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UN Security Council
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France demands independent probe of Beit Hanoun incident

Ambassador to the UN Jean Marc Chevalier says his country demands independent investigation into IDF shelling of north Gaza town; United States expected to veto Security Council decision against Israel regarding recent IDF operations in Gaza; 'Israeli occupying forces have committed another massacre,' Palestinian UN observer Riyad Mansour says
Yitzhak Benhorin

WASHINGTON - France's Ambassador to the UN Jean Marc La Sabliere said during a Security Council meeting Thursday that his country demanded an independent investigation of the circumstances of Wednesday's incident in Beit Hanoun in which 18 Palestinians were killed by IDF fire.

"France wants an investigation of this attack, an independent investigation," La Sabliere said.

The US was expected to veto Thursday night's UN Security Council decision against Israel regarding recent IDF operations in the Gaza Strip and the [killing](#) of Palestinians in Beit Hanoun Wednesday.

A Palestinian proposal to establish an international investigation committee and the stationing of UN observers in the Strip was expected to come up in the meeting. Due to US objections, it wasn't clear whether there would be a vote at the end of the meeting.

The demand to convene the Security Council was raised on Monday by Qatar, the only Arab Council representative. The demand was initially rejected, but the Beit Hanoun incident changed matters.

US Ambassador John Bolton said Qatar's request was discussed by the council on Tuesday "and there was no support for it."

The Palestinian proposal makes no mention of the Quartet's decision calling on the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority to recognize Israel, accept past agreements and denounce terror. There is also no mention of the incessant Qassam rocket attacks on Israel, which the IDF's activity in Gaza was meant to prevent.

The clause calling for the stationing of foreign observers in Gaza is especially problematic for Israel and the US, as it is Israel's position that the Palestinians must take responsibility for Gaza and put an end to the rocket attacks.

'Israel regrets the death of the innocent civilians'

Palestinian UN observer Riyad Mansour said it was time for the UN's most powerful body to shoulder its responsibilities with regard to the Israeli offensive in Gaza, a view backed by Arab and Islamic nations and the 117-member Nonaligned Movement of developing countries.

"The Israeli occupying forces have committed another massacre this morning in Beit Hanoun," Mansour said. "The Security Council has to react and to react immediately in order to stop this aggression and these crimes against the Palestinian people."

Danny Carmon, the deputy head of the Israeli delegation to the UN, said during the meeting that the escalation stems from the Qassam rocket fire on Israel, which is acting 'in self-defense.' He stressed that the death of the Palestinian family in Beit Hanoun was an 'unfortunate accident.'

"Israel regrets the death of the innocent civilians," Carmon said, adding that Israel treated some of those wounded in the incident and launched an investigation into the IDF's artillery fire in the north Gaza town.

Carmon said that Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in the hope that the Palestinian would manage it responsibly as a first step to the establishment of a Palestinian state that can live side by side in peace with Israel.

But since Israel left the Gaza Strip Palestinians fired 1,000 Qassams. "Israel is asked again and again to show restraint. But the question is until when. After 1,000 rockets? 2,000 rockets?" Carmon asked.

He spoke about the need to release the Israeli soldier, while Karnit Goldwasser, the wife of kidnapped soldier, Ehud Goldwasser, was present. "She is here to remind members of the Council who voted on Resolution 1701 that they are obliged to fulfill what they voted for and act for the release of the kidnapped Israeli soldiers."

Secretary-General Kofi Annan condemned the killing of the Palestinian family in Beit Hanun, and noted that he had warned Israel of the dangers involved in operating in densely populated areas.

He said the Israel had promised to investigate the incident.

"Over the weekend, I had the opportunity of talking to the Israeli Prime Minister requesting that they exercise maximum restraint. I also spoke to President Abbas urging him to do whatever he can to ensure that Katyushas (rockets) going into Israel were also stopped," Annan told a news conference.

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