

Hamas' Military Wing in the Gaza Strip: Development, Patterns of Activity, and Forecast

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On December 24, 2008, the Israeli cabinet led by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert authorized the IDF plan to attack the Gaza Strip and to change the security reality in the south of Israel in order to improve the lives of the local population.¹ Three days later, the army embarked on Operation Cast Lead. The operation began with an air strike on Hamas military targets in the Gaza Strip. In two waves of attack involving more than 80 aircraft, the IDF destroyed rocket depots, outposts, training bases, and government centers. This was the start of a continuous, three week long battle, a new climax in the extended struggle between the IDF and Hamas in terms of scope of forces and firepower used by both sides and in terms of the damage to property and harm to people, especially on the Palestinian side.²

In twenty-three days of fighting, the military wing of Hamas, also known as the Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades, suffered an intense blow, the likes of which it had never sustained. According to various estimates, hundreds of its operatives were killed, and many others injured. By contrast, IDF casualties were considerably fewer and challenged the pessimistic scenarios envisioned before the operation.³ Nevertheless, the military wing of Hamas was far from destroyed, and retains enough capabilities – both in terms of armaments and skilled personnel – to challenge the IDF at some future point. The next round of fighting might, in fact, be closer than ever.

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This essay examines Hamas' military wing as a fighting unit with a fixed configuration, and sheds light on its structure and goals, the logic guiding its fighting doctrine, and its patterns of activity. To this end, the essay analyzes the development of Hamas' military wing in 2004-2008 and its transition from a network of terrorist cells to a semi-military hierarchy, and examines its manner of fighting in Operation Cast Lead on the basis of preparations during these years and the movement's sense of its achievements.

2004-2005: Transformation

The year 2004 marked the beginning of the process that transformed Hamas' military wing in the Gaza Strip from a terrorist group to an entity with fixed routines and a military doctrine. The factors that sparked this transformation related both to intra-organizational changes in Hamas and to decisions made by Israel directly impacting on Gaza's future. The targeted assassinations of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and his deputy Abdel Aziz Rantisi in early 2004 strengthened Hamas' outside leadership in Damascus and brought about a closer relationship between the organization and Iran.⁴ Consequently, the military wing in the Gaza Strip, directly subordinate to the outside leadership, began to benefit from significant budgets and professional guidance from Iran's intelligence services and from Hizbollah, Tehran's Lebanese extension. Practical expression first appeared in the form of the establishment of the al-Mourabitoun militia and the placement of Ahmed Jabari, who was to lead Hamas' military wing and become heir to Mohammed Deif at its head. The militia was supposed to form the basis of a people's army, and be a part of preparations for a military confrontation with Fatah over the image of the Palestinian Authority. These trends, which suited Hamas' long term strategy, were accelerated when the Knesset approved the disengagement plan on October 26, 2004, and the Sharon government received the legal imprimatur to carry it out.

Hamas' understanding that Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip was becoming reality, touching off a struggle for its control, accelerated the process of building the force and adopting fighting methods that matched the ethos of resistance and the jihadist identity of the movement. First, the Gaza Strip was divided into six or seven regional divisions responsible for clearly defined sectors. Regiment commanders and company commanders, responsible for smaller areas

such as neighborhoods, operated under the command of every division commander, prepared fortifications, and deployed personnel in prepared positions. Second, the recruitment cycles to the military wing grew, and every regional division numbered on average 1,500 operatives.⁵ Third, the use of tunnels was expanded from their original goal of smuggling arms and operatives, and became the favored means of operating against IDF outposts. Bomb-filled tunnels became a concrete threat and in Hamas' view an effective means of undermining Israel's rule of the Gaza Strip before the disengagement, and of presenting the withdrawal from Gaza as a panicked retreat and true achievement for the resistance.⁶ Fourth, a system for the mass production of Qassam rockets was established throughout the Gaza Strip, including a network of machine and metal shops. Gradually, the range of Qassams was increased, as was their impact force. The smuggling of Grad missiles into the Gaza Strip further improved the quality of arms and brought many Israeli towns and cities within firing range. This is how high trajectory weapons became the long arm of the Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades and the means of punishing Israel for the occasional attacks against its fighters.⁷

Hamas' readiness to establish a security-related calm with Israel in March 2005 suited the movement's plan to run in the local government elections and in the elections for the Legislative Council in order to build political capital.⁸ Further, the insight that armed struggle at the time might impede realization of the disengagement plan helped to lower the level of violence on Hamas' part for a while. Nonetheless, its military wing hardly rested on its laurels. The relative quiet was used by its operatives to build up strength and recruit personnel in the four ways noted above, and as Israel was completing its withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in August-September 2005 the transition from terrorist cells to a hierarchical organization with doctrines of war and military trappings was complete. Thus, Hamas prepared for the day after Israel's evacuation of the Gaza Strip and was ready to begin the violent struggle for control over it.

2006-2008: Consolidation

Early 2006 was a period for Hamas to realize its gains. Not only was the movement able to stitch together a victory narrative, whereby armed resistance had brought about the withdrawal of the IDF from the Gaza Strip – like the IDF's withdrawal from the security zone in southern

Lebanon in May 2000 – but it also succeeded in translating this into political support and the backing of the masses. On January 26, 2006, the movement swept the elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council, and gained 74 of the 132 seats.⁹ Two months later, a government headed by Ismail Haniyeh, composed entirely of Hamas members, was established and the movement became the ruling party. This development helped sustain the ongoing growth of the military wing until it became an entity overshadowing the Palestinian Authority's security mechanisms. Not only was a new militia, the Operational Force, established alongside the Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades, with Hamas boasting thousands more armed men wearing the blue of the police force,¹⁰ but it was also possible to expand the smuggling in the Rafah tunnels and the rocket production lines virtually without any interference, especially in light of Israel's withdrawal from the Philadelphi axis and the absence of continuous oversight of the corridor.

However, once Hamas became the dominant political force in Palestinian society, the strength of its military wing was measured not only by the growth of its ranks and its ability to maintain military tension with Israel, but also by its functioning as the mainstay of governance in the Gaza Strip. Despite the swearing-in of the Haniyeh government, Fatah did not come to terms with losing its centers of power to Hamas, and consistently undermined its base. Therefore, the Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades turned into the Hamas government's gatekeepers in everything relating to the Gaza Strip, and helped the Operational Force handle instances of anarchy and suppress revolt and political subversion. Thus the survivability of the regime, led by the local leadership in the Gaza Strip, came to depend on the effectiveness of the military wing, which obeyed the non-local leadership in Damascus, from which it received financing, arms, and guidance.

More than once the military wing, a group subordinate to the members of Hamas' political bureau – the supreme leadership of the movement, residing abroad – acted against the interests of the local Gaza leadership and demonstrated its own independent stance, imposing a different political reality. The kidnapping of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit on June 25, 2006 was but a prominent example. While release of prisoners was seen as a universal goal in Palestinian society and the action garnered much public support, the blows absorbed by Hamas

in a series of operations undertaken by the Israeli army under the code name Summer Rain between June 28 and November 26, 2006 made it difficult for the Haniyeh government to rule effectively. The violent struggle in the streets of Gaza with the Abu Mazen loyalists and Fatah members escalated. These confrontations continued into 2007, reaching a climax in May-June, with Abu Mazen's decision to deploy the security services subordinate to him throughout the Gaza Strip against Hamas' wishes. Hamas' military wing came to an independent resolution, and in a well-orchestrated move defeated the PA security services, superior in numbers and equipment, through intensive use of exploding tunnels dug underneath Fatah command centers in the Gaza Strip. The takeover of the command center for preventive security in Tel al-Hawah by the Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades on June 14, 2007 sealed the fate of PA rule, led by Abu Mazen, over the Gaza Strip. Hamas control in the Gaza Strip became entrenched.¹¹ With the elimination of two clan-based power centers – the Hilles family (August 2008)¹² and the Durmouh family (September 2008)¹³ – Hamas' rule of Gaza became incontestable, and its military wing became the strongest institution in the Strip.

Hamas Warfare: From Doctrine to Practice

While Hamas' military wing retained its role as the guardian of Hamas' exclusive rule of the Gaza Strip against internal threats, it did not abandon its original objective as a fighting body and prepared to withstand external threats as well, such as an Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip. Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, the ability to leave and enter the Gaza Strip with relative freedom, and the expansion of smuggling activities to a full scale industry under the aegis of Haniyeh's government gave new dimensions to the force buildup of the Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Hundreds of activists left Gaza and underwent advanced training in Iran, Syria, and Lebanon, training that included gathering intelligence, establishing camouflage, constructing sophisticated explosive charges, and operating advanced anti-tank missiles. Furthermore, thousands of new recruits underwent training in the Gaza Strip itself, including training on lightweight weapons and anti-tank missiles such as RPGs and the Yassin (a Hamas-manufactured missile), field training, and laying explosives.¹⁴

More than anything else, the Second Lebanon War in the summer of 2006 and Hizbollah's success in standing up to the Israeli army for 34 days

energized Hamas' military wing to upgrade its capabilities. Hizbollah's patterns of action became a model for Hamas and a symbol of how to conduct asymmetrical warfare while taking advantage of the conditions on the ground and the enemy's weaknesses.¹⁵

On the basis of lessons learned, Hamas' military wing developed a multi-tiered defense concept. First, Hamas distinguished the advantages of the underground spaces, like Hizbollah's "nature reserve" model in Lebanon. Not only was effective use of the tunnels able to neutralize the superiority of Israel's air force to a certain extent, but it also turned out to be an effective defensive system for expanding the stamina of Hamas' military wing as a fighting body and a means for the survival of its operatives. The scattering of rocket stores deep in the ground in every regional division also served this goal.¹⁶

Second, Hamas understood that exhausting the Israeli home front with standoff fire and suspending normal civilian life for an extended amount of time until the last day of the battle, as happened in the Second Lebanon War, was enough to detract from Israel's military achievement and become a source of frustration and feeling that the IDF had not met public expectations. Therefore, the military wing worked hard to formulate an orderly fire program in conjunction with tight operational discipline, aimed at launching measured but continuous barrages at Israeli targets, which would continue to operate even if some of the better-known launching regions in the north of the Gaza Strip were to be captured, using the crowded urban space in Gaza City and the refugee camps on its outskirts.¹⁷

Third, Hamas' military wing strove to take a costly human toll of the IDF, while dragging the army deep into the urban landscape where Israeli soldiers would encounter booby traps, mine pits, sniper fire, suicide terrorists, and so on. Knowing Israel's sensitivity to casualties among soldiers, Hamas felt that a large number of fatalities among Israeli men in uniform would shorten the duration of the fighting, hurt morale, and leave a bitter taste of failure.¹⁸

Fourth, Hamas' military wing prepared to create "surprises" during fighting in order to upset Israeli society's equilibrium and create an effect whose psychological value would of necessity be greater than its direct operational importance. In addition to the terminology copied directly from Hizbollah, Hamas' thinking was based on the desire to display IDF ineptitude, shout its failures from the rooftops, and create public

pressure to stop any future battle before its goals had been achieved. As such, Hamas' military wing would be able to present a victory in a series of isolated incidents, which to its thinking would constitute a decision in its favor.

Fifth, in light of the IDF's intelligence capabilities, especially the targeted assassinations, Hamas' military wing made a major point of integrating into the local population. Hamas became an amorphous, elusive, hard to find enemy, in order to reduce the number of casualties and retain survivability of its forces. Hamas understood that in light of the IDF's qualitative superiority, it was necessary to act in small frameworks, at the level of cells, in a hit-and-run fashion. That is to say, the quantitative force used against internal enemies is not analogous to what is needed to withstand an external enemy enjoying technological superiority and far greater force. In addition, integrating into the local population had the potential of the IDF killing masses of uninvolved people unintentionally. Such an incident, like the attack on Kafr Qana both during Operation Grapes of Wrath in 1996 and in the Second Lebanon War a decade later, would likely result in a lull, if not a complete halt of the battle. As far as the military wing was concerned, not only would the IDF's image as a moral army be tarnished, but international pressure would impose a result that would necessarily benefit Hamas and minimize any Israel achievements until that point in time.

As Hamas' military wing rallied from the opening assault of Operation Cast Lead, its operatives tried to apply the principles of action underlying its defensive plans for the Gaza Strip. In general, Hamas fighters took off their uniforms, blended into the civilian population and turned them into unwilling human shields, and avoided direct friction with the IDF in the open areas that extend to the outskirts of the urban areas.¹⁹ Other than sniper fire, Hamas fire at the IDF originated from afar and involved the use of mortar bombs, ready-to-operate explosive devices laid along travel routes and in booby-trapped houses, and anti-tank fire such as RPGs and Yassins.²⁰ Hamas' military wing sought to drag the IDF deep into the urban area, canceling out some of its advantages, and at the same time tried to create tactical surprises that would have changed the cost in human lives and thereby, perhaps, also the face of the battle as a whole. Hamas fighters moved through the underground tunnels in attempts to strike at Israeli army forces from the home front and in at least one

instance were close to kidnapping a soldier by forcing him into their network of tunnels and from there to a secure location.²¹

While fewer rockets were fired at Israel than anticipated (prior estimates were 100-200 per every 24-hour period²²), this cannot necessarily be attributed to the air force's attacks on munitions stores and launching sites; rather, this is evidence of the orderly logic of the enemy's methodology. Apparently in the course of the fighting, Hamas calculated that it was enough to fire a few long range rockets towards Beer Sheva or Ofakim in the east, and towards Ashdod or Yavne in the north, in order to derail the routine of life in southern Israel.²³ Pursuing this sparing trend until the last day of fighting is evidence of operational discipline, a well-planned fire program, and the desire to extend the duration of the fighting while maintaining operative survivability at the same time as contesting the achievements of the IDF.²⁴ The steady, unceasing drip of rockets, despite the IDF's presence in the northern part of the Gaza Strip and its siege of Gaza City, also proved that Hamas had calculatingly deployed its Grad order of battle among its regional divisions and regiments. Thus, the ability to render a decisive blow to Hamas' artillery was denied to Israel, despite blows to key figures such as Iman Ziam, the head of rocket systems in the Gaza Strip, and Amir Mansi, commander of the Gaza City division.²⁵ Hamas thus sent a clear message: without conquering all of the Gaza Strip, which Israel wanted to avoid if only because it was incompatible with the political hourglass, it would be impossible to end the fire.

In reality, Hamas' plan achieved its goals only partially, though this was enough to give its military wing the sense of victory. Although hundreds of activists were killed despite integrating into the population, they represented a small percentage of Hamas' fighting forces.²⁶ Dozens of people killed were not organizationally affiliated with Hamas but with other groups such as Islamic Jihad and the Popular Resistance.²⁷ Further, the senior command echelon of Hamas' military wing, headed by Ahmed Jabari and the division and regiment commanders beneath him, was hardly touched. That is to say, Hamas retained its military force in a way that allowed it to continue to control the Gaza Strip and to renew the confrontation with Israel at any given time.²⁸

While the use of civilians as human shields in Gaza caused a high fatality rate of uninvolved individuals, this did not stop Israel from

continuing its military operation. Even the isolated incident of a strike near the UNRWA al-Fahoura School in Gaza on January 6, 2009, in which 42 civilians were killed, did not, in Hamas' view, achieve the effect that the incident at Kafr Qana did and bring about the end of the operation,. However, the high number of casualties definitely served Hamas the day after in its struggle for local hearts and minds and the fight for Arab and international public opinion.²⁹

Establishing the system of tunnels and bunkers in the heart of the urban space of Gaza City and its outskirts provided Hamas with hiding places. Nevertheless, the movement's political leadership did not manage to escape the threat of targeted assassinations completely. On December 31, 2008, the IDF managed to kill Nizar Rayan, a member of Hamas' political leadership and a senior religious authority, and on January 15, 2009 killed Said Siam, the Hamas government minister of the interior. The two were part of the starting five of Hamas' leadership in the Gaza Strip, and together with the death of Salah Abu Sharkh, the head of Hamas' interior security service, the Israeli military earned intelligence and operational gains.³⁰ Still, at the end of the battle most of Hamas' leadership remained intact and its hold on the Gaza Strip was as strong as ever. This also was enough to be interpreted as a victory and proof that aerial and intelligence capabilities, as successful as they may be, are not enough to cause the movement to collapse.³¹

Hamas' military wing did not succeed in exacting a costly human toll from the IDF, and failed in creating tactical surprises. In general, its fighters avoided frontal confrontations with the IDF and fled into the constructed interior while leaving much military equipment behind. However, in the eyes of Hamas, it was enough that the IDF avoided entering the crowded refugee camps to conclude that it had created a kind of deterrence.³²

The military wing's ability to maintain the high trajectory fire in a measured and continuous way was, from Hamas' point of view, one of the important achievements of the battle. Not only was the movement's artillery not completely paralyzed despite the duration of the fighting and the IDF's air superiority and its ground maneuver, but it even managed to preserve an orderly plan, showed high operational discipline, and proved that scattering the rocket stores and launchers among the regional divisions withstood the test. In addition, it was enough that about one

million Israeli civilians were within Hamas' firing range, with disruptions to civilian life, real damage to the economy of the south, and the creation of a threat to strategic assets, such as the port of Ashdod and the air force airfields in the region, especially after Hamas shot the last shot of the war in order to win a few extra points.

Conclusion

Operation Cast Lead dealt a hard though not fatal blow to Hamas' military wing. Despite the IDF firepower and Hamas' many casualties, the last round of fighting actually indicates the long way the military wing has come, from being terrorist cells loosely held together in a hierarchical system to a fighting force with a fixed configuration and a fighting doctrine. Its capability of maintaining its force to a great extent even after 23 days of continuous fighting against the might of the Israeli armed forces, even though Hamas did not manage to take the human toll it had expected, demonstrated the amount of thought and effort the movement had invested over the years, both into building the force and into its mode of operation. Thus, one must not doubt the military wing's capacity to learn lessons for the future from the last confrontation, replenish its ranks, and grow stronger in a way that will improve its capabilities. Therefore, rather than viewing Operation Cast Lead as an Israeli success in reasserting its deterrence, additional attention must be paid to the warning light that has emerged in its wake. While Israel may have won the battle, it is still far from winning the war.

Notes

- 1 Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's statement in a press briefing about the operation in Gaza. For the full statement, see <http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMO/Communication/PMSpeaks/speechgaza271208.htm>.
- 2 Amir Bouhbout and Amit Cohen, "Shock Therapy," *Maariv*, December 28, 2008; Amos Harel, "Most Hamas Bases Destroyed in Under 4 Minutes," *Haaretz*, December 28, 2008.
- 3 As early as December 2007, the IDF estimated – in an assessment that was given to the prime minister – that in a widespread ground maneuver in the Gaza Strip Israel might suffer over one hundred dead. See Amir Rapaport and Amit Cohen, "Talking and Shooting," *Maariv*, December 12, 2007.
- 4 For the development of the relationship between Hamas and Iran, see Guy Aviad, *The Hamas Lexicon* (Tel Aviv: Maarachot, 2008), pp. 46-50.

- 5 Amir Bouhbout, "Senior Officer: We Can't Stop Hamas Rearming," *Maariv*, July 20, 2007; Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center – Center for Intelligence Heritage, "The Process of Hamas' Growth in Strength in the Gaza Strip," April 2008, http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/Hebrew/heb_n/pdf/hamas_080408h.pdf.
- 6 Eitan Yitzhak, "Under the Ground," *Maarachot*, No. 422, December 2008, p. 20.
- 7 Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center – Center for Intelligence Heritage, "The Gaza Strip Rocket Threat 2000-2007," December 2007, http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/Hebrew/heb_n/html/rocket_threat.htm.
- 8 The agreement about a period of calm was achieved in the Cairo talks in March 2005 between Fatah and Hamas with Egypt's mediation, without Israel being a party to it. It was established that the calm would be imposed for a limited time and would be conditional on Israel's conduct, i.e., any violation on Israel's part, from Hamas' perspective, would be met with a measured response by the organization. Moreover, Hamas committed itself not to use violence on the intra-Palestinian front and to participate in government institutions – the local government and the Legislative Council.
- 9 Aside from the fact that the achievement expressed a protest vote in the territories as a sign of the revulsion with the corruption of the Palestinian Authority and disappointment with its political path, the split in the Fatah lists and their candidates running as independents in the various districts also contributed to Hamas' victory. For more on the results of the elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council, see the website of the Central Elections Committee at www.elections.ps.
- 10 It was Said Siam, the Hamas government interior minister, who in April 2006 established the operational force as part of a Hamas attempt to root out the phenomenon of anarchy in the Gaza Strip and be a counterweight to the security services subordinate to President Abu Mazen. Jamil Jarah headed the operational force of thousands of armed men, some of whom were simultaneously also serving in the Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades – the Hamas military wing.
- 11 For more about the confrontations between Fatah and Hamas in the Gaza Strip in 2006-2007, see Jonathan Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah: The Struggle for Palestine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 95-119; C. Jacob, "Escalation in Fatah-Hamas Conflict," MEMRI, *Inquiry and Analysis*, No. 316, January 23, 2007, <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=palestinian&ID=IA31607>.
- 12 Amos Harel, Avi Issacharoff, and Yuval Azulay, "Dead in Gaza Fighting, Hundreds Flee to Israel," *Haaretz*, August 3, 2008; Ali Wakad, "Battle Day: Hamas Defeats Clan Identified with Fatah," www.ynet.co.il, August 2, 2008.
- 13 Avi Issacharoff, "11 Dead, Also Children, in Battles between Hamas and Members of Durmouh Clan in Gaza," *Haaretz*, September 17, 2008.

- 14 Taken from an interview with GOC Southern Command Yoav Gallant. Ben Caspit, "We Now Have a Little Hizbollah on the Southern Fence," *Maariv*, September 29, 2008; Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center – Center for Intelligence Heritage, "The Process of Hamas' Growth in Strength in the Gaza Strip," April 2008, http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/Hebrew/heb_n/pdf/hamas_080408h.pdf.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Yitzhak, "Under the Ground," pp. 20-22.
- 17 Avi Issacharoff, "Sources in Gaza: Hamas Fighters Hiding Under Populated Neighborhoods," *Haaretz*, January 6, 2009.
- 18 Alex Fishman, "Tragedy on the Road to Settlement," *Yediot Ahronot*, January 7, 2009.
- 19 Yossi Yehoshua and Alex Fishman, "Shelter for Hamas High Command: Under Sick Children," *Yediot Ahronot*, January 7, 2009.
- 20 Amir Bouhbout, "Inside the Gaza Strip," *Maariv*, January 7, 2009; Alex Fishman, "Not Such a Big Deal," *Yediot Ahronot*, January 30, 2009.
- 21 On January 4, 2009, a Hamas cell moving through the tunnels on the eastern outskirts of Gaza City tried to kidnap a soldier from the Golani Brigade operating in the area. The attempt was foiled. Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, "Hamas Attempt to Kidnap IDF Soldier Foiled," *Haaretz*, January 5, 2009.
- 22 Ben Caspit, "Playing from Weekend to Weekend," *Maariv*, January 2, 2009.
- 23 Ashdod took its first hit on December 29, 2008, and Beer Sheva came into range the next day. From a systematic examination of the map of hits during Operation Cast Lead and announcements made by Hamas' military wing, it would seem that on most days Hamas' artillery made a point of shooting at least two long range rockets both to the east (Beer Sheva, Ofakim, and Netivot) and the north (Ashkelon, Ashdod, Yavne, and the Gderot Regional Council). Moreover, based on statistics published by the Izz a-Din al-Qassam Brigades at the end of the fighting, 213 Grad missiles were fired at targets in the 20-40 km range. Some 92 were fired eastwards and some 104 northwards, i.e., symmetry was maintained between the two regions in a way that paralyzed the entire spectrum of communities in the south by an average steady drip of five missiles to the north and four to the east for every day of the operation, http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/special_files/forqan/hassad_alqassam.doc.
- 24 In a survey given by Brig. Gen. Yossi Baidetz, head of Research at Military Intelligence, before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on January 5, 2009, it was stated that the decrease in scope of the firing was tactical and that the organization had the capacity to launch rockets into the depth of Israel for weeks. Arik Bender, "Military Intelligence: Hamas Has Enough Missiles and Rockets for Another Month," *Maariv*, January 6, 2009; Ofer Shelah, "He Knows How to Take It," *Maariv*, January 9, 2009.
- 25 Diary of Events – Cast Lead, of January 4, 2009, at the website of the General Security Services at <http://www.shabak.gov.il/publications/oferet/Pages/>

- oferet-yoman.aspx; Hanan Greenberg, "The IDF: Commander of Rocket System in Gaza City Eliminated," www.ynet.co.il, January 10, 2009; Amir Bouhbout and Amit Cohen, "IDF Force Eliminates Head of Rocket System," *Maariv*, January 11, 2009.
- 26 At the end of the battle in Gaza, Hamas' military wing claimed that only 48 of its operatives were killed in the fighting. At the same time, the spokesman for the Gaza Ministry of Interior, Ihab al-Routzin, stated that 300 activists subordinate to the ministry, headed by Minister Said Siam, were killed in battle, of them 230 policemen and 50 from the security services, <http://www.alqassam/ps/english/?action=showsta&sid=1309>, and <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=45037&SecID=451>.
- 27 At the end of Operation Cast Lead, the Jerusalem Brigades, the Islamic Jihad military wing, stated that 39 of its activists had been killed in the fighting in Gaza, www.paltoday.com/arabic/Tools.php?act=PrintPage&id=34535; the Salah a-Din Division, the military wing of the Popular Resistance Councils, stated that 15 of its activists had been killed in the battle in Gaza, www.moqawmh.com/ara/index.php?act=News&id=2584.
- 28 Amir Bouhbout, " Hamas Chief of Staff Commanding from the Bunker," *Maariv*, January 8, 2009.
- 29 Amos Gilboa, " Hamas' Victory Laurels," *Maariv*, January 26, 2009.
- 30 Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, " IDF Assassinate Senior Hamas Official in Gaza Strip," *Haaretz*, January 2, 2009; Yossi Yehoshua and Roni Shaked, " Assassination at the Top," *Yediot Ahronot*, January 2, 2009; Avi Issacharoff and Anshel Pfeffer, " IDF Assassinate Senior Hamas Official in Gaza," *Haaretz*, January 16, 2009; Ron Ben-Yishai, " Assassination of Siam – Part of IDF 'Picture of Victory,'" www.ynet.co.il, January 16, 2009.
- 31 A short time after the fighting died down, senior Hamas personnel, including Ismail Haniyeh, Halil al-Haya and Moushir al-Mitzri, emerged from their hiding places and surveyed the ruins of Gaza. In early February, Mahmoud al-Zahar even left Gaza for talks in Cairo, and thus refuted the rumors that he had been wounded or had fled to el-Arish.
- 32 In an interview that Col. Herzl Halevy, Paratroopers Division Commander, granted after the operation, he said: "The intensity with which we entered reduced the number of casualties... The force we applied in the attack did not let them use the means they were most prepared for... We came at them from unexpected directions and with such intensity that the terrorists did not stay behind to set off the booby traps they had prepared for us.... The terrorists who took over the homes abandoned by civilians left behind explosives with connected wires running and ready to operate, ready to launch RPGs, rifles on the floor. Just like real arms depots. But the intensity with which we entered drove them off. They did not stick around to make use of it." See Yossi Yehoshua and Reuven Weiss, "So I Have No Dilemma," *Yediot Ahronot*, January 23, 2009.