

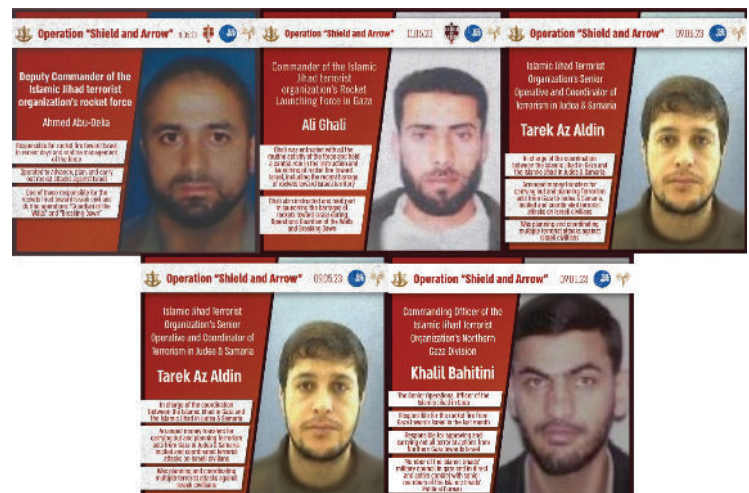
Affirming Israel's Regional Deterrence Through the Gaza Operation

National security affairs in Israel during the first half of May were dominated by Israel's military operation in Gaza against the force buildup of Iranian proxy Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Amid the Iranian attempt to broaden its synergy with, and sphere of influence among pragmatic Sunni nations, this Israeli action underscored its commitment to tackle Iran's infrastructure around it, much like its strikes against Iranian entrenchment in Syria and its attributed actions in Iran itself.

- Israeli air force has eliminated 6 top commanders in the PIJ, responsible for launching rockets on Israeli civilians and who were planning further attacks. These included some 25 rockets fired at Israel a week prior to the Shield and Arrow operation, which began on May 2 following the death of Hader Ednan, a PIJ militant who had self-imposed a hunger strike as he did several times in the past and who died in the hospital
- These militants included the Commander of the PIJ Northern Brigade, responsible for the launch of rockets into Israel; his successor; a senior militant who coordinated PIJ's terrorist activity in Judea and Samaria ("West Bank"), including **the distant instruction of rocket units acting in Jenin and planning to launch rockets into central and northern Israel from Judea and Samaria**; a senior militant who was responsible for the suicide attacks in Beit Lid and Dizengoff st. in the 1990s who claimed the lives of dozens of innocent Israelis; and another senior militant who was responsible for the massacre of Israeli citizen Tali Hatuel and her four daughters (aged 11, 9, 7, and 2) in 2004.
- Israel also made successful strikes on over 700 PIJ targets, including armament warehouses and rocket launch pads.
- During the entire operation, Israel made a distinct, overt separation between PIJ and Hamas, only targeting the PIJ. This marks a departure from Israel's traditional position, according to which it considers Hamas the sovereign in the Gaza strip and responsible for any attacks carried out from this territory toward Israel. Hamas, for its part, made the point of non-interference, getting the most out of an Israeli attack on its main adversary in the Gaza strip.



IDF Spokesperson's summary of the operation in Gaza



Five of the senior PIJ militants targeted by the IDF in Gaza



IDF spokesperson released documentation of mislaunched PIJ rockets landing inside Gaza, harming innocent Gazan civilians



IDF spokesperson released documentation of Iron Dome in action, intercepting PIJ rockets



IDF spokesperson released drone documentation of PIJ terror targets attacked in Gaza



IDF Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi and Head of Shin Bet Ronen Bar in an operational assessment during the Shield and Arrow Operation (IDF spokesperson)



IDF spokesperson released documentation of Iron Dome in action, intercepting PIJ rockets

Several key conclusions can be drawn from this 5-day operation:

While the operation has showcased tactical achievements and Israel's military superiority over PIJ, it has still failed to change the strategic long-term picture of Israel's relations with Gaza and the Iranian entrenchment there.

- Israel has avoided the continuation of strikes until over 24 hours of quiet were violated by PIJ. That means, the old formula has been maintained: "quiet will be answered with quiet" on Israel's part with no willingness of broadening its scope of action unless the adversary forces it to retaliate.
- Namely, **while achieving short-term quiet, the lack of greater vision for the Gaza strip resulting from this tactical operation implies that the repetitive practice of "rounds of fighting" between Israel and Gaza-based terror groups is expected to continue** much like previous rounds (2019, 2021, 2022) with short intervals in between. PIJ's force buildup was eroded, and it has suffered a major blow with 6 of its top commanders taken down, but **immediately upon the end of the current round, PIJ's force buildup toward the next confrontation has begun.**

- This compels Israel as well as the international community to **ponder the long-term arrangements for the Gaza strip, currently controlled by Iranian-backed terror groups, including solutions that address the force buildup problem that endangers the safety of Israeli citizens.**

Having said that, Israel has sent an important message of deterrence at a time when its enemies conduct "drills" to test its domestic cohesion, willingness to fight and the quality of its layers of defense.

- Despite the Iranian Leader's projection of Israel's "demise" in light of its domestic political crisis and increasing social protests, and his proxies' attempt to test the Israeli public's willingness to fight and the quality of its layers of defense during the April escalation - a combined attack in Lebanon, Gaza, tensions in Judea and Samaria and in Jerusalem's Temple Mount - Israel has affirmed its deterrence by means of Operation Shield and Arrow.
- The entirety of IDF reserve and standing forces acted without reservation and in unity. The combined effort of spearhead intelligence that stunned the enemy with its precision and depth of penetration in its ranks, operational success of the air force and the almost ironclad protection by the Iron Dome air defense system gave Israel the upper hand in this round of fighting and stunned the other side with its precision and the depth of its intelligence's penetration. This has signaled cohesion at a time when Israel's standing was interpreted as vulnerable.



Israeli citizen, resident of a Rehovot building that suffered a direct hit by a PIJ rocket standing amid the rubbles. The hit caused the death of an 80-year-old woman (Photo exclusively obtained by the IDSF)

- Israel also showcased the **first operational use of the David's Sling air defense system** in intercepting missiles above the skies of Tel Aviv, which has been a success. Generally speaking, **the use of air defense systems headed by Iron Dome prevented serious civilian casualties in Israeli cities and towns and provided decision-makers with enhanced room to maneuver.**

The operation also reflected Israel's maturing political status among the international community, which enabled it to continue fighting without serious pushback.

- While the United States signaled to Israel its willingness to see an end to the round of fighting, overall the administration had Israel's back and defended its right for self-defense in light of some pushback on the part of some actors. Israeli-Egyptian relations, with Cairo's role in mediating the ceasefire, have also been affirmed.
- As some on social media and the international stage sought to slander Israel for the loss of civilians in Gaza, the IDF has done important work **releasing videos of mislaunched rockets, proving that Gazan innocent people's killing was caused by PIJ's launching of rockets that landed inside the Gaza strip.** All in all, **1 in 5 rockets fired by the PIJ landed inside Gaza.**
- Israel has acted **in accordance with the proportionality principle anchored in international law** as its military strikes were limited to the reasonable degree and intensity of force required to address the threat or harm it faced.

Several high-level conclusions can also be drawn from this operation:

- National security is not measured by the number of rockets or fatalities, but by the degree by which a society is capable of absorbing shock waves and remain resilient, alongside the support and civilian resilience it provides to its decision-makers and armed forces in their action against an enemy.
- Israel's resilience has also been manifested in its willingness to **enter into a military campaign with an unknown ending and to take the risk of uncertainty**, as it was determined to affirm its deterrence with PIJ and the region.
- **The long-standing misconception of "separation between Israelis and Palestinians" was yet again proven wrong**, as no rocket launching units operate around Judea and Samaria due to the IDF's continuous "lawn mowing" activities, as opposed to the uninterrupted force buildup on the other side of the fence in the Gaza strip as a result of the 2005 Disengagement Plan - the separation by fence of the two populations, enabling Hamas to take power.
- If Israel is to disengage from Judea and Samaria as it did in the Gaza Strip, that would imply that the Gaza Envelope, or Israeli towns located up to 15km from the Gaza border, can be elaborated into the Judea and

Samaria Envelope. In that case, 15km from the "Green Line" would already go as far as the Mediterranean Sea, putting most of Israel's Jewish population under direct rocket threat by short-range rockets and mortars.

- In that sense, Israeli settlements fragmented the Palestinian sphere, enabling the IDF an enhanced freedom of action for counterterrorism operations in Gaza, as they do around Judea and Samaria.

As part of its continuous action to prevent the "convergence of fronts", the IDF in cooperation with elite Police units and the Shin Bet have continued to act against terrorist infrastructures around Judea and Samaria.

- A unit aiming to launch rockets into Israel, and was remotely operated by PIJ senior commander Tareq Az al-Din who was eliminated in Gaza, was arrested in the Jenin Refugee Camp.
- Other "ticking time bombs" were arrested around the territories.

Israel should adopt the Syrian model in Gaza and pursue an open-ended campaign. This implies keeping on "mowing the lawn" there by striking PIJ and Hamas-related targets, including senior militants, rocket warehouses and other terror-related targets. This could lead to escalation, but would make Israel better positioned in terms of eroding the enemy's force buildup and prevent large-scale capacities from amassing inside Gaza toward H-Hour.



Rocket interceptions above southern Israel
Credit: Telegram channel @YediotNews)



The Monitor

H1 May 2023 in numbers

GAZA - "SHIELD AND ARROW" OPERATION

1,469 rockets and mortar fired by PIJ from Gaza, of which:
1,139 crossed into Israel
291 mislaunched and landed inside Gaza, harming civilians
39 fell in the sea
439 intercepted

Israeli terror victims:

2 killed (Rehovot - an 80-year-old woman from a direct rocket strike; a 35-year-old man from Gaza who worked in Israel)

77 casualties (32 physically, 45 trauma victims)

1 critically injured (Gazan worker), 4 medium injuries, 25 light injuries

Gaza casualties:

33 killed (of which civilians hit by mislaunched PIJ rockets, collateral damage by IDF strikes and PIJ militants) 147 injured

ON THE PALESTINIAN SIDE - JUDEA AND SAMARIA

May 4 | Nablus | Following intensive intelligence efforts, Hamas militants responsible for the murder of Israeli citizens Lea, Rina, and Maya Dee in the Jordan Valley on April 7 were targeted and killed by IDF, Shin Bet and the Yamam (Israel National Counter Terror Unit). An attempt to arrest them ended up with a fire fight in which the two murderers and another collaborator were killed. In addition, two M16 and an MK47 firearms were found in the premises.

May 6 | Tulkarm | Two Palestinian militants were shot by IDF forces who were intending to arrest them. These militants were responsible for stone throwing attacks near Avne Hefetz on May 2. Two M16 firearms, vests and magazines were found in the premises. The operation involved IDF, Border Police, Shin Bet and J&S Yamas (Police's SWAT tier 1) forces.



Firearms found during the IDF and other special units' arrests in Tulkarm (IDF spokesperson)

May 14 | Nablus | IDF units mapped terrorist Haled Harusha's home in order to prepare it for demolition as part of a deterrence policy against terrorists. Harush and his father admitted responsibility for the Hawara shooting attack on February 26, in which they murdered brothers Haleb and Yagel Yaniv. During the activity, IEDs and stones were thrown toward the soldiers, risking their lives.

May 14 | Nablus | IDF units surrounded the home of two Palestinian terrorists responsible for the Hawara shooting attack on March 25, and arrested them. An M16 firearm, magazines and armament were found in the premises.

May 16 | Victory for the Hamas list in Nablus's Al-Najah University student council, underscoring the mounting popularity of Hamas among younger Palestinian age groups as opposed to the imploding status of the Fatah-based Palestinian Authority. Hamas's Islamic Group won 40 seats, Fatah's Shabiba won 38 seats and the Left's Popular Front 3 seats.

TECHNOLOGY AND ARMS DEALS

May 15 | Israel and Montenegro secure a 20 million EUR arms deal in which the Balkan country will purchase weapons from Israel's Elbit Systems. This includes 120mm mortar munition systems that can be mounted on armored vehicles, training equipment, and training workshops at the Elbit-IMI Academy for soldiers and officers from Montenegro. This is the third deal of its kind between the countries since 2019.

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