

# *Israel to Build Underground Wall Beneath Gaza Strip*

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Tel Aviv, June 17 (RHC)-- Israel is planning to build a massive concrete wall which will extend both below and above the ground along the besieged Gaza Strip, an Israeli media report says. According to a report by the Hebrew daily newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth, the barrier will extend several dozen meters below the ground and will also be present above the ground.

Israel says the plan is aimed at tackling what it calls threats posed by the underground tunnels set up by the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas governing the Israeli-blockaded territory.

The wall, which will stretch along the 96-kilometer (60 mile) border around the Palestinian enclave, is estimated to cost \$568 million USD. The report noted that the plan has already been cleared for publication by Israel's military censor but Israel's ministry for military affairs refused to comment on it.

Hamas says the underground tunnels are needed to defend Gaza against Israeli attacks and fire. They are also used by residents of Gaza to transfer essential supplies, including food and fuel, into the Israeli-blockaded coastal enclave. Israel continues to carry out attacks on the besieged territory of about 1.8 million people from time to time.

In early July 2014, the regime launched a 50-day offensive against Gaza, killing nearly 2,200 Palestinians, including 577 children, and injuring Over 11,100 others. In February 2016, Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to defend Israel through building barriers.

Israeli Foreign Policy also reported in March that Israel was building an "Underground Iron Dome," a system that could detect and destroy cross-border tunnels. The regime has spent more than USD 250 million on the project since 2004. In April, Tel Aviv resumed construction work on a section of a wall separating parts of the West Bank from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory.

The United Nations says nearly 60 kilometers (37 miles) of the structure is built on the Palestinian land. Israel began building the barrier of walls and fences inside the occupied West Bank in 2002.

In a non-binding decision, the International Court of Justice ruled in 2004 that construction of the barrier was illegal and, like the UN General Assembly, demanded its demolition. Tel Aviv is currently also walling off an area in the Upper Galilee near the Lebanese border and the Israeli-occupied side of Golan, citing what it claims to be threats from Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement.

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