



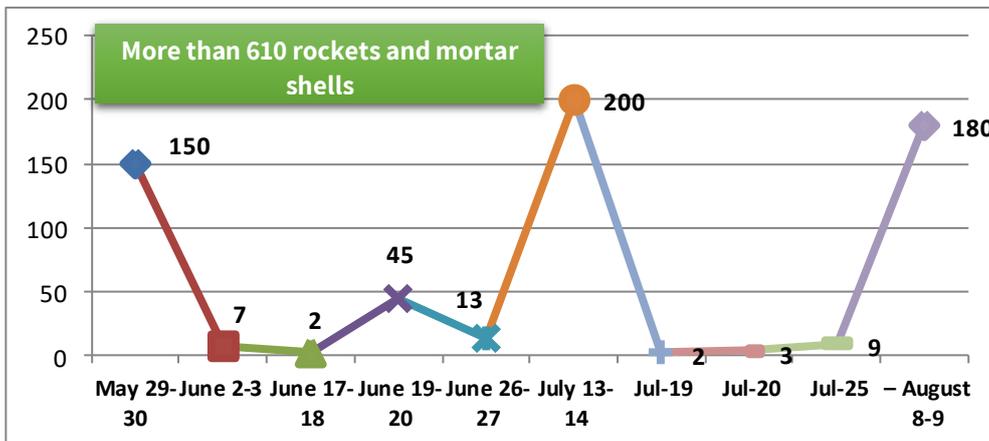
## The fifth round of escalation between Israel and Hamas, August 8-9, 2018

August 12, 2018

### Overview

On August 8 and 9, 2018, there was a **fifth round of escalation** between Hamas and the IDF. Hamas and the other terrorist organizations fired about **180 rockets and mortar shells** at Israeli territory. The IDF responded with **extensive attacks on Hamas' infrastructure and assets**. During and between the rounds of escalation (end of May to August 9, 2018), **more than 610 rockets and mortar shells were fired from the Gaza Strip at Israeli territory**. At the same time, contacts have been held to reach an agreement between the sides, mediated by Egypt and the UN envoy to the Middle East, so far without result.

**Rocket and mortar shell fire during and between the broad-scale rounds of escalation**



**The five rounds of escalation so far: three major rounds (150-180 rockets and mortar shells) and two intermediate rounds (9-45 rockets and mortar shells). Between the rounds there was intermittent fire (2-7 rockets).**

► **The fifth round began on August 7, 2018**, after shots were fired from a Hamas post near Beit Lahia (northern Gaza Strip). Given previous sniper fire, the shots were interpreted by the IDF as sniper fire attacking an IDF force. In response an IDF tank shot a number of shells at the post from which the shots were fired, killing two Hamas terrorist operatives (Hamas military wing website, August 7, 2018). Hamas later announced that the shots had been fired as part of a display and had not targeted IDF forces. Hamas, adhering to its equation of "an attack in

return for an attack and blood in return for blood," promised it would respond to the killing of its two military operatives.

► The response came after a delegation of the Hamas leadership, headed by Saleh al-Aroui, left the Gaza Strip. On **August 8, 2018**, an intensive barrage of rocket and mortar shell fire began, attacking **the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip**. The attacks continued through the night of August 8 into the afternoon of August 9, 2018. The unusually large number of rockets and mortar shells (about 180) and **the deliberate hits inside the communities near the Gaza Strip showed Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) are intent upon determining the rules of engagement on the ground and to dictate to Israel the timing, nature and type of ending for the rounds of escalation**. The IDF responded by **attacking about 150 targets, primarily belonging to Hamas' infrastructure and its assets in the Gaza Strip**. After 24 hours of exchanging blows, **Hamas unilaterally decided to stop the rocket fire**. However, the Israeli prime minister's office denied that Israel had committed itself to the ceasefire (Haaretz, August 12, 2018).

► In the meantime, **the "return march" campaign continues**. The "march" of Friday, August 10, 2018, was attended by about 9,000 Gazans, who gathered at the "traditional" sites along the border and clashed with IDF soldiers. Gazans also continue launching incendiary kites and balloons into Israel, although there has been a decline in the number. In any event, **the violence exhibited in the "return marches" and the continuing arson terrorism are a recipe for another round of escalation, one which is liable to lead to an extensive deterioration on the ground before attempts to reach an agreement can bear fruit**.

## The Unfolding of the Events

### Excuse behind the most recent round of escalation

► On **August 7, 2018**, shots were fired from a Hamas post near Beit Lahia (northern Gaza Strip). The IDF considered the shots as fired at its force, given the previous Hamas sniper attacks on Israeli soldiers. In response an IDF tank fired a number of shells at the Hamas post from which the shots had been fired. Hamas' military wing reported that two of its operatives from Jabalia had been killed (Hamas military wing website, August 7, 2018). Hamas later claimed the shots had been fired as part of a display and had not targeted IDF soldiers.



Picture from a Hamas military wing video showing the two Hamas military operatives who were killed by IDF fire during a display (Hamas military wing website, August 8, 2018).

### Hamas response: Stage 1

► Hamas' response began on August 8, 2018, about 24 hours after a delegation of the Hamas leadership, led by Saleh al-Arouri, had left the Gaza Strip and arrived in Egypt. In the afternoon **Hamas snipers shot at heavy engineering civilian equipment working on the construction of the marine barrier to the north of the Gaza Strip border.** No casualties were reported. One of the pieces of equipment was damaged (IDF spokesperson, August 8, 2018). In response Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked Hamas targets in Gaza City. The Palestinian media reported a shell had been fired at an observation post east of the al-Zeitun neighborhood in southeastern Gaza City, and that no casualties were reported (Safa, August 9, 2018).



Engineering equipment damaged by Hamas sniper fire (Twitter account of Avihai Adrai, the IDF spokesperson in Arabic, August 8, 2018).

## Hamas response: Stage 2

► On the afternoon of August 8, 2018, Hamas began evacuating its posts after the IDF Southern Command raised the alert level and closed a number of roads near the Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, August 8, 2018). In the evening, a massive barrage of rockets and mortar shells began from the Gaza Strip. **Initially the fire targeted the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip, but later its range was increased and rocket hits were identified in Ashqelon, Netivot and one in Beersheba.** Throughout the day the IDF responded with aerial attacks on Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip.

On the afternoon of August 9, 2018, Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip announced **the response to the "occupation's crime" of killing two snipers had ended and they would respond again when there was another Israeli "violation."** Nevertheless, sporadic rocket and mortar shell fire continued. In the afternoon **a rocket was fired at Beersheba for the first time since Operation Protective Edge (July 2014) (see below).** The attacks ended in the evening, and the IDF stopped its response. The announcement of a ceasefire clearly shows that **as far as Hamas is concerned, it is Hamas that will determine the beginning, nature and end of rounds of escalation.**

## Rocket and mortar shell fire

► On August 8, 2018, at about eight at night a massive barrage of rocket and mortar shell fire began from the Gaza Strip. Most of the fire occurred during the night. After a night of continual shelling, the attacks waned but did not cease, continuing until the evening of August 9. **About 180 rockets and mortar shells were fired into Israeli territory.** The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted about 30. Most of the rockets and mortar shells fell in open areas (IDF spokesperson, August 9, 2018). **The rate of rocket and mortar shell fire was higher than in previous rounds of escalation and targeted inside the communities near the Gaza Strip.** The range of rocket fire was also increased to include Ashqelon, Netivot and Beersheba (40 kilometers from the Gaza Strip). **Twenty-three Israelis were evacuated to hospitals,** one in serious condition. In various locations homes and industrial structures were damaged.

- The more prominent events of the round of escalation were the following:
  - ◆ **The events began on the evening of August 8, 2018, when a barrage of eight rockets was fired at the southern Israeli city of Sderot.** Two rockets were

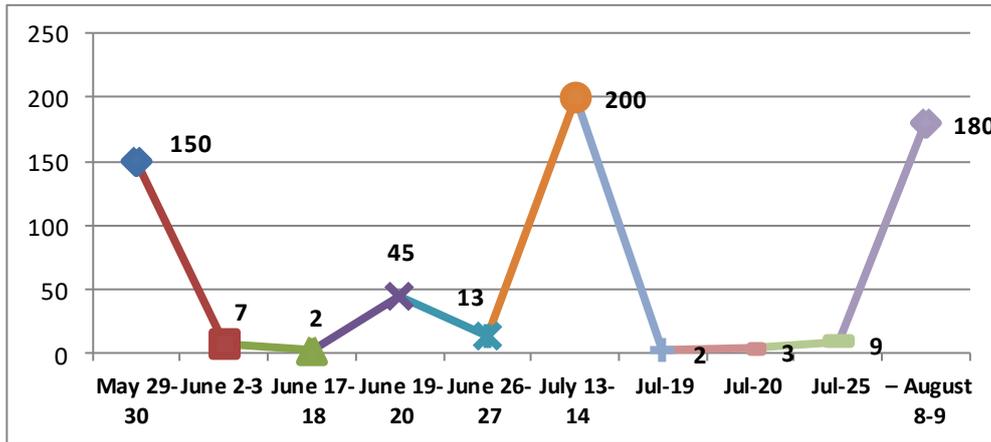
intercepted by the Iron Dome. Four rockets exploded in the city; one hit a private home and one a playground that was full of children at the time. One man was seriously injured and five civilians incurred minor injuries. Eight people were treated for shock.



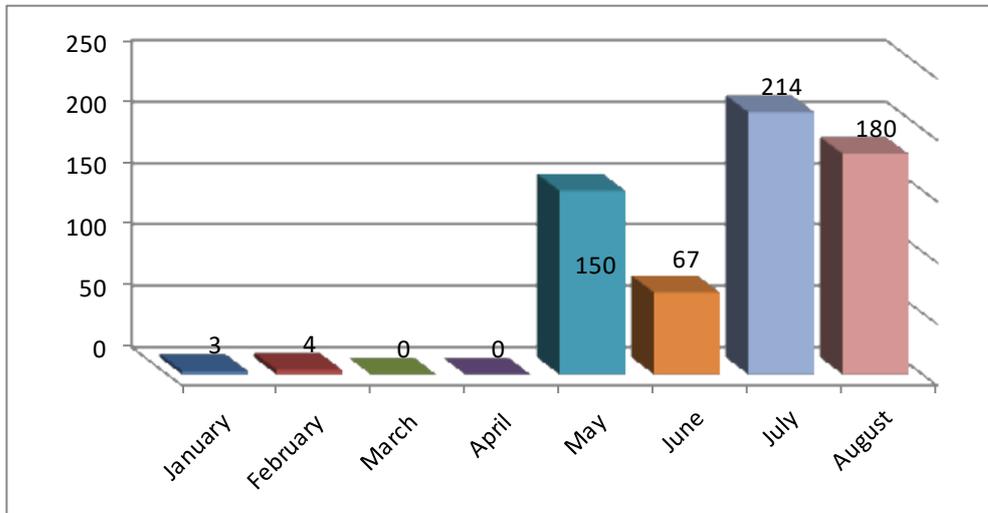
**Damage to a home in Sderot  
(Israel Police Force spokesman's unit, August 8, 2018).**

- ◆ On the **night of August 8, 2018**, a mortar shell was fired at a community near the Gaza Strip in the western Negev. **If fell near the front door of a home next to a packing house.** A Thai woman was seriously wounded. Another person suffered minor wounds.
- ◆ On the **morning of August 9, 2018**, Hamas increased the range of its fire and **launched a number of rockets at the southern Israeli cities of Ashqelon and Netivot.**
- ◆ At around 1500 hours on **August 9, 2018**, **after the Palestinian terrorist organizations had announced a ceasefire, a rocket was fired at Beersheba, Israel's largest southern city.** It exploded in an open area. No casualties or damage were reported. It was the first rocket launched at Beersheba since the end of Operation Protective Edge (July 2014). Palestinian sources reported that **the attack on Beersheba had been carried out by Salafists** and that the security forces in the Gaza Strip were monitoring them (al-Youm al-Sabaa, August 9, 2018).

### Rocket and mortar shell fire during and between the broad-scale rounds of escalation<sup>1</sup>

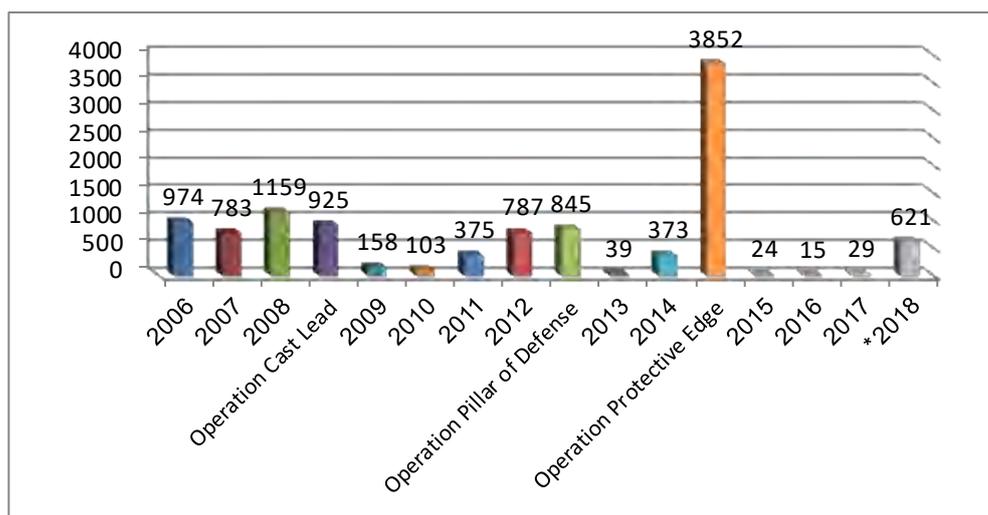


### Rocket and mortar shell fire since the beginning of the year



<sup>1</sup>The statistics do not include rockets that fell inside the Gaza Strip.

## Annual distribution of rocket fire



### Hamas and other terrorist organizations' claims of responsibility

- **By the night of August 8, 2018, Hamas' military wing had already claimed responsibility for the rocket fire at the communities near the Gaza Strip.** According to the announcement, in response to Israel's "aggression," the Palestinian "resistance" [i.e., terrorist organizations] had attacked enemy settlements and posts with **a large number of barrages** (Facebook page of Hamas' military wing, August 8, 2018, al-Anadolu News, August 9, 2018). Later on, Hamas' military wing reported that the most prominent sites attacked by the "resistance" were the headquarters of the IDF's Gaza Division; four army bases and posts; the city of Sderot and a community near the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of Hamas' military wing, August 9, 2018).
- **On the night of August 8, 2018,** the "joint operations room of the resistance [i.e., terrorist] organizations" issued a number of bulletins about rocket barrages targeting army posts, the cities of Sderot and Netivot, and four communities close to the Gaza Strip border (Hamas military wing website, August 9, 2018).



**Right: Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of Palinfo, August 9, 2018). Left: From a video produced by the "joint operations room of the resistance factions" about "rocket barrages targeting the enemy's posts and settlements." At the upper right is the logo of the joint operations room (Twitter account of Hamas' military wing, August 9, 2018).**

## Israel's response

► In response to the rocket fire **Israeli Air Force fighter planes attacked about 150 targets in the Gaza Strip, including military and infrastructure targets and assets** belonging to the terrorist organizations, primarily Hamas (as of August 9, 2018). Among the targets were the following (IDF spokesperson, August 9, 2018):

- ◆ A **battalion headquarters** of Hamas' military wing in Jabalia (northern Gaza Strip).
- ◆ A **military compound** of Hamas' northern brigade, including a submarine tunnel.
- ◆ A **Hamas military post** in the Jabalia region where urban warfare training and naval commando exercises were held.
- ◆ A **military compound** of the **Zeitun battalion** where weapons and tunnel-digging equipment were stored.
- ◆ A **compound of the eastern Jabalia battalion** where urban warfare training exercises were held. Within the compound was a shaft leading to a tunnel for terrorist purposes.
- ◆ A **Hamas base in the northern Gaza Strip** where urban warfare training exercises were held and from which rockets and mortar shells were launched.
- ◆ A **compound for urban warfare training** in the central Gaza Strip.
- ◆ A **battalion compound** where military exercises and meetings of senior Hamas figures were held.
- ◆ A **Hamas military compound** for the **Deir al-Balah battalion** from which a tunnel was dug.



**IDF attacks on the night of August 8, 2018  
(Palinfo Facebook page, August 9, 2018).**



**IDF attack on the night of August 8, 2018  
(Right: From the Facebook page of Hamas military wing, August 9, 2018).  
Left: From the Facebook page of Gaza al-A'an, August 8, 2018.**

► The Hamas-controlled ministry of health in the Gaza Strip reported that **three Palestinians were killed in the IDF attacks**. According to the report, two of them were allegedly a pregnant woman and her 18-month old daughter from the Hamash clan, killed when their house in Deir al-Balah was attacked. It was also reported that 40 people were injured (Twitter account of Shabakat al-Quds, August 9, 2018). The third fatality was Ali Yusuf Ghandour, 31, an operative in Hamas' military wing in the Jabalia refugee camp (Hamas military wing website, August 9, 2018). **Ali Yusuf Ghandour** was the son of **Abu Anas al-Ghandour**, a senior Hamas military wing operative.



**Isma'il Haniyeh (center) at the memorial service held for Ali Ghandour, killed in an IDF strike ( Hamas movement website, August 12, 2018).**

### **IDF response to rocket fire targeting Beersheba**

► In response to the rocket attack on Beersheba **Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a five-story building of Hamas' internal security in the Rimal neighborhood of Gaza City. The building was used by Hamas for military purposes** (IDF spokesperson, August 9, 2018). The Palestinian media reported an attack on the **al-Mis'hal Institute for Arts and Culture** in western Gaza City (Shehab Twitter account, August 9, 2018). According to the announcement, the building was completely destroyed (al-Mayadeen, August 9, 2018). The ministry of health reported 18 people injured in the attack (Twitter account of Ashraf al-Qidra, August 9, 2018).



**Right: The al-Mis'hal Institute building before the attack (Twitter account of Avihai Adrai, the IDF spokesperson in Arabic, August 9, 2018).  
Left: The attack on the building (Palinfo Twitter account, August 9, 2018).**



The remains of the al-Mis'hal Institute building after the attack (Palinfo Twitter account, August 9, 2018).

## Ceasefire

On August 9, 2018, "reliable sources" reported that **the [terrorist] organizations had decided on a "unilateral lull" to prevent a war with Israel, making clear that there would be "quiet in return for quiet."** According to the sources, with the support of "various agencies" **an agreement had been reached to stop firing rockets and mortar shells.** The sources also reported that senior Hamas figures had held conversations with several figures since the beginning of the escalation **to prevent the situation on the ground from deteriorating.** Reportedly, senior Hamas figures were willing to settle for the response to Israel's aggression and with sending the message that "an attack will be answered with an attack" (al-Quds, August 9, 2018). The office of the Israeli prime minister **denied Israel had committed itself to a ceasefire** (Haaretz, August 12, 2018).

► Senior Hamas figure Salah al-Bardawil responded to the ceasefire by writing, "**Now has ended another round of the rounds of struggle against the arrogant enemy. The medicine against the enemy is resistance, which knows no fear and will never retreat from the bosom of our proud people...**[Our] thanks to the spearhead, glorious Gaza, [our] thanks to the heroes of the resistance, [our] thanks to every heart that beats with love of resistance" (palsawa, August 10, 2018). **Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri** wrote on his Twitter account that **the recent round of confrontations proved that Israel was fragile and could be conquered** (Palinfo, August 10, 2018).

► **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** said that what had occurred was clearly Israeli aggression against Gaza and that the "resistance" had responded and defended itself. He said the position of Hamas and the "resistance" was clear: "quiet from Israel will be answered with quiet," and that **any aggression would be met with an appropriate response** (al-

Mayadeen, August 10, 2018). **Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum** said that **alongside the escalation and "aggression" against the Gaza Strip, a Hamas delegation had gone to Cairo to present its concept regarding a lull and the lifting of the siege of the Gaza Strip** (Shehab, August 9, 2018).

## The "Return March"

Despite the events, the Supreme National Authority of the Return March announced that **the "return march" events would take place as planned, and called on the Gazan population to participate in them** (Shabakat Quds, August 9, 2018). Hamas also encouraged Gazans to participate (Shehab, August 9, 2018). **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** said that **on Friday the Palestinian people would participate in the "return march" and challenge Israel's "war apparatus."** He also said Israel's most recent escalation would **give leverage to the "return marches"** (Palestinian Information Center, August 10, 2018). In ITIC assessment, **the violence of the "return marches" could potentially turn into another round of escalation, or possibly even cause the situation to deteriorate further.**

► The Friday, August 10, 2018, "return march" was held, with the theme "Freedom and life in the Gaza Strip." **About 9,000 demonstrators gathered at the traditional friction points along the Gaza Strip border with Israel** (IDF spokesperson, August 10, 2018). During the events rioters clashed with IDF forces. They burned tires near the fence and threw stones; **a hand grenade and an IED** were thrown at the soldiers. **An IDF force also identified an attempt to cross the fence.** In response an IDF tank attacked a Hamas post in the southern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesperson, August 10, 2018).



**Right: Rioters drag barbed wire away from the security fence in the central Gaza Strip (from a video from the Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Return March, August 10, 2018). Left: Rioters sabotage the security fence in the central Gaza Strip (Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Return March, August 10, 2018).**

► A spokesman for the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip reported that during the "return march" **two Palestinians were killed**, one of the allegedly a paramedic, and that 307 were wounded, 131 of whom were taken to hospitals (Facebook page of the spokesman of the ministry of health, August 10, 2018). On August 11, 2018, a spokesman for the ministry of health reported that the number of fatalities had risen to three after one of the wounded had died (Facebook page of the spokesman of the ministry of health, August 11, 2018).

► **Senior PIJ figure Ahmed al-Mudallal** gave a speech during the march in which he called the marches the Palestinians' "strategic solution." He stressed that the Palestinians had to continue the marches until the liberation of the "occupied territories" and holy places. He said the "resistance" had set new rules for the confrontation, called "the balance of fear and deterrence" (al-Aqsa TV, August 10, 2018). **Fathi Hamad, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, went to a "return camp" as part of delegation of senior figures from the various Palestinian organizations. He said they had come **to prove to the Palestinian people the success of the "attack in return for attack" equation**. He appealed to the Palestinians in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, saying they also had borders with Israel, and called on them to carry out the same activities carried out by the "return marches" in the Gaza Strip, including launching incendiary balloons (Paltoday, August 10, 2018).

## Arson Terrorism

► **With the end of the fifth round of escalation** arson terrorism returned, although to a lesser degree. **Over the weekend incendiary kites and balloons were launched into Israeli territory and caused a number of fires**. On August 10, 2018, Israeli firefighters put out five fires near the Gaza Strip, and on August 11, 2018, five more fires broke out, caused by incendiary balloons. In the evening an incendiary balloon was found near the dining room of

one of the communities in the western Negev. The Israeli Air Force operated a number of times against the squads launching incendiary balloons in the northern and southern Gaza Strip.



**Launching incendiary kites in eastern Gaza City during the "return march" (Palinfo Twitter account, August 10, 2018).**



**Launching incendiary balloons in eastern Gaza City during the "return march" (Facebook page of the Supreme National Authority of the Return March, August 10, 2018).**

## The Flotilla to "Break the Siege"

► On the afternoon of August 11, 2018, a **"protest flotilla" of "Lift the Siege" boats** set sail from the Gaza Strip. Before the voyage a press conference was held in the port of Gaza by Adham Abu Salmiya, spokesman for the Supreme National Authority of the Return March. He said the flotilla's objectives were to break through the new security zone which limits the Gaza Strip [i.e., the marine barrier Israel constructed near the Zikim shore to the north of the Gaza Strip border] and to lift the naval siege Israel had imposed. He appealed to all those attempting to secure a lull, saying the Gazans would not accept less than a comprehensive, permanent lifting of the "siege" (al-Aqsa, August 11, 2018).

► The five-boat flotilla **sailed from the port of Gaza towards Israel**. One passenger was Shadi Asfour, a correspondent for al-Aqsa TV, who provided a live report of the events (al-

Aqsa TV, August 11, 2018). Israeli navy boats neared the flotilla and fired warning shots to drive them away. The boats returned to Gaza port.



**The flotilla that set sail from the Gaza Strip  
(Facebook page of Supreme National Authority of the Return March, August 11, 2018).**