

HAMAS ATTACKS ON SDEROT AND THE WESTERN NEGEV

Sderot, less than a mile from Gaza, bore the brunt of Palestinian rocket attacks since the beginning of the second intifada in September 2000. Rockets target vulnerable southern Israeli cities landing in or near private homes, schools, colleges, and daycare and recreation centers. In March 2008, Hamas increased the number and effectiveness of these attacks, using more powerful and longer range Grad (Katyusha-like) missiles to hit the city of Ashkelon. In June, 2008, Hamas and Israel negotiated a six month ceasefire. Hamas used this time to acquire Grad rockets (range of 24.8 miles) with the ability to strike Beersheba. On Dec. 19, 2008 Hamas refused to extend the ceasefire and greatly increased the attacks. Israel launched “Operation Cast Lead” in order to stop the rocket attacks and protect its citizens. Israeli military officials have noted that some of these missiles have components that likely were manufactured in Iran.

Operation Cast Lead significantly crippled Hamas’s ability to launch rockets by cutting off supply tunnels and destroying rocket hubs. Nevertheless, attacks have continued and the citizens of Israel living within rocket range of Gaza must continue to follow extensive security procedures.

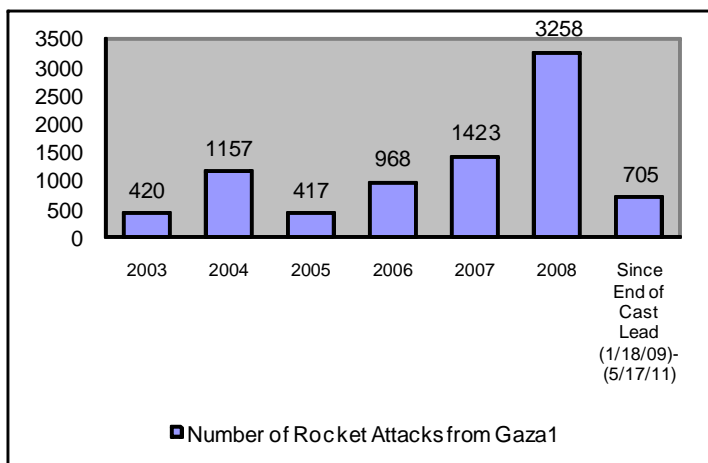
By mid-March 2011, the number of attacks escalated significantly with 49 mortar shells hitting Israel in one day. An anti-tank missile was launched at an Israeli school bus severely injuring one student.

Life in Southern Israel

The psychological trauma of the frequent rocket attacks cannot be minimized. During the peak of rocket attacks, an average of 3-4 rockets were fired into Sderot daily. When the warning alarm is sounded, no matter where residents are or what they are doing — taking a shower, shopping for food, going to work — they only have 15 seconds to reach shelter, or risk being killed or injured. In Sderot, mental health professionals have documented the trauma experienced by children and adults alike, many of whom endure nightmares, panic attacks, and are afraid of going about their daily lives for fear of being caught unprotected during a missile strike. For the children in Sderot, the trauma is most intense. More than 3,000 of Sderot’s 24,000 residents have left the city due to the ongoing rocket and mortar fire.



Israeli communities within range of rocket fire from Gaza



¹Ministry of Foreign Affairs

