

700 Hamas, Islamic Jihad Rockets Rain Down on Israel

There was anger and dismay on the Israeli side of the Gaza border on Monday after two days of rocket blasts and air-raid sirens that ended with a ceasefire.

The dawn deal restored general calm after a barrage of nearly 700 Hamas and Islamic Jihad rockets, the most serious outbreak of violence between Israel and Palestinian militants for months.

But the cessation was greeted with little enthusiasm in the Israeli cities, towns and villages where Israelis were fuming, as well as weary of having to run to shelters.

"In a month, in two weeks, in a month and a half, it will all happen again—we achieved nothing. I think Israel needs to strike them very, very hard so that they learn their lesson," said Haim Cohen, 69, a retired electrician from the coastal city of Ashdod 15 miles (25 km.) north of the Gaza Strip.

Behind him, cleaners were sweeping shattered glass outside a house where an Israeli was killed by a Gaza rocket on Sunday when running for cover. He was one of four Israelis killed.

The Islamist Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007, two years after Israel pulled its troops and settlers out of the small Palestinian coastal enclave. Since then, the two sides have waged three wars and engaged in repeated tit-for-tat barrages.

Some Israelis who live close to the Gaza border believed their government agreed to a truce with Hamas because it did not want rockets raining down during the upcoming Independence Day holiday, or the Eurovision Song Contest finals that begin on May 14 in Tel Aviv, just 50 miles (80 km) up the coast from Gaza.

“Eurovision set the agenda and not us, the residents of the south,” said Ofer Liberman, from Nir-am, a kibbutz – or agricultural village – near northern Gaza. He said he felt abandoned, adding: “I want the government to make Hamas too scared to launch rockets at us.”

“I think that a ceasefire is a mistake. You don’t do a ceasefire with a terrorist organization. If this cycle isn’t finished properly and if Gaza isn’t cleansed of these terrorists then nothing will help,” said Jack Mandel, 57.

In Ein Hashlosha, a kibbutz about a mile and a half from Gaza, Meirav Kohan, 46, said she was shocked and disappointed at the truce.

“This is a war of attrition and the government is not looking for a long-term solution to bring us peace. There’s no policy. We’re just pawns in a game,” she said. {eoa}

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