

# Understanding the Crisis in Gaza

## Important Facts and Context

### Background

The state of Israel, a product of European Jewish colonialism, came into existence through the 1947-49 war. It was created on 78% of the land previously called Palestine, which had been populated by (10%) Christian, (4%) Jewish, and (86%) Muslim Arabs living in peace. Three-quarters of a million Palestinian Arabs were violently pushed out in order to create this Jewish state. Israel has never allowed them to return to their homes because they are not Jewish.

In 1967, Israel launched a war against its neighbors. During this war it conquered the rest of Palestine – the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which remain under military occupation to this day. These Palestinians live under Israeli rule, but have no voice in the Israeli government, causing many to term this an Apartheid-like occupation. Israel has stolen great swaths of Palestinian land and built housing for Israeli Jews, called settlements, in which Palestinians and other non-Jews are not allowed to live. Over 1 million Gazans and 750,000 Palestinians in the West Bank are refugees from 1948 or their descendents.

The ongoing brutal occupation (including 11,000 prisoners in Israeli prisons – many of whom have never even been charged with a crime), and Israel's denial of the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes are the fundamental reasons this conflict continues.

### Gaza: An Open-Air Prison

During the summer of 2005, Israel "disengaged" from the Gaza Strip, claiming to finally be ending its occupation of this land. It dismantled its settlements, resettling the inhabitants in Israel and the West Bank (where settlements continue to expand).

In reality, though, Israel's occupation of Gaza did not end. Instead, Gaza became a huge open-air prison, with Israel controlling all exits and entrances, its air space, and its sea ports. As routinely decried by aid agencies, Israel does not allow the food, medicine, and other essential supplies needed by the population of Gaza to prevent a humanitarian disaster. It also routinely prevents patients in desperate need of medical care outside of Gaza to leave, leading to numerous deaths.

### Hamas and the Siege on Gaza

In 2006, in what was universally hailed as a free, democratic election, members of Hamas, a Palestinian political party with a militant wing, were elected to a majority of the seats in the Palestinian legislature and a unity government was formed. Israel was not happy with this result and worked to undermine it. Western powers declared a boycott of the Palestinian Authority as long as Hamas was included in the government. In 2007, this pressure caused the government to splinter, with Hamas in charge in Gaza, and Fatah (the party that had been in power for decades) in control in the West Bank.

Israel, the United States, and other western powers resumed normal relations with the Fatah government, while continuing their boycott of Hamas. Life in

Gaza became even more difficult, as the entire population stood on the verge of a wide-scale man-made disaster.

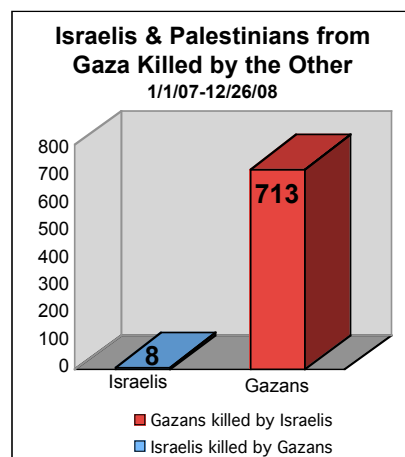
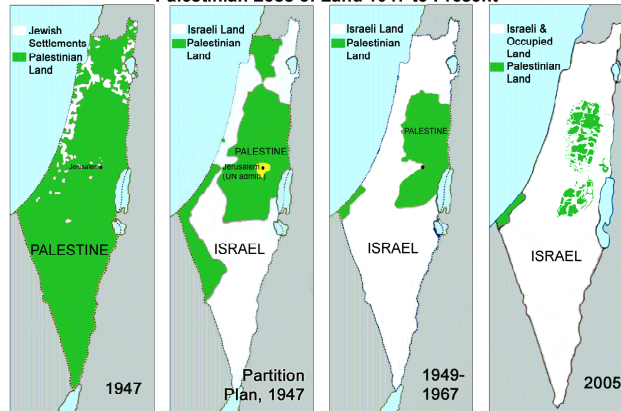
### Imbalance of Power and Loss of Life

During this time, Israel continued to invade Gaza, killing over 713 Gazans in 2007 and 2008 (prior to the launch of their major assault on Dec 27, 2008). Resistance groups in Gaza attempted to resist these attacks, killing 8 of the invading soldiers. Some Palestinian fighters also launched rockets. Often described as a significant threat to Israeli security, most of these rockets are small, homemade projectiles that normally kill no one and only rarely cause damage. Since 2001 these have killed a total of 18 Israelis. Most often these rockets are aimed at the Israeli town of Sderot, which was created on the lands of the Palestinian town Najd that had been ethnically cleansed in 1948.

Israeli forces, on the other hand, are the fourth strongest military on earth and are equipped with massive, modern weaponry, much of it supplied by American taxpayers: F-16s, helicopter gunships, tanks, armored vehicles, etc. In the past 8 years they have killed more than 6,200 Palestinians.

While Israeli violence is often described as retaliatory, the fact is that in every cycle of violence Palestinians are killed first and in far greater numbers. In the uprising that began in fall of 2000, 140 Palestinians were killed before a single Israeli was killed inside Israel; 82 Palestinian children were killed before a single Israeli child was killed.

Palestinian Loss of Land 1947 to Present



## Gaza Massacre: Dec 27, 2008 – Jan 18, 2009

On June 19, 2008 a 6-month truce went into effect between Israel and fighters in Gaza. The terms of the truce were that Israel stop all invasions into Gaza, reduce its blockade on Gaza, and that Palestinians stop all rocket attacks on Israel.

Israel never fulfilled its obligation to ease the siege of Gaza, which had created, according to numerous relief organizations, “catastrophic” humanitarian conditions. Christian Aid stated that Israel must stop using food and medicine as weapons against Gaza’s 1.5 million men, women, and children (over 1 million of whom are refugees from 1948). Five months later, on November 4th, the truce ended when Israel invaded Gaza, killing 6 Palestinians. Only after this did Hamas resume rocket fire.

On December 27th, Israel began a premeditated air, land, and sea assault on Gaza that reduced large areas to rubble. Like shooting fish in an over-crowded barrel, in three weeks Israeli forces killed 1,417 Palestinians – 313 of them children – and injured 5,303. Palestinians killed 9 Israelis during this time. Israeli strikes damaged and destroyed huge numbers of homes, causing a third of all Gazans to be displaced at some point during the assault. According to the WHO, “Vital infrastructure has been compromised or destroyed, resulting in a lack of shelter and energy sources, deterioration of water and sanitation services, food insecurity and overcrowding.”

After ignoring calls for a ceasefire for 3 weeks, Israel finally declared what it called a “unilateral ceasefire” on January 18th. Palestinian factions called a ceasefire as well a few hours later.

### Ceasefire Violations

It was widely reported by the media that this ceasefire was first breached by Palestinians on Jan 27th. In reality, however, Israel had already violated the ceasefire at least seven times, including killing two farmers – the first only a few hours after the ceasefire went into effect – and shooting a child.

A study conducted of all the ceasefires, truces, and periods of calm during the past 8 years, concluded:

“...a systematic pattern does exist: it is overwhelmingly Israel, not Palestine, that kills first following a lull. Indeed, it is virtually always Israel that kills first after a lull lasting more than a week.”

### Americans are Involved: We Can Help

American taxpayers give Israel \$7 million per day – far more than to all the starving countries of Africa put together. Americans are therefore considered by much of the world as responsible for Israeli violations of human rights, creating escalating enmity toward our country. It is time that Americans demand an end to this misuse of our taxes.



### Important Statistics

#### Most Recent Uprising - End of Assault on Gaza (Sep 29, 2000 - Jan 18, 2009)

Palestinians Killed by Israelis:	6,325
Israelis Killed by Palestinians:	1,071
Palestinians killed by Israelis on Palestinian land:	98.9%
Israelis killed by Palestinians on Israeli land:	54.5%
Palestinian Children Killed by Israelis:	1,369
Israeli Children Killed by Palestinians:	123

#### 3-Week Assault on Gaza (Dec 27, 2008 - Jan 18, 2009)

Palestinian Children Killed by Israelis:	313
Israeli Children Killed by Palestinians:	0
Gazans displaced at some point during conflict:	approx. 500,000
Gazans still displaced a month after ceasefire:	approx. 100,000

#### Additional Statistics

1948 refugees residing in the West Bank:	at least 754,263
1948 refugees residing in the Gaza Strip:	at least 1,059,584
Total Palestinian refugees worldwide:	more than 7,000,000
Palestinians held prisoner by Israel:	approximately 11,000
Israelis held prisoner by Palestinians:	1
Palestinian children held prisoner by Israel:	327
Israeli children held prisoner by Palestinians:	0
Conflict pauses of a week or more broken by Palestinians:	4%
Conflict pauses of a week or more broken by Israelis:	96%
Size of Gaza:	139 sq mi
Size of West Bank:	3,462 sq mi
Size of Israel (within pre-1967 borders):	12,906 sq mi

### 'Israel claims success in the PR war'

Following are excerpts from *The Jewish Chronicle's* article, “Israel claims success in the PR war,” published in the midst of Israel’s assault on Gaza (Dec 31, 2008).

“The Gaza attack is the first major demonstration of Israel’s total overhaul of its ‘hasbara’ [public relations/propaganda] operation following the Second Lebanon War. While the military aspects of the operation were meticulously planned, a new forum of press advisers was also established which has been working for the past six months on a PR strategy specifically geared to dealing with the media during warfare in Gaza.

“Whenever Israel is bombing, it is hard to explain our position to the world,’ said Avi Pazner, Israel’s former ambassador to Italy and France... ‘But at least this time everything was ready and in place...’

“The Directorate, which has been up and running for eight months, began planning six months ago for a Gaza operation...”