

# 50 Shades of Control

Israel's implementation of the Disengagement Plan in 2005, during which it removed its permanent military presence and settlements from the Gaza Strip, deluded many into thinking that this also marked the end of Israel's relationship with and responsibility for Gaza. Despite the disengagement, Israel has held on to central elements of control over Gaza and its residents. The decisions Israel makes have a dramatic impact on nearly every detail of their lives, from matters of life-and-death to the very mundane. Israel's decisions impact the ability to maintain family life, conduct trade, pursue professional and educational opportunities, access healthcare, maintain civilian infrastructure, not to mention access cultural and leisure activities.

Israel has been enforcing a regime of restrictions and prohibitions against Gaza's residents for some three decades. In 2007, after Hamas seized control of the Strip, the restrictions were tightened to the point of closure. Israel prohibits the movement of Gaza residents into and through Israeli territory (as well as between Jordan and the West Bank), other than in "exceptional humanitarian circumstances." Most residents, at any given time, do not meet the criteria for requesting a permit to travel. Israel controls what goods can exit the territory and to where, and also requires that any goods entering Gaza receive its approval. It often bans the [entry of certain goods](#), out of a list of thousands of items necessary for a functioning economy and for a normal, dignified life.

Israel has understandable security needs stemming from its ongoing conflict with Hamas and other armed groups, including the need to conduct checks of people wishing to enter its territory. However, many of Israel's restrictive measures against Gaza residents have nothing to do with concrete security needs. The control Israel wields is so pervasive and encompassing that it is difficult to reconcile it with military needs alone. Regardless of the justifications presented, Israel's ongoing and significant control over many aspects of the lives of Gaza residents comes with a legal responsibility to respect and protect the rights of the people affected by that control. In many cases, it is blatantly clear that no effort is made to strike a reasonable balance between legitimate security concerns and the rights of residents of Gaza, including recognition of Israel's responsibility to maintain normal life in the Strip.

To mark 50 years of occupation and 10 years of closure, we present an extensive but by no means exhaustive list of aspects of the lives of residents of Gaza still controlled by Israel.

The occupation looks different in Areas A, B, and C. This is what it looks like in Area G, where Israel:

1. **Prevents the (re)building of an airport or seaport in Gaza**, forcing its residents to travel by land, through crossings that lead to either Egypt or Israel.
2. **Determines which development projects are implemented in Gaza** through [the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism](#) (GRM). No construction project can be implemented in Gaza without Israel's approval of the design, location, and quantity of construction materials needed. Israel also controls which materials are approved for use and when they are allowed to enter the Strip.
3. **Employs collective punishment**. [Israel](#) has often [shut down](#) land crossings in response to rocket fire aimed at Israel, denying movement to all residents of Gaza.
4. **Prevents access to a "buffer zone" inside the Gaza Strip**. Israel has declared a strip of land 300-meters-deep into Gaza off-limits to Palestinians. Much of Gaza's fertile agricultural land is located in this area. The width of this buffer zone [changes](#) occasionally, and the Israeli military enforces the prohibition on access to the area with live fire. Since 2010, on the other hand, the army has entered the area around once a week on average.
5. **Decides who is allowed to worship at holy sites**. Until 2015, Israel allowed only Christian residents of Gaza to travel for worship at holy sites in Jerusalem and the West Bank during holidays. In 2015, permission was also given to Muslims to travel to Jerusalem for prayer, but only on Fridays and only a quota of 200 people weekly who are over age 60. [Less than 5 percent](#) of Gaza's population is over 60 years old. The permission [was rescinded](#) in late 2016.
6. **Controls Gaza's airspace**. The hum of Israeli drones flying over Gaza is heard constantly. Israel blocks Gaza's airspace (as well as the West Bank's) and has sole control over it.
7. **Determines who will be able to hear**. Around the world, very young children with hearing impairments are fitted with electronic hearing aids that enable them to hear and improve their quality of life. Israel [restricts](#) the entry to Gaza of the spare parts and batteries needed for these devices. Additionally, once a child undergoes surgery to have the device implanted, she needs special language training and speech therapy. Currently, there are not enough experts in Gaza who can guide children through this process. Israel [does not allow](#) staff members of civil society organizations to travel abroad or to the West Bank to receive necessary training in speech therapy. Given that the window of opportunity for a successful implant surgery and concomitant speech therapy is limited, Israel's conduct often results in children losing their hearing entirely.
8. **Forbids family meals and visiting grandma in the West Bank**. [A third](#) of Gaza's residents have family members in Israel or the West Bank. As part of Israel's [separation policy](#), designed to keep apart Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, since 2007, Israel has further narrowed the [criteria for travel](#). The criteria do not include family visits to the West Bank or Israel, unless a first-degree relative has died, is getting married or is a terminal patient in need of care.

9. **Takes it upon itself to manage Gaza's economy.** Israel takes the liberty of deciding what products are worth manufacturing in Gaza and selling outside of it, impacting the profitability and feasibility of different branches of industry. According to the Coordinator of Government Activities' (COGAT) [response](#) to a Freedom of Information Application filed by Gisha, the principles that guide COGAT in the making of such decisions are "considerations relating to manufacturing capabilities, as well as supply and demand in the relevant markets."
10. **Created and exploits a captive market in Gaza.** Israel's control over the sole land crossing through which goods are transported into and out of Gaza, gives it the power to restrict what goods come in [and out](#). As such, it influences almost every aspect of Gaza's economy and the job market.
11. **Holds critical influence over the cost of living in the Strip,** seeing as Israel is the near sole source of all products and goods coming into Gaza.
12. **Maintains a monopoly on supply of cement to Gaza.** Like in Israel, almost all cement purchased in the Gaza Strip is made by the Israeli cement monopoly Neshet. In this manner, Israel perpetuates the dependence of Gaza's construction market on the decisions made by the supervisor of Israel's Antitrust Authority, and on the operation and regulation of its construction market in general. Gaza's [dependency](#) on these supplies, particularly following three major military operations, and Israel's control of the crossings perpetuate this situation.
13. **Limits dreams.** Israel allows travel out of Gaza according to [narrow criteria](#) that most residents of Gaza do not meet. Dream of [studying](#) to become a pastry chef in the West Bank, or perhaps a veterinarian in Italy? Would you like to participate in a conference for women's empowerment in Japan, the [marathon](#) in Bethlehem, or maybe a [music competition](#) in the UK? None of these ambitions are deemed worthy by Israel's standards and would not warrant a permit to exit the Gaza Strip.
14. **Restricts the fishing zone.** Israel imposes a slew of restrictions that cause serious harm to Gaza's fishing industry. Primarily, it restricts fishing to a very small area off the Gaza coastline which currently stands at [six nautical miles](#) offshore (the distance changes according to Israeli interests; the Oslo Accords provided for 20 nautical miles off the coast). Israel regularly enforces the restriction by opening fire at fishermen and confiscating their boats.
15. **Prevents repairs to fishing boats.** Israel created a list of items it defines as "[dual-use](#)", or in other words, items that it acknowledges as inherently civilian, but which it claims can also be used for military purposes. Israel either prevents these items from entering Gaza, or scarcely grants permits allowing their entrance, involving a long and non-transparent process. The lists posted to the GRM website already include [thousands of items](#), meaning Israel has strayed far from international standards. The lists include substances like liquid fiberglass, sealant and wood planks, and materials [necessary for repairing fishing boats](#). Unable to repair their boats, fishermen have lost their source of livelihood.

16. **Regulates who gets to go to band camp over the summer.** In 2012 and 2013, children studying at the only music school in Gaza were represented by Gisha's legal department in the hope of receiving permits to allow them to participate in a five-day long music summer camp in the West Bank. In 2012, [Israel only approved exit permits for 19 of the children](#), the oldest of whom was 15. It took another struggle to obtain permits for their accompanying teachers. The year after, 47 children petitioned to go to the music camp. At first, Israeli authorities announced that [only 30](#) of them would be allowed to leave Gaza. The music school teachers refused to choose which of the young musicians, all of whom had prepared all year for the event, would be denied access to the summer camp. Following the threat of media attention and a letter from Member of Knesset Zehava Gal-On, [all 47 children and five accompanying teachers](#) were eventually able to attend camp in the West Bank.
17. **Decides which family member's funeral you can attend.** Israel's criteria for travel to and from Gaza permit participation in a funeral or mourning rituals, [only if the deceased is a first-degree relative](#). In other words, if, heaven forbid your brother passes away, you could ask for a permit to attend the funeral. However, if that brother has lost his wife or son, you wouldn't be eligible for a permit to exit Gaza to comfort him in his time of such great need.
18. **Forces Gaza residents to provide personal information in order to receive construction materials to rebuild their homes.** After Operation Protective Edge in 2014, Israel and the Palestinian Authority established the [Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism](#), under UN supervision. To receive construction materials, Gaza residents are required to provide personal information, specify the location of the building, provide building plans and provide a list noting exact quantities requested. Based on this information, Israel considers whether to approve the supply of construction materials and determines the quantities to be supplied.
19. **Inhibits the construction and operation of water desalination facilities.** The dangerous shortage of potable water in Gaza could potentially be resolved if enough desalination plants are built. However, even if such plants are built, they will not be able to operate without electricity. Israel impedes the reconstruction and development of electricity [infrastructure](#) as it has classified necessary parts and equipment as "dual-use" and severely restricts their entry into Gaza. In fifty years of control over Gaza, Israel has not facilitated the construction of infrastructure in a manner that would keep pace with population growth, and it has been selling Gaza the same amount of electricity for years. The inability of local authorities to collect payment from customers due to the dire state of Gaza's economy and the internal Palestinian rift also contribute to the general shortage of electricity. The result is that power is delivered on a rotating basis to different areas, with each area supplied for eight hours, at best, followed by an eight-hour blackout. All daily activities are planned around the few hours in which electricity is supplied, and there certainly isn't enough to supply a major water desalination facility working around the clock.

20. **Doesn't allow in dental fillings to be used by dentists.** In February 2017, the authorities at Kerem Shalom Crossing [confiscated a shipment](#) of material used by dentists to fill dental cavities, because Israeli authorities claimed they were “dual-use.” Over the years, this material has been allowed into Gaza continuously without incident. In addition to confiscating the filling material itself, the crossing authorities seized the entire content of the truck it was loaded on, including refrigerators and laundry machines coordinated for transport into Gaza by another merchant.
21. **Determines which strawberries weather the journey out of Gaza.** Kerem Shalom Crossing is the only crossing through which farmers and traders from Gaza can transport their goods out of Gaza for sale in Israel, the West Bank or abroad. Goods are screened at the crossing, in a process that takes hours and throughout which they are kept outdoors. Fragile produce, such as strawberries, may become damaged to the point of being completely ruined. Recurrent requests from Gaza farmers and from Gisha to facilitate appropriate shading in the area of the crossing where goods are unloaded and screened have remained unanswered for years. Farmers from Gaza have repeatedly reported that produce has gone bad by the time the screening process finished.
22. **Damages crops inside Gaza.** Private Israeli planes hired by the ministry of defense [spray herbicides](#) along the fence that separates Gaza and Israel, supposedly in order to provide Israeli forces stationed on the fence with a clear line of vision into Gaza. Large swathes of crops inside Gaza are damaged each time, including some that are grown [more than 500 meters away from the fence](#). The health of farmers and local residents may also be jeopardized as a result of the spraying of herbicides. Local farmers [live in constant fear](#) of the spraying and have already sustained profound financial damage because of it.
23. **Lets you travel abroad, if only you promise not to return for a year.** Israel has been denying Gaza residents transit abroad through its territory for almost 20 years. When Gaza residents are able to transit through Israeli territory, they exit via Allenby Bridge border crossing into Jordan, or, [very, very rarely](#), through Israel's Ben Gurion International Airport. Permits to do so are given in exceptional circumstances only. In 2016, Israel issued [a new directive](#), according to which residents of Gaza would be allowed to travel abroad through Israeli territory for purposes other than studying, attending special conferences or getting special medical treatment, [on condition they agree not to return to Gaza for a year](#).
24. **Prevents residents of Gaza from moving to the West Bank.** Contrary to international and Israeli recognition that the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are two parts of a single political entity, Israel has refused, since 2000, to allow Gaza residents to change their registered address to the West Bank, [preventing them from moving to live there](#) in order to reunite with family, to take advantage of employment opportunities, or for any other reason. Relocation is prohibited even if the Gaza resident has a spouse or children who live in the West Bank on a permanent basis.



25. **Classifies many Gaza residents, including medical patients, elderly people, women and children as security threats.** Only a small percentage of Gaza's residents meet [Israel's criteria](#) for requesting a permit to exit Gaza. Those who do undergo individual security screenings. [Over the course of 2016](#), Israel made unprecedented use of a "security block" claim to deny thousands the right to travel, including patients in need of life-saving treatment that isn't available in the Gaza Strip, elderly residents wishing to worship at al-Aqsa Mosque, established traders and local staff of international organizations. To demonstrate just how arbitrary these blanket restrictions are, in several cases, when media coverage or a threat of legal action was pursued, the supposed "security threat" vanished and Israel [allowed individuals previously blocked to travel](#).
26. **Influences life decisions for women in Gaza.** Israel maintains almost complete control over the [Palestinian population registry](#). In 2000, Israel stopped allowing Palestinians to add first-degree relatives who had moved to the West Bank or Gaza to the registry. This has particularly impacted thousands of Palestinian women from the diaspora who married Gaza residents and moved to the Strip. Many of them have no identifying documents which would allow them to exit the Strip, whether through Israel or through Rafah Crossing into Egypt. (See, [page 57](#)).
27. **Holds joint responsibility for the fact that tap water in Gaza is unsafe for human consumption.** Ninety-six percent of Gaza's tap water is [not potable](#), due to contamination and excessive salinity. Consuming this water can cause a variety of diseases, particularly among children. [Seventy percent of the materials and equipment](#) required for repair and maintenance of the water and sewage system are considered "dual-use" items by Israel, and therefore, many water infrastructure reconstruction projects do not materialize.
28. **Doesn't count vacation as an acceptable reason to grant an exit permit.** The restrictive [criteria](#) according to which Israel permits travel in and out of Gaza do not include vacationing abroad (and certainly not in the West Bank or Israel). Most Gaza residents have never been outside of the Strip.
29. **Conditions access on collaboration.** Israel uses its control over the land crossings to pressure Gaza residents to supply information on members of their communities. Residents understand that should they fail to provide the information, the Israeli Security Agency (ISA) interrogators [may deny them exit](#), even if they need life-saving medical treatment. The ISA has been known to interrogate inside ambulances transporting patients.
30. **Influences job numbers in the construction sector.** Occasionally, in acts of collective punishment, Israel [halts the entry of construction materials](#) into Gaza, either partially or completely. In addition to the delays this causes to reconstruction following three major military operations in the Strip, the restrictions leave thousands of individuals employed in the construction sector out of work. About 70,000 Gaza residents make their living in this sector directly and indirectly.

31. **Impedes cultural ties with the West Bank.** Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and those living elsewhere in the world, including Israel, have a shared history and culture. Maintaining these cultural ties became much more difficult when the closure was imposed. Israel [occasionally](#) allows Gaza residents to travel in order to participate in conferences or special events, but only ones held under the auspices of the Palestinian Authority. Any cultural event in the West Bank or Israel that is not sponsored by the Palestinian Authority does not meet the criteria for travel, and therefore does not warrant an exit permit for participants from Gaza.
32. **Enforces use of its currency in Gaza.** The economy of the occupied Palestinian territory, in both Gaza and the West Bank, is based on the Israeli currency, the shekel. Fiscal policies affecting the strength of this currency are designed and carried out by the Bank of Israel. Israel also determines the value added tax (VAT) rate and other important financial policies. This is one way Israel wields significant control over monetary activity in Gaza.
33. **Harms the work of civil society organizations in Gaza.** Gaza is home to a vibrant [civil society](#) that helps support the local population in many different ways and includes organizations that assist people with disabilities, cultural centers, and organizations that promote women's rights. Israel's travel criteria prevent members of civil society from traveling to trainings and deny donors and experts entry to Gaza, thus preventing them from helping to improve the work done by civil society organizations.
34. **Impacts the existence of diagnostic medical tests and treatments inside the Gaza Strip.** Israel's list of items it [considers to be "dual-use"](#) includes a slew of medical substances and equipment, such as medical imaging equipment and batteries for UPS devices, which are required to keep emergency unit equipment running constantly. In one instance, a hospital in Gaza waited for six months for approval to bring in a fluoroscope, which enables real-time viewing of x-ray images. In addition, medical testing equipment occasionally requires calibration by the manufacturer or by specialized companies, but Israel delays or denies their transport out of Gaza, and denies experts entry into Gaza, thus leaving many devices in Gaza inoperative.
35. **Determines whether one can access life-saving medical treatment.** Gaza's impoverished health care system cannot provide treatment for all illnesses and conditions. Patients must receive an exit permit from Israel in order to receive appropriate medical care available only in the West Bank, Jordan, or Israel. The process for obtaining these permits is long and convoluted. Recently, Israel has been [refusing an increasing number of applications](#) made by medical patients due to "security blocks."
36. **Only allows Gaza-grown eggplants and tomatoes to be marketed in Israel.** In March 2015, for the first time since the closure was imposed in 2007, Israel began allowing the sale of Gaza produce in its own territory. However, sales are subject to a [quota of up to 400 tons of eggplant and tomatoes per month](#). The price of Gaza produce is significantly lower, which could be of benefit to Israeli consumers. The proximity and size of the Israeli market make it a natural destination for Gaza growers.

37. **Allows marketing furniture in Israel but prohibits importing the wood needed to build it.** In September 2015, Israel declared that for the first time since the closure was imposed it would allow furniture manufacturers from Gaza to market their products in Israel. However, in March 2015, Israel had [announced](#) that wood planks thicker than 5 centimeters were to be considered a “dual-use” item (eventually expanding this classification to cover wood planks thicker than 1 cm), effectively blocking their entry into the Gaza Strip. Gaza carpenters were left wondering how to manufacture furniture without wood.
38. **Undermines academic programs through control of entrance of goods.** Natural sciences programs at Gaza universities require various chemical and biological substances. Other equipment is also needed in research labs, as well as medical and engineering programs. In many cases, Israel considers these items “dual-use” and prevents their entry into Gaza. In addition, power outages [harm research labs](#) and many experiments are shut down as a consequence. Equipment required for uninterrupted power supply (UPS devices) is also included on the dual-use list.
39. **Prevents academics from traveling abroad to conferences or inviting academic colleagues to Gaza.** Academic development requires participation in conferences, where researchers network and exchange ideas. Israel’s criteria for travel out of Gaza [exclude participation in academic conferences and training](#). Israel also denies foreign researchers entry into Gaza.
40. **Controls Gaza residents, while they have no real way of influencing its decisions.** Residents of Gaza and the West Bank are impacted by the actions and decisions of the Israeli government both directly and indirectly, but cannot vote in elections for the Israeli institutions that implement these policies.
41. **Blocks 3G, i.e. you can’t watch YouTube from your cellphone.** Israel continues to control Gaza’s electro-magnetic space (as well as the West Bank’s), and does not allocate 3G and LTE frequencies to Gaza. This does more than just interfere with user experience in Gaza, it also obstructs the [developing high-tech industry](#).
42. **Determines what agricultural goods can and cannot be sold in the West Bank.** After Operation Protective Edge, Israel allowed Gaza suppliers to market agricultural produce to the West Bank and Israel for the first time since 2007. As noted, only eggplant and tomatoes can be sold in Israel. The Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories published a [list](#) of the types of vegetables Israel allows Gaza growers to sell in the West Bank, omitting many high-quality crops Gaza growers would happily sell, including potato, spinach, peas and beans.
43. **Forbids Gaza residents from studying in the West Bank.** Israel has banned Gaza students from attending universities in the West Bank since 2000, despite the fact that some programs offered there are not available at universities and colleges in Gaza. The High Court of Justice has rejected several petitions brought by Gisha on behalf of students, including [a petition](#) Gisha filed in 2012 on behalf of five women who aspired to study programs not offered in Gaza (gender, law and development, and democracy and human rights).



44. **Harms the economy.** As of March 2017, there are 1,173 valid trader permits and 190 senior businessman permits (BMG), compared to 3,600 permits which were valid in January 2016. Apart from barring many traders' access to Israel and the West Bank, Israel has also banned some of them from bringing in or selling products. In other words, not only are the traders treated as suspect without having been proven guilty, so are their goods, despite the fact that all goods undergo meticulous screening at Kerem Shalom Crossing.
45. **Doesn't consider getting to your wedding a good reason to issue a permit.** The wedding of a first degree relative in Israel, the West Bank, or abroad is one of the humanitarian reasons on the basis of which Gaza residents may ask for a permit to travel from the Strip. However, traveling for one's own wedding is not listed in the recognized criteria. Gisha has had to file [several petitions](#) on behalf of young Palestinians from Gaza who wanted to exit the Strip to attend their own weddings.
46. **Decides when you can do the laundry.** On a good day, Gaza residents have eight hours of power, followed by eight hours of blackouts, on a rolling basis. Many daily household activities have to be put off until the power comes back on, including laundry, pumping and heating water, charging cell phones and laptops, watching TV or using the internet. Gaza does not have the [infrastructure](#) to produce enough of its own electricity and establishing an additional line of supply from Israel has been delayed for several reasons.
47. **Forbids camouflage print, no matter how trendy.** Israel's list of items it considers to be "dual-use" includes military uniforms. In 2016, Israel denied entry to a truck carrying women's camouflage-print leggings (perhaps not to everyone's taste, but certainly trendy) claiming they meet [the definition](#) of military uniforms.
48. **Separates children from their parents.** If a minor from Gaza loses a parent and the remaining parent lives in the West Bank, [there is no guarantee](#) that they would be permitted to live together. Israel assumes the power to determine who will be allowed to reunite with a parent, depending on what it judges to be the extent of their relationship, and who will have no choice but to live with a more distant relative.
49. **Decides what kind of postal services Gaza residents can receive.** Israel controls postal services to and from Gaza, whether provided as a public service by the Palestinian Authority or by private companies like Aramex. It has taken the liberty of [suspending](#) and limiting these services in the past.
50. **Decides what medical treatment residents may receive outside Gaza.** Gaza residents aren't free to seek the [best medical treatment](#) they can afford. Rather, they can only ask to exit Gaza for treatments that are not available there.