



**The Meir Amit Intelligence and  
Terrorism Information Center**

## **Another Round of Escalation in Southern Israel Update No. 3 (As of noon, March 14, 2012)**

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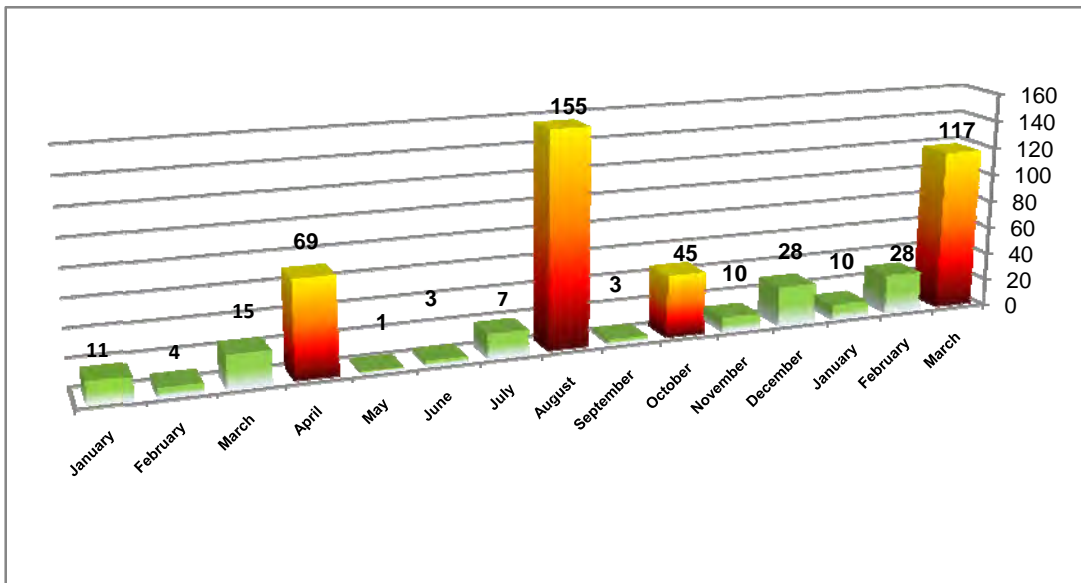
Life begins to return to normal: pupils in Israel's south go back to school (Photo by Yehuda Lahiani, courtesy of NRG, March 14, 2012).  
Note: The schools in Beersheba and other locations were closed again because rocket fire from the Gaza Strip continues in spite of the lull.

### **Overview**

1. **Despite the lull arrangement brokered by Egypt**, sporadic rocket and mortar shell fire from the Gaza Strip into the western Negev continued on March 14, although **to a far lesser degree** than during the four days prior to the arrangement. Since the lull was announced **three rockets** fell in Israeli territory, one of them a Grad rocket which hit the southern Israeli town of Netivot, and **four mortar shells**. **Note:** On the night of March 14, another Grad rocket hit Beersheba, and sporadic rocket fire continued on March 15.

2. The Palestinian terrorist organizations, headed by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, **continue fabricating a "victory narrative."** The PIJ insists it will not agree to a lull without a halt to Israel's targeting killings of senior terrorist operatives, and **threatens that the next time it will fire longer-range rockets** into Israel.

### 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 13)

3. On **March 13** three rockets and four mortar shells fell in Israeli territorial. One was a Grad rocket which **hit a parking lot in the southern Israeli town of Netivot**. There were no casualties. Several vehicles were damaged.



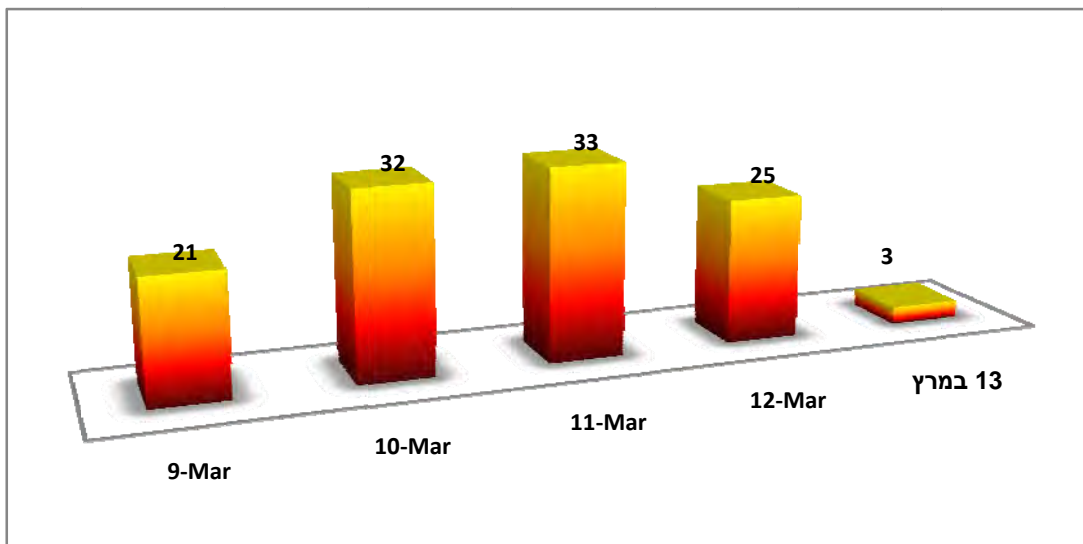
The Grad rocket which fell in Netivot (Photo by Yehuda Lahiani, courtesy of NRG, March 14, 2012)

4. During the latest round of escalation **more than 200 rockets were fired** from the Gaza Strip targeting Israel. Of them, **117 fell in southern Israel**. The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted and destroyed several dozen, preventing hits on populated areas .



Firing Grad rockets at Beersheba and Ofakim (from a video posted on the Jerusalem Brigades website, March 13, 2012).

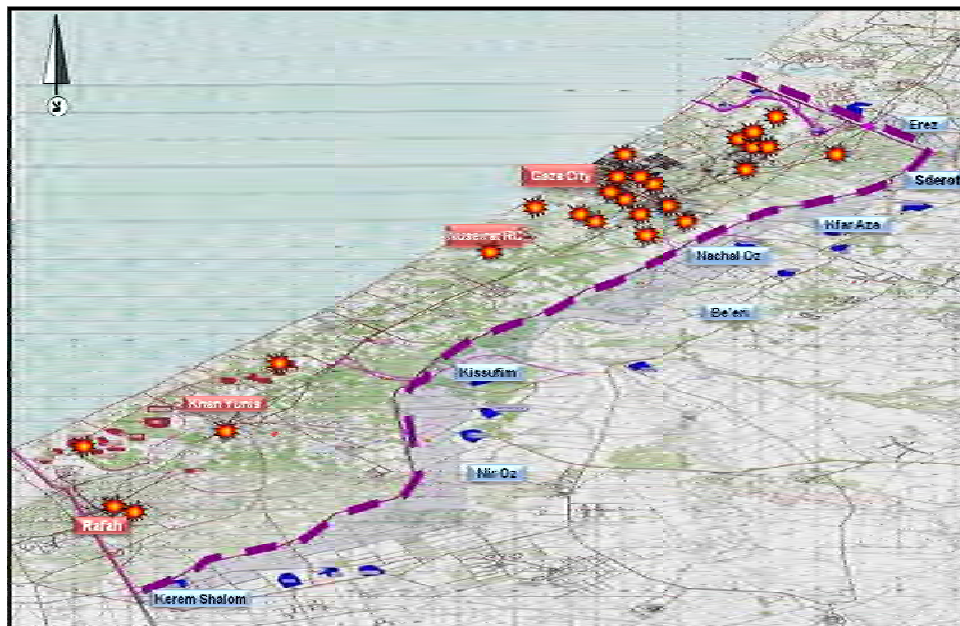
### Daily Distribution Rocket Fire Hits in Israeli Territory<sup>1</sup>



### Israeli Air Force Attacks

5. In response to the rocket attacks which continued after the lull arrangement, Israeli aircraft struck two terrorist targets in the northern Gaza Strip on the night of March 13 (IDF Spokesman, March 14, 2012).

<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 numbers of rockets fired on March 13 **are not final**.



Map of the deployment of terrorist targets hit by the Israeli Air Force during the current round of escalation.

## Reactions

### Israel

6. Major General Tal Russo, Commander of the Israeli Southern Command, said that **the current round of escalation had begun with a preemptive IDF targeted killing, carried out to avert a major terrorist attack in southern Israel, similar to the one on August 12, 2011 near Eilat.** He said that **the IDF had prevented the attack** and that in the current escalation the terrorist organizations had **failed to exact a significant price from Israel.** He added that the IDF was doing its best to ensure that the residents of the south could live their lives normally, but that did not exclude the possibility that in the future a larger-scale action might be required (IDF Spokesman, March 14, 2012).

### The Palestinian Islamic Jihad

7. The PIJ, which suffered the heaviest losses and carried out the greatest number of rocket launchings, is formulating its "victory narrative," and to that end held a victory parade in Gaza City with the theme "Tidings of victory." Speakers at the event admitted that the organization had suffered casualties but stressed that the main achievement of the escalation was that it had succeeded in "forcing Israel" to accept a lull agreement [with a subtext reading, "on the PIJ's terms"]. For example:

1) **Ramadan Shalah**, PIJ secretary general delivered a speech to the participants by telephone. He congratulated the PIJ and Popular Resistance Committees operatives for "having taught the enemy and the world a lesson they will not forget." He said that for the first time the organization had **succeeded in forcing Israel to accept a lull agreement**. He added that the PIJ had made it clear to Israel that if its activity increased, **the range of rockets fired into Israel would increase as well**. He said that the resistance [i.e., the terrorist organizations] had changed the balance of restraint and response between itself and the Zionist enemy. He also thanked **Egypt** for its efforts to **broker the lull, but reiterated that the organizations would not accept a lull without an end to the "assassinations"** [i.e., targeted killings] (The PIJ's Paltoday website, March 13, 2012).

2) **Khaled al-Batash**, senior PIJ figure, called it a "historic moment" in the conflict with Israel because the organization had made it clear that it would not allow Israel to strike it without retaliation. He said that the PIJ regarded the agreement as **a victory achieved by means of "resistance"** (Radio al-Quds, March 13, 2012).

3) **A spokesman for the PIJ's military-terrorist wing admitted that the organization had suffered heavy losses**. He said that he regarded the lull agreement as an achievement and a victory because it was the first time **"we forced Israel to accept the conditions of the resistance,"** and that they were prepared to respond to any attempt to violate the Egyptian-mediated agreement (The PIJ's Paltoday website, March 13, 2012).

## **The Popular Resistance Committees**

8. **Abu Yussuf**, spokesman for the military-terrorist wing of the PRC, said that the organization would be committed to the lull agreement as long as Israel was committed to it. He said his organization had agreed to maintain the agreement according to the conditions presented by Egyptian, and that included the stopping of Israeli attacks. He claimed the Iron Dome aerial defense system had been a complete failure because it has only managed to intercept one out of every hundred rockets fired [sic]. He added that the organization had "many other surprises" (Radio al-Quds, March 13, 2012).