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Israel Update: November 23, 2012

We have many reasons to be thankful.

As we prepare for Shabbat, the Israel-Hamas ceasefire is holding, and rocket attacks against Israeli residents have ended. To read a full copy of the ceasefire text, [click here](#).

We are grateful to our international partners, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, for their hands-on work to provide relief, help the vulnerable and move Israeli residents out of harm's way. Our community is part of the network of support that makes this work possible.

World leaders and news media will continue to analyze Pillar of Defense -- naming winners and losers, speculating the long-term implications, and considering what's next. Two issues are particularly important to understand:

1. What is the blockade of Gaza?
2. What are the implications of the Palestinian bid for statehood recognition at the UN next week?

Understanding the Blockade

Does Israel control Gaza?

Just its borders. Egypt administered Gaza until Israel captured it in the 1967 war. Israel, which withdrew its troops and settlers from Gaza in 2005, controls Gaza's Mediterranean coastline and airspace; Israeli drones patrol the skies and its ships enforce a maritime blockade three miles from shore.

Egypt participated in the blockade under former president Hosni Mubarak and continues to do so under its new president, Mohammed Morsi, whose Muslim Brotherhood party is closely aligned with Hamas.

Hamas has developed an extensive tunnel system beneath the Egypt-Gaza border. These tunnels allow it to import building materials and other prohibited items, all of which Hamas taxes. The tunnels have become a major source of funds for Hamas, and its main route for importing weapons and materials for building them, says Natan Sachs of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings Institution in Washington.

Is the blockade legal?

The United Nations' [105-page investigative report](#), released on Sept. 2, 2011, relied heavily on Israel's internal investigation into the May 2010 Mavi Marmara flotilla incident, concluded that Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip is consistent with customary international law, is legitimate due to the security threat posed by Hamas and does not constitute collective punishment of Palestinians in Gaza.

How did the blockade begin?

The blockade was imposed in 2007 after Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006 and violently ousted the Palestinian Authority from the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Israel and Egypt control the border crossings into Gaza and shipping access to its coast.

What goods are barred?

Israel allows food and medical supplies and equipment in, but blocks weapons and "dual use" items that have both civilian and military uses. Israel allows about 1,000 truckloads of goods, medicines and construction materials each week. Egypt allows no goods to pass through its official border with Gaza. Goods from Egypt must travel first through Israel, where they are inspected, and then to Gaza.

Why not lift the blockade?

Michael Rubin, an analyst at the American Enterprise Institute, says lifting the blockade without a Hamas agreement to end weapon imports would result in a "real flood of weaponry and explosives into Gaza and a far bloodier conflict."

PA bid at the UN

This Thursday, the anniversary of the UN partition vote, the Palestinian Authority plans to bring a resolution to the UN General Assembly calling for statehood recognition. According to the Jerusalem Post, "diplomatic officials said the recent fighting in the Gaza Strip would likely serve as an even greater impetus for Abbas to bring the measure to the UN, in an attempt to make himself - and the PA - relevant after being sidelined throughout the eight-day crisis.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton has come out publicly against the move, as have a number of key EU countries, such as Britain, Germany and France.

UK Foreign Secretary William Hague told Parliament on Thursday: 'While there is any chance of achieving a return to talks in the coming months, we continue to advise President Abbas against attempts to win Palestinian observer state status. We judge that this would make it harder to secure a return to negotiations, and could have very serious consequences for the Palestinian Authority.'" [Read more.](#)

We will continue to update you on this and other issues.

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