



Written by on January 5, 2009

Israeli Invasion of Gaza Continues

By January 5, Israeli ground forces had taken up positions both north and south of Gaza City, and controlled the territory's main north-south road. The *New York Times* reported on January 6 that Israeli officials had announced that their military campaign would continue until Israel had "changed the [security] equation" that existed before its forces moved into Gaza, and Hamas had ceased firing rockets into Israel. Even after the Israeli incursion, Hamas militants continued to fire rockets into southern Israel.



The *Times* report quoted Tzipi Livni, the Israeli foreign minister, who stated at a news conference that Israel was "not only defending its right to defend itself" but was also engaged in a campaign "against extremism and against terror."

Livni said: "When Israel is targeted, Israel is going to retaliate."

Several European leaders, including French President Nicolas Sarkozy and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, have called for a cease-fire in Gaza and are actively engaged in meeting with political leaders in the region. Sarkozy met on January 5 with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak before continuing on to Jerusalem, Damascus, and the West Bank city of Ramallah. Blair met with the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank. Reuters news service reported that Blair announced after his meeting with Abbas: "We are doing everything we possibly can to bring about an end to a situation of immense suffering and deprivation."

Abbas is chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, president of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), and the president of the unilaterally proclaimed "State of Palestine." He is also a leader of Fatah, a Palestinian political organization seen as more moderate than Hamas. Hamas, which both the United States and Israel consider a terrorist group, defeated Fatah in elections in Gaza in 2006 and used military force to seize control of Gaza in 2007. Fatah controls the larger West Bank Palestinian territory.

The Washington Bureau of McClatchy Newspapers, in a December 31 article headlined "What helped the rise of Hamas," quoted observers who warned that Hamas, should it survive the Israeli invasion, may come out of the conflict with its position strengthened. Among these was Steven Cook, a senior fellow at the internationalist Council on Foreign Relations, who forecast: "It's highly possible that this will be a rallying point for Hamas. I believe it will weaken Mahmoud Abbas."

In Washington, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told the press that the U.S. is pressing for a cease-fire that would include three main elements, including an end to the rocket attacks, the opening of crossings into and out of Gaza, and the issue of the tunnels between Gaza and Egypt. "We're doing a lot of work on these three elements," McCormack was quoted as saying by AP.

Speaking from the Oval Office, President Bush expressed support for "Israel's desire to protect itself,"



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stating: "The situation now taking place in Gaza was caused by Hamas."

Even those who believe that Israel has a right to defend itself and who recognize Hamas as a terrorist organization are wary of U.S. involvement in the Gaza crisis, however. Among these is Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas).

Dr. Paul, in a video posted on YouTube, observed that "the whole idea of preemptive, preventative war is spreading," as initiated by the United States against Iraq. He observed that "the position that [the United States] should hold is that we should be on neither side."

Rep. Paul continued:

Even though Israel did the invading of Gaza, we, the United States, will be blamed for it. And there is some truth to this because Israel depends on us. They depend on us economically; they depend on us for their military power and all their weapons. And they really got a green light from our administration. We have not said one word about the plan to go in, the plan has been there for a couple of weeks and everybody knew it was going to happen. So we are participants. It just means that we have just antagonized the Muslim-Arab world even more so than ever before and unfortunately we will suffer the consequences from this.

But there is no benefit for us to be involved in this fight over there. This thing is an entire mess. The Palestinians are virtually in like a concentration camp. They have a few small missiles but it's so minor compared to the firepower of Israel who has nuclear weapons. They can turn off all the food, all the water, they can do whatever they want to the people of Palestine. And yet, we are going to have to accept some of the moral responsibility for this.

As to speculation that the Iranians may have "egged on" Hamas to provoke Israel in Gaza, Rep. Paul acknowledges: "It could be; that might be the case." As for what the U.S. response should be, however, Paul notes: "This whole idea that you should have foreign powers being involved ... when you think of us being involved in Israel is sort of an academic issue.... The Middle East is a powder keg and unfortunately nobody sees an easy way out of the Middle East crisis that is ongoing right now."

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