



TEARS OF GAZA



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Tears of Gaza

Tears of Gaza is less a conventional documentary than a record—presented with minimal gloss – of the 2008 to 2009 bombing of Gaza by the Israeli military. Photographed by several Palestinian cameramen both during and after the offensive, this powerful film by director Vibeke Løkkeberg focuses on the impact of the attacks on the civilian population.

About the Gaza Strip and Surrounding Areas

The areas referred to as Palestine, Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are located in the Middle East, with the Mediterranean Sea to the west, Lebanon and Syria to the north, Jordan in the east, and Egypt in the southwest. Throughout history, this region has been inhabited by both Jews and Arabs. It is of great religious importance to both, and both groups consider it to be their ancestral homeland. The result of this disagreement has been years of conflict between, and amongst, the two groups.

Gaza, or the Gaza Strip, is a very small territory that borders the Mediterranean Sea, Israel, and Egypt. It occupies about 140 square miles. The Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, containing about 2 million people. It is governed by Hamas, a militant Islamist group. The Gaza Strip was formerly occupied by the Israeli military. The military withdrew in 2005, however Israel maintains control over Gaza's coast and airspace. Egypt controls one border crossing with Gaza, and Israel controls the others. Both countries have heavily restricted the crossing of people and goods through these border crossings. As a result, Gaza has created a network of tunnels underneath the Egypt-Gaza border that are used to smuggle people and goods into Gaza.

The West Bank is larger than the Gaza Strip. It borders Jordan to the east, and Israel on all other sides. It has a population of almost 3 million people. The majority of the population of the West Bank are Palestinian Arabs. However, Israel has established a number of Israeli settlements there too. International organizations, including the United Nations, have called these settlements illegal. The West Bank is governed by the Palestinian Authority, under Israeli occupation.

Israel, or the State of Israel, has a population of about 8.7 million people.¹ It declared itself an independent nation in 1948. Israel is governed by a parliamentary democracy.

History

The Palestinian and Israeli people live in an area that has been ruled by numerous groups throughout history. Much of it was under the control of the Ottoman Empire from 1517 to 1917. In 1918, after the Ottoman Empire was defeated in World War I, Britain was given administrative control over Palestine. It was also given the responsibility of creating

¹ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/israel/>

a Jewish national homeland there. The creation of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine was a goal of Zionism, a Jewish movement that grew during the latter part of the 19th century. However, Arabs living there were strongly opposed to this, arguing that this area was their ancestral homeland. At that time, there was a Jewish minority and an Arab majority in Palestine. Following the holocaust and persecution of the Jews that happened in World War II, however, a large number of Jewish people started to come to Palestine.

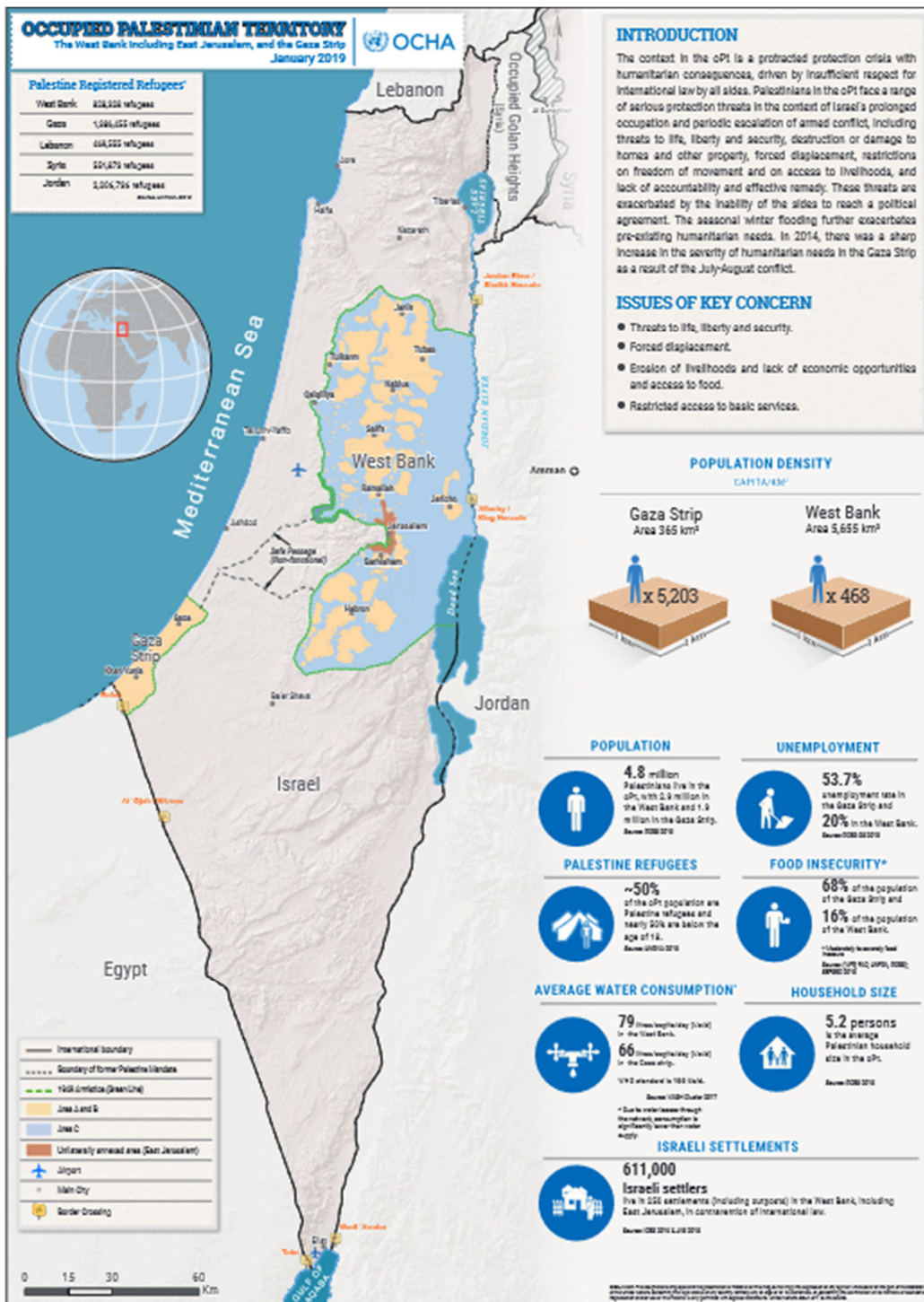
In 1947, the United Nations created a plan that would divide Palestine into two parts; an independent Arab state and an independent Jewish state. The British withdrew from the area shortly after that. Jewish leaders agreed with the plan, and declared Israel an independent state, however Arab leaders did not accept the plan. The disagreement over borders led to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. That war ended in 1949, with the much of the area controlled by Israel, the West Bank controlled by Jordan, and the Gaza Strip controlled by Egypt. Since then, there has been continued conflict in the area, with numerous attempts at peace, and also numerous outbreaks of fighting. A major conflict occurred in 1967; the Six Day War. That war resulted in even more territorial gains for Israel. It gained control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The 2008/2009 Conflict

In 2005, Israel withdrew its army from the Gaza Strip, and there were hopes of peace. However, in 2006, a militant Palestinian nationalist group called Hamas won the Palestinian elections and took control of the Gaza strip, increasing tensions between Israelis and Palestinians again. There was fighting between the two groups, including Hamas rocket attacks on Israel, and retaliations by Israel. In December 2008, Israel launched a military campaign against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The campaign continued for twenty-two days, ending with a cease-fire on both sides.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), Israel used white phosphorus munitions against Gaza during that conflict. White phosphorus is a chemical that can be used in missiles and other military weapons. When it is released, it creates white smoke that can be used as a smoke screen to hide military ground operations. It can also burn buildings. However, white phosphorus can cause serious burns to people. HRW explains, "White phosphorus ignites and burns on contact with oxygen and continues burning at up to 1500 degrees Fahrenheit (816 degrees Celsius) until nothing is left or the oxygen supply is cut. When white phosphorus comes into contact with skin it creates intense and persistent burns, sometimes to the bone. Infection is common and the body's absorption of the chemical can cause serious damage to internal organs, as well as death."² The organization charges that the use of this chemical overpopulated areas in Gaza was a violation of international humanitarian law.

² <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/03/25/rain-fire/israels-unlawful-use-white-phosphorus-gaza>



The Situation Today

Today, Israelis and Palestinians continue to disagree over borders. More than 135 countries recognize Palestine as a sovereign state, however some do not, including Israel and the United States. Conflict continues, with an ongoing cycle of ceasefires, followed by military actions. Most recently, in 2021, tensions between the two escalated after an Israel court ruled that some Palestinian families in East Jerusalem should be evicted and the replaced by Jewish families. Hamas responded with rocket strikes against Israel, and Israel then launched airstrikes against Gaza. A ceasefire was reached on May 21. It is estimated that more than 250 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed before the ceasefire was declared.

As a result of ongoing border restrictions, many people in Gaza struggle to meet their basic needs. The United Nations reports that Gazans face shortages of drinking water, and basic food and medications, and that a large percentage live in poverty.³

Additional Resources

Books

- Phyllis Bennis (2012). *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer*. Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press.
- Noam Chomsky and Ilan Pappé (2010). *Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War against the Palestinians*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Norman Finkelstein (2011). *"This Time We Went Too Far": Truth and Consequences of the Gaza Invasion*. Rev. ed. New York: OR Books.
- James L. Gelvin (2021). *The Israeli-Palestine Conflict: A History*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Khalidi Rashid (2021). *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1907-2017*. New York: Picador, Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company.
- Sara Roy (2006). *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*. London: Pluto Press, 2006.

³ <https://www.un.org/unispal/humanitarian-situation-in-the-gaza-strip-fast-facts-ocha-factsheet/>

Online Sources

- BBC News (June 16, 2021). “Israel-Gaza Violence: The Conflict Explained.” <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44124396>
- Council on Foreign Relations (no date). “Recent Developments.” <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/israeli-palestinian-conflict>
- FP Editors (December 20, 2021). “After a Dramatic Year, What’s Next for Israelis and Palestinians?” *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/12/20/israelis-palestinians-2021-gaza-war-election-new-government-peacemaking/>
- International Crisis Group (May 14, 2021). “The Israel-Palestine Crisis: Causes, Consequences, Portents.” <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/israel-palestine/israel-palestine-crisis-causes-consequences-portents>

Websites

- Al-Haq - <http://www.alhaq.org/>
- Amnesty International (2020). “Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories 2020.” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/report-israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/>
- Applied Research Institute—Jerusalem/Society - <http://www.arj.org/>
- B’Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights Violations in the Occupied Territories – <http://www.btselem.org>
- Institute for Middle East Understanding – <http://www.imeu.org>
- International Committee Against House Demolitions - <http://icahd.org/>
- International Middle East Media Center - <http://www.imemc.org/>
- Middle East Research and Information Project - <http://www.merip.org/>
- Palestine Chronicle - <http://palestinechronicle.com/>

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