



Tales of terror: Israelis share their stories on Gaza rockets

[ALINA DAIN SHARON/JNS.ORG](#)

Download this story in Microsoft Word format [here](#).



Click photo to download.
 Caption: An Israeli woman stands outside a damaged house hit by a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip that hit a house near the Israel-Gaza border, Friday, Nov. 16, 2012. Credit: Tsafir Abayov/Flash90.

The day that longtime Sderot resident Adi Kaslasy, 25, was driving home in her car as rockets started falling around her, a cease-fire was supposed to be in effect. It was one of those frequent cease-fires between the Israeli government and Hamas-ruled Gaza that never truly made the rockets stop coming.

Driving through huge balls of fire hitting the road less than two meters away from her on her left and on her right, it was like she was engaging in an action-movie stunt. But this was reality. Kaslasy lay down on the ground and covered her face, stopped at street shelters (miguniyot) on the way when she could, then drove on every time there was a break in the fire. It took her an hour to get to her house about two kilometers away.

According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the current conflict between Israel and Gaza began back on Saturday, Nov. 10, when an anti-tank missile fired from Gaza struck an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) jeep and wounded four Israeli soldiers. Hamas followed that attack by firing 120 rockets at Israel from Nov. 10-14, prompting the IDF to kill Ahmed Jabari, the head of Hamas's military wing. This marked the start of the IDF's "Pillar of Defense" air offensive. Since then about 700 rockets were fired from Gaza at Israel, and three Israelis were killed despite the deployment of the Iron Dome missile defense system to intercept the rockets. According to Reuters, at least 16 Palestinian civilians were killed by Israel's airstrikes on Gaza.



Click photo to download.
 Caption: A rocket that fell in an Eshkol Regional Council field during the latest conflict with Hamas. Credit: Ronit Minaker.

Gaza rockets killed a total of 23 Israelis between January 2004 and November 2012, according to the ministry of foreign affairs. This year, March, June and October saw a major upsurge in rockets from Gaza, with more than 100 launches in each of those months, according to data from the *Jewish Virtual Library*. Even during relatively quiet times, the Israeli South gets hit by at least 1-2 rockets a week--usually many more. Men, women and children have 15 seconds to get to a safe house before the next rocket hits. Often that is not long enough.

Once as a teenager, Kaslasy was traveling to Dimona in the Negev when she met a good friend on the way. A rocket killed the friend two hours after this meeting. "In Sderot you never know which day will really be your last... It's like Russian roulette," she told *JNS.org*.

The Eshkol Regional Council—a collection of 32 villages, kibbutzim and small communities that runs along 40 kilometers, or nearly two-thirds, of the Israel-Gaza border—sees 40-60 percent of the rockets that fall inside Israeli territory, said Ronit Minaker, the council's official speaker. There is also the danger of sniper shootings and terrorist infiltration attempts, which shut the villages down when they occur—residents get a notice not to leave their homes.



Click photo to download.
 Caption: The "situation room" of the Eshkol Municipal Council. This meeting—including all the department heads in the council (security, education, care of population, engineering, agriculture, public information)—takes place twice a day to

The Israeli government paid for the construction of safe rooms inside most homes in the Eshkol region, but "some villages don't have shelters, so (people) have to run to hallways or some windowless space," Minaker told *JNS.org*.

"If they're outside, they have to lie flat on the ground or go into a nearby building, though sometimes there isn't one," she said. About 40 percent of the Eshkol population has left the area during the most recent rocket attacks. Of those that remain, many experience posttraumatic stress symptoms, not only adults but also children who are wetting the bed again at the age of nine or 10.

Adele Raemer is a Kibbutz Nirim resident who founded a Facebook group, *Life on the Border with Gaza*, which has more than 1,300 members and publicizes what residents are experiencing in Israel's south. Kibbutz Nirim, about two kilometers from the Gaza border, gets hit by the short-range mortars, which are much deadlier than the Qassam rockets. They don't have an early warning system for these, so the mortars "just land and the only way you know about them is when you hear the explosion," Raemer told *JNS.org*. During this latest escalation, she has been sleeping in a safe room. On Saturday she sought shelter about 10 times during

understand the needs of area residents and search for solutions amid rocket attacks. Credit: Ronit Minaker.

the day.



Click photo to download.
Caption: A Gaza rocket in an Eshkol Regional Council field during the latest conflict. Credit: Ronit Minaker.

The 2005 Israeli disengagement from Gaza made the situation for southern Israelis much worse. "The feeling is that instead of building a life over there (Gaza), they made the area into a place for shooting rockets," Minaker said. In recent years there were several escalations that led to a barrage of rockets. Many residents are angered that Israel is willing to accept massive fire daily, sometimes dozens of rockets a day, on its own citizens. Many of those residents welcome Operation Pillar of Defense.

But even if the current operation winds down and the launching of the rockets subsides for a few months or a year, "in the end it will happen again," so the conflict has to be ended through a political agreement, Minaker said. "We as citizens know that citizens on both sides ultimately just want to live a normal life, take their children to kindergarten, go to work and stroll freely through their gardens," she said.

In the latest barrages, several rockets also fell near the central city of Tel Aviv and the capital of Jerusalem. The Israeli government is considering a potential ground offensive into Gaza, mobilizing up to 75,000 reserve soldiers in preparation. "Tel Aviv itself is very much a bubble. When rockets hit Sderot, it's very much a reaction like 'out of sight, out of mind.' Tel Aviv hasn't had [an air raid] siren in over 20 years, so it was very unexpected for us," 18-year-old Tel Aviv University student Ilana Sivachenko told JNS.org.

In fact, many Israelis in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv had no clue where to go when the siren went off, or how long they had to get to the shelters. When the first alarm sounded in Tel Aviv, Sivachenko was walking home with her groceries. University shelters were sealed shut, so she ran to the nearest stairwell. So did Jonathan Nevo, a 26-year-old student of Middle East and international relations in Jerusalem, since his building didn't even have a safe room. Although this is the first time a rocket alarm sounded in Jerusalem, "the area is very connected to everything that's happening because during the Intifada a few years ago there were a lot of suicide bombings here," he told JNS.org.



Click photo to download.
Caption: The damage from a direct hit by a Gaza rocket on an Eshkol Regional Council "safe room" Nov. 16. Credit: Ronit Minaker.

Twenty-four-year-old Ilana Liberman, a student at Hebrew University, was studying with her roommate when they heard the alarm and then the explosion from the rocket. "We don't know exactly where it fell but there were booms. From what I understand they didn't open the safe rooms here, but we looked for a place to hide away from windows, so we went to the last building floor and waited from instructions from the Home Front Command to know when we could leave," she told JNS.org. A friend of hers and his girlfriend continued sitting on their porch as the alarm sounded.

"People who never experienced this before don't know how to react," Liberman said.

In Giv'atayim, a town east of Tel Aviv, 26-year-old graphic designer Zohar Louk hid in a safe room of a random building during the rocket alarm. Her 7-year-old sister became hysterical from the alarm since it sounded while she was at a playground without any place to hide. "We don't understand how the residents of the South deal with this every day," Louk told JNS.org. She hopes that the Palestinians expel Hamas and recognize it as a terror organization. She doesn't believe in negotiating with an organization whose sole purpose is the destruction of her country.



Click photo to download.
Caption: Adi Kaslasy, no stranger to Gaza rockets. Credit: Provided photo.

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians isn't a simple, symmetric, tit-for-tat conflict, Kaslasy said. Though the news frequently presents Israel's side of the conflict as "a rocket hit Sderot, no injured people," such an event is very painful for the people of Sderot, and many around the world underestimate how tough this is for Israel, according to Kaslasy.

"I have a friend who, when he was 23 years old, lost most of his legs. Another neighbor lost his eyesight," Kaslasy said.

Kaslasy recently moved to Berlin, Germany, but her family still lives in southern Israel. She remembers vividly "as a kid, looking up at the sky and thinking, 'Oh God please, don't let me die.'" In another incident, she couldn't get to a safe room in time, so she hid under a tree to escape as the siren sounded.

"At the last minute I started laughing because I looked at this tree... and I thought, 'This is going to protect me?'" Kaslasy said. She started running and felt herself fly in the air, and the rocket hit the tree. The shock was so severe that she didn't notice her bruises, simply got up, and started walking like nothing happened, shivering. In another case, she saw a rocket hit people.

"In that moment you start screaming, and you don't realize that you're screaming," she said.

[SHARE ARTICLE](#) | [EMAIL ARTICLE](#)



POSTED ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2012 AT 8:36AM CATEGORY: [ISRAEL](#), [NEWS](#)

[View Printer Friendly Version](#)