

3-WAY STANDOFF FUELS MIDEAST VIOLENCE

AP via Yahoo! News - Jan 21 4:28 AM

Israel looks powerless to stop the barrage of rockets from Hamas-ruled Gaza. The Islamic militants, choked by a blockade of their territory, find it increasingly difficult to hold on to power. And moderate Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is facing growing pressure to suspend peace talks because of Israel's strikes in Gaza.

No one appears able to win the upper hand in this volatile three-way standoff.

Israel's mighty military has not found a way to halt the crude rockets, short of a full-scale invasion of Gaza. Hamas can't govern effectively because of the crippling economic sanctions, and Gazans are becoming increasingly vocal in their complaints about their rulers' failure to provide basic services.

Abbas is too weak to regain control of Gaza. The TV images of Israeli missiles pounding Hamas targets and Gaza City's residents huddling in darkness have deepened the image of Abbas as an ineffective leader, while Hamas has gained sympathy.

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http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20080121/ap_on_re_mi_ea/mideast_trole_standoff_4

BARAK CAVES INTO INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE, REOPENS GAZA CROSSINGS TO FUEL AND MEDICINES

– www.debka.com

Monday morning, Jan. 21, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said: "Let the Gazans walk!" He was responding to condemnation from Cairo, Arab nations and the European Union over Israel's cut-down of fuel supplies and closure of the Gaza crossings last week under the Palestinians heavy blitz of Israeli civilians.

Yet Monday night, defence minister Ehud Barak gave a "one-time" order to resume the heavy fuel and medicines deliveries to the Gaza Strip. He thus surrendered to the pressure drummed up by Hamas' highly telegenic humanitarian crisis that never was.