

MEMO

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Hamas Terrorists Escalate Violence Against Civilians

Hamas has escalated its attacks against Israeli civilians this year, launching some 800 mortars and rockets from Gaza, including longer-range and more destructive Iranian-supplied Katyusha-style rockets that hit Ashkelon for the first time. These attacks illustrate Hamas' increased military capabilities and its efforts to transform itself into a terrorist army like Hizballah in southern Lebanon. Israel, which has demonstrated tremendous restraint in the face of years of attacks, is being forced to take increased steps to defend its citizens from such wanton violence.

Hamas is using longer-range and more destructive weaponry as part of its escalation in rocket attacks against Israeli civilians.

- For the first time, Hamas hit Ashkelon, a city of 120,000 people encompassing an area between 6 and 10 miles north of Gaza, with more than 20 longer-range rockets capable of carrying more explosives than the crude Qassam rockets.
- Since the beginning of 2008, some 800 rockets and mortars fired from Gaza have landed in Israeli towns and villages, injuring dozens and killing a 47-year-old father of four on Feb. 27.
- Children are increasingly falling victim to Hamas' indiscriminate attacks. An eight-year-old boy recently lost his leg after a rocket struck his home in Sderot, while two Israeli girls playing outside their home were injured by a rocket attack last month.
- Since Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, some 4,000 rockets and mortars fired from Gaza have landed in Israeli towns and villages.



Hamas for the first time hit an apartment building in Ashkelon with longer-range and more destructive Katyusha-style rockets.

Hamas' use of longer-range rockets poses a grave danger to major Israeli population centers and key strategic facilities.

- Hamas' use of longer-range, Iranian-supplied rockets, places more than 250,000 Israelis living in southern cities, such as Ashkelon, within striking range. For the first time, Israel has activated its rocket warning system in Ashkelon due to the increased threat.

- Dozens of strategic facilities in Israel are threatened by the longer-range Katyusha-style rockets. Hamas is now capable of hitting the Ashkelon desalination plant, which provides up to 15 percent of the country's water supply.
- Hamas also can hit the Rutenberg power plant in southern Ashkelon, which has repeatedly come under attack. The plant supplies not only a quarter of Israel's electricity, but more than half of Gaza's power supply.

Hamas continues to increase its rocket and other weapons capabilities by smuggling technology into Gaza from Egypt.

- Hamas has doubled the range of its rocket capabilities. The crude Qassam rockets have a range of four to five miles, while the longer-range weapons can reach targets more than 10 miles away.
- Hamas terrorists are now using underground Qassam launch silos to make finding and destroying the launchers more difficult. The launcher, similar to those used by Hizballah, can also be operated by remote control.
- With assistance from Iran, according to Israeli security officials, Hamas has developed special rockets that can be broken down into small parts to make it easier to smuggle into Gaza. The rockets can easily be reassembled to launch attacks against Israel.
- Hamas is using advanced propellants—smuggled into Gaza during the recent destruction of the border wall with Egypt—allowing rockets to be stockpiled for longer durations and terrorists to fire large number of rockets in a single barrage.
- In addition to increasing its rocket capabilities, Hamas has smuggled into Gaza from Egypt shoulder-fired RPG anti-tank missiles, assault rifles, high-quality explosives and anti-aircraft missiles, according to Israeli security officials.

Israel has demonstrated tremendous restraint in the face of continuing attacks, but is being forced to take increased action to defend its citizens.

- Israel has demonstrated extreme restraint in the face of ongoing rocket attacks. However, like every other sovereign nation, Israel has the right and duty to defend its citizens from terror attacks.
- Israel's military response has been carefully calibrated to reduce rocket fire and ensure the safety of Israeli citizens while at the same time making every effort to limit Palestinian civilian casualties.
- Israel's actions have targeted Hamas operation centers, Palestinian rocket-launching devices and vehicles carrying Qassam rockets and armed terrorists. Terrorists have deliberately launched rockets from densely populated areas in order to complicate Israel's efforts to respond to the attacks.
- While Israel is facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza, it needs to take precautions in the face of continuing violence. IDF forces recently discovered more than two tons of fertilizer, which is used to construct explosives, in a humanitarian aid truck bound for Gaza.