

8 things you need to know about Gaza.

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. 1.8 million Palestinians are crammed into 140 square miles, making it one of the most crowded places on earth. Israeli restrictions have exacerbated a deep economic recession and high unemployment, leading to extremely high poverty rates. Basic supplies and medicine are restricted, while safe drinking water is scarce.

In other words, when Israel is not bombing Gaza, it is largely responsible for holding 1.8 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” is a one-sided war on the civilians of Gaza. It 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 cannot be reasonably compared to the harm inflicted on Gaza.

3. Collective Punishment

Israel claims that this war is against Hamas. But so far (as of July 16), over 80% of the fatalities have been civilians, including large numbers of women and children. Thus far (July 16, 2014), according to the Gaza health ministry, 222 Palestinians have been killed, and over 1600 injured. One Israeli has died. 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. The current escalation was preceded by the formation of a Palestinian Unity government with an agreement between Hamas and Fatah. Three Israeli settlers teens were kidnapped on June 12, prompting a search and repressive crackdown in the West Bank during which Israeli forces killed 10 Palestinians, raided more than 1,000 homes and arrested over 300 Palestinians, many of whom were recently released in a prisoner deal with Hamas. Israel blamed Hamas, who denied involvement, for the kidnapping, covering up the knowledge that the teens were dead in order to initiate raids aimed destroying the new unity government, and whip up fear and hatred. A 16-year old Palestinian teen from East Jerusalem was kidnapped and burned alive in a revenge act by right-wing Israeli Jews, and a Palestinian-American teen was brutally beaten by Israeli border police. During this period airstrikes on Gaza, which had been ongoing, accelerated. The current assault, known as Operation Protective Edge, began on July 8, 2014

5. Media Distortions

In U.S. and Israeli publications, especially, there are often 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” — and in fact it is the role of a government to protect its citizens from attack. But 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. The U.S gives Israel upwards of \$3 billion a year in military aid which it uses to procure weaponry from Boeing, General Electric, and Elbit U.S.A., to name a few. 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. Potential Ceasefire

On July 15, 2014, media reported that the Egyptian government proposed a ceasefire that Israel had agreed to and that Hamas ultimately rejected, stating that they were not consulted on the terms of the ceasefire and would not sign unless their conditions were part of the terms of the ceasefire. From the beginning of the recent escalation, Hamas’ terms have included ending the 7-year embargo and siege on Gaza, opening the borders and releasing the political prisoners rearrested in June. Hamas continued to fire rockets, and Israel resumed its air strikes, claiming that they now had enhanced legitimacy to defend themselves. Hamas has submitted 10 demands to the Egyptians to establish a 10-year truce, which include ending the siege, allowing Gazan farmers to access their fields, extending area of the fishing zone, protecting Palestinian airspace, and releasing political prisoners. Israel’s terms for the briefly observed unilateral ‘ceasefire’ were the continuation of the status quo: Gaza’s civilians under siege and continued occupation.

Sources : www.imeu.net; <http://imeu.org/article/faq-on-failed-effort-to-arrange-ceasefire-between-israel-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.maannnews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=713579>; http://www.democracynow.org/2014/7/15/after_192_killed_in_gaza_is