



Israel and Palestine Conflict - Everything You need to Know

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Zain Raza (ZR): Welcome back and thank you for joining us for another episode of The Source. I'm your host, Zain Raza. And today, I'll be talking to economist, independent journalist and author Dr. Shir Hever about the current situation in Israel and Palestine. Dr. Shir Hever is also the military embargo coordinator of the Boycott National Committee of the BDS movement. Shir Hever, welcome back to the show.

Shir Hever (SH): Thanks for having me, Zain.

ZR: On October 7th, Hamas, which has ruled the Gaza Strip since 2007, launched a surprise attack on Israel breaching its defenses. The surprise attack is considered one of the worst breaches of the Israeli defenses since the 1973 war against Arab armies. In response, Israel launched Operation Iron Sword, which includes heavy airstrikes on the Gaza Strip and also drafted 300,000 reservists. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has ordered a complete siege of Gaza and stated, quote, "There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel. Everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly", unquote. Israel is expected to begin a ground military operation in Gaza anytime soon and many expect the situation to worsen much further. As of today, 900 Israelis have been killed and hundreds of civilians have been taken hostage. In Gaza more than 500 people have perished. Can you comment on these developments and put them into context?

SH: The context is a colonial context of unequal power distribution. The Israelis were taken completely by surprise because they expected that Palestinians are weakened under control and the Palestinians have proven that they're not. And it's not just one political party, it's several groups in Palestine who've organized this attack. And indeed, they didn't do it by accident on the anniversary of 50 years for the 1973 war, the October war, which was also a

fiasco for the Israeli intelligence, for the Israeli military, and a big embarrassment. But let's put things in perspective. 50 years ago, the Israeli army faced conventional armies in a large war, and now they are facing a militia of an indigenous population of Palestine, which is only using makeshift weapons that they've organized together. And nevertheless they were taken by surprise. And it is a very big blow to the Israeli economy, to Israeli society. You mentioned the statement by Yoav Gallant, the minister of defense. This is part of the whole series of genocidal, racist statements by the Israeli leadership, which are also echoed in the Israeli public, completely dehumanizing Palestinians calling for collective punishment. The siege on Gaza is indeed a collective punishment. There are 2 million people, more than 2 million who live in Gaza, and they are all punished. And there is indiscriminate bombing, destruction of houses. And so it is, of course, not anything that you could call a defense by the Israeli state. It is more of a vengeance. And vengeance is exactly the opposite of justice.

ZR: The German media and political establishment consider Hamas to be an Islamic terrorist organization. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock made the following comments after the Hamas attack. And let me quote her here: "Hamas terror must stop immediately. The German government stands in solidarity with Israel. Israel has the right under international law to defend itself against terror". Even the Tagesschau, Germany's leading primetime news channel, states in every single report that it publishes on the Israel-Palestinian conflict that Hamas is an Islamist terrorist organization, without providing much context. For those who don't know much about Gaza politics, can you provide some context about the political spectrum there and then specifically address Hamas and how it came to power?

SH: The answer should be focused on a German complicity with the Israeli crimes. It didn't start now. Israel has existed for 75 years. Those are 75 years of apartheid, of occupation and settler colonialism and the German government, from the moment that they established diplomatic relations with Israel even before that, have sent weapons to Israel and supported the Israeli oppression of Palestinians. The statement from Baerbock is very much to be expected because this is exactly the level of complicity that Germany has shown before and there is no surprise there. But who can take them seriously now? Really... Because when the German government was willing to turn a blind eye against massive violations of human rights and international law by the Israeli forces, when there was an attempt to hold Israeli war criminals accountable by the International Criminal Court, it was Germany which said that it will oppose such a move and try to prevent the application of international law in Palestine and to protect the rights of Palestinians to life and to be safe. So now, when Germany is making this completely unilateral, one sided statement on the side of Israel, then I don't think anyone can take them seriously. I think we need to look to other countries and to the global community, which is now seeing that the West is acting with complete hypocrisy.

ZR: Many young people who are watching the situation from Germany are shocked by the scenes that took place at a music festival that was taking place near the border between Israel and Gaza. Hamas stormed the music festival, immediately opened fire. At least 260 people

died at the festival and many have been taken hostage. The families of the victims are calling for negotiating talks with Hamas. Hamas, in turn, is threatening to execute the hostages if Israel does not issue warnings before conducting airstrikes. Now, to put this into perspective, many people, young people on Facebook and social media are saying that the context is irrelevant and what the situation is, is irrelevant; this sort of action should be condemned on its own and solely based on the act that Hamas did and everything else is irrelevant. What do you think about this sort of stance? Does the context provide a justification or is it serving to provide more of an understanding? And how should this incident be evaluated for young people?

SH: When we're talking about human lives, we cannot speak in black and white terms. Context is always relevant. You cannot say that context is irrelevant. But that doesn't mean that violations of human rights can be justified by the context. So these are two different things. My own family lives in Israel, and of course, I'm affected. My friends are affected. Everyone is affected. And everyone has a right to be alive and to be safe. And even those Israelis who have turned a blind eye to the siege in Gaza and to the suffering of Palestinians under Israeli siege for decades and the violation of their basic human rights, those Israelis who are complicit with those crimes and turned a blind eye and even participated in those crimes, that doesn't mean that if they now suffer the same fate, this is justice. Again, vengeance and justice is not the same thing. So the attack against civilians is never allowed under international law. Israel has been doing that for decades with impunity. The European Union, specifically Germany, did everything in its power to prevent those criminals from being punished. But of course, the fact that they were not punished doesn't mean that their lives are worthless and they can be killed or kidnaped. And so that is not punishment. That is something that is completely separate from that issue. But yes, separate, it doesn't mean irrelevant, right? We have to see the whole picture. We have to ask ourselves where was Germany, when Palestinians did everything in their power to use legal methods and peaceful methods to protect their rights? How could the German government ban Palestinians from holding peaceful demonstrations to commemorate the Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe from 1948? How is it possible that the German government tried to criminalize the BDS movement, the Boycott Divestment Sanctions movement, which is a human rights and a grassroots movement to hold Israel accountable according to international law, without harming any human beings and opposing any forms of racism. The German government has taken the wrong side of history on all of these issues, and now again, they're taking the wrong side of history. So, yes, let's also remember this context.

ZR: As a journalist, I get most of the information from the mainstream media, especially from the Tagesschau Germany's primetime news channel. I do follow a lot of alternative and independent media, but to make sure I'm not part of a bubble, I mostly inform myself through the mainstream media. One observation I made is that the Tagesschau, for example, rarely, if at all, reports on the atrocities Israel commits on a daily basis in Palestine, whether in Gaza or the West Bank. It is just not the frequency of coverage that is lacking, but also the qualitative

aspect. And by that I mean in-depth coverage of the victims, which includes mothers, children, families, interviewing them about the suffering, their grief and daily struggles. All these atrocities are forgotten and brushed aside as soon as the situation spirals out of control and not taken into account when it comes to explaining the overall context. Can you talk about what Palestinians experienced before the war broke out and whether you think this is related to the recent escalation?

SH: Yeah, well, you started your question by speaking about journalism, and the first casualty in war is the truth. And this is a very famous saying, and in this case, it is very much the case. There is a lot of fake news, a lot of misinformation. And I've actually been spending all of my time in the last couple of days going through reports that appear on social media, but also on established newspapers, mainstream newspapers and fact checking them. And a lot of them are wrong. The most prominent Israeli newspapers have published information which turned out to be wrong or failed to publish information that people on the ground see with their own eyes. And this is the reality of war; people use misinformation. The German media has always been completely blind when it comes to Palestinians. They only see things through the perspective of Israelis and when they want to have a report about the situation on the ground, they will ask Israeli officials, even the Israeli government, for comment on their reporting, but they don't ask Palestinians. They don't ask any Palestinian organization. So I was a bit surprised to see that the German media did not respond to the fact that Yoav Gallant made this very racist statement that you mentioned at the beginning calling Palestinians human animals. The president of Colombia Gustavo Petro said that this is a statement that reminds me of what the Nazis said about Jews. And indeed dehumanizing people, calling them animals is a first step towards legitimizing the mass killing, indiscriminate killing of a whole group of people. And it is, in fact, the path towards genocide. No one should know this better than Germans. So let's talk about journalism. Let's talk about what's happening. You asked me about what Palestinians were experiencing that we didn't hear so much in the news. And indeed, there has been this kind of misconception, as if all of the Israeli military is focused on oppressing Palestinians in the West Bank, as if the Gaza situation is completely forgotten. And it is, in fact, an Israeli policy to keep Palestinians trapped in complete closure, complete denial of their freedom of movement during the Jewish holidays. And it was a Jewish holiday. The Jewish holiday was Sukkot. So Palestinians were not able to go to work, were not able to go to hospitals, and they were under a military closure, as they are every Jewish holiday, because that's the Israeli policy. So when the Palestinian attack came, Israelis were taken by surprise because they have become so used to the idea that Palestinians cannot move during the holidays. And they, of course, forgot that this policy is only possible through constant oppression and military force. But it's not because Palestinians just don't want to move on the Jewish holidays. And so that is one of the things that happened leading up to this attack. Of course, there were also a lot of Jewish provocations in the Al-Aqsa mosque, which is a very holy place to Muslims just during the holiday, which was very offensive to Muslims. And it was also used as an excuse for the attack at that particular time. But I do think that one of the things that we can understand from this is about how people perceive reality.

Palestinians know exactly what they are suffering. They know the reality that they have to live in. And they also understand Israeli society very well. Palestinians understand what Israelis are going through when they are reading and thinking about the war of 1973, which happened exactly 50 years before that attack and how this affects the political situation inside Israel. The analysis is staggering in its complexity and depth. And this is only the oppressed who have this ability to see both sides and to see themselves and to see their oppressors. The oppressors can never see the oppressed. So even though the Israelis have better weapons and more money and more soldiers, but without the ability to see Palestinians and to understand what Palestinians are going through every day, living under Israeli oppression, surveillance, torture, administrative detention without a trial, expulsion from their homeland, separation from their family, denial of basic right, Israelis cannot see that. And because they cannot see that they were taken by surprise and they were not able to prevent this attack.

ZR: You have already touched upon alternative forms and peaceful forms of movements. But I want to dig deeper into this. Lots of movements have started both domestically and internationally, to end Israeli apartheid and occupation. However, they failed to make a substantial difference up until now. Can you talk about these movements in detail? Why do you think they failed to provide a viable alternative to armed resistance like Hamas? And how do they fit in the bigger picture?

SH: Well, I don't think that they failed. I think that the problem was to understand who is the target audience of the peaceful human rights based movements, such as the BDS movement? Who are we trying to convince? This is a call for international solidarity. So the Palestinians cannot simply convince the Israelis to give up the occupation. There is no precedent in history for an oppressor just giving up their power and giving up control of the land. And there has to be pressure. And the pressure can be through peaceful and political means, through boycott, economic means, and through legal means, which is what most Palestinians wanted and still want today. This is the path of this movement. But the problem is the complicity of the West with Israeli oppression. Even in Europe, even in Germany, the public mostly respects Palestinian rights and wants the oppression to end, but the governments don't. And because the Israeli military trades with a lot of countries selling tools of oppression and tools of surveillance to authoritarian governments, these governments have an interest in maintaining the Israeli apartheid system in place. So they continue to support Israel in the United Nations. They support Israel economically and give legitimacy to this system of oppression. So unfortunately, this movement, the democratic based movement and human rights based movement and liberal movement was not very successful in getting authoritarian regimes to stop supporting Israel and was not very successful in ending the deep rooted complicity of the West, even, of course, not just authoritarian regimes, but also democratic regimes in the West from supporting Israel. I think it is very unfortunate that for a lot of European citizens they can support political parties that they perceive to be okay on many different levels, except on Palestine, and they're willing to make that compromise. And I think a lot of the voters of the Green Party in Germany, you mentioned Baerbock, are exactly

like that. They say, Okay, well, we don't want apartheid to continue in Palestine. And the German government and the Green Party among them are terrible on that issue and they completely support Israeli apartheid, but we want to vote for them for other reasons. But in the end, they actually pay a price for this compromise. Because the failure of these parties to represent the public will on the issue of Palestine means that these surveillance tools that Israel is exporting are eventually turned against European citizens. It means that money that we need here in Germany for social services, for education, for health, is instead going on weapons. And Germany is now spending three and a half billion Euros to buy the Arrow 3 system from Israel and finance the Israeli war machine. We've just seen that these weapons are useless; that all these fancy weapons that Israel is selling, we're not able to stop the attack. But that is not going to convince the German government to cancel the deal. And so that means that the citizens of Germany are paying a price for this complicity by their own government.

ZR: Since Russia invaded Ukraine 2022, many Western politicians and media figures have been quite vocal about invoking international law to condemn Russia's actions. For example, recently at the 78th United Nations General Assembly, United States President Joe Biden stated in his speech when it came to Russia's war on Ukraine, quote, "But I ask you this: If we abandon the core principles of the United Nations charter to appease an aggressor, can any member state in this body feel confident that they are protected? If we allow Ukraine to be carved up, is the independence of any nation secure?" Ukraine, similar to Palestine, where Israel is the occupying force, is also currently under occupation by Russia. Ukraine, like in Palestine, has also been targeting civilian targets in Russia with hundreds of drones. In Gaza, Hamas uses rockets to target civilian areas. Even Ukrainian Intelligence Representative Andrey Yusov told the New York Times in August, when it came to its drone attacks targeting Russian territory: "The Russian elite and ordinary Russians now understand that the war is not somewhere far away on the territory of Ukraine, which they hate". In your view, why do you think there's such a double standard in terms of international law and condemnation when we compare the cases of Palestine and Ukraine? Can we even make this comparison without falling into relativism and trivialization?

SH: Well, I agree with part of what you said and strongly disagree with another part. I agree with you that there is hypocrisy and double standards. I agree with you, of course, that for countries that are not members of NATO, when they see the hypocrisy in NATO in condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but supporting the Israeli occupation, colonization and oppression of Palestine, then this is, of course, hypocrisy. And like you said, no one can be safe because if the NATO members are willing to apply this kind of double standard, then also their support for Ukraine is not really taken seriously. And when it comes to the next country that will be threatened, again, we cannot trust them to act in an ethical way. They will act according to interests, to imperialism and so on. But there is still a very big difference between Ukraine and Palestine. And the difference is that Palestinians are not asking the West to deliver weapons to them. They don't want military means by which to

become free. The majority of Palestinians want democracy, they want rights. And not all Palestinians even want a separate state, because that's not the issue for all Palestinians. There is a very large, I would say plurality. We don't know if it's a majority or a plurality, but that's a plurality of Palestinians who say, we want one person, one vote. That's not what Ukrainians are saying. And they're saying we want to achieve our basic rights, both individual rights and also collective rights by means of peaceful protest, a grassroots protest, boycott and so on, and not by means of violence. The violence doesn't come from the Palestinian side. The violence comes from the side of the oppressor. And the famous educator, Paolo Ferrara from Brazil, said "Violence begins with the act of oppression". The resistance to oppression is part of that violence. Of course it comes and it's inseparable from that violence. But if you decide, let's look at one Palestinian attack that happened now or started on October 7th and say, Oh, then the violence comes from the Palestinian side. This is completely misreading the situation. And we see this in Ukraine quite differently because in Ukraine – we're not talking about 75 years of oppression and occupation. There is a very clear time in which Russia invaded Ukraine and the choice of the Ukrainian government, the Ukrainian leadership, is to defend themselves by use of force, military maneuvers, and so that is not comparable to the situation in Palestine.

ZR: To my last question and very briefly, we are seeing that both extreme forces in Israel and in Palestine are now taking hold. The war is escalating and we could perhaps – and hopefully not – expect more hundreds of deaths coming along the way. What would be the right method now or approach to end the violence and ensure that we have lasting and sustainable peace?

SH: Ceasefire requires negotiation, but negotiations are only effective if they are made among more or less equal sides. And for the last 30 years, there has been a so-called peace process between Palestinians and Israelis. But it wasn't a peace process and it wasn't negotiations because one side had all the power and the other side had no power. So this has to change. Palestinians need representation. They need support. They need solidarity so that they can speak with confidence and with accountability. Palestinians know, of course, that violence, even in the context of resistance, carries a terrible price. But for the Israelis, that point is not clear. A lot of Israelis still believe, even after the events of the last couple of days, that Israel should just use unstoppable force, indiscriminate violence against Palestinians and kill them in as many as they can, and that nothing will happen to them and they will never be held accountable for that. So this has to end. And the way that it will end is not by sending weapons to the region, is not by sending weapons to either side, of course, but it is by putting political, diplomatic and economic pressure to make sure that there is also strength on the Palestinian side and support and solidarity from the world so that the Israelis will know that they cannot act with impunity.

ZR: Dr. Shir Hever, independent economist and journalist, thank you so much for your time today.

SH: Thank you, Zain.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. We will be watching the developments in Israel and Palestine very closely. So if you want to stay up to date, make sure to subscribe to our YouTube channel as well as our alternative platforms on Telegram, Rumble and our podcast called Podbean. And if you're watching our videos regularly, make sure to donate today. Even though we have 141,000 subscribers, only a few percent donate to us on a regular basis. We are a small, independent and nonprofit media organization that does not take any money from governments, corporations, and we don't even advertise, all with the goal of providing you with information that is free from external influence. So if you want to donate, make sure to click on the description of this video and check out our PayPal, Patreon or bank account. I'm your host, Zain Raza, see you next time.

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