

Egypt Brokered A Cease-Fire with Hamas After Botched Operation Led Israel to the Brink of War with Palestinians

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Israeli forces covertly entered the Gaza Strip on Sunday in a civilian car with some soldiers **reported** to be dressed as women, which drew suspicion and led to an exchange of gunfire that killed seven Palestinians, including one senior Hamas military commander. An Israeli lieutenant colonel also was killed. Israel claimed the action was an intelligence operation, not an assassination or abduction mission. The exchange of fire came as Israeli and Hamas leaders appeared to be making progress toward an unofficial cease-fire. Israel has allowed new shipments of diesel fuel to Gaza's power plant, which now is supplying more hours of electricity to residents of the impoverished enclave. Hamas distributed \$15-million in Qatari-donated cash as back pay to thousands of its civil servants who have received only a fraction of their salaries for months. About 170 Palestinians have been killed since March in protests demanding the right to return to their ancestral homes.

Hamas responded to the Israeli incursion with a barrage of 200 rockets and it shot an anti-tank missile into southern Israel that struck a bus and wounded one man. Israel countered with fiery airstrikes that killed three Palestinians. Israeli jets bombed the studios of Al-Aqsa Television, Hamas's TV station in the Gaza Strip, and the massive fireball took out the ability to broadcast. **Hamas** has accepted an Egyptian-brokered cease-fire. -GEG

JERUSALEM – A covert Israeli operation in the Gaza Strip apparently went bad on Sunday, leaving at least seven Palestinians dead, including one senior Hamas military commander, and puncturing a nascent cease-fire with a flurry of airstrikes and rocket fire.

An Israeli lieutenant colonel was killed and another officer was wounded in the action near Khan Younis, the first known Israeli ground incursion into Gaza since **Operation Protective Edge**, in July 2014, set off a seven-week war.

The impetus for the Israeli operation and its nature were unclear. Reports in the Israeli news media generally described it as an intelligence mission that went awry.

Palestinian militants responded with waves of rockets aimed at Israeli communities near Gaza, and Israeli aircraft pounded targets in Gaza for a time. With sirens going off repeatedly in the Gaza periphery, Israel ordered its citizens there to remain close to air-raid shelters and schools were closed on Monday.

The Israeli military took the unusual step of announcing that none of its personnel had been captured in Gaza. And by early Monday, the Israeli news media were playing down the significance of the country's soldiers operating in Gaza territory.

A former Israeli military commander in charge of long-range missions, Tal Russo, made the rounds of television studios assuring viewers this had been an intelligence operation, not an assassination or abduction mission. It was of the sort, he said, that "are carried out all the time, every night and in all fronts."

Whatever the incursion's purpose, the fighting it set off threatened to damage, if not scuttle, delicate multilateral [efforts to calm the Israel-Gaza border](#).

Those efforts have appeared to be bearing fruit.

Israel has allowed new shipments of diesel fuel to Gaza's power plant, which is supplying many more hours of electricity to residents of the impoverished enclave. Over the weekend, Hamas distributed \$15 million in Qatari-donated cash as back pay to thousands of its civil servants who have received only a fraction of their salaries for months.

But the perception that Israel, by allowing the fuel and cash shipments into Gaza, was paying off Hamas set off acrimonious wrangling between two rival right-wing members of Israel's security cabinet.

Earlier Sunday, Education Minister Naftali Bennett called the cash infusion "protection money." Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman accused Mr. Bennett of having supported such payments and of having opposed in recent weeks the more aggressive military reprisals against Hamas that Mr. Lieberman favored.

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