



## Inside Israel's calculated bombing of Gaza - Dr. Shir Hever

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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. Before I start this interview, I would like to remind you that we recently started our crowdfunding campaign with the goal of reaching €20,000 so that we can continue with our independent and nonprofit journalism in 2024. Journalism that is viewer funded and does not take any money from corporations or governments. If we reach our target by the 10th of January, we will be able to cover all of the costs associated with our journalism that include, for example, tax advising, website maintenance, production, post-production, voice synchronization, video editing, and many others. So if you are watching our video, make sure to participate today by just donating two or three dollars or euros. If all of our 145,000 subscribers just donate that amount today, we will not only be able to reach a crowdfunding target, but also be able to cover our operational costs for the next two to three years. Today, I'll be talking to independent journalist, author and economist Dr. Shir Hever about Israel's war in Gaza. Dr. Shir Hever, however, is also the military embargo coordinator of the Boycott National Committee of the BDS movement. Shir, welcome back to the show.

**Shir Hever (SH):** Thanks for having me, Zain.

**ZR:** I would like to start the interview with an investigative article titled, quote, *A Mass Assassination Factory Inside Israel's Calculated Bombing of Gaza*, unquote, which was written by an independent nonprofit online magazine called 972 Magazine, which is run by a group of Palestinian and Israeli journalists. In the article it is described the use of artificial intelligence that the Israeli military is employing in its war in Gaza. Can you first tell us about the sources that the authors of this article used and then give us some details about the information it reveals?

**SH:** 972 Magazine is one of the very few media channels that are still able to report in a journalistic way about what is happening about the genocide, about the mass killing in Gaza. Yuval Abraham, the author of this report is a very respectable journalist, and he based his analysis and his reporting mostly on reports that he got anonymously from sources within the

Israeli intelligence. And this is very important to bear in mind. First of all, it means, of course, that the report is very reliable and very believable. But we also cannot ignore the fact that the Israeli establishment, the Israeli military, the Israeli government, are not exactly opposed to this article being published. So even though the article makes very serious and justified accusations against the Israeli government and military for intentionally killing civilians, and we will get into that, I hope, but it's also kind of promotional for the way that the Israeli military is using artificial intelligence as a weapon of war. This is the first time in history that artificial intelligence is employed by a military in such a scale. This is really the first time and there is a lot that we need to learn from this in order to avoid a disaster.

**ZR:** Talk about what you mentioned, the intentional killing of civilians, because as you probably know, there is this perspective in the German mainstream media as well as political establishment, that Israel's doing everything possible just to target terrorists and Hamas and is avoiding any attacks on civilian casualties, it is following international law. So can you elaborate what this article revealed?

**SH:** I mean, this is a perspective in the German media, which is completely delusional. And it's based on a serious political problem in Germany that politicians and institutions that are very pro-Israeli are just incapable of looking at the facts on the ground. Because they are incapable of dealing with reality. They invent the story as if Israel is being very careful. But anyone who speaks Hebrew, anyone who watches the Israeli media, knows that around the clock there are calls for killing civilians. We see journalists who are – in order to have fun fire shells, 155 millimeter shells into Gaza without aiming, just, you know, to show that they're part of the war effort. And this is clearly an intentional killing of civilians. When you have generals, journalists, politicians calling for intentional starvation of the population, how is that not intentional killing of civilians? So there is no question about that. But specifically, this article by Yuval Abraham is speaking about something different. Because according to the rules of war and just trying to exterminate the population, killing civilians is, of course, the crime of genocide. It's a very serious crime against humanity. And the Israeli military is trying to protect its own personnel from being charged in the International Criminal Court in The Hague for committing this crime. So they're trying to at least pay lip service, saying that they're not indiscriminately killing everyone in Gaza, but they are targeting specific people, which are the Hamas fighters and the other casualties are collateral damage. And collateral damage is, of course, euphemism for killing civilians. But there is something which is the collateral damage factor. The collateral damage factor which is explained in this article is that for every targeted person there is a certain number of civilians which is okay if they are killed as collateral damage. And the Israeli military, the command has to give orders to the soldiers, what is that factor which is acceptable. So killing five civilians in order to kill one Hamas member, is it to kill 100? The article says yes, the numbers are getting to 100. And also, there's another factor here, which is, what exactly counts as a target, as a Hamas fighter? Because if it's just a lowly foot soldier for Hamas who has a gun, does that justify it, destroying an entire apartment building and killing entire families in order to kill that one

person? So normally, of course, the laws of war do not permit this. There is an idea of proportionality. Proportionality means that you're only allowed to kill people as collateral damage if the end lives that would be saved because of the goal of the war would be so many and this is so urgent, that you are able to justify that. And here's where artificial intelligence comes in, because the artificial intelligence that is used by the Israeli military is not what we think of in terms of artificial intelligence as a weapon, if we watch science fiction movies like *Terminator*. You know, in those movies, it's the artificial intelligence which is taking weapons, guiding them directly to hit people and kill them. And there is a lot of concern that semi-autonomous weapons or fully autonomous weapons will be unleashed to kill people and then will not distinguish between fighters and civilians and may even turn against their own handlers and so on and these are the common science fiction scenarios that we are confronted with. But let's look at the reality of what's happening on the ground right now. And what is happening in Gaza is something different. And unfortunately, this is something that even the article in 972 Magazine by Yuval Abraham does not cover; which is that the way that this artificial intelligence is actually operating in combat is not by guiding the weapons at all. In fact, it operates in a very similar way to ChatGPT, a language model. It maintains a conversation with the soldiers and tells the soldiers, according to our analysis of pictures of videos of the area which has been scanned by drones, by cameras, there is a certain probability for hitting a target and a certain probability for hitting a certain number of unintended civilians and also a certain probability for hitting the Israeli hostages who are held in Gaza and based on that information, the artificial intelligence then asks the soldier, Do you approve this target? And if yes, you'll fire the weapon, not the artificial intelligence, the soldier fires. So the soldier is sitting there with their finger on the trigger, and they're getting these targets from the artificial intelligence one by one by one, and in normal – well, war is never normal – in previous wars and previous attacks on Gaza, there has been about five to six targets that were created by the military intelligence every day, so the soldiers would have to then fire at these targets using bombs, using artillery shells, not so many artillery shells, because they're very inaccurate. And if you have five to six targets, you want to use your smartest bomb in order to hit that particular target. Now, we're talking about hundreds of targets per day. So that's also the reason that the Israeli military is using artillery, which is very cheap and they're just carpet bombing the whole area. But from the perspective of the soldiers, they're not carpet bombing. They're getting specific targets. Just that these targets are not produced by intelligence officers, they're produced by artificial intelligence. And the artificial intelligence goal here and this is exactly how this language model operates, it doesn't operate on achieving maximum accuracy. We have no way to know if the analysis of the pictures, the facial recognition software that they're using is good or not. It could be completely false. What we know is how effective it is in convincing the soldiers to pull the trigger. So the artificial intelligence is actually manipulating the soldiers of Israel's own side in order to believe that if they pull the trigger, they will not be killing hostages, they will not be killing more civilians than is allowed by this same collateral damage factor and so that convinces them to keep pressing the trigger again and again and again and effectively to carpet bomb the Gaza Strip. This is what is happening these days now, as we're speaking,

because it's the holiday season and this is exactly the moment that the Israeli government says we have an opportunity to use more violence and artificial intelligence enables that. And this is something that we all have to be very concerned about, first of all, because this is enabling genocide. And there are more than 20,000 victims, casualties in the Gaza Strip, whom we know have been killed already, in addition to tens of thousands of injured, including many who've lost their limbs, but also thousands who are trapped under the rubble. And there is no effort to try to rescue them and therefore, they are dying as well. So this is what's happening because of the way that artificial intelligence is used in such an industrial way. That's why the title of this article is The Assassination Factory. And industrial killing of the whole population is in fact an act of genocide.

**ZR:** Let's look at Israel's war from a different angle. Initially, when Israel declared war on Gaza, it told all Palestinians living in the north of Gaza to flee to the south so they could focus on eliminating Hamas. After the Israeli government took control of much of the north, it expanded its operation to the south of Gaza. Beginning this week, however, the Israeli newspaper Israel Hayom reported that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made the following comments at his Likud Party meeting when it came to Israel's plans for the population of Gaza. Quote, "Countries that are ready to absorb them and we are working on it", unquote. He further went on to state, quote, "The world is already discussing the possibilities of our voluntary emigration", unquote. He also stressed that a team must be established that, quote, "ensures that those who want to leave Gaza to a third country can do so. It needs to be settled. It has a strategic importance for the day after the war", unquote. Given the actions of the military and the statements expressed by the Israelis leading officials in public, what do you think are the intended goals of Israel in Gaza?

**SH:** Well, first of all, a word of advice. Don't base your research on Israel Hayom or other pro-government Israeli newspapers who have long stopped functioning as reliable media sources. In this particular case, I can actually confirm that Netanyahu did say those things, and it was also reported in real newspapers, so I can verify it. And yes, he said a lot of things. He also ordered one of his ministers to collect ideas of how to depopulate the Gaza Strip. And these ideas include ideas about killing the population, as well as ethnic cleansing and deporting the people into other countries. Egypt has strongly refused to accept the Palestinian refugees, because of various reasons. But of course, we don't want an ethnic cleansing. We don't want Palestinians to be deported to Egypt. And it's very shameful that the left party in Germany made a statement trying to convince the Egyptian government to participate in the act of ethnic cleansing and opening the gates in order to resettle the Palestinian population in the Sinai Peninsula instead of in Palestine. Now, your question was about what is the plan of the Israeli government. And the honest answer is there is no plan. Because the Israeli government is not functioning. They are different; every minister has their own plan. The Minister of Intelligence is still working very hard to promote the idea of deporting all the Palestinians into the Sinai Peninsula while other ministers are doing other things. Danny Danon is traveling to different countries. He just visited Papua New Guinea in an attempt to

convince these countries to accept Palestinian refugees, going much further than Egypt and to the other side of the world. But there are others who say Gaza has to be burned to the ground. There is one minister who suggested dropping a nuclear bomb on Gaza. When we talk about proportionality in times of war, then proportionality only works if you have a clear goal. And the Israeli government, when they're asked what is the goal of the war, they give a different answer every time. Sometimes they say the goal is to rescue the hostages. And I think their actions on the ground prove that they have no intention of rescuing the hostages. Other times, they say the goal is to destroy Hamas, which is a fantasy. I mean, it's not going to happen. And I think everyone understands that unless they are very delusional or getting all the information from the Israeli media where there are still journalists who continue to fantasize about destroying Hamas somehow. And others say the goal of the war is to conquer the Gaza Strip and repopulate it with illegal settlements, or making it completely uninhabitable, making it into some kind of a desert or parking lot, as Israelis like to say. So all of these are different goals. And of these goals, the only one which is really permissible under international law is the return of the hostages. And in order to return the hostages, Israel needs to engage in a prisoner exchange agreement, which also would include a ceasefire. This is what the Israeli government refuses to do. And because they're not going in this direction, the number of civilians that they are allowed to kill in order to pursue their goals is exactly zero. And every person they kill is illegal.

**ZR:** Let me take this conversation to the international stage. On the 12th of December, the United Nations General Assembly voted, demanding the immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. A clear majority that included 153 nations voted in favor of a ceasefire while ten voted against it and 23 abstained. The most powerful nation that voted against a ceasefire was, of course, the United States. On the 23rd of December, the United Nations Security Council finally passed a resolution on more aid for Gaza. However, after days of negotiations, the text of the resolution was essentially watered down and did not call for an immediate ceasefire and instead called for steps to be taken that create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities. How do you assess the UN developments taking place so far, in particular the role of the US?

**SH:** Yeah, let's not use this passive language, the text was watered down. It was the US which watered it down by putting an ultimatum that unless the word "ceasefire" is removed from the text, they will veto it. So it is completely the decision of the United States against the opinion of all other members of the Security Council to oppose a ceasefire in order to continue the killing and continue the fighting. I have to say that it is completely irrational from the point of view of the United States. I mean, even if you try to see it from a strategic, geostrategic perspective, the United States is acting in a very stupid way, in a very irrational way, in a very similar way to how they acted in Vietnam or in Iraq or in Afghanistan, where they developed this idea that there could be a puppet government which is completely unpopular, unsupported by the population, especially by the indigenous population, and just maintained, propped up with corruption, weapons, and that this government can use force of

arms in order to turn the whole region into a proxy of the United States imperial power. It failed in Vietnam. It failed in Iraq. It failed in Afghanistan. And it is failing. And it is certainly going to fail in Palestine. And this corrupt government, which is propped up by US bribes and weapons, is the Israeli government. I think this is something that for Israelis, when they start to realize this, can you imagine what it feels like when they realize that they are the next Afghanistan? That Netanyahu is the next Karzai, and whether this country is going into oblivion or not their country, the state is going into oblivion. And in that moment, people lose the ability to act rationally and to see that the Israelis are not acting rationally, that they are calling for revenge, that they are supporting genocide in full knowledge, that they are committing suicide, I mean, this would be the end of their state, is not completely surprising. It has happened so many times before. But what exactly does the US have to gain from this? Because if they lose their allies in the region and they strain their relationship with their other allies in the region, like the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, who are trying to call for a ceasefire and the US keeps pushing them down to the point where these own regimes are being threatened by their own populations, especially in Jordan and Egypt, where there is a large population which supports Palestinians and wants to end the genocide and are horrified by their government's complicity with US imperialism, but also, of course, in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, all of these places are not exactly democratic. And this is the US empire falling apart. And you see that the emerging forces, like, for example, China, which is becoming more powerful and more influential, have made it very clear that they support Palestinian freedom. They support Palestinian statehood and they support the Palestinian right of return of the refugees. That's a very, very actual thing right now. Very important to mention the right of return right now, because let's not forget the population of Gaza, 2.3 million people, between 60 and 70% of them are refugees, who originally were expelled from their homes in what is now known as the state of Israel. Many of them lived in the areas where the kibbutzim were built, which were attacked on October 7th and they want to go home and they have the right to go home. And now that Israel has demolished so many houses in Gaza, destroyed the infrastructure, polluted the groundwater and caused such terrible destruction that it seems difficult to imagine how Gaza can be rebuilt and restored and what will happen to these people who have nowhere to sleep and it's wintertime then the question of the right of return becomes very, very relevant. Because they do have a right to return to their homes in what is now Israel. Many of these homes don't stand anymore, of course, Israel destroyed them and built other homes and the population changed and there are more refugees today than there were in 1948. But the right of return is certainly a path for saving and healing the Gaza Strip as well, and restoring it to the level of normality that it had until 1948. And so that's something that we see on the geopolitical level, that China is already speaking about a realizable future while the United States is just going again and again in the same path that has always led to disaster and catastrophe. And it looks like its empire is falling apart because of this.

**ZR:** There was a major escalation in the region on Monday. An Israeli airstrike in Damascus killed a high ranking Iranian general named Sayyed Reza Mousavi, a longtime adviser of the

Iranian paramilitary Revolutionary Guard in Syria. Iran has not taken any retaliatory action as of yet, even though it vowed to do so. In your view, do you think if Israel continues with its war in Gaza, an all out regional war is possible, similar to 1973?

**SH:** Well, it's not going to be like 1973, that one I can tell you, because the history moves forward and because we're now in a different kind of geopolitical arrangement. For almost every Israeli, the comparison with 1973 is something very, very strong, especially the 1973, the war started on October 6th and then 50 years and one day after October 7th, 2023, there was an attack that once again took the Israeli army completely by surprise, except that this time the Israeli army is not fighting big conventional armored divisions of Syria and Egypt backed by Soviet weapons. No, they're fighting a guerrilla organization which is fighting with light weapons and still they're losing, which also says a lot about how Israel has changed in those 50 years. But no, I think for the Israelis, the most terrifying thought is Hezbollah in Lebanon and what would happen if another front opens up? And just a couple of days ago, the Israeli media has published the great scoop that Biden has successfully convinced Netanyahu a couple of weeks ago not to start a new front with Lebanon, not to invade Lebanon. And this is an inversion of reality, which really teaches us a lot about the state of mental affairs in Israel right now, when they believe it's their decision if there's going to be a war with Hezbollah or not. And it's not their own decision. And if a war starts, Israel will not be able to decide when it ends. And because of this, yes, there is a very, very serious risk of a regional war. And I think this risk is higher in these days of the holidays than ever, because of the holiday in Israel there is talk that maybe the US will change its position and no longer enable genocide. And what if the US will demand a cease fire around January? And if this happens, then Israel doesn't have a lot of time. And now, over the time of Christmas and New Year's, when international media is not really interested in Palestine, they can escalate the violence. And we are seeing them escalating and bombing on Khan Younis very intensively and killing a lot of people. And in that moment, if the fighting spreads also to the West Bank, I mean, there is fighting in the West Bank, but we haven't seen a fraction of what it could be if the groups, the armed groups in the West Bank rise up against the Israeli occupation. And what happens if the northern front also escalates? And again, there is fighting and there are casualties and Israel has been killing a lot of journalists on the northern front, a lot of journalists in south Lebanon. But again, if Hezbollah decides to actually use its force to attack Israel at this moment, taking advantage of the fact that the Israeli military is trapped in Gaza and losing soldiers every day and the Israeli economy is falling apart then I guess if ever they wanted to do this, they will do it now. And so, yes, the risk of regional war is very high. And what is Iran's role in this is not completely clear; you started by mentioning Iran. And it's true that Iran has a lot to gain because the sanctions against Iran and the coalition against Iran are very much built on Israel. And without Israel, Iran would be able to become an unchecked regional power. And of course, they want that. But do they want to sacrifice their own blood and money and resources in order to engage directly in a war like this? Or would that actually draw the US further in? Or are they content to sit aside and see Israel basically destroying itself by acting in such an irresponsible way and by committing

genocide? I'm sure that the Iranian government knows that every country, that or every people, every nation that commits genocide loses its sovereignty. It always happens. It happened in Rwanda. It happened in Yugoslavia. It happened in Germany. Where where the regime that enables genocide never survives. It is suicide action. So from their point of view, they could just wait and see what happens. But if they do engage, then of course, the Israeli and the pro-Israeli forces in the region do not have the military strength to stand against it.

**ZR:** Let us look at some developments taking place in Germany in regards to the Israel Palestine conflict. In November the use of the slogan "From river to the sea, Palestine will be free" became a criminal offense in Germany, punishable by a prison sentence of up to three years or a hefty fine. However the statement "Between the sea and the Jordan there will be only Israel sovereignty", which is stated in the founding charter of the Likud Party from 1977, the party which the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu currently heads, has not been criminalized by the German government. Furthermore, starting this month, a written declaration of committing, recognizing the right of the state of Israel to exist must be submitted in the eastern federal state of Saxony-Anhalt in order to obtain German citizenship. Could you comment on these developments and their impact on civil liberties?

**SH:** You know, when we're thinking about the genocide in Gaza and tens of thousands of people who are being killed the political insanity that's happening in Germany doesn't seem that interesting, I have to say. I mean, there is certainly an idea in Germany, because it is so deeply traumatized by the Holocaust and the guilt feelings, but also the contradictions of trying to build a state without nationalism but with nationalism, because nationalism is part of the capitalistic array of building modern states and NATO wants Germany to be nationalistic and have a strong army and so on. So because of these contradictions, a lot of Germans then look to Israeli nationalism as an alternative, as a proxy. Instead of waving the German flag, waving the Israeli flag. Now it's a situation in which Israel is falling apart at the seams, committing genocide itself and the traumas are coming back. And then, of course, for Germans, this is very difficult. And they're acting in a very irrational, very self-destructive way. Destroying freedom of speech in Germany in a time like this is a very bad idea. I want to remind our viewers, especially if we have among our viewers, German journalists, this is something very important because there are – in the genocide in Rwanda, after the genocide, there were trials. And of course, the crime of genocide is very serious and people were imprisoned for life, for murder. But journalists who have committed the crime of incitement to genocide were also punished, maybe not as severely, but they were also punished. And clearly, Israeli journalists who are saying Palestinian civilians must be killed, Palestinians must be starved, those kinds of statements are criminal and they will be punished. But and to my horror, I also have to add to this that German journalists would be facing charges as well, because I see in the German media a lot of articles which deny the genocide, deny the killing of civilians, but also justify it. And in order to deny something and justify it at the same time, you need a lot of mental and journalistic flexibility. But there are journalists who have this flexibility, and they are doing that. And this is something that is simply criminal. And I think



this whole nonsense of criminalizing the slogan "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" is, I mean, it's just an expression of loss of coherence by the German authorities. But what's happening in terms of justifying the genocide is much more serious. And here the international law is superior to German law. I mean, even according to the German own legal system, crimes against international law supersede the local jurisdiction. So if in Saxony-Anhalt they want to basically incite against people who don't recognize the state of Israel and call them anti-Semites and deny them the right to become citizens, that is a serious act of discrimination for which they would be tried in an international court. And their ability to use the local court system in order to discriminate against the German citizen is not stronger than the international court.

**ZR:** Dr. Shir Hever, independent economist, journalist and author, thank you so much for your time today.

**SH:** Thank you, Zain.

**ZR:** And thank you for tuning in today. If you watched this video till the very end, make sure to take just a few more minutes and click on the description of this video to check out the information about our crowdfunding campaign. If we reach our target, we will be able to continue with our independent and nonprofit journalism in 2024. And if we're unable to read, we will have to, unfortunately, scale back on our capacities. So if you're watching our videos regularly, make sure to participate today. Thank you for your support and generosity and see you next time.

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