



Hospital Explosion Latest in String of Hundreds of Hamas and PIJ Misfires

Blaise Misztal
Vice President for Policy

Yoni Tobin
Policy Analyst

On Tuesday, October 17, an explosion at a hospital in Gaza resulted in more than 400 deaths. Hamas claimed that the explosion was due to an Israeli airstrike, part of the group's effective disinformation strategy to delegitimize Israel. However, the Israel Defense Forces moved quickly to provide clear evidence, which the United States later confirmed, that a misfired Palestinian Islamic Jihad rocket was responsible. Such misfires, and resulting Gazan casualties, are a common occurrence during Gaza conflicts. A [JINSA assessment](#) of the 2021 Gaza conflict indicated that as many as fifteen percent of all rockets fired by militants misfired, many of them landing inside Gaza, and were responsible for about seventeen percent of all civilian casualties in Gaza.

President Biden, after examining the evidence, defended Israel and acknowledged the complexity of targeting terrorists who use civilian shields. The quick and decisive IDF and U.S. response should be a model for how similar incidents in the future are handled.

What Happened?

- On October 17, an explosion [occurred](#) at 6:59pm local time at the al-Ahli hospital in Gaza City, causing a number of fatalities. Hamas blamed Israel for [perpetrating](#) the explosion with an airstrike.
 - » The Hamas-run Palestinian Health Ministry [claimed](#) that 471 people were killed in the explosion and over 300 [injured](#), including 28 in critical condition, though Gazan authorities routinely inflate casualty counts for information warfare purposes.
 - » IDF spokesperson Daniel Hagari [stated](#) that Hamas “went as far as to inflate the number of casualties” in the explosion.
- Protests against Israel [erupted](#) around the region, including in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, the West Bank, and Yemen. A number of the protests turned violent, including:
 - » Protestors attempting a [storming](#) of the Israeli consulate in Istanbul, Turkey, in which sixty people were injured and five people arrested;
 - » Protestors attempting to [storm](#) the Israeli embassy in Amman, Jordan;
 - » Protestors [throwing](#) rocks and Molotov cocktails at the U.S. embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, causing a fire near the embassy.

- Hezbollah called for a “[day of rage against the enemy](#)” in response to the explosion, which it called an Israeli “massacre” and “brutal crime.”
- The IDF [presented](#) evidence that the explosion was caused by a misfired PIJ rocket, including radar array data, aerial footage, intelligence sources, and intercepted internal Hamas communications.
- President Biden said at a joint press conference with Prime Minister Netanyahu on October 18 that “based on what I’ve seen, it appears as though it was done by the [other team](#), not you.”
 - » Biden later added that his assessment was [based](#) on unspecified data he was shown by the Department of Defense.
 - » National Security Council spokesperson Adrienne Watson [announced](#) on October 18 on X (formerly known as Twitter) that “our current assessment, based on analysis of overhead imagery, intercepts and open source information, is that Israel is not responsible for the explosion at the hospital in Gaza yesterday.”

Why Is It Important?

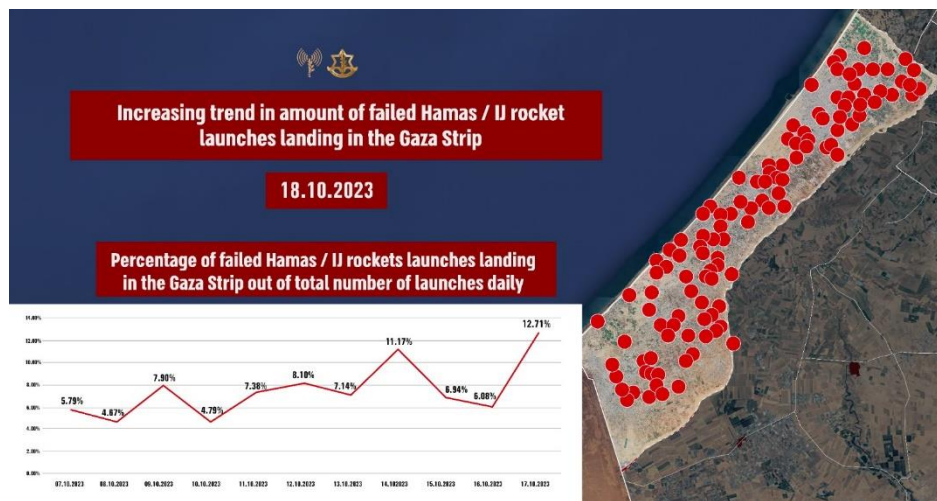
- Disinformation – particularly accusations that Israel has committed atrocities against civilians and perpetrated war crimes – is a core part of Hamas’s strategy that seeks not military victory, but to triumph in the court of public opinion by delegitimizing Israel. In the past, the IDF has moved slowly to dispute high-profile accusations and the United States has provided little if any political cover.
 - » Both the Israeli and U.S. response to the October 17 hospital explosion was quick and decisive. It should be the model for how to handle future incidents, of which there are likely to be many as Hamas seeks to discredit Israel and drive a wedge between it and its American partner.
- Within hours of the hospital explosion, the IDF was able to present compelling evidence from an [After Action Review](#) that the explosion was caused by a misfired PIJ rocket.
 - » The IDF cited four categories of evidence in its assessment, including the IDF’s review of the operations it was conducting at the time, radar data and trajectory analysis from that data, intelligence including internal Hamas communications, and aerial footage of the explosion.
 - » The IDF press release cited several specific data points, including:
 - The absence of IDF operations targeting the area at the time;
 - The lack of evidence of craters or deep structural damage in aerial footage of the explosion, as would occur if Israel had fired munitions on the hospital;
 - Radar data and trajectory analysis showing that ten rockets had been fired in close proximity to the hospital at the time of the explosion;
 - Two privately recorded videos purportedly showing the misfire;
 - Intercepted internal Hamas [communications](#) between two Hamas operatives, including comments that “shrapnel missile is local shrapnel and not like Israel shrapnel,” that “[responsibility for the misfire] belongs to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ),” and that “they shot it from the cemetery behind the hospital.”



Source: [Israeli Foreign Ministry](#)

- » Separately, Israel's Channel 12 released [footage](#) showing a barrage of rockets being fired from Gaza City, in extremely close proximity to the al-Ahli hospital, at the time of the explosion.
- The credibility of this evidence is further supported by the fact that militant rockets misfiring and resulting in civilian casualties in Gaza has been a common occurrence in past conflicts.
 - » During the brief August 2022 Gaza conflict, six Palestinian civilians were killed by Hamas or PIJ rocket [misfires](#), according to the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, an Israeli think tank, including four Palestinian children.
 - » During the 2021 Gaza conflict, a number of Palestinians were killed by Hamas or PIJ misfires:
 - As JINSA noted in its [assessment](#) of the war, one out of every seven (almost fifteen percent) rocket fired by militants fell short of reaching Israeli territory. The IDF recorded 680 rocket [misfires](#) during the conflict.
 - This caused twenty confirmed Palestinian civilian [deaths](#) (approximately twenty percent of civilian fatalities in the war).
 - Israel-based Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies [estimated](#) that these misfires actually caused ninety-one Palestinian deaths, which would comprise over one-third of the Palestinian fatalities in the conflict.
 - » During the 2014 Gaza conflict, 875 rockets are known to have [misfired](#) and landed inside the Gaza Strip.
 - This included a rocket that misfired and struck a playground in the Al Shati refugee camp in Gaza, [killing](#) eleven Palestinian children and [injuring](#) forty-five civilians.
 - Amnesty International [documented](#) four other cases of rocket or mortar misfires by Palestinian terrorist groups in the 2014 conflict, causing at least five Palestinian civilian casualties.
 - » In July 2008, even during a period of relative calm, three different rockets [misfired](#) and landed inside the Gaza Strip in a one-week span. Two Palestinian civilians were [killed](#) due to rocket misfires in December 2008.

- According to IDF data, misfires in the current conflict are reaching similar levels, suggesting that there will be additional civilian deaths for which Hamas and PIJ are responsible but which they will attempt to blame on Israel.
 - » Despite not exceeding ten percent during the first week of fighting, militant rocket [misfires](#) have now reached close to thirteen percent in the last day, a level similar to what was seen in 2021.
 - » The rise in misfires is likely due to a reduction in the militants' rocket stockpiles, militants resorting to using older or more crudely produced rockets, and/or attempts to fire rockets more quickly so as to evade Israeli detection and strikes.



Source: [Israeli Foreign Ministry](#)