

Where shall we put the Palestinians?

by GWYNNE DYER

Reckless people fling accusations of attempted genocide in Gaza at the Israeli coalition government and the Israel Defence Force (IDF) every day, but the scale of the operation is not remotely big enough to justify that word.

IDF snipers and/or civilian American gunmen of the so-called Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) pick off dozens of the starving Palestinians who showed up at the food distribution points in southern Gaza almost every day. However, barely 100 of them were killed outright at the feeding stations in the whole first week.

A far larger number of Palestinians are killed by bombs or shells in their own homes (also known as ' Hamas command and control centres ' by IDF spokespersons), but even that much bigger death toll does not currently amount to as much as a thousand a week. At that rate it would take 42 years to ' clear ' all the Palestinians out of the Gaza Strip.

Donald Trump will be dead much sooner than that, so that's clearly not what he had in mind when he talked about ' clearing ' all the Palestinians out of the Strip. Indeed, we can go further and say that he wasn't thinking of starving them all to death either, even though that would be much quicker.

No food at all went into the Gaza Strip for 11 weeks before the four IDF/GHF feeding centres set up shop about 10 days ago, so some people (mostly very old or very young) will have starved to death already. Their bodies are not riddled with bullets or shell fragments, they won't be brought to hospitals, and most of them will not be counted.

The number who starve to death will now go up steeply, because Israel has only opened four feeding centres where there used to be four hundred. Someone from each family has to make a dangerous journey on foot (up to ten km.), and wait in a queue of hundreds of thousands of others each time to collect maybe a week's rations. (Actually, they're too desperate to queue.)

As Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu recently pointed out to his colleagues, the problem with starving people is that the country's allies cannot tolerate ' images of mass famine. ' But just a little bit short of that is probably okay and will put just as much pressure on the Palestinians of Gaza to abandon their wrecked homes and leave.

That is the current Israeli strategy, but it cannot work unless there is also somewhere else for the Palestinians to go. None of Israel's immediate neighbours would dream of accepting two million Palestinians even if they didn't care about ' betraying the cause. ' Jordan and Lebanon in particular have had huge problems with similar populations of Palestinian refugees.

The destination has to be farther away and confident that it can control a big Palestinian minority even over the long run. Very large bribes would also be needed. Only two places spring to mind, and both have reportedly already been contacted by US and Israeli emissaries. (Such contacts are routinely denied by all the parties involved.)

The first candidate is Libya, more than a thousand km. west of Gaza, where two rival governments have long been mired in a stalemated civil war. The weaker side, based in the east of the country, is more in need of money and arms, but either side could probably be bought if the bribes and other inducements were big enough.

The other is Somaliland, about a thousand km. in the other direction, whose biggest problem is that it is not recognized as legitimate by any other country. It is a poor but reasonably well-run democratic country that was once a British colony, but it was swept into a union with the former Italian colony of Somalia in the heady first days of independence.

The Somalilanders have regretted their choice ever since and Somalia has no real power over them, but they are still legally trapped into the union. If the United States recognised Somaliland's independence, everything else would follow. The price would be

accepting two million Palestinians. (Somaliland's current population is about six million.)

There was a time when I would not have believed such a deal possible, but those times are gone and I no longer say 'never'. I do say it would be a terrible mistake for either Somaliland or Libya to make that deal, but ancient empires shuffled ethnic groups around like this all the time.

And you know what? If Netanyahu, Smotrich, Ben Gvir et al. manage to do this they would still technically not be guilty of genocide; just of a crime against humanity. With good behaviour, ten or twenty years and they'd be out on the street again.