

# GAZA



## INTRODUCTION

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Most of the world looks at Gaza through a prism of news footage comprised of missile attacks, political turmoil, and humanitarian crisis. However, Gaza is a vital part of the Palestinian entity and identity, and its place in the middle of the Palestinian Question makes it a prominent focus of global politics. In effect, the fate of Gaza and the Palestinian people of Gaza will parallel that of the conflict as a whole; nothing can be decided without factoring in the Strip and the 1.5 million inhabitants that represent 40 percent of the total population in the Palestinian territories. With that in mind, this bulletin intends to answer the basic questions that surround the territory and its place in the larger picture of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It should be mentioned that when we talk of Gaza we are talking of the entire Gaza Strip, because the term can also refer to Gaza City, which is the eponymous city located in the north of the region. Gaza City is the area's largest metropolis; it served as the Philistine capital upon their capture of the area in the 13th century BC and became the capital of Palestine in 1660. In fact, it is one of the oldest cities in the world and has a history of prosperity and importance that stretches back to antiquity. For the purposes of this bulletin, however, the term "Gaza" will refer to the entire Gaza Strip rather than just Gaza City. Other main centers of population include Khan Younis and Rafah in the south of the territory.

### Gaza at a Glance:<sup>1</sup>

**Area:** 365 km<sup>2</sup> <sup>a</sup>

**Boundaries:** 51 km Israel to north & east; 11 km Egypt to south; 40 km Mediterranean Sea to west<sup>a</sup>

**Population:** 1,499,369 people (2007 est.)<sup>a</sup>

**Median Age:** 15.3 years<sup>a</sup>

**Growth Rate:** 3.8% <sup>b</sup>

**Population Density:** 4,108 persons/km<sup>2</sup> <sup>b</sup>

**Urban Population:** 63.5% <sup>b</sup>

**Religion:** Muslim (99.3%; almost all Sunni), Christian (.7%)<sup>a</sup>

**Refugees:** 1,030,638 registered with UNRWA as of June 2007; 47% live in camps <sup>c</sup>

**Real GDP (2007 estimate):** about \$3,901 million (14% lower than its peak in 1999)<sup>d</sup>

**Poverty Rate:** 35% (or 67% if based only on household income, excl. remittances and food aid)<sup>d</sup>

There is a need to go further stereotypical images of Gaza, which is usually associated with violence and destitution. Moreover, due to the current situation – i.e., the physical and political separation between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and the importance of Gaza for greater stability Middle East – it is important to summarize current facts and figures about the Gaza Strip in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of related issues. Thus, major elements from general statistics to a detailed map and a brief analysis of recent relations between the political "tribes" of Fateh and Hamas are provided in this bulletin.

### Symbolizing the Lack of Normalcy in 2008

Even in the midst of crisis, a simple game can often provide insight into the confusion. Egyptian football star Mohamed Aboutreika increased his already sizable popularity among Egyptians and Gazans alike when, after



scoring a goal in the Africa Cup of Nations, he lifted his jersey to show an undershirt with the words "Sympathize with Gaza" printed across the chest. Less than a year earlier, the Israeli Army had decided to punish the Palestinians in Gaza by using artillery fire to level the only football stadium in the territory. An Israeli Army spokesman was quick to point out that the act of collective punishment was justified, saying, "The terrorism is coming from within them, and they need to know that they are the ones suffering."<sup>2</sup> The Israeli Army went on to say the stadium was targeted to "send a strong message to the Palestinian people against terrorism."

Yet despite the difficulties Gazans face in merely engaging in a recreational activity like playing football, a dedicated group of young men earned an invitation to compete against top professional teams in England in the summer of 2007. Their chance to represent Gaza on an international stage was quashed, however, when the British government decided to refuse the visa requests for the trip. These three instances show how even a game like football can be used as either a symbol of hope or just another example of the crushing effect the Israeli occupation has on even the simplest aspects of daily life.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics from: <sup>a</sup> PASSIA Diary 2008 <sup>b</sup> PCBS (2007); <sup>c</sup> UNRWA (June 2007), <sup>d</sup> World Bank (April 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Last, Jeremy. "Fifa consider action over air strike." *The Jerusalem Post*, 7 April 2006.

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# GAZA

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Is Gaza just a product of the 1948 and 1967 refugee problems?

Absolutely not, Gaza's roots can be traced back to antiquity, and its place atop the headlines of today would be no surprise to those who have inhabited the land over the last few millennia. As is the case with Jerusalem, the first written mentions of Gaza come from the Egyptians. At one time or another, this lucrative strip of coastline has served as an important part of Egyptian, Philistine, Israelite, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, Hasmonean, and Arab societies. It has religious significance for all three monotheistic faiths and exchanged hands on numerous occasions during the Crusader period. Thus, the violence of recent years is nothing new for an area that has rarely seen peace.

Location has played a central role in Gaza's importance to conquering entities. As Gaza is essentially a bridge between three continents, its cities were originally coveted as valuable ports, and it served as the main Egyptian lifeline to European and Middle Eastern powers. Its allure as an economic artery brought subsequent invaders, and the area was often caught up in the other conflicts that came to historic Palestine.



Gaza's historic Gold Market

The area also holds certain religious significance in the Christian and Muslim faiths. The Bible puts Gaza at the center of the lives of Samson and Deliah, making it a target for the Crusaders in the 12th century. The armies of the Islamic Empire continued on to Gaza soon after retaking Jerusalem from the Crusaders, in part because Hashim Ibn Abd al-Manaf, the great grandfather of the Prophet Muhammad, is supposedly buried there (hence the historical Arab reference "Ghazzet Hashim").

### How has Gaza changed hands in modern times?

Gaza, along with the rest of Palestine, has effectively been an occupied territory for the last 500 years. The Ottoman Empire conquered the area in 1517, and their rule continued until it fell to the British in the Third Battle of Gaza during the World War I (WWI). The First and Second Battles of Gaza had ended in stalemates. After WWI, the territory came under the British Mandate of Palestine and remained so until 1947, when the British submitted the Palestine Question to the United Nations (UN). In the immediate aftermath of the creation of the state of Israel in May 1948 and the subsequent partition of Palestine, the population of Gaza jumped from just under 100,000 people to nearly 300,000 due to the influx of refugees, most of whom were fleeing the advancing Zionist forces from the Jaffa area and the Negev. Post-war Gaza found itself under Egyptian rule, while the West Bank was controlled by Jordan, marking the beginning of Palestine's division into two separate geographic entities.



Rafah Camp, 1950

### When was Gaza reduced to the strip of land that it is today?

Before 1948, Gaza was just one part of the continuous area known as historic Palestine, and its main population center was an important coastal city in the Ottoman Empire. The 1947 UN Parti-



tion Plan had designated a large area of the coast and Negev area Gaza, along with the West Bank, as the home of a new Arab state; this plan was largely rejected in the Arab world, and the 1948 War was the result. By the time the Egyptian-Israeli General Armistice Agreement was signed on 24 February 1949, Egyptian forces had made their way through Gaza on their way to Tel Aviv, and the territory was consequently created as a smaller entity placed under Egyptian control. The current border between Gaza and Egypt was formally established by the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Agreement.

### When did Egypt's influence in the area known as Gaza begin?

As far back as we can trace the existence of Gaza, so can we find an Egyptian presence there. Groups coming from Egypt may have settled there as early as 3000 BC, and the first mention of the name Gaza dates from 1484 BC, when the area came under the domain of Pharaoh Thutmose III. Though the territory passed through many hands in the centuries that followed, Egypt maintained a political and social presence in Gazan affairs. The Fatimid dynasty – a Shi'a Caliphate based in Cairo – gained control in the 10th century, and Gaza became part of Egypt in 1832 under Mohammad Ali. Ali and his son, Ibrahim Pasha, modernized much of the economic, social, and political practices in all of Palestine during their short reign that lasted from 1832 until Ibrahim's death in 1848.



Mohammed Ali of Egypt

### Has Egypt had a hand in Gazan affairs in modern times?

Gaza came under Egyptian control once again as a result of the events in 1948. It was never annexed, however, and its residents were still issued passports by the semi-official All-Palestine Government until the territory was lost to Israel - invading with French and British cooperation - in the October 1956 Suez War.

# GAZA



The All-Palestine Government, formed in Gaza in September 1948

Pressure from the US and the international community soon forced Israeli withdrawal, and when Egypt returned to the Gaza Strip in 1957, Gamal Abdul Nasser emerged as a proponent of the Palestinian cause.

Nasser allowed freer political expression in order to gain wider support, and various Palestinian political organizations were subsequently created. This situation lasted only until 1967, when Egypt once again lost Gaza to the Israelis, and yet the Strip and its inhabitants have retained a prominent place in the political rhetoric of Egypt and its Arab neighbors. For example, the unilateral peace agreement between Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat at Camp David in 1978 caused ripples throughout the Middle East, as it normalized relations between the two nations without a just solution for the Palestinians. The Camp David Accords were in part an Egyptian attempt at finally distancing itself from Gaza, which they hoped would become part of a future Palestinian state.

“I do not think Nasser wanted war. The two divisions he sent to the Sinai would not have been sufficient to launch an offensive war. He knew it and we knew it.”

Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's Chief of Staff in 1967, in *Le Monde*, 28 February 1968

## **What happened to Gaza during and after the 1967 War?**

Tension between Israel and Arab countries came to a peak in the 1960s; in May 1967, Egyptian President Nasser began making bellicose statements, asked the UN to withdraw its Emergency Force (UNEF) from Sinai and the Gaza Strip, and ordered the straits of Tiran closed to Israeli shipping. Despite those moves, analysts such as Avi Shlaim (in *The Iron Wall*) and Noam Chomsky (in *The Fateful Triangle*) believe that Nasser never intended to strike Israel.

Israel attacked the Egyptians beginning on 5 June 1967 and occupied the Gaza Strip and Sinai (along with the West Bank on the Jordanian front and the Golan Heights on the Syrian front) in the course of the subsequent 1967 War. A ceasefire was agreed to on 10 June.

Immediately after the war, the Israeli Army issued an order declaring the Strip a closed military area and assumed control of land and water resources. The war had also created another influx of refugees, and the population of Gaza city jumped to six times what it had been just twenty years earlier. On 22 November 1967, UN Resolution 242 called for negotiations towards a permanent peace between the parties and for Israeli withdrawal from lands occupied in the war. Since then, the resolution has been invoked as the centerpiece for negotiating efforts, though with no tangible results to date. Israel's military occupation remained unchanged in Gaza

for 38 years before it entered a new phase in September 2005. During the 1970s and 1980s the Israeli government undertook numerous measures to strengthen their presence in the Gaza Strip, first and foremost confiscating large amounts of land to build settlements. Resentment stemming from Israeli occupation, a weak economy, and a large refugee population soon made the region a center for Palestinian activism and political unrest. Riots, demonstrations, and violent confrontations between Israelis and Palestinians developed into the first Intifada, which began in Gaza's Jabalia refugee camp on 9 December 1987 and quickly spread to Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian territories.

## **The Jabalia Refugee Camp**

was established in the extreme north of the Gaza Strip shortly after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Almost 40 years later, in December 1987, a series of protests in Jabalia camp grew into the first intifada. Today, with a population of well over 100,000 crowded into an area that measures only 1.4 km<sup>2</sup>, Jabalia is one of the most densely populated places on earth. It is the largest of all the refugee camps in the occupied Palestinian territories and has a very young population, with children under 15 making up the majority of its inhabitants. UNRWA runs 25 schools in the camp, all of which run on two shifts and have an average of 55 children per classroom.\*



Jabalia Refugee Camp

\* Ma'an Development Center. "Jabalia Refugee Camp" ([www.maan-ctr.org](http://www.maan-ctr.org)).

## **What was Gaza's status in the Oslo Accords?**

In September 1993 Israel and the PLO signed the Declaration of Principles. These were followed by the Oslo I and Oslo II Accords, which were signed in 1994 and 1995 respectively and provided limited Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho before extending it to other



Yasser Arafat's return to Gaza in 1994

parts of the West Bank. The first Palestinian police forces entered the Gaza Strip on 10 May 1994, and on 13 May, the several civil spheres were handed over from Israel to the Palestinian Authority (PA). One month later, the Palestinian security apparatus had grown to 9,000 members and was divided into national, preventive, presidential and public security branches. On the administrative level, members of the PA were appointed, ministries were established to form an organizational structure, and several bodies were founded to deal with the aid promised by international donors and other matters (e.g., PECJAR, Palestinian Center for Energy etc.). On 1 July, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat crossed the Rafah border into the Gaza Strip for the first time in 25 years, going so far as to purchase a home and make a pledge to revitalize the territory. However, Israel maintained control over Israeli settlements, foreign policy, and security even though most of their armed forces had withdrawn from Gaza by late May 1994 and the PA had assumed administrative control of the Gaza North, Gaza City, Deir Al-Balah, Khan Younis, and Rafah districts.

# GAZA

The 1995 agreement also provided for Palestinian elections, which were held in January 1996; Yasser Arafat was voted President by a large majority, and an 88-member Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) was also elected. Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other groups boycotted the elections. The council met for the first time in Gaza City in March 1996.

Although it withdrew its troops once again in August and September 2005, Israel retains control of air space, territorial waters, offshore maritime access, the population registry, entry and exit points (regarding both people and goods), and the tax system.

## **What is the relationship between Egypt and Gaza today?**

Egypt is not completely removed from the current situation in Gaza. There exists a sentiment of solidarity with Gaza among the Egyptian public in response to the treatment of its inhabitants by the occupying Israelis, though the actions of the Egyptian government do not always reflect that solidarity. On a more tangible level, Gaza and Egypt share an 11-km-long border. Control of that border was handed over to Egypt in September of 2005, and another agreement was finalized one month later in which Egypt would share the responsibility of patrolling the boundary with the newly created EU Border Assistance Mission in Rafah (see Box).

### **Rafah Border**

The Rafah crossing into Egypt is the only exit from Gaza that does not pass through Israel, and as such represents the Gazans' best hope for access to the wider world. However, in 1993 it came under Israeli military control under the terms of the Oslo Accords; and during the second Intifada the Israeli army demolished thousands of homes in order to clear a "buffer zone" near the border to hamper the smuggling of weapons through tunnels to Egypt. In addition, they erected a fortification system with walls and armored outposts to keep Palestinians imprisoned in the Gaza Strip.

As part of its disengagement from Gaza in September 2005, the Israeli army handed over control and security responsibilities of the Rafah crossing to Egypt, under EU supervision. Since Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in June 2007, however, the border has been closed; it was opened only briefly on January 23 2008 with the explosive breach of the six-meter-high border wall in which thousands of desperate Gazans flooded into Egypt to purchase much-needed provisions. Egyptian forces could do little to stem the human traffic from Gaza at first, but they eventually resealed the border on 3 February. It is estimated that Palestinians – with the blessing of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak – spent hundreds of millions of dollars in that span on the essential goods such as food, fuel, and cement that were either unavailable or unaffordable back home in Gaza.

The future of the crossing remains unclear. With EU observers long gone and Egypt acting carefully so as not to challenge Israel, it is likely that the Israelis will continue to exercise significant control over the border. It may be that the January breach of the border which so startled Egypt will lead President Mubarak to adopt a more reasoned strategy towards the crossing and allow some movement of people and goods. For now, however, Israel's voice on the issue remains the loudest, and their call for security and control continues to drown out the legal and humanitarian concerns for those in Gaza.

On the other hand, Egypt has managed to be an intermediary of sorts between the leaderships of Hamas and Israel. Egyptian involvement has been accepted by Prime Minister Olmert and Defense Minister Barak on the Israeli side and by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and others on the Palestinian side. In March and May 2008, the Egyptians came to agreements with all Palestinian factions, including Hamas, that allowed them to re-open the Rafah Crossing at brief intervals so as to allow patients into Egypt for medical treatment.

It should be mentioned in this regard that Egypt deals with Hamas in a very different way than it does with a similar group active within its own borders: the Muslim Brotherhood. While it declared the latter illegal and refuses to deal with them, it has been willing to negotiate and create a relationship of reciprocity with Hamas. Their role as a facilitator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – similar to the role played by Turkey in recent Syrian-Israeli negotiations and that of Qatar in the internal Lebanese tensions – seems unlikely to change. While a number of Israeli politicians have hinted at their desire to turn Gaza into an Egyptian problem, especially after the breach of the Rafah crossing, those sentiments have died down, much to the relief of the Egyptians and the Palestinians.



*Gazans bring home fuel bought during the Rafah breach in January 2008*

## **DISENGAGEMENT AND LEGAL STATUS**

### **Why did Sharon propose disengagement?**

Israel's unilateral "Disengagement Plan" was first announced during Prime Minister Sharon's address to the Fourth Herzliya conference on 18 December 2003 and officially introduced in February 2004, at a time when the overall standing of Israel and its Prime Minister was not at its strongest: in the diplomatic arena, the international criticism of Sharon's separation barrier had peaked, with the International Court of Justice hearings in The Hague just ahead. In addition, Israel's economy had suffered considerably due to the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians,



# GAZA

and Palestinian resistance groups had managed to carry out painful attacks against Israeli forces, increasing the cost of keeping an extensive military presence in the Gaza Strip. Sharon came under further pressure when part of the Israeli Left came up with a new agenda – the Geneva Accord of December 2003 – that promoted the notion that separation from the Palestinians was the only solution to preserve a Jewish and democratic Israeli state. Picking up the “demographic threat” idea, Sharon managed to hijack the Geneva agenda – which was supported by Europe and high-ranking PA personalities – and proposed Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, including evacuation of the settlers there, while stressing that Israel would never cede Jerusalem and the West Bank. In April 2004, Sharon gained US President George W. Bush’s support for the plan, on 6 June the Israeli cabinet approved it, and on 25 October it was endorsed by the parliament. However, before reaching that point, it had met with considerable backlash from the Israeli public. Indeed, Sharon had actually run a winning campaign based on a rejection of disengagement and any negotiations with Palestinians. His original proposal for evacuating settlers was struck down in a national referendum, and the final approved plan was a revised version.



PM Sharon sweeping the settlements from “Gaza” to “the (West) Bank” (Ad-Dustur, 27/7/2005)

In contrast, the measure was praised internationally by leaders in Europe, the UN and the US. For their part, Palestinians called for a complete withdrawal from all their occupied territories, not only from Gaza; furthermore, they were convinced that

the plan was first and foremost demographically motivated, with Israel hoping that by ridding itself of responsibility for the 1.5 million Palestinians living in Gaza while continuing to exercise exclusive control over the borders and consolidating and expanding control over the West Bank, it will make up the majority of the population longer than is currently forecasted (i.e., 2020). Israel further hoped to garner international support for expanding settlements in the West Bank in exchange for “dumping” Gaza and to jeopardize the possibility of a viable Palestinian state. What supports this argument is that Sharon could have moved at least a portion of the settlers much earlier, as polls have repeatedly indicated that a significant percentage of the settlers were willing to move if compensated.

“The significance of the disengagement plan is the freezing of the peace process... When you freeze that process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state and you prevent a discussion on the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem. Disengagement supplies the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so there will not be a political process with the Palestinians”  
Dov Weissglas, PM Sharon’s chief of staff, quoted in Ha’aretz, 6 Oct. 2004

## How was the plan implemented?

On 16 Feb. 2005, the Knesset passed the Disengagement Implementation Law paving the way for the pullout. On 15 August 2005, the Gaza Strip was closed off to prepare for the evacuation, which began two days later: Israel then pulled out its troops, removed military apparatuses and a community of Bedouins who were seen as Israeli collaborators and therefore feared for their safety, and evacuated some 8,600 Jewish settlers - less than 0.7% of the total population in Gaza! - from 21 settlements (17 alone in the Katif bloc in southwest Gaza).

## Evacuated 21 Gaza Settlements

Settlement (Year of Establishment)	Population (end of 2004)
Atzmona (1979/82)	646
Bedolah (1986)	217
Dugit (1990)	79
Elei Sinai (1983)	407
Gadid (1982)	351
Gan Or (1983)	351
Ganei Tal (1979)	400
Kfar Darom (1970)	491
Kfar Yam (1983)	10
Katif (1985)	404
Morag (1972)	221
Netzar Hazani (1973)	461
Netzarim (1972)	496
Neve Dekalim (1983)	2,671
Nisanit (1984)	1,064
Pe’at Sade (1989)	104
Rafiah Yam (1984)	143
Kerem Atzmona (2001)*	24
Shirat Hayam 2000*	40
Slav (2001)*	50
Tel Katifa (1992)*	60
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,692</b>

Source: Israeli CBS, quoted by Americans for Peace Now, *Disengagement - Profiling the Settlements* (July 2005); the four settlements marked with a \* are not on the CBS database.

Israel declared a formal end to military rule in the Gaza Strip on 11 September, and the last Israeli soldier had left the Strip by the next day.

Although large areas of Israeli greenhouses were transferred to the Palestinians, the World Bank had already warned as early as June 2004 that the economic benefits of disengagement would be very limited if internal closures are not or only partly eased and the border trade regime is not changed.

In the pullout’s immediate aftermath, Palestinians rejoiced and there was talk of a revitalized economy growing in Gaza. This optimism did not last long, however, as the situation in Gaza has only deteriorated. The Palestinians in Gaza are effectively locked in a prison, and they are worse off by all metrics: physically, emotionally, and economically.

## What is the Legal Status of the Gaza Strip Today?

Israel was hoping to make the world believe that its disengagement from Gaza also implied the end of the occupation and that it was thus no longer bound by the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and Hague Regulations concerning occupied territory in its treatment of Gaza residents. This is not the case, however, and Israel clearly remains an occupying power with all the corresponding legal responsibility attached to it.

# GAZA

Under Article 42 of the 1907 The Hague Regulations, which are generally recognized as reflecting customary international law, a territory is occupied when a foreign entity exerts “effective control” over it in terms of military and administrative matters. The actual presence of an army inside the territory is thus not necessarily required to be recognized an occupying power. In the case of Gaza, Israel retains control of all land borders, air space and sea access (revised Disengagement Plan of 6 June 2004, Art. 3.1) and reserves the right to prevent the PA from re-opening its airport or building a seaport (Art. 6).

Moreover, Israel controls the population registry (including decisions on who is a “resident” of Gaza) and the supply of electricity, fuel, gas, medicines, merchandise and water as well as the entry and exit of goods and people to and from the Strip (Art. 8, Art. 10). Even with regard to the border with Egypt, Israel - according to the Rafah Agreement signed on 16 Nov. 2005 - still retains some power and has been able to order the crossing points’ closure on several occasions.

Full and exclusive sovereignty of the PA over the Gaza Strip is further violated by the self-proclaimed Israeli right to use force against Palestinians on the pretext of security (Art. 3.3). In addition, the ongoing applicability of the 1994 Paris Economic Protocol allows Israel to continue to control revenues from taxes and customs, including withholding their transfer as it pleases (Art. 10).

Another important issue addressed by international law is the targeting of civilians. “Collective punishment” - enacting punitive measures against a population because of the actions of a few - is expressly forbidden by international law and is prohibited by Israel’s own laws, as well. Additionally, the ‘general welfare’ of the civilian population is a responsibility of the occupying power. In both cases, Israel has abandoned and ignored their obligations.

Moreover, Israel has even adjusted their rules of engagement in a move that makes civilian casualties even more likely: before 2006, artillery shells could not be targeted within 300 meters of residential areas, but the ‘safety zone’ has now been reduced to 100 meters, which happens to fall within the kill radius of the shells.



The destroyed Airport

The opening of **Yasser Arafat International Airport** near Rafah in November 1998 signaled the optimism among Palestinians for the future of a Palestinian state. The terminals were busy 364 days out of the next

year – closing only for the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur – and US President Bill Clinton was among the first passengers that came through. More than half a million Palestinians per year took advantage of the \$86-million facilities and the opportunity of international travel, but that freedom proved to be short lived: the airport was open for a mere 23 months before Israeli authorities ordered it to be closed following the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000. The radar station and control tower were destroyed by Israeli aircraft in 2001, and in January 2002 bulldozers cut the runway apart. Appeals for the Israelis to compensate the Palestinian people for the damage and allow the airport to be repaired have so far gone unheeded.

## What are the implications of Israel’s declaring Gaza a “hostile entity”?

The Israeli government declared the entire Gaza Strip a “hostile entity” on 19 September 2007, citing the threats posed by Hamas rule and continued Palestinian rocket attacks. Israel’s goal in using such terminology was to reduce their responsibility for the safety and well-being of Gaza’s civilian population, though this assertion was promptly rejected by the UN and others in the international community. Yet additional restrictions on Gaza followed, including the complete closure of all border crossings, de facto sealing the strip from the rest of the world, disruption of power supplies and fuel shipments, increased monitoring of funds, a cessation of visits to prisoners, and the allowing of only essential food and medicine to be brought into Gaza.

These measure are meant to further erode the quality of life and make it harder for Hamas to effectively govern. A humanitarian crisis has been the result, with many considering the Israeli actions to be collective punishment and even crimes against humanity. Even so, the international community has stayed relatively silent and done little to bring about change.

“I call for Israel to reconsider this decision. Such a step would be contrary to Israel’s obligations toward the civilian population under international humanitarian and human rights law.”

Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary-General, on Israel’s decision to declare Gaza a “hostile entity”, 20 September 2007

## Are there any legal actions that can be taken?

As of now, Israeli aggression in Gaza continues unabated. In January 2008, Israel’s Supreme Court upheld the government’s decision to reduce the amount of fuel and electricity being supplied to Gaza. The judges deemed the actions to be a form of “economic warfare” and agreed with government assertions that the measures were appropriate retaliation for rocket attacks on southern Israel. So far, Gazans have found little solace in the international courts and have had to rely on civil society and the outcomes of individual cases, which have provided few successes. Palestinians cannot bring their concerns to the International Criminal Court without a state, and since Israel has refused to ratify the ICC treaty, they are also outside of the court’s sovereignty.

The Israeli courts have thus far managed to find ways around condemning the actions of their government, and the international community has been able to do even less. Though the UN, EU, and international judicial bodies acknowledge the actions of Israel as contrary to international law, their hollow condemnations have had no effect on the situation. The Israeli stranglehold on the civilian population of Gaza continues, and the rocket attacks on southern Israel - which are also illegal and must be stopped - do not show signs of abating. This much is clear: there will be no resolution for the civilians of Gaza as long as political struggles continue to usurp legal considerations.



Israeli occupation shows no signs of easing

To sum up, “disengaged” Gaza remains an open-air prison under Israeli control. The Palestinians living there are denied their right to security, freedom of movement, economic opportunity, and a connection with their West Bank brethren.

## HAMAS, FATEH, AND GAZA'S POLITICAL FUTURE

### ***Why has Gaza become associated with Hamas?***

While media coverage and the international community may make it seem like Hamas and Gaza are synonymous, they have always been two separate entities. Hamas is a political party that was elected by the Palestinian people in what EU observers deemed "fair and democratic" elections, with Edward McMillan-Scott, Vice-President of the European Parliament and Chairman of the EP delegation, saying: "The conduct of these elections has provided a model for the wider Arab region and has clearly demonstrated the commitment of the Palestinian people to democracy." Hamas won a majority in the 2006 elections thanks to Muslim, Christian, and secular voters throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel and the international community have since forced Hamas's hand and isolated Gazans from their fellow Palestinians in the West Bank and from the rest of the world. In the process, and for better or worse, Hamas leaders have become the de facto spokesmen for the Palestinians in Gaza. It has been relegated to administering Gaza by itself rather than sharing the governing responsibilities of the entire Palestinian territories, even though they have never had designs on replacing the PA and have publicly pledged allegiance to the results of the democratic elections.



So while Hamas is seen by many people inside the West Bank and Gaza as a legitimate defender - both politically and militarily - of the Palestinian people, most foreign governments do not share this viewpoint. Palestinians living under occupation often feel that Israel and its allies have stacked the deck against them, and Hamas is seen



*Gazans celebrate Hamas's 20th anniversary*

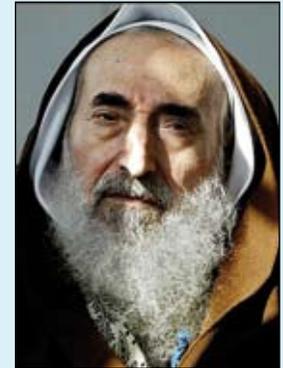
as the only party willing to fight back against occupation, yet the party has been labeled a "terrorist organization" by the United States, Japan, Canada, and Israel. The group has been banned in Jordan. The United Kingdom and Australia only consider the military wing of Hamas - the Izzeddin al-Qassam Brigades - to be a "terrorist group", and the EU refers to Hamas as "involved in terrorist attacks." Since their electoral victory, therefore, Hamas has been the target of a campaign aimed at marginalizing them and eroding their influence. The isolation of Hamas has been stated as the primary goal of the siege on Gaza, and the group has been excluded from the peace process despite a majority of Israeli citizens saying they would prefer peace talks with Hamas to ignoring them<sup>3</sup>. These Israelis may have the right idea, because Hamas has the ability to play the spoiler if any tangible progress is ever made in the peace process. In any case, it is likely that Hamas's reign in Gaza - and therefore the link between the party and the territory - will continue unabated as long as Gaza remains closed off and under siege.

### ***Why is Hamas so powerful in Gaza and not the West Bank?***

Gaza is where the Muslim Brotherhood was established in the 1930s and where the roots of the Hamas movement lie. Though the movement made considerable strides in the West Bank, as evidenced by

the January 2006 elections, their hold has always been strongest in Gaza. It was there that Hamas was officially founded as a resistance movement in 1987, and its origins go back much further.

One of its founders, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, was active in the religious and charitable life of Gaza and the West Bank in the 1960s, when Israeli occupation was in its early stages and new political outlets were growing out of the urge to throw off the grip of the Israelis. Yassin and others had strong ties to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and founded a Gaza branch at the outbreak of the first Intifada in December 1987. Its original charter, marked by Palestinian nationalism and anti-Israel sentiments, came out in August 1988. Since then, the group has undergone an evolution of sorts, from social movement to political party. Hamas has maintained its religious roots, but it is the militant wing that has stirred up the most recrimination. Still, support for Hamas was largely built upon the services it provides for the needy and its corruption-free image rather than their violent attacks on Israelis.



*Sheikh Ahmed Yassin*

The popularity of Hamas reached the point that the group transitioned into electoral politics in 2005. While it boycotted the presidential election in January of that year, which ended with Mahmoud Abbas replacing the deceased Yasser Arafat, it did participate in the municipal elections and won control of over one third of the councils. They further challenged the Palestinian political establishment - mainly the ruling Fateh party - which had been derided as corrupt and ineffective, when contesting in the parliamentary elections of 2006, from which they emerged victorious: their "List of Change and Reform" earned 42.9% of the vote and 74 of the 132 seats.

### ***What caused the rift between Hamas and Fateh?***

Actually, the two factions have clashed almost since the creation of Hamas at the beginning of the first Intifada. At that time, the nascent Islamic Resistance Movement presented a new challenge to the PLO factions that had organized under the banner of the United National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU). When Fateh and the PLO accepted UN Resolution 242 in the 1988 PNC, it succeeded in demonstrating its pragmatism to the world but ceded some sympathies and credibility among the people to Hamas, which henceforth appeared as the steadfast alternative to the "weakened" Fateh, which had implicitly recognized Israel.

Hamas gained further popularity during the Intifada years through Israel's campaigns of arrest and deportation of hundreds of Hamas's activists, Israel's declaring Hamas an illegal organization, and the movement's anti-peace process stand. First, violent clashes between the two groups occurred in 1991 and 1992 and their positions drifted further apart during the period of the Oslo accords, which Hamas not only opposed but tried to jeopardize through series of deadly attacks and suicide bombings against Israeli targets. In the wake of these attacks, the newly established PA, run by Arafat and Fateh, were pressured by Israel and the US to crack down on Hamas as a precondition for future negotiations. When Hamas rejected a call by the PA made in meetings in Cairo in 1995 to join the PA, reduce violence, and back peace, PA security jailed hundreds of Hamas operatives. Due to its objection to the Oslo process, Hamas also refused to participate in the 1996 elections for the presidency

<sup>3</sup> "Poll: Most Israelis back direct talks with Hamas on Shalit," *Ha'aretz*, 27 February 2008.

# GAZA

## Timeline of Events

Sept. 2000	Al-Aqsa Intifada begins
July 2002	Senior Hamas leader Salah Shehadeh is assassinated by Israel in Gaza
March 2003	Leader of Hamas's military wing Ibrahim Al-Makadmeh is assassinated by Israel in Gaza
Jan. 6, 2004	Hamas official Abdel Aziz Al-Rantissi offers a 10 year truce (hudna) in exchange of Israel's complete withdrawal to the 1967 borders in Gaza
March 22, 2004	Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmad Yassin is assassinated by Israel in Gaza (replaced by Abdel Aziz Al-Rantissi)
April 17, 2004	Hamas's Abdel Aziz Al-Rantissi is assassinated by Israel in Gaza; Khaled Masha'al is named new overall leader and Mahmoud Zahar new leader in Gaza.
Sept. 26, 2004	Sheikh Izzeddin Khalil, in charge of Hamas's military wing outside the OPT, is assassinated in Damascus
Oct. 2004	Assistant of military wing leader Mohammed Deif, Adnan Ghoul, is assassinated by Israel in Gaza
Nov. 11, 2004	PLO Chairman and PA President Yasser Arafat dies
Jan. 2005	PLO Chairman Mahmoud Abbas is elected in the Presidential Elections to replace Yasser Arafat; Hamas boycotts the elections
2005	Hamas participates successfully in several rounds of municipal elections
March 2005	Hamas proclaims tahdiyah, a period of calm
Jan. 25, 2006	Hamas wins 74 of the 132 seats in the PLC elections
March 17, 2006	Fateh refuses to join a government formed by Hamas
Dec. 2006	First round of heavy fighting
Feb. 8, 2007	Mecca Accord is signed between Fateh and Hamas
March 17, 2007	The PLC approves the new national unity government
May 2007	Second round of heavy fighting
June 10, 2007	New fighting begins (dubbed the "Battle of Gaza")
June 12, 2007	Hamas fighters take control of the Fateh HQ in Gaza
June 14, 2007	Hamas completes takeover of the Gaza Strip
June 15, 2007	Pres. Abbas dissolves the national unity government, declares state of emergency
June 17, 2007	Pres. Abbas installs an "emergency cabinet" headed by PM Salam Fayyad; Haniyeh still exercises de facto authority in the Gaza Strip

and the PLC, though several members ran independently and won. During those years the profile of Hamas rose as the main opposition to Yasser Arafat's PLO, of which it has never been a member. Hamas stepped in to fill the void created by a weakened the socio-economic and political infrastructure due to continued Israeli aggression and a stalemate in the peace process. It provided social, cultural, and educational services, running clinics, schools and welfare projects in addition to its militant resistance to the occupation.

In the following years the two factions struggled to coexist, and with the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000, the "National and Islamic Forces," a thirteen-member coordination coalition of Fateh, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and others was even formed, though Hamas - recognizing its growing strength and influence at the expense of its rival Fateh - continued to refuse offers to join the PA. The latest wave of factional fighting can be traced back to the aftermath of the death of Yasser Arafat in November of 2004 and the subsequent presidential, municipal and legislative elections that

helped consolidate Hamas's political power. Hamas won their seats with an electoral strategy that was more reasoned and pragmatic than that of Fateh, which appeared disunited and had to struggle with accusations of corruption. Furthermore, in many races, multiple Fateh candidates ran for a post simultaneously, splitting votes amongst themselves and subsequently losing to a single Hamas figure.



Ismail Haniyeh celebrates after the 2006 elections

### Why did the Hamas-Fateh hostilities increase after the Hamas election victory in 2006?

When Israel and the West demanded that newly-elected Hamas renounce violence, recognize the Jewish state, and promise to abide by past peace agreements such as the 1993 Oslo Accords, Hamas leaders only went as far as omitting its call for the destruction of Israel from its election manifesto, calling instead for the establishment of "an independent state whose capital is Jerusalem." As a result, international sanctions were imposed upon the Palestinians; foreign aid to the PA was suspended and Israel stopped the transfer



Hamas fighters in Gaza

of Palestinian taxes, leading to a severe liquidity crisis and an unprecedented deterioration of the local economy, especially in Gaza. Officials from Fateh and Hamas began criticizing each other, and the tensions began to boil over into violence.

After dozens of deaths in the internecine fighting that followed, a hasty truce was brokered by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. Meeting in Mecca in February 2007, the leaders of Fateh and Hamas signed an agreement to stop the clashes and form a national unity government. This was presented to the PLC on 17 March, but violence soon flared up again with dozens of street battles, kidnappings, and property seizures. Dubbed the "Battle of Gaza", the fighting led to Hamas prevailing in Gaza and securing control of the Strip. In the aftermath, President Abbas dissolved the National Unity Government in June and appointed a provisional "caretaker" government under Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, although he had no power to affect Hamas's hold on the Gaza Strip.

Israel, which had suspended all contacts with the PA when Hamas won the elections, resumed meetings between President Abbas and PM Olmert after the dissolution of the Hamas-led government, a move regarded by Hamas as proof of the collaboration between Fateh and the Israeli government.



Hamas disperses a pro-Fateh demonstration in Gaza City in August 2007

# GAZA

## **How much support does Hamas really have?**

There is no question that Hamas is in charge in Gaza. After its coup in June 2007, there were isolated incidents of inter-factional violence over the latter half of 2007. Hamas forcibly dispersed public demonstrations organized by Fateh and expressions of support for the caretaker government in Ramallah became taboo.

The breaching of the Rafah border crossing in late January 2008, the Israeli military incursions that followed in February, and the stagnation of the Annapolis process all contributed to the rise in support for Hamas. Polling conducted in March of 2008 showed the popularity ratings of Hamas growing and approaching those of Fateh in both the West Bank and Gaza, with more respondents naming the administration of Ismail Haniyeh as the legitimate government than that of Salam Fayyad. At the same time, Haniyeh's popularity had reached its highest point since Hamas's electoral victories in 2006, and a presidential election between him and Abbas would have been a dead heat.

In Gaza, Fateh's foothold has been almost completely eroded. Though there are ostensibly still a few operatives working in the territory, they have extremely limited funds with which to run any sort of initiatives. The Preventive Security Forces led by Mohammad Dahlan were routed in the Hamas takeover, a chain of events that was slightly surprising given the number and strength of Fateh fighters that were in the Strip at the time, and the group is no longer functional there.<sup>4</sup>

## **How likely is reconciliation between Hamas and Fateh?**

The early summer of 2008 saw the possibility of reconciliation between the two main Palestinian factions grow stronger than it had been since the devastating events of June 2007. The Yemeni initiative that brought the two sides together in March 2008 may not have delivered a lasting resolution, but it laid the groundwork for future agreements. By early June - a full year after Hamas took over in Gaza - President Abbas was publicly inviting all factions to participate in comprehensive talks, and he did so without putting forth any conditions. As his hope for an agreement between himself and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert fades, and as Palestinians increasingly lose faith in his ability to bring about change, President Abbas has become galvanized in his efforts to avoid a complete collapse of the Palestinian political structure.

Another meeting between Hamas and Fateh officials took place in Senegal in June 2008 and was mediated by Senegalese President Aboulaye Wade, who also serves as the Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal subsequently stated that the group was ready for a national Palestinian dialogue for reconciliation, and Abbas asserted that such a dialogue is the only thing that would lead to improvement in Gaza. Arab leaders - especially those in Riyadh and Cairo - have welcomed the initiative and come with offers to host future talks. The Arab world could become increasingly involved in Gazan affairs, as there have even been mentions of an "Arab administration" assuming control of the Strip.

With the end of his term on the horizon, Abbas has pledged support for early presidential and legislative elections if substantial progress is made towards reconciliation between Hamas and Fateh. Yet many questions still remain, as uncertainty hangs over the motives of Abbas, the willingness of Hamas to cede Gaza, and the outcomes of any future elections.

## **What are the prospects for ending the siege in Gaza?**

While Hamas has repeatedly offered to agree with Israel on a break in the fighting, the Israelis have been content to ignore the 4 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 27, 13-15 March 2008.

proposals and wait for Hamas to become more flexible in its demands. While it is true that Hamas is a resistance movement, the group's roots in Islam provide it with a model for pursuing peace rather than war. Working towards a tahdiya - a "calming down" rather than a final truce - may be the only option Hamas has due to the internal Palestinian struggles and their desire to avoid legitimizing the Israeli occupation. However, Israel's policies of labeling Hamas a terrorist organization, condemning all of Gaza because of the Hamas presence, declaring the Strip a "hostile entity", and refusing to take an official stance on Hamas's offers of peace have severely damaged the prospects of a lasting truce.

It seems that any progress towards at least a temporary end to the violence in Gaza is quickly followed by comments or events that make a truce seem almost impossible. In June of 2008, Hamas relayed a letter from the kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit to his family as a sign of goodwill to the Israelis. At the same time, Egyptian leaders were working to find some sort of common ground between Israel and Hamas that would allow for a ceasefire. Yet Israeli officials were still discussing the possibility of a full-scale military invasion of Gaza, showing once again that the state of Israel neither believes in nor wants a diplomatic solution when it comes to Gaza. Yet even in this seemingly impossible climate, Egyptian officials managed to broker a tentative ceasefire between Hamas and Israel in early June 2008. The deal included a temporary stoppage of attacks from both sides, an Israeli promise of very limited relaxation of border controls in order to allow more supplies to enter Gaza, and the possible return of Gilad Shalit. Still, the agreement was extremely short term, and the merits of its implementation remain to be seen.

Both the Israelis and the Palestinians have internal political obstacles that must be overcome before they will have the strength to sign a truce. Much like Ariel Sharon had to build up his influence and credibility within Israel before he could push his "Disengagement Plan", so too must the current Palestinian and Israeli leaderships consolidate their power before either side can come to the negotiating table with anything tangible to offer.

## **Where is Gaza heading?**

The rift that has developed between the two preeminent parties in the Palestinian political spectrum has been a disaster for the people they govern in the West Bank and Gaza. Now more than ever the two territories are separate entities, and they are drifting farther apart each day. It has reached the point that Palestinians have taken to calling the split Wakseh, which means 'humiliation' or 'ruin' in Arabic. In the end, all of the parties involved must realize that they must strive for the same thing: a united and democratic Palestinian state.

The international response to the Hamas takeover was to isolate Gaza, a move leaders in the West hoped would drive Hamas into collapse or at least force them to ease their harsh rhetoric. When President Abbas swore in a new caretaker government on 17 June 2007 and declared the Hamas authority in Gaza illegal, Israel and the international community endorsed those moves and began to reinstate financial and technical assistance. In actuality, quarantining Hamas and propping up the new "emergency" PA led by Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad has not broken the Hamas regime in Gaza, and yet it seems the US, Israel, and the Quartet are still willing to gamble on ignoring Hamas and the influence they could wield over the peace process.



*A Hamas gunman outside Fateh's Gaza headquarters*

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

### ***Why has Gaza such a high population density?***

The demographic problem goes back to the UN Partition Plan of 1947, which divided Palestine into two states – one Jewish and one Arab – whereby Gaza was part of the Arab state. During the subsequent War of 1948, some 200,000 Palestinian refugees flooded into the Gaza Strip from parts of Palestine that had come under Jewish control, thereby doubling its population. This influx has created many problems as the local economic and political structures were not able to support the large population, which has been largely dependant on the support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) ever since.

### ***What has become of Gaza's traditional social order?***

The de-centralized clan system had always been an integral part of Gazan society, and with the weakening of the influence of the Fateh-led Palestinian Authority in Gaza as the post-Arafat era began, various prominent families stepped in to share the governing responsibilities. By mid-2006, the authority of these clans had developed to the point that they armed their own militias and instituted social programs within their territories. In short, the areas controlled by clans amounted to autonomous regions within Gaza. So when Hamas took control of Gaza in June of 2006, they had to contend with a social structure that was ingrained in the culture of the Strip.

At first, the clans resisted violently against Hamas rule. Clashes among rival clans, shifting allegiances between Fateh and Hamas, and general disarray characterized the months following the Hamas takeover. Even the high-profile kidnapping of BBC journalist Alan Johnston stemmed from these feuds, and Hamas's ability to secure his release – albeit after Johnston had already spent 114 days in captivity – was a symbol of the progress the party had made in restoring order to Gaza. Johnston had been seized by the "Army of Islam", a marginal group dominated by the powerful Dughmush clan, which demanded a prisoner exchange with Great Britain and the release of prominent Islamist Abu Qatada. In their campaign to curb the power of the clans, Hamas confiscated weapons, banned masks and roadblocks, and succeeded in limiting clan activity throughout the territory. Still, it would be a mistake



*Ismail Haniyeh and Alan Johnston after the latter's release in July 2007*

to assume that the powerful families in Gaza are unconditionally loyal to Hamas, and there is little doubt that their influence will be felt the moment their constituents' interests are threatened. In the end, many Gazans are socially and economically dependent on the patronage of their clan, and their allegiances lie with those powerful families before party or country.

### ***Do Palestinians in Gaza differ from those in the West Bank?***

Palestinians are Palestinians whether they are from the West Bank or Gaza, but circumstances have pushed the two territories further apart in recent years and exaggerated the differences between Gazans and West Bankers. Palestinians in Gaza have traditionally been more conservative than their brethren the West Bank, for example, but much of the rise in militancy and religiosity in Gaza in re-

cent years can be at least partly attributed to the correlation between poverty and radicalism, meaning it is rooted in Gaza's dire economic situation. Furthermore, the existence of different dialects, unconnected economies, almost no intermarriage, and a travel ban between the West Bank and Gaza Strip has made it difficult for the people to think alike and make joint decisions. Even parliamentarians and employees of the same ministry – when there is one in Ramallah and another in Gaza – can only interact via electronic media.



Plans for a physical connection between the Palestinian territories have never come to fruition. The 1993 Declaration of Principles asserted that Gaza and the West Bank are "a single territorial unit", and the 1995 Oslo II Interim Agreement proposed the idea of a "safe passage" for Palestinians between the two entities. Yet the concept never moved past the bargaining table, as the Israeli government has made the chances of a bridge, rail line, or other connection very remote.<sup>5</sup>

### ***How has the Gazan economy fared in recent years?***

While Gaza has never been an economic powerhouse, the decimated state of its economy today is unheard of in the region. The Israeli closures and military strikes that began with the first Intifada and only intensified during the second Intifada have been taken to another level since Hamas's electoral victory in 2006, leaving economic opportunities in Gaza all but nonexistent. Salary payments to about 160,000 civil servants were suspended by early March 2007, and later only partially covered through the EU's Temporary International Mechanism and bilateral donor funds. Public investment in the last two years has nearly died away, most private businesses have ceased their operations and import-export restrictions have caused 95% of industrial activity to be suspended.<sup>6</sup> The number of new company registrations had declined to zero by the end of 2007.<sup>7</sup>

"Gaza risks becoming a virtually 100 percent aid-dependent, closed-down and isolated community within a matter of months or weeks, if the present regime of closure continues."  
Filippo Grandi, Deputy Head of UNRWA, 9 August 2007

The public infrastructure has been devastated - first by repeated Israeli military incursions, and then by a lack of tools and cement to make even minor repairs. The damage done to homes, land, and infrastructure amounts to tens of millions of US dollars. Palestinians in Gaza cannot get access to the raw materials they need, and even if they could, the possibility of exporting products are slim to none. This, along with the threat of destruction has kept away any potential donors or investors.

The **agricultural** sector has been particularly ravaged, as farmers must contend with Israeli regulations that restrict them to growing only crops that do not rise above 40 centimeters.<sup>8</sup> These measures have ostensibly been put in place for security reasons.

<sup>5</sup> See Justin Lonergan, "Connecting the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Questions of 'Safe Passage'", presented at a conference at Roger Williams University, Spring 2004.

<sup>6</sup> UNSCO. *Socio-Economic Fact Sheet*. November 2007.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Oxfam, et al. *The Gaza Strip: A Humanitarian Implosion*. (Joint Agency Report), March 2008.

# GAZA

Agriculture in the Strip was once dominated by citrus crops before Israel intervened in 1968. The Israeli citrus market did not want the competition from Gaza, and the Israeli Army claimed militants could take cover in the groves. Even the strawberries and carnations that Gaza was known for more recently can no longer be shipped outside of the territory and are often left to rot at closed checkpoints.

## Strawberries and Carnations

Gazan strawberries were once a ubiquitous delight found throughout the region, as the fruit grows especially well in Gaza soil partly because of the high content of clay and sand. Strawberries - one of the few small crops that can be grown in Gaza - have become so important to the economy that USAID's development efforts have turned to projects based on the cultivation of strawberries. The fruit combines with large quantities of carnations to make up the bulk of the agricultural output in Gaza. Today, however, none of these efforts are profitable for the farmers who, having been cut off from international markets, are left to either feed their yield to livestock or leave it to rot.



According to a poll released in early 2008, economic hardship was the most worrying issue for 30% of Gazans, a shocking statistic in a place where security concerns and political turmoil would be expected to be the primary causes of distress.<sup>9</sup>

## How has this affected jobs and living standards?



The lack of commerce and trade has led to an unprecedented increase in unemployment, which had reached approximately 50% in May 2008.<sup>10</sup> Over 35,000 people were employed in 3,900 factories throughout Gaza in June of 2005, but those numbers had fallen to only 1,700 employees and 195 factories just over two years later.<sup>11</sup> Also, a lack of fuel has crippled the once-thriving fishing industry in Gaza, leaving many fishermen without work.

Ironically, the Gazan economy was once deeply intertwined with Israel's, and the economic implications of the closures are exacerbated by the loss of such a partner. In 2000, there were 24,000 Gazans who were employed in Israel; today there are zero. The continuous increase in public sector employment is a direct result of this situation. The Hamas takeover created many new administrative jobs, which have become increasingly sought after, but the distribution of salaries has been sporadic and there is little confidence among civil servants that their positions offer a steady paycheck on which they can support their families. In all, over one-third of all Palestinians in the occupied territories are supported

9 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR). Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 27. 13-15 March 2008. (See also <http://www.pcpsr.org>).

10 Oxfam, et al. *The Gaza Strip: A Humanitarian Implosion*. (Joint Agency Report) March 2008.

11 Ibid.

by public salaries. It is no wonder, then, that both sides have organized protests around the issue of unpaid salaries in an attempt to discredit the other party.

The hardships of rising unemployment and the corresponding decrease in incomes have been compounded by soaring prices. International humanitarian

"That Gaza has been associated with violence is indisputable. That this violence is a direct outgrowth of economic decline and social fracture is equally indisputable."

Sara Roy, *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*. London, 2007, p. 170.

agencies have been frustrated by the difficulty in gaining clearance for their goods, be they raw materials or food, since Israel has limited the supplies entering Gaza to the point that the daily imports equal only about 15% of what they were before the blockade began in 2007.<sup>12</sup> The only class of expenditures listed in the Consumer Price Index that have declined in any meaningful way in recent years is "recreational and cultural goods and services", while prices for all other goods and services - medical, food, transport, etc. - have increased. In 2007, households spent an average of 62% of their total income on food compared with 37% just three years before.<sup>13</sup>



A girl searching garbage near Beit Hanoun

"The economic boycott on the Gaza Strip... will result in a humanitarian disaster, fueling flames and leading to deterioration of the security situation - a situation that will be destructive to the Israeli economy."

Shraga Brosh, Chairman of the Israeli Association of Industrialists, quoted in Gisha's "Commercial Closure: Deleting Gaza's Economy from the Map," July 2007.

Until foreign governments are willing to accompany their monetary handouts with corresponding political efforts, their investments will be going to waste. Overall, the benefits of development under occupation tend to be illusory and negligible, but they are nonexistent in Gaza.

One thing is sure: little will change in Gaza without a commitment to international law, no matter how much money the outside world is willing to throw at the Palestinians.

## How does Gaza's economy compare with that of the West Bank?

The World Bank reports that the "economic backbone" of Gaza has been eroded. While both the West Bank and Gaza have seen increased poverty rates in recent years, that number has surged in Gaza to the point that two-thirds of the population lives in poverty based on household incomes.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the economic divide between the two territories is just another in a long line of factors that separate Palestinians in Gaza from those in the West Bank. While the West Bank at least has some semblance of economic

12 Ibid.

13 UNSCO. *Socio-Economic Fact Sheet*. November 2007.

14 World Bank. *West Bank and Gaza: Economic Developments and Prospects*. March 2008.

# GAZA

opportunity, a March 2008 report by the World Bank asserts that Gaza has been transformed into a “consumer economy driven by public sector salaries and humanitarian assistance only.”<sup>15</sup>

About 80% of the Gazan population relies on some form of UN humanitarian assistance, and according to the Palestinian Federation of Industries, approximately 95% of Gaza’s industrial operations have been suspended due to Israeli restrictions.



Drivers are forced to run their cars on cooking oil

## **What key recommendations does the World Bank suggest for Palestinian economic recovery?**<sup>16</sup>

### *For the Government of Israel:*

- Removal of checkpoints and barriers.
- Developing Gaza-West Bank transport links.
- Improving the management of border passages and facilities.
- Increase short-term access of Palestinian labor to Israel.
- Strengthen implementation of the 1994 Paris Protocol governing economic relations between Israel and the Palestinian territories.

### *For the Palestinian Authority:*

- Establish civilian authority of security services.
- Undertake judicial reforms.
- Efficiently manage public recurrent expenditure.
- Develop a proactive anti-corruption strategy.
- Ensure transparent management and disposal of settlement assets that are handed over.

“As conflict and economic crisis feed one another in a malevolent cycle, a generation of young men and women is growing up in an environment of curfews, movement restrictions and urban decay. Their experience is reflected in declining grades, high levels of dysfunctional stress and, as frequently shown in credible opinion polls, widespread support for violence against Israelis.”

*The World Bank, Disengagement, the Palestinian Economy and the Settlements, June 2004.*

## **HUMANITARIAN CRISIS**

### **How has Israel’s siege affected the people of Gaza?**

Israel’s actions resulted in the worst humanitarian crisis in Gaza since at least 1967. It is a man-made plight, not one brought on by a natural disaster, as the crisis faced by Gazans is rooted in Israeli measures of collective punishment. International calls for restraint on the part of the Israelis have gone unheeded, and the siege continues with no end in sight. The impact is felt in almost every part of life:

### **Food and Nutrition**

The situation in Gaza has devolved to the point that civilians face a day-to-day struggle to feed themselves and their families. Over 80% of Gazans now rely on humanitarian assistance from international sources, with over 1.1 million people getting their daily nourishment from food aid.<sup>17</sup> There are ten times more people dependant on UNRWA food aid alone than there were just ten years ago.<sup>18</sup>

Israeli restrictions on what crops can be farmed and the lack of an export market have made it impossible for Gazans to grow their own food. Making matters worse, Israeli embargoes have created a situation in which there is little affordable food left in Gaza. As a result, food prices have risen as supply has dwindled.



Gazans are dependent on external food aid

Limited access to fresh food and water (chronic power cuts affecting electric water pumps have left 50% of Gaza households short of fresh drinking water) has furthermore led to unprecedented levels of malnutrition. It is estimated that about half the children are mildly malnourished, while 32% are suffering second-degree and 16% third-degree malnutrition.<sup>19</sup> According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 10.7% of Gazan children under five are suffering stunted growth due to chronic malnutrition.

### **Health & Sanitation**

Israeli policy of limiting the daily amount of fuel and electricity to Gaza has not only made healthcare unreliable and inadequate but leaves entire hospitals without electricity for 8 to 12 hours per day. They are dependent on backup generators, which in turn depend on fuel. Water and sewage plants cannot function without power, leaving an estimated 25-30% of Gazans without running water, while 40-50 million liters of sewage floods untreated into the sea each day.<sup>20</sup> In general, Gaza lacks the tools and cement to make any significant repairs to its infrastructure.



Clean drinking water is sparse in Gaza

Additionally, the needs of the sick and injured are ignored by the Israeli authorities. From October to December 2007 alone, WHO reported that 20 patients, including five children, died because they were not allowed to cross the border into Israel in order to receive medical treatment. In December 2007, over one-third of patients who applied for a temporary permit to leave the Strip via Israel were denied. Moreover, WHO figures suggested that in January 2008, 19% of necessary medicines and 31% of vital medical equipment were lacking in Gaza, and many departments in emergency medical centers and ambulances ceased operation due to lack of fuel.<sup>21</sup>

### **Education**

If Gaza ever gets the chance to develop, it will need bright and open minds to lead the way forward. In Gaza, however, providing children with an education under the stranglehold of Israeli occupation is next to impossible. Even the students who are lucky enough to still be able to attend school have been forced to make due with a crippled educational system. Shortages of power, inadequate textbooks, and a lack of safety have rendered the educational system almost completely broken. UNRWA reported in late 2007 that nearly 80% of children in grades four through nine failed to pass their classes. Over 2,000 children dropped out of school during the

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> World Bank. “Questions and Answers”. <http://go.worldbank.org/KST8HJ6CT0>.

<sup>17</sup> BBC News Online. “Fuel Crisis halts Gaza food aid.” 24 April 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Oxfam, et al. *The Gaza Strip: A Humanitarian Implosion*. (Joint Agency Report) March 2008.

<sup>19</sup> PCHR Report, 15 February 2008.

<sup>20</sup> *The Gaza Strip: A Humanitarian Implosion*, op.cit. .

<sup>21</sup> B’Tselem. *The Gaza Strip - Grave dearth of medical supplies and lifesaving treatments*, 15 May 2008. (See: [http://www.btselem.org/english/Gaza\\_Strip/20080515\\_Medical\\_System.asp](http://www.btselem.org/english/Gaza_Strip/20080515_Medical_System.asp).)

# GAZA

2007 academic year. Computer classes, science labs, and extracurricular activities had been largely cut out because they consume too much power. A recent study estimated that to reach at least current West Bank standards,



*Children in Rafah get a ride to school*

Gaza's educational system needs at least 7,616 additional teachers and 4,749 new classrooms by 2010.<sup>22</sup> However, education carries far less weight in an area so devoid of hope. Israeli policy and aggression is damaging Gaza's future just as much as its present.

In September 2007, UNRWA - which has taken responsibility for the education of 200,000 school children in Gaza, or about half the total - stated that 30% of their students were without textbooks, which the Israeli army prevented from entering. In addition, as the texts used in the PA-run public schools are printed in Gaza and the Israeli ban on supplies was extended to raw materials such as paper and ink, a severe shortage in textbooks evolved. When the school year began, the Palestinian Education Ministry said 27% of its textbooks had not been printed.

## Students Trapped

After the closing of Rafah crossing in June 2007, 722 Palestinian university students studying abroad were trapped in Gaza - about 30 study in US universities, and 10 in the UK. Another 2,000 students enrolled in foreign schools were also trapped. They are a part of the 7,500 Gazans who need permission to continue their work, education or medical treatment outside of Gaza. In January 2008, there were 625 Gaza students still trapped in Gaza and unable to continue their studies.

*Source: The Right to Education Fact Sheet, Right to Education Campaign, Birzeit University, 17 May 2008.*

Students from Gaza are also forbidden from attending Palestinian universities in the West Bank. The argument used by the State was that once they were given permits to leave they would become "information carriers". While prior to the Al-Aqsa Intifada Gaza students comprised 25% of the students of West Bank Universities, including 350 students at Birzeit University alone<sup>23</sup>, there are close to none today. Through Israeli imposed movement restrictions, students have also been systematically deprived of their right to enroll and continue their education abroad, whether in the Arab world or other countries. This is a clear form of collective punishment, which is prohibited by international law.<sup>24</sup>

## US Withdraws Fulbright Grants

In May 2008, the US State Department revoked all Fulbright scholarships that had been granted to exceptional Palestinian students in Gaza, because they feared Israel would not let the students leave Gaza to study abroad. The official Israeli response was that education does not fall under the umbrella of humanitarian concerns, which are the only instances in which Palestinians would be allowed to leave Gaza. However, government spokespeople also said that the State Department never even asked to get visas for the students. Instead of challenging Israel on the oppressive closure policy in Gaza, the US chose to punish Palestinian students.

*Source: "U.S. Withdraws Fulbright Grants to Gaza," New York Times, 30 May 2008.*

22 Harvard University, *Population Projections for Socioeconomic Development in the Gaza Strip*, June 2006.

23 *The Right to Education Fact Sheet*, Right to Education Campaign, Birzeit University, 17 May 2008.

24 *Ibid.*

## EXTERNAL PLAYERS

### What is the position of the United States?

According to President Bush, reaching a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians developed into a serious goal of his administration during his second term. In 2005, he endorsed Sharon's "Disengagement Plan" as a positive step towards the Road Map for Peace. Bush made his first visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories in January 2008, and a push for more purposeful negotiations soon followed. The merits of the Bush Administration's efforts remain to be seen, but it is clear that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had been on their radar long before the public maneuvering of the Annapolis process.



*Olmert and Abbas with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice*

In March 2008, reports surfaced that confirmed Hamas claims that covert actions of the United States had been a primary factor in the split between Hamas and Fateh, a split that left Gaza isolated and under siege.<sup>25</sup> Leaked documents and statements from former top officials showed that the US had been caught off guard by the Hamas victory in the 2006 elections. In response, it set out to implode the subsequent unity government by essentially fomenting a Palestinian civil war. The American plan was to arm certain groups within Fateh and influence them to push Hamas officials from any position of power. The Hamas takeover of Gaza was a response instead of a provocation; it was essentially a preemptive maneuver to deflect the American influence. Since that time, the United States has claimed to approach the peace process with a new resolve, but in reality it has maintained a policy of ignoring and isolating Gaza and Hamas and stepped up the pro-Israeli rhetoric to new levels. President Bush, during his visit to Israel in May 2008, continued to pledge his support for the Jewish state and made repeated references to Israel's biblical right to land and security in a speech to the Knesset in May 2008.

### What role does the UN play in Gaza?

Following the 1948 War and the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem, the UN established UNRWA to carry out direct aid programs for the refugees. Originally envisaged as a temporary organization, UNRWA's mandate has been repeatedly renewed



*Children play in the streets of Nuseirat Refugee Camp south of Gaza City*

in the absence of a solution to the refugee problem. Over the years, UNRWA adjusted its programs to meet the changing needs and has evolved into the main provider of basic services - education, health, and social services - to over 4.4 million registered Palestine refugees in the Middle East (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip). In the Gaza Strip, over three-quarters of the current estimated population of some 1.5 million are registered refugees.

The UN was in favor of Israel's 2005 disengagement as a first step towards a resumption of the peace process, in accordance with the Road Map. Since then, however, its various agencies operating in Gaza have repeatedly warned that the ongoing Israeli military attacks and counterattacks, which come on top of an already deteriorating humanitarian situation, are pushing the Palestinians into an ever deeper crisis.

25 Rose, David. "The Gaza Bombshell." *Vanity Fair*, April 2008.

# GAZA

The UN considers the blockade of Gaza as a form of “collective punishment” for the Strip’s population, and as such a violation of international law. It has repeatedly urged Israel to guarantee unrestricted and secure access to Gaza for humanitarian supplies and relief workers. On numerous occasions the UN has also condemned Israel for using “excessive” force in the Gaza Strip and demanded a halt to its offensives. The UN shares the position that Gaza is still occupied.

## **What is the position of the European Union?**

In recent years, the involvement of European countries has become more consolidated and focused on providing assistance to Palestinians. The Paris Donor’s Conference in 2007 was organized by European leaders and resulted in \$7.4 billion in aid being pledged to the Palestinians.



*Prime Minister Salam Fayyad appealed to the European nations for financial support*

With respect to Gaza, though, European leaders have done little beyond calling for restraint during Israel’s siege. Despite recognizing the 2006 Palestinian elections as free and fair, and despite sharing the position that Gaza is still occupied, the EU has joined in the isolation of Hamas and Gaza. Europe was Gaza’s main export market before the Israeli siege, and yet the EU has been quiet on the

economic disaster that has since transpired in Gaza. It is doubtful that the Paris Conference will show any benefits for Gaza; much more likely it was just another move to bolster Mahmoud Abbas and support development under occupation.

“Donors in my view would be ill advised to inject large additional sums of money today unless the policy conditions are put in place that will enable Palestinian economic recovery. It’s simply a waste of money.”

World Bank’s Regional Director, Nigel Roberts, quoted in “World Bank: Conditions Not Right for Massive Investment in PA”, AP/Guardian, 7 July 2005

## **What has the Arab League done with regard to Gaza?**

The answer is, unfortunately, not much. While the crisis in Gaza and the internal fighting between Hamas and Fateh have appalled the Arab League, they have accomplished little in bringing an end to either situation. They have, of course, been critical of the Israeli Army and their actions in Gaza, classifying the death and destruction there as “crimes against humanity.”<sup>26</sup> In response to the overall Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Arab League has repeatedly called for an independent Palestinian state made up of the West Bank, Gaza, and a capital of East Jerusalem. This proposed solution was first outlined by the League in its “Arab Peace Initiative” in March 2002 and has been reiterated ever since. The League has also offered to play a mediating role between Hamas and Fateh much like it has done throughout the recent instability in Lebanon., and President Abbas began touring Arab countries in June 2008 in order to appeal for help in bridging the divide between Hamas and Fateh. Yet despite having kept Gaza at the forefront of their discussions and thoughts, the Arab League has been unable to have any tangible effect on the ground.

26 Ha’aretz via Reuters. 3 May 2008 (www.haaretz.com).

## **SECURITY**

### **Is there any level of internal security in Gaza today?**

Personal security in Gaza has reached an all-time low since the recent Israeli siege, with no place where one can feel safe - not in the schools, not at home, not anywhere. Israeli military actions, ostensibly in response to the rockets<sup>27</sup> that continue to land in Israeli towns like Sderot and Ashkelon that lie near the border, are a constant threat. The Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem estimates that 47% of the 2,679 Palestinians killed in Gaza between September 2000 and February 2008 were civilians not participating in hostilities. The number was already added to in March, when over 100 people were killed in indiscriminate Israeli attacks.



*Israeli forces fire artillery shells into Gaza*

The circumstances are skewed in favor of the Israeli forces, which have obvious advantages in training and weaponry over their counterparts in Gaza. Prior to the “disengagement” Israeli army tactics included door-to-door raids and ground offensives attempting to destroy the infrastructure of tunnels and rocket launching sites. Since the army has left the strip, the use of artillery shells and missile strikes has increased significantly. In all, 2371 Palestinians in and around Gaza were killed by Israeli military actions; more than half them were civilians. In contrast, 147 Israelis died over the same period, including 50 civilians.<sup>28</sup> On numerous occasions, UN bodies, the UN Secretary-General, and many others have called for Israel to halt its disproportionate and excessive use of force against the Palestinians people.



*Israeli airstrike on Gaza City*

The closure regime that has been imposed on Gaza has also contributed to the lack of safety in the territory. It not only denies many people access to medical assistance, it also has made the crossings a focal point of violence, with civilians, soldiers, and even passing government officials having been victims.

In addition, politically motivated violence - mainly fighting between political factions - has increased, especially since the 2005-2006 elections. It is carried out between the various security forces and their affiliates, with most of the fighting being Hamas’s Executive Force against the Fateh-dominated Presidential Guard and Preventive Security.

27 The first Qassam rocket was launched by the Izz Eddin Al-Qassam Brigades into Israeli territory - hitting Sderot on 5 March 2002. Meanwhile, some rockets reach 15-20 km far. It is estimated that as of May 2008, several thousand rockets had been launched from Gaza territory, mainly causing damage but also having killed 15 people and injuring others.

28 Justin Alexander, “Conflict, Economic Closure, and Human Security in Gaza,” Oxford Research Group, October 2007.

# GAZA

It must also be said, however, that after its takeover in Gaza, Hamas's concerted effort to recruit a large police force, even instating all-female units, succeeded in almost completely eradicating the phenomenon of kidnapping.



Fateh-aligned forces in Gaza



“When a Palestinian child paints a picture of the sky, there’s always an Israeli helicopter there, too.”

Avi Dichter, former head of the Israeli General Security Service, 31 May 2005

## **How much of a concern is crime that does not stem from Israeli actions or fighting between Hamas and Fateh?**

Non-political violations occurred as a result of the PA's inability to enforce the law, a circumstance that has been used as a pretext by families and clans in order to apply their own private



justice, which led to increased confrontations and revenge acts, including incidents of kidnappings and deadly shootings.

The interrelation between rivaling security forces, resistance groups, lawlessness, and family feuds was most clearly reflected in the phenomenon of the abductions of foreigners. Between September 2005 (the first month after “disengagement”) and the takeover by Hamas in June 2007,

28 foreign journalists or aid workers were kidnapped by armed groups in Gaza, in most cases to press for internal Palestinian demands, such as provision of jobs or firing of corrupt officials. Though most abductions ended after a few hours or days, the case of BBC correspondent Alan Johnston was a notable exception. Since taking power, however, Hamas has effectively put a stop to the abduction of foreigners and made crime reduction a top priority.

## **A Final Note:**

The contemporary story of Gaza is one of sadness and loss, as occupation and isolation have made recent years some of the most trying in the territory's long history. It is not even clear which of the current woes is the most dire: Is it the lack of food and fuel, the constant military operations, the tragic split between Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, or one of the many other tribulations? One year after the Hamas takeover, and almost three years since Israel's unilateral disengagement, the fate of Gaza remains largely outside of Palestinian control. While the most pressing issue for the Palestinian leadership is ending the factional discord, they must also contend with the numerous outside entities that, for better or worse, are influencing the direction of the conflict.

The US and the EU nations have held to their standard line of calling on all Palestinians to reject terrorism and recognize Israel. While President Bush has repeatedly expressed his support for a solution that creates “two democratic states”, he has also overseen a failing peace process and contributed to the division between Gaza and the West Bank. In June 2008, for example, he addressed the Palestinians in a speech given in Paris: “You support us and you're going to get a state. You support Hamas, and you're going to get Gaza. Take your pick.”<sup>29</sup> In terms of political action, the EU nations have done little to free the Palestinians in Gaza and bring an end to the conflict, and they have rarely deviated from US policy.

Leaders in the Arab world have welcomed intra-Palestinian dialogue, though there has been no visible presence to ensure that there is follow-through on any agreements that are reached. Egypt has been more active than any other Arab nation when it comes to Gaza, as the Egyptians have acted as liaisons on three fronts: negotiating with Hamas on control of the Rafah crossing, mediating talks between Hamas and Israel towards a ceasefire, and attempting to broker an agreement between Hamas and Fateh.

Even with all of these outside influences, it is clear to Palestinians that the events of June 2007 and the deepening divide between the two territories may be the only issue that is within their control to resolve. The Hamas-Fateh split has distorted the Palestinian identity and shaken the people's confidence in the national cause, and the aspirations of Palestinians in Gaza have been minimized to daily battle concerning food, salaries, and movement in a culture of survival. There is an absence of strong leadership in a time when Palestinians are looking for a hero to end the tragedy in Gaza and a national strategy that can restore hope for freedom and independence in Palestine.

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi  
Chairman of PASSIA

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<sup>29</sup> “President Bush Participates in Joint Press Availability with President Sarkozy of France”. Transcript on [www.Whitehouse.gov](http://www.Whitehouse.gov). 14 June 2008.

# GAZA

## Gaza Crossings



Erez



Nahal Oz



Karni



Sufa



Kerem Shalom



Rafah



**1 Buffer Zone and Northern No-Go Zone**

- 150 to 500 m buffer imposed by the Israeli forces; movement is restricted by frequent army warning fire.
- Covering the former northern settlement bloc, movement in this area is restricted to residents and international organizations since 28 December 2005.

**2 Seaport**

Construction of a seaport was begun during the Oslo process, halted in 2000, and started again in 2005. The unfinished port was partially destroyed by the Israeli Army during the second Intifada, and it remains unoperational today due to the Israeli siege.

	Palestinian Localities		Industrial Area		Minor Crossing Points
	Former Israeli Settlement Blocs pre-2005 Disengagement		Philadelphia Corridor		Major Crossing Points
	Palestinian Coastal Strip Cultivation (Al-Mawasi)		Palestinian Road		500 metre Buffer Zone
	Greenhouse Zone		Israeli Road Link		150 metre Buffer Zone and Northern No-Go Zone
			Double Wire Fence with Watch Tower		

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