



The Meir Amit  
Intelligence and Terrorism  
Information Center

## Another Round of Escalation in Southern Israel Update No. 2 (As of noon, March 13, 2012)

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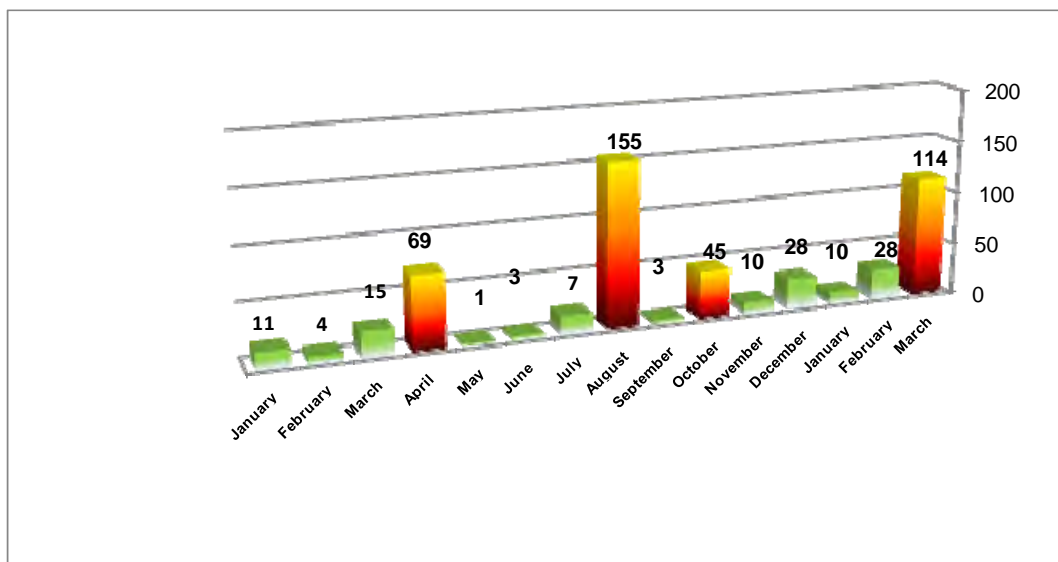
The Iron Dome aerial defense system which has intercepted dozens of rockets fired from the Gaza Strip during the current round of escalation (Photo courtesy of the IDF Spokesman)

### Overview

1. After four days of massive Gaza Strip rocket and mortar shell fire targeting Israel's south, a **lull arrangement was achieved through Egyptian mediation**. It was reported that the arrangement was accepted by all the Palestinian terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip (Reuters, March 13, 2012). **The arrangement went into effect at 0100 hours on March 13. Since the announcement about the arrangement was made, sporadic rocket fire and mortar shell fire has targeted Israel's south.**
2. The **Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)**, the terrorist organization dominant in the current escalation, said in an announcement that it accepted the agreement. However, its senior figures and media stipulated that their acceptance was conditional on Israel's stopping its "assassinations" (i.e., targeted killings), **in our assessment such terminology deliberately lays the groundwork and serves as an excuse for future violations of the agreement.**
3. Reports accompanying the lull arrangement clearly showed that **the PIJ**, the organization with the greatest number of casualties in the escalation, **was (as usual) formulating a "victory narrative."** The reports focused on the arrangement's "achievement" (ending the so-

called "assassinations") and overt and implied threats referring to the organization's "other cards," which it had not yet used (apparently longer-range rockets).

## Rocket Hits in Israeli Territory during the Escalations of the Past Year



Note: To date the statistics for March 2012 are estimations. They do not include the dozens of rockets intercepted and destroyed by the Iron Dome aerial defense system. If those rockets are included, the number of rockets launched in this escalation is far greater than in previous rounds.

## Rocket Fire (March 12)

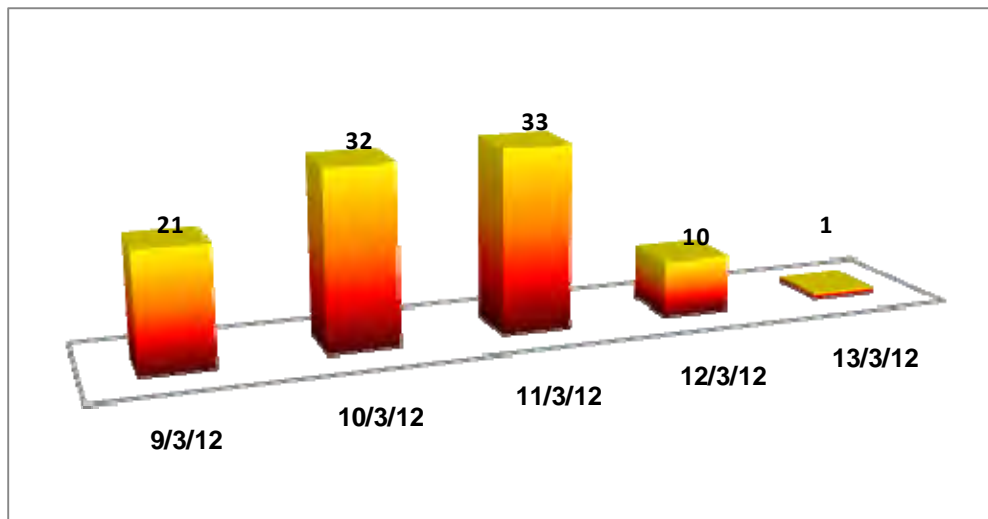
4. **On March 12, 25 rockets fell in Israeli territory.** The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted and destroyed seven others. **One rocket fell in the heart of a residential neighborhood in the southern Israeli city of Ashdod,** wounding two civilians and causing extensive property damage. After the lull agreement had been reached one rocket fell on the night of March 12. **During the morning of March 13 six mortar shells were fired,** falling in open areas in the western Negev. There were no casualties and no damage was done.

5. **During the current escalation more than two hundred rockets were fired, 112 falling in Israel's south.** The Iron Dome intercepted and destroyed **several dozen rockets,** preventing casualties in populated areas.

## The Situation on the Ground (March 13)

6. Generally speaking, Israel's south was relatively quiet on March 13. One exception occurred during the funeral of two PIJ terrorist operatives killed the previous day, **when a number of Palestinians participating in the funeral approached the security fence and threw stones at IDF watchtowers.** When the Palestinians refused to heed the soldiers' calls to halt, the soldiers shot at them to deter them, wounding three, according to the Palestinian media (Ynet quoting the Palestinians, March 13, 2012).

## Daily Distribution Rocket Fire Hits in Israeli Territory<sup>1</sup>



## Claiming Responsibility for the Rocket Fire

7. Many organizations continue to claim responsibility for the rocket fire. However, most of the rockets were apparently launched by the **Palestinian Islamic Jihad**. In claiming responsibility the organizations chiefly reported firing Grad and 107mm rockets (Terrorist organization websites, March 12, 2012).



Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip targeting Israeli territory ( Hamas' Palestine-info website, March 13, 2012).

## Israeli Air Force Attacks

8. In response to the massive rocket fire on March 12, Israeli aircraft pinpointed a number of terrorist targets, operatives and squads launching or about to launch rockets and mortar shells.

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<sup>1</sup>The number of rockets which **actually fell in Israeli territory**, excluding those intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system and those which fell in the Gaza Strip. The number of rockets fired on March 11 **are not final**.

**9. Some of the Israeli Air Force attacks were the following, as reported by the IDF Spokesman:**

1) During **the evening** the IAF struck a terrorist squad in the northern Gaza Strip. The squad was in the final stages of preparing to fire rockets (IDF Spokesman, March 12, 2012). IAF aircraft also attacked a tunnel in the southern Gaza Strip used for terrorist purposes. The Palestinian media reported that **two PIJ operatives had been killed in the strike** (Jerusalem Brigades' Paltoday website, date, 2012).

2) In **the afternoon** the IAF struck a terrorist squad firing medium-range rockets. **They were fired from a densely-populated area in the northern Gaza Strip.** After the launch two Palestinians were seen approaching the launching site and the aircraft attacked, apparently also hitting civilian bystanders (IDF Spokesman, March 12, 2012). The Palestinian media reported that a father and daughter had been killed (Jerusalem Brigades' Paltoday website and Al-Aqsa TV, March 12, 2012).

3) In **the morning** the IAF struck a terrorist squad preparing to fire rockets from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel. An additional terrorist operative preparing to fire rockets into Israel from the southern Gaza Strip was also struck (IDF Spokesman, March 12, 2012).

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XX2X6sYJ74&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XX2X6sYJ74&feature=player_embedded)

Click for the video of an IAF strike on a weapons depot in Jabaliya on the night of March 11 (IDF Spokesman, March 12, 2012).

## **Palestinian Casualties**

10. The Palestinian media reported a number of killed and wounded in the IDF attacks. **To date 20 Palestinian terrorist operatives have been killed** in the current escalation. Four civilian Palestinian bystanders were also killed and several dozen were wounded.

## **Merchandise Transported through the Gaza Strip Crossings Despite Mortar Shell Attacks**

11. **On March 12 two mortar shells were fired at the Kerem Shalom crossing**, falling on the Palestinian side of the crossing and **hitting trucks bringing merchandise from Israel to the Gaza Strip.** They also hit the car of the director of the Palestinian side of the crossing. Despite the attack, **routine activities of transferring merchandise from Israel to the Gaza Strip through the crossing continued** (IDF Spokesman, March 12, 2012).

12. The Palestinian Authority's health ministry sent **15 trucks of medicine and medical equipment to the Gaza Strip** (Wafa News Agency, March 11, 2012). The trucks entered the Gaza Strip through the Kerem Shalom crossing (Alresalah.net website, March 12, 2012).



Trucks loaded at the PA health ministry in Ramallah with medicines and medical equipment for the Gaza Strip (Wafa News Agency, March 11, 2012).

### **Egyptian-Mediated Lull**

13. In the early morning hours of March 13 Egypt announced it had brokered a comprehensive, mutual lull agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. According to the announcement the agreement had gone into effect at 0100 hours on March 13 (Wafa News Agency from Cairo and Reuters, March 12, 2012).

14. A "senior Egyptian figure" said in a statement that due to Egypt's continuing efforts to halt the military activity against the Gaza Strip and stop the shedding of Palestinian blood, Egypt was holding intensive contacts with all the Palestinian organizations and Israel. Accordingly, an agreement had been reached to stop the [military] activity and **to initiate a comprehensive, mutual lull at all levels, including an end to "assassinations" (i.e., targeted killings). The announcement also stated that Egypt would monitor the implementation of the lull** (Wafa News Agency, March 13, 2012).

15. **Daoud Shihab, PIJ spokesman**, said that the agreement committed Israel to stop its "assassinations" and that **it was an achievement for the Palestinian people and the "Palestinian resistance"** [i.e., the terrorist organizations]. He said that the PIJ had made the agreement conditional on Israel's agreeing to stop its "assassinations" and that if Israel violated the agreement "it was the right of the resistance to respond." He added that **there was no written agreement but rather an Egyptian announcement about Israel's commitment to a lull and ending the "assassinations," to which the PIJ agreed** (Al-Jazeera TV, March 12, 2011). The PIJ's website noted that the lull was based on the principle of a Qur'an verse according to which if Israel "returned to its evil ways," the PIJ would respond in kind, and that it was an achievement for the Palestinian people and the "resistance" (Jerusalem Brigades website, March 13, 2012).

16. Along with its mediation efforts, **the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated Egyptian People's Assembly issued a strong condemnation of the Israeli action in the Gaza Strip. It called on the government to revoke all agreements it had signed with Israel**, including the export of gas, to recall the Egyptian ambassador from Tel Aviv and to

expel the Israeli ambassador from Cairo. The Assembly also plans to send an official delegation to the Gaza Strip to express support for the Palestinian people (Al-Shurouq, March 12, 2012).

## Other Reactions

### Israel

17. In reference to the current escalation the **Israeli Defense Minister, Ehud Barak**, said during a visit to troops in the south that the current round of escalation again proved that the IDF would strike anyone who tried to act against Israel. He said that the Israeli Southern Command, in coordination with the IAF, the Israel Security Agency and military intelligence were acting correctly and decisively to deal with the rocket threat (IDF Spokesman, March 13, 2012).



Defense Minister Ehud Barak visits troops in Israel's south (IDF Spokesman, March 13, 2012).

### The Palestinian Islamic Jihad

18. Up to the time the lull was supposed to go into effect senior figures belonging to the PIJ, the organization firing most of the rockets and mortar shells during the current escalation, said that they would not agree to a lull **unless they received comprehensive guarantees**. **Abu Ahmed**, spokesman for the organization's military-terrorist wing, also threatened that if Israel did not stop its activities in the Gaza Strip there would be a "**change in response**," but did not elaborate (The PIJ's Paltoday TV, March 12, 2012).

19. During the morning on March 12 the PIJ's Paltoday TV channel broadcast a news flash to the effect that the military wing of the PIJ had announced that **if the Israeli attacks did not stop, the organization was ready to lengthen the range of its rocket fire into Israeli cities** (Paltoday TV, March 12, 2012).

### Hamas

20. Hamas issued a news brief **condemning the remarks made by the UN secretary general in the Security Council on March 12** (who said the "rockets attacks out of Gaza against Israeli civilian areas are unacceptable and must stop immediately" (UN website). The

Hamas news brief condemned the UN secretary general, noting that his statement was a violation of all the UN orders and treaties. It called on him to renege on his position (Website of the Hamas information office, March 12, 2012).