

## Political

### *update:* Hamas since the ceasefire - 23 October

#### **Key points:**

- Hamas has fired 40 rockets and mortars at Israel since the ceasefire of 19 June began
  - Hamas is breaking its ceasefire obligations by training militants, stockpiling weapons, smuggling weapons imprisoning Gilad Shalit
  - Egypt continues to close smuggling tunnels and negotiate for Shalit's release
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#### **Latest developments**

- Israel temporarily closed its border crossings with Gaza on Wednesday (22 October) after militants from the Hamas-controlled territory fired a rocket into southern Israel on Tuesday (21 October). An Israeli Defense Ministry official said that the crossings would be closed from Wednesday morning. The official did not say how long the crossings would remain shut.
- 32 rockets and mortars have been fired into Israel since the beginning of the Egyptian brokered ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza began on 19 June. 8 additional rockets and mortars have been fired from Gaza, but failed to make it across the border. Israel has responded to the attacks by temporarily closing border crossings, usually for two day periods.
- Under the ceasefire agreement, Hamas is obligated to end its weapons smuggling from Egypt, largely carried out through tunnels; stop all of Gaza's military build-up; and make progress in securing the release of the abducted Israeli Defense Force reservist Gilad Shalit, who was kidnapped into Gaza from Israel on 25 June 2006.
- The Haaretz newspaper and Israel's Channel 10 have reported that Hamas, despite the ceasefire agreement, is continuing to train Gaza's youth to carry out acts of terrorism against Israel. Channel 10 has aired footage which shows children in Gaza being indoctrinated in summer camps to hate Israel and the USA, as well as to take pride in Hamas (29 July).
- The BBC has also reported that Islamic Jihad, who accepted the ceasefire, continues to make preparations for a return to hostilities against Israel. Paul Wood of the BBC interviewed a Gazan woman this month who has volunteered to be trained by Islamic Jihad to be a suicide bomber to kill either Israeli soldiers or civilians (13 October).
- Hamas continues to use tunnels under Gaza's border with Egypt to smuggle weapons into the territory to use against Israel. There are around 500 to 800 tunnels under the border town of Rafah and it is estimated that Hamas earns \$20million a month from taxes levied on tunnel owners.
- The tunnels provide employment for 20,000 to 25,000 people who are able to charge up to 150 per cent on their cargos. It has been reported that if Israel were to relax its controls over Gaza's crossings and more goods could come into the territory conventionally, local tunnel owners may sabotage the calm by firing rockets into Israel to defend their profits.
- Egypt destroyed ten smuggling tunnels on 14 October, attributing their recent success in their ability to detect the tunnels as being due to new US supplied equipment.

- Israeli government and security officials have praised the rise in Egyptian law enforcement activity along their border with Gaza, but emphasised that work to thwart smuggling must continue. Egyptian officials emphasised that their recent success does stem not from a change in their motivation, but in the tools provided by the US.
- Since the ceasefire began, Hamas has also continually increased its demands for the release of Gilad Shalit. Israel had already agreed to the release of 250 named Hamas militants when Hamas submitted a further list of 450 militants in July. An additional 200 names from this list have since been approved for release, although Hamas' demands have now risen to 1,400 (13 October).
- Egypt continues to mediate talks between Hamas and Fatah to broker their reconciliation within the Palestinian Authority, the deployment of Arab troops in the Gaza Strip and the release of Gilad Shalit. Fatah and Hamas have agreed to meet in Egypt on 25 October and also to hold "national dialogue" talks on 9 November to this end.

### **Background**

- Around 3,500 rockets and mortars have been fired from Gaza into Israel since Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in June 2007.
- The ceasefire between Hamas and Israel began on 19 June and was agreed on for a six-month period.
- According to the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC) report Hamas has significantly increased the size of its forces since it took over the Gaza Strip in June 2007, which it estimated in April to be at 20,000 armed militants. The ITIC report also states that Hamas has reorganised into a more professional and structured military operation and has carried out large-scale training operations in Syria and Iran.
- Since June 2007 Hamas has been able to build up stock piles of advanced weapons, including improved rockets, as well as advanced anti-tank weapons, such as Konkurs and Sagger missiles, acquired from Hezbollah. Hamas has acquired weapons from Iran, Syria and Hezbollah; they have smuggled them from Egypt through tunnels into Gaza; and simple rockets, such as the Qassam, have been produced independently within Gaza.
- Hamas revealed in March that hundreds of its fighters have been trained in Iran. A senior commander interviewed by The Sunday Times said 300 of the group's "best brains" had been secretly sent to Tehran to be trained by Revolutionary Guards to make explosives from everyday items, produce deadlier rockets, train as snipers and learn to use tunnels in attacks on Israeli forces. Seven separate groups of Hamas militants have spent up to six months in Tehran since the training began in 2005. The Hamas commander said "Iran is our mother...she gives us information, military supplies and financial support" (9 March 2008).
- According to the Hamas commander, 650 Hamas fighters have also trained in Syria under Hamas instructors who learnt their techniques in Iran (9 March).