

Hamas 'Prepares for Imminent War' With Israel in Gaza

Hamas sees '95 percent' chance of confrontation with Israel, Al Hayat reports, but sources say Hamas is attempting to ratchet up debate about the humanitarian crisis in the Strip



A Palestinian demonstrator prepares to hurl a burning tire at Israeli troops during clashes near the border with Israel in the southern Gaza Strip February 2, 2018. \ IBRAHEEM ABU MUSTAFA/ REUTERS

- PLO to demand UN Security Council recognize Palestine within 1967 borders
- Israeli threats to strike Lebanon missile factory not intended to provoke war, but to distance it
- For second night in a row, Israeli air force attacks Hamas targets in Gaza in response to rocket fire

The Gaza strip is preparing for confrontation with Israel within the next few days, the London-based Arabic daily Al Hayat reported on Sunday. According to the report, Palestinian factions, Hamas being chief among them, assess the chances of war with Israel "at 95 percent" and assume it could erupt within hours or days.

Sources that have met with Yahya Sinwar, Hamas' political leader in Gaza, say that Palestinian factions believe that Israel will use a training exercise planned on the southern front to open a military operation against Hamas. The report further said that the military wing of Hamas has declared a state of high alert, evacuating sites and headquarters and even deploying road blocks accross the Strip.

Political and human rights activists in Gaza told Haaretz that the atmosphere in the Strip is very grim in light of the humanitarian crisis, some of which involves the non-implementation of the reconciliation agreement between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority and mutual

recriminations between the PA and Hamas over the freeze in talks.

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Still, it seems the report of an impending military clash within days is exaggerated, and is part of an attempt by Hamas to ratchet up international discussion over the severe humanitarian situation in the Strip and the lack of progress toward reconciliation. It is widely believed that Israel will not initiate war with Hamas without real escalation in the south, such as a surge in rocket fire at southern communities.

In terms of the wider region, Egypt is not interested in an escalation, considering its continued operations against ISIS in Sinai and its upcoming presidential elections next week.

Political and human rights activists that spoke with Haaretz say that Hamas launching a campaign against Israel remains unlikely at this point.

A senior delegation of Fatah officials is set to visit the Gaza Strip this week, including members of the movement's Central Committee. They are to hold meetings with the leadership of Hamas and the other factions. The PA says Hamas has not yet given up control over security or tax collection, while Hamas accuses the PA of shirking its responsibility toward the Gaza Strip. Hamas says that while Hamas has given up administration to the Mahmoud Abbas government, Abbas has not yet instructed that sanctions it imposed about a year ago be lifted.

Palestinian sources told Al-Hayat that Abbas has presented an alternative plan to that of U.S. President Donald Trump, which calls for a phased recognition of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with possible exchanges of territory that will allow Israel to annex the large settlements. According to the report, Abbas has conditioned his agreement to phased recognition to agreement on borders, but the White House rejected that proposal and said its plan would be presented for implementation, not negotiation.

This report has not been confirmed by officials in the PA, and talks are continuing with international officials, particularly Russia, to move ahead on a UN Security Council resolution.

Source: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/report-hamas-prepares-for-imminent-war-with-israel-in-gaza-1.5787614>

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