

Is Israel Preparing for Another War on Gaza?

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With the approach of the first anniversary since the end of Operation Cast Lead, Israel's war against Gaza, there is mounting speculation that the Jewish state is once again considering a military challenge against Hamas.

As Tony Karon wrote recently in [The National](#): "There were no winners in the Gaza war that Israel launched a year ago today, but no shortage of losers. And failure to address its underlying causes - the economic siege through which Israel, Egypt and the US hope to force Hamas from power, and that organisation's ability to respond by firing rockets into Israel - means that far from anyone learning the lessons of the brutal folly that was Operation Cast Lead, a repeat may be imminent."

On Monday, Bradley Burston, a columnist for the Israeli newspaper Haaretz said: "The countdown to the Second Gaza War has begun in earnest. Date it, if you like, to Sunday, and a coolly terrifying analysis by Yom Tov Samia, former overall Israeli military commander of the Gaza Strip and the adjacent Negev."

The Jerusalem Post had reported that Maj-Gen (res) Samia hinted at the possibility that in the future the IDF will conquer the Philadelphi Corridor, the buffer zone separating the Gaza Strip from Egypt.

"In an interview with Army Radio, Samia said that in a future conflict, Israel would take over 'specific territory' in Gaza that would help reduce Hamas's 'oxygen supply'. Contacted later in the day, Samia refused to specify which territory he had referred to.

" 'We are facing another round in Gaza,' said Samia, who during Cast Lead functioned as the deputy to OC Southern Command Maj-Gen Yoav Galant. 'I am very skeptical about the chance that Hamas will suddenly surrender or change its way without first suffering a far more serious blow than it did during Cast Lead.'

"The blow, he said, would be 'more focused with long-range results including the conquering of territory that Hamas will understand it lost as a result of its provocations. We need to create a situation which reduces its oxygen supply.'"

The Gaza-Egypt border is already the focus of attention as Egypt constructs a controversial underground steel wall that is being put in place in an effort to curtail smuggling, it is believed.

As the Haaretz columnist continued: "With Samia hinting that in a new war the IDF might capture and occupy the tunnel-honeycombed Philadelphi Corridor which borders the new wall, Professor Yoram Meital of the Negev's Ben-Gurion University said this week that to

Israel, 'The message is that Egypt is setting out a border, and views any effort to touch it as an attack on its national security.'

" 'To Hamas they are saying "We will not under any circumstances lend our hand to the establishment of a mini-state in the Gaza Strip," and are thus closing the Rafiah crossing nearly hermetically, and erecting the iron wall in the bowels of the Earth.'

"One of the most important lessons of last year's bloodletting is that war or no war, Hamas and only Hamas decides when and if rockets are to be fired from Gaza into Israel. Rockets flew throughout the three-week war, and stopped only at Hamas' order, several hours after Israel stilled its guns.

"The mayor of rocket-scarred Sderot, David Buskila, said this week that, 'By the close of Operation Cast Lead, we understood that the military solution cannot be a comprehensive one, it's a solution that can create breaks between escalations.'

"In the end, Israel holds perhaps the most significant card to play, a move which may depend on a uncharacteristically hands-on Obama White House. With third-party international mediation, Israel could offer to resurrect the 2008 truce by significantly alleviating its stranglehold embargo on the Strip."

The [Xinhua](#) news agency reported: "Hamas on Monday warned that unrest will hit the region if Israel occupies the border area between Egypt and the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.

" 'If Israel carries out its threat, it has to shoulder the responsibility for the deterioration of the security condition,' Ismail Radwan, a Hamas spokesman, told Xinhua.

" 'Any attempt to reoccupy that area will fail,' Radwan added."

Meanwhile, Haaretz reported: "A Qassam rocket fired by Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip struck the Western Negev on Monday, a day after an Israel Air Force assault killed three Islamic Jihad men posed at a launching ground in the coastal territory.

"There were no casualties or damages reported in the incident Monday. Israeli security forces were summoned to the area to identify the location of the rocket.

"The IAF strike Sunday came hours after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed a 'powerful response' to recent rocket and mortar shell attacks from the coastal territory. The strike targeted a cell as its members, which included a senior Jihad field commander, were launching rockets at Israel.

"Four mortar shells were also fired at Israel from Gaza on Sunday, but they exploded on the Palestinian side of the border.

"Addressing an increase of rocket fire into Israel from Gaza, Defense Minister Ehud Barak on Monday advised Gaza's Hamas rulers to 'watch their step, and not to cry crocodile tears if they force [Israel] to take action.'"

[Xinhua](#) said that a statement issued by Hamas on Monday suggested that the Gaza government will take measures to curtail rocket fire.

"Spokesman of Hamas government Taher al-Nounu said in the statement that the

government would take measures to preserve ‘the highest interests of our people and the national consensus.’

“He called on the Palestinian factions and Gaza militant groups ‘to agree on a national accordance that draws up a certain mechanism in dealing with the changes on the ground with Israel.’

“Al-Nounu referred in his statement to the mounting Israeli military actions carried out recently against the Gaza Strip. At least 10 Palestinians were killed in Israeli air and ground strikes on the enclave within the last 10 days.

“Although al-Nounu’s statements were an implication to halting firing homemade rockets from the Gaza Strip at Israel, he said ‘it is the right of the Palestinian people to defend themselves.’

“Al-Nounu declined to give any details related to what kind of measures Hamas government would take ‘in order to preserve the highest national Palestinian interests.’

“However, well-informed Palestinian sources in Hamas government told Xinhua in condition of anonymity that police forces will soon deploy and carry out field campaigns to prevent firing rockets from Gaza at Israel.”

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