Teach-In

GAZA:
Centering Palestinian Experiences

Center for Security, Race and Rights

csrr.rutgers.edu

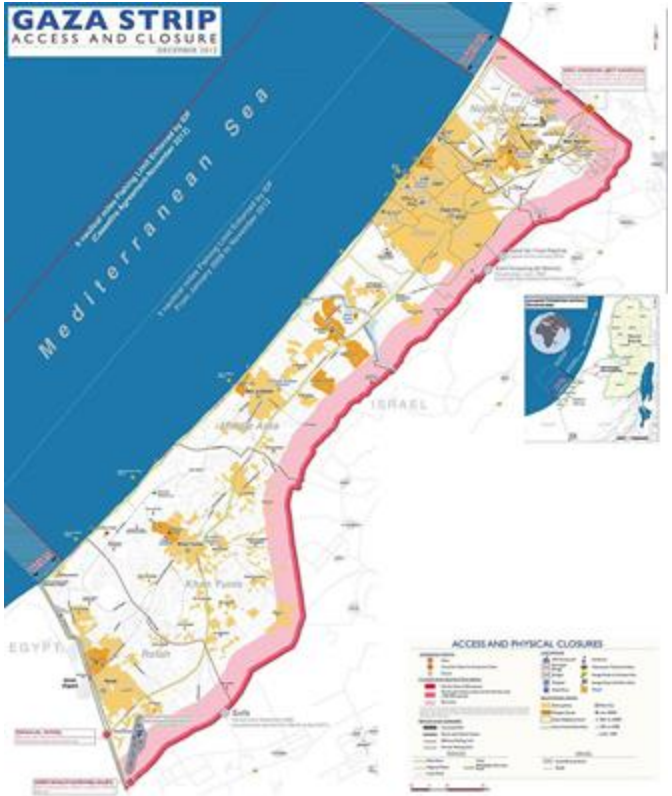
@RUCSRR | @RutgersCSRR

Gaza, Basic Facts & Figures

→ Gaza is home to 2 million Palestinians, more than half of whom are under 18. More than 70% of Gaza's inhabitants are expellees & their descendants from the 1948 War.

→ Political status: From 1948-1967, Egypt occupied the West Bank; From 1967-2007, Israel has occupied the territory, from 2007 to the present, Gaza has been under a full Israeli-led & Egypt supported land, sea & air blockade since 2007. The UN, international human rights organizations & many legal scholars regard the Gaza Strip to be under military occupation by Israel.

→ Gaza is ruled by Hamas, a Palestinian militant organization founded in 1987.



Gaza, Egyptian Occupation, 1948-1967

→ 200,000 Palestinian refugees fled to Gaza (which was already home to 70,000 Palestinians) in the 1948 War.

→ Most of the refugees found themselves in very poor condition, suffering from overcrowding and total impoverishment.

→ Egypt occupied the Gaza Strip in May 1948, and subjected Palestinians in Gaza to martial law until 1962, severely restricting their settlement, employment and movement in Egypt.

→ Israel massacred hundreds of Gazans in 1956 when it occupied the Strip during the Suez Crisis (November 1956 to March 1957).

Water pump in Shati refugee camp, 1956. credit: moshe pridan. source: israeli national photo collection Source, p.170

Gaza, Occupation, Economy, 1967-1987

→ Israel occupied the Gaza Strip in June 1967, leading to the creation of more than 70,000 refugees.

→ Israel implemented a military regime over Gaza, suffocating investment, industry & entrepreneurship: permits were needed to conduct business involving land or property, install a water device, perform electrical work or connect a generator; Israel thus made Gaza's Palestinians dependent on Israel for employment, giving Israel leverage over Palestinians in Gaza since the late 1980s when Israel started to impose closures.

→ Israel creates zones exclusively for Israeli fishing vessels, preventing Gazan fisherman from competing with Israel's; Israel also forbade Gazan Palestinians from selling fish inside Israel. This put a majority of Gazan fisherman out of business.

→ Israel rendered the planting of new citrus trees, replacing old non productive ones, or planting other fruit trees without permission *illegal*; acquiring permits for such actions frequently took 5+ years. Israel also imposed high tariffs on Gaza's citrus exports, reducing Gaza's self-sufficiency, pushing Gazans to find work in Israel.

Gaza Market, Israel, January 8th 1970. (Photo by Pictorial Parade/Archive Photos/Getty Images) (source)

Gaza, Occupation, Economy, 1967-1987

→ Israel shut down Arab financial & monetary institutions, including all banks, and froze their assets. The result: financial, credit, banking systems were never developed to facilitate industrial investment in Gaza. Palestinians could not build companies that would establish a self-sustaining economic base. This had disastrous consequences in the 1990s & beyond.

→ Israel prevented Palestinian farmers from growing many types of fruits & vegetables so as to protect Israeli firms from competition, leading to a *reduction* in the variety of produce grown in the territories and a *shrinking* of Gaza's economic base.

→ Israel prohibited Palestinians in Gaza from making critical improvements to the sewage system in Gaza. Result: By the 1990s, in Gaza City, as much as 50% of all piped water was lost as a result of damage to the pipes.

→ As a result of all of these efforts to suffocate Gaza's economy, less land was under cultivation in 1987 than 1947.

Palestinian men watching cars & taxis queuing at an Israeli checkpoint on the border between Israel & occupied Gaza in 1972. (source)

Gaza, Occupation, Politics, Displacement & Violence (1967-1987)

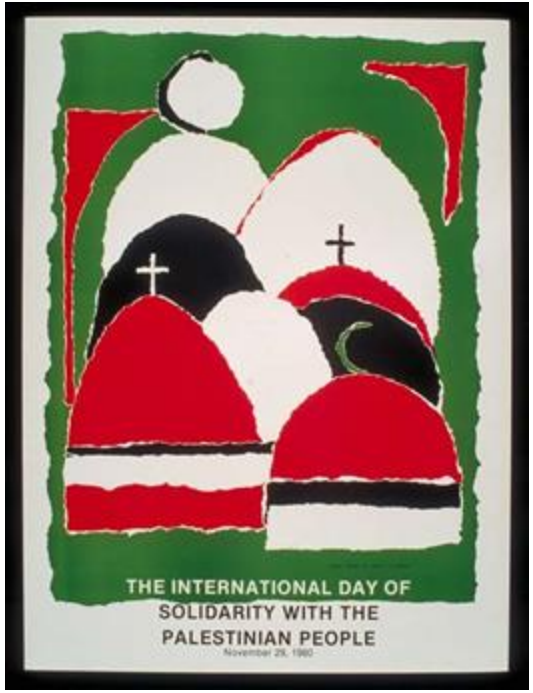
→ Israel arrested & deported Palestinians who resisted its rule & also frequently & indiscriminately detained masses of protestors.

→ Israel displaced many Palestinians in 1982-3 when it began imposing a security zone 50 meters wide along the southern border with Egypt.

→ Israel killed 650 Palestinians from 1967-1987 in the occupied territories (an average of 32 per year).

→ Israel banned any political expressions: artwork made of green red, black & white; Palestinian flags; advocating for Palestinian independence; assembling >10 people for a political purpose.

→ Israel censored textbooks, magazines & newspapers and banned more than ~1,600 books.



Palestine Poster (1980), banned b/c of colors

Gaza, Occupation, Family Reunification (1967-1987)

→ Israel rejected almost every request for family unification b/w Palestinians in Israel & Palestinians in Gaza.

→ Palestinians in the occupied territories could apply for family reunification for a first-degree relative who had become a refugee after the 1967 war, except for males ages 16-60 who were not allowed to return.

→ By the mid-1980s, Israel tightened the process of family reunification for Palestinians in the occupied territories; requests were granted only in exceptional cases, for humanitarian or administrative reasons

Palestinian Arab women & children sitting and crouching inside the Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip territory on 25th April 1969. source

Gaza, First Intifada, Causes, 1980s

→ **Tension on the Rise:** From **1977-1981**, there were 500 Palestinian "disturbances" a year; b/w **1982-1987** there were 3,000 "disturbances" a year.

→ **Underlying Cause:** Palestinian workers in Israel reported constant verbal & physical abuse in the workplace, including being cheated out of wages, forced to work under inhumane conditions, exposed to retaliation following terrorist attacks & feeling humiliated & dehumanized at roadblocks & checkpoints.

→ **Polling Data**: In a 1986 poll, the following % of Palestinians in the occupied territories indicated that they or a member of their immediate family have experienced: 47.5% political arrest; 50.7% beatings, physical abuse or threats; 55.7% harassment or direct insults at Israeli military checkpoints; 22.8% property or land confiscation; 34.1% ban on travel abroad; 74.2% curfew; 17.6% demolition or sealing of homes; 15.7% deportation or town arrest; 37.6% fines by military courts; 6.3% I have not experienced any of the above.

Israel Defense Forces soldiers order Gazans to clear up a roadblock, a few weeks into the first intifada, in December 1987.Credit: AP source

Gaza, First Intifada, 1987-1993

→ **Immediate Trigger:** In 1987, an Israeli truck driver struck & killed 4 Palestinians near a checkpoint at the entrance to Gaza.

→ **What happened?** An uprising that swept across the Gaza Strip, West Bank & set in motion a series of daily strikes, protests, riots, boycotts of Israeli rule, and infamously, and stone-throwing children.

→ **Consequences:** In the first two years of the uprising, 175K Palestinians passed through Israeli jails, 30K Palestinian children needed medical treatment after being beaten by soldiers, 10K had broken bones; a fifth of the injured were under age of 5; 23K subject to “harsh interrogation” (i.e torture); Israel killed about 1,200 Palestinians during the uprising, while Palestinians killed about 160 Israelis.

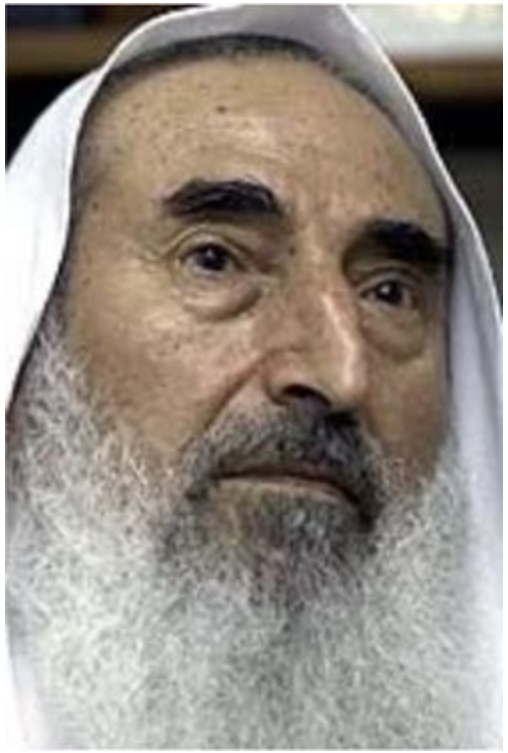
A youth throws stones in the direction of Israeli soldiers at the entrance to Bureij refugee camp in the occupied Gaza strip during the first intifada in 1987 source

Establishment of Hamas (1970s-2000)

→ In 1973, Ahmed Yassin founded an Islamic charity in Gaza focused on education, social services & preaching that was initially encouraged & funded by Israel since they saw it as a counterbalance to the secular, revolutionary PLO.

→ The Islamists feared they would lose support to their rivals (the Palestinian Islamic Jihad & the PLO) if they stayed out of the Intifada, so they embraced violence beginning in 1987.

→ Between February 1989 - March 2000, Hamas carried out at least 27 attacks, including 12 suicide bombings. These attacks caused approximately 185 deaths & left over 1,200 people wounded.



A May 2002 photo of Sheik Ahmed Yassin, spiritual leader of Hamas, killed by Israel in 2004.

Gaza, Oslo Years, 1990s, Closure

→ The key principle of the Oslo Process was that Israel's security trumped Palestinian democratization, development or human rights.

→ Closures were in effect 17 days in 1993, 64 days in 1994, 84 in 1995, 90 in 1996, 57 in 1997, 14 in 1998, and 7 in 1999.

→ Gaza's economy experienced a deep recession in 1995 & 1996 when the incidence of closures was most intense, and again in late 2000. During periods of total lockdowns, unemployment reached 70% in the Gaza Strip

→ Closures blocked patients who required medical treatment in Israel; students were blocked from Gaza who studied in the West Bank; families could not celebrate joyous occasions togher.

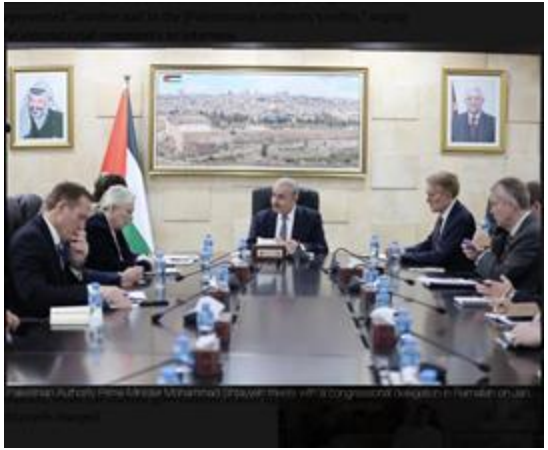
Visualize Palestine Infographic, source

Gaza, Oslo & Beyond, Confiscation of Funds

Background: As part of the Oslo process, Israel & the Palestinian Authority agreed to a customs union in which Israel collects taxes on behalf of the PA on goods imported through Israel whose final destination is the occupied Palestinian territories.

Confiscation of Funds: In 1997, following a wave of violent attacks, Israel began to withhold tax money it collects on goods destined for Gaza and the West Bank. This process has continued intermittently for 23+ years, with Israel withholding funds from the Palestinian Authority in 2000, 2006, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 & 2023. This has left hundreds of thousands of PA employees without salary for months at a time, causing economic hardship. The PA has also withheld funds from Gaza, causing anger against the PA in Gaza.

Israeli justifications: in the 1990s it was because of Palestinian attacks on Israelis, in 2006, Hamas won legislative elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in 2012, b/c PA applied for statehood to the UN; in 2015, b/c the Palestinian attempted to join the international criminal court in the Hague; variously, b/c the PA pays the family members of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, some of whom committed terrorist attacks on Israelis; In 2023, Smotrich doubled deductions over payments to security prisoners, as PA's finances further deteriorate.



Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh meets with a congressional delegation in Ramallah on January 19, 2023. source

Gaza, The Second Intifada, Background & Causes

→ The failure of the Camp David peace negotiations signaled a lack of progress towards a political solution, driving more Palestinians to feel a sense of hopelessness and despair.

→ Israel and the Palestinians pursued policies during that exacerbated the atmosphere of distrust: Israel continued to expand occupation infrastructure, settlements, land confiscations, home demolitions, administrative detentions, etc., while Palestinians resisted in the form of non-violent protests and violent attacks on Israeli civilians in cafes and buses throughout the 1990s.

→ Many Israelis & Palestinians believed their use of violence and force against the other side was justified and would improve their negotiating position.

→ Israeli occupation policies of closures, lockdowns, permits, checkpoints etc. shattered the Palestinian economy during the 1990s and led to poverty and mass unemployment, creating a fertile ground for extremism.

Palestinian demonstrators run for cover from heavy shooting during clashes with Israeli forces at the Netzarim Junction in the southern Gaza Strip, October 6, 2000. source

Gaza, The Second Intifada, Trigger & Escalation

→ Trigger: Ariel Sharon took a provocative visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound. Palestinians protested in response. This sparked protests & riots that Israeli police put down with rubber bullets & tear gas.

→ Escalation: Top Israeli security echelons decided to “fan the flames” during the uprising’s first weeks. Amos Malka, the military general in charge of intelligence at the time, stated that during the Intifada’s first month, when the uprising was still mostly characterized by nonviolent popular protests, the military fired 1.3 million bullets in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

→ Israel launched its suppression of the uprising by shooting children in the head on the Temple Mount: About 10 days after the start of the intifada, 14 Palestinian children had already been killed. These cases were barely reported in the Israeli media, which dealt almost exclusively w/ Jewish victims, of which there were as yet only a few. Israel’s excessive use of deadly force against demonstrators enraged Palestinians, who saw the images of Muhammad al-Durrah in Gaza on September 30, shot as he huddled behind his father.

Faris Odeh was shot and killed in November 2000 by the Israeli military. He become a icon of resistance source

Gaza, the Second Intifada, Outcome

→ During the first three years of the 2nd intifada Israel destroyed more than 10% percent of Gaza's agricultural land and uprooted more than 226,000 trees.

→ For Israel, the second intifada morphed into the nightmare of exploding buses & suicide bombers. For Palestinians, the second intifada meant years of brutal suppression, extensive bloodshed, sieges, closures, lockdowns, checkpoints, mass arrests, mass home demolitions and also combat and sacrifices that achieved nothing.

→ 3,000 Palestinians & 1,000 Israelis were killed between September 2000 & February 2005. There were 138 suicide attacks & 1,038 Israelis killed from September 28, 2000 through February 8, 2005, according to Israel; & 3,189 Palestinians killed, according to B'Tselem.

→ 4,100 Palestinian homes were demolished and some 6,000 Palestinians arrested.

Israeli soldiers shoot at stone-throwing Palestinian teenagers in Khan Yunes in the Gaza Strip during clashes 24 October 2000. Source

Gaza, Hamas's Rise to Power

→ Hamas grew in popularity in the 1990s and 2000s. It received tens of millions of dollars a year in funding, mostly from donors abroad, to spend on schools, social welfare as well as cultural, religious, recreational and charity programs.

→ Yasser Arafat concentrated power in his own hands, sharing little power with the Palestinian Legislative Council, creating discontent and an opening for rivals like Hamas.

→ According to an internal 1997 PA investigation, ~$300 million, or 1/3rd of it's annual budget, could have been saved, and was therefore "wasted".

→ Arafat was accused of -- and his associates were convinced of -- embezzling tens of millions of dollars from the Palestinian treasury for their own personal benefit.

Palestinian women wait to receive aid money for their needy relatives at the Islamic Al-Salah Charitable Society on February 1, 2006 in Gaza City, Gaza Strip (source)

Gaza, Hamas's Rise to Power

→ The Palestinian Authority established legislative and executive branches as a result of Oslo.

→ By 2006, the Oslo process itself was dead, the institutions it created survived. For the first time, Hamas decided to run for the PA legislative elections and won, capturing 76 out of the 132 seats.

→ Recall that Hamas had gained in popularity and appreciation from the public for its operation of schools, orphanages, mosques, clinics, and soup kitchens.

→ In 2006, Hamas ran a modern and well-organized campaign in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections, and **won**.

→ Fatah refused to give up power in Gaza despite its defeat at the polls. So Hamas took Gaza by force in June 2007 & has ruled the territory since.

Hamas security officials using batons to detain Fatah supporters during clashes in Gaza City, September 2007 source

Hamas: From Rejection to Compromise, 2006-present

→ Since its establishment in 1988, Hamas has formally rejected the internationally endorsed frameworks for resolving the conflict. In 1988, Hamas published its charter, calling for the destruction of Israel and the establishment of an Islamic society in historic Palestine.

But… statements from many of its leaders suggest they are open to compromise:

→ “We Hamas are for peace and want to put an end to bloodshed…peaceful means will do if the world is willing to engage in a constructive and fair process in which we and the Israelis are treated as equals” (Ismail Haniyeh, The Guardian 31 March 2006)

→ “Hamas changed a lot & great efforts have been made to conform with the realistic positions of Palestinians and Arabs. When Hamas says with other Palestinians forces that we demand for a Palestinian country as the border was back in 1967. Isn't this a development change?” (Khaled Meshaal, CNN interview, 2007)

→ “We agree to a [Palestinian] state on pre-67 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital with genuine sovereignty without settlements but without recognizing Israel…. we have offered a truce if Israel withdraws to the 1967 borders, a truce of 10 years as a proof of recognition.” (Khaled Meshaal, April, 2008)

Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas political chief, 2017-present.

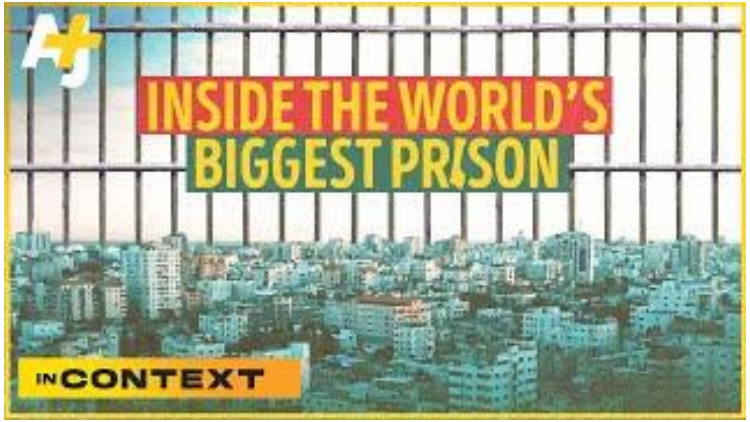
Gaza, Hamas, Current Political Context

→ The chief of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Sinwar, was confirmed for a second term as de facto head of government in a **closed** election by Hamas leadership in March 2021; he had first been chosen in 2017. Ismail Haniyeh was similarly confirmed as the overall leader of Hamas for a second four-year term in August. These elections were neither free nor fair.

→ Since 2007, the Gaza Strip has functioned as a de facto one-party state under Hamas rule, although smaller parties—including Islamic Jihad, the PFLP, the DFLP and a faction of Fatah that opposes President Abbas—are tolerated to varying degrees.

→ After the 2021 Israeli war on Gaza, Hamas enjoyed a surge in popularity among Palestinians, w/ 75% saying Hamas won the fighting; however, this resembles previous swings toward Hamas during times of confrontation, all of which dissipated within 3-6 months as Hamas failed to deliver on promises of change.

→ 2022 Polling Data: Despite continued support for resistance against Israel, ~half of Gazans expressed at least somewhat negative views of Hamas due to corruption and desire for elections.



How Israel Made Gaza The World's Biggest Prison (source)

Gaza, Israel <> Hamas relationship (“it’s complicated”)

→ Israel helped established Hamas in the 1980s.

→ Then Israel tried to destroy Hamas: In 2004 Israel killed Hamas co-founder and spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and co-founder & Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, in Gaza within a month of each other.

→ Israel seeks to drive a wedge between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. From Israel’s point of view, the Palestinians are a much less formidable challenge if they are divided than united.

→ High-ranking Israeli officials have also stated openly that “The Palestinian Authority is a liability, Hamas is an asset”. This is b/c the most Western countries regard Hamas as a terrorist organization, thus providing Israel diplomatic cover for its continued siege on Gaza

A parade for the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas’s militant arm, is held in Gaza source

Gaza, Disengagement

→ Israel unilaterally withdrew its ~6,000 settlers from Gaza in 2005 in the “Disengagement Plan”

→ Israel’s disengagement from Gaza allowed it to present itself to uncritical audiences as making “painful sacrifices” by returning Gaza to its Palestinian population. Many called it a PR stunt.

→ Israel still controls Gaza's airspace and coastal waters, 6/7th of Gaza's land borders, & Gaza remained dependent on Israel for its water, electricity & telecommunications.

→ The Israeli military regularly enter the Gaza strip either with soldiers. Drones, planes, sonic bombs, missiles, or snipers, and controls a no-go zone.

The Gaza Strip (May 2005), shortly before disengagement. Israeli settlements are in blue source

Gaza **Siege**, at a glance

→ Israel implemented a blockade on Gaza in 2007 after Hamas took power. The blockade continues to this day: Gaza functions as an **open air prison**: almost no one enters or exits the strip.

→ The blockade has severely restricted the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza

→ This has led to widespread devastation: 40% of Gaza's population live in poverty, most of them in extreme poverty, more than 80% of households dependent on food aid.

→ The blockade has also made it difficult for Gazans to access education, medical care or even potable water: 90% of the population of Gaza **lack** access to safe drinking **water**.

Al Jazeera report on Gaza, 15 years of Israeli blockade (3min clip)

Gaza Siege, International Law

The consensus among human rights & humanitarian organizations has been that the Israeli blockade of Gaza constituted a form of collective punishment in violation of international law. For example, the UN stated:

→ “The blockade was inflicting disproportionate damage upon the civilian population in the Gaza Strip”

→ “One of the principal motives behind the imposition of the blockade was a desire to punish the people of the Gaza Strip for having elected Hamas.”

Palestinians in front of the gate of Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza during a protest against the blockade calling for reopening of the crossing, in the southern Gaza Strip, July 3, 2017. source

Gaza, Hamas's Role in the Economy

The Hamas government implemented policies that have led to "crowding out" the private sector, making it harder for them to compete.

→ The Ministry of Agriculture in Gaza invested in large-scale agricultural projects, growing seasonal vegetables and fruits, such as melons, mangos, courgette and tomatoes.

→ the Ministry also constructed large fish farms that cover > 60% of market demands in the Strip.

→ Hamas was also able to gain a foothold in the financial and banking sector in Gaza through procedural facilitations provided by its own government in Gaza and support from affiliated businessmen. It established monetary and financial services firms such as the National Islamic Bank, the Production Bank, al-Multazem Insurance Company and many other currency exchange companies and offices.

Palestinians harvest strawberries in a field in Beit Lahia, northern Gaza Strip, on December 30, 2015. (Emad Nassar/Flash90) source

Gaza, Mavi Marmara / Flotilla

→ In May 2010, a Turkish humanitarian & human rights organization sent a ship carrying aid & construction materials, with the intention of breaking the Israeli- Egyptian blockade of the Gaza Strip.

→ On 31 May 2010, Israeli forces boarded the ships from speedboats and helicopters, and after encountering resistance, Israel killed 10 activists, including Cengiz Akyüz, Ali Haydar Bengi, İbrahim Bilgen, Furkan Doğan, Cevdet Kılıçlar, Cengiz Songür, Çetin Topçuoğlu, Fahri Yaldız, and Necdet Yıldırım

→ According to the UNHRC report, six of the people on the flotilla showed signs of "summary execution", including two shot after they were severely injured.

Images of Turkish volunteers killed at Mavi Marmara ship attack (source)

Gaza, Mavi Marmara / Flotilla, Responses

→ Israel's response: One of the commandos responsible for killing multiple passengers was reportedly in line for a medal of valor, while Deputy Prime Minister Eli Yishai exhorted Defense Minister Ehud Barak to award medals to all the commandos: "The warrior's [sic] courage is exemplary, and they deserve a citation.

→ US Response: US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asked Israel to apologize to Turkey for killing 9 Turkish citizens, however, Netanyahu refused.

→ International Response: The UN Security Council condemned Israel's actions, called for a investigation; Israel–Turkey relations reached a low point after the incident. Turkey recalled its ambassador, cancelled joint military exercises, and called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council.

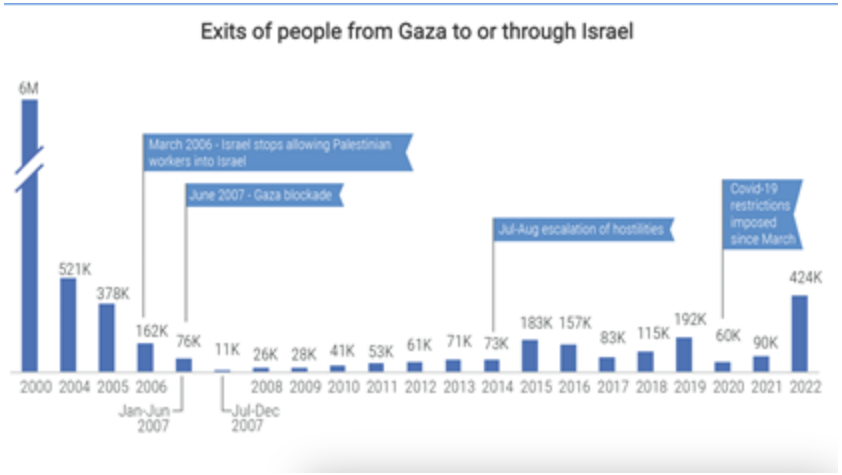
Mavi Marmara, 2010 source

Gaza, restrictions on movement

→ The vast majority of Gaza's 2 million people cannot leave Gaza. Israel also severed Gaza from the West Bank from 2007 onwards.

→ Aside from a brief period during Muhammad Morsi's rule in Egypt (2012-3), the Mubarak and Sisi regimes have generally been complicit in keeping their border with Gaza closed as well, although they have granted some Gazans exit permits, especially recently (since 2022).

→ Israeli forces have largely restricted access to areas within 300 metres of the Gaza side of the perimeter fence with Israel; areas several hundred metres beyond are deemed not safe, which prevents much needed agricultural activities.



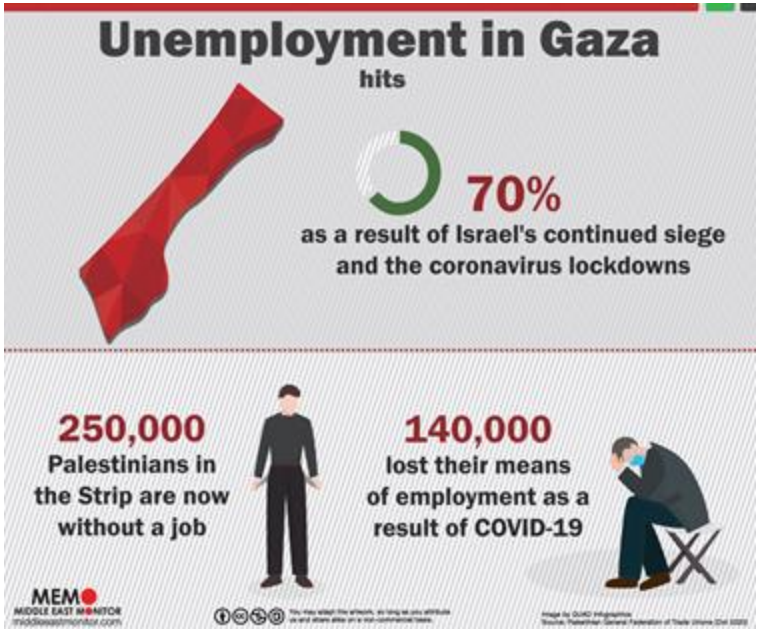
Gaza, Employment

→ In the past ~year, Israel started to issue ~10,000 work permits in January 2022 and then 18,000 in November 2022, the vast majority going to day laborers.

→ In Q3 2022, unemployment in Gaza stood at 46.6%; youth graduate unemployment is 75%.

→ In Q3 2022, 31.5% of those employed work in the public sector, where they earn ~95 ₪(or $27 USD) per day. Many receive only partial salaries; Private sector employees earn ~33₪ (or $9 USD) per day. Avg. monthly earnings in Gaza stood at 705 ₪(or $200 USD)

→ "The ongoing restrictions imposed by Israel on movement of people and goods to and from the Strip are a key factor in Gaza's dire economic situation" (Gisha, 2023)



Data as of November 2020. source

Gaza, Electricity Crisis

→ Since 2006, Israel has prevented restoration of the Gaza's only power plant, impeded infrastructure repairs and upgrades, and forced Gaza authorities to purchase only Israeli fuel. Thus, the plant operates at a fraction of its capacity b/c of an inability to import enough fuel & parts owing to the Israeli blockade.

→ Gaza's residents frequently experience black outs: In 2020, there were rolling blackouts for 12-15 hrs/day; In 2021, rolling power cuts ~11 hrs/day; in 2022, Gazans went ~4-14 hr/day w/out electricity. Overall, the plant meets ~50% of Gaza's needs.

→ The electricity crisis also worsens the water crisis. Gaza's wells and Gaza's desalination plant need electricity to pump water to Gaza's residents. During times of severe power shortages, water is only able to be supplied for two hours a day.

Gaza's only power plant in the Al-Nusairat area source

Gaza, Electricity Crisis

→ Impact: Power cuts harm medical equipment & hospitals are forced to rely on generators and cut back on services, including deferring non-urgent surgeries and discharging patients early; water pumps cannot function, detrimentally impacting public institutions and residential water supply, which has been dramatically reduced;

→ Power cuts have forced many in Gaza to resort to using firewood to cook, which increases the risk of respiratory diseases, pneumonia, tuberculosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

→ Power cuts place night workers like construction workers at added risk.

→ With only 6 hours of power per day (c. July 2023), Gazans cannot operate fans to keep cool in during the heatwave. Instead, plastic trays and cardboard pieces and lying on cement floors are used to to keep cool, causing significant hardships.

Power crisis leaves Gaza's main hospital on the brink (source)

Raw Sewage

→ Sewage treatment plants cannot operate normally due to the blockade and electricity shortages, resulting in the flow of only partially treated sewage into the sea. 108,000 cubic meters of untreated sewage flows into the Mediterranean Sea every day as a result (circa 2023)

→ During the winter, septic tanks overflow and sewage mixes with rain, flooding streets and homes. And in the summer, the rancid smell attracts flies and keeps kids from playing outside and mothers from opening their windows. Infection is common due to the pollution. 26% of diseases in Gaza are related to dirty water.

→ In 2017, 73% of Gaza's coastline was dangerously polluted with sewage.

Gazas at the Sea despite record evels of water contamination, 2017 source

Gaza, Coastal Waters & Fishing Sector

→ Israeli forces deny access to ~50% of the fishing waters allocated for this purpose under the Oslo Accords, leading to a ~50% reduction in the capacity of Gaza's fishing sector

→ Restrictions on the import of motors and other parts is leading to a deterioration of the fishing fleet.

→ Fishermen are frequently shot at by the Israeli coast guard, detained and have their boats confiscated by Israel for getting too close to the boundaries imposed. In 2022 alone, there were > 300 shooting incidents, 14 fishermen injured & 47 fisherman detained.

A fish auction at the Gaza port source

Gaza, Water, Sanitation & Hygiene

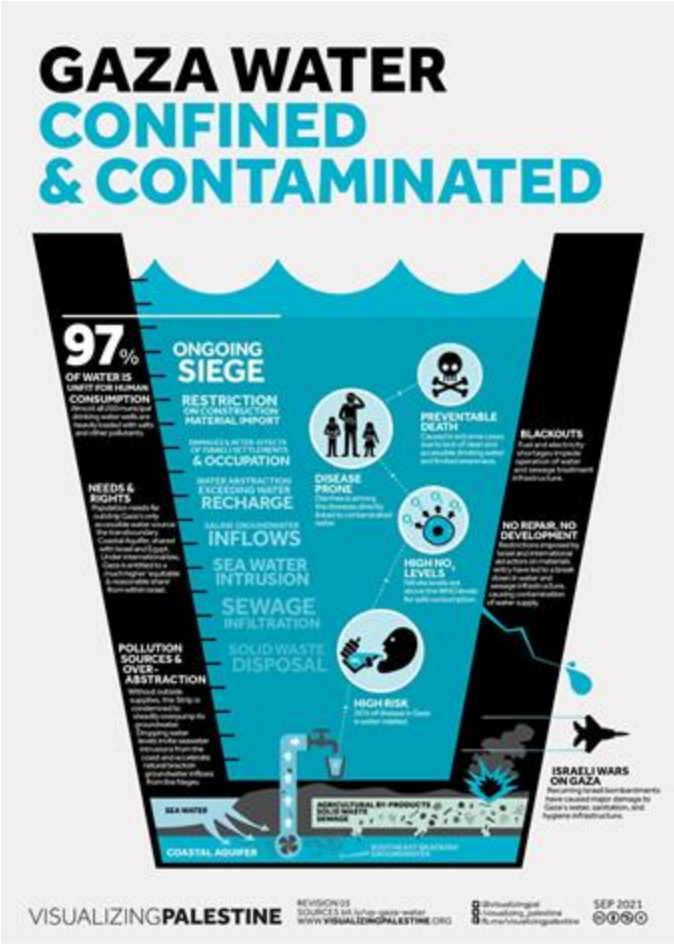
→ 90% of Gazans do not have access to clean water.

→ 78% of piped water in Gaza is unfit for human consumption.

→ “The Gaza ground water aquifer is rapidly deteriorating in both quantity and quality with 97% of the available water undrinkable for the rapidly growing population in the Gaza strip.

→ Water pollution is among the factors causing a dramatic increase in kidney problems in the Gaza Strip: there is a 13-14% increase every year in the number of patients admitted with kidney problems to Gaza City’s Shifa Hospital.

→ Less than 16% of items needed to construct vital water infrastructure are reaching Gaza. Israel’s blockade of Gaza severely limits materials from entering, making it incredibly difficult to develop water and sanitation infrastructure to meet the needs of a growing population.



Gaza, Gender-Based-Violence

→ 70% of married (or previously married) women in Gaza between 15 - 64 experienced violence by their husband in the 12 months preceding the survey.

~15% of married women in Gaza experienced incidents of sexual abuse by husbands over the previous year. More than half of these experienced it repeatedly (3+ times)

→ 50% of Palestinian women and 63% of Palestinian men agreed that a woman should tolerate violence to keep the family together.

→ A 2019 study found that 2/3rds of Palestinian women victims of intimate partner violence keep silent toward violence and dealt with it as a private and family issue; hence, they hesitated to communicate with others or seek any help to protect themselves.

Palestinian women participate in the protest against violence against women organized by the Center for Women's Programs in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, on September 26, 2019. Source

Gaza, Shelter

Israel's assaults on Gaza leave thousands of people homeless on an ongoing basis:

→ A year after the May 2021 War, 7,250 people were still displaced as a result.

→ In August 2022, ~1,500 housing units were damaged or destroyed, displacing ~600 Palestinians as a result of an Israeli attack on Gaza beginning 5 August 2022.

→ Over 120,000 Palestinians in Gaza are living in 21,500 homes that have no windows, safe roofs or doors, leaving families to face winter conditions in unprotected shelters.

→ In December 2022, Israel opened dam gates & levees along the perimeter fence east of Gaza, causing flooding in many homes and farms, destroying dozens of homes, leaving 100 families in need.

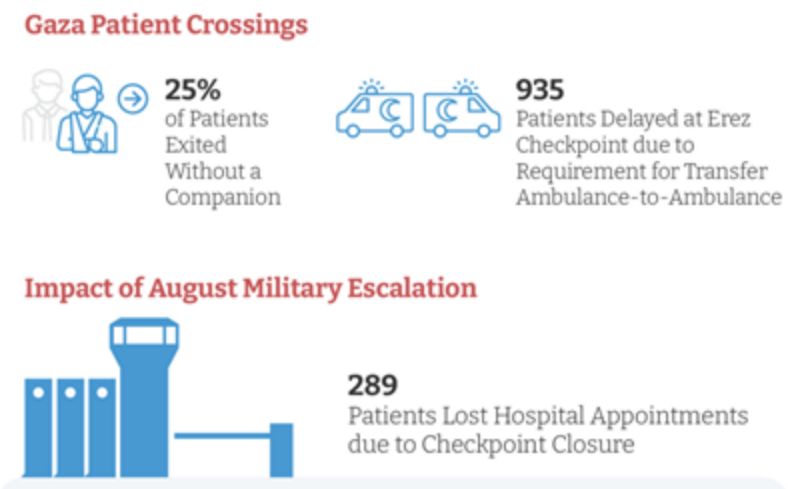
Destroyed home in Gaza, May 2021 source

Gaza Public Health

→ In July 2023, Anera, a humanitarian organization, reported that hospitals & their patients are surviving on a carefully rationed emergency fuel supply that's in serious danger of running out, as well as overworked generators that break down often.

→ At Gaza's largest hospital, Al Shifa, power consumption is triaged and becomes wholly reliant upon diesel generators, endangering care for patients who rely on vital machinery like dialysis units and oxygen respirators. Meanwhile, surgeries often need to be rescheduled and sterilization protocols loosened.

→ Some families burn wood for heating, which is a fire hazard and can lead to children inhaling fumes



Israel regularly prevents Gazans from getting the medical care they need outside the strip [source]

Gaza Health Crisis

→ Israel's siege makes it impossible for Gaza's healthcare system to function properly, forcing residents to seek medical treatment outside the Strip.

→ Israel denied more than 20,000 requests by Gazan patients and persons escorting them to access medical care in hospitals outside Gaza in 2022. Some applicants received no answer at all by the scheduled appointment.

→ Israeli authorities hinder patients' access to obtaining medical care outside Gaza by means of a tortuous, arbitrary bureaucracy that often seals their fate.

→ In 2022, B'Tselem documented 4 cases of patients who died after they were repeatedly denied requests to access medical treatment in the West Bank: Fatimah al-Masri, Muhammad a-Lidawi, Akram a-Sultan and Mahmoud al-Kurd. (these represent a mere fraction of the total # of likely preventable deaths)

Fatimah al-Masri died in '2022 after Israel refused to allow her to exit Gaza for medical treatment source

Gaza, Mental Health

→ From 2018 → 2022, The mental health crisis among children in Gaza worsened significantly: the # of children reporting feeling fearful increased (50% → 84%), nervous (55% → 80%), sad or depressed (62% → 77%) & grieving (55% → 78%).

→ More than half of Gaza's children have contemplated suicide & three out of five are self-harming (highest rate in the world).

→ 71% of the adult population in Gaza screen positive for depression. Anecdote: "My personal life was affected… and I was divorced... My husband had been a car merchant and lost his business due to the siege. He was arrested because of debts and many shopkeepers are still in prison. He was not able to feed his children and locked himself in his room and was just sleeping and on his mobile all the time…"

→ Mental Health Counselors themselves have difficulty helping patients as it triggers their own traumatic memories

Children living in Gaza have had to survive several wars source

Gaza, Food Security

→ 1.3 million out of 2.1 million Palestinians in Gaza (62%) require food assistance.

→ In 2022, many families in Gaza have been forced to reduce non-food expenses just to be able to eat: ~54% of Gazas had to borrow money for food; 52% had to reduce expenses on health; 46% had to reduce or cease payment on utilities.

→ Poorly diversified diets are causing overlapping nutritional problems. According to national surveys, nearly 50 percent of those assessed had very low levels of essential minerals and vitamins.

→ Situation worsening because of Ukraine.

% of households by affirmative response to each food insecurity experience measured through the FIES in 30 days prior to data collection:

Worried about not having enough food to eat	75.5%
Unable to eat healthy and nutritious food	68.5%
Ate only a few kinds of food	67.4%
Had to skip a meal	39.7%
Ate less than they thought they should	38.4%
Ran out of food	15.5%
Were hungry but did not eat	8.4%
Went for a whole day without eating	2.5%

United Nations, OCHA, June 2022 source

Gaza, Education

→ UNRWA is the main provider of education in the Gaza Strip. It serves ~300K students in the 278 UNRWA schools (80 operate on a single shift basis,198 on a double shift), average class sizes in the 2021/2022 school year was 41 students.

→ Access to education is severely impacted as a result of Israel's attacks on Gaza & its blockade, which causes blackouts, overcrowding, impoverishment & also prevents reconstruction. 31% of households in Gaza have difficulties meeting essential education needs such as tuition fees & books, due to lack of financial resources.

→ In 2008, 2009, 2012 & 2014 Israel attacked Palestinian educational institutions: it completely destroyed 18 schools and caused damage to another 280 (out or 560 total) in 2009; it committed another 31 incidents against schools and other educational facilities between 2009-2011; in 2014, it attacked 7+ Palestinian institutions of higher education.

Palestinian children fly kites at a school belonging to UNRWA in Gaza City on 12 March 2018 as a protest against US aid cuts (AFP) source

Israel-Gaza Wars, 2008-2023

1. In 2008, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2019, 2021 & 2023, Israel fought wars in Gaza against Hamas / Islamic Jihad
2. Altogether, Israel killed ~3,476 & wounded ~15,000 Palestinians, while Hamas & other Palestinian groups in Gaza killed 185 Israelis
3. Israel's actions during these military conflicts have been described as apparent war crimes, such as collective punishment and disproportionate use of force.
4. Hamas & Islamic Jihad's actions have been described as apparent war crimes, owing to the indiscriminate attacks on Israeli civilian population centers & via locating operational centres in civilian areas.

source

Operation Cast Lead (2008–9)

→ Israel killed ~1,400 people, including 550 children & destroyed 18,000 homes, including many incidents that show strong evidence of war crimes committed.

→ The Goldstone report investigated 11 incidents in which the Israeli military launched direct attacks against civilians with lethal outcomes. In 10 of the 11 cases, was justifiable military objective was identified. The report concluded that the Israeli objective in Cast Lead was to "punish, humiliate and terrorize a civilian population."

→ Israel targeted critical infrastructure: they destroyed the only operative flour mill and nearly all of the cement factories in order to reduce the Gazan people to abject poverty and thus dependency of Israel loosening its stranglehold

→ Israel targeted holy sites: they destroyed 30+ mosques, in some cases with no evidence that these were military targets and when even presented by Israel,

→ Palestinian armed groups Hamas intensified their rocket attacks against mostly civilian targets in southern Israel, killing 4 Israeli civilians; they also launched rockets from urban areas, which is a war crime as well (note: Israel's Minister of Defense HQ is located in the heart of Tel Aviv)

Israel uses white phosphorus munitions in densely populated urban areas in Gaza during this operation. source

Operation Pillar of Defense (2012)

→ The first shot fired was Israel's assassination of Hamas's military chief Ahmed Jabari, who was about a sign a permanent ceasefire with Israel. But Israel preferred war to strengthen it's "deterrence capacity."

→ During the eight-day offensive, 171 Palestinians were killed. Of the victims, 60% or 102 of them were civilians; 35 of the civilian victims, or 34%, were children, while 14 of the civilian victims, of 14%, were women. The total number of people wounded was 648. At least one Israeli airstrike that killed 10 people was described as a war crime by HRW.

→ Hamas fired 1,500 rockets fired at Israel, killing four Israeli civilians, wounded at least 38, in what HRW also described as war crimes.

Eight-Day Conflict With Israel Wreaks Destruction in Gaza (VOA)

Operation Protective Edge (2014)

→ Israel's longest & most destructive attack on Gaza: Israel killed >1,500 Gazan civilians (& 2,200 total Gazans), including 550 children, and it injured injured 10,000, ; it also destroyed 18,000 homes & left behind 2.5 million tons of rubble.

→ Israel launched 6,000 airstrikes on Gaza, mostly on residential buildings. The UN investigated 15 strikes in which 216 people were killed, including 115 children. Six of the fifteen cases found little or no information available to explain why residential buildings, thus concluding that Israel likely committed countless war crimes.

→ Hamas killed 6 Israel civilians in rocket and mortar attacks fired indiscriminately into Israel, also war crimes.

A Palestinian girl walks through the rubble of her home in Gaza City during the 2014 (source)

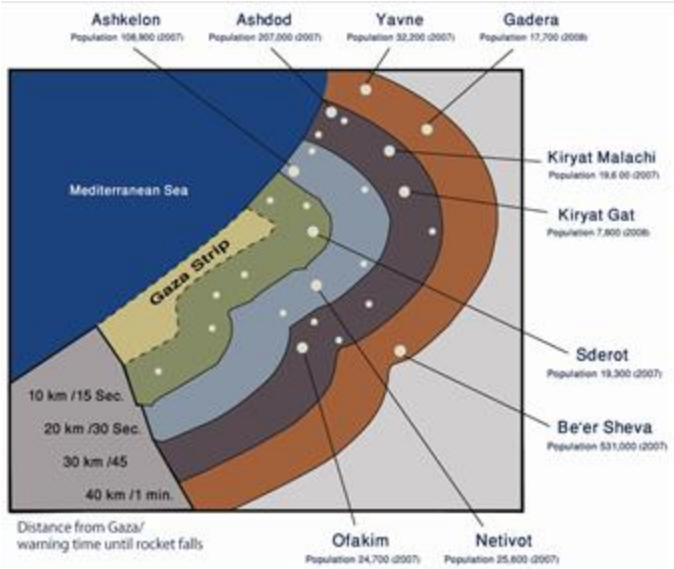
Israeli Cities & Towns near Gaza

→ Israeli cities and towns located near the Gaza Strip face frequent rocket attacks launched by militant groups from within Gaza.

→ Attacks began in 2001. Since then, at least 28 people in Israel have been killed.

→ Sirens & Shelters: the residents of these areas live under the constant fear of sirens warning of incoming rockets, requiring them to seek shelter within seconds to protect themselves, causing

→ 40% of Israeli children in Gaza border town of Sderot suffer from anxiety, PTSD (nationwide hovers is somewhere between 7 and 10 percent,)



Israeli towns

Gaza March of Return, 2018-2019

→ In March 2018, tens of thousands of Gazans descended along the border demanding the right of return. (note: 1/3d of Gaza's Palestinian residents are refugees and their descendents from the 1948 War).

→ Israel killed 223 Palestinians. In total, they hit 8,079 Palestinians with live fire, shrapnel, or tear-gas canisters. This included 6,106 Palestinians who were shot with snipers leading to "life-changing wounds" in many.

→ Not a single Israeli experienced any major physical harm.

Gaza, 2021 War

→ The War broke out after a series of escalations in which (1) Israel pushed forward plans to uproot 58 Palestinians from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem; (2) Palestinians headed to pray at the al-Aqsa Mosque for the holiest night of Ramadan were forced off buses & made to finish the journey on foot; (3) Israel attacked Palestinians at the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem; (4) Israeli police stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque, shooting rounds of stun grenades and tear gas at worshippers (5) Hamas then fired rockets into Israel; (5) Israel began its aerial assault on Gaza

→ At its height, there were 113,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) of whom about 8,250 remain displaced (as of 2023); The assault killed at least 261 people, including 67 children, and wounded more than 2,200; Palestinians killed 14 Israelis

→ A report by the war monitoring group Airwars found that in 70% of the airstrikes that killed civilians in Gaza, no corresponding ‘militants’ or ‘military targets’ were found to have been killed.

A child uses his mobile device in the ruins of a building in Beit Lahia, Gaza Strip on May 26th 2021. source

Gaza, Media Access

→ Israel regularly bars journalists from entering Gaza.

→ Israel targets media outlets as a military strategy: During Israel's 2021 War on Gaza, Israel destroyed ~20 Palestinian, regional & international media outlets;

→ In Sep 2023, Israeli forces "deliberately targeted" three journalists covering protests, including photographer Fadi Al-Danaf, photographer Bilal Al-Sabaa, and Mustafa Hassouna."

→ All of this makes it hard to verify statements made to the Israeli military, which has a history of intentionally spreading misinformation as a military tactic, as well as to deflect responsibility for war crimes committed.

The New York Times

SUBSCRIBE FOR $0.25/WEEK

A Press Corps Deceived, and the Gaza Invasion That Wasn't

A spokesman led the international media to believe that Israeli forces had entered Gaza. They hadn't. But the army wanted Hamas to think they had.

Give this article

Resources for Further Research (books)

Sara Roy,The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development (1995, Institute for Palestine Studies)

Noam Chomsky, Ilan Pappe, Frank Barat, Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War Against the Palestinians

Gideon Levy, The Punishment of Gaza

Raja Shehadeh, When the Bulbul Stopped Singing: Life in Palestine During an Israeli Siege

Hill, Marc Lamont; Plitnick, Mitchell, Except for Palestine: The Limits of Progressive Politics

Norman Finkelstein, Gaza: An Inquest into Martyrdom

Resources for Further Research (documentaries)

Gaza Fights for Freedom

Gaza

Born in Gaza

Gaza Surf Club

Gaza: 60-Minute Warning

Gaza in Context

Resources for Further Research (media)

+972 Magazine is an independent, online, nonprofit magazine run by a group of Palestinian and Israeli journalists. Founded in 2010, our mission is to provide in-depth reporting, analysis, and opinions from the ground in Israel-Palestine.

Eye on Palestine: Aggregates social media posts that contain video documentary evidence of home demolitions, settler violence, Israeli military raids etc. and other human rights violations against the Palestinians

Electronic Intifada The Electronic Intifada is an independent online news publication and educational resource focusing on Palestine, its people, politics, culture and place in the world.

MondoWeiss: Mondoweiss is an independent website devoted to informing readers about developments in Israel/Palestine and related US foreign policy.

Al Jazeera: Al Jazeera provides some of the most in-depth reporting on Gaza. See their dedicated page here

Al Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network was launched in April 2010 as the first and only independent, transnational Palestinian think tank.

Resources for Further Research (civil society)

Gisha: protect the freedom of movement of Palestinians, especially Gaza residents. Gisha promotes rights guaranteed by international and Israeli law.

Al-Haq: Documents violations of the individual and collective rights of Palestinians in the OPT, & seeks to end such breaches through advocacy

B'tselem: Strives for a future in which human rights, liberty & equality are guaranteed to all people, Palestinian & Jewish alike, living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

Adalah: Promotes human rights in Israel & in particular the rights of the Palestinian minority, citizens of Israel

Foundation for Middle East Peace: Works to ensure a just, secure, and peaceful future for Palestinians and Israelis.

Addameer: Offers free legal aid to political prisoners, advocates their rights at the national and international level, and works to end torture and other violations of prisoners' rights through monitoring, legal procedures and solidarity campaigns.

Teach-In

GAZA:
Centering Palestinian Experiences

Center for Security, Race and Rights

csrr.rutgers.edu

@RUCSRR | @RutgersCSRR