

MEMMO

June 21, 2010

Israel Eases Gaza Blockade Despite Hamas Threat

Despite the continued risks posed by Hamas in Gaza, Israel has decided to take additional dramatic measures to facilitate the transfer of civilian goods into Gaza. Most significantly, yesterday's Cabinet decision—a continuation of Israel's efforts to facilitate humanitarian assistance that was welcomed by the United States and Quartet—will create a list banning weapons and sensitive dual-use items while allowing all other items to be transferred. Israel has a legitimate right to prevent Hamas' military build-up, as the terrorist group continues to call for the Jewish state's destruction and has relentlessly targeted innocent Israeli civilians.

The Cabinet's decision is a continuation of Israel's efforts to facilitate the flow of humanitarian goods into Gaza.

- Since the end of the Gaza war in 2009, Israel has facilitated the transfer of more than one million tons of humanitarian supplies to Gaza and 136 million liters of fuel.
- The Israeli government on average facilitates the entry of 220 tons of food to Gaza each day, 20 percent more than the amount recommended by the World Food Program.
- Israel also maintains a corridor for the transfer of medical patients out of Gaza into Israeli hospitals or other foreign medical facilities. In 2009, 10,544 patients along with 12,000 companions left Gaza.
- The Israeli measures come after the review of the blockade policy that had already been underway and build on established mechanisms to “liberalize the system by which civilian goods enter Gaza” and to increase the amount of building supplies needed for international projects.
- Israel has limited “dual-use” building supplies from going into Gaza, such as concrete, out of concern that Hamas would use the material to build bunkers and tunnels. Israel will now allow the transfer of more of these goods for “PA-authorized projects” being carried out “under international supervision and for housing projects such as the U.N. housing development,” according to an Israeli statement.
- Israel currently maintains a list of all items permitted to enter Gaza. Anything not on that list is forbidden. Under the new policy, Israel will publish a list of banned items such as weapons and sensitive “dual-use” technologies. All other goods not on this list will be permitted into Gaza.
- To accommodate the influx of goods, Israel will expedite the processing of goods at the various crossings and the port of Ashdod.



Senior Hamas official Mahmoud al-Zahar said Palestinians should fire rockets at Israel from the West Bank as well as from Gaza.

Israel has a legitimate right to prevent arms from going to Hamas, which calls for the destruction of the Jewish state.

- According to international law experts, it is legitimate for a state to impose an embargo on international waters during wartime. Israel's blockade and detention of the flotilla ships is permissible under international law.
- Israel's actions are aimed at blocking arms and explosives shipments to Hamas, which is at war with the Jewish state. Hamas has fired more than 7,000 rockets and mortar shells into Israel since Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005.
- Hamas and other terrorist groups have 5,000 rockets in Gaza, several of which can hit central Israel, according to Yuval Diskin, Israel's Shin Bet security chief.
- Hamas continues to call for attacks against Israel. Senior Hamas official Mahmoud al-Zahar said on June 20, "The solution is resistance!" He also asserted that Palestinians should fire rockets from the West Bank as well as from Gaza.
- Hamas continues to operate a vast network of tunnels under Gaza's border with Egypt, which it uses to smuggle weapons from Iran and Syria for attacks against Israeli civilians. Hamas also has repeatedly sought to smuggle weapons into Gaza via the sea. Imagine the weaponry Hamas would bring into Gaza if ships had unfettered access to its shores.
- Hamas continues to hold captive Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who was kidnapped from inside Israel four years ago. The terrorist group has refused requests from the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit him. When announcing the ease of the blockade, Israel called on the world to help secure his return.
- Egypt has also imposed a blockade on Gaza to protect its own security and is constructing an underground steel wall along the Sinai-Gaza border to help stymie the flow of illicit goods.

The United States and the international community have welcomed Israel's expanded efforts to facilitate aid to the people of Gaza.

- The United States backed Israel's decision to expand the types of goods going into Gaza while "strongly re-affirm[ing] Israel's right to self-defense, and our commitment to work with Israel and our international partners to prevent the illicit trafficking of arms and ammunition into Gaza."
- "The new policy towards Gaza just announced by the Government of Israel is a welcome development," the Quartet said in a statement, noting that it will help meet "the needs of Gaza's population for humanitarian and commercial goods, civilian reconstruction and infrastructure, and legitimate economic activity as well as the security needs of Israel."
- Quartet Representative Tony Blair also backed Israel's move, saying in a statement, "This new policy allows the Government of Israel and the Prime Minister to maintain their absolute determination to protect Israel's security whilst improving significantly the lives of the people of Gaza."