

Israel trained on model for Gaza assault

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Israel's army had reportedly trained on a model of Gaza City for 18 months before starting the ground offensive in the densely-populated Strip.

According to Israeli military spokesman Avi Benayahou, Israel used a model of the main city built at an army base in the Negev desert to train its soldiers for a ground operation.

"Our soldiers know all the back streets where their targets are," military spokesman Avi Benayahou told Israeli public television on Monday.

"For a year and a half our soldiers trained on a reduced model of Gaza City built on the Tsehilim base," he added.

The base is in the Negev desert in southern Israel, near the frontier with Gaza.

The tenth day of the assault come as Israel continues to rebuff international efforts to end the war on Gaza, and Israeli troops and tanks — protected by heavy air, sea and artillery fire — have sliced through the center of Gaza and surrounded the main city.

Palestinian medical sources say the number of casualties in Gaza has now reached 531, with over 2,600 wounded. The UN says that about 25 percent of the casualties were civilian deaths.

"We have already dealt some very major blows on Hamas but we will have to hit again and the operation could take time," added the Israeli spokesman.

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