

Hamas Eager to Ramp Up Violence

Hamas is demanding that Israel enable the transfer of Qatari funds into the Gaza Strip and is warning that Israel would be “responsible for the repercussions of postponing or disavowing the ceasefire understandings.”

An Egyptian security delegation is expected to arrive in Gaza in the coming days in an attempt to prevent a deterioration in the security situation along the border with Israel this weekend.

Earlier this week, the “Supreme National Authority for the March of Return and Breaking of the Siege,” the body officially behind the weekly border protests, which the Hamas terror group has been encouraging since last March, called on the Palestinian public to participate extensively in marches near the fence this coming Friday.

Israel and Hamas recently agreed to a short-term, limited and unofficial ceasefire under the terms of which Hamas would scale back its attacks on Israel in return for Israeli permission for the entry of millions of dollars in cash from Qatar to pay for gas and electricity supplies in Gaza.

Qatar pledged \$150 million in aid to Gaza, which was to be paid out in phases during the course of six months, in an attempt to bring some calm to the area.

Israel has already allowed for two such transfers, but halted the third payment which was to have been made this week. It was a punitive step taken by Israel in response to Gazan cross-border attacks, the latest including a rocket fired into Israel and the dispatch of a booby-trapped cluster of balloons from the Gazan side.

There had been relative calm at the Friday border protests over recent months, but during the past two weeks, there has been an increase in the number of demonstrations close to the fence, and last weekend also saw a rise in the number of violent incidents there. Last Friday, some 10,000 Gazans rioted on the border. The IDF said that its forces responded with crowd dispersal measures as well as live ammunition when deemed necessary. Gazan sources reported that six rioters were wounded.

Palestinian sources in Gaza report that Hamas is planning to renew the balloon attacks. Both the so-called kite and tire units are said to have received a new budget to prepare for the next round of violence. Kites and balloons have been used as ways of launching aerial attacks, which have posed an increased challenge to the Israeli security establishment, along with the massive burning of tires.

In addition to the more common forms of damage caused by terror attacks, the fires started by these means of protests have created economic hardships on the Israeli side of the border by severely damaging or even destroying Israeli farms, along with environmental damage. Israeli officials have complained about the lack of an outcry from international environmental groups over this phenomenon. {eo}

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