



DANGEROUS: Embracing bin Laden's 9/11 Theory to Target Civilians in Israel-Gaza War

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): We started off our show talking about this theory that was most associated with Osama bin Laden, not saying he pioneered it, but he was the most famous exponent of it, at least during the past couple of decades, which is the idea that either American civilians are legitimate targets for violence when other groups or other countries are attempting to strike back against the United States for wars the United States engaged in or regime change operations it engineered, that it's not just military facilities or people in combat uniform, but all Americans are either legitimate targets for reprisals or there's no such thing as an American civilian by virtue of the fact that the United States being a democracy means that the leaders are elected by the people and they have to be re-elected in order to stay in office and that means whatever policies of violence or aggression in their eyes that the United States government engages in, you have a theory that says Americans are directly responsible for it. Therefore, either they're legitimate targets or there's no such thing as an American civilian. And we have heard that theory in the past week. Obviously, that was the theory that propelled Hamas to go into Israel and not just indiscriminately kill people, including civilians, but deliberately target civilians, because their view is that there's no such thing as an Israeli civilian. They all serve in the military. They're all part of an occupation force. They elect Benjamin Netanyahu, who then bombs Gaza or occupies the West Bank. And they've eroded the idea that there is such a thing as an Israeli civilian that they have the right to be safeguarded and protected. And that's what made what they did so reprehensible.

Had Hamas invaded Israel and gone into military bases and engaged troops there would have been a lot of condemnation of it, but nowhere near the level of moral revulsion. The idea is that the reason why it was indefensible was because they deliberately targeted civilians. But their theory is that there's no such thing as an Israeli civilian. But what's alarming is that we have heard very similar theories emanating from Israeli officials and their defenders in the West about Palestinian civilians. Obviously, Palestinian civilians in Gaza are dying in

enormous numbers. They're going to continue to die in enormous numbers, not just because Gaza, an extremely densely populated strip of land, is being massively bombed. In the last week alone the Israelis have dropped more tonnage of bombs than the United States average dropping in Afghanistan in an entire year. In an entire year! More bombs have been dropped in Gaza by the Israelis over the last week. And obviously, given how densely packed it is, it's inevitable that huge numbers of Palestinian civilians are going to die. And when you add on to that the fact that the Israeli defence minister has vowed and now they're doing to block food and water – there's no clean water in Gaza and there's an increasing shortage of food supplies. There's no electricity. Hospitals are having trouble keeping basic machines running. Obviously, enormous numbers of Palestinians are dying in unthinkable numbers. And so the question is, how is that justified? And one of the reasons or one of the ways that we're hearing from Israeli officials that it's justified is that there's not really such a thing as a Palestinian civilian. Let's listen to the Israeli president, Isaac Herzog, on October 14th, that was late last week, describe his view of that question.

Isaac Herzog (IH): We are working, operating militarily according to rules of international law, period. Unequivocally. It's an entire nation out there that is responsible. It's not true, this rhetoric about civilians, were not aware, not involved, it's absolutely not true.

GG: Okay. Let's just stop there, because I think what he said is crucial. He's saying it's not just Hamas that is responsible for what was done on Saturday. It's an entire nation. And he mocked the idea that there is such a thing as Palestinian civilians who somehow are not responsible for that violence. He's essentially saying it's the entire country that is our target, our legitimate target for violence. The same exact theory that Osama bin Laden used to justify 9/11, the same theory that Hamas knowingly or otherwise used when gunning down and terrorising Israeli civilians on Saturday. Let's listen to part again.

IH: Unequivocally, it's an entire nation out there that is responsible. It's not true, this rhetoric about civilians, were not aware or not involved, it's absolutely not true. They could have risen up. They could have fought against that evil regime which took over Gaza in a coup d'etat. But we're at war.

GG: There is that other part of that theory. Bin Laden said Americans could have removed the government. They could have voted them out. They didn't. They elected these governments that implemented all these policies that Al Qaida said justified a fatwa, justified violence against the American population. Things like imposing a sanctions regime on Iraq that Madeleine Albright, Clinton's secretary of state, notoriously said was worth it, despite being confronted with evidence that it killed 500,000 children of starvation. Or the placement of American military bases on Saudi territory, which Muslims consider sacred as the birthplace of Islam. Or the support for Israel as it occupies Palestinian territory, denies Palestinian statehood. This is the theory that bin Laden used, exactly what the Israeli president said, namely that Americans could have changed their leaders. And because they

didn't, they are now responsible. I heard the same theory, by the way, when it came time to do things like ban Russian athletes from competing internationally. The argument was, at first, while we don't hold athletes or citizens responsible for the acts of their government, American athletes weren't banned, nor were British athletes banned in 2002 and 2003, when the British and the Americans invaded Iraq and used what was called Shock and Awe to explode huge bombs all throughout Baghdad, because we don't hold the individuals responsible for the acts of their government. And yet that theory was promulgated then as well: No, the Russians are responsible for Putin. They could have removed him from power.

The irony is that in my view, this is a theory that should never be entertained, that the civilian distinction is not valid. But if you're going to invoke this theory that civilians are no longer civilians, that they become responsible for their government's violence and therefore are legitimate targets, it really applies far more to a democracy like the United States, where we really do elect our leaders and can remove our leaders, at least in theory, than it does to say, a country like Russia or like Gaza. There hasn't been an election in Gaza since 2007, that is 16 years, which means the majority of the population either was not alive the last time they voted or was way too young to participate in the vote. The vast majority of citizens, that that's true for. So if you are going to adopt that theory, it makes way more sense for the United States and for the U.K. and for Western Europe than it does for places you call tyranny like China or Russia or Gaza. But as I said, this theory has no place in civilised discourse, and yet it's coming right from the Israeli president. You just heard it. Let's hear the rest.

IH: Oh, we're at war with the – We are defending our homes. We're protecting our homes. That's the truth. And then when a nation protects its home, it fights. And we will fight until we will break their backbone.

GG: Now, it is true what he's saying is that they're involved in a war. Probably the Israeli population would not have tolerated anything other than that kind of a response, just like the American population wouldn't after 9/11. But in wars there are rules. There are laws. At least there have been since Nuremberg. We have war crimes tribunals, in fact the West has manoeuvred so that Vladimir Putin currently stands accused of being a war criminal because of actions that he undertook in Ukraine. In fact, we showed you last week the head of the EU accused Putin of being a war criminal, specifically for cutting off food and water and gas to the Ukrainian population, which is exactly what Israeli officials have threatened to do and now have done. And while the Israeli president is right that Israel is at war, it doesn't mean that anything and everything they do is justified, especially erasing the notion of a civilian. It's an incredibly dangerous theory to embrace. And the last people who should want that theory embraced are the citizens of the country that fights more wars in more countries than any other, which is the United States. If this theory prevails, think how many, as an American citizen, how many countries, how many groups of people can now view you as a legitimate military target wherever you might be found, to just kill you and say that you are responsible for the violence undertaken by your government because you voted for them under this

theory. This theory is becoming popularised in this war. Here is Marc Lamont Hill on Aljazeera, interviewing a Israeli official who essentially admits more or less explicitly that the policy of the Israelis right now is collective punishment. Namely, they are, they say, justifying in going to war because of what Hamas did. But they are holding all Palestinians responsible for those acts and punishing them collectively. Which is illegal under every precept of international law and was particularly emphasised as something urgently prohibited after World War Two. Let's listen to this.

Marc Lamont Hill (MLH): He said that the humanitarian situation will only deteriorate exponentially and that crucial lifesaving supplies, including fuel, food and water, must be allowed into Gaza. So the UN is saying, You must do this. You are saying you're not going to do this.

Israeli Official: No. We're not saying that.

MLH: He's saying do it. He's saying doing it immediately. What I'm saying is...

Israeli Official: No, no.

MLH: He is saying, doing it immediately.

Israeli Official: I got you. I tell you exactly what we're saying. I'm saying we will do everything for the Gazan people. Once and now we demand immediate surrender, unconditional surrender of Hamas. If Hamas people come out with their hands up and clear their weapons, believe me, everything will be restored to Gaza. It is Hamas. In Hamas hands.

MLH: Okay. Now, I understand. Thank you for clarifying that, sir. I think we're actually on the same page here. You're saying that once Hamas leaves, you'll grant the guys and people food, shelter, fuel, electricity, hospital, schooling. And if Hamas doesn't leave, then they'll continue to starve and die in hospitals. You are defining for the international community right now collective punishment. You're saying, until Hamas acts differently, the 2 million people in Gaza are going to be treated this way. And once Hamas acts differently, these 2 million people in Gaza will be treated better. That is exactly what collective punishment is. You're holding them accountable for the actions of others. That is the definition, the textbook definition of collective punishment, sir.

GG: So he went on to say that all of this is Hamas' fault, that it's Hamas that is responsible; that's the line. What I want to be clear here is I'm not trying to suggest that the Israeli government is to blame. What I'm suggesting is, is that if you're an American citizen and your government is linked to this war and to many other wars, the theories that get embraced and that get fortified and that get implemented about how wars can be fought, about who can be, who are legitimate targets, about what are and are not valid targets for war, have a great

deal effect on you. They can implicate all sorts of things. Now, if you're somebody who just says, Look, you know what, the Israelis are at war, in war, everything is justified, there are no laws of war, there are no rules of war, then I can at least respect that as a candid argument. Obviously, that would be an argument that would then have to be applied universally. It would mean that everything is fair game for people who perceive a grievance with the United States to do, including targeting civilians or civilian infrastructure. But what the Israelis are doing is something that we are supposed to have considered immoral, illegal under the post-World War Two framework. And it's vital to at least lay that out as a fact. And obviously, you can make the decision about whether you think that is justified.

Just to give you a sense for how this theory has proliferated into the West. Here is a tweet from Eugene Kontorovich. We'll get his exact credentials, I believe he's a professor somewhere. And in response to President Biden's tweet, which said, "We must not lose sight of the fact that the overwhelming majority of Palestinians had nothing to do with Hamas' appalling attacks and are suffering as a result of them". This is what he put on top of that, quote: "Fact check: the majority of Palestinian people in Gaza elected Hamas, which ran on a kill-all-the-Jews platform, and it remains wildly popular in Gaza". And there you see some community note fact checks, including the fact that the last election in Palestine was held in 2006 and nearly half of Palestinians are under the age of 18 and were either not alive in 2006 or could not vote. But this is the sort of moralising, the sort of moral theory that is becoming very acceptable to just openly state. He's a professor at George Mason University, which is where a lot of defenders of the US security state are because it's located in Northern Virginia. Now, when the Israeli officials speak especially when they began speaking after the Hamas attack on Saturday, they say some things that give a very clear idea of what their view of Palestinian civilians are, whether or not they even recognise such a concept. Here is the Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, who the US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin has met with twice in the last week. And here is what he has ordered as his policy.

Yoav Gallant: I have ordered a complete siege on Gaza. No electricity, no food, no fuel, no water. Everything is closed. We are fighting human animals. And we act accordingly.

GG: Okay, there you see that rhetoric. We are fighting human animals and you can argue that he was talking there about Hamas, not all Palestinians, except that it was in the context of his announcing and defending a policy to cut off all food, water, electricity and gas, not to Hamas, but to the entire Palestinian population. What can justify that? Cutting off food and water. And it's not that the Israelis are failing to supply it. As we know they control the airspace, the sea lanes and the border of Gaza. They've controlled everything that comes in and out of Gaza while the Egyptians keep one part of that border closed. Obviously, the Egyptians are very closely tied to the United States government. We provide them with a lot of aid. We helped install that government. The Egyptians had an election where they elected Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, who was very pro-Palestinian and within less than a year he was out in a coup, a military coup that John Kerry at the time

applauded as an event for democracy. So General Sisi is there and keeps that border closed. Is that justified in any way cutting off food and water to an entire population? And is it a positive asset for American national security that the United States is closely associated with this policy of suffocating the Palestinians. Is that something that is positive for American national security in the region?

Here is an interview that was conducted on Sky News that was extremely contentious, to put that mildly, between a Sky News anchor who was asking Naftali Bennett, the former Israeli prime minister, he was the prime minister last year before giving that seat back to Benjamin Netanyahu. He's known as being to Netanyahu's right on questions like the rights of the Palestinians. And watch what happens when this guy, a news anchor, was trying to get him to talk about Palestinian casualties and the deaths of civilians and the Israeli responsibility for Palestinian civilians. This gives you the real sense for the mindset that has emerged inside the Israeli government and their Western supporters when it comes to whether there even is such a thing as Palestinian civilians, and if there is whether they are worthy, if they're assigned any value.

Sky News: And what about those Palestinians in hospital who are on life support and babies and incubators whose life support and incubator will have to be turned off because the Israelis have cut the power to Gaza?

Naftali Bennett (NB): Are you seriously keeping on asking me about Palestinian civilians? What's wrong with you? Have you not seen what happened? We're fighting Nazis. We don't target them. Now the world can come and bring them anything they want. If you want to bring them electricity, I'm not going to feed electricity or water to my enemies. If anyone else wants, that's fine. We're not responsible for this...

GG: Now, again. That is incredibly disingenuous. No one is suggesting the Israelis have a charitable duty to go and buy food and water and deliver it to the Gazans. The Israelis control the Gaza border and have decided to blockade that border and not allow in any food or water. That was the announcement we just showed you from the Israeli defence minister. But at top, Naftali Bennett is morally enraged. That anybody would even care about Palestinian civilians, anybody would even ask about them, even though they're dying an enormous number. And there's a massive humanitarian crisis, really a catastrophe inside the Gaza Strip. Now if you are somebody again who doesn't think Palestinian life has any value, that this is a savage race, that they are people who are primitive or who get what's coming to them, again, if you just want to say that and admit that, then I think there's clarity in the discourse. But as I said last week, that is something I will never be on board with. And I find it shocking, I guess I find it as shocking to hear Naftali Bennett saying this as he found it shocking that the Sky News anchor would care at all enough to ask about civilians in Gaza. Let's listen to the rest.

Naftali Bennett and Sky News: [Overlapping discourse]

Sky News: Listen, this is my program. This is my show. And I am asking the questions. You're raising your voice and I ask you and we've already... Stop, please, and let me finish. We've already distinguished between Hamas...

NB: Shame on you.

Sky News: It's nothing about shame. We're trying to have a conversation about a very serious situation here and you are refusing to address it.

NB: Because when you just jump over immediately and again and again.

Sky News: Absolutely not. You are incorrect.

NB: ...responsible, because I can tell you that when the UK...

Naftali Bennett and Sky News: Absolutely not.

NB: ...when Britain was fighting the Nazis during World War Two, no one asked what's going on in Dresden. It was the Nazis targeting London. And you targeted Dresden. Shame on you if you go on with that false narrative.

Sky News: We're not talking about that. And in hindsight many people have readdress that kind of carpet bombing.

NB: Oh, I see. Now you're Mr. Clean. Shame on you.

GG: So I have to say, Naftali Bennett is not wrong when he points out, as so often happens, that these British journalists who love to put on their self-righteous hat have very little more credibility to do that, given what their countries have done. But nonetheless, the disgust and rage and indifference that Naftali Bennett expressed at the fact that the world is expressing concern over what is happening to this population, filled with mostly children. And that is just the truth. I know it sounds cliché when you talk about the children and you try and get people to care about that, but it is true. It is a population of 2.2 million people, half of whom are under the age of 18, in part because they have a very high birth rate, but also because they have a very low life expectancy. And if you just look at what's happening in Gaza, the reality is there's immense civilian suffering. And the answer seems to be that either those civilians don't have any real value in their lives or there's no such thing as that concept.

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