Armed Conflict

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MAY
7:37 UTC

Israel & Palestinian Territories SITUATION UPDATE: Over 1,050 rockets fired from Gaza Strip into Israel since evening hours of May 10; further escalation in hostilities likely

Executive Summary:

- According to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), over 1,050 rockets have been fired from the Gaza Strip over the past 38 hours. This represents the most significant escalation in the conflict between Israel and Gaza-based militant groups since 2014.
- The past 36 hours have witnessed a shift in the focus of the conflict away from Jerusalem and towards the Gaza Strip as the intensity of clashes in Jerusalem's Old City have to some extent subsided. Tensions within Jerusalem will nevertheless remain high over the coming hours, with periodic unrest likely to be recorded in the city, primarily in the Old City.
- Tensions have increased in mixed Jewish-Arab locales as well as Arab-dominated cities and towns within Israel, especially since the night hours of May 11, which has prompted the Israeli authorities to increase deployment of security forces to these areas. This measure is likely to be perceived by Israeli-Arabs as oppressive, triggering further unrest in these locales.
- Overall, Hamas will likely seek to project that it has won the latest round of escalation with Israel to end the hostilities and thus prevent further loss of ranks and infrastructure within the Gaza Strip. However, Israel will likely seek to prolong the current conflict to restore deterrence vis-a-vis Gaza-based militants.
- Thus, hostilities between the IDF and Gaza-based militant groups are likely to escalate in the coming hours and days, with an increased potential for an expansion of the IDF's operation within the Gaza Strip.
- **MAX Security has strong on-ground capabilities in Israel, including secure transportation, provision of safe havens, and contingency consultation and planning. Contact us at operations@max-security.com or +44 20-3540-0434.**

Please be advised:

General Developments:

- The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has announced that over 1,050 rockets have been fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel since the evening hours of May 10. At least 200 of these rockets fell within the Gaza Strip itself.
- The IDF furthermore acknowledged that dozens of people have been killed and about 200 wounded in the Gaza Strip as a result of IDF action over the past two days.
- IDF troops are currently mobilizing along the Israel-Gaza Strip border and about nine Border Police companies have been redeployed from the West Bank into Israel over recent hours.

- Reports indicate that Israel has refused to accept a ceasefire mediated by the UN and Egypt. Israeli officials have yet to confirm this.

Central and North Israel:

- Two civilians were reportedly lightly wounded after a rocket hit their house in Bareket, located about three km east of Ben Gurion International Airport, at approximately 06:30 (local time) on May 12.
- Two civilians were reported wounded after a rocket hit their house in the Shephelah area at approximately 06:30 on May 12.
- Scuffles were reported between Israeli-Arabs and Israeli-Jews in Haifa during the early morning hours of May 12. The Israeli-Arabs reportedly hurled Molotov cocktails at the Israeli-Jews.
- A state of emergency has been declared in Lod after violent riots were reported between Israeli-Arabs and Israeli-Jews in the city during the overnight hours of May 11-12. At least 12 people were wounded and several vehicles were vandalized in the violence.





Jerusalem’s Old City:

- Clashes were reported between Israel Police forces and local Arab residents at the al-Aqsa Mosque/Temple Mount Compound during the early morning hours of May 12. The Israeli security forces arrested seven suspects for hurling rocks at them.



Southern Israel:

- Color Red sirens were sounded in Eshkol Regional Council at approximately 07:30 on May 12.
- Color Red sirens were sounded in Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Sderot at approximately 06:00 on May 12. No casualties or material damage were reported in the subsequent rocket fire.
- Residents of Sderot and the surrounding areas were temporarily asked to lock themselves in their houses during the morning hours of May 12 due to a suspected infiltration attempt from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel. The warning was removed after IDF troops patrolled the border fence and secured the area.

Gaza Strip:

- The IDF conducted an airstrike targeting a nine-story residential building in the northern Gaza Strip that included Hamas' intelligence center, its West Bank Command headquarters, and its intelligence and propaganda department at approximately 04:20 on May 12.
- The IDF killed two Hamas operatives who were in the process of launching rockets towards Israel at approximately 04:30 on May 12.
- The IDF killed two Hamas commanders in a targeted strike on a building in the Gaza Strip at approximately 05:13 on May 12. The IDF identified the men as the head of the security department of Hamas' military intelligence, Hassan Kaugi, as well as his deputy and head of Hamas' military intelligence counterespionage department, Wail Issa. The IDF further stated that Wail Issa was the brother of Marwan Issa, the deputy commander of Hamas' military wing, the al-Qassam Brigades.
- The IDF has also announced that it had destroyed the homes of three senior Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip: Bassem Issa, the head of the Gaza City District; Rafa'a Salameh, the head of the Khan Younis District; and Mohammad Yazouri, the head of Hamas' military intelligence.
- At approximately 07:00, the IDF reportedly carried out a series of airstrikes targeting several police and security installations within the Gaza Strip. Hamas' main police headquarters was reportedly destroyed in the attack.
- The IDF intercepted an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) that was launched from the Gaza Strip towards Israel at approximately 08:00 on May 12.
- The IDF reportedly targeted the house of a senior Hamas figure, Saleh Dahman, which served as a weapons depot for Hamas in the Gaza Strip, at approximately 09:00 on May 12. The IDF has instructed residents of the Gaza Strip to remain in protected areas.

West Bank:

- The IDF has announced that it launched a large-scale operation across the West Bank during the early morning hours of May 12 to arrest individuals linked to Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in the Gaza Strip.
- During this operation, clashes were reported between Palestinians and IDF troops at the Qalandia Refugee Camp and in Anata, located at the northeastern entrance to Jerusalem. An exchange of fire was also reported between Palestinians and IDF troops at the Jenin Refugee Camp. A Palestinian was killed during an exchange of fire with the IDF at the Fawwar Refugee Camp, located near Hebron.
- The IDF has reported that a Palestinian militant attempted to snatch an IDF soldier's weapon in the Nabi Musa area of Jericho during the morning hours of May 12. The militant was arrested by IDF troops. No casualties were recorded within the IDF's ranks.

Assessments & Forecast:

Israel & Gaza Strip

1. This represents the most significant escalation in the conflict between Israel and Gaza-based militant groups since the IDF's Operation "Protective Edge" in the Gaza Strip in 2014. The rocket attacks towards central Israel showcase the resolve of Gaza-based militant groups, primarily Hamas and the PIJ, to follow through upon their warning of targeting Israel's major population centers in response to IDF attacks on residential buildings in the Gaza Strip. This has also manifested in the release of several ultimatums to Israel by both militant groups, which have been acted upon. The militant groups are thus trying to change the equation and implicity established norms from previous periods of escalation with Israel by conveying that large-scale Israeli Air Force (IAF) airstrikes on high-rise buildings within the Palestinian enclave will result in a direct retaliatory attack on central Israel's economic hubs.
2. **FORECAST:** The IDF will thus attempt to restore its level of deterrence vis-a-vis the Gaza-based militant groups by increasing the scope, frequency, and scale of attacks within the Gaza Strip over the coming hours and days. This is with the objective of deterring Hamas-based militant groups from firing rockets into central Israel by conveying that this will exact a heavy price. This also means that the IDF's operation is likely to continue for several days at least in order for Israel to create a perception of victory vis-a-vis Hamas and the PIJ.
3. **FORECAST**: Based on Israel's reported refusal to accept a ceasefire agreement and the IDF's reported call upon Gaza residents to remain in protected areas, the IDF will likely continue to target high-profile individuals and strategic infrastructure linked to Hamas and the PIJ in the Gaza Strip over the coming hours. Given that in many cases, such infrastructure is located within residential complexes, there is a high risk of civilian collateral damage during such IDF military action in the Gaza Strip. Despite Gaza-based militant groups' interest in containing the hostilities as it provides them with an opportunity to portray a picture of victory, the IDF's operations will compel Hamas and the PIJ to retaliate by launching additional rocket barrages towards southern and central Israel. This will lead to disruptions to civilian life in several parts of the country, potentially including the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem regions. These back-and-forth hostilities have the potential to further escalate the current conflict, particularly due to an increase in civilian casualties on both sides. This increases the possibility of a significant expansion of the IDF's operation in the Gaza Strip over the coming days, which could manifest in the targeting of more high-ranking militant commanders in the Gaza Strip, the firing of artillery into Gaza, and a potential ground offensive, including the large-scale mobilization of reserve forces. In such a scenario, the hostilities may last several weeks, as per the 2014 precedent mentioned above.

Impact on Israel & West Bank

1. Hamas and the PIJ also have a clear interest in utilizing the current conflict with Israel to project themselves to Arabs within Israel itself and the West Bank as well as the Gaza Strip as the defenders of the Palestinian populace against perceived Israeli aggression. While this strategy increases the risk of greater losses for these militant groups in terms of personnel and assets within the Gaza Strip, it also serves their goal of destabilizing the security situation within Israel and the West Bank. This is because the hostilities between Israel and the militant groups increase the risk of further violence between the Arab and Jewish communities within Israel as well as between Palestinians and Israeli security forces and civilians in the West Bank.
2. **FORECAST:** Such violence will continue to prompt a forceful response by the Israeli authorities, which in turn would elevate the perception of Israeli-Arabs and the Palestinian population in the West Bank that Israel's policies towards them are oppressive. This will generally fuel anti-Israel sentiments and raise tensions further. This could garner an increase in support for the Gaza-based Hamas and the PIJ at the expense of the Ramallah-based, Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA), which is already perceived by segments of the Palestinian population as too weak in the way it conducts itself with Israel, particularly with regards to its security coordination with Jerusalem.

Hamas also has a particular interest in raising tensions further and projecting its strength vis-a-vis Israel due to the PA President Mahmoud Abbas' decision to indefinitely postpone the Palestinian elections.

3. All of these factors are likely to lead to a continuation of unrest within mixed Arab-Jewish cities and towns as well as locales with large Arab populations within Israel, such as Haifa, Akko, Lod, Ramla, Jaffa, Rahat, Umm al-Faham, and Nazareth. This also includes Jerusalem, despite the fact that the past 36 hours have witnessed a shift in the focus of the conflict towards the Gaza Strip as the intensity of clashes in Jerusalem's Old City have to some extent subsided. There is also likely to be a further increase in unrest within the West Bank, particularly at checkpoints, roadblocks and junctions where the IDF and the Israel Border Police maintain a more notable presence. This is also liable to increase the motivation of "lone-wolf" to conduct low-sophistication attacks within these areas as well as of local Hamas cells to conduct slightly more sophisticated acts of militancy, such as shootings. Together, all of these developments are likely to cause a significant rise in tensions and further destabilize the security environment of Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

Recommendations:

Those operating or residing in Israel should adhere to all Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Home Front Command guidelines regarding early warning sirens for incoming rockets.
We advise against all travel within 40 km of the Gaza Strip at this time.
Those remaining within this vicinity should stay within close proximity of a shelter and remain abreast of Color Red sirens. We advise downloading the Color Red mobile application to receive timely alerts.
In case you hear a siren, seek shelter in a protected area and remain inside for at least 10 minutes. When a Color Red siren is sounded: If a designated shelter exists, immediately go there. If not, go to a room with as few external walls, windows, and openings as possible, close all openings, sit on the floor below the window line and near an internal wall.
In an open area, lay down on the ground and cover your head with your hands.
When driving, safely pull over and follow the above instructions.
Those operating or residing in Israel on May 12 are advised to avoid the vicinity of all travel to Lod due to the significant unrest in the city.
Avoid protest gatherings throughout the country due to the high likelihood of unrest. These violent demonstrations are more likely in mixed Jewish-Arab locales, such as Haifa, Jaffa, Lod, Ramla, and Akko, as well as Arab-populated cities and towns.
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