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**Background to Operation Protective Edge**

**The Gaza Strip**

**Basics**

The Gaza Strip is a self-governing autonomous area bordering Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea. Despite frequently being in the news The Gaza Strip is really quite small in size. In the southwest it is 11 kilometers (6.8 miles wide) and 51 km (32 miles long.)

Israel seized control of The Gaza Strip in 1967 from Egypt who gained control of the area after Israel's War of Independence.

In 2005 Israel disengaged from Gaza although still controlling Gaza's air and maritime space, and six of Gaza's seven land crossings. Despite Israel's withdrawal the international community still considers Israel as controlling the Strip. Israel rejects this claim.

The Islamic Resistance Movement, or Hamas has ruled the area since June 2007 after a short civil war when Fatah refused to accept defeat in the elections of 2006. Fatah accepted a temporary Saudi Arabian plan to create a national coalition government. The government was short lived.

**Operation Defensive Edge**

The operation began with the kidnapping and killing of three yeshiva students by a Hamas cell in the West Bank on June 12th, 2014. In a revenge attack a Palestinian teenager Mohammed Abu Khdeir was killed by three Israelis. Palestinian riots followed. The killing of the Palestinian teenager was condemned by the Israeli government who has actively arrested Jews who commit violence. The killing of the yeshivah students was celebrated by Palestinians in the West Bank.

As a result of the kidnapping Israel arrested hundreds of Palestinian suspects in the West Bank. Hamas fired 232 rockets and mortars at Israeli population centers in the three weeks after the abduction. Israel failed to stop the fire by air attack. A full out war with Hamas soon followed.

**Hamas Political Isolation Prior to the War**

The internal political exigencies of Hamas are also important to consider the build up to the war. Prior to the conflict Hamas was suffering from both political isolation and economic crisis.

When the Muslim Brotherhood was removed in Egypt and military rule under Field Marshal Abdel Fatah al-Sisi was established, Hamas faced a new crisis. When Egypt ordered the closing of all tunnel, Hamas's revenue from tunnel smuggling was halved.

Hamas damaged itself politically when it supported fellow Sunnis fighting in Syria against both President Assad, Iran and their proxy Hezbollah.

Consequently, Iran cut aid to Hamas. Six months prior to the war Hamas was finding it difficult to pay the salaries of government officials. Many blame Hamas's financial challenges as a motivation to launch war.

**The three phased war.**

1. Pinpoint air strikes (July 8-17)
2. The ground incursion into Gaza (July 17-August 4) to degrade Hamas's capabilities in general and destroy its extensive network of offensive tunnels in particular.
3. Ceasefire following the IDF withdrawal to the international border and sustained air raids.

**The Iron Dome**

The Iron Dome provided one of the most important strategic game changers. Israel managed to destroy 90 per cent of incoming rockets and missiles. Only two Israeli civilians were killed by Hamas. The Iron dome failed to provide protection to the kibbutzim neighboring Gaza who suffered from continual mortar fire. Hamas managed to close the international airport with rocket fire and target the outskirts of Haifa.

**Tunnels**

The construction of tunnels by Hamas within Gaza and exiting Gaza is an important element of the war to understand. Hamas constructed an extensive network of military tunnels.

The tunnels were used to store ammunition, and conceal militants in Gaza and to allow Hamas fighters to enter Israel and attack Israel through them. In 2006 Hamas used a cross border tunnel to kidnap Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. During the war Israel managed to destroy many of these tunnels, including 14 that emerged in Israel. Tunnels have been used by Hamas for varying purposes. These include the smuggling of basic goods and food from Egypt into Israel as well as the smuggling of arms into Gaza. In recent months Egypt has accused Hamas of smuggling weapons out of Gaza into Sinai and arming Jihadist groups affiliated with the Islamic State.

**Hamas and Egypt**

The relationship between Hamas and Egypt is troubled. Egypt finds that it has many common interests with Israel to clip the wings of Hamas. Since the rise of President of Sisi and the demise of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas is seen as a threat to the Egyptian presidency. Egypt accuses Hamas of selling weapons to collaborating with and arming Jihadist groups in the Sinai.

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**Operation Protective Edge**

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