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Bridging the Gap to a Two-State Solution

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By Robert Mason

Gaza has remained under three layers of import control since 2007. Firstly, under banned items classified as 'dual use' by the international Wassenaar Arrangement. Secondly, under Israel's own list for the West Bank and thirdly, under Israel's list for Gaza which includes compliance with Israeli standards (industrial, environmental, medical and telecommunications). The result is that very few goods (restricted types of goods and minimal volumes) have been allowed into Gaza from Israel which has resulted in a 'tunnel economy', whereby Hamas earns its core funding from taxing smuggled goods between Egypt and Gaza. The Israeli government's banned list was revised from a positive list to a negative list after the 5th May 2010 Flotilla incident, but still precludes cement and reinforced steel pipes from entering Gaza because they can be used to build bunkers and make rocket launchers respectively. Only international agencies such as the United Nations or the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) can bring in steel and cement to build public projects. Furthermore, only 7% of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency's (NRWA) reconstruction projects in Gaza have been approved by Israel (see *Dashed Hopes: Continuation of the Gaza Blockade*, published by 26 aid agencies). In a recent interview with the author Dr Tim Williams, at the Office of the Quartet Representative, he also stated that the Flotilla incident had simultaneously led to both bureaucratic and implementation-related (infrastructure and crossings) problems which Minsters are still trying to resolve. Short term permits are certainly not enhancing the territorial integrity and ease of movement that was envisaged originally in the 1991 Oslo Accords.

There may be few perceived alternatives to the blockade against Gaza; certainly there is a debate about whether increasing Palestinian National Authority (PNA) aid may help ease tensions between Gaza and the West Bank and Gaza and Israel. The dilemma that the PNA faces is whether to continue to fund extra social services in Gaza to illustrate that there are tangible benefits of supporting the PNA over Hamas, or whether severing links and isolating Hamas would work. This is unlikely since isolating Hamas could hand them another electoral victory by default, and certainly allow it to consolidate power and support within Gaza. Gaza costs Hamas US$45 million each month (staff and social services costs), therefore closing the tunnel economy would put pressure on Hamas, but its humanitarian effects could be severe.

A more effective option would be the resuscitation of the Access and Movement Agreement (AMA) which included provision for a territorial link between Gaza and the West Bank, a port in Gaza, an Israeli undertaking not to close the Palestinian airport, an opening of the Rafah crossing, and allowing goods in and out of Gaza. It's only current application is the control regime at the Rafah crossing operated by the European Union Border Assistance Mission in Rafah (EUBAM). By supporting the Quartet and the PNA in implementing some more of its provisions, in particular the territorial link, Israel will be able to achieve full disengagement with security. The territorial link is important to the PNA for two reasons. It would provide the contiguity that a Palestinian state would require in order to achieve full sovereignty. Secondly, it would link the political and economic hub of the Palestinian state, around Al Quds and Bethlehem with ports and industrial areas in Gaza. The envisaged sliver of land for a road and/or train link may only be 10m wide, but is unlikely to precede a final political agreement. For the third of the population of Gazans that still lives in deep poverty and the many companies that cannot export or import efficiently, this kind of development cannot come fast enough.

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