

GAZA

It must also be said, however, that after its takeover in Gaza, Hamas's concerted effort to recruit a large police force, even instating all-female units, succeeded in almost completely eradicating the phenomenon of kidnapping.



Fateh-aligned forces in Gaza



“When a Palestinian child paints a picture of the sky, there's always an Israeli helicopter there, too.”

Avi Dichter, former head of the Israeli General Security Service, 31 May 2005

How much of a concern is crime that does not stem from Israeli actions or fighting between Hamas and Fateh?

Non-political violations occurred as a result of the PA's inability to enforce the law, a circumstance that has been used as a pretext by families and clans in order to apply their own private



justice, which led to increased confrontations and revenge acts, including incidents of kidnappings and deadly shootings.

The interrelation between rivaling security forces, resistance groups, lawlessness, and family feuds was most clearly reflected in the phenomenon of the abductions of foreigners. Between September 2005 (the first month after “disengagement”) and the takeover by Hamas in June 2007,

28 foreign journalists or aid workers were kidnapped by armed groups in Gaza, in most cases to press for internal Palestinian demands, such as provision of jobs or firing of corrupt officials. Though most abductions ended after a few hours or days, the case of BBC correspondent Alan Johnston was a notable exception. Since taking power, however, Hamas has effectively put a stop to the abduction of foreigners and made crime reduction a top priority.

A Final Note:

The contemporary story of Gaza is one of sadness and loss, as occupation and isolation have made recent years some of the most trying in the territory's long history. It is not even clear which of the current woes is the most dire: Is it the lack of food and fuel, the constant military operations, the tragic split between Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, or one of the many other tribulations? One year after the Hamas takeover, and almost three years since Israel's unilateral disengagement, the fate of Gaza remains largely outside of Palestinian control. While the most pressing issue for the Palestinian leadership is ending the factional discord, they must also contend with the numerous outside entities that, for better or worse, are influencing the direction of the conflict.

The US and the EU nations have held to their standard line of calling on all Palestinians to reject terrorism and recognize Israel. While President Bush has repeatedly expressed his support for a solution that creates “two democratic states”, he has also overseen a failing peace process and contributed to the division between Gaza and the West Bank. In June 2008, for example, he addressed the Palestinians in a speech given in Paris: “You support us and you're going to get a state. You support Hamas, and you're going to get Gaza. Take your pick.”²⁹ In terms of political action, the EU nations have done little to free the Palestinians in Gaza and bring an end to the conflict, and they have rarely deviated from US policy.

Leaders in the Arab world have welcomed intra-Palestinian dialogue, though there has been no visible presence to ensure that there is follow-through on any agreements that are reached. Egypt has been more active than any other Arab nation when it comes to Gaza, as the Egyptians have acted as liaisons on three fronts: negotiating with Hamas on control of the Rafah crossing, mediating talks between Hamas and Israel towards a ceasefire, and attempting to broker an agreement between Hamas and Fateh.

Even with all of these outside influences, it is clear to Palestinians that the events of June 2007 and the deepening divide between the two territories may be the only issue that is within their control to resolve. The Hamas-Fateh split has distorted the Palestinian identity and shaken the people's confidence in the national cause, and the aspirations of Palestinians in Gaza have been minimized to daily battle concerning food, salaries, and movement in a culture of survival. There is an absence of strong leadership in a time when Palestinians are looking for a hero to end the tragedy in Gaza and a national strategy that can restore hope for freedom and independence in Palestine.

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Further reading:

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²⁹ “President Bush Participates in Joint Press Availability with President Sarkozy of France”. Transcript on www.Whitehouse.gov. 14 June 2008.