

## The Ecology of War in the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific

### Dr. Gus Abu-Sitta in conversation with Andre Vltchek

*Dr. Gus Abu-Sitta is the head of the Plastic Surgery Department at the American University of Beirut (AUB) Medical Center in Lebanon. He specializes in reconstructive surgery. What it means in this part of the world is clear: they bring you people from the war zones, torn to pieces, missing faces, burned beyond recognition, and you have to try to give them their life back.*

*two-part interview with me, about my latest political/revolutionary novel "Aurora" and about the state of the global south, and the upsurge of the Western imperialism.*

*To my surprise, Dr. Abu-Sitta and his colleagues were following my journalistic and political work. To these hardened surgeons, my foot 'issue' was just an insignificant scratch. What mattered was the US*

*Dr. Abu-Sitta is also a thinker. A Palestinian born in Kuwait, he studied and lived in the UK, and worked in various war zones of the Middle East, as well as*

*and Dr. Abu-Sitta and I became good friends throughout Asia, before accepting his present position at the AUB Medical Center in Beirut. We were brought together by peculiar circumstances. Several*

*colleagues were launching on the May 15, 2017 on the months ago I burned my foot on red-hot sand, in Southeast Asia. It was healing slowly, but it was healing. Until I went to Afghanistan where at a checkpoint in Herat I had to take my shoes off and the wound got badly infected. Passing through London, I visited a hospital there, and was treated by one of Abu-Sitta's former professors. When I said that*

*among other places I work in Lebanon, he recommended that I visit one of his "best students working at it from two different angles: "The misery is now works in Beirut." I did. During that time, a pan-Arab television channel, Al-Mayadeen, was broadcasting in English, with Arabic subtitles, a long*

*Ecology of War" See here <http://mema.aub.edu.lb/a-message-from-the-chairpersons-of-the-assembly/> I believe that the topic is essential for our humanity, even for its survival. It happens to people in war zones? And what is a war zone, really? We arrived at some common conclusions, as both of us were working with the same topic but*

*looking at it from two different angles: "The misery is now works in Beirut." I did. During that time, a pan-Arab television channel, Al-Mayadeen, was broadcasting in English, with Arabic subtitles, a long*

*without even realizing it: in slums, in collapsed states or in refugee camp See here (http://aub.edu.lb/communications/media/Documents/may-17/48-mema-EN.pdf)*

*We talked a lot: about fear, which is engulfing*

*countries like the UK, about the new wave of individualism and selfishness, which has its roots in*

*frustration. At one point he said: "In most parts of the world "freedom" is synonymous with the*

*independence struggle for our countries. In such places as the UK, it mainly means more*

*individualism, selfishness and personal liberties." We talked about imperialism, medicine and the suffering*

*of the Middle East. Then we decided to publish this dialogue, shedding some light on the "Ecology of*

*War" – this essential new discipline in both philosophy and medicine.*

The discussion took place in Beirut, Lebanon, in Cafe Younes, on April 25, 2017

## THE ECOLOGY OF WAR

### The Broken Social Contract in the Arab World and in Europe

**G.A-S:** In the South, medicine and the provision of health were critical parts of the post-colonial state. And the post-colonial state built medical systems like those we had in Iraq, Egypt and in Syria as part of the social contract. They became an intrinsic part of the creation of those states. There was a realization that the state exercises power coercively, (whether by imprisoning its citizens or through violence), but above all non-

coercively: it needs to house, educate, and provide health care, all of those things. And that non-coercive power that states exercise is a

critical part of their legitimizing process. We saw it evolve in the 50's, 60's and 70's.

So, if you want to look at how the state was dismantled, the aim of the sanctions against Iraq

was not to weaken the Makhbarat or the army, it was to rob the Iraqi state of its non-coercive

power; its ability to give life, to give education, and that's why after 12 years, the state has totally

collapsed internally – not because its coercive powers have weakened, but because it was

robbed of all its non-coercive powers, of all its abilities to guarantee life to its citizens.

**AV:** So in a way the contract between the state and the people was broken.

**G.A-S:** Absolutely! And that contract existed in the majority of post-colonialist states. With the introduction of the IMF and World Bank-led policies that viewed health and the provision of health as a business opportunity for the ruling elites and for corporations, and viewed free healthcare as a burden on the state, you began to have an erosion of the non-coercive powers of the state in countries like Egypt, like Jordan, leading to the gradual weakening of its legitimacy. The aim of the IMF and World Bank was to turn health into a commodity, which could be sold back to people as a service; sold back to those who could afford it.

**AV:** So, the US model, but in much more brutal form, as the wages in most of those countries were incomparably lower.

**G.A-S:** Absolutely! And the way you do that in these countries is to create a two-tier system where the government tier is so under-funded, that people choose to go to the private sector. And then in the private sector you basically have the flourishing of all aspects of private healthcare: from health insurance to provision of health care, to pharmaceuticals.

**AV:** Paradoxically this scenario is also taking place in the UK right now.

**G.A-S:** We see it in the UK and we'll see it in many other European countries. But it has already happened in this region, in the Arab world. Here, the provision of health was critical to the creation of the states. It was critical to the legitimacy of the state.

**AV:** The scenario has been extremely cynical: while the private health system was imposed on the Arab region and on many other parts of the world, in the West itself, except in the United States, medical care remains public and basically free. We are talking about state medical care in Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

**G.A-S:** Yes. In Europe as part of the welfare state that came out of the Second World War, the provision of healthcare was part of the social contract. As the welfare state with the advent of

Thatcherism and Reaganism was being dismantled, it became important to undergo a similar process elsewhere. The difference is that in the UK, and also in countries like Germany, it was politically very dangerous to eliminate it. It could lead to election losses. So the second plan was to erode the health system, by a thousand blows kill it gradually. What you ended up with in the UK is the piece-by-piece privatization of the health sector. And the people don't know, they don't notice that the system is becoming private. Or in Germany where actually the government does not pay for healthcare – the government subsidizes the insurance companies that profit from the private provision of healthcare.

**AV:** Earlier we were speaking about the philosophical dilemmas that are now besieging or at least should be besieging the medical profession. Even the social medical care in Europe, isn't it to some extent a cynical arrangement? European countries and the United States, which plunder and exploit the Middle East, Africa, parts of Asia and Latin America – also subsidize their social system from that plunder. Also, many of the doctors and nurses working for instance in the UK, Germany and the US are 'imported' from much poorer countries, where they have often received free education. Instead of helping their own needy people, they are now serving the spoiled and demanding populations of Europe and North America.

**G.A-S:** I think what has happened, particularly in Europe, is that there has been a gradual erosion of all aspects of the welfare state. Politically it was not yet possible to get rid of free healthcare. The problem that you can certainly see in the United Kingdom is that health is the final consequence of social and economic factors that shape peoples' lives. So if you have chronic unemployment, a second and third generation unemployment problem, these have health consequences. If you have the destruction of both pensions and the cushion of a social umbrella for the unemployed, that has consequences. Poor housing has health consequences. Mass unemployment has health consequences. Politically it was easy to get rid of all other aspects of the welfare state, but they were stuck with a healthcare problem. And so the losing battle that the health systems in the West are fighting is that they are being expected to cater to the poor consequences of the brutal capitalist system as a non-profit endeavor. But we know that once these lifestyle changes are affecting people's health, it's too late in terms of cure or prevention. And so the European health systems try to patch people and to get back on the street. So if you have children with chronic asthma, you treat the asthma but not the dump housing in which these children are living in. If you have violent assaults and trauma related to violence, you treat the trauma, the physical manifestation, and not the breakdown that is a product of youth unemployment or racism that creates this

situation. So in order to sustain this anomaly, you need an inflated health system, because you make people sick and then you try to fix them, rather than stopping them from being sick. Hence that brain drain has occurred, in which you have more Ghanaian doctors in New York than you have in Ghana.

**AV:** And you have an entire army of Philippine nurses in the UK and the US, while there is suddenly a shortage of qualified nurses in Manila.

**G.A-S:** Absolutely! This is the result of the fact that actually people's health 'happens' outside the health system. Because you cannot get rid of the health system, you end up having a bloated health system, and try to fix the ailments that are coming through the door.

### **Collapse of Health Care in the Middle East**

**AV:** You worked in this entire region. You worked in Iraq, and in Gaza... both you and I worked in Shifa Hospital in Gaza... You worked in Southern Lebanon during the war. How brutal is the healthcare situation in the Middle East? How badly has been, for instance, the Iraqi peoples' suffering, compared to that of Western patients? How cruel is the situation in Gaza?

**G.A-S:** If you look at places like Iraq, in the 80's it probably had one of the most advanced health systems in the region. Then you went through the first war against Iraq, followed by 12 years of

sanctions in which that health system was totally dismantled; not just in terms of hospitals and medication and the forced exile of doctors and health professionals, but also in terms of other aspects of health including sewage, water and electricity plants, all of the parts of the infrastructure that directly impact on people's lives.



**Wounded Israeli Soldier, Shifa Hospital, Gaza**

**AV:** Then came depleted uranium.

**G.A-S:** And then you add to the mix the 2003 War and the complete destruction and dismantling of the state, and the migration of 50% of Iraq's doctors.

**AV:** Where did they migrate to?

**G.A-S:** Everywhere: to the Gulf and to the West; to North America, Europe... So in Iraq you have not only a system that is broken, but has lost the components that are required to rebuild it. You can't train a new generation of doctors in Iraq,

because your trainers have all left the country. You can't create a health system in Iraq, because you have created a government infrastructure that is intrinsically unstable and based on a multi-polarity of centers of power all of which are fighting for control of the state... and so Iraqis sub-contract their health at hospital level to India and to Turkey and Lebanon, or Jordan, because they are in this vicious loop.

**AV:** But this is only for those who can afford it?□

**G.A-S:** Yes for those who can, but even in those times when the government had cash it could not build the system, anymore. So it would sub-contract health provisions outside, because the system was so broken that money couldn't fix it.

**AV:** Is it the same in other countries of the region?

**G.A-S:** The same is happening in Libya and the same is happening in Syria, with regard of the migration of their doctors. Syria will undergo something similar to Iraq at the end of the war, if the Syrian state is destroyed.

**AV:** But it is still standing.

**G.A-S:** It still stands and it is still providing healthcare to the overwhelming majority of the population even to those who live in the rebel-controlled areas. They are travelling to Damascus and other cities for their cardiac services or for their oncological services.□

**AV:** So no questions asked; you are sick, you get treated?

**G.A-S:** Even from the ISIS-controlled areas people can travel and get treated, because this is part of the job of the state.

**AV:** The same thing is happening with the education there; Syria still provides all basic services in that area.

**G.A-S:** Absolutely! But in Libya, because the state has totally disappeared or has disintegrated, all this is gone.

**AV:** Libya is not even one country, anymore.

**G.A-S:** There is not a unified country and there is definitely no health system. In Gaza and Palestine, the occupation and the siege ensure that there is no normal development of the health system and in the case of Gaza as the Israelis say “every few years you come and you mow the lawn”; you kill so many people in these brutal and intense wars, so you can ensure that for the next few years the people will be trying to survive the damage that you have caused.



Gaza During the Intifada

**AV: Is there any help from Israeli physicians?**

**G.A-S:** Oh yes! Very few individuals, but there is... But the Israeli medical establishment is an intrinsic part of the Israeli establishment, and the Israeli academic medical establishment is also part of the Israeli establishment. The Israeli Medical Association refused to condemn the fact that Israeli doctors examine Palestinian political prisoners for what they call “fitness for interrogation.” Which is basically... you get seen by a doctor who decides how much torture you can take before you die. □

**AV:** This actually reminds me of what I was told in 2015 in Pretoria, South Africa, where I was invited to speak at the International Conference of Psychologists for Peace. Several US psychologists reported that during the interrogation and torture of alleged terrorists, there were professional psychologists and even clinical psychiatrists standing by, often assisting the interrogators.

**G.A-S:** Yes, there are actually 2-3 well-known American psychologists who designed the CIA interrogation system – its process.

**AV:** What you have described that is happening in Palestine is apparently part of a very pervasive system. I was told in the Indian-controlled Kashmir that Israeli intelligence officers are sharing their methods of interrogation and torture with their Indian counterparts. And of

course the US is involved there as well.

## CONFLICT MEDICINE

**G.A.S:** War surgery grew out of the Napoleonic Wars. During these wars, two armies met; they usually met at the frontline. They attacked each other, shot at each other or stabbed each other. Most of the injured were combatants, and they got treated in military hospitals. You had an evolution of war surgery. What we have in this region, we believe, is that the intensity and the prolonged nature of these wars or these conflicts are not temporal battles, they don't start and finish. And they are sufficiently prolonged that they change the biological ecology, the ecology in which people live. They create the ecology of war. That ecology maintains itself well beyond the shooting because they alter the living environment of people. The wounds are physical, psychological and social wounds; the environment is altered to become hostile; to the able-bodied and more hostile to the wounded. And as in the case of multi-drug-resistant organisms, which are now a big issue in the world like the multi-drug-resistant bacteria, 85% of Iraqi war wounded have multi-drug-resistant bacteria, 70% of Syrian war wounded have it... So we say: this ecology, this bio-sphere that the conflicts create is even altered at the basic DNA of the bacteria.

We have several theories about it; partly it's the role of the heavy metals in modern ordnance,

which can trigger mutation in these bacteria that makes them resistant to antibiotics. So your biosphere, your bubble, the ecological bubble which you live in, is permanently changed. And it doesn't disappear the day the bombs disappear. It has to be dismantled, and in order to dismantle it you have to understand the dynamics of the ecology of war. That's why our program was set up at the university, which was the major tertiary teaching center during the civil war and the 1982 Israeli invasion. And then as the war in Iraq and Syria developed, we started to get patients from these countries and treat them here. We found out that we have to understand the dynamics of conflict medicine and to understand the ecology of war; how the physical, biological, psychological and social manifestations of war wounds happen, and how this ecology of war is created; everything from bacteria to the way water and the water cycle changes, to the toxic residues of war, to how peoples' bodies react... Many of the Iraqi patients that I see have multiple members of their families injured. □

**AV:** Is the AUB Medical Center now the pioneer in this research: the ecology of war?

□ **G.A.-S:** Yes, because of the legacy of the civil war... of regional wars.

**AV:** Nothing less than a regional perpetual conflict.

**G.A-S:** Perpetual conflict, yes; first homegrown, and then regional. We are the referral center for the Iraqi Ministry of Health, referral center for the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, so we act as a regional center, and our program is dedicated more time, space and energy to understanding how this ecology of war comes about.

**AV:** In my writing and in my films, I often draw the parallel between the war and extreme poverty. I have been working in some of the world's worst slums, in Africa, Central America and Caribbean, South Asia, the Philippines and elsewhere. I concluded that many societies that are in theory living in peace are in reality living in prolonged or even perpetual wars. Extreme misery is a form of war, although there is no 'declaration of war', and there is no defined frontline. I covered both countless wars and countless places of extreme misery, and the parallel, especially the physical, psychological and social impact on human beings, appears to be striking. Would you agree, based on your research? Do you see extreme misery as a type of war?

**G.A-S:** Absolutely. Yes. At the core of it is the 'dehumanization' of people. Extreme poverty is a form of violence. The more extreme this poverty becomes, the closer it comes to the physical nature of violence. War is the accelerated degradation of people's lives, extending to extreme poverty. But that extreme poverty can be reached by a more gradual process. War only

gets them there faster.



**Children in Nairobi, Kenya**

**AV:** A perpetual state of extreme poverty is in a way similar to a perpetual state of conflict, of a war

**G.A-S:** Definitely. And it is a war mainly against those who are forced to live in these circumstances. It's the war against the poor and the South. It's the war against the poor in the inner cities of the West.

**AV:** When you are defining the ecology of war, are you also taking what we are now discussing into consideration? Are you researching the impact of extreme poverty on human bodies and human lives? In this region, extreme poverty can often be found in the enormous refugee camps, while in other parts of the world it dwells in countless slums.

**G.A-S:** This extreme poverty is part of the ecology that we are discussing. One of the



constituents of the ecology is when you take a wounded body and you place it in a harsh physical environment and you see how this body is wounded and re-wounded, and this harsh environment becomes a continuation of that battleground, because what you see is a process of re-wounding. Not because you are still in the frontline somewhere in Syria, but because your kids are now living in a tent with 8 other people and they are in danger of becoming the victims of the epidemic of child burns that we now have in the refugee camps, because of poor and unsafe housing.

Let's look at it from a different angle: what constitutes a war wound, or a conflict-related injury? Your basic conflict-related injury is a gunshot wound or a blast injury from shrapnel. But what happens when you take that wounded body and throw it into a tent? What are the complications for this wounded body living in a harsh environment; does this constitute a war-related injury? When you impoverish the population to the point that you have children suffering from the kind of injuries that we know are the results of poor and unsafe housing, is that a conflict-related injury? Or you have children now who have work-related injuries, because they have to go and become the main breadwinners for the home, working as car mechanics or porters or whatever. Or do you also consider the fact that if you come from a country where a given disease used to be treatable, but

due to the destruction of a health system, that ailment is no longer treatable because the hospitals are gone or because doctors had to leave. Does that constitute a conflict-related injury? So, we have to look at the entire ecology: beyond a bullet and shrapnel – things that get headlines in the first 20 seconds.



**Somali Refugees in Djibuti**

**AV:** Your research seems to be relevant to most parts of the world. It is perpetual state.

**G.A-S:** Exactly, it is perpetual. It does not stop. It is there all the time. Therefore there is no concept of 'temporality of crises.' There is no referee who blows the whistle at the end of the crises. When the cameras go off, the media and then the world, decides that the crises are over. But you know that people in Laos, for instance, still have one of the highest amputation rates in the world.

**AV:** I know. I worked there in the Plain of Jars, which is an enormous minefield even to this day.

**G.A-S:** Or Vietnam, with the greatest child physical deformities in the world as a result of Agent Orange.

**AV:** You worked in these countries. □

**G.A-S:** Yes.

**AV:** Me too; I used to live in Vietnam. That entire region is still suffering from what used to be known as the “Secret War.” In Laos, the poverty is so rampant that people are forced to sell unexploded US bombs for scrap. They periodically explode. In Cambodia, even between Seam Reap and the Thai border, there are villages where people are still dying or losing limbs.

**G.A-S:** Now many things depend on how we define them. It is often a game of words.

**AV:** **India is a war zone, from Kashmir to the Northeast, Bihar and the slums of Mumbai.**

**G.A-S:** If you take the crudest way of measuring conflict, which is the number of people killed by weapons, Guatemala and El Salvador have now more people slaughtered than they had during the war. But because the nature in which violence is exhibited changed, because it doesn’t carry a political tag now, it is not discussed. But actually, it is by the same people against the same people.

**AV:** I wrote about and filmed in Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, on several occasions. The extreme violence there is a direct result of the conflict implanted, triggered by the West,

particularly by the United States. The same could be said about such places as Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and Haiti. It has led to almost absolute social collapse.

**G.A-S:** Yes, in Jamaica, the CIA played a great role in the 70’s.

**AV:** In that part of the world we are not just talking about poverty.

**G.A-S:** No, no. We are talking AK-47’s!

**AV:** Exactly. Once I filmed in San Salvador, in a gangland... A friend, a local liberation theology priest kindly drove me around. We made two loops. The first loop was fine. On the second one they opened fire at our Land Cruiser, with some heavy stuff. The side of our car was full of bullet holes, and they blew two tires. We got away just on our rims. In the villages, they simply come and plunder and rape. They take what they want. It is a war.

**G.A.-S:** The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), trains surgeons in these countries. The ICRC introduced war surgery into the medical curriculum of the medical schools in Colombia and Honduras. Because effectively, these countries are at war, so you have to train surgeons, so they know what to do when they receive 4-5 patients every day, with gunshot wounds.

**AV:** Let me tell you what I witnessed in Haiti,

just to illustrate your point. Years ago I was working in Cité Soleil, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. They say it is the most dangerous ‘neighborhood’ or slum on Earth. The local wisdom goes: “you can enter, but you will never leave alive”. I went there with a truck, with two armed guards, but they were so scared that they just abandoned me there, with my big cameras and everything, standing in the middle of the road. I continued working; I had no choice. At one point I saw a long line in front of some walled compound. I went in. What I was suddenly facing was shocking: several local people on some wooden tables, blood everywhere, and numerous US military medics and doctors performing surgeries under the open sky. It was hot, flies and dirt everywhere... A man told me his wife had a huge tumor. Without even checking what it was, the medics put her on a table, gave her a “local” and began removing the stuff. After the surgery was over, the husband and wife walked slowly to a bus stop and went home. A couple of kilometers from there I found a well-equipped and clean US medical facility, but only for US troops and staff. I asked the doctors what they were really doing in Haiti and they were quite open about it; they replied: “we are training for combat ... This is as close to a war as we can get.” They were experimenting on human beings, of course; learning how to operate during combat. □

**G.A-S:** So, the distinction is only in the definition.

**AV:** As a surgeon who has worked all over the Middle East and in many other parts of the world, how would you compare the conflict here to the conflicts in Asia, Africa and elsewhere?

**G.A-S:** In the Middle East, people still remember when they had hospitals. Iraqis who come to my clinic remember the 80s. They know that life was different and could have been different. And they are health-literate. The other issue is that in 2014 alone, some 30,000 Iraqis were injured. The numbers are astounding. We don’t have a grasp of the numbers in Libya, the amount of ethnic cleansing and killing that is happening in Libya. In terms of numbers, they are profound, but in terms of the effect, we are at the beginning of the phase of de-medicalization. So it wasn’t that these medical systems did not develop. They are being de-developed. They are going backwards.

**AV:** Are you blaming Western imperialism for the situation?

**G.A-S:** If you look at the sanctions and what they did to their health system, of course! If you look at Libya, of course! The idea that these states disintegrated is a falsehood. We know what the dynamics of the sanctions were in Iraq, and what happened in Iraq after 2003. We know what happened in Libya.

**AV:** Or in Afghanistan.

**G.A-S:** The first thing that the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan or the Nicaraguan Contras were told

to do was to attack the clinics. The Americans have always understood that you destroy the state by preventing it from providing these non-coercive powers that I spoke about.

**AV:** Do you see this part of the world as the most effected, most damaged? □

**G.A-S:** At this moment and time certainly. And the statistics show it. I think around 60% of those dying from wars are killed in this region.

**AV:** And how do you define this region geographically?

**G.A-S:** From Afghanistan to Mauritania. And that includes the Algerian-Mali border. The Libyan border... The catastrophe of the division of Sudan, what's happening in South Sudan, what's happening in Somalia, Libya, Egypt, the Sinai Desert, Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, even Pakistan including people who are killed there by drones. □

**AV:** But then we also have around 10 million people who have died in the Democratic Republic of Congo, since the 1995 Rwandan invasion.

**G.A-S:** Now that is a little bit different. That is the 'more advanced phase': when you've completely taken away the state... In the Arab world Libya is the closest to that scenario. There the oil companies have taken over the country. The mining companies are occupying DRC. And

they run the wars directly, rather than through the Western armies. You erode the state, completely, until it disappears and then the corporations, directly, as they did in the colonial phase under the British East Indian Company and the Dutch East India Company.

**AV:** What is the goal of your research, the enormous project called the "Ecology of War"?

**G.A-S:** One of the things that we insist on is the holistic approach. Compartmentalization is part of the censorship process. "You are a microbiologist then only look at what is happening with the bacteria... You are an orthopedic surgeon, so you only have to look at the blast injuries, bombs, landmine injuries..." That compartmentalization prevents bringing together people who are able to see the whole picture. Therefore we are insisting that this program also have social scientists, political scientists, anthropologists, microbiologists, surgeons... Otherwise we'd just see the small science. We are trying to put the sciences together to see the bigger picture. We try to put the pieces of puzzle together to see the bigger picture.

**AV:** And now you will have a big conference. On the 15th of May.

**G.A-S:** Now we will have a big conference; basically the first congress that will look at all these aspects of conflict and health from the

surgical, to the reconstruction of damaged bodies, to the issues of medical resistance of bacteria, infectious diseases, to some absolutely basic issues. Before the war there were 30,000 kidney-failure patients in Yemen. Most dialysis patients are two weeks away from dying if they don't get dialysis. So, there is a session looking at how to provide dialysis in the middle of these conflicts? What do you do, because dialysis services are so centralized? The movement of patients is not easy, and the sanctions... One topic will be 'cancer and war'... So this conference will be as holistic as possible, on the relationship between the conflict and health. We expect over 300 delegates, and we will have speakers from India, Yemen, Palestine, Syria, from the UK, we have people coming from the humanitarian sector, from ICRC, people who worked in Africa and the Middle East, we have people who worked in previous wars and are now working in current wars, so we have a mix of people from different fields.

**AV:** What is the ultimate goal of the program? □

**G.A-S:** We have to imagine the health of the region beyond the state. On the conceptual level, we need to try to figure out what is happening. We can already see certain patterns. One of them

is the regionalization of healthcare. The fact that Libyans get treated in Tunisia, Iraqis and Syrians get treated in Beirut, Yemenis get treated in Jordan. So you already have the disintegration of these states and the migration of people to the regional centers. The state is no longer a major player, because the state was basically destroyed. We feel that this is a disease of the near future, medium future and long-term future. Therefore we have to understand it, in order to better treat it, we have to put mechanisms in place so that this knowledge transfers into the medical education system, which will produce medical professionals who are better equipped to deal with this health system. We have to make sure that people are aware of many nuances of the conflict, beyond the shrapnel and beyond the bullets. The more research we put into this area of the conflict and health, the more transferable technologies we develop – the better healthcare we'll be allowed to deliver in these situations, the better training our students and graduates will receive, and better work they will perform in this region for the next 10 or 15 years. □

**AV:** And hopefully more lives will be saved.

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*Andre Vltchek is a philosopher, novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. He has covered wars and conflicts in dozens of countries. Three of his latest books are the revolutionary "Annozero"*

(<https://www.amazon.com/Aurora-Andre-Vltchek/dp/6027354364/?tag=theasipacjo0b-20>) and two bestselling works of political non-fiction: *Exposing Lies Of The Empire* (<https://www.amazon.com/Exposing-Lies-Empire-Andre-Vltchek/dp/6027005866/?tag=theasipacjo0b-20>) and *Fighting Against Western Imperialism* (<https://www.amazon.com/Fighting-Against-Western-Imperialism-Vltchek/dp/6027005823/?tag=theasipacjo0b-20>). View his other books [here](http://andrevltchek.weebly.com/books.html) (<http://andrevltchek.weebly.com/books.html>). Andre makes films for teleSUR and Al-Mayadeen. *Rwanda Gambit* (<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/rwandagambit>), his groundbreaking documentary about Rwanda and DR Congo. After having lived in Latin America, Africa and Oceania, Vltchek presently resides in East Asia and the Middle East, and continues to work around the world. He can be reached through his [website](http://andrevltchek.weebly.com/) (<http://andrevltchek.weebly.com/>) and his [Twitter](https://twitter.com/AndreVltchek) (<https://twitter.com/AndreVltchek>).