



## December 31, 2008

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**News Blurb:** The Israeli offensive in Gaza continues, and seems set to expand (1, 2, 3, 4). The Los Angeles Times suggests the US government is concerned about the effects of the attack, while Egypt and other Arab states bear the brunt of anger and criticism (5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 15). The Washington Post and Ha'aretz examine Israel's leadership, while Hamas accuses the PA of conspiring with Israel (10, 14, 9). Mkhaimar Abusada in the Daily Star and Tony Karon in Time magazine examine the terms in which both Israel and Hamas would seek a cease-fire (11, 12).

### Israel Rejects 48-Hour Cease-Fire Plan

**Article Author(s):** Ethan Bronner

**Article Author(s):** Taghreed El-Khodary

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[1]

After five straight days of punishing air attacks, Israel rejected a proposal for a 48-hour cease-fire in its military onslaught in Gaza on Wednesday, saying it would maintain pressure on Hamas. But it did not rule out future diplomacy and was open to ways of increasing humanitarian aid.

The decision was announced after a security cabinet meeting here.

The Israeli air strikes on Gaza continued on Wednesday, and at least 20 more rockets were fired by Hamas militants in reprisal into southern Israel, including three that landed in the city of Beersheba. Mark Regev, the spokesman for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, said earlier that the country's leaders "view it as important to keep up the pressure on Hamas."

"We cannot give them a respite to rearm and regroup," he said. "We need a real, sustainable solution, not a Band-Aid." But he added that Israel would still explore ways to expedite humanitarian aid to Palestinian civilians in Gaza and would also explore a broader diplomatic effort to achieve a lasting cease-fire.

He and other officials said Israel was continuing to talk to American and European leaders about finding a longer-term diplomatic solution.

The idea of a 48-hour cease-fire emerged from a conversation between Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner of France and Defense Minister Ehud Barak of Israel. It was supposed to establish at least a temporary pause in the fighting that would allow humanitarian relief to be delivered to the besieged coastal

strip.

?The leading option right now is still a ground invasion, but the target of this operation is an improved cease-fire, and if that can come without the invasion, fine,? a close aide to Mr. Barak said Tuesday, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he is not Mr. Barak?s authorized spokesman. ?But, of course, Hamas has to agree, and there has to be a mechanism to make it work.?

On Wednesday, rockets fired by Hamas militants struck targets more than 20 miles from Gaza, displaying greater range than earlier in the conflict. In Beersheba, one hit an empty school, according to news reports. Schools in Beersheba were ordered closed Tuesday because of an earlier missile strike. The Israeli military says that, while some Hamas rockets are home-made, the longer-range missiles are more sophisticated and are smuggled into Gaza.

Israeli warplanes bombed tunnels along Gaza?s border with Egypt which provide crucial supply lines. The crump of bombing could be heard from the Egyptian side of the frontier.

With Gaza?s food and medical supplies threatened by the conflict, a British government minister, Douglas Alexander, said aid was ?desperately needed.?

?The human cost of this conflict is unacceptable and the humanitarian situation is getting worse by the hour,? said Mr. Alexander, the international development secretary, as he announced a \$10 million emergency aid package on Wednesday.

In Cairo, a meeting of foreign ministers from the 22-member Arab League began amid calls by some Arab leaders for Palestinians to end disputes between Hamas in Gaza and the Fatah movement led by Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, in the West Bank, according to news reports.

The latest European diplomacy began Tuesday when Mr. Kouchner met with his European Union colleagues over the Gaza crisis and called publicly for a permanent cease-fire. A similar call came from the so-called quartet of powers focused on the region ? the United Nations, the European Union, the United States and Russia.

President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made phone calls to Israeli and Arab leaders to explore prospects for halting the fighting. They emphasized that any cease-fire should be ?durable and sustainable,? compelling Hamas to end its rocket attacks, a State Department spokesman said.

?That is different from the cease-fire that existed in the last six months,? said the spokesman, Gordon Duguid, noting that Hamas had routinely violated the previous agreement by firing rockets into southern Israel.

The flurry of diplomacy appeared to be mostly byplay in Jerusalem and Gaza, as Israeli officials spoke of a continuing and expanding military operation, and Hamas vowed to step up its resistance. It was also clear that the number of targets available from the air was declining, making the likelihood of a ground offensive greater.

In Gaza, Hamas militants issued a taped statement vowing revenge for those killed in the Israeli air raids since Saturday and warning that a ground invasion would prove painful for Israel. Palestinian officials say that more than 370 people have been killed, among them, the United Nations says, at least 62 women and children and an unknown number of civilian men. Two sisters, ages 4 and 11, were killed in a strike in the north as concern was growing around the world that the assault was taking a terrible toll on civilians.

‘It would be easier to dry the sea of Gaza than to defeat the resistance and uproot Hamas, which is in every house of Gaza,’ said the statement from the military wing of Hamas. It was played on Hamas’s television station, which had been shut down by an Israeli missile but went back on the air by broadcasting from a mobile van. The statement added that if there was a ground invasion, ‘the children of Gaza will be collecting the body parts of your soldiers and the ruins of tanks.’

Israeli warplanes, returning repeatedly to the same section of Gaza City overnight, pummeled the main government complex with about 20 missiles, residents said Tuesday. The building had been evacuated since the start of the operation on Saturday, which also hit nearly all of Hamas’s security complexes, its university and other symbols of its sovereignty and power.

The Nakhala family, which lives next to the compound, was inspecting the damage on Tuesday morning and recounting the utter fear and panic they all felt as the missiles hit.

‘We have no shelters in Gaza,’ said the father, Osama Nakhala. ‘Where shall we go? I also have to worry about my mother, who is 80 years old and paralyzed.’

His 13-year-old son, Yousef, was with him. When asked his view of the situation, Yousef took an unusual stand for someone in Gaza, where Israel is being cursed by most everyone. ‘I blame Hamas. It doesn’t want to recognize Israel. If they did so there could be peace,’ he said. ‘Egypt made a peace treaty with Israel, and nothing is happening to them.’

His brother Amjad, 16, disagreed and blamed the Palestinian president in the West Bank, Mahmoud Abbas, saying that he had sided with Israel.

Gaza City was entirely without electricity for the first time, the result of an air attack that hit the system’s infrastructure. Repair workers said they were afraid to work because of the possibility of more raids.

The few open bakeries and grocery stores had lines stretching outside as people tried to stock up. But essentials, like diapers, baby food, bread, potatoes and fresh vegetables, were in short supply and costlier than normal.

Israel sent in about 100 trucks with emergency supplies of food and medicine, the military reported.

At the Hassouna Bakery near Shifa Hospital, about 100 men and 50 women waited in separate lines to buy bread. Amal Altayan was telling others in the line that she kept her cellphone in her pocket so that if an Israeli missile destroyed her house she would be able to phone for help. The other women mocked her, saying that if a missile hit her house, she would be gone. Showing familiarity with the kind of knowledge circulating in Gaza these days, Ms. Altayan replied, ‘It depends. If it is an F-16 I will turn into biscuits, but if it is an Apache I may have a chance.’

Osama Alaf, 41, said he spent four hours waiting in line to buy bread. ‘I bought flour until now,’ he said. ‘I don’t have cooking gas, but I make a fire out of cartons and paper and make bread that way.’ Asked whom he blamed, he said, ‘Israel, which is slaughtering us, and whoever is cooperating with Israel, like Egypt.’

Anger at Egypt has grown across the Arab and Muslim worlds because it has declined to open its border with Gaza and is seen as cooperating with Israel.

# Israel set to maintain offensive for 'weeks'

**Article Author(s):** Tobias Buck

**Article Author(s):** Andrew England

**Article Author(s):** Peggy Hollinger

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**Date:** December 31, 2008

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[2]

Israel said yesterday its military was ready for "weeks of action" in spite of growing diplomatic pressure and Arab anger over its bombardment of the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.

The quartet of Middle East peace brokers - the United Nations, the US, Russia and the European Union - last night urged a ceasefire in Gaza and southern Israel. The UN said: "They called for an immediate ceasefire that would be fully respected."

An emergency meeting of EU ministers in Paris was expected last night to call for a 48-hour truce to allow medical supplies through to Gaza's civilian population.

The EU was also expected to urge a halt to all hostilities, the reopening of the Rafah crossing point between the strip and Egypt, an EU mission to monitor any ceasefire and a return to peace talks.

But Ehud Olmert, the Israeli prime minister, dimmed hopes of a speedy truce, saying the offensive "will not end . . . until our goals are reached".

Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian president, lashed out at Israel yesterday. Reflecting mounting pressure from protesters at home and across the Arab world, he said in a televised address: "We say to [Israeli] leaders: 'you bear the responsibility for your savage aggression against the Palestinians, regardless of what justifications you use as an excuse'. And we say to them: 'your bloodstained hands are stirring up feelings of enormous anger'." However, neither Arab criticism nor European appeals succeeded in quelling the violence, as both sides continued assaults that have killed at least 383 Palestinians and four Israelis since Saturday.

Israeli aircraft again attacked a range of targets inside the strip, including key government buildings, while Hamas and other militant Gaza-based groups fired rockets and mortars on nearby Israeli cities. A Palestinian rocket hit the city of Beersheba last night, according to the Israeli army. The rocket struck 40km from Gaza, the deepest yet into Israeli territory.

Matan Vilnai, Israel's deputy defence minister, said there was "no room for a ceasefire", adding that the military had "made preparations for some long weeks of action".

The Israeli army has amassed troops and tanks on the border with Gaza in preparation for a possible ground assault. Israeli analysts said the government would soon have to decide whether to go ahead with an incursion, as the number of obvious targets to strike inside Gaza from the air might be about to run out.

Arab foreign ministers are to hold an emergency meeting in Cairo today in an attempt to find a common position on the attacks.

Hesham Youssef, a senior official at the Arab League, said the meeting would discuss proposals put

forward by Egypt, Palestinian officials and Jordan.

Egypt, which faces Arab criticism for its decision to keep its border with Gaza closed, has submitted a four-point plan, which includes a ceasefire, a return to the truce between Hamas and Israel that expired this month, renewed efforts to reconcile divided Palestinian factions and a reopening of its border with Gaza.

## **IAF bombs Gaza mosque being used as weapons storehouse**

**Article Author(s):** Amos Harel

**Article Author(s):** Avi Issacharoff

**Media Outlet:** Haaretz

**Date:** December 31, 2008

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1051305.html> <sup>[3]</sup>

The Israel Air Force on Wednesday evening bombed a mosque in a southern Gaza Strip which Hamas had been using to store part of its rocket arsenal.

Shin Bet officials said that over the last few days, Palestinian militants have been seen carrying Katyusha and Qassam rockets, as well as a large supply of other weapons, around the vicinity of the mosque. The Shin Vet said that these weapons were destroyed in the IAF strike.

Israeli aircraft pounded smuggling tunnels under the Gaza-Egypt border earlier Wednesday, setting off a huge explosion in a fuel tunnel, witnesses said, as other aircraft hit Hamas positions in Gaza City. No casualties were reported. The military said government buildings were hit, including an office of Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh.

The IDF said Haniyeh's office was a "government target that also served as a planning, support, and finance center for terrorist activity."

The army added that the strike also hit a Hamas ammunition arsenal, a military camp and a rocket launcher.

A Palestinian medic was killed and two others wounded when an Israeli missile struck next to their ambulance during a clash east of Gaza City, Palestinians said. The IDF said it did not know of the incident

Meanwhile, the Israel Defense Forces has finished preparing for a ground operation in the Gaza Strip. However, it will not begin such an incursion until it receives the go-ahead from the government.

On Tuesday, at least 30 Palestinians - including two sisters aged 5 and 12 - were killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza, and Palestinians fired more than 40 rockets on southern Israel by Tuesday evening. A Katyusha rocket hit Be'er Sheva - located 37 kilometers from Gaza - for the first time on Tuesday. Ofakim and Rahat, both 25 kilometers from Gaza, were also hit by their first Katyushas.

Hamas took responsibility for the Katyushas aimed at Be'er Sheva, and its military wing said Tuesday night that it plans to fire at Israeli targets that are even further away as long as the IDF operation continues.

At least 390 Palestinians, including 36 children and nine women, have been killed by Israeli forces since Operation Cast Lead began on Saturday, according to Palestinian sources. According to Channel Two,

220 of those fatalities were members of Hamas.

The Israel Air Force continued its intensive search for rocket launchers on Tuesday. "We haven't finished the work yet," IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi told President Shimon Peres on Tuesday.

Israel bombed dozens of smuggling tunnels in Rafah Tuesday night, the second such attack in two days. The attack came after Israel advised the Egyptian army to move its soldiers away from the border so they wouldn't get hurt in the bombing. Aside from the tunnels, the number of targets attacked by the air force decreased on Tuesday.

Israeli warplanes bombed the Hamas government complex in Tel al-Hawa, in the Gaza City area, knocking down the seven-story buildings housing Hamas' foreign, finance and labor ministries early Tuesday. In a separate attack, Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh's office was bombed a second time.

The Israel Navy also took part in the operation, with navy ships attacking targets along the Gaza coast.

Hamas accused Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas of establishing an emergency operations room to prepare plans for a Fatah takeover of Gaza if Israel begins a ground incursion. Hamas' military wing vowed that if Israel attempted to bring its troops into the Strip, the children of Gaza would soon be collecting soldiers' body parts.

Barak asks for additional reserve troops

Defense Minister Ehud Barak asked the cabinet Tuesday night to approve the mobilization of an additional 2,510 reserve forces soldiers by means of an emergency call-up order (Tzav Shmoneh).

If approved, they will join the 6,700 reservists whose mobilization the cabinet approved on Sunday. Barak apprised Cabinet Secretary Oved Yehezkel of his decision in writing, and requested approval of the order from the cabinet by phone. The resolution will be submitted to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee within 48 hours, as required by law.

The additional reservists will be deployed in the Home Front Command, the Border Police, the Navy, the Logistics Branch, Military Intelligence and Ground Forces headquarters.

The Home Front Command will begin training activities on Wednesday in the communities that were only included in the rocket-strike range as of Monday, such as Gan Yavne, Yavne and Rehovot. Some reservists will be deployed to the liaison units working with local governments in these communities. Physicians and psychologists will be called up to assist local governments in the south with their emergency response programs.

The head of the Israel Defense Force's Central Command, Yair Golan, is planning to introduce an experimental program that will divide the larger towns and cities in the area under attack into districts to facilitate the use of volunteers. He also wants to dispatch students in military academies to the south to aid the communities.

The Central Command plans to focus its activities on Wednesday on Ofakim, which was hit by Katyusha rockets on Tuesday for the first time.

Military officials believe 2,000 rockets remain in terrorist organizations' arsenals, compared to nearly 3,000 last week. More than 200 rockets were fired at Israel from the Gaza Strip since Operation Cast Lead began.

Hundreds more were destroyed in Israel Air Force sorties, as were rocket launchers. The same officials

believe that Hamas and Islamic Jihad have a few dozen Katyusha rockets with a range of 40 kilometers, and a few hundred 20 kilometer rockets.

Army officials are very concerned about the 120 kilometer Iranian-made mortar shells that are causing heavy damage in Gaza-area communities and IDF bases. The assumption is that some of the rockets fired in the past few days were aimed at Air Force bases in the south, although none have hit their mark. About one quarter of the rockets fired this week from Gaza hit populated areas, with the remainder falling in open areas.

The IDF believes that about two thirds of Hamas' underground rocket launch sites in the northern Gaza Strip were destroyed in the first round of Air Force sorties, on Saturday.

Additional bunkers were destroyed in the days that followed, after a way was found of striking them when civilians were not in the vicinity.

The IDF has made frequent use of what is known as "knocking on the roof": Militants are warned by phone when a residential building used to store arms will be bombed, and told to vacate the premises together with their neighbors. The weapons caches are hit only after the residents leave.

Hamas has tried placing civilians on the roofs of such buildings when the phone call warning comes in. In these cases, the IDF fired antitank missiles near the building, and in a few cases the residents left.

## Defiant Hamas Says It Can Outlast Israel as Gaza Strip Smolders

**Article Author(s):** Saud Abu Ramadan

**Article Author(s):** Jonathan Ferziger

**Media Outlet:** Bloomberg

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**Source Link(s):** <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=afW4NRsMSPnA&refer=home>

[4]

Amid the smoldering ruins of European-built ministries demolished by air raids, Hamas leaders say they are confident of their ability to outlast the Israeli military onslaught in the Gaza Strip.

"Our people are willing to pay the price and resist this brutality," Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said in a telephone interview from Gaza. "Israel will eventually weaken, and the popularity of Hamas will only grow."

Even as top leaders including Ismael Haniya, deposed by the Palestinian Authority as prime minister, have gone into hiding, Hamas militants continued to pound Israel with rockets, displaying improved range and accuracy. In the deepest strike yet into Israeli territory, a rocket last night hit the city of Beersheba, 40 kilometers (24 miles) from Gaza.

Officials of the militant Islamic group, who resumed firing rockets after the Dec. 19 expiration of a cease-fire, are banking on what they believe is Israel's fear of sustaining serious casualties if it launches a ground offensive and its susceptibility to criticism from other countries.

"Israel is subject to internal pressures as well as international criticism that will limit its ability to sustain a

long war," said Adnan Abu Amer, a political analyst who runs the Al-Yamman research organization in Gaza. "People in Gaza are different. They're poor, but they're used to suffering, and they will maintain their solidarity with Hamas."

"Hurt Very Badly?"

Other analysts, though, say Hamas may have overplayed its hand, and won't recover soon from the most intense bombardment of Gaza in more than 40 years. Israel's aerial strikes, which were planned over at least six months, have devastated the Hamas military infrastructure, said Jonathan Fighel, a lecturer at the Institute for Counter-Terrorism in Herzliya, Israel.

"I think they miscalculated, and they've been hurt very badly," said Fighel, a former Israeli military governor in the West Bank.

Yesterday, the fourth day of bombardment by Israeli war planes, Defense Minister Ehud Barak vowed to expand the operation until Hamas is crippled and no longer a threat. Israel is considering a French proposal for a 48-hour cease-fire, an Israeli defense official said on condition of anonymity.

At least 360 Palestinians have been killed and 1,400 wounded since Israel started air strikes, according to the Palestinian emergency services office in Gaza City. Three Israeli civilians and one soldier have died from Palestinian rocket attacks since then, the army said.

Pillars of Smoke

Israel began its aerial campaign on Dec. 27 after Hamas said it wouldn't renew the six-month cease-fire that had been brokered by Egypt. Hamas, an Arabic acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement, is designated a terrorist organization by Israel, the U.S. and the European Union.

Pillars of smoke again billowed into the skies over Gaza yesterday as the Israeli Air Force leveled police stations and other government buildings run by Hamas since it seized control of the coastal strip 18 months ago.

A compound landscaped with flower beds and housing the finance, foreign and labor ministries, which were built 10 years ago with millions of dollars in EU donations, was reduced to rubble in a pre-dawn air strike.

Shifa Hospital in Gaza City and other medical facilities across the 40-kilometer long coastal territory were overwhelmed as ambulances delivered the Palestinian dead and relatives snatched the bodies for funerals that were rushed amid frequent Israeli attacks.

"We Will Win?"

"In the end we will win because support for Hamas is based in the heart of every believer," said Ali Arafat, 26, a student at the Islamic University in Gaza City. Israel bombed the campus Dec. 28.

Hamas spokesman Barhoum likened the current struggle to the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

"A war that destroyed everything in Lebanon did not succeed in stopping the resistance," he said. "Instead, its popularity and strength increased, and the same thing will happen here."

# Behind closed doors, U.S. seeks Israel exit strategy

**Article Author(s):** Paul Richter

**Media Outlet:** The Los Angeles Times

**Date:** December 31, 2008

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/mideastemail/la-fg-us-gaza31-2008d...> [5]

While publicly declaring strong support for Israel, the Bush administration is increasingly nervous about the 4-day-old campaign in the Gaza Strip and is urging its ally to settle on a timetable and exit strategy, say foreign diplomats and Middle East experts close to the discussions.

U.S. officials are concerned that the campaign could drag on without destroying Hamas, and might even bolster support for the militant group -- just as the 2006 Israeli campaign in Lebanon strengthened Hezbollah, they say.

"You're not hearing that same confidence you did in 2006 that the Israeli military can impose a new strategic reality and should go full force," said one Arab diplomat in Washington. "There's a real contrast between their words then and now."

U.S. officials were talking intensively Tuesday to Arab and European powers about the possibility of a two- or three-day cease-fire, diplomats said. U.S. diplomacy is complicated by differences between the White House and the State Department, these sources said.

President Bush has been a steadfast supporter of Israel's right to take whatever steps it considers necessary for its defense, and U.S. officials are not pressuring Israel to stop fighting before it believes it can safely do so.

But the State Department must deal with the growing international pressure for a halt in the campaign. U.S. officials are calling for a "durable" cease-fire -- meaning the Israelis need to stop fighting only after Hamas has done enough to convince them that rocket attacks will not resume within hours.

Yet U.S. officials have keen memories of what happened in Lebanon. The administration gave broad support to that campaign, which Israeli officials said could "eviscerate" Hezbollah. The war, which lasted 34 days and involved intense ground and air attacks, strengthened America's enemies and weakened its friends in the region, most observers agree.

"The United States put itself in a vulnerable position internationally with that commitment," said Daniel Senor, a former administration official now affiliated with the Council on Foreign Relations. "Just like Israel, the Bush administration is thinking now about the lessons of the Lebanon war."

U.S. officials have also been warning Israel to take care to avoid any single strike that, by inflicting devastating civilian casualties, could further swing international opinion against it.

That happened in July 2006, when Israeli warplanes hit a building in the Lebanese village of Qana, inflicting dozens of casualties.

The Qana attack "was a big turning point in that war," Senor said. "The administration wants Israel to execute this operation in ways that avoid the mistakes, setbacks and blemishes of 2006."

Of the almost 400 Palestinian deaths in the latest violence, the United Nations estimates that 62 were

civilians. Four Israeli civilians have been killed by rocket fire from Gaza.

Senor said the Americans' desire for clarity about the end game and exit strategy may put them in conflict with Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who wants to preserve his options and keep his enemies guessing.

Though Bush is in his last three weeks on the job, he and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have an enormous stake in the outcome of the battle.

They have been claiming that their peace efforts have been yielding results, but the war has weakened their foremost Palestinian ally, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, while raising the prospect that it will give his Hamas rivals both greater public support and political power.

The fighting also has resulted in criticism of U.S. allies Egypt and Jordan, both of which have diplomatic relations with Israel and are regarded by some Arabs as unable to halt the current conflict. That could enhance the status of Iran and its hard-line president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has been under tremendous pressure because of his country's slumping economy.

The Arab diplomat, who declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of the diplomacy, said that until the offensive, " Hamas was in a bind -- their popularity was declining. . . . Now they could be the winner."

White House and State Department officials declined to comment on what they are telling the Israelis. A State Department spokesman, Gordon Duguid, said U.S. diplomats were "working as hard as we can to help reestablish a cease-fire that can be fully respected, one that's sustainable, one that's durable."

Foreign diplomats who have been talking to U.S. officials say they see a difference in emphasis between the White House and State Department.

On Saturday, when the Israeli campaign began, Rice issued a statement calling for restoration of the cease-fire, which had been mediated by Egypt and which Hamas often violated.

Now, however, both State Department and White House officials are referring to a "durable cease-fire," entailing new and stricter terms.

A diplomat from another Middle Eastern country said there appeared to be a "back and forth" between the State Department and White House, leaving the U.S. position in flux.

Senor said the White House was emphasizing support for Israel while Rice was conveying that the State Department could not indefinitely hold off international pressure for an end to the campaign.

Ziad Asali, president of the American Task Force on Palestine, which lobbies for the Palestinian cause in Washington, said he thought U.S. concerns had been heightened by the possibility of Israel sending in infantry.

Such a move would probably mean higher civilian casualties and more provocative media coverage that could inflame Arab public opinion and "have real consequences for the stability of several of the regimes in the region," he said.

Steven J. Rosen, a former senior official with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, said U.S. concerns were being heightened by fears that Israel probably cannot destroy Hamas, a view shared by many Israelis. Washington and moderate Arab governments in the neighborhood would have more patience if they thought there was a realistic chance Hamas could be overthrown, he said.

Rosen said the Americans, like the Israelis, wonder whether Hamas will emerge politically stronger, even if its military arsenal is badly depleted.

In these circumstances, he said, the U.S. message is: "I know why you're getting in -- but how are you going to get out? How does this end?"

## Moderate Arab States Feel Popular Anger

**Article Author(s):** Robert Worth

**Media Outlet:** The New York Times

**Date:** December 30, 2008

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/31/world/middleeast/31arabs.html> <sup>[6]</sup>

After four days of Israeli airstrikes on Gaza, an outpouring of popular anger is putting pressure on American allies in the Arab world and appears to be worsening divisions in the region.

The sharpest rhetorical attacks have been aimed at Egypt, which is widely seen as having aided the Israeli campaign by closing its border with Gaza.

But as major street demonstrations continued Tuesday from North Africa to Yemen, some marchers and opinion-makers also lashed out at other moderate Arab governments for failing to take a stronger stand. Syria and Iran, meanwhile, have drawn praise for their militancy.

The Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, gave a televised address to defend his decision not to open the border with Gaza except for humanitarian purposes. He derided "those who are seeking political gains at the expense of the Palestinian people."

Although Jordan and Saudi Arabia "solid American allies" have been careful not to blame Hamas publicly, the violence has put them on the defensive, too.

"It's becoming clear that if you are silent, the Arab street is going to consider you part of the enemy," said Muhammad al-Masri, a researcher and political analyst at the Center for Strategic Studies in Amman, Jordan. "There is no way to be in the middle."

The polarization appears to have ended a thaw that had taken place in the past year, Mr. Masri said. Syria had been reaching out to the West and holding indirect peace talks with Israel. Lebanon's political factions had reached a peace deal. Syria and Saudi Arabia had made gestures toward resolving their feud.

Now, fault lines visible during the summer 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah have reappeared. Syria has been pressing for an emergency Arab summit meeting, but Egypt and Saudi Arabia have resisted.

Although the conflict has sectarian overtones "many Sunni Arabs fear that Iran wants to extend its Shiite influence" it is rooted in politics, not religion.

To some extent, the outrage has forged a sense of trans-sectarian unity, allowing militant Shiite figures like Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, to extend his influence in the Sunni Arab world, as he did during the 2006 war.

Demonstrations continued Tuesday in Cairo, where marchers have been carrying banners for days with slogans like "Down with Mubarak" and "Where is the Egyptian Army"? Angry disputes have broken out in the Egyptian Parliament, with members of the Muslim Brotherhood – the ideological parent of Hamas – accusing the government of colluding with Israel.

Protesters attacked the Egyptian Consulate in Aden, Yemen, on Tuesday, and 11 were arrested. There have been similar assaults on symbols of Egyptian authority in the region since Sunday.

In Tehran, a group of 30 to 40 students broke into the British Embassy's residential compound, where they vandalized buildings and replaced the British flag with a Palestinian flag, according to a witness and an embassy official.

Egypt is trapped between Israel, with which it has a peace treaty, and Hamas, which has popular support among Egyptians. The government has struggled with its own Islamist opposition and does not want Hamas operatives to cross into its territory, but it faces popular anger if it appears to endorse violence against Palestinians.

The Israeli airstrikes that began Saturday have exacerbated the situation. Hamas is ruling Gaza and is politically isolated from the West Bank, putting the onus more than ever on Egypt, the only state besides Israel that borders Gaza.

"Egypt is very much cornered this time," said Hassan Nafaa, a professor of political science at Cairo University. "There's a perception that Egypt is leading the moderate Arab camp in this, and that the moderate camp has not been able to achieve anything."

Egyptian officials see the hand of Iran, a patron of Hamas, in the current conflict. Iran had been pressing Egypt before the conflict, apparently eager to undermine Egypt's role as a mediator between the Palestinian factions. Demonstrators gathered in front of the Egyptian Embassy in Tehran on Dec. 17 to protest Egypt's position toward Hamas.

Recently, government-allied newspapers in Egypt have lashed out at Iran and its ally Hezbollah, whose leader, Hassan Nasrallah, demanded Sunday that Egypt open its border and allow weapons and supplies to flow to Hamas.

Mr. Nasrallah "has illusions that people in Egypt will take his orders, and that the government here submits to the kind of bribery he is used to in his country," wrote Usama Saraya in Tuesday's edition of Al Ahram, an Egyptian daily newspaper.

Television stations and newspapers allied with Iran and Syria continued to portray Egypt as a traitor. Some commentators had harsh words for other Arab states.

Saudi Arabia and Egypt "are even more excited about this war than they were during the 2006 war" between Israel and Hezbollah, said Ibrahim al-Amine, the chairman of the board of Al Akhbar, a newspaper aligned with Hezbollah.

"Israel would be satisfied with a compromise, but the Arab regimes want to finish Hamas completely," Mr. Amine said.

They cannot openly say so, he added, because Hamas is a Sunni movement, unlike Hezbollah, which Saudi Arabia and Egypt – both of them Sunni-led countries – publicly criticized at the start of the summer 2006 war with Israel.

# Arabs outraged by bloodshed in Gaza venting their anger at Egypt, as much as at Israel

**Article Author(s):** Sarah El Deeb

**Media Outlet:** The Associated Press

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**Source Link(s):** <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/sns-ap-ml-egypt-gaza,0,3174872.st...> [7]

The Israeli bombing campaign in the Gaza Strip has unleashed outrage across the Middle East ? but the anger is being vented as much against Egypt as it is at Israel.

Protesters have attacked Egyptian embassies, accusing Cairo of helping Israel's longtime blockade of the territory and even giving a green light for the offensive ? a sign of the gulf between an Arab public and some U.S.-allied governments that dislike Gaza's Hamas rulers.

Demonstrators broke into the Egyptian consulate in the Yemeni city of Aden on Tuesday, trashing the interior, throwing computers out windows and burning the Egyptian flag on the roof. More than 500 protesters massed outside Egypt's embassy in Syria, as others did days earlier in Lebanon.

During a demonstration in the Lebanese city of Sidon this week, people chanted slogans denouncing Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak as "a pig" and a "collaborator" with Israel.

Mubarak, whose nation is one of only two Arab states to have peace treaties with Israel, on Tuesday accused his critics of seeking "political profit" from the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza.

His government vehemently denied backing Israel's attack. And the foreign minister, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, announced that Egypt was working with Turkey, which has strong ties with Israel, on an initiative to stop the offensive, restore a truce and open Gaza's borders under international supervision.

Egypt already had angered many Arabs by largely closing its Rafah border crossing into Gaza since the Islamic militants of Hamas violently took over the territory in 2007. Rafah is the sole access to Gaza that does not go through Israel, which has imposed a suffocating economic blockade on the coastal strip.

Embarrassing for Egyptian officials, Mubarak met with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni only a day before Israel launched its assault, and the foreign minister ? though he urged Israel to show restraint ? was photographed smiling and shaking hands with her at a news conference.

Now, with television across the region showing the destruction and death in Gaza, Hamas and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah ? both allies of Syria and Iran ? are stoking the anger against Egypt by accusing it of giving an OK to Israel to end Hamas rule in Gaza.

"We do not accept that the attack on Gaza be announced from the heart of Cairo," Mohammed Nazzal, a Hamas senior leader, shouted on Al-Arabiya television Sunday, referring to the Livni visit.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah charged that Egypt's government was "taking part in the crime" against Palestinians and called on Egyptians to rise up and force the Rafah crossing open.

The anger could severely damage the key role Egypt has played as a mediator between Hamas on one

side and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israel on the other.

Egypt has been in a tough position because of Hamas's control of Gaza.

It worries Hamas rule is boosting Iran's influence in the region and could fuel Islamic militancy on its own soil. And it is under pressure from Israel, Abbas and the U.S. not to make any concessions that would bolster Hamas.

Yet, Egypt's leaders don't want to be seen as fueling a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Egyptian television gave heavy coverage to several truckloads of medical and other supplies that Egypt sent in through Rafah and 36 wounded Palestinians who were brought out to Egyptian hospitals.

But on Tuesday, Mubarak insisted Egypt would not fully open Rafah unless Abbas' Palestinian Authority controls the crossing and European monitors required under a 2005 agreement are present. Otherwise, he said, opening the crossing would "deepen the breach" between Hamas and Abbas, who Egypt's government calls the legitimate leader of the Palestinians.

Aboul Gheit, the foreign minister, initially seemed to blame Hamas for provoking the Israeli offensive, saying soon after it began Saturday that "those who didn't listen" to warnings carry the responsibility.

Such talk put Egypt in the uncomfortable position of echoing the arguments of Israel, which says it acted to halt Hamas rocket attacks on southern Israeli towns. Since then, Egypt has been more vocal in its calls for Israel to stop the bombardment without conditions.

On Tuesday, Aboul Gheit denied that Egypt did not do enough to prevent the Israeli offensive, saying Mubarak warned Livni not to attack Gaza "because it will have repercussions on the region."

But the clamor over Gaza has underlined an increasing divide in the Middle East that pits pro-Western countries like Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia against Syria and Iran and their allied militant groups, Hamas and Hezbollah.

In an unusually vocal criticism for an Egyptian politician, Abdullah Kamal, a member of Egypt's ruling party, denounced Hamas on Monday as a pawn of Iran, saying Iran and Syria are trying to make "Iran as the leader of the region through its militias, whether Hezbollah or Hamas."

## **While Israel fights in Gaza, Egypt and Saudi Arabia take on Iran**

**Article Author(s):** Jonathan Spyer

**Media Outlet:** The Jerusalem Post

**Article Type:** Opinion

**Date:** December 31, 2008

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1230456537121&pagename=JPost%2FJPAr...>

[8]

Israel's campaign in Gaza is serving to expose the strategic fault lines in the Arab and Muslim world.

The essential divide is between, on the one hand, states aligned with the West - chief among them Egypt and Saudi Arabia - and on the other an alliance led by Iran, of which Hamas forms a part. Israel's action in

Gaza has led to unprecedented tensions between representatives of these rival blocs. Because of the strategic importance of Egyptian control of the Rafah Crossing, this divide also has immediate practical implications for the direction and likely outcome of the current battle.

On Sunday, Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah focused on the events in Gaza in a speech on al-Manar TV. Nasrallah did not limit himself to calling down fire and brimstone on Israel.

Rather, he singled out Egypt for criticism. Nasrallah echoed Hamas condemnation of Egypt for refusing to allow a general opening of the Rafah Crossing. The Hizbullah leader expressed incredulity at a statement by a senior Egyptian official holding Hamas ultimately responsible for events in Gaza. Likening Hamas in Gaza to the Shi'ite forces at the battle of Karbala (a central event in Shi'ite history), he demanded that the people of Egypt take action and force the opening of the crossing. He said that the Egyptian police would be unable to prevent this. Nasrallah noted that the opening of the crossing would enable Hamas to bring in supplies and hold out.

He reiterated these remarks on Monday, in a speech (conveyed by video link) to a seething demonstration in Beirut.

Nasrallah's statement is deeply significant. For the first time, the Iran-aligned Hizbullah leader appeared to be calling for an open revolt against an Arab government as part of the fight against Israel. His words followed a declaration, much noted in the Arab media, by Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leader Muhammad Mahdi Akef, in which he expressed his solidarity with Iran, and his endorsement of Shi'ite expansion in the Arab and Islamic world.

The Egyptian government was not slow to respond to Nasrallah's apparent call for Egyptian citizens to rise up against it. Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit said that the Egyptian armed forces existed to defend Egypt. He added, addressing Nasrallah directly, that "if need be, they will also protect Egypt from people like you."

The prospect of Egypt's finding itself pilloried by pro-Iranian forces in the event of a clash between Israel and Hamas in Gaza was foreseen prior to the operation. Arab countries aligned with the west have in the past quietly backed Israel in its confrontations with Iranian proxy forces. This time, because of the close proximity and the Egyptian control of Rafah, no such ambiguity was possible.

In the event, Egypt nevertheless made clear that it was prepared for the crossing to be opened to allow wounded Palestinians to leave for treatment and medical personnel to enter. Hamas demonstratively declined this offer. Egyptian sources have reported that a convoy of trucks and medical supplies was not allowed by Hamas to enter the Strip. Hamas personnel also prevented wounded Gazan civilians from crossing the border.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said that Hamas rejected the idea that only Palestinian 'corpses' should be permitted to leave. (Such actions and statements on the part of Hamas offer a useful reflection of the movement's and its allies' attitude toward their own civilians.) Hamas would like to use the southern border in order to bring in supplies (and, tacitly, weaponry) in case of an extended Israeli operation in Gaza, including the involvement of ground forces. Such a capacity could be of strategic importance to Hamas in determining the outcome of the present battle. Despite stormy demonstrations in Cairo and elsewhere, the Mubarak regime in Egypt has held out against these demands and is likely - with US encouragement - to continue to do so.

These latest events bring home the extent to which events in Gaza cannot be understood in isolation from the broader regional picture. Some analysts are maintaining that the Hamas escalation in Gaza which

preceded the current operation was the result of a coordinated Iranian initiative.

Whether or not this claim has substance, it is a fact that the logic of Egyptian interests, plus Nasrallah's incendiary statements in Beirut, is serving as a kind of spotlight on the actual current strategic dispensation in the region - one which it is often convenient for Arab ruling elites to deny or blur.

It is likely that Hamas's accusations against Egypt - to the effect that Cairo was aware of an impending Israeli operation and took part in the deception preceding it - are largely correct.

At the same time, the desire to keep Egypt 'onside' may also play a role in limiting the dimensions of the current Israeli operation. Ultimately, the presence of an Iranian enclave between Egypt and Israel is a situation which neither country can accept. For the moment, however, all indications remain that the current operation is intended to bring about a renewed lull - probably through Egyptian mediation - rather than a mortal blow against the Hamas regime in Gaza.

## Hamas: PA conspiring with Israel

**Article Author(s):** Khaled Abu Toameh

**Media Outlet:** The Jerusalem Post

**Date:** December 31, 2008

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1230456537100&pagename=JPost%2FJPAr...>

[9]

As the IDF offensive concluded its fourth day on Tuesday, Hamas accused the Palestinian Authority of planning to return to the Gaza Strip with the help of Israel.

According to a report published by the Hamas-affiliated Palestine Information Center Web site, PA President Mahmoud Abbas has ordered his officials in Ramallah to set up an "emergency room" to prepare for reassuming control over the Gaza Strip after the Hamas government is toppled by Israel.

It said the emergency room consisted of commanders of the PA security forces and the interior minister.

The report claimed that Abbas was coordinating his moves with the Egyptians and the Saudis.

It also quoted sources in Ramallah as saying that Abbas's top adviser, Nimmer Hammad, phoned Defense Ministry official Amos Gilad last week and told him that the PA "believes in Israel's right to liquidate Hamas."

Earlier this week, two senior PA officials told The Jerusalem Post that the PA was "ready" to return to the Gaza Strip when and if the Hamas government was overthrown.

The Hamas allegation, which has been strongly denied by the PA, is an indication of the growing tensions between the Islamist movement and Abbas's Fatah faction in the wake of the IDF offensive.

Tensions between the two parties peaked earlier this week when Abbas and other PA leaders held Hamas responsible for the current violence because of its refusal to extend the cease-fire with Israel.

Hamas officials are convinced that one of the main goals of the IDF operation is to remove the Hamas

government from power so as to pave the way for the return of Abbas's men to the Gaza Strip.

Hamas legislator and spokesman Mushir al-Masri claimed that Abbas had known in advance about the exact timing of the "surprise" IDF attack.

"It's no secret that Abbas knew in advance about the attack," he said. "This is not our analysis; rather, it's based on information we received recently."

A Hamas official in Gaza City also claimed that former Fatah security commanders who fled the Strip during the Hamas takeover in the summer of 2007 were holding meetings in Cairo and Ramallah to discuss returning home.

"These Fatah members are working with the Egyptians, Israelis and Americans," he said. "They include [former Fatah security chiefs] Muhammad Dahlan and Rashid Abu Shabak."

The Hamas official accused the Fatah representatives of providing Israel with "vital information" about the location of Hamas security installations.

A leaflet distributed by a Fatah group in Gaza urged supporters of the faction to prepare for the possibility of taking control over the Gaza Strip.

The leaflet said that the Palestinians in the Strip were being held "hostage" by Hamas, which has humiliated and starved them.

It called on all Hamas members in Gaza who were not involved in crimes against Fatah and the Palestinian people to seek refuge with the heads of major clans to avoid being punished.

Fatah also called on all its members and supporters to be prepared to assume full control over the Gaza Strip "to impose law and order and defend the Palestinian people."

However, a Fatah official in Ramallah denied that his faction was behind the leaflet, saying he did not rule out the possibility that it was part of Hamas's "fabrications."

The official said he was unaware of any plans by the PA to return to the Gaza Strip.

"We want to see an end to the brutal Hamas regime, but that should be done by the Palestinians and not Israel," he said. "Hamas is so desperate that they have begun spreading lies and inciting against the PA and Egypt."

## Behind Gaza Operation, An Uneasy Triumvirate

**Article Author(s):** Griff Witte

**Media Outlet:** The Washington Post

**Date:** December 31, 2008

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/30/AR2008123003252....>

[10]

Three Israeli leaders met in secret Friday to review the plan of attack, according to a government spokesman. The targets had been selected, the warplanes readied. Clear skies were forecast over the

## Gaza Strip.

Hours later, Israeli forces began an aerial assault against the Hamas movement that caught nearly everyone by surprise.

The Israeli campaign is being led not by a single commander in chief, but by a triumvirate of politicians. The three are known to mistrust one another deeply, but all have staked their futures on a highly risky military operation aimed at breaking Hamas's capacity to fire rockets at Israel.

With national elections just over a month away, two of the three are vying for Israel's top job. Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni both have led high-profile but fruitless efforts to achieve peace with the Palestinians; now, each is trying to win favor with Israelis by going to war.

All campaigning for the Feb. 10 vote has been temporarily suspended. But Barak, a former prime minister and ex-army commando, is expected to make the case that he can defend the country in times of crisis. Livni, meanwhile, is seeking to overcome concerns that as a woman who never served in the armed forces, she is not tough enough to lead Israel.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert will not be a candidate in the elections and may be indicted on corruption charges. But the Gaza offensive could be his last chance to rehabilitate a legacy badly tarnished by Israel's failure to achieve a clear-cut victory against the Lebanese Hezbollah movement in 2006.

Waiting in the wings is a fourth leading politician, former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu. He has long advocated military action in Gaza and, political analysts say, is well positioned to capitalize on Israeli anxiety if the rockets continue to fly.

For the moment, however, the offensive in Gaza is proving popular with Israelis, and Livni and Barak are reaping the benefits. Recent polls show them closing the gap with Likud party leader Netanyahu, who had opened up a wide lead based on his promise to take a hard line against Israel's main adversaries -- Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria and Iran.

Political analysts said the looming elections forced Livni, leader of the centrist Kadima party, and Barak, head of the center-left Labor Party, to opt for military action when Hamas resumed its rocket fire in mid-December, after a six-month truce.

"With Netanyahu leading in the polls, and the security situation deteriorating, it would have killed Livni and Barak if they had let 50 or 60 rockets land every day and done nothing," said Reuven Y. Hazan, a professor of political science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Indeed, among Palestinians, there is a widespread belief that the decision to launch the Gaza offensive was driven by Israeli politics. Whenever Israelis prepare to vote, they say, Palestinians suffer from Israeli shows of strength. The Gaza offensive has left at least 370 Palestinians dead. Since Saturday, four Israelis have been killed in rocket attacks.

"The Israeli politicians are using this blood bath for the sake of their political campaigns," said Mustafa Barghouti, an independent Palestinian politician based in the West Bank.

Mark Regev, an Israeli government spokesman, denied that politics played a role in the decision to launch the offensive.

This is hardly the first time Israel has held elections during a time of strife. In 1996, during the lead-up to elections, it launched an offensive against Hezbollah forces in Lebanon, and Hamas carried out a series of

suicide attacks targeting Israeli buses. Netanyahu pulled off a surprise win against then-Prime Minister Shimon Peres in that vote. More recently, Likud's Ariel Sharon won election in 2001 and 2003 against the backdrop of the second Palestinian intifada.

Traditionally in Israel, violence during election campaigns has favored the more hawkish candidate.

But this time, analysts say, the violence could favor Barak and Livni -- if the Gaza operation succeeds in suppressing rocket fire.

For Barak, the war might be his best chance to save Labor from political irrelevance. The party, which for decades after the country's founding was the dominant force in Israeli politics, has not held the prime ministership since his government fell in 2001 after the collapse of the Camp David peace talks. Recently, the party's poll numbers have been at historic lows.

Since the start of the Gaza operation, those numbers have improved -- Labor is now expected to win 15 seats in the 120-member Israeli parliament, up from 10. Analysts said that is because of a widespread perception that Barak, who developed a reputation as a wily commander in his years of army service, has taken charge of the operation.

"The one who is running the show is Ehud Barak," said Hebrew University political scientist Gabriel Sheffer.

But Barak would still have a long way to go to become prime minister.

"This has resuscitated Labor from clinically dead to serious condition," Hazan said. "It hasn't brought them back yet."

Livni, whose Kadima party leads the current coalition government, is believed to have a better chance of getting the top job: Kadima is running close with Likud in recent polls.

Livni has for the past year been Israel's lead negotiator in U.S.-backed peace talks with the Palestinian Authority, which were intended to culminate with an agreement by the end of this year.

Even before the offensive began, Livni was repositioning herself, giving a series of forceful statements that threatened Hamas with military action unless the group halted its rocket fire.

"If anything, she's been identified with the negotiations with the Palestinians," said one senior Israeli official who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "But at some point, her advisers started telling her she needed to turn to the right."

Olmert, too, has been repositioning himself. Although he had initially hoped to revive his sullied reputation through a peace deal with the Palestinian Authority, he now appears to be banking on a successful operation in Gaza to help erase the stain of the Lebanon war, which was considered a debacle by many Israelis. If the offensive doesn't succeed, however, he will have presided over two failed military campaigns in less than three years.

Continued rocket fire from Gaza could play into the hands of Netanyahu. Having long called for a military campaign against Hamas, he is now openly supporting the government's decision -- but he also suggests that he would go even further if he were in charge.

"I think ultimately we'll have to remove that regime," Netanyahu said of Hamas during a Tuesday interview with CBS. "Not necessarily right away, but I think ultimately that has to be done."

# Israel's goal, and Hamas': a cease-fire on better terms

**Article Author(s):** Mkhaimar Abusada

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The truce between Hamas and Israel ended in the early hours of December 19, but the accusations over why it ended have followed the missiles and rockets across the border.

Hamas accuses Israel of not complying with the terms of the six-month Egyptian-mediated truce under which Israel was expected to end its siege and blockade of the Gaza Strip, reopen the commercial border crossing between Gaza and Israel and halt its military activities against Gazans.

Israel holds Hamas and other Palestinian groups responsible for not respecting their part of the truce. Israel claims that the firing of Qassam rockets and mortar shells did not stop and accuses Hamas of exploiting the truce by conducting more training and building better fortifications along the border between Gaza and Israel. Israel has also said straight out that the border crossings would not be fully reopened without the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, captured by Hamas in 2006.

In the knowledge that Israel had sent its envoy Amos Gilad to Egypt to renew the truce a week before it expired, Hamas felt it could hold out for better conditions. The Islamist movement seemed convinced that the political leadership in Israel was not interested in a new war in Gaza. Hamas also felt that Israel wanted to exploit the political divide between the West Bank and Gaza as long as possible and therefore was not in a hurry to start a war with Hamas.

But, to the contrary, the Israeli security establishment was busy with the long-term preparation of a major military operation and was carefully gathering intelligence, engaged in secret discussions, operational deception and spreading disinformation to mislead the public. Ehud Barak, the Israeli defense minister, reportedly instructed the Israeli armed forces to prepare for the operation over six months ago, even as Israel was beginning to negotiate a new truce agreement with Hamas.

Hamas fell into the trap. Israel is in the middle of an election campaign and the governing coalition is looking for excuses to justify a military attack on Hamas and its infrastructure in Gaza. Some of the right-wing parties in Israel, mainly the Likud headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, were accusing the government of not doing enough to stop the firing of missiles from Gaza and even called on Barak to resign from his position.

According to Israeli public opinion polls, the Labor party headed by Barak will be the main loser in the coming elections while the Likud stands to become the biggest party in Parliament. In other words, this was Barak's golden opportunity to launch a military strike against Hamas and improve his standing with the Israeli electorate. As a result, Israel launched the largest Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip since it last captured the territory in June 1967, leaving almost 400 people dead and hundreds more wounded at the time of writing.

What comes next is extremely important. Whether Israel halts its air strikes against Gaza or continues the war and launches a ground invasion will depend on Israeli goals and interests. Israel has learned some

lessons from the 2006 Lebanon war and has limited its immediate goal to ending the firing of missiles from Gaza. But military operations are like snowballs: The more momentum they gather the bigger they become. Soon Israel might find itself launching a full and comprehensive invasion if it calculates that the cost will be minimal.

But Israeli calculations will also depend on Hamas' behavior. If Hamas launches a large number of long-range missiles at major Israeli cities like Ashkelon and Ashdod, it will provide Israel with another golden opportunity to go all the way. But if Hamas restrains itself, Israel might reconsider its position. Israel expects Hamas to retaliate and launch a barrage of missiles on Israeli towns and cities, but Hamas has so far been careful. The movement knows that any irrational behavior will cost it its government and potentially its existence in the Gaza Strip.

Nevertheless, Israel is hedging its bets. The army announced its intention to call up 6,700 reservists and Israeli officials said some reservists had already been mobilized to help protect Israeli towns and villages on the Gaza border from retaliatory Palestinian rocket attacks. Hundreds of Israeli infantry and armored corps troops are headed for the Gaza Strip border in preparation for a possible ground invasion.

Was the war on Gaza inevitable? One can argue that Israel's genuine interest with its air strikes is strikingly similar to Hamas' interest in firing scores of rockets into Israeli population centers: to force a cease-fire on better terms than the one just ended. For Hamas, this largely means securing an easing of Israeli economic sanctions against Gazans. For Israel, this centers on ending rocket fire. For both sides, it means a prisoner exchange involving Shalit and hundreds of jailed Hamas members.

## Israel Versus Hamas: How to Shape a Ceasefire

**Article Author(s):** Tony Karon

**Media Outlet:** Time

**Date:** December 31, 2008

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1869122,00.html?iid=tsmodule> <sup>[12]</sup>

In the end, Israel and Hamas both know that there will be a cease-fire in Gaza. Its timing and terms will be "negotiated" in bombs and bloodshed in the days ahead; it will be mediated by a third party or a combination of third parties; and it will be shaped by a complex regional power game involving an array of competing Israeli politicians, the rival Palestinian leaderships of Hamas and President Mahmoud Abbas, Egypt, Syria and even more distant players such as Turkey, Iran and, of course, the United States. The victims of this "negotiation", needless to say, will be scores of ordinary Palestinians, and a handful of Israelis. And at its end, the fundamentals of the Gaza standoff will remain largely unchanged.

While some Israeli political leaders have spun this episode as a decisive showdown, Israel knows that its military offensive is unlikely to end Hamas' political control of Gaza or even to eliminate the movement's capacity to fire rockets into Israel. Israel's objective is to force Hamas to stop all attacks on Israel from Gaza. Or, to put it another way, to restore the ceasefire Hamas abandoned on December 19, on terms more acceptable to Israel. Polls taken on the first day of the bombing showed that while 81% of Israelis supported the military campaign, only 6% believed it would finally end Hamas rocket fire. (See pictures of Israel's deadly assault on Gaza.)

Despite the heavy casualties inflicted by days of bombing, Israel believes it has not seriously impaired

Hamas' ability to fire rockets at Israel. But by targeting the basic infrastructure of Hamas governance in Gaza ? everything from police posts, government building and a university to the private homes of Hamas leaders ? Israel is trying to set a crippling price for continued rocket fire.

Still, Israel's next step remains unclear: Its armored units poised to drive into Gaza have not yet been ordered to advance, and the Israeli offensive remains confined to air strikes. U.S. Defense officials have told TIME that the chances of a successful ground assault would have been higher if it had been launched earlier in the bombing campaign, and not several days into it. But Israel is well aware that a ground assault is precisely what Hamas wants. There is little the militants can do against Israeli air power, but they believe they can bloody Israel's armored columns and, in what they hope will be a reprise of Hizballah's success in Lebanon in 2006, inflict sufficient damage on the Israeli forces to be able to claim a symbolic victory. For the Israeli public, an outcome that leaves Hamas rule intact in Gaza may be easier to swallow if Israel has not suffered the significant casualties that could result from a ground war.

Still, many Israelis believe their "deterrent power", weakened in Lebanon two years ago, will only be reestablished if ground troops go in to destroy more of Hamas' infrastructure. Right now, it's not clear whether it is political calculations or simply the weather ? which restricts the ability of the Israel Defense Forces to fly ground-support missions ? from sending in its armored columns. Reports in the Israeli media on Tuesday that Israel may hold off on bombing for 48 hours in search of a truce were quickly denied.

Hamas, through its Damascus-based leader Khaled Meshal, has indicated acceptance of Israel's basic requirement for a truce, that is, an end to rocket fire ? but only if the truce, apart from ending Israeli military strikes, also opens the border crossings that would allow normalization of economic life in Gaza. Hamas insists that it ended the ceasefire precisely because the truce had failed to lift the economic siege of Gaza.

Hamas' demand on the border crossings, though, is directed as much at Egypt as it is at Israel. Hamas' primary objective, in fact, is to open the border gate between Egypt and Gaza at Rafah, which was closed by Cairo at the request of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas when his forces were driven out of Gaza by Hamas 18 months ago. Rafah, as the Palestinians' only entry point to the outside world not controlled by Israel, represents the closest thing to a symbol of Palestinian sovereignty, which is precisely why Hamas is so keen to control it ? and Abbas is so reluctant to allow that.

Egypt, of course, shares Abbas' hostility towards Hamas, originally a creation of the banned but widely popular Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Earlier this year, Hamas created a crisis for the Egyptian regime by blowing a hole in the wall at Rafah, allowing Palestinians to pour into Egypt to buy up basic supplies. Embarrassed and under domestic and Arab pressure, President Hosni Mubarak left the breach open for the best part of a week, before sealing it, and renewing Egypt's insistence that it would only open the border crossing to Abbas' men. Now, in the midst of a new political firestorm created by the impression of Egyptian complicity in Israel's onslaught, pressure on Cairo is once again mounting. Still, Mubarak reiterated on Tuesday that Rafah would only be opened when the Palestinian Authority is in charge of Gaza.

Egypt's own escalating conflict with Hamas makes Cairo an unlikely mediator this time around. Instead, Egypt has been seeking help from other regional players, particularly Turkey ? which has good relations with Syria, the regional player with the most influence over Hamas. In the power struggle that pits Egypt and the Palestinian Authority against Hamas and its regional backers, the Islamists may be betting that the backlash sparked by the Israeli raids will weaken the resolve of Cairo and Ramallah to keep Hamas' hands off Rafah. But Cairo and Ramallah may be hoping that the punishment inflicted on Gaza by Israel will prompt Palestinians to turn on Hamas. So far, the smart money says that Abbas is paying the higher political price. By contrast, Israel's current leaders may have slightly improved their chances of reeling in

the lead of the more hawkish former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the February election ? although that could change if the operation ends badly from an Israeli point of view.

So, for all the blood shed in the past four days in the hope of changing Gaza's political equation, when the dust settles and the bodies are buried, the wider regional equation of which Gaza forms part is unlikely to change fundamentally ? at least not in the favor of those who would prefer to see Hamas eliminated.

## **Hamas racks up its first diplomatic victory in Gaza campaign**

**Article Author(s):** Zvi Barel

**Media Outlet:** Haaretz

**Article Type:** Opinion

**Date:** December 31, 2008

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1051356.html> <sup>[13]</sup>

President Hosni Mubarak could not keep silent any longer about the attack on Egypt in the press. His decision to explicitly state Egypt's position that the West Bank and Gaza are part of the same country, and that the Rafah crossing will open only under the conditions of the 2005 agreement (to which Egypt is not a signatory), is part of the public diplomacy Mubarak has been dragged into against his will.

Mubarak would have preferred for Hamas to appeal to him directly for a cease-fire, which Egypt would negotiate with Israel. But Hamas, like Hezbollah, chose a different and probably more effective path.

Hamas, by enlisting public opinion through the Arab media, holding street demonstrations and creating public pressure, may very well achieve a cease-fire without being forced to ask for it.

Hamas has experience in winning public support, as it learned last January when it broke through the border fence with Egypt. Egypt was forced to give in to public pressure and let the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians cross the border and buy goods on the Egyptian side.

The knowledge that Arab public opinion, as opposed to the Arab regimes that speak with several different voices, may influence policy is new.

In a region known for not paying attention to public opinion, or where public opinion is dictated by the regimes, an appeal to the masses has usually been viewed as an act of desperation, not policy.

Hamas can rack up its first victory for its methods as several European countries are already talking about a "humanitarian" cease-fire, and Egypt has been fixed in the public eye as a collaborator with Israel. This will make it hard for Egypt to act as a mediator between Hamas and Israel, and the war in Gaza will require international involvement and certainly active Syrian involvement to end the hostilities.

In that way Gaza goes from being a local dispute between Israel and Hamas to the status of half a state with the same status as Israel, so hopes Hamas.

Such a step could never have come off through regular diplomatic channels, where Hamas would have appealed to Egypt or some other mediator, but only by enlisting the masses in the region and by bypassing the Palestinian Authority, which is not functioning during this crisis.

Mubarak's efforts in his speech on Tuesday to relink the West Bank and Gaza and place Gaza again under the PA's authority says something about the diplomatic battlefield. A separate cease-fire with Gaza under Arab and international pressure may be interpreted as a recognition of the separation between Gaza and the West Bank - and recognition of the Hamas government. This will place Gaza under the diplomatic auspices of Iran and Syria, on the border with Egypt.

## After sterling start to Gaza op, Barak proves to be a petty politician

**Article Author(s):** Amir Oren

**Media Outlet:** Haaretz

**Article Type:** Opinion

**Date:** December 31, 2008

**Source Link(s):** <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1051360.html> <sup>[14]</sup>

Almost every war of the last four decades has resulted in the ouster of a defense minister. Levi Eshkol lost the defense portfolio on the eve of the Six-Day War, Moshe Dayan after the Yom Kippur War, Ariel Sharon after the First Lebanon War, Amir Peretz after the Second Lebanon War. Current defense minister Ehud Barak, whose performance during the first days of Operation Cast Lead increased his public support, spoiled his image Tuesday with his very own words. His ambiguous statements, from behind the transparent veil of an "off-the-record conversation," once again lowered him from the rank of commander to that of politician.

Barak, at a meeting with his aides and half a dozen guests, said things that were meant for publication, but not for attribution. The result was miserable, in terms of both content and form. He confused the public just when the aims of the operation seemed crystal clear and enjoyed broad support.

He did not explain the connection between the stable, long-term cease-fire whose achievement - and nothing else - would justify ending the operation, and a limited cease-fire called solely to enable negotiations on the larger cease-fire. The opposition he aroused from his colleagues in the government and senior defense officials managed to put the weaknesses of the group that will decide the operation's future at the top of the agenda.

He thereby turned Tuesday's main story from Israel versus Hamas to Barak versus Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi and Shin Bet security service chief Yuval Diskin.

The deceptive labeling on the package was the media's attribution of the recommendation that Olmert respond favorably to a French proposal for a 48-hour cease-fire to "the defense establishment." Other senior officials in that establishment, with its multitude of services, branches and directorates, hastened to deny that they had anything to do with the recommendation. Barak did not engage in orderly staff work with the IDF and Shin Bet before giving his briefing. He informed Ashkenazi and Diskin of the content before it was published, but this was an order from above.

Diskin opposed it unequivocally. He is the only person authorized to speak for the Shin Bet, but in this case, his opinion was shared by G., the head of the agency's southern district, and other senior Shin Bet

officials. Ashkenazi - who, like Barak, and unlike Diskin, G. and GOC Southern Command Yoav Galant, was one of the last to throw his support behind Operation Cast Lead - does not want to stop the operation now, before it has racked up any clear achievements. If the politicians impose a cease-fire on him, he will salute, and he will also take care not to torpedo any diplomatic initiative. But do not expect him to volunteer to sign the recommendation. In his view, the ministers should decide for themselves what to do, and after they decide, he will do it.

Barak is willing to serve Gaza a two-course meal - first the humanitarian course, then a double portion. This will not be a French kiss, but an Israeli version of what the American army, hit by a paralyzing sandstorm on its way to Baghdad in March 2003, termed an "operational halt" before resuming its advance. During the two-day truce, the IDF will arm itself with a new target bank, fresh intelligence, refreshed troops and domestic and international understanding of the need for a ground operation.

The politicians who are competing against Barak, and the civil servants who are not (yet) in politics, do not care if Barak steals home base behind Bernard Kouchner's back. But they refuse to let him do it on their backs. Whoever is deemed responsible for halting the operation prematurely will take a hit both in the media and at the ballot box. Yet the same is true of anyone who fails to exploit a genuine opportunity to cash in on his investment at a bargain price.

Since Saturday, Ashkenazi had held the General Staff to a schedule of discussions and situation assessments that might be termed a "war clock." Now, along comes the famed watch repairman, Barak, and threatens to portray him as the one eager to stop the operation prematurely, before it has achieved its goal. The trouble is that there is no clock that shows, in real time, the exact moment when the operation should end