

# A Brief History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The three regions on the map (Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank) were once known as **Palestine**. Ownership of the land is disputed primarily between two different groups: **Israeli Jews** and **Palestinian Arabs** (who are chiefly Muslim, but also include Christians and Druze).

After the **Arab-Israeli War of 1947-1948**, Palestine was divided into the areas you see here. Jewish Israelis, whose ancestors began migrating to the area in the 1880s, say their claim to the land is based on a promise from God, and also for the need for a safe haven from widespread hostility toward the Jewish people (known as anti-Semitism). The Palestinian Arabs say they are the rightful inhabitants of the land because their ancestors have lived there for hundreds of years.

The **Gaza Strip** is a rectangle along the Mediterranean coast between Israel and Egypt. The majority of its approximately 1.4 million residents are Palestinian refugees, many of whom have been living in refugee camps for decades; 80 percent were estimated to be living in poverty in mid-2007.

Under the **Oslo peace accords signed in 1993**, Gaza was turned over to the newly created **Palestinian Authority**, to form one wing of an emerging Palestinian state, along with the West Bank and a potential land corridor between them. But two different parties rule these two regions—the militant **Hamas** controlled Gaza and **Fatah** ruled the West Bank. Many Israeli settlers remained in Gaza.

In September **2005** the Israeli prime minister at the time, Ariel Sharon, withdrew all Israeli settlers from Gaza, making it the first territory completely in Palestinian hands. Israel, however, kept tight control over all border crossings and continued to conduct raids.

In January **2006**, Hamas won a surprise victory in the **Palestinian parliamentary elections**, ousting the Fatah government. Then in a burst of fighting in June 2007 in which more than 100 people were killed, Hamas gunmen routed the Fatah forces, and seized control of Gaza outright. Israel, which had refused to recognize the Hamas government, responded by clamping down even tighter on the flow of goods and people in and out of the territories.

By June **2008**, Hamas and Israel were both ready to reach some sort of accommodation, and the six-month **truce** was declared, although never formally defined. Their job, the Hamas officials said, was to stop **rocket attacks** on Israel not only from its own armed groups, but also from others based in Gaza, including Islamic Jihad and Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades.

It took some days, but they were largely successful. Hamas imposed its will and even imprisoned some of those who were firing rockets. But the goods shipments, while up some 25 to 30 percent and including a mix of more items, never began to approach what Hamas thought it was going to get. Israel said it planned to increase the shipments in stages, and noted that the rockets never stopped completely.

After the truce lapsed on **Dec. 19**, rocket firing stepped up quickly, and **Israeli air strikes** soon followed. The death toll on the first day was estimated at 225; by Dec. 29, it had topped 300. On Jan. 3, a **land invasion** of Gaza began, and by Jan. 8, the death toll was 660.

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