

The Israeli War on the Gaza Strip 2014: Operation Protective Edge and the Battle of al-Asf al-Ma'kul



On **July 8, 2014**, Israeli occupation forces launched a large-scale military assault on the Gaza Strip, which Israel called **“Operation Protective Edge”**. Hamas and the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades referred to the confrontation as the **“Battle of al-Asf al-Ma’kul”**, while Palestinian Islamic Jihad called it **“al-Bunyan al-Marsous.”**

The war lasted **50 days** and unfolded in three main phases: a large-scale aerial campaign, followed by a ground invasion that began on July 17, then the withdrawal of ground forces and repeated rounds of bombardment and ceasefires, until an **open-ended ceasefire mediated by Egypt** came into effect on the evening of August 26, 2014.

It was the deadliest and most destructive war the Gaza Strip had experienced since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967 up to that time. According to figures used by the United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry, **2,251**

Palestinians were killed, including 1,462 civilians, while more than 11,000 were wounded. The war also caused widespread and unprecedented destruction to homes, infrastructure, health facilities, and educational institutions.

From the 2012 War to the Summer of 2014

The 2014 war came less than two years after the November 2012 war, known by Israel as “Operation Pillar of Defense” and by Palestinians as the “Battle of Hajar al-Sijil.”

The ceasefire that ended the 2012 war had provided for an end to military operations and an easing of restrictions related to crossings and movement. However, the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip continued, while the movement of people and goods and access to the sea and border areas remained subject to extensive restrictions.

During the first months of 2014, rocket fire from Gaza and Israeli airstrikes gradually increased, while the Strip was experiencing a worsening economic and humanitarian crisis caused by the blockade, the electricity crisis, and the closure of tunnels along the Egyptian border.

The Abduction of Three Israeli Settlers and Escalation in the West Bank

On **June 12, 2014**, three Israeli settlers were abducted in the southern West Bank, and their bodies were found on June 30.

Israel accused Hamas of responsibility and Israeli occupation forces launched a large-scale military campaign across the West Bank involving raids, arrests, closures of areas, and restrictions on movement.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Israeli occupation forces arrested approximately 2,200 Palestinians in the West Bank between June and August during the campaigns that followed the incident and the confrontations that accompanied them. The West Bank also witnessed a significant increase in injuries and clashes.

On **July 2**, Palestinian Jerusalemite teenager **Mohammed Abu Khdeir** was abducted and burned to death by Israelis, an incident that further intensified tensions in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

These developments coincided with escalating Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip and Palestinian rocket fire, until the relative calm that had followed the 2012 war collapsed completely.

July 7-8: The Beginning of the War

On **July 7**, Israel decided to expand its military operations against the Gaza Strip, and the large-scale aerial campaign began the following day.

On **July 8**, Israeli aircraft carried out hundreds of strikes across different areas of the Strip, targeting positions belonging to Palestinian factions, rocket-launching sites, and weapons depots, as well as homes, residential buildings, government facilities, and civilian infrastructure.

Israeli occupation aircraft struck approximately 223 targets on the first day and 326 on the second, while the number of airstrikes during the initial phase alone exceeded 1,700.

Israel's Stated Objectives

Israel announced that the primary objective of the operation was to stop Palestinian rocket fire and reduce the military capabilities of Hamas and other factions.

With the transition to the ground invasion, destroying the network of tunnels

extending from the Gaza Strip toward areas beyond the border fence was added to the main stated objectives of the operation.

Palestinian factions, meanwhile, linked an end to the confrontation to lifting the blockade on the Gaza Strip, opening the crossings, and ending restrictions imposed on residents, movement, and trade.

The Palestinian Resistance Expands the Range of Its Rockets

From the first days of the war, Palestinian resistance factions continued launching rockets and mortar shells toward military positions, towns, and cities inside Israel **(occupied Palestine)**.

The 2014 confrontation was marked by a significant expansion in rocket range compared with previous wars, with rockets reaching the Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Beersheba, Dimona, and other areas in central occupied Palestine.

The resistance also used tunnels to carry out operations behind the lines of Israeli occupation forces and conducted ground and maritime infiltration attempts, making the tunnel network one of the most significant military elements of the war.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Palestinian factions launched approximately **4,844 rockets and 1,734 mortar shells** toward Israel during the war.

July 16: The Bakr Family Children on Gaza Beach

On **July 16, 2014**, four children from the Bakr family, aged between nine and eleven, were killed while playing on a beach in Gaza City.

The strike occurred near hotels where a number of international journalists were staying, and several of them witnessed the incident directly.

Images of the four children became among the most widely associated with the war, while the incident raised major international questions regarding target selection and the protection of civilians.

July 17: The Ground Invasion Begins

On the evening of **July 17, 2014**, Israeli occupation forces launched a large-scale ground invasion along several axes in the northern, eastern, and southern Gaza Strip, involving infantry units, armored forces, artillery, and combat engineering units.

Israel announced that the main objective of the ground phase was to locate and destroy tunnels extending from Gaza beyond the border fence, which it said Palestinian factions were using to conduct operations against its forces.

The invasion was accompanied by intensive artillery, aerial, and naval bombardment of border areas, forcing tens of thousands of Palestinians to flee northern and eastern areas of the Gaza Strip.

The Battle of Shuja'iyya

The **Shuja'iyya** neighborhood east of Gaza City witnessed one of the fiercest battles of the war.

During the night of July 19 and the morning of **July 20**, the neighborhood came under extensive artillery and aerial bombardment as Israeli occupation forces advanced into the area.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported at the time that as many as **60 Palestinians were killed within approximately 24 hours** in Shuja'iyya, including children and women, while the death toll later increased as bodies were recovered from beneath the rubble.

The neighborhood also witnessed intense clashes between Palestinian resistance fighters and Israeli forces, and **13 Israeli soldiers** were killed in the Shuja'iyya

battles on July 20.

Shuja'iyya became a symbol of the scale of firepower used during the ground operations, as Israeli occupation forces employed artillery, aircraft, and tanks extensively in a densely populated area.

Khuza'a

The town of **Khuza'a**, east of Khan Younis, witnessed intense military operations between July 20 and the beginning of August.

The town was subjected to heavy bombardment and Israeli occupation forces entered the area, while ambulances and rescue teams faced severe difficulties reaching it for several days.

The United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry documented testimonies concerning attacks on civilians attempting to leave the town, including cases involving people carrying white flags, as well as extensive destruction of homes and other structures.

The Commission concluded that information collected regarding several of these incidents raised serious concerns about violations of international humanitarian law.

The Shelling of UNRWA Schools and Shelters for Displaced Palestinians

As military operations expanded, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians sought refuge in schools operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which were transformed into shelters for displaced people.

However, several of these schools were struck or had shells land inside them or in their immediate vicinity.

Among the most prominent incidents were:

- **July 24:** An UNRWA school in Beit Hanoun sheltering displaced Palestinians was shelled, killing a number of civilians and wounding dozens.
- **July 30:** The Jabalia Elementary Girls School came under artillery fire while approximately 3,000 displaced people were sheltering inside, resulting in dozens of deaths and injuries.
- **August 3:** A missile struck near the entrance of an UNRWA school in Rafah sheltering thousands of displaced Palestinians, killing civilians, including children.

The United Nations confirmed that the coordinates of schools being used as shelters had been communicated to the Israeli authorities repeatedly.

At the same time, UNRWA also documented the discovery of weapons or components of weapons in three schools that were empty and not being used as shelters, and condemned the use of its facilities for storing weapons as a violation of the inviolability of United Nations premises.

The Targeting of Gaza's Power Plant

On **July 29, 2014**, the Gaza Strip's only power plant was struck, setting fuel tanks on fire and forcing the plant to shut down.

Before the war, the plant had supplied approximately 30 percent of the electricity available in the Strip. Its shutdown, combined with damage to electricity lines coming from Israel and to internal distribution networks, created a severe crisis affecting electricity, water, and sewage systems.

Prolonged electricity outages and water shortages became part of the humanitarian crisis that accompanied the war and continued afterward.

Hospitals and the Health Sector

The Gaza Strip's health system came under immense pressure as a result of thousands of casualties and continuous bombardment.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Health Organization, dozens of hospitals, clinics, and ambulances were damaged during the war.

United Nations assessments indicated that **75 health facilities** were damaged to varying degrees during the fighting, while dozens of facilities were forced to close at different stages because of damage or security risks.

Among the most prominent facilities destroyed was **al-Wafa Rehabilitation Hospital**, Gaza's main specialized rehabilitation center.

August 1: Rafah and “Black Friday”

On the morning of **August 1, 2014**, a 72-hour ceasefire came into effect, but collapsed within a short time after a confrontation in the Rafah area in which two Israeli soldiers were killed. Israel initially believed that a third officer, Hadar Goldin, had been captured.

Israeli occupation forces responded with a massive campaign of fire across Rafah and the surrounding eastern areas.

The events of that day became known among Palestinians as **“Black Friday.”**

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, more than one hundred Palestinians were killed in Rafah on August 1 alone, and most of those whose status could be determined were civilians.

The United Nations Commission later investigated the Israeli military's use of what was known as the **“Hannibal Directive”**, under which massive firepower was used in an attempt to prevent the removal of the soldier believed to have been

captured.

Palestinian Casualties

According to the final figures used by the United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry, **2,251 Palestinians were killed** during the 2014 war.

Among them were:

- **1,462 Palestinian civilians.**
- **551 children.**
- **299 women.**

A further **11,231 Palestinians were wounded**, including:

- **3,436 children.**
- **3,540 women.**

The United Nations reported that approximately **10 percent of those injured** suffered permanent disabilities, while more than 1,500 Palestinian children lost one or both parents.

The United Nations also documented that **142 Palestinian families** lost three or more members of the same family in a single incident, with a total of 742 people killed in these incidents alone.

Israeli Casualties

According to the United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry, **67 Israeli soldiers** were killed during the war.

Destruction in the Gaza Strip

The scale of physical destruction was one of the defining features of the 2014 war.

According to the United Nations, approximately **18,000 housing units** were

destroyed or damaged to an extent that left them uninhabitable or in need of extensive reconstruction and repair.

Schools, hospitals, industrial and agricultural facilities, water and sewage networks, electricity infrastructure, government institutions, mosques, and commercial buildings were also damaged.

Israeli occupation forces carried out more than **6,000 airstrikes** on the Gaza Strip during the war, in addition to firing tens of thousands of artillery and tank shells.

Half a Million Displaced Palestinians

At the height of the war, the number of internally displaced Palestinians in the Gaza Strip reached approximately **500,000 people**, representing nearly 28 percent of Gaza's population at the time.

Hundreds of thousands sought shelter in UNRWA schools, government schools, or the homes of relatives.

By the end of the war, more than one hundred thousand Palestinians still required long-term housing solutions because their homes had been destroyed or severely damaged.

Attempts to Reach a Ceasefire

The war witnessed a series of attempts to reach a ceasefire.

On **July 14**, Egypt presented an initiative to halt the fighting that was accepted by the Israeli government, while Hamas rejected the proposal in the form presented and demanded that any agreement include lifting the blockade on the Gaza Strip and opening the crossings.

This was followed by humanitarian truces and short-term ceasefire agreements, but most collapsed or ended without producing a permanent agreement.

On August 5, Israeli ground forces withdrew from inside the Gaza Strip as one of

the ceasefire periods began. However, aerial warfare and Palestinian rocket fire later resumed, and the assault on Gaza continued intermittently until late August.

August 26: The Open-Ended Ceasefire

On the evening of **August 26, 2014**, an open-ended ceasefire mediated by Egypt came into effect at 7:00 p.m.

It was accepted by the Palestinian side, including the Palestinian Authority and the factions operating in the Gaza Strip, as well as by Israel.

The understanding included easing some restrictions imposed on the Gaza Strip, opening crossings for humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials, expanding the permitted fishing zone, and discussing additional issues in subsequent negotiations.

However, broader issues—including a complete lifting of the blockade, the establishment of a seaport and airport, and issues concerning prisoners and remains—were not resolved under the agreement.

The Blockade and Reconstruction

The humanitarian crisis did not end when the fighting stopped.

The blockade and restrictions on the entry of construction materials, combined with funding shortages, made the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip extremely slow.

Two years after the war, tens of thousands of Palestinians whose homes had been destroyed or severely damaged remained displaced, while health and educational facilities and infrastructure still required reconstruction.

The effects of permanent injuries and psychological trauma also continued, particularly among children who had endured fifty days of bombardment, displacement, the loss of family members, and the destruction of their homes.