



Middle East Spotlight

Hamas' Gaza Strip

In September 2005, Israel completed its disengagement from the Gaza Strip. This gesture of peace by the Jewish state involved the withdrawal of all Israeli civilians and soldiers from their homes, businesses and farms—some 8,000 individuals—in order to grant the Palestinian Authority (PA) complete administrative control. This initiative provided Palestinians the opportunity to produce their own “Singapore” in the Middle East, with a thriving tourism-based economy and liberal democratic governing values.

But less than two years later, the terrorist organization Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip following a battle with Fatah—the principal political party in the PA—that left 161 Palestinians dead and more than 700 wounded. In brutal displays of violence, Hamas militants threw Fatah members off rooftops and executed others in the streets.

Ten years later, Hamas rule has only brought misery to Gaza, as it has prioritized attacking Israel over providing for Gaza’s nearly two million residents. Since seizing power in June 2007, Hamas has actively bolstered its fighting force—spending hundreds of millions of dollars annually on this effort. Moreover, the terrorist group has initiated three wars with Israel—in 2008-2009, 2012 and 2014—that have brought immense suffering to both Palestinians and Israelis.

These conflicts have resulted in hundreds of Israeli casualties, thousands of Palestinian casualties, and many billions of dollars in damage to Gaza’s infrastructure. Over the past decade, Hamas has diverted hundreds of thousands of tons of cement away from civilian reconstruction projects in order to build terror tunnels and other military infrastructure. In fact, Israel estimates that Hamas steals as much as 95 percent of all cement entering Gaza.

Today, 42 percent of the total population in Gaza—and 58 percent of its youth—are unemployed. Up to 80 percent of Gazans rely on international aid for sustenance. “Hamas prefers its own interests and those of its senior members,” according to Israel’s Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) Maj. Gen. Yoav Mordechai. “Every tunnel in the Gaza Strip has a generator, and only after that do the people get electricity.”

Despite the imminent threat that Israel faces from Hamas, COGAT permits the transport of approximately 20,000 tons of goods in 600 truckloads every day into Gaza. On a typical day, five ambulances and over 600 individuals cross the Israel-Gaza border. In addition, Israel facilitates Gaza’s exports, which have doubled in 2016 as compared to the previous year. Moreover, in March 2017, the Jewish state facilitated the transfer of \$82 million to Gaza to pay the salaries of PA employees.

Israel continues to take steps to improve the lives of Gaza’s residents, despite the fact that assistance is often diverted to Hamas. Unfortunately, Hamas remains committed to the destruction of Israel regardless of the cost to the Palestinian people it claims to serve.