



## Col. Wilkerson on Israel-Gaza and the war in Ukraine

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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. I'm delighted to be back after suffering a back injury two weeks ago. And now I look forward to providing you with interviews and analysis on a weekly basis. Today, I'll be talking to Lawrence Wilkerson about the Israeli war in Gaza and in Ukraine. Lawrence Wilkerson is a retired colonel who served in the US Army for 31 years. His last position in government was then as chief of staff for Secretary of State Colin Powell from 2000 to 2005. He's now a senior fellow at the Institute for Responsible Statecraft. Lawrence, welcome back to the show.

**Lawrence Wilkerson (LW):** Good to be back with you, Zain.

**ZR:** On October 7th after Hamas launched a surprise attack against Israel and killed at least 1200 Israelis, many of whom were military personnel, Israel declared war in Gaza, starting with an aerial bombardment operation and then following it with a ground invasion. In Gaza according to the health ministry and UN reports, more than 11,500 Palestinians have been killed. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad hold hostage more than 239 civilians, including foreign nationals. According to The Guardian, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected a deal for a five day ceasefire with Palestinian militant groups in Gaza in return for the release of some hostages. How do you assess the situation so far, in particular Hamas' attack on October 7th and then Israel's response there after.

**LW:** Hamas' attack on October the 7th was a tactical surprise to me, but it was not in any way fashion or form a surprise in the operational or strategic sense. Anyone listening to people like Gideon Levy of Haaretz or any other journalists in Israel or commentators in Israel who tell the truth, knew what was happening with Ben-Gvir and his gangs of settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem increasingly, and in the Golan, anyone who had been watching

Benjamin Netanyahu since essentially Ariel Sharon in 2004. And the Oval Office was told by the president, I served, George W Bush: Over to you prime minister. Everything's failed up to this point, you do what you need to do. Well, Sharon knew exactly what that was, and Netanyahu put a fine touch on it. It was: Exterminate the Palestinians, slowly but surely exterminate the Palestinians, their land, their olive groves, their gas reserves off the coast, all of that, get rid of it and claim it for Israel. That was Netanyahu's plan. Well, any fool could understand that the one organisation that represented total opposition to Israel was not going to take that lying down. And so it was just a matter of time that this happened. If it really was a surprise to Netanyahu, then he's a bigger idiot than sometimes I think he is. So it was no surprise to me. It is also no surprise to me because I gave a speech at the National Press Club several years ago entitled: Is Israel a Strategic Asset or a Strategic Liability to the United States? Well, I concluded it's a strategic liability. I'm being proven every moment of every day now that that is the case.

**ZR:** You provided background and context to the situation. However, if you would do that in the German media, many would accuse you of justifying the attacks that happened on October 7th. How do you differentiate from providing context and justifying the attacks?

**LW:** Well, the first thing you need is an educated and intelligent audience. No question about that. In this country, there are very few of those audiences. And second, I think you need to look at the long term tapestry here. Take Ukraine, for example. That was not a surprise either, especially if you look back at what we did in Georgia. What Russia did after my president announced Georgia would be a member of NATO. After that announcement, you knew Putin was going to take some action. You didn't know exactly when and I must say it was sort of a surprise to me, in February 2022, I guess. But it wasn't a long term surprise. I knew it was going to happen. So it's not like you're trying to excuse the brutal attacks of October the 7th any more than you're trying to excuse the attacks of September 11th, 2001, on the United States. But you knew they were coming. They were inevitable. They were going to come. And if you don't have that kind of historical background, how can you possibly deal with the crisis in an intelligent way when it does come?

**ZR:** The German media and political establishment have largely refrained from using the terms genocide, collective punishment or ethnic cleansing and support this position with the argument that Israel is acting in self-defence and only intends to target Hamas terrorists. When Palestinian civilians are killed it is probably because Hamas is using them as a human shield. On the other hand, world renowned Israeli Holocaust scholar Raz Segal recently stated that Israel's assault on Gaza is, quote, "a textbook case of genocide", unquote. Even UN Secretary General António Guterres made the following remarks at a press conference on the situation in the Middle East in New York. Let me quote him here. Quote: "Hundreds of girls and boys are reportedly being killed or injured every day. More journalists have reportedly been killed over a four week period than in any conflict in at least three decades. More UN aid workers have been killed than in any comparable period in history of our organisation", unquote. In your view, why do you think there's this discrepancy between the media and

international and human rights organisations that are saying on the one hand that Israel is committing war crimes and perhaps genocide and on the other hand the media and the political establishment is saying it's acting in self-defence and only targeting terrorists. Where does there lay the truth?

**LW:** I think any way you look at it, if you are being rational, you have to say that there are war crimes being committed and that I don't know if we've approached the definition of genocide fulfilment yet. We're close to it. I had to go through that with Colin Powell when he was trying to declare that for Sudan, you may recall some years back. Most people don't want to go there because it has all kinds of ramifications when you go there. But it's looking a lot like it could well be that at some court later on down the road. And in fact, lots of world leaders are saying things in their parliaments, like we should be referring Israel to some international tribunal for war crimes, including genocide. I think since what we did in Iraq and Afghanistan and elsewhere in our storied history of warfare over the last 20 years is clear to those who want to care. It's difficult for us to say those sorts of things, and it's difficult for the Western world who largely stood by while we did what we did in Iraq, which was a war crime, too, from the very beginning. Kofi Annan said it. This is an international conflict that was not authorised, therefore, it's a war crime. And he was right. So those who throw stones at people in glass houses have to be careful about their own glasshouse. So that's one reason and that's a big reason the media doesn't go after it. The media in the United States, for example, is almost, I will say, an organ of the government and its policies, whether it's on the right or on the left in which media it happens to be. The difficulty I have right now is we're seeing some really strange things happening – not strange if you understand the motivations behind some of these leaders. You're seeing, for example, the Arabs meeting and almost everyone wanting to do some really drastic things with regard to Israel. For example, an oil boycott like in '73, which got everybody's attention and would get the United States' attention big time because it would drive the prices to pump up, which is Biden's major concern. He just released vast amounts from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve so that now we are actually insecure in that reserve just to keep the price down at the pump so the American voters would still vote for him. So these are some strange things that are happening. But Mohammed bin Salman apparently weighed in and said, No, we can't do these things. You know, these are not things we should be doing. And Egypt sort of backed him up, too, on some of them. So you're looking at some very nefarious activities going on within those various Gulf state countries and other Arab countries because they don't want to interrupt the very lucrative commercial deals that they were looking at coming up with Israel. And the Palestinian people be damned in that regard. They'll go out there, make the rhetoric, and they'll go out there and say this and say that, you know, even maybe call it a war crime or whatever, but they won't take the kind of action that would really cause Israel to have to pay attention and do something. All contraire, the rest of the world or much of the rest of the world, you know, you have people walking out of places. You have people condemning Israel. Got big demonstrations in Amman, Jordan, for example. Holy mackerel. I saw those scenes and I said, the king must be really just sitting there worried to death because he's sitting on a powder keg. To a certain

extent, there's a problem also with al-Sisi's actions with regard to Egypt. So there is a real turmoil out there in the world with some people calling it what it is. And there's much more to what it is than people are talking about. For example, Netanyahu is now probably going to close in on that deal that he had with the Palestinians in Gaza to develop those oil fields or gas fields primarily. And we've got the same thing in the West Bank with gas and oil maybe being discovered in the West Bank. So he's got all these commercial and economic motivations to go ahead with this, too. And it's very clear, it's been very clear for a long time, Netanyahu's goal – and his latest government was the manifestation of this goal, Ben-Gvir and all that bunch – is Israel as big as it can be, as wide as it can spread, and the most prominent place and initial place it's going to spread, it's already spread is to the Golan, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza. And right now, right now, as they're conducting small pogroms in the West Bank and divesting Palestinians there of their homes and so forth, continuing apace, Ben-Gvir and his settler groups are ready to go into Gaza. So I've been accusing them of not having a strategic objective, but I'm about to change my mind on that. Their strategic objective is to rid Gaza of as many Palestinians as possible, particularly in the north, and to follow up with the same kinds of things in that part of Gaza as they are doing in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan. They're going to take over and they're going to eradicate that which stands in their way; the Palestinian people.

**ZR:** On November 14th, Finance Minister of Israel Bezalel Smotrich stated, and let me quote him here, "I welcome the initiative of the voluntary immigration of Gaza Arabs to countries around the world. This is the right humanitarian solution for the residents of Gaza and the entire region after 75 years of refugees, poverty and danger. The state of Israel will no longer be able to accept the existence of an independent entity in Gaza", unquote. Where will 2.2 million Gaza civilians go if Israel does not want to see Gaza as an independent entity?

**LW:** It's an interesting question and one that I've given a little bit of thought to. I think what we're looking at here is exactly what was just described as a wish, as an objective, even as an objective of the current conflict in Gaza. But I don't think it's achievable. And I think we're going to see a stop point in there somewhere. And the strategy that Netanyahu is executing, if I'm right about it, is going to fail and fail colossally. We're going to get to a point here where you usually do in these sorts of conflicts where people are going to have to pick sides and they're going to have to choose sides and they're going to have to come down on one side or the other in a definitive way. You're not going to be able to obfuscate and vacillate, as Mohammed bin Salman is trying to do and trying to convince other Gulf state leaders to do it. He is not having much trouble with the Emirates because they're in the same mindset that he is. But eventually, you're going to have to answer to the, what is it now, 2 to 4 billion people in the world who see this as a war crime painted large across the face of the earth, whether it's in London or it's in Riyadh or in Amman or wherever. And when you get to that point, you're going to be asking yourself a question, who's the real guilty party here in terms of what we're having to deal with now? And I'll appointed something else, too, that happened this morning when I read the Ali Soufan Group. Ali, you may know Ali Soufan. He's probably one of the

English speaking gentlemen who knows the Arab world as well as anyone. He's Lebanese by birth. Ali was the one who broke the first World Trade Centre bombing. He's the one who had much to do with finding the al Qaeda who attacked Cole in Port Yemen, in 2000 I think it was, October 2000. Ali said this morning that 200,000 Israelis are now displaced inside Israel. Many of these have come off the border with Lebanon by orders of Jerusalem because Hezbollah is killing Israelis now and Israelis are killing Hezbollah. And Nasrallah is in a weak position politically, but he cannot sit there for too much longer, probably, and not do something more dramatic than what he's doing. And we know the last time I think it was 2006 when they really got into it, Israel took a shellacking. And he's sitting on something like 150 to 175000 missiles. That's huge. And Netanyahu's nonchalance about, Well, if we open another front, we'll open another front. We'll take it on. My prediction of some years ago that Israel might not be a state in 20 years is looking a hell of a lot more like it might be fulfilled sometime in the next few years. And that's not conducive or moving Palestinians out in some just blatant way is not conducive to changing that situation. It's ramifying, that situation. Israel will be a pariah to everyone in the world and eventually will be a pariah to the United States. I'm looking at polls right now that tell me that somewhere around 55 to 60% of Jewish Americans are not happy with what Netanyahu is doing. A good half of that are angry about what he's doing and don't like him at all. One rabbi said to me recently, the greatest cause for anti-Semitism in the world is Bibi Netanyahu. And he also had said, we're very comfortable in the United States, very comfortable in the United States. We found a home in the United States. What he's doing is jeopardising that by building this momentum for anti-Semitism. And I don't mean anti-Semitism in the way Johnson, Schenker and other idiots in the Anti-Defamation League talk about it. I mean, real hate, real hate. I don't mean throwing out an epithet that doesn't mean anything. After all, the Arabs are Semitic, too. What I mean is real hate generating real hate, the kind of hate Hitler generated. I don't care what label you give it. It's hate. It's hate for another human being. It's looking at them as animals, as vermin, as Hitler said in German. And we've got people now like Donald Trump using those kinds of terms, using terms like that, building hate in the world. That is a real reflection on what Netanyahu's policies really mean for Jews globally. That's not healthy. And sooner or later he's going to lose those Jews and he's going to lose their money. And so I'm really concerned about the future of Israel as it is being demonstrated, being in jeopardy right now.

**ZR:** Since the beginning of the Israeli military operation, Gaza the US has given it carte blanche support. For example, when it comes to public perception the US has questioned the accuracy of the figures presented by the Gaza Health Ministry about civilians killed by Israeli airstrikes, while on the other hand simply repeated the Israeli version, for example, when it came to the beheading of babies by Hamas. In the end, the White House and many media outlets had to backtrack and retract their claims about it. In terms of financial support, the US plans to provide Israel with around \$14 billion in military aid once the funding dispute in the US Congress is resolved. On the diplomatic stage last month, the US vetoed a Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza. But now, under mounting pressure from it, the UN Security Council has passed a resolution for a humanitarian pause in Gaza, with the

US abstaining. As someone who has seen the insides of the workings of US foreign policy, why do you think the US continues to provide carte blanche support to Israel?

**LW:** That's the question of the day. And it's growing more important every moment of every day. The United States has got a relationship with Israel that is, as I said before, euphemistically, a strategic liability, taking the euphemism away and expressing it as it really is, is extraordinarily dangerous. The United States, as Israel isolates itself, is isolating itself, too, in a crash and cruel sort of way in many respects, and in a way that's going to redound down the next decade or so to our loss of power and reputation. Even worse than we have in the last 20 years were the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, torture programs and such. Our relationship with Israel is now seen by probably 3.5 to 4 billion people in the world as first of all, insane. Second, reflective of the fact that we don't care about anybody but white people and rich white people. Third, that the United States has lost its way and lost its way in such a blundering, stupid manner that it probably won't recover. That's fuelling all manner in addition to other causes of opposition to us in the world. The climate crisis, for example, the Global South sees us as the fossil fuel burners, us and Europe, primary fossil fuel burners, therefore, the primary causes of what's going on with the climate and they're suffering from it. And ask anybody in the Global South, they are seeing signs, visible signs of the climate crisis; drought being one of the big things, massive floods being another. Ask Pakistan if they didn't see some results of the climate crisis. So this is a way to finish the empire off linked with John Hagee's theory here that Israel is necessary to bringing about the rapture. You know, Christians united for Israel and that crazy bunch of people who actually send millions and millions of dollars to West Bank settlements to finance their being made firmer amongst Palestinian lands and assets. It's making those people look even more insane. And by extension, it's making the United States appear to be a power that has lost its marbles gone berserk in the world. The last 20 years of warfare did a lot to reinforce that. But now this is doing much more to make it evident to the world that we won't change, that we won't do positive things in the world. We won't bring our power to bear on people who are breaking the law, on people who are threatening things that we hold dear, on people who are doing humanitarian deeds or anti humanitarian deeds that go against everything we supposedly stand for as long as they're Jewish and Israeli. That's the way the world looks at this increasingly. That's not good for this power, which has got \$33 trillion of aggregate debt now, an armed forces that is falling apart, they can't even recruit to the numbers that they barely minimally need, has got all manner of problems internally to include it cannot govern itself, given its Congress and the status of that Congress. We're in trouble in the United States, and here we are sending money off to Israel and here we are sending money off to Ukraine. And the biggest threat, if it eventuates to the United States future in those senses, state threat, is in Asia. And we're parked in the eastern end of the Mediterranean and figuratively in the heart of Europe, in Ukraine. This is insanity, as John Mearsheimer keeps saying over and over again. We are strategically insane.

**ZR:** I want to switch to Ukraine. Reuters recently reported that US and European officials have spoken to the Ukrainian government about possible peace negotiations with Russia to end the war. In addition, Der Spiegel, one of Germany's most widely read newspapers recently wrote in the subheading of its article, quote, "Weeks after a terrorist attack in Israel pulled the world's attention away from Kiev's plight. The situation in Ukraine is bleak. It appears Washington is slowly turning its back on the country, and it is unlikely the Europeans can make up for their possible shortfall", unquote. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz governing coalition however, unlike the US recently agreed to double German military aid to Ukraine to over €8 billion. Can you talk about why the US is now slowly turning its back on Ukraine and whether you believe that the European Union, especially Germany, can lead Ukraine to victory against Russia without Washington's support?

**LW:** I do not ,to be very direct. And I think this was inevitable. I predicted it some weeks ago. Zelensky was the biggest impediment at that time. I think they decided, they being Washington, decided now that that's not even an impediment. If they have to, they will make sure they get rid of him. But the situation in Ukraine has never been positive. It's always been David versus Goliath with Goliath in this case inevitably going to win. And that's what's happening now. The most unconscionable Oval Office address from Joe Biden or any president in our history that I ever heard was the one I listened to in New York. And I said at the end, a CNN commentator actually made a smart comment. He said that was a very political speech. You bet. Because what Joe Biden said in that speech was: We're really having trouble governing ourselves. Therefore, I'm going to use the war in Ukraine and US support there for and the war in Gaza, which had just broken out to unify the American people (and get myself re-elected). At the time I was analysing it, I listened to it a second time because I couldn't believe it. Here's a president saying he's going to use his support for two wars, one of which is lost and the other one, a war crime, in order to reunify the American people. Why is that not going to work? I took a look at the polls the next day and I saw that the American people were falling off dramatically in their support for the money going to Ukraine and were very conflicted over whether or not they were going to be on this side or that side with regard to Gaza. I said, man, this president has lost it. He's lost it. But that's a caricature, a valid one, though, of the United States right now. We have no direction. We have no strategic approach to the world. We just manage our inbox. And the inbox for Joe at that point was: Man, my polls are looking bad against Donald Trump. I better do something. So I'm going to unify the American people using my support for these two conflicts as the unifier. How preposterous is that? That's where we are. And Germany, to get to the core of your question, is not going to fill that void.

**ZR:** Lawrence Wilkerson, a retired Army colonel and former insider. Thank you so much for your time today.

**LW:** Thanks for having me, Zain.

**ZR:** And thank you for tuning in today, please don't forget to subscribe to our YouTube channel if you're watching a video regularly. We are a non-profit, independent organisation that does not take any money from governments or corporations. We don't even allow advertisements, all with the goal of providing you with information that is free from external influence. We have 144,000 subscribers and despite that, only a few percent donate to us on a regular basis. Please take into account this entire team working behind the scenes from camera, light, to audio, in case of our German video, translation, voiceover, correction. And if you donate today, you will ensure that we can provide you going forward with non-profit and independent news and analysis. I'm your host Zain Raza, see you all next time.

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