

Gaza Blockade Questions and Answers

Here are a few examples of some of the most overheard questions about the Gaza Blockade and J Street's policy. If you'd like to see another question answered on this page, send us an email at info [at] jstreet [dot] org.

Q: What does Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip entail?

A: Israel's blockade of Gaza includes a ban on weapons, materials that can be used to create weapons, and humanitarian goods that are not applicable to military purposes.

It prohibits articles, including food, medical goods and construction materials deemed by Israel not to be, in the language of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, "vital humanitarian goods" [1] from entering the territory. It also prohibits all exports from the Gaza Strip, and limits the amount of fuel and electricity allowed into the territory.

The Israeli Government has not released an official list of goods it is preventing from entering the Gaza Strip. However, an ad hoc list by The Economist, compiled based on observations of people in Gaza, includes such items as coriander, fresh meat, wood for housing, tarps and heaters. [2] Israel alters the list of prohibited goods without notice, and has at times prohibited light bulbs, candles, matches, books, clothing, shoes, mattresses, sheets, blankets and pasta.

Additionally, items allowed into Gaza are entering at greatly reduced volumes. It is estimated that Gaza's population of 1.5 million now relies on less than a quarter of the volume of imported supplies they received in December 2005, before the blockade began. [3]

Q: Why is Israel blockading Gaza?

A: Following the intensification of Qassam rocket attacks by Hamas on Israeli civilians in September 2007 and Hamas' political takeover of the Strip, Israel declared Gaza "hostile territory," expanding more limited restrictions on goods entering the territory into the current blockade.

While Israel has every right to institute measures to prevent the entry of weapons to the Hamas-controlled territory, its blockade of the Gaza Strip is intended "to compromise the ability of Hamas to govern in Gaza as the quality of life deteriorated." [4] Israeli officials have repeatedly characterized their blockade policy in the following terms: "No prosperity, no development, no humanitarian crisis." [5]

Q: Is the blockade effective at protecting Israel's security and weakening Hamas?

A: According to the Associated Press, support for Hamas in the Gaza Strip has not been weakened, as Gazan civilians blame Israel for the deprivation they are suffering under the blockade. [6] Hamas has continued to ship arms into Gaza through tunnels, along with

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prohibited food and building materials which it distributes to the besieged population to garner additional goodwill as the sole provider of essential articles. Meanwhile, Israel's standing in the international community continues to deteriorate in lock-step with conditions in Gaza.

Q: Is there really a humanitarian crisis in Gaza?

A: Many international organizations consider Gaza to be experiencing a full-blown humanitarian crisis. [7] Not only is the blockade harming the nutrition and health of Gazans, but the economy -- and the means for Gazans to provide for themselves -- in the territory has been significantly undermined by the dearth of materials and energy for businesses and the total ban on exports.

Consider the following statistics provided by the U.S. State Department-funded charity American Near East Refugee Aid:

- 8 out of 10 Gazans depend on foreign aid to survive;
- Gaza requires a minimum of 400 trucks a day to meet basic nutritional needs, but an average of just 171 trucks worth of supplies enter Gaza every week;
- Clothes that were held in the port of Ashdod for over a year were released into Gaza but arrived unusable, covered with mold and mildew;
- 95% of Gaza's water fails World Health Organization standards, leaving thousands of newborns at risk of poisoning;
- Anemia for children under the age of 5 is estimated at 48%.

Q: Is there an alternative to the blockade that protects Israel's security and prevents weapons from getting into the hands of Hamas?

A: Yes. Israel could end the general blockade while maintaining strict border inspections and controls for interdicting weapons and articles which have military applications. Israel is a world leader in the monitoring and border control technology necessary to ensure weapons are not moved across the border into Gaza. [8] With fewer soldiers and resources assigned to enforcing the current blockade on non-military items, Israel could more effectively devote its energies to detecting and closing the tunnels through which Hamas is currently shipping arms. It could also count on a much broader spectrum of international support in stemming the movement of such weapons into Gaza.

[1] "MFA legal expert Sarah Weiss Maudi on the legal aspects of Gaza aid." Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 26, 2010.

[2] "Partial List of Items Prohibited/Permitted into the Gaza Strip." Gisha - Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, May 2010.

[3] "Guide: Gaza under blockade," by Heather Sharp. BBC, May 31, 2010.

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[4] "Cabinet declares Gaza 'hostile territory'," by Avi Issacharoff, Barak Ravid, and Shlomo Shamir. Haaretz, September 20, 2007.

[5] "Gaza Bonanza," by Yotam Feldman and Uri Blau. Haaretz, June 11, 2009.

[6] "Israeli blockade of Gaza at heart of crisis." Associated Press, June 2, 2010.

[7] "Guide: Gaza under blockade," by Heather Sharp. BBC, May 31, 2010.

[8] "Rethinking the Gaza Blockade." The New York Times, June 1, 2010.

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