

Transcript

Electronic Intifada's video podcast "Day 14 Roundtable: Gaza's Al-Aqsa Flood"

A 103-minute [roundtable](#) presented on October 21, 2023

Featuring: Nora Barrows-Friedman, Asa Winstanley, and Ali Abunimah from EI, with guests Jon Elmer, Ahmed Abofoul, and Tarek Loubani

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Nora Barrows-Friedman:

Welcome back to The Electronic Intifada live stream broadcast for Friday, October 20. I'm Nora Barrows-Friedman, Associate Editor of The Electronic Intifada with my co-host Asa Winstanley and our Executive Director Ali Abunimah. We have a very, very full show once again today. So I hope you all stay tuned. And with that, Ali your opening remarks on what we've seen in the last 48 hours.

Ali Abunimah:

Thanks, Nora. Just over 24 hours ago, our friend Refaat Alareer informed us that the building that he lives in in Gaza City was attacked two missiles hit the fourth floor killing several of his neighbors, a mother and her two daughters who are preparing food. Refaat and his family and the dozens of people they were sheltering in their apartment on the third floor were fortunately spared. But Refaat described the experience as horrifying as it can only be. He said that part of the psychological terror that Israel inflicts is that you do not know if they will hit the building again to finish it off. So now, Refaat and his family are displaced, they're seeking shelter in the school, they have nowhere to go that is safe, like more than a million other people who've already been displaced in Gaza. Refaat texted me this morning, we are fine, he said. My reaction was that fine must be a relative term. I also heard from our friend Ahmed Abu Rtaima, the writer who often contributes to The Electronic Intifada and one of the founders of the Great March of Return, he texted, now very difficult massacres everywhere, near us, they bombarded the family of 50 persons, they were killed.

These experiences, unfortunately, are now the norm in Gaza. There is no one we've been in contact with in Gaza who hasn't had a similar experience or lost friend, friends and family often numbering in the dozens. Ahmed added, Israel found that this is the proper moment to implement a strategic plan of displacement. I wish I could say I believe Ahmed is wrong. But on Thursday, seven United Nations Special Rapporteurs, these are independent experts appointed by the United Nations Human Rights

Council, made the following declaration: The complete siege of Gaza coupled with unfeasible evacuation orders, and forcible population transfers is a violation of International Humanitarian and Criminal Law. It is also unspeakably cruel. The experts recalled that the willful and systematic destruction of civilian homes and infrastructure known as domicide, and cutting of drinking water, medicine, and essential food is clearly prohibited under international criminal law.

We are sounding the alarm. There is an ongoing campaign by Israel resulting in crimes against humanity in Gaza, considering statements made by Israeli political leaders in the allies, accompanied by a military action in Gaza, an escalation of arrests and killing in the West Bank, there is also a risk of genocide against the Palestine people, the experts said. There are no justifications or exceptions for such crimes were appalled by the inaction of the international community in the face of belligerent war mongering, they added. I can only agree anyone who is not appalled has lost their humanity. Last week, three prominent human rights groups, Palestinian human rights groups, called for urgent international intervention "to protect the Palestinian people against genocide," and as the occupying power, Human Rights Watch observes that Israel has a duty under the Fourth Geneva Convention to the fullest extent of the means available of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population. Starvation as a method of warfare is prohibited and is a war crime, the group said, but so far Karim Khan, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, the world's supposed court of last resort, ignored calls to make a preventive statement that could deter further war crimes and crimes against humanity, including genocide.

Now, we're watching a genocide unfold in real time and watch the so called international community doing. Today, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres was at the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza to try to work out all the intricate details of getting trucks of food in. Of course without food, water and medicine, people will take anything that comes into Gaza. But 20 trucks isn't even a drop in the ocean. That's one truck for every 100,000 people. But 1000 trucks wouldn't make a dent in the catastrophic situation. That is because humanitarian aid is beside the point. People in Gaza have no food, water, fuel or medicine, because Israel turn them off in order to commit mass murder through dehydration, hunger and disease. It is shocking that in his statement in Rafah, Guterres did not call clearly and unambiguously for an immediate ceasefire, and did not state clearly that Israel is committing crimes against humanity by deliberately starving the population in Gaza. In such a situation, photo ops with a few aid trucks is complicity. Israel is trying to distract us with disputes about how many trucks when what is needed is to put every kind of pressure on Israel to stop the murder.

When someone is being murdered, you don't offer them a glass of water. You do all you can to stop the murder before anything else. Secretary General Guterres and every other official should be screaming only one message from the rooftops, stop the bombing, stop the genocide. Instead, the UN is abdicating its responsibility and providing a blue cover to the US Israeli Egyptian aid charade at the Rafah crossing. The humanitarian aid distraction was set up by President Joe Biden as a public relations exercise to absolve the United States of complicity with genocide. On Wednesday, following his cheerleading trip to Israel, Biden announced \$100 million in aid for Palestinians. I doubt that will ever materialize and even if it does, it will do nothing now. Meanwhile, Biden is requesting another \$14.3 billion from Congress for Israel to make sure it never runs out of bombs. All this fake activity and fake concern is window dressing to allow Israel to pose as if they actually care about the needs of

Palestinians, while Israel has time to bomb, exterminate, and expelled them. Israel has a clear responsibility under the Fourth Geneva Convention, and the so called international community must not help Israel to evade it by engaging in this charade at the Egyptian border. Since those who are charged with the duty are choosing instead to be complicit in genocide, the responsibility is on us individually and collectively to raise the alarm in every place we can. Stop the bombing! Stop the genocide! That is what people in Gaza are asking us to do. Thank you, Nora.

Nora Barrows-Friedman:

Thank you, Ali. And we are now joined by Ahmed Abufoul. He's the legal research and advocacy officer at the Palestinian rights group, Al-Haq. Ahmed, you're originally from Hamama. You grew up as a refugee in Gaza. We know that your cousin and his wife and your cousin's family were killed two days ago in an Israeli airstrike. We cannot imagine the unspeakable grief that you are experiencing. Can you talk a little bit about your family right now? And your reaction to the abetting of the genocide of your family and community in Gaza?

Ahmed Abofoul:

Yes. Well, thank you. Thank you for having me. My family's situation is like millions of Palestinians in Gaza at this very moment. A lot of people are displaced, they have no access to proper food and sanitation water. It's a catastrophe, as Palestinians would call it, another Nakba. As matter of fact, it's been an ongoing Nakba, for very long. I'm very hesitant to make this personal to speak about our own grief, because it's only a drop in the ocean of what the Palestinian people have been experiencing for over 75 years. And if you allow me, I would like to put things into context and make sure to clarify that this didn't start in the seventh of October, the oppression of the Palestinian people has been going on for over 75 years. When we talk about Gaza, in particular, we're talking about 2.3 million Palestinians that have been locked in what the UN even describes as an open air prison for over 16 years. Israel evidently has been even calculating the amount of calorie intake for the population in Gaza and only allows food to what would make them survive in a policy they call "the head right above the water" where you can swim, survive, and at the same time, you don't die and bring so much attention.

In the current situation, it seems that the Israeli leaders saw an opportunity here to materialize the long announced Zionist dream to get rid of the Gaza population. They're being very open about the plan to ethnically cleanse the Palestinians and push them to the Gaza Strip. We've been hearing from right wing government members for years that they want to implement this plan. We've been hearing even calls for Palestinians in the West Bank, part of them to be pushed to Egypt, part of Palestinians and Palestinian citizens of Israel in 1948, as we call it, to push part of the population of the Galilee to Lebanon and the whole idea behind that is to achieve the long known and announced Zionist dream of having, of colonizing land completely, having maximum land with less Palestinians. The Zionist mentality is so fixated on the so called demographic threat, as they consider all Palestinians, and Gaza represent a threat to them. The very existence of the Palestinians in Gaza, 2.3 Million people and 365 square meter, one of the most densely populated areas on the face of the earth, they consider it a demographic burden.

So the war that we're witnessing now is not a war on Hamas or any other Palestinian faction. This is in fact, a war on the very existence of the Palestinian people. It's important for your viewers also to know

that there have been successive military assaults on Gaza. I personally lived through, rather survived three of them, and have to suffer the fear for my family for another three operations, including this one, and endured the loss of family members and friends. So obviously, there is no military solution to this situation, admittedly by Israeli officials, especially those who are in the government before so the Israelis know very well that there is no military solution. So this understanding of these aspects of the topic were left with a situation where clearly Israel just trying to ethnically cleanse the Palestinians. This is the sole purpose of this war.

And this is an attack on Palestinians everywhere not only in Gaza, let us not forget that there are over 80 Palestinians killed since seventh of October in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem there have been a brutal, a risk campaign for any Palestinian citizens of Israel who publish anything on social media including artists and an influential figures in the Palestinian society and community in Israel. So this shows you that this is an attack on the Palestinian existence. And what is quite shameful to be honest is the complete silence of the international community. We hear a lot of "diplomacy work" but none of that calls for a ceasefire. Like how shameful is that that we have all of these super powers who claim the higher moral grounds and cannot even call for a ceasefire or call for respect for international law or call for accountability! And we're not really asking much, I think, the past year since the Russian invasion in Ukraine, the West has shown us quite clearly that we can mobilize international law to support people for their rights, self-determination, and right to be free from any alien domination or occupation, but when it comes to Palestine, this enthusiasm seems to not exist. And this is not only dangerous, as it is dehumanizing the Palestinians, it's also dangerous because it undermines the very system that the West claims to agree with or to want to implement.

So we're rendered with a situation where Palestinians or I would even say people in the Global South cannot really take the West seriously when they talk about international law and human rights, because obviously, they just apply this selectively when it's politically convenient. And when an occupation is by one of their friends, somehow it's good, but when it's one of their enemies, it's bad. Self-determination for Ukrainians is good. But for Palestinian, somehow we don't talk about it. International law and accountability and international injustice is very important. And it appears in every conversation about Ukraine, but it's completely absent on Palestine. Such shameful, disgraceful hypocrisy of the West, I think harms the system that should govern us all. And the last words may be just to conclude with this and make sure that there is conversation, I think, the most important piece in this puzzle is to recognize that the Palestinian cause is a cause of rights, and therefore, it's important that when civilized nations have any disagreements that they have recourse to courts, this is one of the main pillars of any liberal democracy around the world, right! Any civilized people, they go to courts, and they listen to what the law has to say. This seems to be absent from any discussion when it comes to Palestine.

So I think if the West want to prove that it is genuine about international law and the so called rule based order, they need to call for the application of international law. Israel must end its occupation, Israel's apartheid must be dismantled, and the International Criminal Court must be supported to access to the territory and do its work, investigate those who committed or crimes or crimes against humanity. And I think now, considering the Israeli genocidal statements that we hear, there is serious allegation of the intention to commit genocide. I'll stop there and [I'm] happy to answer questions.

Asa Winstanley:

Thanks for that, Ahmed. We have a question from one of our viewers, which is, how can we pressure the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Kareem Khan, to prosecute our war criminal leaders?

Ahmed Abofoul:

Well, yeah, ideally, we don't need to pressure him. He needs to do his job. And the job of the prosecutor is to deliver on his mandate, which is not only to investigate war crimes and prosecute those who commit them, but also to monitor situations under his investigation and issue the so called preventive statements that are stipulated in his office's policy paper. We didn't invent this mechanism. This is part of his mandate. This has been implemented in several situations, including in Ukraine, in the first week, there have been three statements in Ukraine and on average, a statement every two days, right, while in Palestine, we haven't seen any of that. In Palestine, I think it's quite incomprehensible, that until now, we don't have arrest warrants issued. There is no excuse for that whatsoever. And I say this as an international criminal lawyer. As a matter of law, it's hard. It's really incomprehensible. And if you allow me I'll lay out some of the excuses we hear –

Ali Abunimah:

Ahmed, before you do that, that will be very helpful, but for viewers who aren't aware, just remind us. There is actually a formal investigation on the situation in Palestine. This was opened by the Chief Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, before she left office just over a year ago. And that followed If I'm not mistaken what they call a preliminary investigation that lasted a number of years. So, as I understand it, the procedure is that the prosecutor opens a preliminary examination, I mean, these are formal legal procedures that can last as long as he or she likes, there's no limit on them. And then, at the end of that, whenever they decide the end of that is, they can open a formal investigation, which then could lead to indictments or arrests. So just to be clear, in this case, there was a preliminary investigation that lasted, I don't know, five or six years, I don't remember exactly, then Fatou Bensouda open the formal investigation. And they don't tell us what's going on behind the scenes. They say we have an investigation. But just to be clear, there's nothing that could stop the prosecutor at this point from issuing arrest warrants or issuing charges. Is that correct?

Ahmed Abofoul:

It is one hundred percent correct, but one thing just to be specific, it's quite normal. It's quite logical that the prosecutor doesn't say anything about the investigation. As such, he needs to protect the confidentiality of the investigation. This is something we understand very well. But at the same time, the prosecutor needs to be transparent about the ways in which he conducts the investigation. There is difference between telling us what he is investigating which he shouldn't. Legally, he shouldn't tell us and he needs to protect the confidentiality of the investigation. But he owes it to the victims to tell them why in certain situations, he's very vocal, and in others, he's not, why investigation is quite speedy in certain situations, while in others it's not. So we're talking about a matter of transparency here. And it's not only important for the victims, it's also important for the credibility of the institution itself. So as you mentioned, there was a preliminary examination that lasted for around five years. And in between those years Palestine made or referral, and when a state party makes a referral, the prosecutor has to open the investigation. So it was after that, that the investigation was opened and before the investigation

was opened, the former prosecutor asked the pre-Trial Chamber to decide on the territory jurisdiction before moving on with the investigation.

And in simple words, the prosecutor wanted to make sure what is the occupied Palestinian territories and what is the territory in which she can't practice her jurisdiction. And the court decided on that matter that Palestine is in fact, the state party and the occupied Palestinian territory is the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip and therefore any crimes committed on that territory, regardless of the nationality of the perpetrator are within the jurisdiction of the court and any crime committed by Palestinians, Palestine nationals, is also under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. Now the investigation was open on third March 2021, right before Fatou Bensouda the former prosecutor left office. And there was an active investigation before Mr. Kareem Khan took office. Now, of course, every situation is different. And legally, we can't really compare situations but I said it before. I said it actually on a podcast with The Electronic Intifada with you Nora if you remember with Sahar Francis, when I was asked about Ukraine, I said, legally, it would be very hard to imagine how an arrest warrant will be issued in Ukraine before Palestine. And it was.

It was issued at the highest level in Russia, an arrest warrant against Putin and against Miss Belova, his Commissioner for Children, and this just to put things into perspective, so the audience also understand, the investigation in Ukraine was opened a year after the investigation in Palestine was open. Now, of course, there's different considerations here to be considered. First, the prosecutor has access to the territory in Ukraine, and therefore the investigation might be easier, right? So he has access to the territory, he can obtain hard evidence, he can examine crime scenes. So there is this argument that because he has access, the investigation materialized faster, which is a very sound argument. But when it comes to Palestine, there is no access to the territory and therefore, it's taking long and the prosecutor has announced in the latest assembly of state parties of the ICC, that his plan his objective for 2023 is to visit Palestine. We are almost at the end of 2023, it doesn't seem that it will happen. So the question is, will he deliver on his promise, and if he didn't, he needs to be transparent with the public who or what prevented him from accessing the territory.

But if I may, just one point on Palestine, just, I don't want to leave it there on Palestine, although access to the territory might be an obstacle, there are certain crimes, that they don't need access to the territory. So this justification or "excuse" does not apply. And here I'm speaking in particular about the war crime of transferring the population into the occupied territory by the occupying power, in other words, settlements. For settlements, all the persecutor needs is a satellite imagery, if he doesn't have access to such software, Google Maps can help it's free. And in terms of international criminal law, if he wants to attribute the conduct to the perpetrator, the Israelis are not even hiding it. The decisions to build settlements are in the public domain. So in this particular crime, one of the most settled in international law and in fact, in fact, this is a crime that is established since the Nuremberg trial, and it was described germination of territory when the Nazis moved part of their population into other European territories in order to colonize it. These are the words used by the ICRC commentary on the Geneva Conventions. So this is one of the most settled in facts and in law, and there is no excuse why until now there is no arrest warrants for those responsible for that. On top of that list will be Netanyahu himself.

Nora Barrows-Friedman:

That's Ahmed Abufoul. He is a legal research and advocacy officer for the Palestinian rights group, Al-Haq. Ahmed, it just, you know, I think about the volume of work of organizations and advocacy, you know, lawyers like yourself, not just in the last two weeks, but as you said, in the last 75 years of violations of international law, that the international so called international community that the West that these like, you know, these bodies, like the ICC, International Criminal Court has so far refused to act swiftly on any of these, you know, very well documented violations. In terms of your field workers right now who are in Gaza, documenting the incessant and relentless attacks, right now, you know, we're talking about flattening 15 storey apartment buildings, we're talking about the deliberate humanitarian crisis being manufactured by cutting off water and electricity, bombing bakeries. In your assessment, how is it? What is the level of violations that you're seeing? Is this unprecedented in your opinion?

Ahmed Abofoul:

Yes, in every sense of the word, and I'm speaking as someone who lived through and as I said, rather survived three aggressions on Gaza. This is something like we've never seen before. The brutality and the indiscriminate targeting of residential areas cannot be justified in terms of our work, and let me just commend the work of all Palestinian human rights defenders in these difficult times. They do an extremely important work and in very difficult circumstances, but we believe in the thing we do, and we believe that we owe it to the victims that we make their voices heard, and that we document these crimes, hopefully, someday that there will be an avenue where they will be used to achieve justice. In terms of our work in our field researchers, our field researchers became victims in this military aggression. Their houses were destroyed. Some of them had to flee. And we announced actually in our social media and our website that for the first time, were not since we were established, and Al-Haq is the oldest human rights organization in Palestine and in the region, since we were established in 1979, for the first time ever, we can't document the crimes in Gaza because our field searchers had to evacuate.

But we still do so through our partners. It's important also to highlight that there is an admirable level of coordination between Palestinian civil society across Palestine, whether in 48, in the West Bank, in East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, and our partners in Gaza, those are the Palestinian Center for Human Rights and the Al Meezan Center for Human Rights still have some field researchers and our work in disregard is always joined. So we still receive information from the ground, we do our best. Obviously, the safety of our staff and our colleagues is a priority. But in such situation, we know that we cannot guarantee that. Every Palestinian is in real danger in these difficult times.

Ali Abunimah:

And Ahmed, you know, we're very familiar at The Electronic Intifada with the work that Al-Haq, your organization, does and Al Meezan and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights often put out daily reports in the most difficult and horrifying circumstances. And we will often, the first thing we read in order to know what's happening on the ground. But all of this evidence that you're collecting, it's important, obviously, to document what's happening. It also ought to be of assistance, if I'm correct, all of these groups have submitted over the years significant amounts of evidence to the International Criminal Court. Is that correct?

Ahmed Abofoul:

That is correct, a hundred percent. If I may, we, through The Electronic Intifada, say clearly, if the prosecutor lacks information, he should contact us, we believe that we provided enough and we continue to do so. And if there's anything else needed, please contact us.

Ali Abunimah:

And also, you may be more familiar with this than me. But in cases like Ukraine or other situations around the world that the court is involved in, they do, do they not, appeal for and collect other kinds of evidence, like video evidence, and photographic evidence of potential war crimes and crimes against humanity. So for example, when Benjamin Netanyahu tweets on his own personal Twitter account, a video of the Israeli military blowing up a huge apartment building or attacking individual houses, as Netanyahu has done in the last couple of weeks, that would also be evidence that could be considered by the court. For example, if Vladimir Putin made a statement on Twitter, he doesn't use Twitter, it's completely hypothetical, saying, my plan is to kidnap children from Ukraine, which is what the International Criminal Court indictment claims that Putin is doing, transferring children from an occupied territory to the territory of the occupying power, so if he made a statement saying, I'm going to do this, the court could use that statement as part of an indictment, right?

Ahmed Abofoul:

Well, the court can use that statement, but whether this statement will be qualified as evidence or not is different. I would just like to explain something just to differentiate. Now, the court while doing investigation must collect information. Now we need to differentiate between information collected, and when that information turns into evidence, the court has to process the information, has to assist it, has to verify it and then decides if it can qualify to be an evidence or not. It's not very simplistic as one statement will justify an indictment in all honesty, but in certain cases, as I said, we think the information is there. In other cases, the prosecutor might need access to the territory or could use information those who have access provided.

Ali Abunimah:

But if you're a high official of a country, and you say, I'm going to cut off food, water, electricity, fuel, medicine, to an entire population in a territory over which I have control because Israel controls the land sea, and the air, around Gaza, and while I'm engaging in military operations, that's on its face, a crime against humanity. I mean, I'm just trying to say that there are crimes on such an enormous and urgent scale, that hiding behind these technicalities, the level of the urgency is such that if this court were functioning as it should, they would not be waiting. I mean, I'm just saying this can only be interpreted as willful complicity and then I know you're not in the position to say that but I'm saying it.

Ahmed Abofoul:

No, I'm in a position to say what my integrity allows me to say and I'm speaking proficiently. I don't disagree that the court has enough information, in my personal view, and my personal assessment, and in certain crimes, in particular settlements, to issue arrest warrants. So now that this has been established, talking about evidence, we have to understand that criminal proceedings are of a high threshold, and he needs to, the prosecution team, prove beyond reasonable doubt. So, of course, the statement is an important piece of information, it can actually establish the element, the mental element

of the crime, the intent to commit the crime, but there are certain other elements of the crime that still need to be established, the material element of the crime, so the conduct itself, and then the nexus between that intention and that conduct need to also be established. So of course, there is this technicality in international criminal law, understandably so, but it doesn't mean that the court in my assessment does not have enough information to start its investigation, oh sorry, to start issuing arrest warrants.

Asa Winstanley:

Well, we thank you very much for your time, Ahmed. Before you go, we've got one more question if you'd like to discuss this one, one more from our viewers tonight, on the live chat. And the question is, how useful is the international law framework for Palestine or elsewhere, given the context of imperialism?

Ahmed Abofoul:

I understand this question very well. And perhaps, to answer it, I have to be very clear. I will answer it as Palestinian not necessarily as representative of Al-Haq, but I will give a personal experience. I spent almost 13 years in the Human Rights industry since I started studying law. And as you know, Palestinians come from all, you know, with all shapes and colors, and all different ways of thinking, and ideology and different belief systems. And a lot of my peers never trusted international law because they view it as a tool for colonialism and imperialism. Personally, I always believe that international law is something that can be used, but in and by itself cannot achieve self-determination and liberation. International law is only a tool that can be used if the Palestinians have a clear national program, a clearer vision of what they want to achieve, then international law can be used, but in and by itself cannot be the only strategy to achieve liberation. But the story I want to tell is that I've always defended international law.

And I still think that it must be upheld. The fact that the West applied selectively, it shouldn't push us to reach the conclusion, to say we want to recourse to other alternatives, because other alternatives are ugly. We need to hold on to our humanity. We're a civilized nation, since we ever existed as Palestinians, and we should always recourse to low and democratic means in a way, but what I wanted to say is when Israel designated six Palestinian organizations as terrorists, I had received phone calls from friends and classmates since university that I haven't talked to for a decade, and they told me, see, even you with your binder, with your pen, with your files, with your suits, with your courtrooms, you're also called a terrorist. So what's the point? And this is I think a very dangerous phenomenon. Now we have a whole generation that is watching and seeing Western hypocrisy and reaching that conclusion that International Law is not meant for us. Maybe we don't have the right skin tone that the West call for international law on accountability for the Palestinians.

I think this is a very dangerous phenomenon. I think we're going in a very dark place if the Western leaders want woke up and stop their hypocrisy and selectivity and uphold international law in all situations and treat Palestinians as equal human beings, because we are not human animals. We are not sub humans. We are not children of a lesser God. And let me conclude with this. I said in other context, the Palestinian people are not asking for more than their basic human rights as a matter of fact, in my humble view, I think the word for long has misunderstood us. We're not even asking. We're

demanding those rights. We're entitled to those rights, regardless of what the word feel or think about those rights and we will achieve them, we know that our freedom is inevitable. And what we tried to do is only to minimize the suffering of our people until we achieve liberation and freedom because our oppressor is a brutal, cruel apartheid regime that must be dismantled, and that its very existence in the 21st century is a stain on humanity. And it's shameful that is being supported and enabled by the West.

Nora Barrows-Friedman:

Indeed. Ahmed Abufoul, you are a legal research and advocacy officer at the Palestinian human rights group, Al-Haq, you're originally from Hamama, and grew up as a refugee in Gaza. Ahmed, again, thank you to you and all of your colleagues at Al Haq for continuing to do this good work and for being with us today on the live stream. Thank you.

Ahmed Abofoul:

Thank you for having me. Thank you.

Nora Barrows-Friedman:

And we are now joined by Dr. Tarek Loubani. He's an emergency room physician who has worked for years at al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City. Tarek is also the co-founder of the Glia project, which manufactures open source medical equipment. Tarek, you're coming to us from Ontario. Tell us about the conversations that you are having with your colleagues in Gaza, especially at al-Shifa hospital, where you are so familiar with that kind of work.

Tarek Loubani:

Thank you so much for having me, Nora. The conversations have gone from bad to worse, really. It's been unfortunate. I mean, at this point, I think we've all kind of lost the words to express how dire the situation is. So when the war first started, really, the conversations were almost all about the medical aspect of the situation. It was to talk about what exactly is happening and to discuss what were the little tweaks that can be made to make their response sounder medically. You know, I was getting lots of photos and videos of people who I had taught, people who I had worked with, where they were asking me maybe for some feedback or sharing with me some of their experiences, especially because this is the first war in which Glia has had some tourniquets that were already prepositioned in the field. Generally, we've been very much reacting because the tourniquet project is so young. But this was the first time that we already had almost a 1000 tourniquets out there. And there were more that were sort of being manufactured as time went on. So as I was getting this feedback, you know, it very much was a spirit of the medical, and the talk was all about the medical.

At this point. What does it matter what training a person has when a hospital courtyard can be pumped? What does it matter if a patient is a little bit injured, or a lot injured when you have to sterilize with vinegar? So we're talking about situations that have now gotten to the point where medical solutions aren't available. There is no such thing as advanced medical support now, in the Gaza Strip. All medical support is very basic. All of it is basically what your mother or father would have done for you when you were seven. Essentially, this is boo-boo ology. And the problem here is that you know, you're trying to treat a boo-boo, and that boo-boo is a severed leg, is an arm that's bleeding out, is a person who's totally missing, maybe a critical aspect or a lot of blood or something of this variety. So I

think at this point, really, we've shifted a lot of our effort from the outside from trying to support them in the strictest medical sense to of course trying to enter any kind of humanitarian aid.

If we can get medical supplies, it won't be so dire, however, with the threats to hospitals, with the killing of paramedics, the wounding of many more, the destruction of I believe the number today's 23 ambulances, with all of that going on, really, there's only one solution here, which is to stop the bombing, to have an immediate ceasefire right now. The Ministry of Health has already started calling for a ceasefire in a very limited way. They're not asking for a ceasefire on everybody. They're just asking for a ceasefire on the people who are trying to do the work, the ambulances, the hospitals, the medical personnel. But of course, I think we all know that the ceasefire has to be wider than that.

Nora Barrows-Friedman:

Tarek, we had you on an episode of the brief earlier this week and you were talking about out when patients come in with these kinds of injuries, you know, just horrific, you know, unimaginable limbs severed, you know, mutilation, unspeakable things, they're already coming in being severely dehydrated and being malnourished because of the last week and a half of Israel's intensified siege, which is compounded by the 16 years prior ongoing of a siege. Can you talk about what it's like for doctors to be able to assess the kind of treatment that patients and we're not even talking about the physical and mental emotional trauma, especially that we see in children right now, who are, you know, obviously, half the Gaza population, but who are being brought in by the hundreds to these already overwhelmed hospitals? How do physicians make the kinds of determinations in order to treat patients under these kinds of circumstances?

Tarek Loubani:

We have a pretty standard set of rules that we proceed under in situations like this, basically, it's called disaster triage. There's a few different models, but right now the main model in Gaza is trying to figure out the people who will benefit from help and the people who would not. And then that's multiplied or balanced against the resources required. So for example, let's say three people come in, and one of them will require the resources of the other two, then that person is left to die or is not treated, is triaged in a category that's called expectant where you expect them to die. In most circumstances, for example, in Canada, we could have a person who we're 99% sure is already dead, and we might resuscitate them for an hour because we want to try. We want to give them every chance at life. In Gaza, it might be, it's not the opposite, it's not somebody who has a 1% chance of death doesn't get treatment, you know, but it's flipped over. People who have a reasonable chance of survival with the right tools, still can't receive that kind of treatment, because it would mean depriving many other people who need less treatment.

And also the thing you have to think about, you know, I'm imagining, because I did lots of disaster triage previously, I'm imagining that the disaster triage officer, the doctor at the very front, and the calculations that they're making, they're calculating the chance of survival of the patient, they're calculating the post injury care that's needed. Let's say somebody is shot in the leg, you know, like I was, for example, that person won't need very much post-operative care, so simple surgery or simple treatment, and then you can more or less let them go home. Whereas people who need serious surgeries are then going to occupy beds, take up nurses, take up medical staff, medications, gauze, all

of this other stuff that can otherwise be used to treat people who are not in that position. These are terrible decisions that these doctors are making by the minute

Ali Abunimah:

Tarek, I mean, I was just going to ask you, I mean, when you think of the disaster triage, you think of something that maybe you have a natural disaster or a terrible event, and doctors have to do this to take these kinds of terrible decisions. But what does it do when you're doing it not for a day, not for three days, but day after day after day, week after week after week? How can doctors even do that making decisions of who lives and dies potentially? And we've seen just heart rending videos of medical personnel and doctors breaking down and we've seen also examples of medical personnel coming to a scene or seeing coming to a triage area where patients are being brought in and finding their own children or their own spouse, their own parent. I mean, how can medical workers even cope in such a situation?

Tarek Loubani:

Yeah, I mean, obviously, it's a terrible situation. You mentioned natural disasters, like clearly that's something that we think about and when I was working, I was one of the emergency doctors in a hospital in northern Canada at a time, when there were many forest fires, and so I happened to be responsible for planning the evacuation of that hospital. And I tell you, I had all the resources in the world. Now that's probably similar because in Gaza, as I understand it, it is a natural disaster, these hospitals are blowing up on their own as per the latest reports. So, you know, I think we can try to match it on to there, but even if you do, the fact is that they do not have any of the resources to do what they need. And that, in and of itself is funny enough, both a huge stress and a bit of a relief. Because when you have nothing, it takes the pressure off of you in terms of what to do. This doesn't in and of itself resolve the psychological trauma that people have, it just reduces the number of decisions.

There's no decision paralysis, because most of the trees are gone, you know, most of the branches of the decision tree. So for example, there was no real decision making process and whether or not to evacuate, you know, as I had sort of said previously, on the brief, Nora, when we spoke, the reality is that they don't have the resources to evacuate, they don't have the path, a safe path through which to evacuate, and they don't have a place to go if they do evacuate. And so there was no decision to be made there, you know, you're resolved cognitively very, very easily. It's like, okay, this is clearly a PR stunt on the Israeli side. As for the breakdowns, this is something that we kind of considered like, the way you think of it when you're working in these emergencies is that there are injuries in the field and there are injuries in the hospital. There are people who get wounded out there by the literal physical bombs. And there are people who get wounded in here by the psychological and mental bombs. And one of the scenes that I'll really never forget was this older gentleman, he was in his 50s and he was a pediatrician, during one of the wars were sitting there, we're treating, and he had been through war after war, I mean, he had been through more wars than any of us who were there.

And at one moment, he was treating somebody and I don't know if that person reminded him of somebody or what, but he just snapped. He freaked out. He started yelling, he started screaming, he started hitting things, he started breaking things. And he was saying, like, what is this shuhada, kul sentain bedna harb, every two years we're going to have a war! And he was so upset, and functionally

had gone from an asset to liability. Now, what did we do with him? Did we sit there, explore his feelings, ask him how he was doing check in? No, we didn't. None of those things. We physically restrained him, dragged him off and got mad at him. Because it's like trying to do some shit here. And you're disrupting, obviously, all of the other stuff, the kindness, the sort of human connection, all of that happened later, from all of us.

But in the moment, that person goes from an asset to a liability, they have to be removed from the emergency. He was never able to practice again. He was never able to come back into hospital again. And I met him a few years later. And I saw him and I'm like, Oh, my God, how are you doing? You know, I haven't seen you but I don't do pediatrics, so maybe that's why I haven't seen you. And he was just like, yeah, I just, after the war, I couldn't go back to the hospital. It was just, it was too terrible. And so when we look at the losses, in terms of the occupation, in terms of the war, in terms of the siege, yes, there are the losses, like people getting shot blown up crushed. There, of course, the other losses that we don't talk much about specially because of our culture, like the suicides. And then there are these kinds of losses of the people who are treating, who burnout.

The burnout rate of emergency physicians in Canada is 50% at five years. Just think about that for a second. Now try to imagine and multiply that number into a place like Gaza. Emergency is a hard place to be at the best of times. And trust me, Canada is at the best of times. So what of the people who remain, who are in places like Gaza? So I'm sure obviously this isn't something you hear discussed much. It isn't something that we talk about because doctors generally don't talk about their feelings to outsiders. But it is something that's happening and I'm sure that by the day doctors are being crushed, doctors are being broken. And doctors are going from people who are able to help into liabilities who can never go back to the hospital again.

Ali Abunimah:

And on top of that, we've heard so many reports of doctors, senior doctors, sometimes people who have perhaps decades of skill and experience in teaching, being murdered with their entire families in their homes and one of our friends, Belal Dabbour, you may know him, he's a doctor in Gaza, his uncle who's a doctor was killed. And I believe it was the head of the faculty of medicine that IUG, the Islamic University of Gaza, was killed. So this one young doctor has seen his uncle who's a doctor has been killed, the head of the faculty killed, and as you mentioned, many, many ambulance staff and paramedics have been killed as well. So it's an all-out attack on the health workers as they're trying to help people in that desperate situation. I mean, these are crimes that are just off the scale, as you said, we've lost the words to describe them.

Tarek Loubani:

Yeah, I mean, I want to recognize all of these doctors, and all of these health care workers who are injured and killed, every death is unacceptable. However, there are few ways that you can declare you're a noncombatant more clearly than being in an ambulance. How could you possibly declare more clearly that you're a noncombatant? And this is why I think people find attacks on hospitals, and attacks on ambulances and things like that, so atrocious. It's really obscene. And one of the people who I think you might be talking about is Medhat Saidam, who is a senior plastic surgeon. I didn't know that he was related to Belal. But, you know, Dr. Medhat had had been on duty for –

Ali Abunimah:

No, that was sorry, that was Dr. Muhammad Dabbour, who is related to Belal who was also killed.

Tarek Loubani:

Okay, well, Dr. Medhat Saidam, then another doctor to add to this gruesome list, was a senior plastic surgeon. And like, if you were to see a photo of him, you would instantly know who this human being was. He absolutely oozed this kindness and gentleness. And anybody who knows a plastic surgeon knows that they are usually very delicate people. And he was a delicate human being, who saw some of the worst things imaginable. And seven days in, I wasn't in direct communications with him. But one of my colleagues, who was, you know, he said that he received a message that said, you know, I've been here for seven days, I'm going to go visit my family, make sure everything is okay, and then come back.

And he went, and they all died. And I've been thinking about that. And I've been reflecting on which would have been the gift for him to die with his entire lineage, or for him to survive them all. And I don't have a clear answer for that. But I wonder if it is a little bit of a gift for him that he didn't have to mourn 29 or more. I don't remember the exact count of all of the family members who died, but it was approximately 30 of this family members, his entire family, his extended family, I mean, everybody, everybody. So, you know, yeah, the thing about the loss of these doctors too is that they've been building something. Dr. Medhat was building something. He was building the plastic surgeons up; he was building the system up. He was going to be one of the most important doctors. His hands were going to be some of the most valuable hands in Gaza after the ceasefire, and he's gone. There's nobody who can fill those shoes, not now and for a while.

Nora Barrows-Friedman:

Well, Dr. Tarek Loubani, you are an emergency room physician based in Canada. You frequently regularly work at al-Shifa hospital in the Gaza Strip. You're also my good friend and all of us here at The Electronic Intifada are very grateful for all the work that you do. I also want to point out that you are the co-founder of the Glia project, which has been manufacturing open source medical equipment, like tourniquets, as you mentioned. Where can people go to learn more about Glia? And what's happening with that?

Tarek Loubani:

You can find us on all of our socials including Glia.org. We're currently running a fundraising campaign. Our offices were, unfortunately, heavily damaged during an attack on the International Eye Hospital of Gaza. And so we are now no longer able to produce tourniquets inside Gaza. We had a war plan that we've enacted previously and that plan is now stopped. So we're spending sort of money that we're raising. There's a fundraising campaign as well, if people would like to contribute. We're spending the money that we're raising both on making from outside the tourniquets and bringing them in. We're, for example, making tourniquets in Poland for use in Ukraine, and have been doing that for the last year or so. And so we're redirecting all of the tourniquets at the moment into Gaza. Well, all available, obviously, there's still some needs elsewhere. So if people want to support that, that's a really good way to do it. If people want to follow us really on social media, amplifying the message, but at the end

of the day, this is not a conflict that tourniquets fix. This is a conflict that ceasefires fix and that comprehensive peace deals fix. So I think let's also keep that in mind. We do need the band aids, we do need the tourniquets, they are a band aid in a case like this. But we do need something more comprehensive too.

Nora Barrows-Friedman:

Absolutely. Dr. Tarek Loubnai, thank you so much for being with us on our live stream today. We'll have you back on very soon, of course. And we're now going to bring in our good friend, Jon Elmer, he's a writer and researcher and my cohost at the brief podcast. And he's been with us every step of the way here the last two weeks on these live streams. I do want to ask our viewers to go and hit the like button, if you can. It helps spread the video. It gives us a little bit more visibility. So thank you for doing that. Jon, we wanted to bring you in to talk about Israel's so called war plans at this stage as it is relentlessly bombing Gaza. What have you been following? And how can you analyze these so called plans by Israel?

Jon Elmer:

Yeah, I mean, I think they're defined by the absence of a plan. I think that there's, you know, a lot of discussion about what comes after Hamas as if the success of the Israeli operation is in any way possible. But Israel does this every time. They did it in 2006, during the July war in Lebanon when Chief of Staff Dan Halutz told us on day one that all of Hezbollah's rockets had been knocked out and, "we won the war." So this kind of language from Israel is common. And I think we should keep that in mind. The idea that you can skip past a ground operation against a heavily dug in resistance movement that's been waiting their whole life to fight this that has 500 miles of tunnels, according to the Israelis. You know, many of these tunnels deeper than 25 storeys below the ground. They have the capacity within that tunnel network to resupply. They have the ability to move around at will. It's not something, I mean, I saw the Israeli plan idea, I didn't really see anything in that plan. The plan's step one, according to Golan, is destroy Hamas. Step two was a slightly lesser war. And then step three was bring in some sort of collaborator government.

I mean, I saw in The Economist, which was based on the meetings with Blinken and Netanyahu, that, you know, these meetings are asking for a plan. And there's no plan. The Economist talked about that the discussions at the meeting included bringing Muhammad Dahlan back to Gaza, who people may remember was run out of Gaza, during a US backed plan to overthrow Hamas in the first place, which was unsuccessful in 2006, after Hamas won elections. And so that was 2006. So that's 17 years of Hamas preparing for the next time. I don't think we should look too much into an Israeli plan. It's not serious. The ability for Palestinians in Gaza to defend themselves as a resistance movement is so significant that I think we need to be shown some sort of reality before we accept any of this Israeli madness that we're hearing and in all forums.

Nora Barrows-Friedman:

And we also see, you know, top Israeli military officials saying, you know, that they're not even going to address the captives that have mass has taken, the Israeli captives, that they're going to destroy Gaza before they even think of their own people basically. What do you make of, I mean, basically Hannibal directive on a large scale here?

Jon Elmer:

Yeah, well, the Hannibal directive is sort of a long used Israeli policy of killing their captives, like killing their soldiers before they can be taken captive because the idea is that what comes after your soldiers captured, this long history of prisoner exchanges in the Israel-Palestine conflict and the and Israel's conflicts, in general are not worth it. If we remember back to, or not worth people's lives, right, from a conscripted army. So that's a bold statement for a country that forces their people to serve that it's not worth it to protect them. But we remember in 2006, when one single tank gunner, Gilad Shalit, was captured by the Qassam Brigades, and he was held for 2000 days and was traded for more than 1000 prisoners, including 200 of them that had life sentences, including Yahya Sinwar who is now the politburo head of Hamas. You know, who said that they thought prison was our graveyard, but it was our academy. So you have seen your positions taken by people who are in those prisoner exchanges that Israel doesn't want any part of, so they want to – The Hannibal directive is to prevent these trades where Palestinian fighters are exchanged.

Ali Abunimah:

Jon, just to clarify, for viewers who may not know. the Hannibal directive, basically, is the Israeli army practice that if they see one of the soldiers, who is being taken captive, like, you know, they see them and the resistance fighters have them and they're pulling them away, they're allowed to shell the fighters who are taking the prisoner and the prisoner and kill the prisoner to prevent them being taken alive and being used as a bargaining chip in a hostage negotiation. Just to say, we reported on the testimony of the Israeli survivor, of the woman who was a civilian who survived, what happened in Kibbutz Be'eri on October 7, and her testimony that she gave on Israel radio is that the army when they came in, after many hours, they just started killing and shelling everyone indiscriminately, the Palestinian fighters and the Israeli civilians who are with them alike. And she actually says in this interview, that, basically she calls it the crossfire, but she also makes clear that the Israeli army basically killed everyone. And so, I mean, this is a real thing. They actually do this. They'll kill their own soldiers, and possibly civilians, if this account, you know, can be taken seriously, which I think can. I mean, isn't that extraordinary? Does the US or Canada have any kind of doctrine like that?

Jon Elmer:

No, and Israel says that they retracted the doctrine, of course, because it really doesn't seem like the kind of army you want to fight in when they say that we're going to kill you because you're not worth, you know, saving. And I mean, to note that the person who talked, the Israeli Minister who talked about that they were not going to try to protect the prisoners, was wearing a flak jacket inside giving the press conference. So just to give you an idea of the distance between what it is to fight on the ground and hope that your army is going to bring you home, versus these cowards inside a building wearing a flak jacket giving the statement. So what we do know about the prisoners, Abu Obeida, the spokesperson for the Qassam Brigades, told us a fair bit the other day in his audio message about the prisoners. He said that 22 of them have been killed already by Israeli bombardment. And he named one of the people that had been killed just most recently. You know, he said that they're holding 200, About 200 in the Qassam Brigades, but that there's 50 others at least, that are held by other factions and even by nonaligned groups because as I think we saw, once the Gaza command of the IDF collapsed,

and there was 30 breaches in the wall, there's a second part of the operation that happened outside of Qassam's understanding that there would be no defense provided by the IDF.

So it was almost like a Hannibal directive in the whole South for people. They just abandoned everybody. The military just completely abandoned people. I mean, we're hearing stories of civilian groups that drove in their own cars down to the kibbutz to get people out of the safe rooms that they were locked into, because the army just completely abandon them. And Abu Obeida said very directly that the civilians were brought to them. During the battle on the seventh, they didn't have time to sort out who was who at the time, but that they would take care of the foreigners that are civilians that had nothing to do with the IDF, and that those people would be returned what appeared to be unconditionally whenever the bombing stops, because the real focus for the prisoners is the fact that the entire Gaza command collapsed because their commanders, in part, were all captured. So if you're got a 1000 fighters released from prison for one lowly tank gunner, and you have in your possession at this particular point as prisoners, the Qassam Brigades have presumably many commanders, officers, you know, intelligence officials, we know that the military intelligence hub was one of the places that was overrun, and the Qassam Brigades said that they're going to take care of these prisoners.

And we know from the Shalit exchange that Shalit was never harmed, he was never tortured, he was never subjected to what Palestinians are subjected to in Israeli captivity, he was treated well. And Qassam said they will treat those prisoners well. So the fact that the distance between that reality and Israeli ministers standing in a flak jacket inside saying that they're not going to protect their captives, the prisoners, because they want to massacre civilians from the air, is really a very telling moment. And the Hannibal directive is always a very telling moment of the Israeli army. You have a conscripted army that says, you know, they won't go and get you. I mean, most army's main motto is "no man left behind" because if you're fighting for a force like this, you would like the force to at least defend your existence and not treat you, you know, like cannon fodder, literally as expendable.

Ali Abunimah:

But I have a couple of questions, Jon, I mean, first back to the so called war plan, or the steps that Yoav Gallant announced today, we seem to be in the first phase, which is destroy everything by fire, and then the second phase is some sort of ground operation. I've seen talk about that they're going to cut Gaza in two from north to south. They're going to drive down the middle, and from the boundary with Israel to the sea and split it north to south, and then the third phase, which I don't know what it, you know, who knows what that is, but I mean, from what they've said, or from what you can discern, what will this look like? I mean, Ahmed Abu Rtema, our friend from Gaza, said to me, he said, I fear that the worst is yet to come. And is that true for the people in Gaza? And the second thing is, we know what the Israeli generals or defense ministers say in public, but what do you think they're saying? I mean, I'm just asking you to speculate clearly, because we can't know. What do you think they're saying to each other behind the scenes? How confident are they behind all this public bluster?

Jon Elmer:

I mean, there's no way with all of this American solidarity that's happening with all these missions, with all these military meetings. I just can't imagine that the Americans are telling them that this is a good idea. You know, we were hearing immediately After the attack that, you know, the Israelis kept saying

all their experts kept saying that the ground invasion was going to begin in 36 hours. Right? We heard that from day two. And now we're on day 14. And it doesn't. It's not clear when that's going to happen. Yes, it would be worse. A ground invasion of any kind into the population densities of the Gaza Strip is going to be brutal. I think general military plan for the Gaza Strip is, you know, 60 years old.

The settlements in the Gaza Strip were built by Ariel Sharon as military positions, the settlements that were evacuated in 2005, that land still mostly exists in the way that it was left, I imagine that the Israeli war plan will involve essentially moving into those settlement areas that were originally put there as military positions designed to chop up the territory, and to make it into smaller, more manageable sections. But you know what doesn't care about where the settlements are? The tunnels; the tunnels don't care about what area they move in from, or how much they cut the Gaza strip into sections or how long they occupy the Gaza Strip. The tunnel apparatus, which, you know, people sometimes think about crawling around on your hands and knees or something like this. These are tunnels equipped with motorcycles, with vehicles, with weaponry, with all the fighters. Cutting the Gaza strip into segments like Sharon's dream was, the dream in Gaza was to cut the strip up into sections, make it impossible to move around in Gaza, and make people leave so that Israelis could take these beautiful Mediterranean coastal, you know, territories to make it part of the State of Israel. And Sharon said, when he withdrew, that we had a dream, but the dream could not be implemented. That's what Sharon said, when he announced the 2005 withdrawal. We had a dream but the dream couldn't be implemented. So the pieces of that dream are there, cutting up the territory using the model of the settlements that had been put there with that original purpose.

Ali Abunimah:

Just as a reminder for people, prior to 2005, Israel maintained a number of civilian settlements, so called civilian settlements, I mean, where they basically were using Israeli Jewish women and children as human shields for Israeli military bases in the interior of Gaza, but they had about six or seven thousand civilian settlers there at one point, and the settlements and the settler roads within Gaza, took up something like 40% of the land area of Gaza, as well as large parts of the coastline. So the settlers were on the sea, and then they were connected by roads to Israel, and the army was there. Now, I'm assuming that prior to 2005, the resistance did not have the same extent of tunnels or various assets and yet Israel was still unable to protect the settlements inside Gaza. Is that a fair assessment?

Jon Elmer:

Yeah, the settlements were under attack constantly, especially in the second intifada. So yeah. And the thing is that the Palestinians know that, right? The Palestinians know better than anyone in the world, how their territory was chopped up, how many checkpoints there were inside of Gaza. I mean, Gaza, made the West Bank look like a freedom land, the amount of checkpoints that they would just close them permanent, like close them for days, and you just couldn't move up and down in the strip. So presumably, what the Israelis are going to do, if they're seriously talking about a ground invasion is presumably they're going to move into these, you know, more open spaces of the settlements, and use those as, I would assume, use those as basis as Ariel Sharon intended for their whole lives. But that's what the Palestinians know they're going to do. So you're talking about expertise and preparation waiting for something that the Israelis couldn't do 20 years ago,

Ali Abunimah:

Unless, of course, they have expelled the population from Gaza, which is a horrifying idea, but one that looks like – Many people in Gaza are saying to me, that we think that's what they're trying to do. They're trying to force us out to Egypt. There's also people in Gaza have been talking about how in 2014, after Sisi came to power in Egypt, they forced the Egyptian citizens who lived on the Egyptian side of the boundary with Gaza, in communities along the border, basically, all of their homes were demolished by the Egyptians, and they were expelled. And there's people in Gaza who say, Oh, they're going to force us to go and live in the areas where the Egyptians were expelled from. How much truth there is to that? I don't know. But the point is, that's what the kind of thing people are saying in Gaza. And so, one question for me is, how would this, I mean, we're talking about scenarios, I don't even like to verbalize, but how would this kind of mass expulsion if Israel pulls it off, change the scenario, change the picture that you're talking about? And just also to note that one of the Israeli ministers, I forget who it is now, was on the tip of my tongue, but had said yesterday, I don't think it was the defense minister, but it was another serious senior official, who said that the end of this, Gaza will be smaller. I mean, what can you discern from all these different things?

Jon Elmer:

Yeah, they want to build a bigger buffer zone so that when they break through the ghetto the next time, there's more distance, or that you are able to push rockets and mortars from the border back, I mean, that's the only thing I can think of. That means shrinking the Gaza Strip. Because of the settlements, because of the way a Gaza was built, it's densely populated in concentrated areas, because inside Gaza used to be ten separate ghettos. If Israel is actually talking about fighting in tunnels, they need to remove the buildings that are on top of those tunnels because their forces can't muster underneath while Palestinians can fire from rooftops on their armor. I think that the Israelis, if they're actually talking about a ground invasion, would need to remove the civilians, because the civilians are just another of the many obstacles. You know, it's so crass to even talk this way. It's crazy. I much more believed the Israelis are going to carry out civilian massacres from the air, and not even get into this. But we've seen their commanders down on the Gaza border, saying to the troops that you're going in.

It's hard to imagine that the generals can then look at their troops if they don't. It's going to be hard to imagine them looking at them when they do because they're going to get hit really, really hard. But they seem to be promising something that's difficult to come back from. And I think that the reason they want the civilian population out is because they want to level these buildings. I mean, when I lived in the Gaza Strip, they were creating the buffer zone, and they were trying to get rid of trees, because militants were using trees as cover and the Israelis were like, we have to remove all of the trees and create this buffer zone. So what are they going to do with a 15 storey building that's beside another 15 storey building that's beside another 15 storey building, all full of civilians, starving, dehydrated, and people are drinking boiled mud water now and scraping the water off the top and leaving the mud in the pot. Like Tarek said, people are using vinegar in the hospitals as antiseptics. It's a brutal situation.

There's no way you can fight an urban war, there's no way you can even fight a limited incursion, that they like to call it a limited incursion, without it being devastating to the civilian population. And like we said yesterday on the show, people are piling into these places, because one of the stories that we don't hear all that much is what's happening to the people that are surviving. The people that are

surviving from what I'm hearing, they're moving constantly. The people who have left their home are constantly on the move. There's nowhere safe, but each time they move, they're collecting the entire number of people that were in that place seeking shelter, so they go from one place where there's 30 of them, and then the 30 move to another place and now there's 60 of them. That kind of mathematics plus a ground invasion is – I can't even say, it's unspeakable. The only way that the Israelis will be able to move throughout the Gaza Strip to fight a war against 40,000 underground fighters, while your commanders are being held, and they have the ability to move all over, underneath you, and then to come up from a tunnel into a building, so go from a protected tunnel, move into a building, move up to the top floor of that building, strike Israeli tanks that are underneath from the top where they're not armored, it's chaos for the Israelis.

And that's just on the surface. If you're promising to wipe out Hamas, you're promising to go underground and fight concerted battles under the ground, which has never happened before. The Americans used to send these, you know, they call them tunnel rats, when in Vietnam, the Vietnamese resistance use tunnels to move their weaponry all around, and the Americans couldn't do anything about it, they were forced to send guys down, individual soldiers with a handgun and a flashlight. Is Israel ready for that? They have engineering units, and they have special forces units that have been preparing to fight underground. But the scale, it'd be one thing to say you're fighting into one tunnel to try to get to one particular room that was in the tunnel, but the tunnel apparatus, the network, the warren, you know, like Israel couldn't fight in the old city of Nablus in 2002, they couldn't fight in the Jenin refugee camp in 2002, but now they're going to go down underneath and fight these groups to kill tens of thousands of fighters!

I think we might be wasting our time even talking about an Israeli war plan, when that's the scale of what they're going to confront. And when you talk about the Israeli war plan, I can't imagine that all of these, you know, two aircraft carriers, a Marine Expeditionary Unit, all kinds of intelligence officers, we saw Biden in Israel shaking hands with Delta Force soldiers that are already on the ground in Israel, I can't imagine those people are telling them go down into a 500-mile tunnel network and fight the Qassam Brigades who we're waiting for you.

Ali Abunimah:

But Jon, that all makes a great deal of sense. But you mentioned earlier that you think that, obviously, we were not in the room, so we can't know, but you can't imagine that the American war planners and generals and so on, are telling the Israelis this is a good idea. But if we think about another situation that we pay close attention to, it was the Americans pushing Ukraine to carry out a counter offensive and say you have to do it, you have to do it, and we've given you everything you need, and it was the Ukrainians pushing back and saying that we can't do this, it will be suicide. And the Americans say you have to do it anyway and pushing the Ukrainians into a calamitous counter-offensive that made zero progress. And that was based on fantasies that the Ukrainian forces are going to break through the Russian lines, and rush down to the Sea of Azov and divide the area controlled by the Russian forces. In fact, in a way, it sounds a little bit like the Israeli plan for the Gaza Strip. But my point is, with Biden saying they have to go in and destroy Hamas, you know, that they have an obligation to go and destroy Hamas. I mean, I'm saying you're being too optimistic, in suggesting that there's any form of restraint coming from the United States.

Jon Elmer:

It's true. I mean, this is the scenario that we're in. I mean, also these Marines that are floating off the coast of Lebanon, remember, were chased out of Lebanon. The Marines were based in Lebanon in the early 1980s, and Hezbollah before they were Hezbollah, blew up their barracks and drove them out of Lebanon. So there's a debt from the Marines as well. Yeah, I mean, if that's what we're talking about, we're talking about essentially what would amount to open war in a civilian population that is, you know, already starved of essentials, and then you have a front in the north that we haven't even talked about today that is opening up in a way that, you know, looks like if what was happening in Gaza wasn't happening, we would be talking today about the war in Lebanon, they would call it a war, the number of soldiers killed, the number of fighters killed, the number of attacks on the Lebanon border, you know, where the Americans are focusing their attention. I mean, I don't think the Americans are floating aircraft carriers off the coast for Qassam, all due respect to Assam. They're floating them there for Hezbollah.

They better have a good war plan, or they're going to lose the war. I don't see any other way. I mean, we're talking about speculating. We're speculating and that's difficult. Right away, there's no war plan. If there was a war plan, The Economist would know it. I mean, it's essentially a foreign service dispatch, right? They would know. There's not even a hint of that. They're talking about Dahlan! I mean, this is one audience that we can talk about Dahlan with where it would resonate. But we're talking about bringing back defeated ghosts of the past here. There's not any kind of post Hamas world. I mean, it's difficult. I think we will be, I mean, it seems like we're going to be live on the air to follow this as it happens. Sitting here right now, I don't see how the Israelis aren't just articulating their defeat because even if they were ten times the army that they are, I still think it's virtually an impossible task. And I'm not alone. I mean, there's nobody that's saying that there's a good war plan.

I mean, you're not hearing a realistic war plan for fighting in Gaza. You're hearing people say, you know, you're hearing soldiers say, sure, wouldn't want to be me. You know, the Americans set up these institutes after they got defeated in urban warfare, during the war on terror. They set up these entire institutes where people spend all their time just studying urban warfare. And there's nothing like a solution for 500 miles of tunnels that are armed where the armaments are in the tunnels, even just the mass casualty possibility, these tunnels can be – They have explosives in them. If the Israelis want to move concentrations of troops into open areas in the Gaza Strip, they're just tempting to massive tunnel explosions, which is what they pulled out of Gaza in the first place for because of massive tunnel explosions underneath their troop concentrations on the Rafah border, what's called the Philadelphia Corridor, which they used to patrol up and down the Philadelphia Corridor in tanks until the Palestinians were able to take unexploded ordnance, Israeli bombs, remove the explosives from the Israeli bombs and reconstitute them, put them underneath and a tunnel, underneath their soldiers on the on the Philadelphia Corridor, on the Rafah border and blow them up.

And there was footage people old enough to remember of Israelis crawling on their hands and knees on the Philadelphia Corridor looking for the body parts of their comrades that were blown up by tunnel networks that were underneath the troop positions that they had. And the Israelis just said, we're not doing it. Ariel Sharon, the bulldozer, just said we had a dream but look, guys, we can't do it. It can't be

done. And that was when they already had military control inside the Gaza Strip, they already had all that. Now you're talking about moving it from the outside of the border in, when Palestinians are prepared! What entry is Israel going to make into the Gaza strip from the east, from the south? I mean, the places where they would have to move in from are the most famous areas in the Palestinian territories for resistance.

Shuja'iyya is a nightmare for the Israelis and you're not cutting the Gaza strip from the east without moving completely through Shuja'iyya, and they couldn't even get through one street and it was a brutal massacre that we'll all remember from the 2014 War, when they just shelled civilians all day long because their troops got smoked. And when the Israelis get smoked, what they do is they immediately withdraw and carry out civilian massacres. That's what they do. In Jenin, in 2002, they didn't say let's go in and bulldoze the center of the camp, they said, we're going to go in and defeat the resistance. And they moved in, they got smoked. And they lost their minds and bulldozed the center of the refugee camp on top of people, on top of their own people, on top of their own soldiers, they didn't care. They just lost their minds. That's what happened in Shuja'iyya, when the ground invasion in 2014 began, the first place the Israelis encountered physical resistance.

The Jerusalem Post blew up with stories talking about, soldiers talking about, like, holy smokes, they came from behind us, they came from on top of us, we looked around, we thought, you know, the Israelis, they take buildings, that's what they do in the West Bank, they'll move in, they'll take a building, push the family into the kitchen, or whatever, and then use it as a sniper post. But when they do that, in Gaza, or when they did it in South Lebanon, there's a tunnel underneath the building, and people are coming up and fighting inside the building that the Israelis are in. So while you're trying to move your troops into this, you know, split the territory, they're being constantly attacked from all sides by tens of thousands of fighters who have been prepared for this fight. It's not clear to me that that's possible. But what is possible is to do what they did in Shuja'iyya in 2014, to admit their cowardice, to pull back and to massacre civilians until, you know, they can create a situation where people are so desperate that they sue for peace, which we know the Palestinians aren't going to do. We know that. We know they're not going to do that.

Ali Abunimah:

Thank you. Jon. I just want to share one piece of breaking news is that apparently Hamas has released two American captives that were in Gaza or two Americans who are held in Gaza. And it has released them to the Red Cross for humanitarian reasons. So that will be interesting to watch. I don't know if that was their own initiative or if that indicates some kind of behind the scenes negotiations going on.

Jon Elmer:

Yeah, I mean, the fact that Abu Obeida said just so straight up that the foreigners and noninvolved people would be released unconditionally. And Osama Hamdan, who was the person who with the Israeli person, organized the Shalit exchange and work behind the scenes and Hamdan said that Abu Obeida was very clear that they were giving the civilians and nonaligned people back, which makes sense.

Asa Winstanley:

When the field conditions would allow –

Jon Elmer:

when the field conditions would allow it, because you can't move. You can't ask people to bring aid in right now under bombardment. You can't ask the Red Cross to shuttle prisoners back to the border, but I'm sure if there was, it seems, I mean, Abu Obeida said it straightforwardly, he gives short audio addresses, video addresses that are very to the point. He's not giving long, elaborate speeches where he might say something. He's very pointedly said that those people, that the nonaligned civilians, he called them our guests, and that the only reason that they had them was because other people brought them to the Qassam Brigades during October 7, and Abu Obeida said we didn't have time to verify the provenance of the identities of these people in that moment, when the Southern Command had collapsed.

There's no need to hold the civilians and it makes sense that Qassam would say that. They have military commanders. They've got enough prisoners to free all Palestinian prisoners, and that's what Abu Obeida said too. He said for anyone negotiating internationally that he wants everyone to know that the prisoner exchange that will happen will touch every Palestinian family in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, because political prisoners in Palestine are something that impacts every family. And so he just pointedly said that and then signed off by saying to the prisoners, you know, your time is coming, to the Palestinian prisoners, as in like, we're going to free you with our military action that led to the collapse of Israel Southern Command. I think when we talk Israeli war plans, I think we should keep that part in mind that the Southern Command was collapsed. That those architects, that those intelligence officers, they're gone. They had to be replaced because they're in captivity held underground.

Nora Barrows-Friedman:

Yeah, high level.

Jon Elmer:

High level, higher than have ever been captured in prisoner exchanges that low level people get 1000 prisoners freed for.

Nora Barrows-Friedman:

Well, we're going to wrap it up. Before we do, we want to read some comments from our listeners that have been pouring in during this live stream. Asa, take it away.

Asa Winstanley:

Yeah, as usual, lots of support for all our guests. Thank you, Dr. Tarek, who was on earlier in the show. Ahmed Abufoul very brave, your work is essential to showing the way to truth and justice. And of course, lots of support for El and the live streams. People have been saying thank you for doing the live streams. And thank you for all the great work you're doing.

Nora Barrows-Friedman:

Wonderful. And of course, we want to thank all of our guests, Jon Elmer, our in house analyst and expert and also my cohost over at the brief podcast. We heard from Dr. Tarek Loubani. He's an emergency room physician and co-founder of the Glia project and of course, Ahmed Abufoul, he's with the Al-Haq Palestinian human rights group doing extraordinary work under such unbearable conditions. We want to encourage you to go to our website electronicintifada.net. Sign up for our mailing list. You'll get alerts for when we do these live streams. We are going to continue to do them so please stay tuned next week, and of course, for all breaking news analysis and on the ground coverage, go to electronicintifada.net or follow us on Twitter @intifada. Thank you, Jon. Thank you Asa. Thank you, Ali. Thank you, Tamara Nassar behind the scenes as always. And we will be back next week. Please stay safe, everybody.