

Eleven-minute race for food

How Gaza aid points became 'death traps'

Raed Jamal sends the message shortly after he returns, empty-handed, from an aid distribution point to his tent in the al-Mawasi displacement camp in south-west Gaza. "The tanks came and started firing. Three boys near me were martyred," says the 36-year-old, who has four children. "I didn't even get anything, just two empty boxes."

Jamal's journey involved a long walk to and from a former residential neighbourhood bulldozed by Israeli forces and turned into one of four militarised aid distribution centres run by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), which is based in Delaware in the US.

The GHF sites – Tal al-Sultan, the Saudi neighbourhood in Rafah, Khan Younis and Wadi Gaza – are located in evacuation zones, which means civilians seeking food have to enter areas they have been ordered to leave. According to GHF's Facebook page, the sites remain open for as little as eight minutes at a time, and in June the average for the Saudi site was 11 minutes. These factors have led to accusations from NGOs that the system is dangerous by design. The UNRWA chief, Philippe Lazzarini, has said "the so-called mechanism ... is a death trap costing more lives than it saves".

The system favours the strongest, so it is mostly men who travel along the designated routes. Then they wait – often for hours – for a centre to open. Finally, there is a dash into the centre of the zones and a scramble to grab a box.

At every stage, those seeking aid pass Israeli tanks and troops, as quadcopters fly above. In a clip shared by Jamal, he ducks as bullets



▲ Raed Jamal walks long distances to seek food for his hungry children

pass overhead. "We have purged our hearts of fear," Jamal says of his near-daily walks to the site. "I need to bring food for my children so they don't die of hunger."

GHF, a startup organisation with no experience of distributing food in complex conflict zones, employs US mercenaries at the sites, which opened in May. They replaced 400 non-militarised aid points run under a UN system that Israel claimed had to be shut down because Hamas was diverting aid from it. No evidence for this has been provided.

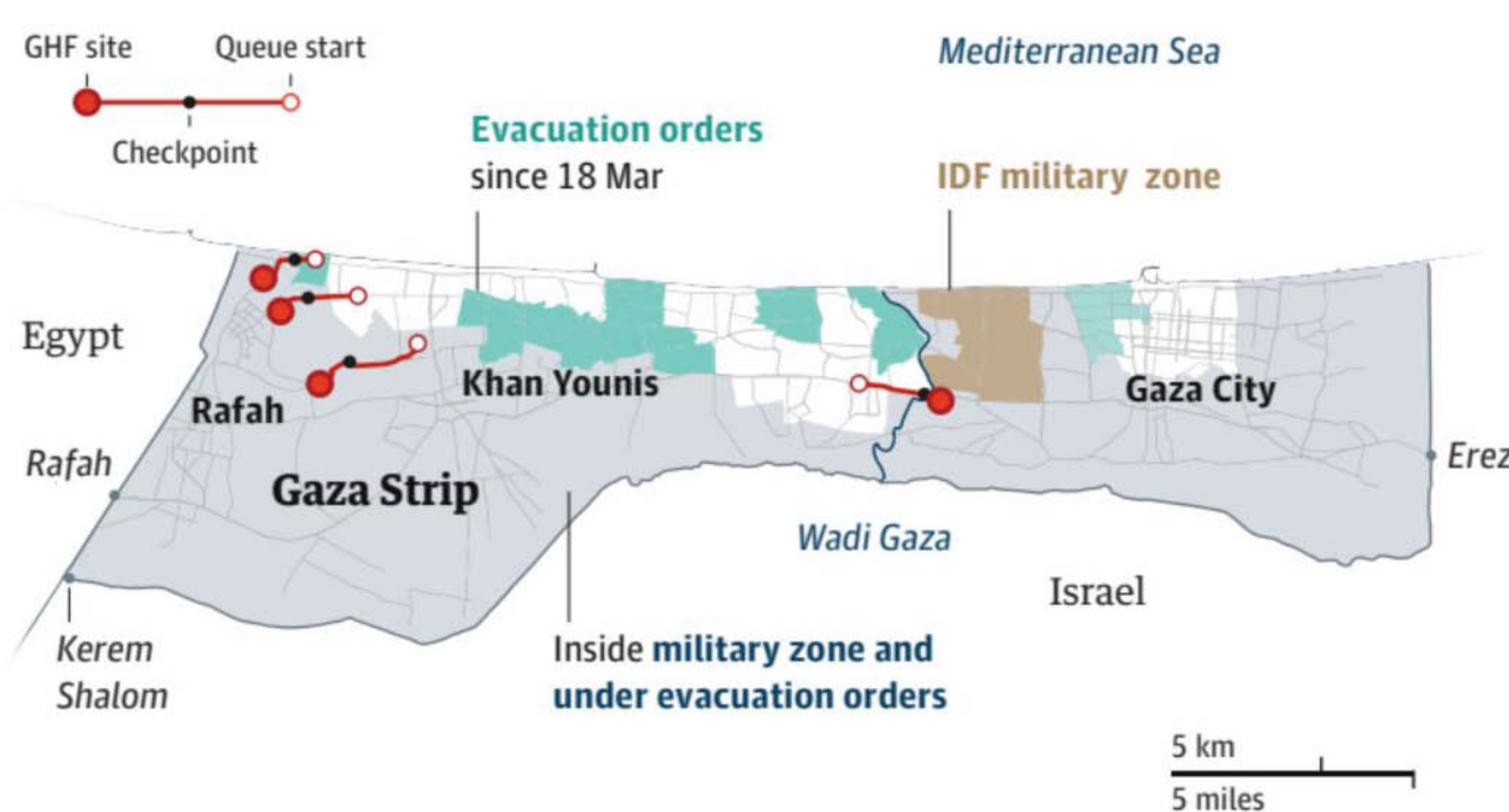
Since May, more than 1,000 people have died while seeking food from the centres and other humanitarian convoys, according to the UN. The sites' opening times are usually announced in posts on a Facebook account and, more recently, messages sent through a Telegram channel. A WhatsApp channel was also set up in the first weeks. People have been warned not to approach the centres until they open.

As chart 3 shows, for the site Jamal visited, the amount of time between the site's opening time being announced and the opening itself decreased dramatically in June.

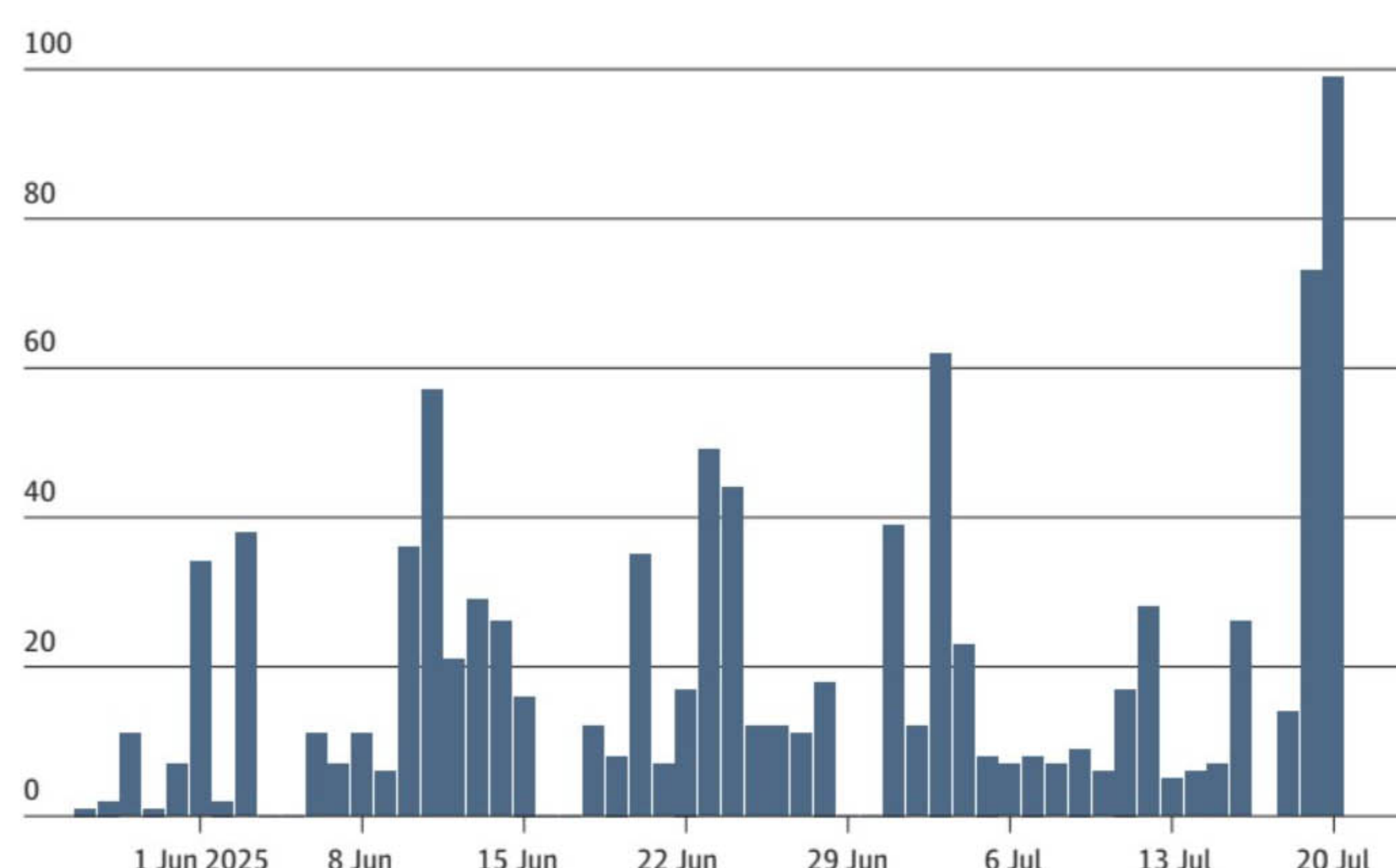
Mahmoud Alareer, a 27-year-old living in a tent in Gaza City, says the opening time announcements for the aid site he uses – Wadi Gaza – have become useless, because of the distance from where he is



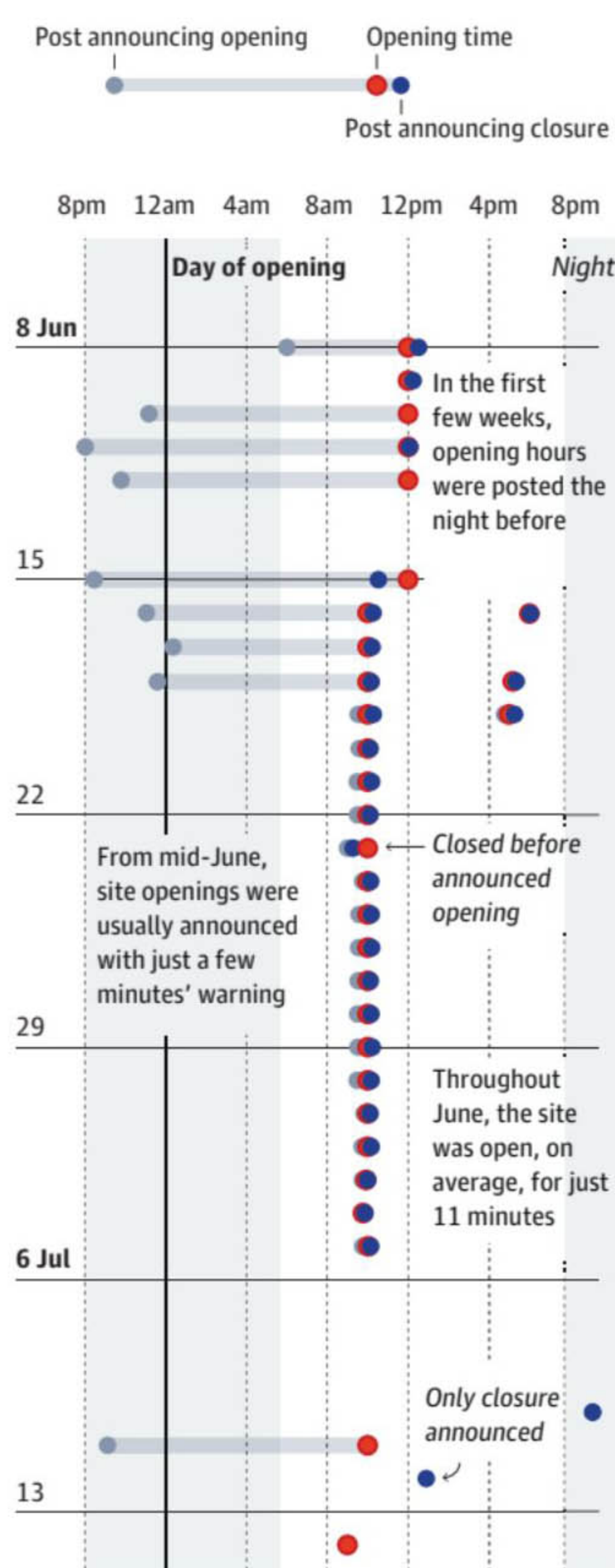
1. GHF aid distribution centres



2. People killed while seeking aid in Gaza



3. Aid distribution at the Saudi centre across June, according to the GHF Facebook page



Reporting team

Kaamil Ahmed,
Ana Lucía González Paz,
Lucy Swan and Garry Blight
Graphics by Finbarr Sheehy,
Harvey Symons and
Paul Scruton

▼ *Palestinians near an aid centre set up by the US and Israeli-led Gaza Humanitarian Foundation*

PHOTOGRAPH: SAEED JARAS/ANADOLU/GETTY



living. Instead, he travels to the edges of the site in the night and gambles on it opening at 2am, as it has on every visit so far.

First he climbs on to the back of a truck for the long ride south from Gaza City through the militarised Netzarim corridor. Then he waits in the dark until Israeli forces allow him to enter. “You get there and you slowly, slowly advance,” he says. “You always know that it could be you who gets shot, or it might be someone next to you.”

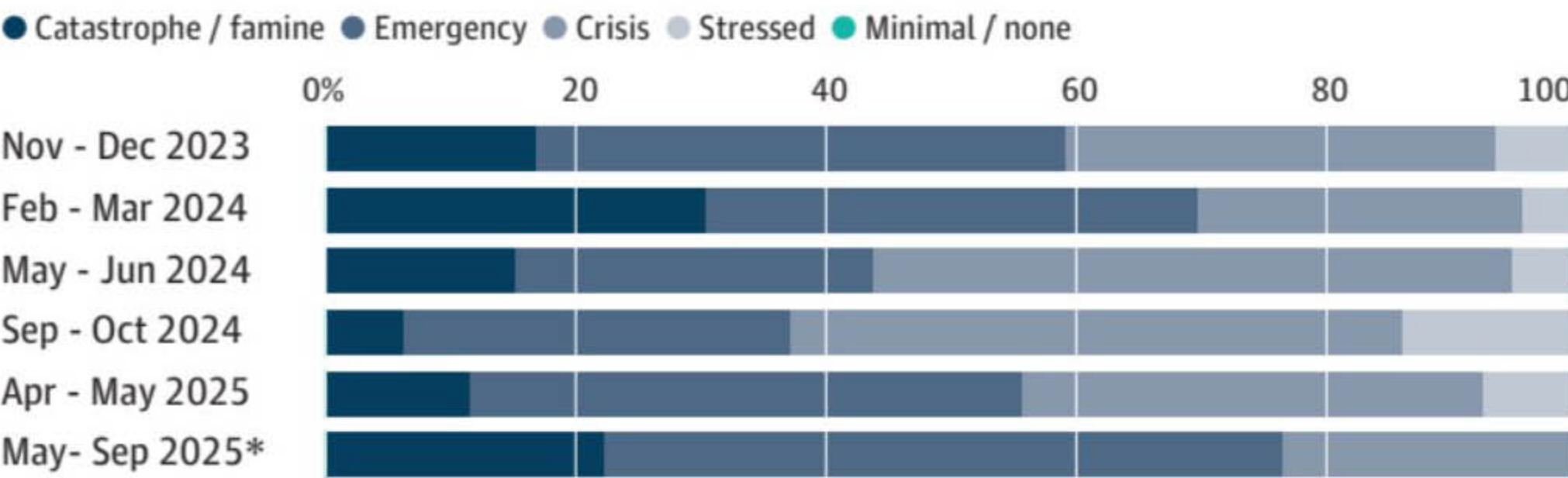
Alareer says chaos always ensues when the aid point opens, as people start running towards the packages, which are left in the middle of the distribution zone. People trip over craters and tangled wires.

GHF has faced severe criticism from the humanitarian community due to the dangers posed to Palestinians both at the sites and on the roads around them. In early July, more than 170 NGOs called for GHF to be shut down, accusing it of violating the principles of humanitarian aid, and calling for the resumption of non-militarised aid in Gaza.

Médecins Sans Frontières’ emergency coordinator in Gaza, Aitor Zabalgoeazkoa, says night-time distributions are particularly dangerous because so many roads in southern Gaza have been made unrecognisable by Israeli bombing, making it hard for Palestinians to stick to routes designated by GHF.

Zabalgoeazkoa is scathing about the GHF system. “This is not humanitarian aid,” he says. “We can only think that it was designed to cause damage to the people seeking aid.”

4. Percentage of population by level of food insecurity



Source: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) *projected

5. Days a week in which each food group was consumed

	Sep 23	Jan 25	May 25	Jun 25
Cereals and tubers	6.9	6.6	5.5	4.3
Oil	6.4	2.4	1.7	1.3
Vegetables	6.3	0.8	0.7	0.5
Sugar	5.5	3.4	1.2	0.4
Dairy products	4.3	0.5	0.1	0.0
Pulses	3.6	4.6	4.1	4.4
Protein-rich foods	2.8	0.4	0.2	0.0
Fruits	2.3	0.2	0.1	0.0

Source: WFP, June 2025. Survey question: How many days over the last seven days did more than half of the members of your household eat the following items?

6. Damage to food production areas

Beit Lahiya: 4 June 2023



Source: Planet Labs

13 May 2025



Timeline
Flour, gas and bread supplies into Gaza

● **6 January 2025**
Five bakeries operational. The rest are closed due to flour shortages and ongoing hostilities.
Bakeries open: 5

● **19 January**
Ceasefire announced.
Bakeries open: 5

● **29 January**
A limited amount of cooking gas enters for the first time in 15 months.
Bakeries open: 5

● **31 January**
Families now get larger food parcels - including a 25kg bag of flour, enough for one and a half months.
Bakeries open: 5

● **2 February**
Sixteen bakeries open across the Gaza Strip thanks to new flour supplies.
Bakeries open: 16

● **16 February**
Twenty-five bakeries now produce 150,000 bread bundles a day.
Bakeries open: 25

● **2 March**
Israel imposes a blockade on all humanitarian aid coming into Gaza.
Bakeries open: 25

● **8 March**
Six bakeries close down due to a lack of cooking gas.
Bakeries open: 19

● **16 March**
Cooking gas scarcity and cost increases reliance on community kitchens.
Bakeries open: 19

● **23 March**
Surge in demand at bakeries due to soaring prices of fuel and flour.
Bakeries open: 19

● **31 March**
All UN bakeries shut down.
Bakeries open: 0

First week April
UN food parcel distribution halted. Community kitchens using up remaining stocks.
Bakeries open: 0

● **April**
Families “resorting to mixing crushed macaroni with flour to make bread”.
Bakeries open: 0

● **13 May**
Growing overcrowding across remaining kitchens, leading to safety concerns.
Bakeries open: 0

● **18 May**
Israel allows UN to temporarily resume delivery of limited aid.
Bakeries open: 0

● **21 May**
Some bakeries reopen but are forced to close due to escalating insecurity.
Bakeries open: 5

● **31 May**
Flour soars to \$420 for 25kg, rising by over 3,000% compared with Oct 2023.
Bakeries open: 0

Source: UNOCHA humanitarian situation updates

▼ *GHF says it has delivered 85m meals via 1,422,712 boxes, below, but Palestinians in Gaza say they contain fewer items* PHOTOGRAPH: TIKTOK



A GHF spokesperson denied that its system was unsafe, claiming the danger was outside its distribution zones. They also accused the UN of using “exaggerated” casualty figures. The Israeli Defense Forces was approached for comment.

GHF has previously defended its operations and accused its critics of engaging in a “turf war” over humanitarian supplies. It says it bears no responsibility for deaths outside the perimeters of its sites.

The Israeli military has previously acknowledged firing warning shots at Palestinians who it says have approached its forces in a suspicious manner. It has also disputed some of the death tolls provided by the Palestinian authorities.

GHF runs four sites to feed 2 million people, in a territory where extreme hunger is widespread and food security experts have warned of looming famine. According to figures released by Gaza’s health ministry, 33 people have died due to starvation and malnutrition since Sunday.

GHF says it has delivered more than 85m meals “via roughly 1,422,712 boxes” since its operations began. According to these figures, each box would provide a family with about 60 meals. The organisation has posted photos of GHF-marked boxes that have items such as flour, potatoes, beans and oil. However, Palestinians in Gaza have shared pictures showing open boxes at GHF sites containing a smaller range of items.

Olga Cherevko, a spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, says she could not

comment on the specific logistics of GHF, but that aid should go beyond food and should include water, cooking gas or other cooking facilities. “If you look at Gaza now ... people have been deprived of everything that sustains life: shelter materials, fuel, cooking gas, hygiene materials, everything that one needs to feel dignified, to have some sort of semblance of normality,” she says.

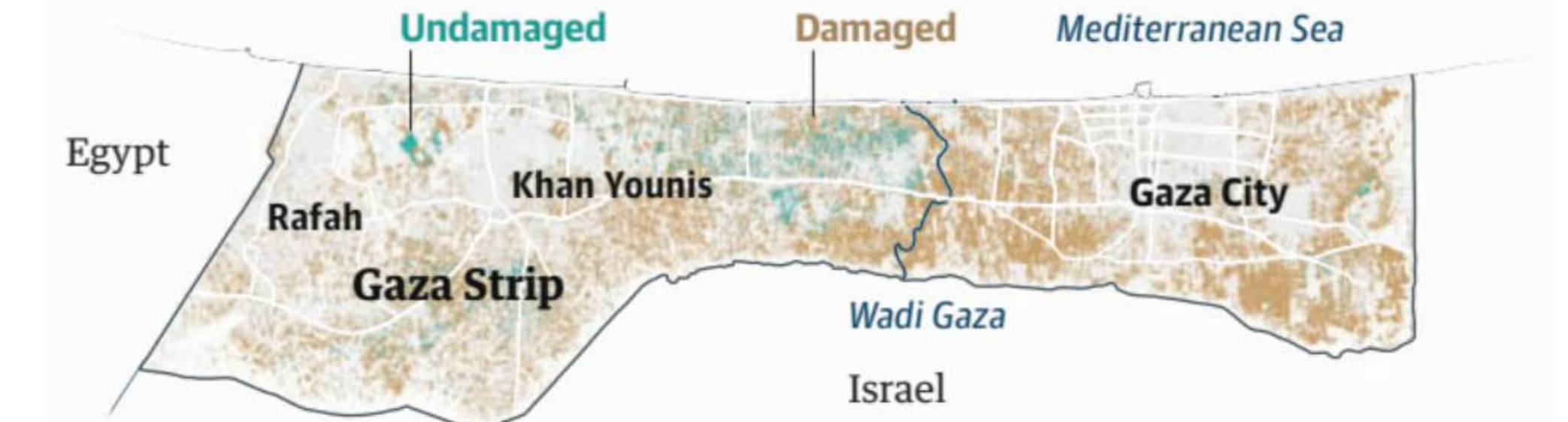
According to the World Food Programme (WFP), nearly a third of Gaza’s population is going several days without food, and 470,000 people are expected to face the most severe levels of hunger between May and September this year. It also warned that dietary diversity declined sharply in May and continued to worsen in June.

Damage to farmland over the course of the war has only increased Palestinians’ reliance on aid. A study published this year using satellite imagery to assess damage to farmland found up to 70% of tree crops had been damaged. A Unosat assessment from April found that 71.2% of Gaza’s greenhouses had been damaged. Graphic 6 shows damage to greenhouses in Beit Lahiya.

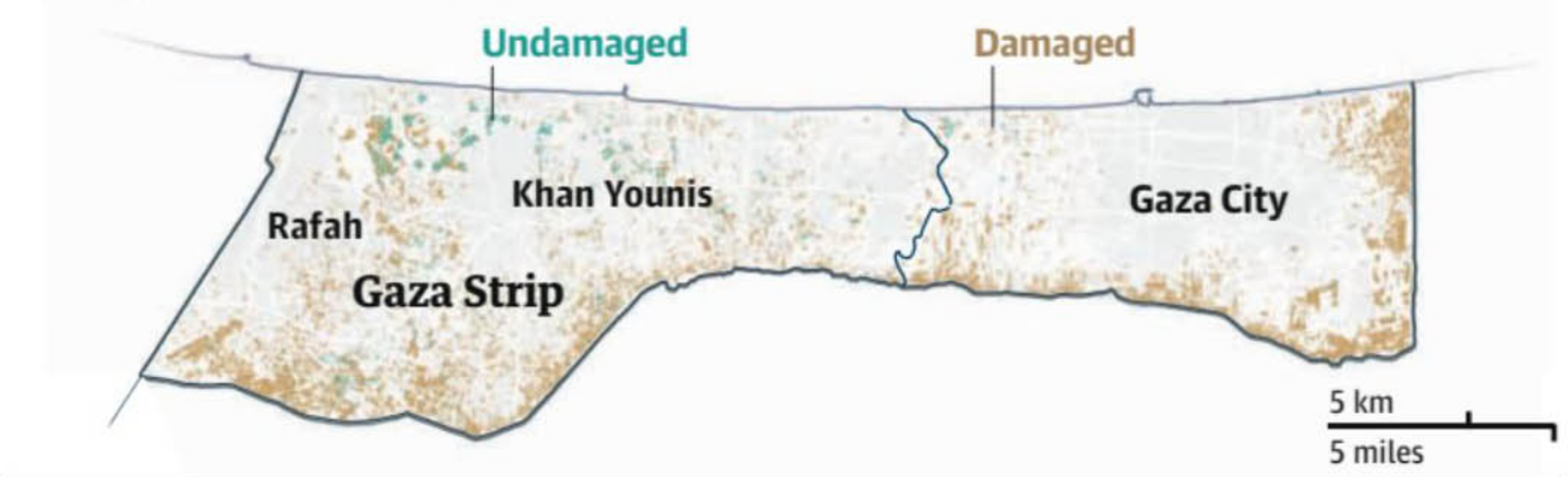
In late March, dozens of bakeries supported by the WFP halted production due to the Israeli blockade. A handful briefly resumed bread production in May when some trucks were allowed into the territory.

Jamal reiterates that he has no choice but to return to his nearest GHF site. “I have gone four days in a row and not brought anything back, not even flour - nothing,” he says. “Sometimes you just can’t beat the others. But what else can we do? Our life is a struggle.”

7. Damage to tree crops



Damage to annual crops



Source: Damage analysis of 3-m PlanetScope imagery © Planet Labs PBC by Dr. He Yin of Kent State University