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Sharon Revisited: Netanyahu's Ultimate Aim in Gaza and

Why It Will Fail



Sharon and Yitzhak Mordechai greeting United States President Bill Clinton in 1998. Wikipedia.

Israel never learns from its mistakes.

What Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is trying to implement in Gaza is but a poor copy of previous strategies that were used in the past by other Israeli leaders. If these strategies had succeeded, Israel would not be in this position in the first place.

The main reason behind Netanyahu's lack of clarity about his real objectives in Gaza is that neither he nor his generals can determine the outcomes of their futile war on the Strip, a war that has killed tens of thousands of innocent civilians.

And, no matter how hard he tries, Netanyahu will not be able to reproduce the past.

Following the Israeli occupation of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem in June 1967, Israeli politicians and generals saw eye to eye on many things. The government wanted to translate its astounding military victory against Arab armies into a permanent occupation. The army wanted to use the newly acquired territories to create 'buffer zones', 'security corridors' and the like, to strangulate the Palestinians even further.

Both, government and military, found the establishment of new colonies to be the perfect answer to their shared vision. Indeed, today's illegal settlements were originally planned as part of two massive security corridors projected by then-Labor Minister, Yigal Allon.

The Allon Plan was predicated on several elements. Among other ideas and designs, it called for the building of a security corridor along the Jordan River, and another along the so-called Green Line, Israel's pre-1967 borders. The new demarcations were meant to expand the Israeli borders – which were never defined, to begin with – thus providing Israel with greater strategic depth. The plan was the original annexation scheme, which has been resurrected by Netanyahu in 2019, and is being advanced by current Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich.

Netanyahu is also sorting through previous governments' archives with the hope of finding a solution to his disastrous war in Gaza. Here, too, the Allon Plan is relevant.

In 1971, then Israeli General Ariel Sharon attempted to implement Allon's idea regarding complete control over Gaza, but with his own unique touch. He invented what became known as Sharon's 'five fingers'.

The 'fingers' were a reference to military zones and colonies, which were meant to divide the Gaza Strip into sections, and to separate the southern city of Rafah from the Sinai region.

To do so, thousands of Palestinian homes were destroyed throughout Gaza, particularly in the north. As for the south, thousands of Palestinian families, mostly Bedouin tribes, were ethnically cleansed to the Sinai desert.

Sharon's plan, an extension of Allon's plan, was never fully implemented, though many aspects of it were carried out, at the expense of the Palestinians, whose resistance continued for many years. It is that resistance, expressed through the collective defiance of the population of the Strip, which forced Sharon, then a prime minister, to abandon Gaza altogether. He called his 2005 military redeployment, and subsequent siege on Gaza, the 'disengagement plan'.

The relatively new plan, which Netanyahu rejected back then, and is trying to revive now, seemed to be the rational answer to Israel's unsuccessful occupation of Gaza. After 38 years of military occupation, the experienced Israeli general, known to Palestinians as the 'bulldozer', realized that Gaza simply cannot be subdued, let alone governed.

Instead of learning from Sharon's experience, Netanyahu is trying to repeat the original mistake.

Though Netanyahu has revealed little details about his future plans in Gaza, he has spoken often of retaining 'security control' over the Strip and the West Bank, as well. Israel will "maintain operational freedom of action in the entire Gaza Strip", he said last February.

Since then, his army began constructing what seemed to be a long-term military presence in central Gaza, known as the Netzarim Corridor – a large 'finger' of military routes and encampments that splits Gaza into two halves.

Netzarim, named after a previous settlement south-west of Gaza City evacuated in 2005, also gives Israel control over the area's two main highways, Salah al-Din Road and the coastal Rashid Road.

The Philadelphi Corridor, located between Rafah and the Egyptian border was occupied by Israel on May 7. It is meant to be another 'finger'. Additional 'buffer zones' already exist in all of Gaza's border regions, with the aim of fully suffocating Gaza and giving Israel total control over aid.

Netanyahu's plan is doomed to fail, however.

The historical circumstances of the '67 Israeli occupation of Gaza are entirely different from what is taking place now. The former emerged as an outcome of a major Arab defeat, while the latter is an outcome of Israel's military and intelligence failure.

Moreover, the regional circumstances are working in Palestine's favor, and the global knowledge of Israel's ongoing genocide in Gaza makes a permanent war nearly impossible.

Another important point to keep in mind is that the current generation of Gazans is empowered and fearless. Its ongoing resistance is only a reflection of a popular reawakening throughout Palestine.

Finally, the Israeli unity that followed the '67 war is nowhere to be found, as Israel today is divided along many fault lines.

It behooves Netanyahu to revisit his foolish decision to maintain a permanent presence in Gaza, as defeating Gaza proved to be an impossible task even for far superior military men of his country.

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