

Gaza Strip: Is A Solution Near?

A Diplomatic Push For Israel-Hamas Cease-Fire Gains Momentum

BY RAVI NESSMAN
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Associated Press

JERUSALEM — A diplomatic push to end Israel's nearly weeklong offensive in the Gaza Strip gained momentum Tuesday, with Egypt's president predicting that airstrikes would soon end, the U.S. secretary of state racing to the region and Israel's prime minister saying his country would be a "willing partner" to a cease-fire with the Islamic militant group Hamas.

As international diplomats worked to cement a deal, senior Hamas officials said some sticking points remained even as relentless airstrikes and rocket attacks between the two sides continued. The Israeli death toll rose to five with the deaths Tuesday of an Israeli soldier and a civilian contractor. More than 130 Palestinians have been killed.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton held a late-night meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after rushing to the region from Cambodia, where she had accompanied President Barack Obama on a visit.

"The goal must be a durable outcome that promotes regional stability and advances the security and legitimate aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians alike," she said at a news conference with Netanyahu.

Netanyahu said Israel would welcome a diplomatic solution to the crisis but threatened further military activity, saying he was ready to take "whatever action" is necessary.

Top Hamas officials in Cairo, where cease-fire talks were being held, said no deal had been reached as of late Tuesday.

"Most likely the deal will be

struck tomorrow. Israel has not responded to some demands which delayed the deal," Hamas official Izzat Rishq said.

Israeli officials said only that "intensive efforts" were under way to end the fighting. Israeli media quoted Defense Minister Ehud Barak as telling a closed meeting that Israel wanted a 24-hour test period of no rocket fire to see if Hamas could enforce a truce.

In what appeared to be a last-minute burst of heavy fire, Israeli tanks and gunboats shelled targets late Tuesday, and an airstrike killed two brothers riding on a motorcycle. The men weren't identified.

Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, perhaps the most important interlocutor between Hamas, which rules the Palestinian territory, and the Israelis, said the negotiations between the two sides would yield "positive results" during the coming hours.

Israel demands an end to rocket fire from Gaza and a halt to weapons smuggling into Gaza through tunnels under the border with Egypt. It also wants international guarantees that Hamas will not rearm or use Egypt's Sinai region, which abuts both Gaza and southern Israel, to attack Israelis.

Hamas wants Israel to halt all attacks on Gaza and lift tight restrictions on trade and movement in and out of the territory that have been in place since Hamas seized Gaza by force in 2007. Israel has rejected such demands in the past.

In Brussels, a senior official of the European Union's foreign service said a cease-fire would include an end of Israeli airstrikes and targeted killings in Gaza, the opening of Gaza crossing points and an end to rocket attacks on Israel. The official spoke

Israel-Gaza conflict

Nov. 10 Border clash wounds four Israeli soldiers; Gaza militants and Israel exchange rocket and shell fire

Nov. 11-12 Sporadic fire from Gaza into southern Israel wounds eight people; shelling and air raids by Israeli forces kill seven Palestinians, including four civilians

Nov. 13 Israel and Hamas send message via Egypt indicating interest in a truce

Nov. 14 Israeli missile strike kills Hamas' military commander and air raids and artillery barrages are directed across Gaza, as Palestinian officials pledge to end rocket attacks against Israel; Hamas and other groups fire at least four rockets at the southern city of Beersheba

Nov. 15 Two rockets fired at Tel Aviv in the first attack on Israel's commercial capital in two decades; rocket kills three Israelis north of the Gaza Strip; Israeli warplanes bomb targets in and around Gaza City, raising the Palestinian death toll to 16

Nov. 16 Dozens of rockets are fired into Israel, some targeting Tel Aviv and Jerusalem; officially in Gaza say 22 Palestinians have died in air attacks; Israel announces the call-up of reserves

Nov. 17 Israeli aircraft bomb Hamas government building in Gaza

Nov. 18 Israeli aerial and naval attacks hit militant targets in Gaza; in the latest cycle of violence, more than 500 rockets have been fired into Israel

Nov. 19 Israel bombs dozens of targets in Gaza, saying that while it is prepared to send in troops, it prefers a diplomatic solution; militants fire 135 rockets at southern Israel, causing no casualties; since last week, 107 Palestinians, more than half civilians and three Israelis have been killed

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Source: Reuters, Tribune Newspapers reporting
Graphic: Chicago Tribune



on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

Violence raged on as the talks continued. An airstrike late Tuesday killed two journalists who work for the Hamas TV station, Al-Aqsa, according to a statement from the

channel. The men were in a car hit by an airstrike, Gaza health official Ashraf al-Kidra said. Israel claims that many Hamas journalists are involved in militant activities. Earlier this week it targeted the station's offices, saying it served as a Hamas communications post.

Girl, 13, Fatally Shot On Miami-Area School Bus

BY KELLI KENNEDY
AND SUZETTE LABOY
Associated Press

MIAMI — A 13-year-old girl was shot to death in front of her sister and several other students while riding the bus to a charter school Tuesday, Miami-Dade police said.

A male student was in custody but authorities did not release his name or age and said they are still interviewing him. A gun was also recovered at the scene in Homestead, south of Miami, but authorities didn't say where or how many times the victim was shot.

"We still don't know what the motive may have been," said police spokesman Det. Alvaro Zabaleta.

Eight other children, including the victim's 7-year-old sister, were on the bus but were not harmed. Authorities took the children and the bus driver to a police station to be interviewed.

The victim, who has not been identified, attended charter middle school Palm Glades Preparatory Academy. The victim's sister went to nearby Summerville Advantage Academy.



GASTON DE CARDENAS/EL NUEVO HERALD/MCT
Police investigators stand outside a school bus after a student shot and killed a 13-year-old girl in front of her younger sister and seven other children on a school bus Tuesday morning in Homestead, Florida.

Concerned parents gathered at the shooting site, which was cordoned off by crime scene tape as authorities combed the bus for evidence and gathered children's backpacks and belongings. The shooting occurred about seven minutes away from the school.

Fabian Otero said he was relieved his son Christian, an eighth-grader at Palm Glades,

rode to school with his wife. He said he and his wife have been shaken by the killing and are going to discuss enrolling their son in a different school or possibly homeschooling him.

"I was stunned! I was stunned!" he said. "That hits really close to home. That's just scary."

About a dozen parents picked

up their children early, said Lynn Norman-Teck, a spokeswoman for Florida Consortium of Public Charter School. Only a throng of TV news crews camped outside signaled the violence from earlier in the morning.

Many of the students had not heard about the shooting and the school did not make an announcement before school was dismissed, but word started to trickle out as they walked outside to waiting school buses.

Thirteen-year-old Eric Carillo said he was in the same class as the victim a few years ago.

"She was a good girl. She was fun," the 13-year-old said.

Sarah Baer said she wouldn't let her daughter walk home from school because there are rough neighborhoods a few blocks away.

"I always take my daughter to and from school. This is so heart-breaking especially right before Thanksgiving," she said.

The school bus was not equipped with video surveillance equipment.

A phone message left for the private school bus company was not immediately returned.

Syrian Rebels Seize Military Base, Arms Trove

BY BEN HUBBARD
Associated Press

BASE OF THE 46TH REGIMENT, Syria — After a nearly two-month siege, Syrian rebels overwhelmed a large military base in the north of the country and made off with tanks, armored vehicles and truckloads of munitions that rebel leaders say will give them a boost in the fight against President Bashar Assad's army.

The rebel capture of the base of the Syrian army's 46th Regiment is a sharp blow to the government's efforts to roll back rebels gains and shows a rising level of organization among opposition forces.

More important than the base's fall, however, are the weapons the rebels found inside.

At a rebel base where the much of the haul was taken after the weekend victory, rebel fighters unloaded half a dozen large trucks piled high with green boxes full of mortars, artillery shells, rockets and rifles taken from the base. Parked nearby were five tanks, two armored vehicles, two rocket launchers and two heavy-caliber artillery cannons.

Around 20 Syrian soldiers captured in the battle were put to work carrying munitions boxes, barefoot and stripped to the waist. Rebels refused to let reporters talk to them or see where they were being held.

"There has never been a battle before with this much booty," said Gen. Ahmad al-Faj of the rebels Joint Command, a grouping of rebel brigades that was involved in the siege. Speaking on Monday at the rebel base, set up in a former customs office at Syria's Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey, he said the haul would be distrib-

uted among the brigades. For months, Syria's rebels have gradually been destroying government checkpoints and taking over towns in the northern provinces of Idlib and Aleppo along the Turkish border.

Rebel fighters say that weapons seized in such battles have been essential to their transformation from ragtag brigades into forces capable of challenging Assad's professional army. Cross-border arms smuggling from Turkey and Iraq has also played a role, although the most common complaint among rebel fighters is that they lack ammunition and heavy weapons, munitions and anti-aircraft weapons to fight Assad's air force.

It is unclear how many government bases the rebels have overrun during the 20-month conflict, mostly because they rarely try to hold captured facilities. Staying in the captured bases would make them sitting ducks for regime airstrikes.

"Their strategy is to hit and run," said Elias Hanna, a retired Lebanese army general and Beirut-based strategic analyst. "They're trying to hurt the regime where it hurts by bisecting and compartmentalizing Syria in order to dilute the regime's power."

The 46th Regiment was a major pillar of the government's force near the northern city of Aleppo, Syria's economic hub, and its fall cuts a major supply line to the regime's army, Hanna said. Government forces have been battling rebels for months over control of Aleppo.

"It's a tactical turning point that may lead to a strategic shift," he said.

At the 46th Regiment's base,

about 25 kilometers (15 miles) west of Aleppo, the main three-story command building showed signs of the battle — its walls punctured apparently from rebel rocket attacks. The smaller barracks buildings scattered around the compound, about 2.6 square kilometers (1 square mile) in size, had been looted, with mattresses overturned. A number of buildings had been torched.

Reporters from The Associated Press who visited the base late Monday saw no trace of the government troops who had been defending it — other than the dead bodies of seven soldiers.

Two of them, in camouflage uni-

forms, lay outside the command building. One of them was missing his head, apparently blown off in an explosion.

The rest were in a nearby clinic. Four dead soldiers were on stretchers set on the floor, one with a large gash in his arm, another with what appeared to be a large shrapnel hole in the back of his head. The last lay on a gurney in another room, his arms and legs bandaged, a bullet hole in his cheek and a splatter of blood on the wall and ceiling behind him as if he had been shot where he lay.

It could not be determined how or when the soldiers had been killed.

Church of England Won't OK Female Bishops

LONDON (AP) — The Church of England's governing body blocked a move Tuesday to permit women to serve as bishops in a vote so close it failed to settle the question of female leadership and likely condemned the institution to years more debate on the issue.

The General Synod's daylong debate ended with the rejection of a compromise that was intended to unify the faithful despite differing views on whether women should be allowed in the hierarchy. But backers failed to gain the necessary majority by six votes.

"There is no victory in the coming days," said Rev. Angus MacLeay. "It is a train crash."

The defeat was a setback for Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, who retires at the end of December, and his successor, Bishop Justin Welby. Both had strongly endorsed a proposed compromise that would have respected the decision of those who objected to the ordination of women bishops.

Instead of ending decades of debate on the issue in the church, the narrow defeat opens the church, which has around 80 million members worldwide, to further years of internal discussions. It also forms an uncomfortable backdrop to the start of Welby's leadership. He is due to be enthroned in March.

History Repeats Itself In Fighting In Congo

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — History is repeating itself yet again in eastern Congo. Rebels supported by Rwanda are on the march. Civilians are fleeing. And higher powers appear to be taking sides.

Congo and Rwanda have been at this stage before. First in 1996, then in 1998. Also in 2004 and 2008. The first two conflicts had their roots in Rwanda's 1994 genocide, but now the fighting is mostly over mineral wealth — including minerals used in the world's smart phones and laptops.

Congo is rich in diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt and tungsten. The provincial capital of Goma, which lies on the Rwandan border and which fell to the M23 rebel group on Tuesday, is a major processing point for minerals coming out of eastern Congo.

Rwanda insists it is not aiding the M23 rebels, though a U.N. group of experts report written this year said both Rwanda and Uganda were doing exactly that.

Many M23 commanders were formerly with the rebel group known as CNDP, which carried out the same military tactics, with Rwanda's backing, in 2007-08, experts say.

Courting Asia, Obama Finds World Intrudes

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — For all the attention wrenched elsewhere in recent days — on new violence in the Middle East, the "fiscal cliff" back home — President Barack Obama's speedy trip to Southeast Asia achieved a major goal: It was clearly seen in the region as a validation of Asia's strategic importance as the U.S. refocuses its foreign policy to counter China's clout.

It wasn't easy. Even in a Buddhist monastery in Thailand, Obama could not escape the budget woes waiting for him back home. And his historic visit to Myanmar was all but drowned out by the rocket fire and missile strikes between Israel and Gaza. He went half a world away to promote U.S.-style democracy but couldn't leave his troubles behind.

Even as Obama traipsed in stocking feet through a temple in the heart of Bangkok, a monk wished him luck negotiating the deficit-reduction challenge awaiting him in Washington. And the bloodshed in the Middle East, exploding as he toured Southeast Asia for three days, illustrated the limits of U.S. foreign policy even as he tried to display its influence and reach.

But he came away from his trip to this corner of the world — a place once defined by a cloistered and shunned nation like Myanmar or by Khmer Rouge "killing fields" or by Chinese power — with at least the hope that the example of U.S. democracy can effect change and strengthen America's hand.

Woman Sentenced In Home Day Care Fire

HOUSTON (AP) — It had been Jessica Tata's dream to run a day care.

She was soon in over her head, caring for too many kids and taking chances by leaving them alone to run errands. The young woman's actions ultimately proved fatal: Four children died and three others were injured when a fire broke out at her home day care after she had left them alone to go shopping at a nearby Target.

On Tuesday, jurors sentenced the 24-year-old woman to 80 years in prison for the death of one of the children, 16-month-old Elias Castillo. She still faces charges related to the rest of the children.

"Nobody wins in this situation," Elias' great-grandmother, Patty Sparks, said after the sentence was announced. "My heart goes out to the Tata family and those precious mothers and fathers who lost their babies."

Tata, who was only a few years removed from her teens when she started her day care, worked alone most of the time. Investigators said the February 2011 blaze happened when a pan of oil she had left cooking on the stove ignited while she was out shopping.

Scandal Puts Attention On U.S. Command

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — For former CIA director David Petraeus, it was a one-year stint as top U.S. commander in Afghanistan. His replacement is scheduled to leave next year after 18 months in the job.

And now the sex scandal that draws them together — Petraeus' career toppled and Marine Gen. John Allen's possibly on hold — also has placed greater attention to the quick turnover of American battlefield chiefs in the 11-year war.

Nearly two dozen generals have commanded troops from the United States and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, since the American invasion in late 2001 — with five U.S. generals running both commands in the past five years alone.

There is no firm evidence the Pentagon's revolving door in Afghanistan has posed any significant obstacles for U.S. troops, but some military analysts suggest the frequent changes at the top create potential breaks in continuity in the critical cooperation with the Afghan political leadership and security officials.

"The learning curve is pretty steep," said retired Lt. Gen. David Barno, who commanded U.S. forces in Afghanistan in 2003 and 2004. "One of the critical coins of the realm in being effective in this kind of environment is relationships among your allies, relationships with the host nation, and with the Afghans."

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