# 2 more Israelis killed by Gaza fire; IDF assassinates Hamas moneyman

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Terror groups in the Gaza Strip on Sunday intensified their attacks on Israel, killing two more people and injuring several others with large rocket barrages aimed at the country’s south, a number of longer-range projectiles fired toward central Israel, and one anti-tank guided missile strike on a car near the Gaza border.

From Saturday, some 600 rockets and mortar shells were fired from Gaza at Israel, with about two-thirds of the projectiles striking empty fields, according to the Israel Defense Forces.

The latest fatalities — in addition to the man killed in a predawn rocket attack on Ashkelon — raised the total Israeli death toll for Sunday to three, making it Israel’s heaviest losses from Gaza since the 2014 war. The two victims were not immediately identified.

As of Sunday afternoon, 14 people in Israel were injured by shrapnel of rockets, missiles and mortar shells from the Gaza Strip, including three seriously injured, two moderately injured and six lightly wounded, according to the Magen David Adom ambulance service. Twelve people were also lightly injured running to bomb shelters, while 66 people received medical treatment after suffering anxiety attacks from the strikes.

In response to the rocket attacks, the Israeli Air Force on Sunday bombed a vehicle in Gaza City carrying a Hamas field commander who was responsible for funneling money from Iran to Gaza terror groups, killing him and wounding three others. The army also targeted dozens of sites connected to terrorist organizations throughout the Strip, including the homes of many terrorist leaders that the military said were used as weapons caches.

This appeared to mark a return by Israel to its once-regular practice of so-called targeted killings — assassinating terrorist leaders with pinpoint strikes — something it has largely forgone in recent years.

A senior IAF official said Israel was “trying to revive the deterrence against Hamas.”

As of Sunday afternoon, six other Palestinians were killed in Israeli airstrikes, according to the Hamas-run Gaza health ministry. All of the fatalities were said to be members of terror groups’ rocket-launching squads. In addition, 80 people were said to have been injured to varying degrees.

The ministry also claimed that a pregnant Palestinian woman and her 14-month-old niece were killed by the Israeli strikes, but the IDF repeatedly denied the allegation, saying the two died in a failed rocket launch by the Hamas terror group within a populated area.

Efforts by the United Nations and Egypt to broker a ceasefire between Israel and terror groups in the Strip yielded no concrete results as of Sunday afternoon, as neither side appeared interested in returning to the conditions laid out before the outbreak of violence.

On Sunday afternoon, the Israeli security cabinet held a meeting about the fighting in Gaza and later instructed the military to intensify its attacks in the Strip.

Throughout the day, terror groups in the Strip threatened to step up their attacks and shoot deeper into Israel, including at Tel Aviv, if the IDF’s strikes continued.

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad has said it will disrupt the upcoming Eurovision Song Contest, due to take place in Tel Aviv May 14-18, and [released a video](https://www.timesofisrael.com/islamic-jihad-threatens-attack-on-dimona-nuclear-facility-ben-gurion-airport/) threatening the Dimona nuclear facility, Ben Gurion Airport and other sensitive sites in Israel.

The intense violence that engulfed the region over the weekend began on Friday evening, when a sniper from the Palestinian Islamic Jihad terror group shot at two soldiers along the Gaza border, injuring them, and the military responded with a strike on a Hamas position that killed several members of the Islamist terror group.

Hundreds of rockets have been fired into Israel since Saturday, drawing hundreds of retaliatory Israeli strikes.

In one barrage aimed at Ashkelon on Sunday afternoon, a rocket directly hit a factory, killing a 22-year-old man and injuring two others. One of the men, 40, was seriously hurt in the attack, with wounds throughout his body, the other sustained moderate injuries to his legs, medics said.

A short while later, another man, 60, was fatally wounded when an anti-tank guided missile slammed into his car as he was driving along the Route 34 highway near the community of Kibbutz Erez just north of the Gaza border. He sustained a serious shrapnel wound to the leg, causing significant blood loss. The man was pronounced dead at Barzilai’s Medical Center after CPR efforts failed. The Hamas terror group claimed responsibility for the attack.

Police closed the area around Route 34, where the missile strike took place, as well as parts of Route 232, a major highway connecting the Israeli communities around the Gaza Strip, amid concerns that terror groups in the Strip would attempt more anti-tank missile attacks.

In response to the dozens of rockets and mortar shells fired at southern and central Israel Sunday late morning and early afternoon, Israel’s air force launched a series of strikes on more than 40 military targets throughout the Strip, in addition to the more than 220 raids it conducted in the previous 24 hours.

One of these strikes targeted the car of Hamed Hamdan al-Khodari, who was said to be a Hamas field commander connected to the terror group’s leader Yahya Sinwar.

According to the IDF, al-Khodari owned a number of money exchanges in the Gaza Strip and used them to bring large amounts of Iranian cash into the coastal enclave for Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other terror groups.

“Al-Khodari’s financial activities… significantly contributed to advancing terrorist

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The IDF added that the assassination of al-Khodari was meant to thwart Iran’s efforts to support terror attacks from the Gaza Strip

In a separate statement, the Israeli military said its latest strikes targeted tunnels and underground bunkers, military bases, weapons factories, and rocket launching sites.

In addition, the military targeted a number of weapons caches that it says were hidden inside the homes of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad senior commanders inside civilian-populated neighborhoods.

In light of the ongoing violence, the Israeli military on Sunday sent an additional tank brigade to the Gaza border on Sunday and prepared for fighting in the coming days.

The fighting began shortly after 9:30 a.m. Saturday, continuing into Sunday morning with a few hours-long periods of calm overnight, and a lull on Sunday morning.

The exchange of fire followed several weeks of relative calm between Israel and Gaza amid an unofficial armistice, which appeared to be breaking down as terrorists in the Strip stepped up their violent activities along the border in the days preceding the outbreak of fighting. Gaza terror groups said their actions were retaliation for Israel not abiding by the ceasefire agreement by halting the transfer of Qatari money into Gaza — a charge Jerusalem denied, blaming the delay on Qatar and the United Nations.

According to the IDF, approximately 70 percent of the more than 450 rockets and mortar shells fired at Israel struck open fields, where they caused neither injuries nor damage. Over 150 projectiles that were heading toward populated areas were intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defense system, the army said.

Despite what the military said was excellent performance by the Iron Dome, several projectiles directly struck houses and apartments or landed just outside them, including one that hit the courtyard of the home of Moshe Agadi, 58, a father of four, who was declared dead after being rushed to Ashkelon’s Barzilai hospital with shrapnel wounds at around 2:30 a.m. Sunday.

Agadi appeared to be the first Israeli fatality from Gazan rocket attacks since 2014’s war with terrorists based in the Strip. A Palestinian man working in Israel was killed in a rocket strike in Ashkelon in November.

The military said the vast majority of the projectiles fired from Gaza were launched by Hamas, which rules Gaza, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the second-most-powerful terror group in the Strip. A smaller number were fired by other groups in Gaza.

The United States said in a statement Saturday that it backed Israel’s right to self-defense.

“The United States strongly condemns the ongoing barrage of rocket attacks by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad from Gaza upon innocent civilians and their communities across Israel. We call on those responsible for the violence to cease this aggression immediately,” State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortagus said in a statement.

The European Union’s ambassador to Israel, Emanuele Giaufret, sharply criticized the rocket attacks on Twitter, saying “firing indiscriminately against civilians (is) unacceptable.”

COGAT, the Israeli defense body responsible for Palestinian civilian affairs, also said it was closing the fishing zone off Gaza’s coast altogether and sealing Israel’s two land crossings — Kerem Shalom and Erez — with the coastal enclave.

The crossings are used by Palestinian medical patients to enter and exit the territory, and provide the main entry for cargo into the blockaded territory.

Diesel fuel and gasoline were allowed into Gaza through Kerem Shalom on Sunday despite the closure in order to “prevent the civilian-humanitarian deterioration of the Strip,” an Israeli official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The UN’s Mideast envoy, Nickolay Mladenov, said the United Nations was working with Egypt to restore calm and called on all sides to “de-escalate” and restore recent understandings.

“Those who seek to destroy them will bear responsibility for a conflict that will have grave consequences for all,” he said in a statement.

Following heavy fighting in early April, Israel agreed to ease its blockade on Gaza in exchange for a halt to rocket fire. This included expanding a fishing zone off Gaza’s coast, increasing imports into Gaza and allowing the Gulf state of Qatar to deliver aid to cash-strapped Gaza.

That agreement appeared to be under stress in recent days, with Palestinians launching arson balloons and rockets into Israel and Israeli warplanes striking Hamas targets. Hamas has said the incendiary balloons were a message to Israel not to hold up the transfer of millions of dollars in Qatari aid funds to the cash-strapped Hamas government in Gaza. Minister Tzachi Hanegbi blamed the delay on Qatar and the United Nations.

Israel and Egypt have maintained a crippling blockade on Gaza since Hamas, which seeks to destroy Israel, seized control of the territory in 2007. Jerusalem says it is necessary to prevent terror groups from rearming and becoming an even greater menace.

The sides are bitter enemies and have fought three wars along with numerous smaller flareups of violence.