



Gaza Ceasefire Has no Winners and Leaves Much Unresolved

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Israel and Palestinians both boasted of victory in the Gaza war but analysts say Hamas received only promises while the conflict aggravated divisions in the Israeli leadership.

"After 50 days of fighting, both sides were exhausted so that's why they reached a ceasefire," said Middle East analyst Eyal Zisser of the Israeli Moshe Dayan Institute.

Seven weeks of fighting cost the lives of 2,143 Palestinians and ravaged the Gaza Strip, where the Islamist Hamas movement has de facto power.

On the Israeli side 70 died -- their heaviest toll in a conflict since 2006.

A Egyptian-brokered ceasefire was agreed on Tuesday with Israel bragging of a resounding success from both military and political victory over Hamas.

"Hamas was hit hard and got none of its demands," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Wednesday.

But Hamas too was triumphant, highlighting the number of Israeli soldiers killed and an agreement that Israel eases restrictions on the entry of goods, aid and construction materials into Gaza.

Jean-Francois Legrain, a researcher of the Muslim and Arab world at France's CNRS, said the claims of victory were aimed at "public opinion".

In the sliver of land where Israelis and Palestinians have fought for almost 50 years, "once again it was a war for nothing, since no real issues were resolved," said Karim Bitar, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for International and Strategic Relations.

"The ceasefire (agreement) is loose and has postponed difficult questions indefinitely," Bitar said.

The truce deal eases a blockade of Gaza, mounted by Israel since 2006, making the lives of the 1.8 million residents increasingly desperate.

In 2012, following an earlier war, Israel and Hamas signed a similar agreement to Tuesday's and CNRS's Legrain says it was Israel which "failed to keep its word".

The question now is whether they will stick to the deal this time, he said.

Hamas is taking the risk because "an agreement mentioning a partial lift of the blockade can be presented as a victory", Legrain believes.

The most sensitive issues are not resolved by the latest accord -- notably the release of Palestinian prisoners and the opening of an airport and port in Gaza.

For Israel, demilitarization of the overpopulated Mediterranean coastal enclave is an unachieved ambition.

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas has said that the more contentious issues will be discussed in Cairo within a month.

But even to mention these key topics has boosted Gazan optimism as Hamas leaders, invisible during the war, came out to celebrate their "victory".

"The Palestinian resistance achieved a military victory before the war was over because it stood firm in the face of the arsenal of Zionist terrorism," the Islamist movement said in a statement.

Netanyahu did his best to dampen Palestinian hopes.

"Hamas wanted a port and airport in Gaza, the liberation of Palestinian prisoners, the mediation of Qatar and Turkey and the payment of salaries for its employees.

"But it got nothing."

The Israeli press, however, took a more downbeat view, saying the "victory" celebrated by its leaders came "too late" for its population.

"I have lost confidence in the government that has hesitated for close to two months," Haim Yellin, head of a locality close to Gaza, to army radio.

IRIS's Bitar said: "The political considerations weighed heavily.

"Netanyahu's popularity began to falter, tourism collapsed and the economy began to show signs of weakness," he said.

On Monday, a poll found that 38 percent of Israelis asked were satisfied with the prime minister, plunging from 82 percent just before the conflict started on July 8.

Netanyahu looks increasingly isolated in government and avoided a vote in his security cabinet on the truce, according to Israeli media reports, because half were against it.

He vowed on Wednesday that Israeli would still not tolerate a single rocket over its territory and would strike back even more strongly.

Source: Agence France Presse