

## GAZA AT A GLANCE

### *Administrative Facts*

- Inhabited from the 4th millennium B.C., and later a strategic and commercial crossroads linking Egypt and Mesopotamia (and Africa and the Arabian Peninsula), **Gaza became the center of one of the 16 districts of Mandate Palestine** under British rule in **1922**.
- The **Gaza Strip** constitutes that part of Palestine held by the Egyptian forces at the end of the 1948 Palestine war and then **administered by Egypt** from the signing of the 1949 Egyptian-Israeli Armistice Agreement to the June 1967 war. The Strip comprised **1.3% of Mandate Palestine, 27% of the Mandate's Gaza district**.
- **Israel** occupied the Gaza Strip during the June 1967 war.
- In 1994, the **Palestinian Authority** assumed territorial and civilian jurisdiction over the Gaza Strip (except for the settlements and military areas) under the Gaza-Jericho agreement, signed that year by Israel and the PLO.
- **Israel unilaterally withdrew all military installations and settlements** from the Gaza Strip in August-September 2005, but retained control of airspace, territorial waters, and entry and exit points; consequently, it remains the occupying power.

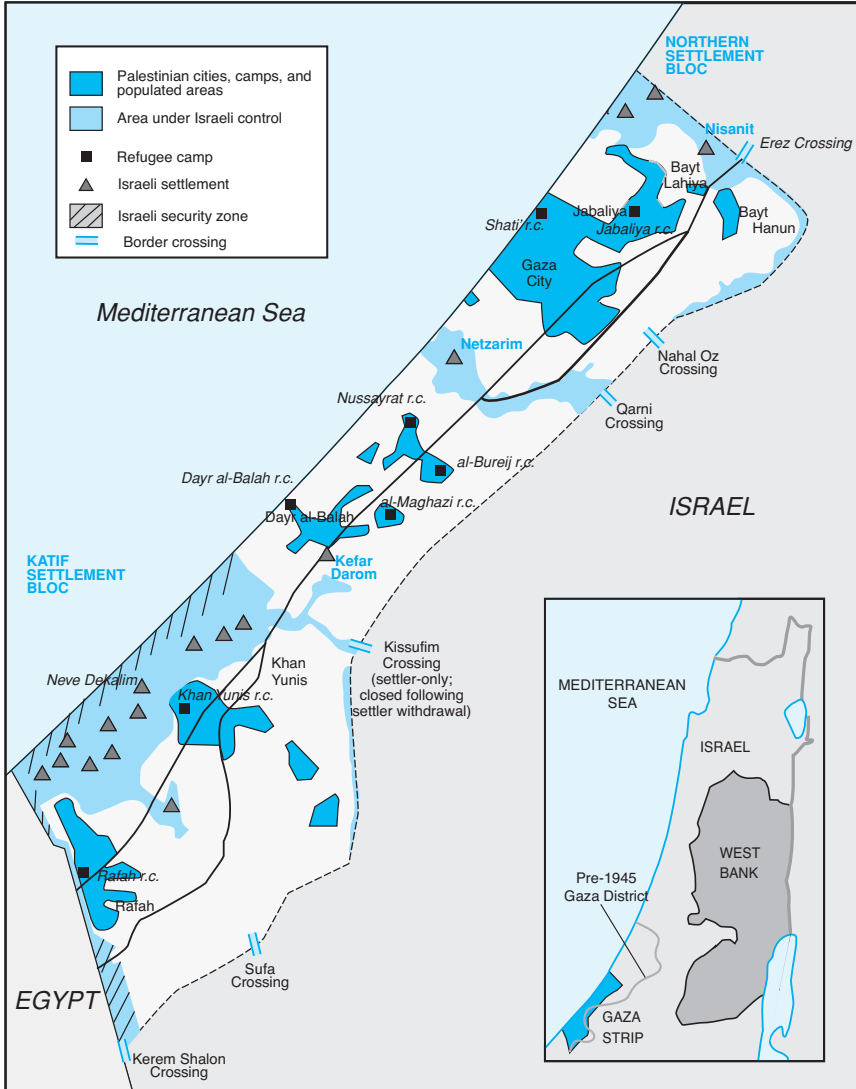
### *Geographic Indicators*<sup>1</sup>

- *Linear size:* 45 km long; 12.5 km wide at southern end; 5.47 km at narrowest point (28 miles, 7.8 miles, and 3.4 miles, respectively)
- *Boundaries:* 51 km border with Israel; 11 km border with Egypt; 40 km of coastline
- *Surface area:* 360 sq. km (140 sq. miles), slightly more than twice the area of Washington, DC
- *Terrain:* Flat to rolling sand- and dune-covered coastal plain (ranging in elevation from sea level to 105 m)
- *Climate:* Temperate, mild winters (low 40s to mid 60s F) and warm to hot summers (upper 60s to low 90s F)
- *Annual rainfall:* 150–250 mm (6–10 inches)
- *Land use:* 29% of the surface area is arable; 21% is planted in permanent crops; and 50% is sand dunes, desert, or other (2002 est.)
- *Environmental issues:* Desertification; salination of fresh water; sewage treatment; water-borne disease; soil degradation; depletion and contamination of underground water resources

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, the information under “Geographic Indicators” and “Population Data” are from the 2008 Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook.

### Gaza Strip c. 2000



Sources: Foundation for Middle East Peace, BBC News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs—Occupied Palestinian Territory.

**For an overview of the Israeli-imposed Gaza security perimeters, see “Israeli Military Operations against Gaza” in this special section.**

### ***Population Data***

- *Population*: 1,500,202
- *Age structure*: 0–14 years, 44.7%; 15–64 years, 52.7%; 65 years and over, 2.7%; median age 17.2 years<sup>2</sup>
- *Annual population growth rate*: 3.42%<sup>3</sup>
- *Birth rate*: 37.75 births /1,000 persons<sup>4</sup>
- *Fertility rate*: 5.19 children born/woman<sup>5</sup>
- *Life expectancy at birth*: 73.16 years
- *Literacy*: 92.4%<sup>6</sup>
- *Population density*: 4,167 persons/sq. km (compared with 315 persons/sq. km in Israel)
- *Urban population*: 72% of the total population<sup>7</sup>, living in 13 cities and towns (in descending order of size: Gaza City, Khan Yunis, Rafah, Jabaliya, and Dayr al-Balah) and 8 refugee camps (see below)

### ***Refugees and Refugee Camps***<sup>8</sup>

- *Refugee population* (as registered with UNRWA): 1,073,303, or **71.5% of Gaza's total population**
- *Refugees living in UNRWA camps*: 495,006, or **33% of Gaza's total population**
- *Refugee camps in order of size*: Jabaliya, Rafah, Shati' (Beach), Khan Yunis, Nussayrat, al-Bureij, al-Maghazi, and Dayr al-Balah. All camps were established in 1950 except al-Maghazi, which was established in 1949.
- *Camp surface area and population density*: The 8 camps together occupy a total surface area of **6.26 sq. km**, making the **average population density** of the 8 camps **74,706 persons/sq. km**. Of the 8 camps, Dayr al-Balah has the highest density (119,270/sq. km); al-Bureij, the lowest (40,000/sq. km). In comparison, the population density of Manhattan is 27,489 persons/sq. km.

### ***Israeli Settlements and Military Installations prior to Disengagement***

- *Settlement population*: At the time of Israel's 2005 disengagement, approx. 8,000 settlers lived in 21 settlements created between 1970 and 2001, especially following the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty and the dismantlement of the Sinai settlements. The settlements ranged in population from 15 to 2,600, with most having fewer than 500 persons and only 2 (Neve Dekalim and Nisanit) with populations exceeding 1,000.

<sup>2</sup> Gaza's population is steadily growing older: corresponding 2000 (CIA) estimates for age structure were, respectively, 50%; 47%, and 3%. No figure for median age was given in the 2000 report. (See also comparisons for population growth rate, birth rate, and fertility rate.)

<sup>3</sup> Compare 3.97% in 2000 (CIA World Factbook, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Compare 43.14 births/1,000 in 2000 (CIA World Factbook, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Compare 6.55 children born/woman in 2000 (CIA World Factbook, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Percentage of population age 15 years and over who can read and write (2004 estimate).

<sup>7</sup> 2008 estimate (CIA World Factbook, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Information in this section comes from the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA).

- *Settlement location:* 16 of the settlements (the largest being Neve Dekalim) were in the **Gush Katif bloc**, a rectangular area of southwest Gaza bounded by the Mediterranean in the west and Egypt in the south and with a combined population above 5,000. The **northern bloc** of 3 settlements (the largest Nisanit) ran from the Mediterranean along the northern border with Israel up to Erez. Two **settlements**, Netzarim and Kefar Darom, were in the middle of the Strip.
- *Land area:* The Gaza settlements together occupied approximately 20% of the Strip's surface area, with an additional 15–20% taken up by Israeli security areas, military installations and posts, bypass roads, and buffer zones off-limits to Palestinians.
- *Evacuated areas today:* Upon disengagement in 2005, the northern bloc immediately became a no-go zone, and it remains so. The other settlement areas were placed under the control of PA security. Almost all usable infrastructure had been demolished by the departing IDF and/or settlers. Greenhouses purchased by the consortium put together by Quartet envoy James Wolfensohn that had not been destroyed were turned over to the PA, which set up the Palestine Economic Development Company to oversee the evacuated lands. Privately held lands (a small share of the total) were returned to their original owners. As of 2/07, little had been done with the settlement sites, as only 3 of the 21 had been cleared of rubble. After its takeover of the Strip, Hamas in late 2007 created a "general administration for liberated lands" involving the ministries of finance, economy, labor, agriculture, and planning; lands under its control are used for agricultural purposes (including fisheries) and food processing.

Although Israel at disengagement withdrew military installations and settlements alike, the buffer zones and no-go areas that remain off limits to Palestinians occupy about 61 sq. km, or 17% of Gaza's surface area.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Borders, Crossings, and Security Measures***

- *Gaza-Israel:* the 51-km border is secured by a triple barrier. The first barrier, mainly electronic fencing, was built along the Armistice Line in the mid-1990s and rebuilt and upgraded at the start of the al-Aqsa intifada with high-tech observation posts and electronic sensors. Prior to disengagement, Israel began building 2 additional parallel barriers along the border *inside Israel*, one of razor wire and the other (up to 23 feet high, with fortified surveillance towers every few hundred yards along the entire length) outfitted with electronic motion sensors and an early warning system linked to monitoring stations in Israel. (High-tech upgrades were added in 2007.) *Inside Gaza*, Israel imposed a

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<sup>9</sup> "Israel increases the security buffer zone around the Gaza Strip," Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ), 1 August 2007.

1-km-deep no-go zone along the eastern and northern borders at the start of the al-Aqsa intifada. A wider northern no-go zone surrounding the northern settlement bloc and Erez crossing was imposed in 2004 in preparation for disengagement and extended (up to 6 miles deep) in December 2005. The Israel-Gaza border's virtual impermeability is enhanced by aggressive open-fire rules.

- *Gaza-Egypt*: The 11-km barrier of concrete and steel panels was reinforced (2003–2005) with an additional concrete wall over 8 m high and 7 km long starting from the coast. The new wall is equipped with electronic sensors and underground concrete barriers to prevent tunneling. Though Egypt is responsible for patrolling its side of the border, Israel cleared (through the destruction of houses and buildings in successive military operations after 2000, including aerial bombardment after 2007) a 200–300-m-wide buffer zone on the Palestinian side known as the Philadelphi corridor.
- *Crossing points*: Since the 2005 disengagement, there have been 6 crossing points on Gaza's borders. **Two are for persons and personal effects only: Erez**, which handles transit into Israel (which Israel treats in many respects like an international border crossing), and **Rafah**, which handles transit to Egypt. Prior to Hamas's June 2007 takeover of Gaza, Rafah was controlled by the PA and EU monitors while Israel viewed (and approved or denied) travel documents and import/export papers in real time via remote cameras. Since the withdrawal of the EU monitors following the Hamas takeover, Egypt has maintained the crossing in close consultation with Israel, mostly keeping it closed except for extreme medical cases.

**Four crossing points are for commercial goods: Nahal Oz** (for fuel), **Qarni** (the main cargo crossing), **Sufa** (primarily for grain, via conveyor belt), and **Kerem Shalom** (built by Israel after disengagement to control the transit of cargo from Egypt into Gaza via Israel). Israel imposes strict requirements on all incoming cargo, which must be offloaded, subject to Israeli inspection (often by x-ray), and moved through the crossing by Israeli approved employees before being loaded onto Palestinian trucks for transport within Gaza.

- *Sea and air*: Gaza's coastline is permanently patrolled by Israeli naval vessels, which routinely fire on Palestinian fishermen who go more than 6 nautical miles from shore. (Under the 1994 Gaza-Jericho agreement, Palestinian fishing was to be permitted up to 20 nautical miles from shore.) Gazan air space is controlled by radar, while overflights by Israeli fighter jets breaking the sound barrier are a regular occurrence. Air raids did not cease after disengagement (see "Prelude to Operation Cast Lead" in this special section for details). Unmanned drones for surveillance are almost never absent from the Gaza skies, and a surveillance blimp is permanently tethered near the Erez crossing.