Monday, Oct. 7, 2024 / The future of Gaza

[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]

[BILLBOARD]

SEAN RAMESWARAM (host): How are we supposed to remember October 7th?

SCORING IN <I Am Just Not Sure Anymore - BMC>

ALLISON KAPLAN SOMMER: It took years to develop rituals for memorializing the Holocaust. And we're only a year into this sort of terrible, traumatic tragedy. So I think it's going to be a fluid process.

SEAN: On *Today, Explained*, we’re going to ask a few Israelis, and a few Palestinians.

MOHAMED GHALAIENY: I reject the memorialization of October 7th because the memorialization of October 7th is about the foregrounding of Israeli suffering. And I don't think it is about considering the Israeli occupation, oppression of Palestinians in the round as, you know, a big factor in why we're here today.

SEAN: And we’re gonna try and figure out what’s going to happen to Gaza.

[THEME]

*<BUMPER> AVISHAY ARTSY (producer): “This is Today, Explained”*

MOHAMED GHALAIENY: My name is Mohamed Ghalaieny. I'm a Palestinian from Gaza. I've been living in Manchester since 2004. In September 2023, I traveled to Gaza with my sister. I woke up at 6:30 on October 7th and on my way to harvest olives when I saw rockets flying through the sky towards Israel and it became very apparent that something big was happening.

SCORING IN <The Darkest Valleys - BMC>

MOHAMED GHALAIENY: I was last on the show in November 2023. At that time I was in Khan Younis sheltering at my grandparents home. In some ways you could say that my life has gone back to its normal course because I've come back to the UK. However, at the same time, my life has changed in a kind of cataclysmic way, almost, in the sense that whereas before I had a home in Gaza, I now do not. Our home in Gaza has been destroyed. Our community has been decimated I have three great aunts who’d stayed in Gaza City. They were in the 70s and 80s, so they stayed in their home because they didn't want to suffer the indignity of having to leave their home, so they took that choice. When the Israeli army went into Gaza in July this year. They went into their home, as I understand, they told them that they had to leave. They refused to leave and they shot them.

ASEEL MOUSA: My name is Aseel Mousa and I am a Palestinian journalist from the Gaza Strip. When you spoke to me in February, I was displaced in Rafah. I was in a refuge house. I had no water, not enough food. Not any kind of dignity in the life I was living.

Maybe I am now in a place that can be described as a safe place since I am in Egypt. But the feeling to be away from home and to be uprooted from your country and your home and it's so hard. And you feel that you are a stranger when you are not in your home.

NOAH EFRON: I am Noah Efron. I'm a professor at Bar-Ilan University and a member of Tel Aviv-Jaffa's City Council. Look, when we talked almost a year ago, it was before Israel had gone into Gaza on the ground. And you asked if I favored Israel attacking or something like that. And I, I believed back then and I, I still do, that the war would cause more misery than it could ever do away with, obviously for Palestinians, but also for us. And that maybe there were other better things to do to find a way to stop money from reaching Hamas or to isolate Hamas or to weaken Hamas without all the terrible destruction and all the death and misery of the ground war. And I still think that maybe these things were possible. Our government, which does not much reflect my way of seeing things, is deeply skeptical of diplomacy, really deeply skeptical of the world, really…

ALLISON KAPLAN SOMMER: I'm Allison Kaplan Sommer, I've been a journalist in Israel for over 30 years. I work at Haaretz. I'm a journalist and I like to write about everything. I like to write about culture. I like to write about society, trends, food… But really, for the past year, professionally, there's only been one story, and that's the story of the war. And the impact has just radiated out to every part of society. Every story I do is about a hostage family or about people who aren't living in their homes in the north of the country or the south of the country. And really, it's just something that hangs there. It's part of the atmosphere. You breathe it in and out.

SCORING OUT

ASEEL MOUSA: I actually lost about 60 people of my extended family in Israeli bombardment, and I lost so many loved ones. After enduring three months in al-Maghazi refugee camp in the middle of the Gaza Strip, Israel also ordered the people in the middle to move to the south. So my family and I decided to displace again to the city of Rafah in the southern part of the Gaza Strip. And we stayed there for like three months. And after these three months, we had no any other choice but to leave the Gaza Strip and to move to Egypt. We did that after Israel threatened to invade Rafah. So we decided to leave. And I swear that this is the hardest decision we have ever forced to take.

NOAH EFRON: Personally the most close to home way the war affected me and us is that our boy got on a plane from college in California on October 8th. When we talked last year, we talked about that. And then he spent the next 4 or 5 months as an infantry soldier in Gaza. And every day his unit would send us a text message saying, ‘Just to report everyone is fine.’ Until the day when they sent a text message saying we've suffered a terrible loss and five of our soldiers are dead and a bunch more are wounded. And then there were funerals and shivas and widows and babies who lost their fathers. And for us, even before that, you just don't sleep when you got a kid who's an infantry soldier in Gaza… And then there was the time when there was the knock on the door in the middle of the night, and my wife Susan sat up bolt straight and said, This is it. It happened… He is fine. He's back in school in California. He seems to be doing okay.

ALLISON KAPLAN SOMMER: It's, you know, a terrible feeling, a terrible, terrible feeling to know that the country that you live in is responsible for so much suffering and death… You feel very fiercely protective of your country, your people. You feel like what has to be done has to be done to to protect your country. And on the other hand, you don't want to be the responsible party when when women and children and innocent civilians are being killed and slaughtered in Gaza…

MOHAMED GHALAIENY: My political consciousness in the past year has changed in the sense that you could say I was in slumber from 2014 to 2023. I was burying my head in the sand. I'd always had, like, a very strong sense of justice and political consciousness. But I, but I, switched off. And then the past year switched me back on again and made me remember that we are in a struggle that is one of, I mean, I guess it is to an extent, a civilizational clash between like the Western Empire, the remnants of, you know, colonialism, white supremacy, and, you know, bolstered by capitalism, and people who aren't that.

SCORING IN <With Shaking Hands - BMC (only the “hangdrum jitters” stem)>

MOHAMED GHALAIENY: The discourse and what you could call a culture war around Israel and Palestine has had quite an effect on some of my relationships. I now find it hard to engage with people who I don't see eye to eye with on Gaza.

SCORING BUMP

NOAH EFRON: Saying all this, can I just say a word about the incommensurability? I am talking to you in America from a rooftop on Tel Aviv overlooking the Mediterranean about the anguish of sleepless nights, worrying that every moment could be the time when that knock comes on the door…. And there are people who are hearing this, and maybe you're one of them, who are thinking, there are tens of thousands of Palestinians who are dead and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians whose lives are wrecked or homes are destroyed, whose loved ones are killed. So how dare you talk about your so very small worries and anxieties or even really about the 1,700 Israelis who are dead and the thousands who are wounded and tens of thousands who've been displaced for a year from their homes, you know, because of the asymmetry. And all I can say is, it is all of it true. Their indescribable anguish, our indescribable anguish.

SCORING IN <add in “Cello Pizzicato” stem>

NOAH EFRON: I'm a historian of science and the great 19th, 20th century mathematician Georg Cantor said that there are different sizes of infinity. And there are. And they’re all still infinities. And we've had our year of our infinities here.

SCORING BUMP

SEAN: That was Noah Efron. You also heard Mohamed Ghalaieny, Aseel Mousa, and Allison Kaplan Sommer – four people we had on *Today, Explained* over the course of the past year. We invited them back today.

The future of Gaza when we return.

[BREAK]

[BUMPER]

SEAN: *Today, Explained*. Sean Rameswaram, here with Josh Keating. He's a senior correspondent at Vox covering foreign policy. Josh, we've been talking a lot about Lebanon and Hezbollah on the show lately but the one year anniversary of the attacks Hamas perpetrated in Israel makes it a good time to talk about Gaza. What is the latest there?

JOSHUA KEATING (senior correspondent, Vox): Things are at a much lower boil. But that doesn't mean the war is any closer to any closer to a conclusion.

SEAN: Where does this go, if not cease fire? What happens?

JOSH: So the question I was trying to answer in this piece I just published was: has Israel effectively reoccupied Gaza?

SCORING IN <Rowing Westward - BMC>

JOSH: Israel, of course, occupied Gaza up until 2005, the same way it currently does the West Bank. In 2005, it pulled out its troops along with, you know, several Israeli settlements that were there. And, you know, the answer came up with us, probably not in quite the same way. It's not going to look like it does in the West Bank. There are some voices in Israel in the influential settler movement that includes the far right finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, who actually want to reestablish settlements in Gaza, who want to basically occupy it the way that the West Bank is currently occupied.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkXJwErm8DM&t=281s)*> CNN:*

*CLARISSA WARD, CORRESPONDENT: Returning to Gaza, they cheer. That is the goal of Zionist settler organization Nahalat, one of more than a dozen groups now advocating for the reestablishment of Israeli settlements in Gaza.*

JOSH: There doesn't seem to be much appetite for that, but neither are they going to withdraw entirely either. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made pretty clear that he wants to keep a military presence there, but not sort of fully administer it.

SCORING OUT

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8DiQnRWx50)*> PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: I would define the end of the war in Gaza when Hamas no longer rules Gaza. We throw them out. To do that, you need to have a military victory and you have to have, also, the political victory to destroy their governance.*

JOSH: The issue with that is it gets us into this sort of uneasy middle position where, you know, Israel hasn't quite pulled out. But, you know, it also hasn't sort of established the conditions that would allow Gaza to either rebuild or establish some kind of adequate civilian governance.

SEAN: Yeah, I mean, it sounds kind of like the United States and Afghanistan or something. Are we talking about a forever war here?

JOSH: There are people like General David Petraeus in the U.S. who've urged Israel to do, you know, what they call, like, ‘Clear, hold, and build,’ which is basically, you know, you come in, you clear out the militants in an area and then you sort of govern it. You set up, you provide basic services.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvpQJpx3eQM)*> GEN. DAVID PETRAEUS: Just as we did in Fallujah and Ramadi in these other cities as we cleared, held and then went further. But we were rebuilding immediately as we proceeded so that the civilians could come back into them.*

JOSH: Israel doesn't seem to be, you know, digging wells or building schools in…

SEAN Mm.

JOSH: …in this areas it's left behind. And, you know, clearly, Hamas has degraded as a military organization, but it's sort of converted into a kind of insurgency where it's launching sort of hit and run attacks. If the position in Israel is that it's going to keep its troops there as long as Hamas poses any military threat, that seems to be a recipe for permanent occupation without the kind of service provision portion of counterinsurgency.

SEAN: Okay. So Israel may be on the precipice of some kind of permanent occupation in Gaza if they're not already there. But they're not worried about taking care of the Palestinian people. What does that mean? Who is running Gaza? Who is providing services for the people who live there?

JOSH: Well, at the moment, Hamas still is to some extent.

SCORING IN <Saturn’s rings are ice and dust>

JOSH: I mean, even as the group's leadership has been decimated, most of the government buildings have been destroyed. From sources I've talked to, Hamas is still the kind of main service provider in, at least in parts of Gaza, but its, its capabilities are dwindling. There's still sort of rampant malnutrition.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0EzEYCtnZBQ&rco=1)*> REUTERS: This is Ahmed Kanaan. His aunt, Isra Khalaq, says he weighs just over 13 pounds, half of his pre-war body weight.*

JOSH: The health system’s been devastated in Gaza.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qcafobaJ7I)*> CHANNEL 4 NEWS: The polio virus, spreading fast for the first time in 25 years. And this is its first victim. Baby Abdulrahman is sleeping through the sound of an Israeli drone overhead.*

JOSH: This is an enclave that was almost entirely dependent on foreign aid even before October 7th, and that’s even more so. And, you know, there are further restrictions imposed on how aid delivery is getting in.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDDyo2OrsQU)*> AL JAZEERA:*

*UM-E-KULSOOM SHARIFF, CORRESPONDENT: Israel is accused of deliberately blocking medical aid into Gaza. Medicine, surgical equipment and hospital supplies are severely depleted.*

JOSH: And so, you know, it's a scenario that a lot of people are worried about, is you'll have kind of like smugglers and organized crime groups and local clans sort of filling the governance vacuum in parts of Gaza. And then you'll have Hamas still in the picture. Israelis still in the picture. And then, to the degree they can, aid groups still doing what they're able to get some aid in there.

SCORING OUT <Saturn’s rings are ice and dust>

JOSH: I mean, we've seen a couple limited successes, such as the, you know, the polio campaign. There have actually been some shots getting in arms. So that shows it is possible to get some aid in, but nowhere near adequate to actually provide basic nutrition, much less, you know, adequate health services to a, to a, you know, really sort of battered and brutalized civilian population.

SEAN: If Hamas is still providing services to people along with some aid groups, does, does Gaza never really make any progress? Is it going to become a truly governable place?

JOSH: You know, in the early months of this war, you know, there was this flurry of pieces. I wrote a few of them myself for what is the day after look like in Gaza? What does postwar Gaza governance look like? And it's weird how now that we're sort of like closer to something resembling a day after, like that conversation has kind of gone away. And it's really striking to me the degree we don't talk about that as much anymore. So there was the kind of U.S. vision, which was, you know, a revamped and revitalized Palestinian Authority. This is the basically the government that currently rules the West Bank would be extended to govern Gaza. The Israelis never found that acceptable. And it's not clear that the people of Gaza did either. I mean, the PA is deeply unpopular in the West Bank in the areas it controls. Now, it's not clear what kind of legitimacy it would have in Gaza, especially if it was essentially installed at the point of an Israeli gun. So, you know, that that was kind of a nonstarter. There's been talks about, you know, neighboring Arab governments basically funding reconstruction in Gaza, which is going to cost a lot. There have been estimates that put it at like 50 to 80 billion dollars. They've made pretty clear they're not really interested in getting involved unless, you know, there's a sort of clear pathway toward Palestinian statehood, toward a two-state solution. And and that's also a political nonstarter right now. You know, Netanyahu has talked about a civilian-led Palestinian government taking over governance, but people basically call this “unicorn Palestinians,” that they want, you know, qualified technocrats who are not associated with Hamas, not associated with Fatah, the party that currently governs in the West Bank, not associated with any Palestinian faction that actually has any sort of following. So it's not clear where that's really going to come from.

SEAN: I just want to go back a year to October 7th, 2023, and ask you, Josh, what was Hamas trying to accomplish when they, you know, horrifically attacked Israel?

JOSH: I think there was a sense at the time that the Israeli-Palestinian issue was kind of falling off the global agenda. I mean, you saw Israel sort of making these normalization deals with other Arab governments. The focus was on Iran. And, you know, I think this was an effort to both sort of put their struggle back on the agenda. And in the process, I'm sure, were under no illusions that this would prompt the sort of devastating Israeli response that would, you know, deepen Israel's international isolation and cause international criticism. So did that work? I mean, in some sense, yes. I mean, Israel is more isolated than ever. They've gotten more international criticism, those normalization deals haven't materialized. But did this make life better for the Palestinians? Did this accomplish anything for Gaza? I mean, I think you have to say no. I mean, it's certainly we're certainly no closer to the establishment of a Palestinian state. Certainly no close to anything that will sort of restore some measure of, you know, sovereignty, security and dignity for the people of Gaza. And now, in a weird way, we're back to where we were.

SCORING IN <Somber 01 - Canopy dusk (soft clacky)>

JOSH: You know, Israel is, like, focusing on Iran again. They're, they're fighting in the north with Hezbollah. They are escalating their conflict with Iran and once again, the suffering of Gaza, the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza is falling off the agenda. People are paying less attention to it than they were a few months ago. So after a whole lot of conflict, a whole lot of bloodshed, a whole lot of people dead. We're, we're almost back to where we were a year ago.

SCORING BUMP

SEAN: Josh Keating. Vox dot com.

Our program was produced by Avishay Artsy and Haleema Shah. We were edited and fact-checked by Matthew Collette. We were mixed by Andrea Kristinsdottir and Rob Byers. It’s Today, Explained.

[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]