

Hello, this is the Global News podcast from the BBC World Service with reports and analysis from across the world. The latest news seven days a week. BBC World Service podcasts are supported by advertising. This is the third Global News podcast special edition on Israel and Gaza from the BBC World Service. I'm Jackie Leonard in London and we are once again getting together with our colleagues from the Conflict podcast to put your questions to our expert correspondents. We're recording this podcast at 13 hours GMT on Friday the 27th of October. Joining us from Jerusalem is the BBC's Chief International Correspondent Lee's Doucet and here in the studio with me in London is Frank Gardner, our security correspondent. And you, our audience, have sent us a lot of questions to pick apart so let's get started.

At the point we are recording this on Friday the aid situation is desperate. You will remember that Israel ordered a complete siege of Gaza on October the 9th in response to the Hamas attacks of October the 7th and almost a week ago some aid trucks started crossing into Gaza from Egypt. Even then though there were far fewer than had been getting in before and aid agencies have described it as a drop in the ocean of what's needed.

So on the subject of aid here's our first question. This is Camille from Australia and my questions about all the aid trucks because I know just before this conflict started there was a lot of discussion about US funding and aid to Ukraine and now there's a lot of trucks amassed at the Egypt border. Was this aid that was already destined to go into Gaza because I've also heard reports that there was aid going in already but this not as much as now. So just a note on how this maneuvering had happened and if one affects the other. So Lee's if you could start with that one. Yes thank you very much for the question it's very important. The UN and other agencies tell us that before this war erupted between Israel and Gaza that as many as 500 trucks a day were getting into Gaza with all kinds of goods and that includes commercial supplies as well. The United Nations on its own was sometimes 100 trucks a day sometimes 200 trucks

a day. If you compare that to now since the truck started rolling across the border from Egypt through the Rafa crossing into southern Gaza there was only about at the time that I'm speaking about 74 trucks which is over the past few weeks since this siege was imposed by Israel. So that is why the UN says it is a drop in an ocean of needs and it doesn't include fuel which we're hearing from the United Nations today means that the aid operations they are able to still maintain in the Gaza Strip are collapsing. And Greg in the US also draws comparisons with Ukraine this one is for you Frank. My name is Greg and I live in Logan, Utah. My question has to do with European countries response to war versus the Middle Eastern countries response. When war broke out in Ukraine

the European countries opened their arms to the women and children who needed safety. Why are the countries in the Middle East not doing the same for the women and children in Gaza who were in a similar situation? And why is this question not being asked by both the media and by the US in communication with these countries? The emphasis is on getting humanitarian aid into

Gaza but that seems like a very poor solution. It seems like the humanitarian thing to do would be to get the women and children out of Gaza and into a safe location similar to what took place in Europe. Thank you. Well Greg, thank you for your question. There are several answers to this. The first is that in terms of human transit, human passage, Gaza is effectively sealed off in the outside world. Israel which controls Gaza's borders on three out of four borders and Egypt

controls the last one between the two of them. There is no passage of people allowed in or out. The second reason is that Arab countries and Palestinians are very wary of what's called a repetition of the Nakba, the catastrophe of 1948. That's what the Palestinians refer to, the mass displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and their families out of areas that they'd lived in for in some cases centuries to make way for the new state of Israel and they ended up as refugees in neighboring countries like Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. And Egypt, there's a third reason here, is that Egypt does not want to allow in large numbers of Palestinians which could well include Hamas fighters into northern Sinai which joins on with Gaza. Why? Because that's already a pretty precarious area. There's been an ISIS-led insurgency there for some years. There have been some horrific attacks on Bedouin and on Egyptian government soldiers. They don't want to see that area unsettled any further. So Egypt is wary of the mass transfer of Palestinians but primarily it's that Arab countries fear that if they moved out of Gaza they'd never be allowed back in and that Israel would simply recolonize it. Now we've talked a bit before about the US response to what's going on. It has pledged its unwavering support to Israel and backed that up with military aid. Here's a question on Washington's military strategy. My name is Jonathan Pullman from Dallas, Texas. What if the US deterrence measures aren't working? We've seen that they have moved carriers from the eastern Mediterranean into the Middle East as a deterrence yet threats and violence they're rising even with F-16s, F-15s and B-52s flying into the region. What if this deterrence doesn't work? What are the next steps the US can take rationally in this conflict? Frank? Okay so we're referring here particularly I think you're referring to the the presence of a massive US naval and air force just offshore in the eastern Mediterranean. That was deployed there

led by the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier as an immediate response by the US Department

of Defense to the attacks of October the 7th. The US said to Israel we've got your back and that's been being joined by a second carrier group. It's meant to be a deterrence primarily to Hezbollah

in Lebanon and by extension to Iran to basically say look don't think that while Israel is preoccupied fighting a war in Gaza you can take advantage of that and start a second front on the Lebanese border

because if you do and you declare and you start a major war there then we the United States will help Israel out and the implication is although they've not said so specifically the implication is that the US would deploy that massive air power and missile power with all these cruise missiles and so on to devastate Hezbollah's positions in southern Lebanon it would also cause a lot of damage in Lebanon itself. So that I think is causing Hezbollah second thoughts about whether they really want to get involved in this they are skirmishing with the Israeli forces on that northern border there are constant exchanges afar each day it's fairly low level it's nothing like the intensity of the 2006 war that Hezbollah fought with Israel which ended inconclusively with neither

side winning ready. And you mentioned their Iran's role that brings us to this question.

My name is Jimmy Vlembera I live in Washington DC but I'm from the Democratic Republic of Congo my question is that when someone does a quick search on Hamas online one of the first things that comes up is that Hamas is a Sunni organization. However for the last three weeks or so news coverage from many news organizations has highlighted that Hamas gets funding and other type

of support from Iran. Now how did the Shia regime in Iran become a sponsor of a Sunni organization.

And Lise we'll turn to you first with that one. Good question Iran's relationship with Hezbollah in Lebanon with Hamas and Islamic jihad in Gaza with the Houthis in Yemen with proxies and militias

in Iraq and in Syria is part of what Iran would say an axis of resistance resistance groups who are willing to take on the might of the United States of imperial forces and this does mark a change if you go back to for example the establishment of Hezbollah in Lebanon Hezbollah means party of God it was established in 1982 in the midst of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon which went right into Beirut and when it was established it was established by Lebanese clerics who very much tried to model Hezbollah on Iran on Iran's Islamic system that relationship is absolutely symbiotic relationship very very important coordination between these two groups but in recent years as so many Arab states moved away from the Palestinian file Iran had been providing support for Islamic jihad but it also started providing more support for Hamas because it was standing up to Israel and Iran saw an opportunity that it could have an ally in Gaza in its fight against the Jewish state so this is why we I think this is why it has reached the point in which it is now where Iran seems to have a hand in not just with the Shia militias with which it has very very very very very strong ties for religious historical and other reasons but also Sunni groups like Hamas and I think we should also mention that one of Hamas's other backers or at least where many of the Hamas political leaders are based is the Gulf state of Qatar and Qatar also has very strong ties with Iran sorry do you want to check in that yeah I I mean I think the big takeaway from this really is that land trumps religion when it comes to this because people have essentially put aside the differences between the Sunni and Shia branches of Islam because for Iran and for Hamas the most important thing in their view is what they would call the liberation of the land of Palestine so remember that neither of those two neither Iran nor Hamas except the right of Israel to even exist at all as a state let alone the West Bank and so on there are a number of Sunni rulers governments in the region who don't like Hamas so Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE they don't like Hamas because Hamas yes it's Sunni but it's tied to what's called political Islam it has links to something called the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt the government there overthrew the Muslim Brotherhood president the elected Muslim Brotherhood president of Muhammad

Morsi 10 years ago and the UAE is extremely suspicious that political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood represent an existential threat to their way of ruling through tribal dynastic shakes handing on power from father to son and and so on and shifting the focus of questions from Iran what about its ally Russia we've got a couple of listeners with similar questions this is Jared living in Berlin my question is what role has Russia played in this conflict Russia has long been a supporter of the Palestinian movement and under the Soviet Union provided support

during the wars of 1967 and the Yom Kippur war given that Russia has formed closer ties with Iran and Iran is the main supporter of Hamas is there a connection hi my name is risk from the blue mountains in Australia would it be a far-fetched idea to think that Russia would get Iran its staunch

ally to stoke the Middle East seen by having them support Hamas in planning and executing the barrage

of the AXA in order to drain the US and the West by getting them involved in another war and spend billions on two different fronts and be distract the world from the Ukraine war that has been going on for almost two years Frank okay these are really interesting and good questions thank you both of you um I think it would be unfair to say that Russia had a hand in the October the 7th raid by Hamas into southern Israel but it has certainly benefited from it because as risk rightly points out it has proved a massive distraction from the Ukraine war which hasn't finished is still ongoing Ukraine is still large parts of it are occupied by Russian invading troops and it's coming still under constant attack from Russian drones but it's just not on the news because all the attention globally is on the plate of those caught up in this Israel Hamas conflict now in the last couple of days there has been a meeting in Moscow with Russian officials together with Iranian officials and Hamas um I don't think Russia will want to get involved in this but they are certainly saying well all of this is America's fault for being such a useless piece broker in the Middle East and America I think has largely up until now lost interest in the Middle East it was even under the previous President Obama it was talking about pivoting to Asia that and certainly with a huge presidential election coming up in about a year's time attention in the US is focusing or was focusing increasingly on East Asia and China and whether Taiwan was going to get invaded and the South China Sea and so on and this I think will have temporarily refocus people on the Middle East but Russia has become a very important figure in the Middle East it's embedded militarily in Syria and it's now an important diplomatic player in the region where it wasn't 10 years ago now as we record Israel has not yet moved its ground troops fully into Gaza Israeli airstrikes are continuing large numbers of people are getting killed every day meanwhile four hostages have been freed by Hamas but Israel says more than 200 are still being held we got this email from a listener who didn't want to be identified so we voiced it up I am curious about what Hamas and other Palestinian groups are doing at the moment besides holding hostages are they also bombing and fighting back are many or any Israelis dying Lees this one's for you well I can certainly say that Hamas hasn't stopped its firing rockets into Israel since this war began I've sent most of the first two weeks of this war in Southern Israel where the air raid sirens went off constantly when we were in the southern community of Sturrot less than a mile from the Gaza border where on some days rockets kept landing very close to us and it was Hamas making the point that for all of the non-stop bombardment by Israeli warplanes they still had the capacity and indeed the determination to keep firing and just before we started recording today we heard that the air raid sirens were sounding in the coastal city of Tel Aviv as well now of course what we don't know is where this vast network of Hamas where are they now are they taking refuge inside that network of tunnels have some of them managed to escape one Hamas a leading political figure has turned up in the Lebanese capital Beirut but from the beginning it's been said that in the same way that Hamas put so much preparation so much resources into this attack this really unprecedented and very brutal attack against Israel on October the 7th it would know there would be an unprecedented retaliation by Israel so that it would have made preparations to fight back when Israel does as is widely expected goes in on the ground so we just don't know how many missiles it has in store it has been firing many more missiles then was it thought it had and that it had fired in previous conflagrations with Israel

but I think it's fair to say that even though we don't know everything what we do know is that they do still have quite an arsenal and Israel is now trying to destroy it well several listeners have written in on the subject of accountability and Israel's alleged war crimes and I do need to point out here that of all the messages that we received on this subject they were all about Israel this is a reflection of what listeners are discussing rather than any bias from our end two listeners with similar questions I am Sachin Naran working as an English teacher I am from India my question is it justified to use disproportionate force against innocent civilian population because of the presence of a few thousand militants who are lurking among them and that is my question to the international community hello my name is Nana I'm calling from Japan there are a number of alleged war crimes by Israel including collective punishment restricting basic necessities to civilians like food and water and fuel bombing areas like schools and hospitals how are governments and leaders held accountable for alleged war crimes Frank okay well first of all to answer the first question there it is never justified to use disproportionate force against civilians on any side there's no question about that but where I think the Israelis would disagree with you is that they would say what they're doing in Gaza is not disproportionate much of the world may disagree with them but they say look what happened on October the 7th was so

appalling so reminiscent of pogroms and of the Holocaust it was the worst single attack on Israelis in their entire history since the foundation the state of Israel in 1948 that they said we have got to do whatever it takes to remove the military threat to our people and that means destroying Hamas and at the time a lot of Western leaders said yep we've got your back Israel do whatever it takes Israel right or wrong effectively people having second thoughts now because certainly UN workers and from pretty much the entire rest of the Middle East are saying what is going on in Gaza now is disproportionate now in terms of war crimes and bringing people to account for this this is phenomenally difficult because there is a precedent here in March of this year the International Criminal Court in The Hague brought charges against both President Putin of Russia and his Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lavov-Bavova so there are international

arrest warrants out for both of them and it hasn't stopped President Putin from traveling to Kazakhstan

and to China and I'm sure in due course you'll go to North Korea it did make him think twice about going to South Africa for a BRICS summit there he didn't go to that but I don't think that we're going to see big figures like him or I mean for that matter I mean what some people would like to see Benjamin Netanyahu the Israeli Prime Minister facing a criminal court for alleged war crimes he's already got a corruption scandal of his own to deal with in his own country but it's just to come back to it it is very very hard to bring people to justice for these things but in the case of Ukraine just to get back to that which is what I've been covering for the last 20 months there are war crimes prosecution ready files being assembled against alleged perpetrators of war crimes there similar things have been done in Syria but it takes time and it's very difficult do you want to chip in yeah the Geneva Conventions with the rules of war it's interesting how in this war everyone is mentioning the rules of war but they're absolutely clear that civilians cannot be targeted and one of the areas that has been focused on is the siege of Gaza which is effectively denying a whole population electricity water fuel and that this is not consistent with the obligations of warring parties under the Geneva Conventions now Israel will say that it is denying

these services to Hamas because Hamas will divert these life-saving goods and services in order to carry out its military operations this has been mentioned here in this war to pick up where Frank said this has also been mentioned in Ukraine where Russia was targeting the energy infrastructure the civilian infrastructure in Ukraine many voices particularly among western leaders were raised at that time many are now raising them again but some have criticized not as loudly as they did in the Ukraine war but I think these there will one day be a reckoning and let's bear in mind too that Hamas in targeting civilians in its operations of October the 7th these are also potential war crimes one of the political leaders from Hamas told our colleague yesterday in an interview in Beirut that they were not there was no command to target civilians they didn't want to take civilians hostage but the evidence is there that civilians were killed and civilians were harmed and taken hostage on to the next question Israel is one of around 85 countries that have military service conscription this listener has a question about it hello everyone my name is Porek Sweeney an Irish man living in Bogota Columbia and so one of my

old Israeli friends who I guess could be described as being a bit more critical of the Israeli government

explained to me one day that he felt that the Israeli government uses military service as a tool to brainwash the Israeli youth against Palestinians and Arabs in general so my question for your experts is what role does the obligatory Israeli military service play in perpetuating the conflict and in fomenting anti-Arab sentiment among Israelis and if it does do this how intentional is please I've never done military service in Israel I'm not Israeli so I don't know what they're taught in classes what I do know from having lived here for several years and having been here for many decades is that a large percentage of Israelis do carry out military service but there are many exemptions ultra-orthodox Jews can get exemptions because they're studying at the the yeshivas and therefore they have a higher more noble task Israeli Arabs also don't serve they're not obliged to do the military service although some can ask to serve the Druze also do serve and for a very long time Israel's military was described as the people's army if you look at the statistics now it doesn't cross all of the residents of the Jewish state but it is a rite of passage here it's a very formative experience for the youth what I would say is that it is such a formative experience that what you're seeing now is that we've met we've spoken to Israeli reservists arriving here from around the world saying my country is under threat and I want to serve this is my war too so it helped bring the nation together whatever differences they may have on other issues when the country

feels that threat but I cannot answer directly whether that contributes to an anti-Arab sentiment I know many Israeli members of the peace movement who also did their military service so to finish then this email from a listener who asked to be anonymous we've voiced it up I've heard about several protests supporting either Israelis or Palestinians in the current polarized climate how can we create a space for a humanitarian approach that supports a peaceful resolution to the conflict and what can I do as an individual to be part of a solution it's such a huge question one for you lose it is such an important question and the answer to that question is the answer to whether or not this region can ever see peace can ever share the land and allow in this case both Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side a Palestinian state side by side to a Jewish state but at this particular moment in time anger anger is running very very high anger is boiling over passions are inflamed around the world we have seen

streets filled with either anti-Israeli protests or anti-Palestinian protests and there is nothing in between it is a zero sum game at the moment I think perhaps the only glimmer of hope that I can see that is blinking away buried amongst all this awful news coming out of this conflict is that there is I think an acceptance around the world that the problem in the Middle East of a just solution for Israelis and Palestinians cannot be ignored because it was being ignored a number of Arab countries UAE Bahrain Morocco and potentially Saudi Arabia they had made peace with Israel they had normalized their ties Saudi Arabia was poised to do the same and this would have certainly sidelined both Hamas and the Palestinian Authority with a view an idea well look let's just get on with life normally there is no such thing as normal life for Palestinians and many cases for Israelis who come under constant fire from Gaza so it can't go on unnoticed you can't keep kettling 2.3 million people into this tiny real estate tiny strip of the Gaza strip not able to get in or out in most cases and denying the Palestinians a homeland according to UN resolutions and so on so until that is resolved sadly I think the cycle of violence is going to continue there may be ceasefire there may be pauses there may be lulls but ultimately it's going to grind on until there is a fair solution for both sides and yet in the midst of this bonfire you still hear those voices and it's very very touching to hear that even some of the family members of hostages Israelis whose family members are now being held hostage by Hamas they are saying we need to find a way forward more violence is not the answer to this solution we have to find ways to live together neither of us is going to go away there's voices in the midst of a much larger roar of a very polarized situation and if I would give you advice about how you can be part of the solution and I think both Frank and I this is the job we we try to do try to listen to both sides try to understand why they're angry what is the root of their anger what is it that is fueling these emotions for them and I think we have to not just listen but we have to really hear what people are saying but unfortunately now people are talking past each other and it's not surprising given the intensity of this war and there we must end this special edition of the global news podcast thank you to Lee's Doucette our chief international correspondent in Jerusalem and our security correspondent Frank Gardner here in the studio in London and thank you if you sent in a question we do plan to keep doing these question and answer specials as long as they're useful so if you have anything that you would like discussed or explained please record it or just write it an email globalpodcast@bbc.co.uk you can also find us on x formerly known as twitter at global news pod and do subscribe to the conflict wherever you found this podcast this edition was mixed by Mike Regard the producers were Anna Murphy and Judy Frankel our editor is Karen Martin I'm Jackie Leonard until next time goodbye