

ANU PUBLIC LECTURE SERIES 2009

GAZA STRIPPED BARE: What does the conflict mean & what's next?

Ghazzah (Gaza)

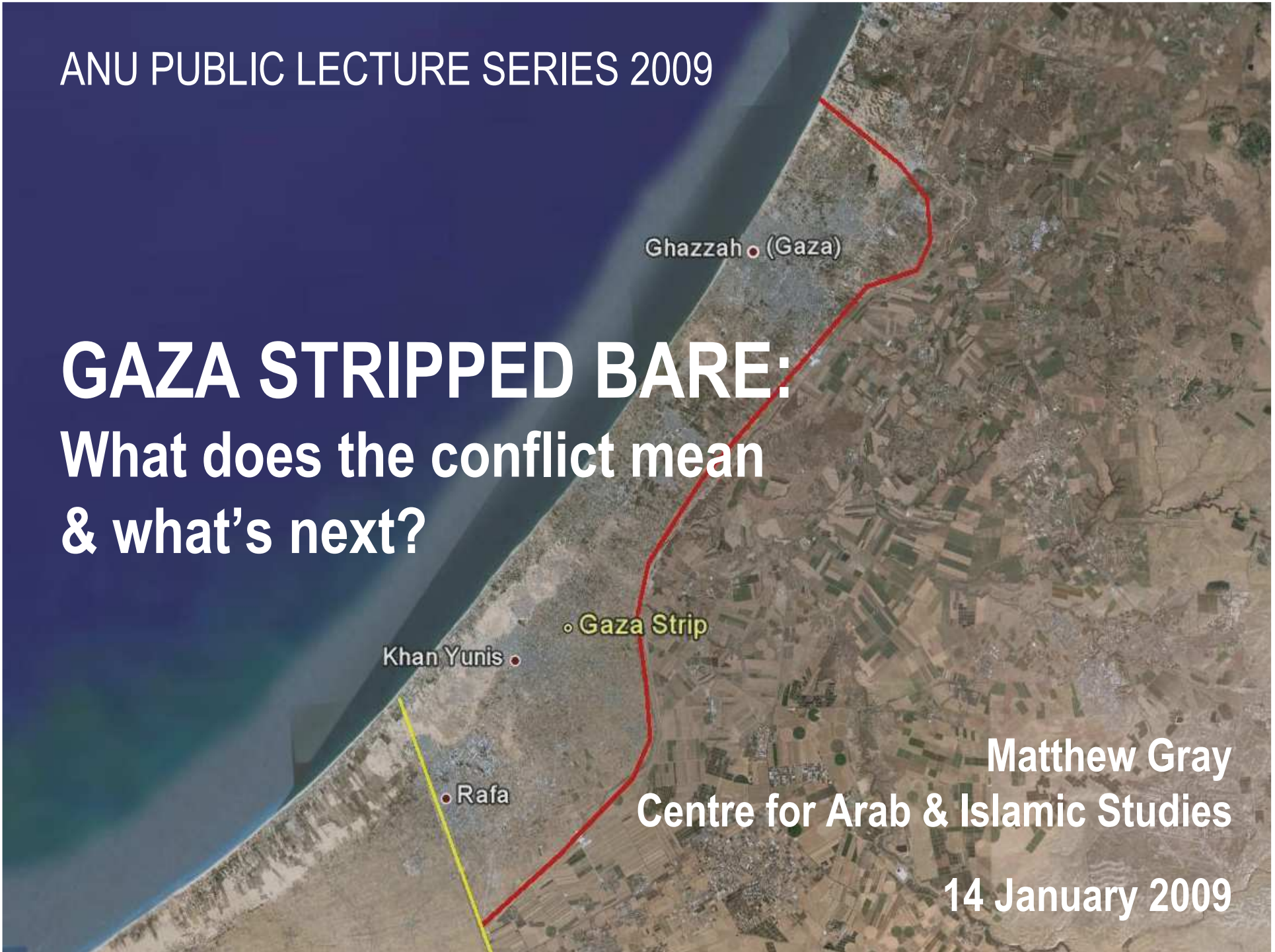
Gaza Strip

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14 January 2009



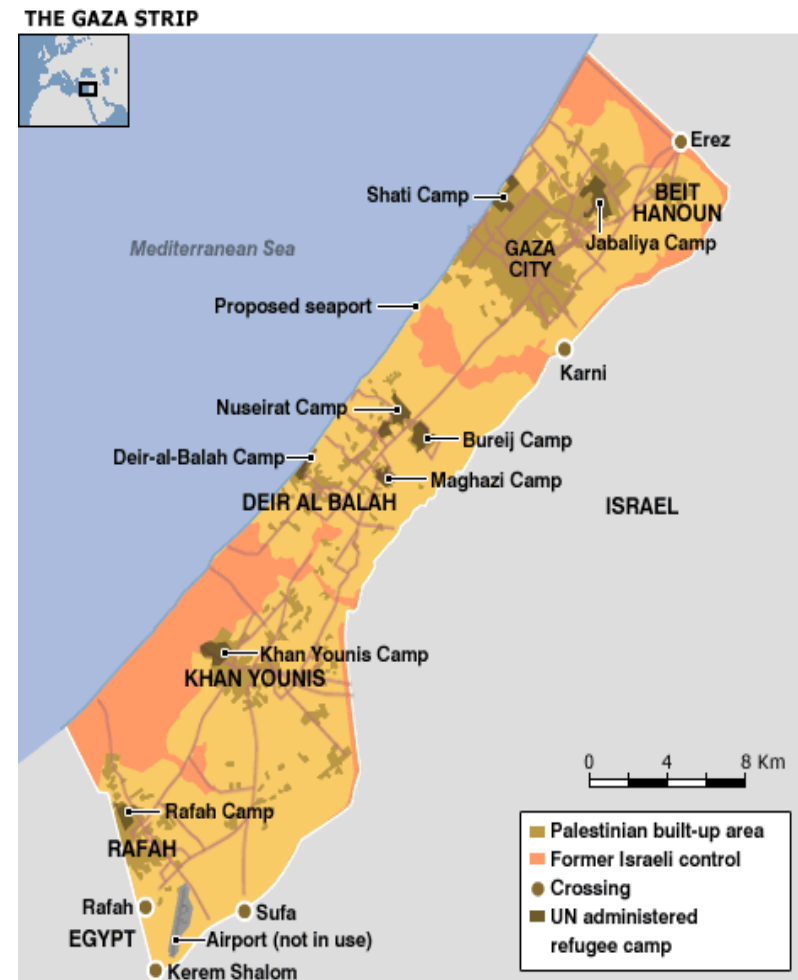
Aims

- Where did the violence in Gaza come from?
- Why blame must be shared – though probably not equally
- What the conflict means for:
 - Israeli politics and the February elections
 - Palestinian dynamics, including the future of Hamas and its relations with Fatah
 - Israeli-Palestinian dynamics
- The future: how important will the Gaza fighting ultimately prove to really be?



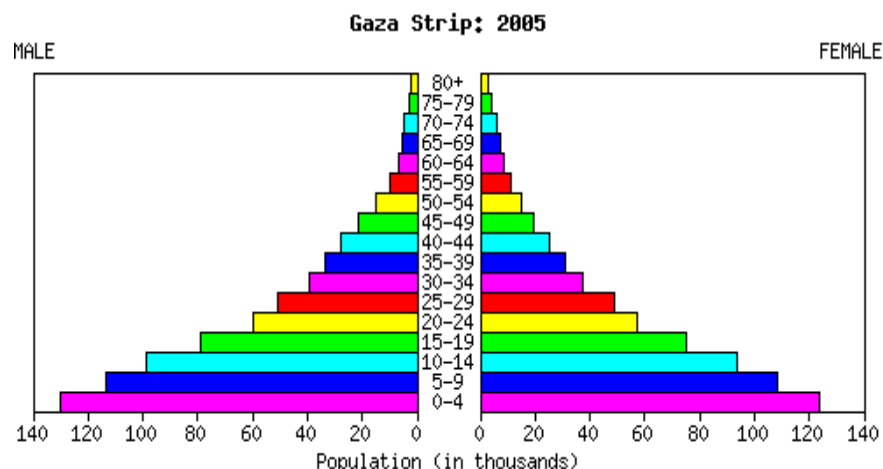
The context

- Under the British Palestine mandate, seized by Egypt in 1950 after the creation of Israel, then seized by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War
- Oslo after 1993 led to creation of a Palestinian authority and Israeli withdrawal, aiming for an eventual final peace agreement where Gaza would become part of a Palestinian state
- Israel reoccupied most of it in 2000 in the second *intifada*, then in 2005 withdrew IDF and settlements
- Hamas won legislative elections in February 2006, then seized control from Fatah in June 2007



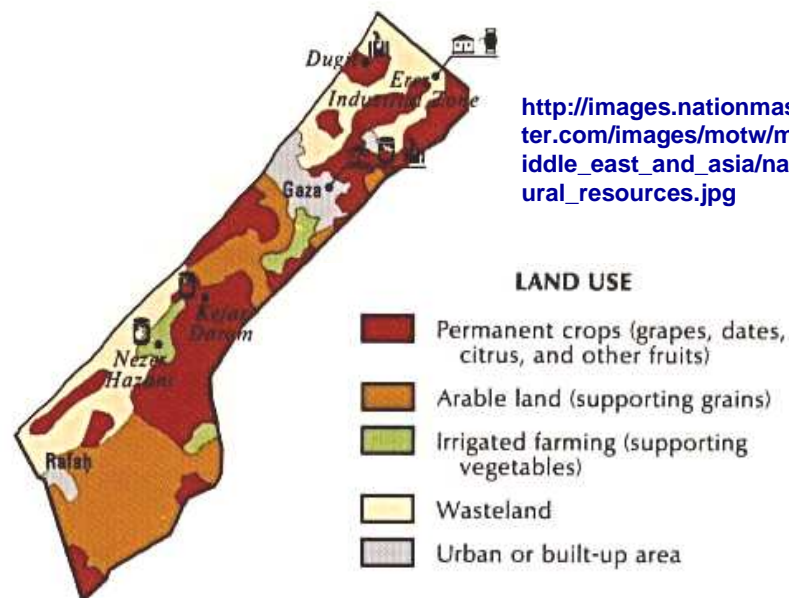
Cont'd

- A small piece of land: only 360 km² (~41km x 6km-10km)
- A large and rapidly-growing population of about 1.5 million
 - 3.4% population growth
 - Fertility rate 5.1 children/woman
 - The median age of a Gazan is 17.2
- Dense urban areas, including multiple refugee camps, but also densely agricultural (one-third under cultivation, more still lightly or informally used); very little fishing due to Israeli restrictions



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base.

http://www.nationmaster.com/country/gz-gaza-strip/Age_distribution,12/1/09



The December-January crisis

- There was some likelihood to the current fighting:
 - A six-month ceasefire between Israel and Hamas ended on 19 December when Hamas did not agree to renew it
 - Though it was much honoured in the breach (by both sides: Hamas' and other Palestinians' rocket attacks, Israel not easing crossings and incursions)
 - Hamas arguably was not getting much out of it
 - Timing – well before the Israel poll on 10 February and with Bush still in the White House
 - Israel increasingly frustrated with Hamas rocket attacks
 - Hamas increasingly frustrated by the blockade



How should blame be attributed?

- Both sides share the blame, even if their shares of it is debatable:
- Israel:
 - Did not open borders with Gaza as per the ceasefire
 - The November 2008 incursion, even if justified at one level as a response to rocket attacks, breached the ceasefire
 - Arguably (this is contested) Israel still technically occupies Gaza and has breached occupation requirements
 - [The question of ‘proportionality’ is complex: incidental civilian casualties, even if predictable in advance, may not be illegal]
- Hamas:
 - Did not control the groups that fire rockets into Israel, and Hamas members certainly fired them too: while it is legal to resist occupation, it is still a war crime to target civilians
 - Hamas, in control of Gaza, also has humanitarian obligations
 - Hamas arms smuggling; again, the legality of this is contested

What will the impacts of the fighting be?

- The fighting almost-certainly will end in a ceasefire: Israel says it does not want to reoccupy Gaza, nor would it want to keep a military force there for any length of time, especially under fire, and Hamas will not win a military victory
- The impacts will be across the actors and dynamics of the region: Israel; Hamas; Fatah; and Israeli-Palestinian relations



Israel

- The 10 February poll could be the first political impact from Gaza
- How Israelis vote will depend on how they see the conflict
 - It's popular now (with ~85% support)...
 - ...but soonish Israelis may come to see it as having failed:
 - Hamas will survive the conflict
 - It will claim a victory; more so if the Gaza blockade is lifted
 - Rocket fire into Israel is unlikely to fully stop; if it does, the risk of it starting again will remain for Israelis
- A perception of failure – or just more security focus from the current fighting – could push voters to the right

	<i>Likud</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Kadima</i>	<i>Israeli Beitenu</i>	<i>Shas</i>	<i>Meretz</i>	<i>Torah Judaism</i>	<i>Others</i>
Poll Average (2-7 Jan)	31	15	27	11	10	6	5	17

Israel, cont'd

- How Israelis vote will depend on whether the conflict is still seen as a success come 10 February
- If Labor or Kadima form government?
 - The current process of talks with Fatah would likely continue, more susceptibility to US pressure from Obama
 - Kadima more separatist
 - Still need to be 'tough' on Hamas
- If Likud forms government?
 - Much tougher line, no substantive peace talks or concessions from Netanyahu, greater risk of regional conflict (eg, an Israeli attack on Iran)

Acting PM and head of the centre-right Kadima party
Tsipi Livni



Former PM (1999-2001) and head of the left-of-centre Labor party
Ehud Barak

Former PM (1996-99) and head of the right-wing Likud party
Binyamin Netanyahu



Hamas

- A Hamas claim of victory is predictable...but how meaningful?
- Hamas has not been legitimised by the fighting
- Still, its support in Gaza may get a boost:
 - But this has only modest benefit in the current environment; especially the absence of electoral politics
- More widely, Hamas' rhetoric and courage in fighting the IDF are popular among Palestinians and in the Arab world
 - But few Palestinians really want to live under Hamas
- Plus there is opposition to Fatah that feeds into support for Hamas...especially as Fatah is seen as corrupt and co-opted by Israel and by the West



Damascus-based Khaled Mesh'al:
in effect the political head of Hamas



Fatah

- Fatah has been caught in a lose-lose position as a result of the conflict
 - Caught between Israel (with whom Abbas wants talks and concessions) and the West, versus wide Palestinian anger towards Israel (in general and as a result of the Gaza blockade/fighting)
- Abbas and Fayyad are widely unpopular among Palestinians:
 - They are seen as having been co-opted by Israel and the US and EU – as ‘sell outs’ – for a peace that won’t be fair to Palestinians
 - Their language has been restrained – this is seen as co-optation and a plot against Hamas
 - Moreover Fatah also is seen as corrupt and having a ‘born to rule’ mentality



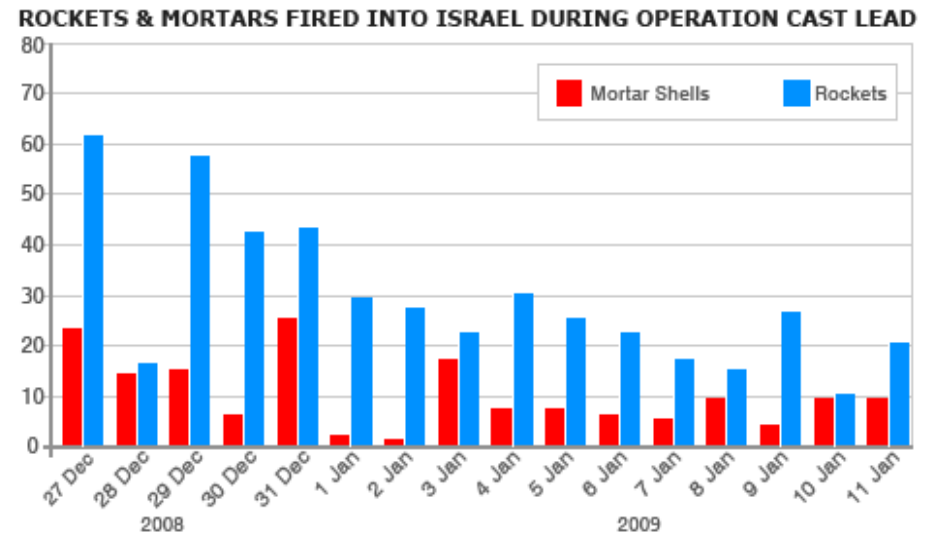
Palestinian National Authority
(PNA) President Mahmoud Abbas



PNA Prime Minister
Salam Fayyad

Israeli-Palestinian relations

- The outlook for Israeli-Palestinian dynamics, and any further peace talks, depends on several factors, stemming from those just discussed:
 - How much of a victory Hamas can claim with ordinary Palestinians, especially in the Fatah-controlled West Bank
 - Whether or how Hamas is handled by external actors, especially the Obama Administration and the EU, after the fighting is over
 - How badly Abbas in particular is harmed from the conflict
 - Who wins the Israeli polls
 - Whether Hamas lives up to its promise never to deal with Israel after the current fighting



SOURCE: Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7826968.stm#map

Other questions for the future

- The strategy of isolating and undermining Hamas through a blockade of Gaza has clearly failed
 - But what's the alternative?
 - Is there any prospect left of Israel or the US or EU recognizing them?
- Both Israel and Hamas appear to have violated the international law on conflict
 - Hamas with deliberate rocket attacks against civilians
 - Israel with some specific claims of not aiding Gazan civilians and possibly with the firing on a UN facility and the use of phosphorus

But will this lead to any attempts at bringing about justice? Probably not
- Can Israel get a stop to Hamas arms smuggling into Gaza? It seems unlikely



Thank you

