

8 things you need to know about Gaza

A Jewish Voice for Peace Fact Sheet

1. Gaza is Always Under Siege

Israel controls the airspace, waters, and borders of Gaza (with the exception of Rafah, the border with Egypt). Israel controls the electrical and sewage infrastructure of Gaza, and how much food, fuel and other supplies can arrive and leave, giving it almost total control over the economy. Palestinians in Gaza do not have the freedom to leave at will, to visit relatives in the West Bank, or get adequate health care. 1.7 million Palestinians are crammed into 140 square miles, making it one of the most crowded places on earth.

In other words, even on the best of days, when Israel is not bombing Gaza, it is largely responsible for holding 1.7 million people captive in miserable conditions. According to international law, by maintaining “effective control” of Gaza, Israel still meets the definition of occupying power. This status has been affirmed by the Red Cross, Amnesty International, the U.N., and the U.S. State Department, among others.

2. Asymmetry of Power

This “conflict” cannot be called a war. This is an assault by one of the most advanced militaries in the world with the full backing, and weaponry, of the U.S., the sole world super power. By every measure, including fatalities, fatalities of civilians, injuries, and destruction of infrastructure, the disproportionate impact on Gaza is clear. While there is no excuse for attacks on civilians, whether in Israel or in the U.S., the threat from Gaza to Israel and Israelis is no comparison to the harm being inflicted on Gaza.

3. Collective Punishment

Israel claims that they are at war with Hamas. But the vast majority of the fatalities were been civilians, including large numbers of women and children. According to the UN, at least 1473 of the dead were civilians, including 501 children and 257 women, with another 379 individuals yet to be identified. 18,000 housing units were totally destroyed or severely damaged by Israeli attacks, leaving approximately 108,000 of Gaza’s 1.8 million Palestinians homeless. Targeting civilians is a war crime and contrary to international law.

4. Who Started The Fighting?

While the predominant narrative in the media tells a story about Israel being forced to defend itself, the truth is that Israel has repeatedly broken truces with Hamas, including in this latest escalation. Until November of this year, one Israeli had been killed by fire from Gaza in 2012, while 78 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli attacks.

On November 8th, five days before coverage of this latest round began, a 12 year old boy in Gaza was killed by Israeli soldiers, which drew a response from militants in Gaza. Although three more civilians, including two children, were killed by Israeli fire during the course of several exchanges between November 8th and 11th, Palestinian militant factions agreed to a truce on November 11th. Most disturbingly, after two days of calm, Israel then assassinated Ahmed Jabari, the head of Hamas’s military wing, and a relative moderate who, it is claimed by independent Israeli negotiator Gershom Baskin, had just two hours before received a proposal for a long-term truce that had been painstakingly developed by Israelis and Hamas officials.

5. Media Distortions

In U.S. publications, especially, there are routine referrals to Israeli “surgical” or “pinpoint” strikes and to “targeted assassinations.” These terms imply a precision that does not exist, and that have resulted in extensive civilian casualties.

News reports often refer to the “cycle of violence” as if both sides have equal power and are equally responsible for the violence. The context of the continuing blockade of Gaza and the enormous disparities in fire power and overall control are not mentioned.

Politicians, in the U.S. and Israel, constantly claim that Israel “has the right to defend itself” which is dutifully repeated in news reports. If this is true, does Gaza have the right to defend itself from Israeli attack in the same manner? There is a clear double-standard at work.

6. U.S. Role

Israel could not continue this assault if the Obama administration and Congress did not approve it. In fact, President Obama has said, “Israel has every right to expect that it does not have missiles fired into its territory.” The Israeli military is using weaponry procured from Boeing, General Electric, and Elbit U.S.A., to name a few, purchases made possible by U.S. military aid to Israel. In other words, U.S. taxpayers are funding the Israeli attack on Gaza.

7. No Military Solution

Israel periodically uses its military might as a deterrent to Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem to rebel. But an unjust occupation and subjugation of an entire people cannot be maintained by military force alone. The only long-term solution, for Palestinians and Israelis, is one that offers freedom and dignity for all the people of Palestine and Israel.

8. Ceasefire and Aftermath

After 50 days of violence, a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas went into effect on August 27, 2014. According to the United Nations, between July 7 and August 26, nearly 2,200 Palestinians were killed in Gaza as a result of Israel’s “Operation Protective Edge,” over 500 of whom were children. The UN estimates that at least 373,000 children require direct and specialized psychosocial support (PSS), while every child in Gaza has been affected by the crisis and will need some level of psychosocial support. During the same period, 71 Israelis were killed by Palestinians, including 66 soldiers and four civilians, as well as one foreign worker from Thailand. Since August, Israel has repeatedly broken the ceasefire by firing on Palestinian fisherman and Palestinians near the security wall that borders the territory, killing one man in an incident on March 7, 2015. Following the Palestinian Authority’s signing of the Rome Statute in December 2014, the International Criminal Court has launched a preliminary investigation into war crimes committed during Operation Protective Edge.

Sources: : www.imeu.net; <http://imeu.org/article/faq-on-failed-effort-to-arrange-ceasefire-betweenisrael-and-hamas>; “Ten Things You Need to Know About Gaza” by Mehdi Hasan (http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/mehdi-hasan/gaza-10-things-you-need-to-know_b_2139356.html); Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (www.pchr.org); www.haaretz.com; <http://www.maaneews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=713579>; http://www.democracynow.org/2014/7/15/after_192_killed_in_gaza_is