



Israeli left wing activists calling for ceasefire outside the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv on November 4, 2023. PHOTO: COURTESY

ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

An Israeli journalist’s perspective

Oren Ziv, a photojournalist covering the Israel and Palestine conflict since 2003, speaks to Ramisa Rob of The Daily Star on the ground reality in the West Bank, the Hamas attacks, and public perception in Israel.

Can you describe what’s happening in the West Bank right now?

The occupation in the West Bank is increasing compared to what we’ve witnessed in the last few years, since the establishment of the extreme far-right government. It seems that Israeli settlers and extreme right groups were just waiting for this opportunity to attack Palestinians in the West Bank and grab more land. I’ve documented cases in villages in Palestinian communities in Area C—which according to the Oslo Accords is under Israeli security’s responsibility—where Israeli settlers and soldiers are increasingly uprooting vulnerable Palestinian communities, such as the farmers, attacking and threatening them with a deadline to leave their homes. From October 7 until October 29, as many as 15 entire communities—home to 133 families—have been forced out of their homes; 870 Palestinian people, including 320 minors, have been displaced. The settlers are taking advantage of the fact that the world’s attention is on Gaza. More than 150 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since October 7, and the numbers are going up every day. Compared to Gaza, these numbers are obviously small, but when this war ends, we may see that the situation in the West Bank has changed dramatically as well.

I recently visited the community of Khirbet Zanouta, in the south of the West Bank, and witnessed Palestinian people literally packing their belongings because of an outpost that is illegal not only according to international law, but according to Israeli law too. Yet, they are getting full support from the government.

To track back to the Hamas attack, were you on the ground reporting? Can you describe what you saw?

I woke up to sirens here in Tel Aviv, and drove down to the south of Israel with my colleagues. We got to the city of Ashkelon where buildings and car parks were hit, but there was not enough emergency security to take care of the sites, which is quite unusual in Israel. We travelled to the city of Sderot and saw unclaimed bodies of civilians lying around. The Israeli emergency services are usually quite fast with responding in such circumstances, but this was not the case on October 7. For people living in the border villages, it was very shocking that the Israeli army did not have the intelligence to anticipate the attack—that it took them hours and days to gain control of the situation. But I can confirm what I saw with my own eyes, documenting from the Kibbutz of Kissufim to the village of Nir Oz and talking to eyewitnesses, that this was a systematic attack. While Hamas did attack military bases, they also did intentionally target civilians, women and children, many of whom were murdered in their homes, in their beds and shelters.

Is Israel’s current military operations in Gaza a justifiable response to the Hamas attacks? How do you view it morally and politically?

As a human being first, as an Israeli citizen, as someone who has friends and colleagues in Gaza, I completely reject the Israeli policy of bombing civilians. We have seen this happen in the past, and many of us have been against it. After the horrific Hamas attacks, it seems that Israel has received a free ticket from the world from being criticised for what they’re doing in Gaza. For verbiage, I use the term “ethnic cleansing,” because I am still trying to be cautious about what words to use; I’m not an expert in the subject of genocide. I base this phrasing on my colleague Yuval’s reporting of an official Israeli intelligence ministry document revealing a policy to expel Palestinians out to Egypt.

In Israel, we are also hearing from the families of victims of the Hamas attack that

they condemn the targeting of civilians in Gaza in their names. From a strategic lens, the bombings in Gaza also risk killing hostages. Many of the families of hostages we have spoken to feel that the Palestinian prisoners who were held before October 7 should be freed in exchange for the hostages. So there is no justification for the killings of innocent women and children in Gaza.

A practical solution is only diplomatic. I’m not even talking about the moral level now, because even for people who don’t share my opinion in Israel, it is very clear that Gazans are not going anywhere—that even the day after the war, if Hamas collapses or leaves to another country, we need a peaceful agreement for people to rebuild their homes and lives. But under this extreme right-wing government, we also acknowledge this will not happen.

There’s speculation that Netanyahu will

be calling for a ceasefire, and police are disbursing protests under emergency law. In the Palestinian towns inside Israel, in Haifa and Umm al-Fahm, we have seen police arresting and disrupting very peaceful demonstrations.

In +972 Magazine, you have been covering “both sides,” so to speak. You also co-authored an article about the political prosecution of critics inside the Israeli government. Do you face challenges in your reporting?

The Israeli media does not show what’s happening in Gaza; and there have been circulation of many false testimonies and rumours. We try to counter it with Palestinian writers and photographers reporting from inside Gaza. It is unbelievable how they continue reporting, even after their houses have been destroyed. The conditions they’re subjected



Israeli journalist Oren Ziv, taking cover from shots fired by Hamas militants during the first hours of October 7, 2023. PHOTO: COURTESY

want this war to go on as his political career might come to an end. People in Israel are going back to the streets to demand his resignation. Even today (Saturday, November 4) we witnessed a father, who lost his daughter in the Hamas attack, going to protest. People are also saying that it was Netanyahu’s responsibility to prevent the October 7 catastrophe. He has been prime minister for so many years, but has not been to any funerals and barely met the families of hostages. On the other hand, there are individuals in the chief of staff who are saying that it was their responsibility. I believe we may see them resigning in the coming days after the first emergency status ends.

Is there polarisation and repression of free speech regarding ceasefire and solidarity with Palestinians in Israeli society?

In my own view and others’, Israel has not been a democracy with its occupation in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and blockade in Gaza. We have witnessed waves of silencing of mostly Palestinian citizens, as well as the Israeli radical left throughout this government’s tenure. Now, there’s been an unprecedented attack on freedom of speech. The courts, police, right-wing organisations are all ready to crack down on anyone for the simplest of things such as putting up a Palestinian flag or talking about the children of Gaza. On the other hand, there are Israeli settlers on social media calling for the murder of Palestinian civilians in the West Bank. We have seen no action taken against them while the chief of police has openly said that whoever protests for Gaza or supports Gaza will be sent to Gaza in buses—which is completely illegal. This shows you how the chief of police views the law and the citizens.

In Tel Aviv, Israeli Jewish left-wing activists

to is terrible for anyone to live under, let alone continue risking their lives.

There is a big challenge to cover the truth of both sides, as people don’t have patience when they’re emotional to hear others’ stories. But it’s important for us journalists, who have been covering this for decades, to give the context from the perspective of people who live in an open-air prison.

What is the key context that people should know from your perspective?

I think it’s important to remember that in the 2006 disengagement plan by the centre-right wing government, Israel withdrew from Gaza but due to pressure from the extreme right wing, they did not want to hand Gaza over to the Palestinian Authority. Then we saw Hamas take over. Netanyahu and his ministers’ policy of separating the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza to prevent any diplomatic solution has led to this. It was actually good for them to say that it’s “Hamas ruling Gaza” to rule out diplomacy. In terms of recent context, Netanyahu’s policy of putting the Palestinians aside, hoping everyone forgets about them, and doing agreements with the Arab world just completely collapsed.

Was the two-state solution ever viable from the ground reality?

I don’t think the two-state solution has ever been viable, with the growing number of Israeli settlements. Only proper political agreements can bring security for both sides. It’s hard to say how things will play out, as political views are changing every minute. But as someone documenting the ground reality for decades, I believe ending occupation will lead to a long-term solution for both Israelis and Palestinians.

The economic beneficiaries of a second Nakba



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RAMISA ROB

After US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken called for “a humanitarian pause,” Israel intensified air strikes on hospitals, ambulances, refugee camps, UN schools, turning the Gaza Strip into a graveyard for children. Yet, Blinken has rejected the push from Arab states for a ceasefire on the grounds that Hamas could still attack Israel, which essentially means Netanyahu’s government isn’t currently under substantial pressure to stop the ceaseless bombings or ground invasion.

According to a rare and recent investigation by The New York Times, speaking to six diplomats, Israel has quietly pushed for more Gazans to leave, framing it as a humanitarian initiative for civilians to temporarily escape what they call “the perils of Gaza” for refugee camps in the Sinai desert. This lends itself to the Palestinian claim that Israel is intentionally pursuing a “second Nakba”—the mass displacement of Palestinian people, similar to 1948—to claim the entirety of the Gaza Strip for itself. When criticising the Israeli military’s unstoppable onslaught in Gaza, and the US for backing it, underlying economic motives are rarely assessed in the fog of political and moral debates. But economic benefits are ingrained in the politics of greed, pushing Israel’s systematic eliminationist campaigns and assaults.

The coastal strip of Gaza and Israeli-Occupied Palestinian Territory sit above sizeable reservoirs of oil and natural gas, which offer an opportunity to distribute and share \$524 billion among different parties in the region, according to a 2017 study by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The UNCTAD report also stated, “What could be a source of wealth and opportunities could prove disastrous if these common resources are exploited individually and exclusively, without due regard for international law and norms.” The opportunity costs of Israeli occupation—with ongoing restrictions on mobility, access and trade—exclusively in the area of oil and natural gas have accumulated tens, if not hundreds, of billion dollars. UNCTAD also estimated that the Palestinians, under occupation in the 2007-17 period, lost \$47.7 billion in revenues leaked to Israel.

Israel has exclusively explored drilling new oil and gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean, from the Leviathan field, and signed billion-dollar deals with Jordan and Egypt, while Arab citizens protested with their rejection of energy “stolen from occupied Palestine.” In the current geopolitical context, natural gas and LNG reflect tools to deepen political relationships through economic dependence. It’s at the heart of normalisation agreements between Israel and Arab states, ignoring the Palestinian cause.

In Israel’s current war-mongering policy, exterminating Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and creating a buffer zone would give Israel open access to Gaza’s gas reserves. It also serves the long term

US-Israel energy cooperation agreement, which stipulates that the development of natural resources by Israel are in the “strategic interest” of the US. This is relevant especially now as the US seeks to tighten its loosening grip in the Middle East in a crumbling world order.

The blood of the innocent Palestinian civilians—the children, the infants—lie in a complex global capitalist system that systematically profits from mass killings of marginalised people.

A lot has also been said about the pro-Israeli lobby driving the Biden administration’s moral hypocrisy in arming up Israel’s powerful military. But to be more specific, a part of the problem is the Pentagon’s increased reliance on the private weapons sector. The arms and weapons industry booms during war; when more people die from bombs or shots, they profit more.

A study by the Watson Institute at Brown University in 2021 revealed that one-third of all Pentagon contracts in recent years have gone to just five major weapons contractors: Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, Raytheon, and Northrop Grumman. Unsurprisingly, stocks of these companies also surged by seven percent since the Hamas attack and Israel’s invasion of Gaza. The outsized influence of the private sector contractors is manifested in the lion’s share of Pentagon receipts in post-9/11 US wars.

While people all over the world watch Israel blowing whole Palestinian families into bits, transcripts of an off-camera press briefing by the deputy press secretary of the Pentagon on October 30, show that the US is not putting any limitations on how Israel uses weapons that are provided.

At the same time, big Wall Street institutions consumed the news of mounting civilian deaths in Gaza, with an eye towards big profits for their clients in the weapons and aerospace sector, as revealed by transcripts of third-quarter earnings calls this month. An analyst in TD Cowen blatantly asked the CFO of General Dynamics about the incremental acceleration of demand of their products resulting from the Israel-Hamas war. The CFO responded, “We’re working ahead of schedule to accelerate the production capacity...the Israel situation is going to put upward pressure on that demand...the biggest one to highlight is on the artillery side.”

It’s also worth noting that prolonging the Ukraine war has benefited US-based defence and weapons contractors, whose values have surged since the beginning of the war. Take, for example, Lockheed Martin, whose value stood at \$98 billion in 2022, and reached its highest records at the end of the year, at \$127 billion, currently standing at a market capitalisation of \$112.2 billion. In the maths of billions, Israel’s ongoing war in Gaza and the indiscriminate killings of civilians, avoiding a ceasefire, will shore up profits for the US military-industrial complex that enjoys the spoils of warfare.

