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Quietly, Israel is easing Gaza restrictions

In a dramatic but undeclared change of direction in its policy toward the Gaza Strip, Israel is significantly easing restrictions on the movement of commodities and people in and out of the Hamas-controlled territory following Operation Protective Edge. For the first time since the Islamist movement took control of the coastal enclave in the summer of 2007, the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), the IDF branch responsible for civil Palestinian affairs, is allowing Gazan agriculturists and fishermen to market their produce in the West Bank. In another first, Israel is allowing thousands of tons of building materials to enter Gaza for reconstruction projects to be managed by private contractors. Previously, only the UN was allowed to import such materials. As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon visited Gaza on Tuesday, Israel allowed 600 tons of cement, 400 tons of steel, and 2,000 tons of aggregates to enter the Strip through the Kerem Shalom crossing, Israeli and Palestinian sources confirmed. A complex three-way supervision mechanism comprising Israel, the PA and the UN has been put in place to ascertain they will not be used to support terrorism.