



Armed Conflict

15

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6:24 UTC

Israel & Palestinian Territories Alert (UPDATE): IDF conducts retaliatory strikes against Hamas targets in Gaza Strip on November 15; broad escalation unlikely

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Please be advised:

- The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) confirmed that two rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel during the overnight hours of November 14-15.
- One rocket triggered Color Red sirens in southern Israel's city of Ashdod and the nearby Shfela region, located in central Israel.
- The Iron Dome air defense system was activated by IDF troops in an attempt to intercept the rockets. The IDF did not indicate that the system successfully intercepted the rockets.
- Israeli reports indicated that the rockets "likely" fell in open territory.
- There are no reports of casualties or damage as a result of the rocket fire.
- During the early morning hours of November 15, IDF aircraft and tanks conducted retaliatory strikes against "underground infrastructure and military posts" belonging to the Hamas militant group in unspecified areas of the Gaza Strip.
- The IDF's statement added that it "is conducting an ongoing situational assessment and remains prepared to operate against any terror activity".

Assessments & Forecast:

1. This development comes amid periodic rocket attacks into southern Israel from the Gaza Strip. The most recent launch occurred on October 22 when two rockets were fired into southern Israel, resulting in Israel Air Force (IAF) retaliatory strikes. However, these infrequent rocket attacks have been contained to areas within relatively close proximity of ten km from the Israel-Gaza Strip border. The firing of rockets towards Ashdod and the Shfela region, located at least 25 km north of the Gaza Strip, constitutes a more noteworthy incident. This is due to its recent rarity amid the observance of a reported ceasefire brokered by Qatar following a rise in tensions in August, which followed persistent incendiary balloon attacks into Israel from Gaza.
2. The rocket fired occurred several days following the one-year anniversary of the assassination of Iran-backed Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) senior commander, Baha Abu al-Ata, on [November 12, 2019](#). This incident fueled an escalation in hostilities between Israel and the PIJ, during which over 200 rockets were fired into Israel. The IDF had been on heightened alert since November 11 in anticipation of a potential symbolic attack, with the deployment of Iron Dome systems to Israel's south and flights into Ben Gurion International Airport being directed to use its northern paths to increase the distance from the Gaza Strip. Therefore, the current rocket attack was likely conducted by the PIJ as a symbolic commemoration of this assassination and effort to project its ability to fire more long-range rockets and disrupt the lives of millions of Israelis who live in the center of the country, as illustrated by the sounding of sirens in Tel Aviv metropolitan area.
3. The fact that the PIJ fired only two rockets, rather than a large-scale barrage, indicates that the overnight rocket launch constituted a primarily symbolic effort to avenge al-Ata and will remain an isolated incident. The IDF, in turn, will seek to avoid an escalation and deterioration of the security situation and will therefore opt to contain the incident to prevent further hostilities. This is bolstered by the IDF's limited retaliatory attacks, which are characteristic of its responses to rocket launches that target Israeli locales within closer proximity to the Gaza Strip, while those breaching this perimeter have often been considered the violation of a "red line" and prompted a response on a larger scale.
4. **FORECAST:** Overall, tensions will remain high over the coming hours and days following the latest hostilities, although a broader escalation is unlikely for the reasons outlined above. An increased

presence of IDF troops will likely be witnessed along the Israel-Gaza Strip border in anticipation of further potential hostilities in the form of shootings or the planting of explosives by Gaza-based militants. At the current juncture, the IDF is likely to retaliate against any hostilities emanating from the Gaza Strip by targeting Hamas, which it holds responsible for such incidents.

Recommendations:

Israel

1. Travel to Israel may continue at this time while adhering to security precautions regarding militant attacks, while avoiding the immediate vicinity of the Syrian, Lebanese, and Egyptian borders, due to the persistent risk for cross-border violence.
2. Those traveling in the 40 km area surrounding the Gaza Strip should continue adhering to all safety precautions regarding early warning sirens for incoming rockets.
3. 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.
4. In an open area, lay down on the ground and cover your head with your hands.
5. When driving, safely pull over and follow the above instructions.
6. Remain in position for at least ten minutes unless instructed otherwise and stay away from any unidentified objects.

Palestinian Territories

1. We advise against all travel to the Gaza Strip at this time due to frequent border crossing closures and the threat of militant activity and armed conflict. Those operating or residing in the Gaza Strip are advised to initiate contingency and emergency evacuation plans due to deterioration in the security situation. Contact us for itinerary and contingency support options.
2. For those remaining in Gaza, be advised that further airstrikes are anticipated over the coming hours. In the event that orders to evacuate are issued by the IDF, including via flyers, it is advised to immediately comply with instructions and leave the mentioned areas. If airstrikes are reported in your vicinity, it is advised to seek shelter and remain away from windows. If no shelter is available, lie on the ground and shield your head.