

Gaza: Analysis of the the Egyptian cease-fire proposal and its failure

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FAQ on Failed Effort to Arrange Ceasefire Between Israel and Hamas

Experts

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FAQ

Q - Why do you think Hamas didn't accept the terms of the ceasefire?

RK - " Hamas has insisted that there be a lasting resolution of the basic problem of Israel's siege of Gaza, as was promised as part of the 2012 cease-fire, but never implemented in spite of Israel's recognition that Hamas scrupulously maintained the cease-fire until quite recently. The Egyptian proposal makes lifting of the siege conditional on Israel's approval, which means never."

MR - " Hamas, and with it other Palestinian organizations such as Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, have indicated that they were not consulted on the Egyptian cease-fire proposal, and that it has not been formally presented to them but rather released to the media after its terms were agreed with Israel." In terms of the proposal's contents, what these organizations and many Palestinians object to is that it simply restores a 2012 ceasefire agreement that Israel has systematically violated and does not provide any guarantees such violations would cease. These violations consist not only of periodic armed Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip, but also Israel's refusal to respect clauses on the rights of fishermen in Gaza's territorial waters and farmers in land close to the Gaza/Israel boundary.

" Hamas has additionally stated that it would not accept an agreement that does not provide for the immediate re-release of Palestinian prisoners who were released by Israel in 2011 as part of a prisoner exchange with Israel, but re-arrested by Israel in the last month." More broadly, Hamas and other Palestinian organizations are averse to returning to an untenable status quo, which lasts only until Israel once again decides to launch a major assault on the Gaza Strip, and which does not include concrete steps towards lifting the ongoing and prolonged blockade of the Gaza Strip.

" There is widespread Palestinian suspicion that Egypt, which has shown nothing but unremitting

hostility towards Hamas since the current regime seized power in July 2013, released a proposal it ensured would be acceptable to Israel but rejected by the Palestinians, in order to help Israel legitimize an escalation of attacks against the Gaza Strip. It is likely to have done so in close cooperation with its new best friend, Tony Blair, and other advocates of Israeli power in the Arab world and internationally.”

NE - “Within two days of Israel’s aerial assault on the population of the Gaza Strip, Hamas announced five conditions for a ceasefire: 1) stop the airstrikes; 2) observe terms of 2012 ceasefire; 3) release the Palestinians released during the Shalit prisoner exchange who were recently re-arrested; 4) lift the siege; and 5) don’t interfere with Palestinian unity government. What little is known about the proposed ceasefire agreement is that it demands a cessation of violence with no conditions thus reverting to conditions that are even worse than the status quo ante.

“This clearly weakens Hamas politically, exacerbates the humanitarian conditions under which Palestinians struggle, and emboldens Israel to strike again with zero accountability. That said, it is not in the Palestinians’ best interest for Hamas to continue launching rockets regardless of the circumstances, as it provides a justification for Israel to continue its brutal attacks on a defenseless and besieged population.”

Q - What will be required for a ceasefire to be accepted by both sides?

RK - “Either serious external pressure on the parties, especially Israel, or the exhaustion of both sides, which is not yet apparent.”

MR - “It’s difficult at this point to imagine a proposal that both Israel and Hamas would accept. Hamas insists on an end to Israeli impunity in its dealings with the Gaza Strip and an end to the blockade and isolation of that territory, while for Israel these are core policies. This means that a solution that meets basic standards of international law and human decency would have to be imposed on Israel by the international community, or that either party is sufficiently exhausted by the current conflict that it lowers its expectations. Neither of these scenarios appears likely in the immediate future.”

NE - “Hamas has made its five demands clear and its observance of the November 2012 ceasefire demonstrates its good faith. In contrast, it is not clear what Israel’s endgame is. It seems willing to accept a ceasefire on condition of Hamas’s unconditional capitulation, but what will ensure that it does not indiscriminately attack the 1.8 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip again? Israel has said it is bombarding Gaza in retribution for the death of three Israeli teens though it has failed to produce a single shred of evidence incriminating the Hamas leadership. Israel also claims it wants to decimate Hamas’s capability to launch rocket and mortar fire but this makes little logical sense since in the past diplomatic efforts have done much more to yield a cessation in rocket attacks than have military ones.”

Q - What do you think Israel’s actual goals for bombing Gaza are?

RK - “Israel’s main goals are to weaken Hamas and to prevent an inter-Palestinian reconciliation, which would strengthen the Palestinians and make them more capable of resisting inexorable Israeli pressure.”

MR - “Israel has been on high alert since Hamas and Fatah signed a reconciliation agreement in late April, and particularly since a new PA government was formed with the endorsement of both Fatah and Hamas thereafter. Its primary goal is to ensure that the Palestinians remain divided and its current campaign should be seen above all as an attempt to sabotage the reconciliation agreement

and initiatives to move it further forward.”

NE - “Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is attacking Gaza in response to domestic and international political considerations that have nothing to do with any threat posed by Hamas. Right before the start of this latest assault on Gaza, Netanyahu suffered several blows politically: he failed to thwart the start of a US-Iran rapprochement; was unable to stop the establishment of a Palestinian unity government; and was widely blamed for the collapse of the peace talks renewed by US Secretary of State John Kerry last summer. His political standing as well as that of Israel’s had been seriously weakened and by launching an attack on the Gaza Strip, he appears strong to the Israeli public, shifts international attention away from Israel’s responsibility for the failure of negotiations, and puts enormous pressure on the recently formed Palestinian Authority national unity government, which Israel wishes to undermine.”

Q - How do you think the United States and international community should respond to the current situation?

RK - “The international community should stop placing an occupied people and their oppressor on the same level, and should stop equating small inaccurate rockets that have so far killed no Israelis and wounded 13 with the world’s most advanced weaponry, that has so far killed 200 Palestinians, 80% of them civilians according to the UN, and wounded nearly 1200. This is not a war between equals: it is akin to shooting fish in a barrel.”

MR - “In an ideal world, the international community would act to arrest and reverse Israel’s systematic impunity in its dealings with the Palestinian people and ensure Israeli accountability for its actions.” It would also need to address the underlying causes of the current crisis, at least the key shorter-term ones formed by the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip and seek to ensure steps towards normalcy in the Gaza Strip.

“That is very unlikely to happen and for the time being I think we should expect continued complicity in Israeli actions.”

NE - “The current situation is a recurrence of Israel’s bloody attacks on Gaza in the winter of 2008-2009 as well as November 2012. Absent efforts to address the root causes of this conflict, it will be repeated yet again in the near future. The primary issue is that of Israel’s military and colonial rule over the Palestinian population of the occupied territories, including Gaza, which is characterized by a discriminatory apartheid legal regime and brutal repression. When the rockets stop flying and the aerial strikes cease, Palestinians will continue to die a slow and protracted death under the boot of Israel’s occupation. In particular, the population in the Gaza Strip faces a horrific future. By 2020, it is predicated that Gaza’s one source of clean water will be unusable and the World Health Organization says the 150-square mile Strip will be unlivable. Strong measures are required to hold Israel to account, aimed at ending the occupation and Israel’s apartheid regime through international legal institutions like the International Criminal Court, arms embargoes, and continued grassroots efforts by the Palestinian-led global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement.”

Q - How do you think Palestinian leaders should respond to the current situation?

RK - “They should re-establish the unity of the Palestinian national movement on the basis of an agreed new strategy for confronting Israel’s control over the entirety of Palestine, they should pronounce that the Oslo accords, which in 21 years have failed to bring about an end to Israeli occupation and colonization, are null and void, and they should insist on a truly honest broker as a mediator rather than the United States, which is totally biased in favor of the aggressor and

occupier, Israel.”

MR - “At the very least one would have expected Mahmoud Abbas to urgently travel to the Gaza Strip and engage in efforts to lead the response to end this assault. Instead he has been sitting in Ramallah with his main concern that Hamas emerges weakened rather than strengthened from this crisis. It’s an abject failure of leadership.” More broadly Palestinians need to undertake concrete steps to ensure national unity, first and foremost through overcoming the schism that has been with us since 2007 and agreement on a common strategy and national program. **NE** - “Palestinian leaders need to launch a full court political offensive against Israel’s violations of international law, systematic human rights abuses, and structural violence, employing all available legal, diplomatic and grassroots means. Multilateral institutions such the International Criminal Court should be engaged to hold Israel to account for war crimes such as the disproportionate use of force and settlement construction, and Palestinian leaders should fully embrace the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement.”

P.S.

* July 15, 2014 IMEU:

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