**Palestinians set off bomb near IDF vehicle in Gaza buffer zone**

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Palestinians detonated a bomb near an Israeli construction vehicle adjacent to the security fence in the northern Gaza Strip on Wednesday, causing neither injury nor damage, the army said.

In retaliation, the Israel Defense Forces targeted “a number” of positions belonging to the Hamas terrorist group, which rules the Gaza Strip, the army said.

Palestinian media reported that Israeli tanks fired shells at the positions.

The army said the bulldozer was located on the Gaza side of the security fence, but within the buffer zone that Israel still considers to be formally part of its territory. According to the IDF, the improvised explosive device was planted in the area during one of the demonstrations held along the security fence in recent weeks.

“During routine activity in northern Gaza, an explosive device that was placed under the guise of the riots was detonated against an (army) engineering vehicle on the western side of the security fence,” an IDF statement said. “In response, the Israel Defense Forces struck a number of Hamas military targets,” it added.

Palestinian media said the blast occurred east of Gaza City, in the northern Strip. The Hamas positions that were targeted were said to be located nearby.

Though no Palestinian terrorist group immediately took responsibility for the attack on the IDF bulldozer, the Israeli army targeted Hamas in retaliation as it rules the coastal enclave.

“The IDF sees Hamas as responsible for any event that happens within the Strip and from it, and will not allow the terrorist group to turn the border area into a combat zone,” the army said in a statement.

Israel routinely sends bulldozers into the buffer zone beyond the security fence to clear it of brush and other debris.

Recent months have seen an increase in the number of IED attacks along the Gaza border. In February, four soldiers were wounded, two of them seriously, when a Palestinian terrorist group detonated a bomb that was made to look like a flagstaff, which was fixed to the security fence.

Gazans have conducted a series of protests on the Israeli border in recent weeks, which have repeatedly descended into violence and seen some 30 Palestinian protesters shot dead after approaching the Israeli fence. Palestinian activists have insisted the protests are civilian-led and nonviolent, while Israel has said they have been used as cover for attempts at violence against Israeli troops and efforts to breach and damage the border.

Defense analysts say the marches are a new tactic by Hamas to conduct terror operations in the confusion of the demonstrations, as the group’s rockets have been thwarted by Israel’s Iron Dome and its tunnels have been countered with a new underground barrier being constructed around Gaza.