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**Forced Accelerated Demographic
Transformation in Palestine:
Learning from the Past to
Understand the Present**

Forced Accelerated Demographic Transformation in Palestine: Learning from the Past to Understand the Present

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1. Introduction: The Challenge of Palestinian Demographics in the Face of Israeli Ideology

The demographics in the occupied Palestinian land (Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem), before any other natural factors, have been influenced by the prolonged Israeli occupation, in continuation of a settlement process that began within the borders of the State of Israel pre-1967, and has extended to constitute the biggest demographic challenge to the Palestinians in the pursuit of the Zionist project to colonize all the land of Palestine. However, according to the perspective of the prominent Israeli demographer, Sergio Dellapergola (Sergio Dellapergola, 2010), Israel also faces a different existential dilemma in achieving its key objectives of maintaining a democratic system, asserting the Jewish identity of the state, and retaining the maximum geographic territory of the state. It can achieve either of these higher objectives, but not all three of them together. In other words, if Israel wants to remain a Jewish state and retain maximum territory, it cannot be democratic, and ultimately it must adopt a formula that involves compromising one of these strategic objectives.

This expert who cares for liberal Israel goes beyond that hypothesis and adds that there is a threshold for the percentage of Arabs that can be sustained out of the total population without compromising the Jewish and democratic identity of the state (20-25%) and without sliding into a binational state model. These contradictions have been intensified during the past decade, manifested in increased settlement activity on Palestinian land, intensified Jewish immigration toward it, and the rise of exclusionary religious, racist, and anti-democratic rhetoric within the Israeli governing institution, countered by liberal forces unwilling to relinquish democracy in favor of territorial or Jewish values. This demographic debate not only concerns the future of the state of Israel and its Jewish citizens at the national level but also affects the resilient Palestinian people in the occupied territories despite this alarming situation.

Since 1967, Israel has managed to avoid resolving this dilemma regarding its relationship with the Palestinian people, especially since the delineation of the internal borders in the West Bank between its jurisdiction and the jurisdiction of the Palestinian National Authority, based on conflict management concepts that separate jurisdiction over the population from control over the land (Joel Singer). These strategies sought to confine the civil authority of the Palestinian Authority to the largest possible proportion of the Palestinian population within the smallest possible area of the West Bank territories- based on policies it developed from its experience of occupying and besieging the Gaza Strip (Darryl Li). This colonial approach resulted in the invention of "Area (A)," "Area (B)," and "Area (C)" classifications, which encompass around 90% of the occupied West Bank population (excluding East Jerusalem) in 40% of its area, permitting 60% of its area for the housing of as many Israeli Jewish settlers as possible.

In the historical Israeli perspective, achieving demographic dominance within the 1949 armistice agreement borders did not pose a problem, as the percentage of non-Jews out of the total population remained below 20%. However, Israel's demographic control is not assured when the entire Israeli community considers the three aforementioned core Zionist objectives. The factor that further complicates the rapid demographic transformation within Israeli society is the continuous increase in the population, cultural, and political weight of the

Haredi Jews (Eastern Orthodox), contrasted with a decline in the proportion of Israeli Jews from other ethnic backgrounds and other religious fundamentalists, as well as a decrease in immigration. All such pressures push Israel away from its secular socialist identity and the European demographic composition of the Zionist movement that founded and led the state during its first five decades. While this component represented approximately 11% of the total Jewish and Arab population of Israel in 2015, it is expected to reach 32% by 2065 (Even). Therefore, since the colonial expansion to seize the largest possible area with the fewest possible number of Palestinian inhabitants represents the most significant demographic challenge to Palestine, this colonial strategy of geo-demographic expansion, in turn, generates new-old crises within the Israeli society.

2. Making The Gaza Strip Unlivable

In a report issued by the United Nations ten years ago analyzing the reality of the Gaza Strip and the prospects until 2020 to become a livable place, the conclusion demonstrated a pessimistic view on the future of the Gaza Strip and its population, indicating the impossibility of transforming the Gaza Strip into a habitable area without significant changes to the daily lives of its residents.¹ Since then, the United Nation's expectations have not changed, but have been reaffirmed in a report issued at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, which pointed to the slow pace of development and reconstruction process post-2014, describing the economic and social conditions as the worst since 1967.² Later, in 2017, the United Nations declared that the situation in the Gaza Strip was approaching a disaster compared to the expectations in 2012.³

This dire situation, leading to unsuitable economic and social conditions for human life, is not isolated from the geopolitical context of the Gaza Strip, which has produced this situation, and it is not limited to difficult living conditions alone. Many years of blockade on the Gaza Strip and its implications on the local development, and thus the economic and social conditions of the inhabitants, fall under the declared goal of depleting this geographical area of its human resources. This goal has always been clear in Israeli policies and statements, explicitly evident in leaked documents and announced plans, and is most vividly manifested in the context of the current aggression.

The population of the occupied Palestinian territories (the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem) has been affected before any natural factors, by the suffocating impact of prolonged Israeli occupation. A settlement process had already begun within the borders of the State of Israel before 1967; expanded to form the greatest demographic challenge facing the Palestinians. It is the goal of Zionism to settle the entire land of Palestine. Whether direct or indirect, Israeli practices to empty the Palestinian land of its indigenous demographic components violate relevant international laws and conventions.⁴ Since the past century, numerous international conventions and laws that condemn military occupation and identify the administration of the colonized by the colonizer have been enacted which,

1 <https://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/file/publications/gaza/Gaza%20in%202020.pdf>

2 https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdb62d3_en.pdf

3 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/07/561302-living-conditions-gaza-more-and-more-wretched-over-past-decade-un-finds>

4 Among these are the Hague Convention (1907), the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), and numerous resolutions of the United Nations Security Council and the UN General Assembly. It is worth noting that in international conventions, the term "Palestinian territories" refers to the West Bank and Gaza Strip and not to the entire historical Palestine.

if enforced, contribute to preventing demographic changes. Such laws and conventions consider forced displacement, or any attempt to alter the demographic composition, especially based on ideological motives aiming to impose dominance, as a war crime and a crime against humanity⁵.

More importantly, forced displacement here is not limited to physical relocation; but also extends to include displacement through threats or coercion, making it inherently coercive.⁶ There are many laws that “regulate” the state of “war” concerning the main dimensions of human rights, such as the right to food, water, medicine, and protection of civilians as well as the bombing of healthcare facilities, among others.⁷ However, the facts indicate that Palestinian territories and their demographic components have undergone a long series of changes that pose a real threat to the Palestinian demographic component and the future of its resilience and growth. In the current context of the ongoing aggression, clear violations of international law are evident in the practices of occupation and its attempt to eradicate the Palestinian demographic component, confining it- temporarily- to narrow geographical areas in preparation for taking control of newly vacated spaces.

Up to this moment, this aggression is considered the most demographically severe in terms of the numbers of martyrs and displaced persons, surpassing even the number of displaced persons during the 2014 aggression and exceeding the casualties of the 1948 Nakba. Additionally, the current aggression has led to demographic changes that can be clearly observed in the relationship between the population and the place, particularly in the northern Gaza Strip. The current aggression attempts to erase the collective memory of the persistent efforts throughout history to deport the Palestinian demographic component from this small geographical space.

Therefore, we are now facing a desperate attempt to carry out a new “Nakba,” as Israeli officials and their supporters have expressed since the beginning of this aggression.⁸ In order to place this aggression and displacement attempts in the wider context of the colonial plan in Palestine, particularly in the Gaza Strip, this summary highlights the major policies pursued by the Israeli occupation to vacate Palestine of its original demographic component and replace it with a colonial one. This summary traces the historical milestones in the approach that has brought us to the imminent danger of making the Gaza Strip empty of its population in two stages, up to October 7, and during the current aggression. Each stage presents the policies used to narrow the demographic-geographic space in the Gaza Strip.

3. Shocks in Forced Demographic Transformation in Palestine

Demographic change, as a term, refers to the historical transformation in fertility and mortality rates from high rates of birth and death in ancient societies to low fertility and mortality rates in modern societies.⁹ In Palestinian society, despite the natural basis for mortality and birth rates, the entire demographic transformation, particularly concerning the population’s

5 https://www.badil.org/phocadownload/Badil_docs/publications/wp15-introduction.pdf

6 https://www.badil.org/phocadownload/Badil_docs/publications/wp15-introduction.pdf

7 https://mas.ps/cached_uploads/download/2023/10/18/pr1-ar-gaza-attack-1697652561.pdf

8 <https://www.newarab.com/news/israel-rolling-out-gaza-nakba-2023-minister-says>

9 Kirk, D. (1996). Demographic transition theory. *Population studies*, 50(3), 361-387

relationship with the land, collides with forced demographic transformations resulted from a long history of an Israeli replacement project that does not only seek to eliminate the Palestinian demographic component but also to replace it with a contrasting and opposing demographic one. Through Israeli planning and construction policies, Israel has relied on a dual policy of hindering Palestinian development and displacing the Palestinian population.¹⁰ Therefore, the components of demographic map of the distribution of the Palestinian people have changed throughout history.

Based on the experiences of peoples, and in the case of Palestine specifically, the colonial project primarily acts towards replacing the indigenous population with new colonizers. The indigenous population faces symbolic and physical removal by settlers.¹¹ There are various methods through which the ultimate goal of colonization is achieved. Historically, colonizers have used planning as a tool to impose power, domination, and laws based on their own agendas and objectives.¹² The Zionist colonial policy meets in its nature other colonial models throughout history. The occupation employs a policy that is “hostile and unsympathetic” towards Palestinians while supporting the development and service plans of settlers,¹³ which have precisely the opposite effect on Palestinian communities.¹⁴ This policy has had geographic and demographic effects on both Palestinians and Jewish settlers. In more detail, population forced displacement policies include denial of residency, practices by informal bodies and institutions (e.g. settler groups), discriminatory zoning and planning through permanent systems, land confiscation and denial of their usage, segregation, deprivation of natural resources, refusal of refugee return, and suppression of resistance,¹⁵ as clearly seen in the case of the Gaza Strip.

These processes collectively form an attempt to empty the geographic space of its demographic component. This can be described as “spatial cleansing,” which refers to the occupation and destruction of the geographic space and uprooting its inhabitants¹⁶, which may be one of the factors leading to internal migration and leaving the space demographically empty. This can be referred to as “transfer” or “silent deportation,” which indicates the use of indirect methods to induce displacement by making the lives of Palestinians difficult and pushing them towards migration.¹⁷ In this context, Rassem Khamaisi uses the term “demophobia “ to describe the “fear and awe of demography” among Israeli planners, which plays a significant role in “distributing the geographic and demographic resources and sharing them in a specific geopolitical space or entity”.¹⁸ This is evident in the colonial context in Palestine.

Furthermore, Kanaana (1992)¹⁹ indicated what he called “number and time factor” of increased Palestinian displacement in the past century, which is proportionate to the growth of

10 B'Tselem, (2019). Planning Policy in the West Bank. https://www.btselem.org/planning_and_building

11 Wolfe, P. (1999). Settler colonialism. A&C Black; Wolfe, P. (2006). Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native. Journal of genocide research, 8(4), 387-409.

12 Zeid, M., & Thawaba, S. (2018). Planning under a colonial regime in Palestine: Counter Planning/decolonizing the West Bank. Land Use Policy, 71, 11-23.

13 Zeid, M., & Thawaba, S. (2018). Planning under a colonial regime in Palestine: Counter Planning/decolonizing the West Bank. Land Use Policy, 71, 11-23.

14 B'Tselem, (2019). Planning Policy in the West Bank. https://www.btselem.org/planning_and_building.

15 https://www.badil.org/phocadownload/Badil_docs/publications/wp15-introduction.pdf

16 حنفي، ساري. (2009). «التطهير المكاني: محاولة جديدة لفهم استراتيجيات المشروع الكولونيالي الإسرائيلي». المستقبل العربي، مج. 31، ع. 260، ص 67-84.

17 زريق، إيليا (2003). «الديموغرافيا والتراخي: طريق إسرائيل إلى اللامكان». مجلة الدراسات الفلسطينية 55 (14): 42-59.

18 خمائسي، راسم. (2019). «الديموغرافيا في القدس: الواقع والتحديات والاستشراف». سياسات عربية، العدد 39، ص 29-29.

19 كناعنة، شريف. (1992). الشتات الفلسطيني: هجرة أم تهجير؟. القدس: مركز القدس العالمي للدراسات الفلسطينية.

settlers resulting from the displacement process. This highlights the deeply rooted element of replacement in the Zionist settlement project, which aims to reduce the number of Palestinian inhabitants and secure a larger area of land for them simultaneously. As Kanaana describes it, “cleansing” Arab villages of Arabs, leaving behind geographic spaces devoid of their demographic component.²⁰ This is what can be witnessed today in the attempts to vacate the northern Gaza Strip of the Palestinian demographic component and turn it into a buffer zone between its original Palestinian component and the Israeli settlement component, as the paper will later demonstrate.

Throughout chronological structures, we see that the Israeli demographic policies and the Jewish demographic concern have recently led to an increase in the number of Jews to reach parity with the number of Arabs within the historical borders of Palestine, through natural growth and intensified immigration of the Jews.²¹ This obsession is evident in intensifying the largest possible number of Palestinians in a confined space in the Gaza Strip, often discussed through the “open-air prison” model.²² Ilan Pappé, in his book “the largest prison on earth,” concludes that these political, legal, and physical policies, which hinder any attempt for Palestinians to their right to self-determination or

to fundamental human and civil rights, are fundamentally rooted in the “Zionist spirit” committed to cleansing as many Palestinians as possible from the Holy Land, and besieging the rest.²³ The blockade serves as a clear example of this conclusion. Pappé describes what happens in the Gaza Strip due to the blockade as “Incremental Genocide,” as it occurs over many years. Therefore, demographic change in relation to the geography of Palestine is not a natural transformation resulting from the relationship between fertility and death rates or between rural and urban areas, but rather a product of external colonial conditions that reshape the Palestinian presence in the place. Therefore, the coercive element in demographic change lies in the presence of colonial population-repelling factors that hinder the ability of Palestinians to resilience in their lands. This is evident in the general trend of internal migration over the years, particularly highlighted by the density of internal migration resulting from the Nakba and subsequently from the 1967 war. For example, statistics indicate that 42.2% of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are refugees (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021a), and such a demographic composition resulted from decades of Israeli practices that displaced the Palestinian people from their land.

Central policies in Gaza that are related to blockade, closure, and aggression have resulted in a state of systematic de-development, particularly in the economic field, which hinders Gaza’s ability to overcome shocks and achieve development, due to years of colonial dominance, 14 years of siege, and repeated attacks that have caused long-term structural distortions in a fundamentally weak infrastructure and have made the economy dependent on the occupation.²⁴ The variations in the central demographic indicators related to poverty,

20 كتاعنة، شريف. (1992). الشتات الفلسطيني: هجرة أم تهجير؟. القدس: مركز القدس العالمي للدراسات الفلسطينية.

21 خمائسي، راسم. (2019). «الديموغرافيا في القدس: الواقع والتحويلات والاستشراف». سياسات عربية، العدد 39، ص 9.

22 Ilan Pappé, *The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Occupied Territories*, (Oneworld Publications, 2017), can be accessed by: <https://ia801504.us.archive.org/35/items/the-biggest-prison-on-earth/The%20Biggest%20Prison%20on%20Earth.pdf>

23 Ilan Pappé, *The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Occupied Territories*, (Oneworld Publications, 2017), can be accessed by: <https://ia801504.us.archive.org/35/items/the-biggest-prison-on-earth/The%20Biggest%20Prison%20on%20Earth.pdf>

24 Roy, S. (1999). De-development revisited: Palestinian economy and society since Oslo. *Journal of Palestine studies*, 28 (3), 64-82; Roy, S. (1995). Civil society in the Gaza Strip: Obstacles to social reconstruction. In *Civil Society in the Middle East*, Volume 2 (pp. 221-258). Brill; Nashef, H. A. (2022). Giving a face to the silenced victims: Recent documentaries on Gaza. *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 39(1), 120-138

unemployment, and food security in Gaza are very low compared to the West Bank and East Jerusalem forcing the people to depart Gaza Strip.²⁵

4. Features of the Forced Demographic Transformation in the Gaza Strip until the Eve of the Aggression

When discussing dual-demography and place, the Gaza Strip represents an extreme case that reflects the clear impacts of forced changes on demography and the impact of forced population density in a limited spatial area on all walks of daily life. The natural demographic transformation, as defined at the beginning of the paper, refers to the historical transformation in fertility and mortality rates. Conversely, coercive transformation necessarily refers to unnatural factors that affect fertility and mortality rates. However, repeated aggression on the Gaza Strip has led to changes in mortality rates that go beyond natural causes and are related to cases of martyrdom. Additionally, migration to and from the Gaza Strip due to occupation over the years has been an additional factor of forced demographic change in the Gaza Strip. Following the 1948 Nakba, approximately 300,000 Palestinians migrated to Gaza, which represents about a third of the total number of refugees in a small spatial area,²⁶ which resulted in a clear change in the previous geographic composition of Gaza. By 1961, approximately 17% of the total refugee population was living in the Gaza “Strip”; thus, a new demographic cluster emerged in addition to the city and village, namely the refugee camp. In 1967, Israel controlled the Gaza Strip, and the occupation confiscated Palestinian lands on which it built settlements, including the settlements of Eretz and Nesanit. However, all settlements in the Gaza Strip were evacuated in 2005, leaving the only demographic composition in the Gaza Strip as Palestinian.

Until the eve of the current aggression, 2.2 million Palestinians live in the Gaza Strip in a small area of approximately 365 square kilometers only, with a population density of 5,936 individuals per square kilometer.²⁷ Refugees constitute 66% of the total population²⁸ of the Gaza Strip and reside in eight camps. UNRWA data shows that despite the limited space and even contraction of the refugee camps as in the case of three camps—Bureij, Deir al-Balah, and Khan Younis—the number of registered refugees in the Gaza Strip has significantly increased since 1948.²⁹ This signals an ongoing demographic crisis that has worsened over the years, with expectations of exacerbation by the current aggression.

The central factor in the forced demographic change in the Gaza Strip is the repeated aggression on the Strip. Since the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, the Gaza Strip has been exposed to five major aggressions, resulting in over 100,000 internally displaced persons within the Gaza Strip and a similar number without shelter. The latest aggression of 2021 led to the displacement of over 74,000 Palestinians from their homes due to shelling and house demolitions, leaving more than 7,000 housing units destroyed.³⁰ Following the 2014 aggression, 29,000 Palestinians remained displaced for three years, primarily due to

25 Bellisari, A. (1994). Public health and the water crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories. *Journal of Palestine studies*, 23(2), 52-63; Barakat, S., Milton, S., & Elkahout, G. (2020). Reconstruction under siege: the Gaza Strip since 2007. *Disasters*, 44(3), 477-498

26 https://ppc-plo.ps/ar/?action=menu_det&id=260

27 <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/students/Population>

28 <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/postar.aspx?lang=ar&ItemID=4507>

29 <https://www.palquest.org/ar/highlight/22189>

30 <https://mezan.org/uploads/files/1644219360370.pdf> ; https://cdn1.ichr.ps/cached_uploads/view/2021/05/26/

the fact that one-third of the homes of the displaced were still under reconstruction at that time.³¹ The most significant outcome was that even after the end of the aggression, the willingness of individuals to emigrate remained high, with 29% of families or at least one of their households thought of migration,³² although the possibility for them to leave the Gaza Strip is almost non-existent.³³

In the general context, the totality of Israeli policies, particularly the blockade, are systematically destroying any development structure capable of providing economic and social conditions conducive to living in the Gaza Strip. This was one of the central goals of the occupation when imposing the siege on Gaza, to create conditions that make individuals unable to live and willing to leave “on their own.” The blockade of goods and restriction of movement prevents the authorities in Gaza from providing or achieving the services, whether essential or emergency.³⁴

5. Demography of Current Aggression

Since 1967, Israel has formulated a set of policies through which it intended to reduce the Palestinian demographic component in the Gaza Strip, the most prominent of which was an economic policy for the Gaza Strip characterized by high unemployment rates and low standards of living, thus encouraging the population, specifically the refugees, to leave “on their own.”³⁵ Likewise, there were many projects that aimed to displace the population of the Gaza Strip to Egypt, the most important of which was the “Eiland Plan,” which was unfolded in 2004 for the first time. The plan proposed by former National Security Advisor, Giora Eiland, aims to force hundreds of thousands of Gazans to emigrate to Egypt by creating a humanitarian crisis that forces them to leave.³⁶ One manifestation of this plan was imposing a blockade on Gaza, which Eiland considered insufficiently stifling, and that Israel should therefore encourage the Palestinians to leave Gaza entirely rather than imposing the blockade.³⁷

In 2020, Eiland presented an updated version of the plan that would indirectly displace the Palestinians from Gaza by allowing them to cross to work in Egypt and Arab countries. Eiland stressed that it is necessary to “revoke the Palestinian Authority’s agreements with Israel which constitutes an opportunity to formulate an independent Israeli policy towards Gaza (...) and to stop considering Gaza and the West Bank as remaining a single political entity, as the Palestinians see it.”³⁸ It is not surprising, therefore, that Eiland was the first to raise his voice loudly calling for the crushing of the Gaza Strip since the first days of the aggression.

The current aggression “intensely” shows the reality of the Zionist project as a replacement project that seeks to eliminate the Palestinian demographic component and replace it with the

31 <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/three-years-2014-conflict-29000-people-remain-displaced>

32 <https://samanews.ps/ar/post/249471/>

33 Veronese, G., Pepe, A., Diab, M., Jamey, Y. A., & Kagee, A. (2021). Living under siege: resilience, hopelessness, and psychological distress among Palestinian students in the Gaza Strip. *Global Mental Health*,

34 Elkahlout, G. (2018). Reviewing the Interactions between Conflict and Demographic Trends in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: The Case of the Gaza Strip. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 11(3)

35 Omri Shafer Raviv (2021) Israeli emigration policies in the Gaza Strip: crafting demography and forming control in the aftermath of the 1967 War, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 57:2, 342-356, DOI: 10.1080/00263206.2020.1864335

36 <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2023/10/25/feature/politics/the-sinai-solution-reimagining-gaza-in-the-post-oslo-period/>

37 <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2023/10/25/feature/politics/the-sinai-solution-reimagining-gaza-in-the-post-oslo-period/>

38 <https://www.amad.ps/ar/post/373369/>

Israeli one, first, through the direct annihilation of the Palestinians,³⁹ and second, through the forced deportation of the residents of the territories and the attempt to vacate them through the systematic destruction of all life components in the various districts of the Gaza Strip and forcing individuals to leave on the one hand, and through intimidation and death threats on the other. Since the beginning of the aggression, the occupation forces have not hidden their intention to create a “buffer zone” empty of the Palestinian demographic component, separating the settlements surrounding northern Gaza from the north of the Strip, which is an area amounting to 20% of the area of Gaza.⁴⁰ Thus, the plan to displace the population of the northern Gaza Strip was launched in its explicit form on the fifth day of the aggression by direct threats of displacement to the residents of the northern Gaza Strip.⁴¹

Until December 11, satellite image analyses monitored the destruction of buildings in the Gaza Strip, which affected 33-42% of the buildings being either demolished or damaged.⁴² According to data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, out of the total number of destroyed buildings, more than 52 thousand housing units were completely demolished,⁴³ and more than 254 thousand units were partially damaged, thus preventing residents from being able to live therein. As a result - in addition to other structural attacks - the total number of displaced people, as of December 13, reached 1.6 million, equivalent to 73% of the population of the Gaza Strip, according to data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.⁴⁴

More importantly, the content of these aerial photographs cannot be read in isolation from the announced plan for population displacement. We find that the highest percentage of buildings that were damaged and destroyed are concentrated in the northern part of the Strip, in the Gaza and North Gaza governorates, as approximately 60-73% of the buildings there were destroyed, which is equivalent to between 65-78 thousand buildings.⁴⁵ Attempts to vacate the north become more apparent when we follow the attacks on basic infrastructure needed for the survival of the population in the northern governorates of the Gaza Strip. Agricultural areas were transformed from green spaces into impoverished land due to the systematic bulldozing of orchards and greenhouses during the ground invasion of the occupation forces.⁴⁶

At the level of health infrastructure, the occupation forces ordered the evacuation of 22 hospitals and more than 2,000 patients from the northern Gaza Strip.⁴⁷ The occupation also made additional attempts to transfer the residents of the north to the south by preventing humanitarian and food aid from passing into the northern Gaza Strip, which made the risk of famine closer over days. This massive population displacement in the Gaza Strip occurred under harsh humanitarian conditions in terms of restrictions on electricity, food, water, and medicine, which resulted from the imposition of the siege.⁴⁸ The United Nations Office for

39 The number of martyrs up to December 14 has exceeded 18 thousand and 7780 are still under the rubble.

https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang_ar/1405/Default.aspx

40 <https://www.alarabiya.net/arab-and-world/2023/12/04>

41 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/un-expert-warns-new-instance-mass-ethnic-cleansing-palestinians-calls>

42 <https://www.conflict-damage.org/>

43 https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang_ar/1408/Default.aspx

44 <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/>

45 <https://www.conflict-damage.org/>

46 <https://twitter.com/hrw/status/1731689503746568334>

47 <https://www.emro.who.int/media/news/evacuation-orders-by-israel-to-hospitals-in-northern-gaza-are-a-death-sentence-for-the-sick-and-injured.html>

48 <https://www.undp.org/arab-states/publications/gaza-war-expected-socio-economic-impacts-state-palestine>

Humanitarian Affairs warned of the danger of genocide as a result of the comprehensive siege imposed by the occupation forces on the Gaza Strip.⁴⁹ This severe exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis prompted the United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs to describe northern Gaza as “hell on earth.”⁵⁰

This, in addition to a number of other attacks, has led to the displacement of at least 400,000 residents of the Gaza and North Gaza governorates to the south, as of November 11.⁵¹ This is what led to population density rates in the south reaching 6,145 people per square kilometer after the density was 4,531 people per square kilometer.⁵² Even during the humanitarian truce, the displaced were barely able to return to their homes and areas in northern Gaza due to the Israeli army’s shooting at displaced returnees, in addition to the use of intimidation mechanisms by throwing leaflets containing threats to prevent them from returning to the north.⁵³ When this summary was drafted, the number of displaced people in the Gaza Strip reached approximately 1.8 million, or 80% of the population.

6. Conclusion: The Risks of the Demographic Catastrophe

As the aggression enters its third month, the occupation threatens displaced people and residents in the southern governorates, specifically Khan Yunis, to be displaced to Al-Mawasi area, by declaring it a “safe zone.”⁵⁴ These areas are, of course, considered completely unsafe, due to the aggression, poor humanitarian conditions, and the inability of this small area to absorb large numbers of displaced people.⁵⁵ This approach only leads to forced, catastrophic, unprecedented demographic changes. The town of Al-Mawasi is a small town, 1 kilometer wide on the coastline, and 14 square kilometers long, which will certainly not accommodate the groups of newly displaced people from Khan Yunis or the displaced people who fled from the north.⁵⁶ It also does not have any humanitarian or livelihood requirements because it is a semi-desert region that is developmentally poor.

All of the above-mentioned cannot be in isolation from attempts to push internal displacement into external migration through (unofficial) Israeli pressure on Egypt to accept the displaced from Gaza,⁵⁷ which is presented (in theory so far) as “temporary displacement” with the aim of “protecting civilians.”⁵⁸ The selection of this area may not seem random in light of the systematic displacement historically since the beginning of the aggression. In this context, the occupation began using an additional method to engineer the transfer, by dividing the Strip into numbered “blocks”, accompanied by a call to the residents of each “block” to leave it to another “block”, threatening its residents that it is “the only way to maintain their security, their lives and the security of their families.”⁵⁹

49 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/if-there-is-hell-on-earth-it-is-north-of-gaza-un-spokesman/3049812>

50 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/if-there-is-hell-on-earth-it-is-north-of-gaza-un-spokesman/3049812>

51 <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/postar.aspx?lang=ar&ItemID=4635>

52 https://mas.ps/cached_uploads/download/2023/11/27/gaza-war-brief6-arb-1701078390.pdf

53 <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/articles/c0j25757989e>

54 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/6/how-israel-is-squeezing-1-8-million-palestinians-into-an-airport-sized-area#>

55 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/6/how-israel-is-squeezing-1-8-million-palestinians-into-an-airport-sized-area#:~:text=Israel%20has%20declared%20a%20mere,size%20of%20London%20Heathrow%20Airport>

56 https://www.btselem.org/arabic/publications/summaries/200303_al_mawasi#

57 <https://www.ft.com/content/75971d8b-e2fd-4275-8747-0bd443673483>

58 <https://www.alhurra.com/israel/2023/12/03>

59 <https://www.idf.il/ar/>

On the other hand, statements by extremist politicians and leaked documents from the Israeli Ministry of Intelligence revealed real Israeli intentions to create the appropriate conditions to permanently displace part of the population of the Gaza Strip after the aggression to Egypt through three stages: the first is erecting tents in Egypt and opening “humanitarian corridors”, and then building cities in the northern Sinai desert peninsula.⁶⁰ With this vision of genocide, history repeats itself with the tents once again turning into refugee camps under the name of “cities” in this case, and the demographic component of the Gaza Strip changes once again by the displacement of its population, who are mostly refugees. In a broader context, the Israeli Minister of Intelligence called on the international community to encourage the resettlement of Palestinians in their countries instead of donating money to Gaza Strip reconstruction projects,⁶¹ which refutes any Israeli attempts to justify the displacement and deportation that occurred under the pretext of buffer and safe zones for civilians.

It may be too early to predict what will happen after the aggression, but the current economic and development indicators, without reaching the expected demographic catastrophe ceiling, pose a risk to the demographic indicators of the Gaza Strip. It is expected that poverty will rise to two folds of its previous level (45%), and the Human Development Index will witness a decline that may take the Strip back more than 16 years.⁶² This is added to the expected effects on the health, educational, and economic infrastructure due to the widespread destruction of facilities, all of which exacerbate the already existing socio-economic conditions due to the siege and the inability to fully recover after previous attacks.

The state of ongoing genocide on the one hand, and the systematic destruction of all vital infrastructure with the forced need for displacement it creates on the other hand, leads to a clear case of ethnic cleansing that is systematically practiced against the Palestinian demographic component, which reflects in the clearest possible terms the term “forced demographic transformation.” This aggression is nothing but a hideous representation of this historical trend of the Zionist project.

60 https://www.calcalist.co.il/local_news/article/rj2mplngp

61 <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-773713>

62 <https://www.undp.org/publications/gaza-war-expected-socio-economic-impacts-state-palestine>

The Main Demographic Indicators in Palestine

Population Projections (1000) until 2030								
Year	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Palestine	5483	5613	5745	5877	6014	6156	6298	6443
West Bank	3257	3326	3395	3465	3537	3612	3687	3762
Gaza Strip	2226	2287	2349	2412	2477	2544	2611	2681

Source: PCBS, demographic projections shared with MAS.

Unemployment by Gender for Age Group (15-24), 2018-2022										
Region	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
	females	males	females	males	females	males	females	males	females	males
Palestine	75.20%	40.00%	67.10%	34.70%	70.00%	36.60%	42.90%	22.40%	57.00%	31.90%
West Bank	55.30%	25.70%	52.50%	20.60%	55.00%	23.60%	28.90%	12.40%	39.80%	19.40%
Gaza Strip	92.20%	71.80%	85.60%	62.70%	92.00%	66.30%	65.00%	41.90%	87.00%	57.20%

Source: Labor Force Data for several years – PCBS.

Percentage of Poor Palestinians by Region, 2017				
Region	poverty		extreme poverty	
	Consumption	Income	Consumption	Income
West Bank	13.90%	24%	5.80%	15.10%
Gaza Strip	53%	67.60%	33.80%	53.90%
Palestine	29.20%	41.10%	16.80%	30.30%

Source: PCBS. Main results of living standards in Palestine (expenditure, consumption, and poverty), 2017.(Ramallah - Palestine 2018).