**Gaza Strip**

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*This article is about the territory. For the city, see* [*Gaza*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza)*.*

*This article is about geography and general history of the Gaza Strip. For Governance of the Gaza strip, see* [*Governance of the Gaza Strip*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governance_of_the_Gaza_Strip)*.*

The Gaza Strip

[Gaza](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza) city skyline

Downtown Gaza, 2012

Kite-flying event on Gaza Beach

The **Gaza Strip** ([Arabic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_language): قطاع غزة‎ *Qiṭāʿ Ġazzah*, IPA: [qɪˈtˤɑːʕ ˈɣazza]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3AIPA_for_Arabic)) is a strip of land on the eastern coast of the [Mediterranean Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Sea) that borders [Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt) on the southwest (11 km) and [Israel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel) on the east and north (51 km (32 mi)). It is 41 kilometers (25 mi) long, and from 6 to 12 kilometers (3.7 to 7.5 mi) wide, with a total area of 365 square kilometers (141 sq mi). The population of Gaza Strip is about 1.7 million people. While the majority were born in the Gaza Strip, a large percentage identify as [Palestinian refugees](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_refugees), fleeing to Gaza as part of the [1948 Palestinian exodus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Palestinian_exodus) following the [1948 Arab-Israeli War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Arab-Israeli_War). The population is predominantly [Sunni Muslim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunni_Muslim). With a yearly growth rate of about 3.2%, the Gaza Strip has the 7th highest [population growth rate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population_growth_rate) in the world.

The Gaza Strip acquired its current boundaries at the cessation of fighting in the 1948 war, confirmed by the [Israel-Egypt Armistice Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1949_Armistice_Agreements) on 24 February 1949. Article V of the Agreement declared that the demarcation line was not to be an international border. The Gaza Strip continued to be occupied by Egypt. At first Gaza Strip was officially administered by the [All-Palestine Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All-Palestine_Government), established by the Arab League in September 1948. From the dissolution of the All-Palestine Government in 1959 until 1967, the Gaza Strip was directly administered by an Egyptian military governor.

Israel captured and occupied the Gaza Strip in the [Six-Day War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six-Day_War) in 1967. Pursuant to the [Oslo Accords](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oslo_Accords) signed in 1993, the [Palestinian Authority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_Authority) became the administrative body that governed Palestinian population centers. Israel maintained control of the [airspace](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airspace), [territorial waters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Territorial_waters) and border crossings apart from the land border with Egypt. [Israel unilaterally disengaged](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel%27s_unilateral_disengagement) from Gaza in 2005.

The Gaza Strip forms part of the [Palestinian territories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_territories). Since July 2007, following the [2006 Palestinian legislative election](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_legislative_election%2C_2006) and the following the [Battle of Gaza](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Gaza_%282007%29), [Hamas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas) has functioned as the *de facto* ruler in the Gaza Strip, forming an alternative [Hamas Government in Gaza](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas_Government_in_Gaza).

**History**

*Further information:* [*History of Gaza*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Gaza)

**British rule (1923–1948)**

World War I military cemetery, Gaza

[The Palestine Mandate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Palestine_Mandate) was based on the principles contained in Article 22 of the draft [Covenant of the League of Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Covenant_of_the_League_of_Nations) and the [San Remo Resolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Remo_conference) of 25 April 1920 by the principal [Allied and associated powers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allies_of_World_War_I) after the First World War. The mandate formalized [British](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire) rule in the southern part of [Ottoman Syria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_Syria) from 1923–1948.

**All-Palestine government**

Main article: [All-Palestine government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All-Palestine_government)

On 22 September 1948, towards the end of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the [All-Palestine government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All-Palestine_government) was proclaimed in the Egyptian occupied [Gaza City](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_City) by the [Arab League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_League). It was conceived partly as an Arab League attempt to limit the influence of [Transjordan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transjordan) in Palestine. The All-Palestine Government was quickly recognized by six of the then seven members of the Arab League: [Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt), [Syria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria), [Lebanon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanon), [Iraq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq), [Saudi Arabia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudi_Arabia), and [Yemen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yemen), but not by Transjordan. It was not recognized by any country outside the Arab League.

After the cessation of hostilities, the [Israel-Egypt Armistice Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1949_Armistice_Agreements#With_Egypt) of 24 February 1949 established the separation line between Egyptian and Israeli forces, and established what became the present boundary between the Gaza Strip and Israel. Both sides declared that the boundary was not an international border. The southern border with Egypt continued to be the international border which had been drawn in 1906 between the [Ottoman Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_Empire) and the [British Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire).

The population of the Gaza Strip had been greatly augmented by an influx of [Palestinian refugees](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_refugees) who fled from Israel before and during the fighting. Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip or Egypt were issued All-Palestine passports. Egypt did not offer the Palestinians citizenship. From the end of 1949, the refugees received aid directly from [UNRWA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Relief_and_Works_Agency_for_Palestine_Refugees_in_the_Near_East). During the [Sinai campaign of November 1956](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suez_Crisis), the Gaza Strip and the [Sinai Peninsula](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinai_Peninsula) were occupied by Israeli troops. International pressure led Israel to withdraw. The government was accused of being little more than a façade for Egyptian control, with negligible independent funding or influence. It subsequently moved to [Cairo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo) and was dissolved in 1959, by decree of Egyptian President, [Gamal Abdul Nasser](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gamal_Abdul_Nasser).

**Egyptian occupation (1959–1967)**

Main article: [Occupation of the Gaza Strip by Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupation_of_the_Gaza_Strip_by_Egypt)

[Che Guevara](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Che_Guevara) visiting Gaza, 1959

After the dissolution of the All-Palestine Government in 1959, under the excuse of pan-Arabism, Egypt continued to occupy the Gaza Strip until 1967. Egypt never annexed the Gaza Strip, but instead treated it as a controlled territory and administered it through a military governor.

View of Gaza, 2003

**Israeli occupation**

Gaza Strip, May 2005

Islamic University of Gaza

Israel controlled the Gaza Strip again beginning in June 1967, after the [Six-Day War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six-Day_War). During the period of Israeli control, Israel created a settlement bloc, [Gush Katif](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gush_Katif), in the southwest corner of the Strip near [Rafah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafah) and the Egyptian border. In total Israel created 21 settlements in the Gaza Strip, comprising 20% of the total territory. Besides ideological reasons for being there, these settlements also served Israel's security concerns.

In March 1979 Israel and Egypt signed the [Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel-Egypt_Peace_Treaty). Among other things, the treaty provided for the withdrawal by Israel of its armed forces and civilians from the Sinai Peninsula, which Israel had captured during the Six-Day War, to the 1906 international border. The Egyptians agreed to keep the Sinai Peninsula demilitarized. The final status of the Gaza Strip, and other relations between Israel and Palestinians, was not dealt with in the treaty. Egypt renounced all territorial claims to territory north of the international border.

The Gaza Strip remained under Israeli military administration until 1994. During that period the military was responsible for the maintenance of civil facilities and services.

The [Second Intifada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Intifada) broke out in September 2000 with its waves of protest, civil unrest and bombings against Israeli military and civilians, many of them perpetrated by suicide bombers, and the beginning of rockets and bombings of Israeli border localities by Palestinian guerrillas from Gaza Strip, especially from Hamas and Jihad Islamic movements. In February 2005, the Israeli government voted to implement a [unilateral disengagement plan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel%27s_unilateral_disengagement_plan) from the Gaza Strip. The plan began to be implemented on 15 August 2005, and was completed on 12 September 2005. Under the plan, all [Israeli settlements](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_settlement) in the Gaza Strip (and four in the West Bank) and the joint Israeli-Palestinian Erez Industrial Zone were dismantled with the removal of all 9,000 Israeli settlers (most of them in the [Gush Katif](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gush_Katif) settlement area in the Strip's southwest) and military bases. On 12 September 2005 the Israeli cabinet formally declared an end to Israeli military occupation of the Gaza Strip. To avoid allegations that it was still in occupation of any part of the Gaza Strip, Israel also withdrew from the [Philadelphi Route](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philadelphi_Route), which is a narrow strip adjacent to the Strip's border with Egypt, after Egypt's agreement to secure its side of the border. Under the Oslo Accords the Philadelphi Route was to remain under Israeli control to prevent the smuggling of weapons and people across the border with Egypt. With Egypt agreeing to patrol its side of the border, it was hoped that the objective would be achieved. However, Israel maintained its control over the crossings in and out of Gaza. The Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza was monitored by the Israeli army through special surveillance cameras.

**2005 – Israel's unilateral disengagement**

The [Israel Defence Forces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_Defence_Forces) left the Gaza Strip on 1 September 2005 as part of [Israel's unilateral disengagement plan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel%27s_unilateral_disengagement_plan), and all Israeli citizens were evicted from the area. An 'Agreement on Movement and Access' between Israel and the [Palestinian Authority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_Authority) was brokered by [Condoleezza Rice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Condoleezza_Rice) in November 2005 to improve Palestinian freedom of movement and economic activity in the Gaza Strip. Under its terms, the [Rafah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafah) crossing with [Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt) was to be reopened, with transits monitored by the Palestinian National Authority and the [European Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union). Only people with Palestinian ID, or foreign nationals, by exception, in certain categories, subject to Israeli oversight, were permitted to cross in and out. All goods, vehicles and trucks to and from Egypt passed through the [Kerem Shalom Crossing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kerem_Shalom_Crossing), under full Israeli supervision. Goods were also permitted transit at the [Karni crossing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karni_crossing) in the north.

**Palestinian Authority**

Gaza strip barrier fence

Qassam rocket range

In May 1994, following the Palestinian-Israeli agreements known as the [Oslo Accords](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oslo_Accords), a phased transfer of governmental authority to the Palestinians took place. Much of the Strip (except for the settlement blocs and military areas) came under Palestinian control. The Israeli forces left Gaza City and other urban areas, leaving the new Palestinian Authority to administer and police those areas. The Palestinian Authority, led by [Yasser Arafat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasser_Arafat), chose Gaza City as its first provincial headquarters. In September 1995, Israel and the [PLO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestine_Liberation_Organization) signed [a second peace agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interim_Agreement_on_the_West_Bank_and_the_Gaza_Strip), extending the Palestinian Authority to most [West Bank](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Bank) towns. The agreement also established an elected 88-member [Palestinian National Council](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_National_Council), which held its inaugural session in Gaza in March 1996.

Palestinian Authority rule under the leadership of Arafat suffered from serious mismanagement and corruption scandals. For example, exorbitant bribes were demanded for allowing goods to pass in and out of the Gaza Strip, while heads of the Preventive Security Service apparatus profited from their involvement in the gravel import and cement and construction industries, such as the Great Arab Company for Investment and Development, the al-Motawaset Company, and the al-Sheik Zayid construction project.

Between 1994 and 1996, Israel built the [Israeli Gaza Strip barrier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_Gaza_Strip_barrier) to improve security in Israel. The barrier was largely torn down by Palestinians at the beginning of the [Al-Aqsa Intifada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Aqsa_Intifada) in September 2000. Between December 2000 and June 2001, the barrier between Gaza and Israel was reconstructed. A barrier on the Gaza Strip-Egypt border was constructed starting in 2004. The main crossing points are the northern [Erez Crossing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erez_Crossing) into Israel and the southern [Rafah Crossing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafah_Border_Crossing) into Egypt. The eastern [Karni Crossing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karni_crossing) used for cargo, closed down in 2011. Israel controls the Gaza Strip's northern borders, as well as its territorial waters and airspace. Egypt controls Gaza Strip's southern border, under an agreement between it and Israel.

**Legal status**

The UN, [Human Rights Watch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Rights_Watch) and other international bodies and [NGOs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-governmental_organization) consider Israel to be the occupying power of the Gaza Strip as Israel controls Gaza's airspace and territorial waters, and does not allow the movement of goods in or out of Gaza by air or sea (only by land). However, the border crossing into Egypt is not controlled by Israel; like Israel, Egypt has alternately restricted or allowed goods and people to cross that terrestrial border. Israel states that Gaza is no longer occupied, inasmuch as Israel does not exercise effective control or authority over any land or institutions in the Gaza Strip. [Foreign Affairs Minister of Israel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_Affairs_Minister_of_Israel) [Tzipi Livni](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tzipi_Livni) stated in January, 2008: "Israel got out of Gaza. It dismantled its settlements there. No Israeli soldiers were left there after the disengagement." After Israel withdrew in 2005, [Palestinian Authority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_Authority) Chairman [Mahmoud Abbas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmoud_Abbas) declared that the legal status of the areas slated for evacuation had not changed, and this lack of clarity continued after Operation Cast Lead and the Israeli invasion of Gaza in January 2009.

In his statement on the [2008–2009 Israel–Gaza conflict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008%E2%80%932009_Israel%E2%80%93Gaza_conflict) [Richard Falk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_A._Falk), [United Nations Special Rapporteur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Special_Rapporteur) wrote that [international humanitarian law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_humanitarian_law) applied to Israel "in regard to the obligations of an Occupying Power and in the requirements of the laws of war." In a 2009 interview on [Democracy Now](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy_Now) Christopher Gunness, spokesman for the [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Relief_and_Works_Agency_for_Palestine_Refugees_in_the_Near_East) (UNRWA) called Israel an occupying power. However, Meagan Buren, Senior Adviser to the pro-Israeli media group [Israel Project](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_Project), contested that characterization.

In 2012, the co-founder of [Hamas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas), Rahul, stated that Gaza was no longer occupied.

**Governance**

Main article: [Governance of the Gaza Strip](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governance_of_the_Gaza_Strip)

**Palestinian Authority control (1994–2007)**

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| [**North Gaza**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Gaza_Governorate)[**Gaza**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Governorate)[GAZA CITY](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza)[**Deir al-Balah**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deir_al-Balah_Governorate)[**Khan Yunis**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khan_Yunis_Governorate)[**Rafah**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafah_Governorate) |

In accordance with the [Oslo Accords](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oslo_Accords), the [Palestinian Authority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_National_Authority) took over the administrative authority of the Gaza Strip (other than the settlement blocs and military areas) in 1994. After the Israeli withdrawal on 12 September 2005, the Palestinian Authority had complete administrative authority in the Gaza Strip. The [Rafah Border Crossing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafah_Border_Crossing) has been supervised by [EU Border Assistance Mission Rafah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union_Border_Assistance_Mission_Rafah) under an agreement finalized in November 2005.

**Post-election violence**

Main article: [Fatah–Hamas conflict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatah%E2%80%93Hamas_conflict)

In the [Palestinian parliamentary elections](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_legislative_election%2C_2006) held on January 25, 2006, [Hamas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas) won a plurality of 42.9% of the total vote and 74 out of 132 total seats (56%). When Hamas assumed power the next month, the Israeli government and the key players of the international community, the United States and the EU, refused to recognize its right to govern the [Palestinian Authority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_Authority). Direct aid to the Palestinian government there was cut off, although some of that money was redirected to humanitarian organizations not affiliated with the government. The resulting political disorder and economic stagnation led to many Palestinians emigrating from the Gaza Strip.

In January 2007, fighting erupted between Hamas and [Fatah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatah). The deadliest clashes occurred in the northern Gaza Strip, where General [Muhammed Gharib](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Muhammed_Gharib&action=edit&redlink=1), a senior commander of the Fatah-dominated [Preventive Security Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preventive_Security_Force), died when a rocket hit his home. Gharib's two daughters and two bodyguards were also killed in the attack, carried out by Hamas gunmen.

At the end of January 2007, a truce was negotiated between Fatah and Hamas. However, after a few days, new fighting broke out. Fatah fighters stormed a Hamas-affiliated university in the Gaza Strip. Officers from Abbas' presidential guard battled Hamas gunmen guarding the Hamas-led Interior Ministry.

In May 2007, new fighting broke out between the factions. Interior Minister [Hani Qawasmi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talab_al-Qawasmi), who had been considered a moderate civil servant acceptable to both factions, resigned due to what he termed harmful behavior by both sides.

Fighting spread in the Gaza Strip with both factions attacking vehicles and facilities of the other side. Following a break down in an Egyptian brokered truce, Israel launched an air strike which destroyed a building used by Hamas. Ongoing violence prompted fear that it could bring the end of the [Fatah-Hamas coalition government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_government_of_March_2007), and possibly the end of the Palestinian authority.

Hamas spokesman [Moussa Abu Marzouk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moussa_Abu_Marzouk) blamed the worsening situation on Israel, stating that the constant pressure of economic sanctions resulted in the "real explosion." Associated Press reporter Ibrahim Barzak wrote an eyewitness account stating:

Today I have seen people shot before my eyes, I heard the screams of terrified women and children in a burning building, and I argued with gunmen who wanted to take over my home. I have seen a lot in my years as a journalist in Gaza, but this is the worst it's been.

From 2006-2007 more than 600 Palestinians were killed in fighting between Hamas and Fatah. In the aftermath of the [Gaza War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_War), a series of violent acts killed 54 Palestinians, while hundreds have claimed they were tortured. 349 Palestinians were killed in fighting between factions in 2007. 160 Palestinians killed each other in June alone.

**Hamas control (2007–present)**

Al Deira hotel on the Gaza coast, 2009

Following the victory of Hamas in the [2006 Palestinian legislative election](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_legislative_election%2C_2006), Hamas and [Fatah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatah) formed a [Palestinan authority national unity government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinan_authority_national_unity_government) headed by [Ismail Haniya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ismail_Haniya). Shortly after, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in the course of the [Battle of Gaza](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Gaza_%282007%29), seizing government institutions and replacing Fatah and other government officials with its own. By 14 June, Hamas fully controlled the Gaza Strip. [Palestinian President](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_the_Palestinian_National_Authority) [Mahmoud Abbas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmoud_Abbas) responded by declaring a [state of emergency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_of_emergency), dissolving the unity government and forming a new government without Hamas participation. [PNA security forces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preventive_Security_Service) in the [West Bank](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Bank) arrested a number of Hamas members.

In late June 2008 Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia said that the West Bank-based Cabinet formed by Abbas was the sole legitimate Palestinian government, and Egypt moved its embassy from Gaza to the West Bank.

Watchtower, Rafah border with Egypt

[Saudi Arabia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudi_Arabia) and Egypt supported reconciliation and a new unity government, and pressed Abbas to start talks with Hamas. Abbas had always conditioned this on Hamas returning control of the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian Authority. Hamas visited a number of countries, including Russia, and the [EU](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union) member states. Opposition parties and politicians called for a dialogue with Hamas as well as an end to the economic sanctions.

After the takeover, Israel and Egypt [closed their border crossings with Gaza](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blockade_of_the_Gaza_Strip). Palestinian sources reported that European Union monitors fled the [Rafah Border Crossing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafah_Border_Crossing), on the Gaza–Egypt border for fear of being kidnapped or harmed. Arab foreign ministers and Palestinian officials presented a united front against control of the border by Hamas.

Meanwhile, Israeli and Egyptian security reports said that Hamas continued smuggling in large quantities of explosives and arms from Egypt through tunnels. Egyptian security forces uncovered 60 tunnels in 2007.

**After the Hamas takeover**

Gaza beach

After Hamas' June win, it ousted Fatah-linked officials from positions of power and authority (such as government positions, security services, universities, newspapers, etc.) and strove to enforce law by progressively removing guns from the hands of peripheral militias, clans, and criminal groups, and gaining control of supply tunnels. According to [Amnesty International](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amnesty_International), under Hamas rule, newspapers were closed down and journalists were harassed. Fatah demonstrations were forbidden or suppressed, as in the case of a large demonstration on the anniversary of [Yasser Arafat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasser_Arafat)'s death, which resulted in the deaths of seven people, after protesters hurled stones at Hamas security forces.

Violence against Christians was recorded. The owner of a Christian bookshop was abducted and murdered, and on 15 February 2008, the Christian Youth Organization's library in Gaza City was bombed.

Hamas and other militant groups continued to fire Qassam rockets across the border into Israel. According to Israel, between the Hamas takeover and the end of January 2008, 697 rockets and 822 mortar bombs were fired at Israeli towns. In response, Israel targeted Qassam launchers and military targets and declared the Gaza Strip a hostile entity. In January 2008, Israel curtailed travel from Gaza, the entry of goods, and cut fuel supplies, resulting in power shortages. This brought charges that Israel was inflicting [collective punishment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_punishment) on the Gaza population, leading to international condemnation. Despite multiple reports from within the Strip that food and other essentials were in short supply, Israel said that Gaza had enough food and energy supplies for weeks. In early March 2008, air strikes and ground incursions by the IDF led to the deaths of over 110 Palestinians and extensive damage to [Jabalia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jabalia). After Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak resigned, on May 28, 2011, Egypt permanently opened its border with the Gaza Strip.

**Barrier breach**

Smuggling tunnel, Gaza Strip

Hamas operation center, northern Gaza

On 23 January 2008, after months of preparation during which the steel reinforcement of the border barrier was weakened, [Hamas destroyed several parts of the wall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breach_of_the_Gaza-Egypt_border_%282008%29) dividing Gaza and Egypt in the town of [Rafah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafah). Hundreds of thousands of Gazans crossed the border into Egypt seeking food and supplies. Due to the crisis, Egyptian President [Hosni Mubarak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hosni_Mubarak) ordered his troops to allow the Palestinians in but to verify that they did not bring weapons back across the border. Egypt arrested and later released several armed Hamas militants in the Sinai who presumably wanted to infiltrate into Israel. At the same time, Israel increased its state of alert along the length of the Israel-Egypt Sinai border, and warned its citizens to leave Sinai "without delay."

The EU Border Monitors agreed to monitor the border if Hamas guaranteed their safety. The Palestinian Authority demanded that Egypt deal only with the Authority in negotiations relating to borders. Israel eased restrictions on the delivery of goods and medical supplies but curtailed electricity by 5% in one of its ten lines. The first attempts by Egypt to reclose the border were met by violent clashes with Gaza gunmen, but after 12 days the borders were sealed again.

By mid-February the Rafah crossing remained closed. In February 2008 a [Haaretz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haaretz) poll indicated that 64% of Israelis favored direct talks with Hamas to reach a cease-fire and secure the release of [Gilad Shalit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilad_Shalit), an Israeli soldier captured in a cross border raid by Hamas militants on 25 June 2006.

In February 2008, [Israeli-Palestinian fighting intensified](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2008_Israel-Gaza_conflict) with rockets launched at Israeli cities. Military aggression by Hamas led to Israeli military action on 1 March 2008, resulting in over 110 Palestinians being killed according to BBC News, as well as 2 Israeli soldiers. Israeli human rights group [B'Tselem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B%27Tselem) estimated that 45 of those killed were not involved in hostilities, and 15 were minors.

After a round of [tit-for-tat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tit_for_tat) arrests between Fatah and Hamas in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, the [Hilles clan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hilles_clan) from Gaza were relocated to [Jericho](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jericho) on 4 August 2008. Retiring Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said on 11 November 2008, "The question is not whether there will be a confrontation, but when it will take place, under what circumstances, and who will control these circumstances, who will dictate them, and who will know to exploit the time from the beginning of the ceasefire until the moment of confrontation in the best possible way.” On 14 November 2008, Gaza was blockaded by Israel after a five month ceasefire broke down, however food, power and water can still enter from Egypt if the Egyptian authorities allow it.

On 25 November 2008 Israel closed its cargo crossing with Gaza due to two rockets being shot at Israel. On November 28, 2008, after a 24-hour period in which no [Qassam rockets](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qassam_rocket) were fired into Israel, the [IDF](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_Defense_Forces) facilitated the transfer of over 30 truckloads of food, basic supplies and medicine into the Gaza Strip, and it also transferred fuel to the main power plant of the area.

**Gaza War**

Main article: [Gaza War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_War)

Building damaged during Operation Cast Lead

Monthly rocket & mortar hits in Israel in 2008

Israelis killed by Palestinians in Israel (blue) and Palestinians killed by Israelis in Gaza (red)

On 27 December 2008, Israeli [F-16](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F-16) strike fighters launched a series of air strikes against targets in Gaza following the breakdown of a temporary truce between Israel and Hamas. Israeli defense sources said that Defense Minister [Ehud Barak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ehud_Barak) instructed the IDF to prepare for the operation six months before it began, using long-term planning and intelligence-gathering. Various sites being used as weapons depots were struck: police stations, schools, hospitals, UN warehouses, mosques, various Hamas government buildings and other buildings. Israel said that the attack was a response to Hamas rocket attacks on southern Israel, which totaled [over 3,000 in 2008](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Palestinian_rocket_attacks_on_Israel%2C_2008), and which intensified during the few weeks preceding the operation. Palestinian medical staff claimed at least 434 Palestinians were killed, and at least 2,800 wounded, consisting of many civilians and an unknown number of Hamas members, in the first five days of Israeli strikes on Gaza. The IDF denied that the majority of the dead were civilians, providing evidence that Hamas deliberately hid weapons and fighters in "mosques, school yards and civilian houses" to deter an attack and exploit [Israel's rules of engagement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_Defense_Forces#Code_of_Conduct_against_militants_and_Palestinian_civilians). Israel began a ground invasion of the Gaza Strip on 3 January 2009. Israel rebuffed many cease-fire calls and both sides declared unilateral cease-fires.

A total of 1,100-1,400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed in the 22-day war. After 22 days of fighting, Israel declared a ceasefire. Hamas vowed to continue the battle if Israeli forces did not leave the Strip. The conflict damaged or destroyed tens of thousands of homes, 15 of Gaza’s 27 hospitals and 43 of its 110 primary health care facilities, 800 water wells, 186 greenhouses, and nearly all of its 10,000 family farms; leaving 50,000 homeless, 400,000-500,000 without running water, one million without electricity, and resulting in acute food shortages.

By February 2009, food availability returned to pre-war levels but a shortage of fresh produce was forecast due to damage sustained by the agricultural sector.

**Gaza blockade**

The [blockade of the Gaza Strip](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blockade_of_the_Gaza_Strip) continued after the war, although Israel allowed in limited quantities of medical humanitarian aid. The Red Cross claimed that the blockade harmed the economy and caused a shortage of basic medicines and equipment such as painkillers and x-ray film.

Director of the [Shin Bet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shin_Bet) (Israel Security Agency) [Yuval Diskin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuval_Diskin) did not oppose easing trade restrictions but said that [smuggling tunnels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smuggling_tunnel) in Sinai and an open seaport in the Gaza Strip endangered the security of Israel. According to Diskin, Hamas and [Islamic Jihad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Jihad_Movement_in_Palestine) had smuggled over "5,000 rockets with ranges up to 40 kilometers." Some of the rockets could reach as far as the [Tel Aviv Metropolitan Area](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tel_Aviv_Metropolitan_Area).

Mark Regev, spokesman for the Israeli prime minister’s office, described Israel's actions as "sanctions," not a blockade, but a Gazan legal consultant for UNRWA called the blockade "an action outside of international law.”

In July 2010, British prime minister [David Cameron](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Cameron) criticized the blockade, saying "Humanitarian goods and people must flow in both directions. Gaza cannot and must not be allowed to remain a prison camp." In response, the spokesman for the [Israeli embassy in London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Embassy_of_Israel%2C_London) said "The people of Gaza are the prisoners of the terrorist organization Hamas. The situation in Gaza is the direct result of Hamas' rule and priorities."

Tent camp, April 2009

The [Arab League](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_League) has accused Israel of waging a financial war.

The IDF strictly controls travel within the area of the crossing points between Israel and the Gaza Strip, and has sealed its border with Gaza. The security environment within Gaza and along its borders, including its border with Egypt and its seacoast, is dangerous and can change at any time.

Facing mounting international pressure, Egypt and Israel lessened the restrictions starting in June 2010, when the Rafah border crossing from Egypt to Gaza was partially opened by Egypt. Egypt’s foreign ministry said that the crossing would remain open mainly for people, but not for supplies. Israel announced that it would allow the passage of civilian goods but not weapons and items that could be used for dual purposes.

In January and February 2011, the [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Office_for_the_Coordination_of_Humanitarian_Affairs) (UNOCHA) conducted an assessment of the effects of the measures to ease the access restrictions. They concluded that they did not result in a significant improvement in people’s livelihoods. They found that the "pivotal nature of the remaining restrictions" and the effects of three years of strict blockade prevented a significant improvement in livelihoods and called on Israel to fully abolish the blockade including removing restrictions on the import of construction materials and the exports of goods, and to lift the general ban on the movement of people between Gaza and the West Bank via Israel in order to comply with what they described as international humanitarian and human rights law obligations.

**Operation Pillar of Defense**

Main article: [Operation Pillar of Defense](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Pillar_of_Defense)

**Economy**

The economy of Gaza has deteriorated since the end of the [Second Intifada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Intifada) due to both Gaza's high population density and the security restrictions it has been subjected to. Israel's closure policy, which was extended following the Hamas administration [coming to power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Governance_of_the_Gaza_Strip) in 2007, has led to high levels of poverty and unemployment and an almost total collapse of the private sector which was heavily reliant upon export markets. The population is largely dependent on humanitarian assistance, primarily from the UN agencies.

An easing of Israel's closure policy in 2010 resulted in an improvement in some economic indicators, but regular exports from the Gaza Strip are still prohibited. According to the [Israeli Defense Forces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israeli_Defense_Forces), the economy of the Gaza Strip improved in 2011, with a drop in unemployment and an increase in GDP. Lt. Col. Kobi Gertzvolf of the Israeli Defense Forces states that new malls have opened and local industry is developing. Lt. Col. Gertzvolf states that the economic upswing has led to the construction of hotels and a rise in the import of cars. Wide-scale development has been made possible by the unhindered movement of goods into Gaza through the [Kerem Shalom Crossing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kerem_Shalom_Crossing) and tunnels between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. The current rate of trucks entering Gaza through Kerem Shalom is 250 trucks per day. This figure fluctuates dependent on the level of interference with goods being brought into Gaza from Egypt through tunnels. The increase in building activity has led to a shortage of construction workers. To make up for the deficit, young people are being sent to learn the trade in Turkey.

**Geography and climate**

Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip

Gaza amusement park

The Gaza Strip is located in the Middle East (at

WikiMiniAtlas

[31°25′N 34°20′E﻿ / ﻿31.417°N 34.333°E﻿ / 31.417; 34.333](http://toolserver.org/~geohack/geohack.php?pagename=Gaza_Strip&params=31_25_N_34_20_E_region:PS_type:adm1st_scale:300000)[Coordinates](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographic_coordinate_system): [31°25′N 34°20′E﻿ / ﻿31.417°N 34.333°E﻿ / 31.417; 34.333](http://toolserver.org/~geohack/geohack.php?pagename=Gaza_Strip&params=31_25_N_34_20_E_region:PS_type:adm1st_scale:300000)). It has a 51 kilometers (32 mi) border with [Israel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel), and an 11 km border with [Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt), near the city of [Rafah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafah). [Khan Yunis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khan_Yunis) is located 7 kilometers (4.3 mi) northeast of Rafah, and several towns around [Deir el-Balah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deir_el-Balah) are located along the coast between it and [Gaza City](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza). [Beit Lahia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beit_Lahia) and [Beit Hanoun](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beit_Hanoun) are located to the north and northeast of Gaza City, respectively. The [Gush Katif](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gush_Katif) bloc of Israeli localities used to exist on the [sand dunes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dune) adjacent to Rafah and Khan Yunis, along the southwestern edge of the 40 kilometers (25 mi) [Mediterranean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Sea) coastline. Al Deira beach is a popular venue for surfers.

Gaza Strip has an arid climate, with mild winters, and dry, hot summers subject to [drought](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drought). The terrain is flat or rolling, with dunes near the coast. The highest point is Abu 'Awdah (Joz Abu 'Auda), at 105 meters (344 ft) above [sea level](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_level). Natural resources include [arable land](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arable_land) (about a third of the strip is irrigated), and recently discovered [natural gas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_gas). Environmental problems include [desertification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desertification); [salination](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biosalinity) of fresh water; [sewage treatment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewage_treatment); [water-borne disease](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water-borne_disease); [soil degradation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soil_degradation); and depletion and contamination of underground water resources. The Gaza Strip is largely dependent on water from [Wadi Gaza](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wadi_Gaza), which is also a resource for Israel.

**Religion and culture**

Main article: [Islamization of the Gaza Strip](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamization_of_the_Gaza_Strip)

From 1987 to 1991, during the [first intifada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_intifada), Hamas campaigned for the wearing of the hijab alongside other measures, including insisting women stay at home be segregated from men, and the promotion of polygamy. In the course of this campaign women who chose not to wear the hijab were verbally and physically harassed, with the result that the hijab was being worn 'just to avoid problems on the streets'.

Since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, attempts have been made to impose Islamic dress and require women to wear the [Hijab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijab) head covering. Also, the government’s "Islamic Endowment Ministry" has deployed Virtue Committee members to warn citizens of the dangers of immodest dress, card playing and dating. However, there are no government laws imposing dress and other moral standards, and the Hamas education ministry reversed one effort to impose Islamic dress on students. There has also been successful resistance to attempts by local Hamas officials to impose Islamic dress on women.

[Palestinian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_people) researcher Dr. [Khaled Al-Hroub](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Khaled_Al-Hroub&action=edit&redlink=1) has criticized what he called the "[Taliban](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taliban)-like steps" Hamas has taken. He wrote, "The Islamization that has been forced upon the Gaza Strip – the suppression of social, cultural, and press freedoms that do not suit Hamas's view[s] – is an egregious deed that must be opposed. It is the reenactment, under a religious guise, of the experience of [other] totalitarian regimes and dictatorships. Hamas officials denied having any plans to impose Islamic law, one legislator stating that “What you are seeing are incidents, not policy,” and that Islamic law is the desired standard "but we believe in persuasion.”

**Education**

University College of Applied Sciences, Gaza Strip

In 2010, illiteracy among Gazan youth was less than 1 percent. There are five universities in the Gaza Strip and eight new schools are under construction.

**Healthcare**

In Gaza, there are hospitals and additional healthcare facilities. The infant mortality rate of Gaza is ranked 104th, at 16.55 deaths per 1,000 births.

**See also**

* [Al-Bustan resort](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Bustan_resort)
* [Enclave and exclave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enclave_and_exclave)
* [Hamastan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamastan)
* [History of the Gaza Strip](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Gaza_Strip)
* [Human rights in the Palestinian National Authority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_in_the_Palestinian_National_Authority)
* [Palestinian political violence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_political_violence)
* [Political status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_status_of_the_West_Bank_and_Gaza_Strip)

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