



Israel's goals in Gaza & debunking the Mainstream Narrative - 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 to Dimitri Lascaris about the latest developments on Israel's war against Gaza. Dimitri Lascaris is a journalist and lawyer who specializes in class actions, human 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, Zain. Pleasure to be here.

ZR: On October 7th, on the day Hamas and Islamic Jihad undertook a surprise attack against Israel, they took around 239 hostages that included military personnel, civilians and foreign nationals. After initially rejecting the cease fire for a hostage deal, the Israeli government today agreed to deal with Hamas. In the agreement, Hamas agreed to release at least 50 women and children for a four day truce and also announced that Israel would be releasing 150 Palestinian women and children from Israeli jails and hundreds of trucks carrying humanitarian, medical and fuel aid would be allowed into Gaza. This is a two part question. Firstly, what is the significance of this development? And secondly, why did Israel take so long to come to an agreement? One would think that freeing the hostages would be the utmost priority of the Israeli government instead of carpet bombing Gaza.

DL: Well, from a humanitarian perspective, you know, we should all applaud the fact that this is happening, that there is going to be a pause, albeit a nonpermanent one, in this bloodshed, and that humanitarian supplies are going to come in and there's going to be a mutual release of hostages. And let's be clear, these women and children that are languishing in Israeli prisons are just as many hostages as those being held by Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza. We just don't call them that in the mainstream Western media. But in any event, we should be welcome from a humanitarian perspective, but as you noted, this is a very different course of action than that which the Netanyahu government vowed to take. It

said very clearly there would be no pause whatsoever in the fighting until all of the hostages had been released on the side of Hamas. It never indicated its willingness to release any Palestinians from its own jails. And that's precisely what it's doing. It's getting less than half of the hostages. The military personnel, and most of them, I believe, are military, being held by Hamas, they continue to remain in the custody of Hamas fighters. The Israelis are having to release three times the number of hostages that Hamas is trying to release. And there's going to be it looks like a significant amount of humanitarian aid and presumably fuel, which could be put to use by Hamas fighters going into Gaza. So while it's from a humanitarian perspective, it's positive, I think it shows a real weakness on the part of the Netanyahu government. These are cracks showing in the edifice of, you know, its determination to destroy Hamas. And what will be really interesting to see is whether this is a temporary retreat from the maximalist goals of the Netanyahu government or if it's the beginning of a collapse, which will lead ultimately to a recognition, not an explicit one, but an implicit one, at least, of a defeat in terms of achieving its objectives. I personally believe I don't believe that the bloodshed is over by any means. It may resume with the same level of ferocity and it may even be worse. But ultimately, I think where this is heading is towards a strategic defeat of the state of Israel.

ZR: Let us look at another recent development; the Al-Shifa Hospital. The Al-Shifa hospital is the largest medical facility in the Gaza Strip. Israel has been claiming for weeks, if not years, that Hamas has built a terror infrastructure, including a control center underneath the hospital. Both Hamas and the health authorities have denied these allegations, pointing out that it is merely a medical facility. Now, Israel announced that a 55 meter long and ten meter deep tunnel was found under the hospital and a calendar with names of terrorists as well as weapons. In your opinion, how valid is the evidence that Israel has presented thus far?

DL: Well, there was a very interesting interview involving Ehud Barak on CNN with Christiane Amanpour a few days ago in which Ehud Barak said, Yes, there is a bunker underneath that hospital and we know this because we built it. The Israelis built the bunker. They built it when they were in control of this area of Gaza. So saying that there is a bunker there, is in no way shape or form revelatory. This is widely known. It's not something that was constructed by Hamas or any other resistance group. The question is: Is it being used for military purposes? And there's no evidence, absolutely no evidence that's been put forward by Israel, which is frankly a serial liar when it comes to claims of this nature, that, in fact, it was used for those purposes. And as you mentioned, you know, medical personnel there, including Mads Gilbert, a very well known and courageous Norwegian physician who worked in there for years; they are adamant that they've never seen any evidence that there is a bunker being used for military purposes underneath the hospital. So they found a tunnel that doesn't prove a damn thing. And the last thing I want to say very clearly and this has to be said over and over again, that even if what they're saying was true, they do not have the right to do what they did to that hospital. Hospitals enjoy special protection under international law, and at a bare minimum, it was incumbent upon them if what they were saying was true,

to ensure the safe evacuation from that hospital of all of the patients, all of the medical personnel and other civilian personnel. They did precisely the opposite. They endangered them. They attacked them. They caused their deaths. So even if what they're saying is true, what they did to that hospital is a war crime.

ZR: I would like to take a step back from the current developments and move into a contextual discussion. What is really missing in the media, especially in Germany, is an analysis that surfaces the political dynamics that have developed in Palestine over time and the role that Israel has played in shaping it. For example, when it comes to the formation and strengthening of Hamas, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz cited former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak on Army radio in August 2019, while he was referring to the strategy of the current Israeli Prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and let me quote him here, quote: "His strategy is to keep Hamas alive and kicking. Even at the price of abandoning the citizens of the South in order to weaken the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah", unquote. In fact, Benjamin Netanyahu himself briefly touched on this strategy and according to Haaretz in March, 2019, said during a meeting of his party called Likud, quote: "Whoever opposes a Palestinian state must support delivery of funds to Gaza because maintaining separation between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza will prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state", unquote. In your assessment, why did Netanyahu pursue this strategy of dividing Palestinians? And do you think it can be viewed as one of the reasons why October 7th happened?

DL: Well, certainly he did this in order to weaken the Palestinian resistance. You know, this is a classic strategy of divide and conquer. It's not only the Israeli government that has done this, the American government has done this all over the Middle East, writ large. So I think that the objective of this strategy employed, of fomenting, developing Hamas is very clear to weaken the Palestinian resistance. But I think there's far too much emphasis placed upon Hamas and the way the Netanyahu government has effectively fostered its growth in order to weaken the Palestinian Authority. The bottom line here, Zain, is that whether or not Hamas existed, there would be resistance. And there would be armed resistance and it might even be more effective and unified armed resistance, but there would be resistance. This situation is simply unsustainable. It is impossible for Israel to continue to oppress. I mean, now the Palestinian people in historic Palestine actually constitute a demographic majority. And after this devastating war, it's going to be very hard for Israel to keep up in terms of, you know, the growth of the Jewish population in Israel, because a lot of people are going to want to leave. A lot of people have left. And the worse this gets, the harder it is going to be to keep Israeli Jews in the country and to attract further emigration from the Jewish diaspora. So this is an unsustainable situation. And we need to talk a lot less about Hamas and talk about the fact that the core injustice here will continue to generate violence. It will continue to inflict casualties on both sides. And the only lasting and durable solution and one, I cannot stress this enough, that is in the best interests of the people of Israel themselves, is to accommodate the just demands of the Palestinian people. And if you're not going to incorporate them into

one state that has equal rights for all its citizens, then for God's sake, give them a Palestinian state. That's the way you will end the suffering. It's the only way to end the suffering. The international community has been demanding this for decades. And unless and until the Israeli government does this, there's going to be some other iteration of Hamas, even if by some miracle they managed to destroy Hamas – I don't think they will – there will be armed resistance. It will not go away. It'll only get worse.

ZR: The German media and political establishment have largely refrain from using the terms genocide, collective punishment or ethnic cleansing, and supports this position with the argument that Israel is acting in self-defense and only intends to target Hamas terrorists. Unlike Hamas, who openly voice the intent to target and eradicate civilians. When Palestinian civilians are killed by Israel, it is probably because Hamas is using them as human shields. On the other hand, world renowned Israeli Holocaust scholar Raz Segal stated recently that Israel's assault on Gaza is, quote, "a textbook case of genocide", unquote. Even UN Secretary General António Guterres remarked, quote, "Gaza is becoming a graveyard of children", unquote. Organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch recently reported that Israel is committing war crimes and even provided evidence to back their claims. In your view, and especially that you're a lawyer that specializes in international law and human rights, does Israel have a higher moral ground? And can we rule out genocide and war crimes if it doesn't explicitly claim that it's targeting civilians, as the German media stipulates? Or do you think the claim made by human rights organization that Israel's committing war crimes and perhaps genocide is accurate? Where does the truth lie?

DL: Whether Israel is committing genocide is a legal question. It's a legal question, and it depends upon the interpretation of genocide in international law, and particularly the genocide convention. This is not a political question, has political implications, but it's a legal question. And as you've noted, I'm a lawyer. I have been passionate about international humanitarian law my entire 30 year legal career. That doesn't make me infallible. But I have formed a legal opinion about this, and I completely concur with the Holocaust scholar Raz Siegel, that this is a textbook case of genocide. It's not just an arguable case of genocide. It is a slam dunk, crystal clear, undeniable case of genocide. Why do I say that? First of all, Israel is committing the genocide definition, has a series of acts that one must commit – not all of them necessarily, but one or more of them, including killing the population, depriving the population of the essentials of life. Israel is committing all of the acts that are listed in the definition of the genocide convention. Secondly, these acts, under the definition of genocide must be accompanied by an intention to destroy all or part, I stress, part of a population. Israel doesn't have to have the intention to exterminate every single last Palestinian. There is absolutely no question that it has that intention. Its leaders, I don't know what the German media, what Kool-Aid they're drinking, but its leaders have been openly declaring that there are no noncombatants in Gaza, that the children and the mothers of Gaza and the civilian males of Gaza are all part of the threat that Israel confronts. They are all legitimate targets. You know, the Israeli defense minister called them human animals. He said we're not going to

put any restraints on the military. Netanyahu said, We're going to turn Gaza into an island of ruins. Isaac Herzog, the president, said no one is innocent in Gaza because they could have turned against Hamas and they didn't turn against Hamas. Therefore, they're guilty. They're responsible for what was done to Israel. And I'm just giving you some examples. It's become so obvious. It's not just Raz Segal. There was a senior human rights lawyer from the United Nations who recently resigned in protest. He, too, called it a textbook case of genocide. Within the last few days, the International Commission of Jurists, 60 leading international lawyers, said there is a serious risk of Israel committing genocide in Gaza and that the risk is so great that the obligation of states under the Genocide Convention to prevent genocide has been triggered already. And they have to act now to put a stop to this. Today, the UN special rapporteur on violence against women and children came out and referred to what is happening in Gaza as an unfolding genocide. These are all legal experts. They are all of one mind, this is a genocide. And it's time for us to stop propagating these lies about what the Israeli government is saying. They themselves have declared a genocidal intent and we now have to act. It is not consistent with the most basic elements of human conscience to wait for a genocide to be carpet consummated before condemning it. You must stop it, not just as a legal matter, but it is a fundamental principle of morality.

ZR: On November 14th, Finance Minister of Israel Bezalel Smotrich stated, quote, "I welcome the initiative of the voluntary emigration 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. Given this statement, what do you think Israel's goals are in Gaza? Is it simply eliminating Hamas or are there other objectives in mind here?

DL: Well, I think we have to entertain the possibility that they don't actually have any coherent strategic objective, that this is just straight up blood lust and barbarism and that they're trying to inflict the maximum level of pain upon Palestinians to deter any future resistance. There's that possibility. But I think that more likely they do have some semblance of a goal here. And the goal, if you look at the way this is playing out on the ground, they started by destroying almost all of northern Gaza, forcing in excess of a million people, I think it's a million and a half people, displacing them and pushing them southward. Then they went into the central part of Gaza, pushing them further southward. There was a plan leaked during the course of these atrocities, from the Israeli government, the bowels of the Israeli government, showing that they have an objective or they dream one day of expelling all the Palestinians of Gaza into the Sinai. So what it looks like to me on the outside is that they're trying to force as many people in Gaza as possible right up against the border of Egypt, make the rest of Gaza entirely unlivable, simply uninhabitable, and then present the international community with a *fait accompli*, which is, if you want to avoid mass deaths amongst the people there, you're going to have to put them into a part of the world that's livable, whether it's the Sinai, whether it's your own countries. They are effectively trying to, in my opinion,

effect a massive and brazen ethnic cleansing of Gaza. And if they were to – I don't think they will succeed, by the way – but if they were to succeed, I think it's crystal clear that the West Bank would be next. And they already are in effect, pursuing that policy, albeit at a less brutal and obvious level within the West Bank itself. So we have an obligation to come in here and put a stop to this right now, because if they have an objective that's other than just causing suffering, that's what the objective is.

ZR: Let us look at some regional developments that have come about since Israel began its fall in Gaza. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman this week called for a global export ban on arms to Israel and said he opposes any forced displacement of Palestinians from Gaza. Jordan also canceled a water and energy deal with Israel with its top diplomat stating and let me quote him here, quote, "We will not sign this agreement any longer. Can you imagine a Jordanian minister sitting next to an Israeli minister to sign a water and electricity agreement all while Israel continues to kill children in Gaza", unquote. However, more drastic measures such as the termination of the Abraham Accords and an oil embargo, or even the severe ending of diplomatic relations with Israel have not been pursued so far. Why do you think countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and others have failed to take more drastic measures?

DL: Well, the leadership of these countries, you know, are primarily interested in their own enrichment, in their own power than they are in the will of the people over whom they rule. Overwhelmingly, I think it's safe to say throughout the Arab and Muslim world, there is mass outrage with what is being done to the Palestinian people and an absolute determination to bring it to an end by any and all means necessary, but at a bare minimum by political and economic measures. But these people, you know, they're not particularly concerned with that, unfortunately, particularly the leader of the leadership of Saudi Arabia, a brutal autocracy. However, I think their hand is going to be forced eventually. If this goes on, the closer Israel gets to its objective, the one that I believe it to have, the more the pressure is going to increase on these governments. And they'll then have to engage in a balancing, you know, their objective being to preserve and enhance their own power and wealth. They're going to say, Well, if we continue to allow this to happen, we ourselves are going to be at risk. I mean, let's not forget that Anwar Sadat was assassinated. He was assassinated because he did a peace deal with Israel.

ZR: Who was Anwar Sadat? For our viewers, can you just briefly mention him?

DL: Anwar Sadat was the former president of Egypt. So, you know, I'm old enough to have remembered that. I was a young man when he was assassinated after doing a peace deal with Israel and one that effectively betrayed the Palestinian people, that provided no future, no democratic rights for them at all. And so there's no reason why this couldn't happen to Sisi, the current dictator of Egypt. There's no reason why this couldn't happen to Mohammed bin Salman. And I think they're keenly aware of that. So at some stage, the pressure upon them to act in their own self-preservation will be so enormous that I think they're going to escalate.

But you know what, Zain? I don't think that necessarily matters because there already exist enough groups and they are acting in such a way as to pressure Israel and the United States to deal fairly ultimately with the Palestinian people. You have Hezbollah on the northern border. We don't hear much about this in the western press, but Hezbollah is putting out daily statements, oftentimes accompanied with video evidence of the attacks and the casualties it is inflicting upon the Israeli military on the northern border. You know, you have militant groups in Iraq and Syria attacking American military bases, inflicting casualties upon them. You have the Houthis seizing an Israeli owned vessel, a civilian vessel, and also firing drones and ballistic missiles at Israel. And, as of yet, Iran which has the missile capability to flatten Israel – that's just a fact – it has the ability to cause permanent massive damage to Israel, hasn't even entered the conflict yet. So I think that at this stage, whether or not the Saudis and the Jordanians and the Egyptians use their economic leverage to put a stop to the carnage, ultimately, as I say, I think this is going to end in a strategic defeat for Israel. And it's just a question of how much bloodshed is going to have to happen tragically before that outcome is realized.

ZR: I would like to switch to Ukraine before I end this interview. Reuters recently reported that the U.S. 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 widely read news organizations, recently wrote in the subheading of the article, quote, "Weeks of the terrorist attack in Israel pull the world's attention away from Kiev's plight. The situation in Ukraine is bleak. It appears that Washington is slowly turning its back on the country, and it is unlikely the Europeans can make up for that possible shortfall", unquote. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's governing coalition however, alike the US, recently agreed to double German military aid to Ukraine over the next year to €8 billion. Can you talk about why the U.S. is slowly turning its back on Ukraine and whether you believe that the European Union, led by Germany, can lead Ukraine to victory against Russia without Washington's support?

DL: It's turning its back on Ukraine because it has realized that Ukraine can't win this war. You know, Ukraine has I mean, let's just put aside for a second the fact that NATO weapons stocks have been largely depleted, that the Russians, meantime, have ramped up dramatically their production of the types of weapons that are needed to conduct a war of this nature, let's put aside the fact that Russia has enormous logistical advantages relative to NATO because this war is being fought at its border next to its industrial heartland, let's just look at the population reality. The population reality is that Ukraine is running out of men to fight this war. Its population has been – it was already approximately one third or less the size of the Russian population. It was eviscerated by the mass exodus of military aged men from the country at the outset of the war. Large swaths of Ukrainian territory are under control of the Russian military, meaning that the population, the military aged men in those territories are not available to the Ukrainian military. And there have been massive casualties on the Ukrainian side. And so they simply don't have the men necessary to wage war against an

opponent like Russia. And so it's gotten so bad that even Richard Haass, the ultimate cheerleader of this war, the president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations, just put out an op ed in which he acknowledged that these objectives, the objective of recovering the territory that Russia controls, is now beyond the realm of realistic possibility. And he's arguing for a, quote, "reassessment of the situation". So the United States elite has belatedly come to the realization that this war is unwinnable. I and others have been saying this for over a year. And I want to say in this regard, how outrageous it is that it took them this long to come to this conclusion and that they actually sabotaged a peace deal that would have resulted in a far better outcome from Ukraine back in March of last year. How do we know this? Well, there's a variety of sources. I'll cite one that's of particular interest to your German audience, and that is a form of three eminent Germans, including a former German general, a leading scholar within Germany and the former assistant secretary general of the United Nations, also a German citizen, recently came out with a report in which they reconstructed what happened last year during the negotiations between Ukraine and Russia. And they came to the conclusion that the Ukrainians and the Russians were on the verge of a deal which would have seen Ukraine remain out of NATO, it would have allowed Ukraine to retain control of those four oblasts which Russia subsequently annexed and the United States and the UK sabotaged the deal. That's what they did. So they have the blood of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians on their hands, these Americans and these British tanked that deal. The German government, instead of trying to escalate this without the assistance of the Americans, which is just going to prolong the suffering and increase the number of people who are dead and disabled at the end of this war, it should come to its senses and sit down with its Ukrainian partners and talk about some kind of a realistic peace deal that will preserve the sovereignty of Ukraine, continue to give it access to the Black Sea, and finally bring an end to the suffering. That would be the sensible thing for Chancellor Scholz to do at this time.

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

DL: Thank you, Zain.

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