Shield and Arrow factsheet
1:00pm AEST, 12 May

Important updates

- 803 rockets have been fired towards Israel over the past two days.
- An Israeli from Rehovot has been killed.
- There were two barrages yesterday evening in Israel, though no rockets have been fired for several hours.
- About 20 per cent of these rockets have landed inside Gaza, causing Palestinian civilian deaths.
- On 8 May, Israel began 'Operation Shield and Arrow', whose objective is to protect Israeli citizens from terrorism. The operation will reduce the ability of Islamic Jihad to attack Israelis and came after over 100 rockets were fired at Israel on 2 May.
- Israel has undertaken about 200 airstrikes in Gaza during the operation, targeting Islamic Jihad rocket manufacturing, storage and firing infrastructure, as well as those responsible for planning and ordering attacks against Israel.
- Egypt is attempting to mediate a ceasefire and is reportedly optimistic of short-term success.

What's happening now?

As at 1:00pm AEST (6:00am IST) 11 May, Islamic Jihad had launched 803 rockets towards southern and central Israel over the past two days. No rockets have been fired for several hours, though there were two barrages yesterday evening, Israel time. One man from Rehovot was killed in the barrage.

Israel's anti-rocket systems only intercept rockets that would otherwise land in urban areas. They have successfully intercepted 95% of these rockets. Because of Israel's extensive efforts to protect its civilians from rockets (see below), there has only been one fatality.

Israel has hit over 200 Islamic Jihad targets in Gaza. Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, has not joined the fighting, though has released joint statements with Islamic Jihad. Numerous smaller groups have claimed to have fired rockets at Israel.

Israeli casualties

An Israeli man from Rehovot was killed yesterday when an Islamic Jihad rocket hit an apartment building. Five others from the building were injured, including a woman in her 60s. In different locations, other Israelis (including a woman in her 80s) and a foreign national have suffered shrapnel injuries from rockets and debris.

In Sderot, two homes suffered direct hits, though no one was injured because of the precautions undertaken by residents.

The reason the casualty list is not significantly longer is because of the great lengths to which Israel goes to protect its civilians from rockets. Beyond destroying rocket storage and launch sites, these measures include:

- The Iron Dome and David's Sling anti-rocket systems that shoot 95 per cent of their targets out of the sky
- The red alert sirens that provide Israelis in a targeted area with valuable seconds to find cover before a rocket hits
- Hardened rocket-proof rooms in every single apartment and house built since 1991
- Public bomb shelters across the country

- The ability of civilians close to Gaza to stay in hotels in other parts of the country at government expense

Palestinian casualties

Media citing Hamas sources say that 30 people have been killed over the last 48 hours. Of these, Hamas is claiming that only 12 were combatants. Some Israeli media are claiming that a total of 10 Palestinian civilians have been killed. Clarity will take time to emerge, but past rounds of violence have shown that Hamas lies to foreign press about the status of casualties, only to boast (in Arabic) about its combatants that were killed in combat.

At least 152 Islamic Jihad rockets have landed inside the Gaza Strip. According to Israeli sources, at least four Palestinian civilians (including three children) were killed by Palestinian rocket fire that landed in Gaza.

Gazan authorities have been telling Palestinians to congregate on rooves, in a deliberate attempt to orchestrate a higher civilian death toll.

In what way are Islamic Jihad rockets war crimes? And is the fighting 'disproportionate'?

Here's a crash course in the relevant laws of armed conflict (also referred to as international humanitarian law). All combatants – not just states – must comply with the laws of armed conflict. If they don't, they are guilty of war crimes. Media and commentators frequently don't have a good grasp on the relevant laws and they misinterpret key principles.

The principle of distinction

Combatants must distinguish between civilians and combatants, and between 'civilian objects' (such as homes) and military targets. It is forbidden to target civilians or civilian objects. This is why every Palestinian rocket fired toward Israel is a war crime – they are aimed at Israeli civilians. They are a war crime even if the rockets don't achieve their objective.

Losing civilian immunity

When a combatant uses a civilian object (e.g. a home) for a military purpose, that civilian object loses its immunity from attack (i.e. becomes a valid military target). It is widely known that Islamic Jihad (and Hamas) use civilian objects for weapon manufacturing, storage and firing, as well as military planning. In doing so, these groups have rendered those objects valid military targets (subject to the principle of proportionality – see below)

The principle of proportionality

Even when hitting a valid military target, a combatant must be sure that the expected military benefit of the action outweighs any expected impact on civilians. This is a difficult subject – we are talking about lives here, and the measurement is obviously subjective. But some key things to keep in mind:

- The measurement is about *expectations*. If the combatants honestly thought harm to civilians would be non-existent or minimal, but when the operation was carried out, civilians were actually harmed, this does not necessarily render the action a war crime. Similarly, if the honest expectation was that great military advantage would be achieved by an attack, then if that expectation was not met, that does not necessarily render the attack a war crime.
- Proportionality absolutely *does not mean* that each side should have roughly equal numbers of fatalities (combatants or civilians), and that if one side has more fatalities, the fighting was 'disproportionate'. This is a common mistake by media.
- Similarly, proportionality absolutely does not refer to the number of individual attacks. *Each attack* must be judged on its own merits. Did the expected benefit *of that attack* outweigh expected impact on civilians?

What about a ceasefire?

Egypt has been trying to mediate a ceasefire, a process of which Israel is supportive. Islamic Jihad's 11 May salvo of hundreds of rockets came after Israeli reports that a ceasefire was close, leading to a near collapse of the ceasefire talks. These have reportedly been renewed. Given the hours-long break in Islamic Jihad rocket fire, Egyptian mediators are reportedly optimistic about achieving a ceasefire soon.

What is Shield and Arrow?

Operation Shield and Arrow is a counter-terrorism operation launched on 8 May. Its aim to protect Israeli citizens by thwarting future Islamic Jihad terrorism in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip, by destroying known weapons production and storage compounds, rocket launch sites and targeting senior members of Islamic Jihad responsible for planning and ordering terrorist attacks. (You can read more information on those targeted here.)

Shield and Arrow's proximate cause was the firing of over 100 rockets at Israeli civilians on 2 May, but Islamic Jihad has been attacking Israeli civilian and military targets throughout 2023.

What is Palestinian Islamic Jihad?

Islamic Jihad is largely funded by Iran and shares its goal of destroying the State of Israel and establishing an Islamist state in its place. It is the second largest group in the Gaza Strip (after Hamas) but also carries out attacks in the West Bank, including suicide bombings, shooting and stabbing attacks. More information on Islamic Jihad, which is proscribed in Australia, is available on the Australian Government website, here.

Key Twitter accounts to follow for the latest events

- Israel Defence Forces @IDF
- Israel @israel
- Imshin @imshin

Plus, make sure you follow the ZFA on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok for more updates.