

Israeli troops divide Gaza in two as push continues

By [Global Research](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Global Research, January 05, 2009

Deutsche Press Agentur 4 January 2009

Tel Aviv/Gaza - Continuing the second stage of a massive offensive against militants in the Gaza Strip, Israeli troops pushed further into the salient Sunday, battling Palestinian gunmen and cutting the enclave in two as they deployed south of Gaza City and seized control of a major traffic artery.

Palestinian medical officials said the ground operation had seen at least 50 Palestinians killed, including a mother and her four children, and 150 wounded. But they said the count was incomplete, as some bodies were believed to be in areas where fighting was taking place and could not be collected.

An Israeli military spokesman said one soldier was killed and 31 wounded, one critically and two seriously, since the army first moved into the Gaza Strip on Saturday night.

The Israeli military spokesman dismissed as a 'complete lie' militants' claims that they had killed nine Israeli soldiers. A senior Israeli military official said reports that an Israeli soldier had been captured by the militants was 'untrue.'

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that most of the resistance the Israelis had encountered so far came from mortars, although other Israeli spokesmen said close-quarters combat has taken place.

'We are operating in a very challenging area that has been well- prepared by Hamas in order to repel attacks,' the official said.

According to the Israeli media, Hamas can call on 16,000 armed fighters, and the organization's arsenal includes 4,000 rocket- propelled grenade launchers, 120 tons of explosives, and dozens of 120mm mortars.

Residents of the Strip said more than half of the enclave appeared to be occupied by the Israelis, who were taking up positions outside major towns, and were avoiding entering densely-populated areas.

Gaza City was a virtual ghost town Sunday, with shops closed and most people huddled indoors.

Backing up the ground forces, the Israeli air force continued its attacks, hitting over 45 targets overnight and on Sunday, including tunnels, weapons storage facilities, mortar shell launching squads and a number of mortar shell launching areas, a statement by the Israeli military said. The air force also provided close support to the troops on the ground, a military spokeswoman said Sunday night.

One of the raids also killed two senior Hamas militants: Hussam Hamdan, held responsible for the firing of long-range Grad missiles toward the southern Israeli cities of Beersheba and Ofakim, and Mohammed Hilo, who was in charge of Hamas 'special forces' in Khan Younis.

The Israeli Navy also attacked several targets including the Hamas intelligence headquarters in Gaza City, rocket launching areas and Hamas marine forces outposts, the statement added.

The Israeli official said that although the Israeli ground incursion was proceeding as planned, it would not be a rapid operation that would end in days.

He said Israel was not seeking to recapture the entire Strip, but wanted to decrease the number of rockets fired from the Strip at Israel, and would thus remain in the areas which are operational at present.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told ministers at the start of Sunday's cabinet meeting in Tel Aviv that the Israeli assault was 'unavoidable' and was part of the overall operation designed to 'create a new security reality' for residents of southern Israel.

But militias in the Strip continued to rocket Israel, firing both short-range and long-range missiles at various cities, although the approximately 40 rockets launched by mid-afternoon was fewer than Israeli analysts had predicted would be fired once the ground assault got under way. There were no reports of fatalities from the day's rocket attacks.

The Israeli ground operation got under way Saturday evening as infantry and armour, backed by combat engineers and with air support, crossed into the salient after an artillery barrage lasting hours.

Palestinian militants immediately confronted the Israelis, sparking what the Islamic Hamas movement, which controls Gaza, said in a statement were 'heavy and tough exchanges of fire and armed clashes.'

Reports from inside the Strip described explosions, heavy machine-gun fire and shelling by Israeli tanks. The bombing campaign continued overnight, and television footage from Gaza showed fires and billowing smoke.

The Israeli military said the ground operation was the second stage of the Israeli offensive, which began December 27, and was intended to destroy Hamas installations in the area of operations and to impede militants' firing of rockets at Israel.

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak warned in a televised statement Saturday night that the ground campaign would be neither easy nor short.

Israel launched its 'Operation Cast Lead' in response to a week of heavy rocket barrages on the Jewish state from the Gaza Strip, following the end of a shaky six-month truce between Israel and Hamas leaders in the territory.

At least 520 Palestinians have been killed since the operation began, and around 2,500 wounded.

The hundreds of Palestinian rockets and mortars launched since the start of the operation have killed four Israelis, three of them civilians, and dozens more wounded.



The original source of this article is Deutsche Press Agentur
Copyright © [Global Research](#), Deutsche Press Agentur, 2009

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Global Research](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca