

Israeli prime minister says Tel Aviv may wage 'broad military campaign' in Gaza



Tel Aviv, March 29 (RHC)-- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says Tel Aviv is ready to wage a broad military campaign in Gaza if needed, after a two-day flareup of cross-border fighting which has left several people injured on both sides.

"All Israelis should know that if a comprehensive campaign is required, we will enter it strong and safe, and after we have exhausted all of the other possibilities," Netanyahu said after visiting the Gaza frontier, where he met some Israeli commanders.

His comments came after two consecutive nights of heavy Israeli bombardments, which wounded several Palestinians, but were responded to with a rocket attack from the enclave. The attack wounded seven Israelis in Mishmeret, an agricultural town north of Tel Aviv, and forced Netanyahu to cut short his visit to the United States.

Palestinian resistance groups on Wednesday fired rockets into Israel in response to the regime's airstrikes on several areas, including the town of Khan Yunis and the Rafah border crossing south of Gaza City. Palestinian sources in the Gaza Strip say Israeli airstrikes on Rafah damaged residential

homes and the electricity network.

The rockets fired from Gaza have turned into a major security challenge for Netanyahu ahead of Israel's April 9th election. In power for a decade and beset by corruption allegations, he is facing his strongest electoral challenge from a centrist coalition led by a former general.

The Israeli military has deployed artillery and tank brigades along the so-called buffer zone with Gaza. "The military will resort to a very strong hand against anyone trying to confront our troops," Israeli security cabinet minister Arye Deri told Army Radio.

The UN's special coordinator for the Middle East peace process expressed concerns Tuesday over the escalation of violence. "I am concerned that we may, once again, be facing another very dangerous escalation of violence in Gaza, with potentially catastrophic consequences," Nickolay Mladenov told the UN Security Council.

In Gaza, organizers have announced plans for a massive protest on Saturday along the border to mark the first anniversary of weekly demonstrations in which Israeli forces have already killed more than 260 Palestinians. Over 26,000 Palestinians have also sustained injuries ever since the anti-occupation protest rallies, known as the Great March of Return, began in the Gaza Strip on March 30, 2018.

The United Nations Human Rights Council said last week that Israeli troops may have committed war crimes by using excessive force against the protests.

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