Air Strike

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MAY
15:48 UTC

Israel & Palestinian Territories SITUATION UPDATE: IDF strike on building in Gaza City on May 16 reportedly kills dozens of civilians; likely to prompt rocket attack against central Israel

Executive Summary:

- During the morning hours of May 16, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reportedly conducted a strike against a building in the center of Gaza City, killing at least 33 civilians. The high casualty toll will likely compel Hamas to retaliate by firing rockets into southern and central Israel over the coming hours, in line with recent trends and its efforts to project itself as the protector of the Palestinian people.
- On May 16, gunmen conducted a shooting attack targeting Israeli civilians in the West Bank's Bnei Naim, located near Nablus. During the evening hours of May 16, a vehicular-ramming attack wounded at least six individuals in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah. Both incidents highlight that tensions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem remain elevated, which increases the likelihood of further attempted acts of militancy in these areas.
- On May 16, Israel's Security Agency (Shin Bet) announced the arrest of dozens of suspects involved in riots and intercommunal violence between Jew and Arabs over the past days within Israel. The announcement comes amid an overall decline in such violence over recent days. The Shin Bet's involvement in stemming the violence will facilitate a further downtick over the coming days, although localized unrest in Israel's mixed cities remains likely.
- **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) stated that between 19:00 (local time) on May 15 and 07:00 on May 16, 120 rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip towards Israel. Approximately 11 rockets fell within the Gaza Strip.
- The IDF's Home Front Command extended the restrictions of movement in southern and central Israel until May 17 at 20:30 (local time). A maximum of ten people are allowed to gather in open spaces and up to 100 people are allowed to gather in buildings. Schools will continue to be suspended. Employees should go to work only in places with designated bomb shelters.
- On May 16, Israel's security cabinet approved the continuation of Operation "Guardian of the Walls". Reports citing unnamed sources indicate that no discussion of a ceasefire was raised at the meeting.

- According to a Palestinian official news agency report released during the afternoon on May 16, 181 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have been killed and 1,225 have been wounded since the beginning of hostilities between Israel and Gaza-based militants.
- On May 16, the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) announced the arrest of dozens of suspects involved in violent attacks against Israeli citizens over the recent days within Israel.

Diplomatic Statements

- During the overnight hours of May 16, UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, stated that he is "deeply disturbed by the destruction by an Israeli airstrike…in Gaza City that housed the offices of several international media organizations as well as residential apartments."
- Israeli Defense Minister, Benny Gantz, met with the US special envoy, Hadi Amr, on May 16. Gantz stated that the object of Israel's military campaign is "to restore long-term quiet to Israel's borders and safety to its citizens." Amr also met with senior figures in Israel's Arab community.
- During the evening hours on May 16, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that "Operation Guardian of the Walls" will continue as long as necessary. He further stated that "we have international backing [from the US] and we will use it".

Gaza Strip:

- During the evening hours of May 15, the IDF stated it had targeted a car and killed at least two Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) operatives in Khan Yunis and Maghazi Refugee Camp.
- An Israel Air Force (IAF) strike on May 15 hit the home of Ra'ad Said, head of Hamas's special operations unit, which the IDF stated was also used as military infrastructure.
- During the late evening hours of May 15, IDF announced an airstrike against a central bank in the Ramal neighborhood which holds Hamas funds.
- The IDF announced airstrikes targeting the homes of Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Sinwar, and his brother, Mohamad Sinwar, a senior member of Hamas' military wing during the overnight hours of May 15-16.
- On May 16, the IDF announced that during the overnight hours of May 15-16 it executed the second phase of the "Hamas Metro" underground tunnel project, and added that "there will be more [stages]". The IDF further announced it attacked more than 60 Hamas and PIJ targets in Gaza Strip during the night, among those targets were the homes of several Hamas senior officials, dozens of production sites, and approximately 40 rocket launchers.
- During the morning hours of May 16, the IDF posted the names of 33 Hamas and PIJ senior militants who have been killed by the IDF since the beginning of the operation in the Gaza Strip.
- Reports from the morning hours of May 16 stated that the IDF conducted an airstrike targeting a building on al-Wahda Street in the center of Gaza City. Additional reports indicate that at least 33 civilians were killed and 50 were wounded. Following the incident, Egypt opened the Rafah border crossing to evacuate the wounded.
- An IAF airstrike targeted military assets at Hamas' intelligence headquarters in the northern Gaza Strip during the early afternoon hours of May 16.
- During the evening hours on May 16, the IDF targeted three Hamas rocket launch sites and "thwarted" six operatives.

Southern Israel:

- On May 16, six Bedouin individuals, including minors, were arrested in the **Negev** region on

suspicion of vandalizing the train tracks and blocking Route 25 while throwing rocks at Jewish-owned cars.

- On May 16, the Israel Police announced several arrests of Bedouins suspected over the recent days of attempting to assault passing vehicles on **Highway 6**, in which one civilian was lightly wounded and was rescued by the local police.
- During the morning hours of May 16, color red sirens were activated several times in the cities surrounding the Gaza Strip and in **Ashdod** and **Ashkelon**. No injuries were recorded. A direct hit was recorded in **Netivot**, several meters away from a gas station.
- Color red sirens were activated during late afternoon in the southern region on May 16, including **Beer Sheva** and **Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council**. A direct hit was recorded on a building in Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council without causing any casualties. According to reports, the attack was aimed to target the **Tamar gas rig**, which was shut down following the incident.
- A barrage of rockets was launched during the late afternoon hours of May 16 towards the cities surrounding the northern area of the Gaza Strip, including **Ashdod** and **Ashkelon**. Direct hits and material damage were recorded in **Ashkelon** and **Ashdod,** although no casualties were reported.

Central Israel

- Over one thousand Israeli Arabs and Israeli Jews gathered in Habima Square in **Tel Aviv** during the evening hours of May 15, to demonstrate against inter-communal violence across the country.
- Following a statement by Hamas's spokesperson threatening to hit **Tel Aviv** after midnight on May 16, a barrage of approximately 40 rockets was fired from the Gaza Strip towards the city and its surroundings at 00:10.
- During the overnight hours of May 15-16, crude explosives were hurled at a Jewish family at a residential building in **Ramla**.

Northern Israel:

- During the evening hours of May 15, the IDF stated that warning shots were fired to disperse rioters who gathered in several locations along the **Lebanese border**. The rioters reportedly threw Molotov cocktails and tried to damage the border fence.
- Two Israeli Arabs were arrested during the overnight hours of May 15-16 in **Jisr az-Zarqa** on suspicion of preparing Molotov cocktails and throwing rocks at cars on the coastal **Highway 2**.
- On May 16, two Jordanians armed with knives were detained by Israeli forces on **Route 6666,** after crossing the border in northern Israel's **Gilboa** Route 6666 is located approximately 13 km from the Jordanian border.

West Bank

- During the late-night hours of May 15, an IDF soldier was reportedly shot and lightly wounded during clashes in **Qalqilya**.
- Around the same time, IDF soldiers opened fire against an assailant who reportedly attempted a vehicle-ramming attack at a military checkpoint in **Hebron.** The attacker was killed and no casualties were reported among the Israeli security forces.
- On May 16, a shooting attack occurred in **Bnei-Naim** against Israeli civilians. No injuries were recorded during the incident. Bnei Naim is located approximately six km from

East Jerusalem:

- During the evening hours of May 15, several light rail stations in the **Shuafat Refugee Camp** area were set on fire causing severe damage.
- During the overnight hours of May 15-16, 15 **East Jerusalem** residents were arrested on suspicion of involvement in violent incidents in Jerusalem's Old City and the al-Aqsa/Temple Mount compound during the past week. During one of the arrest operations in the **Silwan** neighborhood, three locals were arrested for attacking the police officers and causing damage to their vehicle.
- On May 16, police reportedly arrested 20 Hamas-affiliated individuals in **East Jerusalem**.
- During the evening hours of May 16, at least six individuals, including police officers, were wounded in a vehicular-ramming attack on Nablus Street in **Sheikh Jarrah**. Security forces neutralized the perpetrator of the attack.

Assessments & Forecast:

Israel-Hamas Hostilities

1. The Palestinian reports on the IDF strike against a building in Gaza City's al-Wahda area on May 16 will further raise tensions. The Palestinians reported that the IAF conducted the strike without an early warning procedure, an effort that the IDF routinely employs to minimize civilian casualties. Palestinian media outlets also published extensive picture material from rescue operations of civilians stuck under rubble. **FORECAST:** This incident is likely to prompt a direct retaliation by the Gaza-based militant factions in the form of rocket barrages towards southern and central Israel over the coming hours.
2. This is because, in the past days, Hamas has often fired barrages of rockets towards Israeli territory, particularly its more impactful attacks on the center of the country, against the backdrop of IDF strikes that have resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties. For instance, Hamas claimed to have conducted the rocket barrage towards central Israel on May 15 due to the IDF's alleged "massacre of women and children at the Shati Refugee Camp" during the overnight hours of May 14-15. **FORECAST:** Thus, although Hamas likely prefers to reach a ceasefire agreement at this stage and thus consolidate its various achievements against Israel and mitigate the significant blow to its capabilities that the IDF is currently inflicting, large civilian casualty tolls as in the current strike targeting the building in al-Wahda Street will compel the militant group to continue to retaliate against Israel. This is aimed at preserving the status that it seeks to project of itself as the protector of the Palestinian people against perceived Israeli aggression as well as the dominant actor among the Palestinian leadership.
3. From the Israeli side, the IDF's airstrikes against Yahya Sinwar's house and other senior operatives are likely meant to convey the message that Israel will continue its operation in the Gaza Strip and is ready to target the interests of even the most senior Hamas operatives, even though it is cognizant of the fact these actors remain in hiding at the current time due to the ongoing fighting. The scale of the IDF's aerial operations during the night hours of May 15-16, and May 16, indicates that Israel has yet to completely deplete its bank of targets in the Gaza Strip that are accessible by aerial, artillery, and naval strikes, which enables Israel to continue destroying militant infrastructure without having to commit to a ground offensive that will significantly increase the risk to its troops. **FORECAST**: Against this backdrop, while more and more indications show that international pressure on Israel to halt the operation is growing, including from Washington, IAF strikes are likely to intensify over the coming 24 hours due to the high probability of more intense diplomatic efforts to reach a ceasefire within the window of the next 48 hours. Israel will thus seek to maximize the damage inflicted on Hamas and other militant factions while it has the window of opportunity to do so.

West Bank and East Jerusalem

The attempted militant attack that was reported by the IDF in Bnei Naim Junction near Hebron, and the vehicle-ramming attack in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah, on May 16 come as part of an uptick in attempted militant attacks in the region, particularly in the West Bank, over the past days. On May 15, the IDF thwarted two attempted ramming attacks in the Mount Hebron area and near ad-Dhahiriya, approximately 18 km southwest of Hebron. In addition, on May 14, violent unrest was recorded in several locales throughout the West Bank, with at least ten individuals being shot dead by the IDF. While the scale and scope of such violent incidents decreased on May 15, the latest attacks highlight that, as tensions remain elevated, attempted militant attacks are likely to materialize against both military and civilian Israeli targets in the West Bank, and to a lesser extent, East Jerusalem. **FORECAST**: Given that the IDF reported that it bolstered its forces near Hebron, an increase in friction between Israeli forces and locals is likely to be recorded in and around the city. This may manifest in violent unrest in the area over the coming hours and days.

Israel Unrest

The reports that the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) has arrested several individuals who were involved in violent rioting and lynch attempts within Israel come amid an overall downtick in the scale and scope of violent riots within Israel's mixed cities. The Shin Bet's primary role during routine periods generally pertains to counter-militancy and it is therefore focused on activities within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as militant supporters within Israel itself. The involvement of the agency in stemming the unrest within Israel thus highlights a change in perception within the Israeli leadership that incidents involving extreme violence in Israel's mixed cities, which are based on nationalistic motives, cannot be effectively addressed exclusively by the Israel Police. The latter organization is primarily focused on crime within Israel. **FORECAST**: Given that the Shin Bet has a greater capacity for investigations than the Israel Police, this is likely to bolster Israel's ability to detain perpetrators of intercommunal violence and violent riots. Together with the significant measures the Israel Police has taken to bolster its capabilities, a downtick in violent incidents in Israel's mixed cities will likely continue to be recorded over the coming hours and days. That said, as tensions remain high, primarily due to the ongoing hostilities between Israel and the Gaza-based militant factions, localized violence within these cities remains possible.

Recommendations:

1. 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.
2. We advise against all travel within 40 km of the Gaza Strip at this time.
3. 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.

4. 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.
5. In an open area, lay down on the ground and cover your head with your hands.
6. When driving, safely pull over and follow the above instructions.
7. 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.
8. **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.**