

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. You're listening to the Global News podcast from the BBC World Service. Hello, I'm Oliver Conway. This edition is published in the early hours of Friday, the 27th of October. At a heated United Nations debate, Israel's ambassador says the world must not ignore the atrocities carried out by Hamas. Any call for a ceasefire is not an attempt at peace. It is an attempt to tie Israel's hands, preventing us from eliminating a huge threat to our citizens. The Palestinian ambassador calls for justice, not vengeance.

Nothing can justify war crimes, crime against humanity and genocide. Nothing can justify the killing of a single Palestinian child. We'll hear from the UN and get the latest on the conflict. Also in the podcast, a gunman who killed 18 people in the US state of Maine is still on the run, and the Taliban in Afghanistan release a prominent advocate of girls' education after months in jail. For more than 75 years, disputes between Israelis and Palestinians have proved impossible to reconcile, with rival world powers taking opposing sides. Global divisions have only intensified following the Hamas atrocity of the 7th of October and the devastating Israeli response. And those disagreements have been on display at an emergency meeting of the UN General Assembly

in New York, which was debating whether to call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

Our correspondent at the UN, Neda Taufik, has this report.

As the session began, the president of the General Assembly urged members not to use it to fan the flames of division and revenge, but to unify, to save lives and end the violence.

The first to speak was the Palestinian ambassador, Riyad Mansour, who spoke emotionally about the death, trauma and devastation civilians in Gaza were living with every day. Israel's relentless bombardment, he said, had killed 7,000 Palestinians, mainly children and women. And he asked the assembly how that could be defended.

He urged members to vote to save lives, to uphold international law, and to put an end to what he called three weeks of the worst double standards seen in decades.

Nothing can justify war crimes, crime against humanity and genocide.

Nothing can justify the killing of a single Palestinian child.

Nothing. Why not feel a sense of urgency to end our killing?

The Israeli Ambassador Gilad Erdan was next and spoke about the lasting pain of the October 7th attacks by Hamas. He said had killed more than 1,400 Israelis. He urged members not to vote for the resolution, which he said was biased. Any call for a ceasefire is not an attempt at peace.

It is an attempt to tie Israel's hands, preventing us from eliminating a huge threat to our citizens. Hamas, the terror group that started this war, is not even mentioned.

The United States Israel staunchest ally also claims a ceasefire will only help Hamas.

Nader Taufik in New York. The death toll given by the Hamas or on health ministry in Gaza has been publicly questioned by the U.S. President Joe Biden. Palestinian officials have now responded by releasing 6,747 names of those they say were killed, including the sex, age and ID number of each. A further 281 bodies have not yet been identified, they said. Israel's airstrikes have intensified over the past few days, and on Thursday the European Union joined calls for a humanitarian pause in the fighting to allow aid into Gaza. In a statement issued after a European council meeting, the leaders expressed their quote, gravest concern for the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territory. The BBC's Paul Adams and Lee's Doucet, who are both in Jerusalem,

discussed Israel's current military plans and whether there were any prospects for a ceasefire. Israel's ambition is unlike anything we've ever seen before. Before it was all about going and dealing with some tunnels, making sure that Hamas wouldn't pose a threat in the foreseeable

future, this is so completely different. You know, the decision that has been taken to uproot Hamas politically and militarily from the entire Gaza Strip, and we see no indication from Israel that it is ready to back away from that grand ambition. So they're not going to be swayed by calls for a ceasefire from the UN. When the Americans talk about maybe humanitarian pauses, maybe there's room for maneuver there. But ceasefires, not for a long while yet, I would say. Yes, it does seem that President Joe Biden is being said here in Israeli media. He's given space to Israel and not just space. We understand that very senior military officers are sitting down with Israeli commanders and looking exactly at what would be involved in that ground attack when it happened. Because the Americans, of course, have experienced any rock. They know what it's like to go in on the ground. And some of those very commanders are indeed here. Now, there are constraints coming from Washington that every effort should be made to release hostages before a ground invasion. Right now in Tel Aviv, there is a protest by relatives of family members of people who are missing, saying their patience is running out. They want Israel to do everything it can to get the hostages out. So those pressures are enormous. Joe Biden talked about this the other day when he was here, didn't he? Don't repeat the mistakes of 9-11. Don't act out of blind rage. And so there are those American commanders here talking about how to avoid certain

mistakes. Maybe even talking about things like don't go in for a kind of debarthification. In other words, don't think that you can go into Gaza and remove Hamas as an idea. By all means, go and achieve certain clearly defined objectives. But the idea that you can just remove the whole notion of Hamas is for the birds. So perhaps that begins to explain why we're still waiting for something more than just these occasional nighttime raids that the Israelis are doing at the moment. Paul Adams and Lee's Doucet in Jerusalem. As Paul mentioned, plans for an Israeli invasion of Gaza are complicated by the 224 hostages that Israel says are currently being held by Hamas. That rally by families in Tel Aviv was disrupted by air raid sirens.

And adding to the concerns of the families in a statement on Thursday, Hamas said that nearly 50 hostages it was holding in Gaza have been killed in Israeli airstrikes. That figure is impossible to verify. But the BBC did have a chance to question Hamas over its murderous rampage of

the 7th of October when our correspondent Hugo Bachega interviewed Hamas spokesman Ghazi Hamad

in Lebanon. I was directed for military purposes for the military sides and for the military soldiers who imposed sanctions and collective punishment against our people. But I can confirm and assure again and again that there was no command to kill any civilians. You said this was a military operation, but the result of it was that hundreds of civilians were killed. Because the area is very wide and there are many people there and there was clashes and confrontation. It's not confrontation. You invaded houses. We didn't have any intention to call the civilians. You say you were not targeting civilians. Yes. And you now have more than 200 hostages, many of them civilians. Why don't you then just release those civilians?

We are ready to deal positively with the point of these hostages. And I will declare this. I think

we have to find suitable circumstances for this. We are not planning from the first moment to have the hostages, as you said, the civilians. It's a military operation. But how does it advance the Palestinian cause? I don't accept from you that we are just killed the civilians in order to...

We've seen the evidence. We've seen the pictures. We've seen the footage.

This is a shame for you to do that. It is not a question. It is a shame for you to do that.

We are fighters for dignity and for freedoms. By killing people in their homes, by invading a music festival and killing hundreds of people. Israel is a country. They provide and supply their occupation with money, with weapons. Israel is a state of occupation. Israel is a state of brutality, of massacres. How do you justify killing people as they sleep, you know, families? How do you justify killing hundreds of people? I want to stop this interview.

I want to stop this interview.

Hamas spokesman Ghazi Hamad, walking out of an interview with the BBC's Hugo Bachega. Since the start of the conflict, the BBC has been hearing from people across the region affected in different ways. Maya and Beka are two Jewish women, both married to Palestinian men. One a resident of the Palestinian West Bank, the other a Palestinian citizen of Israel. Maya began by sharing her first reaction to the news of the terrible attack by Hamas in southern Israel on the 7th of October.

It's almost hard to remember through the fog of everything that's happened in the past few weeks.

The conversations have been at times tense, but Mohammed has been super supportive of me and the kind of huge range of feelings I've had on October 7th. When I woke up to the news, I was shocked by what was happening, and I think I wasn't able to fully process.

And I said, oh my God, we're headed towards some sort of horrible disaster for everyone.

In that moment, my first impulse was to reach out to him, no one else, because no one understands my love of the land and the place and its people and my discomfort with the politics better than Mohammed. The second kind of thing, and I'm ashamed to admit this, was from my side, some questions to him that maybe were not appropriate. I mean, he's an individual, he doesn't represent the Palestinian people, and he definitely doesn't represent Hamas, but I asked him, do you support this? And I probably said it in a very rude, sarcastic tone.

Is this the sort of operation that you support? And he was like, of course not,

but I had to ask him that question, and I regret it. And I think it was unfair,

and I think later I apologized. I do think my first reaction was kind of similar to Maya's.

Like I was like, nothing like this big from the Palestinian side has ever happened in my time.

I immediately was like, they are going to punish Gaza so hard. Like I was like, this is going to be so, so bad. And my brain immediately went to regional war. And of course I sought about my family, my husband's family, you know, they're my family. I've been in this family for 13 years.

And I have watched videos or like testimonies of the Israeli Jews. And I feel like I didn't even have time to grieve it because I was so panicked about the next step. And it was like almost like

on October 7th. And even through the end of that first week, like I was seeing all the solidarity

with Israel. And I was like, this is going to turn so quickly. You're either going to

say something about the disproportionate response, which is definitely coming,

or you're not, and you're going to be a hypocrite. In slow time, I was like, this is happening.

This is about to happen. I sort of said this to some people in week one. And I think I did get

some backlash where people were like, too soon. And it's just been very interesting to watch

the tides turn back. And Maya, two Jewish women married to Palestinian men.

Returning now to a story you may have heard in our earlier global news podcast, America's deadliest mass shooting this year. Police in the northeastern state of Maine are still searching for the gunman who killed 18 people in the small city of Lewiston on Wednesday evening. More than 60,000 people have been told to stay indoors as the manhunt continues. The suspect has been identified

as a 40 year old US Army reservist called Robert Card. William Ross of the Maine State Police warned people to be careful. There is an arrest warrant for eight counts of murder

Mr. Card. And the reason it's eight counts because 10 people have not yet been identified.

As those people are identified, accounts will probably go to the total of 18. He should be considered armed and dangerous. Based on our investigation, we believe this is someone that should not be approached. Well, we got more from our correspondent in Lewiston, Namia Iqbal. The latest is that police just don't know where this suspect is. Police say the 40 year old had mental health issues. And at one point he's alleged to have threatened to shoot up a base where he was stationed as an army reservist. So there's hundreds of officers looking for him. We drove through Lewiston. This city is in lockdown. Businesses are closed. It feels a bit like COVID times when everything was so quiet. But of course, it's entirely different reason here. The police are hoping that people will stay in stay safe so that can they can try and find this man who is a fugitive. Yeah, and take us through the attack on a bowling alley and a restaurant on Wednesday night. It was just before 7pm Eastern time. And it happened at this

bowling alley full of families, you know, very normal, traditional pastime. And then the shooting also happened at a local bar and grill. So these two locations, we visited them earlier. Obviously, they're all cordoned off. You can't get anywhere near, but they're about four miles apart. And, you know, some of the stories we've been hearing are just awful. One mother said she lay on top of her 11 year old daughter at the bowling alley to protect her. One man said that he thought at first the gunfire was a popping balloon. I've reported on quite a few mass shootings in America. And what you tend to hear from people is that you never think that this sort of thing will happen here. Maine is an incredibly quiet state generally, certainly Lewiston in terms of gun related murders. It's pretty low. What I also find is when there are mass shootings, of course, there's that immediate grief, anger, and then it does turn into the politics. People say to me, as I've experienced in the past, this isn't political, but guns do end up becoming political. I think there will be questions asked about gun laws in Maine. Maine, of course, borders, Canada, as well as New Hampshire, I guess they are also on alert. They are. There's lots of authorities working together to try and catch this man. Nomiah Iqbal in Lewiston in Maine.

Police in the Chinese city of Jiangjia Gang have rescued more than 1000 cats who could have been slaughtered and sold as pork or mutton. The case has led to public outcry on Chinese social media and calls for the authorities to clamp down on the trade in illicit cat meat. James Reynolds spoke to BBC Monitoring's Kerry Allen. Activists had noticed a large number of cats being held in these nailed wooden boxes, and they've been monitoring it for days, and then they told the police when they were loaded onto a truck. I mean, these could be people's pets that have been stolen.

Also, as well, if they're being used for consumption, there are health concerns, you know, if they are strays, there is the potential that there could be disease as well, that people are consuming. There have been stories like this before, as people have been

discussing on Weibo, which is China's equivalent of a platform like Facebook, if there's profit to be made, people will do whatever it takes, and these cats can be sold at a considerable amount of money to restaurants that simply don't know what the meat is, or maybe they do know, and they just want to turn a blind eye. But cat meat, and also dog meat as well, consumption used to be very common in China. When I was living in the country 10, 15 years ago, it used to be quite common that you would see, even in urban cities, sometimes dog listed on the menu, but very much in the last decade, there has been a shift in attitude with people feeling we shouldn't be eating dogs or cats. And that's very much reflective in what I'm seeing in social media, people saying that they think this is horrific and that laws need to be changed. Are the authorities taking it seriously? They are definitely taking it seriously. Yeah, the people involved in this are being punished. The cats, which were alive, have been moved to a shelter, and there are attempts to try and reunite them with their owners if they indeed were pets. One of the big concerns in China of the back of this story is whether laws will change. There's a question of trying to hold accountability to people who steal cats, if that's the case. Are having pets increasingly become a thing as the middle class in China has expanded? Oh, absolutely. It's so common. Everybody wants to have a dog or a cat, and particularly in recent years, before the one child policy was abolished, it was very common for families to have pets because it was almost a substitute for having another child. But it is the case that in some urban cities where certain dog breeds, for example, Rottweilers are not allowed, so there are different laws in different places, but dogs and cats are very, very common and well love pets. China media analyst Kerry Allen. Still to come on the Global News podcast? On the stage in Lyon, Tatiana tries to talk through a glass wall to her grandmother, she and five of her 11 children died in the famine of the 1930s. The entire Russian theater company that's gone into exile in France. India has expressed deep shock after the Gulf state of Qatar sentenced eight Indian citizens to death. The former naval officers were detained last year accused of spying for Israel. I heard more about this rather murky story from our South Asia regional editor and Barasen Etirajan. Neither the Indian government nor the Qatari authorities have given details about this case or even what are the actual charges. Now, according to the Indian media, these eight former Indian Navy personnel, some of them are senior officers, they were working for a Gulf based private company, working with the Qatari defense forces, providing services in terms of training, and according to one expert, Qatar was working closely with Italy to build a new type of submarine. And the accusation was that some of these details of the submarine were given to Israel through these Indian employees of this company. And based on that, this trial was conducted. This has been going on for nearly a year. This has triggered a huge concern. A lot of social media activity on this, it has been trending. And the Indian government is now saying that we're exploring all legal options to find out how they can help these men. But it is a very strange case when everyone was taken by surprise when the death penalty news came up. Incredibly serious. What are diplomatic

relations like between India and Qatar? Like many other Gulf countries, Qatar and India, they share close relationship. There are about 800,000 Indians working in Qatar, and they're sending like more than four billion dollars every year as remittances. And if you look at the Qatari population, they're not more than 350,000. So you can as well imagine Indians are one of the biggest expatriate groups in Qatar. What it shows clearly that whatever they were doing, the Indian foreign ministry was not really having any effect because this could have been done behind the scenes. They could have been deported. But now the only option

seems to be go for an appeal or the Emir of Qatar giving a pardon and then deport them. But this will be a huge embarrassment for the Indian government. If something goes wrong in the appeals court, then it becomes a diplomatic issue. And Indian government, Indian foreign ministry saying we are now exploring other options and behind the scenes talks are expected. Our South Asia regional editor Anbar San Atirajan. The authorities in Afghanistan have freed an activist who campaigned for girls education, which has been severely restricted since the Taliban retook power. Matula Wisa has been detained for more than seven months. I found out more from Hafizullah Marouf of the BBC Afghan service. I know him since 10 years when I was in Kabul, we deported his activity. He is considered a champion of girls education in Afghanistan, traveling from province to province, from village to village. He is considered as a hero for most of the activists and for girl education. Actually, there is no clear evidence why he was arrested, but he was campaigning and asking the family to send their children, particularly daughters, to school and education. Why has he been released now? I mean, one of a series of detainees to be freed by the Taliban recently. I was speaking to his brother this morning and he was telling me that the court of the Taliban has decided that seven months prison is enough for him and he should be released. And we know the case was referred to a court almost two months before and there was a lot of complain, outcry by the international community. So the court decided that, okay, the seven month imprisonment is enough for him and he should be released.

Other women's activists are still being held by the authorities there. Could this be a change in their attitude following international pressure? It's really hard to estimate now whether the international pressure do something that the Taliban to release the activists. And last week, there was an Afghan French journalist who was released by the Taliban as well after 10 months in prison. And we don't know whether this would be the beginning or there might be many more months

for the activists who are still in prison. Afizullah Marouf of the BBC Afghan service.

Millions of Ukrainians have fled abroad since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of their country last year. Hundreds of thousands of Russians have also moved abroad, particularly those who oppose the war. Among them is a whole theater company from a remote town in the Russian

Far East, which dared to challenge the state. Now the company is performing in France from where Tim Huell reports. The house lights go down. The black stage in front of us is bare, save for a row of seven neat bundles of clothes. Then the actors appear in ghostly white costumes, piercing the swirling mist with torches. They're from Komsomol, a city in the Far East of Russia. And the bundles are all that they were allowed to bring in their baggage allowance when they went into exile here in Lyon, France. The story they tell on stage is of their own lives, their families, and Russia in the 20th century. It's an attempt to understand themselves, to answer the question,

why did they all grow up so scared? All my childhood photos show a frightened little girl. Tatiana Frolova is director of the play. She founded the theater company that's performing it, known as Knam, 37 years ago in Komsomolsk. It was the first independent theater in the Soviet Union since the communist crackdown on the arts in the 1920s. And it dared to delve into some of the unmentionable, tragic episodes of recent history. On the stage in Lyon, Tatiana tries to talk through a glass wall to her grandmother. She, and five of her 11 children, died in the famine of the 1930s, caused by the forcible collectivization of agriculture. Hunger, poverty, and fear, she says, are what my granny passed on to me in her jeans. But as freedom of speech was gradually curtailed under Vladimir Putin, the authorities in remote Komsomolsk were watching her tiny theater with only 26 seats ever more closely. So in our last two years there, we almost stopped performing, because friends warned us that state security were just waiting for and in order to arrest us. So we only performed when we knew every single person in the audience by name, because they were

our friends. Finally, after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year, the whole company fled to France, where they'd performed before, and audiences greet them with standing ovations. Tim Huell reporting in Econ here, the full documentary The Life, Death and Rebirth of a Russian Theater by going to bbcworldservice.com or search for the documentary wherever you get your BBC podcasts. It could be argued that in the age of TikTok, the public appetite for big, difficult ideas is a thing of the past. But a theoretical physicist whose books have sold millions of copies and whose YouTube lectures have been viewed millions of times might beg to Dr Carlo Rovelli's new book is called White Holes. So what's it about and why is it so popular? Amal Rajen spoke to Dr Rovelli and asked him first to explain what black holes are.

I think it's one of the most spectacular discoveries of the last five or ten years, the fact that the universe in which we live is full of these black holes, which are really holes in the sky. The universe is not this uniform extension of space, it's like a colander. I mean, there are places where we see matter falling in. Where does this matter go? What happens if you fall inside? That's a question that started the story about white holes. It's a speculative idea on which a group of people are working, which is that the black hole, after a long time, turns into a white hole from which everything that came in is going to come out.

Black holes are areas of such dense gravity that a little bit of light seeps out of them, but not very much. If white holes emit light, why don't we see lots of them?

First of all, we don't know how many there are around. The speculation is that maybe in the early universe, there were a lot of teeny, teeny black holes that had the time to sort of end the life, transforming into white holes. So they do emit light, but too dim for us to see. However, and again, I'm talking about things we are trying to understand, one possibility is that a lot of these white holes, we actually have already seen them, and it's what astronomers call dark matter. This mysterious substance which is around galaxies that nobody knows what it is.

Your book is really a meditation on the nature of knowledge.

Can we ever really know about a region beyond the reach of our eyes and our bodies, if not our imagination? This is what science is about, I think. We have studied the sky far beyond what we see directly. We have studied atoms. We know what happens in the very small scales, even if we don't

see directly. We have instruments for that, but besides instruments, we also have our brain, which has the capacity of mind-traveling, going to places where we cannot go directly,

using all the knowledge we have, but also using imagination. Imagination is what allows us to think if we were there, what we would see, and on the basis of what we know, we can guess, and then out of this guess, we can make predictions that we confirmed and then confirm the hypothesis.

And you also have this idea of unlearning. What is that exactly?

I think science itself is a constant exercise in metaphors, because we create new concepts in science by using all concepts and sort of modifying them a little bit. I think that this aspect of science, creating new conceptual structure, it's the core of the best science.

The way it works is by abandoning previous ideas, of course. And that's a hard part. The hard part is not really inventing something new. It's realizing that something we thought was obvious and clear, it's actually not so. And all major scientific advances from Darwin to Einstein to Copernicus, it's always unlearning something we thought we knew. And we are in an era, post-ideological eras. In the past, there were big ideologies to refer to, so a master of thinking, you just rely on them. There is not like that anymore. So I think we need more people who try to think and produce new ideas. Dr. Carlo Rivelli talking to Amal Raja.

Returning now to the Gaza conflict, and one difficulty the Israeli Defense Forces will face if and when they go in, is the vast network of tunnels underneath the Palestinian territory used by Hamas fighters. This week, a freed hostage described the area as a spider's web. To find out more about what those tunnels look like, Rebecca Kesby spoke to John Spencer, chair of Urban Warfare Studies at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point.

The tunnels, they call it the underground, much like the London Underground, believed to be 500 kilometers plus. It's a city under a city. As I study underground warfare around the world, from South Korea to Nagorno-Karabakh, Hamas tunnels are very unique because of their

prefabricated concrete sides and archways at the top, which allows them to dig very fast, and another reason why they have so many of them. They're also very deep from 5 meters to 50 meters

down because of the fact that Israel over the years and the strategy to combat these had the ability to see and then to hit them with bombs. It's like this race now that Hamas has gone down. There are these long, very narrow tunnels that open up into big rooms that can hold vehicles, rockets, motorcycles, hospitals, all the command and control networks of Hamas.

It will be one of the biggest problems that Israel and the idea face if they launched a ground invasion. Goodness, mate, 500 kilometers worth of tunnels. How would the Israelis be able to map those tunnels? Will they have an idea of what they look like already? Yeah, absolutely. So they've already mapped a lot of it through aerial capabilities from informants from the Hamas side. They have an idea of where some of them run and their past operations have all been somewhat about the tunnels. In 2021, they had a response bombing raid to Hamas' rockets and they targeted the tunnel, and that's when they realized how much these tunnels are woven into the civilian infrastructure. They're underneath the hospitals. They're underneath the schools. So in 2021, they bombed and destroyed 60 miles of them and the concussion would ripple through the tunnels into other areas of Gaza. Yeah, I mean, we see the Israelis bombing extensively, but will those airstrikes have any impact on the tunnels or can the tunnels withstand them? So many of the tunnels can absolutely withstand all the bombings, but will close, interest and exit. It will collapse tunnels, but you don't solve this problem by

bombing it. The bombing helps support a ground invasion and reduces the tunnel complex, but some of it you just have to deal with. How would you do it? That's a great question. I mean, the hostages, though, present a unique challenge to any research I've ever done about what to do about tunnels. In the past, US forces put tear gas down there. That won't happen here because of the perception of using anything like that. Water down there, concrete. Soldiers is the last step. I think it'll be a mix of everything. It'll be a mix of sending robots in to see what's in a tunnel before you decide to destroy it or send a soldier in with a ballistic shield to try to clear, which is a nightmare for any soldier. The IDF have very unique capabilities for tunnels, but there's no one solution. It'll be a situational, wasteful approach. In the end, I think they'll destroy all the tunnels. And one of the options is a very realistic option is to horizontally drill from the Mediterranean Sea and connect the sea to the tunnel complex. And that way, they'll never be used again. Retired Army Officer, John Spencer. And that's all from us for now, but there'll be a new edition of the Global News podcast very soon. This one was mixed by Chris Hansen and produced by Emma Joseph, our editors, Karen Martin. I'm Oliver Conway. Until next time, goodbye.

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