

GAZA

An Overview



GENERAL INFORMATION



Self-governing Palestinian territory (with the West Bank, makes up the unofficial 'State of Palestine')



- Population = 1.8 million (July 2017 est.) - most are descendants of refugees from the 1948 Arab-Israeli war
- 99.8% Sunni Muslim (Arab), 0.2% Christian (est. 2,000-3,000 Arab Christians)



- North-east of the Sinai Peninsula
- Bordered by Egypt, Israel and Mediterranean Sea
- Total area of 365km²

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

- Originally a Canaanite settlement
- Came under control of ancient Egyptians and then Philistines
- Fell to Israelites in about 1000 BC
- Became part of Assyrian Empire around 730 BC
- Captured by Alexander the Great in 332 BC – became a centre of Greek learning and philosophy
- Alternately resettled by Bedouins, Seleucids (of Syria), Ptolemies (of Egypt) and Hasmoneans
- Rebuilt by Romans and given to Herod the Great – home to diverse population of Greeks, Romans, Jews, Egyptians and Persians
- Growth of Christianity led by Saint Porphyrius between 396 and 420 AD
- Conquered by Muslims in 637 AD
- Was later part of the Ottoman Empire



"INTIFADA"

Arabic word meaning "shake", or "uprising, resistance or rebellion"

Refers to large-scale Palestinian uprisings against Israeli occupation

MODERN TIMELINE

- **1917** – Britain conquers Ottoman Palestine during WWI
- **1948** – Israel declares independence as British mandate ends. Thousands of Palestinians flee in war that follows. Egypt occupies Gaza.
- **1959** – Yasser Arafat forms Fatah fighting group in Egypt to carry out raids into Israel.
- **1964** – Arab League sets up Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Palestine Liberation Army.
- **1967** – Six-Day War leads to Israel occupying Gaza. Jewish settlements set up.
- **1969** – Yasser Arafat takes over PLO leadership and asserts independence from Egyptian control.
- **1974** – Arab League recognises PLO as "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" and admits it to full membership of League. Yasser Arafat becomes first non-state leader to address UN General Assembly.
- **1978** – Israel pledges expansion of Palestinian self-government as part of Camp David Accords establishing diplomatic relations with Egypt.
- **1987** – First Palestinian Intifada uprising begins in Palestinian Territories. Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza forms Hamas movement, which rapidly turns to violence against Israel.
- **1991** – US-Soviet sponsored conference in Madrid brings Israeli and Palestinian representatives together for first time since 1949.
- **1993** – Oslo Declaration signed to plot Palestinian self-government and formally end First Intifada.
- **1995** – Israel installs perimeter fence surrounding Gaza.
- **2000-2001** – Palestinian protests escalate into Second Intifada aimed at ending Israeli occupation of West Bank and Gaza.
- **2005** – Mahmoud Abbas elected as Arafat's successor as head of Palestinian National Authority. Israel withdraws all Jewish settlements and military personnel from Gaza but retains control of airspace, ports and border crossings.
- **2006** – Hamas forms Gaza government after winning parliamentary elections. US and EU suspend aid because of Hamas' refusal to recognise Israel, renounce violence and accept previous peace accords. Major clashes between Israel and Hamas forces in Gaza.
- **2007** – Hamas ousts Fatah from Gaza and reinforces control of the territory. Israel tightens blockade after increase in rocket attacks from Gaza. Egypt closes border with Gaza.
- **2011** – Palestinian National Authority launches campaign for UN membership. Bid fails, but UNESCO cultural agency accepts Palestine as member.
- **2012** – UN upgrades Palestinian representation to "non-member observer state", allowing it to take part in General Assembly debates and improving chances of joining UN agencies.
- **2014** – Fatah and Hamas agree to form unity government. Israel responds to attacks from armed groups in Gaza with military campaign to knock out missile launching sites and attack tunnels.
- **2015** – Vatican announces plans to formally recognise Palestinian statehood.
- **2017** – Hamas lets unity government take over public institutions in Gaza as part of reconciliation process between the two rival administrations.

HAMAS

What?

- Palestinian militant movement based in Gaza. Controlled Gaza since 2007

- Spinoff of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood

- Founded in 1987 after start of the First Intifada, came to forefront of armed resistance against Israel

- Charter calls for destruction of Israel and establishment of an Islamic society in 'historic' Palestine

- Considered a terrorist organisation by Israel, the US and the EU

Who?

Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades

Hamas military wing

Khaled Meshaal

Political chief since 2007

Ismail Haniyeh

De facto prime minister of Gaza

Funding & Partners

- Palestinian expatriates, private donors in the Gulf, some Islamic charities in the West
- Iran was a primary supporter, but cut funding after fallout about Iran's support of the Syrian regime (Hamas backed the Syrian rebels)
- Closely allied with Qatar and Turkey (public and financial support)

How?

Tactics include:

- suicide bombings

- tunnel networks for smuggling goods and launching attacks)

- rocket and mortar launches into Israel

- operating from (and storing weapons in) densely populated areas, schools, mosques and private homes ('human shield' tactics)

Criticism

- Use of child labour to build tunnels and training teenagers to handle weapons
- Restricting press freedom and forcefully suppressing dissent

GAZA BLOCKADE

- ▶ Land, air and sea blockade by Israel and Egypt
- ▶ Israeli aim is to limit smuggling of weapons into Gaza and to limit Palestinian attacks
- ▶ Restrictions of movement in place since early 1990s escalated in 2007 when Hamas took control of Gaza
- ▶ Living condition challenges – power shortages, food and water insecurities, poor healthcare and education, lack of jobs
- ▶ More than 2/3 of families in Gaza are dependent on aid



CURRENT SITUATION



Protestors have planned six-week protest – the 'Great March of Return' – culminating on 15 May



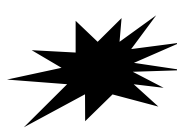
15 May marks 70th anniversary of Israel's founding as well as the 'Nakba' ('disaster' or 'catastrophe') – when an estimated 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee their homes



Peaceful protests turned **violent and deadly** when protestots began rioting and converged on the Israel-Gaza fence with stones and Molotov cocktails (firebombs) and the Israeli Defence Force fired on protestots



Israel is criticised for using **excessive force** in response
Hamas is accused of using **protests as cover** for attacks



SOURCES

- <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gz.html>
- <https://www.encyclopedia.com/places/asia/west-bank-and-gaza-political-geography/gaza-strip>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip
- <https://www.britannica.com/place/Gaza-Strip>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Gaza
- <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29362505>
- <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/hamashttps://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas#Criticism>