

Professor Chomsky's Solidarity With Palestine at UN

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Noam Chomsky: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here to be able to talk with you and discuss with you afterwards. Many of the world's problems are so intractable that it's hard to think of ways, even to take steps towards mitigating them. The Israel-Palestine conflict is not one of these. On the contrary, the general outlines of a diplomatic solution have been clear for at least 40 years. Not the end of the road, nothing ever is, but a significant step forward. And the obstacles to a resolution are also quite clear. The basic outlines were presented here in a resolution brought to the U.N. Security Council in January 1976. It called for a two state settlement on the internationally recognised border, and now I'm quoting, "with guarantees for the rights of both states to exist in peace and security within secure and recognised borders". The resolution was brought by the three major Arab states Egypt, Jordan, Syria, sometimes called the confrontation states. Israel refused to attend the session. The resolution was vetoed by the United States. A U.S. veto typically is a double veto. The resolution is not implemented and the event is vetoed from history. So you have to look hard to find the record, but it is there. That has set the pattern that has continued since, the most recent U.S. veto was in February 2011. That's President Obama, when his administration vetoed a resolution calling for implementation of official U.S. policy; opposition to expansion of settlements.

And it's worth bearing in mind that expansion of settlements is not really the issue. It's the settlements unquestionably illegal, along with the infrastructure projects supporting them. For a long time there has been an overwhelming international consensus in support of a settlement, along these general lines. The pattern that was set in January 1976 continues to the present. Israel rejects a settlement of these terms and for many years has been devoting extensive resources to ensuring that it will not be implemented with the unremitting and decisive support of the United States, military, economic, diplomatic and indeed ideological, by establishing how the conflict is viewed and interpreted in the United States and within its broad sphere of influence. There's no time here to review the record, but its general character is revealed by a look at what has happened in Gaza in the past decade, carrying forward a

long history of earlier crimes. Last August, August 26th, a ceasefire was reached between Israel and the Palestinian authority. And the question on all our minds is what are the prospects for the future? Well, one reasonable way to try to answer that question is to look at the record. And here, too, there is a definite pattern. A ceasefire is reached, Israel disregards it and continues its steady assault on Gaza, including continued siege, intermittent acts of violence, more settlement and development projects, often violence in the West Bank. Hamas observes the ceasefire as Israel officially recognises, until some Israeli escalation elicits a Hamas response, which leads to another exercise of mowing the lawn in Israeli parlance. Each episode, more fierce and destructive than the last.

The first of the series was the Agreement on Movement and Access in November 2005. I'll give a close paraphrase of it. It called for a crossing between Gaza and Egypt at Rafah for the export of goods and the transit of people. Continuous operation of crossings between Israel and Gaza for the import and export of goods and the transit of people. Reduction of obstacles to movement within the West Bank. Bus and truck convoys between the West Bank and Gaza. The building of a seaport in Gaza. The reopening of the airport in Gaza that Israel had recently destroyed. These are essentially the terms of successive ceasefires, including the one just reached a few weeks ago. The timing of the November 2005 agreement is significant. This was the moment of Israel's disengagement, as it's called, from Gaza, the removal of several thousand Israeli settlers from Gaza. This is depicted as a noble effort to seek peace and development. But the reality is rather different. The reality was described very quickly by the Israeli official who was in charge of negotiating and implementing the ceasefire, Dov Weissglas, close confidant of then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, as he explained to the Israeli press: "The goal of the disengagement", I'm quoting him, "was the freezing of the peace process so as to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state and to ensure that diplomacy has been removed indefinitely from our agenda". The reality on the ground is described by Israel's leading specialists on the occupation, respected historian, Idith Zertal. Israel's leading diplomatic correspondent Akiva Eldar wrote the major book, the standard work on the settlement project called "Lords of the Land", referring to the settlers. What they say about the disengagement is this. They say: "The ruined territory – and by then it was ruined, largely part of the reason for the removal of the settlers – the ruined territory, was not released for even a single day from Israel's military grip or from the price of the occupation that the inhabitants pay every day. After the disengagement, Israel left behind scorched earth, devastated services and people with neither a present nor a future. The settlements were destroyed in an ungenerous move by an unenlightened occupier, which in fact continues to control the territory and to kill and harass its inhabitants by means of its formidable military might". That's an accurate description from the most respected Israeli source.

The Oslo Accords, 20 years ago, established that Gaza and the West Bank are an indivisible territorial unity whose integrity cannot be broken up. For 20 years, the United States and Israel have been dedicated to separate Gaza and the West Bank in violation of the accords that they had accepted. And a look at the map explains why. Gaza offers the only access to

the outside world of Palestine. If Gaza is separated from the West Bank and whatever autonomy might ultimately be granted in the West Bank would be imprisoned. Israel on one side and a hostile Jordan, ally of Israel, on the other side. And in addition one of Israel's slow and steady U.S. backed policies is to take over the Jordan Valley, about a third of the West Bank, much of the arable land which would essentially imprison the rest even more, more tightly if Gaza is separated from the West Bank. That's the major geostrategic reason for the Israeli insistence, with U.S. backing on separating the two in violation of the Oslo Agreements and the series of ceasefires that have been reached since November 2005. Well, the November 2005 agreement lasted for a few weeks. In January 2006, a very important event took place. The first full free election in the Arab world, carefully monitored, recognised to be free and fair. It had one flaw; it came out the wrong way. Hamas won the parliament, the control of parliament. The U.S. and Israel didn't want that. You may recall at that period the slogan on everyone's lips was democracy promotion. The highest U.S. commitment in the world was democracy promotion. Here was a good test. Democracy election came out the wrong way. The U.S. instantly decided, along with Israel, to punish the Palestinians for the crime of voting the wrong way. A harsh siege was instituted. Other punishments, violence increased. The United States immediately began to organise a military coup to overthrow the unacceptable government; that's quite familiar practice. I won't go through the record.

The European Union, to its shame and discredit, went along with this. There was an immediate Israeli escalation that was the end of the November agreement, followed by major Israeli onslaught. In 2007, a year later, Hamas committed even a greater crime than winning a fair election. It pre-empted the planned military coup and took over Gaza. That's described in the West and the United States, most of the West, as Hamas taking over Gaza by force. Which is not false, but something is omitted. The force was preempting a planned military coup to overthrow the elected government. That was a serious crime. It's bad enough to vote the wrong way in a free election. To preempt the U.S. planned military coup is far more serious. The attack on Gaza increased substantially at that point; major Israeli onslaught. Finally, in January 2008, another ceasefire was reached. Terms were pretty much the same as those that I quoted. Israel publicly rejected the ceasefire, said that it would not abide by it. Hamas observed the ceasefire, as Israel officially recognises, despite Israel's refusal to do so. That continued until November 4th, 2008. On November 4th, which was the day of the U.S. election, Israeli forces invaded Gaza, killed half a dozen Hamas militants, that led to Qassam rockets attacking Israel. Huge Israeli response. Lots of killings. All Palestinians as usual. By the end of December, a couple of weeks later, Hamas offered to renew the ceasefire. The Israeli cabinet considered it, and rejected it. This was a dovish cabinet led by Ehud Olmert, rejected it and decided to launch the next major military operation that was Cast Lead, which was a horrible operation, so much so that it caused a very substantial international reaction, investigations by the United Nations Commission, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch.

In the middle of the assault, the assault, incidentally, was carefully timed to end immediately before President Obama's inauguration. He had already been elected, but he wasn't inaugurated yet. So when he was asked to comment on the ongoing atrocities, he responded by saying that he couldn't do so. The United States has only one president and he wasn't president yet. He was talking about lots of other things, but not this. The attack was timed and immediately before the inauguration, so he therefore could respond to the questions by saying, Well, now is not the time to look at the past, let's look forward to the future. Diplomats know very well that that's a standard slogan for those who are engaged in serious crime. Let's forget about the past, let's look forward to a glorious future. Well, right in the middle of the assault, the Security Council did pass a resolution, unanimously U.S. abstaining, calling for an immediate ceasefire with the usual terms. That was January 8th, 2009. It was never observed and it broke down completely with the next major episode of mowing the lawn in November 2012. You can get a good sense of what was going on by looking at the casualty figures for the year 2012. 79 people were killed, 78 of them Palestinians. The usual story. After the November assault, there was a ceasefire reached with the usual terms.

Describe what happened next by quoting a leading specialist, Nathan Thrall, he is a leading Middle East analyst for the International Crisis Group. As he writes, "Israel recognised that Hamas was observing the terms of the ceasefire and therefore saw little incentive in doing the same. The military attacks on Gaza increased along with more stringent restrictions on imports. Exports were blocked, exit permits were blocked". That continued until April 2014, when Palestinians committed another crime. Gaza based Hamas and West Bank based Palestinian authority signed a unity agreement. Israel was infuriated, infuriated even more when the world mostly supported it. Even the United States gave weak, but actual support. Several reasons for the Israeli reaction. One is that unity between Gaza and the West Bank, between the two movements, would threaten the long standing policies of separating the two. For the reasons that I mentioned. Another reason was that a unity government undermines one of the pretexts for Israel's refusal to participate in negotiations seriously. Namely, how can we negotiate with an entity that is internally divided? Well, if they are unified, that pretext disappears. Israel was infuriated. It launched major assaults on the Palestinians in the West Bank, primarily targeting Hamas – hundreds of people arrested, mostly Hamas members, also Gaza, also killings.

There was a pretext, of course, there always is. The pretext was that three teenagers, Israeli teenagers in the settlement had been brutally murdered, captured and murdered. Israel claimed officially that they thought that they were alive, so therefore launched a long several weeks assault in the West Bank, alleging that they were trying to find them alive; meanwhile, the arrests, attacks and so on. It turns out that they knew immediately that they had been killed. They also knew immediately that it was very unlikely that Hamas was involved. The government said they had certain knowledge that Hamas had done it, but their own leading specialists, like Shlomi Eldar had pointed out right away that the assault, which was a brutal

crime, it was very likely committed by members of a breakaway clan, Qawasmeh Clan, in Hebron, which was not given a green light by Hamas and had been a thorn in their sides. And that apparently is true if you look at the later arrests and punishments. Anyway, that was a pretext for this assault. Killings in Gaza, two that finally elicited a Hamas response. Then came Operation Protective Edge, the one which was just completed. More brutal and destructive even the ones that preceded it.

The pattern is very clear, and so far at least it appears to be continuing. The latest ceasefire was reached on August 26th. It was followed at once by Israel's greatest land grab in 30 years, almost 2000 acres in the Gush Etzion area near what's called Jerusalem, Greater Jerusalem, about five times the size of anything that Jerusalem ever was taken over by Israel, annexed in violation of Security Council orders. The U.S. State Department informed the Israeli embassy that Israeli, I'm quoting now, "Israeli activity in Gush Etzion undermines American efforts to protect Israel at the United Nations and urged that Israel should not provide ammunition for those at the United Nations who would interpret Israel's position as hardening". Actually, that warning was given 47 years ago, in September 1967, at the time of Israel's first colonisation, illegal colonisation of Gush Etzion. Israeli historian Gershom Gorenberg recently reminded us of this. Little has changed since, in the last 47 years. Apart from the scale of the crimes which continue without a break with constant U.S. support. Well, as for the prospect, there is a conventional picture. It's repeated constantly on all sides. Israel. Palestine. Independent commentators. Diplomats. The picture that's presented is that there are two alternatives. Either the two state settlement, which represents an overwhelming international consensus, virtually everyone. And if that fails, although it will have to be one state, Israel will take over the West Bank. The Palestinians will hand over the keys, as it's sometimes said. Palestinians often have favoured that. They say then they will be able to carry out the civil rights struggle, maybe modelled on the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, fight for civil rights within the whole one state controlled by Israel. Israelis criticise that on the grounds of what is called the demographic problem, the fact that there will be too many non-Jews in a Jewish state, in fact pretty soon a majority. Those are the alternatives that are presented overwhelmingly, hardly an exception.

My own opinion, which I've written about repeatedly without convincing many people apparently, but I will try to convince you, is that this is a total illusion. Those are not the two alternatives. There are two alternatives, but there are different ones. One alternative is the international consensus on a two stage settlement. Basically the terms of January 1976. By now, it's virtually everyone. The Arab League, the Organisation of Islamic States, includes Iran, Europe, Latin America, a formal at least about everyone. That's one option. The other option, the realistic one, is that Israel will continue doing exactly what it is doing right now before our eyes. It's visible. With U.S. support, which is also visible. And what's happening is not a secret. You can open the newspapers and read it. Israel is taking over what they call Jerusalem. As I mentioned, a huge area, maybe five times the area of historic Jerusalem, Greater Jerusalem, big area in the West Bank includes many Arabic villages being

dispossessed, destroyed, bringing settlers in. All of this is doubly illegal. All the settlements are illegal, as determined by the Security Council advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. But the Jerusalem settlements are doubly illegal because they are also in violation of explicit Security Council orders going back to 1968, with the U.S. actually voting for them at that time, barring any change in the status of Jerusalem. But it continues. That's Greater Jerusalem. There are then corridors extending to the east, one major corridor extending from Jerusalem almost to Jericho. Virtually bisecting the West Bank, includes the Israeli town of Ma'ale Adumim, which was built largely during the Clinton administration, the Clinton years, with the obvious purpose of bisecting the West Bank doesn't – still a little contested territory, but that's the goal. There's another corridor further to the north, including the town of Ariel, partially bisecting what remains, another one further to the north, including the town of Kedumim. If you look at the map, these essentially break up the West Bank into pretty much cantons. It looks from a map as though a large territory is left. But that's misleading. Most of that is uninhabitable desert. And that's separate from what I mentioned before, the slow, steady take over of the Jordan Valley; to the east. Again, about a third of the arable land country Israel has no official policy of taking it over, but they're pursuing the policy in the way that has been carried out now for 100 years, literally. Small steps so nobody notices, or at least people pretend not to notice. Establish a military zone. The Palestinians who live there have to be displaced because it's a military zone, no settlement allowed. And pretty soon there's a military settlement, Nahal settlement, and another, then, sooner or later, it becomes an actual settlement. Meanwhile, dig wells, dispossess the population, set up green zones, a large variety of techniques which have by now reduced the Arab population from about 300,000 in 1967 to roughly 60,000 today. As I mentioned, that essentially imprisons what's left.

I don't think Israel has any intention of taking over the Palestinian population concentrations which are left out of these plans. There are analogies often made to South Africa, but they're quite misleading. South Africa relied on its black population, that was 85% of the population. It was its workforce and they had to sustain them, just like slave owners have to maintain their capital. They tried to sustain the population. They even tried to gain international support for the Bantustans. Israel has no such attitude toward the Palestinians. They don't want to have anything to do with them. If they leave, that's fine. If they die, that's fine. In standard neo colonial pattern, Israel is establishing, permitting the establishment of a centre for Palestinian elites in Ramallah, where you have nice restaurants, theatres and so on. Every third world country under the colonial system, something like that. That's the picture that's emerging. It's taking shape before our eyes. It has so far worked very well. If it continues, Israel will not face a demographic problem when these regions are integrated slowly into Israel. Actually, the proportion of Jews in Greater Israel will increase. There are very few Palestinians there. Those who were there are being dispossessed, kicked out. That's what's taking shape before our eyes. I think that's the realistic alternative to a two state settlement. And there's every reason to expect it to continue as long as the United States supports it.

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