

## *Chapter Twelve*

# The Ultimate Maximum Security Prison Model: the Gaza Strip

### 2004: THE DUMMY CITY

In 2004 the Israeli army began building a dummy Arab city in the Negev Desert. It was the size of a real city, with streets (all of them given names), mosques, public buildings and cars. Built at a cost of \$45 million, this phantom city became a fake Gaza in the winter of 2006, after Hezbollah fought Israel to a standstill in the north, so that the Israeli army could prepare to fight a 'better war' against Hamas in the south.<sup>1</sup>

When the Israeli Chief of General Staff, Dan Halutz, visited the site after the Lebanon war, he told the press that soldiers 'were preparing for the scenario that will unfold in the dense neighbourhood of Gaza City'.<sup>2</sup> A week into the bombardment of Gaza, Ehud Barak attended a rehearsal for the ground war. Foreign television crews filmed him as he watched ground troops conquer the mock city, storming the empty houses and no doubt killing the 'terrorists' hiding in them.<sup>3</sup>

In 2009 the Israeli NGO Breaking the Silence published a report of its members', reserve soldiers' and other soldiers' preparation for Operation Cast Lead, when the attack on the dummy city was replaced

by an assault on the real Gaza. The gist of the testimonies was that the soldiers had orders to attack Gaza as if they were attacking a massive enemy stronghold: this became clear from the firepower employed, the absence of any orders or procedures about acting properly within a civilian environment, and the synchronized effort from land, sea and air. Among the worst practices they rehearsed were the senseless demolition of houses, the spraying of civilians with phosphorus shells, the killing of innocent civilians by light weaponry and obeying orders from their commanders generally to act with no moral compass. 'You feel like an infantile child with a magnifying glass that torments ants, you burn them,' one soldier testified.<sup>4</sup> In short, they practised the total destruction of the real city as they trained in the mock city.

This was the new version of the maximum security prison that awaited the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, as the Israeli government and its security policymakers realized that the open-prison model, which was meant to enclose the people of the Strip under a collaborative rule of the PA, had been foiled by the people themselves. The retaliation that came in the form of besieging and blockading the Strip into surrendering to the preferred Israeli model had not worked either. The Palestinian political groups in the Strip, led by Hamas, decided to retaliate by launching occasional barrages of primitive missiles so that the world, and Israel, would not forget them and their life within a hermetically closed prison.

This is how the Israeli fiasco unfolded in 2005, which turned into what I have referred to elsewhere as the incremental genocide of Palestine. The Israelis referred to their first operation against Gaza as 'First Rain'; it was more a rain of fire from the sky than of blessed water from above.

#### 2005: THE FIRST RAIN

The militarization of the Israeli policy towards the Gaza strip began in 2005. That year Gaza became an official military target from the Israeli point of view, as if it were a huge enemy base rather than a

place of civilian habitation. Gaza is a city like any other in the world, and yet for the Israelis it became a dummy city for soldiers to experiment with the most recent and advanced weapons.

This policy was enabled by the Israeli government's decision to evict the Jewish settlers who had colonized the Gaza Strip since 1967. The settlers were allegedly moved as part of what the government described as a unilateral policy of disengagement, the argument being that since there was no progress in the peace talks with the Palestinians, it was up to Israel to determine how its borders with the Palestinian areas would ultimately look. In essence, Prime Minister Sharon was willing to turn the Strip into a West Bank Area A and in turn strengthen Israel's grip on the West Bank (and in evicting the Gazan settlers against their will, it would create an alleged trauma that would absolve Israel from ever repeating it again).

But things did not turn out as expected. The eviction of the settlers was followed by a Hamas takeover, first in democratic elections, then in a pre-emptive coup staged to avert an American-backed seizure by Fatah. The immediate Israeli response was to impose an economic blockade on the Gaza Strip, to which Hamas retaliated by firing missiles at the nearest town to the Strip, Sderot. This gave Israel the pretext to use its air force, artillery and gunships. Israel claimed it was firing at the launching areas of the missiles, but in practice this meant anywhere and everywhere in the Strip.

Creating the prison and throwing the key into the sea, as UN Special Rapporteur John Dugard has put it,<sup>5</sup> was an action against which the Palestinians in Gaza reacted with force in September 2005. They were determined to show that at the very least they were still part of the West Bank and Palestine. That same month they launched the first significant barrage (in number only, not quality) of missiles into the western Negev – as so often, these resulted in damage to some properties but very rarely in human casualties. The events of that month deserve to be mentioned in detail, because the early Hamas response before September had been the sporadic trickle of missiles. The launching in September 2005 was in response to an

Israeli campaign of mass arrests of Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists in the Tul Karem area; one could not escape the impression at the time that the army was looking to trigger a Hamas response. Indeed, when it came, it was a harsh policy of massive killings, the first of its kind, code-named 'First Rain.'

It is worth dwelling for a moment on the nature of that operation. The discourse that accompanied it was one of punishment and it resembled the punitive measures inflicted in the more distant past by colonial powers, and more recently by dictatorships, against rebellious imprisoned or banished communities. A frightening show of aggression by the oppressor ended with large numbers of dead and wounded among the victims. In Operation First Rain, supersonic flights took place over Gaza to terrorize the entire population, followed by the heavy bombardment of vast areas from the sea, sky and land. The logic, the Israeli army explained, was to create pressure in order to weaken the Gaza community's support for the rocket launchers.<sup>6</sup> As everyone expected, the Israelis included, the operation only increased support for the rocket launchers and gave impetus to their next attempts.

In hindsight, and especially given the Israeli military commanders' explanation that the army had long been preparing the 2008–2009 Operation Cast Lead,<sup>7</sup> it is possible that the real purpose of that particular operation was experimental. And if the Israeli generals wanted to know how such operations would be received at home, in the region and in the wider world, it seems that the quick answer was 'very well'; namely, no governments showed any interest in the scores of dead and hundreds of wounded Palestinians left behind after First Rain subsided.<sup>8</sup>

Subsequent operations were along similar lines. The difference was in their escalation: more firepower, more casualties and more collateral damage and, as to be expected, a tighter siege and blockade. The Palestinians reacted with more Qassam missiles.

## THE LEBANON HUMILIATION AND THE GAZA 'COMPENSATION'

Tank shelling, bombing from the air and the sea and brutal incursions were frequent occurrences throughout 2006. But when Israel was defeated on another front, this time in southern Lebanon in the summer of 2006, the army intensified its punitive policy even more against one and a half million people living in the most densely populated 40 square kilometres on the planet. Such was the brutality of the Israeli policy that it met the UN Article 2's definition of genocide, which stressed that it can be applied to actions against part of an ethnic or national population (and not necessarily against all of it). The kinds of weapon used by Israel – 1000-kilo bombs, tanks, missiles from the air and shelling from the sea against civilian areas – were not intended to deter, wound or warn. They were intended to kill.

Not surprisingly, Hamas's reaction became more desperate. Quite a few observers inside and outside Israel attributed the escalation to a determination to show that the Israeli army had swiftly recovered from the humiliation meted out to it by Hezbollah in Lebanon.<sup>9</sup> The army needed to show its superiority and deterrence capability, which it considered to be the primary safeguard of the Jewish State's survival in a 'hostile' world. The Islamic nature of both Hamas and Hezbollah, and an alleged, and totally false, association of both with Al-Qaeda, enabled the army to imagine an Israel spearheading a global war against Jihadism in Gaza. While George W. Bush was in office, the killing of women and babies in Gaza could be accepted even by the American administration as part of that holy war against Islam.

The worst month in 2006 for the Gazans was September, when this new pattern in the Israeli policy became all too obvious. Almost daily, civilians were killed by the IDF: 2 September 2006 was one such day. Three citizens were killed and an entire family injured in Beit Hanoun. This was just the morning's harvest; before the end of the day many more were killed. In September an average of eight

Palestinians died every day in Israeli attacks on the Strip, many of them children. Hundreds were maimed, wounded and paralysed.<sup>10</sup>

More than anything else the systematic killing had the appearance of an inertia killing due to the absence of a clear policy. The Israeli leadership in September 2006 seemed to be at a loss as to what to do with the Gaza Strip. Reading its statements at the time you get the impression that the government was quite confident about its policy towards the West Bank, but not towards the Strip. It perceived the West Bank, unlike the Strip, as an open space, at least on its eastern side. Hence Israel – under a strategy the Prime Minister of the day, Ehud Olmert, defined as ‘ingathering’ – was entitled to take unilateral action in the West Bank, since there was no progress in the peace process.<sup>11</sup> In practice, it meant that the 2006 government wished to annex the parts it coveted – more or less half of the West Bank – and to try to push out, or at least enclose within it, the native population, while allowing the other half of the West Bank to develop in a way that would not endanger Israeli interests (either by being ruled by a submissive Palestinian Authority or by associating directly with Jordan). This was a fallacy, but it nonetheless won the enthusiastic backing of most of the Jews in the country when Olmert turned it into a key policy of his election campaign.

However, this strategy could not be applied to the Gaza Strip. As early as 1967, Egypt, unlike Jordan, had succeeded in persuading the Israelis that the Gaza Strip was a liability for it and would never form part of Egypt. So one and a half million Palestinians remained an ‘Israeli’ problem and responsibility – although geographically the Strip is located on the margins of the State of Israel, psychologically it still lay very much in its midst in 2006.

The inhuman conditions in the Strip made it impossible for the people living there to reconcile themselves to the imprisonment Israel had imposed on them since 1967. There were relatively better periods when movement to the West Bank and into Israel for work was permitted, but such better times had gone by 2006. Harsher realities had been in place since 1987. Some access to the outside world was allowed as

long as there were Jewish settlers in the Strip, but once they were removed the Strip was hermetically sealed. Ironically, most Israelis, according to the 2006 polls, regarded Gaza as an independent Palestinian state that Israel had graciously allowed to emerge.<sup>12</sup> The leadership, and particularly the army, saw it as a prison with the most dangerous community of inmates, which had to be managed ruthlessly one way or another.

The conventional Israeli policy of ethnic cleansing employed successfully in 1948 against half of Palestine's population, and against hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the West Bank in 1967, was of no use here.<sup>13</sup> You could slowly transfer Palestinians out of the West Bank, and in particular out of the Greater Jerusalem area, but you could not do it in the Gaza Strip – once you had sealed it as a maximum security prison camp.

The result, as I have argued elsewhere, was the onset of a policy of incremental genocide by Israel against the Gaza Strip. I have also explained how the various legal and moral definitions of genocide have been relevant to the Israeli policy in the Gaza Strip since 2006, so I will not repeat them here. Let me just say that every year I ponder afresh this problematic definition and nothing on the ground suggests that I am wrong. This is not necessarily an intentional policy of annihilation, but it is one that has brought about the slow destruction of the ability of people in the Strip to survive (as was recognized by a UN report in 2016 that predicted that in 2020 life in the Strip would be unsustainable).

As with the ethnic cleansing operations, the unfolding genocidal policy that began in 2006 was not formulated in a vacuum. Since 1948, the Israeli army and government needed a pretext to commence such policies.<sup>14</sup> The takeover of Palestine in 1948 produced the inevitable local resistance that in turn allowed the implementation of an ethnic cleansing policy, pre-planned in the 1930s. Twenty years of Israeli occupation of the West Bank eventually led to some sort of Palestinian resistance. This belated anti-occupation struggle unleashed a new cleansing policy that was still intact in the West

Bank in 2006 and an aggressive policy of massive killing in the Gaza Strip. The daily business of slaying Palestinians only reached the back pages of the local press.

The Lebanon war provided the screen for a while, covering the sheer scale of destruction being wreaked on the Gaza Strip. However, the policies raged on even after the conclusion of the ceasefire up in the north. It seems that the frustrated and defeated Israeli army was even more determined to enlarge the killing fields in the Gaza Strip. The political elite seemed unable, or unwilling, to stop the generals. The daily killing of up to ten civilians throughout 2006 left a large number dead by the end of the year.<sup>15</sup> Such numbers are, of course, different from the destruction of a million people in a single campaign, an act more commonly defined by the international community as genocide. Indeed, one felt, at least until the 2009 massacre in Gaza, that, if only out of deference to Holocaust memory, official Israel would balk at the prospect of committing genocide.

On 28 December 2006 the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem published its annual report about Israeli atrocities in the Occupied Territories. That year Israeli forces killed 660 citizens.<sup>16</sup> The number of Palestinians killed by Israel in 2006 tripled in comparison to the previous year (around 200). According to B'Tselem, the Israelis killed 141 children in 2006. Most of the dead were from the Gaza Strip, where Israeli forces demolished almost 300 houses and slew entire families. This means that since 2000, Israeli forces have killed almost 4000 Palestinians, many of them children; more than 20,000 were wounded.

B'Tselem is a conservative organization, and the numbers it quotes may be higher. It did not describe the killings as part of a policy of genocide. In a series of articles written that year and after, I chose to differ. The point I made was that the question of definition was not just numeric; it related to the trend and the strategy. As 2007 began, Israeli policymakers faced two very different realities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In the former, they were closer than ever to completing the delineation of their eastern border. Their



internal ideological debate about the fate of the West Bank was nearly over and their master plan for annexing half of the West Bank was being implemented at an ever-growing speed by the last months of 2006. The last phase was delayed because of the promises made by Israel, under the road map for peace, not to build new settlements. Israel found two ways of circumventing this alleged prohibition. First, it defined a third of the West Bank as Greater Jerusalem, which allowed it to build towns and community centres within this new annexed area. Secondly, it expanded old settlements to such an extent that there was no need to build new ones. This trend was given additional impetus in 2006 when hundreds of caravans were installed to delineate the boundaries of the Jewish 'sphere' within the Palestinian territories. The planning schemes for the new towns and neighbourhoods were finalized and the apartheid bypass roads and highway system was completed. In all, the settlements, the army bases, the roads and the wall would allow Israel to complete the annexation in the following years.

Within these territories there are still a considerable number of Palestinians against whom the Israeli authorities pursue slow and creeping transfer policies – too boring a subject for the Western media to bother with and too elusive for human rights organizations to make a general point about. There was no hurry as far as the Israelis were concerned; they felt at the beginning of 2007 that they had the upper hand there: the daily abusive and dehumanizing mechanisms of army and bureaucracy were as effective as ever in contributing their own share to the process of dispossession.

This strategy was first conceived by Ariel Sharon in 2001 and became a political consensus. It won the day and was deemed the preferred strategy for the future in 2006 and much preferable to the one offered by the blunt 'transferrists' or ethnic cleansers such as Avigdor Lieberman (he would repeat his advocacy for transfer once more at the end of 2016 as Defence Minister). It was endorsed as the way forward in 2006 and was accepted by everyone in the 2006 government, from Labour to Kadima (the new centre party that Ariel

Sharon founded with Shimon Peres and which lasted for a few years after Sharon's departure from political life in 2006). The *petit crimes* of state terrorism were also effective as they enabled critical, but loyal, support of the state around the world to softly condemn Israel and yet categorize any genuine criticism of Israel's criminal policies as anti-Semitism.

This clarity on the policy towards the West Bank highlighted the confusion about Gaza. There was no clear Israeli strategy for the Gaza Strip at the beginning of 2007; but the difference between 2006 and 2007 was that the daily activity by the army in the Strip transformed into the strategy itself. Gaza, in the eyes of the Israelis, was a very different geopolitical entity from that of the West Bank. Hamas had already been controlling the Gaza Strip for almost a year, while the leader of Fatah, Abu Mazen (aka Mahmoud Abbas), was running the fragmented West Bank with Israeli and American blessing. Israel did not covet any chunk of land in the Strip, as it did in the West Bank; nor did the Strip have a hinterland, like Jordan, to which the Palestinians of Gaza could have been expelled. As mentioned before, ethnic cleansing was an ineffective option here.

Up to 2007, the salient strategy in Gaza had been ghettoizing the Palestinians there, but this was no longer working. The ghettoized community continued to express its zest for life by firing primitive missiles into Israel. Ghettoizing or quarantining unwanted communities, even if they were regarded as sub-human or dangerous, had historically never been a solution. The Jews knew it best from their own history.

Hamas's counter-operation culminated in the capture of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit on Gaza's soil in June 2006. This incident was irrelevant in the general scheme of things, but nonetheless provided an opportunity for the Israelis to escalate even more the components of the tactical and allegedly punitive missions. After all, there was still no strategy that followed the tactical decision of Ariel Sharon to remove 8000 settlers whose presence complicated punitive missions and whose eviction almost made him a candidate for the

Nobel Peace Prize. Thereafter, the 'punitive' actions continued and themselves became a strategy.

The Israeli army loves drama and therefore also escalated its discourse. Operation First Rain was replaced by Summer Rains, a general name given to the 'punitive' operations since June 2006 (in a country where there is no rain in the summer, the only precipitation that one can expect are showers of F-16 bombs and artillery shells landing on the people of Gaza).

Summer Rains introduced a novel component: the land invasion into parts of the Gaza Strip. This enabled the army to kill citizens even more effectively and to present it as a result of heavy fighting within densely populated areas, an inevitable result of the circumstances and not of Israeli policies. With the end of summer came Operation Autumn Clouds, which was even more efficient: on 1 November 2006, in less than forty-eight hours, the Israelis killed seventy civilians; by the end of that month, with additional mini-operations accompanying it, almost 200 were killed, half of them children and women.<sup>17</sup>

From First Rain to Autumn Clouds one could see escalation in every parameter. The first was the removal of the distinction between civilian and non-civilian targets: the senseless killing turned the population at large into the main target for the army's operation. The second was the escalation of the means to kill: employment of every possible killing machine the Israeli army possessed. Thirdly, the escalation was conspicuous for the number of casualties: with each operation, and each future operation, a much larger number of people were killed and wounded. Finally, and most importantly, the operations became a strategy – the way Israel intended to solve the problem of the Gaza Strip.

A creeping transfer in the West Bank and a measured genocidal policy in the Gaza Strip were the two strategies Israel also employed in 2007. From an electoral point of view, the one in Gaza was more problematic as it did not reap any tangible results, while the West Bank under Abu Mazen was yielding to Israeli pressure and there seemed to be no significant force that could arrest the Israeli strategy

of annexation and dispossession. However, Gaza continued to fire back. On the one hand, this enabled the Israeli army to initiate more massive genocidal operations; but on the other hand, there was also the great danger, as had happened in 1948, that the army would demand a more drastic and systematic 'punitive' and collateral action against the besieged people of the Gaza Strip.

#### 2007–2008: THE POLICY BECOMES A STRATEGY

The casualties were rising in 2007. Three hundred people were killed in the Gaza Strip, dozens of them children. However, during the George W. Bush administration and definitely after, the myth of fighting the world Jihad in Gaza had started to lose credibility. So a new mythology was proposed in 2007: the Strip was a terrorist base determined to destroy Israel. The only way the Palestinians could be 'de-terrorized', so to speak, was eliciting from them a consent to live in a Strip encircled by barbed wire and walls. Supply, as well as movement, in and out of the Strip depended on the political choice made by the Gazans. Should they persist in supporting Hamas, they would be effectively strangled and starved until they changed their ideological inclination. Should they succumb to the kind of politics Israel wished them to adopt, they would suffer the same fate as those on the West Bank: life without basic civil and human rights. They could either be inmates in the open prison of the West Bank or incarcerated in the maximum security one of the Gaza Strip. If they resisted they were likely to be imprisoned without trial, or killed. This was Israel's message in 2007 and the people of the Gaza Strip were given a year, 2008, to make up their minds.

A bilateral ceasefire was officially declared in the summer of 2008, brokered by Egypt. The Israeli government did not achieve its goals. It needed to prepare more seriously for the next step and used that year for such preparations. Its strategy not only depended on silencing Hamas in the Gaza Strip, but also consisted of desperate attempts to prove to the international body appointed to deal with the Israel/

Palestine conflict, the Quartet (consisting of representatives from the EU, Russia, the USA and the UN), and the Palestine Authority, that the situation in the Strip was sufficiently under its control that it could be incorporated into an Israeli peace vision of the future.

The summer of 2008 was two years after the humiliation of Lebanon. The Olmert government, which had led Israel into that war, was bitterly criticized in a damning report by an official inquiry into its failure in the north. The government did not want the Israeli public to dwell on this open wound for too long. Winds of change were also blowing from Washington where it was feared a new administration would not be as sympathetic to the Israeli strategy; and, all in all, world public opinion, at least bottom up, as it had been since 2000, seemed restless and antagonistic.

The old method of waiting for the right pretext to move ahead and escalate the struggle against the only resistance still intact was at work once more. The training in the dummy city now became operational and was turned into a proper doctrine in the Israeli policy towards the Gaza Strip. It was known as the 'Dahiya Doctrine'. In October 2008 *Haaretz* referred to this for the first time. The gist of it was the comprehensive destruction of areas in their entirety and the employment of unparalleled force in response to the launch of missiles. *Haaretz* referred to it as a possible scenario that could unfold in Lebanon, hence the Dahiya reference (a Shi'ite quarter in Beirut that was blown to smithereens in the 2006 Israeli air attack on the city). Gadi Eizenkot, the then Chief of the Northern Command, said that 'for us villages are military bases'. He talked about the total destruction of villages as a punitive action. His colleague at the top of the army, Colonel Gabi Siboni, confirmed that this would apply to the Gaza Strip as well. He added: 'this is meant to damage in such a way that it will take a long period to recover'.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, all was ready for reigniting the Strip. The first step was tightening the siege on the Strip. This produced a shortage of basic foodstuffs, a lack of the simplest medicines and caused massive claustrophobia for a million and a half people who were not allowed to move out. The siege also included severe restrictions of fishing rights,

which is one of the Strip's main sources of income. The highly sophisticated yet idle Israeli navy has been mainly occupied in chasing small dinghies and fishing boats in recent years.

Hamas did not budge and refused to go away in return for the lifting of the blockade. Thus another pretext was sought: Israel violated the ceasefire in several attacks from the air and by incursion on the land on a daily basis during one week in June 2008. Consequently, groups that were not affiliated to Hamas retaliated with several rockets and the public opinion in Israel was now prepared for a larger operation.

To reinforce the point, in November 2008 the Israeli army attacked a tunnel, one of many dug in order to survive the blockade, and claimed that it was a pre-emptive strike against a future Hamas operation. This time Hamas fired the rockets. It lost six people in the attack and launched a barrage of more than thirty rockets. At the end of the month, Hamas declared that such Israeli actions, which had become a daily occurrence, had terminated the ceasefire.

On 18 November 2008, Hamas declared the end of the ceasefire and on the 24th intensified the barrage of missiles for a short time in response to the previous Israeli action, before ceasing after a while. As before there were hardly any casualties on the Israeli side, although houses and flats were damaged and the afflicted citizens traumatized.

The 24 November missile attack was what the Israeli army was waiting for. From the following morning until 21 January 2009, it bombarded the million and a half people of Gaza from the air, land and sea. Hamas responded with missiles that caused three casualties and another ten Israeli soldiers were killed, some by friendly fire.

The evidence collected by Israeli-based human rights organizations, by international agencies and the media (although the Israelis barred the media from entering the Strip) – some of it repeated in the Goldstone Report, which was both a very conservative and guarded summary of what occurred – reveals the true dimension of the

massacre in Gaza in that period. (The South African Justice, Richard Goldstone was appointed by the UN at the head of a fact finding mission for the events in Gaza in 2009.)

The nearly 1500 killed and thousands of wounded, and tens of thousands who lost their homes, do not tell the whole story. Only the use of military force in the confines of such a space populated by civilians could produce the kind of collateral damage that was seen. It also displayed a desire on the army's part to try out new weaponry, all intended to kill civilians as part of what the former Chief of the Army General Staff, Moshe 'Bogie' Yaalon, termed the need to imprint upon the Palestinian consciousness the fearsome might of the Israeli army.<sup>19</sup>

A new, more cynical dimension was now added: international and Arab aid promised billions to help rebuild what Israel would probably destroy again in the future. Even the worst disaster can be profitable.

The next round of aggression occurred in 2012 with two operations: Returning Echo, which was smaller than the previous ones and escalated from a border clash; and, more significantly, Pillar of Defense in July 2012, which ended that summer's social protest movement in Israel. Hundred of thousands of middle class Israelis demonstrated for a few months, threatening to bring down the government for its economic and social policies. There is nothing like a war in the south to convince young Israelis to stop their protesting and go and defend the homeland. It worked before, and it worked this time as well.

In 2012 Hamas reached Tel Aviv for the first time, with missiles that caused little damage and no casualties. Typical of the familiar imbalance that year, 200 Palestinians were killed, including ten children.

This was not a bad year for Israel. An exhausted EU and US administration did not even condemn the 2012 attacks; in fact, they repeatedly cited 'Israel's right to defend itself'. No wonder that two years later the Israelis realized they could go even further.

Operation Protective Edge, in the summer of 2014, had been in the planning stage for two years and the abduction and killing of three settlers in the West Bank provided the pretext for a destructive operation that killed 2200 Palestinians. Israel itself was paralysed for a while as Hamas rockets even reached Ben-Gurion airport.

For the first time the Israeli army tried to take on the Palestinian guerrillas face to face in the Strip and lost sixty-six soldiers in the confrontation. This was a bit like a police force entering a maximum security prison in which the prisoners are besieged and running their own lives; you control them mainly from the outside parameters and you put yourself in danger if you try to invade it, to confront the desperation and resilience of those you are trying to starve and slowly squeeze the life out of. The Israelis knew all too well that such confrontation had to be avoided and therefore they still opted to use massive firepower, which, in the words of the army, contained the situation in the Strip rather than leading to the destruction of Hamas.

The war in Syria and the refugee crisis left little room for international action or interest. However, it seems everything is poised for yet another round of aggression against the people of Gaza. The UN predicted that, at such a rate of hostilities, by 2020 the Strip would become uninhabitable. This would be caused not only by military force but by what the UN called 'de-development' – a process whereby development is reversed.

Three Israeli military operations in the past six years, in addition to eight years of economic blockade, have ravaged the already debilitated infrastructure of Gaza, shattered its productive base, left no time for meaningful reconstruction or economic recovery and impoverished the Palestinian population in Gaza, rendering their economic wellbeing worse than the level of two decades previous.<sup>20</sup>

This death sentence is even more likely since the military coup in Egypt. The new regime there has added its own closure on the only opening Gaza has, outside of Israel. Since 2010 the civil societies have



sent flotillas of ships to show solidarity and break the siege. One of them, the *Mavi Marmara*, was viciously attacked by Israeli commandos, who killed nine of the passengers and arrested the rest. Other flotillas were treated better. However, the 2020 prediction still remains, and it seems that in order to avoid this happening the people of the Gaza Strip will need more than peaceful flotillas to persuade the Israelis to stop bringing about the slow death of Gaza.

The monstrous mega-prison Israel contemplated in 1963, and then built in 1967, is fifty years old as this book comes to a close. The third generation of inmates are still there waiting for the world to acknowledge their suffering and to realize that, as long as their oppression continues, it will be impossible to engage constructively with oppression elsewhere in the Middle East, and in particular in Syria. The immunity Israel has received over the last fifty years encourages others, regimes and oppositions alike, to believe that human and civil rights are irrelevant in the Middle East. The dismantling of the mega-prison in Palestine will send a different, and more hopeful, message to everyone living in this troubled part of the world.

10. Agha and Malley, 'Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors'
11. Dor, *The Suppression of Guilt*, 2005.
12. Drucker and Shelah, *Boomerang*, 2005.
13. For the full text see: [http://eeas.europa.eu/mepp/docs/mitchell\\_report\\_2001\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/mepp/docs/mitchell_report_2001_en.pdf).
14. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – Occupied Palestinian Territory, 'The Humanitarian Impact on Palestinians of Israeli Settlements and Other Infrastructure in the West Bank', April 2009.
15. European Union, Internal Report on 'Area C and Palestinian State Building', pp. 220–23.
16. Playfair (ed.), *International Law and the Administration of Occupied Territories*, 1992, p. 396.
17. Human Rights Watch, which ironically is banned from Israel, has annually catalogued these abuses.
18. World Bank Technical Team Report, 'Movement and Access Restrictions in the West Bank', 9 May 2007.
19. European Union, Internal Report on 'Area C and Palestinian State Building', pp 220–23.

## CHAPTER TWELVE: THE ULTIMATE MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON MODEL – THE GAZA STRIP

1. On the plans to establish the dummy city see the daily *Globes* (Hebrew), 20 May 2002 (planning actually began in 2002); there was also an interesting report of a soldier who participated in the training on the blog on 7 November 2009, [www.dacho.co.il/showthread.php](http://www.dacho.co.il/showthread.php), although this blog has now been removed for obvious reasons (it was available until 2010). IDF's own announcement on its website in an article by Ido Elazar has also been removed.
2. See Ilan Pappé, 'Responses to Gaza', *London Review of Books*, 21, no. 2, 29 January 2009, pp. 5–6.
3. Ibid.
4. Breaking the Silence, *Report on Gaza*, 15 July 2009. The NGO has a website, [www.shovrimshetik.org](http://www.shovrimshetik.org), where this report is available and it has also published a 96-page booklet entitled *Soldiers' Testimonies from Operation Cast Lead: Gaza 2009*.
5. John Dugard, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied by Israel Since 1967*, UN Commission on Human Rights, Geneva: United Nations, 3 March 2005.

6. See *Yedioth Ahronoth* for an analysis by the Israeli journalist Roni Sofer on 27 September 2005.
7. Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, 'Analysis: Gaza Gains have Softened Israel Stance on Shalit Deal', 25 January 2009, [www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/analysis-gaza-gains-have-softened-on-Shalit-deal-1.268774](http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/analysis-gaza-gains-have-softened-on-Shalit-deal-1.268774).
8. See the report by Amir Buhbut and Uri Glickman, 'The IDF Had Attacked in Gaza', *Maariv*, 25 September 2005.
9. Several generals and ex-generals expressed this view in a collection of articles in a strategic journal published by the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies, *Strategic Assessment*, Volume 11, no. 4, February 2009.
10. Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, 'One humiliation too many', *Haaretz*, 13 July 2006.
11. Ilan Pappé, 'Ingathering', *London Review of Books*, 28, no. 8, 20 April 2006, p. 15.
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