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Israel-Gaza ceasefire comes into effect, ending 11 days of intensive fighting  
IDF air strikes in Strip and rocket fire on southern Israel continued almost until deadline to end hostilities; Egypt, which brokered agreement, dispatches delegations to both sides;  
Al Arabiya: Cairo planning 'peace summit' on long-term calm  
Itamar Eichner, News Agencies | Updated: 05.21.21 , 02:06

A ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian terror groups in the Gaza Strip came into effect at 2am Friday, ending 11 days of intensive fighting.

Israel's security cabinet earlier voted unanimously to approve the truce after a three-hour debate.

In an official statement, the cabinet said the ceasefire was proposed by Egypt and would be "mutual and unconditional."

A member of the Hamas terror group that controls Gaza told Reuters that it and Israel would enter the "mutual and simultaneous" truce at 2am on Friday. Egyptian state TV later confirmed the timing of the ceasefire.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said Thursday night that the cabinet had unanimously approved the truce without preconditions on the recommendation of all

defense officials, including IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi, Shin Bet head Nadav Argaman, Mossad Director Yossi Cohen and National Security Advisor Meir Ben-Shabbat.

The statement said that Israel's achievements in Operation Guardian of the Walls were "unprecedented."

"The political leadership emphasized that the reality on the ground will be that which determines the future of the campaign," the statement said.

Rocket fire on southern Israel continued on Thursday night despite the reports of an imminent ceasefire. The IDF also continued its attacks on targets in the Gaza Strip. The cabinet vote came hours after Qatari-based news outlet Al Jazeera reported that Israel had officially updated Egypt that it was ready for a cessation of hostilities. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu convened the security cabinet at 7pm Thursday to discuss the Gaza operation and ceasefire efforts.

According to Saudi outlet Al Arabiya, Egypt presented Israel with the draft for a ceasefire on Thursday morning, but there was still some disagreement about the timeframe for it to take effect.

The report also said that Egypt was planning to hold a "peace summit" between Israelis and Palestinians on long-term calm.

The White House said Thursday that it had seen reports of a move towards a ceasefire, which is said appeared to be encouraging.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi spoke to U.S. President Joe Biden on Thursday to discuss the de-escalation of violence, the Egyptian presidency said.

Sisi and Biden agreed to continue talks and coordination between their countries in the coming period in order to contain the situation, the presidency said.

Two Egyptian security delegations will be sent to monitor the ceasefire deal, diplomatic sources said Thursday night.

The delegations were being sent to Tel Aviv and the Palestinian territories to "monitor [the ceasefire's] implementation and procedures to maintain stable conditions permanently," the sources said.

Meanwhile, Israel and the terror groups in Gaza continued their cross-border attacks throughout Thursday with the IDF firing on targets in the Strip and the terror groups launching wave after wave of rockets at Israeli communities in the south.

Health officials in the Hamas-run Strip said 232 Palestinians, including 65 children and 39 women, have been killed since the fighting began on May 10, and more than 1,900 have been wounded in airstrikes.

Israel says it has killed at least 160 combatants in Gaza and put its own death toll at 12, with hundreds of people treated for injuries in rocket attacks that have caused panic and sent people rushing into shelters.

Biden on Wednesday urged Netanyahu to seek "de-escalation" and a Hamas political official, Moussa Abu Marzouk, said he believed a ceasefire would be reached "within a day or two."

Senior Fatah official Jibril Rajoub, who is close to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, also said that a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel could happen over the next 24 hours thanks to Arab mediation efforts led by Egypt.

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05.20.21

Hamas convey: Sure we fired rockets, but the Zionist enemy started this

05.20.21

Hamas postmortem: The 'Zionists' started Gaza fighting

Khaled Mashal, the terror group's leader in Qatar claims victory in fiercest fighting enclave has seen since 2014; calls for West Bank intifada and accuses Netanyahu of launching campaign for his own legal and political interests

Elior Levy| Published: 05.20.21 , 23:41

With a ceasefire set to begin Friday 2am after 11 days of fighting between Gaza and Israel, the Palestinian terror group that rules the enclave has already begun to dissect the events leading up to the heaviest round of violence since the 2014 war.

Hamas leader Khaled Mashal, who is based in Doha, told Qatari news outlet Al Jazeera on Thursday that Hamas had come out on top in the fighting.

"Sure we fired rockets, but the Zionist enemy was the one who started this with its aggression at the al-Aqsa Mosque," he said, referring to clashes at the Jerusalem site holy to both Jews and Muslims that preceded the conflict.

"Mohammed Deif [the leader of Hamas' military wing] warned the Zionists to not play with fire in al-Aqsa and [the East Jerusalem neighborhood of] Sheikh Jarrah, but they chose not to listen," Mashal said.

According to Mashal, the rockets launched from Gaza at the Jerusalem area on May 10 were meant to convey several messages to Israel.

"Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa are our red line," he said. "We all understand that these locations are close to our hearts. You cannot separate us [Palestinians] - we are all united in this issue.

"The people, Jerusalem and the holy places, the siege on Gaza and the right of return. From Al-Aqsa and Sheikh Jarrah, the campaign moved to the West Bank, into Israel and also to Gaza with our rockets. Until we are able to rid of the occupier completely."

"These people [Palestinians] will not stop fighting despite the difficult conditions," Mashal said. "The Palestinian-Arab situation is very bad, but our people stick to their lands and rights and will continue the resistance."

Mashal also stated that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "tried to take over Israel's agenda so he would not be kicked out of power and be replaced by a different government, so he would not go to jail."

"This will not happen at the cost of our blood," he added. "The Zionists and their leadership will pay for this."

Another Hamas official speaking to Al Jazeera said that the organization "had achieved unprecedented support worldwide."

"Though most messages from the international community are still pro-Israeli, the age of Trump has come to an end," he said. "There is a crisis within U.S. politics, there are calls for a ceasefire within the American government."

Asked what does Hamas expect after the fighting will be over, Mashal said: "We have entered a new phase. This is different from past rounds of fighting. The resistance in the land of Palestine has been able to lay the groundwork for a strategy to liberate Palestine and return to al-Aqsa. We bombed Tel Aviv, Ramon [Airport near Eilat] and all of Israel's home front. The Zionist entity does not have an unbeatable army. Israel survives on external support."

Mashal also called the Palestinians in the West Bank to "unite and start an intifada in all of Palestine," and demanded the end of the Palestinian Authority's security coordination with Israel.

"The issue of Jerusalem and al-Aqsa is enough to unite Arab leadership around us," he said.

05.20.21

IDF Research Division eliminated significant targets & Hamas engineers

05.20.21

IDF: Most main targets in Gaza have been hit

After years of close monitoring, the military's intelligence arm expresses satisfaction with severe blows delivered to Hamas' strategic capabilities, including production of rockets and other advanced armaments

Yoav Zitun| Published: 05.20.21 , 13:49

Military Intelligence Directorate officials said on Thursday that the IDF had almost depleted its target bank within the Gaza Strip as the current round of fighting with Palestinian terrorist groups may be nearing its closure.

Some even began summarizing the campaign, dubbed "Operation Guardian of the Walls" in Israel, which was launched after years of close inspection on the targets struck over the span of eleven days.

Intelligence official already announced last weekend that a series of Israeli blows had destroyed Hamas' rocket production capabilities during the early days of fighting, so that if the 14,000 rockets with which the terrorist organization reportedly began fighting had depleted, then it would not have been able to produce new ones.

The military continued its strikes in the Hamas-controlled territory; however, with much less intensity compared to previous days of fighting.

Israeli fighter jets attacked a Hamas offensive tunnel in Beit Hanoun, as well as two underground rocket launchers in Jabalya, which were used, among other things, to fire rockets at Tel Aviv.

In addition, the military said that it had attacked other terrorist targets throughout the Gaza Strip overnight, including military infrastructure at the home of the commander of Hamas' northern brigade in Khan Yunis, Ali Abu Zarqa, weapons production sites and several launch and underground positions.

Meanwhile, officers in the Research Division were already referring to actions that began with their intelligence work in the past tense, evidence of the critical mass of high-quality targets that have already been attacked and destroyed.

"We have carried out plans that we have been working on for years," said a Research Division officer entrusted with collecting a bank of quality targets, including Gaza's subterranean tunnel and rocket production systems. "If I were to close my eyes and imagine how many of our plans would be executed and in such a short and successful period of time -- I would not have been able to envision this."

The Research Division has developed to grant them a deep understanding of each target and its potential impact on the ongoing campaign.

"We've eliminated senior Hamas engineers, experts in rocket production and other types of armaments," the officer said. "These are sources of knowledge that otherwise don't exist in the Gaza. It's also hard to find a replacement for them as opposed to senior field commanders that are eliminated. We're talking about research and development experts that are unique to a para-military guerilla group that specializes in fighting in densely built places such as Gaza."

The Research Division confirmed that most significant targets that were pre-prepared were already attacked, but it was focusing on creating new targets during fighting using artificial intelligence, cross-referencing sources and analyzing anomalies.

The intelligence arm also recorded partial success in two other fields -- locating and destroying the hundreds of long-range rockets that have been successfully stashed and locating senior Hamas figures, such as the terror outfit military wing's shadowy leader Mohammed Deif and Hamas chief Yahya Sinwar who continued to command the group's forces.

According to Palestinian sources, the IDF targeted both Deif and Sinwar but they managed to escape in the nick of time.

05.20.21

Electric Union announced no repair to Gaza power until KIAs & captives returned

05.20.21

'Electric Company won't repair Gaza power lines until KIAs, captives returned'

Workers' union refuses to repair five of ten high-voltage power lines supplying electricity to Gaza damaged by rockets fired from Palestinian enclave; corporate says 'electricity is an essential product outside the conflict'

Tzahi Sade| Published: 05.20.21 , 11:34

The Israel Electric Company workers' union announced Thursday morning that they will not repair the power lines to the Gaza Strip that were damaged by Hamas fire until the terror outfit returns to Israel the bodies of fallen soldiers Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul, as well Israeli Avera Mengistu, who is believed to be held in Hamas captivity since 2014.

In response to the union's announcement, IEC corporate said that "the company is a government company that is subject to the provisions of the law, and believes that electricity is an essential product outside the conflict."

On Saturday, the IEC announced that five of the ten high-voltage lines supplying Gaza with power had been damaged by rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. The company added that the power lines will not be fixed until their workers can access them safely.

The IEC workers' union's announcement follows the call of Oron Shaul's brother, Aviram Shaul, not to conclude the operation against Gaza's terrorist factions until the bodies of his brother and Goldin are retrieved, alongside Mengistu and Hisham Al-Saeed, an Israeli Bedouin who has been held captive in Gaza since April 2015.

יומר שתכמב למשח ידומע

"Senior members of both the defense and political establishments have consistently stressed that Israel will do everything in its power to retrieve Oron, Hadar and the other captives held in Gaza. These aspirations seem to dissipate every time though," said Shaul. "I hear quite a few people on the news say that the prisoner and missing persons issue should not be a prerequisite for ending this operation, and I ask myself, if not now, then when?" he added.

05.19.21

Israel hit tunnel network, command centers & headquarters of Islamic Jihad

05.19.21

Israel pounds tunnel network in Gaza as Hamas keeps up rocket fire  
IDF says the strikes also targeted head of Hamas military wing, who escaped 7 assassination attempts in the past, but they were unsuccessful; meanwhile, ceasefire talks stalled over Hamas demands to condition end of fighting on Jerusalem situation

Yoav Zitun| Published: 05.19.21 , 08:30

Israel heavily bombarded the network of underground attack tunnels in Gaza and Palestinian militants kept up cross-border rocket fire on Wednesday, with no firm sign of any imminent ceasefire despite international calls to end more than a week of fighting.

Israeli leaders said they were pressing on with an offensive against Hamas and Islamic Jihad, but an Israeli military spokesman acknowledged that with an estimated 12,000 missiles and mortars in the groups' Gaza arsenal, "they still have enough rockets to fire".

IDF Spokesperson Brig. Gen. Hadai Zilberman on Wednesday morning said that 15 kilometers (7.45 miles) of the so-called "metro" of attack tunnels came under strikes by 52 planes, dropping 122 bombs over a 25-minute period in the southern part of the Strip.

The IDF said the tunnels were used to launch rockets at the south and enable the movement of terrorists and weapons from inside the Strip to the sea. The spokesperson added that after all targets in the Rimal neighborhood in Gaza City were "exhausted" on Tuesday, the overnight strikes were concentrated in Khan Yunis and Raffa, from where rockets were fired at Be'er Sheva and other southern cities and communities.

"We hit command centers, offices of the Internal Security Services and the headquarters of the Islamic Jihad," Zilberman said, adding that at least 10 members of both the Hamas and the Islamic Jihad were killed.

Since the beginning of the fighting, more than 100 Hamas and Islamic Jihad operatives were killed.

Mohammed Deif, head of the Hamas military wing and the IDF's most wanted Hamas official, has survived two attacks directed against him, according to the military.

Deif was hiding deep underground and his bunker was attacked from different directions using a variety of weapons but Israeli forces were unable to kill him. Over the years, Deif apparently survived at least seven attempts on his life, which left him disabled.

Seven other members of Hamas were also targeted by the military, some were injured but all survived, the spokesperson said.

In the meantime, rocket fire from Gaza late Tuesday targeted south-central Israel, including the cities of Rehovot and Ness Ziona. Hamas said it was aiming its fire at six air force bases from where Israeli jets take off to strike Gaza.

Hamas fire on southern communities resumed early Wednesday, shortly before 6am. Meanwhile, efforts to bring about a ceasefire were reported by the Saudi-owned Al Arabiya network late on Tuesday. According to the report, Egypt proposed a cessation of fighting as of 6am on Thursday.

Egypt asked for a temporary lull to allow humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip and enable the evacuation of wounded out for treatment. Sources in Gaza said the terror factions were prepared to accept the Egyptian offer.

But a Hamas statement released on Tuesday denied the reports. "Efforts are underway to bring about an end to the fighting and our demands are known," the statement said.

The U.S. and the EU were also appear to back Egypt's efforts to bring about an end to hostilities. Cairo offered to host an Israeli delegation to negotiate the ceasefire terms.

The Qatari-based Al Jazeera network, however, reported that the agreement is far from being reached. Israeli sources confirmed the report. "There is no Israeli commitment to end the fighting," one source said.

Sources in the cabinet said the fighting will end after Israel completes its objectives and before the political costs increase, which could happen "within days".

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tasked National Security Advisor, Meir Ben Shabbat with coordinating ceasefire negotiations with Egypt, but did not authorize him to finalize any agreement.

Thus far, the sources said, Israel has politely declined Egyptian offers to end the fighting. This is apparently due to Hamas demands to stop evictions of Palestinian families from Jerusalem's Sheik Jarrah neighborhood, a condition Israelis are not willing to accept on any terms.

Israel is also struggling to introduce into any negotiated agreement the return of two Israeli soldiers believed dead and two civilians, held by Hamas in Gaza.

Hamas for their part will likely reject any Israeli demands that would impact their ability to rebuild their military capability after the fighting. The sources believe that a one-sided ceasefire would be the likely outcome of any talks.