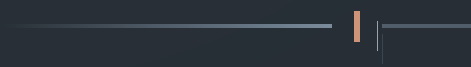


STILL JUNE · A RECKONING

Where My Country Ends



Gaza, Israel, Iran, and America — as of September 5,
2026

June Ashlyn

A PRIVATE RECKONING

*Everything factual herein was checked against the record. Where the
truth is unfinished, it is left unfinished.*

A note before I start

I am not a person who understands this.

That is the whole reason for the pages that follow. I have spent months half-reading headlines and closing the tab. I have felt the specific shame of not being able to hold two place names in my head at the same time. Gaza. Iran. I have nodded along in conversations I could not have passed a test on. I have looked away, and then been ashamed of looking away, and then looked away again from the shame.

So this is not a brief. I am not starting from a side and gathering evidence to win the case. I am trying to sit down at the table and finally understand what my own country is doing, and what is being done, and to whom, and to make it plain enough that a person like me – a person who does not know the history – could follow it without pretending. If I have a point of view by the last page, it is because the facts walked me to it, not because I carried it in with me.

Everything factual in here has been checked. The numbers are sourced at the back. Where I did not know something, I say so. Where the record is unfinished, I leave it unfinished, because it is.

And the whole way through, I am going to try to hold two things at once – two things that are both true and do not cancel each other out. It is the only honest way I have found to look at any of this. The moment I let one truth erase the other, I have started lying.

I may never show this to anyone. That is not the point. The point is to stop looking away.

A ceasefire can be
announced.

The killing can continue.
Both of these are true
right now, and I needed
to understand how.

PART ONE

The history, plainly



If you already know this part, skip it. I did not know it. I am writing the version I wish someone had handed me – enough to understand why the present looks the way it does, and no further. I am going to simplify. I am trying hard not to distort. When you fold a hundred years into a few pages, something true always gets left out; the whole trick is to lose the detail without losing the truth.

The land, and the two peoples

There is a narrow piece of land on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean. People have lived there, and fought over it, for as long as there have been people to fight. For most of the last several centuries it was part of the Ottoman Empire – mostly Arab, mostly Muslim, with old and rooted Christian and Jewish communities living alongside. It was not empty, and it was not any one people's alone. Hold onto that plain sentence; almost every fight since has been an argument with it.

By the early twentieth century two national movements were taking shape over the same ground, and that overlap is the root of everything after.

One was Zionism – the movement for a Jewish homeland in that land. It matters not to flatten it. Jews had lived there for millennia and prayed toward it for two thousand

years more, but for most of the 1800s the great majority of Jews were not Zionists; the movement was one strand among many, and plenty of Jews opposed it or paid it no mind. What changed that was Europe. As the pogroms worsened, and then the Nazi genocide murdered six million Jews, more and more Jews came to understand a state of their own as the only thing that had ever reliably kept anyone alive – not a preference but a shelter, after the world had shown them exactly what it would allow to happen. That is the weight the word carries for many Jews, and it is not nothing.

The other movement was Palestinian Arab nationalism – the people already on the land, working it and filling its towns, coming to see themselves as a nation with a claim to the place they had never left. To them, a movement to build someone else's state on top of their homes did not look like shelter. It looked like being written out of their own country.

Both of those are true, and the whole difficulty is that they do not cancel.

And one thing has to be set down this early, because the rest of the argument keeps abusing it: the State of Israel is not the Jewish people, and the Jewish people are not the State of Israel. Jews are a people scattered across the world, of every politics, and many of them – inside Israel

and out of it – are among the sharpest critics of what its government does. Criticizing that government is not turning on Jews, any more than criticizing Hamas is turning on Palestinians. I am going to hold that line the whole way through, in both directions. When it gets blurred, it is almost always on purpose.

The promises, and the promises under them

Here is the piece I was missing completely, and without it the rest is a mystery: none of this happened on its own. It happened under an empire, and then under another one.

In the First World War the Ottoman Empire collapsed, and Britain took control of Palestine – first by conquest, then under a formal "mandate" from the League of Nations to govern it. During that war, needing everyone's help at once, Britain made promises it could not keep together. It led Arab leaders to believe that rising against the Ottomans would earn Arab independence. It secretly agreed with France to carve the region up between the two of them. And in 1917, in the Balfour Declaration, it announced support for "a national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine – while adding, in the same breath, that nothing should prejudice the rights of the people

already living there. One small country, promised in three directions at once.

Under British rule, Jewish immigration grew, much of it desperate people fleeing Europe. Land was bought, towns were founded, and the Arab majority watched the ground shift under them and grew afraid of where it was heading. By the late 1930s that fear broke into a full Arab revolt against British rule and Jewish immigration, which Britain put down hard. Violence ran in every direction. By the time Britain wanted out, it had built a place where two peoples each held a promise, a fear, and nowhere else to go.

Partition, and two wars

By 1947 Britain handed the problem to the new United Nations, which proposed the obvious-sounding thing: split the land into two states, one Jewish and one Arab.

Jewish leaders accepted. Arab leaders rejected it, and it helps to understand why without having to agree. Arabs were about two-thirds of the population and owned most of the land, and the plan handed a slight majority of the territory to the Jewish state. From where they stood, they were being asked to sign away half of a country they considered wholly theirs, to solve a European problem on

their soil. So they said no. Whether that no was wise is one of the oldest arguments here. That it was human is not in question.

What came next usually gets blurred into a single war, and pulling it apart matters. First, right after the vote, a civil war broke out inside Palestine between its Jewish and Arab communities – and in those months, before any foreign army had arrived, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were already fleeing or being driven out. Then, in May 1948, the state of Israel declared itself, the surrounding Arab nations invaded, and the civil war became a regional one. Israel won.

The Nakba, and the map it left

By the end of that war, more than seven hundred thousand Palestinians had fled or been expelled from their homes and were never allowed to return. Palestinians call it the Nakba – the catastrophe. Their descendants, now in the millions, are still refugees. This is not ancient grievance. It is the grandparents of people who are alive today.

For a long time that war was told as David against Goliath – a tiny Jewish militia surviving five Arab armies bent on pushing the Jews into the sea. Historians who went back into the archives later, many of them Israeli, complicated

that story. By most of their counts the Jewish forces were better organized and, before long, more numerous than the divided Arab armies they faced; the Arab side was less a single invasion than a scramble, each state also grabbing for itself. And in some places the emptying of Palestinian villages was not the accident of war but the intent – a means to a state without a large Arab minority inside it. None of this erases the fear the war was fought under. The memory of Europe was six years old; for the people who had just survived it, this did not feel like strength. It means only that the simple version – the brave underdog with no choices – was also a version, chosen, with the hard parts left out. I keep finding that under everything here. The story everyone learned, and beneath it a harder one.

And then the part no one ever taught me: after 1948, there was still no Palestinian state. The land meant for one did not become one. The West Bank and East Jerusalem were taken over by Jordan; Gaza came under Egyptian control; the refugees sat in camps that were meant to be temporary and were not. For nearly twenty years the Palestinians were a people without a country, living under other nations' armies, waiting.

So from the very start there are two peoples, each with a real and deep claim to the same ground, and each carrying a genuine history of being hunted. That is the wound

underneath everything else. Nobody gets to have the simple version.

Nobody gets to have the simple version.

1967, and the occupation that never ended

In 1967, in six days, the map set into the shape it still holds.

Israel, ringed by hostile neighbors massing for war, struck first and won overwhelmingly. In under a week it captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria. For Israel it was survival, and something close to a miracle. For Palestinians it meant that the last pieces of Palestine – the West Bank and Gaza – were now under Israeli military occupation. That occupation, begun in 1967, is the thing still being fought over today. It never fully ended.

And soon after, the settlements began. Israeli civilians started building homes inside the occupied territory – at

first a trickle, later with government backing, until hundreds of thousands lived there. Most of the world considers those settlements illegal under the laws governing occupied land; Israel disputes that. I am putting them here, in 1967, on purpose, because in the present-day story they seem to appear out of nowhere. They do not. They have been growing for more than half a century.

The Palestinians organize, and rise

With no state and no army, Palestinians built a national movement of their own. The Palestine Liberation Organization – the PLO, led for decades by Yasser Arafat – became the body that spoke for them: first through armed struggle and hijackings that forced the word "Palestinian" onto the world's front pages, later through the slow, grinding turn toward negotiating for a state.

Then, in 1987, something rose from below. The First Intifada was a largely unarmed Palestinian uprising against the occupation – strikes, boycotts, stones thrown at soldiers. It freed no one, but it made the occupation impossible to look past, and it set the stage for the one real attempt at peace.

Oslo, and the hope that broke

This is the largest thing I had never understood, and it is the reason everyone in the present sounds so exhausted and so certain they have been lied to before.

In 1993, Israel and the PLO did something that had seemed impossible: they recognized each other. Out of it came the Oslo Accords, and out of Oslo came the Palestinian Authority – a partial Palestinian government meant to run Palestinian daily life during a five-year window, while the hardest questions of all, borders and refugees and Jerusalem and the settlements, got negotiated toward a final deal. For a moment, a great many people on both sides believed a Palestinian state was genuinely coming.

It did not come. The reasons are still fought over and I am not going to pretend to settle them. But the shape is this: through the Oslo years the settlements kept growing instead of stopping; the Israeli prime minister who signed the accords was assassinated by an Israeli who opposed them; and the final negotiations collapsed at Camp David in 2000, in a cloud of blame that has never been agreed on. Then came the Second Intifada – far bloodier than the first, years of suicide bombings and military raids that killed thousands on both sides and burned the trust to the ground.

That is the inheritance every negotiation since has carried: a peace process that raised the hope of a state and then did not deliver one, and left each side sure the other had never meant it. The Palestinian Authority still exists, still runs parts of the West Bank, still holds the wreckage of that promise. So when you hear, now, that Hamas wants "a credible path to a Palestinian state" before it will disarm, this is the graveyard that phrase is standing in.

Gaza, up close

Now the strip itself.

Gaza is small. Absurdly, almost unbelievably small — about twenty-five miles long and a few miles wide, smaller than many American cities, with around two million people packed inside. One of the most densely populated places on earth. Most of them are refugees, or the children and grandchildren of refugees, from the towns that became Israel in 1948. They did not move far. You can stand in Gaza and be a few miles from the village your family lost.

In 2005, Israel did something it had not done before: it pulled its settlers and its soldiers out of the inside of Gaza and left. Many Israelis saw it as giving peace a chance and being answered with rockets. Palestinians and much of

the world pointed out that Israel still held Gaza's borders, its coastline, its airspace, and its population registry – that leaving the inside was not the same as letting go. Whether the occupation of Gaza legally "ended" in 2005 is a real dispute with real stakes, and it has never been settled.

What is not in dispute is what came after. Following the split of 2007 – which I will get to in a moment – Israel and Egypt sealed Gaza under a blockade that governed who and what could go in or out, and it stayed sealed for years. That is the place: a strip of sand and concrete the size of a city, walled, crowded, poor, full of people displaced once already and then, mostly, unable to leave.

Who Hamas is

In 2006, Palestinians held their last real legislative election, and Hamas – an Islamist movement, both a political party and an armed group – won it. It is worth being exact, because "Hamas won" gets stretched in both directions. Hamas took a majority of the seats, but with something like forty-four percent of the vote, in a contest split against a Fatah party widely seen as corrupt and exhausted. It was a protest as much as an embrace. And it was the last time Palestinians were allowed to vote for a

national government at all. There has not been another election since.

What followed was a Palestinian civil war in miniature. Hamas and Fatah, the two main factions, turned on each other, and in 2007 Hamas seized full control of Gaza by force while Fatah kept the West Bank. Since then the two Palestinian territories have had two rival governments, split from each other – Hamas in Gaza, the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. That division is part of why there has never been a single Palestinian government to sit across the table from.

Hamas is designated a terrorist organization by the United States, the European Union, and Israel, among others. It has fired thousands of rockets at Israeli towns; its founding charter called for Israel's destruction. It has also, for the better part of two decades, been the actual government of Gaza – the schools, the police, the bureaucracy, the garbage collection. Both of those are what it is: an armed movement sworn to Israel's destruction, and the civil administration of two million people. That doubleness matters for everything happening now.

And it has to be said plainly: Hamas is not the Palestinian people, and the Palestinian people are not Hamas. Something close to half of Gaza is children – the median age is around eighteen. A great many of them were born under

the blockade, under a Hamas they never voted for, with no vote and no way out, into a war none of them chose.

Between 2007 and 2023 there were repeated Gaza wars – 2008, 2012, 2014, 2021 – each one a burst of rockets and airstrikes and dead, then a ceasefire, then the same pressure building again toward the next. This war did not come out of a clear sky either.

October 7, 2023

On the morning of October 7, 2023, Hamas fighters broke through the fence around Gaza and attacked southern Israel. They killed about 1,200 people, most of them civilians – families in their homes, young people at a music festival. They committed acts of sexual violence and torture. They took 251 people hostage back into Gaza, including children and the elderly.

It was the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust. I want to write that sentence without any softening, because it is the thing that has to be held on one side of the scale. The terror of that day is real, and it is not diminished by anything that came after.

What came after is the war this whole packet is about.

Israel responded with one of the most intense military campaigns of the century – an air and ground assault on Gaza aimed at destroying Hamas and recovering the hostages. It has now gone on, in one form or another, for nearly three years. By the time you reach the numbers later in these pages, more than seventy-three thousand Palestinians have been killed, around half of them women and children, according to figures the United Nations treats as broadly reliable. Most of Gaza has been reduced to rubble.

Two peoples. Two catastrophes now, not one. And a scale of death between them that is not equal.

Why America stands where it stands

To understand where my country ends and Israel begins – which is the sentence I keep coming back to, the one I could not stop thinking about – you have to understand that the two have been bound together for generations.

The United States recognized Israel the day it was born, in 1948. The bond tightened after 1967, when Israel's battlefield dominance made it a valuable Cold War partner; the military relationship expanded sharply after the 1973 war; and by now it is fully institutionalized – a standing arrangement of aid, weapons, intelligence-shar-

ing, and a reliable American veto shielding Israel at the U.N. Security Council. Israel is the single largest cumulative recipient of American foreign aid since the Second World War, about \$3.8 billion a year, most of it military. After October 7, Congress sent billions more.

Why. There are many reasons braided together, and people argue about which one is really running the engine. A genuine sense of moral debt and kinship after the Holocaust. Israel as the one stable, democratic American ally in a region the United States wanted to control. Cold War strategy. Domestic politics, including the support of both a large pro-Israel lobby and a huge bloc of evangelical Christians for whom Israel is scripture. Shared enemies. Weapons contracts. All of it, at once, for sixty years.

The result is that American bombs, American planes, and American diplomatic cover have been part of Israel's wars for as long as I have been alive. When people say the United States is "involved" in Gaza, this is what they mean at the floor of it. Not opinion. Arithmetic.

Iran — the other thread

Now the second story, which is tangled into the first but is not the same.

Iran is a large, ancient country – Persian, not Arab, mostly Shia Muslim – with a history the United States is deep inside of, in ways most Americans were never taught. In 1953 the CIA helped overthrow Iran's elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, and restore the Shah – the country's monarch, friendly to Western oil interests – to real power. In 1979 Iranians overthrew the Shah in a revolution that turned the country into an Islamic Republic, fiercely anti-American and anti-Israel. Iranian students seized the U.S. embassy and held Americans hostage for 444 days. The two countries have been enemies ever since.

For decades that enmity was fought in the shadows. Iran built and backed a network of allied armed groups around the region – Hezbollah in Lebanon, militias in Iraq and Syria, the Houthis in Yemen, and support for Hamas in Gaza – a loose front sometimes called the Axis of Resistance. It is easy to picture these as identical puppets on a single Iranian string, and they are not. They differ in strength, in aims, and in how much they take orders versus follow agendas of their own: Hezbollah is a serious army in its own right, Hamas is Sunni and ideologically distinct from Shia Iran and was never Tehran's creation, the Houthis fight largely for reasons of their own. What they share is a patron and an enemy. The point of the whole network was to let Iran fight Israel and

the United States without Iran itself having to go to open war.

And over and over, one question sat at the center of it: Iran's nuclear program. Israel and the United States insisted Iran must never be allowed to build a nuclear weapon. Iran insisted its program was peaceful. In 2015 there was a deal – Iran accepted strict limits on the program in exchange for relief from crushing sanctions, and international inspectors repeatedly certified that Iran was keeping to the key restrictions. In 2018, in his first term, Trump pulled the United States out anyway. Only afterward did Iran begin pushing past the limits again. The program advanced. The shadow war got hotter. In 2025 it broke into the open for the first time, in a short, brutal round of direct fighting sometimes called the Twelve-Day War, during which the United States struck Iranian nuclear sites.

That did not end it. It set the table for what came next.

How the open war began

This is the part that is only months old, so I checked it carefully.

After the 2025 fighting, the Trump administration accused Iran of secretly restarting its drive for a nuclear weapon. It is worth knowing – and I did not know it – that America's own intelligence agencies and the international nuclear inspectors publicly contradicted that claim. That disagreement did not stop what happened.

In January 2026, Iran's government killed large numbers of its own people during protests. Trump threatened military action and ordered the largest American military buildup in the Middle East since the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

On February 28, 2026, it began. The United States launched Operation Epic Fury and Israel launched Operation Roaring Lion – simultaneous, coordinated strikes on Iran. Hundreds of targets in the first hours. One of the first was the man at the top: the opening strikes killed Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, the cleric who had run the country for thirty-six years. By any plain definition, that is a decapitation strike – a war that opened by killing the head of another state. Within days his son, Mojtaba, was named to take his place. Iran struck back at Israeli cities and at American bases across the Gulf, and closed the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow sea passage through which a large share of the world's oil moves.

That is the war my country is now directly fighting. Not arming someone else to fight. Fighting.

And on that first day, February 28, in a town in southern Iran called Minab, something happened whose full weight I could not feel until I understood everything else first. So it comes later, where I can finally hold it.

Keep the two wars separate in your mind, even though the same people are running both. Gaza is one war. Iran is another. They overlap in Washington and in the sky over the Middle East, but they are not the same war, and the first thing that made any of this legible to me was learning to hold them apart.

PART TWO

Right now



The word "ceasefire" does not mean what I thought it meant

Here is what I believed, vaguely, from the headlines: the Gaza war ended in the fall. There was a ceasefire. The hostages came home. It was over.

Almost none of that is quite right, and the gap between what I believed and what is true is the whole thing.

The ceasefire was announced on October 10, 2025. It was real, and it did real things. The enormous, grinding, two-year assault dropped away. The remaining living Israeli hostages were returned in October. Israel released Palestinian prisoners and detainees. The United Nations' own report says the guns "largely" fell silent compared with the two years before. All of that is true and none of it should be erased. People stopped dying at the rate they had been.

But "largely" is doing a great deal of work in that sentence.

The same UN report says violations have continued on a near-daily basis. Airstrikes. Shelling. Gunfire. And here is the number that rearranged the word "ceasefire" in my head:

Since the ceasefire began, more than 1,300 Palestinians have been killed. In the same period, four Israeli soldiers have been killed in Gaza. UNICEF calculated that in the first 300 days of the ceasefire, at least 300 children were killed.

One child a day. Under the ceasefire.

So when someone says they thought the Gaza war was over, the honest answer is: the main offensive stopped. The killing did not. And the agreement that was supposed to turn a pause into an actual end has stalled.

These are not abstractions. Let me put down what happened this week, the week I finally sat down to understand any of it.

On Tuesday, August 18, an Israeli strike hit a busy café by the sea in Gaza City. Seven people were killed, including a child. On Wednesday, August 19, a strike hit a police station in Gaza City – eight officers and a thirteen-year-old girl killed, according to Gaza's interior ministry. Israel said it was targeting Hamas fighters gathered there to plan attacks. Another strike in the Nuseirat camp killed one more person. Also that day, Israeli troops crossed the ceasefire line in the south and took two men.

And it did not stop there. Around the middle of the month, Washington quietly asked Israel to ease off. A

week later the strikes were still coming – four more people killed, two of them children, and Israeli fire hitting a water desalination plant, a mosque, and a warehouse of humanitarian supplies. Every few days, a handful more names. The country arming Israel asked it to slow down, and it did not slow down.

That is not a violation from six months ago that I am dredging up to make a point. That is the days I was sitting here reading. And it did not stop when the month did: at the start of September, Israeli forces raided Gaza City and seized a senior Hamas official, and the strikes that covered them killed more Palestinians, children among them. The word still does not mean what I thought it meant.

The number I keep having to reread

More than 73,400 Palestinians have been killed since October 7, 2023.

The figure comes from Gaza's health ministry. It is worth knowing how to think about that source, because it gets fought over. The ministry keeps detailed, named casualty records, and United Nations agencies and international organizations have generally treated them as reliable over many years and many wars. What the ministry does not

do is separate civilians from combatants – so anyone who hands you a clean split of "this many innocents, this many fighters" is guessing. The ministry says roughly half the dead are women and children. Of the deaths individually identified by the end of 2025, more than twenty-one thousand were children.

Twenty-one thousand children is a number I cannot make mean anything. That is its own kind of horror – that the number is so large it stops working as a number. It becomes weather. I have to keep dragging it back into being children.

The other side of that ledger, which stays on the other side and does not move: about 1,200 people killed in Israel on October 7, most of them civilians, and 251 taken hostage.

What is actually left of Gaza

Start with the buildings.

By satellite, the United Nations found that around 82 percent of all the structures in Gaza have been damaged. Not a neighborhood. Not a district. Four out of every five buildings in the entire strip. More than a hundred and

thirty thousand of them assessed as destroyed outright. Tens of millions of tonnes of rubble.

And the destruction kept going after the ceasefire – the number of destroyed buildings rose again between the fall and the summer.

Almost the entire population, more than two million people, is now pressed into less than half of Gaza's territory, west of a line the Israeli military controls. Families crowded into a third of a place that was already one of the most crowded places on earth.

During the worst of last year, the UN's hunger monitors did something they had never done anywhere in the Middle East: they declared a famine in Gaza. Israel rejected the finding and called the numbers inflated – that dispute is real, and I am not going to flatten it. What is also real is that the ceasefire pulled Gaza back from that specific edge. "Back from famine" is what counts as improvement here.

And there is the particular horror of how some people died trying not to starve. Through last year, after aid was funneled through a handful of militarized distribution points, hundreds of Palestinians were killed trying to reach food – shot near the crowds waiting for flour. Israel disputed the circumstances at many of the sites, and the death toll kept climbing anyway. The circumstances are

contested. People were killed going to get food for their children. I am not going to let the first sentence swallow the second.

The ordinary machinery of staying alive is broken. Roughly two out of three people in Gaza are expected to face crisis-level hunger or worse in the second half of this year. Most people rely on water trucked in, and surveys found many households getting less than six liters of drinking water per person per day. The World Health Organization reported this summer that every hospital in Gaza has been damaged, and only about half are even partly working. The estimate to rebuild is around \$71 billion, over ten years, and the assessment says the war erased decades of human development – that Gaza was thrown backward by a generation.

I keep wanting to write something after these facts. Some line that makes them bearable. That is exactly the instinct I am trying to kill. There is no line. You just have to look at it.

Where Israel actually is

When people say "Israel needs to withdraw," I pictured some future invasion that might or might not come. That is not the situation.

Israeli forces are already inside Gaza and control most of it. The October agreement set a line – the Yellow Line – behind which Israeli troops were to stay, covering a little over half the strip. They then expanded past it. And the line itself will not hold still. Visual investigations – the BBC, the CBC, comparing satellite images week to week – have shown the boundary creeping forward: new concrete barriers and earthworks built deeper into Gaza than the agreed maps allowed, families ordered to move again toward the coast. By the spring, Israel was estimated to control roughly two-thirds of Gaza, with the prime minister ordering the military to push toward seventy percent, calling the extra ground a security buffer. Officials warned that if the transition failed, that division could simply harden into permanence.

This is the pattern I finally understood is not an accident, because it runs through the whole story: the map that is agreed to and the map that is actually built are never the same map. The agreed one is always behind the one on the ground. The one on the ground always holds more.

So the argument is not about whether Israel will enter Gaza. It is about whether Israel will leave.

The other front, the quiet one

There is a second Palestinian place, and I almost left it out, which is exactly the problem with it.

The West Bank is the other territory – separate from Gaza, on the far side of Israel, home to around three million Palestinians. No Hamas government here. No October 7 launched from here. It is run, loosely, by the Palestinian Authority, the same body the peace plan imagines eventually governing Gaza. For decades it has been under Israeli military occupation, threaded with Israeli settlements that most of the world considers illegal and that keep expanding.

While the cameras were on Gaza and then on Iran, the West Bank had its worst year in memory. The United Nations described settler violence against Palestinians reaching an all-time high. Human Rights Watch warned the surge threatened mass atrocities. A UN report found settlement expansion driving mass displacement; Amnesty International documented whole Bedouin and herding communities pushed off land their families had used for generations. Homes demolished. Families handed papers, or handed nothing, and told to go.

And in August it produced the clearest version of the whole pattern yet. Israel opened bids to build a large new

settlement on a stretch of open land east of Jerusalem known as E1 – around twelve hundred homes on ground that had been frozen for years for one reason: building there cuts the West Bank in two and walls Palestinians off from East Jerusalem, the city they expect as a capital. France, Germany, Italy, and Britain condemned it together and warned it could put a viable Palestinian state permanently out of reach. Israel's own finance minister said the quiet part out loud – that the point was to bury the idea of that state. It is the map being redrawn on purpose, in daylight, with the paperwork filed.

There is no war here to point to. That is what makes it clarifying. It is the same motion as the moving line in Gaza, running quietly, in a place with no rockets and no hostages – land changing hands a household at a time, under the cover of the larger fires. The taking does not require a war. The war only makes it easier not to watch.

Hamas, now

This is where the story stops being simple in the direction I did not expect.

Hamas still exists. It is still armed. It still holds sway over parts of Gaza. Israel's central demand – that Hamas can

no longer be an armed force running the place – has not been met.

But in July, Hamas formally dissolved its Gaza government and said it would hand civilian authority to a new American-backed technocratic administration created under the peace plan. Israel called it a stunt, because Hamas did not give up its weapons at the same time. Hamas says it will disarm – but in stages, and only as Israel withdraws, and it has tied full disarmament to some real movement toward a Palestinian state. It has kept fighting, too: those four Israeli soldiers.

So neither "Hamas is gone" nor "nothing has changed about Hamas" is true. Its government has stepped aside on paper. Its guns have not. It is trying to trade the one thing Israel wants – its weapons – for a credible path toward a Palestinian state, and neither side will move first.

What Israel says

Israel says the continuing strikes are necessary – that it is hitting Hamas and allied fighters, stopping planned attacks, protecting its soldiers. The prime minister's position is that Israel will not withdraw until Hamas has completely disarmed, and he has rejected the American plan's

demand that Israel stop its targeted killings while that disarmament is supposed to be happening.

This matters, because the American plan does not say " Hamas disarms completely, and then Israel decides whether to leave." It imagines the two happening together, in matched, verified steps – Hamas gives up weapons in stages, Israel withdraws in stages. Israel has rejected that sequence. So has, in its own way, Hamas. Which is the whole knot, and I will come back to it.

There is an actual plan. We are nowhere near it.

I did not know this either: there is a formal, on-paper plan for how the Gaza war is supposed to end. It is not a hope. It is a United Nations Security Council resolution, number 2803, which endorsed Trump's plan in November 2025.

On paper it goes like this. Every armed Palestinian faction disarms. Israeli troops withdraw in step. An international force takes over security. Vetted Palestinian police are trained. A non-political Palestinian technocratic government runs daily life. Gaza is rebuilt. Authority eventually passes to a reformed Palestinian Authority. And negotiations open what the resolution calls a "credible

pathway" toward Palestinian self-determination and, possibly, a state.

There is one sentence in the resolution I want to write down, because it is either a promise or an epitaph and we do not yet know which: *"Israel will not occupy or annex Gaza."* Israeli forces, it says, are eventually meant to withdraw completely, except for a temporary presence along a security perimeter.

That is the official destination. Now hold it next to everything on the pages before this one.

And here is the thing that complicates my own clean line that we are nowhere near it: the scaffolding for that ending is actually going up. The international force is no longer just a paragraph in the resolution. By late August, several countries had committed or approved troops for it, while other governments were being asked to provide personnel, training, or support. Washington had approached roughly seventy countries to take part. So the house is being built while the central argument inside it stays unsettled. The force assembles, the money moves, the plans for a vetted Palestinian police get drawn – and the disarmament and the withdrawal that all of it is supposed to hinge on have not budged an inch. We are nowhere near the destination, and the machinery to get there is being bolted together anyway.

The strange category my country is now in

Here is where that question – *where does my country end and Israel begin* – turns out to have an answer I did not expect.

America is not simply giving Israel some aid. That part is old, and it continued: in March, the administration used emergency powers to skip the normal congressional review and push through a sale to Israel that included more than twenty thousand bombs.

But America is also, now, sitting on the other side of the table. Trump personally chairs the "Board of Peace" that is supposed to oversee Gaza's governance and reconstruction. His administration designed the whole postwar structure. An American major general has been named to command the international force that is meant to take over Gaza's security, and Washington is putting more than \$200 million into standing that force up.

So my country armed the war and is now designing and paying for the machine meant to end it and replace it. It is the patron and the architect at once. I do not have a tidy word for that. I looked for one. There isn't one. A bomb in one hand and a blueprint in the other.

The courts, and what they have not settled

There is one more place all of this is being weighed, and I had no idea how far it had gone.

Back in late 2024, the International Criminal Court – the world's court for war crimes – issued arrest warrants for Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and his former defense minister, over alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza, including the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare. The same court had gone after Hamas's leaders too, for the murders and abductions of October 7. It moved against both sides. A warrant is not a conviction – it reflects the judges' finding of reasonable grounds to believe, not that anyone has stood trial. But it means the leader of America's closest ally is, across much of the world, a wanted man.

There is another finding I have to name, and name carefully, because it is not the same thing as a court's verdict. In 2025 a United Nations independent commission of inquiry concluded that Israel had committed genocide in Gaza, and in 2026 it said that conduct was still going on, including in what is being done to Palestinian children. Israel rejects the finding completely. That commission is not a court, and what it issued is not a binding judgment. But it is a formal body of the United Nations setting the

word down on paper, and I am not going to leave it out because it is heavy.

Separately, South Africa took Israel to the International Court of Justice – the court that judges disputes between nations – accusing it of genocide. Israel rejects the charge completely and calls the case a modern blood libel. That case is still inching through the court; a real ruling could be years away. Unproven, unfinished, and enormous.

My country's answer to all of it has been roughly the same: it rejects these proceedings and has defended Israel against them. And it did not stop at rejecting. It went after the court itself. By this summer the United States had sanctioned a growing list of ICC officials – prosecutors and judges, including ones tied to the Netanyahu case – the kind of measures normally reserved for cartels and terror financiers, now aimed at the judges of the world's war-crimes court. The United Nations called it a flagrant attack on the court's independence. So here is the shape of it, one more time. International institutions built to judge exactly these kinds of crimes have turned toward a country the United States is arming – and the United States has answered by punishing the judges.

Why the peace is not happening

It comes down, mostly, to a trap that no one will step out of first.

The plan says: verified Hamas disarmament and phased Israeli withdrawal, together.
Israel says: Hamas disarms completely first, then we withdraw.
Hamas says: stop attacking and start withdrawing first, then we disarm.

Neither will give up its leverage before the other. That is the entire stall, and it is almost unbearably human – two parties who do not trust each other, each holding the exact thing the other demands, each certain that to let go first is to be destroyed.

I can see it from inside each of them, and that is the part I cannot put down. I can see why Hamas will not lay down its weapons while the strikes are still falling – and they were falling this week. Disarm first, and where is the guarantee the withdrawal ever comes? And I can see why Israel will not pull its soldiers back until Hamas is disarmed – after October 7, "trust us, and then we will

disarm" is not a sentence Israel's government is willing to act on. Both of those are reasonable from where each side is standing. That is what makes it a trap and not a misunderstanding: not two parties simply lying to each other, but two sides each convinced that moving first would put its own people at risk. And the people with the least power in it keep dying in the space between.

In the middle of August, Jared Kushner spent a weekend on it – meeting Hamas leaders in Egypt, then Netanyahu in Israel. He went home without a breakthrough. They agreed to set up working groups. That is not nothing, and it is very far from peace. And while the meetings were happening, Israel resumed the strikes I described at the top of this section. Which is why the countries mediating between them spent this week sounding alarmed.

The other war, still burning

I have to leave Gaza now and go back to Iran, because that war has not ended either, and my country is fighting it directly.

The Pentagon's own words: it "commenced Operation Epic Fury against Iran at the direction of the President." Its own fact sheets say that within the first month, American forces had struck more than eleven thousand targets

and flown more than eleven thousand combat sorties – bombers, fighter jets, submarines, aircraft carriers, destroyers, drones. When anyone tells you America is not really at war with Iran, that is the document to put on the table. It is not interpretation. It is the military's own accounting.

And it has cost my own country's people, which the fact sheets are quieter about. By late August, the Pentagon's own casualty database put the toll at eighteen American service members killed and more than seven hundred and fifty wounded. When I say America is directly in this war, that is what I mean at the most literal level: our own dead, our own wounded, in a war a lot of Americans could not tell you we are fighting.

Is it over? No – but by late August its shape had changed, and the change is worth getting right. There was a real attempt at a deal in the summer, the Islamabad Memorandum, a fourteen-point framework brokered by Pakistan, and it came apart within weeks because it never touched the things the war is actually about: Iran's missiles, its network of militias, who controls the Strait. And then something quieter happened. The large-scale, night-after-night American airstrikes stopped – thirteen straight nights of bombing, and then a pause – and Iran, whose strategy had been mostly retaliation, largely stopped firing back. It is not peace. There are still no

direct talks between Washington and Tehran, and the president has said as much. But underneath the quiet there were signs of indirect diplomacy – Gulf mediators floating ways to reopen the Strait, Iran's foreign minister saying it was not impossible to get talks back on track if Washington built a little trust. The guns lowered so that some kind of talking might happen at all.

The rest of it did not lift. The Strait of Hormuz stayed choked – a handful of ships a day where there are normally dozens, thousands of sailors stranded on stalled vessels – with the president declaring the strait open and under American control and Iran's Revolutionary Guard still turning ships back, each side insisting it was the one who decided who passed. And Washington opened a front that needs no planes at all: by late August the Treasury had escalated to what one official billed an "economic D-Day," a widening sanctions campaign – cutting off a foreign bank accused of moving more than a billion dollars for Iran – meant to strangle the country's finances. There were still no direct talks between the two governments. A war can pause its bombing and go on killing a country by other means. By the end of August this one had reached its six-month mark, and it was nowhere near finished.

And then the quiet did not hold. At the very start of September the pause broke. The United States launched a

fresh wave of strikes on Iranian air defenses and military sites near the Strait, and Iran answered the way it had at the beginning – firing missiles and drones not only at American forces but at the Gulf countries that host them, striking Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Iraq. It was the largest exchange between the two since the summer.

And civilians were underneath it again. A U.S. strike in the south of Iran appears to have hit a wedding, killing at least five people, among them two children; American officials say the incident is under investigation. Meanwhile the nuclear fight hardened alongside the shooting: the United States, Britain, France, and Germany moved to have the international nuclear agency report Iran to the UN Security Council over its refusal to let inspectors back into the bombed sites. The lull I walked you through a page ago was only days old when I wrote it, and it did not outlast the writing. That is the thing I keep having to learn about this war: every time it looks like it is winding down, it turns out to have only been reloading.

The man they killed to begin it has been replaced by his son, who by midsummer had barely appeared in public. A country losing a war, its ruler of thirty-six years suddenly gone, the heir installed and mostly unseen. That is its own kind of danger – the kind no one is steering.

And now the school

This is what the whole rest of it was making room for.

On February 28 – the first day of the war with Iran, the same morning the opening strikes killed Khamenei – multiple munitions struck the compound containing the Shajareh Tayyebbeh Elementary School, in the town of Minab, in southern Iran. The school was destroyed.

The school stood inside the same larger walled compound as a Revolutionary Guard base, but it had been fenced off from it and running as a school for years. That is real, and it matters, and I am not going to pretend it doesn't. But the building was also, visibly, undeniably, a school. Reporters went back through years of public evidence – the school's own websites, photographs of the children, of school events, murals on the walls, a local business listing that literally named it as a school, satellite images showing it walled off from the military compound and operating as a school since at least 2018.

Journalists and monitors reconstructing the day found at least 157 people killed. Of those, 123 were children. All of them thirteen years old or younger. Iran's own counts have run higher.

The school area was struck in more than one wave. One forensic reconstruction, by the research group Forensic

Architecture, describes three strikes on the compound, landing in sequence with time in between; a later Associated Press reconstruction verified multiple munitions hitting the larger compound but said it could not establish how many struck the school itself. What the accounts share is the sequence that matters most: after the first impact, witnesses say, the school's principal moved the children who were still alive into an interior prayer room, the safest place she knew. A later strike hit that room. Another came down close by. Most of the children, in other words, were killed in the place an adult had gathered them to keep them safe. The exact number of munitions that struck the school itself remains unresolved.

One of them was a seven-year-old named Makan Nasiri. His body was never recovered – the only child from the school never found, which meant his family had nothing to bury and nowhere to set their grief down. I am keeping his name in here on purpose. A number lets you look away. A name does not.

Did America do it. The Pentagon has still not stood up and said the words. But the evidence has moved far past "Iran says so." America's own preliminary military investigation concluded that U.S. forces were likely responsible. Weapons experts who reviewed video said it was consistent with a Tomahawk cruise missile – a weapon the

United States uses and Iran does not. The investigators reportedly began focusing on one horrifying, bureaucratic possibility: outdated targeting data. The building was still on a list somewhere as a military site.

And then the detail that took the floor out from under me. According to correspondence from members of Congress, public reporting indicates that a U.S. intelligence analyst raised a concern, as far back as 2019, that the building was no longer the military facility the targeting data said it was. That someone, years ago, noticed it was a school. And the target stayed on the list anyway.

Seven years. A note in a system. A school full of children.

When the strike first happened, the president suggested Iran might have hit its own school, and floated the idea that Iran might have Tomahawk missiles – which experts called extremely unlikely, and for which no evidence was offered. Later, the Defense Secretary acknowledged the investigation but said the findings would be released "when the appropriate time is right." A formal investigation, led by a general from outside the command that ran the strike, was completed months ago – and then reportedly stalled under review at Central Command, and into September it still had not been released. Round after round of senators wrote demanding it be made public, warning that if the casualty numbers are accurate, Minab

would be the largest killing of civilians by the American military since 1991. One set a deadline of August 14 for answers. It came and went, and so did the next one.

I looked, today, for any public release of that investigation.

I could not find one.

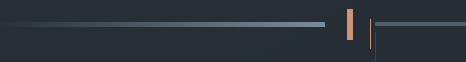
So this is where the truth sits, on September 5, 2026, and I am going to state it as carefully as I can, because it deserves to be stated carefully:

The available evidence, including the American military's own preliminary investigation, indicates that a U.S. strike likely destroyed the Minab school and killed at least 123 children. The suspected cause involves outdated American targeting data – a building that someone may have flagged as a school years before the missile found it. The Pentagon completed a fuller investigation months ago. It has not released the findings, and it has not formally accepted responsibility.

That is not a conclusion. It is the shape of a thing that has not been allowed to become a conclusion.

PART THREE

The map



I sat down to make one giant war make sense, and what I have instead is worse, because it is truer.

It is not one war. It is several, with different names and different rules and different reasons, tied together by the same aircraft and the same men making the decisions.

Gaza has a ceasefire and no end.

Israel controls most of the territory and will not say when it leaves.

Hamas has given up governing on paper and kept its guns.

My country is Israel's armorer and the architect of Gaza's future at the same time.

The world's courts have moved against Israel's leader; my country has answered by sanctioning their judges. And in the middle of all of it, while all of that was unfinished, my country opened a second war against Iran, and an American targeting database apparently sent a missile into an elementary school full of children, and the report on how

that happened is still sitting, months later, inside the Pentagon.

That is the map. Not a battlefield. A set of overlapping ledgers, most of them open, none of them closed.

The words that end the argument

There are a few phrases in this that get laid down like a gate across the road, and I want to take one of them apart, because it stopped me for the longest time.

Israel, you will hear, has a right to exist. I kept snagging on it. No country has a *right to exist* – not the way the phrase is used. I could not find a general rule of law that guarantees any particular state goes on existing forever. States do have real rights once they exist – sovereignty, political independence, the integrity of their borders – but that is not the same claim. States are not people. They rise and fall, split and merge, are made and unmade. As a plain fact about the world, the phrase does not hold up.

But I think I finally understand what it is reaching for, and it is not nothing. After the Holocaust, Jews wanted one place on earth where their safety did not hang on some other government's mercy – where the door could

not be locked from the outside. "A right to exist" is really the right of Jewish people to have that place and not have it wished away. Underneath the slogan is an old and specific and earned fear, and I am not going to mock it.

Here is where I get stuck, and I am done pretending I don't. If the real claim is that a people deserves a safe place to live and the right to govern itself, then the Palestinians have that claim too. Exactly as much. Not a little less because they lost the war, not a little less because Hamas exists, not a little less because it is inconvenient to the people holding the land right now. The same right – or it was never a right, only a possession dressed up as one.

And this is the part that makes me angry, so I will just say it plainly. When you point that out – when you say Palestinians deserve the same safety and the same self-rule that Israelis do – someone will call it antisemitism. It is not. "Two peoples deserve to live" is close to the least hateful sentence I can put together. Antisemitism is real, and it is vicious, and it is specific: hating Jews for being Jews, blaming every Jew for a government's crimes, reaching again for the old lies about money and control and loyalty. It is a real poison and it should be named everywhere it shows up, including on the side that agrees with me. But it is not the same thing as saying a Palestinian child deserves to grow up. Using the word for the world's

oldest hatred to shield a government from the plainest criticism does not protect Jewish people. It spends their history as cover – and it makes the real thing harder to see when it actually comes.

So I hold the line I set down at the start, and I hold it both ways. The Israeli government is not the Jewish people; criticizing what that government is doing in Gaza is not an attack on Jews, and a great many Jews are saying it louder than I am. Hamas is not the Palestinian people, and the crimes of October 7 do not come down onto two million civilians as a bill they owe. Two peoples, on the same narrow ground, have the same right to be safe on it. If saying that out loud is not allowed, the conversation was never meant to be an honest one.

So now what?

If you have read this far, you are carrying some of it now too, and there is a question that comes attached to the weight. I have felt it the whole time I was writing. *So what am I supposed to do with this.*

I want to be careful here, because this is the exact place where writing like this goes soft. This is where it hands you a link to click, a number to text, a phrase to repost, so the horror can convert into a small clean action and you

can set it down. I do not trust that. Not because those things are worthless – they are not – but because the relief they offer arrives too fast. You should not be able to feel better this quickly.

And I should say the quiet of these pages is not calm. Getting this clear did not settle me down; it did the opposite. Somewhere in the reading I stopped being confused and started being angry, and I have quit treating that as a failure of composure. Anger is the correct response to a finished report on a dead classroom, sitting in a drawer because releasing it would embarrass someone. It is the correct response to my own money spent on this, in my name, while I am told not to make it political. The work is not to swallow the anger. The work is to keep it exact – aimed at the thing that actually earned it, and not one inch wider.

I do not have a lesson. I told you at the start I would not hand you one, and the temptation to end this with something that makes it sit right in the chest is exactly the temptation I do not trust. Nothing about this sits right. It is not supposed to.

What I actually have is smaller, and harder to hold, and all of it is in the first person, because that is the only place I can vouch for anything. I live in a country that is doing some of this and paying for more of it, in my name, with

my money, whether I look or not. I can look. That is close to the whole of my power and I am not going to swell it into more than it is. I can refuse to let the numbers turn back into weather. I can keep the names – the children of Minab, the families killed on October 7, Makan Nasiri who was seven and was never found. I can refuse the version of the story with the hard parts taken out, no matter which side is holding it out to me. I can stay uncomfortable on purpose, which turns out to be the opposite of nearly everything a day is built to let me do.

That is not a plan. I said I did not have one. It is only a way of standing while the ledgers stay open.

And I do not want the school to become the only horror – the single terrible thing I let stand in for all the rest – because it cannot carry that alone. It is horrifying, and it is nowhere near alone.

It is horrifying that more than seventy-three thousand people are dead. It is horrifying that twelve hundred were killed in a single morning in Israel, and that the answer to it has destroyed more than a hundred thousand buildings. It is horrifying that a prime minister slides a line across a map, week after week, and calls the killing underneath it security. It is horrifying that the bombs were bought with my taxes, in a fight most of the people I know want no part of. It is horrifying how fast the headlines come, and

how quickly a person learns to read them the way you read the weather. It is horrifying that all of it has been allowed to become normal.

And here is the one that indicts me as I write it: I can put it down. When it gets too heavy I can close the laptop, make dinner, be a person in a country that is not on fire. The people I have spent these pages counting cannot. That gap – between my freedom to look away and their inability to leave – is its own kind of horror, and it is mine, and no amount of writing dissolves it.

And I no longer get to say I do not understand it. I understand it now, more or less, in the plain way a person can. I know the difference between the two wars. I know what a ceasefire is not. I know the number has passed twenty-one thousand children and that the number stops working and that I have to keep dragging it back into being children.

And I know that somewhere in a building in Washington there is a report about a school, finished, waiting, not released.

I keep thinking about the note from 2019. Somebody saw it. Somebody wrote it down. *That is a school.* And the missile went anyway.

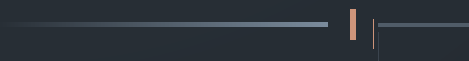
I am not going to look
away from that.

From any of it.

Not anymore. I have seen
it now, and I cannot
unsee it.

A CLOSING THREAD

Also worth understanding



A few threads did not fit the spine of this without turning a reckoning into something larger, but I learned them and I will not pretend I didn't.

The region is redrawing itself. While I was reading all of this, the ground shifted under it. In August, three big American-aligned countries – Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan – signed a joint defense pact of their own, in Mecca, an arrangement built to route around Washington. People who study the region for a living called the American order in the Middle East over. I had sat down to find where my country ends and Israel begins. While I was looking, other countries were answering a colder version of the same question – watching what the United States had done, and quietly deciding to stand somewhere else.

§

THE RECORD

Notes & Sources



Everything factual in this packet was checked against reporting available through the morning of September 5, 2026. Figures from active wars change daily; casualty counts in particular climb between the day a source is published and the day it is read. Where numbers appear rounded or given as "more than," that is deliberate – the precise figure had moved by the time of writing. Consequential current claims are cited below by title, outlet, and publication date where available; where a title is linked, it points to the source.

On the history (Part One). *The account of 1948, the Nakba, the 1967 occupation, Gaza's blockade, Hamas's 2006 election and 2007 takeover, October 7, 2023, the U.S.–Israel relationship, and the U.S.–Iran history from 1953 through 2025 is drawn from the broad documentary and journalistic record. It is written to be fair to two peoples with real and competing claims; readers who want to go deeper should read historians from more than one perspective. On 1948 in particular, the more critical passages follow the Israeli "new historians" – Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pappé – whose archival findings on troop strength and expulsion remain debated; that debate is itself part of the honest picture, and I have tried to hold it alongside the genuine, post-Holocaust fear the war was fought under.*

GAZA, PRESENT DAY.

- Ceasefire announced October 10, 2025; hostages returned; the UN reporting the guns "largely" silent but violations near-daily – [Israeli hostages freed, hundreds of Palestinians released](#), NPR, October 13, 2025; [Gaza ceasefire news](#), CNN, October 2025; [Statement by the Secretary-General](#), United Nations, October 13, 2025.
- More than 1,300 Palestinians killed since the ceasefire against four Israeli soldiers killed in Gaza in the same period (post-ceasefire toll reported past 1,300 by early September); strikes continuing into September – the café and police-station strikes of August 18–19, a water-desalination plant, a mosque, and an aid warehouse hit with children among the dead around August 23–24, and a September 1 Israeli raid on Gaza City that seized a senior Hamas official, with covering strikes killing Palestinians including children; more than 73,400 killed since October 7, 2023, roughly half women and children (Gaza Ministry of Health figures, treated as broadly reliable by UN agencies, which do not separate civilians from combatants) – [Israel's deadly Gaza strikes cast doubt on ceasefire progress days after Kushner visit](#), PBS NewsHour / Associated Press, August 19, 2026; [Israeli strikes hit water plant, warehouse in Gaza, killing at least seven](#), Al Jazeera, August 24, 2026; [Israeli fire kills four people, including three children, in Gaza, medics say](#), Reuters, September 1, 2026; [IDF strikes Gaza as Hamas official captured in reported raid](#), Times of Israel, September 1, 2026; UN OCHA Humanitarian Situation Updates, 2026.

- At least 300 children killed in the first 300 days of the ceasefire, roughly one a day – [At least 300 children reportedly killed in Gaza in past 300 days, UNICEF, August 2026; UNICEF says one child killed per day in Gaza since "ceasefire", Al Jazeera, August 6, 2026.](#)
- October 7, 2023: about 1,200 killed in Israel and 251 taken hostage – Israeli government figures, corroborated by the Associated Press, Reuters, and the BBC.
- Roughly 82% of structures damaged, 130,000+ destroyed, the population compressed west of the Yellow Line, about \$71 billion to rebuild, and the hunger, water, and hospital figures – UNOSAT Gaza damage assessments, UN OCHA, the World Health Organization, and the joint UN/EU/World Bank interim assessment, 2026.
- Israeli control of roughly two-thirds of Gaza, the push toward 70%, and the Yellow Line moving deeper than the agreed maps – [Israel's yellow line in Gaza is moving, expanding IDF's control, CBC News, 2026; New images show Israeli control line deeper into Gaza than expected, BBC, 2025.](#)
- Famine formally declared in Gaza (August 2025), the first such determination in the Middle East, and disputed by Israel – [Food crisis body declares first-ever famine in Gaza, CBS News, 2025; Famine confirmed in northern Gaza, says U.N.-backed panel, NPR, August 2025.](#)
- Hundreds of Palestinians killed near militarized aid-distribution sites through 2025, with circumstances disputed – UN OHCHR reporting and UN OCHA humanitarian updates, 2025.

THE WEST BANK.

- Settler violence at an "all-time high," settlement expansion driving mass displacement, home demolitions, and moves toward de facto annexation through 2026 – [UN warns West Bank settler violence hits "all-time high"](#), UN News, July 2026; [West Bank: Surge in Settler Violence Threatens Mass Atrocities](#), Human Rights Watch, July 24, 2026; [Israel's settlement expansion drives mass displacement in West Bank](#), UN Human Rights Office, March 2026; [Israel's ethnic cleansing of West Bank Bedouin and herding communities](#), Amnesty International, June 2026.
- The E1 settlement tender (roughly 1,200 homes east of Jerusalem, August 2026), condemned jointly by France, Germany, Italy, and the UK and warned to sever the West Bank from East Jerusalem and foreclose a viable Palestinian state – [West Bank: Illegal E1 Settlement Tender Opens for Bids](#), Human Rights Watch, August 19, 2026; [Israel issues tender to build 1,200 housing units in contested West Bank E1 area](#), Haaretz, August 18, 2026; [Why Israeli tenders for illegal E1 West Bank settlement prompted outrage](#), Al Jazeera, August 21, 2026.

THE PLAN, AND AMERICA'S ROLE.

- UN Security Council Resolution 2803 (November 2025): the Board of Peace, phased disarmament and matched withdrawal, the international force, the technocratic government, "Israel will not occupy or annex Gaza," and the "credible pathway" language – [What is Security Council Resolution 2803?](#), Chatham House, November 2025; [Implementation of Resolution 2803: Report of the Board of Peace](#), United Nations, 2026.
- America's dual role: about \$3.8 billion in annual aid, and the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. aid since World War II (Congressional Research Service); a March 2026 munitions sale pushed through by emergency authority that skipped congressional review – [US bypasses congressional review to approve munitions sale to Israel](#), Times of Israel, March 2026; [US sells Israel 27,000 bombs made by Turkish-owned firm as Trump administration bypasses Congress](#), Ynet News, March 2026.
- Trump chairing the Board of Peace; U.S. Maj. Gen. Jasper Jeffers named to command the international stabilization force (planned at roughly 20,000 troops and 12,000 police), with startup funding reported by Reuters at more than \$200 million – [Trump names Gaza's "Stabilization Force" commander](#), Jerusalem Post, 2026.

- The force actually assembling by late August 2026 – several countries committing or approving troops and others asked to provide personnel, training, or support, with Washington approaching roughly seventy nations, even as disarmament and withdrawal stayed unresolved – [5 nations commit troops to Gaza stabilization force](#), Anadolu Agency, 2026; [Uganda approves sending troops for international force in Gaza](#), NBC News, August 2026; [US presses 70 countries to join Gaza stabilisation force](#), The New Arab, 2026.
- Kushner's mid-August meetings with Hamas (Egypt) and Netanyahu (Israel), no breakthrough, working groups agreed, disarmament-before-withdrawal – [Jared Kushner meets with Israel's Netanyahu after Hamas talks](#), Washington Post, August 17, 2026; [Kushner and Netanyahu agree U.S. general should oversee Hamas "demilitarization"](#), NBC News, August 17, 2026; [Hamas leaders tell Kushner they will demilitarize Gaza](#), Axios, August 16, 2026.

THE COURTS.

- ICC arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant (war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza, including the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare), issued November 2024; the court also pursued Hamas's leaders over October 7. A warrant is not a conviction; it reflects the judges' finding of reasonable grounds to believe – [ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I issues warrants of arrest for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant](#), International Criminal Court, 2024.

- South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, still ongoing, with a final ruling potentially years away; Israel rejects the charge; the U.S. rejects these proceedings, has defended Israel against them, and sanctioned ICC officials – [Don't hold your breath – ICJ decision on SA's genocide case may take years](#), Daily Maverick, March 2026; South Africa v. Israel proceedings, International Court of Justice, 2024–2026.
- The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry finding (September 2025) that Israel committed genocide in Gaza, reiterated in 2026, with Israel rejecting it – a UN commission's conclusion, not a binding ICJ judgment – [Israel has committed genocide in the Gaza Strip, UN Commission finds](#), UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR), September 16, 2025; [UN commission says Israel is committing genocide in Gaza](#), CNN, September 16, 2025; and the Commission's 2026 reiteration concerning children – [Israel continues to commit genocide and other atrocity crimes by deliberately targeting Palestinian children](#), UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR), June 23, 2026.
- U.S. sanctions on the ICC escalating through 2026 to include judges and deputy prosecutors tied to the Netanyahu warrants – measures the UN called a flagrant attack on the court's independence – [US slaps sanctions on two more ICC judges over cases against Israel](#), Times of Israel, 2026; [New US sanctions 'a flagrant attack' against ICC independence](#), UN News, August 2026.

THE WAR WITH IRAN.

- Origins – the 2025 Twelve-Day War and U.S. strikes on Iran's nuclear sites; the administration's claim that Iran had restarted its weapons program, contradicted by U.S. intelligence and the IAEA; the January 2026 crackdown and U.S. buildup – [2026 Iran war, Explained](#), Britannica, and contemporaneous Reuters and Associated Press reporting.
- February 28, 2026: Operation Epic Fury (U.S.) and Operation Roaring Lion (Israel), simultaneous strikes; more than 11,000 targets and sorties in the first month – [Operation Epic Fury](#), U.S. Department of War / CENTCOM fact sheets, March 2026.
- The opening strikes killed Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei; his son Mojtaba was named successor amid a leadership crisis and had barely appeared publicly by midsummer – [Iran names Mojtaba Khamenei as new supreme leader after father's killing](#), Al Jazeera, March 8, 2026; [Mojtaba Khamenei named Iran's new supreme leader](#), NBC News, 2026.
- The Islamabad Memorandum (summer 2026), a Pakistan-brokered framework, and its collapse within weeks over missiles, proxies, and the Strait – [US-Iran Memorandum of Understanding expires: how and why it fell apart](#), Al Jazeera, August 17, 2026.

- By late August 2026 the war's shape had shifted: large-scale U.S. airstrikes paused after thirteen straight nights and Iran largely halting retaliation; still no direct U.S.–Iran talks, though signs of indirect diplomacy through Gulf mediators; the Strait of Hormuz still severely restricted, with thousands of sailors stranded and Washington and Tehran each claiming to control passage; a widening U.S. Treasury sanctions campaign billed an "economic D-Day"; and the conflict passing its six-month mark on August 28 – [U.S. pauses Iran strikes for second straight night as talks move in positive direction](#), CBS News, 2026; [Bessent promises 'economic D-Day' ahead of expected Iran sanctions](#), CNN, August 23, 2026; [Iran warns of Hormuz ship seizures ahead of Bessent's planned sanctions push](#), CNBC, August 24, 2026; [US-Iran war reaches 6-month mark as Strait of Hormuz tensions remain high](#), Fox News, August 28, 2026.

- The early-September re-escalation: after the late-August lull, the U.S. resumed major strikes inside Iran and Iran retaliated against U.S. forces and Gulf host states – Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Iraq – around September 1–2, 2026; a U.S. strike in southern Iran reportedly hit a wedding gathering, killing at least five civilians including two children, an incident U.S. officials said was under investigation; and on September 4 the U.S., Britain, France, and Germany moved at the IAEA to report Iran to the UN Security Council over barred inspections – [Iran claims attacks on Bahrain, Jordan, Iraq after US strikes kill 11](#), Al Jazeera, September 1, 2026; [Iran, US exchange new attacks: Who was hit in latest strikes?](#), Al Jazeera, September 2, 2026; [U.S. Investigates Deadly Strike on Wedding in Iran](#), Vance Says, TIME, September 4, 2026; [Women gathered in a small Iranian town for a wedding. Then a deadly U.S. strike hit](#), Associated Press, September 4, 2026; [UN nuclear agency members draft resolution reporting Iran to the UN Security Council](#), Associated Press / Washington Post, September 4, 2026.
- U.S. military casualties by late August 2026 of roughly 18 service members killed and more than 750 wounded (Pentagon casualty database) – [Pentagon adds 60 wounded to Iran war casualty count](#), Stars and Stripes, August 21, 2026; [13 US troops killed, more than 380 wounded in Operation Epic Fury](#), Military Times, April 2026.

THE WIDER REALIGNMENT.

- The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement among Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan (August 2026), read by analysts as a turn away from the U.S.-led order – [The U.S.-Led Middle East Order Is Over. The Mecca Agreement Proves It.](#), Council on Foreign Relations, 2026; [Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan sign joint defence agreement: What's in it?](#), Al Jazeera, August 7, 2026.

MINAB.

- The Shajareh Tayyebah school, struck February 28, 2026 – the same morning as the strike that killed Khamenei; inside the same larger walled compound as a Revolutionary Guard base, but fenced off from it and operating separately as a school for years before the strike – [Iran girls' school targeting likely "deliberate"](#), Al Jazeera, March 3, 2026; [Satellite images show Iran school strike hit more buildings than earlier reported](#), NPR, March 4, 2026; [Airstrikes on Minab](#), Forensic Architecture, 2026.
- At least 157 killed, 123 of them children aged thirteen or younger (Iranian totals higher) – [As the Pentagon stays quiet, AP reconstructs a US strike that killed over 100 Iranian children](#), Associated Press, July 1, 2026; [More Than 100 School Children Were Killed in Iran](#), TIME, March 11, 2026.

- Munitions striking the compound in more than one wave (one reconstruction describes three strikes; a later AP reconstruction could not establish how many hit the school itself); the principal moving surviving children into an interior prayer room struck by a later wave; outdated U.S. targeting data and a reported 2019 warning; the fuller investigation completed months earlier and reportedly stalled under review at Central Command, still not publicly released as of September 5, 2026 – [When Intelligence Fails: A Legal Targeting Analysis of the Minab School Strike](#), Just Security, 2026; [Pentagon probe points to U.S. missile hitting Iranian school](#), NPR, March 11, 2026; [Four Months After Horrific Minab School Airstrike, Accountability Delayed](#), Amnesty International USA, 2026; [AP reconstruction of the Minab school strike](#), Associated Press, 2026 (verified multiple munitions striking the larger compound but could not establish how many hit the school itself); Senate press releases (Warnock, Gillibrand, Gallego, and others), 2026.
- Makan Nasiri, seven years old, the only child from the school never recovered – [Makan Nasiri, the only child still missing from the school bombed in Iran](#), Al Jazeera, April 23, 2026.
- The school was attended by both boys and girls; the identified dead included boys and girls alike (25 boys and 26 girls among the first 61 named) – [Names and ages of children killed in strike on Iranian school](#), Middle East Eye, 2026.

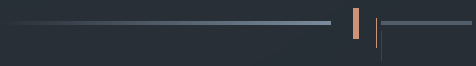
***A note on what I left out.** Building this, I checked several further claims that circulate widely and chose not to use them,*

for the same reason I checked everything else. The story that the UN "admitted" Gaza's casualties were far lower than reported is a distortion: in 2024 the UN separated the identified dead from the total, which never fell, and it continued to assess women and children as roughly half – the figure kept here. The claim that an AI targeting system "caused" the Minab strike remains contested; investigators have leaned toward human failure with outdated data, which is what the pages say. And the controversy over specific, later-walked-back atrocity stories from October 7 is real, but the core finding – including a UN investigation's conclusion that sexual violence occurred – stands; relitigating it inside this piece would tip a scale I have worked to keep level. If any of these turns out differently as more is confirmed, this is the kind of page that should be corrected, not defended.

If any single figure in here is going to be quoted to another person, pull the current number from the live source first. This was true on the day it was written. Wars do not hold still.

STILL JUNE · JUNE ASHLYN

Where My Country Ends



Checked against the record. Where the truth is unfinished, it is left unfinished. If a figure here is quoted elsewhere, pull the current number from the live source first – wars do not hold still.

A FIXED RECORD · EDITION I · SEPTEMBER 5,
2026