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09.08.21

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Gaza rulers Hamas wage perilous campaign of harassing Israel

Islamist armed group sends crowds to engage in low-intensity terror acts against Israeli troops along the border, hoping to steer clear of a full-blown conflict, but analysts warn it is a dangerous game

AFP| Published: 09.08.21, 16:21

As night falls on the Gaza Strip, Palestinian protesters approach the border fence with Israel, carrying homemade stun grenades and Molotov cocktails to hurl toward Israeli soldiers.

The aim of these so-called disruption operations, sponsored by the Islamist armed group Hamas that rules Gaza, is to harass the Israeli border forces — but analysts warn it is a dangerous game.

One of the protesters, 19-year-old Farid, said he studies engineering at Gaza University by day, and then joins the night-time rallies demanding an end to the 15-year-old Israeli blockade.

The young man had brought a homemade stun grenade, which he hurled toward the border fence, heavily guarded by the Israeli army, about 200 meters (219 yards) away. A flash of light burst through the darkness, followed by a blast that, for a brief moment, drowned out the martial music playing from a huge portable sound system. "We'll drive them crazy," Farid said enthusiastically.

"As long as we can't sleep in safety, we won't allow the soldiers, the occupation, to sleep!"

Street vendors nearby sold cold drinks, and buses waited to take the protesters back to Gaza City at the end of the evening.

All this could have created an almost festival-like atmosphere — were it not for the regular casualties that result from these protests.

Three Palestinians — including a member of the armed wing of Hamas — and an Israeli sniper have lost their lives since mid-August in these demonstrations.

The Israeli army at times fires live rounds. It also maneuvers drones overhead which from time to time drop tear gas grenades, forcing the crowds to scatter.

The recent deaths are a reminder of the fragility of the truce between Israel and Hamas, which fought their last full-scale war in May, the fourth since 2008.

In that bloody escalation, Israeli strikes on Gaza killed 260 Palestinians, including fighters, between May 10 to 21, according to local authorities.

In Israel, rocket fire from the Palestinian territory killed 13 people, including a soldier, according to the police and army.

Since the Egypt-brokered ceasefire, Hamas has fired only one rocket, instead re-focusing on its disruption operations.

These include activists sending incendiary balloons floating through the sky and into Israel, where they start fires in grasslands and on farms.

The Israeli air force often responds with strikes, most recently targeting Hamas infrastructure on Monday night.

The Hamas strategy is one of "limited and carefully calculated" escalation, said Mukhaimer Abu Saada, a political science professor at Al-Azhar University in Gaza.

The aim is to protest Israeli restrictions on the impoverished enclave of two million people, but without spiraling into another full-scale conflict.

Since the last war, Israel has eased restrictions on the entry of goods into Gaza, widened the permitted fishing zone and approved a new system for distributing Qatari aid via the UN, which Doha has said would begin soon.

Hamas, which dismisses these steps as nowhere near enough, has resumed its campaign to "irritate" Israel while avoiding "an open armed confrontation", said Mukhaimer Abu Saada, who labeled it a risky strategy.

"Hamas prefers to use disruption units along the fence because the Israeli deterrence towards Hamas works in a way," said researcher Kobi Michael, a former Israeli strategic affairs ministry official in charge of Palestinian issues.

"They understand that if they launch rockets, the probability that the Israeli retaliation will be much more rapid and aggressive is higher."

For more than a year from March 2018, every Friday demonstrators would amass along the fence, demanding an end to the blockade and the "right of return" for Palestinians driven into exile when Israel was created in 1948.

About 310 Palestinians were killed by Israeli soldiers' fire, and eight Israelis also died during that period.

Hamas — emboldened by what it has presented as a "victory" after the latest war in May — now "feel they are able to provoke Israel... but they might be wrong," said Michael. Hamas thinks they can "control the level of violence", he said, adding that this might be "a miscalculation because Israel is losing its patience.

"Israel will have no problem retaliating very aggressively if Hamas drags it into another campaign."

09.07.21

Israel strikes Gaza in response to arson balloons distracting prison escape

09.07.21

Israeli military strikes Gaza in response to incendiary balloons

Among targets hit by the IDF is a Hamas military base inside a cement factory in Khan Yunis in the southern part of the Gaza Strip, where materials used to build terror tunnels are made, located close to civilian infrastructure and mosques

Yoav Zitun, Elinor Levy | Updated: 09.07.21, 09:08

The IDF struck Hamas targets in Gaza late on Monday night in response to incendiary devices launched from the Strip into Israeli territory, the army said.

The military said two strikes were carried out, targeting a rocket manufacturing facility and a Hamas military installation in the Khan Yunis area in the southern Gaza Strip, where a concrete factory was used in the construction of underground terror tunnels.

According to the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, the factory is located near civilian areas that include mosques, water infrastructure facilities and cultural centers, proving the army's claims the terror group that rules Gaza has embedded its military resources among a civilian population.

In a statement, the military said that any "terror attempt," will be met by a military response.

"The IDF holds the Hamas terror group responsible for all actions taken from inside the Gaza Strip," the IDF said.

On Monday, hundreds of supporters of Islamic Jihad rallied in Gaza, while the militant group sent incendiary balloons across the frontier in support of six Palestinian prisoners who had tunneled out of one of the most secure Israeli prisons overnight.

Three separate fires were ignited on Monday in fields near the border that were attributed to incendiary devices launched from Gaza towards Israel.

The **escape from Gilboa Prison** was the biggest prison break of its kind in decades. Israel launched a massive manhunt in the country's north and the West Bank. The search continued on Tuesday.

The escape marks an embarrassing security breach just ahead of the Jewish New Year, when Israelis flock to the north to enjoy beaches, campsites and the Sea of Galilee. The **prisoners** appear to **have gone into hiding** and there was no indication Israeli authorities view them as an immediate threat.

Palestinians consider prisoners held by Israel to be heroes of their national cause, and many celebrated the escape on social media. Efforts to capture the escapees will likely draw attention to the Palestinian Authority's security coordination with Israel, which is deeply unpopular among Palestinians. There was no immediate comment from the PA, but President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party praised the escape.

On Saturday, Palestinians launched dozens of balloons carrying pictures of Palestinians they said had been victims of Israeli gunfire and those of high-ranking members of the Gaza factions, but with no incendiary devices attached to them.

The balloons also carried with them messages warning Israelis to "prepare for hell," in broken Hebrew.

The IDF last struck Gaza on Sunday one week ago. Those raids came several hours after hundreds of Hamas-backed activists protested along the Israeli border, throwing explosive devices at IDF forces who responded with live fire.

An activist launching balloons said last week, that the purpose of the action was to impress upon Israel that if the siege on Gaza continues, the communities along the border will be targeted by the incendiary devices.

"We will not accept the blackmail by Israel that withholds humanitarian assistance from Gaza," the activist said.

**09.06.21**

**Qatar to resume Gaza funding with Abbas & Hamas involving UN escort**

**09.06.21**

**Qatar plans to resume Gaza funding with new method involving Abbas, U.N.**

Gulf state's aid envoy says stipends for civil servants and poor families would resume in coming days, having been suspended since May; adds **Hamas** agreed to new **payment mechanism** involving PA's Abbas

Reuters| Published: **09.06.21**, 16:13

**Qatar** will soon resume **funding** for civil servants and poor families in the Gaza Strip under a new mechanism **involving** the Western-backed Palestinian Authority and the **United Nations**, the Gulf state's aid envoy said on Monday.

Doha has underwritten Gaza rebuilding and infrastructure projects since the 2014 war between the Palestinian enclave's Islamist Hamas rulers and Israel, but another round of fighting in May prompted Israeli and U.S. demands to revise the payouts.

Envoy Mohammed Al-Emadi said after meeting Hamas leaders in Gaza that Qatari stipends for civil servants and poor families, suspended since May, would resume in coming days.

Gas-rich Qatar used to spend \$30 million per month to help operate the enclave's lone power plant and to support needy families and Hamas-hired public servants.

Hamas, blacklisted as a terrorist group in the West, has endorsed a new payment mechanism involving the rival Palestinian Authority (PA) of President Mahmoud Abbas as well as the United Nations, Al-Emadi said in a statement.

He did not elaborate.

Israeli officials had previously said that the PA- and U.N.-led mechanism could involve disbursing the Qatari aid as vouchers rather than cash, as a safeguard against Hamas diverting the money to military needs.

COGAT, the Defense Ministry agency for liaising with the Palestinians, declined comment on the Qatari announcement.

Emadi said the new agreement also entails full opening of border crossings with Gaza, which Israel and neighbouring Egypt keep cordoned off. There was no immediate word on when this might happen.

The hold-up in Qatari payouts had fuelled rancour in aid-dependant Gaza, which in recent days has seen increasingly violent border confrontations with Israel.

Emadi voiced hope that the resumption of payouts and a full border opening "will have a clear and positive impact on improving the living reality in Gaza Strip (and) help all parties emerge from the tense situation".

Qatar and Egypt have both promised funds to help rebuild the Palestinian territory. Having already pumped more than \$1 billion into Gaza projects since 2014, Qatar pledged another \$500 million in late May.

09.05.21

Israel's Rosh Hashanah year 5782 population tops 9.39 million; 6.943 million Jews

09.05.21

Israel's population tops to 9.39 million on eve of Jewish New Year

According to a report published ahead of the Rosh Hashanah by Central Bureau of Statistics, the country's population grew by 146,000 over the past year, and is expected to surpass 10 million by 2024

Ynet ,TPS| Published: 09.05.21, 17:55

Israel's population has topped 9,391,000, according to a report published Sunday ahead of the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah.

The annual report released by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics shows that the country's population is **on course to reach 10 million** by 2024.

According to the CBS, Israel's population grew by 146,000 over the past year, indicating a **1.6% growth**, while the average birthrate stood at **2.9 children per woman** - somewhat lower than in previous years.

The total population appears to be made up of **6.943 million Jews (74 %)**, 1.982 million Arabs – including Muslims and Christians (21%) - and 466,000 residents of other minorities and religions (5%).

Some 172,000 Israeli couples welcomed a new child into the world this year. About **48,000 Israelis passed** away, **7,154** of them **from coronavirus**.

In addition, the Jewish state this year welcomed **20,000 new immigrants** to the Holy Land, despite the country's COVID-related restrictions on departures and arrivals. According to CBS data, 44.8% of Jews in the country define themselves as secular, 20.5% consider themselves marginally observant, 12.5% are partially religious, 11.7% are religious and **10% are ultra-Orthodox**.

The report also shows the life **expectancy** of Israeli men stands at **80.7 years**, while that of **women is at 84.8** - one of the highest in the world.

The most common cause of death in Israel is cancer (25.5%) followed by heart disease (14.5%).

An overwhelming majority, 90.3%, say they were satisfied with life, including 80.6% satisfaction rate among Arabs.

The **two-day holiday of Rosh Hashanah**, the Jewish New Year - **begins on Monday evening** and will mark the beginning of the **Jewish year 5782**.

**09.04.21**

**Israel president Herzog meets Jordanian king after Bennett met July in secret**

**09.04.21**

**Israel president meets Jordanian king to cultivate ties**

Herzog's **visit in Amman** comes at the **invitation of the king** where according to a statement the two men discussed a series of political and economic issues including energy and sustainability; President says he has the utmost respect for Jordanian ruler Associated Press| Updated: **09.04.21**, 23:18

**President Issac Herzog met with the Jordanian king** this past week, in a new sign of improved relations between the two countries, the president's office said Saturday.

At the king's invitation, new President Isaac **Herzog met King Abdullah II** at his palace in the Jordanian capital, Amman, Herzog's office said in a statement. The two discussed a series of political and economic issues including energy and sustainability.

"Jordan is a very important country. I have immense respect for King Abdullah, a great leader, and a highly significant regional actor," Herzog was quoted as saying following the meeting.

Last week's meeting came less than two months after Abdullah II and the Israeli Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, met in secret following years of fraught relations under former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In the week following, Jordan and Israel signed two breakthrough water and trade deals.

In his statement, Herzog spoke of improving regional relations and the success of the so-called Abraham Accords in which Israel last year normalized diplomatic ties with Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates.

On Thursday, King Abdullah II along with the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas attended a trilateral summit held by Egypt's president, Abdel Fattah el-Sissi. The leaders discussed the elusive two-state solution to the conflict with Israel, vowing their commitment for Palestinians to have a right to an independent state.

Israel and Jordan made peace in 1994 and have close security ties. However, diplomatic relations have been strained in recent years over tensions at the Al-Aqsa compound in Jerusalem, and Israel's expansion of Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank.