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## **IAF chief strongly defends Shehadeh bombing mission**

By Vered Levy-Barzilai

Air Force Commander Maj. Gen. Dan Halutz yesterday said he was satisfied the operation to drop a one-ton bomb on a crowded Gaza neighborhood to kill Hamas military leader Salah Shehadeh was proper - "militarily and morally."

In his first interview since the controversial July 23 air strike that also killed 15 civilians, including nine children, Halutz said: "The decision making process was correct, balanced, and careful. The problem was with the information, the information changed. I reject all the criticism about this operation, before, during and after."

He said that it is legitimate to strike at a terrorist even if innocent bystanders will be hurt. "I have no doubt about it," he said. "Against a man who committed or is positively known to have the planning in hand for 'mega-terror,' my answer is categorically yes. How many people? I don't know."

As for the method chosen to kill Shehadeh Halutz said that "for a half-ton bomb to achieve the effect we wanted, we would have needed two, because of the chance one wouldn't hit the target at all. And that was a decisive factor. So the operational decision was correct. As for the changing intelligence information, those who wait for 100 percent certainty in every case, will apparently never move. The attempt to find people to blame is shameful. I know of no armed force with the moral level of the IDF."

He said he had yet to call a discussion among senior commanders on the Shehadeh killing and was waiting for the final results of the inquiry "at all levels." When he has those results, he said, "I will conduct a serious discussion with the base commanders forum. It will happen soon."