

# Gaza: Israel's Experiment on Humans in Situations of Extreme Stress and Deprivation

One experiment: What happens to two million human beings when they are deprived of electricity nearly all the time, day and night?

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*One of the biggest experiments involving human subjects ever conducted anywhere is taking place right before our eyes, and the world is silent.*

The project is at its peak and the world shows no interest. This experiment on human beings, unsanctioned by any of the international scientific institutions whose oversight is required by the Helsinki Declaration, seeks to examine human behaviour in situations of extreme stress and deprivation.

The experimental group does not comprise just a few, nor dozens or hundreds, nor thousands or tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of people. The experimental population includes no fewer than two million human beings.

Thus far they have stood the test amazingly well. While some turbulence is evident inside the pressure cooker within which they are confined, it has not yet exploded. The Gaza Strip is being watched to see when and in what form it will ultimately explode. This is apparently only a matter of time.

As presented by Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt: What happens to two million human beings when they are deprived of electricity nearly all the time, day and night? What happens to them in winter, and in spring, and especially now, in the terrible heat of a Middle Eastern summer?

This experiment, like all such experiments, is being conducted in a phased manner. The frog is to be cooked in water that will gradually be heated until it boils.

At first Gaza was deprived of electricity for about a third of each 24 hours, then for about half, and now the level has been ratcheted up such that the two million residents of Gaza have electricity for only about 2.5 hours in each 24. Let's see what that does to them. Let's watch how they respond. And how about when they are supplied with electricity for only a single hour per day? Or for one hour per week? This experiment is still in its early stages, and no one can foresee its end.

The location of this experiment is among the most cursed parcels of land on earth. Forty kilometres long, its width varying between 5.7km and 12.5km, with a total area of 365

square kilometres – the Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated places in the world. According to the CIA, in July 2016 there were some 1.7 million people there; the Palestinian Authority cites two million residents as of October 2016.

In any case, a million of them are considered refugees or the children or grandchildren of refugees, about half of whom are still living in refugee camps. Compared with other refugee camps elsewhere in the Arab world, the camps in Gaza are considered especially wretched, except perhaps for the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria. The refugees in Gaza were expelled or fled from Israel in 1948 and comprise about a fifth of all Palestinian refugees in the world.

This population has rarely known any meaningful period of quiet, security or minimal economic welfare. Their situation today may be at its worst and most despairing, and a UN report has already concluded that in another two-and-a-half years or so, by 2020, the Gaza Strip will no longer be habitable, largely due to the escalating water problem. The new cuts in electricity are exacerbating the plight of these human beings as the experiment continues.

In the last decade, this battered strip of land has also turned into a cage, the largest cage on earth.

Gaza is surrounded: by Israel to the north and east and by Egypt to the south, and on its western boundary by the sea, where the Israeli military has absolute control. Since the advent of Hamas rule in Gaza, Israel in cooperation with Egypt has imposed a siege. The siege has been eased somewhat over the years, but remains a siege, especially with respect to the movement of people into and out of Gaza and the almost total prohibition on the export of goods.

But even that isn't sufficient. Gaza's torments are far from over. Now comes the reduced supply of electricity.



In this file photo, a Palestinian woman and her children light candles during a power outage in Gaza City, on November 10, 2013 (Source: [phys.org](http://phys.org))

Gaza has a single electric power plant, which cannot produce as much electricity as is consumed. Launched in 2002 with a production capacity of about 140 megawatts, the plant is limited by the carrying capacity of its grid and in 2006 was producing only 90 megawatts, with 120 additional megawatts supplied by Israel, paid for in full, of course.

The plant was blown up by Israel after the abduction of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in the summer of 2006, when it was producing 43% of Gaza's electricity consumption. After reconstruction, the plant reached a production capacity of about 80 megawatts. But even this is entirely dependent on Israel, which is the plant's only supplier of diesel fuel and spare parts.

When the siege was first imposed, Israel began restricting the quantity of diesel fuel it supplied. Gaza needs between 280 and 400 megawatts of electricity, depending on the season. About a third of the total required, some 120 megawatts, was coming from Israel, and 60-70 megawatts was coming from the power plant. There was a chronic shortage of electricity in Gaza even before the most recent decrease. Gazans have been without electricity for some hours every day for years now.

On 11 June of this year, Israel's security cabinet decided to cut the supply of electricity provided by Israel to Gaza as per a request by the chairman of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas. That set off the present crisis, the worst so far. The power struggle between Abbas and Hamas, which rules in Gaza, a struggle in which Israel cooperates in a contemptible manner with the PA, has created the present situation. In this situation there are no good guys and bad guys, but only bad guys.

About two weeks after the cabinet decision, Israel cut back on its supply again and eliminated another eight megawatts from the 120 megawatts it was providing. In consequence, the supply in some parts of Gaza, especially in the west and south, has been reduced to only about two-and-a-half hours of electricity in each 24 hours. Two-and-a-half hours of electricity per day.

It's hard to imagine the day-to-day routine in this sweltering heat with only two-and-a-half hours of electricity a day. It's hard to picture how food can be kept fresh, frightening to think of all the ordinary human tasks being done without electricity, awful to consider all the hospital patients whose lives depend on electricity.

Not long ago, an article in Haaretz (4 June) by Mohammed Azaizeh, who works for the Israeli human rights organization Gisha, described what was happening in the Al-Rantisi Hospital in Gaza.

In the paediatric ICU, children were hooked up to respirators for which the electricity was available only a few hours each day, their lives now dependent on a generator. Sometimes the generator breaks down. Hospital director Dr Muhammad Abu Sulwaya described the situation in his hospital as catastrophic. In the other Gaza hospitals the situation is, of course, similar.



Children receive kidney dialysis treatment at al-Rantisi pediatric hospital in Gaza. (Photo by Dr. Rand Askalan through [The Electronic Intifada](#))

Thus the residents of Gaza again fall victim to cynical political machinations that play out at their expense. The unbridled power struggles and ego games between Abbas and Hamas, between Egypt and Hamas, and between Israel and all the others have consequences that reach as far as the paediatric respirators for the children at Al-Rantisi.

No one can see where this will end, with the parties only further entrenching their positions and the world responding with apathy. The lack of electricity results in a lack of clean water and flooding of untreated sewage. Gaza is accustomed to all of that, but even the fantastic and unparalleled resilience of Gaza's residents has its limits.

Israel bears primary responsibility for this situation, due to the siege it imposes, but Israel is certainly not the only culprit.

The PA and Egypt are full partners in this crime. Yes, crime. This is 2017 and preventing millions of human beings from receiving electricity means depriving them of oxygen and water. Israel's responsibility cries out to the heavens because Gaza is still under partial Israeli occupation.

Although Israel withdrew its military and its settlers from the Gaza Strip, it retains sole responsibility for many other aspects of life in Gaza. This makes Israel responsible for providing electricity for Gaza's residents. The PA also bears a heavy responsibility for the current situation, in which it is abusing its own people. Likewise Egypt, which likes to refer to itself loftily as the sister of Palestinians, even as its own role in the siege of Gaza is intolerable.

Gaza is dying, slowly. Elsewhere, its suffering matters to no one. No one in Washington, or Brussels, or Jerusalem, or Cairo nor even in Ramallah. Incredibly, there is evidently almost no one who cares that two million people are abandoned to the dark at night and to the sweltering heat of the summer days, with nowhere to run and no shred of hope. Nothing.

*Gideon Levy is a Haaretz columnist and a member of the newspaper's editorial board. Levy joined Haaretz in 1982, and spent four years as the newspaper's deputy editor. He was awarded the 2015 Olof Palme human rights prize and was the recipient of the Euro-Med Journalist Prize for 2008; the Leipzig Freedom Prize in 2001; the Israeli Journalists' Union Prize in 1997; and The Association of Human Rights in Israel Award for 1996. His new book, The Punishment of Gaza, has just been published by Verso.*

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