

## Gaza Strip

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Gaza is a 25-mile long, 7-mile wide densely populated coastal strip between Israel and Egypt which is today home to approximately 1.9 million Palestinians. In ancient times, Gaza was considered a strategic area due to its central location for trade between Asia, European and North Africa. Gaza has significance for Jews, though far less than the West Bank, and is mentioned in the books of Joshua and Judges. From biblical times until 1948, the West Bank and Gaza Strip were occupied by the Romans, the Ottomans and the British.

Following the [1948 War](#) the Gaza Strip was controlled by Egypt.

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

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.

In 2003, then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced a plan for Israel to unilaterally disengage from the Gaza Strip and some small settlements in the

northern West Bank in order to further Israel's political, security and demographic interests. The [disengagement](#) was approved by the Cabinet and Knesset and began on August 17, 2005. By mid-September all 8000 Israeli civilians from all 21 settlements in the Gaza Strip had been evacuated.

Since 2007,  [Hamas](#) has governed Gaza, and the territory is the center for terrorist and militant activity against Israel – including the launching of rockets at Israeli population centers, raids on Israeli military installations, the building of underground cross-border tunnels to enable Hamas operative to smuggle into Israel, and the smuggling of weapons from Egypt or by sea. In [December 2008](#), [November 2012](#) and [July 2014](#), Israel launched military operation aimed at ending Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli population centers.