



Air Strike

17

MAY

16:17 UTC

Israel & Palestinian Territories SITUATION UPDATE: PIJ northern battalion commander killed in IAF airstrikes in Gaza Strip's Jabaliya on May 17; to prompt rocket attacks towards southern, central Israel

Executive Summary:

- On May 17, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced that the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's (PIJ) northern battalion commander Hisam Abu Harbid was killed in an Israeli Air Force (IAF) strike in Gaza Strip's Jabaliya, which the PIJ confirmed. This will likely prompt retaliatory rocket attacks by the PIJ and Hamas towards southern and central Israel over the coming hours. In this context, during the evening hours of May 17, Hamas' spokesperson pledged to fire at Tel Aviv if the IDF attacks against its positions are not halted.
- On May 17, the IDF announced the thwarting of an attempted maritime attack by Hamas against Israel via the sea. This shows Hamas's failure to successfully diversify its military operations due to Israel's heightened vigilance and advanced intelligence on such maneuvers.
- Fatah called for a general strike across the West Bank on May 18. The call for mobilization comes against the backdrop of Hamas overshadowing Fatah in the Palestinian national movement at present. The call for a strike will increase the likelihood of violent clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli troops in the West Bank over the course of the next 24 hours.
- Israeli authorities' arrest on May 17 of an Arab suspect over the wounding of a minor in Jaffa and the death of a Jewish individual in Lod on May 17 after sustaining injuries during riots several days ago may fuel tensions and trigger localized unrest in Israel's mixed cities. However, these will likely remain limited in scope and scale, in line with the major downtick in such incidents witnessed over recent days.
- **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 Israeli Air Force (IAF) announced during the afternoon hours of May 17 that a total of 3,150 rockets have been fired from the Gaza Strip towards Israeli territory since the beginning of the latest round of escalation. Approximately 460 of these rockets were failed launches that landed within the Gaza Strip.
- Reports indicate that the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, held extensive talks with both Israel and Hamas on May 16-17 to reach a ceasefire agreement and end the ongoing conflict. While the Israeli authorities have acknowledged the call

for the ceasefire, they have reportedly stated that their operation in the Gaza Strip will continue.

- On May 16, Hezbollah reportedly stated that it will not be involved in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Gaza-based militants and that it will not open a second front along the Israel-Lebanon border.
- On May 17, China, Norway and Tunisia submitted a draft statement to the UN Security Council (UNSC), calling for an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.
- During the evening hours of May 17, Hamas pledged to fire at **Tel Aviv** if Israel's attacks against Hamas militant infrastructure are not halted.

Gaza Strip

- The IDF has announced that the IAF struck 35 Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip within a time-span of 20 minutes during the overnight hours of May 16-17. This included airstrikes targeting Hamas' intelligence compound and the residences of nine senior Hamas operatives. About 15 km of underground tunnels linked to Hamas were also destroyed.
- The IDF confirmed during the afternoon hours of May 17 that the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) commander of the northern battalion, Hisam Abu Harbid, was killed in an IAF strike in Jabaliya. Harbid replaced Baha Abu al-Ata after the latter was killed by the IDF in Operation "Black Belt" in November 2019. The PIJ confirmed that he was killed in the strike.
- During the afternoon hours of May 17, the IAF stated that it had identified a Hamas submersible naval weapon that was being taken to the shore to be used in an attack in Israeli waters. Following this, the IAF carried out an airstrike and neutralized the threat.

Southern Israel

- About 60 rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel between the evening hours of May 16 and the morning of May 17. Ten of them fell within the Gaza Strip, while most of the others were intercepted by the Iron Dome air defense system. No casualties or significant material damage was reported as a result of these attacks.
- During the afternoon hours of May 17, three Israelis were wounded due to the impact of a rocket hit in **Ashdod**. Material damages to a building were also reported.
- Large number of rockets were intercepted over the cities of **Ashdod**, **Ashkelon**, and **Beer Sheva**, on May 16-17.

West Bank

- On May 16, Fatah issued a statement instructing its fighters in the West Bank to adhere to the call for a general mobilization known as "al-Nafir" to defend Jerusalem, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip until "Israel's attacks against Palestinians at the al-Aqsa Mosque/Temple Mount Compound and East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah are stopped".
- Fatah has also announced a general strike across the West Bank on May 18 to condemn Israel's ongoing operations in the Gaza Strip.
- During the morning hours of May 17, the IDF announced that it had neutralized a perpetrator involved in a vehicular-ramming attack near **Nablus**. No Israeli casualties were reported. Jaysh al-Ummah, an al-Qaeda-inspired Salafi-jihadi group in the Gaza Strip, claimed responsibility for the attack. The group "celebrated" the attack and called for more attacks against Israelis.

Jerusalem

- Clashes were reported between Palestinians and the Israeli police in East Jerusalem's **al-Tur** neighborhood as well as on the **Mount of Olives** during the night hours of [May 16](#). During the clashes, Palestinians hurled Molotov cocktails at Israeli security forces' vehicles.

Assessments & Forecast:

Israel & Gaza Strip

1. The May 17 targeted killing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) commander of the northern battalion, Hisam Abu Harbid, in the Gaza Strip's Jabaliya is significant. The elimination of an individual with more than 15 years of leadership experience within the militant group's ranks will partially reduce the PIJ's ability to conduct successful future operations against Israel both on a tactical level in the short-term and more strategically over the medium-term. Furthermore, at the time of the airstrike, Harbid was reportedly hiding in a tunnel or bunker under his home. His killing will therefore send a message to the various militant factions, including Israel's adversaries outside of the Palestinian Territories, such as Hezbollah, that Israel has both the intelligence and operational capabilities needed to identify and eliminate prominent figures wherever they may be located. **FORECAST:** Other high ranking militants will likely increase their personal security measures, such as refraining from staying in one location for extended periods of time and minimizing the divulging and communication of all information that could expose them, due to the fear of such attacks. These additional measures will likely partially reduce the militant factions' ability to plan and conduct complex reprisal operations against Israel as their leaders and high-ranking militants divert their energy and attention towards personal survival rather than conducting offensive maneuvers.
2. **FORECAST:** The killing of the PIJ's Harbid will prompt the group's fighters to intensify its attacks over the coming hours, predominantly in the form of rocket and mortar barrages aimed at Israel's southern cities as well as possibly long-range rocket barrages against Israel's central areas. Attacks against the southern region have already intensified since the incident. Such attacks will likely force Hamas to join the retaliatory strikes, including against central Israel and other strategic sites in Israel, in order to not be perceived as weak by the Palestinian populace and its supporters. This is despite the group's overall desire to reach a ceasefire and limit the damage on its capabilities and governance abilities in the Gaza Strip due to Israel's persistent strikes. Overall, this event will escalate tensions over the coming 24 hours at least. However, alongside reports of intense mediation efforts by the US and Egypt, among others, it may also facilitate Israel's acceptance of a ceasefire over the coming 48 hours. This is because Jerusalem can emerge from the fighting with a perceived significant gain in the elimination of a senior high-ranking militant. The terms of any ceasefire between the groups will also likely prolong the fighting as Hamas seeks to extract concessions from Israel on the status of Jerusalem and the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood dispute, which Israel will refuse to grant the group.
3. Since the conclusion of the last prolonged period of conflict with Israel in 2014, Hamas appears to have invested a great deal of its resources in naval weapons development. This is illustrated by Hamas' development of a number of GPS-guided explosive-laden submarines. Hamas has periodically attempted to utilize its naval capabilities to launch attacks during the IDF's "Operation Guardian of the Walls", which highlights the group's efforts to target Israel in an environment it perceives to be more vulnerable to attack. However, the Israeli security apparatus has successfully thwarted all of the militant group's naval attacks, the latest of which occurred during the afternoon hours of May 17, in which the IAF carried out an airstrike after it identified a Hamas submersible naval weapon that was being taken to the shore to be used in an attack in Israeli waters.
4. Israel's continual thwarting of such attacks highlights its ability to identify and destroy potential

threats to its territorial integrity, including at sea. It also shows Hamas's failure to successfully diversify its military operations due to Israel's heightened vigilance and advanced intelligence on such maneuvers. **FORECAST:** The IAF strikes on Hamas' naval facilities, personnel, and vessels will significantly reduce the latter's operational capabilities in the maritime arena over the coming months at least. In the tactical, short-term sphere, Hamas will continue its attempts to breach Israel's naval security protocols in the hope that it will be able to successfully target an Israeli vessel, thereby providing the organization with a justification for its large investment. However, such attacks are likely to remain unsuccessful given Israel's cognizance of the threat and its overall supremacy at sea.

West Bank

The call for a general strike across the West Bank on May 18 by the Ramallah-based Fatah to condemn Israel's operations in the Gaza Strip indicates that clashes between IDF and Israel Border Police troops deployed in the West Bank and Palestinian protesters are likely over the coming 24 hours. Fatah is the dominant party in the Palestinian Authority (PA) and by calling for the strike, it is trying to seize the initiative and momentum in the Palestinian national movement. This is because it is currently significantly overshadowed by Hamas that has successfully mobilized Palestinian West Bank residents and Arab citizens of Israel to the street, dominated the agenda over the issue of Jerusalem, and undermined Fatah as the "protector of Palestine". **FORECAST:** The call for a general strike by Fatah indicates that the PA may instruct its security forces to limit their preventative operations against Palestinian protesters and allow them to engage in clashes with Israeli troops in the West Bank. This will significantly increase the level of friction between the parties and possibly lead to Palestinian casualties, which will further inflame tensions. There is also a heightened risk of low-sophistication acts of militancy in the West Bank as well as East Jerusalem, similar to those seen over recent days, such as vehicle-ramming attacks, stabbings, and the hurling of Molotov cocktails and rocks.

Israel Unrest

The reported arrest of an Arab suspect over the wounding of a minor in Jaffa on May 14-15 due to the hurling of Molotov cocktails into the latter's residence may heighten tensions among the Israeli Arab community. Arabs may perceive this arrest as the Israeli authorities' efforts to portray the former community as the instigators of violence in Israel's mixed cities like Jaffa. Similarly, the death of a Jewish individual in Lod on May 17 who sustained serious injuries after getting hit by a brick allegedly thrown by Arab rioters on May 11-12 may also fuel tensions among Israeli Jewish segments in central Israel. **FORECAST:** While these incidents may trigger unrest in Jaffa and Lod, they are most likely to remain localized. This is in line with the downtick in scale and scope of violent riots within Israel's mixed cities over recent days, partly due to the Israeli Police and the Shin Bet's heightened efforts to curb the intercommunal violence through scores of arrests and confiscation of materials used by rioters.

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.
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