

GAZA



The All-Palestine Government, formed in Gaza in September 1948

Pressure from the US and the international community soon forced Israeli withdrawal, and when Egypt returned to the Gaza Strip in 1957, Gamal Abdul Nasser emerged as a proponent of the Palestinian cause.

Nasser allowed freer political expression in order to gain wider support, and various Palestinian political organizations were subsequently created. This situation lasted only until 1967, when Egypt once again lost Gaza to the Israelis, and yet the Strip and its inhabitants have retained a prominent place in the political rhetoric of Egypt and its Arab neighbors. For example, the unilateral peace agreement between Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat at Camp David in 1978 caused ripples throughout the Middle East, as it normalized relations between the two nations without a just solution for the Palestinians. The Camp David Accords were in part an Egyptian attempt at finally distancing itself from Gaza, which they hoped would become part of a future Palestinian state.

“I do not think Nasser wanted war. The two divisions he sent to the Sinai would not have been sufficient to launch an offensive war. He knew it and we knew it.”

Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's Chief of Staff in 1967, in Le Monde, 28 February 1968

What happened to Gaza during and after the 1967 War?

Tension between Israel and Arab countries came to a peak in the 1960s; in May 1967, Egyptian President Nasser began making bellicose statements, asked the UN to withdraw its Emergency Force (UNEF) from Sinai and the Gaza Strip, and ordered the straits of Tiran closed to Israeli shipping. Despite those moves, analysts such as Avi Shlaim (in *The Iron Wall*) and Noam Chomsky (in *The Fateful Triangle*) believe that Nasser never intended to strike Israel.

Israel attacked the Egyptians beginning on 5 June 1967 and occupied the Gaza Strip and Sinai (along with the West Bank on the Jordanian front and the Golan Heights on the Syrian front) in the course of the subsequent 1967 War. A ceasefire was agreed to on 10 June.

Immediately after the war, the Israeli Army issued an order declaring the Strip a closed military area and assumed control of land and water resources. The war had also created another influx of refugees, and the population of Gaza city jumped to six times what it had been just twenty years earlier. On 22 November 1967, UN Resolution 242 called for negotiations towards a permanent peace between the parties and for Israeli withdrawal from lands occupied in the war. Since then, the resolution has been invoked as the centerpiece for negotiating efforts, though with no tangible results to date. Israel's military occupation remained unchanged in Gaza

for 38 years before it entered a new phase in September 2005. During the 1970s and 1980s the Israeli government undertook numerous measures to strengthen their presence in the Gaza Strip, first and foremost confiscating large amounts of land to build settlements. Resentment stemming from Israeli occupation, a weak economy, and a large refugee population soon made the region a center for Palestinian activism and political unrest. Riots, demonstrations, and violent confrontations between Israelis and Palestinians developed into the first Intifada, which began in Gaza's Jabalia refugee camp on 9 December 1987 and quickly spread to Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian territories.

The Jabalia Refugee Camp

was established in the extreme north of the Gaza Strip shortly after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Almost 40 years later, in December 1987, a series of protests in Jabalia camp grew into the first intifada. Today, with a population of well over 100,000 crowded into an area that measures only 1.4 km², Jabalia is one of the most densely populated places on earth. It is the largest of all the refugee camps in the occupied Palestinian territories and has a very young population, with children under 15 making up the majority of its inhabitants. UNRWA runs 25 schools in the camp, all of which run on two shifts and have an average of 55 children per classroom.*



Jabalia Refugee Camp

* Ma'an Development Center. "Jabalia Refugee Camp" (www.maan-ctr.org).

What was Gaza's status in the Oslo Accords?

In September 1993 Israel and the PLO signed the Declaration of Principles. These were followed by the Oslo I and Oslo II Accords, which were signed in 1994 and 1995 respectively and provided limited Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Jericho before extending it to other



Yasser Arafat's return to Gaza in 1994

parts of the West Bank. The first Palestinian police forces entered the Gaza Strip on 10 May 1994, and on 13 May, the several civil spheres were handed over from Israel to the Palestinian Authority (PA). One month later, the Palestinian security apparatus had grown to 9,000 members and was divided into national, preventive, presidential and public security branches. On the administrative level, members of the PA were appointed, ministries were established to form an organizational structure, and several bodies were founded to deal with the aid promised by international donors and other matters (e.g., PECJAR, Palestinian Center for Energy etc.). On 1 July, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat crossed the Rafah border into the Gaza Strip for the first time in 25 years, going so far as to purchase a home and make a pledge to revitalize the territory. However, Israel maintained control over Israeli settlements, foreign policy, and security even though most of their armed forces had withdrawn from Gaza by late May 1994 and the PA had assumed administrative control of the Gaza North, Gaza City, Deir Al-Balah, Khan Younis, and Rafah districts.