

Introduction

So again, hello and welcome to *Eyes on Gaza*. Today we are holding our first gathering since the ceasefire came into effect. Since then, Israelis and Palestinians have returned from captivity, and celebrations of joy have been mingled with pain over lives cut short in vain. The fragile ceasefire, and the hope for lasting calm—and beyond that, the possibility of building a sustainable future for all of us here between the Jordan and the sea—are accompanied by worry and apprehension. It is clear to us that in this unstable present we must keep our eyes on Gaza, to bear witness to the destruction and devastation we have wrought there. Not only because all of this still does not belong to the past, but because without recognition of the horror, we will not be able to turn toward another future. We could not think of a more fitting guest for our first meeting after the ceasefire than Nir Hasson, *Haaretz* journalist and winner of the 2025 Sokolov Prize, who has been covering the war of annihilation in Gaza and the destruction, hunger, and death that Israel has sown there since July 2024. Nir is one of the few voices in Israel’s print journalism who presents to the Israeli public an accurate picture of the scope and nature of the uncontrolled violence that Israel has inflicted on Gaza. At the beginning of October, just about two weeks ago, Nir published in *Haaretz* an article describing the October 7 massacre and Israel’s response to it as the two greatest disasters to have befallen Israeli society. In the article, he describes in detail the trauma caused by each, from a deep understanding that one cannot overcome one without acknowledging the other—that recognizing Palestinian suffering and rebuilding Gaza are conditions for Israel’s own recovery. That is why precisely now, with the beginning of an unstable ceasefire and an uncertain future, it seems especially fitting to hear from Nir about the humanitarian situation in Gaza—not only to know what is happening there now, but to understand the scale of the destruction, the extent of the loss, and our responsibility toward those who remain under it. This gaze, being willing to see, to listen, and to document, is also the gaze from which another way of thinking about a shared future can grow. It allows us to challenge the narrative of eternal enmity, the idea that we are doomed to lives of violence and hostility, and to ask how it might still be possible to imagine and create here a different reality—one of equality and life for all of us. Thank you very much, Nir, for agreeing to join *Eyes on Gaza* today. We will listen to you for eight minutes, and as usual, you are invited to write your questions in the chat.

Presentation

Thank you, Lior, thank you for the invitation. This is an amazing project—I didn’t know about it, I had heard of it, but didn’t know the details. Really, all respect to you for making this happen. You mentioned instability. I think that is a very accurate description. It was impossible not to breathe a sigh of relief on the eve of the holiday with the return of the hostages and the quiet. And as someone who follows what’s happening in Gaza, it really did feel—for a moment—it felt different. I spoke with a UN worker who was standing at the Kerem Shalom crossing just the day before, on Saturday. And she told me: “I see a truck of kiwis, I see a truck of bananas—you won’t believe it, a truck of bananas just passed—and cooking gas, cooking gas entered for the first time since March.” And of course, the return of the hostages—there was truly a moment when one could breathe. But it feels like a very frightening, very unstable period. The feeling is that this agreement that Trump stitched together was sewn quickly and roughly. We heard the speech. We understand that there’s no attention to detail here, no engagement with the hard questions, that he simply applied pressure on both sides, forced them to sign, and now has fled back to Washington—and is not interested anymore. And that’s very worrying, because it’s unclear what will happen next.

I wrote this morning on Twitter that it’s becoming apparent that we both ate the rotten fish and got thrown out of the city: we dragged out a bloody war for two years and became lepers in the eyes of the world; we got beaten, 2,000 of our people were killed—including more than 40 hostages—and we killed 70,000; and in the end, we were driven out of the city because Hamas returned to power in the

Strip. That's how I feel today. That is to say, the feeling is that Israel did not achieve its goals. Hamas is back in control of Gaza. We can see videos from recent days of executions, and of Hamas security forces returning. It's unclear exactly how this phase of Turkish or Egyptian forces entering will work—how they will enter, and if Hamas resists, whether they will actually fight Hamas; how Israel will even allow them to operate. It's all very murky and very concerning. I don't think we're in immediate danger of renewed fire. It seems to me that, in that respect, Trump and the Sharm el-Sheikh conference have boxed Israel in. But that doesn't mean it can't happen later. And it doesn't mean Israel won't take steps like it did last year—actually, at the beginning of this year—to impose a blockade and starvation and similar actions. We already saw some of that yesterday when Israel closed the Rafah crossing because of the issue with the bodies.

Regarding the story of the bodies: contrary to the common Israeli narrative that Hamas is playing games and trying to hide them, I think there's a real difficulty in finding people. Open satellite images and you'll see what's happening in Gaza. I assume that if you're informed, you know what's going on. It's not a place where it's easy to find people who were buried two years ago. The people who buried them are gone, the geography of the place has changed. It's truly a challenge. There is a real problem here. And it's very worrying, because as time passes, I think in the end we will indeed be left with missing people whose fate we won't know—and that will be terrible. Terrible, of course, for their families. I'm in contact with several families, and the pain, the uncertainty, are unbearable. But it will also be terrible for the ability to maintain stability in Gaza.

Now, I'll say something about the current situation. I always say there are four plagues that we inflicted on Gaza: killing—we know the numbers, 70,000, and likely much more if you count the missing and excess deaths; destruction—we see the numbers, 78% destruction, entire cities flattened to the ground; displacement—90% of the population displaced from their homes, several times over, having lost all their property; and hunger. Of these four plagues, hunger is in the best condition. Since July Israel has opened up, allowed more food in. We've seen prices drop already by the end of August, and hunger rates and deaths from hunger have begun to decline. About three weeks from now, people will still die of hunger. Just last week, I published the story of a girl who died of starvation. People will still die, because extreme malnutrition isn't something that disappears so quickly. You don't just pour food on people and solve the problem. But I assume that if there isn't another blockade, that problem can be solved.

The other three problems—the other three plagues—will continue to accompany Gaza and its residents for years, for decades ahead. There are some plans beginning to be discussed for reconstruction. Just to give a sense of scale: at the beginning of last year, there was talk of reconstruction taking about twenty years and costing 53 billion dollars—that's about a third of Israel's national budget. And that was at the beginning of last year—that is, before Operation *Gideon's Chariots A* and *Gideon's Chariots B*, before the complete destruction of Rafah, before the destruction of Gaza's towers. So since then, that amount has certainly risen by tens percent, if not more.

There's also the Egyptian plan that was presented at the beginning of the year, which spoke of the same order of magnitude. Regarding the problems, I'll mention just two enormous challenges anyone seeking to rebuild Gaza must address. The first is: what to do with the construction debris. A report released last week speaks of 61 million tons of construction waste. Just to give scale—I did the math this morning—that's 167 kilograms of debris for every square meter of the Strip, from the Erez crossing to Rafah, from the sea to the fence. This debris is contaminated with human remains, chemicals, heavy metals, asbestos, unexploded ordnance. Clearing it, treating it, recycling it—that's an insane engineering challenge. And the second is: where will people live in the meantime? Because it's clear that this interim period of rebuilding Gaza will last for years.

So there are a few ideas. The Egyptians proposed setting up seven compounds—seven new “cities of refuge” within the Strip—and housing there a million to a million and a half people. There's also a very interesting proposal from the Arava Institute and the Palestinian NGO Damour, which already runs one displaced-persons camp, about how to develop off-grid displacement camps. Because it's clear that Gaza's grids—electricity, water, sewage—won't return to function for years. Therefore, all

these camps will need to sustain themselves: generate their own electricity, provide their own water, establish communal kitchens, set up schools—small kibbutzim, or not so small, quite large ones, each housing tens of thousands of people. So those are the two main challenges. I long for the day when this becomes serious—when there's really a plan, when it's clear who the political authority is, who the physical force is, who the policing power in Gaza is. Then we'll be able to talk about the day after.

Just one last word: during the previous ceasefire, I don't know how many of you followed, but there was an amazing TikTok trend in Gaza of people returning to their homes and cleaning them, posting before-and-after videos of how they cleaned their houses—clearing the rubble, scrubbing, mopping, placing a chair and a table in the middle, pouring a cup of tea. It was heartwarming to see those videos. I spent hours scrolling through them. And as soon as this ceasefire began, I started looking for them again. A few came out, but very few. And I keep asking myself why there aren't more. Is it because the destruction is so vast—or because the despair is so great? Those are the two possibilities for why these videos haven't returned. Maybe they will.