Offensive Hamas terror tunnel into Israel exposed, neutralized

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The IDF has exposed and neutralized a Hamas terror tunnel encroaching into Israeli territory in the Sha'ar HaNegev Regional Council, which was described as "long and of high quality," the army said Sunday.

The army further said the tunnel was neutralized over the past few days by filling it with cement. On the Gazan side, the tunnel connected to a chain of other tunnels, and its destruction could therefore be considered a significant operational achievement.

The tunnel was excavated after Operation Protective Edge near the town of Jabalia in the northern strip and crossed into Israeli territory, mere meters from the border fence, where mass protests took place over the past several weeks.

The IDF Spokesperson's Office stressed that at no time were the Israeli residents of border communities in danger.

The tunnel was the eighth discovered and destroyed in the past few months, with the army adding it may have been used to a mass exodus of Palestinian protesters towards Israel or for carrying out a serious terror attack. Three of the eight tunnels were destroyed in Gaza, with the remaining five leveled inside Israel.

Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman tweeted about the incident, saying, "We've opened the week with an impressive intelligence and operational achievement with the destruction of another tunnel, the longest and deepest exposed thus far."

"Millions of dollars were invested in its excavation," the defense minister added, "money that would have been better served mitigating the plight of residents but has now sunk into the sand. Gaza residents, Hamas is frittering away your money on tunnels leading nowhere. We will get to them all."

While the tunnel neutralized contained no armaments, the IDF said it was equipped for carrying out terror attack in the immediate future. The tunnel was located through strategic means rather than the new underground anti-tunnel barrier.

All told, the tunnel crossed some 20 meters into Israeli territory.

 The mission to locate and destroy all of the tunnels entering into Israel by the end of the year was nearing its completion, the army stated, with the latest tunnel not being the last.

"We have put in considerable resources on the Gaza borders to avoid it becoming a main theater of war, and have additional means we have yet to utilize," IDF Spokesman Brig.-Gen. Ronen Manelis said.

"While we aren't seeking escalation in the strip, we will continue working adamantly against tunnel," the spokesman added. "We will continue demarcating between countering terrorism and assisting the populace, with measures such as increasing the fishing zone near the strip and the number of trucks allowed to bring in goods through the Kerem Shalom crossing."

The IDF charged that "Hamas has been working over the past few months—and with added vigor over the past few weeks—to turn the fence area into a warzone and terror zone.

"The violent riots in the vicinity are merely a pretext for attempts at carrying out attacks both above and below ground. The IDF will not allow Israel's citizens to come to harm or its sovereignty compromised and will continue working adamantly against terror of any sort.

"The army has been carrying out a methodical, operational, intelligence and technological mission to locate terror tunnels while construction on the barrier is ongoing to defend Israelis and the country's sovereignty.

"Hamas continues to invest innumerable resources in hopeless terror endeavors instead of investing in the welfare of the people of the strip."

Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz commented on the tunnel's destruction in a Ynet studio interview Sunday, and said it constituted a "remarkable achievement. Israel is the first (country) in the world capable of locating and intercepting tunnels underground."

"The achievement is first and foremost the IDF's, but also of outstanding scientists from the Technion, Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and even the Energy Ministry's Geophysics Institute," he continued.

"There may be more tunnels, I won't divulge our intelligence on the matter. I'll only say we are moving very rapidly to completing the project of destroying the tunnels," the energy minister stated.

The IDF [destroyed](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5176406,00.html) a Protective Edge-era terror tunnel in mid-March, leading from the Rafah region to the Eshkol Regional Council, which Hamas recently tried to refurbish. The tunnel was neutralized in Israel's territory by flooding it with materials preventing its use. Another tunnel was [destroyed](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5176207,00.html) by an Israel Air Force strike in central Gaza.

In January, the IDF destroyed a 1.5 km-long Hamas tunnel dug from Rafah to the Egyptian side, passing beneath the only border crossing for goods from Israel into the strip at Kerem Shalom.

 In October 2017, Southern Command forces [detonated](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5070606,00.html) a [terror tunnel](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5073093,00.html) still under construction located inside Israel near the border fence, in the vicinity of Khan Yunis. Four Palestinians inside the tunnel at the time were wounded and taken to a Gaza hospital for treatment.

"We have utilized technological means to detect it," Brig.-Gen. Manelis said at the time. "The tunnel is no longer a threat."

 The IDF said it monitored the tunnel—not yet operational at the time of its destruction—for a time before moving on it and that it was a "blatant violation of Israeli sovereignty that will not be allowed."