



Rocket Fire Targeting Israel

April 17, 2023

Overview

- ▶ Beginning on Passover eve (April 5, 2023), dozens of rockets were fired at Israeli territory typically from three different arenas: about 50 from the Gaza Strip, 40 of which fell inside Israel or were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system (April 5 and the night of April 6, 2023, the first rocket fire since March 18, 2023); 34 from south Lebanon (April 6, 2023), the heaviest barrage since the Second Lebanon War (2006); and three from southern Syria, two of which fell inside Israel (April 8, 2023). All of the rockets were apparently fired by Palestinian organizations.
- ▶ In response IDF aircraft and artillery attacked Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip, south Lebanon, the rocket launchers and several other targets in southern Syria, including a military facility of the Syrian army's Fourth Division, radar and Syrian army artillery.
- ▶ The pretext for the rocket fire was the riot at al-Aqsa mosque when Israeli police and Palestinians clashed on the night of April 4, 2023. The clash spread to the mosque itself when police entered to remove several hundred men and woman who refused to leave. During the riots Palestinians threw chairs and other objects at the Israeli police and shot fireworks at the forces, who were employing teargas and shock grenades. The Palestinians reported many casualties and claimed they had been beaten by Israeli police forces. They also reported extensive damage to the mosque. Dozens of Palestinians were detained. The riots were documented by videos which were uploaded to Palestinian and Arab-Muslim media outlets and received extensive coverage. In addition to rocket fire, riots broke out in east Jerusalem and at locations in Judea and Samaria, and Palestinians carried out several terrorist attacks.
- ▶ For the Palestinians, Hezbollah and other Arabs the incidents signified the so-called "unity of the fronts," a Palestinian-Hezbollah strategy employed against Israel, and they regard the events as a "victory" of the Palestinian people over the "false occupation" [i.e., Israel]. They also claim that firing rockets from three arenas revealed their ability to "conquer" Israel (Hamas' al-Risalah, April 11, 2023). Elias Hanna, a Lebanese military expert, said the recent

events indicated a turning point, and that the simultaneous opening of three military fronts against Israel was a "strong indication of the change in the regional rules of engagement." He said Israel was now facing an unfamiliar situation and was confronting it very carefully (al-Jazeera, April 8, 2023).

Rocket Fire from the Gaza Strip

Rocket fire

- ▶ At 3:00 in the morning on April 5, 2023, sirens sounded in the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip. Nine rockets were identified from the Gaza Strip. Four were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system and four fell in open areas. Somewhat later another rocket was fired at Israeli territory and also fell in an open area (IDF spokesman, April 5, 2023). The media in the Gaza Strip reported the rockets were the "first response" to the events in al-Aqsa mosque, adding that the joint operations room of the Palestinian organizations had begun its official response to the "aggression."
- ▶ The military-terrorist wing of the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) claimed responsibility for the rocket fire. **Abu Mujahed, PRC spokesman**, threatened that if Israel did not understand the message sent from the Gaza Strip by the "resistance" [Palestinian terrorist organizations], additional messages would be sent shortly (al-Mayadeen, April 5, 2023). PRC terrorist operatives documented six rockets fired at the southern Israeli city of Sderot (PRC Telegram channel, April 5, 2023).
- ▶ Another barrage of rockets was fired from the Gaza Strip on the night of April 6, 2023, in response to IDF attacks. **A total of 44 rockets were fired, eight intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system and 23 falling in open areas.** A house in Sderot was directly hit while the residents were in a protected area. The residents of the communities near the Gaza Strip were asked to stay in their protected areas.
- ▶ Several organizations claimed responsibility for the rocket fire, among them the Shaheed Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades, the military-terrorist wing of Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which reported firing rockets at the western Negev at 55 minutes past midnight and at 1:30 in the morning on April 7, 2023 (Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades Telegram channel, April 7, 2023); the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (AAMB) claimed responsibility for firing rockets at "the occupied Palestinian lands" (AAMB Telegram channel, April 7, 2023); and the military-terrorist wing of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) also

claimed responsibility for "a barrage" of rockets at Israeli territory to the north of the Gaza Strip in "response to Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and al-Aqsa mosque and attacks on the Gaza Strip" (DFLP Telegram channel, April 7, 2023).



Rocket fire from the Gaza Strip intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system (Twitter account of photojournalist Hassan Aslih, April 7, 2023).

Israel's response

- ▶ Following the rocket attacks, on the morning of April 5, 2023 Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked a Hamas military facility in the northern Gaza Strip used as a training camp, a site for the manufacture of weapons and a site for the manufacture and storage of weapons in the central Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, April 5, 2023). The terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip reported fired a number of surface-to-air missiles at the IDF planes (Shehab, April 6, 2023).
- ▶ In response to the IDF activity, **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** claimed the attacks were a failed attempt to prevent the Gaza Strip from "continuing its support for the Palestinian people in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria." He claimed the attack would not frighten them, but rather increase their adherence to "realizing their rights to support al-Aqsa mosque" (Hazem Qassem's Telegram channel, April 5, 2023).
- ▶ During the night of April 6, 2023, other Hamas targets were attacked (Israel regards Hamas as responsible for all events occurring in the Gaza Strip). Among the targets were the route of a terrorist tunnel from the Beit Hanoun area in the northern Gaza Strip and another in the Khan Yunis area in the southern Gaza Strip, which was attacked during Operation Guardian of the Walls and undergoing repairs and reconstruction. Two Hamas sites for the manufacture of weapons were attacked, one in the northern Gaza Strip and one in the

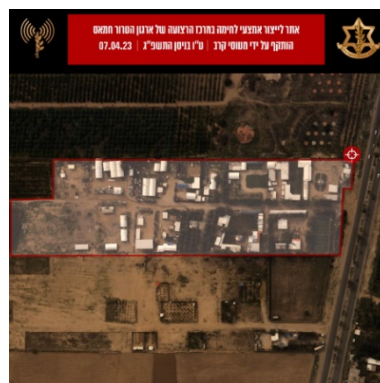
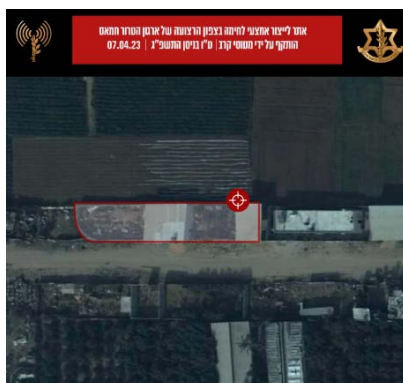
central Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, April 6, 2023). A heavy machinegun, used to shoot at IDF planes and at Israeli territory near the Gaza Strip, was also attacked. On the morning of April 7, 2023, an IDF tank and aircraft attacked Hamas military targets along the Gaza Strip border (IDF spokesman, April 7, 2023).



Results of the Israeli Air Force attacks in the Gaza Strip (Twitter account of photojournalist Hassan Aslih, April 7, 2023).



Hamas post attacked in the central Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman's Twitter account, April 7, 2023).



Illustrations of the IDF attack on Hamas sites for the manufacture of weapons located in the northern and central Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, April 7, 2023).

► Operatives of Hamas' military-terrorist wing reported firing anti-aircraft missiles at IDF planes (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades website, April 7, 2023). The Mujahedin Brigades¹ also claimed its aerial defense unit had used missiles to attack the "Zionist warplanes" (Mujahedin Brigades Telegram channel, April 7, 2023).



Hammas' military-terrorist issued a video documenting the firing of surface-to-air missiles to attack Israeli Air Force aircraft (Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades Telegram channel, April 7, 2023).



Pictures from a video called "Ready" issued by the joint operations room (al-Aqsa Radio Twitter account, April 13, 2023).

¹ A network called the Mujahedin Brigades split from Fatah's AAMB after **becoming more radical**. One of the networks leaders is **Assad Ibrahim Abu Sharia**, from the Gaza Strip, who has often been involved in firing rockets from the Gaza Strip and placing IEDs along the border security fence. The network operates in the Gaza Strip with the knowledge and under the aegis of Hamas, and also receives funding, guidance and support. In May 2012 a network squad was exposed which had been planning to abduct an Israeli civilian to use as a bargaining chip for the release of Palestinian terrorist prisoners (Israeli Security Agency website, May 31, 2012).

Rocket Fire from Lebanon

Rocket fire

► In the early the afternoon on Thursday, April 6, 2023, which was the first day of Passover and the middle of Ramadan, rockets were fired from south Lebanon at the Western Galilee. Sirens were heard in many communities for long periods of time. The rockets were launched from three areas south of Tyre and in south Lebanon from near the town of Qlaileh. The IDF reported that according to the initial investigation, **34 rockets were fired at Israeli territory from south Lebanon. The Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted 25, five fell in open areas inside Israeli territory and the impact points of four others is still under investigation** (IDF spokesman, April 6, 2023). No casualties were reported; property was damaged.



Damage to property in the northern Israeli town of Shlomi (al-Araby al-Jadeed, April 6, 2023).

Follow-up activity on the ground

- The Lebanese army and UNIFIL began a joint investigation to locate the site from which the rockets had been fired (al-Mayadeen, April 6, 2023). According to reports, they searched the Qlaileh area and along the Lebanese border (al-Araby al-Jadeed, April 6, 2023).
- The Lebanese army said the rockets had been fired from the regions of Qlaileh, al-Malia and Zibkin. Patrols found additional rockets, ready for firing (Lebanese army Twitter account, April 6, 2023). The Lebanese army later announced that another rocket launcher with unfired rockets had been found near Marjayoun in south Lebanon, and that the rockets were being neutralized (Lebanese army Twitter account, April 7, 2023).



**A rocket launcher near Marjayoun with unfired rockets
(Lebanese army Twitter account, April 7, 2023).**

► UNIFIL said in a statement that **Aroldo Lázaro, UNIFIL commander**, was in contact with both sides, which stated they did not want the situation to escalate. He called on all sides to stop all activities over the Blue Line [the Israeli-Lebanese border] (UNIFIL website, April 7, 2023). UNIFIL forces evacuated the posts near the areas between al-Malia and Qlaileh from which the rockets had been fired. Reportedly, that increased concern among local residents that Israel was planning to escalate its response (al-Akhbar Twitter account, April 6 2023). **Ali Shoeib, an al-Manar correspondent in south Lebanon**, reported that the information about UNIFIL forces evacuating their posts was incorrect (Ali Shoeib's Twitter account, April 6, 2023).

IDF response

► In response to the rocket fire from Lebanon, at 4:00 in the morning on April 7, 2023, the Israeli Air Force attacked a number of targets in south Lebanon. According to the IDF spokesman, they were part of Hamas' infrastructure in the Tyre sector, from which the rockets had been fired at Israel (IDF spokesman, April 7, 2023). Correspondents in south Lebanon reported that six missiles had been fired at the area to the south of Tyre near the al-Rashidiya refugee camp and that there was property damage.

► Lebanese sources reported that targets had been attacked near the al-Rashidiya refugee camp south of Tyre and near the village of Qlaileh and the al-Malia junction, from which rockets had apparently been fired (al-Jazeera, April 7, 2023). It was also reported that the attacks destroyed the al-Limona Bridge near the al-Rashidiya refugee camp and an electrical transformer, and that buildings and vehicles had been damaged by the concussion from the attack (Lebanese National News Agency, April 7, 2023). Attempts were made to minimize the damage done by the attack, claiming Israel had attacked a sheep farm in Rashidiya, a house

and a banana plantation in Qlaileh while Israel claimed it had attacked Hamas military targets. Hezbollah did not react to the attack.



**Damage done by the Israeli Air Force attack in south Lebanon
(Rayan Twitter account, April 7, 2023).**

Who fired the rockets?

- ▶ The IDF spokesman announced that Hamas was behind the rocket fire, although Israel regarded Lebanon as responsible because the rockets were fired from Lebanese territory (IDF spokesman, April 6, 2023).
- ▶ **Najib Mikati, Lebanese prime minister**, said that according to the initial investigation carried out by the Lebanese army, the operatives who fired the rockets were not Lebanese and the rocket fire was a response to "Israeli aggression" in the Palestinian territories and the Gaza Strip (al-Nashra, April 6, 2023). The Arab networks rushed to quote "three security sources in Lebanon" who said Palestinian organizations, not Hezbollah, were responsible for the rocket fire from Lebanon (Reuters, April 6, 2023).
- ▶ An anonymous source in Hezbollah denied that the organization was responsible for firing rockets at Israel (al-Araby al-Jadeed, April 6, 2023). A ranking Fatah operative in Lebanon also claimed there was no connection between the prominent Palestinian organizations in Lebanon and the rockets, which were fired "far from the Palestinian refugee camps" (al-Nahar, April 6, 2023).
- ▶ Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, his deputy Saleh al-'Arouri and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) leader Ziyad al-Nakhalah, who were in Beirut when the rockets were fired, held a meeting. They issued militant statements, threats and promises that their military wings would not be inactive in the face of Israel's "aggression." In the Gaza Strip as well the Palestinian terrorist organizations of the joint operations room said they were prepared for "aggression" and would respond to it. They also noted at the long-range

rocket units in the Gaza Strip were on high alert and the matter of a response and the range of the response depended on the extent of Israel's "aggression" and the targets attacked by Israel (al-Mayadeen, April 6, 2023).

► The Lebanese news website [asasmedia.com](https://www.asasmedia.com) revealed that on April 6, 2023, the day the rockets were fired, Esmail Ghaani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, met with Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, his deputy Saleh al-'Arouri, high-ranking PIJ operatives and Lebanese close to Hezbollah in the Iranian embassy in Beirut. They ate the Ramadan fast-breaking meal together and it claimed "the meal turned into a joint operations room where the zero hour for a number of 'activities' was decided" ([asasmedia.com](https://www.asasmedia.com), April 9, 2023).

► According to an article in the Wall Street Journal, following the meeting, on April 15, 2023, Esmail Ghaani coordinated details with Hezbollah and Hamas, pressuring them to attack Israel to avenge the deaths of two Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) commanders in Syria, who died two weeks ago in an attack attributed to Israel. According to the Wall Street Journal, the details of the rocket attacks were agreed on during clandestine meetings with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, Isma'il Haniyeh and his deputy, Saleh al-'Arouri, held in the Iran embassy in Beirut. Ghaani, according to the report, said it was important that the attack be carried out quickly in response to the deaths of the two Iranian officers who served as "advisors" to the local forces (Wall Street Journal, April 15, 2023).

Reactions to the events

► **Najib Mikati, Lebanese prime minister**, related to the rocket fire and to the discourse about Lebanon's helplessness, claiming that the reports were part of a media campaign. He said that from the beginning of the events the government had made the necessary contacts with the relevant parties and international agencies operating behind closed doors. He claimed that following the event he met with the Italian minister of defense and requested he exert pressure on Israel to prevent it from actions that would increase tension. He also said they stressed that Lebanon completely rejected any military escalation from its territory and its use for carrying out actions that would undermine stability. He claimed "ongoing Israeli aggression" against Lebanon and its continuous violations of Lebanese sovereignty were unacceptable (al-Nashra, April 6, 2023).

► Mikati, meeting with **Guido Crosetto, the Italian minister of defense**, claimed Lebanon condemned the rocket fire, adding that the Lebanese army and UNIFIL were intensifying

their investigation. He said Lebanon completely rejected all use of its territory for military escalation or undermining existing stability. He also confirmed Lebanon's commitment to UN Resolution 1701, and asked the minister to exert pressure on Israel to stop any activity that would increase tension in south Lebanon (Lebanese prime minister's Twitter account, April 6, 2023).

► The Lebanese mission to the UN sent a letter of complaint to the Security Council protesting Israel's "aggression against south Lebanon." The letter had four main points: one, a "gross violation" of Lebanese sovereignty; two, a threat to the stability of south Lebanon; three, a violation of UN Resolution 1701; and four, a threat against "international peace and security." The letter also stated that Lebanon opposed the use of its territory to undermine existing stability and demanded the Security Council and the international community condemn "Israeli aggression" (Lebanese foreign ministry website, April 8, 2023).

► **Bassem Mawlawi, minister of the interior in the interim government**, said it was unacceptable for Lebanon or its south to serve as a platform for threats from any source. He said abiding by UN Resolution 1701 was in the interest of Lebanon and the Lebanese, and complained that Lebanon was the only country which was required to accept a resolution dealing with war or peace. He said there were a lot of armed organizations in south Lebanon which were not Lebanese, and added they were continuing their investigation into the rocket fire and examining who could have sponsored it (al-Hadath, April 6, 2023).

► **Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah** related to the events at a later date during his speech for World Jerusalem Day. He said it was important considering the changes that had occurred since 2006. He said he had not related to it earlier because it had been necessary to study the situation and conduct consultations. He also said that policy had to be vague when dealing with Israel because what determined the situation was the balance of deterrence. He added that they would respond to every attack on Lebanon (al-Mayadeen, April 14, 2023).

► **Bassem Na'im, deputy Hezbollah leader**, said if Israel attacked Lebanese there would be a response. He claimed there was now a new "equation" of the balance of deterrence for all Lebanon. Hezbollah was in Lebanon and its "resistance" [terrorist] activity began from Lebanon, and the regional opposition to the Israeli "entity" consisted of the Palestinian people and the "additional" forces in "Palestine." He said Hezbollah did not conceal its support for anyone who opposed Israel in any location, and before discussing rockets

launched from Lebanon or anywhere else, first it was necessary to discuss Israel's "aggression" against Jerusalem and the Palestinians. The question was not where the rockets had been fired from but rather why the world did not stop the aggression against al-Aqsa and put an end to the "Zionist crimes" against the Palestinians (al-'Ahad, April 13, 2023).

► **Hashem Safi al-Din, chairman of Hezbollah's Executive Council**, said the axis united the "resistance" and the objective remained the same, to destroy Israel (al-Manar, April 12, 2023).

► **Nasser Kanaani, spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry**, condemned "Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and south Lebanon," and claimed it was a gross violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and of the "principles of international law." He said an emergency meeting of Organization of Islamic Cooperation had to be held and all the members had to conform to a united position that would make it possible to support the Palestinian people and prevent the desecration of al-Aqsa mosque (al-Alam, April 7, 2023).

► Hamas strongly condemned the "Zionist aggression" against Lebanon, which reflected the "barbarity of the fascist occupation" and its policies, which threatened regional security. Hamas also called on the UN to take urgent measures to stop the "crimes and violations of the occupation, which have gone beyond all limits" (Hamas Telegram channel, April 7, 2023).

Rocket Fire from Syria

Rocket fire from southern Syria

► At approximately 2:40 before dawn on April 8, 2023, three rocket launches were identified from Syria. Two crossed the Israeli border; one was intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system and the other fell in an open area (IDF spokesman, April 8, 2023). No casualties or damage were reported.

► The Jordanian army reported a rocket had exploded in the air over Wadi Aqraba, near the Syrian border, at 10:25 at night and that pieces fell in the area. No casualties or damage were reported and the Jordanian army engineering corps was reported as investigating the incident (Jordanian army website, April 8, 2023).

► **A Palestinian network in Syria calling itself the al-Quds Brigade² claimed responsibility for the rocket fire as a response to the "aggression" against al-Aqsa mosque.** According to the organization, there will be a firm response from the "southern Syrian front" for every "act of aggression" carried out by the "Zionist entity" (al-Mayadeen, April 8, 2023).

► Somewhat later, a "high-ranking source" in the network denied its involvement in firing the rockets. The "source" said there was no truth to the claim spread by the social networks of militia involvement in the rocket fire. However, the "source" continued, denial of involvement did not mean they and the "resistance axis" [the Palestinian terrorist organizations and Hezbollah] would not respond to the "crimes of the Zionist enemy" against the Palestinian people or its repeated attacks on Syrian territory, and warned "the Zionist enemy" would pay a high price for its "crimes" (Sputnik News Agency, April 9, 2023).

► **According to Turki al-Hassan, a Syrian strategist,** the rockets may have been fired by the Syrian "resistance" in the Golan Heights, established in 2013 by Samir Kuntar,³ who died in a targeted killing in December 2015. It was also possible, according to al-Hassan, that Bashar Assad gave the Palestinian organizations permission to reconstruct themselves and promised he would not interfere (Sky News, April 8, 2023).

IDF response

► In response to the rockets, the IDF fired artillery at the area from which they were launched and the launchers were attacked from the air. Later Israeli Air Force aircraft attacked other targets in Syria, including a military facility of the Syrian army's Fourth Division, radar installations and Syrian army artillery positions (IDF spokesman, April 8, 2023). A Syrian army source reported that at 5:00 in the morning Israel attacked a number of sites in the southern

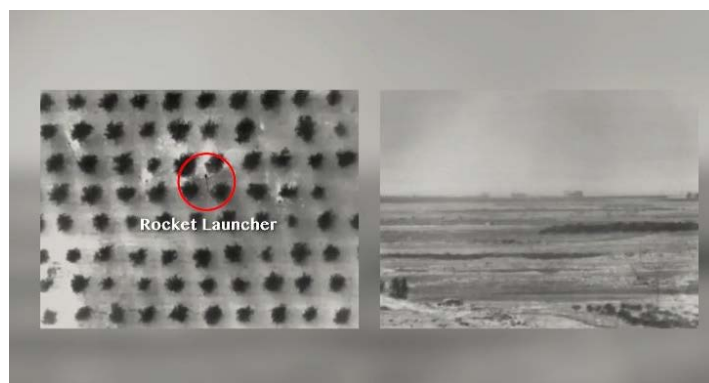
² The al-Quds Brigade is a Palestinian military force operated by the Assad regime as a Syrian army auxiliary force. It was established in October 2013 and has several thousand operatives. During the Syrian Civil War the regime employed it against the rebel organizations for both defensive and offensive missions and its operatives gained combat experience, mainly in urban warfare. Apparently the force is the most militarily capable of the various Palestinian militias operated by the Syrian regime, and may be supported, financially and logistically, by the IRGC's Qods Force. For further information see the March 19, 2018 report, "Armed Palestinian forces, militias and organizations handled by the Syrian regime in the Syrian civil war."

³ Samir Kuntar was a Lebanese Druze and a PLO operative. In April 1979 he and his accomplices infiltrated Israel from the sea, and then broke into the Haran house in Nahariya. They abducted the father, Danny Haran, and his 4-year-old daughter Einat, and killed him in front of her. Then they killed her. They also killed an Israeli policeman. Kuntar was caught and imprisoned, but released in 2008 in a prisoner exchange deal for the return the bodies of IDF soldiers Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser.

part of the country, causing material damage. The source also claimed that Syrian aerial defense had intercepted a number of missiles (SANA, April 9, 2023). A Syrian army source reported that the aerial defense system clashed with "hostile targets from the direction of the occupied Golan Heights" (Sabarin News, April 9, 2023).

► **Rami Abd al-Rahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights**, reported that the IDF attack was directed against the Syrian army's 90th Brigade in the Quneitra district, the 52nd Brigade in the Daraa's eastern village area and the radar installation in the western village area of al-Suwayda. He said the targets attacked by Israel did to belong to the IRGC or Hezbollah, but rather to the Syrian army (al-Ghad, April 8, 2023).

► **Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem** condemned the "barbaric Zionist aggression" against Syria, which reflected Israel's "increasing aggression against the entire region." He claimed Hamas' solidarity with Syria against "Zionist aggression" demanded the unification of the fronts to prevent attacks on the Islamic and Christian holy sites (al-Risalah, April 9, 2023).



IDF drone attack on Syria (IDF spokesman's Twitter account, April 9, 2023).

Response to the rocket attack

► The rocket fire from southern Syria was widely reported by the Shi'ite social networks in Lebanon, Yemen and other countries with the hashtag, "The Golan waits for a signal." The leader of the Houthi Shi'ite rebels in Yemen was quoted as saying he hoped "the brothers in Syria" would start using "a strategy of deterrence" against Israel (al-Mayadeen, April 8, 2023).

► Asked how Syria could justify the firing of rockets at Israel by "unofficial" agencies, **Ghassan Yussuf**, a Syrian political commentator answered that there was no need for justification in light of Israel's repeated attacks on Syria, the Gaza Strip and al-Aqsa mosque. He claimed "rage" had greatly increased in the Arab street in general and the Syrian street in particular, and it was only natural that it would be manifested. The rocket fire from Syria, he claimed, was a "message" to Israel, and there were three possible reasons for more rocket

fire: the Golan was "occupied Syrian territory," Israel's repeated attacks against Syria might lead to a future response, and there was a Syrian and Palestinian popular demand for "responses" (BBC in Arabic, April 8, 2023). **Turki al-Hassan, an Syrian strategist**, said the decision had already been made for Syria to begin a new stage regarding Israel and the "resistance axis" (Sky News in Arabic, April 8, 2023). **Elias Hanna, a Lebanese military expert**, said the rocket fire deep into the Golan Heights enforced a new "equation" on Israel regarding the Syrian front, but it was too early to know what the front would do (al-Jazeera, April 8, 2023).