

Briefing Paper 4

The Israel-Hamas ceasefire of 19 June to 4 Nov. 2008:

***The peaceful alternative to “Operation
Cast Lead” that Israel rejected***



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Executive Summary

- Operation Cast Lead, Israel's military assault on Gaza, cost the lives of more than 1,400 Palestinians, including over 400 women and children. 13 Israelis, including 3 civilians, also died.
- None of this carnage was necessary in order to protect Israeli citizens from rocket and mortar fire out of Gaza. All Israel had to do to achieve this was to stick to the terms of the ceasefire agreement it made with Hamas in June 2008. It chose not to do so.
- From 19 June 2008 til 4 November 2008 – during its Egyptian brokered ceasefire with Israel – Hamas didn't fire any rockets or mortar shells out of Gaza and restrained other Palestinian groups from doing so. This was confirmed by Israeli spokesman, Mark Regev, on More4 News on 9 January 2009.
- This was despite the fact that Israel failed to honour its obligations under the ceasefire agreement to lift its economic blockade, which had brought the people of Gaza to the verge of starvation.
- From 19 June 2008 until 4 November 2008, only 19 rockets and 18 mortar shells were fired out of Gaza (all by groups other than Hamas), compared to 1,199 rockets and 1,072 mortar shells in 2008 up to 19 June – which amounts to a reduction of 98% in the frequency of both rockets and mortars.
- On 4 November 2008 – while the world was watching the election of Barack Obama – Israel made an armed incursion into Gaza, the first since the ceasefire began on 19 June, and killed 7 members of Hamas.
- In retaliation, Hamas resumed firing rockets and mortar shells out of Gaza.
- Israeli Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni, declared on 31 December: "Last Saturday [27 December] at 11:30, Israel started its military operation in the Gaza Strip – there was no other alternative. For eight years now, Israel has been under attack from the Gaza Strip and it has become worse. Hamas ... has been targeting Israel on a daily basis."
- There, Tzipi Livni told a big lie. There was an alternative: it was to stick to the terms of its ceasefire with Hamas, as a result of which Hamas had fired no rockets or mortar shells out of Gaza from 19 June to 4 November.
- Israel's assault on Gaza did not destroy the capability of Hamas and other groups to fire rockets and mortars out of Gaza: rocket and mortar firing continued after Operation Cast Lead at a much higher rate than during the ceasefire.

Introduction

"Success is freeing the civilian population of southern Israel from the fear of an incoming Hamas rocket."

Those were the words of Israeli spokesman, Mark Regev, in an interview with David Fuller of More4 News on 9 January 2009. The interview is available on YouTube [\[1\]](#). Annex A contains a transcript.

Mark Regev was speaking two weeks into Operation Cast Lead, Israel's military assault on Gaza, which killed more than 1,400 Palestinians, including over 400 women and children. 13 Israelis also lost their lives, 4 in southern Israel (3 civilians and 1 soldier) by Palestinian rocket and mortar fire out of Gaza and 9 soldiers in Gaza itself, 4 by friendly fire.

In fact, Israel had achieved the success of "freeing the civilian population of southern Israel from the fear of an incoming Hamas rocket" months earlier without spilling any Palestinian or Israeli blood. It had done so by negotiating a ceasefire agreement with Hamas in June 2008.

Hamas stuck rigidly to the ceasefire agreement, and fired no rockets or mortars out of Gaza into Israel from 19 June 2008, when the ceasefire came into operation, until 4 November 2008. Despite being restrained by Hamas, other Palestinian groups fired a small number, but no Israeli civilians were killed as a consequence.

From 19 June until 4 November, only 19 rockets and 18 mortar shells were fired from Gaza, compared to 1,199 rockets and 1,072 mortar shells in 2008 up to 19 June. This amounts to a reduction of 98% on average in the frequency of both rocket and mortar firing. And the rate of firing declined as time went by – in October, only 1 rocket and 1 mortar were fired out of Gaza.

Mark Regev confirmed the ceasefire's success on More4 News on the same occasion. When it was put to him that "there were no Hamas rockets during the ceasefire before November 4, there were no Hamas rockets for 4 months", Regev replied: "That's correct". As a "partner for peace", Hamas could not be faulted – it made a deal with Israel and stuck to it.

Under the agreement, brokered by Egypt, in exchange for Hamas and other Palestinian groups stopping the firing of rockets and mortars out of Gaza, Israel undertook to lift its economic blockade of Gaza and cease military incursions into Gaza. The ceasefire was to be for six months initially, but, if successful, it was to be renewed.

Israel didn't lift its blockade of Gaza, but it did cease military incursions into Gaza until 4 November, when, while the world was watching the election of Barack Obama, Israeli forces entered Gaza and killed seven members of Hamas. Israel had now broken both of its obligations under the ceasefire agreement. In retaliation, Hamas restarted rocket and mortar firing into Israel.

Why did Israel break the ceasefire?

In October 2008, only 1 rocket and 1 mortar were fired out of Gaza, compared with 153 rockets and 241 mortars in the first 18 days of June, just before to the ceasefire. In these circumstances, one would expect the Israeli government to be extremely careful to avoid action that might disturb this peaceful situation and, conceivably, to take action to bolster the ceasefire by, for example, easing its economic blockade of Gaza, as it was supposed to do under the ceasefire agreement.

But instead, the Israeli government ordered a military incursion into Gaza on 4 November for the first time since 19 June. There is little doubt that the government knew (a) that, as a result of this incursion, the civilian population of southern Israel would no longer be free from Hamas rockets, and (b) that, without such an incursion, the civilian population of southern Israel would continue to be free from Hamas rockets indefinitely. In other words, it chose course (a) in the full knowledge that its civilians in southern Israel would be less safe.

David Fuller put it to Mark Regev that "the civilians of southern Israel are less safe now than before you started operations". Regev replied:

"The civilians of southern Israel fully support this operation and you know why: because they've been living under the threat of incoming Hamas rockets, not for days, not for weeks, but for months, but for years. We're trying to create a new security environment in which they no longer have to live in constant fear of an incoming Hamas rocket."

That omits the very important fact that, for four and a half months from June to November 2008, the civilians of southern Israel were not living under the threat of incoming Hamas rockets, and that, if Israel had not made a military incursion into Gaza on 4 November, they would have continued to be free from the threat of incoming Hamas rockets.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Israel chose to make an incursion because it wanted a justification that could be sold to the world for launching a military assault on Gaza of the kind that began on 27 December 2008. Certainly, an assault of this kind could not have been launched before 4 November, when the civilian population of southern Israel was completely free from Hamas rockets and almost completely free from rockets from other groups. To justify such an assault in the name of "freeing the civilian population of southern Israel from the fear of an incoming Hamas rocket", there had to be some.

(It has been said that, after the breakdown of the ceasefire on 4 November, Hamas was unwilling to re-negotiate ceasefire arrangements. That was not the view of the head of Shin Bet, Yuval Diskin. According to Ynet News [\[2\]](#), he told a meeting of Israeli ministers on 21 December that "Hamas is interested in maintaining its truce with Israel". He continued:

"Make no mistake, Hamas is interested in maintaining the truce. It seeks to improve its conditions – a removal of the blockade, receiving a commitment from Israel that it won't attack and extending the lull to the Judea and Samaria area."

So, a week before Operation Cast Lead was launched, the opportunity still existed to restore the calm that existed before 4 November, but Israel didn't pursue it.)

Tzipi Livni's big lie

The Israeli town of Sderot, situated about a kilometre from the north-east corner of Gaza, has been the target for many of the rockets fired out of Gaza. The Israeli authorities brought many visitors, including Barack Obama, the future US President, to Sderot to see the damage done by these rockets and to bolster their case for taking military action to counter them.

On 31 December 2008, a few days after Israel launched its military assault on Gaza, Israeli Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni, went to Sderot and declared:

"Last Saturday [27 December] at 11:30, Israel started its military operation in the Gaza Strip – there was no other alternative. For eight years now, Israel has been under attack from the Gaza Strip and it has become worse. Hamas, which is an extreme Islamic organization, a terrorist organization, ... has been targeting Israel on a daily basis." [\[3\]](#)

Tzipi Livni was telling a big lie, when she said "there was no other alternative". There was an alternative, which worked well from 19 June to 4 November, as the following account of life in Sderot in October illustrates:-

Israeli town celebrates end to daily rocket

Besieged residents of Sderot relieved at quiet start to Yom Kippur, thanks to the ceasefire with Hamas

Toronto Star, October 09, 2008 [\[4\]](#)
Oakland Ross
MIDDLE EAST BUREAU

SDEROT, Israel—Young boys horsed around on their bicycles, families hurried to make last-minute purchases at the downtown supermarket, and food stands did a steady business in shawarma and beer.

Meanwhile, the October sun sparkled down from a blue and rocket-free sky.

If this seems like an unremarkable description of any Israeli town about to mark the holy day of Yom Kippur, it almost could be – except for that part about rockets.

Just a kilometre from the Gaza Strip, this southern Israeli town has been struck by an average of three missiles a day for each of the past seven years – and that is a long way from what most people would consider normal.

Lately, however, the cloudless firmament over Sderot has been mostly free of deadly ordnance, and the community is doing its best to resemble what for a long time it has singularly failed to be – a halfway normal town.

For seven years, local residents barely went out at all. But, late last June, under Egyptian mediation, the Israeli government reached a ceasefire agreement with the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

Since then, with only a few violations, the rocket salvos from Gaza have stopped.

So have the punitive Israeli military incursions into the neighbouring strip – attacks that had been a frequent and deadly feature of Palestinian existence prior to the laying down of arms in June.

Less than a month later, on 4 November, Israel broke the ceasefire and, as a result, the near rocket-free days that Sderot had enjoyed since 19 June came to an end.

Key facts indisputable

The key facts about the ceasefire are indisputable. They are confirmed in reports by the Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center [ITIC], reports that are publicly available on the Center's website [\[5\]](#) and are used extensively by the Israeli Government.

According to the ITIC report, *Summary of rocket fire and mortar shelling in 2008* [\[6\]](#) (p7), 1,199 rockets were fired out of Gaza in the five and a half months in 2008 up to 19 June, that is, on average, more than 200 a month. By comparison, in the four and half months of the ceasefire from 19 June until 4 November, only 19 rockets in all were fired, that is, on average, around 4 a month, so the rate of firing fell by 98%.

The equivalent decline for mortar shells is 1,072 to 18, that is, on average, 180 a month to around 4 a month. Again, the rate of firing also fell by 98%.

(Other ITC reports give figures that differ by one or two from these).

Another ITIC report, called *The Six Months of the Lull Arrangement* [\[7\]](#), summarises the effect of the ceasefire as follows:

"The lull arrangement brought relative quiet to the western Negev population and the Gaza Strip, especially during its first months, but it did not completely end the rocket and mortar shell attacks." (paragraph 3)

The report makes no attempt to hide the fact that the ceasefire worked well up to 4 November 2008 and that it was Israel's military incursion into Gaza on that date which brought it to an end in all but name. Here's what it says:

"An analysis of the situation on the ground indicates two distinct periods:

i) A period of relative quiet between June 19 and November 4: As of June 19, there was a marked reduction in the extent of attacks on the western Negev population. The lull was sporadically violated by rocket and mortar shell fire, carried out by rogue terrorist organizations, in some instance[s] in defiance of Hamas (especially by Fatah and Al-Qaeda supporters). Hamas was careful to maintain the ceasefire. The IDF refrained from undertaking counterterrorism activities in the Gaza Strip, taking only routine defensive security measures along the border fence. Between June 19 and November 4, 20 rockets (three of which fell inside the Gaza Strip) and 18 mortar shells (five of which fell inside the Gaza Strip) were fired at Israel.

ii) The escalation and erosion of the lull arrangement, November 4 to the time of this writing, December 17: On November 4 the IDF carried out a military action close to the border security fence on the Gazan side to prevent an abduction planned by Hamas, which had dug a tunnel under the fence to that purpose. Seven Hamas terrorist operatives were killed during the action. In retaliation, Hamas and the other terrorist organizations attacked Israel with a massive barrage of rockets." (paragraph 4)

The ITIC also confirms that Israeli forces entered Gaza on 4 November and killed 7 members of Hamas and that the subsequent rocket fire by Hamas and other groups was “in retaliation”. Clearly, if Israeli forces hadn’t entered Gaza, there would have been no retaliation – and the population of the Western Negev would have continued to be free from Hamas rocket fire.

The following bar chart from this ITIC report illustrates the dramatic decline in rocket and mortar firing when the ceasefire was functioning:



In answering these questions, Israel is less than forthcoming about the ceasefire and the consequent reduction of rocket and mortar firing to a trickle – understandably so, since it might prompt people to ask why Israel brought this highly desirable state of affairs to an end. It is

mentioned only once, where Hamas is accused of “abusing the Tahadiya (the lull) to smuggle in vast quantities of weapons”.

The answer to the question: “What was the result of Israel's efforts to end the rocket and terrorist attacks on its civilians through diplomatic channels?” says:

“Neither Israel's diplomatic overtures, nor its pleas to the international community, nor sanctions imposed by numerous countries, were able to stop the rocket attacks.”

The successful diplomatic overture via Egypt to Hamas, which led to the ceasefire agreement and stopped all Hamas rocket attacks for a period of four and a half months, isn't mentioned.

The answer to the question “What prompted Israel to launch Operation Cast Lead?” contains the following:

“The frequency and intensity of rocket and mortar attacks on Israel increased dramatically - in 2008, nearly 3,000 rockets and mortars were fired at Israeli homes, schools, kindergartens, shops, clinics, factories and other civilian infrastructure. Israeli civilians were compelled to race to bomb shelters several times a day and lived in constant fear of where the next rockets would hit.”

It is true that over 3,000 rockets and mortars were fired from Gaza during 2008 (though to say that they were fired at Israeli homes etc implies a targeting capability that Palestinian weapons don't possess, unlike Israel's). It is also true that this was the highest total in any calendar year to date.

However, 2008 had another distinguishing feature: about 99% of the rocket and mortar firing took place in the seven and a half months before and after the period from 19 June to 4 November. A mere 1% or so of the firing took place in that four and a half month period – thanks to Israel's successful diplomatic overture to Hamas.

Return of near daily rockets

Hamas and other Palestinian groups continued firing rockets and mortars out of Gaza during Operation Cast Lead and afterwards. Here is a picture of life in Sderot in mid-March 2009:

Israeli town copes with return of near daily rockets

In Sderot, Purim holiday fun masks stresses of rocket attacks from Gaza militants.

By Ilene R. Prusher | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor
from the March 14, 2009 edition [\[10\]](#)

SDEROT, ISRAEL

The very hour Chana Melul returned to Sderot with her three young boys, whom she'd taken on vacation up north to escape the front lines, the rockets were back.

Minutes after they set down their suitcases, a Qassam rocket launched from nearby Gaza landed about 50 yards from their apartment building. It crashed into a storage shed and blew apart the sidewalk that leads to the community center around the corner. The center includes a rocket-resistant theater, recently built to give kids and grownups living here a little stress-free entertainment.

But for Ms. Melul, a single mother, the disquiet never really goes away. ...

Nearly two months after Israel and Hamas each declared unilateral cease-fires, they have yet to come to an official truce. ...

In the meantime, the violent volleys continue. Several times a week, Israel strikes at smuggling tunnels and the Palestinian militants in Gaza it says are responsible for launching rockets. Hamas and other groups such as Islamic Jihad send several rockets and short-range missiles into Israel on an almost daily basis. ...

Geographically, her closest neighbors are in northern Gaza, where houses have suffered destruction in the recent war that simply can't be compared to the damages done here by Qassam rockets.

Clearly, the near rocket-free conditions, which Sderot enjoyed prior to Israel breaking the ceasefire on 4 November, were not restored by Operation Cast Lead. In March 2009, Sderot was a less safe place than before Israel broke the ceasefire.

Operation Cast Lead a success?

Rocket and mortar firing out of Gaza into Israel continued throughout 2009, without much complaint from Israel. ITIC reports rarely blame Hamas for the firing, so it is likely that the bulk of the firing was carried out by groups other than Hamas.

A year after Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli Government has been celebrating its "success". For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website boasts:

"The main goal of the operation was achieved: restoring security and a normal fabric of life to southern Israel." [\[11\]](#)

It continues:

"In 2008, 1750 rockets and 1528 mortar bombs were fired from the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip against communities in southern Israel. In addition, during the three weeks of the operation, Hamas launched another 571 rockets and 205 mortar bombs at Israel. Yet, in the year since the operation, only 127 rockets and 70 mortar shells have been fired into Israel. This dramatic decrease in the number of missiles hitting the south is positive proof of the operation's success."

So, a total of 127 rockets and 70 mortars were fired from Gaza in 2009 in the eleven and a half months after the end of Operation Cast Lead on 18 January, that is, roughly 11 rockets and 6 mortars a month on average.

These figures are significantly higher than during the ceasefire, when on average only 4 rockets and 4 mortars were fired a month – and only 1 rocket and 1 mortar in October, the month before Israel brought the ceasefire to an end. Hardly a resounding success for Operation Cast Lead compared with the alternative, bloodless, method of preventing rocket and mortar fire out of Gaza.

The following section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement actually mentions the ceasefire:

"In November and December of 2008, the calm agreement that had been in effect since June 2008 began to deteriorate. By December 26, the number of rocket and mortar bomb attacks against communities in southern Israel had reached almost 3000. As then-Prime

Minister Ehud Olmert said in a statement to the press, life in the south had become unbearable."

One would never guess from this that the ceasefire was so successful that 99% of the rocket and mortar firing out of Gaza in 2008 occurred in the seven and a half months before the ceasefire began on 19 June and after 4 November, when Israel brought it to an end.

The reason for this gross distortion is plain. An accurate account of what occurred from 19 June and the 4 November blows Israel's self-defence justification for Operation Cast Lead out of the water, and demonstrates that maintaining its ceasefire with Hamas would have been more successful than Operation Cast Lead in "freeing the civilian population of southern Israel from the fear of an incoming Hamas rocket". And no Israelis or Palestinians needed to die in order to achieve that success.

Why did Israel choose the military option?

So why did Israel choose the military option? Statements by Tzipi Livni, Foreign Minister (and newly elected leader of Kadima) in December 2008 may provide a clue. Speaking at Tel Aviv University on 9 December, she said that an extended truce or long term calm with Hamas "harms the Israel strategic goal, empowers Hamas, and gives the impression that Israel recognizes the movement" [\[12\]](#).

She returned to this theme on 31 December, a few days after Operation Cast Lead, telling the world that attempts by Hamas to gain legitimacy must be resisted:

"But there is one thing that the world needs to understand: Hamas wants to gain legitimacy from the international community. Hamas wants to show that there is a place which is called the Gaza Strip, that this kind of an organization - an extremist Islamic organization that acts by terrorism and which is a designated terrorist organization - can rule. And to make it seem a legitimate regime. So they want the crossings to be opened, not only for the sake of the population, but because this symbolically is how they can show that the Gaza Strip has become a kind of a small state, which is controlled by them. This is something that nobody can afford, neither Israel, nor the pragmatic leadership, nor the legitimate Palestinian leadership or government, nor any part of the moderate the Arab world." [\[13\]](#)

Those statements appear to mean that making arrangements with Hamas about, for example, a long term ceasefire or border crossings, bolsters the legitimacy the Hamas – and Israel is opposed to that, and the rest of the world should also be opposed to it.

Could it be that Israel broke its ceasefire with Hamas on 4 November, not because it wasn't effective, but because the mere existence of the ceasefire, and the fact that Hamas stuck to it religiously, was adding to legitimacy of Hamas? And, if that process continued indefinitely the outside world might begin to consider Hamas a legitimate "partner for peace", with whom it could do business, particularly since Hamas won a majority of the seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council in January 2006.

Annex A: Transcript of interview with Israeli spokesman, Mark Regev [\[1\]](#)

More4 News, 9 January 2009

Interviewer: David Fuller

MR: Our goals are minimalistic and defensive. Success is freeing the civilian population of southern Israel from the fear of an incoming Hamas rocket.

DF: But, if that was the case, there were no Hamas rockets during the ceasefire before November 4th, there were no Hamas rockets for 4 months.

MR: And that's correct. This crisis started when Hamas throughout the ceasefire ...

DF: Surely this crisis started when Israel broke the ceasefire on the 4th of November.

MR: I disagree strongly, sir. Israel acted on the 4th of November defensively because there was a tunnel that was being dug ...

DF: There were no Israeli civilians being killed at that time.

MR: Israel was acting to prevent Israeli civilians being killed. Our operation was defensive. It was in response to aggression from Hamas. It's not just Israel that pointed the finger at them. It was the United Nations, it was Russia, it was Egypt, it was Jordan.

DF: But the civilians of southern Israel are less safe now than before you started operations.

MR: The civilians of southern Israel fully support this operation and you know why: because they've been living under the threat of incoming Hamas rockets, not for days, not for weeks, but for months, but for years. We're trying to create a new security environment in which they no longer have to live in constant fear of an incoming Hamas rocket.

[Source: uk.youtube.com/watch?v=SILJxPTqjAM

The information which led to this interview was provided by the author]

Today, Jews in Israel and around the world are observing Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar.

With any luck, the people of Sderot will be able to join them without suddenly being interrupted by a recorded woman's voice shouting "Code Red! Code Red!"

That is the local signal that warns of incoming Palestinian rockets, homemade contraptions known as Qassams.

The warning sends people scrambling for the nearest bomb shelter, with only about 15 seconds to get there ahead of the rocket's impact.

Since 2001, and with increasing frequency following Hamas's takeover of Gaza in June 2007, missiles have been hurtling out of the territory at an alarming pace – sometimes dozens in a single day.

The Qassams have only rarely proved lethal, but they have been destructive enough in other ways, severely depressing the local economy, crushing the town's real estate market, driving away about 20 per cent of Sderot's population, and burdening many of those who remain with the ravages of post-traumatic stress disorder.

True, the people of Gaza have suffered vastly worse effects.

But, perhaps understandably, the residents of Sderot are concerned about their own community.

"I don't hate Palestinians," said Ofir Aboukrat, a 24-year-old ambulance driver.

"But the situation now – it's us or them."

Like others in Sderot, he wants the Israeli armed forces to take severe action in Gaza, killing the militants, destroying their infrastructure, and blocking the flow of weapons and lethal material into the territory.

But he does not expect this to happen anytime soon.

In the meantime, like others here, he is enjoying the unaccustomed climate of peace that has lately settled over his town, even as he prepares for what he sees as its inevitable end – a return to the rocket attacks and the fear. "It's not over," he said. "I don't think anyone believes it's over."

- <http://www.thestar.com/World/Columnist/article/514498>

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Sadaka – an Arabic term meaning “friendship” – is an Association established in Dublin in 2009 to promote the cause of Palestine in Ireland through raising public awareness and engaging in political dialogue. It aims to persuade the Irish Government to champion the cause of justice for the Palestinian people.

The Steering Group of Sadaka consists of: Marie Crawley (Chair), Noreen Byrne (Secretary), Adnan Shabab (Treasurer), Dr. David Morrison, Philip O’Connor, Des McGuinness, Alan Lonergan and Elaine Murtagh.

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