# Kidnapping new tactic in battle for control of Gaza

Two months after Israel packed up and left Gaza the problems still fester and in some cases are getting worse.

Militant groups, out to rule the Strip, are frantic to outgun each other and the Palestinian Authority. Dozens have been killed and wounded.

Now there's a new tactic: kidnapping, nearly two dozen cases since the start of the year and, unlike the sporadic cases of the past, which were largely internal affairs with members from one clan kidnapping members from another, this time the militants are snatching foreigners such as aid workers and journalists.

UN photographer Steve Sabella was grabbed in Gaza this summer along with an Australian colleague. "I opened the door and out of nowhere, I swear to God, seven men with guns pointed them at us and they told me to move into another car.

"They said they would want any international [person], it doesn't make a difference whether it was a UN [employee], or a tourist or a journalist," he said.

The militants are just looking for bargaining chips and when they got what they wanted Sabella and his

colleague were released.

The Palestinian Authority insists this trend will end.

"Breaches of national security won't be tolerated," said a Palestinian police chief. "They [the kidnappers] will be severely punished."

But in almost every case it seems the Palestinian Authority has given in to the kidnappers' demands for jobs or money.

"The kidnappers have a kind of impunity from the side of the PA," said Bassam Eid, who is with the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group. "No case has been investigated by the PA until now and no people have been arrested."

While none of these hostages has been harmed, the situation is dangerous. The UN has pulled out all nonessential staff and other agencies are following.

Some UN workers fear kidnappers will become more violent. "My biggest concern is the envelope being pushed right now," said Ehab Shanti, who works for the UN Development Program, "that is [militants] seeing what is happening in Iraq and elsewhere and basically emulating it."

The situation in Gaza isn't comparable with Baghdad, but the post-disengagement era was supposed to be a time

when Gaza got a chance at prosperity. Now residents worry international agencies will be scared off along with any hope of progress.