Israeli killed in Rehovot, several hurt as Gaza rockets manage to pierce Iron Dome

May 11, 2023

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The Times of Israel

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The latest round of fighting between Israel and Gaza terrorists claimed its first Israeli victim Thursday evening, as one person was killed and five others injured when a rocket fired from the Strip slammed into an apartment building in the central town of Rehovot.

The deadly attack, coupled with several other rocket hits in southern Israel, led to combative statements from Israeli officials and pushed off the prospect of an imminent ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad after three days of combat.

The strike in Rehovot was one of several near-simultaneous ones in central and southern Israel that managed to puncture the Iron Dome missile defense system, which has had a 95% interception success rate in. Over 800 rockets have been fired at Israel since Wednesday afternoon, some 600 of which crossed the border.

At 9 p.m., a fresh barrage of rockets was directed at central Israel, with no reports of casualties or damage.

The Rehovot victim was not immediately identified, but police said medics were forced to declare his death almost immediately upon arrival at the scene. He was apparently not inside a protected room when the rocket hit, despite alarm sirens sounding in the city prior to the strike.

Home Front Command chief Rafi Milo, visiting the scene afterward, said the room was being used for storage. “This shows how important it is to follow the instructions of the Home Front Command,” he said.

One projectile fell in the Sdot Hanegev Regional Council, injuring an 82-year-old woman who was struck by shrapnel. According to the Magen David Adom ambulance service, the rocket launched from the Gaza Strip landed outside a home in the municipality. A 90-year-old man was evacuated to Soroka Medical Center in Beersheba after suffering an anxiety attack.

In the Eshkol Regional Council Council, a foreign agricultural worker was moderately hurt by shrapnel, local authorities said. MDA said the man, in his 30s, was taken to Soroka Medical Center for further treatment.

Three more rockets fell in the southern town of Sderot, with one hitting a public building. There were no reports of injuries, though.

Shrapnel from another rocket landed in the yard of a house in Moshav Ge’a just north of the Gaza Strip. There were no reports of injuries.

Of the five injured in the Rehovot rocket attack, four were in moderate condition and one suffered minor wounds.

Shay Cohen, who was injured in Rehovot, told the Kan public broadcaster that after the attack, he joined others and rescued a family trapped in their home inside the building.

“We rescued an elderly woman, a man in his 40s, and a child about two or three years old, and it was a miracle that they didn’t get hurt,” he said.

The continuing bloodshed has left 29 Palestinians dead and at least 93 more injured. It has been the worst bout of fighting between Israel and Palestinian terrorists in Gaza in months, with at least 10 civilians — mostly women and children — among the dead. Some of the civilians were killed in Israeli strikes, while others are believed to have died as a result of failed Palestinian rocket launches.

**‘Meeting fire with fire’**

Following the latest barrages, Israel indicated a ceasefire was not imminent, with one senior official accusing Islamic Jihad of torpedoing ceasefire talks and saying Israel will “meet fire with fire.”

“Over the last day, despite Egypt’s efforts to bring about a ceasefire, the Islamic Jihad launched a barrage of fire at Israel. In response, a fourth significant senior official in the Islamic Jihad was targeted, and the organization continued to suffer severe damage,” the senior official said.

The official said Israel will respond harshly to continued rocket fire.

“If the shooting at Israel continues, the strikes on Gaza will continue, including the continuation of the targeted attacks that exact other heavy prices from the Islamic Jihad,” he said. “Fire will be answered by fire.”

On Thursday afternoon, the IDF said it struck an Islamic Jihad attack tunnel that was dug up to Israel’s security barrier with the Gaza Strip.

The IDF said the tunnel was established under the orders of Khaled Mansour, a former commander of the terror group in southern Gaza who was killed in an Israeli strike last August.

The Mujahideen Brigades — a relatively small armed faction in the Gaza Strip that is somewhat allied with the coastal enclave’s rulers, Hamas — said two of its members were killed in an Israeli airstrike near the Gaza City neighborhood of Shuja’iyya.

The terror group said the two members were involved in launching rockets at Israel when they were targeted.

The Hamas-run health ministry said another two were wounded in the strike.

**Another Islamic Jihad commander killed**

An Israeli airstrike in the Gaza Strip earlier Thursday afternoon killed a senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad member, dealing another blow to the group in the latest round of hostilities and further dampening hopes for a ceasefire.

The airstrike in the southern Gaza town of Bani Suheila, near Khan Younis, killed Ahmad Abu Deka, the deputy commander of Islamic Jihad’s rocket forces, the Israel Defense Forces and Shin Bet security agency said in a statement.

Abu Deka was the deputy of Ali Ghali, the head of the Islamic Jihad rocket forces, who was killed in a separate Israeli strike early Thursday morning.

The IDF said Abu Deka “held a significant role in commanding and carrying out the rocket barrages toward Israel” over the past day.

The Hamas-run health ministry in the Gaza Strip said that in addition to Abu Deka, another four were wounded in the Israeli airstrike. Palestinian Islamic Jihad also confirmed Abu Deka’s death, saying he was killed in a “cowardly Zionist assassination.”

Speaking to reporters after the latest airstrike, the head of the IDF Southern Command Maj. Gen. Eliezer Toledano said the military would continue with targeted killings of members of Islamic Jihad.

Operation Shield and Arrow, as it is known in the military, was launched early Tuesday with the killing of three top Islamic Jihad commanders in the wake of rocket fire from Gaza earlier this month.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a warning to Islamic Jihad on Thursday afternoon.

“This morning we targeted the commander of Islamic Jihad’s missile array in Gaza. Now… we targeted his deputy as well,” said Netanyahu during a visit to a military base housing the David’s Sling air defense system.

“I have already said, anyone who comes to harm us — their blood will be on their heads, including anyone who replaces them,” Netanyahu said.

The terror group responded to the initial strikes in Gaza by firing hundreds of rockets at Israeli communities, causing some material damage across southern Israel.

As of Thursday evening, the IDF said Palestinians in Gaza had launched 803 rockets and mortar shells at Israel. According to the military, at least 620 of the projectiles crossed the border, while 152 fell short in Gaza — with some of them believed to have killed four Palestinians.

The IDF said air defense systems — Iron Dome and the medium-range David’s Sling — intercepted 179 of the rockets, marking a 95 percent interception rate of projectiles heading for populated areas, while a handful landed in urban areas, causing damage.

The Middle East Media Research Institute on Thursday published video shared by PIJ of its rocket squads firing at Israel.

The military also said it had carried out strikes against 191 targets belonging to Islamic Jihad during the campaign.

Over 40 people have sought treatment for wounds suffered as they tried to reach shelter, or because of acute anxiety from nearby impacts.

Security restrictions in southern Israel remained in place, including rules mandating school closures within 40 kilometers (25 miles) of Gaza and limiting outdoor gatherings to no more than 10 people.

Israeli officials have insisted that they are keeping the fight limited to Islamic Jihad and not the larger and better-armed Hamas terror group, which rules the Strip, hoping to avoid widening the conflict, while warning that it is prepared to do so if fired upon.