



Parot Kdoshot, Chapter 76.

“Netanyahu is not the only one who failed, Bennett and the protest movement failed as well. The two-state solution they tried to repress will now return in a huge way.” Shaul Arieli discusses the shattering of the “Conceptions” and some other myths about us and Gaza.

By Yizhar Be'er

Translated by Galia Bar-On

Language Editor: Sigal Omer Sharon

Introduction:

Dr. Shaul Arieli served 25 years in the army in the Paratrooper Brigade. He was the commander of the Northern Brigade in Gaza, with the rank of colonel, and the last IDF brigade commander inside Gaza City. Afterwards he served as the head of several directorates responsible for negotiations with the Palestinians in the Prime Minister's Office, during the Rabin, Peres, Netanyahu, and Barak administrations.

Currently, Arieli is Israel's leading authority on the history of the conflict between the Zionist movement and the Palestinians, since the Balfour Declaration (1917.) and on the agreements that were on the table, the borders, the security fence, and the various rounds of negotiations with the Palestinians. He published eight books and two atlases on these subjects.

Arieli has been insisting for more than 20 years that the two-state solution is the only way out of the conflict and argues that the end of the engagement on the issue is one of the reasons for the

Hamas attack on October 7th. Like Cato the Elder, Arieli has been repeating this idea over and over again, even when the two-state solution appeared to be buried dishonorably and he was called "A tireless anachronist". Now, following the war, he predicts that the two-state solution will be imposed on us by the reality.

Arieli analyzes the shattering of the "Conceptions." He explains the reason why the Gaza Envelope (Otef Aza) was established, even before there was a Gaza Strip. He talks about the developing religious war in Gaza and the terrible similarities between the Israeli and Palestinian sides; about the war's brutalities, which also took place here 75 years ago in acts of murder and rape of Arabs by Israelis, to such a degree that Ben-Gurion considered introducing the death penalty into the law. Arieli also offers options for "the day after." His claims are accompanied by data that demonstrate the depth of the crisis we are in and help us understand it.

We met twice last week: once at a lecture, which I recorded, that Arieli gave to refugees from one of the Gaza Envelope kibbutzim, Kibbutz Gevim, who are staying in Kibbutz Mizra, and again in a follow-up interview I conducted with him at my home.

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Dr. Shaul Arieli, Shalom.

Arieli: Shalom.

Are we witnessing an event that is fundamentally different from any other event in the history of the conflict since the Balfour Declaration?

Arieli: Yes. I think that the events of October 7th are equal in weight to two dramatic events that we have experienced in the hundred years of the conflict. The first event is of course the Yom Kippur War in 1973, which caused a significant upheaval in the Israeli consciousness, and which ultimately led to the desired outcome after the war. An outcome we could have achieved before the war, without the heavy price we have paid. The second event was the recognition of Israel by the PLO in 1988. It was a dramatic change that gave birth to the Oslo accords and the political process.

What is dramatic this time, to your opinion?

Arieli: The dramatic issue is that this event, which is equivalent to the Yom Kippur War, can ultimately lead to the fulfillment of the real goal of the State of Israel: the resolution of the conflict with the Palestinians. This event can bring the two-state solution back to the forefront, based on the same parameters we used in the negotiations with the PLO, and according to international resolutions that were accepted until 2008.

Do you mean to say that Sinwar's grand strategic move could take the conflict out of the status quo of stalemate in which it has been stuck?

Arieli: Yes, but there is still a fundamental difference. Hamas's strategy is different from the strategy and agenda of Sadat at the time. Sadat did not seek to destroy the State of Israel, he wanted to get Sinai back. He was willing to recognize Israel, and proposed a peace agreement as early as 1971-1972, which Golda rejected. In the case of October 7th, Hamas's strategy and agenda are the destruction of the State of Israel, not living alongside it. But what can happen is that a silver lining will be found in the cloud. This attack, for which we paid such a high and completely unnecessary price, will ultimately lead to the two-state solution. Not with Hamas, but with Fatah-PLO or any other legitimate representative who will come forward after the elections by the Palestinians.

This idea of the two-state solution has been buried countless times during the last 20 years, and it seems to me that you are the last Mohican, who remained on the hill and shouted: "This is the only solution, and it is possible." Following the October 7th events, do you believe that this is the only possible idea for a settlement with the Palestinians?

Arieli: What I have argued all these years is that the physical-spatial feasibility to separate us from the Palestinians exists, contrary to what the public thought. However, I agree with others that there is no political feasibility because of the standpoint of the Israeli government, led by Netanyahu. The real question is what is the vision? My vision is the established, accepted Zionist vision. I see the State of Israel as a democratic state with a Jewish majority that needs to preserve its Jewish national characteristics. Therefore, the only possibility to fulfill this vision is the two-state solution. That is why we need to strive for it. We need to strive for it and fulfill the Zionist vision through it.

The obstacle to this vision was the political system, whether it was Netanyahu or Bennett, and those who surrounded them. That was my war. And I think this understanding is coming back today. The dreams that existed about a confederation, a federation, or one state, people understand today that these things are impossible, given the pain and suffering that both Israelis and Palestinians inflicted upon one another during all these years.

Therefore, the solution requires a separation into two states. Political and physical separation is essential, although it is important to maintain normal human relations because we live on the same piece of land, and we have a common interest in managing several things together as well. I tried to give the Israeli public the understanding that in contrary to what was prevalent in Israeli public opinion for years—that Gaza is a separate episode that no longer belongs in the picture—we have come to realize that Gaza is a significant part of the problem, and therefore it must also be a part of the solution.

The next part is based on a conversation I recorded, which Arieli had with Kibbutz Gevim refugees who are staying in Kibbutz Mizra in the Jezreel Valley.

The birth of the Gaza Envelope (Otef Aza)

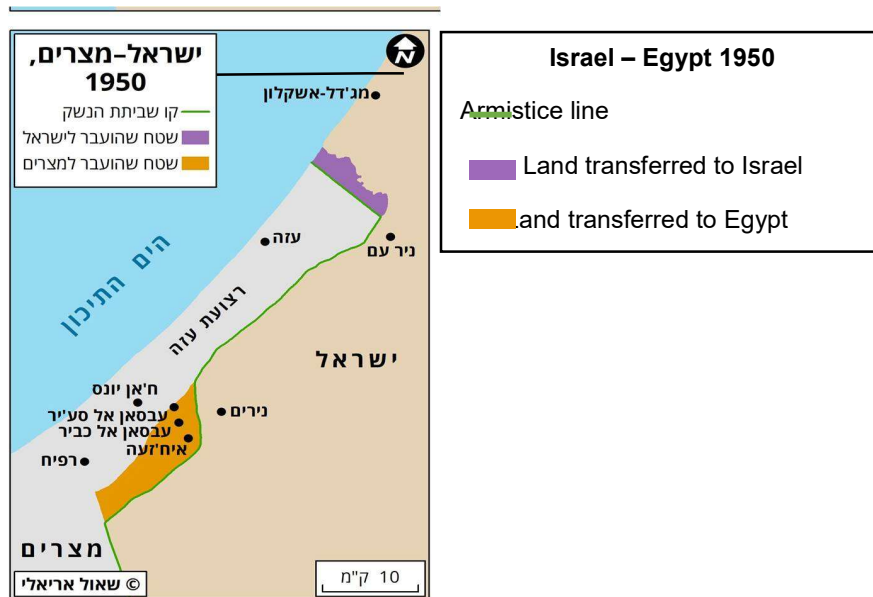
I prefer to use the term Western Negev rather than Otef Aza. It started as a response to the Peel Commission map from 1937, which determined that this entire region, the Western Negev, and the entire Negev in general, would be part of an Arab state that would be annexed to Transjordan under the leadership of King Abdullah.

That map shocked the Jewish community and the Zionist movement. Based on the insights that came up, it was understood that the partition plan would be based on the layout of the Jewish settlements. And so, the Negev, which we thought would not escape from us, escaped with the Peel Committee's decision, and we wanted to ensure that it would not escape in the future, and this is how the settlement of the Western Negev began.



Peel Commission map, 1937

The first settlement of the Western Negev began in 1943, with the three outposts (mitzpim) in the Negev that we see here, Gvulot, Beit Eshel, and Revivim. These outposts were used as research stations that tested the feasibility of agricultural settlements in the Western Negev. At the end of Yom Kippur, 1946, 11 famous settlements were founded, among them Be'eri and Nirim, which largely gave us the Western Negev in the U.N. partition plan.



This agreement was called the Compromise of the Hour, and it took place in February 1950. Between 1949 and 1967, you can see the armistice agreements here, and you can see the Strip. The strip is under Egyptian control, but Egypt does not annex it, unlike the annexation of the West Bank by Transjordan, by Abdullah I. Since Egypt is a member of the U.N. and did not want to violate Article 2 and so on, she appointed a military governor and held Gaza, as they say, out of sight and out of mind.

Why was the settlement on the Gaza border thickened?

All the green areas on this map were planned to be part of the Arab state according to the partition plan and were conquered by Israel in the War of Independence, but Israel quickly applied Israeli law to them. We were worried that these territories would be transferred by some kind of agreement or under international pressure back to the Arabs in one way or another, or that the Palestinian refugees would return there. Therefore, in the 1950s, also relating to the massive immigration of Jews from North Africa and some European countries, Israel founded an array of settlements that you can see here. The first line was the kibbutzim, such as Nahal Oz and Kfar Aza. Nahal Oz, for those who remember, was the first NAHAL outpost. The second line was of agricultural Moshavim for immigrants from North Africa, Kurdistan, and Iran. The third line was the development towns that we know better today as Ofakim, Sderot, and Netivot. And so it happened, as we can see, all over the country.



And this how the Fedayeen was born:

Between 1949 and 1956 this region, like other areas in the Western Negev, suffered greatly from the Fedayeen. What was the origin of the Fedayeen? Contrary to what most of us learned at school, we did not consider the land that belonged to the villages that remained in our territory and which we destroyed. The villages that remained in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank also lost part of their lands inside Israel, such as Beit Lahia, Beit Hanun, Abbasanim, and so on.

During the 1950s, the IDF was reduced by almost 90 percent, there was no fence, and there were almost no Israeli settlements along the border. What we call Fedayeen, are refugees who tried to return to their villages. Later, the Fedayeen expanded and got involved in espionage and sabotage, for the benefit of the Jordanian or Egyptian intelligence.

You can look into statements that tell the real story. For example, the reaction of Moshe Dayan, the commander of the Southern Command, to the criticism he heard from Moshe Sharet about the fact that we were killing too many unarmed refugees, which caused an outcry around the world.

He said in 1954: “[...]and on the other side, there are 200,000 hungry Arabs, and they cross the fields, and we shoot them, will this stand up to criticism? The Arabs cross the border to recover the crops they left in the abandoned villages, and we get them to step on landmines, and they return with amputated arms and legs... Will that stand up to criticism?” But he also said, “Guys, I have no other way to protect Israel’s borders. If we will not do it,” he said, “tomorrow there will be no borders for Israel.”

Professor Yoav Gelber describes these things in detail, in his masterpiece, the book “Komemiyut (sovereignty) and Nakba,” where he says exactly the same things about the refugees who tried to

return to their homes. (In English: *Palestine 1948: War, Escape and the Emergence of the Palestinian Problem*,).

Why am I highlighting this point? Because we must learn and try to understand the picture as a whole, how the Palestinian sees things when he sits in Gaza. If anyone followed some of the videos or, for example, the phones we intercepted, they say there: "We freed the occupied lands" or "We returned to our lands." Like the guy who called his grandfather and told him these things.

The Israeli response included the well-known retaliatory operations in Gaza and all over Israel's borders. What stopped this phenomenon was the Kadesh War (the Sinai Operation), Operation Kadesh in 1956, after which Israel occupied the Strip, held it for a total of five months, and under pressure from the superpowers, got out of there in March 1957.

The only thing we got in return was the deployment of U.N. observers along the border. But this force was pulled out on the eve of the Six-Day War following Nasser's instruction.

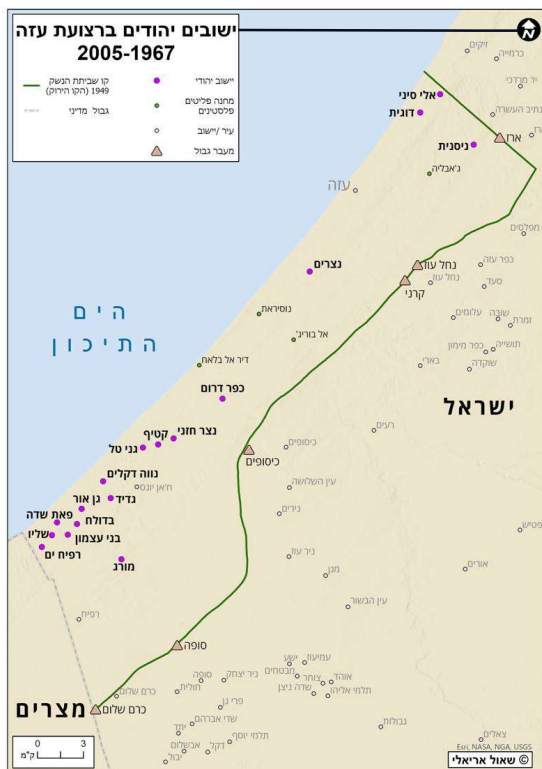
This is how we were left alone with the simmering Gaza:

In the Six-Day War, we returned and conquered the Gaza Strip and Sinai, but in 1978 we signed the first framework agreement for peace with the Egyptians. The agreement was divided into two: The first part talks about Palestinian autonomy and this is the reason why Gaza remained in Israel's hands. The Egyptians were never interested in Gaza. Sadat was not interested in Gaza and insisted on returning to the international border. Israel, on the other hand, led by Begin, demanded Gaza and the West Bank with the plan to implement autonomy there. Begin thought that after five years we would annex the territories and even give citizenship to the Arabs. Very quickly he realized that it would not work out and by 1982, we've killed that agreement.

On the left side of the map, you see all the withdrawals. In Sinai, we established what we called Pithat Rafiach (Rafah Gate) on the Gaza border, and several other settlements such as Neviot and Di Zahav along the Red Sea. Following the agreement and its implementation, some of the settlements that were in Pithat Rafiach moved to the Gaza Strip, such as Elay Sinai in the northern part. Some of the settlements went to the Envelope (Otef), such as Holit, Sufa, Talmay Yosef and Ein Ha'Bsor.

Israel did not annex the Strip, even though all the Israeli governments from 1967 to 1992 accepted an official government resolution to annex the Strip, on one condition, that we settle the refugees issue first. Luckily, we didn't settle it, so we didn't annex the Strip. What did we do? The Strip remained under military rule and was managed according to warfare laws. An occupied territory. But we established settlements in the Strip.

Until 1982, we established 12 settlements, which were part of the so-called Gush Katif (Katif Block), and in the end, we reached 17 settlements that you can see here; Elay Sinai, Dugit, and Nisanit in the north. This was called the Northern Finger. The Israeli settlement plan in the Gaza Strip was called the Five Fingers Plan of Ariel Sharon. The idea with these fingers was to dissect the Strip into separate areas that could be controlled using a relatively small number of people. The idea was to separate Israel from Gaza with the Northern Finger. The Second Finger, which should have been the most significant, but did not grow to be so, was the Netzarim Finger, in the area of Nahal Ha'Bsor and Nahal Aza. The Third Finger of Kfar Darom was not too successful either. The Fourth Finger was between Khan Yunis and Rafah, where the heart of Gush Katif was located, and the Fifth Finger was Pithat Rafiach (Rafah Gate) which was supposed to separate the Gaza Strip from the Sinai Peninsula.



Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip
1967-2005

Disengagement and Siege:

Another milestone was the 1993 Oslo Accords, the so-called framework agreement. The first milestone was the Cairo Agreement, in May 1994. What did this agreement say? It transferred the Gaza Strip and Jericho to the Palestinians. In the Gaza Strip, Israel transferred 83 percent of the Strip to the control of the Palestinian Authority with all its residents. The settlements remained under our control.

Below in white is the central part of the settlements in the Gaza Strip, Gush Katif. You can see Kfar Darom, Netzarim, and finally the Northern Block. The other milestone was the Disengagement of 2005. The idea was to evacuate all 17 settlements and deploy the IDF around the Strip. However, the Disengagement was carried out as a unilateral move so as not to create any momentum for a political process with the Palestinians.

Professor Arnon Sofer said the following in an interview with the *Jerusalem Post*, as well as in a conversation he had with Sharon: “When two and a half million people are imprisoned in the enclosed Gaza”—this is exactly the number of Gazans today—“It is going to be a human catastrophe. With the help of the fundamentalist Islam, these people will become even worse animals than they are today. The pressure on the border will be terrible. This is going to be a terrible war.” This means that the idea that you could isolate Gaza from the issue and not let it develop, led to the things that we now know.

The present picture in the Gaza Strip and the Western Negev:

The Gaza Strip, as you can see, is an area under the control of Hamas, but the entire Envelope is under Israeli control, by land, air, and sea. The Strip’s area is very small, less than 400 square kilometers, which is 1.2 percent of British Mandate Palestine (pre-1948), but it is the center of 40 percent of the Palestinian population in the territories. Today, two and a quarter million people live in the Gaza Strip. The fertility rate there is indeed high, but on the decline, and there is also negative migration. Gazans go to all kinds of places. For example, today there are already close to 200,000 Palestinians in Turkey, one of their destinations.

There are 8 large cities in the Strip, the largest and most central of which is Gaza City. It is the largest Palestinian city in British Mandate Palestine. Larger than East Jerusalem, larger than Nablus, larger than Hebron. All three cities together reach the size of Gaza City. This city is the heart of the whole thing.

There are 8 refugee camps in the Gaza Strip. Seventy percent of the residents of the Strip are refugees. In 1948, there were 100,000 permanent residents in the Gaza Strip, and they absorbed 200,000 refugees. It caused a total economic collapse of the Strip ever since. That is why the role of UNRWA is so significant. UNRWA is a key player that organizes aid and relief for the Palestinian refugees and supports them in terms of medical services, education, and of course food, with monthly allowances of flour, oil, sugar, infant formula, and so forth.

Here you can see the refugee camps. There are 4 main refugee camps at the heart of the Strip: Nuseirat, al-Bureij, al-Maghazi, and Deir al-Balah. Those who have served in the Gaza Strip know that the camps are organized according to the villages, one block is the Masmiyya village, and another is the Burayr village. This is how they live, and this is why the family ties between them are so strong. In the north, there are 2 more famous camps, Jabaliya and Shati, and of course, Khan-Yunis and Rafah.

On the Israeli side, 4 regional councils have a border with the Gaza Strip. The northern council covers the coast of Ashkelon, which you see here in purple, and in the center is the city of Ashkelon, which used to be Majdal until 1948, and today is a large city of almost 190,000 inhabitants. The second council in the pink is Sha'ar Ha'Negev, in the center of which is what used to be a developing town and is now a city, Sderot, with 35,000 inhabitants.



The Gaza Strip
and Otef Aza (the envelope)

The blue is the religious-national council Sdot Negev, which is smaller, with Netivotat its center, which is relatively large, with close to 50,000 residents. The largest regional council is Eshkol. It runs along the entire Strip and covers a thousand square kilometers, one million dunams. Meaning, it is almost three times larger than the entire Gaza Strip and it does not have a central city. The fifth regional council, which does not have a border with the Gaza Strip but was hit like all the others in recent events, is called Merhavim, with Ofakim, a town of 36,000 people, in its center.

The idea of Hamas:

The core of Hamas originates from the activities of the Dawah, the charity and religious organizations that Israel vigorously supported in the late 1970s and 1980s. They were supposed to be the alternative to the Palestinian youth and the public's identification with Fatah. The movement was established in December 1987, under the leadership of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who was released in the Jibril deal.

This movement has two main arms, the political arm and the military arm. One must remember that a significant part of Hamas is based on relief and charity mechanisms, and this is how it is

perceived by some of the Palestinian public. In the world, especially in the Western world, Hamas is viewed as a terrorist organization for all intents and purposes, but some countries, for political reasons, consider it a legitimate movement, such as Iran, Russia, Turkey, China, and most Arab countries.

There are significant differences between Hamas, ISIS, and Al-Qaeda. I won't go into it because Hamas is more particular due to its "Palestinian-ness." It is also more pragmatic and can change its positions and adapt to the internal Palestinian system. Hamas is waging a struggle for the primacy of leadership against Fatah, based on the non-recognition of Israel.

Musa Abu Marzouk said this in 2007, when he was the deputy of the head of the political bureau of Hamas: "Why should anyone recognize Israel's right to exist, when Israel has never recognized the basic crimes of murder and ethnic cleansing through which it took over our towns and villages, our farms and orchards, and turned us into a nation of refugees? Why should the Palestinians recognize the monstrous crime committed by Israel's founders, which continues to exist through the modern, distorted, apartheid state... these are not empty questions, and our refusal to abandon the victims of 48 and their descendants is not a refusal for its own sake."

We need to understand what the Palestinian narrative is and how they see and interpret the reality and the events that happened here.

Who will win the Palestinian elections?

In the debate about who will win the elections, Fatah or Hamas, things are changing. According to surveys conducted by Dr. Khalil Shikaki, we see that in 2021, two years ago, Fatah was the one who would have won the elections in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, by twice as much as Hamas. But a year later, we see that there is a tie between them. The rest support the so-called independents.

This means that Ismail Haniyeh, who is the chairman of the political bureau, and the head of Hamas, would have won the elections against Abbas. Another phenomenon that characterizes not only Gaza but also the West Bank, in a survey conducted before the events in the south, we can see the increase in support for the armed resistance against Israel, what we call terrorism. But still, 31 percent support a peace agreement and the two-state solution. The rest have not yet decided what they will be when they grow up.

Hamas structure:

The political arm shapes the positions, dictates the activities, authorizes, raises money, and so on. The political arm is based on a political bureau, headed by Ismail Haniyeh and consists of 18 members, 6 members from each region, Gaza, the West Bank, and abroad. It represents everyone, including, of course, the refugees. Here you can see most of the people who are members of the political bureau today, the most prominent is Musa Abu Marzouk, who was the first head of the bureau, then a deputy, and Khaled Mashal, who was for years the head of the bureau. We tried to eliminate him in Jordan, but we were not so successful.

Yahya Sinwar is the head of Hamas in Gaza, and Saleh al-Arouri is the representative of the West Bank (assassinated on January 2, 2024.). The political bureau is elected by the General Shura Council, which consists of 45 members, 15 members for each of the three regions I mentioned earlier, and the one who heads them is Ahmad Bahar from Gaza. Two and a half weeks ago, Israel killed the head of the Shura in Gaza, but not Ahmad Bahar. Hamas, although it is a fairly homogenous group, is controlled by the political bureau, but within the bureau, there are power struggles for the leadership. These struggles are also influenced by countries in the region, according to each country's interests.

Yahya Sinwar, the head of Hamas in Gaza, is supported by the Egyptian axis. Khaled Mashal is supported by the Qatari-Turkish axis. He also sits there most of the time. By the way, most of Hamas leadership sits in Doha-Qatar and occasionally skips, as it skipped to Istanbul on the eve of October 7th. Saleh al-Arouri, who sits on the Iranian-Shiite axis, and manages the relationship with Hezbollah, is the only one who does not live in Doha.

Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the political bureau, sits in Qatar, but he is not a heavyweight. He was a compromise appointment at the time, and although I talked about the significance of the political arm, Mohammed Deif is the commander of the military arm in Gaza, and he got his say because he is the commander of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, he has his weight, and sometimes he can block the moves of one of the other camps.

These people benefit from a lot of money that has been channeled either through aid to Gaza or through the taxes they have collected for years from the smuggling of goods into Gaza. You can see the numbers here. Khaled Mashal sits on a personal capital of between two and five billion

dollars, Ismail Haniyeh and all the rest have a personal capital of between three and five or ten million dollars. Their children study in good schools, and they all spend time in the hotels of Doha, Istanbul, or Beirut.

Another significant milestone for Hamas was in 2006, when Hamas decided to join the elections campaign to the Palestinian Authority, and the Parliament, and Hamas won the elections. Hamas's goal is completely clear and was stated at the time by the head of the political bureau, Khaled Mashal: "Hamas aspires to spread its patronage over the affairs of the Palestinian people in all its locations and bear national responsibility within the framework of the Palestinian leadership." In simple language: We are replacing Fatah, the PLO.

This was the idea in 2006 and for that reason, they entered the elections with the momentum that claimed that the Israeli withdrawal and the disengagement plan were credited to Hamas, and secondly, the corruption that existed at that time, as it always has, in the Palestinian Authority. This winning in the elections, led to a conflict with Fatah and eventually, in 2007, Hamas took over the Gaza Strip and created the split between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, between the two parts of the PA.

What is less known is that the Palestinian Authority pay the budget of the entire Gazan establishment. Why? Because the Palestinian Authority receives most of its money, you will soon see some graphs in this regard, from taxes that Israel collects for the PA. The PA taxes that are paid by the Gazans who bring in the goods. And so, the entire operation that is run by the establishment, something like 15,000 to 20,000 people, which was once 70,000—teachers, doctors, nurses—all of them receive their salaries from the PA who resides in Ramallah.

The issue of Hamas pragmatism is expressed, among other things, in the political document from 2017, which some saw as a replacement for the difficult Hamas Covenant that came out in 1987. Without getting into details, the essential difference that can be noted regarding this document is that Hamas cut itself off, so to speak, from the parent movement, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and changed its priorities. Hamas became first Palestinian and only then Islamic, which in the original Covenant was the other way around.

No strategic discussion ever took place:

It is impossible to understand Israel's policy, Netanyahu's policy during the past 15 years about the Gaza Strip, without understanding his basic position regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the possibilities of settling it. In this matter, Netanyahu's policy was very clear from the first moment. There will be no Palestinian state. He sees it as a deadly threat to the Jewish state. During all his terms, he repeated and announced it, and of course, with his growing confidence came appetite, and very quickly he switched to the approach of annexing the West Bank.

Thus, to ensure that this reality is maintained, a dual policy is implemented, one is called the differentiation strategy between Gaza and the West Bank, and the other is the creeping Israeli annexation strategy by the construction of settlements. The differentiation strategy says the following: if I want to avoid a Palestinian state, I need to ensure that there is not a single Palestinian address, and if I create a split and preserve it between Gaza and the West Bank, there is no single Palestinian address. If I strengthen Hamas, I weaken the PA, I weaken the PLO, and I have no partner for a political process.

He says about Hamas, , the policy was to strengthen Hamas to the level that it can weaken the PA in the West Bank as well, that it can apply its rule to other organizations in the Gaza Strip, and that it can manage the day-to-day life of the Palestinians in the Strip, but it is not strong enough to threaten Israel. And so, in one swoop, he changed all of Israel's moves and policies. As Gadi Shamni said, "When I was commander of the Central Command in 2009, Netanyahu became prime minister for the second time and at that time we ran a system of sanctions against Hamas, but Benjamin Netanyahu stopped everything."

Netanyahu himself also said this clearly, and everyone likes to mention his statement in the Likud Center, "Those who oppose a Palestinian state should support the flow of funds to Hamas. The maintenance of the separation between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza helps us prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state. A strong Hamas helps us prevent a Palestinian state."

The Palestinians are not idiots, absolutely not, and they understand this issue, and the one who said it sharply recently in an interview with Al-Arabiya was (Khaled) Mashal. The interviewer tells him: "Netanyahu said that, thinking that it would deepen the internal Palestinian division. They were those who enabled you to establish yourselves and reach this level in the first place."

So, Mashal responded: “Israel sought to stabilize Gaza just above the threshold of death so that Gaza would not blow up in its face, just below a threshold of life with dignity. And Israel deluded itself that some money and facilitations would do the job.”

This policy was criticized by many people, and I also happened to take part in it. Five years ago, following the last operation that took place at the time, I wrote that the last ceasefire established Hamas’s status as the ruling address of the Gaza Strip. But, and I warned about it, as much as Israel works to maintain a political stalemate and erode what is left of the PLO’s authority, the day is not far away when the ambition of the former head of Hamas, Khaled Mashal, will become the harsh and uncompromising reality that Israel will have to face. Assuming that Hamas will succeed in doing it.

Also, this illusion of a policy that “a satiated neighbor is not a threat.” In recent years, we believed in laundered slogans of “economic peace” and “scaling down the conflict.” We thought we could isolate the Gaza Strip.

One can see that from 2019, Bennett is a full partner in this policy. Let’s not get confused, he is a full partner in this policy of Netanyahu, even in the year that he was the prime minister. We see that the willingness to allow entry of the Palestinian workers (from Gaza into Israel), was not to start some kind of a political process, but to what is called “give food and it will calm them down, it will contain the situation, and it will create a lever of pressure on the population for Hamas not to carry out violent actions.” Here you can see the number of permits and their implementations. On the eve of October 7th, nearly 20,000 Palestinian workers from the Gaza Strip entered Israel.

The Palestinian-Gazan dependency on Israel was also growing. We thought that in this way we could keep them, on a so-called short leash, with their use of the shekel, with the scope of imports into the Gaza Strip through Kerem Shalom, and other things.

But no one conducted real situation assessments or plans with the appropriate organizations about alternatives to Hamas rule, or how to deal with it. Do we just stay with the status quo? Because that’s what Netanyahu was striving for all along. And note here, in a study done by Dr. Maoz Rosenthal, from Reichman University. He collected all the tweets on Twitter of all the leaders of the political parties in Israel in the last decade about Gaza. Close to 67,000 tweets,

mind you. Not one of them referred to a long-term solution for Gaza. The only ones who spoke about Gaza were the Ministers of Defense, who addressed only the issue of terrorism.

That means that an examination of some kind of solution did not evolve in the Israeli public discourse, or through the leaders of the parties, because they thought that Gaza would one day be part of Egypt and that we should not deal with it, because it is no longer our concern. Even worse, out of 54 meetings of the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee in the current government, not a single meeting was dedicated neither to the discussion of Hamas in Gaza, nor to Hezbollah, nor to the readiness of the home front.

Why? Perhaps because Edelstein, who is the head of the committee, refused to do so because it would harm the judicial reform, I call it the coup d'état. Nor did any meeting of the subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that was supposed to deal with the home front readiness headed by Danny Danon, who replaced Dudi Amsalem, deal with it. That is why I ask, if they didn't deal with an alternative to the Hamas rule, then actually what plan does the government have for after the collapse of Hamas? They have not dealt with it at any level in the last ten years. But that did not stop Netanyahu from saying half a year ago, contrary to all the facts, in an interview he gave in April 2023, "We are of course preparing for every possibility" when nothing was done about it.

The decision plan of the extremists on both sides:

There is a terrible similarity between the messianic, religious, and fundamentalist movements and organizations on both sides according to the Smotrich decision plan, which Ben Gvir adopted. The plan suggests three options, a translation of the words of Maimonides and Joshua ben Nun upon entering the land of Israel: Those who want to flee, will flee; those who want to make peace will make peace but will be second-class citizens, and those who want to make war with us will do so and pay the price of a second Nakba.

From the other side, the same words, but from Hamas. The plan of the end of days for the Jews: The peace-loving among those who decide to surrender will be absorbed into Palestine as second-class citizens. Or they will get an extension, to immigrate. Whoever tries to flee, will be allowed to flee, unless he needs to be prosecuted, and whoever decides to fight, needs to be killed. Same thing, one on one.

You also see the statements of senior officials such as Ghazi Hamad, the Hamas spokesman. He says Hamas will carry out many more attacks like October 7th to achieve its goals because the goal is clear. Islamic Palestine between the sea and the Jordan River.

On the other side, you see here the “brilliance” of the Messianic ideas. Bezalel Smotrich says: "Maybe we should have received this terrible and painful blow to remember who we are and what we are." Not to mention Minister Eliyahu's brilliant assertion of an atomic bomb on Gaza as a possible course of action.

Netanyahu knows that their words are disconnected from reality, but he cannot separate them from the government because he needs them, you know exactly for what. Or Professor Yoel Elitzur, who explains that the massacre carried out by Hamas is part of a divine plan for Israelis “who bring calamities upon the people of Israel and thwart the divine plan of the beginning of salvation.” As if nothing had happened here in the last month. This is the government, and it continues to talk this way. And I only gave you a little taste of it.

The physical barrier failures:

What did we do with Gaza after all? We built three obstacles around the Gaza Strip. The first obstacle that was built in 1994 was on the green line, in contrast to what we built later in the West Bank. The second obstacle was built a few years later, and it was inside Israel's territory, for operational reasons of one type or another. This obstacle was better. Finally, we also built the 80-meter iron wall, in some parts to eliminate the threat of the tunnels. We thought we found an answer to all possible offensive moves from the Gaza Strip. And the assumption was that they could not dig attack tunnels and there were no more problems.

Quite a few opposed it, and I also authored an article six years ago, when it was built, and it was based on a large study I did together with Professor Gideon Biger on the subject of obstacles around the world. I wrote that “the history of building obstacles in Israel and around the world shows that there is no obstacle that can provide a complete solution as long as the motivation of those who seek to cross it is maintained.” And it doesn't matter if they were immigrant workers or terrorists.

We should have learned from the lessons of the first fence we built in 1994. We upgraded it all the time. Why? Because the intruders always found a way to deal with the innovation presented

to them. I also talked about this obstacle, which is mainly an underground wall against the tunnels, and I said that one penetration method can be quickly replaced by another. They did not bang their heads on the wall, and we saw exactly what happened. They went over the wall, easily.

Netanyahu's strategy of differentiation and strengthening of Hamas was walking on a tightrope from which we fell several times. This fall is reflected, repeatedly, in the military operations that Israel carried out in the Gaza Strip. You all know Operation Summer Rains, the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit in 2006, until Iron Swords. And these are only the main operations.

The Strip pretty much dictates our military actions and the Hamas mode of defense. The Strip is very narrow. Here it is 6 kilometers wide in total, and here it is 12 kilometers wide. It is built from two sandstone ridges, eastern and western, at a height of 80 to 100 meters, and in the middle, we have a shallow depression. Thus, there are two main longitudinal axes in the Strip. There is the coastal axis, which is controlled by the navy, so Hamas will not move any forces on it. Then there is the central axis that runs from Gaza to Rafah, the Tencher axis, if you can remember, road number 4, which crosses the Strip.

The first thing that Israel does during military operations accompanied by ground invasion, like now, is to cut off the north of the Gaza Strip from the south along Nahal Ha'Bsor, a.k.a. Nahal Gaza. Why? Because Israel focuses on Gaza City. Because Gaza City is the heart of the Strip. All the institutions are there, all the headquarters are there, the means of production are there, not everything of course, also in the south, but the heart is really in Gaza City itself.

And so, Hamas created a huge tunnel system with an investment of billions. It is estimated that there are 500 kilometers of tunnels in the Gaza Strip. I mean, if the strip is 60 or 56 kilometers long, consider that 10 tunnels cross the strip from north to south, on average. Every meter there is covered with tunnels, that's why you hear in the news now about hundreds of shafts that go into those tunnels, because that was their only way to deal with the Israeli air superiority and the shelling and bombing. You go underground, and under the ground, you can move forces, vehicles, classified and wired communications, and other things.

These military operations are extremely expensive for Israel. It is what we call asymmetric wars, Goliath fighting David. It costs a lot. Look here at the numbers and you can see the total cost of the various operations. By October 31, this war had already cost us 30 billion shekels.

The collapse of the status-quo concept:

This whole policy of falling off the same tightrope by conducting repeated operations served Netanyahu's policy. Why? Because it feels good to return to the warm bosom of the status quo. Because the status quo serves him electorally and serves his policy of not making any political move toward the Palestinians.

Almost ten years ago, I published an article in Ynet, and I will read it now because it is relevant to understand where Netanyahu may be heading with this war. "The status quo on which Netanyahu's policy was based in recent years does not reflect a true state of balance and security and political stability, but the opposite, it is an expression of the prime minister's deep fear of a political shift, that could have prevented the escalation we are experiencing these days. The status quo was an expression of mental stagnation on the Israeli side, which enabled the conditions that allowed Hamas to initiate the next flare-up each time. In his blindness, Netanyahu did not imagine that the punitive moves against Hamas in the West Bank, the disavowal of the Palestinian government that Hamas recognized, and the continuation of the siege on Gaza, led Hamas to renew the path of resistance and terrorism. It was the only tool left in Hamas possession. And so 'the day after' raises the following questions even more urgently: does he understand the escalation potential inherent in the fabricated status quo, and will he continue to implement all the wild plans of his party's ministers, Uri Ariel, then in the Jewish Home Party and so on, which negates any compromise and thus strengthens Hamas."

This was written nine years ago! And I was not alone on the scene. But the Israeli public, too, was not paying attention, and this has been repeated several times.

A religious war?

We can see the great religious weight of this event, which better explains Hamas and its motives and the issues of slaughtering babies, harming the elderly, and so on. We see here the extreme interpretation that Hamas gives to the verses in the Quran "And when it is up to me, we will roll your heads, you men, like gravel on the sides of the roads, and we will rape the women." (A saying that Nasser used in 1967). Or for example, in the Sword verse which says that all enemies

must be killed, and even the justification that was given to acts of rape by soldiers, which we witnessed in these events. You can see the relevant verses “And if you fear that you will not be able to do justice to your lawful wives, be content with the female slaves that you own...” and so on. Everything with a religious-Islamic basis in its most extreme interpretation, which is not accepted by most of the Islamic scholars.

(These last quotes were collected by Ini Abadi, who presented them in chapter 72 of Parot Kdoshot).

We also had acts of rape and murder in a war:

The acts of murder, slaughter, and rape are phenomena of war, which we also committed, although not in this war. As in the Quran, our Torah also permits and even praises such acts: the case of the "Pretty woman" in the book of Deuteronomy, which permits the raping of female prisoners of war; As well as Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu's interpretation of these words (Parot Kdoshot chapter 72).

I am talking about these phenomena mainly in the War of Independence and immediately afterward. Moshe Sharet said this at a government meeting in 1948: “I imagine that there have been revolutions in the world in which more terrible things have been committed. I imagine that our soldiers did not shred pregnant women to pieces, nor did they rape young girls, nor did they systematically burn down houses with their occupants, although there were acts in all these areas.” (Moshe Sharet, 1948).

David Ben-Gurion in a meeting of what is called today “the General Staff,” then called the command group, spoke about grim phenomena that existed in 1949 and 1950. He said, “The young men coming from these countries (Muslim countries) should be educated... not to seize an Arab girl, rape her and murder her.” (DBG 1951). At a government meeting in 1951, the government discussed bringing back the hanging sentence, because David Ben-Gurion said: “The situation is horrifying in two areas, murders and rapes...” (of Arabs and Arab women.) These grim acts, despite all the differences, also existed on our side. Of course, we are talking 75 years ago, but we must understand that in war these things happen, and this is how Hamas perceives it, unfortunately.

Key insights from October 7th?

Both Netanyahu's and Bennett's strategy of differentiation and strengthening the wall failed miserably. The policy of ignoring the consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict failed here as well.

One must say honestly: this is one of the worst failures of the protest leaders in Israel against the coup d'état. They pushed the conflict aside, pushed the confrontation to the corner: "We'll deal with it later. First, the democratic issue." No matter how many times they were told otherwise. Until it blew up in our faces.

But of course, the main blame lies with the Netanyahu governments.

Even this concept, which was led at the time by Aviv Kochavi, the former Chief-of-Staff, about a small and lethal army, kind of collapsed as well. Why? Not because of the technology. The technology is top-notch. But because we have a situation today that along the borders, we have offensive capabilities of terrorist organizations of above a brigade level, that can carry out such operations. And that is why the concept that with fences and obstacles, we can stop this problem without deploying forces, what we used to call routine security patrols... To all this, we need to wake up again.

We know that the IDF cannot deploy enough forces along the security wall, and it is a fact that the security wall that we built in the West Bank like crazy—a 500-kilometer-long obstacle—is a barrier that we do not have enough forces to protect. So, over the past 5 to 7 years, the Palestinians have blown a thousand holes in the Gaza fence, and to make that barrier effective, the entire training system of the IDF was stopped and soldiers were deployed along it. We have been fighting this nonsense for years, and this is also the conclusion they arrived at, to shorten the length of the barrier in the West Bank and close the holes that remained there, the main holes that remained opened there, because of pressure from the settlers.

Another important and big issue is that Israel's deterrence ability was damaged. If an organization like Hamas allows itself with 30,000 fighters, without sophisticated weapons, to penetrate 30-40 kilometers deep inside Israel, we have a problem with deterrence, and we must admit it.

Secondly, our independence of decision making regarding our actions was harmed specifically because of the American and European involvement.

. The enormous American hug will cost us. They approve our plans and more than that.

If Israel wants to make moves, and it needs to make long-term moves, not just Wham! Bam! Thank you, ma'am! it must have an international coalition. And an international coalition can only be formed if there is a clear political purpose based on international resolutions, mainly the promotion of the two-state solution. Without it, we will not have this coalition for long.

The Americans can be dealt with. Soon there will be elections in the U.S., and we see what is happening in the Democratic Party. But we need this issue because nothing else will work to create the same coalition.

Israel is waging a war on the consciousness of the world public opinion and in my opinion, it is making a big mistake because it assumes that it can market the events and war crimes of October 7th as the starting point. It doesn't work and we see it. The public in the world has been aware of the policy of rejection for 15 years and is of course not aware of all the facts and all the complexities. If we don't change this strategy, we will simply lose the support of the public with the pressure it exerts in the Western world on its governments.

Israel was unprepared for this change. No work was done here. I say this with full responsibility. Not one official government body of the State of Israel has done any work related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the State of Israel is unable to make a change now because it does not have a professionally prepared plan by its institutions. For a long time, Israel had no prime minister and no government qualified to lead this war, to lead this change, to lead the international coalition.

Hamas is more identified with characteristics of ISIS, despite the differences between them. But as I said, we will not be able to sell it for long, and the deterioration into a regional war still exists as a probability, which I estimate to be moderate, if we do not make mistakes with Hezbollah as a result of all kinds of "brilliant ideas" by this or that minister.

What should be done?

First, the concept that the Palestinian Authority will take responsibility, (I say) the Authority will not take responsibility. The Prime Minister, Mohammad Shtayyeh, said that recently. He said,

"The Palestinian Authority will not return to Gaza and manage it without a political solution in the West Bank, because it would be like riding in an F-16 plane or an Israeli tank. I disagree with the idea that the PA will take responsibility. Our president, Abu Mazen, disagrees with that idea. No man will accept such a thing. The Palestinian Authority will not return to control Gaza without a comprehensive arrangement in which the West Bank will be part of a Palestinian state."

Therefore, it is completely clear that those who fantasize about it should forget it. And I also spare you all the other brilliant ideas of pushing the Palestinians to Sinai or exporting them to Europe and all that.

We must go for a comprehensive plan that has three time slots. All of them should start now. In the short term, we have the diplomatic and military challenge of returning the kidnapped and POWs. In an overall deal, all the Palestinian security prisoners should be released, Israel owes it to the hostages after neglecting them. But Israel must destroy the political and military capabilities of Hamas. Hamas is a movement; it cannot be eliminated. It has outposts outside the Gaza Strip as well. It has them in the West Bank, in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and so on.

If Israel wants to survive in the Middle East, it cannot afford to have an organization that attacked it and committed such war horrors continue to exist alongside it.

The second thing, in the medium term which should start tomorrow, is rebuilding the Palestinian partner. To build someone that we can, at some point, talk to about a solution. It is what it is, not the best product on the market, but it is what it is. And this is the PLO, the Palestinian Authority. And it needs to be built.

How do you build it? You give it legitimacy. First, by providing a significant package that indicates political achievements, above all they must be territorial, because everything else is nonsense that we sold them, and they never bought. For example, creating territorial continuity, transferring areas C to A and B, and other things that build them up so that they can come to the Palestinian public and say that there are achievements in the political process.

After that, another year, a year and a half, go to elections. These elections are the ones that will legitimize the Palestinian Authority's return to the Gaza Strip. Without elections in which Fatah is elected and Hamas does not participate, they will not be able to return and manage the Strip. The elections will also give them the legitimacy to invite an international Arab force or another

international force to help them control the Strip in the interim until they take responsibility again. But it must be with elections, and Israel must allow and encourage these elections subject to agreements, including East Jerusalem.

In the long term, which also needs to start now, Israel needs to present the political purpose of everything it is doing now, and Israel, for those who don't know, refuses to do that. This is the big argument with the Americans. Ten days ago, the Israeli government met, the cabinet, not the government, and they decided not to decide. Just like that, the decision is not to decide. First, destroy Hamas, and then what?

How is the picture of the end of the war supposed to serve the political purpose if you don't know what the political purpose is, and what will happen the day after the defeat of Hamas? Smotrich will come and all the other guys will come, Strook and Rothman, and what will they ask for? To rebuild Gush Katif?

Yes, but it will go into implementation. So, what about the war? Without a political purpose, military actions have no meaning, it is just a rampage. Therefore, Israel should declare that ultimately the political purpose is to move toward a settlement of the conflict. Gradually, conditionally, in a controlled manner, over years, but this is the purpose. In my opinion, the best basis for this today is to accept in principle and fundamentally the initiative of the Arab League which is based on international resolutions, and the idea that in the end a demilitarized Palestinian state will be established alongside Israel.

It is a long process, after which there will be Palestinian elections in a year and a half, it will be possible to begin the negotiation towards an agreement, not only on a bilateral level but also on a regional level, to turn the Abraham Accords into something broader and more significant, and then go to a stage of gradual implementation, conditioned on performance, conditioned on security, conditioned on all these issues. If we do not have this package deal, I will not author the next article.

It will be very bad because it will end up in the same place. The Israeli public should demand is the replacement of this government and this prime minister because neither this prime minister nor this government can lead the necessary change.

How do you replace a government in the middle of a war?

There are all kinds of ways and among others, 200,000 people or 100,000 people who do not allow the people of this government move anywhere and leave their homes, and many other ways.

I always say, us, or rather, the young among us, if they don't understand that today, to save Israel, requires a sacrifice in the magnitude of the pioneers of the past, it will not happen. As sad as it sounds, it will not happen.

This was episode 76 of Sacred Cows, with Shaul Arieli on the shattering of the conceptions and some other myths about us and Gaza.

As always, we would be happy to receive help with this project, which is done entirely by volunteers, in English translation, video editing, or donations. Details in "Help and Donation" on the Sacred Cows website.

See you in the next chapters.

Additional articles relating to the "Conceptions" and the conflict, by Shaul Arieli:

- ❖ A Dose of Depressive Realism for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
- ❖ Thirty Years since the Oslo Accord: You Can't Cross a Ravine in Two Jumps
- ❖ Area C Will Never Be Part of Israel (with co-writers Sivan Hirsch-Hoefler, and Gilad Hirschberger)