

# Hamas-Israel talks failure 'threatens escalation of border confrontations'

Author:

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GAZA CITY: The continued standoff between Hamas and Israel and the failure of international mediation attempts to bring the two sides together threatened a further escalation of border confrontations, officials warned on Tuesday.

Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip, and the launch of incendiary balloons and rockets from Gaza targeting Israeli communities adjacent to the border, have intensified in recent days despite ongoing efforts by Egypt, Qatar, and the UN to calm tensions.

With no sign of an imminent breakthrough in negotiations, activists are now believed to be planning a resumption of popular border protests.

A source on the Great Return March committee told Arab News that members were discussing options for a return to public activities on the border if Israel continued to flout its obligations toward "truce understandings."

Late last year, the committee decided to limit its activities to national events before completely suspending action at the beginning of this year due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Hamas official Ismail Radwan said that international mediation attempts, although continuing, faced severe difficulties due to what he described as Israeli intransigence.

An Egyptian-led security delegation which visited Gaza and Israel last week, conveyed messages exchanged between the two parties but returned to Cairo without securing an agreement.

A Palestinian source told Arab News that Israel had refused to positively deal with demands relayed by the Egyptian delegation after meeting with Hamas leaders in Gaza and had threatened to broaden the scope of its response.

On Tuesday, Israel strengthened its military presence along the eastern border of Gaza with Israeli media reporting that army plans had been drawn up to combat various scenarios regarding security tensions in Gaza.

Radwan said: "The threats of the occupation will not frighten us, and we will break the unjust siege with all our strength. "The resistance is ready to move forward to the farthest extent, and it is no longer possible to remain silent on the catastrophic situation in Gaza because of the blockade."

Israel moved on Sunday to block all goods from entering the enclave through Kerem Shalom, the only commercial crossing, with the exception of food and medical supplies.

For more than a week, Israel has stopped fishing crews from heading out to sea, and it has also prevented the supply of building materials and fuel which has caused the only power station in Gaza to stop operating and electricity output to be cut off for around 20 hours a day.

Hamas has demanded that Israel stick to stated understandings reached last year under Egyptian and international auspices.

However, experts believe that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could be engineering the Gaza situation to detract attention from internal calls for his dismissal and trial on corruption charges.

Ron Ben-Yishai, military analyst for the Israeli newspaper Yediot Aharonot, said the recent exchange of threats were unlikely to result in a major confrontation in Gaza.

He questioned the seriousness of sabre rattling by Israel, attributing this to what he called "the convictions in Hamas, that Israel will not rush into a comprehensive confrontation in light of the worsening of the COVID-19 crisis and its economic and political repercussions, the fragility of the government coalition, and the possibility of heading to fourth elections in the near future."

The military correspondent for the Israeli Walla website, Amir Bukhbout, said the Israeli army was preparing for a scenario of comprehensive escalation but could not "exclude the possibility of deterring Hamas by returning to the policy of assassinations," despite factions warning that such action would lead to rocket attacks on Tel Aviv.

Bukhbout claimed the negotiations conducted by Egyptian intelligence between Hamas and Israel had stalled due to each party's adherence to its position and the lack of any concessions.

Husam Al-Dajani, professor of political science at Al-Ummah University, told Arab News that both sides had more important priorities than open confrontation.



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## [Nightlife in ruins: Beirut blast pummels industry, destroys businesses](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-08-26 01:41

BEIRUT: A cozy Beirut restaurant, Tenno once hosted a dog's birthday party, vinyl record nights and stand-up comedians.

Those days are gone. Its doors collapsed and glass shattered in the port blast this month that killed at least 180 people and turned one of Beirut's most popular pub streets into a disaster zone.

"We plan to rebuild ... we owe it to ourselves to not let things end this way," said Mohamed Soliman, 28, one of the owners of the cafe which opened around 2 years ago. Money for repairs has poured in through online crowdfunding.

Many others will not rebuild, however, because it no longer makes sense to invest in a country where years of work can vanish in seconds.

“We’ve been saying we’re all on the verge. I don’t know how we made it this far. We’re not going to last,” said Maya Bekhazi of the union of nightclub, cafe and restaurant owners.

It is a tired cliché that the nightlife in Beirut – billed worldwide as a party destination – stands as proof of the capital’s ability to endure one crisis after another.

So much so that Lebanese have made a joke of their fabled resilience which has portrayed them partying through wars and assassinations, when behind the glitz the reality is much grimmer.

The past year, including Lebanon’s financial meltdown and the COVID-19 pandemic, has battered the service industry, a pillar of an economy that produces little. The August warehouse explosion left over 2,000 premises in tatters, putting tens of thousands more jobs at risk in a country with soaring unemployment and poverty.

The restaurant sector alone will cost at least \$1 billion to reconstruct, Bekhazi estimates.

Even before the blast, hundreds of venues had shuttered with mass layoffs in an industry that employs a big chunk of Lebanon’s workforce.

In response to a question about what the state has done, Bekhazi laughs. “Nobody cares.” With low-wage workers hit hardest, she said, the union will help provide meals for employees for a month.

Beirut’s nightlife has long attracted investor money and performers from abroad, spawning images of extravagant soirees in ranking lists around the world.

Since last year, a currency crash has eroded the purchasing power of Lebanese, including among the middle class that most of these businesses cater to. Costs skyrocketed and suppliers demanded cash as dollars grew scarce.

The owners of Cafe Em Nazih, who also run a hostel and rooftop bar, do not plan on rebuilding now.

“To start from scratch, without any trust in the state, will be a loss. We could invest again and get hit by another 20 explosions,” said manager Nazih Dirani, who suffered a dislocated shoulder when the blast ripped through the cafe. “This place is my life. I know where every screw is.”

On social media, Lebanese posted videos of bloodied faces emerging from behind bar counters. Some spoke of a sense of loss in a city with few public spaces.

For Jade, founder of the entertainment group Factory People, the focus now is

on keeping his 170 employees. The blast reduced one of its clubs to a pile of twisted metal. It cost nearly \$2.5 million to launch and will need millions more to fix up.

“We kept investing despite it all,” the DJ said. “But now it’s like we’re in the middle of the battlefield and we ran out of ammunition.”



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## [Regional cooperation tops agenda at Arab leaders' summit](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-08-26 01:01

AMMAN: The need to boost regional economic cooperation topped the agenda at a tripartite summit meeting between the leaders of Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan.

Ways of strengthening strategic bonds for the mutual benefit of the three

nations' economies were the focus of talks at the forum in the Jordanian capital Amman.

A final communique said: "The summit took place to strengthen active partnership within the tripartite coordinating mechanism between Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt and in seeking to deepen the strategic complimentary cooperation between the three countries on the economic, development, political security, and cultural level."

The statement added that Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi had praised Jordanian King Abdullah's call to "recalibrate globalization in order to accomplish positive independence and mutual exchange."

A rotating secretariat was established to ensure the continued cooperation and coordination between the three countries.

Jawad Al-Hamad, president of the Middle East Studies Center, told Arab News that Jordan had strategic projects with Iraq, and was a transit country between Egypt and Iraq. "While Jordan is not interested in major openness because of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), it is willing to accept a gradual opening to people while accelerating other economic issues."

Oraib Rantawi, director of Al-Quds Center for Political Studies, said: "While this was a follow-up meeting to an earlier summit in New York, the aim was focused on reviving the Arab Economic Council.

"Both Egypt and Jordan hope to find job opportunities for their citizens. At one time, 5 million Egyptians were working in Iraq," he added.

Correspondent for Al-Quds Al-Arabi in Amman, Bassam Badarin, told Arab News that the summit agenda had put economics before politics and had discussed better usage of the Red Sea route.

He pointed out that Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi was now the new political star of the region following his recent successful visit to Washington and said Iraq's new premier had plans to reduce Iranian influence on his country and the region.

However, former Jordanian minister, Nadia Alloul, said regional politics was never far below the surface of meetings involving Arab leaders. "In our region politics is always present and currently one can't avoid the political discourse especially when it concerns the Palestinian issue."

The official Jordanian news agency Petra said that prior to the summit, a meeting between King Abdullah and El-Sisi had dealt with "efforts to fight terrorism" and "the importance of maintaining coordination and consultation on issues of mutual concern, in the best interest of the two peoples and in service of Arab causes."

The agency added: "The meeting between His Majesty and Iraq Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi covered the strong ties between Jordan and Iraq, and the importance of bolstering them, while maintaining coordination on various issues.

“The king stressed the importance of activating bilateral agreements in all sectors to advance economic relations, especially in energy, electricity interconnection, and trade exchange.

“Moreover, the king said that Jordan supports ‘Iraq’s efforts to bolster its security and stability, and maintain its territorial integrity and political independence, while countering all foreign attempts to meddle in its internal affairs,’” Petra said.



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## [Erdogan ‘losing support among young voters’](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-08-26 00:53

ISTANBUL: Fading domestic support for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan could lead to the self-styled strongman taking aggressive action abroad,

according to a new report.

The study by the Washington-based Center for American Progress (CAP) highlights eroding support for Erdogan among right-wing nationalist voters, particularly young conservatives.

It concludes that the hard-line Turkish leader is losing ground at home for the first time in years, and warns that this could result in “more aggressive moves abroad” and heightened regional tensions as he seeks to bolster support.

The survey revealed that Erdogan’s key constituencies are unhappy and unenthusiastic about the government’s performance.

A generation familiar with online news is also dissatisfied with Justice and Development Party (AKP) attempts to restrict social media.

So far, more than 400,000 websites are blocked in Turkey.

“Those who believe the media is ‘biased’ and ‘untrustworthy’ reached 70 percent in 2018, rising to 77 percent in 2020, with a particularly sharp rise among AKP voters,” the CAP report said.

“The growing divergence of younger and older Turks into discrete media spheres may be feeding into broader generational divides over politics and cultural life. This has important political implications for Erdogan and the AKP,” it added.

With 5 million more young voters expected to vote in the next parliamentary and presidential elections set for 2023, the generation aged between 18 and 29 has become the largest voting bloc and the focus of domestic politics.

Max Hoffman, associate director of National Security and International Policy at the Center for American Progress, said economic stagnation was one of several factors damaging support for Erdogan on the conservative right.

Young Turks face a brutal job market, with youth unemployment around 25 percent. In the past year, about 2.5 million people have become jobless, while the Turkish central bank desperately tries to keep the lira’s value steady by using its net reserves.

“That compounds with widespread anger about the refugee crisis and the visibility of Syrian refugees in the major cities, where they stoke economic anxiety among Turks struggling to make ends meet and cultural resentment among those feeling that traditional Turkish culture is threatened,” he told Arab News.

Controversial moves such as turning the Hagia Sophia into a mosque are viewed as attempts to bolster support by pandering to religious conservatives.

Hoffman said the dynamism of the early AKP years is mostly gone – people have become accustomed to services provided by the government and are now more focused on the petty corruption they see in daily life, whether preferential

treatment for AKP officials or the need to “know someone” to get a job.

A recent youth survey by Turkish foundation SODEV found that 70 percent of respondents across all political segments believe a talented young Turk would be unable to succeed professionally in Turkey without “political connections.”

“That is all contributing to a generational change that is sapping AKP enthusiasm and could threaten Erdogan’s hold on power,” Hoffman said.

Lisel Hintz, a Turkey expert from Johns Hopkins University, believes frustration is growing among voters over perceived corruption and waste during the years of AKP rule.

With the country’s growth and material benefits long a source of pride, the AKP’s handling of the economy has also disillusioned voters.

“The massive disparity between a president who lives in a 1,000-plus room palace and the average citizen who has seen the price of produce quintuple breeds resentment. This is fueled by the view that Syrians offered temporary protection are a threat to citizens’ economic and cultural status quo,” she added.

A recent survey by MetroPoll revealed that support for the AKP fell from 34 to 30 percent in the past six months, with voters who said they were “undecided” rising to 10 percent.

Two breakaway outfits, the Future and DEVA parties – headed by former Erdogan allies Ahmet Davutoglu and Ali Babacan, respectively – are gaining voters from Erdogan’s base.

Hoffman said that if the two parties attract only a small number of conservatives, they will open the door for opposition mayors trying to show they can address people’s basic needs.

Based on nationwide surveys between October 2019 and April 2020, CAP said that the share of AKP supporters loyal to Erdogan fell by 10 percentage points to 66 percent, while the share of AKP voters willing to support another party leader increased to 37 percent from 21 percent.

Hintz said that government attempts to use its media influence to control public opinion are proving counter-productive as the younger generation voiced its frustration.

A day before university entrance exams, Erdogan met with young Turks on YouTube, but the event quickly received about 300,000 dislikes.



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## [In northeast Syria town, families say Turkey cut their water](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-08-26 00:46

HASAKAH, Syria: Outside her home in northeast Syria, Sheikha Majid said her life had become an endless quest for fresh water, three weeks into the latest supply cut by Turkish forces.

"I spend the whole time running after water trucks," the 43-year-old grandmother said, amid an ongoing outage – one of many in recent months – in Hasakah, a city run by a semi-autonomous Kurdish administration.

As coronavirus spreads across northeastern Syria, residents in Hasakah have been caught up in spats between Turkish forces to the north and Syria's

Kurds, viewed by Ankara as “terrorists.”

In October last year, Turkish forces and their Syrian proxies occupied a 120-kilometer (75-mile) stretch of land inside the Syrian border, including the Alouk power station that supplies drinking water to Hasakah.

Kurdish officials say Turkey is now using the water station to pressure the local authorities into giving them more electricity in areas Ankara seized from them.

While Turkey claims the station has merely been under maintenance, aid organizations have warned against using water as a political or military tool to the detriment of civilians.

Majid said the latest supply cut had made it difficult to ensure basic hygiene for her seven children and two grandchildren.

“Most of the time we bathe in salty water” from wells instead, she said, adding that she used the brackish liquid for washing clothes too.

In the city’s narrow streets, women and children clutched empty jerrycans, waiting to fill them up from water deliveries, some from aid groups.

On a rooftop, a young girl held a gushing green pipe over a water tank, funnelling water from a truck below.

“This time it’s really dragged on,” elderly resident Muhammad Khatar told AFP on Saturday, referring to the latest supply cut.

“All we want is to eat and drink, and do our job. We have nothing to do with politics.”

The Kurds say there have been eight interruptions to the supply of water from the station near the town of Ras Al-Ain since last autumn.

The Turks “occupied our land and now they’re cutting off our water,” 45-year-old Saleh Fattah said.

The issue has sparked increasing concern at a time when confirmed coronavirus infections have risen to 362 cases including 25 deaths in Syria’s Kurdish-held northeast, according to data provided by the semi-autonomous administration. Dozens of those cases are in Hasakah.

In March, the UN warned one of the earlier water supply interruptions from Alouk was putting 460,000 people at risk in the Hasakah area, as the pandemic spread worldwide.

Kurdish forces spearheaded the US-backed battle against the Daesh group in Syria, but Ankara says they are linked to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in Turkey.

Turkey’s Defense Ministry claimed on Aug. 6 the Alouk water facility was under maintenance but that Hasakah was still receiving water.

The Kurds say the water has been cut off, and the hashtag “Thirst is strangling Hasakah” has been trending online.

Damascus on Monday accused Ankara of using water as a “weapon against Syrian civilians.”

Kurdish officials say that, after Ankara’s military campaign in October, there was an initial deal for the Turks to ensure continued water supply from Alouk, in exchange for the Kurds providing electricity to newly taken areas.

But the Turks have been trying to exert pressure on the Kurds to give them more electricity, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights war monitor and a Kurdish official.

The Turks repeatedly “ask for more electricity,” said Suzdar Ahmad, the joint head of the Kurdish-run water authority.

Aheen Sweid, co-director of the energy authority, said the water cuts were nothing new.

“Since the Turks occupied Ras Al-Ain there have been endless rounds of negotiations over water interruptions from Alouk,” she said.

This time, around 10 days after the taps ran dry in Hasakah, on August 13 the Kurds cut off the electricity to the Ras Al-Ain area in retaliation, Sweid said.

Both sides then negotiated via Russia – an ally of Syria’s central government in the country’s complex civil war – and on Saturday they came to an agreement that envisaged water making its way back to Hasakah’s pipes from Monday.

But Syria analyst Nicholas Heras said the water cuts were likely to continue in areas controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces.

“Seizing the Alouk plant was one of Turkey’s key campaign goals” in October last year, he said, “exactly because Turkey wants to use water as a pressure point to turn local people in Hasakah against the SDF.”

Ankara now held the “ability to cut water indefinitely to over half a million water-starved people” in Kurdish-held areas, representing a far more effective weapon than retaliatory power cuts, he said.



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