Israel Essay, Research Paper

IBRAHIM BARZAK, Associated Press Writer GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) – Despite American criticism, Israel on Wednesday briefly re-entered the Gaza Strip and leveled a Palestinian police station on territory granted to Yasser Arafat’s government in peace agreements. The raid in southern Gaza came 10 hours after Israel withdrew troops from a square-mile area they had seized Tuesday morning at the opposite end of the strip. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon came under criticism that he had bowed to pressure from the United States, which had denounced the land takeover. Israel advertisement said its actions were a response to Palestinian mortar and shooting attacks against Israeli civilians. The attacks and Tuesday’s land seizure outraged Palestinians. Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo said the Palestinians would respond with “popular resistance” to Israel’s incursions. Palestinian fire continued despite the Israeli retaliation. Soon after Israeli troops pulled out of the northern pocket, six mortars hit near the Jewish settlement of Neve Dekalim in Gaza. After nightfall Wednesday, five mortar shells landed at Nir Am, an Israeli village just outside the Gaza border fence, as well as near the Gaza settlement Kfar Darom, the military said. No injuries were reported. Israeli tanks fired shells at a police post in Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza, Palestinians said. Fierce exchanges of fire took place near Jerusalem, between the Palestinian town of Beit Jalla and Israeli positions near the Jewish neighborhood of Gilo in disputed east Jerusalem. Sharon’s government insisted it had planned to pull out of the northern Gaza pocket even before Secretary of State Colin Powell denounced the takeover. Foreign Minister Shimon Peres spoke with Powell by phone Wednesday and said Powell’s sharp words had resulted from a “problem with communication.” In a telephone call late Wednesday, President Bush carried a message of restraint directly to Sharon, the White House said, reinforcing U.S. efforts to moderate Israel’s retaliation to Palestinian attacks. “Both leaders agreed on the need for restraint by both parties to avoid further escalation in the area,” White House spokeswoman Mary Ellen Countryman said. Sharon aide Raanan Gissin said the call was aimed at clearing the air over the incursion. Palestinian parliament speaker Ahmed Qureia praised the U.S. stand against the Israeli incursion. He said it showed that the United States can play an active role in Middle East peacemaking and “can impose this role on Israel.” Up to now the Bush administration has hesitated to involve itself deeply in the conflict. In Geneva, the U.N. Human Rights Commission censured Israel for allowing Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories, with only the United States taking Israel’s side.

In Wednesday’s incursion, a tank and two bulldozers razed a Palestinian police station and farmland near Gaza International Airport in the southern Gaza Strip, then returned to Israeli-controlled territory. The army said shots had been fired from the position at workers at the nearby Israeli-Egyptian border fence. No one was injured in the shooting. During its land-seizure in northern Gaza, Israeli troops razed six Palestinian police stations and destroyed orange groves and farmland outside the town of Beit Hanoun. Hassan Shabat, returning to his farm, said he lost 5,000 chickens, the livelihood of a family of 17. Traces of the incursion were everywhere – tracks of battle tanks, piles of concrete rubble, dozens of weary and frustrated Palestinians shifting through the ruins. Before its troops entered early Tuesday, Israel fired a heavy rocket barrage across the Gaza Strip, killing one Palestinian policeman. Soon after troops seized the pocket, an Israeli army commander had said troops might remain in place for “days, weeks or months.” Yet the soldiers were pulled out just several hours after Powell called the Israeli action “excessive.” Sharon’s aides denied there had been a hasty about-face following the U.S. condemnation, the harshest rebuke of Israel since Bush took office three months ago. The decision to withdraw was made at a time when Powell was still “sleeping the sleep of the just” in Washington, said Gissin, the Sharon adviser. The army said the Israeli brigadier general who spoke of a possibly extended stay of troops in the Palestinian-controlled area had “exceeded his authority.” But legislators from both the dovish opposition and right-wing parties accused Sharon of unfairly shifting the blame to the army officer to avoid the appearance of having succumbed to U.S. pressure. “Sharon is covering up an operational failure,” said Shaul Yahalom of the right-wing National Religious Party. “Instead of admitting he withdrew under American pressure he shifts the blame to .. Naveh.” Jewish settlers in the Gaza Strip, whose communities have frequently been targeted by Palestinian mortars, complained that Sharon has not lived up to his promise to restore security. Yossi Yered, whose infant son was injured in a mortar attack on a Gaza settlement earlier this month, said troops should not have withdrawn from the Palestinian area. “Where is the feeling of security?” asked Yered. “They (government officials) talk, talk, talk and when finally they do something, they back down with their tail between their legs.” Military commentators called the army’s incursion a resounding failure because it did not prevent more mortar fire and deprived Israel of a major option. “The Palestinians know that there is no longer an (Israeli) option of going in and occupying areas they control. A card has been lost,”said Roni Daniel, the military correspondent for Israel Channel 2 TV.