

Newsletter Wednesday November 14, 2018

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IDF destroys major Hamas assets as rocket barrage challenges air defenses

Israeli Air Force struck 160 Hamas assets and Islamic Jihad targets, including "four unique strategic assets," IDF says • Hamas TV station, intelligence and internal security headquarters leveled • IDF: Air defenses cannot offer hermetic protection.

Lilach Shoval

The ruins of the Hamas TV station building in Gaza, Tuesday | Photo: Reuters

The IDF released data on Tuesday on the scope of its strikes on the Gaza Strip over the previous two days, as a fragile truce brokered between Israel and Hamas came into force.

In the worst flare-up in the area since 2014, Gaza terrorists fired hundreds of rockets and mortar shells on Israeli communities near the border over Monday night and Tuesday morning, killing one person and wounding 55.

The IDF said over 460 projectiles were fired from Gaza in under 36 hours, 100 of which were intercepted by the Iron Dome defense system, while over 200 landed in open areas, 30 hit urban areas in southern Israel, and the rest hit on the Gazan side of the border.

The Israeli Air Force struck 160 Hamas assets and over a dozen Islamic Jihad targets in Gaza, including what it called "four unique strategic assets."

One of the targets destroyed was Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV headquarters in Gaza City. Other high-value targets included Hamas' intelligence headquarters, its internal security building, a research and development center and several weapon arsenals.

The IDF stressed that to limit casualties in non-military sites, Israel employed a practice often referred to as a "knock on the roof," in which small projectiles are dropped on rooftops to inform occupants that an airstrike is imminent and give them a chance to evacuate.

A defense official said the targets "have great importance for Hamas, both practically and psychologically."

The missile Islamic Jihad claims to have fired at Ashkelon

"We are planning our next steps, with the understanding that the situation can calm down or flare up rapidly," the official said.

"The IAF is prepared to act according to the orders we receive. These are surgical and aggressive strikes. When you look at the result, the price exacted [from Hamas] is very high."

IDF Spokesman Brig. Gen. Ronen Manelis admitted Tuesday that the massive rocket barrage had posed a challenge to the Iron Dome defense system.

Stressing that air defenses cannot provide "hermetic defense," Manelis said, "The way rockets are fired at certain cities creates a challenge for our air defenses. ... The homefront's defense concept is based not only on Iron Dome, but also on the Homefront Command's guidelines for civilians."

He said Iron Dome's interception rate is close to 90% and the system is programmed to counter only projectiles likely to hit populated areas.

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit said Tuesday that the Israeli Navy had destroyed several Hamas vessels "used to carry out maritime terrorist attacks against Israeli forces and civilians."

Also on Tuesday, the Islamic Jihad revealed on its website the mid-range missile it claims it used to hit a house in Ashkelon.

The terrorist group claimed this was the first time it had used this missile, but offered no other details.

Newsletter Tuesday November 13, 2018

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Gaza rockets pound Israel, killing one, wounding dozens

Palestinian man living in Ashkelon is killed when rocket hits apartment building •

Emergency medical services report treating at least 55 people across southern Israel •

Israeli officials say more than 400 rockets and mortars hit Israel over Monday night.

Lilach Shoval and News Agencies

A house in Ashkelon damaged by a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip, Monday | Photo: Reuters

Gaza terrorists kept up their **most intense rocket fire on Israel since the 2014** Gaza war over Monday night and Tuesday morning, killing a civilian in Ashkelon and wounding dozens across Israel's south.

Starting from Monday afternoon, hundreds of projectiles fired from Gaza pounded Israeli communities, a day after a botched Israeli intelligence operation in Gaza that resulted in the deaths of an Israeli officer and seven Hamas operatives, including a key Hamas commander.

Magen David Adom emergency medical personnel were on the highest alert level, administering first aid to at least 55 people in a number of locations across southern Israel.

The man killed in Ashkelon was Mahmoud Bashir Abu Asbah, 48, from the Arab village of Halhul, near Hebron. He was killed when a rocket fired from Gaza scored a direct hit on an apartment building. His body was only discovered an hour after the impact, when a civilian surveyor working for a construction company came to film the damage and found the dead man and a seriously wounded woman in her 40s in the rubble.

The IDF said some 400 rockets and mortars had been launched from Gaza since Monday afternoon, with about 100 of them intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome defense system.

School was canceled in many areas in southern Israel and a local election was postponed because of the threat of further attacks.

Over recent months, the sides have come close to a major escalation several times, only to step back in favor of giving a chance to a long-term Egyptian-mediated truce.

However, the current level of escalation and angry rhetoric, including Hamas' warnings to strike deeper inside Israel unless Israel halts its strikes in Gaza, may make it more difficult to restore calm.

Israel's Diplomatic-Security Cabinet, which had been due to meet Tuesday afternoon, pushed its meeting forward to 9 a.m. to discuss the next steps.

The eruption of fighting cast doubt over recent understandings brokered by Egypt and U.N. officials to reduce tensions. Earlier this week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defended those understandings, saying he was doing everything possible to avoid another war. But he will now be under intense pressure to retaliate, given Hamas' unrelenting rocket salvos.

Earlier on Monday, Hamas fired a guided missile that struck a bus from which soldiers had just disembarked. The missile represented an upgrade from the largely inaccurate projectiles typically fired from the Gaza Strip. The strike set the bus on fire, sending a

large plume of black smoke over the area. A 19-year-old Israeli soldier was seriously wounded.

The airstrikes and rocket barrages resumed at dawn Tuesday after nearly two hours of calm.

IDF spokesman Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus said the Israeli military had enhanced its deployment along the border but had yet to mobilize any reserves. He said Gazan terrorist groups are believed to have an arsenal of more than 20,000 rockets and mortars of different calibers and ranges.

Israel and Hamas have fought three wars since the Islamic militant group seized control of Gaza from the internationally backed Palestinian Authority in 2007.

Newsletter Monday November 12, 2018

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[Elite IDF officer killed, another wounded in Gaza flare-up](#)

[Seven Hamas operatives, including senior military wing officer, killed in a clash with IDF commandos](#) • [Military: Operation was not an assassination attempt, but an intelligence-gathering mission that went awry](#) • [Hamas: Israel will pay for its actions.](#)

News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

Palestinians inspect the remains of a vehicle that was destroyed in an Israeli airstrike in Khan Younis, Sunday | Photo: Reuters

An Israeli special forces officer was killed and another was wounded on Sunday night during a clash with Hamas operatives in the southern Gaza Strip, the military said. Seven Hamas operatives were killed in the incident.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was in Paris for a summit of world leaders, cut his visit short and flew back to Israel. He was expected to convene a security assessment meeting in Jerusalem at noon, Monday.

Many of the details were not approved for publication due to the sensitive nature of the military action Sunday, but according to available details, [IDF special forces operating in the southern Gaza town of Khan Younis were discovered by Hamas operatives.](#) A fierce

gunfight erupted, and the Israeli troops, who eventually found themselves trapped, radioed for aerial assistance, which arrived within minutes, allowing for their extraction.

The IDF said it could not release details on the casualties' identity, naming the slain officer only as Lt. Col. M.

The second officer sustained moderate wounds and was admitted to the Soroka University Medical Center in Beersheba in stable condition, the military said.

Sunday's clash sparked a flare-up on the border as Palestinian terrorists fired 17 projectiles at southern Israel.

The Color Red early warning rocket alert system repeatedly blared across the Gaza-vicinity communities, sending residents scrambling for shelter over a dozen times between 10:45 p.m. and 1:15 a.m.

The military said the Iron Dome air defense system intercepted three rockets, with the others landing in open areas.

The bodies of the Hamas operatives killed Sunday
Following the night's events, the military reinforced its deployment in the Gaza sector.

Tensions in the area have prompted the Homefront Command to cancel the school day in a number of Israeli border-adjacent communities and close several major roads in the area. Train traffic was also suspended south of Beersheba.

Sunday's development shattered what appeared to be a turning point after months of Palestinian border riots and arson terrorism. Prior to the flare-up, an Egyptian-brokered lull appeared to be holding.

The clashes sparked a wave of online rumors about the nature of the operation in Gaza, with some saying an Israeli soldier had been abducted.

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit eventually issued an unusual statement, clarifying that the operation in Khan Younis was not an assassination raid, but rather an intelligence-gathering mission that went awry, and asking the public "to refrain from spreading unsubstantiated rumors."

The statement said that while the troops sustained a loss, they were all extracted from the area safely.

In a press briefing, IDF Spokesperson Brig. Gen. Ronen Manelis said, "IDF troops operating in Gaza with the aim of maintaining Israel's advantage over its enemies became trapped in a highly complex situation."

"The soldiers acted heroically to neutralize the threat and facilitated their extraction back to Israel. Unfortunately, they sustained casualties – Lt. Col. M., whose acts of heroism cannot be made public. Another officer was moderately wounded as well," the statement said.

Manelis stressed that the aim of the Israeli operation was not the assassination of a Hamas official or the abduction of an enemy agent.

"Those kinds of missions are taken extremely seriously and usually stay under the radar."

He noted that "IDF forces in the area have been reinforced and remain ready for any scenario."

Facebook

Hamas' announcement of the "martyrdom" of Nour el-Deen Baraka, its commander in Khan Younis

Gaza's Health Ministry confirmed that seven people were killed in Sunday's clash, saying several others were wounded.

Palestinian media shared photos of the vehicle allegedly used by the Israeli forces inside Gaza, saying the car was bombed from the air by Israeli aircraft after the extraction in order to demolish any trace of classified information or equipment.

The Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing, said that "a special force of the Zionist enemy infiltrated 3 kilometers [2 miles] into Khan Younis and assassinated a commander of our forces. The withdrawal of the enemy led to the martyrdom of a number of people."

Hamas later named the operative killed in the clash as Nour el-Deen Baraka, the local military commander, who was reportedly heavily involved in the terrorist group's tunnel enterprise.

Hamas further accused Israel of sabotaging the emerging cease-fire agreement brokered by Egypt and supported by Qatar, and warned that "Israel will be made to pay for its actions."

Islamic Jihad warned Monday that the IDF will "pay a heavy price" if it continues to enter the Gaza Strip.

"We are prepared to counter any act of aggression," the terrorist group said.

The al-Quds Brigades, the Islamic Jihad's military wing, has placed all of its operatives in Gaza on alert, the group said.

Newsletter Monday November 5, 2018

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| Iran launches defense drill as US reinstates sanctions

Iranian president warns of "war situation" in Iran, labeling the U.S. a "bullying enemy" • Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman welcomes renewed U.S. sanctions, says they will deal a "critical blow" to Iran's military presence across the region.

News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani speaks with officials in Tehran, Monday | Photo: AP

Iran greeted the reimposition of U.S. sanctions Monday with air defense drills and an acknowledgment from President Hassan Rouhani that Iran is facing a "war situation." The moves intensified regional tensions as the hard-line U.S. approach to the Islamic republic takes hold.

The sanctions that took effect on Monday mainly target Iran's oil sector and effectively end all the economic benefits the United States had granted Iran under the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. For now, Iran continues to abide by the curbs in the accord that limit its enrichment of uranium.

However, Iranian officials have made a point in recent months of declaring that uranium enrichment could resume at any time, faster than before.

The new U.S. sanctions particularly hurt Iran's vital oil industry, a crucial source of hard currency for the country's anemic economy. The Iranian currency, the rial, has plummeted over the last year, sending prices for everything from mobile phones to medicines skyrocketing.

"Today, Iran is able to sell its oil and it will sell," Rouhani vowed Monday as the sanctions took effect.

Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman welcomed the newly restored U.S. sanctions in a tweet on Monday, saying they will deal a "critical blow" to Iran's military presence around the Middle East.

The Trump administration's decision to restore sanctions "is the sea change the Middle East has been waiting for," he said.

Israel has been a fierce opponent of the 2015 nuclear deal, from which the U.S. withdrew in May, saying it failed to rein in Iran's regional military threat.

Meanwhile, Iranian state television aired footage of air defense systems and anti-aircraft batteries in two-day military maneuvers underway across a vast stretch of the country's north. The exercise included simulations of surface-to-air missiles shooting down a drone.

The drill was to continue through Tuesday.

Iranian army Gen. Habibillah Sayyari said both the national army and the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard were taking part in the exercise.

In comments aired on state television Monday, Rouhani pledged to government officials that Iran would overcome the American sanctions.

"We are in the war situation," Rouhani said. "We are in an economic war situation. We are confronting a bullying enemy. We have to stand to win."

He further stepped up the rhetoric, comparing Iran's situation in the 1980s war against Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein with the current reality.

"Yesterday, Saddam was in front us; today Trump is front of us. There is no difference. We must resist and win," he said.

Iran is already in the grip of an economic crisis. Its national currency, the rial, now trades at 145,000 to one U.S. dollar, down from when it traded 40,500 to \$1 a year ago. The economic chaos sparked mass anti-government protests at the end of last year which resulted in nearly 5,000 reported arrests and at least 25 people being killed. Sporadic demonstrations still continue.

Rouhani separately said leaders from "four powers" met with Iran on the sidelines of the September meeting of the United Nations General Assembly to try to save the nuclear deal, including brokering a possible meeting with Trump. He did not name those countries, but was likely referring to China, France, Russia and Britain, which along with Germany made up the world powers involved in the nuclear accord.

"This issue does not require a mediator," Rouhani said, blaming America for unilaterally pulling out of the agreement.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi also predicted the sanctions will actually work against America's interests.

"Many countries from Europe to Russia and China have opposed the sanctions," Ghasemi told journalists, adding that Iranians "have experienced more extensive sanctions" and that they are "not a new issue."

The United States says the sanctions are not aimed at toppling the government, but at persuading it to radically change its policies, including its support for regional terrorist groups, such as Hezbollah and Hamas, and its development of long-range ballistic missiles.

However, Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani and U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton have both made public statements supporting overthrowing Iran's theocratic government.