



Center for Special Studies
Intelligence and Terrorism
Information Center

News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation

October 16-31, 2006

IDF activity in the northern Gaza Strip...



A convoy of armed IDF vehicles on its way to Beit Hanoun (Amir Cohen/Reuters, November 1)

...and in its south.



Exposing a hidden tunnel near the Philadelphi route (Photo courtesy of the IDF spokesman, October 20)

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Overview

- During the past two weeks the IDF continued broadening the scope of its ground operations in the Gaza Strip, focusing on two areas: in the **southern Gaza Strip** attempts were made to damage the flourishing “tunnel industry” along the Philadelphi route. In the Beit Hanoun region of the **northern Gaza Strip**, the IDF tried to reduce the extent of Qassam rocket attacks aimed at populated areas in the western Negev (attacks which have increased over the last month).
- A Hamas delegation headed by ‘Imad al-‘Alami, a member of the movement’s “political bureau,” arrived in Egypt to discuss the issue of Gilad Shalit, the abducted IDF soldier. Palestinian sources (including Hamas) leaked information to the media stating that an agreement is being formulated for Shalit’s release.
- In the internal Palestinian area the violent confrontations, anarchy, economic crisis and propaganda war between the rival sides continue. At the same time, efforts to establish a national unity government are also taking place, and to prevent the violent confrontations from turning into a civil war.

Important Events

The Gaza Strip

Rise in Qassam rocket fire aimed at populated areas in the western Negev.

- During the past two weeks there was a **rise** in the number of Qassam rockets fired at the western Negev, especially at **Sderot**. The rockets caused a number of slight injuries and some slight property damage.
- A total of 40 rocket hits were identified, as opposed to 14 during the first two weeks of October. There was an overall increase in rocket fire as compared with preceding two months (See **Statistical Data**).
- The rise might be, among others, a reaction to the IDF's intensive counterterrorist activities in the Gaza Strip. Prominent was the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, while, however, Hamas's Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades also claimed responsibility for a number of rocket launches (October 25 and 27).

IDF activity

- During the past two weeks the IDF continued intensive activity in the Gaza Strip, focusing on two main areas: in the **southern Gaza Strip**, for the first time since the disengagement,¹ the IDF operated along the Philadelphi route to attack the flourishing "tunnel industry" there, used by Hamas and the other Palestinian terrorist organizations to smuggle large quantities of weapons into the Gaza Strip. In the **northern Gaza Strip**, near Beit Hanoun, the IDF operated against terrorists launching Qassam rockets and against launching sites to reduce the extent of attacks carried out against the western Negev.
- The IDF's activity was carried out on the background of Hamas's accelerated arms buildup and the massive influx of weapons terrorist money and terrorist operatives into the Gaza

In August 2005 Israeli settlers and soldiers evacuated the Strip, leaving no Israeli presence.¹

Strip, primarily through the tunnels; the continuation and increase in rocket fire at populated areas in the western Negev, and the worsening general anarchy and chaos.

- In view of the situation, according to media reports the IDF recommends taking exceptional action in the Gaza Strip and intends to carry out a broad action in the Gaza Strip, or perhaps a “middle sized” action to encircle Rafah for an extended period of time and separate it from the rest of the Gaza Strip.² On November 1 the Cabinet met to discuss the situation in the Gaza Strip and the action the IDF was to take. On October 31, in a speech given at Tel Aviv University, Defense Minister Amir Peretz presented his perception of Israeli policy in the Palestinian arena. He noted that Israel should act in three spheres:

- ✿ **The military sphere:** Israel, he said, must not allow Hamas and the other terrorist organizations to construct the same kind of terrorist infrastructure in the Gaza Strip as Hezbollah did in Lebanon. He added that **Israel did not intend to reoccupy the Strip**, but that the IDF would use all the means at its disposal on land and in the air to attack the existing terrorist infrastructure and to prevent attacks, Qassam rocket fire and arms smuggling.

- ✿ **The political sphere:**

- ✓ He said that Israel welcomed the steps being taken to stabilize the Palestinian arena and, he stated, the collapse of the PA was not in Israel’s interests.

- ✓ He added that Israel viewed Abu Mazen as vital to preventing the complete Hamas takeover of the PA and was looking for ways to strengthen his position compatible with the Arab and international efforts.

- ✿ **The humanitarian sphere:** He noted that Israel welcomed a humanitarian and economic effort carried out in coordination with the United States and the international community to reduce the distress of the Palestinian population and to prevent a humanitarian crisis. Recently steps have been taken to advance the program

See the articles by Avi Issacharoff and Amos Harel in the October 27 issue of Haaretz.²

suggested by Lt. Gen. Keith W. Dayton, Washington's Security Coordinator for the Palestinians, to upgrade the Karni crossing point, which is the main artery for goods and services into the Gaza Strip.

IDF activity in the southern Gaza Strip

- **Special emphasis has recently been put on preventing the use of tunnels to smuggle arms and terrorists into the Gaza Strip.** On October 18 IDF forces exposed 13 tunnels near the Philadelphi route which were used to smuggle arms, and two additional shafts. The exposed tunnels are, in our assessment, only **a small part** of the broad and intensively-used tunnel infrastructure along the route.³ Two armed Hamas operatives who tried to attack the soldiers were killed.



**Exposing tunnels near the Philadelphi route
(Photo courtesy of the IDF spokesman, October 17 and 18)**

IDF activity in the northern Gaza Strip

- On October 23, during an IDF activity in the northern Gaza Strip, the Palestinians opened fire and the IDF soldiers killed ten of them. Among the dead terrorists was **'Atta Kamal**

Musa Abu Marzouk, deputy head of Hamas's political bureau, admitted that tunnels were being used to smuggle ³ arms into the Gaza Strip. He said, "it is Hamas's right to protect itself and its people, and to arm the members of its resistance..." (Al-Bayan, October 31).

‘**Ali Shambari**, leader of the Popular Resistance Committees in Beit Hanoun. He took part in planting explosive devices, launching Qassam rockets and firing anti-tank missiles.

- On October 31 the IDF broadened the scope of its activity in the northern Gaza Strip as part of Operation Autumn Clouds, whose objective has been to impede Qassam launching capabilities. The operation has focused on the town of Beit Hanoun, which is a center for rocket fire. There was an exchange of fire during the operation, during which Staff Sergeant Kiril Golenshin, 21, from Moshav Shekef in the Negev. Nine Palestinians were killed, two of them Hamas operatives, and several dozen were wounded (as of the morning of November 1).



Staff Sergeant Kiril Golenshin (Photo courtesy of the IDF spokesman)

Air strikes

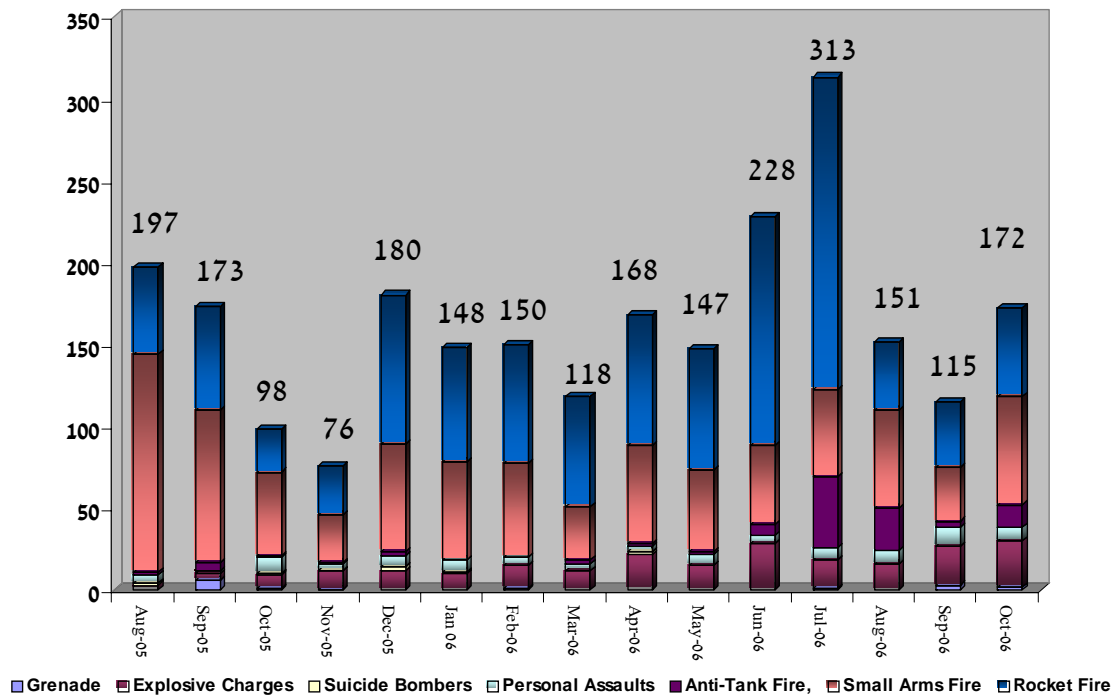
- The Israeli Air Force continued its attacks against buildings used by the terrorist organizations:
 - ✿ **On October 27** an arms storehouse in the Jabaliya refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip was attacked.
 - ✿ **On October 20** a house in Rafah which hid a tunnel was attacked.

Counterterrorist activities in the West Bank

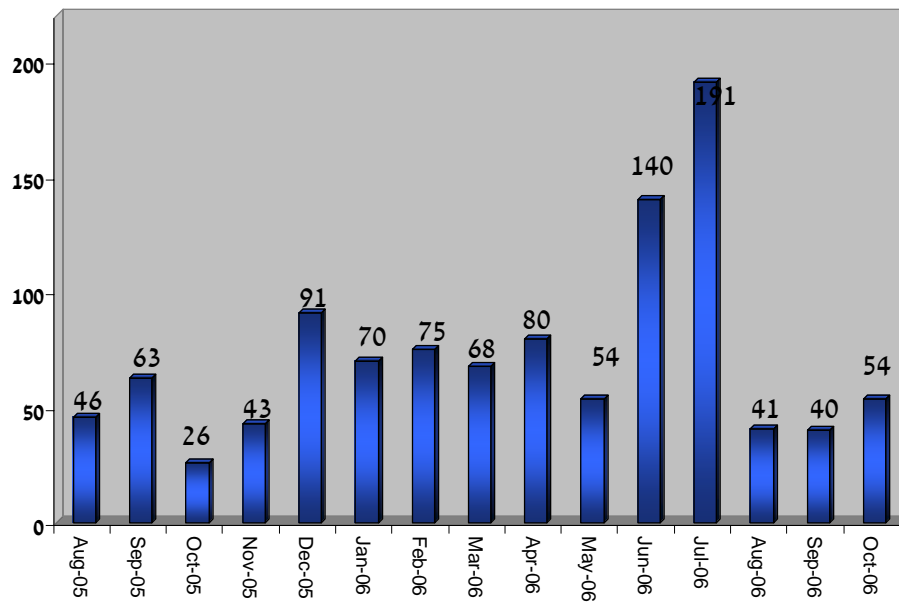
- On October 31 IDF forces arrested 16 Palestinians in the Jenin region.
- On October 27 IDF forces in Jenin arrested a PIJ operative who was involved in preparing an attack within Israel.

Statistical Data

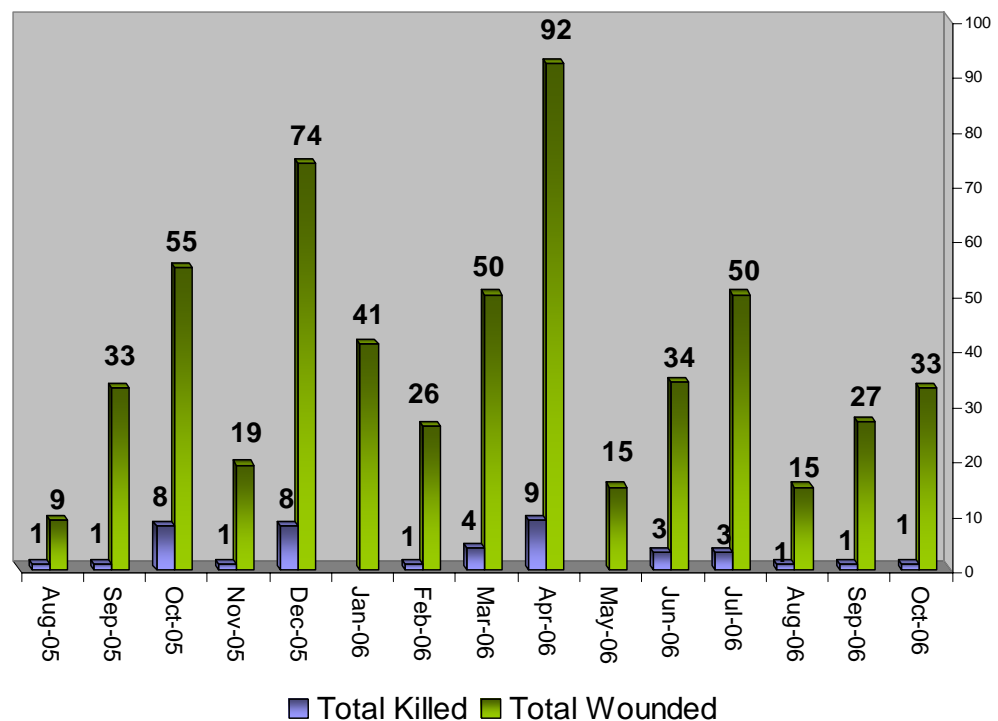
Monthly distribution of attacks



Monthly distribution of rocket hits⁴



Monthly distribution of Israeli casualties



These data relate only to identified hits and not to the total number of rockets fired. That number is, in our ⁴ assessment, 20%-30% larger.

Gilad Shalit, the abducted Israeli soldier

- A Hamas delegation headed by ‘Imad al-Alami, a member of Hamas’s “political bureau,” arrived in Egypt on October 30. Musa Abu Marzouk, the bureau’s deputy secretary, said that the delegation would meet with Omar Suleiman, chief of Egypt General Intelligence, to discuss the issue of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. According to Abu Marzouk, they would also discuss forming a Palestinian national unity government (Al-Bayan, October 30).

- With the arrival of the delegation there was an increase in media reports concerning the elements of a possible agreement, especially from Palestinian sources (which do not necessarily reflect Israel’s position):
 - ✿ ‘Izzat al-Rashq, a member of Hamas’s “political bureau,” told the Saudi Arabian newspaper ‘Ukaz that Hamas demanded the release of 1,000 Palestinian prisoners and of all the women and sick prisoners in return for the release of Gilad Shalit. Al-Rashq said that Hamas was showing flexibility by agreeing to the release of Palestinians in stages and would transfer Gilad Shalit to “a third party” (‘Ukaz, October 31).

 - ✿ Osama Hamdan, a Hamas representative in Lebanon, stated that it was important for the Palestinian prisoners to be released at the same time as Gilad Shalit, and noted that Hamas would **insist on simultaneous release** because it did not trust the “Zionist enemy.” When asked about the difficulty of implementing simultaneous release, Hamdan replied that the issue would be discussed with the Egyptians to receive “clear and definite guarantees” from them regarding the release of prisoners after that of Gilad Shalit (Feras Internet site, October 28).

The Internal Palestinian Arena

Anarchy and violent confrontations continue

- Signs of anarchy continue in the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria. The main ones are abductions on both sides, abductions of foreign nationals (most recently a Spanish photographer) and the violent confrontations between Fatah and Hamas. Most prominent among the violent incidents were the exchanges of fire between members of the Palestinian General Intelligence Service and those of Hamas's Operational Force near the Service's headquarters in Gaza on October 17; the break-in of armed Intelligence Service members into Gaza's College for Science and Technology on October 18; and the shots fired at Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya's convoy in the Nuseirat refugee camp which was aimed at the Operational force operatives securing the convoy on October 20.



Ismail Haniya's convoy, shot at in Nuseirat (Al-Jazeera TV, October 20)

- The worsening of the security situation and the fear that the violent confrontations will lead to a civil war motivated the rival sides to sign an agreement on October 27, calling for calm. Both factions agreed to take their armed operatives off the streets, to end the confrontations, to end media incitement and to deploy the police force. In addition, they decided to establish an office to coordinate between Fatah and Hamas. (Agence France-Presse, October 28, www.paltoday, October 29). It is uncertain whether the agreement will be honored.

The propaganda war continues

- The violent confrontations are accompanied by a propaganda war of mutual mudslinging:
 - ✿ Gaza Strip Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar reportedly gave a sermon in which he accused Yasser Arafat of collaborating with Israel. He also said that the members of the Palestinian Preventive Security service were spies and collaborators working for Israeli (Al-Shabbab Radio, October 27).
 - ✿ Hamas again warned “the plotters” (i.e., Fatah) not to attempt to carry out a coup d’etat against the Palestinian government and warned they would strike back with an iron fist (Hamas Website, October 27).
 - ✿ A Website affiliated with Hamas posted the “biography” of Muhammad Dahlan, accusing him of corruption, embezzlement, oppressing those who opposed the Oslo Accord, destroying the PA’s institutions and collaborating with the “Zionist-American plot” (Hamas-affiliated Filastin Alan Website, October 28).

Power struggles within the PA



A cartoon drawn by Hamas-supporting Omayya Joha presenting the basic opposition between Abu Mazen (and Fatah) and Hamas (Al-Quds, October 21).

Contacts continue to establish a national unity government

- Contacts between Hamas and Fatah have continued with the objective of forming a Palestinian national unity government, so far without success. The difficulties are the result of Hamas’s stubborn refusal to make its ideological position more flexible, first and

foremost with regard to recognizing the right of the State of Israel to exist and to abandoning terrorism.

- In an interview with Palestinian television, Abu Mazen stated that he was in favor of forming a government of technocrats because such a government would be able to solve problems and would not have to make concessions. He also repeated his position that launching rockets into Israel harmed the Palestinians, and, he claimed, the heads of Hamas agreed with him (Palestinian TV, October 17).

The problems of establishing a national unity government



A cartoon by Omayya Joha illustrating the problems of forming a national unity government. The road is rocky and the woman's feet are bleeding. (Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda, September 30)

Hamas continues to strengthen its Operational Force

- Hamas's violent confrontations with Fatah and its security services, the growing anarchy in the Gaza Strip and the information that the IDF intends to escalate its activity in the Strip

have led Hamas to continue its efforts to build up its military power, especially of the Operational Force.

- On October 15, a Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip claimed that the Force had 5,500 members, most of them (about 3,000) from Hamas and the others from other organizations. He stated that the Force, which was deployed throughout the Gaza Strip, would remain independent and not join other security services. The Hamas government has decided to enlist 2,500 more operatives into the Operational Force (Al-Ayam, October 16).



The Operational Force (Al-'Alam TV, October 24)

- The Fatah leadership has been following the establishment and growing might of the Force with concern. A strongly-worded announcement issued by Fatah/Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades stated that it would not permit such a military force to exist in the West Bank and that it would not hesitate to use force against it (Dunya al-Watan, October 25). In an interview with Palestinian television, Abu Mazen stressed the fact that the Operational Force was illegal (Palestinian TV, October 17).

Opening the Rafah crossing

- On the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, Israel opened the Rafah crossing to enable the passage of hundreds of Palestinian residents who had been stranded at the Egyptian border for 13 days (Reuters, October 24). The crossing was opened four times (in both directions) and a few thousand residents moved through it.

Non-payment of PA civil servants' salaries

- The strike caused by the non-payment of PA civil servants' salaries continues, and it has been reported that it will be intensified. Especially problematical is the fact that the salaries of the members of the security forces have not been paid, leading to rage and frustration, because the salaries of Hamas's Operational Force **are** being paid.

- Sa'id Siyam, interior minister, who brought \$2 million into the Gaza Strip, announced that in honor of the holiday he had decided to use half of it to grant a one-time payment of \$50 to 20,000 members of the security forces. The other half would be used to cover the debts of the Interior Ministry (AP, October 26).

- Members of Fatah expressed severe criticism of the payment. A Fatah spokesman in Tulkarm said that it did not reflect genuine concern for the security forces but was only an attempt "to buy their loyalty with a handful of dollars" (Palestinian News Agency, October 27).

- At the same time, it was reported that at the meeting held between Abu Mazen and the Xavier Solana, the European Union's foreign policy coordinator, it was decided that at the beginning of November the EU would give every PA civil servant an advance of 1,500 shekels (Al-Quds, October 30).