

Last update - 10:30 04/01/2009

ANALYSIS / International community giving Israel time to weaken Hamas in Gaza

By [Aluf Benn](#)

The international community, headed by the U.S. and Egypt, is giving Israel time to carry out the ground offensive in Gaza, so it will severely damage Hamas' regime. The rationale behind such a move is that a weakened Hamas would improve the chances of achieving a stable agreement in Gaza once the fighting subsides.

And so there is a degree of foot-dragging in the diplomatic efforts to reach a cease-fire. The most visible sign of this was the decision to postpone the United Nations Security Council discussion on Gaza planned for Monday.



France postponed the discussion to Wednesday, to ensure that it would be held after French President Nicolas Sarkozy's visit to the region tomorrow.

During her visit to France on Thursday, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni had requested that the discussion be postponed.

In its efforts to formulate a draft for an agreement with Hamas in the wake of Operation Cast Lead, the designated team of Israeli officials is aiming to bring about the restoration of the cease-fire with Hamas, which expired on December 19, in addition to steps to curb Hamas' arms-smuggling through the border with Egypt.

The officials, all of them from the Prime Minister's Office, the defense establishment and the Foreign Ministry, are not seeking to introduce international enforcement bodies, but rather the introduction of an upgraded border control system on the Egyptian side of the border. The U.S. administration supports such a move, and is expected to assist the Egyptians in stepping up their efforts to control the border.

Currently, Israeli officials are trying to find a work program that would not infringe on Egyptian sovereignty, which is why Israeli diplomats are pessimistic about the prospect of stationing an international force in the Sinai Peninsula.

According to sources in the U.S., President George W. Bush has intercepted an initiative by his secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice and her British counterpart, Secretary of State David Miliband, to formulate a cease-fire draft.

One source said Bush instructed the State Department to refrain from action in the matter. To date, the U.S. has refrained from sending any envoys or delegates to the region. According to officials, the U.S. and Israel are cooperating diplomatically on the issue.

Egypt's unexpected support for Israel in the conflict with Hamas has, according to Israeli diplomats, been a pleasant surprise for Jerusalem.

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