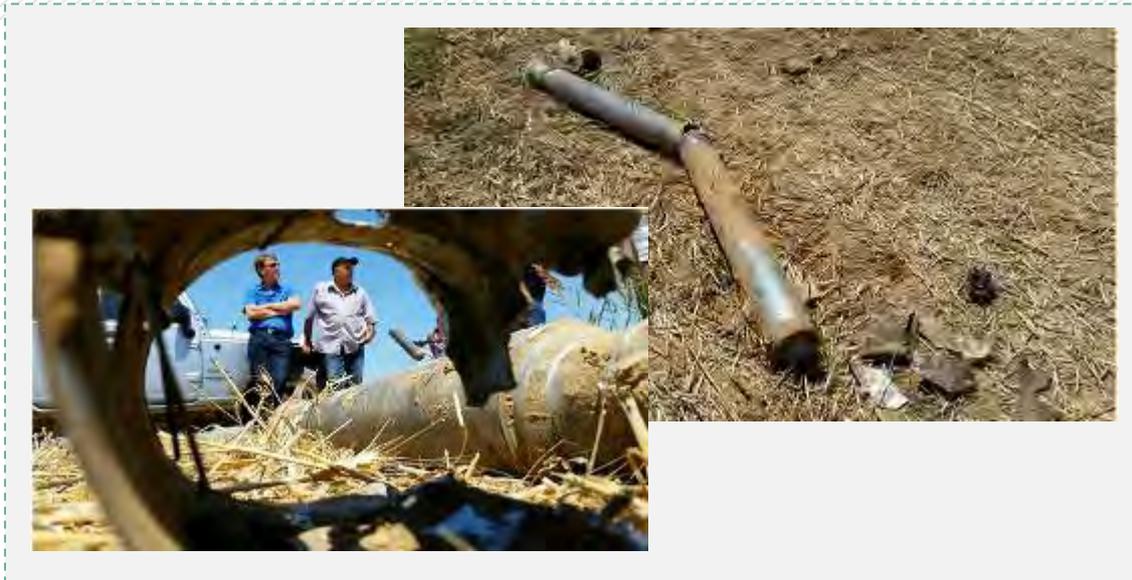




July 16, 2015

# The Gaza Strip One Year after Operation Protective Edge: An Overview

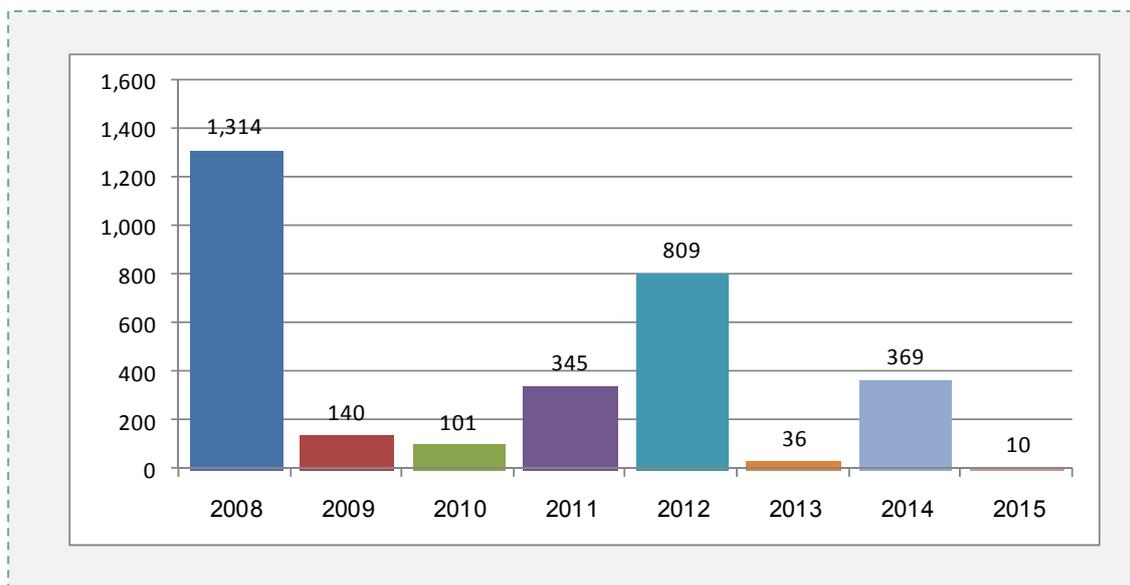


Left: The remains of the rocket fired on June 6, 2015, by an ISIS-affiliated Salafist-jihadi network (Spokesperson for the Sdot Negev regional council, June 6, 2015). Right: One of the two rockets fired into the western Negev on June 3, 2015 by an ISIS-affiliated Salafist-jihadi network in the Gaza Strip (Negev Field Security, June 4, 2015).

## Main Conclusions

1. This study examines the **activities of the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip during the year since Operation Protective Edge, especially Hamas**. Most notable have been **the small number of rockets fired into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip, and the relative quiet along the Israeli-Gazan border**.
2. The number of rocket attacks (12 identified rocket hits, three of them from the Sinai Peninsula) **was the lowest since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007**. It was the lowest number both in absolute terms and in comparison with **rocket hits identified during the first year after Operation Cast Lead and Operation Pillar of Defense**. There were also fewer clashes along the **Gaza Strip border** compared with the first year after previous major IDF operations.

## Rocket Hits Identified in Israeli Territory, 2008 – 2015<sup>1</sup>

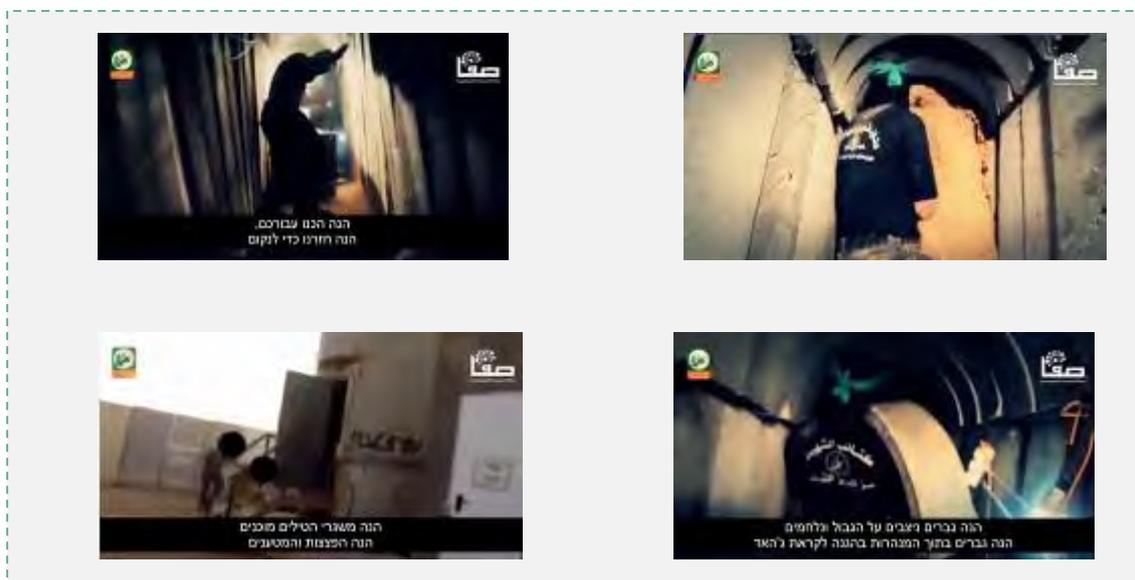


3. The drastic decrease in rocket fire from the Gaza Strip has been caused by **Hamas' policy of restraint, enforced more strictly and rigidly than in the past**. It is **primarily a result of the deterrence Israel gained in Operation Protective Edge**. **That deterrence is an asset but it is expected to erode as time passes**. The **ongoing sporadic rocket attacks** of the past year have been carried out by rogue organizations and networks as a way of challenging Hamas or to resolve internal struggles. During the past month ISIS-affiliated Salafist-jihadi networks in the Gaza Strip and rogue elements of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) have used the rocket fire to send messages of violence by firing rockets into Israel. **The sporadic rocket fire continues**.

4. Hamas' policy of restraint is the result of its desire **to gain time to restore its military-terrorist capabilities**, which were severely damaged in Operation Protective Edge. It also wants to **rebuild the civilian infrastructure** and increase external support for the Gaza Strip (with donations of funds and the lifting of the so-called siege). However, during the past year **the time gained was not exploited for significant civilian reconstruction, but instead invested in restoring Hamas' military capabilities** (and those of the other terrorist organizations).

<sup>1</sup> The graph does not include rocket hits during major IDF operations in the Gaza Strip, or rockets which fell inside the Gaza Strip.

5. Restoring military capabilities included replenishing, enlarging and improving its rocket arsenal (mainly by manufacturing its own weapons); **constructing defensive and offensive tunnels** (i.e., tunnels that enter Israeli territory); **renewing military-terrorist units decimated during the fighting and establishing new military frameworks**; **enlisting operatives**, including youths and semi-military militiamen ("the popular army"); **intensive training** (emphasizing infiltrating Israeli territory and abducting Israelis); **improving the capabilities of the security forces, which are important in preserving Hamas' control of the Gaza Strip**; **finding alternative smuggling routes** to replace those severely damaged by the measures taken by Egypt; and **increasing its presence along its border with Israel** to improve its ability to control the Gaza Strip and carry out routine security activities.



Pictures from a Hamas video posted to YouTube showing a tunnel being built by Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operatives (implying it is an offensive tunnel). The video shows digging and concrete slabs being mounted (YouTube, June 8, 2015)



Left: PIJ operatives simulate a raid on an Israeli post. Right: A PIJ tunnel (YouTube, March 6, 2015).



Two new kinds of rockets were exhibited in a military display held by Hamas in Gaza City to mark the first anniversary of Operation Protective Edge. According to Hamas claims, they have already been added to its arsenal. The rockets are named for Hamas terrorist operatives killed during Operation Protective Edge, Ra'ed Atar and Muhammad Abu Shamala. Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades spokesman Abu Obeida claimed that in due time the rockets' capabilities would be made apparent (Al-Aqsa TV, July 8, 2015).

6. In ITIC assessment, **Hamas and the other terrorist organizations are still in the process of intensively rebuilding their military capabilities.** Therefore they are strongly motivated to preserve the security lull, which enables them to continue the buildup without interruption from Israel. While the process has not yet been completed, **Hamas tries to glorify its military capabilities** and magnify its achievements in Operation Protective Edge (strengthening "the myth of victory"). To that end Hamas publicly sends deterrent messages to Israel, **claiming its military capabilities have returned to their previous competence and even surpassed it.**

7. **The year since Operation Protective Edge has been notable for the establishment of the Supporters of Jerusalem (Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis), ISIS's branch in the Sinai Peninsula.** The military capabilities demonstrated by the Supporters of Jerusalem against the Egyptian security forces motivated **Hamas' military wing in the Gaza Strip to cooperate with the organization in smuggling, training and providing medical aid** (even at the expense of worsening relations with Egypt). So far the activities of the Supporters of Jerusalem have been directed against the Egyptian security forces, but **their cooperation with Hamas' military wing increases the terrorist threat to Israel along the Egyptian border** (both routinely and in a crisis). On the other hand, **inside the Gaza Strip Hamas' security forces have been suppressing the ISIS-affiliated Salafist-jihadi networks** trying to challenge its control. So far, however, **suppressing the networks in the Gaza Strip has not prevented Hamas from cooperating with the Supporters of Jerusalem outside the Gaza Strip.**

8. **Politically and internally**, Hamas is forced to deal with a series of problems and constraints that make it difficult to operate as movement and challenge its governance of the Gaza Strip.

1) **Delays in reconstructing the civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip:**

A. Hamas has strong interests in rehabilitating the extensive destruction caused by Operation Protective Edge, mainly because it is the de facto sovereign of the Gaza Strip. In addition, Hamas wants both to prevent internal civilian dissatisfaction and keep its opponents from becoming bold enough to erode its power of governance.

B. On October 12, 2014, **an international conference was held in Cairo** under Egyptian and Norwegian aegis to promote the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. It was attended by representatives of fifty countries and dozens of international institutions. **The Palestinians received pledges of \$4.9 billion for reconstruction.** Qatar pledged \$1 billion, the EU \$570 million, Saudi Arabia \$500 million and the United States \$400 million. All the donors promised to transfer the funds as soon as possible.

C. One year after Operation Protective Edge it can be said that **the promises have not been kept and that there is a substantial gap between the pledges and the funds received.** Houses in battle zones that were destroyed have not yet been rebuilt and many families are still

homeless. According to reports from the Global Humanitarian Assistance Initiative, which follows the transfer of funds for humanitarian purposes, and from UNRWA, **only a small portion of the promised funds were actually transferred to the Gaza Strip**. According to **Rami Hamdallah**, prime minister of the Palestinian national consensus government, only 27% of the promised \$4.9 has actually reached the Gaza Strip (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, July 14, 2015). As a result the Gazan public has become increasingly frustrated and sometimes holds protests and demonstrations, most of them organized or permitted by Hamas. **So far Hamas does not face a meaningful governance problem.**



**A Palestinian women's organization demonstrates in front of UNRWA headquarters in the Gaza City to protest the delay in rebuilding the Gaza Strip (Filastin al-Yawm, May 6, 2015).**

D. **What causes the continuous delays?** The Arab and Western donor states are generally accused of causing the delays because they (customarily) do not rush to send the funds they have pledged. The Palestinian Authority (PA), Israel and Egypt are also accused of responsibility for the delays. However, **Hamas itself bears much of the responsibility because it gives clear-cut priority to restoring its military capabilities**, often at the expense of civilian reconstruction (for example by allotting funds and cement for its military buildup).

2) **Internal dissention within Hamas:** During the past year **severe and perhaps unprecedented internal dissentions surfaced within the ranks of Hamas**. Most were between Hamas' military-terrorist wing and the external leadership (headed by Khaled Mashaal), which has considerations (and

**constraints) of its own.** Events of the past year have revealed that the military wing follows independent policies in a number of important issues, challenging the external leadership. For example, the military wing **collaborates with the Supporters of Jerusalem, ISIS's branch in the Sinai Peninsula, and encourages closer relations with Iran, viewing it as a source of funds and weapons** (at the expense of improving relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt).



Senior Hamas figure Ismail Haniya giving the Friday sermon in Rafah, where he called for closer ties with Saudi Arabia (Facebook page of PALDF, May 1, 2015). Hamas' military-terrorist wing conducts its own policy of closer ties with Iran, raising obstacles to improving Hamas' relations with Saudi Arabia.

3) **The worsening rift between Hamas and the PA:** Operation Protective Edge deepened the basic disputes between Hamas and Mahmoud Abbas' PA. **The Palestinian national consensus government does not function as a unified Palestinian government and Hamas continues its de facto control of the Gaza Strip, making the important decisions regarding the Strip.** On the other hand, the security forces in Judea and Samaria make certain that Hamas does not increase in strength in PA territory, continuing their security coordination with Israel. The difficult relations between Hamas and the PA are manifested by mutual accusations and disputes that paralyze its ability to deal with a variety of common issues (accelerating the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, regularizing the salaries of employees, control of the crossings, etc.).



A plainclothes Hamas security force operative confronts journalists during the dispersal of a demonstration to end the internal Palestinian conflict (Facebook page of Fatah, April 29, 2015).

#### 4) Deterioration of relations with Egypt

A. This past year ISIS's branch in the Sinai Peninsula has intensified its campaign against the Egyptian security forces, with considerable success. The campaign has been accompanied by a deterioration of relations between Hamas and the Egyptian regime. The regime regards Hamas as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and is aware that ISIS's branch in the Sinai Peninsula receives support from Hamas in the Gaza Strip against Egypt.

B. For that reason **Egypt initiated a series of unprecedented measures against Hamas, including the almost total closing of the Rafah crossing** to the passage of civilians and merchandise (increasing the Gazans' sense of being under siege). That was accompanied by **intensive, effective, unprecedented measures to destroy the tunnels between the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula, and the establishment of a buffer zone near the Egyptian-Gazan border** (damaging Hamas' ability to smuggle weapons into the Gaza Strip and profit from the taxes it imposes on the illegal civilian smuggling traffic).

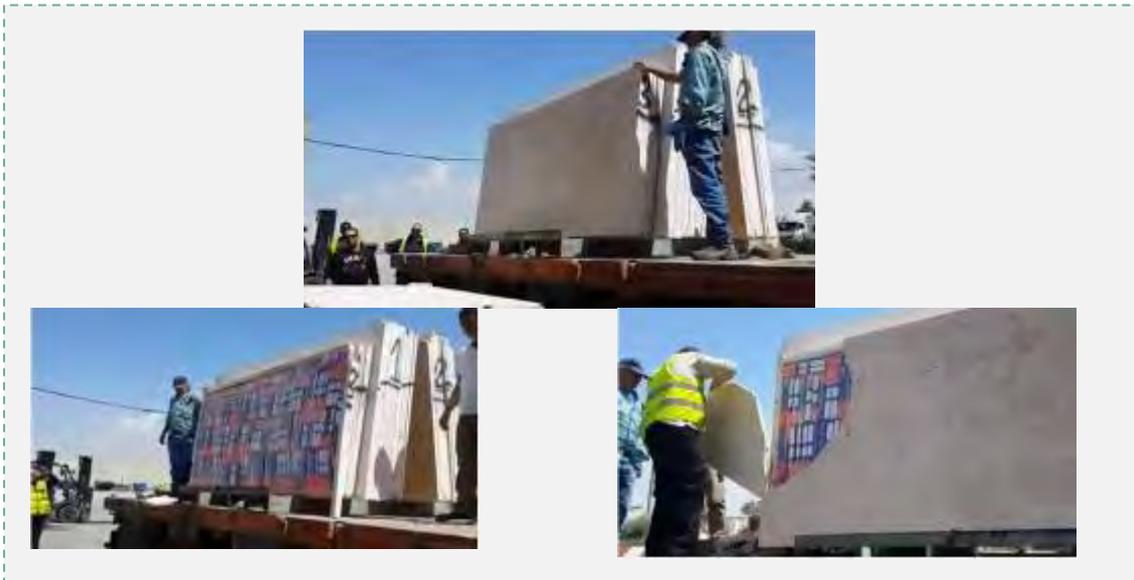
C. **Egypt also conducts a propaganda campaign against Hamas, accompanied by continual anti-Hamas mud-slinging in the Egyptian media.** Notably, the Egyptian Court of Urgent Matters designated Hamas as a terrorist organization. At the beginning of June 2015 an appeal was accepted, cancelling the Court's ruling. However, the appeal referred only

to Hamas' political wing, thus **its military wing is still designated by Egypt as a terrorist organization.**

D. Because of the obstacles raised by Egypt to Hamas' smuggling through the tunnels, during the past year Hamas has looked for **alternative routes to infiltrate operatives and smuggle weapons and equipment into the Gaza Strip.** Attempts were made **to smuggle raw materials and equipment through the Israeli Kerem Shalom crossing,** occasionally with the involvement of Israeli citizens. Other attempts included smuggling **by sea from the Sinai Peninsula coast to the Gaza Strip,** aided by fishermen and smugglers. Such alternative routes ease pressures to a certain extent, but in ITIC assessment **do not replace the tunnel system severely damaged by the Egyptian forces.**



**Creating alternative smuggling routes: raw materials for the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades' manufacture of weapons, seized by the Israeli navy at the end of January 2015 (IDF Spokesman, February 11, 2015).**



**Creating alternative smuggling routes: thousands of electrodes found hidden between slabs of marble and sent to the Gaza Strip from Judea and Samaria (Crossings authority, Israeli ministry of defense, April 13, 2015).**

9. The situation described above, of a **relatively unprecedented lull in terrorism** from the Gaza Strip, is primarily the result of **Hamas' security and civilian interests**. However the lull in the Gaza Strip **is not relevant to Judea and Samaria, where Hamas encourages the establishment of military-terrorist networks for terrorist attacks against Israel, challenging the PA.**

10. In the future, the main factors that can influence the situation in the Gaza Strip and rocket fire into Israel are the following: **the rate of civilian reconstruction in the Gaza Strip** (an acceleration in construction may curb terrorism, while a sense of strangulation and stagnation may encourage its renewal); **the rate of the reconstruction of the military-terrorist infrastructures of Hamas and the other terrorist organizations** (increasing their military capabilities may create a sense of self-confidence that can erode the deterrence Israel gained with Operation Protective Edge); **internal Palestinian disputes and confrontations** (possible catalyzing anti-Israeli terrorist attacks as defiance of Hamas); and **the growing power of ISIS's branch in the Sinai Peninsula in cooperation with Hamas' military wing** (increasing terrorist threats for Israel on the Egyptian border that may radiate to the Gaza Strip).

## Appendix A

### Rocket Fire from the Gaza Strip and Clashes along the Border in the Year since Operation Protective Edge

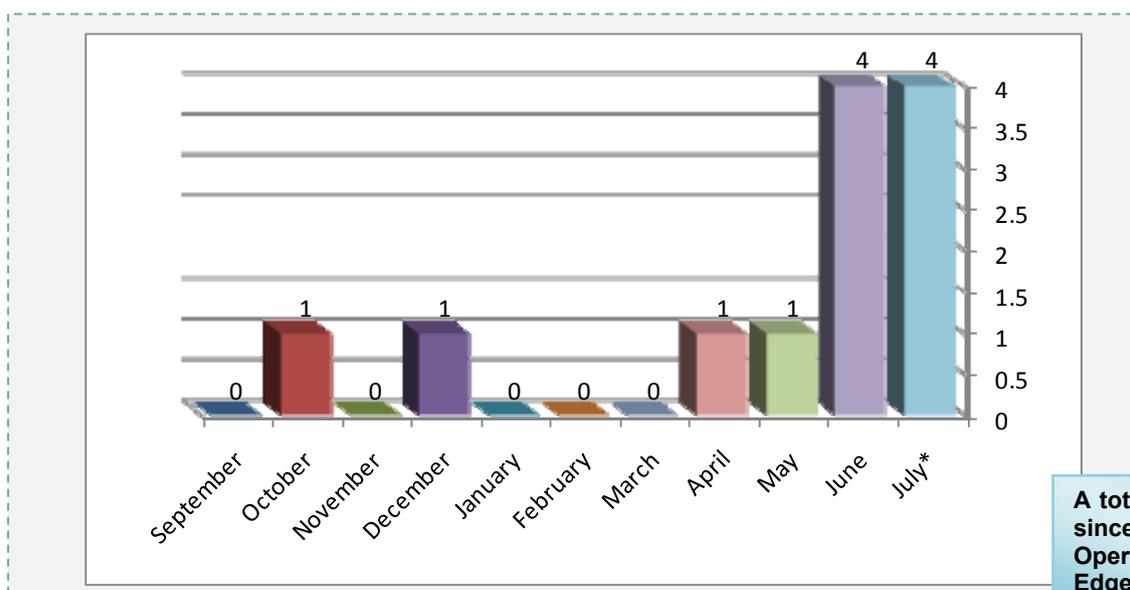
#### Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

1. The year following Operation Protective Edge was the quietest since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007. Twelve rocket hits were identified in the western Negev, nine of them launched from the Gaza Strip (three were launched from the Sinai Peninsula by the Supporters of Jerusalem). In addition, there were two mortar shells and three instances in which the rockets fell inside the Gaza Strip (See below).

2. A comparison of the rocket fire during the last year and during the years after previous IDF operations shows that during the last year the smallest number of rockets was fired. In the year after Operation Cast Lead 152 rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory, 36 after Operation Pillar of Defense, and 12 after Operation Protective Edge.

#### Comparison of Rocket Hits Identified in Israeli Territory in the Years after Major IDF Operations in the Gaza Strip

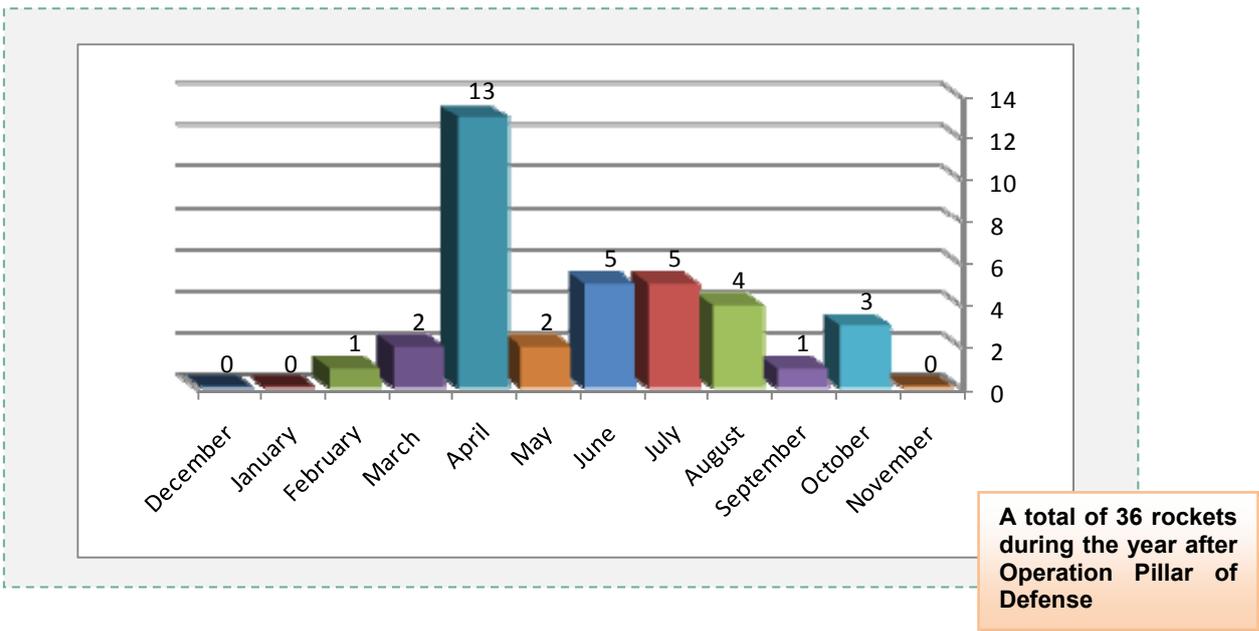
##### Rocket Hits Identified in Israeli Territory after Operation Protective Edge<sup>2</sup>



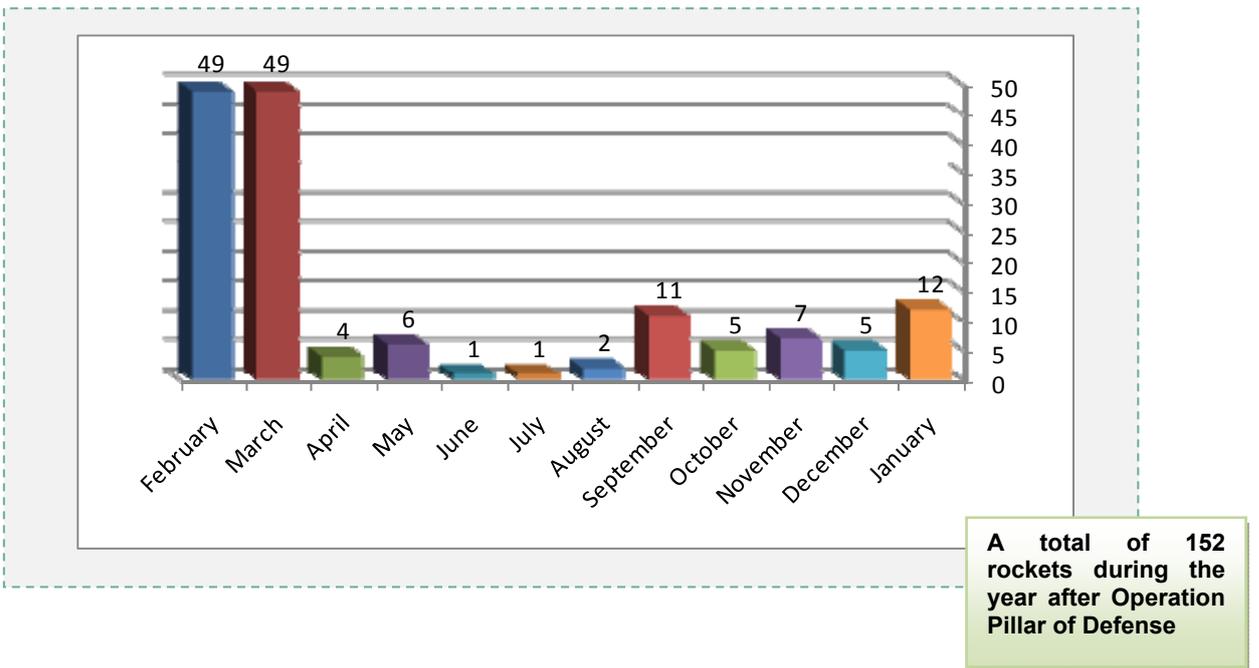
\* Nine rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip, three from the Sinai Peninsula in July 2015.

<sup>2</sup> The graphs show only rocket hits identified in Israeli territory, not rockets or mortar shells that fell inside the Gaza Strip.

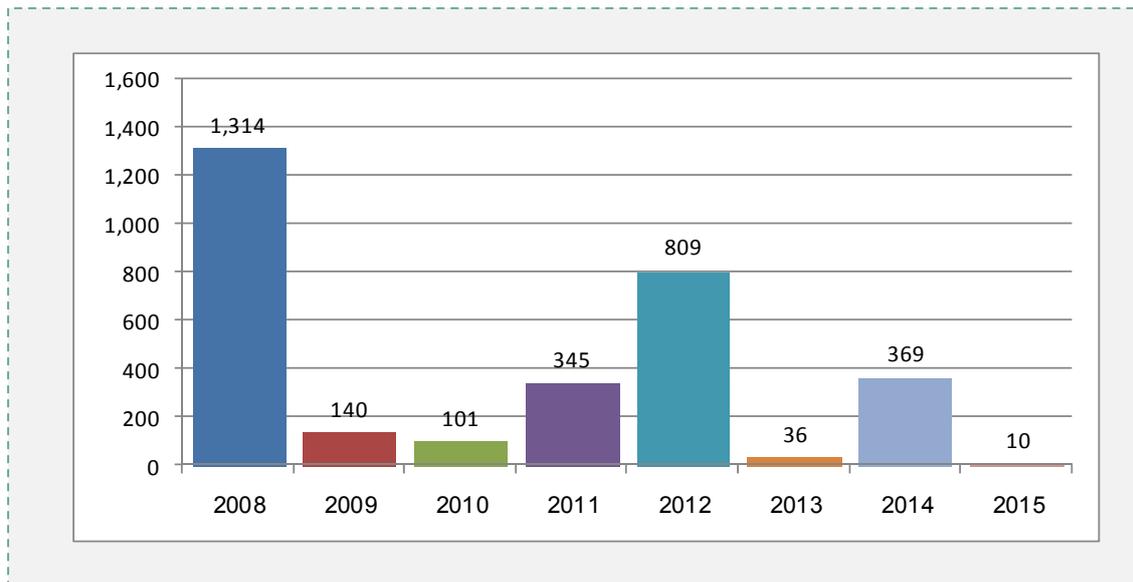
### Rocket Hits Identified in Israeli Territory after Operation Pillar of Defense



### Rocket Hits Identified in Israeli Territory after Operation Cast Lead



### Distribution of Rocket Fire, 2008 – 2015<sup>3</sup>



The graph shows that **in every instance there was a decrease in the extent of rocket fire during the periods after major IDF operations in the Gaza Strip, but that rocket fire never completely ceased.** IDF deterrence lasted for a year or two, after which it was eroded (slowly or rapidly). In that respect **Operation Protective Edge was the most effective operation since 2008**, and so far has led to a significant reduction in the amount of rocket fire and the stricter enforcement of Hamas' policy of restraint, for the reasons noted above.

### The Identity of the Organizations Firing Rockets

3. The sporadic rocket fire of the past year was carried out by rogue organizations and networks **to defy Hamas and serve as leverage in internal disputes.** It was carried out contrary to Hamas' policy, in recognition of the fact that Hamas regards preservation of the lull as its central interest. Hamas employs measures to foil and prevent the renewal of rocket fire and detains operatives suspected of firing rockets. It has also tried to reach an understanding with the various organizations and networks to preserve the lull. **The results of Hamas' efforts indicate they have been far more effective than in the past.** Israel, aware of the situation, responds to rocket fire, but **its responses are measured to prevent escalation.**

<sup>3</sup> The statistics do not include rocket hits during Operation Cast Lead, Operation Pillar of Defense and Operation Protective Edge, only those hits identified after the operations ended.

#### 4. The identity of the rogue organizations is the following:

1) During the first months after Operation Protective Edge no organization claimed responsibility for the rocket fire. According to Palestinian and Israeli media sources, the rocket fired on May 26, 2015, was launched by the **PIJ**. **It was the result of disputes within the organization's leadership over the appointment of a new commander for its military wing in the northern Gaza Strip.**

2) **Since June 2015 responsibility for rocket fire has been claimed by an ISIS-affiliated network in the Gaza Strip calling itself the Company of Sheikh Omar Hadid – Bayt al-Maqdis** (Omar Hadid was an Iraqi jihadist killed by the American army). It launches the rockets to challenge Hamas and pressure it to ease its actions against the Salafist-jihadi networks in the Gaza Strip and to release their operatives.

3) On July 3, 2015, rockets were fired from **the Sinai Peninsula for the first time since Operation Protective Edge**. They were fired two days after the Supporters of Jerusalem, ISIS's Sinai Province, carried out a broad combined attack against Egyptian security forces in the northern Sinai Peninsula. The organization said in a statement that its operatives had attacked Israel with three Grad missiles in response to Israel's support of "infidels," that is the Egyptian regime (ISIS-affiliated forum, July 3, 2015).

#### 5. Details of the rocket and mortar shell fire attacking Israel since Operation Protective Edge:

1) At 2100 hours on **October 31, 2014**, a rocket hit was identified in an open area in the western Negev. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. No organization claimed responsibility.

2) On the afternoon of **December 19, 2014**, a rocket hit was identified in an open area in the western Negev. There were no casualties; damage was reported to an agricultural area. No organization claimed responsibility.

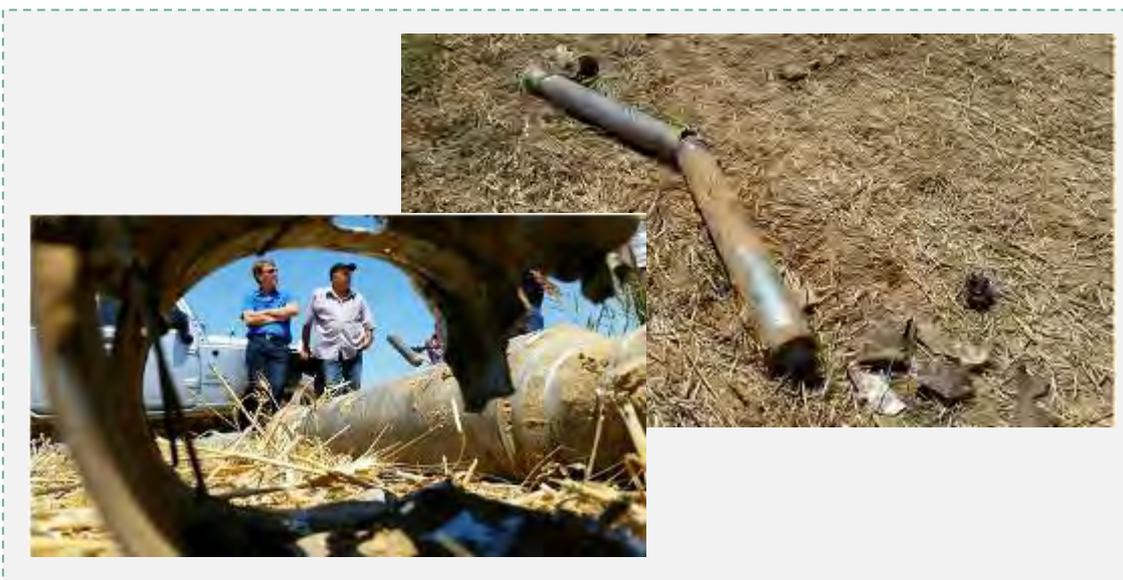


**Remains of the rocket that landed in the western Negev on December 19, 2014.**

3) On the evening of **April 23, 2015**, Israel's Independence Day, two rockets were fired attacking the western Negev. One fell in an open area and the other inside the Gaza Strip. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. No organization claimed responsibility.

4) On the evening of **May 26, 2015**, a rocket was launched into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip. Its remains were found east of the coastal city of Ashdod. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. According to Palestinian and Israeli media sources, **the PIJ fired the rocket because of disputes within the organization's leadership over the appointment of a new commander for its military wing in the northern Gaza Strip.**

5) On **June 3, 2015**, two rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip attacking the western Negev. Both rockets fell in open areas, one of them in the region of the southern coastal city of Ashqelon. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. According to Israeli military sources one rocket was launched from the Al-Shati refugee camp and the other from the area of Netzarim, south of Gaza City. **The Company of Sheikh Omar Hadid**, an ISIS-affiliated jihadi network, claimed responsibility for the attack. It issued a statement claiming the rocket fire was in retribution for the killing of one of its operatives (Yunis al-Hanar, killed when the Hamas security forces attempted to detain him).



Left: Remains of the rocket fired on June 6, 2015 (Spokesman for the Sdot Negev regional council, June 6, 2015). Right: Remains of the rocket fired on June 3 (Negev Field Security June 4, 2015)

6) On the evening of **June 6, 2015**, a rocket was fired from the Gaza Strip attacking the western Negev. It fell in an open area near Ashqelon. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. **The Company of Sheikh Omar Hadid** claimed responsibility, claiming the rocket was dedicated to the Palestinian prisoners on hunger strikes in Israeli prisons and to the prisoners in Hamas jails.

7) On **June 23, 2015**, a rocket hit was identified near Ashqelon; the rocket was launched from the Gaza Strip. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. **The Company of Sheikh Omar Hadid** claimed responsibility, claiming the attack had been in response to "the crimes of the Jews in Jerusalem."



The Company of Sheikh Omar Hadid's claim of responsibility (The Company of Sheikh Omar Hadid Twitter account, June 23, 2015).

8) On **July 3, 2015**, three 122mm rockets were fired at the western Negev from the Sinai Peninsula. They landed in an open area there were no casualties and no damage was reported. The remains of two of the rockets were located in Israeli territory immediately after they hit. The remains of the third were located the following day. The rockets were fired two days after the Supporters of Jerusalem launched a massive combined attack against Egyptian forces in the northern Sinai Peninsula. **The Supporters of Jerusalem claimed responsibility for firing three Grad rockets.** According to the statement, the attack was in retribution for Israel's support of "infidels," that is, the Egyptian regime.

9) Shortly after 0200 hours on **July 16, 2015**, a rocket landed in an open area near Ashqelon. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. **The Company of Sheikh Omar Hadid** claimed responsibility.

6. In addition to the rocket fire into Israeli territory, **at least two rockets were launched but fell inside the Gaza Strip.** Mortar shells were also fired at Israel:

1) On **November 7, 2014**, a rocket was fired at Israel from the northern Gaza Strip. It apparently fell inside the Gaza Strip.

2) On **May 3, 2015**, a rocket was fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip, falling inside the Strip.

3) On **September 16, 2014**, a mortar shell hit was identified in the northern Gaza Strip. It fell in an open area near the border security fence. There were no casualties and no damage was reported. The Hamas security forces reportedly detained two Salafi-jihadist operatives who had launched the mortar shell (Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, September 18, 2014).

4) On **February 16, 2015**, two mortar shells were fired from the Rafah region. They fell inside the Gaza Strip near the border security fence. No organization claimed responsibility.

## Appendix B

### Clashes along the Israel-Gaza Strip Border

#### Overview

1. Also notable during the year since Operation Protective Edge has been **the large number of clashes near the Israel-Gaza Strip border**. They include a small number of **shooting attacks and IEDs targeting IDF forces operating along the border**; **gatherings of civilians** near the fence who have sometimes thrown stones (similar to the "popular resistance" Friday clashes in Judea and Samaria); civilians approaching the fence even trying to infiltrate **into Israeli territory**.

2. **Despite the large number of clashes, so far there have been no serious incidents. Both sides, the IDF and Hamas, patrol the border and contain clashes to keep them from escalating.** Moreover, in recent months the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas' military-terrorist wing) and **Hamas security forces have increased their presence along the border, among other reasons to strengthen their control over events and to enforce Hamas' policy of restraint.** Manifestations of Hamas' increased presence are **the construction of a road along the border and the construction of a line of military posts** a few hundred meters from the border security fence (See below).

#### Shooting and IED Attacks

3. During the past year there were **eight attacks involving the use of light arms or IEDs placed along the border fence**. Most of them targeted Israeli security forces. **It was a low number of such incidents after a major IDF operation in the Gaza Strip.**

4. The more prominent attacks were the following:

1) On **November 27, 2014**, Gazans shot light arms or machine guns at an IDF jeep on a routine patrol along the fence near the village of Be'eri. There were no casualties but the windshield of the jeep was damaged. In response IDF forces fired a tank shell at the region the shots were fired from (Ynet, November 27, 2015).

2) On the morning of **December 24, 2014**, Gazan snipers shot at an IDF force securing maintenance work east of the border fence in the southern Gaza Strip.

An IDF soldier was critically wounded. In response IDF tanks and aircraft attacked Hamas targets in the region of the incident (IDF Spokesman, December 24, 2015).

3) On **March 18, 2015**, an IDF force defused an IED placed on the western side of the border fence inside the Gaza Strip. The IED was several hundred meters from the border in the region between Shejaiya and the village of Nahal Oz (IDF Spokesman, March 18, 2015).

## Attempted Infiltrations into Israeli Territory

5. **During the past year there was an increase in the number of infiltration attempts from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory. In most instances the infiltrators were unarmed civilians uninvolved in terrorist activity.** In some instances **the Palestinians had weapons.** Some of the incidents resulted in the wounding or killing of the infiltrators.

6. The main incidents were the following:

1) On **November 23, 2014**, an IDF force apprehended a Palestinian near the Israeli border in the southern Gaza Strip; he had a fragmentation grenade in his possession. Another Palestinian was apprehended with him. The two were taken for questioning. In addition, several hours later a Palestinian was killed by IDF fire near the Gaza Strip border north of the Jabaliya refugee camp. According to the Israeli security forces, two Palestinians approached the border fence. They were identified by IDF soldiers who called to them to retreat. When they did not obey, the soldiers shot at them. The Palestinian media reported that Muhammad Halawah had been shot and killed by IDF fire east of Jabaliya while he was allegedly "trying to hunt birds" (Al-Ra'i and Alresala.net, November 23, 2014).

2) On **November 29, 2014**, IDF soldiers shot at a 16 year-old Palestinian who approached the security fence near the town of Beit Lahia in the northern Gaza Strip. The Palestinian media reported that a Palestinian youth had been critically wounded by IDF fire (Ma'an News Agency and Quds News, November 29, 2014).

3) On **December 31, 2014**, IDF forces detained three Palestinians who had infiltrated into Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip. They were taken for questioning (Facebook page of Red Alert, December 31, 2014).

4) On **January 11, 2015**, an IDF force opened fire at a suspicious Palestinian who approached the security fence near Khan Yunis. The Palestinian retreated and returned to the Gaza Strip.

5) On **January 29, 2015**, an IDF force detained three Palestinians who had crossed the border security fence in the southern Gaza Strip. They had three hand grenades, a knife and a screwdriver in their possession. They were taken for questioning (IDF Spokesman, January 29, 2015).

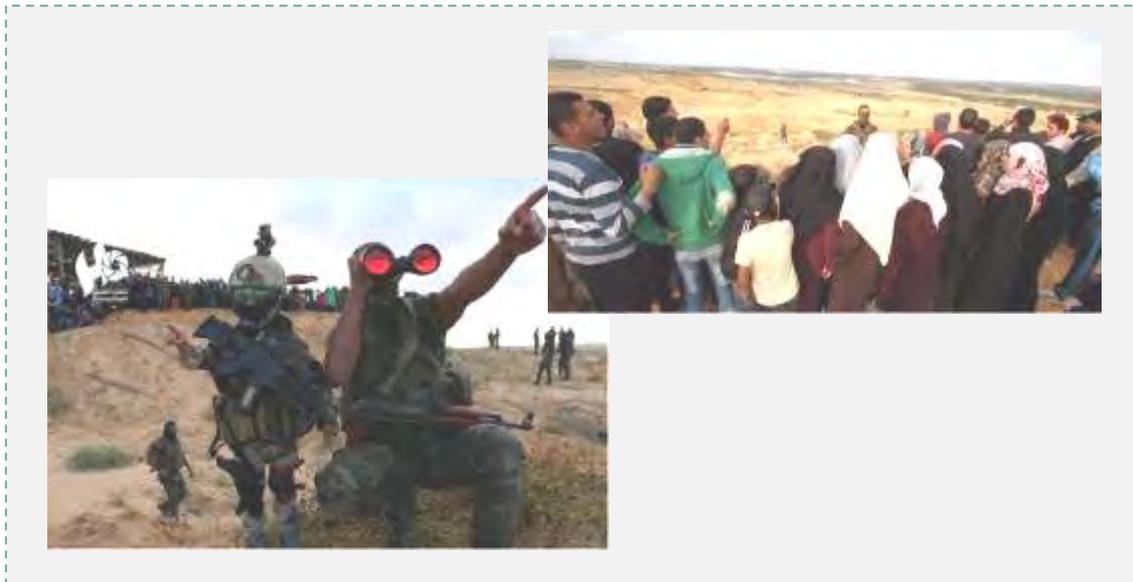
6) On **May 8, 2015**, an IDF force detained two Palestinians who crossed the border security fence in the western Negev. Another Palestinian, who approached the fence, was shot and seriously wounded by IDF fire (Facebook page of Red Alert, May 8, 2015).

7) On **May 9, 2015**, an IDF force opened fire at three suspicious Palestinians in Khan Yunis near the border security fence (Facebook page of Red Alert, May 10, 2015). The Palestinian media reported that three farmers from Khan Yunis had been wounded (Filastin al-Yawm and Safa News Agency, May 9, 2015).

7. On the night of **March 6, 2015**, Israeli navy ships halted boats with fishermen suspected of engaging in terrorist activity. One Palestinian was killed and two were detained and taken for questioning (IDF Spokesman, March 7, 2015). The Palestinian media reported that the men had been fishing and accused Israel of a gross violation of the lull agreement (Wafa News Agency and Safa News Agency, March 7, 2015).

## **Demonstrations and Gatherings near the Border Security Fence**

8. During the past year **Gazans held demonstrations and gatherings to defy Israel. Most of the events were held under Hamas aegis.** The demonstrators waved signs, threw stones and taunted the Israel security forces, as the Palestinians do in their weekly "popular resistance" riots in Judea and Samaria, according to "the Bil'in model." In ITIC assessment **Hamas allows the demonstrations but contains them and ensures they do not spin out of control.** Generally Hamas security forces have dispersed the demonstrators. They have also erected roadblocks to keep demonstrators from approaching the border. In several instances Palestinian civilians have been wounded by Israel security force fire when their proximity to the border fence created a security threat.



**Left: A uniformed child and an Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operative using binoculars to conduct surveillance of Israel (Facebook page of PALINFO, May 5, 2015). Right: Gazans marking Nakba Day hear an explanation about the Gaza Strip border with Israel from an Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operative ( Hamas website, May 5, 2015).**

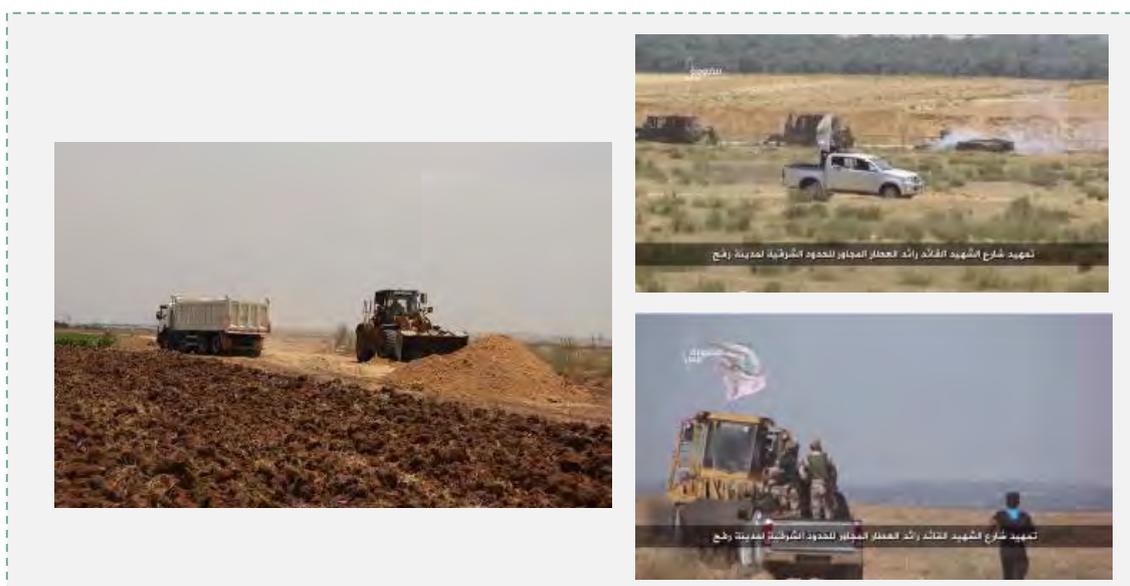
9. Other notable gatherings were the following:

- 1) On **December 5, 2014**, dozens of Palestinians gathered near the border security fence near Jabaliya in the northeastern Gaza Strip and threw stones. Israeli security forces dispersed the gathering; two Palestinians were wounded (PALDF forum, December 5, 2015).
- 2) On **December 19, 2014**, several dozen Palestinians gathered near the border security fence near Jabaliya. An IDF force opened fire at them. The Palestinian media reported that five of them had been wounded in the leg.
- 3) On **January 2, 2015**, an estimated fifty Palestinians gathered near the security fence in the northern Gaza Strip. An IDF force fired shots to force them to retreat. A Palestinian who approached the fence was shot in the leg (Facebook page of Red Alert, January 2, 2015).
- 4) On **January 23, 2015**, dozens of Palestinians gathered and threw stones at the border security fence near the Jabaliya refugee camp. An IDF force fired shots to force them to retreat (Facebook page of Red Alert, January 23, 2015). The Palestinian media reported that a Palestinian youth had been seriously wounded. Hamas' security forces dispersed the demonstrators (Alresala.net, January 23, 2015).

## Increased Hamas Presence and Activity along the Israeli-Gazan Border

10. In recent months **Hamas has carried out a variety of activities to increase its presence along the border with Israel**. The Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades has begun constructing a line of military posts at a distance of several hundred meters from the security fence (Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades website, March 14, 2015). Hamas also began **constructing a road at a distance of 250 meters (about .15 of a mile) and a few meters from IDF bases close to the border**.

11. The Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades is responsible for the construction of the road, whose objective is the "preservation of border security" and "resistance activities" [i.e., terrorist activities] (Rai al-Youm, May 24, 2015). Hamas' information bureau in the western Gaza Strip claimed the road would be called the Ahmed al-Ja'abari road, after the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades commander killed by the IDF (Alresala.net, June 3, 2015).



**Left: Construction near the eastern border of the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of PALINFO, May 24, 2015). Right: Scenes from a video posted by the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades show the construction of a road near the Israeli border security fence east of Rafah. An armed Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades operative secures the construction work a few meters from IDF forces (YouTube, June 4, 2015).**



Senior Hamas figure Ismail Haniya visits one of the new forward posts built by the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades (Facebook page of PALINFO, April 4, 2015).

12. In ITIC assessment the posts and road are primarily meant to increase the security control of Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades and Hamas' security forces over the area near the border with Israel. They will make it easier for Hamas to supervise civilians approaching the fence or trying to cross it and infiltrate into Israel. The road, when it is finished, can improve the operational capability of Hamas' military wing regarding Israel's ongoing security activities, and also make it easier to attack Israel when Hamas has decided the time is right. According to the Israeli media, senior IDF sources view the road construction positively, because it means that in effect **Hamas is enforcing a kind of security "buffer zone" near the fence** (Haaretz, July 8, 2015).

13. Operatives of **the PIJ's military-terrorist wing** have also increased their presence near the border with Israel and erected an observation post. Called the "Challenge Post," it is eight meters tall (almost 9 feet), and **located** about 650 meters (about 4/10 of a mile) from the border security fence near the town of Khirbat Ikhz'a in the southern Gaza Strip. The post is used by PIJ operatives to observe the movements of IDF forces in the region. According to the PIJ, its objective is to "raise the morale of the fighting residents" and to emphasize the victory of the Palestinians over Israel in Operation Protective Edge (Jerusalem Brigades website, July 5, 2015).



**Left: Movement of IDF forces near the border security fence seen from a Gazan observation post.  
Right: An observation post (Paltoday, June 5, 2015).**