



**A third round of escalation, more severe than the previous rounds, with about 200 rockets and mortar shells fired at Israel. The shelling is a continuation of Hamas' policy of controlled violence creating escalation.**

July 15, 2018

## Overview

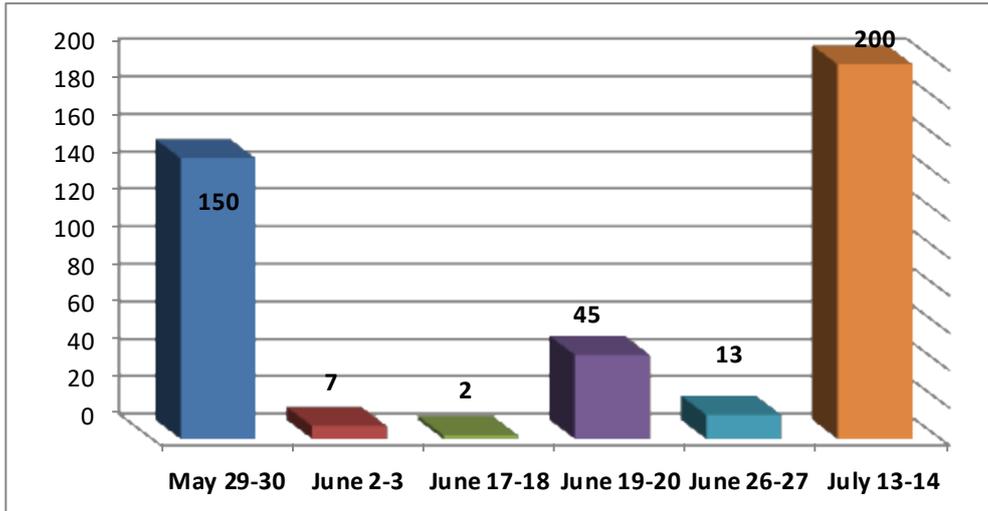
**On July 13 and 14, 2018 there was another round of escalation near the Gaza Strip.** It began after the IDF carried out extensive aerial attacks **in response to the wounding of an IDF officer by a hand grenade thrown during the "return march" on Friday, July 13, 2018.** During the escalation Israeli Air Force aircraft carried out three waves of aerial attacks on Hamas military targets, beginning on the night of July 14, 2018, and continuing the following day.

► During the round of **escalation massive barrages of rockets and mortar shells were fired** in three main waves, parallel to Israel's aerial attacks. **A total of about 200 rockets and mortars shells were fired.** The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted 37 of them. Four members of the same family in the southern city of Sderot were wounded.<sup>1</sup> Property damage was reported. In ITIC assessment, most of the rockets and mortar shells were fired by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) (no organizational claims of responsibility have been issued).

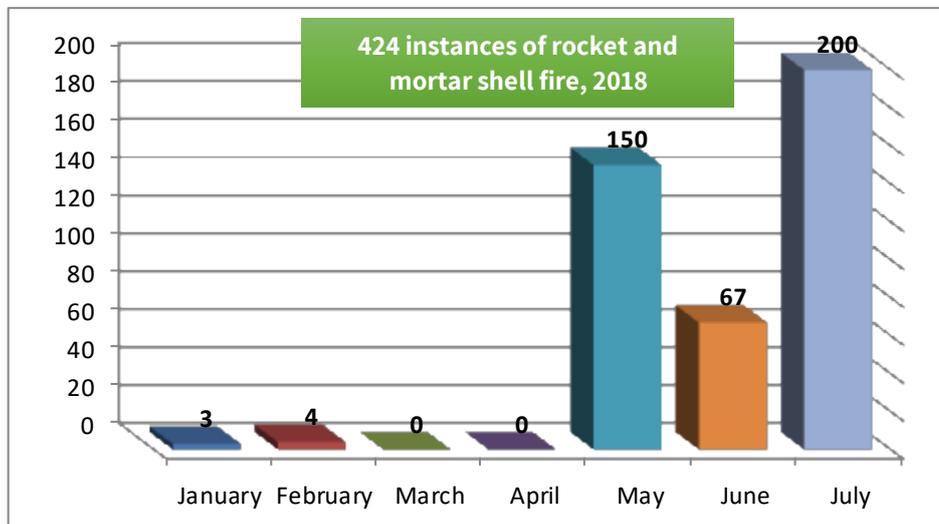
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<sup>1</sup> Data from the IDF spokesman. The data include the minimum number of rockets and mortar shells. At this stage the ITIC cannot distinguish between rockets and mortar shells.

### Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire during the Third Round of Escalation after Hamas Set Its "New Reaction Equation"<sup>2</sup>



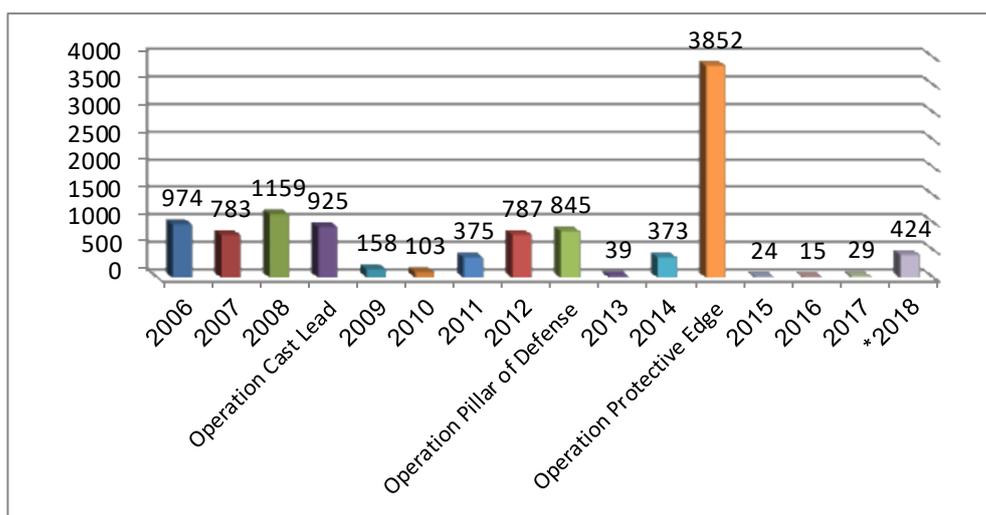
### Monthly Distribution of Rockets and Mortar Shells, 2018



Updated to July 15, 2018

<sup>2</sup> For further information see the June 25, 2018 bulletin, "Hamas' new policy towards Israel: from restraint and calm to controlled violence, creating escalation."

## Annual Distribution of Rocket Fire



- ▶ On the evening of July 14, 2018, Hamas and the PIJ announced **they would agree to the ceasefire brokered by Egyptian and international mediation**. However, they made it clear that **the ceasefire does not include the "return marches" or the launching of incendiary kites and balloons**. That clearly indicates that **Hamas intends to continue the policy of controlled violence towards Israel** it has employed for the past three and a half months. During the first stage (March 30 to the end of May 2018) emphasis was put on mass demonstrations and riots against Israel accompanied by violence near the security fence and the launching of incendiary and explosive kites and balloons into Israeli territory (arson terrorism). When the first stage exhausted its propaganda value and the number of participants at the "return marches" dropped, **Hamas decided to adopt a new modus operandi, which it currently employs**.
- ▶ Hamas and the PIJ announced **they would protect the launching of kites and balloons with the "new equation" of "an attack in return for an attack and blood in return for blood."** That included rocket and mortar shell attacks against Israel, an increase in number of incendiary kites and balloons, and a rise in the level of violence used against IDF forces near the security fence (with the decline in the number of "return march" participants).

So far, the transition of Hamas and the PIJ to firing rockets and mortar shells in defense of kite terrorism added **a new dimension to the Hamas-instigated escalation in the south**. So far Hamas has acted carefully and not fired rockets deep into Israeli territory. However, its **decision to continue arson terrorism** and various other forms of violence within the "marches" indicates that Hamas has taken into account the possibility of **a further escalation which does not deter it from continuing its policy**.

## The Events Leading to the Escalation

- ▶ **During the demonstrations and riots near the border fence on Friday, July 13, 2018, two IEDs and a number of hand grenades were thrown at IDF forces near the Karni Crossing.** One of the hand grenades wounded an IDF officer. In response to the attacks, at around 01:30 on July 14, 2018, **Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a series of Hamas terrorist targets.** As the IDF carried out its attacks, massive barrages of rocket and mortar shells were fired into Israeli territory. **During the night about 100 rockets and mortar shells were fired at Israel.**
- ▶ **There was quiet until the afternoon of July 14, 2018.** At 13:15 Israeli Air Force aircraft carried out extensive attacks against terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, rocket and mortar shell fire from the Gaza Strip was renewed. **As the rockets and mortar shells were fired Gazans, continued launching incendiary kites and balloons which caused a number of fires in the communities near the Gaza Strip.**
- ▶ Following international and Egyptian mediation efforts, a ceasefire went into effect at 19:00 hours. A few rockets and mortar shells were fired after 19:00 (see below).

## Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire

- ▶ **During the IDF attacks massive barrages of rocket and mortar shells were fired from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory** in waves parallel to the IDF attacks. **Most of the two hundred shells fired were mortar shells, with a smaller number of rockets. The rocket alert siren was sounded no less than 130 times in the communities near the Gaza Strip and in the southern Israeli cities of Ashqelon, Sderot and Netivot.** The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted 37 rockets. Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman reported that 90% of the rockets fell in open areas or were intercepted by the Iron Dome (Ynet, July 15, 2018).



**Firing rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel. They are launched from within civilian population centers (Palinfo Twitter account, July 14, 2018).**

- ▶ Two of the rockets hit the southern city of Sderot, one landing near a synagogue. No casualties were reported. The other landed in the yard of a residential home; **four family members were wounded by shrapnel**. A chicken coop in one of the communities was directly hit.



**Rocket hit in the southern Israeli city of Sderot (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, July 14, 2018).**

- ▶ **During the rocket and mortar shell attacks Gazans continued launching incendiary balloons**, which caused about 15 fires in communities near the border. All the fires were extinguished but fields and a nature preserve were damaged.



**A helium balloon from the Gaza Strip in one of the communities near the Gaza Strip border (Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, July 14, 2018).**

## IDF Response

► **Israeli Air Force aircraft responded with aerial attacks on Hamas targets.** The IDF reported it was the most severe response during daylight hours since **Operation Protective Edge** (July 2014). **More than 40 attacks were carried out** on military targets in four Hamas military compounds. Among the targets were a training area for urban warfare, warehouses storing weapons, training compounds, operations rooms, offices, sites for the manufacture of weapons and various storage centers (IDF spokesman, July 14, 2018).



**IDF aerial attacks in the Gaza Strip, July 14, 2018 (Palinfo Twitter account, July 15, 2018).**

- Some of the targets attacked were the following (IDF spokesman, July 14 and 15, 2018):
  - ◆ **A training site for urban warfare:** the IDF attacked a five-story building (the al-Katiba building) in Gaza City. It was used by Hamas' military wing as a training ground for urban warfare. There was a tunnel under the building which was used to train

operatives in subterranean fighting. The building was attacked after the inhabitants were warned by the IDF to vacate the premises (IDF spokesman, July 14, 2018).



**Right: An aerial photograph of the al-Katiba building in Gaza City, used as a training site. It is located near the Sheikh Zaid mosque (IDF spokesman, July 15, 2018). Left: The al-Katiba building, and to the left, the Sheikh Zaid mosque (Palinfo Twitter account, July 14, 2018).**



**Right: The IDF attack on the al-Katiba building. Left: The aftermath of the attack (Palinfo Twitter account, July 15, 2018).**



**Pictures from March 2018 of Hamas operatives during urban warfare training in the al-Katiba building. The facility is next to the Sheikh Ziad mosque. A tunnel was dug beneath it (Facebook page in Arabic of Israeli Coordinator for Government Activities in the Territories, July 15, 2018).**

- ◆ **The headquarters of the Hamas battalion in Beit Lahia:** the IDF spokesman reported the battalion's entire facility had been destroyed.



**Before (right) and after (left) the attack on Hamas battalion headquarters in Beit Lahia (northern Gaza Strip) (IDF spokesman, July 15, 2018).**

- ◆ **Terrorist tunnels:** two terrorist tunnels in the region of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip were destroyed. They tunnels did not extend into Israeli territory.
  - ◆ **Facilities for the manufacture of weapons and two weapons storehouses:** one storehouse was used by Hamas' naval force.
  - ◆ **A squad of mortar shell launchers in the northern Gaza Strip.**
- The ministry of health in the Gaza Strip called on all residents not to gather in places where Israel attacked (Twitter account of Ashraf al-Qidra, July 14, 2018). **According to reports from the Palestinian ministry of health, two Palestinian youths were killed in Israel's attacks in the Gaza Strip and 25 people were wounded.** The two fatalities and most of the wounded were the result of the attack on the al-Katiba building. The two killed were Amir al-Nimra, 15, and Loua'i Kahil, 16, both from Gaza City (Ma'an, July 14 and 15, 2018).

## Ceasefire Agreement

**Throughout the day on July 14, 2018, representatives of Egyptian intelligence and Nikolay Mladenov, the UN envoy to the Middle East, held talks with both sides in an attempt to reach a ceasefire.** According to media reports, Egypt exerted pressure on Hamas to cease its fire, reasoning that a continuation was liable to cause Israel to respond more severely and could lead to a general deterioration. **In the afternoon Hamas and the PIJ announced they agreed to a ceasefire.** Despite their agreement during the night **there were four launchings from the Gaza Strip**, one of which was intercepted by the Iron Dome.

- ▶ **Senior PIJ figure Ahmed al-Mudallal said the understandings of the ceasefire did not include the launching of incendiary kites and balloons or the demonstrations at the fence.** He said there was no connection between the lull in the fighting based on the understandings of the ceasefire in 2014 [i.e., the ceasefire that ended Operation Protective Edge] and the "return marches" and everything connected to them.
- ▶ Israel did not officially confirm the ceasefire and no details were reported of the particulars of the agreement. However, the IDF's Home Front Command reported the cancellation of the special instructions to Israelis living near the Gaza Strip and the return to routine daily life. Despite the lull, IDF forces are on high alert along the border, and the Iron Dome systems remain deployed (Ynet, July 15, 2018).
- ▶ On the morning of July 15, 2018, after the agreement went into effect, several fires were located near the Gaza Strip border, having been caused by incendiary balloons. About an hour later an Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked Hamas operatives launching balloons from the southern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, July 15, 2018).



Fire in one of the communities in the western Negev on July 15, 2018, after the ceasefire went into effect (Jewish National Fund, July 15, 2018).

## Responses of Hamas and the PIJ

- ▶ Most of the senior Hamas figures did not make public statements during the round of escalation. Hamas and PIJ spokesmen blamed Israel and **reiterated the equation recently formulated by Hamas and the PIJ of fire in return for fire and quiet in return for quiet.**
- ▶ Hamas spokesmen made the following comments during the clashes:
  - ◆ **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, gave a speech at the funeral of the two youths killed in the IDF attack on the al-Katiba building. He emphasized that **the "return marches" would continue** until their objectives had been achieved, the most important of which was lifting the siege on the Gaza Strip (al-Aqsa TV, July 15, 2018).
  - ◆ **Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** praised the Palestinian "resistance" [i.e., terrorist organizations] which had taken responsibility for responding directly with force to Israel's escalation. He said the **"resistance" would not retreat from the equation of "an attack for an attack."** He added that Hamas placed full responsibility on Israel for the results of the escalation. He said that the "resistance" would continue defending the Palestinian people and coping with [Israel's] aggression (Hamas website, July 14, 2018).



Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum responds to Israel's attacks in the Gaza Strip (Watan TV channel, July 14, 2018).

- ◆ **Isma'il Radwan, a senior Hamas figure in the Gaza Strip**, said he did not expect Israel to attack the Gaza Strip because Israel was aware of its failure. **He repeated that as far as Hamas was concerned, the kites were peaceful weapons [sic]** (al-Ghad YouTube channel, July 14, 2018).

- ◆ **Abd al-Latif Qanu', a Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip**, praised the Palestinian organizations in Gaza. They had, he claimed, put an end to the "Zionist escalation," responded to the attack on their people and kept Israel from forcing a new equation [on the Gaza Strip]. In addition, he said, the organizations had made it clear to Israel that it would lose every battle against the "resistance" and that **every attack would be answered with an attack** (Palinfo Twitter account, July 15, 2018).
- ◆ **PIJ spokesman Daud Shehab** said the era when Israel could attack the Palestinian people without a response had ended. He said the Palestinians were prepared to deal with any Israeli aggression. He said the "resistance" does not want a military struggle, but would not slacken in its response to Israeli aggression (Filistin al-Yawn, July 14, 2018).



**Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, give a speech at the funeral of the two youths killed in the IDF attack on the al-Katiba building in western Gaza City (al-Quds TV channel, July 15, 2018).**

## Appendix

### Previous Rounds of Escalation

#### First round of escalation (May 29-30, 2018)

► **On May 29, 2018**, at around 07:00, **about 30 mortar shells were fired into Israeli territory**. One shell landed in a kindergarten a short time before the children were supposed to arrive. The mortar shells were fired by the PIJ in response to the deaths of three of its operatives on May 27, 2018. Israel responded with Israeli Air Force aerial attacks on Hamas and PIJ targets. The IDF spokesman reported that more than 35 targets had been hit in seven compounds. During the Israeli Air Force attacks another barrage of rockets and mortar shells was fired at Israel. In addition to mortar shells, 107mm rockets were fired. Four Israelis were wounded by shrapnel; three were soldiers. At that point **operatives from Hamas' military wing joined the rocket fire**.



**Right: The remains of a mortar shell fired from the Gaza Strip (Shehab Facebook page, May 29, 2018). Left: The yard of the kindergarten near the Gaza Strip after it was hit by a mortar shell (Twitter account of Hamas' military wing, May 29, 2018).**

► **On the night of May 29, 2018**, the rocket and mortar shell fire continued. During a heavy barrage at about one in the morning a rocket fell in the stadium of the southern city of Netivot. Another hit a home in the western Negev. No casualties were reported but property damage was reported. Most of the rockets and mortar shells were intercepted by the Iron Dome.

► In response to the continuing attacks, **Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked 25 targets in the Gaza Strip**. They destroyed military equipment and Hamas and PIJ security facilities.

Among the targets hit were stores of drones used for terrorist purposes, a lathe used in the manufacture of rockets, an advanced naval device, military compounds, training camps and sites for the manufacture of weapons (IDF spokesman, May 30, 2018). However, no casualties resulting from the attacks were reported during the first round. It ended with a flimsy, informal agreement for a ceasefire, obtained through Egyptian mediation.

### **Second round of escalation (June 2-3, 2018)**

► **The second round of escalation was more limited in scope and occurred three days after the ceasefire that ended the first round.** Seven rockets and mortar shells were fired at Israeli territory. In the early evening of June 2, 2018 three mortar shells were fired from the southern Gaza Strip at Israeli communities. One was intercepted by the Iron Dome and two fell inside the Gaza Strip. In response the IDF fired two shells at an observation post in the southern Gaza Strip. Following the IDF fire more mortar shells and rockets were fired at the southern city of Sderot and several nearby communities. Somewhat later rockets were fired at communities in the western Negev near the northern Gaza Strip and the area south of the southern city of Ashqelon.

► In response Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip. Among them were ten targets in three terrorist compounds, including a site for the manufacture of weapons and a military facility. Also attacked from the air were five targets of Hamas' naval force in the northern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, June 3, 2018).

### **Rocket fire in response to IDF activity (July 17-18, 2018)**

► On the night of July 17, 2018, three rockets were fired at the western Negev south of Ashqelon. Two rockets fell in Israeli territory. No casualties or damage to property were reported. The rocket fire was in response to an IDF attack in response to the launching of incendiary kites and balloons and an attempt to sabotage security installations at the Karni Crossing. Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked nine targets in two military compounds and Hamas facilities for the manufacture of weapons in the northern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, June 18, 2018).

### **Rocket fire in response to IDF activity against incendiary kite and balloon launchers (June 19-20, 2018)**

► Following the increase in arson terrorism the IDF intensified its responses. It attacked targets of Hamas and other terrorist organizations and did not merely fire warning shots at

launchers of kites and balloons. Following the IDF attacks Hamas announced it was behind arson terrorism and had set "new rules of engagement" which would prevent strong Israeli responses and protect the kite and balloon launchers. The result was that another round of escalation began on the night of **June 19, 2018. Hamas operatives fired about 45 rockets and mortar shells at Israel.**

### **Rocket fire in response to IDF activity (June 27, 2018)**

► **On the night of June 27, 2018**, the IDF, using aircraft and a tank, attacked a vehicle belonging to a Hamas operative who was part of a squad launching explosive and incendiary balloons. Also attacked were two Hamas observation posts in the northern Gaza Strip. In response **Hamas fired 13 rockets and mortar shells** at communities near the border. Three rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system. No casualties were reported (IDF Facebook page, June 27, 2018).