Overview

Operation Guardian of the Walls entered its eleventh day. With reports of an upcoming ceasefire rocket and mortar fire continues, although slightly smaller in number. During the 24 hours between 0700, May 19 and May 20, 2021, 270 rockets were fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip. So far, since the beginning of Operation Guardian of the Walls, 3,153 rockets have been fired at Israel. About 90% of those attacking populated areas were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system. Most of the rockets fired during the past 24 hours had ranges of about 40 kilometers (25 miles) and targeted the southern Israeli coastal cities of Ashqelon and Ashdod, and the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip border. Longer range rockets were fired at Beersheba. Since May 15, 2021, no rockets were fired at the Greater Tel Aviv area. So far 11 Israelis have been killed by rocket fire; an IDF soldier was killed by an anti-tank missile.

The IDF continues to respond to the rocket fire from the Gaza Strip by attacking Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) terrorist targets. During the past 24 hours the attacks focused on squads firing rockets, rocket launchers, weapons storehouses concealed in the houses of terrorist operatives and Hamas' underground tunnel system ("the metro"). During the morning an anti-tank missile was fired at an IDF bus. It was empty at the time.

An female terrorist tried to shoot Israeli civilians and soldiers at a junction in Kiryat Arba, near Hebron. She was shot and killed. Judea and Samaria have become relatively calm since the violent events of the "day of rage."

Sources in Hamas (especially those living outside the Gaza Strip) continue linking the Gaza Strip with Jerusalem and al-Aqsa mosque, promoting a narrative of victory over Israel.

Mahmoud Abbas, speaking at an emergency meeting of the speakers of the Arab state parliaments, accused Israel of "organized political terrorism and war crimes" in the Gaza Strip as defined by international law, noting the Palestinian Authority (PA) would pursue the "criminals" until they had been tried in international courts.
On the afternoon of May 19, 2021, four rockets were fired at Israel from south Lebanon. Two fell in the sea. One was intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system and the other fell in the region of the northern city Arab of Shfaram, east of Haifa. At the same time a barrages of rockets was fired at the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip border. No organization claimed responsibility for the rocket fire. It was the third time rockets were fired at Israel from south Lebanon since the beginning of Operation Guardian of the Walls (May 10, 2021).

Rocket Fire

Rocket and mortar fire attacking Israel continues. After a relatively quiet night, on the morning of May 20, 2021, rocket launches at the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip were renewed. Since the beginning of the operation and 0700, May 20, 2021, 3153 rocket hits were identified in Israeli territory and 550 fell inside the Gaza Strip. About 90% of the rockets that would have hit populated areas were intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system. So far, 12 Israelis have been killed. Several hundred civilians have been injured. Substantial property damage has been caused to homes, public institutions, commerce, industry and agriculture. Hamas and the PIJ have claimed responsibility for most of the rocket fire.

During the past 24 hours the terrorist organizations concentrated most of their rocket fire on Israeli cities and towns within 40 kilometers (25 miles) of the Gaza Strip, including the southern coastal cities of Ashqelon and Ashdod, as well as Ofakim, Sderot and Netivot in the western Negev, and the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip border. Several barrages of rockets targeted Beersheba, Israel’s largest southern city. Hamas’ military-terrorist wing has made several (unsuccessful) efforts to attack Israeli Air Force bases in the south and the center of the country.

Rocket fire from within populated areas of Gaza City (IDF spokesman, May 19, 2021).
On the night of **May 19, 2021**, barrages of rockets were fired at Beersheba and Kiryat Malakhi (southeast of Ashdod). On the afternoon of **May 20, 2021**, there were massive rocket and mortar shell attacks on the Israeli communities near the Gaza Strip border. The attacks continued for several hours. Local residents were instructed to remain in shelters.

Direct rocket hits in Sderot (Twitter account of journalist Hassan Aslih, May 19, 2021).

Rocket hit in Ashdod (QudsN Facebook page, May 19, 2021).

**Anti-tank missile fire**

While the IDF successfully prevented dozens of squads from firing anti-tank missiles, on **May 20, 2021**, a missile was fired at an IDF bus, which was empty at the time. A soldier standing next to the bus was injured by shrapnel (IDF spokesman, May 20, 2021).
Texas EMTs hit by Hamas anti-tank missile (al-Quds, May 20, 2021).

Daily distribution of rocket fire from the Gaza Strip

(According to the IDF spokesman)

Israel's Response

- The IDF continued attacking terrorist targets in the Gaza Strip from the air, on land and from the sea. Some of them were the following (IDF spokesman, May 20, 2021, unless otherwise noted):
  - Houses of **senior terrorist operatives**.
  - The infrastructure of the **naval force**.
  - **Launching positions for rockets, mortar shells and anti-tank missiles.** On May 20, 2021, a number of rocket launching squads were attacked, as well as underground and aboveground launching positions. One was a position in Jabalia used for firing rockets at Tel Aviv. Another was on the roof of a house in the Shati refugee camp.
- Hamas **terrorist tunnels** in the northern Gaza Strip.
- **Weapons storehouses and military positions** in the houses of terrorist organizations, including storehouses in the houses of Atallah Abu al-Sabah, the former minister of justice in the Hamas administration; the house of the deputy commander of the aerial units for the refugee camps in the central Gaza Strip; and the house of an operative in Hamas' aerial unit in Khan Yunis.
- Operatives in **Hamas' cyber system** who were hiding in apartments housing the system's equipment.
- Ongoing attacks on **Hamas' tunnel system** (the "metro").

**Attacks on Hamas' tunnel system (the "metro") in the northern, central and southern Gaza Strip (IDF spokesman, May 20, 2021).**

**IDF attack in the northern Gaza Strip (Twitter account of journalist Hassan Aslih, May 20, 2021).**
The Rimal neighborhood of Gaza City after IDF attacks (QudsN Facebook page, May 20, 2021).

Right: IDF attack in Gaza City. Left: IDF attack in western Khan Yunis (Twitter account of journalist Hassan Aslih, May 19, 2021).

The overall situation in the Gaza Strip

- According to the ministry of health in Gaza, as of May 19, 2021, 230 Gazans had been killed and 1,710 wounded. The fatalities included 39 women, 17 old people and 65 children (ministry of health in Gaza Facebook page, May 20, 2021).
- The Hamas administration’s office of media affairs in Gaza reported that since the beginning of the hostilities Israel had carried out 1,810 aerial strikes which caused damage estimated at $322 million (Dunia al-Watan, May 19, 2021).
- A cellular and Internet company in the Gaza Strip called Jawal Media reported extensive damage to cables connecting the districts in the southern Gaza Strip, the refugee camps in central Gaza Strip and Gaza City. That reportedly led to slow Internet service in the southern Gaza Strip. The company later reported the network had been repaired (QudsN, May 19, 2021).
Foreign aid for the Gaza Strip

► UNRWA formally requested $38 million for urgent humanitarian assistance for Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria. UNRWA described itself as "shocked" by the number of casualties and the extent of the damage to the Gaza Strip infrastructure. It was also "shocked" by Israel's "excessive use of force." UNRWA called for the Gaza Strip crossings to be opened so that assistance could be delivered (UN website, May 19, 2021). **Note:** During the past two days Hamas repeatedly shelled the Kerem Shalom Crossing when humanitarian assistance was being delivered, as well as the Erez Crossing. For that reason the crossings were closed.

### Statements from the Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) Leaderships

► **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**, sent a communiqué to Iranian leader Ali Khamenei describing the situation in the Gaza Strip (al-Arabiya, May 19, 2021).

► **Musa Abu Marzouq, deputy "external" Hamas leader**, announced a Hamas "victory" even before the hostilities had ended, saying this time the Palestinian people participated, from those who fired rockets to those who confronted the Israeli security forces at the friction points. He claimed they could keep fighting for longer than in Operation Protective Edge [51 days], they could fight for months. He was also of the opinion that Israel's "bank of targets" was empty and was "begging" for a ceasefire. He also claimed Israel had failed in its attacks on Hamas' "metro," and its attacks on the political and military leadership had also failed, with the exception of a number of PIJ operatives. He said Hamas had no plan for a lull, stressing that the ceasefire had to be mutual and would be in the Gaza Strip, not at the friction points in the West Bank where the hostilities against Israel would be continued (al-Mayadeen, May 19, 2018).
PIJ leader Ziyad al-Nakhalah gave a speech where he said the Palestinians had led Israel into a historic crisis. He blamed Israel for killing civilians and using American weapons to destroy houses and kill civilians. He claimed the Palestinians had paid a high price but they understood it was the only way to defend Jerusalem and the Palestinian public. He called on the Palestinian people to increase their presence in every location, to block the settlers' roads and to attack roadblocks (al-Mayadeen, May 19, 2021).

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

Mahmoud Abbas gave a speech at an emergency meeting of the speakers of Arab state parliaments where he accused Israel of "carrying out organized political terrorism and war crimes violating international law." He promised the PA would continue pursuing the criminals until they were tried by international courts. He said the Palestinians were currently focusing on stopping Israel's "aggression" in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and they would turn to political activity that would lead to "the end of the occupation" (Palestinian TV, May 19, 2021).

Mahmoud Abbas and UN Secretary General Antonito Guterres discussed recent developments and efforts to stop the hostilities. Mahmoud Abbas stressed the need to stop "Israel's aggression" against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the aggression of the settlers against the Palestinians in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of east Jerusalem (Amad, May 19, 2021).

PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh and Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff, the EU representative in the PA, discussed the need to stop Israel's "aggression" in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Wafa, May 19, 2021).
**Terrorist attack in Hebron**

On May 19, 2021, a Palestinian woman from Hebron armed with an M-16 assault rifle arrived at an entrance to Kiryat Arba, near Hebron. She opened fire at the IDF fighters and civilians at the site. She was shot and killed. No casualties were reported (IDF spokesman, May 19, 2021). It was the second attempted terrorist attack at the same site in the past week. The Palestinian media reported the Palestinian woman was Wafaa’ Abd al-Rahman al-Baradai, 37, mother of five from Hebron (Ma’an, May 19, 2021).

**Riots and demonstrations**

After the riots and other violence on the Palestinian “day of rage” relative calm was restored to Judea and Samaria. In preparation for Friday the social networks used the hashtag #Palestine_resists to enlist Palestinians for “the great dawn,” during which Palestinians will be asked to intensify the riots at the friction points (QudsN Facebook page, May 19, 2021).

*Call for attacks on Israel: #Palestine_resists (QudsN Facebook page, May 19, 2021).*

*A Hamas march in Hebron in support of Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip (QudsN Facebook page, May 19, 2021).*
Lebanon

On the afternoon of May 19, 2021, four rockets were launched from the region of Sadiqin in south Lebanon. Two fell into the sea. One was intercepted by the Iron Dome aerial defense system and one fell in the area of the northern Arab city of Shfaram, east of Haifa. At the same time a barrage of rockets was fired from the Gaza Strip at the Israeli communities near the border. No organization claimed responsibility for the rocket fire. It was the third time rockets were fired at Israel from Lebanon since the beginning of Operation Guardian of the Walls (May 10, 2021).

Right: Rocket launched from south Lebanon intercepted in the sky over the northern coastal Israeli city of Acre. Left: Rocket hit in the northern Israeli city of Shfaram (QudsN Facebook page, May 19, 2021).

Musa Abu Marzouq, asked during an interview with al-Mayadeen if Hamas was behind the rocket fire from Lebanon, said they were not ashamed that they confronted Israel ("the Zionist project") everywhere. Asked if Hamas coordinated with the "resistance" to the north and east, he said understandings were in place with the entire "resistance" (al-Mayadeen, May 19, 2021).

Mediation Efforts

After 11 days of hostilities there has been increasing discussion of a ceasefire between Israel and the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip. Senior Palestinian figures confirmed that efforts were in fact being made to mediate a ceasefire. Reportedly, a high-level Egyptian delegation met in Ramallah with the Palestinian leadership, and informed Muhammad Shtayyeh that Egypt was prepared to support the Palestinians in every way (Wafa, May 19, 2021).
Musa Abu Marzouq said the ceasefire would begin "within a day or two" (al-Mayadeen, May 19, 2021). Jibril Rajoub said the Egypt-led Arab effort for a ceasefire could be implemented within 24 hours (al-Shurouq, May 19, 2021). PIJ spokesman Da'ud Shehab said a ceasefire would be conditioned on the demands of the "resistance." He added that even if there were a ceasefire, if Israel acted "aggressively" towards Jerusalem and the Palestinians, rocket fire and riots would be renewed (al-Aqsa, May 19, 2021).

Iran

At a meeting held in Tehran in support of the Palestinians Hossein Salami, commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, said the Palestinians were attacking Tel Aviv with Qassam and Sejil rockets. Israel, he claimed, was at an impasse, because it could neither continue its military action nor stop it. He also said the "war" with Israel did not involve only the Palestinians, because the Iranians would always support them. He said "Palestine" had become a "global issue" and was not restricted only to the West Bank and Gaza Strip (al-Mayadeen, May 19, 2021).