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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Monday, May 6

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- Likud's Sa'ar Joins Opposition in Lambasting Ceasefire Deal
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News Excerpts

May 6, 2019

Ynet News

Four Israelis Dead, 700 Rockets and a Weekend Full of Terror

A 21-year-old man was killed when a rocket fired from Gaza struck a building in Ashdod Sunday evening. He was the fourth casualty in the latest round of fighting between Hamas and Israel. Since the start of Saturday's rocket fire from the Gaza Strip into Israel, some 234 patients have been treated at Barzilai Hospital in Ashkelon and Soroka Medical Center in Beersheba. More than 650 rockets have been fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip since Saturday morning, a senior Israel Air Force officer said Sunday. "Two hundred rockets were fired at residential areas, with an interception rate above 86 percent," the officer said of Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system, adding that the army was trying to ascertain why some rockets managed to get through and hit residential areas.

See also, ["CEASEFIRE REACHED AFTER HAMAS, ISLAMIC JIHAD FIRE 700 ROCKETS AT ISRAEL"](#) *Jerusalem Post*

See also, ["Why the Gaza rocket fire? Because Hamas thinks Israel is vulnerable to extortion"](#) (by Avi Issacharoff)

Jerusalem Post

Trump-Pence Voice Support for Israel Amid Gaza Rockets

President Trump addressed Sunday the continuing rocket attacks by Hamas and Islamic Jihad against Israel, and tweeted words of support for the Jewish state. "Once again, Israel faces a barrage of deadly rocket attacks by terrorist groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad," the president tweeted. "We support Israel 100% in its defense of its citizen." Rep. Ted Deutch (D-FL), a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, was among the first congressmen to address the rocket attack when tweeted Saturday: "Over 250 rockets fired at Israel again by terrorists from Gaza. This must stop now. Israel, like any country, has a right to defend itself against terror attacks."

See also, ["U.S. may review ties with countries deemed anti-Israel"](#) (Reuters)

Israel Hayom

PM Announces Truce, Warns Israel is Prepared for More fighting

After three days of intense fighting between Israel and Hamas, a cease-fire between the sides was reached early Monday morning. Speaking just before noon on Monday, Prime Minister Netanyahu confirmed that latest round of escalation had ended but warned that "this is not the end; this battle requires stamina and levelheadedness, and we are preparing for more fighting."

See also, ["690 Rockets, 320 Strikes: Gaza-Israel Flare-up in Numbers"](#) (Ha'aretz)

Times of Israel

Likud's Sa'ar Joins Opposition in Lambasting Ceasefire Deal

Opposition leaders were joined Monday morning by a senior member of the ruling Likud party in criticizing an apparent ceasefire between Israel and Gaza terror groups that ended two days of intense fighting. In the first time he has broken ranks with Netanyahu since returning to politics earlier this year, Likud MK Gideon Sa'ar said the terms of the agreement hold little to no benefit for Israel and will not prevent future violence. Blue and White party leader Benny Gantz on Monday said that Israel had capitulated to Hamas and Islamic Jihad in order to end the violent flareup.

Eurovision Ticket Sales Low, Less Tourists Flock to Israel

The anticipated stream of tourists to the Eurovision Song Contest, to be held in Tel Aviv on May 14-18, has not materialized. Producers said Sunday that about only 5,000 Eurovision tourists are expected to land in Israel. This is a modest number compared to competitions held in other countries as well as early predictions of tens of thousands of tourists. For the time being the Home Front Command is allowing preparations for the event to go forward and rehearsals are underway at the Tel Aviv Fairgrounds. No delegation has canceled its participation. However, rocket strikes in the Tel Aviv metropolitan area and further escalation could shut down the event.

See also, ["*Hamas Twists Israel's Arm Right Before the Eurovision and Independence Day*" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Israel Hayom

US Deploying Carrier, Bombers to Middle East to Deter Iran

The Trump administration is deploying a carrier strike group and bombers to the Middle East in response to "clear indications" that Iranian and Iranian proxy forces were preparing to possibly attack U.S. forces in the region, an American defense official told the Associated Press. National Security Adviser John Bolton said the carrier deployment was also to show that the U.S. will retaliate with "unrelenting force" to any attack on U.S. interests or those of its allies, adding that the move was in response to "a number of troubling and escalatory indications and warnings."

Losing Control

By Alex Fishman

- On the third day of the tenth round of fighting between Israel and Hamas this past year, the two sides—contrary to their plans and to their interests—are on the brink of Operation Protective Edge Two.
- So before we are amazed by the flood of achievements that the IDF's psychological warfare department tries to sell to us, we all ought to bear in mind that from the perspective of the leaders—Prime Minister and Defense Minister Netanyahu and Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi—the tenth round has not been a success story thus far. Both sides are in a situation that they did not want and, in practice, have lost control over events. In fact, what has been taking place here since Friday is a series of mutual blows that will pit Israel and Hamas in a crisis that they currently don't know how to get out of without being dragged into an all-out war.
- There were six stations in the current round of fighting, and six major decisions, which brought this train to the edge of the cliff. The first was Islamic Jihad's decision to use snipers, which injured an officer and a woman soldier. The second was Israel's response, which was particularly lethal and, as Hamas perceived it, broke the rules: Israel attacked a manned outpost in the Gaza Strip and killed a Hamas officer and three other people. At that point, Hamas decided on the shape and form of the third station: it has been firing hundreds of rockets in salvos since Friday, with the clear intent of causing maximum fatalities on the Israeli side.
- At this stage Israel decided not to suffice with hitting military installations, such as camps, warehouses, tunnels and headquarters, but instead sought to recreate the "victory picture" that ended Operation Protective Edge: it attacked high rise buildings in the Gaza Strip. One was Palestine Tower, which is known to every Gazan and is visible from every corner in Gaza and whose collapse was an insult and attested to the Hamas government's weakness. The second tower, albeit less visible, housed Hamas's military intelligence, which relocated there after its offices were destroyed by the Air Force a month ago. For dessert, apparently with the GSS's encouragement, the building that housed Hamas's internal security organization was leveled. This organization is the GSS's "rival," it is the organization that hunts down collaborators with Israel. The IDF also tried the ploy of hitting the leaders' homes to create a psychological deterrence. But nobody in Gaza was upset by the fact that senior Islamic Jihad figure Khaled Batsh, who is with the Islamic Jihad delegation in Cairo, was left homeless.
- Hamas responded to the humiliation of the towers by firing a Kornet missile at a civilian car. An Israeli civilian was killed, and the number of victims on the Israeli side—which is the fuel that feeds the bonfire of deterioration—rose to four, along with several people who sustained serious injuries. This brought Israel to the sixth station, that of targeted killings. And the moment that this door was opened—so opened wide the gate to an all-out war. Killing leaders is an invitation to war.

- **Up until now, the Air Force was instructed to use force on a level of less than war, in other words, to cause minimum collateral damage, to choose targets prudently and to use precision-guided ordnances. The gloves were not removed. A hint as to the possibility that the gloves would be removed was given yesterday when the Armored Corps' Seventh Brigade and the Golani Brigade were given the order to deploy on the Gaza border. This was meant to remind the enemy in Gaza of the ground incursion option, i.e., an aggressive invasion of the Gaza Strip that is liable to leave behind a trail of blood that could put an end to Hamas's regime. Hamas, for its part, is signaling that it has the ability to fire rockets even beyond the 40 kilometer range from the Gaza border.**
- **In the meantime, Israel has received signals from Hamas that Ramadan is not a factor as far as it is concerned. The terrorists in Gaza have no problem continuing to fight even in the course of the fast. Israel, for its part, is signaling to the other side that it has no problem continuing to fight even close to Independence Day and perhaps also during the Eurovision contest. Suddenly, no date is sacred, and the war can be moved up from the summer to today. The result is that both sides are raising the price, they are both saying let's see who breaks first. If this spiral continues, the seventh station will be when Israel launches another ground operation in the Gaza Strip.**
- **But there is another option: a few tens of millions of dollars for Hamas could be waiting at the seventh station, and the train will stop for another two to three months of quiet.**

Gaza Ceasefire Leaves Israel and Hamas Exactly Where They Were Before

The latest flareup and truce were born of Jerusalem's past capitulation to extortion by the rulers of the Strip

By AVI ISSACHAROFF

- The morning after the latest round of fighting between Israel and Hamas looks exactly like the morning before it began. It's as if nothing had happened.
- In two days of conflict, more than 700 rockets were fired toward Israel; four Israelis were killed, along with 29 Gazans (at least 11 of them members of the terror groups); and considerable damage was done to Hamas and Islamic Jihad infrastructure in the Strip.
- But as usual, Israel and Hamas find themselves in a shaky truce without the situation having changed in the slightest. As they say, the more things change, the more they stay the same.
- Neither side has any substantive achievement to boast of, nor have they made a move that has altered the status quo.
- Hamas has shown that its military capabilities have improved, with the lethality of the rocket attacks and their ability to overcome the Iron Dome missile defense system on multiple occasions, as well as the minimal harm sustained by members of the terrorist organization.
- This attests to constant improvements to the terrorists' military wing in the run-up to the next campaign.
- On the other hand, the Israel Defense Forces improved its list of targets and managed to hit important Hamas military facilities. It also showed its ability to carry out a targeted assassination against a member of the terrorist group who had tried to remain under the intelligence radar, with a missile strike on the car of Hamed Hamdan al-Khodari, who funneled Iranian money to Palestinian terror groups in the Gaza Strip.
- There are, nonetheless, many causes for concern on the Israeli side.
- It is clear that Hamas has learned to defend itself. Most of its senior operatives took cover in the subterranean bunkers and tunnels the terror group has dug underneath the enclave, and escaped the flareup unharmed. Its missile launch and command and control capabilities were impressive.
- All of these things should ring warning bells in Israel.
- The big problem for Hamas is that on the first morning of the holy month of Ramadan, it cannot present any hope of an economic solution to the people of Gaza — and certainly not of a political one.
- This failure on Hamas's part comes despite the fact that many Gazans expressed willingness for a major military operation, if only to bring about a change in their situation.

- **While Qatari money may enter Gaza in the coming days, it will not alleviate the overall crisis: Unemployment stands at 51 percent and there is abject poverty.**
- **Hamas does nothing to help the local population. Instead, it imposes more and more taxes, which it uses for military infrastructure (including the aforementioned tunnels and bunkers for senior Hamas officials) rather than improving the overall situation in Gaza.**
- **Gazans are starting to show signs of discontent with Hamas — although not enough to bring them out to the streets as was the case earlier this year. But there is now criticism of the terrorist organization on social networks.**
- **The latest round of fighting was likely also an attempt by Hamas to divert Gazan public anger away from the organization and toward Israel.**
- **Ultimately, both sides are hostages to Israel's decision six months ago to approve the transfer of Qatari money to pay the salaries of Hamas employees.**
- **That money was interpreted in Gaza in only one way — an Israeli surrender to Hamas's extortion.**
- **It is clear that whoever on the Israeli side made the deal with Hamas — whether they were from the Mossad or the Prime Minister's Office — did not understand this.**
- **What appeared to those on the Israeli side as an opportunity to cut a deal with Hamas was interpreted on the other side as sign of a weakness that could be exploited.**
- **Thus, when the Qatari money was delayed last weekend, not due to any fault of Israel, Hamas immediately triggered a broader conflict than usual, thinking and believing that what had worked six months ago would work again this time.**
- **And it seems that Hamas was right.**
- **While the Qataris didn't get involved initially, the money is expected to be transferred to Gaza shortly — just in time to ensure a Ramadan kareem.**