IDF airstrikes hit 15 sites in Gaza after 2 rockets fired at Israeli cities

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-airstrikes-said-to-hit-gaza-after-2-rockets-fired-at-israeli-cities/>

The Israel Defense Forces launched a series of  airstrikes on the Gaza Strip early Wednesday, just hours after terrorists fired two rockets at the southern cities of Ashkelon and Ashdod, where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was holding an election rally.

The IDF said warplanes hit 15 different targets across the Strip, “including a number of targets in a military base producing arms, a number of targets in a compound belonging to the naval forces and a terror tunnel belonging to the Hamas terror group.”

The army said it held Hamas responsible for the rocket fire.

Palestinian sources reported heavy strikes and explosions in Beit Lahiya just north of Gaza City, Deir el-Balah in central Gaza and in Khan Younis in the south.

There were no reports of injuries.

The strikes came after Netanyahu, who is also defense minister, met with army chiefs, along with the heads of the Mossad and the Shin Bet security agency, at the military headquarters in Tel Aviv

Netanyahu was forced to seek shelter during a campaign event in Ashdod on Tuesday night as rocket sirens went off.  Both rockets were intercepted by the Iron Dome air defense system, according to the Israel Defense Forces.

Israeli analysts said it appeared that Gaza terrorist deliberately targeted the southern cities, knowing that Netanyahu and other politicians were holding rallies there. Netanyahu’s rally was being live-streamed on his Facebook page.

Most recent rocket fire from the Strip has targeted surrounding communities, only firing at large Israelis cities during major flare-ups or if trying to provoke a heavy Israeli response.

Early Wednesday, Palestinian media reported that an IDF tank fired a shell at empty Hamas position in southern Gaza, causing no injuries. There was no comment from the IDF.

One woman, 46, in Ashdod was treated for anxiety after failing to reach shelter, medics said, but no other injuries or damage were reported.

The rocket fire came as Netanyahu was about to begin a speech to Likud supporters a week before Israelis head to the polls.

In an extraordinary scene captured on video, Netanyahu could be seen being whisked away from the stage by a gaggle of security guards as sirens sound.

“Leave quietly,” Netanyahu told the crowd before calmly walking off the stage.

He returned minutes later to resume his speech.

Netanyahu was [widely panned](https://www.timesofisrael.com/pm-draws-fire-after-being-forced-to-take-shelter-from-rockets/) by his political rivals for being forced offstage.

In nearby Ashkelon, Blue and White MK Gabi Ashkenazi had to cut a campaign event short due to the rocket fire.

The city of Ashkelon opened its public bomb shelters after the sirens went off as a precautionary measure in case rocket attacks persisted.

On Sunday, a rocket was fired from Gaza at southern Israel, but landed inside the enclave, short of the border.

The attempted rocket attack came as an Egyptian military intelligence delegation visited Gaza on Sunday in a bid to calm heightened tensions between Israel and terror groups in the Strip.

Egypt has in the past helped broker unofficial ceasefires between Israel and Hamas.

Netanyahu warned Hamas on Saturday that Israel would respond forcefully to any attempt to harm its citizens and soldiers, following two days of violent incidents on and near the Gaza border.

The weekend saw a string of violent incidents along the Gaza border, after several weeks of relative calm.