**Israel’s first real response to Goldstone**

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Over a year after Operation Cast Lead and following wide-ranging criticism and countless international condemnations, the vindication of the IDF has finally begun.

The 500-page report revealed Monday by *The Jerusalem Post* and authored by the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center is the first real, aggressive Israeli response to the Goldstone Report, taking it apart piece-by-piece and explaining the true nature of the conflict against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

There are chapters on Hamas’s use of mosques, hospitals, ambulances and schools. There is an entire section dedicated to unmasking the Palestinian police force in the Gaza Strip, which the Goldstone Report claimed was a civilian force, saying Israel’s attacks against policemen were unjustified.

There is another section dedicated to explaining the events that led Israel to launch Operation Cast Lead in December 2008, a period of time almost completely ignored by judge Richard Goldstone and an issue illustrated most recently by the interview Col. Desmond Travers, the Irish officer who sat on the panel, gave in which he claimed only two rockets were fired into Israel in the month preceding the operation. In reality, there were close to 200.

What is interesting about the Malam report is that it does not focus on the IDF and the way it operated inside the Gaza Strip. Instead it focuses strictly on Hamas, its tactics and the way it cynically uses civilians as well as civilian infrastructure to hide behind and launch attacks from within against Israel.

The results are astounding.

While Hamas’s use of mosques was known, the Malam report shows that it was extensive and was a pillar of Hamas’s overall military doctrine (almost 100 mosques were used to store weapons and launch Kassams). While everyone has heard the story about how Hamas terror chiefs hid in the basement of Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, the Malam report reveals maps of other hospitals which were surrounded by mines, Hamas military posts and tunnels.

While Malam and its head, Col. (res.) Reuven Erlich, should be applauded for their work, the question that needs to be asked is why a non-profit organization run by former Military Intelligence officers is doing what the Foreign Ministry, IDF Spokesman’s Office and Prime Minister’s Office should have been doing immediately after the air force launched its first missile into downtown Gaza City on the first day of the operation.

The radio waves are full these days of commercials from Public Diplomacy Minister Yuli Edelstein’s new campaign to get regular Israelis, during their travels abroad, to explain that they don’t ride camels or eat only barbecued foods. Instead of wasting taxpayer’s money, Edelstein’s budget should go to establishing an official response team that will be responsible for writing such reports and disseminating them to the media, not a year after the operation but rather as the fighting is still going on.

Until this happens, Israel has only itself to blame for the level of criticism it faces after every war and operation.

And if not for Erlich and his team of expert researchers, Israel wouldn’t even have the report that Malam released on Monday. Instead we would be focused on camels and barbecues.