



## Rocket and mortar shell fire attack Israel as part of the new "rules of engagement" Hamas is trying to dictate to protect arson terrorism

June 20, 2018

### Overview

- ▶ **On the night of June 19, 2018, there was another round of escalation from the Gaza Strip.** It began with the launching of incendiary kites and balloons which caused a series of fires in the Israeli communities along the Gaza Strip. In response Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a number of Hamas' military targets. **Hamas responded by firing 45 rockets and mortar shells at Israel.** This round of escalation was similar to the one two weeks ago, when Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) operatives fired rockets and mortar shells in response to Israeli Air Force attacks (May 29 and 30, 2018). In addition, **on the night of June 17, 2018,** while Israeli planes attacked Hamas military targets, **three rockets were fired at the western Negev north of the Gaza Strip.**
- ▶ The "return marches" organized by Hamas which began on March 30, 2018 recently took a new turn after participation in the marches waned and **arson terrorism using incendiary kites and balloons took center stage.**<sup>1</sup> Launching incendiary kites and balloons, which began on a small scale during the third week of the "return marches," **gained momentum in recent weeks, orchestrated by Hamas.** The kites and balloons have burned thousands of acres of crops and natural forest, and **severely disrupt the daily lives of the Israelis living in communities along the Gaza Strip border.**

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<sup>1</sup> For further information, see the June 18, 2018 bulletin "Arson Terrorism: A new method devised by Hamas during the "return marches" to attack the communities near the Gaza Strip and disrupt their daily lives."

Following the worsening of arson terrorism, the IDF stepped up its responses and began attacking Hamas targets, and did not only make do with firing warning shots at Palestinians launching kites and balloons. **Hamas, which is behind arson terrorism, is now trying to establish "new rules of engagement" to prevent severe Israeli responses and to protect the Palestinians launching kites and balloons. Hamas calls the "response equation" "an attack in return for an attack, blood in return for blood."** That is, **an IDF attack on Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip in response to the launching of kites and balloons will be retaliated by rocket and mortar shell fire into Israeli territory. As a result, an explosive situation has been created, with potential for additional escalation in the Gaza Strip. That, in turn, is liable to lead to a broad confrontation even if neither side wants one.**



**Joint Hamas-PIJ military wing notice stressing the "new equation:" "an attack in return for an attack and blood in return for blood" (in Hebrew)  
(Twitter account of Adham Abu Salmiya, June 20, 2018)**

## Rocket fire

- ▶ The last round of escalation began on June 19, 2018, at midnight, when Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked Hamas targets in the southern Gaza Strip close to the location from which a squad launched incendiary balloons into Israeli territory. In response a barrage of rocket and mortar shell fire from the Gaza Strip hit Israeli territory, continuing through the waves of Israeli attacks from about 01:15 until about 06:00 in the morning.
- ▶ According to the IDF spokesman, **during the night about 45 rockets and mortar shells were fired from the Gaza Strip at Israeli territory.** Seven were intercepted by the Iron Dome Aerial Defense System. At least three fell inside the Gaza Strip (Twitter account of the IDF spokesman, June 20, 2018). Five rocket hits were identified inside Israeli communities in the Eshkol regional council in the western Negev. **One rocket fell on a path leading to the kindergarten in one of the communities near the southern Gaza Strip** (spokesman for the Eshkol [southern Gaza Strip] regional council in the western Negev). Many of the residents of

the communities along the Gaza Strip and in the western Negev spent the night in bomb shelters and fortified rooms. No casualties were reported. Property damage was reported.



**A rocket hit near the kindergarten on one of the communities in Eshkol regional council the western Negev (Eshkol security, June 20 2018).**



**A rocket hit on a road (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, June 20, 2018).**



**Property damage in the Eshkol regional council region (Eshkol security, June 20 2018).**



**Notice issued by Hamas after firing 45 rockets at Israel. The Arabic reads, "45 rockets fired from the Gaza Strip at the occupied territories [i.e., Israel] since this morning" (Palinfo Twitter account, June 20, 2018).**

## IDF attacks

► In response to the rocket and mortar shell fire from the Gaza Strip, **Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked about 25 targets in the Gaza Strip, most of them belonging to Hamas.**

The attacks were carried out in three waves (IDF Twitter account, June 20, 2018).

- ◆ In the **first wave** three terrorist targets were attacked in a Hamas military installation.
- ◆ In the **second wave** eight terrorist targets were attacked in three Hamas military installations.
- ◆ In the **third wave** 11 terrorist targets were attacked in four Hamas military installations, including an underground training facility.

► The Palestinian media reported that the targets attacked belonged to Hamas, noting the following:

- ◆ The "**al-Hashashin post**" of Hamas' military wing **west of Rafah**. Two operatives of the military police were reportedly injured (Paldf Twitter account, June 20, 2018).
- ◆ The "**Ahmed al-Ja'abari post**" east of the Jabalia refugee camp (Twitter account of Shabakat Quds, June 20, 2018).
- ◆ **Agricultural territory near the Nuseirat refugee camp** (Palinfo Twitter account, June 20, 2018).
- ◆ **A post belonging to the naval police** of the "resistance" [i.e., the terrorist organizations] in the **southern Gaza Strip** (Twitter account of Shabakat Quds, June 20, 2018).
- ◆ A post belonging to the "resistance" [i.e., the terrorist organizations] in the **northern Gaza Strip**.
- ◆ The "**al-Katiba 13 post**" near the **al-Maghazi refugee camp** (Shabakat Quds, June 20, 2018).
- ◆ The "**al-Quds post**" belonging to Hamas' military wing **in western Khan Yunis** (Facebook page of Muthana al-Najar, date, 2018)

## Hamas and PIJ responses

► **The senior leaders of Hamas and the PIJ have not yet made public comments about the policy of rocket and mortar shell fire** (as of the afternoon of June 20, 2018). However, **Hamas and PIJ spokesmen have stressed the "right or response" to the so-called "Israeli aggression."** They have referred to **"a new equation" with Israel, calling it "an attack in return for an attack."** The Hamas and PIJ military wings also issued joint notices in Hebrew and Arabic (with the logos of both organizations) emphasizing the equation. However, according to their statements, it seems they are not eager to escalate the situation and apparently as far as they are concerned the **current round** has ended.

► For example:

- ◆ **Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** praised the rocket fire carried out by the "courageous resistance" in the Gaza Strip after one of the posts was attacked. He claimed the main message of the fire was **"an attack in return for an attack."** He claimed it was the "resistance" that would determine the rules of the confrontation,

and would not allow the "enemy" to harm the Palestinian people or impose "new equations" (Twitter account of Fawzi Barhoum, June 20, 2018).

◆ **PIJ spokesman Da'ud Shehab** said the Gaza Strip was not a "shooting range" for Israeli fighter jets and that the "occupation" was no longer operating in an empty space. He claimed **it was the "resistance's" right to repay Israel with the same coin**, at a time when it was convenient and according to the circumstances on the ground (Palinfo Twitter account, June 20, 2018).



**Joint Hamas-PIJ military wing notice stressing the "new equation" of "an attack in return for an attack and blood in return for blood"** (Telegram account of the Jerusalem Battalions, June 20 2018). It is similar to the notice also written in Hebrew (see first page).