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## Israeli Strikes in Retaliation Kill 9 Gazans

By FARES AKRAM

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Nine Gazans have been killed in Israeli strikes since Wednesday night, with [Israel](#)'s southern communities withstanding 20 rockets from Gaza over the same 24-hour period.

Warning sirens repeatedly sent Israelis across the south into bomb shelters, but most of the rockets landed in empty fields near the Israeli cities of Ofakim, Ashkelon and Beersheba. However, a 9-month-old baby was slightly hurt in Ashkelon when a car was hit with shrapnel.

The recent round of violence started a week ago, with a terrorist attack on southern Israel in which eight Israelis were killed. Israeli forces pursuing suspects killed three Egyptian security officers in the Egyptian Sinai, creating a furor with Egypt.

Israeli officials said the perpetrators and planners of the terrorist attack were originally from Gaza, and Israel has retaliated with strikes that have killed at least 23 [Palestinians](#). Gazan officials say they know nothing about the source of the attack.

Israel's first retaliatory strike in Gaza killed leaders of the Popular Resistance Committees, a pro-Hamas group that Israel said was behind the terrorist attack. On Wednesday, an airstrike killed an Islamic Jihad leader, Ismail al-Asmar, 34; the group said Thursday that it had fired several of the missiles at Israel in retaliation.

Early Thursday, Israelis struck a smuggling tunnel that crossed under Gaza's southern border with Egypt, killing four.

A third airstrike — on a club that the Israeli military said held weapons — killed two people in northern Gaza: a member of Islamic Jihad and a Palestinian man who later died.

A Palestinian medical spokesman said 29 Palestinians were wounded in those three assaults.

Thursday evening, as Gazans began to break their Ramadan fasts, an Israeli plane fired a missile at a motorbike in northern Gaza, killing two Palestinian militants, witnesses and medical sources said. The Israeli military said that the two had fired a mortar shell at the Erez crossing.