



Israel & Gaza: A Different Perspective with Independent Journalist 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. Today I'll be talking to author and independent journalist Fabian Scheidler. Fabian Scheidler is the author of several books, the latest being *The End of the Mega Machine: A Brief History of a Failing Civilization*. Fabian, welcome back.

Fabian Scheidler (FS): Thanks for having me, Zain.

ZR: On the 5th of February you published an article called *Gaza The German Far Right And The Hypocrisy Of The Ruling Class*, in which you look at the widespread demonstrations taking place in Germany against the Alternative for Germany, also known as AFD, after a journalistic outlet called Corrective revealed that some of its members attended a conference in which a secret plan was discussed to deport migrants. In your article, you focus on the establishment party, such as the conservatives and the Christian Democratic Union, CDU, Social Democrats, SPD, Greens and Liberals who have been supporting these demonstrations vocally and even by taking part in them. Can you elaborate on the main points of the article, and why you find it so hypocritical about their approach?

FS: Yes. First of all, I find it remarkable that so many people took to the streets to protest right wing policies and the idea of deporting migrants. I think that's a good sign. It was one of the most significant demonstrations in postwar German history. What I find hypocritical is that the parties in government, which is the Social Democrats, the Greens and the Liberals and the opposition of the Christian Democrats, put themselves in the front of the demonstrations and portrayed themselves as the defenders of democracy and higher values as defenders against the far right, while at the same time, these parties are protecting and supporting a far right Israeli government with its assault on Gaza. About 27000 people have died yet in the Israeli assaults and they are certainly major war crimes going on there, to say the least. And the German government including the Greens and the Liberals and the Social Democrats have been supporting Israel from the outset. The German chancellor, Olaf Scholz,

even said one or two months ago that any accusations that Israel would be violating international law or humanitarian law would be absurd. Well, there is the case at the International Court of Justice now about genocide. Whether this is genocide or not will be discussed by the court, but what we have seen and Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and other organizations and the UN itself have repeatedly said that there are major war crimes going on. And so the idea that these same parties who support an extreme right wing government in Israel defend the world from the even right wing is utterly hypocritical. And so I think, there is a debate going on now in the whole world about what to do about the situation in Israel and Germany is isolating itself, even more.

ZR: Let us dig deeper into what you briefly mentioned, South Africa's lawsuit against Israel. I would also like to recap the situation so far. On the 29th of December, South Africa government brought a case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, ICJ, accusing it of genocidal acts in its assault on Gaza, which to date has killed at least 27,500 civilians, majority of them being women and children. Soon after South Africa filed the suit, the German government sharply rejected the allegation and termed it as political instrumentalization of the UN Genocide Convention. It also announced that it would intervene as a third party on behalf of Israel at the ICJ. Starting this week, Nicaragua issued a warning to Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Canada that it will take them to the International Court of Justice if they continue providing Israel with weapons. The statement reads as follows. Quote: "Nicaragua has urged the government of the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Canada to immediately halt the supply of arms, ammunitions, technology and or components to Israel as it is plausible they might have been used to facilitate or commit violations of the genocide conventions", unquote. Can you talk about the credibility of South Africa's genocide case against Israel, and thereafter assess in detail the role of Germany?

FS: Well, I think that the ICJ case against Israel is really a major point in our recent history. The ICJ has been sometimes accused of being biased, to have a pro Western bias. And it will be seen now if the court is able to independently rule on a Western ally, which is Israel. And I think the South Africa case is very significant. South Africa has this long experience with the apartheid regime, which they have overcome more or less peacefully. And so I think they're in a very good position to make this case. They made a very strong case. And the ICJ in an emergency ruling said that the case is plausible. So they seriously consider the accusation that Israel is committing genocidal acts in the Gaza Strip. And the German position is really quite awkward. They intervened, saying that there is no foundation whatsoever for the South African case, even though we know about these war crimes. Just to name some of them, even the Israeli blockade of Gaza was a crime under international law even before October 7th. After October 7th immediately, the Israeli government declared that they will now have a complete siege of Gaza, which is completely illegal under international law because it's targeting a whole population. Under the Geneva Convention, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention, it's illegal to have something that they call collective punishment of a population. Now, the Hamas attacks on Israel were horrific, no doubt about it. They were a major crime. But that does not give Israel any right for collective punishment under

international law. And international law is made for situations like this, war situations, situations of severe conflict and crisis. And so any party has to comply with international law. Israel has even signed the Geneva Convention, which it is violating all the time. Israel has also bombarded civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, cultural institutions and under the Geneva Convention Israel has to not only not attack these institutions, but to actively protect them. Israel failed to do so. Israel is still blocking humanitarian aid. There's some humanitarian aid coming into Gaza, but not sufficiently. We have a situation where children have been amputated without any anesthesia, because there is no medical equipment because of the partial blockade. And so there are a huge number of violations of international law. Some of them could be considered under the under the Genocide Convention, that's what the ICJ court is about, but as one of the columnists of the Israeli flagship newspaper Haaretz recently wrote, the most important thing to decide whether this is genocide or not, even if it's not considered genocide, it's a series of war crimes and they have to be stopped. And the position of the German government has been from the beginning to support Israel more or less unconditionally. There were some statements of Annalena Baerbock, our foreign minister, that said, Well, you have to spare civilian lives. But they have done nothing to call for a ceasefire in the United Nations, as 153 nations did in the General Assembly. And they have lobbied to stop the EU from a statement that would call for a ceasefire. So the German position is, I think, incomprehensible given German history. The German government always claims that the lessons to be learned from German history is that we have to support Israel unconditionally. I think the lessons to be learned from German history is that we have to protect people, civilians, without respect to their nation, to their color of skin, to their sex and to their religious beliefs. That's the lesson we should have learned from history. And what we see now is that the German government is siding with one state which is perpetrating a lot of violence against the people of another state, and that it is not protecting people, whatever their color of skin, whatever their nation is. So, I think this is deeply troubling. And Namibia has also raised its voice to criticize Germany for this intervention at the International Court of Justice.

ZR: For the sake of objectivity, I would like to run some counter-arguments that the Israeli as well as Western governments routinely bring forward. And I would like you to respond to them one by one. Firstly, Israel has taken every precautionary measure possible to warn civilians in Gaza of its bombardments by, for example, dropping leaflets from the air and requesting them to flee to safer areas.

FS: Well, the UN and human rights organizations have said many times, and I think that's right if you consider the fact that there is no safe place in Israel to go to. Even if you drop leaflets from an airplane. And people have no safe haven to go to, it's just ridiculous to claim that you have taken any provisions to save civilian lives. The contrary is true. Israel has bombarded civilian infrastructures wherever they could, and they have not spared civilian lives at all.

ZR: Secondly, Hamas is using civilians as a shield by hiding amongst them and using this advantage to fire rockets at Israeli civilians.

FS: Well, Hamas has been firing rockets, which is also illegal under international law, if civilians are hit. The Palestinians have a right under international law to resist occupation and blockade, even by military means, but they have no right to kill civilians for that matter. So I do criticize Hamas for this type of actions, but at the same time, this does not give Israel a pretext to disproportionately kill civilians and to engage in what international law calls collective punishment. When it comes to using civilians as human shields, that's what Gaza claimed, for example, when it came to the Al-Shifa hospital, it turned out to be just a fake story. There were no major military structures under the Al-Shifa hospital. The tunnels that Israel showed later were dug by Israel itself. So, even if a military organization, as Hamas, uses civilians as human shields under the Geneva Convention, all parties still have to protect the civilians. So the protection of civilians has priority over military targets. So in any case, Israel cannot claim that this would justify 20,000 dead civilians and more than 10,000 dead children in Gaza.

ZR: Last month, the United Nations Relief and Work Agency, also known as UNRWA, was accused by Israel of being infiltrated by at least 190 Hamas and Islamic Jihad members. In Israel's six page intelligence dossier 12 members were named with pictures. Following this accusation, 16 donor countries, including its major contributors in the US and Germany, froze the 400 million funding to the agency, which has greatly impacted its capacities. UNRWA has around 13,000 employees in Gaza and provides essential services that encompass the educational and health care sector. In response, the UN terminated the contracts of the accused staff members and said it was launching an investigation into the claims made by Israel. Israel has not shared its full intelligence dossier with the UN, but spread it far and wide with international media outlets that in turn published it. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated when he was asked about the evidence, quote, "we haven't had the ability to investigate the allegations ourselves, but they are highly, highly credible", unquote. In your assessment, how credible are these claims made by Israel? And secondly, should the funding by the US and Germany remain frozen until the investigation is complete?

FS: Well, as you said Zain, these are just claims by the Israeli government or the intelligence community. There's no evidence yet. That's what UNRWA itself said, what other UN institutions say and what the press says. So unless there's any hard evidence, we have to go with the presumption of innocence. And even if it turns out that some of the members of UNRWA – there are 30,000 employees, not only in Gaza, but also in the West Bank, in Lebanon and elsewhere, which take care of Palestinian refugees – even if some of them engaged in criminal acts, that wouldn't mean that we have to defund UNRWA. The work of UNRWA is essential to the survival of millions of people. 2.3 million people in Gaza depend on UNRWA. And there are now urgent warnings that Gaza is at the verge of entering a severe famine. And if people are already starving, if UNRWA would be abandoned, they would starve to death. UNRWA is the main channel to get humanitarian aid to Gaza. So I think it's really indeed a criminal act to defund UNRWA. The accusations have to be investigated. Of course, UNRWA members engaged in criminal activities, they have to be persecuted, no doubt about it. But, defunding UNRWA in the current situation is really highly immoral, in my view. The head of UNRWA said that he is now trying to get funds from Arab states as

Western states are defunding UNRWA. It's also interesting who the states who are defunding UNRWA now are. Basically NATO states. It's again the West against the rest of the world and the West against the Palestinian people. And what is also interesting is that the accusations of Israel against UNRWA were made public the same day when the ICJ ordered Israel to comply with international law on genocide. So, in my view, it's an attempt of Israel, to shed a bad light on UN institutions and to delegitimize the case at the ICJ because much of the accusations of South Africa were based on material from UNRWA members. And so Israel, of course, wanted to get rid of UNRWA for decades, because they take care of Palestinian refugees. They keep alive the case of Palestinian refugees, of those also who were driven from their homes in 1948. And so Israel was against UNRWA from the outset, and now they see a chance to dismantle it. And if Western states go with Israel in that case, they might be guilty of really starving hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to death.

ZR: Let's take another look at other developments surrounding Israel's assault on Gaza. The Yemeni based Houthi militia began the activities to stop what they call Israel's genocidal actions in Gaza by focusing on attacking or capturing Israeli commercial ships in the Red Sea. However, since then, they have expanded their activities and are also targeting British and US vessels, following a series of recent attacks in Yemen by the British and US military. In addition, the US has launched dozens of attacks on armed groups in Iraq and Syria after three US soldiers were killed in Jordan by an unmanned aerial system at a military base near the Syrian border in late January. Washington claims that these attacks were supported by Iran. What is your assessment of these activities of the Houthis and the overall situation in the Middle East?

FS: Well, first of all, I have to say I have no sympathies for the Houthis, as such. I mean, they have a very authoritarian rule in parts of Yemen. But what they said, what they are doing in the Red Sea is to attack all kinds of shipping that goes from Israel or to Israel, and to stop the assault on Gaza. And they would immediately stop attacking these ships if the assault on Gaza would be halted. So there's a very easy solution to this, for many reasons, which is a ceasefire for Gaza, which many organizations around the world, many states, the majority of the General Assembly of the UN, 153 states are asking for. So, there would be an easy way out of this conflict. The US does what it always does. It cannot rationally deal with conflicts. It cannot diplomatically deal with conflicts. They just drop bombs. That's all they can do. And they will antagonize people even further. And they are escalating the conflict in the region, which they always said they wanted to avoid. I mean, Blinken was going to and fro to the Middle East. And he always said, Well, we have to avoid escalation in the region, but they are escalating the situation. By the way, the bombing of Yemen, this is what many members of Congress in Washington have said is illegal under the American Constitution. Article one of the American Constitution says that Congress can declare war and stop war, not the president. So what Biden is doing here is clearly illegal under international law, and it's very counterproductive to resolve this conflict.

ZR: Let us now finally switch to Ukraine. On the 2nd of February, European Union leaders agreed on a €50 billion financial support for Ukraine that will last until 2027. This funding

will assist Ukraine in keeping its government public services running, which the EU says is essential to continue fighting against Russian aggression. This aid package comes after a standoff with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who has been vetoing the package since December 2023. The European Union threatened to sabotage Hungary's economy and the strategy according to the Financial Times, included targeting Hungary's economic weakness; imperils currency and drive a collapse in investor confidence, with a plan to hurt jobs and growth if Viktor Orbán continued to block aid to Ukraine. Soon thereafter, Viktor Orbán made a swift U-turn and the EU's aid package got approved. On the other side of the Atlantic, on the 5th of February, the United States Senate proposed a \$108 billion bipartisan deal that included a \$16 billion aid package for Ukraine. This bill has been stalling for quite some time, as many conservative Republicans have been demanding a tougher stance on immigration in return, and it is unclear if it will go through in Congress. How do you assess these developments, and do you think these aid packages by the EU and possibly by the US, will make a difference in Ukraine's efforts to win against Russia in 2024?

FS: Well, I think the most striking thing here, Zain, is, that both the US administration and the EU governments are unwilling to take notice of a simple, inconvenient truth, which is that Ukraine cannot win in the sense what they have been saying for a long time, that they can reconquer all the territory, including Crimea. That's what even the Commander in Chief of Ukraine has said last autumn to The Economist, that it's a stalemate. They cannot win that war. They are running out of people. Even if they get many more weapons, they are running out of people. They have lost tens of thousands of lives, many more are injured, and they have a huge problem recruiting more people. And I think the situation really calls for diplomatic action. And I think, you know, I don't like Viktor Orbán for many reasons. For example because of his fierce support of the Israeli assault on Gaza, for his stance on migration and so on, but I think in this point, he was right to block this, because it doesn't make sense. It makes sense to send humanitarian aid to Ukraine. I mean, people are very poor there, and it's a cold winter and so on, they need assistance now. And I think it's fair to do that. But further military assistance does not solve the case. We have to engage in negotiations. And I think Russia might be interested. Just remember that two years ago, in April 2022, there were negotiations in March and early April, and there was almost an agreement based on Ukraine not joining NATO. And now the situation is much worse for Ukraine. In fact, it's unlikely that they will get back their territory in exchange for not joining NATO. And that situation will likely deteriorate even further. So, if you want to support the Ukrainian people, if you want to stop the killing, and to have a rational solution, you have to stop engaging in this militaristic logic. And the point here is also that the US is step by step pulling out of the support of Ukraine, because, of course, they knew. They know that they can't win. It's been the American military, General Milley and others who have been saying for a long time that it's a stalemate. The Pentagon knows quite well and the intelligence community that it doesn't make any sense. It's just about the election in the US, of course. And for President Biden this is a huge problem. It's unpopular to spend a lot of money on foreign wars and the Republicans are exploiting this situation and so on. So of course, in some way or another, the US would like to pull out of this thing and they would like the Europeans to pay the bill. And now the Germans, of course, as one of our members of

Parliament, Sahra Wagenknecht recently said, have the most stupid government in Europe, which might be true, and they are willing to pay the check. Other European countries such as France are much more hesitant. And then the next thing then is that there is this idea that Ukraine will soon join the EU. I think it's not very realistic, because Germany, they would pay any bill – I mean, we have just had a new budget in Germany, with huge cuts for social spending, for elderly people, for all kinds of social provisions and we put all the money into the military, our own military and the Ukrainian military – but I think in other countries this won't go through. And I think that, of course, the US would like that the EU would pay the bill for the mess that the Americans, in a way, helped to bring about.

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

FS: It was a pleasure.

ZR: And thank you for tuning in today. Please don't forget to join our alternative channels on Rumble, Telegram and our podcast called Podbean. YouTube, which is owned by Google, can shadowban and censor as at any time, especially in times of crisis. So if you're watching our video regularly, make sure to click on the description below and visit the links to our alternative platforms. Also, if you're watching our videos, make sure you donate today! If all of our 145,000 subscribers donate today, we will be able to cover our costs for the next four to five years. Make sure to take into consideration that there's an entire team working behind the scenes from camera, light, audio, voiceover, translation, correction, all with the goal of providing you with independent and nonprofit information. I'm your host, Zain Raza, see you next time.

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