



"DISASTER!" Columbia Prof. Jeffrey Sachs Condemns Israel's War in Gaza

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): Obviously, the last time we had you on, there was not this new war, this war in the Middle East between Israel and Gaza. The major parts of the world have obviously transformed and changed as a result of this brand new war. We were talking a lot about the last war when you were on the last few times, which is the war in Ukraine. I think people have forgotten that that's kind of still plodding along. But as far as this new war is concerned in Israel/Gaza, obviously this latest outbreak began with this horrific attack on Israeli civilians by Hamas on October 7th, it's now been about five weeks of relentless Israeli bombing and now a ground invasion that many, many sources say – including U.S. intelligence – have killed in excess of 10,000 Palestinians, 4500, almost 5000 children, devastated the infrastructure of Gaza. What do you make of this war in general before we get to some specific questions?

Jeffrey Sachs (JS): Well, it's a disaster, of course. What Israel is doing is a danger to Israel. It is absolutely one war crime after another in Gaza. It is not going to lead to any kind of safety for Israel. So we have yet another absolute disaster on our hands, which is worsening American security, world security, pushing the chances of more global war. So I can't say I'm – well, no one can be happy about this. The Hamas attack was horrific. The response has been absolutely mind boggling in its inappropriateness and the damage that it's creating. Today, as I'm sure you know, a lawsuit was filed in the Northern District court of California by the – what is the name of the group? The Centre for Constitutional Rights is saying that America is complicit in genocide. So with a brief that is horrifying, actually, because it's dozens of pages of all of the horrific things that are being committed by Israel right now. So this has to stop. This is extraordinarily destructive and dangerous.

GG: Yeah, there's no question this has become an American war, as almost every Israeli war has. And the Biden administration made clear we're going to give Israel everything it needs. Everybody knows in that region and around the world that when they see a bomb dropping on

a hospital or an ambulance or church or a school or a mosque, even with the Israeli claim that Hamas is there, everybody knows those are actually American bombs. America feeds Israel the bombs and pays for the bombs. And any reverberations on Israel always spill over to the United States as well. We have a sizable part of our audience, not a majority, I don't think, but certainly a non-trivial portion of our audience that definitely supports Israel. And maybe not everything they're doing, but certainly their response and their argument is the following and I want to get your response to it: Look, Israel was attacked in this, as you said, horrific way. We don't know exactly how many civilians died. Israel readjusted the number from 1400 to 1200 without a lot of explanation. Many hundreds of those people were on military bases, were soldiers, other civilians were killed from the Israeli response. But obviously, Hamas deliberately killed a lot of civilians. And their argument is no country could tolerate security breaches of that kind. You keep criticising what Israel is doing, but what should Israel do in order to prevent an attack like this from happening again?

JS: Well, the first thing is Israel let its guard down, which it should not have done. This was a major security and intelligence failure. Israel had been warned in the days leading up to October 7th that the Hamas militants were going to undertake some kind of operation. The Egyptian government gave the warnings, but Israel has the worst government in its history. The government failed completely. In fact, it is reported widely that soldiers that were guarding the border of Gaza and Israel were on holiday or had been shifted to the West Bank and therefore Israel let its guard down and the first thing it should do was keep its guard up. So this is very basic. The second thing that should have happened is that Netanyahu should have stepped down and taken responsibility for this massive failure. The third is to think, what is going to deliver Israeli security. Now, launching a massive war in Gaza, levelling a large part of northern Gaza, displacing hundreds of thousands of people, killing more than 11,000 people and more than 4500 children – and those are just the identified deaths because it is widely presumed that there are thousands of children and others under the rubble still whose deaths have not been accounted for – the idea that this is going to lead to security is mind boggling. What it has done is to isolate Israel almost entirely in the world. Israel has one backer left. That's the United States. I would say, within the United Nations of the 193 countries, you can't count, certainly you don't need two hands to count the number of countries that support what Israel is doing. Probably it's on one hand maximum. Israel has isolated itself. It's committing war crimes. Today it was said that more than 100 UN workers have been killed in this attack. The brazenness of it is also matched by the rhetoric, the intentionality of this extreme right wing cabinet to level Gaza, to treat the residents of Gaza as animals. That's their line to say that Gaza will never recover from this. In other words, this brief that was filed about the genocide, the documents, the shocking statements, because one of the conditions for a claim of genocide under the Genocide Treaty is intent. And there is such vulgarity in the language of this extremist right wing government that it's there for all to see the ugliness of it. Now, Israel needs security, but it is never going to achieve security unless there is a political settlement of a conflict that has been going on, at least one could say, for 57 years, 56 years since the Six-Day War in 1967. And that political settlement

requires the political rights of the Palestinian people. And this government not only has launched a war that it cannot win, that could spread to regional war, but it absolutely opposes vehemently, vulgarly, any kind of two state solution, which almost all – in fact I would say the rest of the world, because even on that score, the United States has reiterated almost every day in recent days that that's the only way forward. But this is a government which utterly rejects this. So they're launching a war that they cannot win, that will kill tens of thousands of innocents. And without any political vision at all, other than continued domination by Israel, of the Palestinian people, which means no peace at all. So nobody, no friend of Israel should be satisfied for one moment that what's happening is in Israel's interest. There isn't anything that's happening that isn't self-destructive of Israel. Or maybe that's not the right way to say it, that Netanyahu is creating destruction of Israel. He's the worst prime minister Israel has ever had. This cabinet is the most extremist that Israel has ever had. And this cabinet is doing grave damage to Israel, starting with letting Israel's basic guard down and then responding in a way which is absolutely destructive of Israel's security and its interests.

GG: I think the event that comes to mind almost immediately and this is something we've been emphasising since the very first days after the October 7th attack, when I think the space to kind of criticise Israel was very limited – people were very traumatised by watching those images coming out of Israel. No one wanted to hear any criticism of Israel. So the thing we tried to say early on was, look, we have a historical lesson, a recent historical lesson that's highly comparable, which is we also suffered a terrible terrorist attack on 9/11, 22 years ago, and 3000 civilians were killed on that day. Two gigantic skyscrapers in New York City came crashing down on top of our fellow citizens. A plane was flown into the Pentagon. It was very traumatic. It was very outrageous. And a lot of people have spent the last 20 years talking about the lessons of 9/11, the idea that we overreacted, we fell into Bin Laden's hands by doing exactly what he hoped he would do, which was turn the world against us, by going around the world madly bombing and a quest for vengeance, but no real geostrategic plan. We said we were going to go to Afghanistan to destroy the Taliban, and 20 years later we left Afghanistan, the Taliban waltzed right back into power as though nothing had happened, because 20 years of occupation and war radicalised the population even further against the West and in favour of the Taliban. But one of the things that has happened and what happened back then after 9/11, was anybody who stood up and questioned these wars and what Bush and Cheney were doing with torture and Guantanamo and rendition and that whole panoply of things they wanted to do, everybody got accused who objected to being pro-terrorist or unpatriotic or on the side of Al Qaida. And it was very effective. It really repressed dissent for a long time in the United States. The tactic that's being used now, not just in Israel, but also in the United States, is to say that anyone who isn't fully supportive of the Israeli war is obviously guilty of antisemitism, must hate Jews. As a Jew myself, I've heard that I don't know how many times every day for the last five weeks as I've expressed these criticisms of the Israeli response. I'm wondering what you make of that as a tactic and how do you react to that when you hear that?

JS: Well, let me say the analogy with 9/11 is even more direct. It's said that the United States acted with rage, and therefore made a lot of grave errors. But I think it's actually deeper than that. The United States government at the time, I would not say the nation, but I would say the government under George W Bush junior and Cheney didn't react with rage so much as react with a planned neocon agenda, which was actually already in place in the late 1990s, the Project for a New American Century and the idea of the PNAC, the Project for a New American Century, was in a unipolar world. So they thought in their delusions that the US stands alone in its power and can do whatever it wants and define reality the way that it wants, this was literally described by one of the neocon protagonists, was that 9/11 would be used to take out every American foe. And so we know that the first reaction to 9/11 wasn't even Al Qaida or Afghanistan. The first reaction was Iraq. Now we can go after Iraq, now we can go after Saddam Hussein. And it was questioned. What do you mean, Iraq? Don't you mean Afghanistan? No, no, no. We mean Iraq. Now, we can do what we have wanted to do. And so this was an agenda of the United States. It was absolutely mind boggling in its craziness, in its ineptitude, in the trillions of dollars that it cost, in the destruction of America's reputation around the world in the free fall of American prestige, which, believe me, happened and continues to happen and has changed the world and diminished America's safety from not just Afghanistan and Iraq, but the not so covert covert operations to overthrow Bashar al Assad. The mobilisation of NATO to overthrow Gadhafi. This was all a sequence of operations that was anticipated already in the late 1990s. Now, the reason I make all of this analogy is, this government of Netanyahu is not just acting with rage. It's acting with an agenda. And you look across the cabinet and listen to the words of Smotrich, the finance minister, and of course, to Netanyahu himself, who was just the most awful prime minister in Israel's history, to the interior minister, to across the board; they have an agenda. The agenda has been what is called the Greater Israel, the greater land of Israel, which is that Israel really should control in any way, not only Israel, but the Palestinian territories, Gaza and the West Bank. And for some, it goes even beyond that, because they look to the book of Joshua in the Bible and say, Oh the promised land is even beyond that. What they're doing includes...

GG: Like Jordan and multiple Middle Eastern countries, all part of Greater Israel.

JS: It actually goes to Mesopotamia. It goes to the Euphrates, right? No, less. So it's kind of mind boggling book, by the way, to read, because it's a book of serial genocide, as a matter of fact. But the point is that this cabinet wants to clear out Gaza. That was the first impulse. Actually, the United States was almost pulled along. They tried to talk al-Sisi in Egypt into this. He said, No way, I'm going to be a party to the next nakba, the next disaster of the Palestinian people by opening Rafah, the border with Gaza and Egypt, to take in hundreds of thousands of Gazans fleeing after Israel told them you must flee for your life. Giving them a few hours to flee for their life. So this is an agenda. And in that sense, the analogy to 9/11 is even more precise. It's not just blind rage. It's a political agenda. And we should understand, I think it's the smartest words about war that have been uttered since Sun Tzu, since the

strategy of war in ancient China by von Clausewitz, the war theorist in Germany in the period just after the Napoleonic wars. And in von Clausewitz's famous book on war, he says very famously that war is the continuation of politics with other means. And so when you see conflict, I think politics don't just think rage or attack and counterattack, but what's the underlying politics? In Ukraine, the underlying politics is NATO enlargement. This is a war over NATO enlargement, which I think was a reckless thing for the United States to do. And it put Ukraine into the battleground of a proxy war between the US and Russia, which is destroying Ukraine. Now, what is the politics here? The politics here is that the people of Palestine do not have political rights. They live in a condition dominated by Israel. Effectively, as countless organisations have rightly pointed out, an apartheid system imposed by Israel. And the whole world, including the United States, has said this has to be remedied by a Palestinian state. And even President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken have repeated this several times in the last days. But this is precisely what Netanyahu and his government oppose. So this is not a war to end the Hamas threat in order to move to a state of Palestine. Completely the opposite. This is a war being waged by Israel, ostensibly to crush Hamas, but to dominate the Palestinian lands.

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