

Interview with Dr. Feroze Sidhwa, organizer of open letters to White House on genocide in Gaza from doctors who have worked there

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Dr. Feroze Sidhwa is a trauma surgeon who works at the San Joaquin General Hospital in Stockton, California. Born in the US of Pakistani parents who belong to the non-Muslim Parsi minority, he was radicalized while attending college in 2000 with the outbreak of the Second Intifada in Gaza. Deeply affected by the horrific brutal treatment and murder of Palestinians, he immersed himself in studying the history and politics of the region.

Following two weeks as a volunteer at the European Hospital in Gaza, and based on his knowledge of the history of the Middle East conflicts and, in particular, the Israeli-US campaign to ethnically cleanse and depopulate the Gaza Strip and West Bank, he drafted two open letters to the Biden administration, signed by dozens of other doctors who had worked in Gaza, to bring attention to the brutal and cruel violence being wrought on the population. He also co-authored a report published by Politico on the terrible conditions in Gaza's hospitals.

The World Socialist Web Site contacted Dr. Sidhwa after the second open letter was made public, and he spoke with Dr. Benjamin Mateus at length about his experiences. The interview below was conducted on the eve of the publication by the New York Times of an op-ed column by Dr. Sidhwa, which summarized the experience of 65 doctors who were witnesses to Israeli war crimes in Gaza.

He wrote that he had "worked as a trauma surgeon in Gaza from March 25 to April 8. I've volunteered in Ukraine and Haiti, and I grew up in Flint, Michigan. I've seen violence and worked in conflict zones. But of the many things that stood out about working in a hospital in Gaza, one got to me: Nearly every day I was there, I saw a new young child who had been shot in the head or the chest, virtually all of whom went on to die."

The purpose of the report was to tell the world what "independent observers who have seen war from the ground, day after day, volunteer healthcare workers," experienced, he said. The column was the first significant report in the Times on the deliberate mass killing of children and other helpless victims of the genocide, and attracted widespread attention.

At the time of our interview with Dr. Sidhwa, it was not clear whether the Times would go ahead and publish his op-ed, since the editors of the newspaper were still insisting on changes that would diminish the sharpness of his criticism of the actions of the Israeli authorities in Gaza.

Benjamin Mateus (BM): Hello Dr. Sidhwa. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. Can you begin by telling me about yourself and your politicization on the Israel-Palestine conflict?

Feroze Sidhwa (FS): I work in Stockton, California. I'm at San Joaquin General Hospital, which is the only trauma center for about a million people in San Joaquin County.

My parents are from Pakistan. We're from a small ethnic minority called the Parsis [According to Wikipedia, they are descended from

Persians who migrated to the Indian subcontinent during the Arab conquest of Iran in the seventh century, when the Zoroastrians were persecuted by early Muslims]. They moved to the United States in 1982, just a week before my mother gave birth to me. I was born in Flint, Michigan and grew up there until we moved to Houston, Texas when I was 16.

I went to med school in San Antonio. But I took a break from that to do my Masters in Public Health in Boston and then returned to finish med school. I completed my residency at Boston Medical Center, fellowship at Cooper in Southern Jersey and came out here to Northern California for my first trauma job.

As for my politicization, when I started college in 2000 the second intifada broke out in October of that year. It was a big thing on campus. And then 9/11 happened the following year. All of it was quite a formative experience for me. You must understand that I grew up in a very Islamophobic household. My parents are still very Islamophobic people. They grew up in Pakistan and were a religious minority there. I was shaped by their experience.

So, I didn't really know anything about the conflict in Palestine. When the intifada broke out, the first few weeks I watched the coverage on CNN. It seemed pretty straightforward. The Israelis were just killing a bunch of people in the territories. I began to take an interest in these developments and wanted to learn more about the history of the region and why these conflicts occurred. I picked up several books and read them. I even took courses on the subject at Johns Hopkins International Relations Department, which is very right wing. None of the courses were sympathetic, but they were, to say the least, interesting.

When I became a physician, my goal had always been to do international work. I got to do some in medical school, in residency, but since I became an attending, I've been able to work in Ukraine three times. I went to Gaza in April. I've also been to Burkina Faso and Ghana. I worked in Haiti when I was a resident, when I was on my research years.

That's the kind of work that I've always wanted to do, mostly because I was exposed to it right after college, when I lived in Israel for a year. I would tour around the West Bank, and one day I met a guy just for a few hours, but he became a mentor of mine. I don't even know his name. I believe he was an orthopedic surgeon; he was with the organization Physicians for Human Rights-Israel.

I remember he took me aside and said, "Look at what those Arabs," that's what he called them, "go through every day. The doctors too. They suffer the same as everybody else in their society. They're not privileged. They may have an income, and they can maybe afford to buy a used car or something, but they don't get any special privileges. The Israelis will beat them up just like anybody else. If they get in the way of Hamas or Fatah,

they'll beat them up just like anybody else. They'll kill them if they want to." And then he said, "If you would be a doctor, even if you had to live like they do, then become a doctor..."

The humanity that he displayed having spent time with these people and his willingness to sacrifice his own social status, probably his own income, was compelling. To go and work with Palestinians was not an easy thing to do if you're an Israeli even back then. (I was there from 2004 to 2005.) He was a privileged person. He didn't have to go into the territories. I took those things to heart and thought that was the kind of work I wanted to be involved in.

When I did my residency at Boston Medical Center—it's Boston's County hospital and serves the poor population—it's the people I always wanted to work with. I saw how people lived not just abroad, but here too. That's just what I have always done; worked with poor people who don't have what they need.

Honestly, basically everything I've done since I turned 18 has been focused on trying to be able to do something about the Israel-Palestine conflict. Tomorrow I'm probably going to have an article published in the *New York Times* about what physicians and nurses who've worked in Gaza did. Since I returned from Gaza, I've been giving about one lecture a week in the Bay Area, and not just to community groups. I was the keynote speaker at Stanford's trauma symposium this year. I spoke at UCSF medical school. I was supposed to speak at UC Davis for surgical grand rounds, but they decided to cancel that at the last minute.

The public response to the anti-genocide campaign

BM: How has the public responded to your outspoken criticism of Israel and US policy? Have you faced any backlash at work?

FS: It's variable. I work at a county hospital. There are two reasons for this. First, it's where poor people get their care. Second, I'm a county employee. I'm unionized. It'd be very hard to fire me unless I came out as a Hitlerite or something like that. I'm also a federal employee within the VA system. If somebody wants to say I'm an antisemite that's on them, but nobody's going to fire me over that.

Here at my hospital specifically actually I was happily surprised. I went to my chairman/CEO and told him I was going to take vacation and travel to the Gaza Strip. "I just want to let you know," I said, "because the hospital might get a blowback." But they said they hadn't heard a thing.

Things have been fine at my work. The nurses organized an equipment drive for my trip. They started saving every unopened ET tube, every unopened laryngoscope. I took about 850 pounds of stuff to Gaza with me, and I gave another, 250 or 300 pounds to a guy that lives just north of me who went on a different flight. I took a lot of equipment over there and a lot of it was donated.

One of my friends said we should make the trip and request for donations public. And the response was surprisingly positive. I think half of the donations that I received were literally from people who just Venmo'd me. I have no idea who they were. Judging from their names, about a third of them were Jewish. I wasn't surprised by the fact that Jewish people were donating, but just that people who literally have no idea who I am, they're just going off of a friend's recommendation to donate money to me because I'm going to Gaza ... this was in January and February.

Open letters to the White House

BM: You drafted two open letters to the White House, one in July and another more recently. Both are very powerful documents. Why did you write it, and have you heard from Biden or Harris?

FS: The first letter was crafted around a call for a ceasefire and arms embargo and the second letter is crafted around the same, but also with the request for a meeting with the administration. I never got a response to either letter or any meaningful response.

I sent the first letter to people at the National Security Council. They just responded with a one-sentence platitude about how everyone wants a ceasefire. Nobody at the White House has responded to either letter. And I know it's been given to the Harris and Walz campaign, and they haven't responded either.

In summary, the goal of the open letters was twofold. Foremost, it was important to keep Gaza in the news. I also wanted to provide testimony from people on the ground. Anytime you read any news article in the mainstream media, it says the administration has had to walk a fine line between satisfying Jewish Americans who want more support for Israel, even though that's not true, and Arab Americans who want less support for Israel. But that's just not the case at all.

The situation is that literally the entire world, including most of the United States, is on one side and the governments of Israel and the United States are on the other. We wanted to give some testimony from Americans that is unimpeachable. I want to add, no one has even accused us of lying. No one has brought any challenges to our testimony.

As I previously mentioned, the *New York Times* article that is going to be published tomorrow, they sent the Israel Defense Force [IDF] a request for comment and the IDF, instead of actually answering any of the questions put to them, only said that the IDF always adheres to international law. They didn't bother to answer any of the specific questions: "Have you noticed children are being shot in the head by your forces? Have you noticed that women are being starved to death with their newborns?" They didn't bother, because what are they going to say?

To be honest, I think I had no expectation that this *New York Times* article would ever actually come out. I'm still skeptical that it'll be squashed at the last minute, but if it does get published then it may be possible that this administration will be forced to meet with us.

"Please meet with these doctors" that seemed a straightforward ask, or tactic, call it what you will. I thought that was an easy thing to motivate people to stay engaged and to not just throw their hands up and give up because, we're all incredibly tired of all of this and the level of frustration with realizing that our two major political parties, neither one of them is even opposed to genocide on principle.

BM: I recently read that the US has shipped more than 50,000 tons of weapons to Israel delivered in 600 shipments in the year since October 7, 2023.

FS: Yeah, those were the figures for about two months ago.

Imperialist restructuring of the Middle East

BM: And now Israel is taking the genocidal campaign into the West Bank, Lebanon and Syria, and with the continued support of the US, into Yemen and certainly Iran is next. We wrote that Israel functions as the United States' attack dog. They've been given a blank check to restructure the entire map in the Middle East. What are your thoughts?

FS: I think October 7 gave the US and Israel—and for all practical purposes, the US and Israel function as a single unit—the opportunity to advance plans that had been drawn up for some time. Israel is central to the US's ability to control the Middle East. The US owns almost every government in that region except maybe Syria. But Israel is the only

serious fighting force there. Hezbollah is fairly weak in relation to Israel. The Syrian army may be able to terrorize its own people, but it can't do much else. It certainly can't project force beyond its borders. Same with Jordan and the same with Saudi Arabia. The Saudis can invade Bahrain, but that's basically like me walking into my living room.

The major impediment to really solidifying US control over the Middle East since the Arab spring is Iran because it remains independent, and its oil resources are flowing away from the west. Iran has become the energy linchpin of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Syria has been essentially destroyed. It's going to take a generation to recover. Lebanon's Hezbollah, in terms of its ability to project force, is not going to invade Israel although it was able to oppose US designs in Syria. So, when October 7 happened, this was just a huge opportunity.

It was also a big propaganda opportunity for the US because what happened on October 7 was awful. It was quite brutal. I know a lot of Palestinians who think that it was just some false flag operation. For the other side, it was certainly widely exaggerated, no doubt. Still, the killing of 800 or 900 civilians is quite brutal.

But the US realized it had an opportunity to let Israel go completely ballistic. And it seems like once the US gave Israel the green light, it's been hard to pull them back from it. And Israel has destroyed the place. That was their main objective. They don't really care if Hamas carried out terrorist attacks. That was only the pretext. What they wanted to do was destroy Gaza and basically make it uninhabitable, hoping that over the next 10 to 20 years Gaza just disappears; everybody dies; everybody leaves. They don't really care either way.

But when it comes to Hezbollah, it's very different. A reporter that attended a White House press briefing said to Matthew Miller [State Dept. spokesperson] something to the effect, "It seems we're seeing the same pattern in Lebanon that we saw in Gaza where the US says it doesn't want something done but Israel does it anyway and you keep sending them arms and then you say you want a diplomatic solution, and Israel interrupts the diplomatic solution."

And Miller, now that Gaza's been destroyed, doesn't have to pretend anymore. He interrupted the reporter and said, "We've never wanted to see a diplomatic resolution with Hamas. ... We have always been committed to the destruction of Hamas." And then he realizes maybe he had said too much—you can see this happening in his head in real time—then says he had hoped Hamas would have come to the ceasefire table. But it has always been the Israelis who have thwarted these negotiations.

I'm pretty sure the US has just been lying in public about all these hang-ups that they have had. They say, "We asked the Israelis to reduce the number of civilian casualties." It doesn't seem like they've done that at all.

Reuters just published a recent report about emails that were sent to the White House by a senior Pentagon official delivering a blunt warning early during the conflict last October. They said that the mass evacuation order for northern Gaza was going to cause a humanitarian catastrophe. They also said it was completely illegal, tantamount to war crimes.

But it's not like this is some revelation. They knew full well what the Israelis were planning on doing in Gaza City, then in Khan Younis and then in Rafah. It's the US trying to shape the Middle East. It's the same reason the US allowed Indonesia to commit a genocide in East Timor, because it was beneficial for the US.

There is no actual anti-genocide political party for which genocide is just a step too far. Let's say they want to control the world by force, maintain control over Middle Eastern oil, and maintain the Arab dictatorships over the regions. Fine. But can they agree that genocide is a step too far? No, apparently not. They can't claim they don't know. It's totally ridiculous. Furthermore, State Department officials, at least a dozen publicly, and probably plenty privately, have resigned, calling out

the Biden administration for enabling the genocidal campaign.

BM: These comments you've made are critical and important regarding the point that genocide is now a weapon of foreign policy under the guise that Israel is only trying to protect itself.

FS: But it's important to recognize that it always has been.

This brings me back to the *New York Times*, which I think is an important point, the opinion piece that should, in theory, come out tomorrow. The editor I was discussing it with was challenging the report, asking what the American doctors and nurses who've worked in Gaza saw with their own eyes.

In our report we wrote that the US has been doing everything it can to keep sending arms to Israel. Even according to our own internal governmental processes, the administration understands it's illegal, but it keeps at it. And at the end we write that it's time to stop arming Israel, but more importantly, we really need to look at ourselves and what we are doing.

The *Times* tried to get me to remove that last sentence. I kept telling them no we put a lot of work into this, but I'm happy to throw all of it out the window and just print it independently. But I'd been happy to throw it all out the window because that's the whole point: we're responsible. The *New York Times* should be telling us what we need to do about our own society and not tell other people what they need to do about their society.

The Israelis have already decided what they're going to do in Gaza, but we don't have to go along with that. Like Netanyahu famously said, "I'll fight with my fingernails if I have to." Okay, good. Go do that. You enjoy doing that. Fight with your fingernails and see how far you get. Because we all know they won't get very far without our arms.

The resilience of the people of Gaza

BM: Your piece in *Politico* obviously was very moving and detailed. But now that you've had a few months to reflect on it, can you maybe share your experiences in Gaza? What happened? What did you see? The mainstream press and political bodies including Harris and Biden have gone to great lengths to demonize Hamas and the Palestinians. Yet, every healthcare worker or person I've had a chance to speak with provides the exact opposite of what is being written—a very humane and rich culture.

FS: The people of Gaza, for lack of a better term, have endured. The only really modern comprehensive book on Gaza, a political history of Gaza, I guess would be Norm Finkelstein's *Gaza: Inquest Into Its Martyrdom*. The term martyrdom is correct. But the first line in the book begins, "This book is not about Gaza. It is about what has been done to Gaza. It is fashionable nowadays to speak of a victim's agency. But one must be realistic about the constraints imposed on such agency by objective circumstance."

Gaza has been a place with virtually no agency whatsoever for a very long time.

It's politically incorrect to say, but the Palestinians just don't have much of an influence over how their lives are led, what their lives are like, not much more so than a concentration camp victim does. And I mean that seriously.

If you were to tell me that in 2004 an entire society of two million people, half of whom are children, were forced to live in a concentration camp that's 25 miles long and 6 miles wide, I would assume that they would become depraved monsters. Twenty years later, you see no such thing. It's incredible how much of their humanity they have preserved.

One of the first things you notice when you step foot into Gaza is that there's no running water. There's no way for most people to bathe. And

with half the population being children, there's just all these kids running around all over the place. Despite that, people make every attempt to air out their clothes, to maintain some privacy, to stay in family units. It's a very conservative society. Modesty and family are really the values that are at a premium in their society and maintain their faith. I'm not a religious person at all. I'm not Muslim, but the degree to which people maintain their faith is impressive.

I remember I was walking and these two guys who didn't speak English at all come up to me. And what they were trying to ask me was if I'd like to come pray with them. They are both filthy. They can't bathe or do anything. I told them I wasn't Muslim. And they said, "Welcome," and kissed me on the cheek and then walked away.

When you go over to where the men are praying—men and women pray separately—and they know they can't wash their hands and feet like they would before prayer. Instead, they just take out a water bottle and pass it around, each person taking a drop and symbolically wash their hands and feet. It's these attempts at preserving their dignity and their humanity and their culture and their society that's remarkable.

About two to three days before we left Gaza, the day I went to Rafah, I noticed on the grounds of the displaced persons camp at the European Hospital that every single tent had a designation on it made of English letters. I thought that was very strange. And when I arrived at Rafah, I saw the same thing. It turns out that basically all these places have spontaneously organized a leadership system that has nothing to do with Hamas or anything else.

In this system, which is all organized through WhatsApp documents, which is why they're using English letters, there's one person who is the designated, not spokesperson, but maybe for a lack of a better word I'll use a watchman, who is responsible for a group of several dozen people, certain number of families. They keep track of everyone who is disabled, all the children, anyone that is wounded, etc.

They keep these detailed lists on their phones and text them to each other. There's a primary committee for the entire camp that decides if a certain family needs an extra ration of flour, or they have a wounded person that needs to be carried to the hospital for surgery the next day so they make sure people are there at two in the morning to literally pick them up because they can't move. It's phenomenal.

You wonder if Americans were subjected to what the Palestinians are going through how they would stand up to it. But in this society where the family unit is very extended—cousins of cousins—and incredibly strong and tenacious, despite it all have managed to pull together and organize themselves in a way that maximizes survival.

In the appendix to our recent open letter, we gave a detailed calculation of the minimum number of deaths from starvation and starvation-related causes that one can estimate based on the available data. I can't remember the number exactly now, but I think it was around 62,000. Obviously trying to estimate these is very difficult, but going by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification data, that's the most conservative figure we calculated. And if that number doesn't turn out to be accurate, or let me say, if that number turns out to be an overestimation, the reason is going to be because of the extensive and incredible sharing that goes on in this society.

How the *Times* sought to edit Gaza account

Again, I keep referencing the *Times* piece, because going back and forth with them has been almost an interaction with American power, which I found very interesting.

The senior editors insisted on changing one paragraph in the piece

where we've already established that Israel is doing all of these things on purpose that because we never personally saw someone get shot in the head—a ludicrous standard to satisfy—we couldn't say that Israel deliberately did it. We can't say it in the active voice; we have to say it in the passive voice. Instead of taking it out completely, which was the other option, because they wouldn't budge on this I said, "Okay, fine, leave it in, but in the passive voice."

But what is the other option? That Hamas is shooting all these kids? It's insane. The point is it didn't happen just one time, two times, five times, or a hundred times. It's happening all the time. It's literally happening all the time. Everybody who goes to Gaza sees the same thing.

So, this bogus charge that Palestinians want their kids murdered even to the point that it could be possible that the government of Gaza is shooting children in the head on purpose, in a widespread, continuous, daily fashion, and not a single person has said anything about it is insane, but clearly politically motivated. I don't mean to be offensive, but this is like asking if Jews gassed themselves in Auschwitz. It's outrageous. Can you imagine if a Nazi asked you if you ever saw a Nazi pull the levers? It's like saying that the alternative option is that all these people marched themselves into a gas chamber. Is that credible? Is it credible that Hamas is shooting its own people's children in the head every single day throughout Gaza and in the society where children are revered, that no one is saying anything about this?

It's absurd, but nevertheless, that seems to be the understanding that a lot of these people at the *Times* have, which speaks volumes to how deeply dehumanized they have become. It isn't just in Israel, but even here.

BM: Why is the *Times* choosing to publish your piece now?

FS: I have no idea. If I had to guess ... let me preface my answer by explaining that the opinion piece is based on a poll of 65 physicians and nurses who worked in Gaza since October 7, 2023, about what they saw. "Did you see children shot in the head? Did you see women and babies starve?"

Suppose, hypothetically, all 65 of us had seen those same things in the first month of the attack. I don't think they would have published this on November 1, after the first month, because at that time the genocidal attack hadn't succeeded. Now, maybe they don't have to keep up the same pretenses. It's like Matt Miller accidentally letting loose that we [the US] always wanted to destroy Hamas. "Okay, so now you're saying you were lying for the past year every day on that stage."

So, I don't think they would have published it back then, but now with the open letters out there and the *Times* having to maintain some level of credibility then such things make their way into their pages. There are also internal contradictions to these systems, such as the level of professionalism and journalistic integrity. The younger and more junior people in the institution were the ones who reached out to me and asked me to write the piece.

I've learned a few things from talking to reporters (I happen to know a lot of reporters now, quite a few from the *Post* and the *Times*, also some from the British press), especially after our first open letter in July and after a congressional briefing that we gave with the rebuilding alliance back in April or May. They had all reached out and said they'd like to do a story and most of them were interested in the children being shot in the head because that's just such damning evidence.

I would talk to them, give them the information, give them plenty of other people they could speak with. And you wouldn't believe it. They are straightforward about it. They'd say, "I need a massive and overwhelming amount of evidence to take to my news editor, because these are not opinion people, these are news people," or "I need an enormous number of testimonies on the record to be able to get this published."

And even then, they probably wouldn't publish it, but I was going to try

anyway.

I think the *Guardian* and the *Independent* both published a report regarding our open letter referencing the shooting of Palestinian children in the head, but no American papers covered it. (I think the Canadian and British doctors did write similar letters to their own people after our July letter.) So, it was covered in Britain where 30 people signed a letter, but not in the US where 45 had originally signed a letter and then more recently a hundred did. The *New Republic*, strangely enough, put out a piece about the letter being obtained by the *Huffington Post*.

But in terms of readership of media that are widely read, I think the game is up now in terms of their attempts to suppress such stories. I think that honestly people just know too much about it. It's obvious that Israel has destroyed all of Gaza and, furthermore, the Israelis are just being petty at this point and just insisting on continuing to bomb the hell out of Gaza every day. I mean for the past two weeks almost a hundred people have been killed in Gaza every single day in bombing massacres. The level of violence has not lowered at all.

The US has probably told Israel to quit it for a long time now. They're probably behind closed doors saying, "How much more destroyed do you want this place to be? You've already accomplished your goal. There's no way Hamas is going to do anything of any value for a long time now." On top of that, the situation is becoming more than embarrassing for the US with American hostages still being held in Gaza.

There are all these contradictions that emerge on full display. I think the willingness of the *New York Times* to publish this a year later reflects all that put together.

The historical parallels for Gaza genocide

BM: You mentioned that despite the horrific scenes of death and mayhem, the Palestinians remain resilient. But one can't help but see a culture being openly eradicated in short order before the whole world. Perhaps you'd have to go back to World War II to see such deliberate carnage—Hiroshima, Nagasaki, the Holocaust, and the attack on the Soviet Union.

FS: As you mentioned, this is a very unusual situation. You have a level of destruction that is significantly greater than the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Back in December, UN special rapporteur on adequate housing, Balakrishnan Rajagopal, said that the bombing destruction of Gaza was worse than Hamburg and Dresden in World War II, which are literally the stereotypes of overkill in military operations.

Those were literally American and British terror bombing campaigns. They were specifically intended to make the Germans overthrow the Nazi government, which they didn't do for obvious reasons. But at the same time, the people of Dresden and Hamburg could flee the city. It wasn't easy, involved a lot of hardship, obviously. But they could leave. The atomic bombing of Hiroshima, on the other hand, was an incident, and then it was over. And then, in fact, the war was over a few days later.

Palestinians have no place to escape the incessant violence being done to them. There's nowhere for them to go. Right now, the population is being forced into Al-Mawasi, which is west of Khan Younis, along the sea. The statistic is probably wrong now, but when Oxfam estimated there were a half-million people in the area, there was one toilet for every 4,130 people in al-Mawasi.

A deliberate policy of destruction and starvation

Gaza was already one of the most densely concentrated places in the world. Now it is most likely the most populated place that has ever existed in the history of the world. It's more densely populated than downtown Tokyo in the middle of the workday with all the high-rise buildings and massive municipal services available. This horrible social catastrophe is going to grow worse with the rainy season soon to arrive. There is going to be massive flooding and with every sewage processing plant destroyed in Gaza ... it doesn't take much imagination to understand what these people are facing.

Former major general and head of Israel's national security council, Giora Eiland, now part of the war cabinet's advisory council, said in *Ynet*, something to the effect that the epidemics caused by the war would be a good thing. [*"Epidemics in the South of Gaza will bring victory closer and will decrease casualties among IDF soldiers"*]. He also said that the population had only two choices; leave or stay and starve. And that's what they're doing.

Gaza's capacity to sustain life had been already destroyed, largely destroyed after Operation Protective Edge in 2014. It continued to degrade, deliberately, for 10 years after. And in 2023, after October 7, they saw an opportunity to just go all the way and finish the job.

In the first few weeks they tried to literally starve the entire population to death. You remember Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said, "I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed." This is important to remember because they did implement that. Strictly nothing went in. Zero! The number of people that died from just withholding water must have been in the hundreds if not more.

The US said that it's too extreme, that's too embarrassing, we can't really starve all the Gazans. So, they floated the possibility of expelling the population to Sinai. But even Egypt's president Al-Sisi, one of the worst monsters in the world, wasn't willing to be complicit in this no matter what the US offered him. Then they said, "Fine, no expulsion to Sinai. We'll just destroy the whole place, and we'll let them fester and die."

The UN Environmental Program estimated months ago that there's around 45 million tons of rubble in Gaza. There are 107 kilos of rubble for every square meter of the Gaza Strip right now. They estimate under the best conditions that it would take 15 years just to clear the rubble. And that doesn't include the rubble that was present since 2014 that hadn't been cleared.

The story about what the UN, US and Israel did to Gaza after Operation Protective Edge in 2014, what's called the Gaza reconstruction mechanism, the GRM, is utterly outrageous. The UN basically became Israel's enforcer of the blockade of Gaza. That's why nothing was ever rebuilt. Oxfam has been saying this since the operation ended in 2014.

How to oppose the US-Israeli genocide

BM: What needs to be done? The White House hasn't responded to your open letter, nor has it acquiesced to any pressures from demonstrations and organized protests.

FS: I don't think we know what works and what doesn't. And we don't know how or to what degree it worked. I guess you could say has anything that we've done worked in terms of ending the conflict?

BM: The strike by tens of thousands of dockworkers on the east coast and Gulf, had they not been shut down by the collusion of the union bureaucracy with the White House would have gone a long way to ensure shipment of weapons were halted and international attention brought to bear on the issue.

If you're going to try to bring an end to this genocidal attack as you have said, we must cut off all military aid to Israel. But then who will do it? Not the White House, not the union bureaucracy, nor anyone in the state department. But the working class has the capacity and capability to end this conflict and ensure a ceasefire is accepted and the Gazans receive aid in the form of food, water, sanitation and medical attention. Meaning that the fundamental question becomes a class issue.

FS: Most European countries seem to have told the US that they will not allow their docks or their airspace to be used for these arms shipments anymore. The last thing I saw about this was a shipment of jet fuel that Spain or Portugal said they would not allow their docks to be used for. They went to Morocco instead. These problems exist because of the globalization of the economy.

I had an Egyptian reporter call me and ask me for an interview and I told him I'm happy to interview with you, but my goal is to change the behavior in the United States, so I don't see any reason to criticize the US in an Egyptian newspaper. However, if you want to talk about the Egyptian government, I'm happy to but I don't want to land you in prison. He said why, what is the Egyptian government doing?

I proceeded to explain various things that had been done and he agreed that maybe we shouldn't have that discussion. I understand his dilemma. I don't want to be in an Egyptian torture chamber either. But, yes, it is a class issue; there are components of the class issue, no doubt about it.

But unfortunately, we don't really have that class-wide consciousness in the US yet. I know that is something your publication is working on, which is great, and it is important that it is being built. I would encourage people not to be discouraged. It's very hard, believe me. I've seen it up front and personal. I've seen Gaza up close.

Eventually the pressure will be enough that the administration will have to pull back or Gaza will ultimately be destroyed. It's just one of those two options. And if you don't do anything today, people keep dying. But maybe they won't in the future. That's all there is to it.

And, furthermore, Gaza is not the only place in the world where this kind of thing is happening. If Israel gets away with what they've done in Gaza, and what they're doing in the West Bank and elsewhere, this is going to be repeated probably in India with its Muslim population of 200 million people, and in plenty of other places where there are just "undesirable" populations that people want to get rid of.

It's a very dangerous time, and people mustn't allow themselves to get complacent and give up because they aren't seeing immediate results. We live in a very rough and brutal world, and we have a lot of organizing, and a lot of educating to do before we change the world. There's a common cliché that only an informed citizenry has ever changed the world, right?



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