What’s Wrong with Gaza?
Why Won’t Hamas Make Peace?

Welcome!!

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Israel's Netanyahu says no ceasefire with Gaza if arson attacks continue
Outline
• My most recent visit to Gaza
• “The Great March of Return”
• What did I see/learn?
• My conclusions

Break
• Who, or what is Hamas?
• Where does Hamas come from”?
• Why is it still in power today in Gaza?
• What do people in Gaza think about Hamas?
• Why doesn’t Hamas make peace with Israel?

Conclusions
Area
365 km sq
(vs. Ottawa 2778 km sq)

Population
1.8 million
(Of which 40% under 25)
80% refugees

Religion
99.9% Muslim
Small Christian community

Education
100% literacy
6 universities

GDP/person
$600/month
(cf Canada $5000, Israel $4000/ month)
Mostly foreign aid
Gaza is under siege (or blockade) by Israel

- Israel has erected a fence on all sides in 2007
- Blockaded by land, sea and air
- Extra “No-go zone” of 300 m inside Gaza
- Need Israeli permission to enter or exit
Recent history of Gaza

- 2006 Palestinian elections – Hamas wins but prevented from taking over the Palestinian government – except in Gaza
- Israel blockades Gaza
- Hamas tries to get around blockade by building tunnels - which Israel bombs

Tunnels bring in
- Fuel
- Food
- Basic necessities
- Weapons, Etc.

Hamas sends rockets into Israel
And then.....

*Photo credit: Reuters News Agency*
Israel responds with massive and overwhelming force

Seems a hopeless cycle:

- 2008 “Hot Winter”
- 2008/9 – “Cast lead”
- 2012 – “Pillar of Defence”
- 2014 – “Protective Edge”
Results of Israeli operation “Protective Edge” 2014

- 1800 Palestinian deaths vs 71 Israelis – source: CNN
- 90,000 Palestinians displaced or homeless – source: UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

The world feels sorry for the Palestinians

But also sympathizes with Israel which claims it is fighting terrorism
March 31, 2018 Palestinians announce they will try a new tactic...

Great March of Return

To demand “right of return” for Palestinians and an end to blockade

Intended to be a non-violent demonstration

Thousands of unarmed people march to Israeli fence and demand right to return

Israel announces it has posted 80 snipers
March of Return protest
Friday, April 27th

My first taste of tear gas
(I didn’t like it very much)

But ...

what was I doing in Gaza in the first place?
Why was I in Gaza at all?

I was invited to teach English
A great opportunity to meet and talk with 24 young Palestinian women about themselves and their families
What did I do?

Lesson plan

• Individually - write about yourself and family
• Video on Canada – and test
• Conversation about current events
What did I learn?

- All born in Gaza
  - Their parents (or grandparents) were made refugees in 1948 from what is now Israel
  - All of them are stateless
  - Only 3 have EVER been out of Gaza

- Most could point to the village their family was from

- Many still have relatives inside Israel, or West Bank or elsewhere but whom they have never seen

- They all said they would like to travel

- But most would want to live in Gaza if it were safe and if there was work
How do they feel?

• Sad, angry, frustrated
• Claustrophobic, cut off from the world and forgotten
• Their biggest wish is to travel outside Gaza

• But they also complained about very difficult living conditions
  • Electricity only 4 hours a day
  • Beaches are polluted
  • Water sources contaminated
  • Day and night drones/planes flying over
  • No parks, playgrounds, museums, etc.
  • No jobs and no future

• Many also had complaints about Hamas – “too strict, old fashioned, can’t win”

A common fantasy

Romantic dinner – Gaza style
– by cellphone light
What about the March of Return?

- Everyone said they supported the idea of the march
- But... only half of them said they had gone
- Several said they were “a little bit scared” to go
- A couple were pessimistic - didn’t think the march would do any good = “nobody cares about us”
All angry/frustrated by the Israeli blockade
Some thought they should assault the Israeli “fence” en masse
Others were pessimistic, said Israel would shoot them all and the world would ignore it
After talking to dozens of young people, I conclude that

Many (most? All?) young, educated people in Gaza are fed up with the blockade
- They want out
- They feel they have been “prisoners” all their lives
- They don’t understand world indifference
- They want the right to return
- They blame Israel for their misery
- They want to be heard

- One man had an idea...
Introducing Ahmed Abu Rtema

https://youtu.be/LcKGLOzv9WE
They came in tens of thousands

Men, women, children
Includes representatives from:

- university faculty,
- refugee camps,
- NGO’s,
- Palestine Bar Association,
- student unions
- political parties: i.e. Hamas, Fateh, etc.
- women’s organizations, etc. etc.

"Higher National Commission for Lifting the Siege"

Envisaged as a non violent popular protest a la MLK, Mandela, Gandhi, etc.
How did it work?

- 5 “camps” were set up just outside “no go zone” (300 metres inside Gaza strip)
- Tents set up for villages
- Food stands
- Music
- Dancing
- Big demonstrations every Friday
- To be repeated until May 15th
Tents, dancing, music
Mostly a big “sit in” in the Israeli “no go zone”
An act of defiance
Banners reminding where refugees came from in 1948
But the braver ones go even closer to the Israeli “fence”

- Call names at the Israeli soldiers
- Burn tires
- Throw stones
- Slingshots
- Even try to cut the “second fence”
- Threaten to “break through”
Smoke, burning tires and slingshots make for colourful images

But stones or Molotov cocktails rarely reach Israeli fence

For first several weeks NO Israelis reported killed or even injured
Met with deadly force by Israel

- Snipers
- Tear gas
- Tank shelling
- And later, even aerial bombardment

Photo credit: Time
At first the Western press was sympathetic to the plight of the Gazans

“The fence between Gaza and Israel is no ordinary border.

“Gaza is a prison, not a state. (...) it is one of the most crowded and miserable places on Earth. It is short of medicine, power and other essentials. The tap water is undrinkable: untreated sewage is pumped into the sea. (...) “Israel, Egypt, and the PA cannot just lock away the Palestinians in Gaza in the hope that Hamas will be overthrown.”

Economist Editorial, May 19th, 2018
Israeli public relations response

- Blame Hamas
- Divert attention away from basic issues
- Denounce Palestinian violence
- Present march as threat to Israel
- We have the right to protect our borders
- Refuse an international investigation

Defense minister: Hamas to blame for Palestinian teen’s death in border riot

Four Palestinians, including 15-year-old, killed in border riots
Friday • EU, U.N. demand investigation into shootings of Palestinian protesters by IDF • Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman: Hamas' cowardly leaders use women and children as human shields.

Daniel Siryoti, Nikki Guttman, Shlomo Cesana, News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff
As sensational photos appeared to show Palestinian aggression western public opinion changed
“We discouraged burning Israeli flags and attaching Molotov cocktails to kites; (...) we want peaceful, equal coexistence to be our message”

“but (...) when a movement becomes this large—attracting (...) as many as 200,000 people on Fridays — it cannot be completely controlled.

Ahmed Abu Rtaima, 33
Member of Higher Committee
His December Facebook post planted the seed for the march

- NYTimes OpEd, May 14th, 2019
Hamas divided

“(Hamas) was under pressure from militants to avenge the dead. But Mr Sinwar announced on Al Jazeera that Hamas would pursue peaceful, popular resistance”.

The Economist Magazine, May 26 2018

Something new: even Hamas leader talking non-violence!!
My conclusions

- Young Palestinians are frustrated by the blockade and want to get out
- Great March of Return was an expression of this frustration
- Adoption of non-violent approach was an attempt to change in tactic

Results?

- Hundreds killed (156) and thousands injured.
- For a few weeks, Gaza/refugee issue back on the international agenda
- Israel on the defensive – harder to gain world sympathy as a victim
- Tareq Loubani incident
But then???

• Western attention dropped off

• As non violent action seemed ineffective, more aggressive acts by Palestinians – kites, even a few snipers from Gaza side

• Eventually led to more fighting between Israel and Hamas – rocket attacks and powerful retaliation by Israel

• As before, death/injuries/destruction lopsided

• Israel regained control of narrative – protest no longer seen in the west as non-violent

• The non violent strategy failed, deaths and wounded were in vain.
What should Canada do?:

- We should encourage the Palestinians in their non-violent/peaceful protests.
- Pressure Israel to **end its blockade** of Gaza
- Demand that a **fair solution** be found for the Palestinian refugees in Gaza
- Offer **psychological support** for a traumatized generation of young people
- Promote massive **economic aid**/investment to help repair Gaza’s damaged infrastructure
Part 2 –

Who is Hamas and why won’t it make peace?
First World War
1914 - 1918

End of the
Ottoman Empire

Britain and
France eye
Middle East

English officer promises the Arabs that if they join the fight against the Ottomans Britain will assure their independence
But at the same time, back in Britain, a different promise to a different group…

England promises to favour a ‘national home for the Jewish People’ in Palestine

With a coy rider…

‘…it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country’.

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.
1923 - League of Nations officially gives British Mandate for Palestine

Britain resolves its contradictory promises by dividing “Palestine” in two

Appoints King Abdullah, a Hashemite, first king of Jordan

Appoints Herbert Samuel as military governor of “Palestine”
- Samuel's mandate to implement "Balfour Declaration"

- Under Britain, huge immigration of Yiddish speaking European Jews to Palestine

- Jews begin agitating for their own state

- Increasing friction between immigrant Jews local Palestinians (mostly Muslim and Christian)

- Britain attacked by Zionists - pulls out

- Turns over to UN
1947 Partition!!

1947 – UN votes to “partition” Palestine
- Arab State
- Jewish State

- European Jews are now 31% of total population, but are “awarded” 58% of the land, including most of the best land

- Jews accept, but Palestinians feel betrayed

- To have a Jewish majority, necessary to make Arabs leave and bring in more Jews
The Nakba
(Nov 1947 – August 1948)

- several massacres by Zionist militias
- 750,000 Palestinians fled for safety
- 500+ villages destroyed to prevent return
- land was confiscated by Israel
- (The Palestinians call this “the Naqba” (the disaster”)
About 250,000 fled to Gaza

All their property seized by new State of Israel

Ended up in tents in refugee camps

Protected by Egyptian army
Palestinian resistance after 1947/48

• Society devastated, leaderless, confused
• Many ideas about what to do:
  • First counted on UN (194)
  • Nasser and Pan-Arabism
  • Then formed Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)
• Israelis, backed by USA, far too strong
• Catastrophe of ‘67 war
• More refugees
• Growing criticism of Arafat’s leadership by Palestinians
• First Intifada 1987
• Founding of «Hamas»
What is “Hamas”?

• A Palestinian political party
• Name comes from HMS in Arabic or “Islamic Resistance Movement”
• Formed in 1987, during 1st intifada
• In opposition to the main secular Palestinian Party “Fateh”, which many felt was not standing up to Israel enough

Hamas was founded to liberate Palestine, including all of modern-day Israel, from Israeli occupation and to establish an Islamic state in the area that is now Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

- Wikipedia

The 1989 Hamas Charter - key points

- Hamas is the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine and declares its members to be Muslims who "fear God and raise the banner of Jihad in the face of the oppressors."

- There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are all a waste of time and vain endeavors.

- Hamas is tolerant of other religions as long as they "stop disputing the sovereignty of Islam in this region".

It had some very problematic parts, including some that are clearly anti-Semitic......

“It strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine, for under the wing of Islam followers of all religions can coexist in security and safety where their lives, possessions and rights are concerned...”

Hamas Charter Article 6
Excerpts from the Hamas covenant 1989

Article 22 - On the world wide power of Jews…

“The (Jews) were behind the French Revolution, the Communist revolution (...) With their money they formed secret societies, such as Freemasons, Rotary Clubs, the Lions and others in different parts of the world for the purpose of (...) achieving Zionist interests.

(...) They were behind World War I. (...) They obtained the Balfour Declaration, formed the League of Nations through which they could rule the world. (...) There is no war going on anywhere, without having their finger in it.

Article 32

“Their plan is embodied in the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion", and their present conduct is the best proof of what we are saying.”

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp
Hamas program

Claims Palestinians have the right to resist “Israeli occupation” and to fight to regain their country

It is designated by Israel, USA and Canada as a “terrorist organization”

Military wing is underground
Political wing is (semi) public

In 2005 announced it would engage in Palestinian elections scheduled for 2006
Jan 2006 Palestinian elections

Surprise – **Hamas wins a majority!!**

86 International observers say it was “free and fair

Israel and Bush administration shocked – refused to accept results (Canada, too)

Hamas proposes a “national unity” government with Abbas (Fateh)

Ignored

Israel and most Western countries continue to recognize Abbas and Fateh as “Palestinian government”
But after the elections.....

- With US support, Abbas retained control in the West Bank
- Tries to take over the government of Gaza, but Hamas too strong, retains control in Gaza
- Israel imposes an economic blockade on Gaza
- Today - Fateh/PA controls West Bank and Hamas controls Gaza
- Hamas candidates in West Bank arrested by Fatah
- No elections for the last 12 years, a stalemate
- Israel maintains blockade on Gaza
- Hamas puts up resistance, but is no match for Israeli military.
Hamas today

- Still has members all across Palestinian society – but in Israel, Jerusalem and WB have to be underground

- Internal structure unknown for fear of Israeli detention or assassination

- Total membership unknown

- Military wing
  - Estimated at several hundred, plus 10,000 – 15,000 “operatives”
  - Digs tunnels and occasionally fires rockets at Israel

- Political wing
  - Forms the government in Gaza
  - Provides “normal” government services (education, health, police, water, sewer, electricity, etc.

- Budget estimated at $70 million (2011), most from foreign donors (cf. $3.5 billion for Ottawa) (1/50th)
Gaza today

- 1.8 million
- 2/3 are refugees from 1948
- 40% under 25 years of age
- Wall/fence surrounds Gaza
- 360 km², (15% of Ottawa territory)
- UN resolution 194 guarantees ‘right to return’
- Israel refuses to allow return in order to preserve “Jewish majority”
Among other things, the new charter:

• Eliminates the crude anti-Semitic language of the earlier document.

• Specifies that its fight is against Zionism not against Jews.

• Downplays the Islamic/religious nature

• Opens the door to accepting a 2 state solution based on pre-67 borders.

• But retains its right to use military force

• Israel claims new charter is “not significant”
Hamas still wrestling with strong internal contradictions

On the one hand......

(The Hamas leader) was under pressure from militants to avenge the dead. But Mr Sinwar announced on Al Jazeera that Hamas would pursue “peaceful, popular resistance”.

The Economist Magazine, May 26 2018
But on the other, on July 24th...

“O Muslims, wherever you find a Zionist Jew, you must kill him because that is an expression of your solidarity with the al-Aqsa Mosque and an expression of your solidarity with... your Jerusalem, your Palestine and... your people,” said Hamad, a member of the Hamas politburo.
What does the future hold for Hamas… and for the Palestinians of Gaza?

Hamas (and Palestinian society generally) is having an internal debate:

A mainly military strategy – “We want our country back and are prepared to keep on fighting until we win”

Vs.

A mainly political strategy – “We need to mobilize international opinion on our side to pressure Israel to drop the punishing blockade and allow us to return”
Conclusions (1) What’s wrong in Gaza?

• The majority of the population of Gaza is composed of young, frustrated, stateless, desperate refugees

• Their living conditions are appalling and getting worse

• Israel will not allow them to return because they are not Jewish, and Western countries support Israel.

• They see this as western hypocrisy and racism. Their main demand is the “right of return” – a right officially supported by the UN

• They will support whatever political party or strategy offers them a plausible solution

• “Giving up” is not an option. If they “give up” the right of return, they are still young, frustrated and stateless.
Conclusions (2) Why won’t Hamas make peace?

Hamas won in 2006 because most Palestinians thought it would be better at defending their rights than Abbas and the current PLO leadership.

Israel has attacked Hamas fiercely and tried to turn the population against it by imposing a punishing blockade. But Hamas still has a lot of grudging support because it fights back and defies Israel.

Hamas is stuck:

- The strategy of military struggle against Israel is fruitless, as long as Israel has international support.
- But if Hamas were to “make peace” by giving up the idea of returning to the lands lost, it would lose popular support.
Final Conclusions (3)

• The Great March of Return was an attempt to bring international attention to the plight of the refugees in Gaza and bring pressure on Israel through non violent protests.

• It was not Hamas-led, although Hamas eventually played an important role.

• At first it seemed to be working:
  • Hundreds of Palestinians killed/injured and no Israeli injuries
  • Much international condemnation of Israel’s “excessive force”

• But it failed to gain sufficient Western support:
  • Images of anarchic violence (burning kites, burning Israeli flags, etc.) sabotaged it
  • The hope to be seen as a “non violent protest” was soon lost

• As it became clear that it was not mobilizing international support, the anarchism and violence became more pronounced.
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Why Won’t Hamas Make Peace?

Peter Larson
Canada Talks Israel Palestine

www.canadatalksisraelpalestine.ca
Gaza’s many divides today

- Old – Young
- Male – female
- Rich – poor
- “Gazans” vs. Refugees
- Muslim vs. Christian