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## “We’re going to bomb your home, one hour to leave...”

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GAZA CITY • “Is that Omar Al Mamluk? This is the Israeli army. You have only a few minutes to leave your house.” The army’s new tactic of telephoning people before dropping bombs on their homes is sowing panic in the Gaza Strip.

All that is left of Mamluk’s house in Gaza City is a pile of rubble.

“It was Monday night, about 10.30 in the evening,” said the officer from the Palestinian security forces who lived in the house along with his two wives and 19 children.

“I received a call with the number of the caller hidden. I thought it was a prank by one of my mates. I asked: ‘Are you joking?’ and got the reply: ‘The Israeli army doesn’t make jokes.’ Then the caller hung up.” So Mamluk rounded up his children and took them to his brother’s house before alerting his neighbours who then set up barriers on the road outside to stop cars or pedestrians entering the area.

“They hit 25 minutes later,” he said. “I’d expected an Apache (attack helicopter) but not an F-16 fighter jet.”

Israeli aircraft have dropped thousands of flyers on the Gaza Strip in recent weeks, warning people that all sites and buildings where weapons or military equipment are stored will be bombed. The warnings came amid a massive Israeli offensive that has now left 145 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier dead, and has wreaked massive damage on the impoverished Gaza Strip, where electricity is now rationed and sewage left untreated. The assault was launched in late June to recover a soldier captured by Gaza militants and to halt rocket fire from the strip into southern Israel. So far neither goal has been achieved.

Mamluk insists that the only weapon he had was the gun he was issued for his job. Mohammed Al Sheikh Dib, another security officer, also thought it was a joke when he got a similar call. But, after two missiles struck his home in the north of Gaza City, he wasn’t laughing. “It was late Sunday. I got four calls from unidentified callers but I didn’t bother answering. When the fifth call came, I finally answered,” said Dib, who wore his pistol on his belt as he spoke.

“A male voice asked me in Arabic if I was Mohammed Al Sheikh Dib. I said I was. He said: ‘I am Danny from Israeli intelligence. We’re going to bomb your house. You have one hour to leave.’ He had a strong Hebrew accent,” said Dib. Dib and his family quickly left, as did their neighbours. The Palestinian government on Wednesday condemned the Israeli tactics, accusing the Jewish state of “psychological warfare” aimed at creating a “climate of fear”.

“It’s a pitiless terrorist government,” said Dib.

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