

“Turning Gaza to Dust”, Meiron Rapoport, Sikha Mekomit “Local Call”, 8/7/2025, [English](#):

Introduction

Welcome to “Eyes on Gaza”, our daily gathering of protest and learning. Today, we host the journalist and activist Meron Rapoport from *Sikha Mekomit*, “Local Call”, who will speak on the destruction of Gaza’s built environment under the title, “Turning Gaza to Dust”. As always, Meron will speak for eight minutes, followed by a short discussion.

Lecture

In December 2023, two months into the war, I published an article entitled “Is What Israel is doing in Gaza Domicide?” “Domicide” is a relatively new concept, highlighting a gap in international law. While the unjustified destruction of homes is a recognized war crime, the systematic erasure of entire urban environments lacks a precise legal definition—even though such actions can function as a precursor to genocide. Already then, evidence showed that much of the destruction in Gaza was not tied to battles but occurred afterward—long after fighting had ended. We saw high-profile demolitions of symbolic institutions like the Palestinian Parliament, courts of justice, and al-Azhar University, along with dozens of residential buildings in Shuja’iyya—all often filmed and celebrated by Israeli soldiers. Though military justifications were cited, it was clear that the scope of destruction far exceeded any immediate tactical needs.

By January 2024, The journalist website the “Hottest Place in Hell” (Hebrew *haMakom haKhi Kham baGehenom*) reported that Israel had razed virtually every building within one kilometer of Gaza’s border—creating a so-called “buffer zone”—without identifying them as terror infrastructure. Today, roughly 130 square kilometers, a significant portion of Gaza, are designated as such zones. In May 2025, I co-authored another investigation titled “Destroying So They Can’t Return”. I have argued—based on testimony from over ten soldiers and countless videos—that destruction itself had become the army’s primary daily operation in Gaza. Direct confrontations with Hamas were rare; instead, troops were tasked with routine demolition. One case drew wide attention: Abraham Zarviv, a rabbinical court judge and IDF commander, boasted on Israeli TV Channel 14 and social media about personally destroying 50 buildings per week with his D9 between October 2024 and January 2025. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in Rafah. After Israel broke the ceasefire in March 2025, demolition became systematic. According to visual analysis by researcher Ariel Kan for “Local Call”, just 4 percent of Rafah’s buildings remained intact by May 2025. The old city—first mentioned in 1303 BCE under Pharaoh Seti I, and once home to over 250,000 people—was erased.

Reports by journalists Nir Hasson, Yaniv Kubovic, and Uri Misgav have revealed that much of the IDF’s ground operations now involve escorting bulldozers. Private contractors—many from Israeli settlements—are paid NIS 2,500 to destroy a small house and NIS 5,000 for a larger one. Khan Yunis is quickly becoming another Rafah: aerial imagery suggests half its buildings are already gone. Prime Minister Netanyahu recently suggested repurposing bulldozers currently demolishing Khan Yunis to build a new “humanitarian city” on Rafah’s ruins—clearly signaling premeditated intent. According to current estimates, 180,000 buildings in Gaza have been destroyed or severely damaged since the war began—about 73 percent of the Strip’s total structures.

The military logic, first and foremost, is to keep Israeli casualties as low as possible. This, I believe, also stems from the fact that the entire operation in Gaza is a political one. The army is deeply concerned about high casualty numbers and therefore aims to minimize them. And once international law no longer imposes constraints, entire neighborhoods can be demolished under the pretext of security—because, militarily speaking, if there are no buildings, there is no threat. The logic follows: if there are no people, there is no threat. So even though IDF spokespeople insist that

the destruction is strictly for operational purposes, every video from the ground shows the scale of devastation to be vast and often justified in other terms—most plainly, as an act of revenge. Soldiers can be heard in these videos dedicating the destruction to a fallen comrade or to a previous attack.

To this we must add the political dimension. If the current goal of the war in Gaza is to concentrate the population in the southern part of the Strip in preparation for its expulsion—for the so-called “voluntary relocation” Netanyahu has mentioned—then of course the cities must be destroyed. Palestinians must have nowhere to return to. Netanyahu himself said in a meeting of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee: “We are destroying more and more houses. They have nowhere to go back to.” The meaning is crystal clear: once the homes are gone, and there is nothing left to return to, so-called voluntary migration will follow—because people simply will have nowhere to live.

But I think it’s worth adding another statement—one that stems from an even deeper logic. I interviewed the archaeologist Rafi Greenberg, and he told me that as an archaeologist who studies the Middle Bronze Age—meaning 1500 BCE, 2000 BCE—over 4,000 years of history in the Land of Israel, there has never been destruction in this area between the Jordan River and the sea like the destruction caused by Israel in 1948. And the destruction in Gaza, he said, is a continuation of that. His words have stayed with me. The scale of destruction—unprecedented not only in the history of this region but almost anywhere in the world—is not only meant to prevent people from returning. It is also intended to make them forget that they were ever there to begin with, to erase any memory of their presence in the future. I believe the destruction we are witnessing is part of that logic. It is not only for operational purposes, and not even solely for political aims. It is meant to erase presence—to make people forget that human beings once lived there.