

Operation Protective Edge: July-August 2014

In response to unceasing missile, rocket and mortar fire on civilian centers in Israel, on July 7, 2014, Israel launched a military operation, codenamed “Operation Protective Edge.” Israel Defense Forces (IDF) targeted strategic [Hamis](#) facilities, tunnels, weapons and leadership. The conflict lasted 50 days, with a series of short-lived ceasefires breached by Hamas. Israel initially attacked Hamas targets by air, however, on July 17, Israel sent ground forces into Gaza for a period of just over two weeks in order to destroy Hamas’s infrastructure, including rocket storage sites and infiltration tunnels which Israel was unable to destroy by aerial attacks. An open-ended cease-fire was reached on August 26.

Prior to launching the ground operation, Israel attempted to deescalate the situation with repeated warnings to Hamas and appeals to the international community to facilitate a ceasefire. When these measures failed to end the barrage of rocket attacks on Israel’s population centers, Israel determined it had no choice but to act against Hamas and try to constrain its operational capabilities in order to protect Israeli civilians from further attacks.

During the 50-day conflict, 4,700 missiles, rockets and mortars – some of which were supplied by Iran - were fired by Hamas and other affiliated terrorist organizations from Gaza into Israeli cities and towns. At least six Israeli civilians were killed by Hamas rockets, the youngest a 4 year-old boy who was at play in his family’s living room, and a number were injured, some quite seriously. Sixty-six Israeli soldiers were killed during the ground operation.

The majority of the rocket attacks were on population centers in the south, including Sderot, Ashkelon and Ashdod, but scores of rockets reached significantly further into Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, Be'er Sheva, and even as far north as Haifa, a distance of over 85 miles from Gaza. Two-thirds of Israel's civilian population (equivalent to over 200 million Americans) – Jews, Muslims, Christians and others – were directly threatened by missiles from Gaza. Hamas' rockets struck Israeli apartment buildings, schools, houses, cars and power lines, causing approximately \$25 million in damage. For seven weeks, sirens warning of incoming rockets blared across Israel. In some regions of the country, sirens went off dozens of times a day, with people having as little as 15 seconds to find safe shelter. Nearly one million Israelis had less than one minute's notice to reach shelter before a rocket would explode.

Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system intercepted approximately 600 projectiles fired into Israel, including missiles fired toward Ben Gurion International Airport. The primary reason Israel's casualty figures were quite low is due to the Iron Dome's success in intercepting the incoming projectiles. Several rockets were also fired by other terrorist groups from Lebanon, Syria and the Egyptian-controlled Sinai desert into Israel. In addition, Israeli security forces stopped Hamas-affiliated terrorists from infiltrating Israel by sea, overland, and through infiltration tunnels.

Despite Israel's best efforts to avoid harming non-combatants, there were many civilian injuries and deaths were reported in Gaza. As in prior Israel-Hamas conflicts, Hamas had deliberately placed its operational centers, storage facilities and rocket launching sites, infiltration tunnels, in densely populated areas, including private homes, mosques, schools and medical facilities, a violation of the Law of Armed Conflict (which prohibits a party to hostilities from deliberately making civilians the object of attack). Hamas' own military manuals urged their fighters, many of whom posed as civilians and non-combatants, to use populated civilian areas so that it "increases the hatred of the citizens towards the attackers

[the IDF] and increases their gathering [support] around the city defender [Hamas].”

Israel enacted procedures to warn civilians through leafletting, phone calls and other methods, that their neighborhoods and buildings were located in the vicinity of military operations and urged them to leave the area. In response to these warnings, Hamas advised Gaza residents to ignore “Israeli propaganda” and stay in their homes.

The exact number of Palestinian casualties in Gaza remains under investigation, but in the weeks after the war ended, Israel estimated the number at 2,127 – 616 were members of Hamas and other terrorists groups, 706 were civilians and 805 were still being investigated. Each Palestinian casualty was regrettable and tragic, and Israel has begun investigations into certain incidents where it is claimed that civilians were killed or injured.

During the conflict, Israel stopped a number of Hamas terrorists attempting to enter Israel through so-called “terror tunnels” built to enable Hamas terrorists to infiltrate into Israel. In one incident, Hamas operatives were caught carrying tranquilizers and handcuffs, with the apparent aim of kidnapping Israeli soldiers. In addition, Hamas operatives used tunnels to attack Israeli soldiers on the ground in Gaza. Over the course of the operation, the IDF uncovered and destroyed 32 tunnels and over 60 tunnel shafts. Exit points in Israel were discovered under kibbutz dining halls, in fields near Israeli towns and on the outskirts of Israeli communities all along the border with Gaza. It is estimated that the construction of each tunnel required over 4000 tons of concrete each at a cost of over one million dollars.

Throughout the conflict, Israel and Hamas did agree to a number of “humanitarian ceasefires” in order to enable Gazans to shop and resupply. On most occasions, Hamas refused to extend the ceasefire and resumed firing rockets almost immediately upon the ceasefire’s conclusion. Short-lived cease-fires were agreed

to on July 15 (Hamas rejected it within hours); August 1 (within 90 minutes Hamas attacked a group of Israeli soldiers); August 8 (Hamas rejected the terms and resumed the firing of rockets); August 19 (Hamas violated an extension agreement and fired rockets).

Finally, on August 26, following nearly two months of conflict, Israel, Hamas and other Palestinian factions in Gaza agreed to an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire for an indefinite period of time. As part of the agreement, Hamas committed to halting rocket fire from Gaza into Israel, and Israel ceased its military actions in Gaza. Israel also agreed to reopen border crossings between Israel and Gaza in order to facilitate the transfer of humanitarian aid and reconstruction supplies, and to restore the six-nautical-mile fishing zone off the Gaza coast.

The terms agreed to were virtually identical to those Hamas had rejected in the early days of the conflict. Referring to Hamas' prolonging of the crisis, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said in the days after the end of hostilities, "it was possible for us to avoid all of that, 2,000 martyrs, 10,000 injured, 50,000 houses (destroyed)."

In keeping with its commitment to observing international law, Israel created a permanent Fact Finding Assessment Mechanism (FFA Mechanism) to compile alleged violations of international law during Operation Protective Edge, approximately 100 incidents in total. The incidents are being investigated by Israel's Military Advocate General (MAG) which has launched criminal investigations into a number of the alleged violations.