

English: “Israel and Hamas: A view from Gaza”, Dr. Assaf David, Regional Thinking Forum, Van Leer Institute, 4.8.2025

Introduction

Hello to everyone and welcome to *Eyes on Gaza*, our daily gathering, a combination of protest and learning. Dr. Assaf David is with us today. He is the director of the “Forum of Regional Thinking” at the Van Leer Institute, which itself is a great resource of knowledge. I recommend that you check their website. Assaf is probably the person from whom I, personally, and many more here I'm sure, have learned more than from anyone else about what is happening in Gaza, about the intolerable gaps between what military and government spokespeople are saying, and what is actually happening. His real commitment to realistic witnessing and also his insistence on building a different regional future is inspiring and I am very grateful to him for being with us today. Assaf will speak for 8-9 minutes and afterward we will open for questions. Questions can be asked in the chat. You can also put questions in the chat while Assaf is speaking and I will read them to him after he finishes his talk. Assaf, thank you so much for joining us today.

Lecture

Thank you for inviting me. I see here familiar faces. I am so happy to see them. We have time for a brief introduction, so I will try to speak concisely about a few points that cannot be found in the public discourse in Israel, and also you may hear surprising things, especially if I am correct that we have here activists who have a very critical position vis-à-vis what Israel is doing in Gaza. I want to say first that the information that I collect on what is happening in Gaza since October 8th comes from what I read, hear, and see via Facebook, sometimes through direct conversations with friends and acquaintances that I have met during the war. I absorb many things that they write. Just a few days ago someone from there wrote to me: “I have no food, I am in the tent, I cannot move, if I get up I get dizzy and fall down, but I have internet, so I am writing.” And it seems to me that Gaza, the residents of Gaza—even in the tents—if there is something they can do now, it is simply to document their conditions. There is no international media. The IDF allows in only whom they want. Most of the Palestinian journalists in Gaza—or I do not know if it is most, but many of them—have been killed. So, Gazans simply document their own destruction themselves.

Firstly, I start from the assumption that there are human beings in Gaza. Unfortunately, this is not a given in Israel today. So, it is very natural that when humans experience this kind of war of retribution, of revenge, never-ending and harmful first and foremost to the civilian population and to the basic infrastructure of existence for people in Gaza, it is natural that they will not like, to put it euphemistically, those who are bombing them. So, my basic point is that they have no special affection for Israel—not before October 7th, and certainly not after October 7th. And I have already written enough about that. I emphasize it here because we will pay for it dearly in the future.

That said, it is important for me to say that there is great disgust for Hamas in Gaza. And I want to expand on that a bit because it was important for me that people hear this. I discovered that when we were writing and saying this in Israel, for people in the mainstream this helps. It helps to humanize the population of Gaza, to understand that they do not see a future in Hamas and do not see a future in the actions of Hamas, and also do not see a future in the way that Hamas cooperates with Israel in demolishing Gaza, and I will get to that in a minute.

Over the past months I have already found it difficult to present this criticism—the Gazan criticism of Hamas—because first of all it has already become self-evident in my eyes. That is to say, I do not remember when in the past months I saw even a quarter of a statement defending Hamas's decision-making process, either on October 7th or since then, coming from Gaza. Outside Gaza—in the West Bank, in the Palestinian diaspora, or among Arab populations in neighboring countries—there certainly is support. In Gaza there is great anger about this, in the form of: “How dare you support the spilling of our blood down to the last drop? All this glorified heroism, and we are being wiped

out here.” So, there is enormous anger at Arabs in neighboring countries who praise and glorify Hamas.

For me it has been hard to mirror this in recent months, because it no longer matters now, it simply does not matter at all what Gazans think about Hamas. They have no ability whatsoever to affect the survival of Hamas rule. If we—and I keep saying this—if we can get rid of Netanyahu’s regime, which has committed crimes and corrupted so much of what existed here (not that what existed here before was perfect), but this regime truly dragged it into grotesque proportions, in abandoning the population, in personal and political corruption, and now in this genocide—if we, Israelis, can still go out into the streets and protest and we still have various ways to throw this government out, and for various reasons we do not do it or do not manage to do it, then what do we expect Gazans to do, when they do not know at all, not only how they will survive this day, but how they will survive the coming hour? So here a little humility is really required from Israeli Jews.

I will say a few words in the 2–3 minutes left to me: the loathing toward Hamas in Gaza is immense. I have never seen such a thing. Since Gazans, as I said, are human beings in my eyes, this is very natural. Imagine what you would feel as Jewish Israeli citizens if, heaven forbid, the State of Israel were facing an unceasing annihilation attack, ostensibly directed against the government but in fact succeeding in destroying all the country’s life infrastructures, erasing 70–90 percent of the buildings in the country, destroying all infrastructure, people hungry for bread, barely managing to survive, looking like *Muselmänner*. What would you think of the government when something like this happens, and it knows it needs to do one-two-three in order to end it, and it does not end it? You would loathe it, that is all. That is exactly the situation of the people of Gaza. Exactly that situation.

I cannot count how many times I have already seen, heard, watched, spoken with people from Gaza who say: “Total surrender! We demand total surrender of Hamas. Return immediately all the hostages with no precondition. If you want to hand them over to a third party it does not matter, as long as they are not in Gaza, not here, that the negotiations over them be with another actor. Second, disarm yourselves. Anyway, what weapons are even left for Hamas in Gaza? The tunnels were bombed, there are no heavy weapons anymore. And light weapons: disarm yourselves and also leave Gaza. Leave us alone. You destroyed Gaza.” “You”—that is how the claim runs in the population—“you are partners of Israel in the erasure of Gaza.”

I do not know how Hamas will come out of this “war.” This is no longer a war. How will it come out of this extermination campaign with any remnant of the support, of the esteem it once had in the Palestinian population? Certainly not in Gaza, and I think after what Israel did in Gaza is exposed, then maybe not even in the West Bank. That is to say – I repeat again – none of this removes any responsibility from Israel. We, our children, and apparently also our grandchildren will pay for this. We do not even understand how much we will pay for this, I think, because the world has still not been exposed to the images from inside. But when that happens, and when Gazans can tell their story freely, then we will pay a very heavy price. But Hamas too will pay a very heavy price, and perhaps the entire conception of institutionalized Palestinian armed struggle—I am not speaking of individual struggle—that depends much on what Israel will do.

Now these are things—and with this I will conclude—that if there had been a government in Israel—I am not even expecting too much, I am not even expecting a left-wing government—if there had been a pragmatic right-wing government and not a crazy regime, then perhaps it would have been possible to work with this situation. Hamas absorbed a very hard blow. It would have been possible to cut things short, a year—a year and a half ago, and to build on the enormous image damage. Because Hamas, after all, became known as, or was built up as, a movement that cares for civilians and is not corrupt and so on and so forth. That of course did not happen, because Netanyahu’s regime’s interests—he does not care about anything, not about the Palestinian armed struggle, not about anything. He cares about his own interests. Therefore, if Israel also ends this war after it destroyed Gaza, and even if Hamas remains there, for Netanyahu’s regime this certainly will not matter. We, all of us as Israelis, will pay for it.