

GAZA SEEN FROM THE GROUND

A view from inside the war



SEYMOUR HERSH
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Scene of the destruction following the Israeli airstrike on the Zeitoun Martyrs School, a shelter for displaced Palestinians in Gaza City, on September 14. At least five Palestinians, including two children and a woman, were killed, and several others were injured in the attack. / Photo by Dawoud Abo Alkas/Anadolu via Getty Images.

This week I spoke to a Canadian citizen who has been working as a researcher in Gaza. She speaks Arabic and knows the people and the territory, once a Mediterranean oasis of grand gardens and exotic fruits from ancient times that, since the Hamas attack last October 7 and the Israeli response, has become a barren death trap. I am not at liberty to tell you much more about her. She acknowledges the shock

and horror of Hamas's attack on Israel last October 7, but sees it in the context of decades of brutal Israeli suppression of life in Gaza.

She has come over the years to know the Palestinian people well and to admire what she calls "their willingness to adjust and accommodate. Let's put it this way," she said, "if you had to destroy one particular group of people—what can I tell you? The military campaign in Gaza has opened up a new terrain of violence against civilians. In the next war, whether in Lebanon or another part of the world, systematically targeting hospitals won't be so shocking because we've seen the live raids of hospitals, four or five of them. And targeting journalists won't be shocking. Multiple images of beheaded babies on a livestream won't be shocking.

"People don't understand that what the Israelis are getting away with in Gaza is setting the stage for wars to come—everywhere. And when international organizations fail us in Gaza and UN Security Council resolutions are ignored, they are going to be ignored by everyone going forward.

"People are not that stupid, and they are not going to forget. We knew what was coming in October, and we were screaming at the top of our lungs: stop it! Stop it now! And this is why people are so terrified and enraged. I'm terrified for what is to come, but do not misunderstand me. Why is what is to come going to be any worse than what has just come? This is the most televised genocide in history. We haven't had a live stream of people as their homes are being bombed, mobilizing TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter, and Instagram—a very young population in Gaza who are well versed technologically, who speak English, and who are telling you in real time as things are happening and also using social media to raise money so they can survive.

"It's incredible and that's what sets it apart. The visual element of this war is a part of setting the normalization. It is also part of the difficulty Israel is having in denying that things are happening because we are able to see and we're able to locate it and to prove it. They are not denying any more that they raided a hospital or that they bombed a school. They're just saying that it is justified.

"Israel is not unique in this. What is unique is the visual evidence that we have even though we don't have many international journalists doing their work independently on the ground. And yet it is still continuing, almost a year on. I think that is what's different about it. And that's part of the terror many of us are feeling.

“Gaza has collapsed the past and the future. What is the message that Israel is being given by the United States? It is: ‘You can escalate but keep it contained.’ And that is what they are doing. They have been escalating. In the beginning, when we saw a handful of children blown up and shredded into pieces, it was shocking. Now we are seeing it over and over again. When I was in Gaza—I’m not a medical doctor—but the things that were happening to people’s flesh, it was shocking. I thought I was the only one in the room who was shocked. But when I looked around, among doctors who do this daily, heroically, they were as disturbed and traumatized and one hundred times as exhausted and overworked as I was.

“So you don’t think Palestinians are human? Okay, it’s on you but it’s not going to stop there. And we’re already seeing that in the region. And we have a government in Washington that is absolutely incapable of putting any pressure on Israel and the next one will not, either. I don’t have much hope for the Democrats or the Republicans.

“We’re not documenting this only for ourselves now. We’re documenting it for the future. We’re going to look back and try to understand how in the fuck did it get to a point where the main demographics that are being killed and shredded are women and children? Whether it is children being hit by a single sniper rifle shot to the head, which shows intent, or children being flattened by bulldozers, or dying from infections, this is a genocidal intent.

“A woman giving birth in Gaza is in total hell. She has two or three hours to give birth, and the moment she does she is sent home. And being sent home means walking for hours with the new infant in your hands or sitting on a donkey cart, which is horrific—full of animals and it’s dirty. You and your child are going to be infected. Women are a target.

“Another thing I want to share with you is about men, because men are very much understudied in this iteration of the genocide. We have stories of men being humiliated, raped. People need to see the footage of men to see what Israel has been doing to men since October. Multiple doctors have told me of what they’re seeing as a pattern of young men in their twenties being shot by Israeli snipers in the groin area. It prevents their ability to have children.

“Is there some empirical evidence of this?” she asked rhetorically. “I doubt it. I mean, who has statistics?”

The researcher made it clear that she was all for mobilizing students at universities worldwide to put political pressure on the United States and other nations in Western Europe to stop supplying Israel with bombs and other weapons. There was another issue that she found profoundly unsettling—the posts that some Israeli soldiers on leave overseas after a rotation in Gaza, many with dual citizenship, displayed graphically showing what she said were videos of their violations in Gaza. “These soldiers are openly posting and bragging” about their violations of military law “before returning to Gaza,” she told me. “I think we should be going after them.”

I asked about her view of the Western press and its coverage of the Gaza war. “I think about it,” she said, “but my struggle is not to redeem the Western media. They are showing themselves and they are failing in this moment. I mean academia, media, courts, the street, right? Who gets to speak on the street? Who gets to hold up a sign? Who gets to chant? Who gets to wear a scarf around their neck? These are existential moments for the media and they are failing to step up to the plate. I’m not interested in saving the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* from themselves.”



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