OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. Agency for International Development

USAID's Gaza Response: External Factors Impaired Distribution of Humanitarian Assistance Through the JLOTS Maritime Corridor

Report E-000-24-004-M
August 27, 2024

Evaluation

Office of Audits, Inspections, and Evaluations

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. Agency for International Development

DATE: August 27, 2024

TO: Sonali Korde
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Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance

FROM: Paul K. Martin
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SUBJECT: USAID's Gaza Response: External Factors Impaired Distribution of Humanitarian Assistance Through the JLOTS Maritime Corridor

This memorandum transmits the final report on our evaluation of USAID's efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to Gaza through the maritime corridor. Our objectives were to assess USAID's (1) planning and execution and (2) oversight of the distribution of humanitarian assistance through the Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS) maritime corridor. In finalizing the report, we considered your technical comments on the draft and made adjustments where appropriate.

We appreciate the assistance you and USAID staff provided to us during this engagement.

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Report in Brief

Why We Did This Evaluation

On October 7, 2023, Hamas—a U.S.-designated terrorist organization—invaded southwest Israel, killing more than 1,200 people and seizing 253 hostages. In response, Israel declared war on Hamas the next day and announced a total blockade on Gaza that cut off food, medicine, and other supplies to more than 2 million residents in Gaza. Since the beginning of the war, nearly 40,000 Gazans have been killed and about 96 percent of the population faces severe food insecurity and a high risk of famine.

Immediately after the October 7 attack, USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance worked with the United Nation's World Food Programme (WFP) to provide humanitarian assistance to Gaza through land crossings in Israel and Egypt. In March 2024, President Biden directed the Department of Defense to establish a temporary maritime corridor to deliver aid to the Gaza coast to supplement land-based humanitarian aid operations. The Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS) modular system would transport aid from Cyprus via a series of vessels, a floating platform, and a temporary pier affixed to the beach. USAID requested Department of Defense support through JLOTS for about 90 days, with a goal of feeding or assisting 500,000 people each month. Costing an estimated $230 million, JLOTS construction was completed on May 16, 2024.

We initiated this review given the critical humanitarian need and the large U.S. investment in the JLOTS system. Our objectives were to assess USAID's (1) planning and execution and (2) oversight of the distribution of humanitarian assistance through the JLOTS maritime corridor.

What We Found

External factors impaired USAID's efforts to distribute humanitarian assistance to Gaza through JLOTS. The Department of Defense and Israel Defense Forces operational and security requirements took precedence in the planning to use JLOTS for the humanitarian response. Accordingly, USAID and WFP adjusted their plans to work within these security requirements. Multiple USAID staff expressed concerns that the focus on using JLOTS would detract from the Agency's advocacy for opening land crossings, which were seen as more efficient and proven methods of transporting aid into Gaza. However, once the President issued the directive, the Agency's focus was to use JLOTS as effectively as possible.

Due to structural damage caused by rough weather and high seas, the pier operated for only 20 days and was decommissioned on July 17. Additionally, security and access challenges plagued aid distributions once on shore. As a result, USAID fell short of its goal of supplying aid to 500,000 or more Palestinians each month for 3 months and instead delivered enough aid to feed 450,000 for 1 month.

USAID relied on existing controls to oversee the distribution of humanitarian assistance through JLOTS. Although JLOTS was a new method for USAID to deliver aid into Gaza, the Agency relied on its existing controls of risk assessments and monitoring to provide oversight of aid distribution with USAID and WFP documenting risks as required. While unable to directly monitor distribution activities in Gaza, the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance received incident reports and updates from WFP that aligned with internal guidance for monitoring implementing organizations in nonpermissive environments such as Gaza.

Based on our findings and the decommissioning of JLOTS, we are not making any recommendations at the present time.

Introduction

On October 7, 2023, Hamas—a U.S.-designated terrorist organization—invaded southwest Israel, killing more than 1,200 Israelis and others and seizing 253 hostages. Following Hamas' cross-border attack, Israel declared war on the group and imposed a total blockade on Gaza, cutting off food, medicine, fuel, and supplies to the more than 2 million residents of the region. In the 10 months since the war began, nearly 40,000 Gazans have died and about 1.9 million people have been displaced, "with most facing unsanitary, overcrowded conditions alongside acute shortages of food, water, medical care, and other essential supplies and services."[1] According to a global authority on food security, about 96 percent of the population of Gaza faces severe food insecurity and is at a high risk of famine.[2]

USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) activated its response to the Gaza crisis in October 2023; working with World Food Programme (WFP) and other United Nations (UN) and nongovernmental organization partners in the region, the Agency sought to provide humanitarian assistance to mitigate food insecurity and risk of famine. However, ongoing hostilities, closed routes, and inspection delays at land crossings impeded efforts to deliver aid into Gaza.

In his March 7, 2024, State of the Union address to Congress, President Biden directed the Department of Defense (DoD) to lead an emergency mission to establish a temporary pier on the Gaza coast to facilitate humanitarian aid operations:

> *The United States has been leading international efforts to get more humanitarian assistance into Gaza. Tonight, I'm directing the U.S. military to lead an emergency mission to establish a temporary pier in the Mediterranean on the Gaza coast that can receive large ships carrying food, water, medicine and temporary shelters.*
>
> *No U.S. boots will be on the ground.*
>
> *This temporary pier would enable a massive increase in the amount of humanitarian assistance getting into Gaza every day.*[3]

Following the President's announcement, USAID requested support from DoD to facilitate transportation of humanitarian assistance from Cyprus to Gaza. The Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS) modular system consisted of a series of vessels, a floating platform about 5 miles offshore,[4] and a floating pier affixed to the beach in Gaza where the aid would be driven onto land for distribution by UN relief workers. DoD previously deployed versions of the JLOTS system in other crisis areas, including Kuwait, Somalia, and South Korea. However, according to

[1] Congressional Research Service, *Israel and Hamas Conflict In Brief: Overview, U.S. Policy, and Options for Congress* (R47828), updated August 1, 2024.
[2] Integrated Food Insecurity Phase Classification (IPC), *Gaza Strip: IPC Acute Food Insecurity Special Snapshot, May 1-September 30, 2024*, June 25, 2024. The IPC is the international standard for classifying food insecurity and malnutrition.
[3] The White House, *Remarks of President Joe Biden – State of the Union Address As Prepared for Delivery*, March 7, 2024.
[4] The distance between the floating platform and the Gaza shore depended on sea and weather conditions and fluctuated from 3 to 7 miles offshore.

BHA, the Gaza crisis was the first time DoD used JLOTS to support a humanitarian response in an active combat, nonpermissive environment.

JLOTS cost an estimated $230 million,[5] and DoD finished building it on May 16, 2024. From the outset, USAID and DoD said JLOTS was a temporary measure to complement aid deliveries arriving through land routes. JLOTS was expected to be operational for about 3 months, anticipating that rough conditions in the Mediterranean Sea in the fall would necessitate shuttering its operations.

However, rough seas and high winds began earlier than anticipated, and the temporary pier operated intermittently for about 20 days. Overcrowded roads and limited safe, passable land routes also created significant challenges to moving aid from JLOTS to UN warehouses for distribution, including several instances where aid trucks were looted.

Security issues escalated during the ongoing conflict and on June 9, WFP announced that it was pausing food distribution from the pier temporarily due to staff safety concerns. Five weeks later, on July 17, DoD announced the permanent closure of the pier after delivering over 8,100 metric tons of humanitarian assistance to Gaza. According to USAID, this is the equivalent of assistance to feed 450,000 people for 1 month.

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) initiated this review given the critical need for humanitarian assistance in Gaza, the U.S. government's investment in the JLOTS system, and USAID's commitment of more than $350 million in humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza and the West Bank.[6] Our objectives were to assess USAID's (1) planning and execution and (2) oversight of the distribution of humanitarian assistance through the JLOTS maritime corridor.[7] We focused our review on USAID's role in providing and handing over aid delivered to the Gaza shore through JLOTS. This review is one of several oversight engagements examining aspects of USAID's humanitarian response in Gaza.[8]

We conducted our review in June and July 2024 in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*. To answer our objectives, we analyzed documentation related to USAID's plans and oversight for providing aid to Gaza through the corridor and interviewed officials from BHA and WFP. Appendix A provides more details on our scope and methodology.

[5] DoD initially estimated that the pier would cost $320 million to build and operate but reduced that figure to $230 million in June 2024.
[6] In fiscal year 2024, USAID has obligated more than $350 million for its Gaza response as of July 11, 2024. This total does not include the $14.6 million in funding obligated in fiscal year 2023.
[7] We coordinated our work with DoD OIG, which is conducting its own reviews of DoD's equities related to JLOTS operations. Specifically, DoD OIG is conducting a review of DoD's involvement in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza through the JLOTS maritime corridor, as well as a separate evaluation of DoD's capabilities to effectively carry out JLOTS operations and exercises.
[8] See OIG's webpage for oversight products related to USAID's humanitarian response in Gaza.

Background

USAID's Humanitarian Response in Gaza

USAID's BHA is the lead Federal coordinator for international disaster assistance. BHA responds to emergencies in over 65 countries each year, including in areas affected by protracted crises and conflict. In October 2023, following the onset of the Israel-Hamas war, BHA deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team to lead the U.S. government's humanitarian response in Gaza. At the same time, it also activated a Response Management Team in Washington, DC, to coordinate USAID's more than $350 million in humanitarian assistance for Palestinians.[9] Of this overall amount, USAID has awarded the UN's WFP more than $240 million since October 2023 as its primary implementer for providing food assistance, logistics, and program support in Gaza. USAID provided an additional $110 million to other organizations working in the region to provide cash assistance, health services, shelter, water, sanitation, hygiene support, and assistance coordination to the Palestinian people.[10]

Since the outbreak of hostilities in October 2023, numerous and prolonged border closures have significantly affected the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza. Figure 1 shows entry points for humanitarian aid into the region.

Figure 1. Entry Points for the Delivery of Humanitarian Aid into Gaza



Source: OIG generated from USAID/BHA information.
Note: The Government of Israel opened both Erez West and Erez East crossings, but only one of the two crossings was kept open due to capacity limits in managing the crossings.

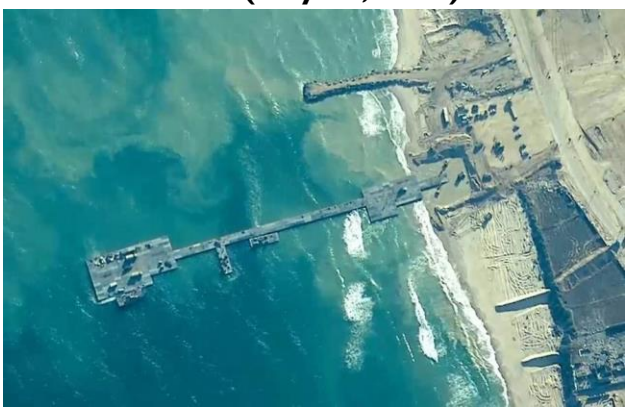
[9] This includes Palestinians residing in the West Bank.
[10] Other USAID implementers include the UN International Organization for Migration, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNICEF, and World Health Organization.

Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore

The United States—in coordination with other donors—established the maritime corridor to transport aid from Cyprus directly to Gaza, an undertaking that included DoD constructing a temporary JLOTS pier and floating staging area. DoD's JLOTS capability makes it possible to deliver food and other humanitarian aid to places that, like Gaza, lack a functioning seaport. Once the goods reach the pier, they are transported to an offloading area where a partner aid agency loads them onto trucks for distribution across the region.

For Gaza, this multinational operation has involved the United States, led by USAID and DoD, with assistance from Cyprus, Israel, the UN, and other foreign donors, including the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the European Union.[11] DoD dedicated more than 1,000 U.S. soldiers and sailors, as well as several ships, to this project. Engineers from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) anchored the temporary pier to the shore to ensure U.S. military personnel would not have to enter Gaza in keeping with the President's mandate of no U.S. military "boots on the ground" in Gaza. DoD construction of the temporary pier was completed on May 16, 2024; delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza began the following day. Figures 2 and 3 show an aerial view of the pier and the floating platform positioned about 5 miles offshore.

Figure 2. JLOTS Temporary Pier on the Gaza Coast (May 16, 2024)



Source: U.S. Central Command.

Figure 3. JLOTS Floating Platform (May 16, 2024)



Source: U.S. Central Command.

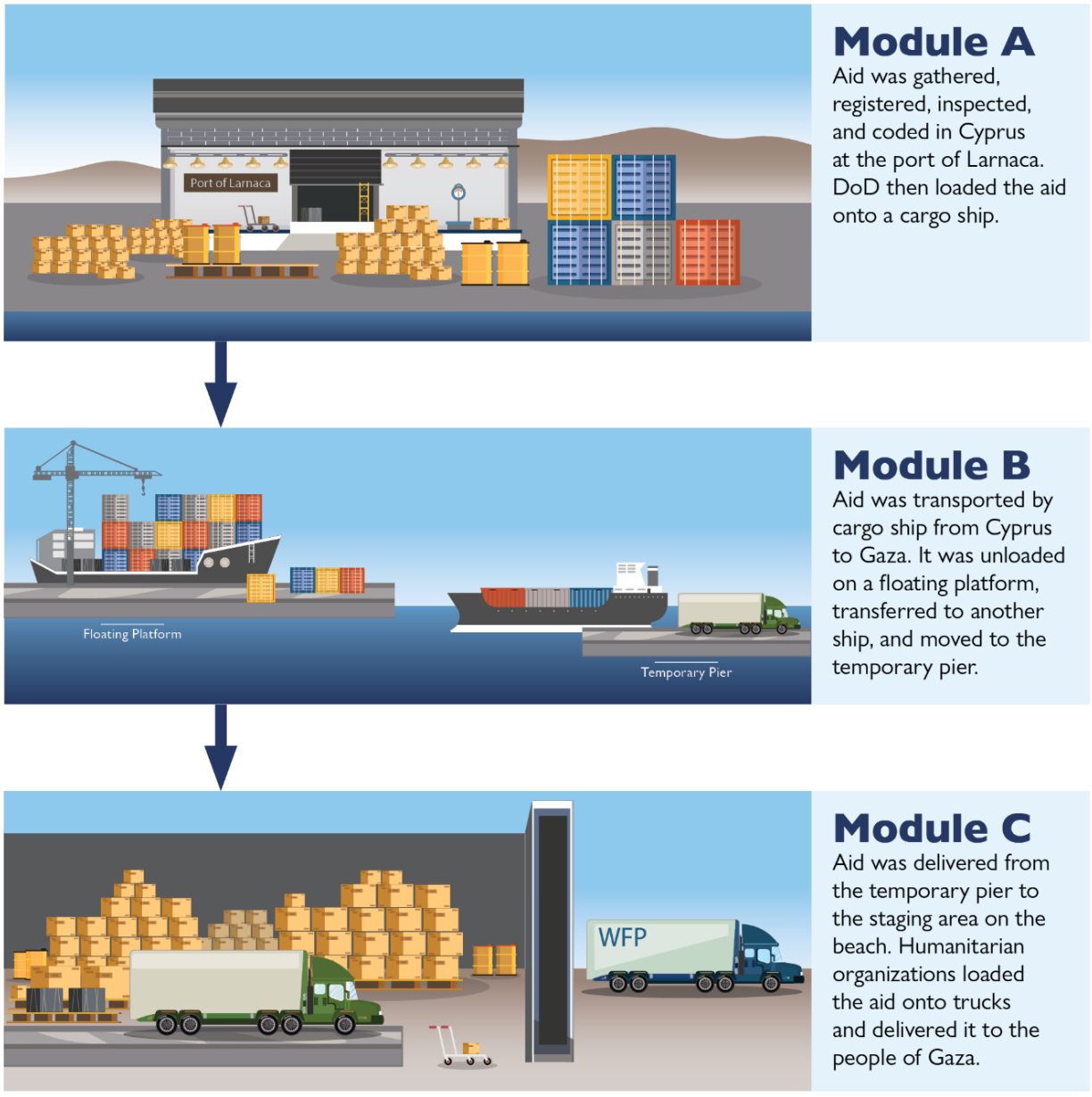
Through JLOTS, USAID aimed to supply 500,000 or more people per month with humanitarian assistance including food, shelter, and hygiene kits. According to USAID, this goal was developed after consultations with the UN. USAID's initial plan was to provide support for the humanitarian response through JLOTS for about 90 days.

[11] USAID positioned Disaster Assistance Response Team members in Cyprus and Israel to provide direct coordination between DoD, Israel Defense Forces, and UN stakeholders involved in JLOTS operations.

As shown in Figure 4, JLOTS involved a complex series of aid movements grouped into three modules:

- Module A, where aid was gathered and screened in Cyprus;
- Module B, where aid was shipped from Cyprus to Gaza via the Mediterranean Sea to a floating platform about 5 miles from the Gaza coast and then transported to the temporary pier; and
- Module C, where aid was delivered to the beach and handed over to humanitarian partners in Gaza from the pier and transferred via trucks to warehouses and distribution points throughout Gaza.

Figure 4. Movement of Humanitarian Assistance Through JLOTS



Source: OIG-generated based on USAID documentation.

Table 1 outlines the key stakeholders involved in JLOTS and their roles and responsibilities across the modules.

Table 1. Key Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities in JLOTS by Module

Stakeholder	Roles and Responsibilities
USAID	• Reviewed and approved donor requests to use JLOTS for humanitarian commodities, asked DoD to load aid onto the ships for delivery through JLOTS, and assigned tracking numbers to donors (Module A). • Worked with UN, DoD, and IDF stakeholders on the Convoy Management Board to support the collection of aid from the beach and distribution of aid in Gaza through its implementer, WFP (Module C).
DoD	• Received, organized, and loaded aid onto ships in Cyprus (Module A). • Transported aid from Cyprus to Gaza (Module B). • Worked with USAID, UN, and IDF stakeholders on the Convoy Management Board to support the collection of aid from the beach and distribution of aid in Gaza through WFP (Module C).
WFP	• Led logistics among the humanitarian organizations; managed the reception, pickup, and distribution of aid in Gaza (Module C).
Government of Israel	• Provided Israeli customs clearance for aid in Cyprus (Module A). • Provided security over aid delivered to the Gaza shore (Module C).
Republic of Cyprus	• Led coordination for the Cyprus portion of the maritime corridor (Module A). • Provided Cypriot customs clearance (Module A).

Source: OIG analysis of JLOTS documentation and interviews with stakeholders.

Module C—where aid was handed over to humanitarian organizations—was divided into three zones to ensure military and humanitarian operations were separate (see Figure 5).

- C1: A staging and release area for vehicles offloading from the temporary pier.
- C2: An offload point for vehicles from the pier and an upload point for vehicles delivering humanitarian assistance. C2 was divided into three compartments to allow continuous flow of logistics activity and separation of humanitarian and military actors.
- C3: A logistics space solely for humanitarian actors that served as a staging and release point area for vehicles coming from outside Module C. WFP managed the logistics at C3 for the delivery, pickup, and distribution of humanitarian aid within Gaza.

Figure 5. Design of Module C



Source: USAID/BHA.

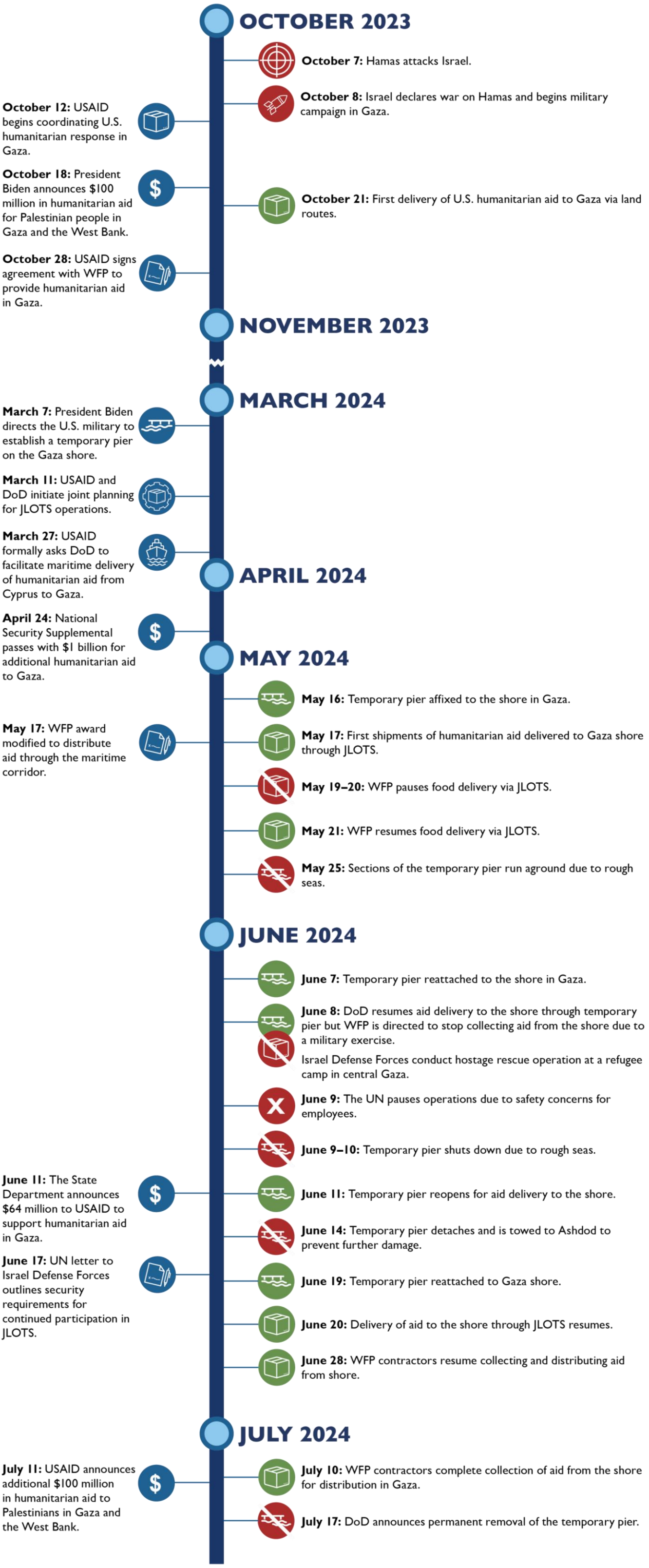
External Factors Impaired USAID's Efforts to Distribute Humanitarian Assistance in Gaza Through JLOTS

Multiple factors outside of USAID's control impaired the Agency's efforts to distribute humanitarian assistance delivered through JLOTS within Gaza. DoD and IDF operational and security requirements took precedence in the planning to use JLOTS for the humanitarian response. In addition, issues related to operating in a conflict environment were compounded by weather, security, and humanitarian access challenges that affected how much assistance could enter the region through the maritime corridor and safely reach partner distribution centers in Gaza.[12] As a result of these external factors, JLOTS operated for about 20 of the planned 90 days. It fell short of meeting the U.S. government's goal of providing enough aid to feed 500,000 people per month, or 1.5 million people over 3 months, and instead delivered enough aid to feed 450,000 people for 1 month.

See Figure 6 for a timeline of the significant events related to USAID's response in Gaza and JLOTS operations.

[12] Humanitarian access relates to aid organizations' ability to reach populations affected by crisis, as well as an affected population's ability to access humanitarian assistance and services.

Figure 6. Timeline of Significant Events Related to JLOTS



DoD and IDF Requirements Took Precedence Over the Expressed Humanitarian Response Needs in the Planning for JLOTS

Discussions about establishing a pier to deliver humanitarian assistance to Gaza took place before President Biden's announcement at the State of the Union on March 7. According to a senior BHA official, interagency discussions had considered options for commercial and DoD-supported piers to establish a maritime corridor into Gaza. At the time, BHA advocated for transporting aid through land routes and did not pursue planning a maritime route because of the logistical and technical challenges it would present. Multiple BHA staff noted that using JLOTS was not an option USAID would typically recommend in humanitarian response operations. In addition, multiple USAID staff expressed concerns that the focus on using JLOTS would detract from the Agency's advocacy to open land crossings in Israel and Egypt, which were seen as more efficient and proven avenues for delivering aid to Gaza. WFP staff said that their organization was a part of the initial consultations for a commercial option to establish a pier in the north of Gaza. According to WFP staff, after the President's State of the Union address, conversations about the pier shifted from a commercial option to the DoD JLOTS capability. Similarly, once the President issued the directive, BHA staff said their goal was to use JLOTS in a way that would maintain a separation between military and humanitarian actors.

In the week following the State of the Union address, DoD and USAID held several meetings on the initial operational planning to use JLOTS, according to multiple USAID staff. On March 27, USAID formally requested that DoD "facilitate maritime delivery of humanitarian supplies and associated logistics support" from Cyprus to Gaza to support its humanitarian response operations. While USAID, WFP, and DoD each contributed to the JLOTS planning effort, a senior BHA official said USAID worked within the operational and security requirements set by DoD and the IDF, in support of DoD's force protection requirements. According to BHA staff, operational planning for JLOTS followed DoD's Joint Planning Process because the interagency effort would use DoD's unique capabilities and rely on a variety of DoD components.[13] This process applied to the entirety of JLOTS, including Module C where aid was handed over on the beach in Gaza to humanitarian organizations for forward distribution.

In implementing the planning process for the use of JLOTS in the humanitarian response, WFP's initial requirements for conducting humanitarian operations in Gaza were not fully accommodated. Recognizing that WFP would play a key role in USAID's humanitarian response, USAID and DoD met with WFP to discuss requirements and identify the latter's issues of concern. Early in these discussions, WFP identified several prerequisites to participate in the JLOTS maritime corridor, including but not limited to:

1. Locating the pier in northern Gaza;
2. Obtaining security for humanitarian operations from a UN member state; and

[13] Among other things, DoD's Joint Planning Process seeks to identify how to use military capabilities to achieve objectives within an acceptable level of risk.

3. Transitioning the response to civilian operation after the initial 90 days of planned use.

In addition, during these initial planning discussions WFP highlighted that humanitarian assistance should continue to enter Gaza primarily via land routes.

Despite WFP's prerequisites for participation, DoD ultimately decided to locate the pier along the central Gaza coast rather than in the north near Gaza City, the closest location to the population in the most acute need for humanitarian aid at the time. According to a BHA official, the decision was made after consultation with the IDF and USAID. A northern location would have enabled WFP to avoid the south-to-north land route where it had previously faced delays at IDF checkpoints as well as "self-distribution" or looting of the aid. However, BHA staff said that DoD decided to locate the pier further to the south after surveying the beach and assessing the security situation in Gaza. WFP staff told OIG that it was their understanding DoD chose the location it did to ensure that military personnel and JLOTS infrastructure could be protected.

USAID and WFP also compromised on the issue of dedicated security for the humanitarian response. WFP stated that it could not work with the IDF to provide security for humanitarian operations because doing so would compromise the international humanitarian principle of neutrality. Instead, WFP requested that a third-party UN member state provide security for the humanitarian effort through JLOTS. A senior BHA official said DoD explored several options in coordination with USAID and interagency stakeholders. In the end, no third-party country agreed to provide security and, as a result, the IDF provided security for Module C operations for JLOTS.

Weather, Security, and Access Constraints Impaired USAID's Ability to Distribute Humanitarian Assistance Through JLOTS

USAID initially planned to use JLOTS to provide support for the humanitarian response for about 90 days with the goal of delivering enough aid to feed or assist 500,000 people or more per month. However, during its 8-week existence, JLOTS was frequently rendered inoperable due to structural challenges caused by high winds and rough seas. In June, WFP paused its distribution of JLOTS-delivered aid based on security concerns and community misperceptions from disinformation that the pier had been used to assist the IDF in a military operation to free several hostages. Finally, difficulty in finding viable access and distribution routes once the aid reached the beach in Gaza also limited the amount of JLOTS-delivered aid that WFP could distribute. In the end, while JLOTS allowed for the delivery of aid in Gaza at a time when land routes were restricted, it operated for about 20 days and allowed delivery of enough assistance to feed only 450,000 people in Gaza.

Weather and Security Issues Led to Pauses in Aid Distribution

From the start, rough weather posed a major challenge to the success of JLOTS operations. DoD guidance on the temporary pier stated its usage was weather-dependent and that it could not operate in conditions beyond what is known as sea state 3, or short and moderate waves. However, the Mediterranean Sea is often at sea state 4 with significant winds and waves. According to BHA staff, at the JLOTS planning kick-off meeting a DoD expert discussed weather issues and structural challenges to the pier's sustainability. From May 16 when it first

became operational, the pier detached or was shut down numerous times due to rough seas, structural damage, and needed repairs, limiting the amount of aid that could be delivered via the maritime corridor. When JLOTS was not operational, the Port of Ashdod, a commercial port in Israel about 23 miles north of Gaza, was used to redirect assistance and shelter components of the JLOTS system, according to multiple BHA staff.[14] Ultimately, the pier operated for about 20 days and was decommissioned on July 17.

Security concerns also significantly impacted the distribution of humanitarian assistance delivered through JLOTS. Before its launch, WFP highlighted in its USAID award documentation that lack of community buy-in among Palestinians for the maritime corridor could result in significant safety and security risks and compromise its operations. Further, the WFP documentation stated that its participation in JLOTS "potentially entailed significant risk exposure for WFP." Security concerns continued throughout the JLOTS operation with WFP and USAID staff citing multiple instances of looting after aid was collected from the beach and transported into Gaza, attacks on WFP warehouses, and drivers being detained or shot. Moreover, concerns about the perceived militarization of the pier and Palestinian community views about the neutrality of humanitarian operations further limited the distribution of aid delivered through the JLOTS maritime corridor.

WFP's prerequisites for participating in the maritime corridor operation included the clear and visible distinction between humanitarian and military actors. On June 8, the IDF conducted an operation in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, resulting in the rescue of four Israeli hostages and the deaths of multiple Palestinians.[15] Social media posts showed video of the IDF with the JLOTS pier in the background, resulting in the inference that Israel had used the pier in connection with the military operation. In a statement on June 8, U.S. Central Command officially denied that the IDF used the pier in a military operation. The next day, WFP publicly announced a pause in operations at the temporary pier to conduct a security review. On June 17, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Gaza and the West Bank—the UN's Designated Official for Security—sent a letter to the IDF outlining minimum requirements for UN organizations to continue their participation in JLOTS. The requirements included a functioning coordination and notification mechanism, a commitment to protecting all aid workers, and access to armored vehicles and communications equipment. The letter noted that the security risks to the UN, including the June 8 hostage rescue operation and subsequent community perceptions, could extend beyond JLOTS and impact all UN operations across Gaza.

As a result of the UN's pause in using JLOTS, thousands of pallets of aid from the JLOTS operation piled up on the Gaza beach. According to USAID staff, DoD sought to deliver the commodities to the beach while the weather permitted, regardless of whether or when WFP could collect the goods for distribution in Gaza. USAID staff stated that the aid that accumulated on the beach was shelf-stable canned goods not at an immediate risk of spoilage. For 3 weeks, USAID and WFP did not conduct any formal contingency planning for such a pause in aid distribution, in part because the two organizations did not expect the pause to last

[14] Following the end of JLOTS operations, transition plans as of July 2024 centered on using the Port of Ashdod as a supplemental aid delivery route.

[15] Gaza's health ministry reported 274 deaths while the Israeli military stated it knew of less than 100 Palestinians killed during the operation.

as long as it did. At one point during this pause, WFP expressed to USAID that it was ready to resume aid distribution operations at the pier but was waiting on an overall UN decision regarding safety and security. According to a BHA official, several days into the pause USAID started to consider alternate methods to transport items off the beach. However, in July 2024 UN leadership agreed to a temporary solution. This solution allowed WFP contractors to collect the 8,860 pallets of aid that had piled up on the beach during the nearly 3-week pause and move them to WFP warehouses in Gaza without resuming overall JLOTS operations.

Access Issues Disrupted Aid Distribution

Although JLOTS enabled delivery of aid directly into Gaza, challenges remained with access and distribution routes. For example, in the first 2 days of the maritime corridor's operations, crowds improperly removed humanitarian aid from 12 of 26 WFP trucks attempting to make the trip from the temporary pier to the UN's warehouse in Gaza. WFP subsequently identified alternative routes to safely transport aid. However, Israeli authorities delayed approving new routes from the pier to the UN warehouse and prevented WFP from transporting additional aid from JLOTS for 2 more days.

To help address security and distribution challenges, USAID, DoD, and IDF officials established a coordination structure between humanitarian and military operations at the beginning of JLOTS operations. This structure later evolved into a convoy management board composed of representatives from DOD, USAID, UN organizations, and the government of Israel. USAID staff told OIG that while convoy management boards are standard practice in civilian-military operations, such an approach was new to the IDF. According to a USAID staff member, the operating environment on the Gaza shore was so insecure that planned distribution routes could become evacuation zones within a matter of hours, so transportation plans needed to change quickly. The convoy management board enabled real-time deconfliction of military and humanitarian operations to enable aid to be transferred safely from JLOTS to UN warehouses. One USAID staff member stated that the board was able to redirect trucks that left JLOTS to avoid looting and helped drivers who were lost or encountered other problems, increasing the efficiency of the distribution of aid delivered through JLOTS.

When it was functioning, JLOTS enabled aid to enter Gaza through the maritime corridor at a time when other land routes were restricted. For example, the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt closed on May 7 following the Rafah offensive and remained closed throughout the period JLOTS was operational. BHA stressed that the purpose of JLOTS operations was to augment existing land routes, and multiple BHA staff acknowledged that JLOTS had provided a direct route to Gaza at a time when other crossings were closed. Table 2 shows the amount of humanitarian aid entering Gaza through the various access points or border crossings from May to July 2024, as reported by WFP.

Table 2. Amount of WFP Aid Entering Gaza (Metric Tons), May to July 2024

Month	Egypt Corridor (Kerem Shalom and Gate 96)	Jordan Corridor (Erez East and Erez West)	Ashdod Port (Erez West)	JLOTS	Total (Metric Tons)
May	6,079	2,886	1,548	748	11,261
June	7,086	1,926	882	1,955	11,849
July (as of July 18)	1,148	1,655	556	4,039	7,398
Total	**14,313**	**6,467**	**2,986**	**6,742**	**30,508**

Source: OIG analysis of WFP documents.

Note: These figures represent WFP commodities and do not include humanitarian assistance from other organizations. WFP commodities through JLOTS totaled 6,742 metric tons; the total amount of humanitarian assistance through JLOTS—including from other organizations—was 8,100 metric tons.

Despite the additional aid provided through JLOTS, external factors prevented the operation from meeting the original distribution goals that USAID and DoD communicated. At the outset, USAID announced its goal for using JLOTS was to deliver enough aid to feed or assist at least 500,000 people per month for about 90 days, or enough aid to feed about 1.5 million people. However, external factors prevented JLOTS operations from approaching its full potential. USAID stated that by the end of the JLOTS operation in July 2024, about 20 million pounds of assistance had been delivered into Gaza through JLOTS, enough to feed 450,000 people for 1 month.[16]

At a July press conference a week before the JLOTS operation ended, President Biden acknowledged the underperformance of the maritime corridor effort, saying "I've been disappointed that some of the things that I've put forward have not succeeded …like the port…I was hopeful that would be more successful."[17]

USAID Relied on Existing Controls to Oversee the Distribution of Humanitarian Assistance in Gaza

Although JLOTS was a previously unused method for delivering aid to Gaza, USAID relied on its existing controls of risk assessments and monitoring to provide oversight of aid distribution through the maritime corridor.

We found that BHA completed all required risk mitigation processes and documentation related to Gaza and the relevant WFP award. BHA also followed its internal processes to assess award-related risks. Additionally, BHA required that every award application or modification include a Risk Assessment and Management Plan for applicants working in high-risk environments such as Gaza.

[16] USAID, *U.S. Humanitarian Maritime Pier Delivers Nearly 20 Million Pounds of Aid to Gaza*, July 17, 2024.
[17] The White House, *Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference*, July 11, 2024.

We determined that WFP's Risk Assessment and Management Plan for the West Bank and Gaza addressed all BHA risk management requirements. The plan noted that the escalation of conflict fundamentally changed WFP's risk profile in the area, creating a highly volatile environment with significant access constraints. It cited limitations including security and access constraints and interference in the distribution of goods. It also outlined risk mitigation measures, including vetting partners, calibrating transport movements based on risk levels, monitoring, operating a community feedback mechanism, and maintaining physical and access controls at all WFP and partner locations. Further, WFP award language included a special provision that barred any funds for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)[18] but allowed for in-kind assistance to UNRWA for distribution to eligible beneficiaries in Gaza.[19]

Due to the volatile environment in Gaza, BHA did not have any staff in Gaza to conduct direct monitoring of WFP activities. As such, BHA relied primarily on WFP to monitor its distribution of aid to beneficiaries.[20] Since BHA's tracking of JLOTS operations was limited to the delivery and collection of aid through JLOTS, it increased the frequency of meetings with WFP and enhanced its use of partner-collected data and reporting. At the time of our review, BHA was also discussing the possibility of remote and third-party monitoring.[21] Overall, these efforts aligned with internal BHA guidance for monitoring aid in nonpermissive environments.

While JLOTS was active, BHA routinely received partner updates and incident reports from WFP. We reviewed the 15 program updates that BHA received from WFP between March and June 2024 and found that WFP routinely provided information on the delivery status and distribution of USAID assistance. For example, one update showed that as of June 27, WFP had distributed 171 metric tons (about 377,000 pounds) of USAID-funded high-energy biscuits delivered through JLOTS. Additionally, as of July 10, BHA had received two allegations of the looting or diversion of WFP trucks transporting aid from the pier to its warehouses.[22]

In addition to regular program updates, BHA also engaged WFP through frequent partner meetings. For example, between March and June 2024, BHA conducted at least 13 partner meetings with WFP to discuss WFP activities in Gaza, 6 of which included information related to the distribution of aid to beneficiaries. In addition, WFP and BHA field and headquarters staff provided real-time updates about the atmospherics of the conflict, WFP operations, and the status of BHA-funded commodities.

Third-party monitoring of WFP's humanitarian activities in Gaza proved a challenge due to the ongoing conflict. A BHA staff member explained that one organization had suspended third-

[18] UNRWA provides education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance, and emergency assistance to Palestine refugees. The Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 precludes U.S. funds from being used for any contribution, grant, or other payment to UNRWA through March 25, 2025. Public Law 118-47, Division G, Title III, March 23, 2024.
[19] We did not assess WFP's compliance with this provision.
[20] At the time of the evaluation, BHA's third-party monitor had not conducted site visits of WFP activities.
[21] To address access impediments, BHA may contract independent third-party monitors with in-depth knowledge of local communities and security conditions. Third-party monitors combine quantitative and qualitative methods—including direct observation, document reviews, focus group discussions, individual interviews, and surveys—for data collection at program sites.
[22] OIG received these allegations in accordance with its oversight authorities.

party monitoring because of the trauma its Palestinian workers experienced from the conflict in Gaza. WFP's May 2024 Risk Assessment and Management Plan stated that where "safety and security restrictions for monitoring persist and WFP's program reach remains sporadic for the same reasons, the third-party monitoring exercise will be undertaken as and when conditions allow." BHA staff said that WFP and BHA still intend to use third-party monitors in the future to conduct visits to aid distribution sites.

Conclusion

About 96 percent of the population in Gaza, or 2.15 million people, continues to face severe food insecurity and is at a high risk of famine.[23] In the 20 days JLOTS operated, 8,100 metric tons of assistance were delivered through JLOTS to Gaza. This was enough to feed 450,000 people for 1 month, according to USAID, at a time when access and security constraints hindered aid deliveries and distribution through traditional land routes. However, despite its role as the U.S. government lead for humanitarian assistance in Gaza, USAID had limited control over the decision to use JLOTS, where it would be located, and who would provide security on the beach and during transportation of JLOTS-delivered aid. These issues, coupled with high winds and rough seas in the Mediterranean Sea near the Gaza coast, impaired the Agency's ability to deliver the intended amounts of aid through the maritime corridor.

As USAID continues to respond to humanitarian needs in Gaza, it should examine its experience with JLOTS for lessons related to deconfliction, stakeholder coordination, and contingency planning. Notably, USAID identified the convoy management board as a best practice that it hopes to expand across Gaza to address deconfliction, checkpoint, and road closure issues in real time.

[23] IPC, *Gaza Strip: IPC Acute Food Insecurity Special Snapshot, May 1- September 30, 2024*, June 25, 2024.

Appendix A. Scope and Methodology

We conducted our work from June 2024 through July 2024 in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*. Our objectives were to assess USAID's (1) planning and execution and (2) oversight of the distribution of humanitarian assistance through the JLOTS maritime corridor.

The scope of the evaluation was USAID's assistance provided through the maritime corridor from March to July 2024. Our review focused on Module C of JLOTS—the arrival and handover of aid delivered to the shore of Gaza—and was limited to USAID's plans to distribute aid through its agreement with WFP. As of July 2024, USAID had awarded the UN's WFP more than $240 million for food assistance, nutrition, and logistics support.

To answer our objectives, we reviewed key documentation that outlined and described USAID's plans and controls for distributing assistance through the maritime corridor. For example, to identify key plans and controls, we reviewed BHA's agreement with WFP; internal BHA portfolio risk assessment guidance; agreements with DoD for JLOTS; and other working documents, meeting notes, and joint planning documents. To assess USAID's implementation against its plans and established controls, we analyzed award documentation, WFP's risk assessment and mitigation plans, program updates, incident reports, biannual reports, JLOTS shipment information, official press releases, and open-source media reports. We also interviewed USAID officials in BHA, including those involved in planning, coordination, and operations within USAID's Response Management Team and Disaster Assistance Response Team. Additionally, we interviewed WFP staff supporting the Gaza response.

We closely coordinated our work with DoD OIG, which is conducting its own reviews of the maritime corridor. Given the scope of our review, we did not interview DoD officials or evaluate DoD's actions related to providing humanitarian assistance through the JLOTS maritime corridor.

Appendix B. Major Contributors to This Report

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- Amy Burns, Inspections and Evaluations Director
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