



## Operation Protective Edge - Q&A

14 Aug 2014

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**The aftermath of a rocket attack on Ashkelon, July 13, 2014**

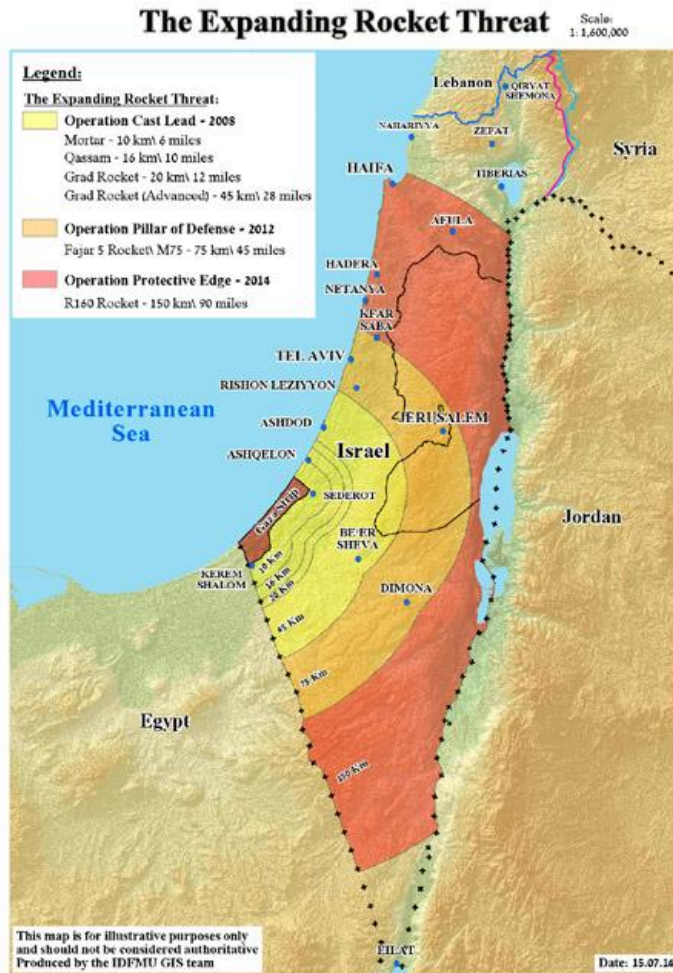
**Copyright: GPO/Kobi Gideon**

- **How did it all start?**

Hamas is a terrorist organization (recognized as such by the EU, US and other democracies) with the declared goal of destroying Israel. In 2007, Hamas violently seized control of the Gaza Strip and transformed it into a terror fortress

Between 12 June and 7 July, Hamas and other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip fired approximately 300 rockets at Israeli civilians. Although Israel showed great restraint and called for the cessation of the rocket attacks, Hamas kept firing indiscriminately at Israeli towns and cities. No country in the world would accept such a reality and Israel is no exception.

After three weeks of restraint in the face of incessant rocket attacks, Israel was left with no alternative but to respond in order to protect its civilian population and restore calm to southern Israel.



- **Does Israel have a legal right to respond to Hamas' attacks?**

[Israel has been acting in self-defense](#) in response to hostilities initiated and prolonged by Hamas. Indeed, Israel's right to self-defense has been stressed time and again by numerous world leaders, including US President Barack Obama, British Prime Minister David Cameron, and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

- **What is Israel's objective?**

The main objective of Operation Protective Edge is to provide the sustained peace and security the citizens of Israel deserve. Israel cannot accept a reality in which millions of its civilians are subject to the whims of a radical Islamist terrorist organization and live under constant threat, with as little as 15 seconds to find shelter from incoming rockets.

Similarly, Israel cannot tolerate the existence of cross-border attack tunnels which could be used at will by terrorists in Gaza to infiltrate Israeli territory in order to murder and kidnap Israeli citizens.

- **What are the objectives of Hamas?**

According to [Hamas' ideology](#), Israel has no place in the world and Hamas' declared goal is the destruction of the Jewish state. This is stated in the organization's covenant: "Hamas strives to

raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine" [meaning all of Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip]. In addition, the organization promotes an antisemitic ideology that glorifies jihad [holy war] and the killing of Jews.

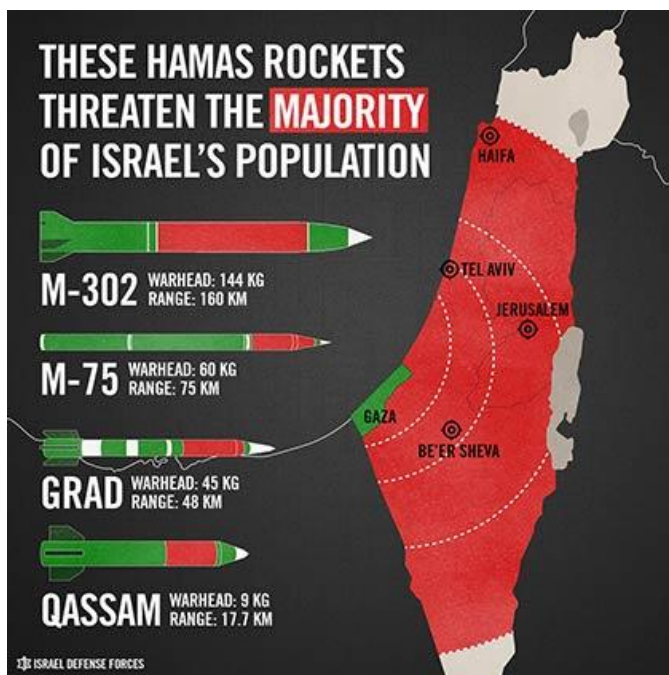
Hamas, like ISIS, is part of a movement that seeks to violently impose Islamist rule devoid of pluralism and basic human rights, especially those of women, minorities and gays. Hamas is similar to other extreme Islamist movements like al-Qaeda, ISIS and Boko Haram in its total intolerance of the presence of non-Muslims in the Middle East. Therefore, it is no surprise that Hamas maintains close operational ties with radical Islamist terrorists in Sinai, including for weapons smuggling, and that it is getting weapons and support from Iran.

- **Why is Hamas shooting rockets at Israeli towns?**

By firing rockets at densely populated areas in Israel, Hamas terrorists are attempting to cause as many civilian deaths as possible. Hamas' indiscriminate rocket fire is consistent with its ideology, which sees Israeli civilian casualties as military successes.

Because of its commitment to the annihilation of Israel, Hamas views every Israeli man, woman and child as a legitimate target of its terrorist attacks by rockets, suicide bombings, murder and abductions.

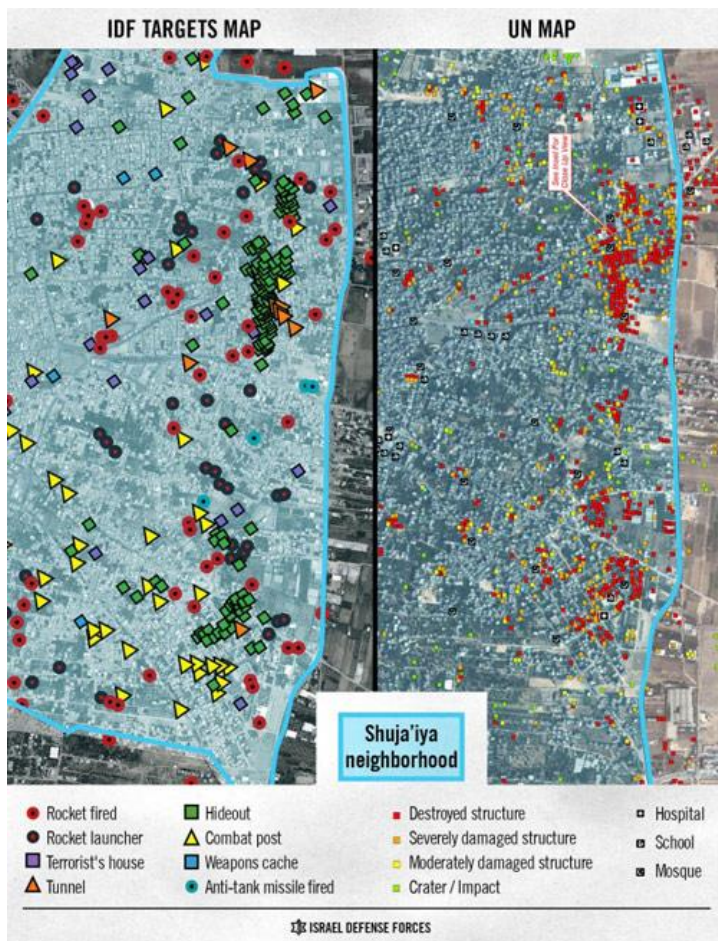
Hamas' tactic of firing rockets at Israeli civilian communities did not end when [Israel left Gaza completely in 2005](#), but rather [intensified](#). In recent years, the Hamas terrorist organization invested heavily in offensive weapons, bringing the number of rockets aimed at Israeli towns to around 12,000.



- **Why have civilians in Gaza been hurt?**

The civilian casualties in Gaza are a direct result of the [Hamas tactic of using the Palestinian civilian population as human shields](#) for its terrorist activities. The placing of rockets, rocket launching pads, weapons caches and tunnel openings in private homes, UNRWA schools,

hospitals and mosques has been well documented, [including by foreign correspondents reporting from Gaza](#). Attacks on Israeli soldiers have also been deliberately launched from within or next to civilian installations in order to draw return fire.



### Shuja'iyah comparison: IDF target map and UN map

In order to increase Palestinian casualties, Hamas' Ministry of the Interior has instructed the residents of Gaza not to heed Israel's warnings about impending attacks. Hamas also urges residents to [actively form human shields](#), thus deliberately exposing them to grave danger.

Hamis is in fact committing a [double war crime](#) by deliberately targeting Israeli civilians while at the same time embedding its weapons, leaders, operatives and infrastructures in the midst of non-involved Palestinian civilians. [Hamis bears full responsibility for the civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip.](#)

At the same time, the data on casualties is usually based on information supplied by the Hamas-controlled Ministry of Health in Gaza and must be taken with more than a grain of salt.

[Independent experts who analyzed the data](#), including a senior BBC expert statistician, have questioned whether the unusually high proportion of men of fighting age among the reported civilian casualties indicates that they were in fact active terrorists.

- **What measures has Israel taken to minimize civilian casualties in Gaza?**

[Israel has done its utmost to reduce to a minimum the harm caused to non-involved civilians in Gaza.](#) It has done so by employing stringent target selection procedures, by [warning residents about impending strikes](#) using phone calls, text messages and leaflets, and by firing warning shots.



**Flyer distributed by the IDF to warn the civilian population of Shuja'iyah before an operation**

Israel has gone to these unprecedented lengths despite significant tactical costs, foregoing operational opportunities and refraining from attacking known terrorist hideouts and weapons caches located in dangerous proximity to civilians.

In this type of asymmetrical confrontation that pits a democratic country like Israel against a murderous terrorist organization like Hamas that embeds itself among the civilian population, there are many operational dilemmas that arise. This is why Israel has been extremely careful to act within the limits of international law and the democratic values by which it is bound.

- **Why have there been fewer Israeli civilians casualties?**

[64 Israeli soldiers lost their lives](#) since 8 July in a military operation aimed at saving Israeli civilians from the rocket threat. Even so, three civilians were killed in rocket and mortar attacks.

The primary reason for the lower number of Israeli casualties despite approximately 3,500 rocket attacks is Israel's defensive measures. Israel has invested huge resources in establishing a two-fold system to protect its citizens against rocket attacks:

1. Israel developed the Iron Dome missile defense system, which throughout this confrontation has provided outstanding protection to Israeli civilians, saving the lives of countless Israeli civilians.
2. Israel constructed a vast infrastructure of shelters and set up an early warning system enabling its civilians to find quick cover when terrorists launch their rockets.

Were it not for the effective deployment of Iron Dome and the shelters, the number of Israeli civilian casualties in this conflict would be very high.

- **Is there a siege on Gaza?**

There is no Israeli "siege" on the Gaza Strip. For four years, all goods - except for weapons and dual-use items which could be used by terrorists - have been allowed into the Gaza Strip. Not only food, medicine, fuel and aid enter freely, but also consumer goods of all types are [transferred daily from Israel to Gaza through the land crossings](#).

Moreover, Gaza shares a border with Egypt in addition to its borders with Israel. It is Egypt, not Israel, which controls the Rafah border crossing in the southern part of the Gaza Strip.

- **What has Israel done to assist the civilian population of Gaza?**

Israel has made tremendous efforts to enable the [continued passage of goods and aid into Gaza despite the fighting](#). It facilitated the entry of approximately 2,000 truckloads carrying some 40,000 tons of food, medical supplies and essential goods during a month of fighting.

Israel kept the land crossings into Gaza operating even as the terrorist organizations continuously attacked them, including with more than a hundred rockets fired at the primary crossing for goods, Kerem Shalom.



**Humanitarian aid to Gaza**  
**Copyright: IDF Spokesperson**

Israel also declared numerous humanitarian lulls in fighting to allow civilians in Gaza to shop for supplies, receive humanitarian aid and move to safer areas. Although these humanitarian ceasefires were declared for the benefit of the residents of Gaza,  [Hamas violated every one.](#)

- **Why has it been so difficult to reach a ceasefire?**

The main reason it is so difficult to bring an end to the hostilities is Hamas' lack of motivation to do so. Up to now Hamas has seen that much of the international community does not hold it accountable for its violations of basic morality and of international law.

Hamas has put forward a list of unrealistic demands and uses them as an excuse to prolong its attacks on Israel. In the meantime, it is the civilians on both sides who bear the brunt of Hamas' intransigence.

Time and again Hamas rejected offers of a ceasefire.  [Each time Israel declared a humanitarian truce, aimed at benefiting Gaza's civilians, Hamas broke it](#) and resumed its rocket attacks and attempted kidnappings of soldiers.

All throughout the attempts to de-escalate the situation, Hamas leaders and spokesmen repeated their threats to continue targeting Israeli towns. Hamas' lack of goodwill was demonstrated when a minute before the entry into force of the 72-hour ceasefire of 10 August it launched a long-range missile towards Tel-Aviv (and then bragged about it).

- **Why is it important to demilitarize the Gaza Strip?**

Although Hamas has been firing its missiles against Israeli civilians for years, the recent confrontation revealed the full extent of the terror infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. Hamas has acquired or produced a huge arsenal of rockets with varying ranges, anti-tank rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), large amounts of explosives,  [offensive terror tunnels](#) and a great number of light weapons.

In order to prevent the terrorist organizations in Gaza from rearming with even deadlier weapons, which will inevitably result in renewed hostilities, the Gaza Strip must be demilitarized.

This fact received strong support from both the United States and the European Union.  [In their decision of 22 July, EU foreign ministers stated clearly that "all terrorist groups in Gaza must disarm."](#)

- **Why is it crucial to control goods entering Gaza?**

The vast terror infrastructure which developed in Gaza in recent years became possible only through the misuse of funds and raw materials that entered the Gaza Strip intended for civilian use. This has made abundantly clear the need to oversee the proper use of resources brought into the Gaza Strip so that they will not be channeled for military purposes.

The extent of Gaza's terror infrastructure confirmed Israel's intelligence assessments and vindicated its calls for tightening controls over the import of dual-use goods such as concrete and other building materials which were used to construct terror tunnels and infrastructures.

This is the reason why, paradoxically, the only way to increase the flow of goods into Gaza is by tightening control over what goes in. Better mechanisms have to be put in place to ensure that the ability of the terrorist organizations in Gaza to rearm themselves is curtailed, and that building materials going into Gaza do not end up being used for the construction of attack tunnels and rocket bunkers.

- **Are the current hostilities part of a cycle of violence?**

One could be tempted to view this confrontation as the latest round in an imagined "cycle of violence". However, nothing could be further from the truth since there is no symmetry between Israel and Hamas.

[Israel left the Gaza Strip completely in 2005](#) and has no claims on the territory besides the wish to see it develop as a peaceful and prosperous neighbor. If Hamas and the other terrorist organizations disarmed and stopped their attacks, Israel would have no reason to respond.

Yet instead of developing the Gaza Strip, the Hamas regime has turned it into a terror fortress and established a fundamentalist dictatorship whose declared goal is the destruction of Israel.