



**The Meir Amit Intelligence and
Terrorism Information Center**

News of Terrorism and the Israeli- Palestinian Conflict

December 7-13, 2011

Three Days of Escalation in the South



Israel police demolitions expert carries away the remains of a rocket fired during the latest round of escalation from the Gaza Strip (Photo by Edi Israel, courtesy of NRG, December 9, 2011).

Overview

- This past week terrorist events focused on another round of escalation in Israel's south (December 8-10). It began with an Israeli Air Force attack which killed two terrorist operatives. One of them was an Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade operative, who was in the process of preparing a terrorist attack against Israel. It was followed by rocket fire into Israel (for a total of 18 rocket and 11 mortar shell hits).
- The Popular Resistance Committees claimed responsibility for most of the rocket fire, along with other terrorist organizations and Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade. Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad did not claim responsibility, and in our assessment did not participate in the attacks. Thus the current round of escalation, the fourth this year, was smaller than the previous ones.

Another Round of Escalation in Israel's South Rocket Fire Follows the Killing of Terrorist Operatives(December 8-10)

Overview

■ On December 8, in a joint IDF-Israel Security Agency action, Israeli aircraft attacked a vehicle in the Gaza Strip carrying terrorist operatives, killing two, Issam Batash and his nephew Subhi Batash. Following the attack rockets were fired into Israel's south and the IDF responded by attacking terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip. **The current round of escalation, the fourth of its type in 2011, was smaller than the previous ones, in our assessment because Hamas has no interest in an escalation.**



The Batash vehicle after the attack (Wafa News Agency, December 8, 2011)

Two Terrorist Operatives Killed in Israeli Air Force Attack

■ **Issam Batash**, born 1968, resided in Gaza City, was an Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade operative.¹ **He was in the process of orchestrating a terrorist attack against Israel** at the time of his death. In the past he was involved in many terrorist activities. **His main field was infiltrating terrorist operatives from the Gaza Strip into the Sinai Peninsula and from there to the region of Eilat to carry out attacks. In January 2007 he was responsible for sending a suicide bomber to Eilat; three Israeli civilians were killed.**² During recent years he was involved in attempted attacks which were prevented (IDF Spokesman, December 9, 2011).

■ The second terrorist operative killed in the IAF attack was **Subhi Alaa Batash**, a nephew of

¹The Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade issued a press release following the killing saying that he was a high-ranking field commander in the Brigade commanded a squad of the so-called Army of True Believers.

²Before dawn on January 29, 2007, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a bakery in Eilat, killing three Israeli civilians, the two bakery owners and one employee. No one else was injured by several civilians were treated for shock. An examination of the bomb found with the dead terrorist's body indicated it had been carried in a bag and had been a 100mm shell. For further information see the January 31, 2007 bulletin "The Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Fatah elements in the Gaza Strip dispatched a terrorist who carried out a suicide bombing attack in Eilat. He infiltrated through the Israeli-Egyptian border. PIJ spokesmen stated suicide bombing attacks would continue and called upon the other terrorist organizations to aim their weapons at Israel" at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/eilat_290107e.pdf.

Issam Batash and an operative in Hamas' Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. He was the son of the former police chief of the Sujaya refugee camp, east of Gaza City (Al-Aqsa TV, December 8, 2011).

The Media Response of the Terrorist Organizations

■ Immediately after the attack the interior ministry of the de-facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip issued an appeal to the international community to intervene and end the "escalation" against the Gaza Strip (Hamas interior ministry website, December 8, 2011). Taher al-Nunu, Hamas de facto administration spokesman, strongly denounced the attack on the "civilian" vehicle in the Gaza Strip, warning of a possible escalation and demanding that all forms of attacks and crimes against the Palestinian people be stopped (Hamas' Palestine-info website, December 8, 2011).

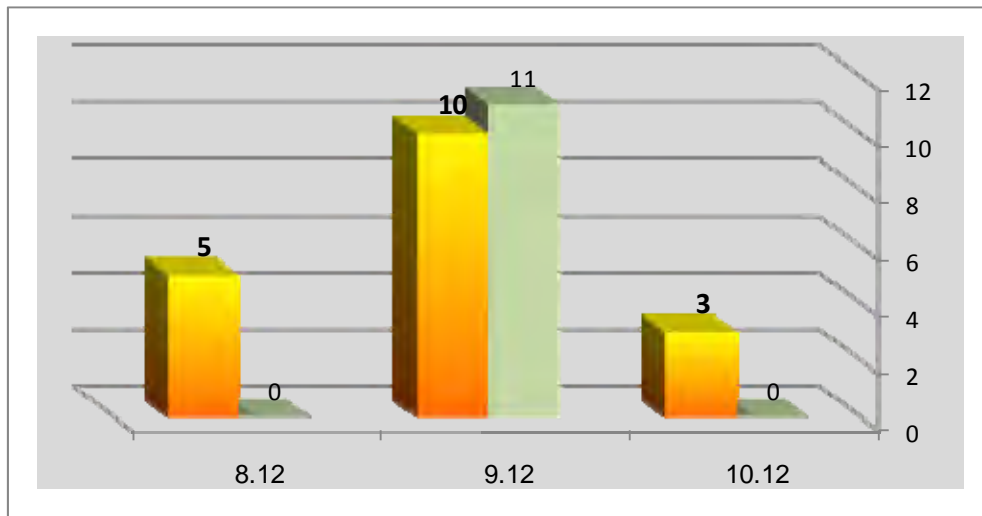
■ The other Palestinian terrorist organizations called for a "hard, painful" response to the attack. For example, one of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade commanders said that Israel's action demanded a joint response, one that would be painful and strong (The PIJ's Paltoday website, December 8, 2011). A member of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's political bureau issued a statement saying that the Israeli action was an attack against "all the Palestinian resistance forces" [i.e., against all the Palestinian terrorist organizations], and was a serious violation of the lull in the fighting, and therefore the organizations had the right to respond to "the Israeli crimes" (The PIJ's Paltoday website, December 8, 2011).

Response on the Ground: Rocket Fire into Israel

■ Following the killing of two terrorist operatives, rockets and mortar shells were fired into Israeli territory. **Between December 8 and 10, 18 rocket hits were identified, some of them rockets with ranges of 40 kilometers (about 25 miles). Eleven mortar shells were also fired.**

■ Most of the rockets landed in empty areas in the western Negev. There were no casualties and no damage was done (IDF Spokesman, December 11, 2011). The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted a 122mm Grad rocket fired at the southern Israeli city of Ashdod (IDF Spokesman, December 9, 2011).

Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire during the Three Days of Escalation



Green-Mortar shell fire

Yellow Rocket fire

Israeli Air Force Attacks

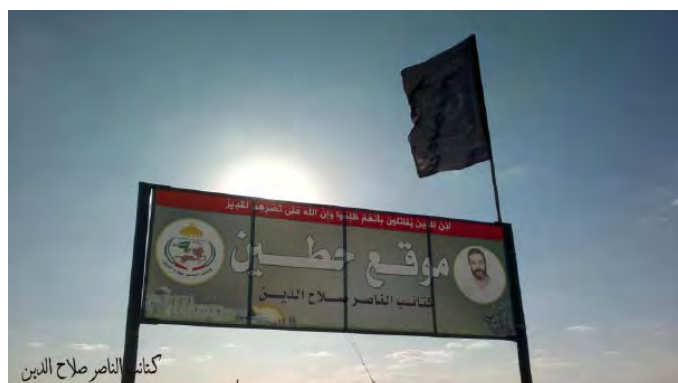
■ In response to the rocket and mortar shell fire Israeli aircraft attacked a number of terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip:

- **December 9** – Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked terrorist bases in the northern and southern Gaza Strip. The base in the southern Gaza Strip stored rockets and was situated near populated civilian areas. Following the attacks secondary explosions were identified, indicating the presence of weapons (IDF Spokesman, December 9, 2011). The Palestinian media reported that two Palestinian civilians had been killed in the attack and 12 wounded, most of them members of the same family. According to the Hamas media, one of the targets was an Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades post and was located near a residential building northwest of the Gaza City (Al-Aqsa TV, Hamas' Palestine-info website, December 9, 2011).
- **December 10** – Israeli Air Force aircraft attack a terrorist target in the southern Gaza Strip (IDF Spokesman, December 10 2011).

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2t9OfLywh0&feature=player_embedded#!

Click to see the video of the December 10 attack. The secondary explosions can be clearly seen, indicating the presence of great quantities of weapons.

- **December 11** – In the early morning Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a site in the northern Gaza Strip where weapons were manufactured (IDF Spokesman, December 11, 2011). The Palestinian media reported that a Palestinian and his house were seriously harmed by the attack. The house, according to the Palestinian media, belonged to a high-ranking Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operative, but he escaped the attack (Hamás' Palestine-info website, December 12, 2011).



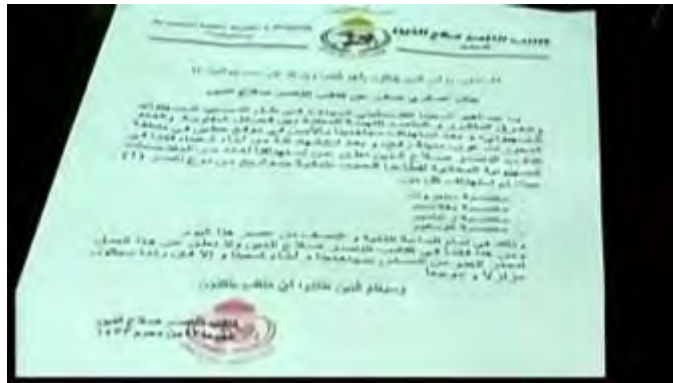
Left: The entrance to the Salah al-Din Brigades of the Popular Resistance Committees post. Right: The post after the IAF attack (PRC forum, December 9, 2011).

- On **December 7**, before the round of escalation, IAF aircraft attacked terrorist squads in two different locations in the northern Gaza Strip. Both were preparing to fire rockets at IDF forces (IDF Spokesman, December 7, 2011). The Hamas media reported that as a result of the attacks in Sujaya, a Palestinian Islamic Jihad operative was killed and seven wounded, one of them seriously. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad said in a statement that the operative who had been killed belonged to its rocket unit. An attack was carried out immediately afterwards in an open area east of the Zeitun neighborhood in the Gaza Strip, and two operatives were wounded (Al-Aqsa TV, December 7, 2011).

Claiming Responsibility

- **The Salah al-Din Brigades, the military-terrorist wing of the Popular Resistance Committees, claimed responsibility for most of the rocket and mortar shell attacks** (The PRC website, December 9, 2011). Abu Ataya, PRC spokesman, said Israel would have to bear full responsibility for the escalation and that the "resistance" and the the Salah al-Din Brigades, would not sit by idly (Al-Quds, December 9, 2011).
- Somewhat later other organizations and networks joined them. For example, the **Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade / Ayman Jawda Squads** claimed responsibility for firing a number of rockets on December 10 (Website of Al-Qala'a media, December 11, 2011). In addition, a network calling itself the Holy Fighters Brigades claimed responsibility for firing a rocket at the

southern Israeli city of Sderot (Alresalah.net website, December 10, 2011).



The Popular Resistance Committees claim responsibility for the rocket fire at Sderot (Posted on YouTube, December 11, 2011).

■ **Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad did not claim responsibility for any rocket fire into Israeli during the three-day escalation.** Moreover, Ismail Haniya, head of the de-facto Hamas administration, said that intensive contacts were being held with many Arab and international elements to stop the so-called "Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip" (Hamas' Palestine-info website, December 9, 2011).

Egypt Attempts to Arrange a Ceasefire

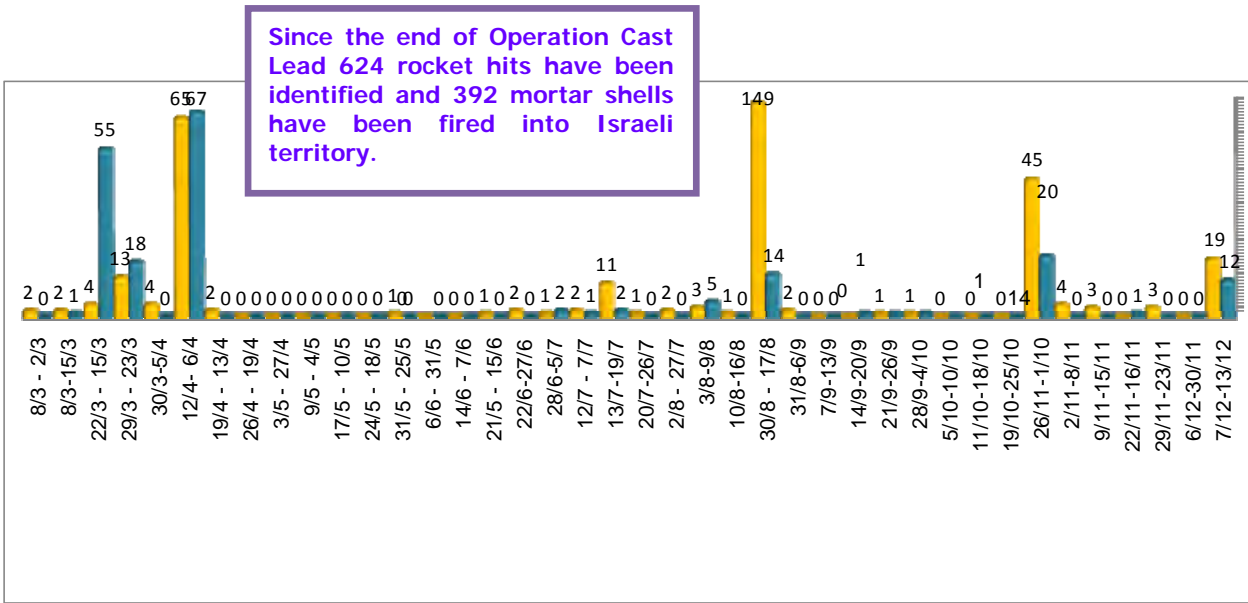
■ According to the Palestinian media, Egypt was in contact with Hamas and Israel to arrange a lull in the fighting. Yasser Othman, Egyptian ambassador to the Palestinian Authority, said that Egypt would continue its efforts for a lull and that both sides had to commit to it. He said that Yasser Reda, the Egyptian ambassador in Tel Aviv, held several conversations with the Israeli side as well as with the administration in the Gaza Strip to stop the Israeli attacks and the Palestinian responses (The PIJ's Paltoday website, December 10, 2011).

Important Terrorism Events Israel's South

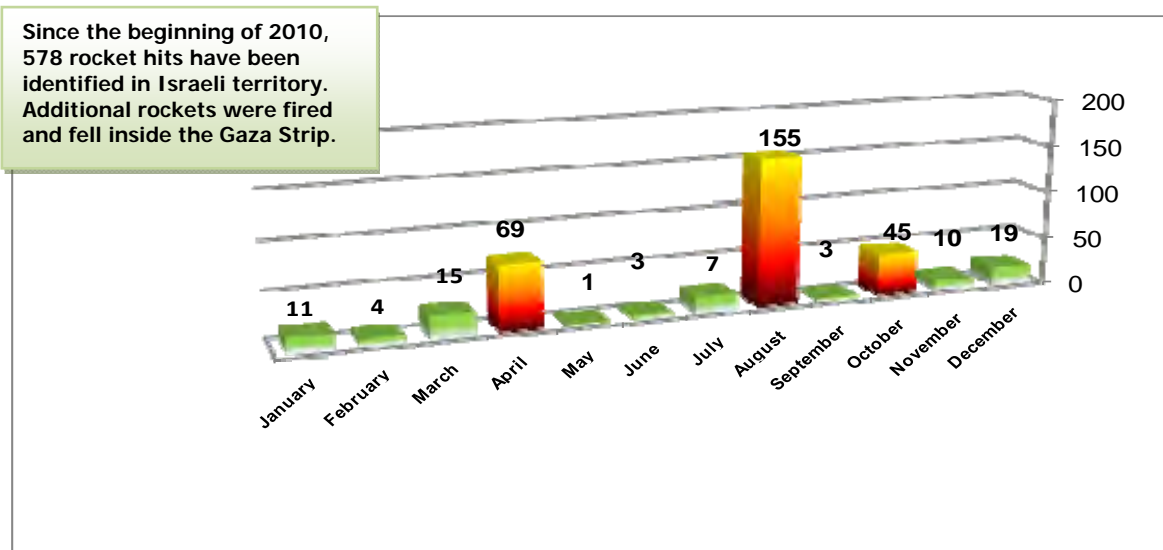
Rocket Fire into Israel: Weekly Statistic

■ This past week 19 rockets (18 of which fell during the three-day escalation) and 12 mortar shells (11 during the escalation) were fired into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip. The rockets and mortar shells fell in open areas; there were no casualties and no damage was done.

Rockets and Mortar Shells Fired into Israeli Territory³

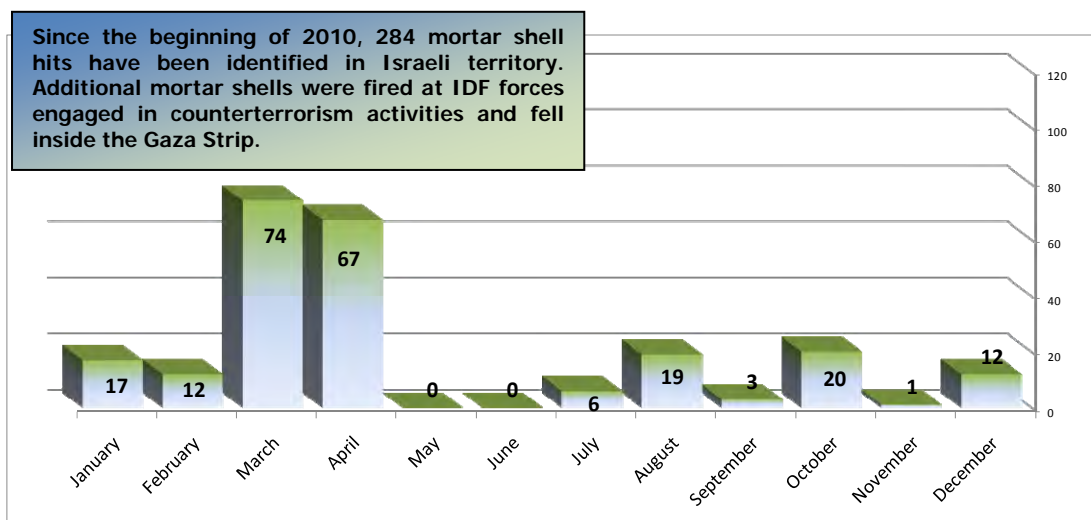


Rocket Fire – Monthly Distribution



³ The statistics do not include rockets and mortar shells fired which fell inside the Gaza Strip. As of December 13, 2011.

Mortar Shell Fire – Monthly Distribution



Judea and Samaria

The Situation on the Ground

■ This past week the IDF carried out routine counterterrorist activities in Judea and Samaria, detaining Palestinians suspected of terrorist activities and confiscating weapons. Over the weekend (December 9-10) **there was a marked increase in attempts to attack IDF forces in Judea and Samaria, IEDs were placed, and stones and Molotov cocktails were thrown at the soldiers.**

■ A prominent event occurred on December 6 when about 100 Palestinians rioted at Nebi Saleh (a traditional friction point) and threw stones at Israeli security forces, who used riot control equipment to disperse the crowd. During the dispersal it was reported that one of the rioters, Mustafa Tamimi, 27, was wounded in the head. IDF medical forces administered first aid and evacuated him to a hospital. He later died. The IDF is investigating the circumstances of his death (IDF Spokesman, December 11, 2011).

■ The Palestinian media accused Israel of delay in treating the wounded Palestinian because they prevented Palestinian medical teams from reaching the site (Safa News Agency, Filastin Al-'Aan, December 10, 2011). Mahmoud Abbas sent a condolence telegram to the family in which he denounced the death and said that "crimes" such as those would not prevent the Palestinian Authority from continuing its "popular non-violent resistance" (Wafa News Agency, December 11, 2011).

■ Other prominent events were the following:

- **December 7** – A 17 year-old Palestinian girl who came to a checkpoint in Hebron aroused the suspicions of the soldiers stationed to secure the site. As she approached the soldiers she took out a knife and tried to stab one of them. She was detained (IDF

Spokesman, December 7, 2011).

- **December 9** – During the evening hours an IED exploded near the security fence northwest of Ramallah. There were no casualties and no damage was done. Demolitions experts who arrived on the scene found gas tanks camouflaged in a burning tire (IDF Spokesman, December 10, 2011).

- **December 9** – Two Molotov cocktails were thrown near Tulkarm in western Samaria, causing a fire in a factory in the industrial zone of the settlement of Nitzanei Oz. The fire was extinguished by Israel and Palestinian firemen.

- **December 9** – An IDF force uncovered an IED north of Tulkarm. It was detonated in a controlled explosion by IDF forces (IDF Spokesman, December 10, 2011).

- **December 9** – About 100 Palestinians gathered west of Nablus and threw stones at Israeli security forces. The forces responded with riot control equipment. About 25 Palestinians rioted at Um Salmona southwest of Bethlehem. Two rioters were detained by the Israeli security forces (IDF Spokesman, December 10, 2011).

- **December 10** – Three Molotov cocktails were thrown at an Israeli Border Police post northeast of Bethlehem. There were no casualties and no damage was done (IDF Spokesman, December 10, 2011).

- **December 10** – Three Molotov cocktails were thrown at vehicles on a road west of Ramallah. There were no casualties and no damage was done (IDF Spokesman, December 10, 2011).

- **December 10** – Several dozen Palestinians gathered northwest of Ramallah and threw stones at Israeli security forces. The forces used riot control equipment to disperse the crowd. There were no casualties and no damage was done (IDF Spokesman, December 10, 2011).

- **December 11** – About 300 Palestinians gathered near Nebi Saleh near Ramallah and threw stones at the Israeli security forces.

Palestinian Reports of Jewish Settler Harassment

- The Palestinian media **reported that Jewish settlers burned a mosque and two cars in the village of Burqin**. Eye witnesses said that the settlers came to the village in the morning and set fire to the mosque entrance. Palestinians reacted strongly to the event and said **the government of Israel was responsible**:

Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, the Mufti of Jerusalem, claimed that the event was part of a campaign planned by the Israeli government. He said that there had been an

increase in that kind of attack recently and his impression was that it was "genuine Israeli aggression."

- **Muhammad al-Habash**, endowments minister in the Palestinian Authority, denounced the arson and said that a continuation of the "racist activity of the settlers will bring a catastrophe in their wake," and that responsibility for the "terrorist attacks" carried out by the settlers rested with the Israeli government. He appealed to the international community to protect the Palestinians holy places from the "crimes of the settlers" (Safa News Agency, Wafa News Agency, December 7, 2011).

Developments in the Gaza Strip

Economic Growth

- The international community and the Palestinian central statistics bureau issued data concerning the economic growth of the Gaza Strip for the second quarter of 2011. According to the data, **the rate of growth rose 31% over the same period last year. The rate of unemployment is 25%, the lowest in a decade.** According to the authors of the report, the sharp rate of growth reflects the Israeli policy of easing the closure of the Gaza Strip and its relative security stability (IDF Spokesman, December 10, 2011).

Demonstrations and Events Marking the Anniversary of Hamas' Founding

- Throughout the Gaza Strip the Hamas movement organized marches and demonstrations to mark the 24th anniversary of its founding. The events included military displays, a march of masked men and a march of adolescent boys. The events were well-attended. In the military display held by the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military-terrorist wing, on December 7, the marchers carried a coffin bearing the sign "Gaza will be the Zionists' graveyard" (Al-Risala, December 7, 2011).



Mahmoud al-Zahar, high-ranking figure in the Gaza Strip, burns the Israeli flag (Al-Aqsa TV, December 8, 2011).

Israel and the Palestinians

Closing the Mugrabi Bridge: Fanning the Flames

■ The decision of the Jerusalem municipality to close the **Mugrabi bridge to the Temple Mount** – the bridge is temporary, falling apart and **presents a danger to the public** – was turned by the Palestinians into a political issue and exploited in their anti-Israeli propaganda campaign. The inflammatory marks made by Palestinian public figures took the issue out of its purely technical, public-safety context and made it another element in what they call Israel's "Judification" of Jerusalem. They threatened that "damaging" the Mugrabi bridge would have dire consequences.

■ For example:

- **Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, the Mufti of Jerusalem**, demanded that Israel change its decision and warned that if it were carried out it would draw the region into a whirlpool of violence. He claimed the bridge was part of the mosque and the way leading to it, and that **any damage done to it would influence not only Jerusalem but the entire region** (Ma'an News Agency, December 5, 2011).

- **Hathem Abd al-Qadr, who holds the Jerusalem portfolio in Fatah**, said that destroying the Mugrabi bridge would have serious consequences. He warned that the Palestinians would not sit idly by and said that **the Palestinian Authority was currently working with the Jordanians and international organizations, including UNESCO, to prevent the plan from being carried out**. He said that the Palestinian Authority had stated it was "the line in the sand" and placed full responsibility on Israel for the serious results of its actions. **He claimed that the Palestinian Authority was aware that the bridge needed shoring up but that the question was who would renovate it, because only the *waqf* [the trust responsible for religious endowments] had the authority to do so** (Voice of Palestine Radio, December 8, 2011).

- A source in Hamas **warned Israel lest it harm the bridge, which, it claimed, was an integral part of Al-Aqsa mosque**. According to the source, Israel would bear full responsibility for the consequences of any damage done to the bridge. Hamas appealed to the Palestinian people and the Arab-Islamic nation to join the struggle to support Al-Aqsa mosque and the other holy places in danger of destruction and change (Hamas' Palestine-info website, December 8, 2011).

- In Egypt, a network calling itself "the popular campaign against the Judification of Jerusalem" held a vigil in front of the national library in Cairo on December 12 to protest

the Israeli decision to close the Mugrabi bridge (Al-Ahram, December 12, 2011).



The demonstration against the Judification of Jerusalem in Cairo (Hamas' Palestine-info website, December 12, 2011)

Lebanon

Rocket Fire Attack into Israeli Territory Fails

- **On December 12 an attempt was made to fire a rocket from Lebanon into Israel.**

The rocket, fired from the central sector of south Lebanon, failed to launch, and fell on a house in a Lebanese village, injuring a woman. Lebanese and UNIFIL forces arrived on the scene to investigate (Al-Nashra, December 12, 2011). **No organization claimed responsibility for the attack and the perpetrators are unknown.**⁴

- Alberto Asarta Cuevas, commander of UNIFIL, denounced the rocket fire. He said that recent events have proved that despite all efforts, there were still weapons and armed operatives willing to take action in the region for which the UNIFIL force was responsible (Agence France-Presse, December 12, 2011).

UNIFIL Force Attacked in South Lebanon

- **On December 9 a roadside bomb exploded east of Tyre** in an attack on UNIFIL's French company. **Five soldiers and two civilians were wounded.** The UNIFIL force in general and the French company in particular have been targeted.

- The IED, which was apparently detonated by remote control, weighed between 7 and 8 kilograms (15.4 and 17.6 pounds) and was hidden in a garbage bag lower than the level of the road. The force of the explosion left a crater in the ground (Lebanese News Agency, December

⁴On the night of November 28 three 122mm rockets were fired from south Lebanon into the Western Galilee (IDF Spokesman, November 29, 2011). Initially an organization called the Abdallah Azzam Brigades/Jihad Headquarters claimed responsibility (Al-Nashra, November 29, 2011). However, the organization later denied having fired the rockets.

9, 2011). **Security sources reported that examinations showed the bomb and the way it was detonated were identical to the one which was used to attack a French patrol near the Awali River five months ago.** UNIFIL commander Alberto Asarta Cuevas strongly denounced the "base, despicable" attack on the force (Al-Hayat, December 10, 2011).



Wounded French soldiers (Al-Manar TV, December 9, 2011).



The French soldiers' vehicle damaged in the attack (English.al-akbhar.com website, December 9, 2011)

■ **Lebanon's entire political spectrum denounced the attack:**

- **Lebanese President Michel Suleiman**, currently on a visit to Armenia, said that the objective of the attack was to force the withdrawal of UNIFIL from Lebanon and sabotage its activities as peace-keeping force (Al-Nashra, December 9, 2011).
- **The Lebanese government** held a meeting headed by the prime minister and denounced the attack on the French UNIFIL soldiers. The prime minister said the objective of the attack was to exert pressure on UNIFIL to withdraw from Lebanon and allow terrorist activities to return to the country (Al-Gomhouria, December 10, 2011).
- **Nabieh Berri**, chairman of the Lebanese parliament, said that the objective of the attack was to turn Lebanon and south Lebanon into an area of unrest and tension (Lebanon Now, December 9, 2011).
- **Walid Jumblatt**, the Druze leader, hinted at the neighbors, i.e., Syria, as the source of the attack. He said it was a message to France "from the neighbors." In his opinion, there were people who wanted UNIFIL out of Lebanon so that a new confrontation could begin (Al-Nashra, December 12, 2011).⁵

⁵An Al-Hayat columnist claimed that the attack on the French brigade, coupled with the rocket fire into Israel, were part of a Syrian effort to heat up the area and force UNIFIL out of south Lebanon (Al-Hayat, December 11, 2011).