

"Gaza Strip" – a Unique political area

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Summary: Gaza Strip, a small area located in the South East shore of the Mediterranean sea in a unique political territorial entity which from time to time catch the headline as rockets are sent from it to Israel and Israel retaliating by army force. It is part of the non – independence Palestinian Authority, not recognized as a separated area by no-one, behave independently toward the world. It was created by a series of political agreements, military activities, citizen wars, United Nation resolutions and agreements, more the 10 times during the last 100 years, and its future is still to be seen.

Key Words: Gaza Strip, Peace Agreement, derangement, armistice Arab-Israeli Wars

Gaza Strip is a unique political territorial entity of about 365 square kilometers, located in the south eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. It extends from the Egyptian border near the city of Rafah in the south to the Israeli border located on the sand dunes south of the Shikma dry river in the north, bounded in the west by the Mediterranean Sea and in the east by a border line with Israel, running parallel to the main road going from south west to the north east of Gaza strip. It is a unique political area as officially has no formal political status, being part of the Palestinian Authority but ruled by its opponents – The HAMAS Organization, ruling over its more then 1.5 million people which live there .Gaza Strip is the result of military, diplomatic and one side activities created in a long period begins back to the early twentieth century but its future is not yet known. The aim of this article is not to deal with its present situation but to present its unique way of creating, during a period of 100 years, from 1906 till present time.

Gaza Strip was created in 11 different stages:

1. 1906 - The creation of "an administrative Separated line" between the Ottoman empire and Egypt, placing the discussed area in Ottoman hands.
2. 1919 - British decision to adopt the 1906 line as international boundary between Egypt and British Palestine, placing the discussed area in Palestine.
3. 1947 – UN Partition plan which allocated the discussed area to a future Arab State.
4. 1948 - The Israel-Arabs war, creating cease-fire lines, leaving the discussed area under Egyptian army control.
5. 1949 – Armistice agreement between Israel and Egypt, creating Gaza Strip as a "Military Occupied Area" under Egyptian control.
6. 1950 – "Officer's agreement" which established the boundaries of Gaza Strip.
7. 1967 – The "Six Days War" in which Israel occupied the Gaza Strip, holding it as "Military Occupied area" under Israeli control.

8. 1979 -1982 – Peace Agreement between Israel and Egypt, leaving the Gaza Strip under Israeli control.
9. 1992 – Agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, placing most, but not all, of Gaza Strip under the authority of the PA.
10. 2005 – Self withdrew (Disengagement) of Israeli settlements and Army for the entire area of Gaza Strip.
11. 2007 – Hamas took over the control of Gaza Strip.

Stage - 1.

The beginning of the Gaza Strip is related to the determination of the course of establishing in 1906 a separating line between the Sinai Peninsula, which was under British control, and the Ottoman Empire (Kliot1995). This episode brought with it the first fixing a segment of its southwestern boundary of the Gaza Strip. This line was created after Britain forced the Ottoman Empire to retreat from Sinai Peninsula to a line located far east of the Suez Canal. The official definition of the 1906 line was "an administrative separation line". This line, running from a point near the north most point of Gulf of Aqaba (Gulf of Eilat in Israeli maps) northwest to the Mediterranean Sea,

was drawn on maps, and was marked by boundary pillars. The purpose of the line was to create a buffer between Turkish forces and the Suez Canal.

Stage - 2.

The modern borders of Palestine (Eretz Yisrael) were created in the early 1920s. With regard to the border between Palestine with Egypt the British Foreign Office decided in the spring of 1919, despite appeals from various sources to determine a new line in the area, to adopt the 1906 line and defined it as the international boundary line between Palestine and Egypt (Biger 2004). This is mainly because the line was already marked in the area and on maps and it gave the future Jewish State planned to be established in Palestine, an access to the Red Sea for future developing marine transportation to the Far East and East Africa. From 1919 onward, this line appeared on various maps which were the basis for marking the international boundary between Israel and Egypt after a Peace Agreement was signed between the two countries in 1979.

Stage - 3.

During the British period (1948-1918), as an outcome of opposition from the Arabs to recognize the right of Jews to share a unified government in the country, there were some suggestions to divide Palestine between the Jews and the Arabs. The main proposals were proposed by the British Royal Commission (His Majesty Stationery office 1937) issued in July 1937 and the UN Partition Plan adopted in November 29, 1947 (UN 1947).

The territorial basis for these proposals were the distribution of Jews and Arabs in Palestine at that time and an allocation of area for the large Jewish immigration planned to enter to the future Jewish state after the partition. The Jewish most southern settlement in 1937 was Be'er Tuvia , about 40 km. south of Tel Aviv, so the whole area south of the line starting with "Ten miles south of the road and from there the line would run west to the sea" was supposed to be part of the Arab state. The 1937 plan was not implemented but the General assembly of the United Nation voted ten years later, in November 1947, for partition of Palestine based on the same criteria, but completely with different lines. Jewish Settlement activities since the summer of 1937, and particularly extensive settlement in the Negev (the southern part of Palestine), led to the inclusion of a main part it in the future Jewish state. How ever, even if the Jewish national ethos concerning the boundaries of the Jewish state was, and to some extend it is still heard, that "settlements will determine the boundary line", many Jewish settlements remained in the UN Partition plan in the area which was allocated to the future Arab state. Thus, concerning the area near the city of Gaza, the Jewish settlements of Kfar Darom, Yad Mordechai, NITZANIM, and Nirim as well as the Arab towns of Majdal (Ashkelon) and Isdud (Ashdod) were supposed to be within the Arab state. That Partition line was the first to define an area similar of the Gaza Strip of today under Arab state. The Arab territory extends to the north east up to a point north of Arab small town of Isdud (Today Israeli Ashdod).

Stage - 4.

The Arab population of Palestine and the Arab states rejected the Partition Plan and led to a war against the Jewish population of Palestine and later against the newly established State of Israel. Up to May 1948 the fighting were between the Palestinian Arabs and the Jewish population of Palestine, and from the establishing of the State of Israel, on 14 May 1948, Arab independent states – Egypt, Trans-Jordan, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon sent armies against the newly born Israel. The war lasted until the autumn of 1948 and its aftermath, especially the operations against the Egyptian

army, spilled over to the beginning of 1949. During the first phase of the war, Egyptian army moved through the area designated for the Arab state in the coastal plain, occupying the Jewish settlements of Kfar Darom, Yad Mordechai and NITZANIM, went through Majdal and Isdud. Later, during "Operation Yoav" (22-15 October 1948), the Israeli army attacked the Egyptian forces in the northern Negev, conquering Beersheba and Ashdod coast south up to Yad Mordechai. A Cease-fire agreement was established by the UN in 4 November 1948 which called the sides to withdraw their forces advancing beyond the lines of the 14th October. On the basis of this decision a temporary demarcation lines were defined in a memorandum dated November 13, 1948. So Egyptian forces occupied stayed inside former Palestine in the area which began to be called "Gaza Strip.". On 16 November the Security Council decided to call the parties to open negotiations to establish a truce. The opening of the negotiations was delayed and at the end of December 1948, Israel launched a new military operation ("Operation Horev" 22 December 1948 - January 7, 1949), whose goal was to push the Egyptian army behind the international boundary. The main objectives of the operation have been achieved; the Israeli army reached the international border in Nitzana and even crossed it, but failed to push the Egyptian forces from Gaza. During the war period about 150,000 Palestinian Arabs fled to the area held by the Egyptian army.

Stage - 5.

Israel and Egypt launched an armistice negotiation on 13 January 1949. Talks were held on the Greek island of Rhodes were aimed, among other things, to determine the line of demarcation between the fighting forces. The limits of British Palestine, the lines of the UN Partition boundaries, a line concerning the location of the armies' troops in early January 1949, and the cease-fire lines of 13 November 1948, were all intermingled. The Israeli government demanded the evacuation of Egyptian forces from the territory of former Palestine but eventually it agreed to accept an Egyptian presence in Gaza with the withdraw of Israeli force from Beit Hanoun and the area adjacent to the cemetery in Rafah, while holding all other areas of the Negev. On February 24 an Armistice Agreement (UN 1949) was signed between Israel and Egypt, in which the armistice line would be "a line running from the coast at the output of Wadi Hasie (NAHAL SHIKMA of today), moves east across Deir Snied, crossing the Gaza- Majdal road to a point within three miles east of the road. From there the line will run in a southerly direction parallel to the Gaza - Al Majdal road, continued until the Egyptian border ". This line does not coincidence precisely the location of the armies and left the question of the meaning of the term "over Deir Snied" unsolved. The location of the line was determined according to the needs Egyptian Army and it placed the IDF forces far from the main road between Rafah and the north of "Gaza strip." The armistice agreement also declared that the armistice line should not be construed in any respect as a political border or territorial and not violating any of the rights, claims and positions of each party for settlement the final question of the Palestine. It appears that the parties undertook to recognize this line as a temporary one and to discuss the issue of the international border in the near future.

Armistice Lines 1949

גבולות שביתת הנשק 1949



Stage - 6.

The Lines laid in Rhodes did not suit the military needs of both parties. The road that runs along the "Gaza strip" passes in the southern part through a flat area and the placing the line 3 km. from it was not enough for the Egyptians. On the other hand, the location of the armistice line on Wadi Hasie, prevent Israel of using the water running in the Wadi during winter time and to use large underground water located there. The question of the village of Deir Snied also needed to be solved. Israeli and Egyptian officers, in cooperation with UN observers, toured in 1950 the area and agreed to slightly modify the route of the line. Thus, in the north, the line which was designed to run from the mouth of the Wadi, was removed for about 1.5 km southward, to the sand dune area for the benefit of Israel. As he inhabitants of the village of Deir Soniid left their village, the line was placed about 2 km. south of it again, for the benefit of Israel. As compensation for it, the line has been pushed for about 5 km east from Khan Younis area thus gave the Egyptians far more area in order to protect their army convoys. The new line was marked on maps, but was not marked officially on the ground. Both sides agreed to by a plow furrow in the location of the line, renew it every year.



Egypt has not annexed the Gaza Strip with its 100,000 original habitants and 150,000

Arab refugees and for all subsequent years Gaza Strip was officially a military area occupied by Egypt, not giving any formal status to its inhabitants.

Stage - 7.

During the Six-Day War of June 1967, the Israel captured the Gaza Strip, together with all of the Sinai Peninsula. Israel as Egypt before, according to international law, also did not annexed Gaza Strip which has been ruled as a military occupation zone. Any how, the previous Armistice Line disappeared from the official maps of Israel, although it continued to exist in fact in managing the difference between the military regime and the Israeli civilian systems. For years, following the Six Day War, Jewish settlements were established in the area and were subject to Israeli law (Gush Katif, Netzarim, Kfar Darom and three settlements near the north border of Gaza Strip) but the territory itself has not changed its position and remained an occupied territory.

Stage - 8.

In 1979 Egypt and Israel signed a Peace Treaty (Avalon 1979), during which it was determined that the Mandatory international boundary - the British Mandate line between Palestine and Egypt would be accepted as the international boundary between Israel and Egypt. However, over the years in which Israel held the region, the town of Rafah located in Gaza Strip near the former line with Egypt, grew, and houses were built across the international border. During the peace discussions Israel suggested to place the boundary in that area as to place the whole town under one sovereignty, Egyptian or Israeli, but the Egyptians refused to change the location of the line and demanded to return to exactly to the line of the Mandate period. This creates a situation where the line crosses the urban area of the town of Rafah, when most of the city was located adjacent to the Gaza Strip "border" held by Israel while a small part was left in of the Egyptian side.

Egypt did not return to control Gaza, who they perceive as was "occupied military zone". Now, as a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt was signed, Egypt did not see any need to hold the Gaza Strip, as, under international law, it belongs to its residents and not to a foreign occupier, Israel or Egypt.

Stage - 9.

On 4 May 1994 the Cairo Agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority was signed (Israel Ministry of FA 2004), transferred the control of the Gaza Strip (and part of the West Bank), except for the areas of Jewish settlements, to the Palestinian authority. A map was attached to the agreement, with marked the boundaries of Gaza Strip, comprehensive agreement known as the Oslo Accords, determined the future course of state formation of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip which constitute part of the whole Palestinian area. Some years later, the Palestinian political party of Hamas (Ultra - Islamic militant party) won the election for governing the Palestinian authority, but was pushed from the West Band while holding the Gaza strip in their hands. For six years after the signing of this agreement Israel ruled the Jewish settlements, to which were added to Elei Sinai, Dugit and KHOLIT, located in northern Gaza Strip since the peace agreement with Egypt and the evacuation of Yamit settlement.

Stage - 10

In 2005 the Israeli government decided to evacuate all its army troops and all Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip. This decision was both figuratively and literally gave the entire Gaza Strip to the Palestinians. This Disengagement used the 1950 armistice line and made it a quasi international border, without any written and signed agreement

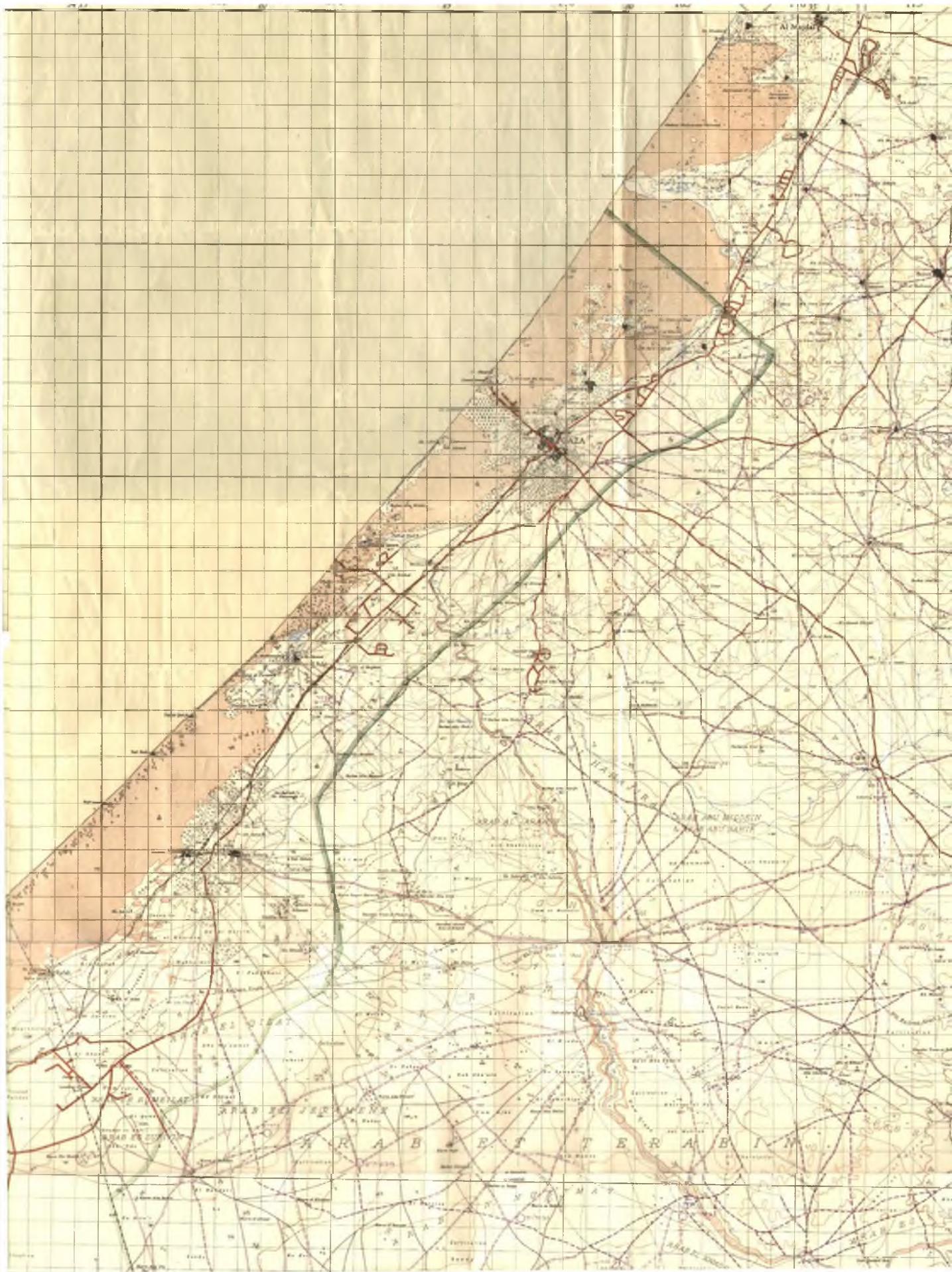
between Israel and the Palestinian authority.

Stage -11

The Hamas – a militant Islamic organization which won the election in the Palestinian Authority, took over Gaza Strip from the Palestinian central authority. Hamas does not recognize the authority of the Palestinian Authority, ruling Gaza by themselves, but not recognized by the P.A. and most of the Arab countries, except Syria, while the Moslem non-Arab countries – Turkey and Iran, recognized the legitimate rights of the Hamas to govern Gaza Strip.

The Disengagement of 2005 left the entire area without a Jewish presence in the area currently administered by the Hamas, which from time to time, sent rockets into Israel, which, in retaliation, firing into Hamas stronghold in Gaza Strip. There's no telling how long this situation will continue.

Thus, only historical geography research can present how, during a short period of only 100 years, a unique political territorial entity was created, changing its status many times, have no formal status, but continue to exist, with no future to be seen. Officially it is a part of the non independent Palestinian Authority, recognized as such by the United Nation but it is closed from every side by Israel and Egypt, both not so friendly to Hamas, and as such, controlled the freedom of movements of people and trade between Gaza Strip and the whole world, including the entire area of the P.A. which also not recognized the Hamas controlling of that troubled area.



Remarks

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