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Alarming Threat: Hamas Amassing Weapons in Gaza

Since Hamas' takeover of Gaza in June, it has tried to replicate Hizballah's example in southern Lebanon by upgrading and expanding its offensive military capabilities. The terrorist group is amassing tons of increasingly advanced explosives and weaponry, carrying out rocket attacks and preparing for wider-scale future operations. Israel continues to demonstrate extreme restraint, but may be forced to take additional measures to forestall the growing threat posed to its citizens.

Terrorists Continue Attacks Despite Israel's Withdrawal

Since Israel fully withdrew from Gaza in the summer of 2005, Hamas and other terrorist groups have turned the territory into a terrorist headquarters, planning and launching attacks and using the border with Egypt to smuggle in tons of explosives and weapons. During the past two years, terrorists fired more than 2,000 Qassam rockets into Israel. With support from Iran and Syria, Hamas has also



An Israeli man sits in his living room after it was hit by a rocket fired by terrorists in Gaza.

increased the range and efficiency of the rockets, which have been used to target Israeli towns such as Sderot as well as key strategic facilities such as the Rutenberg power plant in Ashkelon, which supplies a quarter of Israel's electricity.

Hamas and other terrorist groups have used Israel's evacuated settlements—intended to facilitate Palestinian housing, farming, industry and tourism—to build terrorist training camps. The former settlements along Gaza's northern border have become launching pads for daily Qassam rocket attacks into Israel. Indeed, since Hamas' takeover of Gaza in June, more than 1,000

mortar rounds and 500 rockets have struck inside Israel. In September alone, 186 mortal shells and 70 rockets were fired from the territory. In addition to the crude Qassam rockets, terrorists have used more sophisticated weapons, including a longer-range Katyusha rocket fired into Israel in early October.

Gaza Border with Egypt Used to Smuggle Weapons, Cash

In the aftermath of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, the border between Gaza and Egypt became an increasingly open conduit for weapons, cash, drugs and the movement of terrorists. In November 2005, Israel, the PA and Egypt—with the assistance of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice—negotiated an agreement to control the border and stem what was already a booming smuggling industry.

Under the agreement, the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt was opened—under the supervision of the European Union—to allow Gaza residents to enter and exit the area. Egypt was expected to increase its efforts to interdict smugglers before they could reach Gaza. Israel even

withdrew its forces from the Israeli-Egyptian border on the promise of international assurances that the border would be monitored. Unfortunately, such international assurances have, once again, proven unreliable.

Hamas has used the Rafah crossing to smuggle into Gaza tens of millions of dollars from Iran and other Muslim states. Dozens of known Hamas terrorists have entered Gaza through the crossing since its opening, while elements of al-Qaeda are suspected of crossing into Gaza as well. Terrorists also have used the border to cross into Egypt and then into Israel through the porous Israeli-Egyptian border. In January 2007, a suicide bomber did just that, killing three people in a bakery in the southern Israeli city of Eilat.

Israeli security officials have estimated that terrorists from Hamas and other groups have smuggled in hundreds of shoulder-fired RPG anti-tank missiles, thousands of assault rifles, millions of bullets, tons of high-quality explosives and a dozen anti-aircraft missiles. In addition, the production and quality of “homemade” arms such as Qassam rockets and mortars have advanced at an equally alarming rate. Israeli officials have said Hizballah is directly involved in the transfer of such materials and expertise to the Palestinian groups, which have reportedly sent their members for training in Iran. Meanwhile, Palestinian terrorists are currently digging at least 10 tunnels from Gaza under the security fence into Israel in an effort to infiltrate and carry out attacks inside the Jewish state.



An Israeli soldier examines a tunnel along the Gaza-Egypt border.

Unfortunately, the Hamas’ arms buildup and construction of fortified bunkers in Gaza reflect preparations by it and other terrorist groups to launch major operations against Israel and to defend against possible Israeli countermeasures. This was the model followed by Hizballah for years in southern Lebanon before it launched a major attack into northern Israel last summer.

While Israel has taken limited measures to try to prevent the daily attacks on the communities near the border with Gaza, it may be forced to take additional steps to forestall the growing threat posed to its citizens.

TERRORIST BUILDUP IN THE GAZA STRIP



Since Israel's Full Withdrawal in 2005



LEGEND

SCALE

0 5 mi.



Rocket Attacks

Northern Gaza is being used to fire rockets at Israeli towns and cities.



Attacks On Crossings

The Karni and Kerem Shalom Crossings have been the scenes of numerous attacks on Israelis.



Terror Training Camps

Former Israeli settlements are now being used as terrorist training camps.



Tunneling into Israel

Tunnels are being built in order to infiltrate Israel and carry out attacks.



Cash Smuggling

The Rafah Crossing has been used by Hamas to smuggle in tens of millions of dollars.



Weapons Smuggling

Terrorists have used tunnels and sea routes to smuggle in massive amounts of weapons.

This map is for illustrative purposes only and does not imply any view regarding future agreements between Israel and its neighbors.