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## West Bank

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The territory known as the West Bank is the area to the west of the Jordan River. It is approximately 2262 square miles in total area, and is home to approximately 2.7 million Palestinians and approximately 400,000 Israeli Jews living in settlements.

The West Bank formed the heart of ancient Israel and was the site of many significant biblical events. Since ancient times, the area has been known as Judea and Samaria and was identified as such through the [British Mandate](#) period. From biblical times until 1948, the West Bank were occupied, at various times, by the Romans, the Ottomans and the British.

This territory was part of the British Mandate Palestine, and occupied by both Jews and Arabs. The [1947 Partition Plan](#), which was accepted by the pre-state Zionist leadership, but rejected by the Arabs, allocated much of what is now called the West Bank to an independent Arab state to be established alongside an independent Jewish state.

In the [1948 Arab-Israeli war](#), Jordan took control of the West Bank (which it annexed in 1950). For the next 19 years Jordan ruled this territory and made no attempt to establish an independent Palestinian state or authority. Indeed, these areas were relatively neglected in terms of economic and agricultural development.

In the [1967 war](#) Israel gained control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and its population of at least one million Palestinians. In the aftermath of the war, Israel

indicated it would be ready to withdraw from the territory in return for a peace agreement with its Arab neighbors, however, Israel's offer was rebuffed.

In the ensuing years, Israel built [settlements](#) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Over the decades, the population residing in West Bank settlements grew substantially. By 2017 approximately 400,000 Jewish Israelis resided in West Bank settlements (not including East Jerusalem).

It expected that the West Bank will form the heart of a mutually-negotiated future Palestinian state.

In 1993, as part of the [Oslo Accords](#), Israel agreed to redeploy from Palestinian population centers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Beginning with the West Bank city of Jericho and a large portion of the Gaza Strip in May 1994, there were a series of Israeli redeployments totaling 40 percent of the West Bank and over 85 percent of the Gaza Strip, leaving 99 percent of the Palestinian population living under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. At [Camp David in July 2000](#), Prime Minister Ehud Barak reportedly offered an Israeli withdrawal from as much as 95 percent of the West Bank, 100 percent of the Gaza Strip, and parts of Jerusalem. Palestinian Authority Chairman Arafat rejected this offer, arguing that only a full withdrawal to the [pre-1967 lines](#) would be acceptable, but made no serious counter-offer. In recent years, Israel has reportedly proposed "land swaps", whereby areas of Israeli territory within the Green Line would be incorporated into a Palestinian state, in exchange for modification of the line to include large Israeli populations living in West Bank settlement blocs within Israel's permanent boundary.

Palestinians assert that West Bank [settlement](#) building is the main obstacle to peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel rejects that notion, arguing that settlements are only one of numerous difficult issues to be determined as part of final status negotiations with the Palestinians. At the same time, however, there is growing concern that the growth of settlements, especially in areas deep within

the West Bank and outside of the main settlement blocs, are creating so-called “facts on the ground” which could physically impede territorial contiguity of the borders of a future Palestinian state, and thereby undermine the viability of a two state solution.

Since 1967, Israeli governments have maintained a willingness to withdraw from areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as part of a peace agreement. In the event of such a final status agreement with the Palestinians, along with a comprehensive Israeli-Arab peace agreement, it has always been expected that settlements – particularly those outside the main settlement blocs – would have to be uprooted, just as the Israeli town of Yamit in the Sinai was dismantled following Israel’s peace agreement with Egypt.