

Independent journos on life inside Iran under US-Israeli bombs

Independent American journalist Ahmad Saadaldin of Prop&Co and Canada's Dimitri Lascaris of Reason2Resist join The Grayzone's Max Blumenthal to discuss their reporting from the ground in Iran. In this segment, Ahmad and Dimitri give their impressions of life inside Iran during the war, and describe the resilience and stoicism they witnessed in cities like Isfahan as bombs fell nearby. ||| The Grayzone ||| Find more reporting at <https://thegrayzone.com> Support our original journalism at Patreon: <https://patreon.com/grayzone> Facebook: <https://facebook.com/thegrayzone> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/thegrayzonenews> Instagram: <https://instagram.com/thegrayzonenews> Minds: <https://minds.com/thegrayzone> Mastodon: <https://mastodon.social/@thegrayzone> #TheGrayzone

#Max

Let's just start with your overall impressions, and then we can kind of—like, maybe then we could go into a chronology of your journey from Tabriz all the way to the Strait of Hormuz. What was your overall impression of the war, what you saw—what Iranian society was like under this imposed war, what they call the Ramadan War—and their reaction to it? What kinds of differences did you witness throughout the regions, and how do you think that affects your view of how this will play out? I don't know who to start with here, so whoever wants to jump in.

#Ahmad Saadaldin

Go ahead. No, I was going to say, after you, my friend—elders first.

#Dimitri Lascaris

Elder by a wide margin, I might add. Well, let me talk first of all about my immediate surprise. I was really surprised when I spent a little time in the country. Based on what I'd been seeing in both the corporate media and the alternative media, I expected the level of devastation to be much greater—physical devastation. I thought I was going to see something similar to what I'd seen in South Lebanon. I've been there four times since the genocide began in October 2023, and each time it was progressively worse. But even on my first visit, it was already worse than what I saw in Iran.

I mean, we could have—I think if they just let us walk around the country for 11 days randomly, we might never have actually seen a destroyed building. The vast majority of the infrastructure is unscathed—well over 99%. And it's like you suddenly realize you're dealing with a damn big country. It's a very big country. The population is well dispersed. It's much farther away from Israel than Lebanon is, and than the occupied Palestinian territories are. It has, as we've seen over the last few

days, real air defenses. And the munitions of Israel and the United States have been greatly depleted by their insane warmongering going all the way back to the start of the war in Ukraine. So Iran's—no, it's also very early in the war.

Things could get really bad, really fast. But at least when we were there, I was impressed by how unscathed most of the country was. That being said, Max, there's no doubt in my mind that there is a reign of terror there. Everywhere we went, we were taken to emergency centers that had been demolished, meteorological stations destroyed, hospitals put completely out of service, schools leveled, cars blown up in the middle of the street, street workers grievously injured, children lying in hospital beds. It was absolutely clear that they are engaged in a campaign of terrorism against the Iranian people. And it's really quite remarkable how well they're standing up to it. Of course, people there are very concerned.

They're very saddened by what's being done to their country—particularly, you know, the children, and also the historical and cultural sites that have been severely damaged. And we talked about that in our reporting. But they are defiant. They are steadfast. They are as united as you could possibly imagine. We saw pro-government demonstrations all over the country. I remember in Shiraz, one night we were driving around—I think we saw four different pro-government demonstrations at different intersections. We went out there looking for them; that was about a half-hour drive around the city. And we didn't see a single—Ahmad can correct me if he saw anything like this—but I didn't see a single anti-government protest. Now, I'm sure there are people out there who are opposed to the government. There's no question that there are.

There are in every society. But right now, as a good friend of mine from the Canadian-Iranian diaspora—who moved back to Iran three years ago because she wanted to return to her country—told me, there are positive things happening there. She said, "I want to be in the country," and she hasn't left during the war. She said the voices of dissent have been muted. The people who support the government have taken to the streets—they've literally taken over the streets to show their support night after night. And she said there's kind of a middle group, you know, people who swing back and forth between support for the government and opposition to it. And that middle has swung decisively in favor of the government right now. So what I saw was a very united and determined people, and a very dignified people.

#Max

Ahmad, what were your impressions? And I guess I should have mentioned that you both also went to Minab, to the site of the bombing at the girls' school. But give us your impressions of the trip.

#Ahmad Saadaldin

I had a very similar perception. I felt like a tourist a lot of the time, especially in Isfahan. You'd hear bombings at night—like in our hotel with Dimitri. Maybe you felt the same, but between midnight

and 2 a.m. was usually when you'd hear some pretty intense bombings, and it would shake the hotel. But outside of that, we didn't really see a whole lot. And, as Dimitri mentioned, it's a gigantic country. We felt that because we traveled from city to city to city, and every time we traveled it was at least a ten-hour journey. Our last trip was about twenty-four hours total—maybe even longer.

Um, going from Bandar Abbas by train all the way to Tehran, then taking a bus to Tabriz and on to the border—that was about a 36-hour journey, just to give you a sense of how massive this country is. And as Dimitri mentioned, you really wouldn't see the effects of the war—damaged or destroyed sites—unless you went looking for them. Tehran is a little different, especially in the area with a lot of government buildings. There, if you drive around, you'll find some sites that are destroyed. But yeah, for the most part, you have to go looking for it. And I don't want to make it sound like the war isn't—sorry, like the country isn't being bombed relentlessly.

At this point, I think over 20,000 bombs have been dropped on Iran, and now they're very open about the fact that they're bombing civilian infrastructure. I think just today they bombed the railway—the same railway company we took, Dimitri, Raja Transportation or Railway, however you call it. But the people are—I had the same feeling—the people are defiant. And, you know, last time when we took our trip to Iran, Max, we spent most of it in Tehran. You got to go to Isfahan and Shiraz afterwards, but I didn't, so I didn't really know what people felt like all around the country.

Everyone you speak to in the country is inspired to defend their country. They're very patriotic, but they're also deeply interested in the concept of martyrdom. Everyone we spoke to was obsessed with it. There was one woman who discovered a landmine in her house in a village outside Shiraz, and she told Dimitri how she debated whether or not to pick it up because it was an opportunity to save someone's life and also attain martyrdom herself. That was all you heard—martyrdom—throughout the trip. So I had a similar impression that people are very defiant and inspired to defend their country.

#Max

Let's turn to some video that Dimitri filmed in Isfahan, in the central square, which I visited last year. You can see from this clip—if you watch closely—and I'll let Dimitri narrate. Can you max the volume, Max, on this?

#Dimitri Lascaris

Yeah, here we go. Just listen.

#Speaker 1

Okay.

#Dimitri Lascaris

Okay, so a bomb just went off. Look at those people. I mean, you know, you're playing it here. I urge people to actually listen to it, to watch the video. Crank up the volume, and you'll hear very distinctly that there's a large explosion nearby, and you can also hear the roar of jet engines. And look at these people. I mean, it's the most remarkable thing—kids, couples, parents—just strolling around as if a huge bomb going off within a couple of kilometers of the square is par for the course. They've internalized the war, and they refuse to be cowed by it, even the children. It's the most remarkable thing. And, you know, this video was shot just after the governor of Isfahan—so he would be the highest-ranking civilian official in the province, which has the second-largest city in Iran—gave us a tour, about an hour long. There were no bodyguards with him, as far as we could tell.

As he was walking around the square, a number of people came up to him and expressed their affection and respect. Nobody was disrespectful. He didn't seem to have the slightest concern about his safety, and I had the overall impression that people liked him. So this is not at all consistent with the narrative we've been given—that the vast majority of Iranians want to lynch their leaders. Again, I can't say what the conditions are like outside of wartime, and before I went to Iran in May of last year—for the first time in my life—but this is what I witnessed. And I think, as I put it, Max, to one of the Iranians in our entourage: this war was intended to destroy Iran, and it is in fact enabling Iran to assume its rightful place in the world. I think that's what the people you're seeing here essentially feel about it.

#Max

Yeah, and I think that's how a lot of Americans feel. I think these walking tour videos, which I shot, are so important because they show what daily life is like, and they eviscerate the propaganda we're subjected to. You see women everywhere without hijab, just freely walking around—no morality police attacking them. You see all different kinds of people, and you see the rich culture and history of Iran right there in the middle of one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, which is now being viciously bombarded. Some of these buildings were damaged in bombings—some of the market stalls, some of the religious sites.