



International Migration and Refugee Studies

**Faculty of Graduate Studies
University of Birzeit**

Birzeit, Palestine

Targeting Homes, Shelters and Shelter Seekers:

Israel's *raison d'état*, military doctrine and consistent practice

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***Birzeit Working Papers on
Displacement and Colonialism***

No. BZ-WP-2024-01

International Migration and Refugee Studies Program
Faculty of Graduate Studies
University of Birzeit
PO Box 627
Birzeit- Palestine
2024

**Birzeit Working Papers on
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31 December 2024

Abstract

Israel's founding military doctrine, expressed in its 1948 Plan Dalet, directs attacks on Indigenous civilian Palestinian homes and human settlements that forcibly displace inhabitants into columns and clusters of shelter seekers. Israeli forces often have bombed the displaced persons in flight and/or their places of refuge, including refuges that Israeli military commanders deem 'safe' or 'humanitarian' zones.

This article traces the pattern of Israeli forces applying their military doctrine in opportunistic phases, most dramatically manifest in the Nakba and two decades of serial wars against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. It presents serial examples that demonstrate how this military doctrine has evolved through various tactics and techniques, geographical scope, scale, intensity, rationale and technologies. While these attributes differ slightly over time, they remain consistent with military doctrine set in Israel's conquest phase (1946–53), institutionalized under a state ideology that aligns Israel's *raison d'état* with the serious crimes of apartheid, population transfer and, now, genocide, as currently charged before the International Court.

Keywords: military doctrine, population transfer, domicide, *raison d'état*, Zionism, Israel, Palestine

Acknowledgements:

Editorial Board:

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Website: <https://www.birzeit.edu/en/special-working-papers-series-addressing-themes-displacement-dispossession-palestinian-diaspora>

WORKING PAPER No. 01/2024

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Abbreviations

AI	Amnesty International
AI	artificial intelligence
AJ	Aljazeera
BtS	Breaking the Silence
CEDRE	Center for Documentation and Research
CoE	Council of Europe
EJA	<i>Environmental Justice Atlas</i>
EMHRM	Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor
<i>et al.</i>	and others
Europarl	European Parliament
FA	Forensic Architecture
GH	General Headquarters
GoI	Government of Israel
HAMAS	Islamic Resistance Movement
HIC	Habitat International Coalition
HLRN	Housing and Land Rights Network
HP	<i>Huntington Post</i>
HPC	Higher Planning Committee
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICAHD	Israeli Committee against House Demolitions
ICEJ	International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IDP	internally displaced person
IHL	international humanitarian law
ILC	International Law Commission
IOF	Israeli occupation force
IOI	Israeli Office of Immigration
JA	Jewish Agency
JNF	Jewish National Fund
JTA	Jewish Telegraphic Agency
JVL	Jewish Virtual Library
LAS	League of Arab States
LCDDE	Lemay Center for Doctrine Development and Education, Air University
LRCJ	Land Research Center - Jerusalem
MGoI	Military Government of Israel
NYT	<i>The New York Times</i>
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN)
oPt	Occupied Palestinian territory
PBS	<i>Public Broadcasting Service</i>
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
RSA	Republic of South Africa
<i>ToI</i>	<i>Times of Israel</i>
TRT	<i>Turkish Radio and Television (Corporation)</i>
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNRWA	United Nations Relief Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organization
WZO	World Zionist Organization

1. Introduction

During Israel's 2023–25 war on Gaza, reporters typically have observed that Israeli forces attacked civilians *even* in designated humanitarian safe zones (Wright: 2024; AJ: 2024b), suggesting an exception or aberration. More than just a series of shocking 'incidents,' the military practice is to attack the Indigenous population in their homes to evict and/or kill them, only to strike the survivors huddling in their refuge. This reflects a seamless and unitary standard of operation, aligned with Israel's political, legislative, judicial and development institutions. These coordinate to fulfill Israel's *raison d'état*: the removal of the Indigenous People, replacing them in their land with alien settlers, constituting the serious crime of population transfer (ILC: 1996; UNCHR: 1993; Haslam: 2002; CoE: 2011). The historic record is rich with evidence of the Zionist Movement promoting population transfer (Teveth: 1985; Masalha: 1989, 1992) as "the central task of the State [of Israel]" (GoI: 1952) and "the chief purpose and function of the State itself" (IOI: 1952).

Nor are these examples of a random failure to distinguish between civil and military targets in the conduct of war. More than 'collateral damage' from undisciplined military practice, Indigenous homes, shelters and displaced persons seeking shelter remain the explicit targets of Israeli military attack since Zionism conceived its colonial-settler state (Rodinson: 1967; Sabbagh-Khoury: 2022; Salamanca *et al.*: 2012); Veracini: 2006).

2. Theoretical Framework

Having evolved since its establishment in 1901, the parastatal Jewish National Fund (JNF) formalized the practice into permanent military doctrine (LCDDE: 2020)¹ as Plan D (or Plan Dalet), which JNF issued while Zionist militias were carrying out serial

¹ 'Doctrine' consists of fundamental principles by which military forces guide coordinated actions in support of national objectives. It may include terms, tactics, techniques, and procedures. Military doctrine constitutes official advice, but requires judgment in application. While doctrine is relatively enduring, policy is more mutable, if also directive. Policies may change due to changes in national leadership, political considerations, or for fiscal reasons. At the national level, policy may be expressed in such broad vehicles as presidential executive orders. Within military operations, policy may be expressed not only as a means of pursuing objectives, but also in rules of engagement.

massacres in Palestinian villages before the Zionist state's unilateral proclamation. On 10 March 1948, that military doctrine refined three previous conquest plans,² calling for Zionist militias to target all things Palestinian, specifically “the sources of livelihood and vital economic targets (water wells, mills, etc.); attack clubs, coffee houses, meeting places, villages and neighborhoods likely to assist in future resistance against Zionist colonization, etc.” (Slutsky: 1972; Khalidi: 1998; Pappé: 2007).

The Dalet doctrine has been “a strategic-ideological anchor and basis for expulsions by front, district, brigade and battalion commanders,” providing “*post facto* a formal persuasive covering note to explain their actions.” (Morris: 2004). It underlies the continuous operations of Israel's apartheid-chartered parastatal institutions—JNF, World Zionist Organization/Jewish Agency (WZO/JA), Mekorot and Histadrut—and their affiliates to acquire Palestinian land, property and natural resources; water; and human resources, respectively (Muhareb *et al*: 2022), exclusively to benefit colonial settlers endowed with ‘Jewish nationality’ status constructed under Israeli law (Tekiner: 1987, 1991; GoI: 1952a, 1952b, 1953, 1954, 1960) for those of “Jewish *race* or descent” (JNF: 1953). Plan Dalet and its associated regime have sought to replace the Indigenous People belonging to that land by:

“Destroying villages (by setting fire to them, by blowing them up, and by planting mines in their debris), especially those populations centers that are difficult to control continuously;

Mounting search and control operations according to the following guidelines:

- Encirclement of the villages, conducting a search inside them;
- In case of resistance, the armed forces must be wiped out and the population expelled outside the borders of the state” (Khalidi: 1998).

That pattern persists also across the spatial dimension through Israel's invasions of Lebanon and the Syrian Golan since 1967. Israel's ongoing genocide and domicide³ (Rajagopal: 2023; HLRN: 2022) in Gaza represent only the most-recent iteration of rigidly consistent military doctrine, most often applied outside the context of interstate warfare.

² The preceding Plan C added the gathering of data necessary for the successful performance of these actions, which would be collected in the village files, which contained lists of leaders, activists, “potential human targets,” and the precise layout of villages.

³ ‘Domicide’ is defined as the massive and deliberate destruction of homes, in order to cause human suffering.

The civilian consequences of this military doctrine have long been planned and discussed frankly among Israel's high officials. Nearly half a century ago, Israel's Chief of Staff admitted that, since 1948, "we have been fighting against a population that lives in villages and cities" (Gur: 1982). Israeli military analysts have concurred that "the Israeli Army has always struck civilian populations, purposely and consciously...the Army has never distinguished civilian [from military] targets...[but] purposely attacked civilian targets" (Schiff and Ya'ari: 1984). In October 2023, Israel's Intelligence Ministry bluntly announced the strategy to "expel all Palestinians from Gaza" (Abraham: 2013).

3. Case Studies and Discussion

Conquest, 1946–53

The ensuing pattern, unbroken since the 1948 War of Conquest (*al-Nakba*),⁴ is preceded by proto-state Zionist militias perpetrating at least 33 strategically located massacres in Palestinian villages between December 1947 and November 1948⁵ (Abu Sitta: 1998; Saleh: 2007). Their assaults on Palestinian cities, towns and villages caused 770–780,000 Indigenous Palestinians to flee as refugees (Abu Lughod).

Zionist Attacks on Palestinian Homes and Habitat during al-Nakba, early 1948		
Operation Harel	15–21 April	Haganah clearance of Arab villages near Latrun (Tel Aviv–Jerusalem) road (defeated)
Operation Bi'ur Chametz (<i>Misparayim</i> Plan)	21–23 April	Haganah capture of Haifa
Battle of Manshiyya	25–27 April	Irgun attack on the Manshiyya neighborhood of Jaffa, leading to British intervention
Operation Chametz	27 April–13 May	Haganah capture villages east of Jaffa
Operation Yevusi	22 April–2 May	Haganah to destroy villages surrounding Jerusalem
Operation Yiftach	15 April–15 May	Haganah/Palmach capture of Safad and destroy/depopulate eastern Galilee villages
Operation Matateh	3–4 May	Destroy villages connecting Tiberias to eastern Galilee (part of Operation Yiftach)

⁴ Arabic for 'catastrophe'.

⁵ These included Haganah, Palmach and Irgun carrying out 24 massacres in the north (Galilee), five massacres in the central area of Palestine, and another five in the south.

Battle of Safad	6–12 May	Palmach forces capture of Safad (part of Operation Yiftach)
Operation Maccabi	8 May	Haganah to destroy villages near Latrun to open route to Ramallah, north of Jerusalem (defeated).
Operation Gideon	11 May	Haganah capture Beit She'an and expel Bedouin
Operation Barak	10–15 May	Givati Brigade destroyed villages in Burair neighborhood (partially completed)
Operation Ben-Ami	13–14 May	Capture Acre and ethnically cleanse Galilee up to the Lebanese border
Operation Kilshon	14–18 May	Capture of homes in west Jerusalem
Operation Namel	22–23 May	Massacre of al-Tantura (near Haifa)

The Zionist militia, Haganah, later the core of the Israeli army, implemented this doctrine in at least 16 operations within the first year Zionists proclaimed their state (Pappé: 2007). In an orgy of domicile across historic Palestine, Israeli forces depopulated and then razed at least 531 Palestinian villages (Abu Sitta: 2007; Bronstein: 2007)⁶ in the area that the UN General Assembly (UNGA) proposed *ultra vires* (UNGA: 1947; Imseis: 2022; Kohen: 2009; Albanese and Takkenberg: 2020) to partition Palestine into a ‘Jewish state’ and an ‘Arab state’ within an otherwise-integral Palestine with “economic union” (UNGA: 1947).

The Zionist destruction of Palestinian habitation continued beyond the proposed “Jewish state” borders, evicting and demolishing at least 154–156,000 Palestinian homes,⁷ among an untold number of other structures. Israeli forces created a closed military zone over those localities to prevent displaced and refugee Palestinians’ return to their homes, imposing martial law over the surviving Palestinian communities for the next 20 years (Jiryis: 1969). JNF subsequently afforested most of

⁶ Bronstein cites: “678 Palestinian localities destroyed by Israel during the Nakba: 220 of them had fewer than 100 inhabitants; 428 had between 100 and 3,000; 30 towns and cities had more than 3,000 Palestinian inhabitants. 22 Jewish localities that were destroyed in 1948; some were rebuilt that same year.”

⁷ For housing units destroyed in the Nakba, we based the estimate on the number of expelled refugees divided by 5 (presumed average number of persons per household). Using Abu Lughod’s reliable figures (770–780K expelled), the resulting estimate would be 154–156K housing units, among other buildings. An absolute minimum round number would be 150,000. ICAHD (2020) cites 52,000 units destroyed. However, this estimate is approximately one-third of the total. Note it took the Israelis 15 years to demolish them all between the 1948 to 1967 wars.

those depopulated sites, transforming crime scenes into ‘public’⁸ green spaces (Braverman: 2009; Benjamin: 2011; Skidmore: 2019; *EJA*: 2022).

One ‘instance’ within the continuum was the Palmach 3rd Battalion’s emblematic 1 May 1948 attack on `Ayn al-Zaytūn village, 1 km north of Palestine’s Galilee town of Safad. The well-documented massacre (Khoury: 2006; Nasrallah: 2004) terrorized Safad’s inhabitants such that they scattered during the so-called Battle of Safad, which Zionists count among their “miraculous victories” (JVL: 2015).

Following their battle against Palestinian national resistance at Qastel (Abu Gharbiyya: 1993; Khalidi: 1998), Zionist militias were able to invade the international zone (*corpus separatum*) of Jerusalem on 1948, dispossessing 73,258 Palestinians of their homes and depopulating nearby villages on 27,273.5 ha of land by year’s end (Tamari: 2002). Zionist militias blew up many Jerusalem Palestinian homes after they bombed Samiramis Hotel (Karmi: 1994), threatening the same fate as Palestinians whom they recently massacred at Dhayr Yasīn (De Reynier: 1948), causing mass exodus. Israel’s Custodian of Absentee Property then confiscated, and Jewish soldiers and settlers looted and occupied some 10,000 spacious Palestinian homes in the newer city neighborhoods (Cattan: 1981; Aderet: 2020;).

In January 1949, shortly after signing Armistice Agreements (without Palestinian counterparts), the Government of Israel (GoI) conferred 100,000 ha of Palestinian refugees’ land and properties to JNF and, in October 1950, another 120,000 ha. At the time, a JNF spokesperson explained the tactical meaning of such land transactions as ensuring JNF “will redeem the lands and will turn them over to the Jewish people—to the people and not the state, which in the current composition of [surviving Indigenous] population cannot be an adequate guarantor of Jewish ownership” (JNF: 1951).

In 1951–53, Israeli forces targeted the southern Naqab, where mostly sedentary Palestinian Bedouin were scattered in small habitation clusters (Falah: 1989). Rather than ‘settling nomads,’ Israel evicted those Palestinians from their homes and lands, forcing them into an ‘enclosure’ (*al-siyāji*) on only about 10% of their traditional land

⁸ In Israeli parlance, ‘public’ and ‘national’ are adjectives effectively meaning Jewish only.

holdings, and clustering survivors into Israeli state-planned concentrations (*rekuzim*) and controlled townships, where they have faced incremental demolition and eviction ever since (Coon *et al*: 2010).

Already in 1946, JNF, JA, Haganah and Mekorot (Israel's 'national' water company) launched a coordinated "11 points" campaign to create as many settler-colonies in the Naqab for inclusion in the eventual Jewish state (Boelien: 1996). One such settler colony is Be'eri, which Ha-No'ar ha-Oved (Israel Working Youth Movement) founded as a kibbutz where Zionist settlers grabbed land in the night of 6 October 1946 (Helm: 2020). In 1948 military operations, Zionist forces expelled the Indigenous inhabitants and land owners of the Jabarat tribe from there to today's West Bank, and the smaller Hanajra group to today's Gaza Strip (Yahel and Kark: 2014).

In 1951, Israeli military and administrative authorities uprooted 11 tribes west of Bi'r Sabi` (Beersheva), making them landless overnight in an area JA had planned for the 11 Zionist settler colonies. In a bid to consolidate Israel's absorption of the entire Naqab into Israel, Zionist forces—rebranded as Israel Defense Forces (IDF) (PGoI: 1948)—then depopulated and demolished 108 villages and habitation clusters (Abu Sitta: 2010).⁹

By September 1953, IDF's General Headquarters (GH) ordered Unit 101¹⁰ to drive the Indigenous Bedouins beyond *al-siyāj* southward to Egypt's Sinai (Vardi: 2008). Israeli soldiers raided Bedouin settlements, shooting aimlessly, confiscating any arms and burning the fleeing Palestinians' homes and tents. For several days after, Unit 101 pursued the escaping Bedouin until they exited the Naqab (Abu Sitta: 2003), becoming stateless persons in neighboring territories: Egypt's Sinai, Palestine's Jordanian-administered West Bank and Egyptian-administered Gaza Strip.

⁹ Since many of these villages were demolished after the 1948 War of Conquest/Nakba, they do not always appear on maps of war-induced demolitions. The figure of 108 total localities depopulated and demolished is derived from the number of depopulated localities after 1948 in Bi'r Sabi` (Beer Sheva) District outside the border of *al-siyāj*.

¹⁰ Unit 101 was the main Israeli military formation responsible for retaliation (*tagmul*) attacks. The unit's doctrine followed the teachings of the British army, and specifically those of Orde Wingate, a British officer with Zionist sympathies. Unit 101 relied on small experienced forces and conducted guerilla attacks on the enemy's territory. The unit was dismantled and integrated into the Paratroopers after the Qibya massacre.

Tagmul operations (1951–56)

Simultaneously, IDF responded to any perceived resistance with *peulot tagmul* (reprisal operations, in Hebrew). Although officially against security and military targets, these operations prioritized attacking civilians and their habitat (Pappé: 2006). Between 1951 and October 1956 (when the Suez War erupted), Israeli soldiers retaliated against organized Palestinian resistance to Israeli military positions in recently captured Palestinian territories.

Tagmul operations were “to kill the maximum number of Arabs” (Vardi: 2008) in usually brief attacks that rarely involved face-to-face combat, thus minimizing dissent among Israeli soldiers (Hazkani: 2010). However, following Israel’s 1956 raid on Qalqiliya, the IDF ostensibly abandoned this tactic, instead pursuing full-fledged war with continuous territorial occupation (Vardi: 2008).

Early *tagmul* operations included a 6 January 1952 regular forces raid on Bayt Jala, in the Jordanian-annexed West Bank, now occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Supposedly in reprisal for an unresolved rape/murder of a Jewish woman in Bayit VeGan settler colony, Israeli soldiers blew up three Bayt Jala houses, killing seven civilian inhabitants (Morris: 1997; Hutchison: 1956). The practice then expanded in scope and intensity.

Cross-border operations

Unit 101 Commander Ariel (Scheinerman) Sharon’s petitioned to conduct *tagmul* operations when, on 28 August 1953 night, Unit 101 attacked UNRWA-administrated al-Buraij Refugee Camp, in Gaza, 2 km west of the demarcation line (Pappé: 2006). Sharon ordered his soldiers to forge ahead through the camp and withdraw only from the other side, attacking Palestinian refugees in their shelters. The UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) chief reported the ensuing massacre of 15–50 inhabitants: “Bombs were thrown through the windows of huts in which the refugees were sleeping and, as they fled, they were attacked by small arms and automatic weapons” (UNSC: 1953).

On 14 October 1953 night, Palestinian *fedayi`in* (commandos) killed a Jewish settler with two children while sleeping when they infiltrated Yahud. That settler colony arose from the site where the Irgun militia had attacked and depopulated the Palestinian village of al-`Abbasīyya, attacking villagers in a local coffeehouse and detonating homes on 13 December 1947. But IDF's High Command singled out the distant Jordanian-administered West Bank village of Qibya for *tagmul* "Operation Shoshana." Sharon personally ordered Unit 101 to achieve "maximal killing and damage to property," whereby troops broke into houses, "clearing" them of inhabitants with grenades and gunfire. A paratrooper company, equipped with 600 kilograms of explosives, joined Unit 101 in the attack. Sharon's soldiers detonated village houses, a school and a mosque, killing 69 Palestinian inhabitants, half of them women and children who died sheltering in the detonated houses (Morris: 1997).

Meanwhile, IDF fired at least 25 mortar shells from three sides of neighboring Budrus village, blowing up 41 homes and the village school, killing 42 villagers and wounding 15. UN observers noted that "Bullet-riddled bodies near the doorways and multiple bullet hits on the doors of the demolished houses indicated that the inhabitants had been forced to remain inside until their homes were blown up over them" (UNTSO: 1953; Khalidi: 1954).

Also emblematic is the 29 March 1954 raid on an Arab Legion base 4 km inside the West Bank at the village of Nahalīn. Varying testimonies put the death toll at 9–19 men, women and children as Unit 101 surrounded the village from three sides, then penetrated it, opening automatic-weapon fire, tossing hand grenades and blowing up seven houses, as well as the village mosque (UNSC: 1954; *JTA*: 1954).

In an unprovoked attack on 29–30 April night 1966, IDF claimed *tagmul* against Tal al-Arba`īn village, 4 km inside the West Bank. Israeli forces blew up about ten stone houses. Witnesses reported, "in some places, where a group of houses were close together, the destruction was so total that it was impossible to tell the exact number of houses involved." Israeli forces also carried out a massacre of 11 villagers, wounding three, all civilian farmers (UNSC: 1966).

On 13 November 1966, 3–4,000 Israeli forces launched “Operation Shredder” in a cross-border attack on al-Samu` village (pop. 4,000), in the then Jordanian-controlled West Bank. Israel’s massacre there was supposedly a *tagmul* response to a landmine explosion that killed three Israeli soldiers patrolling two days earlier near the West Bank border, but that incident was never investigated (UNSC: 1966).

IDF personnel carriers entered al-Samu`, firing in all directions, while troops advanced into the village and planted explosives so powerful that houses made from 50-pound stone blocks were shattered to bits. Israeli aircraft then bombed the village five times and launched three rocket attacks on vehicles until IDF withdrew at 09:45 AM (UNSC: 1966).

In al-Samu`, IDF destroyed 125 houses, two shops, a village medical clinic, a six-classroom school, and over 20 vehicles. Troops damaged at least 23 other houses, a dwelling tent and a mosque, killing four cows, a goat and eight monkeys, while wounding a camel. Eye-witnesses reported that, while IDF was killing innocent people and destroying property with tanks, artillery and air cover, soldiers “were celebrating all these crimes with joy and singing” (UNSC: 1966).

Other than ‘reprisals,’ the continuum of such Israeli military behavior suggests not to retaliate for resistance operations, or even criminal acts, as claimed at Bayt Jala and Yahud. Rather a pattern points toward civilian homes, shelters and shelter seekers as primary targets. As Israel’s *tagmul* operations intensified as cross-border attacks on the Jordanian-administered West Bank, escalating hostilities may have provoked the ensuing war (Ben-Yehûdā and Sandler: 2002).

The 1967 War

Whatever other pretexts for Israel’s 1967 military operations invading the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza Strip, IDF was unambiguous in its purpose to expel civilian population from the territory acquired by force. In addition to conducting chemical and concussion bombings against homes and shelter-seeking displaced populations, Israel’s army also loaded local inhabitants onto trucks, depositing them under guard across the Jordanian border (UNGA: 1967).

As ground forces swept across the West Bank, Israel's planes, guided by U.S. military reconnaissance (Green: 1984), dropped napalm on thousands of Palestinian refugees fleeing across Allenby Bridge into Jordan. By that method, they also depopulated `Ayn al-Sultān Refugee Camp near Jericho, which had housed 20,000 Nakba refugees. Jordanian Army survivors later testified that Israeli aircraft had napalmed entire field hospitals in the process (Forrest: 1971).

After the fighting ended, IDF completely destroyed three Palestinian villages Yalū, Bayt Nūba and Imwās, now landscaped as JNF-managed 'Canada Park.' Even some dutiful perpetrators of those operations in the 'Latrūn Salient' have questioned its moral and strategic justifications (Kenan: 1970).

When a Canadian journalist requested to visit, in 1967, Israeli occupation force (IOF) authorities refused, insisting "There isn't any Beit Nuba!" Nevertheless, he learned from survivors how Israeli bulldozers demolished houses atop less-mobile elderly villagers who perished under the rubble of their own homes (Forrest: 1971).

In the West Bank town of Qalqīliya, for example, IOF forcibly drove out many families after demolishing some 850 (42.5%) of the town's 2,000 homes. Also after the fighting ended, IDF attacked and depopulated other villages, including Bayt Liqya, Bayt Sīra and Banī Harīth, in the central region. In Hebron District, IOF troops destroyed more than 90% of the approximately 400 houses in Bayt `Awwa (population: 2,500), and damaged the rest. Nearby, IOF also completely destroyed Bayt Marsīm (population 500) (UNGA: 1967).

Many other rural and marginalized Palestinians who witnessed the expulsion of villagers in the West Bank, evoking their collective memories of 1947–48, also joined the exodus, fearing a similar fate, or worse. Under both direct bombardment and threats of the same, 57% of those escaping or transferred across the Jordan River reported intense Israeli bombardment as their reason for flight (Dodd and Barakat: 1968).

In prosecuting the 1967 War, Israeli forces expelled or displaced the vast majority of 135,000 Indigenous Syrians (109–120,000) of the Golan, preventing their return and

forbidding those remaining from entering their own country. After the *pre-emptive* 1967 War (Kutulus: 2007) on the Syrian Golan's two cities, 163 villages and 108 farms, Israel destroyed the main city of Quneitra and 134 villages, amounting to about 20,000 demolished homes¹¹ (Davis: 1983).

With the collaborating WZO/JA, bound by a common apartheid charter requiring the dispossession and exclusion of Indigenous Syrians (i.e., not being of “Jewish race or descent”), Israel's physical-planning regime perpetuates the assault on Golani households by systematically denying them building permits. This institutionalized material discrimination manifests also in the continuous demolition of Syrian structures, while facilitating illegal settler-colony expansion on land Israel illegally annexed in 1981 (Who Profits: 2016). WZO maintains this regime, imposing ‘administrative’ (effectively punitive) demolition orders on 80–90 Syrian homes as of 2016 (Europarl: 2017), thus complementing military doctrine.

Military Administration in oPt

With military occupation in 1967, Israel transplanted previous military-administration policy of demolition imposed on Palestinian Arab citizens (1948–66) across the Green Line into the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip (Nakhleh: 1982; Schechla: 2021). IOF demolished at least 2,000 Palestinian houses immediately following the war, among them were dozens of ancient homes in the Mughrabi Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City to create a plaza at the Noble Sanctuary's western wall.

Across the oPt, Israeli Military Orders empowered a Higher Planning Council (HPC) to transfer planning authority to “anyone appointed by the commander,” who also appoints other HPC members. Three HPC subcommittees oversee (1) Israeli settlement, (2) (Palestinian) house demolitions and (3) local planning and development (MGoI: 1971). These military structures still operate in 61% of the West Bank designated Areas C since the Oslo II (1995–) occupation phase (WB: 2014).

Across the oPt, Israel military administration has demolished Palestinian homes under four broad pretexts: (1) Punitive demolitions (3%), including collective punishments

¹¹ Assuming six people per family unit.

against families of security-offense suspects; (2) administrative demolitions in East Jerusalem and Area C for lack of a building permit, which Israeli planning authorities deny to 97% of Palestinian applicants; (3) land-clearing and military operations (about 66% of demolitions since 1967), whereby Israeli forces variously clear land, including for extrajudicial executions; and (4) undefined demolitions, mainly resulting from land-clearing operations and Palestinian depopulation (Halper: 2011).

In the first decades of Israel's occupation, its military government attempted to "thin out" Gaza's refugee camps with housing projects outside major camps. In 1971, Sharon's Southern Command cleared 2,000 houses in Gaza refugee camps to facilitate military control (HRW: 2004a).

House demolitions formed a persecutory pattern, notably invoking the cruel precedent of the British Mandate's (revoked) Defence (Emergency) Regulations (1945).¹² By 1985, annual IOF demolitions spiked to 81 Palestinian homes across the oPt (UNSC: 1985). During the first Intifada, punitive IOF operations in December 1987–June 1991 razed or sealed at least 1,882 Palestinian homes (Bose: 2007; Halper: 2011).

IOF demolitions spiked again during the second (al-Aqsa) Intifada. In 2000–04, IOF demolished 4–5,000 Palestinian homes in military operations, including hundreds in Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem, al-Khalil and other West Bank cities. Israeli forces also rendered tens of thousands of other Palestinian homes uninhabitable, with an estimated 50,000 inhabitants made homeless. IOF also destroyed or damaged beyond repair hundreds of shops, workshops, factories and public buildings, and destroyed 3,000 ha of cultivated land, some 10% of the Strip's agricultural land (AI: 2004).

The so-called 'Battle of Jenin' saw the IOF attack Jenin Refugee Camp, in the northern West Bank, on 1–11 April 2002. Palestinian resisters were prepared for a fight, booby trapping locations throughout the camp. After an Israeli column walked into an ambush, IOF used armored Caterpillar D-9 bulldozers to plow a 160-by-250-meter swath through the camp, levelling the Hawashīn neighborhood's homes and

¹² In particular, Article 119.

infrastructure (Graham: 2004). In the camp's al-Damjī neighborhood, IOF demolished homes on top of the residents without warning (see the case of Budrus above). Many of the killed and injured were trapped under the ruins, as IOF prevented rescue teams' access (*BBC*: 2002). The IOF destroyed at least 140 buildings and rendered 200 additional buildings uninhabitable or unsafe (HRW: 2002).

When petitioners sought an injunction from Israel's Supreme Court to end the destruction, the state admitted that, in certain cases, the army's bulldozers began demolishing houses with Palestinian inhabitants still inside. However, Justice Levine refuted petitioners' insistence that IOF obey international humanitarian law (IHL) to avoid civilian targets and allow noncombatants an opportunity to leave their homes before an attack. Comparing Israel's attack on Jenin Camp to the World War II Allies' bombing of Dresden, the judge suggested that, like in Dresden, warning civilians of impending attack, or giving them effective opportunity to leave the targeted area were unnecessary (Adalah and LAW: 2002).

Meanwhile, in the Gaza Strip, under Prime Minister (PM) Sharon (2001–06), IOF demolished over 2,500 Palestinian houses in the occupied Gaza Strip, mostly near Rafah, including the Pink Zone (Philadelphi Corridor), and razed two large tracts of agricultural land away from the border, without any military objective. Over 10% of Rafah's population (16,000), lost their homes. Most were refugees whom Israel already had dispossessed multiple times (HRW: 2004b). Israeli officials falsely asserted that, under the Oslo Accords, they had no IHL obligations and, thus, enjoyed wide latitude to destroy property there (Almog: 2002).

Elsewhere in the oPt, IOF's house-demolition policy continued apace. A significant year was 2016, when Israel demolished 418 residences, rendering 1,852 West Bank Palestinians homeless, including 848 children (LRCJ: 2016).

Lebanon

Israel's first invasion of Lebanon came after an 8 May 1970 Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine cross-border attack on an Israeli school bus, killing 12 and injuring 22. In response, IDF killed some 400 Lebanese and Palestinian resisters and

civilians (UNSC: 1970). In the early 1970s, Israeli forces regularly shelled South Lebanon and, thereafter, ground forces conducted search-and-destroy patrols “usually against civilian targets and always with results quite out of proportion to the original Palestinian attack.” This formed a “pattern that would be expanded, developed and perfected with ferocity over the coming fifteen years” (Fisk: 1990).

By August 1974, IDF declared a policy of *pre-emptive* raids, which Israel’s Cabinet belatedly endorsed in 1979. Israeli attacks averaged 1.4 daily on Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) bases in border villages through 1968–74, and averaged seven daily raids in 1975 (Keck and Sikkink: 1998).¹³ Israel’s warplane attacks on Palestinian refugee camps were especially deadly: One June 1974 camp attack, killed 27 and wounded 105, and a May 1975 raid killed 60 and wounded 140 (Khalidi: 1979). That operation made internally displaced persons (IDPs) of 150–300,000 Lebanese civilians seeking refuge in the poorest suburbs of war-torn Beirut, which then became targets of Israeli airstrikes (Randal: 1983; Hamizrach: 1988).

With the outbreak of Lebanon’s Civil War in 1975, Israel maintained military operations in South Lebanon and, in March 1978, invaded to “liquidate terrorist bases along the border” in “Operation Litani.” The operation killed 1,000–2,000 civilians, 75 in a single airstrike on a mosque. Thousands were wounded, while 200,000–285,000 persons fled northward amid destruction “on a scale known well in Vietnam” (Randal: 1983). Israeli gunfire damaged or destroyed 7,700 homes (Khalidi: 1979), leveled six villages and damaged 82 (Rynen: 1990) “in a frenzy of violence” (Randal: 1983). IDF’s targeting of homes from the air followed its urban-warfare tactic of sending troops into Palestinian neighborhoods only after first leveling them with heavy artillery.

Israeli commanders had long planned their 1982 “Operation Peace for Galilee” invasion of Lebanon to eliminate the PLO bases there (Sayigh: 1982). IDF fielded 120,000 men, 1,600 tanks and 1,600 armored personnel carriers, advancing toward Beirut in three waves: One along the coast, one in the central region and one to the

¹³ Lebanese officials reported an average of 1.4 daily Israeli attacks in 1968–74, and an average of seven daily raids in 1975.

east. These forcibly evicted civilians from their homes, towns and villages corresponding to those three columns toward Beirut.

Along Lebanon's coast, the Israelis concentrated their strikes along a 25-km band from Tyre to Na'mah, south of Beirut. IDF helicopter gunships effectively dominated the central region, and IDF land assaults fanned out to the east through the UNIFIL zone toward the Bika' Valley, with another branch turning westward to converge at Tyre, on the coast (Sayigh: 1982).

Israel's invasion caused 19,085 deaths and wounded 31,915, mostly civilians, and displaced 500,000 people under ferocious attacks on cities, villages, homes and civilian infrastructure. Shelter seekers found themselves in the line of attack, where Beirut's southern suburbs subsequently became the principal target of IDF bombings (Sayigh: 1982; Irani: 2008). Israel's land, sea and air 'blanket bombings' under implosion bombs, concussion bombs, napalm and other restricted agents made civilian populations 'incidental' victims as IDF targeted homes and entire apartment blocks (MacBride *et al*: 1983).

After PLO forces already had withdrawn from the country, Palestinian refugee civilians were left without any structures to protect them. Under direct supervision of Gen. Sharon and Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan, Israeli forces ensured the wanton¹⁴ murder of 1,500–3,500 unarmed Palestinian and Shi'a Lebanese civilians at home in Sabra and Shatila Refugee Camps on 16–18 September 1982.¹⁵

¹⁴ 'Wanton,' in this case, means lacking in military necessity. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia held that "the elements for the crime of wanton destruction not justified by military necessity... are satisfied where: (i) the destruction of property occurs on a large scale; (ii) the destruction is not justified by military necessity; and (iii) the perpetrator acted with the intent to destroy the property in question or in reckless disregard of the likelihood of its destruction" (ICJ: 2001).

¹⁵ Estimates of the fatalities vary from 700 (the official Israeli count) to 3,500. Robert Fisk, one of the first journalists to visit the scene, quotes unnamed Phalangist officers as saying "that 2,000 Palestinians—women as well as men—had been killed in Chatila." He reports "1700 civilians murdered." (Fisk: 2002). The Palestinian Red Crescent put the number killed at over 2,000, as cited in Schiff and Ya'ari: 1984. Israeli journalist Amnon Kapeliouk estimated 2,000 corpses disposed of after the massacre from official and Red Cross sources. He roughly estimated 1,000–1,500 other victims disposed of by the Phalangists themselves (Kapeliouk: 1982).

After assessing that a major ground incursion would lead to face-to-face combat and significant Israeli casualties, IDF commanders opted for artillery and aerial bombardments. Pursuing the most-certain objective 4, IDF's weeklong operation forced the population to flee with the unfulfilled intention of turning civilians against Hizbullah. Israel bombarded thousands of houses and buildings, displacing 300–450,000 civilians toward Beirut and elsewhere. IDF also destroyed infrastructure such as major electricity stations and bridges, maximizing civilian casualties and other losses, while contaminating the environment (HRW: 1996).

Fully 90% of Tyre's 80,000 inhabitants joined the northbound IDP columns, with Israeli artillery "pounding shells repeatedly and devastatingly into selected houses" in response to any movement inside or out (Nicolson: 1993; Chomsky: 1993). An Israeli army spokesperson boasted that "70% of the village of Jibshit is totally destroyed; its inhabitants will not recognize it." Another senior Israeli officer clarified the goal was "to wipe the villages from the face of the earth" (Nicolson: 1993; Chomsky: 1993). IDF killed 125 civilians in that operation.

In 1996, Israeli PM Shimon Peres launched his signature "Operation Grapes of Wrath," in April 1996, replicating Operation Accountability's population-transfer model. Some families already displaced during the 1993 operation refused to repeat the ordeal; others fled, cursing the Israeli invaders. Throughout Grapes of Wrath, Israeli political and military officials blamed Lebanese civilians for their own death if they defied IDF and allied South Lebanon Army orders to vacate (HRW: 1996, 2004a).

Grapes of Wrath explicitly targeted civilians, according to contemporaneous statements by Peres and other IDF commanders. Major-General Amiram Levine declared, "The residents in south Lebanon who are under the responsibility of Hezbollah will be hit harder, and the Hezbollah will be hit harder, and we will find the way to act correctly and quickly" (Afriat: 1996). Israeli Defense Ministry's Yitzhak Bailey wrote, "Unfortunately, the only way to stop Hezbollah actions...is to inflict heavy blows on the passive population.... Then Hezbollah would be loathed" (Berman *et al.*: 2006).

IDF pursued this strategy with “indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks” against civilians in what became effective free-fire zones across large parts of South Lebanon. The UN issued a “strong protest” when Israeli “planes had dropped bombs in front of a clearly marked two-vehicle UN convoy transporting essential items to refugees taking shelter in and around UN positions” (Rudge: 1996).

On 15 April 1996, Israeli aircraft rained down over 700 shells and 30 air-to-surface missiles and bombs on South Lebanon in four hours (*Reuters*: 1996). Journalists were unable to investigate the destruction in villages near Tyre “because of the intense bombing and shelling.” Inhabitants fleeing nearby villages reported: “It’s random shelling.... They are sparing nothing. They are hitting homes and fields and civilians.” IDF fired up to 100 shells, bombs and rockets every hour into the village of Mansūri (Haddadin: 1996).

On 18 April, combined this strategy with its tactic of targeting shelters: An Israeli strike on a village near Nabatīyya destroyed a building, killing a woman, her seven children and a cousin. A few hours later, Israeli artillery shells hit the makeshift refugee compound at the UNIFIL post at Qana, some 10 km southeast of Tyre, killing over 106 displaced civilians and wounding at least 116 more, all of whom had fled their homes to seek shelter in the UN compound.

The UN Secretary-General’s military adviser investigated the apparently deliberate attack on the refuge and concluded: “It is unlikely that the shelling of the United Nations compound was the result of gross technical and/or procedural errors” (UNSC: 1996). Despite the indicting conclusion, Peres responded: “In my opinion, everything was done according to clear logic and in a responsible way. I am at peace” (Walsh: 1996). Following that massacre at Qana, one Israeli soldier recounted, “The battery commander gathered us all and told us that this was war and that we had to continue firing like the great fighters that we are. Hezbollah entered a village in which there were some Arabs, but that was their problem. One more Arab, one less Arab, you know” (Berman *et al*: 2006).

After a Hizbullah raid on an Israeli border patrol, Israel’s “Operation True Promise,” began on 12 July 2006. The Israeli air and ground invasion left nearly one million

displaced Lebanese by 14 August 2006. As many as one-half of the shelter seekers were children. Approximately 16,000 were Palestinian refugees displaced again within Lebanon (HLRN: 2006).

Punctuating the attacks on civilian homes and IDPs, an 11 August 2006 Israeli attack on a UNIFIL convoy of approximately 759 vehicles containing Lebanese noncombatant police, army and civilians moving under IDF coordination from the Marj` Ayūn army base after Israel took it over the day before. Israeli aircraft attacked the convoy with eight-to-nine bombs, leaving six people dead and 32 wounded, including a Lebanese Red Cross volunteer as he was assisting a wounded person (UNIFIL: 2006; ICRC: 2006).

Israel's Air Force committed a second Qana massacre, striking a three-story building in the small nearby community of al-Khuraybah on 30 July 2006, killing 28 civilians, of whom 16 were children. Israel's claim to have taken out a Hizbullah rocket launcher behind the building was proven false, and no military objective was in evidence (HRW: 2007).

The single greatest cause of civilian deaths during True Promise was attacks on civilian homes (HRW: 2006). The air war had a greater impact on the civilian population than IDF's Hizbullah-stifled ground invasion. Israel used air, naval and army forces simultaneously, flying some 15,500 sorties that attacked more than 7,000 targets across Lebanon. Israel's navy within range of the Lebanese coast conducted over 2,500 bombardments, and the army fired tens of thousands of artillery shells and multiple-launch rockets (UNHRC: 2006).

Most of the 1,191 Lebanese whom the Israeli forces killed were civilians; a third were children. Significantly, the alleged 56 Israeli-conducted massacres during the Summer War involved at least 42 cases of destroying homes and other shelters. Of known casualties, at least 454 died in homes and other shelters. Over 280 were reported injured, but the true and likely much larger number remains unknown (CEDRE: 1984).

The *Jihād al-Bina'* organization, responsible for post-occupation and postwar reconstruction, estimated that Israeli forces had destroyed 5,000 housing units in al-Dhāhiya, causing various degrees of damage to 17,000. At the end of 2006, 14,000 al-

Dhāhiya families (over 60,000 persons) were still without homes (HLRN: 2006). This IDF practice has been termed the ‘Dhāhiya Doctrine,’ referring to Israel’s use of massive, disproportionate force and the deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure (IMEU: 2024).

Gaza attacks

Targeted assassination at home became a common IOF devise in the Gaza Strip under siege since al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000, whereas Israel had more commonly carried out extrajudicial killings by attacking vehicles. However, the targeted killings of “wanted persons” at home in urban areas eventually become a common Israeli tactic also across the oPt and in Lebanon.

At midnight on 22 July 2002, an Israeli fighter jet dropped a 1-ton bomb on the densely populated al-Darraj neighborhood of Gaza City, admittedly targeting the family home of Salāh Shihāda, commander of the military wing of Palestine’s growing Gaza Strip-based Islamic Resistance Movement (known by its Arabic acronym: HAMAS). The bomb killed Shihāda, plus 17 civilians, including his wife, daughter, eight other children (including a 2-month-old), two elderly men, and two women. It injured 77 more persons, completely destroyed 11 houses and damaged another 32 nearby. GoI confirmed its full awareness that Shihāda’s wife and daughter “[w]ere close to him during the implementation of the assassination...and there was no way out of conducting the operation despite their presence” (Lendman: 2008).

Former head of Israel’s Southern Command Colonel Yom Tov Samya admitted that Israel’s house-demolition policy was an end in itself, not an outcome of searching for tunnels or resistance fighters. In October 2003, he said, “The IDF has to knock down all the houses along a strip of 300 to 400 metres [wide]. It doesn’t matter what the future settlement will be. This will be the border with Egypt” (McGreal: 2003).

Later, in “Operation Rainbow” (10–14 May 2004), IDF totally or partially demolished about 100 Palestinian homes in the Gaza Strip, leaving 1,160 Palestinians homeless. Troops also destroyed about 100 houses in the Rafah Refugee Camp, and IOF said

hundreds more may be torn down, while some 2,197 people lost their homes to Israeli demolitions in the first 15 days of May (AP: 2004).

On 16 May 2004, Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon announced IDF would widen the Pink Zone on Egypt's border by demolishing more houses in Rafah. This statement of intent followed a High Court ruling that day, authorizing the army to demolish Palestinian homes without granting residents a right of appeal, if dictated by "immediate operational necessity," or the need to protect soldiers' lives (*Haaretz*: 2004). On 14 May 2004, 13 Palestinians whose homes were destroyed already had appealed to the Court to restrain the demolitions in the refugee camps in the south of Rafah and, so, the Court dismissed 45 others petitioning on 18 May against the destruction of their homes.

Israel's "Operation Days of Penitence" ostensibly sought to prevent homemade Hamas rockets being fired into Israel's Sderot settler colony, which recently had killed four Israeli citizens. On 28 September 2004, columns of Israeli tanks, bulldozers and armored personnel carriers moved into northern Gaza from nearby Nissanit settler-colony bases. They tore up roads and flattened homes and crops along their way, while IOF units established strategic positions on high ground overlooking towns on the north and east of Jabāliya Refugee Camp.

For 17 days, IOF launched regular raids into civilian areas, firing from the air and ground, sealing off Palestinian neighborhoods, leveling large swaths of agricultural land and restricting movement of civilians and humanitarian/emergency relief workers. Israeli bulldozers dug deep trenches across main roads, severing sewage, water and electricity lines, while IOF incursions prevented thousands of civilians from leaving their homes as fighting raged around them. Some 4,000 persons managed to flee.

Upon their 15 October redeployment, Israeli forces killed 107 Palestinians, over one-third of whom were civilians (McGreal: 2004), including 27 children, and wounded at least 431 (UNRWA: 2004). Even after GoI announced the operation was ending, Israeli troops moved into Bayt Hanūn and ordered civilians from their homes to carry out fresh demolitions.

The operation made 675 Palestinians homeless by destroying 91 homes to 143 families, over 90% of whom already were refugees. The estimated cost of rebuilding those homes was around US\$2.5 million. A further 101 homes (housing 833 persons) sustained damage. Most destroyed homes were on Jabāliya Refugee Camp's eastern edge, close to Block 4, in the most-intense house demolition operation in northern Gaza since al-Aqsa Intifada (UNRWA: 2004).

From the outset. Israel's "Operation Cast Lead" airstrikes targeted private homes and civilian public and private structures. Some were well-known UN facilities jointly monitored by UN and Israeli officials.

During three weeks (late-December 2008–mid-January 2009), IDF assaults demolished about 8,000 Gaza homes, using high-precision weapons, including bombs and missiles launched from Israeli F-16s, tank shells and weapons whose use is prohibited in civilian-inhabited areas. Much of the destruction was wanton and resulted from direct attacks on civilian objects (UNSG: 2009; B'Tselem: 2009); BtS: 2009; LAS: 2009); UNHRC: 2009).

The 2009 UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (Goldstone Commission) noted "the extent of the destruction of residential housing caused by air strikes, mortar and artillery shelling, missile strikes, the operation of bulldozers and demolition charges...in the absence of any link to combat engagements with Palestinian armed groups or any other effective contribution to military action" (UNHRC: 2009).

IDF launched "Operation Pillar of Defense," an eight-day campaign, beginning with its 14 November 2012 assassination of Ahmad Jabari, chief of HAMAS' military wing, by an airstrike on the car he was riding in (Lappin: 2012), following reciprocal attacks between IOF and Hamas fighters (*JP*: 2012). Hamas then fired rockets into Rishon LeZion settler colony and into Beersheba, Ashdod, Ashkelon, which Palestinian towns IDF had ethnically cleansed for colonization after 1948. Hamas also fired rockets toward Jerusalem and hit Tel Aviv for the first time since the 1991 Gulf War (Lappin: 2012).

IOF claimed to have targeted more than 1,500 sites in the Gaza Strip, including apartment blocks (Reuters: 2012). In a famous airstrike on the al-Dalu family home, an Israeli bomb killed ten family members and two neighbors (*HP*: 2012). Other Israeli strikes killed 174 Palestinians, wounded hundreds (UNHRC: 2013), and displaced 350–700 families (OCHA: 2012; B’Tselem: 2012; Lappin: 2012).

In its 2014 war on Gaza, code named “Operation Protective Edge,” Israel killed 2,251 Palestine, 65% of whom were civilians (Harel: 2015). IOF destroyed 203 mosques and two churches (*NYT*: 2016); 22,000 homes (HRW: 2015), including 25% of the homes in Gaza City) (OCHA: 2014); and displaced 520,000, representing 30% of Gaza's population (*AJ*: 2017). IOF left the homes of 108,000 Gazans uninhabitable (HRW: 2015). On 22 July 2014, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) spokesperson concluded “There is literally no safe place for civilians in Gaza” (Ferris: 2014).

Israel’s Supreme Court triggered a new crisis on 6 May 2021, when it deliberated authorizing the eviction of six Palestinian families in East Jerusalem’s Shaikh Jarrāh neighborhood. That was not a singular case, but followed a year in which Israeli authorities ordered 119 Palestinian homes demolished in East Jerusalem, 79 of them by their owners under grave threat (Halbfinger and Rasgon: 2021). That was also the year that IOF dispossessed the entire hamlet of Khirbat Humsa al-Fawqa, demolishing the homes of 73 newly homeless inhabitants (HLRN: 2020).

Enabled by Israel’s judiciary, IOF also had demolished 383 Palestinian homes and livelihood-related structures in the oPt since January 2021 (OCHA: undated). That pattern met or exceeded the rate of 854 demolitions in the pandemic year 2020, mostly in Jerusalem and Area C, affecting 869 Palestinians (OCHA: undated). Those were the largest numbers since 2016.

Ahead of a planned Jerusalem Day parade, known for far-right Jewish nationalists’ ‘Dance of Flags,’ Israeli police forces stormed al-Aqsa Mosque compound on 7 May, firing tear gas, rubber bullets, and stun grenades. That prompted protests around the world, including official reactions from world leaders, and the Court delayed its ruling on the Shaikh Jarrāh evictions for 30 days.

On 13 May, Hamas' al-Qassām Brigades spokesperson Abu `Ubaida warned Israel to expect an armed response to “attacks on Palestinian civilians and houses in Jerusalem” (HAMAS: 2021). Already on 5 May, voices in Gaza asserted the struggle of national unity, vowing they would not stand by idly in the face of Israel's military/settler and judiciary attacks on Palestinians homes and inhabitants in Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrāh neighborhood. Al-Qassām Commander Mohammed Deif even issued a written warning on the night of 4 May: “They will pay a heavy price if the aggression against our people in the Sheikh Jarrāh neighborhood does not stop immediately” (AJ: 2021), speaking on behalf of the Palestinian people, comprised of Christians and Muslims, in its land, from Galilee to al-Naqab (AJ Mubasher: 2021).

On the afternoon of 10 May, Hamas issued Israel an ultimatum to withdraw its forces from both the al-Aqsa/Noble Sanctuary complex and Sheikh Jarrāh by 18:00 PM. When the ultimatum expired without response, both Hamas and Palestine Islamic Jihad launched rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel. Some rockets hit Israeli residences and a school, killing nine civilians (six Israelis and three foreign workers) (ToI: 2021).

By the time IOF famously announced its intent to bomb the Hanadi residential tower block, it already had unleashed much destruction across the oPt, including Jerusalem. Israel had already announced that it had attacked another residential building that may have housed “some kind of Hamas office.” After that Israeli strike on 11 May, the military wing of HAMAS promised an unprecedented barrage of rockets at Tel Aviv, if Israel continued to strike residential buildings (Finighan: 2021).

Israel did just that, launching “Operation Guardian of the Walls.” By 16 May, Israeli bombed some 950 targets, demolishing completely or partially 18 buildings, including four residential high-rises, 40 schools and four hospitals, while also striking al-Shati Refugee Camp (Haltiwanger: 2021) and destroying or damaging at least 19 medical facilities (Akram and Krauss: 2021). By 17 May, Israeli airstrikes had destroyed 94 buildings in Gaza, comprising 461 housing and commercial units, including al-Jalā' Tower, with 60 condominiums, offices of several news agencies (Sokol: 2021; BBC: 2021).

Heavy IOF bombardment of Gaza City tower-block homes evoked memories of Israel's previous wars on Gaza (Balousha *et al*: 2021). However, the new round of violence was unprecedented. Israel's targeting of homes continued with the destruction of 2,000 units and partial destruction of another 15,000 homes (*IT*: 2021), leaving over 72,000 Palestinian IDPs sheltering mostly at 48 UNRWA schools (Lazaroff: 2021).

West Bank pogroms

For years before and during Israel's 2023–25 "Operation Hot Winter" war on Gaza, Israel had intensified its persecution of Palestinians in the West Bank by increasing expropriations, house demolitions and demolition orders, building settler-colony housing units and intensifying natural resource exploitation for their benefit. IOF and settlers frequently rampaged through Palestinian homes, villages and towns across the West Bank, escalating violence, seizing land, destroying homes and agricultural infrastructure, denying livelihoods to rural Palestinians (Talab: 2020; B'Tselem: 2021; Klein: 2023; Sharon: 2023; Shalash: 2023).

Emblematic has been a series of Israel's pogroms against Huwwāra village, raids on Jenin Refugee Camp and demographic manipulation by evictions of Indigenous Jerusalemites in the Old City, Silwān and Shaikh Jarrāh (Bateman: 2023; *BBC*: 2022; McKernan: 2022; FA: undated; Hussein: 2024). The major February 2023 assault on Huwwāra was ostensibly a reprisal for a killing of Israeli settlers, one day after a deadly IOF raid on Jenin (*AJ*: 2023).

Jewish Israeli settlers under IOF protection torched some 30 homes, many cars, and killed sheep. On 21 June 2023, hundreds of armed and masked settlers attacked the West Bank village of Turmus `Ayya, setting at least 50 vehicles and 15 houses ablaze, killing one Palestinian and wounding 12 (Fabian: 2023a, 2023b), while the Israeli army watched (Khader: 2023). The following day, settlers also attacked the village of al-Lubbān al-Sharqīyya, destroying vehicles, vandalizing ten homes, two shops, a gas station, a granary and electricity infrastructure (Ziv: 2023).

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a settler leader charged with ‘security’ in the West Bank, called for Huwwāra to be “wiped out” by the Israeli army (Maanit and Samuels: 2023; Magid: 2023). Zvika Fogel, a radical Jewish Power Party member of Knesset, also publicly welcomed the settler violence in Huwwāra (AJ: 2023).

In its attacks on Jenin Refugee Camp, IOF attacked homes and infrastructure throughout densely constructed neighborhoods in multiple campaigns through 2023–24. In July 2023, IOF forcibly evicted another 4,000 refugees, whom Zionist militias already had dispossessed and displaced in 1948 (*Conversation*: 2023). These attacks evoked previous attacks on Palestinian refugee camps, not least the destruction of homes throughout Jenin Refugee Camp 20 years before (AI: 2002). Other serial IOF attacks targeted especially Tulkaram and Tubās, also in the northern West Bank (AJ: 2024e).

Amid escalating violence, with increasing militarization of settlers across the West Bank, IOF has razed well over 12,000 Palestinian homes since 2009 (OCHA: undated). The total Palestinian homes IOF has demolished in the oPt is estimated at 122,672 to date (ICAHD: 2020, 2024).

Genocide

Continuously since 7 October 2023, Israel retaliated for the attack by al-Qassām Brigade and other opportunistic groups when they disproved Israel’s claim to supreme security and intelligence capability by breaching the Israeli barrier around the Gaza Strip. The militants attacked Israeli soldiers and settlers, killing many of the 1,139 Israelis killed in the attacks and IDF response, and taking 251 hostages (Ma`an: 2025). The first 385–400 fatalities were Israeli soldiers, but the rest were in settler colonies located in the traditional territory of Gaza Governorate and formerly Palestinian villages depopulated by proto-Israeli Zionist forces before 1948, including the above-mentioned Be’eri colony (HLRN: 2023).

Israel’s 2023–25 “Hot Winter” war on the occupied Gaza Strip has destroyed more than 87% of homes, at least 141,000 completely and 270,000 partially, 150–155 UN shelters, 68% of farmland, 87% of schools 493 of 564) (OCHA: 2024), plus at least

three churches and 227 mosques, many of which were serving as shelters for IDPs (OCHA: 2024). Exemplary of this tactic has been Israel's bombing of al-Taba`in School, where IDPs were sheltering. The attack, killing 100, was timed and calculated to cause the greatest possible number of victims (AJ: 2024c). In August and September 2024, Israel bombed 21 such school-shelters, killing 267 Palestinians, while wounding and maiming hundreds more (EMHRM: 2024).

At this writing, Israel's bombings of Gazan homes and shelters since 7 October have killed over 64,260 Palestinians (Jamaledidine *et al.*: 2025), with at least 10,000 missing under rubble. Beyond any legal claim to self-defense (Albanese: 2024; AJ: 2023), Israel's genocide in the Gaza Strip has forcibly displaced 90% of Gaza's 2.3 million population in repeated mass expulsions (PBS: 2023a), obliterating most of Gaza's agricultural lands and built environment (Malsin and Shah: 2023). With more than 88.5% of Gaza Strip under IOF forced-eviction orders or designated as no-go zones, civilians are packed into small, overcrowded, unilaterally IOF-declared 'humanitarian zones,' where population density has burgeoned to 30–34,000 persons per km², compared to just 1,200 before 7 October 2023 (WeWorld: 2024).

Since 12 October 2023, IOF incrementally ordered approximately 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza to evacuate southward to improvise shelter in supposed 'safe zones' under abominable conditions (AI: 2024), while systematically subjecting them to daily bombings (AJ: 2024a). This culminates Israel's military doctrine of targeting Indigenous homes, shelters and shelter seekers, replicated over time, forcibly evicting and dispersing inhabitants and/or concentrating them into camps and defenseless 'humanitarian zones,' to become 'sitting ducks' for slaughter.

The OCHA described how "More and more people are being crammed into an ever-smaller sliver of land, only to find yet more violence and deprivation, inadequate shelter and a near absence of the most basic services" He repeated, "There is no safe place in Gaza" and said dignified human life is "a near impossibility. Even if people were able to return home, many no longer have homes to go to" (AI: 2024).

By May 2024, IOF had designated 77% (281 km²) of the Gaza Strip as "evacuation zones," which it also calls "green zones," cynically mimicking the internationally

protected zone of Baghdad under the US-led occupation of Iraq. However, for displaced Gazans, these also became designated death zones, directly, because of Israel's continuous bombardment, or indirectly, due the unliveable conditions there (Nour and Saeed: 2024).

Al Haq has concluded:

“With insufficient space, shelter, sanitation facilities, food, or water sources, and medical care, these safe zones are intentionally designed to ensure the destruction of all life sheltering there. What's more, the safe zones...are routinely targeted by Israeli occupying forces by air, land, and sea” (Al Haq: 2025).

4. Supportive rhetorical and tactical devices

Throughout these phases in the application of its military doctrine of targeting homes, shelters and shelter seekers, Israel's military commanders, political and diplomatic ranks have punctuated this constant with various justifications and rhetorical flourishes and other techniques that seek to shroud their actions behind various arguments and tactics. The use of *tagmul* justifications (1951–56) evolved into cross-border tactics with permanent territorial occupation. So -called “*pre-emptive* strikes” justified this military doctrine targeting homes, shelters and shelter seekers as if to prevent resistance before it happened. These rhetorical and tactical devices cited here reflect a kind of reasoning that serves to rationalize the felonious doctrine of the Israeli military before domestic and extraterritorial publics, while certain of them merit special mention.

Fomenting disaffection with resistance

Israel's urban warfare doctrine admittedly attacks civilians as primary targets, destroying them with their homes, shelters and in flight. This is sometimes explained as part of a strategy—however unproven—to turn the local population against the organized resistance to its own colonial dispossession (Harel: 2023).

When Israel's assassination of Hizbullah leader `Abbās Musāwī in a February 1992 helicopter attack failed to deter resistance, IDF mounted “Operation Accountability” on 25–31 July 1993. South Lebanon's Shi'a towns and villages in the heaviest attack

since 1982. Ostensibly to flush out Hizbullah guerrillas, that operation pursued four broader objectives:

1. Force the Lebanese government to enter into direct confrontation with the Lebanese resistance to guarantee security on Israel's northern border;
2. Pressure Lebanon to sign a separate peace deal with Israel, similar to the 17 May 1983 agreement between Israel and Lebanon, which the Lebanese government cancelled a year later under Syrian pressure;
3. Demonstrate to the Lebanese government that respecting the 1949 Armistice Agreement (between Lebanon and Israel) and strict implementation of UN Resolution 425 were superfluous;
4. Destabilize the civil peace in Lebanon by systematically destroying homes and property, thereby forcing mass population movements (CEDRE: 1984; Schulze: 1998).

Demographic manipulation

Consolidating its South Lebanon occupation, Israel made sure no single sectarian group comprised a majority by way of forced segregation and 'demographic manipulation' (i.e., population transfer within borders). This social engineering sought to foment further sectarian division within South Lebanon's population, isolating the majority and most-resistant Shi'a community spatially, as Israel's invasion had done by displacing them to south Beirut (al-Dhāhiya). One further example was the corridor of towns and villages from largely Christian Jazẓīn south toward Marj' Ayūn, a mixed Muslim and Christian city. Midway in the corridor is Rīhān, once a Shi'a Muslim town, which IDF emptied of its residents, replacing them with Christians from al-Zahrāni and Iqlīm al-Tuffāh (Irani: 2008).

Scriptural license

On 3 November 2023, Netanyahu called for Israelis to unite in their fight against HAMAS, saying "You must remember what Amalek has done to you, says our Holy Bible. And we do remember." (*Sky News*: 2023). Of more than 23,000 verses in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), Netanyahu revived its most violent, favored and echoed by Zionist extremists (*TRT World*: 2024) and Evangelical Christians (ICEJ: 2023) to justify killing Indigenous Palestinians.

In a passage of dubious historicity (Begg: 1997), the Hebrew god commands King Saul to kill every person in Amalek, a nation rivaling ancient Israel, which allegedly attacked

Hebrews on their fictitious migration from Egypt (Salibi: 2004; Finkelstein and Silberman: 2002; al-Rubay`ī). God supposedly instructed: “I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys” (Samuel: 2011). A month before Netanyahu’s citation, 47% of Israeli Jews polled said that Israel should “not at all” consider the “suffering of the civilian Palestinian population in Gaza” in the war (Lanard: 2023).

The Amalek quote is one of many Israeli leaders’ biblical references to justify Israel’s genocidal response to the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023. A member of the Knesset also has called for a second Nakba (Krauss: 2023), and a military spokesperson characterized Israel’s airstrikes, saying that “the emphasis is on damage and not on accuracy” (McKernan and Kirszenbaum: 2023).

Technical advancement

While the pattern of military practice continues to comply with Plan D doctrine, it has evolved to grow in scale and progressively integrate new technologies, including such digital tools as artificial intelligence (AI). Characteristic of this innovation is the infamous ‘Where’s Daddy’ application, which tracks and directs massive strikes on ‘Lavender’ AI program-listed individuals when they are home at night to die with their family (Abraham: 2024; Goodman: 2024; HRW: 2024).

Senior Israeli officials’ dehumanizing statements about Palestinians, along with the staggering violence in Gaza (RSA: 2023), often graphically celebrated by Israeli soldiers and shared on social media, have confirmed the intent to bring about the destruction of Palestinian life there (PBS: 2023b; Toler *et al.*: 2024). These acts have led to the World Court’s ruling on the plausibility of Israel’s commission of genocide in Gaza (RSA: 2023).

Meanwhile, Israel has long used the oPt as a testing ground and Palestinians as targets for research and development of its tools and techniques for implementing its military doctrine. For more than 50 years, occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has given

the Israeli state invaluable experience at perfecting not only its architecture of control, but also domicide and targeting civilian populations (Qumsiyeh and Isaac: 2012; Loewenstein: 2023).

From Pegasus software, supplying the Myanmar army, drones used by the European Union to monitor refugees left to drown in the Mediterranean, as well as Hindu-nationalist India's brutal occupation of Kashmir, Israel's weaponry exports have made it a global leader in spyware and defense hardware that perpetuates the world's most brutal conflicts (Loewenstein: 2023). As ethno-nationalism and militarization of policing grow in the 21st century, Israel has erected the ultimate model for predatory forces to emulate.

5. Conclusion

The continuum of Israel's targeting Indigenous Peoples' homes and, in turn, the fleeing population and in their shelters is military doctrine carried out amid strategic, tactical and rhetorical phases over time. This review began with the period of initial conquest (1946–53), the context in which it was born. However, in its evolution since then, it has varied only in its scale, strategic objectives, and techniques. Meanwhile, this destruction is coordinated with perhaps less explicit, but no less injurious attacks on Palestinian persons, structures and institutions in other sectors as well.

The inevitable resistance against the assaults on Palestinian civilians gave rise to a new justification as *tagmul* operations in the 1950s, which pretext rationalized IDF cross-border assaults that may have provoked the 1967 inter-state war. However, outside the war context, Israel's wanton targeting of civilians at home remains constant. In the context of the Oslo Accords, Israel has even claimed absolution from the totality of IHL.

While these practices and their justification overlap to blur strict time frames and tactical categories, their development from 'reprisal' to 'pre-emptive' strikes followed a single tactic. Ostensibly, that method also sought to reduce the prospect of hand-to-hand combat, which would result in greater Israeli casualties. Hence, such avoidance, preferring soft targets, has obviated dissent among the ranks.

Despite IHL norms and obligations to protect occupied populations (OHCHR: 2024), Israel's military has continued its assault on Palestinian homes and habitats as standard practice across historic Palestine. Moreover, this doctrine has extended also to urban warfare in neighboring Syria and Lebanon, not least targeting displaced populations in their shelters, including UN peacekeeping bases.

It was in Lebanon where the IDF articulated most clearly its goal of fomenting local disaffection with the only organized resistance to Israeli occupation. And despite its failure to do so, Israeli forces have continued this tactic, presuming also that its Gaza wars and eventual genocide would deflect popular rage at the invader toward the only surviving resistance against decades of Israel plying its population-transfer *raison d'état* against them.

The Dalet doctrine has evolved also to progressively integrate AI. However, surveillance technology has not made Israeli military performance more precise, but admittedly prioritized greater destruction over accuracy, ensuring to obliterate entire families, villages, neighborhoods and agricultural lands. And, by marketing the various tools and techniques of its military doctrine, Israel has distinguished itself as one of the primary and most-promiscuous merchants of death on the planet.

Israel's pogroms against Indigenous Palestinian communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank since 1967 have only expanded with illegal colonial-settler transfer. Their increasing radicalization under current Israeli leadership has exhumed apocryphal scripture and re-enacted biblical atrocity stories, however ahistorical, now as a sacred writ to continue committing genocide in this way.

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