

*Gaza has suddenly captured the world's attention. On October 7, 2023, thousands of terrorists from Gaza invaded Israel, massacred over 1,200 Israelis, and abducted some 248 hostages back into Gaza, including women and children. Israel responded by declaring war on the Iran-backed terrorist organization Hamas and launching Operation Iron Swords with three primary goals: return the hostages; destroy Hamas's military capabilities; and ensure that Gaza will never again be a threat to the Jewish state. The future governance of Gaza remains an open question, with the Palestinian Authority, Israel, and Egypt all declining that role.*

## **1. Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005**

Following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the defeat of Egyptian invaders, Israeli forces occupied Gaza. Over the next 38 years during Israel's military occupation of Gaza, Israel established Jewish communities that flourished under the protection of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). However, friction remained, and peace continued to be elusive. Accordingly, in 2005, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced Israel would unilaterally withdraw from the entire Gaza Strip. In a process that divided Israeli society, nearly **9,000** Jewish settlers living in 25 settlements left Gaza or were forcibly removed by the IDF, and every Jewish **grave** was removed. In the withdrawal's immediate **aftermath**, Palestinians burned or looted much of what Israel had left behind, including homes, businesses, and greenhouses.

## **2. Gaza has never hosted an independent Palestinian state**

The land of Gaza has been inhabited by many different peoples and empires over the last three millennia. The area now known as the Gaza Strip was slated to become part of a Palestinian state, pursuant to the partition plan endorsed by the United Nations in 1947. The Jews accepted the plan, but the local Arab population and the Arab states roundly rejected partition, declaring war on the Jewish state. Israel's War of Independence ensued from 1948-49, during which the invading Egyptian army took control of Gaza. Between 1948 and 1967, Egypt installed a military governor who oversaw Gaza's **population** and allowed Palestinian fighters known as "fedayeen" to attack Israel. During this period, Egypt also opposed the creation of a Palestinian state and did not allow Palestinians to become Egyptian citizens or migrate to any country where they could resettle. During the pre-emptive war that Israel fought against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in 1967, Israel gained **control** of Gaza as well as the adjacent Sinai Peninsula. After Israel withdrew in 2005, Hamas's political ascendancy there, coupled with bitter rivalry with Palestinian leadership in the West Bank, quashed hopes of a Palestinian state.

## **3. Hamas violently seized control of Gaza from the Palestinian Authority in 2007**

One year after the Israeli withdrawal, at the behest of the United States, elections were held in the Palestinian territories. This effort was part of George W. Bush's broader policy of democracy promotion in the Middle East. Bush also sought to bolster Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas's legitimacy, but the experiment backfired. Hamas won the elections. The United States, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority were not willing to allow Hamas — a U.S.-designated terrorist organization — to take power. This caused acute friction between Hamas and Abbas's Fatah faction. In June 2007, Hamas launched a violent assault on the Palestinian Authority in Gaza. After Hamas emerged victorious, a Hamas spokesman **announced**, "[T]he past era has ended and will not return. The era of justice and Islamic rule have arrived."

## **4. Hamas has committed egregious human rights abuses in Gaza**

Christians, women, and the LGBT community have all suffered in Gaza under Hamas rule. Christian schools, homes, and institutions have been **vandalized and firebombed**, while converts are **persecuted**. When Hamas took over Gaza in 2007, there were approximately **3,000** Christians in the territory, whereas today there are an estimated **1,000**. In 2014, human rights groups in Gaza **demand** better protection for women after an increase in so-called "honor killings." In 2016, Hamas members **shot to death** a Hamas commander accused of homosexual activity. A gay Palestinian living in exile in Turkey **described** being arrested and tortured by Hamas: "They hanged me from the ceiling, beat me up, and interrogated me for five days." During its 2014 confrontation with Israel, Hamas **summarily executed** at least 23 Palestinians accused of collaborating with Israel.

## **5. Hamas has repeatedly used Gaza as a launchpad for indiscriminate attacks on Israel**

Since Israel's disengagement from Gaza in 2005, Israel has fought multiple rounds with Hamas; with each conflict, Hamas's arsenal has grown. In December 2008, in response to indiscriminate rocket fire targeting southern Israeli towns, Israel **launched** a 22-day offensive against Hamas in Gaza. During this operation, Hamas **fired** several hundred rockets at Israel. In November 2012, Israel launched Operation Pillar of Defense in response to escalating rocket fire. Israel's newly developed Iron Dome missile defense system **featured prominently** in that conflict, during which Hamas fired more than **1,500 rockets**. Two years later, in 2014, Hamas's kidnapping and killing of three Israeli teenagers precipitated a **seven-week war**, in which 73 Israelis, including 67 soldiers, died as Israel sought to eliminate cross-border assault tunnels and rocket launchers. During the 2014 conflict, Hamas launched over **4,500** missiles, rockets, and mortars. The next major escalation between Hamas and the IDF was in May 2021, when Hamas launched Operation Sword of Jerusalem, a reference to frequent but false claims that Israeli Jews were **seeking** to **defile** the al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount. During this 11-day operation, which did not involve an IDF ground invasion into Gaza, Hamas fired over 4,000 rockets at Israel.

## **6. Hamas has a history of holding kidnapped Israelis hostage in Gaza**

According to the IDF, kidnapping is a "**central element**" of Hamas's efforts to terrorize Israel. In 2006, Hamas members infiltrated Israel via tunnels, killed two IDF soldiers, and kidnapped a third, Gilad Shalit, releasing him in 2011 in exchange for 1,027 terrorists held in Israeli jails. One of the terrorists released in the Shalit exchange was **Yahya Sinwar**, who masterminded the Hamas invasion of Israel and massacres of October 7, 2023. Before the 2023 war between Israel and Hamas, the terror organization was holding two Israeli civilian hostages in Gaza along with the remains of two Israeli soldiers whom Hamas killed in the 2014 war.

## **7. Hamas diverts civilian resources, harming the people of Gaza**

In an attempt to try to prevent weapons and cash from reaching Hamas, Israel and Egypt **control** the flow of imports into Gaza. Prior to the 2023 war, Israel **facilitated** several thousand truckloads of imports to Gaza per month through the Kerem Shalom crossing. These imports **included** food, medicine, and ambulances. Israel also **facilitated** the import of materials for Palestinian schools and their students and helped medical patients in need of life-saving care enter Israel for treatment. However, Hamas seizes imported construction and other materials intended for civilian purposes. **Cement and iron** are confiscated to build bunkers and tunnels, while water pipelines are **dug out** to use for rockets. Palestinians in Gaza suffer the consequences through degraded and neglected infrastructure. Much of the damage to infrastructure occurred during battles with Israel that Hamas initiated, yet Hamas **diverts** foreign aid intended to help rebuild critical infrastructure. Gazans have limited hours of electricity each day and sewage water goes **untreated**, resulting in water-borne disease, food insecurity, environmental degradation, and **health impacts**. In 2022, hundreds of Palestinian activists online **criticized** Hamas governance, with one posting to X, "Hamas has billions of dollars in investments in many countries, while people in Gaza starve."

## **8. United Nations efforts in Gaza consistently benefit Hamas**

For 75 years, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has operated within Gaza, with a mandate to support residents with food, medicine, education, and jobs. Since the United Nations (UN) does not consider Hamas a terrorist organization, UNRWA does not screen its employees for ties to Hamas. **Assessments** of the curricula in UNRWA schools have repeatedly found they promote antisemitism and violence. Since October 7, over a **dozen** UNRWA officials have posted to social media expressions of support or justification for the Hamas attack, according to UN Watch, with one **saying** the attack "surpassed our wildest dreams," while another said that it "redressed [Palestinian] grievances." According to its former general counsel, UNRWA "has taken very few steps to **detect and eliminate terrorists** from its ranks."

## **9. Hamas actions have put international humanitarian aid to Gaza at risk**

Hamas's actions place continued foreign aid in jeopardy, showing the group's utter disregard for Palestinian lives. After the October 7, 2023, attack, Austria's foreign minister announced the [suspension](#) of aid, saying, "The extent of the terror is so horrific, we cannot go back to business as usual." Germany announced a review of aid to ensure it "serves peace and not terrorists." In 2018, the UN [halted](#) aid shipments to Gaza after discovering Hamas seized hundreds of tons of food and other aid, including rice, flour, and blankets. Hamas members have used UN facilities for sniper attacks and to [hide weapons](#) and its ambulances to [transport](#) weapons, exploiting freedom of movement Israel provides to UN vehicles.

## **10. Hamas leadership eschew Gaza, luxuriate in Qatar**

Qatar is a major financial, logistical, and political supporter of Hamas, though little of the \$1.8 billion Qatar [reportedly](#) has given Hamas reaches impoverished Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip. Qatar hosts Hamas's headquarters and three of its senior leaders, Ismail Haniyeh, Mousa Abu Marzouk, and Khaled Mashal, who are [reported](#) to lead luxurious lifestyles. According to Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the three Qatar-based Hamas leaders are each worth [billions](#) of dollars gained from direct payouts and absconding with international aid. War Cabinet minister Benny Gantz has [said](#) that after the horrific attacks of October 7, Hamas's leadership outside of Gaza would be targeted by Israel.