Gaza under fire

Sattar kassem
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Israel is waging currently a vicious air attack on Gaza strip, and is expected to proceed toward a ground attack. For seven days, Israel has been bombing Gaza with strategic F16's and helicopter fighters. So far, around 430 Palestinians are killed, and 2250 people injured, and 200 hundred of them seriously. The Palestinian resistance led by Hamas has been firing missiles on Israeli towns and military targets killing 3 and injuring around 50.

This wave of violence has been expected because the siege against Gaza has not achieved its goal of throwing Hamas. Gaza strip which is around 365 squared km in area has been under tight siege for 18 months because Hamas which is opposing the Palestinian accords is in control. The siege has been imposed by Israel and many Arab regimes such as the Egyptian, the Saudi and the Jordanian and the rest of the world led by the United States. Violent skirmishes continued to occur between the Israelis and the Palestinians until a verbal agreement on calm was reached. Hamas vowed to respect the calm in return of ending the siege and opening the crossings between Israel and Gaza so commodities will flow to Gaza. The outcome was the prevalence of calm but with continued closed crossings.

The calm was supposed to last for six months, but Israel did not wait and waged air attacks killing around 30 Palestinians under the pretext that they where preparing for attacks against Israel. The Palestinians in turn fired rockets on Israeli towns.

The period of the agreed upon verbal calm ended early December 2008, and tension started to intensify. Israel started threatening, while some Arab countries started putting pressure on Hamas to accept renewal of the calm. Hamas agreed but under the condition of lifting the siege.

The air strikes

Israel decided to go for military action, and its foreign minister announced that the goal is to change the status quo in Gaza, that is to overthrow Hamas, and to end the launching of Palestinian missiles. At the very beginning, the Israeli leaders were very hopeful and thought that Hamas will collapse due to the heavy air strikes. A week has passed, and Hamas is still in tact.

After one week, the Israelis realized that the Palestinians are well prepared and ready to face the Israeli ground troops. It became clear that the Israeli warplanes hit hard on the Palestinian police and the civilians, but inflicted very few losses in the Palestinian resistance.

The Israelis, apparently, have learned from the results of the strikes that:

1- Hamas is dug underground, its leadership and fighters are deep underground;
2- Hamas prepared itself for the worst, and this indicated in the ability of its space channel to proceed in its programs although its main headquarters were completely destroyed;
3- The Palestinian factions surprised Israel with the missiles they have and the range they can reach. The Palestinian missiles were known to be of 20 km in range, but they are launching now 40 km range.

Due to these indications, the Israelis are recalling their failure in Lebanon in 2006. They were surprised with the effective weapons that Hizballah had. Now, they are thinking of the possibility that the Palestinians have secret weapons that are unknown. That is why they are reassessing the situation and thinking seriously about the effectiveness of ground incursion.

The civil situation

The civilians in Gaza have been suffering for more than two years because of the siege. Financial aid has been cut, and the salaries of those employees supporting Hamas have not been payed. Gaza does not have enough food, and people have to wait in long lines so as to be able to buy few loafs of bread. Electricity and water are available in very small amounts. Houses are in complete darkness, and water is mostly unsuitable for human purposes.

Hospitals are unable to furnish medical services to the great number of injured people. There is not enough medicine and there is a lack of instruments necessary for medical surgeries. Blood in Gaza is everywhere, and fright is widespread.

Some humanitarian aid has been flowing into Gaza through different crossings, but it is not enough. That is why Palestinians have been pushing very hard for Egypt to open Rafah crossing. Egypt has been slightly responsive so far, and Gaza continues to live under extremely dire and insecure circumstances.

Peace initiatives

So far, initiatives for ending the battle have not been coined down yet. Some states have called the two parties to end the animosities, but no practical suggestions have been forwarded or discussed on the international level. The US has been blaming Hamas for the upheaval, but it is thought that it will not discuss any peaceful initiative until Israel makes a real achievement on the ground

War On Gaza

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Israel thought that its ongoing war on Gaza would last two or three days, but today (8/1/2009) is the thirteenth. So far, Israel hasn't made any tangible military achievement, and has no reason to announce victory. On the other hand, the Palestinian resistance is talking about steadfastness and relentless resistance that will abort the Israeli military expedition. The war is expected to continue for few more days while tension in the whole area is mounting.

Reasons for the war:

Israel decided to attack for the following reasons: a) to destroy Hamas, remove it from governance and bring Gaza strip back to the negotiations process; b) to destroy Hamas rocketing ability, and to destroy its capability to manufacture weapons and ammunition; c) to destroy the tunnels that the Palestinians dug so as to smuggle goods, commodities, money and arms from Egypt. The Israeli prime minister summed up the reasons by saying that Israel is seeking to change the status quo in Gaza.

The Palestinians say that Israel and some Arab states together with the US failed in bringing Hamas to its knees through the siege, and the military expedition is their second choice.

Where are the Arab states?

So many Arab states are thought by the Palestinian resistance to be encouraging and inciting the Israelis to wage the attack because Hamas has not been obedient and refusing to recognize Israel. These states such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan are

the patrons of normalizing relations with Israel, and feel that Hamas has ruined their marsh toward solving the Palestinian question when it took over Gaza and ended the presence of the Palestinian authority which is an ally of these states.
Apparently, these states thought that Israel would finish the job quickly, and took their time until they made an attempt toward the Security Council so as to order a cease-fire.

Fighting modes

Israel stated the war with heavy and tireless air bombings. On the first strike, it used 66 planes to bomb Palestinian police and security targets. This was the shock and horror strike which was meant to pull down the morale of the Palestinians. Around 300 Palestinians most of them policemen were killed in this strike. But that did not lead to the Israeli desirable results. The air strikes are still going on.
On the 8th day of air strikes, Israel decided to go for the ground battle hoping to easily sweep the Palestinian cities. Because of the fierce resistance, Israel hasn't achieved any significant gains so far, and its tanks could only enter empty areas where resistance is absent. Israel then tried to make incursions on the edges of Gaza city and Jabalia refugee camp, but suffered heavy losses and pulled back.
The main problem Israel is facing is the lack of information about the kinds of weapons that the Palestinians have. The Israelis are puzzled, and they discovered in the first three days that the Palestinian resistance is much stronger than what was thought, and there is a high possibility that it owns very destructive anti tank instruments. That is why the Israelis have been hesitant in occupying the Palestinin cities.
For the Palestinians, they are very patient, and unwilling to use their arsenal until Israel wages a major attack against the cities. So far, they have uncovered the 42 km range missile, and still promising real military surprises.

The civilians

Both the Palestinians and the Israelis have hit civil targets. The Palestinians have been firing missiles at Israeli towns killing three Israelis and injuring others, and the Israelis have been committing genocide in Gaza. So far, more than 700 Palestinians are killed, 46% of them are children and women. The Israelis have been targeting the civilians, and bombing houses on the heads of the inhabitants, and lately they bombed a school that is supervised by the United Nations killing 43 people and injuring others. Some Palestinian families have been wiped out such as the Rayyan family: all 15 family members have been killed. Another family of 11 people disappeared, while another family was buried underneath with one girl surviving.
So many nations have been expressing concern about the killing of Palestinian civilians, but Israel hasn't being paying much attention.
The Palestinians have been under siege for almost 18 months, and they haven't been receiving the needed food and medicine. Now, they don't have electricity or food or medicine or clean water, there is real and grave human crisis in Gaza.

The Security Council

The Arab states have been trying to get a cease fire resolution from the Security Council but with no avail. The United States will not allow for such a resolution until Israel makes a tangible military achievement. Without military achievement, Israel will not reach any of its goals, and the Palestinian resistance will grow stronger, and will become more influential in the Palestinian society.

General evaluation

Israel, the US and some Arab states gave been dismayed with the poor performance of the Israeli army. The results so far haven't been up to the expectations at all. As the war goes on, all parties interested in dismantling the Palestinian resistance including the Arab states become under increasing pressure from the mass media, the international community and the peoples of the Arab Islamic area. The Arab regimes have been facing pressure from demonstrators all over the world, and the Israeli mass media started to question the abilities of the Israeli army.

Israel is very hesitant in entering the Palestinian population centers due to its hard experience in Lebanon in 2006. The Israelis suffered a setback and failed in achieving any of their objectives. For this new war, I don't think that the Israelis will win the war. The Palestinian fighters are will prepared for the war and well equipped. They are dug deep under ground and they have evaded the effects of the air strikes. Israel will continue its air strikes for few more days, but as long as it is incapable of making a major offensive that would paralyze the resistance, none of its objectives will be realized, and it will settle for something insignificant such as measures to prevent smuggling from Egypt.

I expect Hamas to remain in tact, and it will grow more popular. Consequently, the Palestinian Authority will be a big loser, and its presence in the West bank will be challenged.