

# U.S. Experts: Gaza Destruction 'Unlike Anything We Have Studied'

PARIS (Dispatches) – As well as killing more than 34,000 people and causing catastrophic levels of hunger and injury, the seven-month aggression by the Zionist regime has also caused massive material destruction in Gaza.

"The rate of damage being registered is unlike anything we have studied before. It is much faster and more extensive than anything we have mapped," said Corey Scher, a PhD candidate at the City University of New York, who has been researching satellite imagery of Gaza.

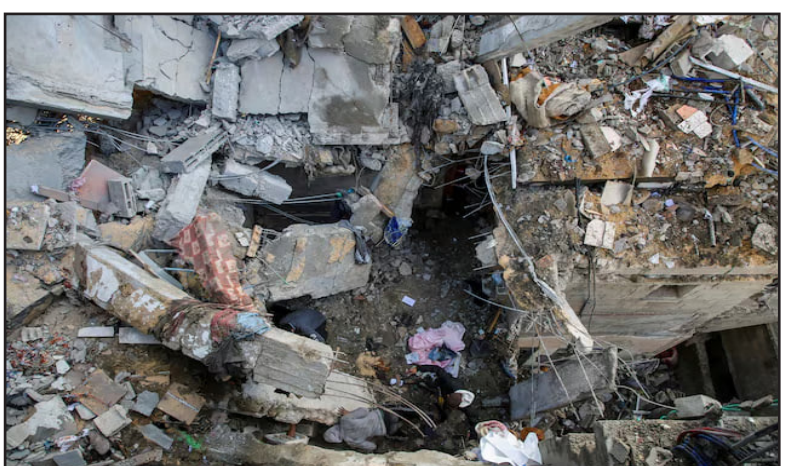
As Israel launches an aggression on Rafah, the last population center in Gaza yet to be entered by its ground troops, AFP looks at the territory's shattered landscape seven months into the war sparked on October 7 last year.

Gaza is one of the most densely populated places on the planet, where before the war 2.3 million people had been living on a 365-square-kilometer strip of land.

According to satellite analyzes by Scher and Jamon Van Den Hoek, an associate professor of geography at Oregon State University, 56.9 percent of Gaza buildings were damaged or destroyed as of April 21, totaling 160,000.

"The fastest rates of destruction were in the first two to three months of the bombardment," Scher told AFP.

In Gaza City, home to some 600,000



*Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a house in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip May 7, 2024.*

people before the war, the situation is dire: almost three-quarters (74.3 percent) of its buildings have been damaged or destroyed.

During the war, Gaza's hospitals have been repeatedly attacked by Israel, which accuses Hamas of using them for military purposes, a charge the resistance movement denies.

In the first six weeks of the war, "60 percent of health care facilities... were indicated as damaged or destroyed," Scher said.

The territory's largest hospital, al-Shifa in Gaza City, was targeted in two assaults by the Zionist regime's army, the

first in November, the second in March.

The World Health Organization said the second invasion reduced the hospital to an "empty shell" strewn with human remains.

Five hospitals have been completely destroyed, according to figures compiled by AFP from the OpenStreetMap project, the Palestinian health ministry and the United Nations Satellite Center (UNOSAT). Fewer than one in three hospitals — 28 percent — are partially functioning, according to the UN.

The territory's largely UN-run schools, where many civilians have sought refuge from the fighting, have also paid a

heavy price. As of April 25, UNICEF counted 408 schools damaged, representing at least 72.5 percent of its count of 563 facilities.

Of those, 53 school buildings have been completely destroyed and 274 others have been damaged by direct fire.

The UN estimates that two-thirds of the schools will need total or major reconstruction to be functional again.

Regarding places of worship, combined data from UNOSAT and OpenStreetMap show 61.5 percent of mosques have been damaged or destroyed.

The level of destruction in northern Gaza has surpassed that of the German city of Dresden, which was firebombed by Allied forces in 1945 in one of the most controversial Allied acts of World War II.

According to a U.S. military study from 1954, quoted by the Financial Times, the bombing campaign at the end of World War II damaged 59 percent of Dresden's buildings.

In late April, the head of the UN mine clearance program in the Palestinian territories, Mungo Birch, said there was more rubble to clear in Gaza than in Ukraine, which was invaded by Russia more than two years ago.

The UN estimated that as of the start of May, the post-war reconstruction of Gaza would cost between 30 billion and 40 billion dollars.

## Police...

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French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal and President Emmanuel Macron among its alumni, were seen entering the campus unobstructed to take exams as police stood at the entrances.

Protests took place last week at some other universities in France, including in Lille and Lyon. Macron's office said police had been requested to remove students from 23 sites on French campuses.

In the U.S., police cleared a pro-Palestinian tent encampment at the University of Chicago on Tuesday as tension ratcheted up in standoffs with demonstrators at other college campuses across the country.

Nearly three weeks into a movement launched by a protest at Columbia University, the Rhode Island School of Design held talks with protesters occupying a building, and MIT dealt with a new encampment on a site that was cleared but immediately retaken by demonstrators.

At the University of Chicago, hundreds of protesters had gathered in an area known as the Quad for at least eight days.

Police in riot gear blocked access to the Quad early Tuesday as law enforcement dismantled the encampment. Officers later picked up a barricade erected to keep protesters out of the Quad and moved it toward the demonstrators, some of whom chanted, "Up, up with liberation. Down, down with occupation!" Police and protesters pushed back and forth along the barricade as the officers moved to reestablish control.

At MIT, protesters were given a Monday afternoon deadline to voluntarily leave or face suspension. Many left, according to an MIT spokesperson, who said protesters breached fencing after the arrival of demonstrators from outside the university. On Monday night, dozens of protesters remained at the encampment in a calmer atmosphere, listening to speakers and chanting before taking a pizza break.

Sam Ihns, a graduate student at MIT studying mechanical engineering and a member of MIT Jews for a Ceasefire, said the group has been at the encampment for two weeks and is calling for an end to the killing in Gaza.

"Specifically, our encampment is protesting MIT's direct research ties to the Israeli Ministry of Defense," he said.

Harvard University's interim president, Alan Garber, warned students that those in an encampment in Harvard Yard could face "involuntary leave," meaning they would not be allowed on campus, could lose their student housing and might not be able to take exams.

At the University of California, San Diego, police cleared an encampment and arrested more than 64 people, including 40 students. The University of California, Los Angeles, moved classes online for the week because of disruptions after the dismantling of an encampment last week that resulted in 44 reported arrests.

## Zionist...

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were killed when a strike flattened their home as they slept.

Egypt's Foreign Ministry condemned the seizure of the crossing, calling it "a dangerous escalation."

Egypt has previously warned that any seizure of Rafah — which is supposed to be part of a demilitarized border zone — or an attack that forces Palestinians to flee over the border into Egypt would threaten the 1979 peace treaty with Israel.

Netanyahu and other top officials have publicly said they plan to resume the invasion after any release of captives and continue it.

The Zionist regime said the ceasefire proposal that Hamas agreed to did not meet its "core demands." But it said it

would send a delegation to Egypt to continue negotiations. An Egyptian official said delegations from Hamas and Qatar arrived in Cairo on Tuesday.

An Egyptian official and a Western diplomat said the draft Hamas accepted had only minor changes in wording from a version the U.S. had earlier pushed for with Israeli approval. The changes were made in consultation with CIA chief William Burns, who embraced the draft before sending it to Hamas, they said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the deliberations.

According to a copy released by Hamas, the proposal outlines a phase release of the captives alongside the gradual withdrawal of Zionist troops from the entire enclave and ending with a "sustainable calm," defined as a "permanent cessation of military and hostile operations."

## Putin ...

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in Ukraine, whatever the cost, said the country would emerge "with dignity and become even stronger".

"Serving Russia is a huge honor, responsibility and sacred duty," Putin had said in the Kremlin's gilded Saint Andrew's Hall.

Government officials and foreign diplomats in Moscow were invited to the ceremony, including French ambassador Pierre Levy.

Putin kicks off his six-year term emboldened by advances on the battlefield in Ukraine and sustained economic growth, despite a barrage of Western sanctions.

Some analysts have suggested Putin may use the inauguration to shake up his government, which is obligated to resign ahead of a new presidential term.

## Nuclear...

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Highlighting the important role of the IAEA, the Iranian foreign minister said Grossi's impartial and professional positions, in addition to effective assistance in cooperation between Iran and the agency, will be effective in restoring stability and security to the region.

The top Iranian diplomat then described the threats from the Zionist authorities to use nuclear bombs as a clear threat to regional and international peace and security, the Foreign Ministry's website reported. He stressed the very important role of the IAEA to respond to such dangerous statements by the authorities of a regime that possesses an arsenal of nuclear weapons.

He then highlighted the history of the U.S.' non-compliance with the previous agreements on Iran's peaceful nuclear program, saying cooperation between Iran and the IAEA should not be influenced by the unstable and contradictory policy and behavior of Washington.

Amir-Abdollahian urged that this cooperation should continue in the right direction, and at the same time, the two sides should feel that this cooperation results in a breakthrough.

For his part, Grossi highlighted Iran's important role in restoring stability and security to the region, praising Iran's policy to recognize and strengthen the reassuring cooperation with the IAEA.

Grossi underscored that bolstering cooperation between Iran and the IAEA will lead to the failure of those who are seeking to escalate the conflict, tension and confrontation in the region with any justification and excuse.

Referring to his previous successful trip to Tehran and reaching an agreement with Iran, the IAEA chief expressed hope that good agreements will be made during this visit in order to strengthen cooperation between the two sides.

Grossi further stressed the importance of consultations between Iran and the agency to reach an understanding for the purpose of resolving all issues.

# Barclays 'Increased' Israel Arms Trade Investments

LONDON (Dispatches) – Barclays has increased its investments in companies involved in supplying arms and military technology to Israel, according to an investigation carried out by a collective of activist groups.

According to findings published jointly by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) and War on Want, the British multinational bank is ramping up its investments despite pressure to divest from

holdings linked to the Israeli arms trade.

The campaigners say Barclays has £2bn (\$2.48bn) in shares in companies that produce weapons and military technology used by the Israeli army in its attacks on Palestinians.

Another £6.1bn (\$7.66bn) has been made available to companies involved in the arms trade to Israel in loans and underwritings, according to the report.

Researchers said the figures amounted to a 55 percent increase in share holdings since

2022 and a 54.5 percent increase in loans and underwritings since the same year.

The list of firms in which Barclays is reported to have a financial interest in includes the Israeli drone manufacturer Elbit Systems, and General Dynamics, a U.S. arms firm that produces components for warplanes. Others include BAE Systems and Raytheon.

The report comes ahead of the bank's annual general meeting on 9 May in Glasgow.

Barclays, which is one of the

UK's largest banks, with a presence across the globe, is facing calls for a boycott over its ties to the arms trade with Israel.

In the last fortnight, half the bands and musical artists scheduled to play the Brighton-based Great Escape have demanded the festival drop its sponsorship with Barclays.

Boycott calls have grown as Israel's war on Gaza, which has so far killed at least 34,500 Palestinians, the vast majority of them women and children, has continued.

# Mid-Level Israeli Team to Head to Cairo for Talks

AL-QUDS (Dispatches) – A team of mid-ranking officials with the Zionist regime will travel to Cairo in the coming hours to assess whether Hamas can be persuaded to shift on its latest ceasefire offer, a senior Israeli official said on Tuesday.

The official also reiterated that the current Hamas proposal was

unacceptable to Israel.

"This delegation is made up of mid-level envoys. Were there a credible deal in the offing, the principals would be heading the delegation," the official told Reuters, referring to the senior officials from the spy agencies Mossad and Shin Bet who are leading the Israeli side.

The visit to the Egyptian capital will take place hours after Israeli tanks took control of the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza.

Israeli jets have carried out repeated strikes on eastern Rafah, the city in southern Gaza where more than 1 million Palestinians displaced by the seven-month war

have been sheltering.

Egypt's state-aligned Al Qahera News TV reported that there were still efforts by the two sides to contain the escalation. It also said Egyptian officials had asked Israel to stop the Rafah operation immediately. Hamas issued a statement saying the operation was designed to undermine ceasefire efforts.

# U.S. Repatriates Two Dozen Westerners From Syria Daesh Camp

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – The United States announced Tuesday it had brought back two dozen Western citizens, half of them Americans, from a camp for Daesh prisoners in Syria, its largest-ever repatriation as thousands languish.

In an operation involving U.S. agencies, Kuwait and pro-U.S. Kurdish militants, the United States repatriated 11 U.S. citizens, including five minors, as well as a nine-year-old non-U.S. sibling of an American, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

The United States in the same operation facilitated the repatriation of six Canadian citizens, four Dutch citizens, and one Finnish citizen, among them eight children, he said.

"This is the largest single repatriation of U.S. citizens from northeast Syria to date," Blinken said in a statement.

"The only durable solution to the humanitarian and security crisis in the displaced persons camps and detention facilities in northeast Syria is for countries to repatriate, rehabilitate, rein-

tegrate and, where appropriate, ensure accountability for wrongdoing," he said.

The United States has long pushed European governments to bring back nationals who went to fight for the Daesh terrorist group — or their children.

Most European countries have done so but slowly and despite initial reservations, especially in countries with a history of militant attacks at home such as France and Britain.

Blinken did not identify the people who were repatriated.

The New York Times, quoting unidentified sources, said they included an American woman, whose husband apparently took the family to Daesh territory and was later killed, and their nine children.

The Star Tribune of Minneapolis reported last week that a man who joined Daesh but then became a valuable informant was seeking the repatriation of two sons, one apparently the non-U.S. citizen, to be raised by their grandparents in Minnesota.

The repatriations remain controversial in the United States as well, with the administration of former president Donald Trump in one prominent case insisting that a young woman seeking to return was not legitimately a U.S. citizen.

Five years after the extremists were ousted from their last territory, the SDF still holds more than 56,000 detainees with alleged or perceived links to the Daesh group.

Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch has urged the government of Trinidad and Tobago to repatriate a number of its citizens from Iraq being held in detention for alleged involvement with Daesh.

HRW said four Trinidadian women have been held by authorities in Iraq along with seven children, aged 7-15 years, for almost seven years.

It said it had been in contact with one mother, currently in Rusafa prison, who on May 2 told them in a voice recording that her two sons, aged 13 and 15 — one of whom suffers from asthma, anaemia and malnutrition — had been taken away from her.