



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

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Operation Cast Lead—Update No. 15



Paratroopers on a night operation in the outskirts of Gaza City (IDF Spokesman, January 14, 2009)



Rockets still launched from central Gaza City (PALDF website, January 14, 2008)

Overview

- Over the past 24 hours, IDF forces have continued expanding the ground operations in the outskirts of Gaza City, wresting control of more and more areas from the terrorists and carrying out raids deep into the Hamas-controlled urban territory. During the operations, the IDF forces encountered some terrorist squads, their assessment being that several dozen terrorists have been killed over the past 24 hours. A total of 16 soldiers were injured during today's operations--one severely, two moderately, and thirteen lightly (IDF Spokesman, January 15).
- Since early morning, the Israeli Air Force raided over 50 targets, including 15 tunnels in the vicinity of Rafah which had been used for transporting rockets--including some longer-range rockets. Also attacked were about ten terrorist squads (including a terrorist seen setting an IED against Israeli troops), a weapon storehouse, about ten rocket launchers (including a Grad launcher ready to fire), as well as subterranean launch sites some of which were aimed and ready to fire at Israel.
- On the night of January 14-15, IDF forces continued their activity inside the Gaza Strip. Assisted by ground troops, the Air Force attacked over 60 targets, including more than 13 terrorist squads and five weapon storehouses. More than 25 terrorists were killed during the night. Israeli Navy vessels escorted the IDF forces and assisted by attacking Hamas targets from sea and enforcing the sea blockade on the Gaza Strip (IDF Spokesman, January 15).
- On January 15, at 5:30 PM, the Israeli Air Force attacked a building with several Hamas operatives inside: Sa'id Siyam, his brother Iyad Siyam, and Salah Abu Sarah, the head of Hamas's internal security service in the Gaza Strip. The building was hit, and the three were killed. Sa'id Siyam was the Interior Minister in the Hamas administration, and the highest-ranking leader of Hamas killed in Operation Cast Lead. Another senior Hamas figure, Nizar Riyan, was killed early into the operation (for details on Sa'id Siyam, see **Appendix B**).

The fighting on the ground

■ A summary of the main events follows:

- An IDF force exposed weapons and military equipment hidden **inside a mosque** to the west of Gaza City; the weapons and equipment included IEDs, grenades, ballistic vests, and communication devices.
- An IDF force identified and shot a terrorist who was launching a mortar shell at Israel.
- A terrorist opened fire on IDF forces from a house to the east of Gaza City. An IDF force demolished the building and hit the terrorist who fired at them.
- An IDF force exposed and defused a rocket that was ready to be launched at Ashkelon.

[Click here to view the rocket exposure video](#)

Air Force strikes

■ A summary of the main events follows:

- The Air Force attacked a terrorist squad shortly after that squad fired an anti-tank rocket at IDF forces, as a result of which seven IDF soldiers were injured.
- The Air Force attacked two Hamas operatives in the Zaitoun area. The two were involved in fighting IDF forces and firing rockets at Israel.
- The Air Force attacked a mosque in Rafah which served as a rocket storehouse and a meeting place for senior operatives of the Hamas military-terrorist wing.



Tunnels blown up by IDF forces in Rafah (PALDF website, January 14)

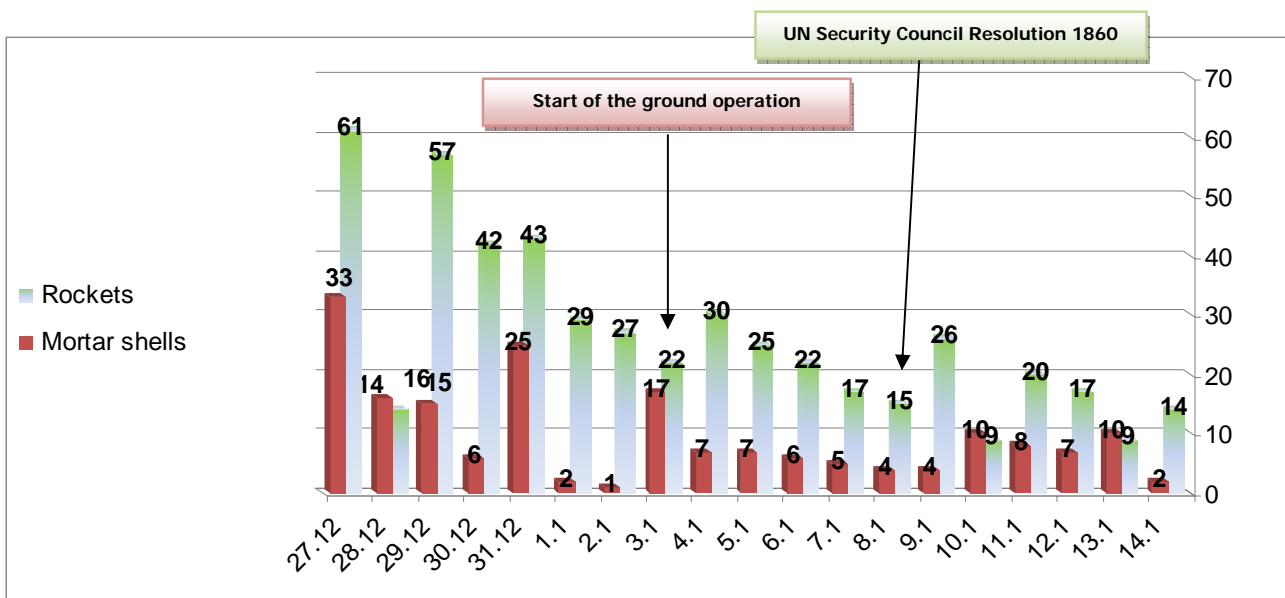
Rockets and mortar shells fired at Israel

■ The slow decline in the number of rockets fired at Israel is continuing, **even though rockets still land in cities as distant from the Gaza Strip as Beersheba and Ashdod**. On January 15, there were **14 recorded rocket landings and 2 mortar shell landings** in Israeli territory. An event of note occurred at around 1:00 PM, when a volley of six long-range 122-mm rockets was launched at Israel, landing in the cities of Ashdod and Beersheba. Some of the rockets were launched during the “humanitarian window”. No casualties were reported. A total of **485 rockets and 183 mortar shells** landed in Israel since the beginning of Operation Cast Lead.



Rockets fired at Israel from densely-populated areas (PALDF forum, January 14)

Rockets and mortar shells during Operation Cast Lead



Transfer of humanitarian aid from Israel to the Gaza Strip

- As in previous days, a “humanitarian corridor” was opened on January 14 between 1:00 PM and 4:00 PM in order to allow Gaza Strip residents to obtain supplies and carry out repairs. Since the early morning, 108 trucks passed through Kerem Shalom Crossing, including three fuel trucks bound for the Gaza power station. Erez Crossing was left open for urgent humanitarian needs. Since the beginning of the operation, over 1,133 trucks loaded with over 25,322 tons of humanitarian supplies and goods have entered the Gaza Strip.
- The UNRWA coordinator in the Gaza Strip expressed his appreciation of Israel’s cooperation in delivering the humanitarian assistance sent by the UN to the Gaza Strip. However, he noted that the sanitary conditions in the Gaza Strip were a cause for severe concern, adding that the daily three-hour “humanitarian corridor” was not enough time to repair the water infrastructure in the Gaza Strip (Relief Web, January 14).

Humanitarian assistance through Egypt and Rafah Crossing

- About 33 injured Palestinians from the Gaza Strip crossed into Egypt through Rafah Crossing to receive medical aid. They were brought by 25 ambulances which entered the Gaza Strip from Egypt (Middle East News Agency, January 14). In addition to the evacuation of the wounded:
 - Fourteen Sudanese physicians arrived at the crossing on their way to do volunteer work in Gaza Strip hospitals (Islam On Line, January 14).
 - Eleven aid planes carrying about 450 tons of medications and food landed at the Al-Arish airport, including four planes from Morocco and one plane each from Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Egypt (Middle East News Agency, January 14).
 - Four aid planes belonging to the Jordanian Air Force departed for the Al-Arish airport. The planes are carrying food supplies (Middle East News Agency, January 14).
 - About 80 tons of medications sent by Qatar and by an Egyptian businessman were brought into the Gaza Strip.

■ Also, it was reported that the **Spirit of Humanity** aid ship left the Larnaka port en route to the Gaza Strip in the morning of January 14 with 21 passengers and crewmen on board. The passengers included physicians, journalists, left-wing activists, and a shipment of medical supplies (Free Gaza website, January 14).

The Lebanese border

■ Three rocket hits were detected at 8:30 AM. They were fired from the region of Rashaya al-Fukhar (a Christian village in the eastern sector) in south Lebanon. Two hits were detected in Lebanese territory; no third hit was detected. The residents of Kiryat Shmona and neighboring areas were instructed to go into their bomb shelters. Three civilians suffered stress-related trauma. No organization claimed responsibility for the rocket fire. The IDF responded by firing artillery at the launch site.



Rashaya al-Fukhar, the region from which the rockets were fired (Al-Jazeera, January 14)

■ A UNIFIL spokeswoman said that during a search conducted by UNIFIL forces and the Lebanese army in the territory, **three more rockets** were found that were ready to be launched at Israel. She also said that UNIFIL forces were on alert (AFP, January 14).

■ **Nawaf al-Moussawi**, the head of Hezbollah's office of international relations, accused UNIFIL of failing to meet its obligations and noted that the responsibility rested on the Lebanese government. He also criticized Israel for reacting to the incident and called upon all Lebanese to "stand firm in light of that attack" (OTV, January 14). The spokesman of the PFLP-GC (a pro-Syrian terrorist organization supposedly responsible for the previous incident of rocket fire during Operation Cast Lead) refused to take responsibility. However, he expressed his support in

principle for any military action from Lebanese territory in response to the IDF's activity in the Gaza Strip (Quds Press, January 14).

■ It is the second time that rockets are launched from Lebanon into Israeli territory since the beginning of Operation Cast Lead. On the morning of January 8 (at about 7:45 AM), 2-3 rockets were fired from the eastern sector of south Lebanon to the Western Galilee. One rocket hit a senior citizens home in Nahariya, causing damage to the building and light injuries to several people. Another rocket landed in a Western Galilee town.¹ In both cases, Hezbollah denied responsibility.

The Egyptian initiative -- update

■ On January 14, the Hamas delegation visited Cairo once again to hold talks about the Egyptian initiative. Hamas sources as well as an Egyptian source told Arab and Egyptian media that Hamas agreed to the Egyptian initiative. Later on, delegation members and senior Hamas figures clarified that Hamas still had reservations and that there were still points of contention left. On January 15, Amos Gilad, chief of the Israeli Defense Ministry's Security-Diplomatic Bureau, will visit Cairo in order to study Hamas's response and convey to the Egyptians Israel's demands about the smuggling of weapons into the Gaza Strip (a **key issue** in the talks for ending the fighting).

Main statements of Hamas seniors

■ Following are the main statements made by Hamas senior figures about the Egyptian initiative:

- **Salah al-Bardawil**, a member of the Hamas delegation for the Egypt talks, said in a press conference that the Egyptian initiative was the single one **offered** to Hamas. He added that Hamas **did not object** to the initiative and was not talking about changing it. Hamas presented to the Egyptians several reservations which Egypt will deliver to Israel (Al-Jazeera TV, January 14).
- **Muhammad Nasr**, a member of the Hamas delegation, noted that Hamas's compliance with Egypt's efforts did not mean that Hamas agreed to the Egyptian initiative.

¹ See our Information Bulletin: "[Rockets hit Western Galilee, initial report](#)" (January 8, 2009).

He said that there were still some controversial issues and that Hamas would continue examining the issue (Ramattan News Agency, January 14).

- **Moussa Abu Marzouq**, the Deputy Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, noted that there were several principal comments which Hamas brought up regarding the Egyptian draft. Those comments pertain to the length of the lull in the fighting, the withdrawal of IDF forces, the ceasefire, and the control at the crossings and along the borders. As for the length of the lull in the fighting, Abu Marzouq stressed that it had to be **short** and must not be of indeterminate length, thus denying the “resistance” (terrorism) of its “right” to continue its actions. He added Hamas was the body currently administering the Gaza Strip, and said that it had to be reflected in a new agreement about the management of Rafah Crossing (according to Abu Marzouq, the crossings agreement from 2005 is no longer legally valid) (Al-Alam TV, January 14).

- **Muhammad Nazzal**, a Hamas Political Bureau member, noted that Hamas neither rejected nor agreed to the Egyptian initiative. The Hamas delegation demanded that corrections be made to several clauses in the agreement, and if they were approved, Hamas would agree and commit to the initiative. He added that the ball was now in Israel's court, and it was expected to send a representative to Cairo on January 15 (Amos Gilad) who would be presented with Hamas's demands (Al-Jazeera TV, January 14).

■ As for the **Egyptian** response, the **Al-Ahram** newspaper (January 14) wrote that the talks held by Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman with the Hamas delegation in Cairo were “positive and encouraging”, and that it was fully convinced about the Egyptian initiative. It appears, however, that there is a schism between the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip and the Hamas leadership abroad, mostly in Syria, **which is pressured by Iran and Syria** to reject the Egyptian initiative or to try to exert pressure on it. According to the article, the leaders in the Gaza Strip “are showing great willingness to consent to the Egyptian initiative... driven by the desire to protect the civilians' lives”. The article calls upon Hamas to unite “and to get rid of the pressure which does not serve its own purposes but rather the purposes of other regional elements [i.e., Iran and Syria] that do not want a solution...”

Creating the “myth of victory” by Hamas (update)

■ Hamas continues its attempts to create a “myth of victory”—despite the blow it took, despite the immense destruction caused in the Gaza Strip, despite the heavy losses, and before the fighting is actually over. Those attempts are orchestrated by the Hamas leadership; however, Hamas’s media in the Gaza Strip do their best to follow its lead. **Moussa Abu Marzouq**, the Deputy Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, claimed that in practice “**victory was already achieved**”, which is why he expected the Israeli “aggression” to stop soon (interview to the Iranian Al-Alam TV, January 14).

■ In the past several days, further attempts have been made to perpetuate the myth of victory based on several components:

- **De-legitimization of the IDF’s operation in the Gaza Strip:** Hamas continues its efforts to undermine the legitimacy of the Israeli military operation by emphasizing the civilian casualties. **Moussa Abu Marzouq:** Israel has military superiority “only when it murders women and children” (Al-Alam TV, January 14). **Khaled Mash’al** noted that viewers watching the news coming in from the Gaza Strip were seeing a tragic image of “Zionist massacres, murder of children and women, bombings of schools, mosques, hospitals, and ambulances”; “we are seeing images of killed children and body parts” (failing to mention the damage caused to terrorists and terrorist infrastructure) (Al-Watan, January 14).
- **Israel is having military failures compared to so-called military “successes” made by Hamas.** **Moussa Abu Marzouq:** the IDF forces are only advancing “several feet” in all confrontation sites. The IDF failed in accomplishing its goals and therefore passed on the failure to the Israeli political leadership; “resistance” operatives caused many casualties to Israel (Al-Alam TV, January 14). **Muhammad Nazzal**, a Political Bureau member, claimed that over the past 24 hours terrorist operatives (“resistance”) managed to kill 17 IDF soldiers, including a senior commander (Al-Jazeera, January 14). **The Hamas media** brought up the **false** claim that the fire which broke out in the Ashdod chemical factory (January 14) was caused as a result of a rocket landing. **Al-Aqsa TV** aired a video “documenting” Hamas operatives breaking into a house where IDF forces barricaded themselves in western Beit Lahiya, claiming that five IDF soldiers were killed in the incident (in the investigation we conducted, the IDF forces are not familiar with such incident) (Al-Aqsa TV, January 14).

- **On the ideological sphere:** Hamas stresses that it will not bow down to **pressure to abandon the strategy of “resistance” (terrorism)**.
- **Khaled Mash’al**, the Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, said that the Zionists wanted Hamas to stop the resistance (terrorism) and compared it to the occupation, however, “Gaza Strip residents will not surrender to the injustice of that invidious equation” (interview to the daily Al-Watan, Bahrain, January 14). **Moussa Abu Marzouq**, the Deputy Chairman of the Political Bureau, stressed that in its contacts with Egypt, Hamas would not agree to a prolonged lull in the fighting, so that the lull would not deny the “resistance” of its “right” to continue operating and achieve its goals (Al-Alam TV, January 14). **Khaled Mash’al** (falsely) noted that the “Zionist army” was still standing on the outskirts of the Gaza Strip, that it did not enter the residential areas, and that it lost more than 20 soldiers and officers (Bahraini daily Al-Watan, January 14).

Osama Bin Laden calls for jihad to stop the “aggression” against the Gaza Strip

■ On January 14, Osama Bin Laden released a new audio tape. It was produced by **Al-Sahab**, Al-Qaeda’s media production center. The tape is titled **“Call for jihad to stop the aggression against Gaza”** and it is 22 minutes long. In the tape, Bin Laden calls young Muslims to “carry out the duty of jihad against the Zionist-Crusader alliance and against its agents in the region [i.e., pro-Western regimes]...” According to Bin Laden, jihad is the only way to take back the Al-Aqsa mosque and Palestine. In our assessment, such calls made by Bin Laden and other senior Al-Qaeda figures **may encourage global terrorist networks to perpetrate terrorist attacks against Israeli, Jewish, and Western targets.**

Appendix A

Using mosques as firing positions and places to store weapons

- During the activity of IDF forces on January 14, a **mosque** was uncovered that served as a storage place for many weapons. Some of them were hidden in a cache built under the imam's podium.



Weapons discovered in the mosque (IDF Spokesman, January 15)

IEDs seized in the houses of Hamas operatives in the Gaza Strip

■ The houses of operatives belonging to Hamas and other terrorist organizations are frequently used for storing weapons. IDF forces discovered large quantities of weapons in the houses of terrorist operatives' families, where civilians who are not involved in terrorist activity reside as well.



Weapons discovered in the houses of Hamas operatives (IDF Spokesman, January 15)

Initial biographic details on Sa'id Siyam, a member of the Hamas leadership and Minister of Internal Affairs and National Security in the Hamas administration

- **Full name:** Sheikh Sa'id Muhammad Sha'ban Siyam ("Abu Muss'ab")

- **Origin/place of residence:** born in Al-Shati refugee camp, Gaza, 1959, resident of the Gaza City neighborhood of Sheikh Radwan. His family is from the village of Al-Jura near Ashkelon (also the origin of Ahmed Yassin and Ismail Haniyah).

- **Marital status:** married and father of six.

- **Education:** studied at a teachers' seminar in Ramallah and was trained as a teacher of science and mathematics. He completed his studies in the Open University of Al-Quds with a B.A. in Islamic culture.

- **Activities:** in the past, he worked in one of UNRWA's schools in Gaza. He left his position as a result of disagreements with his employers due to his political affiliation. He was involved in social activity as part of Hamas's *da'wah* network. He worked as a preacher and volunteer imam in Gaza Strip mosques.

- **Status and activity in Hamas:**
 - Siyam was a member of Hamas's leadership in the Gaza Strip, and took part in its decision making. With the outbreak of the violent confrontation (the Al-Aqsa intifada), his political status within Hamas strengthened.
 - Between December 2001 and April 2002, he was the Hamas spokesman. He was responsible for establishing Hamas's Radio Al-Aqsa station, operating from the Gaza Strip. He was elected for the legislative council and won many votes.

- In 2003, he became member of the Hamas political leadership in the Gaza Strip. As Minister of Internal Affairs in the Hamas administration, he was one of the highest-ranking, most influential people. Siyam was the one who established Hamas's Executive Force which was Hamas's spearhead of clashes with the Palestinian Authority and was used as the main force for oppressing Fatah and Hamas's other opponents.
- He was one of the leaders in the Hamas military takeover of the Gaza Strip. Following the Hamas takeover, he was the one in charge of the police and the internal security services, which were brutally employed against Hamas's opposition.

■ **Arrests by Israel and the Palestinian Authority:** he was arrested by Israel four times in the years 1989-1992. He was among the group of Hamas's activists who were expelled to Lebanon (1992) and were allowed to return later. He was arrested twice by the Palestinian Authority security services (1995).

■ **Statements he made after being elected Minister of Internal Affairs:** after he entered office, he declared that he would not stop the members of the "resistance" (that is, those who perpetrate acts of terrorism against Israel) due to his belief that "resistance" was "a legitimate right of the Palestinian people" (Maan News Agency, March 24). His fundamental support of terrorism is highly significant, because in his capacity as Minister of Internal Affairs he was in charge of the Palestinian security services which support the military-terrorist wing of Hamas.