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From: OpsNewsTicker@state.gov [mailto:OpsNewsTicker@state.gov]
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Subject: Jubilant Palestinians mob Gaza streets (Reuters)

GAZA (Reuters) - With gunshots, sweets and cries of victory, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip poured into the streets to celebrate a ceasefire deal on Wednesday which ended eight days of deadly fighting between Israel and Islamist militants.

After being stuck at home for days for fear of Israeli air strikes, tens of thousands of Palestinians crowded into cars and doubled up on motorcycles, waving flags and chanting for Hamas, Israel's main adversary and rulers of the Gaza Strip.

Women leaned over balconies ululating with joy as children stuffed four-abreast in the open trunks of cars clapped and sent out hoarse screams of "God is Great!".

"We feel like we've gotten our freedom back, our lives back. Thank God for Hamas, and thank God for the patience and strength of the Palestinian people in humbling Israel," said Mohammed Skeik, marching with a pack of fist-pumping friends.

The Egyptian-brokered ceasefire put an end to Israeli air raids which bombed hundreds of Hamas targets and the firing of more than 2,000 rockets and mortar bombs by Hamas and other factions into Israeli cities, including Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

In all, 162 Palestinians, including 37 children and 11 women, were killed in the offensive, along with three Israeli civilians and a soldier.

Firing a deafening burst from his Kalashnikov rifle, Mohammed al-Ghazaleh boasted: "(Israeli Prime Minister) Netanyahu will mourn tonight, while the people of Gaza are steadfast in their resistance and have triumphed."

"Israel won't think of challenging us like this ever again. We payed a dear price in the blood of our people for their aggression, but we made great gains and showed our strength," he said.

"PEOPLE OF GAZA, YOU HAVE WON"

Members of Hamas's top political echelons, also forced to seek shelter during the raids because Israel had them in its sights, joined eagerly in the grandstanding.

"The resistance achieved a historic victory against the occupation and laid the foundation for the battle of liberation for all our land and sacred sites," said senior Hamas official Ahmed Bahar.

During a lull in fighting eight days ago, Israel launched an offensive by assassinating Hamas's acting military chief, Ahmed Al-Jaabari, on November 14.

"Jaabari won, alive and dead," Hamas activists shouted through loudspeakers of Gaza mosques.

Gaza's revellers seemed less concerned with the details of the truce or whether they thought Israel would keep its part of the bargain than achieving what they saw as a symbolic victory.

"Imagine, the rockets of our resistance hitting Tel Aviv, hitting them and making them afraid everywhere they were. Nobody thought we could strike at them like this," said Saleh Abu Khaled, sitting on the stoop of his apartment, his children frolicking around him still in their pyjamas.

"It doesn't matter if they break the truce, we're ready to fight them again tomorrow. But we hope they learned a lesson this time," he said, grinning widely.

The agreement calls on Hamas and Israel to cease all forms of military activity, including Israel's targeted killings of militants, and for an easing of the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of Gaza.

Ismail Haniyeh, prime minister of the Hamas government in Gaza said: "We are satisfied and proud of this agreement and at the steadfastness of our people and their resistance."

Gazans said they took pride in facing Israel's superior might but that after Israel hinted it might launch a ground offensive into the territory, home to 1.7 million people, they were happy a ceasefire agreement would spare lives.

"We are not afraid of the Israeli army but at the same time we want a truce for the sake of our children who are being killed and displaced," Saeed Hashem Hanouna, of Gaza City, said.

Hussam Abed from the Jabalya refugee camp in northern Gaza City, visiting a relative at the Gaza Shifa hospital, said he hoped the truce's backers would make Israel would keep its word.

"We are used to the Jews making calm and then they either assassinate or commit a catastrophe and things blow up," he said. "We are keen for calm. Everyone in the world likes to live in peace and safety, for us and for all."

While Gaza's hardships remain as the terms of the truce and its implementation are tested, Palestinians congratulated themselves and savoured a rare moment of empowerment.

Green banners waving in the night air, Hamas activists from Hamas cried through loudspeakers at the clogged streets, "Oh people of Gaza, you have won."