



## Gaza ceasefire agreement

Standard Note: SN06969

Last updated: 29 August 2014

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Section International Affairs and Defence Section

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A ceasefire agreement was signed on 26 August, putting an end to seven weeks of hostilities between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza. Israel had been conducting air strikes since 7 July, with the aim of preventing militants from firing rockets into Israeli territory. Israeli ground incursions also took place between 17 July and 5 August. This Note provides a brief chronology of the conflict, and summarises the content of the ceasefire agreement.

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## 1 Introduction

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## 2 Gaza: political background

The Gaza Strip (Gaza) has been under the occupation of Israel since 1967, and along with the West Bank is known as the Occupied Palestinian Territory. From the beginning of the occupation until the mid-1990s, these territories were under full Israeli control. Much of the Gaza Strip came under the control of the Palestinian Authority following the signing of the Oslo Accords;<sup>1</sup> the remainder of Gaza remained under Israeli control until 2005, when the PA assumed control of the whole Gaza Strip.<sup>2</sup>

The most recent Palestinian Authority legislative elections took place in January 2006, leaving Hamas as the largest party.<sup>3</sup> Hamas refuses to recognise the state of Israel. Following the elections Hamas formed a coalition administration alongside the more moderate (and previously ruling) Fatah.<sup>4</sup> However, in June 2007, tensions between the two parties spilled over into armed conflict. Hamas seized control of Gaza by force,<sup>5</sup> leaving a separate Fatah administration in control of the West Bank.<sup>6</sup> Following the Hamas takeover of Gaza, the Government of Israel imposed a number of significant restrictions on Gaza. Under these new conditions, residents of Gaza were not generally allowed to leave the territory.

On 23 April 2014 it was announced that Fatah and Hamas had signed a reconciliation agreement:<sup>7</sup> a unity Government was formed within weeks, with jurisdiction over both the West Bank and Gaza. Whilst the Cabinet has the support of both Fatah and Hamas, its makeup is primarily technocratic: there are no Hamas ministers.<sup>8</sup> Although the unity Government officially has jurisdiction over both the West Bank and Gaza, Hamas remains in de facto control of Gaza.<sup>9</sup> Further details are available in the [House of Commons Library Standard Note](#) on the subject.

In response to Fatah's reconciliation with Hamas (which does not recognise Israel's right to exist), Israel suspended its direct, US-brokered talks with the Palestinians indefinitely. The talks, which have been underway since August 2013,<sup>10</sup> sought to make progress towards ending the occupation by means of a two-state solution (i.e. the creation of a Palestinian state).<sup>11</sup> The talks had already run into significant difficulties before their eventual suspension. Each side's participation in the talks had been conditional on certain

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP, *About the occupied Palestinian territory* (accessed on 30 June 2014)

<sup>2</sup> "Israel completes Gaza withdrawal", *BBC News website*, 12 September 2005

<sup>3</sup> "Hamas celebrates election victory", *The Guardian*, 26 January 2006

<sup>4</sup> "Israel snubs Palestinian coalition", *The Guardian*, 18 March 2007

<sup>5</sup> "Hamas takes control of Gaza", *The Guardian*, 15 June 2007

<sup>6</sup> International Development Committee, *The UK's Development Work in the Middle East*, [evidence submitted by DFID](#)

<sup>7</sup> "Fatah and the Hamas agree unity government", *The Telegraph*, 23 April 2014

<sup>8</sup> "Palestinian unity government of Fatah and Hamas sworn in", *The Guardian*, 2 June 2014

<sup>9</sup> "Thousands of Israelis rally for abducted youths", *Boston Herald*, 29 June 2014.

<sup>10</sup> "Israel suspends peace talks with Palestinians after Fatah-Hamas deal", *Guardian*, 24 April

<sup>11</sup> International Development Committee, *The UK's Development Work in the Middle East*, [evidence submitted by DFID](#)

concessions made by the other side: Israel agreed to release 104 Palestinian prisoners, whilst the Palestinians agreed to refrain from upgrading their membership of UN organisations.<sup>12</sup> In early April Israel demanded the “review” of the peace process, and cancelled the release of the final tranche of Palestinian prisoners. This was a response to the Palestinian Authority’s decision to resume its campaign for membership of 15 UN organisations; for the Palestinians, the decision to pursue the UN “route” was itself a response to delays in the prisoners’ release.<sup>13</sup>

### 3 Chronology of events

Tensions between Israel and Hamas increased markedly during June 2014, following the abduction and murder of three Israeli teenagers in Area C of the West Bank. Israel claimed that Hamas was responsible for the killings (though Hamas did not accept responsibility until August<sup>14</sup>), and Israeli forces entered Palestinian-controlled areas of the West Bank to arrest over 300 suspects. Prior to the discovery of the bodies on 30 June, the Palestinian Authority had agreed to cooperate with the Israeli search effort, but the PA also criticised the perceived excesses of the Israeli operation, whilst many ordinary Palestinians protested against the Israeli incursions. Some protests turned violent, with a number of Palestinians being killed in clashes with Israeli forces. Another Palestinian boy was killed in a suspected “revenge” attack by Israeli extremists.<sup>15</sup>

On 7 July, following rocket attacks by Hamas,<sup>16</sup> the Israeli military launched a large military operation in Gaza. The operation initially consisted of air strikes alone, but from 17 July the Israeli military began conducting ground incursions into the Gaza Strip.<sup>17</sup> Israel’s objectives were to target Hamas militants and the infrastructure used to launch attacks on Israel. In particular, Israel was seeking to destroy a series of underground tunnels leading from Gaza into Israel. All known tunnels were successfully destroyed by early August, and the ground incursions came to an end on 5 August<sup>18</sup> – though air strikes (and rocket attacks from Gaza) continued.

The hostilities ended on 26 August, when an open-ended ceasefire came into effect following mediation by Egypt.<sup>19</sup> There were also a number of short-term ceasefires during the conflict, some of which were more fully observed than others. Examples include the following:

- 17 July: five-hour ceasefire;<sup>20</sup>
- 20 July: two-hour ceasefire, interrupted by crossfire but subsequently extended for a further hour;<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> International Development Committee, *The UK’s Development Work in the Middle East*, [evidence submitted by DFID](#)

<sup>13</sup> "Israel scraps the release of Palestine prisoners as talks are 'reviewed'", *Guardian*, 3 April

<sup>14</sup> "What's in the Gaza peace deal?", *Reuters*, 26 August 2014.

<sup>15</sup> R Page, *Abduction and murder of Israeli teenagers*, House of Commons Library Standard Note SN06928, as amended 3 July 2014

<sup>16</sup> "How Politics and Lies Triggered an Unintended War in Gaza", *Forward*, 10 July 2014.

<sup>17</sup> "Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Emergency Situation Report (as of 18 July 2014, 1500 hrs)", *OCHA*, 19 July 2014

<sup>18</sup> "New Gaza cease-fire begins as Israel withdraws troops", *Los Angeles Times*, 5 August 2014

<sup>19</sup> "What's in the Gaza peace deal?", *Reuters*, 26 August 2014.

<sup>20</sup> "Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Emergency Situation Report (as of 16 July 2014, 1500 hours)", *OCHA*, 17 July 2014

<sup>21</sup> "Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Emergency Situation Report (as of 20 July 2014, 1500 hrs)", *OCHA*, 21 July 2014

- 26 July: 12-hour ceasefire;<sup>22</sup>
- From 1 August: 72-hour ceasefire, broke down almost immediately;<sup>23</sup>
- From 5 August: 72-hour ceasefire;<sup>24</sup>
- From 10 August, 72-hour ceasefire, extended for a further 120 hours from 13 August.<sup>25</sup>

## 4 Casualties

During the conflict, 65 Israeli soldiers plus four Israeli civilians (and one foreign national in Israel) were killed. Casualties amongst Palestinians were far higher. According to UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) figures, 2,104 Palestinians were killed, it was reported that at least 1,973 Palestinians had been killed, including 1,462 civilians.<sup>26</sup>

## 5 Terms of ceasefire deal

The ceasefire agreement was signed not only by Israel and Hamas, but also by the Palestinian Authority and by Islamic Jihad (another militant group operating in Gaza).<sup>27</sup> Terms of the ceasefire deal included the following:

- Israel agreed to lift some of its restrictions on Gaza. Specifically, Israel agreed to:
  - open more of its border crossings with Gaza to allow the easier flow of goods, including humanitarian aid and reconstruction equipment, into the coastal enclave.
  - allow Palestinians to fish in waters up to six miles off the coast of Gaza (as opposed to three miles previously). This may be extended further in due course: Palestinians are seeking an extension to twelve miles.
- Israel is also expected to reduce the width of the “buffer zone” on the Gaza-Israel border, from 300m to 100m. (There have been allegations of International Humanitarian Law violations in the buffer zone: Palestinian civilians in the buffer zone have been shot at by Israeli forces.<sup>28</sup>)
- The PA, rather than Hamas, will control Gaza’s borders.

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<sup>22</sup> "Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Emergency Situation Report (as of 26 July 2014, 1500 hrs)", OCHA, 27 August 2014

<sup>23</sup> "Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Emergency Situation Report (as of 1 August 2014, 1500 hrs)", OCHA, 2 August 2014

<sup>24</sup> "Gaza ceasefire enters second day as delegations prepare for Cairo talks", *Guardian*, 6 August 2014.

<sup>25</sup> "Gaza conflict: Israel and Hamas agree to extend ceasefire by five days", *Guardian*, 13 August 2014.

<sup>26</sup> "Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Emergency Situation Report (as of 28 August 2014, 0800 hrs)", OCHA, 28 August 2014

<sup>27</sup> "Gaza ceasefire: Israel and Palestinians agree to halt weeks of fighting", *Guardian*, 27 August 2014.

<sup>28</sup> "The Legality of the Land "Buffer Zone" in the Gaza Strip", *Diakonia International Humanitarian Law Resource Centre*, 21 November 2013.

In a separate bilateral agreement, Egypt will agree to open its border crossing with Gaza. In addition, both Israel and the Palestinians have agreed to take part in further indirect talks. These talks are due to begin by late September, and will cover the following issues:

- Palestinian prisoners: The PA is seeking the release of the final tranche of prisoners whose release was cancelled by Israel in early April. Hamas is seeking the release of those who were arrested in connection with the abduction and murder of the three Israeli teenagers in June.
- Airport: Palestinians are seeking the reconstruction of Gaza's airport, which closed in 2000.
- Sea port: Hamas is seeking the construction of a sea port in Gaza.
- Israeli soldiers: Israel wants Hamas to hand over the remains and personal belongings of all Israeli soldiers killed during the hostilities.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> ["What's in the Gaza peace deal?"](#), *Reuters*, 26 August 2014.