

Statement on the Middle East

Friday, Jul 11, 2014 in Office of Tony Blair, Office of the Quartet Representative

This is a transcript of Tony Blair speaking to the BBC, Reuters and Associated Press this morning, 11th July, in Jerusalem. It begins with a statement:

"I am extremely worried about what is happening now. There have been around 100 deaths in Gaza, many of them civilians.

"There is continual rocket fire being aimed indiscriminately at the Israeli population. We've all been trying to call for restraint and de-escalation but the reality right now is that the situation is escalating and not de-escalating, and I think that we need, as a matter of urgency, short-term arrangements and agreements that do allow us genuinely to de-escalate this situation and restore some form of calm. But, I don't think that would work unless there is also put in place some way of resolving the longer-term questions at the heart of this violence and conflict and without that long-term solution in place I think it's going to be very difficult to create any short-term peace.

"So, right now, I think we are at a very, very critical point and obviously in the international community and in the region I think we have got to do everything we can to put in place both that short-term change in circumstances here and then that longer-term plan that allows us to create a situation in which the people in Gaza, the West Bank and in Israel, feel that this is not then going to recur and that there is some genuine plan in place that is going to allow this situation to be resolved for the long-term security and peace of the people here. That's the situation as I find it today."

AP asked what a short-term and a long-term solutions would be:

TB: "In the short-term very obviously it means that the rockets stop coming out of Gaza aimed at the Israeli population, Israeli operations can then be scaled back. So the short-term is to try to restore some calm and peace but I don't think frankly now that this is now going to work unless there is also a sense of what the long-term plan is for Gaza, for the unification of Gaza and the West Bank on the basis of political leadership that is supportive of peace and for a situation in which the Israelis feel that their security is going to be guaranteed. So I think for both the people in Gaza who are suffering and the people of the West Bank by way who are suffering too at the moment, and the people in Israel who are taking shelter in their millions every day, every evening, I think we are not going to be able to resolve this unless as well as whatever short-term agreement there is to restore calm there is a longer-term agreement in place to resolve some of the fundamental underlying issues of the conflict here."

BBC asked if Israel would go for a ground operation:

TB: "We all want the situation to calm down, we all want the maximum restraint shown, we all want the minimum civilian casualties, all of that is obvious, but there is a reality here I'm afraid which is whilst the rockets keep coming out of Gaza, Israel will take action to protect itself and if we want to avoid a further escalation we are going to have to put in place, and as a matter of urgency, the agreements that allow us to de-escalate and then resolve the longer-term questions but in this situation, when you are actually here, you are talking to people both on the Palestinian side and on the Israeli side, the reality is people are living in fear, there is a conflict going on, it is actually escalating as we speak and if we are going to step back from this then we are going to have to put some agreements in place that allow us to do so and those agreements in my view have to be for the longer-term as well as the short-term."

BBC asked about 'behind the scenes mediation'

TB: "I think it's important that all of the international community plays its part and the regional players here are also absolutely crucial and there is, I believe, a strong desire on the part of the majority of the population, Palestinian or Israeli, for this to stop and for us to get to a better and longer-term form of security, but the reality is the international community and the regional powers, when they get involved have to take account of the fact that unless we can put in place some longer-term framework along with a short-term cessation of the conflict then this isn't really going to work. But of course the international community and indeed as I say I think particularly the regional powers have got a strong part to play."

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"There is continual rocket fire being aimed indiscriminately at the Israeli population. We've all been trying to call for restraint and de-escalation but the reality right now is that the situation is escalating and not de-escalating, and I think that we need, as a matter of urgency, short-term arrangements and agreements that do allow us genuinely to de-escalate this situation and restore some form of calm. But, I don't think that would work unless there is also put in place some way of resolving the longer-term questions at the heart of this violence and conflict and without that long-term solution in place I think it's going to be very difficult to create any short-term peace.

"So, right now, I think we are at a very, very critical point and obviously in the international community and in the region I think we have got to do everything we can to put in place both that short-term change in circumstances here and then that longer-term plan that allows us to create a situation in which the people in Gaza, the West Bank and in Israel, feel that this is not then going to recur and that there is some genuine plan in place that is going to allow this situation to be resolved for the long-term security and peace of the people here. That's the situation as I find it today."

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