

Israel May Evacuate Border Towns as Gaza Conflict Escalates, Senior Officer Says

More than 180 rockets fired at Israel in major escalation ■ Officer says Israel nears wider Gaza campaign ■ Military reinforcements sent to the south.



|An explosion is seen during Israeli air strikes in Gaza August 9, 2018.\ AHMED ZAKOT/ REUTERS

- Israeli army renews strikes on Gaza, Palestinians report; Egypt says still working toward restoring calm
- Foreign worker severely wounded in Israel by Gaza rocket

A senior Israeli commander said Thursday morning that the military is nearing launching an operation in the Gaza Strip, not ruling out evacuating communities near the border as the fighting continues.

“We are after another night of escalation, and at this stage we don’t see it ending,” the officer said.

Referring to negotiations between Hamas and Israel, being mediated by Egypt, the officer said that Hamas “chose to stay away from a deal and it will pay the price for its violations in the last four months.” The officer warned Hamas of “suffering a severe blow” if it continues firing rockets.



Israel will continue striking Gaza, the officer said, noting that reinforcements are being sent to southern Israel. “The military is preparing to evacuate civilians located up to four kilometers from the border, even at the first stage of a wider campaign.”

The officer added that as of right now, reserve soldiers from air defense units were called up, but the military is preparing to call up more reservists if needed.

“ Hamas must go back to the understandings after the [2014 Gaza war], and if it doesn’t, it will understand the hard way. Part of the things it was dreaming of are getting farther and farther away.”



A woman inspects a damaged house where a Palestinian woman and her 18-month old child were killed, in the Gaza Strip, August 9, 2018.\ Credit: IBRAHEEM ABU MUSTAFA/ REUTERS

The officer warned Hamas that Israel will continue its strikes in the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, Hamas on Thursday blamed the latest round of violence on Israel killing two Hamas militants on Tuesday. “ Israel says it does not seek an escalation but in practice causing it,” sources said. The Israeli military believes that the incident was a misunderstanding, after Israeli troops mistakenly thought that gunfire during a military demonstration in the Strip was aimed at them.

Hamas spokesman Abed Lateef Kano warned Thursday morning that Israel’s attacks will not be tolerated: “ The resistance forces are doing what they have to do as part of protecting the Palestinian people from Israeli aggression,” he said. “ The brutal Israeli attack and the targeting of civilians will not be tolerated quietly, and the occupation will pay the price and will not be successful in dictating a new equation,” he added.

Over 180 rockets were launched at Israel on Wednesday evening and overnight Thursday. A woman sustained serious wounds on Thursday at the Eshkol Regional Council, and another man was lightly wounded. On Wednesday, nine people were wounded, including one moderately, and 13 others suffered shock.

In Gaza, Palestinians reported three people were killed, including a pregnant woman and a toddler.



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