Hamas faction in the Palestinian Legislative Council, **Salah al-Bardawil**, criticized the meeting, saying that it was part of Barak’s campaign propaganda. He said that Salam Fayyad had held the meeting without “any bargaining chips and without legitimate authorization to sign any agreement whatsoever” (Filastin al-’An website, August 16).

The Internal Palestinian Arena

Ineffective attempts at reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas continue

- On August 17 a Fatah delegation arrived in Cairo to discuss with Egypt the internal Palestinian dialogue. Next week a Hamas delegation is expected to go to Cairo for the same purpose. Egypt has recently informed both sides that it would not host a Palestinian dialogue in Cairo without sufficient guarantees of its success, especially regarding the issue of disbanding

the security forces (about which Hamas is not willing to compromise).. A high-ranking Hamas figure anonymously said that “if Fatah asked for that, it means there will never be a dialogue. Returning the security services to Fatah and disbanding the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades means putting Hamas’s neck on the enemy’s chopping block...” (Al-Hayat, August 17).

Hamas-Jordan contacts

■ A delegation of members of Hamas’s political bureau, headed by **Mahmoud Nizal**, went to Jordan and met with **Muhammad al-Dhahabi**, head of Jordanian general intelligence. They spoke about the situation in the Gaza Strip, the future of relations between the two sides and current security issues (Al-Arab al-Yom, August 14).

■ It was the second meeting in less than a month. Hamas spokesmen said future meetings might be held by more senior individuals and that Khaled Mashal, head of the Hamas political bureau in Damascus, who had been expelled from Jordan, might go there (Al-Ghad, August 16). An Al-Quds Al-Arabi commentator close to the Jordan administration said that so far there had been only security contacts and that Jordan had no intention of entering other channels (Al-Quds Al-Arabi, August 17). The contacts were the first of their kind since the deterioration of relations between Jordan and Hamas following the exposure of Hamas terrorist activity in April 2006. That centered around smuggling weapons and gathering information about potential targets for terrorist attacks within the Hashemite kingdom.⁴

⁴ For further information see our April 30, 2006 Bulletin entitled “Jordan accuses Hamas of planning terrorist attacks on its territory, directed by one of its Syria-based military leaders” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hamas_260406e.pdf.