



April 3, 2013

**Mortar shells and rockets were fired into Israel's south for the third and fourth time since the end of Operation Pillar of Defense. For the first time, the IDF responded by attacking terrorist targets in the northern Gaza Strip.**



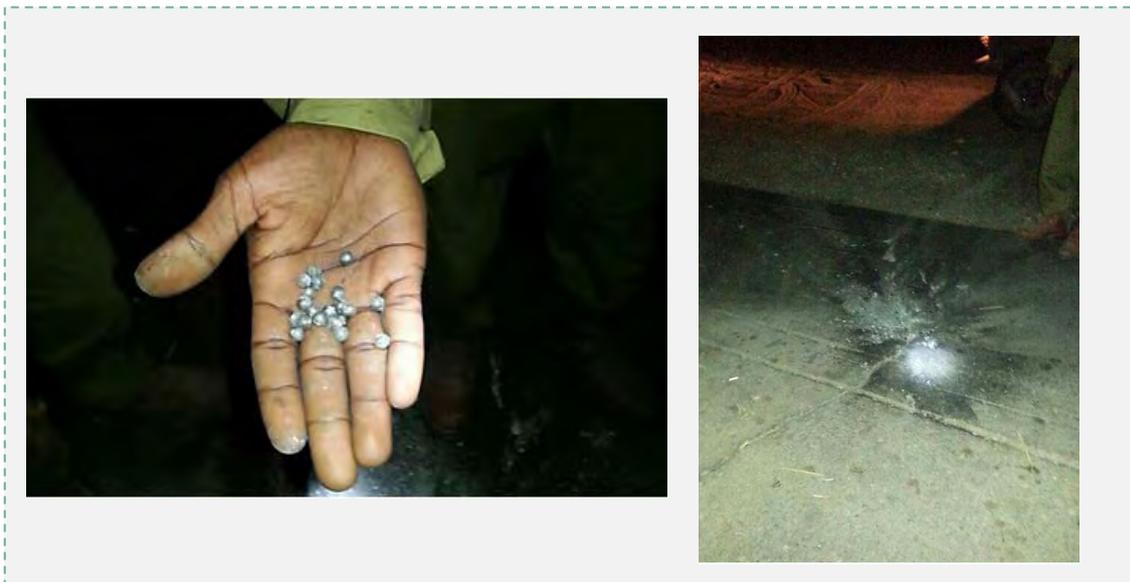
Left: The remains of one of the rockets that landed in Israeli territory on April 3, 2013 (Israel Police Force Facebook page, April 3, 2013). Right: Remains of rocket identified in the western Negev (Photo by Edi Israel, courtesy of NRG, April 3, 2013).

## Overview

1. On April 2, 2013, a number of mortar shells were fired from the Gaza Strip into the western Negev, one of them landing between two Israeli villages. Remains of rockets were also found in an open area in the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, April 3, 2013). There were no casualties and no damage was reported. **It was the first recorded mortar shell attack since the end of Operation Pillar of Defense (November 21, 2012).**

2. A network affiliated the global jihad and calling itself the "**Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem**" claimed responsibility for the attack (also claiming responsibility for the rocket fire targeting the southern Israeli city of Sderot on March 21, 2013). According to the network's announcement, the mortar shell fire was

in response to the death of Palestinian prisoner Maysara Aby Hamdia.<sup>1</sup> The announcement also called on Hamas activists to exert pressure on the Gaza Strip security forces not to act against the network's operatives.<sup>2</sup>



**Left: Location of the mortar shell hit. Right: Ball bearings from the mortar shell (Spokesman for the Eshkol Regional Council, western Negev, April 2, 2013).**

3. **On the morning of April 3, 2013**, as children were on their way to school and kindergarten, **a number of rockets were fired into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip**. Two rockets were identified as falling in open areas in the western Negev. One has been located and a search is being conducted to find the other (Israel Police Force Facebook page). There were no casualties and no damage was reported.

## Israel's Response

4. **IDF sources made it clear that a return to the status quo ante of Operation Pillar of Defense was out of the question** and that quiet would be preserved in Israel's south (IDF spokesman, April 3, 2013). Israeli Minister of Defense Moshe Yaalon said that Israel regarded Hamas as responsible for every rocket and mortar shell attack launched from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory (Ynet, April 3, 2013).

<sup>1</sup> **Maysara Abu Hamdia**, a 64 year-old Palestinian terrorist, died of cancer in an Israeli jail on April 2, 2013. Abu Hamdia was a Hamas terrorist operative who recruited a terrorist who was attempted to carry out a suicide bombing attack in a coffee house in Jerusalem in 2002. He was convicted of attempted murder and was serving a term of life imprisonment. The announcement of his death led terrorist operatives in Israeli prisons to riot. There were also violent confrontations between rioters and the Israeli security forces at several locations in Judea and Samaria.

<sup>2</sup> Salafist networks have recently complained that the Hamas security forces detain their operatives.

5. In response to the mortar shell fire, on the night of April 2 **Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked terrorist targets in the northern Gaza Strip for the first time since the end of Operation Pillar of Defense** (IDF spokesman, April 3, 2013). According to the Palestinian media, there were no casualties (Ma'an News Agency and Filastin Al-'Aan, April 3, 2013).

## Incidents of Rocket Fire since Operation Pillar of Defense

### Overview

1. The mortar shells fired on April 2 and the rockets on April 3 were the third and fourth incidents of fire targeting Israel since Operation Pillar of Defense. In our assessment, they were carried out by the so-called "rogue" terrorist organizations challenging Hamas and its policy of maintaining a cease fire with Israel. The two previous incidents, in February and March 2013, were the following:

### Ashqelon Attacked by Rocket Fire

2. **On the morning of February 26, 2013**, a rocket hit was identified to the south of the Israeli city of Ashqelon. The remains of the rocket were found on a road running through an unpopulated area. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. The rocket was fired after the death of Arafat Jaradat, a Palestinian arrested for throwing stones, on February 23, 2013. **Ihab al-Ghussin**, head of the information office of the de-facto Hamas administration, denied the rocket fire, claiming it was an Israeli fabrication meant to draw attention away from Jaradat's death (Al-Ra'i Online, February 26, 2013).



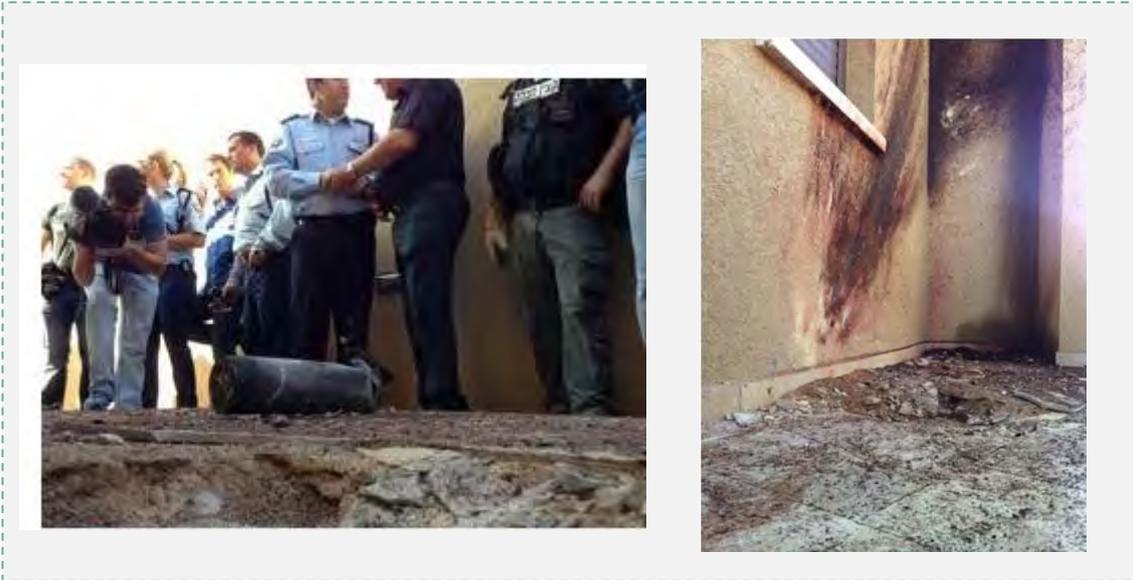
The remains of the rocket that landed south of Ashqelon (Photo by Edi Israel, used courtesy of negotiation, February 26, 2013).

### **Sderot Attacked by Rocket Fire**

3. **On the morning of March 21, 2013**, the second day of American President Barack Obama's visit to the region, five rockets were fired from Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip. Two landed in Israeli territory. One hit the yard of a house and caused damage to the building. The other landed in an open area. A network affiliated with the global jihad and calling itself "**Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem**" claimed responsibility for the attack. According to the announcement, its objective was to make it clear to the "dog of the Byzantines" (i.e., Barack Obama) that Israel would not enjoy security and that nothing would stop the jihad (Network website, March 21, 2013).

4. On April 2, 2013, **the remains of another rocket were found near a kindergarten in the southern Israeli city of Sderot**. The rocket penetrated the roof and ceiling and partially exploded inside the kindergarten. The kindergarten was empty because the children were on Passover vacation, and for that reason there were no casualties and the rocket was discovered only later. In our assessment, it was one of the rockets fired on March 21, 2013.

5. In response to the rocket fire Israeli temporarily closed the Kerem Shalom crossing to the passage of goods into the Gaza Strip, limited the activity of the Erez crossing to humanitarian cases and reduced the size of the fishing zone used by Gazan fishermen from six to three miles (IDF spokesman, March 21, 2013). On March 28 the crossings were reopened, but so far the size of the fishing zone has not been increased (IDF spokesman, March 28, 2013).



**Left: Direct rocket hit in the yard of a house in the Israeli southern city of Sderot (Sderot Media Center, March 21, 2013). Right: One of the two rockets that landed in Sderot (Photo by Edi Israel, courtesy of NRG, March 21, 2013).**