



Issue Backgrounder: Israel/Palestine

Background: Israel/Palestine includes the state of Israel and the territories of the West Bank and Gaza. Gaza is a small, heavily populated territory south of Israel along the Mediterranean Sea; the West Bank is a larger territory east of Israel bordering the state of Jordan. There are [2.1 million Palestinians](#) in Gaza plus [3.3 million](#) in the West Bank. There are [9.5 million in Israel](#)—80 percent Israeli Jews and 20 percent Palestinians—plus [500,000 Israeli settlers](#) in the West Bank.

The state of Israel was [established](#) in 1948, leading to a large number of Palestinians becoming refugees, many going to Gaza. Israel has annexed East Jerusalem and Golan, and threatened to annex the West Bank and occupy Gaza permanently. Hamas, considered a terrorist group by Israel and the United States, technically governs Gaza while the Palestinian National Authority governs the West Bank; Israel occupies both militarily.

The United States has long been Israel's most important supporter. The U.S. has [supplied](#) more than \$130 billion in arms to Israel—about two-thirds of Israel's weapon imports—with current assistance totaling at least \$3.8 billion annually. The Biden and Trump administrations have delivered missiles, bombs, and armored personnel carriers in 2024 and 2025.

Current Status: A temporary ceasefire has taken hold and may allow the return of hostages. The current cycle of mass violence in Gaza was exacerbated with an attack by Hamas on southern Israel on October 7, 2023, in which some 1,200 Israelis were killed and more than 200 taken hostage. Israel responded with a military assault on Gaza, leading to the death of more than 66,000 Palestinians (including at least 20,000 children) and some 460 Israeli soldiers (Source: [UN/OCHR](#)). Hamas has continued rocket attacks on Israel. Israel has cut off most humanitarian assistance to Gaza, leading to more than 600,000 Palestinians trapped in [famine](#) currently and up to 90 percent of the population displaced from homes. Tensions are high in the West Bank, where Israeli settlers often [attack](#) Palestinians to displace them from their land.

Why the Faith Community Cares: The world's three Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—all have their roots in Israel/Palestine, and all their scriptures call for peace. For Christians, Jesus told us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44), put down our swords (Matthew 25:52), and said "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

Why FAN Cares: St. Francis of Assisi is one of the great peacemakers, who traveled to Egypt at great personal risk to try to stop the war between Christians and Muslims. He opposed the use of arms and forbade his followers from carrying them. As followers of Jesus in the footsteps of Francis today, we must also be peacemakers and oppose the use of violence to settle conflicts.