



June 22, 2012

Escalation in Rocket Fire in the South (Update No. 2) (1300 hours, June 21, 2012)



Kibbutz children in a reinforced security room (Facebook, June 20, 2012)

Overview

1. On June 20 rocket and mortar shell fire into Israeli territory intensified, with **70 rocket hits identified during the day**. Most of the rockets landing in the western Negev. Seven additional hits were identified on the morning of **June 21**. **Since the beginning of the current round of escalation, so far 125 rockets have landed in the Israel's south.**

2. **Most of the rockets had short ranges of up to 10 kilometers** (a little over 6 miles), and fell in the western Negev. Three rockets were intercepted and destroyed by the Iron Dome aerial defense system: one fired at the coastal city of Ashqelon, one at the town of Netivot and one at Beersheba. Local residents spent the night in reinforced security rooms in their own homes. After two rockets landed near an Ashqelon elementary school, classes were suspended (junior high and high school students have been on vacation since the beginning of the week).

3. **On night of June 20, following Egyptian mediation, Hamas announced to agreed to a ceasefire, beginning at 2300 hours.** Rocket fire continued after the ceasefire went into effect. On the morning of June 21 seven additional rockets hits were identified in Israeli territory, that the current round of escalation continues.

4. **The most recent round of escalation was the first in a year in which Hamas headed the attacks,** while the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which fired most of the rockets in the previous round, so far has not participated. The past year has been punctuated by rounds of escalation every few months, and between them incidents of sporadic rocket fire accompanied by attacks on IDF forces and Israeli civilians working near the security fence. The "routine" of sporadic rocket fire and other attacks **leaked from the Gaza Strip to the Sinai Peninsula,** where the governmental-security vacuum contributed to the latest outbreak of attacks and subsequent escalation.

Rocket Fire

5. On **June 20**, 70 rockets fell in Israeli territory. Most of them landed in open areas and did not cause damage. A small number fell in Israeli towns and villages and caused property damage. Three women were treated for shock. The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted and destroyed three long-range rockets targeting Ashqelon, Netivot and Beersheba.

6. On the evening of **June 20** Hamas' military-terrorist wing said in an official statement that "**in response to Egyptian efforts" the military wings of Hamas and the other [terrorist] organizations would hold their fire if Israel pledged to stop its attacks.** Taher al-Nunu, spokesman for the de-facto Hamas administration, called on Israel to stop what he called its "aggression." He said that if Israel continued escalating, the Palestinian response would continue, but if Israel maintained the lull, **it would be mutual** (Al-Quds TV, date, 2012).

7. On the morning of **June 21**, after Hamas announced its willingness to stop the attacks, seven rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory, indicating that the current round of escalation continues. As of noon no rocket hits have been identified.



Rockets which fell near population centers in the western Negev (western Negev public relations office, June 20, 2012).

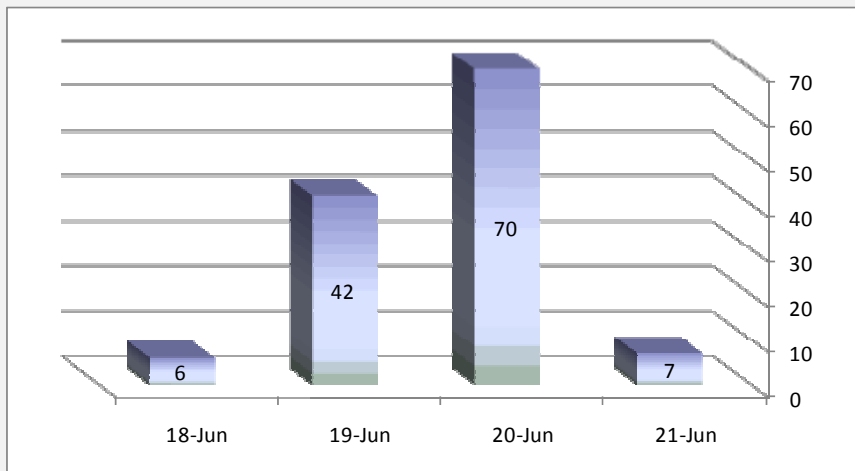


Rocket which fell in a populated area in the western Negev (Daniel Hajbi for the Sderot Media Center, June 20, 2012).



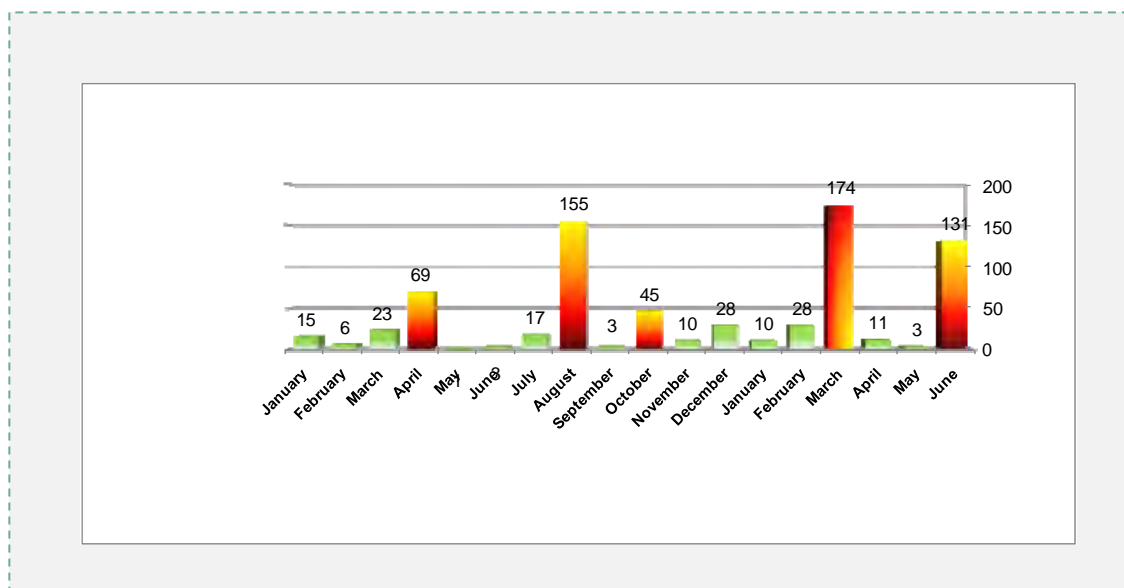
Damage to a residential structure in an Israeli town (Daniel Hajbi for the Sderot Media Center, June 20, 2012).

Rocket Fire during the Current Round of Escalation



Note: As of the morning of June 21.

Rounds of Escalation since the Beginning of 2011



IDF Response

8. On **June 20** Israeli Air Force aircraft continued its strikes against terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip (IDF Spokesman, June 21, 2012).

- 1) On the afternoon of **June 20** IAF aircraft struck two terrorist bases in the northern Gaza Strip. The Palestinian media reported that several Palestinians were injured in the strike on **an Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades training base in Jabaliya**. The reports claimed that the base had been empty at the time (Safa News Agency, Al-Aqsa TV, June 20, 2012). Reports also claimed that a 14 year old boy was killed and four members of his family wounded in an IAF strike on the Al-Zeitun neighborhood of southern Gaza City (Wafa News Agency, Safa News Agency, June 20, 2012).



The IAF attacks in the northern Gaza Strip (Hamas' palestine-info website, June 21, 2012).

- 2) In the early afternoon of **June 20** IAF aircraft attacked and killed a **global jihad terrorist operative riding a motorbike in Rafah**. He was Muhammad Rashwan, born 1986, an operative of a **global jihad-affiliated network calling itself Tauhid wal-Jihad**. The network has been extensively involved in carrying out terrorist attacks against IDF soldiers and Israel civilians for a number of years. **Muhammad Rashwan** was involved in the attack along the Israeli-Egyptian border on June 18 in which an Israeli civilian was killed. His involvement in the network included help in transporting weapons, supplying terrorist operatives with IEDs, firing rockets and mortar shells into Israeli territory, sniping at Israeli forces and infiltrating terrorist operatives into and out of the Gaza Strip. During the past several days the network was preparing for another attack (IDF Spokesman, June 21, 2012).



The motorbike ridden by the terrorist operative (Hamas' palestine-info website, June 21, 2012).

Claiming Responsibility and Responses to the Escalation

9. **Hamas' military-terrorist wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades**, continued as the organization firing most of the rockets and mortar shells. Its website reported that during the past two days **it had fired 86 rockets and wounded 18 "Zionists"** (Hamas' palestine-info website, June 21, 2012).

10. Each Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades announcement claiming responsibility stressed two themes (Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades website, June 20, 2012):

- 1) **The rocket fire was in response to "continued aggression against the Gaza Strip;"**
- 2) **The rocket fire targeted "military posts opposite the Gaza Strip"** [giving the names of Israeli villages populated entirely by civilians].

11. On June 20 an official announcement was posted stating that the [current] round of fighting was the Palestinians' "natural duty and sacred right." **It called Israel's response to the escalation "minimal"** (Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades website, June 20, 2012). In our assessment, the announcement indicates Hamas' satisfaction with the results of the escalation so far.