

IDF: Egyptian frontier on peak alert, no longer a border of peace

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Israel's frontier with Egypt - once a peace border

Israel-Egyptian frontier units went on peak alert Wednesday night, Aug. 24, following specific intelligence that Palestinian Jihad Islami was preparing to launch another cross-border terrorist attack on Israel from Sinai.

Earlier Wednesday, Gen. Benny Gantz, Chief of Staff of Israel's Defense Forces announced the IDF was no longer treating the Egyptian frontier as a border of peace in view of new perils. The new situation was exemplified by the terrorist attacks Palestinian gunmen launched from Egyptian Sinai on Aug. 8 killing eight Israeli civilians and injuring forty.

The IDF is forced to elevate the army's Edom Division's mission, said the general, from border defense to a more proactive offensive role, the warding off of cross-border attacks for which it will receive infusions of extra combat manpower, intelligence systems and weapons.

This is a radical change in military outlook. For three decades since concluding a peace treaty with Egypt, Israel regarded their common 200-kilometer border as safe and non-belligerent.

In recent months, the IDF has been obliged to start thinking in new terms.

debkafile's military sources report that the Edom Division's officers will be provided with surveillance equipment for detecting threats taking shape inside Sinai and armored units for combating them.

The Edom Division is currently composed of two brigades, the 76th Military Engineering Battalion, two intelligence companies – for gathering field intelligence and electronic surveillance, the mixed male and female 33rd Infantry Brigade and the Special Forces Reserve unit.

Our sources report that this set p will be given "iron and intelligence teeth." Tank units, armored infantry, airborne radar and early warning electronic capabilities will be strung the length of the Egyptian border.

The Aug. 18 attack on the Eilat highway revealed that Palestinian terrorists were playing hide and seek between the Gaza Strip and Egyptian Sinai, adding to volatility on both sides of the Egyptian border and putting a heavy strain on Israeli-Egyptian relations. Iran was pulling strings to aggravate the tension.

The expanded frontier force is designed to keep the situation under better control by addressing the new issues:

1. The row over the killing of three Egyptian police officers in Sinai while Israeli was grappling with some 15 Palestinian gunmen has not subsided. The military rulers in Cairo were not appeased by Israel's apology. The initial IDF probe released its first finding Wednesday, Aug. 24, confirming that the IDF had suspected Egyptian security personnel might be hurt in the heat of the firefight with the terrorists and tried as hard as possible to prevent this happening.

However, street protesters in Egypt continue to demand that Israel be punished and no one rules out the possibility of Egyptian soldiers or police taking matters in their own hands and staging freelance reprisals against Israel.

2. The new Israeli deployment carries a message to Cairo.

The military junta's demand to revise the military clauses of the peace treaty so as to permit the stationing of Egyptian forces up to the Israeli border of formerly demilitarized Sinai will be matched by extra military strength on the Israeli side too. Cairo's reaction to the dying moments of the peace border between them is awaited in Jerusalem.

3. The Palestinian terrorist organizations of the Gaza Strip were encouraged by the success of their first raid from Sinai and eagerly prepared for more.

Early Wednesday morning, the IDF assassinated Islamic Jihad figure Ismail Zadi Ismail Asmar, who organized the smuggling of Iranian Grad missiles into Gaza via Sinai.

Asmar also provided the funding for the 15 or so terrorists who shot up the Eilat highway in southern Israel.

As of now, no Israeli spokesman has confirmed the debkaf file report on the day of the attack that Iran, via Hizballah, was behind it, although Jihad Islami is notoriously Iran's Palestinian surrogate and Tehran used Sinai smugglers to transfer the necessary funds for the planning and execution of the attack.

Officially, Israel still pins the blame on the Popular Resistance Committees.

Wednesday night, Jihad Islami fired 7 Grad missiles at Beersheba, Ashkelon, Ofakim and the Eshkol District, following which an Israeli air raid targeted and killing the head of the Grad team.

4. Cairo was reported Wednesday to be mapping the smuggling tunnels linking Sinai to the Gaza Strip in readiness for an operation to demolish them.

debkaf file's counterterrorism sources report that Cairo decided to go ahead with this plan after Hamas rejected its ultimatum to hand over all the Al Qaida operatives and former Egyptian jailbirds, mostly Muslim extremists, who broke out of prison in February at the start of the uprising against former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak.

The Egyptian military warned Hamas that its refusal to hand them over carried a price: The destruction of the Gaza smuggling tunnel network.

IDF strategists fully expect Hamas and the other Palestinian terrorist groups to hit back for this operation at Israel. They will heat up the Egyptian-Israeli border from Sinai and the Al Qaeda, Hamas and Islamic Jihad cells already planted there will carry out more cross-border raids in southern Israel and Eilat.

Lt. Gen. Gantz announcement of the revised status of the Israeli-Egyptian border and the beefing up of the Edom Divisions was intended to have a deterrent effect.