

CONFLICT, ECONOMIC CLOSURE AND HUMAN SECURITY IN GAZA

Justin Alexander



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Cover photo: A Palestinian girl waits for the rest of her family, who are on their way to a wedding. Reproduced by kind permission of the photographer, Judah Passow.

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Foreword

I am pleased that Oxford Research Group is able to offer this study *Conflict, Economic Closure and Human Security in Gaza* at this very critical juncture of the Middle East in general and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular. Recent events in Gaza have had a profound impact not only on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but on the region and beyond. It was hoped that the Palestinian presidential elections in January 2005, Israel's unilateral "disengagement" from Gaza in September 2005, the Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006 and the formation of a national unity government following the Mecca Agreement in March 2007 would open a real window towards improving the dire situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and would pave the way for the resumption of peace talks that could lead to ending the protracted conflict. Alas, the Palestinian situation had dramatically deteriorated since June 2006 turning Gaza's already critical political, economic and security conditions into unprecedented levels of blockade, poverty, violence and uncertainty.

There is sufficient research and analysis on what should happen in the long term with regards to the political process. There is almost a consensus on the ultimate cure for most, if not all, of the region's problems. That cure would be a political settlement to bring about an independent sovereign Palestinian state side by side with a secure Israel and a just resolution to the issue of refugees. Little, however, is being done to examine – through a "human security" lens – the immediate desperate situation in Gaza and offer recommendations to minimise the current unbearable, and in most instances, avoidable human suffering. The study offers a new insight and a detailed account of the day to day security breaches, unearths root causes of violence and uniquely offers ways to improve the security situation based on both the particularities of the area and international law and conventions that govern such situations.

It is our solid belief that safeguarding the dignity, safety and wellbeing of the human being in any conflict exceeds any other consideration. It is in such a spirit that the study was commissioned, in the hope that it can contribute to easing the ever worsening security situation in Gaza and its Israeli neighbouring town of Sderot, and advancing the argument that much could be done to protect civilians and minimise human suffering while the quest for a political resolution is underway. As the study shows, this is both urgent and possible. Last but not least, I commend the principle author, Justin Alexander, for his scholarly work, dedication and courage to conclude the study despite the severe and rapidly changing situation while writing the report. The study greatly benefited from ORG's team who lent their extensive knowledge and experience in the region.

Dr. John Sloboda

Executive Director, Oxford Research Group, October 2007

Executive Summary

At a time of dramatic flux, this report looks at Gaza through a variety of interconnected lenses, including history, economics and conflict. Throughout, it stresses the central importance of human security – the physical, economical and psychological well being of Palestinians in Gaza and Israelis living nearby. It does not directly address issues of politics and “state security”, such as how the Palestinian Authority should be governed or how a final status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians can be achieved. However a resolution of these issues is of course needed to ensure abiding human security. Nonetheless, human security should not be set aside until progress is made on the seemingly intractable political issues, and there are measures that can and should be taken now.

“Throughout, it stresses the central importance of human security.”

Section 1 sets the scene for what follows with an overview of the changing threats to human security in Gaza and its neighbourhood. Section 2 summarises Gaza’s turbulent history, tracing the development of conflict with Israel and internal divisions, as well as the gradual disintegration of Gaza’s economy. Section 3 examines in more detail Gaza’s moribund economy, particularly the devastating impact of border closures on a territory that is too resource poor and overpopulated to be able to function in isolation from the rest of the world. The economic situation is both a cause and a consequence of conflict, and therefore leads logically onto Section 4 which analyses the modes of violence, their frequency and impact. It also examines internal conflict in Gaza and the asymmetric nature of the conflict. Finally, Section 5 suggests some specific measures which could lead to improvements in human security, both for Gazans and for Israelis in Sderot and other nearby communities. These recommendations, which are exploratory and will require political will to implement, include:

- An urgent resumption in coordination at the border crossings, whether directly between Palestinians and Israelis, or with an international body as the intermediary.
- The continuation and expansion of plans developed under the 2005 *Agreement on Movement and Access* to improve both the throughput and security of border crossings.
- A careful reassessment by both Israelis and Palestinians, ideally with input from independent third parties, of their rules of engagement, with a view to minimising the impact of conflict on civilians. Ideally these rules should be publicly communicated so civilians can minimise the risks they face.
- Better targeting practices by both sides to minimise civilian casualties and practices such as preventative shelling should be ruled out.
- A commission established to monitor and report on human rights (especially civilian casualties) in Gaza and neighbouring areas of Israel.
- Robust and rapid investigations into all civilian casualties and the initiation of legal proceedings where combatants have violated the rules of engagement or are otherwise liable for wrongful killing.
- Implementation of an independent commission to monitor civilian casualties and human rights abuses on both sides of the border.
- Serious consideration of an international force along the Gaza-Israel border. The force should be developed through consultation with all parties and designed to gain the confidence of both Israelis and Palestinians and contribute significantly to mitigating conflict and improving human security for civilians on both sides of the border.
- Support for the development of civilian links between Gaza, Sderot and other Israeli communities. In particular an official covering should be provided for this in Gaza to prevent accusations of collaboration.

In addition, Gaza’s economy is of overriding importance. Israel will have no security while Gaza remains blockaded and impoverished. The resilience of the Palestinian people has enabled the international community to overlook the economic decay in Gaza for too long, however their coping mechanisms are exhausted and the situation can no longer be ignored. Gaza must have significant investment to rebuild its shattered infrastructure, revive industries crushed by closure and create new employment opportunities for its growing workforce. Export and import routes through Israel need to be designed to operate in spite of recurring conflict, and the political obstacles to new trade routes through Egypt or directly to European markets by sea and air need to be overcome. This is essential if there is to be a vibrant future for Palestinians and Israelis.

1 | Introduction: The changing threats to human security

The Israeli Disengagement from Gaza was heralded by many in the international community as an opportunity to improve the lives of people in the crowded and impoverished territory. Some saw it as the first step towards a comprehensive peace and the creation of a Palestinian state. The mood amongst Palestinians and Israelis was generally less optimistic, although many hoped that something positive would emerge from the move, which was indeed possible. Unfortunately, the two years since the Disengagement have proven to be a disappointment. The situation in Gaza is at a historic low in terms of poverty, human security and future prospects and the nearby Israeli town of Sderot has been in a state of turmoil as a result of continual rocket attacks.

This report provides a background to understanding some of the complexity of the situation inside Gaza and in its relations with Israel. It maps out the events and processes which led to the current situation, and diagnoses some of the underlying problems which are often obscured by dramatic headlines. There are unfortunately no easy remedies, but a number of options are considered that could mitigate conflict and improve human security, and hopefully thereby ease the path towards a political solution.

This report was first envisaged in December 2006 in the context of a ceasefire in Gaza that had been agreed upon by Israel and most Palestinian factions (including Hamas) a few weeks beforehand. Although the situation then was temporarily calmer, no real process had been established to address the underlying tensions, nor were there any mechanisms to mitigate the escalation of future, inevitable, violent outbreaks. Furthermore, Gaza continued to be extremely isolated both because of the international financial boycott on the Hamas government and because of Israeli closures restricting the ability of Gazans to travel and trade. This isolation was expected to lead to further economic, social and security disintegration in Gaza, in turn raising the likelihood of renewed conflict with Israel.

“Human security” is sometimes used in a very broad sense covering every kind of security, but here is used very specifically to narrow the focus onto the daily life of civilians and away from what may be called “state security”, which is frequently the dominant lens through which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is viewed. Professor Mary Kaldor, writing after a trip to Gaza in March 2007, put it succinctly: “For most Israelis, state security, i.e.: the delineation of borders, the protection of territory and the preservation of the Jewish character of the state, is crucial and originated from the experience in the second World War... For most Palestinians, human security is their main concern. Many of them are refugees... they are denied freedom of movement, humiliated at checkpoints.”¹ This analysis contains an important insight into the different way that most Israelis and Palestinian experience the conflict. This difference exists precisely because Israelis have a state whereas Palestinians live under occupation.

“For most Israelis, state security is crucial.

For most Palestinians, human security is their main concern.”

Although this report focus on human security, it does not dismiss the fact that Palestinians earnestly want to have a real state and therefore issues of state security which threaten its development or eat into its prospective borders are also of profound concern to them. Also, whereas most Israelis focus mainly on issues of state security, there is a section of the population, which at the moment includes residents of Sderot and other communities near to Gaza, for whom human security concerns are vital, perhaps paramount, because of the immediate threats they face. The bulk of this report covers Gaza, where most violations of human security in the region take place, however the lives and welfare of Israelis in Sderot and neighbouring communities are both of serious concern and interrelated with Gazans, and so will be examined in parallel.

When this report was envisaged, the Palestinian factional fighting was a depressing sideshow but did not seem to be the principle human security threat to people in Gaza. The most feared and plausible scenario was not a Palestinian civil war but rather another major Israeli incursion in the style of Operation Summer Rains, probably launched in retaliation to the ongoing (albeit reduced) firings of Qassam rockets at Sderot. Oxford Research Group (ORG) was also concerned about the dire economic situation in Gaza which stood little chance of reviving unless Gazans were permitted freedom of movement and trade with the West Bank, Israel, Egypt and the wider world. As it transpired, the threat of internal conflict was much more serious than it had seemed. Hamas' consolidation of power in Gaza has changed some, but not all, of the factors related to human security. Later sections of this report will develop these issues in detail, but in summary the main threats to human security in Gaza during the first half of 2007 were:

- 1 | **Israeli strikes and incursions.**
- 2 | **Poverty, unemployment, shortages and restrictions in movement due to closure.**
- 3 | **Factional fighting.**
- 4 | **Crime and feuds.**

In recent months (3) and (4) have reduced significantly because of the monopoly of force that Hamas has established. At the same time (2) has increased substantially and the threat of (1) seems to be significantly greater. Although Israel has yet to fully articulate its response to the new situation in Gaza, past experience suggests that it will take the form of air strikes and continued closure. There have been speculations for some months that Ehud Barak, having replaced Amir Peretz as defence minister, has been planning a ground invasion.² Certainly the head of Southern Command, Maj. Gen. Yoav Galant, has been urging a "massive incursion into Gaza" for some months.³ The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) held an exercise in late March 2007 in preparation for "a possible action in the Gaza Strip that would use large numbers of ground forces," and Ha'aretz reported a security source who said that "Israel could not avoid responding in the long term as terror organisations grew stronger in the Strip. Intelligence assessments say both Hamas and Islamic Jihad have rockets with a range of 15 kilometres, but efforts are being made to significantly increase their range."⁴ However, a major incursion would be difficult to sell to the Israeli public, given its reaction to the Second Lebanon war; engaging Hamas street-to-street in the mazes of Gaza's towns might be even more costly to Israel than fighting Hezbollah.

From an Israeli perspective Gaza, even controlled by Hamas, does not pose much of a direct military threat to the IDF inside Israel. At most Palestinians could stage occasional small-scale raids at crossings or through tunnels. However, Gaza's very existence, with its dense, impoverished and growing population, the majority of whom are refugees from what is now Israel, is perceived by some Israelis to pose a demographic threat to the maintenance of a Jewish-majority state next-door, indeed this was a major motivation for the Disengagement.

Since the Disengagement, Israelis have been concerned about the build-up of weapons in Gaza, presumed to have been smuggled through tunnels under the Egyptian border. Estimates in the Israeli press have said that 30 tonnes of explosives was smuggled through in 2006,⁵ six times more than in 2005,⁶ although the basis of these estimates is unclear. Brig. Gen. (ret.) Tzvika Fogel, a former chief of staff for the Southern Command, has commented that since the Disengagement "the Palestinians have brought in anything they wanted through the tunnels they dug and Hamas has built up its army in this time in preparation for the conflict with Israel."⁷ The tunnels and rocket factories operated even when the IDF had bases in Gaza, but Israelis fear they have been stockpiled in greater numbers since the Disengagement.⁸ Israel is also concerned about the influence of Iran in Gaza; Maj. Gen. Amos Gilad, Director of Policy and Political-Military Affairs at the Ministry of Defense, has said: "To understand the situation in Gaza, we must first focus on Iran... Even if he wanted to be more moderate, [Khalid] Mashaal receives orders from Iran and Syria."⁹

It seems unlikely that substantial amounts of heavy weaponry (whether Iranian or not) could have been brought through the narrow tunnels. However the tunnels, which are operated by the more powerful Rafah clans and are profitable precisely because of Gaza's precarious economic situation and sealed borders, have certainly been used to bring in small arms and materials for explosives used in bombs and rockets. The barrage of rockets launched from Lebanon by Hezbollah last summer (though these were Russian – made Katyushas which are more powerful than Qassams) has raised Israeli fears of a rocket build up in Gaza. Most Israelis of course have nothing to fear from these short range rockets, but they do pose a very serious threat to human security for residents of Sderot on both an ongoing basis and particularly in the event of another escalation of hostilities.

2 | History

2.1 Gaza's geography and its Israeli neighbours

The Gaza Strip is a 360 km² section of the coastal plain which continues up through Tel Aviv to Haifa, bordered by Egypt to the south, the Negev desert on the east and the Mediterranean Sea on the west. Gaza has three geographical regions running parallel to the coast: coastal sand dunes give way to agricultural land and then sandstone ridges.¹⁰ The Strip is divided into five districts of roughly equal area which, running north to south are: Rafah, Khan Younis, Deir al-Balah, Gaza City and Northern District (containing the towns of Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahia). There are also eight refugee camps run by the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) spread across the strip and Gaza's total population today is nearly 1.5 million.

Sderot is a university town of about 20,000 less than a kilometre from the north-eastern corner of Gaza. Sderot was founded in 1951 as a temporary camp for Jews ejected from Iraq and Iran, and the permanent town that subsequently formed was composed mainly of Jewish immigrants from Morocco and other parts of North Africa. In the 1990s the population doubled with the influx of immigrants from Russia. The population is 99.8% Jewish with only a handful of Israeli Arabs.¹¹ Amir Peretz, formerly the Labour leader and Defence Minister, began his political career as Sderot's mayor in 1983 and still lives there. Ariel Sharon's thousand acre Sycamore Ranch is only a few kilometres from Sderot.

“Sderot was founded in 1951 as a temporary camp for Jews ejected from Iraq and Iran.”

Aside from Sderot the environs of Gaza are relatively thinly populated with ranches and agricultural kibbutzim, totalling around 33,000 people spread across 75 rural communities within about 8 miles of Gaza. The Eshkol Regional Council runs along most of Gaza's eastern border, stretching from Egypt almost to the Karni crossing. It is named after the Israeli prime minister at the time of the occupation of Gaza in 1967 and has a strong Zionist flavour as the first Jewish settlements there were established in 1943 in defiance of a British proposal to ban Jewish immigration to the area. In 1980 many of the settlers evacuated from Sinai moved to Eshkol and recently some of the former Gaza settlers have joined them.¹² Continuing around the border are three more regional councils: Sedot Negev touches Gaza for a few kilometres near the Karni crossing,¹³ Sha'ar Hanegev then borders Gaza until Erez,¹⁴ and finally Hof Ashkelon touches part of Gaza's northern border.¹⁵ To the north along the coast is an IDF base (Zikim) and then a power station (dominating the skyline seen from Gaza) and the world's largest desalination plant. Further to the north, about 8 miles from Gaza, is the city of Ashkelon with a population of 120,000

2.2 The creation of Gaza (1948)

The Gaza Strip is something of an anomaly. Although Gaza is an ancient city, located at a strategic watering point along the Via Maris connecting Egypt with the Levant, there was no defined region corresponding to the modern Gaza Strip before 1948. Under the British Mandate, Gaza City was the centre of one of the 16 districts in Palestine, but it was substantially larger than the modern Strip, also containing the coastal cities of Ashkelon and Ashod, as well as a section of the Western Negev. In 1945 the Gaza district had a population of 150,540 and was 98% Palestinian.¹⁶ The UN partition plan for Palestine envisaged an Arab state split into three parts, one of which consisted of Gaza District plus a section of the Negev desert along about half of the Egyptian border. The failure of the partition plan and the subsequent war led eventually to a ceasefire on 14 October 1948. The Gaza Strip was defined in the Israel-Egypt armistice agreement on 24 February 1949¹⁷ based on the positioning of the Egyptian and Israeli forces at the time of the ceasefire. It consisted of about half the area of Gaza District, swelled with very large numbers of refugees from other districts, particularly Ramla, Jaffa and Hebron.

Israel was uncomfortable with the existence of a large refugee community in the Gaza Strip and variously considered both their expulsion and absorption. Yigal Allon, who commanded Israeli forces in the area, is reported as having said that if he had another day or two before the 1948 ceasefire,

they would have captured Gaza and most refugees would have fled into Egypt.¹⁸ David Ben Gurion proposed capturing Gaza in 1955 and deporting the refugees to Jordan and the proposal was considered again in 1967.¹⁹ On the other hand, during the discussions of the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine in May 1949, Israel proposed that: “if the Gaza area were incorporated in the State of Israel, the latter would be prepared to accept as citizens of Israel the entire Arab Population of the area, both inhabitants and refugees.”²⁰ It is unclear whether this was a genuine offer, but the fact that it was even articulated in the negotiations is significant.

Under Egyptian military rule the situation in Gaza formalised and stagnated. UNRWA was established and began to develop a network of basic provision for the refugees in Gaza. Gaza was not economically integrated into Egypt, and most of its residents were restricted from leaving the Strip.

2.3 Suez and the first disengagement (1956)

The IDF invaded Gaza on 1 November 1956, as part of the wider invasion of Sinai, in coordination with France and Britain, following General Nasser’s nationalisation of the Suez Canal. The Israeli motives for the invasion included opening the Suez Canal and Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping and weakening Egypt so as to end the sporadic conflict with fedayeen (Palestinian refugee militias) along the border.

It is unclear whether Israel had a clearly developed plan for Gaza after the invasion and it only withdrew reluctantly on 8 March 1957 under intense US pressure and the threat of sanctions.²¹ As mentioned, Ben Gurion had previously considered the idea of a mass deportation but Palestinians had learnt from 1948 not to leave their homes and “when [Ben Gurion] visited the towns and refugee camps in Gaza... a new reality was revealed before his eyes, which shocked him deeply: the Palestinians did not flee from the IDF as they had in 1948.”²²

There are some strong indications that Israel intended to hold on to Gaza. Only a few days after the invasion the New York Times reported on 6 November 1956 that “Israel has started integrating the conquered territory into the nation”. Work began to lay railway lines between Israeli territory and Gaza and plans were formulated to change the standard currency from Egyptian pounds to Israeli currency.²³ Statements by Israeli politicians support the view that a longer term occupation was intended.²⁴ Foreign Minister Golda Meir told a Mapai Party rally on 10 November 1956 that “the Gaza Strip was an integral part of Israel.”²⁵ Menachem Begin, then the leader of the Herut Party, said on 27 November that “he could not countenance withdrawal from the Gaza Strip under any terms because the area belonged to Israel by right.”²⁶

“The human security dimension to the conflict over Gaza is apparent during this first occupation.”

The human security dimension to the conflict over Gaza is apparent during this first occupation. A propaganda pamphlet produced by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Gaza Strip: Aggression or Peace*, features on its cover a blood red image of Gaza with dagger-like arrows extending from it towards major Israeli cities. The pamphlet features graphic photographs of Israeli civilians killed by fedayeen. It argues that: “The expulsion of the Egyptians put an end to the bloodshed, violence and tension of which for eight years the Gaza Strip had been the source. Fedayeen have ceased to infest the countryside. The refugee camps are calm. The inhabitants of the Strip and Israel farmers and their families in the Negev have attained security.”²⁷ On the other hand there seem to have been at least two significant massacres of civilians: “UNRWA officials found that 275 Arab civilians were killed by the Israeli army at Khan Yunis and the adjacent refugee camp on 3 November, and 111 other civilians were killed at the Rafah refugee camp, mostly on 12 November. UNRWA officials also protested strongly about these civilian deaths, in particular about the murder of eight of the Agency’s local employees.”²⁸

“Israel used arguments which would later be directed against its own occupation of Gaza.”

Ironically, in presenting a justification to the international community for its continued administration of Gaza, instead of a revision to Egyptian rule, Israel used arguments which were similar to those which, decades later, would be directed against its own occupation of Gaza. It criticised the former “Egyptian military regime... which was of provisional character and of undefined legal status [and] has resulted in the decay of the area and the impoverishment of its population.” It rightly criticised the Egyptian policy of closure: “Restrictions were placed on the passage of persons and goods from the Strip to Egypt. Numerous petitions addressed to the Egyptian authorities by the representatives of Gaza, for the removal of economic barriers and for the easing of these restrictions, proved of no avail.”²⁹ By contrast, the pamphlet contested, the Israeli occupation had brought substantial benefits, meeting humanitarian needs and providing Gazans with new opportunities for economic development. On the humanitarian side: “Pipes are now being laid to carry water from Israel to the Strip. Free supplies of food, fuel and other essential commodities have been provided by the Israel authorities for the 60,000 destitute of the local population.”³⁰ On the economic side: “Banking, trading and fishing are in regular operation. Citrus fruit... is being marketed and exported abroad through Israel... Development projects for the area are being worked out with a view to making the local population self-supporting.” It concluded that any consideration of the future status of Gaza should be based on an understanding that: “the geographical and economic links of Gaza are with Israel and not with Egypt,” and it would be impossible to maintain Gaza, “almost entirely devoid of resources of its own, in economic isolation from any adjoining territory.”

2.4 Occupation and settlement (1967-87)

Following the re-occupation during the 1967 war, Israeli policy towards Gaza and the other occupied territories fluctuated somewhat during the first decade of occupation. In the early years there seems to have been a serious effort to win hearts and minds through economic improvements. In 1972 ORG advisor Dr. Tony Klug was writing his doctoral thesis on the occupied territories; Shlomo Gazit, the first coordinator of Israeli government operations in the occupied territories, suggested that instead of assessing the Israeli occupation in isolation, he should make a comparison between it and previous occupations such as the Ottoman, British and Egyptian and with occupations elsewhere in the world.³¹ Gazit clearly believed that an objective assessment of the Israeli occupation at the time would compare favourably to the occupations of the past. This aspiration matched that articulated during Suez in the pamphlet quoted above.

Initially after 1967 Palestinian labour in Israel was not encouraged by the government because it conflicted with its policy of Jewish self-sufficiency. However, the Israeli economy boomed in the 1970s and more and more Palestinians crossed the porous borders, largely to work in Israeli-Arab farms and small construction businesses. In later years there does seem to have been a deliberate integration of the Gazan economy with Israel - part of what political economist Sara Roy documents as “de-development” – but in the early years of occupation it was market forces that took the lead. The numbers of workers grew far faster than the number of legal work permits issued and eventually the policy switched retrospectively in favour of integration.³² By the mid 1980s almost 70% of Gaza’s workforce was employed in Israel.³³ Moshe Dayan, the Minister of Defence in the early 1970s, saw the strategic benefits of economic integration and “he imagined a benevolent and pragmatic colonialism, which first and foremost meant a steady improvement in material conditions [for Palestinians],”³⁴ as a diversion while Israel quietly settled key locations in an “invisible occupation“, at least in the West Bank. Gaza was a less appealing prospect which Prime Minister Levi Eshkol referred to as “a bone stuck in our throats.”³⁵

Nonetheless, some Israelis were determined to settle Gaza. Whereas there were civilian settlements in the West Bank within a year of occupation, the first settlement in Gaza was paramilitary. Kfar Darom was established in 1970 as a paramilitary outpost of the Nahal youth movement near the very centre of the Gaza Strip in the location of a former kibbutz which was one of the few Jewish communities that had existed in the region (albeit briefly from 1946-48). In 1972, Netzarim and Morag were similarly founded as Nahal outposts. In 1975 the Qatif bloc, 5,000 acres of land in the southwest of Gaza which had been controlled by the Egyptian army until 1967, was handed over to the Hapo'el Hamizrahi Moshav Federation, a religiously based community cooperative. This led to the establishment of Netzer Hazani, the first civilian Jewish community in the Gaza Strip, in 1977. Some historians argue that at Camp David in 1978 Prime Minister Menachem Begin, unsuccessfully, encouraged Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat to take Gaza back.³⁶ Instead, the settlements expanded as the settlers sought to establish facts on the ground. Most of the Gaza settlements were established after Camp David, and their population increased rapidly during the 1980s, reaching over 5,000.

2.5 The First Intifada and Oslo (1988-2000)

After two decades of occupation and no apparent progress, tensions in Gaza eventually boiled over into what became the First Intifada. It is generally considered to have been triggered on 8 December 1987 after an Israeli truck crashed into two vans carrying labourers in Jabalya refugee camp, killing four Palestinians. A demonstrator protesting this incident was killed by Israeli soldiers, leading to riots which spread throughout Gaza and the West Bank. In the early days of the Intifada Hamas was founded in Gaza. Clashes were particularly intense in Gaza, and the IDF found the maze of narrow streets in Gaza's towns and refugee camps extremely difficult to control. It is therefore no surprise that Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin exclaimed in 1992 that: "I would like Gaza to sink into the sea."³⁷ Poverty in Gaza increased dramatically during the Intifada, although still coming nowhere near the levels it would reach following the Second Intifada. One figure that illustrates the increase in poverty is that between June 1990 and June 1991 the number of families receiving food assistance from UNRWA increased from 9,383 to 120,000.³⁸

“One figure that illustrates the increase in poverty is that between June 1990 and June 1991 the number of families receiving food assistance from UNRWA increased from 9,383 to 120,000”

Following the secret negotiations between Israel and the PLO in Oslo, Yasar Arafat and colleagues from Tunis arrived in Gaza on 1 July 1994, initially establishing the Palestinian Authority (PA) there (with authority over the 60% of the Strip that was categorised as “Area A” by Oslo) and in Jericho, before extending it to other West Bank cities in 1995 and Hebron in 1997. Starting on 6 April 1994, Hamas and Islamic Jihad began a campaign of suicide bombings on buses in Israel. As a result, Israel built a security fence around Gaza in 1995 and in 1996 the PA's Preventative Security Service launched a major crackdown on Hamas. Over two thousand Hamas members were arrested and allegedly tortured during interrogation leading to a number of deaths.³⁹

2.6 Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-05)

Frustration at the failure of progress towards a Palestinian state and Israeli policies of closure that restricted movement and trade led to the eruption of the Al-Aqsa Intifada following Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount. Although this started in the West Bank, much of the fiercest conflict was in Gaza and the defining image of the uprising was that of 12 year-old Muhammad al-Durrah, apparently shot as he huddled behind his father near Netzarim junction in Gaza on 30 September 2000. Rafah was the focus for much of the conflict due to concern about smuggling tunnels; Israel destroyed around 1,500 homes to create a buffer corridor between the town and the border, making 16,000 people homeless.⁴⁰ The American activist Rachel Corrie was crushed by a bulldozer in Rafah on 16 March 2003 trying to prevent these home demolitions.

Most of the suicide attacks on Israel originated in the West Bank, presumably because of the difficulty of mounting operations from Gaza. Only three "successful" suicide attacks appear to have come from Gaza. The most recent was a bombing in Eilat in January 2007 involving a man from Beit Lahia who crossed into Israel from Egypt. An attack on Tel Aviv in April 2004 was committed by two British Palestinians who had visited Gaza.⁴¹ Finally two suicide bombers who killed 10 in an attack on Ashdod port in March 2004 were believed to have been smuggled out of Gaza in a cargo case.⁴² Attacks in Gaza were largely directed at the settlements and occupying soldiers. However, a new form of attack was initiated on 5 March 2002 when the first Qassam rocket was fired.⁴³ The early Qassams were had a limited range and only a small explosive payload, but they awakened Israelis in Sderot and kibbutzim around Gaza to the potential danger from Gaza. The first deaths from a Qassam were not until 28 June 2004.

The Disengagement plan was articulated by Ariel Sharon in February 2004 and coincided with an increase in Israeli military operations in Gaza, presumably to try and prepare the ground for a post-disengagement Gaza that was more amenable to Israeli concerns and interests. The assassinations of Sheikh Yassin, the founder of Hamas, and his deputy Abdel Aziz Rantisi in spring 2004 were clearly designed to weaken Hamas. The IDF also launched two major incursions, "Operation Rainbow" in May 2004 focused once again on tunnels in Rafah, and "Operation Days of Penitence" in October 2004 which focused on northern Gaza following a Qassam attack which killed two infants.

The Sharm al-Sheikh conference on 8 February 2005 - involving Sharon, Abbas, Egypt and Jordan - appeared at the time to mark the end of the Intifada and a return to negotiations by both sides; this was reinforced by a suspension of Israel's targeted killing policy and the tahdiyeh, a lull in fighting, agreed amongst Palestinian factions at the Cairo conference on 16 March. However, the ceasefire was only briefly and partially respected.

"Rafah was the focus for much of the conflict ... Israel destroyed around 1,500 homes to create a buffer corridor between the town and the border, making 16,000 people homeless."

2.7 Disengagement (2005)

Ariel Sharon, viewed as the father of the settlement movement, intended the Disengagement Plan to strengthen Israeli control of the West Bank, particularly the large settlement blocs, both through redeploying resources and soldiers and as a result of the political capital gained from the move. In his first address on the subject in 2003 he explained that: “[The] settlements which will be relocated are those which will not be included in the territory of the State of Israel in the framework of any possible future permanent agreement. At the same time, in the framework of the ‘Disengagement Plan’, Israel will strengthen its control over those same areas in the Land of Israel which will constitute an inseparable part of the State of Israel in any future agreement.”⁴⁴ Sharon’s principal advisor Dov Weissglas went further in an interview with Ha’aretz (probably intended just for domestic consumption): “Arik [Sharon] doesn’t see Gaza today as an area of national interest. He does see Judea and Samaria as an area of national interest... The significance of the disengagement plan is the freezing of the peace process. And 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.”⁴⁵ The interview was controversial, not least because Weissglas said that the US was fully in support of a strategy that contradicted President Bush’s Middle East Road Map.

Israeli society was deeply divided on the Disengagement, although opinion polls consistently showed that a majority supported the plan. The opposing minority was very vocal and visible through the orange ribbons tied to their car aerials and a series of high profile protests. Reasons for opposing disengagement included support for the concept of greater Israel, a belief that the settlements protected Israel (for example the Gush Katif block prevented Palestinians in Rafah and Khan Younis from accessing the sea and part of the Egyptian border) or simply an objection to removing Israelis from their homes. Some other Israelis, while not actively opposing the disengagement, questioned its motives and feared that a unilateral step would not lead to progress towards the creation of a Palestinian state and peace.

Many Gaza settlers left voluntarily, accepting generous compensation and resettlement packages (although two years later many are still unemployed and living in temporary accommodation and trailers).⁴⁶ Others remained and were forcibly removed, along with non-residents from settlements in the West Bank who entered Gaza prior to the Disengagement. Most of the settlement buildings (apart from greenhouses) were demolished, as were IDF military positions and the Erez industrial zone on the northern border. The Disengagement was conducted unilaterally, and therefore there was only limited coordination with Palestinians throughout the process. The last Israeli soldier left Gaza on 12 September 2005.

Israel has argued that its disengagement from Gaza marked the end of occupation and hence of its legal and humanitarian responsibilities as an occupying power. However, this position has been contested. Human Rights Watch maintains that “because Israel has retained effective day-to-day control over key aspects of life in Gaza, including cross-border movement and thus the economy, it retains the responsibility of an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention.”⁴⁷ Alvaro de Soto, the former UN Special Envoy, also argued that: “few international lawyers contest the assessment that Gaza remains occupied, with its connection to the outside world by land, sea and air remaining in the hands of Israel.”⁴⁸ The British International Development Committee concurred with this: “In many ways the current conditions in Gaza are much worse than under conventional occupation... because the [Government of Israel] still controls all movement in and out of the Gaza strip - by land, sea and air - the Israelis remain de facto occupiers.”⁴⁹ This argument has been developed in most detail by Gisha, an Israeli human rights organisation. In its 2007 report *Disengaged Occupiers* it outlines in detail the elements of Israeli control over Gaza including border closure, control of the Palestinian population registry, the enforcement of “no-go zones” inside Gaza and the ongoing direct occupation of the West Bank.⁵⁰ Perhaps the most helpful way of understanding Gaza’s status since disengagement is seeing the whole territory as what Oslo defined as “Area A”, on the same standing as the urban centres in the West Bank, but still legally occupied.

“Israel has argued that its disengagement from Gaza marked the end of occupation.”

2.8 Tensions within the PA and the rise of Hamas (2003-05)

After the intensity of the early years of the Al-Asqa Intifada, attention turned more and more to the failings of the PA and there was growing pressure, both internally and externally, for reform. An initial move in this direction was the appointment of Mahmoud Abbas as Prime Minister in April 2003, but he resigned within five months in frustration at Arafat's continuing level of control. During a reshuffle of PA positions on 19 July 2004, Yasser Arafat's cousin Musa Arafat was appointed as the new head of security in Gaza. This was a deeply unpopular move in Gaza and led to a weekend of riots, the sacking of a base in Khan Yunis and the kidnappings of corrupt PA officials linked to demands for a reform of Arafat's multilayered security organisations.⁵¹ The tension was not between Hamas and Fatah but between Arafat loyalists and other elements of Fatah, particularly the Al-Asqa Martyrs Brigade. The first really significant change in the PA came with the death of Yasser Arafat on 11 November 2004 and the subsequent election of Mahmoud Abbas as President. One implication of this for Gaza was a strengthening of Abbas' close ally, Mohammed Dahlan.

Hamas had developed as the political and military expression of an Islamist movement that had roots in Gaza long before the First Intifada. Islamist social organisations were widely recognised as effective and reliable in addressing Gaza's poverty, albeit with limited resources. With the establishment of the PA and the subsequent corruption (both real and perceived) of Fatah officials, Hamas' popularity grew substantially. As early as 1995 one informed commentator wrote that: "The Islamists are trusted by the poor, Gaza's overwhelming majority, to keep their promises and are perceived to be less corrupt and subject to patronage than their secular, nationalist counterparts, especially Fatah."⁵² Hamas also gained popularity for its attacks in the early years of Oslo as the stagnant peace negotiations became increasingly despised. Hamas did not contest the 1996 Presidential and Parliamentary elections, or the 2005 Presidential election, because it opposed the Oslo Accords and hence disputed the value of the Palestinian Authority. However, Hamas did decide to contest the municipal elections which took place in a series of rounds from December 2004 to September 2005 and, although Fatah won more seats overall, Hamas was well ahead in Gaza and also received strong support in some West Bank towns such as Nablus. This paved the way for Hamas contesting, and winning, the 2006 Parliamentary elections. It is worth noting in passing that there was a period of a few months in 2005, before the Disengagement, in which elected Hamas officials in the Gaza municipal councils were interacting to some extent, on account of their positions, with Israeli soldiers and officials.

The fact that two of the most significant events in Gaza's recent history – the Disengagement and the election of Hamas with the subsequent reaction from Israel and international donors – happened in such quick succession means that it is difficult to disentangle the impact of each event individually. It is hard to be sure whether some of the optimistic post-disengagement economic scenarios floundered as a result of the financial boycott following Hamas' election or whether they would not have been realised whatever the election result. Equally it is unclear whether Israel would have been able to instigate such complete closure after Hamas' election, or stage such intense military operations in 2006, had there still been 9,000 settlers living in the Strip. Ariel Sharon's departure from the political scene as a result of his stroke on 4 January 2006, so soon after the Disengagement and his formation of Kadima, was another wildcard. What is clear, however, is that these events collectively set the scene for probably the most gruelling eighteen months in Gaza's history, as well as a serious ordeal for Israelis in the neighbouring town of Sderot.

“Two of the most significant events in Gaza's recent history – the Disengagement and the election of Hamas with the subsequent reaction from Israel and international donors – happened in such quick succession means that it is difficult to disentangle the impact of each event individually”

“Towards the end of March, Israel significantly intensified its level of artillery shelling”

2.9 Hamas in government: boycott and battles (2006-07)

At the time of Hamas’ election victory it was still respecting the “lull” in fighting announced almost a year before. There was no increase in Qassam rocket firings; in fact there was a slight reduction during the first months of Hamas’ administration. Islamic Jihad was largely responsible for the rockets although some commentators alleged that Hamas assisted with the production of the rockets and essentially “outsourced” resistance so as to maintain an official ceasefire.⁵³ There were a number of significant rocket incidents, including the first launch of a Russian Katyusha and an unexploded rocket which killed two Israeli Bedouin shepherds who stumbled across it. Towards the end of March, Israel significantly intensified its level of artillery shelling and also began shelling from battleships.

As soon as Hamas formed a government, Israeli began withholding custom taxes revenues (which it is obliged to transfer to the PA under the Paris Protocol) and international donors immediately ceased payments to the PA. The Quartet insisted upon three conditions: that Hamas renounce violence, recognise Israel and endorse previous peace agreements. The US went further and threatened action against banks that handling PA funds, restricting the PA’s ability to make transactions or even to access funding from willing sources. Later the European Union developed a Temporary International Mechanism through which it paid the salaries of some PA employees, purchased fuel for Gaza and gave other support which did not involve passing money through the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority.

Israel closed Erez crossing to Palestinian workers in Israel on 11 March 2006 and it remains closed at the time of writing, although a small number of businessmen involved in trade with Israeli companies have been allowed to continue crossing. An intensive period of closure also began at Karni and Rafah crossings at this time. This, along with the financial blockade, quickly began to strangle Gaza’s economy.

In response to external pressure and to the responsibilities of governing, Hamas began to indicate that it might be willing to alter some of the positions it previously held and consider a two state solution (a fundamental change that even Sheikh Yassin had been moving towards shortly before he was killed).⁵⁴ This seemed to be re-enforced by a joint document agreed by Hamas and Fatah prisoners in Israeli jails which talked about a Palestinian state limited to the West Bank and Gaza (rather than the whole of historic Palestine, as claimed in Hamas’ Charter). However, political progress was slow and was quickly overtaken by violence.

Jamal Abu Samhadana, the founder of the Popular Resistance Committees and recently appointed by Hamas as director general of the police forces, was assassinated in an air strike on 8 June. The following day a family was killed in an explosion while picnicking on the beach near Beit Lahia. The incident was controversial; although the IDF admitted to shelling nearby it denied responsibility and insisted that the explosion was caused by unexploded ordinance buried on the beach. Human Rights Watch, which had interviewed eyewitnesses and examined the scene, challenged the IDF’s explanations and called for an independent inquiry.⁵⁵ In response to the incident Hamas announced the end of its 16 month ceasefire. By 22 June, when Olmert and Abbas met in Jordan, there had been another four major air strikes bringing the total number of civilians killed in Gaza during the previous month to 31.

Israel made its first incursion into Gaza since the Disengagement on 24 June, detaining two Hamas members from a village near Rafah. The following day, in a raid through a tunnel into Israel, a coalition of Hamas’ Qassam Brigades, the Popular Resistance Committees and the Islamic Army killed two IDF soldiers near Kerem Shalom and captured a third, Gilad Shalit. The raid was said to be in response to the beach blast, although some action may have been planned beforehand because the tunnel would have taken months to dig. Israel launched a full scale invasion of Gaza, Operation Summer Rains, with

a stated objective of locating Shalit and a possible additional intention of toppling the Hamas government. In the early hours of the operation missiles were fired at Gaza's only power plant, cutting off most of Gaza's power supply for months.⁵⁶ Israel also detained over a third of Hamas' parliamentary representatives in the West Bank, including three ministers. Government buildings in Gaza were targeted including Interior Ministry offices and Prime Minister Haniyeh's office. Qassam rockets hit more distant targets including central Ashkelon and Netivot for the first time. The Israel-Lebanon conflict, which broke out following the capture of Israeli soldiers in a Hezbollah raid, paralleled the conflict in Gaza in many ways, although its larger scale drew much of the international attention away from Gaza. However, the conflict continued in Gaza and intensified at the start of November when Operation Autumn Clouds was launched, focused specifically on curbing Qassam activity around Beit Hanoun in Northern Gaza. It came to an end, presumably earlier than intended, following a controversial shelling on 8 November which killed a family of 19. However, conflict continued after the incident and two Israeli civilians were killed by Qassams in Sderot, the first since the Disengagement.

A ceasefire in Gaza (though not the West Bank) was agreed on 26 November between Olmert and Abbas with the support of most Palestinian factions except Islamic Jihad. In the first five months of the ceasefire there was a considerable lull in Israeli attacks; 11 Palestinians were killed in this period, all allegedly attempting attacks on the border. Qassam fire continued, although only from Islamic Jihad, and at a significantly lower level (averaging around 60 a month) causing no deaths and only a couple of injuries. The first suicide bomber in almost a year, and the first originating from Gaza in two years, killed three Israelis in Eilat on 29 January 2007. The first Israeli air strike since the ceasefire was on 28 March and the first incursion by soldiers came a week later on 4 April. Hamas' armed wing claimed responsibility for rockets fired into Israel for the first time on 24 April (Israel's Independence Day), however Ghazi Hamad, spokesman for Hamas' political wing, said that the government wanted the truce to continue. Such apparent divisions between and within Hamas two wings added to the confusion of the following months.⁵⁷

2.10 Factional fighting (Dec 2006 - May 2007)

There was unfortunately no lull in violence inside Gaza. There had been sporadic fighting between Hamas and Fatah since the election, including assassinations and protests by unpaid security forces (as a result of the boycott), however the conflict with Israel largely put internal conflict on hold. The situation between Hamas and Fatah degenerated rapidly following the November ceasefire with Israel. On 11 December three young children of Baha Balousha, a senior Fatah intelligence officer, were killed when gunmen fired on their car.⁵⁸ Balousha had been deeply involved with the torture of Hamas prisons in the 1990s, and so it was widely believed that the killings were revenge attacks by some members of Hamas. Perhaps in response, on 14 December Prime Minister Haniyeh's convoy was attacked at Rafah as he returned from Egypt, and Hamas accused Dahlan of attempting to assassinate him.⁵⁹ There was a week of street clashes in Gaza and President Abbas suggested calling new elections. Serious flare ups continued in January and February 2007, claiming dozens of lives and setting a pattern of reprisal killings and street battles interrupted only by temporary truces that rapidly collapsed.

Saudi Arabia intervened to try and halt the factional fighting, something Egypt had been unable to achieve, and summoned Palestinian leaders to Mecca to broker an agreement to form a unity government.⁶⁰ The new government took over a month to form, largely because of disagreement over who would be Minister of Interior and thereby control most of the security forces. During this time there was a lull in open Hamas-Fatah fighting, however the sense of lawlessness continued, particularly due to incidents such as the kidnap of BBC journalist Alan Johnson on 12 March and the shooting at an UNRWA convoy carrying the agency's operations chief John Ging on 15 March.⁶¹ Eventually on 16 March a compromise was achieved appointing an independent, Hani Kawasmeh, as Interior Minister. However, Israel immediately rejected the new government⁶² and there was not much relaxation of the boycott by international donors, as had been hoped, meaning that the new unity government had few resources or freedom of action. The Interior Minister announced a 100-day security plan on 11 April to

tackle the lawlessness in Gaza, however within a few weeks he was already threatening to resign because of a lack of cooperation from the factions and a refusal by some of the security forces to accept his authority.⁶³

The factional fighting was a result of a complex mixture of internal factors and economic hardship, as well as external pressure. The violence was further accelerated as blood feuds developed and could not be resolved peacefully through traditional mechanisms because of the social disintegration. *The Guardian* focused on the economic dimension: “the two factions are competing for whatever spoils remain in an already dire economic situation... [such as] jobs, which are few and far between.”⁶⁴ Crisis Group emphasised the role of social decay and power politics in its analysis: “You can’t brutalise a society for four decades and expect to produce the Vienna Boys Choir. This is a power struggle, pure and simple. It has absolutely nothing to do with ideological rivalry or different conceptions on how Palestine should be organised or liberated.”⁶⁵

“The factional fighting was a result of a complex mixture of internal factors and economic hardship, as well as external pressure”

There also seems to have been a US policy, championed by Deputy National Security Advisor Elliott Abrams, of building up Fatah forces with training, finances and equipment in order to take on Hamas. Abrams is a controversial figure for supporting right-wing paramilitary groups in Central America during the 1980s, turning a blind-eye to their human rights abuses, and being indicted in the Iran-Contra scandal.⁶⁶ The thesis that the US support for the Presidential Guard (to which \$59 million was allocated by Congress) was part of a deliberate policy to topple Hamas has been developed most forcefully by Alastair Crooke and Mark Perry of Conflicts Forum,⁶⁷ which encourages engagement with political Islam, and was demonstrated most clearly by the “Action Plan for the Palestinian Presidency”, which was apparently a secret US plan leaked by Jordanian newspaper *Al-Majd* but hardly reported in the Western media.⁶⁸

A respected independent Gazan psychiatrist and civil society leader, Eyad Sarraj, wrote about a meeting he had with Abrams: “He was blunt that the Hamas government, which was democratically elected, must be pushed out at any cost. We’re not Hamas followers, but we tried to persuade him and other officials that engagement, rather than confrontation, is the better choice; but their determination was unshakable.”⁶⁹ Nathan Brown, at the Carnegie Endowment for Peace concurred: “is difficult to argue with the conclusion that the United States effectively aided the slide toward civil war.”⁷⁰ Whatever the actual extent of US efforts to topple Hamas, some officials were clear about their views. The UN special envoy Alvaro de Soto noted after a Quartet meeting in early February 2007: “The US envoy declared twice in an envoys meeting in Washington how much ‘I like this violence’, referring to the near-civil war that was erupting in Gaza in which civilians were being regularly killed and injured, because ‘it means that other Palestinians are resisting Hamas’.”⁷¹

Any pretence of a unity government collapsed in May with the most intense round of factional fighting so far. Kawasmeh’s security plan had involved a joint-deployment of Fatah and Hamas forces wearing the same uniforms, however it seems that forces associated with Dahlan deployed ahead of time on 9 May on the orders of Rashid Abu Shbak without approval from Kawasmeh or Hamas.⁷² Clashes on the streets, particularly at checkpoints created by both sides, spiralled into full scale battles. Egyptian intelligence worked to organise truces, but these rarely held longer than overnight. This round of fighting was particularly brutal, with instances of cold blood killings such as men being thrown off tower blocks. The danger for civilians was intense, as one local journalist explained: “If you have a beard, you might be arrested by Fatah security for looking Islamic. If you have a chain around your neck, Hamas gunmen might shoot you because you look secular.”⁷³ A week into the fighting Israel began a series of air strikes, focusing on the buildings of Hamas’ Executive Force. These Israeli attacks may have been in response to intensified Qassam fire (which killing a woman in Sderot), but were widely seen as being directed to support Fatah. A factional truce on 19 May largely held for a few weeks, but the Israeli Palestinian fighting continued. President Abbas travelled to Gaza to meet with Prime Minister Haniyeh on 23 May to cement the factional truce and discuss renewing the November ceasefire with Israel; Abbas was willing to have a limited ceasefire in Gaza - as Israel favoured - but Hamas wanted it to cover the West Bank as well.

2.11 Hamas' consolidation of control (June 2007)

The sudden advance of Hamas in Gaza in June caught most people by surprise. Fatah had considerably larger forces on paper and seemed to hold trump cards including the backing of the US, Egypt, Jordan and increasingly Israel. As late as 24 May the US security coordinator, General Keith Dayton, testified to Congress that Hamas was losing ground both in terms of popular support and strength of arms as a result of US training of Fatah forces.⁷⁴ However, this analysis proved incorrect. Fatah's forces were divided across a multitude of security services and lacked the cohesion and determination of Hamas' military wing; there was also something of a leadership vacuum because of the number of senior Fatah security officials who had previously been killed by Hamas or gone to the West Bank during the May clashes; Dahlan himself was in Egypt following knee surgery.

Hamas launched a full scale assault on 11 June on Dahlan's Preventive Security Force and certain other Fatah forces. Preventive Security crumbled as Hamas systematically targeted its bases firstly in Northern Gaza, then in Khan Younis, central Gaza, Gaza City and Rafah. Many Fatah forces appeared to stand down due to deals done with Hamas or a lack of orders to engage. The Egyptian security envoy in Gaza had predicted two years earlier that Hamas could easily take over all of Gaza in three days: "I've seen both sides and it is clear that Hamas scores much higher in five areas: leadership, discipline, training, arms and, most important, the motivation." He said the Fatah security forces would be hobbled by being stationed in buildings, while Hamas fighters would be able to hit and run.⁷⁵ This is exactly what happened.

From Hamas' perspective, their assault was a legitimate enforcement of security by the elected government against opposing forces that refused to cooperate with them and were involved in criminal activities and assassinations of Hamas members. The assault was a pre-emptive strike because Hamas feared that Dahlan – who they saw as a collaborator with Israel and the US, and who had masterminded the crackdown on Hamas in 1996 – was planning a decisive assault on them. This fear was probably well grounded, and the approval by the US Congress of the \$59 million package of security assistance to President Abbas in April was seen by Hamas as a clear signal of where things were headed. On 6 June, a few days before the Hamas assault began in earnest, it was widely reported that Fatah had requested permission from Israel to bring in a large arms shipment – provided by Arab countries, but part of the plan of assistance developed by Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton, the US Security Coordinator – which was waiting in Egypt and included dozens of armoured cars, hundreds of RPGs, thousands of hand grenades and millions of rounds of ammunition.⁷⁶ This may partly explain Hamas' timing, as they struck before the arms shipment could arrive and potentially shift the balance of power. However, the operation was so well coordinated that a contingency plan, at least, must have been in place, and factors such as the tunnel bomb underneath the Khan Younis headquarters of Preventive Security would have taken months to prepare.⁷⁷

The timing of the assault may also have been partly related to divisions within Hamas. Hamas has generally maintained a strongly unified stance in its external relations, but practical divisions have long existed between its political and military arms and between the leadership in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and those in Damascus. The responsibilities entailed by governing had begun to result in some moderation of stance by those in office and caused some internal divisions in Hamas, which intensified after the Mecca Agreement to share power with Fatah failed to yield a loosening of the boycott. The Israeli practice of detaining elected Hamas officials cannot have helped, as this removed from the internal policy debates precisely the people with the most experience of the complexities of governing and who were more likely to advocate conciliation. Many of the people ORG interviewed in April 2007 emphasised the importance of these internal dynamics within Hamas, although no one accurately predicted what would come next.

“Many of the people ORG interviewed in April 2007 emphasised the importance of these internal dynamics within Hamas, although no one accurately predicted what would come next.”

3 | Economics

3.1 Introduction

Any serious study of Gaza leads to the conclusion that the hopeless economic situation is one of the main stimuli for internal instability and attacks on Israel, as well as causing great suffering for the people of Gaza. The World Bank and UNCTAD⁷⁸, NGOs such as Oxfam and Christian Aid, Israeli human rights groups such as Gisha, and academics, led by Harvard's Sara Roy, are among those who have emphasised the overriding importance of Gaza's devastated economy. In a context of abject poverty and hopelessness, where one of the only prospects for employment is with a security force, it is little surprise that Gazans have competed violently over their limited resources and have lashed out as best they can against Israel, whose policies of closure set the parameters of their lives. The reasons for Gaza's shattered economy are no secret.

“The hopeless economic situation is one of the main stimuli for internal instability and attacks on Israel, as well as causing great suffering for the people of Gaza.”

Firstly, Gaza is one of the most densely populated places in the world. At the end of the British Mandate, the population of the Gaza Strip was only 69,700, mainly in Gaza City and Khan Younis.⁷⁹ In sixty years the population has increased a staggering twenty-fold. This is a result of two factors. Firstly, the influx of refugees in 1948 - representing about 70% of the population, compared to 20% in the West Bank. Secondly, the high population growth since then, which is due to a combination of the high birth-rates (around 5.5 children per woman)⁸⁰ and low mortality rates because of healthcare provided by UNRWA and others. By way of illustration, the population density in the Jabalya refugee camp is 74,000 per square kilometre, triple that of Manhattan.⁸¹ Elsewhere, a population of this density would have migrated in search of work, but leaving has not been an option for most Gazans. The population - over half of which is under 16 yrs - has only been able to subsist as a result of international aid and this is the case now more than ever before.

Secondly, opportunities for work and commerce have been in decline since Israel first began imposing closure during the First Intifada, and have completely evaporated since the Second Intifada. After 1967, Gaza's economy became deeply integrated with Israel. Unemployment fell to 1% in 1975 because of the huge demand for labourers in Israel (at one point 70% of Gaza's workforce were employed in Israel), building the infrastructure of the country as its economy boomed.⁸² Towards the end of the First Intifada, Israel began implementing a policy of closure, restricting trade and movement, which caused Gaza's economy to decline by about a third between 1992 and 1996. As a result of the former economic integration, Gaza now functions far more poorly under closure than it might have done if it had developed independently but under the same population pressure. Closure was reduced in 1998 leading to an almost three year recovery in the economy until the outbreak of the Second Intifada, which led to massive closure and economic collapse. Things got even worse with the Disengagement which involved the loss of thousands of jobs in the settlements and the dismantled Erez industrial zone. Extremely tight closure since March 2006 has led to a near total collapse of employment in export industries. Most of the remaining jobs in Gaza are now in the public sector where pay has been sporadic as a result of donor imposed sanctions since Hamas' electoral victory.

Finally, repeated Israeli incursions, coupled more recently with crime and factional fighting, have repeatedly devastated Gaza's crumbling infrastructure. Donors and investors have been unwilling to finance the rebuilding of infrastructure - such as Gaza's port - which could be destroyed again in the near future.

“The damage cannot be undone simply by ‘returning’ Gaza’s lands...”

3.2 Sara Roy on Gaza

No other foreign academic has studied the economic and social situation of Gaza in more detail, or for a longer period than the Jewish-American, Harvard political economist, Sara Roy. She first visited Gaza a few years before the First Intifada and began to develop the concept of “de-development” to describe what she encountered there: a deliberate process of undermining Gaza’s local economic base and integrating it fully with Israel. She explains that “de-development refers to a process that undermines the ability of an economy to grow and expand by preventing it from accessing and utilising critical inputs needed to promote internal growth beyond a specific structural level.”⁸³ In the case of Gaza she concluded: “Palestinian resources and labour [were integrated] into Israel as a mechanism to hasten the full incorporation of the land and other economic resources into the Jewish state.”⁸⁴

Dr. Roy’s most recent book, *Failing Peace*, draws together a series of her articles written over a twenty year period up until 2006. It chronicles the disintegration of Gaza’s social structure through the First Intifada, Oslo and beyond. Her economic analysis made her immediately sceptical about Oslo which, she posited in 1994, “does not alter the structural asymmetries between Palestinians and Israelis; it reshapes and reinforces them. The economic fundamentals of occupation remain unchanged.”⁸⁵ Her work on de-development helps to explain why closure has hit Gaza far harder than other economies undergoing sanctions: “The closure policy proved so destructive only because the thirty-year process of integrating Gaza’s economy into Israel’s had made the local economy deeply dependant. As a result, when the border was closed in 1993, self-sustainment was no longer possible.” And for this reason she correctly predicted that disengagement would not solve Gaza’s economic malaise: “The damage cannot be undone simply by “returning” Gaza’s lands... Without porous boundaries allowing workers access to jobs, something the Disengagement Plan not only doesn’t address but in effect denies, the Strip will remain effectively a prison without any possibility of a viable economy.”⁸⁶

3.3 Socio-economic data

Socio economic data on Gaza, produced mainly by Palestinian and UN bodies (including UNRWA, OCHA and WFP), is both depressing and dates quickly. Because the economy is so sensitive to closure and conflict, there can be dramatic changes in a matter of weeks. The general downward trend over the last seven years means that the situation today is likely to be worse than the historical data quoted below; where data is only available for the combined West Bank and Gaza, the underlying figures are usually lower for Gaza. Given those provisos, some past data is illustrative of the depth of poverty and economic malaise.

- The GDP per capita (in PPP terms) for the West Bank and Gaza was around \$1,500 in 2003, a similar level to Mozambique and Chad.⁸⁷ Given that Gaza is the poorer of the two and imports into Gaza are more expensive because of closure, the level will be considerably lower when it is considered in isolation. The difference will be even more marked now that Gaza is largely administratively, as well as physically, disconnected from the West Bank.
- A survey in March 2007 revealed that 87% said their **household incomes** had fallen over the last year; 53% said it had fallen by more than a half, and 21% said they no longer had any income at all.⁸⁸
- The **dependency ratio**, meaning the ratio of employed people to the rest of the population, has risen dramatically. World Bank data showed that two years into the Second Intifada, that dependency had increased in Gaza from 5.9 dependent to each employed person to 9.4:1,⁸⁹ and is probably even higher now.
- A June 2007 survey showed that 68% of families have increased their **debt** over the last year, including to their electricity and water suppliers and grocers.⁹⁰
- Over 40% of families have **sold assets** in the year up to June 2007, including jewellery, furniture and other personal items, in order to survive.⁹¹
- **Malnutrition** amongst under fives reached 13.2% in 2002, higher than Zimbabwe.⁹²

The collapse in employment and high birth rates has led to the high dependency ratio. Even those employed have been only been paid sporadically, hence the fall in household incomes. The accumulation of debt and selling of assets is particularly worrying. It indicates that people's "coping mechanisms" for surviving periods of unemployment and uncertainty, including savings and support from relatives, has been almost completely eroded. Financial sanctions also mean that Gazans now have little access to remittances from relatives living abroad, which used to be a major source of income, particularly during hard times. It is only the presence of UN agencies that has prevented famine and even their intervention has been insufficient to prevent rising malnutrition.

The Palestinian economy as a whole has declined in parallel with the economies of individual households. The World Bank, writing in 2004 when the situation was far better than it is today, explained that: "The Palestinian recession is among the worst in modern history... Between September 2000 and late 2002... the decline in real per capita GDP reached almost 40%... exceeding the scale of economic losses suffered by the US in the Great Depression... In Gaza, unemployment exceeded 46% and the poverty level rose to 68%"⁹³

3.4 Destruction

The physical destruction of homes, businesses, agricultural land and public infrastructure has had a significant economic impact. A full assessment of this damage is a complicated exercise and outside of the scope of this report, but a few examples are provided as illustrations.

During the first nine months of the Second Intifada, up until June 2001, the World Bank estimated that capital damage in Gaza totalled \$193m.⁹⁴ The Quartet assessed that in the first two years of the Second Intifada, up until August 2002, 5636 acres of agricultural land were levelled in Gaza.⁹⁵ UNCTAD later estimated that up until 2005, "The levelling of land by the Israeli forces effectively decommissioned... 15% of the agricultural land in the Strip," and also noted "the destruction of 357 irrigation networks, 102 wells, 65 greenhouses and 46 water pumps over the period between April 2003 - April 2004 alone."⁹⁶

The damage that was done during military operation in 2006 was particularly intense. UNDP estimated that \$46 million of damage was done in just two months between 28 June and 27 August, during Operation Summer Rains. \$23.5 million of this damage was to the agricultural sector as a result of the destruction of olive and citrus trees, greenhouses, wells and irrigation networks and poultry farms. The three road bridges destroyed by the Israeli air force on 28 June amounted to \$5.4 million of damage.⁹⁷ OCHA estimated that the six-day incursion into northern Gaza in November 2006, termed Operation Autumn Clouds by the IDF, resulted in \$23.3 million of damage.⁹⁸ Over half of the damage was to agricultural land that was flattened by bulldozers. Damage was also done to homes, public buildings and roads, water and sewage pipes, electricity infrastructure and phone lines. As well as the immediate damage of the attacks, unexploded shells present an ongoing hazard which can hinder farming and daily life.⁹⁹

"The physical destruction of homes, businesses, agricultural land and public infrastructure has had a significant economic impact... During the first nine months of the Second Intifada, up until June 2001, the World Bank estimated that capital damage in Gaza totalled \$193m."

3.5 Closure

Steel and concrete walls run around the full length of Gaza's land borders with Israel and Egypt, and its seaport and airport were destroyed by Israel in 2001. Therefore, aside from tunnels under the Egyptian border and an occasional boat which manages to evade the blockade enforced by the Israeli Navy, the only access into and out of Gaza is via six crossings which, listed from North to South, are:

- **Erez** (Beit Hanoun) is the crossing point into Israel for individuals, and the only way non Palestinian-ID holders can enter Gaza.
- **Nahal Oz** is used exclusively for fuel imports via pipelines.
- **Karni** (Al-Muntar) is the commercial crossing for most imports and all exports.
- **Sufa** is used for imports of construction materials, and occasionally for UN humanitarian supplies. Before the Second Intifada it was a crossing point for Palestinian workers in Israel.
- **Kerem Shalom** (Karm Abu Salim), near the meeting point of Israel, Egypt and Gaza, currently only opens by arrangement for humanitarian shipments. It has been suggested as a terminal for imports from Egypt, but Palestinians generally oppose this because the crossing is controlled by Israel.
- **Rafah** is the crossing with Egypt. Only Palestinian ID holders are allowed to use the crossing and trade is not permitted. It is operated by the PA and monitored by the EU Board Assistance Mission (EUBAM) in coordination with Israel.

Israel has direct control of the five crossing into Israel and also considerable indirect control over the Rafah crossing. Through the means of partial or total closure of the crossings Israel is able to determine the parameters of life in Gaza. The situation for the past year has been one of almost continual closure. OCHA does not exaggerate when it concludes that: "The Gazan population is undergoing a virtual siege by historical standards."¹⁰⁰

From an Israeli perspective, closure of Gaza's borders is framed as a response to security threats. There have certainly been serious attacks on the border crossings in the past, and explosives and fighters have occasionally been smuggled over for attacks in Israel. However, these incidents have been fairly infrequent and although Israel alleges that a considerable number of attacks are foiled, for example a planned car bomb attack on Karni crossing in April 2006,¹⁰¹ it is not clear to an independent observer whether the periods of closure always correspond to specific intelligence about such threat. The British House of Common's International Development Committee's research led them "to question the extent to which Israel is motivated by legitimate security considerations."¹⁰² Indeed, there is evidence from internal Israeli discussions that suggest other reasons for closure, as reported by Ha'aretz: "The Israel Defense Forces and the Shin Bet recommended... that Israel shut down the Rafah crossing to pressure the Palestinians to release kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit. This was said during a Defense Ministry meeting whose transcripts Ha'aretz has acquired. The document reveals for the first time that the IDF and the Shin Bet are calling for a closure on grounds other than intelligence on pending terrorist attacks."¹⁰³ Similarly, in May 2007 a senior Israeli official told Reuters that: "If they will resume suicide bombings, we will retaliate with a siege on Gaza."¹⁰⁴ Israel does face real security threats at the Gaza crossings, but it seems unlikely that they are as numerous as alleged or require such intense closure to counter.

The framework for the operation of the crossings was laid out in the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) and the Rafah Agreement, negotiated by the Quartet special envoy James Wolfenson and signed on 15 November 2005. The AMA set clear goals for the facilitation of trade and movement along with the strengthening of security measures. Unfortunately none of the AMA's targets have been achieved. On some points of the agreement, such as the facilitation of bus convoys between Gaza and the West Bank or the rebuilding of Gaza's seaport, no discussions have even taken place since the signing of the agreement. On other points, such as the targets for operation of the crossing points, the

"Israel does face real security threats at the Gaza crossings, but it seems unlikely that they are as numerous as alleged or require such intense closure to counter."

actual levels achieved are far below the stated targets, particularly since the 12 March 2006 (when Erez was closed) and since 25 June 2006 (when other crossings were closed following the capture of Gilad Shalit). Looking back on the first year after the signing, OCHA reported that as a result of the closures only 23% of Gazan business owners were optimistic about future productivity when surveyed in September 2006 compared to 81% in January of that year.¹⁰⁵

OCHA also produces bi-weekly reports on the implementation of the AMA.¹⁰⁶ The reports show the percentage of scheduled days and hours each crossing is open and the flow of people and goods across them, as well as any security incidents. It also monitors progress towards the AMA targets, such as rebuilding the seaport and installing new x-ray scanners at Karni. Almost all of these points are consistently marked “NO” in these reports, indicating no progress, or even any discussions, towards implementation. The reports usually contain graphs summarising operations and throughflow at each crossings which powerfully demonstrate the degree of closure.

- **Erez** – There is a vast new terminal at Erez, designed to process up to 20,000 people a day. At the start of 2006 almost 3,000 workers and traders were crossing each day, however Israel has closed it on 12 March 2006, prior to the Jewish holiday of Purim, and never reopened it to workers. Since November 2006 a small number of traders have been permitted to cross into Israel, numbering less than 400 a day. Small numbers of medical cases have been permitted to pass through Erez to go to West Bank or Israeli hospitals, although there is often a substantial wait and some people have died as a result. A proposal is under discussion for limited trade at the Erez crossing, particularly to facilitate an industrial zone planned by Turkey in the area that was formerly the Erez Industrial Zone.¹⁰⁷
- **Nahal Oz** – Unlike the other crossings, fuel imports (funded largely by the EU’s Temporary International Mechanism) remained fairly constant even during the conflict in summer 2006, at around 650 truckloads of fuel a month.
- **Karni** – The crossing was last open for its scheduled 14 hours a day in February 2006. Since then it has averaged less than 7 hours a day and mainly been used for imports not exports. OCHA reported that up to 15 November 2006, Karni had been closed for 54% of scheduled days during 2006, compared to only 18% and 19% of days in 2004 and 2005 respectively, with an average of only 12 trucks per day, compared to the AMA target of at least 150 by December 2005 and 400 by the end of 2006. As a result, only 4% of the 2005/6 harvest was exported, 24% was sold locally and the rest had to be donated or destroyed.¹⁰⁸ The closure regime has resulted in significant corruption and the World Bank reports that bribes of between \$2-6,000 are often required to ensure that trucks make it over the crossing.¹⁰⁹ The Israeli liaison officer told ORG in April 2007 that the crossing was actually meeting the total demand.¹¹⁰ If this is correct, then it may be indicative of the extent of the collapse of Gaza’s economy, which no longer has the ability to export at anything like the levels envisaged in 2005. Imports through Karni had continued at around 200 trucks a day, though with fluctuations during periods of greater closure such as after Gilad Shalit’s capture. Karni has been closed since 12 June 2007.
- **Sufa** – It was closed for 40% of scheduled days during the first year of the AMA.¹¹¹ Since 12 June 2007, the conveyor belt at Sufa has been used to transfer some food imports.¹¹²
- **Kerem Shalom** – It was open sporadically, averaging about 5 days a month, during the first half of 2007. Since the closure of Rafah, it has recently been suggested as an alternative route for people between Gaza and Egypt but Palestinians have generally resisted this as it would increase Israel’s level of control; this is probably a major reason for mortar attacks on the crossing.¹¹³
- **Rafah** – The crossing was open on average 9.5hrs/day permitting about 650 people to cross daily in the first half for 2006, double the average for the 6 months prior to AMA. However, after 25 June it was usually closed 86% of days until 15 November.¹¹⁴ The World Bank has argued strongly for the

development of trade across Rafah, which is theoretically permitted by AMA, so that Palestinians can export to Europe and Arab countries via Egypt, making use of generous trade agreements with those countries.¹¹⁵ A few truck loads of exports did go through Rafah in 2006 and it would be possible for this to be expanded. Because of the Paris Protocol, which included the OPT within Israel's customs envelope, an agreement between Israel, Egypt and the PA is required to permit imports through Rafah. At the time of ORG's visit in April, it was rumoured that this customs agreement would be concluded imminently. However no progress seems to have been made, and now that both Israel and Egypt are unwilling to deal with Hamas in Gaza, it is unlikely that this will proceed any further in the near future. Rafah has been closed since 12 June 2007, stranding around 5,000 Palestinians on the Egyptian side.¹¹⁶

As well as the restrictions and uncertainty for trade introduced by closure, the cumbersome customs, transport and security measures substantially increase both import and export costs for Palestinians. UNCTAD estimated that the costs to Palestinian traders are at least 30% higher than their Israeli counterparts, a level which UNCTAD calls "prohibitive".¹¹⁷ The World Bank also points out that because it can take on average 30 days for imports bound for Gaza to clear Israeli customs (compared to a day or two for Israeli imports) Palestinian businesses have to retain a large inventory of inputs which increases their cost base. Furthermore, reliable and time sensitive delivery is increasingly important for international markets, particularly for the agricultural products which are Gaza's main exports, and so the uncertainties introduced by closure reduce Gaza's competitiveness in this category as well as in cost.¹¹⁸ Finally, Palestinians, donors and private foreign investors are reluctant to invest in Gaza because of the risks posed by closure (and conflict).

Gaza's other border, the sea, cannot be used because Israel destroyed Gaza's seaport in 2001 and donors will not finance its rebuilding without commitments from Israel not to do the same again and to permit boats to access it. Israel has not given these commitment and no discussions have been held on the issue up to May 2007.¹¹⁹ Maritime closure is enforced by the Israeli navy which prevents not only trade and travel but also most fishing. Around 5,000 Gazans are engaged in fishing and this industry once contributed 4% to the PA's GDP (and so presumably at least 10% of Gaza's GDP) and provided affordable fish protein for Palestinians. However, since the start of the Second Intifada Israel has imposed tight limits on fishing. Under Oslo, Palestinians were permitted to fish up to 20 miles off Gaza's shore. Before the Disengagement, Israel often simply closed Gaza's fishing wharfs to prevent launches. Since disengagement, the Israeli navy has enforced varying limits, currently standing at 6 miles. This is problematic because the good fishing grounds are beyond this limit and the shallow coastal waters have now been over-fished.¹²⁰

Gaza's airport has not operated since 8 October 2000 when Israel closed the airspace. It was badly damaged in 2001, and then, having been partially restored, was ransacked again in summer 2006 during Operation Summer Rains, when it was appropriated by the IDF as a base. OCHA reported that roofing tiles were torn down from the ceiling, windows were smashed, water pipes dug up and airport authority papers were scattered everywhere. OCHA concluded that the damage means that there is no chance that the airport will reopen in the foreseeable future, even though this was one of the provisions of the AMA.¹²¹

Gaza is also dependent on Israel for imports of water, fuel and electricity. Electricity comes via 10 cables providing up to 107 MW, representing almost 60% of Gaza's supply.¹²² The Gaza power station (bombed by Israel on 5 July 2006) can at most produce 60 MW, though this is itself dependent on fuel imports through Nahal Oz. Currently only about 17 MW comes from Egypt, though the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company has made a deal with Egypt that could eventually provide 800 MW of electricity from al-Arish; the first stage to provide 150 MW was planned to be ready by early 2008 and would have replaced the existing supply from Israel,¹²³ but it seems unlikely that it will be completed on anything like the original schedule.

3.6 Developments since 12 June 2007

After Hamas took over full control of Gaza, Israel greatly intensified closure, further damaging the crippled economy. The proportion of Gaza's residents living below the poverty line has now risen to an all time high of 87% and rising, and 85% are now receiving food aid.¹²⁴ Karni and Rafah crossings have been completely closed, and only basic humanitarian imports have entered through the Kerem Shalom and Sufa crossings. Fuel has continued to flow through Nahal Oz, although occasional stoppages have led to serious blackouts and there has been a constant fear of hospitals running out of electricity.

Most of Gaza's factories involved in developing goods for export had already closed down prior to 12 June because of the closure of the last 18 months. Now factories producing food, pharmaceuticals, construction materials and other goods for domestic consumption are ceasing to function because of their inability to import raw materials. The Palestinian Federation of Industry has said that 75% of the 3,900 factories that were operating prior to 12 June have not ceased production.¹²⁵ If the situation does not change and the factories close permanently, as has happened with most export-orientated factories, then 10% of Gaza's workforce (about 30,000 people) could lose their jobs and of course the goods they produce will become scarcer and more expensive. One recent report says that an additional 68,000 workers have lost their jobs since Gaza's borders were closed on 12 June 2006.¹²⁶ The Palestinian Association of Businessmen calculate that their members are losing \$0.5 million every day, and predict that if the closure continues 120,000 Gazan workers will lose their jobs.¹²⁷ The Gaza Chamber of Commerce estimates that, in total, merchants are losing \$5 million a day.¹²⁸

The agricultural sector, which employs 13% of the workforce, is facing a crisis. Farmers have to make decisions about planting and tending their crops but have no way of knowing whether they will be able to export their next harvest or even if they will be able to import basic inputs such as fertiliser and pesticide.¹²⁹

Imported goods have already begun increasing in price, with the World Food Program reporting an increase in the price of basic foods in June 2007, including a 30% increase in milk and a 34% increase in flour.¹³⁰ Particularly worrying are reports that Israel has recently erased from its computers the customs code used to identify goods bound for Gaza and instructed shippers that any requests to clear foods intended for Gaza will be blocked by the computer system.¹³¹ This seems to signal a long term policy of preventing imports to Gaza, rather than merely the official stance that closure is a short term measure in response to security concerns at the border crossings. NGOs and UN officials have given extremely sober warnings about the consequences of continued closure. Arnold Vercken, the head of the World Food Program mission, concludes: "We are heading towards a progressive collapse of the economy in Gaza."¹³² Filippo Grandi of UNRWA has warned: "Gaza risks becoming a virtually 100 percent aid-dependent, closed-down and isolated community within a matter of months or even weeks."¹³³

3.7 Links between economic hardship and violence

The connection between the economic situation in Gaza and violence – directed both at Israel and internally – may seem obvious. However, because this connection is so critical, it is worth grounding the observation in credible sources.

Dr. Sara Roy has concluded: "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." She has noted rising levels domestic violence as one of the symptoms of the collapsed society.¹³⁴

A year before the Disengagement, the World Bank assessed the dire economic situation in Gaza and noted that "conflict and economic crisis feed one another in a malevolent cycle."¹³⁵ The implication was that conflict would not reduce after disengagement unless there were definite economic improvements. James Wolfenson, special envoy of the Quartet and former President of the World

Bank, warned that “without an economic revival, today’s Palestinian youth face a gloomy future, and their desperation will endanger any peace process... Today’s economic crisis has been caused by... ‘closures’, which the Government of Israel regards as essential to protecting Israeli citizens from attacks by militants. Without a major reform of the closure regime the Palestinian economy will not revive and Israel’s security gains may not be sustainable.”¹³⁶ The British House of Common’s International Development Committee made a similar point: “There is a fundamental relationship between Palestinian economic viability and Israeli security.”¹³⁷

In September 2006, in the context of the intense closure that followed the capture of Gilad Shalit, the head of UNRWA, Karen Abuzayd, criticised Israeli tactics in Gaza: “The strangulation of commerce and trade has ruined the economy, it has brought the institutions of government to a point of near-meltdown and badly shaken the society... created mass despair, anger and a sense of hopelessness and abandonment.”¹³⁸

Ziad Abu Amir, the PA Foreign Minister after the Mecca Agreement and a political independent, blamed the Palestinian factional fighting on economic pressure: “If you have two brothers, put them in a cage and deprive them of basic and essential needs for life, they will fight... People cannot move in Gaza. They can’t travel. There’s no work. There’s no normal life.”¹³⁹ Many Israelis also recognise the link between economic hardship and violence. The chairman of Israel’s Association of Industrialists, Shraga Brosh, has warned recently that: “the economic boycott on the Gaza Strip ...will result in a humanitarian disaster, fueling flames and leading to deterioration of the security situation.”¹⁴⁰

“If you have two brothers, put them in a cage and deprive them of basic and essential needs for life, they will fight... People cannot move in Gaza. They can’t travel. There’s no work. There’s no normal life.” Ziad Abu Amir, PA Foreign Minister

4 | Conflict

TABLE 1

Palestinian Violence	Israeli Violence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battles in response to IDF incursions into Gaza. • Mortar and rocket fire. • Suicide bombings. • Static explosives, including charges planted near the perimeter wall or in tunnels under builds. • Assaults, including car bombs, on border crossings. • Raids into Israel through tunnels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground incursions. • Air strikes using planes, helicopters and drones – including “targeted killing” assassinations. • Artillery shelling. • Shooting by snipers from border fortifications. • Naval attacks on boats and shelling on to land. • House demolitions and land clearance using bulldozers.

4.1 Palestinian violence

Suicide bombings are the highest profile forms of Palestinian violence. These mainly originate in the West Bank, not Gaza, largely because of the relative difficulty of accessing Israel from Gaza. The easiest way for prospective Gazan bombers to enter Israel is via Egypt, and this was the method used in the most recent suicide bombing, by a man from Beit Lahia in northern Gaza, which killed three people in Eilat on 29th January 2007. Two Islamic Jihad militants who had similarly entered through Sinai were arrested with suicide belts in the Negev on 6 February 2006. Another method that has been used is smuggling militants in crates, for example the 14 March 2004 attack on Ashdod port that killed 10 Israelis and the bombing in Tel Aviv in March 1996 by an Islamic Jihad militant who had hidden inside a truck crossing through Karni. Finally, some prospective bombers have sought to cross into Israel through the Erez crossing. No recent suicide bombings have happened this way although Israel has announced that it has foiled a number of plots including one in May 2007 involving two women who were travelling to Ramallah for medical tests and apparently planned to collect suicide belts there for attacks on Tel Aviv and Netanya.¹⁴¹ Before the Disengagement there were also suicide attacks directed at the settlements, something which rarely happens in the West Bank.

Perhaps in part because of the difficulty of launching cross-border attacks, Palestinian fighters in Gaza have developed the use of mortars and rockets, weapons which are almost unheard of in the West Bank. Indeed, the Qassam rocket attacks have become the most visible mode of Palestinian violence from Gaza leading Ha'aretz's Dani Rubinstein to declare (perhaps prematurely): “The era of suicide bombers is over. The new era is the Rocket Era.”¹⁴²

“The rockets are difficult to target but do not require sophisticated materials or machinery to produce.”

Simple home made rockets are produced and launched by a number of groups including Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the al-Asqa Martyrs Brigade, but they are generally referred to as Qassams [or Kassams] after Hamas’ military wing (itself named after Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam who formed the Black Hand militia in 1930). Other Palestinian factions have their own name for rockets (al-Quds for Islamic Jihad and al-Nassar for the Popular Resistance Committees) however “Qassam” is used generically throughout this report to refer to rockets fired by any faction, following common usage in Israel and in the international media. Production of Qassams began in 2001 and the first was launched into Israel on 5 March 2002. The rockets are difficult to target but do not require sophisticated materials or machinery to produce, just basic metal working tools, and can be launched in as little as 15 minutes. Qassams have gradually grown in range and payload, and are roughly divided into three varieties (summarised in the chart below¹⁴³) although there is considerable variety in size and quality of production. In addition, a small number of more sophisticated Russian-built Katyusha rockets, as used extensively by Hezbollah in the Summer 2006 war, have probably been smuggled into Gaza. Between September 2005 and May 2007, around 2,696 rockets were fired into Israel, killing four people and injuring a further 85 (of which 76 were civilians).¹⁴⁴ Graphs of Qassam firings and casualties are shown in the next section.

TABLE 2: QASSAM ROCKETS SPECIFICATIONS

	QASSAM-1	QASSAM-2	QASSAM-3
WIDTH	80CM	180CM	200CM
DIAMETER	60MM	50MM	170MM
FIRST APPEARED	2001	2002	2005
WEIGHT	5.5KG	32KG	90KG
PAYLOAD	0.5KG	5-9KG	10-20KG
MAX. RANGE	3-4.5KM	8-9.5KM	10-20KM

Tunnels in Gaza are used for three purposes. Firstly, and most commonly, for smuggling under the Egyptian border. Secondly as a means of planting explosives under buildings and roads, as happened during the factional fighting in June 2007 when Hamas blew up the Khan Younis branch of the Preventative Security Service, and in December 2004 when an Israeli Joint Verification Team terminal near Rafah was blown up killing five soldiers. Thirdly tunnels have been used very occasionally to stage attacks on Israel. This is rare because there is a buffer zone along the border that has been largely cleared and is closely monitored. The dramatic raid on 25 June 2006 which killed two Israeli soldiers and captured Gilad Shalit seems to be the only instance of a successful tunnel raid.

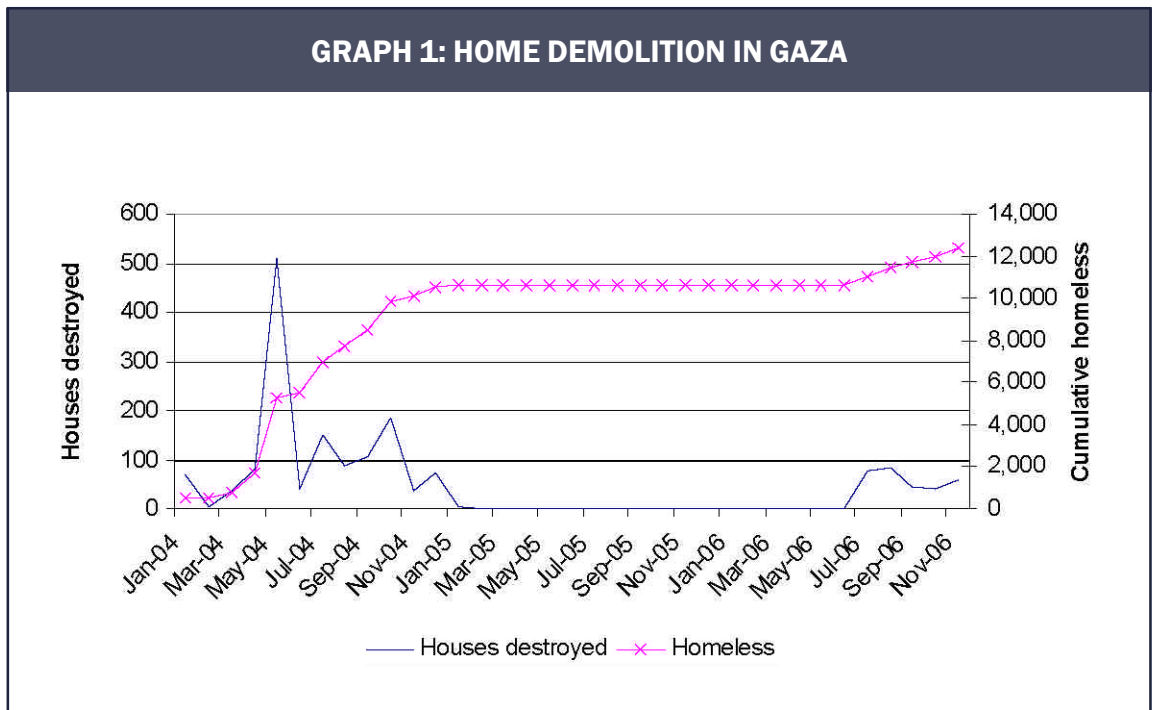
The border crossings are easier targets for attacks. Erez crossing has undergone occasional mortar fire, but most attacks have been directed at Karni, the commercial crossing. The IDF has documented two significant attacks on Karni.¹⁴⁵ On 15 April 2003, a Hamas combatant was smuggled into Karni hidden in a packing case and killed two Israelis in his attack. On 13 January 2005 there was a large scale attack in which a hole was blown in the wall separating the Israeli and Palestinian sides of the crossing, enabling three Palestinians to cross into the Israeli side and kill six Israelis. The IDF also says that it thwarted a number of other attacks, including a major one on 26 April 2006 planned by the Popular Resistance Committees.¹⁴⁶

4.2 Israeli violence

Israel’s military methodology has varied over the years. During the First Intifada, the IDF attempted to methodically patrol Gaza, break up demonstrations and raid houses. A former IDF soldier who had served in Gaza at the time explained to ORG that it was extremely difficult to find addresses and soldiers would often raid the wrong house and detain the wrong people.¹⁴⁷ The IDF attempted to assert control through displaying “like a peacock” with overwhelming strength wherever there were disturbances. However, the mazes of narrow streets, particularly in the refugee camps, were also easy terrain for ambushes and, unlike in West Bank cities, could not accommodate tanks and armoured personnel carriers. As a result, the IDF increasingly focused on securing the roads and perimeters of towns, and using air support to strike locations that would be dangerous to access on foot. In the early years after Oslo the Palestinian security forces took over much of the work of tracking down suspected militants in close coordination with the IDF.

“It was extremely difficult to find addresses and soldiers would often raid the wrong house and detain the wrong people.”

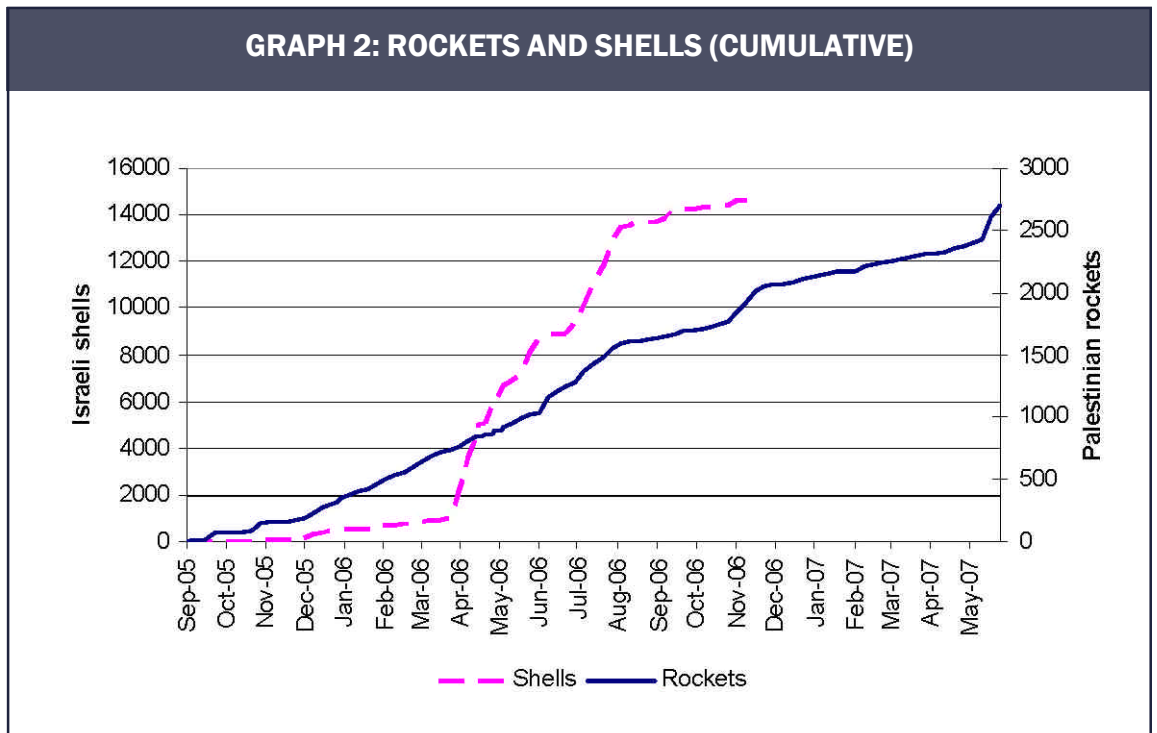
During the Second Intifada, there was a major focus on eliminating smuggling tunnels under the border with Egypt. Large numbers of homes were demolished in Rafah, particularly during “Operation Rainbow” in May 2004, in order to create a bigger buffer region along the border. The graph below shows monthly data on home demolitions and the cumulative numbers made homeless (nearly 1% of Gaza’s population) for the three year period from January 2004 (shortly after the Disengagement plan was formulated) until the end of 2006. In addition to the home demolitions, around 15% of the agricultural land has been levelled,¹⁴⁸ destroying greenhouses and other structures, in order to create a buffer region around the borders and remove cover in the areas of northern Gaza that could be used for Qassam launches. B’Tselem data shows that 13 civilians (and 3 combatants) were crushed to death in home demolitions between August 2002 and 2004.¹⁴⁹

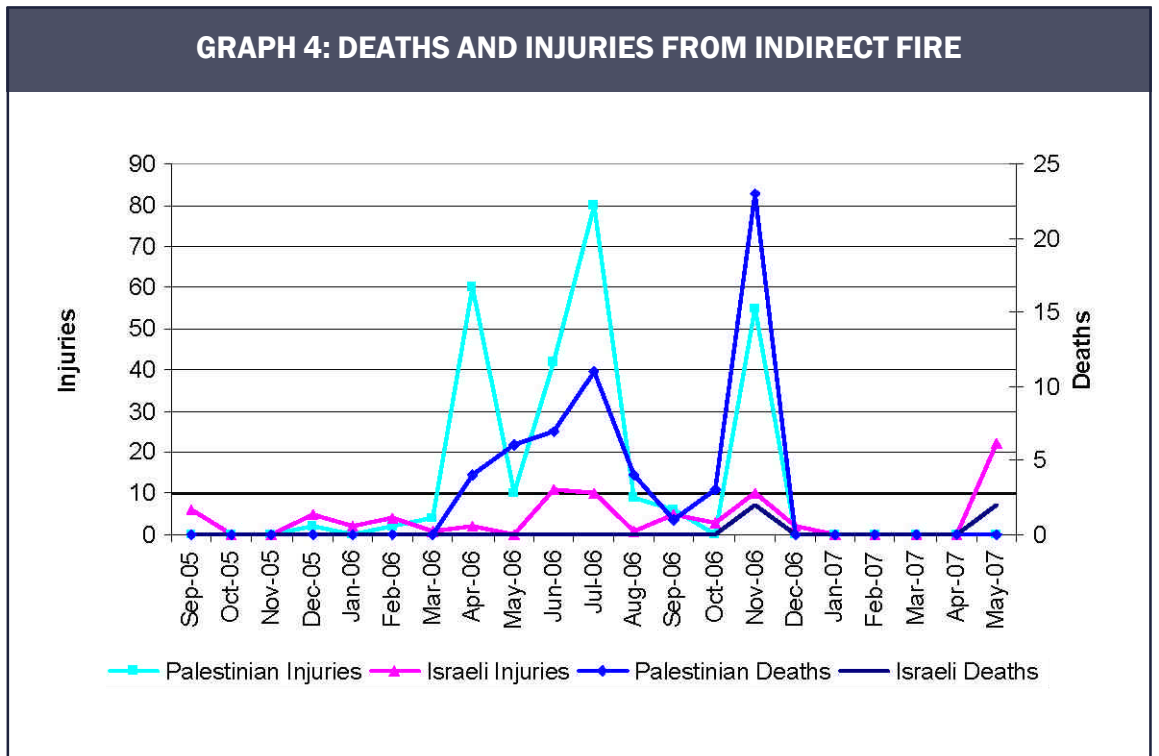
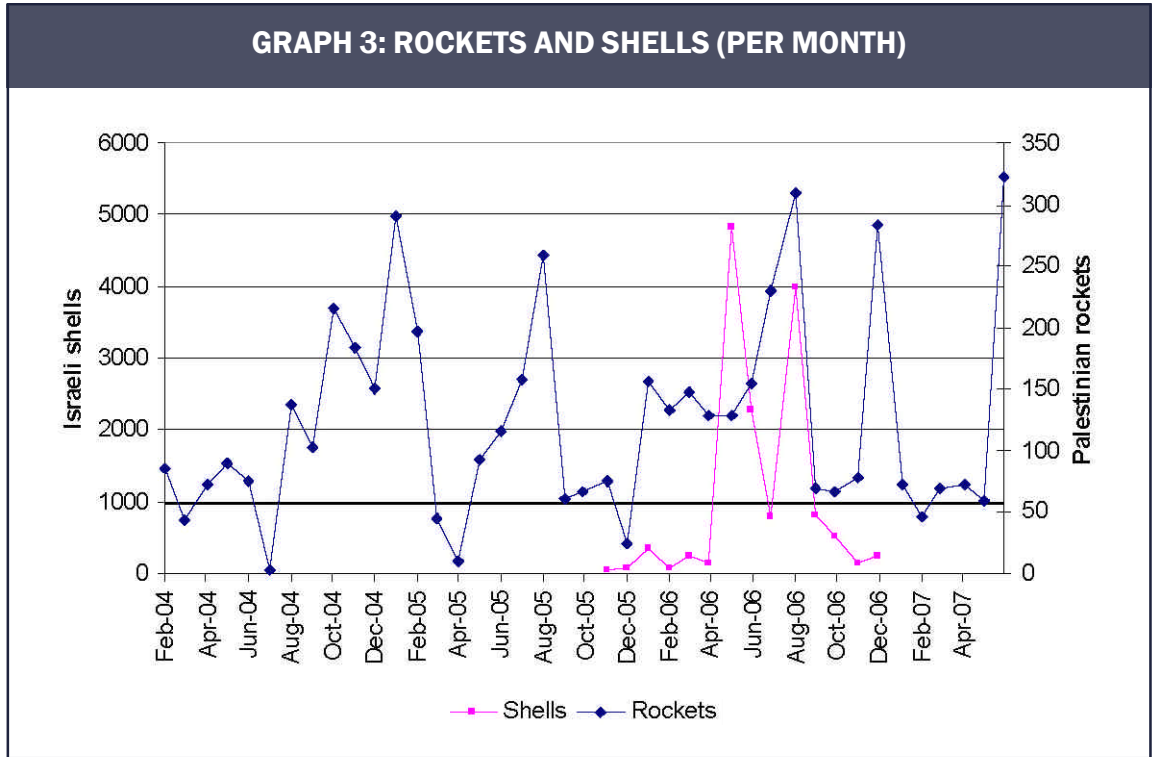


“Between the Disengagement and the end of May 2007, 59 Palestinians were killed by artillery fire and a further 270 injured.”

Following the Disengagement, Israel employed large numbers of 155m heavy artillery shells, particularly between March and September 2006. In total, around 14,617 shells were fired until the ceasefire on 26 November 2006, which came soon after the controversial Beit Hanoun incident in which Israeli shells killed 19 members of a family. Between the Disengagement and the end of May 2007, 59 Palestinians were killed by artillery fire and a further 270 injured.¹⁵⁰

The firing statistics for Israeli artillery shells and Palestinian rockets are shown below. Graph 2 shows cumulative numbers fired between September 2005 and May 2007, drawn from data compiled by Human Rights Watch from OCHA data (which was sometimes recorded daily and sometimes weekly).¹⁵¹ Graph 3 gives monthly averages, estimated from the OCHA data and also drawing on IDF data¹⁵², for Qassams fired between January 2004 and August 2005. There was an overlap of a few months in the data sets, between September and May 2006, and the OCHA figures counted more than twice as many rockets as the IDF data over that period (1048 compared to 490), perhaps because it included rockets which fell short of the border. The higher OCHA data, which was available for a longer period, was used in the graph but may therefore be an overestimate of rockets that actually hit Israel. Finally Graph 4, drawn from Human Rights Watch data, shows the numbers of deaths and injuries from both kinds of indirect fire.





“B’Tselem data estimates that, since the start of the Second Intifada, at least 231 people were killed in targeted killings, of which only 128 people were the intended targets, the rest being bystanders.”

Although the November 2006 ceasefire has since broken down, Israel has not yet resumed shelling and instead has relied more heavily on air launched missile strikes, which require a line-of-sight to the target. These weapons are less random than artillery, and have been used for many years for the so called “targeted killings” of Palestinian leaders and combatants. Israel briefly paused its targeted killing policy in January 2005 but resumed it in July 2005. The policy had been challenged at the Israeli high court but in December 2006 the court ruled that it could not declare targeted killings *per se* to be illegal because their effectiveness and proportionality varies from instance to instance.¹⁵³ However, Chief Justice Aharon Barak, referring in his ruling to the killing of Saleh Shehade on 22 July 2002 with a thousand kilogram bomb that also killed his wife and twelve neighbours, said that: “This case, like other cases, demonstrates the damage caused by the targeted killings policy, which does not discriminate between terrorists and innocent persons.”¹⁵⁴ B’Tselem data estimates that, since the start of the Second Intifada, at least 231 people were killed in targeted killings, mainly using missiles fired at cars, of which only 128 people were the intended targets, the rest being bystanders. Since the Disengagement until the end of May 2007, at least 61 people were killed in targeted killings, of which 41 were targets and 20 bystanders.¹⁵⁵ As well as targeted killings, heavier air strikes are used against buildings such as the one which seriously damaged the Gaza power station in June 2006. In total, OCHA counted 550 air strikes between the Disengagement and the November 2006 ceasefire.¹⁵⁶

Sonic booms are a non-lethal tactic sometimes used by Israel. However, although this tactic is less bloody than artillery shells or missile strikes, it is by its nature indiscriminate and Israeli journalist Gideon Levy has argued that it is intended as collective punishment against the people of Gaza. He noted that there were 29 booms over Gaza during a four day period in September 2005, “creating fear in a helpless and terrified civilian population.” He continued, “Parents in Gaza speak about the fears their children have suffered in recent weeks, the nightmares and bed-wetting. Husbands tell about pregnant women who have experienced panic attacks. The windowpanes in homes shatter one after another... The fact that the air force is employing this weapon mainly late at night, or early in the morning, when masses of pupils are making their way to school, only makes its wickedness more conspicuous.”¹⁵⁷

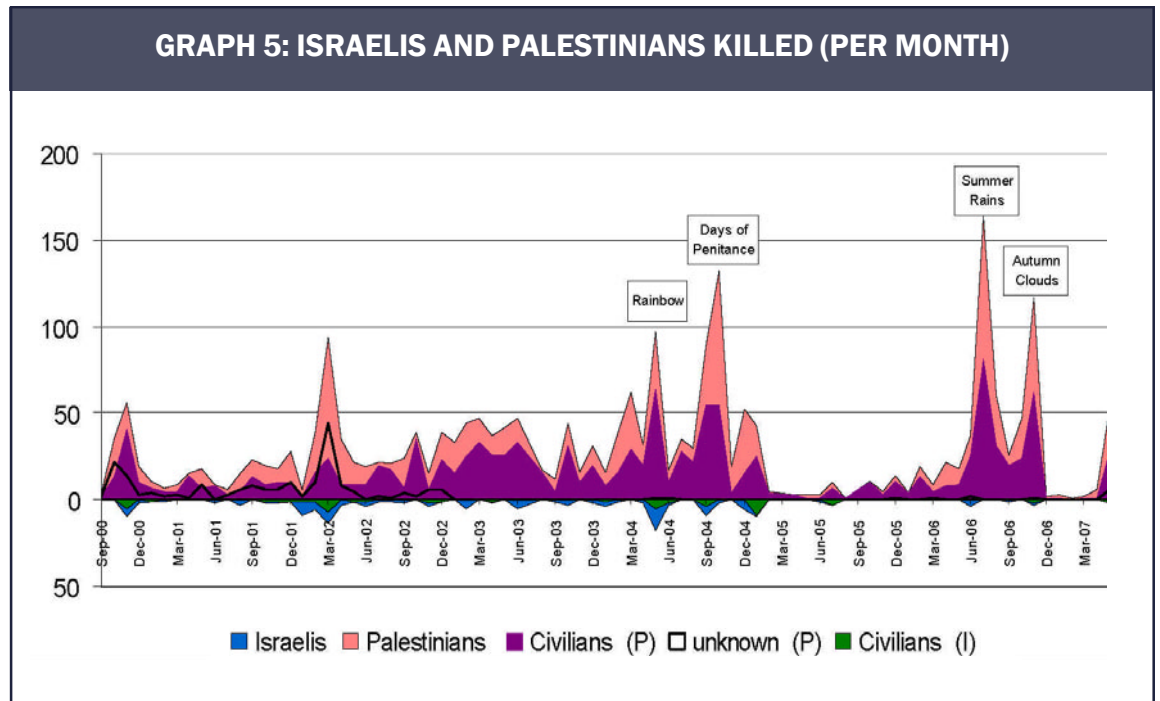
Since June 2006, Israel has reverted to ground incursions into Gaza, both to locate Gilad Shalit and because artillery and air strikes had proved ineffective at preventing Qassams and tunnels. Since the end of Operation Autumn Showers in November 2006, most incursions have been brief and close to the borders. Incursions tend to result in the greatest number of civilian casualties, both from direct fire on the ground and the intensified air attacks supporting them. ORG estimates that of the at least 217 Palestinian non-combatants who were killed from the start of Operation Summer Rains until the November ceasefire, 87 were killed by fire from guns or tanks during land incursions, along with a further 42 killed by externally fired artillery shells and 98 by missiles.¹⁵⁸ The IDF makes some effort to mitigate this through warning broadcasts and leaflets dropped from the air. For example, prior to Operation Summer Rains, leaflets were dropped stating “To the civilians of the area: The IDF extends its operations to all areas of the Gaza Strip, and therefore conducts military activities in your area, for the time period that is required... For your own safety and due to our intent to prevent injuring citizens who are not involved in activities against our forces, you must avoid being on any premises in which the IDF is operating and be attentive to the IDF’s instructions. Anyone who interrupts IDF forces activities... will be in danger.”¹⁵⁹ Unfortunately in the confusion of conflict, such warnings may not be very helpful for civilians, as one Beit Lahia resident told Israeli media during that incursion: “It’s a crazy scene – everyone is shooting at everyone. Soldiers are coming out of the trees, from the rooftops. The residents don’t know if they should leave their homes or hide.”¹⁶⁰

4.3 Analysis of casualty data

Between the start of the Second Intifada and 31 May 2007, Israelis killed 2371 Palestinians in and near Gaza, more than half of them civilians, compared to 1709 in the West Bank. During the same period Palestinians killed 147 Israelis in and near Gaza, of whom 50 were civilians, mainly Gaza settlers; this compares to 797 Israelis killed elsewhere in Israel or in the West Bank¹⁶¹ In addition, at least 13 Israelis were killed by suicide bombers originating from Gaza. Palestinians who died as a result of closure or other Israeli policies are not included. Table 3 below, adapted from B'Tselem's data, summaries the categories across four time distinctive periods. The Gaza beach blast on 8 June 2006, after which Hamas called off the truce that it had largely respected since February 2005, is chosen as the point at which hostilities intensified after a partial lull following the Disengagement. Graph 5 presents the data on a monthly basis, giving the totals and civilians (and unknown) breakdown, with the Palestinian casualties above the x-axis and the Israeli casualties below it. The names of some of the major Israeli military operations during this period are marked to explain spikes. A full list of monthly casualty figures from this dataset is given in Appendix 1.

It should be noted that the categories of combatant and civilian are somewhat blurred and controversial. Israelis counted as civilians may be reserve members of the IDF, or armed settlers, who Palestinians would view as valid combatants. Equally Palestinians who were not actively engaged in conflict at the time of their death are counted as non-combatants, including the objects of targeted killings who Israel would consider to be combatants. The category listed as "Palestinians unknown" are those who B'Tselem had insufficient information on to make a judgement as to their combat status.

TABLE 3: CASUALTIES IN GAZA					
	TOTAL	INTIFADA UNTIL DISENGAGEMENT PLAN ANNOUNCED	UNTIL DISENGAGEMENT	UNTIL GAZA BEACH BLAST	UNTIL 31 MAY 2007
PERIOD	Oct '00 – May '07	Oct '00 – 18 Dec '03	18 Dec '03 – 12 Sept '05	12 Sept '05 – 8 Jun '06	8 Jun '06 – 31 May '07
DURATION	79 months	38 months	21 months	9 months	12 months
IDF SOLDIERS	97	53	36	4	4
ISRAELI CIVILIANS IN GAZA	39	22	17	0	0
ISRAELI CIVILIANS NEAR GAZA	11	0	7	0	4
PALESTINIAN COMBATANTS ¹⁶²	876	261	330	50	235
PALESTINIAN NON-COMBATANTS	1291	558	382	79	272
PALESTINIANS UNKNOWN ¹⁶³	205	191	3	4	7



4.4 Reasons for attacks

There are a variety of possible reasons why Palestinians and Israelis launch particular attacks. Sometimes those involved make clear statements explaining their aims and motivations. At other times multiple and contradictory statements are made, or it is reasonable to suppose that other factors are at work than those publicly articulated. It is not within the scope of this report to investigate in detail the language used by officials and combatants to explain their actions, although such research would be valuable. In brief, the reasons for attacks may include:

- **Retaliation:** this is probably the most common reason for attacks and can take the form of tit-for-tat exchanges or collective punishment.
- **Defence:** both Israelis and Palestinians commonly describe their actions as defensive; Israel would include in this category most of its military actions, including pre-emptive measures such as shelling to discourage Qassam launches, strikes on munitions factories and home demolitions to create buffer zones.
- **Unprovoked attacks:** a suicide bomb or a targeted killing during a ceasefire would probably fall into this category, although those involved might seek to justify such attacks as resistance to occupation or as pre-emptive measures.
- **Provocations:** attacks intended to cause a response from the other side that can be used politically.

The language of defence and claims of unprovoked attacks occur in almost every interview relating to the conflict, and there is no need to cite specific examples. Admissions of retaliation and provocation are less common, and it is worth giving a few examples.

The language of retaliation comes across in an interview with the military commander of the Qassam Brigades, Abu Obieda, who was negotiating with Islamic Jihad to stop rocket fire but explained: “To shoot rockets into Israel is not a goal of Hamas; it is not a real target. But when Israel attacks us, it is our only way to respond. We do not hope to kill people in Israel with these rockets but it’s a necessary response.”¹⁶⁴ Similarly, shortly after the Disengagement, the Israel Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz warned: “We’ll hit them (Hamas) and hit them and hit them until they understand that Israel will not accept shooting into its borders. This artillery battery behind me is not just for show. It’s operational ... and will react against any rocket attack.”¹⁶⁵ Avigdor Lieberman, the Deputy Prime Minister has even suggested that Israel build its own Qassam-style rockets to fire in response.¹⁶⁶

The situation is further complicated because Palestinian attacks in Gaza are sometimes in retaliation for Israeli actions in the West Bank; similarly Israel may act in Gaza in response to suicide bombs or other incidents originating in the West Bank. Ha’aretz’s analysis in July 2007 was that “fearing that a lack of response to the recent killings [in the West Bank] of seven Palestinians by IDF forces would undermine their standing among the Palestinians in the strip, members of the Hamas’ military wing decided to resume attacks.”¹⁶⁷

If attacks are sometimes intended as provocations, it will be difficult to prove this because combatants are unlikely to openly admit to this. The most that can be done is to analyse events and assess whether there are strong reasons to suspect a motive for provocation. Tanya Reinhart, who was a professor at Tel Aviv University until her recent death, claimed that “the Israeli army has a long tradition of “inviting” salvos of Qassams” at key moments when it knows the world is watching.¹⁶⁸ She cited an example in April 2005, prior to a visit by Sharon to the US, when the IDF killed three Palestinian youth who were reportedly playing soccer near the Egyptian border. This resulted in a salvo of 80 Qassams being fired and thereby strengthened Sharon’s hand in Washington. In June 2006 she noted that as Olmert “set out on a campaign of persuasion in Europe to convince European leaders that now, with Hamas in power, Israel definitely has no partner... The Israeli army... “liquidated” Jamal Abu Samhanada, who had recently been appointed head of the security forces of the Interior Ministry by the Hamas government. It was entirely predictable that the action may lead to Qassam attacks on Sderot.” Reinhart’s assessment may not be correct in these cases, but it does illustrate the potential benefits that could accrue from provocation. Equally, part of the motivation for Qassam attacks may be to provoke the IDF into entering Gaza where it can be fought directly.

4.5 Asymmetry of violence

When the army of an industrialised nation state is engaged in conflict with non-state combatants, there are usually significant asymmetries in the confrontation including in tactics, intelligence, technology and firepower. These asymmetries are particularly extreme in the case of Gaza. Israel’s superior weaponry and intelligence collection enables it to make targeted attacks on individual Palestinians and specific locations; Palestinian combatants on the other hand are generally only able to respond to Israeli incursions into Gaza or mount hard-to-target, and hence indiscriminate, attacks with mortars and rockets. There is also an asymmetry in legal status and representation between the armed forces of a democratically elected national government and unaccountable militias (the links between militias and the elected officials of Fatah and Hamas blurs this distinction somewhat, though not completely as they are not employed or directly financed by the Palestinian Authority).

“When the army of an industrialised nation state is engaged in conflict with non-state combatants, there are usually significant asymmetries in the confrontation .”

The Israeli army has access to substantial intelligence data regarding Palestinian combatants in Gaza from sources such as telephone intercepts and visual surveillance (from border positions, tethered blimps and flyovers by planes and drones). Its prime source of intelligence is probably informants on the ground, and the motivations for Palestinians to provide information to Israel are presumably greater in the current context of desperate poverty (for payment), inter-factional fighting (for score-settling) and retaliatory strikes (to avoid them). The fact that many “targeted killings” successfully eliminate their targets is an indicator of the extent of Israeli intelligence (it is unclear whether botched strikes are a result of faulty intelligence or faulty implementation). Israel also has far greater firepower, with more sophisticated and numerous weapons and a fully financed standing and reserve army. The \$2.4 billion in annual military aid that Israel receives from the US alone is about half the GDP of the Palestinian Authority. By contrast Palestinian combatants in Gaza seem to have little access to intelligence about the Israeli military and its operations, or about the movements of Israeli officials and even if they had better information they do not have the access or weaponry to act on it (Tourism Minister Rehavam Zeevi is the only Israeli official who has been assassinated during the Second Intifada, and that took place in Arab East Jerusalem).

When Israeli forces are physically on the ground in Gaza, it is possible for Palestinian fighters to stage direct attacks against them, and this is when the majority of Israeli casualties related to Gaza occur. However, Palestinians generally lack the firepower to threaten the Gaza perimeter wall, let alone stage significant raids into Israel - the one which captured Gilad Shalit was significant precisely because it was so unusual.

One consequence of the asymmetries is the way that killings of civilians are depicted. Based on the B’Tselem data above, Palestinian combatants kill roughly twice as many Israeli soldiers as civilians, while Israelis kill more civilians than soldiers. However, from an Israeli perspective the Palestinian civilians (some of whose status they might dispute) are unintended “collateral damage” or victims caught in the cross fire, whereas they argue that, unlike them, Palestinian fighters deliberately target civilians. The Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tzipi Livni, put it this way: “The terrorist organisations deliberately target civilians and children, while IDF troops, in combat against terrorists hiding amongst a civilian population, go to extreme lengths to prevent any harm to civilians and children. These are the Israeli principles to which the IDF adheres, and which sometimes cause us to pay a considerable price. Israel expects the world to judge the occurrences according to the same principles present in every legal system around the world, the principles that differentiate between intentional murder and unintentional death.”¹⁶⁹ Similarly the IDF complains that: “Terrorist organisations operate from within the civilian population, while cynically exploiting uninvolved civilians and using them as human shields, exploiting their homes to store weapons and launch rockets at Israeli towns from populated areas,” and warns “the population not to stay in structures that are used by terrorist organisations for storing weapons,”¹⁷⁰ as they may be attacked.

“Since the Disengagement, Israel has killed around 88 Palestinian civilians in Gaza for ever Israeli civilian killed.”

It is indisputable that suicide bombers frequently target civilian locations and Qassam rockets are fired at Sderot which does not contain military installations (although Amir Peretz’s home might have been considered a valid target during the period he was Defence Minister). However, Palestinian suicide bombers would find it nearly impossible to enter Israeli military bases and Qassam launch crews lack the information and technology to accurately target their rockets at military locations. Therefore, it may seem, from the perspective of Palestinian fighters in Gaza, that the only targets available to them are civilian, whereas Israel has access to a much wider range of choices. This in no way excuses the murder of civilians, and nor does it mean that Palestinian fighters would necessarily choose military targets even if they were more accessible, but nonetheless this asymmetry is a factor that needs to be born in mind to properly understand the different methodologies of violence.

The difference in the absolute numbers killed is difficult to ignore. Since the Disengagement, Israel has killed around 88 Palestinian civilians in Gaza for every Israeli civilian killed. If combatants on both sides are included then the ratio falls to 54 to 1. The figures only tell a part of the story of course, but they cannot help but raise the question of proportionality. The British House of Commons Development Committee called for the end of Qassam attacks but noted that: “The question of a proportionate response nevertheless arises... Many civilians, including women and children, have been killed in Gaza. We accept that in situations of conflict there will be mistakes and even excesses but proportional response must be an integral part of any state’s security policy.”¹⁷¹ Similarly Eliezer Rivlin, Deputy President of Israel’s Supreme Court, has warned that: “There can be collateral damage to the civilian population which is so severe that even a military objective with very substantial benefit cannot justify it.”¹⁷²

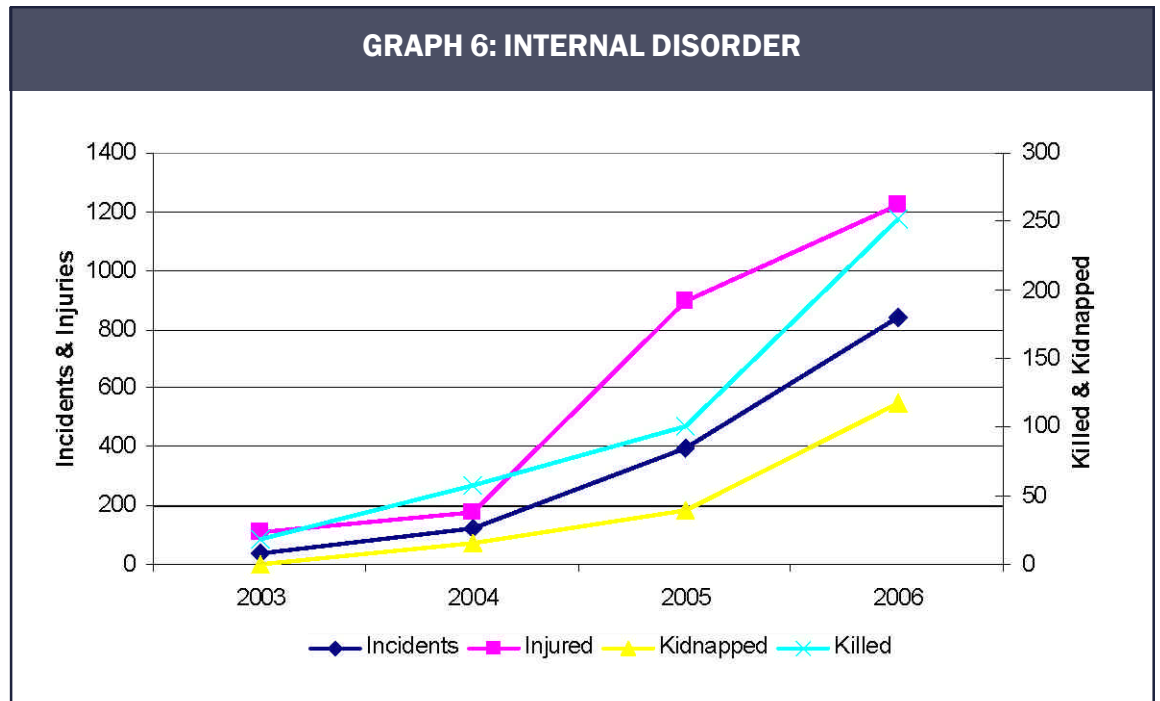
“There can be collateral damage to the civilian population which is so severe that even a military objective with very substantial benefit cannot justify it.”

4.6 Internal insecurity

The history of factional fighting in Gaza has already been discussed at some length, however it is worth studying the figures which demonstrate the rise in disorder. A report by the Gaza-based human rights group Al-Mezan, heavily critical of the PA and factions, detailed the declining internal security situation in Gaza.¹⁷³ It explained the complexity of the violence, which involves more than simply battles between political factions. It has also included competition for control of the former settlement land and an increase in bloody family feuds. Violence has been used to settle feuds because of the proliferation of small arms and the collapse of the judicial system for settling disputes due to the financial boycott of the PA. “The international boycott has completely neutralised the judicial institutions... due to the suspension of payments for the employees... The role of the judicial institution was replaced by armed groups, political powers and extended families. These groups started to replace the functions of police forces and courts by detaining/abducting people with whom they had any kind of dispute and inflicting punishment upon them.”¹⁷⁴

Table 4 and Graph 6 draw on data from the al-Mezan report. It shows that the number of people killed nearly quintupled from 57 to 252 between 2004 and 2006, and kidnappings increased more than seven-fold to 118. The incidents recorded by al-Mezan in 2006 included 137 armed clashes (52 deaths), 214 family feuds (90 deaths) and 64 “mysterious killings” (75 deaths).

YEAR	INCIDENTS	INJURED	KILLED	FOREIGNERS KIDNAPPED	PALESTINIANS KIDNAPPED
2003	39	111	18	0	0
2004	121	178	57	6	10
2005	394	895	101	16	23
2006	843	1226	252	18	100



The Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens’ Rights gave a higher estimate than al-Mezan of 345 Palestinians killed in factional fighting in 2006 (although this figure is for the West Bank and Gaza combined, almost all of the deaths have been in Gaza). It also estimated that in just the first five months of 2007, another 271 were killed in factional fighting.¹⁷⁵ B’Tselem’s data set shown in Table 5 is different again, giving lower casualty figures (N.B. the killings prior to 2006 are mainly of suspected collaborators).¹⁷⁶ The differences in data between three extremely professional NGOs itself indicates how confusing the intra-Palestinian fighting can be, and it is often unclear whether deaths are due to factional conflict, crime or feuds.

YEAR	KILLED
2007 (Jan - May)	144
2006	42
2005	11
2004	13
2003	2
2002	11
2001	14

In recent months the level of internal crime and conflict seem to have decreased considerable. This is welcome, although it is unclear whether it will continue.

5 | Measures to improve human security

5.1 Reviving and improving security coordination

There are two elements to security coordination. The first is the day-to-day operations of the border crossings and the second is broader coordination to prevent attacks and mitigate tit-for-tat escalations. During the Oslo period there was extremely close coordination on both counts. The clearest example of this in Gaza was the rounding up of thousands of Hamas members in 1996 by the PA, in coordination with Israel, following a series of suicide bombings. ORG interviewed Hassan Hejazi, the former Palestinian head of the District Coordination Office (DCO).¹⁷⁷ He explained that until the Second Intifada there was excellent coordination between the two sides. Offices were shared by Israeli and Palestinian security units who responded jointly to any security concerns. With the start of the Second Intifada the coordination began to decrease, initially through the posting of lower ranking Israeli officers to the DCO and the construction of checkpoints and roadblocks by the IDF. There was very little coordination with the Palestinian representatives. A minimal level of coordination continued through the period of the Intifada but was ended completely by Israel after the election of Hamas.

The Presidential Guard had, until Hamas consolidated control in June, operated the border crossings, and Israel was willing to interact with them. When interviewed by ORG in April, the Israeli District Civilian Liaison (DCL) officer spoke in complimentary terms about the Presidential Guard and said that their work at Rafah had been very professional. For this reason, Israel was (at the time) considering extending security coordination arrangements to Karni.¹⁷⁸ However, he also made it clear that Israel was not prepared to share intelligence information with the Palestinians, even the Presidential Guard; he said that this was the reason why Israel had never challenged the crossing of any individual at Rafah - which they are entitled to do under AMA - as this might provide some intelligence information to the Palestinians. Sharing of suspect lists would seem to be one of the most basic elements of security coordination, and the unwillingness to do this was not a hopeful sign.

Lieutenant General Keith Dayton, the US security representative, has played a significant role in attempting to restart security coordination between Israel and the President Abbas' office. Following Secretary of State Rice's visit in March 2007, a new committee was formed to meet monthly to deal with Gaza border issues, involving Egypt, the US, Israel and the President's office.¹⁷⁹

“It currently seems unlikely that Israel will agree to any security coordination with Hamas-led security forces.”

It currently seems unlikely that Israel will agree to any security coordination with Hamas-led security forces. Furthermore, the US and EU can't act as intermediaries if they also continue to refuse to deal with Hamas. Therefore a détente between Hamas and Fatah which enabled the Presidential Guard to resume its role at the borders, with Hamas retaining control of internal security, might enable the previous border regime to be resumed. If, however, direct coordination could begin between Hamas and Israel this would be preferable and would provide a basis for beginning to address broader issues. There is a precedent for this: elected Hamas representatives did in fact coordinate with Israel at a local level following the municipal elections in 2004-5. Another possibility would be for a third party, such as EUBAM (or even an armed force as discussed in 5.5), to not merely monitor but actually manage the Palestinian side of the crossings. They could mediate between Israelis and Palestinians in order to ensure the flow of traffic. In April, though under different circumstances, Israel was in favour of increasing EUBAM's mandate at Rafah.¹⁸⁰ If the operations of the border crossings could be restarted under any of these three scenarios, then some of the technical plans that have been developed to increase both security and volumes transferred, such as using x-ray machines at Karni that are capable of scanning an entire truck, could finally be implemented.

In any event, there has been a shift in attitude since 2000 that means that the degree of security coordination that took place during the Oslo years, including interception and imprisonment of Palestinian by other Palestinians, is unlikely to be repeated, whether under Hamas, Fateh or anyone else. During the Oslo period many Palestinians believed, at least initially, that they were part of a process that would lead in a few years to the end of occupation and an improvement in their lives. In this context there was a strong motivation to oppose armed groups whose actions endangered that process, and hence to cooperate with Israel in security coordination. However, because Palestinians have now largely lost faith in Israel's intentions there is little reason for them to fight with their own people to prevent attacks on Israel. Hamas has sometimes expressed an intention to cease rocket fire and said in June that it was negotiating with Islamic Jihad to achieve this. However, Mahmoud Zahar made it clear that although there may be reasons for supporting ceasefires, Hamas does not consider itself to have a responsibility to prevent attacks: "Nobody will be a protector of the Israeli border... We are protecting our people."¹⁸¹

5.2 Reviewing and communicating the rules of engagement

Much of the day-to-day conflict is based on the decisions of local commanders and their responses to the actions of the other side. This can often lead to incidents, such as civilian casualties, which have a wide-ranging impact. For this reason the commanders and their soldiers operate within a set of pre-defined rules of engagement and can be subject to disciplinary or legal action if they violate these. This is most clearly the case within a formal state army such as the IDF, but it can also apply informally to Palestinian combatants who may have their own rules of behaviour. From a human security perspective, the rules of engagement must be framed in such a way as to minimise the effect of hostilities on civilians - including casualties, trauma and the disruption of their daily lives.

One problem with military rules of engagement is that they are rarely made publicly available, let alone actively communicated. This has a significant human security implication because civilians in the conflict zone may be unaware of the parameters of the conflict. For example, a Palestinian farmer may be shot when working his land near the border because he is unaware of Israeli rules of engagement which permit soldiers to fire on Palestinians who approach within a certain distance of the perimeter wall. This is a particular problem at sea because there are no buoys marking out the fishing limits set by Israel (currently 6 miles from the shore) and no direct communication between Israel and the fishermen (limits are instead relayed via the UN), therefore there is often confusion which leads to conflict. OCHA noted that 3 fishermen had been killed and scores of other boats fired upon by the Israeli navy in the 18 months up until April 2007.¹⁸²

Once rules of engagement are publicly available they not only help civilians take measures to avoid being caught up in conflict, but they also enable debate on the appropriateness of the rules. Two examples are discussed below related to indirect fire, firstly, the practice of "preventative shelling" and secondly, the targeting parameters of shells or rockets relative to civilian homes. These examples have been chosen because they are reasonably well documented and also because, since Israel is currently not shelling at the time of writing, it is easier to stand back and assess the appropriate rules of engagement in this area. However, ORG strongly recommends that Israel and Palestinian factions carefully reassess the rules of engagement for all their modes of military activity, ideally with the input of independent third parties. These rules of engagement should be clearly communicated to the civilian population so they are able to minimise the risk to which they are exposed.

“One problem with military rules of engagement is that they are rarely made publicly available, let alone actively communicated. This has a significant human security implication.”

5.3 Ending the practice of preventative shelling

If Israeli artillery is fired in immediate responses to a Qassam firing or based on specific intelligence of an imminent launch attempt, so as to hit the rocket crew, it is easiest to defend on military and moral grounds. However, the majority of shells fired by the IDF have been used for “preventative shelling”. This entails firing systematically into “the Qassam launching spaces, broad areas from which – it is estimated – Qassam rockets had previously been fired.”¹⁸³ Rockets fired, that is, on previous occasions, not necessarily on the day itself. Israel claims that “the shelling disrupts the movements of the Qassam cells. They feel threatened and shoot quickly, without taking aim, in order to flee.”¹⁸⁴ The IDF further argues that this tactic has resulted in Qassams being poorly aimed and ending up in the sea rather than hitting Israel. However, there is little evidence for this. Lt Col Ron Ben Yishai, the defence correspondent of the newspaper Yediot Aharonot, counters that: “Even before the Lebanon war [which demonstrated the ineffectiveness of artillery in preventing rocket attacks] it was proven that artillery fire failed in preventing or even minimising Qassam rocket fire from the Gaza Strip.”¹⁸⁵ There are so many places in Gaza from which Qassams could be launched that the continual shelling of these locations is not only ineffective, but causes trauma and casualties among the civilian population, prevents farmers from tending their land, and acts as a goad for further rocket fire. If the IDF resumes shelling, this must be limited to specific intelligence about Qassam launches or attempted launches, not the widespread preventative shelling that was implemented between April and November 2006.

5.4 The targeting of shells and rockets

“The most infamous shelling occurred when 19 members of a family were killed when a barrage of shells hit their house in Beit Hanoun.”

In the aftermath of the shelling of a house in Beit Lahia on 10 April 2006, killing 12-year-old Hadil Aban and injuring most of her family, Ha’aretz reported that the IDF had recently relaxed its restrictions on the targeting of artillery shells near residential areas.¹⁸⁶ The “safety zone” was reduced so that shells could now be targeted within 100m of residential areas, down from the previous limit of 300m. Ha’aretz estimated that the kill radius of the shells was 100m, while another source gave the radius as up to 150 metres for the 155mm high-explosive shells.¹⁸⁷ In either case, once the margin of error is taken into account, the new policy substantially increases the risk to civilians. A senior IDF officer had admitted to Ha’aretz that the army did understand that this revised rule of engagement could result in the killings of more Palestinian civilians.¹⁸⁸ The most infamous shelling occurred six months later, when 19 members of a family were killed when a barrage of shells hit their house in Beit Hanoun. The IDF claimed that the tragedy was a result of an error in its radar targeting system, which normally had a margin of error of 25m but had increased to 200m in this case.¹⁸⁹ Combining this higher targeting margin of error with the potential kill radius of the shells gives a danger zone of up to 350m from the site targeted, greater than the original safety zone.

The issue of targeting has been pursued in the Israeli High Court by a coalition of six Israeli and Palestinian human rights organisations who requested an urgent ruling on it.¹⁹⁰ The organisations submitted to the Court a list of the civilians who they believed had been killed and injured as a result of the changed targeting rule. By the time of the Beit Hanoun shelling the Court had not yet made a ruling.¹⁹¹ Former Supreme Court President Aharon Barak was due to make a ruling in December 2006,¹⁹² but this does not seem to be publicly available yet; a further hearing took place at the High Court on 2 July 2007.¹⁹³ At the time of writing the issue was still being discussed in the courts.

The UN Human Rights Council¹⁹⁴ formed a fact-finding mission led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to investigate the Beit Hanoun shelling. Israel opposed this mission and did not permit it to visit Gaza.¹⁹⁵ The mission was conducted in spite of this limitation and its report was discussed during the Council's fifth session in June 2007. The Council was highly critical of the Israeli tactics and requested that Israel explain, by its sixth session, what steps it has taken to avoid similar collateral damage in the future. It insisted that: "The IDF must place at the centre of their decision-making and activities in the occupied Palestinian territories the consequences of the use of force on civilians. That includes the use of artillery in densely populated areas such as Gaza... Regardless of whether the casualties at Beit Hanoun were caused by a mistake, recklessness, criminal negligence or were wilful, those responsible must be held accountable."¹⁹⁶ The British House of Commons Development Committee concurred, stating that "The Beit Hanoun incident raised questions about the extent to which the operational directives of the IDF are aligned with Israel's security policy."¹⁹⁷

Tutu's report also concluded that: "The lack of accountability for those firing Qassam rockets indiscriminately on civilian areas in Israel, as well as a lack of accountability for civilian deaths caused by Israeli military activity in Gaza have resulted in a culture of impunity on both sides." He recommended that a commission of two well-respected individuals, one representing each side, be established to monitor and report on human rights (specifically civilian casualties) in Gaza and neighbouring areas of Israel – a recommendation which the council endorsed.¹⁹⁸ ORG endorses this recommendation provided that the commission is well resourced and granted sufficient freedom and access by both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities.

5.5 Ensuring incidents are investigated and prosecutions are made

In June 2006, two separate missile strikes in Gaza killed three children and a pregnant woman shortly before a meeting of President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert in Jordan. Olmert apologised and it was reported that Defence Minister Peretz had ordered the IDF to conduct an inquiry into the deaths and "ensure that all missions are aborted if there is a danger of harming civilians".¹⁹⁹ This was the appropriate response to the killing of civilians, however, it does not seem to be the usual response. Following the Beit Hanoun shelling, which also initiated an Israeli investigation, B'Tselem said that it was not aware of any other ongoing military investigations into killings in Gaza. Furthermore, B'Tselem confirmed that: "of the 1,845 Palestinian non-combatants... killed by Israeli forces since September 2000, no soldier has been convicted for manslaughter, or murder, or anything like it."²⁰⁰ The only conviction for an unlawful killing in Gaza was of IDF soldier Sergeant Taysir Hayb who was sentenced to 8 years in prison for manslaughter for shooting British peace activist Tom Hurndall in Rafah in April 2003.²⁰¹ It would be reasonable to conclude that this case only went to trial because of pressure from the British government and that similar shootings of Palestinian civilians have gone untried. By comparison there have been a number of convictions of British and American soldiers for killing Iraqi civilians.

Worryingly, Sergeant Hayb stated in court that he was under orders to fire even on unarmed people and had immediately reported his shooting of Hurndall to his commander: "I told him that I did what I'm supposed to: anyone who enters a firing zone must be taken out. He always says this... The [Israeli army] fires freely in Rafah."²⁰² If this was the soldier's genuine belief then either acceptable rules of engagement which ruled out shooting unarmed civilians were not properly communicated to him or, if there were indeed orders to shoot anyone who entered a certain area in Rafah, then this should have been clearly communicated to Hurndall and the Palestinian civilian population. Sergeant Hayb appeared to believe that there would be no consequences to him for shooting Hurndall. Some people have argued that there was a culture of impunity in the IDF in Rafah in 2003 as two other foreigners (James Miller and Rachel Corrie), as well as dozens of Palestinians, were also killed within weeks of Hurndall.

One well documented case is the targeted killing of Saleh Shehade on 22 July 2002 in an air strike, along with 13 civilians. After the attorney general refused to order a criminal investigation into the incident, the High Court of Justice was petitioned in September 2003 by Yesh Gvul, an Israeli refusenik group. After many delays, the High Court finally ruled on 17 June 2007 – almost five years after the incident – that the government must say whether it is willing to establish an independent committee to investigate the incident, and whether a criminal probe is justified. This was based on Chief Justice Barak’s December 2006 ruling on targeted killings which recommended that when civilians are killed a targeted killing should be “objectively” examined to determine what went wrong.²⁰³ Ha’aretz noted that: “while the court did not clarify what it meant by this, legal experts believe an inquiry committee set up by the Defense Ministry would suffice. In this case, an inquiry would probably focus on whether the army could or should have known that the bombing was likely to kill innocent people. The army claimed at the time that it had no reason to foresee this result.”²⁰⁴ At the hearing, the Government Attorney, Shai Nitzan said that the IDF would consider agreeing to an independent inquiry. The case remains pending at the time this report went to press.

In a remarkable and welcome development in August, a civilian court in Israel has ordered an army officer to pay NIS 500,000 compensation to the family of Mohammed Ali Zayd, a 16-year-old Palestinian boy he shot dead at home in October 2002 in the West Bank village of Nazlat Zeid.²⁰⁵ Lieutenant Tzvi Koretzky was also the first Israeli officer to be charged in relation to the killing of a Palestinian since the start of the Intifada in 2000. Israel’s 2002 “Intifada law”, an amendment to the Civil Wrongs Law, absolved the state from any liability to pay compensation to Palestinians. However, Judge Sabri Muhsin ruled that this did not apply in this particular case because the shooting was a deviation from the officer’s mission of searching for a suspected car bomb. The original military court had simply demoted Koretzky one rank and detained him in a military prison for two months for “negligent killing.”²⁰⁶ Unfortunately there has been another development in the other direction. On December 2006, the Israeli High Court overruled the amendment to the Civil Wrongs Law.²⁰⁷ However, on 11 July this overruling was in turn overruled for Gaza (though not the West Bank) by a new Knesset bill which defines Gaza as foreign territory and states: “It is unthinkable that [Israel] will continue to bear any responsibility for the residents of the Gaza area today, when Israeli communities cease to exist in the Gaza area, any Israeli activity in this area is a defensive activity in every sense of the word. In that case, there is no room for damage lawsuits.”²⁰⁸

In conclusion, carefully constructed and clearly communicated rules of engagement, together with rapid inquiries into civilian killings, with prosecutions when there is evidence that soldiers have killed wrongfully and a fair system of compensation payment, could contribute significantly to improving human security in Gaza. These measures would compel combatants to take greater care in discriminating civilians. Because of the asymmetry of the situation, this section has necessarily focused on the Israel side, but the principle also holds for Palestinian combatants. The Palestinian armed factions should be transparent about the criteria under which they engage in attacks and when these are violated. Similarly, when Israeli civilians are killed, they should try those responsible, ideally in the official Palestinian courts (although these are currently not functioning in Gaza because of the donor boycott). Combatants operating under pressure need clear guidance as to what they can and can not do. An appreciation that there may be legal consequences to their actions will almost certainly encourage greater efforts to avoid civilian casualties.

“Carefully constructed and clearly communicated rules of engagement, together with rapid inquiries into civilian killings, with prosecutions when there is evidence that soldiers have killed wrongfully and a fair system of compensation payment, could contribute significantly to improving human security in Gaza.”

5.6 Considering the deployment of an international force

The first ever UN peacekeeping force UNEF (UN Emergency Force) was deployed in 1957 in Gaza (and Sinai) following the Israeli withdrawal from territory conquered during the Suez crisis. Its presence served to reduce the border skirmishes that had been common during the first decade of Israel's existence²⁰⁹ and, had it not been withdrawn, the 1967 war might have been prevented. It is, therefore, worth considering whether, fifty years later, a similar force might again be able to help mitigate conflict and increase human security. Calls for an international force in Gaza (and in the West Bank) date back at least as far as Yasar Arafat's address to the UN Security Council on 25 May 1990. The resolution proposed on that occasion was vetoed by the US,²¹⁰ as was another in the early days of the Second Intifada.²¹¹

Palestinians have generally been in favour of an international force "to protect us from Israeli aggression," as Information Minister Mustafa Barghouthi said recently.²¹² However they oppose a force with a unipolar mandate such as the one proposed by Olmert and rejected by Hamas.²¹³ Israel, on the other hand, has always opposed an international force, for the reason that Dore Gold, the head of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, recently reiterated. He warned that such a force would "end up doing nothing more than narrowing the freedom of maneuver of the Israel Defense Forces."²¹⁴ It was, therefore, remarkable to hear an Israeli Prime Minister personally propose an international force – albeit on very specific terms that were subsequently retracted.²¹⁵ Prime Minister Olmert floated the idea to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon on 11 June and it was discussed in the Security Council on 13 June.²¹⁶ Although the timing of this suggestion was linked to a desire to constrain Hamas, which President Abbas shared, the shift in Israeli thinking can be seen more fundamentally as reconsideration of the post-disengagement status-quo, now that they view Gaza as foreign soil, not disputed territory. The apparent success of the strengthened UNIFIL force in maintaining peace on the Lebanese border since the war in summer 2006 is one reason why the idea has gradually been gaining currency for almost a year.

“Any force which is focused mainly on tackling the actions of one side would never get the approval of that side.”

Italian Foreign Minister, Massimo D'Alema has been one of the strongest recent advocates for intervention in Gaza. Building on Italy's involvement in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), he proposed a Gaza force in August 2006²¹⁷ but failed to secure Israeli agreement at that time.²¹⁸ He reframed his proposal in the changed context of the factional fighting in January²¹⁹ and again in May.²²⁰ The idea was also picked up by the new UN special envoy to the Middle East, Michael Williams, during his first official visit to the region in May,²²¹ and Karen Abuzayd, head of UNRWA, has expressed the hope that peacekeepers could offer civilians in Gaza some protection against Israel.²²² The EU Ambassador to Israel, Ramiro Cibrian-Uzal, asked Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni in May whether Israel still objected to an international force.²²³ Livni replied that to be acceptable a force would need to have a more executive mandate than UNIFIL, able to actively search for "terrorists" and arms. This seems to have initiated a discussion in the Israeli cabinet, which was the context to Olmert's proposal to the UN on 11 June. Other Israelis have been considering the issue. Since the spring, Meretz Knesset members Avshalom Vilan and Zahava Gal-On have been suggesting the deployment of a UN force as part of a package deal linked to the Arab Peace Initiative, presenting their proposal to Arab diplomats and Palestinians, including Salam Fayad²²⁴ and President Abbas.²²⁵ Even hard-line Deputy Prime Minister, Avigdor Lieberman has suggested a NATO force²²⁶ (and he even visited NATO Deputy Secretary General, Alessandro Minuto Rizzo in Brussels to discuss the issue).²²⁷

There have been a wide variety of international force proposals, but are any of them politically feasible and likely to improve human security? Many experts interviewed by ORG expressed a great deal of scepticism about the idea, particularly given the current context in Gaza. It is clear that any force which is focused exclusively or mainly on tackling the actions of one side would never get the approval of that side. A force which focused just on tackling Palestinian rockets or arms smuggling would be unlikely to

succeed where the IDF failed, while one focused on Israeli attacks would be just as incapable of blocking air strikes as UNIFIL has been in Lebanon (even when UN positions have been bombed). However, an international force could still be successful if both Israelis and Palestinians saw that it might benefit their human security. While it might not be able to prevent most attacks by force of arms, it could instead decrease the motivation for launching those attacks and marginalise the elements intent on fermenting conflict by providing the general population with the prospect of improved human security and an economic peace dividend.

The IDF and Palestinian factions in Gaza have been fighting with the same old tactics for the past four years; neither has achieved their aims and both have killed civilians on the other side and endangered their own people. Israel was unable to prevent rocket and other attacks while it was directly occupying Gaza, it has failed to prevent them using air strikes and incursions since the Disengagement, and there is no reason to think that a reoccupation of Gaza would prove any more effective. Former Mossad chief, David Kimche recommended engagement with Hamas and possibly a NATO force because, in spite of Israel's military superiority, experience has shown that, "after each such attack, after the thousands of shells fired, and the hundreds of terrorists – and civilians – killed, after the death and the destruction, the Qassam workshops would spring up again."²²⁸ Although Palestinian combatants may have had more limited operational aims, such as showing defiance to the occupation, the fact that Israel usually inflicts far greater carnage in response to their attacks would suggest that this tactic is counterproductive. If both sides can appreciate that their past tactics have been ineffective, because of the asymmetry of the conflict, then perhaps they can appreciate that an international force with a balanced mandate could benefit everyone.

The international force - numbering at least 5,000 – would need to be under a UN mandate to be sufficiently legitimate. The EU should be a major contributor in partnership with Arab countries (although Egypt should not be involved and should focus instead on clamp down on arms smuggling, and facilitating legitimate trade, from its own side of the border). US and British involvement might also be problematic because of their historical involvement in region. The force should be careful not to get involved, or be perceived to be involved, in Palestinian factional disputes. It should focus only on securing the borders against conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. The force would have positions at the border crossings and patrols along the border to discourage tunnelling and the planting of explosives by Palestinians, and the shooting of Palestinian civilians near the border by Israelis. It could also have a presence in the farms and wasteland of northern Gaza used to launch Qassams, and would work with local people to discourage launches. Where necessary, it would help apprehend those responsible and ensure that they are tried through the Palestinian courts. It would also have a presence on the Israeli side of the border and would thoroughly investigate any Israeli attacks, particularly those resulting in civilian casualties, and seek to ensure that there are fair and transparent trials rather than cover-ups in military courts.

Expectations for the force would have to be managed. There would certainly be Qassam attacks under its watch and probably also "targeted killings" by Israel, however the level of incidents would probably be substantially reduced and communications mechanisms would be in place to prevent major escalations. In the longer term, the economic development that must accompany the force – including the construction of a seaport for Gaza, the easing of trade through Egypt and Israel, and a program of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) to create employment opportunities for militia members - could address the poverty and lack of opportunities, which is one of the main underlying causes of violence.

5.7 Developing cross-border community links

One of the most effective ways of preventing conflict over the long term is building close ties between people from the opposing communities. While there will always be extremists who will not be swayed by this, popular support for violence which harms the human security of civilians on the other side can be reduced through developing these community links. This approach has played a significant role, over many years, in bringing about peace in Northern Ireland, and has been developed in the Middle East by various organisations, for example Families Forum, which brings together bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families.²²⁹ However, almost all of the efforts towards grassroots reconciliation and the building of community links has happened in the West Bank. Jerusalem is a natural meeting place which is accessible to Israelis and to many Palestinians, and many Israelis visit the West Bank, because of the settlements and religious sites. Gaza, on the other hand, was never a very appealing destination for Israeli visitors, even before the First Intifada when travel into the OPTs was easier and safer.

The region around Gaza contains a large number of kibbutzim and in the past the Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council organised joint youth camps with children from Gaza. It is unclear to what extent these links have survived the recent years of fighting. New links, however, are being established by urban kibbutzim in Sderot.²³⁰ People in Gaza face difficulties in making contacts with Israeli civilians as these could easily be misunderstood as military collaboration and have serious repercussions. For this reason, it would be helpful if a respected organisation or individual in Gaza could provide an official covering under which cross-border links could happen safely. There are also rabbis in Sderot keen to develop links with religious leaders in Gaza.²³¹ These kinds of links are slow and difficult, and are no substitute for political progress, but experiences in other conflicts shows that community links can play a role in mitigating violence.

“One of the most effective ways of preventing conflict over the long term is building close ties between people from the opposing communities.”

Appendix 1 | Timeline of major events

<p>2007</p> <p>July 4 June 15</p> <p>May 9 April 24 April 4 March 16 March 12 February 8 January 29</p>	<p>Alan Johnston released.</p> <p>Hamas seize full control of Gaza's security apparatus. President Abbas forms an emergency government in the West Bank with Salam Fayyad as Prime Minister.</p> <p>Deployment of Fatah forces on streets leads to ten days of factional fighting.</p> <p>Hamas launches rockets for the first time since the November 2006 ceasefire.</p> <p>First Israeli incursion since November, killing a member of Islamic Jihad.</p> <p>Unity government formed with independent Interior Minister Hani Kawasmeh.</p> <p>BBC journalist Alan Johnson kidnapped.</p> <p>Mecca Agreement between Hamas and Fatah.</p> <p>Suicide bomber from Beit Lahia in Gaza kills three in Eilat.</p>
<p>2006</p> <p>December 14 November 26 November 8 June 27</p> <p>June 25 June 9 March 28 March 11 January 25</p>	<p>Prime Minister Haniyeh's convoy attacked at Rafah.</p> <p>Palestinian-Israeli truce announced, covering only Gaza.</p> <p>Beit Hanoun shelling kills family of 19.</p> <p>Operation Summer Rains launched involving a major incursion into Gaza and the detention of a third of Hamas representatives.</p> <p>Gilad Shalit captured and two IDF killed in raid.</p> <p>Gaza beach blast, 7 killed – Hamas calls off its 16-month-old truce.</p> <p>Israeli elections: Likud loses, Kadima has plurality but not majority.</p> <p>Closure of Erez crossing to workers begins.</p> <p>Hamas wins Palestinian Legislative Council elections. US, EU and other donors cut off their aid soon afterwards.</p>
<p>2005</p> <p>September 12 March 16 February 8 January 9</p>	<p>Disengagement complete.</p> <p>Cairo Conference – Palestinian groups agree to a <i>tahediyeh</i> (a lull in hostilities).</p> <p>Sharm al-Sheikh conference: Abbas announces that the Intifada is over.</p> <p>Mahmoud Abbas elected President.</p>
<p>2004</p> <p>September 30 September 29 July 19 June 28 May 18 March 24 February 2</p>	<p>Operation Days of Penitence in Northern Gaza.</p> <p>Two children killed by a Qassam near Sderot.</p> <p>Fatah infighting following appointment of Musa Arafat.</p> <p>Two Israelis, one a child, killed by a Qassam near Sderot.</p> <p>Operation Rainbow launched to stop arms smuggling across Rafah border.</p> <p>Sheikh Yassin assassinated; Abdel Aziz Rantissi is killed three weeks later.</p> <p>Sharon announces details of the Disengagement plan.</p>
<p>1949 – 2003</p> <p>December 18, 2003 March 5, 2002 September 30, 2000</p> <p>March 1, 1996</p> <p>July 1, 1994 December 8, 1987 January 1, 1970 June 12, 1967 March 8, 1957 November 1, 1956 February 24, 1949</p>	<p>Concept of disengagement first articulated at Herzliya conference.</p> <p>First Qassam attack.</p> <p>12yr old Muhammad al-Durrah shot in Gaza at the start of the al-Asqa Intifada.</p> <p>Dahlan begins a crackdown on Hamas following a series of suicide bombings.</p> <p>Yasar Arafat arrives in Gaza to form the Palestinian Authority.</p> <p>Intifada begins in Jabalya refugee camp.</p> <p>First Gaza settlement, Kfar Darom.</p> <p>Gaza conquered by Israel.</p> <p>Israel withdraws from Gaza, UN Emergency Force enters.</p> <p>Gaza conquered by Israel during Suez crisis.</p> <p>Israel-Egypt armistice agreement defines extent of Gaza Strip.</p>

Appendix 2 | Table of monthly casualties

This is the data, drawn from B'Tselem, upon which Table 3 and Graph 5 is based.

DATE	PALESTINIANS			ISRAELIS		DATE	PALESTINIANS			ISRAELIS	
	CIVILIANS	COMBATANTS	UNKNOWN	IDF	CIVILIANS		CIVILIANS	COMBATANTS	UNKNOWN	IDF	CIVILIANS
PART 1						PART 2					
May-07	28	19	6	-	2	Dec-03	20	11	-	2	-
Apr-07	1	5	-	-	-	Nov-03	10	6	-	-	-
Mar-07	1	1	-	-	-	Oct-03	31	13	-	3	-
Feb-07	-	1	-	-	-	Sep-03	5	7	-	1	-
Jan-07	1	2	-	-	-	Aug-03	16	1	-	-	-
Dec-06	1	1	-	-	-	Jul-03	-	-	-	-	-
Nov-06	62	54	1	1	2	Jun-03	33	14	-	5	-
Oct-06	24	23	-	-	-	May-03	26	16	-	-	-
Sep-06	20	6	-	1	-	Apr-03	26	11	-	1	1
Aug-06	31	29	-	-	-	Mar-03	33	14	-	-	-
Jul-06	81	83	-	-	-	Feb-03	25	19	-	5	-
Jun-06	25	10	2	4	-	Jan-03	15	18	-	-	-
May-06	9	9	-	-	-	Dec-02	23	10	6	-	1
Apr-068	14	-	-	-	-	Nov-02	6	3	6	2	2
Mar-06	5	3	1	-	-	Oct-02	35	2	2	-	-
Feb-06	13	6	-	-	-	Sep-02	7	13	4	2	-
Jan-06	4	-	-	-	-	Aug-02	17	3	1	1	-
Dec-05	11	2	1	-	-	Jul-02	20	-	2	1	-
Nov-05	3	2	-	-	-	Jun-02	9	10	-	3	1
Oct-05	10	1	-	-	-	May-02	9	8	5	-	1
Sep-05	6	-	-	-	-	Apr-029	18	8	3	-	-
Aug-05	1	-	-	-	-	Mar-02	24	26	44	7	7
Jul-057	3	-	-	3	-	Feb-02	16	13	10	5	1
Jun-05	1	2	-	1	-	Jan-02	2	2	2	8	1
May-05	1	2	-	-	-	Dec-01	10	8	10	-	1
Apr-053	-	-	-	-	-	Nov-01	10	2	6	1	1
Mar-05	-	-	-	-	-	Oct-01	9	5	6	1	1
Feb-05	4	1	-	-	-	Sep-01	13	2	8	-	-
Jan-05	25	18	-	1	9	Aug-01	5	4	6	3	-
Dec-04	15	37	-	6	-	Jul-01	3	-	3	-	-
Nov-04	4	15	-	-	-	Jun-01	8	1	-	2	-
Oct-04	55	77	-	2	-	May-01	7	2	9	-	-
Sep-04	55	34	-	5	4	Apr-01	14	-	1	-	-
Aug-04	22	8	-	-	-	Mar-01	5	1	3	-	-
Jul-04	28	7	-	-	-	Feb-01	5	-	2	1	-
Jun-04	10	6	1	1	2	Jan-01	7	-	4	-	1
May-04	64	32	1	13	5	Dec-00	10	6	3	2	-
Apr-04	20	12	-	2	-	Nov-00	41	1	14	5	5
Mar-04	29	33	-	-	-	Oct-00	13	1	22	-	-
Feb-04	16	23	-	1	-	Sep-00	2	-	2	-	-
Jan-04	8	8	-	3	1	Total	1291	860	202	105	52

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Conflict, Economic Closure and Human Security in Gaza

Recent events in Gaza have had a profound impact not only on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but on the whole Middle East region and beyond. Following the Palestinian presidential elections in January 2005, Israel's unilateral "disengagement" from Gaza in September 2005, the Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006 and the formation of a national unity government following the Mecca Agreement in March 2007, many had hoped for a new window of opportunity for improving the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories which could potentially pave the way for the resumption of peace talks to bring about an end to the protracted conflict. However, the Palestinian situation has dramatically deteriorated since June 2006, turning Gaza's already critical political, economic and security conditions into unprecedented levels of blockade, poverty, violence and uncertainty.

This report examines the immediate and desperate situation in Gaza through a "human security" lens. Much is known about the parameters of the political endgame of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but little is being done to examine and minimise the current unbearable human suffering in Gaza. This study seeks to redress this balance by offering a new insight and a detailed account of the day to day security breaches and the root causes of violence. Uniquely, it offers ways to improve the security situation based on both the particularities of the area and international law and conventions that govern such situations.

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