



SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT

UPDATE REPORT



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Proposed Resolution on Israeli Military Action in Gaza

At press time a Qatar-sponsored draft resolution on the recent Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip is under discussion. It seems Qatar has accepted several amendments proposed in the morning by a wide range of Council members. The Council is currently holding consultations.

The draft has been put in blue and Qatar has requested an early vote. The resolution now commands sufficient numbers for adoption. However, a US veto is still a strong possibility.

Recent Developments

Since last June, when an Israeli soldier was captured in a cross-border raid by Palestinian militants, Israeli forces have made regular incursions into Gaza.

On 1 November, the Israeli army carried out air strikes and encircled the town of Beit Hanoun, initially killing eight Palestinians and wounding sixty others. The operation, aimed at stopping rocket fire into Israel, intensified over the next week, and resulted in the death of more than sixty Palestinians (many of them civilians) and one Israeli soldier.

On 8 November, eighteen Palestinians were killed, mostly women and children. The Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, said a massacre had been committed and demanded intervention by the UN. Israel's Prime Minister acknowledged that the deaths were a result of a technical error and expressed regrets.

The Arab Group, chaired by Qatar, called for an urgent meeting of the Security Council, which took place on 9 November, 45 speakers participated. Angela Kane, the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, spoke on behalf of the Secretary-General reiterating his expression of shock and dismay at the killing of civilians. While condemning Palestinian rocket fire, she also recalled that it was not the first time an Israeli military operation in the occupied Palestinian territory had resulted in a high number of civilian casualties. She welcomed Israel's announcement of its investigation of the incident.

Council members have held several sessions of informal meetings to discuss the draft resolution circulated by Qatar.

The original draft resolution expressed grave concern at the indiscriminate use of force by Israel and condemned in particular the military assaults carried out by Israel in the Gaza Strip, as well as the killing of civilians that took place in Beit Hanoun on 8 November. It also:

- demanded that Israel cease its aggression against the Palestinian civilian population;
- called for an immediate ceasefire;
- called for a UN observer force to supervise the ceasefire and for the establishment of a committee to investigate the Beit Hanoun massacre;
- called upon Israel to abide by its obligations under the Geneva Conventions; and
- called upon the Quartet to take immediate steps to resume peace negotiations.

During experts' consultations, amendments to the resolution were proposed by many Council members in order to have a more balanced text. It seems that most of these proposed amendments were accepted by Qatar and have been incorporated in the final draft.

"Indiscriminate" now reads "disproportionate". "Military assault", "aggression" and "massacre" now read "military operations". Demands now reads "calls upon". The calls for a ceasefire and for the dispatch of a UN observer force were replaced by calls for a halt of violence and for the establishment of a fact-finding mission by the UN Secretary-General. There were also some alterations to the paragraph on the role of the Quartet, introducing a call for the creation of an international mechanism for the protection of civilians, a call upon the parties to take immediate steps to restart peace negotiations and a call upon the Quartet to do its utmost to stabilise the situation. A condemnation of the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel is now included in the preamble and an operative clause now calls for the firing to stop.

Key Issues

The first issue is the timing of the vote on the resolution. Normally a draft resolution must wait 24 hours before it is put to the vote. The second issue is whether Qatar will see value in a stronger majority of support of the resolution. However, to advance that further negotiations would be necessary. And, if the prospects of consensus are slim, Qatar may be willing to proceed to a vote as soon as possible due to the urgency of the matter. A third issue is whether the 24 hour rule for the vote on a resolution put in blue would be waived as a courtesy to the sponsors. The position of Council members on this is unclear.

A further issue, especially if there is a veto, is the possibility that the issue will be taken up outside the ambit of the Security Council next week by submitting the draft to the General Assembly.

Council Dynamics

It seems likely that the US will oppose the adoption of any text that condemns Israeli actions in Gaza. Although it participated in the experts' meetings, it apparently did not take part in the discussions. The US still seems determined that the Security Council should not be a forum where Israeli-Palestinian issues are decided on the grounds that the Quartet is the appropriate venue. Therefore, it is very likely that it will veto the resolution.

It is unclear whether other members, such as Denmark, the UK, Slovakia and Japan will abstain on the basis that some of the issues they have raised are not reflected in the new draft. (They abstained last July in a not dissimilar vote on a resolution on Israeli military operations in Gaza.)

Selected UN Documents

Last Vetoed Resolution
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• S/2006/508 (12 July 2006)
Selected Letters
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• S/2006/868 and S/2006/869 (7 November 2006)• S/2006/862 (3 November 2006)• S/2006/858 (1 November 2006)

Useful Additional Sources

"Israel: IDF Probe No Substitute for Real Investigation - Internal Army Probe into Beit Hanoun Deaths is Insufficient" Human Rights Watch Press Release, 10 November 2006

http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/11/10/isrlpa14550_txt.htm