

Conflict in Middle East

Contributed by
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War on Israel's Southern border The war that everyone has expected has not started but the prelude has. Tank and infantry units of the Israeli have entered the strip on search and destroy missions looking for rocket launchers and rocket stockpiles. There have been hundreds of rockets that have been launched into Israel in the last few days as Israel has flown almost non-stop sorties against Hamas positions in the strip. This clear escalation of military activity by the Israeli army has not managed to stop the rocket attacks as another 20 rockets have come into the strip that has wounded 2 civilians. The Palestinians have said that almost 100 fatalities have from there side have resulted because of the violence. No one really seems to know where all this is leading to even in the short range. All the options seem grim in the short range and long range. In the short range the Israeli defense minister has said that the massive incursion of the Israeli army is just a matter of time. The present action is apparently a prelude to complete takeover of the strip, something that Israel has done a number of times. It won't be easy. The Hamas for its part has been preparing for such an incursion since Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the strip 2 years ago. The Gaza strip is the most densely populated are in the world and fighting a guerilla army in such conditions will not be easy. Beyond this are the psychological issues that the present Israeli government needs to deal with. The majority of the present government strongly favored a very controversial unilateral pullback from the strip two years ago. This pullback was heralded as the final chapter of Israeli influence in the strip. This disengagement was justified as a window of peace and opportunity for Israel. The forcible removal of 10,000 Jews from the strip would benefit the Jewish state by relieving her of the need of having anything to do with the strip. Entering the strip now is making those statements ridiculous, retaking the strip would make those words ludicrous. Beyond that the government is not sure what to do if and when the Israeli army does gain control of the strip. Some of the options would be just staying in the strip indefinitely as Israel did from 1967 till the 1990s. Another option would be trying to give control of the strip to more moderate Palestinian elements that are at least negotiating with Israel. Still another option is trying to kill as many terrorists as possible while destroying weapons caches and then leaving. All those options seem grim for the following reasons. Entering the strip and leaving later on would just temporarily solve the shelling of Israeli towns, as soon as the army leaves shelling will resume. Giving the Strip after the Hamas defeat to the more moderate Fatah movement will certainly put Fatah in a very bad light with people living in Gaza. The Fatah will be seen as puppet rulers and as accomplices in Israeli "atrocities" in the strip, it would not and could not work. The only other option would be to stay in the strip indefinitely. The drawback would be that Israeli soldiers would be steady targets and Israel would need to tend to the humanitarian needs of over 1.5 million people in the strip. That would be daunting indeed.

It's a big mess.