

# Israeli army's latest tactic: Kill, take a short break, and kill again

By [Global Research](#)

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Israel ordered a pause in its Gaza offensive on Wednesday for three hours to allow food and fuel to reach besieged Palestinians, as the country's leaders debated whether to accept an international cease-fire plan or to expand the assault against Hamas.

With criticism rising of the operation's spiraling civilian death toll and Gazans increasingly suffering the effects of nonstop air strikes and shelling, Israel's military said it would open "humanitarian corridors" to allow aid supplies to reach Palestinians.

Israeli military spokesman Peter Lerner said the "recess in offensive operations" was aimed at allowing in supplies and fuel, and would last from 1 to 4 p.m. local time (11:00-14:00 GMT). He said similar lulls in the coming days would be considered.

Lerner said that even during the pause, "For every attack against the army, there will be a response." Gaza residents reported scattered gunfire and explosions even after it was supposed to have gone into effect, but the scale of fighting appeared to drop.

As Israel's leadership met in the morning in Tel Aviv, sounds of heavy gunfire and thick plumes of smoke engulfed the Zeitoun neighborhood east of Gaza City. Israel said it struck 40 Hamas targets during the hours of darkness. Gaza health officials said new strikes on Wednesday morning killed eight people.

Outrage over an Israeli strike on Tuesday near a UN school continued, with the UN agency responsible for the building demanding an "impartial investigation" into the attack. Gaza health officials put the death toll from the strike at 39, while the UN says 42 were killed.

Israel says its forces fired at militants who launched mortars from that location.

About 300 of the nearly 700 Palestinians killed so far are civilians, according to Palestinian and UN figures. Of those killed, at least 130 are children age 16 and under, says the Gaza-based Palestinian Center for Human Rights, which tracks casualties.

The number of armed fighters killed remains unclear. Gaza residents say Hamas fighters have begun wearing civilian clothes, and the organization is keeping its casualties secret and housing its wounded and dead in undisclosed locations.

Israel has lost six soldiers since launching a ground offensive on Saturday — four of them in "friendly fire" incidents — and four other Israelis have been killed by rocket fire, three of them civilians.

Israel's lull in operations could ease the plight of civilians in Gaza, where much of the territory has no power or running water, because pumps are dependent on electricity.

More than 500 aid trucks have been shipped into Gaza since operations began. But even when aid crosses into Gaza military operations have prevented officials from distributing it, leading to food shortages in some areas.

A World Bank statement Wednesday said there are growing signs of a severe public health crisis in Gaza because of a shortage of drinking water and an escalating failure of the sewage system.

Militants hit the Israeli city of Ashkelon on Wednesday with a medium-range rocket, causing no casualties. Rocket fire has fallen off somewhat as Israeli troops tighten their hold on Gaza, taking over open areas used to launch rockets, but Gaza residents say militants are still launching from heavily populated areas.

Israel's leaders — including the top troika of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Defense Minister Ehud Barak — were to discuss whether to broaden the operation in Gaza or move to accept a plan being proposed by Egypt and France to end the fighting.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said the initiative calls for an immediate cease-fire by Israel and Palestinian factions for a limited period to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza and an urgent meeting of Israel and the Palestinian side on arrangements to prevent any repetition of military action and to deal with the causes.

International Mideast envoy Tony Blair said Tuesday the key to any cease-fire will be an arrangement to stop weapons smuggling over the Gaza-Egypt border.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy said Tuesday he saw the proposal as a "small hope" for ending the Gaza violence. Meanwhile, Reuters quoted French President Nicolas Sarkozy as saying that Israel and the Palestinian Authority had accepted a truce plan for Gaza announced by Egypt on Tuesday. "The president is delighted by the acceptance by Israel and the Palestinian Authority of the Franco-Egyptian plan presented last night in Sharm el-Sheikh by (Egyptian) President (Hosni) Mubarak," said a statement from Sarkozy's office. "The head of state calls for this plan to be implemented as quickly as possible for the suffering of the population to stop."

Israeli officials have said any cease-fire agreement must prevent further rocket attacks by Gaza militants and put in place measures to prevent the smuggling of missile and other weapons into the small Palestinian territory. Hamas has demanded that Israel open Gaza's blockaded crossings as part of any agreement.

"The principles are clear," Israeli government spokesman Mark Regev said. "Sustained quiet will require both the complete cessation of all hostile fire from Gaza into Israel and, in parallel, a complete, internationally supported arms embargo on Hamas in Gaza."

In the meantime, Israel has been making preparations to continue fighting. The military has called up thousands of reserve troops that it could use to expand the Gaza offensive, supporting the three brigade-size formations of regular troops now inside. Defense officials said the troops could be ready for action by Friday. They spoke on condition of anonymity

because the army's preparations are classified.

The Franco-Egyptian plan was given increasing urgency by the Israeli mortar strike near a UN school that killed 42 Palestinians and stained the streets with blood.

The United Nations said the school was sheltering hundreds of people displaced by the onslaught on Hamas militants. Israel said its troops returned fire on a Hamas squad that fired mortars at them from nearby.

Israel's military said its shelling — the deadliest single episode since Israeli ground forces invaded Gaza on Saturday following a weeklong air bombardment — was an attack on a military target and accused Hamas militants of using civilians as cover.

Christopher Gunness of the UN Relief and Works Agency, responsible for the school, said the agency is "99.9 percent certain there were no militants or military activity in its school."

That would not necessarily contradict Israel's claim that the militants were just outside.

Gunness demanded an investigation, and punishment for anyone found to have violated international law.

Two residents of the area who spoke with The Associated Press by telephone said they saw a small group of militants firing mortar rounds from a street near the school. They spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. Gunness said 1,300 people were taking shelter from the shelling at the school.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said there were no militants there at the time.

The Gaza-based Palestinian Center for Human Rights said the presence of militants did not justify Israel's response. "The presence of armed resistance does not justify in any way the use of excessive force that is disproportionate," the center said in a statement.

The carnage, which included 55 wounded, added to a surging civilian toll and drew mounting international pressure for Israel to end the offensive against Hamas.

Lebanon's Hezbollah leader stepped up his anti-Israeli rhetoric on Wednesday, warning Israel that it can't destroy the Palestinian Hamas and that it would be "crushed" should it attack Lebanon.

Hassan Nasrallah's speech, broadcast on Arab televisions, could stoke tension on Israel's northern border.

Nasrallah also chastised "Arab leaders" for trying to mediate a truce between Palestinian Hamas and Israel, instead of siding with the embattled Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

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