



Vijay Prashad - Israel-Palestine and the Context Missing in the Media

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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 author, historian and journalist Vijay Prashad about Israel's war in Gaza. Vijay Prashad is the author of more than 30 books, some of them being *The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and the Fragility of U.S. Power and Washington Bullets*, a history of the CIA coups and assassinations. Vijay Prashad, welcome back.

Vijay Prashad (VP): It's great to be with you. Yeah, thanks.

ZR: Let's start with the recent events taking place in Israel and Gaza by recapping the current situation. On October 7th, after Hamas launched a terrorist attack against Israel and killed at least 1200 civilians, many who were military personnel, Israel declared war in Gaza, starting with an aerial bombardment operation and following it with a ground invasion. In Gaza, according to the Health Ministry and UN reports, more than 14,532 Palestinians have been killed, and that includes more than 5000 children. Gaza's health officials say they lost the ability to account for the dead due to Israel's ongoing military operation. It is also being reported that more civilians have died in Israel's assault in Gaza in just 55 days than in the entirety of Russia's war on Ukraine, dating back to February 2022. How do you assess the situation so far, in particular, Hamas's attack on October 7th and Israel's response thereafter?

VP: Well, you know, the first thing is to quote from the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres: "October 7th didn't happen in a vacuum". I mean, a lot of media are starting the story with the Hamas and other faction attacks across the line from Gaza. But October 7th, [there] doesn't start the problem, you know. The problem begins in the occupation of the Palestinians, which begins in 1948, but even more specifically, in a way, Gaza is a very narrow strip on the Mediterranean Sea and hemmed in mostly by Israel. Israel controls the

Gaza Strip. Palestinian children born in Gaza have to be registered with the Israeli government. They get an Israeli registration number. Recently, Elon Musk said he would like to provide StarLink Internet for Gaza, saying that the Internet has been cut, relief agencies can't function, we should provide an umbrella Internet. And the Israeli government said no. We will be regulating your provision of the Internet for these agencies. In other words, these two examples of the identity card and the fact of the Internet situation, it just shows you how Gaza is under occupation. There is no sovereignty for the Palestinians of Gaza. Yes, Israel pulled out troops in 2005. That's true. Even uprooted settlements in 2005. But Israel maintains the embargo siege of Gaza, controls the land and even controls the population, demanding that they have their identities registered with the Israelis. It's part of what the UN calls the Occupied Palestinian Territory [the OPT] that is an official UN designation. So Gaza has been hemmed in.

There was an election in the Palestinian territories, the occupied Palestinian territories, and the people of Gaza voted for Hamas. This was in 2006. Now, neither the Israelis nor the Americans wanted to permit Hamas to govern Gaza. Hamas was prepared to come to a political, you know, compact where they would run the municipalities, where they would deal with the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and so on. They were prepared, but the West and the Israelis said, No, we cannot allow Hamas to enter the political process. This is what the Israeli political science Baruch Kimmerling calls *politicide*, you know, not genocide, but *politicide*, killing the ability of a people to have a politics. Every time the people inside Gaza try to assert themselves, you know, demand rights and so on, the Israelis pummel them with violence. 2008, 2009, Operation Cast Lead almost every year after that – 2014, brutal attack, Operation Permanent Resolve [Operation Protective Edge]. I mean, you know, you travel to Gaza after Operation Permanent Resolve [Operation Protective Edge], walking down the streets of Khan Yunis, walking down the streets of Gaza City, the neighborhoods are flattened. You know, I was surprised to see the level of destruction after 2014. Gaza has been in this condition of not being allowed to have any kind of reasonable politics. Then in 2019, the people of Gaza organized a nonviolent march to the perimeter fence called the March of Return. And instead of saying, Okay, now they are operating nonviolently, let's, you know, have a negotiation, no, Israeli snipers fired at unarmed protesters, marching to the fence and killed over 200 people. You know, where was the outrage then? What about 2019? Why doesn't history start there? Why only October 7th? What about 2014? Why doesn't history start there? What about 2008, 2009? Why doesn't history start then? Go back to 1948.

So the people of Gaza have attempted all kinds of politics, electoral politics. 2006 elections, Hamas won the elections. They were told, Sorry, we don't like you, so you can't take office. I mean, that's the nature of Western democracy for other people. And then 2019, we're going to march to the fence nonviolently, they're going to use snipers and kill 200 of you. So, you know, now you say, Why did Hamas use this violent technique on October 7th? Well, they tried elections, you shut them down. Then they tried a nonviolent march, you shut them

down. In fact, you killed over 200 people with snipers. So they took actions like this. You know, Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, makes a very interesting point about colonized people. Fanon says that the violence of the colonized person is merely a mirror reflection of the violence of the colonizer. So in that sense, Israel has created a structure of violence around the occupation of the Palestinians. Why is it a surprise that the Palestinians then react violently despite the fact that they also tried electoralism, they also tried nonviolence. You keep squeezing them violently, they will respond with violence. That's the nature of political struggle in a colonial context, which is exactly what this is. So, yes, of course, nobody wants to see civilians killed. Nobody. Nobody wants to see children killed and so on. That is an outrageous thing. On the other hand, it's not something that you can just say, you know, this is the problem of Hamas. Why don't you condemn Hamas and so on. You know, Hamas is the mirror reflection in that sense of the colonial conditions placed by the Israelis. I mean, it's also the case, and I'll close with this, that over this period, the Israelis have tried to neuter the left wing forces, you know, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Democratic Party for the Liberation of Palestine. You know, Khalida Jarrar, for instance, the leaders of these movements are all sitting in Israeli prisons. Israel has basically defang the ability of the left to operate because they ill left wing leaders and they imprison them. They don't allow them to produce. But they allow Hamas to operate. You know, and so then Hamas becomes the face of the Palestinian resistance. It's not that Hamas is the only game in town. There are other factions and so on. But this is also part of Israel's ploy to catalyze, you know, descent into the rout of Hamas and to try to neuter the left forces within the Palestinian struggle by jailing their leadership and so on.

So what I'm just trying to say here is not to, you know, evade the question of October 7th. You know, if you are a different kind of interviewer, you would say, but do you condemn Hamas? You know, that's not the kind of interviewer you are. And in fact, me, condemning Hamas is hardly going to change anything. You know, the real issue is to try to understand why October 7th happened. You know, my condemnation is of no consequence, but I'm giving an explanation of why October 7th was so stark; what the Israelis are calling Israel's September 11th. You know, why is that so stark? It is so stark because Hamas's operation in some ways was a mirror of the structure of colonial violence put in place. And in fact, you know, it's a mirror of the fact that the Israelis have prevented any other kind of politics available for the Palestinian people.

ZR: I want to look at another recent issue. On October 7th, Hamas and Islamic Jihad took 239 hostages, that included foreign nationals, soldiers and civilians. After initially rejecting the cease fire for a hostage deal, the Israeli government, after facing mounting domestic pressure, came to an agreement with Hamas, which includes the release of Israeli hostages for a temporary ceasefire, allowing humanitarian aid into Gaza and the release of Palestinian women and children from Israeli prisons. Today, Israel holds around 8000 Palestinians in its prisons. While the Western media is focusing on the release of Israeli hostages and the emotional aspect around it, and rightfully so, little to no attention is being paid to the release

of Palestinians. Who are these Palestinians being held by Israel and can they even be called prisoners, as the Western media keeps on repeating?

VP: Okay. So this is a really interesting and important issue here. You know, yes, there are 8000 at a minimum, Palestinians imprisoned in Israeli jails, many of them under laws that, if scrutinized properly, would horrify liberals. These are the administrative detention orders. Look, there is something called *corpus delicti* where you cannot be convicted of a crime unless the fact of the crime having taken place is proofed. In other words, if there's no evidence of a murder, you can't convict me of murder. There has to be a body. There has to be, you know, some evidence. You can't just say you are a murderer, I'm convicting you. You understand? It's called *corpus delicti*. It's a very old, established part of European legal tradition. Unless you can prove a crime has taken place, you can't condemn or convict somebody of that crime because there was no evidence of the crime. Many of the people sitting in Israeli prisons, political prisoners, are convicted of crimes for which there is no evidence that the crime occurred. For instance, they are convicted of terrorism, administrative detention or terrorism. What did they do that was terrorist? They belong to a political party. Now, Israel hasn't proved that membership in that political party, that's the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, they named the party a terrorist group. Okay. But again, it's not a crime to be in a political party. In fact, the United Nations Treaty Obligations, the UN Charter, allows for political association. You are allowed to gather together under a political platform. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine is a political party. And also under the Oslo Accords of 1994, it has legal standing. And yet a lot of people are picked up as members or leaders of political parties. They're accused of things which didn't happen. There is no *corpus delicti*. That's the one interesting issue.

In that sense, it's quite interesting that Palestinian leaders say that these are not prisoners, these are also hostages. They are held hostage there. They are held politically hostage. You know what is a political prisoner, if not a political hostage? They are held incommunicado. They are not able to have a relationship with their political allies, with the forces out there and so on. You know, this is what again by Baruch Kimmerling called *politicide*. You're killing the politics of a people. That itself is a violation of international treaties. So they are held hostage. Among their ranks, among the 8000 not-prisoners are very large numbers of children. I mean, Samidoun, the prisoner network, Palestinian defense for children and so on, they give a whole series of numbers of how many children, 1000, 1800, you know, there are numbers out there. The fact is, Zain, if one child is in prison where there's no *corpus delicti*, you can't prove the crime has been committed, to me, that is ridiculous. That itself is such an enormous violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and so on, that somebody should be in a jail cell for putting children in prison.

Let's back up for a minute, okay? During the war in Ukraine, the early period of the war, the International Criminal Court put forward arrest warrants from the International Criminal Court against the basis given by the Rome Statute, the Treaty of Rome 2002, two arrest

warrants, one for Mr. Vladimir Putin, president of Russia, and secondly, for a person who works in his cabinet, in his administration. They were charged with removing 6000 children from an active war zone to Russia. They didn't kill them. They didn't imprison them. They moved 6000 children from a war zone. Now, can have a debate: Is that a war crime? Maybe it is. Transport of population and so on, you could have a debate and a discussion. Israel has killed 6000 children in Gaza and has maybe a thousand plus children as hostages in prisons. Nobody has shipped an International Criminal Court warrant against Mr. Netanyahu or people like that. There's no international outrage that children are sitting in Israeli prisons, often condemned over the following crimes: Throwing a rock at a settler, throwing a rock at an illegal Israeli military outpost in the West Bank, that's protecting settlements. But that settlement is illegal by international law. The military outpost is doubly illegal by international law. A child throws a rocket, the child is in jail. The children are in jail for yelling at Israeli soldiers when they come and raid their villages. Children are put in jail when they write on social media against the Israeli occupation and so on. What is this? These are political crimes. These are not even crimes. These are political acts, but they are criminalized, you see. And then you have these children as hostages. No international condemnation, no international worry, no ICC warrant for Mr. Netanyahu. So, yes, there is a kind of invisibility going on about the treatment of Palestinian children in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Now, of course, nobody wants a child to be taken as a hostage. Hamas should not have taken children as hostages. That is outrageous. But then I don't know what the alternative is at that moment. You're going to take the parents hostages, leave the children there? I don't know what happened inside those kibbutzim. I don't know exactly what went on. There's a lot of controversy about what happened on October 7th when these fighters entered the kibbutzim. There's some evidence now that some of the people were not killed by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, but by the Israeli forces trying to take back the kibbutz. Those numbers might be slightly more complicated. We don't really know. There's a huge fog here because independent journalists cannot operate inside Israel. But it is outrageous to take children. You know, it's outrageous in any – but it's so asymmetrical, the coverage, as you say. Those photographs that are coming of Palestinians coming home, those are busloads of children, busloads of children. The prior question to ask is why was Israel holding these children in these prisons? That's the prior question. Not that the children are being released. Of course, that's important; should be celebrated, children should be reunited with their families, now deeply damaged by being in prison again for conducting political acts. In some cases and there are one or two cases that B'Tselem had written about where children were picked up because they walked down the wrong road. In the West Bank, there are roads for Israeli Jews and then there are roads for Palestinians. If the Palestinians go on the Israeli Jewish road, they can be arrested. And that's sometimes what what has happened. Imagine that, segregated roads. What better example do you need of apartheid?

ZR: You began the interview by providing context on the Palestinian struggle. But I would like to focus on the Palestinian struggle that took place on the international level and how the

West played a vital role in undermining it. Could you provide us some context on the international diplomatic level where Palestinians attempted to resolve the issue via peaceful means?

VP: It's interesting because, you know, the state of Israel is created in 1948, at the time when they ethnically cleansed large parts of that land in the Nakba, The Great Catastrophe, a term used by the Lebanese historian Constantin Zurayk; captures everything, the catastrophe. You know, at that time, international support for the Palestinians was very much restricted to the new United Nations. The new United Nations, some of the newly emerging states out of colonialism, you know, countries like India, Pakistan and so on, which were now newly independent, provided some diplomatic support for the Palestinian cause, but it was extremely weak. The main support came from the Arab states, both militarily, the attack on the newly formed state of Israel by the forces of Egypt, Jordan and Syria, that was the immediate response. The Arab states defended the Palestinians – for years. It was basically the Arab states that held the cause of the Palestinians. Very cleverly, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, led by Yasser Arafat in the 1960s, started a campaign, a global campaign to link the Palestinian cause with the cause of the Vietnamese. A very clever move because international solidarity for the people fighting in Vietnam against the French first in the 50s and then the United States was immense. You know, there were – you in Germany, the German Democratic Republic, the DDR, had made the cause of the Vietnamese very much central to its internationalism. In Cuba, in 1959, the cause of the Vietnamese – central. I'm talking to you from Santiago, Chile, where Victor Jara, the great singer, a part of the Popular Unity movement, writes a song called El Derecho, which is about Ho Chi Minh. Solidarity with the Vietnamese was right on top of the table. And what the Palestinians do that's clever is they yoked their struggle with the struggle of the Vietnamese, the anti-imperialist struggle and so on. And then there were some spectacular instances of their attempted, raising consciousness, such as the hijacking of planes. You know, the figure of Leila Khaled plays a major role as a hijacker of planes, taking them to the Libyan desert, removing all the passengers, they were let go and blowing up the planes in order to send a message saying that Palestine must not be forgotten. The Nakba is a permanent condition and so on.

And so for years, the Palestinian struggle became part of, in a way, left struggles around the world, left movements all had a common agenda in trying to keep the Palestinian struggle visible. But this, of course, had an impact in the last 30, 40 years in particular, as Israeli violence became very much something that was visible. You can't hide it. You know, you can't hide the nature of the violence, the bombings of Gaza periodically, the treatment of people in the West Bank, you know, apartheid roads and apartheid wall and so on. Then a sentiment began to grow in the last 40 odd years, you know, saying that the Palestinians should not be treated like this, that even Bethlehem, you know, the site of the Christian worship, birthplace of Jesus Christ and so on, Bethlehem is garrisoned. Every year on Christmas, there's the image that gets circulated of Joseph and Mary trying to enter

Bethlehem with the donkey so that Mary can go and give birth to Jesus, but there are barbed wire and walls and they can't get it; every year on Christmas that image circulates. Many different images with the same theme circulate every year. Now, Israel therefore created these, you know, actually cabinet level positions on public diplomacy, Hasbara, to tell Israel's story, to raise enormous amounts of money from overseas supporters, including the Christian right wing, who are anti-Semitic to the core. Pastor John Hagee in the United States is an anti-Semite to the core, but he's pro-Israel. Why are these evangelicals, such supporters of Israel, even though they have an extremely anti-Semitic approach? Because they believe that Jews must take over Jerusalem, build the second temple, and then God will kill all the Jews and then Christians will rise to heaven. I mean, it's a deeply anti-Semitic vision. And yet they are the principal supporters of Israel. So people like that, you know, important figures overseas raised a lot of money for this Hasbara campaign.

And part of this Hasbara campaign, Zain, and this is interesting for Germany, part of this Hasbara campaign was to portray any critic of Israel, any critic, not just a critic of Zionism, but any critic, liberal critics of Israel as anti-Semites. That became very much part of the process. You saw what happened at Documenta in Kassel; you don't like criticism, Israel called the artist an anti-Semite. And secondly, to cancel them, to Roger Waters coming to Germany, to play in Munich, to play in different places, in Frankfurt. In fact, the venue cancelled the concert and Roger Waters had to sue the venue to allow him to play. In Buenos Aires, Roger Waters couldn't get a hotel room for himself in the whole city of Buenos Aires because hoteliers said we will not allow him because they will cancel it. So Hasbara, desperate to close down the story about Israel's apartheid, Israel's occupation, treatment of Palestine and so on attempted with a lot of money, building institutions that portrayed all critics of Israel, all critics of Zionism, as anti-Semites, and then to cancel them. And if you cancel one or two people, or Roger Waters, say somebody prominent, etc., etc., you fire an academic – you know, when I was a professor, I would get routine harassment saying: He's an anti-Semite. Why? Because he is a critic of Israel. He writes about Israel's wars. You know, he is a pro-Palestinian. That makes him anti-Semitic. Furthest from the day, I'm a complete anti-racist, you know, completely against anti-Semitism. The real anti-Semites are seen as allies, the wizards. A bizarre situation, then. Extremely bizarre.

You know, Germany can't have a decent conversation about Israel. People are too nervous and scared and partly because they haven't gotten over the fact of the Holocaust, you know, they haven't been able to come to terms with Germany's role in the creation of Israel. You know, Germany plays a role in the creation of Israel. Had there not been a holocaust, there might not be a state of Israel. We may not be here today. You know, if Germany and Poland and these countries were not so deeply troubled by the so-called, you know, Jewish question, die Judenfrage, that 19th century racist debate inside the German world or the Polish world or wherever, France, you know, all these countries, you know, anti-Semitism is a European problem. But the Hasbara project tried to project anti-Semitism out of its European roots and into the domain of saying this is about critics of Israel. But here's the interesting thing. This

bombardment from October 7th onwards, this bombardment of 14,000 plus people killed, 6000 plus children killed, 1.7 Palestinians displaced from their homes in northern Gaza, the visuals of the bombardment, the attacks on hospitals, an entire generation has been created now of people who will not buy what the Hasbara communities are selling; this propaganda of the Israelis, they will not take it – an entire generation. I mean, the government of Israel, I think at some level knows they have lost the world. Now it's just the United States that's holding firm. And interestingly, the Israelis now want to shift the focus to go south, south of Salah al-Din Road, which divides northern and southern Gaza, south of Khan Yunis. They want to take the fight where they have told people to go and become, as it were, refugees, you know. And it's the US that's saying, please don't do that. Please don't bomb southern Gaza like you bombed the North. But the Israelis are going to do it. And Zain, then you're not only going to lose the generation for X number of years, you're never going to be able to win them back.

ZR: On November 14th, Finance Minister of Israel, Bezalel Smotrich stated, and I quote him here, quote: "I welcome the initiative, the voluntary immigration 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 and you already mentioned south of Gaza, what do you think Israel's goal is after eliminating every last soldier of Hamas? Or do you think there are other objectives in mind here? And where will the 2.2 million refugees go?

VP: Yeah, this is a very important and interesting discussion. Okay. So firstly, first point here is that remember I said there was a Nakba the ethnic cleansing of 1948 when Palestinians from within what becomes Israel are either removed out into the what later becomes occupied Palestinian territories, Jerusalem, West Bank and Gaza, or they are thrown out into Jordan, into Egypt, into Lebanon and further afield, becoming refugees, some put into refugee camps run by the United Nations. That's the Nakba. In a sense, the Nakba never ended. There has been, since 1948, a permanent Nakba. Israeli state policy since 1948 was to make the life of Palestinians so miserable that they will flee out, go to Australia, go to the United States, go to Chile. Chile has the largest population of Palestinians outside the Middle East. Basically, the attempt by the Israeli government since 1948 was to take the Nakba to the final stage. In fact, now Israeli officials are talking about a second Nakba as if there hasn't been a permanent Nakba since 1948. Okay, so that's been the state policy. In 1994, the Israeli government disingenuously made an agreement with the Palestinian Liberation Organization, an agreement called the Oslo Accords. This idea was that in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, they'll create a Palestinian state. That will be the two state solution; one state of Israel and one state of Palestine. And the idea was because these are noncontiguous spaces, Palestinians would have safe passage between them, they can go from Gaza to the West Bank in East Jerusalem and vice versa, that there would be in fact no interference by the Israelis of the zones and so on. There were a number of provisions placed there, and in fact built into the

cake of the Oslo Accords was the failure of the two state solution.

What do I mean? Number one, the very day they signed the Oslo Accords, the Israelis annulled safe passage. They didn't allow Palestinians to move between these three parts of the occupied Palestinian territory. Gaza was kept separate from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, so safe passage was annulled. So they already violated the two state agreement called Oslo Accords. Secondly, the Israelis from the beginning started to build settlements inside the West Bank and inside Gaza at the time, building large settlements, building settlement roads, started to build an apartheid wall – I use the word apartheid wall, it's not my definition. It's not a moral statement, it's a legal issue. The International Court of Justice called it an apartheid wall, built around the West Bank, to garrison the people, to prevent safe passage. You had to stand in long lines to try to get from one part of Palestine into the next and so on. The settlements ate into the West Bank, ate into Gaza. Water sources were taken over by the Israeli settlers. These settlements are illegal. Again, international treaties have demonstrated that you can't go in and take land from people you are occupying.

Also, international courts have said repeatedly and so has the United Nation at the highest level that these settlements are illegal. So they eroded the two state solution through that. And East Jerusalem, one of the three parts of the occupied Palestine territory has almost entirely been taken over by the Israelis. You know, with their quest to build Jerusalem as the capital. So they have always rejected this. The idea of the two state solution, which was that from 1994, was always a mirage. It was not taken seriously by the Israelis. They continued their long term policy of the permanent Nakba; make life so miserable for the Palestinians in Gaza, in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, that they will leave. And so the Israelis have always had it in their head to make a three state solution, the three states being Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan. That's where they want the Palestinians to go. That's the three state solution. And that's what they've been saying in this last period. You know, the only humanitarian solution is for Palestinians to leave that territory. I mean, that is a war crime. Don't make a war crime into a humanitarian solution. That itself is deeply troubling, that they are using the language of humanitarianism in a way to camouflage what is basically a war crime.

ZR: One of the prevailing arguments in Germany is that: Look, nobody wants the Palestinians, including Islamic nations like Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Iran and so forth. And although they support them on the streets and loudly, very vocally, diplomatically, nobody really wants them. What do you think this line of thought reveals?

VP: I mean, this is actually very mendacious. You know, this is a mischievous argument because let's face some facts. Firstly, the Palestinian population in Jordan is a majority of the population of Jordan. Okay, so lots of Palestinians are in Jordan. There's a large Palestinian population in Syria. You know, in Damascus, if you travel to Damascus in the area called Yarmouk, it's a majority Palestinian area. In Lebanon, there are large areas, including the Israelis well known, the camp of Sabra and Shatila, where they helped conduct a massacre in

1982. Then the camps in Saida, in the south and so on. There are large numbers of Palestinians in Lebanon. In Egypt, there is a large Palestinian population. Across the Gulf, there are sizable Palestinian populations. Firstly the Gulf is a very much under populated area, but sizable Palestinian – in Kuwait, for instance, big Palestinian population, that's where Yasser Arafat and his friends form the Fatah, which becomes the pillar of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which was created in Kuwait, where there were students of engineering and medicine and so on. So it's actually disingenuous to say they don't want the Palestinians.

Secondly, Palestinians do not want to go and become Egyptian or to become Jordanian. They want to be Palestinian. They have a right to be Palestinian. UN resolution 194. You know, it's a UN resolution, a treaty obligation calls for the right of return of Palestinians to their homeland. They have a right. They don't want – I have friends who are sitting near the Rafah crossing, you know, worried about their children, worried about the bombing and so on. But they are equally worried that if they cross into Egypt, they will never be allowed to go back to their homes in Gaza City, that they will lose the right to return. 194 UN resolutions, the right to return. The Israelis are trying to push the Palestinians out, even saying things like: Later you can come back, but what do you mean later you can come back? After the Nakba? 1948, there was a UN resolution giving Palestine the right to return. Never allowed them to return, not till today. Why should any Palestinian believe the statement that go out for humanitarian reasons then you can come back. They will never be allowed in. So for people to say, Look, the Arab countries don't – the Palestinians don't want to go to Egypt, they don't want to become Lebanese, they want to be Palestinian, for God's sake. They have a right to their homeland. And to say that is so disingenuous. And this coming from countries like Germany, which are so reticent to absorb migrants. I mean, Germany has its own problem with migration. You know, where you have the rise of a right wing, which is deeply anti-immigrant. You know, the levels of racism against the people who come from Turkey or northern Africa and so on; deep levels of racism. One hears about, you know, Muslim residents in Germany facing deep discrimination, disingenuousness of somebody in a country like Germany to say, Well, look, the Arab countries don't want the Palestinians. You don't want migrants. From what moral standards are you judging any country?

ZR: I want to look at some regional players surrounding this conflict and look at the Iranian backed organization called Hezbollah. In Germany, whenever Hezbollah's name comes up in the media, little to no context is given, and it is labeled as a terrorist organization. Until the truce to call with Hamas, the Israel-Lebanon border saw daily exchanges of fire between Israel and Hezbollah. Hezbollah, it is stated, has tens of thousands of missiles stationed in Lebanon aimed at Israel. Can you provide us some context to Hezbollah, how it came into being and why it is getting involved into this fight?

VP: Well, you know, as I said earlier, the Israelis understand Lebanon very well because they invaded and occupied large parts of Lebanon, the south and sections of Beirut in 1982. Why

did the Israelis come and invade Lebanon in 1982? Because they wanted to basically attack the Palestinian camps from which they suspected— true— that Palestinian militants were going across the border and conducting armed struggle; which is their right, their right to resist an occupation and so on. So the Israeli government occupied Lebanon in 1982. When they occupied Lebanon in 1982, they conducted, as I said, helped conduct a massacre in Sabra and Shatila and so on. At the time, various resistance organizations emerged against Israeli occupation of Lebanon, including one group that became Hezbollah. The army of God is what it means. It's a perfectly legitimate thing for a resistance organization to emerge to fight against the resistance of their homeland and also to fight against the presence of U.S. troops. There were U.S. Marines stationed in Beirut. In fact, right at the Corniche, it was the U.S. embassy. And the United States had a big military presence there. Hezbollah emerges in the fight against the occupation of Lebanon by the Israelis and the United States. Now, that's an entirely legitimate act to resist occupation. That's exactly what UN resolutions allow for. International law allows for the right to resist against an occupation.

So I don't understand why Hezbollah is thought of as a terrorist organization, in that instance. When Hezbollah became more powerful inside, particularly the south of Lebanon, they actually militarily fought against the Israeli occupation and defeated it. They defeated Israel. They forced Israel to go back across the line, retreat back to Israel. It was a huge victory for the Lebanese people. Hezbollah was seen then and in 2006 as a major defender of the rights of Lebanese sovereignty. That's a legitimate act. That's not terrorism. In fact, in 2006, the Israelis came and attacked Lebanon. What happened was that, you know, the United States made an incredible miscalculation, regional miscalculation by overthrowing the government of Saddam Hussein in 2003. They gave for once the Iranians an enormous victory because Saddam and on the other side, the Taliban, were the true enemies of Iran. The United States between 2001 and 2003 got rid of Iran's two enemies. Can you imagine? I mean, you basically took care of Iran's enemies. And so Iran then starts to develop relationships with the new Iraq. After all, it's a Shia majority country.

The new government that came in was completely pro Iran. You know, they were not a theocracy, but they were pro Iran. You know, you've got to understand that in the world of Shi'ism, southern Iraq plays an enormous role. Najaf, for instance, Qom. I mean, these are major schools of Shiite learning. And Shi'ism has its own important place in southern Lebanon. You know, in fact, there are old marriage relations between the Shiites of Iraq and southern Lebanon. They marry among each other, the families; they travel across Syria to marry. So these are all ties. And the Iranians, of course, took advantage of these old ties. They also certainly have close, very close links with Hezbollah, which is largely a Shiite militia, but not entirely. I mean, I've met Hezbollah fighters who are Sunnis. I've met Hezbollah fighters who are Christians. It's not an exclusively Shiite organization, but it's dominantly a Shiite organization. Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, for instance, is a sheikh. He's a sheikh in the Shiite tradition. When he speaks, he talks about his relationship to the Iranians. There's nothing to hide in that. That's the nature of the situation.

So when the United States, after 2003, tried to put Iran back into its box, it did a number of things. It started this campaign against Iran's nuclear weapons. Iran doesn't have nuclear weapons. It has a nuclear energy program. They use that to try to isolate Iran. They had an act called the Syria Accountability Act to try to break the link between the Assad government and the Iranians. This is in 2005. Then in 2006, they basically greenlighted the Israelis to go back and bomb Hezbollah and to attack Hezbollah. Well, Hezbollah resisted. They fired rockets back into Israel and so on. They resisted an illegal attack on them by Israel in 2006. And they won, they prevailed. Israel had to back off. And Hassan Nasrallah became a hero in the region. So, again, what terrorism? Where is the terrorism here? They are defending the sovereignty of Lebanon. Right now, after October 7th, there was some silence from Hezbollah. Hezbollah at the border was engaging the Israeli military in the normal way that it does. Israel began to pummel southern Lebanon with white phosphorus. Go and check an Amnesty International report, which criticized Israel for using white phosphorus, not in Gaza, but in southern Lebanon, in October of this year. So Hezbollah fought back at the border. Then Hassan Nasrallah spoke and he gave a very interesting speech then. He said, Look, we don't want to open a war against Israel. We don't want that. We don't want a regional war. We want the Israelis to stop bombing the Palestinians. We want the Palestinians to have justice. But he also warned the United States. He says you have 70 odd military vessels sitting in the eastern Mediterranean. We can attack them. We have the ability. Don't be misled. Also, he told the Israelis, we can bomb. We have 100,000 fighters, we have rockets and so on, we can attack Tel Aviv and make your life hell. About 40% of the Israeli army, he said, has been down in northern Israel. He said we are preventing them from going to Gaza. We are beating them down, the 40% of the Israeli army. We are playing that role. But he did say that if Hamas is threatened with destruction, Hezbollah will enter the fight, that Hezbollah is not going to be intimidated by the situation; that Hezbollah will enter the fight.

So interestingly, I mean, what is Hezbollah? Hezbollah is a Lebanese political organization. Number one, it has members of parliament, sitting members of parliament inside Lebanon, it has sitting members of parliament. So it is a legitimate political organization in Lebanon, which is a country recognized by the United Nations, member of the UN, and has relations with Germany. How do I know that? Because I had dinner a couple of times with the German ambassador in Beirut about ten years ago. In fact, in Beirut, I met German parliamentarians who came, two parliamentarians particularly in the Green Party, who came on tour. There's a German institution in Beirut funded by the German government. This is the same country where Hezbollah is a legitimate part of the Lebanese political scene. So what terrorism? Secondly, they have a military force, but that is to defend the sovereignty of Lebanon. They are not attacking, going inside Israel and so on. What Israel has done is, Israel has made people imagine all military critics of Israel, anybody with a military, you know, attempting to defend itself from Israel is a terrorist. It's very interesting. All political critics of Israel are anti-Semites, they argue, and all military defenders of sovereignty against Israel are terrorists. It is a very interesting thing. Hamas is terrorists, Hezbollah is terrorists, Popular Front for the

Liberation of Palestine is terrorist, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Then any critique of Israel, Palestinian or not, is an anti-Semite, I mean people buy this hook, line and sinker but I'm telling you, not any more. This is going to change with this violence that Israel is conducting. The Hasbara is going to fall apart.

ZR: Let us look at some more recent developments that have come about since Israel began its war on Gaza. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman recently 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 energy deal with Israel, with its foreign minister recently stating that the events in Gaza were within the realm of the legal definition of genocide and emphasized the extension for the current ceasefire. However, more drastic measures such as the termination of the Abraham Accords and oil embargo or even the severing of diplomatic relations with Israel have not been pursued thus far. Why do you think countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and others have failed to take more drastic measures?

VP: Well, it's a complicated issue because firstly, the people of Egypt, the people of Jordan, the people of Saudi Arabia and so on, are much further angry publicly than their own governments. I mean, in many of these countries, the governments have tried to prevent protests. They don't, they just cannot tolerate allowing people to protest. I mean, in Egypt, if President Sisi opened the door and said, Yes, you can protest, there will be more than a million people on the streets of Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, maybe people would march to the Rafah crossing. I mean, Egyptians are angry. This is humiliating for them. They have such a well-equipped army, military, air force and so on. Why don't the Egyptians fly their jets over Gaza, say this is the no fly zone? We are constituting it as a no fly zone. Where's the guts? Where's the history of the Egyptian military? They are sitting in their bases, like retired. It's a retired military. Effectively. The Egyptian military is effectively a retired military. It's not an active military.

Saudi Arabia, you know, Mohammed bin Salman has been making some interesting moves. He phoned the president of Iran first; high level conversation between the president of Iran and effectively the ruler of Saudi Arabia, I think two days after the bombing started. You know, there are lots of interesting moves happening, but these people know that their populations are far more angered than these people are able to act. I mean, the Jordanians, Jordan's queen, Queen Rania has been so outspoken about the outrageousness. Well, the Jordanians then flew in some aid to Gaza without seeking Israeli permission. They're trying to do a few things, but not enough. I think it's likely that the South African government is going to call for the Convention against Genocide, passed by the world community in 1948, the same year as the Nakba. They are going to ask for the Convention against Genocide to be exercised against Israel. That'll be interesting to see a sitting member of the United Nations in high standing, South Africa, push for the Genocide Convention to be operating against Israel, another sitting member of the United Nations. You remember when the struggle started in

Syria, in Daraa, in Homs and so on, and the Syrian government reacted, the United States pushed in the UN for the total isolation of Syria. In fact, they wanted to try to eject the Syrian ambassador, Ambassador Ja'afari from the chamber; it isolated the Syrian government very much.

You know, if Israel bombed southern Gaza, the pressure in the Arab countries is going to be severe. They may not be able to contain it. I think even Turkey, Mr. Erdogan, will have a problem. He allowed one demonstration, and a million people marched, but it was also a demonstration of Turkish nationalism. I don't think they can control their people. Let's see what happens then. It's hard to predict, but as this violence increases, the Abraham Accords might die. I mean, it's unlikely that Morocco will give up the Abraham Accords because they got Western Sahara rights. They don't want to give that up. You know, Bahrain and so on, it's not so consequential. But the new agreement between India, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Israel and the European Union to build a corridor, you know, from Gujarat all the way to Greece, I think that's finished. I don't think the Saudis are going to be able to build infrastructure that links Riyadh to the port of Haifa. I think that's finished. I just don't see that happening easily. An oil embargo, an interesting idea. It's been on the table. I think the weapons embargo comes first. Let testing the waters and then an oil embargo. And if there's an oil embargo, Israel is in serious trouble. Because the United States might will be then sending oil to Israel, will be sending tankers and so on. But they'll be in serious trouble because U.S. oil is much more expensive. So the U.S. is going to have to pay for the oil they're giving Israel to prosecute a war that the U.S. is now beginning to say is getting access. So, I mean, Tel Aviv should not sit thinking, Okay, we're all set. If they continue this and the violence continues, they start ejecting people from Gaza, there's an oil embargo, don't count on the United States fully. Because there's pressure in the US. Trump is rising in the polls. Biden's standing is falling. Trump is very much a mercurial character. What if he comes out and says, Look, we don't want to put so much money into this Israeli war? Who knows what's going to happen?

ZR: We've observed the double standard in the way the West approaches Ukraine, which is Palestine. For example, when Ukraine's territory was annexed by Russia, the West was very critical about it and followed it up with sanctions. However, when it comes to Palestine, where Israel has been annexing its territory for 75 years, even though the West, such as the U.S. And Germany, have regularly criticized its actions, they've never followed up with sanctions. Why do you think there's a double standard in the way the West treats Ukraine, which is Palestine?

VP: Well, firstly, Zain, you're going to have to bring Olaf Scholz onto your program to answer that question, or Joe Biden or Emmanuel Macron or Rishi Sunak and so on. I mean, I don't know. You know, they are hypocrites. Is that enough? What does one say? I would like Mr. Olaf Scholz to justify this. If in Germany the parliament was actually a place of discussion and debate, I'd like to see this debate. I visited the parliament a couple of times. I

just don't feel like there is space to have these kinds of discussions and debates. Here's the question, Mr. Scholz... And this would be great for a mainstream German newspaper to have a headline. Olaf Scholz, you have such indignation for what's happening in Ukraine. You don't have one tenth indignation for what's happening to Palestinians. What's up? You know, I don't know how to say this sentence in German, but I think what's up in German must sound great. You know, what gives? I don't know what the phrase is, but that's what I would ask him. I can't answer your question. I have some ideas.

You know, this is racism to some extent that in Ukraine, these people are white. Plus, there's a geopolitical battle being fought to weaken Russia. And these countries in Europe are basically acting as poodles of the United States in its geopolitical struggle. But also the people are white. That makes a difference. Suddenly, let's let all the Ukrainians in. They're not even refugees. They are our fellow Europeans. But Palestinians are brown. They are not white. They are Muslims. They are enemies. I mean, even though there are sufficient Christian Palestinians, that is irrelevant. Maybe it's racism. Also, Israel is a close ally. Also, Europe is still uncomfortable with its history of the Holocaust and in France, the rounding up of Jews and so on. You know, they have their own guilt here, a guilt that has convulsed these countries and ridiculous debates around anti-Semitism. Again, rather than go after the real anti-Semites. I mean, look at Britain. They called Jeremy Corbyn an anti-Semite. Jeremy Corbyn has been fighting against racism his entire career. Jeremy Corbyn has been a defender of the rights of Jews within Britain for years, decades. To call him an anti-Semite is obscene. There are real anti-Semites in Britain. Deal with them. But you manufacture this lie, because Jeremy Corbyn is pro-Palestinian. That becomes enough condemnation.

So Europe has a lot of problems. It's hard for me to decant all of them, you know, in an easy way. But really, I don't want to speak for the European leadership because that's how you ask the question, right? I don't want to speak for them. I would like them to speak for themselves. But interestingly, despite the fact that these are formal democracies, they don't actually have to make the argument to anybody. They hide behind all the walls of privilege and don't come before the people and say, Listen, the reason we are backing Israel 100% is we really don't care about Palestinian life because there's an international division of humanity. White life is really the most privileged. And then it sort of goes down. We don't care about the wars in Africa. We don't care about the deaths in the Middle East and so on, because there's an international division of humanity. At least that's an argument. Then Olaf Scholz would have made the argument, then we'd say, Okay, Mr. Scholz, I get it. I mean, you know, a lot of the earlier intellectual books written about race were written by Germans. In fact, in the early 19th century, many of the German scholars sophisticatedly construct the idea of scientific racism. So perhaps you are in that lineage. Well, good of you to be honest about it. But these are dishonest people Zain, and they're not democratic in spirit. They don't come before their own public and offer an explanation of what is so obviously hypocrisy. But why are you here and not here?

ZR: To my last question. Next month we are launching a crowdfunding campaign with the goal of reaching at least €20,000 so we can continue with our independent and nonprofit journalism. How and why should people support independent media networks such as us?

VP: Well, Zain there's two reasons to support acTVism Munich and other independent media organizations. Why call them independent? You're not an independent media organization. What you are is a people supported organization. You want to give the news as best as you can, write with context and discussion and so on. There's two ways to support these kind of people supported or people centered organizations. One is obviously, you provide the kind of refreshing, long conversations on issues that matter for people. You don't get bite sized, you know, hallucinatory news. This is a serious look at the news, looking underneath it, looking historically and so on. People should support it. If they enjoy listening to it, they should provide the resources to allow you to go on. That's one way to support it.

The other way to support it is to go out there in public, go on to Twitter and tell politicians, German politicians and others, that they should actually clamor to come on your show, that if they actually believe in democracy, they shouldn't just give interviews to Die Zeit and all these other big papers, they should come to your program. It's a good place for a serious politician to spend an hour, to have a conversation, to speak, because you are a kind and decent interviewer. You're not harassing anybody. If Mr. Scholz was in my shoes, you would say, How do you account for the fact that you had this policy with Ukraine, but you have this policy in Palestine? And then let him tell you, let him talk, let him explain, that's the reason you need people supported media. It should not only be supported with the resources to help you continue and so on, but it should be supported by people telling their members of Parliament and other leaders that they need to come and speak at these venues at length about what they think and not just give bite sized quotes; often quotes that are created by public relations teams to the big media so that it's there in the evening news. They need to be able to talk to the public, so the public understands their thinking. That's how you support people supported news.

ZR: Vijay Prashad, historian, author and journalist, thank you so much for your time today.

VP: Thanks a lot.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. I would like to share an important development that will take place next month in our organization. Next month, we are launching our crowdfunding campaign with the goal of reaching €20,000. If we reach this goal, we will be able to cover our cost in 2024. That includes, for example, tax advising, website, translation, voice-over and many other costs that we face on a daily basis. If we're unable to reach this goal, we will unfortunately have to scale back on our capacities. So if you're watching our videos regularly, make sure to donate to our crowdfunding campaign next month in December. I'm your host, Zain Raza. See you all next time.

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