After lull, Hamas resumes rocket fire, shoots anti-tank missile at empty IDF bus

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/rocket-fire-from-gaza-halts-for-8-hours-then-renews-as-idf-continues-airstrikes/>

Rocket fire from Gaza abated overnight Wednesday-Thursday with no alarms sounding in Israeli communities from 1 a.m. until after 9 a.m., when the tense calm was broken with multiple waves of attacks on Israeli communities near the Gaza border, including an anti-tank missile fired by Hamas operatives at an empty military bus north of the enclave.

A soldier standing nearby the bus was lightly injured by shrapnel in the attack, the Israel Defense Forces said.

The lull came as the IDF kept up airstrikes against the Hamas terror group, which has launched the majority of thousands of rockets fired at Israel since the fighting erupted 11 days ago. However, the number and intensity of the Israeli strikes were lower than in previous nights.

There have been intense international diplomatic efforts to achieve a ceasefire, with reports indicating a truce could be reached as early as Friday as the current round of fighting appears to be drawing to a close.

In the Thursday morning attacks, multiple rounds of mortar and rocket fire were directed at Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip beginning just before 9:30 a.m., with a mortar attack on the communities of Nirm and Ein Hashlosha.

Over the next few hours, more waves of mortar fire targeted additional communities around the Strip and rockets were fired toward the city of Ashkelon, one of the hardest hit areas in Israel in the current round of fighting, as well as at Beersheba.

No injuries were reported from the projectiles, but at least three people were lightly injured while running to bomb shelters, medics said.

Shortly after 10 a.m., the Hamas terror group announced that it had fired an anti-tank guided missile at an IDF bus near an army camp in Zikim, south of Ashkelon.

The IDF confirmed the attack, saying the bus had been long empty when it was hit. A soldier standing nearby was lightly injured by shrapnel and taken to nearby Barzilai Medical Center for treatment, the hospital said.

This was the second successful anti-tank guided missile attack directed against IDF soldiers on the border so far in this campaign. In the first such strike last Tuesday, IDF soldier Staff Sgt. Omer Tabib was killed when the missile struck his jeep and two other servicemen were injured, one seriously and one moderately.

From 7 p.m. Wednesday until 1 a.m. Thursday, some 80 rockets and mortar shells were fired from the Gaza Strip toward Israel, with 10 of them falling short of the border and landing within the Palestinian enclave, the IDF said Thursday morning. According to the military, roughly 90 percent of the rockets heading toward populated areas were intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defense system.

No direct injuries were reported in the late-night attacks, save for a man in his 50s who injured himself on a bomb shelter door and a 14-year-old girl who fell while running for cover. Both sustained minor injuries, according to the Magen David Adom ambulance service, and were taken to Soroka Medical Center in Beersheba for treatment.

The IDF conducted a number of overnight strikes in the Gaza Strip, continuing its campaign against Hamas’s sprawling tunnel network throughout the enclave, the military said.

There has been increasing international pressure for the sides to agree, via mediators, on a ceasefire.

Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen said Thursday that Israel will continue what has been dubbed Operation Guardian of the Walls until its objectives are achieved.

“We can see that there is significant international pressure. We see that Hamas sources are begging for a ceasefire,” Cohen told the Kan public broadcaster. “We will finish the operation when we decide that we have obtained the objectives we want.”

Defense Minister Benny Gantz met Wednesday evening with senior security officials, including IDF commander Aviv Kohavi, and then approved another day of military operations in Gaza, the Walla news website reported.

Moussa Abu Marzouk, a member of Hamas’s politburo, said Wednesday night that the[group could reach a ceasefire](https://www.timesofisrael.com/senior-hamas-official-ceasefire-can-be-reached-within-one-or-two-days/) within the next 24 to 48 hours to end the ongoing hostilities with Israel.

However, he warned any further Israeli airstrikes would draw additional rocket fire from the Gaza Strip.

There have been various Israeli and international reports about ceasefire talks.

Following denials by officials on all sides, Channel 12 news reported Wednesday night that Israeli security officials believe a ceasefire could go into effect Friday afternoon. The report said that was the assessment shared during meetings of top Israeli defense brass on Wednesday.

At the same time, Israeli officials have told US officials that Washington’s pressure to reach a ceasefire quickly is only hindering the possibility of a truce, according to Channel 12.

The Wall Street Journal also reported late Wednesday that the ceasefire between Israel and the Gaza terror groups could come into effect as early as Friday.

People involved in the discussions told the outlet that Egyptian mediators have made progress in talks with leaders from the Hamas terror group, and Israel has “privately conceded” that it is close to achieving all its military objectives.

The report said Washington believes that barring any unforeseen events, the ceasefire could come into effect this week and the only question is one of timing.

However, a US official told the outlet that the Palestinian Islamic Jihad one of the terror groups in the Gaza Strip, remains an unknown quantity — the newspaper says the terror group is a “wild card” — and could continue to carry out attacks even after the ceasefire is agreed upon.

The White House declined to comment on the report.

Earlier Wednesday, US President Joe Biden told Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a phone call that he expects “a significant de-escalation today on the path to a ceasefire,” as Washington stepped up pressure on Jerusalem to end the fighting.

Yet, the IDF believes that Hamas is trying to score a “major success,” such as a cross-border attack or other major assault, which it can fete as a victory over Israel, a senior officer in the military’s Southern Command told reporters on Wednesday.

The senior officer said he believed the military’s intelligence capabilities would prevent the terror group from conducting a large invasion into Israel, but acknowledged that a smaller operation was possible.

The officer said Hamas may try to conduct a large-scale barrage on the Tel Aviv metropolitan area, having refrained from firing rockets at the city in recent days. According to IDF Military Intelligence, the terror group has at least enough long-range munitions to conduct several more barrages of dozens of rockets at Tel Aviv.

Hamas and other Gaza terror groups have launched nearly 3,700 rockets at Israel since May 10, at times forcing people living near Gaza into bomb shelters around the clock.

Israel, in response, launched an extensive bombing campaign in the Strip. The humanitarian crisis has deepened in the impoverished Strip, with the UN saying 72,000 Palestinians have been displaced.

Twelve people in Israel, including a 5-year-old boy and a 16-year-old girl, have been killed in rocket fire, and hundreds have been injured over the past ten days.

On Wednesday, Gaza’s Hamas-run health ministry updated the death toll in the Strip to 227, including more than 64 minors. It was not immediately clear if the ministry tally included all of those killed or if there were Hamas operatives not included in the count.

According to the IDF, more than 120 of those killed were members of Hamas and over 25 were members of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad as of Monday night. The IDF says some of the Gaza civilian fatalities were killed by the terror groups’ own rockets falling short and exploding in Gaza.