

Israel's Long-Held Plan to Drive Gaza's People Into Sinai Is Now Within Reach

As the UK and US back Israel's aggression against Palestinians, including an imminent ground invasion of Gaza, are they also about to assist Israel's ethnic cleansing proposal for a "Greater Gaza" - in Egypt?

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As Israel masses its forces along the fence encaging Gaza, waiting for a green light from the United States for a ground invasion, the question few are asking is: What is the ultimate endgame for Israel?

Instead, British and US politicians, backed by their media, have limited themselves to amplifying Israel's bogus rationales for indiscriminately bombing men, women and children in the tiny coastal enclave and preparing to send in troops. Only 80 or so British MPs, out of 650, have so far called for a ceasefire.

Israeli strikes are known to have killed more than 7,000 Palestinians, nearly half of them children, with many times that number seriously injured. They are being treated in hospitals without medicines or electricity. The United Nations estimates at least 600,000 Palestinians are homeless from the bombing.

At first, Western establishments [justified](#) the carnage as Israel's "right to defend itself" - a right Palestinians had been denied for the previous 16 years while Israel enforced a brutal military siege of the enclave that prevented basic goods and medicines from entering.

Israel's supposed "right to self-defence" - the official line from both sides of the political aisle in Britain - serves as western cover for, and complicity in, the crimes against humanity Israel has been committing: mass killing and wanton destruction; a "complete siege" of Gaza, starving it of food and water; and attacks on community infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, mosques, and UN compounds.

But now, as the death toll becomes increasingly obscene, the rationale has shifted. In

chorus, British and US politicians [say](#) Israel must be given the time and space to “destroy Hamas”.

That requires a ground invasion by Israeli troops – many of them religious extremists from illegal settlements in the West Bank – who are certain to be seeking vengeance for Hamas’ attack on October 7. The atrocities are only likely to intensify.

Military Madness

But there is method in Israel’s military madness. And the main goal is not the one being promoted. Israel has much larger ambitions than “destroying Hamas”.

Israel knows enough history to understand that occupied and oppressed peoples never come to accept their subjugation. They continue to find ways to resist. Even if Hamas can be wiped out, a new, more fearsome adversary will emerge among the next generation currently being traumatised by Israel’s bombs.

In fact, after Israel removed its physical presence from Gaza by pulling out settlers and soldiers in 2005, it began to understand that it had boxed itself into a strategic corner.

It was still occupying the enclave, but at arm’s length. This was the rationale for the blockade that tightly limited what was allowed in and out of the strip. Gaza had been turned into an open-air prison, controlled by Israel through intensive surveillance via drones, eavesdropping and local collaborators.

In practice, however, Israel found it much harder to police Gaza from afar. Hamas managed to create a much more sophisticated resistance movement in the small spaces left inside the prison that Israel could not surveil, such as a network of underground tunnels.

The results became fully apparent in the preparation and execution of Hamas’ attack on 7 October.

Israel’s strategic problem was compounded by the humanitarian crisis it had created by penning such a large and growing population into a tiny area with no resources.

Poverty, malnutrition, unclean water, overcrowding and lack of housing, as well as the trauma of being engaged and intermittently bombed by Israel to subdue any resistance, was slowly turning Gaza from a prison into a death camp. The UN had [warned](#) that the enclave would be effectively “uninhabitable” by 2020.

The solution to this – one that accorded with Israel’s long settler colonial ambitions to replace the Palestinians in their own homeland – was clear. Israel needed to create a consensus in the West justifying the expulsion of the Palestinians from Gaza.

And the only realistic place for them to go was into the neighbouring Egyptian territory of Sinai.

‘Greater Gaza’

Behind the scenes, Israeli officials term their latest ethnic cleansing proposal a “Greater Gaza Plan”. Details first leaked in the Israeli media in 2014, although reports indicate that

the origins date to 2007, when the Bush administration was apparently brought on board following Hamas' election victory in Gaza a year earlier.

At the time, Israel's secret plan relied on carrots more than sticks. The idea was to attach Gaza to Sinai, erasing the border between the two. Washington would help secure international funding for a free trade zone in Sinai.

With unemployment at over 60 per cent, massive overcrowding in the enclave and little clean water to drink, the expectation was that Palestinians in Gaza would gradually move the centre of their lives to Sinai, settling there or moving to distant Egyptian cities.

Following the leaks, Egyptian and Palestinian officials hurriedly [denounced](#) the plan as "fabricated". However, there were plenty of clues that Egypt had begun facing pressure from 2007 onwards.

In response to the Israeli media leaks of 2014, an official close to former president **Hosni Mubarak** [admitted](#) that the screws had been turned on him in 2007 to agree to annex Gaza.

Five years later, according to the same source, **Mohamed Morsi**, who led a short-lived Muslim Brotherhood government, sent a delegation to Washington. There, the Americans proposed that "Egypt cede a third of the Sinai to Gaza in a two-stage process spanning four to five years". Morsi too refused.

Suspicious that Egypt's current president, Sisi, was close to capitulating in 2014 were fuelled at the time by Palestinian Authority leader **Mahmoud Abbas**. In an [interview](#) on Egyptian TV, he said Israel's Sinai plan had been "unfortunately accepted by some here [in Egypt]. Don't ask me more about that. We abolished it."

The Greater Gaza plan received another boost in 2018 when it was reportedly [considered](#) for inclusion in Donald Trump's "deal of the century" Middle East "peace" plan. The hope was it would be financed by Gulf states as part of their normalisation with Israel.

That summer, Hamas even [sent](#) a delegation to Cairo to learn about the proposals.

Crushing Hamas

The gains for Israel in moving Palestinians from Gaza to Sinai, whether voluntarily under the Greater Gaza Plan or by force during a ground invasion, are obvious.

Egypt's military dictatorship would inherit the problem of crushing Palestinian resistance groups like Hamas - largely out of view - rather than Israel. Hamas would not be likely to fare well, given the Egyptian military's repression of the country's own political Islamist movements.

The costs of confining and policing Gaza would shift from Israel to the Arab world and international community.

Once inside Sinai, ordinary Palestinians could be expected to seek alleviation from their poverty and suffering by integrating into wider Egyptian society, eventually moving to big cities like Cairo and Alexandria. They would be stripped of their right in international law to

return to their homes.

In a generation or two, their children would identify as Egyptian, not Palestinian.

Meanwhile, the West Bank would be even more isolated and vulnerable to attacks from Jewish settlers, backed by Israeli soldiers. And Abbas would no longer be able to claim to represent the Palestinian cause, undermining his campaign to win recognition for statehood.

Very Large Stick

The problem is that no Egyptian leader has dared to accept such a plan, however much international arm-twisting and bribery was involved.

None wanted to be seen conspiring in Israel's ethnic cleansing and final dispossession of the Palestinian people, one of the gravest and longest-running grievances shared by populations across the Middle East.

Which brings us to Israel's current bombing campaign, which accords with no conceivable principle of proportionality, and its imminent ground invasion. Far from targeting Hamas, Israel has every incentive to use the Hamas attack of October 7 as a pretext to wreak as much damage on Gaza as possible.

Israel's goal is to speed up the process of making Gaza uninhabitable.

Israel needs Palestinians in Gaza so desperate to leave that they will ethnically cleanse themselves, and Egypt under so much opprobrium for not opening the border to Sinai that it finally relents.

With its current bombing campaign, Israel has moved from carrots to a very large stick.

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is aware that he has only a limited time-window to effect enough carnage to realise Israel's plan.

Notably, back in 2018, veteran Israeli reporter Ron Ben-Yishai [revealed](#) that the Israeli military was considering a new strategy towards Gaza that involved invading it and dissecting it in two, with Israel occupying the northern half.

At the same time the US was [said](#) to be willing to deepen Gaza's humanitarian crisis by withholding funds from UNRWA, the UN's relief agency.

Israel is currently achieving both through its bombing rampage and its demand that northern Gaza's population "evacuate", supposedly for their own safety, to southern Gaza.

The aim appears to be to squeeze Palestinians into the tiny space of Gaza's south, next to the border with Sinai, destroy all civilian infrastructure, and bomb and terrorise Palestinians in the south too.

Palestinians are already clamouring to be allowed into Sinai, while Sisi is presumably coming under the severest pressure behind the scenes to back down and open the border.

In Israel's cold, cynical calculations, its military is rolling the toothpaste tube tightly, before opening the top to see the toothpaste pour out.

If Gaza can be emptied, Israel will hope to establish a precedent the international community will condone. West Bank Palestinians will be pressured to join family or compatriots in Sinai.

Having been embarrassed by the festering wound of the Palestinians' dispossession for more than 75 years, the West and Arab world will be only too happy finally to bury the Palestinian cause for good.

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