Israel strikes Gaza in retaliation for rocket fire

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The IDF struck targets in the Gaza Strip on Friday night in response to the firing of a rocket sent into Israel earlier in the evening, breaking a lull of violence amid the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

“IDF aircraft and tanks attacked military positions and infrastructure used for underground activity by Hamas in the northern Gaza Strip,” the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit said in a statement.

“The attacks were carried out in response to rocket fire launched from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory earlier in the evening,” the statement added.

Explosions were heard in southern Israel on Friday night after incoming rocket sirens were activated in communities bordering the Gaza Strip. The sirens were activated around 9.30 p.m. in the southern college town of Sderot and neighboring communities including Nivim and Or Haner.

The IDF said that one projectile was fired from the northern part of the Hamas-run coastal enclave, with local reports saying that it struck an open field.

There were no reports of damage or injuries.

Palestinian media reports later said that Israeli Air Force jets struck several targets in the Hamas-run coastal enclave.

The projectile was the first fired in almost a month, when a rocket was fired towards southern Israel but landed inside the Gaza Strip.

In February, close to 100 rockets were fired at Israel by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) terror group after gruesome footage of an IDF bulldozer lifting the mutilated corpse of a 27-year-old PIJ terrorist after he was killed by IDF fire while planting an explosive device along the Gaza perimeter fence.

Footage from the scene which went viral on social media showed the IDF bulldozer driving at high speed toward a group of Palestinian youth throwing stones to prevent them from retrieving the body. Several people were seen carrying one individual, but the bulldozer was seen lifting the body from the ground before it returned to Israel along with an IDF Merkava tank which had been guarding it.

But the past few weeks have seen a period of calm holding, as both sides have focused on halting the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

The number of individuals diagnosed with the virus climbed to over 3,035 by Thursday afternoon. According to the Health Ministry, while the large majority of cases are mild, 49 people are in serious condition and 10 people have died.

There are at least nine confirmed cases in the Gaza Strip. The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that Gaza’s healthcare system would not be able to deal with an outbreak of the deadly disease in the densely populated enclave, home to nearly two million people.

There are 20 coronavirus quarantine facilities in Gaza's South, including empty schools, hotels and medical facilities, which are currently housing more than 1,200 people who have just returned to the blockaded Strip.

WHO has established a field hospital at the Rafah crossing with 38 beds, six intensive care unit beds and 30 beds for patients in moderate condition. Another 50 rooms will be established as a quarantine area for travelers. The Gaza European Hospital will also be designated to absorb and treat additional cases should the field hospital reach full capacity.

The IDF’s Unit for Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) has helped transfer approximately 1,000 coronavirus detection kits donated by the WHO into the Strip as well as the entry of hundreds of medical protection kits as well as medicines and disinfectants.