**Man killed as rocket hits Ashkelon home during overnight barrage**

Times of Israel

May 4, 2019

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/man-killed-as-rocket-hits-ashkelon-home-during-overnight-barrage/>

A man was killed when a rocket slammed into his home in southern Israel early Sunday morning, as Gazan terrorists pummeled Israeli towns with projectiles and Israel responded with hundreds of airstrikes over the weekend.

The man, in his 60s, was declared dead after being rushed to Ashkelon’s Barzilai hospital with shrapnel wounds after the rocket hit his home in the city at around 2:30 a.m. Sunday.

The man was not immediately identified but appeared to be the first Israeli fatality from Gazan rocket attacks since 2014’s war with terrorists based in the Strip.

A Palestinian man working in Israel was killed in a rocket strike in Ashkelon in November.

The killing came as intense fighting engulfed the region over the weekend, sharply intensifying tensions after several months of relative calm between Israel and the Strip.

In a familiar scene, air raid sirens wailed across southern Israel throughout Saturday and into Sunday as barrages of rockets were repeatedly fired. Retaliatory airstrikes caused large explosions to thunder across Gaza, as plumes of smoke rose into the air. Outgoing Palestinian rockets left long trails of smoke behind them and puffs of smoke bloomed overhead as dozens of rockets were intercepted by Israel’s Iron Dome anti-missile system.

Three Israelis were injured Saturday, including an 80-year-old woman seriously hurt from rocket shrapnel in Kiryat Gat.

According to the IDF Saturday, some 70 percent of the incoming rockets and mortar shells struck open fields, where they caused neither injury nor damage. Of the remaining 30 percent, which were heading toward populated areas, most were intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defense system.

Several directly struck homes or landed just outside them. At least two rockets landed in the courtyards of schools in southern Israel, which were empty due to the weekend, causing damage to the buildings.

The rocket fire continued after midnight, keeping Israelis in the affected areas pinned close to rocket shelters, and leading authorities to cancel school Sunday throughout the region. Aside from Ashkelon, a rocket strike was also reported in Sderot after 2 a.m.

In response to the strikes, Israel hit at least 120 targets in Gaza on Saturday, including a cross-border attack tunnel, an underground rocket factory and a six-story building used by Hamas’s military intelligence, the army said.

Palestinians reported continuing strikes overnight and into Sunday morning.

At least two Palestinians were reported killed in the Israeli strikes, both of whom were said to have been part of rocket launching teams.

Gazan authorities also blamed the deaths of a mother and her baby on Israel, but the IDF denied responsibility and said it was likely the result of a failed rocket launch.

The Israeli military also flattened a building housing the offices of the Turkish state-run Anadolu news agency, prompting outcries of condemnation from Ankara. The IDF said the eight-story building was used by the Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terror groups to conduct terrorist activities.

The Israeli army said it was prepared to continue conducting airstrikes if the attacks from Gaza continued. Israeli military officials told reporters that the fighting could continue for several days. Terror groups in the enclave made similar threats, saying they would attack deeper into Israel if the IDF continued its strikes.

The US said in a statement it backed Israel’s right to self-defense.

“The United States strongly condemns the ongoing barrage of rocket attacks by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad from Gaza upon innocent civilians and their communities across Israel. We call on those responsible for the violence to cease this aggression immediately,” State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said in a statement.

The European Union’s ambassador to Israel, Emanuele Giaufret, sharply criticized the rocket attacks on Twitter, saying “firing indiscriminately against civilians (is) unacceptable.”

The fresh exchange — one of the larger battles of the past year — began on Friday evening when Palestinians in the Strip shot two soldiers on patrol near the border in southern Gaza.

In response, the Israeli military bombed a Hamas post, killing two of the terror group’s operatives.

Shortly after 9:30 on Saturday morning, terror groups in the Strip began launching rockets and mortar shells at Israel.

The military launched a series of reprisal strikes from air and land, hitting targets throughout the coastal enclave connected to Hamas, the islamist group that rules Gaza, and the Iran-backed Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist organization.

COGAT, the Israeli defense body responsible for Palestinian civilian affairs, also said it was closing the fishing zone off Gaza’s coast altogether and sealing Israel’s two land crossings with Gaza.

The crossings are used by Palestinian medical patients to enter and exit the territory, and provide the main entry for cargo into the blockaded territory.

Hamas in a statement said it was “prepared to respond to Israel’s crimes” and vowed to stop it from “spilling the blood of our people.” Gaza’s second-largest terror group, Islamic Jihad, threatened to disrupt the upcoming Eurovision Song Contest, due to take place in Tel Aviv May 14-18, as well as issuing a video threatening the Dimona nuclear facility, Ben Gurion Airport and other sensitive sites in Israel.

The UN’s Mideast envoy, Nickolay Mladenov, said the United Nations was working with Egypt to restore calm and called on all sides to “de-escalate” and restore recent understandings.

“Those who seek to destroy them will bear responsibility for a conflict that will have grave consequences for all,” he said in a statement.

Following heavy fighting in early April, Israel agreed to ease its blockade on Gaza in exchange for a halt to rocket fire. This included expanding a fishing zone off Gaza’s coast, increasing imports into Gaza and allowing the Gulf state of Qatar to deliver aid to cash-strapped Gaza.

That agreement appeared to be under stress in recent days, with Palestinians launching arson balloons and rockets into Israel and Israeli warplanes striking Hamas targets. Hamas has said the incendiary balloons were a message to Israel not to hold up the transfer of millions of dollars in Qatari aid funds to the cash-strapped Hamas government in Gaza.

On Thursday, a Hamas delegation led by the group’s Gaza chief Yahya Sinwar traveled to Cairo for talks with Egyptian officials on a truce with Israel, Hamas officials said.

Israel and Egypt have maintained a crippling blockade on Gaza since Hamas, which seeks to destroy Israel, seized control of the territory in 2007. Jerusalem says it is necessary to prevent terror groups from rearming and becoming an even greater menace.

The sides are bitter enemies and have fought three wars and engaged in numerous smaller flare-ups of violence.