

# Israel's War with Hamas 2014: Part II – The Gaza Tunnel Threat

by Jerry Gordon and Ilana Freedman (August 2014)



**Israeli Givati Brigade Soldier at entrance of Hamas tunnel, July 23, 2014**

**Source: IDF Spokesperson/FLASH90**

## **The Tunnel that Triggered Israel's Ground Incursion into Gaza**

In the pre-dawn hours of Thursday, July 17, 2014 prior to a five hour UN-negotiated Humanitarian Pause, the IAF intercepted 13 black clothed terrorists emerging from a tunnel near the Kerem Shalom border crossing with Gaza. Spotted by an armed IAF drone, they quickly scampered back into their tunnel and were promptly dispatched by missiles. Calm returned with the onset of the Humanitarian Pause holding to 3PM Israel time when with a roar a barrage of more than 130 rockets rained down from Gaza on Southern and Central Israel signaling the end of the Pause. At 4:52 PM local time, the IDF announced its limited ground incursion with the express purpose of destroying those Gaza tunnels and underground armories containing upwards of 12,000 rockets and missiles. Israel had flooded Gaza with hundreds of thousands of leaflets announcing that civilians should flee targeted areas. The ground incursion opened with strikes by IAF F-16s and both naval and IDF bombardment of targets in Gaza. 80 Percent of Gaza was plunged into darkness by loss of power.



**IDF Soldier with captured Tunnel attack weapons**

**Source: Times of Israel**

*The New York Times* [reported](#):

"We will strike Hamas and we are determined to restore peace to the State of Israel," the military spokesman, Lt. Col. Peter Lerner, told reporters in a conference call. "It will progress according to the situation assessment and according to our crafted and designed plan of action to enable us to carry out this mission."

Israel began to draft 18,000 reservists, adding to 50,000 already mobilized in recent

days; Colonel Lerner said the ground forces would include infantry and artillery units, armored and engineer corps, supported by Israel's "vast intelligence capabilities," air force and navy.

Fawzi Barhoum, a spokesman for Hamas, called the invasion "a dangerous step."

Israel's ground incursion in [Operation Protective Edge](#) is eerily familiar. It looks like the continuation of [Operation Cast Lead](#) in 2008 and 2009, which was aborted on President Obama's inauguration, January 20, 2009. That first operation, over 22 days, endeavored to root out Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad rockets hidden in tunnels and underground launching sites by terrorist rocketeers. As they did then, the IDF warned intended targets with cell phone text messages, leaflets and non-explosive missiles knocking on roofs sending occupants scampering. However, Hamas security was accused of using human shields, a war crime. As PM Netanyahu said on a Sunday FoxNews Report on July 13<sup>th</sup>, "Israel defends its people with missiles, while Hamas defends its missiles with its people."



#### **Hamas Rockets and Ranges, July 2014**

**Sources: Israel Defense Forces (IDF)**

#### **The Hamas Rocket Threat to Israel**

Warnings of incoming rockets were communicated to Israelis by a new means, a Red Alert app downloaded to iPhones that pinged every time an incoming rocket was detected heading to their intended targets. Several hundred thousand downloads of the Red Alert app signaled the threat of incoming rocket and missile barrages from Gaza. A later refined version [iRon Dome](#) according to a report in *The Times of Israel* had significant refinements. A website, [Israel Under Attack](#), gave 24/7 information on Hamas rocket launchings and strike targets inside Israel.

Virtually on the heels of Hamas' takeover, following Israel's unilateral withdrawal from northern Gaza in August 2005, homemade Qassam terror rockets began falling on the Eshkol region of the Western Negev. Over the ensuing nine years, the deadly barrages swelled to cover the heavily populated central and northern areas including Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa. Rockets also fell near hotels in the resort area of Eilat on the Red Sea. Rockets were also launched from Lebanon and from Syria on Israel's north and the Golan. But the main threat was the Hamas arsenal in Gaza equipped with locally manufactured M-75, Iranian-supplied longer range Grad, Fajr-5 and Syrian made M-302 rockets with ranges up to 150 to 160 kilometers. Besides drone, F-16 and helicopter attacks, the only defense against the rain of death from

Gaza was the Israeli-developed Iron Dome System. The system proved itself for the first time in April 2011, when it successfully intercepted a [Grad rocket](#) launched from [Gaza](#). During the eight day Operation Pillar of Defense in November 2012, the Iron Dome batteries achieved an impressive 90% interception success rate against rockets intended for populated areas in Israel. On 19 November, *Time Magazine's* [Mark Thompson](#), wrote that while it was impossible to confirm the Israeli Air Force's claims that Iron Dome had taken down 421 rockets during operation "Pillar of Defense," the "lack of Israeli casualties suggests Iron Dome is the most-effective, most-tested missile shield the world has ever seen."

The Hamas rockets currently lack precision guidance. Iran has supplied Hezbollah in Lebanon with rockets fitted with GPS guidance sets. Ted Belman, Israeli Canadian publisher of the [Israpundit](#) blog, cites a senior Israeli Intelligence officer saying, "Iran is currently transferring to Hamas more capable missile guidance. Future Hamas rockets will be guided by GPS and have the ability for evasive trajectories." That capability will likely test the Iron Dome's effectiveness in interception and destruction of guided rockets and avoidance of civilian casualties.

Dr Uzi Rubin, developer of Israel's missile shield, noted this strategic threat in a *Jerusalem Post* [article](#), "Missile defense expert warns of growing strategic threat ":

That's the bad news. The worse news is that these rockets are being turned into smart rockets. The Iranians took the Zilzal 2 and turned it into a guided rocket. The third generation of it contains a homing sensor and a GPS. The Syrians can have this capability too, to create a fully guided M-600 rocket with GPS. Hezbollah probably has these.

### **Significance of Hamas' Tunnel Threat to Israel**

The cease fires with Hamas that Israel brokered via the US and Egypt interrupted Israel's efforts to achieve the complete destruction of the underground tunnels. In the intervening two years, the tunnel system grew exponentially, and created a significantly more daunting challenge for Israel in 2014. [See](#) the thwarted tunnel attack that occurred prior to the IDF ground incursion in Gaza:

*The Jewish Week* [noted](#) these comments from a former IDF spokesperson about the significance of the tunnel attack:

Despite Israel's aerial and sea assault against Hamas rocket launchers, command and

control centers and other visible targets, Israel was unable to get at the network of tunnels that form a virtual underground city in the 25-mile long Gaza Strip.

That became most pronounced just hours before the cease-fire began when 13 Hamas terrorists from the Gaza Strip were spotted emerging from a tunnel inside Israel, according to Miri Eisen, the former Israeli government spokesperson during the Second Lebanon War.

"A woman observer saw them come out of the tunnel and when they heard the sound of a UAV [unmanned aerial vehicle], they ran back into the tunnel and the tunnel was attacked," she said.

"In the last 10 days we have seen Hamas as a paramilitary organization, now we have seen the transition to a full-scale military, firing rockets and trying to attack Israel from the land, sea and air – and underground," Eisen said in a conference call organized by The Israel Project. "They are trying to attack Israeli communities that are located around the Gaza Strip."

[...]

Former US Marine Corps, Commandant, Gen. James T. Conway, recounted in a *Wall Street Journal* [op-ed](#), a tour that he and other retired US flag officers had made on May 1, 2014 of "a 3 mile long tunnel reinforced with concrete, lined with telephone wires, and included cabins...useful for holding hostages. The tunnel was located less than a kilometer from an Israeli kindergarten."

#### **The Qatar Connection that Funded the Tunnels and Gave Safe Haven to Corrupt Leaders**

Ms. Eisen's comment about who was paying for construction of the tunnels and underground armories of Hamas was the subject of an op ed by Steve Emerson of The Investigative Project just prior to the Israeli ground incursion, ["Hamas-Israel Cease Fire, its déjà vu all over again."](#)

Emerson noted:

What happened to President Obama's promises to Israel, as part of the November 2012 cease-fire agreement, to stop the flow of missiles to Gaza? In two words: Absolutely nothing. ... The Obama administration focused its efforts on getting Israel to lift its blockade on steel and concrete, the two major building components of underground tunnels and storage facilities for munitions, on "humanitarian grounds." Despite the

administration's much ballyhooed November 2012 "cease-fire" agreement that the Obama White House prided itself in bringing an end to the Israeli-Hamas war, somehow Hamas never got the message: From December 2012 to July 1, 2014, Hamas fired nearly 600 missiles into Israel.

Who funded the building of underground armories by Hamas that triggered the IDF current ground incursion? It was, and continues to be, the gas rich emirate of Qatar who provided over \$405 million to "restore" Gaza following the November 2012 Operation Pillar of Defense. Qatar is noteworthy for its hold on the Obama Administration, given its role in filtering arms to Libya to overthrow Qadaffi, into Syria, and to facilitate the exchange of Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl for five Taliban leaders. On July 12, 2014, the Obama Administration signed an \$11 billion weapons deal with Qatar.

Qatar also provides a luxurious sanctuary for Hamas political leaders like Khaled Mashal. A *Ynet* investigative [article](#) in mid-July 2014 disclosed the massive fortunes that Hamas leaders had acquired:

With multi-million-dollar land deals, luxury villas and black market fuel from Egypt, Gaza's rulers made billions while the rest of the population struggled with 38-percent poverty and 40-percent unemployment.

Regarding ex-pat Mashal, who was expelled from Assad's Syria for the safe haven of Qatar in 2011, *Ynet* revealed details about his fortune:

In 2012, a Jordanian website reported that Mashal had control of a massive \$2.6 billion, in large part deposited in Qatari and Egyptian banks. This is likely Hamas' accumulated assets from years through donations, as well as its investments in various projects in the Arab and Muslim world. It is also known that, among other things, Hamas has invested in real estate projects in Saudi Arabia, Syria and Dubai. And, according to reports, Mashal did not always separate Hamas money and his own.

### **The Mega-9/11 Rosh Hashanah Hamas Attack Plan that Stunned the IDF**

By July 27, 2014, 20 days into the tough slog of the ground phase of Operation Protective Edge, more than 35 tunnels had been uncovered. American intelligence estimates there could be upwards of 60 tunnels in a network reached across the Gaza Israel frontier. That does not include the massive underground complex underneath Gaza, the "city under a city." A number of these were found to have entrances in homes, schools, apartment buildings and mosques. The Givati brigade has been assigned the dangerous tasks of inspecting these tunnels. After

sending in small tactical robots to detect booby traps, the tunnels were inspected and, if possible, destroyed.

However, the obvious question is, why was the IDF caught flat footed by the enormity of the Hamas tunnel network when there were means available to map them? Despite the fact that many of the tunnels were being excavated more than 30 meters below the surface, technology was available to detect them.

Sheera Frenkel, *Buzzfeed's* correspondent in Israel, [reported](#):

Israeli military officers described an "underground city" in Shujayeh, made up of a labyrinth of tunnels in which Israeli soldiers clashed with Hamas fighters.

"Even with the intelligence the Israeli military keeps on Gaza, they were caught by surprise at the extent of what they found below ground," said Amir Bohbot, a military affairs correspondent with *Walla*, a news site. "There were traps, explosives everywhere. There is no way for them to continue their operation without taking the risks of even heavier casualties."

A source in Jerusalem told us *this week* that Tzahal was surprised by the extent of the tunnels. Dan Diker, Executive Producer for the Voice of Israel and its Chief Middle East Analyst, sent this chilling email message:

The news here is that Hamas was planning a doomsday mega attack for Rosh Hashanah, sending hundreds of Hamas Suicide commandos via the underground terror tunnel networks to conquer Israeli towns and cities. That is the meaning of the tunnel threat. It is the most serious strategic threat Israel has faced since the 1973 war. The failed conception is also notable as there is a real question as to whether the intelligence echelons recognized the seriousness of the threat.

But should they have? A noted Israeli geologist was cited in a *Daily Telegraph U.K.* [article](#) complaining that the tunnel threat had been overlooked by the Israeli Ministry of Defense:

"For 10 years I've been crying and screaming to the highest possible levels – to the Defense Ministry, the chief of staff, the commanding officers of southern and northern commands," Dr Joseph Langotsky, an Israeli geologist who has long advocated greater attention to the issue of the tunnels, said in an interview with the *Jerusalem Post*.

"Although the tunnels are a low-tech option, they might be a strategic threat to our security," said Dr Langotsky.

The heavily fortified areas of southern Lebanon that the IDF encountered in the 2006 Lebanon War should have raised alarm bells. Hezbollah, with the alleged technical assistance of Iranian Quds Force engineers, had prepared tunnels connecting command and control centers in villages, rocket launching areas, armories and firing positions. Moreover, Hezbollah with the aid of Iran and possibly North Korea had also dug tunnels underneath the northern frontier between Lebanon and Israel.

A *Telegraph U.K.* [report](#) on an alleged secret weapons deal between Hamas and North Korea noted that Israeli intelligence believed that Hamas consulted with North Korea in the design and excavation of the tunnel network underneath the Israel- Gaza frontier. This was reminiscent of those the North Koreans built in the 1970's under the DMZ into South Korea. A US Federal district court in Washington, DC in late July 2014 [ruled](#) on a case filed in 2009 that both Hezbollah and North Korea were liable for claims brought by American victims of the rocket onslaught in northern Israel during the 2006 Second Lebanon War.

The massive network of tunnels under Gaza mirrors the system of tunnels that criss-crosses southern Lebanon, which were built to avoid Israeli drone surveillance of Hezbollah's movement of missiles across Lebanon from Syria. The IDF was warned about these Hezbollah tunnels as early as April 2010, and was also given information about cross-border tunnels that were being built at the time with assistance from the IRGC, using North Korean tunnel-building technology. Eye witness accounts reported the construction of a large tunnel that was planned to run from southern Lebanon to central Haifa, and a number of small bore tunnels that were being built, to emerge within northern Israeli towns and kibbutzim. These were designed for Hezbollah's child warriors who would be sent heavily armed and would be instructed to fire on anyone they see once they emerge in these towns.

When the Givati brigade went into Gaza during [Operation Cast Lead](#) in 2008-2009, they also encountered tunnels. But they were nothing compared to the massive labyrinth of tunnels uncovered by IDF Golani, Givati and Nahal brigades in the current operation. Unlike the earlier, more primitive constructions, the maze of tunnels found in Operation Protective Edge were an interconnected network of well-designed tunnels, constructed from pre-stressed concrete, with significantly more sophisticated lighting and ventilation systems. A few were even large enough to accommodate trucks. The longest one discovered was over 3 miles in length. The average cost of the tunnels was estimated at \$1 million each. It is clear that the Hamas tunnel networks in Gaza were expertly planned and executed using the Hezbollah playbook, possibly with both Quds Force and North Korean assistance.

## **The Possible Technical Options to Detect Tunnels**

*The Daily Telegraph U.K.*, article, "[Israel tests hi-tech tunnel detection system to fight threat from underground,](#)" disclosed that the Israeli Ministry of Defense was working on the tunnel problem. However, the means of detecting them would not be available until after the current conflict. The report noted:

In a bid to find a solution, the IDF's elite Talpiot unit has been working on developing a tunnel detection system which was tested in Tel Aviv. Its costs are estimated to be \$59 million.

"The high-tech system, which uses special sensors and transmitters, is still in its R&D phase, and if all goes well, should be operational within a year," notes a report on Israel's *I-24 news*.

The most common type of technology for tracking down tunnels is focused on listening for sounds of digging, notes Inbal Orpaz in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*.

Another Israeli company, Magna, already provides defense systems for the Israel-Egypt border. It proposed digging a 70-km tunnel along the Israel-Gaza border, equipped with a sensitive alert system.

This "will provide real-time alerts of any tunnel digging that crosses our tunnel, whether above or below it. The IDF will know exactly where the attack tunnel is and how many people are in it, and can monitor the progress of digging it in real time, and decide how to respond to the threat," the company's founder and CEO Haim Siboni told Israel's *Globes* publication.

In an interview in *Start-Up Israel*, Canadian expert Paul Bauman, revealed that Israel may have already had the means of mapping the tunnels, "[IDF 'didn't follow up' on MRI-style, below-surface technology to find tunnels](#)":

Paul Bauman, a Canadian who is one of the world's foremost experts on discovering underground tunnels and voids, insists that the technology exists and has been used in the US, Canada, Korea, and other places. "We actually did some work with the IDF some years ago, showing them how the technology we've developed works," Bauman told *The Times of Israel* in an interview. "They were interested, but there was no follow-up. Why, I couldn't say."

Bauman referred specifically to the off the shelf technology that might have been used for detection and mapping of the tunnels:



It was on one of his exploration trips to Israel that Bauman showed the IDF some of the techniques it could use to discover underground tunnels. At the time, after another Gaza flare-up, Operation Cast Lead in 2009,