

# Israel's Operation Shield and Arrow

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*Israel initiated Operation Shield and Arrow on May 9 with airstrikes that killed three senior members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), an Iranian proxy in Gaza, a week after the terrorist group fired over 100 rockets at Israel. Following that attack and a multi-front offensive by Iranian-backed groups in April, Israel is determined to enforce redlines and rebuild deterrence specifically against PIJ—and its Iranian patron. Israel also appears to be pursuing a relatively new strategy of trying to separate PIJ from Hamas, explicitly targeting only the former. So far, this strategy appears to be working as Hamas has avoided becoming directly involved.*

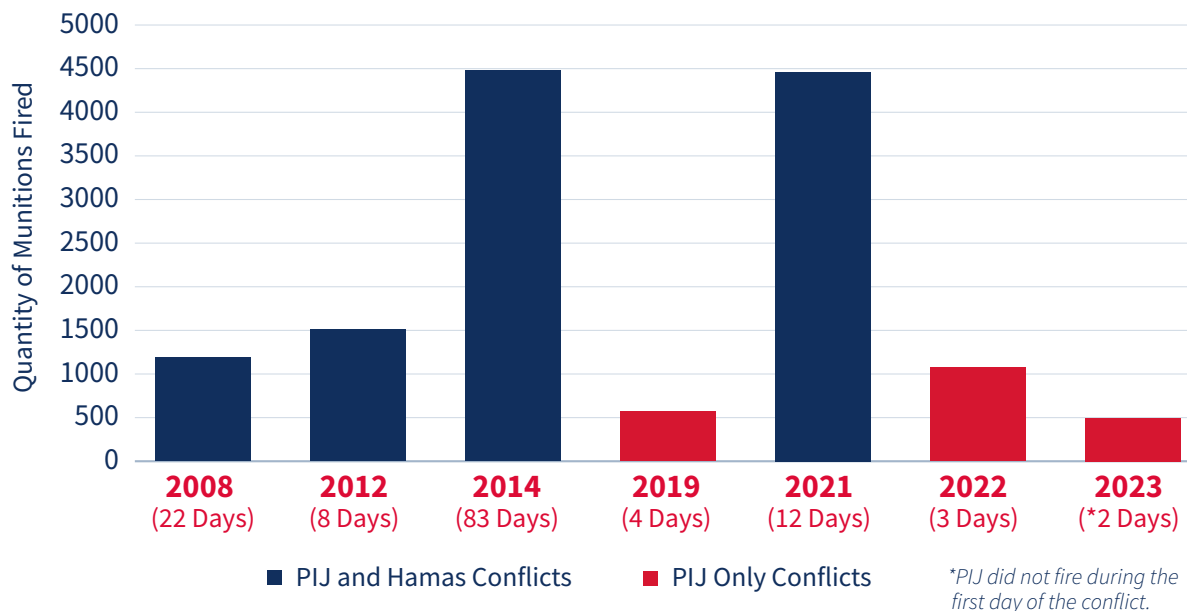
*The United States should ensure that Israel has the time to pursue its objectives, rapidly resupply it with air defense interceptors should its stocks become low, and protect its partner at the United Nations Security Council against spurious accusations.*

## What Happened?

- Israel launched Operation Shield and Arrow in the early hours of May 9, beginning with separate, simultaneous airstrikes that [killed](#) three senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) commanders who allegedly posed an immediate threat to Israeli civilians.
  - » On May 2, PIJ militants in Gaza [launched](#) over 100 rockets at Israel. That attack was a response to the death of PIJ official [Khader Adnan](#) after an eighty-seven-day hunger strike in Israeli prison. Israel had also [targeted](#) a Hamas training camp and weapons storage facility on May 3.
  - » During the strikes that targeted the three PIJ commanders, at least ten civilians were also killed.
    - The IDF [conducts careful checks](#) to minimize collateral damage, but in this operation a greater freedom of action was permitted so that it could conduct the airstrikes simultaneously to prevent any of the targets from fleeing.
  - » Also on May 9, Israeli aircraft struck ten PIJ weapons manufacturing and military facilities, and later that day hit an anti-tank missile cell preparing to launch an attack.

- On May 10, Israel renewed its strikes on PIJ rocket launch sites to preempt attacks by the militants, striking over 150 targets. Militants from PIJ in Gaza fired roughly 500 rockets, mortars, and anti-tank missiles at southern Israeli cities and Tel Aviv. Israel responded to these attacks with further strikes against PIJ rocket launch sites.
  - » With the Iron Dome short-range air defense system intercepting most of the incoming projectiles, there were reports of some injuries but no deaths in Israel.
  - » Israel’s David’s Sling air defense system made its [first successful operational interception](#) by neutralizing a rocket over Tel Aviv.
  - » Later on May 10, Egypt reportedly [negotiated a ceasefire](#), but a heavy barrage of rockets in southern Israel and Tel Aviv continued after the ceasefire was said to have gone into effect.
- The United States and United Kingdom blocked an effort by China at an emergency United Nations Security Council meeting on May 10 to pass a resolution expressing concern about the fighting, which would have drawn equivalence between Israel and PIJ.
- Despite reports of ceasefire negotiations, Israel and PIJ continued to exchange sporadic fire overnight into May 11. This included an Israeli strike that killed Ali Ghali, the commander of PIJ’s rocket force in Gaza responsible for attacks against Israel.

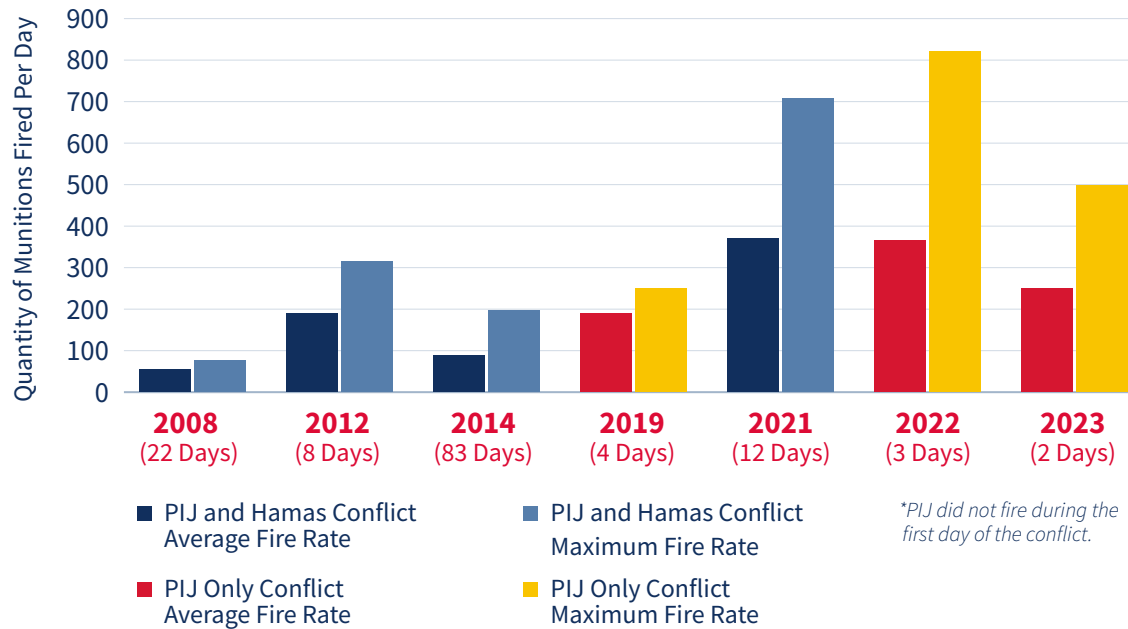
## Even Without Hamas Joining, PIJ Has Fired Barrages at Israel



## Why Is It Important?

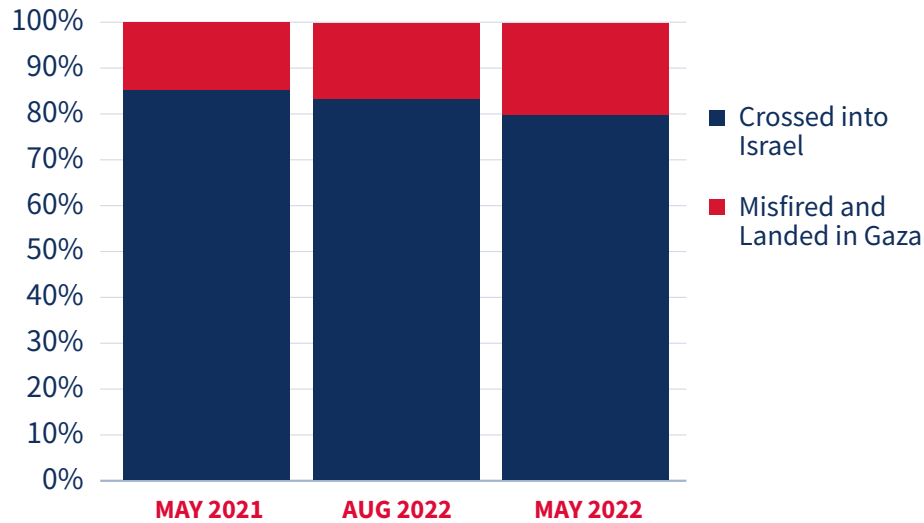
- Aside from its operational importance of demonstrating Israel's ability to strike multiple key targets simultaneously, Operation Shield and Arrow's major strategic implication is Israel's determination to enforce redlines and rebuild deterrence specifically against PIJ—and its Iranian patron. Israel also appears to be pursuing a relatively new strategy of trying to separate PIJ from Hamas, a larger and more capable Gaza-based terror organization.
- PIJ's recent attacks from Gaza, along with multifront strikes Israel faced in April, indicate an erosion of Israeli deterrence against Iran-backed groups on its borders. Operation Shield and Arrow was an attempt to reverse this trend and reestablish Israeli redlines.
  - » Iranian-backed terrorist groups seek to capitalize on possible weaknesses and distractions from Israel's internal political turmoil, persistent strains in its bilateral partnership with the United States, and Washington's own perceived retrenchment from the Middle East.
  - » In just four days last month, Israel was attacked on [multiple fronts](#) from Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza in an unprecedentedly coordinated effort by Iranian proxies.
- Since the conclusion of the May 2021 Gaza conflict, Hamas and PIJ have taken different approaches, leading Israel to adopt differing strategies for dealing with each group.
  - » Up to and through the 2021 conflict, Israel generally held Hamas, which controls Gaza, responsible for all attacks originating from the territory, even if not carried out by Hamas.
  - » Since that conflict, however, Hamas has largely been deterred from launching more attacks against Israel from inside Gaza.
    - Instead, Hamas has been actively funding, recruiting, and initiating [terrorist attacks](#) in the West Bank that target Israelis.
    - It also engaged in a coordinated round of rocket and drone attacks on Israel from Lebanon.
    - Tellingly, Hamas has remained conspicuously on the sidelines during the current operation, indicating it remains deterred and seeks to avoid another round of escalation. This despite JINSA Distinguished Fellow MG (ret.) Yaakov Amidror indicating that PIJ asked for Hamas assistance and involvement in responding to Israel's initial May 9 airstrikes.
  - » PIJ, on the other hand, has grown increasingly more aggressive over the last two years, frequently attacking Israel.
    - Notably, from August 5-7, 2022, Israel launched [Operation Breaking Dawn](#) to preempt PIJ plans to launch anti-tank missiles against Israel. The terrorist group fired 1,100 rockets during this short round of hostilities.

## Israel Faced a Much Higher Rate of Fire Per Day in Recent Conflicts



- » During the May 9-11 airstrikes of Operation Shield and Arrow, the IDF targeted PIJ leaders and capabilities and explicitly avoided striking Hamas or holding it responsible for PIJ attacks.
  - At the start of the operation on May 9, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [claimed](#) Israel “wiped out the leadership” of PIJ and “dealt a significant blow to the assets of this murderous terrorist organization” by destroying hundreds of weapons production and storage facilities.
  - On May 10, IDF spokesman Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari [made clear](#) that Israel’s focus is on PIJ, not Hamas, and that the IDF is “striking those who are launching rockets at us... Islamic Jihad is leading this rocket fire. If other factions join, we will respond against them too.”
- In contrast to Hamas, whose de facto control of Gaza gives it more to lose in any escalation—and thus makes it more deterrable there—upholding deterrence against PIJ is more difficult for Israel.
  - » PIJ’s chief decision-makers are more ensconced in Lebanon than in Gaza (compared to Hamas), making them feel less directly vulnerable to current Israeli operations and giving them fewer equities to fear they could lose in any escalation of fighting in Gaza.
  - » Relative to Hamas, which receives funding and training from Iran, PIJ is more a direct creation of the Iranian regime and depends more wholly on Tehran for largesse.

## Rockets from Gaza Endanger Palestinian Lives Too



- With efforts to negotiate a ceasefire ongoing, the duration of this operation will be determined by two key factors:
  - » Israel’s satisfaction that it has restored deterrence and degraded PIJ capabilities; and
  - » Whether Hamas joins PIJ in directly launching projectiles at Israel from Gaza.

## What Should the United States Do Next?

- The Biden administration should continue supporting Israel's right to defend itself against terrorist threats, including through preemptive action.
- Bipartisan congressional leadership should publicly commit that they will not delay [Israel’s replenishment](#) of Tamir interceptors for [Iron Dome](#) should it face a similar shortage as after the May 2021 conflict with Gaza.
- The Biden administration should declare its public support for Israel at the United Nations Security Council. This should include an acknowledgement that Israel has the right to defend itself against terrorism. The administration should further urge the international community to demonstrate restraint in projecting unfounded accusations against Israel’s actions to combat terror.