

Ynet-News, May 18, 2021 – Tuesday

05.18.21 – Tu- - - News Placed in May 18 spot – Tuesday
More than 3,150 Gaza rockets since May 10, killing 10 Israeli & 212 Palestinians

05.18.21 – Tu- - - News Placed in May 15 spot – Saturday
EU boosted aid to Gaza, but has no strategy for Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire

05.18.21 – Tu- - - News Placed in May 17 spot – Monday ***
Gaza Associated Press & Al Jazeera News housed Jihad offices directing attacks

05.18.21 – Tu- - - News
Arab activists stand at the entrances and ask locals not to go out to work

05.18.21 – Tu- - - News
3,150 Gaza rockets over the week, IDF struck 35 Hamas targets in 20 minutes

05.17.21 – Mo- - - News Placed in May 16 spot – Sunday
US expected to approve an expedited precision-guided weapons sale to Israel

05.18.21
More than 3,000 Gaza rockets since May 10, killing 10 Israeli & 212 Palestinians

05.18.21
Gaza rockets, IDF strikes continue amid international push for ceasefire
Egypt proposes cessation of hostilities to take effect at 6pm on Thursday; Hamas said to agree to proposal but no response yet from Israel; Netanyahu: We have set Hamas back years, fighting to end within days
News Agencies, Ynet| Published: 05.18.21 , 22:40

Rocket fire from Gaza into Israel continued throughout Tuesday amid reports of a massive international push for a ceasefire.

The IDF also struck six rocket launching posts belonging to Hamas across the Gaza Strip.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the heads of local authorities in the South that Operation Guardian of the Walls will end within several days and promised that, "fire on the Gaza border communities after the operation will elicit very fierce responses."

Egypt has proposed an Israel-Hamas ceasefire through private channels that would enter effect on Thursday at 6am, according to a report by Channel 12 news.

The report cited Palestinian sources saying Hamas has agreed to the offer, while there has been no response from Israel.

At least two people were killed and eight others wounded Tuesday afternoon when a rocket fired from Gaza made a direct hit on a packing plant at Moshav Ohad in Eshkol Regional Council.

All the casualties were foreign workers from Thailand. Two people were seriously wounded, one person was moderately hurt and the others sustained light wounds.

Some of the wounded were airlifted to Soroka Medical Center in Be'er Sheva for treatment.

Eshkol Regional Council head Gadi Yarkoni said the moshav that was hit did not have bomb shelters.

"We have been demanding the government provide adequate protection for our residents who are under constant threat from Gaza," he said.

A rocket also hit an apartment block under construction in the city of Ashdod, as massive barrages were fired at the south. There were no injuries initially reported.

The rocket fire on the South continued throughout Tuesday afternoon, with a house south of Ashkelon being hit. No casualties were reported.

Rockets also targeted Be'er Sheva, where the Iron Dome missile defense system was able to intercept the fire.

Earlier Tuesday afternoon, a 19-year-old IDF soldier was lightly wounded in heavy mortar fire from the Gaza Strip at the Erez Crossing between Israel and the Hamas-run enclave.

The military said he was preparing trucks carrying humanitarian aid into the Strip when he was hurt.

The wounded soldier was taken to Barzilai Medical Center in Ashkelon.

Residents of the Israeli communities within a 4km range of the Gaza border were ordered into bomb shelters at 1pm Tuesday until further notice.

The order came as Gaza terror groups resumed heavy rocket and mortar fire on the area following a six-hour lull.

Homes were damaged in the Eshkol Regional Council when rockets landed close by and an agricultural farm was also hit by rockets, killing some livestock.

The Kerem Shalom Crossing also came under heavy fire from Gaza as it opened to allow medical, fuel and food supplies into the Strip.

The attacks from Gaza resumed at around midday after a six-hour break, targeting communities near the border as well as the city of Ofakim some 20km from the Strip. Israel also continued to strike targets in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, toppling a six-story building that housed libraries and educational centers belonging to the Islamic University, leaving behind a massive mound of rebar and concrete slabs.

Israel warned the building's residents ahead of time, sending them fleeing into the predawn darkness, and there were no reports of casualties. Israel said it was targeting terror groups, their tunnels and rocket launchers across the territory.

The IDF said that since the early morning hours, it has hit nine rocket launchers, a squad responsible for firing anti-tank shells at targets close to the border and the homes of senior members of the Hamas terror group.

According to the military, in the past 24 hours it has targeted 12 homes belonging to senior Hamas commanders, including that of the deputy leader of the Northern Gaza Brigade.

Health officials in the Strip said that they had no reports of Palestinians killed overnight in the ongoing Israeli strikes on the enclave, the first apparent reduction of casualties since fighting erupted on May 10.

Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias arrived in Israel on Tuesday for meetings with his Israeli counterpart Gabi Ashkenazi and Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki. The purpose of the visit was said to be an expression of solidarity with Israel as Greece hoped to prevent further violence.

Dendias was also due to meet with officials in Jordan and Egypt.

In a briefing for reporters early on Tuesday, IDF Spokesperson Brig. Gen. Hidi Zilberman said that 90 projectiles were identified to have been fired from Gaza as of Monday evening and until early on Tuesday, 20 of them landed short of the border and that Iron Dome missile defense system intercepted dozens more.

In strikes overnight, the IDF said it targeted the affluent quarter of Rimal in Gaza City and approximately 15 kilometers of the Hamas tunnel system that runs beneath the Strip as is used to transport people and weaponry.

A home in the border area was hit by a rocket on Tuesday morning, causing extensive damage. The family was not in the house at the time and there were no injuries.

Israeli forces downed a UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) that approached Israel's border with Jordan on Tuesday, the military said, without specifying where the aircraft might have originated from. The drone was being checked for explosives.

Zilberman said that at least 160 terrorists have been killed in the fighting, 130 of them affiliated with Hamas.

More than 3,000 rockets have been fired at Israeli communities since the fighting began. Ten people have been killed by rockets fired at Israel, including two children.

At least 212 Palestinians have been killed, including 61 children, according to Gaza health officials.

Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts to end the fighting continued, with U.S. President Joe Biden telling Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a Monday night call that he supported a ceasefire, the White House said.

"The president expressed his support for a ceasefire and discussed U.S. engagement with Egypt and other partners towards that end," the White House said.

Biden "encouraged Israel to make every effort to ensure the protection of innocent civilians," the White House said.

"The President reiterated his firm support for Israel's right to defend itself against indiscriminate rocket attacks," it said.

The White House said the two leaders also "discussed progress in Israel's military operations against Hamas and other terrorist groups in Gaza."

The IDF said that at least five rockets were fired at Israel from Lebanon late on Monday but all fell short.

This was the second time rockets were fired from Lebanon since the fighting began. IDF returned fire and said that the Iranian-backed Hezbollah terror group was not behind the which it attributed to Palestinian groups in the area.

Bomb shelters were opened in communities along the northern border.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) said that it was bolstering security control in coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces after it detected rockets fire from southern Lebanon.

UNIFIL added on Twitter it has intensified patrols "to prevent any further incidents that endanger the safety of the local population and the security of southern Lebanon," while the head of the mission remains in contact with the involved parties to ensure stability in the area and deescalate existing tensions.

It added the situation in the area was now calm.

On Monday, sources in the U.S. said the Biden administration approved the potential sale of \$735 million in precision-guided weapons to Israel.

The Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Gregory Meeks said he will urge the president to suspend the sale, according to a report in the Washington Post.

Meeks claimed in a virtual conference Monday discussing the violence that Congress was unaware by the weapons deal, although the White House officially advised Congress of the sale on May 5, and demanded more time for deliberations.

05.18.21

EU boosted aid to Gaza, but has no strategy for Israeli-Palestinian cease fire

05.18.21

EU calls for Israeli-Palestinian cease fire

Hungary declines to join call for truce; several members call for sanctions against Israeli officials; French foreign minister calls for Middle East Quartet to resume peace talks

Reuters| Published: 05.18.21 , 20:17

European Union foreign ministers called on Tuesday for a cease fire between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas and boosted humanitarian aid for Gaza, but failed to reach the unanimity that might give the EU leverage in peacemaking.

Hungary, Israel's closest ally in the bloc, declined to join the other 26 foreign ministers in calling for a truce on their video call, convened by EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell.

General view of European Union ambassadors with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell during special video conference of EU foreign ministers to discuss recent developments in the Middle East, in particular the ongoing violent confrontation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territories, in Brussels, Belgium

Nevertheless, the other ministers vowed that the EU would try to relaunch the peace process along with the United States, Russia and the United Nations.

"As a minimum we can try to get a ceasefire, then provide humanitarian aid, and then see what can be done to restart the Middle East peace process to address the root causes of the violence," Maltese Foreign Minister Evarist Bartolo told Reuters.

"We cannot let the extremists on both sides feed off each other and set the agenda," he said.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian told reporters in Paris that the Middle East Quartet of mediators, comprising the EU, Russia, the United Nations and the United States, was the right forum to push for a resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which has been moribund since 2014.

"We must relaunch the peace process as quickly as possible and find a path to dialogue," he said.

Slow to respond

Weeks of Israeli-Palestinian tensions boiled over into armed conflict at the start of last week, and Turkey in particular has criticized the West's failure to respond quickly. Washington has long been the key broker in Middle East peacemaking, but President Joe Biden did not publicly back the idea of a ceasefire until a call with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday.

The EU is Israel's biggest trade partner and a big aid donor to the Palestinians. But it has been reluctant to use such leverage or discuss possible economic sanctions on Israel's government.

Borrell said he had spoken with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday.

At least eight smaller EU states, led by Luxembourg and including Belgium, Ireland, Malta and Finland, are vocal defenders of the Palestinians. Several Belgian lawmakers called this week for EU travel bans and asset freezes on Israeli politicians over the violence.

Germany, which still carries a burden of guilt over the Nazi crimes of World War Two, is unwilling to discuss coercive measures against Israel, but pledged 40 million euros (\$49 million) on Tuesday in humanitarian aid for civilians in Gaza.

Others, including Hungary, the Czech Republic, Austria, Greece, Cyprus and Poland, are more ready to speak out in Israel's favor. Austria flew an Israeli flag over the federal chancellery in Vienna on Friday. And in Hungary's nationalist prime minister, Viktor Orbán, Netanyahu has found an ally prepared to block statements or actions critical of Israel.

"The European Union should have, right now, a leading role (in defusing the crisis). It doesn't have that role, either because of differences in approach by member states or because there is no strategic approach from Brussels," Cypriot Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides told Cyprus' Alpha TV.

05.18.21

Gaza Associated Press & Al Jazeera news housed Jihad offices directing attacks

05.18.21

Blinken: U.S. received more info on Gaza tower bombing

American top diplomat says he cannot comment on further information received through intelligence channels on the destruction of the building that housed Associated Press, Al Jazeera offices

Reuters| Published: 05.18.21 , 17:36

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday that Washington had received further information about Israel's destruction of a Gaza high-rise that housed the local offices of the Associated Press and Al Jazeera news organizations.

"We did seek further information from Israel on this question," Blinken said at a joint briefing with Iceland's foreign minister in Reykjavik.

"It's my understanding that we've received some further information through intelligence channels, and it's not something I can comment on," he said. But he declined to comment further on it.

Israel said its fighter jets struck a multi-story building "which contained military assets belonging to the intelligence offices of the Hamas terror organization." The Associated Press' top editor Sally Buzbee on Sunday said they were yet to see any evidence from Israeli officials to justify the bombing and added that her organization wants an independent investigation into the incident.

A call from U.S. President Joe Biden on Monday in support of a ceasefire appeared to go unheeded, although cross-border fighting between Israel and Hamas seemed to abate slightly on Tuesday.

Ron Dermer, a former Israeli ambassador to Washington and now adviser to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, told CNN that evidence has been provided to Washington. Brigadier-General Hidai Zilberman, chief Israeli military spokesman, told Israel's Army Radio on Tuesday that Hamas military intelligence offices were in the building, as well as assets of Islamic Jihad.

"These are people tasked with collecting information about IDF combat troops and the southern (Israeli) communities, in order to carry out all the attacks," Zilberman said of

those allegedly based in the building. "These are the people who directed the terrorist attacks on the communities of the Gaza periphery."

05.18.21

Arab activists stand at the entrances and ask locals not to go out to work

05.18.21

Israeli troops thwart attempted terrorist attack in Hebron

Responding to Palestinian leaders' calls to confront Israeli forces, terrorist charges at troops on West Bank after gun fails, firebomb detonates in his hand; soldiers neutralize attacker; no casualties among servicemen

Elisha Ben Kimon, Yoav Zitun | Published: 05.18.21 , 11:47

Israeli troops thwarted an attempted terrorist attack in the West Bank city of Hebron on Tuesday.

Preliminary details from the incident indicate that the terrorist apparently tried to fire a weapon at soldiers but was unsuccessful due to a stop. Then, one of several explosive devices he was carrying detonated in his hand when he tried to cross the checkpoint where Israeli forces were stationed. He kept charging the soldiers, who opened fire and neutralized him.

There were no casualties among Israeli forces.

This is the ninth attempted terrorist attack on the West Bank in recent days and came shortly after the Palestinians declared a general strike and a day of rage in the territory on Tuesday in protest of Israel's military campaign against terrorist groups in the Gaza Strip and boiling tensions in Jerusalem.

The Palestinian ruling faction Fatah called for confrontations with Israeli security forces. Due to the strike, many Arab bus drivers did not show up for work, causing disruptions in public transportation throughout the West Bank. Local leaders were working with the Transportation Ministry to address the issue.

The labor action corresponds with a similar move carried out by Israeli Arabs.

As part of the strike, Arab activists will stand at the entrances to Arab communities in the morning hours and ask locals not to go out to work. The strike will reportedly include all businesses and industries except for private education.

Monday evening, armed men marched through the streets of Ramallah in preparation for the day of rage.

Palestinians also fired from a moving vehicle at an IDF force stationed outside the Palestinian village of Halhul near the settlement of Kiryat Arba. The soldiers returned fire. No injuries were reported in the incident.

05.18.21

3,150 Gaza rockets over the week, IDF struck 35 Hamas targets in 20 minutes

05.18.21

Rockets fired from Lebanon, fall short of border; source says no ceasefire before Thursday

Rockets fired from Lebanon at Israel; four rockets hit southern city of Sderot, no injuries reported; Biden, Netanyahu to speak again Monday amid international push for end to eight days of fighting; PM consults with defense chiefs; UN General Assembly set to convene on Gaza

Ynet, Reuters | Updated: 05.18.21, 00:13

The IDF said late on Monday that at least five rockets were fired from Lebanon towards Israel, but all fell short of the border and crashed in Lebanese territory.

This was the second time rockets were fired from Lebanon since the fighting along Israel's southern border with Gaza began last Monday.

Bomb shelters were opened in communities along the northern border.

Meanwhile, a senior Israeli official said Monday there won't be a ceasefire on the Gaza borders the U.S. and other countries pushed for an end to the eight-day round of fighting.

The rocket fire from Gaza continued to pound southern Israel on Monday night, as de facto Gaza rulers Hamas threatened to launch another barrage at the Tel Aviv area if the IDF continued to strike buildings in the Strip.

Four rockets hit the Gaza border city of Sderot on Monday night, causing damage but no injuries.

According to the IDF, at least 190 rockets were launched by the terror factions in Gaza at Israeli communities since the morning, 25 of which crashed within the Palestinian enclave.

The military said it had attacked a command center of the Hamas internal intelligence services in northern Gaza, claiming it was used by the group's military wing. Shortly before the strike, the IDF said it killed five militants as they were preparing to launch rockets.

That strike followed an attack on Gaza City in which a six-story building was hit. Meanwhile, Gaza border area residents were instructed by the military to remain in bomb shelters until further notice.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held consultations with the upper echelon of the security services, the National Security Council and the IDF later in the evening and said Israel will continue to strike Hamas until it completes its objectives.

U.S. President Joe Biden told Netanyahu in a phone call on Monday that he supported a ceasefire in the fighting between Israel and Gaza factions, the White House said.

The UN General Assembly is scheduled to convene on Thursday to discuss the deteriorating situation in Gaza. Israeli officials said that due to a majority of pro-Palestinian members, they believed a condemnation of Israel would be made. Unlike in the Security Council, the U.S. has no veto power in the General Assembly and cannot prevent it from convening.

The IDF Home Front Command ordered schools as far from the Gaza border as Netanya, to remain closed at least until Thursday.

Also on Monday, the IDF assassinated a senior Islamic Jihad commander in the Gaza Strip in a drone strike. The target of the operation was Hussam Abu Harbeed, commander of the Islamic Jihad's northern brigade. He took the position in late 2019 after his predecessor, Bahaa Abu al-Atta, was also assassinated by the Israeli military.

Palestinians also said the IDF attacked a car in the western part of Gaza City and at least three people were killed in the incident. The military said the three tried to launch an attack from sea using an unmanned underwater vehicle.

The terror group responded by firing a barrage of rockets into Be'er Sheva, Ashkelon, Kiryat Malakhi and Ashdod, where a residential home sustained a direct hit. Three people were lightly wounded in the attack.

Earlier, Hamas fired rocket barrages at southern Israeli cities overnight and early morning while Israel struck a host of terror targets, including an unusually long underground attack tunnel.

Despite mounting international calls for a ceasefire, there was no sign of any imminent end to the most serious hostilities in years between Israel and the terror group that rules the densely-populated enclave, where 2 million Palestinians live.

Throughout the night, rocket alert sirens also blared in Be'er Sheva, Ashkelon Ofakim, Netivot and Israeli communities near the border. The Iron Dome intercepted the majority of the projectiles, with the rest falling in open areas. There were no reports of casualties from the attacks.

The military said that since 7pm on Sunday, 60 rockets have been fired from Gaza into Israel and at least 10 rockets fell inside the Gaza Strip.

In response, Israeli fighter jets struck nine residences belonging to high-ranking Hamas commanders. Some of the homes, it said, were used for weapons storage.

Roads, security buildings, militants' training camps and houses were also bombed in Israeli attacks that seemed to be focused on Gaza City, witnesses said. The sound of explosions echoed in many parts of the Palestinian enclave overnight.

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit said it struck 35 Hamas targets in 20 minutes, including a network of underground terror tunnels, one of which was 15km in length. "The attack is part of a wide-ranging IDF operation to significantly damage the underground network of terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip," the military said, adding that one of the tunnels was located next to a kindergarten.

On Sunday evening, an Israeli air strike in Gaza reportedly destroyed several homes. Palestinian health officials said killed 42 people, including 10 children. Israeli military said the homes were housing Hamas terrorists and served as terror infrastructure. The latest developments appeared to have injected more urgency into Washington's calls for calm, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrote on Twitter: "All parties need to deescalate tensions - the violence must end immediately", after he spoke with Egypt's foreign minister about ongoing violence in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. Spoke today with Egyptian Foreign Minister Shoukry to discuss the ongoing violence in Israel, West Bank, and Gaza. All parties need to deescalate tensions – the violence must end immediately.

At a U.N. Security Council meeting on Sunday, the United States said it has made clear to Israel, the Palestinians and others that it is ready to offer support "should the parties seek a ceasefire".

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel's campaign in Gaza was continuing at "full force", and that deterrence had to be achieved to prevent future conflict with Hamas.

In the meantime, on U.S. network CBS' "Face the Nation" program, Netanyahu defended another Israeli air strike a day earlier that destroyed a 12-story building where the Associated Press and the Al Jazeera TV network had offices.

He said the structure also housed the militant group's intelligence office, making it a legitimate target. He said Israel had passed information about the building to U.S. authorities. A U.S. intelligence official did not respond to a request for comment.

Israel had given advance warning to occupants to leave. The Associated Press has condemned the strike and called on Israel to present evidence that Hamas was in the building.

The Gaza Health Ministry put the death toll since the hostilities flared at 197, including 58 children and 34 women. Ten people have been killed in Israel, including two children, Israeli authorities say.

The Israeli military said that Hamas, a group regarded by Israel, the United States and the European Union as a terrorist movement, and other armed factions have fired more than 3,150 rockets from Gaza over the past week.

Hamas began its rocket assault last Monday after weeks of tensions over a court case to evict several Palestinian families in East Jerusalem, and in retaliation for Israeli police clashes with Palestinians near the city's Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest site, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

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05.17.21

US expected to approve an expedited precision-guided weapons sale to Israel

05.17.21

Biden administration approved \$735 million arms sale to Israel - sources
Congressional aids say congress advised of intended sale of Joint Direct Attack
Munitions and no objection is expected from either political parties despite growing calls
among progressive democrats to take a tougher stance against the Netanyahu government
Reuters| Published: 05.17.21 , 20:43

President Joe Biden's administration approved the potential sale of \$735 million in
precision-guided weapons to Israel, and congressional sources said on Monday that U.S.
lawmakers were not expected to object to the deal despite violence between Israel and
Palestinian militants.

Three congressional aides said Congress was officially notified of the intended
commercial sale on May 5, as part of the regular review process before major foreign
weapons sales agreements can go ahead.

The sale was first reported by the Washington Post.
Congress was informed of the planned sale in April, as part of the normal informal
review process before of the formal notification on May 5. Under U.S. law, the formal
notification opens up a 15-day window for Congress to object to the sale, which is not
expected despite the ongoing violence.

The sale of Joint Direct Attack Munitions, or JDAMs, made by Boeing Co, was
considered routine at the time, before the start last week of the fiercest hostilities in the
region in years.

There were no objections at the time by the Democratic and Republican leaders of the
congressional foreign affairs committees that review such sales, aides said.
Asked for comment, a State Department spokesperson noted that the department is
restricted under federal law and regulations from publicly commenting on or confirming
details of licensing activity related to direct commercial sales like the JDAMs agreement.

"We remain deeply concerned about the current violence and are working towards
achieving a sustainable calm," the spokesperson said.

Strong support for Israel is a core value for both Democratic and Republican members of
the U.S. Congress, despite calls from a few of the most progressive Democrats to take a
tougher stance against the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

U.S. law allows Congress to object to weapons sales, but it is unlikely to do so in this
case. Because Israel is among a handful of countries whose military deals are approved
under an expedited process, the typical window for objecting will close before lawmakers
can pass a resolution of disapproval, even if they were inclined to.