

# MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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## *The War Around US*

### [TRANSCRIPT]

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** Ready to go?

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** Ready to go insha'allah (God willing). We're going to the hotel and insha'alla (god willing). He will make it easy for us. We can't see a thing.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** Okay we're in the car we're on our way so will be there shortly. Sherine says they're hitting the port.

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** Really?

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** Really hard, she said she could hear the shelling off of the port- you can see absolutely nothing - pitch blackness. We're not taking the shortest way right?

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** Exactly.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** Why?

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** No I'm going to take the (BANG)

**NEWS ANCHOR:** There's breaking news as you can see, the airstrikes hitting the Gaza strip. These are the latest pictures.

**NEWS ANCHOR:** You'll see on the screen here, nothing but war crimes, a massacre.

**NEWS ANCHOR:** Well Nick, you simply can't put a number on the number of families whose lives have been ruined by this war.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** The most important situation on the ground is that Gaza has been put into further desperation.

**NEWS ANCHOR:** There is no doubt that the situation here is horrific for everybody.

**NEWS ANCHOR:** They the ammunition being dropped on the area is consistently white phosphorous.

**NEWS ANCHOR:** Missiles continue to be fired, and then the heavy machinery started to move.

**NEWS ANCHOR:** Paramedics, Journalists, and humanitarians, can't get to that area.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** When I arrived into Gaza in the spring of 2008, foreign journalists had all pulled out of Gaza. I was kind of saying to myself, "What the hell am I doing walking into Gaza as someone with an American passport? I approached it with the mindset of like, "Okay, just get through these next twelve months. Take it one day at a time. Live your life with the mindset that you're a foreign journalist coming to work in Gaza. When I arrived into Gaza, Gaza had already been under siege.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** There is still a shortage of fuel because of the sanctions Israel has imposed. The Israeli siege on Gaza is essentially a stranglehold on the territory.

Israel controls all of the access points into the Gaza strip with the exception of one border that Egypt shares with Gaza.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** For every Palestinian that makes it across the border into Egypt, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of Palestinians desperately trying to get across – each with their own compelling reason.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** It was November of 2008 and it was just around the time of the U.S. presidential elections. We were very much interested in just getting the sense of the global reaction -- especially in a place like Gaza where U.S. foreign policy is tangibly felt. So, at the time, we were hoping to do an interview with the deposed Prime Minister Ismail Haniya, and what we needed was a second correspondent to help us gauge the public reaction.

**SHERINE TADROS:** So, I entered Gaza on the 4th of November, and as my bureau chief was saying goodbye to me, he said to me, "It's only 24 hours. Have a nice fish meal in Gaza, come back out and we'll have a really nice meal in Jerusalem." I'll never forget that phrase.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** So when Sherine came in from the outside, I had a very specific vision in terms of what Gaza was going through and what needed to be communicated about the suffering of the people, and what needed to be communicated about what was happening on the ground.

**SHERINE TADROS:** Before then, we were very good friends—like brother and sister— but we hadn't worked together.

**AL JAZEERA (AJE) NEWSANCHOR:** As Americans were voting, Israeli bombs were falling on Gaza. A deadly strike threatens the ceasefire.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** We realized immediately that, while the world was consumed with what was happening in the U.S., there was a secondary story that was unfolding in Gaza.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** That attack killed four Palestinian fighters. By mid-afternoon, Hamas responded with the grad rockets.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** This was a monumental shift. The ceasefire had completely collapsed. We felt that Gaza and the armed factions and Israel now were on a collision course. This is why Sherine – who had come in for just a few days – had found herself now in one week, two weeks, several weeks, a month... And there was so much work to be done.

**SHERINE TADROS:** For the first month I was there, it was just seeing so many people living in this hopeless state. An 18 year old who is really excited about going to university – what do you say to him when you know that once he finishes university, he probably won't be able to work or go anywhere else to work? And life stands still; they can't see a future.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** When Nevine's university emailed and asked to explain why she wouldn't be able to enroll for the upcoming fall semester, she replied "I'm living under siege." So the university decided to revoke her scholarship, admission status, and her visa to the United States.

**SHERINE TADROS:** Emotionally, it took a huge toll on me because I'd never been around something so hopeless before.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** So many things that we were experiencing professionally and personally were just taking their toll on us, and my relationship with Sherine was very at the time... Very, very tense.

**SHERINE TADROS:** I was already been there a lot longer than I thought I was going to be, and I was desperate at that point to go home.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** It was a beautiful Saturday morning...

**SHERINE TADROS:** Ayman and I were at a coffee shop just near Palestine square and it was a coffee shop that we had been to before.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** ...we figured it was a Saturday, it was the Sabbath, it was unlikely that anything was going to happen on the Israeli side. Usually, the government takes that day off. You aren't going to get any major statements or any kind of major reactions from the Israeli government. And in Gaza it was the weekend while we were sitting there in that coffee shop...

**SHERINE TADROS:** When we heard the first blast, everyone in the coffee shop just stopped and looked around them but there wasn't a huge reaction. And one of the waiters came and said, "Don't worry, it's a sonic boom, nothing big. Everyone go back to normal."

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** . . . And then we heard another loud explosion.

**SHERINE TADROS:** So I go to the window and I look, and I see smoke and people running past our building.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** People had seen the clouds of smoke from nearby buildings and police stations, so we knew something happened.

**SHERINE TADROS:** It was completely robotic. It was: pay the check, go downstairs, get into the car, and go to the office. Nothing much said; he called Doha. At that time, he was completely professional. I, on the other hand, was in a bit of shock and I really wasn't thinking very much about work. I was thinking about getting myself out of there, and what is the safest option and where was everyone else.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** Reports of Israeli air strikes on the Gaza strip.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN ON PHONE:** Ten minutes ago a series of explosions were heard in Gaza City. The communication network seems to be down gathering information has been very difficult. On our way here we were able to see some of the destruction we have seen some casualties being evacuated. Saturday morning the hospitals are generally closed because of it being the Sabbath.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** I was scared as hell. I was frightened.

**SHERINE TADROS:** I had never heard a blast. I had never seen a missile strike. I didn't understand what was happening and I was terrified. I was terrified.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** I remember doing that first live shot: I was just looking all around Gaza City and I could just see column after column after column of black smoke rising.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** Clearly the Israeli operation still taking place. The death toll stands at on-hundred-and-twenty.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** I can't remember five minutes without the sound of an explosion happening in that first day.

**AJE REPORT:** There are bodies in the streets. Thirty missiles have slammed into the enclave ...the number of dead in Gaza at one-hundred-and-ninety-seven after a series of Israeli air strikes.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** There was another strike, did you guys see that? Did you guys see that strike? Hello Auday can you hear me?

**SHERINE TADROS:** The intensity with which the bombardment started made us think: surely this is not going to go on for more than a day.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** They were telling us, "You know, this is the most number of Palestinians ever to die in a single day," and we started questioning, "Is that really true?"

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN MAN:** There are people alive inside

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** ...And to imagine that that kind of damage was going to be repeated and intensified, and not only could you not unleash that kind of damage but you could never do it while the world stood silent and did nothing about it.

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN MAN:** Say your last prayers

**SHERINE TADROS:** I don't think either of us realized that this was the beginning of a war.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** When that first day happened, we knew that there were no major international organizations in Gaza.

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN MAN:** Martyrs! Martyrs!

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** Sherine and I had become the only major outlet for the world to see what was happening inside Gaza.

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN MAN:** We need personnel to move the injured. Leave him he's already dead leave him. Ambulance! Ambulance! Call another ambulance. Wait there is one more injured.

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN WOMAN:** 9-8-1-1-7-6.

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN MAN:** I'll tell him you 're ok.

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN WOMAN:** No just let me talk to him.

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN MAN 1:** Come carry with me.

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN MAN 2:** Ambulance where are the ambulances?

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN MAN 3:** Pull him!

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN MAN 4:** My arm! My arm!

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN MAN 5:** Just wait a little.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** By the end of the day it was, it was the single bloodiest day in Palestinian history since 1948.

**SHERINE TADROS:** We decided on the first night that the best place to report from, to go live from, was the main Shifa hospital.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** The second we walked into the hospital, the smell of blood, the smell of fear, the smell of the bodies that had been brought there.

**SHERINE TADROS:** I saw kids, I saw young men, and when I asked them what they did, where they lived, they were civilians.

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN MAN:** I want to see her. I want to hold her. I want to carry her myself. I want to kiss her kiss her kiss her. There's no God but God. May god rest her soul.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** And it was chaos, just intense chaos and we did a live shot that very first night.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** We're actually standing in the orthopedic section of the hospital because it was made into a makeshift emergency intensive care unit. And I'm going to take you in here and I have to warn you, though, that the pictures may be a bit disturbing but these are some of the cases that are being treated. This woman right here, 55 year old Fatma, a charity worker, she was working in a building that was adjacent to one of the buildings that was struck. But I have to again emphasize that the place we are standing is not an emergency care facility nor is it an intensive care or special care unit. This is a make shift room. All of these appliances that are being put to use here have been put really on an ad-hoc basis relatively quickly, as the cases were brought in. Here is another student that is being treated. Now, most of these cases, we are told from the doctors here, are suffering from severe head fractures. They are in a state of coma right now; their status still a bit unclear. Now I'm joined by Dr. Hassan Khalaf the director general of Shifa hospital. Doctor, thank you very much for joining us. I want to start off by

asking you, what is the situation at Shifa hospital now with the amount of cases that have been brought in today?

**DR. HASSAN KHALAF:** Well, today is the desperate day, really, it is the desperate situation. More than two-hundred-and-ten cases arrived in fifteen minutes...

**SHERINE TADROS:** The fact that you could see these people lying there bleeding and the doctors were telling us they were running out of blood. There wasn't enough bandage and gauze to cover people so they started to cut up the blankets and the sheets and tie people up in them.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** When the war began, it's not like Israel opened it's borders to allow people to flee the fighting; it's not like Egypt opened it's borders to allow civilians to flee the fighting. Never had I found myself in a situation where the war is all around me.

**SHERINE TADROS:** And you just thought, 'How do we help these people?' And these are innocent civilians: don't forget this comes off the back of two years of siege and it was as if you were watching a film that was set during the Second World War. This is the main hospital in Gaza. If they were doing this, then what about other hospitals? What were they doing? And this was day one.

**SHERINE TADROS:** There is a falafel stand just next to the Shifa hospital and I said to Ayman, "I'm starving. We haven't eaten anything. Should we go and get some sandwiches?" And he looked and he thought for a second, and he goes, "No, let's just get back. We need to get back to the office." As we were stepping back into the office from the hospital, we hear this big blast and we find out it was just next to the Shifa hospital – that there was a missile strike and that falafel stand that we were about to stop at had been blown up – and had we decided to stop and get those sandwiches, we probably wouldn't have made it.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** Hesitating for a moment there because you can very clearly hear the sound of it.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** I'm sorry, I couldn't hear you because of the plane flying above.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** I guess that was the sound of an F16 was it? Flying above?

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** Well, there is certainly some type of fighter jet that is flying above us overhead. It's been consistent like that for the past 15 minutes or so. It's certainly a very defining sound.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** I remember that first night, we actually got into an argument about what it is that we were going to do the next day, and I told Sherine, "Listen,

this is not up for discussion. Here's how we're going to cover it: one of us will be doing the larger picture."

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** Ayman Mohyeldin joins me live now from Gaza. Ayman, how are Palestinians receiving news that a truce doesn't look like a truce is on

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** Well Sami, we've had a chance to go out on the street today and speak to some of the Palestinians about the likelihood of that truce. First, they questioned the intentions of Israel, saying they don't buy into it. They're saying that it could be an opportunity for Israel, as it amasses its forces on the border with Gaza, as really an attempt to get Palestinians to ease up, to relax, and then launch a massive ground operation. So certainly there is that concern. The news that there could be a truce though would've been very welcome but the reality on the ground for the Palestinians in the lull that has been in the past 6 or 8 hours in terms of the air strikes has given them a chance to go out try to make it to the super market try to... (BANG)

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** Take cover there. Ayman, take cover, it sounds like strikes are resuming.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** And I wanted her to go out and capture and personalize this war through the eyes of ordinary people, and I think that is where I felt a tremendous amount of responsibility.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** Sherine Tadros reports from a hospital in Gaza that is finding it almost impossible to cope.

**SHERINE TADROS:** Ten year old Jomaa was waiting for his mother to pick him up from school when the missile hit. "My head hurts so much," he tells me, "and I don't know what happened to my friends." His U.N. school happens to be next to a police station and the strike hit at precisely the time children were going home.

**SHERINE TADROS:** This was my first big story and the first time I had been in that kind of environment.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** The thing about journalism is that no two days are alike. Every day is different and you never know who you're going to meet, and you never know where you're going to find yourself, and you never know where you're going to be and that is the addictive part of the job.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** Well, one of the most heart wrenching scenes we've seen over and over again has been the long lines at the bakeries across Gaza. You can see hundreds of people, if not thousands, lined up here for hours trying to get their hands on some bread. You can see right here this is where an Israeli air strike took place in the first days of this military operation, but as we've been saying



all along in this war, every time there is a strike they may not be the intended target, but the civilian population ends up paying the price.

**ISraeli DEFENSE MINISTER EHUD BARAK:** We are ready to deepen and widen the operation in order to make sure that the calm and tranquility will come back to the region. We believe that this is our primary contract with our citizens -- to protect them against terrorist attacks.

**AM LIVE SHOT:** As you can see, it is written in Arabic for the residents here, but it warns them saying that any area that they know of to have weapons or believe to have any kind of fighters in their vicinity will become a target. Therefore calling on the people of that area to evacuate and flee their homes immediately. And you can kind of understand the psychological terror that has put the hundreds of thousands of residents of Gaza City in the northern part of Gaza.

**AJE CAMERAMAN:** Don't be scared, it's the building next to us, don't be scared! Don't be scared, don't be scared!

**SHERINE TADROS:** As a father, or a mother, who got that phone call, or who caught that leaflet, saying that their house was going to be bombed -- having that responsibility of your kids and thinking, 'Where do I take them? My decision will affect whether they live or die.' They didn't know how to protect their kids. The very basic feeling that you have as a parent, they could not carry out. That day I cried during the interview because I realized that this little boy isn't scared of dying, he's scared of being left as the only one alive.

**SHERINE TADROS REPORTING:** And just as we were talking, the neighbors rushed in to say a warning had been issued for everyone to evacuate the area.

**SHERINE TADROS:** And there was this girl who walked out with us, and she was terrified and she was shaking and her mother was holding her, and then walked a little bit to the side -- just the look on her face when she was looking around her and it really brought it home, she doesn't know where to go, just like everyone else.

**SHERINE TADROS REPORTING:** We can hear the sound of the Israeli drones just above us and there's word that we may have to evacuate the area because the ministry buildings are just to our left here, not very far away at all, and that's why everyone is trying to move everything they can and trying to get out of here. But the problem is, where can everyone go?

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** You had a propaganda machine that was in full swing to portray the war as a just war, as a necessary war, a war of self-defense. And when you have a PR machine that is portraying everyone in Gaza as a Hamas sympathizer, as a terrorist sympathizer, and that justifies the kind of bombardment -- that was the

biggest challenge that we had to contend with, reporting the truth in the face of that spin.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** Everyone's complaining that there's no electricity, no clean running water and that has made the situation for them very difficult.

**SHERINE TADROS REPORTING:** When the first Israeli strikes hit, six year old Assir was terrified. For five days he's been at home and, like his brothers, won't leave his mother's side. I asked him why. "Every time there's a strike he think I'm dead if I'm not next to," him his mother told me.

**SHERINE TADROS:** I cried every day of the war. I cried sometimes when I was voicing my stories. And the day that I went to see Reema – and she is the strongest woman. She lives for her kids. I thought, maybe if someone out there can't relate to a Palestinian woman, they can relate to Reema, any mother.

**SHERINE TADROS REPORTING:** What would you like people outside in the world to understand about what you're going through?

**REEMA:** What we feel, they have to understand what we feel.

**SHERINE TADROS:** And what do you feel?

**REEMA:** Unsafe. I'm going to die any minute and leave my kids alone. They feel this too. They feel mom will go to die. Mom we want to die with you--not don't die--we want to die with you.

**SHERINE TADROS:** That day I cried during the interview because I realized that this little boy isn't scared of dying, he's scared of being left as the only one alive.

**REEMA'S FAMILY:** "I love you, you love me, we're a happy family with a great big hug"

**SHERINE TADROS:** Reema was just like any other mother and when they were singing that song, I think it would have resonated with other families around the world who would just be listening to that and going, "Well, we sing that song to our kids." Yes, it's the same. She was feeling just the same as you would feel. Just because she lives in Gaza, it doesn't make it any different.

**SHERINE TADROS REPORTING:** The Israeli army keeps saying that there are targets... That these are "targets" or "surgical strikes" and that they are not targeting civilians, but time and time again, we are seeing that it is civilians that are bearing the brunt. A mother lying next to her to young children for a final few minutes. Another family lost because of Israel's assault of Gaza.

**CIVILIAN CHILD:** Daddy, I want Daddy and Mommy.

**SHERINE TADROS:** I didn't talk to Ayman about the stories that people were telling me, or some of the horrific things that I was seeing on a day-by-day basis. He was dealing with his own emotions and he was seeing his own horrific things.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** But I completely took all of my own personal fears and reservations and threw them out the window. It's not to say that I wasn't afraid, but I wouldn't let fear become a factor in what I was saying and what I was seeing. I didn't let fear affect me. I didn't break down and cry or tear up.

**SHERINE TADROS:** I started to try and work out the probability of one of us being killed or injured in this war and I came to him with these statistics, and he looked at me and said, "Why are you doing all this?" But for me, I needed to make sense. I needed some kind of guarantee of whether I was going to make it or not because that's how I've lived my life. Logic prevails, and now there was no logic, and nobody could tell me if I was going to make it.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** I wanted to make sure I had a grasp of what was happening, what was being said, what was being reported from the people on the ground, and mesh that together so that the viewer gets a sense of everything that's happening in Gaza.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING: LIVE:** David, you can see behind me the Friday prayer session has just begun. Thousands of people have gathered here. These are the first live pictures, actually, since the military campaign that began on Saturday. We've been able to come to Jabaliya, one of the most crowded refugee camps in the world, actually: 70,000 people live here, in a very condensed area. And you can see the thousands of people gathered here. You can see, actually, they're bringing in the bodies of those killed in yesterday's attacks.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** And despite the fact that it was midday and the war was in full swing, hundreds of mourners and worshipers gathered for normal Friday prayers in the shadow of this mosque that had been destroyed. And while everyone was in mid-prayer, complete solitude, praying and the sound of warplanes approaching. And I looked up and I saw these two Israeli warplanes fly right above the crowd. At that precise second, I thought this was the moment that I was going to die. The vast majority of the people standing there did not even flinch, did not even duck, did not even scream. And, for me, Gaza was not the first time that I had to deal with me potentially dying. I had felt it many times before.

**SHERINE TADROS:** During the war, when he was half asleep most of the time because the poor guy was sleeping two to three hours a night, he was still waking me up at 7 o'clock in the morning and saying you need to go out and start filming.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** It was very selfish of me to assume that Sherine had already gone through that experience because it didn't occur to me that she hadn't. That, in fact, her experience was for the first time.

**SHERINE TADROS:** I had never been treated like that. I'd never been treated in the way where I was in a conflict place, I was working 19 hour days, yet it still wasn't good enough.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** It didn't even occur to me that she may be afraid, or that she wouldn't want to do that. I really pushed her to overlook her own fears

**SHERINE TADROS:** He was after me all the time and when I would say to him, "Why are you doing this?" He would say, "It's tough love," and he didn't accept things like, "I'm scared," "I'm tired," "I've spent too much time in Gaza so I feel like I'm claustrophobic." He didn't accept this. All of this was melodrama, all of this was being a princess and he wasn't having any of it. And that's where we clashed because I felt he wasn't being very understanding towards the fact that I was still essentially starting out and I was trying my best.

**SHERINE TADROS REPORTING:** Once again, for yet another day, we've seen the Shifa hospital here inundated with cases just after an Israeli missile...

**SHERINE TADROS:** He tried to stay focused and keep me focused on the job, and say that this journalism tool that we have in front of us -- that is where you need to channel your emotion and your anger into.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** Sherine, Ahmed says that you need to see a psychologist after this

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** actually Ahmed Sherine needed to see a psychologist before she came to Gaza. What's wrong?

**SHERINE TADROS:** I've got to brush my hair.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** You think your hair is the most important thing right now in the middle of this conflict? Clearly that's what everyone is going to remember in your story right?

**SHERINE TADROS:** It's distracting. One will just be thinking, "Why didn't she brush her hair?"

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** You think that's the immediate reaction that everyone's going to have?

**SHERINE TADROS:** It's between that, and the sort of white stuff that's around my mouth that happens when you get up and there's no mirror and there's no water.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** How are you holding up in this whole conflict?

**SHERINE TADROS:** I'm all right, just a toothbrush away from being fine.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** That's all you need right?

**SHERINE TADROS:** Some toothpaste and toothbrush and I will be good.

**SHERINE TADROS:** It was unhygienic and it was difficult to only have a shower every four days but we had so many other concerns that superseded any of the other problems that we were having.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** We managed, in the most desperate and dire of situations, to try and create perhaps like a little bubble of humor to escape what we were seeing on a daily basis.

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** Jingle bells jingle bells, jingle all the way, sounds of bombs sounds of gunshot everywhere. Join in! Happy new year! Film me! Film me! Merry Christmas this is your gift. The one you lost in Shifa hospital!

**SHERINE TADROS:** Thank you!

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** As the sun sets around me Sami that's what many Palestinians are bracing for yet another deadly night an intense night of fighting . Darren well obviously that's the latest signal that the operation is still ongoing. We can see that from where we are it seems that Israeli helicopters firing at a target off of to the West, I'm sorry off to the East, of the Gaza strip on the border along the border between Israel and Gaza. But clearly the operation is still ongoing Darren.

**SHERINE TADROS REPORTING:** An eerie silence as we drove through Gaza City at night. It's Thursday evening – usually these streets would be bustling. Not tonight. The usual signs of life replaced by those of destruction.

**SHERINE TADROS REPORTING:** I can't hear anything - (BANG) Okay. Let's do it off camera we'll do it off the camera we'll just do it off camera.

**INTERVIEWEE:** It's unwise to continue.

**SHERINE TADROS:** Well, we'll just do a very quick one. I promise you one question, please we've got twenty seconds.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** A very grim situation over the past several hours in the morning though in the past twenty minutes or so a slight lull in the intensity of the shelling but by no means has that shelling entirely stopped as you can hear clearly behind me another round going off.

Burning bright in the skies of Gaza Israeli munitions that human rights groups say is white phosphorus. A deadly weapon illegal to use against civilians now it appears landing on the people of Gaza. These pictures show what is believed to be white phosphorus in the heart of Gaza's neighborhoods. Children unaware of the deadly toxin dropped on them naively playing with the munitions. White phosphorus is a very incendiary substance that burns when it comes in contact with the human skin.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** Let's talk about white phosphorus. Are you using it?

**MARK REGEV:** I can tell you straight out that the Israeli army uses no weaponry that is outlawed under international convention. Israeli army uses no weapon that is not used by N.A.T.O. forces, by the forces of Britain, Canada, the United States and other countries.

**MARK GARLASCO:** I've stood on the border of Gaza watching Jabaliya as it's been hammered by white phosphorus over the last few days. It's very clear as you walk by the Israeli 155mm artillery batteries, they're handling American-manufactured white phosphorus rounds. They are fused – you don't fuse it unless you're going to use it. And I'm watching as the white phosphorus exploded in air burst situation and comes down and covers the area of the refugee camp. The problem, of course, is that while it's not illegal to use it to cause smoke and to create a smoke screen, it is illegal to use if you're going to harm a civilian population.

**SHERINE TADROS REPORTING:** The streets are empty except for those running from house to house, but now there is no front line in this war. Attacks are everywhere and anywhere and the whole of Gaza feels like a target.

**SHERINE TADROS:** There was this time when we had got a call in our building that we needed to evacuate because there were Hamas fighters in the building and they were going to bomb it. So I ran downstairs and I had lost Ayman at that point because he told me to go down and he would follow. So I was standing at the bottom of the building and it was pitch black, and as I waited, I realized that there was no one else coming down. So I ran maybe 200 feet and found a supermarket, and I hid in the supermarket, under the table. At that point, I prayed, I kept reciting the "Our Father in Heaven."

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven..." and I prayed for my family, that they can get through this and that's the thing is that I kept thinking, "I'm just going to go. I won't feel it, but what about the people who live?"

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** Breaking news that we have is that a small convoy of Israeli military vehicles, backed by combat helicopters, has indeed rolled into the northern Gaza strip. It's obviously the start of the much-awaited Israeli incursion. Ayman, just tell us what you've been seeing there and hearing.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** Well, Darren, if we go back to the early hours of the evening – about four hours ago, initial reports and activity along the northern border suggested that a ground invasion...

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** On the night of the ground offensive, the war was taking a turn for the worse now that troops had entered Gaza and there were all these fears that there was going to be street-to-street fighting, a kind of urban warfare.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** This, say the Israelis, is the first footage of the Israeli offensive inside Gaza. These pictures have been released by the Israeli army under strict censorship. Obviously there is no way of confirming when or where these pictures were taken.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** At the end of that night, my dad called me. And I remember speaking to my father and I could feel the tension in his voice. I don't think there's anything you can say to your parents at that point to assure them that you're going to be safe, other than trying to reaffirm their belief in... In letting them know that you are going to be cautious and you are going to be safe, and that you are not going to be taking risks for the sake of taking risks.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** Al Jazeera has received this footage from the military wing of Hamas. The pictures allegedly show an attack on an Israeli tank. Hamas claims Israeli soldiers were killed in this incident. Al Jazeera is unable to independently verify this material

**SHERINE TADROS:** I remember speaking to my brother on the phone and he said to me, "I need you to take care of yourself because your life isn't just your life, your life is my life, it is my mother's life, it is my dad's life, it's my wife's life, it's the rest of our lives. If anything happens to you this is the reaction it's not just your life. I'm so sorry."

When my brother said that to me, I really couldn't say anything except, "I'm so sorry." I was so sorry that I was putting them through this and I knew what I was putting them through. There could be nothing worse, because just like those Palestinian mothers I was interviewing that felt like they couldn't protect their kids, my parents were feeling the same thing.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** Israel has gone in heavy, the ground part of this offensive was planned long in advance but it hasn't stopped the rocket attacks fired from Gaza into

Israel. There were no deaths, only minor injuries so far. So far, three people have been killed by rockets since the war started. People living here back the offensive that's now killed well over eight hundred in Gaza.

**SHERINE TADROS REPORTING:** Well, we're seeing and hearing more explosions, more violence across Gaza. I'll just show you now a big plume of smoke that's been billowing now for well over two hours really.

**SHERINE TADROS:** When you are close to the missile, you can hear it as it was coming in, just before it exploded, just seconds before it exploded and then you'd hear the screaming. And the screaming is what I remember a lot more than the sound of the blast because that was just raw, raw emotion coming from people that were trying to get away.

**CIVILIANS:** Come on mom! Let's go!

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** In it's most raw and most pure form, war is being carried out by other human beings against other human beings. And you always just kind of like... You get frustrated. You just want to like... "Do you know what happens when you drop this bomb on these people?"

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** We're just going to show you this. This is the recent attack that took place west of where we are, just off the coast you can see a slight - a small cloud of white smoke rising. But this was indeed the concern that so many people had was that as the infrastructure was completely destroyed by the Israeli military more and more residents were bearing the brunt of this.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** Now Ayman, just how close is the conflict getting to where you are?

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** Well Emran, we're standing in the heart of Gaza City. You can see the smoke billowing from the U.N. compound behind that tall tower there. That is several hundred meters away from where we are. The U.N. compound today obviously the scene of some intense shelling and a fire that's been raging for several hours now, as a result of what has been described as white phosphorus landing on the open warehouse that paradoxically has in storage the supplies that were supposed to be distributed to the Palestinian people.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** Carnage outside a United Nations school near the Jabaliya refugee camp. Many of these victims thought they'd be safe inside a U.N. building, but clearly they were not.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** We started getting reports that a U.N. school had been hit. This one quickly became alarming because of the number of casualties, of initial reports that we were getting, were very significant. We were shocked by what we



found because we were the first media organization to accurately report what had happened.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** But Israel insists it was responding to mortar fire from inside the school and claims Hamas fighters were using civilians as cover.

**AVITAL LEIBOVITCH:** Any terror organization that chooses to booby trap his own people, I think it's despicable. I think that it's not moral. I think that Hamas does not really care for it's own people.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** and it became one of the most notorious incidents in the war

**JOHN GING:** We're in control of our installations and, in particular, the installation involved. I can tell you categorically that there was no militant activity inside that installation at the time of the horrible tragedy and that's the. They're the facts that I'm presenting and then others should present whatever facts they have at their disposal, but we need an independent investigation.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** The fact that so many of these facilities were intentionally or unintentionally hit is alarming, and is a violation of international law. And the silence of the international community... Where was the outrage that this happened? Where is the accountability?

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** The UN, like other international organizations in Gaza, has been paralyzed by Israel's non-stop bombardment and is struggling to get much needed goods to the people.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** To be honest with you, I was really angry when I realized that we were the only journalists inside Gaza.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** Hello Renee? Hi - sorry about that. Some small gunfire.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** I was really angry because when other international news organizations called us and started asking us to report for them I almost wanted to lash out against them for not being there for neglecting this story. Then not only had they neglected this story but then also on top of that they had the audacity to question the only journalists that were on the ground there. The way that they were speaking to us about, you know, we want you to report but here's what we want you to tell us. Just tell us what you saw and when we would describe it they would say but did you actually see that - did you actually you know see the limbs or the bodies in the hospital, and try to spin it in a way that would marginalize or diminish the affect of what was happening.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** The biggest risk for international warfare is a complete information blackout. And we're talking about large media organizations that have large viewer-ships, and those viewers are entitled to see first hand what is happening here on the ground. And certainly any time the government tells the media that they are not able to go into a war zone to see for themselves first hand what is happening, it's a disservice to information, it's a disservice to public knowledge, it's genuinely a disservice to humanity.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** The position stated by the Israeli government is that it will not allow any outside agency to determine how it maintains its own security, and this security, it says, can only be guaranteed when Hamas no longer has the capability of attacking targets in Israel. But the U.N. Human Rights Council insists Israel must still accept responsibility. And more information emerging about an event in recent days. Claims that the Israeli army shelled an area after having ordered civilians to move into it, a claim that the U.N. says is consistent with eyewitness reports.

**ALLEGRA PACHECO:** What we have received as testimony from survivors of this incident who told us that on Sunday, the IDF ordered their evacuation of about a hundred people into one house in Zeitouna, south of Gaza City, and the next day the house was shelled.

**SHERINE TADROS REPORTING:** We've been speaking to doctors, both Western and Palestinian, who told us that this is a desperate situation and they have never seen anything like it.

**SHERINE TADROS:** When I heard the story of what was going on, that the troops had surrounded the homes and were shooting, and that they were moving them from house to house and shooting at point blank range... I hesitated. I wasn't sure whether this is an exaggerated story or something that is the truth. It seemed so incredible, even given what I had seen, it was an incredible story.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** This man, one survivor when the Semouly family in the Zeitouna neighborhood perished under a barrage of Israeli rockets. "Oh my family died. My mother, my father, my wife, my son died, my sisters and their children, my cousins died." In this house there was once a family in one blow it was turned into dust.

**SHERINE TADROS:** And then, finally, when we could actually do the story because we needed a witness, the red cross called me and they said we just gone into the Zeitouna area and we've taken out some of the kids we went to the hospital and while Ahmed Samouly told me the story my heart broke into pieces because no human being in the world should witness what that boy saw.

**SHERINE TADROS REPORTING:** He witnessed what many are calling a massacre and then was left for days amidst the dead bodies of his mother and four brothers.

The horror a 16-year-old Ahmed Samouly had seen was hard for him to put into words, but the effects are written all over his face.

**AHMED SAMOULY:** It was the third missile I remember. The other ones had killed my elder brother and injured other people they kept bleeding. But the third missile that killed them all. My brother was bleeding so much and right in front of my eyes he died. My other brother Ismail he also bled to death and my mother and my youngest brother they are gone.

**SHERINE TADROS REPORTING:** Thirty members of the Samouly family were killed. We tracked down the ambulance driver who rescued Ahmed. The Red Cross were denied access by the Israeli army to the area for four days.

Mohamed took us to see Ahmed's cousins who he also rescued that day from the Samouly house. Six year old Abdallah was trapped inside the same house as Ahmed surrounded by his dead cousins and uncle. Terrified and distraught he could hardly speak to us. There was no food or water he told me we only have tomatoes. What happened to your family I asked, "They were in front of me dead and I was just looking at them," he said. Okay, so this is really the closest we can get to the Samouly house. It's about one kilometer that way in an area called Zeitouna but it's really not safe to go there in fact paramedics and journalists and humanitarians can't get to that area without special permission from the Israeli army. Zeitouna, the neighborhood where the Samouly household lives, is just one neighborhood where Israeli ground troops are operating. According to the Red Cross there are many more houses in different neighborhoods which could potentially have injured and dead people still inside.

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** The Israeli operation in Gaza unrelenting and despite the U.N. security council demand for a ceasefire clearly open ended.

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** we want to go to a supermarket. I hope, I hope, I hope that it's open.

**ABU RAMI:** Where are you going?

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** We are going to the supermarket. Need anything?

**ABU RAMI:** Bring me whatever you find. I don't have a problem.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** Send me down the elevator. I have the live shot coming up.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** Can you guys believe we're actually standing outside right now - look how pitch black it is.

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** Completely black.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** Can you see anything in front of you?

**SHERINE TADROS:** Not a single thing. I don't think the supermarket is going to be open. I don't know if it's because there's a wall. No way, it's not open! That's crazy! Let's just go back inside.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** What do you want to do big fella?

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** Oh my God I need some f\*cking snacks.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** you want to go to Seven Eleven? Grab a hot dog? Maybe a hot dog? Jumbo hot dog with cheese on it?

**SHERINE TADROS:** Cheeseburger, oh my God a cheeseburger!

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** How about a McD's or Burger King? Listen to the city

**SHERINE TADROS:** Can you hear me?

**AJE NEWS ANCHOR:** This man runs into the emergency room demanding to be let in hoping his children are still alive A

**PALESTINIAN CIVILIAN MAN:** May god rest her soul!

**SHERINE TADROS:** The biggest motivator was the fact that if we don't tell the story nobody else will to the outside world.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** We would think that children are naive enough to not know what is happening around them but in Gaza, it's actually the opposite. The children are very much aware of what they're going through; they're very much aware that they're being deprived of fundamental rights; their fundamental rights to dream; their fundamental rights to be the best; their fundamental rights to aspire into becoming better people.

**SHERINE TADROS:** Even in the media, you can't say that "Six People Killed in Gaza" will make the headlines like, "Six People Killed in New York." Why is it that a Palestinian life isn't worth the life of someone else? And that's what they really feel.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN REPORTING:** It's those types of open areas that have been the scene of some intense rocket fire over the past eight years. That rockets have been falling on Southern Israel, and so a clear reason for them...

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** Did you hear that?

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** What? A missile?

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** I thought that there was a rocket chasing us man -tracking u. Listen, I don't want to pass by this area. I don't want to face the sea so I have to take side streets - you see.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** So, we're clearly taking a lot of back roads and side roads to try to get to our hotel, which is not too far from our office. Actually, it's a very short distance, but we have to take these back roads because you never know what could be nearby that someone's trying to target. Right ahead, in front of us, is the sea and that's where the Israeli Navy has been firing off of... So, we're just a few hundred meters away from our hotel. Hopefully, we'll try to make it in there as quickly as possible. Hello, Sherine, hi – have them open the door quickly because we're outside the hotel.

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** Thank God, we made it!

**SHERINE TADROS:** It was a press conference that was given by Ehud Olmert, so we were sitting there and we were all watching around this tiny computer screen. We were trying to watch the live stream and he finally said the words “ceasefire.”

**AJE EMPLOYEE 1:** Ceasefire!

**AJE EMPLOYEE 2:** Oh God, Please end this misery!

**SHERINE TADROS:** Hours later, you start to realize what this means. That this is over, you can see your family again, everyone around you... They've made it.

**SHERINE TADROS:** We're going to sleep on a bed in a room - in a room! I really like beds!

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** So you don't believe that you're going tonight back to the room and just laying on the bed watching TV, movies, no air strikes, no drones, no shelling-just a bed. I'm going to sleep on a bed!

**SHERINE TADROS:** So what are you doing there? I see you're packed up.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** We've finally left or we're about to leave our nice little cubicle.

**SHERINE TADROS:** That's our office. That is where Al Jazeera turned into CNN.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** Her fingers are in the camera and everything. I don't even know how this girl knows everything about journalism after 22 days?

**SHERINE TADROS:** That's my colleague Ayman Mohyeldin who's stood by me for the last 24 days and helped me progress as a person and as a journalist I would say. Wessam how has Ayman been in the past 22 or 23 days of this war would you say?

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** He's just always working and he was always in coma, coma.

**SHERINE TADROS:** Not even fake coma - but actual coma.

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** Yes, exactly.

**SHERINE TADROS:** How would you describe Sherine?

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** Sherine she's the best, and she's always crying ...crying.

**SHERINE TADROS:** For all you English speakers out there that means she's always happy Ayman what would you..

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** Wessam is a freaking' nervous train wreck 24 hours a day.

**WESSAM HAMMAD:** Absolutely!

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** I've never seen a guy in a war zone with more fucking clothes in my life, look at this guy!

**SHERINE TADROS:** Okay so dark streets of Gaza maybe a ceasefire but there's certainly no fuel coming in.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** I doubt if there's any similar situation in the world, where such a traditionally developed people... and you have to keep in mind that Gaza was not an impoverished area before the siege. It's a relatively wealthy area, with farmlands and a coastline, and was the trade route of many civilizations, that has a rich history of merchant families and a merchant class, and you know at one point was a very industrial area, to be reduced to such abject poverty and to be reduced to such destitution.

**SHERINE TADROS:** I always hope that what I am doing is affecting someone, somewhere but I think that the Gaza experience taught me that that is a bit too much to hope for. That we can try and change people's minds or show people a different side of what's going on, or show people the human cost of war, but we can't expect beyond that, that they will do anything about it.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** What is so unique, I think particularly about this Gaza war, is that in some ways it is the first war in the Israeli Palestinian conflict where Western Media did not have a monopoly on reporting. And therefore, I really think that our

reporting has made a difference in the way the Western world will look at the people of Gaza and the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

**SHERINE TADROS:** . . . And when I first came out, my big guilt was, 'Why was it me who was in Gaza reporting to the outside world?' Maybe if it was a hotshot reporter, they would've got to a bigger audience and something would've been done.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** There's no doubt, when you look back at the war, it's Sherine's personalized stories of the suffering of those people that stands out as the most memorable in terms of our coverage. Nobody remembers the number of casualties on the first day. Nobody remembers the number of air strikes, the number of victims, the number of buildings destroyed – those are abstract numbers. Sherine's courageous and brave reporting are the things that everyone remembers about that war.

**SHERINE TADROS:** I have learned tons from Ayman – tons. He taught me how to push it further, always push it further, always strive not just to be good, but to be the best. I never remember Ayman crying the war but I do remember one episode, after the war ended, where he went to cover the area of Zeitouna, where they were dragging people out of houses and they were dragging bodies out at that point. That really hit him, and I think, in a way, because I think at that point he realized it was after the war. Some of the adrenaline had gone, and that's when I definitely saw him emotional.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** It's frustrating when you can't even understand the suffering that they went through. They were something to someone, but when you just see them there as bodies – reduced to clothes, reduced to just limbs – it's embarrassing that human beings can still do that to each other.

**SHERINE TADROS:** I think my major problem is with children, and especially children that look Middle Eastern. And when I first came out of Gaza, the first thing I did, of course, was go home to London and my nephew, who at that point was just about one year old, and I couldn't pick him up, and I couldn't look at him because every time he would come towards me, I imagined that he had blood on his face and blood coming through his clothes. And when my sister was trying to give me him, all I could think of was, "I'm going to drop him and kill him."

We were feeling so many emotions during the war Ayman and I, that we didn't really take a step back and look at our own friendship and what was happening there. Our emotions were very much channeled into what was going on – so it was really after the war that we felt, perhaps, that nobody else understood how we were feeling except each other

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** . . . And I think that's probably why we were so close and it's probably a relationship that very few people will ever understand.

**SHERINE TADROS:** But what I can say about Gaza is that it made me pray that I am never again in a war and I will not choose to be in that kind of environment again.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** The story of what happened in Gaza is a story of shame on humanity. It really is. It is a story of great shame on humanity that so many people could be killed in such a short amount of time, on top of being squeezed to death for years before even the first bullet in that war was fired. So it's a stain on the moral conscience of the world.

**SHERINE TADROS:** I think that the Sherine before the Gaza war didn't understand how precious life was and how easily it could be taken away from you, and also didn't understand how bad humanity can be, and how people live in such horrible circumstances and how lucky you are to have what you have. It's so easy to forget that and take it for granted. The Sherine now is a lot more aware of that and thanks God everyday for what she has.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** Those who live on the ground and those who've spent a lot of time there will tell you it has failed – this Western formula of trying to save the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has failed time and time again, and it needs to be changed. There really is a need for a true paradigm shift because if we can't understand one another, if we can't see things from different people's perspectives, then we are doomed to these types of wars over and over and over again.

**SHERINE TADROS:** I think people need to make more of an effort to understand what's going on. I think that they need to get that these are people too, they are humans too, they are mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers. And the international community, the United States, has a responsibility not to put it on the sidelines of a peace process or the sidelines of a larger deal but to deal with Gaza and what's happening now.

**AYMAN MOHYELDIN:** From the time of slavery until the Holocaust, there were people who spoke out against atrocities but they weren't able to prevent them from happening. And war is no different – war is an atrocity that cannot be prevented from happening simply by reporting on it once it has happened. So when I find myself in the middle of a war or when a photographer finds himself taking pictures in the middle of a war, it's too late. It's too late by then. That's the sad reality of it.