

The Israel Project

Conference Call: Terror Attacks in Israel

Moderator:
David Harris,
Director of Research and Content,
The Israel Project

Speaker:
Lieutenant Colonel Avital Leibovich,
Head of International Media and Communications Branch,
Israel Defense Forces

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DAVID HARRIS: Thank you very much indeed for joining us on this conference call on a particularly tragic day for Israel. My name's David Harris. I'm the director of research and content for The Israel Project. I'm pleased that Lieutenant Colonel Avital Leibovich, the IDF's spokesperson to the international press, has made time for this conference call. And without further ado, I hand over this call to you, Avital. Thank you.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL AVITAL LEIBOVICH: Yeah, thank you. Hello, everyone. It is a tragic day indeed. We're talking about a multiple attack – terrorist attack infiltrating from Gaza towards Israel, towards Israelis.

I'll give you a rundown of the timeline of events. We're talking about something like six hours ago at an area 20 kilometers north of Eilat, which is the most southern city in Israel. A public bus, on its way to Eilat – usually, this time of season in Israel, people are vacationing and so on; Eilat is a very considered holiday resort area – and the bus was filled with people. Heavy gunfire was opened towards the bus. And as a result, we had several people injured. They were evacuated to the hospital in Eilat. A short time later, another public bus that was driving in the same area was also hit. And in addition, two civilian vehicles that were in the same road were also hit by gunfire.

Somewhere along the line of a kilometer from that area, another vehicle of patrol of IDF soldiers that arrived at the scene was – there was an IED that was activated on that vehicle. And as a result, we have some injuries there as well.

In another area, in the fence surrounding Gaza on the Egyptian-Israeli border, there were some shelling of mortars from Gaza towards a civilian tractor that was conducting some maintenance work on the fence in that area.

We can tell you now that we have managed to target seven terrorists in the exchange of fire. We are now taking control – we have taken control of the situation. And I'm sure that later on tonight we'll be able to give more accurate figures of casualties and fatalities.

MR. HARRIS: OK. We have questions from various journalists – Eli Lake from the Washington Times, Chris Mitchell from CBN amongst others are asking if you have any idea at this stage of the origins of the cell. Could it have possibly been al-Qaida in the Sinai? Or are we assuming, at this stage, that it's someone out of Gaza?

LT. COL. LEIBOVICH: At this stage, I can tell you that the terrorist squad originated in Gaza, but I don't have any further information whether they were al-Qaida or something else.

MR. HARRIS: How concerned is the IDF about the relaxation of the border between Egypt and Gaza over the last couple of months?

LT. COL. LEIBOVICH: Well, I – you know, the IDF has been on alert in that area, and this is another sure sign that we have similar events, of course, not in the this multilayer manner. But we are prepared for terrorists trying to either attack civilian vehicles or civilian population

centers. However, I think this is the most severe terror incident that we had in this area in the last couple of years.

MR. HARRIS: Another question from someone in the United States asking, what is the latest situation with regards to Egyptian forces in the Sinai Peninsula?

LT. COL. LEIBOVICH: And this question, I don't think, should be addressed to me, maybe to the Egyptian Army.

MR. HARRIS: Mm-hmm. (Affirmative.)

What, in terms of warnings and so on, is the IDF saying to those who carried out and those who were responsible for today's attacks?

LT. COL. LEIBOVICH: Well, naturally the IDF has a very distinct goal, and this is to protect the civilians of Israel. And we will not tolerate with such severe terroristic attack.

MR. HARRIS: I can add to that – in the statement that you put out a short while ago, that you describe this as a malicious attack on innocent civilians and, formally, the IDF will pursue those responsible for this attack at all costs and will not allow any further harm to Israeli civilians.

LT. COL. LEIBOVICH: That's correct.

MR. HARRIS: On the ground, what is – what's happening now as far as the army is concerned? You said the situation is under control. What is the process from now onwards?

LT. COL. LEIBOVICH: Well, the situation's (under ?) control. But some of the road is still closed from civilian traffic as we are still investigating some details regarding these events. We have put forces in the area; we've spread them in those most sensitive places, and we are on alert right now.

MR. HARRIS: OK, I know you have to go, but just one more – one more thing if you could do before you leave: If you could just again repeat the headlines of what happened for those people who joined the call late, it would be appreciated.

LT. COL. LEIBOVICH: Sure. We're talking about a multilayered terrorist attack towards Israelis. It began something like 12 noon Israeli time. The first attack was directed to a civilian bus driving towards the resort city of – the holiday city of Eilat. Twenty kilometers north of Eilat, fire – heavy fire was opened towards the bus and the passengers on board, which consisted of civilians and soldiers. We know that 14 of those passengers were injured and evacuated later on to a hospital in Eilat.

Simultaneously another bus that was driving or heading towards Eilat on the same road, fire was opened towards that bus as well, as well as two other civilian vehicles in the same road,

over 20 kilometers north of Eilat. And in these events, several – quite several – more than several people were injured at different levels.

The IDF patrol that was alerted to the area, due to the attack, was – there was an IED activated towards that patrol. And in addition, in an area on the Philadelphi Route near the Egyptian-Israeli border, there were a mortar shell attack targeting civilian tractors doing – conducting some maintenance work on the fence.

I can tell you that due to the exchange of fire between IDF soldiers and the terrorist squad, we hit seven of the terrorists. Currently the situation is contained; it's under control; and we are still conducting some more investigation due to the events.

MR. HARRIS: Before I say a formal thank you to Lieutenant Colonel Leibovich, just to let you all know, that if you go to our home page, theisraelproject.org, theisraelproject.org, go to the top right-hand corner; you'll find a graphic pointing you to all of our coverage.

There are elements, of course, that are not under the purview of Lieutenant Colonel Leibovich. You'll find many of the answers to the questions that you posed there as well as multimedia, maps and a variety of other pieces of information.

Lieutenant Colonel Avital Leibovich, on behalf of everybody listening and The Israel Project, thank you so much indeed for your time.

LT. COL. LEIBOVICH: Thank you very much.

MR. HARRIS: And ladies and gentlemen, thank you also for joining us, as ever, on one of our calls, and hopefully we'll speak to you again soon, but that next time, it will be to consider something of a much more positive nature. Thank you very much indeed and have a good rest of the day.

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