

## **Major Escalation in Israel- Tel Aviv Under Attack**

*May 12, 2021*

**Overnight, the violence from Gaza escalated significantly with a massive and unprecedented bombardment directed at the center of the country. Hundreds of rockets were fired at Tel Aviv, Herzliya, Ra'anana, Rishon LeTzion and other cities, leaving six dead and others injured. Millions of Israelis were forced to take refuge in shelters and safe rooms.**

### **Rocket Attacks**

- Close to 1,000 rockets have been fired into Israel from Gaza since attacks by Hamas and other terrorist groups began at 6:00pm on Monday night. See footage of the rockets [here](#). A further 200 rockets fired from Gaza fell short, landing in the Hamas-controlled enclave.
- On average, a rocket has been fired at Israel every two minutes, 24 hours a day, since fighting began. See video of the rockets striking Israel [here](#).
- In a never-before seen attack, hundreds of longer-range rockets were fired at the center of the country throughout the night, causing sirens to sound multiple times in Tel Aviv, Bnei Brak, Givatayim, Herzliya, Ra'anana, Ramat Gan, Rishon LeTzion, Holon and other locations. See [here](#) for an image of Tel Aviv families taking shelter in the stairwells of their apartment building while under rocket attack; and [here](#) for footage of a paramedic taking cover during a rocket strike.
- Six Israelis have been killed in the attacks:
  - Two Arab Israelis from Lod, Khalil Awad, 52, and his daughter Nadin, 16, were killed when a rocket hit their home. See footage [here](#).
  - An elderly woman and her foreign care-worker were killed in Ashkelon. The carer was attempting to help her patient reach a shelter when the siren sounded, but the two did not make it in time.
  - Leah Yom-Tov, a 63-year-old woman from Rishon LeTzion was killed by a direct rocket strike as she ran from her apartment to a public shelter across the street, which she couldn't reach on time. See [here](#) for the aftermath of the attack.
  - An Israeli was killed and two others seriously injured when an anti-tank missile was fired across the border from Gaza at an Israeli vehicle.
- Close to 50 Israelis have been injured by the rocket fire, including two men in the town of Bereket, whose house was hit by a rocket, and the driver of a bus that suffered a direct rocket hit (that thankfully was empty of passengers; see images of the bus [here](#)).
- The Iron Dome anti-rocket defense system continued to knock-out 90% of those rockets headed to populated areas, but some Hamas hits were successful, including attacks on an [empty school](#), a kindergarten, an oil pipeline, private homes and more. See [here](#) for footage of a rocket hitting a home in Sderot.
- Earlier this morning the IDF shot down a drone after it flew from the Gaza Strip into Israeli

territory.

### **Israeli Response**

- In response to the rocket fire, tens of Israeli aircraft took part in a massive counter-strike, aimed at major Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip. Over 500 terror targets have been struck since Monday night. See video of Hamas targets being hit by the IDF [here](#).
- According to Palestinian sources, 35 people have been killed in Gaza by Israeli attacks, including 12 children and three woman. Another 233 have been wounded.
- According to the IDF, a full third of rockets launched from Gaza do not make it over the border and land in the Gaza Strip. The military says that the majority of the civilians killed and wounded in Gaza are in fact a result of these misfires. See [here](#) for Ministry of Foreign Affairs video of this.
- The IDF also says that in their strikes, only senior leaders of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad were targeted. At least five significant terror figures were killed, and the homes of three others were destroyed. The terror leaders include the head of Hamas' anti-tank missile unit, and the operative in charge of Islamic Jihad's rocket arsenal.
- In one of the strikes, the IDF said it killed Hassan Kaugi, the chief of the security department in Hamas' military intelligence, and his deputy, Wail Issa. The two commanders were in a high-rise building, and residents were warned to leave before the strike took place. See IDF footage of the strike [here](#)).
- Following the attack, Hamas warned that it would launch a massive attack on Tel Aviv if Israel continued to target high-rise buildings; a promise that the terror group upheld. See [here](#) for a Hamas video showing preparations to attack Tel Aviv.
- In order to avoid civilian casualties in Gaza, and focus on military targets (which are typically placed by Hamas in built-up and populated areas), the IDF has been using a tactic known as "door knocks," where the military first drops a very small explosive on a target that makes noise, but does no real damage. This "knock" is sent as a warning to residents that the building is about to be hit, giving civilians a chance to escape.
- In addition, the IDF warned residents of Gaza to stay away from any locations where Hamas weapons are stored for their own safety.
- According to the IDF, significant terror infrastructure has been destroyed in their counter-strikes, including Hamas' military intelligence headquarters, munition manufacturing sites, military complexes belonging to Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, as well as two terror tunnels that were close to the border fence. See [here](#) for a photo of a building containing military infrastructure that was struck by the IDF.
- In parallel, Israeli troops in the West Bank have arrested numerous Hamas leaders.
- Defense Minister Benny Gantz said that Israel's goal is to "severely weaken Hamas and restore calm to southern Israel." He said that Israel will continue to attack the terrorists and will not end the operation until the IDF can guarantee long-term calm and quiet from Gaza.

### **Defensive Precautions**

- Schools in large parts of the country, including Tel Aviv, were ordered closed today as lessons were suspended in all cities and towns south of Herzliya.
- Ben Gurion Airport was closed briefly with all take-offs and landings cancelled due to rocket attacks, but has since re-opened.
- Ashkelon's Barzilai Hospital has moved its neo-natal and nursery unit to bomb shelters overnight. So far, 21 babies have been born in the newly-designated nursery-shelter.

## Rioting in Israel

- The fighting in Gaza has also spilled over into the Arab-Israeli street, with significant unrest seen, mainly in mixed Arab-Jewish towns.
- The rioting was worst in the mixed city of Lod in the center of the country where the government, in an unusual and extreme move, declared a state of emergency. A day earlier, one rioter in Lod was killed by a Jewish bystander (who has since been arrested) who felt threatened when being pelted by stones; and two were wounded in clashes with police.
- Three synagogues and dozens of cars were torched in the disturbances in Lod. The city's mayor, Yair Revivo, appeared on Channel 12 news and declared, "We have lost control of the city and the streets." He added that "the danger that Lod faces, and the damage that it can do, is harsher than hundreds of rockets being hurled towards Israel."
- In response to the unrest in Lod, authorities brought in units of Border Police (the para-military branch of the civilian police force) to help contain the protests.
- Uri Buri, a popular Jewish-owned fish restaurant in Akko, was destroyed by a fire lit by rioters.
- In Jerusalem, the Maoz Yeshiva in the mixed Jewish-Arab Ramat Eshkol neighborhood was firebombed, causing considerable damage. Shortly afterwards a synagogue in the neighborhood was burned and Jewish-owned cars were set ablaze.
- Police attempted to maintain order, shooting rubber bullets and stun grenades as they were pelted with rocks and Molotov cocktails. At least 150 rioters were arrested in cities such as Lod, Ramle, Akko and Jaffa.
- Widespread violent protests also took place in Arab Israeli towns across the country.

## Reactions

- Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said last night, "We are all mourning those killed and praying for those who were injured. We all give our full support to the IDF and Israeli security forces. This campaign will take time." See Netanyahu delivering his statement [here](#).
- Defense Minister Benny Gantz said, Israel has "the right and the obligation to act and will continue to do so."
- Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, said Israel had "ignited fire in Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa and the flames extended to Gaza, therefore, it is responsible for the consequences."
- UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said that "The UK condemns the firing of rockets at Jerusalem and locations within Israel. The ongoing violence in Jerusalem and Gaza must stop. We need an immediate de-escalation on all sides, and an end to the targeting of civilian populations"

## Jewish Federations and Partners

- The Jewish Federations of North America continues to closely monitor the situation and is in regular contact with the government, security forces, our partners, and individual Federation representatives in the areas under attack.
- See [here](#) for JFNA's statement following last night's attacks on Tel Aviv.
- The [Jewish Agency for Israel](#) is continuing its work with its Fund for the Victims of Terror, and expects some 15 victims to receive emergency payments either today or tomorrow. In addition, the Agency is working on strengthening psychological support for new olim. The Agency has also begun distributing games to children in shelters in the south.
- The [Israel Trauma Coalition's](#) (ITC, a federation partner) resilience centers are operating in emergency 24/7 mode now and are looking to recruit reinforcements to help operate the centers. Currently, there are no resilience centers in central Israel and ITC is working with local

hospitals to have them geared up to provide trauma relief. Today, ITC is launching twice-daily Facebook sessions to teach trauma coping mechanisms for parents with children. ITC is also reporting “extreme burnout” of care-providers following a year that has included COVID, the Meron tragedy and more.

- The [American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee](#) (JDC) is increasing its virtual content and counseling services for its Centers for Independent Living for people with disabilities, and are examining similar programs for the elderly through its ESHEL program. In addition, JDC will meet with municipal leaders tomorrow to assess local needs and discuss responses.

### **Background**

- Background [video](#) on the threat from Gaza from Alma.
- See [here](#) for an article by Palestinian human rights activist Bassam Aid on the background to the current violence.
- Numerous dramatic photos of “Israel Under Attack” from the Jerusalem Post can be seen [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.*