



Departamento de Sociologia

A Construção da Notícia Alinhada – Estudo de caso da Rádio
ONU a partir da cobertura dos atentados em Bombaim (2008) e
a ofensiva do exército israelita na Faixa de Gaza (2009)

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Aos meus irmãos.

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e pela ajuda durante – e após - a minha permanência
em Nova Iorque.

Palavras-chave: ONU, VALOR-NOTÍCIA, RÁDIO, IDEOLOGIA, MEDIA

Este trabalho é o resultado da análise da mediatização pela Rádio ONU em português dos atentados em Bombaim (Novembro de 2008) e da ofensiva do exército israelita na Faixa de Gaza (Janeiro 2009) e da comparação com a cobertura mediática da agência Reuters aos mesmos acontecimentos.

Os dados demonstram que cobertura mediática da Rádio ONU em português é determinada não pelo acontecimento mas pelo envolvimento da Organização das Nações Unidas nos mesmos. Demonstram ainda que o protagonista do acontecimento é quase sempre a própria ONU, através das suas múltiplas agências e representantes.

O presente estudo define o conceito de notícia na Rádio ONU em português como um conteúdo informativo que mediatiza as iniciativas da Organização das Nações Unidas e cujas fontes são primordialmente elementos da Organização. Por outro lado, têm valor-notícia nesta estação as informações susceptíveis de promover o quadro ideológico que está na base da criação da Organização das Nações Unidas ou que promovam a sua acção como actor político e diplomático global.

Key-words: UNITET NATIONS, NEWS VALUE, RADIO, IDEOLOGY, MEDIA

This essay is the result of (several) studies of news coverage made by the Portuguese Unit of the United Nations Radio on the Mumbai bombings (NOV2008) and the war in Gaza (JAN2009). The results were compared with the news coverage of Reuters for the same events.

The data shows that UN Radio news coverage is mostly related to the presence of the Organization at the event and not by the event itself and that the main actor of the event is a member or an official body of the UN.

The present study defines the concept of news at the Portuguese unit of UN Radio with informative content that promotes the United Nations Organization's initiatives. UN Radio's main sources of information are the organization's members and official bodies. The data defines news-value in UN Radio as information capable of promoting the ideological framework in which the United Nations has its roots and information to help the recognition of the United Nations Organization as a global political and diplomatic player.

ÍNDICE

INTRODUÇÃO	1
METODOLOGIAS	2
HIPÓTESES	3
DEFINIÇÃO DE CONCEITOS	
1. Notícia e valor-notícia.....	4
2. Acontecimento.....	6
3. Mediatização.....	7
O CONTEXTO DA RÁDIO ONU	
1. Pressupostos e objectivos.....	9
2. O Departamento de informação pública da ONU.....	12
2.1 A importância da Internet.....	13
2.2 Número de ouvintes e penetração mundial.....	14
2.3 Modelo de difusão.....	16
2.4 Os parceiros.....	16
3. A Rádio ONU em Português.....	18
3.1. Rotinas de trabalho.....	20
A INVESTIGAÇÃO	21
AVALIAÇÃO DAS HIPÓTESES DE INVESTIGAÇÃO	24
1. Ataques em Bombaim – o acontecimento.....	25
1.1. A cobertura informativa pela Rádio ONU em português.....	26

1.2 A cobertura informativa pela agência noticiosa Reuters.....	27
2. Conflito militar em Gaza – o acontecimento.....	30
2.1 A cobertura informativa pela Rádio ONU em português.....	30
2.2 A cobertura informativa pela agência noticiosa Reuters.....	34
NOTAS COMPARATIVAS.....	36
INQUÉRITO.....	39
NOTAS CONCLUSIVAS.....	41
REFERÊNCIAS.....	44
BIBLIOGRAFIA.....	45
PERIÓDICOS.....	45
WEBGRAFIA.....	45
ANEXOS	

INDICE DE GRÁFICOS

Gráfico 1	
Audiência estimada dos conteúdos da Rádio ONU.....	11
Gráfico 2	
Crescimento da audiência diária estimada da Rádio ONU entre 2003 e 2005.....	12
Gráfico 3	
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Bombaim	
Temas.....	53
Gráfico 4	
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Bombaim	
Eventos mediatizados.....	54
Gráfico 5	
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Bombaim	
Protagonistas.....	55
Gráfico 6	
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Bombaim	
Distribuição dos conteúdos por Géneros informativos.....	56
Gráfico 7	
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Bombaim	
Variedade dos Temas.....	57
Gráfico 8	
Agência Reuters	
Cobertura Bombaim Presença dos Temas relacionados com o conflito.....	58
Gráfico 9	
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Bombaim	
Variedade de Eventos mediatizados.....	59
Gráfico 10	
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Bombaim	
Presença de Eventos relacionados com o conflito.....	60
Gráfico 11	
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Bombaim	
Variedade dos Protagonistas.....	61
Gráfico 12	
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Bombaim	
Presença de Protagonistas relacionados com o conflito.....	62

Gráfico 13	
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Bombaim	
Distribuição dos conteúdos por Géneros informativos.....	63
Gráfico 14	
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Gaza	
Temas.....	64
Gráfico 15	
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Gaza	
Eventos mediatizados.....	65
Gráfico 16	
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Gaza	
Variedade de Protagonistas.....	66
Gráfico 17	
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Gaza	
Presença dos Protagonistas da ONU.....	67
Gráfico 18	
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Gaza	
Distribuição dos conteúdos por Géneros informativos.....	68
Gráfico 19	
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Gaza	
Temas.....	69
Gráfico 20	
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Gaza	
Eventos mediatizados.....	70
Gráfico 21	
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Gaza	
Variedade de Protagonistas.....	71
Gráfico 22	
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Gaza	
Protagonistas com maior ocorrência.....	72
Gráfico 23	
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Gaza	
Distribuição dos conteúdos por Géneros informativos.....	73

INDICE DE QUADROS

Quadro 1	
Evolução da audiência Diária Estimada por Unidade linguística 2003/2004.....	12
Quadro 2	
Audiência Diária Estimada, 2005.....	16
Quadro 3	
Diferenças registadas na cobertura mediática entre a Rádio ONU e a agência Reuters.....	36

INTRODUÇÃO

Porquê estudar o que é entendido por *notícia* no contexto da Rádio da Organização das Nações Unidas¹? São várias as razões que se alinham, e não querendo este trabalho ser exaustivo no imediato – até por que essas razões irão surgindo ao longo das páginas que se seguem – aponta-se aquela que parece mais pertinente neste momento de apresentação do presente documento: a ambiguidade que parece haver no posicionamento da Rádio ONU no quadro dos media de massas, sobretudo no universo dos grandes órgãos de comunicação social com capacidade de difundir informação à escala planetária.

A Rádio ONU é difusora de vários *géneros* em que se convencionou modelar a informação para apresentação ao público - a notícia propriamente dita, a entrevista, a reportagem, entre outros.

Por outro lado, a Rádio ONU é uma fonte de informação particular, na medida em que faz parte de uma estrutura – a própria ONU - que tem necessidade de comunicar as suas actividades, mas também que essas actividades sejam mediatizadas e incluídas nas agendas do maior número de jornais, rádios, televisões e outros meios de mediatização por todo o planeta.

E a Rádio ONU é, reconhecidamente como se verá, um dos elementos da estratégia de difusão da organização.

O presente estudo pretende ser um contributo para a compreensão da amplitude do conceito de notícia, a partir do exemplo do trabalho produzido na secção portuguesa da Rádio ONU. Tenciona igualmente caracterizar o processo de mediatização dos acontecimentos na redacção da Rádio ONU. É ainda objectivo aferir qual a credibilidade conferida pelos parceiros à informação da Rádio ONU.

A Rádio da Organização das Nações Unidas é uma estrutura criada para difundir a nível planetário a informação produzida pela própria ONU, pelas suas múltiplas agências especializadas e pelas missões espalhadas pelo mundo. Acompanha também a

¹ N.A.: Para economia de palavras, chamaremos à Rádio da Organização das Nações simplesmente Rádio ONU.

informação e as notícias que, não sendo oriundas da organização, são de interesse internacional

É um elo de ligação entre as diferentes organizações que se compreendem no interior da organização, os parceiros regionais e a ONU.

Parte deste trabalho baseia-se na possibilidade dada ao autor de ter observado como é o processo de produção de informação no âmbito da Rádio das Nações Unidas, durante um período de seis semanas. Foi assim possível acompanhar, a partir da sede da organização, em Nova Iorque, a difusão de informações com impacto planetário no período entre Novembro de 2008 e Janeiro de 2009.

Relacionando a experiência de actividade jornalística do autor com o trabalho que era produzido pela unidade portuguesa e com o conhecimento sobre os métodos da redacção internacional da Rádio ONU, surgiu a pergunta: **o que define notícia no contexto da Rádio ONU?**

A partir desta questão principal, surgiu outra: **como é que a informação da rádio ONU em Português constrói a sua credibilidade?**

A redacção internacional da Rádio ONU produz e difunde informações à escala global, como o fazem órgãos de comunicação como são exemplos as rádios britânica BBC, a francesa RFI ou a alemã Deutsche Welle.

A experiência na redacção da Rádio ONU permitiu a observação, empírica, de condicionalismos de várias ordens à difusão de notícias.

METODOLOGIAS

Propõem-se duas metodologias para a realização do estudo empírico: inquéritos e análise de conteúdo.

A Rádio ONU em Português funciona como um fornecedor de conteúdos de informação e notícias para mais de 60 rádios, jornais e revistas de língua portuguesa em todo o mundo. Estes órgãos de comunicação acedem à página da Rádio ONU na Internet, descarregam os conteúdos e emitem-nos ou reproduzem-nos. Deste modo, a informação da ONU é repetida em vários pontos do globo, em fusos horários diferentes, o que lhe

permite atingir um público estimado em vários milhões de falantes de Língua Portuguesa.

O uso da informação é feito através de acordos de parceria entre os órgãos de comunicação e a própria Rádio ONU.

No que respeita à análise de conteúdo, realizou-se um estudo à informação produzida na redacção da Rádio ONU em Português em relação a dois acontecimentos mediatizados internacionalmente: os tentados em Bombaim (em Novembro de 2008) e o reacender do conflito israelo-palestiniano, ocorrido entre Dezembro de 2008 e Janeiro de 2009.

HIPÓTESES

O facto de fazer parte do sistema da Organização das Nações Unidas determina para a Rádio ONU um entendimento próprio do conceito notícia?

O facto de pertencer ao sistema da Organização das Nações Unidas determina um entendimento próprio do conceito de acontecimento na Rádio ONU?

O facto de integrar o sistema da Organização das Nações Unidas resulta numa concepção própria de mediatização?

Nos passos que se seguirão são apresentadas propostas que definem actualmente estes conceitos para o universo dos media.

1. DEFINIÇÃO DE CONCEITOS

1. Notícia e valor-notícia

Na sua página na internet, a Rádio ONU apresenta-se como emissora de “um serviço de notícias, em primeira mão, sobre as Nações Unidas. Produzimos, direto [sic] da sede da ONU em Nova York [sic], noticiários internacionais, programetes [sic], entrevistas, reportagens e boletins em Português para o Brasil e para África.”²

Deixando para o capítulo seguinte a análise sobre a Rádio ONU em geral e, em particular, os conteúdos produzidos para o universo dos países lusófonos, interessa reter na rápida introdução apresentada acima, o que é percebido como notícia no contexto da Rádio ONU.

Assim, atente-se a alguns princípios teóricos sobre o que é a notícia, antes de verificar se, de facto, as notícias que a estação emite correspondem ao conceito genericamente aceite nos estudos sobre os media.

Na sua procura por uma definição do conceito, Wolf (1987) transforma as notícias num serviço de informações, a cargo de profissionais de comunicação, que levam esse serviço a uma audiência que não tem participação no fluxo das informações que chega a si.

“*Faz notícia* aquilo que, depois de tornado pertinente pela cultura profissional dos jornalistas, é susceptível de ser «trabalhado» pelo órgão informativo sem demasiadas alterações e subversões do ciclo produtivo normal. (...) A notícia é o

² <http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/about.html>.

produto de um processo organizado que implica uma *perspectiva prática* dos acontecimentos, perspectiva essa que tem por objectivo reuni-los, fornecer avaliações, simples e directas, acerca das suas relações, e fazê-lo de modo a entreter (...).”³

A notícia está longe de ter uma conceptualização fácil e homogénea. McQuaill (1983-2003)⁴ procura explicar o que é a notícia, sintetizando conceitos inscritos em estudos realizados ao longo do séc. XX. O resultado é uma lista dos atributos necessários para definir o que são as notícias:

- temporalidade e actualidade
- Imprevisibilidade;
- previsibilidade do tipo;
- natureza fragmentária;
- pouco tempo de vida;
- sinalização;
- marcadas por valores;
- são interessantes;
- são factuais.

McQuail concretiza uma proposta de conceito em que notícia é uma “forma fundamental de informação corrente sobre acontecimentos públicos, em todos os tipos de media (...) as características definidoras são a actualidade, a relevância e a credibilidade (valor de verdade).”⁵

³ WOLF, M., *Teorias da Comunicação*, Lisboa, Presença, 1987, p. 169.

N.A. Wolf ilustra o conceito de notícia com uma citação de Altheide, 1976, p. 112.

⁴ McQUAIL, D., *Teoria da Comunicação de Massas*, Lisboa, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2003, p. 342- 343.

N.A. McQuail destaca os contributos de Lippman (1922), Park (1940), Gatung e Rouge (1967), Breed (1956) e Hall (1973).

⁵ McQUAIL, D., *Idem*, p.506-507.

2. Acontecimento

O mundo é o palco permanente de ocorrências, mas da imensidão de ocorrências que se realizam, em todos os momentos e em todos os lugares, só uma ínfima parte ganha destaque e ascende ao conhecimento público. O processo que determina essa discriminação foi estudado por Molotch e Lester (1974-1993) nos aspectos que dizem respeito à emergência dos acontecimentos públicos, as estratégias que influenciam a sua transformação em notícias e o papel dos promotores de menções no processo de produção de notícias⁶.

Os autores partem da observação de que há uma necessidade individual e social de demarcar (ou segmentar) em momentos a passagem do tempo, para que se criem “pontos de referência temporais para o ordenamento do passado e do futuro”⁷.

Do registo contínuo de ocorrências, são elevadas à categoria de acontecimentos as ocorrências a que se atribui a capacidade de assinalarem a passagem do tempo, seja do indivíduo seja da comunidade. Os autores apresentam como exemplos, ao nível do indivíduo, os aniversários ou mortes.

No essencial, os autores descrevem os acontecimentos como sendo ocorrências “criativamente utilizadas”⁸ para servirem de marcos temporais. Por outro lado, assinalam que a criação dos acontecimentos públicos é feita nos meios de comunicação social e reflecte modos diferentes de interpretar o mundo. Daí que a construção de acontecimentos seja guiada por objectivos específicos a serem atingidos por quem os promove.

O sucesso da criação de um acontecimento regista-se quando este passa a ter efeito sobre a realidade, proporcionando uma mudança no modo de olhar o mundo.

⁶ MOLOTOCH, H. e LESTER, M., “As notícias como procedimento intencional: acerca do uso estratégico de acontecimentos de rotina, accidents e escândalos”, in TRAQUINA, Nelson (org.) *Jornalismo: questões, teorias e “estórias”*, Lisboa, (1974/1993), p.. 34-51.

⁷ MOLOTOCH, H. e LESTER, M., *Idem*, p. 35.

⁸ *Idem, ibidem.*

À luz do conceito desenvolvido por Molotch e Lester, reconhece-se que os objectivos específicos que guiaram os promotores do atentado às Torres Gémeas de Nova Iorque foram plenamente conseguidos.

Rebello (2002) indica como funciona o processo que leva ao efeito desejado pelos promotores dos acontecimentos:

“Para que uma ocorrência ganhe estatuto de acontecimento é necessário, (...) que se verifique uma modificação no estado do mundo fenomenal, desequilibrante e ressentida pelos sujeitos, produzindo assim um “efeito de relevância”. É igualmente necessário que a percepção dessa modificação se insira numa rede coerente de significações sociais, produzindo um “efeito de pregnância.”⁹

Nos media, o processo de dar importância a uma ocorrência, transformando-a num acontecimento exige o reconhecimento de um *antes* e um *depois* do acontecimento e que quem acompanha a mudança possa “reordenar o mundo segundo novas categorizações.”¹⁰ Ao efeito do processo atribuiu-se um nome: mediatização.

3. Mediatização

Diz Zengotita (2006) que “ao nível conceptual mais elevado, a mediatização significa lidar com a *realidade* por intermédio de outra coisa”¹¹, sendo essa outra coisa, no quadro em análise, os órgãos de comunicação social.

A proposta de Katz (1980) para uma definição dos acontecimentos mediáticos diz que são “radiodifundidos, ao vivo”¹²; são acontecimentos pré-planeados para terem cobertura dos media; o dramatismo e os valores simbólicos devem estar presentes, a exemplo dos rituais de comunhão que o torne o acto de assistir uma obrigação; têm um enquadramento espaço-temporal e “finalmente, deve-se observar a centralidade da personalidade. Todos os acontecimentos têm um herói (...)”¹³ individual ou colectivo.

⁹ REBELO, J. *O discurso do jornal – o como e o porquê*, Lisboa, Editorial Notícias, 2002, p. 116-117.

¹⁰ *Ibem, ibidem.*

¹¹ ZENGOTITA, T., *Mediatizados – como os media moldam o nosso mundo e o modo como vivemos*, Editorial Bizâncio, Lisboa, 2006, p. 20.

¹² KATZ, E., “Os acontecimentos mediático: o sentido de ocasião”, in Nelson Traquina (org.) *Jornalismo: questões, teorias e “estórias”*, Lisboa, 1980, p. 52-59.

¹³ *Idem.*

Numa outra proposta de definição, não sendo necessário traduzir todos os acontecimentos do mundo – a *realidade* – para que possam ser entendidos, Rebelo (2002) explica que o para um acontecimento se tornar mediático deve cumprir três condições:

- Quando este revela o seu potencial de imprevisibilidade, ou seja, quando a sua materialização perturba o “*sistema de espera* do consumidor de informação”, irrompendo do registo contínuo de menções pela relevância que lhe é atribuída, pela surpresa e por ser no princípio uma ocorrência inesperada;
- A condição de socialidade, que se prende com a forma como o sujeito integra o acontecimento e as suas consequências no seu quadro de valores. Relaciona-se com o efeito de pregnância desse acontecimento e como o sujeito irá reconstruir ou adquirir novas referências sobre a realidade que é alterada com o acontecimento;
- A condição de actualidade, que se avalia “pela distância entre o momento de emergência do acontecimento e o momento da respectiva representação mediática.”¹⁴

Uma nova representação da realidade é produzida através do processo de mediatização, integrando o novo acontecimento na ordem do quotidiano e, assim, reequilibrando o *sistema de espera* da audiência da informação.

Um processo de integração que Formäs (1995) encontra na construção da identidade colectiva pós-moderna, quando refere que “a reflexividade e a estetização estão ambas relacionadas com a crescente presença na construção das identidades que foi nomeada mediatização.”¹⁵

¹⁴ REBELO, J., *Op. Cit.* p.116-117.

¹⁵ FORMÄS, J. , *Cultural theory and late modernity*, London, UK, Sage Publications, Lda, 1995, p. ?.

O CONTEXTO DA RÁDIO ONU

1. Pressupostos e objectivos

Instituição politico-diplomática fundamental na organização do mundo no pós II Guerra Mundial, a ONU é formalmente criada na sequência dos contactos internacionais realizados no Verão de 1944, que ficaram conhecidos como Conversações de Dumbarton Oaks, nos Estados Unidos. É certo que o caminho para a criação de um organismo como a ONU estava a ser definido pelo menos desde 1941 em vários encontros dos representantes dos governos dos países aliados na II Guerra Mundial.

É das Conversações de Dumbarton Oaks entre os governos dos Estados Unidos da América, União Soviética, Reino Unido e da China que sai o documento conhecido como a Carta da Organização das Nações Unidas, que contém os objectivos da organização, estipulados do seguinte modo no seu primeiro capítulo:

1. Manter a paz e a segurança internacional, e para esse fim tomar medidas efectivas e colectivas para a prevenção e remoção das ameaças à paz e supressão de actos de agressão ou outras ameaças à paz e promover através de meios pacíficos a resolução de disputas internacionais que podem resultar em fissuras na paz;
2. Desenvolver relações amistosas entre as nações e tomar outras medidas apropriadas para reforçar a paz universal;
3. Alcançar a cooperação internacional na solução para questões económicas internacionais, sociais e outros problemas humanitários; e

4. Constituir um centro com o propósito de harmonizar as acções das nações na persecução destes objectivos comuns.¹⁶

«The United Nations cannot achieve its purposes unless the peoples of the world are fully informed of its aims and activities»¹⁷.

A declaração acabada de referir está inscrita nas actas da primeira sessão da Assembleia-Geral das Nações Unidas, órgão máximo da organização, realizada em Londres, em Fevereiro de 1946.

Do encontro saíram recomendações sobre a política, funcionamento e organização de um Departamento de Informação Pública (Public Information Department) para a ONU, que deveria promover instalações e serviços para a imprensa, rádio, produção de filmes e outros media.

A Assembleia-Geral da ONU recomendava de modo claro que o Departamento de Informação Pública realizasse «por sua própria iniciativa, actividades de informação positiva»¹⁸, que seriam fornecidas às agências de informação com a maior abrangência geográfica possível.

Sob a responsabilidade do Secretário-Geral Adjunto, que coordena todas as divisões e serviços de difusão da informação relativas às actividades das Nações Unidas, o Departamento de Informação Pública é a fonte oficial de todas as declarações e comunicados da organização e congrega todas as solicitações dos órgãos de comunicação social.

¹⁶<http://docs.google.com/gview?a=v&pid=gmail&attid=0.1&thid=122092e5654fdea4&mt=application%2Fpdf&pli=1>, (1946-47) Origin and Evolutions of the United Nations, Dumbarton Oaks Documents on International, Organization. U. S. Department of State, Conference, Series 56, Publication 2192. Dumbarton Oaks Conversations on World Organization, August 21 to October 7, 1944, Part 1 Chapter 1, p. 4. (T. A).

¹⁷ <http://unyearbook.un.org/unyearbook.html?name=194647index.html>, p.626-630.

¹⁸ *Idem, Ibidem.*

O Departamento prepara a informação para difusão, organiza conferências de imprensa e entrevistas com membros do Secretariado, bem como presta assessoria ao Secretário-Geral e a outros responsáveis da ONU sobre matérias que tenham a ver com as relações com os media.

Integra as seguintes unidades:

Escritório de Imprensa e Publicações;

Divisão de Rádio;

Divisão de Filmes e Informação Visual;

Serviços de ligação do Quartel-General da ONU;

Serviços Externos;

Serviço de Pesquisa.

As resoluções da Assembleia-Geral das Nações Unidas que criam o Departamento de Informação Pública atribuem duas responsabilidades centrais à Rádio ONU: a primeira consiste em providenciar serviços e instalações para acolher as agências noticiosas e os correspondentes dos media que fazem a cobertura das actividades da ONU e segunda é assegurar a direcção da emissão rádio das Nações Unidas, nas cinco línguas oficiais da ONU¹⁹.

Compete à Divisão de Rádio «encorajar a retransmissão de programas originados»²⁰ no seio desta divisão, bem como a produção de programas especiais, blocos noticiosos, reportagens, contactos e entrevistas que sejam emitidas por terceiros. A Divisão de Rádio deve ainda «preparar e distribuir material publicitário»²¹, assim como assegurar a distribuição de comunicados de imprensa, em conjunto com o Escritório de Imprensa e de Publicações.

O objectivo primordial desta divisão da ONU vem plasmado na orientação que finaliza o capítulo sobre as atribuições da Rádio e que se prende com a conjugação de meios e

¹⁹N.A Inglês, Francês, Russo, Castelhana, Chinês [não é especificado se o cantonês ou o mandarim] e Russo, em 1946. Actualmente são seis as línguas oficiais, tendo o Árabe entrado entretanto na lista. A Rádio ONU emite ainda em Português e em Swahili, embora não sejam línguas oficiais das Nações Unidas.

²⁰ <http://unyearbook.un.org/unyearbook.html?name=194647index.html>.

²¹ *Idem*.

tecnologia que permita «o estabelecimento de um serviço de rádio de âmbito mundial e de uma rede de distribuição de informações às organizações de rádio nacionais para manter as Nações Unidas em contacto com os povos de todos os Estados Membros e com todos os seus centros de informação no estrangeiro.»²²

O Secretário-Geral da ONU informa anualmente a Assembleia-Geral sobre as actividades do Departamento de Informação Pública (DPI) em sessões onde são revistos os objectivos e estipuladas estratégias para o Departamento cumprir no período subsequente.

2. O Departamento de Informação Pública da ONU

As orientações seguidas pelo DPI, onde se integra a rádio reflectem as prioridades programáticas e diplomáticas da ONU.

No relatório sobre informação elaborado para a 63^a sessão da ONU, e apresentado a 8 de Agosto de 2008, o Departamento de Informação Pública da organização dá conta da resposta às orientações gerais para a estrutura, recebidas em sessões anteriores, que passam pela promoção dos temas prioritários das Nações Unidas nas áreas da paz e segurança, desenvolvimento e direitos humanos, pelo destaque às celebrações do sexagésimo aniversário da Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos e do sexagésimo aniversário das missões de paz da organização. Difusão dos Objectivos do Milénio, acontecimentos sobre o combate às alterações climáticas, bem como programas para o fim da violência contra as mulheres e sobre a recuperação e promoção social no Ruanda são alguns dos assuntos que o Departamento de Informação Pública acrescenta à lista de Temas alvo da cobertura noticiosa ou de publicações ao longo do período em análise.

O sumário do relatório termina com uma nota sobre o aumento da utilização do sítio da ONU na internet no primeiro semestre de 2008, que é apresentado como “aumento de

²² *Ibidem.*

mercado com um número crescente de pessoas que visitam a página como uma fonte essencial de notícias e informação.”²³

2. A importância da Internet

Assiste-se a um crescimento na utilização do sítio oficial na internet como recurso para conhecer informação proveniente das Nações Unidas, o que é importante para compreender o impacto da informação difundida pela Rádio ONU a nível mundial, uma vez que a maior parte dos seus conteúdos é disponibilizada através da página na internet.

No primeiro semestre de 2008, a página www.un.org foi acedida 263.267 vezes por 33.130 visitantes.

Em igual período do ano anterior, o sítio oficial das Nações Unidas foi acedido 233.464 vezes por 27.355 visitantes.

O relatório do Departamento de Informação Pública da ONU atribui parte da responsabilidade pelo aumento da procura do sítio da ONU na internet ao facto de terem sido criadas ou traduzidas 23 páginas nas várias línguas ao longo do primeiro semestre do ano passado, em resposta às exigências colocadas pela difusão dos programas especiais realizados, como por exemplo, para assinalar os sessenta anos das missões de manutenção de paz da ONU, os sessenta anos da Declaração Universal dos Direitos do Homem ou a cobertura dos desenvolvimentos da força de trabalho de alto nível para a Crise Alimentar criada pelo Secretário-Geral da ONU.

É vasto e seria fastidioso expor os tipos de informação que a ONU tem disponíveis no seu sítio da internet, as quais abordam as mais variadas áreas em que a organização actua. Há cerca de 200 centros a fornecerem conteúdos para a página www.un.org.²⁴

²³ Relatório do Secretário-Geral da ONU sobre “Questões Relacionadas com a Informação”, A/63/256 de 8 de Agosto 2008, Assembleia-Geral da ONU, Nova Iorque.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p.13

A Rádio ONU é um desses centros de distribuição de informação.

Funciona no edifício do Secretariado da Organização das Nações Unidas, em Nova Iorque.

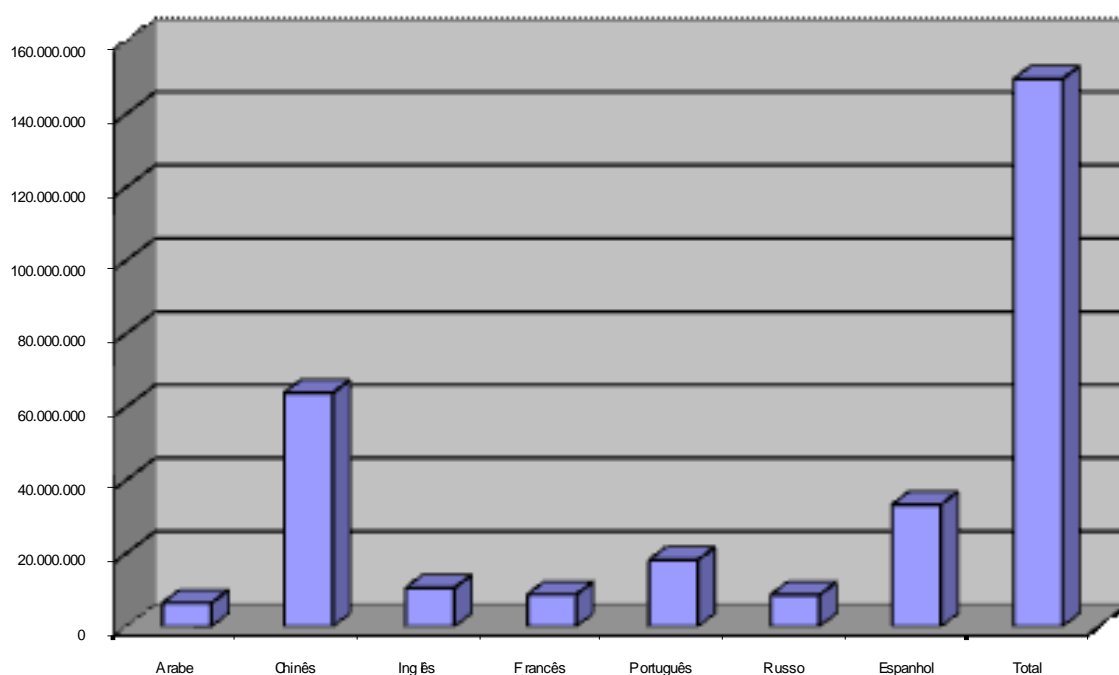
A secção de rádio é composta por profissionais de comunicação provenientes de países das seis línguas oficiais da ONU – Inglês, Francês, Russo, Chinês (sem especificar se em cantonês ou em mandarim), Árabe e Castelhana – e ainda Português e Swahili.

2.2. Número de ouvintes e penetração mundial

O último estudo de audiências realizado pela ONU dos conteúdos da Rádio, em 2005, revela que o número estimado de ouvintes por dia era de 149.547.500 com a seguinte distribuição linguística:

Gráfico 1

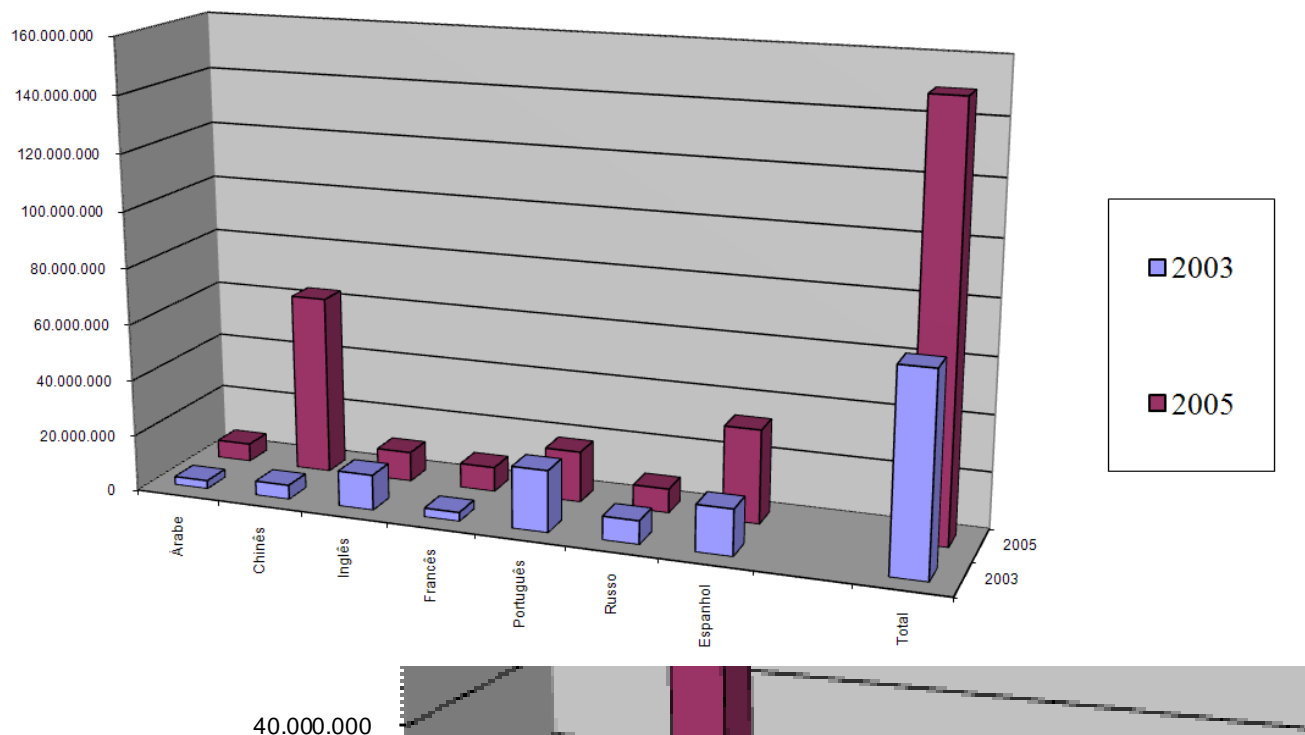
Audiência estimada dos conteúdos da Rádio ONU



Fonte: Survey of Broadcast Products of de Department of Public information, Radio and TV. August-December UN, 2005,

Comparando com a audiência diária estimada obtida no estudo anterior, de 2003, registou-se um crescimento significativo no número de ouvintes.

Audiência Diária Estimada - Comparação 2003 e 2005



Fonte: Survey of Broadcast Products of de Department of Public information, Radio and TV. August-December UN, 2005

Quadro 1 – Evolução da Audiência Diária Estimada por Unidades Linguísticas 2003/2005²⁵

	2003	2005
	Audiência Diária	
Árabe	2.931.000	6.420.000
Chinês	5.085.000	63.816.000
Inglês	12.567.800	10.564.000
Francês	3.127.250	8.729.500
Português	21.861.500	18.130.000
Russo	8.303.000	8.584.000
Espanhol	16.421.400	33.304.000
Total	70.296.950	149.547.500

Audiência Diária Estimada, 2003/2005

²⁵ Survey of Broadcast Products of de Department of Public Information, Radio and TV. August-December, 2005, UN (adaptado).

2.3. Modelo de difusão

Os conteúdos informativos produzidos na Rádio ONU são difundidos:

- a) ao vivo, por emissão via satélite ou por onda curta;
- b) através do envio de ficheiros digitais áudio por correio electrónico para as rádios parceiras (por telefone, a partir do Centro Internacional de Emissão, no Secretariado da ONU para as rádios parceiras que gravam os boletins informativos)
- c) através de descarregamentos (*downloads*) de áudio digital da página da internet da ONU;
- d) através de descarregamento de um ficheiro digital áudio do servidor da ONU do protocolo de transferência de ficheiros (File Transfer Protocol-FTP).

De todas as formas de difusão, os processos de descarregamento dos conteúdos colocados no sítio da internet da Rádio ONU são os que o Departamento de Informação Pública tem vindo a privilegiar como forma de levar a programação da rádio ao maior número de ouvintes.

O desenvolvimento dos fornecimentos pela internet é, aliás, uma das estratégias do Departamento, que considera este meio de difusão “de longe, o mais vantajoso quer para os clientes quer para o Departamento de Informação Pública, fornecendo o conteúdo de acordo com as conveniências do cliente, em boa qualidade e sem os incómodos e os custos da difusão através de telefone.”²⁶

2.4. Os parceiros

No centro de produção de conteúdos radiofónicos da ONU, em Nova Iorque, cada secção linguística produz um bloco informativo diário de 15 minutos, à excepção da secção portuguesa, que realiza um boletim diário de cinco minutos. Além do boletim, a

²⁶*Idem*, p.30.

produção de cada uma das oito secções linguísticas consiste em realizar entrevistas, traduzir relatórios das várias agências da ONU e difundir as novidades, além de recolher informações e consultar fontes como se fosse numa qualquer redacção de um órgão tradicional de comunicação social.

Toda a informação reunida e tratada - bem como os boletins noticiosos – é gravada e colocada no sítio da internet das notícias da Rádio ONU, de acordo com a secção linguística que as produz, em áudio e em texto escrito.

Os parceiros são as estações de rádio espalhadas pelo mundo, que estabelecem um acordo com a Rádio ONU para o descarregamento e utilização dos conteúdos digitais da página da internet nas suas próprias emissões rádio. Esse acordo não implica quaisquer custos para a utilização do material informativo produzido pela Rádio ONU. Os parceiros são, por conseguinte, os responsáveis pela difusão da informação aos ouvintes. Por altura do estudo de audiência aos conteúdos da Rádio ONU, realizado em 2005, havia 206 rádios parceiras. Destas, 21 eram rádios que, por todo o mundo, transmitiam em Português.

Referiram-se as várias modalidades usadas pela Rádio ONU na distribuição dos seus conteúdos informativos e destacou-se a internet como aquela que é a prioridade da própria organização. Assim sendo, é a difusão pela página da internet que é considerada para efeitos do estudo que aqui se desenvolve sobre o processo de distribuição de informação a partir da sede da ONU, em Nova Iorque.

Uma vez colocados na página da internet da Rádio ONU nas várias línguas em que a estação funciona, os conteúdos são aproveitados de modos diferentes de acordo com as necessidades das programações das rádios parceiras. Os noticiários tanto podem ser utilizados como são disponibilizados, sob a forma de um bloco ou editados para apenas aproveitar parte das notícias.

A Rádio ONU disponibiliza som, texto e fotografias das matérias noticiosas que difunde.

Os noticiários são substituídos no sítio da ONU de 24 em 24 horas. Os conteúdos avulsos mais antigos vão cedendo os lugares cimeiros no alinhamento da página, à medida que novos conteúdos vão chegando ou os antigos vão sendo actualizados.

As equipas de profissionais de cada secção estão divididas entre produtores e assistentes de produção, auxiliados por uma equipa de técnicos de som que servem as oito unidades linguísticas.

O trabalho de rotina dos produtores passa pelo contacto com as fontes, elaboração ou selecção da informação, tradução de documentos oficiais, realização de entrevistas, edição das declarações gravadas que são utilizadas como ilustradoras da informação segundo a técnica da notícia para rádio, composição dos textos informativos segundo as regras do jornalismo radiofónico, e gravação dos mesmos.

Os assistentes de produção são responsáveis pelo *upload* dos conteúdos, ou seja, por toda a componente do trabalho que envolve a gestão do respectivo sítio da internet da sua secção linguística e a configuração das informações na página. Cabe-lhes, ainda, a gestão dos ficheiros de audio com os vários conteúdos, que se encontram no sistema informático da Rádio ONU, colocar na página o audio e o texto da informação e procurar fotografias ilustrativas.

Estão também incumbidos de procurar informações produzidas no interior da ONU que possam ser aproveitadas para difusão.

3. A Rádio ONU em Português

A Rádio ONU em Português não faz parte do grupo inicial de secções com que a ONU lançou as suas emissões rádio. A decisão da Assembleia-Geral que criou este serviço, em 1946, compreendia apenas as cinco línguas oficiais da Organização das Nações Unidas: Inglês, Francês, Russo, Chinês e Castelhana.

A secção de Língua Portuguesa produz conteúdos informativos destinados principalmente ao Brasil e aos Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa (PALOP), onde está o maior número de rádios parceiras. Alguns órgãos de comunicação social

portugueses e timorenses também recebem os envios informativos emitidos a partir de Nova Iorque.

No estudo de 2005 sobre as audiências dos conteúdos informativos da ONU, a secção portuguesa era a terceira mais escutada, com uma audiência diária estimada em 18.130.000 ouvintes, como se pode observar no seguinte quadro:

Quadro 2 - Audiência Diária Estimada, 2005.²⁷

Árabe	6.420.000
Chinês	63.816.000
Inglês	10.564.000
Francês	8.729.500
Português	18.130.000
Russo	8.584.000
Espanhol	33.304.000
Total	149.547.500
Audiência Diária Estimada, 2005	

A produção informativa é assegurada por quatro profissionais, dois produtores e dois assistentes de produção, falantes de Português de várias nacionalidades. A equipa é habitualmente reforçada por estagiários, também de países onde o português é a língua oficial.

A página da internet da secção de ou em Língua Portuguesa (<http://radio.un.org/por>) está dividida em duas secções:

- a) Informação para o Brasil, onde os conteúdos são escritos de acordo com a norma do português variedade do Brasil e verbalizados por falantes da variante da língua falada neste país sul-americano.
- b) Informação para África, com conteúdos escritos de acordo com a norma do português Europeu e verbalizados por falantes desta variedade (ainda que com o sotaque da nacionalidade africana de quem diz esses conteúdos).

²⁷ *Survey of Broadcast Products of the Department of Public Information, Radio and TV. August-December 2005, UN (adaptado).*

À divisão linguística corresponde também uma divisão regional dos conteúdos, sendo que as informações da ONU respeitantes ao Brasil e à América Central e do Sul são tratadas na página da internet destinada aos internautas e parceiros do Brasil e os conteúdos referentes ao continente africano são dispostos no sítio África. A mudança de secção entre Brasil e África é feita com um clique do rato na própria página.

3.1. Rotinas de trabalho

O dia de trabalho na Rádio ONU começa com uma reunião geral de produtores de todas as secções linguísticas, às 8.30h, com o produtor executivo chefe – função que numa redacção se poderia traduzir por chefe de redacção – em que é distribuída a agenda (“notas editoriais”) onde constam os assuntos que todas as estações deverão tratar ao longo do dia.²⁸

A recolha e ordenação de assuntos são responsabilidade do produtor executivo chefe. A lista é completada com sugestões dos representantes das várias secções linguísticas.

Depois deste encontro, os elementos de cada secção reúnem-se para definir como vão ser tratados os conteúdos da agenda central e estudar a agenda da própria secção de assuntos regionais para o dia.

A produção destina-se a alimentar o sítio da internet com novas informações e a criar um grupo de assuntos que são editados e apresentados num noticiário diário de cinco minutos (como foi anteriormente referido), gravado nos estúdios da Rádio ONU ao fim da manhã (às 12h 30m é feita a gravação do bloco informativo para o Brasil e às 12h 45m é a gravação do noticiário para África). Após as gravações, os ficheiros digitais de ambos os blocos informativos são colocados no sítio da internet, para ficarem disponíveis para serem descarregados pelos parceiros da Rádio ONU em Português, ou para o envio telefónico através do Centro Internacional de Emissão, para as rádios parceiras que não dispõem de acesso ou meios para utilizar a internet. O número diário de conteúdos gravados e colocados on-line é entre sete e nove “peças”.

²⁸ Vide Anexo 1.

Embora esta seja a rotina geral associada à difusão através da internet, convém ressaltar que há casos, como a secção francesa da rádio ONU, que emite o bloco noticioso em directo, por satélite e onda curta, a partir de Nova Iorque. As secções que utilizam a emissão em directo também colocam na sua página da internet os conteúdos após terem sido emitidos *no ar*.

A página da internet é carregada ao longo das tardes com as actualizações das informações e a realização de outros conteúdos (como entrevistas) e ainda com o trabalho final de cada dia, que é gravado e colocado no sítio da internet da rádio mas que só se torna visível a partir das 00h 00m, hora de Nova Iorque. É a única actualização que o sítio da internet tem durante o período fora do horário de trabalho dos profissionais da Rádio ONU, a menos que haja razões para prolongar o horário, como crises internacionais em que a Assembleia Geral da ONU é chamada a intervir, com o respectivo acompanhamento noticioso e actualização da página na internet.

A INVESTIGAÇÃO

As páginas anteriores serviram para traçar o contexto em que funciona a Rádio da ONU, e particularizar as práticas de trabalho na secção desta rádio em Português.

Não há dúvidas que existem semelhanças entre esta rádio - a funcionar no âmbito da ONU - e os métodos de trabalho e objectivos de outros media de massas, particularmente rádios, como é o caso da alemã Deutsche Welle, que também funciona com uma redacção multilingue, utilizando um sistema de angariação de rádios parceiras para difundirem os conteúdos informativos produzidos na sede, em Bona e recorre ao sistema de descarregamento desses conteúdos pela internet.²⁹

Mas são as diferenças que permitem levantar questões. Assim, tendo em conta o contexto da Rádio ONU, os conceitos apresentados na primeira parte deste trabalho têm, na Rádio ONU, o mesmo valor que num outro órgão de comunicação social?

²⁹ Conteúdos disponíveis aos parceiros e ao público em www.dw-world.de/portugues.

Afinal, o que é entendido por notícia na Rádio ONU?

No conjunto de decisões tomadas pela Assembleia-Geral da Organização das Nações Unidas no Relatório da Comissão sobre Informação sobressai a missão do “serviço de notícias” realizado pelo Departamento de Informação Pública que dever ter como objectivo central “o fornecimento atempado de notícias e informações rigorosas, objectivas e equitativas emanadas do sistema das Nações Unidas a todos os media de massas, nomeadamente imprensa, rádio, televisão e Internet, (...) e a outras audiências a nível mundial (...).”³⁰ Mais adiante, o texto reafirma que as *notícias* devem ser relatadas de forma rigorosa, imparcial e sem ambiguidades.

Diz ainda o texto das recomendações que o Departamento de Informação Pública deve “continuar a chamar a atenção dos media mundiais para estórias que não conseguem ter uma cobertura apropriada”³¹ e reconhece que “a Rádio das Nações Unidas permanece um dos media tradicionais mais eficazes e de maior penetração ao serviço do Departamento de Informação Pública e uma ferramenta importante para as actividades das Nações Unidas.”³²

Fica patente que a ONU exige da sua rádio uma actuação de acordo com objectivos jornalísticos genéricos: informação rigorosa, atempada, imparcial e sem ambiguidades. Mas será o suficiente para que essas informações sejam consideradas *notícias*?

Faça-se uma comparação entre estes objectivos e os plasmados no livro de estilo do jornal Público, definidos como: “o rigor de uma informação completa e fundamentada

(...) a imparcialidade da atitude jornalística, a correcção, a clareza e concisão de escrita são, para o PÚBLICO, regras essenciais.”³³

³⁰ Relatório da Comissão sobre Informação, Trigésima sessão (28 de Abril - 9 Maio 2008), Nações Unidas, Nova Iorque, 2008, p.21.

³¹ *Op.Cit.* p.21.

³² *Op.Cit.* p.21.

³³ *Livro de Estilo PÚBLICO*, Comunicação Social, S.A., 1998, Fevereiro, p.25.

Tirando a referência à qualidade da escrita que o manual define para o diário português, as restantes características são similares às pretendidas para a Rádio ONU.

Recupera-se aqui, também, a definição proposta por McQuail, no que respeita às características de “actualidade, a relevância e a credibilidade (valor de verdade) ”³⁴ que o autor atribui à notícia e registem-se as semelhanças gerais com os objectivos propostos pela ONU para a informação da sua rádio.

Quando Mark Fisher (1980) focalizou o seu estudo dos media nos métodos de trabalho dos profissionais, propôs um conceito no qual as notícias são um género de informação pela qual é difundida uma visão ideológica oficial sobre a realidade, uma vez que reproduzem não a realidade, mas factos oficiais ou definidos oficialmente por organizações/poderes que querem e precisam que esses factos aconteçam.³⁵

A preocupação de Fisher era determinar como são criadas as notícias e assim determinar como é que elas moldam a visão que as audiências têm do mundo.

Do trabalho, destaca-se a questão da credibilidade das notícias oriundas das fontes oficiais, entendidas pelos jornalistas como factuais, uma vez que reconhecem a estas fontes competência e autoridade sobre as matérias que relatam, porque é conveniente aos métodos de produção de notícias pelos jornalistas e porque as informações oriundas das fontes oficiais – por exemplo, através de relatórios - têm um carácter “performativo”.

A proposta de Fisher acaba por avançar para uma definição do que é o valor-notícia, assente na credibilidade das fontes que fornecem a informação.

Outra definição, porventura mais conceptual, é proposta por McQuail, na obra já referenciada. É a proposta de se atribuir valor a “um acontecimento noticioso pensado pelos jornalistas como tendo potencial para transformar os factos numa «história» interessante para a audiência, ou algo que lhe dê uma relevância apelativa (...) refere-se ao tipo de acontecimento que se torna numa grande história, não só pela sua escala,

³⁴ McQUAIL, D., *Idem*, p.506- 507.

³⁵ FISCHER, Mark, 1980

surpresa e qualidade dramática, mas por um grau não habitual de ressonância e relevância pública (...).³⁶

O exposto leva a considerar dois níveis de hipóteses. O primeiro pode ser formulado através da seguinte questão:

Não será no ponto relativo ao valor-notícia que reside uma maior divergência entre os objectivos da ONU para a informação da sua rádio e os conceitos teóricos sobre o tema?

Um segundo nível nasce da observação de que a Rádio ONU em Português é um instrumento de comunicação das Nações Unidas. Essa especificidade:

- a) Condiciona a credibilidade da informação veiculada pela rádio ONU?
- b) Representa uma menor operacionalidade da própria estação?
- c) Retira legitimidade à Rádio ONU face aos objectivos a que se propõe?

AVALIAÇÃO DAS HIPÓTESES DE INVESTIGAÇÃO

São analisados a partir de agora dois acontecimentos, amplamente mediatizados a nível internacional, ocorridos entre o final de 2008 e início de 2009. O primeiro é a onda de ataques na cidade indiana de Bombaim. O segundo é o confronto militar entre as forças de Israel e da Autoridade Nacional Palestiniana, na Faixa de Gaza.

Compara-se a cobertura noticiosa dedicada pela Rádio ONU a estes dois acontecimentos com o acompanhamento que a agência internacional Reuters dedicou aos mesmos.

A análise começa com a mediatização da Rádio ONU sobre os ataques em Bombaim.³⁷

³⁶ McQUAIL, D., *Op.Cit.*, p.345-346.

³⁷ Vide Anexo A.

De modo a sistematizar os dados, optou-se por identificar em cada matéria noticiosa artigos quatro grupos de análise: Tema, Evento, Protagonista e Género.³⁸ Sempre que possível são utilizadas as informações dos *leads* de cada artigo para preencher cada uma das categorias.

A análise desenvolve-se em duas fases: descrição dos dados e análise dos conteúdos.

1. Ataques em Bombaim – o acontecimento

No dia 26 de Novembro de 2008, um grupo armado lançou vários ataques concertados na cidade indiana de Bombaim que duraram até ao dia 29, quando as autoridades indianas anunciaram ter o controlo da situação.

Morreram mais de 190 pessoas, centenas foram feitas reféns durante o cerco militar.

Durante os quatro dias que duraram os ataques, as notícias de Bombaim ocuparam páginas de jornais, as cadeias de televisão internacionais mostraram as imagens de soldados em acção e de explosões no hotel, bem como os testemunhos das autoridades e dos sobreviventes. As agências noticiosas internacionais mantiveram uma cobertura permanente, explorando vários ângulos e consequências dos ataques que decorriam em Bombaim. Foi um acontecimento de grande cobertura mediática e difusão global..

1.1 A cobertura informativa pela Rádio ONU em Português

São consideradas apenas os conteúdos noticiosos colocados para descarregamento na página da Internet da Rádio ONU entre os dias 26 de Novembro e 31 de Dezembro de 2008.

³⁸Vide Anexos 2, 3, 4 e 5 para observação dos dados de cada categoria sistematizados em gráficos.

No conjunto das 137 notícias produzidas por esta rádio durante o período em análise contam-se três despachos sobre os atentados em Bombaim, o que equivale a 2,1% do total da produção noticiosa realizada no período em estudo.

O primeiro artigo surge dois dias depois do início da crise e os restantes nos dias subsequentes aos ataques³⁹ (respectivamente 14 e 17 dias depois do início dos actos violentos).

A rádio disponibiliza a primeira informação sobre os ataques dois dias depois do início dos mesmos, com a notícia do compromisso do Conselho de Segurança no combate ao terrorismo.

No que respeita aos temas, dois artigos são sobre “combate ao terrorismo” e o terceiro sobre “sanções” da ONU.

No que respeita aos eventos difundidos regista-se uma vez “reunião”, uma “decisão” e uma “declaração”.

Nos três artigos, os protagonistas são representantes organização: uma vez o Secretário-Geral da ONU e duas vezes o Conselho de Segurança;

Não há variedade de géneros informativos, uma vez que os três despachos são notícias.

Numa análise sobre o conteúdo de cada notícia, regista-se que um dos artigos tem como evento uma deliberação do Conselho de Segurança da ONU que surge como protagonista.

O segundo despacho noticioso da Rádio ONU mediatiza uma reunião na ONU, onde é anunciada a posição oficial da organização sobre o terrorismo. A notícia é protagonizada pelo Secretário-Geral.

³⁹Vide Anexo A.

No terceiro artigo da estação sobre Bombaim, o evento é a declaração do Conselho de Segurança, o protagonista, sobre um embargo aos quatro líderes do movimento que organizou os ataques.

1.2 A cobertura informativa pela agência noticiosa Reuters

Foram contabilizados 45 despachos sobre os ataques na Índia realizados pela agência noticiosa internacional britânica *Reuters* a partir da sede, em Londres (não foram contemplados neste trabalho as actualizações das notícias que a *Reuters* já tinha divulgado nem os despachos realizados a partir de Nova Deli).

Os 45 artigos foram emitidos no período entre as 7h 51m GMT do dia 26 de Novembro, às 2h 57m GMT do dia 29, quando a agência Reuters noticia o fim dos ataques.⁴⁰

Regista-se o gradual aumento do número de artigos produzidos durante os ataques: no primeiro dia são emitidos sete despachos; no segundo 12; no terceiro dia 10 e no último dia dos atentados são 16 os artigos difundidos pela agência Reuters.

Classificaram-se os dados recolhidos nas categorias Temas, Protagonistas, Eventos. Por outro lado, assinalaram-se os géneros jornalísticos utilizados.⁴¹

No que respeita aos temas, “ataques” tem o maior número de menções: 15 (o equivalente a 33.3% das notícias produzidas e difundidas pela Reuters sobre este acontecimento). O segundo tema em número de menções é o “contra-ataque” ou seja, as informações sobre a resposta militar das autoridades indianas, com oito registos (17,7%).

O terceiro tema mais citado é “economia”, cinco vezes (11,1%). Os temas “reféns”, “americanos mortos” e “fim dos ataques” ocorrem todos por duas vezes (4,4%).

Registam-se ainda 10 temas⁴² que ocorrem uma única vez, sinal da grande variedade de matérias noticiosas suscitadas a partir dos ataques a Bombaim.

⁴⁰ Vide Anexo B (informação recolhida em <http://uk.reuters.com>).

⁴¹ Vide Anexos 6 a 12.

Na categoria de análise dos eventos, “ataques” é também o mais citado, surgindo 12 vezes (representando 26,6% das notícias). O segundo evento em número de menções no período temporal em análise é “combates”, que surge por sete vezes (15,5% das notícias). Segue-se “relatos”, com quatro menções (8,6%) e “anúncios”, com três menções (6,6%). Os eventos “queda da bolsa” e “destruição de hotel” surgem ambos duas vezes (4,4%).

São 14 os eventos que ocorrem apenas uma vez no período em estudo.⁴³

Regista-se também considerável variedade nos protagonistas que suscitam os conteúdos informativos da agência Reuters. Os responsáveis pelos ataques são os protagonistas com maior presença quantitativa, com nove menções (ou seja, em 20% dos despachos informativos). A forma de os nomear é muito diversificada: são chamados “homens armados” em quatro notícias; “islamitas”; “islamitas armados”; “jovens islamitas”; “militante islamita”, “militante”, numa notícia cada.

Os “militares” indianos protagonizam sete (15,5%) das notícias produzidas no período em análise. O mesmo número de menções para “testemunhas”. São também protagonistas “bolsa de valores”, com três menções e, com duas menções cada: “Departamento de Estado dos EUA” e “perito em segurança”. Os restantes 13 protagonistas⁴⁴ surgem por uma vez na informação difundida pela agência Reuters sobre os ataques em Bombaim e denotam a variedade da cobertura da agência noticiosa.

Atendendo ao género das peças noticiosas, no período em estudo, a agência produz 31 notícias (equivalente a 68,8% dos conteúdos emitidos sobre este assunto no período em

⁴² Mortos; alemão morto; terrorismo internacional; Hotel Trident; manifestação; combates; preparação de ataques; política; aviação civil; equipa de *cricket* e campeonato de *cricket*.

⁴³ Cancelamento de voos; terrorismo; manifestação; subida da bolsa; declaração; fim de ataques; decisão; envio de tropas; libertação de reféns; adiamento *cricket*; visita a alvos; acusação; testemunhos; mortes.

⁴⁴ Economia indiana; organizadores; atriz australiana; companhias aéreas; capitão de equipa; sobreviventes; oficial indiano; responsáveis indianos; canais de TV da Índia; jornalista e media indianos, alemão morto; mortes.
Não foram contemplados nesta categoria os actores militante islamita, jovens islamitas, islamitas e islamitas armados por terem sido incluídos no grupo “responsáveis pelos ataques”.

análise), oito reportagens (17,7%) e seis peças de análise/contextualização aos ataques na Índia (13,3%).

Relacionando as categorias tema e evento, verifica-se que coincidência de “ataque”-tema e “ataque”-evento em seis das 15 notícias da Reuters sobre este caso. O registo simultâneo das duas categorias leva a crer que a agência Reuters deu prioridade à cobertura dos desenvolvimentos bélicos no terreno, hipótese que também tem como aliada o facto de os outros eventos com ligação mais recorrente ao tema “ataques” serem “relato dos sobreviventes”, por três vezes, e “combates”, em duas notícias.

Por outro lado, pelo cruzamento das categorias evento e protagonista é possível desenvolver a linha de análise segundo a qual a Reuters teria conferido prioridade à informação sobre os actos violentos em Bombaim. Das 12 notícias em que “ataques” é o evento, em oito desses conteúdos os protagonistas estão no terreno onde ocorrem os actos violentos. Cinco notícias têm como actores principais os responsáveis pelos atentados, descritos como “homens armados”(três vezes), “islamitas armados” e “militantes” (uma menção para cada). Outras duas notícias têm como protagonistas vítimas dos atentados - “mortos” e “alemão morto”, respectivamente – por fim, ainda no quadro do que se pode entender como prioridade às notícias sobre a violência em Bombaim, há uma notícia cujos protagonistas são “testemunhas” dos atentados.

A reforçar a mesma linha de análise que enfatiza os ataques está também o número de reportagens que descrevem os acontecimentos a partir do seu palco principal, a cidade de Bombaim. As reportagens são oito. Sete têm por protagonista “testemunhas” (ou seja, a totalidade destes actores que se encontram no *corpus*) e uma “sobreviventes”.

Como género jornalístico, a reportagem privilegia a descrição e o testemunho do acontecimento, é «uma estória que se relata: uma história verdadeira. Incide sobre o acontecimento. Esclarece-o, coloca-o em perspectiva e dá vida à informação em bruto.»⁴⁵ As características deste género parecem reforçar a linha informativa da agência Reuters sobre os atentados na Índia no sentido já referido.

⁴⁵ BOUCHER, Jean-Dominique, *A Reportagem Escrita*, Mem Martins, Editorial Inquérito, Lda, 1994, p. 12

2. Conflito militar em Gaza – o acontecimento

De Novembro de 2008 e Janeiro de 2009, o conflito militar entre o Estado de Israel e o governo do Hamas da Autoridade Nacional Palestiniana registou uma escala de violência que só terminou depois de uma invasão militar das forças de Israel do território da Faixa de Gaza, administrado pela Autoridade Palestiniana.

Vários órgãos de comunicação social calculam que tenha morrido mais de mil pessoas e que cerca de seis mil tenha ficado feridas.

O renascer da guerra mereceu uma ampla cobertura dos meios de comunicação social ocidentais e dos estados árabes. Foi um acontecimento mediatizado à escala global, como se já tornou habitual em relação aos desenvolvimentos em torno do processo que opõe o Governo israelita e a Autoridade Nacional Palestiniana.

2.1 A cobertura informativa pela Rádio ONU em Português

Sendo o conflito israelo-palestiniano um processo complexo e em curso desde o fim da segunda Guerra Mundial, torna-se difícil estabelecer balizas sobre o início e o fim de cada momento em que se reacendem as hostilidades.

Por razões metodológicas, a análise às notícias sobre o episódio emitidas pela Rádio ONU em português incide sobre o mês de Janeiro de 2009.⁴⁶

Apresentam-se em anexo⁴⁷ os gráficos que sistematizam os resultados da análise dos conteúdos das notícias da agência por Tema, Evento, Protagonista e Género.

A Rádio ONU em Português emitiu 42 despachos noticiosos sobre o conflito em Gaza, no período entre os dias 2 e 30 de Janeiro de 2009.

⁴⁶ Vide Anexo C.

⁴⁷ Vide Anexos 13 a 17.

Os gráficos apresentados sistematizam o conteúdo da informação a partir de uma tabela que contempla o Tema, o Evento mediatizado, o seu Protagonista e o Género informativo utilizado para a mediatização.

No que respeita aos temas, “solução do conflito” é aquele que apresenta maior número de notícias: 16. Neste tema estão reunidas as notícias cujos eventos - como se verá adiante - são as várias iniciativas e acções realizadas para estabelecer o fim das hostilidades entre israelitas e palestinianos. O tema “conflito”, surgindo oito vezes no *corpus* (19%), é o segundo em número de ocorrências. Estão reunidos neste tema os conteúdos noticiosos sobre as movimentações militares e suas consequências. Com cinco menções (11,9% das notícias) o tema “ajuda humanitária” surge em terceiro lugar, seguido das quatro ocorrências (4,5%) que têm “situação humanitária” e “solidariedade”. Com três menções (7,1%), segue-se o tema “direitos humanos” e, por fim, com duas referências (4,7%), o tema “protecção de civis”.

Na categoria dos eventos, “reunião”, com 12 ocorrências (28,5%), tem preponderância sobre os restantes. Segue-se “anúncio”, com sete ocorrências (16,6%), e “declaração” que ocorre cinco vezes (11,9%). O evento “pedido” surge três vezes (7,1%) e “apelo doações” duas (4,7%). Com uma ocorrência no *corpus*, temos os eventos “distribuição alimentos”, “análise de propostas”, “resolução”, “condenação”, “alerta”, “visita”, “missão chega ONU a Gaza”, “lançamento”, “avaliação” e “entrevista”.

No que respeita à categoria dos protagonistas, o Secretário-Geral da ONU é o mais referido com 11 menções (está presente como actor principal em 26,1% dos conteúdos) Com quatro presenças cada (9,5%), a Agência das Nações Unidas de Assistência aos Refugiados Palestinos (Unrwa)⁴⁸ e o Conselho de Segurança partilham o segundo lugar. Vários protagonistas estão presentes duas vezes nos conteúdos da Rádio ONU sobre Gaza. São eles o Programa Alimentar Mundial (PAM); o Conselho dos Direitos Humanos da ONU; o Fundo das Nações Unidas para Infância (Unicef); a Organização Mundial de Saúde (OMS); a Embaixadora do Brasil na ONU e a Liga Árabe. Cada um destes protagonistas está em 4,7% dos despachos noticiosos da Rádio ONU emitidos em

⁴⁸ *United Nations Relief and Works Agency.*

Janeiro de 2009 sobre Gaza. Com apenas uma presença no *corpus* encontramos 18 actores.⁴⁹

No que respeita aos géneros jornalísticos, há 41 notícias (97,6%) e 1 entrevista (representando 2.3% do total dos conteúdos do *corpus* de informações da Rádio ONU.

O tema “solução do conflito” é aquele que mais é mediatizado e nos eventos, “reunião” é o dominante, com 12 menções. Do total de notícias com o tema “solução de conflito” dez (62,5%) estão relacionadas com o evento “reunião”. Esta relação dá a entender que uma linha forte da informação da Rádio ONU sobre o conflito em Gaza durante o mês de Janeiro de 2009 foi a procura de soluções para pôr fim ao confronto. A relação entre o tema “solução do conflito”, os eventos “reunião” com os protagonistas das principais instituições internacionais envolvidas (Secretário-Geral da ONU, Liga Árabe, Coordenador Especial da ONU para o Processo Paz no Médio Oriente, Conselho de Segurança, entre outros) resulta na produção de nove notícias, que equivalem a 21,4% do total da informação sobre a crise militar no Médio Oriente difundida no período em análise pela Rádio ONU.

Com oito menções, o tema “conflito” é o segundo mais mediatizado (19% dos despachos sobre Gaza emitidos no período em análise). Trata-se da informação pela qual a Rádio ONU faz a actualização dos acontecimentos em Gaza. Ao tema “conflito” correspondem os eventos: “anúncio” (duas vezes); “pedido de investigação” (uma vez); “condenação” (uma vez); “alerta” (uma vez); “declaração” (uma vez); “entrevista” (uma vez) e “denúncia” (uma vez).

É digno de nota não existirem sob o tema “conflito” notícias sobre os combates em Gaza que, no entanto, estavam em curso durante o período em análise.

⁴⁹ Relatora dos Direitos Humanos da ONU; o Coordenador Especial da ONU para o Processo Paz no Médio Oriente; o Embaixador de França na ONU; o Embaixador de Angola na ONU; o Presidente da Assembleia Geral das Nações Unidas; o Escritório da ONU de Assistência Humanitária (Ocha); o Alto-Comissário da ONU para os Refugiados; a Alta-Comissária dos Direitos Humanos da ONU; o Sub-Secretário-Geral da ONU para os assuntos humanitários; o Programa das Nações Unidas para o Desenvolvimento (PNUD); representantes israelitas; a Autoridade Palestina; o Presidente da Autoridade Palestiniana; o Presidente do Egipto; Rainha da Jordânia; Cat Stevens/Youssuf Islam; o Vice-Ministro das Relações Exteriores da Autoridade Nacional Palestiniana.

No que respeita aos protagonistas das informações com este tema, apenas um não faz parte do campo da ONU. Trata-se do Vice-ministro das Relações Exteriores da Autoridade Palestiniana, que concede uma entrevista à Rádio ONU. Protagonizam os restantes artigos informativos o Secretário-Geral, a Unrwa, a OMS, a Unicef e a Ocha.⁵⁰

A relevância de protagonistas relacionados com as Nações Unidas ressalta, com efeito, da análise dos conteúdos da rádio. Num total de 25 protagonistas, 17 estão ligados à ONU (40,4%). A diferença entre os protagonistas com ligação à ONU e os que não têm essa ligação torna-se mais significativa se se atender à divisão de notícias entre os dois grupos. Assim, os actores ligados às Nações Unidas estão presentes em 38 notícias (90,4% do total da informação que compõe o *corpus* deste trabalho). Principal destaque é conferido ao Secretário-Geral da ONU, Ban Ki-moon, protagonista em 11 dos despachos emitidos pela estação, sendo o actor principal em cinco notícias que têm por tema “solução do conflito” e evento “reunião”.

Outra observação que resulta da análise dos dados é o facto de os temas com mais ocorrências se inscreverem nos princípios orientadores do funcionamento da Rádio ONU,⁵¹ nomeadamente a promoção da paz, o respeito pelos direitos humanos, a tolerância e a manutenção da lei internacional.

À excepção das notícias sobre “conflito” – acima observadas - verifica-se que os temas com mais notícias associadas correspondem às preocupações que fundamentam a acção da própria ONU. Deste modo, podem classificar-se as notícias sobre “solução de conflito”, as de “ajuda humanitária”, de “situação humanitária”, “solidariedade”, “direitos humanos” e “protecção de civis”. Em conjunto, as notícias associadas a estes temas .representam 80,9% do total da informação difundida sobre o conflito em Gaza pela Rádio ONU em Janeiro.

2.2 A cobertura informativa pela agência noticiosa Reuters

⁵⁰ Ocha – Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

⁵¹ “(...) to promote the universal ideals of the United Nations, including peace, respect for human rights, gender equality, tolerance, and the upholding of international law”, segundo o documento History of the UN Radio, disponível em <http://www.un.org/av/unfamily/radio.html#>

Foram contabilizados 70 despachos noticiosos da agência Reuters sobre o conflito entre as tropas israelitas e a Autoridade Palestiniana durante o mês de Janeiro de 2009.⁵²

A produção informativa decorre ao longo das duas primeiras semanas do mês.

Repete-se o modelo utilizado anteriormente com recurso à de análise de conteúdo, através das categorias: Temas, Protagonistas, Eventos e Géneros jornalísticos.⁵³

Começando pela categoria dos géneros, observa-se que há 57 notícias, (o que equivale a 81,4% dos conteúdos difundidos pela Reuters sobre este acontecimento). As peças de análise/enquadramento são sete (10%) e foram emitidas seis reportagens (8,5%).

Na categoria tema, aquele que tem o maior número de menções é “conflito”. Surge 32 vezes (45% dos conteúdos informativos emitidos pela agência noticiosa no período em análise). Em segundo lugar aparece “solução de conflito”, com 21 menções (30%). Os “combates”, estão presentes oito vezes (11,4%): “diplomacia” três (4,2%), e “ajuda humanitária”, duas (2,8%). Com apenas uma ocorrência estão os temas “Direitos Humanos”, “Papel Irão no Médio Oriente”, “Ataque em França” e “Papel dos líderes árabes no Médio Oriente”.

No grupo dos eventos, “declaração” está presente 14 vezes, (20%), “reunião” oito (11,4%), “apelo” e “manifestação” cinco (7,1%). Notícias sobre “Movimentações militares”, ocorrem três vezes (4,2%) e “ataque israelita”, “acusação” e “apoio” têm duas menções (2,8%) Com uma ocorrência no *corpus* estão: “reação”, “acordo”, “evocação”, “assassinato”, “pedido”, “ameaça”, “proposta de resolução”, “recrutamento”, “expulsão”, “preocupação”, “tumultos”, “queda de míssil”, “condenação”, “análise de proposta”, “apresentação de proposta”, “elaboração de proposta”, “resgate de crianças”, “acordo de paz”, “plano de paz” e “anúncio de plano de paz”.

⁵² Vide Anexo D.

⁵³ Vide Anexos 18 a 22.

Na categoria protagonistas há uma disseminação de notícias por um grupo variado de actores, pelo que não se observa um protagonista aglutinador da informação sobre Gaza. O que tem maior presença é “forças israelitas”, que surge oito vezes (11,4%). Em segundo lugar em número de presenças está “presidente francês”, com três notícias e, em seguida, estão seis protagonistas que surgem em duas notícias cada um (2,8%): “líder Hamas”, “Secretária de Estado Condolizza Rice”, “Presidente Bush”, “França”, “Cruz Vermelha” e “ONU”. Segue-se um variado grupo de 38 protagonistas que ocorrem apenas uma vez⁵⁴. Sete artigos de análise não têm protagonista identificado.

O “conflito” assume-se como questão central da cobertura informativa da *Reuters* (45% dos artigos). A cobertura da agência internacional não se limita aos acontecimentos no terreno mas acompanha e relata vários episódios ocorridos fora de Gaza em consequência da violência que se registava em Janeiro nessa região do Médio Oriente. Observa-se assim, dentro do tema “conflito”, eventos como manifestações, ameaças ou declarações, ocorridos fora das fronteiras de Gaza ou de Israel como, por exemplo, no Afeganistão, no Iraque ou na Bósnia.

O evento que mais vezes está relacionado com este tema é “declaração” (seis vezes). São declarações oriundas de várias instâncias e personalidades (Barack Obama ou o Comissário Europeu Jean Michel), o que indica a amplitude informativa da agência.

A mediatização de acontecimentos dispersos mas decorrentes do acontecimento central, o conflito em Gaza, parece ser uma das apostas na cobertura informativa da *Reuters*.

⁵⁴ Manifestantes pró- Israelitas e pró-palestinos; autoridades palestina e egípcia; autoridades de segurança da Jordânia e Egipto; Barack Obama; cipriotas gregos e turcos; Conselho dos Direitos Humanos da ONU; Conselho de Segurança da ONU; Comissário Europeu; Departamento de Estado EUA; Egipto; facções palestinas; Governo israelita; Governo mauritano; Irão; Israel e Hamas; jovens afegãos; líder da al Qaeda; líder da al Qaeda no Iraque; manifestantes afegãos; ministros árabes e potências ocidentais; Ministros dos Negócios Estrangeiros árabes e dos países do Conselho de Segurança da ONU; Ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros belga; muçulmanos de Kashmir e polícia; muçulmanos sobreviventes de Srebrenica; organismo islâmico de topo; palestinos e israelitas; polícia egípcia e irmandade muçulmana; porta-voz da Casa Branca; prémio Nobel iraniana; Presidente do Irão; Primeiro Ministro palestino; Rei do Barein; responsáveis franceses; Senado dos EUA; União Europeia; Vaticano e povo judeu; e Venezuela.

O tema que contém o segundo maior número de notícias é “solução do conflito”, que tem como evento principal “reunião”, onde se englobam os encontros diplomáticos destinados a tentar parar a violência em Gaza. Observa-se uma assinalável variedade de protagonistas neste tema. No total encontramos dezanove protagonistas (entre eles estão a ONU e suas instâncias, Egito, a França ou a Secretária de Estado dos EUA Condolizza Rice, etc.), a maioria divididos em dois tipos de evento: “reunião” (com sete actores) e “declaração” (com seis protagonistas).

No tema “combates”, que, como já se observou, é o terceiro em número de notícias, todos os artigos têm por protagonista apenas o lado israelita do conflito. Assim, as “forças israelitas” são protagonistas de seis das oito notícias. Os actores das notícias restantes são “Israel” e “Ministra dos Negócios Estrangeiros de Israel”. No que respeita aos eventos relacionados com este tema, por três vezes ocorre “movimentações militares”, por duas vezes “ataque israelita”, há um “assassinato” uma “declaração” e uma notícia é sobre o número de “mortos”.

NOTAS COMPARATIVAS

O trabalho desenvolvido permite fixar diferenças entre a mediatização na Rádio ONU e na agência Reuters dos acontecimentos em análise.

A ONU é fonte principal das notícias para a Rádio. Na cobertura realizada pela rádio aos atentados em Bombaim, as instâncias da organização representam 100% das fontes. No caso do conflito em Gaza, em 81% da informação difundida pela estação são citadas fontes relacionadas com o universo da ONU.

Nas coberturas noticiosas da agência Reuters não é possível encontrar uma fonte com maior preponderância que outras. Por outro lado, a variedade de fontes caracteriza a informação da agência.

Há temas que têm maior ocorrência na cobertura mediática da Rádio ONU. Esses temas englobam notícias que se relacionam com a resolução dos conflitos, promoção da paz, questões humanitárias, solidariedade, lei internacional e diplomacia. Em conjunto, as

notícias relacionadas com estes temas totalizam 100% dos artigos difundidos na cobertura dos atentados em Bombaim e 81% das notícias emitidas pela Rádio ONU sobre o conflito em Gaza no mês de Janeiro.

Sublinhe-se que os assuntos mais mediatizados pela Rádio ONU coincidem com o quadro de valores em que assenta a fundação da Organização das Nações Unidas, como a manutenção da paz internacional e a segurança, a construção de relações amistosas e de cooperação entre as nações ou a promoção dos direitos humanos e das liberdades fundamentais⁵⁵. Pode sugerir-se que os acontecimentos noticiados pela Rádio ONU são enquadrados em valores pré-determinados pela própria organização a que pertence a estação.

Também na cobertura mediática da agência *Reuters* existem temas abordados com maior frequência. É o caso das notícias sobre actos violentos que, a propósito dos atentados em Bombaim, representam 71% dos artigos difundidos pela agência. No que toca ao conflito em Gaza, regista-se, no entanto, que a maior parte das notícias difundidas não são sobre os combates, que ocupam 10% da informação, mas sim às consequências dos combates (51%) em países como a França, o Iraque, o Afeganistão, com protagonistas que não estão directamente relacionados com os acontecimentos da Palestina. Assim, por exemplo, os muçulmanos de Srebrenica, na Bósnia, quando se reúnem numa manifestação de repúdio dos ataques israelitas. Tal cobertura noticiosa confere uma dimensão multi-facetada e internacional do conflito.

Outro aspecto em que as coberturas da Rádio ONU e da *Reuters* se distanciam tem a ver com o tipo de eventos mediatizados. Na Rádio ONU regista-se uma predominância dos eventos relacionados com a comunicação de posições oficiais ou institucionais. Assim se pode compreender que os eventos do tipo “reunião” sejam os mais referidos. Nas notícias sobre Gaza, “reunião” corresponde a 30% dos eventos mediatizados e a comunicação de posições oficiais das instituições ou seus representantes na Rádio ONU através de “declarações” e “anúncios” estão presentes em 31% das notícias. No acompanhamento dos atentados na Índia, se a totalidade dos eventos mediatizados são

⁵⁵ Cf. p.9.

N.A. A alínea sobre os direitos humanos e liberdades fundamentais pertence ao capítulo IX da Carta.

oficiais: 34% dos eventos são da categoria “reunião”, 33% estão na classe da “decisão” e outros 33% na classe da “declaração”.

Olhando para a cobertura noticiosa da *Reuters* dos atentados de Bombaim, verifica-se que não há qualquer notícia que entre na categoria “reunião”. Os eventos oficiais/institucionais mais citados nas notícias da Reuters sobre Bombaim são a “declaração” e o “anúncio”, com 2% e 7% de ocorrências, respectivamente.

Nos gêneros noticiosos utilizados, ambos os meios de comunicação recorrem de modo expressivo à notícia. Há, contudo, diferenças significativas na utilização de outros gêneros. A mais evidente é que, no contexto da informação difundida sobre os dois acontecimentos analisados, a utilização da notícia pela Rádio ONU não é de 100% porque é interrompida uma vez em que se faz recurso a uma entrevista. Na cobertura do conflito em Gaza e o entrevistado é o Vice-Ministro das Relações Exteriores da Autoridade Nacional Palestina. Por seu lado, a agência *Reuters* completa a informação difundida com recurso a artigos de análise/contextualização (10% dos conteúdos informativos) e com reportagens (8,5% das peças difundidas pela agência sobre Gaza no mês de Janeiro).

Sistematizam-se, de seguida, as principais diferenças entre os dois meios de comunicação em análise.

Quadro 3 – Diferenças registadas na cobertura mediática entre a Rádio ONU e a agência noticiosa Reuters

RÁDIO ONU	AGÊNCIA REUTERS
Predominância da informação que promove os interesses e objectivos da ONU.	Pluralidade nos temas nos artigos difundidos e cobertura mediática com vários ângulos.
Predominância dos protagonistas relacionados com a ONU e com as suas múltiplas agências.	Pluralidade nos protagonistas e de posições/opiniões sobre os acontecimentos.
A Rádio ONU é um canal para a difusão das declarações oficiais da ONU, dos seus representantes e das suas instâncias.	Cobertura com múltiplas vozes, incluindo as oficiais mas também os relatos das testemunhas dos acontecimentos.
A ONU, as suas instâncias e porta-vozes são a fonte maioritária das informações.	Pluralidade de fontes na cobertura dos acontecimentos
Predominância da notícia sobre outros géneros jornalísticos	Recurso a vários géneros jornalísticos embora a predominância seja da notícia

INQUÉRITO

De modo a obter dados mais actualizados sobre a receptividade e utilização dos conteúdos da Rádio ONU, em língua portuguesa, elaborou-se um inquérito⁵⁶ que foi enviado por correio electrónico para 40 rádios parceiras. Receberam-se três respostas.

Pretendia-se com este inquérito:

- a) Saber se a Rádio ONU cumpria os objectivos para que foi criada;
- b) Saber qual o grau de credibilidade atribuído à informação por ela produzida.

⁵⁶ Vide Anexo 23.

Uma vez que o número de respostas não permite a constituição de uma amostra representativa, optou-se pela utilização dos resultados do questionário realizado pela ONU em 2005⁵⁷ que constitui a fonte mais recente de informações sobre a audiência e recepção dos conteúdos da Rádio ONU.

O questionário⁵⁸ foi enviado para 21 estações parceiras. Cinco estações não responderam por terem deixado de utilizar, na altura, o serviço da Rádio ONU em português, substituindo-o por outras fontes de informação internacional.

Apuraram-se quinze respostas. Todas as estações parceiras que responderam consideram que os temas abordados pela Rádio ONU são “relevantes”. Quanto à qualidade dos conteúdos, 13 avaliaram-na com “excelente” (86,6%) e duas como “boa” (13,3%).

No que respeita à duração do noticiário diário emitido a partir da sede da ONU, de cinco minutos, 14 parceiros respondem “sim” à pergunta se a duração é satisfatória (93,3%) e uma estação responde que a melhor duração seria de “10 a 15” minutos.

Finalmente, no que se refere à frequência da difusão dos despachos, oito rádios parceiras respondem que emitem os conteúdos da Rádio ONU cinco vezes por semana, quatro emitem 10 vezes por semana; uma emite seis vezes por semana e outra (Rádio Vaticano) responde que emite 0,5 [*sic*] vezes semanalmente.

Apesar de o questionário não estar actualizado sobre os número de estações parceiras que, nos nossos dias, recebem e retransmitem os conteúdos da Rádio ONU em português, ainda assim é possível encontrar respostas às questões formuladas no início deste capítulo.

⁵⁷ *Survey of Broadcast Products of the Department of Public Information, Radio and TV*. August-December 2005, UN

⁵⁸ *Vide Anexo 24*.

Sobre se a Rádio ONU cumpre os objectivos para que foi criada conclui-se que os conteúdos enviados, da sede da ONU, têm presença diária na maioria das estações parceiras.

No que toca ao grau de credibilidade atribuída à informação produzida por esta rádio, não tendo sido feita a pergunta directamente não é possível ter uma resposta assertiva. Mas, de modo indirecto, admite-se que a resposta seja positiva, fundamentando essa possibilidade na unanimidade dos parceiros sobre a relevância dos temas abordados pela estação e na elevada percentagem (86%) dos que percebem a qualidade dos conteúdos emitidos como “excelentes”.

NOTAS CONCLUSIVAS

Pretendeu-se saber *que é notícia na Rádio ONU*. O estudo do *corpus* constituído por notícias desta estação indica que a notícia na Rádio ONU em português é um conteúdo informativo que mediatiza as iniciativas da Organização das Nações Unidas e cujas fontes são primordialmente a ONU, os seus representantes oficiais, os seus organismos internos e as suas agências.

Era também um objectivo saber *quais são as informações que têm valor de notícia na Rádio ONU*. Os dados sugerem que têm valor-notícia as informações produzidas no interior da ONU susceptíveis de promover o quadro ideológico que está na base da criação da Organização das Nações Unidas. Têm também valor-notícia as informações produzidas no interior da ONU sobre as iniciativas e eventos dos seus representantes que promovam a acção da Organização como actor político isento e supra-nacional.

Outra questão consistia em *saber se o facto de a Rádio ONU integrar o sistema da Organização das Nações Unidas resultava numa concepção própria de mediatização*.

A análise dos resultados aponta no sentido de que o que determina a cobertura mediática da Rádio ONU não é o acontecimento, mas o envolvimento da própria ONU ou dos seus representantes nesse acontecimento. A ocorrência passa a acontecimento na

medida em que é ou não protagonizada pela ONU ou por algum dos seus representantes. O protagonista do acontecimento é quase sempre a própria ONU, através das suas múltiplas agências e representantes.

Com outra abordagem metodológica pretendeu-se, ainda, compreender *como é avaliada a credibilidade da Rádio ONU* pelas estações parceiras e se a estação *cumpr*e os *objectivos* para que foi criada. Para isso, recorreu-se aos resultados de um questionário realizado e enviado pela ONU às estações com as quais mantém acordos de parceria para a distribuição dos seus conteúdos. As estações consideram que a informação difundida pela estação tem elevada credibilidade. Destacam a qualidade dos seus conteúdos. Daí concluir-se que a Rádio ONU é operacional no cumprimento dos *objectivos* para que foi criada.⁵⁹

Refira-se que, de acordo com o estudo efectuado em torno da cobertura dos acontecimentos ocorridos em Bombaim e em Gaza, a informação da Rádio ONU é o produto que assenta em acontecimentos de rotina, como sejam as declarações, as conferências de imprensa, as decisões de reuniões e as próprias reuniões. Na maior parte dos acontecimentos mediatizados, a ONU é, pois, exemplo do que Molotch e Lester (1974/1993) consideram um caso em que o *promotor* das notícias é também o *executor* das mesmas.⁶⁰

E uma vez que a Organização tem a possibilidade de definir o tipo de conteúdos que são difundidos em antena, a Rádio ONU é, também, o que os autores chamam de *news assembler*,⁶¹ já que promove à categoria de acontecimentos as ocorrências associadas à organização a que pertence.

Assumindo que os media «ocupam uma posição de charneira entre os poderes políticos, económicos e científicos (...), e os cidadãos em geral – para os quais (...) funcionam como veículos tradutores da complexidade dos problemas»,⁶² é possível verificar que o

⁵⁹ Vide p.11.

⁶⁰ MOLOTOCH, H. e LESTER, M., *Op. Cit.*, p.42- 43.

⁶¹ *News assembler* é o profissional dos media que valida uma informação, dando-lhe o estatuto de notícia.

⁶² SCHMIDT, L., “*Ciência, risco ambiental e democracia: O papel dos media*”, in GONÇALVES, M.E.. *Globalização, Novos Riscos e Ciência* (Actas dos IX Cursos Internacionais de Verão de Cascais – 2002, Volume 4). Cascais: Câmara Municipal de Cascais, in SERRA, J.P., *A mediatização dos riscos: o caso*

trabalho da Rádio ONU se traduz numa recriação do mundo onde os acontecimentos são apresentados aos consumidores de informação de acordo com os interesses particulares da ONU.

Como nota final, acrescenta-se que, ao difundir a ideologia e dos valores da Organização, A Rádio ONU contribui para que a Organização das Nações Unidas seja um actor principal na gestão dos conflitos no mundo, na cooperação entre os Estados e na procura de soluções para alguns dos problemas da Humanidade.

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ANEXOS

ANEXO 1
CONJUNTO DE NOTAS EDITORIAS DA RÁDIO ONU

UNITED NATIONS RADIO
News/Editorial Notes
Friday, 26 December 2008

GAZA UPDATE:

- Israel has opened three border crossings with Gaza to allow fuels and commodities into the occupied Palestinian territory for the first time in ten days. About 80 trucks filled with food, medicine and other commodities were expected to cross into Gaza. The goods also include 400,000 liters of fuel and 120 tons of cooking gas. The decision to open the crossings at Kerem Shalom, Karni and Nahal Oz came after requests from international aid groups and Egypt. Meanwhile the Israeli government has warned Palestinian militants in Gaza to stop their rocket attacks on Israel. Some 50 rockets have been launched from Gaza in recent days, after the killing of three Hamas members by Israel.
- *[UN Radio pursuing interviews (Arabic and English) with UNRWA.]*

PIRACY BY SOMALIS – CHINA DEPLOYS WARSHIPS:

- China has embarked on its first naval operations outside of the Pacific by deploying two destroyers and a supply ship from the port of Sanya on Hainan Island to join warships from other nations already patrolling the coastline of Somalia.
- *[UN Radio to pursue interviews (Chinese and English) with China's Permanent Representative at the United Nations.]*

TSUNAMI – FOURTH ANNIVERSARY:

- Events are being held in many parts of South Asia to mark the fourth anniversary of the tsunami that killed about 230,000 people in several countries. More than half of the casualties happened in Indonesia and in Aceh. In many of the affected countries – India, Banda Aceh, Thailand, Sri Lanka - thousands of mourners prayed, burned candles and shared meals.
- *[Possible UN Radio interview with UNICEF in the region.]*

GUINEA – LATE PRESIDENT'S FUNERAL AND NEW LEADER REACHES OUT TO INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

- A new government led by the leader of the coup Capt Moussa Dadis Camara has invited the United Nations and the international community to discussions as more than 30 thousand mourners turn up in the national stadium for the funeral of the former president Lansana Conteh who died about a week ago. *[Possible UN Radio interview with UNDP Resident Representative in Conakry.]*

ZIMBABWE HEALTH UPDATE:

- **Cholera Update:** Latest figures (as of 25 December 08): 1518 deaths and 26,497 cases.

DR CONGO – SECURITY AND HEALTH CRISIS UPDATE:

- Rebel leader Laurent Nkunda has accused government troops of violating a ceasefire agreement and requested the UN to intervene.

- Concerns remain over suspected cases of Ebola in Kasai Occidental.
- [Possible UN Radio with MONUC Spokesperson.]

UNITED NATIONS RADIO
News/Editorial Notes
Tuesday, 23 December 2008

GUINEA MILITARY COUP FOLLOWING PRESIDENT'S DEATH:

- The army in Guinea's army has announced a military takeover and dissolved the country's government and suspended the constitution, hours after the death of President Lansana Conte. Capt Moussa Dadis Camara said on state radio that the army had taken over, and a National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD) has been set up. But the situation remains unclear because Prime Minister Ahmed Tidiane Souare had announced in a state broadcast that he was inside his office and that his government had not been dissolved. [*Possible SG Statement*]

MAKE SCHOOLS SAFER. URGES UNICEF IN A REVIEW OF 2008:

- UNICEF is calling for “more concerted action to make schools safe for children”, in view of the number of school collapses that have happened during the course of 2008. “*Safe schools don't just save children's lives,*” says UNICEF's Global Chief of Education, Mr. Cream Wright, adding, “*They can also serve as temporary shelters for communities in times of disasters.*” [*UNICEF Press Release. Possible interview with UNICEF's Cream Wright.*]

'YEAR OF TRAGEDIES AND TRIUMPHS FOR SOUTH ASIA'S CHILDREN' – UNICEF:

- UNICEF's Regional Director for South Asia, Dan Toole, says 2008 will go down as ‘*a year in which children continued to be recruited in conflicts, yet a year when conflicts were briefly halted for the sake of children's health; and a year when the food, fuel and financial crises threatened to worsen child malnutrition, yet triggered off important new thinking on protection of the most vulnerable*’. [*UNICEF Press Release. Possible interview with UNICEF's Dan Toole*]

FIRST DETECTION OF EBOLA-RESTON IN PIGS / PHILIPPINES / FAO:

- Following the detection of the Ebola-Reston virus in pigs in the Philippines, FAO, the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the World Health Organization (WHO) announced today that the government of the Philippines has requested the three agencies send an expert mission to work with human and animal health experts in the Philippines to further investigate the situation. [*FAO Press Release. Possible interview with FAO*]

ZIMBABWE CHOLERA UPDATE:

- Latest figures: More than 1,174 deaths and 23,712 cases.
- UNICEF representative in Zimbabwe, Roeland Monasch, says the disease is still popping up across the country and so the epidemic is not yet under control.

- **UNICEF's** first ever airlift of critical emergency supplies to Zimbabwe has landed in Harare, as Zimbabwe grapples with cholera and a collapsing health system. The cargo – which includes intravenous (IV) fluids, drip equipment, essential drugs, midwifery and obstetric kits – will boost UNICEF's cholera response and aid government to deliver some essential health services to expecting mothers. *[Possible UN Radio interview with UNICEF's Roeland Monasch in Zimbabwe.]*

DR CONGO UPDATE:

- **UNHCR** remains very concerned about the safety of hundreds of vulnerable families living in villages in the east and north-east of Dungu. These people, who include the elderly and the handicapped, are reportedly unable to make their way south to safety. Many of them are sleeping in the open and several are in acute need of medical assistance, food and shelter. Still in the same area, five children abducted by the LRA have recently managed to escape. UNHCR and UNICEF traced their families in the Dungu district and a reunion will be organized in the coming days. *[UNHCR Press Release available – Audio of Helene Caux from Geneva Briefing.]*

GENERAL ASSEMBLY PLENARY MEETING, 10 am, GA Hall:

1. Follow-up to and implementation of the outcome of the **2002 International Conference on Financing for Development and the preparation of the 2008 Review Conference**: draft resolution (A/63/L.57)
2. General and complete **disarmament**: report of the First Committee (A/63/389, para.86, draft resolution XXV)
3. **Promotion and protection of the rights of children**: report of the Third Committee (A/63/426, para.18, draft resolution)
4. **Elimination of racism and racial discrimination**: report of the Third Committee (A/63/428, para.31, draft resolutions II and III)
5. **Human rights questions**, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms: report of the Third Committee (A/63/430/Add.2, para.182, draft resolution XXIII)
6. Human right situations and reports of **special rapporteurs and representatives**: report of the Third Committee (A/63/430/Add.3, para.29, draft resolution II)
7. Reports of the **Fifth Committee**

ANEXO 2

ACORDO
ENTRNASÇÕES UNIDAS
E

(Transmissora ou Empresa Parceira)

SOBRE

DIREITOS DE RETRANSMISSÃO DOS PROGRAMAS DA RÁDIO ONU:

JORNAL DA ONU E TEXTOS DE INTERNET

DOCUMENTÁRIOS E REPORTAGENS

ANÚNCIOS, SPOTS E INFORMATIVOS PÚBLICOS DAS
NAÇÕES UNIDAS

Este acordo é assinado entre as Nações Unidas (doravante denominada

PRODUTORA) e (empresa parceira) _____

(doravante denominada TRANSMISSORA ou EMPRESA PARCEIRA) situada à

Rua (endereço) _____

_____ .

1. Iniciando a partir de (data), o PRODUTOR cede à TRANSMISSORA ou EMPRESA PARCEIRA e a TRANSMISSORA adquire do PRODUTOR os direitos não-exclusivos de transmissão ilimitada por ar, cabo e satélite dos programas produzidos pela RÁDIO DAS NAÇÕES UNIDAS (RÁDIO ONU), incluindo, mas não limitado, ao NOTICIÁRIO DIÁRIO “Jornal da ONU” (DIAS ÚTEIS) DA RÁDIO ONU, REPORTAGENS, ANÚNCIOS, SPOTS DA RADIO ONU, TEXTO E MATÉRIAS no seu formato original, além de outros produtos e materiais que a RÁDIO ONU possa oferecer, em qualquer língua em que os programas e matérias forem produzidos. Para este acordo específico, a produção será feita em primeiro lugar em Português para África e Português para o Brasil ficando a cargo da TRANSMISSORA escolher a variante. Outros programas são produzidos nas seis línguas oficiais da ONU (Inglês, Francês, Espanhol, Russo, Chinês e Árabe) ao quais a TRANSMISSORA também têm acesso. O acordo prevê ainda acesso ao texto da página da Rádio ONU na internet para reprodução com atribuição padronizada de crédito à Rádio ONU incluindo a indicação de link do PRODUTOR (<http://radio.un.org/por>).
2. O NOTICIÁRIO DIÁRIO “Jornal da ONU” DA RÁDIO ONU consistirá de um programa de rádio de cinco (5) minutos de duração, produzido a cada dia útil incluindo feriados nos Estados Unidos. As notícias são produzidas e colocadas na

página imediatamente e podem ser usadas como boletins ou matérias de texto (sempre com acesso ao som) pelas empresas parceiras. As REPORTAGENS DA RÁDIO ONU se constituirão em programas com, no máximo, 10 minutos de duração, distribuídos semanalmente, quinzenalmente ou mensalmente. Além disso, empresas parceiras têm acesso a entrevistas exclusivas com personalidades políticas, altos funcionários da ONU e, numa edição especial anual, exclusivas com chefes de Estado e Governo durante os debates na Assembléia Geral da ONU, em setembro. Os SPOTS e ANÚNCIOS DA RÁDIO ONU se constituirão em mensagens de áudio com 30 ou 60 segundos de duração, distribuídas concomitantemente com vários eventos e/ou atividades organizadas pela ONU.

3. A TRANSMISSORA é autorizada a veicular os programas diretamente/ por satellite, RSS feed/ em seus canais e estações ou outros meios e plataformas que possuam legalmente para transmissão.

4. A TRANSMISSORA concorda com:
 - a) Preencher o formulário em anexo (Perfil da Estação ou Empresa Parceira da RÁDIO ONU);
 - b) Transmitir os programas e os spots da RÁDIO ONU integralmente, sempre que for possível;
 - c) Não transmitir os programas da RÁDIO ONU, seja integralmente ou parcialmente, no horário entre 02h e 6h da manhã, horário local, sem que o programa tenha sido transmitido primeiramente em horário nobre;
 - d) Dar crédito à RÁDIO ONU todas as vezes que o programa for transmitido, seja integralmente ou parcialmente;
 - e) Informar ao PRODUTOR os horários específicos de transmissão nos quais os programas da RÁDIO ONU forem veiculados, integralmente ou parcialmente;
 - f) Aceitar unilateralmente a responsabilidade sobre o conteúdo, todas as vezes que partes dos programas da RÁDIO ONU sejam utilizados ou inseridos em outras transmissões;
 - g) Enviar ao PRODUTOR a logomarca do SISTEMA DE TRANSMISSÃO no sentido de promover a parceria entre AS PARTES em materiais promocionais, incluindo páginas na internet, além da divulgação de um comunicado de imprensa conjunto;
 - h) Enviar regularmente ao PRODUTOR comentários e sugestões sobre aspectos técnicos e de conteúdo dos programas da RÁDIO ONU, que poderão ser utilizados pelo PRODUTOR para promoção dos produtos da RÁDIO ONU em diversos formatos e mídias.

5. Para ter acesso a TODOS OS PROGRAMAS DA RÁDIO ONU, o PRODUTOR concorda com oferecer gratuitamente à TRANSMISSORA o endereço do servidor FTP da ONU, identificação válida e senha, através dos quais a TRANSMISSORA baixará (download) os progr

6. O PRODUTOR solicita a TRANSMISSORA participar de pesquisas formais ou informais que o PRODUTOR precise realizar no sentido de avaliar quaisquer aspectos dos programas da RÁDIO ONU incluindo pesquisas sobre produção, promoção e distribuição dos mesmos;

7. A TRANSMISSORA poderá, através de financiamento próprio, conduzir campanhas promocionais promovendo a produção da RÁDIO ONU garantindo que crédito nominal seja dado ao PRODUTOR nesses materiais promocionais;

8. A TRANSMISSORA não poderá utilizar o nome das Nações Unidas ou sua abreviação para nenhum propósito ou fim sem a expressa autorização prévia por escrito das Nações Unidas;

9. Este acordo será renovado a cada dois (02) anos por um período de mais dois (02) anos e pode ser terminado por qualquer uma das partes mediante aviso prévio por escrito.

EM TESTEMUNHA PRESENTE, as partes firmam o presente acordo para execução imediata.

ACEITO:

Por: _____
(assinatura)

(Transmissora ou Empresa Parceira)

(representante)

(título)

Data:

ACEITO:

Por: _____
(assinatura)

NAÇÕES UNIDAS

Ahmad Fawzi

Diretor

Divisão de Notícias e Mídia

Departamento de Informação Pública

Nações Unidas

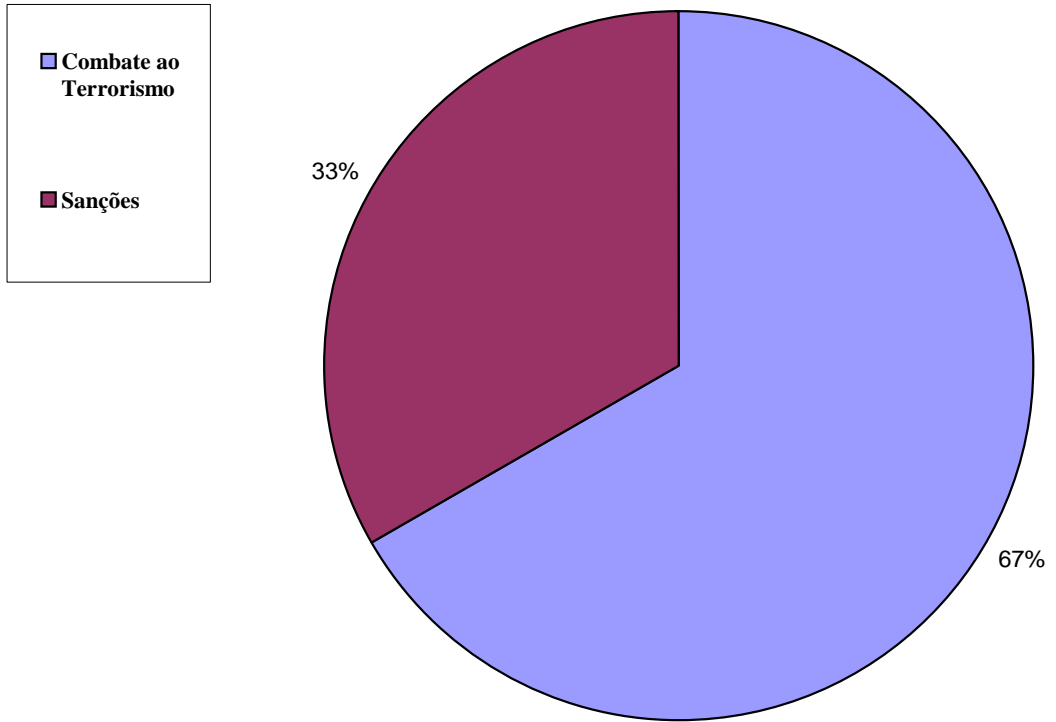
Nova York, NY 10017

Data:

GRÁFICOS

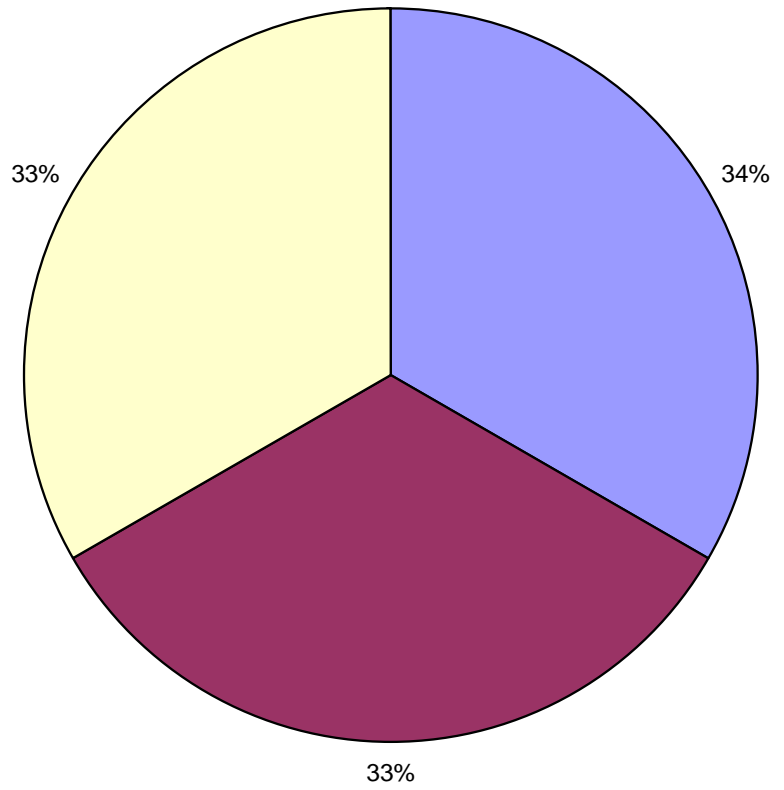
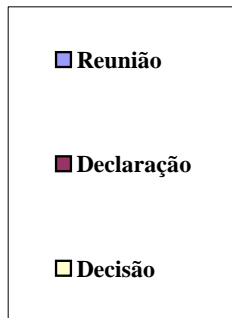
ANEXO 3

Gráfico 3
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Bombaim
Temas



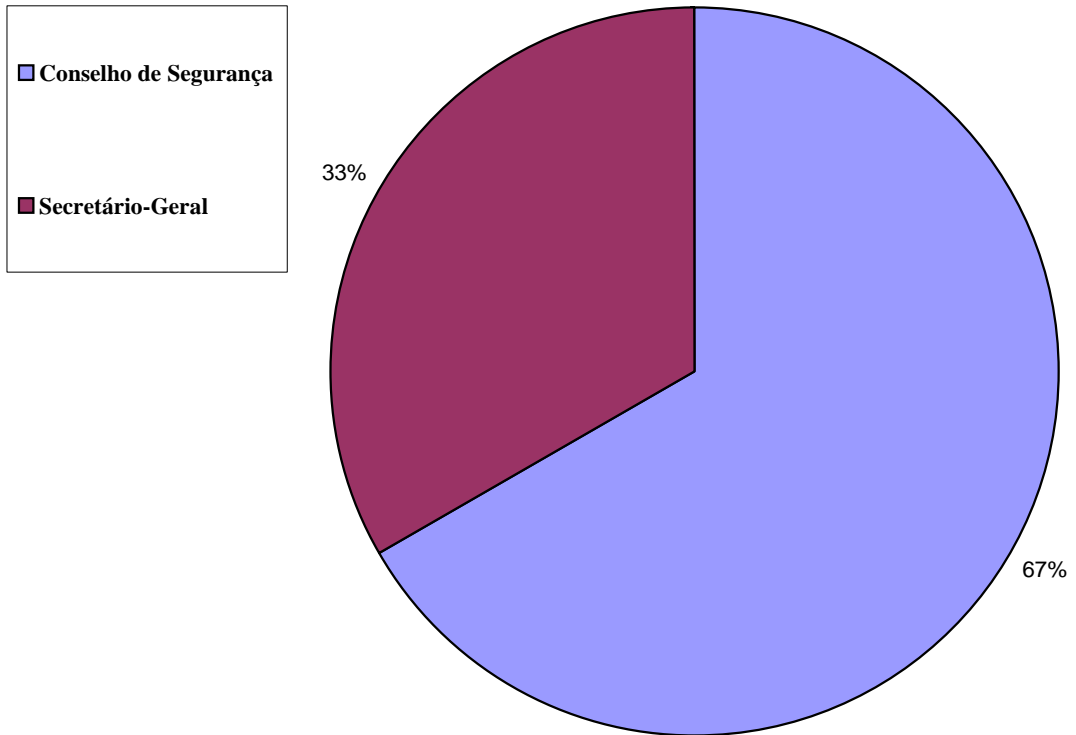
ANEXO 4

Gráfico 4
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Bombaim
Eventos mediatizados



ANEXO 5

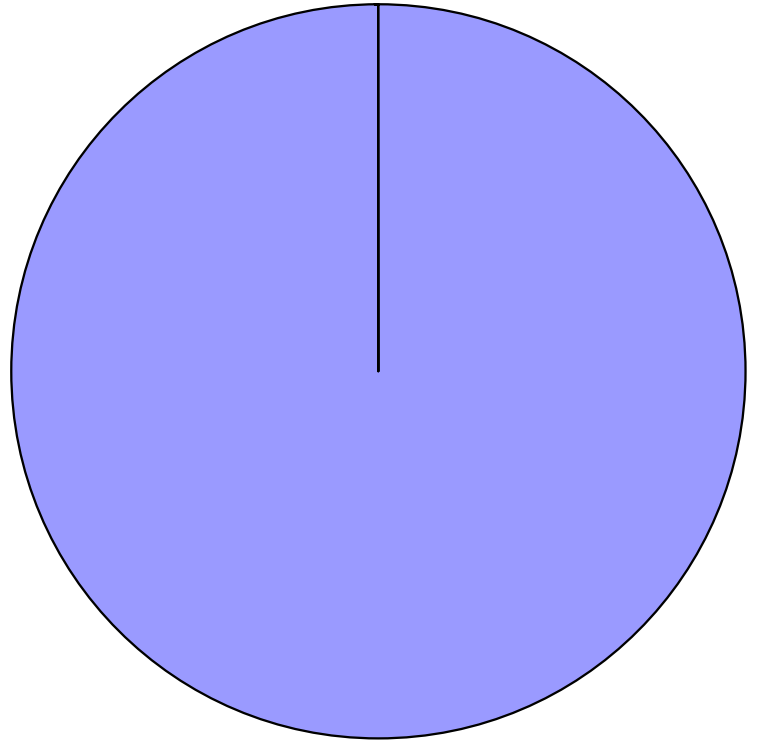
Gráfico 5
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Bombaim
Protagonistas



ANEXO 6

Gráfico 6
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Bombaim
Distribuição dos conteúdos por Géneros informativos

Notícia

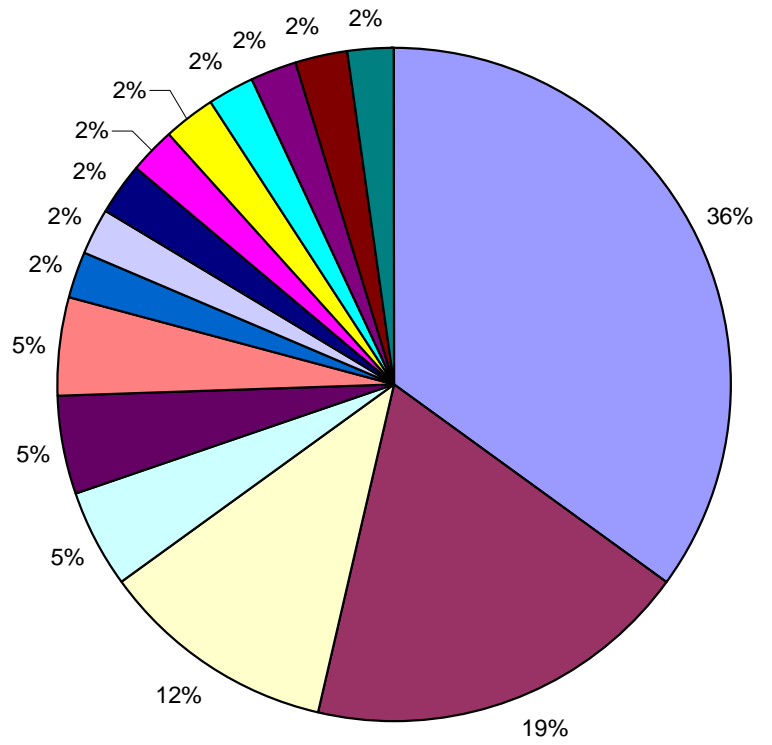


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ANEXO 7

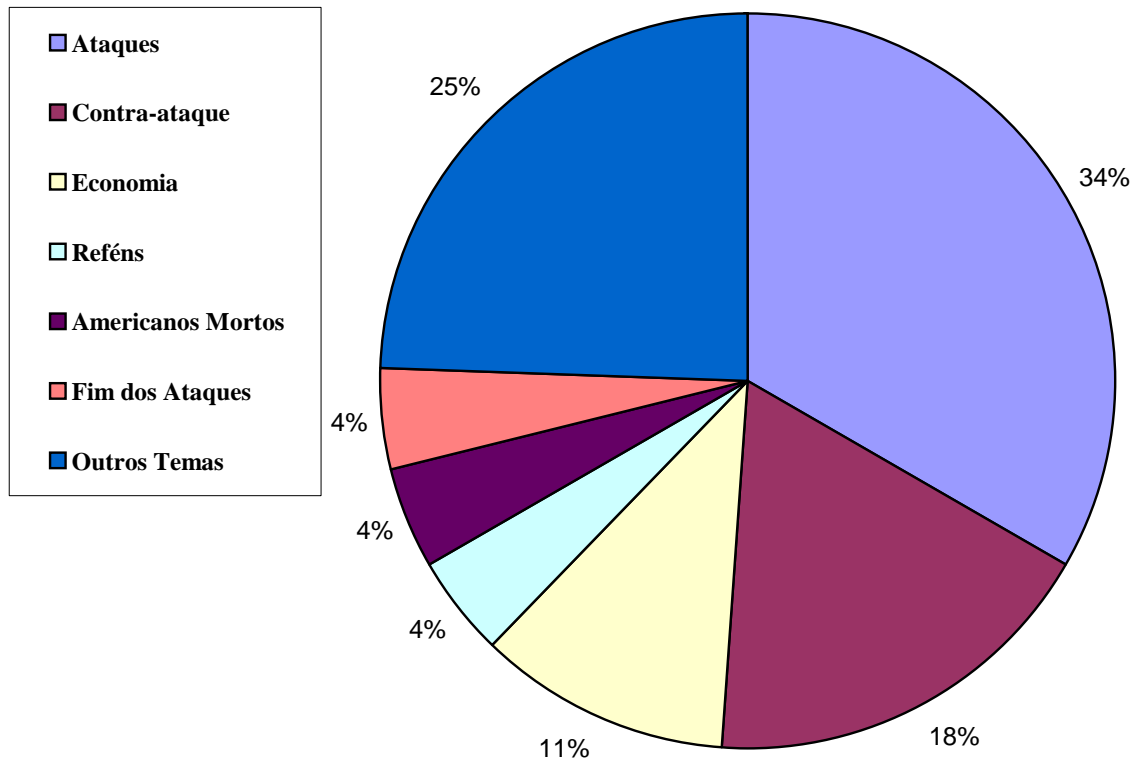
Gráfico 7
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Bombaim
Variedade dos Temas

- Ataques
- Contra-ataque
- Economia
- Reféns
- Americanos Mortos
- Fim dos Ataques
- Campeonato de Cricket
- Aviação Civil
- Equipa Cricket
- Política
- Preparação de Ataques
- Combates
- Manifestação
- Hotel Tridente
- Terrorismo Internacional



ANEXO 8

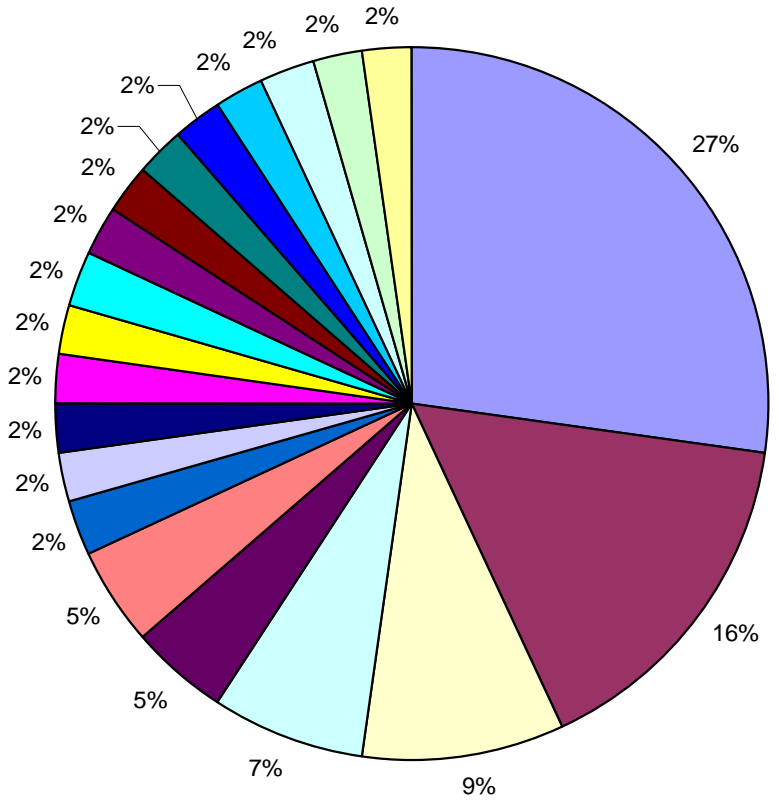
Gráfico 8
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Bombaim
Presença dos Temas relacionados com o conflito



ANEXO 9

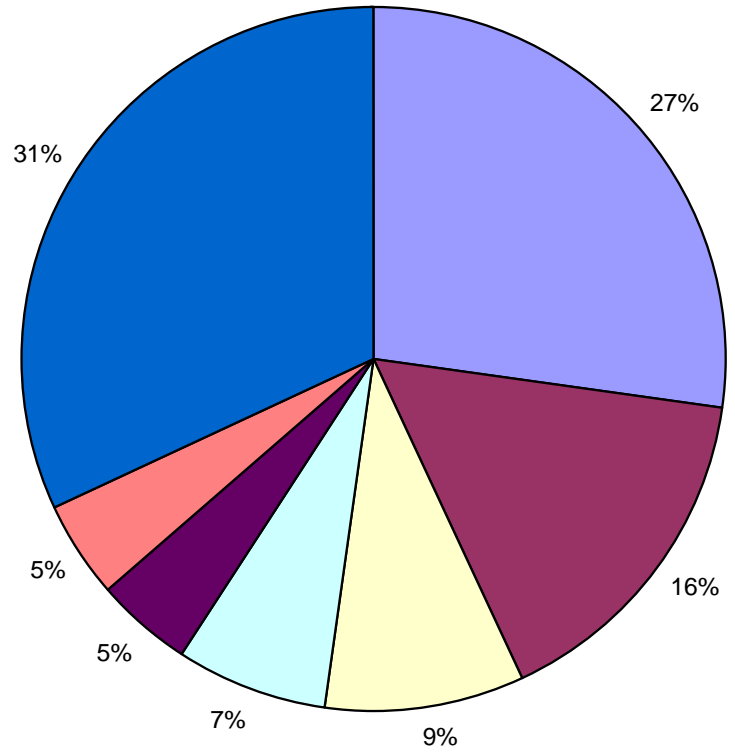
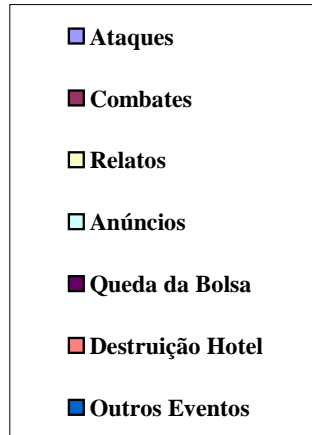
Gráfico 9
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Bombaim
Variedade de Eventos mediatizados

- Ataques
- Combates
- Relatos
- Anúncios
- Queda da Bolsa
- Destruição Hotel
- Terrorismo
- Manifestação
- Subida da Bolsa
- Declaração
- Fim Ataques
- Cancelamentos Voos
- Decisão
- Envio Tropas
- Libertação de Reféns
- Adiantamento Cricket
- Visita a Alvos
- Acusação
- Testemunhos
- Mortes



ANEXO 10

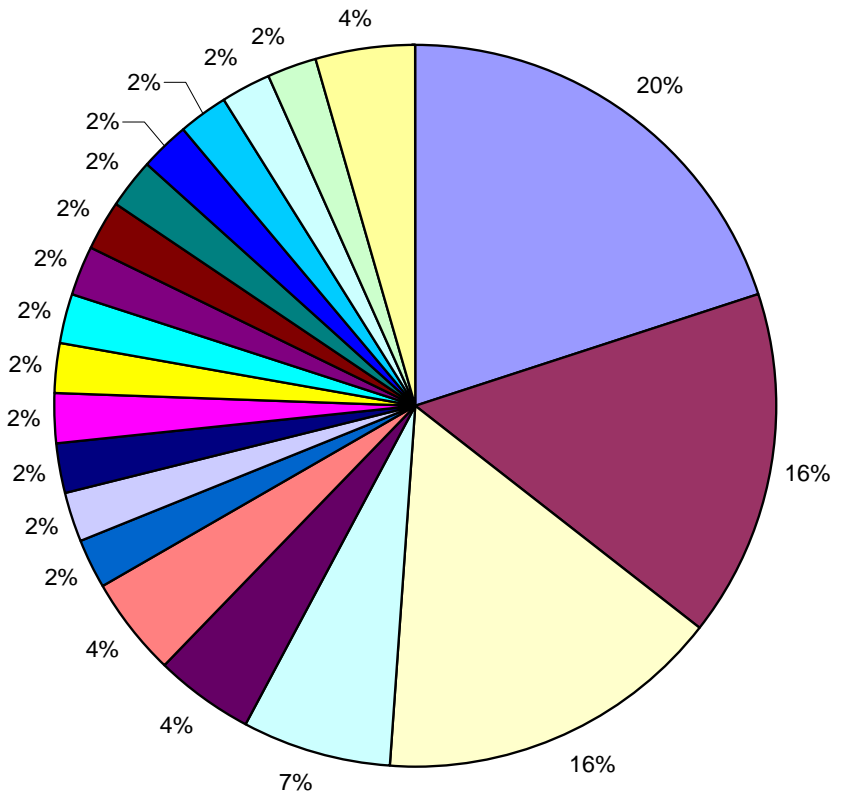
Gráfico 10
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Bombaim
Presença de Eventos relacionados com o conflito



ANEXO 11

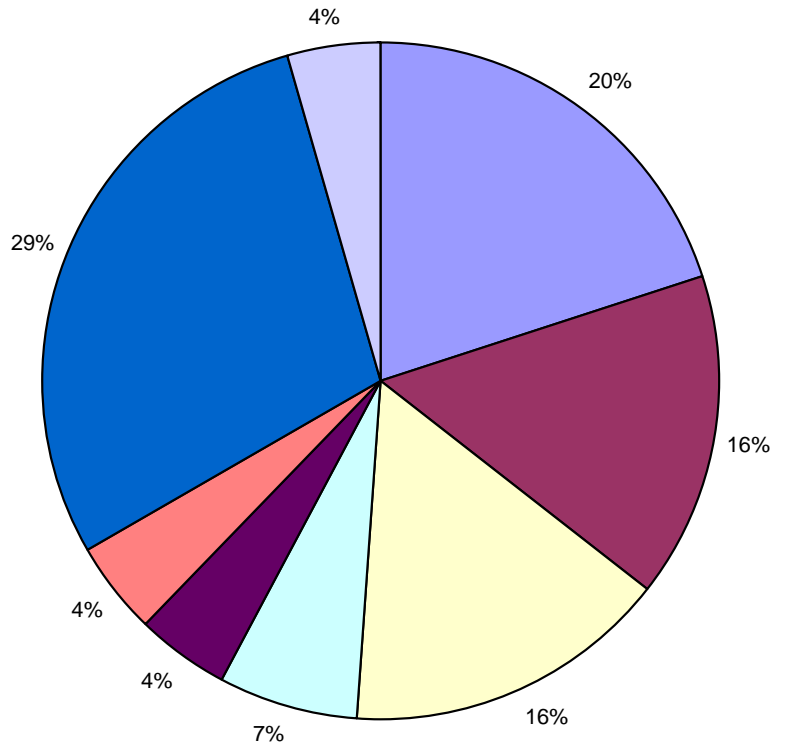
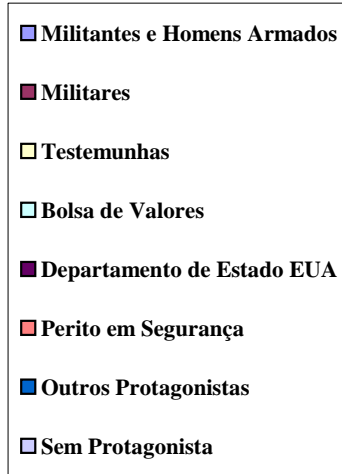
Gráfico 11
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Bombaim
Variedade dos Protagonistas

- Militantes e Homens Armados
- Militares
- Testemunhas
- Bolsa de Valores
- Departamento de Estado EUA
- Perito em Segurança
- Atriz Australiana
- Media Indianos
- Capitão de Equipa
- Mortos
- Economia Indiana
- Oficial Indiano
- TV's India
- Alemão Morto
- Organizadores
- Sobreviventes
- Responsáveis Indianos
- Jornalista
- Companhias aéreas
- Sem Protagonista



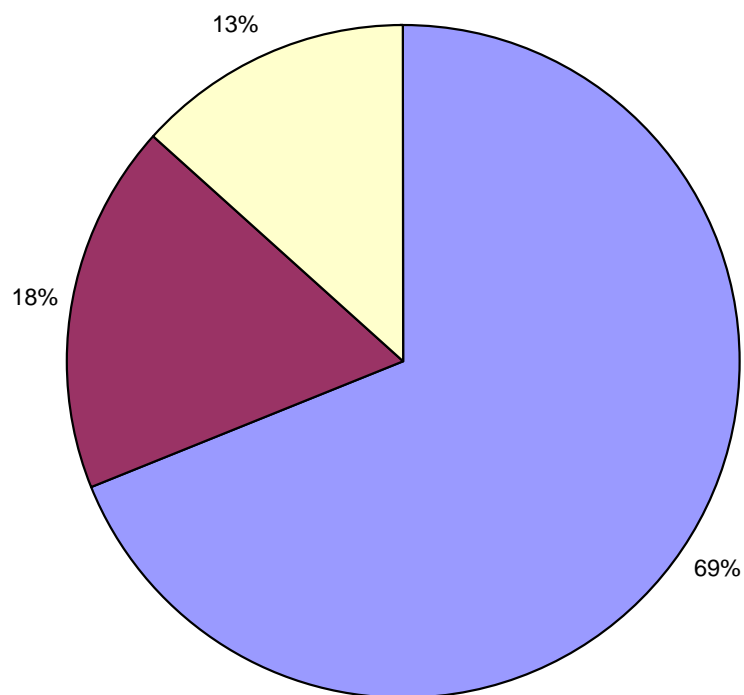
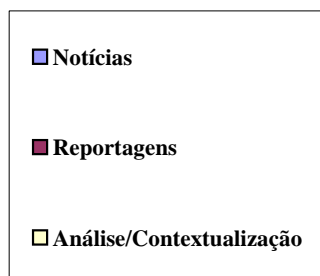
ANEXO 12

Gráfico 12
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Bombaim
Presença de Protagonistas relacionados com o conflito



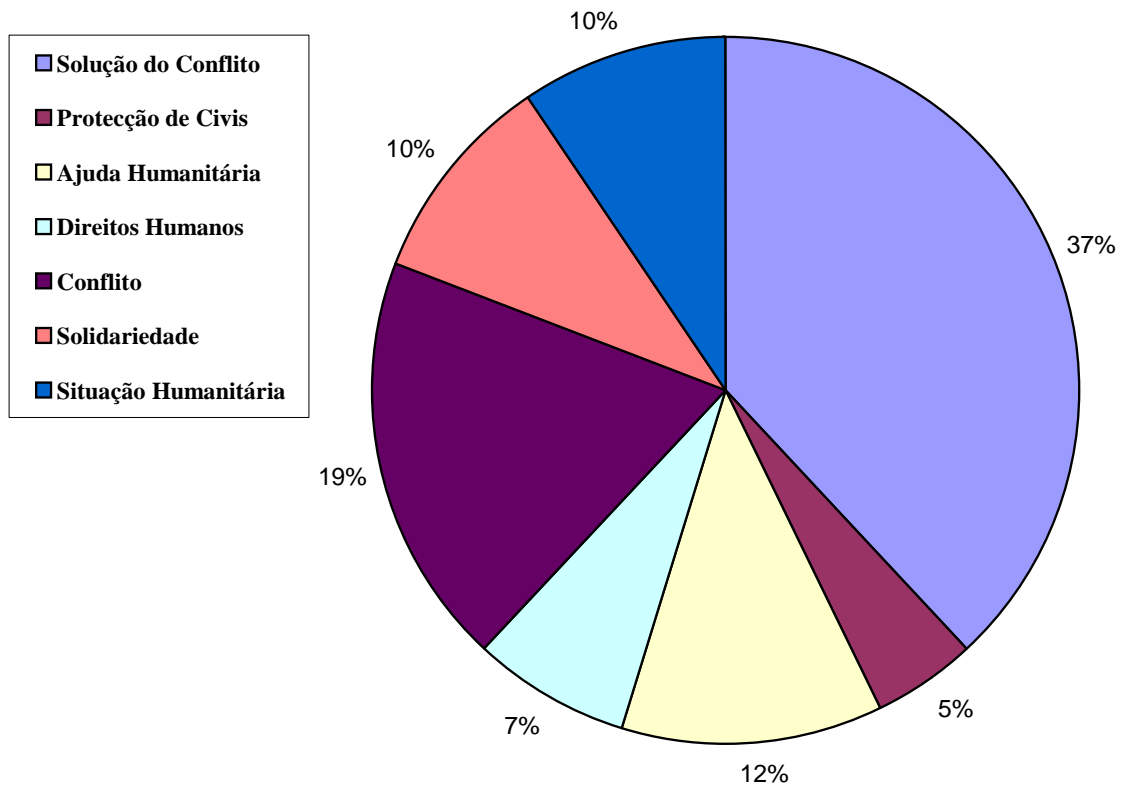
ANEXO 13

Gráfico 13
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Bombaim
Distribuição dos conteúdos por Gêneros informativos



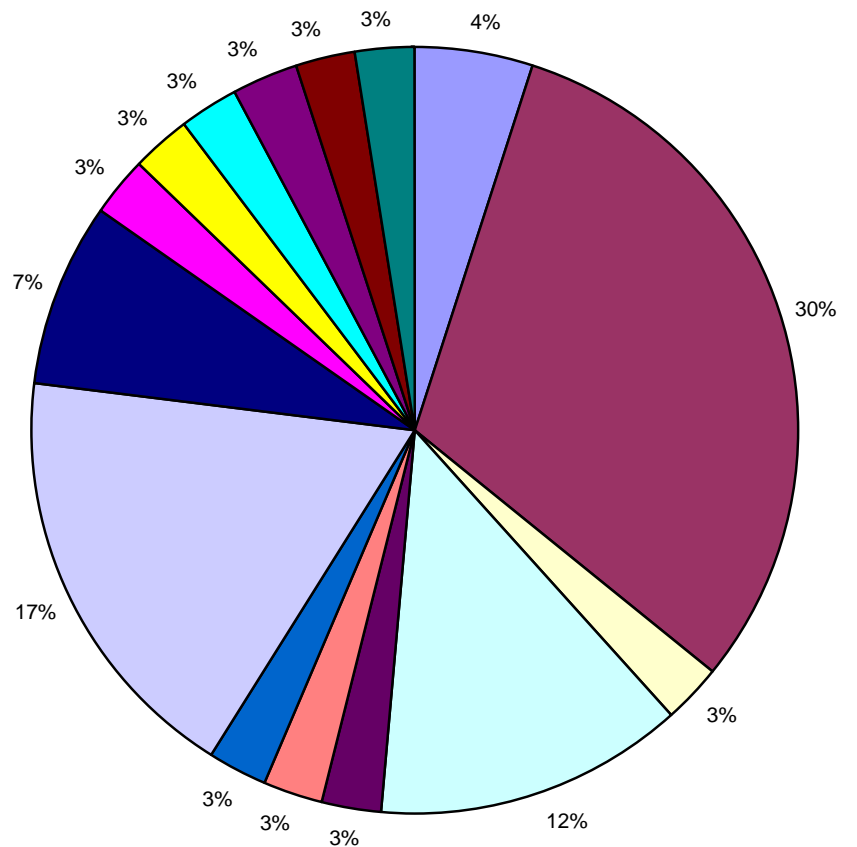
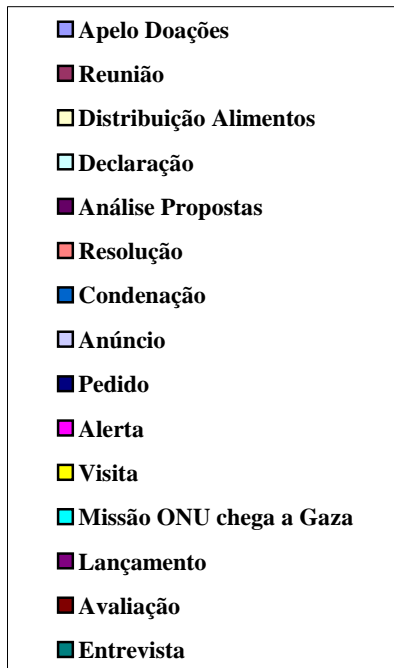
ANEXO 14

Gráfico 14
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Gaza
Temas



ANEXO 15

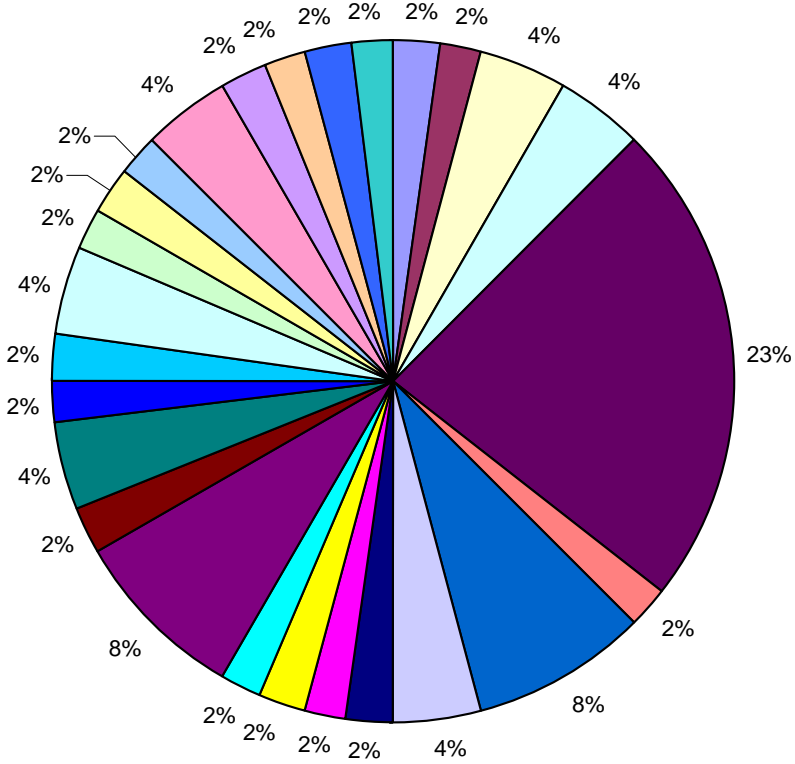
Gráfico 15
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Gaza
Eventos mediatizados



ANEXO 16

- Relatora Direitos Humanos ONU
- Coordenador ONU para o processo de paz no Médio Oriente
- PAM - Programa Alimentar Mundial
- Liga Árabe
- Secretário-Geral ONU
- Presidente Autoridade Palestiniana
- Conselho Segurança ONU
- Embaixadora Brasil na ONU
- Embaixador França na ONU
- Embaixador Angola na ONU
- Presidente Assembleia-Geral ONU
- OCHA - Escritório ONU de Assistência Humanitária
- UNWRA - Agência ONU de Assistência aos Refugiados Palestinos
- Alto Comissário para os Refugiados
- Conselho Direitos Humanos ONU
- Alta Comissária para os Direitos Humanos ONU
- Rainha da Jordânia
- UNICEF - Fundo ONU para a Infância
- Presidente Egito
- Autoridade Palestiniana
- Representantes Israelitas
- OMS - Organização Mundial de Saúde
- Sub-Secretário-Geral da ONU para os Assuntos Humanitários
- Cat Stevens/Youssuf Islam
- Vice-Ministro das Relações Exteriores da Autoridade Palestiniana
- PNUD - Programa da ONU para o Desenvolvimento

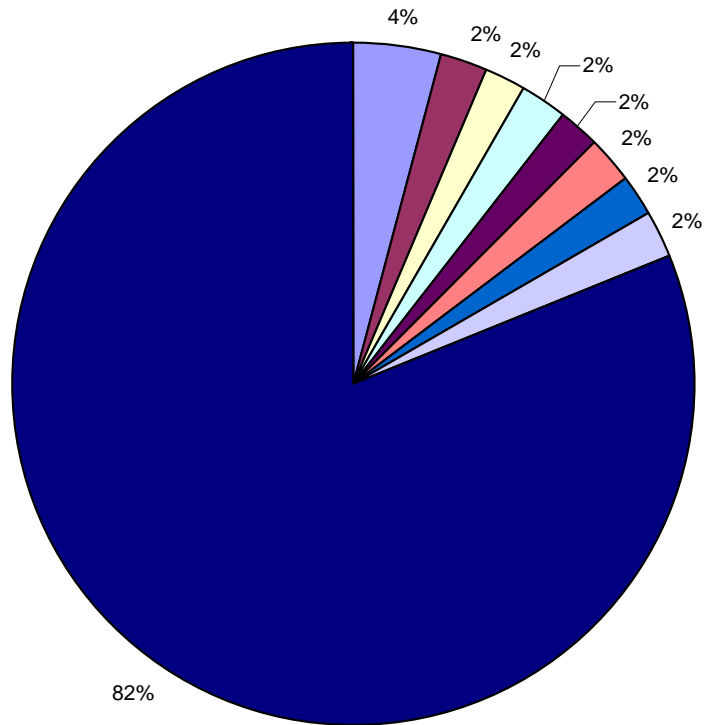
Gráfico 16
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Gaza
Variedade de Protagonistas



ANEXO 17

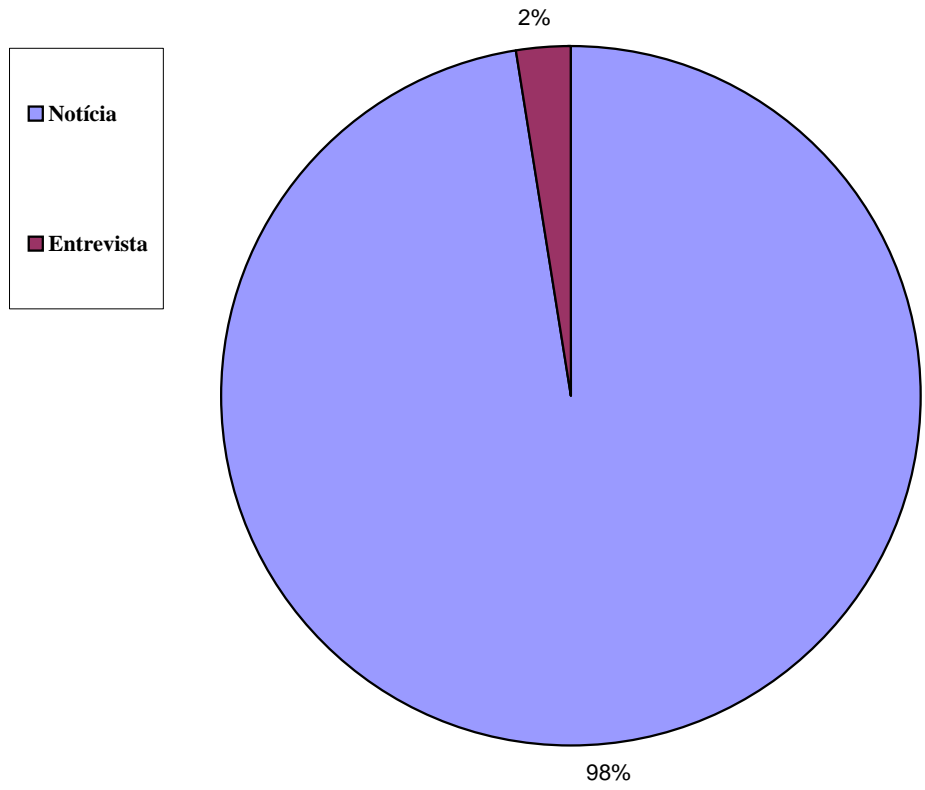
Gráfico 17
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Gaza
Presença dos Protagonistas da ONU

- Liga Árabe
- Presidente Autoridade Palestiniana
- Rainha da Jordânia
- Presidente Egípto
- Autoridade Palestiniana
- Representantes Israelitas
- Cat Stevens/Youssuf Islam
- Vice-Ministro das Relações Exteriores da Autoridade Palestiniana
- Protagonistas ONU



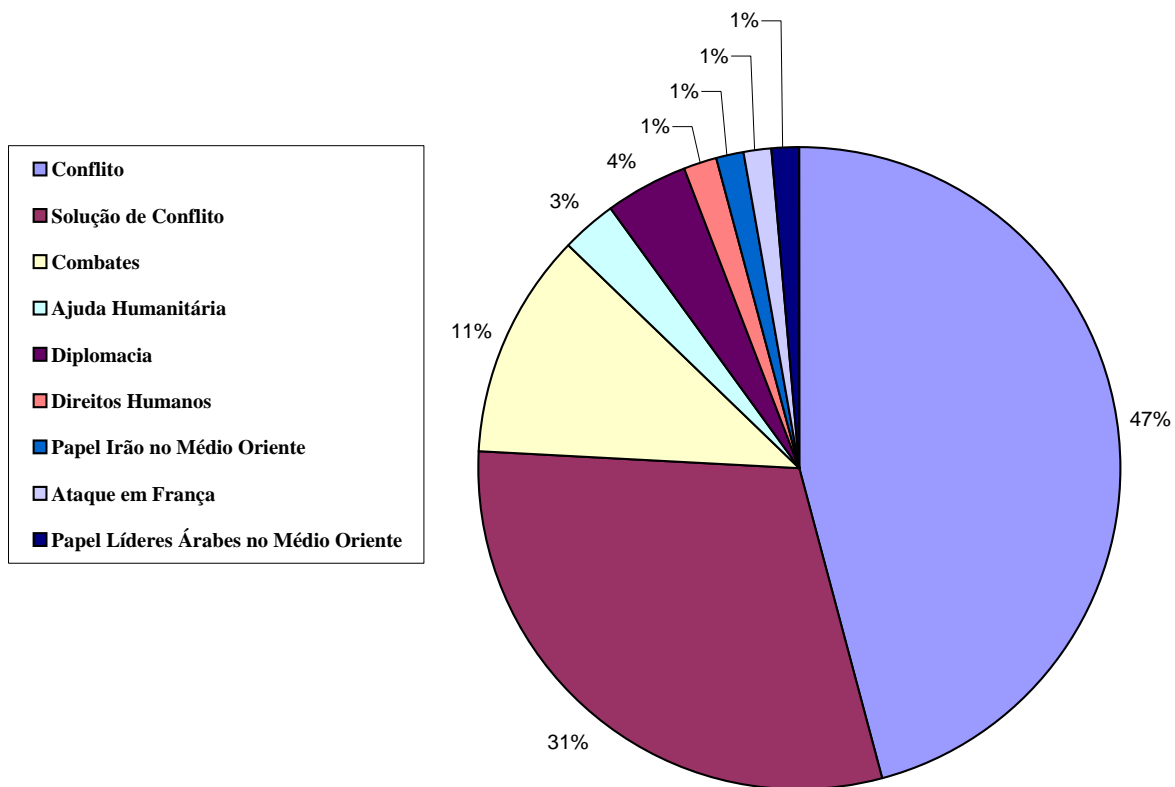
ANEXO 18

Gráfico 18
Rádio ONU - Cobertura Gaza
Distribuição dos conteúdos por Género informativo



ANEXO 19

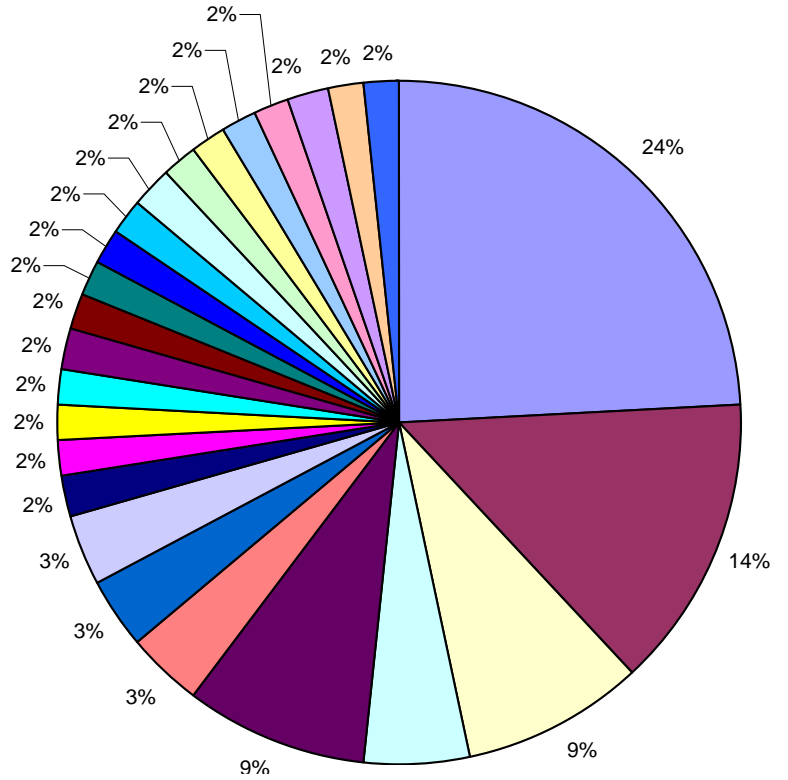
Gráfico 19
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Gaza
Temas



ANEXO 20

Gráfico 20
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Gaza
Eventos mediatizados

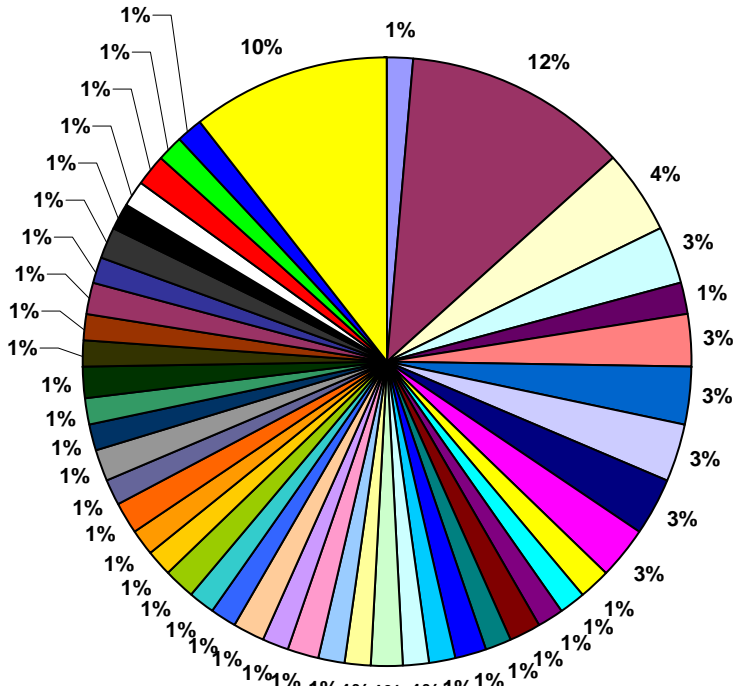
- Declaração
- Reunião
- Apelo
- Movimentações Militares
- Manifestação
- Apoio
- Ataque Israelita
- Acusação
- Acordo
- Evocação
- Assassinato
- Pedido
- Ameaça
- Pedido de Ajuda
- Recrutamento
- Expulsão
- Preocupação
- Tumultos
- Queda Míssil
- Condenação
- Análise Proposta
- Apresentação Proposta
- Elaboração Proposta
- Resgate de Crianças
- Reacção



ANEXO 21

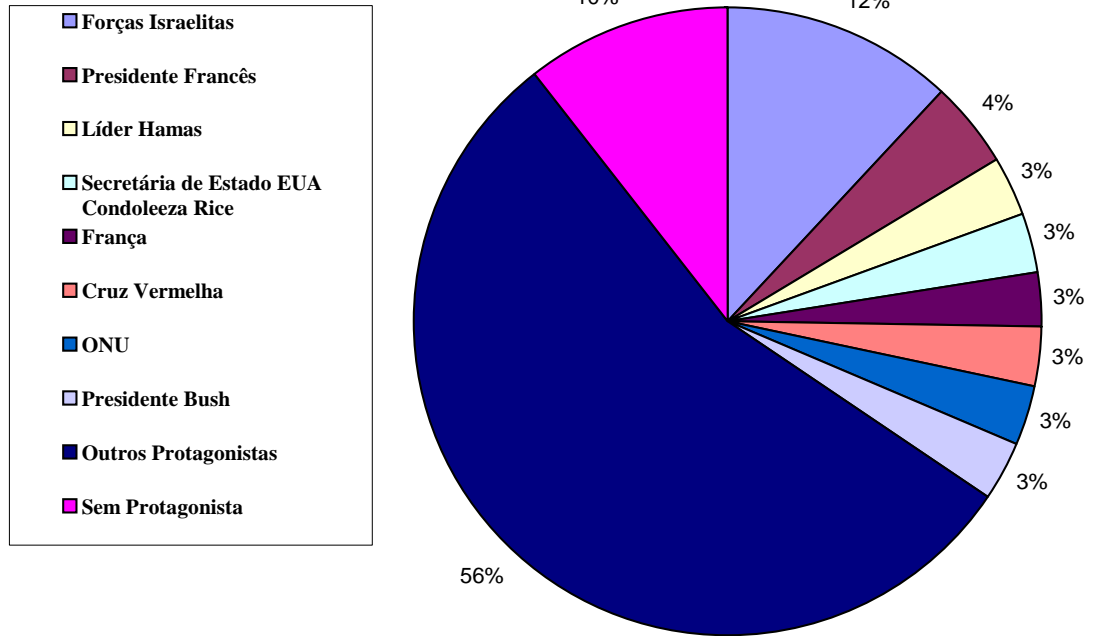
Gráfico 21
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Gaza
Variedade de Protagonistas

- Israel e Hamas
- Forças Israelitas
- Presidente Francês
- Presidente Bush
- Senado EUA
- Líder Hamas
- Secretária de Estado EUA Condoleeza Rice
- França
- Cruz Vermelha
- ONU
- Manifestantes Pró-Israelitas e Pró-Palestinos
- Departamento Estado EUA
- Egípto
- Vaticano e Povo Judeu
- Conselho dos Direitos Humanos ONU
- MNE's Árabes e dos Países do Conselho Segurança
- Ministros Árabes e Potências Ocidentais
- Governo Mauritano
- Conselho Segurança ONU
- Organismo Islâmico de topo
- Presidente Irão
- Irão
- Manifestantes Afegãos
- Facções Palestinianas
- Cipriotas Gregos e Turcos
- Autoridades Palestiniana e Egípcia
- Autoridades de Segurança da Jordânia e do Egípto
- Jovens Afegãos
- Líder da Al-Qaeda
- Palestinos e Israelitas
- Venezuela
- Porta-voz Casa Branca
- Primeiro-Ministro Palestino
- Barack Obama
- Muçulmanos de Kashmir e Polícia
- Comissário Europeu Jean-Michel
- Governo Israelita
- Líder Al-Qaeda no Iraque
- Nobel Iraniana
- Responsáveis Franceses
- União Europeia
- Polícia Egípcia e Irmandade Muçulmana
- Muçulmanos Sobreviventes Sbrénica
- MNE Belga
- Rei do Barein
- Sem Protagonista



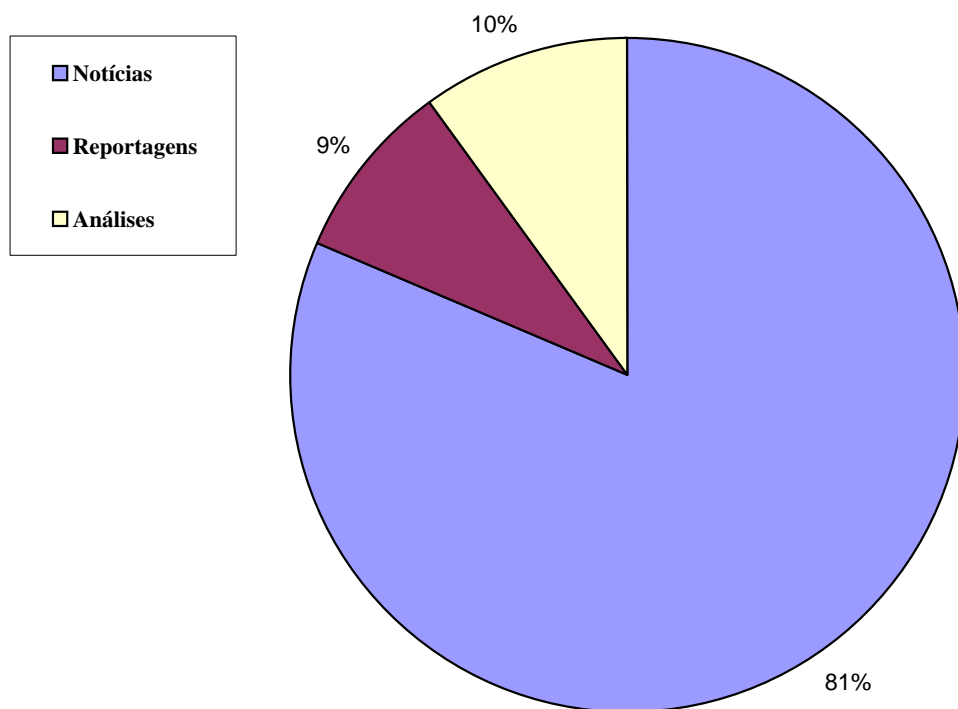
ANEXO 22

Gráfico 22
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Gaza
Protagonistas com maior ocorrência



ANEXO 23

Gráfico 23
Agência Reuters - Cobertura Gaza
Distribuição dos conteúdos por Gêneros informativos



ANEXO 24

Três vezes por semana _

Duas vezes por semana _

Nunca _

Reportagens

Todos os dias _

Quatro vezes por semana _

Três vezes por semana _

Duas vezes por semana _

Nunca _

2) Utiliza os conteúdos da Rádio ONU na totalidade ou aproveita apenas o que interessa à sua audiência?

Em bloco _

Só o que interessa _

Não utilizo _

3) Quanto à credibilidade, considera que as notícias da Rádio ONU:

Não têm credibilidade —

Têm pouca credibilidade —

Têm credibilidade —

Têm muita credibilidade —

Não sabe —

4) Quanto ao interesse, considera que as notícias da Rádio ONU:

Não têm interesse —

Têm pouco interesse —

Têm interesse —

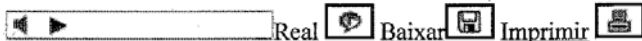
Têm muito interesse —

Não sabe

ANEXO A
NOTÍCIAS DA RÁDIO ONU SOBRE BOMBAIM

9 dezembro 2008

TBD



ONU deve liderar esforços na luta ao terrorismo

09/12/2008

Ban Ki-moon diz que a imparcialidade e independência da ONU permitem à organização liderar melhor os esforços internacionais contra o terrorismo.



João Rosário, da Rádio ONU em Nova Iorque.

O Secretário-Geral da ONU, Ban Ki-moon, defendeu que a liderança da luta contra o terrorismo deve ser uma responsabilidade das Nações Unidas.

Num encontro do Conselho de Segurança, realizado esta terça-feira, sobre Segurança Global e Terrorismo Internacional, Ban Ki-moon declarou que o combate a este fenómeno deve ser uma das maiores prioridades da comunidade internacional.

Ameaça

Ban disse que “as Nações Unidas têm a responsabilidade de liderar os esforços da comunidade internacional no confronto contra esta ameaça, que não tem qualquer justificação”. O Secretário-Geral considera ainda que a ONU, “enquanto organização Universal, independente e imparcial, está em situação impar para o papel de líder” da luta contra o terrorismo.

O Secretário-Geral citou os recentes ataques em Bombaim como exemplos de como o terrorismo pode dividir sociedades e povos e minar instituições.

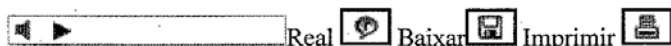
Ban Ki-moon lembrou a Estratégia Global Contra o Terrorismo, aprovada pela ONU em 2006 como um exemplo dos esforços da organização em reunir a comunidade internacional em volta de um consenso geral para lutar o fenómeno, sob a égida das Nações Unidas.

Outras notícias

- [Fale conosco](#)
- [©ONU2000-2007](#)
- [Volte ao Topo](#)

28 novembro 2008

TBD



ONU reafirma compromisso de combater terrorismo

28/11/2008

Declaração foi feita pelo Conselho de Segurança após atentados que mataram pelo menos 130 pessoas em Bombaim, na Índia.



Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

Os 15 países-membros do Conselho de Segurança da ONU divulgaram uma declaração que condena os ataques terroristas em Bombaim, considerada o centro financeiro da Índia.

Os múltiplos ataques, incluindo um contra o hotel de luxo Taj Mahal Palace, mataram pelo menos 130 pessoas.

Novas Explosões

Leia o boletim de Eduardo Costa.

“Na declaração, publicada na quinta-feira, o Conselho de Segurança pediu que os responsáveis e patrocinadores dos ataques sejam levados à Justiça.

O órgão também reafirmou sua determinação para combater todas as formas de terrorismo de acordo com os parâmetros da Carta das Nações Unidas.

Segundo agências de notícias, novas explosões e tiroteios foram ouvidos esta sexta-feira. E tropas especiais da polícia continuam a tentar a libertação de vários reféns.

A polícia indiana informou que quase 400 pessoas ficaram feridas desde o início dos ataques na quarta-feira.

Hospital

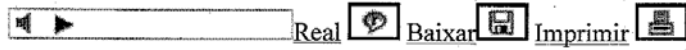
Dezenas de hóspedes estrangeiros que estavam no Hotel Oberoi/Trident, também alvo dos atentados, foram resgatados pela polícia, que teve que usar helicópteros e tropas especiais. Ao todo, foram atacados sete prédios em Bombaim incluindo um hospital e um centro judaico.”

Na quarta-feira, logo após os ataques o Secretário-Geral da ONU, Ban Ki-moon, afirmou que a violência é inaceitável e disse que não existe justificção para atentados indiscriminados contra civis.

Os ataques terroristas em Bombaim foram condenados também pelo director-gerente do Fundo Monetário Internacional, FMI, Dominique Strauss-Kahn e pelo secretário-geral da Organização Mundial do Turismo, OMT, Francesco Franeiali.

12 dezembro 2008

TBD



Sanções para grupos acusados de ataques na Índia

12/12/2008

Conselho de Segurança impôs embargo para viagens e congelamento de bens a quatro líderes do grupo Lashkar-e-Taiba, acusado dos atentados terroristas em Mumbai.



Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

Quatro líderes do movimento islâmico do Paquistão, Lashkar-e-Taiba, receberam sanções do Conselho de Segurança após acusações de envolvimento nos atentados terroristas em Mumbai, na Índia, que mataram mais de 170 pessoas.

Os quatro homens, Mohammed Saeed, Zaki-ur-Rehman, Haji Muhammad Ashraf e Mahmoud Mohammed Ahmed Bahaziq, foram incluídos na lista de pessoas e empresas associadas à organização Al-

Qaeda e ao grupo Talebã.

Indivíduos

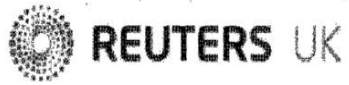
A lista das Nações Unidas é dividida em quatro seções e contém 507 nomes, a maioria de indivíduos ligados à Al-Qaeda.

Autoridades da Índia responsabilizaram militantes paquistaneses pelo ataque.

Outras notícias

- [Fale conosco](#)
- [©ONU2000-2007](#)
- [Volte ao Topo](#)

ANEXO B
NOTÍCIAS DA REUTERS SOBRE BOMBAIM



Print | Close this window

Mumbai attackers seen taking hostages at Taj Hotel

Wed Nov 26, 2008 7:52pm GMT

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Gunmen in Mumbai are holding Western hostages at the luxury Taj Mahal Hotel after a series of attacks across the city, CNN/IBN television reported.

Local television channels said at least 40 people have been killed in the attacks.

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Mumbai attacks kill 80

Wed Nov 26, 2008 11:50pm GMT

By Rina Chandran

MUMBAI (Reuters) - Gunmen killed at least 80 people in a series of attacks in India's financial capital Mumbai and troops began moving into two five-star hotels on Thursday where Western hostages were being held, local television said.

Police said they had shot dead four gunmen and arrested nine suspects.

However, the chief minister of Maharashtra state said the situation was not yet contained.

"The situation is still not under control and we are trying to flush out any more terrorists hiding inside the two hotels," Vilasrao Deshmukh, Maharashtra's chief minister, told a news conference.

Gunfire and explosions were heard at the landmark Taj Mahal hotel and thick plumes of smoke rose from the building, witnesses said. There were also explosions at the Oberoi hotel and firing at a hospital where gunmen were surrounded.

"The terrorists are throwing grenades at us from the rooftop of the Taj and trying to stop us from moving in," Ashok Patil, a police inspector told Reuters.

Police said at least 250 people were wounded in the attacks which also targeted a railway station and the Cafe Leopold, perhaps the most famous restaurant and hang-out for tourists in the city.

An organisation calling itself the Deccan Mujahideen said it was behind the attacks, television channels said. The previously little known group sent an email to news organisations claiming responsibility.

"THEY HAD BOMBS"

"I guess they were after foreigners, because they were asking for British or American passports," said Rakesh Patel, a British witness who lives in Hong Kong and was staying at the Taj Mahal hotel on business. "They had bombs."

"They came from the restaurant and took us up the stairs," he told the NDTV news channel, smoke stains covering his face. "Young boys, maybe 20 years old, 25 years old. They had two guns."

India has suffered a wave of bomb attacks in recent years. Most have been blamed on Islamist militants, although police have also arrested suspected Hindu extremists thought to be behind some of the attacks.

The latest attack, apparently aimed at least partly at prosperous Western

tourists, is bound to spook investors in one of Asia's largest and fastest-growing economies.

Hemant Karkare, the chief of the police anti-terrorist squad in Mumbai, was killed during the attacks, police said.

"We have shot dead four terrorists and managed to arrest nine suspected terrorists," P.D. Ghadge, a police officer at Mumbai's central control room, told Reuters.

Japan's Foreign Ministry said one of its nationals was killed in the Mumbai attacks and one injured.

TRAPPED HOTEL GUESTS

Mark Abell, a British lawyer, said he had locked himself inside his Oberoi hotel room after hearing two explosions.

Several hundred people had been evacuated from the Taj hotel, one witness said, but many more remained inside, some calling for help from the fifth floor. Firefighters broke windows to reach trapped guests.

"We came down the fire exit, but I think they took some more people, they are trying to get to the roof," one foreigner told local television. "I think about 15 people (have been taken hostage), about half of them are foreigners.."

In Washington, the White House and U.S. President-elect Barack Obama condemned the attacks, as did France, current president of the European Union, and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

Indian Home Minister Shivraj Patil said there were around four or five attackers in each of the two hotels.

"They have attacked hotels, they have attacked the hospitals, they have attacked the railway station," he said.

KOREANS, EUROPEANS CAUGHT UP IN ATTACKS

A driver told Reuters at least 50 Koreans were stuck inside the Taj with their drivers waiting outside.

"We were just getting ready to pick them up, when we heard the first blast, police did not let us get past and they (the Koreans) are not answering the phones," Deepak Aswar, the driver said.

Europeans were also caught up in the attacks.

"I was in the restaurant inside Oberoi and I saw this series of gunshots and death which I don't want to see again," a Spaniard who declined to give his name told Reuters.

"I crawled out into the kitchen and waited there, until I sensed it was all quiet and seemed over."

Maharashtra state police chief A.N. Roy said attackers had fired automatic weapons indiscriminately, and used grenades, adding that they were still holed up in some buildings.



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Army moves into Oberoi Hotel in Mumbai: report

Wed Nov 26, 2008 9:22pm GMT

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - The army sent troops into the luxury Oberoi Hotel in Mumbai on Thursday after reports that attackers had entered the Oberoi and the Taj Mahal hotels and taken tourists hostage.

Explosions were heard in both the hotels, CNN/IBN television reported.

(alistair.scrutton@thomsonreuters.com)

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REUTERS UK

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Multiple attacks in Mumbai, 80 dead, hostages taken

Wed Nov 26, 2008 9:12pm GMT

(Adds report of army moving into hotel; U.S., EU condemnation)

By Phil Smith

MUMBAI, Nov 26 (Reuters) - At least 80 people were killed in attacks apparently aimed at tourists in India's financial capital Mumbai on Wednesday night, and television channels said Westerners were being held hostage at two five-star hotels.

At least 250 people were wounded in the series of attacks, police said. Local television channels said the army had begun moving into one of the hotels, the Oberoi, containing hostages.

Apart from the hotels, attackers also targeted the Cafe Leopold, perhaps the most famous restaurant and hang-out for tourists in the city, as well as hospitals and railway stations.

"I guess they were after foreigners, because they were asking for British or American passports," said Rakesh Patel, a British witness who lives in Hong Kong and was staying at the Taj Mahal hotel on business. "They had bombs."

"They came from the restaurant and took us up the stairs," he told the NDTV news channel, smoke stains all over his face. "Young boys, maybe 20 years old, 25 years old. They had two guns."

India has suffered a wave of bomb attacks in recent years. Most have been blamed on Islamist militants, although police have also arrested suspected Hindu extremists thought to be behind some of the attacks.

No one has claimed responsibility for the latest Mumbai attacks.

Police said targets included the luxury Taj Mahal and Oberoi hotels, with television stations showing the lobby of both hotels on fire and people being evacuated from the Oberoi with their hands on their heads.

Hemant Karkare, the chief of the police anti-terrorist squad in Mumbai, was killed during the attacks, police said.

In Washington, the White House condemned the attacks. France, current president of the European Union, also condemned the attacks and hostage-takings.

A European c

"My hotel is s

lawmaker Ignasi Guardans told Spanish radio from the Taj. "We are in

Fresh explosions were heard in the early hours of Thursday.

"An encounter is going on at the two hotels, the situation is grave," Vilasrao Deshmukh, the chief minister told CNN-IBN TV. "Our men are on the job."

Indian Home Minister Shivraj Patil said there were around four or five attackers in each of the two hotels.

"They have attacked hotels, they have attacked the hospitals, they have attacked the railway station," he said, adding that two attackers had been killed and two arrested.

KOREANS AND EUROPEANS CAUGHT UP IN ATTACKS

A driver told Reuters at least 50 Koreans were stuck inside the Taj with their drivers waiting outside.

"We were just getting ready to pick them up, when we heard the first blast, police did not let us get past and they (the Koreans) are not answering the phones," Deepak Aswar, the driver said. Europeans were also caught up in the attacks.

"I was in the restaurant inside Oberoi and I saw this series of gunshots and death which I don't want to see again," a Spaniard who declined to give his name told Reuters.

"I crawled out into the kitchen and waited there, until I sensed it was all quiet and seemed over."

Maharashtra state police chief A.N. Roy said attackers had fired automatic weapons indiscriminately, and used grenades, adding that they were still holed up in some buildings.

"These are terrorist strikes in at least seven places," he told the NDTV news channel.

"Unknown terrorists have gone with automatic weapons and opened fire indiscriminately. At a few places they even used grenades."

Some of the injured were evacuated from the Taj on the hotel's golden luggage carts, while waiters in black and white formal wear and chefs were seen leaving the Oberoi.

"The lobby of the Taj hotel is on fire," a police spokesman said. "We are trying to find out how many people are inside the hotel."

Sourav Mishra, a Reuters reporter, was with friends at the Cafe Leopold when gunmen opened fire around 9:30 p.m. He has received injuries and is in St. George's Hospital.

"I heard some gunshots around 9:30. I was with my friends. Something hit me. I ran away and fell on the road. Then somebody picked me up. I have injuries below my shoulder," Mishra said from a hospital bed he was sharing with three other people.

The wreckage of a red scooter, the remains of shop awnings and broken glass were strewn across the street.

Armed police, rifles cocked at the hip, set up barricades. Local people were seen yelling at each other, angry that another terror attack had hit the city.

Another Reuters reporter saw a hospital ward full of injured people with bullet and shrapnel wounds. Many people were crying as the injured were brought in on trolleys. (Reporting by New Delhi and Mumbai bureaus; Writing by Simon Denyer; Editing by Alistair Scrutton; Editing by Charles Dick)

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Mumbai attackers take hostages at Taj Hotel

Wed Nov 26, 2008 7:51pm GMT

NEW DELHI, Nov 26 (Reuters) - Gunmen in Mumbai are holding Western hostages at the luxury Taj Mahal Hotel after a series of attacks across the city, CNN/IBN television reported.

Local television channels said at least 40 people have been killed in the attacks. (alistair.scrutton@thomsonreuters.com; +91-11-41781015; Reuters Messaging: alistair.scrutton.reuters.net@reuters.com))

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ANALYSIS-Mumbai attacks rattle already shaky investors

Thu Nov 27, 2008 10:34am GMT
By Rina Chandran and Tony Munroe

MUMBAI/HONG KONG, Nov 27 (Reuters) - The attacks that left dozens dead in India's financial capital have dealt a fresh blow to the country as an investment destination, but India's size and growth will retain their allure over the long term.

India's shine had already been dulled as foreign portfolio investors fled from risk around the globe, helping send the country's once-soaring stock market down 55 percent this year. Tight liquidity, a battered currency and a slowing in its once-scorching economic growth add to the gloom.

The attacks on two luxury hotels and other targets were a reminder that risk in India extends beyond the red tape and crumbling infrastructure that investors accepted as a cost of doing business in the world's second-most-populous country.

"In the near term this highlights the risk of investing in markets which have instability of some form or the other," said Ashish Goyal, Chief Investment Officer at Prudential Asset Management in Singapore.

India, like other emerging and developed markets, has endured militant attacks before and managed to bounce back. Goyal said the long-term picture for India changes only if the latest attack hurts business, slows the economy and scares off foreign firms.

"It could raise the cost of security, it could raise the effectual cost of doing business, and at the margin that's not positive, but doesn't fundamentally alter the investment view or the perceived risk of investing in India," he said.

The timing of the attacks, which comes as the central bank struggles to defend a weakening rupee and stabilise credit markets, may hurt more than previous attacks, wrote Nikhilesh Bhattacharyya, an associate economist at Moody's Economy.com.

"This means that capital outflows will have a greater impact than they did in the past, though history suggests that any reaction to attacks in Mumbai will only be temporary," he said.

India's central bank expects the economy to expand by 7.5-8 percent in the 2008/09 fiscal year, but many private economists and some government officials see growth closer to 7 percent.

"We don't think there is any immediate impact on the Indian economy, although longer term, it will get that much harder to attract and retain foreign capital, at the margin," said Daniel Chui, Head of Investor Communications at JF Asset Management.

"Sentiment in India, particularly Mumbai, will be dented even more," he said

from Hong Kong.

BRAVE FACE

Indian Trade Minister Kamal Nath on Thursday said he was confident the deadly attacks would not slow investment.

"This does not have an economic component," he told Reuters.

His confidence was echoed by Jan Masiel, a member of the European Parliament, who is visiting Mumbai with a trade delegation of eight.

"I don't think this affects India's image as a good place to do business in ... neither do we consider India to be an insecure or unsafe country to be in," said the Polish national, who was waiting to go back into the Taj Mahal Hotel, at the centre of the hostage drama and where many died.

Some investors said that after the initial shock of the attacks wears off, attention will return to the fundamentals.

"India's fiscal position is not in particularly good shape, so this is my focus instead of the political," said Clement Ho, chief investment officer with Hang Seng Investment Management in Hong Kong, which invests a small portion of its \$10 billion portfolio in India.

Markus Rosgen, head of Asia Pacific equity research at Citigroup, said that the political unrest in Thailand is proportionately more damaging to that country's markets. In the MSCI Asia index that excludes Japan and Australia, Thailand has a weighting of 2.2 percent, compared with 10.2 percent for India.

"As a global investor, as an Asia investor, I can ignore Thailand now. It's become very small in terms of market cap, relative to my index. But I can't do the same for India." (Additional reporting by Narayanan Somasundaram in Mumbai and Jeffrey Hodgson in Hong Kong; Editing by Jean Yoon)

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Mumbai attacks may hasten India rate cuts

Thu Nov 27, 2008 12:26pm GMT

By V. Ramakrishnan - Analysis

MUMBAI (Reuters) - The deadly attacks in India's financial heartland struck when the economy was already vulnerable from the global credit crisis, so could hurry the central bank into cutting interest rates again to bolster investor confidence.

Analysts said the assault by Islamist militants will further undermine sentiment and worry the central bank, which has seen the main Bombay Stock Exchange index drop more than 50 percent this year and the rupee shed a fifth of its value as the global financial storm hit India.

Some economists said the central bank could be tempted to cut rates by a full percentage point as soon as Friday. That would bring the benchmark repo rate down to 6.5 percent, the lowest since June 2006.

"I think this will accelerate the process of monetary easing. Large terrorist attacks of this kind lead to a huge problem in the money market," said Abheek Barua, chief economist at HDFC Bank in New Delhi.

"The fact that this was explicitly focussed on foreign nationals including those on business, sends a different kind of message altogether. This kind of thing can do damage to sentiment both in terms of foreign institutional investment and foreign direct investment and add to the slowdown in the economy," Barua said.

Some 17 hours after the late evening assault on Wednesday, soldiers were exchanging intermittent gun fire with the militants, who attacked some of Mumbai's plush hotels frequented by bankers, businessmen and investors.

More than 100 people were killed and a similar number were still trapped inside the Taj Mahal hotel, a city landmark.

"The names ring a bell. These are the hotels they have been staying in. These are the landmarks they know. These are the bars they would hang out in," said Jan Lambregts, head of Asia research with Rabobank Global Financial Markets in Hong Kong.

The repo rate, which the central bank uses to infuse cash into the banking system, currently stands at 7.5 percent. Inaction by the central bank, could prove damaging for financial markets.

"If they don't cut, capital flight will likely pick up momentum. If these attacks did not occur, the need to cut would not have been strong enough," said Suresh Ramanathan, regional FX and rates strategist with CIMB investment

bank in Kuala Lumpur.

INFLATION SUPPORT RATE CUT

A fall in inflation to six-month lows also favours a rate cut, the analysts said.

India's closely watched wholesale inflation has come off a peak of 12.9 percent in August, which was the highest rate since annual numbers in the current series became available in April 1995.

It surged into double digits in June after India raised state-set fuel prices and as the economy absorbed the impact of rising prices for raw materials.

The latest weekly reading on Thursday though saw the wholesale price index up 8.84 percent in the year to November 15, easing from the prior week's 8.9 percent rate and the lowest level since May.

"Food prices have not come off so much globally but raw foodstuffs that go into the final products have come off a lot. That will give them the room to act in this economic weakness," Rabobank's Lambregts said.

Investors have already moved to price in added risk on India following the attacks. Although domestic financial markets were closed on Thursday, offshore trading in credit default swaps, insurance-like contracts, on state-owned State Bank of India widened 20 basis points to 440 basis points. The bank's CDS are seen as a proxy for India because the government doesn't have any sovereign bonds outstanding.

The implied 1-month deposit rate in the rupee is already up by 130 basis points at 9.339 percent, CIMB's Ramanathan said, showing the market was pricing in the risk premium of holding rupee in the short term.

Investors have been clamouring for the Reserve Bank of India to cut rates again.

Since the start of October, it has cut the repo rate by 150 basis points to 7.5 percent to try to shield the economy from the global financial crisis that has already tipped advanced economies such as Japan and the euro zone into recession.

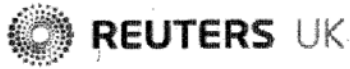
The government bond market was disappointed the central bank did not act last weekend after speculation sparked by a meeting between the finance minister and the central bank governor.

Those expectations pushed the yield on 10-year bonds to its lowest in nearly three years last Friday at 7.10 percent. By Monday it bounced back to 7.20 percent.

However, the yield fell again after China's big 108 basis point rate cut on Wednesday raised expectations once again for an Indian rate cut. The yield was at 7.09 percent on Wednesday before the militant attacks.

The rupee hit an all-time low against the U.S. dollar this month and the Bombay stock index fell to a 3-year low last month.

(Additional reporting by Kevin Plumberg in Hong Kong; Editing by Neil Fullick)



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One German among Mumbai victims, foreign ministry says

Thu Nov 27, 2008 1:25pm GMT

BERLIN (Reuters) - One German died in attacks by armed militants in India's commercial capital Mumbai and several others were injured, the foreign ministry said Thursday.

German media company C.A.M.P. TV, based in the southern city of Munich, said one of its executives died from injuries after he fell off a facade as he tried to escape the Taj Mahal hotel.

The Taj Mahal is one of the hotels suspected Islamist gunmen targeted in a wave of attacks in Mumbai late Wednesday. More than 100 people have been killed in the violence.

A group of members of the European Parliament, who had also been staying at the hotel, were safe, according to a colleague of one of the deputies, German conservative Daniel Caspary.

Some of the politicians had been threatened but they had managed to leave the hotel. The eight parliamentarians and nine staff had been taken to the French consulate.

Germany's foreign ministry advised Germans not to travel to Mumbai for now, and called on travellers in the city to stay indoors until local authorities considered the situation safe.

(Reporting by Hans-Edzard Busemann; Writing by Kerstin Gehmlich)

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FACTBOX-Attacks on landmarks in Mumbai

Thu Nov 27, 2008 2:37pm GMT

Nov 27 (Reuters) - Elite Indian commandos fought room-to-room battles with Islamist militants inside two luxury hotels to save scores of people trapped or taken hostage, as the country's prime minister blamed neighbouring countries.

At least 101 people, including six foreigners were killed, and police said another 287 people were wounded in the attacks. Here is a list of places where attacks have been reported.

TAJ MAHAL HOTEL:

- * Scores remained trapped inside their rooms at the Taj though commandos have freed hostages at the 105-year-old luxury hotel.

- * Commandos battled with Islamist militants who were still

holed up in the hotel more than 22 hours after Wednesday's late-evening attack.

- * Commissioned by the founding father of the Tata Group of

companies, Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, the Taj, located in Colaba district on the seafront, opposite the Gateway of India monument, opened in December 1903.

TRIDENT/OBEROI HOTEL:

- * 20-30 people could still be hostage at the deluxe 541-room hotel and more than 100 others remained trapped in their rooms.

- * Commandos, backed by helicopters, were trying to flush militants from the hotel.

- * Located at Nariman Point, about a kilometre from the Bombay Stock Exchange and Legislative Assembly, the hotel known as the Oberoi by locals is also close to the British and other embassies. A block back from the seafront, it overlooks the Arabian Sea.

CHABAD HOUSE:

- * An Israeli rabbi was being held hostage by gunmen in Chabad House, formerly known as Nariman House, an apartment building in the downtown Colaba area of the city.

- * A militant at the centre offered talks with government for the release of hostages. Commandos were said to be gathered outside centre but holding off from an assault.

- * The building, the name of which name refers to the Jewish

religious movement called Chabad, is a popular stop for Israeli visitors to Mumbai, according to local media.

CAFE LEOPOLD:

* Earlier in the day, gunmen had riddled the popular restaurant and famous tourist hangout with bullets.

* Located opposite a police station on Colaba Causeway Road, it features heavily in the bestselling 2003 novel "Shantaram" by Australian author Gregory David Roberts.

CAMA HOSPITAL AND G.T. HOSPITAL:

* Gunfire was reported at the Cama Hospital in south Mumbai, near the Mumbai Police Headquarters, and at the G.T. Hospital. Local press said four militants hijacked a police van from near the Cama Hospital and fired bullets from inside before two were killed and the other two captured by the authorities.

CHHATRAPATI SHIVAJI TERMINUS (CST):

* Ten people were reported killed and about 30 injured in attacks at the terminus which began shortly after 10.30 p.m.

on Wednesday. Gunmen opened fire into crowds of commuters waiting for their trains.

MAZAGAON DOCKYARD ROAD:

* Three people were killed in a bomb explosion in a taxi on

Mazegaon Dockyard Road, in south Mumbai.

POLICE HEADQUARTERS IN SOUTHERN MUMBAI:

* Gunmen reportedly attacked a police HQ in southern Mumbai, where most of the attacks took place.

Source: Reuters (Writing by Gillian Murdoch, Singapore Editorial Reference Unit; Editing by Valerie Lee)

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SNAPSHOT - Mumbai Attacks - 1900 GMT

Thu Nov 27, 2008 7:16pm GMT
NEWS

- Indian commandos fight Islamist militants in two hotels
- Indian PM says attacks plotted by neighbouring countries
- Situation not under control, state chief minister says
- At least 119 people killed, 315 wounded in attacks
- Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba denies role in attacks
- Militant asks govt to talk, offers hostage release - TV
- Israeli rabbi held hostage in Mumbai apartment
- Bush calls PM Singh to offer support, condolences
- England cricketers to fly home; return for December tests

MARKETS

- India's bond, foreign exchange markets closed on Thursday
- S&P does not believe attacks will have direct effect on sovereign ratings on India
- Handful of flights from Europe to Mumbai cancelled, most airlines say monitoring situation

QUOTES

"They came from the restaurant and took us up the stairs. They had bombs. Young boys, maybe 20-years-old, 25-years-old. They had two guns." - Rakesh Patel, British witness staying at the Taj Mahal hotel.

"The situation is still not under control and we are trying to flush out any more terrorists hiding inside the two hotels." - Vilasrao Deshmukh, chief minister of Maharashtra state which is home to Mumbai.

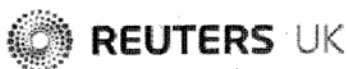
"There could be 100-200 people inside the (Trident/Oberoi) hotel, but we cannot give you the exact figure as many people have locked themselves inside their rooms." - Maharashtra state deputy chief minister R.R. Patil

"The well-planned and well-orchestrated attacks, probably with external linkages, were intended to create a sense of terror by choosing high-profile targets." - PM Manmohan Singh in an address to the nation.

"Ask the government to talk to us and we will release the hostages." - militant at Jewish centre speaking to Indian TV.

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Mumbai attacks kill 80, police shoot four gunmen

Thu Nov 27, 2008 1:00am GMT
(Adds details, witness account, U.S. aid offer)

By Rina Chandran

MUMBAI, Nov 27 (Reuters) - Gunmen killed at least 80 people in a series of attacks in India's commercial hub Mumbai and troops began moving into two luxury hotels on Thursday where foreign hostages were being held, local television said.

The attacks by small groups of gunmen armed with automatic weapons and grenades in the hotels and other sites in the city came amid state elections, including in Kashmir, and risk destabilising the country ahead of national elections next year.

Police said they had shot dead four gunmen and arrested nine suspects. Eleven police were killed, said Vilasrao Deshmukh, Maharashtra state chief minister.

"Eleven of our policemen laid down their lives, including five good officers," he said.

Hemant Karkare, the chief of the police anti-terrorist squad in Mumbai, was killed during the attacks, police said.

Deshmukh told a news conference the situation was not yet contained.

"The situation is still not under control and we are trying to flush out any more terrorists hiding inside the two hotels."

"It is very difficult to say how many terrorists are holed up in the two hotels," he added, although Indian Home Minister Shivraj Patil earlier said there were around four or five attackers in each.

"We have shot dead four terrorists and managed to arrest nine suspected terrorists," P.D. Ghadge, a police officer at Mumbai's central control room, told Reuters.

A Reuters witness said that hours after the assaults began the Taj Hotel was surrounded by police, with fresh firing heard and a floodlight scanning its exterior. A fire in the hotel was still not under control.

Japan's foreign ministry said at least one Japanese national had been killed and one injured in the attacks, while South Korea said 26 of its nationals had escaped unharmed.

Gunfire and explosions were heard at the landmark Taj Mahal hotel and thick plumes of smoke rose from the building, witnesses said. Staff and guests were seen running out of the lobby.

There were also explosions at the Oberoi hotel and firing at a hospital where gunmen were surrounded.

Security forces were seen moving into the hotels.

"The terrorists are throwing grenades at us from the rooftop of the Taj and trying to stop us from moving in," Ashok Patil, a police inspector, told Reuters.

Police said at least 250 people were wounded in the attacks which also targeted a railway station and the Cafe Leopold, perhaps the most famous restaurant and hang-out for tourists in the city.

An organisation calling itself the Deccan Mujahideen said it was behind the attacks, television channels said. The previously little known group sent an email to news organisations claiming responsibility.

"THEY HAD BOMBS"

"I guess they were after foreigners, because they were asking for British or American passports," said Rakesh Patel, a British witness who lives in Hong Kong and was staying at the Taj Mahal hotel on business. "They had bombs."

"They came from the restaurant and took us up the stairs," he told the NDTV news channel, smoke stains covering his face. "Young boys, maybe 20 years old, 25 years old. They had two guns."

India has suffered a wave of bomb attacks in recent years. Most have been blamed on Islamist militants, although police have also arrested suspected Hindu extremists thought to be behind some of the attacks.

The Mumbai attacks are bound to spook investors in one of Asia's largest and fastest-growing economies.

"It is the highest profile, boldest attack we have seen in some time," said Bruce McIndoe, a travel security expert and President of iJET Intelligent Risk Systems, a private intelligence firm.

Mark Abell, a British lawyer, said he had locked himself inside his Oberoi hotel room after hearing two explosions.

Several hundred people had been evacuated from the Taj hotel, one witness said, but many more remained inside, some calling for help from the fifth floor. Firefighters broke windows to reach trapped guests.

"We came down the fire exit, but I think they took some more people, they are trying to get to the roof," one foreigner told local television. "I think about 15 people (have been taken hostage), about half of them are foreigners."

"I was in the restaurant inside Oberoi and I saw this series of gunshots and death which I don't want to see again," a Spaniard who declined to give his name told Reuters.

"I crawled out into the kitchen and waited there, until I sensed it was all quiet and seemed over."

In Washington, the White House and U.S. President-elect Barack Obama condemned the attacks, as did France, current president of the European Union, and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

The White House convened counterterrorism, intelligence and defense

officials over the attacks and the U.S. government offered assistance to Indian authorities.

Australia's foreign ministry told the country's citizens they should avoid travel to Mumbai and those already there should remain in a safe location and follow the advice of local authorities. (Reporting by New Delhi and Mumbai bureaux; Writing by Simon Denyer and Jerry Norton; Editing by Paul Tait)

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WITNESS: Walking the streets on Mumbai's night of fear

Thu Nov 27, 2008 5:39am GMT

Phil Smith is the South Asia Editor for Reuters and is based in Mumbai. In the following story, he describes his experience covering the attacks in Mumbai.

By Phil Smith

MUMBAI (Reuters) - As the first explosion rattled the seafront homes of south Mumbai's Colaba district at about 10 p.m., my first thought was it must be a firecracker left over from last month's raucous Diwali festival.

It was soon clear it was much, much more than that.

Not far away, what appeared to be a small bomb had exploded leaving the mangled remains of a scooter strewn across the street. Windows of nearby buildings had been blown out.

Police were erecting road blocks using their own vehicles and the barrows of street vendors who ply the area.

Emotions were running high, resilient Mumbaikars hardened by bombings over the years clearly angry that once again their city was under attack.

The gunmen who spread fear throughout the city over the next few hours had picked their target carefully: the heart of the city's tourist area, packed with shops and many of the luxury hotels favored by international businessmen and visitors. Among the early targets was the Cafe Leopold, perhaps the most famous hangout for food or a late night drink, an eatery featured in the bestselling novel Shantaram.

On a normal evening, the Colaba causeway near the cafe is packed with stalls selling tourist souvenirs ranging from pashmina shawls to reproduction antique clocks.

Most nights, tourists haggle and move on, heading either for a seafront stroll near the Gateway of India, erected for the visit of Britain's King George V early last century, or their rooms at the nearby 105-year-old Taj Mahal hotel.

I reached the imposing hotel at about midnight, but it was a very different scene.

Gunmen armed with automatic weapons and grenades had moved from the Leopold and stormed into the hotel, beginning a long and bloody siege as fire trucks and police cars parked outside.

A series of explosions set fire to the upper floors of the six-storey heritage wing of the hotel and grenades were lobbed from second- or third-floor windows into the street.

Police officers were pulling back and moving forward as they came under attack as were scores of reporters at the scene. As the fires took hold, high-pressure hoses were used to try and dampen the blaze.

In the following few hours, gunfire could be heard within the Taj as firemen with ladders and hydraulic lifts began rescuing people through smashed lower windows.

Women in colorful saris and men in suits who a few hours earlier had been dining in the hotel's restaurants or their rooms nervously edged down the ladders.

As they moved away from the hotel, they recounted harrowing tales of how the siege had begun, how they were forced to dive under tables and lock bedroom doors.

As dawn broke, flames could be seen jumping from the domed roof of the hotel and sporadic gunfire sent bystanders running.

(Editing by Mark Williams and Bill Tarrant)

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Actress narrowly escapes Mumbai attacks

Thu Nov 27, 2008 5:48am GMT

CANBERRA (Reuters) - Australian actress Brooke Satchwell, who starred in the successful Neighbours television drama, said she narrowly escaped the gunmen behind the Mumbai attacks by hiding in a hotel bathroom cupboard.

Satchwell, 28, was staying with friends at the Taj Mahal Hotel, where the attackers are still holding hostages.

She said she was heading back inside the building after smoking a cigarette when she heard gunshots.

"There was people getting shot in the corridor. There was someone dead outside the bathroom," the shaken actress told Australian television on Thursday.

Satchwell said she, along with other guests, hid in a hotel bathroom. Satchwell locked herself inside a small cupboard, while other guests hid in cubicles until being escorted out by staff.

"Next thing I knew I was running down the stairs and there were a couple of dead bodies across the stairs. It was chaos," she told Australian media.

Satchwell is best known for playing Anne Wilkinson in Neighbours, which is screened in many countries around the world. She is currently starring in another Australian drama and had been in Mumbai on holiday and for some filming.

(Reporting by Rob Taylor, editing by Miral Fahmy)

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Mumbai mourns attacks on beloved icons Taj and Leo's

Thu Nov 27, 2008 9:27am GMT
By Rina Chandran

MUMBAI, Nov 27 (Reuters) - In the harsh morning light there was no escaping the truth: the Taj Mahal Hotel, Mumbai's iconic luxury hotel, was hurting after gunmen laid siege to it.

As angry orange flames resisted firemen's attempts to douse them, thick black smoke billowed from the heritage, or palace, wing, obscuring the distinctive central dome and smaller cupolas that are an integral part of south Mumbai's skyline.

Soot marred the red-white-and-grey-brick facade, and curious onlookers, anxious hotel employees, tired reporters all gaped at the hotel, tut-tutting and shaking their heads.

A spokesman for the hotel, owned by Tata Group's Indian Hotels Co, said in a statement: "The Taj is very much a symbol of India. We will rebuild every inch that has been damaged in this attack and bring back the Taj to its full glory."

That will be tough in this day and age.

The brainchild of wealthy industrialist Jamsetji Tata, the hotel was built at a cost of a quarter of a million pounds more than 100 years ago, and boasted such features as the first air-conditioned ballroom in the country and a Turkish bath.

One story of its origin is that Tata took a foreign friend to dinner in a plush Mumbai hotel, only to be told he was not welcome since he was Indian.

Slighted, Tata vowed to build a finer hotel that would welcome all Indians, and set about his mission with zeal.

He leased a plot of land of about two acres on reclaimed land on Mumbai's seafront, and got involved in its design and interiors, shopping at London, Dusseldorf, Berlin and Paris.

A more apocryphal story of its design, an example of Indo-Saracenic architecture, is that the entrance to the hotel is actually in the back, and not on the sea-front, with construction workers messing up the plan when the architect was away.

Either way, with its vaulted alabaster ceilings, onyx columns, graceful archways, crystal chandeliers and a dramatic cantilever staircase that employees refer to as the "grand staircase", the hotel always makes a big impression on visitors.

Inaugurated in 1903, it welcomed the Prince of Wales on his state visit two years later in an ironic twist.

Tourists and locals have wandered its hallways, admiring its art and a collection of black-and-white photographs of some of the maharajas, presidents, rock stars and chief executives who have stayed, including John Lennon and John F. Kennedy.

The 1970s saw the addition of a more modern tower wing alongside, but its arched balconies failed to impress.

EVERYONE GOES TO LEO'S

Less dramatic but just as beloved to locals and tourists in Mumbai is Leopold's Cafe, a popular bar on the bustling Colaba Causeway road, the nerve centre of shopping and dining.

Opening in 1871 as a wholesale oil store, it later became a restaurant, and then opened an on-site pub in the 1990s. Always popular for cheap beer and greasy snacks, it shot to fame when it was featured in the bestselling 2003 novel "Shantaram".

A stack of books autographed by Australian author Gregory David Roberts sits prominently on a counter in the cafe.

With its checkered tablecloths and doors that open wide on to the sidewalk, Leopold's is also known as the place for tourists to land a role in a Bollywood movie.

But the grim scene of blood-spattered shoes and napkins outside the shuttered cafe on Wednesday after gunmen fired at guests was a far cry from lavish Bollywood musicals.

A senior British executive for a foreign firm who has been in India for over a year, said life had to go on after the attacks.

"It's one of those things we have to live with and we have to get back to normal as soon as we can," he said.

"But just to walk into Leopold's — that's so horrific." (Additional reporting by Charlotte Cooper; Editing by Simon Denyer and Sanjeev Miglani)

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WRAPUP 1-Militants, commandos fight on in India's Mumbai

Thu Nov 27, 2008 10:31pm GMT

* Mumbai "still not under control" - state government

* Indian Prime Minister says attacks plotted overseas

* Police say 119 people killed, 315 wounded

By Krittivas Mukherjee

MUMBAI, Nov 28 (Reuters) - Indian commandos fought to regain control of Mumbai on Friday, more than 24 hours after heavily armed militants killed at least 119 people and wounded more than 300 others in coordinated attacks in the commercial capital.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh pinned blame for the attacks on militant groups based in India's neighbours – usually an allusion to Pakistan – raising prospects of renewed tension between the nuclear-armed rivals.

He warned of "a cost" if these nations did not take action to stop their territory being used to launch such attacks.

An estimated 25 men armed with assault rifles and grenades – at least some of whom arrived by sea – fanned out across Mumbai on Wednesday night to attack sites popular with tourists and businessmen, including the city's top two luxury hotels.

At least six foreigners, including one Australian, a Briton, an Italian and a Japanese national, were killed. Scores of others were trapped in the fighting or were being held hostage.

Commandos battled the militants through Thursday – often room to room in the hotels – to rescue people, police said. Flames billowed out of the buildings and loud explosions were heard during the fighting.

Dipak Dutta told NDTV news after being rescued at the Taj Mahal hotel that he had been told by troops escorting him through the corridors not to look down at any of the bodies.

"A lot of chef trainees were massacred in the kitchen," he said.

The city of nearly 18 million people, the nerve-centre of India's growing economic prowess and home to the "Bollywood" film industry, was virtually shut down on Thursday as the battles raged.

Sporadic gunfire and explosions could be heard early on Friday, and authorities said at least one militant was still holed up in the Taj Mahal hotel and several more in the nearby Oberoi-Trident hotel. Many staff and guests

were also trapped, but it was not clear how many.

"It is evident that the group which carried out these attacks, based outside the country, had come with single-minded determination to create havoc in the commercial capital of the country," Prime Minister Singh said in a televised address.

"We will take up strongly with our neighbours that the use of their territory for launching attacks on us will not be tolerated, and that there would be a cost if suitable measures are not taken by them."

Pakistan, condemning the assault, promised full cooperation.

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Hindu-dominated India, which has a sizeable Muslim minority, has been hit by militant attacks for decades. But this strike appeared aimed at crippling its ability to attract foreign investment.

The militants appeared to specifically target Britons, Americans and Israelis, witnesses said.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said the attack would be met with a "vigorous response".

U.S. President-elect Barack Obama condemned the incident. Obama, who favours a regional solution to the war in Afghanistan and is encouraging Pakistan and India to make peace over Kashmir, was monitoring the situation closely, an aide said.

The Times of India published a photograph of one of the attackers, dressed in a black T-shirt and holding an assault rifle with a backpack over his shoulder.

At least some of them had come ashore in what police said was a rubber dinghy. They commandeered a vehicle and sprayed passersby with bullets, fired indiscriminately in a train station, hospitals and a popular tourist cafe.

Police said at least seven of the attackers were killed and nine suspects had been taken into custody. They said 12 policemen were killed, including Hemant Karkare, chief of the police anti-terrorist squad in Mumbai.

"The situation is still not under control and we are trying to flush out any more terrorists hiding inside the two hotels," said Vilasrao Deshmukh, chief minister of Maharashtra state which is home to Mumbai.

The death toll was only an estimate in an attack which brought the biggest chaos to the city since serial bombings in 1993 killed 260 people and injured hundreds.

India blamed the city's Muslim crime syndicates for that attack and saw it as revenge for deaths of Muslims in Hindu-Muslim violence which followed the destruction of a mosque in the north of the country. It said the perpetrators had later found refuge in Islamic Pakistan.

One of the sites attacked was a Jewish centre. At least 10 Israeli nationals were trapped in buildings or held hostage, an Israeli embassy official in New Delhi said.

A militant holed up at the centre phoned an Indian television channel to offer talks with the government for the hostages' release. He complained of abuses in Muslim-dominated Kashmir, over which India and Pakistan have fought two of their three wars. (Reporting by New Delhi and Mumbai bureaux; Writing by Raju Gopalakrishnan; Editing by Richard Balmforth)

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Few flights to Mumbai cancelled after attacks

Thu Nov 27, 2008 10:41am GMT

By Maria Sheahan and Matthew Scuffham

FRANKFURT/LONDON (Reuters) - A handful of flights from Europe to Mumbai were cancelled on Thursday after more than 100 people were killed in attacks on luxury hotels, hospitals and a tourist cafe in India's financial capital.

Most airlines said they were monitoring the situation and were making contingency plans should it worsen, and Europe's biggest travel firm TUI Travel said it did not expect large numbers of cancellations.

Some 17 hours after the late-evening assault, soldiers and militants were still exchanging intermittent fire and more than 100 people were trapped inside rooms of the Taj Mahal hotel, a 105-year-old city landmark.

Germany's flagship carrier Lufthansa said that one flight had been on its way to Mumbai on Wednesday at the time of the attacks and was diverted to New Delhi.

"Today there were supposed to be two flights there, from Frankfurt and Munich, and those will not take place. Tomorrow we'll have to see how the situation develops," a spokesman for Lufthansa said.

Both Air France and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, the two main carriers of Europe's largest airline group Air France, cancelled flights to Mumbai.

But a British Airways spokesman said flights to Mumbai were still operating normally. The group operates two per day from London's Heathrow airport.

TUI Travel said Goa in India was a bigger destination than Mumbai for holiday travellers.

"We understand that we have one or two holidaymakers in Mumbai on a tour which is clearly very regrettable and we're just trying to understand what their whereabouts are at the moment," TUI Travel Chief Executive Peter Long told Reuters.

"From previous tragedies, our customers are becoming hardened and it will not impact on their holiday arrangements ... There will certainly be some cancellations but I don't think it will be huge numbers," he said.

SECURITY FIRST

Thomas Cook, Europe's no. 2 travel operator, said it had 20 to 30 holidaymakers in Mumbai who were all accounted for, and that it did not anticipate cancellations.

Flight cancellations have also hit passengers to Thailand, where a blockade by anti-government protesters at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi airport, a major Asian air hub, entered its third day on Thursday, stranding thousands of tourists.

Thailand is offering a naval airbase on the eastern seaboard as an alternative for airlines.

The airline industry is going through a rough patch, with the International Air Transport Association (IATA) saying international air traffic declined from a year ago for the second consecutive month in October.

Among the airlines that said they will continue to fly to Mumbai were Indian airline Jet Airways, which uses Brussels as a hub for a number of routes between India and North America, Austrian Airlines and Finnair.

Scandinavian airline SAS said it only flies to New Delhi and not to Mumbai and has therefore not cancelled any flights to India.

"We put the passengers' security above everything else, and if there is trouble we will take that decision at that point ... as far as I know there haven't been any incidents in New Delhi," said SAS spokesman Anders Lindstrom.

In Asia, Australian flag carrier Qantas, which flies three times a week into Mumbai from Sydney, said it is monitoring the situation and working on contingency plans to add capacity if necessary to help get people out of Mumbai.

(Additional reporting by Reuters bureaux in Amsterdam, Brussels, Helsinki, London, Vienna, Sydney, Stockholm and Paris; Editing by Chris Wickham)

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FACTBOX: Mumbai landmarks attacked in shootings

Thu Nov 27, 2008 7:53am GMT

(Reuters) - At least 101 people have been killed in a series of militant attacks in India's financial capital Mumbai, where gunmen armed with automatic weapons and grenades burst into luxury hotels and other landmark buildings on Wednesday night. Here is a list of places where attacks have been reported.

CAFE LEOPOLD:

* Gunmen riddled the popular restaurant and famous tourist hang-out with bullets.

* Located opposite a police station on Colaba Causeway Road, it features heavily in the bestselling 2003 novel "Shantaram" by Australian author Gregory David Roberts.

CAMA HOSPITAL AND G.T. HOSPITAL:

* Gunfire was reported at the Cama Hospital in south Mumbai, near the Mumbai Police Headquarters, and at the G.T. Hospital.

* Local press said four militants hijacked a police van from near the Cama Hospital and fired bullets from inside before two were killed and the other two captured by the authorities.

CHABAD HOUSE:

* An Israeli rabbi is among at least three people being held hostage by gunmen in Chabad House, formerly known as Nariman House, an apartment building in the downtown Colaba area of the city.

* The building, the name of which refers to the Jewish religious movement called Chabad, is a popular stop for Israeli visitors to Mumbai, according to local media.

CHHATRAPATI SHIVAJI TERMINUS (CST):

* Ten people were reported killed and about 30 injured in attacks at the terminus which began shortly after 10.30 p.m. on Wednesday. Gunmen opened fire into crowds of commuters waiting for their trains.

* One of the country's busiest railway stations, the CST serves Mumbai's local suburban railway as well as regional, Central Railway, trains.

* Formerly known as the Victoria Terminus (VT), it is the headquarters of the Central Railways of India. It is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its Victorian gothic architecture.

MAZAGAON DOCKYARD ROAD:

* Three people were killed in a bomb explosion in a taxi on Mazegaon Dockyard Road, in south Mumbai.

* The Mazagaon dockyard builds warships for the Indian navy as well as civilian vessels. One of India's largest ship-building sites, it has operated since the 1800s and is currently run by the state-owned Mazagaon Dock Limited.

* Several maritime companies operate from the generally quiet Mazagaon area, as do a couple of Anglo-Indian schools.

METRO ADLABS MULTIPLEX:

* The Times of India website listed the famous cinema in the southern neighborhood as one of the high-profile targets attacked, but did not give further details.

* Built in the art deco style, it opened in 1938. Becoming the Mumbai-based Bollywood movie industry's most famous red carpet theater, it was renovated into a multiplex in 2006.

POLICE HEADQUARTERS IN SOUTHERN MUMBAI:

* Gunmen reportedly attacked a police HQ in southern Mumbai, where most of the attacks took place.

TAJ MAHAL HOTEL:

* Three people were reportedly gunned down at the iconic 565-room, 105-year old luxury hotel located in Colaba district on the seafront, opposite the Gateway of India monument.

* Television stations showed the lobby of the hotel, and another luxury hotel, the Trident, on fire.

* A delegation of European politicians were staying at the hotel, owned by the Tata Group's Indian Hotels Co Ltd, for an EU-India summit.

* International cricketers also frequently stay at the hotel. The English team were planning to stay there during a Test against India next month.

* Commissioned by the founding father of the Tata Group of companies, Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, it opened in December 1903.

TRIDENT HOTEL:

* Gunmen burst into the Kandahar restaurant in the deluxe 541-room hotel, and rounded up diners who appeared to be tourists.

* Gunmen were reportedly still holed up in the hotel on Thursday, and in the Taj Mahal Hotel, another luxury hotel in the south business district.

* Located at Nariman Point, about a kilometer from the Bombay Stock Exchange and Legislative Assembly, the hotel known as the Oberoi by locals is also close to the British and other embassies. A block back from the

seafront, it overlooks the Arabian Sea.

Source: Reuters

(Writing by Gillian Murdoch, Singapore Editorial Reference Unit; Editing by Surojit Gupta and Jerry Norton)

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UPDATE 1-Cricket-Champions League postponed after Mumbai attacks

Thu Nov 27, 2008 10:55am GMT

(adds details)

MUMBAI, India, Nov 27 (Reuters) - The Champions League Twenty20 tournament has been postponed due to security fears following the attacks in Mumbai, organisers of next month's event in India said on Thursday.

"The inaugural edition of the Champions League Twenty20 scheduled to be played in Mumbai, Bangalore and Chennai from Dec 3-10 has been postponed," they said in a statement.

Teams from England, Australia, Pakistan, South Africa and India had been scheduled to play.

The decision was taken by the league's governing council after consultations with the tournament's three founding board members -- India, Australia and South Africa -- it added.

A league official said fresh dates will be decided next month for the \$6 million prizemoney event featuring eight teams from five countries.

English champions Middlesex cancelled their flight to India and South African and Australian boards also delayed travel plans following the attacks in the country's commercial capital.

A Pakistan board official said they would be ready to send their champions, Sialkot Stallions, led by national captain Shoaib Malik, before the postponement.

Many of the teams would have stayed in the Taj Mahal hotel, a focal point of the gun and grenade attacks, which were still continuing into Thursday afternoon.

At least 101 people were killed and 287 wounded in the attacks carried out by Islamist militants.

The last two games in England's one-day series in India have already been called off with next month's two-test series hanging in the balance.

(Reporting by Sanjay Rajan and N.Ananthanarayanan, Editing by Miles Evans)

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ANALYSIS-Daring Mumbai attacks reveal any city's vulnerability

Thu Nov 27, 2008 2:29pm GMT

By Luke Baker

LONDON, Nov 27 (Reuters) - Whatever group lies behind the attacks in Mumbai, security experts say one thing has been made abundantly clear: a massive city can be reduced to mayhem if a group of men is well-enough armed and prepared to die.

Rather than hijacking planes as in Sept. 11, or smuggling delicately wired car bombs into a city, the Mumbai gunmen chose a frontal style of armed assault, killing more than 100 people, wounding around 250 and causing immense panic in a thriving city of 13 million.

Security specialists say the attack was probably months in the planning and appears to have been finely tuned in its execution, but it ultimately relied on only an estimated 25 gunmen lightly armed with assault rifles and hand-grenades.

Their ability to roam around and sustain the attack, while all the while being willing to die in the onslaught, made it all the more difficult to combat and far more drawn out than an instantaneous suicide bomb attack might have been.

"It's virtually impossible to stop 20 guys with guns from attacking anywhere in the world if they are prepared to die," said Sajjan Gohel, an analyst with the Asia-Pacific Foundation, an independent security and intelligence group based in London.

"That is the thing about the fedayeen strategy," he said, using an Arabic term used to describe self-sacrificial gunmen who have operated in Iraq, Kashmir and across the Muslim world.

"It's even more effective than a suicide mission. With a suicide mission, you blow up your explosives and you're gone. With a fedayeen attack, you try to last out as long as possible, killing as many people as possible," he told Reuters.

Nearly 20 hours after the attack began late on Wednesday night, Indian soldiers and the militants were still exchanging gunfire and more than 100 people were trapped inside the Taj Mahal hotel, one of two five-star hotels popular with Western tourists and businessmen that were targeted in the assault.

Indian authorities closed stock, bond and foreign exchange markets, schools were shuttered and panicked foreigners on holiday or on business were desperate to flee, reducing India's business powerhouse to a tense, semi-warzone.

"Men armed with automatic weapons are able to run amok and keep the situation going for much, much longer," Henry Wilkinson, a senior analyst

with Janusian Security Risk Management, a London-based consultancy, told Reuters.

"Whether it's intended or not, that creates an extended drama which is all the more terrifying."

AL QAEDA INSPIRATION?

Given the boldness of the assault, its high-level of planning and the fact that foreigners were specifically targeted, security specialists believe there is likely to have been a degree of inspiration from or link to external groups allied to al Qaeda, such as the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba.

They say the tactics are different from the more common, post-9/11 attacks seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, but still bear similar hallmarks.

"It's very interesting that they didn't go in using car bombs, it was more of a direct armed assault on a city," said Wilkinson. "It's very reminiscent of the attacks in Saudi Arabia in 2003, when the gunmen were going around trying to find Westerners and kill them."

Wilkinson highlighted the fact the Mumbai gunmen appeared to have used only assault rifles and hand-grenades, giving them much more mobility and freeing them up to take hostages.

"I would suggest that using guns and hand-grenades was a deliberate choice... The amount of planning and training they must have done to carry out such an attack is impressive."

Such an assault might be mounted virtually anywhere in the world, he said, making cities in Europe and the United States vulnerable, even if such an outcome remains unlikely.

In London in 2005 four suicide bombers killed 52 people on public transport and brought the city to a standstill.

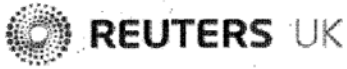
Both attacks underline just how hard it is for democratic states to protect themselves against such attacks without draconian security measures and powerful intelligence.

"I can't see any reason -- if there is a terrorist group that has the capability... attacks like this in Europe or the United States can't be discounted," he said.

One advantage for Indian authorities and any intelligence services called in to help investigate the Mumbai attacks is that at least nine gunmen are reported to have been seized.

In a suicide bombing, forensics can help investigators establish only so much. In this case, those detained are likely to reveal much more intelligence about who plotted the attack.

"The fact that a few of them have been seized is highly significant," said Wilkinson. "I think a lot more information about these attacks and who was behind them is going to come to light." (Additional reporting by Andrew Marshall in Singapore) (Reporting by Luke Baker; Editing by Myra MacDonald)



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Mumbai gunmen battle army, some hostages freed

Thu Nov 27, 2008 9:36am GMT

* Hostages freed at Taj, some still held at Trident/Oberoi

* Many others still trapped in rooms as siege continues

* Islamist group claims responsibility

* At least 101 people killed, 287 wounded

* British, Americans, Israelis apparently targeted

By Rina Chandran

MUMBAI, Nov 27 (Reuters) - Indian commandos freed hostages from Mumbai's Taj Mahal hotel on Thursday but battled on with gun-toting Islamist militants who launched an audacious attack across India's financial capital, killing more than 100 people.

The gunmen arrived by boats in Mumbai on Wednesday, before fanning out and attacking luxury hotels, a landmark cafe, hospitals and a railway station, firing indiscriminately.

Some 17 hours after the late-evening assault, soldiers and militants were still exchanging intermittent fire and more than 100 people were trapped inside rooms of the Taj Mahal hotel, a 105-year-old city landmark.

"People who were held up there, they have all been rescued," Maharashtra state police chief A.N. Roy told the NDTV news channel. "But there are guests in the rooms, we don't know how many."

Roy said some people were still apparently being held hostage at the nearby Trident/Oberoi Hotel. "That is why the operation is being conducted more sensitively to ensure there are no casualties of innocent people."

Police said at least six foreigners were killed and another 287 people were wounded in the attacks, which were claimed by the little-known Deccan Mujahideen group.

"Release all the mujahideens, and Muslims living in India should not be troubled," said a militant inside the Oberoi, speaking to Indian television by telephone.

The man, who identified himself only as Sahadullah, said he was one of seven attackers inside the hotel, and wanted Islamist militants to be freed from Indian jails.

Later, an explosion was heard at the hotel, a Reuters witness said.

At least two guests, trapped in their rooms in the Taj, also phoned TV stations. One said the fire doors were locked, and another said he had seen



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Mumbai gunmen battle army, foreigners held hostage

Thu Nov 27, 2008 6:03am GMT

* Suspected Islamist gunmen hold foreigners hostage

* Commandos surround hotels, intermittent firing

* At least 101 people killed, 287 wounded

* British, Americans apparently targeted

By Rina Chandran

MUMBAI, Nov 27 (Reuters) - Suspected Islamist gunmen launched waves of attacks in the heart of India's financial capital, killing at least 101 people and taking many foreigners hostage in two of the city's plush hotels, police said on Thursday.

The late-night attacks sent shockwaves through an economy already under strain. Authorities closed stock, bond and foreign exchanges as commandos and armed police laid siege to the gunmen.

Some 16 hours into the crisis, scores of tourists remained trapped in the Taj Mahal hotel, a 105-year-old city landmark, and at the five-star Trident Oberoi in Mumbai's downtown peninsula, the city's financial and tourist heart, officials said.

At least 101 people were killed, including six foreigners, police said. Another 287 people were wounded in the attacks, which were claimed by the little-known Deccan Mujahideen group.

One militant inside the Oberoi told Indian television by phone that the hostages would only be freed when all mujahideens, or Islamic holy warriors, being held in Indian jails were freed.

The man, who identified himself only as Sahadullah, said he was one of seven attackers inside the hotel.

"Release all the mujahideens, and Muslims living in India should not be troubled," he said.

The central bank closed the bond and foreign exchange markets but said it would continue auctions to keep cash flowing through interbank lending markets, which seized up after the global financial crisis destroyed Wall Street banks in September. [ID:nBOM333116]

The attacks were bound to spook investors in one of Asia's largest and fastest-growing economies. Mumbai has seen several major bomb attacks in the past, but never anything so obviously targeted at foreigners.

Foreigners have already been heavy sellers of Indian assets and a steep fall in the Indian rupee was now feared.

Nerves were already clearly rattled. Credit default swaps, insurance-like contracts on the State Bank of India's five-year bonds, widened 15 basis points to 435 basis points.

Trade Minister Kamal Nath described the attacks as "an unfortunate event" but said HE did not expect they would slow investment. [ID:nDEL364718]

The attacks could be another blow for the Congress Party-led government ahead of a general election due by early 2009.

The government has suffered a string of state election losses in the last year. The main Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, which has done well in state polls, has criticised the government for being soft on terrorism after a series of bomb attacks in Indian cities this year.

Strategic expert Uday Bhaskar said the attacks had grave implications for India on many levels.

"The fact that they were trying to segregate British and American passport holders definitely suggests Islamist fervour," Bhaskar said.

MANY TRAPPED

Small groups of militants armed with automatic weapons and grenades burst into the luxury hotels, a hospital and a railway station late on Wednesday, as well as a famous cafe popular with foreign tourists, firing indiscriminately and tossing grenades.

"There are many people trapped inside the two hotels it seems, and we are hearing reports of constant gunfire, mostly from the Taj hotel," a duty officer at the Mumbai police control room said.

The attackers appeared to target British and Americans as they sought hostages. Police said an Israeli rabbi and his family were being held hostage in a Mumbai apartment. [ID:nSP366813]

Witnesses said the attackers were young South Asian men speaking Hindi or Urdu. (For a factbox on who might be behind the attacks click on [ID:nSP351489])

Television footage showed gunmen in a pick-up truck spraying people with rifle fire as the vehicle drove down a Mumbai street.

Hotel staff were seen evacuating wounded on luggage trolleys, with passers-by covered in blood after they rushed to help. Some clambered down ladders to safety.

Other distressed guests stood at hotel windows, although a slow trickle could later be seen leaving the Taj hotel through a back gate, surrounded by heavily armed troops and police.

Schools were closed and a curfew was imposed around the Gateway of India, a colonial-era monument. But train services were running as normal taking people to work in the stunned city.

GUNMEN, POLICE KILLED

Police said they had shot dead four gunmen and arrested nine suspects. They said 12 policemen were killed, including Hemant Karkare, the chief of the police anti-terrorist squad in Mumbai.

As dawn broke on the red, white and grey brick facade of the Taj on Mumbai's waterfront, the hotel was surrounded by armed police, ambulances and fire engines.

At least two guests, trapped in their rooms in the Taj, phoned TV stations. One said the fire doors were locked, another said he had seen two dead bodies by the swimming pool.

"Two of my colleagues are still in there and the last we heard from them was three hours ago and then the phone battery died," said a German national who escaped the Taj.

Rakesh Patel, a British witness who was staying at the Taj Mahal hotel on business, said the attackers were looking for British and U.S. passport holders.

"They came from the restaurant and took us up the stairs. They had bombs. "Young boys, maybe 20 years old, 25 years old. They had two guns," he told the NDTV channel, smoke stains covering his face.

Japan's foreign ministry said at least one Japanese national had been killed and one injured in the attacks, while South Korea said 26 of its nationals had escaped unharmed. Australia said two of its nationals had been injured but the toll could rise.

In Washington, the White House and President-elect Barack Obama condemned the attacks, as did France, current president of the European Union, and U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

Bruce McIndoe, a travel security expert and President of iJET Intelligent Risk Systems, a private intelligence firm, said he had already advised his corporate clients to postpone travel to Mumbai, and warned there would be "ripple effects". (Reporting by New Delhi and Mumbai bureaux; Writing by Paul Tait; Editing by John Chalmers)

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Gunfire, explosions rock Mumbai hotel

Fri Nov 28, 2008 11:28pm GMT

By Kritivas Mukherjee

MUMBAI (Reuters) - Gunfire and explosions rocked a luxury Mumbai hotel early on Saturday, the last battleground after three days of attacks by Islamist militants in India's financial capital that have killed at least 144 people.

Two or three gunmen remained holed up in the vast, 105-year-old Taj Mahal hotel, but all the others had been killed or taken into custody, officials said.

India blamed the strike on "elements" from Pakistan, raising tensions between the nuclear-armed rivals. Pakistan said the two countries faced a common enemy and it would send its spy chief to share intelligence.

On Thursday, elite Indian troops stormed a Jewish center and another luxury hotel, the Trident-Oberoi. They killed two gunmen at the Jewish center after sliding down ropes from helicopters onto its roof, but failed to save the lives of five hostages, including a New York-based rabbi and his wife.

The commandos freed 143 hostages at the Trident-Oberoi, including foreign tourists and businessmen who emerged with harrowing stories of the bloodshed inside. Two gunmen were killed.

As onlookers cheered and chanted "Victory to mother India," many of the troops moved to the Taj, where militants have been fighting for over 48 hours.

"In view of the firing and the positions they have occupied, I would say there are at least two or three of them," said Jyoti Krishna Dutt, head of the paramilitary National Security Guards. The gunmen may be holding hostages, other officials said.

Police said 24 bodies had been found inside, but that number could rise.

ENGINE ROOM

The militants' action has struck at the heart of the city of 18 million people, engine room of an economic boom that has made India a favorite emerging market.

It is also home to the "Bollywood" film industry, the epitome of glamour in a country still blighted with poverty.

An Indian state minister said one of the militants arrested was a Pakistani national and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh warned of "a cost" if India's neighbors did not take action to stop their territory being used to launch attacks.

But Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi struck a conciliatory

note and promised full cooperation.

"Whoever has done this is neither your friend nor our friend," he told reporters in New Delhi. "We are not responsible for this, nor is it in our interest to get involved in something like this."

The attacks were carried out by a small army of young men armed with rifles and grenades, some of whom arrived by sea, who fanned out across Mumbai on Wednesday night to attack sites popular with tourists and business executives.

Police said 16 foreigners were among the 144 killed. At least 283 were wounded.

Three Germans, three Americans, one Australian, a Briton, one Canadian, two French, an Israeli, an Italian, a Japanese, a Singaporean and a Thai, were among the dead, according to various governments.

At the Trident-Oberoi, foreigners and Indians, some dragging their suitcases, trickled out of the five-star hotel after their ordeal ended. One hotel staff member held a baby in his arms.

Fear was palpable throughout the city, although it has been targeted by militants previously.

"When you have a terrorist shooting down people in stations and on roads, how can anyone feel safe any more?" said shopkeeper Pankaj Angre.

Mumbai was hit by serial bomb blasts in 1993 that killed at least 260 people at the stock exchange and other landmarks. Two years ago, more than 180 people died when Islamist militants bombed commuter trains.

(Reporting by New Delhi and Mumbai bureaux; Writing by Raju Gopalakrishnan; Editing by Giles Elgood)

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FACTBOX-Key developments in Mumbai attacks on Friday

Fri Nov 28, 2008 11:57am GMT

Nov 28 (Reuters) - Indian commandos took control of Mumbai's Trident-Oberoi hotel on Friday, but battles raged on with militants who were still holed up in another luxury hotel, the Taj Mahal, and a Jewish centre with about half a dozen foreign hostages.

Below are Friday's main developments in the militant attacks which killed at least 121 in India's financial hub:

OBEROI/TRIDENT

The chief of the elite National Security Guards, J.K. Dutt, said the Oberoi Hotel and Trident were under their control, announcing the end of the siege.

Earlier more than 90 guests, many of them well-dressed and dragging their suitcases, trickled out of the hotel and were escorted into waiting buses and cars, 36 hours after the siege began. One foreign member of the hotel staff held his baby in his arms.

Mumbai's police chief said 24 bodies were found in the hotel on Friday.
[nISL392010]

TAJ MAHAL HOTEL

The head of one commando unit searching for militants at the Taj said he had seen 12 to 15 bodies in one room among a total of 50 in the hotel.

Government and army officials said operations would be wrapped up within hours.

At least one militant was still thought to be holding two hostages at the hotel, but army commander Lieutenant-General N. Thamburaj told reporters almost all guests and staff had been evacuated from the historic, 105-year-old hotel.
[nSP373908]

Survivors emerging from the shattered Taj Mahal hotel told of how hotel staff had heroically put the lives of their guests first and thrown themselves into harm's way.
[nB147671]

JEWISH CENTRE

Israel's ambassador to India said he believed six or more Israeli nationals were still being held hostage at Jewish centre. Among those held were a rabbi and his wife. [ISL305449]

Early on Friday, Indian commandos, their faces covered by balaclavas, rappelled from helicopters onto the roof of the centre to flush out militants there.

SEA BORNE ATTACK?

Coast guard officials said an Indian-owned fishing trawler may have been used to deliver the militants who attacked from the sea. The boat was found abandoned near the Mumbai shore with communications equipment on board and could have been hijacked.

"We also found a dead body in the vessel," Commandant Kulpreet Yadav told Reuters. "We took the boat under tow and handed it over to the police for investigation." [nDEL358207]

INDIA LECTURES PAKISTAN

India again pointed a finger at Pakistani-linked "elements" for Wednesday's attacks. Pakistan urged New Delhi not to play politics over the attacks. [nLR648031]

Islamabad agreed to send the head of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to India to share information on the attacks, following a request by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

TRAVEL WARNINGS

Australia and Singapore upgraded travel warnings for India, telling nationals to reconsider plans to go there. [nSP337859]

CRICKET TOUR

The Indian cricket board switched the second test against England scheduled for Dec 19 to Chennai from Mumbai. The England players are to fly home on Saturday after their last two one-day games were called off following the attacks. [nDEL382322]

MARKET REACTION

India's stock market seesawed, falling and then rising 1 percent before ending the day up 0.7 percent, while the rupee weakened past 50 per dollar towards a recent record low in the first day of trade since the attacks. [nBOM345622]

Bond yields touched their lowest level in more than three years in anticipation of interest rate cuts from the central bank to shore up confidence battered by the global financial crisis and the train of attacks around the city. (Compiled by Mark Williams; Editing by John Mair and Sanjeev Miglani)

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India return will be up to individuals, says Pietersen

Fri Nov 28, 2008 12:35pm GMT

By Mitch Phillips

LONDON (Reuters) - England players will be allowed to make their own decision on whether to return to India for a two-test series next month after the militant attacks in Mumbai, captain Kevin Pietersen said on Friday.

England cut short their one-day series to fly home on Friday but are scheduled to return in December. The first test is scheduled to start on December 11 in Ahmedabad and the second was planned for Mumbai from December 19 but will now be switched to a new venue.

"We will make every effort to come back and play in the tests but at the end of the day if it's not safe we won't be coming back," Pietersen told BBC radio.

"I'll never force anybody to do anything. A man is a man and he can make his own decisions for himself.

"It's the right decision right now to get the boys out of here, to get them to their families, even if it's only going to be for a couple of days.

"It has been really, really hard. It's something that we weren't expecting and when unexpected things happen you deal with them in certain ways."

Pietersen said postponing the series until after Christmas were not practical and that plans were in place to set up a new practice match in place of the scheduled three-day game in Baroda from December 5.

Former England captain Michael Vaughan said he and the rest of the performance squad would have been in Mumbai, and possibly in one of the hotels targeted by gunmen, if they had not been moved to Bangalore.

"It was only at the last minute it was switched, I don't know why," Vaughan wrote in his Daily Telegraph column.

"We could have been there in one of those hotels when they were attacked.

"All our test kit is in the Taj Mahal hotel where one of the sieges has been going on. It was deposited there after England's two practice games there. That's how close the danger is.

"I can imagine the (one-day) England squad must have been going through some really tough meetings. Some players will have wanted to go home permanently, some will have wanted to stay.

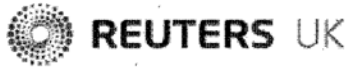
"I just hope the decision to return for the tests is taken out of their hands and that it is not a financial decision but is made with their well being, and the

supporters and media, first and foremost."

(Editing by John Mehaffey)

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Comments from foreigners caught up in Mumbai attacks

Fri Nov 28, 2008 12:42pm GMT

Nov 28 (Reuters) - Following are some quotes from foreign tourists and businesspeople who were holed up in Mumbai during the attacks:

AUSTRIAN AIRLINES REPRESENTATIVE, HERBERT KOSCHIR,
SPEAKING TO AUSTRIAN RADIO

"I am living in an apartment bloc which is right next to the Oberoi. I've been stuck for 36 hours. The road is a cul de sac, I can't get out at the other end.

"The situation is currently quiet but interrupted now and again by explosions and shootings. Yesterday, the afternoon was very turbulent.

"We can't leave the building, and given the fact that the terrorists are targeting foreigners it isn't really advisable to walk by the hotel and risk being shot at from the roof.

"In our building, sniper units have moved into the 9th and 13th floors and onto the roof and they are shooting at the hotel from time to time, so it's not exactly cosy here.

"In the city as a whole, life goes on -- if at a slower pace than normal. I have talked to my colleagues on the phone."

HARNISH PATEL, A CHARTERED SURVEYOR FROM BRITAIN,
SPEAKING TO THE EVENING STANDARD NEWSPAPER FROM HIS
HOSPITAL BED. PATEL WAS SHOT BY THE ATTACKERS AT THE
LEOPOLD CAFE

"I was so lucky. The guy just took one look at me and showered the whole side of the bar -- chairs and table and everything. He just let loose. It's unimaginable.

"Luckily he didn't keep his finger down because if he did, I'd be gone."

When he was shot he said he just felt a "tingly feeling".

"I think it was the shock. It just seemed a tingly feeling. I knew that he'd hit me in this leg. I thought 'stay, don't move'.

"I was literally one drink in, a gunman walked in and that was it. I was in the bar and we had one of those jugs with taps that you drink out of. And suddenly it just shattered, and you could hear a sound like fire crackers.

"I was out near the back of the bar so I moved further back for cover and he kept showering us with shots. I never saw where he was standing. He came to the right side of me, the guy to the left, he was saying 'stay quiet, stay quiet.'"

LONDON LAWYER MARK ABELL, SPEAKING TO BBC AFTER HIS
RELEASE FROM THE OBEROI HOTEL:

"Eventually I got a call from the inhouse system from someone downstairs saying they were coming to get me. In about half an hour there was a knock on the door and there was an entourage of heavily armed military, some hotel staff, the police. It was great."

What was your first thought?

"I'm going home. I'm going to see my children, going to see my wife. Yeah; going home."

Did you think this moment would happen?

"Oh yeah. I think these people have been fantastic. All the Indian authorities and military and police. The hotel staff. They were really there for us and I think they are a great advertisement for their country."

WIFE OF PAUL BEAN, A BRITISH BUSINESSMAN WHO HID UNDER A
RESTAURANT TABLE IN THE TAJ MAHAL HOTEL FOR SIX HOURS. HE
CALLED HIS WIFE BUT THE PHONE WENT DEAD:

"Until we heard from Paul again it was absolutely horrendous. When he did get through he was in total shock. He had been rescued after hiding flat on his front under a table for about six hours.

"He told us it had all kicked off when he was in the restaurant. People started throwing hand grenades down the stairwells -- one of them shattering the glass doors in the restaurant. He had hidden there until rescuers put up a ladder to the restaurant window and he climbed out." (for main story click on [ID:nLR648031]) (Editing by Philippa Fletcher)

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India shares fall 1.5 pct after attacks, seesaw

Fri Nov 28, 2008 4:37am GMT

BANGALORE, Nov 28 (Reuters) - India's main share index opened down 1.5 percent on Friday and seesawed in early trade, after coordinated militant attacks on India's financial capital of Mumbai that killed more than 100 people.

Financial markets were shut on Thursday after the attacks.

Shares in Indian Hotels Co Ltd (IHTL.BO: Quote, Profile, Research) fell 12.9 percent to 42.20 rupees and EIH Ltd (EIHO.BO: Quote, Profile, Research) was down 8.5 percent at 85 rupees after their main hotels – Taj Mahal Hotel and Oberoi-Trident were hit by the attacks.

At 9:59 a.m. (0429 GMT), the 30-share BSE index .BSESN was down 0.24 percent, or 21.64 points, at 9,005.08, after having risen as much as 0.6 percent earlier following a weak start.

The 50-issue NSE index .NSEI fell 0.25 percent to 2,745.45 points. (Reporting by Sumeet Chatterjee & Ami Shah; Editing by Ranjit Gangadharan)

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TIMELINE-Attack on Mumbai

Fri Nov 28, 2008 5:49pm GMT

Nov 28 (Reuters) - Indian commandos stormed a Jewish centre in Mumbai on Friday, killing two Islamist gunmen but failing to save five hostages, after two days of bloodshed in the city.

Following is a timeline of the attacks on Mumbai:

* WEDNESDAY:

- Islamist gunmen attack Mumbai in at least seven places shortly after 10.30 p.m. Around two dozen militants armed with automatic rifles and grenades attack targets including luxury hotels – the Taj Mahal and the Trident Oberoi - hospitals, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station and the popular Leopold cafe.
- Gunmen remain holed up in the hotels and at Chabad House, a popular stop for Israeli visitors. Many are reported killed and the army begins moving into the Trident Oberoi hotel.
- Police say at least some of the attackers came ashore in a rubber dinghy.
- The chief of the police anti-terrorist squad in Mumbai is killed in the attack.

* THURSDAY:

- Commandos fight room-to-room battles in the two hotels to rescue people trapped by the gunmen. Explosions rattle the Taj hotel where some hostages are rescued.
- Prime Minister Manmohan Singh blames militant groups based in India's neighbours, usually meaning Pakistan.
- Pakistan condemns the attacks and promises full cooperation in fighting terrorism.

* FRIDAY:

- India points a finger at Pakistani-linked "elements" for the attacks in Mumbai.
- At the Trident Oberoi Hotel, commandos kill two militants and free 143 guests.
- A lone gunman continues to hold out at the nearby Taj hotel.
- Five hostages inside the besieged Jewish centre are found dead.
- At least 12 foreigners – three Germans, two Americans, one Australian, a Briton, Canadian, two French, an Italian and a Japanese national – are among the dead.

- Pakistan says the two countries face a common enemy. Urging India not to play politics, it agrees to send its spy chief to share intelligence on the suicide attacks.
- Police say 124 people are killed and 284 wounded.

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Indian shares fall after attacks, hotels plunge

Fri Nov 28, 2008 6:42am GMT

- * Main index down 0.6 pct after losing 1.5 pct at open
- * Hotel stocks fall after militant attacks
- * Political risk premium seen rising in short term (Updates to midday)

BANGALORE, Nov 28 (Reuters) - Indian shares fell on Friday after militant attacks on the financial capital of Mumbai killed at least 121 people and shut down the market for a day, rattling investors.

The attacks by armed Islamic militants at several places, including two luxury hotels, killed at least 121 people and shut down financial markets on Thursday. Fighting was continuing on Friday morning, more than 36 hours after it started. [ID:nLR648031]

Shares in Indian Hotels Co Ltd (IHTL.BO: Quote, Profile, Research) fell 13.5 percent to 41.90 rupees and EIH Ltd (EIH0.BO: Quote, Profile, Research) was down 4.6 percent to 88.60 rupees after their main hotels -- Taj Mahal Hotel and Oberoi-Trident were damaged by the attacks.

By 12 p.m. (0630 GMT), the 30-share BSE index .BSESN was down 0.64 percent, or 57.54 points, at 8,969.18, with 20 stocks losing ground. It opened down 1.5 percent and then rose as much as 0.6 percent.

Traders said short covering ahead of the expiry of monthly derivatives and better-than-expected economic growth in the September quarter helped the market to pull back, but the outlook for the near term was weighed down by greater political risks.

"A knee-jerk reaction to the attacks was expected and it has happened and now I think the markets are behaving normally," said Arun Kejriwal, strategist at research firm KRIS. "People here don't like this to hammer down the markets."

Volume was below normal at 66 million shares in the broader market, where losers led gainers two to one.

Outsourcers such as Infosys Technologies (INFY.BO: Quote, Profile, Research) rose percent to 1,225 rupees and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS.BO: Quote, Profile, Rese) was up 4.2 percent at 549 rupees, as investors hunted for bargains in battered stocks, traders said.

Data showed India's economy grew 7.6 percent in the September quarter from a year earlier, above market expectations for 7.3 percent but below the preceding quarter's 7.9 percent rise.

Analysts said Mumbai was no stranger to political violence and markets had usually regarded previous bombings and other attacks with a degree of nonchalance.

Still, investors will be cautious.

"We have no doubt that the risk premium will rise in the short term," Securities firm Macquarie analyst Seshadri Sen said in a note, adding the market would partly offset the shocks by gains in overseas markets in the past two days.

"Some fresh selling from the FIIs also may come as the situation has changed between Wednesday and today," said Gajendra Nagpal, chief executive of Unicon Financial in New Delhi, referring to foreign institutional investors.

Foreign funds have withdrawn a net \$13.7 billion from Indian shares this year, pushing the BSE index down 55 percent.

The broader 50-share NSE index .NSEI was down 0.44 percent at 2,740.05.

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Commando chief says sees bodies in hotel room

Fri Nov 28, 2008 7:48am GMT

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - A chief of a Indian commando unit flushing out militants at Mumbai's Taj Mahal Hotel said on Friday that he saw 12 to 15 bodies in one room.

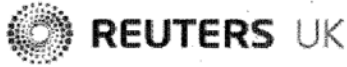
"We found 12-15 bodies," the commander, whose face was disguised in a black scarf and sunglasses, told a news conference.

The commandos found money, ammunition and an identity card from Mauritius thought to have belonged to the militants.

(Reporting by Surojit Gupta; Editing by Alistair Scrutton)

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India and Pakistan simmer over Mumbai attacks

Sat Nov 29, 2008 10:23pm GMT

By Rina Chandran

MUMBAI (Reuters) - Indian accusations of a Pakistani link to the attacks on Mumbai that killed nearly 200 people threaten to damage attempts to improve ties between the rivals.

Indian officials have said most, perhaps all, of the 10 attackers who held Mumbai hostage with frenzied attacks using assault rifles and grenades came from Pakistan, a Muslim nation carved out of Hindu-majority India in 1947.

An official in Islamabad said the next one to two days would be crucial for relations between the nuclear-armed neighbours. Pakistan has condemned the assaults and denied any involvement by state agencies.

After a final battle between militants and security forces inside the Taj Mahal, Mumbai's best-known hotel, a crowd of protesters outside pumped their fists and shouted "Our soldiers came and Pakistan ran away."

A senior Pakistani security official said Islamabad would divert troops to its border with India and away from fighting militants on the Afghan frontier if the tension spilt over.

"If something happens on that front, the war on terror won't be our priority," the official told reporters at a briefing.

"We'll take out everything from the western border. We won't leave anything there."

Elite Black Cat commandos killed the last of the gunmen on Saturday after three days of room-to-room battling inside the Taj Mahal, one of several landmarks struck in co-ordinated attacks on Wednesday night.

Hundreds of people, many of them Westerners, were trapped or taken hostage as the gunmen hurled grenades and fired indiscriminately. At least 22 of those killed were foreigners, including businessmen and tourists.

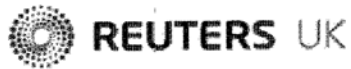
Nine gunmen and 20 police and soldiers were also killed.

A tenth militant caught alive told interrogators they wanted to be remembered for an Indian version of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, Times Now TV said, quoting an unidentified Defence Ministry official.

"SENSITIVE MOMENTS"

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has said "elements" in Pakistan may

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Militants visited Mumbai before attack - newspaper

Sat Nov 29, 2008 1:13am GMT

NEW DELHI, Nov 29 (Reuters) - Several of the Islamist militants who attacked Mumbai this week visited the city a few months ago and lived there for a while pretending to be students, the Times of India reported on Saturday.

Quoting from interrogation reports of one of the militants taken into custody, the newspaper said nine militants rented an apartment in the Colaba area of downtown Mumbai, near where the attacks were carried out.

The group often visited the two luxury hotels that were among the city landmarks attacked on Wednesday night, it added.

The militants, who were mainly Pakistanis, pretended to be Malaysians during their reconnaissance visit, the newspaper said.

At least 10 militants slipped into Mumbai this week after hijacking an Indian fishing trawler in international waters and killing the four crew, it said. They came ashore in rubber dinghies and the trawler was found abandoned off Mumbai.

In all, 16 militants took part in the attack, the newspaper said, but it did not give details on how the others may have entered the city.

At least 144 people have been killed and more than 280 wounded in the attacks. Indian commandos were still trying to flush out two or three militants holed up in the Taj Mahal hotel. (Reporting by Raju Gopalakrishnan; Editing by Alex Richardson)

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Five U.S. citizens dead in Mumbai, more "at risk"

Sat Nov 29, 2008 2:38am GMT

By Sue Fleming

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - At least five U.S. citizens, including a Brooklyn rabbi and a Virginia teenager, were killed in militant attacks in Mumbai and the State Department said it was working with India to account for missing Americans.

State Department spokesman Gordon Duguid confirmed five U.S. citizens had been killed, but he did not identify them.

"The consulate in Mumbai will continue to work with the Indian police until all missing American citizens have been accounted for," he added.

"There are still Americans at risk on the ground and we want to be very, very careful with any facts," Duguid said.

The Virginia-based Synchronicity Foundation said on its website that Alan Scherr and his 13-year-old daughter, Naomi, Americans who were in India as part of a meditation program, died in the attacks that have killed at least 144 people and wounded 283 more.

The New York office of the Chabad-Lubavitch Jewish group said a Brooklyn rabbi and his wife were killed in the siege on a Jewish center in Mumbai as part of the coordinated attacks. The rabbi was a dual U.S.-Israeli national and his wife Israeli, the group said.

"Rabbi Gavriel and Rivka Holtzberg, the beloved directors of Chabad-Lubavitch of Mumbai, were killed during one of the worst terrorist attacks to strike India in recent memory," the Chabad's New York headquarters said in a statement.

The couple's son, Moshe, who turns 2 on Saturday, escaped with his nanny, who brought him to a local hospital. The boy was now in the custody of the mother's parents, who had traveled to India from Israel, the group said.

Rabbi Chaim Cunin, an official at the Chabad center in Los Angeles, said two other rabbis, Leibish Teitelbaum and Bentzion Chroman, were also killed in the attack. He said they were Israeli citizens, but could not rule out they also held U.S. passports.

President George W. Bush said he was deeply saddened and the United States was working with India's government to ensure the safety of those still under threat.

"We will continue to cooperate against these extremists who offer nothing but violence and hopelessness," Bush said in a statement.

President-elect Barack Obama also expressed condolences about what he called "outrageous terrorist attacks in Mumbai," and said he fully supported the Bush administration's efforts to protect U.S. citizens in India.

"The United States must stand with India and all nations and people who are committed to destroying terrorist networks, and defeating their hate-filled ideology," he said in a statement.

'HORRIBLE ATTACKS'

Senior Bush administration officials met on Friday afternoon for more discussions about the attacks, said White House spokeswoman Dana Perino. She said they were focused on "ensuring everything possible is being done to help American citizens affected by these horrible attacks."

The Bush administration also continued to work with the Indian government at all levels, and had offered assistance and support, Perino said. She said Bush had received regular updates since the attacks on Wednesday night.

Indian commandos stormed the Jewish center, killing two suspected Islamist gunmen but failing to save five hostages. Early on Saturday, gunfire and explosions rocked the luxury Taj Mahal hotel where many foreigners stay in Mumbai.

Duguid said a State Department hot line had received about 1,500 calls for information about friends and relatives.

U.S. consular staff are stationed at hotels affected by the attacks as well as hospitals in order to identify Americans in need of help as quickly as possible, he said.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had over the past 36 hours spoken to India's foreign minister as well as Pakistan's president, Asif Ali Zardari, said Duguid.

Rice also called Obama twice to brief him, said Duguid. Aides to Obama said he also received an intelligence briefing on the attacks.

(Additional reporting by Ross Colvin, Deborah Charles, Arshad Mohammed and Andrea Shalal-Esa; Editing by Peter Cooney)

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Fires break out in Mumbai's Taj hotel

Sat Nov 29, 2008 2:22am GMT

MUMBAI, Nov 29 (Reuters) - Fires broke out in two parts of Mumbai's Taj Mahal hotel on Saturday as security forces exchanged heavy fire with Islamist militants holed up inside, a Reuters witness said.

Flames could be seen licking the outside the building and plumes of black smoke were billowing out. (Reporting by Rina Chandran; Editing by Raju Gopalakrishnan)

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Operation at Mumbai Taj hotel is over - TV

Sat Nov 29, 2008 2:57am GMT

NEW DELHI, Nov 29 (Reuters) - Two Indian television channels quoted the Indian commando chief on Friday as saying that the operation to dislodge militants at the Taj Mahal hotel in Mumbai was over. (Reporting by Rina Chandran; Editing by Alistair Scrutton)

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REFILE-WITNESS-Black Cats prowl as gunfight ends Mumbai siege

Sat Nov 29, 2008 8:29am GMT
(Corrects acronym in paragraph two to NSG, not SNG.)

By Phil Smith

MUMBAI, Nov 29 (Reuters) - The gunbattle at Mumbai's famous Taj Mahal Palace Hotel was finally over after three bloody days, but the dull thud of explosions still vibrated up through the shoes of those standing nearby.

India's crack NSG "Black Cat" commandos went from room to room to secure the battle-scarred old building, mopping up after brazen, coordinated attacks that killed at least 155 people at three sites in the heart of India's financial hub.

The bodycount rose as one last gunfight in the Taj marked the end of the drama, during which scores of foreigners hid terrified in their rooms and many more were taken hostage.

Live television images were jolted by explosions, either from stun grenades or controlled detonations used to destroy ordnance found by the Black Cats as they prowled through the hotel.

The gunbattle ended just after dawn on Saturday.

In the early hours I made my way around to the back of the Taj, where a crack Sikh regiment was stationed.

Stray bullets fizzed as they passed overhead in light rain.

By that stage the story had become a little surreal as tiredness and fear set in, like watching a televised news report with me in it unfold before my own eyes.

After 30 years in journalism I knew it was my job to be there but it was still hard to put aside fears for my own safety.

I couldn't help but be struck by the futility of ducking each time I heard a bullet pass overhead, knowing full well that the bullet was long gone by the time I heard it.

BULLETS, GRENADES AND RATS

It was very quiet and very dark at the back of the Taj. Rats scurried around our ankles as we chatted to the soldiers, who were stretching tired, cramped legs and easing stiff backs.

The language barrier meant it was hard to communicate but it was clear the Sikhs had been on duty for many hours. Unlike them, at least I had been able to enjoy some nap breaks since the drama began to unfold late on Wednesday.

Through the quiet at the back of the building I could hear a lot of gunfire from the front. It seemed to range widely along the length of the corridors at the front rather than from the area around the pool at the back of the complex.

The Taj is U-shaped, with the pool spanning the open end. I could see clearly palm trees in the gardens surrounding the cool waters I had swum in occasionally when visiting friends had found enough money to stay at the swanky hotel.

At the front of the Taj, bleary-eyed journalists who had earlier mobbed National Security Guards chief J.K. Dutt when he announced the end of the siege were pushed back roughly behind a rope that had marked an unofficial boundary for them.

But that was still only 100 metres from the lobby and the smashed and blackened windows of the hotel.

Hundreds of media workers dived for cover as stray bullets whistled above them during the final stages of a firefight.

Live pieces-to-camera, or PTCs as they are known in the trade, were delivered by local journalists lying prone, adding to the drama of the scene.

On Friday at least two journalists were wounded by grenade debris which hit the 100-metre long phalanx of cameras and journalists working behind their rope border.

It was hard not to think that prying reporters and cameras would have been kept back much further from the action if a hotel siege such as this had happened somewhere like Britain, rather than this teeming, chaotic, unforgettable city.

A few reporters, including me, wore flak jackets. They were often derided amid an air of bravado, until bullets and debris began flying and blood-stained journalists were carted off to hospital.

Even wearing the jacket I still felt genuine fear as bullets whizzed overhead, knowing it was useless if I was hit in the head.

"When I was doing my stand-upper (piece to camera) I felt like a bullet might hit the back of my neck at any moment," one Western reporter told me.

"I stopped then, it just wasn't worth it." (Editing by Paul Tait and John Chalmers)

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Militants in Mumbai "wanted an Indian 9/11"

Sat Nov 29, 2008 9:56am GMT

By Matthias Williams

MUMBAI (Reuters) - The gunmen who attacked Mumbai killing at least 195 people wanted to go down in history for an Indian 9/11, and were also inspired by the bombing of the Marriott hotel in Islamabad, media reports said.

They had planned every detail, knew the layout of the Taj Mahal and Trident Oberoi hotels they targeted, had commando-style training and even had snacks such as dry fruit stuffed in their backpacks.

The capture of one of the militants, a clean-shaven, fluent English-speaking 21-year-old from Pakistan according to reports, has highlighted the ambitious plans of the Islamist group.

"The entire idea was to replicate the JW Marriott at the Taj," Times Now television reported, quoting a defense official present at the interrogation of Azam Amir Kasav.

He was referring to one of Pakistan's worst bomb attacks, when a lorry packed with explosives all but destroyed the hotel in Islamabad and killed at least 55 people in September.

"They wanted to reduce the symbols of economic strength to rubble, the Taj and Trident, so they cannot be rebuilt," Times Now said. "They talked of a 9/11 to bring down the buildings."

Their methods were different but the impact was huge.

During the first hours of the attacks at landmarks across Mumbai police seemed powerless. Top officials, including the head of the city's anti-terrorist force, were gunned down.

The use of at least 10 heavily armed and well-trained "fedayeen" bore the hallmarks of Pakistan-based militant groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Kasav, the militant reported to have been captured, confessed to being a member of Lashkar-e-Taiba, newspapers said, but the group has denied any role in the Mumbai attacks.

AS WELL-TRAINED AS COMMANDOS

The militants, all young men, knew exactly their targets, including cafes and hotels frequented by executives and tourists.

It was only when elite "Black Cats" commandos arrived to tackle the

remaining militants holed up in the Taj, the Trident Oberoi and a Jewish center, that the tide appeared to turn.

At least three gunmen battled India's best-trained commandos for two days in the maze of corridors in the Taj Hotel, setting fire to places as they moved from floor to floor.

"At times we found them matching us in combat and movement," one commando told the Hindustan Times. "They were either army regular or have done a long stint of commando training. They were behaving the way Indian commandos would have."

Several militants checked into the Taj in the weeks before the attack, gathering details of the hotel layout, several newspapers reported. They filmed some locations on scouting trips.

Their rucksacks were packed to the brim with ammunition, six to seven magazine with 50 bullets each, and grenades. They had satellite phones, credit cards. They were in for the long haul.

"These people were very, very familiar with the hotel layout and it appeared they had carried out a survey before," the chief of the elite Naval Commando Unit, told reporters. "A very determined lot, remorseless."

In one four-to-five-hour gunbattle, the militants retreated through a hidden door in the hotel. The troops did not know even the door existed, the Hindustan Times reported.

The gunmen also threw grenades to destroy the close circuit television control room early on in the siege.

A picture of the captured militant taken in Mumbai showed him dressed in light grey combat trousers with numerous pockets and sneakers and carrying a rucksack on his back.

One security expert told the Mail Today the way he carried his AK-47 in one hand showed he had months of training.

Prior to mounting the attack the militants had taken over an Indian fishing trawler, tying up and blindfolding some fishermen. One newspaper picture showed one lying on the floor of the small trawler with his hands tied behind his back and his throat cut.

The boat then sailed to Mumbai, where gunmen landed from rubber dinghies. The bloodbath started with an attack on the main railway station that killed nearly 50 people.

Among the dead in the ensuing violence were a couple at the Trident. They were found by police, in rigor mortis, holding hands.

"In their last seconds together, one must have squeezed the other's hand," a police official told the Indian Express.

(Writing by Alistair Scrutton; Editing by Simon Denyer and Alex Richardson)

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ACTBOX: The plans and tactics of the Mumbai attackers | Reuters.com



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ACTBOX: The plans and tactics of the Mumbai attackers

Sat Nov 29, 2008 10:54am GMT

MUMBAI (Reuters) - Indian commandos killed the last Islamist gunmen holed up at Mumbai's Taj Mahal hotel on Saturday, ending a three-day battle at landmarks across India's financial capital that killed at least 195 people.

The following is a round-up of media reports on the tactics and plans of the militants:

- * The gunmen wanted to go down in history for an Indian 9/11, and were also inspired by the bombing of the Marriott hotel in Islamabad, Times Now TV reported. Their targets, which included a cafe, were frequented by executives and tourists.
- * They knew the layout of the Taj Mahal and Trident-Oberoi hotels they hit. Several members of the group of at least 10 checked into the Taj in the weeks before the attack, gathering details of the layout. They filmed some locations on scouting trips. In one four- to five-hour gunbattle, the militants retreated through a hidden door in the hotel that Indian troops did not know existed, the Hindustan Times reported.
- * Before mounting the attack, the militants had taken over an Indian fishing trawler, tying up and blindfolding some fishermen. One newspaper picture showed one lying on the floor of the small trawler with his hands tied behind his back and his throat cut. The boat then sailed to Mumbai, where gunmen landed from rubber dinghies.
- * Their rucksacks were packed to the brim with ammunition, six to seven magazines with 50 bullets each, and grenades. They had satellite phones, credit cards and, indicating they were in for a long haul, even snacks such as dried fruit.
- * The militants appeared to have had commando-style training. A security expert told The Mail Today that the way one man carried his AK-47 in one hand showed he had had months of training.
- * The gunmen threw grenades to destroy the closed circuit television control room early on in the siege. At least three of them battled India's best-trained commandos for two days in the maze of corridors in the Taj, setting fire to places as they moved from floor to floor.
- * Azam Amir Kasav, the only one of the militants to be captured, confessed to being a member of the Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba, newspapers said, but the group has denied any role in the Mumbai attacks.

(Writing by Alistair Scrutton; Editing by John Chalmers and Paul Tait)

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Daring Mumbai attacks reveal any city's vulnerability

Sat Nov 29, 2008 12:09am GMT

By Luke Baker - Analysis

LONDON (Reuters) - Whatever group lies behind the attacks in Mumbai, security experts say one thing has been made abundantly clear: a massive city can be reduced to mayhem if a group of men is well-enough armed and prepared to die.

Rather than hijacking planes as in September 11, or smuggling delicately wired car bombs into a city, the Mumbai gunmen chose a frontal style of armed assault, killing more than 100 people, wounding around 250 and causing immense panic in a thriving city of 13 million.

Security specialists say the attack was probably months in the planning and appears to have been finely tuned in its execution, but it ultimately relied on only an estimated 25 gunmen lightly armed with assault rifles and hand-grenades.

Their ability to roam around and sustain the attack, while all the while being willing to die in the onslaught, made it all the more difficult to combat and far more drawn out than an instantaneous suicide bomb attack might have been.

"It's virtually impossible to stop 20 guys with guns from attacking anywhere in the world if they are prepared to die," said Sajjan Gohel, an analyst with the Asia-Pacific Foundation, an independent security and intelligence group based in London.

"That is the thing about the fedayeen strategy," he said, using an Arabic term used to describe self-sacrificial gunmen who have operated in Iraq, Kashmir and across the Muslim world.

"It's even more effective than a suicide mission. With a suicide mission, you blow up your explosives and you're gone. With a fedayeen attack, you try to last out as long as possible, killing as many people as possible," he told Reuters.

Nearly 20 hours after the attack began late on Wednesday night, Indian soldiers and the militants were still exchanging gunfire and more than 100 people were trapped inside the Taj Mahal hotel, one of two five-star hotels popular with Western tourists and businessmen that were targeted in the assault.

Indian authorities closed stock, bond and foreign exchange markets, schools were shuttered and panicked foreigners on holiday or on business were desperate to flee, reducing India's business powerhouse to a tense, semi-warzone.

"Men armed with automatic weapons are able to run amok and keep the situation going for much, much longer," Henry Wilkinson, a senior analyst with Janusian Security Risk Management, a London-based consultancy, told Reuters.

"Whether it's intended or not, that creates an extended drama which is all the more terrifying."

AL QAEDA INSPIRATION?

Given the boldness of the assault, its high-level of planning and the fact that foreigners were specifically targeted, security specialists believe there is likely to have been a degree of inspiration from or link to external groups allied to al Qaeda, such as the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba.

They say the tactics are different from the more common, post-9/11 attacks seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, but still bear similar hallmarks.

"It's very interesting that they didn't go in using car bombs, it was more of a direct armed assault on a city," said Wilkinson. "It's very reminiscent of the attacks in Saudi Arabia in 2003, when the gunmen were going around trying to find Westerners and kill them."

Wilkinson highlighted the fact the Mumbai gunmen appeared to have used only assault rifles and hand-grenades, giving them much more mobility and freeing them up to take hostages.

"I would suggest that using guns and hand-grenades was a deliberate choice... The amount of planning and training they must have done to carry out such an attack is impressive."

Such an assault might be mounted virtually anywhere in the world, he said, making cities in Europe and the United States vulnerable, even if such an outcome remains unlikely.

In London in 2005 four suicide bombers killed 52 people on public transport and brought the city to a standstill.

Both attacks underline just how hard it is for democratic states to protect themselves against such attacks without draconian security measures and powerful intelligence.

"I can't see any reason -- if there is a terrorist group that has the capability... attacks like this in Europe or the United States can't be discounted," he said.

One advantage for Indian authorities and any intelligence services called in to help investigate the Mumbai attacks is that at least nine gunmen are reported to have been seized.

In a suicide bombing, forensics can help investigators establish only so much. In this case, those detained are likely to reveal much more intelligence about who plotted the attack.

"The fact that a few of them have been seized is highly significant," said Wilkinson. "I think a lot more information about these attacks and who was behind them is going to come to light."

(Additional reporting by Andrew Marshall in Singapore)

(Reporting by Luke Baker; Editing by Myra MacDonald)

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Militants lead commandos in deadly dance in Mumbai

Sat Nov 29, 2008 12:09am GMT

By Simon Denyer

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Dodging from floor to floor, cutting off lights and dragging hostages behind them, a handful of young Islamists held India's elite commandos at bay for more than 24 hours in two Mumbai hotels, trailing death in their wake.

By Friday afternoon, gunfire and explosions continued to erupt from the luxury Taj Mahal Hotel as a lone militant fought on, but commandos said they had finally gained control of the nearby five-star Trident-Oberoi after killing two of the attackers.

The crack Indian troops seemed to grant their foes a grudging respect for their military know-how and planning.

"These people were very, very familiar with the hotel layout and it appeared they had carried out a survey before," the chief of the elite Naval Commando Unit, his face covered with a black scarf and sunglasses, told reporters.

"A very determined lot, remorseless," he said, adding that he had seen around 50 bodies scattered through the Taj hotel, including at least 12 in a single room.

The attackers were young men under the age of 30, carrying AK-47 assault rifles and grenades, obviously trained in how to use them.

"They were moving from one place to the other," the masked commando said, adding there were three to four of them raining fire and grenades on the commandos.

On Thursday night, the head of the elite National Security Guards said just one militant was left at the Taj, adding that he was wounded and would be "mopped up" soon.

But on Friday, it was apparent the lone gunman was proving a hard nut to crack, as explosions and gunfire erupted first from one floor and then another.

"He is moving in two floors, there is a dance floor area where apparently he has cut off all the lights. And sometimes he gets holed up into some of the rooms, and he has made the area dark," Lieutenant-General N. Thamburaj told reporters.

"This morning while carrying out the operation we heard the sound of a lady and a gentleman, so it is possible that this terrorist has got two or more hostages with him," he added.

The attackers' determination has been matched only by their ruthlessness. On Wednesday, some walked into the city's main railway station and fired indiscriminately on the crowd, killing 47 people in the blink of an eye.

Guests who escaped the hotel told of bodies littered in the corridors, although one Briton said the attackers had released some women hostages when they started to panic in the early stages of the siege.

Naval commandos said they had recovered a Mauritian national identity card, seven credit cards, and more than \$2,000 in U.S. dollars and Indian rupees in the Taj hotel.

They also found grenades, ammunition, dried fruits and almonds – signs, they said, that the attackers had been prepared to sustain themselves during a long siege.

"We are not aware how many have been killed," the masked commando said of the battle at the Taj.

"When exchange of fire takes place in darkness and there is blood all over, there are bodies lying all over," he said.

"You are not looking at who is injured and who is killed, you are just looking at somebody who has weapons on him."

(Additional reporting by Surojit Gupta; Editing by Alistair Scrutton and Jeremy Laurence)

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Comments from foreigners caught up in Mumbai attacks

Sat Nov 29, 2008 12:09am GMT

(Reuters) - Following are some quotes from foreign tourists and businesspeople who were holed up in Mumbai during the attacks:

AUSTRIAN AIRLINES REPRESENTATIVE, HERBERT KOSCHIR,
SPEAKING TO AUSTRIAN RADIO

"I am living in an apartment bloc which is right next to the Oberoi. I've been stuck for 36 hours. The road is a cul de sac, I can't get out at the other end.

"The situation is currently quiet but interrupted now and again by explosions and shootings. Yesterday, the afternoon was very turbulent.

"We can't leave the building, and given the fact that the terrorists are targeting foreigners it isn't really advisable to walk by the hotel and risk being shot at from the roof.

"In our building, sniper units have moved into the 9th and 13th floors and onto the roof and they are shooting at the hotel from time to time, so it's not exactly cozy here.

"In the city as a whole, life goes on -- if at a slower pace than normal. I have talked to my colleagues on the phone."

HARNISH PATEL, A CHARTERED SURVEYOR FROM BRITAIN,
SPEAKING TO THE EVENING STANDARD NEWSPAPER FROM HIS
HOSPITAL BED. PATEL WAS SHOT BY THE ATTACKERS AT THE
LEOPOLD CAFE

"I was so lucky. The guy just took one look at me and showered the whole side of the bar -- chairs and table and everything. He just let loose. It's unimaginable.

"Luckily he didn't keep his finger down because if he did, I'd be gone."

When he was shot he said he just felt a "tingly feeling."

"I think it was the shock. It just seemed a tingly feeling. I knew that he'd hit me in this leg. I thought 'stay, don't move'.

"I was literally one drink in, a gunman walked in and that was it. I was in the bar and we had one of those jugs with taps that you drink out of. And suddenly it just shattered, and you could hear a sound like fire crackers.

"I was out near the back of the bar so I moved further back for cover and he kept showering us with shots. I never saw where he was standing. He came to the right side of me, the guy to the left, he was saying 'stay quiet, stay

quiet."

LONDON LAWYER MARK ABELL, SPEAKING TO BBC AFTER HIS RELEASE FROM THE OBEROI HOTEL:

"Eventually I got a call from the inhouse system from someone downstairs saying they were coming to get me. In about half an hour there was a knock on the door and there was an entourage of heavily armed military, some hotel staff, the police. It was great."

What was your first thought?

"I'm going home. I'm going to see my children, going to see my wife. Yeah, going home."

Did you think this moment would happen?

"Oh yeah. I think these people have been fantastic. All the Indian authorities and military and police. The hotel staff. They were really there for us and I think they are a great advertisement for their country."

WIFE OF PAUL BEAN, A BRITISH BUSINESSMAN WHO HID UNDER A RESTAURANT TABLE IN THE TAJ MAHAL HOTEL FOR SIX HOURS. HE CALLED HIS WIFE BUT THE PHONE WENT DEAD:

"Until we heard from Paul again it was absolutely horrendous. When he did get through he was in total shock. He had been rescued after hiding flat on his front under a table for about six hours.

"He told us it had all kicked off when he was in the restaurant. People started throwing hand grenades down the stairwells – one of them shattering the glass doors in the restaurant. He had hidden there until rescuers put up a ladder to the restaurant window and he climbed out."

(Editing by Philippa Fletcher)

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India stocks rise after militant attacks

Sat Nov 29, 2008 12:09am GMT

By V. Ramakrishnan

MUMBAI (Reuters) - India's stock market wobbled then fought back to end higher on Friday, while the rupee neared a recent record low in the first day of trade since attacks in the financial capital, Mumbai, which killed at least 121 people.

Bond yields touched their lowest level in more than three years in anticipation of interest rate cuts from the central bank to shore up confidence battered by the global financial crisis and the series of deadly attacks around the city.

Economic growth for the September quarter beat expectations but still slowed to its lowest pace in nearly four years.

People trickled back to work in the business district in the south of the city, although security operations continued into the day in three locations, including two luxury hotels, to flush out Islamic militants and free trapped staff and guests.

"Guns don't control the markets. It's the fundamentals that control the market and today you saw the economic growth numbers that were ahead of the forecast," said Amitabh Chakraborty, president of equities at Religare Securities.

"In the short-term, however, the country's risk premium will go up and it will not be viewed as a safe destination."

The 30-share BSE index ended up 0.7 percent at 9,092.72, after opening down 1.5 percent. Analysts said it was helped by short-covering on monthly contract settlement, delayed from Thursday when the market was closed.

It has already fallen 55 percent this year, badly pummeled by an outflow of foreign capital as a result of the global financial crisis, and for the past few weeks has been trading at its lowest levels for three years.

"The immediate aftermath of the Mumbai terror attack, immediately in the near term, there will be a negative sentiment," Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidabaram said.

But longer term he was confident investment would continue to be made in the country.

RUPEE ON THE SKIDS

Shares in Indian Hotels Co Ltd, which runs the Taj Mahal hotel at the center of one militant operation, fell 17 percent to their lowest levels in more than four years.

India stocks rise after militant attacks | Reuters.com

Hotel operator EIH Ltd, which operates the Trident-Oberoi hotel also hit by attacks, gained 5.2 percent.

Commandos took control of the Trident-Oberoi on Friday, some 36 hours after the evening strike on the city. Mumbai police chief Hassan Ghafoor said 24 bodies were found in the building.

But battles raged through the day with militants holed up in another luxury hotel and a Jewish center.

The partially convertible rupee slid toward a recent record low against the dollar, closing at 50.09/12 per dollar, near the 50.60 trough set earlier in the month.

The benchmark 10-year bond yield ended at 7.07 percent after dipping to 7.04 percent, the lowest in more than three years and below Wednesday's close of 7.09 percent.

"Some people feel that rate cut expectations have increased after all these (attacks)," said Piyush Wadhwa, a senior vice president at ICICI Securities.

Data showed economic growth slowed to 7.6 percent in the September quarter from a year earlier, below the June quarter's rate of 7.9 percent and the slowest pace in nearly four years.

The economy has been battered by high borrowing costs and the global financial crisis.

"One should remember that this data is backward-looking. Demand conditions, external as well as domestic, have worsened significantly since September," said A. Prasanna, an economist with ICICI Securities in Mumbai.

(Additional reporting by Anurag Joshi and Swati Bhat in Mumbai, Sumeet Chatterjee in Bangalore and Surojit Gupta in New Delhi; Writing by Charlotte Cooper; Editing by John Mair and Mike Nesbit)

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Three U.S. citizens dead in Mumbai

Sat Nov 29, 2008 12:12am GMT

By Sue Fleming

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - At least three U.S. citizens, including a Brooklyn rabbi, were killed in militant attacks in Mumbai, India, and the State Department said more Americans were at risk.

President George W. Bush said he was deeply saddened and the United States was working with India's government to ensure the safety of those still under threat.

"We will continue to cooperate against these extremists who offer nothing but violence and hopelessness," Bush said in a statement.

President-elect Barack Obama also expressed condolences about what he called "outrageous terrorist attacks in Mumbai," and said he fully supported the Bush administration's efforts to protect U.S. citizens in India.

"These terrorists who targeted innocent civilians will not defeat India's great democracy, nor shake the will of a global coalition to defeat them," Obama said in a statement. "The United States must stand with India and all nations and people who are committed to destroying terrorist networks, and defeating their hate-filled ideology."

The Virginia-based Synchronicity Foundation said on its website that Alan Scherr and his 13-year-old daughter, Naomi, Americans who were in India as part of a meditation program, died in the attacks that have killed at least 144 people and wounded 283 more.

The New York office of the Chabad-Lubavitch Jewish group said a Brooklyn rabbi and his wife were killed in the siege on a Jewish centre in Mumbai as part of the coordinated attacks. The rabbi was a dual U.S.-Israeli national and his wife Israeli, the group said.

"Rabbi Gavriel and Rivka Holtzberg, the beloved directors of Chabad-Lubavitch of Mumbai, were killed during one of the worst terrorist attacks to strike India in recent memory," the Chabad's New York headquarters said in a statement.

The couple's son, Moshe, who turns 2 on Saturday, escaped with his nanny, who brought him to a local hospital. The boy was now in the custody of the mother's parents, who had travelled to India from Israel, the group said.

Rabbi Chaim Cunin, an official at the Chabad centre in Los Angeles, said two other rabbis, Leibish Teitelbaum and Bentzion Chroman, were also killed in the attack. He said they were Israeli citizens, but could not rule out they also held U.S. passports.

U.S. WORKING WITH INDIA

State Department spokesman Gordon Duguid said, "There are still Americans at risk on the ground and we want to be very, very careful with any facts."

Senior Bush administration officials met on Friday afternoon for more discussions about the attacks, said White House spokeswoman Dana Perino. She said they were focussed on "ensuring everything possible is being done to help American citizens affected by these horrible attacks."

The Bush administration also continued to work with the Indian government at all levels, and had offered assistance and support, Perino said. She said Bush had received regular updates since the attacks on Wednesday night.

Indian commandos stormed the Jewish centre, killing two suspected Islamist gunmen but failing to save five hostages. Early on Saturday, gunfire and explosions rocked the luxury Taj Mahal hotel where many foreigners stay in Mumbai.

Duguid said a State Department hot line had received about 1,500 calls for information about friends and relatives.

U.S. consular staff are stationed at hotels affected by the attacks as well as hospitals in order to identify Americans in need of help as quickly as possible, he said.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had over the past 36 hours spoken to India's foreign minister as well as Pakistan's president, Asif Ali Zardari, said Duguid.

Rice also called Obama twice to brief him, said Duguid. Aides to Obama said he also received an intelligence briefing on the attacks.

(Additional reporting by Ross Colvin, Deborah Charles, Arshad Mohammed and Andrea Shalal-Esa; Editing by Peter Cooney)

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WITNESS-In the wreckage of Mumbai's Trident hotel

Sat Nov 29, 2008 1:10pm GMT
By Gregory Beitchman

MUMBAI, Nov 29 (Reuters) - Standing outside the jammed office door of Mumbai's battered Trident-Oberoi Hotel, the thought hits us at about the same time: what if it's blocked by a booby trap?

Simon Hartley, a Briton working in the construction industry, and I have come back to retrieve our belongings from the Trident, a home-away-from-home for us both, after elite troops ended a harrowing siege by Islamist militants.

A concierge has escorted us up to the 12th floor. The door to Simon's office looks as if it has been forced. The concierge and a guest services manager assure us the floor has been cleared, but we're not convinced. We want them to check again.

"I think it's a good idea", Simon agrees.

The guest manager calls downstairs. "Room 1208 has been opened and checked, please confirm," he asks. "National Security Guard officers have inspected every room," comes the reply.

"There were no terrorists on the 12th floor," offers the concierge. Satisfied, we stand back as locksmiths arrive.

Simon has been working and living in the Trident-Oberoi hotel for about six months.

"I had gone out with a friend and was coming back when I heard what happened. I was lucky ... a lot of people and staff I know have lost their lives", he says.

Well-armed gunmen struck at the heart of India's financial centre late on Wednesday, laying siege to the Trident-Oberoi, the historic Taj Mahal Palace Hotel and a Jewish centre.

The death toll stood at 195 after Indian commandos killed the last of the gunmen holed up inside the Taj on Saturday.

BROKEN GLASS, BULLET HOLES

Soon after the last shots were fired at the Taj, I was sitting back in the lobby of the Trident-Oberoi after receiving a call from the hotel to come and get our belongings.

About 12 hours earlier, hundreds of people had been trapped inside but now immaculately dressed staff are cleaning up broken glass. Bullet holes pepper the walls and the sea-facing windows have been blown out.

I passed through the same lobby on Wednesday on the way for a haircut, just

two hours before the attacks began.

Uniformed staff stand at the checkout counter. Some guests pull out credit cards to pay room bills.

In the lobby, heavily armed police with National Security Guard badges speak with hotel officials in hushed voices.

The concierge takes Simon and me to the elevators. Surprisingly, they work. A thick bloodstain greets us in the 12th floor elevator lobby.

"One guest was shot and then came to the 12th floor. One of our staff then brought him out through the staff entrance," the concierge says.

Once the doors are open we find papers strewn around a room next door, but Simon's room is untouched. Wednesday's newspaper lies neatly on a table.

Simon gathers up documents and a printer.

"Wow. Everything looks intact and I have to get back to work," Simon says. "This won't be good for general confidence but things weren't too good for the economy here anyway."

Simon packs up his things and calls an assistant. They still have to get ready for a presentation, he says.

Back in the lobby, a guest relations manager wearing a sari guides us towards the main entrance. Soldiers in helmets stand on a balcony scanning the area.

Shattered glass has been swept up, broken windows and doors replaced by large white boards. Off to the side is a lonely looking metal detector. I ask the guest relations manager if new security measures will be put in place.

"Rest assured they will," she answers. (Editing by Paul Tait and John Chalmers)

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Grief, anger as India reckons with its own "9/11"

Sat Nov 29, 2008 3:53pm GMT

By Phil Smith and Kritivas Mukherjee

MUMBAI (Reuters) - Shock gave way to grief and anger on Saturday as India grappled with what newspapers called its own "9/11" and protesters accused neighboring Pakistan of being behind attacks that killed 195 people.

Commandos and rescue personnel were cleaning up the wreckage of a three-day rampage when about 50 protesters gathered near the smoldering Taj Mahal Palace Hotel.

"Our soldiers came and Pakistan ran away," they shouted, pumping their fists skyward.

India has blamed the strikes on "elements" from nuclear rival Pakistan and evidence is mounting that the Islamist gunmen may have hatched their plan there.

For relatives of the victims, the reality of the attacks was laid bare at a morgue at the JJ Hospital in Mumbai.

"For three days, we kept hearing different reports about my sister. Finally, today when I saw her, her face was blown off," said a relative of journalist Sabina Saikia, who was killed inside the Taj Mahal hotel.

A text message circulated throughout Mumbai urging people to wear black on Sunday. Many lit candles in cities across the country on Saturday as a mark of condolence.

Elsewhere across India, thousands mourned 20 policemen and soldiers killed fighting the heavily armed militants who turned India's commercial and entertainment capital into a war zone with coordinated assaults on city landmarks.

"This is a day of mourning for all the men who laid down their lives," Maharashtra state police Chief A.N. Roy told reporters.

The last rites were conducted with full state honors.

TV footage showed the flag-draped and garlanded coffins of the dead men – widely described as martyrs – being carried in brightly colored processions. Military bands in red and black uniforms played and honor guards fired 21-gun salutes.

Newspapers called the Mumbai attacks India's own "9/11," referring to the September 11, 2001, hijacked airliner attacks on the United States which killed about 3,000 2,973 people.

The Hindustan Times wrote: "India is under attack. The very idea of India is under attack...Playing the headless chicken is no longer an option."

Politics did not take a break, with local polls taking place in New Delhi on Saturday.

The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India's main opposition, took out front-page advertisements accusing the ruling Congress party coalition of failing to defend the nation.

"Brutal terror strikes at will. Weak government. Unwilling and incapable. Fight terror - Vote BJP," said one ad, showing a blood-red stain on a black background.

Congress, criticized by the BJP about national security for the past few weeks, shot back: "20 days of false campaigning cannot replace 10 years of development. Your decision."

(Reporting by Mumbai and Delhi bureaux; Writing by Bryson Hull; Editing by Paul Tait and Angus MacSwan)

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TIMELINE: Major attacks in India since 2003

Sat Nov 29, 2008 5:08am GMT

(Reuters) -Indian commandos killed the last Islamist gunmen at Mumbai's Taj Mahal hotel, ending a three-day-long battle at landmarks across India's financial capital that has killed at least 155 people.

Mumbai has been repeatedly hit by deadly militant attacks over the past 15 years.

Following is a chronology of some of the major attacks in India in the past five years:

March 13, 2003 - Bomb attack on a commuter train in Mumbai kills 11 people.

August 25, 2003 - Two car bombs kill about 60 in Mumbai.

August 15, 2004 - A bomb explodes in the northeastern state of Assam, killing 16 people, mostly schoolchildren, and wounding dozens.

October 29, 2005 - Sixty-six people are killed when three blasts rip through markets in New Delhi.

March 7, 2006 - At least 15 people are killed and 60 wounded in three blasts in the northern Hindu pilgrimage city of Varanasi.

July 11, 2006 - More than 180 people are killed in seven bomb explosions at railway stations and on trains in Mumbai that are blamed on Islamist militants.

September 8, 2006 - At least 32 people are killed in a series of explosions, including one near a mosque, in Malegaon town, 260 km (160 miles) northeast of Mumbai.

February 19, 2007 - Two bombs explode aboard a train heading from India to Pakistan; at least 66 passengers, most of them Pakistanis, burn to death.

May 18, 2007 - A bomb explodes during Friday prayers at a historic mosque in the southern city of Hyderabad, killing 11 worshippers. Police later shoot dead five people in clashes with hundreds of enraged Muslims who protest against the attack.

August 25, 2007 - Three coordinated explosions at an amusement park and a street stall in Hyderabad kill at least 40 people.

May 13, 2008 - Seven bombs rip through the crowded streets of the western city of Jaipur, killing at least 63 people in markets and outside Hindu temples.

July 25 - Eight small bombs hit the IT city of Bangalore, killing at least one

ANEXO C
NOTÍCIAS DA RÁDIO ONU SOBRE GAZA

Rádio ONU

Civis devem ser autorizados a fugir, diz Acnur

06/01/2009

Chefe da agência da ONU, António Guterres, afirma que vítimas da violência têm direito à segurança e que países são responsáveis em ajudar.

Mónica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

O alto comissário das Nações Unidas para Refugiados, António Guterres, afirmou que os civis que queiram fugir da região por causa dos combates devem ser autorizados a sair.

Guterres lembrou aos países vizinhos sobre a responsabilidade de fornecer acesso à segurança de quem foge da violência.

Famílias e Crianças

Leia o boletim de Leda Letra, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

“Segundo o alto comissário da ONU, os que são obrigados a deixar a Faixa de Gaza à procura de segurança devem encontrar proteção em outros países, de acordo com as leis internacionais.

O porta-voz do Acnur em Genebra, Ren Redmond, disse que o Acnur não está encorajando os palestinos a sair de Gaza, mas apenas discutindo a necessidade de proteção de famílias e crianças.

Redmond lembrou que apenas dois países fazem fronteira com Gaza, Israel e Egito. Segundo ele, o Egito não teria respondido ao apelo do Acnur até o momento.

O porta-voz da agência disse ainda que a tendência natural é do retorno dos refugiados após o fim dos combates.

Água Potável

Ele citou a volta de refugiados que deixaram Kosovo, na ex-Iugoslávia, na década de 1990.”

O subsecretário-geral da ONU de Assistência Humanitária, John Holmes, afirmou que a situação em Gaza é alarmante. Ele disse que os moradores estão cada vez mais expostos ao frio, fome, falta de combustível e água potável além de outros serviços básicos.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150247.html>

Rádio ONU

ONU quer investigação sobre ataques a escolas

06/01/2009

Mais de 30 pessoas morreram e 55 ficaram feridas nos bombardeios em Gaza; elas estavam se abrigando da violência no acampamento de Jabaliya.

Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

A Agência de Refugiados das Nações Unidas, Unrwa, pediu uma investigação independente sobre ataques separados a duas escolas da ONU em Gaza.

O diretor de Operação da Unrwa, John Ging, disse que mais de 30 pessoas morreram e pelo menos 55 ficaram feridas.

GPS

As vítimas estavam se abrigando da violência na escola quando foram atingidas pelo mísseis.

Segund a Unrwa, os prédios estavam claramente marcados como sendo das Nações Unidas, no acampamento de refugiados de Jabaliya.

Ging contou que as aulas haviam sido suspensas desde o início do ataque aéreo de Israel a Gaza, em 27 de dezembro.

O diretor de operação da Unrwa afirmou que a ONU marcou as escolas com a bandeira azul da organização e que além disso forneceu toda a informação sobre suas instalações a Israel por GPS.

John Ging disse que os ataques contra às escolas da ONU em Gaza só reforçam a urgência de um cessar-fogo.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150245.html>

U

io ONU

Conselho de Direitos Humanos debaterá Gaza

2009

o Conselho de Direitos Humanos da ONU, com sede em Genebra, fará sessão especial, nesta sexta-feira, a pedido do grupo de países árabes, africanos e não-alinhados.

de acordo com a jornalista *Carla Vilela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.*

O Conselho de Direitos Humanos da ONU anunciou que irá realizar uma sessão especial, nesta sexta-feira, em Genebra, para debater a situação na Faixa de Gaza.

O encontro foi marcado a pedido dos países árabes e africanos, da Organização da Conferência Árabe e do grupo de países não-alinhados, atualmente liderado por Cuba.

ofensiva

Para a realização de sessões especiais, o conselho precisa do apoio de pelo menos dois terços dos membros ou 16 países. Até agora, 29 nações concordaram em realizar o encontro.

De acordo com o órgão da ONU, a sessão especial deve analisar relatos de graves violações dos direitos humanos nos territórios palestinos incluindo a ofensiva militar de Israel à Faixa de Gaza.

O conflito na Faixa de Gaza já matou pelo menos 580 pessoas e deixou 2,5 mil feridas.

Segundo o governo israelense, a operação é uma resposta aos ataques com foguetes lançados por militantes palestinos contra o sul de Israel.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150238.html>

Rádio ONU

Conselho de Segurança retoma sessão sobre Gaza

07/01/2009

Encontro suspenso na terça-feira à noite, após quase cinco horas de debates, está analisando solução sobre conflito entre Israel e Hamas.

Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

Os 15 países-membros do Conselho de Segurança retomaram na manhã desta terça-feira, em Nova York, uma reunião especial para debater a situação sobre o conflito na Faixa de Gaza.

O encontro foi interrompido na terça-feira à noite, após quase cinco horas de debates.

Escolas da ONU

O Secretário-Geral da ONU, Ban Ki-moon, discursou no início da reunião de terça-feira, pedindo o cessar-fogo imediato. Ele também elogiou os esforços da França e do Egito ao propor o fim dos combates e a abertura de um corredor humanitário.

Ban condenou os ataques de Israel contra duas escolas da ONU que mataram pelo menos 40 pessoas. Segundo ele, a situação é inaceitável e só demonstra a urgência de um cessar-fogo.

Nesta quarta-feira, Malásia e Cuba abriram a série de intervenções, de no máximo cinco minutos, nos debates. O Brasil também discursa ao lado de Argentina, Senegal e outros países.

Terror

A operação militar de Israel na área já matou pelo menos 580 pessoas e deixou mais de 2,5 mil feridas.

O governo israelense disse que a ofensiva é uma resposta aos ataques com foguetes lançados por militantes do movimento islâmico Hamas, que controla Gaza.

Em seu discurso, o presidente da Autoridade Nacional Palestina, Mahmoud Abbas, condenou a violência e pediu liberdade incondicional para os palestinos.

A embaixadora de Israel na ONU, Gabriela Shalev, disse que seu país buscou evitar todos os dias o conflito atual, mas segundo ela, o movimento islâmico Hamas não tem interesse na paz, mas sim no terror.

A reunião no Conselho de Segurança está sendo dirigida pela França, que ocupa a presidência rotativa do órgão.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150237.html>

Rádio ONU

Brasil diz que mundo espera decisão sobre Gaza

07/01/2009

Embaixadora na ONU, Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, afirma que eficiência e legitimidade do Conselho de Segurança correm risco de diminuir em caso de hesitação sobre solução para o conflito.

Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

O Brasil discursou nesta quarta-feira durante a retomada da sessão especial do Conselho de Segurança sobre a situação na Faixa de Gaza.

A embaixadora Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti condenou o que chamou de uso desproporcional da força por Israel e os ataques com foguetes lançados por militantes palestinos.

Eficiência

Ela afirmou que o Brasil apóia um cessar-fogo imediato. E disse que o Conselho de Segurança precisa agir.

“O papel primordial do conselho é o de manter a paz e a segurança internacionais. Este é um caso clássico em que o conselho precisa agir para obter a restauração da paz e promover um entendimento entre as partes. A principal prioridade neste momento é um cessar-fogo, mas nós temos plena confiança de que é necessário continuar os esforços para uma solução duradoura para este conflito”, disse.

Segundo a embaixadora, a legitimidade e eficiência do órgão da ONU podem diminuir caso o conselho seja considerado hesitante sobre uma resolução para o conflito.

Alimentos e Remédios

Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti afirmou que o presidente Lula e o ministro das Relações Exteriores, Celso Amorim, já manifestaram a disposição do Brasil em ajudar numa solução duradoura.

Ela lembrou que o país apóia a proposta de criação de um Estado palestino vivendo lado a lado, em paz e segurança, com Israel.

A embaixadora do Brasil na ONU disse que o país está enviando 14 toneladas de alimentos e remédios às vítimas em Gaza.

Primeiros Socorros

“Esse carregamento deve chegar no sábado. Ele compreende medicamentos, entre os quais sais de reidratação, instrumentos para primeiros socorros, antibióticos e também caixas contendo alimentação para uma família de cinco membros, dois adultos e três crianças, por dez dias, cada caixa”, explicou.

A operação militar de Israel já matou pelo menos 580 pessoas e deixou 2,5 mil feridas. O governo diz que a ofensiva é uma resposta aos atentados com foguetes palestinos contra o sul de Israel.

Rádio ONU

Angola quer reunião sobre Faixa de Gaza

07/01/2009

País africano participa de grupo de 29 nações que querem assunto debatido no Conselho de Direitos Humanos, esta sexta-feira.

João Rosário, da Rádio ONU em Nova Iorque.

O Conselho dos Direitos Humanos da ONU reúne-se numa sessão especial na próxima sexta-feira, em Genebra, Suíça, para analisar a situação na Faixa de Gaza.

Angola faz parte dos países que assinam a petição para este encontro especial, ao lado dos países árabes e os Estados do grupo dos Não-Alinhados e de outros 28 países.

Justificação

Os Estados que fazem o pedido justificam a reunião com o que consideram “as graves violações dos direitos humanos nos territórios palestinianos ocupados”, incluindo o recente conflito.

Esta será a nona sessão do Conselho dos Direitos Humanos desde que foi criado em Junho de 2006.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150233.html>

Rádio ONU

Brasil sobre Gaza

07/01/2009

Embaixadora brasileira nas Nações Unidas, Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti (foto), diz no Conselho de Segurança que país defende cessar-fogo imediato na Faixa de Gaza; violência já matou pelo menos 580 pessoas e deixou 2,5 mil feridas. Acompanhe a íntegra da entrevista de Ribeiro Viotti à Rádio ONU em Nova York. (Tempo: 3:21")

Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

O Brasil discursou nesta quarta-feira durante a retomada da sessão especial do Conselho de Segurança sobre a situação na Faixa de Gaza.

A embaixadora Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti condenou o que chamou de uso desproporcional da força por Israel e os ataques com foguetes lançados por militantes palestinos.

Eficiência

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Segundo a embaixadora, a legitimidade e eficiência do órgão da ONU podem diminuir caso o conselho seja considerado hesitante sobre uma resolução para o conflito.

Alimentos e Remédios

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A embaixadora do Brasil na ONU disse que o país está enviando 14 toneladas de alimentos e remédios às vítimas em Gaza.

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A operação militar de Israel já matou pelo menos 580 pessoas e deixou 2,5 mil feridas. O governo diz que a ofensiva é uma resposta aos atentados com foguetes palestinos contra o sul de Israel.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150232.html>

Rádio ONU

Conselho de Segurança analisa duas propostas sobre Gaza

07/01/2009

Embaixador da França diz que países-membros estudam projeto de resolução da Líbia e um texto de declaração presidencial do órgão sobre o conflito.

Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

M

Presidência Rotativa

Papel Primordial

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<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150226.html>

Rádio ONU

Assembleia Geral fará sessão de emergência

08/01/2009

Porta-voz do presidente afirma que países discutirão situação humanitária causada por conflito que já matou pelo menos 683 pessoas.

*Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova Iorque**

O presidente da Assembleia Geral da ONU, Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, convocou uma reunião de emergência para debater a situação humanitária nos territórios palestinos incluindo a Faixa de Gaza.

O Secretário-Geral da ONU, Ban Ki-moon, deve participar do encontro, que é aberto a todos os países-membros da ONU.

Propostas

Na quarta-feira, o Conselho de Segurança reuniu-se pelo segundo dia consecutivo para discutir o assunto.

O embaixador de França, Jean-Maurice Ripert, que ocupa a presidência rotativa do conselho, contou que os países-membros analisaram duas propostas.

Ripert explicou que a Líbia apresentou um projecto de resolução, em nome dos países árabes, e o segundo documento é de uma declaração presidencial.

Roquetes

A reunião terminou na noite de quarta-feira sem acordo.

O conflito em Gaza já matou pelo menos 683 pessoas e deixou mais de 3 mil feridas, segundo informações do Escritório de Assistência Humanitária da ONU, Ocha. O governo israelita diz que a operação militar é uma resposta aos ataques com roquetes por militantes palestinos contra o sul do país.

De acordo com agências de notícias, nesta quinta-feira, a cidade de Naharya, no norte de Israel, foi alvo de ataques com roquetes Katiuscha.

A israelita Silvia Nudelman, que mora em Naharya, disse à Rádio ONU que a população foi totalmente apanhada de surpresa.

Ajuda Humanitária

“Eu pensei que era um trovão, pois ontem havia muitos trovões por causa da chuva. A minha filha ligou-me e disse para eu não sair de casa porque estavam a cair Katiuschas na cidade. Ela disse-me para eu não sair de casa até que tenhamos uma resposta”, contou.

Nesta quinta-feira, a ONU suspendeu a entrega de ajuda humanitária a Gaza por causa do perigo

para os funcionários.

De acordo com a Agência de Assistência a Refugiados Palestinos, Unrwa, uma pessoa morreu e duas ficaram feridas num ataque na fronteira de Erez quando entregavam alimentos.

*Apresentação: João Rosário, da Rádio ONU em Nova Iorque**

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150223.html>

Rádio ONU

ONU vai avaliar situação na Faixa de Gaza

19/01/2009

Secretário-Geral informou que grupo de alto nível deverá verificar necessidades humanitárias e de recuperação ainda esta semana; conflito matou mais de 1,3 mil pessoas e deixou cerca de 6 mil feridas.

*Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.**

As Nações Unidas anunciaram que irão enviar, esta semana, uma missão de alto nível a Gaza para avaliar a situação humanitária e de reconstrução após o conflito de 22 dias na região.

O anúncio foi feito por Ban Ki-moon, durante uma visita oficial ao Kuwait, como informou o porta-voz de Ban, na viagem, Ahmad Fawzi.

Apelo

Ele explicou que as equipes da ONU que já estão no local, como a Agência de Assistência aos Refugiados Palestinos, farão um relatório das medidas de emergência que devem ser tomadas para aliviar a situação das vítimas, e a missão de alto nível deverá avaliar as necessidades de médio e longo prazos.

Logo depois, a ONU deverá lançar um apelo para os palestinos.

No sábado, Israel anunciou um cessar-fogo unilateral na Faixa de Gaza, o que foi seguido também pelo movimento islâmico Hamas, no domingo.

Apoio

Antes do anúncio, o vice-ministro do Exterior da Autoridade Nacional Palestina, Ahmed Sobeh, falou à Rádio ONU, de Ramallah, sobre a visita de Ban Ki-moon à Cisjordânia e a mensagem de apoio levada pelo Secretário-Geral à região.

“Uma mensagem muito forte de que a comunidade internacional está a procurar uma reconstrução de Gaza e enviar todo o tipo de ajuda de emergência para Gaza”, disse.

Normalidade

O israelense aposentado Zvi Chazam, que mora no sul de Israel, a 7km de Gaza, disse à Rádio ONU que a vida começou voltar à normalidade nesta segunda-feira.

“As pessoas, aos poucos, estão voltando para seu trabalho, para as escolas etc. Hoje, ainda não foi um dia regular, mas a partir de amanhã já foi anunciado que tudo volta à normalidade. Inclusive ontem, eles (Hamas) somente declararam o cessar-fogo 12 horas depois de Israel. Ontem, tivemos 20 foguetes lançados contra a população com feridos, danos. Esperamos que continue o cessar-fogo”, contou.

Segundo autoridades palestinas, o conflito na Faixa de Gaza matou pelo menos 1,3 mil pessoas e

deixou cerca de 6 mil feridos.

**Apresentação: Carlos Araújo.*

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150162.html>

Rádio ONU

Ban visita Gaza no fim do seu périplo ao Médio Oriente

20/01/2009

Secretário-Geral visitou também Sderot, a cidade israelita que foi alvo da maior parte dos foguetes lançados pelo Hamas.

*Mónica Villela Grayley & Carlos Araújo, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.**

O Secretário-Geral da ONU, Ban Ki-moon, visita a Faixa de Gaza, nesta terça-feira, para manifestar a sua solidariedade para com os funcionários da ONU que trabalharam, segundo ele, de forma heróica durante o conflito de 22 dias na região.

Ban Ki-moon disse ainda que levará à população de Gaza o apoio das Nações Unidas à ajuda humanitária e reconstrução.

Infra-Estrutura

O vice-ministro da Autoridade Nacional Palestiniana, Ahmed Sobeh, disse à Rádio ONU, de Ramallah, que a infra-estrutura de Gaza está praticamente destruída após os bombardeamentos de Israel.

Antes de chegar à Faixa de Gaza, Ban reuniu-se como o primeiro-ministro israelita, Ehud Olmert, e expressou seu alívio após o cessar-fogo.

Ele voltou a dizer que as tropas do país devem se retirar inteiramente da área palestiniana.

Foguetes

O Secretário-Geral da ONU visitou ainda Sderot, no sul de Israel. A cidade foi alvo da maior parte dos foguetes lançados pelos palestinianos.

Ban voltou a afirmar que os dois lados precisam trabalhar por uma paz duradoura e pela criação de um Estado palestiniano e outro judaico vivendo lado a lado de forma pacífica.

O conflito na Faixa de Gaza matou pelo menos 1,3 mil palestinianos e 13 israelenses.

**Apresentação: Carlos Araújo, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.*

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150150.html>

Rádio ONU

Conselho de Segurança deb Oriente Médio

21/01/2009

Secretário-Geral, Ban Ki-moon (foto), que retornou da Faixa de Gaza nesta terça-feira, participará de encontro em Nova York.

Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

O Conselho de Segurança da ONU se reúne nesta quarta-feira em Nova York para avaliar a situação no Oriente Médio incluindo a questão palestina.

O Secretário-Geral, Ban Ki-moon, participa da reunião para informar aos 15 países-membros do órgão sobre sua visita de uma semana à região incluindo a última parada na Faixa de Gaza.

Leia o boletim de Leda Letra, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

“Durante sua viagem a Gaza e à cidade de Sderot, no sul de Israel, Ban Ki-moon, afirmou que as vítimas do conflito precisam de ajuda humanitária urgente.

Os bombardeios de Israel mataram pelo menos 1,3 mil pessoas e deixaram mais de 5 mil feridos. Do lado israelense, pelo menos 13 pessoas morreram.

Bilhões

Ban reafirmou o compromisso da ONU com a reconstrução de Gaza e disse que palestinos e israelenses precisam trabalhar por uma paz duradoura.

De acordo com agências de notícias, Israel teria retirado todas as tropas da região nesta quarta-feira.

O subsecretário-geral de Assistência Humanitária das Nações Unidas, John Holmes, informou que a reconstrução da Faixa de Gaza custará bilhões de dólares. Holmes pediu ainda que Israel autorize a entrada de material de construção na área palestina.

União

As agências da ONU na região já estão avaliando medidas de emergência para lidar com a situação dos deslocados. Cerca de 50 mil pessoas estão vivendo em abrigos improvisados.”

Em seu discurso em Gaza, o Secretário-Geral da ONU pediu a união dos palestinos, atualmente divididos entre o movimento islâmico Hamas, que controla Gaza, e a Autoridade Nacional Palestina, que administra a Cisjordânia.

Na quinta-feira, chegará a Gaza uma missão de alto nível da ONU para discutir ajuda humanitária e reconstrução a longo prazo.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150141.html>

Rádio ONU

Missão de avaliação da ONU chega à Faixa de Gaza

22/01/2009

Grupo liderado pelo subsecretário-geral, John Holmes (foto), ficará até sábado na região para analisar resposta humanitária às vítimas da operação militar que matou mais de 1,3 mil pessoas.

*Leda Letra, da Rádio ONU em Nova York**

O subsecretário-geral da ONU para Assuntos Humanitários, John Holmes, chegou à Faixa de Gaza nesta quinta-feira para avaliar a situação das vítimas do conflito que durou 22 dias na região.

Holmes, que já manteve uma reunião com representantes da ONU e autoridades em Jerusalém, deve permanecer no Oriente Médio até sábado.

Prazos

Ele está liderando uma missão de alto nível que irá analisar uma resposta de médio e longo prazos para os moradores de Gaza.

Após a missão, a ONU deverá lançar um apelo para os palestinos. A operação militar matou pelo menos 1,3 mil pessoas e deixou mais de 5 mil feridas.

O subsecretário-geral da ONU pretende visitar as instalações da Agência de Assistência aos Refugiados Palestinos, Unrwa, que foram bombardeadas pela Força Aérea de Israel. Um dos ataques causou o incêndio de depósitos de alimentos e remédios da ONU.

De acordo com a Autoridade Nacional Palestina, faltam água, comida e energia.

Numa visita a Gaza, na terça-feira, o Secretário-Geral da ONU, Ban Ki-moon, disse que a organização está comprometida com a reconstrução da região.

**Apresentação: Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.*

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150136.html>

Rádio ONU

PMA pede reabertura de cruzamentos para Gaza

23/01/2009

Programa Mundial de Alimentos está distribuindo biscoitos vitaminados, mas ainda tem 600 toneladas de comida para entregar; subsecretário-geral, John Holmes, falou sobre destruição chocante.

Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

O Programa Mundial de Alimentos, PMA, pediu ao governo de Israel que reabra todas as passagens para a Faixa de Gaza.

A agência da ONU informou que começou a distribuir biscoitos vitaminados à população da região, mas ainda tem 600 toneladas de alimentos para serem entregues.

Abrigo

O conflito de 22 dias em Gaza matou pelo menos 1,3 mil palestinos e 13 israelenses e deixou cerca de 5,5 mil feridos.

O subsecretário-geral da ONU de Assistência Humanitária, John Holmes, que está visitando Gaza afirmou que a destruição é chocante.

Holmes também esteve nas instalações da Agência de Assistência aos Refugiados Palestinos, que foi bombardeada por Israel, e disse que o fato de ninguém ter morrido foi um milagre.

O subsecretário-geral contou que visitou um abrigo, onde muitas pessoas ainda estavam reunidas porque não tinham lugar para voltar após suas casas terem sido destruídas.

Apelo

Depois da missão, Holmes retorna a Nova York com recomendações para o lançamento de um apelo de emergência, que deve ser anunciado no início de fevereiro. A operação militar destruiu grande parte da infra-estrutura de Gaza.

O embaixador de Portugal na ONU, José Filipe Moraes Cabral, disse que seu país já fez uma doação para os palestinos e está disposto a ajudar de novo.

Investigação

“Nós antecipamos, um pouco, com esta contribuição de US\$ 400 mil, o que para um país como Portugal, nesta fase de crise econômica e financeira, a nível mundial, é também um esforço já de si importante. O que posso dizer também é que Portugal, certamente, não negará nenhum esforço para contribuir para uma reconstrução e uma reabilitação tão pronta quanto possível de Gaza”, afirmou.

O Secretário-Geral da ONU, Ban Ki-moon, pediu a Israel que investigue os bombardeios às instalações da organização.

Além da Unrwa, os ataques de Israel atingiram, em incidentes separados, pelo menos três escolas das Nações Unidas e dois comboios de alimentos, terceirizados pela ONU.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150131.html>

Rádio ONU

Yusuf Islam, ex-Cat Stevens, faz música para Gaza

26/01/2009

Canção deverá arrecadar fundos para crianças e famílias, vítimas do conflito de 22 dias na região.

Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

O cantor Yusuf Islam, conhecido anteriormente como Cat Stevens, lançou nesta segunda-feira uma música beneficente para as vítimas do conflito na Faixa de Gaza.

O dinheiro arrecadado com a canção será destinado à Agência da ONU de Assistência aos Refugiados Palestinos, Unrwa, e à ONG britânica "Save the Children" ou Salve as Crianças.

Legado

O conflito na Faixa de Gaza durou 22 dias e matou pelo menos 1,3 mil palestinos e 13 israelenses. Mais de 5,5 mil pessoas ficaram feridas.

Yusuf gravou a música, lançada primeiro pelo ex-Beatle, George Harrison, e disse que espera que o mundo se lembre do legado de paz, amor e felicidade.

A agência da ONU que já opera em Gaza há 60 anos foi a maior organização humanitária atuando durante as três semanas de conflito entre militantes do movimento islâmico Hamas e tropas de Israel.

Apelo

De acordo com o Fundo das Nações Unidas para a Infância, Unicef, o conflito em Gaza afetou cerca de 840 mil crianças e jovens.

Muitos perderam escolas, postos de saúde e áreas de lazer durante os bombardeios de Israel.

Uma missão de alto nível da ONU visitou a região para avaliar a situação da reconstrução e da ajuda humanitária a médio e longo prazos.

A ONU deve lançar um apelo de emergência para Gaza na próxima semana.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/158041.html>

Rádio ONU

ONU avalia necessidades humanitárias em Gaza

28/01/2009

Programa das Nações Unidas para o Desenvolvimento, Pnud, está trabalhando com autoridades locais e organizações não-governamentais para verificar as necessidades humanitárias e desenvolver um plano de reconstrução.

Samantha Barthelemy, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

O Programa das Nações Unidas para o Desenvolvimento, Pnud, iniciou, nesta quarta-feira, a avaliação dos danos causados após 22 dias de conflito na Faixa de Gaza.

A agência está trabalhando com autoridades locais e organizações não-governamentais para verificar as necessidades humanitárias e desenvolver um plano de reconstrução.

Danos e Preocupações

O Pnud está coordenando estudos nos setores ambiental, privado e macroeconômico e de infraestrutura. E já enviou propostas, no valor de US\$ 56 milhões, o equivalente a quase R\$ 129 milhões, para o apelo de emergência que deve ser lançado em fevereiro.

Além disso, a agência criou grupos de apoio para mulheres para colher informações sobre danos e preocupações.

De acordo com o Pnud, um relatório de avaliação deve ser lançado em meados do próximo mês.

Ainda nesta quarta-feira, a Agência das Nações Unidas de Assistência aos Refugiados Palestinos, Unrwa, anunciou que está distribuindo alimentos para 900 mil dos um milhão de refugiados palestinos em Gaza.

Segundo autoridades palestinas, o conflito na região matou pelo menos 1,3 mil pessoas e deixou cerca de 6 mil feridos.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/158186.html>

Rádio ONU

ONU lança apelo humanitário para Gaza

29/01/2009

Ban Ki-moon disse que sem uma acção urgente Gaza irá enfrentar uma calamidade humanitária ainda maior.

Carlos Araújo, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

As Nações Unidas lançaram, nesta quinta-feira, um apelo de emergência para a Faixa de Gaza.

A ONU quer angariar US\$ 613 milhões para financiar ajuda humanitária às vítimas do conflito de 22 dias na região.

Acção Urgente

O apelo foi lançado pelo Secretário-Geral da ONU, Ban Ki-moon, em Davos, na Suíça.

Ban disse que sem uma acção urgente, Gaza iria enfrentar uma calamidade humanitária ainda maior. Os palestinianos perderam as suas famílias, as suas casas e os seus bens, afirmou o Secretário-Geral.

Os ataques de Israel à Faixa de Gaza, que começaram em Dezembro, mataram pelo menos 1,3 mil pessoas e deixaram 5,5 mil feridas.

Bombardamentos

Ele afirmou que o dinheiro será usado para comprar alimentos, água, abrigos, fornecimento de cuidados médicos e educação.

O Secretário-Geral disse ainda que a ONU deve ajudar a remover os destroços da guerra incluindo explosivos e o reparo da infra-estruturas básicas."

O vice-ministro das Relações Exteriores da Autoridade Nacional Palestina, Ahmed Sobeh, disse à Rádio ONU de Ramallah, que o dinheiro ajudará a aliviar o sofrimento.

"Nós apoiamos, totalmente, este apelo e coordenaremos com eles todos os esforços árabes e internacionais para conseguir este dinheiro que é necessário e muito urgente para atender as necessidades ainda mais urgentes da nossa gente em Gaza. A reconstrução de Gaza precisará de ainda mais dinheiro", afirmou.

Ahmed Sobeh, o vice-ministro das Relações Exteriores da Autoridade Nacional Palestiniana.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/158315.html>

Rádio ONU

Entrevista: Autoridade Palestina

30/01/2009

Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

Em 29 de janeiro, o Secretário-Geral da ONU, Ban Ki-moon, lançou um apelo de US\$ 613 milhões, o equivalente a R\$ 1,4 bilhão, para as vítimas do conflito na Faixa de Gaza.

A intervenção militar de Israel, que começou em dezembro, matou pelo menos 1,3 mil palestinos e deixou 5,5 mil feridos. Do lado israelense, morreram pelo menos 13 pessoas, a maioria vítimas de ataques com foguetes lançados por militantes do movimento islâmico Hamas contra o sul de Israel.

Acompanhe a entrevista na íntegra com o vice-ministro das Relações Exteriores da Autoridade Nacional Palestina, Ahmed Sobeh.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/158417.html>

Rádio ONU

Relatora pede proteção de civis em Gaza

02/01/2009

Asma Jahangir disse que os bombardeios de Israel e os ataques com foguetes contra o país representam indefensável perda de vidas e violação de leis internacionais.

Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

Um grupo independente de especialistas em direitos humanos das Nações Unidas, conhecido como Procedimento Especial, pediu a proteção imediata de civis na crise do Oriente Médio.

A diretora do grupo e relatora especial da ONU, Asma Jahangir, disse que tanto os bombardeios de Israel a Gaza como os ataques com foguetes por militantes palestinos representam uma indefensável perda de vidas.

Leia o boletim de Leda Letra, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

Perigo Extremo

“De acordo com agências de notícias, pelo menos 400 pessoas morreram e cerca de 2 mil ficaram feridas após os ataques aéreos de Israel na Faixa de Gaza, que começaram em 27 de dezembro.

Israel afirma que a operação é uma resposta a atentados com foguetes lançados por militantes palestinos contra o sul do país.

Jahangir afirmou que os dois lados estão violando as leis internacionais humanitárias e de direitos humanos e colocando a população civil sob perigo extremo.

Falta de Consideração

A relatora também criticou o que ela chamou de uso desproporcional da força por Israel e a falta de consideração pela vida de civis, que segundo ela, está ocorrendo das duas partes.

O grupo de especialistas da ONU afirmou ser preocupante o impacto da violência atual e a destruição da infra-estrutura em Gaza, que agrava ainda mais a precária situação humanitária da região.”

Eles encerraram a nota pedindo a todas as partes que permitam a passagem de ajuda humanitária, comida e medicamentos aos feridos e doentes, além do fornecimento de energia e saneamento.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150276.html>

Rádio ONU

Liga Árabe se reúne na ONU para debater Gaza

05/01/2009

Coordenador especial para Processo de Paz no Oriente Médio, Robert Serry (foto), diz que encontro analisará solução urgente para o conflito, entre Israel e o movimento Hamas, que já matou pelo menos 400 pessoas.

Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

Representantes da Liga Árabe se reúnem em Nova York, nesta segunda-feira, para analisar a situação da violência na Faixa de Gaza. A informação foi dada pelo coordenador da ONU para o Processo de Paz no Oriente Médio, Robert Serry.

Serry explicou que espera que o Conselho de Segurança, que ainda está analisando o assunto, consiga concordar com uma solução para a crise.

Desde 27 de dezembro, Israel está realizando bombardeios contra alvos na Faixa de Gaza. A operação, que já matou pelo menos 400 pessoas e deixou 2 mil feridas, é uma resposta de Israel aos ataques com foguetes por militantes palestinos contra o sul do país.

Medidas

O coordenador especial da ONU falou a jornalistas, na sexta-feira, por videoconferência de Jerusalém, e disse que Ban Ki-moon está impaciente com a situação. Serry disse ainda que os foguetes contra Israel já estão atingindo 40km de distância.

Segundo ele, qualquer tentativa de solução para o conflito deve incluir medidas a longo prazo.

Para Serry, o fim do conflito, o fim da ocupação e a criação de um Estado palestino vivendo lado a lado em segurança com Israel precisam ser discutidas. Ele afirmou ainda que Gaza, que é controlada pelo movimento islâmico Hamas, retorne à Autoridade Nacional Palestina para se reunir à Cisjordânia.

Consultas

Serry disse ainda que a comunidade internacional tem que estar preparada para facilitar a concretização destes objetivos.

Na semana passada, o Conselho de Segurança realizou consultas sobre a possibilidade de uma resolução.

O Secretário-Geral da ONU pediu o cessar-fogo imediato entre israelenses e palestinos e disse que a situação é inaceitável.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150267.html>

Rádio ONU

Liga Árabe chega à ONU para discutir Faixa de Gaza

05/01/2009

Ministros das Relações Exteriores do Médio Oriente participarão em vários encontros em Nova Iorque; Ban Ki-moon lamentou falta de acordo durante sessão de emergência no Conselho de Segurança no sábado.

Mónica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.*

Representantes da Liga Árabe reúnem-se, esta segunda-feira, em Nova Iorque, com o Secretário-Geral da ONU, Ban Ki-moon, para debater a situação na Faixa de Gaza.

No sábado, tropas de Israel entraram no território palestino. Segundo o Exército israelita, a ofensiva está a ocorrer agora por terra, mar e ar.

Roquetes

De acordo com agências de notícias, pelo menos 500 pessoas morreram e cerca de 2 mil estão feridas.

O Secretário-Geral da ONU, Ban Ki-moon, emitiu uma nota em que lamenta que o Conselho de Segurança não tenha chegado a um acordo na reunião de emergência, realizada no sábado, para debater o assunto.

Ban voltou a pedir o fim do conflito e disse que a situação humanitária em Gaza é preocupante.

A operação de Israel, que começou no último dia 27, é uma resposta aos ataques com roquetes lançados por militantes palestinos contra o sul do país.

Escalada

O coordenador especial da ONU para o Processo de Paz no Médio Oriente, Robert Serry, disse aos jornalistas, na sexta-feira, que os roquetes já estavam a atingir até 40km de distância dentro de Israel.

Questionado sobre a possibilidade de um ataque terrestre, um dia antes da operação, Serry afirmou que a acção agravaria ainda mais a situação.

Robert Serry disse que o ataque por terra deve aumentar a violência, que segundo ele tem que parar imediatamente.

O presidente da Autoridade Nacional Palestiniana, Mahmoud Abbas, está a caminho de Nova Iorque para participar nas reuniões da ONU sobre uma solução para o conflito em Gaza.

A região é controlada pelo movimento islâmico Hamas enquanto a Autoridade Nacional Palestiniana, liderada pela facção Fatah, controla a Cisjordânia.

O coordenador especial da ONU em Jerusalém disse que um acordo de cessar-fogo deve incluir também a reunificação palestina.

Rádio ONU

PMA distribui alimentos para vítimas em Gaza (Português para o Brasil)

05/01/2009

Agência da ONU está entregando pão às famílias afetadas pelo conflito entre tropas de Israel e o movimento islâmico, Hamas.

Mônica Villela Grayley, da Rádio ONU em Nova York.

O Programa Mundial de Alimentos, PMA, começou a distribuir comida para as vítimas do conflito na Faixa de Gaza.

A agência da ONU está entregando pão às famílias afetadas pela violência que resulta dos combates entre tropas de Israel e militantes do movimento islâmico Hamas, que controla Gaza.

Mercados

A representante do PMA nos territórios palestinos, Christine van Nieuwenhuyse, afirmou que os mercados de Gaza não têm mais gêneros básicos de alimentação e que a situação é muito grave.

A operação de emergência do Programa Mundial de Alimentos começou, na quinta-feira passada, com a distribuição de pães em Beit Hanoun para cerca de 3 mil famílias.

A escalada da violência está impedindo a entrega de comida a cerca de 265 mil não-refugiados e pessoas carentes.

Segundo a agência da ONU, a situação humanitária em Gaza já era precária antes do conflito, que começou em 27 de dezembro.

Por causa do fechamento de passagens para a região, a população palestina de 1,5 milhão de habitantes estava sofrendo com falta de alimentos e de combustíveis para o funcionamento de centrais elétricas e hospitais.

<http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/portuguese/print/150258.html>

ANEXO D
NOTÍCIAS DA REUTERS SOBRE GAZA



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Israeli strike kills senior Hamas leader

Thu Jan 1, 2009 5:31pm EST

- * Israeli air strike kills senior Hamas leader
- * Livni says enough humanitarian aid getting in
- * Foreigners get to leave Gaza on Friday
- * Palestinian death toll now 412
- * Major mosque hit by Israeli planes

By Nidai al-Mughrabi

GAZA, Jan 1 (Reuters) - Israel killed a senior Hamas leader in an air attack on his home on Thursday, striking its first deadly blow against the top ranks of the Islamist group in a Gaza offensive that has claimed more than 400 Palestinian lives.

Nizar Rayyan, a cleric widely regarded as one of Hamas's most hardline political leaders, had called for renewed suicide bombings inside Israel. Medical officials, confirming his death, said two of his four wives and seven of his children were killed in the bombing, in Jabalya refugee camp.

Hundreds of supporters scrambling over the concrete rubble vowed revenge as the mangled bodies, covered in blood and cement dust, were extracted from the wreckage.

"The blood of Sheikh Nizar Rayyan and the blood of other martyrs will never be wasted and the enemy will pay a heavy price for the crimes it has committed," Hamas official Ayman Taha said.

Black-bearded Rayyan, 49, was a preacher at Jabalya's "mosque of martyrs" who mentored suicide bombers. With a cartridge belt around his stocky frame, he would sometimes patrol the streets of Gaza with Hamas fighters.

Hamas Radio said he had ignored advice to leave his house as other Hamas leaders have done in anticipation of assassination attempts by Israeli forces, who confirmed the air strike.

"I think that even now, after a few days of operation we have achieved changes," Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said after talks in Paris with French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

"We affected most of the infrastructure of terror within the Gaza Strip and the question whether it's enough will be according to an assessment on a daily basis."

Late on Thursday night, Israeli war planes bombed the Jabalya mosque. Israeli security officials said it was a meeting place and command post for Hamas militants and the large number of secondary explosions after the strike indicated that rockets, missiles and other weapons had been stored there.

Witnesses in Gaza said it was completely destroyed.

Israeli armoured forces remained massed on the Gaza frontier in preparation for a possible ground invasion as international calls for an immediate ceasefire mounted.

Turkey, starting a rotating membership at the United Nations Security Council, urged Israel to end the offensive and lift its blockade against the coastal strip.

A humanitarian agency said it was told Israel would let 400 foreigners leave the Gaza Strip on Friday, possibly part of preparations for a land offensive. Most resident foreigners are spouses of Gaza Palestinians and their

children.

AID GETTING IN

Livni reiterated Israel's rejection of a French-proposed ceasefire of 48 hours to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza.

"There is no humanitarian crisis in the Strip, and therefore there is no need for a humanitarian truce," she said. "Israel has been supplying comprehensive humanitarian aid to the Strip ... and has even been stepping this up by the day."

Seventy trucks carrying humanitarian supplies crossed into the Gaza Strip from Israel on Thursday. But medics say their needs are acute and power blackouts are increasing.

The deadliest conflict in the Gaza Strip in four decades has killed at least 412 Palestinians and wounded some 1,850. About a quarter of the dead were civilians, the U.N. estimates.

On the sixth day, Israeli planes and ships attacked about 20 Hamas targets, including a government complex.

Visiting southern Israeli towns where rockets fired from Gaza have killed four people since Saturday, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Israel was fighting Hamas with an "iron fist".

Israeli television broadcast film of rubble-strewn street in the port of Ashdod, where a Hamas rocket tore into the eighth floor of a high-rise. Several residents were treated for shock.

"I very much hope we will succeed in achieving our goals quickly," Olmert said.

CEASEFIRE MOVES

In New York, the U.N. Security Council adjourned an emergency session without a vote. Western delegates described an Arab-drafted resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire as unbalanced and said talks would continue to agree a text.

The Czech premier announced that EU foreign ministers would conduct a mission to the region, likely to coincide with a visit to Jerusalem on Monday by French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Olmert told his security cabinet on Wednesday that if a diplomatic solution could be found that ensured better security for southern Israel, the government would consider it.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said Israeli attacks must stop before any truce proposals could be considered. Israel must also lift its economic blockade of Gaza and open border crossings.

Israeli officials said a truce would require international monitoring to ensure Hamas lives up to its obligations.

The Gaza operation, launched after Hamas ended a six-month ceasefire on Dec. 19 and intensified rocket strikes, could affect the outcome of Israel's Feb. 10 national election. (Additional reporting by Adam Entous and Jeffrey Heller in Jerusalem, Patrick Worsnip at United Nations and James Mackenzie in Paris; Writing by Jeffrey Heller; Editing by Angus MacSwan)

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Israel says bombing has damaged Hamas capabilities

Thu Jan 1, 2009 12:57pm EST

PARIS (Reuters) - Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip has damaged Hamas and will continue until the Jewish state no longer deems the Palestinian Islamist faction a threat, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni said on Thursday.

"I think that even now, after a few days of operation we have achieved changes," she told reporters on a visit to Paris, referring to an air strike campaign launched on Saturday.

"We affected most of the infrastructure of terror within the Gaza Strip and the question whether it's enough will be according to an assessment on a daily basis."

Livni, who met French President Nicolas Sarkozy, said Israel intended to "change the reality" in and around Gaza. Israeli officials say this would entail ending Palestinian rocket salvos that have sown panic in neighboring southern Israel.

"We want to weaken Hamas in the Gaza Strip. At the end of the day, Hamas is a problem not only to Israel but to the entire Palestinian people," Livni said.

"They are a problem to all the Arab states who understand that they have their own radical elements back home, including Muslim brotherhoods in different places."

Hamas has remained defiant despite an Israeli barrage that has killed more than 400 Palestinians. Four Israelis have been killed by retaliatory rocket strikes.

Livni came to Paris to address a French proposal for a 48-hour truce to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza. Her office said she had reiterated her government's rejection of the idea.

"There is no humanitarian crisis in the Strip, and therefore there is no need for a humanitarian truce," the Foreign Ministry quoted Livni as saying in a statement.

In her remarks to reporters, Livni said Israel had been careful to protect the civilian population and had kept the humanitarian situation in Gaza "completely as it should be."

"The crossings are open, more than it used to be before the military operation," she said.

The European Union has called for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, which Israel has been attacking for days in retaliation for rocket attacks on its territory from the Hamas-controlled area.

Sarkozy, whose country handed over the rotating EU presidency to the Czech Republic at midnight is due to visit Egypt, the Palestinian Territories, Israel, Syria and Lebanon on Monday and Tuesday, hoping to assist in ending hostilities.

Despite Israel's rejection of France's ceasefire proposal, Livni thanked Sarkozy for his engagement.

"President Sarkozy is well familiar with the situation and the complexity in our region. He understands the threat that Israel is facing," she said.

(Reporting by James Mackenzie and Laure Bretton; Editing by Katie Nguyen)

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Iran Nobel laureate accused of Israeli bias-activist

Thu Jan 1, 2009 2:25pm EST

TEHRAN (Reuters) - Some 150 protesters stood outside the home and office of Iranian Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi on Thursday accusing her of sympathy for Israel, the Islamic state's foe, a member of her human rights group said.

Abdulreza Tajik, of the Human Rights Defenders Center led by Ebadi, said he believed they were student members of the Basij religious militia. The crowd tore down a sign of Ebadi's law practice and trampled on it, he told Reuters.

"Israel commits crime, Ebadi supports (it)," Tajik quoted the protesters as shouting in reference to the Jewish state's attacks in Gaza. He said they dispersed after police intervened. It was not clear on what grounds they made the accusation.

Tajik said Ebadi's rights watchdog center had condemned violence against Palestinians in the Gaza strip and called for international action to stop the Israeli campaign.

A Basij leader at an Iranian medical university, Alireza Keighobadi, told the ISNA news agency that members of his organization had gathered outside Ebadi's office, which is in the same Tehran building as her home.

"Considering that Shirin Ebadi received her Nobel Peace Prize for the defense of children we came together in front of her office to ask whether the children of Gaza are not children (to be defended)," Keighobadi said.

The incident came a day after the French Foreign Ministry said France, acting in the name of the European Union, had summoned Iran's ambassador to Paris to protest about the treatment of Ebadi.

The Iranian government raided Ebadi's law office in Tehran earlier this week less than 10 days after closing the headquarters of her human rights center, a rights advocacy group in the United States said on Tuesday.

Ebadi has repeatedly criticized Iran's human rights record, saying the country had the highest number of executions per capita in 2007 and a growing number of political prisoners.

Iran's judiciary said last week the closure of her center on December 21 was a temporary measure, adding that the office could be reopened "if the group obtained the necessary legal permit" for its activities.

Iran's government rejects accusations that it violates human rights and accuses its Western foes of hypocrisy.

Over the years, Ebadi's advocacy of human rights has earned her a spell in jail and a stream of threatening letters and telephone calls. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003.

(Reporting by Hossein Jaseb; Writing by Fredrik Dahl; Editing by Katie Nguyen)

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UN concerned over any ground attack on Gaza -envoy

Fri Jan 2, 2009 4:21pm EST
By Patrick Wvornship

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 2 (Reuters) - The United Nations is "gravely concerned" about any ground invasion of Gaza by Israel, which would simply worsen a conflict that has already killed hundreds, the U.N. Middle East envoy said on Friday.

Israel is seven days into a campaign of air strikes aimed at stamping out Palestinian rocket attacks from Gaza against Israeli cities and its armored forces are massed on the Gaza border in preparation for a possible ground operation.

Asked by journalists about such an attack, U.N. envoy Robert Serry said, "We are gravely concerned about that prospect because that would just mean another cycle of violence and a further escalation of the conflict. This must stop.

"With Israeli tanks on Gaza's border, it is absolutely imperative now that we find an immediate and lasting way out to avoid an even deeper and deadlier conflict," Serry said by video link from Jerusalem.

At least 425 Palestinians have been killed in the conflict so far and 2,000 wounded. Four Israelis have been killed.

Serry said that if a ceasefire could be achieved, "new conditions on the ground" would be needed to prevent a return to the situation that existed before the Israeli attack.

These should include a commitment by Hamas, which controls Gaza, to stop rocket attacks and arms smuggling, the permanent opening of crossing points into Gaza, and bringing Gaza back under the Palestinian Authority, which governs the West Bank.

Serry also restated his support for a mechanism to monitor any ceasefire, an idea that has been floated by both Israelis and Palestinians. He would not go into detail on how such a mechanism would work, but said the United Nations was willing to play a role.

Security Council diplomats were working on Friday on the text of a resolution submitted on Wednesday by Arab states aimed at halting the Gaza violence. Western diplomats said the original draft was unbalanced, stressing Israeli actions but only hinting vaguely at the Palestinian rocket attacks.

Diplomats said the drafting work was expected to continue over the weekend and into next week, when senior Arab officials are due in New York to press the Arab case.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is expected on Sunday and ministers from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and possibly elsewhere will arrive by Monday, diplomats and U.N. officials said.

Egypt, which a senior Palestinian official said on Friday had begun contacts with Hamas on ways of restoring a ceasefire, has urged Arabs to compromise over the U.N. text. Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit said on Thursday, "We should show some flexibility to convince others of our demands."

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U.S. urges Israel to keep aid flowing to Gaza

Fri Jan 2, 2009 10:18am EST

WASHINGTON, Jan 2 (Reuters) - Israel has a right to defend itself against Hamas rocket attacks but must avoid civilian casualties, the White House said on Friday

"Israel has a right to defend itself from these rocket attacks," White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe told reporters. He said Washington wanted Israel to avoid civilian casualties and "to make sure that food and medical supplies reach the people of Gaza."

(Reporting by Jeremy Pelofsky and Paul Eckert)

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U.S. urges Israel to keep aid flowing to Gaza

Fri Jan 2, 2009 10:19am EST

WASHINGTON, Jan 2 (Reuters) - Israel has a right to defend itself against Hamas rocket attacks but must avoid civilian casualties, the White House said on Friday.

"Israel has a right to defend itself from these rocket attacks," White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe told reporters. He said Washington wanted Israel to avoid civilian casualties and "to make sure that food and medical supplies reach the people of Gaza."

(Reporting by Jeremy Pelofsky and Paul Eckert)

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Kashmir protests over assault on Gaza, 50 injured

Fri Jan 2, 2009 9:37am EST

SRINAGAR, India, Jan 2 (Reuters) - At least 50 people were injured when baton-wielding police in Indian Kashmir fired teargas shells on Friday to disperse hundreds of Muslims protesting at Israeli strikes on Gaza, police and witnesses said.

There were also demonstrations in other Indian cities, including New Delhi and Hyderabad.

In Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar, angry demonstrators shouting "Down with Zionist terrorism, down with Israel" burnt American and Israeli flags near Kashmir's grand mosque Jamia Masjid.

Police also clashed with stone-throwing demonstrators in several other parts of the city. Most of the protests were staged after Friday prayers.

"Policemen and some photojournalists are among the injured," Mohammad Syed, a police official said.

Israel says the attacks, which have killed more than 400 people, are designed to stop Hamas Islamists who rule the Gaza Strip from firing rockets on towns in the Jewish state.

Around 250 Muslims in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad also protested against the offensive outside the recently opened U.S. consulate on Friday, police said.

They tried to set fire to an effigy of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert but were stopped by police. There were further large protests in the Muslim-majority old part of the city.

A Reuters witness saw similar scenes in the capital, New Delhi, as protesters gathered outside India's largest mosque, similarly called Jama Masjid, to burn Israeli and American flags and an effigy.

The Indian government has joined international calls for a halt to the conflict, and promised \$1 million in financial aid to affected families in Gaza.

In Srinagar earlier on Friday, the chief priest of Kashmir and senior separatist leader, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, led thousands of worshippers in a mass prayer for the slain Palestinians.

"Why is the world community silent when innocent, unarmed Muslims are killed in hundreds by Israel? It is a naked aggression," Farooq said at the city's grand mosque.

"Muslim countries must unite to fight for the liberation of Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kashmir."

Kashmir, which was hit by massive anti-India protests last year, is India's only Muslim-majority state. Officials say more than 47,000 people have been killed since simmering discontent against Indian rule turned into a full-blown rebellion in 1989. (Reporting By Sheikh Mushtaq; Editing By Matthias Williams and Sugita Katyal)

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Israel keeps up air assaults on Gaza

Fri, Jan 2, 2009 3:27am EST

* Israel pursues air strikes

* Diplomacy bogs down

* Palestinian death toll now 412

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA, Jan 2 (Reuters) - Israeli warplanes struck targets in Gaza on Friday and Islamist fighters fired rockets into the Israeli port of Ashkelon, dashing international hopes of a ceasefire to end seven days of fighting.

The Israeli air force bombed around 20 targets, killing two Palestinians in a house, and raising the Gaza death toll to at least 414 since last Saturday. The rockets injured two people slightly in Israel, which has lost 4 dead in the conflict.

Israel said its air force targeted a weapons arsenal, a vehicle that transported anti-aircraft missiles, rocket launchers and a tunnel used for arms smuggling.

Bracing for protests and retaliatory violence a day after it killed a senior Hamas leader in an air strike on his Gaza home, Israel sealed off the occupied West Bank to deny entry to most Palestinians and deployed heavy security at checkpoints.

Nizar Rayyan, an Islamic cleric who was one of Hamas's most headline political leaders, had called for renewed suicide bombings inside Israel. He was the highest ranking Hamas official to be killed in the current offensive.

Israeli armoured forces remained massed on the Gaza frontier in preparation for a possible ground invasion, ignoring international calls for a halt to the conflict.

Some 1,850 people have been wounded in Gaza in the deadliest conflict in four decades. It was launched by Israel to put an end to rocket fire which intensified after the Hamas rulers of Gaza declared an end to their six-month truce on Dec. 19.

A quarter of the dead were civilians, the United Nations estimates. Four Israelis were killed in rocket attacks from Gaza since the Israeli offensive began last Saturday.

Analysts said Israeli leaders felt under pressure to act ahead of a Feb. 10 national election, and surveys indicate the assaults may boost support for centrist candidates Defence Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, against frontrunner Benjamin Netanyahu of the right-wing Likud party.

Two Israelis were injured when two rockets struck the Israeli city of Ashkelon on Friday, medics said.

The latest rocket attacks followed Israeli military air strikes on about 20 Hamas targets early on Friday, including a house destroyed in Gaza City.

MOSQUE BOMBED

Late on Thursday night, Israeli war planes bombed the Jabalya mosque. Israeli security officials said it was a meeting place and command post for Hamas militants and the large number of secondary explosions after the strike indicated that rockets, missiles and other weapons had been stored there.

Hamas official Ayman Taha called to avenge the killing of Rayyan. "The blood of Sheikh Nizar Rayyan and the blood of other martyrs will never be wasted and the enemy will pay a heavy price for the crimes it has

committed," Taha said.

Two of Rayyan's four wives and seven of his children were killed in the strike on his home in Jebalya refugee camp.

Black-bearded Rayyan, 49, was a preacher at Jabalya's "mosque of martyrs" who mentored suicide bombers. With a cartridge belt around his stocky frame, he would sometimes patrol the streets of Gaza with Hamas fighters.

Israel says its strikes in Gaza have been effective.

"I think that even now, after a few days of operation we have achieved changes," Livni said after talks in Paris with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, where she rejected a proposed 48-hour respite in fighting.

Livni said there was "no humanitarian crisis in the Strip, and therefore there is no need for a humanitarian truce" and that Israel has been permitting medical, food and other supplies into Gaza during the offensive.

Seventy trucks carrying humanitarian supplies crossed into the Gaza Strip from Israel on Thursday. But medics say their needs are acute and power blackouts are increasing.

A humanitarian agency has said it was told Israel would let 400 foreigners leave the Gaza Strip on Friday. Most resident foreigners are spouses of Gaza Palestinians and their children.

Turkey, starting a rotating membership at the United Nations Security Council, urged Israel to end the offensive and lift its blockade against the coastal strip. But the council adjourned an emergency session without a vote on Thursday.

Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek, whose country holds the European Union presidency, said EU foreign ministers would visit the region, possibly Monday, when Sarkozy plans to visit.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has said that if a diplomatic solution could be found that ensured better security for southern Israel, the government would consider it.

Israeli officials said any truce would require international monitoring to ensure Hamas lives up to its obligations.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said Israeli attacks must stop before any truce proposals could be considered. Israel must also lift its economic blockade of Gaza and open border crossings. (Additional reporting by Adam Entous and Jeffrey Heller in Jerusalem, Patrick Worsnip at United Nations and James Mackenzie in Paris; Writing by Alyn Fisher-Ilan; Editing by Jon Boyle)

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Hamas leader says it ready to confront Gaza invasion

Fri Jan 2, 2009 6:51pm EST

* Bush spells out vision of ceasefire

* Palestinian official says Egypt begins truce initiative

* Hamas leader says group will resist any Gaza invasion

* Palestinian death toll reaches 429

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA, Jan 3 (Reuters) - Hamas's top leader warned Israel its army would be defeated if it invaded the Gaza Strip, while the United States said it envisioned a ceasefire with international monitoring that would ensure the Islamist group could not rearm.

Israeli armoured forces remained poised on the Gaza border for a possible ground operation, a week after Israel launched devastating air strikes with the declared aim of ending rocket attacks on its southern towns.

Gaza medical officials put the Palestinian casualty toll at at least 429 dead and 2,000 wounded.

A United Nations agency said more than a quarter of those killed in the Gaza Strip were civilians. A leading Palestinian human rights group put the figure at 40 percent.

Four Israelis have been killed by Palestinian rockets since Israel's offensive began, including longer-range weapons that have hit the port of Ashdod and the desert town of Beersheba, forcing schools to shut and residents to scurry for shelter.

In Damascus, Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal sounded a defiant note in a televised speech.

"We are ready for the challenge, this battle was imposed on us and we are confident we will achieve victory because we have made our preparations," Meshaal said.

A Palestinian official has told Reuters that Egypt had begun exploratory talks with Hamas to stop the fighting.

U.S. President George W. Bush, in his first public comments on the hostilities that erupted less than a month before he leaves office, said: "Another one-way ceasefire that leads to rocket attacks on Israel is not acceptable."

"And promises from Hamas will not suffice - there must be monitoring mechanisms in place to help ensure that smuggling of weapons to terrorist groups in Gaza comes to an end," he said in remarks prepared for his weekly Saturday radio address, which was released on Friday.

The United States has demanded Hamas, which Israel says has been smuggling weapons through tunnels under Gaza's border with Egypt, take the first step by halting rocket attacks on Israel.

In the Israeli-blockaded Gaza Strip, 1.5 million Palestinians are unable to escape the conflict. Residents face bombs, missiles and flickering electricity, and queue for bread along streets littered with broken glass and other debris.

Ten Palestinians were killed on Friday in more than 30 Israeli air strikes. Seven of them were civilians, including five children, local medics said.

One missile killed three Palestinian children aged between eight and 12 as they played on a street near the town of Khan Yunis in the south of the

strip. One was decapitated.

Islamist fighters fired rockets at Israel's ancient port of Ashkelon, blowing out windows in an apartment building. Another house took a direct hit from a long-range missile later in the day, and cars were set ablaze.

DIPLOMACY

Bush and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have been engaged in telephone diplomacy during the past week, talking with leaders in the Middle East and Europe, including Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Earlier on Friday the White House said Israel must decide for itself whether to go into the Gaza Strip with ground forces but it cautioned any actions should avoid civilian casualties and ensure the flow of humanitarian goods.

Hamas is believed to have 25,000 fighters. Its men have been maintaining a vigil along the Israeli frontier, observing army movements on the other side and broadcasting messages in Hebrew over field radios telling their enemy they are not afraid.

In his remarks, Bush expressed concern about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and said the United States had offered \$85 million to relief efforts this week.

Meshaal urged Arabs to step up aid and to send medical teams. He said European and Arab countries had contacted Hamas to discuss ending the fighting but he did not name them.

Israel has been allowing about 90 truckloads of food and medicine to enter the Gaza Strip daily, saying its enemy was Hamas, not the Palestinian people. Israel tightened its blockade of the territory after Hamas seized the enclave in fighting against Abbas's Fatah group in 2007.

"We will not rest until we destroy the Zionist entity," said Hamas leader Fathi Hammad at the funeral of Nizar Rayyan, a senior Hamas leader who was killed along with four wives and 11 children in an air strike on Thursday.

Bracing for protests and retaliatory violence, Israel sealed off the occupied West Bank to deny entry to most Palestinians and beefed up security at checkpoints. (Additional reporting by Adam Entous, Ailyn Fisher-Ilan and Ori Lewis in Jerusalem and Jeremy Pelofsky in Washington, Writing by Jeffrey Heller and Douglas Hamilton, Editing by Giles Elgood)

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Gaza campaign exposes Middle East policy vacuum

Fri Jan 2, 2009 11:24am EST

By Alistair Lyon, Special Correspondent - Analysis

BEIRUT (Reuters) - Israel's week-old offensive in the Gaza Strip is a violent sequel to a drive led by the United States, with much European and Arab support, to punish Hamas for resisting a largely discredited Middle East "peace process."

The campaign is unlikely to eradicate Hamas or make it any easier for the next U.S. president, Barack Obama, to break the cycle of conflict and rescue swiftly receding prospects for a solution based on creating a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Israel is consolidating its grip on the West Bank, while keeping Gazans bottled up. Splits between Palestinian factions have made sporadic U.S.-sponsored talks between the Israelis and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas notional at best.

Outgoing President George W. Bush had set a goal of reaching a peace deal by the end of 2008 after belatedly relaunched Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at Annapolis in November 2007.

Faced instead with a new spasm of violence, the White House has effectively encouraged the Israelis to pursue what they portray as an attempt to quell rocket attacks on their civilians and "change the reality" in Hamas-controlled Gaza.

The European Union, lacking the energy and unity to act in the diplomatic vacuum left by Washington, has merely appealed for a ceasefire -- and promised a bit more humanitarian relief to the 1.5 million people locked into the coastal strip by a punitive Israeli blockade and a sealed Egyptian border.

The Arab League, caught between public dismay at the Gaza bloodshed and the hostility of many member states to Hamas and other Islamist groups allied to Iran, has agreed only to ask the U.N. Security Council to compel Israel to halt its onslaught.

But the council is toothless without the United States and other veto powers in accord. It has yet to adopt a resolution.

RISING DEATH TOLL

So far air strikes have killed 424 Palestinians, a quarter of them civilians according to a "conservative" U.N. estimate. Rockets fired from Gaza have killed four Israelis.

Israeli leaders, keen to bolster their security credentials before a February 10 election, began the assault on December 27, eight days after a six-month, Egyptian-mediated Hamas truce expired.

Rocket fire mounted after Hamas declared it would not seek to renew a truce that was never fully observed. Israel had kept up tight border controls and launched deadly raids on militants, who failed to halt all of their pinprick rocket attacks.

The unfolding war is a culmination of attempts to crush Hamas that intensified after the Islamist group's decisive victory over Abbas's Fatah faction in a 2006 election.

The United States and the EU, which classify Hamas as a terrorist group, reacted sharply to the result of the poll.

They boycotted the Hamas-led unity government and cut off most aid, insisting that Hamas recognize Israel's right to exist, renounce violence and accept agreements made by the Palestine Liberation Organisation -- from which it is excluded.

The United States bolstered pro-Fatah security forces, but Hamas drove them from Gaza in June 2007. The West has since poured funds into the

West Bank to prop up Abbas's authority.

"Neither Israel nor anyone else has a long-term workable strategy for dealing with Hamas in Gaza," wrote Israeli security analyst Yossi Alpher in the bitterlemons.org online newsletter.

Hamas, he argued, has taken over a slice of Palestinian territory, but refuses to act like a sovereign power and "glories in the victimhood or martyrdom of its people."

At best, the Israeli attack would deliver a few more months of truce, Alpher said. At worst, it could inflame Arabs and Muslims against Israel and the West, prompt Palestinian rioting and spark a new conflict with Lebanon's Hezbollah.

CREDIBILITY CRISIS

The assault on Gaza is a major embarrassment for Abbas, now openly accused by Hamas of being an Israeli collaborator.

He has thrown all his bets on faltering U.S. peace efforts embodied in Bush's "road map" plan of 2004. But his strategy has failed to bring Palestinian statehood any closer.

Israel controls all access to the Gaza Strip, while expanding settlements and barriers in the West Bank -- allowing Hamas and others to argue that such negotiations are futile.

"The Israeli attack on Gaza is strengthening Hamas politically and increasing public support for the movement," wrote Palestinian analyst Ghassan Khatib in bitterlemons.org.

Hamas's main objective, he said, was to force Egypt to open its Rafah crossing point with Gaza and lift the siege -- without Palestinian Authority control and European monitoring as before.

Cairo rejects those terms for fear of undermining Abbas and to avoid being lumbered with long-term responsibility for Gaza.

Iran and Hezbollah are exploiting the Gaza crisis to stoke popular anger at Arab rulers, such as Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, who view Hamas and other Islamists as a threat to their own power.

But the militants' recipe of prolonged struggle with Zionism offers scant relief for Palestinians desperate to lead normal lives beyond the shadow of Israeli occupation and control.

"Fair enough, the Arab street blames Mubarak and King Abdullah for not doing anything about Gaza, but nor is Iran, Syria and Hezbollah doing anything," said Paul Salem, director of the Carnegie Institute's Middle East Centre in Beirut.

"And certainly Israeli policy is a dead end as well."

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In the summer capital Srinagar, angry demonstrators shouting "Down with Zionist terrorism, down with Israel" burned American and Israeli flags near Kashmir's grand mosque Jamia Masjid.

There were also demonstrations in New Delhi, Hyderabad and other Indian cities.

TURKEY

In mainly Muslim Turkey, thousands gathered outside an Istanbul mosque to condemn the attacks, which have prompted harsh government criticism against its close ally Israel.

Chanting "Damn Israel, Damn Zionism" up to 5,000 worshippers held a peaceful protest after prayers in Turkey's largest city.

About 200 Iraqi men and boys gathered for an indoor demonstration inside a Baghdad mosque, many wearing white headbands bearing the words "victory for Gaza." Banners read: "Gaza is in the hearts and minds of all Arabs."

Several thousand demonstrators gathered in the central square of the Austrian capital Vienna, freeing black and white balloons and holding pro-Palestinian signs. Bigger protests are expected in London, Dublin and elsewhere in Europe on Saturday.

(Editing by Andrew Roche)

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Egypt and Jordan crack down on anti-Israel rallies

Fri Jan 2, 2009 12:30pm EST

* Egyptian and Jordanian police curb anti-Israel protesters

* Jordan opposition has biggest rally in years to back Hamas

* At least 50 demonstrators injured in Indian Kashmir

By Richard Meares

LONDON, Jan 2 (Reuters) - Jordanian and Egyptian riot police cracked down on Friday on protesters demanding an end to Israel's attacks on Gaza and to ties with the Jewish state.

Israel's week-old offensive has sparked daily protests around the world and Friday, the Muslim day of prayer, also saw angry demonstrations in Kashmir, Turkey and Iraq.

Jordanian police fired tear gas to push back hundreds of people marching on the Israeli embassy in the capital Amman.

Chanting "No Jewish embassy on Arab land", worshippers set off from a mosque to the nearby Israeli embassy. Police fired tear gas at around 1,500 demonstrators, forcing them to retreat, and beat and arrested several of them.

Protesters chanted slogans backing the Islamic militant group Hamas that controls Gaza. "Revenge ... revenge ... Hamas, bomb Tel Aviv," they shouted.

Watched by riot police, at least 60,000 people headed later to Amman sports stadium for the largest rally in decades by the opposition Muslim Brotherhood. Its leader told a cheering crowd Palestinians should intensify an uprising against Israel.

In Cairo, police beat opposition Islamists with batons when they tried to stage a rally downtown, witnesses said.

A rally in the coastal town of El-Arish in North Sinai turned violent when protesters tried to force their way through a police cordon.

"People charged at the police and pelted them with rocks," a Reuters witness said. "Police started rounding people up and beating them."

Egypt's protests were called by the Brotherhood, the main opposition group which has historical and ideological ties to Hamas.

"This will not prevent us from declaring our anger and expressing our solidarity with the Palestinian people," Mohamed Habib, the Brotherhood deputy leader, told Reuters. He said Egypt should break off diplomatic and economic ties with Israel.

"SELL-OUT" CALLS

Egypt and Jordan both have peace treaties with Israel, and their diplomatic ties with it often prompt accusations of a sell-out from other Muslims and Arabs.

Protesters in countries such as Lebanon, Yemen and Iran accuse Egypt of cooperating with Israel by refusing to open its border crossing with the Palestinian coastal strip.

Israel's offensive, one of the worst in 60 years of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has killed more than 420 people. Israel says the attacks aim to stop Hamas firing rockets on towns in southern Israel, where four Israelis have died.

It sealed off the West Bank to deny entry to most Palestinians and beefed

up security at checkpoints as people renewed protests across the occupied territory.

In Ramallah, Hamas supporters scuffled with the Fatah faction of Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, taunting them as "collaborators". Elsewhere, protesters stoned soldiers at checkpoints and some were wounded by rubber bullets.

In Indian Kashmir at least 50 people were injured when baton-wielding police fired tear gas shells to disperse hundreds of Muslim protesters, police and witnesses said.

In the summer capital Srinagar, angry demonstrators shouting "Down with Zionist terrorism, down with Israel" burned American and Israeli flags near Kashmir's grand mosque Jamia Masjid.

There were also demonstrations in New Delhi, Hyderabad and other Indian cities.

TURKEY

In mainly Muslim Turkey, thousands gathered outside an Istanbul mosque to condemn the attacks, which have prompted harsh government criticism against its close ally Israel.

Chanting "Damn Israel, Damn Zionism" up to 5,000 worshippers held a peaceful protest after prayers in Turkey's largest city.

About 200 Iraqi men and boys gathered for an indoor demonstration inside a Baghdad mosque, many wearing white headbands bearing the words "victory for Gaza". Banners read: "Gaza is in the hearts and minds of all Arabs".

Several thousand demonstrators gathered in the central square of the Austrian capital Vienna, freeing black and white balloons and holding pro-Palestinian signs. Bigger protests are expected in London, Dublin and elsewhere in Europe on Saturday. (Editing by Andrew Roche)

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Bush pushes for monitored ceasefire for Gaza

Fri Jan 2, 2009 5:49pm EST

WASHINGTON, Jan 2 (Reuters) - The United States is working to reaching a meaningful ceasefire in the Gaza Strip that includes monitoring mechanisms to halt weapons smuggling into the territory, President George W. Bush said in remarks released on Friday.

"Another one-way ceasefire that leads to rocket attacks on Israel is not acceptable," Bush said in his first public comments on the fighting.

The United States has demanded Hamas take the first step by halting rocket attacks on Israel.

"And promises from Hamas will not suffice -- there must be monitoring mechanisms in place to help ensure that smuggling of weapons to terrorist groups in Gaza comes to an end," he said in remarks prepared for his weekly Saturday radio address, which was released on Friday. (Reporting by Jeremy Pełofsky, editing by Bill Trott)

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Bush pushes for monitored ceasefire pact for Gaza

Fri Jan 2, 2009 6:20pm EST
(Corrects Ehud Olmert's name in 8th paragraph)

By Jeremy Pelofsky

WASHINGTON, Jan 2 (Reuters) - The United States is working to reach a meaningful ceasefire in the Gaza Strip that includes monitoring mechanisms to halt weapons smuggling into the territory, President George W. Bush said in remarks released on Friday.

"Another one-way ceasefire that leads to rocket attacks on Israel is not acceptable," Bush said in his first public comments on the fighting.

The United States has demanded Hamas, which it considers a terrorist organization, take the first step by halting rocket attacks on Israel.

"And promises from Hamas will not suffice - there must be monitoring mechanisms in place to help ensure that smuggling of weapons to terrorist groups in Gaza comes to an end," Bush said in remarks prepared for his regular Saturday radio address, which was taped and released on Friday.

The United States has defended Israel's right to respond to the rocket attacks and has blamed the renewed fighting on Hamas, the militant group that seized control of the Palestinian territory about 18 months ago.

At least 429 Palestinians have been killed in the seven days of fighting and some 2,000 have been wounded. Rockets fired from Gaza have killed four Israelis.

A Palestinian official has told Reuters that Egypt had begun exploratory talks with Hamas to stop the fighting.

WORKING THE PHONES

Bush and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have been engaged in telephone diplomacy during the past week, talking with leaders in the Middle East and Europe, including Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Earlier on Friday the White House said Israel must decide for itself whether to go into the Gaza Strip with ground forces but it cautioned any actions should avoid civilian casualties and ensure the flow of humanitarian goods.

Bush also expressed concern about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and said the United States has offered \$85 million to relief efforts this week. He criticized Hamas for using its resources on rocket launchers instead of roads and schools.

"Hamas has demonstrated that it has no intention of serving the Palestinian people," Bush said.

He also urged other countries to pressure Hamas to stop its rocket attacks on Israel and support the elected Palestinian leaders.

"I urge all parties to pressure Hamas to turn away from terror and to support legitimate Palestinian leaders working for peace," Bush said.

Rice told reporters after meeting Bush that the United States was working toward a "durable and sustainable" ceasefire in Gaza but that she had no plans at this point to travel to the Middle East to try to broker one.

"We are working toward a ceasefire that would not allow a re-establishment of the status quo ante where Hamas can continue to launch rockets out of Gaza," Rice said.

With less than three weeks before leaving office, Bush said he was keeping his successor, President-elect Barack Obama, and his team informed.
(Editing by Bill Trott)

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Rival Greek, Turk Cypriots condemn Gaza attacks

Mon Jan 5, 2009 11:09am EST

NICOSIA, Jan 5 (Reuters) - Rival Greek and Turkish leaders of Cyprus condemned Israeli attacks on Gaza on Monday, in a rare sign of unanimity on the divided island.

Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat and the Greek Cypriot leader, President Demetris Christofias, called on action from the international community to end the violence.

"The two leaders condemn the attack against Gaza and the disproportionate use of force applied by the Israeli forces that has led to huge loss of life of innocent civilians including women and children," Talat and Christofias said in a joint statement.

Regardless of ethnic origin, Cypriots are generally viewed as sympathetic to the Palestinians. Last week a boat carrying Cypriot aid to Palestinians in Gaza almost sank after it was involved in a collision with Israeli speedboats in international waters, and had to divert to Lebanon.

Christofias, who heads the communist government representing Cyprus in the European Union, has also been vocal in his criticism. His party, AKEL, has called the Israeli attacks "barbaric".

Cyprus itself was divided in a Turkish invasion in 1974 triggered by a brief Greek-inspired coup. The Greek and Turkish Cypriot sides started a new round of reunification talks in September 2008. (Writing by Michele Kambas; Editing by Charles Dick)

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Mauritania calls back Israel ambassador for talks

Mon Jan 5, 2009 12:26pm EST
(Adds quote from second source)

NOUAKCHOTT, Jan 5 (Reuters) - Mauritania has called back its ambassador to Israel for consultations, Mauritanian government sources said on Monday.

Protesters took to the streets of the Mauritanian capital Nouakchott last week to demand that the Islamic country sever diplomatic ties with Israel after the Jewish state launched a military offensive in the Gaza Strip.

"We have recalled our ambassador in Tel Aviv for consultations," said a Foreign Ministry source who declined to be named, adding that the diplomat was on his way home.

The northwest African state is one of only three Arab countries to have diplomatic relations with Israel, along with Egypt and Jordan.

Another source close to Mauritania's ruling military junta said Mauritania condemned the Israeli military action.

"Our position as regards cutting diplomatic ties with Israel will depend on how things move on the ground, on the military situation, and on the possibility of appeasement in the Gaza Strip," he said.

The ambassador, Ahmed Ould Teguedi, has held his post since Mauritania opened relations with Israel in 1999.

Gunmen attacked the Israeli embassy in Nouakchott last February after political parties called for then-President Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi to break off ties with Israel to reflect anger over events in Gaza.

Protests against the latest attacks in Gaza, which have killed more than 500 people, have broken out across the Arab world, while diplomats have called for a ceasefire. (Reporting by Hachem Sidi Salem and Vincent Fertey; Writing by Daniel Magnowski; Editing by Alistair Thomson and Giles Elgood)

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Israel deaf to truce calls as Gaza battles rage on

Mon Jan 5, 2009 6:51pm EST

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA (Reuters) - Israeli troops backed by air strikes fought to seize ground from Hamas militants deep inside the Gaza Strip on Monday despite international calls for a ceasefire in a conflict that has killed more than 540 Palestinians in 10 days.

More than 30 civilians, including children, were killed on Monday, the third day of an Israeli ground offensive, medics said. Israel said it killed dozens of Islamist guerrillas as the battle crept into the suburbs of the city of Gaza itself.

Frightened families huddled in rooms away from windows. "Until now I was not afraid," a Reuters journalist said from his home in the city of 500,000. "I am afraid now and my daughter is trembling the whole time. No place seems to be safe."

Israel's defense minister said the assault, which he hopes can stem rocket fire on its own towns, could get harder for troops. They were edging forward, wary of Hamas's quest for more captives to join a soldier used as a bargaining chip since 2006.

Hamas vowed to fight on in "every street, every alley" and threatened to fire more missiles across the border into Israel. Threats to resume suicide bombings have yet to materialize.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, on a peace mission to the Middle East, and U.S. President George W. Bush, in his final weeks in the White House, both appealed for a ceasefire.

But disagreement on who should stop shooting first and on what terms made the chances of an immediate pause seem remote.

The reminder of conflict stubbornly rooted at the heart of the Middle East helped drive oil prices up 5 percent and analysts questioned whether there was any prospect of a peace that has eluded Israel and the Palestinians for over 60 years.

Israel, whose leaders are fighting a parliamentary election on February 10, made clear its priority was to secure the safety of its citizens. Hamas called for a lifting of the blockade of the enclave, crammed with 1.5 million people whose lives are growing ever more squalid. Many lack food, water or power.

The death toll in Gaza rose to at least 541 people. Among Monday's 33 civilian victims were 13 members of a Palestinian family killed in an Israeli strike on their home in a refugee camp, Palestinian medical officials said.

BATTLE RAGES

Israel launched the offensive after Hamas called off a six-month truce last month and stepped up its rocket attacks in response to Israel's raids and blockade of the enclave, which the Jewish state occupied from 1967 to 2005.

Israeli soldiers and Islamist militants fought throughout the day and into the night on Monday. Militants fired mortars and grenades and detonated mines and tried to lure Israeli soldiers into built-up areas, witnesses said.

Although Israel allowed in 80 trucks of supplies on Monday, people badly needed food, medical supplies and other aid but the hostilities were hampering relief efforts, aid agencies said.

The Israeli air force bombed dozens of targets, including homes of Hamas members used as weapons depots.

Israel's advances into Gaza have carved the 40 km (25 mile)-long coastal territory into two main zones.

Defense Minister Ehud Barak told lawmakers that Hamas had been dealt a heavy blow: "But we cannot say that its fighting capabilities have been harmed ... Hamas did not seek a direct confrontation with our forces," he said. "Difficult moments lie ahead in this operation and the main test could still be ahead."

Hamas leaders, who have support from Iran and Syria but are viewed with suspicion by most Arab states, rallied their men with defiant rhetoric. Thousands of fighters were waiting "in every street, every alley and at every house" to tackle them, Hamas military spokesman Abu Ubaida said in a broadcast speech.

Hamas would increase its rocket strikes on Israel if the Israeli attacks on Gaza continued, Ubaida said.

A rocket hit the Israeli port city of Ashdod, damaging a building and wounding two people, police said. Four Israelis have been killed by salvos since the offensive began. Five were killed in such attacks in the previous two years.

An Israeli soldier was killed in fighting on Sunday and 48 have been wounded since the ground invasion began.

PEACE CALLS

Sarkozy called for a rapid ceasefire and said "time is running against peace." "The guns must fall silent, there must be a humanitarian truce," Sarkozy said, telling President Shimon Peres in Jerusalem: "Israel should take the risk of peace."

He also condemned Hamas for attacks on Israeli civilians that, he said, had brought misery on the people of Gaza.

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni rebuffed European proposals for international observers in the Gaza Strip after any ceasefire, pushing instead for teams to help search out and seal off tunnels that could allow Hamas to rearm.

At the United Nations, Arab countries were drafting a resolution to demand an immediate end to "Israeli aggression."

Hamas, which wants to reverse the events of 1948 that created the Jewish state and turned Palestinians into refugees, won a parliamentary election in 2006. It routed rival forces loyal to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Gaza in 2007, creating a schism that has blighted Abbas' bid to found a Palestinian state through U.S.-brokered talks with Israel.

U.S. President George W. Bush, in his final weeks in the White House, blamed Hamas for provoking bloodshed and said any ceasefire must include provisions to stop its rocket attacks.

"Instead of caring about the people of Gaza, Hamas decided to use Gaza to use rockets to kill innocent Israelis," he said.

With Bush's successor Barack Obama shying away from taking a public stand on the violence, Sarkozy and other Europeans have seen an opportunity to intervene, but to little result.

U.S. security analyst Anthony Cordesman said Obama's silence and Bush's refusal to join EU and Arab leaders in demanding that Israel cease fire immediately had turned the latest fighting into a strategic liability for the United States; by irking U.S. allies and complicating U.S. security concerns in the region.

Saudi Arabia, key oil producer and a bulwark for U.S. interests, said the international community should do more to stop Israeli "barbarity" and should not ignore the history of its occupation and settlement of Palestinian territories.

While noting the difficulties of resolving the conflict, Cordesman of Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies said: "Israel cannot achieve peace or even political stability by turning Gaza into even more of a defeated, hopeless Palestinian prison camp ... For all the talk of a 'peace process', however, history has been more of a 'war process'."

(Additional reporting by Douglas Hamilton on the Israel-Gaza border, Dan Williams, Adam Entous and Joseph Nasr in Jerusalem and Wafa Amr in Ramallah; writing by Angus MacSwan and Alastair Macdonald in Jerusalem; editing by Andrew Roche)

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(Additional reporting by Douglas Hamilton on the Israel-Gaza border, Dan Williams, Adam Entous and Joseph Nasr in Jerusalem and Wafa Amr in Ramallah; writing by Angus MacSwan and Alastair Macdonald in Jerusalem; editing by Andrew Roche)

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France's Sarkozy calls for Gaza ceasefire

Mon Jan 5, 2009 12:48pm EST

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Jan 5 (Reuters) - French President Nicolas Sarkozy, on a peacemaking mission to the Middle East, called on Monday for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas fighters in the Gaza Strip "as soon as possible".

Addressing a news conference in Ramallah with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Sarkozy said the European Union was working to support efforts to end the bloodshed. He said he would tell Israeli leaders later in the day that the violence must stop. He also condemned Hamas for its attacks on Israel.

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Iran tells Egypt it is ready to help Gaza wounded

Mon Jan 5, 2009 5:05am EST

TEHRAN (Reuters) - Iran has told Egypt it is ready to treat people wounded in the Israeli assault on Gaza and is seeking permission to set up a field hospital nearby, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said Monday.

Iranian officials have condemned Israel for its attacks and expressed support for the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, criticizing what they say is the silence of some Arab states.

Egypt, the only Arab state to border Gaza, has been a focus for protests by hardline Iranians who say Cairo has not done enough to help the Palestinians. Egypt has partly blamed Hamas for the violence because it failed to renew a truce with Israel.

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki wrote to his Egyptian counterpart Sunday outlining Iran's offer to treat wounded people from Gaza, ministry spokesman Hassan Qashqavi told a news conference in Tehran.

He said the letter expressed "Iran's readiness for receiving and treating the wounded at hospitals."

Qashqavi said the letter also "asked for the cooperation of Egypt for setting up an Islamic Republic field hospital and its medical team on the nearest point to Gaza at the recommendation of the Egyptian government."

"We are awaiting response to this demand," he said.

Israel launched aerial bombardments on December 27 to curtail Hamas rocket attacks from Gaza then sent in ground troops on Saturday. At least 512 Palestinians have been killed, at least a quarter of them civilians, a U.N. agency said.

Iran does not recognize Israel's right to exist and does not have full relations with Egypt, the first Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel.

Egypt sometimes allows wounded people and medical supplies through its border with the Gaza Strip but the crossing has been closed to ordinary traffic since Hamas seized control of the territory in 2007.

(Reporting by Hossein Jaseb; writing by Edmund Blair; editing by Andrew Dobbie)

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Zawahri urges attacks on Israeli, Western targets

Tue Jan 6, 2009 5:25pm EST

DUBAI (Reuters) - Al Qaeda's second-in-command, in an Internet message, called on Muslims on Tuesday to strike Western and Israeli targets around the world over Israel's Gaza raids, and accused U.S. President-elect Barack Obama of complicity.

"Hit the interests of the Zionists and crusaders wherever and in whichever way you can," Ayman al-Zawahri said in an audio tape posted on Islamist websites.

"What you are facing now ... is a link in a chain in the Zionist crusader campaign on Muslims and Islam," Zawahri said. "These attacks are Obama's present to you (Palestinians) before he takes office."

Zawahri said the Gaza attacks had exposed Obama whom he said "the U.S. lying (propaganda) machine had tried to portray to the world as a savior who would change U.S. policy."

Obama, breaking his silence about the fighting between Israeli troops and Palestinian militants, expressed deep concern on Tuesday about civilian deaths in Gaza and in Israel and vowed to push for Middle East peace when he takes power.

"We are keen to realize the vow of our Sheikh Osama bin Laden ... that America or anyone living there won't be able to even dream of security until we truly experience it in Palestine and until all infidel armies leave the lands of (Prophet) Mohammad," Zawahri said, citing a bin Laden message in 2001.

Zawahri, an Egyptian, blasted Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak as a "traitor" for failing to back Palestinians in the face of Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip.

He called for mass strikes in Egypt and said Suleiman Khater, an Egyptian conscript who shot dead seven Israeli tourists in Sinai in 1985, was "an example to follow for the zealous and free in the Egyptian army."

The 10-minute audio tape, produced by al Qaeda's media arm As-Sahab, was part of a video showing a still photograph of Zawahri with an assault rifle on his lap and that of a Palestinian child receiving emergency treatment after apparently being wounded in the Israeli attacks which have killed more than 630 people.

(Reporting by Firooz Sedarat and Inal Ergan)

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Venezuela expels Israel envoy over Gaza attacks

Tue Jan 6, 2009 4:45pm EST

CARACAS (Reuters) - Venezuela expelled the ambassador to Israel on Tuesday in protest over the offensive in Gaza only hours after leftist President Hugo Chavez called the attacks a Palestinian "holocaust."

The socialist Chavez, a harsh critic of Israel and the United States, in recent years has frequently withdrawn Venezuela's diplomatic envoys amid bilateral disputes and last year kicked out the U.S. ambassador over a conflict involving allied Bolivia.

The OPEC nation's Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Israel's campaign constituted "flagrant violations of International Law" and the use of "state terrorism."

"For the reasons mentioned above, the government of Venezuela has decided to expel the Ambassador of Israel and part of the personnel of the Embassy of Israel," the statement said.

The Israeli embassy did not respond to phone calls requesting comment.

Chavez in 2006 threatened to break ties with Israel over its military campaign in Lebanon in a war of words that led both nations to withdraw their envoys.

On Monday he accused Washington of poisoning the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to destabilize the Middle East and justify U.S.-backed Israeli incursions into Arab countries.

Israel is under international pressure to reach a ceasefire with Hamas militants and halt an offensive that has killed nearly 600 Palestinians, including more than 40 in a U.N. school sheltering civilians.

"The Holocaust, that is what is happening right now in Gaza," Chavez said in televised comments earlier on Tuesday.

"The president of Israel at this moment should be taken to the International Criminal Court together with the President of the United States."

The United States, which Chavez describes as a decadent empire, firmly backs Israel -- its principal ally in the region.

(Reporting by Brian Ellsworth; Editing by Sandra Maler)

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US calls for immediate, durable Gaza ceasefire

Tue Jan 6, 2009 11:13am EST
(Adds quotes, background)

WASHINGTON, Jan 6 (Reuters) - The United States signaled some flexibility on Tuesday by saying it would like to see "an immediate ceasefire" in Gaza but said any such agreement must be durable, sustainable and indefinite.

U.S. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack also said Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's trip to the United Nations on Tuesday was designed to show that the United States was open a variety of ways to achieve a ceasefire.

"We would like an immediate ceasefire, absolutely," McCormack told reporters, speaking after Israeli tank shells killed at least 40 Palestinians at a U.N. school where civilians had taken shelter. "An immediate ceasefire that is durable, sustainable and not time-limited."

"We want, obviously, to be constructive," he added. "(Rice) going up there is to signal that we are making every possible diplomatic effort to try to bring about a ceasefire on the terms that we have outlined. We are open to a variety of different formats to bring that about."

The spokesman's comments, however, stopped short of a demand that Israel cease its offensive in the Mediterranean coastal strip.

More than 600 Palestinians have been killed and more than 2,700 have been wounded since Israel began the campaign last month with the declared aim of ending Hamas rocket attacks on its southern towns. Nine Israelis, including three civilians hit by rocket fire, have been killed in the conflict.

At least five rockets fired from the Gaza Strip landed in Israel on Tuesday, including one that hit the town of Gadera, 28 km (17 miles) from Tel Aviv, police said. A three-year-old girl was wounded.

International efforts already under way to end the fighting have focused on securing a ceasefire deal that would meet an Israeli demand to ensure Hamas, an Islamist group in charge of the Gaza Strip, could not rearm once hostilities end. (Reporting by Arshad Mohammed and Andrew Sullivan, Editing by Frances Kerry)

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Spirit of solidarity sidelines Palestinian split

Tue Jan 6, 2009 1:05pm EST
By Wafa Amr

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Jan 6 (Reuters) - Israel's offensive on Gaza appears to be creating a mood of unity on the streets of the West Bank that the leaders of hostile Palestinian factions have been unable to obtain in months of negotiation.

It is not the formal entente they say they are searching for, but it is a grassroots solidarity of suffering that some feel exposes how artificial is the split in Palestinian ranks at the level of the political leadership.

On Tuesday, angry Palestinians in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah protested, chanting: "Today Gaza is under fire, tomorrow it will be the West Bank."

Slogans called for an end to the schism between President Mahmoud Abbas' secular Fatah faction and Islamist rival Hamas, winner of a 2006 parliamentary election. Since fighting in 2007, the two now control the West Bank and Gaza Strip respectively.

Abbas and his allies are ready to negotiate peace with Israel after 60 years in return for an end to occupation and an Arab state that would live side by side with the Jewish state, in mutual security.

Hamas has refused to recognise Israel's right to exist and its leaders call on all to join their resistance platform.

Some analysts say Israel is content to have Palestinians divided, and doubt that there would be serious progress towards a peace deal with them if Islamist hardliners were brought back into the fold.

Non-stop television pictures of charred corpses and children's body parts plucked from the smoking rubble of bombed buildings are shocking West Bank Palestinians.

Israel's 11-day offensive has killed 600 of their people, including many civilians. And it has sidelined the once all-engrossing Fatah-Hamas schism, for the time being at least.

Some blame Hamas for allowing the situation to reach such a destructive state, but others praise Hamas fighters for their courage in confronting Israeli troops.

"People in the West Bank sympathise with the civilians in Gaza who get killed, not with Hamas," said Lama Hourani of Ramallah.

"People here are aware that Israel's aim is not to destroy Hamas but to destroy the will of the Palestinian people everywhere. That is why people here call for unity."

A shopkeeper in Qatqilya had a different view.

"Hamas has succeeded in winning the people's support during this war," Fathi Abdel-AJ said. Hamas was winning the peoples' hearts for resisting Israel's military might.

Some Palestinians, however, recalled the widespread destruction of West Bank cities during the Israeli invasion of 2002, when the late Yasser Arafat came under siege in his Ramallah compound. They fear it could happen again.

Since the Israeli offensive began Hamas leaders have threatened to resume suicide bombing attacks in Israeli cities.

But some Palestinian analysts doubt they will do that.

"Sometimes such threats are media-oriented, and sometimes it has to do

with local abilities," Hamas lawmaker Ayman Daraghmeh told Reuters.

"I also see that the world is seeing pictures of the Palestinian people as victims ... maybe any martyrdom attack now could alter this image."

(Additional reporting by Ali Sawafta in Ramallah, Haitham Tamimi in Hebron, Naim Sweilem in Qalqiyah and Atef Saad in Nablus; Editing by Douglas Hamilton)

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Sarkozy says may be close to deal on Gaza

Tue Jan 6, 2009 12:27pm EST

(Incorporates PALESTINIANS-ISRAEL/SARKOZY-SYRIA)

By Francois Murphy

TIRI, Lebanon, Jan 6 (Reuters) - French President Nicolas Sarkozy said on Tuesday a deal to end the Israeli offensive in Gaza was "not far" away and asked Syria to help convince Hamas to cooperate in ending the conflict.

"I'm convinced that there are solutions. We are not far from that. What is needed is simply for one of the players to start for things to go in the right direction," Sarkozy told reporters during a visit to French U.N. peacekeepers in south Lebanon.

Shuttling around the Middle East for a second day, Sarkozy headed to Sharm el-Sheikh to meet Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to work out the details of a peace plan.

"I do not know if it will work. I am telling you that I am trying and if I am going back there (Sharm el-Sheikh) it is because there is a small hope," he said.

During a visit to Damascus, Sarkozy urged Syria to put pressure on its ally Hamas to support a compromise to halt violence that has killed at least 629 Palestinians and nine Israelis since December 27.

"I am convinced that Syria can provide an important contribution in seeking a solution," Sarkozy said after talks with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Syria's ties with France and other European states have improved since Damascus helped defuse a political crisis in Lebanon last year.

"President Assad can play a role. He must convince Hamas to make the choice of reason, of peace and reconciliation," Sarkozy said. Assad said any initiative must stop what he described as Israel's war crimes in Hamas-run Gaza and lift the blockade of the besieged territory.

Diplomats in the Syrian capital said France wanted Syria to exert its influence with Hamas to make sure any ceasefire sticks, but Syria has been careful not to be seen as acting as a guardian of Israel's security.

Israel launched its offensive with the stated aim of halting rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. Sarkozy said any ceasefire must include "serious guarantees" for the security of Israel and halt the attacks.

The French president earned wide praise during his country's tenure of the rotating six-month EU presidency last year for brokering a ceasefire between Russia and Georgia.

In Jerusalem, Sarkozy emphasised the need to improve the humanitarian conditions in Gaza, after meeting Israeli officials and calling for a ceasefire.

"I hope that today European non-governmental organisations will enter Gaza, that there will be humanitarian corridors and medicine (deliveries)," he said.

More than 2,700 Palestinians have been wounded since Israel began its campaign to put an end to Hamas rocket attacks on its southern towns. (Additional reporting by Khaled Yacoub Oweis in Damascus; editing by Andrew Roche)

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Rice in New York to discuss Gaza ceasefire

Tue Jan 6, 2009 5:42pm EST

By Arshad Mohammed

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice flew to New York on Tuesday to discuss with key powers how to get a ceasefire in Gaza that the United States says must be durable, sustainable and indefinite.

Rice was to meet foreign ministers gathering for a United Nations Security Council meeting on ending the Israeli offensive launched last month with the stated aim of stopping Palestinian rocket attacks on civilians in southern Israel.

More than 600 Palestinians have been killed and at least 2,700 wounded since Israel began its campaign in Gaza, which is controlled by the Hamas Islamist group. Nine Israelis, including three civilians hit by rocket fire, have died.

"We would like an immediate ceasefire, absolutely, an immediate ceasefire that is durable and sustainable and non-time-limited," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters at his daily briefing.

While some of the United States' allies in Europe and in the Arab world have called for an immediate ceasefire, the United States has tended to steer away from the phrase and to stress that any cessation must be durable and indefinite.

The Bush administration has consistently supported Israel's right to defend itself against Palestinian rocket attacks from Gaza and McCormack's comments stopped well short of calling on Israel to halt its offensive.

The Bush administration is pressing for a ceasefire that would include three elements: a halt to rocket attacks from Gaza, the opening of border crossings into the territory and an end to smuggling into the area through tunnels from Egypt.

"There is some degree of coalescing around those elements," McCormack told reporters, playing down expectations that a Security Council resolution would emerge quickly and saying that there were still "a lot of details" to be worked out.

"It's going to be hard for us to support anything that doesn't deal with those three elements," said another U.S. official who spoke on condition that he not be named. "There isn't a whole lot of flexibility here."

Under an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire in June, Hamas agreed to halt rocket fire in return for Israel easing the blockade. Israel began its offensive on December 27 after Hamas declared an end to that truce.

Barack Obama, who takes over as U.S. president from George W. Bush on January 20, broke his silence about the violence on Tuesday, saying the loss of civilian lives in Gaza and in Israel was a "source of deep concern for me."

He declined further comment, saying he believed that only Bush should be the voice of U.S. foreign policy for now.

RENEGOTIATING CEASEFIRE?

Israel tightened its blockade of Gaza after Hamas seized control of the region in 2007. Israel's frequent closure of Gaza's border crossings increased hardships for the aid-dependent territory's 1.5 million residents.

Martin Indyk, a top U.S. diplomat under U.S. President Bill Clinton and the author of "Innocent Abroad: An Intimate Account of American Peace Diplomacy in the Middle East," said Hamas and Israel were "both using force to try to improve the conditions of the ceasefire."

He said Hamas wanted an easing of the blockade, while Israel wanted to stop the rocket fire and to ensure tighter controls to prevent arms smuggling

into Gaza.

"Without a diplomatic alternative the chances that the conflict will spiral down ... is very real now," he added. "The Israeli army is surrounding major population centers ... if they go in there the casualties will be higher on both sides."

Rice tentatively decided on Monday to attend the U.N. session in New York, McCormack said, before Israeli tank shells killed at least 40 Palestinians on Tuesday at a U.N. school in Gaza where civilians had taken shelter.

U.S. officials said Rice's U.N. trip in part aimed to blunt possible accusations that the United States was indifferent to the suffering of Gazans had she stayed away.

Security Council diplomats said it would take at least several days to prepare a ceasefire resolution for a vote.

"The end of this week at the earliest, more likely next week," one diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

The Arabs are advocating an immediate halt to the fighting, diplomats said, while U.S. officials have made clear they did not back a ceasefire without mechanisms to prevent rocket attacks against Israel and the smuggling of weapons into Gaza.

Once an agreement on those mechanisms is reached -- and it must be acceptable to Israel -- that deal would form the basis of a Security Council resolution which the French will most likely draft and negotiate, the diplomats said.

(Additional reporting by Caren Bohan, Matt Spetalnick and Andrew Sullivan in Washington and Louis Charbonneau at the United Nations; Editing by)

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Rice gives US support to Mubarak proposal on Gaza

Tue Jan 6, 2009 6:56pm EST
(Adds more quotes, details)

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 6 (Reuters) - U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Tuesday gave U.S. backing to a proposal by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

"We need urgently to conclude a ceasefire that can endure and that can bring real security," Rice told the U.N. Security Council. "In this regard we are pleased by and wish to commend the statement of the president of Egypt and to follow up on that initiative," she added.

But Rice made clear the United States insisted on a ceasefire that was "durable and sustainable" and would not result in a return to the situation on the ground before Israel launched its air and ground offensive 11 days ago in response to Hamas firing rockets deep into the Jewish state.

"A ceasefire that returns to those circumstances is unacceptable and will not last," said Rice.

A senior U.S. official said while the United States backed Mubarak's initiative, including his invitation to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to work together on a ceasefire, the United States would not back down on its basic principles of a ceasefire.

The Bush administration is pressing for a ceasefire that would include three elements: a halt to rocket attacks from Gaza, the opening of border crossings into the territory and an end to smuggling into the area through tunnels from Egypt.

Rice, who leaves office in less than two weeks, called for global efforts to rebuild Gaza and called for an international donors conference to tackle the challenge.

"The United States remains deeply concerned about innocent Palestinians and Israelis who are suffering. In that regard, let me assure you, we understand the urgency of an end to the fighting and that we are working around the clock to bring an end to the violence," she said. (Reporting by Sue Fleming, editing by Jackie Frank)

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France pushes for Gaza truce at U.N.

Mon Jan 5, 2009 6:51pm EST

By Louis Charbonneau

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - France stepped up its push for a ceasefire in Gaza by drafting a U.N. Security Council resolution on Monday demanding a truce but Israel vowed to continue military action until Hamas stops firing rockets.

Discussions between French, Arab and other Western U.N. delegations at the United Nations intensified as Israeli forces continued to pound Gaza in an offensive to halt Hamas rocket fire against southern Israel from the Palestinian territory.

Diplomats said the French draft resolution would include elements that Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Malki and Arab League chief Amr Moussa described after meeting with Arab ministers and diplomats -- and U.N. officials -- in New York.

Malki told reporters that Arab countries wanted a resolution demanding an immediate end to "Israeli aggression" in Gaza and calling for the deployment of international monitors who would police any ceasefire agreement.

Moussa also said the Arabs did not want to explicitly condemn Hamas militants, whose rocket attacks Israel and the United States say sparked the present crisis.

Ambassador Jean-Maurice Ripert of France, the current Security Council president, said, "We will do our best to have a resolution as soon as possible, and as soon as feasible."

Israel rejects the idea of observers in Gaza but European diplomats say the Jewish state can be persuaded to accept it.

The Israeli army launched an attack on Hamas positions in Gaza last month after the group ended a six-month ceasefire.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner and British Foreign Secretary David Miliband are among Western officials attending a special council session on Gaza on Tuesday, along with some half a dozen Arab ministers, U.N. diplomats said.

ISRAEL: NO CEASEFIRE RESOLUTION YET

Israel's U.N. Ambassador Gabriela Shalev said there was no point in the Security Council passing any ceasefire resolution while Hamas militants continued to fire rockets at Israel.

"The situation will be ripe for a ceasefire whenever Hamas will stop shooting the rockets and we will have guarantees that there is going to be a comprehensive package to ensure a long-term ceasefire," she told Reuters in an interview.

She said this must include an end to rocket attacks against Israel and weapons smuggling into Gaza. She also rejected the idea of a resolution treating Israel and Hamas, which does not recognize Israel's right to exist, as equal parties.

"We cannot be put on the same level as a terrorist organization -- Hamas," she said.

Shalev said Israel was aware of the difficulties facing the 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza, most of whom depend on aid.

"But we must take care of the people in the southern part of Israel," she said.

Malki and Moussa said they hoped the council would pass a ceasefire resolution when it meets on Tuesday. But U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad said he cautioned Arab ministers and diplomats during a closed-door meeting against "false expectations" of immediate council action.

"We want this conflict to end as quickly as possible," he told reporters. "But in order to get an enduring resolution ... practical arrangements have to be put in place in which everyone has confidence it will be maintained."

Among those, he said, should be mechanisms to prevent the rearming of Hamas through the smuggling of arms into Gaza.

British Ambassador John Sawers said there would be "a lot of intensive diplomacy over the next 48 hours." Other Western envoys said the soonest a resolution might come was Wednesday.

(Editing by Cynthia Osterman)

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Red Cross urges Israel to ease Gaza medical crisis

Tue Jan 6, 2009 7:45am EST

By Stephanie Nebehay

GENEVA (Reuters) - The International Committee of the Red Cross urged Israel on Tuesday to allow speedier access for ambulances to evacuate the wounded in Gaza which it said was mired in a "full-blown" humanitarian crisis.

The neutral agency also said it had unconfirmed reports that a Palestinian Red Crescent ambulance station had been hit overnight in Jabaliya, site of a refugee camp.

"We are dealing with a full-blown major crisis in humanitarian terms. The situation of the people in Gaza is extreme and traumatic...", Pierre Kraehenbuehl, ICRC director of operations, told a news briefing in Geneva.

"We call on the parties, in particular on Israel, to do more to allow the Palestinian Red Crescent and other medical workers to carry out their work and save lives," he said.

The movement of ambulances and aid workers remains extremely difficult and dangerous despite a "stated willingness of Israeli authorities to facilitate the conduct of humanitarian activities," according to the Swiss aid veteran.

Access to medical care in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip was worsening by the day, he said. Two hospitals were about to run out of fuel for their generators, their only source of power.

"Many people in Gaza don't get emergency medical care they need. Some are even dying because the ambulances can't reach them in time, which is frankly appalling," Kraehenbuehl said.

Israel and Palestinian authorities must make every effort to "keep civilians out of the firing line," he said.

Between 580 and 600 people have been killed in the 11-day-old conflict, and some 3,000 wounded, he said, although the ICRC had not separately verified the figures.

Four Israelis had also been killed and 60 injured by rocket attacks launched from Gaza into southern Israel, he said.

Israel launched its offensive after Hamas called off a six-month truce last month and stepped up rocket attacks in response to Israeli raids and a blockade of the Gaza Strip.

ICRC officials in Gaza had reported that the past night had been "the most frightening of all to date," Kraehenbuehl said.

The Geneva-based agency had no information that Palestinian civilians were being used as human shields -- as alleged by Israel, which says Hamas is firing rockets from densely populated areas and storing weapons in homes and mosques.

"Just as much as we are saying it is important that Israel take every measure to distinguish between civilian and military targets, it is important to underline the fact that it is prohibited under international humanitarian law to place these military objectives in the midst of civilians," he said.

(Editing by Jonathan Lynn and Giles Elgood)

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Obama breaks silence on Gaza, voices concern

Tue Jan 6, 2009 1:59pm EST
(Adds quotes, background)

By Steve Holland

WASHINGTON, Jan 6 (Reuters) - U.S. President-elect Barack Obama, breaking his silence about the Gaza war, expressed deep concern on Tuesday about civilian deaths in Gaza and in Israel and vowed to push for Middle East peace when he takes power.

Speaking after Israeli tank shells killed at least 40 Palestinians at a U.N. school where civilians had taken shelter, Obama said "the loss of civilian life in Gaza and in Israel is a source of deep concern for me."

Obama otherwise said he would adhere to his principle that only U.S. President George W. Bush would speak for American foreign policy at this time, but said he would have plenty more to say after his Jan. 20 inauguration.

He expressed deep concern about the conflict but made no mention of a "durable, sustainable and not time-limited" ceasefire sought by the Bush administration.

Nonetheless, he gave his most extensive comments about the Gaza conflict, responding to criticism from some commentators in the region that he had been too quiet about a top foreign policy challenge that will greet him as soon as he walks into the White House.

Obama was accused by critics both of siding with Israel with his silence or of failing to stand with the Jewish state as it seeks to repel rocket attacks from the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

Speaking to reporters, Obama pledged to work for a resolution to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an issue that has bedeviled several American presidents.

"After Jan. 20 I'm going to have plenty to say about the issue, and I am not backing away at all from what I said during the campaign, that starting at the beginning of our administration, we are going to be engaged effectively and consistently in trying to resolve the conflict in the Middle East," he said. "That's something I am committed to."

Until then, he said, his job is to monitor the situation, and his aides are keeping him constantly up to date on developments.

(Reporting by Steve Holland, Editing by Sandra Maler)

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Israeli troops widen and deepen push into Gaza

Tue Jan 6, 2009 2:06am EST

* Israeli ground offensive widens to south Gaza * Three Israeli soldiers killed by "friendly fire" * 18 Palestinians killed on Tuesday * Sarkozy on Middle East peace mission

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA, Jan 6 (Reuters) - Israeli forces pressed closer and into cities in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday despite new international calls for a ceasefire in an 11-day-old conflict in which hundreds of Palestinians have been killed.

Palestinian witnesses said Israeli forces moved into Khan Younis in southern Gaza as the army widened the ground assault it launched four days ago against Hamas militants after a week of air strikes failed to stamp out cross-border rocket fire.

There was intense fighting overnight on the outskirts of the city of Gaza, where residents huddled indoors in fear. Deaths recorded by Palestinian medics reached 564.

Most of several dozen deaths reported by hospitals in recent days have been civilians, apparently because dead militants remain on the battlefield. The Israeli military said it had killed 130 militants since Saturday -- an indication that the total Palestinian death toll since Dec. 27 may be close to 700.

Israel's military said three soldiers were killed and 24 were wounded on Monday when an Israeli tank fired at a building in northern Gaza that they had occupied in fighting against the Islamist Hamas group, which seized control of Gaza in 2007.

The "friendly fire" incident caused the military's highest casualty toll since Israel launched its offensive. Eight Israelis, including four civilians hit in Palestinian rocket attacks, have been killed in the conflict.

Palestinian medics said 18 Palestinian civilians were killed on Tuesday, including 10 people who were hit by naval shells along the beach in the central Gaza Strip.

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said the assault could get harder for troops. Hamas, vowing to fight on in every street and alley, threatened to fire more rockets across into Israel.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, on a peace mission to the Middle East, and U.S. President George W. Bush, in his final weeks in the White House, both appealed for a ceasefire.

But disagreement on who should stop shooting first and on what terms made the chances of a quick truce seem remote.

Israel, whose leaders fight a parliamentary poll on Feb. 10, made clear its priority was securing the safety of its citizens. Hamas demanded a lifting of Israel's blockade of Gaza. Many of the enclave's 1.5 million people lack food, water or power.

The Jewish state launched the offensive after Hamas called off a six-month truce last month and stepped up cross-border rocket attacks in response to Israeli raids and the blockade.

SUICIDE BOMBERS

Israeli media reported that Hamas gunmen were manoeuvring within a well-fortified tunnel system and that Israeli troops had encountered Palestinian suicide bombers.

Militants had been trying to lure Israeli soldiers into built-up areas,

witnesses said.

An overnight Israeli air strike in the southern Gaza town of Rafah killed a Palestinian woman, medical officials said.

Barak told Israeli legislators on Monday Hamas had been dealt a heavy blow: "But we cannot say that its fighting capabilities have been harmed ... Difficult moments lie ahead in this operation and the main test could still be ahead," he said.

Hamas leaders, who have support from Iran and Syria but are viewed with suspicion by most Arab states, were defiant.

Thousands of fighters were waiting "in every street, every alley and at every house" to tackle the Israeli forces, Hamas military spokesman Abu Ubaida said in a broadcast speech.

Hamas would increase its rocket strikes on Israel if the Jewish state kept on attacking Gaza, said Ubaida.

Hamas, which wants to reverse the events of 1948 that created the Jewish state and turned Palestinians into refugees, won a parliamentary election in 2006.

It routed rival forces loyal to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in 2007, taking control of Gaza and creating a schism that has blighted Abbas's bid to found a Palestinian state through U.S.-brokered talks with Israel.

Israel pulled its troops and more than 8,000 settlers out of Gaza in 2005 after 38 years of occupation in a move that many at the time hoped would lead to a breakthrough for relations between Israel and the Palestinians. (Writing by Ari Rabinovitch; Editing by Ralph Gowling)

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Israel under pressure at UN to halt Gaza assault

Tue Jan 6, 2009 7:51pm EST
(Adds Kouchner on Israeli response, Israel's envoy, details)

By Louis Charbonneau

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 6 (Reuters) - Foreign ministers from U.N. Security Council members and Arab states piled pressure on Israel on Tuesday to end its 11-day attack on the Gaza Strip as the number of civilian deaths there continued to mount.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, presiding over a special Security Council meeting on the Gaza crisis, called for an immediate ceasefire that would also ensure an end to Palestinian rocket attacks against southern Israel and the smuggling of weapons from Egypt into Gaza for Hamas militants.

He said France expected Israel's response on Wednesday to a ceasefire proposal announced by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak after a meeting with French President Nicolas Sarkozy and "we harbor hope that it will be a positive one."

The Mubarak announcement received explicit backing from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Israeli U.N. Ambassador Gabriela Shalev made no reference to the proposal in her speech to the council.

Abbas' Fatah movement was ousted from Gaza in 2007 when Hamas, which does not recognize Israel's right to exist, seized control of the enclave. Gaza has some 1.5 million Palestinians, most of whom are dependent on some form of humanitarian aid.

Rice said it was crucial for Abbas' Palestinian Authority to re-establish its control over Gaza.

"Our goal must be the stabilization and normalization of life in Gaza," Rice said, adding that any ceasefire plan "has to be a solution that does not allow the rearmament of Hamas."

'PIECES OF PAPER'

Libya has circulated several versions of a draft resolution that calls for a truce and criticizes Israel. Western diplomats said the text had little chance of passing.

Shalev was dismissive of the idea that the council was obligated to weigh in on the conflict. "The credibility of this council is measured not by the pieces of paper it issues, but by the values it upholds," she said.

Diplomats said negotiations in New York on a ceasefire resolution may have been overtaken by Mubarak's proposal, which calls for a limited initial truce to allow aid into Gaza and give time for Egypt to broker a permanent ceasefire.

Abbas criticized Israel for ignoring calls from around the globe for an end to its military campaign in Gaza -- and for the large number of civilian deaths it has caused.

"The Israeli machine of destruction continues to kill, to commit the most heinous of possible crimes despite international unanimity, an unprecedented unanimity in calling for an end of this massacre against innocent civilians that do not deserve such brutality," Abbas said.

Other top diplomats attending the council meeting were British Foreign Secretary David Miliband and senior Arab officials like Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal.

Earlier on Tuesday, Israeli fire killed at least 40 Palestinians at a U.N. school in Gaza where civilians had taken shelter. Israel said its troops were

returning fire from the school.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said attacks on schools were "totally unacceptable and should not be repeated." He said he would travel to Israel and the Palestinian territories next week to support efforts to end the crisis.

More than 600 Palestinians have been killed and at least 2,700 wounded since Israel began the campaign last month with the declared aim of ending rocket attacks by Hamas Islamist militants on its southern towns. Ten Israelis, including three civilians hit by rocket fire, have been killed. (Additional reporting by Sue Fleming and Claudia Parsons)

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Iran wants to show regional power over Gaza crisis

Tue Jan 6, 2009 9:39am EST

By Edmund Blair - Analysis

TEHRAN (Reuters) - Iran wants to send a message to the new U.S. administration and Arab governments that it is a power to be reckoned with in the region by championing the cause of its Palestinian ally, Hamas, in its fight with Israel.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, expected to seek re-election in June, may also have found a cause to muzzle criticism of his economic management and tumbling oil revenues, analysts say.

But Tehran's outspoken support for Hamas and criticism of the response by some Arab states could backfire if it wins over the Arab public, but, in doing so, pushes wary Arab governments closer toward the United States in its dispute with Iran.

Washington accuses Tehran of seeking a nuclear bomb, which Iran denies. The row is likely to be near the top of President-elect Barack Obama's foreign policy in-tray, though Gaza may now trump it bringing another benefit to Iran from the crisis.

"The message from the Iranians (to Washington) is there is give and take. We can help you in Afghanistan, we can help you in Iraq, we can help you with Lebanon and Palestine, if you have good relations with us," said Iranian analyst Baqer Moin.

"We are a regional power and you have to acknowledge that and talk to us on that level if you want us to be cooperative on issues where you need us," the London-based analyst said.

Gaza's plight -- more than 560 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli attacks -- has drawn sympathy from Iranians frustrated like many other Muslims at what they see as a limited international response to end fighting.

But hardliners have been most vocal backing the Palestinian cause, a pillar of the Islamic Republic since the revolution and a way Iran has fashioned itself a leader of the Muslim world although it is mainly Shi'ite and most Muslims are Sunni.

INFLUENCE

Israel accuses Iran of stoking the violence by supplying arms to Hamas. Tehran, which does not recognize Israel, says it gives moral and financial support to the group that has been isolated by much of the Arab world and international community.

Analysts say it is not clear whether Iran encouraged Hamas not to renew its truce with Israel in December or pushed it to fire the rockets that Israel says it is trying to stop.

But, whatever Iran's role, the violence has set back peace moves between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and Syria -- initiatives, analysts say, Iran fears may undermine its allies.

"They feel the way to maintain influence in this region is by having a strong Hezbollah and strong Hamas," said one Western diplomat, adding that if either Hamas's or Hezbollah's conflict with Israel were resolved "it would be a strategic catastrophe (for Iran)."

Iranian officials compare the battle Hamas is waging to Hezbollah's resistance to Israeli attacks in 2006. Iran claimed victory after the Lebanese group emerged battered but in tact.

Moin said the conflict in 2006 "must have encouraged Iranians that if Hamas stay put ... they are not going to lose."

Iran's top authority, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who wears a Palestinian scarf, has criticized some Arabs for not doing enough and urged Muslims to do what they can to help.

Hardline Iranians have demonstrated outside the Jordanian and Egyptian missions. Both have peace treaties with Israel.

'RISKY GAME'

But criticizing Arab governments carries risks. Tehran may win over an Arab public frustrated at their own governments, but it may make Arab leaders even more wary of Tehran.

"They wanted to use this (cause) to prevent any Shi'ite-Sunni rift in the region, and to put some pressure on Sunni governments not to be too antagonistic to Iran. You could argue that the result is the complete opposite," said the diplomat.

An Iranian analyst said: "It is a very risky game. Arab governments would realize they have to take Iran very seriously but at the same time it could push them toward the United States if they gradually ... lose support of their own people."

The Gaza crisis has offered a diversion for Ahmadinejad whose government is likely to have to cut spending in this presidential election year after oil prices fell from \$147 a barrel in July to below \$50, slashing Iran's main source of revenue.

"You see how radicals and Ahmadinejad are using this to divert attention from the economic situation to prevent critics from opposing the government," said the diplomat.

Tehran University professor Hamidreza Jalaiepour said Israel's actions were playing into the hands of hardliners in Iran and the region, pushing moderates "to the margins."

But he said falling oil earnings could, in the longer run, push Iran to moderate its foreign policy because it will have less cash to splash out on its favored regional causes.

"Reducing revenues of a state would certainly influence foreign policy, especially those countries that have policies ... based on slogans and populism," Jalaiepour said.

(Editing by Samia Nakhoul)

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France nervous of Gaza violence spillover

Tue Jan 6, 2009 8:13am EST

By James Mackenzie

PARIS, Jan 6 (Reuters) - French officials condemned a petrol bomb attack on a synagogue in the southern city of Toulouse on Monday night which triggered fears that anger over Israel's offensive in Gaza could spill over into violence in France.

Interior Minister Michele Alliot-Marie described the action, in which two cars packed with petrol bombs were launched at the doors of the synagogue, as "particularly stupid and revolting".

"What I want to avoid above all is that a worrying international situation should be transposed onto our national territory," she said.

No one was hurt in the attack, which took place as about a dozen people were attending a class with a rabbi, but it underlined fears of a repeat of attacks against Jewish people and property in France after past Israeli offensives.

Clashes between police and pro-Palestinian demonstrators at a rally in Paris on Saturday had already raised the spectre of the riots in the run-down "banlieues" that shook France in 2005.

More than a dozen cars were overturned and several others were torched as mainly younger demonstrators took on riot police and firefighters in the streets near some of the biggest department stores in the French capital.

France is home to Europe's largest Muslim community but many young people from North African immigrant families still complain of discrimination. There have been concern that broader social frustrations could be fuelled by the crisis in Gaza.

"I am extremely worried about the way in which some people want to encourage a part of the population or young people in particular to replay in France conflicts that are taking place thousands of kilometres away," Dominique Sopo, president of the SOS Racism association told France Info radio.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy completed a visit to the region on Tuesday in a bid to encourage a ceasefire between Israel and the militant Hamas group.

But despite his condemnation of Israel's land offensive in Gaza, he remains deeply unpopular with many young people of Arab origin for his perceived hardline stance as interior minister before he became president.

Many of the demonstrators on Saturday chanted "Sarko accomplice" as they denounced the Israeli attacks on Gaza.

"Vigilance at all levels is pretty much the government's attitude on this," government spokesman Luc Chatel said on LCI Television on Tuesday.

(Editing by Sophie Hardach)

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France asks Syria to help end Gaza conflict

Tue Jan 6, 2009 11:25am EST

By Khaled Yacoub Oweis

DAMASCUS (Reuters) - French President Nicolas Sarkozy asked Syria on Tuesday to help convince Hamas to cooperate in international efforts to end the Israeli assault in the Gaza Strip.

Sarkozy said that he expected Syria to play a role in a regional push for a ceasefire to halt the Israeli offensive on Gaza, which has killed 588 Palestinians since Dec 27.

"I know the importance of Syria in this region and its influence on a number of players. I don't have any doubt that President Bashar al-Assad will throw all his weight to convince every one to return to reason," Sarkozy said after meeting the Syrian president in Damascus.

"Those who can work for peace must do it immediately," said Sarkozy, who is on a peace-brokering tour in the Middle East.

Sarkozy said any ceasefire must provide "serious guarantees" for the security of Israel and the halt of rocket attacks from Gaza on Israel, the stated aim of Israel's offensive on Gaza.

The French president, who held talks with Israeli officials in Jerusalem on Monday, emphasized the need to improve the humanitarian conditions for Palestinians in Gaza. He also called for a ceasefire.

"I hope that today European non governmental organizations will enter Gaza, that there will be humanitarian corridors and medicine (deliveries)," said Sarkozy, who headed after his talks with Assad to Beirut for meetings with Lebanese officials.

Sarkozy will also stop in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh on his return flight to Paris for further talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Egyptian officials said.

Egypt has been critical of Hamas and helped Israel secure a blockade on Gaza.

Hamas officials said the U.S.-backed Egyptian government was one of the better placed regional players that could broker a truce despite the group's misgivings about Egypt.

Israel launched its offensive after Hamas called off a six-month truce last month and stepped up rocket attacks in response to Israeli raids and a blockade of the Gaza Strip.

More than 588 Palestinians have been killed and some 2,700 wounded in the 11-day conflict. Four Israelis had also been killed and 60 injured by rocket attacks launched from Gaza into southern Israel, he said.

Syria, along with Iran, is a main backer of Hamas and hosts members of the group's exiled leadership, including Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal.

Assad said that any initiative for a truce must stop what he described as Israel's war crimes in Hamas-run Gaza and lift the blockade in the besieged territory.

"The blockade is slow death. There will not be a ceasefire that holds if the blockade is not lifted," he said.

Diplomats in the Syrian capital said that France wanted Syria to exert its influence with Hamas to make sure that any ceasefire holds, but Syria has been careful not to be seen as acting as a guardian of Israel's security.

(Editing by Samia Nakhoul)

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Egypt announces Israel-Palestinian ceasefire plan

Tue Jan 6, 2009 4:44pm EST

By Aziz el-Kaissouni

SHARM EL-SHEIKH, Egypt (Reuters) - Egypt said on Tuesday it was proposing an immediate truce between Israel and the Palestinians in Gaza, to be followed by talks on long-term border arrangements and an end to the blockade of Gaza.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak presented the proposal in a brief statement after talks with French President Nicolas Sarkozy in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

The proposal made no mention of many of the elements which diplomats said were under discussion, such as an international force to prevent the Islamist group Hamas receiving weapons.

But a senior official in Sarkozy's office said that Egypt had told Israel the two countries could work together to make the border between Egypt and Gaza watertight.

Sarkozy then told Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert: "You have to say that in these conditions you are ready to accept a ceasefire, which means a withdrawal from Gaza, and you have to do it now," added the official, who asked not to be named.

"Olmert told Sarkozy: 'If Mubarak does that then I will immediately announce a ceasefire and a withdrawal in principle, but I want to open talks with Egypt on the Philadelphi corridor (along the border between Egypt and Gaza)'," the official said.

If Olmert makes that announcement, then Sarkozy will make a statement, as president of the U.N. Security Council, asking the council not to discuss any resolutions, he added.

Mubarak did not say what role Hamas would play in the talks he is proposing. Israel and the Europeans who have been active diplomatically do not talk to the Islamist group.

Mubarak said he was offering the proposal to end the bloodshed in Gaza, where Israeli forces have killed more than 600 people in 11 days of attacks, including at least 42 civilians in an attack on one school on Tuesday.

SARKOZY "CONFIDENT"

Sarkozy, who has been on a peacemaking mission in the Middle East for the last 36 hours, said: "I am confident that the Israeli authorities' reaction will make it possible to consider putting an end to put an end to the operation ... in Gaza."

The Egyptian proposal, as read by Mubarak, contained the following points:

- Israel and the Palestinian factions should accept an immediate ceasefire for a limited period, which would allow safe passages to open for humanitarian aid to Gaza and give Egypt time to continue its efforts for a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire.
- Egypt would invite both Israel and the Palestinian side to an urgent meeting to reach arrangements and guarantees to ensure that the current escalation does not recur and deal with the causes, including protecting the border, reopening the crossing points and lifting the blockade.
- Egypt would again invite the Palestinian Authority and all Palestinian factions to respond to Egyptian efforts to achieve national reconciliation.

At first sight the plan did not appear to meet Israel's demand for agreement on lasting arrangements before a truce starts.

The United States also said on Tuesday that its priority was that any ceasefire should be durable and indefinite, rather than that it be immediate, as Mubarak proposed.

The Egyptian initiative did meet Hamas's main condition for a ceasefire -- that Israel and Egypt should end the blockade they have imposed on Gaza since Hamas took control of the impoverished coastal strip in June 2007.

But the Islamist group might seek firmer guarantees that the blockade will end completely.

(Additional reporting by Francois Murphy; writing by Jonathan Wright; editing by Andrew Roche)

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Arab leaders can weather Gaza storm with ease

Tue Jan 6, 2009 11:25am EST

By Jonathan Wright - Analysis

CAIRO (Reuters) - Arab governments have weathered 10 days of public outrage at their passive response to the Israeli assault on Gaza and can easily survive as long as the Israeli operation takes, political analysts said.

Although hatred of Israel and sympathy for the Gaza Palestinians are widespread, only a minority of Islamists and other political activists are willing to come out on the streets and risk abuse at the hands of state security agents.

The governments, none of them democratically elected in free elections, have plenty of experience handling public anger at their inability to stop Israel or the United States using overwhelming military force against Arabs.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Israeli attempt to defeat Hezbollah in south Lebanon in 2006 are the two most recent examples of operations which brought Arabs out on the streets demanding that their governments take a stand.

In both cases Arab public opinion carried little weight with U.S., Israeli or Arab policymakers, despite dire warnings that Arab governments friendly with Washington might be in danger.

In the current conflict Arab leaders can sleep even sounder because they have had some success with their campaigns to discredit the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, which is bearing the brunt of the Israeli assault.

"More than half of the public accept the Egyptian idea that Hamas was irresponsible and was irrational... They are not going to fight, or take a stance against Egypt or Saudi Arabia," said Sateh Nouredin, columnist at the Lebanese newspaper as-Safir.

COUNTERATTACK

"The Arab public is outraged (at) the killings of children and women, old men, but other than that ... they are not interested in the future of Hamas," he told Reuters.

Walid Kazziha, professor of political science at the American University in Cairo, said the Egyptian government had made some progress in its aggressive defense of its position on the Gaza conflict and its appeals to nationalist sentiments.

The Egyptian government refuses to recognize the legitimacy of Hamas in Gaza and has cooperated in the Israeli blockade of the impoverished coastal strip, adding to the hardships there.

It has interpreted criticisms of its policy as attacks on the Egyptian nation, reviving the old argument that in four wars with Israel Egypt made great sacrifices for the Palestinians.

When an Egyptian officer was shot dead on the Gaza border last week, the Egyptian government blamed Hamas and the state media gave him and his family extensive coverage.

"They have been successful in turning public opinion against Hamas by invoking Egyptian nationalism," Kazziha said.

Issandr el-Amrani, Egypt and North Africa analyst at the International Crisis Group, said Egyptian public opinion on the Gaza conflict was much more divided than in 2006 when Israel was fighting Hezbollah, which won broad public support.

"For a start there has been a media campaign against Hamas for what it did in 2007 (when it drove rival Fatah forces out of Gaza). The second thing is that to a lot of Egyptians the idea of Hamas being a fundamental threat makes sense," he added.

POLICE DETER PROTESTS

Hamas has close ties with the Egyptian-based Muslim Brotherhood movement, the largest opposition force in the country. The government on the other hand shares the worldview of the rival Fatah movement, which controls the West Bank.

Although the Arab world has seen some big protests against the Israeli attacks on Gaza, Arab police forces have learnt how to handle demonstrations, whether by containing them physically or by rounding up the organizers in advance.

In Cairo, a city of more than 15 million people, the largest gathering against Israel's Gaza operation has not drawn more than a few thousands, less than protests in some Western capitals.

"The security services are trying to prevent any major organization (of protests), and also the group that can mobilize the most people, the Muslim Brotherhood, is willing to avoid all-out confrontation," Amrani said.

In Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy with no legal opposition or elected parliament, protests are banned and the authorities have tried to restrain popular reactions to Gaza.

Shi'ites in eastern Saudi Arabia said they held a protest last week that police broke up with rubber bullets and batons, while the government denied it took place.

A civil rights activist was detained last week for trying to hold a protest in Riyadh, associates say.

Saudi-owned Al Arabiya Television, which is widely watched throughout the Arab world, has come under attack on the grounds that it is biased against Hamas.

"Al Arabiya is Al Ibriya (the Hebrew Channel). It is an Israeli channel now," said preacher Mohsen al-Awajy, echoing a taunt by Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah.

(Additional reporting by Tom Perry to Beirut, Peter Graff in Baghdad, Lamine Ghanmi in Rabat; Editing by Samia Nakhoul)

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UN rights body calls special Gaza session

Wed Jan 7, 2009 12:54pm EST
(Updates with new sponsors of call for session, recasts)

GENEVA, Jan 7 (Reuters) - The United Nations Human Rights Council on Wednesday called a special session on Friday on the situation in the Gaza Strip at the request of Islamic and developing countries as well as Russia and China.

The formal request -- from 33 members of the 47-nation body -- says the session should discuss "the grave violations of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory including the recent aggression in the Occupied Gaza Strip."

Resolutions issued by the Council are not binding.

Many countries have expressed concern at the civilian deaths in Gaza where Israel has launched an offensive to end rocket attacks by Islamist militants. More than 640 Palestinians have been killed in the fighting, local medical officials said.

The meeting, expected to last only one day, will be the fifth aimed at condemning Israel out of the nine special sessions the Council has held in the 2-1/2 years since it was launched.

Over that period, the Council -- where a bloc of Islamic states backed by many African countries, Russia, China and Cuba holds an overwhelming majority -- has condemned Israel 20 times.

The only other countries to be strongly criticised have been Myanmar, four times, and North Korea, once. The Council has issued no condemnations of any countries in the majority bloc.

Argentina, Brazil and Chile, among developing countries on the Council that often take a more neutral position, were among signatories of the request for Friday's session. They were joined by Switzerland late on Wednesday.

European Union countries on the Council, Canada and South Korea did not immediately voice support for the request. The United States has only observer status and does not take part in the rights body's work. (Reporting by Robert Evans; Editing by Jonathan Lynn)

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Israel 'positive' but non-committal about Egyptian truce

Wed Jan 7, 2009 7:21am EST

JERUSALEM, Jan 7 (Reuters) - Israel said on Wednesday it viewed "positively" talks with Egypt over a proposal to halt fighting in the Gaza Strip but the Jewish state stopped short of accepting a ceasefire.

In a statement, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's office said Egypt was trying to find "a solution aimed at stopping terror attacks from Gaza as well as halting the smuggling of weapons to the Gaza Strip".

"Israel views positively dialogue between Egyptian and Israeli officials to advance those issues," the statement said, but it stopped short of saying whether Israel would accept a ceasefire.

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Islamic body says Israel school attack a war crime

Wed Jan 7, 2009 8:55am EST

RIYADH, Jan 7 (Reuters) - A top world Islamic body accused Israel on Wednesday of war crimes in its Gaza offensive and said it should face an international court after tank shells killed 42 Palestinians at a U.N. school.

"This is a brutal crime and a clear war crime, along with other attacks, and its perpetrators must not escape an international trial," Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, secretary-general of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) said in a statement.

The 57-nation OIC, based in Jeddah, represents over one billion Muslims. The body, whose charter dates back to the early 1970s when Islamic nations were divided along the lines of the Cold War, has little political power.

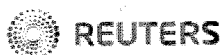
Israel acknowledged hitting a school run by a United Nations refugee aid agency where hundreds of people were taking refuge on Tuesday. Medics said 42 people were killed.

Israel says its offensive in Gaza since Dec. 27 aims to end rocket salvos into Israel by Islamist militants including Hamas, a faction that rules the Gaza Strip.

More than 600 Palestinians have been killed in the fighting. According to U.N. figures more than a quarter of the Palestinian dead are civilians. Israel has lost seven soldiers and three civilians in the conflict.

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Egypt floats truce plan, 42 killed in Gaza school

Wed Jan 7, 2009 2:48am EST

* Egypt makes U.S.-backed truce proposal, Israel interested

* Israeli forces kill 42 in school, Israel accuses Hamas

* Fighting dies down, Israel offers "humanitarian corridor"

* Al Qaeda's Zawahri urges Muslims to hit Western interests

By Nidal al-Mughhrabi

GAZA, Jan 7 (Reuters) - Israel and Hamas studied an Egyptian proposal for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday that won immediate backing from the United States and Europe, hours after Israeli shells killed 42 Palestinians at a U.N. school.

However, Israeli officials also said ministers would discuss a major escalation of their 12-day-old offensive that would push troops deep inside Gaza's cities and refugee camps in their bid to end rocket salvos into Israel by Islamist militants.

Isaac Herzog, a member of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's security cabinet which was to decide on Israel's next moves, said pictures of the scene at the Gaza school "would accelerate the diplomatic process" and the next two days would be critical.

A Palestinian official said Gaza's Hamas rulers, who want an end to Israel's blockade of the enclave, had been briefed in Egypt by President Hosni Mubarak and were debating the proposal. More than 600 Palestinians have been killed in the attacks.

In fresh fighting, five Palestinians were killed by Israeli tank fire in the northern Gaza Strip, medical workers said.

In New York, where the U.N. Security Council met on Gaza, Israeli Ambassador Gabriela Shalev told reporters, "I am sure that (Egypt's proposal) will be considered and you will find out whether it was accepted. But we take it very, very seriously."

Israel, which has lost seven soldiers and three civilians in the conflict, wants any end to hostilities to satisfy its demand that Hamas will no longer be able to smuggle weapons into the Gaza Strip through tunnels under the border with Egypt.

Mubarak made his ceasefire call at a joint news conference in Egypt with French President Nicolas Sarkozy. He gave little detail, but diplomats have described a process that would focus on bringing in foreign forces to seal the Egypt-Gaza border against Hamas arms smugglers while easing other trade routes.

Sarkozy, winding up a two-day tour of the Middle East, said, "I am confident the Israeli authorities' reaction will make it possible to consider putting an end to the operation in Gaza."

With Washington in a transition period ahead of the Jan. 20 inauguration of President-elect Barack Obama, France and its European partners, with backing from U.S. allies in the Arab world, have been pushing hard for Israel to cease fire.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice endorsed the Mubarak proposal and said a "sustainable" ceasefire should involve both closing off Hamas's ability to rearm through tunnels from Egypt and easing the lives of the 1.5 million people of the Gaza Strip by reopening trade routes.

"We need urgently to conclude a ceasefire that can endure and that can bring real security," Rice told the Security Council.

She welcomed an offer by Israel to open what it called a "humanitarian corridor" that would let aid agencies more easily distribute food and medicine around Gaza while it continues its military operation.

ISRAEL'S FINAL MILITARY PUSH?

Arab and widespread international anger mounted on Tuesday when Israel acknowledged hitting a U.N. school where hundreds of people were taking refuge. Medics said 42 people were killed.

Israel accused Hamas of using civilians as "human shields" and said troops had been returning mortar fire from the school.

For all the talk of a truce, Israel is still demanding a stop to all rocket salvos -- more than 30 hit the Jewish state on Tuesday -- and guarantees Hamas cannot rearm.

Olmert's security cabinet, due to convene on Wednesday, would debate whether to order their armed forces to storm into Gaza's urban centres, the planned culmination of the offensive, political sources said.

They said ministers may defer a vote on approving the plan.

"The plan is to enter the urban centres," one source said, noting the first phase was an air campaign launched on Dec. 27 and the second a ground invasion that began on Jan. 3.

After nightfall on Tuesday, fighting eased to a sporadic explosions and gunfire across Gaza. On Tuesday alone, 77 civilians were killed. The Palestinian death toll stands at 636, according to local medical officials.

Israel says it has killed dozens of militants this week.

An aide said Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, a bitter foe of Hamas, had ordered officials to look into taking Israel to international courts over the deaths at the school in Jabalya refugee camp. A U.N. spokesman said the world body wanted an inquiry into both the incident and Israel's allegations about militants firing from schools.

The deaths in the school prompted Obama to break his silence on the Gaza offensive and to say the loss of life among civilians was "a source of deep concern" for him. Obama said he would not engage in policy until he was in office but vowed to work rapidly thereafter to secure peace in the Middle East.

Al Qaeda's second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri called on the Internet for Muslims to "hit the interests of the Zionists and Crusaders wherever and in whichever way you can".

Washington's allies in Arab governments have condemned the Israeli assault, which has contributed to rising oil prices.

Hamas, which has rebuffed Western demands to recognise the Jewish state, end violence and accept existing interim peace deals, has demanded a lifting of the blockade of Gaza in any truce. It seized the territory in 2007, 18 months after it won a parliamentary election. (Additional reporting by Dan Williams and Adam Entous in Jerusalem, Aziz el-Kaissouni in Sharm el-Sheikh and Claudia Parsons and Louis Charbonneau at the United Nations; Writing by Alastair Macdonald; Editing by Louise Ireland)

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West, Arabs reach deal on U.N. Gaza truce resolution

Thu Jan 8, 2009 5:58pm EST

By Sue Plerning

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - Western powers and Arab states reached agreement on Thursday on a draft Security Council resolution that would call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, Arab and Western diplomats said.

"In principle there is an agreement," Arab League U.N. envoy Yahya Mahmassani told reporters after a day of negotiations. Palestinian representative Riyad Mansour said, "Yes, we have a deal". Several Western diplomat confirmed agreement on the text.

The Security Council went into closed-door consultations on Gaza late on Thursday afternoon but it was unclear if there would be an immediate vote.

Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa said the council would vote on the draft on Thursday, but Western diplomats, who asked not to be identified, said the vote could be delayed until Friday.

A European diplomat said France, which holds the council presidency for January, had promised Israel there would be no vote until Friday. French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner declined to comment to reporters on the issue.

The resolution "stresses the urgency of and calls for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza," according to a text obtained by Reuters.

Israel attacked Gaza on December 27 in a bid to stamp out rocket fire by Palestinian militants against southern Israel.

Arab countries, many facing strong anti-Israeli sentiment at home, had insisted the 15-nation Security Council must issue a binding resolution that would force Israel to end its military campaign in the Gaza Strip immediately.

More than 750 Palestinians and 11 Israelis have been killed in the 13-day offensive aimed at halting rocket attacks from Hamas militants on southern Israel.

Israel has opposed the idea of a binding U.N. resolution.

VIOLENCE CONTINUES

The United States had backed its ally Israel but diplomats said it dropped its objections and agreed to back a cautiously worded text.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband and Kouchner negotiated through much of Wednesday and Thursday with Arab diplomats at the United Nations on a compromise text.

As they did so, violence continued on the ground. Israel pressed its offensive, a U.N. aid agency said it was suspending operations in Gaza and a rocket salvo from Lebanon slightly wounded two people in northern Israel.

Libya, the only Arab country on the council, had earlier presented Western countries with a revised version of a resolution it drafted earlier this week.

Until Thursday, Western countries had pushed for a nonbinding presidential statement by the Security Council. But Arab ministers rejected that as inadequate and persuaded the British, U.S. and French delegations to accept wording that might be unpalatable to Israel.

But a Western diplomat said there was something for both Israelis and Palestinians in the resolution.

"You need to give the Israelis something which responds to their legitimate security concerns about smuggling, and the balancing element of that for the Palestinians is to find a sustainable way of opening the crossings" into Gaza.



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Vatican-Israel ties tense over cardinal's camps comment

Thu Jan 8, 2009 1:58pm EST
(Adds Holocaust survivors group condemning cardinal, para 6)

By Philip Pullella

VATICAN CITY, Jan 8 (Reuters) - Relations between the Vatican and Israel grew tense on Thursday when the Jewish state condemned an aide to Pope Benedict for calling Gaza "a big concentration camp".

Israel criticised Cardinal Renato Martino as the pope delivered a speech to diplomats in which he spoke out against the use of violence by both Israel and Hamas Islamists in Gaza.

On Wednesday, Martino, president of the Vatican's Council for Justice and Peace, delivered the Vatican's toughest criticism of Israel since its offensive in the Palestinian-ruled enclave, calling Gaza a "big concentration camp".

"We are astounded to hear from a spiritual dignitary words that are so far removed from truth and dignity," Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor told Reuters.

"The vocabulary of Hamas propaganda, coming from a member of the College of Cardinals, is a shocking and disappointing phenomenon," he said.

Jewish leaders around the world also condemned Martino. "His comments are offensive and an insult to the memory of the Holocaust and survivors worldwide," said Elan Steinberg, vice president of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and their Descendants.

"He is either trying to nefariously disseminate anti-Israeli propaganda or he doesn't have the faintest clue about the murderous conditions inside a concentration camp," Stephan Kramer, general secretary of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, told Handelsblatt newspaper.

"These remarks are untrue, distort the memory of the Holocaust and are only used against Israel by terrorist organisations and Holocaust deniers," said Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

SHADOW OVER POPE'S HOLY LAND TRIP

The row over Martino's remark as well as Israel's bombing of Gaza have cast a shadow over negotiations for the pope to visit the Holy Land in May, a trip some diplomats say is now in doubt.

The exchange of accusations heated up as the pope delivered his yearly "state of the world" speech to diplomats in which he seemed at pains to be even-handed following the furore over Martino's remarks.

The pontiff lamented "a renewed outbreak of violence provoking immense damage and suffering for the civilian population" in Gaza and Israel and urged "the rejection of hatred, acts of provocation and the use of arms".

"Violence, wherever it comes from and whatever form it takes, must be firmly condemned".

More than 750 Palestinians have been killed since Israel started bombarding Gaza on Dec. 27 with the aim of halting Hamas rocket attacks. At least eleven Israelis have been killed, eight of them soldiers, since the offensive began.

In a follow-up interview in Italy's La Repubblica newspaper on Thursday, Martino defended his comments, saying the people of Gaza "are surrounded by a wall that is difficult to breach, in conditions that go against human dignity".

Martino said "certainly, the rockets of Hamas are not confetti. I condemn

them" but forcefully criticised Israel for an attack on a U.N. school.
(Additional reporting by Erik Kirschbaum in Berlin)

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US Senate supports Israel's Gaza incursion

Thu Jan 8, 2009 12:00pm EST

WASHINGTON, Jan 8 (Reuters) - The U.S. Senate voiced strong support on Thursday for Israel's battle against Hamas militants in Gaza, while urging a ceasefire that would prevent Hamas from launching any more rockets into Israel.

The chamber agreed on a voice vote to the non-binding resolution co-sponsored by Democratic and Republican party leaders in the chamber.

"When we pass this resolution, the United States Senate will strengthen our historic bond with the state of Israel, by reaffirming Israel's inalienable right to defend against attacks from Gaza, as well as our support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process," Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Nevada Democrat, said before the vote.

Noting that Israel was bent on halting Hamas rocket fire into its southern towns, Reid said: "I ask any of my colleagues to imagine that happening here in the United States. Rockets and mortars coming from Toronto in Canada, into Buffalo New York. How would we as a country react?"

Co-sponsor and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican said before the vote: "The Israelis ... are responding exactly the same way we would."

The House was expected to pass a similar resolution.

The Senate resolution encourages President George W. Bush "to work actively to support a durable, enforceable and sustainable ceasefire in Gaza as soon as possible that prevents Hamas from retaining or rebuilding the capability to launch rockets or mortars against Israel," Reid said.

It also expresses an "unwavering" commitment to Israel's welfare and recognizes its right to act in self defense to protect citizens against acts of terrorism, he said. "It allows for the long-term improvement of daily living conditions of the ordinary people of Gaza," he said.

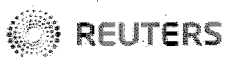
Palestinians faced even grimmer conditions in Gaza on Thursday after a U.N. aid agency halted work, saying its staff was at risk from Israeli forces after two drivers were killed.

The reported Palestinian death toll in the 13-day-old conflict topped 700. At least 11 Israelis have been killed, eight of them soldiers, including four hit by "friendly fire."

(Reporting by Susan Cornwell, editing by Philip Barbara)

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UN Security Council calls for immediate Gaza truce

Thu Jan 8, 2009 10:38pm EST

* U.N. Security Council calls for immediate ceasefire

* Dozens more bodies recovered from rubble

* ICRC says Israel delayed access to casualties

* Gaza ministry says third of over 750 dead are children

By Sue Plerning and Nidal al-Mughrabi

UNITED NATIONS/GAZA, Jan 9 (Reuters) - The U.N. Security Council called for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip but Israeli warplanes launched intermittent attacks on Friday.

After days of intense haggling, the Security Council passed a resolution urging an "immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire", and for Israel to withdraw from Gaza after a 14-day air-and-ground offensive. The United States abstained.

The resolution, pressed for by Arab countries in the face of efforts by Britain, France and the United States for a more muted statement, called for arrangements to prevent arms smuggling into Gaza and for its borders to be opened.

It said there should be "unimpeded provision" and distribution of aid to the territory, home to 1.5 million people, many of whom are dependent on food assistance.

Moments before the resolution was passed, Israeli warplanes dropped bombs on areas on the outskirts of Gaza, the main city in the north of the coastal strip.

There was no immediate reaction from Israeli officials after the Security Council vote, but Israel had opposed the idea of a binding resolution. Israel's military commanders are keen to pursue the ground offensive and secure more gains.

On Thursday, ambulance workers ventured onto the battlefield to gather decomposing bodies from the rubble. Hamas officials said the Palestinian death toll had risen to 765, of whom more than a third were children.

While the United States abstained from the U.N. resolution, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Washington backed the text and had abstained only because it wanted to see the results of an Egyptian mediation effort.

"The United States thought it important to see the outcome of the Egyptian mediation efforts in order to see what this resolution might have been supporting," she said.

ROTTING CORPSES

In Gaza, local ambulance crews and the Red Crescent, using a time slot coordinated with Israeli forces, said they collected rotting corpses in places that had been too risky to reach since Israeli forces began a ground attack six days ago.

They found four children starving beside the bodies of their mothers and evacuated scores of trapped and wounded, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said.

Israel lost three soldiers in combat with Islamist militants who hold the territory. Apart from a "friendly fire" incident which killed four, it was its heaviest one-day combat toll.

Ten soldiers have so far died in the campaign launched by Israel to crush Hamas forces and halt the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel. Israel says it is doing what it can to avoid civilian casualties but accuses Hamas of deliberately placing its fighters close to homes and mosques.

About 20 rockets hit Israel on Thursday, fewer than at the start of the war but not the total halt it wants so that "quiet will reign supreme", as Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has said. Rockets have killed three Israeli civilians since the offensive began. Olmert said Israel's goal had not been achieved and a decision on further military action lay ahead.

Aside from a three-hour ceasefire which Israel ordered for a second day to let Gaza civilians venture out, there was no let-up in fighting. Air strikes and ground attacks killed at least nine civilians and three gunmen, medical officials said.

The dead included two brothers aged six and 13, killed when an Israeli air strike missed a group of Islamic Jihad fighters.

In Washington, the U.S. Senate adopted a bipartisan motion "reaffirming Israel's inalienable right to defend against attacks from Gaza", said majority leader Harry Reid.

The United States would do the same if "rockets and mortars coming from Toronto in Canada" hit Buffalo, New York, he said.

Israel says it accepts the "principles" of a ceasefire proposal by Egypt and the European Union, and Washington has urged the Jewish state to study details of the plan.

Hamas, shunned by the West for espousing violence, said it was still considering the ideas. But the militants say they will never accept Israel, whose establishment amid conflict 60 years ago dispossessed and uprooted Palestinian people.

European governments offered to back the plan with an EU border force to stop Hamas rearming via tunnels from Egypt. The deal would also address Palestinian calls for an end to Israel's economic blockade of the Gaza Strip.

The ICRC accused Israel of violating the rules of war by delaying ambulance access to the house where its team found children huddled beside corpses, not far from the Israeli army.

The Red Cross said the army must have known of the situation but did not help the wounded, in violation of international law.

Israeli nerves were rattled in the morning when a rocket from southern Lebanon hit an old people's home in Nahariya, raising fears that Hezbollah fighters were opening a second front to relieve pressure on Gaza.

Israel fought a 34-day war with Shi'ite Hezbollah guerrillas in 2006 and is in no hurry to engage them now. It responded with a few artillery rounds and played down the rocket attack. (Additional reporting by Louis Charbonneau at the United Nations and by Jerusalem bureau)

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U.S. haggles with Arabs over U.N. action in Gaza

Thu Jan 8, 2009 12:35am EST

By Sue Fleming

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - Arab ministers haggled with Western powers over U.N. action to end violence in Gaza, pushing for a binding resolution while the United States sought a more diluted response.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and the foreign ministers of France and Britain stayed on an extra day in New York to push their case with Arab ministers, who face mounting anger on the street at home if they return without a strong U.N. response to Israel's invasion of Gaza last month.

"We believe there is still work to do," Rice told reporters after late-night discussions between Western and Arab ministers at U.N. headquarters in New York on Wednesday.

As diplomats argued over whether to adopt a resolution, violence continued on the ground. Israeli planes bombed the Gaza Strip on Thursday and tanks pounded Palestinian guerrillas for the 13th day in response to Hamas attacks deep into Jewish state.

The United States and its allies want a presidential statement to emerge from the U.N. Security Council, far weaker action than a robust U.N. resolution being pushed by Arab states, which Israel strongly opposes.

Negotiations were set to resume at the United Nations at 10 a.m. EST (1500 GMT) and Britain's foreign minister said it was important that there be unity in tackling the Gaza crisis.

"The world needs to hear the united voice of the Security Council," said British Foreign Secretary David Miliband, who also extended his trip to New York to try to reach a deal with Arab ministers.

Egyptian Ambassador Maged Abdelaziz insisted a resolution was necessary to halt the fighting in which more than 650 Palestinians have been killed.

"We do not accept the presidential statement as it stands alone, meaning that the ministers can ... go home and arrive to find the fighting still going on," he told reporters.

Another Arab diplomat, who declined to be named, said the United States was holding back on calling for an immediate ceasefire, but rather referring to a "durable and sustainable" truce which would take longer to draw up.

"Our view is get a ceasefire now," said the Arab diplomat. "It's about principles and taking a position."

The Arabs want a Libyan-drafted resolution which focuses heavily on Israel's actions and makes only a fleeting reference to Palestinian rocket-firing. It "demands an immediate and permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip."

The nonbinding statement drafted by the three Western powers contains no demands, but "stresses the urgent need for an immediate and durable ceasefire." It also voices strong concern over the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Also under discussion is an Egyptian ceasefire proposal between Hamas and Israel, which the United States backs while trying to include its own elements.

The Egyptian plan, partly brokered by France, calls for an end to the rocket attacks on Israel, the opening of Gaza border crossings and an end to weapons smuggling into Gaza.

Hamas said it was looking at the Egyptian plan while Israel said there was a broad understanding of the "general principles" outlined in the offer from Cairo.



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Paris, Berlin offer whatever needed for Gaza peace

Thu Jan 8, 2009 9:08am EST
(Adds quotes, background, detail)

PARIS, Jan 8 (Reuters) - French President Nicolas Sarkozy said on Thursday he and German Chancellor Angela Merkel were prepared to do whatever was necessary to help reach a ceasefire ending Israel's military offensive in the Gaza Strip.

Sarkozy drew up a plan for a truce between Israel and Hamas fighters in the Middle East with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, and Merkel said she backed the plan.

Israel and Egypt are in talks on how to prevent the smuggling of weapons to Hamas Islamists in Gaza through tunnels under the territory's border with Egypt. Under the plan, an agreement on securing the border would lead to a ceasefire.

"Mrs Merkel and I work together every day and we are ready to take a joint initiative to help bring peace to the Middle East," Sarkozy told a news conference with Merkel in Paris, without elaborating on what that initiative would be.

"Germany and France are ready to do whatever is necessary to help the various protagonists move towards peace."

Sarkozy said he was grateful to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, whom he met on a two-day tour of the Middle East this week, and to the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, for putting pressure on Hamas to stop its rocket attacks against Israel.

Syria, along with Iran, is a main backer of Hamas and the group's leader Khaled Meshaal lives in Syria.

"Time is of the essence. Everything must be done to get a quick ceasefire. The key is guarantees for Israel's security, particularly an end to weapons smuggling," Merkel said.

Sarkozy, whose has condemned Israel's ground offensive which has killed more than 700 Palestinians, echoed that a deal should be reached quickly.

"Our analysis is absolutely identical. The weapons must fall silent. The escalation must stop. Israel must obtain guarantees for its security and leave Gaza. The sooner the better," Sarkozy told reporters.

"We must give Israel the guarantee that weapons will not pass through that border. As of that moment, the Israeli army must withdraw from Gaza. Then in a second phase we will talk about reopening the border crossings," he said. (Reporting by Francois Murphy; additional reporting by Noah Barkin and Kerstin Gehmlich in Berlin)

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Palestinian PM: Gaza carnage a new catastrophe

Thu Jan 8, 2009 6:52am EST

RAMALLAH, West Bank (Reuters) - Palestinian losses from Israel's Gaza offensive amount to a national catastrophe recalling the 1948-49 war in which the Jewish state was founded, Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad said Thursday.

"What our people in Gaza are facing is a humanitarian catastrophe. It's a new Nakba, of a kind that has not happened since 1949," Fayyad told reporters in Ramallah.

Palestinians consider Israel's May 1948 declaration of independence their "Nakba," or catastrophe, citing the forced flight of hundreds of thousands of Arabs during the ensuing battles over what had been British-ruled Palestine.

Israel says its 13-day-old offensive, in which more than 660 Palestinians have been killed, is a response to cross-border rocket attacks by the Gaza Strip's Islamist Hamas rulers.

Fayyad is a leading figure in U.S.-sponsored efforts to advance peace talks and restructure the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank. Hamas runs a separate administration with its own prime minister in the Gaza Strip.

Israelis bristle at "Nakba" commemorations, saying they cast doubt on the commitment of Palestinians to creating a state that coexists with Israel. Palestinians say they want Israel to recognize the suffering of refugees and demands for redress.

(Reporting by Ali Sawafta; Editing by Alistair Lyon)

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Israel faces criticism as Gaza toll hits 765

Thu Jan 8, 2009 5:58pm EST

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA (Reuters) - Recovery teams ventured into battlegrounds of the Gaza Strip on Thursday to gather bodies from the rubble, and Hamas officials said the Palestinian toll in Israel's 13 day-old offensive rose to 765 dead.

Local ambulance crews and the Red Crescent, using a time slot coordinated with Israeli forces, said they collected rotting corpses in places that had been too risky to reach since Israeli forces began a ground attack six days ago.

They found four children starving beside the bodies of their mothers, dead many days, and evacuated scores of trapped and injured, the International Committee of the Red Cross said.

Israel lost 3 soldiers in fighting with Islamist militants who hold the Gaza Strip. Apart from a "friendly fire" incident which killed four, this was its heaviest one-day combat toll.

Ten soldiers have so far died in the campaign launched by Israel to crush Hamas forces and halt the firing of missiles from Gaza into Israel. Israel says it is doing what it can to avoid civilian casualties but accuses Hamas of deliberately placing its forces close to homes and Mosques.

At the United Nations, Western powers and Arab states reached an agreement in principle on a draft Security Council resolution that would call for an immediate ceasefire.

"In principle there is an agreement," Arab League envoy ambassador Yahya Mahmassani told reporters.

It was not clear if they would vote on the resolution later in the day or on Friday.

Rescue work in Gaza was becoming increasingly dangerous.

The U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which feeds half of Gaza's 1.5 million people, stopped work after a driver was killed by an Israeli tank. It had earlier said two drivers died.

Operations would be suspended until the Israeli army could guarantee security.

The Hamas ministry of health said 34 percent of the dead and 35 percent of over 3,000 injured were children. There was no independent confirmation of the figure.

"The danger to medical staff and the difficulty of extracting the injured from collapsed buildings makes proper evacuation and estimation of casualties difficult," the U.N. Humanitarian Coordinator's daily field report said.

"Civilians, notably children who form 56 percent of Gaza's population, are bearing the brunt of the violence. As one of the most densely populated places in the world, it is clear that many more civilians will be killed if the conflict continues."

BROTHERS IN DEATH

Around 20 rockets hit Israel on Thursday, fewer than at the start of the war but not the total halt it wants so that "quiet will reign supreme," as Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said.

Rockets have killed three Israeli civilians since the offensive began. Olmert said Israel's goal had not been achieved and a decision on further military action lay ahead.

Aside from a 3-hour ceasefire which Israel ordered for the second day, to let Gaza civilians venture out, there was no let-up in fighting. Air strikes and ground attacks killed at least nine civilians and three gunmen, medical officials said.

The dead included two brothers aged six and 13, killed when an Israeli air strike missed a group of Islamic Jihad fighters.

A Ukrainian woman, who could have left, was killed in her home by a tank shell, along with her son. The father said his wife was sliced in two, his 18-month-old son only recognizable "by his teeth."

In Washington, the U.S. Senate adopted a bipartisan motion

"reaffirming Israel's inalienable right to defend against attacks from Gaza," said majority leader Harry Reid.

The United States would do the same if "rockets and mortars coming from Toronto in Canada" hit Buffalo, New York, he said.

LEBANON FRIGHT

Israel says it accepts the "principles" of a ceasefire proposal by Egypt and the European Union, and Washington has urged the Jewish state to study details of the plan.

Hamas, shunned by the West for espousing violence, said it was still considering the ideas. But the militants say they will never accept Israel, whose establishment in war 60 years ago dispossessed and uprooted Palestinian people.

European governments offered to back the plan with an EU border force to stop Hamas rearming via tunnels from Egypt. The deal would also address Palestinian calls for an end to Israel's economic blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Relations between Israel and the Vatican, never easy, chilled further over Gaza. The Jewish state condemned an aide to Pope Benedict for calling Gaza "a big concentration camp," the Vatican's toughest criticism of Israel since its offensive.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor said Israel was astounded at "the vocabulary of Hamas propaganda, coming from a member of the College of Cardinals."

The ICRC accused Israel of violating the rules of war by delaying ambulance access to the house where its team found children huddled beside corpses, 80 meters (yards) from the Israeli army.

The Red Cross said the army must have known of the situation but did not help the wounded, in violation of international law.

Israeli nerves were rattled in the morning when a rocket from southern Lebanon hit an old people's home in Nahariya, raising fears that Hezbollah fighters were opening a second front to relieve pressure on Gaza.

Israel fought a 34-day war with Shi'ite Hezbollah guerrillas in 2006 and is no hurry to engage them now. It responded with a few artillery rounds and played down the rocket attack.

(Additional reporting by Yara Bayoumy in Beirut and Aliyn Fisher-Ilan and Dan Williams in Jerusalem; writing by Douglas Hamilton; Editing by Ralph Boulton)

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ICRC says Israel broke international law in Gaza

Thu Jan 8, 2009 6:18am EST
By Stephanie Nebehay

GENEVA, Jan 8 (Reuters) - Relief workers found four starving children sitting next to their dead mothers and other corpses in a house in a part of Gaza City bombed by Israeli forces, the International Committee of the Red Cross said on Thursday.

The ICRC accused Israel of delaying ambulance access to the hit area and demanded it grant safe access for Palestinian Red Crescent ambulances to return to evacuate more wounded.

"This is a shocking incident," said Pierre Wettach, ICRC chief for Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

"The Israeli military must have been aware of the situation but did not assist the wounded. Neither did they make it possible for us or the Palestinian Red Crescent to assist the wounded," he said.

In unusually strong terms, the neutral agency said it believed Israel had breached international humanitarian law in the incident.

An Israeli offensive launched in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip on Dec. 27 to end rocket attacks by Islamic militants has drawn increasing international criticism over mounting civilian casualties.

Palestinian Red Crescent ambulances and ICRC officials managed to reach several houses in the Zeitoun area of Gaza City on Wednesday after seeking access from Israeli military forces since last weekend, the ICRC statement said.

The rescue team "found four small children next to their dead mothers in one of the houses", the ICRC said.

"They were too weak to stand up on their own. One man was also found alive, too weak to stand up. In all there were at least 12 corpses lying on mattresses," it said.

In another house, the team found 15 survivors of Israeli shelling including several wounded, it said. Three corpses were found in another home. Israeli soldiers posted some 80 meters (yards) away ordered the rescue team to leave the area which they refused to do, it said.

The ICRC said it had been informed that there were more wounded sheltering in other destroyed houses in the area.

"The ICRC believes that in this instance the Israeli military failed to meet its obligation under international humanitarian law to care for and evacuate the wounded. It considers the delay in allowing rescue services access unacceptable," it said. (Reporting by Stephanie Nebehay; Editing by Jonathan Lynn)

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FACTBOX-Developments in Gaza fighting, Jan 9

Thu Jan 8, 2009 11:56pm EST
Jan 9 (Reuters) - Following are developments in the fighting in the Gaza Strip as of 0430 GMT:

(* Denotes new or updated items)

*NEW YORK - U.N. Security Council passes resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, followed by full Israeli withdrawal. Resolution calls for arrangements to stop smuggling of weapons into Gaza and to reopen its borders for aid.

*GAZA - Moments before the resolution is passed, Israeli warplanes drop bombs on areas to the east of Gaza's main city and attacks continue after the resolution is approved.

*BEIT LAHIYA - An Israeli tank shell hits a house in Beit Lahiya killing six people from the same family, Palestinian ambulance workers said.

*KHAN YOUNIS - Israeli tanks pull back from areas near the southern Gaza Strip town of Khan Younis. Two Palestinian dead found after the withdrawal.

*GAZA - Shelling from the sea and clashes to the north and east of the main city of Gaza continue through the night.

(Jerusalem Newsroom)

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EU to call on Israel to allow aid into Gaza-letter

Thu Jan 8, 2009 6:04pm EST
By Anne Jolis

BRUSSELS, Jan 8 (Reuters) - The European Union wants Israel to allow free and safe access for humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, a document obtained by Reuters on Thursday said.

The draft letter by the European Commission, the EU's executive branch, is due to be delivered on Friday, and is the 27-nation bloc's strongest bid so far to persuade Israel to let more aid into the embattled territory.

It calls on Israel to reopen all six crossing points into Gaza, where the Israeli military has conducted a 13-day offensive against Hamas militants.

"Full and unfettered access to the Strip and the civilian population in Gaza needs to be made possible," the message to Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Defense Minister Ehud Barak said.

"Palestinian civilians trapped in the conflict zone have the right to safe haven nearby where they can find shelter and are not at risk of being exposed to fire from either side," the commission wrote.

Israel must guarantee that the most urgent medical cases can be evacuated from Gaza to receive treatment, the commission added, saying the EU was ready to assist in any such operations.

Israel began the military offensive in the Palestinian territory on Dec. 27, responding to cross-border rocket attacks from Hamas, the militant Islamist group which rules Gaza.

Since the strikes began, more than 700 Palestinians have been killed, the Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza said, and at least 3,000 people wounded.

The draft letter lauded the daily three-hour truces Israel announced on Wednesday to allow aid to enter Gaza, but said this is not sufficient.

A United Nations aid agency on Thursday said it was suspending operations in Gaza because of the risk posed there.

"The tragic events around the (U.N.) schools have shown that civilians cannot be safe anywhere in the Gaza Strip at the moment," the letter said. Medical officials in Gaza have said U.N. schools have been hit by Israeli fire, killing more than 45 Palestinians.

"We consider the placement of launching devices in the middle of densely populated areas to be a serious violation of international humanitarian law," the letter added.

On its official website, Israel's Foreign Ministry says Hamas uses civilians as human shields and deliberately stashes weapons and fires them from crowded civilian areas.

Belgium said on Thursday it planned to start moving wounded children evacuated from Gaza by local aid groups to hospitals in the region as soon as Saturday, and was urging other EU countries to join its mission.

The European Commission welcomed the Belgian plans, and would back any eventual EU-level mission, a spokesman said.

(Editing by Michael Roddy)

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Afghans sign up to fight Israeli troops in Gaza

Thu Jan 8, 2009 9:30am EST
By Hamid Shalizi

KABUL, Jan 8 (Reuters) - More than a thousand Afghans signed up on Thursday to say they wanted to go and fight Israel in the Gaza Strip, many of them blaming the United States which has some 30,000 troops in Afghanistan, for supporting the Jewish state.

Accusations by Taliban militants and some Muslim clerics that Israel and its main ally, the United States, aim to destroy Islam have a strong impact on public opinion in Afghanistan, where Washington plans to almost double its troop numbers this year.

Scores of young men crowded into the library of Kabul's Milad ul-Nabi mosque, lined with banners reading "Death to Israel" and "Death to America", to sign up to fight Israel.

"More than a thousand brave Afghans registered their names here to fight Israeli troops in Gaza," said Habibullah Assam, the imam of the mosque and organiser of the campaign.

"Several hundred Afghans, including doctors and teachers, have also volunteered to give blood to help the miserable people of Palestine," he said.

"The acts of Israel against the innocent Muslims of Gaza are barbaric and inhumane and widely helped by the Americans," Assam said, adding that nearly 10,000 people across Afghanistan had so far volunteered to fight in Gaza.

One Afghan at the mosque said he fought in Chechnya in the 1990s after being trained by the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba Islamist militant group which India says is behind the Mumbai attacks.

"I have the military training and I will do whatever possible to go to Gaza to at least fire one bullet towards Israel," Mohammad Ayaas said. "I will be the luckiest person to die beside my Muslim brothers fighting for an honourable cause."

The 13-day Israeli operation against Hamas in Gaza led to protests in Afghanistan last week.

While reaching Gaza from Afghanistan is all-but impossible, many of the volunteers said they would take revenge on U.S. troops inside Afghanistan instead.

"Infidels are killing Muslims everyday and the United States is saying Israel's offensive is just," said Mohammad Akram, a shopkeeper. "If we can't reach Gaza, we should seek revenge on Israel's allies in our own country like the Taliban do."

U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan are struggling to contain a virulent Taliban insurgency to expel them and topple the Western-backed Afghan government.

U.S. President-elect Barack Obama has vowed to make Afghanistan a foreign policy priority once he comes to office on Jan. 20. (Editing by Sugita Katyal)

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Bahrain king floats Islamic summit on Gaza

Thu Jan 8, 2009 2:17pm EST

DUBAI, Jan 8 (Reuters) - The king of Bahrain proposed on Thursday a summit of Islamic countries to press for an end to Israeli attacks on Gaza after calls for a meeting of Arab leaders failed to bring them together.

"Let the feelings and words turn to actions for peace," the official Bahrain News Agency quoted King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa as saying at a cabinet meeting of the U.S. ally.

"We have stated that we approve of holding an Arab summit since the beginning and we are still waiting for invitations to take part, but if an Arab summit proved unattainable why cannot there be an Islamic summit?"

Qatar and Syria have called for a summit of Arab states to discuss Israeli raids on Gaza shortly after Israel began its offensive in the coastal enclave ruled by militant group Hamas.

But Arab governments in a meeting on Dec. 31 decided to take their case for an end to Israel's attacks on Gaza to the United Nations Security Council and have been pressing for a binding resolution to force Israel to end its offensive.

Israel's attack on Gaza has deepened the divide in the Arab world between Islamists with popular appeal and authoritarian governments seen as siding with Israel and the United States.

(Reporting by Inal Eisan; editing by Michael Roddy)

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Belgium seeks EU mission to evacuate Gaza children

Thu Jan 8, 2009 11:04am EST
By Anne Jolis

BRUSSELS, Jan 8 (Reuters) - Belgium is seeking support for a European Union mission to evacuate wounded children from the Gaza Strip, the country's foreign ministry said on Thursday.

Foreign ministry spokesman Bart Ouvry said Belgium may consider sending its own mission if it fails to get the backing of other EU countries at a meeting of EU ambassadors on Friday.

He said Belgium was mulling several options, including an airlift or ground transport to hospitals in Egypt, Lebanon or Jordan or to a hospital in Brussels which specializes in burns.

"The government has decided to urgently study the possibility of a Belgian operation to evacuate wounded children from the Gaza Strip. Such an operation must, as far as possible, be coordinated at the European level," a ministry statement said.

Medical facilities in Gaza have been overwhelmed since Israel began a military offensive in the Palestinian territory on Dec. 27 in response to cross-border rocket attacks by Palestinian militants.

More than 700 Palestinians have been killed, the Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza said, and at least 3,000 people wounded.

The European Commission backed the evacuation initiative, a spokesman for EU Development and Humanitarian Aid Commissioner Louis Michel said.

Eli Lev, Israel's Deputy Ambassador to Belgium, said Israel would support in principle a coordinated EU evacuation mission.

"Now, they (Belgium) have to approach the Israeli authorities and see how this can be arranged," Lev said, adding while Israel would welcome an EU operation, the logistics of allowing individual countries into Gaza to assist and evacuate wounded children would be unmanageable.

Ouvry said Belgium hoped any evacuation operation would take place at the weekend, but said no firm timeframe had been set. (Reporting by Anne Jolis, Editing by Darren Ennis and Janet Lawrence)

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Bosnia genocide victims protest Gaza offensive

Thu Jan 8, 2009 9:35am EST

SARAJEVO, Jan 8 (Reuters) - Survivors of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre of 8,000 Bosnian Muslims protested in front of the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo on Thursday to call on Washington to stop Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip.

Munira Subasic, who lost her son and husband when Bosnian Serbs took over the eastern town of Srebrenica, said she felt solidarity with the Palestinian people.

"In 2009, Palestinian mothers are going through ordeals we experienced in 1995 and we are raising our voice because we know about pain and suffering. We know how it feels to lose a child or husband," said Subasic.

Protesters said they felt they had to react to killings of more than 660 Palestinians and the suffering of refugees in the 13-day-old offensive launched by Israel.

Israel says the operation is a response to cross-border rocket attacks by the Gaza Strip's Islamist Hamas rulers.

Hundreds joined the Sarajevo protest, some with placards reading "Stop the killing of innocent children" and "Srebrenica 1995 -- Gaza 2009."

"I believe the United States, as the leading world power, could stop the bloodshed of civilians and, even worse, of children in Gaza," said Murat Tahirovic, the head of an association of Bosnian wartime camp inmates.

"During the war, the blood, the suffering and the pain were our everyday scenes and I cannot help but sympathise with the Palestinian people," said another protester. "It all reminds us of what we went through during the war and it must stop."

Srebrenica, the site of Europe's worst atrocity since World War Two, was under U.N. protection when it was overrun by Bosnian Serb forces led by General Ratko Mladic. He has been indicted on genocide charges but is still on the run. (Reporting by Maja Zuvela; editing by Adam Tanner and Andrew Roche)

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Bush backs Israel, Gaza death toll tops 900

Mon Jan 12, 2009 5:01pm EST

* Bush says, up to Hamas to end war, Israel defending itself

* Troops say tightening encirclement of city of Gaza

* Palestinian death toll rises to 913, many civilians

* U.S. ally Saudi accuses Israel of "racist extermination"

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA, Jan 12 (Reuters) - Israel won renewed support from its main ally the United States on Monday when President George W. Bush said a ceasefire to end its offensive in the Gaza Strip depended on Hamas ending its rocket fire on Israeli towns.

As the Palestinian death toll passed 900, including many civilians, troops tightened their grip around urban areas in search of elusive guerrillas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Israel would pursue the 17-day-old war as long as it took.

Hamas's leader in Gaza made a rare television and radio broadcast from a secret site, promising "victory is at hand".

Troops and tanks, backed by warplanes and helicopters that mounted more than 25 air strikes, probed guerrilla defences around the city of Gaza, wary of snipers and booby traps. Hamas fighters kept largely out of sight, firing several rockets into Israel and bracing for an all-out assault that may yet come.

As international diplomats worked with Egypt on a truce plan, Israeli army spokesman Brigadier General Avi Benayahu said the army had yet to launch a much-heralded "Phase 3" of the war, following the initial air campaign and then ground advance.

But reserve units had moved in, he said, to hold positions and free up regulars for thrusts deeper into the city of Gaza.

"We are tightening the encirclement of the city," Brigadier General Eyal Eisenberg told reporters touring Israeli positions.

They saw few signs of civilians in farmland near the city. Troops exchanged occasional fire with fighters and seemed confident they had control of territory outside urban areas.

After dark, residents in the northwest of the city reported tank shelling that struck residential buildings, wounding some civilians, and prompted speculation of a new push into town.

The bloodshed has burst open fragile faultlines in the map of Middle East diplomacy, with the Bush administration in its final week standing firm behind Israel, European governments pressing the Israelis to call off their attacks and Arab leaders speaking out stridently against the Jewish state.

On Monday, Saudi Arabia, an oil power and one of several Arab governments whose pro-American stance is far from popular with its people, accused Israel of "racist extermination".

It said it hoped Bush's successor Barack Obama would work swiftly to resolve the 60-year-old Palestinian issue.

BUSH CALLS ON HAMAS TO CHOOSE

Hamas Islamists won a 2006 parliamentary election and seized control of

Gaza 18 months ago. Bush said it was up to them now to end the misery of the enclave's 1.5 million people.

"I'm for a sustainable ceasefire, and a definition of sustainable ceasefire is Hamas stops firing rockets into Israel ... I happen to believe the choice is Hamas's to make," he said.

Asked by a reporter if he approved of Israel's conduct, Bush replied: "I think Israel has a right to defend herself."

That echoed Israel's view that it is acting in self-defence against rockets that have killed 22 people since 2001. Bush added that he hoped it would "continue to be mindful of innocent folks" and help expedite the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Figures from Palestinian medics indicate at least 913 people have been killed. The health minister in Gaza's Hamas-run government said close to 400 of those were women and children.

"No place is safe in Gaza," the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Gaza told Reuters. "Civilians ... are afraid to stay home, they are afraid to move."

Medics said Israeli forces killed 13 people, including at least five civilians, on Monday. Israel says 10 soldiers and three civilians have died since the offensive began on Dec. 27.

Saudi Arabia's cabinet said in a statement: "The extermination Israel is launching upon the Palestinian people in Gaza has denuded Israeli leaders of humanity and places their policies in the ranks of racist extermination."

It hoped Obama, who takes office on Jan. 20 and who has called the civilian deaths on both sides "heartbreaking", would work immediately on a "fair resolution of the Palestinian question".

Obama has made no clear policy statement on the fighting.

CAIRO TALKS

International Middle East envoy Tony Blair said after talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt on Monday that "the elements of an agreement of the immediate ceasefire are there and are now being worked on very hard, in great detail".

Egypt, another Arab government close to Washington but with a strong Islamist opposition, is trying to broker a ceasefire to halt the fighting on its northern border. A senior Western diplomat and a Hamas official called Monday's talks positive.

Israeli leaders, who are also fighting for power in a Feb. 10 election, have given few clues on how long they are prepared to continue the offensive, although some officials have cited the inauguration of Obama, a U.N. ceasefire resolution and the election as factors pushing them toward calling off the troops.

Political sources said Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, head of the ruling Kadima party, and Defence Minister Ehud Barak, head of centre-left Labour, wanted to halt the operation as soon as possible. But, the sources said, Olmert, who resigned as Kadima chief in September over a corruption probe, disagreed.

Israel, backed by its Western allies, says any ceasefire must depend on Hamas halting rocket fire -- 16 landed in Israel on Monday, the army said -- and, crucially, also wants measures to stop Hamas from rearming via tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border, in an area known as the Philadelphi corridor.

"We want Hamas to understand there will be no possibility of smuggling arms into Gaza, because any such attempt will be met by the iron fist of the Israeli people," Olmert said. "Nothing more, nothing less. If it takes time, it takes time."

Hamas negotiators returned to Cairo late on Monday after consulting the leadership in exile in Damascus. Hamas's leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, said on television that it was ready to negotiate a truce but insisted it would do so only if Israel pulled back all its forces and ended a blockade on Gaza.

"After 17 days of this mad war," Haniyeh said, "Gaza will not be broken and Gaza will not collapse."

(Additional reporting by Adam Entous, Ori Lewis, Alastair Macdonald, Luke Baker, Alistair Lyon, Jeffrey Heller and Joseph Nasr in Jerusalem, Wafa Amr in Ramallah, Dan Williams in Gaza and Alaa Shahine in Cairo; Writing by Alastair Macdonald, editing by Mark Trevelyan)

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RPT-ANALYSIS-Few speak up for Palestinians in U.S. Congress

Fri Jan 9, 2009 8:00am EST

(Repeats without changes to text or headline)

By Susan Cornwell

WASHINGTON, Jan 9 (Reuters) - Many voices around the world speak up for the Palestinians, but few in the U.S. Congress.

Lawmakers in Washington routinely pass nonbinding resolutions supporting Israel during Middle East crises. The Senate has backed Israel's ongoing battle against Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip and the House of Representatives is expected to follow suit soon.

Even U.S. lawmakers who express sympathy for the Palestinians hesitate to call themselves pro-Palestinian and they voice strong support for the security of Israel as well, hewing to decades of close U.S.-Israeli ties.

"When these events occur, there's almost a knee-jerk reaction of Congress that endorses 1,000 percent what Israel is doing," said Nick Rahall, a West Virginia Democrat and Lebanese-American who has voted against some of the measures.

"Israel is our ally. ... It always has been, with which I perfectly agree. But I don't believe in allowing that to blind us to what is in our best interests, or giving knee-jerk approval to anything Israel does. We don't do that with any other ally," he told Reuters.

Washington has been Israel's closest ally since 1948, when President Harry Truman made the United States the first country to recognize the new Jewish state.

Harry Reid, who leads the Democratic majority in the Senate, gave voice to the depth of the relationship when he said on Thursday, "Our resolution reflects the will of the State of Israel and the will of the American people."

The Senate measure offered "unwavering commitment" to Israel. It recognized "its right to act in self-defense to protect its citizens against acts of terrorism" and urged a ceasefire that would keep Hamas from firing rockets at Israel.

That closely tracked Republican President George W. Bush's comments on the crisis, said Ric Stoll, professor of political science at Rice University. But he questioned whether it helped U.S. diplomats trying to broker a ceasefire.

LANDSLIDE VOTES

"You don't have to say Hamas are nice folks," Stoll said. "(But) how do you convince supporters of the Palestinians to pressure Hamas to go for a ceasefire, if your statements look like you are tilting heavily towards Israel?"

The House has passed similar measures in recent years by landslides.

In 2006, the House voted 410-8 to condemn Hamas and Hezbollah for "unprovoked and reprehensible armed attacks against Israel" and supported Israel's incursion into Lebanon.

In 2004, the vote was 407-9 to support a statement by Bush that it was "unrealistic" to expect Israel to return completely to pre-1967 borders. In 2003, it was 399-5 to support Israel's forceful response to Palestinian attacks as justified.

The few opponents of the measures often include lawmakers of Arab-American descent or from Arab-American communities, and mavericks such as Democrat Dennis Kucinich of Ohio and Republican Ron Paul of Texas.

Kucinich, who sought the Democratic presidential nomination last year,

charged that the United States was ignoring the current humanitarian crisis in Gaza while facilitating Israel's actions with arms deals worth billions.

Washington "sniffs at the slaughter of innocents in Gaza," he said. "U.S. tax dollars, U.S. jets and U.S. helicopters provided to Israel are enabling the slaughter in Gaza."

James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute, says the Israeli lobby is often seen as the force behind pro-Israel votes, but he thinks it is not that simple.

Some Americans "don't have a clue" about the Palestinians' history, he said.

Lawmakers also take foreign policy cues from the president, Zogby said, so some change could lie ahead with President-elect Barack Obama, who has said little about the crisis so far.

"If the story from the White House is that the president expresses deep concern for the people in Gaza ... politicians will have cover," Zogby said. "Members will say, 'Shoot, I support the president.'" (Editing by Eric Walsh)

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Shadow of Warsaw Ghetto over Gaza-Israel border

Sat Jan 10, 2009 5:22am EST
By Alastair Macdonald

YAD MORDECHAI, Israel, Jan 10 (Reuters) - The shadow of the Warsaw Ghetto hangs over Israel's border with the Gaza Strip.

On a hilltop that gave a good view last week of the smoke of battle rising over Gaza and helicopters hunting Palestinians who aim rockets at Israel, that shadow is cast literally by a statue of the man who led the 1943 Jewish uprising against the Nazis.

The bronze figure of Mordechai Anielewicz, who died fighting rather than follow millions of Jews to the gas chambers, towers in the low winter sun over gardens and a swimming pool at the kibbutz named after him by fellow Jewish socialists from Poland, whose move to Palestine in the 1930s spared them the Holocaust.

But figurative shadows from that time also hang over the Yad Mordechai communal cattle and honey farm, a mile or so north of the Gaza border: "It's very heavy to live in the shadow of Mordechai Anielewicz," said Raya Passi, the kibbutz spokeswoman.

"The statue and the story of the war hang over the kibbutz."

She recalled how horrors in Europe brought Jews to the area but also how the kibbutz, set up just after German troops razed the Warsaw Ghetto, went down five years later in the founding epics of the Jewish state as the site of a David-and-Goliath battle against overwhelming odds and helped define the border.

The shadows hang, too, over Palestinians crammed miserably into the Gaza Strip, most descended from refugees who lost homes in what became Israel on May 14, 1948. They hang over vanished Arab villages, crumbled into the farmland north of the walls and fences Israel erected to stop attacks by people from Gaza.

MEMORY IN CONFLICT

Symbolic clashes of memory and imagery that burden histories of Israelis and Palestinians resonate nowhere louder than around Yad Mordechai, where the real-life soundtrack this week was a mixture of lowing cattle, birdsong and heavy machinegun fire.

For Israelis, it is where a few dozen Jewish farmers, living Anielewicz's example, held off an Egyptian army of Biblical proportions, thousands strong, for six days in May 1948. They bought time and blunted an Arab attack that might otherwise have reached Tel Aviv, the main Jewish city, further up the coast.

A shell-shattered water tower still stands at a crazy angle, next to the Anielewicz statue, in memory of the battle.

For Palestinians, 1948 was the "catastrophe", when Western colonial powers, shocked by the Holocaust, handed half of their country to Jewish immigrants from Europe and stood by as the new Israeli army, driving them before it, expanded its borders in a war against the chaotic forces of neighbouring Arab nations.

Each side interprets history in its own way, often shocking the other. Comparisons by Palestinians of the Islamist fighters confronting Israel's army in Gaza for the past two weeks to the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto who fought the Nazis dismay Israelis, who say they are acting only in self-defence. Arabs are equally angry and frustrated that most Israelis do not see their point.

In the story of the Battle of Yad Mordechai, many Israelis see inspiration for the triumph, in Anielewicz's words, of "the few against the many", and for their attachment to a God-given land from which Jews were themselves

forced out 2,000 years ago.

For today's 600 residents of Yad Mordechai, now a neat community of lawn sprinklers and bougainvillea, Passi describes the battle's legacy: "It is a common feeling -- that we belong here, that we keep the border and we will never leave again."

She notes that the U.N. plan to partition Palestine, put forward in 1947, would have placed the kibbutz deep inside the proposed Arab state. "But luckily war broke out," she said, and, helped by the defenders of Yad Mordechai, Israel pushed its border southward to within a few miles of the Arab city of Gaza.

SHADOW OF THE GHETTO

In that same war, tens of thousands of people fled in terror to the area around Gaza held by Egyptian forces. In 1967, Israel seized and occupied what had become known as the Gaza Strip and by the time it pulled back in 2005, the Palestinians in the enclave, still without a state, numbered 1.5 million.

Some of these people lay claim still to the lands around Yad Mordechai. Many voted for Hamas, which wants to turn back the clock, send Jews "back" to Europe and destroy their state. All in Gaza view 1948 as a calamity that still blights their lives.

In Yad Mordechai, where Hamas rockets have done occasional damage and where parents are anxious this week for sons in the army now fighting just a few miles from home, Passi remembers fondly the time up to a few years ago when Palestinian workers were a daily presence in the kibbutz and says she and others feel "very sad" for Gaza's civilians, though not for Hamas.

Now, the Palestinians are penned in, grimly, behind 50 km (30 miles) of wall and fencing, their backs to the sea, and Hamas guerrillas cast themselves in the role of the underdog, battling the tanks and jet fighters of the Middle East's only nuclear power with rifles and improvised bombs and rockets.

At demonstrations around the world and in chatter on the Web, protests crackle with shock-value comparison between Israel today and Jewish history, from the Vatican cardinal who called Gaza a "concentration camp" to bloggers who see in it a new Warsaw Ghetto. Gaza's fighters in the role of Anielewicz.

"The Gaza Ghetto Uprising will mark both the latest chapter in Palestinian resistance to colonialism and the latest Israeli colonial brutality," Joseph Massad, an associate professor at Columbia University in New York, wrote in one blog this week.

Such comparisons incense Israelis. They note Hamas's backing from Iran, whose president questions histories of the Holocaust and has said Israel should be "wiped off the map". They see themselves as peace-seeking democrats fighting anti-Semitic, quasi-Nazi religious bigots who are bent on their destruction.

"Comparisons of Israel to the Nazis are a deeply cynical perversion of history," said Abraham Foxman, a Holocaust survivor and director of America's Anti-Defamation League.

On both sides, past pain overshadows the present, looming over Israel, the Gaza Strip and beyond as concretely as the pugnacious shape of Mordechai Anielewicz on his hilltop. Grasp that and the violence and intractability of the conflict still churning up the Gaza plain below may make more sense.

"They wanted peace with their neighbours," Passi said of Yad Mordechai's pioneers as a helicopter gunship flew overhead. "But maybe it was destiny. When the war started, they were divided into enemies that wanted to fight for the same land."

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Israel and Hamas defy ceasefire calls

Sat Jan 10, 2009 4:13am EST

* Israel continues attacks after rejecting U.N. truce call

* Medical officials put Palestinian death toll at 786

* Hamas to discuss Egyptian ceasefire plan in Cairo

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA, Jan 10 (Reuters) - Israeli aircraft, tanks and ships pounded the Gaza Strip for a 15th day on Saturday and militants from Hamas fired rockets back at Israel, defying international efforts to put a stop to the conflict.

Concerned about the deepening impact of the war on Gaza's 1.5 million people, more than half of whom depend on U.N. food assistance, the United Nations said it was hoping to resume full aid distribution on Saturday, but wanted Israeli assurances first that its staff would not be harmed.

Despite a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire and Egyptian-European mediation efforts, Israel appeared set on pressing on with its offensive, designed to stop Hamas rocket fire. Hamas fired more rockets.

"Israel is determined to deal with this matter until its positive conclusion, so that there is no terrorism in Gaza against Israel," Rafi Eitan, a member of Israel's security cabinet, told Israel Radio.

Medical officials in the Gaza Strip said the Palestinian death toll had risen to 786, of whom more than a third were children, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry.

Thirteen Israelis have been killed: 10 soldiers and three civilians hit by Hamas rocket fire.

In overnight air strikes, the Israeli military said it had hit another 40 targets across the Gaza Strip and killed 15 Hamas militants in clashes on the ground.

The bombing of tunnels along the southern Gaza border with Egypt, used to smuggle arms and other goods into Gaza, knocked out electricity in the town of Rafah, residents said.

Hamas has fired around 35 rockets into Israel in the past 24 hours. No casualties or damage were reported after the latest salvo on Saturday.

CEASEFIRE EFFORTS

In an attempt to breathe life into an Egyptian-led mediation effort, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, whose Fatah party is a political foe of Hamas, was due to fly to Cairo for talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

However, diplomats believe the Egyptian initiative, also sponsored by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, is in trouble, even if Israel has said talks over the ceasefire proposal will continue and Hamas has sent representatives to Cairo.

"There is a growing sense that the Egyptian-French plan is not going to work," a senior European diplomat told Reuters. European and Israeli diplomats said Egypt was objecting to proposals that foreign troops and technicians be stationed on its 15-km (9-mile) border with Gaza to prevent arms smuggling.

Instead, diplomats said, Egypt was ready to accept technical assistance for its own forces on the border. Israel says the Egyptians have failed in the past to prevent Hamas building up an arsenal of hundreds of Soviet-

designed Katyusha missiles.

Likewise, the U.N. Security Council resolution calling for an "immediate and durable" ceasefire appears to have found little traction with either Israel or Hamas.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert dismissed it as "unworkable" and Hamas officials in the Gaza Strip said they objected to it because they had not been consulted.

In a telephone call to Olmert, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon "expressed disappointment that the violence is continuing on the ground in disregard" of the Security Council resolution, U.N. spokeswoman Michele Montas said.

U.N. officials have no direct contacts with Hamas but Montas said the same message would be conveyed to the group indirectly.

On Friday, Israel's security cabinet debated for the second time in three days whether to send in reservists for a push into Gaza's towns and cities. There was no word on the outcome.

WHITE HOUSE BLAMES HAMAS

The United States, which abstained in the U.N. vote, offered further public support for Israel's military goals.

"This situation will not improve until Hamas stops lobbing rockets into Israel," White House spokesman Scott Stanzel said.

He said President George W. Bush had voiced his concern to Olmert about the humanitarian situation and the loss of civilian lives during the Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip.

With the Palestinian civilian death toll already in the hundreds, Israeli actions have drawn denunciations from the Red Cross, U.N. agencies and Arab and European governments. U.N. sources said Israel was also stepping up operations in the West Bank, detaining Palestinian suspects in rising numbers.

Hamas wants any ceasefire deal to include the ending of Israel's crippling economic blockade of the Gaza Strip and the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from the territory, from which Israel withdrew in 2005 after a 38-year occupation.

Israel's key demands are for a complete halt to Hamas rocket fire and for international guarantees to stop the group rearming via smuggling tunnels under the border with Egypt.

The onslaught in Gaza has solid support among Israelis, one month before a parliamentary election. A poll on Friday showed over 90 percent support among Israel's Jewish majority. (Additional reporting by Adam Entous in JERUSALEM; Writing by Luke Baker; editing by Myra MacDonald)

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Iraq Qaeda group urges anti-Jewish, U.S. attacks: web

Sat Jan 10, 2009 2:41am EST

DUBAI (Reuters) - The leader of an al Qaeda-linked group in Iraq, in an Internet message, called on Palestinians to launch global attacks on Jewish and U.S. targets to avenge Israel's offensive in Gaza.

"Palestinians around the world ... should support (Gaza) using the military proficiency they are known for, and target Jewish and American interests everywhere," said Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, head of the self-styled Islamic State in Iraq, in an audio recording posted on Islamist websites Saturday.

"We in Iraq shall not abandon our (Arab) people in Gaza ... and we shall step up our operations against the American occupiers," he said.

Baghdadi was echoing a call by al Qaeda's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahri, who called on Muslims Tuesday to strike Western and Israeli targets around the world.

Al Qaeda has become increasingly isolated in Iraq, but General David Petraeus, the outgoing U.S. commander in Iraq, said in September that it remained a dangerous force in the country and U.S. troops must continue to confront it.

(Reporting by Firouz Sedarat; editing by Myra MacDonald)

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Iran's Ahmadinejad presses Egypt on Gaza stance

Sat Jan 10, 2009 10:39am EST

TEHRAN, Jan 10 (Reuters) - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called on Egypt on Saturday to clarify whether it is a "partner" with Israel in efforts to break Hamas resistance in the Gaza Strip, a news agency reported.

Iran has condemned Israel for its attacks in Gaza and expressed support for the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, criticising what Tehran says is the silence of some Arab states. Ahmadinejad said they should cut ties with Israel.

Egypt, the only Arab state to border Gaza, has been a focus for protests by hardline Iranians who say Cairo has not done enough to help the Palestinians. Egypt has partly blamed Hamas for the violence because it failed to renew a truce with Israel.

"Today it has been heard in some of the West's political meetings that the Egyptian government is a partner in crimes in Gaza and they are after breaking Hamas as part of the resistance and bring it under their own influence," the semi-official Mehr News Agency quoted Ahmadinejad as saying.

Ahmadinejad may have been referring to Egyptian-European efforts at mediation in the two-week conflict, in which at least 821 Palestinians and 13 Israelis have been killed.

"I believe that in the current conditions, and with the crimes it is committing, the Zionist regime (Israel) is after finding a partner for its crimes," Ahmadinejad said.

"Therefore I ask the Egyptian officials to announce their stance on the Palestinian nation, especially on the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip and the Zionist regime's crimes, as soon as possible," Mehr quoted him as saying.

Israel has accused Iran of supplying arms to Hamas, which has been isolated by some Arab and international governments.

Tehran says it gives moral, financial and humanitarian support to its Palestinian ally.

Iran is embroiled in a row over its nuclear work with Washington, which accuses Tehran of seeking an atomic bomb. The United States has sought to win over Arabs in its effort to isolate Iran. Tehran denies seeking nuclear arms.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Thursday said some Muslim governments in the region had been wrong not to do more to stop Israeli attacks on Gaza.

Ahmadinejad, who often rails against Israel and the West, echoed that view, in comments carried by ISNA news agency.

"Cut your relations with the Zionist regime and boycott this regime. Don't give them a chance to influence you," he said. (Reporting by Zahra Hosseinian; Writing by Fredrik Dahl; Editing by Michael Roddy)

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Hamas leader accuses Israel of Gaza holocaust

Sat Jan 10, 2009 5:35pm EST
By Khaled Yacoub Oweis

DAMASCUS, Dec 10 (Reuters) - Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal accused Israel on Saturday of perpetrating a "holocaust" in Gaza and said its invasion had only succeeded in drowning the besieged territory in a "sea of blood".

In a speech from the Syrian capital widely carried by Arab channels, Meshaal said Israelis' support for the 15-day offensive compromised the moral fabric of the Jewish state.

"I ask you Israelis, what have you achieved from this war you support? What have you achieved except killing innocent children and creating a trace of smashed skulls and a sea of blood drowning Gaza?" Meshaal said.

"What have you achieved except a holocaust your leaders want to win the next Israeli elections with?" Meshaal said, using the term for the Nazi genocide during World War Two that killed some six million Jews.

Israel said Hamas was to blame for the civilian death toll because the group's fighters used civilians as a shield and hid in buildings and urban infrastructure.

Meshaal, who lives in exile in Syria, said Israel was deliberately targeting civilians to destroy morale in Gaza. He reiterated Hamas's conditions for a ceasefire, including ending an Israeli blockade that was one of the reasons cited by the group for its decision not to renew a six-month truce in December.

"BITTER TASTE"

Citing a history of Arab struggle against invaders, Meshaal questioned how long Israel would survive, saying the ferocity of the Israeli attacks finished off chances for a lasting peace between the Jewish state and the Arab world surrounding it.

"You have destroyed the last chance for negotiations. No one will now believe you. Our people are fed up with compromises after they had tried them for so long. A bitter taste is all that's left," he said addressing the Israeli public.

"You should know God's law. There is no future for entities and nations founded on oppression and aggression. This is a law applicable to Muslims, Jews and Christians alike," he added.

Meshaal said Israel's onslaught on Gaza was failing to achieve military objectives, citing rockets still falling on Israel from Gaza and Palestinian resistance to far superior Israeli forces.

"You have created resistance in every household and every town," he said.

Meshaal said Israel had also lost the battle for international public opinion, with worldwide demonstrations and popular Arab anger.

"We are living the most difficult days of the battle. What is needed is fierce resistance on the ground of Gaza and fierce support from the Arab, Islamic and international street until the aggression ends and the enemy withdraws."

Hamas's ideology is based on non-recognition of Israel and its charter calls for Israel's destruction.

Leaders of the Islamist group have said in the past they would accept the establishment of a Palestinian state on land occupied by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war in return for a truce with the Jewish state lasting for decades.



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FACTBOX-Developments in Gaza fighting, Jan 10

Sat Jan 10, 2009 3:29pm EST
Jan 10 (Reuters) - Following are developments in the fighting in the Gaza Strip as of 2030 GMT:

(* Denotes new or updated items)

* DAMASCUS - Hamas's leader in exile, Khaled Meshaal, said his group would not consider a Gaza ceasefire until Israel ended its 15-day-old military offensive and opened the coastal strip's border crossings.

* GAZA - Israel said an air strike near the Jabalya refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip killed Amir Mansi, a senior Hamas commander. Palestinian medical workers said one adult and two children were killed but that Mansi's condition was unclear.

* GAZA - A series of Israeli air strikes in Jabalya killed an Islamic Jihad militant and two civilians, Palestinian medical workers said.

* GAZA - An Israeli tank shell killed five members of a Palestinian family in Beit Hanoun, Palestinian medical workers said.

* GAZA - Eight Palestinians were killed by an Israeli tank shell in Jabalya refugee camp, Palestinian medical workers said. The Israeli military denied carrying out attacks in the area.

* SOUTHERN ISRAEL - Gaza militants fired about a dozen cross-border rockets, some landing deep in Israel. Several struck the Israeli town of Ashkelon, injuring two Israelis, the military said.

* GAZA/ISRAEL - The death toll in Gaza in the two-week Israeli offensive has reached 843, more than a third of them children, the Hamas-run Health Ministry said. Thirteen Israelis have been killed, 10 soldiers, and three civilians killed by Hamas rocket fire.

GAZA - An Israeli air strike on a house in northern Gaza killed a woman and wounded two people, Palestinian medics said.

SOUTHERN GAZA - Israel carried out a series of air strikes along the southern Gaza border with Egypt, where tunnels have been used to smuggle arms and other goods into Gaza. Residents said the air strikes damaged an electricity transformer feeding power to Gaza.

GAZA - A missile landed inside a hospital compound in the centre of the Gaza Strip, wounding one person, doctors said.

GAZA - A Palestinian gunman was killed in central Gaza in clashes with Israeli troops, doctors said.

GAZA - A gunman from the Islamic Jihad militant group was killed in the Beach Camp refugee settlement in northern Gaza Strip, medical workers said. (Jerusalem Newsroom)

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Egypt, Abbas see no foreign force on Gaza border

Sat Jan 10, 2009 5:26am EST

CAIRO, Jan 10 (Reuters) - Egypt and the Palestinian Authority said on Saturday they did not envisage any international forces in Egypt or on the Gaza border under a possible truce agreement between Israel and Gaza.

Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hossam Zaki said Egypt had received no request. "No one has asked for this, and this is a non-issue for us," he said.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, after talks in Cairo with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, said: "We want an international presence in the Gaza Strip, and not on the Egypt-Gaza border."

"If they say in the West Bank and Gaza, we say yes, ... (but) it is not between the borders of Egypt and Rafah. We basically want to spare the blood of our people," he added.

European and Israeli diplomats have said Egypt is objecting to proposals that foreign troops and technicians be stationed on its 15-km (9-mile) border with Gaza to prevent arms smuggling. Diplomats have also suggested that they could supervise the operation of the border crossings and monitor the truce between Israel and Hamas, the Islamist movement which runs Gaza.

Instead, the diplomats said, Egypt is ready to accept technical assistance for its own forces on the border. Israel says the Egyptians have failed in the past to prevent Hamas building up an arsenal of hundreds of rockets.

Egypt already has international forces on its side of the border with Israel as part of the peace treaty it signed with the Jewish state in 1979.

But Zaki said that force was not relevant as a precedent. "It's like apples and oranges," he added.

Abbas said an Egyptian initiative launched on Tuesday was in fact the way to implement a U.N. Security Council ceasefire resolution passed on Thursday.

Neither diplomatic initiative has made much difference on the ground in Gaza, which received more Israeli attacks by land, sea and air on Saturday. Hamas fired rockets into Israel.

Abbas said the Palestinian Authority wanted a ceasefire and peace. "Resistance is not an end in itself ... If the resistance aims to destroy the people, we don't want it," he added. (Additional reporting by William Rasmussen and Aziz El-Kaissouni; Writing by Jonathan Wright)

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Palestinian, Israel supporters rally across Europe

Sun Jan 11, 2009 3:20pm EST

By Sophie Hares

LONDON (Reuters) - Thousands of demonstrators poured onto the streets of major European cities on Sunday to protest for a second day against Israel's assault on Gaza, but there was no repeat of Saturday's widespread violent clashes with police.

Around 30,000 people demonstrated in Brussels, some carrying models of bloodied Gaza children, while more than 1,000 formed a human chain to march through Rome as Italy's defense minister warned Muslims against provocative prayers in public squares.

"Enough with the bombs, enough with the massacre, enough with the Gaza occupation, enough with the destruction of lives and houses and enough with the death of children," said Chiara Palladini, a demonstrator in Rome.

Smaller numbers of supporters of Israel also made their voices heard, in London, Manchester and Prague. In Dublin they gathered waving Israeli flags and singing psalms in lashing rain, separated by a police barricade from a rival pro-Palestinian rally.

"Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East and has a right to defend itself," said Annette Horseman, 43, from Dublin.

Gilad Handler, 25, an Israeli high-tech worker living in Dublin, said the high number of Palestinian civilian casualties was difficult for Israelis.

"We don't want war with Gaza," he said. "But it's enough getting years of rocket barrages on our heads from there."

Israeli forces edged into Gaza City on Sunday, killing at least 29 Palestinians on the 16th day of the offensive, as fighting raged in defiance of international ceasefire calls.

The Palestinian death toll since Israel's offensive began stands at 874, many of them civilians, Gaza medical officials said. Israel says thirteen Israelis — three civilians hit by rocket fire and 10 soldiers — have been killed.

Israel wants a halt to rocket attacks and arrangements to ensure that Hamas cannot rearm through tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border.

PEACEFUL RALLIES

A London gathering of 4,000 pro-Israel demonstrators, some carrying Israeli flags and placards saying "End Hamas Terror!," passed off without a repeat of Saturday's violent scenes when about 20,000 Palestinian supporters confronted riot police.

Thousands of demonstrators including high-profile actors and politicians marched peacefully through Madrid demanding increased international action against Israel's offensive, some chanting "We are all Palestinians."

The Israeli embassy in the Spanish capital issued a statement asking why demonstrators there had never protested against aggression by Hamas and calling recent anti-Israel rallies "a double standard."

In Italy, where thousands marched in Naples and Genoa to demand an end to violence in Gaza, Defense Minister Ignazio La Russa said he did not oppose protests but called public Muslim prayers by demonstrators a challenge to peace.

On Saturday, thousands of Muslims knelt in prayer before Milan's central train station. A week ago Muslims held prayers in front of the city center cathedral, angering right-wing politicians in the overwhelmingly Catholic country.

"I say enough of the provocations of Islamists in Milan," La Russa, from the right-wing National Alliance, told *Il Giornale* newspaper on Sunday. "In Milan, a legitimate demonstration ended in a deliberately provocative

mosque under the open sky."

While Sunday's protests were overwhelmingly peaceful, a Reuters photographer in Brussels reported windows had been smashed and a car overturned and set alight in the area where the city's anti-Israel march had ended.

(Reporting by Jonathan Saul, Frank Prenesti, Deepa Babington, Jan Lopatka, Pete Harrison, Elena Massa, Tracy Rucinski; editing by Tim Pearce)

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Israeli forces edge into Gaza city, Hamas defiant

Sun Jan 11, 2009 7:19am EST

* Hamas's Meshaal: no ceasefire until Israel ends assault

* Rockets strike deep in Israel; clashes in Gaza city

* Rights group says Israel using white-phosphorus munitions

* Palestinian death toll rises to 869

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA, Jan 11 (Reuters) - Israeli forces edged into the Gaza Strip's most populous area on Sunday, killing at least 27 Palestinians in an offensive stepped up in defiance of international calls for a ceasefire.

Medical officials said about half of the Palestinian dead in the latest fighting in the Hamas-ruled territory were civilians.

"Israel is getting close to achieving the goals it set for itself," Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told his cabinet in Jerusalem, giving no timeframe for an end to the 16-day-long war.

"But patience, determination and effort are still needed to realise these goals in a manner that will change the security situation in the south," Olmert said, referring to Hamas rocket attacks that continued to hit Israeli towns.

Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal said his ruling Islamist group would not consider a ceasefire until Israel ended its 16-day-old air, sea and ground assault and lifted a Gaza blockade. A Hamas delegation held talks in Cairo on an Egyptian truce plan.

Israel, describing as unworkable a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire, wants a halt to rocket attacks and arrangements to ensure that Hamas cannot rearm through tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border.

An Israeli defence official was to visit Egypt on Monday to press for tougher anti-smuggling measures. German diplomatic sources said Berlin offered to send specialists next week to Egypt to discuss ways to improve border security and Cairo had responded positively.

Backed by helicopter gunships, Israeli troops and tanks pushed into eastern and southern parts of the city of Gaza, confronting Hamas militants who fired anti-armour missiles and mortar bombs.

A total of 869 Palestinians, many of them civilians, and 13 Israelis — three civilians hit by rocket fire and 10 soldiers — have been killed since Israel's offensive began on Dec. 27.

New street fighting killed 10 gunmen, Palestinian medical workers said. Another three fighters and a member of the Hamas police force were killed by Israeli air strikes.

Medical officials said 13 civilians, including four members of a family, were killed by Israeli forces and that Israeli shelling of two villages south of the city of Gaza had set 15 houses on fire.

Israel's military said it attacked a mosque used to store weapons, 10 squads of gunmen, three rocket-launching sites and the house of a Hamas commander.

Mahmoud Abu Hasseera surveyed the rubble of his house on the edge of the city of Gaza, where Israeli tanks and infantry had battled Palestinian fighters hours earlier.

"Where should we and our children go to sleep? To the streets?" he asked. "We have no mattresses, blankets, cooking gas, food or water. Everything

was destroyed."

Though Palestinian rocket salvos into Israel have diminished, two rockets on Sunday struck Beersheba, 42 km (26 miles) from the Gaza Strip, and at least four others hit other communities, police said. There was some damage but no casualties.

THIRD STAGE?

Israel's deputy defence minister, Matan Vilnai, suggested time was running out for the Gaza campaign now that the U.N. Security Council had weighed in with a call to stop it.

"Therefore it seems -- I'm guessing -- that we are close to a cessation of the ground operations and a cessation of the overall operations," Vilnai said on Army Radio.

Olmert convened his cabinet for a discussion expected to include a possible "third stage" of the offensive in which the military would storm into Gaza's urban areas, a politically risky move a month before Israel's national election.

Israel, the prime minister said, "must not miss out, at the last moment, on what has been achieved through an unprecedented national effort".

While Israeli commanders said whole Hamas battalions were being wiped out, Damascus-based Meshaal said Israeli forces had achieved nothing and pointed to the continued rocket fire.

Israeli actions have drawn denunciations from the Red Cross, U.N. agencies and Arab and European governments.

New York-based Human Rights Watch has called on Israel to stop using white-phosphorus munitions in densely populated areas in the Gaza Strip, saying the chemical could severely burn people and set structures and fields on fire.

The group said white phosphorus was apparently being used to create smoke screens, describing this as "a permissible use in principle under international law".

But it also noted media photographs of air-bursting white phosphorus projectiles, which it said can spread burning wafers over an area between 125 and 250 metres (410-820 ft) in diameter, depending on the altitude of the explosion.

Israel said it uses only weapons permitted by international law. It has accused Hamas of using civilians as human shields. (Additional reporting by Adam Entous, Ari Rabinovitch and Allyn Fisher-Ilan in Jerusalem; writing by Dan Williams and Jeffrey Heller; Editing by Michael Roddy)

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Egyptian police hold 21 Islamists after Gaza rally

Sun Jan 11, 2009 8:20am EST
(Updates number of detained)

CAIRO, Jan 11 (Reuters) - Egyptian police detained 21 members of the opposition Muslim Brotherhood after a rally in protest against Israel's offensive in Gaza, the group and security officials said on Sunday.

The Brotherhood, the strongest opposition group in the country, said most of the men were rounded up before dawn in the coastal city of Alexandria.

One security official said the detentions were made in response to the Gaza protests and because of suspicion of membership of an illegal organisation.

Those detained include members of the provincial leadership of the Brotherhood, which has historical and ideological ties with Hamas, the Islamist group ruling Gaza.

The government says the Brotherhood is outlawed but allows it to operate relatively openly.

The Egyptian government and security agencies have been eager to suppress protests against the Israeli attacks on Gaza, in which protesters frequently condemn the government for what they see as its complicity in the blockade of the coastal strip.

In recent days protesters have called for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador to Cairo, and for Egypt to open its Rafah border crossing with Gaza to allow Palestinians to flee the 16-day onslaught which has killed 869 people.

More than 100 injured Palestinians have been allowed into Egypt since the offensive began. (Writing by Alastair Sharp; Editing by Charles Dick)

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Israel says Egypt should have Gaza border role

Sun Jan 11, 2009 1:50am EST

JERUSALEM, Jan 11 (Reuters) - Israel said on Sunday the job of stopping arms smuggling from Egypt to the Gaza Strip should be done by Egyptian forces and rejected the idea of an international force. European and Israeli diplomats have said an international force is part of a package mediators are trying to put together to end a more than two-week-old Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip that is designed to stop Palestinian rocket attacks.

Egypt said on Saturday it would not allow such a force to be stationed on its side of the 15 km (9 mile) Gaza border. On the other side, Hamas has said it would not accept foreign troops.

"There's no doubt Egypt has a superb military and security forces which can tackle all the undesirable phenomena from a security standpoint. No one can compete with this," leading Israeli Defence Ministry official Amos Gilad told Israel Radio.

Gilad, Israel's point man in security talks with Egypt, said by contrast an international force would be "devoid of intelligence, devoid of an ability to penetrate those doing all of this smuggling, devoid of an operational capability".

"There's an international force in southern Lebanon and we know exactly what's going on there," he said, referring to U.N. peacekeepers whom Israel accuses of not doing enough to stop a military build-up by Hezbollah since the Lebanese guerrilla group's 2006 war with the Jewish state.

Israel Radio said Gilad would travel to Egypt on Monday to discuss truce ideas.

Israel's main demand is for a new mechanism to prevent Gaza's Islamist Hamas rulers from receiving arms smuggled through tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border.

(Writing by Dan Williams, Editing by Ralph Gowling)

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Israel sends army reservists into Gaza battle

Sun Jan 11, 2009 7:34pm EST

* Olmert, Barak, Livni opt to step up pressure on Hamas

* Barak: Israel pursuing dual military, diplomatic tracks * Germany ready to help Egypt prevent arms smuggling

* Palestinian death toll rises to 890

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA, Jan 12 (Reuters) - Israeli leaders trying to find a knockout blow for Hamas militants defying a 17-day-old assault on the Gaza Strip have thrown army reservists into battle.

With the Palestinian death toll nearing 900 and world pressure for a ceasefire mounting, Israeli forces might launch a full-scale attack on Hamas smuggling tunnels on Gaza's border with Egypt, and perhaps a wider urban operation.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Defence Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni met late on Sunday and decided to tighten pressure on Hamas, Israel Radio said.

"We have begun to integrate reservist forces into the action in the Gaza Strip," Israeli military spokesman Avi Benayahu said earlier. "We aren't acting in panic, but cautiously."

The reservists had been held back while Israeli leaders ponder an all-out ground offensive on Gaza's towns and cities to try to destroy Hamas's ability to fire rockets into Israel.

Such a move would risk higher Israeli military casualties as well as even heavier losses among the 1.5 million Palestinians packed into the tiny coastal enclave with no escape route.

Busloads of Israeli reservists headed south towards Gaza on Sunday as fighting raged on in the Hamas-ruled territory in defiance of a U.N. Security Council demand for a ceasefire.

Israeli warplanes have repeatedly bombed the so-called Philadelphi corridor along Gaza's 15 km (nine mile) border with Egypt, sometimes using "bunker buster" munitions that explode underground and cause shockwaves to try to collapse the tunnels.

"We are continuing to operate to restore calm to the south and to create a situation of effective action along the Philadelphi corridor," Barak told visiting German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the defence ministry said.

"We are determined to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves at the beginning of the operation, and are in parallel examining the diplomatic course as well," Barak said.

Israel, which rejected last week's U.N. ceasefire resolution as unworkable, wants a halt to rocket attacks and measures to stop Hamas from rearming via the cross-border tunnels.

Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal said his Islamist group would not consider a ceasefire until Israel ended its air, sea and ground assault and lifted its blockade of Gaza. A Hamas delegation is in Cairo for talks on an Egyptian truce plan. Western and Israeli officials said diplomats were discussing a broad internationally-assisted monitoring system to help Egypt stop weapons smuggling and intercept rocket shipments.

Steinmeier told Livni Germany was ready to help Egypt combat smuggling by land and sea, Israeli officials said. Berlin has offered Egypt training and

equipment, German diplomats said.

Israel believes at least some of Hamas's rockets arrived in Egypt by ship and were then transported overland across the Sinai peninsula before being sent into Gaza through tunnels.

Backed by helicopter gunships, Israeli tanks pushed into eastern and southern parts of the city of Gaza, attacking Hamas militants who fired anti-armour missiles and mortar bombs.

The Palestinian death toll since Israel's offensive began on Dec. 27 stands at 890, many of them civilians, Gaza medical officials said. About 3,600 Palestinians have been wounded.

Thirteen Israelis -- three civilians hit by rocket fire and 10 soldiers -- have been killed, Israel says.

In Washington, U.S. President-elect Barack Obama said the deaths of Palestinian and Israeli civilians were "heartbreaking" and vowed early involvement in the quest for Middle East peace. (Additional reporting by Adam Entous, Jeffrey Heller and Ailyn Fisher-Ilan in Jerusalem; Writing by Alistair Lyon, editing by Ralph Gowling)

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Israel throws reservists into Gaza battles

Sun Jan 11, 2009 6:13pm EST

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA (Reuters) - Israel threw reservists into battle in the Gaza Strip on Sunday and at least 31 Palestinians were killed on the 16th day of a devastating offensive Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said was close to achieving its aims.

The reservists had been held back until now, as Israeli leaders ponder a full-scale assault on Gaza's towns and cities to try to destroy Hamas's ability to fire rockets into Israel.

"We have begun to integrate reservist forces into the action in the Gaza Strip," military spokesman Avi Benayahu said on Israel's Channel 2 TV. "We aren't acting in panic, but cautiously."

His phrasing left it unclear whether Israeli forces had been ordered to storm into built-up areas, risking higher military casualties as well as heavy civilian losses.

Olmert, Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni met to discuss their next move, Israel radio said, predicting more attacks on smuggling tunnels used by Hamas on the Gaza-Egyptian border, and possibly a wider operation.

Thick black smoke rose over the city of Gaza as fighting raged on in the Hamas-ruled territory in defiance of a U.N. Security Council demand for a ceasefire. Medical workers said about half the Palestinians killed on Sunday were civilians.

"Israel is getting close to achieving the goals it set for itself," Olmert told his cabinet in Jerusalem.

"But patience, determination and effort are still needed to realize these goals in a manner that will change the security situation in the south," Olmert said, referring to Israeli towns where life has been disrupted by Hamas rocket salvos.

On the usually quiet Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, shots were fired from Syria at Israeli army engineers working on the frontier fence, but no one was hurt and it was not immediately clear who was responsible, an Israeli military spokesman said.

Backed by helicopter gunships, Israeli tanks pushed into eastern and southern parts of the city of Gaza, attacking Hamas militants who fired anti-armor missiles and mortar bombs.

At the edge of the city, Mahmoud Abu Haseera surveyed the rubble of his house, in an area where Israeli tanks and infantry had battled Palestinian fighters hours earlier.

"Where should we and our children go to sleep? To the streets?" he asked. "We have no mattresses, blankets, cooking gas, food or water. Everything was destroyed."

RISING DEATH TOLL

The Palestinian death toll since Israel's offensive began on December 27 stands at 890, many of them civilians, Gaza medical officials said. About 3,600 Palestinians have been wounded.

Thirteen Israelis -- three civilians hit by rocket fire and 10 soldiers -- have been killed, Israel says.

Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal said his ruling Islamist group would not consider a ceasefire until Israel ended its air, sea and ground assault and lifted its blockade of Gaza. A Hamas delegation held talks in Cairo on an Egyptian truce plan.

Israel, which has rejected as unworkable the U.N. ceasefire resolution adopted last week, wants a halt to rocket attacks and measures to prevent Hamas from rearming through tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border.

Western and Israeli officials said diplomats were discussing a broad internationally assisted monitoring system to help Egypt stop weapons smuggling and intercept rocket shipments.

Visiting German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier told Livni his country was ready to help Egypt combat smuggling by land and sea, Israeli officials said. German diplomats said Berlin had offered training and equipment to the Egyptians.

Israel believes at least some of Hamas's rockets arrived in Egypt by ship and were then transported overland across the Sinai peninsula before being sent into Gaza through tunnels.

Israeli forces killed 17 civilians, including four members of one family, and 10 gunmen, in the latest fighting, medics said. Air strikes killed three fighters and a Hamas policeman.

"We are continuing to confront a mad reality of boobytrapped tunnels, boobytrapped schools," the Israeli army spokesman said.

Hamas fired 17 rockets into Israel, wounding two people in the town of Beersheba, 42 km (26 miles) from Gaza, police said.

Along Gaza's border with Egypt, Israeli aircraft pounded suspected tunnels. Witnesses said Israeli warplanes had been flying over Egyptian territory on their bombing runs. An Israeli military spokesman had no comment.

The spokesman said Israel had complained to a U.N. monitoring force about the shooting on the Golan Heights, and had been told by the force that the gunman had been arrested.

Israel captured the plateau in the 1967 Middle East war and later annexed it in a move not recognized internationally.

In Washington, U.S. President-elect Barack Obama said in broadcast remarks he would begin the search for Middle East peace immediately on becoming president and the Gaza conflict underscored his determination to become involved early.

(Additional reporting by Adam Entous, Jeffrey Heller and Alyn Fisher-Ilan in Jerusalem; writing by Alistair Lyon, editing by Tim Pearce)

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Israeli missile falls in Egypt, fails to explode

Mon Jan 12, 2009 10:55am EST
CAIRO, Jan 12 (Reuters) - An Israeli missile fell on Egyptian territory near a house in the border town of Rafah on Monday but it did not explode, police sources said.

The missile landed in the Brazil district of the town, about 200 metres (yards) inside Egypt, during an Israeli air raid on the border strip between Egypt and Gaza, where the Israelis are targeting tunnels used for smuggling into the strip.

Police have cordoned off the area and called bomb disposal experts to deal with the missile, the sources added.

It is the first complete Israeli munition known to have fallen on Egyptian territory during 17 days of Israeli attacks on Gaza, although flares and shrapnel have landed in Egypt.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry apologised to Egypt on Monday that shrapnel from Israeli bombs injured two Egyptian children and two police officers a day earlier.

The Israeli ambassador said the bombing was meant to hit a military target, the Egyptian foreign ministry said.

Israeli warplanes have been flying over Egyptian territory during their bombing runs on the tunnels, witnesses say. (Writing by Jonathan Wright; Editing by Dominic Evans)

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Israel tightens grip on urban parts of Gaza

Mon Jan 12, 2009 8:42pm EST

* Intense fighting as Israeli tanks edge toward city of Gaza

* U.N.'s Ban to visit region to press for truce

* Hamas said set to reject Egypt's ceasefire plan

By Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA, Jan 13 (Reuters) - Israeli troops tightened their grip on urban areas in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday on the 18th day of an offensive against Hamas guerrillas, while world leaders struggled to coax the sides to a ceasefire.

The Palestinian death toll passed 900, including many civilians, as Israeli tanks moved to the edges of the city of Gaza and troops backed by air and naval strikes fought intense battles with Hamas militants.

Israeli leaders met to decide on further steps, Israeli media said, as Hamas's leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, said defiantly in a televised broadcast that "victory is at hand".

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon headed to the region to further press for a truce in a week of talks with leaders in Egypt, Israel, Jordan and Syria.

"My message is simple, direct, and to the point: the fighting must stop. To both sides, I say: Just stop now," Ban told reporters before his departure.

Lebanese political sources close to the Islamist group said Gaza's Hamas rulers would reject Egypt's proposals to end the offensive Israel said it launched to stop rocket fire from Gaza that causes few casualties but disrupts life in southern Israel.

Hamas's main objections were to a proposed long-term truce and to any ceasefire being put in place before Israel withdrew all its forces from Gaza, one of the sources said.

Israel has rejected a United Nations Security Council call for a truce but said it was ready to discuss further proposals.

GUN BATTLES ERUPT

Despite a world drive to end the fighting, Israel pressed on with its offensive, its tanks closing in on Gaza city, where explosions shook the skies on Tuesday, as gun battles that broke out between Hamas fighters and Israeli troops.

Israeli military spokesman Brigadier General Avi Benayahu said Monday Israel was "deeper in the territory" and that reserve units had moved in to hold positions and free up regular troops for thrusts deeper into the city of Gaza.

"We are tightening the encirclement of the city," Brigadier General Eyal Eisenberg told reporters touring Israeli positions on Monday.

Three Israeli soldiers were wounded in a "friendly fire" incident in Gaza on Monday night, the military spokesman said.

Violence was also reported in the occupied West Bank, where gunmen shot and wounded four soldiers while shooting at an Israeli vehicle, a military spokesman said.

Palestinian medics said at least 913 people in Gaza have been killed in the Israeli attacks launched since Dec. 27 in the coastal territory. The health minister in Gaza's Hamas-run government said close to 400 of those were

women and children.

Israel's casualties in the conflict were 10 soldiers killed and three civilians from rocket and mortar fire aimed from Gaza.

The bloodshed has burst open fragile faultlines in the map of Middle East diplomacy, with the Bush administration in its final week standing behind Israel, Europe pressing Israel to call off its attacks and Arab leaders speaking out against the Jewish state.

SAUDIS ACCUSE ISRAEL

On Monday, Saudi Arabia, an oil power and one of several Arab governments whose pro-American stance is far from popular with its people, accused Israel of "racist extermination".

It said it hoped Bush's successor Barack Obama would work swiftly to resolve the 60-year-old Palestinian issue.

Bush said Monday it was up to Hamas, which won a 2006 parliamentary election and seized control of Gaza 18 months ago, to end the misery of the enclave's 1.5 million people.

"I'm for a sustainable ceasefire, and a definition of sustainable ceasefire is Hamas stops firing rockets into Israel ... I happen to believe the choice is Hamas's to make," Bush said.

Bush said Israel had a right to defend itself but he hoped it would "continue to be mindful of innocent folks" and help expedite the delivery of humanitarian aid to Palestinians.

Egypt, an Arab government close to Washington but with a strong Islamist opposition, is trying to broker a ceasefire to halt the fighting on its northern border.

Israeli leaders, facing a Feb. 10 election, have given few clues on how long they would continue the offensive. Analysts have cited Obama's coming inauguration on Jan. 20 as a factor pushing for an end to the fighting.

Hamas negotiators returned to Cairo late on Monday after consulting the leadership in exile in Damascus. Haniyeh, Hamas's leader in Gaza, said the group would negotiate a truce but only if Israel pulled back all its forces and ended a Gaza blockade.

A Lebanese source close to Hamas said the group wanted a truce for a limited time and objected to the presence of any foreign observers at the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt.

Israel, backed by its Western allies, says any ceasefire must depend on Hamas halting rocket fire — 16 landed in Israel on Monday, the army said. Israel also wants measures to stop Hamas from rearming via tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border, in an area known as the Philadelphi corridor.

(Additional reporting by Adam Entous, Ori Lewis, Alastair Macdonald, Luke Baker, Alistair Lyon, Jeffrey Heller and Joseph Nasr in Jerusalem, Wafa Amr in Ramallah, Dan Williams in Gaza and Alaa Shahine in Cairo; Writing by Ailyn Fisher-Ilan, editing by Angus MacSwan)

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Israel weighs seizing Gaza border corridor-diplomats

Mon Jan 12, 2009 7:22am EST
By Adam Entous

JERUSALEM, Jan 12 (Reuters) - Israeli military plans in the Gaza Strip include the option of retaking the narrow stretch of land that separates the coastal enclave from Egypt to try to prevent Hamas from rearming, Western diplomats said on Monday.

Israel intensified its aerial bombardment overnight of the so-called Philadelphi corridor to destroy smuggling tunnels that the Islamist group could use to move longer-ranged rockets, leaders, fighters and funds in and out of the war zone.

Western diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, described a ground operation to retake the Philadelphi corridor and parts of the town of Rafah as one of Israel's leading "third phase" options if talks over a ceasefire founder.

A ground operation along the corridor would allow Israel to use bulldozers and sonar equipment to root out tunnels that have yet to be destroyed with air power alone.

Local Palestinian tunnel operators estimated that several hundred of the secret passages have been disabled but that many hundreds of others remained intact.

Holding the 14-km (9 mile)-long Philadelphi corridor could give Israel a bargaining chip in ceasefire talks, diplomats said. Israel has demanded security guarantees from Egypt and Western powers to ensure the tunnels are not rebuilt, but differences remain over how that can be accomplished.

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak stressed the importance of taking "effective action" along the Philadelphi corridor in talks with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on Sunday night, but Barak's office provided no other details.

RISKS

A senior European diplomat said a top Israeli military intelligence official, in a private briefing, acknowledged the risky nature of a ground operation to reoccupy the border zone.

The sandy stretch is only a few hundred metres (yards) wide in some areas, leaving ground troops open to rocket attacks and ambush.

That was a big factor in Israel's decision to leave the corridor when it withdrew troops and settlers from the Gaza Strip for 2005.

The sight of Israeli soldiers, crawling in the dirt along the corridor in a search for the remains of five comrades blown apart by an explosion in 2004, is seared in Israeli memories.

Thousands of Rafah's 150,000 residents have already fled their homes because of the Israeli offensive, which has killed more than 900 Palestinians in 17 days, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza.

Thirteen Israelis — three civilians hit by rocket fire and 10 soldiers — have been killed, Israel says.

Many Palestinian homes next the Philadelphi corridor have been shelled. Israel argues that many of them hid entry shafts leading to larger tunnels that cross the border.

Israel could sweep through the Philadelphi corridor and withdraw quickly. But barring a diplomatic solution acceptable to Israel, its ground forces could end up staying there long-term, increasing the risks, diplomats said.

"Some (Israeli leaders) want to do it and some think it's crazy," the European diplomat said.

Before the current offensive, Israel estimated there were hundreds of smuggling tunnels.

Palestinians say the number topped 3,000.

The tunnels include deep passages wide enough to bring through items as large as farm animals and Katyusha rockets. Leading to these are a matrix of smaller access shafts. (Reporting by Adam Entous in Jerusalem and Nidal al-Mughrabi in Gaza; Editing by Samia Nakhoul)

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Israeli strikes disproportionate - EU aid chief

Tue Jan 13, 2009 8:11am EST

BRUSSELS, Jan 13 (Reuters) - Israel's military strikes in the Gaza Strip were disproportionate and breach international law, the European Union's aid chief was quoted as saying on Tuesday.

In some of the toughest criticism by an EU official since Israel began an 18-day offensive that has killed more than 900 Palestinians, EU Aid Commissioner Louis Michel said the Jewish state's response to Hamas' rocket attacks were "totally disproportionate".

"One simple fact, acknowledged and denounced by established experts in the field, is that Israel is not respecting international humanitarian law," Michel told Belgian newspaper La Libre Belgique in an interview published on Tuesday.

"The first obligation is that an occupying power has the obligation to preserve the life of populations, to protect them, to nourish them and to care for them. That is manifestly not the case here," he added.

Michel did say it was hard to pin the responsibility on any one party, saying it was clear that Hamas had harassed Israel with its continuous rocket attacks. (Reporting by Mark John)

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