4 soldiers killed, 10 hurt inside Israel by Hamas rocket attack from Rafah

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/at-least-10-israelis-hurt-in-hamas-rocket-attack-from-south-gazas-rafah/>

Four Israeli soldiers were killed and 10 more were wounded in a Hamas-claimed rocket attack on a staging ground near the Gaza Strip on Sunday, prompting the military to shutter a key border crossing.

The slain soldiers were named as:

* Staff Sgt. Ruben Marc Mordechai Assouline, 19 of the Givati Brigade’s Shaked Battalion, from Ra’anana.
* Staff Sgt. Ido Testa, 19, of the Givati Brigade’s Shaked Battalion, from Jerusalem.
* Staff Sgt. Tal Shavit, 21, of the Nahal Brigade’s 931st Battalion, from Kfar Giladi.
* Sgt. Michael Ruzal, 18, of the Nahal Brigade’s 931st Battalion, from Rishon Lezion.

Their deaths brought the toll of slain troops in Israel’s ground offensive against Hamas and amid operations along the Gaza border to 267.

Another 10 soldiers were wounded, including two soldiers of the 931st Battalion and a soldier of the Shaked Battalion who were listed in serious condition, the Israel Defense Forces said.

More than 10 rockets were fired from the Rafah area in southern Gaza in the attack, according to the IDF.

The Hamas terror group said it had launched a barrage of short-range rockets at a gathering of Israeli troops on the border, near the southern community of Kerem Shalom.

Most of the rockets struck an area where troops were gathered on the border, not far from the Kerem Shalom border crossing, which has been used to deliver thousands of truckloads of humanitarian aid to Gaza amid the war.

The soldiers had been guarding military equipment that was brought to the area for the IDF’s planned offensive in Rafah.

The victims were taken to hospitals by ambulance, aside from one who was airlifted.

The military was investigating why the Iron Dome air defense system did not engage the barrage.

Sirens had also sounded in Kerem Shalom during the attack, and one of the rockets hit a home in the community. Towns close to the enclave have been largely evacuated of civilians since the devastating Hamas-led onslaught on October 7.

The IDF said it had shuttered the Kerem Shalom Crossing for humanitarian aid trucks following the attack.

According to the military, the rocket attack was carried out from an area close to the Rafah Crossing with Egypt, some 350 meters from a civilian shelter.

The IDF said the attack was “another clear example of the systematic exploitation that the Hamas terror organization makes of humanitarian facilities and spaces for terror needs, while using the civilian population as a human shield.”

The IDF also carried out strikes in Rafah in response, including hitting the launchers and an adjacent building used by Hamas, the military said.

According to health officials in the Hamas-controlled enclave, one airstrike hit a house in Rafah, killing seven people.

Another strike just before midnight, the officials claimed, killed nine Palestinians, including a baby, in another house in a different part of Rafah.

“The toll of martyrs in Rafah reached 16,” AFP quoted Gazan first responders as saying.

More than a million Palestinian civilians are sheltering in Gaza’s southernmost city, considered to be the Hamas terror group’s last major redoubt.

Israel has repeatedly indicated it [could launch an offensive in Rafah imminently](https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-plans-expansion-of-gaza-humanitarian-zones-ahead-of-looming-rafah-offensive/) should talks for a truce and hostage deal talks break down.

During a visit Sunday to the central Gaza Strip, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said Israel had identified signs that Hamas was not interested in a hostage deal, and in turn, the military would launch its offensive in Rafah in “the very near future.”

“We have clear goals for this war, we are committed to the elimination of Hamas and the release of the hostages. We have given [Hamas] time and we wanted to reach a situation where we would realize the release of the hostages as quickly as possible, with a certain delay in the operational action, because the hostages are in a difficult situation and we need to make every effort to release them,” Gallant said to troops in central Gaza’s Netzarim Corridor.

“We have identified alarming signs that Hamas actually does not intend to go for any agreement framework with us. The meaning of this [is] action in Rafah and the entire Gaza Strip in the very near future,” he said.

Also Sunday, a Hamas command and control center based out of a UNRWA facility in the central Gaza Strip was targeted in an airstrike, the Israeli military and Shin Bet security agency said.

According to a joint statement, the site was used by Hamas as a staging ground to direct numerous attacks against Israeli troops in the Netzarim Corridor and against humanitarian aid deliveries.

According to the military, the command center was also used to supply dozens of operatives with weapons, including members of the terror group in tunnels.

“The attack was carefully planned and carried out using precise weaponry to avoid as much harm as possible to uninvolved [civilians],” the IDF said.

“The Hamas terror organization systematically exploits international institutions and the civilian population as a human shield for terror actions against the State of Israel,” the IDF added.

Earlier Sunday, the military said it had killed a senior Hamas commander in the terror group’s Bureij Battalion was killed in a recent airstrike.

The IDF said that Saleh Jamil Muhammad Imad, head of the Bureij Battalion’s combat support unit, was killed alongside several other Hamas operatives at the targeted site in central Gaza.

Another airstrike killed three Hamas terrorists, members of the group’s elite Nukhba force, who participated in the October 7 onslaught, according to the IDF.

The IDF said a separate strike in northern Gaza’s Jabaliya killed three Hamas operatives, including a deputy company commander.

Overnight, the IDF carried out artillery shelling against a Hamas rocket launching site in Gaza that the military said was primed for attacks on southern Israel.

Fighter jets also hit several more sites across Gaza, including buildings used by terror groups, weapon depots and other infrastructure, the IDF said. One of the buildings was struck after a sniper was identified in it, according to the army.

The airstrikes came as ground troops of the 99th Division continued to operate in central Gaza’s Netzarim Corridor.

Israel says it has killed at least 13,000 fighters inside Gaza, along with around 1,000 killed inside Israel on October 7 and in the days immediately after.

Gaza’s Hamas-controlled health ministry says over 34,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli offensive, a figure which cannot be confirmed. The ministry does not differentiate between civilians and combatants.