



**Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
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Hamas leader Khaled Mash'al has recently addressed the issue of rocket fire and of terrorism ("resistance") in general. In an interview geared towards Americans, he admitted that Hamas is currently exercising restraint in firing rockets, whereas when speaking to Palestinians, he stressed that "resistance" remained the strategic option of Hamas.



Gaza Strip memorial rally for two Hamas leaders, Said Siyam and Nizar Rayan, killed in Operation Cast Lead. In a live televised address to the participants, Khaled Mash'al stressed that "resistance" was still Hamas's strategic option until the "liberation" (of Palestine) and the restoration of "Palestinian rights".

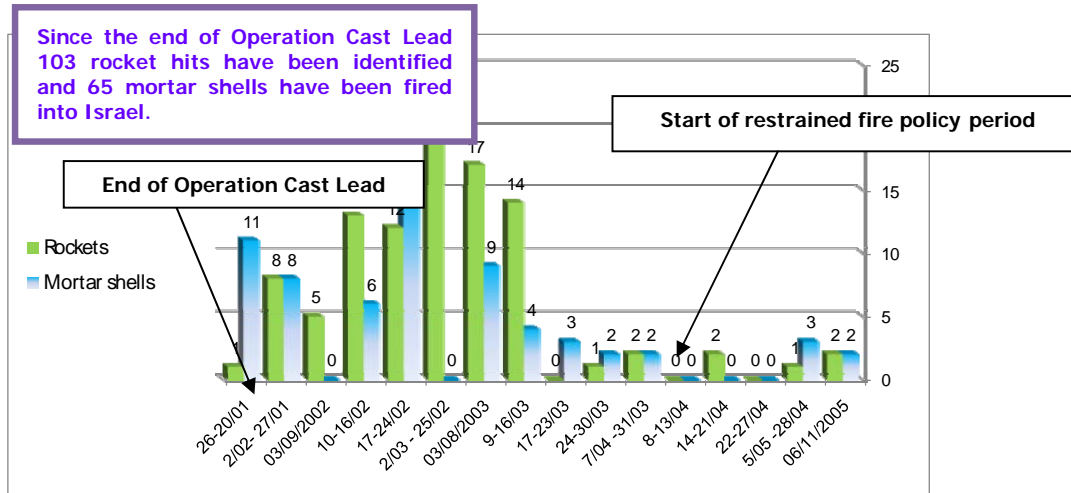
Overview

1. The issue of using the strategy of terrorism (“resistance”) and, more specifically, the rocket fire policy, have recently been publicly addressed by Hamas Political Bureau chief Khaled Mash’al. In an interview to the New York Times, geared towards an American target audience, Mash’al chose to present a “pragmatic” approach, stressing the policy of restraint Hamas has lately been following with regard to firing rockets from the Gaza Strip. However, in a speech for Hamas’s supporters in the Gaza Strip, who took part in a memorial rally for two Hamas leaders killed in Operation Cast Lead, Khaled Mash’al stressed that “resistance” has been and will remain the movement’s strategic option for restoring “Palestinian rights”, and that Hamas will make no concessions about the “resistance” (see Appendix for details).

2. What Khaled Mash’al said about firing rockets in the New York Times interview (even though one day later he said that he had been misunderstood) and to the participants of the rally in the Gaza Strip **reflects, in our assessment, two sides of the same coin:** ideologically and strategically, Hamas was and still remains committed to using violence and terrorism (“resistance”) as the preferred strategy of obtaining “Palestinian rights” (that is, the destruction of the State of Israel as a political entity). At the same time, however, it does not rule out a cessation or reduction of terrorist activities for limited periods of time, if it receives something worthwhile in exchange from Israel and when it believes that Palestinian (or its own) interests call for such a lull in the fighting.

3. In the New York Times interview, **Khaled Mash’al** said that Hamas operatives had for the time being ceased firing on Israel due to the **“Palestinians’ interest”**. Similar statements attributed to Hamas have recently been published on Palestinian and Arab media. **Indeed, the extent of rocket fire and mortar shelling from the Gaza Strip has dropped considerably over the past two months**, since mid-March 2009. During that time, the extent of such attacks was reduced to a “trickle” of several mortar shells or rockets per week, at times even coming to a complete halt (in comparison, attacks were considerably more frequent following Operation Cast Lead, with 10 to 30 rockets or mortar shells fired per week). Over the past several weeks, the terrorist organizations’ activities have focused mostly on setting IEDs and occasionally firing mortar shells at IDF patrols near the border. It is our assessment that the relative calm is a result not just of Hamas’s reluctance to fire rocket, but also of its readiness to

extend that restraint to other terrorist organizations, going as far as to impose some level of enforcement when necessary.¹



Rocket fire and mortar shelling since the end of Operation Cast Lead

4. It is our assessment that Hamas's policy of restraint on rocket fire stems mostly from the fact that **its current top priority is to undo the damage caused in Operation Cast Lead**, which it perceives as a basic, fundamental interest of the movement and of the population in general. While repairing the physical damage caused to the civilian population, Hamas is hard at work on rebuilding its military infrastructure and reinforcing its control mechanisms over the population. At the same time, Khaled Mash'al and other Hamas spokesmen (who have the support of the Iranians²) emphasize that the current policy of restraint is the result of various circumstances and consideration for the population's interests, and that Hamas's fundamental adherence to the path of "resistance" (violence and terrorism) as the strategic alternative for achieving its goals still stands. In addition, while espousing a policy of restraint in the Gaza Strip,

¹ Palestinian media have published reports on enforcement measures taken by Hamas, even though Hamas denied those out of internal Palestinian considerations. For example, Fatah elements claimed that the Hamas police deployed vehicle checkpoints in the northern Gaza Strip to prevent rocket fire (Pal Press, May 5). Hamas denied the reports and claimed that those were fabrications designed to tarnish the movement, adding that Hamas would not become "Israel's protector" (Maan, May 6). The Kuwaiti daily Al-Jarida wrote that PIJ leader Ramadan Shalah complained to Iran's President Ahmadinejad, during the latter's visit in Damascus, about the attitude of Hamas operatives to PIJ operatives in the Gaza Strip. He complained about the detention of PIJ operatives and said that they were "intolerable". Khaled Mash'al, on his part, talked (to the Iranian President?) about "an agreement shared by the PIJ to stop firing rockets at Israel" so that the PIJ would not have excuses (to fire rockets from the Gaza Strip) (Al-Jarida, May 17, 2009).

² During his visit in Damascus, Iran's President Ahmadinejad met with the Hamas Political Bureau chief, Khaled Mash'al (May 5). Iran's Fars News Agency reported that the Iranian President stressed the importance of finding a "solution" to the problem of Palestine through "resistance" (i.e., violence and terrorism) and called upon the Islamic countries to support the Palestinian people and the "resistance" (Fars, May 6). A "top Iranian official" said that Iran would soon hold a conference for the support of the "resistance" (Al-Khaleej, Iran, May 10).

Hamas is running an incitement campaign to encourage individuals to perpetrate terrorist attacks in the West Bank and in Israel, expecting them to eventually become an all-out military uprising, "the third intifada".³

³ An Information Bulletin on this issue will soon be published in English.

Appendix

Khaled Mash'al's interview to the New York Times and reactions to the interview

1. Hamas Political Bureau chief Khaled Mash'al has recently (and uncharacteristically) granted an interview to the New York Times, geared towards the American target audience. In the interview, given from Damascus, he addressed, among other subjects, the issue of rocket fire from the Gaza Strip at Israel, saying that Hamas operatives had currently stopped firing rockets at Israel. Khaled Mash'al also made an effort to demonstrate that Hamas was able to control its own operatives as well as operatives belonging to other organizations (New York Times, May 4, 2009). Following is an excerpt in which Khaled Mash'al addressed the cessation of rocket attacks and the reasoning behind it: **"Not firing the rockets currently is part of an evaluation from the movement which serves the Palestinians' interest.** After all, the firing is a method, not a goal. Resistance is legitimate right, but practicing such a right comes under an evaluation by the movement's leaders."

2. Khaled Mash'al's statement about the rocket fire is part of his attempt to present a pragmatic approach to the American public opinion and to President Obama's new administration. Following are additional issues brought up in the interview:

a. Early in the interview, Khaled Mash'al assured the American administration and the international community that Hamas would be **"part of the solution, period"**. Mash'al noted that President Obama spoke positively, unlike his predecessor, but was not pleased with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, saying that her statements reflected the policies of the previous American administration.

b. According to Khaled Mash'al, there is only one enemy in the Middle East, that enemy being Israel, the existence of which he is not willing to recognize. He said that Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas gained nothing from their willingness to recognize Israel. Nevertheless, Hamas will be willing for a long-term ten-year truce with Israel, provided that its fundamental demands are fulfilled: "On the two-state solution sought by the Americans, he said: 'We are with a state on the **1967 borders, based on a long-term**

truce. This includes East Jerusalem, the dismantling of settlements and the right of return of the Palestinian refugees.’ Asked what ‘long-term’ meant, he said 10 years.”

c. Following up on his statement on Hamas’s current avoidance of rocket fire (as cited above), Khaled Mash’al said that Hamas was “eager for a ceasefire with Israel” (i.e., a new lull agreement). Hamas is also eager to exchange the captive Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit for “many Palestinian prisoners”.

d. Khaled Mash’al **confirmed** that Hamas was **assisted by Iran**, claiming, however, that the assistance was “not conditioned” and that it did not control or affect the movement’s policies.

e. Asked if Hamas was a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood **and if it wanted to bring strict Muslim law to Gaza and the West Bank**, Khaled Mash’al answered that Hamas’s priority was “ending the occupation” and “achieving the [Palestinian] national project.” As for the nature of the future Palestinian state, “it’s to be determined by the people. It will never be imposed upon them” (in practice, in its day-to-day policy in the Gaza Strip, Hamas imposes the Islamic law and the Islamic code on the local population under its control).

Reactions to Khaled Mash’al’s interview to the New York Times

3. The day after the interview was published, Khaled Mash’al claimed that the New York Times misrepresented his statements about Hamas’s decision to cease firing rockets at present. According to Mash’al, he meant to say that the decision whether to fire or to cease fire depended on Hamas’s strategic decision, made based on a variety of considerations. He stressed that Israel (“the Zionist entity”) was the one always initiating the “aggression”, and that firing rockets was a “defense measure” of the Palestinian people, used while taking into consideration the circumstances of the Palestinian people (Palestine-info, May 5).

4. Top PIJ official **Nafez Azzam** granted an interview in which he commented on Khaled Mash’al’s New York Times interview. He said that his organization would discuss the issue of the lull in bi-lateral talks with the Hamas leadership, as well as with the other organizations. He made it clear that the PIJ refused a long-term ceasefire with Israel but it may agree to a “tactical lull for a certain period of time”, just as it agreed to the 18-month lull offered by Egypt following Operation Cast Lead, which, as he claimed, was undermined by Israel (Pal-today website, May 3).

Khaled Mash'al's statement at a memorial rally for Said Siyam and Nizar Rayan

5. On May 7, a memorial rally for Said Siyam and Nizar Rayan, two Hamas leaders killed in Operation Cast Lead, was held in the Gaza City Rashad al-Shawa Culture Center. Hamas Political Bureau chief Khaled Mash'al gave a speech from Damascus, broadcasted live to the memorial rally's participants. The rally was attended by the senior leadership of the Palestinian police in the Gaza Strip, which is an inseparable part of Hamas's military-security infrastructure.

6. In his speech, Khaled Mash'al noted that no one (referring to the Palestinian Authority) had the right to negotiate the "rights" and "principles" of the Palestinian people. Portraying Said Siyam and Nizar Rayan as model jihad warriors, **he stressed that the "resistance" was Hamas's strategic option for "liberation"** (i.e., the "liberation of Palestine") and for "restoring the rights", and that Hamas would make no concessions regarding the "resistance" under its leadership. Referring to the issue of smuggling weapons into the Gaza Strip, he stressed that "resistance is a legitimate right of the Palestinian people, **and no one has the right to keep the Gaza Strip from arming itself or to choke it in order to prevent weapons from coming in**" (a broad hint at Egypt, which stepped up its activities to prevent weapons smuggling following the exposure of the Hezbollah network on its territory) (Palestine-info, May 7, 2009; Al-Aqsa TV, May 7; other Palestinian media).



The personal belongings of Nizar Rayan, a top Hamas operative killed in Operation Cast Lead and portrayed by Khaled Mash'al as a model jihad commander (Palestine-info, May 7, 2009)