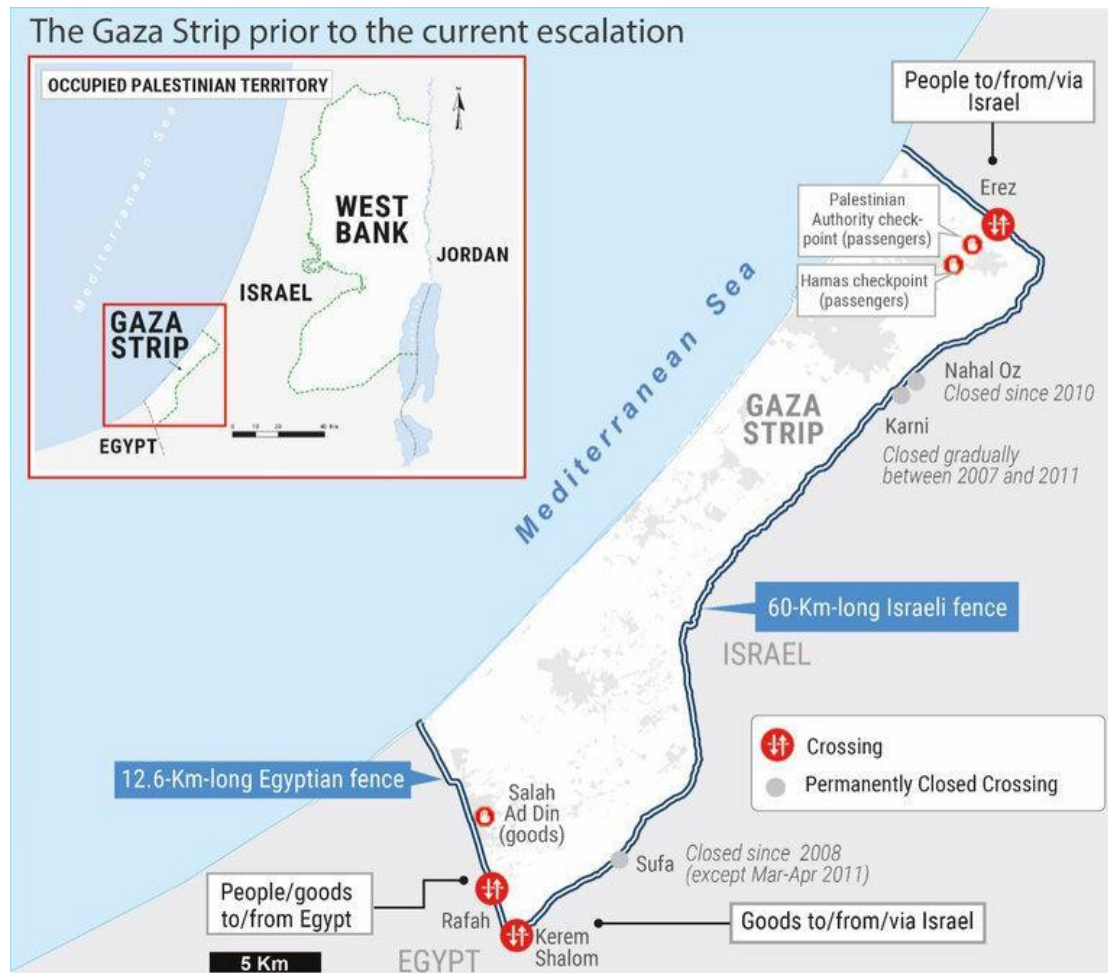




Israel and the Gaza Strip: The Context of the Current Assault

The Gaza Strip is only 40 kilometres long, and between 6 to 12 km wide, and has a total area of 365 km², less than half the 826 km² of Louth, Ireland's smallest county. With 2.3 million residents Gaza, is one of the most densely populated territories in the world, with the majority of residents descendants of refugees who fled or were expelled in 1948 from the area that became Israel. Over 40 per cent are under the age of 15, and the vast majority of the population has never left the narrow coastal enclave due to the ongoing siege.



UN OCHA OPT. The Gaza strip prior to the current escalation.

Since 1967, the Gaza Strip like the West Bank has been under Israeli military occupation. Despite withdrawing its military and settlers in 2005, Israel is still considered the occupying power under international law as it continues to control all entry and exit points by land (but for the Rafah crossing), as well as Gaza's airspace and coastline. The tight restrictions imposed by Egypt on the Rafah crossing reinforce the feelings of Gazans of being confined to the 'biggest open-air prison in the world.'

Since 2007, when Hamas took control of Gaza, Israel has imposed a siege, isolating the territory from the rest of the world by land, sea and air and restricting the category and number of people and goods allowed in and out. The economy has collapsed; by 2015 The Economist, reported that Gaza's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per person of \$1,700 a year was comparable to Congo-Brazzaville. Unemployment is nearly 50 per cent and about 1 million people in Gaza are severely food insecure according to the World Food Programme. The siege of Gaza has been **repeatedly condemned by the UN and human rights organizations as a form of collective punishment.**



Photo by Ray Dolphin. Buildings in Gaza this year, prior to the current violence.

Israel's restrictions have also undermined health, education, and water and sanitation services. Extraction from the coastal aquifer, Gaza's only natural source of water, is almost three times the sustainable annual recharge, with over 96 per cent of groundwater in Gaza unfit for human consumption, according to the World Health Organization. Damage to facilities from Israeli airstrikes since the current hostilities began on 7 October has already undermined the provision of water, sanitation, and hygiene services to over 400,000 people, according to the UN.



© UNRWA/Mohammed Hinnawi. A building collapsed into the street in Gaza.

The functioning of Gaza's only power plant has been impaired by conflict and the restrictions on the import of spare parts, equipment, and fuel due to the ongoing siege. On the evening of 7 October, Israel ceased supplying electricity to Gaza, reducing the hours of electricity to 3-4 per day. The power plant has now run out of fuel and stopped running, cutting the only electricity source to Gaza. According to its operators, the Israeli authorities have warned that they would attack the plant if it received any fuel and reoperated. The electricity blackout means that there is not enough power to operate water wells and pump the water through the system to run water desalination and purification plants and sustain sanitation services across the entire Gaza Strip.

The civilian population of Gaza has borne the brunt of the recurring hostilities that have resulted in huge loss of life, injury, permanent disabilities, and psychosocial trauma, while further aggravating Gaza's chronic shelter, infrastructure and energy deficits.

Between 2008 and 2022 over 6,000 Palestinians were killed in Gaza. Four major escalations of hostilities 4,000 Palestinian fatalities, including approximately 1,000 children.

On 9 October a total blockade of Gaza was announced by the Israeli Minister of Defence. "We are putting a complete siege on Gaza ... No electricity, no food, no water, no gas – it's all closed. We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly." The Israeli Minister of Energy has already ordered the water supply to Gaza to be cut. According to the UN, this decision affects over 650,000 people in Gaza and will result in a severe shortage of already scarce drinkable water.

During the 2014 hostilities, the UN recorded that 142 Palestinian families had three or more members killed in individual bombing incidents on residential buildings, for a total of 742 fatalities in total. Some 900 people, a third of them children, were permanently disabled and about 100 underwent amputation of limbs. Since the start of the current hostilities, the Ministry of Health in Gaza reports at least 28 Palestinian families have had most of their members killed in the same incident.

By 11 October, the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) had reached 350,000, of whom 220,000 are taking shelter in UN schools. As there are no shelter or warning facilities in Gaza, residents have sought refuge in UN-run schools during hostilities. UNRWA schools serving as emergency shelters for displaced families were struck by Israeli missiles in the 2008/09 and 2014 escalations. Since the start of the escalation of hostilities, the UN is reporting that eighteen schools and eighteen healthcare facilities in Gaza have sustained damage.

These figures were correct at the time of writing. However, it is almost certain that there will have been more casualties, more people displaced and an even greater loss of life by the time you read this document.

To remain up to date on the current hostilities, consider the daily 'Flash Update' documents released on the UN OCHA occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) webpage, accessible here:

<https://www.ochaopt.org/>