

GAZZA

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INTRODUCTION

The city of Gaza on the Mediterranean coast of Palestine has made the headlines since biblical times.

The first mention of the city on record dates to the reign of Thutmosis III (1504-1450 B.C.), the Egyptian ruler who defeated the Syrians at Megiddo and extended Egyptian military and political influence over Asia.

Gaza was Egypt's administrative centre in Palestine under Thutmosis III.

Throughout history, Gaza, situated on one of the world's great crossroads—between Africa and Asia—was of great importance both strategically and as a trade route linking Egypt with the Levant. The road passing through the port city of Gaza was the traditional Spice Road of Western Arabia and of all land trade from the Nile Valley to the East.

It was also the route over which armies shuttled back and forth through the centuries in the constant clashes between the powers ruling Egypt and Syria.

When the Philistines conquered the coastal plain of Canaan, Gaza became one of their main cities.

The Philistines resisted Jewish penetration under the rule of David and Solomon, and the coastal plain from Jaffa to Gaza remained in their hands until the Assyrian conquest in 734 B.C.

Then came the Greeks in 332 B.C., and later the Romans who rebuilt the city of Gaza on a new site in 57-56 B.C. Soon Gaza became a Christian centre, but was later the first Palestinian city to embrace Islam when the Arabs came in 634 A.D.

Arab geographers described mediaeval Gaza as a large, flourishing city surrounded by cultivated land and orchards.

During the Crusades, Gaza and the surrounding area became once more a battlefield until 1224 when it was liberated by Sultan Beybars.

The Turks occupied the city in 1517; Napoleon conquered it in 1799; but it reverted to the Turks after the French defeat in 1801.

After World War I, Gaza and the whole of Palestine came under the British Mandate.

In May 1948, the Egyptian armed forces entered Gaza to support the Palestinians, to frustrate Zionist attempts to take over the whole of Palestine, and to protect Egypt's Sinai border at Rafah.

After the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, Gaza became a refuge for displaced Palestinians from the north of the country, Jerusalem, and the area surrounding Gaza.

*The people without a land to the
land without a people.*

Israel Zangwill

The Gaza Strip is a sliver of coastal land, 45 kilometres in length and five to eight kilometres in width on the Mediterranean coast of Palestine, south of Jaffa.

The Strip is probably the most densely populated area in the world, with about 450,000 inhabitants crowded into 300 square kilometres.

More than two thirds of the population—316,776 in January 1967—are refugees, Palestinians from the towns, villages and fertile plain south of Jaffa and areas east and south of Gaza.

The bulk of the refugees, about 200,000, came to Gaza in May 1948, fleeing the battle areas at the time of the Zionist armed take-over of Palestine.

The Strip came into existence in February 1949, following the Armistice Agreement between Egypt and Israel, and was placed under Egyptian administration.

The Zionists had taken over large stretches of the areas of Palestine allotted to the Palestinian Arabs under the proposed UN Partition Plan.

The UN and world opinion turned a blind eye to the *fait accompli*, the first in a long chain. Tens of thousands of Palestinians, dispossessed of their homes, property and land, in many cases within sight of Gaza, were forced to seek shelter in the narrow enclave, all that the Zionists left them of the verdant plain of Philistia.

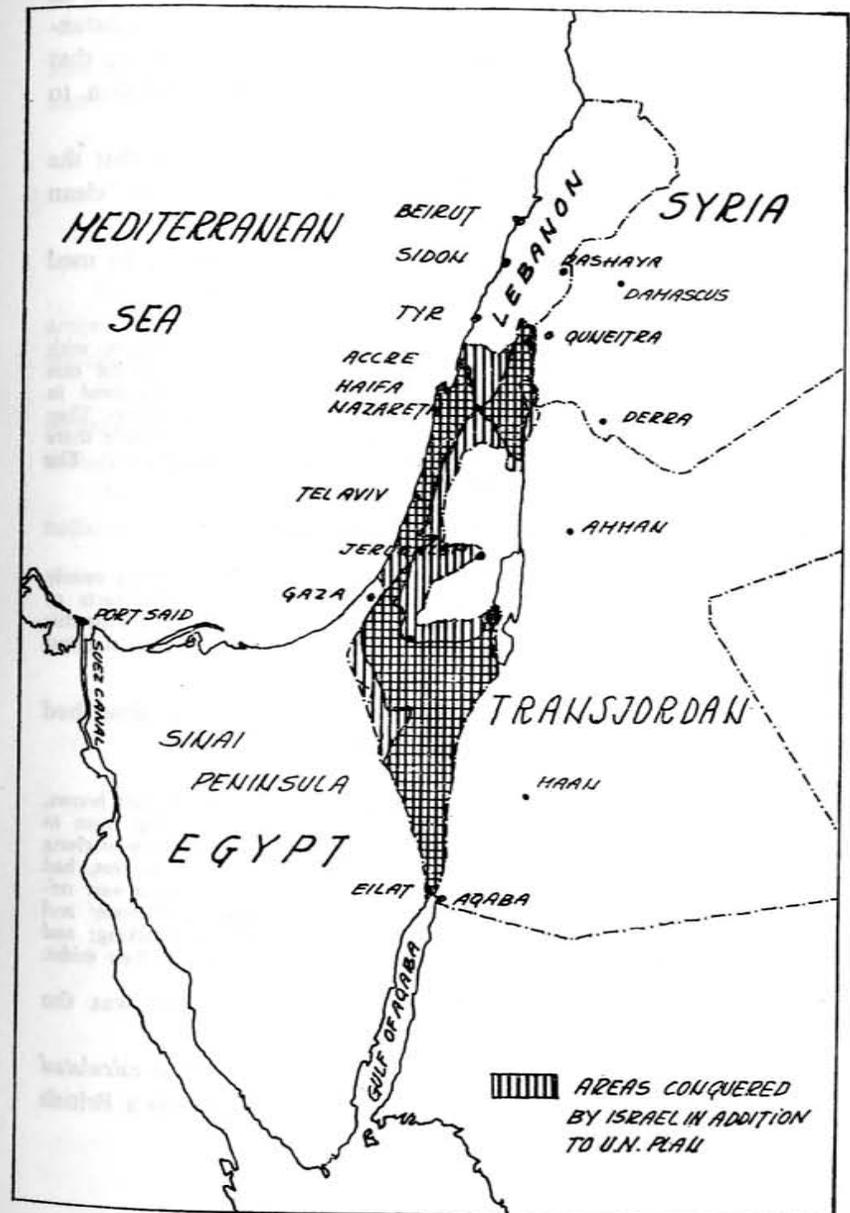
The territories seized by the Zionist forces in excess of the boundaries fixed for the Jewish state by the UN Partition Plan were peopled almost exclusively by Arabs. A total of about 600,000 people were expelled or fled from Western Galilee, the Jaffa enclave, Ramleh sub-district and parts of the sub-districts of Nazareth, Jenin, Tulkarm, Gaza and Hebron. The Zionists seized the wholly Arab towns of Jaffa, Acre, Nazareth, Lydda, Ramleh, Shafar Amr, as well as several hundred Arab villages.

But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land before you; then it shall come to pass that those which you let remain of

MAP OF PARTITION OF PALESTINE



PALESTINE—AS RESULT OF ARMISTICE AGREEMENTS 1949



them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.

Numbers 33:55

The Zionists later claimed that the Arab population left on orders from their leaders. Not only were these charges never substantiated but studies of B.B.C. records revealed, on the contrary, that the Arab leaders issued strict orders to the civilian population to stay put.

There is, on the other hand, abundant written evidence that the aim of the Zionists was to dislodge the Arab population, to "clean up" the area.

A Palmach commander (Allon) has described the tactics he used before May 15, 1948, to make the Arabs leave Galilee:

I gathered all the Jewish mukhtars, who have contacts with Arabs in different villages, and asked them to whisper in the ears of some Arabs that a great Jewish reinforcement had arrived in Galilee and that it is going to burn all the villages of Huleh. They should suggest to the Arabs, as their friends, to escape while there was still time . . . The tactic reached its goal completely The wide areas were cleaned.*

In *Edge of the Sword*, Netanel Lorch admitted that:

The Irgun, the Stern Gang, and the Haganah . . . began openly to attack Arab villages and cities, driving out the inhabitants or massacring those who stood by their homes and fields That this was a planned military manoeuvre there is no longer the slightest doubt.

In *The Arab Israeli War*, Major Edgar O'Ballance also described the Zionist method of getting rid of the Arabs:

It was Jewish policy to encourage the Arabs to quit their homes, and they used psychological warfare extensively in urging them to do so. Later, as the war went on, they ejected those Arabs who clung to their villages. This policy, which had such amazing success, had two distinct advantages: first, it gave the Arab countries a vast refugee problem to cope with, which their elementary economy and administrative machinery were in no way capable of attacking; and secondly, it ensured that the Jews had no fifth column in their midst.

A psychologically decisive factor in the Arab exodus was the appalling massacre of Deir Yassin.

And if the Arabs do not get out fast enough, "a few calculated massacres will get rid of them,"** a Jewish official confided to a British officer in December 1947.

* *Ha Sepher Ha Palmach*, Vol. II, p. 286.

**Quoted by Sir John Glubb in *A Soldier with the Arabs*.

This method, used on the small Arab village of Deir Yassin on the outskirts of Jerusalem on the night of April 9-10, 1948, resulted in a "miraculous clearing of the land; the miraculous simplification of Israel's task."

Mr. Jacques de Reynier, the Chief Delegate of the International Red Cross, gave an eyewitness account of the aftermath of the massacre in his book, *A Jérusalem, un Drapeau flottait sur la Ligne de feu*:

Three hundred persons were massacred without any military reason or provocation of any kind, old men, women, children, newly-born were savagely assassinated with grenades and knives by Jewish troops of the Irgun, perfectly under the control and direction of their chiefs.

On the scene Mr. de Reynier met Jewish troops, men and women, armed with submachine guns, grenades and "large knives most of which were still bloodstained."

In the homes of the villages he found the mutilated bodies of victims, among them a girl ten years old and two old women who, though wounded and left for dead, were still breathing.

As terror mounted and the Palestinians fled in panic, the Zionist radio urged them on with the call "Remember Deir Yassin."

A TENT AND 1,500 CALORIES

*I do not want the pity of him who loves me
And the love of him who tortures me*

Gabriele d'Annunzio

On December 11, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted resolution 194 (III) embodying the right of the refugees to return to their homes, the restitution of their property and compensation for loss or damage of their property.

The Zionists ignored the resolution. The United Nations did not press the point. Any hope that the resolution awakened in the refugees, huddled in flimsy tents and makeshift shelters, was short-lived, as no move was made to repatriate them and, on the contrary, more refugees came to swell their numbers.

Many more thousands of Palestinians became "Gaza refugees" after hostilities had ended, the Armistice Agreements had been signed, and the UN had affirmed the right of the refugees to return to their homes.

Covetous of the last vestiges of fertile land left to the Palestinians and anxious to build up a *berrenvolk* state, the Israelis continued to round up the Arab Palestinians in their villages and on their lands, load them into trucks, take them to the border of the Gaza Strip and order them to *ubrub*—"scram!"

Ascalon, for instance, was an Arab village until the summer of 1950 when the Israeli Defence Authorities expelled all the inhabitants to make way for a purely Jewish town.

"We have set up a dynamic state bent upon expansion," David Ben Gurion boasted.

By the end of 1949, the Jewish state envisaged in the UN Partition Plan had expanded from 5,500 to 7,100 square miles. Between 1952 and 1955 it grew from 7,800 square miles to 7,993.

Of the first 370 Jewish settlements built after 1948, 350 are on evicted Arab property. The Zionists grabbed 388 Arab towns and villages containing almost half the buildings in Palestine, 10,000 shops, businesses and stores and 30,000 acres of citrus fruit groves.

Arab losses in property and revenue amounted to \$2,000 million in 1962.

Unable or unwilling to secure or wrest from the Zionists the right of the Palestinians to return to their homes, the UN undertook to provide them with food and "welfare."

At an annual cost of \$27.00 per person, UNRWA provided a sop to world conscience in the form of basic dry rations that would ensure that the internment-type refugee camps would not become mass graveyards that might shock the world into pressing for UN action.

Monthly Basic Ration for a Palestinian

10 kilogrammes of flour.
600 grammes of pulses.
600 grammes of sugar.
500 grammes of rice.
375 grammes of oils and fats.

In winter the ration is increased by
300 grammes of pulses.
400 grammes of flour.

These rations provide 1,500 calories per day in summer and 1,600 in winter, less than the minimum calorific intake recommended for a stringent slimming diet.

Each refugee was also allotted a piece of soap once a month and 1.5 litres of kerosene for cooking and lighting, as there is no electricity in the camps.

The pulse ration was suspended in mid-1970 owing to a deficit in UNRWA funds and the bar of soap has also been removed from the ration.

In the Gaza Strip, the expelled Palestinians are housed in eight camps administered by UNRWA. Accommodation has evolved from the temporary shelters set up in 1948-49 in which to await the signal to return to their homes—to congested "villages" of one-room concrete shelters with populations ranging from less than 10,000 to about 40,000.

It was not as though there was a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist.

Golda Meir, June 1969

Under the influx of deportees, the density of the population of the Gaza Strip jumped in a few weeks from 208 to more than 6,000 persons per square kilometre.

The majority of the newcomers, about 65 per cent, were farm labourers; about 18 per cent were skilled and semi-skilled workers and 17 per cent were professionals, merchants and landowners.

The town of Gaza and the surrounding area had been overpopulated even before the 1948 catastrophe increased its population about fourfold.

Every inch of the fertile soil in the Strip had been intensely cultivated by the original inhabitants. To find land and work for thousands of farmers and labourers was simply out of the question. Nor did the strip offer many opportunities of work for the remaining 35 per cent of the refugees.

For a certain time after the flight into the Gaza Strip, the struggle to survive overshadowed everything in the lives of the Palestinians who had fled or were expelled with only the clothes they stood in and bundles or cases they could carry by hand.

Reduced to the status of paupers, traumatized, sick, in many cases separated from their families, bereaved, they clung, in their misery, to the belief that soon the nightmare would end, that they would return to normal. "Tomorrow ... next week ... next month in Jerusalem, Beersheba, Jaffa ..."

The General Assembly resolution was reaffirmed in 1949, in 1950, and every year successively, but to no avail.

The Gaza Strip became a place in which to wait, to brood, and to plan a way to return.

As the period of waiting dragged on, the refugees became restive, truculent.

There were disturbances in the camps—strikes, demonstrations, riots.

The first UNRWA annual report to the General Assembly gave a clear indication of the restive mood in the Gaza Strip camps:

The desire to go back to their homes is general among all classes; it is proclaimed orally at all meetings and organized demonstrations and in writing, in all letters handed in to the Agency and all complaints handed in to the area officers. Many refugees are ceasing to believe in a possible return . . .

This sense of injustice, frustration and disappointment has made the refugees irritable and unstable. There are occasional strikes, demonstrations and small riots.

The refugee camps in the Gaza Strip were fertile ground in which to breed bitterness, despair and the frenzied anger that urged a boy or man to violate the Armistice Agreements and infiltrate across the border with Israel that separated him from his village, his plot of land, his orchard, his people; a border that arbitrarily divided his homeland into "allied" and "enemy" territories; that kept him a prisoner among thousands of his compatriots while strangers from foreign lands, speaking foreign tongues, having no roots, ties or relations with Palestine, enjoyed the freedom of his house, his village, and his homeland.

They sneaked across the border in the dark of night, sometimes to harass the enemy, but more often merely to "feel the land of Palestine under my feet," to pick an orange from the family grove or to return clandestinely to their birthplace.

Sometimes they came back triumphant. Mission accomplished could mean they had chucked a grenade at a Jewish settlement; got into a fight with Jews; "spent a couple of hours in my village" or returned with a load of fruits "stolen" from the family orchard.

Many were caught on the other side. Others were killed in encounters with Israelis or shot for "ignoring a challenge."

The dead were brought back in white-wood coffins, across the border through the Israeli checkpoint, the no-man's land, the Arab checkpoint, to be buried in Gaza.

What a waste of youth! Resisting even in his death the truth that we Israelis took this land; resisting all our efforts to unclench his hand.

And in it—stranger still—
a chunk of bloodied earth, a grain of sand.
A dead boy clinging to a hill.

From "Resistance," a poem by
Amelia Martin

FROM RESIGNATION TO RESISTANCE

*Write down,
I am an Arab
My card number is 50,000
I have eight children
The ninth will come next summer
Are you angry?*

Mahmoud Darweesh
"Investigation"

In the refugee camps of Gaza a minimum of 6,000 refugee babies are born every month.

The fedayeen are from the generation of Palestinians who were chased out of their homeland when they were very young or who were born in the refugee camps.

A woman of Gaza

Out of the misery, humiliation and bitter frustration of life in the refugee camps was born a generation of Palestinian nationalists passionately resolved and committed to continue the struggle started by the Arabs of Palestine in 1920, in opposition to the Anglo-Zionist plan to partition their country.

The years 1920, 1921, 1929, 1933, 1936, 1937, and 1939 had been years of rebellion against the British Mandatory Power and the Zionists to whom Britain had promised Palestine.

The Palestinian rebels were volunteers, with little or no training, armed with a completely ineffectual assortment of pistols and rifles that dated back to World War I and earlier.

They were courageous, dedicated, foolhardy, but no match for the overwhelming military power of the Zionists.

The largest Palestinian armed group, the Arab Liberation Army, made up of volunteers from many Arab countries, numbered about 4,000 men. In her book, *The Arabs and the West*, Clare Hollingworth described this army as "nondescript" and "badly and incongruously armed . . ."

"Ill-organized, unruly groups of Arabs were faced by a powerful, efficient and utterly ruthless machine; there was never any doubt of the result," Hollingworth concluded.

In 1946 the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry estimated the Jewish armed force at 65,000 men. In addition, there was the Kibbutz police, fully-trained and equipped by the British, the Jewish Brigade which fought with the British forces in World War II, and the Zionist terrorist organizations: Haganah, Irgun Zvai Leumi and the Stern Gang.

Between December 1947 and March 1948, all Palestinian Jews between the ages of 17 and 25 were called to active service.

The Jews possessed large stocks of light arms. According to David Ben Gurion (in *Years of Challenge*) Haganah alone possessed in April 1947:

10,073 rifles
1,900 submachine guns
186 machine guns
414 light machine guns
768 mortars

but he adds:

As soon as the Second World War was over, I applied myself to the procurement of heavy arms, which would enable us to face a regular army, and to the construction of proper ordnance factories, so that we could match the Arab armies, if we had to . . . For less than a million dollars we bought machinery worth scores of millions, and it was all safely conveyed to Palestine. The Mandatory Government, for all the zeal with which it then instituted searches for arms in Jewish settlements, never once detected its nature or purpose.

Ha Sepher Ha Palmach (Book of the Palmach) recorded that by March 1948, local Zionist arms factories were producing 100 sub-machine guns a day (this was soon increased to 200); 400,000 rounds of 9mm ammunition per month: flamethrowers; antitank guns; a heavy mortar, large numbers of grenades and two- and three-inch mortar shells.

The first shipment of Czech arms reached the Zionists in March 1948 and the second a few days later.

The full Arab force, which the Arab countries had undertaken to send to the aid of the Palestinians, numbered altogether a mere 21,000, distributed as follows:

Egypt	10,000
Arab Legion	4,500
Syria	3,000
Lebanon	1,000
Iraq	3,000

The areas which these armies had to cover totalled about 670,000 square miles and, as Brig. General Glubb who was in command of the Arab Legion remarked:

It is common practice to add up the total of all Arab armies at home, and compare them with the Israeli forces, taking no account of distance. It is not realized that the distance from Baghdad to Haifa is seven hundred miles, as far as Calais to Vienna, or London to Berlin. Moreover, by far the greater part of this distance is across waterless desert.

Another factor that weighed against the Arabs was that the area was virtually ruled by Britain who was the initiator and supporter of the Zionist plan in Palestine.

Transjordan, created by Britain in 1921 as a consolation prize for Emir Abdullah to discourage him from attempting to force the French out of Syria, was ruled, armed, and financed by Britain, therefore, not free to intervene on behalf of the Palestinians. The Arab Legion was trained, armed and commanded by British officers purely as an internal defence force and did not, at any time, threaten to enter or set foot on territory allotted by the UN Partition Plan to the Zionists.

Egyptian action was limited at the time by the fact that it was still Britain that dictated policy to the decadent regime in Cairo. What is more, the British army was still firmly entrenched on the Suez Canal. Egypt's poorly equipped and trained army was certainly not a force to be reckoned with.

Syria was busy coping with her newly-won independence from the French (the mandate ended in April 1946), and distant Iraq, ruled by a Hashemite, was answerable to London to the same extent as Transjordan.

The 1948 war resulted, as the West had intended and planned it should, in a resounding, humiliating defeat for the Arabs.

The defeat was humiliating only insofar as the friends and supporters of the Zionists swallowed or feigned to swallow the Jewish myth of a peace-loving, defenceless little people savagely attacked by tens of millions of bloodthirsty Arabs.

The same myth earned all-out Western support for the Zionists in November 1956, when Israel's panzer divisions streaked across Sinai in a "defensive" bid to annex the peninsula, and unbelievable as it may seem, it worked again in 1967, when the air force of beleaguered little Israel performed the miraculous feat on June 5, of wiping out on the ground two thirds of Egypt's "attacking air force."

After the 1948 Arab defeat, Palestinians bitterly criticized the Arab regimes and blamed them for the loss of their country.

The late President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who fought in the Palestine war, shared these feelings. In his *Philosophy of the Revolution* he wrote:

The Arab countries entered the Palestine War with the same degree of enthusiasm. They all shared the same feelings and knew quite well the limits of their security. They came out of the war with the same bitterness and frustration. Everyone of them was thus exposed, in their own country, to the same factors and was governed by the same forces, that caused their defeat and made them bow their heads low with shame and humiliation.

Britain's "gift of independence" to the Arabs, in exchange for their help in defeating the Turks in World War I, was to transfer dependence to the West and secure it there—hopefully for all time—by an ingenious system of dividing the area into new style, self-contained supernational mini-states, vilayets and sultanates ruled by walis, kinglets, sultans, loyal and answerable to the British Padesha.

Involvement of these "independent" states could not be permitted to go beyond a symbolic show of force backed by moral and verbal support.

For the West to have allowed or enabled the Arab armies to give effective assistance to the Palestinians would have been self-destructive.

*I came not, friends, to mourn my loved ones,
My wounds bear the wrath of a million
In the land of exile.*

Mahmud Darweesh

What did Palestinian boys and men dream and talk about in the long nights of exile, when pangs of hunger gnawed the belly; flames of anger and humiliation burned the cheek; frustration nagged?

The subject of Palestine was obsessive.

At first the plaintive, negatively hopeful, compulsive conjecturing about "the return."

The tone changed when it became clear that Israel had no intention of allowing the refugees to go home and the UN had no intention of using its powers to compel the Zionists to carry out its resolutions.

It was clear, the Palestinians were not going to be allowed to go home. But what was the alternative?

Spend the rest of one's life in a refugee camp on a dole of 1,500 calories a day? Accept defeat? Lose one's identity? Emigrate and trade Palestine for a job, a good salary, a comfortable life? Allow the world to forget or ignore the crime that was being committed and leave the road free for further Zionist expansion?

Or reject acquiescence and humiliation, betrayal and defeat; struggle to keep the issue alive; force the world to remember; fight to wrest the rights withheld from them, to redeem and avenge; prepare for the next confrontation that would inevitably come?

There was no time to waste. Only to realize that too much time had been wasted in the past, precious time in which the Zionists had built up a tremendous war machine with which to impose upon the area their paranoid dream of a Messianic empire; while the Arabs had waited, foolishly, for the coming of white man's justice and equity.

It was in the Gaza Strip that the Palestine resistance movement as it is known today was born in the early fifties out of secret meetings.

Many of the men who attended had fought in a haphazard, untrained sort of way against the Haganah, the Stern Gang and the

Irgun in the months that preceded the 1948 war.

Simultaneously, in Beirut a young Palestinian Christian, George Habash, and his fellow students, many from Gaza, formed the Arab National Movement from which later sprang the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Later, during the first Israeli occupation of Gaza in 1956, groups of Gaza students began clandestine discussions and planning for the formation of Al Fat'h, the Palestine National Liberation Movement. The group leader was Jerusalem-born Yassir Arafat.

In the early fifties, commando action was the initiative of desperate individuals; but fairly soon it developed into an organized operation which the Zionists claimed presented Israel with a grave security problem, especially in the new border settlements.

In *Dairy of the Sinai Campaign*, Moshe Dayan recorded:

Towards the end of 1955 and during 1956, the acts of terror and sabotage by fedayun units increased, disturbing the ordered pattern of life in Israel, particularly among the new immigrant villages in the border regions.

Mr. Dayan conveniently ignored the fact that these new immigrant villages were the homes of "fedayun" who had suffered not only a disturbance in the "ordered pattern of life" in Palestine, but a complete upheaval which left them uprooted, homeless, landless, with the status of "refugee."

Dialogue in Gaza

Israeli	:	Where are you from?
Palestinian	:	From Jaffa.
Israeli	:	Where do you live?
Palestinian	:	In a tent in Beach Camp.
Palestinian	:	And where are you from?
Israeli	:	From Sofia.
Palestinian	:	Where do <i>you</i> live?
Israeli	:	In Jaffa.

Later Dayan recorded that "developments reached a pass by the end of summer 1955 and there seemed to be no way out. The explosive pattern of Arab terror and Israeli reaction heightened tension between the two sides and produced an eve-of-war atmosphere . . . This was not yet war, but . . ."

ISRAEL'S FIRST BID FOR SINAI

It need not have been war. There was another answer to the threat from Palestinian "terrorists" and that was to remove the cause of the threat by allowing them to return to the "ordered pattern of life" in their towns and villages.

It soon became clear, however, that the Zionists were spoiling for another tussle with the Arabs. They had flexed their muscles in the 1948 war, got away with considerably more territory than they had ever hoped to grab at the first attempt. Israel was strong, well prepared militarily, had world opinion on its side and was itching to stretch further into Arab land.

Britain and France were threatening war with Egypt over Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company and, as Dayan pointed out in his *Diary* (October 15, 1956), "Egypt is not now linked to any European ally who is obliged to go to her help."

This was the time to grab. Not on the Jordan side, for fear of antagonizing Britain, but the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula, where Israel would not only have Britain's sympathy but the active help of both Britain and France.

The Government told me or asked me . . . can you do it, that is to say to take the entire Sinai within 8 days, and I said I suppose I can, but why 8 days? And they said: 'Now look here, the Security Council will be called on this day, it will take them two days to debate and then there will be one resolution, then we shall not obey, then there will be another meeting and the time that we have to our disposal will be more or less eight days.'

Dayan, *Diary*

David Ben Gurion submitted the plan for "Operation Sinai" to the Cabinet on October 27, 1956.

The invasion was launched at 16.59 on October 29 with the drop of 395 paratroopers at the Mitla Pass.

The first Israeli communique, approved by Ben Gurion "after much drafting and redrafting," announced:

Israeli Defence Forces entered and engaged fedayun units in Ras-en-Nakeb and Kuntilla, and seized positions west of the Nakhel cross-roads in the vicinity of the Suez Canal. This action follows the Egyptian military assaults on Israel transport on land and sea designed to cause destruction and the denial of peaceful life to Israel's citizens.

The operation was completed within a week and resulted in Israel's capture of the whole of Sinai and the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli army was assisted in this new military adventure by Britain and France who bombed Egypt's airfields, keeping up the raids for three days, and landed troops in Port Said to take control of the waterway.

Ben Gurion had told the Cabinet that the aim of this extensive operation in the Sinai Desert and the Gaza Strip was to "demolish the bases of the fedayun ... safeguard freedom of navigation ..."

Asked if he would want to hold onto the Gaza Strip if the operation were successful, he had replied that "Gaza is an 'embarrassing' objective, and would be a burden to us."

But having conquered, he could no longer conceal his secret ambitions. He exulted:

After 3,300 years, we were at Mount Sinai again. The peninsula and the Gaza Strip were rid of the plague of the Egyptians, from Ras el-Naqb opposite Eilat, south to Sharm el-Sheikh at the tip of the peninsula; and from the Eilat-Rafah line in the north to the Suez Canal and its southern outlet, a stretch of 24,000 square miles, three times as large as Israel ...

*However late they might be,
They always come ...
Without identity, without names*

Nizar Kabbani

In 1948 the Israeli army saw Palestinians only as a fleeing mass of terrified people.

Dragging children, clutching bundles and bags, pleading, weeping, stumbling, falling, they rushed blindly out of their towns and villages, out of their houses, repeating over and over again the dreadful cry of "Deir Yassin."

Then, suddenly the noise of the battle was over, the shouting, the weeping, and the pleading stopped. The roads were empty. The Palestinians had gone, vanished ... the "miraculous clearing of the land" was complete.

Betrayed, broken, dispirited, humbled, the Palestinians had withdrawn, like wounded animals, into the anonymous security of the refugee camps.

Would the experience be repeated in 1956? Would the arrival of the first Israeli troops set the interrupted process in motion again, complete the "miraculous clearing" by emptying the Gaza Strip? Would there be an exodus in reverse, with the Palestinians fleeing into Egypt?

They fought. The Palestinians had their own "army," the Eighth Palestinian Division.

It was a force of about 10,000 men, but:

... split into small units dispersed in scores of separate outposts, none able to rush to the help of another and none capable singly of withstanding an attack by tanks or half-tracks.

Dayan, *Diary*

When the Israelis attacked the Gaza Strip on the morning of November 2, the Egyptians had been defeated at Rafah and el-Arish and were getting out of the strip.

... This narrow coastal strip could not hold out independently after the fall of Rafah and Arish.

Dayan, *Diary*

The city of Gaza and the large village of Khan Yunis to the south put up stiff resistance, but could not hold out long against the overwhelming strength of the Israeli forces.

Regular fighting was followed by sacking the towns and looting:

The last problem we dealt with was that of looting by our men ... Groups of our soldiers and also civilians from the settlements in the region began laying their hands on property which, because of the curfew, remained unguarded ... Much damage was done to Arab property and much shame to ourselves.

Dayan, *Diary*

But the people of the Gaza Strip have far more shameful stories to tell about Israel's *mission civilisatrice* in the area.

Men and youths were dragged from their homes and shot on the spot in the presence of their families. Suspects were "taken for questioning" and never heard of again. Whole families were arrested, tortured, imprisoned, evicted from their homes for the crime of being related to, or in many cases, merely for being the neighbours of men suspected of being fedayeen or of having collaborated with the Egyptians.

In Khan Yunis about two hundred men were taken from their homes, herded into the main square and shot "as a warning"—or was it perhaps in the hope of provoking a new flight? Students were rounded up, taken out along the road to Beersheba and shot.

There are people living in Gaza, Khan Yunis, Rafah today, parents, wives, orphans of some of the victims. When they tell the stories of the massacres they witnessed, their eyes and voices convey the unbelieving horror they experienced at the time.

Imprisoned in the Strip which was hermetically sealed off by the Israeli forces from the Arab world to which they belonged, cut off from the rest of the world, the Palestinians resolved to make life intolerable for the occupier until the day of liberation came.

The Strip became a vast gaol in which the inmates were in a state of constant mutiny and the Israeli gaolers were kept on the alert night and day chasing snipers, coping with acts of sabotage and hit-and-run attacks by fedayeen of the Palestinian Brigade who had managed to hide their weapons when the Strip surrendered and freelance freedom fighters who had their own methods for harassing the enemy.

Active resistance was supported and backed by the passive resistance and civil disobedience of the population.

Strikes, mass demonstrations, closedowns—until shopowners were forced to open under armed threat; children stayed away from school; women and girls marched through the streets demanding the withdrawal of the Israelis, the return of the Egyptians and the release of prisoners; men slipped away at night to infiltrate into Jordan and join the resistance groups; Israeli notices were torn off walls as soon as they appeared to be replaced by posters and orders of the Liberation Movement.

Retribution was fierce but only resulted in stiffened resistance.

This new outrage of the Israeli invasion, coming after eight years of the intolerable misery and humiliation of refugee life, the realization that the Zionists intended to annex this last vestige of their homeland, gave the Palestinians of Gaza the courage of despair.

*To have done great things together;
to wish to do them again—these
are the essential conditions for the
existence of a people.*

Abba Eban, November 1965

Israel withdrew from Sinai and the Gaza Strip on March 17, 1957.

The Israeli forces left under pressure of world public opinion and a U.S. threat to withhold financial aid. The threat was accompanied by an admonition that aggressors should not be allowed to benefit from aggression.

Without exerting any effort, the U.S. earned for themselves the reputation of having stood for right against might and restored order and justice in the area.

What Washington had done, in fact, was to recognize as legitimate Israel's considerable gains from previous aggression by insisting only upon withdrawal to the 1949 armistice lines.

There was no pressure from the U.S. on the Israelis to relinquish the 6,350 square kilometres of land they seized in 1948 in excess of the area allotted to the Jews under the proposed UN Partition Plan. More than two thirds of the Palestinian refugees came from these areas.

Nor did the U.S. exert pressure on Israel to comply with the UN resolution affirming the right of Palestinians to return to their homeland.

Far from removing the causes of friction, tension and violence in the area, this partial withdrawal merely restored the tense situation that had prevailed between 1948 and 1956.

Administration of the Gaza Strip was handed back to Egypt, and with Cairo's consent, a UN Emergency Force was stationed on Egyptian territory along the armistice lines between Egypt and Israel and at Sharm el-Sheikh.

The presence of the UN Emergency Force benefitted Israel by considerably curtailing fedayeen action from the Gaza Strip.

RETURN TO GAZA

The 1967 June war erupted out of a crisis built up around Israeli threats against Syria.

On May 10, 1967, Israeli Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin threatened to "attack Damascus and change its government." On May 13 Levi Eshkol spoke of drastic measures to be taken against Syria "at the place, the time and in the manner we choose."

Under a mutual defence pact of November 1966, Syria called on Egypt for assistance.

Hoping to deter an Israeli attack, Egypt requested the Commander of the UN Emergency Force to withdraw his men to enable Egyptian forces to move up to the Egyptian-Israeli armistice lines, and to reoccupy Sharm el-Sheikh at the entrance of the Gulf of Aqaba.

On May 22, as tension mounted, Egypt announced that the Straits of Tiran, which lie in Egyptian territorial waters, would be closed to Israeli ships and ships of other nationalities carrying strategic material to Israel.

On June 2, Egypt agreed to the suggestion of the American government to send Vice President Zakaria Mohieddin to Washington to discuss a diplomatic settlement of the Tiran Straits issue.

Mr. Mohieddin was to have flown to Washington on June 5, and U.S. Vice President Humphrey was to have visited Cairo.

Israel promised President Johnson to await the outcome of the Egyptian Vice President's mission.

President Nasser gave a solemn undertaking to the Soviet Ambassador that Egypt would, under no circumstances, fire the first shot.

Israel struck on June 5, its third "defensive" war in twenty years, and accused Egypt of having launched the fighting.

Israel radio broadcast the following on June 5, 1967:

09.22. A spokesman for the Israeli Defense Forces has stated that fierce fighting started this morning between Egyptian air force and tanks, which began moving towards Israel ...

11.37. Soldiers of the Israeli Defense Forces, we have no aims of territorial conquest. Our only objective is to foil the attempt of the Arab armies to invade our country and destroy the encircling blockade and aggression against us.

In *Strike Zion*, Leon Uris later described "Egypt's armed attack against Israel" on the morning of June 5, 1967:

In precise and thunderous arcs, out over the Mediterranean, lovely Mirage 3's and Super Mysteres flew towards the *slumbering targets* They flew at 500 feet and slammed new and secret 12-foot directional bombs into some 200 frontline Egyptian fighter jets, mostly Mig 21's *dozing in their revetments* (author's italics).

By 4.30 p.m., the Israelis announced they had destroyed 280 Egyptian aircraft on the ground and another 20 in the air.

And ...

The three Israeli divisions started to roll into the Sinai amphitheatre at 8.15 a.m., grinding through choking dust and ochre hills. ...

Leon Uris, *Strike Zion*

In the *Washington Post* of June 15, Bernard Nossiter—whose copy had been "delayed by strict censorship in Israel"—reported that:

Israel's Cabinet made the crucial decision to go to war against its menacing Arab neighbours on the night of June 3, about 36 hours before the conflict broke out in its full fury.

Commenting on the fact that the Israelis struck on the very morning that Zakaria Mohieddin was to have flown to New York, Miles Copeland commented in *The Game of Nations*:

After all, they had been rehearsing the assault for years and never again would they get such favourable circumstances in which to launch it.

For the third time in twenty years, the Zionists got away with the myth of the defenceless little David courageously warding off and defeating the monstrous Goliath.

An indication of the West's gullibility or bias is the fact that nobody questioned the credibility of charges that Egyptian aircraft "dozing in their revetments" on Egyptian airfields had attacked Israel or that Egyptian tanks had invaded Israel at the time that Israeli tank divisions were already advancing deep inside Egyptian territory.

By nightfall the invaders of Gaza were shifting into the high gear of night fighting at which Israeli troops excelled.

Leon Uris, *Strike Zion*

On June 6, the Gaza Strip was under Israeli occupation for the second time in ten years.

The pattern of the 1956 invasion and conquest was faithfully repeated: the bombing and heavy shelling, Israeli aircraft screeching

overhead towards Egypt, the thunder of tanks, explosion of rockets and shells, panic of women and children in the crowded refugee camps as they came under fire.

Later in Gaza town, Khan Yunis, Deir el-Balah, Rafah, the inhabitants described how they fled from their houses down to the beaches, to get out of the range of "targets"—how they hid in the bushes without food or water, remaining there for several days. Children dying of heat and dehydration, the smell of dead bodies everywhere, curfew, the wholesale looting of houses and shops, the rounding up of "suspects," the searches and accompanying brutality. Finally the mournful realization that this was the 1956 nightmare all over again—for how long?

GAZA AT WAR

*What about the Arabs? They
are hardly of any consequence.*

Chaim Weizmann to Albert Einstein

Having grabbed the Gaza Strip again, the next step must be to clear it of Arabs.

Since the Arabs would not leave of their own free will, they must be encouraged.

Gaza and the whole Strip were submitted to a reign of terror.

Curfews in parts or the whole of the Strip lasted from a few hours to days or weeks and recurred at frequent intervals.

During curfews the Israeli security forces carried out systematic searches. Armed men burst into houses, generally at night, on the pretext of looking for arms and fedayeen. They ransacked, tore furniture apart, looted, robbed, beat up men and youths, dragged them away "for questioning." Many were never heard of again. They evicted families of "suspects"; blew up or bulldozed houses in which arms were allegedly found or whose inhabitants were suspected of belonging to resistance groups, of helping, harbouring or even knowing fedayeen.

Male Arabs were rounded up by the hundreds and taken to cordoned-off areas of the beaches or marshland, kept there for days at a time and forced to remain for long periods in a kneeling or squatting position. Israeli soldiers guarding these enclosures would fire over the heads of the prisoners to discourage their wives and daughters from approaching to bring them food or water.

Living under curfew was particularly distressing for the inhabitants of the refugee camps where latrines and water faucets are outside the houses, each one shared by several thousand people. The camp populations were allowed one hour—sometimes only half an hour—a day in which to fetch food and water and use the latrines.

A number of camp dwellers were shot when they broke curfew out of a desperate need to relieve themselves!

People began to leave the Strip. At first in trickles; later, as oppression became unbearable, in groups of 50, 100 or more.

By the beginning of 1968, six months after the June war, UNRWA officials in Gaza estimated that 35,000 people had left the Strip and were continuing to leave at the rate of about 300 to 400 a day.

The Israeli authorities "helped" the terrorized Palestinians to get out by providing free transport to the Allenby Bridge on the river Jordan, after getting them to sign papers affirming that they were leaving the area of their own free will and did not intend ever to return.

Israeli attempts to empty the Gaza Strip were frustrated early in 1968 when Jordan refused to grant permission to any Gaza residents to cross to the East Bank of Jordan.

Since then, resistance and repression have maintained the Strip in a state of constant warfare and out of bounds to the Israelis who flocked to the area immediately after the June 1967 cease-fire to buy up whatever the looting army had left in the shops, and no doubt, to inspect and appraise this new annex to the Zionist state.

No accurate figures are available of the number of acts of resistance that have taken place in the Strip in the four years of Israeli occupation or of casualties on the two sides.

It is, however, safe to say that scarcely a day has passed without at least one incident. Despite the most efficient policing and brutal repression, the occupying authorities have not succeeded in intimidating the population.

In the most recent all-out attempt to crush resistance once and for all, the security forces lost their heads completely and used methods so harsh and indiscriminate that even Israeli soldiers on security duty in the Strip protested in writing to General Haim Barlev against the "cruelty and barbarism of the troops."

The wave of terror began on January 2, 1971, when a grenade thrown at a car killed two Israeli children and injured their mother.

Some areas of Gaza and the Beach Camp were under total curfew from January 2 to February 14. The camp's 32,000 refugees, cooped up with their unusually large families in their one-room houses, were allowed out for four hours a day, while the security forces carried out "punitive action" indiscriminately.

Eyewitnesses and victims described how Israeli security men beat men, women and small children at random and so brutally that in many cases bones were broken and serious injury inflicted.

They used their fists, whips and sticks and hardly a man or youth in Gaza got away without a beating.

People were dragged off buses and beaten. Six people were wounded when security men opened fire on a bus that did not heed a summons—the driver did not hear. Lorry loads of Palestinians were carted off to Sinai to concentration camps.

Brig. Gen. Menahem Aviram, in command of the Israeli forces in Gaza, admitted that about 1,200 people were deported to Sinai. Official reports put the figure at 4,000.

Members of the Israeli security forces complained about the brutality of repression in Gaza. The Israeli Human Rights League called upon "all Israelis to join in the demonstration on Monday, February 1, 1971" to protest "the horrors of Gaza." Brig. Aviram admitted that there had, in fact, been "abuses on the part of the troops ... blows administered with sticks ... some acts of brigandry ... but the culprits have been punished and the money stolen during searches has been returned ..."

Later, Gaza residents explained:

We all regretted and deplored the incident, the death of the two Israeli children. But Gaza is at war. We realize, and the Israeli authorities realize, that it was not a premeditated, planned act. The fedayeen lie in wait to attack any Israeli vehicle that passes. There have not been any tourists in the area for more than three years. The fedayeen obviously did not expect there would be small children in a car with an Israeli number plate. They did not aim at the children.

Regrettable as the incident was, it could not possibly justify the weeks of terror, premeditated, indiscriminate brutality to which thousands of Gaza people were subjected in one of the worst phases of Israeli collective punishment.

But resistance continued throughout the period of frenzied repression. On February 1 an explosion rocked and wrecked the Gaza central post office, wounding 61 people. Attacks on Israeli armed patrols and armed vehicles continue to occur daily.

Fedayeen action will end with Israeli withdrawal or when there is not one able-bodied Palestinian left alive, Gaza residents say. They are not fighting repression, they explain, but occupation and annexation.

Israeli leaders have made no secret of their intention to annex the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli authorities have plans to move 300,000 Palestinians from the Strip to the West Bank of Jordan. They are establishing military, paramilitary and rural settlements in the area and planning to build villages there.

In September 1970, Yigal Allon announced that "for security reasons" Israel would keep sovereignty over the approach to the westernmost town of the Gaza Strip, Rafah, no matter what.

Official sources in Tel Aviv have stated that Israel would be willing to withdraw from all occupied territories except East Jerusalem, the Syrian Heights, the Gaza Strip and a strip of land bordering on the Gulf of Aqaba.

Israel Gallili is of the opinion that Israel should speed up consolidation of its economic bases in the Gaza Strip. Each visit to the Strip reconfirmed his identification with the Government's conclusion that it must not be separated from Israeli territory, he told the *Jerusalem Post*.

But getting the Arabs out of the Strip is a tough proposition.

According to reliable sources in the occupied territories, a total of 1,116 houses had been destroyed in the Gaza Strip by the end of 1970 in Israeli acts of individual and collective punishment. The total for the whole of the occupied territories, excluding the Syrian Heights was 7,629. Many more have been destroyed in the Gaza Strip this year, leaving several thousand people homeless.

According to legal sources in Israel, about ten thousand inhabitants of the Strip have been tried and served sentences since June 1967. Several thousand more are in detention in concentration camps awaiting trial, in administrative detention, or serving sentences.

There are new arrests every day.

The world press has, on several occasions, drawn attention to the disastrous conditions in which the people of the Gaza Strip are living under Israeli occupation.

Yet world opinion, which is so often moved to protest against injustice and persecution, has remained surprisingly unaffected by the persecution of nearly half a million people in the Gaza Strip, whose only crime is that they are ... still there.

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