

## PRECARIOUS CEASE-FIRE IN GAZA

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Calm reigns in Gaza since the entry into force of a cease-fire on the evening of November 21, after an intense diplomatic campaign marked by, among other things, a decisive visit by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Israel and Egypt. A terrestrial military intervention of large scale however seemed inevitable after the attack on the same day against a bus in the center of Tel Aviv.

By carrying out the conflict in the nerve centre of the Jewish State and by breaking the taboo of the inviolability of Tel Aviv, the terrorists sought to produce a major psychological and political impact. The announcement of the attack was also welcomed by demonstrations of joy in the streets of Gaza and by the enthusiasm of Hamas' leadership. "Palestinian factions will employ all means to protect the Palestinian people in the absence of global efforts to halt Israeli aggression." said Abu Zuhri, a spokesman for the terrorist movement.

To date, it is impossible to predict the viability of the cease-fire. In a week of the conflict, Tsahal had already begun to methodically destroy all terrorist installations in Gaza. Several hundred sites have been targeted by air raids or maritime bombardments: official Hamas buildings, training bases of the military wing of the group (the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigade), weapons caches and especially dozens of rocket launchers. From a human point of view, many Palestinian civilians, but also dozens of Islamist terrorists, were killed in military operations. On the Israeli side, three civilians and two soldiers were killed and dozens more were wounded across the country within the seven days of the crisis. Palestinian groups have indeed fired hundreds of rockets against Israel, where more than seventy-five thousand reservists were mobilized to face the possibility of a ground offensive in the Gaza Strip.

### **Iran claims support for Palestinian terrorists**

As we noted in our previous briefing, the situation in the coastal strip would not have reached this critical level without the intervention of malicious actors outside the Israeli-Palestinian relations. A few hours after the attack in Tel Aviv, the Chairman of the Majlis of Iran (parliament), Ali Larijani, boasted of the determining role of the Islamic Republic with Palestinian fighters. "We are honoured that our help has material and military aspects and these Arab countries that sit and hold meetings should know that the nation of Palestine does not need words or meetings. Our message is that if Arab countries want to help the nation of Palestine they should give

military assistance.” he said in a statement quoted on the official website of the Majlis, ICANA.ir. In the wake of the Iranian statement, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigade (the military wing of Hamas) unambiguously claimed the attack on their Twitter account.

There is no concrete evidence to establish with certainty Iranian responsibility for the explosion in Tel Aviv, however the hypothesis needs to be considered. It is vitally important for Tehran to discuss the strategy of tension with Israel and thwart the efforts of Egypt’s Mohammed Morsi to assert its role as a regional power and influence the process of the cease-fire between Israel and Hamas. Iran hopes to return to the front of the Arab world by providing Fajr 5 missiles of long range to Palestinian rebels and by playing on the divisions between the military wing and the political leadership of Hamas. Note also that the latter began to distance itself from Tehran because of solidarity with the Muslim Brotherhood which is engaged in a thankless struggle in Syria.

### **Is the truce viable?**

In a certain way, the triggering of a ground offensive or intensification of air strikes on Gaza would therefore have served the interests of Tehran, which is mired to the side of President Bashar al-Assad in the terrible Syrian civil war. Such an option would, however, have to be endorsed by the international community. Until the end, Barack Obama stated his full support for the right to self-defense of Israel, hammering in the fact that rockets against southern Israel were responsible for the crisis. Maintaining the pressure would also have been in accordance with the Israeli military doctrine, which prescribes never yield to force, and instead always show that the army’s response is greater than that of the adversary, whatever its nature. It should still be noted that with less than two months until the legislative elections of January 22nd 2013, the Israeli government is more committed than ever its credibility to stop the rockets.

According to a survey released on Friday 22 November by the newspaper Maariv, Israel's population remains divided and sceptical about the viability of the cease-fire. While accepting the interruption of military operations, Benjamin Netanyahu was clear in affirming its determination to take any necessary actions in case of new fire or new terrorist provocations. The "return to normal" remains precarious, as evidenced by the fire-fight in which a Palestinian died on Friday morning near Khan Younis.

The attitude of Egypt and its ability to stop arms trafficking via the Sinai Peninsula will be a determining factor in the search for a long-term outcome of this conflict. In addition, the observance of the truce continues to depend on the power struggle being waged by the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo and Tehran's mullahs through the various Palestinian factions. It finally comes to the Hamas leadership, including Ismaïl Haniyeh’s government, to demonstrate its ability to impose a cease-fire in its military wing and other jihadist organizations. If the truce was greeted with joy by the people of Gaza, a further deterioration of the situation is not excluded in the coming days, with its inevitable civilian casualties and material destruction on both sides.