

# Social Resilience in the Jewish Communities around the Gaza Strip Envelope during and after Operation Protective Edge

**Meir Elran, Zipi Israeli, Carmit Padan, Alex Altshuler**

With the assistance of Hofni Gartner, Shani David,  
Maya Kornberg, and Shlomi Ben Meir

This study examines and measures the social resilience of the residents of the Gaza Strip area during Operation Protective Edge in summer 2014 and thereafter. We provide an overview of the concept of resilience, focusing on the phenomenon of bouncing back towards recovery following the functional decline as a result of stressful events. Social resilience is measured here by three behavioral yardsticks: demographics and evacuation, therapeutics and education, and employment and economics. We chose two regional councils to represent the people living in the Gaza envelope, in direct proximity to the Gaza Strip. We collected the data through interviews with council employees, residents in these regional councils, and from the media. Although the residents in the two councils behaved in different manners, the level of behavioral resilience monitored in most of the localities was generally high, whereas the level of psychological-communal resilience

Brigadier General (ret.) Meir Elran is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies, Head of the Homeland Security Program, and Head of the Society-Security Program of the Institute for National Security Studies. Dr. Zipi Israeli is a Research Fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies. Carmit Padan is a Neubauer Research Associate at the Institute for National Security Studies. Dr. Alex Altshuler is a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Department of Management at Bar-Ilan University, Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and a Research Fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies. Hofni Gartner, Shani David, Maya Kornberg, and Shlomi Ben Meir are research assistants at the Institute for National Security Studies.

was lower and presented a more complex picture. Based on our findings we propose lessons that can be learned for enhancing social resilience in Israel and elsewhere.

**Keywords:** Operation Protective Edge, social resilience, Gaza envelope, Nahal Oz, Eshkol Regional Council, Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council

*Social resilience during Operation Protective Edge was the factor that allowed the war to be fought. These days, wars are fought in the rear.*

*The rear is the battlefield.*

Maj. Gen. Sami Turgeman,  
Commander of IDF Southern Command

## Background

For the residents of the Gaza envelope in Israel, Operation Protective Edge (OPE) (July 8-August 26, 2014)<sup>1</sup> actually started ten days earlier, when they were hit by dozens of mortars and rockets during “Operation Brother’s Keeper” – the IDF’s search for three Israeli teenagers who had been abducted by Hamas terrorists on June 12. For the residents of the Gaza envelope, OPE was a war in every sense of the word, lasting sixty days, and unprecedentedly threatening civilians and putting their social resilience to the test. Three of the five Israeli citizens (plus a foreign employee from Thailand) killed during the operation were Gaza envelope residents, a fact that added a profound element of mourning and shock to the community’s mindset.<sup>2</sup>

The objective of this paper is to examine the social resilience of the residents of the Gaza envelope during and after OPE. The research is based on a comparative study, focusing on the regional councils of Eshkol and Sha’ar Hanegev,<sup>3</sup> which suffered a high percentage of attacks during the operation. Out of some 4,500 rocket and mortar attacks launched against Israel during the operation, the Gaza envelope took 2,248 hits.<sup>4</sup> According to one source of data, the localities in the two regional councils were subjected to some 1,600 attacks.<sup>5</sup> In addition, they were affected by the new and frightening threat of Gaza’s Hamas offensive tunnels,<sup>6</sup> adding to the overall picture of terrorist intimidations from the Gaza Strip.

There are 32 localities in the Eshkol Regional Council, which shares a forty-kilometer-long border with the Gaza Strip. These include fourteen kibbutzim, fifteen moshavim, and three communal settlements,<sup>7</sup> with a

total of some 15,000 residents. The Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council, which borders the Gaza Strip to the north, is composed of some 7,500 residents living in ten kibbutzim and one moshav.<sup>8</sup> The population is quite diverse and consists of groups with different social characteristics and mindsets, who, consequently, respond differently to emergencies. Each of these groups has its own characteristics, manifested in different responses to emergencies. Naturally, a closer geographic proximity to the border affects residents and may increase the stress.

The purpose of this study is to learn from these communities about social resilience and the factors contributing to it. When those are analyzed and understood, they can contribute to enhancing resilience in Israel and in other countries. The study examines the levels of social resilience in these communities, using both quantitative and qualitative data about the conduct of the residents, the local communities, and the regional councils before, during, and after the military escalation in summer 2014. We also compared the levels of social resilience during the three rounds of hostilities between Israel and Hamas since 2008, focusing on several parameters: the demographic aspect, and particularly, the phenomenon of evacuation and return; the psychosocial dimension, based mainly on the information provided by the resilience centers and schools; economics and employment; and the role of communication in enhancing resilience. Each of these featured differently in the two regional councils, but together they depict a comprehensive and instructive picture. In brief, the objective of this paper is to provide the decision makers with detailed evidence regarding the manifestations of social resilience and their contribution to the country's strategic response to the man-made risks that threaten Israel's national security.

### **Social Resilience: Theoretical Background and Practical Implications**

The concept of resilience<sup>9</sup> (*hosen* in Hebrew) has been used extensively in Israel by the media and in the political discourse since the Second Intifada (2000 – 2004). It is borrowed from the English concept of *resilience*, which became common in the public discourse in the United States and elsewhere after the 9/11 attacks. In Israel, the erroneous tendency is to relate to resilience in two overlapping ways: 1) as immunity, which manifests a system's ability to isolate itself from the hazard and thereby escape serious damage from

it, mainly through conceptual, mental, and physical steadfastness; 2) and as *hason*, a robustness manifested by physical and mental fortitude.

In fact, the term resilience has a different meaning in the academic and professional literature.<sup>10</sup> It mostly centers on the following components: Resilience will always be manifested in situations involving severe threat and damage. Resilience may refer to the individual, organizational, group or community levels (societal resilience), as well as to infrastructure or economic systems. When these elements are in conjunction with one another, they may also express a more general, national resilience. For the purpose of this study, we propose the following definition: resilience expresses the capacity of a system to respond flexibly to a severe disruption or disaster – in accordance with its magnitude and severity of its consequences – in order to contain the damage and the inevitable decline of the system’s functionality, and to bounce back rapidly to its normal entity, structure, and conduct.

The component of bouncing back and rapidly recovering is one of the cornerstones of the concept of resilience and should serve as its major yardstick. The underlying assumption is that a severe disruption will always cause the system’s functioning to seriously decline. Lack of a real decline indicates that the disruption has not been significant, even if some would view the disruptive episode as severe. Consequently, a disrupted system whose functional decline is severe and persistent, and whose recovery is slow or does not materialize, would be characterized by having a low rate of resiliency. A system whose functional decline is flexible and manages to quickly bounce back and return to normal functioning is a system with a high level of resilience. A system that recovers quickly and returns to a higher level of resilience than it previously had is a system with a very high resiliency level.

Resilience does not represent a system’s inherent or fixed characteristics; rather, it needs to be constantly nourished as an important part of the system’s preparedness for severe disruptions. The concept of resilience starts with the assumption that resistance to the disruption, seemingly designed to prevent or protect a system from severe disruptions, would never provide a total and ultimate solution. Therefore, the concept of resilience should be implemented in a concurrent and balanced manner, as it is designed to provide a systemic response to severe disruption, i.e., rapidly bouncing back, which enables the swiftest and fullest recovery

possible, and allows the system to reach its designated functional continuity and optimal reconstruction.

These theoretical assumptions, commonly accepted in different countries,<sup>11</sup> and by international organizations dealing with the challenge of disaster risk reduction,<sup>12</sup> have clear, far-reaching implications for emergency preparedness. Adopting resilience as a strategy – something that unfortunately is not yet fully implemented in Israel – might be recommended as an adequate framework for a comprehensive national plan, both at the macro and micro levels.<sup>13</sup> In general, our research shows that the communities that adopted the concept of resilience in practice, and acted according to its principles, showed a fairly high level of recovery. The commendable performance of the resilience centers in both Eshkol and Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Councils, operated by the Israel Trauma Coalition,<sup>14</sup> doubtlessly contributed to enhancing the bouncing back and recovery of the communities during OPE.<sup>15</sup>

### **Demographics and Evacuation Scales**

One of the more significant phenomena serving to gauge social resilience in the Gaza envelope is the demographic growth of the communities in recent years. Since Hamas started to systematically use high-trajectory weapons after it seized control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, the population of the Gaza envelope has continued to grow steadily and at significant rates. The Eshkol Regional Council had an average growth of some 200 families per year (mostly young adults returning to their home communities) since 2007, resulting in a 35 percent increase by 2014. It is still too early to determine the post-Protective Edge trend, but given residential infrastructures (according to forecasts based on government financing), the picture is encouraging and even higher growth is expected.<sup>16</sup> The situation in Sha'ar Hanegev is similar. The regional council reports an increase of some 1,200 new residents and continuous growth since Operation Cast Lead in 2009.<sup>17</sup> For example, since 2012, Kibbutz Nir-Am has seen a 50 percent increase in membership, a fact that lowered the average age there from sixty-seven to fifty in less than three years, and increased the number of preschool children from one to twelve.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the ongoing threat to security, including three rounds of violence with Hamas (Cast Lead in 2008 – 2009, Pillar of Defense in 2012, and Protective Edge in 2014) and numerous incidents in-between,<sup>19</sup> very few residents in either regional councils actually left – with the exception

of Kibbutz Nahal Oz as we discuss below.<sup>20</sup> The notable trend of staying, as well as the continued population growth – limited primarily because of a housing shortage and local policy of measured and steady growth on the basis of social and economic needs – should serve as indicators of the high level of social resilience.<sup>21</sup> Clearly, the major attraction of the region is economic (the low cost of living) and social (high standard of living and quality education). Furthermore, the construction of the railway line to Sderot shortened the distance to and from the country's center. Integral to this discussion, however, is that the residents do not perceive the very difficult and persistent security challenges as an obstacle in their considerations, at least to this point in time. This reflects a high level of human and social capital in the communities under discussion, which is a clear contributor to social resilience.<sup>22</sup>

### **Evacuation, Return Home, and Social Resilience**

On May 11, 2015, at a meeting with the heads of the regional councils in the Gaza envelope, Maj. Gen. Sami Turgeman, Commander of the IDF Southern Command said, "We embarked on this operation [Protective Edge] with the attitude that the evacuation of the population would represent a gain, a victory for Hamas. That is why we were in no hurry to do so. This approach was wrong. It makes no sense to leave (non-essential) civilians in a war zone."<sup>23</sup> Fundamentally, the Israeli government and the IDF did not think it was appropriate to evacuate civilians from their threatened communities, or apparently sensed that it would be wrong to do so, including evacuating those living right next to the border fence.<sup>24</sup> As Maj. Gen. Turgeman said, the main reason was the traditional Israeli narrative in which the country does not evacuate civilians under enemy fire.<sup>25</sup> With this, perhaps, outdated and not very accurately based ethos in mind, the residents and settlement leaders decided to do what they thought was right, and left home. Many of them were motivated by a sense of disappointment and frustration with the lack of a government decision, which adversely affected their trust in the government and the IDF.<sup>26</sup> With the lack of clear instructions from the government, the IDF, and the regional councils, the decision to stay or leave was made by the residents themselves and at times by local community leaders. In the background, different and even contradictory messages were heard from the two heads of the regional councils; Haim Yellin, the head of the Eshkol Regional Council, generally supported the residents' decision to evacuate,<sup>27</sup> whereas Alon Shuster, the head of the



Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council, conveyed a message that could have been interpreted as supporting the decision to stay put.<sup>28</sup>

The attitudes of the people in the Gaza envelope towards the issue of evacuation can be divided into three major groups. The first group, which was relatively small, constitutes the communities next to the border fence, which did not evacuate or whose residents did not leave. Kibbutz Alumim, whose residents did not evacuate at all, stands out as a highly ideological, cooperative religious kibbutz, without privatized dwellings, with a core group of English speakers.<sup>29</sup> The other is Kibbutz Erez, where the evacuation rate was less than 50 percent of the mothers and children.<sup>30</sup> This kibbutz is noted for its remarkable communal cohesiveness, a strong tradition going back to pre-statehood times (represented by the old-timers), and a well-trained emergency team; this kibbutz also does not have privatized dwellings. Both kibbutzim, then, have a cohesive communal spirit and faith, two of the well-known attributes of social resilience. This has been translated into a strong sense of self-confidence and trust in the community and its path, which allowed residents to choose to stay put even under conditions of direct physical danger, unlike other kibbutzim in the region.

The second group consists of the other communities along the border fence – all kibbutzim – which were hit the most, and the majority of whose residents left.<sup>31</sup> There is no exact data on the evacuation rates; the common estimate is that 50 percent of the residents, mostly mothers and children, left the communities located within less than seven kilometers from the Gaza Strip.<sup>32</sup> In some cases, the evacuation was the result of personal decisions, whereas in other cases, the kibbutz organized the evacuation.<sup>33</sup> Essential workers, emergency teams, and residents who refused to leave, especially the old-timers, remained in place. The common trend was to evacuate as a community and strive to maintain communal life in the so-called “Diaspora” while preserving continuous – although not trouble-free – contact with home and those who stayed.<sup>34</sup> After the cease-fire ended the hostilities on August 26, the evacuees returned home, almost all of them immediately. A small minority stayed away until the start of the new school year on September 1, and a few did not return until Rosh Hashanah (The Jewish New Year) on September 24. This held true also for those who publicly announced that they would not return home until . . . or ever. There was not any explicit government decision or directive to evacuate nor to return home. Only on August 22-23, as the operation was winding down, the Ministry of Defense

(through the National Emergency Management Agency – NEMA) decided to look for systemic solutions to help the evacuees.

The third group consists of residents of the more distant settlements, living beyond the seven-kilometer range from the Gaza Strip (east of Route 232). Most of them, some 80 percent of the residents, stayed and managed to conduct an “emergency routine.”<sup>35</sup> In future rounds of hostilities, these communities could face a serious challenge, as their level of communal preparedness for emergencies is much lower than that of the localities closer to the fence.<sup>36</sup>

The issue of evacuation and return can serve to gauge social resilience. The inevitable decline in the community’s functionality is manifested by the evacuation, while the bouncing back is exhibited by the return. In terms of evacuation, indicating functional decline, the decision – whether personal or communal – to temporarily leave a home that is exposed to real life danger reflects both a sober view and flexible conduct, concomitant with the level of risk. Flexible conduct and assuming responsibility for the fate of individuals and the community can be interpreted as an appropriate and positive response to the challenge. This is perceived as a component of social resilience. The fact that almost all the residents in the majority of settlements came back within a few days, and resumed their normal functioning and conduct similar to before the evacuation, also truly manifests social resilience. At the same time, a survey undertaken by the Sha’ar Hanegev Regional Council, using other indexes, found that the level of social resilience among the evacuees as a group was generally lower than of those who stayed in their homes, the majority of whom served in critical positions in the community.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Story of Nahal Oz<sup>38</sup>**

OPE caught Kibbutz Nahal Oz after years of stagnation. Located on the border with the Gaza Strip, the kibbutz numbered 180 members at its height; privatization in the late 1990s, however, led to an acute social and economic decline as well as a deep and persistent leadership crisis. On the eve of the operation, the kibbutz consisted of approximately seventy households, 108 members, and a total of 330 people. The 7-12 age group had only twelve children. The high-tech plant had closed and no more than twenty people worked on the kibbutz itself, ten of them in agriculture. Some said that the kibbutz, with its glorious historic past as the nation’s first Nahal para-military outpost in 1951, was on its last legs. During the



fighting, the kibbutz suffered serious blows; it was continuously shelled (269 hits) and terrorist offensive tunnels were discovered nearby, which led to the evacuation of most of the members – only some 35-90 people stayed in the kibbutz. It also suffered the tragic death of four year-old Daniel Tragerman following the decision of the kibbutz leadership to return the evacuated families to their homes; this decision was a horrendous mistake. The atmosphere in the kibbutz completely broke down, as seventeen families left, many more than all of the families who left the other Gaza envelope settlements.

When the fighting ended, the kibbutz suddenly experienced an unexpected growth. Even before all the evacuees had returned, the kibbutz began intense, goal-oriented action, which within a short period of time reversed the atmosphere and led to an unprecedented upswing in construction; since the war, the kibbutz has welcomed eight new families, and eight more families were expected to arrive in the summer of 2015. In the next few years, the kibbutz expects to add ten more families, and, for the first time since the 1980s, the kibbutz is planning to expand by building seventeen housing units. A pre-army educational program with a group of youngsters also moved to the kibbutz, and an economic initiative – a therapeutic parent-child program – was established there. Nahal Oz now enjoys lively cultural and communal activity: the young group has been joined by eight teens from outside the kibbutz, and last Passover the kibbutz held a communal Seder for the first time since 2000. The leadership has changed while the general atmosphere has been radically transformed. Despite the intensity of emotion associated with the events of the fighting, there is a strong sense of growth, drive, collective action, and hope.

What caused the turnaround? What are the roots of this renewal after the ongoing decline and the sense of breakdown that characterized the kibbutz during the severe disruption of OPE? There are a few explanations, including financial grants that the government decided to give after the operation, which were supposed to inject some ILS 20 million into the kibbutz and allow construction and expanded activity. According to kibbutz members, however, it was much more a question of the community recapturing a sense of togetherness that was once the hallmark of all kibbutzim: a fierce connection to the locale, a sense of belonging to the community, a shared vision, attachment, and cohesion. All of these attributes again bring to the fore the kibbutz's strong ideological foundation, as well as its search for meaning. The new local leadership, activated during the fighting, has

earned the trust of kibbutz members who were impressed by how well the leadership functioned during the disruption, its transparency, the inclusiveness of the work, and the fair treatment of individuals. As a result, the members have expressed hope, despite the fragile security situation, the lack of clarity about the future, and the strong emotional low regarding the events of the summer of 2014.

The story of Kibbutz Nahal Oz is one of bouncing back after an extreme functional decline. It is a patent indication of an especially high level of resilience. Despite the uniqueness of this example, Nahal Oz is not alone when it comes to growth. Another example is that of Kibbutz Kerem Shalom, which also continues to grow this year.<sup>39</sup>

### **Indexes of Social Conduct (Education and Therapy)**

OPE took place during the summer vacation; the evacuation of the children and parents, as well as most of the teachers and staff – especially in the kibbutzim abutting the border fence – completely disrupted activities planned by the educational institutions. As early as July 10, the schools started operating in a scaled-back manner,<sup>40</sup> although it was decided not to suspend educational activities, including day camps, and run most activities as long as the army gave the go-ahead. The personnel were provided with a backup, composed of volunteers and soldier-teachers, in order to run at least a minimal emergency routine.<sup>41</sup> The attitude was that the school system serves largely as a communal anchor. It strives to maintain a certain level of functional continuity, and intends to create “conditions of certainty under uncertain conditions,” including a persistent situation of severe, harmful, threatening disruption designed to upset the routine.<sup>42</sup> Even when activities took place in well-protected shelters, there was still considerable risk in traveling there and back. The widespread evacuation of children led the school system to operate in the “Diaspora” away from home, on the basis of the regional council’s plan.

Already on August 1, 2014, the school system began to prepare for the orderly start of the following school year, even though the hostilities were still at their height. The ceasefire took effect on August 26, and the question arose whether the school year would start on time. A fierce debate ensued, which, in turn, led to the decision of August 28 to begin the school year on time. On September 1, 99 percent of the students and teachers showed up for the new school year.<sup>43</sup> This rapid return to routine activity – only five days after the end of the war – reflects the ability to rapidly bounce

back and manifests the community's high social resilience.<sup>44</sup> Before the start of the school year, some parents and teachers vociferously opposed beginning the school year as planned and declared that they would not send their children to school. In practice, very few made good on this threat. Not all educational activities, however, resumed in full format as in the past. Notable examples have been the annual school trips, including the Passover 2015 trips, in which no more than two-thirds of the students participated. This suggests that the wounds have not completely healed; concern about being caught outdoors still exists, and a full recovery has not been achieved, even months after the end of the fighting. According to the educational index, social resilience has not yet reached the highest possible level, while therapeutic activity among the students is still necessary.

The extent of therapeutic activity among school students reveals a relatively slow although consistent trend towards recovery. The experience of the students during OPE was more severe than during the previous rounds of hostilities with Hamas when recovery was notably faster. The difference may be due to the longer duration of the conflict; the larger number of hits and early warning alarms; the discovery of the offensive tunnels; the widespread evacuation; and other disruptions due to military activity. For example, the number of students – as well as adults – who needed some kind of therapy after Operation Pillar of Defense in 2009 was only some 15 percent of the population aged 4-18, with the overwhelming majority being in elementary school, compared to some 25 percent who needed therapy after OPE.<sup>45</sup> The estimate is that during the 2015-2016 academic year, and perhaps until the spring of 2016, it will be necessary to continue treating some 15 percent of the students.<sup>46</sup>

The students' willingness to participate in group therapy after OPE was higher than in the past. Similarly, the number of therapists, teachers, and other professionals in the Eshkol Regional Council needing and undergoing therapy at the resilience centers is larger than it was in previous rounds of fighting.<sup>47</sup> These findings mean that the students' recovery, as well as that of social welfare professionals – and some would say the residents as a whole – is gradual and requires a measure of ongoing therapeutic maintenance. The sense of crisis is still present in the form of persistent anxiety.<sup>48</sup> In some of the communities where the damage was great, such as Nirim,<sup>49</sup> the recovery and gradual return to the routine started only in the spring of 2015.<sup>50</sup> Generally speaking, this slower ability to recover and bounce back is typical of the kibbutzim west of Route 232.<sup>51</sup> An example

of this is the high turnover among the heads of the Communal Emergency Teams,<sup>52</sup> indicating a high level of burnout.<sup>53</sup> In addition, the local discourse expresses a great deal of concern about the next round of fighting. This mixed picture may point to lower social resilience than indicated by the physical indexes presented above.

### **Economic and Employment Indexes**

Two government decisions have had a decisive impact on the social resilience of the Gaza envelope residents. The first decision was made during OPE, declaring a “special situation in the home front.” The second was to compensate and allocate extensive budgets to reconstruct the region after the hostilities. This decision and the start of its actual implementation are already evident on the ground, and may boost the prospects of the beleaguered region to rebuild and prosper, and enhance its social resilience even further.

Eshkol is the largest agricultural council in Israel, providing 60 percent of the nation’s fresh produce.<sup>54</sup> The Sha’ar Hanegev Regional Council reports its sources of income as being 60 percent from farming, 30 percent from industry, and 10 percent from small businesses. Generally speaking, agriculture continued in the Gaza envelope throughout OPE in the slow format that characterizes the summer months;<sup>55</sup> however, damage to the agricultural infrastructure due to the heavy traffic of IDF vehicles and limits imposed on civilian traffic, and desertion of the Thai laborers disrupted the work. In the industrial sector, the plants in Sha’ar Hanegev’s industrial zone and in the kibbutzim, including those close to the border fence, did not close. Work continued at 60 – 80 percent of the usual volume, mainly due to low attendance of workers. For example, Eco-Energy in Kibbutz Magen did not suffer much of a shortage; only a few workers stayed away.<sup>56</sup> Beeri Printers, the largest industry in the region, did not shut its machines down for the fighting; they only suspended action for a concert of pop star David Broza that was held on the premises.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, Michsaf Housewares Ltd., at Kibbutz Nir-Am, which employs forty-five people, was partly closed, and the number of workers dropped as low as 20 percent. In tourism and other entrepreneurship, the responses varied from a complete halt to sustaining local damage, while the number of businesses that closed for the duration of the hostilities was negligible.<sup>58</sup> Other branches, such as non-essential services, suffered a significant drop in employee attendance, causing temporary work stoppages.

Immediately after the ceasefire, work resumed fully in most sectors – with the exception of small private enterprises – clearly demonstrating an ability to rapidly bounce back. Despite the security challenge, not a single industrial plant in the region shut down or left the area.<sup>59</sup> Government compensation for direct and indirect damage was appropriate and reasonably quick in comparison to previous rounds of hostility, and played a positive role in the economic recovery and general atmosphere.<sup>60</sup> The most important move for systemic recovery was the government's approval of a multiyear strategic plan for the development of Sderot and the Gaza envelope localities.<sup>61</sup> This plan budgeted ILS 1.3 billion over 2014 – 2018, will be financed in part by special supplements, and will complement the government decision, made at the beginning of OPE, to direct ILS 417 million to the region over the next two years.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the multiyear strategic plan and its contribution to the social resilience of the Gaza envelope communities and residents.<sup>62</sup> It caused an immediate and profound change in the local morale, based on the assumption that the plan would be fully implemented over the next five years. Despite familiar bureaucratic snafus, a strong sense of momentum and hope is apparent; the demand for parcels of land in southern industrial zones is growing, and real estate prices are rising, in part due to the new train station in Sderot. There is a marked increase in entrepreneurial interest in the area, and several deals in the industrial zones have already been signed. It is clear that the economic benefits and reduced investor risk are outweighing the security risk.<sup>63</sup> The budgeting of new construction on the kibbutzim will allow demographic growth and meet the rising demand, while the budgeting of social activities, including those to enhance social resilience, is already lifting the spirits and attitude of those involved.

### **The Media's Impact on Resilience**

In order to enhance social resilience, Eshkol and Sha'ar Hanegev embarked on a mission to solicit all channels of the media to its cause. Indeed, the media served as an important tool in promoting social resilience in the Gaza envelope during OPE. Policy makers in both regional councils formulated media strategies, which were designed, in part, to enhance the resilience of their residents. They used the national and local media, as well as social media, and involved experienced media professionals. When the war



started, they were already prepared and informed, and had studied the lessons of the previous rounds of fighting.

The regional council leaderships focused on several well-defined points, designed to strengthen the resilience of their communities, including those that had remained and had been evacuated. One was to use the media to disseminate information and instructions. The media informed the inhabitants on how they should maintain their safety and carry on with the emergency routine in order to reduce uncertainty; strengthen the residents' sense of control; and convey the multiple message that: a) life goes on; b) all systems are functioning; c) they are not alone; and d) there is someone to talk to and rely on.<sup>64</sup> Another use of the media was to help residents cope with the risks by addressing their stressful emotions and encouraging an open discussion of those feelings. The communiqués to residents suggested,

to avoid conveying the message of 'self-pity' and the absence of the wish to return following the evacuation. It is possible, even recommended, to talk about fear and concerns, but it is important to balance this by asserting that this is our home and we expect a future of true peace and security. [It is also possible to talk] about the sense of being a refugee (for those who left) and the difficulty in experiencing the war atmosphere (for those who stayed) . . . Our communities are strong and we believe in our ability to bounce back and take care of ourselves . . . and find a way to get back to normal life.<sup>65</sup>

References to difficulties were more prominent in the messages sent out by the Eshkol Regional Council, whereas the Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council seemed to echo the notion that public discussion of the problems might weaken social resilience.

The topic of evacuation also exposed differences in the messages conveyed by the two councils. Sha'ar Hanegev emphasized remaining put, while Eshkol legitimized temporary relocation; the latter explicitly stated in its communiqués that, "We encourage residents not to be here, so that they do not experience the war." The issue of building trust in the institutions was first and foremost in reference to the regional council itself: "You are not alone. The entire system is thinking about you and is here to help you."<sup>66</sup> Economic recovery was also emphasized. Towards the end of the hostilities, the daily communiqués stated that, "At the next stage, we expect the government of Israel to strengthen the area and treat



it as a region with national priority . . . that will attract new residents who will help ensure this area's prosperity and success."<sup>67</sup>

It is interesting to note the differences in the media strategies of the two regional councils, which stems from the opposing attitudes of their political leaders. Haim Yellin, the head of the Eshkol Regional Council, regarded the media as central to maintaining social resilience. He understood that his appearance in the media was to make his personal voice heard, and help ease the stress and anxiety of his constituency. It was important for him to speak personally and frequently in public about the residents' concerns in order to "embrace them, calm their feelings, show them that they are not alone, that people know what they are living through." The communiqués put out by the Eshkol Regional Council also tried to convey strength as well as concern for the residents: "We still have a long way to go together, but we will make it and come out stronger than ever . . . so that we can once again enjoy the beautiful expanses around us, the reason we are here to begin with. With lots of love, Haim Yellin."<sup>68</sup>

By contrast, Alon Shuster, the head of the Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council, believed that during the crisis he had to work rather than speak in the media. His rate of media appearances was much lower than Yellin's. Also his approach and messages were that the communities represent "Zionism on the border" and that it was counterproductive to convey a message of weakness or wave the white flag. Accordingly, his media messages focused on remaining put and that the residents were a sort of "civilian army." In interviews, he stated explicitly that he would not call on his residents to evacuate themselves from home.

It is not our domain here to judge which approach to the media was the right one. Both were legitimate, and succeeded in realizing their common goals, which focused on maintaining the resilience of the people. Professionals in both regional councils reported that they succeeded in controlling the messages that were conveyed during the operation, and that the media did indeed play a critical role in maintaining the social resilience of the residents.

## Conclusions

Terrorism against civilians in Israel – including terror characterized by high-trajectory fire – is designed to disrupt the normal routine and frighten and demoralize the civilian population, as a means of changing Israel's policy towards the perpetrators. This is the objective of Hamas and the

other Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip, who try repeatedly to harm civilians and damage the fabric of daily life in Israel. A high level of social resilience can and must serve as an appropriate response to this threat. During OPE, the Israeli home front faced a relatively limited challenge, with the exception of the communities in southern Israel and especially those in the Gaza envelope. Following the events of the summer of 2014, these communities succeeded in bouncing back, a benchmark that best characterizes social resilience and the capacity to stand up to the difficult challenge imposed upon them by Hamas.

An in-depth look at the two regional councils examined in this study shows that the local residents generally demonstrated a reasonable-to-fairly-high level of social resilience in the face of the profound threat.<sup>69</sup> This was manifested by the rapid functional and behavioral bouncing back as expressed by the return to full systemic functioning within a few days after the end of the hostilities. Still, it seems that the ability to bounce back emotionally is less apparent, slower, and more moderate, indicating the complexity of the psychological challenge as manifested in most of the communities, especially those abutting the border fence. The excruciating experience of last summer and the attendant anxieties are still prominent in the local discourse almost a year after the events, and in the slow pace of recovery of both individuals and communities.<sup>70</sup>

In relation to bouncing back and hence social resilience, one can note some differences among the Gaza envelope communities. Some, like Nahal Oz, Alumim, Erez, and Kerem Shalom, displayed a remarkably high level of resilience, despite the direct and acute challenge they faced. Their level of resilience represents an especially rapid and all-encompassing return to full systemic functioning, in some cases even higher than experienced before the summer of 2014.

To a great extent, this encouraging picture of the Gaza envelope following the events of 2014 depends on the relative quiet that the region has enjoyed since the end of the fighting,<sup>71</sup> even if some would suggest that this is a fragile facade liable to crack sooner or later.<sup>72</sup> Many believe such a collapse is imminent as Israel has not reached an understanding with Hamas and severe internal pressures are building up in the Gaza Strip.<sup>73</sup> In interviews, local residents expressed their concern over the minor, but steady onslaught of rockets from the Gaza Strip – a worry that feeds the residents' anxiety and slows down their recovery – and certainly raises concern of another

round of fighting in the future, which is liable to bring the entire system to the risk of collapse.<sup>74</sup>

On the basis of this study several key lessons can be suggested, to enhance the capacity of Israelis to deal with ongoing terrorism. The first is the importance of prior preparedness. This is a constant lesson in emergency management. Preparedness, both organizational (e.g., preparing the Community Emergency Teams) and therapeutic<sup>75</sup> (e.g., the Resilience Centers and Stress Clinics), greatly proved itself during OPE, and contributed directly to the social resilience of the residents. The fact that many of the communities surveyed here are kibbutzim, where the social capital is stronger than in other localities, almost certainly enhances their capacity to cope and adapt, and consequently helps to construct their high level of social resilience. The component of preparedness would be significant for other communities in locations further from the border, which are bound to be targeted by longer-range, high-trajectory weapons, especially those equipped with guided measures. Apart from the imperative to strengthen the active defense and the warning systems,<sup>76</sup> it is necessary to bolster the prior preparedness of the local authorities all over Israel. Even if some of them have already taken steps in this direction, the lessons of the summer of 2014 point to the urgency of reaching a standard level of preparedness, which is the responsibility of the local governments, to be implemented with adequate state supervision.

The second key point is the role of local leadership. Although some differences were manifested in the leadership of the two regional councils of Eshkol and Sha'ar Hanegev during OPE, undoubtedly the conduct of the respective leaderships, both at the council and the community levels, made a significant contribution to strengthening social resilience. The leaders played an important role in designing and leading the preliminary preparations. They maintained close personal relationships with their communities and residents, including representing the plights of their constituencies vis-à-vis the government, the IDF, and the Israeli public at large during and following the hostilities. All these ensured an impressive level of functional continuity of the municipal systems. Many local leaders in Israel can learn from the ways in which Haim Yellin and Alon Shuster led their councils and residents. It has long been understood and established in Israel that local government is a basic building block for the preparedness of the civilian home front. It is the personal responsibility of the elected leaders of the local governments to ensure that this concept is properly

realized, by designing a careful program based in part on the lessons learned in the Gaza envelope during OPE.

Trust in local leadership, the IDF, and the government is the third critical point. Despite some inevitable reservations, the two regional council heads earned the sweeping confidence and trust of their residents for their leadership and conduct during the war. Trust in leadership in general – whether local or state – is an important component in constructing social resilience. In this case, while the local leadership had the backing and trust of their constituency, the same public had a much lower level of confidence in the national leadership. They expected the nation's political leadership to provide them with long-term security, based on an agreement or arrangements with Hamas. The level of trust in the government rose when it decided on the economic plan for the region, and rightly so. The question of confidence in the IDF, including its local commanding officers, is decisive, as they are committed to maintain continuous contact with the local governments and the residents, lend an ear, and show empathy for their legitimate concerns and grievances. This was not always the case to the full satisfaction of the residents.<sup>77</sup> One would assume that the political leadership is aware of this sensitive issue. It also behooves the IDF to study the lessons in this field of what happened and what did not happen in OPE, and pay attention in the future to forming an inclusive and supportive dialogue with the residents and communities they are supposed to serve.<sup>78</sup>

The fourth point is the question of evacuation, which lately has become more relevant in the public discourse and among senior office holders.<sup>79</sup> The evacuation of civilians at acute risk is a legitimate move, representing the autonomous right of individuals and communities to make their own decisions on issues pertaining to their lives. It does not hamper national resilience, even if presented as such by the enemy's propaganda. Those in charge, especially the National Emergency Management Authority, should be commended for updating the "Melonit program," which is supposed to provide organizational and logistical responses to large-scale evacuations.<sup>80</sup> The main problem, however, is that a government decision is required for an organized massive evacuation. As long as a limited evacuation occurs, it does not represent a major challenge. If a massive evacuation is considered, including of people with special needs, it would pose an unprecedented challenge to the decision makers. They might be prejudiced against such a decision, primarily because of the traditional narrative that views – unjustifiably – evacuation as a show of weakness.

The fifth and final point is associated with the economic assistance, which is critical in constructing and maintaining social resilience. The direct contribution to the well-being of the residents and their sense of security in facing the acute threat from the Gaza Strip has been discussed above at length. The government decision to grant these extraordinary benefits to the communities close to the fence, and not to those located farther away, was a correct and important decision. In the future, it would also behoove the government to provide differential support to communities whose direct threat is higher. Another important recommendation for the government is to implement the program it approved to the fullest.

These lessons have direct meaning and relevance to all communities in Israel within the range of high-trajectory weapons, whose numbers and accuracy are ever on the increase. The main message of this essay is that there is an urgent need for the formulation of a national doctrine on social resilience and its translation into practical programs to enhance resilience in each local government in Israel. Such programs will have to provide solid responses to relevant, albeit extreme risk scenarios, which might challenge the capacity of society to bounce back rapidly and to express its inherent resilience.

## Notes

We would like to thank Alon Shuster, head of the Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council, and member of Knesset Haim Yellin, former head of the Eshkol Regional Council, who assisted us in carrying out this study, as well as the many employees in both councils who generously shared their time, professionalism, and consideration with us.

- 1 Residents of the Gaza envelope consciously refer to the events of the summer of 2014 as a war. This is obviously a clear message, reflecting a subjective view meant to depict an event that differs from and is larger than an operation as described by the IDF and in official websites.
- 2 The residents of the Gaza envelope killed were Daniel Tragerman, Zeev Etzion, and Shahar Melamed.
- 3 The regional council is one of three types of local government entities in Israel, the other two being city and local councils. As of 2003, there were fifty-three regional councils in the country, with each representing three to fifty-four communities often spread over a relatively large area within the vicinity of each other. Each community within a regional council usually does not exceed a population of 2,000.
- 4 Uzi Rubin, *Israel's Active Defense in Operation Protective Edge*, Studies in Middle East Security, No. 111 (Ramat Gan: The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2015).



- 5 Zaki et al, "A Moment of Statistics: A Summary of Alarms During Operation Protective Edge," *RotterNet*, Israel's Community of Forums, August 31, 2014, <http://rotter.net/forum/scoops1/135166.shtml>; Ronit Minker, spokeswoman for the Eshkol Regional Council during the operation, in an interview on May 14, 2015, presented an expanded version of the number of hits in the Eshkol Regional Council: 1,303 hits during the sixty days of fighting, with 166 hits occurring on the last day alone.
- 6 During the operation, a total of five attack tunnels penetrating the Gaza envelope were exposed between July 7 and July 28 next to the kibbutzim of Sufa, Beeri, Nir-Am, Erez, and Nahal Oz.
- 7 Eshkol Regional Council website, May 2015, <http://www.eshkol.info>. The kibbutzim are Urim, Beeri, Kisufim, Ein Hashlosha, Nirim, Nir Oz, Re'eem, Magen, Nir Yitzhak, Sufa, Holit, Kerem Shalom, Gvulot, and Tze'elim; they represent 46.2 percent of the regional council's population. The moshavim are Ohad, Sdeh Nitzan, Talmei Eliyahu, Amioz, Mivtahim, Yesha, Talmei Yosef, Pri Gan, Yated, Sdei Avraham, Yevul, Ein Habsor, Bnei Netzarim, and Naveh; these represent 48.3 percent of the regional council's population. The communal settlements are Avshalom, Tzohar, and Shlomit, forming 5.5 percent of the regional council's population.
- 8 Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council website, May 2015, <http://www.sng.org.il>. The kibbutzim are Or Haner, Ivim, Erez, Brur Hayil, Gevim, Dorot, Kfar Aza, Miflasim, Nahal Oz, Nir-Am, and Ruhama, while the moshav is Yechini. Also in the regional council is the Shikmim Farm.
- 9 The Biblical source connects the word with *otzar*, variously translated as "store" or "treasure." "Moreover, I will give all the store [*hosen*] of this city, and all the gains thereof, and all the wealth thereof, yea, all the treasures [*otzrot*] of the kings of Judah" (Jeremiah 20:5).
- 10 Committee on Increasing National Resilience to Hazards and Disasters, *Disaster Resilience: A National Imperative* (The National Academies Press, 2012); Fran H. Norris, Susan P. Stevens, Betty Pfefferbaum, Karen H. Wyche, and Rose L. Pfefferbaum, "Community Resilience as a Metaphor, Theory, Set of Capacities, and Strategy for Disaster Readiness," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 41 (2008): 127-150; Jerome H. Kahan, Andrew C. Allen, and Justin K. George, "Resilience – Concept Developments: An Operational Framework for Resilience," *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management* 6, no. 1 (2009); K. Tierney, *Conceptualizing and Measuring Organizational and Community Resilience: Lessons from the Emergency Response following the September 11, 2001 Attack on the World Trade Center*, Preliminary Report, no. 329 (University of Delaware, Disaster Management Center, 2003).
- 11 "Resilience," *Homeland Security*, July 24, 2014, <http://www.dhs.gov/topic/resilience>.
- 12 For example, UNISDR. See <http://www.unisdr.org/campaign/resilientcities>.



- 13 Several years ago, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services, via the Community Work Service, formulated a comprehensive approach, but it has been implemented only partially. The ministry works to strengthen social resilience in Sderot and in the Gaza envelope communities in accordance with Government Decision No. 2173, from July 4, 2004, which accorded special assistance for these communities, including the idea of communal resilience. See Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services, *Survey of Social Services*, 2011, <http://www.molsa.gov.il/CommunityInfo/ResearchAndEvaluation/Documents/591-620.pdf>.
- 14 The centers are located in Sderot and in four regional councils in the first line of fire from the Gaza Strip: Hof Ashkelon, Sdot Negev, Sha'ar Hanegev, and Eshkol. See "Resilience Center," *The Israel Trauma Coalition*, 2015, <http://www.israeltraumacoalition.org/?CategoryID=196>. See also 2012 report, [http://www.israeltraumacoalition.org/\\_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/annual\\_report2012\\_short\\_heb.pdf](http://www.israeltraumacoalition.org/_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/annual_report2012_short_heb.pdf).
- 15 T. Levanon and D. Gidron, "Readiness, Resilience and Hope: The Israeli Experience," in *Strategies for Supporting Community Resilience*, ed. Robert Bach (Stockholm: Crismart, Multinational Resilience Policy Group, Swedish Defense University, 2015), pp. 289-309.
- 16 Boaz Krechmer, Strategic and Economic Division Manager, Eshkol Regional Council, interview, April 21, 2015.
- 17 Hannah Tal, Social Services Department Manager, Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council, interview, April 29, 2015. The population of Sha'ar Hanegev grew by 30 percent since 2009, and the growth continues, albeit at a more moderate pace because of the lack of housing. Special emphasis is placed on "community building," i.e., strengthening the community. See Naftali Sivan, Project Manager at the Strategic Staff, Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council, interview, May 17, 2015.
- 18 Ofer Lieberman, Community Emergency Team Spokesman at Nir-Am, interview, April 29, 2015.
- 19 Shay Levy, "From the Disengagement to Operation Protective Edge: The War in the Gaza Strip – Special Survey," *PAZAM*, July 10, 2014, <http://www.mako.co.il/pzm-israel-wars/operation-protective-edge/Article-9a4a5e78fb02741006.htm>.
- 20 According to Alon Shuster, head of the Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council, "An apartment available for renting at Kibbutz Miflasim in the middle of the war was rented out within two day at higher than the asking price. Israelis looking to live at a reasonable standard, who understand that there are problems . . . including explosions from time to time, this is a suitable, even nice place to live. 97 percent of the people who lived here continue to live here; they must have enough good reasons for staying." *Globes*, Man of the Year 2014.
- 21 Sivan, interview.

- 22 D. P. Aldrich, *Building Resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery* (University of Chicago Press, 2012).
- 23 In other words, we never got to that point and we did not evacuate the residents who evacuated themselves. See *Ynet*, May 11, 2015, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4557268,00.html>. On another occasion, Maj. Gen. Turgeman said, "Under similar circumstances [in the future] I would recommend evacuating the settlements." See *Yedioth Ahronoth*, April 3, 2015.
- 24 Since Operation Protective Edge, the Ministry of Defense (via the National Emergency Management Authority) has carried out staff work designed to prepare a preliminary plan for evacuating residents from the Gaza envelope settlements. See Noam Amir, "This is how the IDF will evacuate Gaza envelope residents and the south in the next conflict," *Maariv*, May 22, 2015, <http://www.maariv.co.il/news/military/Article-477953>.
- 25 See also the debate on mass evacuation of Tel Aviv residents in the First Gulf War, who were labeled "deserters" by then-Mayor Shlomo Lahat. See, for example, "The Gulf War in Tel Aviv," Tel Aviv Municipality, January 17, 1991, <http://tel-aviv.millennium.org.il/NR/exeres/FB17AEC8-6875-4D4F-AEF8-E1CF4B7DC992,frameless.htm>.
- 26 Michal Shaban, Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council Spokeswoman, noted that, "There was a sense of refugeehood. There was criticism of the central government directed at the entire establishment, including the regional council." Interview, April 29, 2015.
- 27 From the daily communiqué of the Eshkol Regional Council: "There are many communities in which almost all the residents have left for an orderly respite, either communally or individually, outside the settlement. We very much encourage leaving the area, especially families with children. Our area is a war zone and there is no reason to experience these events unnecessarily. You are invited to take advantage of respite [options] available to us through the Community Emergency Teams in the settlements or through the range of respite [possibilities] through the regional council." Daily communiqué no. 17, July 19, 2015, <http://www.eshkol.info/1669-11544-he/Eshkol.aspx?pos=30>.
- 28 "The message of the regional council and its head was 'The council will help anyone who wants to leave, but will in no way urge people to do so.'" Shaban, interview.
- 29 Kibbutz Alumim is located in the Sdot Negev Regional Council, <http://www.sdotnegev.org.il/11/>.
- 30 More information on Kibbutz Erez is available at the website of the Rural Settlement Organization, <http://www.homee.co.il/%D7%90%D7%A8%D7%96/>.
- 31 "Home, which is supposed to be the safest place of all, has become the most dangerous place of all." Anat Sarig, the Israel Trauma Coalition, interview, March 29, 2015.

- 32 Matan Tzuri and Itamar Eichner, "Promises are one thing, reality another," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, August 5, 2014. During summer vacation, some residents leave their homes in any case. The number of people who stayed was much greater in the settlements that were further away from the border fence.
- 33 The website of the Eshkol Regional Council, daily communiqué, no. 9, July 10, 2014, <http://www.eshkol.info/1669-11516-he/Eschol.aspx?pos=48>.
- 34 "Diaspora" was the term applied to residents who evacuated as a group to a single site and maintained communal life there. From the website of the Eshkol Regional Council, daily communiqué, no. 27, July 30, 2014, <http://www.eshkol.info/1669-11564-he/Eschol.aspx?pos=12>.
- 35 "See, for example, the moshavim that host the Gush Katif evacuees, who represent a unique group in the Eshkol Regional Council, characterized by their religious nature." Meirav Vidal, Resilience Center Manager, Eshkol Regional Council, interview, March 29, 2015.
- 36 "By their nature, the moshavim are less communally organized than kibbutzim and therefore less prepared for emergencies." Hannah Avni, Social Services Division Manager, Eshkol Regional Council, interview, March 29, 2015.
- 37 "By all parameters examined in the survey held on September 11, 2014, involving 412 residents of the regional council, the responses of those who stayed in their settlements revealed a higher level of resilience manifestations – according to the models used at Ben-Gurion University – than those who were evacuated. For example: 'My settlement is prepared for an emergency' – 4.2 compared to 3.6 (out of 5); 'I trust the upper command structure of the IDF' – 4.3 compared to 3.6; 'The council is functioning properly' – 4.1 compared to 3.3." Maya Silverbush, Resilience Center, Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council, interview, April 29, 2015.
- 38 Yossi Wagner, one of the leaders of the Community Emergency Team at Nahal Oz, interview, April 29, 2015; Yanina Barne'a, Economic Development Coordinator, Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council and the kibbutz's Community Emergency Team Spokeswoman, interview, May 17, 2015.
- 39 Shirley Seidler, "Kerem Shalom Growing in War," *Haaretz*, April 3, 2015; Noam Berko, "Shifting Border," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, November 4, 2014.
- 40 From the Eshkol Regional Council website, daily communiqué no. 8, July 9, 2014, <http://www.eshkol.info/1669-11510-he/Eschol.aspx?pos=51>.
- 41 From the Eshkol Regional Council website, daily communiqué no. 10, July 12, 2014, <http://www.eshkol.info/1669-11524-he/Eschol.aspx?pos=43>; "We had a problem operating the system also because of a lack of workers, the majority of which had evacuated." Maya Silverbush, interview, April 29, 2015.
- 42 Yael Adar, Education Division Director, Eshkol Regional Council, interview March 29, 2015. Adar stated that, "A brief overview of the activity in Eshkol: day camp for grades 1 – 6 and daycare centers. About half of the residents did not avail themselves of the educational system. During July, attendance

at the day camps of the moshavim ranged from 36 to 80 percent. Attendance at the kibbutzim ranged from 31 to 86 percent, and at the kibbutz preschools from 34 to 60 percent. The daycare centers also had low attendance rates.

After normal activity hours, many of the day camps served as respite centers in the Shalom, Zohar and Ein Habsor sectors and provided a solution for children in grades 1 – 6.”

- 43 The only exception was children in preschools from settlements located farther away, who did not come back at all. Adar, interview; Vidal, interview.
- 44 A similar situation occurred at the end of the Second Lebanon War, which ended two weeks before the start of the new school year.
- 45 “In the year after Operation Pillar of Defense, the Eshkol Regional Council’s Resilience Center received 250 calls. In the six months after Operation Protective Edge, the center received about 450 calls.” Vidal, interview.
- 46 The data on the number of people in treatment are based on psychological treatment reports at the Eshkol Regional Council’s Resilience Center. The estimate of expected continuing treatment was based on past experience. “Children, especially with attention deficit disorders, are considered to be at very high risk.” See Naomi Kamin, Eshkol Regional Council’s Resilience Center, interview, April 29, 2015.
- 47 Yizhar Sha’ar, Educational Psychological Services Director, Eshkol Regional Council, interview, June 3, 2015.
- 48 Aliza Ben Yehuda, Therapy Center Director, Eshkol Regional Council, interview, March 29, 2015.
- 49 Arnon Avni, Itzuvnik Studio, editor and publisher of 232, Kibbutz Nirim, interview, March 29, 2015. According to Avni, three families left Nirim after Operation Protective Edge and three families were welcomed.
- 50 Sarig, interview.
- 51 Hannah Avni, interview. There is still need to invest much in kibbutzim’s emergency preparedness, even though it is fundamentally higher than that of the moshavim east of Route 232.
- 52 The heads of the Community Emergency Teams play a critical role in emergencies, but they also play a central role in managing the community in general, including evacuations. There is high turnover also among those who fill social roles, but not in other positions such as coordinators and secretaries. Hannah Avni, interview.
- 53 Vidal, interview. This is in reference to volunteers whose ability to function before, during, and after the operation created a concern about damage to their place of work and their status vis-à-vis some of the residents and perhaps even vis-à-vis the IDF.
- 54 The Eshkol Regional Council’s internet page, [http://www.eshkol.info/sip\\_storage/FILES/2/6822.pdf](http://www.eshkol.info/sip_storage/FILES/2/6822.pdf).
- 55 In previous rounds, the damage was greater. Interview with Boaz Krechmer, April 21, 2015.

- 56 Orah Koren, "Factory at Kibbutz Magen: How Much Can Workers Take?" *The Marker*, August 21, 2015, <http://www.themarker.com/news/macro/1.2411532>.
- 57 Yigal Zore'a, "Reports from the Field: Gaza envelope, Operation Protective Edge, Day 14," July 21, 2014, <https://kavimvenekudot.wordpress.com/2014/07/21/שיגרת-חרום-דיווחים-מהשטח-עוטף-עזה-צו/>.
- 58 In terms of tourism, hostels were occupied by journalists and others involved in the war effort.
- 59 Barne'a, interview.
- 60 Information from the Israel Tax Authority website, [http://taxes.gov.il/EmergencyInformationA\\_CompensationfundPropertyTax/Pages/ZukEitan2014.aspx](http://taxes.gov.il/EmergencyInformationA_CompensationfundPropertyTax/Pages/ZukEitan2014.aspx).
- 61 Government Decision No. 2017, approved on September 21, 2014, <http://www.pmo.gov.il/secretary/govdecisions/2014/pages/govdes2017.aspx>.
- 62 This program encountered explicit reservations among heads of more distant settlements who claimed that the decisions represented "a difficult message for the residents of the southern cities regarding their contribution to national resilience." *Maariv*, September 1, 2014.
- 63 Barne'a, interview.
- 64 Minker, interview.
- 65 From the information page for Eshkol Regional Council residents, August 3, 2014.
- 66 Minker, interview.
- 67 From the Eshkol newsletter, August 3, 2014
- 68 Letter to residents, Eshkol Regional Council, August 3, 2014.
- 69 Haim Yellin feels that social resilience during Operation Protective Edge was lower than that in the previous two rounds of fighting with Hamas because of the higher security challenge, and estimates that the general recovery afterwards was not quick. See Haim Yellin, interview, May 31, 2015.
- 70 "Operation Protective Edge exposed and created many cracks and fractures, not all of which we are capable of identifying, naming, or explaining at this point, and not all of which the residents, communities, and even we, the professionals, can handle. It is still painful, hard, and complicated. Almost six months have passed since the operation and the anger and hurt bubble and burst out in direct and indirect spurts in whatever or whoever we touch. The process of rebuilding trust and security, the distress and anxiety, will apparently be a long one." See Hannah Tal, "Summary of 2014 in Resilience Centers in Sderot and Gaza Envelope Settlements" in *The Israel Trauma Coalition*, ed. Tali Levanon (2015), p. 59.
- 71 In addition to the number of red alerts since the summer of 2014, area residents noted several disruptions: the noise they hear almost daily from Hamas rocket fire to the west; the noise of explosions of Hamas tunnels set off by the Egyptian army; and a large number of attempts – 250 by June



- 2015 – to penetrate eastwards through the border fence, news of which are immediately disseminated via cellphone applications.
- 72 A survey conducted by Mina Tzemach before the 2015 Herzliya Conference determined that 82 percent of Israelis expect another round with Hamas. See *Ynet*, June 7, 2015, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4665484,00.html>.
- 73 On this issue, see the essay by Carmit Padan about the protest movement of the western Negev in this issue of *Military and Strategic Affairs*.
- 74 Yellin, interview. The emerging picture is one of shorter breaks between rounds of violence on the one hand, and a longer recovery time required by the communities on the other hand.
- 75 “It’s important to relate to preliminary preparation on the part of **all** pertinent staff in the regional councils: the educational psychological service, counselors, therapists from the resilience center, therapists from the Telem Center, therapists from the child development center, and volunteers. The Eshkol Regional Council handled some 1,300 calls during the fighting. In every location there are residents, and these responses prevented acute damage to residents and communities in Eshkol and in exile and strengthened their resilience and ability to bounce back, also by means of responses down the line.” See Sha’ar, interview.
- 76 In September, the installation of radar systems, which will discover more launches and reduce warning of less than fifteen seconds, will be completed. See Lilach Shoal, “New in the Gaza Envelope: Mortar Bomb Warning System,” *Israel Hayom*, May 27, 2015, <http://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/285065>.
- 77 “For the residents of the Eshkol region, Operation Protective Edge ended with a crisis of trust in the leadership of the nation and the IDF, particularly because of unsuitable instructions on defense.” See Tal, “Summary of 2014 in Resilience Centers in Sderot and Gaza Envelope Settlements,” p. 82.
- 78 Yellin, interview; Naama Angel Mishali, “Gaza Envelope: New Unit to Prevent Damage to Farmers,” *NRG*, May 3, 2015, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/692/386.html?hp=1&cat=875>. It seems that Gaza envelope residents are dissatisfied with the insufficient degree of sensitivity accorded by the IDF to their needs; the IDF has decided to implement the decision to establish a special unit to minimize damage in the agricultural terrain in future operations, after military vehicles damaged the fields during OPE due to lack of coordination with local settlements. Another lesson learned by the IDF from Operation Protective Edge is transferring the responsibility for the contact with the citizens to the Southern Command, together with the liaison personnel of the Home Front Command. One of the decisions was to establish an “overall rear command,” consisting of Home Front Command personnel who would be in charge of liaising with the residents and improving communication with them. See *Ynet*, May 28, 2015. Another point relating to this issue is the IDF’s decision to post soldiers as guards in the settlements adjacent to the border; this was criticized by residents. See



Matan Tzori, "Abandoning the Rear," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, January 4, 2015; Yossi Yehoshua and Matan Tzori, "The Regimental Policeman's Post Is Empty," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, January 5, 2015; Noam Amir and Moshe Cohen, "Gaza envelope Furious at Soldiers Leaving: 'Not before saying the tunnel threat has been removed,'" *Maariv*, January 5, 2015.

79 Evacuation was drilled as part of the annual Turning Point exercises on June 15, 2015.

80 See interview with Betzalel Treiber, Acting Head of National Emergency Authority, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Defense, in *Yedioth Ahronoth* supplement, May 29, 2015; Noam Amir, "This Is How the IDF Will Evacuate Gaza envelope Residents and the South in the Next Conflict," *Maariv*, May 22, 2015, <http://www.maariv.co.il/news/military/Article-477953>.