



# News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (January 9 - 15, 2019)

## Overview

- ▶ **This past week there was a high level of violence during the "return march."** The number of "return march" participants increased, IEDs and hand grenades were thrown at IDF soldiers and at the security fence, and there were a number of attempts to break through the security fence and enter Israeli territory. Senior Hamas figures said the marches would continue, and that they were considering intensifying the "return march" methods.
- ▶ In response to the violence, Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a Hamas post (January 11, 2019). On the night of January 12, 2019, a rocket was fired from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory. In response Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked two underground Hamas facilities in the northern Gaza Strip.
- ▶ On January 10, 2019, an Egyptian delegation visited the Gaza Strip. On the agenda were discussions about opening the Rafah Crossing, which has been only partially functional since the Palestinian Authority (PA) officials left (the crossing is currently open only for entrance into the Gaza Strip). A senior Palestinian figure claimed the Egyptians promised to open the crossing regardless of whether or not the PA authorized the return of its officials.
- ▶ In the northern arena **Israel announced the end of Operation Northern Shield**, carried out to locate and neutralize Hezbollah tunnels penetrating into Israeli territory. **During the operation six tunnels were exposed and neutralized.** The most recent tunnel, which was the largest and most complex, was dug from the Lebanese village of Ramyeh (in the central sector of the Lebanese-Israeli border) and penetrated several dozen yards into Israeli territory. The Lebanese government, in an effort to deflect attention from Hezbollah's tunnel project, launched a political and media campaign accusing Israel of violating Lebanese sovereignty by erecting a security fence along the border (especially in the region of Adaisseh, across the border from the Israeli community of Misgav Am).

## Israel's South

### The "return march" of January 11, 2019

► On January 11, 2019, the 42<sup>nd</sup> "return march" was held. Its theme was "Our firm stance will lift the siege." **About 13,000 Palestinians participated** (10,000 last week). The demonstrators gathered at a number of locations along the border. During the events **there was a high level of violence, which included burning tires as well as throwing stones, IEDs and hand grenades at IDF soldiers and at the security fence. In the northern Gaza Strip there were at least three attempts to break through the fence into Israeli territory.** In one instance IDF forces fired shots at suspicious Palestinians who fled back into the Gaza Strip. One IDF soldier was slightly injured by a stone (IDF spokesman, January 11, 2019).



**Palestinian rioters attempt to sabotage and cross the security fence (Supreme National Authority of the Great Return March Facebook page, January 11, 2019).**



**Palestinians burn tires near the security fence (Palinfo Twitter account, January 11, 2019).**

► In response to the violence **Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a Hamas post** (IDF spokesman, January 11, 2019). The Palestinian media reported an attack on "resistance" posts in the eastern Gaza Strip and in eastern Khan Yunis (Shehab, January 11, 2019). In addition, according to reports, tanks fired at an observation post in the town of Khirbat

Ikhza'a in eastern Khan Yunis, and at an observation post in the neighborhood of Sajaiya in eastern Gaza City. No casualties were reported (Ma'an, January 11, 2019; QudsN, January 11, 2019). Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said in response that the "crimes" Israel commits against the "peaceful" demonstrators and the attack on "resistance" posts are a "serious escalation," and that Israel is "playing with fire" and will not achieve anything (Fawzi Barhoum's Twitter account, January 12, 2019).

► According to information from the Palestinian ministry of health, during the "return march" events 185 Palestinians were injured (al-Mishraq News, January 11, 2019). Ashraf al-Qidra, spokesman for the ministry of health in the Gaza Strip, said that during the events **a Palestinian woman was killed** in eastern Gaza City and 25 demonstrators were wounded by IDF fire. He added that a **Palestinian child was wounded east of Jabalia and later died** (Ashraf al-Qidra's Twitter account, January 11 and 14, 2019).

► As they have every week since the marches began, senior figures from Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and other organizations in the Gaza Strip attended the events. Members of the Egyptian delegation visiting the Gaza Strip also went to the region of the march. According to **Fathi Hamad, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, members of the Egyptian delegation visited the "return camps" to see the demonstrators first hand, who, according to Hamad, allegedly preserved the calm (Paltoday, January 11, 2019).



**Khalil al-Haya and Isma'il Radwan at the "return march" in eastern Gaza City (Isma'il Radwan's Facebook page, January 11, 2019).**

► Senior Hamas figures said the marches would continue and that **they were considering intensifying the methods:**

- ◆ **Fathi Hamad, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said the Supreme National Authority had decided to test Israel. If Israel preserves the lull, he said, the status quo will be preserved, and if Israel does not preserve the lull or if demonstrators are killed

or wounded, they would assess the situation and take steps in accordance with developments on the ground. Based on the decisions, they would instruct the Palestinians regarding the "return march" of the following week (Paltoday, January 11, 2019).

◆ **Senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan** said that if Israel continued delaying the implementation of the understandings reached through Egyptian mediation, **the Supreme National Authority would reexamine escalating the methods it had used during the "return marches"** (al-Aqsa, January 11, 2019). During an interview he stated that the marches would continue to be popular in nature. He said they would escalate and that **on March 30, 2019, the first anniversary of the "return marches," new activities and methods would be revealed** (al-Aqsa, January 13, 2019).

◆ **Khalil al-Haya, deputy chairman of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip**, said the attempts to force the "resistance" to surrender and to draw attention to its weapons through the "siege" would fail. He said the Egyptian delegation had reported that Israel was committed to the understandings of the ceasefire. He also said that as long as Israel was committed, Hamas was committed (Filastin Online, January 12, 2019).



**Khalil al-Haya interviewed during the "return march" in eastern Gaza City (Filastin Online, January 12, 2019).**

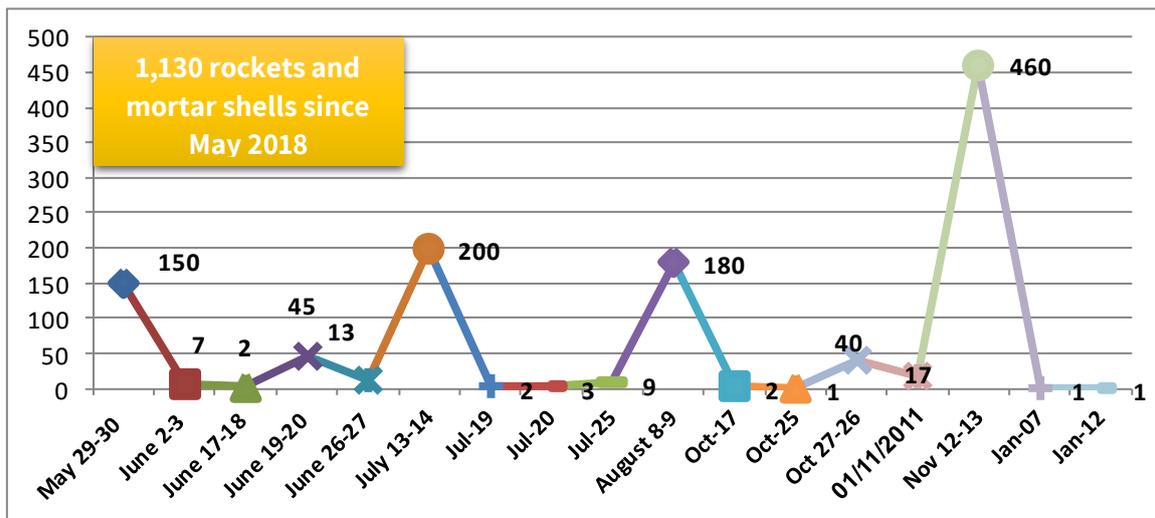
► The Supreme National Authority warned Israel that its efforts to evade its commitment to break the "siege" would **be answered with another escalation and the use of "various popular means of exerting pressure."** The Authority called on the Palestinians to participate in the march this coming Friday (January 18, 2019), whose theme would be "Unity is the path to victory and to foil plots" (al-Hadath, al-Aqsa TV, January 11, 2019). The Authority also announced the mini-flotilla would be cancelled because of the weather, and stressed that the activities on land and on sea would continue until all demands had been met and the

"siege" had been completely lifted (Ma'an, January 13, 2019). **It was the third consecutive time the mini-flotilla events were cancelled.**

## Rocket Fire

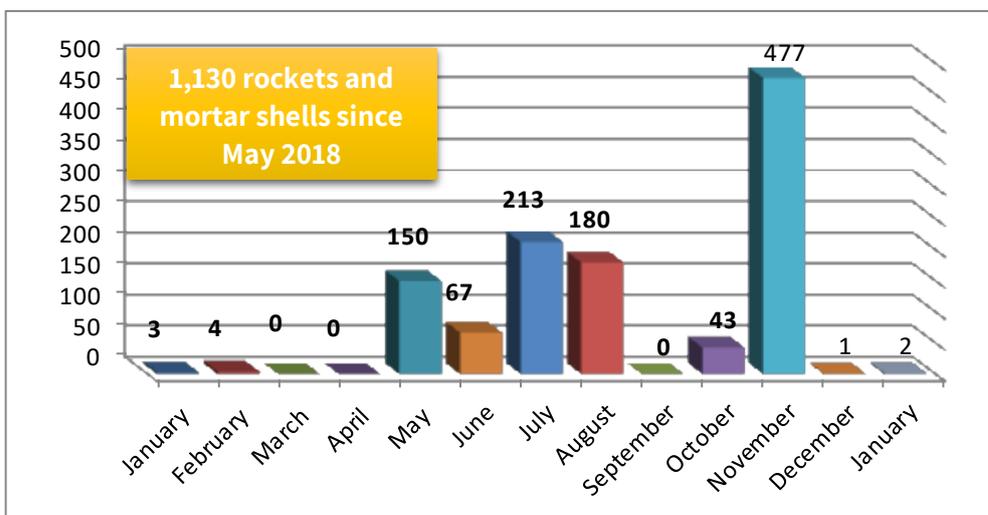
- **On January 12, 2019, a rocket was launched into Israel territory.** It exploded in an open area in the western Negev. No casualties or damage were reported.
- In response to the rocket fire Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked two underground Hamas facilities in the northern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, December 13, 2019). The Palestinian media reported that an observation post of Hamas' military wing and agricultural areas had been attacked in eastern Gaza City. No casualties were reported (Safa, January 12, 2019; al-Andalou News, January 13, 2019).

### Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire During and Between the Recent Rounds of Escalation<sup>1</sup>

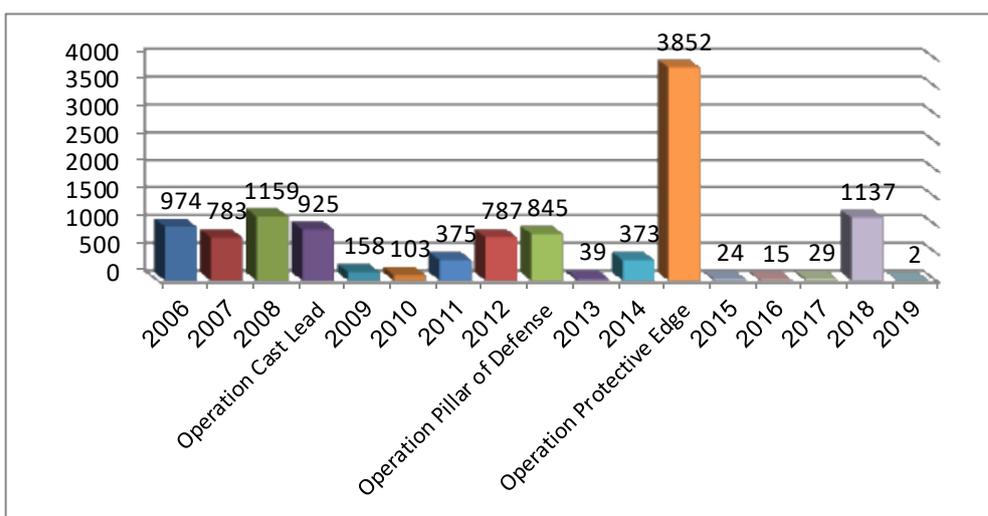


<sup>1</sup> The statistics of the launching of rockets and mortar shells are according to the IDF spokesman's assessment..

## Monthly Distribution of Rocket and Mortar Shell Fire since January 2018



## Annual Distribution of Rocket Hits



## Judea and Samaria

### Attempted stabbing attack

► On **January 11, 2019**, a Palestinian tried to stab IDF soldiers manning a **military post in Kiryat Arba**. The soldiers and a civilian fired shots at the Palestinian, who was wounded and evacuated to a hospital. No Israeli casualties were reported (IDF spokesman, January 11, 2019).

## Shooting attack

► On **January 5, 2019**, shots were fired from the roof of a building **in the village of Beit Fajjar at the community of Migdal Oz** (in the Gush Etzion region). No casualties or damage were reported. Israeli security forces carried out a search which led to the detention of a squad of operatives and the seizure of the weapons (IDF spokesman, January 11, 2019).

## Other events on the ground

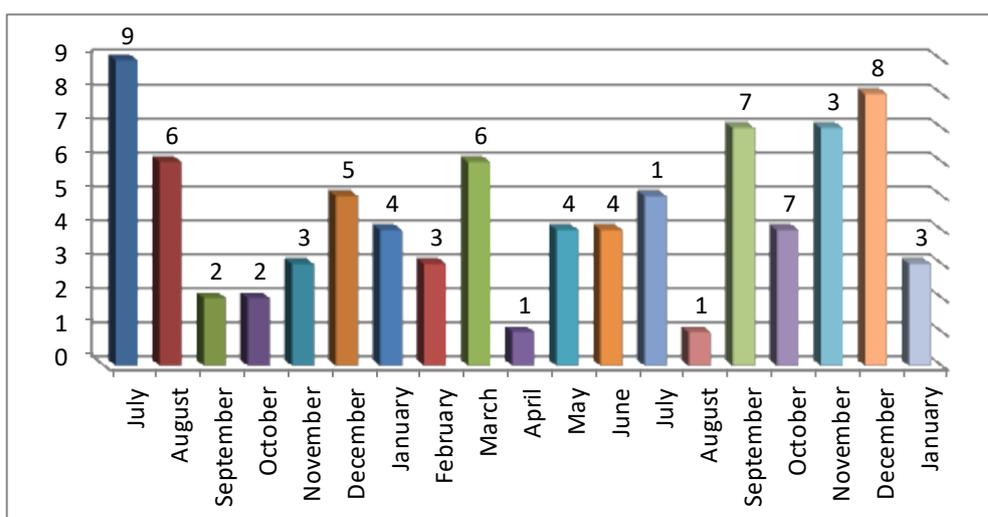
► Israeli security forces carried out counterterrorism activities detaining Palestinians suspected of terrorist activity and seizing weapons. The more prominent events were the following:

► **December 13, 2019:** During an Israeli security force activity in **the village of Arana (northeast of Jenin)** six weapons, thousands of bullets and parts of weapons were seized (IDF spokesman, January 13, 2019).

► **December 10, 2019:** During an operational activity in **Hebron** the Israeli security forces identified a suspicious vehicle. The vehicle was pursued and halted. A search revealed an M-16 assault rifle, two improvised hand guns and a large quantity of ammunition (IDF spokesman, January 10, 2019).

► **December 9, 2019:** During an operational activity in **Hebron** an M-16 assault rifle and a hand gun were seized (IDF spokesman, January 9, 2019).

## Significant terrorist attacks in Judea and Samaria during the past year<sup>2</sup>

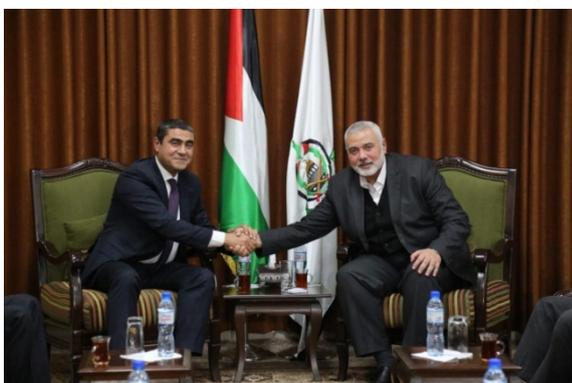


<sup>2</sup> A significant attack is defined by the ITIC as involving shooting, a vehicular attack, the use of IEDs, or a combination of the above. Stones and Molotov cocktails thrown by Palestinians are not included.

## Developments in the Gaza Strip

### Egyptian delegation visits Gaza Strip

► An Egyptian delegation headed by **Ayman Badi'**, a senior officer of Egyptian General Intelligence, arrived in the Gaza Strip on January 10, 2019 (Shehab Twitter account, January 10, 2019). The delegation met with **Isma'il Haniyeh**, head of Hamas' political bureau, and **Yahya al-Sinwar**, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip (Shabakat Quds Twitter account, December 10, 2019). The delegation also met with **Tawfiq Abu Na'im**, in charge of Hamas' internal security apparatus, and other senior figures (Shehab, January 10, 2019).



**Right: Yahya al-Sinwar greets the Egyptian delegation on their arrival in Gaza City (Safa Twitter account, January 10, 2019). Left: The Egyptian delegation meets with Isma'il Haniyeh (Hamas website, January 10, 2019).**

► One of the main topics discussed at the meetings with the Egyptians was **the full opening of the Rafah Crossing**. Since the PA officials left, the crossing has been operated in **one direction only**, for people and merchandise entering the Gaza Strip (Facebook page of the ministry of the interior and national security in the Gaza Strip, January 14, 2019). According to senior Hamas figure Isma'il Radwan, at a meeting with the Egyptians **they also discussed the possibility of opening the Rafah Crossing independently of the presence of PA officials** (al-Aqsa, January 13, 2019). A senior Palestinian who was present at a meeting of representatives of the organizations with the Egyptian delegation claimed that **the members of the delegation promised to open the Rafah Crossing in any event, regardless of whether or not the PA authorized the return of its officials** (Shahed Sinaa's Facebook page and al-Ayam, January 12, 2019).



**The Rafah Crossing open in one direction only, for Palestinians returning to the Gaza Strip and merchandise entering from Egypt (al-Jazeera YouTube channel, January 13, 2019).**

- ▶ Another issue discussed was implementing the understandings with the Israelis to ease the "siege" of the Gaza Strip. The Hamas leadership stressed that Israel ("the enemy") had to be made responsible for implementing the understandings under the aegis of Egypt and that the "siege" of the Gaza Strip had to be broken. The Hamas leadership also claimed that Israel's justifications and lack of commitment to the understandings to stabilize the ceasefire were not acceptable. Khalil al-Haya, a member of Hamas' political bureau, said Egypt had promised it would make Israel implement former agreements (al-Aqsa TV, January 10, 2019).
- ▶ On January 11, 2019, the Egyptian delegation left the Gaza Strip through the Erez Crossing for meetings in Ramallah (Palinfo Twitter account, January 11, 2019).

### **Hamas delegation visit to Russia postponed**

- ▶ **Musa Abu Marzouq, a member of Hamas' political bureau**, said that during a phone call with Mikhail Bogdanov, the Russian deputy foreign minister and presidential envoy to the Middle East, **they decided to postpone the visit to Russian of Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, to a later date.** That was because of "the commitments of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov" (Musa Abu Marzouq's Twitter account, January 10, 2019). During an interview, **Abd al-Hafiz Nofal, the PA representative to Russia**, said he had spoken with Mikhail Bogdanov who told him that it had been decided to postpone the visit because as far as the Russians were concerned, there were tensions in the Palestinian arena and they wanted the visit to be held under more suitable circumstances (al-Mayadeen, January 10, 2019).
- ▶ Asked if there were preconditions preventing the visit, Musa Abu Marzouq said that Russia had not set any preconditions. He said there might be other reasons for the postponement,

for example the Russians might want to prepare for the visit to make sure it was a success. He added that in all probability a new date would be set for the visit in the near future (sputnik agency in Arabic, January 11, 2019).

### Personnel change in Hamas legation in Lebanon

► On January 10, 2019, Hamas held a ceremony in its office in Beirut for changing its personnel in Lebanon. **Ahmed Abd al-Hadi**,<sup>3</sup> currently responsible for Hamas' political affairs in Lebanon, will be the new Hamas representative. He will replace **Ali Baraka**, who has been Hamas' representative in Lebanon for eight years, according to the movement's regulations. Present at the meeting was **Izzat al-Rishq**, a member of Hamas' political bureau, and head of its bureau of Arab and Islamic relations. According to the announcement, Ali Baraka will continue as a member of the bureau of Arab and Islamic relations (Hamas website, January 10, 2019).



Ceremony in Beirut. Left to right, Ali Baraka, Izzat al-Rishq, Ahmed Abd al-Hadi  
(Hamas movement website, January 10, 2019)

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<sup>3</sup> **Ahmed Abd al-Hadi** (Abu Yasser) is a Hamas activist and long-time member of the Hamas leadership in Lebanon. Until now he has been responsible for Hamas' political affairs in Lebanon, and is known as second in command in Lebanon, after Ali Baraka.



**Right: Izzat al-Rishq meets (center) with the Lebanese Prime Minister Sa'ad al-Hariri (al-Mustaqbal website, Lebanon, January 9, 2019). Left: Izzat al-Rishq (second from right) meets with Nabih Berri, speaker of the Lebanese parliament (al-Markazia, Lebanon, January 8, 2019).**

### PIJ delegation visits Syria and Lebanon

► A PIJ delegation which included **Khaled al-Batash, a member of the PIJ's political bureau and chairman of the Supreme National Authority; Isma'il al-Sundawi, coordinator for the Syrian arena;** and other activists, met with **Bouthaina Shaaban**, political advisor for information of the bureau of the Syrian president. Al-Batash praised Syria's pioneering role in the "resistance axis" and its support in the past and present for the struggles of the Palestinians. He stressed the need to support the "return marches" to ensure they would continue. Bouthaina Shaaban said Palestine was Syria's most important issue. She said she was prepared to support the "return marches" and raised the possibility of accepting some of the wounded for treatment in Syria (Paltoday, January 7, 2019).



**Khaled al-Batash and Abu Mujahed with Bouthaina Shaaban (Paltoday, January 7, 2019).**

► **From Syria the PIJ delegation went to Lebanon** where they met with **Hassan Huballah, a former member of the Lebanese parliament and responsible for Hezbollah's relations with the Palestinians.** One of the subjects discussed was the "return marches." They stressed the

importance of continuing the marches and the need to give them moral support. **They also discussed ways to support the families of the shaheeds and wounded.** The Hezbollah representative said the Lebanese "resistance," led by Hezbollah, supported the Palestinian "resistance" in every way possible (Facebook page of Ihsan Atiya, PIJ representative in Lebanon, January 9, 2019).



**Khaled al-Batash (center) meets in Beirut with Hassan Huballah, in charge of Hezbollah's relations with the Palestinians (Facebook page of Ihsan Atiya, PIJ representative in Lebanon, January 9, 2019).**

## The Palestinian Authority (PA)

### PA activity in the UN

- ▶ On January 14, 2019, Mahmoud Abbas arrived in New York to participate in transferring the chair of the 77 Group of Developing Countries to the PA. Nabil Abu Rudeina, spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas, said it was a historic event and another political achievement for "Palestine" since its admittance to the UN General Assembly as an observer (Wafa, January 14, 2019).
- ▶ In October a large majority of the UN General Assembly voted to have the PA chair the 77 Group. Moreover, since the PA is not a full UN General Assembly member, after the vote it was decided to give "Palestine" addition legal privileges including the right to issue statements and propose resolutions and amendments (UN website, October 17, 2018). That gives the PA the capability to act as a member state in every respect, another step in recognizing Palestine as a member state.



**Right: Mahmoud Abbas shaking hands in New York with the president of the UN General Assembly. Left: Mahmoud Abbas shaking hands with the UN Secretary General (Wafa, January 14, 2019).**

► During his visit to New York Mahmoud Abbas planned to request full membership in the UN Security Council for the PA (al-Quds, January 11, 2019). During an interview **Nabil Shaath**, advisor to Mahmoud Abbas for foreign affairs and international relations, said that if the United States continued using its veto to prevent the PA from attaining full membership in the UN, the PA would achieve membership gradually through other channels (Palestinian TV, January 12, 2019).

## The Northern Front

On January 13, 2019, **Israel announced the completion of Operation Northern Shield, carried out to locate Hezbollah tunnels penetrating into Israeli territory from Lebanon.** According to the announcement all the tunnels crossing the border had been exposed. Thus according to the IDF spokesman, **the threat of tunnels in Israel's north had been lifted.** The IDF announced that it was monitoring a number of sites in Lebanon from which Hezbollah is digging tunnels that have not yet crossed the Israel-Lebanese border (IDF spokesman, January 13, 2019). That ended the IDF activity that began on December 4, 2018 to expose and neutralize the tunnels dug by Hezbollah. **During the operation six tunnels penetrating into Israeli territory were exposed and made inoperable.**



**Right: The sixth Hezbollah tunnel, east of the village of Ramyeh in south Lebanon. Left: The route of the tunnel from Ramyeh into Israeli territory (IDF spokesman's website, January 13, 2019).**