**Close Call: Rocket Strikes Sderot Day Care Center, No One Hurt**

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Hours after rocket salvos fired from Gaza scored direct hits on two buildings in Sderot, Mayor Alon Davidi urged the government to launch an offensive in Gaza. "The rockets are designed to murder children," Davidi told Channel 2 News on Thursday.

"The residents of the city know the reality before [the December 2008 Gaza offensive] Operation Cast Lead and the [November 2012 offensive] Operation Pillar of Defense, and they know the reality after the operations," Davidi said. "We have to launch another offensive to eradicate terror."

Davidi's remarks followed a barrage of 13 rockets that pounded Israel's southern communities early Thursday. Overnight and in the early morning hours, six rockets hit the city of Sderot alone. Three rockets hit houses in the city. No injuries were reported, but the blasts caused extensive property damage.

In response, the Israeli Air Force bombed 15 targets in Gaza. In the morning hours, missile defense system Iron Dome intercepted two rockets headed for the city of Netivot.

At around 8:30 in the morning, the early warning alarm sounded in Sderot followed by a salvo of three rockets. One of the rockets penetrated the wall of the second story of a building. On the first floor of the same building, a day care teacher and five infants in her care scrambled to the nearest protected area, narrowly evading tragedy.

More than 30 rockets have been fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip over the past 24 hours.

The majority of the rockets were fired Wednesday afternoon. At 3 p.m. three mortar rounds were fired at the Eshkol Regional Council area. Three hours later another volley of four mortar rounds exploded in the same area. The IDF responded by striking the mortar emplacement and the military reported "precise hits on the target."

At 8 p.m. a Grad rocket was fired at Ashkelon and was intercepted by Iron Dome. Shortly afterwards, Iron Dome intercepted a rocket fired at Netivot, and four other rockets exploded in the Sdot Negev Regional Council area. Three more explosions were recorded at the Eshkol Regional Council area around that time.

In light of the unrelenting rocket fire, and fearing further escalation in the southern arena, the IDF has begun reinforcing its presence along the Gaza border. Over the past week, artillery pieces and tank transporters have been spotted making their way southward, Israeli media reported.

Israeli officials have asserted that Hamas does not want an escalation of violence, as demonstrated by Hamas political bureau chief Khaled Mashaal's recent remarks: "Hamas is not interested in an escalation of the security situation in the Gaza Strip," he said from his office in Qatar. "We are committed to the cease-fire with Israel and we will continue to abide by it."

Mashaal stated that despite the fact that many Hamas leaders had cheered the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teens last month, he insisted that "Hamas had nothing to do with the kidnapping and murder of the teenagers."

The Hamas leader said that the Islamist group regularly communicates with Israel via a third party and revealed that Hamas appealed to Turkey for assistance in maintaining the calm and getting Israel to refrain from any wide-scale offensive in the Gaza Strip.

Despite some fiery rhetoric from Israeli officials, it appears that the defense establishment is also wary of escalating the friction in Gaza.

"The situation is volatile," a defense official said on Wednesday. "We are preparing ourselves for further escalation, but if Hamas will be able to clamp down on what is going on in the Gaza Strip, we will not have a reason to strike it. We have no desire enter into an escalation with Gaza, but if they shoot we will fire back, and with more force. Calm will be met with calm."