



Intelligence and Terrorism  
Information Center  
Israel Intelligence Heritage  
and Commemoration Center

# News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation

December 15-31, 2007

## Shooting attack in the Hebron region



**First Sergeant  
David Elhanan  
Ruben**



**Corporal Ahikam  
Amihai**

**Two IDF soldiers murdered while on a field trip near Hebron (IDF spokesman, December 29).**

## Rocket fire continues



**Rocket launchers carried by vehicle and used to fire rockets into Israel (Al-Jazeera TV, December 24).**

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## Overview

- Terrorist activity focused on a shooting attack near Hebron in which two IDF off duty soldiers were murdered during a field trip. There was a sharp increase in the amount of rocket fire from the Gaza Strip aimed at the western Negev towns and villages; one rocket fell near a school in Sderot.
- The Israeli security forces recently carried out a **series of successful targeted killings** of senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad operatives in the Gaza Strip. In view of the IDF's intensive counterterrorist activities and media reports of a possible IDF incursion into the Gaza Strip, senior Hamas officials expressed the possibility of a mutual "lull in the fighting."
- In the wake of the Annapolis meeting Ehud Olmert met with Abu Mazen; the Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams met as well. The Palestinians protested Israel's construction of dwelling units in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, while deliberations on the core issues have yet to be held. The sum of \$7.48 billion dollars was pledged at the meeting of donor countries held in Paris, far beyond Palestinian expectations. However, so far the money has only been pledged and the true test will be how it contributes to shoring up the Palestinian economy and institutions.

# Important Events

## Two IDF soldiers murdered in a shooting attack near Hebron

■ On December 28 a squad of terrorist operatives shot and killed two IDF soldiers on leave, **David Ruben and Ahikam Amihai**, both residents of Kiryat Arba. One terrorist was killed and another wounded. The murder occurred while the two soldiers and a female friend were on a field trip in Wadi Telem, northwest of Hebron. The two were out of uniform but were armed, and used their weapons in the exchange of fire with the terrorists. The young woman managed to hide and alert the security forces (IDF spokesman's Website, December 28).

■ The Israeli security forces revealed that the attack had been carried out by a **Fatah squad**. The Hamas and PIJ claims of responsibility were false. Two Fatah operatives managed to escape and turned themselves over to the Palestinian General Intelligence Service, fearing that Israel would apprehend them. One was an activist in the Palestinian national security service and the other was in contact with Palestinian General Intelligence.



Bassel Nabil al-Natshe, the terrorist operative killed in the shooting incident (Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades Website, December 28). Hundreds of Palestinians attended his funeral in Hebron.

■ Senior members of the Palestinian Authority publicly deplored the attack. **Salaam Fayyad**, PA prime minister, expressed sorrow at the deaths of the Israeli soldiers (December 30). **Riyad al-Maliki**, information minister, said that the PA had detained those responsible for the murders, the motives for which, he claimed, were criminal (a claim later proved to be false). He also said that the detentions “proved the efficiency of the Palestinian security services.” (In point of fact, the treatment given the affair by the Palestinian security services was ineffective).

## Rocket and mortar fire

■ In December there was a **sharp increase** in the amount of rocket fire aimed at western Negev towns and villages. A total of 113 identified hits were recorded, compared with 65 in November. The most prominent event was a Qassam rocket which fell near a school in Sderot on December 20, sending 20 civilians into shock, ten of them children.

■ An exceptionally large barrage of rockets was fired into Israel on December 25, with 23 identified hits. The PIJ, which continues launching the greatest number of rockets, claimed responsibility for most of them. The Popular Resistance Committees and the Popular Front also claimed responsibility for the rockets fired at the Kerem Shalom and Sufa Crossings and at Ashqelon.



Firing rockets into Israel (Al-Jazeera TV, December 24).

## **Fatah al-Islam claims responsibility for firing rockets into Israel**

■ During the past two weeks an organization calling itself “**Fatah al-Islam in the Land of Ribat**”<sup>1</sup> claimed responsibility for a number of rocket launchings, including a rocket which fell in the southern part of Ashqelon on December 23 (Ana al-Muslim Forum Website, December 25). **Fatah al-Islam** (i.e., “the victory of Islam”) is a terrorist organization which is a branch of Al-Qaeda in **Lebanon**. Its center of power was in the Nahr Al-Bared refugee camp near Tripoli in north Lebanon and was crushed by the Lebanese army on September 2 (after months of fierce battles which began on May 20).<sup>2</sup>

■ Hamas has denied the existence of global jihad groups in the Gaza Strip. A spokesman for the interior ministry, Ihab al-Ghasein, claimed that there were no “external groups” operating in the Strip. He blamed Fatah for issuing the statements about global jihad groups and said that they “give the occupation [i.e., Israel] excuses for violence...” (Filastin al-‘An Website, December 26). Hamas spokesman Ayman Taha claimed that Fatah al-Islam did not exist in the Gaza Strip but added that Hamas “blessed every organization operating in the Palestinian arena.”

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<sup>1</sup> **The Land of Ribat** (“frontier”) is a Muslim name for the territory known as “**Palestine**,” on which the Temple Mount, one of the three places holy to Islam, is located. Since the area is occupied by Israel if is considered an area where the Palestinians are considered a kind of garrison force whose role will be to take part in the future jihad for the liberation of Palestine and Islam’s holy places.

<sup>2</sup> For further information see our May 31, 2007 and September 10, 2007 Bulletins entitled “The confrontation in northern Lebanon between the Lebanese army and Fath al-Islam, the Al-Qaeda offshoot in Lebanon” at [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/html/fath\\_al\\_islam.htm](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/fath_al_islam.htm) and “Achievement for Fuad Siniora’s government: victory over Fatah al-Islam, the Al-Qaeda branch in Lebanon, after three and a half months of battles,” at [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/html/lebanon\\_e0907.htm](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/lebanon_e0907.htm).

# Counterterrorist Activities

## Damage to the PIJ's operational infrastructure in the Gaza Strip

■ The Israel security forces recently carried out a series of counterterrorist activities in the Gaza Strip, focusing on senior terrorist operatives belonging to the PIJ, the organization launching most of the rockets at the western Negev towns and villages. **The IDF activities were successful and caused damage to the PIJ's operational infrastructure.**

■ On December 17 and 18 the Israeli Air Force struck from the air four times, killing ten PIJ and two Hamas terrorist operatives. Among them were **Majid al-Harazin**, commander of the PIJ's terrorist operative wing, and **Karim Marwan al-Dachduch**, in charge of weapons and rocket manufacturing in the Gaza Strip.<sup>3</sup>

■ On the evening of December 27 the IAF struck PIJ operatives twice: the first strike was in the Bureij refugee camp, when three PIJ operatives were killed in a moving vehicle. The second strike, carried out somewhat later, killed **Muhammad Hassan Abdallah** (Abu Murshid), head of the organization's terrorist operative wing; a Palestinian with him was critically injured.

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<sup>3</sup> For further information see our December 20 Bulletin entitled "Palestinian Islamic Jihad operational-terrorist network in the Gaza Strip under attack," at [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/html/ct\\_191207e.htm](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/ct_191207e.htm).



Muhammad Hassan Abdallah (Abu Murshid)'s vehicle after the IAF attack (Al-Aqsa TV, December 28).

■ In response to the killing, Abu Hamzah, a Jerusalem Battalions spokesman, warned that rocket and mortar shell fire would increase (PalMedia Website, December 27). Abu Ahmed, also a Jerusalem Battalions spokesman, said that “the enemy opened the gates of hell for himself... Rockets will be launched against the enemy from every region and suicide bombers are ready to go out” (Agence France Presse, December 27).

### Other counterterrorist activities in the Gaza Strip

■ In addition to the targeted killings of senior PIJ terrorist operatives, the Israeli security forces carried out other counterterrorist activities:

✿ **December 30:** An IDF force identified two armed terrorists moving toward them near the border fence in the region of Kerem Shalom. The soldiers opened fire and killed one of them, a Hamas operative. Searches later found two charges, two rifles, two bullet-proof vests and a large quantity of ammunition.



Weapons and equipment found at the scene of the incident (Picture courtesy of the IDF spokesman, December 30).

✿ **December 27:** An anti-tank missile was fired at the IDF soldiers during counterterrorist activity carried out near the border fence in the Kissufim region. The soldiers returned fire, killing one Hamas and two PIJ operatives.

✿ **December 25:** The IAF attacked two rocket launchers in Beit Lahia. The Palestinians reported that two PIJ terrorist operatives were wounded in the attack (Ramattan News Agency, December 25).

✿ **December 20:** IDF forces carrying out counterterrorist activities in Al-Maghazi refugee camp killed seven terrorists, four belonging to the PIJ and three to Hamas. During the activities an IDF soldier was critically wounded by an anti-tank missile (IDF spokesman's Website, December 20).

## **Judea and Samaria**

■ Counterterrorist activities continued in Judea and Samaria in view of the continued attempts by the terrorist organizations to carry out terrorist attacks:

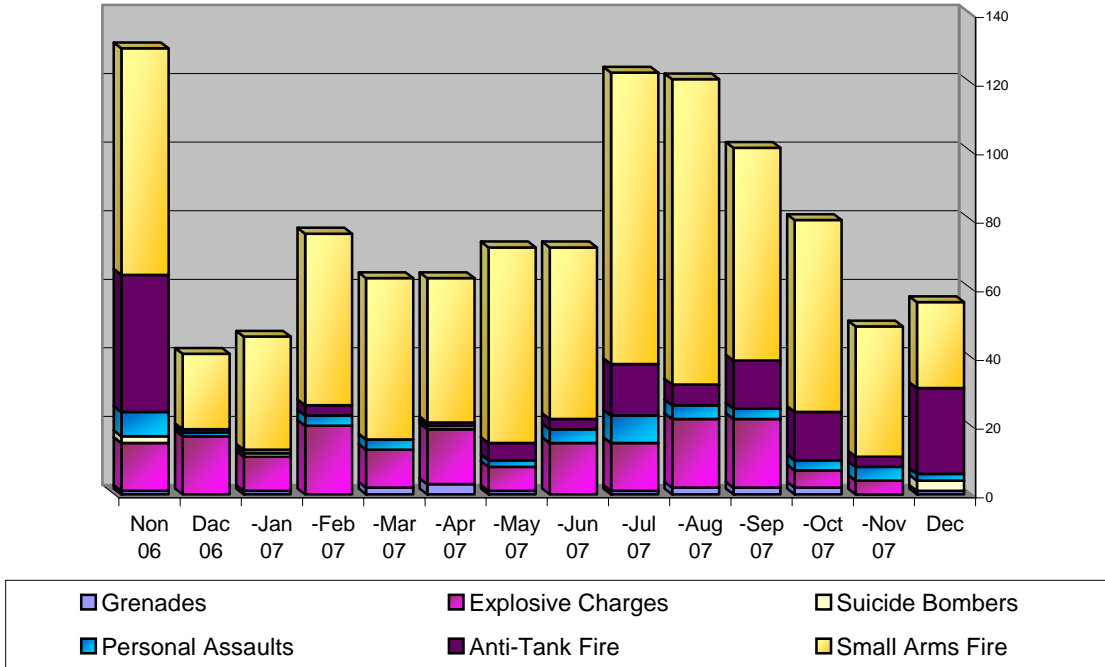
✿ **December 21:** An IDF force stationed at the Hawara road block (south of Nablus) detained a Palestinian who had a mortar shell in his possession. The Palestinian was handed over for interrogation.

✿ **December 19:** A senior PIJ terrorist operative was critically wounded in a terrorist roundup in the village of Silat al-Harithiya near Jenin. He was responsible for an attempted car bomb attack inside Israel in September 2002. The attack was prevented when the vehicle was stopped by the Border Police near Givat Ada (north of Hadera) and found to be carrying 400 kilograms (880 lbs) of explosives (IDF spokesman's Website, December 19).

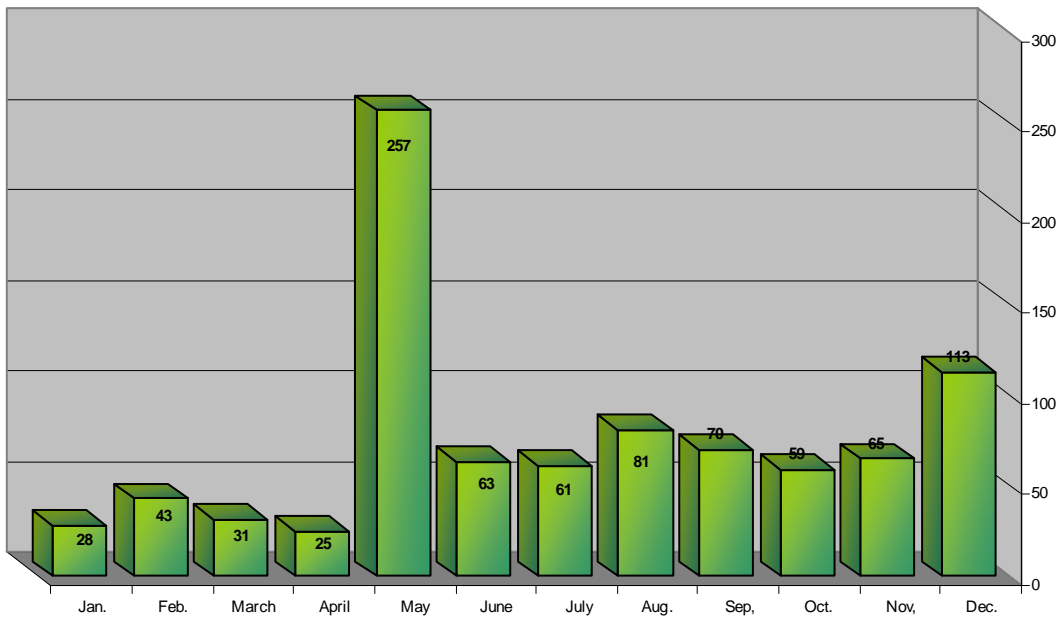
✿ **December 19:** An attack was prevented when a Palestinian arrived at the Hawara road block and tried to stab the soldiers during a routine security examination (IDF spokesman's Website, December 19).

# Statistical Data for 2007

## Monthly distribution of attacks

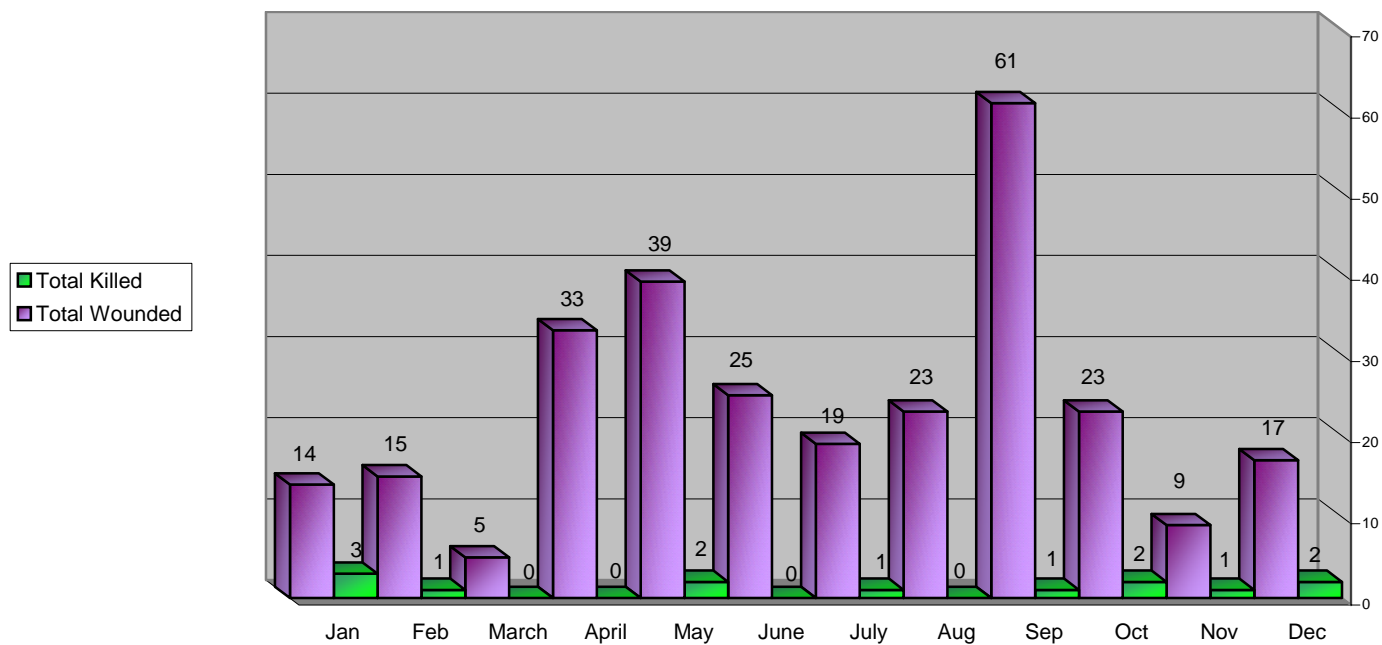
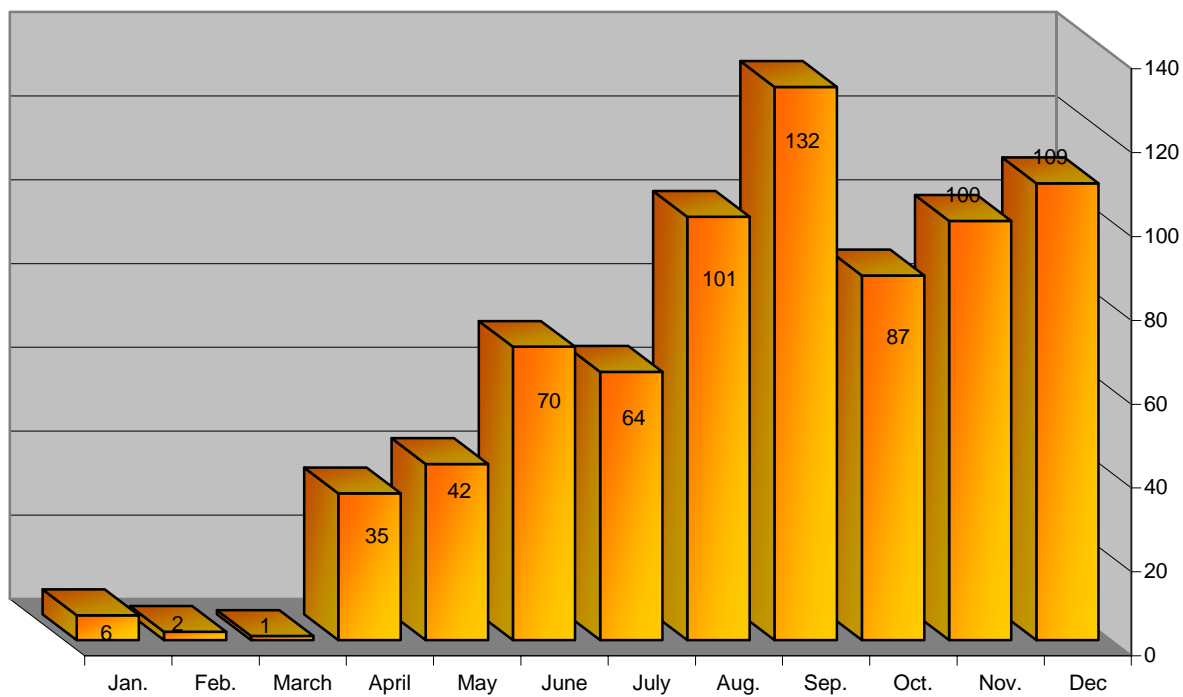


## Monthly distribution of identified rocket hits





## Monthly distribution of identified mortar shell hits



<sup>4</sup> The statistics do not include cases of shock.

# The Internal Palestinian Arena

## Hamas continues its violent suppression of Fatah in the Gaza Strip

- On December 31 there were violent confrontations between the Hamas police (which incorporates the Executive Force) and Fatah operatives. The confrontations occurred in Khan Yunis, Beit Lahia and the Sajaiya neighborhood in Gaza City. They resulted in the deaths of six Palestinians (five civilians and one member of the Hamas police). [Note: The confrontations continued on January 1, 2008, and caused more casualties].
- The confrontations were the result of Hamas' refusal to allow Fatah to hold a main rally and other, local events on the 43<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the organization's founding. It was not the first time that Hamas used force to suppress Fatah activities in the Gaza Strip during events connected to its history. On November 12, 2007, during a memorial rally for Arafat in the main square in Gaza City, Hamas operatives opened fire at the participants, killing six Fatah supporters and wounding dozens of others.<sup>5</sup>
- As part of its efforts to prevent the 43<sup>rd</sup> anniversary celebrations, Hamas detained dozens of Fatah supporters and confiscated Fatah flags and propaganda material. During the violent confrontations on December 31 Hamas took action against senior Fatah activists, including firing machine guns and shells at the house of **Ahmed Hilas**, one of the most prominent leaders in the Gaza Strip (Wafa News Agency, December 31).

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<sup>5</sup> For further information see our November 15, 2007 Bulletin entitled "A record in Hamas' violent suppression of Fatah in the Gaza Strip" at [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/html/gaza\\_121107e.htm](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/gaza_121107e.htm).

## Hamas statements regarding a “lull in the fighting”

■ In the wake of the intensive activity carried out by the Israeli security forces in the Gaza Strip and the media reports of a possible extensive IDF incursion into the Strip in response to the rocket fire, Hamas has recently made many references to a potential lull in the fighting (*tahdiya*) against Israel.<sup>6</sup>

■ The first was aired by Suleiman a-Shafi, a commentator for Israel TV’s Channel 2. He said that Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya had called him on the phone and said, “**we have no problem in negotiating with Israel at least about two topics, Qassam rocket fire and the targeted killing, to achieve a mutual cease fire (*hudna*)** (Channel 2 Website, December 18).

■ Senior Hamas figures do not make uniform statements, which might indicate internal disagreement. For example,

✿ **Ahmed Yussuf**, a political advisor in the foreign ministry of Ismail Haniya’s government, said **it was a question of a short-term lull and not a cease fire (*hudna*)**: “We are talking about months, not years... **resistance [i.e., terrorism] will remain an option**. As long as the occupation exists the resistance will exist”(Al-Jazeera TV Website, December 24).

✿ **Osama al-Muzeini**, a prominent Hamas figure, said that if Israel accepted Hamas’ conditions (an end to the targeted killings, opening the crossings and ending the siege) **Hamas would agree to cease the rocket fire, while the other “forms of resistance” would remain legitimate** (Al-Aqsa TV, December 25).

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<sup>6</sup> In the past negotiations between Abu Mazen and Ismail Haniya, and between Abu Mazen and Ehud Olmert, achieved a lull (November 26, 2006). It was not maintained by the Palestinian terrorist organizations, and there was incidence of rocket fire from the Gaza Strip until the “routine” level of rocket attacks returned.

✿ Hamas government spokesman **Taher al-Nunu** told the Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz that the Hamas government demanded a mutual lull in the fighting which would commit Israel to stop its targeted killings and ground actions in the Gaza Strip, in return for which the Palestinians would agree to a cease fire (stop the rocket fire, stop laying explosives charges, etc).

✿ It should be noted that Hamas has not participated in rocket fire since the takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, but does not prevent the other terrorist organizations from launching rockets. Spokesmen for the **PIJ**, the organization responsible for most of the rocket attacks, said they would not agree to a lull in the fighting. Senior PIJ figure **Khadir Habib** said that it was “a mistake to appeal to Israel and talk about a lull... The only option is resistance” (Paltoday Website, December 25). Another important figure, **Khaled al-Batash**, said that “**no one can impose a lull on the PIJ because it is a resistance movement**” (Nidaa al-Quds Website, December 23).

✿ **Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert** referred to a potential lull saying, “counter-terrorist operations will continue as they have for months. There is no other way to describe what is happening in the Gaza Strip except as a true war between the IDF and terrorist elements. This war will continue even as we take strict care, as we have up to now, to avoid a humanitarian crisis which could harm civilians who are uninvolved in terrorism. This policy requires both patience and fortitude. The State of Israel has no interest in negotiating with elements that do not accept the Quartet's basic principles. Thus we have declared and thus we will continue. This is true regarding Hamas, Islamic Jihad and all other elements”<sup>7</sup> (Prime Minister’s Website, December 23).

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<sup>7</sup> [www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/HPChannel\\_Spokesman/spokegovmeet231207.htm](http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/HPChannel_Spokesman/spokegovmeet231207.htm)

# The Annapolis Process

## Meetings between Israel and the Palestinians

■ On December 27 Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and PA Chairman Abu Mazen met for the first time since the Annapolis meeting. Abu Mazen used the meeting to protest Israel construction in Judea and Samaria. In response Ehud Olmert said that Israel would not build new settlements or confiscate lands in the territories and would evacuate illegal outposts (Haaretz daily newspaper, December 28). Discussions of the core issues, which were supposed to begin after the Annapolis meeting, have yet to be held.



The settlements seen through the eyes of Hamas (Sawt al-Aqsa Website, December 11). In Christian and Islamic anti-Semitism the snake often symbolizes Jews.

Israel tightens the siege on the Gaza Strip  
إسرائيل تشدد حصار قطاع غزة ..



The outcome of the Annapolis meeting, according to Hamas (Flesteen, December 5).

■ Prior to the Ehud Olmert-Abu Mazen meeting, the negotiating teams held their second meeting on December 24. The Palestinians called it a failure because of what they claimed was Israel's refusal to freeze construction in the Har Homa neighborhood south of Jerusalem. **Saeb Erikat**, Palestinian chief negotiator said that "Israel could have either attacks and settlements or peace and negotiations, but not both" (Palestinian TV, December 24).

## The Paris Donors' Conference

■ On December 17 a conference of donor countries was held in Paris under the aegis of the French president, attended by representatives of 87 countries and international organizations. Its objective was to create continuity for the Annapolis meeting and to enlist economic and political support for the PA, which would enable it to develop into a viable country (French Foreign Ministry Website, December 17).

■ The participating countries and organizations **pledged to transfer \$7.48 billion to the PA**. The funds are to be used to support Palestinian institutions and to rehabilitate the Palestinian economy during the coming three years, \$3.4 billion during 2008 (French Foreign Ministry Website, December 17). **The sum far surpasses the Palestinians' expectations, which were \$5.6 billion.** However, the proof of the pudding will be the eating.

■ Following is a table of the main donors (according to the French Foreign Ministry and media reports):

<b>Donor</b>	<b>Amount (in millions of dollars)</b>
European Union	650
United States	555
Saudi Arabia	500
Great Britain	490
France	300
Germany	300
Sweden	300

Kuwait	300
United Arab Emirates	300
Canada	300

■ The French foreign ministry announced the distribution of the funds as follows: \$1.54 billion for **budgetary support**, \$996 million for **humanitarian aid**, \$644 for **additional aid**. Of the total \$7.48 billion, \$2.23 have **no specific destination** at this point. The donations are supposed to be transferred to the PA between 2008 and 2010.

■ After the Paris conference Abu Mazen called it “a political and economic success... Besides pledging funds, it demonstrated genuine support for the peace process” (Agence France Presse, December 18). **Salaam Fayyad** said that the **PA included the Gaza Strip** in its economic expenses, and that many projects had been planned to improve the situation in the Gaza Strip (Al-Jazeera TV, December 17).

### **Crisis for Gaza Strip pilgrims to Saudi Arabia**

■ About 2,200 Gaza Strip pilgrims who passed through the Rafah Crossing in early December<sup>8</sup> returned from Saudi Arabia to the port of Nueiba in the Sinai Peninsula on December 29. The Egyptian authorities refused to allow them to reenter the Gaza Strip through the Rafah Crossing, which stopped functioning with the Hamas takeover in June, and demanded that they enter through the Kerem Shalom Crossing, which is supervised by Israel.

■ The pilgrims were transferred to temporary camps in El Arish after they rejected the Egyptian demands. Egypt is maintaining contacts with both Israel

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<sup>8</sup> For further information see our date Bulletin entitled “**News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation, December 1-15 , 2007**” at [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/eng/eng\\_n/t15dec\\_07e.htm](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/eng/eng_n/t15dec_07e.htm).

and the PA, and according to Palestinian reports, with Hamas as well, to resolve the issue. On the other hand, 700 pilgrims who left the PA from Ramallah, returned to the Gaza Strip through the Erez Crossing. In an attempt to exert pressure on Egypt, on December 29 and 31, demonstrations were held by the pilgrims' families in front of the Rafah Crossing. Encouraged by Hamas, they demanded that the Egyptian government open the crossing and let their relatives through.

■ Among those delayed by the closed crossing are dozens of Hamas terrorist operatives. Hamas activist **Ayman Taha**, who was with the pilgrims in the camps at El Arish, said he wondered how the Egyptians could let them leave the Gaza Strip and then try to force them to reenter through Israel. He added that “Egypt... is a sovereign country... and will resolve the crisis as it sees fit.” He also said that **“we would stay in the middle of the ocean before going back through the occupation’s crossings”** (Radio Monte Carlo, December 30).

■ Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak said that Egypt was at a loss because some of the pilgrims were bringing back forbidden things (possibly a reference to cash for Hamas). He added that to open the Rafah Crossing there had to be Egyptian, European and Palestinian representatives. However, he said, the European representative refused to go to the crossing (Al-Jazeera TV, December 30). [Note: Egypt finally opened the Rafah Crossing and allowed the pilgrims into the Gaza Strip as of January 2. That was done in express violation of a crossing agreement to which Egypt is a party].



**Demonstrations in support of the families of the pilgrims on the Palestinian side of the Rafah Crossing (Al-Jazeera TV, December 29).**



## Notice to our readers

As of the beginning of 2008 our Bulletins **will appear weekly**. That will be done to better cover the wealth of events and to keep the bulletins more up-to-date. The statistical data will appear at the beginning of every month.

Yours sincerely,

The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center staff