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History of Gaza Marine Gas Field Part 2: Israel Attacks

Submitted by Peter Garcia-Webb on Thu, 2014-07-31 09:32

This is a long article, over 2,100 words. It provides a brief history of Israel's attempts to take control of the natural gas fields under the Mediterranean Sea in Gaza territorial waters by military force. The time frame is from 2008 to the end of July, 2014.

Part 1 of the history of the [Gaza Marine Gas field](#) closed in January 2008, when the British Gas Group withdrew from negotiations with Israel. Over the next six years Israel would try to restart these negotiations and together with a few from the Palestinian Authority do all it could to steal the majority of Gaza's gas and associated profits.

Israel would invade Gaza four times in those six years. The invasions were directly related to Gaza's offshore gas.

The first of these invasions started on 27 February, 2008 and by Israeli standards it was a modest affair. The immediate excuse was the firing of 40 Qassam rockets by Hamas into southern Israel.

Operation Hot Winter (also called Warm Winter) began two days later. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned what he called Israel's "excessive and disproportionate" response.

(The same phrase has been used countless times in Israel's 2014 invasion of Gaza as well.)

Israel withdrew and by 19 June 2008 Egypt had helped to broker a six month truce. Israel's blockade of Gaza

continued however and Hamas fired the odd rocket from time to time

The reason for this increase in hostilities was describes in an article in The Electronic Intifada dated 22 January, 2008. The article title was: [Gaza siege intensified after collapse of natural gas deal](#).

After the Hamas election victory, Israel embarked on an intense campaign to eliminate the movement as a viable political entity in Gaza while at the same time attempting to rehabilitate the defeated Fatah as the dominant political player in the West Bank. By leveraging political tensions between the two parties, arming forces loyal to Abbas and the selective resumption of financial aid, Israel and the United States effectively re-installed Fatah in the West Bank, projected the party back onto the international stage and revived the possibility of concluding the energy deal.

With Hamas isolated geographically in Gaza, Israeli policy focused on isolating it politically as well. Israel has made significant progress toward this goal. Fayyad was appointed Prime Minister of the new unelected West Bank government recognised by the West, and by April 2007 the Israeli Cabinet had reversed an earlier decision to prohibit the purchase of natural gas from the Palestinian Authority. But with 1.5 million people living in the Gaza Strip, Hamas retains significant influence in the Palestinian political arena. Israel will have to eliminate the party completely in order to create a political climate suited to accommodate the BG deal. Time is running out.

Time was running out, and a month later Operation Hot Winter began.

Operation Cast Lead

However the truce fell apart on 27 December, 2008 when Israel launched Operation Cast Lead. This invasion was specifically about offshore gas. It's purpose was to destroy enough of Hamas organisation to allow the Palestinian Authority (rather than Fatah itself) to take up the government of Gaza. Had that been successful, Israel's exploitation of the Gaza gas fields would have begun in 2009.

[Noel Chomsky](#) put it this way:

It cannot be too often stressed that Israel had no credible pretext for its 2008–9 attack on Gaza, with full U.S. support and illegally using U.S. weapons. Near-universal opinion asserts the contrary, claiming that Israel was acting in self-defence. That is utterly unsustainable, in light of Israel's flat rejection of peaceful means that were readily available, as Israel and its U.S. partner in crime knew very well.

On 8 January, 2009 Global Research published an article titled: [War and natural gas: The Israeli invasion and Gaza's Offshore Gas Fields](#). The introduction reads:

The December 2008 military invasion of the Gaza strip by Israeli Forces bears a direct relation to the control and ownership of strategic offshore gas reserves. This is a war of conquest.

In June 2008 two things happened. Defence Minister Ehud Barack instructed the IDF to prepare for an operation in Gaza and Israel contacted British Gas with a view to resuming the stalled negotiations for the

purchase of Gaza's gas.

In fact, negotiations between British Gas and Israeli officials were ongoing in October 2008, 2-3 months prior to the commencement of the bombings on December 27th.

In November 2008, the Israeli Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of National Infrastructures instructed Israel Electric Corporation (IEC) to enter into negotiations with British Gas, on the purchase of natural gas from the BG's offshore concession in Gaza.

Operation Cast Lead failed

Despite the use of white phosphorous and other illegal weapons, and despite the destruction of buildings and the death of many Palestinian civilians, Operation Cast Lead was a failure. At its end, Hamas was still firmly in power in Gaza, and the gas fields were not going to be developed.

Fishing boats

Continuing with Noel Chomsky:

According to reports from the scene, the naval siege has been tightened steadily since 2000. Fishing boats have been driven steadily out of Gaza's territorial waters and toward the shore by Israeli gunboats, often violently without warning and with many casualties. As a result of these naval actions, Gaza's fishing industry has virtually collapsed; fishing is impossible near shore because of the contamination caused by Israel's regular attacks, including the destruction of power plants and sewage facilities.

These Israeli naval attacks began shortly after the discovery by the BG (British Gas) Group of what appear to be quite sizeable natural gas fields in Gaza's territorial waters.

Israel did not want Gaza fishing boats anywhere near Gaza's offshore gas fields. More precisely, Israel wanted to undermine the concept that Gaza had territorial water at all. If Israel could somehow claim that the water did not belong to Gaza the gas underneath the sea floor would not belong to Gaza either. One step towards achieving this was to severely limit and preferably terminate the Gaza fishing. (See the 2014 invasion.)

As Noel Chomsky put it:

The pillage of what could become a major source of income for Gaza is surely known to U.S. authorities. It is only reasonable to suppose that the intention to appropriate these limited resources, either by Israel alone or together with the collaborationist Palestinian Authority, is the motive for preventing Gaza fishing boats from entering Gaza's territorial waters...

Israel running out of gas

By early 2011, Israel was in danger of running short of natural gas. The gas fields near Cyprus would provide plenty (since by then any claim Turkey might have had been dispelled by Israel) but not some years. Gas flow from Egypt was interrupted by sabotage and the Egyptians stopped gas flow to Israel. Gas from Gaza would

provide both an income and the gas itself as a stop gap.

And so PM Netanyahu began a new round of negotiations with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. Despite the fact that Abbas had no authority in Gaza at the time. These negotiations did not proceed smoothly and from Israel's perspective were taking too long.

Israel had already tried to drill close to Lebanon's offshore gas fields but with limited success. Sweden in particular came to Lebanon's aid in defending against this. So instead it began drilling for gas in the south, close to the border with Gaza's territorial waters (see below for the significance of this).

In 2013 Israel reopened secret talks with British Gas. These talks were brokered by Tony Blair, the Quartet special envoy to the Middle East. It was not the first, nor would it be the last time that Tony Blair acted irresponsibly in that position. All Palestinians were excluded from these talks. Neither the PA who anyway did not own the gas, nor Hamas took part. By then of course Israel, with specific assistance from both the US and the UK had managed to label Hamas as a terrorist organisation.

Israel Gas reserves overstated

In 2014 an Israeli analysis of its known gas reserves revealed the uncomfortable fact that Israel the known reserves would not allow Israel to have the gas it needed and to export sufficient to also have the foreign income it needed. Drilling in the Leviathan reserves was not straight forward due in part to the very high gas pressures in certain layers. Drilling was postponed in December 2013 to “later in 2014”.

According to a French researcher much of the gas there was not commercially recoverable.

The need for access to Gaza gas had increased.

Hamas however was as insistent as always that the gas did not belong to Fatah or to the Palestinian Authority. Israel would have to negotiate with Hamas, and pay the full price for its gas, or Hamas had to be removed. Totally this time.

As an additional difficulty, from Israel's point of view at least, the PA has recently started negotiations with Russia for the developed of Gaza gas. Despite the fact that the PA did not “own” the gas. President Abbas met with Putin in January 2014. The idea is that the Russian energy company Gazprom would undertake the necessary drilling. The announcement of a Unity government between Hamas and Fatah early in 2014 was from Israel's perspective the last straw.

If the PA and Hamas continued as one, and if Hamas agreed to allow Gazprom to develop Gaza gas Israel's plan to bolster its gas supply to meet its needs would collapse.

Hamas must be destroyed

But how? What was needed was an excuse to invade Gaza again. Stupidly as it turns out, that excuse was provided by a small family living in the West Bank. That family has long provided suicide bombers for attacks on Israel. On 12 June, 2014 it made the huge tactical error of kidnapping and killing three Israeli teenagers.

PM Netanyahu's response was as immediate as it was vicious. He had two immediate goals. Stir up feelings of revenge and hit the West Bank as hard as possible. Politicians belonging to the Unity government were thrown into jail. People were killed indiscriminately. What Netanyahu needed to do was to provoke another series of Hamas rocket attacks.

Unfortunately, he was successful. Once that happened Netanyahu announced to a receptive West and an even more receptive western media, that Israel has no recourse other than to self defence.

After a week of bombardment to soften up Gaza the plan to destroy Hamas moved into a more intensive phase. The ground invasion began.

The excuse for this was Israel's need to destroy Hamas tunnels, which are actually quite extensive, and to prevent Israel from rocket attacks.

But the real reason was that this time Netanyahu would not stop until Hamas was destroyed or until the people of Gaza no longer supported Hamas.

Close to 1,300 have been murdered, mostly women and children. Well over 6,000 have been wounded. Around a quarter of Gaza residents have been rendered homeless. Israel has attacked homes, schools, hospitals, mosques, medical clinics, ambulances, the water supply, the sewerage system, communications, and more recently the sole electricity generating plant.

Israel has used conventional weapons as well as poisonous gas, DIME bombs and flechette containing tank shells.

And Israel has shelled and destroyed what remained of the [Gaza fishing fleet](#). Why was that still necessary? I can only guess. Israel is now drilling close to the boundary with Gaza waters. The technique of lateral drilling has improved in recent years. It is now relatively easy to drill horizontally through the sea bed. Were it to be true that Israel is trying to tap into the Gaza gas fields under the sea bed, it would be mandatory not to allow any vessel in to those waters that might be able to detect that such illegal drilling has occurred.

Gas engineers I talk with agree that it would be feasible. But they point out that no gas company would do it because it can easily be discovered. But not if Israel prevents any boats or any low flying planes going into the area.

As I write this, Israel is becoming more and more frustrated by the extraordinary courage of the Palestinians in Gaza. Despite hardship their support for Hamas is showing no sign of being reduced. Gaza is rapidly becoming uninhabitable. The [destruction of electricity generation](#) will pave the way for a total failure of public health as water and sewerage systems fail.

The end game is still control of Gaza's gas. But instead of a puppet Fatah or PA government which might still allow Gazprom into the Mediterranean, the aim might be the total destruction of Gaza.

If Israel could achieve that it could take over the land and declare it it's own.

Meanwhile the US continues to provide Israel with arms, and has recently agreed to the urgent reprovisioning of such things as mortar shells. And it continues to stall on peace agreements and to absolutely refuse to negotiate with Hamas.

Part three of this history will need to wait a while. By the time I write it Israel will have taken much of Gaza's gas by one method or another.

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The Author

Hi! My name is Peter. Last year I decided I would like to try my hand as an author. I've written a novel called Aeron, some poems and a short story. You can read more about me in the Menu heading About. Enjoy.



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