

Seizing the moment: Gaza donors' conference

*Addressing humanitarian consequences of violence is just the first step
Dealing with its causes is the next*

KEY MESSAGES

- The reconstruction of Gaza after the latest round of conflict will cost \$6 billion, and could take decades. Simply pledging more money at the donor conference in Cairo in October is not the solution.
- As the cycle of violence continues, Israelis and Palestinians are heading towards a state of near-permanent conflict. Donors can and should play a more assertive role by demanding a clear timetable and milestones for negotiations.
- It is in the interest of Israelis and Palestinians to find a durable solution to the conflict, and donors should support this - and if need be put pressure on both sides to make progress.

Introduction

On 12 October Egypt and Norway will host a donor conference in Cairo to raise funds for the rebuilding of Gaza following the recent conflict there. It is hoped that the conference will help generate \$5 billion.

The latest round of violence in Gaza this summer killed 2,142 Palestinians and 69 Israelis. Gaza's already fragile infrastructure has been badly degraded; the Palestinian Authority estimates that reconstruction will cost \$6bn¹, and could take decades if Israeli restrictions on the import of building materials are not lifted². Donors are wary of financing yet more reconstruction, and raising the necessary sums will be difficult. The UN's humanitarian funding appeal alone asks for \$550 million, but it is unlikely that donors will pledge this much when they meet in Cairo.

The UN and donor governments are demanding that Israel lift its restrictions on goods and movement into and out of Gaza as a precondition for any

reconstruction support. According to Norway's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Borge Brende, 'donors intend to send a clear signal that the fundamental situation in Gaza must be changed. Gaza cannot be simply rebuilt in the same way as it has been before. The international community cannot necessarily be expected to contribute to yet another reconstruction effort'³. Counter-terrorism legislation poses an additional challenge. Hamas, the governing authority in Gaza, is considered a terrorist organisation by several key donors, including the US, the UK and the European Union (EU). This means that the money provided by donors comes with the condition that it does not benefit Hamas, and that aid organisations receiving funds have no contact with the organisation. As a result, aid agencies have to use up valuable resources in applying for applications for exemptions and checking that partner organisations are not listed as terrorist organisations. They also have to bypass line ministries, municipalities and government or public entities or risk being in breach of counter-terror legislation.

1 'Palestinian Official: Rebuilding Gaza Will Cost \$6 Billion', VOA News, 3 August 2014. <http://www.voanews.com/content/palestinian-official-at-least-6-billion-to-rebuild-gaza/1970960.html>

2 'Rebuilding Gaza Will Take 20 Years, Housing Group Says', Huffington Post, 30 August 2014. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/30/rebuilding-gaza_n_5740884.html

3 'Norway and Egypt to host donor conference for Gaza', Ministry of Foreign Affairs Norway, 18 August 2014. http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/press/news/2014/host_conference.html?id=765944

The blockade

What is shown on the news is the bombing, the rockets, the death and destruction and the fear and desperation of the people caught up in the conflict. What is not, or only rarely, shown is the impact the Israeli blockade and the separation between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have had on the daily lives of Palestinians. High unemployment, food insecurity and deepening poverty are all signs of Gaza's failing economy.

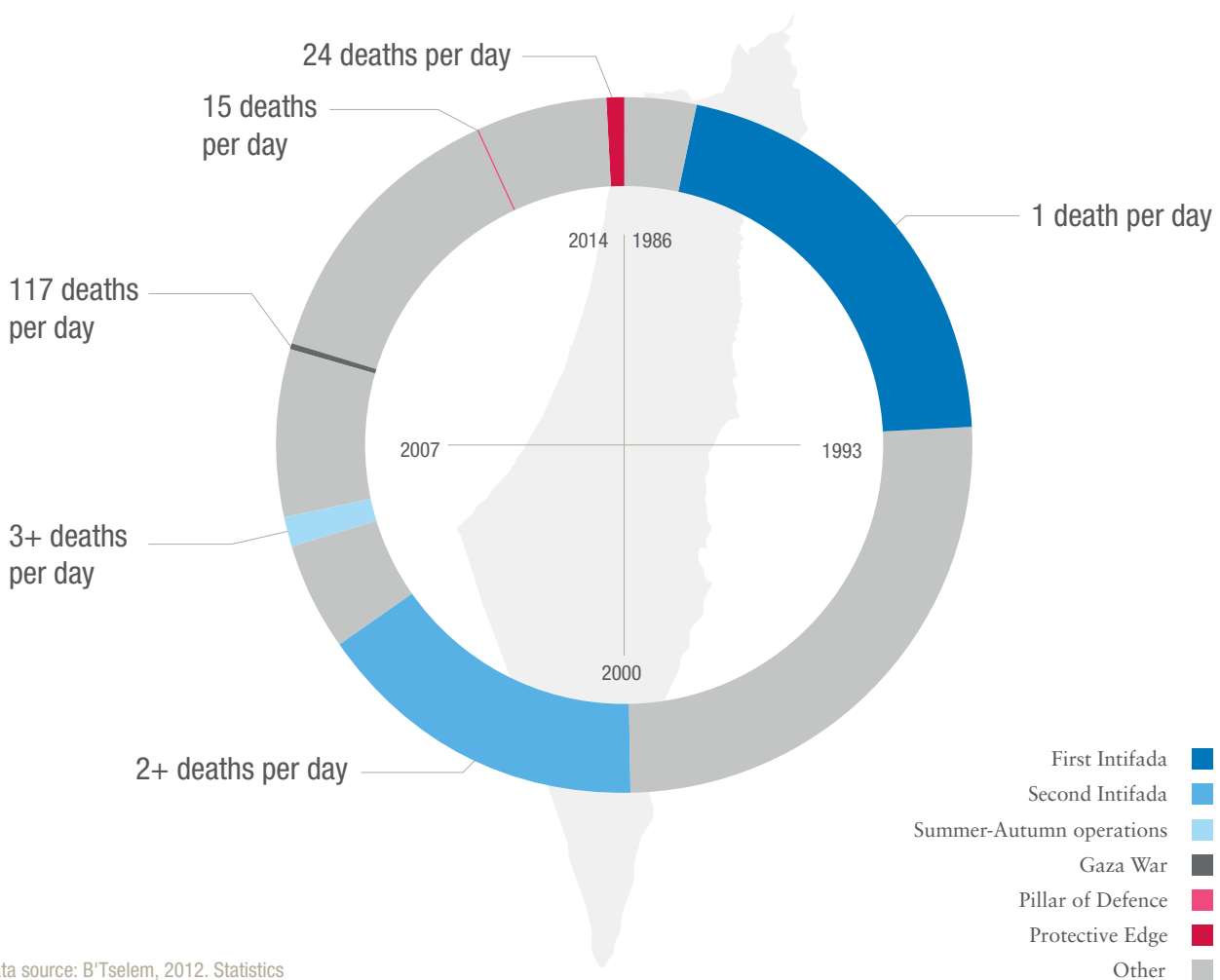
Israel imposed its blockade seven years ago, in 2007, following an escalation of violence between Hamas and Fatah and a sharp increase in rocket attacks on Israel. Restrictions include limits on the supply of fuel and electricity from Israel to Gaza, the transfer of

goods through border crossings and the movement of people to and from Gaza. The blockade has resulted in a steady deterioration in living conditions. The prohibition on imports of any materials that might be considered dual-purpose and the severe restrictions on movement have ravaged the economy and left most Gazans dependent on aid. Palestinians do not die of hunger – they have enough to survive – but they do not have enough to live in dignity.

In an effort to facilitate the import of construction materials, while reassuring Israel that so-called dual-use items do not fall into the hands of militants, the UN, the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority have recently reached a deal under which Israeli approval of UN projects will require only minimal information. This should speed up

Time to end the cycle of violence

Deaths per day during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict



Data source: B'Tselem, 2012. Statistics

implementation and hopefully facilitate the import of items essential for reconstruction. More immediately, it should ease the shortage of drugs and other essential items required to address humanitarian needs. The focus for now must be on addressing the humanitarian consequences of the conflict, including providing adequate shelter, water and medical care. The immediate priorities are clear, but hopefully Palestinians and Israelis will not lose sight of the need to address the wider political issues once the most urgent needs have been tackled.

What next?

Simply providing more money is not the solution. Funds will be needed to rebuild Gaza, but money is only useful if it can be dispensed. Past efforts to rebuild Gaza have been severely hampered by the blockade. After Operation Cast Lead in 2009, donors pledged \$1.3bn to help with the recovery; a year later, little of the damage had been repaired.

If the two sides decide to seriously negotiate a two-state solution then the latest ceasefire is only the beginning of what will undoubtedly be a long and difficult process. However, leaving things as they are will most likely lead to more violence in the future. With every bout of violence the hatred, anger and resentment on both sides will become more entrenched, and what little hope there is that things will change will at some point disappear forever. Speaking in August, the Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process was blunt about the prospects if matters are left as they are, and warned that the current negative trend, if not reversed, was leading towards a state of permanent conflict and hopelessness.

As a next step following the donors' conference, efforts must focus on immediate humanitarian

needs. But these efforts will not be sufficient if they are not accompanied in the medium and long term by concrete steps to address the drivers of conflict. To that end a direct meeting between the two sides should take place as soon as possible. Such a meeting, initially away from the cameras, might be helpful, although any agreement reached secretly between leaders will not hold if the Israeli and Palestinian public does not support it. Although Israelis and Palestinians want peace, they are also highly sceptical of recent peace initiatives and recurrent cycles of violence have reduced their confidence that peace can be achieved. There must be a clear commitment to put people first. Ordinary Palestinians and Israelis have for too long been at the receiving end of the political whims, agendas and trade-offs of their governments and the wider international community in a conflict which polarises opinions not only among Israelis and Palestinians. Political bargaining and short-term trade-offs have had a major impact on people on both sides.

It is hoped that the recent agreement between Fatah and Hamas on the administration of Gaza will hold beyond the immediate objective of reaching a durable ceasefire and the easing of the blockade, and will pave the way for future negotiations. Donors can and should play a more assertive role by demanding a clear timetable and milestones. Strict adherence to such a plan may not be possible at all times, but sustained support and pressure from donors can help in meeting targets. This will require a commitment from donors that goes beyond the pledging conference.

Violence affects both Israelis and Palestinians. It is in both their interests to stop it and find a durable solution that will allow them to live in safety and economic prosperity. And it is in the interest of donors to support and if need be push them in that process.



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