Hamas officials announce that BBC reporter Alan Johnston may be released today. Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak considering invasion of Gaza. A Hamas official in Iran made the announcement on Friday, following the terrorist organization's coup in the Gaza Strip. Alan Johnston is the only Western reporter based in Gaza. Shortly after his capture, both Hamas and Fatah said his capture had done the Palestinians a great disservice, describing Alan Johnston as a " staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause ". Even Palestinian Authority Information Minister said of Johnston, "We are opposed to the kidnapping of foreign journalists who serve the Palestinian cause"...

Quote: *"A spokesman for Hamas in Gaza, Sami Abu Zuhri, said the Islamist group could confirm there were "intensive efforts to end the crisis of the abduction". "There are encouraging indicators that he will be released in the near future, but we cannot determine this in terms of hours," he told Reuters. On Friday, Hamas said it would* ***no longer allow*** *the journalist to be held captive and that it was in contact with Mr Johnston's abductors.*

The above statement, that Hamas will "no longer allow" Alan Johnston to be held captive, leads me to believe it is a most convenient time for Hamas to call for the release of the BBC reporter. At a time when the terrorist organization is facing increasing isolation following its take-over of Gaza, the release of Western journalist Alan Johnston is the ultimate public relations act, and will increase sympathies in the mainstream media for the "hard-done-by" Palestinian government. As for the release of the other captive, still being held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip, there is no such hope. Gilad Shalit is Jewish, and the only way his release will be secured is through major concessions from the Israeli government. After Gilad Shalit was first captured, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert launched a massive in vasion of Gaza , in an effort to pressure Hamas into releasing him. When that failed, Olmert attempted to secure his release by agreeing to a " prisoner exchange ". Gilad Shalit - who had committed no crime, would be exchanged for nearly a thousand Palestinians, many of whom had been involved in terrorism against Israeli civilians. But the deal fell through. Now Prime Minister Olmert may be considering lifting the economic boycott of Hamas, in return for the release of his captives.

Quote: *"Israel has offered to remove the economic embargo on Hamas if captured IDF Cpl. Gilad Shalit is freed and Kassam rocket attacks stop, the London-based Arabic newspaper Al-Hayat reported on Sunday morning. The message was reportedly conveyed to the Islamic group via Arab mediators. A Hamas source in the Gaza Strip was pessimistic about the seriousness of the proposal, telling Al-Hayat that it was an Israeli attempt to "put out the feelers" on the now Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.*

Meanwhile, the situation in Gaza continues to deteriorate. Hundreds of Palestinians have fled the Gaza Strip following Hamas' coup, and some Islamic states are split on whether to support Hamas or Fatah. So far the international community has largely rallied behind President Abbas, but clearly the situation in Gaza cannot be left for much longer. Incoming Defence Secretary, and former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, is planning a large-scale invasion of Gaza , in an effort to topple the Hamas "government" (democratically elected, don't forget), and end the chaos in the region.

Quote: *"A senior Israeli military source, told the Sunday Times that military action, which will involve some 20,000 troops, would be in response to Hamas Qassam attacks on the western Negev, or renewed suicide attacks on Israel, and should destroy much of Hamas' military capability in a number of days. According to the report, Barak, who is expected to take role as defense minister on Monday, has already demanded detailed plans to deploy two armored divisions and an infantry division, accompanied by assault drones and F-16 jets, against Hamas.*

Source BBC , Jerusalem Post , YNet News