

Beat: Politics

Israeli forces kill 4 Hamas militants in Gaza airstrike, shooting

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USPA News - Three Hamas militants were killed Friday when Israeli forces carried out an airstrike on a tunnel in the southern Gaza Strip, just hours after a fourth militant was killed and five Israeli soldiers were injured in a clash at a separate tunnel near the border. The operation began early Friday morning when elite engineering forces of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) used explosives to destroy a segment of the infrastructure of a tunnel exposed on the Israel-Gaza border early last month.

It was approximately 18 meters (59 feet) underground and extended 1.7 kilometers (1 mile). As work was underway to destroy the tunnel, a Hamas militant threw an explosive device at the IDF forces, injuring five Israeli soldiers. "In an immediate response, the soldiers opened fire and directly hit a terrorist," an IDF spokesperson said, adding that the five soldiers were evacuated to an Israeli hospital. Their conditions were not immediately known, but officials said the militant was killed. In response to the attack, Israeli Air Force (IAF) aircraft carried out an airstrike against what the military described as a second "terror tunnel" in the southern Gaza Strip, killing three more Hamas militants. A Hamas spokesman confirmed a total of four of their fighters had been killed in both incidents and warned Israeli forces against entering Gaza. "This mission was imperative due to the potential to utilize the terror tunnel for future attacks against Israeli civilians," said IDF spokesman Lt. Col. Peter Lerner. "The IDF is committed to preventing all terror activities emanating from the Gaza Strip. This tunnel, similar to the one used to kill two IDF soldiers and kidnap Gilad Shalit in 2006, was built for this heinous purpose." Friday's violence in the Gaza Strip was the worst since November 2012, when an Israeli offensive set off eight days of fierce cross-border fighting. At least 174 Palestinians and 6 Israelis were killed while hundreds more were injured until an Egyptian-brokered truce was reached with Palestinian militants. Israeli aircraft last targeted the Gaza Strip on Monday, destroying two concealed rocket launchers but causing no casualties. On April 30, Israeli Air Force aircraft fired at a motorcycle northwest of Gaza City, killing a top militant from the al-Qaeda-influenced group the "Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem."

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