

Former IDF officer responds to Israel's critics: What if it were you?

By Guy Morag



Sirens blare outside and the music on the radio is interrupted with warnings to take cover. I also receive an emergency text message on my cell phone. Cars come to a screeching halt, doors swing open, parents grab their children and everyone runs for cover.

Some leap into ditches on the shoulders of the road and others sprawl out onto the ground and cover their heads with their hands. I am one of the ditch-leapers and I do it without thinking. I blink and raise my head to see where my loved ones are, becoming conscious of the blood pumping through my veins and feeling vulnerable under the vast sky. I wonder if this will be the rocket that hits me.

Welcome to Israel. No, it's not Sderot, the Israeli city nearest to Gaza, where this has been a normal occurrence for the past 14 years. And no, it's not Ashkelon and Ashdod, or another southern Israeli city just a bit farther out where this, too, has become commonplace in recent years. Welcome to Israel, where now the entire country is threatened by Hamas' indiscriminate rocket fire into Israeli cities and towns.

This happened to my sister and me on Freeway 4, at the Morasha junction – a major junction in central Israel on my way to Ashdod from Tel Aviv for Shabbat dinner at my mother's house. Imagine this happening on your commute from, say, Baltimore to Washington, D.C.

The powerful explosions above



Guy Morag is seen here at his March 2011 graduation ceremony at the School for Aerial Defense in the Negev. With him is his grandmother Hadassah Morag, who lives with Guy's grandfather Yehuda in Rosh HaAyin.

us thump in our chests like the bass coming from loud music at a rock concert. The Iron Dome interceptors successfully destroy the incoming rockets, which were launched by bloodthirsty jihadists hoping to hit and kill anything they can. "That was close!" says someone next to us as he stands up and brushes the dirt off of his jeans and shirt while making his way back to his car. Within moments, close to 50 people walk back to their cars, switch the radio and air conditioning back on, and continue the drive to their destinations. I actually see a woman pick up a mat she spreads on the street to lie on for these kinds of occasions.

I can't help but think to myself how surreal this is; my mind is spinning with questions. I feel conflicted because what just

happened is crazy, and yet I get the sense that it is becoming the norm. It's like muscle memory: Hear a sound, run for your life and then get on with it. Are we allowing this to become "normal life" from here on out? Are we going to accept random rocket fire as a way of life?

My sister and I continue our drive to Ashdod in relative quiet, but updates are broadcast on the radio every few minutes and we learn about one rocket here, three mortars there, another two over there, and so on. Luckily, we make it to Ashdod without having to find cover again. An hour into our meal, a siren goes off and we run out to the stairwell where we meet the rest of the building tenants. A few of the kids are crying and their parents are trying to convince them that the sirens are

part of a game – the more quickly you find cover, the more likely you are to win – but these kids already know better.

Israelis are on the brink of 50 days into Operation Protective Edge, and we have not yet achieved the quiet and protection that we yearn for and deserve. Miraculously, we've only had few civilian casualties. Less fortunate are the Gazans who are caught in the crossfire as a result of Hamas' shooting rockets from civilian areas. Some around the world criticize us for daring to rid ourselves of this threat in a densely populated area – a tricky situation, indeed. But I am grateful that our government invests in missile defense, early-warning systems, bomb shelters and more to protect its citizens from unprovoked, indiscriminate rocket fire. Without these protective measures, Israeli casualties would be far greater and cities would be in shambles.

I implore the critics of Israel's response to ask yourselves a few questions: What would you expect your government to do if rockets were raining down on your cities? What if you had to leap into a ditch on the freeway to avoid incoming rockets during a ride home to visit Mom? What if it became second nature for you to scan for the nearest bomb shelter anywhere you go? What if all of your daily life routines were disrupted by a terrorist organization eager to kill you?

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