

Operation Breaking Dawn

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Israel launched Operation Breaking Dawn against Iran-armed Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) on August 5 as part of a new, preemptive strategy to disrupt the Gazan terrorist group's plans to launch anti-tank missile strikes on Israel, restore deterrence against the group, and, most importantly, send a strong deterrent signal to other terrorist groups, particularly Hezbollah. The operation killed a top PIJ commander, Taysir al Jabari, as well as several other operatives before they could conduct planned terrorist attacks. The United States should give Israel the time and space to protect itself against terrorist threats. It can further signal its support by rearticulating its commitment to resupply Israel's supply of Tamir interceptors for its Iron Dome short-range air defense system.

What Happened?

- On August 5, the IDF launched airstrikes it is calling [Operation Breaking Dawn](#) against PIJ targets that were preparing to strike Israel. Israel's strikes killed several PIJ operatives, including the PIJ commander of northern Gaza, Taysir al Jabari. After targeting al Jabari, the IDF also reportedly targeted two squads of PIJ operatives, killing at least twelve PIJ fighters who were about to conduct anti-tank missile attacks.
 - » The IDF used a specialized munition against al Jabari that [only destroyed](#) the apartment he was inside, similar to the recent [U.S. airstrike](#) that targeted al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahri without killing civilians.
 - » Palestinian militants, likely PIJ, [responded several hours](#) later by firing at least 70 rockets that the Iron Dome missile defense system engaged over southern Israel. Israeli air defenses intercepted 30 of these projectiles, eleven fell short into the Gaza Strip, and there have been no reported casualties. Since Israeli air defenses only intercept incoming projectiles that threaten populated areas, this is a very high interception ratio.
- The events [leading up to the current escalation](#) between PIJ and Israel started overnight on August 2, when the IDF arrested Bassem al-Saadi, the head of PIJ in the West Bank. A seventeen-year-old was also killed in the raid. However, al-Saadi's arrest did not trigger Israel's operation in Gaza.

Why Does It Matter?

- Through Operation Breaking Dawn, Israel is attempting to reestablish deterrence against PIJ and, just as importantly, send a signal to other terrorist organizations on its borders, most notably Hezbollah. Whereas Israel had previously waited for Palestinian terrorists to escalate before launching airstrikes, Operation Breaking Dawn marks a new preemptive strategy that seeks to deter the escalation from beginning.
 - » Unrest in Gaza detracts IDF planning and readiness against the much more dangerous threat to Israel's north in Lebanon and Syria. Hezbollah maintains an arsenal of roughly 130,000 missiles and has recently sent [UAVs into Israeli airspace](#). Meanwhile, Iran continues to attempt to proliferate precision ballistic missile capabilities in Syria and Lebanon.
 - » Iran provides funding, training, and military equipment to both PIJ and Hamas. PIJ has 30% of the armaments in the Gaza Strip, and conducts its activity based on guidance, if not instruction, from Tehran. It is not clear if the operations against Israel planned by PIJ were directed from Tehran.
 - » This new Israeli strategy might be a recognition that the particular challenges it faces in Gaza are require a “proactive, preventative approach” similar to the “campaign between wars” Israel has been conducting in Syria, as [JINSA President Mike Makovsky wrote a year ago](#).
- With control over Gaza, Hamas faces the conundrum that it likely does not want to engage Israel now in a war that reaches levels similar to the May 2021 conflict, but it also wants to avoid appearing weak compared to PIJ.
 - » Israel previously killed PIJ's commander in Gaza, Baha Abu al-Ata in 2019, which set off a brief exchange of rocket fire. Hamas mostly stayed out of that round of violence despite a Hamas member dying. Hamas's decision to avoid fighting was easier because—similar to Operation Breaking Dawn so far—Israel made clear that it was not targeting its leadership or infrastructure.
 - Traditionally, regardless of which terrorist group in Gaza launches an attack, Israel has held Hamas responsible as the organization in charge of the territory. With Operation Breaking Dawn, however, Israel has [made clear it is drawing a distinction](#) between PIJ and Hamas.
 - » So far, Hamas has stayed out of the fighting and has claimed to face cyber issues that have prevented it from promoting further attacks. The group may have to take some action against Israel to ease domestic pressures on their leaders, while trying to avoid Israeli retaliation. This could take the form of limited attacks against Israel that Hamas will claim were the unsanctioned actions taken by discontented fighters.
- Shortly after the strike that killed al Jabari, the IDF publicly [released footage](#) of the attack and information plans to conduct terrorism, signaling it has learned lessons from the May 2021 conflict about the importance of shaping international perception by providing timely information about the targets of its strikes.
 - » More rapidly disseminating information and countering disinformation was a [critical recommendation](#) that JINSA's Gaza Assessment Policy Project made in its report about the May 2021 conflict.

- Israel's Iron Dome is highly effective at intercepting the short-range rockets and drones that terrorists in Gaza launch over the border. When Israel faced a shortage of Tamir interceptors for its Iron Dome system after the May 2021 conflict with Gaza, President Biden [immediately pledged](#) to replenish its stocks. However, holdups in both the House of Representatives and the Senate prevented Congress from passing the necessary appropriation for ten months.
- Like Israel's limited operations in 2019, this round of violence will likely end in a few days since Israel has already achieved its discrete objective of preempting PIJ's specific planned attacks. The potential for broader escalation remains if either side miscalculates its strikes.

What Should the United States Do Next?

- The Biden administration should continue supporting Israel's right to protect itself against terrorist threats, including through preemptive action.
- Congressional leadership in both parties should state that they will ensure there will not be a repeat of the holdup to expedite Israel's replenishment of Tamir interceptors for the Iron Dome should it face a similar shortage as after the May 2021 conflict with Gaza.