

# The Gaza Strip: A key point in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

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Palestinian children fasten a flag near fishing boats as they join the call for an end to the Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip during a protest in Gaza City's port, May 20, 2009. Israeli restrictions, which are enforced by the Israeli navy, limit Gaza's fishermen to fish within 3 miles of the shore. Photo by: AP Photo/Khalil Hamra

The Gaza Strip is a small strip of land in the Middle East. It is next to Israel and Egypt, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. About 2 million Palestinian people live in Gaza.

It has been described as "the world's largest open-air prison."

Gaza is a major part of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Gaza was once part of the region Palestine. Then, in 1948, the state of Israel was created. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled, or were forced to leave their homes.

Gaza was captured by Egypt during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. It was controlled by Egypt until 1967. At that time, Israel went to war with Egypt and other Arab countries. After the war, Israel took the leftover Palestinian territories of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

**Borders Are Mostly Closed**



When the state of Israel was created, Gaza was divided from the nearby West Bank and East Jerusalem areas. Israel has been blocking off the Gaza Strip from these areas since 2007.

People go in and out of the Gaza Strip through a border stop in Israel. Egypt runs another border stop. However, both Israel and Egypt have kept their borders mostly shut. This has caused serious problems for residents of Gaza. People there have little money and are in poor health.

Many people in Gaza ask Israel officials if they can leave Gaza to get medical treatment. According to a 2016 report, one-third of those applications have been denied or delayed.

In the late 1980s, Israel started a permit system. It required Palestinians in Gaza to get permits to work or travel through Israel or get into the West Bank and East Jerusalem. These permits are difficult to get.

Since 1993 in particular, Palestinians in certain areas have not been allowed to leave at times. Sometimes they are stuck for months.

In 1995, Israel built a concrete wall around the Gaza Strip. People in Gaza have been cut off from meeting with other Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

In 2000, after a Palestinian rebellion, Israel canceled many of the permits in Gaza.

In 2001, Israel bombed and demolished the Gaza airport.

Israel says that its occupation of Gaza is finished. Their troops and settlers were pulled from the territory. But in the eyes of many countries, Israel still has full control over the space.

## **Rockets Fired Into Israel**

In 2006, a group called Hamas won elections in Palestine. Hamas has carried out terrorist attacks against Israel. Hamas has launched thousands of rockets from Gaza into Israel. Since Hamas gained power in 2007, Israel has made its siege more intense.

Israel's blockade has cut off Palestinians from the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem has hospitals, banks and other important services. This cut-off goes against international laws agreed upon by many countries.

Families have been ripped apart. Young people can't study and work outside of Gaza.

## **Palestinians In Poverty**

Israel's siege on Gaza has ruined its economy.

More than two-fifths of Palestinians in Gaza live in poverty. Nearly three-fifths of young people have no jobs. About 80 percent rely on help from other countries, mainly for food.

More than three-fifths of Palestinians in Gaza are refugees. They once lived in other parts of Palestine, but were driven from their homes in 1948. Many of them now live just a few miles away from their original homes and towns.

The siege has led to shortages of basic items, like food and gas. It has also stopped Gaza from making jobs and money. Education, health care and water has gotten worse.

Since the beginning of the siege, Israel has launched three long military assaults on Gaza: in 2008, 2012 and 2014. Each of these attacks has made Gaza's situation worse. Thousands of buildings have been destroyed.

Rebuilding has been almost impossible. No one can get any construction materials, such as steel and cement, into Gaza. Israel is blocking the borders.

Over the years, Israeli attacks have also damaged Gaza's pipes and sewers. Now, more than 90 percent of Gaza's water is unsafe for drinking.

Electricity has also been cut in Gaza. This has hurt Gaza's students. At home, they are forced to study by candlelight. This hurts their ability to concentrate and learn. At school, the electricity goes out often. Their food goes bad, bathrooms are left dirty, and there is no clean water for washing hands.

Many people are sick and cannot leave to get treatment.

Israel's blockade has caused a crisis. The UN recently warned that, if the current situation continues, Gaza could be unlivable by the year 2020.

## **Hamas Governs The Strip**

In 1987, the political and military group Hamas was created during an event called the First Intifada. The Intifada was a popular movement of Palestinians against the Israeli occupation.

In 2006, Hamas won elections in Palestine. Hamas now governs the Gaza Strip.

Hamas calls itself a Palestinian Islamic national liberation and resistance movement. Its goal is to free Palestine and "confront the Zionist project." Zionism is the plan that created Israel as a nation for Jewish people.

Originally, Hamas wanted all of historic Palestine to be part of a new Palestine. It wanted Israel to vanish. Recently, Hamas wrote a new document. Hamas now says it would accept the borders that were created in 1967. Hamas wants to create a new Palestinian country, with Jerusalem as its capital city. Hamas also wants refugees returned to their homes.

Hamas does not recognize Israel as a country. It is trying to free Palestine using violent resistance and terrorism.

## **Major Israeli Assaults Damage Gaza**

After blocking off Gaza in 2007, Israel launched three major assaults on the area.

The assaults destroyed much of the city, including Gaza's only power plant. Gaza has been experiencing electricity problems for a decade. Most homes, businesses, and hospitals can get power for three hours a day at most and gas is also hard to get.

Tens of thousands of people in Gaza live in tents.

In 2008, the first major Israeli assault on Gaza continued for 23 days. About 47,000 homes were destroyed. More than 1,440 Palestinians were killed, including at least 920 innocent people.

In 2012, Israeli forces killed 167 Palestinians in an eight-day attack.

Gaza was also heavily damaged; 126 houses were completely destroyed. Schools, mosques, cemeteries, and health and sports centers were also hit.

In 2014, over 50 days, Israel killed more than 2,100 Palestinians. Sixty-four Israeli soldiers died, and seven civilians died in Israel (from Hamas rocket attacks).

During the assault, about 20,000 homes were destroyed and half a million displaced from their homes.

**Quiz**

- 1 Read the paragraph from the section " Hamas Governs The Strip."

*Originally, Hamas wanted all of historic Palestine to be part of a new Palestine. It wanted Israel to vanish. Recently, Hamas wrote a new document. Hamas now says it would accept the borders that were created in 1967. Hamas wants to create a new Palestinian country, with Jerusalem as its capital city. Hamas also wants refugees returned to their homes.*

Which detail from this paragraph BEST supports the conclusion that Hamas has changed its demands?

- (A) Originally, Hamas wanted all of historic Palestine to be part of a new Palestine.
  - (B) Recently, Hamas wrote a new document.
  - (C) Hamas now says it would accept the borders that were created in 1967.
  - (D) Hamas also wants refugees returned to their homes.
- 2 Read the paragraph from the section "Borders Are Mostly Closed."

*People go in and out of the Gaza Strip through a border stop in Israel. Egypt runs another border stop. However, both Israel and Egypt have kept their borders mostly shut. This has caused serious problems for residents of Gaza. People there have little money and are in poor health.*

Which of the following is the MOST accurate explanation of this paragraph?

- (A) People living in the Gaza Strip cannot find work or medical care there.
- (B) Egypt keeps its border with the Gaza Strip shut to help the state of Israel.
- (C) People living in the Gaza Strip have problems getting along with neighboring countries.
- (D) Israel has only one border stop because the Gaza Strip is a small area.



- 3 Read the paragraph from the section "Borders Are Mostly Closed."

*Israel says that its occupation of Gaza is finished. Their troops and settlers were pulled from the territory. But in the eyes of many countries, Israel still has full control over the space.*

Which phrase from the paragraph helps the reader understand the meaning of "occupation"?

- (A) is finished
  - (B) pulled from
  - (C) many countries
  - (D) full control
- 4 The word "blockade" is essential to understanding the situation in the Gaza Strip.
- Which sentence from the article BEST explains what "blockade" means?
- (A) Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled, or were forced to leave their homes.
  - (B) When the state of Israel was created, Gaza was divided from the nearby West Bank and East Jerusalem areas.
  - (C) However, both Israel and Egypt have kept their borders mostly shut.
  - (D) It is trying to free Palestine using violent resistance and terrorism.