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THE SOURCE

Abby Martin on Julian Assange, Coup in Bolivia, Bernie Sanders & Gaza

Zain Raza (ZR): Thank you guys for tuning in today. And welcome to another episode of The Source, a program in which we interview investigative journalists, policy experts and whistleblowers. My name is Zain Raza. Today, I will be talking to an investigative journalist, documentary filmmaker and the founder of The Empire Files, Abby Martin. Abby Martin's latest documentary film is called "Gaza Fights for Freedom". Abby Martin, thanks for coming on the program and thank you for your time.

Abby Martin (AM): Thank you so much for having me on, Zain.

ZR: So let's begin with some current issues, in particular the case of Julian Assange in the latest court hearing on Julian Assange's extradition case. The WikiLeaks legal team requested more time to submit evidence and ask for a postponement, which the judge denied. The full proceedings on Assange's extradition case would begin on the 25th of February. Even though observers at the hearing, such as John Pilger, an investigative journalist, stated that Julian Assange couldn't even form a proper sentence at the court hearing. Nils Melzer, a United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, has also reported that his imprisonment and persecution is threatening his life and amounts to psychological torture, which the UK court and the government have simply ignored. What is your assessment of this case and what significance does it have to press freedoms and investigative journalism?

AM: Yeah, I mean, I fully agree with what the U.N. Rapporteur of Torture has assessed here. We're talking about several years of isolation, right. I mean, what does that do to someone, especially it coming out that the CIA was spying on essentially every single encounter that Julian Assange had with people who were visiting him in the embassy? Lawyers, I mean, all of these things should have remained confidential. It was an absolute betrayal by Lenin Moreno and the UK government. He was tortured and this was before he was actually put in this confined cell. Facing 175 years in prison under the Espionage Act. This case has incredibly wide-reaching implications. And unfortunately, Julian Assange has already been tried in the court of public opinion. People loathe him and they think that he know cost the election for Hillary Clinton when really in reality, if you look at these charges, they have nothing to do with Russia. They have nothing to do with the 2016 election. They have everything to do with exposing war crimes. We're going back to 2003. I mean, the Iraq war cables, war crimes that were committed, the collateral murder video. These are what the charges come down to. And if people really understood how devastating it is to actually charge a publisher under the Espionage Act, which has never been done before. I mean, the Espionage Act was, of course, used flagrantly by the Obama administration. Now it's being used by the Trump administration against whistleblowers, which is already horrifying enough to resurrect this archaic law – during World War I – to now charge people who are whistleblowing, war crimes and things like torture.

But now to use it against a publisher; this could mean the New York Times, Wall Street Journal. It could mean you or me. It can mean anyone that simply publishes leaks and analyzes them, just like all

of these publications do. So I think this case is absolutely devastating, horrifying and has wide-reaching implications for press freedom and journalism as a whole. And unfortunately, people have already made up their mind about Julian Assange. They're not taking a stand the way they should be because this is a case that affects us all. And if we don't stand up and say no more, I fear we're in for a really dark road ahead.

ZR: I want to pick up on that. In press conferences held by the German government, Russia Today (RT) journalist named Florian Warweg has been quite persistent and the question he's been asking persistently is what is the German government's position on the report produced by the U.N. Special Rapporteur Nils Melzer? And the government's reply has been consistently, even though this question has been posed for weeks; they haven't heard about it or about the report. And the Real News Network also reported recently that Amnesty International has not raised the level of Julian's case to campaign level, which they usually do for other cases, whether it's from foreign countries. And corporate media outlets in Germany and the US have not called red alert on this, even though, as you've just pointed out, this has major implications on journalism. So the question is, why is there this silence on this issue and what can people do to inform others about this case?

AM: I think there's silence on this issue because there is a direct collaboration between all of these governments that are essentially puppets or criminal collaborators of the US empire. The fact that Trump, you know, kind of went outside of the norm to arrest, seized someone out of an embassy that they were granted amnesty in, and charge them with the Espionage Act for simply publishing leaks and covering leaks. I mean, it's really unprecedented. And I think that all of these collaborators are guilty of the same crime. I mean, anyone who is not standing up and saying that this is an absolutely atrocious and criminal assault on journalism is complicit and are participating in this criminal act. But I think that's exactly why they're staying silent on it. Of course, they're not going to come out and say, you know, unfortunately Julian Assange was tortured for the last couple of years. And he is being tortured now. I mean, we still can't explain that solitary confinement is torture in this country and we use it all the time. So it's it's devastating. I think that people need to wake up and inform themselves and act out. I mean, speak out about this issue; inform people that these charges have nothing to do with Russia. They have nothing to do with the election, that they are about exposing war crimes. And if we're going to lock people away, facing 200 years in prison for exposing war crimes, what kind of country – what kind of world are we going to live in? So we have to stand up and collectively say no more.

ZR: I want to move to another issue that is making headlines recently, and it's about the recent developments in Bolivia. There's a lot of confusion on this topic in the German mainstream media. It is being claimed that Evo Morales ousting was of his own making due to election fraud, popular discontent, and also because of his persistence in rewriting the constitution. What do you make of these counter arguments and what is really unfolding there?

AM: Sure. I mean, this is kind of the latest in a long line of CIA backed coups, to be honest. I mean, of course, the corporate media is telling us, don't believe your lying eyes. Don't believe what is really going on on the ground. So let's break down a couple of these myths that are being perpetrated and propagated by corporate media outlets and essentially their lackeys.

So, first of all, there was fraud in the election, right, and there were voting irregularities. Well a think tank called the Center for Economic and Policy Research based out of D.C., has broken down the statistical facts and they have found that there are absolutely no voting irregularities in the data. And they found that there was no fraud whatsoever. Now, of course, while these tallies were still being conducted, you had Carlos Meza, the opposition candidate, coming out saying he wasn't going to recognize the final results.

You had politicians like Marco Rubio, Donald Trump already taking to Twitter, saying fraud is being conducted. How would they know that when the election hadn't even concluded yet? The Organization of American States, which is essentially a cutout of the US government – funded 60% by U.S. funds – but it's kind of proposed as this impartial organization, because it's comprised of a conglomerate of Latin American states, but primarily it kind of does the bidding of the US empire. It went out ahead and said, you know, there were voting irregularities we're very concerned. And then, of course, the U.S. follows suit and says, we stand behind the OAS.

So all of these things put together has made it seem like, oh, my God, the election was fraudulent. Oh, my God, you know, Evo Morales needs to resign. And of course, they said, oh, he resigned. Right. It wasn't a coup. What do you call it when the military to poses a democratically elected leader? Who was deemed by the highest court in the land the year prior, that he could indeed run for a fourth term?

Agree with it or not, these judges are elected, unlike the United States Supreme Court, judges in Bolivia are elected and they did actually grant him a fourth term to run. So like it or not, these are the facts here. And unfortunately, Zain, we're finding out more and more proof of direct US involvement. Let's talk about Carlos Mesa really quick. I mean, this is a guy who was incubated from a D.C. think tank called the Inter-American Dialogue, subsidized by the same corporations that subsidize corporate media, banks, weapons contractors, oil companies. He worked at this think tank, which is also run by the National Endowment for Democracy. This is another CIA cutout that uses civil society groups to foment regime change and insurrection, especially in Latin American countries like Venezuela and Cuba.

So let's also look at the fact that six graduates from the School of the Americas of the Fort Benning military training institution, which literally trains people and torture, is responsible for millions of people who are disappeared in Colombia and several Latin American countries in the past, with direct CIA coups are also complicit in this criminal overthrow of Evo Morales. Six confirmed SOA graduates directly tied to the U.S. government. Not only that, there were secret audio recordings leaked that literally showed direct collaboration with opposition figures in Bolivia, with senators like Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz talking about running the coup out of the US embassy in Bolivia, and also planning that if Evo Morales won democratically another term that they would say that there was fraud, they would attack polling centers and essentially run this criminal coup out of the US embassy. That's exactly what we saw happen. That is what Evo Morales is claiming today.

And who has filled this power vacuum? Who has filled this disgraceful absence of leadership? Christian fascists, Christian fascist people running around with a giant prop Bibles declaring indigenous people in a country where 65% are indigenous, satanic, saying Indians have no place here! What kind of government are we going to see take over this fascistic Christian paramilitary state that is already committing massacres of poor and indigenous campesinos in rural areas, where dozens have died at the hands of these soldiers.

So it is disgraceful to not call a spade a spade. This is a military coup. And unfortunately, we're seeing it's the next in a long line of military coups that are directly backed by the US government because the Trump administration already has declared alongside Mike Pompeo that the Monroe Doctrine is basically being reclaimed, that we are going back to the days of brazen CIA coups to overthrow leftist leaders in Latin America. And Evo Morales was one of the last holdouts here of this pink tide that we saw. I mean, he did incredible things to uplift the poor in that country. And that was an unforgivable crime to US empire, it was first nationalizing the resources, oil and gas, next was pursuing socialism, and third, was providing a voice for indigenous and poor people in the country. And those are three unforgivable crimes for US empire.

ZR: I want to pick up on that. And one of the things that come to mind is Ronald Reagan, I think it was in the 1980s, who tried to ban assassinations of foreign leaders. I think it was in 1981, he passed a directive. But still, we see this sort of mentality continuing in US foreign policy. We saw this in Brazil and Venezuela. And now we're seeing this in Bolivia. Do you think the US is going to continue with its policy of overthrowing governments, or do you think public consciousness is high enough now to see behind this propaganda, and to stand up against it?

AM: Unfortunately, you know the propaganda is very deep and very strong, and a lot of people are kind of tricked. They see protests all around the world and they just automatically think, well, you know, governments are inherently corrupt, and there is this kind of line that's towed by a lot of so-called leftists, even here. And a lot of liberal media establishment journalists – they essentially portray these talking points that are completely false. So, again, you know, "the elections were fraudulent and Evo Morales resigned because he was a dictator and he's authoritarian". It's interesting that all these Latin American countries that have democratic elections are all authoritarian, you know, autocratic dictatorships. And unfortunately, no, I think that the Trump administration is kind of going back to this bloody legacy from the Reagan era of death squads, torture squads, paramilitary assassinations, and also just direct CIA coups. I mean, we saw it kind of coming back with Venezuela in full force.

You know, the Bush administration tried to overthrow Hugo Chavez. Of course, that failed miserably. Obama tried to use kind of these civil society groups and undermine the Venezuelan government with sanctions. But when Trump got into office, he really just removed the gloves completely, you know, not only around the world with drone strikes and bombings, but in Latin America specifically; kind of this attack on socialism. Saying that, you know, it's no longer about the axis of evil, it's about the troika of tyranny: Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela.

And every single thing that's happened in Venezuela to try to overthrow Nicolas Maduro has been directly tied back to the US government. Go back to the assassination attempt with C-4 explosives where Nicolas Maduro was on stage that was directly linked back to the US government and of course, this ridiculous attempt to overthrow Maduro with this U.S. puppet, Juan Guaido, another DC incubator baby who could barely muster crowds of 100 people today. He was completely propped up and he's still being paid 54 million dollars by USAID.

Unfortunately, I think public consciousness is not growing fast enough. I mean, we need to resurrect an anti-war movement in this country. We need to stand together with our brothers and sisters around the world who are living under the boot of the US empire and who are being directly threatened by these criminal genocidal sanctions and say: no more. We need to start looking outside the borders of our own country and realize what our government is doing in our name and with our tax dollars.

ZR: I want to switch gears now and talk about your recent documentary film called "Gaza Fights for Freedom". I watched it, I must say, I was shocked by the amount of information that you documented which does not at all appear in the mainstream media, especially in Germany. Talk about the making of your documentary, the inspiration, expectations you had, the problems you faced and how it all turned out eventually.

AM: Sure, it's a great question, and thank you so much for watching it Zain. You know, I know that this is a really contentious issue, of course, in Germany, where BDS laws have made it very restrictive to actually talk honestly about the Palestinian struggle and what needs to be done to gain justice. You know, Mike Prysner, my partner with Empire Files, which is the series that we conduct on YouTube, we were in the occupied West Bank back in 2016. We were doing a series of investigative reports about the occupation. I mean, this is under brutal military occupation, similarly to what Gaza was prior to 2006 when the Israeli military was forced out and Hamas won that election. Now, while we

were in the occupied West Bank, we tried to get into Gaza. We had all the proper credentials. We filled out all the right paperwork. And I was told by the Foreign Press Office under Netanyahu that I was a propagandist. And not only that, but that I was an Iranian agent. I mean, here I am used to being called a Russian agent, a Venezuelan agent. So to be called an Iranian agent by the Israeli government to be banned outright from getting into this territory was really devastating.

And I think that really shows how scared they are for people to go in and report the honest truth. They only want lackeys. They only want people who will toe the Israeli line. And so they try to keep this forced separation from actual honest journalists, from getting into this area and really reporting what is going on. So fast forward two years later, when the Great March of Return sparked off. I mean, I was absolutely appalled by the corporate media coverage of the Great March. It was always told in the passive voice, right? Palestinians died. Clashes happened.

No. This was an ongoing massacre. Direct targeted assassinations of civilians, scores of civilians, and not only that: children, journalists, medics, disabled people. The way that this was being covered was atrocious. I was lucky enough to Skype into this session of about 30 journalists within Gaza who were talking about how is the western media covering this march? Because, of course, as you know, it was unlike anything that has ever really happened before, a mass civil disobedience, non-violent action of tens of thousands of Palestinians of all stripes. And out of that Skype session came a collaboration, came a pitch. Why don't we do an Empire Files episode or episodes about this? But once we saw the footage come back, once we directed the interviews with these victims and saw how incredible and cinematically brilliant this footage was, we knew we couldn't just do an Empire Files episode, we knew we had to take at least eight months off and really work to do exactly what you saw, which is do a full feature length documentary film. And that's exactly what we did.

ZR: One of the most revealing parts of the documentary was to focus on the socio-economic conditions surrounding Gaza. You even provided a voice to ordinary people who, to quote one example, make a living for their families by collecting scraps from the rubble that is left behind from Israeli airstrikes. Talk about the conditions that Gaza is under, and do you think this is contributing to the radicalization there?

AM: Great question. Yeah. We're talking about a besieged enclave where 2.2 million people are trapped inside, right? 75% percent of these people are refugees. Half of them are children. Half are children. I repeat that point because it's a really, really strong point, and we have to remember that this is essentially a war against children. It's the largest open air prison in the world. People are deprived of basic human mobility.

You talked about the struggles of making the documentary, another big struggle Zain, was basically accumulating the footage, which took several, several months because of the lack of adequate electricity. These people are surviving with two to three hours of electricity a day – if they're lucky. That took an extreme hardship to try to get this footage, download the footage, because they literally did not have access to the Internet. Electricity is as important as the air we breathe. As Amad says in the film, the gentleman who we're talking about that survives on scraps, who was also shot in the leg at the Great March of Return, lost his farm from Israeli bombardment, has a family that, you know, he can barely take care of because of just how little resources that they have. We're talking about not being able to pump water to the roof because of the lack of electricity; the fact that you can't keep food cold. And that's just electricity. Let's talk about the water crisis really quickly.

Even the U.N. reports that in 2020, water will be completely non potable, 100% non potable. What does that mean? What does it mean to not have access to clean water? That means that right now 97% is completely toxic. Desalination plants can't be rebuilt because construction material is prohibited from entering the territory. Israel controls the land, the air and the sea. They actually count the caloric

intake of food that's coming in so they can maintain just above the level of malnutrition. It is absolutely horrifying what is going on. And of course, they can step back and just say, well, Hamas rules this territory. And so they have self-leadership, without saying that they actually control every single aspect of what goes in and what goes out.

And that includes people. That includes people. The amount of amputations that have come out of the Great March is insurmountable, because so many people are directly targeted in the kneecaps and the limbs, and they cannot actually leave. They are collectively punished and told outright that they are banned from getting medical permits because they were part of the march. And we already know that aside from the Great March of Return, medical permits were already drastically dwindling. And a lot of people just cannot get life saving medical care, necessary equipment and cancer treatment. And so they are designated to die a slow and painful death under this medieval siege. And of course, this contributes to radicalization. Of course it does. How could it not? How could it not? It's absolutely shocking that we can't link this together and say, why is this happening? Why are these people being collectively punished to the point where they are given no choice but to basically vote or support an, a lot of times, armed resistance. I mean, of course, they voted for Hamas. Hamas was the only organization that was actually fighting back against the military occupation.

But I think the Great March of Return shows you that there's hundreds of thousands of people, or thousands of people at least, who want a peaceful resolution, who want a non-violent resolution, despite the fact that arms armed resistance is completely legitimate and actually legal under international law.

ZR: What do you make of the argument that Hamas does not recognize Israel and therefore it is anti-semitic? What is your take on this argument? What have you found out by reading the general principles and their constitution?

AM: Absolutely. So this is an argument that's often repeated and hopefully it holds no bearing on reality. If you look at Hamas's charter today, they actually call for a two-state solution, which essentially means that they recognize Israel's right to exist, because that's what a two-state solution is. They call for their two state solution within the lines of the 1967 borders. So withdrawing illegal settlements in the West Bank, of course, expanding Gaza to the 1967 lines. If you look at what Bernie Sanders is saying, he actually says the same thing. So that's a really important thing to show that Hamas is willing to negotiate.

It's the Israeli authority and the Israeli ruling coalition who are not willing to negotiate. In fact, they declare that there should be no Palestinian state and they are openly declaring the annexation of the West Bank. And this includes the so-called Israeli opposition, Benny Gantz. You know, he actually just applauded the recent decision from the Trump administration to say these settlements will no longer be called illegal in our perspective. So this really shows you kind of what the opposition is and what they consist of, that there is no teeth to oppose these criminal policies.

Now, let's go back to the fact that Hamas is anti-semitic. In their charter as well they actually say this is a fight against Zionism, not against Judaism. This is a fight against political Zionism. This is the stance of progressive Jewish organizations worldwide, like Jewish Voices for Peace, which actually sponsored our entire Gaza Fights for Freedom Tour and many of these cities that we took across North America. Jewish Voices for Peace is in line with the same thing. I mean, they're the ones who say that Israel is the one who conflates Judaism and Zionism. And that's not the case. Israel does not represent Judaism worldwide, but they've politicized it in such a way that people mistakenly think that they do. So Hamas has actually made that differentiation in their new charter that you can read online. This is no secret. But people will continue to conflate this issue and distort the issue to paint Hamas in this

cartoonishly evil way without actually understanding that they are willing, more than willing to come to the negotiating table.

ZR: And they have negotiated before in Qatar in Doha. I think that they regularly negotiate when the situation goes out of hand they then meet and negotiate and find some sort of agreement, which then does not hold for more than a couple of years before the bombardment starts again, right?

AM: Absolutely, and you see this happening a lot where, you know, the corporate media will paint the same script every time. And this is what happened last week when 34 Palestinians' lives were taken. This followed an extra-judicial assassination of an Islamic Jihad leader while he was sleeping in his bed alongside of his wife and his family. Of course, whenever these attacks happen, these pre-crime assaults, of course militant groups will fire rockets back in retaliation. Absolutely.

But the corporate media will paint that Hamas or Islamic Jihad will violate the ceasefire when in reality it's 99% of the time that Israel and Israeli government is actually violating whatever ceasefire is agreed upon, commit some sort of atrocity and then rockets are fired in retaliation. And then, of course, that provides the pretense to just bombard – carpet bomb a neighborhood, take out an entire family and kill scores of civilians. But of course, it's always one sided Zain and the corporate media will never tell the truth. And Palestinian lives are so dehumanized that it's just merely a blip on the radar.

ZR: One of the things that I saw at the Tagesschau, which is Germany's highly watched most watched daily news segment at 8:00. Millions of Germans watch that to get their daily news. I watched right after they attacked the Islamic Jihad group. They did not mention at all that his wife and children were killed or injured in that attack. And secondly, the headline in the thing that I observed was "Palestinians react". Palestinians fired rockets. As if all Palestinians fired rockets into Gaza. And so I noticed this reporting goes on as well. I mean, just ignoring the deaths of the families and then just saying that Palestinian rockets, paints some kind of a picture in my opinion, of pure evilness in Gaza and it dehumanizes them. So what is your assessment? When will this script end and how do you think people can break through this propaganda?

AM: Right. And I think the Great March of Return and "Gaza Fights for Freedom" really kind of exposes how bankrupt this argument, that everyone is a Hamas target. Everyone's a terrorist living in Gaza. I mean, again, these are tens of thousands of peace-going Palestinians. You know, a lot of Westerners always ask, where's the Palestinian Ghandi? And as the Great March organizer Ahmed Abu Artema said, there's been 200 of them and they've all been mowed down by Israeli snipers at the fence. And the whole intention behind the march was actually to stage a peaceful sit-in akin to an Occupy Wall Street, to just mount international attention, draw international attention to the fact that these people are still refugees 70 years later. So it's really criminal, the coverage and the distortion of what the Great March is. And, of course, the war crimes that have been committed, I mean, these are incontrovertible war crimes that we actually document extensively, coming from the U.N. report that was released early this year Zain, that literally documents the use of exploding bullets, the use of toxic gas. And again, the direct targeting of protected categories under the Geneva Conventions. And that's the truth. And, you know, even though over 200 Palestinians have been gunned down and thousands wounded with live ammunition, zero Israeli soldiers were killed, zero Israeli soldiers were wounded from the Great March of Return.

Now, how can this script end? Well, I think that's a really important point, because, you know, it's always painted as, well, Gaza needs to lay down their arms and Gaza just needs to follow the rules of engagement and then Israel will stop criminally, you know, basically suffocating them in every which way. Now, I think it's really important to kind of open our eyes and take a step back and look at the broad view here, and see, as I articulated at the beginning of the segment, the food, water, electricity.

The fact that they have to live in fear every day of being bombed just because they literally live in this besieged area. I think that who really needs to stop the assault and who is really the the oppressor here is, of course, the state of Israel, which controls every single aspect of society in Gaza. And that's them who needs to stop the siege. Them who needs to lift the siege. Allow construction materials to get in. Allow people to rebuild their homes. Allow desalination plants to be rebuilt. Allow them to have water, electricity. And then give them back the basic dignity of humanity. That is what every one deserves: is to be a human being and to move freely and to be able to get medical treatment.

If you want to, you can just look at the cancer survival rates compared to these neighboring people Zain and it drops to as low as 30% if you live in Gaza. And of course, you have a 90% survival rate if you live in Israel. And this just really shows you the stark reality of what these neighboring peoples live through every single day. So I think first and foremost, stop the siege, end the brutal occupation. And then we can talk about what a democratic society and democratic rights looks like for the 5.5 million Palestinians that are deprived of basic democracy. And what is deemed the greatest democracy in the Middle East.

ZR: I want to dig deeper into your documentary and where you would talk about the Great March of Return. In particular, I want to talk about the weaponry that the Israeli Defense Force use and the snipers. You also mentioned in your documentary the explosive bullets that they use. Could you talk about the snipers and the explosive bullets that they were using?

AM: Absolutely. So it's important to realize, again, like these are not clashes. This is not some sort of obfuscated view from the Israeli snipers. These are snipers that are perched up on mounds of dirt that have a wide view of the demonstrations. It is crystal clear in their sniper scope, and they are literally picking people off like its target practice. They started using live ammunition at 9 a.m., the first day of the Great March of Return, March 30th, 2013. They killed 18 unarmed marchers and shot hundreds more with live ammunition. Fast forward six weeks later, on May 14th, one of the most egregious massacres of unarmed people in modern history, where they shot down 60 unarmed protesters, shot thousands with live ammunition. Countless amputees, Zain. And of course, as we know from all of the victims' testimonies that we got first-hand, the vast majority of those shot were with exploding bullets. These are bullets that are internationally banned by the Hague Convention. A lot of these conventions, were where the world bodies got together decades, if not hundreds of years ago, and outright said these are condemned, we cannot accept these.

And that really shows you the flagrant violations that Israel basically conducts of international law with complete impunity and protection from the US empire. So it is really atrocious that they have the audacity to use exploding bullets on top of the several, you know, war crimes that they're already committing by targeting just unarmed civilians. I mean, even in an armed battle, the documented actions of the Israeli military would be considered war crimes.

But if you're taking away armaments altogether, it is absolutely incomprehensible that they are getting away with what they are doing at the Great March of Return. But yeah, I mean, these snipers basically pick people off. One international war correspondent who was interviewed for the UN report said, I've documented wars in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Libya; she said I've never seen anything like this. She said it's a slow, methodical shooting, where every couple of minutes you just hear a gunshot go off and another person goes down. And it's just a stream of bloodied bodies being carried back towards the ambulances in a very, very sadistic and methodical way. And we actually have seen first-hand, as much as the Israeli government says, oh all the people shot were by accident, oh we didn't mean to shoot civilians.

We've seen it first-hand, actually the footage from the Israeli snipers themselves. They've leaked it in a group chat, I think on Facebook that actually became exposed to the public, and it shows exactly

what they're doing behind the sniper scopes. And unfortunately, it was pretty brutal to watch. I mean, kind of gleefully laughing at taking down a small child that posed no immediate threat to their lives. So unfortunately, when these cases are tried, like recently, we just saw the first time that a case of a small child who was shot at the Great March of Return and killed was finally tried in Israeli courts, because there was an international outcry, because there was a video, and pressure was mounted to bring that to trial. And unfortunately, what we saw as so-called justice, was simply a month on house arrest for the Israeli soldier who took his life.

ZR: The counter argument usually goes, and let me quote the Israeli Defense Force, that Hamas uses medics, children, journalists and even disabled people, as human shields. What is your take on this argument?

AM: Sure so human shield in a military term, if you look at the legal definition of human shield, that means that a militant is standing behind a civilian and using them as a shield while they are armed, right. We looked at 12 hours of footage of the Great March of Return. There was no militant there. There were no people with guns. And you can see yourself with the footage that we actually accumulated first-hand. I mean, have direct evidence for, that there are no "human shields" at the Great March. It's literally people standing there on their cell phones, filming, holding flags, chanting national slogans. And those are the people, unimpeded, no one around them, that are just completely gunned down and executed by Israeli snipers. So this argument is morally bankrupt. It has been disproven many, many times.

And, you know, the human shield rhetoric has actually been used by the US empire to dehumanize civilian populations that it's assaulting, back to the Korean War, Vietnam. This is used over and over again: Iraq. You can see this in corporate media propaganda that calls populations of human shields to kind of preempt what are going to be bloody atrocities and massacres committed against them. And it's quite disgraceful that this is still used today.

And it's quite disgraceful that people still believe it, that unarmed civilians are somehow cast away as human shields. You can just look at Rouzan al-Najjar, the case of the young female medic who was a strong feminist. The first female in the Great March of Return risking her life to save the wounded and injured on the front lines, who of course was also killed by Israeli snipers on June 1st 2018. After she was killed, the Israeli government actually came out with a propaganda video, maliciously doctored a clip that she had been interviewed for in Turkish media, where she says, "I am Rouzan al-Najjar, I am a human shield to save the wounded and injured on the front lines". And they maliciously cut that video to say, "I am Rouzan al-Najjar, I'm a human shield". How dare they? How dare they try to cut and edit her own words when she was a hero? She was a humanitarian aid worker. And she's someone that we can all look to around the world as what a paramedic should be. And actually just diminish her life to just say she was just another human shield for Hamas. And that's the way these people operate. Unfortunately, that's the way the Israeli government will operate, it doesn't matter whose lives are taken, Zain, they will always just disregard them as human shields and then they move on.

ZR: How has the reception been towards the documentary. Break it down in terms of corporate media and social media. And secondly, where can people view your documentary.

AM: So you can check out the documentary on <https://gazafightsforfreedom.com/>. We have it on Vimeo. We have it available in English and Arabic right now. And we also have DVDs for sale that you can check out and buy in agitator packs. Now, we took this documentary on a North American tour all across the US and Canada to an amazing reception; nearly sold out venues all across North America. People coming out in droves to support this issue. We were worried at the beginning because Gaza is not really in the news, you know, of course, unless some horrific bloodletting takes

place. But it was really incredible to see so many people and passions, so many people empowered to come out and support the film and support the message for Palestinian solidarity and Palestinian rights. I think after you watch the film, you cannot go away without completely understanding and being confident in the facts that Israel is flagrantly committing war crimes and violating international law on an astounding level.

And that's exactly what the documentary seeks to do with direct victim testimony and evidence that we've accumulated. And, you know, it's really important to no longer see this as a "both sides" issue. This is oppressed and oppressor. This is a victim and victimizer. So I think that we need to get out of that mindset and really kind of see the truth for what it is. But unfortunately, the corporate media, of course, has not covered this documentary *Zain*. I mean, of course, this is a third rail issue, not only in Germany but in the US as well. There's staunch bipartisan allegiance for the State of Israel. They kind of label people as antisemitic. You saw what happened at Ilan Omar for simply discussing the power of AIPAC and the Israeli lobby in this country. This is their game. This is pretty much all they have, to discredit people who dare to criticize the state of Israel and dare to discredit or call out this kind of political cover that the US provides for Israel. I mean, I think the rest of the world has really woken up to this fact. That's why we see unanimous BDS resolutions being passed in Ireland, Britain, South Africa and millions of people standing up for Palestinian rights in these countries. But I think the level of conditioning and propaganda and brainwashing that starts from childhood to American citizens is very hard to break out of because we're kind of taught from birth that Israel is our best ally in the Middle East, they can do no wrong, and Palestinians are essentially animals, right? And they're conflated with terrorists. And when we're in this perpetual war on terror, it's really hard to break out of that mindset.

But I do think that political consciousness is shifting on this issue. And that's why this tour was so successful. We see it dropping in polls across Democrats and Republicans. We see dwindling support for Israel. And I think Trump has really exposed this first-hand. I mean, his alliance with the fascistic Netanyahu government has really exposed that Israel is not progressive. They are not liberal. And they are in no way left wing. And in fact, there is no hope, really, for the left wing to take over. Israeli society is becoming increasingly right wing and increasingly fascistic. As I mentioned before, with the so-called opposition, Benny Gantz.

And that's what I think Trump has exposed with his unabashed support for settlements, essentially condoning settler terrorism. And basically the continued colonization and ethnic cleansing that we see in this settler colonial project. So people are waking up. It's becoming increasingly hard to attach yourself to the State of Israel if you're an artist. And we're seeing a lot of cultural isolation working with the BDS movement, and that that's the hope that I see, is that artists are dropping like flies. No one can really go to Tel Aviv without kind of apologizing to their fanbase like, oh, my God, I didn't know what I was getting into. And that's kind of the trajectory that we need to go: is the isolation and showing people that this is not progressive and you cannot call yourself a liberal if you support this rogue apartheid state.

ZR: I want to take a step back and touch upon this general issue that you also just mentioned. There's a lot of fear, especially in Germany, when they talk about Gaza. For example, providing voices to ordinary people, as you have in your documentary, because criticism of the State of Israel is conflated directly with antisemitism. The same situation is, however, not true when journalists in Germany criticize Saudi Arabia or Turkey. This criticism is not leveled as Islamophobia, for example. How, in your opinion, should journalists and activists make it clear they're not antisemites and are simply advocating for human rights?

AM: I think that it's first and foremost expanding your political consciousness to not be afraid of what you know is going to be disingenuous and dishonest smears from the political establishment. And

honestly, just stand armed with the truth behind you. Be confident with the facts. It doesn't matter what state is doing this. I mean, I encourage Americans to be engaged because we can change what the US government does first and foremost, because we're American citizens, and any government who is essentially giving money to the state of Israel to conduct these atrocities. I encourage those people, first and foremost to stand up, stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Palestine and follow their lead to take action in terms of things like BDS and join local Palestine solidarity groups, because these are the governments that are condoning this. These are the governments that are providing political cover for these crimes. And that's why we need to wake up to what's going on. But it doesn't matter what states are doing these things. If anyone was doing these things, I would stand up and condemn them, because they are horrific crimes against humanity and they need to be stopped. And we need to stop living in fear of whatever we're called. When we speak with just complete facts and honesty and dare to humanize Palestinians, Palestinians who are being assaulted every single day, it's time that we stop this nonsense, and it's time that we stand for the right thing, and stand on the right side of history.

ZR: But to return to current issues again. And this time I want to talk about US politics. There are a lot of candidates running in the Democratic Party. There's a lot of diversity, we have Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Joe Biden, Tulsi Gabbard, etc. Could you provide your assessment of the most notable candidates in the Democratic Party and their policies? And how do you view them in terms of the anti-imperialistic anti-war perspective?

AM: Well, it's funny that you said there's a lot of diversity, because I don't see that. I think that what's funny about the primary today is that it's pretty much Bernie Sanders, and then everyone who's kind of mimicking Bernie Sanders, I mean, he far outflanks every single Democratic contender on the left. He is by far the most progressive candidate. For 40 years he has been on the right side of history, fighting for things like LGBTQ rights, abortion, fighting against racism, fighting against climate change, fighting against special interests, the military industrial complex and fighting for health care. All of these things kind of became politically convenient for other politicians who we see as political contenders attaching their names to very, very recently. So I think that really says it all. I mean, there's one person who I think is the most honest broker and who has a 40-year track record to prove it. So everyone else I see as kind of just imitations of what the real thing is.

Look, Bernie Sanders is not perfect. He has a lot of problems when it comes to foreign policy. But I think that his stance on Palestine – you can take, for example – shows how much he can be pushed from the left. Four years ago, Bernie Sanders in the Democratic debate with Hillary Clinton could barely muster the word disproportionate when he was talking about the bombing campaign in 2014, where 2200 Palestinians were killed. Fast forward four years later, he is talking about withholding military aid from Israel. He's talking about the two state solution within the 1967 borders. That means withdrawing illegal settlements for the last 50 years to the 1967 borders. I mean, that's a big deal. And he's the only one who kind of dares to humanize Palestinians in a way that no one else really has. And I think that that really shows you how much the political consciousness has shifted on this issue. How much leftists on the ground have pushed the dialog forward and how much he's really listening and able to be swayed.

And that's why him versus the rest of the contenders makes it about: I am the organizer-in-chief, this isn't about me, it's about us. It's about millions of people coming to the streets and pushing policies like Medicare for all forward. Because he kind of acknowledges the limitations, I think, of the executive branch; that there are going to be a lot of roadblocks with judges, with the Senate, with the staunch Republican majority that we see, that's going to be hard to overcome. And he's saying, look, without millions, tens of millions of Americans coming out and supporting this and shutting things down, we're never going to make this happen. And so I think that really speaks to how much we can do. And that's what gives me hope, I think for the future, is seeing that the youth are waking up,

they're rejecting the corporate media, they're rejecting the two party dictatorship – is what I like to call it. And they're really seeing that we need to make the future that we want to see. We need to have a utopian vision of what we want. And certainly the two party system, the stale system that pushes neoliberalism and imperialism is going to leave a disastrous path ahead and a disastrous future for our children. And, you know, I think a lot of Democratic contenders have good things about them, but really it's incomparable when you're looking at who is really the only one willing to call out global capitalism and the special interests that perpetuate these endless wars.

ZR: You already answered my next question, but I pose it again so we can hit it all the way home. The question is, we just talked about Bolivia, Julian Assange, the situation in Gaza. I don't want to leave our viewers because acTVism was founded based on solutions and giving people hope for the future. We don't want to leave our viewers in a depressed state. How can we, at this point of this conversation, give people hope going forward?

AM: Well, I think that polls show, and just the masses show that people, especially the youth – and this is where the future lies. Who are the younger generations? Who are we going to leave our future to? They are saying no more. They are rejecting the unanimity of the corporate media. They are rejecting this bipartisan stranglehold in our government. They are rejecting what has been the official religion of the United States for the last hundred plus years, which is global capitalism and capitalism can do no wrong. And they are finally rejecting that dogma and saying, wait a minute, maybe we can have a different future. Wait a minute, maybe capitalism is actually the overarching system that is driving the vast inequality, that is driving the climate crisis, that is driving the fact that these wars are driven for profit and to essentially protect capital around the world.

And the fact that millions of young people are literally shutting things down, staging sit ins, staging blockades, spreading political consciousness on social media, becoming their own citizen journalists, is incredibly inspiring to me. And I'm sorry, but I think that Bernie Sanders' Movement speaks to that kind of energy that we need to be open to and tap into. No, I don't think there's a savior in 2020. But what I do think is a savior is the fact that there's millions of people waking up to the corrupt nature of the system and realizing that we need to revolutionize. We need to completely revolutionize the system. We need to completely construct a utopian vision of what we want to see happen and no longer fall prey to whatever is being laid out before us. And we need to empower ourselves. I mean, the system wants us to feel disenfranchised. They want us to feel alone. They want us to feel like we can't do a damn thing. That's exactly by design. The second you get out and you're involved in this struggle and you connect with people who are acting and doing things on the streets you feel empowered. You feel like you have a place.

And I encourage everyone to get out of their comfort zone and do just that, because nothing is going to change if you feel like you can't make a change. And that's what they want us to do, they want us to fall down and die. And we can't do that. We have to stand up and live. And demand a better future and demand a life worth living, and that doesn't just stop and start with Americans. It doesn't just stop and start with Germany or Europe. It starts and stops with all of the countries that are being persecuted, that are being oppressed by this global system. By imperialism.

It's time that we really acknowledge what's going on, link our struggles together and acknowledge how we have a very important role to take action, Zain. And that's why I appreciate acTVism Munich and that's why I appreciate grassroots independent media for playing that role. It is a very crucial role and we need to fill that vacuum of propaganda and show things with a kind of leftist lens and show people how we got here. How we got here, because if we don't understand how we got here, we can't change where we're going.

ZR: Abby Martin, documentary filmmaker and investigative journalist, thank you for joining us today.

AM: Thank you so much for having me.

ZR: And thank you guys for tuning in. Don't forget to subscribe to our YouTube channel by clicking on the bell below, and to donate so we can continue to produce independent and non-profit news and analysis. My name is Zain Raza. See you guys next time.

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