Rockets fired at Jerusalem area and south, shattering calm amid Gaza truce efforts

May 12, 2023

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The Times of Israel

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/gazan-rocket-fire-targets-south-jerusalem-area-shattering-truce-hopes-after-calm/>

Gazan terrorists fired dozens of rockets at Israel late Friday morning, breaking several hours of calm and likely setting back efforts to end the fighting after several days.

Rocket fire was directed at areas near the Strip, and a short time later long-range projectiles were launched toward areas south of Jerusalem, setting off sirens in the Etzion settlement bloc and Beit Shemesh for the first time since violence erupted.

According to a military source, two rockets fired from Gaza toward Jerusalem were intercepted, one by the Iron Dome, and the second by David’s Sling. It marked the [second-ever David’s Sling interception](https://www.timesofisrael.com/davids-sling-downs-rocket-headed-for-tel-aviv-in-first-real-world-interception/), after a rocket fired at Tel Aviv on Wednesday was downed by the system.

The medium-range David’s Sling is expected to fill a hole in Israel’s missile defense array, which includes the short-range Iron Dome and the Arrow system, which is designed to intercept long-range ballistic missiles.

One projectile also apparently landed outside the West Bank settlement of Bat Ayin.

Dozens of rockets were fired at the southern city of Sderot and other towns near the border with the Gaza Strip in successive volleys starting at 11 a.m.

Homes were hit by rockets and shrapnel in Sderot and Nir Am, and the Eshkol Regional Council said one rocket caused minor damage to a greenhouse.

The rest of the rockets were downed by the Iron Dome air defense system or landed in open areas, local officials said.

No injuries were reported in the attacks.

The rocket fire, which was claimed by Islamic Jihad, came as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was holding a meeting with top defense officials in Tel Aviv to examine steps forward after both sides had refrained from cross-border fire for nearly 10 hours, raising hopes that the latest bout of violence between Israel and the Palestinian enclave had ended.

Shortly after the attack, the Israel Defense Forces said it carried out strikes against four Islamic Jihad military sites, a mortar launching position, and the area used to fire rockets at Israel.

Meanwhile, the IDF extended restrictions on movement and gathering for residents living up to 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the Gaza Strip, to Saturday at 8 p.m.

The IDF said the extension of the restrictions comes following an assessment held by military officials, following renewed rocket fire from Gaza at Israel. The rules were supposed to end at 2 p.m. on Friday.

The Home Front Command rules mandated school closures, work closures — unless employees have a bomb-safe room they can reach in time — and limited outdoor gatherings to no more than 10 people.

Indoor gatherings in towns near the Gaza border were restricted to 50 people, while those up to 40 kilometers from the border with the Strip were limited to 100 people.

Additionally, special education schools were permitted to operate, provided there is a bomb-safe room that school kids and teachers can reach in time.

The rocket attacks Friday morning marked the first launch out of Gaza since 10 p.m. Thursday, according to the IDF. The Israeli military said it continued to strike Islamic Jihad sites in Gaza until 2 a.m.

In the intervening hours, a tense calm had returned to parts of Israel brought to a practical standstill since fighting erupted on Tuesday.

“We’re making it so citizens can [return] to routine, and it demands patience,” Military spokesman Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari told reporters early Friday morning. “We don’t have towns locked down, you can leave your homes and do Friday shopping.”

Hagari said restrictions put in place at the start of fighting on Tuesday were still valid until 2:00 p.m., but the IDF would assess the situation in the coming hours and decide whether to lift, adjust or even extend them.

In Gaza, Palestinians used the break in the fighting Friday to survey the wreckage wrought by over 200 Israeli strikes.

“The dream that we built for our children, for our sons, has ended,” said Belal Bashir, a Palestinian living in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza, whose family home was reduced to a heap of rubble in an airstrike late Thursday.

The lull came as Egypt, Qatar and the United Nations were involved in intense efforts to broker a ceasefire, hosting an Islamic Jihad delegation in Cairo for indirect talks.

Hagari confirmed to reporters that talks were taking place.

“There have been contacts for over a day. We don’t comment on them, we don’t know when it will happen. We are busy defending and attacking,” he said.

Israel generally avoids confirming ceasefire agreements with terror groups, but several previous rounds of fighting between the IDF and Gaza have come to a close with international mediation.

Hamas officials told local media early Friday that Egypt was ramping up its diplomatic efforts to stop the fighting through “intensive contacts” with both Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Islamic Jihad figures have sent mixed signals about the ceasefire talks. Senior official Ihasan Attaya complained early Friday that the mediators “have been unable to provide us with any guarantees.” A sticking point has been Islamic Jihad’s demand that Israel ceases its policy of targeted killings, Attaya said. Israel has flatly rejected the condition.

This week’s battles began when Israel launched simultaneous airstrikes early Tuesday that killed three Islamic Jihad commanders along with some of their wives and children as they slept in their homes. Israel said it was retaliating for a barrage of rocket fire launched last week by Islamic Jihad following the death of one of its West Bank members, Khader Adnan, from a hunger strike while in Israeli custody.

Islamic Jihad political bureau member Mohamad al-Hindi told media from Cairo that he hoped both sides “would reach a ceasefire agreement and honor it today.”

Talks had been set back a day earlier after an Israeli woman was killed by a rocket that slammed into a Rehovot home, the country’s first fatality in the current conflict. Israel responded with strikes that killed the commander of an Islamic Jihad rocket division and his deputy.

Hagari said Israel struck 215 Islamic Jihad targets from the start of Operation Shield and Arrow until Friday morning.

At least 31 people in Gaza have been killed since Israel launched the offensive, according to the Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza, and at least 93 more injured.

The military spokesman said Israel had killed 16 terrorists but admitted the IDF was responsible for the deaths of 10 civilians during the initial strikes, which destroyed residential structures where families were sleeping. He said four Gazan civilians had been killed by Islamic Jihad rockets impacting inside Gaza.

Gazan fighters, who only began firing rockets in response to the bombing on Wednesday afternoon, launched 866 projectiles during the conflict, 163 of which fell short of the border and 260 of which were intercepted, Hagari said. Most rockets targeted towns in southern Israel, but some reached as far north as Tel Aviv.

Netanyahu held a security briefing Thursday night with his security chiefs at the IDF’s Kirya military headquarters in Tel Aviv. As it ended, Hebrew media cited a message from the premier’s office that Israel would continue its operation in Gaza “as needed” and “continue to exact a heavy price from Islamic Jihad for its aggression against Israel’s citizens.”

However, reports indicated that those at the meeting had come to the conclusion that the operation had met its objectives and that pressure should be piled on Islamic Jihad to agree to a ceasefire.

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Both the European Union’s foreign policy chief and foreign ministers of France, Egypt, Germany and Jordan issued public statements Thursday [urging a ceasefire](https://www.timesofisrael.com/europe-egypt-urge-truce-between-israel-and-gaza-terrorists-as-fighting-intensifies/).

They also praised Egypt for its mediation efforts and called on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to implement commitments made at summits in Aqaba in February and in Sharm El-Sheikh in March.

Officials earlier [said](https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-officials-deny-concessions-offered-to-islamic-jihad-in-exchange-for-ceasefire/) Israel was in talks with Arab countries on a potential ceasefire, but denied reports claiming Israel would agree to a number of controversial concessions, such as the halting of targeted killings and the return of the body of Adnan.