

Gaza Relief

"If the people of Gaza have no hope, if they can't even get clean water... if the border closures are so tight that it is impossible for reconstruction and humanitarian efforts to take place, then that is NOT going to be a recipe for Israel's long-term security or a constructive peace track to move forward." -- President Barack Obama, Cairo, June 4, 2009

The ongoing crisis in Gaza is a genuine threat to Israel's long-term security and well-being.

Having a distressed and politically unstable society on its border is a genuine threat to Israel. The Gaza Strip, home to nearly 1.5 million Palestinians, is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. It is plagued with 40% unemployment, profound poverty, crumbling infrastructure, and international isolation. At least 85 percent of Gazans receive some kind of aid from international donors. There has been limited reconstruction after the recent Israeli incursion into Gaza, which resulted in the destruction of 22,000 buildings. Gaza's economy is based largely on an underground smuggling industry: money, ammunition, and other items are brought into the Strip via tunnels that circumvent Israeli border controls. To ignore Gaza is to ignore a powderkeg.

Resolving the Gaza crisis is key to advancing the peace process.

Gaza will almost certainly be part of a future Palestinian state. In order for Israel to relinquish its present control of the Gaza Strip's borders, airspace, and seacoast, stability must replace the status quo. Hamas and Fatah will need to end their internal hostilities for there to be a final status agreement between Israel and an accountable Palestinian entity — reason enough to support the Hamas-Fatah reconciliation process now underway, with a plan to have a joint security force maintain order in Gaza. Finally, Israeli Cpl. Gilad Shalit remains captive in Gaza after more than three years, and Israel has tied Shalit's release to any discussion around lifting the economic and political blockade of Gaza.

The Obama Administration's multi-faceted Gaza policy stresses the role all parties--Israel, Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, Egypt, and international aid organizations--play in resolving the conflict.

Israel : In the aftermath of President Obama's speech in Cairo, the Administration called on the Israeli government to allow more food and medicine into Gaza as well as rebuilding materials, to permit the transfer of funds from West Bank banks to Gaza banks, and to open the border crossing to materials that encourage economic growth. The Obama Administration has also been involved in behind the scenes attempts to secure the release of Gilad Shalit.

Hamas : The Administration has argued that Hamas must play a role in ending the conflict and called on it to renounce violence, while refusing official contact. Top Hamas leaders now support a ten-year truce and state that they would accept a peace agreement if Israel returns all land occupied since 1967.

Palestinian Authority : The PA, controlled by Fatah, has governed the West Bank since Hamas took over Gaza two years ago in a coup. The Administration has urged the PA to build stronger security and economic institutions in preparation for an independent Palestinian state.

Egypt : The Administration is quietly supporting Egypt's key role in brokering unity talks between Hamas and Fatah and, separately, negotiation between Israel and Hamas for the release of Gilad Shalit.

International Aid Organizations : In March, Secretary of State Clinton pledged \$300 million in aid to rebuild Gaza – to be channeled through organizations not associated with Hamas – at the Donor's Conference for Gaza Recovery and has continued to encourage international rebuilding support.