



**Intelligence and Terrorism  
Information Center  
at the Israel Intelligence Heritage  
& Commemoration Center (IICC)**

22 January 2008

## **Closing the crossings into the Gaza Strip and renewing the fuel supply – the situation on the ground as of noon, January 22, 2008.**

---



**Diesel oil flows into the Gaza Strip through the fuel terminal at Nahal Oz (Muhammad Salem for Reuters, January 22, 2008).**

## Overview

1. Following the massive barrage of Hamas rockets fired at the western Negev towns and villages from the Gaza Strip, on January 17 Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak announced that the crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip would be closed and that no merchandise or fuel would enter **for a number of days**. On January 20 most of the crossings were closed: the **Karni Crossing** (used for the passage of merchandise), the **Nahal Oz Crossing** (used for the transfer of fuel) and the **Sufa** and **Kerem Shalom Crossings**. The **Erez Crossing** remained open for cases of humanitarian aid.

2. On the morning of January 22, a number of days after Hamas's massive rocket barrage, the Nahal Oz crossing reopened in a limited fashion following orders from the Israeli defense minister. On the same morning Israel renewed pumping **diesel fuel** into the Gaza Strip through the fuel terminal at Nahal Oz and cooking gas was again supplied. In addition, the transfer of **essential items** (such as drugs and milk) was authorized. The Palestinian Authority and Hamas represented the renewal of the transfer of fuel as a "victory" over Israel resulting from their energetic pan-Arab and international political and propaganda campaign. At the same time, Hamas was quick to make it clear that it would continue "the path of resistance and jihad" (i.e., the path of violence and terrorism).

3. The closing of the crossings **led to a lack of basic commodities and fuel**, and the residents congregated in the stores to stock up on necessary items. Because of the lack of fuel, Hamas decided to shut down Gaza's power plant, which supplies the Strip with 25% of its electricity. Following shutdown parts of central Gaza City were without power.<sup>1</sup>

4. **The lack of items caused by the closing of the crossing was made to seem worse by Hamas's propaganda campaign**, which enlisted

---

<sup>1</sup> It should be taken into consideration that the various power stations can be regulated among themselves. The local power stations supply only 25% of the electricity, while the northern and southern Gaza strip receive 70% of their electricity from Israel and 5% from Egypt.

children from Judea, Samaria and the “Palestinian diaspora.” Its objective was to vilify Israel and **create an atmosphere of panic and emergency**, and the image of a humanitarian crisis to provoke pan-Arab and international pressure. At the same time, Hamas exerted pressure on Egypt to open the **Rafah Crossing**.



**Left: Banner reading “Stop the siege of Gaza” (PalMedia Website, January 22). Right: Palestinian children holding candles in a rally to protest the power cuts to the Gaza Strip (Al-Aqsa TV, January 20).**

## The situation in the Gaza Strip –image and reality

5. The closing of the crossings led to a host of articles in the Palestinian, Arab and Western media about the **deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip**. On January 20 senior officers at the Gaza Strip power station announced that shutting it down would harm the operation of vital facilities, and that without a steady supply of fuel they found it difficult to operate the generators which ensure continued activity. **The deputy head of the Gaza Strip Energy Authority, Kanaan Obeid**, said that if the two stations in Gaza City stopped functioning, 50% of the city and 60% of the Gaza Strip would be without electricity. The **health ministry** of Ismail Haniya’s government, which had announced an emergency situation, claimed that hundreds of people were in danger of losing their lives and that some of the hospitals in the Gaza Strip had stopped performing operations. **UNWRA’s director of operations** in the Gaza Strip warned that stopping the flow of

electricity influenced every aspect of the residents' lives (Agence France Presse, January 21). He said that the agency would be forced to suspend its activities because of difficulties in storing food (AP, January 21).

6. An examination of the situation in the Gaza Strip following the closing of the crossings shows that there was in fact a **deterioration in the humanitarian situation** in the Gaza Strip but that Hamas's descriptions were **exaggerated and sometimes untrue**. The following table compares Hamas's claims with the reality of the situation:<sup>2</sup>

No.	<b>Hamas description</b>	<b>Actual situation</b>
1.	70% of Gaza Strip residents have no electricity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Palestinian professionals state that 40%-50% of Gaza Strip residents have no electricity.</li> <li>• The Palestinian Energy Authority geared up to distribute electricity received from Israel and channel it to hospitals and vital services.</li> </ul>
2.	The power station has closed down.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A deliberate shutting of the power station caused the disruptions in the power supply, mainly in Gaza City and its environs.</li> </ul>
3.	Vehicles stalled for lack of gasoline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are few cars on the road. According to reports from health officials, ambulances and other emergency vehicles are running.</li> </ul>
4.	Hospitals stopped performing operations and respirators have been turned off.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A state of emergency was declared in all hospitals. They continue functioning with regular power and generators.</li> </ul>

---

<sup>2</sup> Based on Israeli security and Palestinian sources.

5.	Five patients died as a result of the situation in the hospitals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As yet, hearsay information. Representatives of the Palestinian health services cannot provide the names of patients who died as a direct result of the situation.</li> </ul>
6.	The lack of flour has led all the bakeries in Gaza City (which also provide bread to the northern Gaza Strip) to close their doors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All the bakeries which were closed are now open.</li> </ul>
7.	According to an announcement from the Hamas-controlled Gaza City municipality, the water and sewage systems have ceased functioning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No proof has been provided for the claims or for damage done to health in coastal regions.</li> <li>• There are problems with the water supply to high-rise buildings because pumps are not working.</li> </ul>

## Protests against the closing of the crossings

### Demonstrations and marches

■ Gaza City residents organized a march to protest the closing of the crossings. Hundreds marched through the streets holding candles and signs in English and Arabic (Wafa News Agency, January 20). Hamas exploited their distress to **exert pressure on Egypt to open the Rafah Crossing**. It organized a demonstration attended by hundreds of Palestinians near the crossing, among them doctors and sick and wounded patients (Al-Aqsa TV, January 21). Another well-attended demonstration was held on January 22 and dispersed by Egyptian security forces with night sticks and water cannons. The Palestinians reported several dozen wounded. In the cities of Judea and Samaria demonstrations were also held (Agence France Presse, January 20).

There were also a number of protest demonstrations in the Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon.



**Demonstrations and riots at the Karni Crossing (Pal-today Website, January 22).**

## The PA

■ On January 20 **Abu Mazen** appealed to international groups (UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, the International Quartet and the Arab League) and demanded that pressure be exerted on Israel to raise the siege on the Gaza Strip and renew the fuel supply (Wafa News Agency, January 20). In another announcement he said that he was ready to manage the crossings himself to enable them to operate normally (Agence France Presse, January 21).

■ **Nimr Hamad, Abu Mazen's advisor**, said that by virtue of Abu Mazen's intensive efforts to persuade the international community, "it had been decided" to allow fuel, medical equipment and food into the Gaza Strip (Wafa News Agency, January 21).

## Hamas

■ Hamas also initiated a propaganda campaign for the crossings to be opened:

- **Khaled Mashal, head of Hamas's political bureau in Damascus**, appealed to Egypt and asked the government to supply fuel for the Gaza Strip's power station. At the same time, he appealed to Arab leaders and called upon them to exert pressure to bring about an end to the "Zionist crime" (Al-Jazeera TV, January 21).

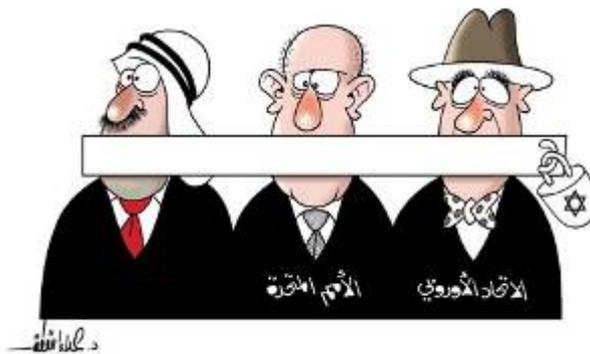
- **The Hamas movement issued a “call for help”** in which it urged Egypt to open the Rafah Crossing (Palestine-info Website, January 20). The Popular Resistance Committees threatened that if the siege were not raised and the fuel supply renewed, they would use force to open the Rafah Crossing (Radio Sawt al-Quds, January 20).



**Khaled Mashal in a special broadcast following the electricity cut (Al-Jazeera TV, January 20).**

- Following Israel’s decision to allow the transfer of fuel and necessary commodities to the Gaza Strip, a spokesman for the Hamas government said it was an achievement of the Palestinian struggle and that Israel was “backing down” (Al-Jazeera TV, January 21). **Mahmoud al-Zahar** said that Hamas would **continue the path of “jihad and resistance” (i.e., violence and terrorism)**.

شدت حصارها على غزة ..  
إسرائيل أغلقت جميع (المغابر) ..



**Israel closes the Gaza Strip crossings and Arab world and international community do nothing (PalMedia Website, January 22).**

## Pan-Arab and international protests

- In the pan-Arab and international arenas protests were voiced over the steps Israel was taking and worries were heard about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. **That was done with no reference to the rocket attacks and terrorism from the Gaza Strip which were behind Israel’s actions:**

- The minister of the **Arab League** held an emergency meeting to discuss the situation in the Gaza Strip.
- In **Egypt** the events in the Gaza Strip led to a series of strongly critical newspaper articles filled with hatred for Israel. Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak held telephone conversations with the Israeli prime minister and defense minister, warning them of a deterioration of the situation, stressing that Israel had to stop its “aggression against the Palestinian people in Gaza” (Middle East News Agency, January 21).
- In **Jordan** there was a series of demonstrations and rallies, primarily in the Palestinian refugee camps. Abdallah, king of Jordan, ordered that a convoy of emergency aid be sent to the Gaza Strip.
- Officials in the **Syrian and Lebanese** regimes condemned the Israeli action. Throughout Syria and Lebanon there were demonstrations to identify with the Gaza Strip. Walid Mualem, the Syrian foreign minister, denounced the “slaughter” and warned of a “humanitarian catastrophe.”
- **Iran** rushed to help the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip by working to convene a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Islamic Committee.
- At the **UN** the secretary general of the Security Council spoke to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. The Council acceded to the request of the Arab countries and moved its deliberation of events occurring in the Middle East to January 22 (Agence France Presse, January 21). The deputy secretary general for humanitarian affairs said that Israel had acted in an unacceptable, unjustified and immoral way and had endangered the peace process (L’Unita, January 20).

## Reactions in Israel

- According to “security sources” in Israel, despite the closing of the crossings **there are sufficient diesel fuel reserves in the Gaza Strip to run the power station and sufficient gasoline reserves for cars.** They also said that regular supplies of electricity flow into the Strip from Israel **despite the fact that the power station in Ashqelon is constantly threatened by rocket fire.**

■ **General (Ret.) Nir Peres, head of the IDF's Coordination and Liaison Administration**, said that despite the complexity of the security situation, Israel continues providing the Gaza Strip with electricity. He added that even though Israel did not supply the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip with the necessary amount of fuel, there is no need for the entire Strip to be blacked out because **the supply of electricity can be regulated**. He also said Israel was in daily contact with the aid organizations operating in the Gaza Strip and making an effort to provide immediate basic necessities.

■ Reactions from senior politicians

- **Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert** said that Israel had no intention of creating a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, however, it also had no intention of making life easy for them while the western Negev towns and villages were under constant threat of rocket fire. Ehud Olmert added that as far as he was concerned, that if there was no gasoline, there was no reason Gaza Strip residents couldn't walk.
- In a speech at the Herzliya Conference, **Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak** said that regarding the Gaza Strip, Israel did not intend to lessen the pressure on the Palestinians as long as the residents of the western Negev towns and villages were threatened by rocket fire.
- In a meeting with the Dutch foreign minister, **Israeli Foreign Minister Tsippi Livni** said that Hamas could change the existing situation in the Gaza Strip only if it stopped employing terrorism. In response to criticism of Israel she said that Israel did not mean to punish the Palestinian populace, but that the Palestinians had to understand that they would not make political capital with terrorism.
- **Brigadier General (Ret.) Amos Gilad**, head of the political security section of the defense ministry, said that the Gaza Strip was not suffering from a humanitarian crisis. Israel was continually doing its best so that no crisis would occur while the Palestinian side attacked with the intention of killing Israeli civilians and prevented the PA from reaching the negotiating table.