

Operation Cast Lead (Gaza) - December 2008 – January 2009

On December 27, 2008, in response to eight years of barrages of rockets and missiles launched by [Hamas](#) and other terrorist organizations in Gaza, Israel began a ground military operation. In light of the unceasing attacks, Israel felt it had no choice but to act against Hamas and eliminate its operational capabilities.

As then Presidential candidate Barack Obama said in July 2008 when he visited the beleaguered southern town of Sderot – the target of thousands of rockets - "If somebody was sending rockets into my house, where my two daughters sleep at night, I'm going to do everything in my power to stop that."

During the three-week operation, Israel's military action targeted the Hamas terrorist infrastructure, including Hamas operational centers, storage depots, workshops, production facilities, smuggling tunnels, rocket launching sites and Hamas gunmen.

During the operation, Hamas launched hundreds of rockets on Israel with increasingly further reach. On January 6, 2009, rockets hit the central Israeli city of Gadera, putting over 900,000 Israeli civilians living within range of Hamas rocket attacks.

While every military operation is difficult, the Israel Defense Forces faced particular challenges in Gaza. Hamas deliberately placed its operational centers in densely populated neighborhoods. Hamas leadership headquarters were bunkered beneath a major Gaza hospital. Palestinian rocket launchers were

placed amidst apartment houses, schools, mosques and hospitals. Hamas stashed weapons in houses, schoolyards and mosques.

The IDF, following its own internal ethics guidelines and rules of engagement, required its forces to make every effort to limit civilian casualties under these very challenging conditions. The IDF conducted investigations of IDF forces during the operation and concluded that: "...throughout the fighting in Gaza, the IDF operated in accordance with international law. The IDF maintained a high professional and moral level while facing an enemy that aimed to terrorize Israeli civilians whilst taking cover amidst uninvolved civilians in the Gaza Strip and using them as human shields. Notwithstanding, the investigations revealed a very small number of incidents in which intelligence or operational errors took place during the fighting. These unfortunate incidents were unavoidable and occur in all combat situations, in particular of the type which Hamas forced on the IDF, by choosing to fight from within the civilian population."

Throughout the operation, Israel also undertook to ensure the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza. Israeli government officials met regularly with representatives from the United Nations and humanitarian organizations to ensure that Gazans were provided with the necessary aid, food and medical supplies.

On January 17, Israel announced it was unilaterally ending its operation in Gaza. Israel's decision to undertake this unilateral ceasefire followed the January 16 signing of a "Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and Israel Regarding Prevention of the Supply of Arms and Related Materiel to Terrorist Groups". The MOU, signed by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Israel Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni provided Israel with the assurance that the United States would be a partner in preventing the flow of arms and military equipment to Hamas. Following these guarantees, Israel agreed to a one week ceasefire to enable negotiators to work out firm guidelines for ending Hamas' smuggling of

weaponry into Gaza, and guarantees to stop Hamas rocket fire into Israel. By January 21, all Israeli troops had left Gaza.

On January 9, 2009, the United Nations Human Rights Council voted to send a mission of appointed experts to assess Israel's alleged human rights violations in Gaza. The resulting Goldstone Report was released in September 2009, and accused Israel of committing war crimes in the Gaza Operation through a deliberate policy to target civilians. The report further alleged that Israeli government and civil society would be unable or unwilling to properly investigate charges of military abuse. The Goldstone Report became a focal point for critics of Israel, who claimed it documented "proof" of Israel's guilt and immoral policies.

In response to the report, Israel submitted a series of comprehensive papers to U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon detailing Israel's intensive process of investigating military-related incidents during the Gaza Operation. While Israel found no proof of wrongdoing in numerous incidents, these investigations led to a number of indictments and criminal charges, and military disciplinary action. Israel also reported that consistent with its process of learning lessons from each military operation, the IDF has implemented procedures to further minimize civilian casualties and damage to civilian property, as well as further limits on the use of munitions that contain white phosphorus.

In April 2011, the lead author of the UN report, South African jurist Richard Goldstone, wrote an op-ed in *The Washington Post*, stating: "If I had known then what I know now, the Goldstone Report would have been a different document." In the op-ed, "*Reconsidering the Goldstone Report on Israel and war crimes*," Justice Goldstone withdrew the report's most serious claim that the Israeli Defense Forces intentionally targeted civilians during their operations in Gaza. The op-ed further commended Israel's investigations into charges of abuse. As Justice Goldstone concluded, "the investigations published by the Israeli military and recognized in the U.N. committee's report...indicate that civilians were not intentionally targeted as a matter of policy."