**IDF chief condemns ICC probe, implies judges unfamiliar with terror tactics**

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Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Aviv Kohavi on Sunday condemned the International Criminal Court’s investigation into Israel over alleged war crimes and defended the Israeli military’s conduct.

Earlier this month, the ICC announced it would investigate possible war crimes committed by Israel and Palestinians following a request by the Palestinians, who joined the court in 2015 after being granted nonmember observer status in the UN General Assembly.

“The Hague is living in the old world. In the Middle East, there is a new area of terrorism,” Kohavi said during a ceremony held at the IDF’s Southern Command which is responsible for security against the Gaza Strip.

He argued that the Hague-based ICC is unfamiliar with the terrorist tactics that IDF soldiers encounter saying there’s a “gulf” between what is happening on the ground and how the judges at the ICC perceive those actions.

“It is our enemies who have chosen to settle in populated areas and place thousands of missiles and rockets there that by definition hit civilians,” he said. “Anyone who thinks of preventing us from attacking rockets inside a populated built-up area is abandoning our citizens in our built-up space.”

“It is incumbent upon the international community to adapt patterns of thinking, patterns of warfare, and international law to the way in which the armies of terrorism are to be fought,” Kohavi urged.

He told soldiers that the IDF will protect them from prosecution and depicted the decision to open a probe of Israel’s actions as having “crossed a red line.”

“The values of the IDF and international law are not only intended to prevent harm to bystanders on the other side, but they are also equally aimed at enabling us to protect our citizens,” Kohavi stressed.

Last week the ICC confirmed it has sent formal notices to Israel and the Palestinian Authority about its impending investigation, giving them a month to seek deferral by proving they are carrying out their own investigations.

Israel has fiercely condemned the investigation, accusing the ICC of bias, noting that it is demonstrably capable of investigating any alleged IDF crimes through its own legal hierarchies, and saying the ICC has no jurisdiction since the Palestinians do not have a state. Israel is not a member of the ICC, but its citizens could be subject to arrest abroad if warrants are issued.

The report said the one-and-a-half page letter briefly laid out the three main areas the probe intends to cover: the 2014 war between Israel and Hamas; Israeli settlement policy; and the 2018 Great March of Return protests, a series of violent demonstrations along Gaza’s border with Israel that left dozens of Palestinians dead.

The probe will also look at terrorist rocket fire from Gaza onto civilian areas in Israel.

Channel 13 reported that Israel’s National Security Council has met to begin formulating its response to the notice.

Israel could respond to the letter by detailing its own efforts to investigate potential crimes and hold its citizens accountable. If the court is satisfied with the process, it could allow it to unfold under periodic ICC supervision, postponing or even canceling its own investigation.

Israel could potentially avail itself of that option for the allegations regarding Gaza violence, as it says it routinely investigates and punishes wrongdoing by its own troops.

But the construction of settlements in the West Bank, that the Palestinians want for their future state, is an official government policy going back decades and is viewed as illegal by much of the international community.

The Palestinians have expressed outrage at the idea the ICC would investigate terrorist rocket fire or the use of civilians as human shields by Hamas, which rules Gaza, and other terror groups. They view such actions as self-defense and are extremely unlikely to seek a deferral by launching their own investigation.

The Channel 13 report said Jerusalem is leaning toward responding to the letter after having largely refused to cooperate with The Hague-based international court until now.

On Sunday Palestinian Authority Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki was stripped of a special travel permit for senior Palestinian officials and his entourage was questioned by Israeli intelligence in an unusual incident following Al-Maliki’s visit to the ICC.

The PA Foreign Ministry was informed by Israeli authorities that Al-Maliki’s VIP travel pass had been canceled as the diplomat entered Allenby crossing from Jordan into the West Bank, senior PA Foreign Ministry official Ahmad al-Deek told The Times of Israel.