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“ Hamas Achieved Nothing but Ruining Gaza ”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Though firing over 3,500 rockets and missiles at Israeli cities, towns, and villages, more than it did during the 51-day conflict in 2014, Hamas’ military infrastructure has suffered massive damage that will set back the terrorist organization a number of years, according to Israeli estimates.

As a ceasefire to the Gaza fighting seems to be in the offing, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) continued to target Israeli civilians with rocket attacks and missile, and the Israeli Air Force (IAF) has worked to further degrade the capabilities of the terror organizations.

While it remains unclear when a ceasefire will actually take effect, Israeli security officials’ initial assessments say that Hamas has been set back a number of years by the massive targeting of its rocket and missile factories, storage facilities, rocket launchers, and a variety of military sites and compounds throughout Gaza. According to one Israel Air Force official, Hamas commanders and leaders have been under very heavy pressure due to the accumulating damage that Hamas is sustaining with each passing day.

Israel had struck more than 820 military targets by Tuesday night, while the terror organizations fired more than 3,500 rockets at Israeli cities, towns, and villages. By comparison, during the 51-day conflict in 2014 Hamas and other terror factions fired 3,393 projectiles at Israel, a number that they surpassed within a week in this round of fighting. Similarly, the IDF struck 180 Hamas and PIJ targets in 2020, meaning that the Israeli military hit far more targets last week than in the previous year.

Two Thai workers were killed by a direct rocket strike on an Israeli village on Tuesday, and two were seriously injured. Twelve people in Israel have been killed by Palestinian rocket fire.

According to conservative Israeli estimates, at least 130 Hamas and PIJ terrorists have been killed. Gaza's Health Ministry, which is controlled by Hamas, said on Monday that 212 people were killed in the Strip.

While the IDF hasn't been able to reach every rocket launcher, the amount of damage inflicted on Hamas and PIJ is substantial, an IAF source said. One of the targets hit during the fighting are tunnels dug by Hamas, designed to enable terrorists to raid military posts or civilian communities.

An additional major target has been the network of tunnels running under Gaza, dubbed "the Metro" by the IDF, designed to enable Hamas to move its fighters and its missiles and munitions out of Israel's sights. The tunnels would also enable Hamas to challenge a future Israeli ground offensive. Hundreds of kilometers of tunnels were destroyed by Israel in the past week.

"The attack on the Metro took a very heavy toll on Hamas," the source said. "It has basically forced them to move over ground, and uncovered all of their efforts in fighting against Israeli civilians, as they have been doing for the past week. The tunnels ran under homes, under Gaza City, damaging some of Gaza's civilian infrastructure," he added.

Long-range rocket launchers with multiple barrels were hit repeatedly, as well as posts used by Hamas for command and control.

Describing the May 10 Hamas missile assault on Jerusalem, which set off the current fighting, the source said, "It is a very serious thing for a terror organization to be terrorizing the capital of a sovereign country. Israel has every right to defend itself, but also to defend against rocket and mortar fire on its communities next to Gaza. There is no difference. There is zero tolerance for indiscriminate rocket fire aimed at civilians."

The IDF is making every effort to prevent harm to Gazan non-combatants, though this still happens because of the way Hamas operates, he stressed, using civilians for human shielding purposes.

Since the end of the 2014 war between Hamas and Israel, the terror army has amassed some 15,000 rockets in Gaza and aimed them at Israeli civilians. "This infrastructure was built by the Hamas leadership with international funding. Instead of going to the people of Gaza, the money went to rockets. This is how absurd the leadership of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad are. This is what you get for funding terror organizations. You get missiles factories that fire your money at Israeli civilians. It's been happening since 2007," the air force official said.

Addressing the high rise buildings targeted by the IAF, the source said these are used by Hamas for command and control, intelligence-gathering, and other military purposes.

Israel evacuates such buildings with advance warnings, he said, noting that there have been no casualties from demolitions of high rise buildings. "Israel is paying a price for advanced warning [by giving Hamas an alert and allowing terrorists to flee the buildings]. It's absurd. It might take three hours per target just to evacuate everyone with phone calls, or small munitions warnings just to show that we're serious," he added referring to the "roof knocking" tactic. "That's the only thing we can do and we're doing it."

Iron Dome has been able to intercept about 90 percent of projectiles heading into populated areas, despite the heavy barrages. "We intercept most rockets that are aimed at the heart of cities," said the source. "It does not prevent the sirens. The sirens are lifesaving."

The IDF will "keep doing this until they stop, and until there are zero rocket launches," said the official. "No matter the rocket range, it must be zero rockets. Whether it is Sderot, Jerusalem or Tel Aviv, we will go on defending until it stops."

Hamas has been working hard trying to surprise Israel with new kinds of attacks, including the launching of six UAVs out of Gaza. The IDF intercepted all of them, using, for the first time, Iron Dome to do so, as well as F-16 missiles. Iron Dome's intercepting of an attack UAV "is a huge advancement in active air defenses," he said.

According to the IDF, such UAVs can fly at least 100 kilometers, are GPS-guided, and have explosives on-board. "The UAVs have a warhead. They're not just collecting intelligence. They can crash into a residential building in the middle of the city, or a strategic location like an electric power plant," said the source.

As time goes by, Hamas is paying a steeper price, as are, sadly, Gaza's civilians, the source said. "Hamas is achieving nothing, except ruining the Gaza Strip which they rule," he added.

While Hamas' leadership enjoys electricity via generators, hundreds of thousands of Gazans have no electricity because of Hamas rockets that fell short, knocking out power lines that connect Israel to the Strip's power grid.

"The leadership has food, unlike their citizens. It attacked [Israel] because of their recklessness," said the source.

This is an edited version of an article originally published by the Investigative Project on Terrorism.

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