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Library Note

Question for Short Debate on 8 February: Blockade of Gaza

This Library Note aims to provide background reading for the question for short debate to be held on 8 February:

“To ask Her Majesty’s Government what arrangements they have in place to monitor the impact on humanitarian aid for the population of Gaza of the blockade by the Government of Israel; and what representations they have made to the Government of Israel about the blockade”

This Note provides an overview of the blockade of Gaza by the Government of Israel, including its history, attempts to bypass the blockade and recent developments. It then examines the impact of the blockade on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and finally the response of the British Government.

James Tobin
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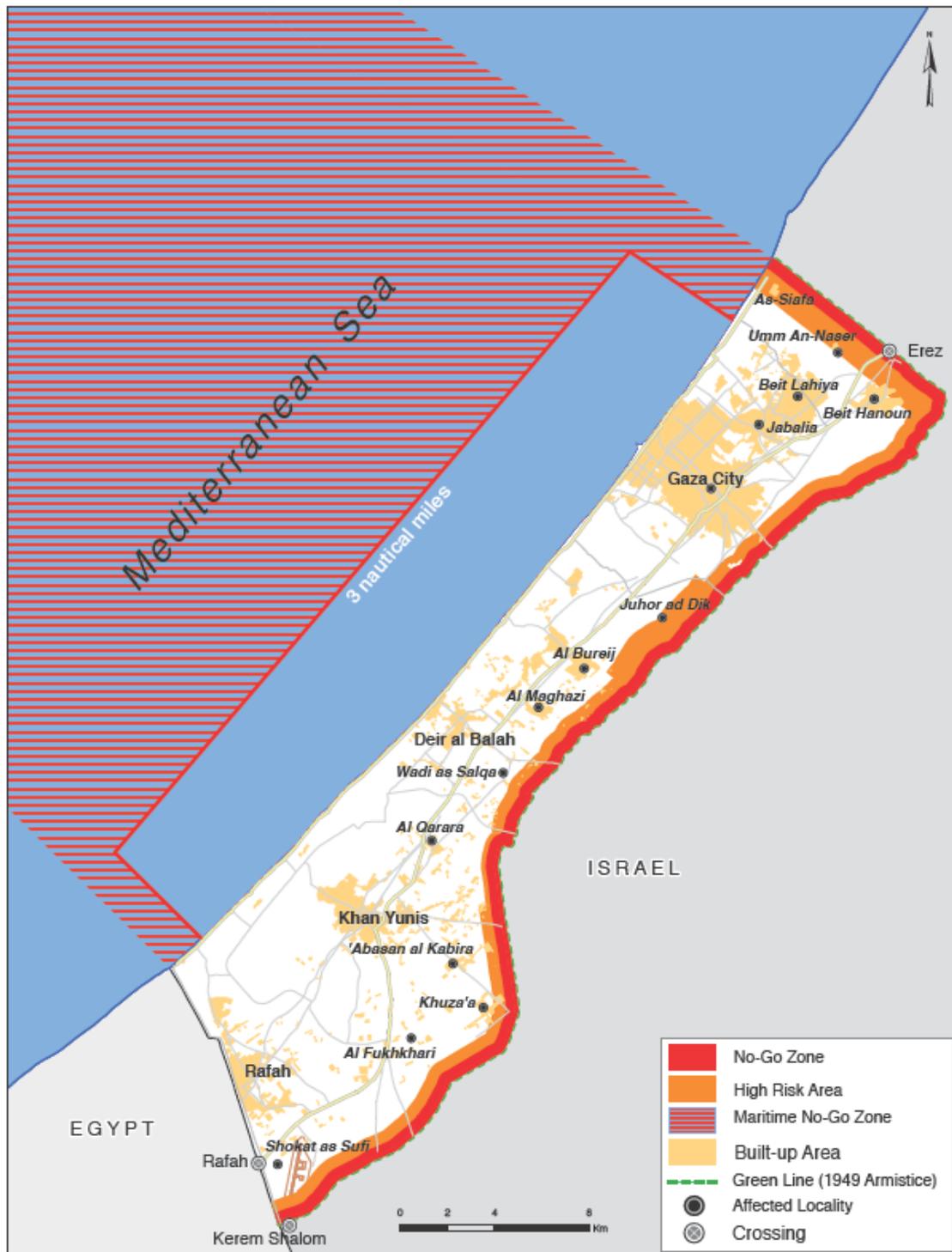
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1. Map of Gaza Illustrating the Extent of the Blockade



(Source: UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Humanitarian Situation in the Gaza Strip*, October 2011 Bulletin, p 2)

2. History of the Blockade, the *Mavi Marmara* Incident and Recent Developments

2.1 Origins of the Blockade

Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, though it retained control of the territory's borders. In the elections for the Palestinian Authority (PA) which followed in 2006,¹ Hamas won a majority of seats for the first time, beating the rival Fatah Party which had led all previous Palestinian Governments. Israel considers Hamas to be a terrorist group, and the US State Department designates it as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO). As a result, Israel and the Quartet—the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia—withdrawed all direct foreign aid to the Palestinian Authority following the election, and refused to recognise the Hamas-led Government.²

Under pressure from regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, Fatah and Hamas formed a unity Government in February 2007. It proved to be short-lived. In what it argued was a pre-emptive act to stop Fatah striking first, Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip by force in June 2007. In response, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas dissolved the Hamas-led Government across the Palestinian territories and replaced it with one led by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, which administered the West Bank alone. Hamas meanwhile remained in control of Gaza. While re-establishing relations with the new PA Government in the West Bank, Israel subsequently imposed a land, sea and air blockade of the Gaza Strip, in what it described as an act of self-defence to prevent arms and other military supplies from reaching Hamas.³

2.2 Early Years of the Blockade and Operation *Cast Lead*

In the early years of the blockade, with limited exceptions, Israel allowed only those goods into Gaza that were “vital for the survival of the civilian population”.⁴ Effectively only basic humanitarian supplies—food and basic subsistence materials—were allowed to enter, whilst other goods—particularly any form of construction material, but also commodities such as fertiliser and fuel, along with some household and consumer products—were either entirely prohibited, or significantly restricted.⁵ Exports were also severely restricted, as was the movement of people in and out of Gaza, and access to agricultural land and fishing waters. The effect of a significant easing of restrictions by the Israeli Government in June 2010 is discussed in the latter sections of this Note. However, severe restrictions in virtually all these areas remain in place today.

Carol Migdalovitz, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs at the US Congressional Research Service, argues that by imposing the blockade, and in such terms, Israel had hoped to turn the population of Gaza against Hamas by contrasting its rule with the situation of Palestinians in the West Bank. Migdalovitz argues that in reality the blockade achieved the opposite, however, with the isolation of the territory enabling Hamas to consolidate its control.⁶

¹ The elections were for the whole Palestinian territory, in which voters in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank could participate.

² However, measures were established to provide international aid to the Palestinian people which bypass the Hamas Government. Further details on the British contribution to this aid can be found on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office [website](#).

³ Migdalovitz, C, *Israel's Blockade of Gaza, the Mavi Marmara Incident, and Its Aftermath*, Congressional Research Service Report, 23 June 2010, p 1.

⁴ *Al Jazeera*, '[History of Israeli blockade on Gaza](#)', 2 November 2011; HCJ 9132/07 al-Bassiouni v Prime Minister, respondents' response from 1 November 2007, para 73.

⁵ BBC News website, '[Gaza under the blockade](#)', 6 June 2007.

⁶ Migdalovitz, C, *Israel's Blockade of Gaza, the Mavi Marmara Incident, and Its Aftermath*, Congressional Research Service Report, 23 June 2010, p 1.

Hamas rocket attacks from Gaza into Southern Israel continued in the first year of the blockade. In response to these attacks—and Migdalovitz argues in a further attempt to weaken or overthrow Hamas—in December 2008 Israeli forces launched a major military operation in Gaza. The offensive, named Operation *Cast Lead* which lasted until January 2009, resulted in the deaths of 1,000 Palestinians and the destruction of much of Gaza's already ailing infrastructure. Following the campaign Israel tightened restrictions on Gaza yet further—particularly regarding sea access—and also conditioned the end of the blockade on the release of Israel Defence Forces' (IDF) Sergeant Gilad Shalit, captured by Hamas in 2006.⁷

2.3 Attempts to Bypass the Blockade

2.3.1 Tunnel Network

A number of methods have been used to attempt to bypass the blockade and restrictions in place at official border crossings. Principal among these is a significant network of tunnels under the border used to smuggle prohibited goods into Gaza which, despite military offences such as Operation *Cast Lead* and aerial bombing by Israeli forces, continue to thrive. The United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report that thousands of people—many of them children—still risk their lives smuggling goods through the tunnels every day.⁸ According to OCHA, during 2010 at least 58 Palestinian civilians, including nine children, were killed working in the tunnels, and another 257 injured, including 46 children.⁹

The traffic of goods through the tunnels has been significant. While definitive statistics are unavailable, almost all possible goods are reportedly transferred through them, including construction materials, livestock, fuel, cash, food products and weapons. Hamas, which supervises the tunnels, provides operating licenses and collects taxes for their digging and operation, is estimated to receive millions of dollars in revenue from their operation every month.¹⁰ Despite delivering badly needed goods, however, these tunnels often create economic distortions by fuelling the large informal economy in the Gaza Strip.¹¹

2.3.2 Delivering Aid by Sea and the Raid on the *Mavi Marmara* Transport Vessel

Since the imposition of the blockade there have also been a number of attempts to deliver aid to Gaza by sea. Israel typically permits such convoys, but requires that they must first submit to inspection at an Israeli port—typically Ashdod—before sailing on to Gaza. However, convoys have occasionally sought to bypass such inspections and proceed directly to Gaza to deliver their cargo. There were eight such attempts between the beginning of 2008 and the incident involving the *Mavi Marmara*, some of which had been allowed to enter Gaza, and some of which were stopped and boarded by Israeli naval forces, all without bloodshed.¹²

⁷ *ibid*, p 2.

⁸ *ibid*, p 2.

⁹ UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Easing the Blockade: assessing the humanitarian impact on the population of the Gaza Strip*, March 2011, p 2.

¹⁰ Gisha Legal Centre for Freedom of Movement, [Rafah Crossing: Who holds the keys?](#), March 2009.

¹¹ Migdalovitz, C, *Israel's Blockade of Gaza, the Mavi Marmara Incident, and Its Aftermath*, Congressional Research Service Report, 23 June 2010, p 2.

¹² House of Commons Library Standard Note, *The Gaza flotilla attack and its aftermath*, 8 July 2010, [SN/IA/5637](#), p 3.

The *Mavi Marmara*, a former Istanbul passenger ferry owned by the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation, left Istanbul on 22 May 2010. It subsequently joined with other vessels, becoming part of a six-ship flotilla intent on delivering 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid to Gaza in defiance of the blockade. On 30 May 2010, after refusing to dock at Ashdod and when the ships were in international waters between 80 and 100 miles from the Israeli coast, the flotilla was intercepted by Israeli Navy Zodiac boats. From those boats naval commandos boarded five ships in the flotilla, all without incident. However, the *Mavi Marmara* resisted, and additional commando forces rappelled down onto the vessel from helicopters hovering above. Accounts differ as to what occurred on the deck of the *Mavi Marmara*. However, in the resulting confrontation between those commandos and some of the activists onboard the ship, nine passengers lost their lives.¹³

2.3.3 Fallout from the *Mavi Marmara* Incident and Conflicting United Nations Investigations into the Legality of the Gaza Blockade

There was significant international condemnation of the *Mavi Marmara* incident. After initial resistance and insisting on its own inquiry into the raid, in August 2010 Israel acceded to calls for an investigation into the incident by a panel chosen by the United Nations Secretary-General.¹⁴ That investigation was to consist of a four person panel, led by former President of New Zealand Sir Geoffrey Palmer.

However, only a month after Israel gave its support to the Palmer inquiry, in September 2010 a separate fact-finding mission by the United Nations Human Rights Council presented its findings of the incident. The report, which was highly critical both of the raid and of the blockade's impact on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, found that Israeli forces committed a "series of violations of international law" during the interception of the flotilla:

The conduct of the Israeli military and other personnel towards the flotilla passengers was not only disproportionate to the occasion but demonstrated levels of totally unnecessary and incredible violence... It betrayed an unacceptable level of brutality. Such conduct cannot be justified or condoned on security or any other grounds. It constituted grave violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law.¹⁵

It added:

The Mission has come to the firm conclusion that a humanitarian crisis existed on 31 May 2010 in Gaza... for this reason alone the blockade is unlawful and cannot be sustained in law. This is so regardless of the grounds on which one seeks to justify the legality of the blockade. Certain results flow from this conclusion. Principally, the action of the Israel Defence Force in intercepting the *Mavi Marmara* on the high seas in the circumstances and for the reasons given was clearly unlawful. Specifically, the action cannot be justified in the circumstances even under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations.

The investigation led by Sir Geoffrey Palmer reported in September 2011, after receiving the results of detailed national investigations into the incident by Israel and Turkey. The

¹³ *ibid*, p 4. For an in-depth examination of the *Mavi Marmara* incident please see this [Note](#).

¹⁴ BBC News website, '[Israel to co-operate with UN probe into Gaza flotilla](#)', 2 August 2010; *Daily Telegraph*, '[Israel to Co-operate with UN Gaza flotilla investigation](#)', 2 August 2010.

¹⁵ UN News Centre website, '[Israeli action against Gaza flotilla 'unlawful'—UN Human Rights Council panel](#)', 23 September 2010.

findings of that report questioned the intentions of the flotilla and the violent resistance posed by a small minority of passengers upon the *Mavi Marmara*. However, it also found that the Israeli assault on the vessel was both “excessive and unreasonable”.¹⁶ The report stated that a satisfactory explanation of the nine deaths—and particularly the fact that most of the deceased had been shot multiple times—had not been received, despite evidence presented by Israel. It also recorded that there was significant mistreatment of passengers following the incident.¹⁷

Despite these criticisms, however, the report also found that the naval blockade of Gaza was a “legitimate security measure”:

Israel faces a real threat to its security from militant groups in Gaza. The naval blockade was imposed as a legitimate security measure in order to prevent weapons from entering Gaza by sea and its implementation complied with the requirements of international law.¹⁸

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights issued a statement contradicting this claim following the publication of the Palmer report, which said:

In pronouncing itself on the legality of the naval blockade, the Palmer Report does not recognize the naval blockade as an integral part of Israel’s closure policy towards Gaza which has a disproportionate impact on the human rights of civilians... As a result of more than four years of Israeli blockade, 1.6 million Palestinian women, men and children are deprived of their fundamental human rights and subjected to collective punishment, in flagrant contravention of international human rights and humanitarian law.¹⁹

2.4 Easing of Blockade Restrictions in June 2010

Following significant pressure after the *Mavi Marmara* incident, in June 2010 Israel announced a set of measures to ease the blockade. Since 2009 some limited quantities of additional goods (such as glass, wood and clothing) had been entering Gaza through the official crossing points. However, the measures announced in June 2010 represented a significant alteration of the restrictions policy, the key elements of which were commitments to:

1. Publish a list of items not permitted into Gaza that is limited to weapons and war material, including problematic dual-use items. All items not on this list will be permitted to enter Gaza.
2. Enable and expand the inflow of dual-use construction materials for approved PA-authorized projects (schools, health facilities, water, sanitation, etc) that are under international supervision and for housing projects such as the UN housing development being completed at Khan Yunis. Israel intends to accelerate the approval of such projects in accordance with accepted mechanisms and procedures.

¹⁶ United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General’s Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 Flotilla Incident*, September 2011, p 4.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p 4.

¹⁸ *ibid*, p 4 (Finding ii).

¹⁹ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights press release, [‘How can Israel’s blockade of Gaza be legal?—UN independent experts on the “Palmer Report”](#)’, 13 September 2011.

3. Expand operations at the existing operating land crossings, thereby enabling the processing of a significantly greater volume of goods through the crossings and the expansion of economic activity.
4. Add substantial capacity at the existing operating land crossings and, as more processing capacity becomes necessary and when security concerns are fully addressed, open additional land crossings.
5. Streamline the policy of permitting the entry and exit of people for humanitarian and medical reasons and that of employees of international aid organizations that are recognized by the GOI. As conditions improve, Israel will consider additional ways to facilitate the movement of people to and from Gaza.
6. Continue to facilitate the expeditious inspection and delivery of goods bound for Gaza through the port of Ashdod.²⁰

Delivery of these commitments has been mixed. OCHA reported that in the second half of 2010 the monthly average of truckloads entering Gaza increased by 66 percent in comparison with the first six months of the year. However, this represented just 35 percent of the equivalent figure during the first five months of 2007 before the imposition of the blockade.²¹ OCHA also recorded that the share of non-food items also remained disproportionately low, ranging between 40 and 50 percent, in comparison with over 80 percent before the imposition of the blockade.²² Reporting in November 2010, a coalition of human rights organisations also highlighted that at that time only 7 percent of the building plan for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees' (UNWRA) projects in Gaza had been approved. Further, of that 7 percent only a small fraction of the necessary construction material had been allowed to enter Gaza for projects which included schools and health centres.²³

The impact of Israeli commitments to ease restrictions, and their subsequent delivery, on the humanitarian situation in Gaza is explored in detail below.

2.5 Recent Developments

2.5.1 2011 Prisoner Exchange

On 11 October 2011, as part of a deal between Israel and Hamas that saw 1,000 Palestinian prisoners released, Sergeant Gilad Shalit, the Israeli Defence Force soldier held in captivity for five years, was freed.²⁴ As cited above, Sergeant Shalit's freedom had been established by Israel as a precondition for the ending of the blockade of Gaza

²⁰ Prime Minister's Office statement following the Israeli Security Cabinet meeting; Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs press release, 20 June 2010 (referenced in House of Commons Library Standard Note, *The Gaza flotilla attack and its aftermath*, 8 July 2010, SN/IA/5637, p 10).

²¹ UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Easing the Blockade: assessing the humanitarian impact on the population of the Gaza Strip*, March 2011, p 5.

²² *ibid*, p 5.

²³ Coalition of Non-Governmental Organisations including Amnesty International, the International Federation for Human Rights, Oxfam, Christian Aid and CAFOD, [*Dashed Hopes: Continuation of the Gaza Blockade*](#), November 2010, p 3.

²⁴ BBC News website, ['Gilad Shalit freed in Israeli-Palestinian prisoner swap'](#), 18 October 2011.

following the conclusion of Operation *Cast Lead*. His release has led to further calls for the blockade to be lifted.²⁵

2.5.2 Rafah Crossing: Relations with Egypt Post-Mubarak

The relationship between Gaza, Egypt and Israel is still in a state of flux following the fall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. On 25 May 2011, following an earlier announcement that had been made during the term of the Mubarak regime, the Egyptian state news agency announced that Egypt was to open the Rafah border crossing into Gaza for most civilians—namely women of all ages, and men under 18 or over 40.²⁶ However, the Reuters news agency reported in July 2011 that there had been considerable delays in opening the crossing, and that significant restrictions were still in place. According to the most recent update available from OCHA, the Rafah crossing is currently open six days a week for the movement of a number of authorised travellers, Palestinian medical and humanitarian cases only.²⁷

2.5.3 Deteriorating Relations between Israel and Turkey

Following the raid on the *Mavi Marmara*, relations between Israel and Turkey have markedly deteriorated. Formerly close allies, Turkey reacted to the failure of Israel to apologise for the flotilla raid by expelling the Israeli Ambassador to the country, cutting all military ties with Israel, and announcing that it had begun steps to challenge the blockade of Gaza in the International Court of Justice.²⁸

2.5.4 Preliminary Agreement on a Unified Government

On 22 December 2011, the *Guardian* reported that following mediation by Egypt, the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas (Fatah), and the Leader of Hamas, Khaled Meshaal, agreed to establish a unity Government to be sworn in by the end of January 2012.²⁹ At the time of writing, however, no such Government has been formed.

3. Humanitarian Situation in Gaza

The blockade has had a severe impact on the humanitarian situation in Gaza. OCHA, which issues regular reports on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, states:

[The blockade] has worsened conditions of the life of Palestinians, deepened poverty and food insecurity, prevented reconstruction, and increased aid dependence by destroying livelihoods and economic activity.³⁰

It has also declared that the blockade constitutes “collective punishment” and is a contravention of international law. Israel has consistently refuted this claim and denies

²⁵ Human Rights Watch, ‘[Israel: Follow Prisoner Exchange by Ending Blockade](#)’, 18 October 2011.

²⁶ BBC News website, ‘[Gaza: Egypt “to open Rafah crossing to Palestinians”](#)’, 25 May 2011.

²⁷ United Nations Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs website, ‘[Border Crossings Update](#)’.

²⁸ *Guardian*, ‘[Turkey to challenge Gaza blockade at International Court of Justice](#)’, 3 September 2011.

²⁹ *Guardian*, ‘[Palestinian factions agree on unified government](#)’, 22 December 2011.

³⁰ Migdalovitz, C, *Israel’s Blockade of Gaza, the Mavi Marmara Incident, and Its Aftermath*, Congressional Research Service Report, 23 June 2010, p 1.

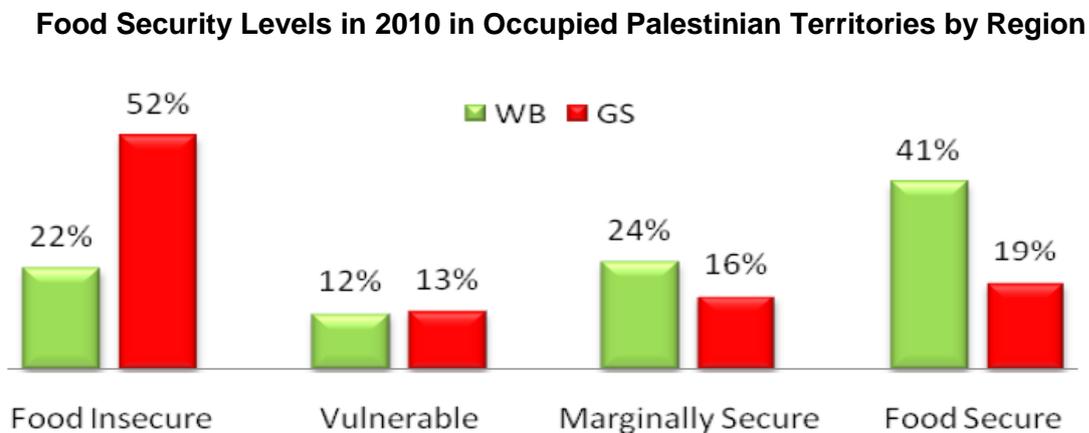
the existence of a humanitarian crisis in Gaza at any time since the imposition of the blockade.³¹

The impact of the blockade on particular areas of life in Gaza is explored below.

3.1 Food Security

Aid agencies have reported that since the imposition of the blockade they have largely been able to continue to supply basic food supplies. However, in 2010 UNRWA reported that 80 percent of Gazan households remained dependent on food aid. UNRWA itself provides such aid for 750,000 people—more than half the population. A joint report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Food Programme in February 2011 also reported that the prevalence of food insecurity remained far higher in the Gaza Strip in comparison with the West Bank, with over 52 percent of households there described as “food insecure”, in comparison with 22 percent in the West Bank.³²

The graph below illustrates these findings:



(Source: World Food Programme and UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, [Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey, West Bank and Gaza Strip, occupied Palestinian territory](#), February 2011, p 8)

3.2 Infrastructure and Housing

Since the beginning of the blockade in 2007, and exacerbated by the destruction caused by Operation *Cast Lead*, Gazans have faced severe difficulties in repairing public infrastructure—including hospitals, schools, electric systems and sewage treatment plants. Those attempting reconstruction work faced difficulty gaining approval for such projects and sourcing materials such as steel, concrete and tiles designated as “dual purpose”, in other words materials which could, according to Israel, be used for both rebuilding and for the manufacture of weapons. Similarly, such restrictions have severely inhibited the construction of homes in Gaza, despite severe and ongoing need.

The easing of restrictions in June 2010 has had some effect. The recent OCHA report *Easing the Blockade: assessing the humanitarian impact on the population of the Gaza Strip*, recorded that there has been a subsequent increase in the availability of some raw

³¹ France 24, ‘[1,000 days of the Gaza Blockade](#)’, 2 June 2010; *Guardian*, ‘[Gaza’s markets of unaffordable goods conceal reality of people under siege](#)’, 4 June 2010.

³² World Food Programme and UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, *Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey, West Bank and Gaza Strip, occupied Palestinian territory*, February 2011, p 9.

materials—though only a fraction of this has come through authorised channels, and remains dwarfed by the volume of black market goods smuggled into Gaza through the tunnel network—and an increase in the approval and implementation of a number of housing and infrastructure projects funded by international organisations.³³ However, that same report stated that because of restrictions still in place only a fraction of the 40,000 housing units, needed both to meet natural population growth and the loss of homes during Operation *Cast Lead*, could actually be constructed.³⁴ It also remains the case that only international organisations are allowed to legally import restricted construction materials, subject to protracted and complex entry permit procedures.

3.3 Access to Services

The difficulties in repairing infrastructure in Gaza has led to a decline both in the condition of public buildings and in access to vital services. The impact on water and sanitation in Gaza, for example, has been significant. Despite Israeli approval for projects to improve water and sanitation since the easing of restrictions, OCHA reports that 50–80 million litres of partially treated sewage are still being dumped into the sea off the Gazan coast each day.³⁵ Furthermore, 90 percent of the water in the Gazan aquifer—the sole fresh water source in Gaza—is undrinkable.³⁶ The result is that the majority of the population is forced to purchase water from small-scale desalination plants, most of which are privately owned and are subject to little or no regulation or quality control.

The inability to construct new classrooms and schools has also had a severe impact on the quality of education available in Gaza. Before the blockade the majority of schools operated on double shifts to cope with overcrowding. However, a growing population, combined with the impact of the blockade and the destruction of 18 schools and kindergartens during Operation *Cast Lead*—and damage to 250 more—has severely exacerbated the problem. OCHA recorded in May 2011 that 79 percent of Ministry of Education (MoE) schools and over 90 percent of UNWRA schools were running on either double or triple shifts.³⁷ Since the blockade was eased in June 2010 the construction of some new schools has begun or resumed, but still remains only a fraction of what is needed.

Similarly, in the area of health, OCHA records that the ability of the health service in Gaza to function has been severely affected by the inability to upgrade its physical infrastructure and by a lack of supplies. As highlighted by the World Health Organisation in 2010, many specialised treatments, for example, for complex heart surgery and certain types of cancer, are not available in Gaza. Patients are therefore referred for treatment to hospitals outside the Gaza Strip, but many have had applications for exit permits denied or delayed by the Israeli Authorities and have missed their appointments, meaning some have died while waiting for referral.³⁸ Approximately one-third of items on the essential drug list in Gaza are also out of stock.³⁹

³³ UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Easing the Blockade: assessing the humanitarian impact on the population of the Gaza Strip*, March 2011, p 1.

³⁴ *ibid*, p 1.

³⁵ UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Situation in the Gaza Strip*, October 2011 Bulletin, p 2.

³⁶ *ibid*, p 17.

³⁷ *ibid*, p 18.

³⁸ World Health Organisation, [Gaza Health Fact Sheet](#), 20 January 2010.

³⁹ UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Humanitarian Situation in the Gaza Strip*, October 2011 Bulletin, p 2.

Again, the situation has improved slightly since the easing of restrictions. In May 2011, OCHA recorded that at that time Israel had given approval for ten international projects, including the construction of four health clinics by UNWRA and the renovation and rehabilitation of a further six by international actors.⁴⁰ However, though these programmes are significant, they only address a fraction of the huge need for health services and infrastructure in Gaza.

3.4 Wider Economy in Gaza

Food insecurity, restricted access to services, and difficulties rebuilding infrastructure and housing, are all exacerbated by the state of the wider economy in Gaza. In its latest bulletin on Gaza in October 2011, OCHA records that 26 percent of the Gazan workforce—including 38 percent of youths—are unemployed.⁴¹ According to UK Government statistics, 38 percent of the population in Gaza live in poverty.⁴² Despite recent signs of growth, GDP remains far below pre-blockade levels, leading the World Bank in its latest profile of Gaza to describe its economic situation as both “stagnant” and “dire”.⁴³

There has been some relief since the easing of restrictions, particularly in the area of manufacturing. Increasing access to formerly restricted goods, including raw materials, has led to a growth in sales and in the work available for manufacturing companies, and an increase in employees in the manufacturing sector. However, the number employed in the sector at the end of 2010 was still less than half of those employed in the second quarter of 2007, prior to the blockade.⁴⁴ The NGO report *Dashed Hopes* also highlights that the remaining ban on exports continues to significantly undermine production, meaning the scale of economic activity in Gaza is dependent on local demand, which in turn is constrained by the low purchasing power of the population and the small size of the local market.⁴⁵ Rates of employment in the construction and agriculture sectors also remain significantly lower than 2007 pre-blockade levels.⁴⁶

4. UK Government Position

Ministers of the current Government have consistently described the situation in Gaza as “unacceptable and unsustainable”.⁴⁷ While it no longer considers there to be a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, the Government has stated that there remains an “enduring need” for humanitarian aid in Gaza, and continues to provide such aid indirectly through the PA and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.⁴⁸

The Foreign Secretary, William Hague, was critical of the Israeli raid on the *Mavi Marmara*, and called in the immediate aftermath for Israel to “open the crossings to allow unfettered access for aid to Gaza, and address the serious concerns about the

⁴⁰ France, USA and Belgium.

⁴¹ UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Situation in the Gaza Strip*, October 2011 Bulletin, p 2.

⁴² HC *Hansard*, 13 September 2011, col [248WH](#).

⁴³ World Bank website, ‘[West Bank and Gaza Country Brief](#)’.

⁴⁴ Manufacturing jobs increased to 8,500 by the fourth quarter of 2010, in comparison with 18,500 in summer 2007 (UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Easing the Blockade: assessing the humanitarian impact on the population of the Gaza Strip*, March 2011, p 18).

⁴⁵ Coalition of Non-Governmental Organisations, *Dashed Hopes: Continuation of the Gaza Blockade*, November 2010, p 3.

⁴⁶ UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Easing the Blockade: assessing the humanitarian impact on the population of the Gaza Strip*, March 2011, pp 7–11.

⁴⁷ HC *Hansard*, 13 September 2011, col [248WH](#); HL *Hansard*, 14 September 2011, col [WA66](#).

⁴⁸ HC *Hansard*, 11 July 2011, col [129W](#).

deterioration in the humanitarian and economic situation there”.⁴⁹ He added, in a statement to the House of Commons on the raid on 2 June 2010:

It has long been the view of the British Government, including the previous Government, that restrictions on Gaza should be lifted—a view confirmed in United Nations Security Council resolution 1860 which called for sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and which called on states to alleviate the humanitarian and economic situation.

That this has not happened is a tragedy. It is essential not only that there is unfettered access to meet the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza but also to enable the reconstruction of homes and livelihoods and to permit trade to take place.⁵⁰

Mr Hague added:

We will... continue to press the Israeli Government to lift the closure of Gaza, and plan early discussions with Israel as well as our other international partners about what more can be done to ensure an unfettered flow of aid while ensuring that aid reaches those who need it and is not abused.⁵¹

The Government welcomed the easing of blockade restrictions announced by Israel on 20 June 2010. However, it also stated that more needed to be done, particularly to ease restrictions on exports, construction material imports and the movement of people.⁵² During a debate on Gaza on 13 September 2011, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Stephen O’Brien, outlined what steps the Government was taking to encourage the lifting of current restrictions:

What is the UK doing? We continue to press the Israeli Government bilaterally to ease the movement and access restrictions. We have consistently lobbied the Israeli Government at ministerial and official level, in close co-ordination with the office of the Quartet representative and European Union partners. The Department for International Development supports the UN Access Co-ordination Unit to work with the United Nations, Israel, the Palestinian Authority and aid agencies to facilitate the transfer of vital humanitarian assistance, including medical equipment and supplies, in and out of Gaza. DFID has also contributed to a greater international understanding of the situation in Gaza and the impact of the blockade.⁵³

⁴⁹ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, ‘[Foreign Secretary Statement on Gaza Flotilla](#)’, 31 May 2010.

⁵⁰ HC *Hansard*, 2 June 2010, cols [438–9](#).

⁵¹ *ibid*, col 439.

⁵² HC *Hansard*, 13 September 2011, col [248WH](#).

⁵³ *ibid*, col [249WH](#).

