



Hamas' Attack on Israel & the Roots of the Conflict - International Lawyer Dimitri Lascaris

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Zain Raza (ZR): Thank you for tuning in today and welcome back to another episode of The Source. I'm your host Zain Raza. And today I'll be talking with Dimitri Lascaris about the recent conflict in Israel and Palestine. Dimitri Lascaris is an independent journalist and lawyer who specializes in class action, civil rights and international law. In 2020, he ran for the Green Party leadership in Canada finishing second. Dimitri, welcome back.

Dimitri Lascaris (DL): Thank you. It's a pleasure, as always, Zain.

ZR: On October 7th, Hamas, which has ruled the Gaza Strip since 2007, launched a surprise attack on Israel and successfully breached its defenses. This surprise attack is considered one of the worst breaches of Israeli defenses since the 1973 war against Arab armies. In the initial attack, some 1200 Israeli civilians, including 200 soldiers, were attacked and killed by Hamas and around 199 were taken hostage. In response, Israel has launched operation Iron Sword, which includes heavy airstrikes in Gaza. A ground military invasion is expected to begin any time soon. In the north, Israel is also preparing for a possible conflict with Hezbollah, a militant group based in Lebanon and supported by Iran. In Gaza, 2600 people have been killed by Israeli airstrikes, one third of them being children. How do you assess Hamas' attack on Israeli civilians as well as Israel's response there after?

DL: Well, there unquestionably have been hundreds of civilians who have been killed on the Israeli side, on October 7th, the precise circumstances in which they were killed, however, remain murky. So, for example, Electronic Intifada published yesterday, a report on an interview done by an Israeli settler who was for a number of hours held hostage by Hamas militants on October 7th. And she reported with a high level of confidence based on what she saw and experienced, that a number of her fellow hostages were killed by Israeli forces. Basically what happened was when the forces tried to attack the Hamas militants who at that

point had a number of civilians in their custody, they basically mowed down everybody. And she stated with absolute confidence that this is what happened in her particular case. Now, there were many other civilians who died to the extent that these people were intentionally targeted by Hamas militants or other militants, because this wasn't just an operation by Hamas. Everybody talks about Hamas, but there were several militant groups participating in this operation. Of course, any person of conscience would condemn this unequivocally, certainly would not condone it.

But I found very moving and interesting, an interview that Dr. Norman Finkelstein, whose parents were actual inmates at concentration camps during the Holocaust and survived, about this very question. And Dr. Finkelstein courageously asked, and quite movingly, I might add, that when you are in the position that the people of Gaza are in, which is to say that you've spent your entire life in what is, in effect, a concentration camp and you have been deprived many times of the essentials of life and repeatedly subjected to bombardment and all peaceful avenues have been closed off to you – for example, in 2018, the people of Gaza, thousands of them peacefully participated in the Great March of Return, and thousands of them were wounded by Israeli snipers and other Israeli munitions. Medical personnel, reporters, disabled persons, children were shot dead. This was a peaceful initiative. And when you have countries like Canada submitting letters to the International Criminal Court urging it not to take jurisdiction over the case of Israeli war crimes, you effectively and of course, the so-called peace process in Israel is dead, has been dead for years. That the Israeli government and Netanyahu in particular, have declared their determination not to allow the Palestinians to have a sovereign state – you reach a level of desperation where the entire population of Israel, at least the adults and those who are living on stolen land, look like enemies to you. And in your desperation and your rage, you can commit horrendous acts. And I think it's important for us to put this in context and not forget these basic principles and considerations. Every single one of us who recoils, quite understandably, the killing of civilians by Hamas and other Palestinian militants should ask ourselves this: What would we do if we were in their position, if we had spent our entire lives living under this brutal racist oppression? Might we ourselves be driven to acts of desperation and extreme violence? Speaking for myself, I would like to believe that I wouldn't be. But I can't say in good conscience that I would not be, especially if I saw my children being killed, you know, deprived of the basic essentials of life, driven to points of trauma and my fellow people being constantly ground under the jackboot of militarism and oppression. So it's a tremendously sad moment certainly for the Israeli civilians who were killed.

But now we come to today, Zain. And now the, you know, the number of children alone who have been massacred in Gaza since October 7th exceeds a thousand, well over a thousand. This happened in the space of a week. The deadliest assault on Gaza up until this current assault was the 2014 assault. And approximately half as many children were killed over an eight week period. So they have more than doubled the massacre of children in a week's time in the current assault. And this was preceded by statements from the Israeli defense minister

that he was lifting all restrictions on the Israeli military. There were no more red lines. The laws of war have become meaningless. He declared that there would be no court martials, no military courts examining the crimes of the Israeli military. Not that they do with any meaningful effect in the past. But he's even abandoned the pretense of abiding by the laws of war. And he referred to the people of Gaza as human animals. What we're witnessing now in retaliation is a genocide. A Holocaust scholar and a genocide scholar of Jewish origin at Stockton University said that this is a textbook case of genocide. And as a lawyer, I completely agree with him. That's what's happening, and our governments are facilitating it.

ZR: A few days after the Hamas attack, Israel cut off electricity and water supply in Gaza and told 1.1 million Palestinians in Gaza to flee to the south. The statement from the Israeli Defense Force, which I have translated, reads as follows quote, "Those who choose to remain in Gaza are putting themselves and their families in danger and serving the interests of Hamas. Leave Gaza City, go to the south. We will continue the attack with great intensity", unquote. In the south of Gaza, the humanitarian situation is out of control as there are very few hospitals and shelters there for the people that are already living there. And now on top of that, 1 million people are arriving from the north. The only way out is the Rafah border crossing, which has been closed by Egypt, causing extreme shortages of food, water, fuel and medical supplies. Egypt claims to have closed a supply route for security reasons as Israel bombed the crossing several times, killing 49 civilians, which even the German media outlet the Tagesschau confirm today. Egypt is demanding security guarantees from Israel before opening the supply route, which Israel has not provided thus far. How do you assess Israel's action and the situation south of the Gaza Strip?

DL: Well, there's no more water or food or electricity in the parts of the Gaza Strip to which these devastated refugees are being told to go than there is in the northern part of the Gaza Strip. Sending them to the southern part of the Gaza Strip will not solve the humanitarian crisis. In fact, it will exacerbate it, in part because once they move out into the open, they're easy targets for the Israeli military. And in fact, the Israeli military attacked a civilian convoy, at least one, killing 70 people, mostly women and children. An Israeli security source confirmed to a blogger, Richard Silverstein, that, in fact, an Israeli aircraft struck that civilian convoy. So this is also a precursor. Let's be very clear to what's happening here. The Israeli government has been quite blunt in its ultimate objective, which is to force all the people of Gaza into the Sinai desert. Getting them to the south of Gaza, where they're crammed up against the border of Egypt is a precursor to doing just that, which would be a massive act of ethnic cleansing. And furthermore, it would create an even worse humanitarian crisis. Can you imagine 1 to 2 million people flowing into the desert, dehydrated, on the verge of starvation, exposed to the elements, no structures to protect them, and a government that is hostile to them. This is an act of utter monstrosity.

Again, I come back to what I said earlier. This is a textbook case of genocide and any person of conscience, whatever you may feel about the attacks that were mounted by Hamas,

however much you may rightly condemn the killing of civilians on the Israeli side, any person of conscience has to stand up at this moment and demand an end to the slaughter and an immediate introduction of massive amounts of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.

ZR: According to an article by the Times of Israel, an Egyptian intelligence official says Israel ignored repeated warnings of something big about to come. The article further reads and let me quote a passage here quote, "Egypt's intelligence minister, General Abbas Kamel, personally called Netanyahu only ten days before the massive attack that Gazans were likely to do. Something unusual, a terrible operation, according to ynetnews", unquote. Not only is Israel considered a leader in surveillance and security technology, but its intelligence services are lauded as among the best in the world. Why do you think they were unable to prevent this attack from happening?

DL: Well, there are several possibilities here. Of course, one possibility is that Netanyahu understood that the casualties, both military and civilian, would provide him with a pretext to do precisely what is being done now, which is basically to ethnically cleanse the Gaza Strip of Palestinians. I don't know whether that's, in fact, what happened, but that certainly is a possibility that we have to consider seriously based on what we know. But there's another possibility. And the other possibility is that Netanyahu, you know, and there is a number of reports supporting this hypothesis and his defense minister directed forces that would normally be assigned to defend, quote unquote, Israel from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank in order to protect the violent and armed Israeli settlers there who are constantly expanding their dispossession of Palestinians and their theft of Palestinian land. And therefore, the Gaza border regions were very lightly defended, inadequately defended. That's a second possibility. And another possibility is that this is sheer hubris and that, you know, that the Israeli government has gotten away with brutalizing the people of Gaza for so long and to such a degree that they never imagined that something like this could happen.

I've said this before many times. I think I've said this in discussions with you, Zain, impunity makes people stupid. And when you don't have to face the consequences of your actions for a prolonged period of time, you let your guard down. You think that you're invulnerable and disasters happen. And that's another hypothesis here. And it could be some combination of those things. One thing is for sure, whatever may have caused this, the aura of invincibility that the Israeli military and security forces have successfully projected for decades has exploded. And this is going to have very serious consequences, I think, for a deal going forward.

I must say that, you know, in the last week, I'm here now in Greece, on October 8th or 9th, I believe it was, I was in Athens. And we're not far from Israel, of course. And now I'm near my home in the south of Greece, in Kalamata. I have seen all over Athens and the south of Greece Israelis. A sudden huge influx of Israelis. I saw it yesterday at a restaurant here where I normally dine near the sea, near my home, an entire Israeli family, three generations,

grandparents, parents, several children. I'd never seen that before at this particular establishment. A lot of people of Jewish origin, Jewish Israeli citizens of Israel, had fled the country in the last week. And who could blame them? Because what may be about to befall Israel is a devastating multi-front war.

Whatever may happen, there is going to be a lot of questions asked about this mythology that, you know, Israel constitutes a sanctuary for the Jewish people. That mythology has been used to persuade large numbers of people of Jewish origin to emigrate from Europe, North America, Russia, other parts of the world to Israel to help the government combat what it regards as a demographic war against the Palestinian people. But what happens now? What happens if, in fact the Jewish people in the diaspora, many of them have already realized this, but there's a great awakening that Israel, in fact, is not a safe place for the Jewish people because there are many, many angry Palestinians and other Arabs surrounding Israel, understandably so. How is Israel going to continue to maintain dominance over the Palestinian population? So I think that however this plays out, what happened the past week is going to have dramatic impacts in the medium and long term for the apartheid regime's project of dispossessing and oppressing the Palestinian people.

ZR: I've been observing the Tagesschau, Germany's leading primetime news channel, very closely from the day of Hamas' attack until today, October 17th. It has not even once mentioned Israel's long standing policy, which you stated already towards Palestine, which Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Human Rights Office have called apartheid and occupation. According to The Guardian, even many prominent Jewish voices, including a former head of Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency, have stated that Israel is imposing apartheid on Palestinians. Israel's own largest human rights organization, B'Tselem, has also stated that Israel is guilty of apartheid. In your opinion, does Israeli occupation, apartheid and settlement expansion play a role in this conflict?

DL: Without a question. You know, people do not spontaneously do the things that the Palestinian militants did. I don't think that is the nature of anybody, frankly. People aren't born that way. They don't behave that way out of a natural impulse. People are driven to commit these acts of desperation and sometimes engage in horrific violence against civilians because of injustices that they've suffered, resentments that they've accumulated, feelings of despair that have poisoned their lives. How can anybody, any serious intellectual, any fair minded person claim with a straight face that decades of dispossession and oppression and discriminatory treatment have had no impact, have played no role in the violence that has occurred within the past week or any of the violence that, you know, a minority of the Palestinian population has engaged in over the years. Of course, that has played a determinative role. And the only way we're going to solve this crisis is by addressing the underlying injustice.

And I just want to point out one thing, because people, we often, as you just did and I do the same thing, we recite the laundry list of human rights experts and organizations that have judged Israel to be an apartheid state. I just want to give people one concrete example of this apartheid system and how it operates. In the West Bank, which is under international law, occupied Palestinian territory, and has been set aside by the entire international community for a sovereign Palestinian state one day, there are two legal systems. There's one legal system for the Palestinian people who were born there and who spent their entire life there and that legal system is the system of military justice, so-called military justice, which anyone will tell you, including pro-Israel members of Israeli society, lacks the relatively robust due process protections of the Israeli domestic legal system. What legal system do they apply to the settlers in the West Bank who are there illegally, who are participating in a war crime? They apply the Israeli domestic system, which contains or includes relatively robust due process protections. So you have two legal systems, one for the people who are there lawfully, who were born there, have spent their entire lives there, and another one which is much more favorable for the people who are there illegally. And I say illegally, this is the judgment of the U.N. Security Council, the International Court of Justice, and virtually all of the governments of the West that the settlements are illegal. How is that not apartheid? Any sense? And I could go on and on, Zain, and give you plenty of other examples of how this apartheid system operates. Now, are we to believe that this system is not influencing the behavior of the Palestinian people? I mean, that's preposterous, it's an insult to our intelligence.

ZR: Even though you provided the entire background context, in Germany, especially during this time of crisis in Israel and Palestine, where our foreign minister has said, "We are all Israel", quote unquote, it's still now considered providing context understanding as equating it with justifying what Hamas did. How and why do you think the mainstream media and establishment politicians are equating these two things?

DL: Because they don't want us to talk about the causes. So they constantly will level against us. They did this with respect to Ukraine. You know, anybody who had the audacity to say, Look, people were warning for decades that if you expanded NATO to include Ukraine, that the Russians would view that as a very serious threat to their security and react, perhaps quite violently. Anybody who said that was accused of justifying and approving and even cheerleading Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But that's preposterous. Understanding the cause of something is not the same thing as wanting that something to happen. Any simple minded person should be able to grasp this. And this is exactly the same thing in the case of Israel. If we want to understand why sometimes and again, I stress it's a small minority of the Palestinian population engaging in acts of violence against Israeli civilians, surely if we want to put an end to it, we should look at the causes. And are we seriously going to contend that decades of oppression, brutalization, the torture of Palestinian children, all of this has nothing to do with the way this small segment of Palestinian society acts. Basically, what they're trying to do by equating understanding the causes with justifying the acts is to silence us and

to prevent us from addressing the underlying causes. But at the end of the day, that is simply going to cause more suffering not only for Palestinians, but also for Israelis.

ZR: You mentioned Ukraine. And when Russia annexed Ukrainian territory, as it did in 2022, the West followed it up not only with rhetoric like condemnations, but also with sanctions. However, Israel has been doing this for decades, even when this extreme right-wing government came into power last year, it announced soon thereafter that it would be annexing large parts of the West Bank and build new housing settlements for only Jews. And just to add to that, the US Foreign Minister, Anthony Blinken, criticized this even, and said that we condemn these sort of actions of settlement expansion. Back in 2020, the Deutsche Welle reported that Germany and France would take concrete steps if Israel continues to annex Palestinian land. Why do you think there's this double standard in one thing, like Ukraine, where the West follows it up with sanctions and on the other hand, Palestine, where we only heard lofty words but never concrete sanctions?

DL: Well, let me just add to your point. It's not only that they don't impose sanctions, they actually reward Israel. So, for example, Israel receives \$3.8 billion a year in military aid from the United States government. The government of Canada, where I'm from, it accords to these settlements, these illegal settlements. The government of Canada itself recognizes that settlements are a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, an obstacle to peace. And under the Canada Israel Free Trade Agreement, it confers preferential tariff treatment on products that are produced in the settlements, which is basically making the production of products in these illegal settlements more profitable for the war criminals who live there and who are violating international law. So they also reward Israel, not only do they not sanction Israel. Why do they do this? This is a critically important question. It's all about power at the end of the day. We have to understand that this is about power. They don't really care about providing the Jewish people with a sanctuary. They didn't particularly care about that in World War Two, frankly, and they didn't care about that prior to World War Two. The whole reason why Israel exists, in my opinion, was to establish a permanent U.S./Western military presence in the heart of the region that has the highest caliber and quantity of conventional oil supplies in the world. We all know how critically important it is to a functioning economy to have abundant access to affordable fossil fuels. These exist in massive quantities in the Middle East, and they established Israel for the purpose— it was effectively a European/American colonial outpost which has been armed to the teeth ever since. That's why they give it \$3.8 billion a year. It isn't for the protection of the Jewish people, for our brothers and sisters in the Jewish community, I'm sad to say, this is all a smokescreen. This is about dominance of the Middle East. So they're never going to impose sanctions on Israel for the simple purpose that Israel serves their purposes of pursuing hegemony within that region.

And this is exactly why they imposed sanctions on Russia. It wasn't for the purposes of democracy, international human rights. It said Russia is a geopolitical rival and in order to weaken Russia and prevent it from opposing whatever agenda the United States and its allies

might have in that part of the world, they imposed sanctions, had nothing to do with, you know, the noble principles that they invoke. This is the way you make sense of the double standard of the obvious hypocrisy. At the end of the day, it's all motivated by the pursuit of power.

ZR: Dimitri Lascaris, independent journalist and lawyer, thank you so much for your time today.

DL: Thank you, Zain.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. We urge all of our viewers to join us on our alternative platforms on Telegram, Rumble and our podcast called Podbean. Especially now at times of crisis when we are providing an alternative opinion and perspective and providing context to the situation, there's no bigger threat to us than censorship and shadow banning. So we ask all of our viewers as a precaution, please join today. Also, if you are watching our channel regularly, make sure to donate a small amount today via PayPal, Patreon or bank account. We are a small, independent and nonprofit media organization that does not take any money from corporations, governments and even does not allow advertisement. All with the goal of providing you with information that is free from external influence. We have 140,000 subscribers and only a few percent donate to us on a regular basis. So please check out the links in the description to our donation platforms and donate today. I'm your host Zain Raza, see you all next time.

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