



News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation

August 16-31, 2006

Birthday celebration for abducted IDF soldier Gilad Shalit



Friends and family mark Gilad Shalit's 20th birthday with balloons at KeremShalom (the site of his abduction) (Amir Cohen for Reuters, August 28).

Unrest caused by unpaid salaries and the worsening economic situation



Unemployed Palestinians at a demonstration, holding bread and an empty plate (Sahib Salem for Reuters, August 29).

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Overview

- During the second half of August the Israeli security forces continued their intensive counterterrorism activity in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. Senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Fatah terrorist-operatives were killed, suicide bombing and other attacks were prevented and a tunnel, apparently dug to facilitate an attack at the Karni crossing, was exposed. Hezbollah was behind some of the attempted attacks.
- There was a significant decline in the number of rockets launched from the Gaza Strip at population centers in the western Negev. Hamas (perhaps temporarily) has stopped its rocket attacks because of the IDF's intensive activity in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian population's mounting weariness with the situation and perhaps because of the shift in international attention from the Gaza Strip to the second Lebanon war.
- The deterioration of the economic situation and continued delay in salary employments have led to an increase in internal Palestinian unrest. Palestinian Authority employees have threatened to hold a general strike at the beginning of September. The Hamas government, which views the increase in strikes and demonstrations as part of Fatah's attempt to overthrow the government, has tried to contain the protests by announcing that advances would be paid on salaries and by threatening to punish anyone who was absent from work.

Important Events

Terrorist attack at an IDF roadblock

- On August 19 a Palestinian terrorist opened fire at IDF soldiers at a roadblock at Beqaot in the Jordan Valley. Roi Farajun, one of the soldiers stationed at the roadblock, was killed. The terrorist was a resident of the village of Tamun (near Jericho); his organizational affiliation is unknown. Arriving at the roadblock, he entered the line of those waiting to pass through, and as he approached the soldiers he began shooting with a small handgun. The soldiers returned fire and killed him.



Staff Sergeant Roi Farajun (Photo courtesy of the IDF spokesman)

The decline in Qassam rocket attacks continues

- During the last two weeks of August there was a continued significant decline in the number of Qassam rocket launched into Israeli territory. **Seventeen hits were identified**, for a total of 41 for the entire month. It was the lowest number of identified rocket hits since October 2005 (See **Statistical Data**).



The Ahmad Abu al-Rish Brigades took credit for rocket attacks (Al-Jazeera TV, August 20).

Counterterrorist activities

Overview

■ During the war in Lebanon against Hezbollah, the security forces prevented suicide bombing attacks and attempts to abduct Israeli soldiers and civilians. Some of the attempts were prevented only shortly before they were to be carried out.

■ The attacks were planned by the various Palestinian terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria, mainly by those belonging to Fatah. Some of the groups (including Fatah groups from Nablus) were directed by Hezbollah, which instructed the Palestinian terrorist infrastructures in the West Bank to carry out suicide bombing attacks and abductions to open another front against Israel.¹

The Gaza Strip

■ Counterterrorist activities continued in the Gaza Strip and terrorist weapons' stores and machine shops were attacked. On August 28 the Israeli Air Force and IDF ground forces attacked targets in the northern Gaza City neighborhood of Sajaiya, killing more than 20 armed terrorists and wounding more than 20 . During the fighting the terrorist organizations fired anti-tank missiles and detonated explosive devices.



After the attack on a weapons workshop in the Al-Zeitun neighborhood in Gaza City (Al-Jazeera TV, August 18)

¹ For further information see our Information Bulletin entitled “Thwarted Palestinian terrorist organizations attempts to perpetrate suicide bombing attacks and abduct Israelis during the war in Lebanon ,” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/il_security_e.htm or http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/il_security_e.pdf.

- IDF forces revealed a **tunnel** on the outskirts of the Sajaiya neighborhood on August 27. Thirteen meters (43 feet) deep and 150 meters (164 yards) long, **it had been dug within a building in an area inhabited by civilians**. It was apparently intended to be used by terrorists as **part of a plan to carry out an attack on the Israeli side of the Karni crossing, possibly the abduction of Israelis working there**.



The tunnel (Photo courtesy of the IDF spokesman)

- It should be noted that the Karni crossing is a lifeline for the residents of the Gaza Strip, through which every day trucks carrying merchandise, foodstuffs, medicines and raw materials pass on their way to the local population. During the past few months it has been closed because of repeated advance warnings of planned terrorist organization attacks. **The tunnel exposed illustrates terrorist organization intentions to continue their attacks at the crossings, in blatant disregard of the interests of the Palestinian population.**

Judea and Samaria

- During the second half of August, Israeli counterterrorism activities continued in Judea and Samaria. Some of the more conspicuous events were the following:
 - ✿ During an IDF action in Nablus on August 31, Fadi ‘Abd al-Latif Kafisha, head of the Fatah terrorist-operative infrastructure in Nablus was killed. Fadi Kafisha, on

the most wanted list for Judea and Samaria terrorists, **took instructions from and was funded by Hezbollah**. He was responsible for dozens of shooting attacks, the detonation of explosive devices (including car bombs), the preparation of explosive belts and the dispatching of suicide bombers.

✿ On August 30 security forces arrested a Fatah terrorist-operative at the Hizmeh roadblock north of Jerusalem who was planning to use an explosive belt to carry out a suicide bombing attack.

✿ On August 29, Ibrahim Niba and Hani Hashash, two senior Fatah/Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades terrorist-operatives, were killed by Israeli security forces in the Balata refugee camp in Nablus. The terrorists had been involved in suicide bombing attacks and **took instructions from and were funded by Hezbollah**.

✿ On August 23 **Husam Jaradat** was critically wounded in an IDF action in Jenin and later died. He was one of the heads of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Samaria and responsible for many terrorist attacks carried out in Israel. Among them was the suicide bombing attack at the Maxim restaurant in Haifa in October 2003, in which 21 Israeli civilians were killed.

✿ On August 22, near Jericho, two terrorists were arrested by the IDF. One of them was apparently planning a car-bomb attack in a crowded area in the center of Israel.

Continued arrests of senior Hamas members

- On August 19 the IDF arrested **Nasser al-Din Muhammad Ahmad Sha'er**, the Hamas government's deputy prime minister and minister of education, at his house in Ramallah. On August 20 the security forces in Ramallah arrested Mahmoud al-Ramahi, secretary general of the Palestinian Legislative Council. So far dozens of senior Hamas, Hamas government and Palestinian Legislative Council members have been arrested.

Smuggling arms in to the Gaza Strip²

- Yuval Diskin, head of the Israeli Security Agency, reported to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee about the vast extent of arms smuggling from the Sinai into the Gaza Strip. He said that all the weapons are smuggled in either **through tunnels or the Rafah crossing**. He added that the Rafah crossing was wide open and that any terrorist-operative could enter or leave the Gaza Strip unhindered.

- He also noted that the smuggling is carried out by bribing Egyptian border police. Egypt, he said, ignored the list of wanted terrorists who were to be prevented from entering or leaving the Strip. Among those entering were “expert terrorist” who had received training in Iran. The Egyptian authorities, he said, avoided taking effective action to deter arms smuggling.

- **The Hamas terrorist organization**, added Diskin, **aspired to adopt the Lebanese model** and is interested in “a balance of deterrence” with Israel of the sort that existed with Lebanon, which would include long-range rockets, bunkers and tunnels. Even today, he said, there were populated areas in the Gaza Strip where tunnels have been built to hide weapons and personnel.

- He provided statistical data concerning the weapons and money which have been smuggled into the Gaza Strip since last year’s disengagement and the transferal of responsibility for the border crossing to Egypt:
 - ✿ 15,000 light weapons, 2,300 hand guns and four million rounds of ammunition.
 - ✿ Approximately 50 rockets, 10-15 of which are Katyushas.
 - ✿ Dozens of anti-tank missiles.
 - ✿ 15 tons of standard explosives
 - ✿ 65 advanced anti-tank missile launchers and 400 RPGs.
 - ✿ Tens of millions of dollars.

² From an article by Gideon Alon, *Haaretz*, August 30, 2006.

The abduction and release of two Fox News journalists

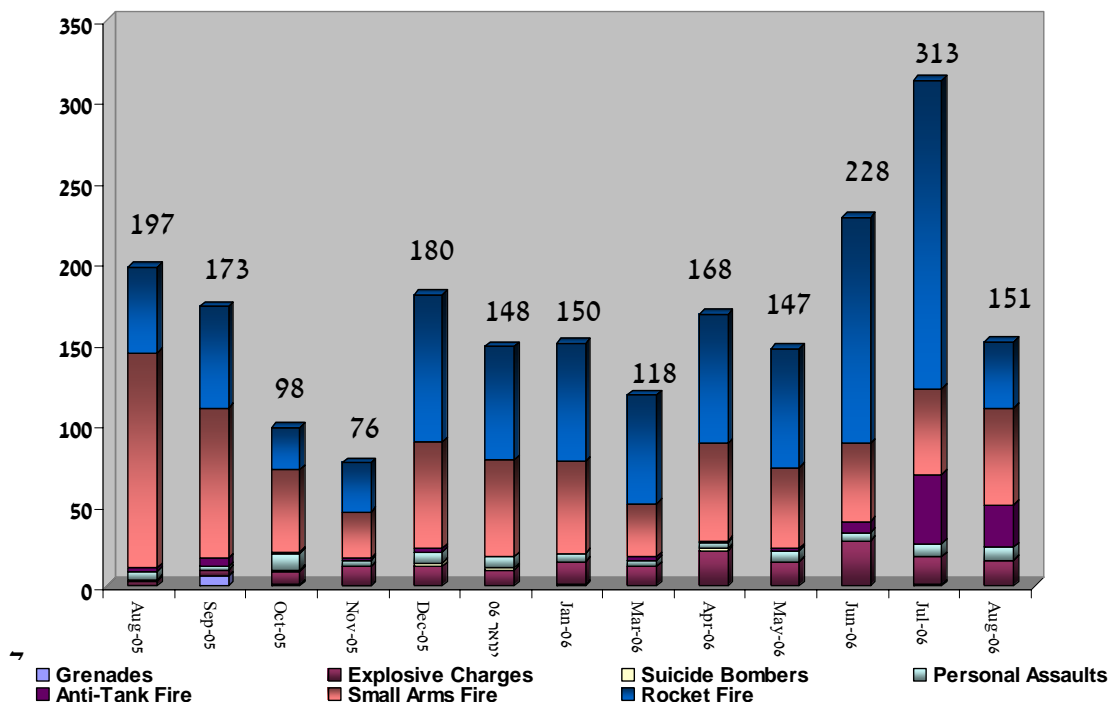
- On August 14 two Fox News journalists, New Zealander Olaf Wiig and American Steve Centanni, were abducted in the Gaza Strip.
- On August 27, the two, who had been forced at gunpoint to convert to Islam, were released. They were abducted by the Popular Resistance Committees, although publicly responsibility was claimed by a fictitious organization called the “Holy Jihad Brigades.” That “organization” issued a demand for the release of Muslim prisoners held in American jails in return for the release of the two journalists.



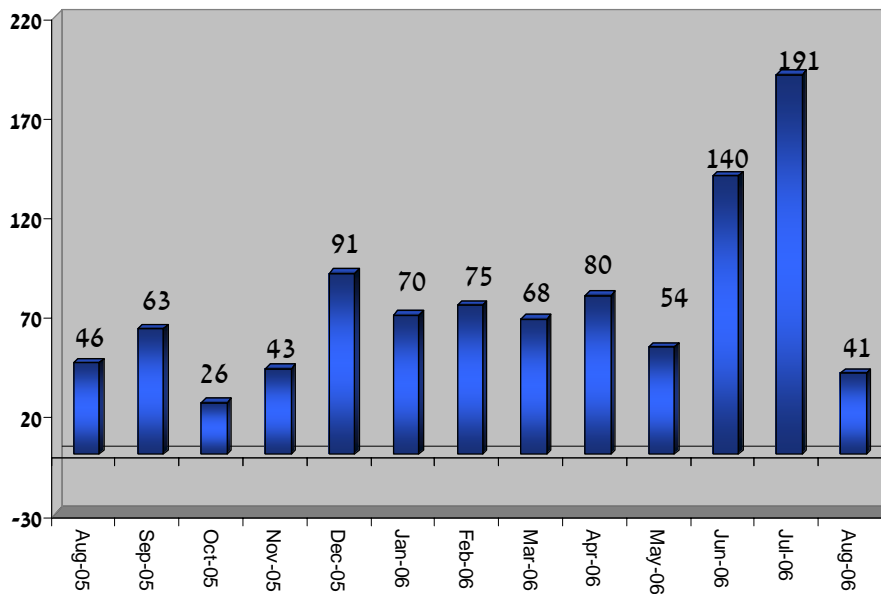
] The two abducted journalists (Ramattan News Agency, August 23)

Statistical Data

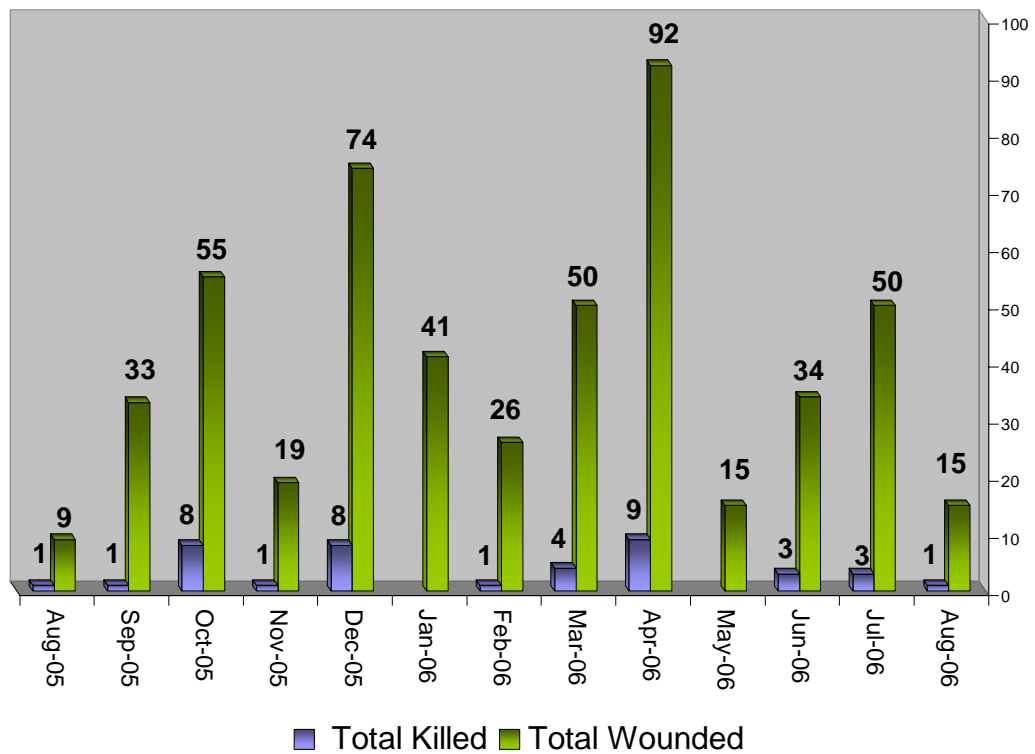
Monthly distribution of attacks



Monthly distribution of rocket hits³



Monthly distribution of Israeli casualties



³ These data relate only to identified hits and not to the total number of rockets fired. That number is, in our assessment, 20%-30% larger.

The Internal Palestinian Arena

Continuing attempts to establish a national unity government

■ During the last two weeks of August contacts continued between Abu Mazen and Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya to establish a national unity government. A Hamas spokesman stated that the main objective was to strengthen the Palestinian's ability to stand firm in the face of pressure from the international community. Forming the government has proven to be difficult because of basic differences between Hamas and Fatah, and because Hamas continues to demand full control of any future government established.

Increased unrest caused by non-payment of salaries

- There has been increased public protest by Palestinian Authority employees against the Hamas government because of the non-payment of salaries. They threatened to hold an unlimited general strike beginning Saturday, September 2, if they were not paid.

- Hamas views the strikes as directed by Fatah in an attempt to overthrow the government. Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya has tried to prevent the strike, stating that the government is working to find a solution to the problems of unpaid salaries and the financial crisis from which the PA is suffering. In an attempt to calm the situation, on August 30 Samir Abu 'Eisha, acting treasury minister, announced that next week the Hamas government would pay advances of 1,500 shekels to employees whose salaries were more than 2,500 shekels.



Workers confronting the Palestinian security forces in Gaza (Al-Jazeera TV, August 29)

- Speaking before 1,000 public sector employees at an anti-government demonstration held in front of the presidential residence, Abu Mazen called for the establishment of a national unity government to relieve the dire economic situation. He also attacked Hamas for firing rockets into Israel and not taking steps to end the “economic blockade,” i.e., for not being more flexible and adapting to international realpolitik. He noted that “in the final analysis, making a living is more important than the results of the democratic [process]” (Ma’an News Agency, August 30).



Abu Mazen speaking before public sector employees (Al-Jazeera TV, August 30)

Lessons Hamas learned from the second Lebanon War

- On August 30, deputy head of the Hamas political bureau, Musa Abu Marzuq, spoke about the lessons the organization had learned from the war in Lebanon. He claimed that it had strengthened faith in the “resistance” [i.e., violence and terrorism] because Israel had completely failed to achieve its goals. He said that **Hamas was currently examining ways to import Hezbollah’s operational tactics into the Gaza Strip, with the emphasis on its ability to destroy tanks and aircraft** (Palmedia, August 29).

Hamas government spokesman's soul searching

- Ghazi Hamad, in an editorial published in Al-Ayyam on August 27, criticized the deteriorating situation in the Gaza Strip, for the most part blaming the “resistance” (i.e., the Palestinian terrorist organizations).

- He claimed that the Palestinians had not been wise enough to use the disengagement as a springboard for socio-economic development and that the Strip had become a focal point of “anarchy and corruption,” for reasons related to Palestinian society itself and not the Israeli occupation. He also criticized rocket attacks against Israel, which he said, did more harm than good, and called for Palestinians to search their souls to find a way out of their predicament.⁴

⁴ For further information see our Information Bulletin entitled “In an exceptional statement on the first anniversary of the disengagement, Hamas government spokesman Ghazi Hamad criticized anarchy and corruption in the Gaza Strip, blaming Palestinian society and not, as usual, the Israeli ‘occupation,’” at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/english/html/hamas_spokesman_e.htm or http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/english/pdf/hamas_spokesman_e.pdf.