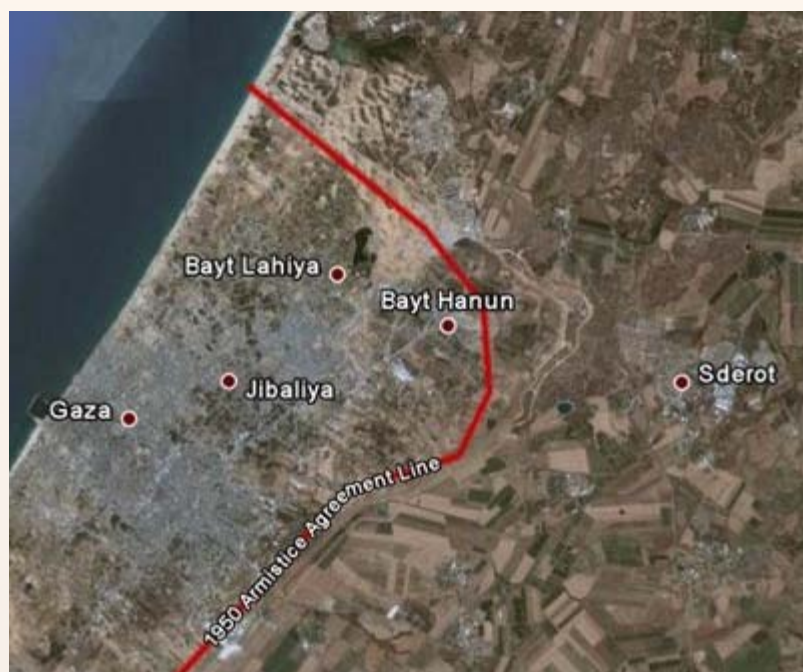


# Middle East Perspectives

by Rick Francona

JANUARY 25, 2009

## Sderot - Israel's "Rocket City"



From my recent visit to Sderot - The small city of Sderot, Israel sits just under three miles from the border with the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. This places the city within the range of the homemade al-Qassam rocket, manufactured in the machine and welding shops in Gaza City, and launched from the strip of land south of Bayt Hanun and closest to Sderot.



An acknowledged Middle East expert, dynamic speaker, author of *Ally to Adversary - An Eyewitness Account of Iraq's Fall from Grace*, and former NBC News Middle East military analyst, retired intelligence officer Lt Col Rick Francona offers his thoughts and opinions on various Middle East topics.

Recommended by TIME.com, CNN.com and MSNBC.com.

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Since Israel dismantled its settlements in the Gaza Strip and withdrew its military forces in 2005, over 8000 al-Qassam rockets have been fired at Sderot. There have been 13 deaths attributed to the rockets. The photo shows three al-Qassam rockets being fired at Sderot, seen from Mitzneh hill in Sderot.



Israel and Hamas had a temporary ceasefire (in Arabic, a *hudnah*, or "lull") in effect for six months - that ended in December. Immediately after the truce expired, Hamas began firing dozens of al-Qassam rockets into Sderot every day. Life reverted to the pre-truce days of running for safe rooms and public shelters. The precast shelter above sits next to a parking lot and school.

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### Crude Oil

Crude Oil		
<b>\$50.33</b>	<b>▼2.18</b>	<b>4.15%</b>
13:52 PM EDT - 2009.04.06		



All new homes in Israel are required to have air-tight reinforced shelters. Many existing structures, especially in areas with Hamas rocket range are being refitted with safe rooms.



Once the launch of an al-Qassam is detected, a warning is issued over loudspeakers throughout the town of 20,000 people. There are multiple sensors used to detect rocket launches, like the network of blimps (photo). The warning is the two Hebrew words, "tzevah adom" - meaning "color red." The warning system and shelters have saved lives.



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Schools have been protected by external steel roofs and awnings to prevent the ball bearings and nails packed as shrapnel in the rockets from penetrating classrooms.



The last al-Qassam fired in this round struck Sderot a few hours after the unilateral Israeli ceasefire went into effect on January 18. Note the date on the rocket in the photo. It was fired to make a statement, a gesture.



The al-Qassams that have hit Sderot are on display at the city police station.



There is a new sense of patriotism and pride in Sderot as the rockets have stopped and the people believe that the Israeli armed forces have dealt a blow to Hamas. Hopefully it will last for some time.



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