

Is another Gaza war on the horizon?

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Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

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In Israel, it appears that a war can be imminent. A number of Hamas terrorists and an IDF officer were killed during clashes with Hamas as the IDF operated on the ground in Gaza last night. In the wake of these developments, classes were cancelled in schools across Southern Israel as the area was bombarded with rockets overnight. The train stations from Ashkelon to Sderot were shut down. The flight path to and from Ben-Gurion Airport has been diverted in order to protect the planes flying into Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has cut short his trip to Paris in light of the security situation. But how did we get to this situation?

Although Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently compared the prospects of reaching a peace agreement with Hamas to having a similar agreement with ISIS, he still is a strong supporter for the establishment of a long-term truce between Israel and the Gaza Strip, believing that it is the only way forward. Just recently, Israel had permitted Qatar to deliver 15\$ million to Hamas in the hopes of averting another war. There were discussions regarding the implementation of a long-term truce between Israel and Gaza, where 5,000 Gazans would be permitted to work inside of Israel and ultimately 70% of the blockade would be lifted. The truce was set to last for three years, according to the Times of Israel.

So, what exactly happened? A report from the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre argued that Hamas is in fact ready to decrease the level of violence on the ground as demonstrated last Friday, when there was a decreased level of violence because Hamas had in fact kept protesters away from the Israel border during the Great March of Return protest.

Nevertheless, at the same time, Hamas has vowed to continue the protests and at this protest, Molotov cocktails and IEDs were thrown at IDF forces and there were still a number of attempts in order to break through the border fence. Furthermore, the organizers declared that next week, protesters will be demonstrating under the slogan: "Normalization is a crime." According to them, the truce deal is not entirely satisfactory for Hamas for it does not solve the fundamental difficulties and is limited in scope and time. They claim that the protests will continue until they achieve all of their objectives.

Rubin Ehrlich, who heads the Meir Amit Intelligence and Information Centre, believes that what happened along the Gaza border recently was in fact inevitable and given this, there is a great potential for an escalation: "I think that the situation in the Gaza Strip is very fragile for a variety of reasons and not necessarily because of what happened. Hamas continues to encourage the Right of Return Marches. They are increasing the level of violence according to its interests. When they got the money, there was a decrease. If they do not get their wishes, there is an increase. Basically, the problem is not solved. It will be solved when all of the parties agree to return to the status quo. So far, they have not agreed to return to the status quo. They only agreed to tactical measures but not to stop the violence."

Nevertheless, even though Hamas is part of the problem, according to a Palestinian source, Fatah and the Palestinian Authority stand behind the recent escalation because they are ideologically opposed to any truce that jeopardizes their status as the sole representatives of the Palestinian people. The source claims they are utilizing other groups such as the Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, an ISIS affiliate, etc. in order to inflame the situation so that there will be no truce between Israel and Hamas for Hamas gets the full blame for whatever violence emanates from Gaza.

Meanwhile, the atmosphere in Israel has become quite tense, as everyone is glued to the news, waiting to see what will happen next. While it remains to be seen what will happen and whether the violence along the Gaza border will remain within Southern Israel or escalate into a full-scale confrontation that will affect the entire country, a message must be delivered that the violence must stop.

Last month, an entire home was destroyed by a Palestinian rocket as the children were asleep at home. Only the vigilance of the mother saved the family with three children who were living inside of that home. They lost not only their home but all of their personal belongings due to Hamas terror. The destruction of the Be'ersheva home was not an isolated incident. Thousands of acres of forests and farmland have been burnt to the ground due to the fact that Gaza terror groups dispatched incendiary kites into the country.

Despite this, it is critical to be realistic. Unless there is a regime change, another war is unlikely to change anything in Gaza. At least with the truce, there is strong Egyptian pressure to reinstate calm. Nothing like that will exist if there is a war. As former Israel Consul General Yitzchak Ben Gad proclaimed: "Hamas has its own ideology that Israel has no right to exist here, that all of Israel is Islamic Waqf (land that belongs exclusively to Muslims throughout all times) and they are not going to change their ideology."

Mendi Safadi, who heads the Safadi Centre for International Diplomacy, Research, Public Relations and Human Rights, stated in an exclusive interview that Hamas does not really care about the well-being of the Palestinians in Gaza, noting that it is not important to them if the average Palestinian starves and is under siege due to their policies: "What is important to them is to implement the vision of the Muslim Brotherhood of establishing an Islamic Caliphate." If there is a war, the Hamas will march in line in order to become "shahids" and they will put aside their fear of the Egyptians, who are advocating for a truce.

Nevertheless, most Israelis do not want to fill the power vacuum that would come should Israel topple Hamas. Nor do most Israelis wish to create a power vacuum that could lead to either the Islamic Jihad or an ISIS affiliate taking over the Gaza Strip. While Hamas potentially can be deterred by Egypt for they greatly fear them, this is not the situation for either the Islamic Jihad or an ISIS affiliate. For this reason, most Israelis including Israel's Prime Minister do not want to reoccupy Gaza. They believe that another war is not in Israel's interests. This is why Netanyahu tried so hard to reach a truce via Egyptian mediation. That is why he even let Qatar transfer money to Gaza.

But not everything is under Israel's control. There are those with a political interest to sabotage the truce, who believe that dying as a shahid (martyr) is the greatest honor. All they know is terror. This is why they fight Israel instead of building a Middle Eastern Singapore. This is why according to a Palestinian source, Gazans who partake in the Great March of Return get paid according to their injuries: "It's a significant amount. 500-700 NIS for attending or getting injured is significant. If he leaves lifted, it's higher. If he becomes a shahid (martyr), it's higher." Given this, Israel should empower the Palestinians in Gaza to overthrow the terror groups and to establish a peaceful entity, who will respect their right to live as free and liberated people in peace and security. But Israel should not be the one to do the job for them.

Photo: Wired