



# Middle East Spotlight

## One Tough Town

“We are living in a war zone,” Chava Gad told Reuters news service. Ms. Gad is a 42-year-old resident of the little Southern Israeli town of Sderot – population about 17,000 down from 24,000 just two years ago.

An average of more than six times daily, the air-raid sirens give Ms. Gad just 15 seconds to get herself and her nine-year-old son into a bomb shelter before the Qassam rocket – a crude, unguided missile fired by terrorists in the Gaza Strip – strikes.

A recent study showed that anywhere between 75 and 90 percent of all children in Sderot suffer symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. One of these children is Ms. Gad’s son, who cannot sleep alone and is, on an almost daily basis, so afraid that he soils himself.

Since Hamas violently took control of Gaza in June of 2007, the terrorist group has intensified its rocket attacks into Israel. More than 2000 rockets have been fired at Sderot and other communities. The barrage occurs several times every day and is a constant threat to innocent civilians. Recently, daily bombardments have seen occasional spikes from the usual six or seven rockets to 30 or 40 rockets in a single day.

In order to continue the attacks, Hamas has turned Gaza into an armed camp by tunneling under the Egyptian border and smuggling arms and explosives. Hamas has smuggled 70 tons of explosives into the Gaza Strip since June, Yuval Diskin, chief of Israel’s Shin Bet security agency, recently told the Knesset’s Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

Thirteen tunnels between Egypt and Gaza were found by the Israeli army during maneuvers in late October and early November. In addition to weapons and goods smuggling, these tunnels have been used to send Hamas members to Iran for military training.

Hamas has also been shameless about exploiting the good will of Israel and the international community by using humanitarian aid shipments as hiding places for chemicals and other bomb-making materials.

Despite the incessant attacks on Sderot, the indomitable Israeli spirit survives. People are vowing to stay – partly because the economic situation forces them to (home prices have dropped by half and, even if people were willing to take the loss, there are no buyers), but also because they want to stand firm in the face of the threat.

The international community must take a lesson from the strength of the people of Sderot. The world must condemn and isolate Hamas and their benefactors in Iran. And the world must hold the Palestinian Authority to its promise not to have any rapprochement with Hamas.