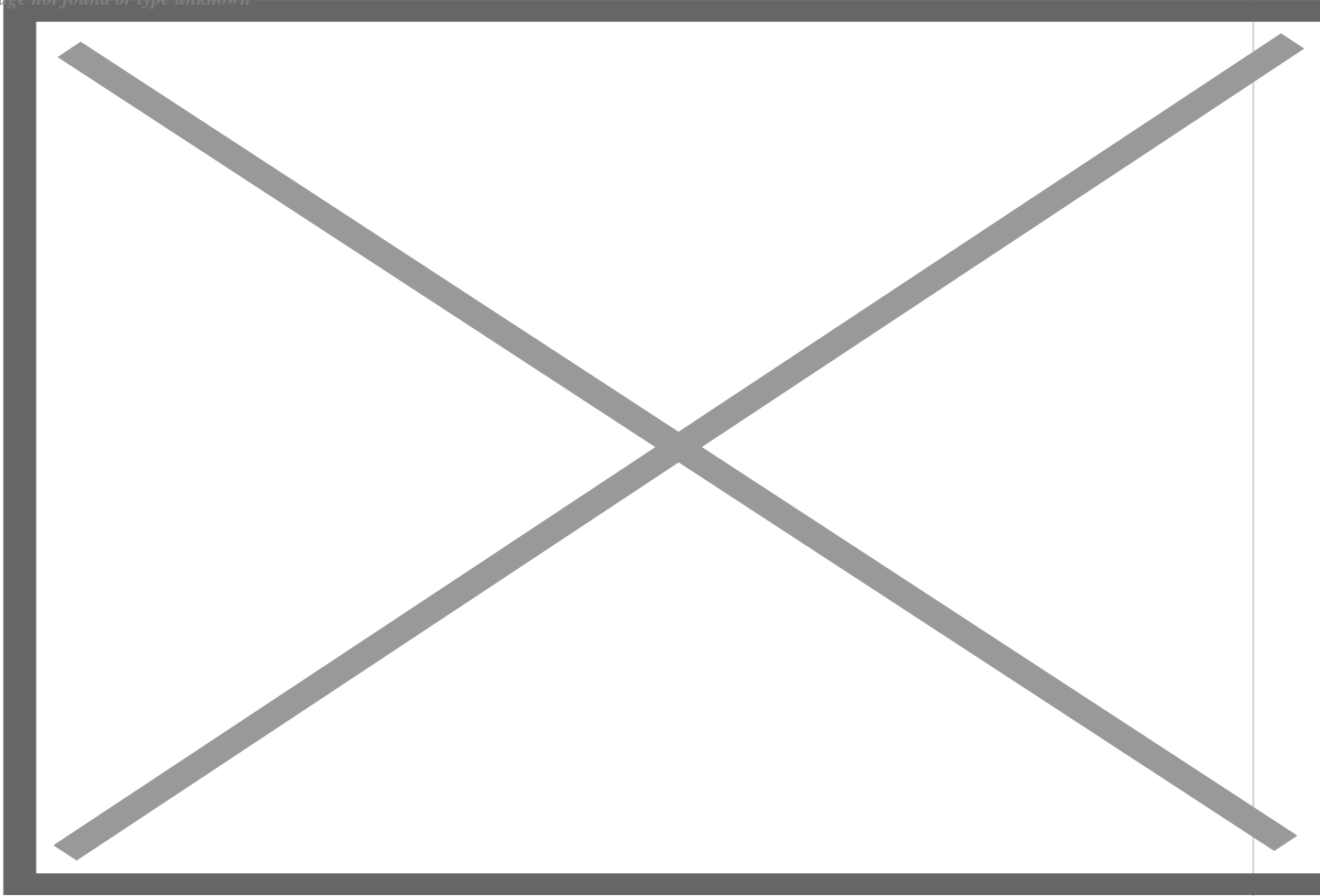


Israel completes iron wall underground Gaza barrier

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Israeli soldiers stand on guard by the fence along the Gaza Strip near Moshav Netiv HaAsara in southern Israel [Menahem Kahana/AFP]

Tel Aviv, Decmeber 8 (RHC)-- Israel has announced the completion of a sensor-equipped underground wall on its side of Gaza, a countermeasure developed after Hamas used tunnels to repel its troops during a 2014 invasion of the besieged Palestinian territory.

Israel went public with the project, which also includes an above-ground fence, a naval barrier, radar systems and command and control rooms, in 2016.

“The barrier, which is an innovative and technologically advanced project, deprives Hamas of one of the capabilities it tried to develop,” Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz said, according to a ministry statement. “[It] places an ‘iron wall,’ sensors and concrete between the terror organization and the residents of Israel’s south,” he said of the project, which beefs up an existing fence.

The ministry said the barrier, which includes hundreds of cameras, radar and other sensors, spans 65 km (40 miles) and 140,000 tonnes of iron and steel were used in its construction, which took three-and-a-half years to complete.

It said the project’s “smart fence” is more than 6 metres (20 feet) high and its maritime barrier includes means to detect infiltration by sea and a remote-controlled weapons system. The ministry did not disclose the depth of the underground wall.

Gaza also has a 14 km (8.7 miles) long border with Egypt, which has also clamped down on crossings, citing security concerns. Since 2013, Egyptian forces have demolished smuggling tunnels while Hamas, on its side, has stepped up patrols.

Israel and Hamas have fought four wars since the group seized control of the coastal Gaza Strip in 2007 from forces loyal to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

In May, an 11-day Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip killed more than 260 Palestinians, including 66 children, and wounded more than 1,900 people, according to the health ministry in Gaza. At least 12 people, including three foreign workers and two children, were killed in Israel by rockets fired by Hamas and other armed groups from Gaza during the same period.

Israel deployed its Iron Dome interceptors against the rockets and carried out extensive air attacks on Gaza. Hamas and other armed groups fired more than 4,300 rockets at Israel.

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