

Muhammad Shehada at CEIP event, 4-13-26

Shehada's contribution to an April 13, 2026 Carnegie Endowment panel discussion "What Path Forward? The Board of Peace, Gaza, and the Future of Multilateralism." Muhammad Shehada is a visiting fellow with the European Council on Foreign Relations' Middle East and North Africa program. The 61-minute discussion was moderated by Carnegie Senior Fellow Zaha Hassan, and can be viewed in full [here](#). Shehada's contribution starts at 18:15.

[Zaha Hassan]

I want to turn to Gaza now and to Muhammad. You know, it's been six months since the ceasefire began in Gaza. Muhammad, can you talk about what implementation of Trump's plan for Gaza has looked like and how has the launch of the war with Iran impacted implementation, particularly as it concerns relief and reconstruction efforts?

[Muhammad Shehada]

Thanks so much, Zaha. Good to be here with such giant names, people whose work I've been following with admiration for years...

With the whole implementation of the Trump plan, it's been disastrous, whether with or without the whole Iran shenanigan.

There was no implementation to begin with. So take, for example, by the end of February, before the first strikes on Iran, how much of the Trump plan was actually implemented to the letter of the agreement? It was only one item, one alone.

That was the full release of every Israeli captive held in Gaza. Nothing else was fulfilled with the same degree of honesty, decency, whatever. If you look, for example, at the amount of food that Israel was allowing into Gaza, at the maximum estimate that Israel itself has put out, which is widely exaggerated, it was 475 trucks in a single day.

The minimum that the Trump deal had put in place was 600 trucks. The overwhelming majority of those 475 were private sector products sold for profit, where Israeli generals, officers, and government officials would charge every single truck, one truck, one single truck. They would charge it a so-called coordination fee of about 100,000 U.S. dollars to half a million U.S. dollars based on what kind of cargo it's carrying. It became recently a scandal that the brother of the Israeli head of the Shin Bet, the national security agency, was implicated in one of those coordination fees to allow into Gaza cigarettes, drugs, and other banned items.

So basically, if you look, for example, at the bombardment, it never stopped a single day. I get reports, briefings almost daily on Israeli strikes in Gaza. It goes minute by minute by minute. Either artillery fire, bulldozers, detonation, explosives, airstrikes, a machine gun being emptied at random into neighborhoods, etc.

And the last item is non-stop demolition work in the very area where Trump's sort of like, the birth child of the whole Board of Peace is the idea of what is called the new Rafah, the safe alternative community, as they would like to call it. In that very area, the new Rafah, destruction there has never stopped.

But from the very start of this Trump deal, I was made aware of minutes of meetings with Arab leaders from the very countries that negotiated and brokered that deal. None of them expected that this would be a ceasefire. None. The immediate assumption, the working assumption that they all had is this was at most about reducing the Israeli violence dramatically and allowing a flow of humanitarian aid and food into Gaza to stop famine. That was the ceiling of expectations.

There's an Arab leader, and I always love to bring up this particular quote, an Arab leader was asked about this, and he said, "There's no framework. There's no plan. It's only a spectacle. It's basically a political stunt, a PR stunt, nothing more." He was asked to elaborate more. And he said, "Well, it's a bunch of businessmen who think the country is their company and they run it through their offices, not through institutions."

And then he went on to say, those are impulsive, unaccountable [people], convinced that intuition and spectacle substitute for policy. They will start, they hit a wall, they change direction. They don't learn. They just pivot to the next headline. That's the mentality of the people running it.

There is a center that Trump created, which is called the Center of Civilian Military Coordination. It's supposed to be the very nucleus that implements his plan in Gaza. I talked to people at that center. I talked to an American colonel. I talked to some European diplomats, others. And the impression I got from them is that they were completely paralyzed because this center did not have any mandate to do any, what they would label as "political" work. So if Israel bombs Gaza, they cannot tell them to stop. It's political. If Israel doesn't allow food, they cannot tell them to stop. It's political.

They need to convey it to the White House in order for the White House to tell the Israelis to do it. But here's the loophole. The middleman between the White House and CMCC, the very person that's in charge of implementing the ceasefire is a guy called [Aryeh Lightstone](#).

I literally have no words to describe that guy, but the words that I got from Israeli colleagues that met him or European diplomats that met him face to face is that they said, quote, "He hates Palestinians with passion. He's more right-wing than Netanyahu. He hates Palestinians with passion." That is the verbatim quote. The guy was David Friedman's advisor when David Friedman, the Israeli settler, the American diplomat, was ambassador to Israel and basically took that job afterwards.

His right-hand guy is a guy called [Adam Hoffman](#). If you've ever watched the movie *Revenge of the Nerds*, he's the lead character from that movie. The guy basically is a 25-year-old graduate from Princeton with no qualifications whatsoever to play any role in a situation like Gaza. His CV is two things. He used to write articles bashing pro-Palestinian demonstrations at the university. He's very right-wing, very openly pro-Israel. And the

second accomplishment is that he worked at DOGE, Elon Musk's initiative to destroy the American government.

And then he landed a job being Aryeh Lightstone's right-hand guy that is in charge of designing what Gaza should look like on the day after.

It is very much reminiscent of the American occupation and invasion of Iraq. Back then you had interns and people in their early 20s from new Khan Institutes, think tanks in Washington that were running ministries in Iraq, that were devising Iraq to be so-called a tax haven, an area with zero regulations, a fantasy of any new conservative.

And it's the same mentality that they have in Gaza. If you look even at the Kushner plan that he presented at Davos, it just turns Gaza into four things. Number one, a giant concentration camp.

Each single area in Gaza would be dissected from the area next to it by a giant buffer zone that is filled with just grass, nothing else. Nobody's allowed to have inhabited. Gaza would be cut into eight small cages.

The only connection between each cage and any form of human civilization is an industrial zone attached to that cage. Then that industrial zone would have a data center, a mega factory, it would have an Elon Musk Tesla car factory, whatever you put there.

So it's basically no wonder that you had the leading Israeli national TV, Channel 12. They had an article a few months ago. The headline was this, "Kushner, Peter Thiel, and Larry Ellison. They wanted to turn Gaza into a tax haven for billionaires with zero regulations and cheap labor."

That is the vision there. The second element there is that it's a scam. It's basically a grifting scheme where, for example, there were a couple of reports in The Guardian about an obscure group in Florida called Gotham.

That Gotham group, it sounds like something from the Batman movies, but that Gotham group, they are more nicknamed as Alligator Alcatraz because they subcontracted for ICE, they built that prison in Florida. And Alligator Alcatraz, they were offered an inside track through the White House, particularly through Trump's chief of staff, Susie Wiles, to get, quote, the most lucrative, most profitable contract in their history of up to \$1.7 billion to go and work in Gaza, to establish that new Rafah Potemkin village that's a concentration camp, and to be in charge of imposing that coordination fee on every truck that goes in Gaza. They were promised to secure a profit margin of 300%. And despite all of this, the owner of a group called Alligator Alcatraz-- keep the name in mind-- he was concerned about working in Gaza because he thought that those plans were so shady, so illegal, so criminal, so atrocious, that they would give his group, again, Alligator Alcatraz, a bad name.

He wanted to create a fictitious company to give that contract to so that he wouldn't get the negative PR of a group called Alligator Alcatraz implementing a project in Gaza. That is how outlandish it is as a grifting scheme.

There's the other element that you mentioned, Zaha, substituting the international multilateral system.

Instead of having international law and institutions, et cetera, you have dealmaking: a bunch of businessmen going into rooms and making deals, and that's it.

And the last element is what you have here of basically fulfilling the ultimate Israeli fantasy about turning Gaza into a massive surveillance state project, like George Orwell on steroids, where you have Gaza being, there was the idea that was proposed at Davos by a guy called [Liran Tancman](#). He's also the other right-hand guy to Aryeh Lightstone.

He's an Israeli former intelligence officer turned businessman, played a huge role in the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, the notoriously murderous organization that was responsible for the murder of over 1,500 starving Palestinian aid seekers.

So that guy pitched an idea at Davos, and the idea goes thus. He says, every person in Gaza would have a digital wallet. Gaza would become a cashless society. You wouldn't transact with hard physical currency. You would transact with bitcoins.

And the idea comes from two reasons. One is Trump's kids, Steve Witkoff's kids, are very invested in bitcoins, so it's an opportunity for them to skim the top. The second aspect there is that if you implement a digital financial system in Gaza and you put Israel in charge of it, Israel can play God with every person there.

You write one article critical of Israel, your account is suspended, transactions rejected. Every single move that you make is monitored by the Israelis 24-7. We know that Israel implemented the world's most lunatic artificial intelligence surveillance technology in human history.

Something that would make anything about China's social credit scoring system look like an ideal utopia. The Israelis had the three AI technologies, Lavender, Gospel, and Where's Daddy? That's the literal name of the AI machine that was responsible for massacring Palestinians on scale in Gaza, where they would scrape every person's entire history off the internet, as well as surveillance data that Israel has been collecting on every person in Gaza, and they would feed it to an AI machine to give you a score from one to 100 and decide how much is Zaha threatening to people in power, to the Israeli occupation. If you get a bad score, too bad for you, your life is over.

And this is the last element that I wanted to allude to, is that basically you have Gaza no longer being just a unique extraordinary case of human savagery. It is basically a canary in a coal mine. What starts there does not end there. It is coming to your doorsteps very soon.

So Peter Thiel, Larry Ellison, the nice guys that I mentioned earlier, they are basically now buying U.S. corporate media. They are now basically engulfing and swallowing U.S. government institutions, Peter Thiel's Palantir, etc. There is the last element with the sort of a ticking bomb in the making.

So Israel succeeded to convince Trump to basically put everything that has to do with Gaza on hold on one condition: Hamas should fully surrender and every single person in Gaza

should hand over whatever weapons they have, even if it is a pistol, if it is a rifle, if it is a pocket knife, whatever they have, a nail clipper, all of it needs to be submitted to the Israelis and only then will Israel allow any reconstruction in Gaza or allow any government to enter Gaza or allow any elections to happen in Gaza or any security force.

An IDF withdrawal is left to the whims of the Israelis. I read the proposal that was handed over by Nikolay Mladenov to the Hamas delegation, other Palestinian leaders, factions, etc. in Cairo, three weeks ago.

It literally explicitly makes every single progress in Gaza, even if it's a tiny, tiny fractional thing about temporary housing, if it's about allowing tents into Gaza. All of it is conditional on Hamas surrendering, handing over everything with no talk on Israeli withdrawal. And he told them explicitly, if you do not accept this proposal, war is going to be resumed again.