



Written by on January 9, 2009

The Gaza Crisis Continues

As the resolution was passed, several Arab nations were negotiating to advance a rival proposal initiated by Britain and supported by the United States and France. The AP reported that the alternate resolution would demand an end to all military activity in Gaza, and would also mention Hamas by name and call for an international force to prevent arms smuggling — two key U.S. demands.



A spokesperson in Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's office issued a statement that the Hamas rockets fired at Israel on January 9 "only prove that the U.N.'s decision is not practical and will not be kept in practice by the Palestinian murder organizations."

AP also quoted Osama Hamdan, a Hamas envoy to Lebanon, who told the Al-Arabiya satellite channel that his group "is not interested in [the ceasefire resolution] because it does not meet the demands of the movement."

Speaking on the Al-Jazeera satellite television network, Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said: "This resolution doesn't mean that the war is over. We call on the Palestinian fighters to mobilize and be ready to face the offensive, and we urge the Arab masses to carry on with their angry protests."

On January 8, Israel came under criticism from international quarters as the UN Relief and Works Agency suspended its food aid deliveries to Gaza after reporting that one of its drivers, Bassem Quta, had been killed during an Israeli attack on its delivery convoy near the Kerem Shalom border crossing. The truck driven by Quta was marked with the UN flag and insignia.

Andrew Whitley, the UNRWA head, said food aid will resume when Israel can guarantee safe passage for convoys, the *New York Times* reported. The Shuhaiber trucking company refused to continue operations after the border incident and after two of its trucks were hit on January 5 in Gaza.

"We've been coordinating with [Israeli forces] and yet our staff continue to be hit and killed," UN spokesman, Chris Gunness, was quoted by AP. The Israeli army said it was investigating the incident.

Israel had been suspending military activities for three hours a day to allow for deliveries of food and medical supplies and to allow treatment and evacuation of the wounded. Also on January 8, the International Committee of the Red Cross issued a statement, saying that it believed "the Israeli military failed to meet its obligation under international humanitarian law to care for and evacuate the wounded."

That same day, in comments reported in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, Cardinal Renato Martino, president of the Vatican's Council for Justice and Peace, defended comments he had made in a January 6 online interview in which he had compared the Gaza Strip to "a concentration camp." Cardinal Martino, while ceding that Hamas rockets fired into Israel were "certainly not sugared almonds," called



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the situation in Gaza "horrific" and said conditions there went "against human dignity."

AP reported that the Israeli offensive has reduced rocket fire from Hamas, but not stopped it. Several attacks were reported on January 8, including one strike that damaged a school and sports center in the southern Israeli city of Ashkelon.

On January 8, the U.S. Senate, in a voice vote, agreed to the non-binding resolution cosponsored by Democratic and Republican party leaders expressing strong support for Israel's battle against the Hamas militants in Gaza, and urging a ceasefire that would prevent Hamas from launching any more rockets into Israel.

The resolution encourages President Bush "to work actively to support a durable, enforceable and sustainable ceasefire in Gaza as soon as possible that prevents Hamas from retaining or rebuilding the capability to launch rockets or mortars against Israel."

"When we pass this resolution, the United States Senate will strengthen our historic bond with the state of Israel, by reaffirming Israel's inalienable right to defend against attacks from Gaza, as well as our support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process," Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Nevada Democrat, was quoted by Reuters news service as saying before the vote.

Reid told the press that Israel was determined to stop Hamas rocket fire into its southern towns and said: "I ask any of my colleagues to imagine that happening here in the United States. Rockets and mortars coming from Toronto in Canada, into Buffalo New York. How would we as a country react?"

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a cosponsor of the resolution, said before the vote: "The Israelis ... are responding exactly the same way we would."

["Conditioning Gaza: preparing to deploy international forces in Palestine?"](#) an opinion piece in the Lebanon-based *Daily Star* newspaper for January 6 by independent writer Hani Asfour, presented the supposition that "the Israeli attack on Gaza is likely timed to coincide with the February elections in Israel and this month's inauguration of President-elect Barack Obama in anticipation of launching a comprehensive Middle East peace plan."

Asfour cites a proposal presented by Martin Indyk, the former U.S. ambassador to Israel under presidents Bill Clinton and George Bush, in a 2003 article, "A Trusteeship for Palestine?" in *Foreign Affairs* (the journal of the Council on Foreign Relations). Indyk is a CFR member.

Asfour quoted a more recent statement from Indyk, in which the former ambassador proposes: "Ultimately, if the ineffectual Qassam rockets that continue to fall on Israeli towns and kibbutzim become more deadly, that job [dismantling Hamas in Gaza] may well have to be done by the Israeli Defense Forces. But once the job is accomplished, with high casualties on both sides, Israel will not want to stay one minute more than necessary. That is when an international force will be essential to help Abbas, as the democratically elected president of the Palestinian Authority, retake control there."

Also cited in the Asfour article is a policy paper Indyk recently co-published with CFR President Richard Haass, entitled "Beyond Iraq: A New US Strategy for the Middle East." The paper proposed a new strategy for President-elect Barack Obama: "The new president should lay the groundwork for deploying international forces as part of a final-status agreement, to partner with the Palestinian forces until they can police their own territory."

According to Asfour, Indyk's proposals should not be dismissed lightly, as he is a diplomatic heavyweight. He is regarded as one of Secretary of State-designate Hillary Clinton's key advisers on the



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Middle East, and the *New York Times* has reported that Indyk is slated to be Clinton's special envoy to the Middle East.

The [article](#) is packed with insight too extensive to be given justice here and is well worth reading in its entirety.

Photo: AP Images



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