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Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Israel and Islamic Jihad announce Gaza truce

Ceasefire agreed after worst violence since 11-day war last year



A Palestinian man walks through the rubble of his home following Israeli air strikes in Gaza on Sunday © Mohammed Abed/AFP /Getty Images

James Shotter in Jerusalem YESTERDAY

Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad have agreed a ceasefire, raising hopes of an end to the most serious flare-up in hostilities between Israel and militants in the Gaza Strip for more than a year.

The agreement, brokered by Egyptian officials, took effect at 11.30pm local time on Sunday, and followed three days of fighting during which Israeli forces [bombarded sites in Gaza](#) and Islamic Jihad militants fired hundreds of rockets into Israel.

According to the health ministry in [Gaza](#), 44 Palestinians, including 15 children and four women, have been killed since the fighting began. No Israeli deaths have been reported.

[Israel](#) said it maintained the right to “respond strongly” if the ceasefire was violated. “We will not allow any disruption to the lives of the citizens of the State of Israel,” the government’s public diplomacy directorate said.

Islamic Jihad confirmed the truce, but also reserved the right to “respond to any Israeli aggression”.

The escalation was the worst since Israel and Hamas, the militant group which rules Gaza — an impoverished stretch of land hemmed in between Israel and Egypt that is home to more than 2mn Palestinians — fought an [11-day war last year](#).

However, this year's clashes have been less intense because Hamas, which has controlled Gaza since 2007 and has greater military capabilities than the smaller, Iran-backed Islamic Jihad, has stayed out of the conflict.

The latest round of fighting began on Friday, when Israel launched air strikes against the strip, killing Taysir al-Jabari, a senior figure in Islamic Jihad.

Islamic Jihad responded by firing a barrage of rockets into Israel, setting off warning sirens across the south and centre of the country and sending thousands of Israelis into air-raid shelters.

Israel said it had launched the air raids in response to an "imminent threat" from Islamic Jihad, following days of tension sparked by the arrest of another senior member of the group, Bassam al-Saadi, in the occupied West Bank last week.

Gaza's health ministry said that, in addition to the 44 Palestinian deaths, "Israeli aggression" was responsible for injuries to 360 people. Israeli officials said some Palestinians were killed by misfiring Islamic Jihad rockets, including one incident in which children were killed in the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza.

An Israeli official said Israel had killed 17 militants, including a second senior figure in Islamic Jihad, Khaled Mansour, who died in a strike on Saturday.

Even as Egyptian officials had stepped up efforts to broker a deal on Sunday, fighting continued, with Israel pounding targets in Gaza and militants firing rockets towards both Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, Israel's Mediterranean business hub.

Israel's military said that, as of Sunday evening, Palestinian militants had fired 935 rockets, of which 775 had reached Israeli skies. It added that the [Iron Dome air defence system](#) was operating at a 96 per cent interception rate.

The conflict has further strained Gaza's already ravaged economy. Israel closed border crossings into the strip last week for fear of reprisals following its arrest of al-Saadi.

The closures have prevented fuel deliveries to Gaza's only power plant, which stopped functioning on Saturday, exacerbating the power cuts that already plague the territory.

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