Five rockets launched at Israel after day of unrest claims four deaths

March 31, 2019

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The Jerusalem Post

<https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Two-Palestinians-killed-in-Land-Day-protests-along-Gaza-border-585255>

Five rockets were launched towards Israel from Gaza late Saturday night after largely peaceful protests along the Gaza border during the day maintained the fragile stand-off between Israel and Hamas.

In response to the rockets, the IDF attacked several terror targets in Gaza belonging to Hamas, the IDF said.

The IDF Spokesperson confirmed earlier that five rocket launches were identified in the late Saturday night hours, shortly after sirens wailed in the Eshkol Regional Council.

The rockets fell in open territory, the council's spokesperson said, and no injuries or damages were reported.

Earlier, four Palestinians were killed and more than 200 were wounded in clashes along Gaza’s security fence with Israel, as thousands rioted to mark Land Day and the first anniversary of the weekly March of Return protests.

About 41,000 Palestinians gathered on Saturday in five main points along the border, hurling stones and explosive devices such as hand grenades at the fence, but Hamas had deployed hundreds of operatives wearing orange vests at each of the sites to make sure protesters didn’t approach the fence.

Hamas’s control of the situation had a major impact on the low level of violence, said IDF Spokesperson Brig.-Gen. Ronen Manelis, adding that the Land Day protests ended “successfully” and did not turn out as the military expected. The IDF also used crowd dispersal methods, including live fire and tear gas, to keep rioters away from the fence.

The Gazan Health Ministry reported that a 13-year-old Palestinian was hit in the head with a rubber-coated steel bullet in Khan Yunis, and that 17-year-old Adham Amaara was killed when he was struck in the face by live fire near the fence. Seventeen-year-old Tamar Abu El Hir was killed when he was shot in the chest east of Khan Yunis, the ministry reported.

Of the 244 Palestinians wounded, 65 were children and 15 women. While the majority of injuries (139) were minor, five were critically wounded and evacuated to hospitals.

On Friday, 21-year-old Muhammad Jihad Jawad Sa’ad was killed by IDF gunfire during night clashes east of Gaza. The IDF said about 200 Palestinians took part in the riots, and that an IDF tank attacked an abandoned Hamas outpost in the northern Gaza Strip in response to explosives being thrown at the fence.

According to the military, while there were more protesters on Saturday than during the usual Friday protests, there was less violence along the fence. The number of explosive devices was also markedly fewer than during usual Friday protests, with only 15-20 hurled at the security fence.

“Hamas controlled the demonstrations in Gaza with restraint we have not seen all year,” Manelis said, adding that “the restraint shown by Hamas allowed us to be more restrained as well.”

Nevertheless, there were instances of infiltration. Two eight-year-olds with a knife crossed over the border, but were sent back into the Gaza Strip through the Erez crossing soon after. There was another instance in the southern Strip where Palestinians crossed the fence and returned shortly after.

By 6 p.m. the number of protesters diminished significantly, with some 6,000 Palestinians demonstrating.

With the dispersal of most of the demonstrators, IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Aviv Kochavi held a situation assessment with the head of the Operations Branch, the head of the Military Intelligence Directorate and the commander of the Southern Command.

According to Manelis, despite the quiet riots on Saturday the IDF will not be removing any troops that have been deployed to the South – a Division Headquarters unit, three infantry brigades and an artillery unit deployed to enhance the Southern Command earlier in the week. In addition, the leave of all combat units that are currently assigned to the Southern Command has been canceled.

“Everything is fragile,” Manelis stressed. “It all depends on how the nights will look. We will not accept that civilians living in the Gaza vicinity will not be able to sleep at night.”

Land Day commemorates Israel’s expropriation of Arab-owned land in the Galilee on March 30, 1976. Six unarmed Arab citizens were killed and hundreds wounded and arrested in the ensuing riots and confrontations with the IDF and police.

Last year on Land Day, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip began the March of Return protest with thousands of Gazans violently demonstrating along the security fence with Israel demanding an end to the 12-year-long blockade of the coastal enclave.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed appreciation to Southern Command ground forces, the Air Force and the other security branches for their resolute activity and massive deployment, which helped bring about the calm.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad officials said on Saturday that the weekly protests at the border will continue despite Egypt’s ongoing efforts to reach ceasefire understandings between the Palestinian factions and Israel.