

# Israel's Operation Shield and Arrow Recap

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*Israel's Operation Shield and Arrow against the Iranian-backed Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) terrorist group in Gaza ended after five days with a ceasefire on May 13. It was the fourth round of hostilities between Israel and Gaza-based terrorists in just five years and the third to involve only PIJ and not the much larger Hamas. Nor is it likely to be the last such conflict. Operation Shield and Arrow is unlikely to have changed the dynamics that are driving PIJ's attacks and making them increasingly frequent.*

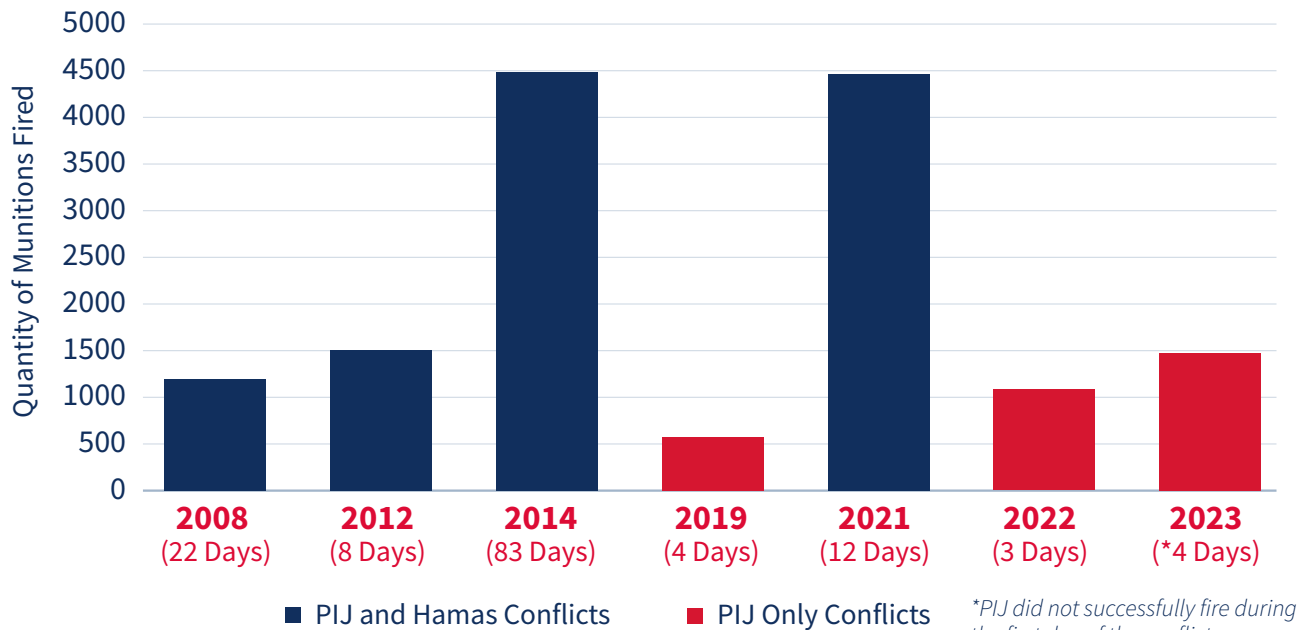
*In this latest conflict, Israel succeeded in its operational objectives to eliminate PIJ leaders and degrade the Iran-backed terrorist group's capabilities without Hamas joining the fighting. Yet the decision to target only PIJ, despite Hamas violating an understanding with Israel to prohibit any attacks from Gaza, could have demonstrated to Israel's adversaries that it is as much reluctant to engage in a larger conflict against Hamas as Hamas is to fight Israel again. This perception could undermine Israeli efforts to restore deterrence against PIJ—already complicated by the group's lack of strategic interests inside Gaza—and make another round of conflict likely in the near-term. The United States should support Israel's right and ability to protect itself through additional support for Iron Dome air defense batteries and interceptors, continue defending Israel against unfair criticism at the United Nations, and look to extract lessons from the conflict for its own military purposes.*

## What Happened?

- The latest round of fighting between Israel and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) Iranian-backed terrorist group in Gaza ended on May 13 with a ceasefire [negotiated](#) by Egypt.
- The hostilities, which Israel calls Operation Shield and Arrow, began on May 9, a week after PIJ fired [100 rockets](#) at Israel, and a month after a multifront projectile assault on Israel by PIJ and other Iranian proxies in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria.
  - » The Israeli operation [eliminated](#) six senior members of PIJ's leadership and struck 420 PIJ command centers, rocket launch sites, and other military installations throughout Gaza.
  - » According to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), PIJ launched 1,468 rockets, mortars, and anti-tank munitions at Israel over the course of four days.

- As with other recent conflicts in Gaza, Israel’s multi-layered air defense network—chiefly Iron Dome—intercepted roughly 95 percent of projectiles that were deemed a danger to built-up areas, according to the IDF.
  - » David’s Sling intercepted two rockets over Tel Aviv, the system’s first successful operational use.
  - » However, several rockets evaded Israeli defenses, killing one Israeli civilian and injuring seven. Another death occurred in an open area, where Iron Dome does not attempt to intercept rockets.

## PIJ Has Fired Barrages at Israel Without Hamas Joining



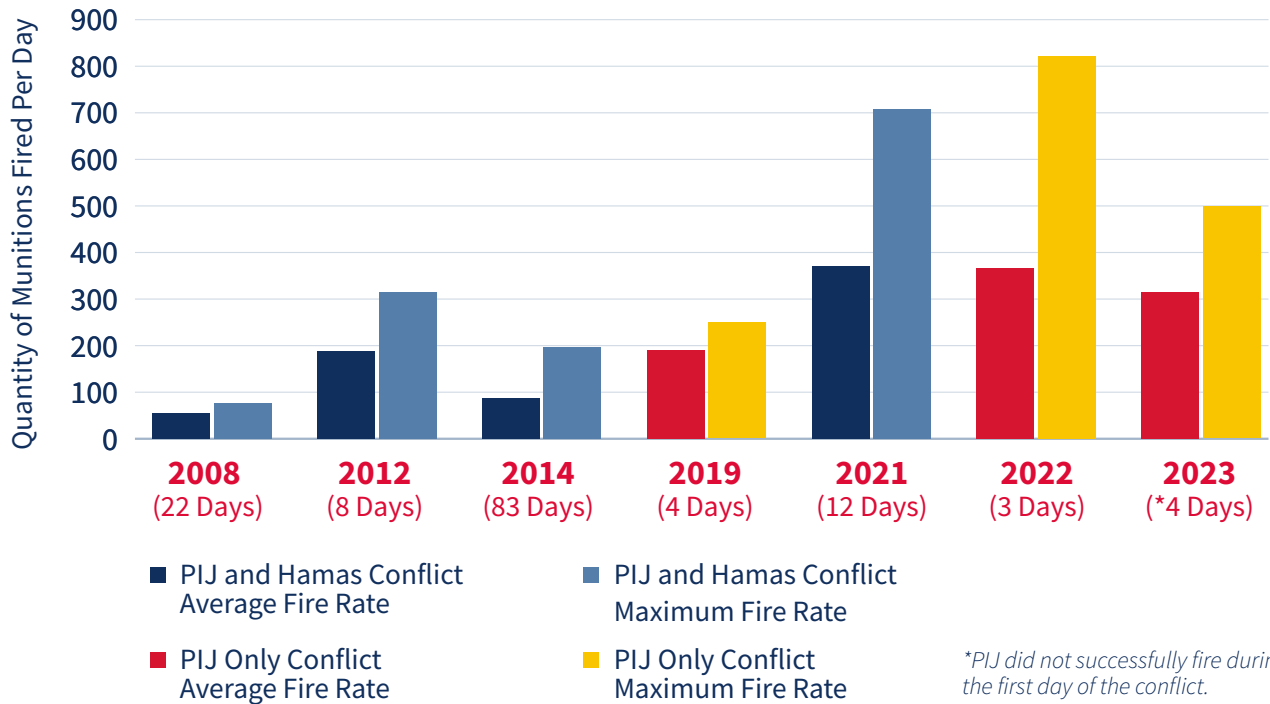
## Why Is It Important?

- Israel achieved its operational goals in this latest round of fighting by eliminating PIJ leaders and capabilities without drawing Hamas into the conflict. It appears unlikely, however, that Israel successfully restored deterrence—not only against PIJ but also Hamas, which recently attacked Israel from Lebanon and the West Bank, or against Iran and its other proxies that work increasingly closely to threaten Israel on multiple fronts. Operation Shield and Arrow did little to change the dynamics driving and enabling PIJ’s increasingly frequent attacks on Israel.
  - » PIJ previously has proven difficult for Israel to deter, not least because it acts based on Iran’s operational needs, not just its own strategic logic. The potential for renewed fighting—including possibly additional coordinated assaults with other Iran-backed groups—remains significant after last month’s [multifront](#) projectile attacks from Gaza, southern Lebanon, and Syria.
  - » Despite Israel’s operational successes, therefore, there is a strong possibility of another round of IDF-PIJ conflict in the near- to mid-term.

- This was the fourth major round of fighting in Gaza in five years, three of which were short, intense hostilities against PIJ alone. None have prevented PIJ from growing steadily more aggressive nor from quickly reconstituting its ability to launch hundreds of rockets at Israel.
- Once PIJ rebuilds, with Iranian support, the group will likely again stand ready to attack Israel if and when Tehran deems it useful to further probe Israel’s resolve or divert its attention and resources from more directly countering Iran’s regional and nuclear expansions.
- Up to and through the 2021 Gaza conflict, Israel generally held Hamas, which controls Gaza, responsible for all attacks originating from the territory, even if not carried out by Hamas. However, since then, including in Operation Shield and Arrow, Israel has adopted a different approach: dealing with each group individually.
  - » Operation Shield and Arrow sought specifically to degrade PIJ’s military assets while avoiding Hamas targets, as long as the latter stayed out of the fighting.
  - » Going forward, the success of this approach will depend on the extent to which Israel can establish deterrence against PIJ and potentially other Iranian-backed groups—and maintain deterrence against Hamas—by attacking only the former and not the latter in Gaza.
- Even despite the IDF’s operational success in eliminating PIJ leadership and degrading its capabilities, it will be difficult for Israel to establish deterrence against PIJ because, compared to Hamas, it is more directly controlled by Iran with few strategic interests in Gaza that Israel could directly hold at risk.
  - » Compared to Hamas, which has its own interests and equities as the de facto authority ruling over Gaza, PIJ’s chief decision-makers depend even more directly on the Iranian regime, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ (IRGC) Quds Force, and fellow Iranian terrorist subsidiaries like Hezbollah for direction, training, and an estimated [\\$100 million](#) in annual funding.
  - » Whereas Hamas leadership is based more wholly in Gaza with satellite presences in Lebanon and Syria, the fact that PIJ’s leadership is based primarily in Lebanon and Syria makes them feel less directly vulnerable to Israeli operations in Gaza and gives them less to fear they could lose directly in any escalation of fighting there.
    - Even after the IDF neutralized key PIJ figures in Gaza, the group’s leadership in Lebanon ordered its military units in Gaza to [continue](#) rocket attacks right up until after the ceasefire.
  - » According to Israeli reports, Tehran offered PIJ \$5 million for each [additional day](#) it could drag out last week’s fighting, presumably to further erode Israeli deterrence and attrite IDF capabilities. And unlike Hamas, which coordinated directly with Egypt on past Gaza ceasefires, PIJ reportedly needed Tehran’s [consent](#) to pursue a ceasefire in last week’s fighting.
  - » PIJ has repeatedly instigated conflicts against Israel, seemingly hoping to draw in Hamas and portray Israel as the aggressor through a public media campaign, yet it lacks an evident strategic agenda, or desire, to achieve military victories.
- Though Israel attained its stated objective of avoiding escalation with Hamas in the latest Gaza conflict, this is as much evidence of Israel being deterred by Hamas as it is of Hamas’ being deterred by Israel.

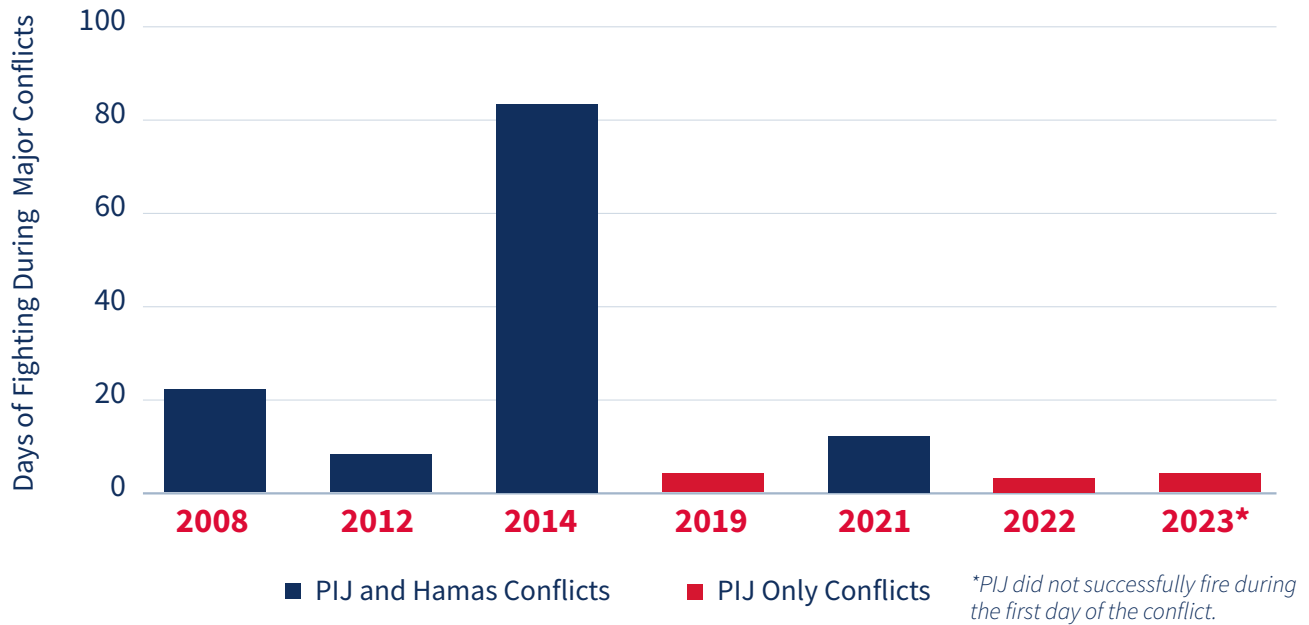
- » Since the IDF's May 2021 Operation Guardian of the Walls seriously degraded Hamas' military capabilities in Gaza, it largely has refrained from attacking Israel from inside Gaza.
  - But Hamas has been bold enough recently to attack Israel from the West Bank and Lebanon, suggesting Israeli deterrence is limited.
- » Israel's attempts to keep Hamas out of the latest round of fighting largely succeeded as, despite [pressure](#) from Iran and PIJ to attack Israel, Hamas remained on the sidelines.
  - Israel's internal political dissension and the public's lack of a desire for another Gaza conflict, or for a multifront war involving Iranian proxies in Lebanon and Syria, may also have contributed to the decision not to target Hamas.
- » To some extent, Hamas' reluctance to launch attacks from Gaza derives from the benefits to Gazans of a deal, reached after the May 2021 conflict, for roughly 17,000 Gazans to work inside Israel daily in exchange for Hamas ensuring no terror group in Gaza fires projectiles at Israel. These workers provide economic support to roughly half a million Palestinians living in Gaza.
  - But in recent conflicts Israel has implicitly weakened its requirement that Hamas prevent any attacks from Gaza in return for the work permits by allowing Gazans to continue working in Israel despite PIJ's attacks. As a result, Hamas likely does not believe Israel is willing to cancel the arrangement entirely and, therefore, is not fully incentivized to pressure PIJ against future attacks.
  - While Israel paused issuing [work permits](#) during the August 2022 Gaza conflict, it resumed issuing them after a few days.
  - In 2023, despite Hamas not upholding its end of the bargain once again, Israel closed the border crossing during the fighting and [reopened](#) them hours after the ceasefire.
- » Yet, Hamas' actions raises questions about the extent to which it remains deterred from attacking Israel more generally, especially in light of its strikes against Israel last month from Lebanon and its ongoing funding, recruiting, and initiating of [terrorist attacks](#) against Israel in the West Bank.
  - Hamas did not stop PIJ from firing at Israel despite sharing a joint headquarters with PIJ and being the predominant military force in the Strip. This could be because Hamas prefers to have Israel weaken a group that is as much as competitor to it as a common traveler. Alternatively, Hamas might see PIJ as a useful proxy for attacking Israel without risking its own leadership and capabilities.

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



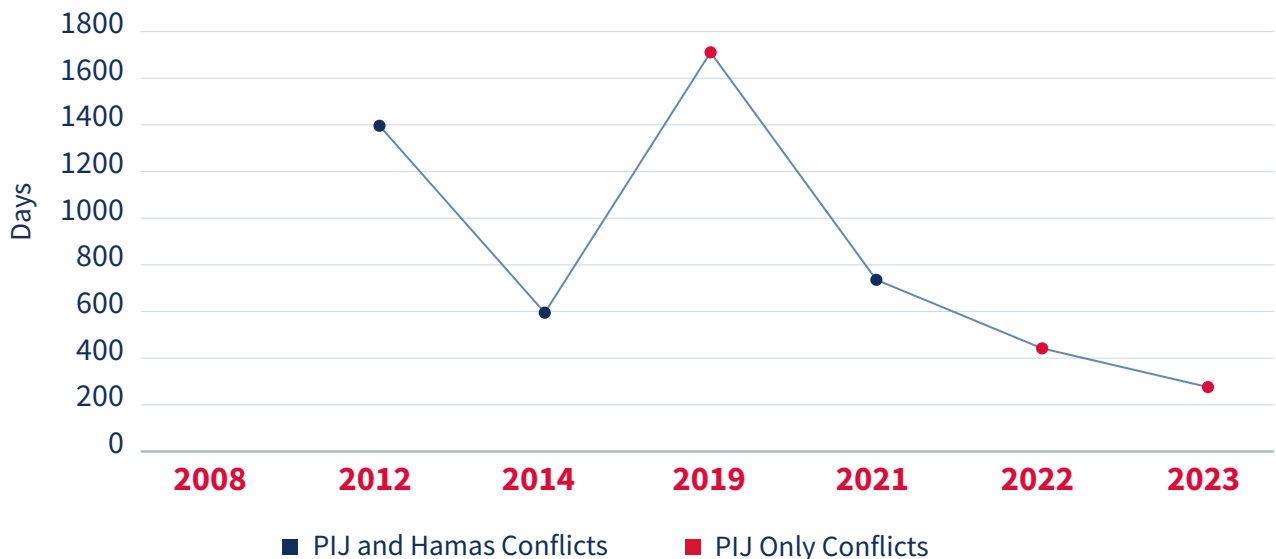
- Another intense, if brief, round of IDF-PIJ conflict appears likely in the coming months, given this combination of factors working against Operation Shield and Arrow’s efforts to reestablish deterrence, namely: Israel’s tolerance of Hamas’ permission of PIJ rocket fire from Gaza, as well as PIJ’s relative lack of strategic vulnerabilities in Gaza, its direct subordination to Tehran, and its rapid reconstitution of forces in Gaza after each recent conflict with the IDF.
  - » In light of rising Iran-led efforts to probe and undermine Israeli deterrence through coordinated multifront proxy attacks, another outbreak of conflict with PIJ in Gaza also raises the specter of broader escalation to include fronts in southern Lebanon, Syria, and/or the West Bank.
  - » Even without Hamas joining the fighting, PIJ has shown a willingness and ability to launch progressively larger barrages of rockets, mortars, and anti-tank missiles at Israel in short but firepower-heavy bouts of conflict like the four-day blitz it unleashed last week.

# PIJ-Only Conflicts Are Much Shorter Than When Hamas Joins



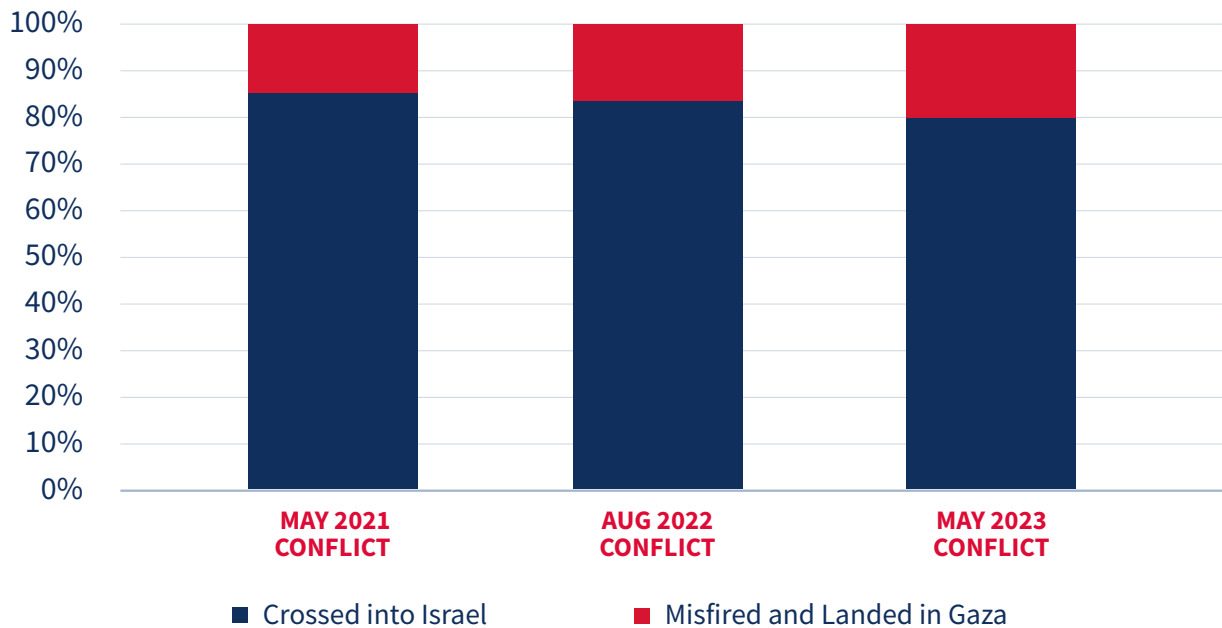
- » Escalations between Israel and Gaza have also grown increasingly frequent. There has been a steady drop in the number of days between conflicts since 2019, with this latest round occurring only 275 days after the fighting in August 2022.
- The increasing frequency of escalations with Gaza could lead to calls in Israel to [reoccupy the territory](#).

# Days Between Israel-Gaza Conflicts



- PIJ rockets not only endanger civilians living in Israel. Misfires that landed in Gaza were reportedly responsible for [four Palestinian deaths](#), including three children.

## Rockets from Gaza Endanger Palestinian Lives Too



- The first successful use of David’s Sling underscores the importance of U.S.-Israel air and missile defense technology as a co-produced system, and sends a signal not only to PIJ and Hamas but also to Hezbollah and other Iran-backed groups and Tehran that Israel can defend itself from short-, medium- and long-range projectile attacks.

## What Should the United States Do Next?

- The United States should provide funding so that Israel can acquire additional Iron Dome batteries and interceptors beyond the ten or so it reportedly currently fields.
  - » Given the shared threats to Israel and U.S. forces and installations in the Middle East from drone, rocket, and missile attacks by Iran-backed groups, CENTCOM, and the U.S. military services should study Israel’s precision targeting capabilities.
- The Biden administration should continue supporting Israel’s right to defend itself against terrorist threats, including through preemptive action.
- The Biden administration should continue supporting Israel at the United Nations Security Council as rampant human rights violators Russia and China seek to falsely accuse it of violating international law.