



**Intelligence and Terrorism
Information Center
Israel Intelligence Heritage
and Commemoration Center**

News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

March 24-31, 2009



The scene of the aerial attack in Sudan (Al-Jazeera TV, March 26, 2009).

Overview

- The trend toward a decrease in rocket and mortar shell attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory continued this past week. An exceptional event was the IDF's prevention of an attempt to place an IED in the central Gaza Strip on March 31, after which a number of rockets and mortar shells were launched.
- The American and Arab media reported that during January 2009 Israeli airplanes attacked a convoy of trucks in Sudan which were carrying an Iranian shipment of arms to the Gaza Strip. Authoritative Israeli sources refused to comment. If the information is true, an Iranian attempt to help Hamas rebuild the military-terrorist capabilities damaged during Operation Cast Lead was thwarted. Had the attempt succeeded, in all probability it would have contributed to the deterioration of the security in the south of Israel and given Hamas operational capabilities, possibly upgraded, to exhaust the Israeli home front.

Important Events

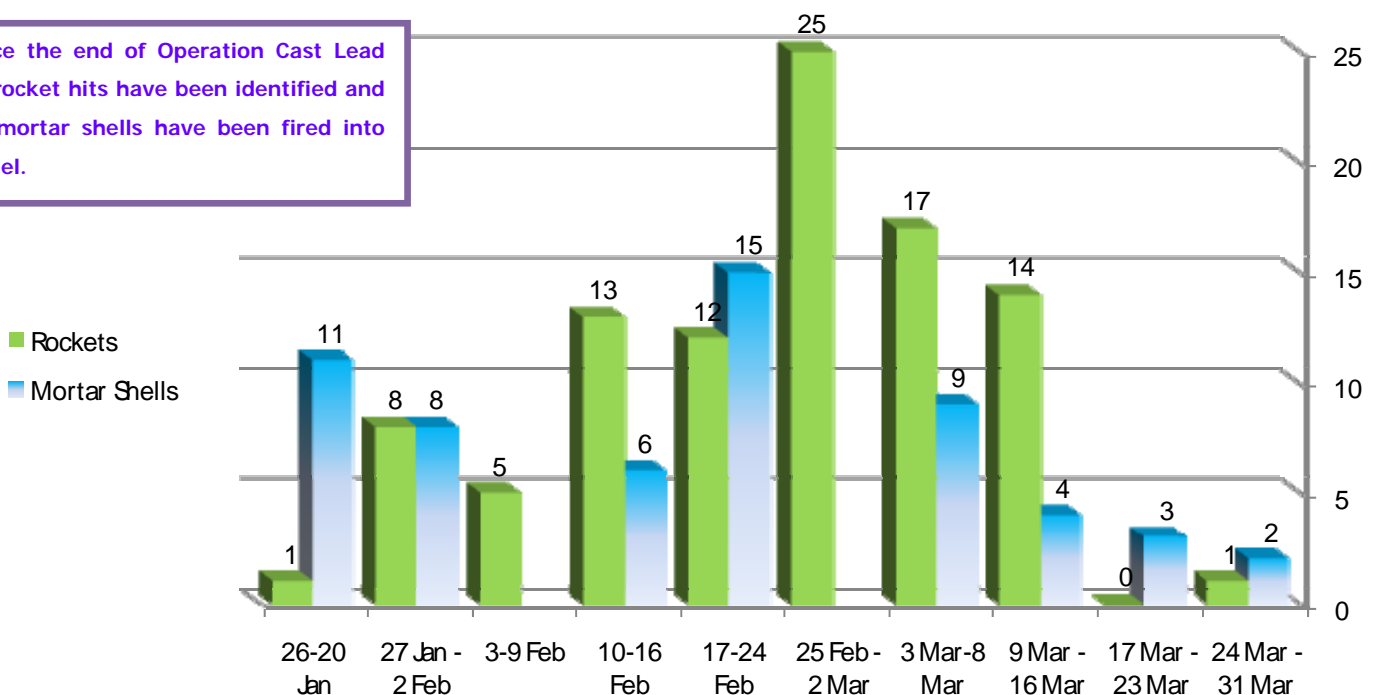
The Gaza Strip

The trend toward a decrease in rocket and mortar shell attacks continues

■ This past week the trend toward a decrease in the number of rockets and mortar shells fired at the western Negev continued. One rocket and two mortar shells were launched. On March 31, following the prevention of an attempt to place an IED near the border security fence (see below), three rockets and a mortar shell were fired at western Negev communities. One rocket landed inside the Gaza Strip. There were no casualties and no damage was reported.¹

■ Yuval Diskin, head of the Israel Security Agency, informed the government ministers that the decrease in the scope of rocket fire was the result of increased Hamas prevention. He said that Hamas, which was not interested in escalating the confrontation at the present time, was preventing rocket squads from attacking and had even reached an agreement with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad to that effect (*Haaretz*, March 30, 2009).

Since the end of Operation Cast Lead 96 rocket hits have been identified and 58 mortar shells have been fired into Israel.



¹ As of March 31, 2009, 1600 hours.

Attack prevented in the central Gaza Strip

■ On the morning of March 31 an IDF force identified four armed terrorist operatives **placing an IED near the border security fence in the central Gaza Strip**. The soldiers crossed the fence and with attacked the terrorists with backup from the air. Two operatives were killed and large quantities of weapons were found. During the exchange of fire with the terrorists an IDF soldier sustained minor wounds (IDF Spokesman's website, March 31, 2009).

■ It was the first incident of its type in several weeks. On March 5 an Israeli Air Force plane struck armed terrorists near the border security fence in the central Gaza Strip after they had fired an anti-tank missile at an IDF force. Three Palestinian Islamic Jihad operatives were killed in the incident.

Judea and Samaria

Attack prevented in the Nablus region

■ On the night of March 24 an IDF force detained three Palestinian terrorists near the village of Beit Dajan, southeast of Nablus. In their possession were found a pipe bomb, an improvised weapon and maps of the area. The soldiers arrived after a Molotov cocktail had been thrown at an Israeli vehicle on the road to the local community of Alon Moreh. They searched the area and found the three, detaining them after a chase.

■ Israeli security force counterterrorism activities continue in Judea and Samaria. On March 30 an IDF force found a gun, ammunition and a commando knife in the home of a Palestinian in a village southwest of Hebron. The weapons were confiscated and the Palestinian was taken to the security forces for interrogation.

Attacks in Judea and Samaria

- This past week as well stones and Molotov cocktails were thrown in Judea and Samaria:
 - **March 25:** A Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Israeli vehicle southwest of Hebron. There were no casualties but the vehicle was damaged.
 - **March 26:** An Israeli civilian sustained minor injuries when stones were thrown at his car near Bir Naballah, south of Ramallah. Five other vehicles were damaged.
 - **March 29:** A Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Israeli vehicle near Deir Abu Mash'al, northwest of Ramallah. There were no casualties and no damage was reported.

The Gaza Strip after Operation Cast Lead

The crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip

■ During the past week the deliveries of humanitarian assistance continued through the crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip. An average of more than 100 trucks entered daily through the Kerem Shalom and Karni crossings. In addition, more than 200 tons of cooking gas were delivered daily, and diesel fuel for the Gaza Strip power plant was also delivered.

■ **Mahmoud al-Khazandar**, senior member of the Gaza Strip association of petrol station owners, said that during the past week there was an increase in the amounts of gas entering the Gaza Strip. He said that while 200 tons entered daily, 300 tons were needed to make it possible to provide Gazans with gas on a regular basis (*Hamas's Al-Risala*, March 30, 2009).

Smuggling Weapons into the Gaza Strip

Israel Security Agency chief warns of continued arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip

■ On March 25, Israel Security Agency chief Yuval Diskin updated the government regarding the **continued smuggling of weapons into the Gaza Strip**. He said that since the end of Operation Cast Lead, tens of tons of standard explosives and raw materials for homemade rockets had been smuggled in. He added that a gradual improvement had been noted in Egyptian activities along its border with the Gaza Strip, however, the improvement was insufficient. He said that **22 tons of standard explosives, 45 tons of raw materials for the manufacture of weapons, dozens of standard rockets, hundreds of mortar shells and dozens of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles had been smuggled in** (*Haaretz*, March 30, 2009).

■ According to the Egyptian media, Egypt continues to reinforce its troops deployed along the border with the Gaza Strip, especially near Rafah. An Egyptian newspaper reported that large police forces had been sent to the area to monitor smuggling activities (*Birr Misr*, March 25, 2009). On March 25 the Egyptian security forces uncovered six tunnels in Egyptian Rafah containing various types of goods meant to be smuggled in to the Gaza Strip (*Al-Yawm Al-Sabaa*, March 25, 2009). On March 29 the Egyptians found a storehouse used to smuggle fuel, situated in an agricultural area near Rafah. The entrance to a tunnel and pipes used to deliver fuel were found (*Al-Yawm Al-Sabaa*, March 29, 2009).

Reports in America media about an Israeli attack in Sudan

■ American (and Arab) media recently reported that Israel attacked a convoy of trucks in **Sudan** carrying weapons to the Gaza Strip. Authoritative Israeli spokesmen refused to comment. The main reports were the following:

● On March 25 **CBS** reported that Israeli planes had attacked a convoy of 20 trucks in Sudan during January 2009. The trucks were loaded with weapons on their way to the Gaza Strip. According to the report, the attack was carried out in a desert region south west of Sudanese port city of Port Sudan, and that 39 people were killed.

● On March 30 *Time Magazine* reported that the shipment of arms was **Iranian**, and included long-range Fajar missiles with a range of 25 miles. According to the *Time* report, "F-16 fighter-bombers carried out two runs on the convoy, while F-15 fighter planes circled overhead as a precaution in case hostile aircraft were scrambled from Khartoum or a nearby country."

■ If the information in the American (and Arab) media is correct, then an Iranian attempt to aid Hamas and rebuild the military-terrorist capabilities damaged in Operation Cast Lead was prevented. Such an attempt, had it succeeded, would have contributed to the deterioration of security in the southern part of Israel and given Hamas and the other terrorist capabilities upgraded capabilities to exhaust the Israeli home front, as it gives Hezbollah the tools in Lebanon.²

■ Hamas denied the reports of the attack in Sudan. **Salah al-Bardawil**, senior Hamas figure in the Gaza Strip, said that the idea of weapons being smuggled into the Gaza Strip via Sudan was "ludicrous." He claimed that proof that the information was false was that between Sudan and the Gaza Strip was all of Egypt, which could prevent the weapons from entering the Strip (PalMedia website, March 26, 2009). **Usama Hamdan, Hamas representative in Lebanon**, said that it was a desperate attempt by Israel to regain "what it lost by its failure in the Gaza Strip." He added that Hamas knew that Israel, with American backing, was trying every means to prevent Hamas from smuggling weapons into the Gaza Strip, and said he hoped the smuggling would continue because it was "part of the resistance" [i.e., the terrorist campaign against Israel] (Hamas's Palestine-info website, March 26, 2009).

² For further information about the military aid Iran gives Hamas, see our January 12, 2009 bulletin entitled "[Iranian Support of Hamas](#)." If recent information is correct, Iran is making another attempt to send weapons to the arena of the confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians, weapons which are **liable to seriously upgrade** the operational capabilities of the terrorist organizations (similar to the affair of the arms ship *Karine A*, intercepted by the IDF in January 2002).



Pictures reportedly taken at the scene of the aerial attack in Sudan and broadcast by Al-Jazeera TV, March 26, 2009.

Report of the Lessons Hamas Learned from Operation Cast Lead

■ According to an article in the March 26 issue of the British *Jane's Defence Weekly*, Hamas has completed its investigation of the holes in its defensive plan revealed during Operation Cast Lead. Accordingly, 50 commanders will be fired because of faulty performance. In addition, steps will be taken to improve the morale and motivation of Hamas operatives so that they do not demonstrate "the same weakness and fear [when confronted] by a real war." In addition, the conclusions also deal with "plans for new logistical supply lines and a modern satellite communications network."

Hamas Rallies and Demonstrations in the Gaza Strip

■ On March 27 Hamas held three rallies in the Gaza Strip in memory of the casualties of Operation Cast Lead. Yusuf Rizka, political advisor to the head of the Hamas de-facto administration, spoke at the rally in the Al-Bureij refugee camp, noting the need to "rebuild the resistance" [terrorist organizations] as part of rebuilding the Gaza Strip. Hamas operatives held a military show at the Al-Nuseirat refugee camp to mark the anniversary of the deaths of Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, and the deaths of those killed in Operation Cast Lead (Filastin al-'An website, March 28, 2009).

Hamas Victory in the UNRWA Workers' Union Elections

■ On March 25 elections were held for the UNRWA workers' union in the Gaza Strip. According to reports, **Hamas won 17 of the 27 seats**. Hamas spokesman **Fawzi Barhoum** said that the victory showed that "all Palestinians follow the resistance [i.e., the terrorist organizations] and its successful path." He said the results of the election showed Hamas's popularity (Al-Bayan Center website, March 25, 2009). One of those elected remarked anonymously that UNRWA regulations forbade anyone to talk openly about names of organizations and that whoever did would be fired, but that nevertheless Hamas had managed to market its Islamic ideas without that being held against it. Another successful candidate said that the elections were important because of their social influence, since UNRWA employees support 10,000 families (Hamas's *Felesteen*, March 30 not May, right, 2009).

Large Number of Boats to Gaza Strip Expected in May

■ The organization calling itself "Free Gaza" announced that more boats were planning to reach the Gaza Strip at the end of May, and that many cargo and passenger ships were expected to participate in the "Fleet of Hope" voyage ("Free Gaza" website, March 30, 2009).

The Political Front

Hamas Prisoners' Privileges to Be Limited

■ In view of Hamas's continued captivity of Gilad Shalit and the lack of progress in the contacts for his release, on March 17 the Israeli government decided to appoint a ministerial committee headed by the Minister of Justice to examine the conditions of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad security prisoners held by Israel. On March 18 the committee decided to appoint a professional panel to examine the issue, with the participation of representatives of the Israeli Prison Service, the IDF, the Israel Security Agency and the Ministry of Justice. The government instructed the panel to limit the privileges accorded to such prisoners insofar as it was possible according to Israeli and international law.

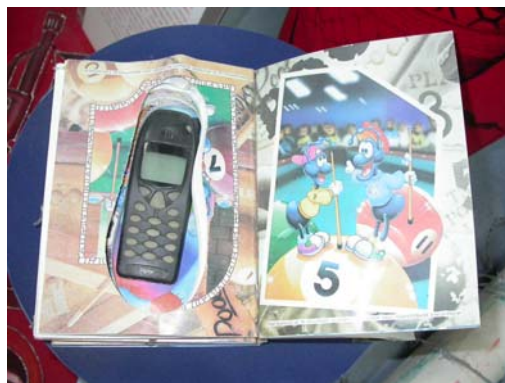
■ The panel met and formulated a series of recommendations which were presented and **authorized** at the most recent government meeting (March 29). The main recommendations were to limit the frequency and duration of family visits, to revoke the possibility of the bulk buying of products not generally sold in prison commissaries, to reduce the number of television stations prisoners can watch in their cells, and to no longer allow family members and lawyers to deposit funds in prisoners' accounts. In addition, a number of other changes, which require a legal change to be made, will be examined in depth. Issues which were not dealt with at all, for legal and practical reasons, included visits from International Red Cross representatives, the sending and receipt of letters and conditions related to religion and worship.

■ Hamas spokesmen were quick to condemn Israel for its intention to limit prisoners' privileges, claiming that by exerting pressure Israel would not make progress in the negotiations regarding Gilad Shalit (while completely ignoring Hamas's refusal to allow him the most basic humanitarian conditions³). Some of the reactions were the following:

- **Usama al-Muzeini, senior Hamas figure**, claimed that the prisoners' privileges Israel wants to revoke "were taken by force from the jailers using means such as strikes..." The steps taken by Israel, he said, would not influence Hamas's decision and not push it into making concessions (PalMedia website, March 29).

³ According to international law, at the very least Gilad Shalit is entitled to visits from the International Red Cross and to receive mail. The IRC's requests to Hamas have been denied. Hamas also refrains from providing information about the conditions under which he is being held and about his health. There is a conspicuous **lack of balance** between the conditions and privileges Israel provides for Palestinian security prisoners and Hamas's treatment of Gilad Shalit.

- **Usama Hamdan, Hamas representative in Lebanon**, claimed that by exerting pressure Israel would not make progress in the negotiations for the release of Gilad Shalit. He said that the Hamas prisoners had patience and that the message they were sending the Hamas leadership was that " the deal should be another victory for Hamas..." (Al-Qassam website, March 30, 2009).
- **The Hamas ministry for prisoner affairs** called on the organizations holding Gilad Shalit, especially Hamas, to increase their demands for his release in response to the limiting of the prisoners' privileges. According to ministry announcement the Israel statements that Hamas prisoners enjoy good conditions "are meant to fool world public opinion..." (Al-Center website, March 30, 2009).
- **Prisoner Yehya al-Sinwar, head of the so-called "high committee of Hamas movement prisoners,"** according to the Hamas website, smuggled a note out of prison praising Hamas's refusal to make any concessions in the deal for the release of Gilad Shalit. Another announcement issued in the name of **Hamas prisoners** said that "we will not allow our suffering to be used to pressure the Palestinian resistance..." and noted that the new Israeli decisions for punishing the prisoners did not deter them or "move one hair of their heads" (Hamas's Palestine-info website, March 22, 2009).
- On March 25 Hamas's newspaper *Felesteen* published an article claiming Palestinian prisoners had the upper hand in smuggling cell phones into jail. Hamas prisoners, said the article, had succeeded in contacting Al-Jazeera TV from jail and using the phones to broadcast live. One prisoner said that the phones were not bartered among the prisoners because they were the property of the movement and "priceless." He added that the prisoners had their own special ways of hiding the phones.



Palestinian security prisoners smuggle cell phones into prisons in shoes, books and toys (Samples of items taken from prisoners in the Israeli prisons of Megiddo and Ketziot, from the display at the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center).

The Internal Palestinian Arena

The internal Palestinian dialogue

- At the beginning of April a third round of talks is expected to take place in Cairo to complete the national Palestinian dialogue. Issues to be discussed will be those for which a consensus has not been reached, such as basic political guidelines of the national unity government, the electoral system and the source of national authority (Ma'an News Agency, March 30, 2009).
- At the same time, Fatah and Hamas trade accusations regarding the continued mutual detention of the activists. **Ashraf Juma'a**, Fatah representative in the Palestinian Legislative Council, issued a list of 38 Fatah activists who, he said, had been detained by Hamas in the Gaza Strip (Ma'an News Agency, March 30, 2009). In response, the interior ministry of the Hamas de-facto administration said that the movement was not holding any political detainees and that the names on the list were individuals being held for criminal or security offences (Al-Bayan Center website, March 30, 2009).