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Death returns to Gaza as cease-fire replaced by rockets, airstrikes

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Israeli airstrikes in Gaza resumed Friday after a 72-hour cease-fire lapsed with no extension agreed or broader deal emerging from Egyptian-mediated talks, leading to a prompt barrage of rocket launches from Palestinian fighters.

At least 33 mortar attacks on Israel were recorded shortly after the truce ended at 8 a.m. local time, officials said. Most hit open spaces, and at least three were intercepted by the country's Iron Dome defense system. But one strike resulted in injuries to two Israelis, with a civilian and soldier suffering light to moderate wounds, the Israel Defense Forces said.

In response, the Israeli military said it commenced shelling targets "across Gaza." At least three airstrikes were reported in the initial Israeli salvo. There were reports of at least one casualty from raids on the north of the territory, adding to the nearly 2,000 deaths reported from the month of violence.

Palestinian medics said a 10-year-old was killed in Gaza City. It marked the first death since the truce expired and served as a sad reminder of the toll the conflict has had on young people in Gaza. At least six other people were wounded in the same attack, authorities said.

Despite the resumption of fighting, on-the-ground reports initially suggest a lower intensity in attacks compared with earlier in the conflict.

Nonetheless, thousands of Palestinians fled their homes east of Gaza City on Friday as news of the truce's end became known.

The cease-fire expired after no progress was seemingly made in negotiations aimed at forging a more durable solution to the conflict.

But even as rocket attacks resumed, talks among the main Palestinian factions in Cairo were ongoing, sources told Al Jazeera.

Representatives from Hamas, the Palestine Liberation Organization and Islamic Jihad have been meeting in Cairo for talks with Egyptian mediators on extending the cease-fire.

The resumption of rocket fire followed an all-night meeting aimed at extending the truce. Egypt had been hoping that the cease-fire would hold even without a formal extension. But with no broader deal in the offing, the 72-hour truce lapsed.

"All the Palestinian factions, including Hamas, have agreed not to renew the cease-fire because [Israel] is refusing to accommodate our demands, but negotiations continue in Cairo," Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhum said.

The Palestinians have laid out a number of demands, starting with the lifting of Israel's eight-year blockade of Gaza. They also want the release of about 125 key prisoners held by the Israelis. Israeli demands include the demilitarization of Gaza and disarmament of Hamas.

Israel had said it was ready to indefinitely extend the cease-fire.

Naftali Bennett, Israel's economy minister and a member of the right-wing party Jewish Home, told Army Radio on Friday morning that Israel should "immediately" withdraw its negotiating team from Cairo, saying there can be "no talks under extortion."

It was later reported that the Israeli delegation had left the negotiations Friday morning.

'Deeply distressed'

A spokesman for Hamas' armed wing, Al-Qassam Brigades, warned late on Thursday that fighting would resume if their demands were not met — foremost, opening a seaport in the blockaded Palestinian enclave.

"If there is an agreement, it will be possible to extend the truce, but if there is not, we will ask the delegation to withdraw from the talks," a spokesman using the nom de guerre Abu Obeida said in a televised address.

Despite the withdrawal of all its troops from Gaza by the time the three-day cease-fire began early on Tuesday, Israel has retained forces along the border, ready to respond to any attack from Gaza.

Four weeks of military assault on Gaza has claimed the lives of 1,890 Palestinians, according to Gaza officials. United Nations figures indicate that 73 percent of the Palestinian victims were civilians. Of those, at least 429 were children.

On the Israeli side, three civilians have been killed by rockets or mortars from Gaza, and at least 64 soldiers have died in the fighting.

Speaking in Jerusalem after a visit to Gaza, International Committee of the Red Cross president Peter Maurer said he was “deeply distressed and shocked” by the impact of violence, saying the scale of the civilian losses must not happen again.

He also suggested there may have been violations of international humanitarian law, echoing earlier statements from Navi Pillay, chief human rights officer at the U.N., who agreed to an independent inquiry into the allegations.