

The Facts about Israel's War on Gaza

By Adam Sheets, January 1, 2009

It is crucial that one has her/his facts straight about Israel's war on Gaza. What events brought about this dreadful situation? What needs to be done to make it stop? These questions will be answered in the content of this article, using concrete facts from a variety of news sources.

Let's first investigate the recent cease-fire between Israel and Hamas. The cease-fire began in June 2008. The terms were as follows:

1. Israel would drastically reduce its military blockade of Gaza.
2. Israel would halt all military incursions into Gaza.
3. Hamas would halt all rocket attacks into Israel.

From the outset of the cease-fire, Israel did little to ease its military blockade. As a result, Gazans continued to suffer from a lack of food, fuel, financial aid, electricity, clean water, medical supplies, and more. This has been, inarguably, an attack on innocent Palestinian civilians.

- *Gaza faces a humanitarian "catastrophe" if Israel continues to prevent aid reaching the territory by blocking crossing points, the head of the main UN aid agency for the Palestinians said on Friday... **Israel had restricted goods into Gaza despite the truce**, which calls on militants to halt rocket attacks in return for Israel easing its embargo on the territory... Israel also held up deliveries of European Union-funded fuel for the power plant, which generates about a third of the electricity consumed by Gazans... Ailments associated with insufficient food were surfacing among the impoverished coastal strip's 1.5 million population, including growing malnutrition.*
--Haaretz Israel News, Nov. 21, 2008 [1]
- *A former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, has told the BBC she was taken aback by the "terrible" conditions in Gaza on a recent visit. Mrs Robinson said it was "almost unbelievable" that the world did not care about what she called "a shocking violation of so many human rights"... Israel tightened a blockade on Gaza after Hamas took control there in 2007... "Their whole civilisation has been destroyed, I'm not exaggerating," said Mrs Robinson... Israel says the blockade, under which **it has allowed little more than basic humanitarian aid into Gaza**, is needed to isolate the militant group and stop it and other militants from firing rockets into Israel. **Israel came to a truce with Palestinian groups in June this year, but Mrs Robinson said this had had little effect on people's lives and "just brought a bitter taste in the mouth"**.*
--BBC News, Nov. 4, 2008 [2]

- *The UN in the Gaza Strip says it will run out of food aid in two days unless Israel's blockade - which it describes as "shameful and unacceptable" - eases. The UN refugee agency UNWRA, which distributes food to half of Gaza's 1.5m people, called the blockade "a physical as well as a mental punishment". Israel is now allowing a limited amount of fuel across the border, but it is still **blocking food deliveries**... In a statement, UNWRA spokesman Christopher Gunness said food distribution operations would end on Thursday unless Israeli authorities allowed deliveries of wheat, luncheon meat, powdered milk and cooking oil without delay. **"This is both a physical as well as a mental punishment of the population - of mothers and parents trying to feed their children - who are being forced to live hand to mouth,"** he said... "It is a further illustration of the barbarity of this **inhuman blockade**..." "It is also shameful and unacceptable that the largest humanitarian actor in Gaza is being forced into yet another cycle of crisis management," Mr Gunness added.*
 --BBC News, Nov. 11, 2008 [3]
- ***International aid agencies, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, have said virtually no medical supplies were reaching Gaza.***
 --Haaretz Israel News, Nov. 9, 2008 [14]
- *The UN has no more food to distribute in the Gaza Strip, the head of relief efforts in the area has warned. John Ging said handouts for 750,000 Gazans would have to be suspended until Saturday at the earliest, and called Gaza's economic situation "a disaster". **Israel earlier denied entry to a convoy carrying humanitarian supplies**... The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) distributes emergency aid to about half of Gaza's 1.5m population. "We have run out [of food aid] this evening," said Mr Ging, UNRWA's senior official in Gaza. "Unless the crossing points open... we won't be able to get that food into Gaza," he told Reuters news agency... Also on Thursday, **Israel refused permission for a group of senior European diplomats to visit the coastal enclave. It has also prevented journalists, including those from the BBC, from entering the territory.***
 --BBC News, Nov. 13, 2008 [4]
- ***Since June 2007, Israel has allowed little more than basic humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip. Many there hoped that policy would change, five months ago, when Hamas and Israel agreed to a truce. But while there were some increases in the amount of aid allowed in, Israel's strict restrictions on the movement of goods and people into and out of Gaza largely remained**... Serious fuel shortages have led to widespread power cuts across Gaza City. That, in turn, has caused problems in pumping water to homes, and sewage to treatment plants. Israel is preventing many aid workers, and all journalists from entering Gaza too... "I never thought we would see days like this," says Monther Shublak, head of Gaza's water authority. "The water system was severely stretched even before this crisis, but now, things are much worse. For the last four days, around 40% of*

people in Gaza City have had no access to running water in their homes at all."... "But we are putting all of our resources into sewage pumping. The health consequences of that system totally failing are too worrying to think about, but it could happen unless things change."

--BBC News, Nov. 20, 2008 [5]

- ***Israel has refused to allow cash to enter Gaza in recent weeks to ratchet up pressure on the ruling Hamas militant group. With the supply of currency dwindling, banks have limited withdrawals over the past two weeks, and some have posted signs telling customers they cannot take out any more money... The United Nations halted cash handouts to 98,000 of Gaza's poorest residents last week, and economists and bank officials warn that tens of thousands of civil servants won't be able to cash their paychecks next month... "No society can operate without money, but that's the situation we are reaching in Gaza," said Gaza economist Omar Shaban... Israel and Egypt have restricted movement through Gaza's border crossings since the Islamic militants of Hamas violently seized control of the coastal territory in June 2007. Since then, closures have been eased or tightened, depending on the security situation. But even in quiet times, when Gaza militants refrained from firing rockets at Israeli border towns, only limited shipments of food, medicine and commercial goods were allowed in... Shlomo Dror, an Israel Defense Ministry spokesman, questioned the seriousness of the currency shortage. "We are used to the Palestinians inventing things and we are looking into their claim," he said.***

--Washington Post, Nov. 24, 2008 [6]

The Israeli government maintained that the blockade was a necessary measure in order to stop rocket attacks. However, Hamas had ceased launching rockets into Israel during the cease-fire and even arrested those of militant groups who did fire a handful of rockets.

- ***Hamas arrested three Palestinians who fired rockets into Israel from the Gaza Strip on Thursday, in the first such detentions since the Islamist group and Israel agreed a truce last month, a militant faction said. The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades... said Hamas men pursued two of its members after the attack into the Jabaliya refugee camp. No one was hurt after two rockets hit southern Israel... The ceasefire deal calls on Hamas to prevent cross-border rocket fire and attacks from the Gaza Strip and for Israel to halt its raids and ease an economic blockade... Israel tightened restrictions on the passage of people and goods to and from the impoverished territory after Hamas seized control of it a year ago. United Nations officials said Gaza's goods crossings were still shut rather often despite the agreement. "There is not enough fuel, not enough food, there is not enough of anything," John Ging, an official with the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) that aids refugees, said in Gaza.***

--Globe and Mail Canadian News, July 10, 2008 [21]

Despite the intense blockade against Gazan civilians, the cease-fire held until November 4, 2008. On that date, the Israeli military made an incursion into Gaza and killed six Palestinians. The Israeli government sought to justify these actions, saying that they suspected these Palestinians of plotting to kidnap Israeli soldiers. Palestinian fighters responded to the attack by launching rockets into Israel. Thus began the unraveling of the cease-fire.

- *At least six Hamas militants have been killed after Israel's first incursion into the Gaza Strip since June's truce. Israel said its troops had uncovered a tunnel along central Gaza's frontier which had been dug by militants intending to abduct Israeli soldiers. Clashes ensued when troops were sent to thwart the threat, Israel said. One militant died, Palestinian reports say. A subsequent Israeli air strike on Hamas positions in southern Gaza killed at least five fighters, medics said. An Israeli army spokeswoman said the air strike targeted militants who had fired mortars at Israeli forces... **Tuesday evening's fighting broke out after Israeli tanks and a bulldozer moved 250m into the central part of the coastal enclave, backed by military aircraft, says the BBC's Aleem Maqbool in Ramallah. Residents of central Gaza's el-Bureij refugee camp said a missile fired from an unmanned Israeli drone flying over the area injured another three Hamas gunmen. A truce between the two sides had held since it was declared on 19 June. Israel said the raid was not a violation of the ceasefire, but rather a legitimate step to remove an immediate threat.***

--BBC News, Nov. 5, 2008 [7]

- *An Israel Air Force air strike in the southern Gaza Strip killed at least five militants and wounded several others on Tuesday, Palestinians said. Earlier, Israel Defense Forces soldiers killed a Hamas gunman and wounded two others on Tuesday in **the first armed clash in the Gaza Strip since a ceasefire was declared in the territory in June**, Palestinian medics said... **An Egypt-brokered cease-fire agreement between Israel and the Gaza Strip was signed earlier this year, and went into effect on June 19. The IDF argued that the raid did not constitute a violation of the cease fire, but instead was a legitimate step to remove an immediate threat to Israel from Gaza, which is controlled by the Islamic militant group Hamas.***

--Haaretz Israel News, Nov. 5, 2008 [8]

- *Two weeks ago, an already fragile humanitarian situation resulting from the mounting effects of months of shortages, saw a dramatic downturn. **The fighting resumed, with an Israeli army incursion into Gaza and a retaliatory barrage of militant rocket fire.***

--BBC News, Nov. 20, 2008 [5]

As the cease-fire began to crumble, the violence from both sides intensified. Efforts to redeem the cease-fire ultimately failed.

- ***Palestinian armed groups in Gaza remain committed to a truce with Israel if Jerusalem reciprocates, Hamas's Gaza leader said on Friday, even as militants launched more attacks from the coastal territory... "I have met with armed factions over the past two days and they stated their position clearly: they are committed to calm as long as (Israel) abides by it," said Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas's most senior representative in Gaza.***
 --Haaretz Israel News, Nov. 21, 2008 [9]
- ***Hamas announced on Sunday that militant groups in Gaza have agreed to cease cross-border attacks if Israel opens crossings into the coastal territory, Ma'an news reported.***
 --Haaretz Israel News, Nov. 24, 2008 [10]
- ***After expressing contradictory positions on Sunday, Hamas' leadership on Monday adopted a united stance: The cease-fire with Israel, which expires this Friday, will not be extended... Hamas' spokesman in the Gaza Strip, Ayman Taha, said the movement had concluded that there was no point in extending the truce "as long as Israel isn't abiding by its terms" - though he added that talks on continuing the cease-fire were still taking place. Specifically, Taha said, Israel was supposed to have expanded the truce to the West Bank - something Hamas demanded but Israel in fact never promised - and opened the Gaza border crossings, and "this hasn't happened."***
 --Haaretz Israel News, Dec. 16, 2008 [11]

Following the end of the cease-fire, Israel moved closer to an invasion of the territory. The Israeli government claimed that this was the only remaining option to eliminate rocket attacks from Gaza. However, as cited in the sources above, this was clearly not the case. Israel had failed to abide by the terms of the cease-fire. For the overwhelming majority of the six-month truce, Israel had refused to ease its military blockade of Gaza to any significant degree. In addition, it was the initial violator of the cease-fire when it sent tanks and aircraft into Gaza and killed six Palestinians on November 4, 2008. In fact, there is evidence that Israel was planning to strike Gaza even while the cease-fire was still in effect.

- ***Barak told the assembled lawmakers that the defense establishment spent months preparing for the Gaza operation.***
 --Haaretz Israel News, Dec. 29, 2008 [16]
- ***Sources in the defense establishment said Defense Minister Ehud Barak instructed the Israel Defense Forces to prepare for the operation over six months ago, even as Israel was beginning to negotiate a ceasefire agreement with Hamas.***
 --Haaretz Israel News, Dec. 31, 2008 [20]

In the interest of peace, Hamas, and especially Fatah, have firmly established that they are willing to participate in negotiations that are based on internationally recognized borders and rights.

- *On June 6, 2006, Haniyeh met Dr. Jerome Segal of the University of Maryland in the Gaza Strip... At the end of the meeting, Haniyeh dictated a short message he asked Segal to transmit to President Bush... In the second paragraph, Haniyeh laid out the political platform he maintains to this day. "We are so concerned about stability and security in the area that we don't mind having **a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders and offering a truce for many years,**" he wrote... Haniyeh called on Bush to launch a dialogue with the Hamas government. "We are not warmongers, we are peace makers and we call on the American government to have direct negotiations with the elected government," he wrote... In his own letter, Segal emphasized that **a state within the 1967 borders and a truce for many years could be considered Hamas' de facto recognition of Israel.** He noted that in a separate meeting, Youssuf suggested that the Palestinian Authority and Israel might exchange ambassadors during that truce period. This was not the only covert message from Hamas to senior Bush administration officials. However, **Washington did not reply to these messages and maintained its boycott of the Hamas government.***

--Haaretz Israel News, Nov. 14, 2008 [12]

- *The Hamas leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, said on Saturday his government was willing to accept a Palestinian state alongside Israel within the 1967 borders... Haniyeh told his guests Israel rejected his initiative... He said the Hamas government had agreed to accept a Palestinian state that followed the 1967 borders and to offer Israel a long-term hudna, or truce, if Israel recognized the Palestinians' national rights... In response to a question about the international community's impression that there are two Palestinian states, Haniyeh said: "We don't have a state, neither in Gaza nor in the West Bank. **Gaza is under siege and the West Bank is occupied.** What we have in the Gaza Strip is not a state, but rather a regime of an elected government. A Palestinian state will not be created at this time except in the territories of 1967."... **"Our conflict is not with the Jews, our problem is with the occupation," Haniyeh said.***

--Haaretz Israel News, Nov. 9, 2008 [14]

- *The Palestinian Authority has placed a full-page advert in Israel's Hebrew newspapers to promote an Arab peace plan first proposed in 2002. The Saudi-backed initiative offers Arab recognition of Israel in exchange for an end to Israel's occupation of land captured in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. It also proposes what it calls a just solution for Palestinian refugees. The Israeli government has noted "positive aspects" in the plan but has not formally accepted it... Peace Now, and Israeli campaign group, welcomed the publication of the adverts. "On behalf of a majority of Israeli citizens who*

support peace with the Palestinian people on the basis of a two state solution - we embrace the Arab Peace Initiative and urge both governments to endorse it and negotiate the final status agreement in its spirit," a statement from the group said... The text reads: "Fifty-seven Arab and Muslim countries will establish diplomatic relations with Israel in exchange for a full peace accord and the end of the occupation."

--BBC News, Nov. 20, 2008 [13]

- *U.S. President-elect Barack Obama proclaimed himself "very impressed" with the Arab League's peace plan when he discussed it with President Shimon Peres during a brief visit to Israel four months ago, Peres said Tuesday... The plan, originally proposed by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in 2002 and later adopted by the Arab League, states that Israel would receive full relations with the entire Arab world in exchange for a full withdrawal from all the territory it captured in 1967, including East Jerusalem, plus a solution to the refugee problem. The Bush Administration has said it views the plan positively, but its own road map peace plan and the understandings reached at last year's Annapolis summit have served as the basis of its diplomatic program.*

--Haaretz Israel News, Nov. 19, 2008 [15]

Since Israel began its strike, 4 Israelis and over 420 Palestinians have been killed, with 5 Israelis and over 2100 Palestinians injured [22]. The White House said that Israel will cease its attack when Hamas has agreed to a truce. Hamas said they are open to any cease-fire propositions. A cease-fire has been proposed, but Israel rejected this offer.

- *"In order for the violence to stop, Hamas must stop firing rockets into Israel and agree to respect a sustainable and durable ceasefire," White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe said.*

--BBC News, Dec. 29, 2008 [17]

- *Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has rejected international calls for a 48-hour truce in the Gaza Strip to allow in more humanitarian aid... The 48-hour ceasefire plan to allow more aid into Gaza, was proposed by French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner. Hamas spokesman Ayman Taha told AFP news agency that his group was open to any ceasefire propositions as long as they meant an end to the air strikes and a lifting of the Israeli blockade of Gaza.*

--BBC News, Dec. 31, 2008 [18]

The international community must continue to demand that a cease-fire be implemented. In order to be successful, any agreement must call for 1) an end to Israel's blockade of Gaza, 2) an end to the Israeli invasion of Gaza, and 3) an end to all rocket attacks into Israel.

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