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The Gaza Tunnel Operations 2001–2004: From Tarmid to "Volcanoes of Rage"



During the al-Aqsa Intifada, the military posts the occupation had planted on the edges of Gaza’s towns and camps and along the Rafah border strip were fortified with concrete walls, towers and radar. The resistance in Gaza turned to a new weapon: **attack tunnels**, dug hundreds of metres underground to reach beneath a post and blow it up from below. [1][2]

The best known were the bombing of the **Tarmid** post in Rafah in 2001, the **Mahfouza** post north of Khan Younis in June 2004, and the **“Volcanoes of Rage”** operation at the Rafah crossing in December 2004 – all part of the pressure that

ended with the occupation's withdrawal from the Strip's settlements in 2005. [1][3]

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The operations at a glance

Operation	Date	Place	What happened
The Tarmid post (Salah al-Din Gate)	26 September 2001	The Rafah border strip	A tunnel of about 150 metres; a three-storey building housing occupation soldiers blown up
The Mahfouza post	June 2004	North of Khan Younis	A tunnel of about 495 metres; the post blown up entirely
"Volcanoes of Rage"	12 December 2004	A desert-patrol post at the Rafah crossing	A tunnel of about 600 metres and 1,300 kg of explosives; a joint Qassam–Fatah Hawks operation

[1][2]

Why tunnels?

After the al-Aqsa Intifada erupted in 2000, the occupation turned the Gaza settlements and their surroundings into fortified barracks, and set up military posts

at the entrances to towns and camps and on the border with Egypt, firing on neighbourhoods and demolishing homes. With only light weapons, the resistance could not storm these posts above ground, so it went beneath them. [1][3]

Tunnels in Rafah were already known for smuggling goods and weapons across the Egyptian border, and the resistance developed them into attack tunnels packed with explosives and detonated beneath the posts. [1]

The Tarmid bombing, 2001

The occupation army set up the Tarmid military post in a residential building it had seized near the Gaza–Egypt border, in the Salah al-Din Gate area of Rafah. On **26 September 2001** the Qassam Brigades blew up the post, after its fighters had dug a tunnel about 150 metres long and packed it with explosives, destroying the three-storey building where the soldiers lived. [1][2]

The Brigades credit the commanders **Mohammed Abu Shamala** and **Raed al-Attar**, both assassinated by the occupation in Rafah on 21 August 2014, with overseeing the operation.[2][1]

The Mahfouza bombing, 2004

In **June 2004** the Qassam Brigades blew up the Mahfouza military post north of Khan Younis. The Brigades say their fighters dug a tunnel some 495 metres long until they were beneath the post, then destroyed it completely. [1][2]

“Volcanoes of Rage,” 2004

On **12 December 2004** the Qassam Brigades and the Fatah Hawks carried out a joint operation they named “Volcanoes of Rage,” targeting a military post of the occupation army’s Bedouin “desert patrol” unit at the Rafah crossing on the Egyptian border. [1][2]

According to the resistance’s account, the fighters spent four months digging a

tunnel about 600 metres long until they were beneath the post. At 5:07 p.m. on Sunday, 1 Dhu al-Qa’da 1425, they detonated a charge of about 1,300 kilograms of explosives; two fighters, one from Qassam and one from the Fatah Hawks, then emerged from a second tunnel prepared for the purpose and fought the post’s soldiers for about an hour.

The fighter **al-Mu’ayyad bi-Hukm Allah al-Agha**, twenty, from Khan Younis, was martyred in the clash, while the other fighter withdrew after seizing a heavy MAG machine gun. About an hour later a second charge of some 200 kilograms was detonated around the post, and occupation reinforcements arrived only some 40 minutes after the operation began. [2]

The post was destroyed completely, and the blast hit the crossing point some 300 metres away. The operation was one of the most prominent examples of joint action by two Palestinian factions during the Intifada.

The road to withdrawal

The tunnel operations, together with rockets, mortars and clashes, raised the cost of the occupation’s presence in Gaza. In August and September 2005 the occupation evacuated 21 settlements in the Strip and withdrew its army, which the resistance considers the fruit of its steadfastness. But the Strip remained besieged, with the occupation controlling its borders, sea and sky. [3]

Between the accounts

Date of Tarmid: TRT Arabi dates it to October 2001, while the martyr Abu Shamala’s page gives 26 September 2001. [1][2]

Losses: the Qassam Brigades say the Mahfouza bombing killed 7 and wounded 30, and that “Volcanoes of Rage” killed 5 and wounded 6 of the desert patrol – figures we found no independent Arab source to confirm. [2]

Dead in “Volcanoes of Rage”: 5 killed and 6 wounded according to the Qassam

page, and seven killed according to the account of the fighter who withdrew, as relayed by Qassam spokesman Abu Obeida. [2]

The martyr's affiliation: a commonly told account says the martyr was the Fatah Hawks fighter and that the Qassam fighter withdrew, while the Qassam Brigades list al-Mu'ayyad bi-Hukm Allah al-Agha among the operation's martyrs without specifying his affiliation. [2]

Nature of "Volcanoes of Rage": TRT Arabi counts it among the tunnel operations, while the Qassam page describes it as a raid on a military post. [1][2]

Timeline

Date	Event
September 2000	The al-Aqsa Intifada erupts [3]
26 September 2001	The Tarmid post in Rafah blown up [2]
June 2004	The Mahfouza post north of Khan Younis blown up [1]
12 December 2004	The "Volcanoes of Rage" operation near the Rafah crossing [1]
August–September 2005	21 settlements evacuated; occupation army withdraws from the Strip [3]

Frequently asked questions about the Gaza tunnel operations

What were the attack tunnels?

Tunnels dug by the resistance in Gaza beneath occupation military posts, packed with explosives and detonated from below. [1]

When was the Tarmid post blown up?

On 26 September 2001 according to the Qassam Brigades, and in October 2001

according to TRT Arabi. [2][1]

What was “Volcanoes of Rage”?

A joint Qassam Brigades–Fatah Hawks operation on 12 December 2004 in which a military post at the Rafah crossing was blown up with about 1,300 kg of explosives through a 600-metre tunnel. [1][2]

How are the tunnels linked to the withdrawal from Gaza?

Together with other forms of resistance they raised the cost of occupation until it evacuated 21 settlements and withdrew in 2005. [3]

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Sources and references

1. Imad Nasser, “The battle of the last refuge: the emergence and development of tunnels in Gaza (1),” TRT Arabi (in Arabic).
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3. Al Jazeera Net, “16 years on: when the resistance forced the occupation to evacuate 21 settlements and withdraw from Gaza,” 12 September 2021 (in Arabic).