

WHY ISRAEL IS TAKING OUT THE TUNNELS OF RAFAH

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism-+Obstacle+to+Peace/Terror+Groups/Weapon+Smuggling+Tunnels+in+Rafah+May+2004.htm>

Weapon Smuggling Tunnels in Rafah - Background Material

17 May 2004

The area along the "Philadelphi Route," between the Palestinian and Egyptian towns of Rafah, has been used during recent years as the main pipeline for transporting weapons and ammunition into the Gaza Strip, which are used to carry out terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians and IDF soldiers.



IDF Spokesman presentations: [Rafah tunnels presentation](#) / [Weapons factory and gateway](#)

(Communicated by the IDF Spokesman)

General Background

The Oslo Accords signed in 1994-1995 granted the Palestinian Authority control over most of the Gaza Strip. The agreements specify that the IDF will continue to control a narrow strip between the area under Palestinian control and the border with Egypt, called the "Philadelphi Route." On both sides of the route are the towns of Palestinian Rafah and Egyptian Rafah.

During the ensuing years, the area has been used for smuggling, and rapidly became the main pipeline for transporting weapons and ammunition into the Gaza Strip. The smuggled weapons, which account for the majority of the weaponry in the Gaza Strip, are then used for carrying out terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians and IDF soldiers. Currently, the area is being used for smuggling weapons, drugs, goods and lately, human beings.



Tunnel uncovered along the Philadelphia Route



Entrance to tunnel uncovered in home in Rafah

The City of Rafah

The smuggling business began in Rafah during the 1980's, due to the city's economic condition and geographic location. The smuggling is carried out mainly through tunnels dug under the border – while in the past smuggling took place overland as well.

Parallel to the smuggling industry in the area, the extremist Islamic infrastructure also

developed, which increased the involvement of the residents in terrorist and smuggling activity.

The economic element comprises an important factor in channeling local residents and families into the weapons and ammunition smuggling industry. During this period, a large-scale smuggling industry developed in Rafah.

This industry comprises a primary source of income for entire families, and is the main source of income in the area. Due to the lucrative economic aspects of this industry, a power struggle has been raging between different clans and tribes over control of the smuggling.

I: The Process of Constructing Tunnels

The method of tunnel construction is complex and has evolved numerous times throughout the years. Currently, the construction of tunnels is overseen by Palestinian residents of Rafah who have specialized in this area over the years.

The smugglers in Rafah are now experts in digging tunnels and smuggling weapons. They smugglers transport weapons for terrorist organizations, or for other elements that order firearms in exchange for money, and transfer money to Palestinians and Egyptians who own the house or land while the tunnel is dug.

They are adept at how to avoid detection of the tunnels, thus they build them in residential areas and use small children to construct the tunnels and smuggle the weapons.



How to build a weapon smuggling tunnel

- 1) Locate a landowner who agrees to provide his house for the exit of a tunnel.
- 2) Search for a suitable opening for the tunnel on the Egyptian side. The tunnel opening should be located in a house or within private property, to allow the owner of

the house to cross from one side to the other; to abide by agreements with Egyptian officials; for economic reasons, and to prevent discovery of the tunnel by Egyptian officials.

3) Choosing an engineer: An engineer specializing in the excavation of tunnels is chosen. The engineer mobilizes and recruits individuals to construct the tunnel, and provides electric and hand-held tools for the job.

4) Duration of the excavation: The duration of the excavation may last anywhere from two weeks to two months based on the following conditions:

- The number of workers digging.
- Excavation equipment.
- Depth and length of the tunnel.
- Width of the tunnel.

Instructions for excavating the tunnel:

1) Secrecy: Ensure that the building area of the tunnel construction remains secret. Do not allow members of any other family or clan to discover the tunnel.

2) Work at night: To guarantee that the tunnel is not discovered, and to conceal excavation activity from the IDF.

3) Transporting tunnel material: Transport the sand from the excavation activity away from the site in a vehicle.

Smuggling Methods:

1) Egyptian smugglers leave the merchandise at the entrance to the tunnel and depart.

2) Palestinian smugglers cross to the Egyptian side of the tunnel, and/or load the weapons on a trolley and tow it to the Palestinian side.

3) After the use of the tunnel, the underground passage is concealed to prevent discovery.

II: Activity carried Out by terrorist Organizations and their relationship with the Palestinian Authority

The Hamas

The Hamas terrorist organization utilizes the Rafah area to arm its members throughout the Gaza Strip. This effort is aided by senior Hamas members and terrorist

organizations in various countries – which transport weapons throughout the Gaza Strip via the Rafah tunnels. It also carries out hostile terrorist activity against IDF forces in the area.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

During the current armed conflict, the PFLP has smuggled weapons and explosives to the Gaza Strip. This effort is aided by Iranian officials, as part of Iranian efforts to bolster the Palestinian terrorist infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. Iranian officials have smuggled weapons to the PFLP, and maintain close contact with supporters based in Egypt.

The role of the Palestinian Authority since in the beginning of the current armed conflict

The Palestinian Authority has aided the above-mentioned terrorist activity since the beginning of the current armed conflict. For example, the Palestinian Authority has encouraged residents to conceal tunnels in their homes, which results in the demolition of their houses.

Today, the demolition of a house in which a tunnel has been uncovered, brings with it an ample windfall, as well as the construction of a new house – built of concrete in the neighborhood of Tel-Sultan by the Palestinian Authority. As a result, residents have even begun to construct fictitious tunnels, and spread rumors about tunnels located under their houses in order to receive compensation from the Palestinian Authority after their home is demolished. Thus, the Palestinian Authority encourages the smuggling of weapons into the Gaza Strip.

During the entire cease-fire period, the Palestinian Authority failed to deal with the smuggling of weapons into the Gaza Strip, as it should have. This smuggling, during the cease-fire, served to arm the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip and strengthen the terrorist infrastructure in the area.

Palestinian Authority efforts to re-arm

During the current armed conflict, the Palestinian Authority itself, through the “rearmament network,” has been active in smuggling weapons into the Gaza Strip via tunnels.

Weapons Smuggled into the Gaza Strip since January 2003

Since January 2003 large amounts of diverse weapons have been smuggled into the Gaza Strip, among them:

- Dozens of RPG rockets and launchers
- Hundreds of kilograms of explosives

- Hundreds of rifles (mainly AK-47 Kalashnikovs)
- Tens of thousands of bullets and other ammunition
- Thousands of cartridges
- Efforts are made to smuggle in more advanced kinds of weapons.

III: IDF Activity

During the past year and a half, IDF forces have acted forcefully to prevent smuggling of weapons into the Gaza Strip.

Construction of a physical blockade

In order to create a continuous cover of observation and fire, and as well as a physical blockade, a wall was erected. As part of the wall, the Termit and Hardon outposts were established.

Targeted activity to uncover and demolish tunnels

Since September 2000, the IDF has uncovered and demolished approximately 90 tunnels.

- During 2003, the IDF has uncovered and demolished over 40 tunnels as well as a large number of houses and buildings from where the tunnels emerged.
- Since the beginning of 2004, the IDF has uncovered and demolished 11 tunnels as well as a number of houses and buildings from where the tunnels emerged.

Appendix A: Interview with Palestinian smuggler

On August 10, 2002, the Islamic web portal, "Islam Online," published an interview with an individual named "Honey."

Honey identified himself as an active "expert" in the excavation of clandestine subterranean passages in the Rafah area, and described how he and his friends dug tunnels in which Palestinian terrorist organizations smuggled arms.

Determining the most suitable location for a tunnel

After determining the most suitable location to begin work, engineers survey the ground, which must be of a firm, and not overly sandy consistency. The further the point of origin is from the (Israeli) border, the less chance there is of being caught.

How the tunnels are dug

A pit is dug one meter wide and between twelve to fourteen meters deep. Supports

are placed on the sides of the pit. The pit is dug to a depth of at least twelve meters so that Israeli detection devices cannot detect tunnels at this depth. The tunnel is dug horizontally so that it has a width of forty centimeters by forty centimeters. Every three meters wooden planks are placed alongside the four sides of the tunnels so it doesn't collapse. Various mechanical devices are used to overcome natural obstacles like rock, including a machine that removes sand via suction. An electrical cable is hung in the tunnel to provide lighting.

Security precautions

The work is conducted clandestinely. The sand is not removed all at one time, but is placed in flour bags and transported to a remote location. A lookout is posted at the entrance to the tunnel to ensure that the work continues unimpeded. The completion of one tunnel takes three months or more. The last tunnel we built took three months. The workers who build a tunnel receive a percentage of the profit generated from smuggling weapons.

Between six to twelve meters are dug every day. The last tunnel we dug was two hundred and thirty meters long. At either end of the tunnel there is a "work manager;" the two work managers maintain contact by code, usually via phone. The workers on the Egyptian side direct where the tunnel exit will be. The exit from the Palestinian side is steep (a straight vertical shaft), while it is gradually inclined on the Egyptian side.

Construction of a tunnel costs a minimum of \$10,000. The minimal cost for smuggling weapons is \$300 and the money is split between the five partners for building and maintaining the tunnels.

Smuggling method

If someone is interested in smuggling weapons, he makes a coded request and the workers schedule the date for the smuggling operation. The codes and passwords are transferred via [land-line] phones and cellular phones. The transfer from one side to the other takes between five to ten minutes and is carried out using an engine which pulls a rope.

Smuggling prices

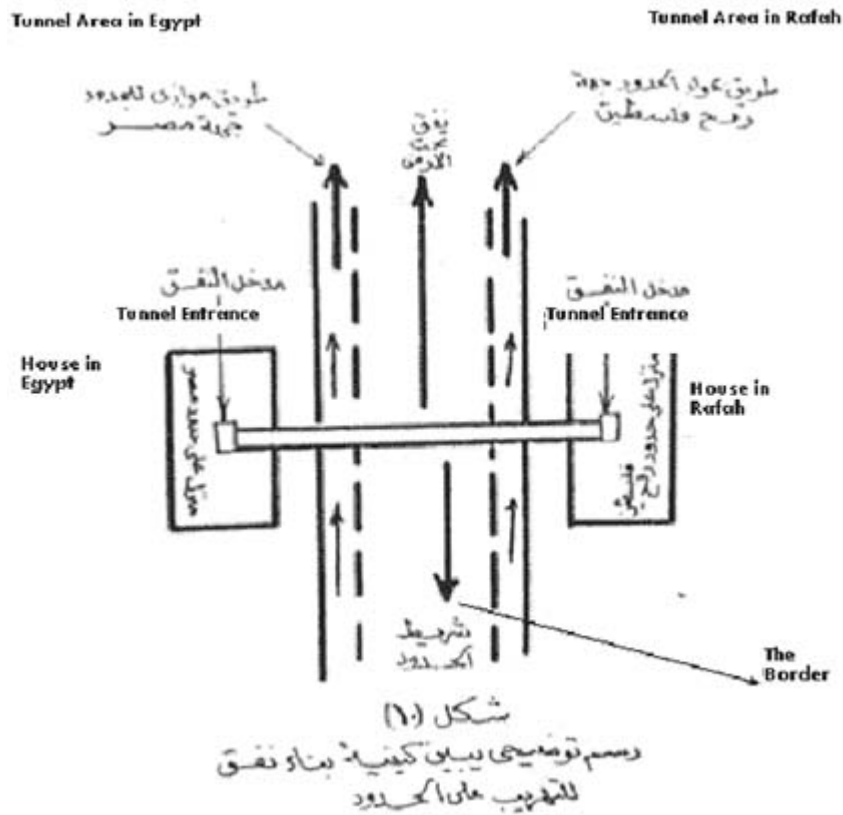
The following prices vary according to location and item.

- Person: \$1,000
- AK-47 assault rifle from Egypt to Gaza: 2,000 Egyptian liras
- AK-47 assault rifle within Gaza: \$1,000
- AK-47 bullet from Egypt to Gaza: 0.5 Egyptian Liras.
- AK-47 bullet within Gaza: \$3

Source of weapons:

Egypt, Iraq, Sudan, and the Salom area in Libya.

Appendix B: Map of seized smuggling plan.



Appendix C: Smuggling tunnels uncovered by the IDF along the Philadephi Route

Total of tunnels uncovered during 2002: 34

Total of tunnels uncovered during 2003: over 40

Total of tunnels uncovered during 2004: 11