

## **Major Escalation in Israel**

*May 11, 2021*

**A major escalation in violence occurred overnight as Hamas fired hundreds of rockets at Israeli cities and towns, including the capital Jerusalem. At least 27 Israeli civilians have been injured. Schools in many areas of the country have been closed today as the attacks continue, and reserve troops have been called up.**

### **Rocket Attacks**

- More than 250 rockets and mortar shells were fired at Israel overnight, with the onslaught beginning at exactly 6:00pm local time (11:00am ET). See [here](#) for video of multiple rockets being launched from populated civilian areas of Gaza, and [here](#) for footage of the rockets reaching Israeli towns.
- Hundreds of sirens sounded across the Jewish state throughout the night, and millions of Israelis spent time in bomb shelters. See video [here](#) of an Israeli city under rocket attack.
- Most rockets were fired at cities and towns in Israel's south, but a number of longer-range rockets were launched against cities further away, including Israel's capital, Jerusalem. This is the first time that Jerusalem has been targeted by rockets since the 2014 war in Gaza known as Operation Protective Edge. See [here](#) for video of the sirens in Jerusalem.
- In [this](#) video, an older brother is protecting his young sister during a rocket attack on the southern Israeli city of Sderot.
- At around 6:00am on Tuesday, an unusually large barrage of rockets was fired at the major southern Israeli city of Ashkelon. Hamas has threatened to turn the sea-side town "into hell."
- About 1/3 of all the rockets fired since last night fell short of their targets including many in Palestinian territory, or landed in unpopulated areas. Of the remainder, Israel's anti-rocket defense system - the Iron Dome - successfully intercepted 90% of incoming projectiles.
- See [here](#) for video of the Iron Dome intercepting multiple incoming rockets during the dawn attack on Ashkelon.
- Unfortunately, a number of rockets did successfully hit their targets:
  - One of the rockets struck a family home in Ashkelon. The father (40) suffered moderate-to-serious head injuries, the mother (39) was in moderate condition and the children (11 and 8) suffered light injuries. All are currently in hospital. See [here](#) for video of IDF troops examining the home after the injured were evacuated.
  - During the same barrage, a rocket hit a second home in Ashkelon, lightly injuring two people who are also currently hospitalized. See footage [here](#).
  - Another rocket struck a house in Nir Am, in the Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council, shortly after midnight on Monday night, but no injuries were sustained.

- An anti-tank guided missile fired from Gaza struck an Israeli vehicle near Sderot, causing light injuries to the civilian driver who was sheltering several feet from his vehicle. He was also transferred to hospital for treatment.
- One rocket landed near a home in a community outside Jerusalem, causing light damage, but no injuries. Some of the others sparked fires in the forests surrounding the capital, which were quickly extinguished.
- See [here](#) for video of damage from a rocket that hit a Magen David Adom Ambulance.
- At least 27 Israelis have been injured in total. Of these, five were children. In addition to those hit by rocket fire, a number of people were hospitalized for injuries sustained while running to bomb shelters, and seven people suffered acute anxiety attacks brought on by rocket sirens.
- Both Hamas and Islamic Jihad have taken responsibility for the attacks.
- The rocket attacks continue at the time of writing.

### Israeli Response

- In response to the rocket fire, Israel struck some 130 targets in Gaza, mainly hitting terrorist infrastructure belonging to Hamas. The wave of counter-attacks began after the security cabinet authorized "significant airstrikes" in the Gaza Strip. See [here](#) for video of Israel Air Force planes preparing to launch attacks on Hamas targets.
- The IDF response has been named Operation Guardian of the Walls (Shomer HaChomot).
- Targets hit by Israel include the home of a Hamas battalion commander in a multi-story building, the organization's military intelligence headquarters, an arms factory, military complexes belonging to Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, as well as two terrorist attack tunnels that were close to the border fence with Israel. See [here](#) for video of IDF precision attacks, (filmed from the planes), hitting terrorist infrastructure in Gaza.
- In one attack, the IDF bombed a Hamas team preparing to fire an anti-tank guided missile.
- Palestinian sources claim that a total of 24 people, including children, were killed in the strikes and a further 103 were injured. Israel has said that it has killed at least 15 Hamas terrorists in its attacks.
- IDF Spokesman Brig.-Gen. Hidai Zilberman said that while Israel always "takes precautions" to minimize possible harm to non-combatants during its military operations, Hamas "deliberately places its military assets in the heart of the civilian population in Gaza." He added that many of those killed in Gaza, were struck by "errant rockets fired by Hamas," and not by Israeli airstrikes.
- On Tuesday morning, the IDF sent additional artillery batteries to the Gaza border, possibly indicating that the military is preparing for a potential wider conflict.
- The IDF says that it has not ruled out a ground offensive into Gaza.
- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defense Minister Benny Gantz and top military personnel spent most of the night at the Kirya, Israel's military headquarters in Tel Aviv. See [here](#) for a photo of Israel's chiefs of staff meeting last night, and [here](#) for a photo of political and military leadership meeting.
- At noon on Tuesday, Defense Minister Gantz authorized the call-up of 5,000 reserve troops.

## Defensive Precautions

- The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has deployed additional batteries of Iron Dome systems due to the heightened security situation, and ground forces around Gaza have been significantly bolstered.
- Under orders from the IDF Home Front Command, local councils in Israel's south (within a 25 mile radius of the Gaza Strip) shut schools today and banned large public gatherings. Under the restrictions, only 10 people can gather outside and 50 inside, as long as there is a bomb shelter nearby that can accommodate all participants.
- In the center of the country, large gatherings have been banned.
- With rockets reaching the center of the country, councils have also closed schools in other cities, including Rishon Lezion, Holon, Bat Yam, Rehovot, Lod and Ness Ziona.
- Public bomb shelters have been opened in many locations in the center of the country, including Tel Aviv-Yafo, Bnei Brak, Givatayim and Ramat Gan.
- A number of roads near the Gaza border have also been closed and farmers have been instructed to stop all work near the border.
- Train lines between Ashkelon and Beersheba and to Sderot, Netivot and Ofakim were halted on Monday afternoon.
- A major IDF drill set to begin this week has been postponed. The drill, known as "Chariots of Fire," was meant to be the army's largest ever peace time exercise and would have involved large sections of the IDF.
- Israel's President Reuven Rivlin has opened his official residence to children from the area around Gaza and the south of the country today. Groups from the areas under rocket attack have been invited to Rivlin's home to enjoy educational and experiential tours.

## Background

- The latest escalation began late yesterday following days of Palestinian rioting, when Hamas threatened major retaliation if Israel did not remove all police from the Temple Mount and other areas of Jerusalem by 6:00pm. The first barrage of rockets struck at exactly that time.
- Hamas leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, declared that "Jerusalem has called and Gaza has responded. We will continue as long as Israel does not stop the aggression and terrorism in Jerusalem and at the al-Aqsa Mosque."
- For full details on the rioting and the factors that have led to the violence, see JFNA's update [here](#).
- In the hours before the rocket attack began, Israel made a number of moves to try to de-escalate the situation, including barring Jews from entering the Temple Mount during Jerusalem Day celebrations and re-routing the annual Jerusalem Day flag parade away from heavily Arab-populated areas of Jerusalem. Among other changes, this involved removing the traditional Damascus Gate portion of the parade. Later, the parade was cancelled outright. The sensitive Supreme Court decision on the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood was postponed a day earlier.
- Since the rocket attacks began, riots have continued throughout Jerusalem and Israel's Arab Israeli community with at least 30 Israeli Arabs arrested for violent disturbances overnight.
- Early Tuesday an Arab protestor was shot dead during rioting after he threw rocks at Jewish bystanders. According to initial reports, a Jewish civilian shot the protestor after coming under rock attack. The Jewish civilian has been arrested in connection to the shooting.
- Eight companies of Border Police reserves have been called up to assist with riot control and other tasks in Israel as a result of the increased tensions. The Border Police are the para-military branch of the civilian police force that traditionally deals with significant violent incidents.

- See [here](#) for Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs background to the current fighting.

## Reactions

- US State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said, "While we urge de-escalation on all sides, we also recognize Israel's legitimate right to defend itself, to defend its people and its territory." See video [here](#).
- US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the rocket attacks from Gaza against Israel should stop "immediately," and he urged all sides to take steps to reduce tensions.
- An IDF spokesperson's message can be seen [here](#).
- Defense Minister Benny Gantz said the IDF would continue striking Hamas and other terrorists in the Strip until "long-term and complete quiet" is restored.

## Jewish Federations and Partners

- The Jewish Federations of North America has been closely monitoring the situation on the ground and has activated our Emergency Situation Protocols.
- We are in close contact with the government, security forces, our partners, and individual Federation representatives in the areas under attack.
- See [here](#) for JFNA's statement following the initial attacks.
- The [Jewish Agency for Israel](#) has placed its Fund for the Victims of Terror into Emergency Mode. The Fund is in contact with the families of the homes that were directly damaged in Ashkelon and the Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council, as well as others who have been injured, to determine whether emergency funds are needed and will distribute as appropriate.
- The Ashkelon Resilience Center, whose team were extensively trained by Federations' partner the [Israel Trauma Coalition](#) (ITC), has just begun operating, and is functioning at full emergency capacity. Teams were on emergency duty throughout the night and are preparing to provide reinforcement for local staff in line with any future developments. At the same time, ITC's national trauma hotlines have received very heavy traffic since the escalation began. ITC has also been working with therapists in the East Jerusalem area, who are reporting difficulties in coping with a large number of requests from Arab families for help with teens who have joined the rioting. Anxiety victims are also being treated by ITC in the areas around Jerusalem, where a number of long-range rockets fell yesterday.
- At the time of writing, the [American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee](#) (JDC) are convening their emergency situation team and are assessing the situation on the ground and needs.

## Update - Afternoon

- In the early afternoon on Tuesday, two buildings in Ashkelon and one in nearby Ashdod suffered direct hits from a massive barrage of rockets from Gaza. At least two of the rockets sparked fires. Two rockets landed in Ashdod, and six in Ashkelon. So far, it seems that three people were injured including a 12-year-old who was hit by shrapnel in Ashkelon.
- One of the buildings hit was an Ashkelon school, which was empty as lessons had been suspended due to the attacks. See [photo](#) and video [footage](#) here.

*For more information, please contact JFNA's [Dani Wassner](#), Director of Israeli Government Relations.*

*Sources: IDF Spokesperson, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Government Press Office, Office of the Prime Minister, N12 Israel News, The Times of Israel, Galei Tzahal Radio, The Jerusalem Post, Ynet, i24 News, Stand With Us, Alma.*