



Israel knew about Hamas' Attack Plan – With Fabian Scheidler

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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 share with you that we just started our crowdfunding campaign with the goal of reaching €20,000 so we can cover the costs associated with our journalism. These costs include, for example, tax advising, website maintenance, translation, voiceover, correction and many others. If we're unable to reach this target, we will unfortunately have to cut our capacities. So if you're watching our videos regularly, make sure to donate just 1 or €2 in our recent crowdfunding campaign. If all of our 145,000 subscribers donate just €1, we will be able to not only achieve our crowdfunding goal but also cover our costs for the next 4 to 5 years. Today I'll be talking to independent journalist and author Fabian Scheidler. Fabian Scheidler is the author of several books - one of them includes *The End of the Megamachine: A Brief History of a Failing Civilization*. Fabian, welcome back.

Fabian Scheidler (FS): Thanks for having me.

ZR: Before we look at recent events in Israel and Gaza, I would like to start the interview by talking about your trip to Israel and the West Bank in June of this year. Let us put aside all the developments that have unfolded since October 7th and just focus on this. Could you tell us about your trip, why you undertook it, the observations you made, and what struck you the most?

FS: Well, I visited a friend of mine in West Jerusalem who is teaching at a German school in East Jerusalem. And I took the opportunity of my two weeks trip to go to the West Bank and to have some tours on the political situation in the country. And this was months prior to the horrendous attacks of Hamas on Gaza. Now, what I found is that the situation was critical for

many Palestinians for many reasons. In Jerusalem itself - and you have to understand that East Jerusalem was annexed by Israel, not recognized internationally - and the people in East Jerusalem, mostly Arabs, have a set of, let's say, minor rights. They have been annexed. They are supposed to pay taxes to the Israeli state, but they get hardly any infrastructure out of this and they are not able to vote for the Knesset, for the national parliament, which is really a situation that's rather unique that people are considered to be part of a state but not able to vote. They are able to vote for the local elections, but not for the Knesset. And then you have the wall. I mean, after Israel annexed East Jerusalem, they built the wall - not only around East Jerusalem, it is also some of the territory of the West Bank and the trade and the opportunities of Palestinians to make a living have been severely severed by this wall. Prior to the wall, which was built in the early 2000s by Ariel Sharon, there was a coming to and from the West Bank to Jerusalem and so on, which was vital for the communities. And that was severed by the wall. And you find all kinds of absurdities - the wall is not even on the border between Jerusalem and the West Bank. So parts of East Jerusalem are out of the wall. They are beyond the wall, but they are part of Jerusalem. So you have these Kafkaesque situations. And then I also took a trip from the Lake of Tiberias, which is in Galilee, to Jerusalem through the occupied territories of the West Bank. And this is interesting because most of this territory is area C. The West Bank is divided into three kinds of areas by the Israeli forces. Area A is governed by the Palestinian authorities, which are also partly controlled by the Israeli government. And Area C is completely under military control of Israel. And so you can go from the Lake of Galilee, from the Lake of Tiberias to Jerusalem, through Palestinian territories, on a road which is only used by Israelis. And we took a hitchhiker, a young female Israeli soldier, and we spoke to her. And she was really fed up with the Israeli military because she said, well, I've been serving three years, I lost my youth to this military, I had no private space and I see the whole thing as a pointless venture. And many young Israelis, they all have to serve in the military for many years, they are fed up with the system. Many of them, after the military service, by the way, are traumatized. Many go to India, to Goa to forget about their traumatic experience. So the situation is a traumatizing situation for the Palestinians because of the occupation, because of the blockade of Gaza. But also for some parts of the Israeli population as well, who have to enforce the occupation on the people of Palestine.

ZR: Let me recap the situation so far in Gaza for our viewers. On October 7th, after Hamas launched a terrorist attack against Israel and killed at least 1200 citizens, many of whom were military personnel, Israel declared war on Gaza, starting with an aerial bombardment campaign and followed it with a ground invasion. After a brief truce between Hamas and Israel from the 24th to the 30th of November, Israel has expanded its ground operation to southern Gaza, focusing on the second largest city there called Khan Yunis. In Gaza, according to the health ministry and UN reports, more than 16,000 Palestinians have been killed, with 70% of them being women and children. It is also being reported that more civilians have been killed in the Israeli assault on Gaza in just 61 days than in the entirety of Russia's one in Ukraine, dating back to February 2022. In a rare move, UN Secretary-General

Antonio Guterres invoked Article 99 of the UN Charter, calling on the Security Council to act to avert a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. Can you comment on these developments in particular Hamas's attack on October 7th and Israel's response thereafter?

FS: Yes. First of all, I think we have to take three things into account. The first thing is that the Hamas attack on October 7th was a horrendous attack, also in violation of international law. The people under occupation have a right under international law to defend themselves, but not to kill civilians. So what Hamas did on October 7th was a major crime, killing civilians, killing hostages and so on. The second thing is that under international law, one crime doesn't justify another crime. So the Israeli reaction was a collective punishment of the population of Gaza, which is a crime under international law. It was completely disproportionate. And they have killed almost more than 16,000 people, according to Palestinian authorities now - which is more than ten times the amount of Israelis killed by Hamas in both days. And they have been targeting hospitals and schools and humanitarian facilities, UN facilities and so on. All of these are war crimes. The Israeli war crimes started already when they imposed a complete siege of Gaza, which is also a crime under international law, because people have a right to have access to food, to water, to medicine and so on. So these are the first two things. And all of this happened under the situation of decades of occupation and 16 years of a blockade of Gaza, which is also a crime under international law. So this situation has been escalating ever since. And the very problematic thing here is not only the behavior of the Israeli government, but also the behavior of Western governments. The German government has backed Israeli operations from the outset. They have not called for a cease fire, as 120 other nations have called in the General Assembly. Guterres himself called for a cease fire. Olaf Scholz, the German chancellor said that all that Israel is doing is complying with international law and everything else would be absurd. Those were his words. I mean, this is an utter lie. And the backing of the German government and other Western governments, such as the UK and the US is outrageous, and they should call for a cease fire. You mentioned Article 99, Guterres invoked that article to call in the Security Council to vote again on a cease fire - the last time it was blocked by a veto of the United States.

ZR: What do you make of the argument that in Gaza - the people that have died there - the figures are wildly exaggerated because Hamas has an interest to portray more deaths in front of the world community because they would get sympathy and support.

FS: Yes, of course. If you have numbers and information that comes from one side of a conflict, you always have to verify them. And the UN said that in the past, the figures of the Palestinian authorities, including the Gaza authorities, were largely correct. I mean, there were many attacks on Gaza, including the Operation Cast Lead, with more than 1000 dead on the Palestinian side, and the figures largely turned out to be correct. A spokesperson of the US Foreign ministry said that probably there are more deaths than reported by Palestinian

authorities because many people are lying under the rubble. So I think the figures can be trusted and probably there are more people dead.

ZR: Let us look at a recent development that is taking place in Gaza- the Al-Shifa Hospital, the largest medical facility in the Gaza Strip. Israel was claiming for weeks, if not years, that Hamas has built a terror infrastructure, including a command and control center underneath the hospital, which Hamas and their health authorities have vehemently denied. The Israeli Defense Force released an animation video prior to the operation that showed in great detail how the control center looked like. After taking control over the hospital, Israel claimed to have found a 55 meter long and ten meter deep tunnel under the hospital, and it released a series of images showing bathrooms and bedrooms and even a calendar with names of terrorists. The media attention on this issue has completely dissipated, given how many issues are being stacked up one after another due to Israel's fast paced military operation. Nevertheless, we would still like to stay on top of this issue. In your view, how credible was the evidence that Israel presented on the command and control center under the Al-Shifa Hospital?

FS: Yeah. First of all, we have to understand that in a situation like that, when it's unclear whether there is a military infrastructure beneath the civilian infrastructure, under the Geneva Convention, the fourth Geneva Convention, in these cases, the protection of civilians has priority over military targets. Even if the Israeli forces had come up with strong evidence that there was a military center beneath the hospital, they wouldn't have the right to bombard the hospital to cut electricity and so on. So under no circumstances was this in compliance with international law, what they did. It was a crime to attack this hospital under any circumstances. Now, when they had invaded the hospital and came up with the video footage and so on -funnily, and in a macabre way - it came out that the tunnels beneath the hospital were built by Israeli forces decades ago. So these tunnels were not constructed by Hamas. Then they had all this talk about command centers, which was a complete hoax. When they went into these rooms, it was just - the infrastructure was not usable and so on. It's quite possible that some Hamas fighters were under the hospital. I mean, they have a huge tunnel system all over Gaza, but there was by no means a command center. So all of this was just propaganda to justify something that couldn't have been justified from the outset.

ZR: According to a report by The New York Times, the Israeli military knew of Hamas's plan to attack Israel over a year before the October 7 attacks. The New York Times cited a 40 page document obtained by Israeli officials that had predicted Hamas would target Israel with rockets, use drones to disable Israeli security and civilian facilities at the border and wall and take over southern communities and military bases in Israel. In your view, what is the significance of this document and why do you think Israel ignored these signs?

FS: It is highly significant. And The New York Times this time did a good job on this. And what they say is when they compare the detailed plan one year ago with what Hamas actually

did, it's amazing how it matches. Hamas did quite exactly what they were planning to do from the outset. And the paper, the 40 page document you mentioned, circulated widely in the Israeli military and in the intelligence service. We don't know if Benjamin Netanyahu and other members of the administration saw the document and we don't know the motives why they didn't act accordingly. The fact that Hamas was able to undertake these attacks was amazing from the outset, even without that document. I mean, Gaza is one of the most surveilled places on earth. The Israeli military is surveilling everything. So how could it be that they didn't get it? And with that document this becomes even a sharper question. We don't know why they ignored it. Some people in the administration in the military say, well, we thought Hamas would not be able to undertake such a huge operation. Well, it might be. But there might be other motives. Some say, well, maybe Israel was allowing Hamas to do that, to strike back and get control over the Gaza Strip. We don't know if that is the case, but this could be possible. In any case, it raises questions about whether either the Israeli military really defends its own citizens or whether it let it happen. So that has to be investigated to really show what the Israeli government knew and why they decided not to act.

ZR: On November 14th, Finance Minister of Israel, Bezalet Smotrich stated, and let me quote him here, 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. Editors and commentators interpret this as, quote "evidence for Israel's plan to ethnically cleanse Gaza of Palestinians." What is not sufficiently being discussed, however, are the economic incentives that may be driving this military operation. Have you found out anything about this in regards to your research?

FS: Yes. I mean, if this represents really the position of the Israeli government, including Benjamin Netanyahu, it would be really outrageous. I mean, the statement in itself, calling for ethnic cleansing is outrageous. It's a major crime to do this. We don't know if this is really the goal of the Israeli government. When it comes to the economic interest, it's rarely talked about, but for Israel, the gas fields in the Mediterranean at the coast of Israel and of Gaza are very important. They use the gas for their electricity demands, it's a high tech country. They need a lot of energy for desalination and other things. And they have developed a number of gas fields to the north of Gaza. And there are also huge amounts of gas at the coast off the coast of Gaza. So, of course, Israel is quite interested in controlling these gas fields. We don't know if the assault on Gaza has anything to do with that. There are also plans for a high speed rail from the Red Sea to the Israeli coast. There is also talk about a possible competition to the Suez Canal, the so-called Ben Gurion Canal Plan, which was already discussed in the 60s. We don't know if that plan is seriously considered now. And if it is, of course, they would have an interest to have the canal to the Mediterranean near Gaza. We don't know if any of that played a major role. What we know is that the Israeli military operations are also used to promote the weapons industry. The arms industry is surging in the

United States, Lockheed Martin is going through the ceiling with their weapons sales and their shareholder value. Same is true for many Israeli companies. Israel is one of the main weapons manufacturers in the world, and they have one advantage in the eyes of weapons buyers. That is, that they are testing their weapons in real time. That has been the case all the time in their military operations, and they use that to sell their weaponry. So there is an interest of a very important part of the Israeli economy to test weapons and to develop further weapons. That might not be the main motive for the operation, but it might play a part.

ZR: I want to switch gears here and take this discussion to the international level, in particular the role of Germany and the US which you briefly mentioned in the second answer. Whether diplomatically or militarily, Germany and the US have given Israel's military operation in Gaza carte blanche support on the grounds that Israel has the right to self-defense. They have also so far denied that Israel is committing genocide, portraying Israel as having benign intentions. But today, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced a new policy that would ban those Israeli settlers entering the US who carry out violence against Palestinians in the West Bank. According to Reuters, a spokesperson for the German Foreign Ministry said when asked about Germany's position on this new US policy and let me quote him here, quote, "We welcome the fact that the US is just as clear in its stance as we are and will now take concrete measures in the form of entry restrictions", unquote. Can you talk about Germany's role thus far and whether you think we will see a shift now given this new US policy in terms of the West Bank?

FS: Well, first of all, the US administration has come into serious trouble with their position, giving a carte blanche to Israel for their horrendous attacks on Gaza and their war crimes because they are alienating the Arab world and much of the rest of the world. And it's not working in the interest of US foreign policy to do so. So they are trying to, you know, take back a little bit to give in, a little bit. To tell Israel, well, you can't go on like that. But your settlers are a problem - this or that. So these are minor measures, partly directed to the world public. But what is much more important is that the US said that they will again veto any resolution of the Security Council for a cease fire. That's what they said yesterday. So there are no deep changes in the US policy. I think it's superficial. But the US policy also has a lot of problems with the Jewish constituencies because a lot of American liberal Jews are saying: not in our name. You know, there was this huge demonstration at the Grand Central Station. Thousands of people, led by Jewish Voice for Peace have blocked the station to say Israel is not acting on behalf of Jews around the world. We are saying no to this kind of policy. So they have internal problems and there's an election coming up. Now, regarding the German position. Germany, in my view, has learned the wrong lessons from its past. Because the lesson I think we should learn from the Holocaust, from the Shoah, is that no people, regardless of their ethnicity or the nation or the color of their skin or their gender, should be exposed to these kinds of human rights violations and to war crimes. So I think we as Germans have a special responsibility to protect human rights wherever they are threatened. And so I think that a sound position would have been after the 7th of October, to say: we as

Germans protect civilian lives on both sides, we are against all kinds of public punishment and war crimes. And the German government took a completely different position. They said: we are in complete solidarity with whatever Israel does. I already cited Olaf Scholz. Our foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, had a slightly different position. She once said, Well, Israel has a right to self-defense and they should go after Hamas, but they should do so according to international law. But she refused and is still refusing to call for a cease fire, which is the only consequence if you are concerned with international law that you can take to stop the humanitarian catastrophe. Antonio Guterres just said that a breakdown of public order in Gaza is imminent if there is no cease fire. So I think the German government is really only aligned with the radical forces in Israel. It's an extreme right wing government and the American position, and it is isolating itself from the world. Many people around the world and many governments around the world are looking at Germany and saying what are you doing? You have been calling for the respect of international law in the case of Ukraine and other cases and now you are just siding with a state that is so obviously undermining international law. So the double standards are so obvious here. And I think the German reputation in the world is really in a very bad state now.

ZR: I want to look at some domestic developments taking place in Germany in regards to Israel and Palestine. In November, the use of the slogan "From the 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 fine. In December, a written declaration of commitment recognizing the right of the state of Israel to exist must be submitted in the Eastern Federal State of Sachsen-Anhalt in order to obtain German citizenship. How do you view these developments in regards to the implications on civil liberties?

FS: Well, first of all, the slogan "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" can be interpreted in various ways. Many Palestinians and many human rights activists use it to demand an end to what Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and many other organizations have called an apartheid state. That means they are calling for equal rights for Palestinians, for a Palestinian state. So it's largely used in that sense. It can also be used in a different sense. And I think part of Hamas might have used it in that sense to say "from the river to the sea", meaning from the Jordan to the Mediterranean, it should only be a Palestinian state, so Israel should vanish. That's not a realistic position at all. And I think very few Palestinians would support that. There's also a third interpretation that has been indeed used by the Likud Party, that is the party of Benjamin Netanyahu, which is in power and has been in power for a long time. In its 1977 platform, in its charter, they also use "From the river to the sea, all should be Israel." They call this the historical Israel - Eretz Israel. And they denied the right of Palestinians to have their own state. So both these kinds of statements that deny status to any of the two parties are, of course, to be rejected. But to ban this and to criminalize the slogan which has been used in a variety of meanings, in my view, is ridiculous. And even more ridiculous is the idea that people who apply for citizenship in Germany should sign a statement saying that I defend the right of Israel to exist. I've never

heard of something like that, that in order to become a citizen of one Nation, you should make statements about another nation. I think it's also unconstitutional and I hope this will be challenged in court up to the constitutional court in Germany, because that is not in line with any decent way of defining citizenship.

ZR: To my last question, and I want to leave things with Ukraine. Reuters reported in November that US and European officials have spoken to the Ukrainian government about possible peace negotiations with Russia to end the war. In addition, in November as well, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian army acknowledged in an interview with The Economist that the war with Russia has entered into a stalemate. Let me quote him here from this interview: quote, "There will be most likely no deep and beautiful breakthrough. The simple fact is that we see everything that the enemy is doing and they see everything we are doing. In order for us to break this deadlock, we need something new, like the gunpowder which the Chinese invented and we are still using to kill each other", unquote. These remarks angered Ukraine's President Zelensky, and the general later had to apologize. In November, however, the German chancellor governing coalition agreed to double the country's military aid for Ukraine next year to €8 billion. In view of these developments, do you believe that Ukraine can still win the war?

FS: No, it is not able to win the war in the sense that they will reconquer all of Donbass and Crimea. It was not realistic from the outset. And the Pentagon itself and for example, the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in those days, General Milley, they all said that it's a stalemate. Neither side can win. And so I think finally, part of the Ukrainian military has publicly acknowledged that fact. And the so-called summer offensive, counteroffensive, has completely failed. The New York Times has run a piece recently that showed that Russia gained even more territory than Ukraine during the last month. So it has become very difficult for the Ukrainian side to claim that they can achieve their goals. And the West, of course, has understood that they cannot do that. And now the US wanted to spend - the Biden administration - to spend \$60 billion more in aid to Ukraine. And the Senate has blocked this. The Republicans have blocked this so far. Elections are coming up in the US and the aid to Ukraine is becoming increasingly unpopular. They are about 55%, according to CNN. Polls say that they are not in favor of further aid to Ukraine. And this war is more or less regarded now as a failed war for the US. So the internal conflicts in Ukraine are increasing. The conflicts between the military, between General Zaluzhnyi and Zelensky are a sign that there might be severe changes in the Ukraine leadership ahead. Zelensky, I think, wants to get rid of Zaluzhnyi, and there are also parts of the Ukrainian military, other parts who would like to get rid of him. But on the other hand, we see that the position of Zelensky is severely weakened because he has bet everything on a total victory in the war, which has been unrealistic from the outside. And he doesn't know what to do. And so we could see major changes in Ukraine in the coming months if things do not change. And we will see if the US - if the Biden administration will get through the 60 billion in additional aid. It's not clear yet. But even if they get it, it's unrealistic that they will make any great advancements on the field

because they are running out of people. I mean, the number of casualties is so enormous and they are now recruiting people at the age of 45, 50 and even more. And these are not highly motivated fighters. They are forced to fight and they don't see the point. And so the morale, I think, in the Ukrainian military is quite low.

ZR: Actually, this is my last question. We are currently in a crowdfunding campaign and I hope we do raise enough funds to continue in 2024. How important do you think it is to support independent organizations such as acTVism Munich that provide a different perspective?

FS: Well, I think independent media are crucial for understanding the challenges of our times. We have the problem in many parts of the world that much of the media is run by corporations who have their special interests. Some media are run by states. And so we need independent media that are funded by the viewers. I think that's the only reasonable way to be independent. And so I wish acTVism good luck and good continuation. And we should support independent media like your media.

ZR: Fabian Scheidler, independent journalist and author, thank you so much for your time today.

FS: It was a pleasure. Thank you.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. Please don't forget to take part in our crowdfunding campaign so we can continue with our independent journalism. Journalism that is free from corporate or government interests and provides you with information that is independent and non-profit. If we do not reach our goal, we will, unfortunately, have to scale back on our capacities. So be sure to look at the links in the description of this video and donate today. I'm your host, Zain Raza. See you next time.

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