



SHOWDOWN IN GAZA UPDATES (3) - 22 January 09

COMMENTARY: THE MEANING OF THE GAZA WAR

The Gaza war rendered an Israeli-Palestinian two-state peace agreement more difficult and more distant. And it probably changed the incoming American president's order of priorities in ways the government of Israel - both this one and the next one - will have to adjust to quickly and flexibly.

The Israel-Arab related issues that Barack Obama will face upon assuming the presidency now begin, unexpectedly, with the ugly unfinished business of Gaza.

There is only a **temporary** cease-fire in and around Gaza, and the Gaza passages remain closed to all but humanitarian aid.

This war demonstrated that Hamas, even if (hopefully) defanged, is here to stay. Obama, the new leader on the block, is well situated to affect a new departure with regard to engaging Hamas - just as he intends to engage Iran and Syria - and opening the Gaza-Israel passages to commerce, thereby reversing a foolish and counter-productive policy.

The Gaza post-war humanitarian situation, too, will need Obama's attention. As matters currently stand, the provision of western aid - intended not only to help Gazans rebuild but to counter Iranian aid and influence - requires a PLO presence in Gaza, which Hamas may or may not be persuaded to concur with. This issue may dovetail with Egypt's hopes to bring Hamas back into unity government talks with Abbas' PLO. If those talks succeed, they could within the year produce new Palestinian elections that Hamas might win, thereby putting paid to any near-term aspirations to negotiate a two-state solution. Those who speak approvingly of "Palestinian unity" should now beware of what they wish for.

Obama will quickly discover that the war weakened Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen). And Israel's Feb. 10 elections are liable to produce a new Israeli government less interested in removing settlements and negotiating a final status agreement than its predecessor or, if interested, no more capable.

Meanwhile, Syria beckons. The prospects for a Syria-Israel peace process weathered this war well; the only casualty may have been Turkish mediation, reflecting the vociferous anti-Israel pose struck during the war by Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan..

Apropos (*in regards to*) Turkey's performance during this war, Obama now confronts a Middle East even more divided. Egypt, backed by Saudi Arabia and the PLO, cooperated closely with Israel and reestablished its traditional claim to courageous Arab leadership, while Israel reinforced its role as primary regional military power. On the other hand, Qatar and Turkey seemingly sided with the Iran-Syria-Hizballah-Hamas camp and Jordan sat on the fence.

Obama's Middle East strategy requires a large measure of regional cooperation; in this regard, his job just became a little harder.

- by Yossi Alpher – Jerusalem Post. Read full commentary>

www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1232292918898&pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull

THE WAY OF THE PHILISTINES – HOW IT WILL END

By Joseph Farah – worldnetdaily

Let me tell you how it ends in Gaza.

It doesn't end with a cease-fire.

It doesn't end with a new breathtaking round of diplomacy.

It doesn't end with new elections and new peace plans or with foreign peacekeeping troops on the ground.

It doesn't end any of those ways.

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The inevitable path of the suicidal terrorism of Hamas is the destruction of its own people. The handwriting is on the wall. The pride of the Philistines is about to be cut off.

Ironically, in ensuring that no Jews would ever be allowed to live in Gaza in the future, the Arabs sealed their own fate.

Time's running out for the so-called "Palestinians." They are about to go the way of the Philistines.

Here's how it ends in Gaza:

Read this short commentary>

www.worldnetdaily.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=86535

HAMAS REASSERTS CONTROL IN GAZA, ROUNDS UP 'COLLABORATORS' -

Jan 21/09. The Islamist Palestinian group Hamas said on Wednesday it had begun reasserting control in the Gaza Strip and rounding up suspected collaborators with Israel, drawing accusations from the rival Fatah group that its members were being targeted.

"The internal security service was instructed to track collaborators and hit them hard," said Ehab al-Ghsain, spokesman of the Hamas Interior Ministry, without singling out Fatah members by name.

"They arrested dozens of collaborators who attempted to strike the resistance by giving information to the occupation about the fighters," he said.

More> www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1057499.html

GAZA SMUGGLING ROUTES OPERATIONAL AGAIN

Jan 21/09. Smuggling into Gaza from Egypt is underway again, only days after the end of the IDF operation against Hamas.

AP Television News footage showed Palestinian smugglers filling a fuel truck with petrol that came through a cross-border tunnel from Egypt. The footage also shows workers busy clearing blocked tunnels and bulldozers carrying out other repairs.

One of the stated goals of the IDF offensive was to stop the smuggling through the hundreds of tunnels under the border. The goods coming through have included a steady flow of rockets and other weapons.

Israel has said eighty percent of the smuggling tunnels were destroyed in bombing raids during the IDF's *Operation Cast Lead*.

ARAB LEAGUE SPLIT OVER REBUILDING GAZA

KUWAIT CITY (AP) — Arab leaders failed to agree Tuesday on a plan to rebuild the devastated Gaza Strip and whether to back Egyptian peace efforts to end the crisis at a meeting of the Arab League fraught with divisions.

The deep tensions among rival Arab leaders could affect the fragile cease-fire between Hamas and Israel that ended a three-week Israeli onslaught on the Mediterranean strip. The military campaign to stop militant rocket fire left around 1,300 Palestinians dead, according to Gaza health officials, and material damage estimated at around \$2 billion. Thirteen Israelis were also killed.

The violence in Gaza split Arab countries into two camps — one led by Syria and Qatar supporting Hamas hard-liners who rule the territory, and another led by Egypt and Saudi Arabia hoping to lure the Palestinian militant group toward more moderation.

CASUALTIES

Health officials in Hamas-controlled Gaza say at least 1,300 Palestinians have been killed and 5,100 wounded since Israel launched *Operation Cast Lead* on 27 December.

Thirteen Israelis died in the three weeks. Three were civilians; five soldiers were lost to enemy fire, while five others died from (accidental) "friendly fire." 233 Israeli soldiers were wounded, the Israeli army says. Dozens of Israelis civilians were injured from rocket attacks.

HAMAS, IRAN AND HIZB'ULLAH MAKE OUTRAGEOUS CLAIMS

Jan 21/09. After Israeli troops pulled out of Gaza, Hamas gunmen were waving flags on the top of massive ruins, claiming victory over Israel, and broadcast figures that were detached from any reality on the ground.

At a Hamas news conference held on Jan 19, a spokesman for the Al-Kassam Brigades "conservatively estimated" that the terror group killed up to 80 Israeli soldiers while it lost only 48 of its own fighters.

The spokesman, known as Abu Obeida, further claimed that Hamas destroyed or incapacitated 47 IDF tanks and bulldozers, hit four helicopters and shot down one unmanned drone plane. He said that the terrorists took several soldiers captive during Israel's ground offensive, but the

Israeli response was to call in air strikes that "always deliberately targeted" the Hamas abductors along with their hostages.

Iran and Hizb'ullah joined Hamas in painting an outrageous picture of victory.

An Iran-based website serving the Lebanese Hizb'ullah terrorist organization was more outrageous than Hamas in its claims. *Mogavemat* told its readers that 225 Israelis were killed - 203 soldiers and 22 civilians, and several thousand 2,580 Israelis were injured during the war. - source: *Sheva Arutz*

COMMENT. JERRY GOLDEN, ISRAEL

Jan 21/09. We are praying here in Israel that the UN, EU and USA will not rebuild Hamas but will help us build a peaceful society in Gaza that will realize that Hamas is their enemy as well.

It has troubled me to see once again that the US has stopped Israel from finishing off its enemy. I saw it happen in 1982 when the US 6th fleet rescued Arafat and his PLO terrorist in Lebanon and took them to Tunis to regroup and fight another day. Again I watched as the IDF had to be pulled out of Gaza before finishing the task before them in order not to offend the Obama inauguration.

It becomes more obvious that the powers to be do not want the enemies of Israel to be destroyed; it is known that these same powers prosper by waging wars around the world, as the motto of the Illuminati is to bring order out of chaos.

US-EGYPTIAN RED SEA HUNT FOR IRANIAN SHIP CARRYING 60 TONS OF ARMS FOR HAMAS

Jan 20/09. US and Egyptian warships were scouring the Gulf of Aden and Red Sea to waylay an Iranian freighter carrying scores of heavy rockets for delivery to Hamas. DEBKAF's exclusive sources report they were acting on intelligence that a ship loaded with an estimated 60 tons of arms to replenish Hamas' depleted war stocks had set out from the Iranian Persian Gulf port of Bandar Abbas on Jan. 17.

Our sources reveal that the arms-smuggling vessel started its voyage as the Iran-Hedayat and changed its name in mid sea to Famagustus registered to Panama. The captain was ordered by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards to unload its cargo at a smugglers cove on the southeastern coast of Sinai opposite the Gulf of Suez, to be picked up by armed Bedouin gangs and moved to El Arish in northern Sinai. From there the contraband rockets were to be slipped gradually into the Gaza Strip.

The cargo consists of 50 Fajr rockets whose range is 50-75 km, scores of heavy Grad rockets, new, improved launchers whose angle of fire can be precisely adjusted, tons of high-quality explosives, submachine guns, rifles and pistols and armor-piercing missiles and shells (of types used successfully by Hizb'ullah against Israeli tanks in 2006).

Read the full report> www.debka.com/headline.php?hid=5867

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SHOWDOWN IN GAZA UPDATES (2) - 20 January 09

U.S.- ISRAEL SIGN DEAL

Jan 16/09. In a step toward achieving "guarantees," Israel won a U.S. commitment to help crack down on weapons smuggling into Egypt and from there, to Gaza.

The "memorandum of understanding" signed in Washington by Condoleezza Rice and Tzipi Livni calls for expanded intelligence cooperation between the US and Israel, as well as other US allies in the Middle East and Europe to prevent Hamas from rearming should Israel agree to a truce. It aimed to boost Egyptian efforts to broker a cease-fire to end fighting in Gaza.

Livni described the deal as "a vital complement for a cessation of hostility" in the troubled region. It was meant "to complement Egyptian actions and to end of the flow of weapons to Gaza." Egypt's cooperation is essential if the smuggling is to be stopped. But Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said that his country would not be bound by the agreement.

The US will provide military and intelligence assets, including detection and surveillance equipment, as well as logistical help and training to Israel, Egypt and other nations in the region. The equipment and training would be used for monitoring Gaza's land and sea borders. The document also calls for the U.S. to expand work with its NATO partners in the effort, particularly in the Red Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean and eastern Africa, according to a text.

It also commits Washington to use "relevant components" of the U.S. military to assist Mideast governments in preventing "weapons and explosives flows to Gaza that originate in or transit their territories."

Although signed by the Bush administration, the agreement is binding on the incoming administration of President-elect Barack Obama and Rice and State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said both Obama and Secretary of State-designate Hillary Rodham Clinton had been briefed on the details.

HAMAS DECLARES ITS OWN CEASE-FIRE

Jan 19/09. Only hours after its leaders declared that they would continue to fight, Hamas announced on Sunday a **one-week cease-fire** and issued an ultimatum to Israel to withdraw IDF troops from the Gaza Strip within that time.

Daoud Shihab, a spokesman for Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip, said that his group would abide by the cease-fire "out of concern for the national interests of the Palestinians and to allow humanitarian aid to be delivered to the people."

Like Hamas, Islamic Jihad also declared "victory" and pointed out that Israel had failed to destroy the "resistance" or topple the Hamas government.

REJECTS ABBAS AS PA PRESIDENT

Hamas officials expressed outrage over the participation of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in the peace summit just held at the Egyptian resort of Sharm.

Faraj al-Ghul, the minister of justice in the Hamas government, said that Abbas was now the **former** president of the PA and therefore no longer represented the Palestinians. Although his term in office expired earlier this month, Abbas is remaining in office until new Palestinian elections are held..

The Hamas minister said that no Palestinian government would honor an agreement signed by Abbas after his mandate ended on January 9. He added that according to the PA Basic Law, the government of Ismail Haniyeh was the only legitimate body representing the Palestinians.

The minister also called for Abbas to be brought before a Palestinian court, or any other legal forum, on charges of committing "atrocities" against the Palestinians.

– Jerusalem Post

WORLD LEADERS DISCUSS GAZA AT SHARM SUMMIT

Jan 18/09. French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on Sunday hosted the leaders of Germany, Jordan, Italy, Turkey, Britain, Spain and the United Nations at an emergency summit in Sharm el-Sheik. The talks focused on the way ahead now that the fighting in Gaza has, for now, abated.

The plan the European leaders have developed with Egypt provides a **\$1.6 billion aid** package for the Gaza Strip's reconstruction.

The millions of tons of cement and supplies will be shipped to Israeli ports and delivered through the Gaza crossings over a period of years. Israel, they believe, will not be able to refuse to reopen the crossings, thereby bringing its embargo of the Gaza Strip to an end.

UK MAKES £20 MILLION AID PROMISE TO GAZA

Jan 18/09. The British government has pledged to give a further £20m in humanitarian aid to crisis-torn Gaza. The promise came as international leaders, including Gordon Brown, met in Egypt to discuss the conflict.

\$2 BILLION ARAB LEAGUE FUND FOR GAZA

Jan 19/07. The Arab League, meeting in Kuwait, is expected to discuss a proposal for a \$2bn fund for reconstruction in Gaza. Saudi King Abdullah said his country would donate \$1bn.

HAMAS CLAIMS GREAT VICTORY

Jan 19/09. Hamas leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniya, said Israel had "failed to achieve its goals". In a speech on a Hamas TV station, he said: "God has granted us a great victory, not for one faction, or party, or area, but for our entire people."

Hamas said it would hold fire for a week to give Israel time to withdraw its forces from the Gaza Strip.

A spokesman for Hamas' military wing, Abu Ubaida, said its rocket capabilities had not been affected by the conflict. "We hereby stress that our rockets are being developed and are piling up, and that the enemy will receive more rockets and God willing, our rockets will hit more targets," he said in a news conference broadcast live on Hamas' al-Aqsa TV. - BBC Jan 19

ROCKETS THREATEN GAZA CEASE-FIRE

18 Jan 18/09. A volley of rockets has been fired into southern Israel from Gaza, hours after a unilateral Israeli ceasefire began.

At least four out of seven rockets landed near the town of Sderot, with no reports of injuries. Israel launched an air strike on Gaza in response.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said the latest attacks "again proved that the ceasefire is fragile and it has to be reassessed on a minute-by-minute basis".

Heads of state from across Europe are joining Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas and UN chief Ban Ki-moon at the Egyptian resort of Sharm El-Sheikh for a summit aimed at shoring up the ceasefire.

They will discuss how to make the ceasefire durable and respected by Hamas, how to get aid to Gaza and beginning the process of rebuilding there.

But the BBC's Laura Trevelyan, who is at the resort, says with neither Israel or Hamas attending, there are questions about how much can be achieved and whether this will amount to more than a gigantic photo opportunity by those who want to help resolve the conflict. - BBC

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/7835981.stm

IDF sets post-truce response formula for future Hamas attacks

Jan 19/09. The IDF has created a "price list" based on which it will formulate its response to future Hamas attacks following the implementation of a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip.

On Sunday, some of the IDF units that participated in Operation Cast Lead pulled out of Gaza ahead of the possibility that the ground offensive would be renewed if Hamas did not cease its rocket attacks. Ehud Olmert said Sunday night that the remaining troops would leave Gaza "quickly" if the truce held.

The IDF plans to give Hamas a day or two to completely stop the attacks and if they continue, the military has received permission from the government to renew ground operations. Under the cease-fire, the IDF will not assassinate senior Hamas leaders who come out of hiding but will renew targeted killings if the rocket attacks continue. "We will not return to our past policy of restraint," a senior defense official explained. "For every attack there will be a response."

Since the weekend, the IDF has noted increased Hamas efforts to renew the smuggling of arms along the Philadelphi Corridor. The IDF does not plan to take action and believes that increased Egyptian and US involvement can succeed in curbing the illegal flow. "There are already attempts by Hamas to rebuild their capabilities," a security source said. "Hamas has not changed and is still motivated to rearm so if it decides it can attack."

NETANYAHU: JOB LEFT UNFINISHED



Jan 19/09. Likud head MK Binyamin Netanyahu, who is considered likely to lead Israel after the coming elections, said Sunday afternoon that “the IDF has dealt Hamas some very hard blows on the head, but regrettably the job has not been finished.”

"Hamas still controls Gaza and it will continue to smuggle new missiles in through the Philadelphi Route," he said. "I believe that in the face of Hamas's terror and its Iranian backing, we must show no weakness and we must show a resolute, iron fist, until the enemy is vanquished." - ArtuzSheva

“HAMAS WILL RESUME ARMS SMUGGLING WITHIN A FEW MONTHS”

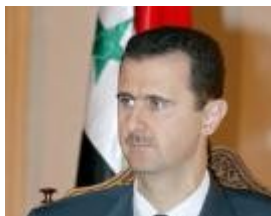
Jan 18/09. Shin Bet chief Yuval Diskin told the Israeli cabinet that Hamas would resume smuggling arms into Gaza within a few months, despite the recent destruction of many tunnels. Diskin said that the Palestinian Islamist group would soon rebuild the tunnels, which were destroyed during Israel's 22-day offensive.

He said that despite heavy criticism of Israel, Gaza residents are "fiercely criticizing Hamas for the destruction it has brought to Gaza."

Diskin emphasized that there has been mass confusion among the Hamas leadership in both Gaza and Damascus since Israel's announcement of a unilateral cease-fire.

"The confusion stems from the fact that Hamas' stance, in the context of the UN resolution and in the context of the Egyptian initiative, placed the organization in a very problematic position in which it is likely to emerge exposed from all sides."

Diskin added that Hamas suffered a strategic surprise and that it "did not expect that Israel would begin an operation in the lead up to elections, not of such a scope and magnitude and not one in which Israel would send troops deep into Gaza." He said the IDF's pressure on Gaza City put Hamas in a very difficult situation.



ARABS IN DISARRAY

“ARAB WORLD FACING COLLAPSE”

Jan 19/09. Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Saud al-Feisal and Arab League Secretary-General Amr Musa warn that the Arab world is on the verge of collapse.

Speaking at a joint press conference they held in Kuwait, the two said that the Arab world faces anarchy and an inner split, which they attribute to two factors: The inter-Palestinian struggle, and the “Israeli aggression and occupation.”

Several recent incidents portray the weakness of Arab unity.

Last Friday, a gathering of representatives of more than a dozen Arab and Muslim nations was held in Doha. Among the participants were Damascus-based Khaled Mashaal of Hamas and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinajad – but the others were not informed of the participation of these two until after they had already arrived in Doha. Apparently, it was feared that the participation of Mashaal and Ahmedinajad might keep others away.

In addition, a high-ranking French diplomat has been quoted as saying that Syria was more interested in weakening Egypt over the past three weeks than in helping solve the crisis in Gaza. Syria and others accused Egypt of conspiring with Israel in order to attack Gazan Arabs.

The diplomat further said that the Syrian branch of Hamas is more extremist than the Gazan, and that this is related to Syria’s influence over Mashaal.

MUBARAK LASHES BACK

Jan 19/09. The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs reports that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak will take part in an economic summit in Kuwait Monday, but refuses to reconcile with those who attacked Egypt for its stance during the Gaza war. Mubarak refused to take part in the Doha conference.

Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, for his part, has postponed his arrival in Kuwait, and it is possible that he will not take part at all.

KUWAITIS AGAINST ABBAS

Jan 18/09. Twenty-one Kuwaiti parliamentarians called for Palestinian Authority Fatah Chairman Mahmoud Abbas not to be invited to the summit. They said that Abbas’s term as president ended on Jan. 9, in accordance with the elections of four years ago, and that a Hamas figure must be invited in his stead.

In response, Fatah legislator Azzam Al-Ahmad said that the Kuwaitis were intervening in an “internal Palestinian issue” and were “recruited by regional powers who wish to weaken the Palestinian people and the Arab nation.”

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/129497>

LIEBERMAN: “GAZA IS STILL HAMASTAN”

Jan 18/09. 'Politicians caused offensive to fail by not allowing IDF to seize control over Philadelphi route, Rafah crossing,' Yisrael Beiteinu chairman says. Meretz: Israelis must consider other issues before casting their ballots in upcoming elections.

Cabinet's decision to declare a unilateral ceasefire in Gaza was a mistake, Yisrael Beiteinu Chairman Avigdor Lieberman told Ynet Sunday.

"The IDF's operation in Gaza didn't change a thing, and Hamas is going to get exactly what it needs – including the reopening of the crossings," he said. "Gaza is still Hamastan and serves as an Iranian base

"The operation was very impressive on a military level, but it wasn't translated into political achievements. The politicians caused the offensive to fail; they did not allow the IDF to seize control over the Philadelphi route (Egypt-Gaza border) and the Rafah crossing; this only accentuates the need for a leadership change (in Israel)."

Lieberman continued to say that "it is clear that Hizb'ullah is also gearing up for another round of fighting, and now we have shown it our inability to defeat an organization just two feet away from us (Hamas)."

GAZA IS NOT MAJOR CHALLENGE FOR OBAMA

Stratfor Geopolitical Weekly gives this interesting comment:

Jan 20/09. Candidate Obama said much about what he would do as president; now we will see what President Obama actually does. The most important issue Obama will face will be the economy, something he did not anticipate through most of his campaign. The first hundred days of his presidency thus will revolve around getting a stimulus package passed. But Obama also is now in the great game of global competition — and in that game, presidents rarely get to set the agenda.

The major challenge he faces is not Gaza; the Israeli-Palestinian dispute is not one any US president intervenes in unless he wants to experience pain. As we have explained, [that is an intractable conflict to which there is no real solution](#).

Certainly, Obama will fight being drawn into mediating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during his first hundred days in office. He undoubtedly will send the obligatory Middle East envoy, who will spend time with all the parties, make suitable speeches and extract meaningless concessions from all sides.

This envoy will establish some sort of process to which everyone will cynically commit, knowing it will go nowhere. Such a mission is not involvement — it is the alternative to involvement, and the reason presidents appoint Middle East envoys. Obama can avoid the Gaza crisis, and he will do so.

The two crises that cannot be avoided are Afghanistan and Russia.

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SHOWDOWN IN GAZA UPDATES (1) - 18 January 09

HAMAS STILL HAS ABILITY TO LAUNCH WEAPONS

<http://www.maranathamrc.com/>

Jan 17/09. The IDF's working premise is that Hamas still possesses short and long-range rockets. Its ability to launch the weapons it has still exists, even if it has suffered a blow.

The significant damage caused to Hamas during the operation includes all of the organization's infrastructures, including the smuggling of weapons, the transfer system, the manufacturing and the launching cells. The entire process suffered a heavy blow," said military sources, "but did not crash completely.

Our activity is not aimed at erasing abilities, but at making it clear to Hamas that using these abilities is not worthwhile, and this message seems to have been internalized.

"Nonetheless, in order to obtain a morale-related achievement, Hamas will try and exert every effort during the last hours before the ceasefire, and we are prepared for that."

HAMAS LAYS DOWN CONDITIONS FOR GAZA TRUCE

Jan 16/09. Hamas is prepared to accept a conditional cease-fire with Israel in the Gaza-Strip starting on Saturday 17th, the *al-Sharq al-Awset* daily reported today. According to the report, Hamas has set five conditions for the cease-fire:

1. The reciprocal truce would begin on 17th and be followed by the immediate transfer of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.
2. The Israel Defense Forces must pull all of its troops out of the coastal territory within the first week of the truce.
3. The flow of trade in and out of the Gaza Strip must be renewed and monitored by observers from Egypt, Europe, and Turkey.
4. The Rafah crossing must be reopened and supervised by Palestinian Authority security forces and international observers, until a Palestinian unity government has been established and can take its place.
5. The truce would be instated for one-year with an option for renewal.

EGYPTIAN-PROPOSED TRUCE

Jan 16/09. Israeli and Western sources say that Jerusalem has rebuffed some of the conditions set forth by Hamas for an Egyptian-proposed truce, including how long it would last and who would manage the border crossings. Jerusalem has expressed its reservations regarding the Islamist group's terms, despite Cairo's apparent promise to crack down on arms smuggling to Gaza - one of Israel's key demands - and Hamas' willingness to accept the offer.

The Egyptian truce proposal, of which *Ha'aretz* obtained a copy, contains three clauses.

1. Israel and the Palestinians will agree to an immediate, time-limited cease-fire, during which the border crossings will be opened for humanitarian aid and Egypt will lead negotiations on a long-term truce.
2. The long-term truce must include provisions on both border security and an end to the blockade of Gaza.
3. Fatah and Hamas should resume reconciliation talks.

Egyptian officials told *Ha'aretz* they believe the initial, short-term truce should last a few months, to allow plenty of time for negotiations on the long-term cease-fire.

However, the proposal does not require Israel to withdraw from Gaza during the initial truce, and Hamas has said it will **not** accept the proposal unless that omission is corrected.

Salah al-Bardawil, who was Hamas' Gazan representative to the talks with Egypt, said his organization demands that Israel completely withdraw within five days of whenever the initial cease-fire takes effect.

Hamas also insists that the agreement include a deadline by which the border crossings must reopen. Israel insists that the crossings not be reopened until the smuggling issue is resolved to its satisfaction.

Israel also wants Hamas to agree to an explicit timetable for concluding a deal on kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit and to be more flexible in what it is demanding in exchange for Shalit. - Ha Aretz

GAZA DAMAGE ESTIMATE: \$1.4 BILLION

Jan 16/09. Israel's assault on Gaza's Hamas rulers has destroyed at least \$1.4 billion worth of buildings, roads, pipes, power lines and other infrastructure in already impoverished territory, Palestinian surveyors estimate. - *Jerusalem Post*

EGYPT URGES ISRAEL TO IMPLEMENT UNCONDITIONAL GAZA TRUCE

Jan 17/09. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has called on Israel to end its military operations in the Gaza Strip immediately and said his country would call for a meeting on post-war reconstruction in the enclave.

"I call on Israel today to end its military operations immediately. And we call on its leaders to (agree) to an unconditional ceasefire, and I call on them to withdraw all the forces completely from the strip," Mubarak said in a televised address to the nation.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said on Saturday his country was **not** committed [to the U.S.-Israeli pact](#) to halt arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip, telling reporters "We have no commitment towards this memo whatsoever."

ALL ISRAEL'S GOALS IN CAST LEAD HAVE BEEN ATTAINED

Jan 18/07. PM Ehud Olmert declared *Operation Cast Lead* a victory last night and threw the ball into Hamas' court, declaring a unilateral cease-fire that suspends the three-week operation. The cease-fire's future depends on whether Hamas continues to fire on Israel.

Olmert's announcement followed a 3-hour emergency meeting of the 12-member security cabinet that approved the cease-fire by a vote of 7-2.

It was decided that Israel will stop its offensive, but will keep the IDF forces in place, see how Hamas responds, and whether an effective mechanism will be set up on the border to stop smuggling. If so, then discussions will begin on withdrawing the troops. If not, the operation will continue.

Olmert said the cease-fire would go into effect at 2 a.m. Sunday morning.

In a special address to the nation on Saturday night, Olmert said, "Today, we face you again and can say that the conditions have been created so that our targets, as defined when we launched the operation, have been fully achieved, and more so."

Those goals were defined as **stopping the rocket fire on Israel** and **an end to the arms smuggling into Gaza**.

" Hamas was hit hard, both its military capabilities and its governing infrastructure," Olmert said. " Its leaders are in hiding," Olmert said. " Many of its members have been killed. The factories in which its missiles were manufactured have been destroyed. The smuggling routes, through dozens of tunnels, have been bombed. The Hamas' capabilities for conveying weapons within the Gaza Strip have been damaged."

Olmert said that according to the assessments of all the security services, " Hamas' capabilities have been struck a heavy blow, which will harm its ability to rule and its military capabilities for some time."

Olmert stressed that the security cabinet met after he received a phone call from Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak describing the Egyptian cease-fire proposal.

" Hamas is not a part of the arrangement we reached," he said. " Terrorist organizations like Hamas have no part in agreements."

Immediately following Olmert's announcement, Hamas fired eight missiles at Israel.

Hamas, meanwhile, said it was not obligated by the unilateral declaration.

" The occupier must halt his fire immediately and withdraw from our land and lift his blockade and open all crossings and we will not accept any one Zionist soldier on our land, regardless of the price it exacts," Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said.

The return of kidnapped soldier Gilad Schalit was not a condition of the cease-fire, though both Olmert and Barak pledged to continue working unceasingly for his release.

Read full article from *Jerusalem Post*>

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1232100163477&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

HOW THE GAZA WAR COULD END: THREE SCENARIOS

Jan 16/09. Pressure is mounting on Israel and Hamas to find a way of ending the war in Gaza. Both sides have responded positively, if tentatively, to Egyptian proposals for a phased truce that would begin with a lull in fighting for a defined period (10 days by some accounts). That interlude would then allow for the brokering of a more comprehensive cease-fire. But each side's goals from any truce remain antagonistic to those of the other, and reaching an agreement that bridges the vast gap between them remains a Herculean diplomatic challenge.

Here are the three most likely scenarios, each with different political consequences for the main players and the future of the conflict:

SCENARIO 1: REGIME CHANGE

Given Israel's long-term goal of ousting Hamas in Gaza, some key military and political leaders have urged that it expand the goals of its current operation, and use its momentum to take control of Gaza City and decapitate Hamas.

<http://www.maranathamrc.com/>

SCENARIO 2: LONG-TERM CEASE-FIRE

Israel has insisted that a cease-fire be "sustainable," by ensuring that Hamas is unable to rearm itself. An actual disarming of Hamas' current militias is unlikely without a full-scale reoccupation of Gaza, which would involve tens of thousands more Israeli troops over many months. Anything less will see Hamas continue to be the dominant security presence inside Gaza.

Hamas will claim victory from any truce that results in the crossings being reopened.

Ending the current operation on the basis of a formal long-term truce in Gaza will codify Israeli-Hamas coexistence. That's why Israeli journalist Aluf Benn dubbed the conflict "**Gaza's War of Independence**," an allusion to the conflict 60 years ago in which Israel established its existence as an intractable political-military fact.

SCENARIO 3: THE GUNS GO SILENT WITHOUT A FORMAL TRUCE

If the offensive cannot deal Hamas a death blow, Israel may see benefit in holding its fire, in line with the first phase of the Egyptian plan but not necessarily concluding a comprehensive cease-fire. It would simply maintain the halt to hostilities and even withdraw its forces on an open-ended basis.

Whichever of these three permutations defines the Gaza outcome, the likelihood is that *Operation Cast Lead* will not have ended the conflict between Israel and Hamas, but will instead have propelled it into a new phase.

The full *TIME* article gives an excellent analysis of the option. Read >

www.news.yahoo.com/s/time/20090116/wl_time/08599187214200

HAMAS INTERIOR MINISTER SAID SIYAM DIES IN IAF STRIKE

Jan 16/09. The IDF has stepped up pressure on Gaza, killing Hamas Interior Minister Said Siyam, and pushing deep into Gaza City.

Siyam, the most senior Hamas political leader killed since *Operation Cast Lead* began on December 27, died along with his brother Iad, his son, and Gen. Salah Abu Shraikh, head of the Hamas General Security Service. The four were killed by an IAF strike on Iad Siyam's home in Jabalya.

Siyam was the Hamas political echelon's liaison with the group's military wing, Izzadin Kassam, and was responsible for the various security apparatuses in the Strip, including the Hamas police and naval forces. Officials said he was one of the Islamist movement's more radical leaders and was a close associate of its Damascus-based chief Khaled Mashaal.

Siyam was seen as a main architect of the violent Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, when Hamas fighters expelled forces loyal to Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

A Hamas expert in the West Bank said Siyam's death was a "huge loss for Hamas," but he noted that the movement is easily capable of generating new leaders, often more radical than their predecessors.

Six other Hamas operatives were wounded in the air strike in the heart of Gaza City. According to Palestinian reports, Mahmoud Watfa, one of the commanders of Izzadin Kassam, was killed in the attack.

HAMAS LEADER KHALED MASHAAL



Jan 16/09. Hamas' most powerful official is widely thought to be Khaled Mashaal, the Syrian-based political leader. Mashaal is considered a hard-liner who consults frequently with Syrian and Iranian officials. Top Iranian officials have visited Damascus frequently throughout the Israeli offensive that began on Dec. 27.

Mashaal has repeatedly called for the militant group to fight on despite more than 1,000 deaths during the offensive. Hundreds of those who died are believed to be fighters, but Gaza medical officials say about half of the dead were civilians. RIFT

Mashaal's power lies in the fact that **he controls the group's purse strings and funnels money as he chooses — much of it thought to come from Iran** — to individual Hamas leaders, inside both Gaza and the West Bank. Gaza Hamas leaders in particular depend almost entirely on outside money because the territory's borders are sealed.

From article - APPARENT IN HAMAS AS FIGHTING INTENSIFIES

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