

# Dissecting Israeli Military Propaganda: The Numbers behind the Rocket Attacks

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**by Phan Nguyen**

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*In this brief study, I examine the many numbers cited by the Israeli military relating to Gaza rocket attacks into Israel.*

*To begin, Israeli spokespeople frequently remind the world that a million Israeli citizens are within range of Gaza rockets, twelve thousand of which have been fired into Israel in the last twelve years, inflicting thousands of injuries and several dead.*

*However, we are rarely told exactly how many people have been killed by these rocket attacks.*

## Counting the dead

Below is a list of all the fatalities of rocket and mortar attacks fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel in the entire history of these attacks. Throughout the years of rocket attacks into Israel, a total of 26 people have been killed altogether.

### Fatalities from rocket and mortar attacks in Israel from the Gaza Strip

Date of attack	Name	Age	Location	Weapon
2004.06.28	Mordechai Yosephov	49	Sderot	Qassam
2004.06.28	Afik Ohion Zehavi	4	Sderot	Qassam
2004.09.29	Yuval Abebeh	4	Sderot	Qassam
2004.09.29	Dorit (Masarat) Benisian	2	Sderot	Qassam
2005.01.15	Ayala-Haya Abukasis	17	Sderot	Qassam
2005.07.15	Dana Gelkowitz	22	Moshav Nativ Ha'asara	Qassam
2006.03.28	<a href="#">Salam Ziadin*</a>	?	Nahal Oz	Qassam <sup>‡</sup>
2006.03.28	<a href="#">Khalid Ziadin*</a>	16	Nahal Oz	Qassam <sup>‡</sup>
2006.11.15	Faina Slutzker	57	Sderot	Qassam
2006.11.21	Yaakov Yaakobov	43	Sderot	Qassam
2007.05.21	Shirel Friedman	32	Sderot	Qassam
2007.05.27	Oshri Oz	36	Sderot	Qassam
2008.02.27	Roni Yihye	47	Sderot	Qassam

2008.05.09	Jimmy Kedoshim	48	Kibbutz Kfar Aza	mortar
2008.05.12	Shuli Katz	70	Moshav Yesha	Qassam
2008.06.05	Amnon Rosenberg	51	Kibbutz Nir-Oz	mortar
2008.12.27	Beber Vaknin	58	Netivot	Qassam
2008.12.29	Lutfi Nasraladin*†	38	IDF base near Nahal Oz	mortar
2008.12.29	Irit Sheetrit	39	Ashdod	Grad
2008.12.29	Hani al Mahdi*	27	Ashkelon	Grad
2010.03.18	Manee Singueanphon*	30	Moshav Nativ Ha'asara	Qassam
2011.08.20	Yossi Shushan	38	Be'er sheva	Grad
2011.10.29	Moshe Ami	56	Ashkelon	Grad
2012.11.15	Yitzchak Amsalem	24	Kiryat Malachi	rocket
2012.11.15	Mira Sharf	25	Kiryat Malachi	rocket
2012.11.15	Aharon Smadja	49	Kiryat Malachi	rocket

**Total fatalities in the history of rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza into Israel: 26**

*Operation Cast Lead: December 27, 2008–January 18, 2009*

*Operation Pillar of Cloud: November 14, 2012–*

(Refer to the [bottom of the page](#) for notes and sources.)

The shaded rows in the table refer to fatalities sustained during Operation Cast Lead (December 27, 2008–January 18, 2009) and Operation Pillar of Cloud (November 14, 2012–).

Note that of the 26 fatalities from rocket and mortar attacks, *more than one out of every four deaths* occurred during these two operations, which were ostensibly designed to *deter* rocket attacks.

For the entire duration of the 2008 Hamas–Israel cease-fire—even after Israel had broken the cease-fire on Nov. 4—not a single person was killed by rocket or mortar fire into Israel. Yet approximately two hours after Israel’s commencement of Operation Cast Lead, one person in Israel was struck and killed by shrapnel from a Qassam rocket. Two days later, three more people were killed in Israel from Gaza rocket and mortar attacks.

And for an entire year before Operation Pillar of Cloud, not a single Israeli was killed by rocket or mortar. Yet approximately sixteen hours after Pillar of Cloud commenced, a rocket from Gaza killed three Israelis.

It was during both military operations that Israel endured the highest number of fatalities from Gaza rockets and mortars in the shortest time spans.

The data is too scant to draw a more definite conclusion (and it is scant because fatalities are so rare), but one can suspect a pattern:

Rocket fatalities are more likely to happen during major Israel “anti-rocket” operations. Note that I say that fatalities *are more likely to happen*, rather than fatalities *increase*. Because fatalities are so rare, when they do happen in a burst, they appear more as instigations rather than incidental progressions.

This disputes the clichéd notion that rocket attacks are “designed to maximize civilian casualties.” Indeed, with such a low fatality rate and with the characteristic imprecision of the weapons, they cannot be expected to inflict a fatality most of the time.

At the same time, armed groups in Gaza are capable of increasing the likelihood of fatalities when prompted.

### **A verrry slow genocide**

If we borrow the IDF’s claim that more than 12,000 rockets have been fired into Israel in the last twelve years (which I dispute later), we get a kill rate of less than 0.217%. Thus in order to secure a single kill, we should expect to fire about 500 rockets. However, if the goal is to specifically kill Jews rather than foreign workers and Palestinian laborers, then it gets harder. Only 21 Jews have been killed by this method, bringing the kill rate down to 0.175%.

If this sounds disturbing or even anti-Semitic, note that I am just testing the argument of the current Israeli ambassador Michael Oren, who, during Operation Cast Lead, co-wrote an [op-ed](#) in the *Wall Street Journal* claiming that the Gaza rockets and mortars were “more than a crude attempt to kill and terrorize civilians—they were expressions of a genocidal intent.”

Yet the statistics demonstrate that it is much less than a “crude attempt to kill.” One can imagine easier ways to kill a random person than to manufacture and fire 500+ homemade rockets.

As for genocide, at the going kill rate, it would require 4,477,714,286 rockets and mortars, and 4,477,714 years to kill all the Jews in Israel. This is assuming that Israel’s Jewish population does not increase. And of course we would need to factor in the limited range of the projectiles, which would require Israel’s non-growing Jewish population to all congregate in the western Negev by the year 4479726 CE, give or take a few years.

But by then, all of Israel’s Jewish population will have already been exterminated by the country’s other violent killer, automotive accidents.

It makes more sense, then, to suppose that there are political rationales for the firing of rockets and mortars.

### **The IDF’s mysterious deaths**

Now that we’ve established that a total of twenty-six people have been killed by high-trajectory weapons from Gaza into Israel, let’s look at some of the numbers that the Israeli military has been peddling.

In keeping up with its social media focus, IDF 2.0 has been distributing infographics through Facebook, Twitter, and an official blog, encouraging subscribers to share the images. One recent infographic makes the following claims about the number of Israeli casualties from rocket attacks:



First, let’s compare the IDF’s fatalities numbers to the numbers that I’ve established:

#### **Number of rocket/mortar fatalities by year, 2006-2011**

## **IDF claim Established**

2006	9	4
2007	10	2
2008	15	8
2009	2	0
2010	5	1
2011	3	2

For every year listed, the IDF's rocket fatalities number is higher than what has been established. Could it be due to different interpretations of the figures? We can try to find out by examining the fatalities for each year:

### **2006**

In 2006, at the tail end of the second intifada, there were several Israeli fatalities, including a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, another suicide bombing in the West Bank, several shootings of soldiers and settlers in the West Bank, two soldiers killed by sniper fire in separate incidents in the Gaza Strip, and the capture of Gilad Shalit in a Hamas/PRC operation that left two other soldiers dead. However, there were only two people who were killed in Israel by rocket strikes. Another two, a Bedouin father and son, were killed while attempting to move an unexploded Qassam rocket for salvaging. Their deaths are not listed in the [Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs page](#) as deaths by Palestinian attacks. Nevertheless, I included them in my listing, making four deaths by rockets in 2006.

**For 2006, it is unknown how the IDF transformed four rocket fatalities into nine.**

### **2007**

In 2007, two Qassam rockets killed two people in Sderot. There was one other incident in Israel that produced fatalities—a suicide bombing that killed three people in a bakery in Eilat. Beyond that, four soldiers were killed by gunfire in the West Bank, one settler was gunned down in a drive-by, another settler was stabbed to death by unknown assailants, and three soldiers were killed in separate gunfights in the Gaza Strip. Altogether, sixteen were killed, only two of whom were by rockets—not ten, as asserted by the IDF. The IDF's claim is also contradicted by Shin Bet (the Israeli Security Agency), which [reported](#) that in 2007, "rocket fire killed two Israeli civilians."

**For 2007, it is unknown how the IDF transformed two fatalities into ten.**

### **2008**

In 2008, eight people were killed by rockets and mortars from Gaza. Four were killed in the first half of the year prior to the "tahdiya" ceasefire. As soon as Israel launched Operation Cast Lead, four more people were killed by Gaza rockets and mortars. Yet the IDF graphic claims 15 fatalities. Again, this claim is contradicted by the Shin Bet, which [reported](#) that in 2008,

8 people (4 during the final days of December) were killed by high-trajectory fire (rockets and mortars) from the Gaza Strip.

**For 2008, it is unknown how the IDF transformed eight fatalities into fifteen.**

## **2009**

In 2009, there was one conflict-related civilian death in Israel by Palestinians: A Jewish Israeli taxi driver was strangled to death by three Palestinians as revenge for the IDF killing of a relative. Outside of that, a 16-year old boy in the Bat Ayin settlement was killed by a lone Palestinian with an axe, two police officers were shot to death in the Jordan Valley, a settler near Nablus was shot in a drive-by, and a soldier was killed by an explosive detonation on the Gaza border. No one in Israel was killed by rocket or mortar from Gaza, even though the IDF claims two.

This is corroborated by the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC), which [stated](#) that

In the two years since Operation Cast Lead there has been a significant decrease in the number of Israelis killed and wounded by terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip. There have been five deaths, one civilian (a worker from Thailand) killed by a rocket attack [which was in 2010] and four IDF soldiers killed during counterterrorism activities.

At the start of 2009, during Cast Lead, nine IDF soldiers were killed in the Gaza Strip, four of which were by friendly fire. Of the remaining five, one was killed by a mortar round while the other was killed by an anti-tank missile.

**For 2009, there were no deaths in Israel from Gaza rockets or mortars. The only way to claim two fatalities would be to include the deaths of two soldiers engaged in a military invasion inside the Gaza Strip, which would be misleading for the message being conveyed by the infographic.**

## **2010**

The IDF inexplicably attributes five deaths in 2010 to Hamas rockets and mortars. There were either nine or eleven Israeli fatalities relating to the Palestine/Israel conflict in that year, depending on the interpretation: the [Shin Bet](#) says there were nine fatalities relating to the conflict, while the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) records eleven. Of the eleven fatalities listed by the MFA, two were committed by a Palestinian criminal gang (one strangulation and one stabbing), one was a knifing of an IDF soldier in the West Bank, four settlers were killed by gunfire in their car on a segregated road near Hebron, two soldiers entered the Gaza Strip and were killed in a shootout with Palestinian gunmen, and one police officer was shot to death just south of Hebron. Only one fatality was due to a Qassam rocket.

**For 2010, it is unknown how the IDF transformed one fatality into five.**

## **2011**

In 2011, there were only two rocket fatalities. The third fatality could be attributed to the April 7, 2011 killing of Daniel Vlific by an anti-tank missile. I explain [in the note below](#) why his death is generally not considered a high-trajectory rocket/mortar fatality. However, in this case, the IDF graphic does depict anti-tank missiles as part of the " Hamas Rocket Threat," so the count of three fatalities can be considered correct. (Note, however, that in another IDF graphic, also entitled " [Hamas Rocket Threat,](#)" anti-tank missiles are not included, as their limited ranges would undermine the intended message of a far-reaching threat.)

**Thus, for 2011, the IDF number is correct if we include an anti-tank missile strike**

on April 7.

### **Conclusion**

In the infographic, all of the IDF's fatality numbers are exaggerated, with the exception of the fatality number for 2011.

### **Wounded by "shock"**

The same IDF infographic lists the number of people injured by rocket/mortar attacks. Thus we learn, for example, that in 2008, 611 people were injured by rocket and mortar attacks:



For obvious reasons, counting the injured requires more subjective assessment than counting the dead. And when it comes to Gazan rockets and mortars, Israeli authorities push the limits of subjectivity.

Gaza rockets have produced so few casualties that in the absence of deaths and serious injuries, Israeli authorities have resorted to detailing how many people were "treated for shock," which the [press has duly noted](#) over the years.

Thus we are treated to shocking reports such as this [Nov. 12 Haaretz article](#), concerning a rocket that landed on the yard of a house in Netivot:

The hit on Netivot left no casualties, but **20 people were treated for shock** after the incident. [My emphases here and below]

And here's the *Jerusalem Post* [on Nov. 15](#):

MDA [Israeli emergency medical responders] on Wednesday treated a total of **16 people for injury or shock** after a bevy of rockets fired from the Gaza Strip struck Israeli territory.

Injury or shock? How many of the 16 were physically injured?

According to MDA, two people were lightly injured in Beersheba, one from shattered glass and the other from falling down the stairs. **Fourteen more were treated for shock** as well, 12 in Beersheba and two in Sderot.

Though *Haaretz* may make a distinction between "casualties" and those treated for shock (which confirms that we are talking about *acute stress response*, rather than, say, *hypovolemic* or *cardiogenic shock*), not everybody does so.

The Shin Bet, for instance, claims that rocket attacks [in 2007](#) "lightly injured more than 300 persons, most of whom suffered shock."

The following year, the Shin Bet reported that out of the supposedly 630 Israelis wounded in "terror attacks" [in 2008](#),

The majority of the wounded in 2008 (about 400 people) were wounded by high-trajectory fire from the Gaza Strip. This data includes **victims of shock** as a result of high-trajectory fire.

Shin Bet numbers on injuries aren't available for every year, so let's just compare the 2007 and 2008 rocket injuries number with the IDF's:

### **Number of injuries from Gaza rocket and mortar attacks into Israel**

#### **IDF Shin Bet**

**2007** 578 more than 300 (most from shock)

**2008** 611 about 400 (including victims of shock)

How did the IDF come up with more than 200 injuries than the Shin Bet for each year? And are the Shin Bet figures subsets of the IDF figures (meaning the IDF also included hundreds of victims of "shock"), or are they different (meaning the IDF actually found much more than 200 additional injuries per year)?

Regardless, there seems to be some very loose playing with the numbers. Oh, but it gets looser...

### **Number of rockets and mortars fired into Israel from Gaza**

For its latest invasion of Gaza, Israel unveiled a cool new feature that rivals all your iPad apps: the Rocket Counter widget. Now you never have to guess how many rockets have hit Israel. *You only have to wonder why the numbers are so damn inconsistent:*



**According to the IDF Rocket Counter widget, some time between Nov. 15, 2012 (left) and Nov. 16, 2012 (right), Gaza militant groups fired 24 rockets out of the year 2011.**

The screenshot on the left shows the widget display on Thursday, November 15. The screenshot on the right shows the widget display a day later. On Thursday, the widget explained that there were 651 rockets that hit Israel in 2011. On Friday, the number changed to 627, despite the fact that the year 2011 is too recent to have made a comeback.

Moreover, supposedly 122 rockets had hit Israel between the time of the screenshots on Thursday and Friday ( $396-274=122$ ). It would follow, then, that the full 2012 figure of 822 would also increase by 122, giving us a total of 944. Instead it jumped to 1,197, an increase of 375 ( $1197-822=375$ ). What accounts for the 253-rocket surplus in 2012 and the 24-rocket deficit in 2011?

Part of the explanation may lie in another chart that the IDF has been peddling. The bar chart below, taken from the [IDF blog](#), purports to show the number of rockets fired into Israel from the Gaza Strip.



The Rocket Counter widget appeared on the same blog page, and on Thursday, it seemed peculiar that two IDF graphics on a single page gave contradictory reports on how many rockets were fired in 2011. Eventually the widget was perhaps adjusted to conform to the



bar chart.

However, it still does not explain why the other widget numbers do not add up. Nor does it explain where the 651 figure came from.

To make matters even more complicated, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has long promoted the figures collected by the [Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center](#) (ITIC).

Below is a comparison of the number of Gaza rocket and mortar attacks into Israel, according to both the IDF and the ITIC.

**Number of rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza, by year, as reported by the IDF and the ITIC**

	<b>IDF</b>	<b>ITIC</b>
2001	510	249
2002	661	292
2003	848	420
2004	1528	1157
2005	488	417
2006	1123	968
2007	2427	1536
2008	3278	2471
2009	774	266
2010	231	156
2011	627	n/a
2012	1197+	n/a

Note the wide discrepancy for almost every year, with the IDF numbers being significantly higher than the ITIC numbers. We can add to the embarrassment by referring to a page about [“The Hamas Terror War Against Israel”](#) on the website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which reproduces both the IDF bar chart and rocket numbers as reported by ITIC—contradictory information, presented together in a single page by the Israeli government, in order to explain “The Hamas Terror War Against Israel.”

And then consider a quote by the Israeli ambassador to the US, Michael Oren, in an [interview](#) conducted on November 14:

This government has exhibited superhuman restraint: 2,500 rockets since 2009. Last month, 800 rockets. In the last week, 300 rockets. What government in the world wouldn't have responded with war a long time ago?

No other Israeli agency claims that 800 rockets were fired in October 2012. Shin Bet [claims](#) 171 rockets and mortars were fired from Gaza in October.



## Conclusion

It can be argued that numbers ultimately don't matter: One death is a death too many; one rocket is a rocket too many. But if that is the case, why do the IDF and related Israeli agencies need to inflate or fabricate numbers? Why has the numbers game been the cornerstone of Israeli rhetoric about rockets, as depicted in these other recent IDF graphics:



One of the most cynical uses of numbers is in [this tweet](#) by IDF spokesperson Maj. Peter Lerner:



Perhaps inadvertently hinting at the causality (422 Gaza rockets fired *since the start of Operation Pillar of Cloud*), Lerner offers a circular argument, suggesting that the IDF military operation in Gaza is a justifiable response to the Gazan response to the operation itself. Operation Pillar of Cloud is necessary to prevent actions—which are a response to the operation—from ever happening. And the fact that it *has* since happened, justifies having made it happen, to prevent it from happening again.

The same reasoning applies to this new IDF graphic:



*After a full year of no Israelis being killed by rocket fire from Gaza*, Israel had to invade Gaza, prompting the new killing of three Israeli civilians, which provides retroactive justification for the prompting itself.

Still, this is part of the story. As much as the IDF loves to play with numbers, there are certain numbers that it avoids, such as the numbers behind the artillery fire leveled against Gaza, which rivals the number of rocket attacks from Gaza.

That will be treated in a future post.

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## Notes on the rocket and mortar fatalities table

Sources include, but are not limited to, the [Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), the [Israeli Prime Minister's Office](#), [the Israel Project](#), the [Jerusalem Post](#), [B'Tselem](#), and numerous press articles. I made a point of referring to official Israeli and pro-Israeli sources, and then cross-checking them with one another. Some ages and spellings of names vary in press reports.

\* Five of the 26 fatalities were non-Jewish: Salam Ziadin, Khalid Ziadin, and Hani al Mahdi were Bedouin; Lutfi Nasraladin was Druze; Manee Singueanphon was a Thai national.

† The only non-civilian fatality in Israel, Sgt.-Major Lutfi Nasraladin was killed in a mortar attack on an IDF military base.

‡ Salam and Khalid Ziadin were killed while handling an unexploded Qassam rocket for salvaging. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not include the Ziadins in its list of ["Victims of Palestinian Violence and Terrorism."](#)

This list does not include:

1. *Palestinians killed by rocket or mortar misfire in the Gaza Strip.*

2. *People killed by Gaza rockets and mortars targeted inside the Gaza Strip.* Prior to the so-called Gaza “disengagement,” illegal Israeli settlements within Gaza were targeted by rockets and mortars. They were not aimed inside Israel, and none of the rocket counts that I describe in this article include rockets and mortars that were aimed inside the Gaza Strip. They also do not form part of the rhetoric that rockets and mortars from Gaza constitute an “existential threat” to Israel.

In Gaza settlements and the Erez Industrial Zone, rocket and mortar attacks inflicted eight civilian fatalities: three Israeli Jews, three foreign laborers from Thailand and China, and two Palestinian laborers from Khan Younis.

Additionally there were two IDF fatalities in Gaza settlements, including a soldier killed while on his way to guard duty in Kfar Darom and a soldier killed at an IDF outpost in the Morag settlement.

All other rocket and mortar fatalities within Gaza were directed against IDF soldiers engaged in military operations outside of settlements.

3. *One fatality in Israel by anti-tank missile.* The rockets-and-mortars rhetoric refers to high-trajectory ordnances deployed with the following qualities: indirect fire, which coupled with a high inaccuracy rate results in nondiscriminatory targeting; a wide range that encompasses significant portions of southern Israel; and a high deployment frequency.

Anti-tank missiles are direct-fire ordnances with a more limited range and have been used infrequently against civilian targets by Gazan armed groups. There has been one civilian fatality from an anti-tank missile fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel (Daniel Viflic, age 16, killed on April 7, 2011, near Kibbutz Sa’ad, by an anti-tank missile that struck the bus he was riding in). B’Tselem does not include this instance in its [count](#) of rocket and mortar fatalities.

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