

Battles rage in north Gaza as Palestinian fighters ambush Israeli troops

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Israeli tanks push through the narrow streets of Jabalia, in northern Gaza [Israeli Army via AFP]

Gaza City, June 28 (RHC)-- Palestinian fighters engaged Israeli forces in fierce battles in northern Gaza City's Shujayea neighborhood a day after tanks and troops rolled in and sent tens of thousands of terrified civilians fleeing.

In a statement on Friday, al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, said it blew up a booby-trapped residential building in Shujayea, killing four Israeli soldiers and wounding five others. The improvised explosive device used was an undetonated F-16 missile recovered intact after it was fired from an Israeli warplane, it said.

The Qassam Brigades, Hamas's armed wing, said its fighters also continue to engage in "violent clashes" while "inflicting deaths and injuries" in attacks with anti-tank rockets and small-arms fire.

A day earlier, Israeli forces carried out heavy air and artillery attacks and sent armoured vehicles into war-ravaged northern Gaza in a renewed assault after pulling out in January saying Hamas had been "dismantled" in the area.

Israel displaced at least 60,000 people from Gaza City since Thursday, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

No official confirmation of soldiers' deaths in Shujayea was immediately available on Friday but Israel's military did report one soldier was killed and nine were wounded in clashes throughout Gaza over the last 24 hours.

Ground operations backed by air raids are continuing in northern Gaza, killing "dozens" of fighters, the army said on Friday. The heavy fighting follows comments by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week suggesting the "intense phase" of the war is winding down.

Soldiers "started to conduct targeted raids" in Shujayea as intelligence indicated "the presence of terrorists and terrorist infrastructure in the area", the military said, in its first details of the operation.

At least 668 Israeli soldiers have been killed since October 7, 2023, including more than 300 since the ground invasion of Gaza began. Another 3,953 have been wounded.

Israel lost eight soldiers in a single attack earlier this month in southern Rafah as Hamas fighters ambushed and blew up a military vehicle with a rocket-propelled grenade.

Palestinian health officials said tank shelling in Rafah killed at least 11 people on Friday. Displaced Palestinian families fled what they said was intensifying Israeli fire to seek shelter further north, describing chaotic scenes as fighting drew closer.

One resident said some bulldozers in the Shakoush area piled up sand for Israeli tanks to station behind. "The situation there is very dangerous and many families are leaving towards Khan Younis, even from the Mawasi area as things became unsafe for them," the unnamed man told the Reuters news agency.

The UN's Dujarric said incursions into al-Mawasi – declared an "evacuation zone" by Israel's army – resulted in many casualties and displacement of at least 5,000 people.

Most of Gaza's population has been uprooted and much of the territory's infrastructure destroyed, leaving residents struggling to survive. A UN-backed assessment this week said nearly 500,000 people in Gaza are experiencing "catastrophic" hunger.

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