



Israel's Hannibal Directive, escalation with Hezbollah & Ukraine war

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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 Dimitri Lascaris about the situation in Israel and Gaza, as well as Ukraine. Dimitri Lascaris is a journalist and lawyer who specializes in class actions, international law and human rights. In 2020, he ran for the Green Party leadership in Canada, finishing second. Dmitri, welcome back.

Dimitri Lascaris (DL): Thank you for having me. Always a pleasure, Zain.

ZR: I would like to begin with news related to Israel and Gaza that did not make major headlines here in Germany. A few days ago, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz published an investigation that revealed that the Israeli army ordered the Hannibal Directive during the Hamas October 7th attacks of last year. The Hannibal Directive is an Israeli military policy that permits the use of maximum force in the event of a soldier being kidnaped. One Israeli military source told Haaretz, quote, "The instruction was to turn the area of defense into an extermination zone; to close the line of contact towards the West", unquote. The October 7th Hamas attacks on Israel killed 1139 people, that included 764 civilians and 373 Israeli security personnel. According to Haaretz it is unclear at the moment how many Israeli civilians were killed as a result of the Hannibal Directive. What do you make of this new report? And does it in any way change the way we evaluate October 7th?

DL: Let's recall that the number of persons killed was initially set by the Israelis to be 1400. Then it was reduced to 1200 after the Israelis conceded that 200 of the bodies they had identified had actually been, they were Palestinian militants who had been killed by Israeli forces and then the number was reduced further to the level you just mentioned, 1139 persons. And at every step of the way, the media uncritically accepted, Western mainstream media I am referring to, uncritically accepted whatever the Israeli said. And they did this even though, as was reported by independent news outlets, including The Grayzone and

Electronic Intifada in the United States, that there immediately surfaced evidence that at least some of the civilians had been killed by Israeli forces. I believe it was in Kibbutz Be'eri, where a tank fired upon a house, where there were both Palestinian militants and numerous Israeli civilians being held hostage. A person who witnessed the attack told Israeli television in a Hebrew language interview, which was picked up by these independent media outlets in the West that this had happened. So that immediately raised a question. But anybody who then, you know, said the logical thing, which was how many civilians, in fact, were killed by the Israelis, and anyone who asked the question was dismissed as a conspiracy theorist. And now we have Haaretz, a very reputable, major newspaper saying that it has viewed documents, documentary evidence, extensive documentary evidence to back this up and spoken to very senior Israeli military officials who are in the process of conducting an investigation, a public demand, that in fact, this was done in a widespread scale, so much so that it could have killed hundreds of Israeli civilians. We simply don't know. But it definitely did kill many more civilians than simply those who had died in that house that day at the attack of a tank. How this affects the narrative? This is part of a propaganda initiative launched immediately in the wake of the October 7th attacks by the Israeli government and its supporters to justify the most horrific attacks upon Gaza. The suffering inflicted by Palestinian militants is made to be seen, and the more inflamed Western voters become, and observers around the world become, the easier it is for the government of Israel to get away with atrocities. And so we had, for example, also the claim that dozens of babies had been beheaded by Hamas, which was completely debunked. That was an utter fabrication. The claim that there was mass systemic rape has been, if not thoroughly debunked, certainly has suffered mortal wounds, this theory. There may well have been instances, isolated instances of sexual assault, that's unclear at this stage. But there's no evidence of any credible nature to back that up. All of this was part of this propaganda initiative that I've mentioned. And, I think the public needs to step back and reflect on, not what the Israeli government claims was done on October 7th, but what we know to be happening now in Gaza, which is a genocide. That's what would need to be the focus of our attention. October 7th is over. The genocide in Gaza is ongoing.

ZR: The criticism that is emerging from this investigation is that the findings by Haaretz is being instrumentalized by pro-Palestinian voices as downplaying and even outright denying the brutality and extent of Hamas's October 7th attacks. That it's a form of anti-Semitism and, in the worst case, akin to Holocaust denial. How do you respond to this criticism? Don't you think it's essential, if not objective, that even though we take into account the findings of this investigation, we do our best to avoid downplaying the atrocities committed by Hamas?

DL: I've always said, and I will continue to say, that anybody who violates the laws of war should be held accountable. And targeting civilians is a fundamental violation of the laws of war. This applies whether the attacker is Palestinian, Israeli, American, German, Canadian, whatever it may be. And I would never hesitate to call for all such persons to be held accountable. But we should also bear in mind, in my view, that there was a clear moral distinction between the violence of the oppressed and the violence of the oppressor. As Nelson Mandela said, it is the oppressor that dictates the conditions of violence and the

tactics that are to be employed. And Israel ultimately is the cause of all political violence in historic Palestine. It is Israel that has deprived the Palestinian people of its state. It is Israel that year after year has killed far more civilians than civilian casualties it has suffered. It is Israel that has imposed upon the Palestinian people an apartheid system that has built settlement upon settlement in the West Bank in violation of international law, and has deprived the Palestinians even of that little spit of land that was reserved for them by the international community. So ultimately, it would be utterly foolish of us to expect that the violence on the Palestinian side is going to stop unless and until these fundamental grievances have been addressed. And we in the West, our governments have done everything possible to enable Israel to avoid addressing those grievances. So ultimately, you know where the responsibility lies for all of this violence? It's not even Israel, Israel is the penultimate culpable party. The ultimate culpable party are the Western governments that are making all of this possible.

ZR: Let us now look at the bigger picture surrounding Israel and Gaza. I would like to recap the situation for our viewers. Beginning of June, the United Nations Security Council approved the United States draft of a ceasefire resolution to end Israel's military offensive in Gaza. At the time, the US stated that Israel had agreed to the ceasefire and now it was in Hamas's hands to agree to it. Specifically the ceasefire plan was divided into three phases, which included a temporary ceasefire allowing for humanitarian aid to enter and negotiation on hostages and prisoner exchange. Eventually, a full withdrawal of Israeli forces, as well as redevelopment and reconstruction of Gaza would follow. However, despite this development, Israel continues with its military offensive and so far has killed at least 38,000 Palestinians, as well as severely injured another 87,000. According to Lancet this week, a renowned medical journal, the accumulative effects of Israel's war in Gaza could mean the true death toll to reach up to 186,000 people. Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is also in a very precarious situation. He's facing protests from tens, if not hundreds of thousands of protesters on a daily basis. They are demanding a new election, as well as that he embarks on negotiations with Hamas to resolve the hostage situation. Furthermore, the Israeli state is divided internally as well. On the one hand, you have the military, who is critical that Netanyahu's government has not presented a plan for a postwar Gaza, while on the other hand, extreme right wing forces within the Netanyahu coalition government are threatening to break up if he decides to opt for any sort of settlement with Hamas. Why do you think the Israeli government is so reluctant to pursue negotiation with Hamas when it comes to hostages, and instead focuses on special military operations to rescue them? And secondly, what do you make of the situation within the Israeli state? Will Netanyahu be able to maintain power despite these internal fractures?

DL: Well, I don't think the objective of the Israeli government was ever to destroy Hamas. I'm sure that they would be happy to destroy Hamas, but they have a much more important objective, and one which, tragically and appallingly, may be more realizable and that is the ethnic cleansing of Gaza. That has always been the ultimate objective. And frankly, it's the West Bank that's happening next. It's already begun at a level of low intensity, the ethnic cleansing of the West Bank and has been going on for decades. And it's begun to accelerate.

And it is to the West Bank that is next. This is the project and the so-called the far right ministers, I mean, let's be clear, the entire cabinet of Benjamin Netanyahu, including the prime minister himself, is a far right racist. Everybody in that cabinet is a far right racist. But the most extreme, Smotrich and Ben-Gvir don't even pretend that the ultimate objective is to destroy Hamas. Of course they want to destroy Hamas, but they clearly want Gaza to be ethnically cleansed in the West Bank as well. And they even have a vision of a larger Israel than the one that currently exists on the historic borders of Palestine. Their vision of what Israel should look like encompasses substantial parts of Jordan, Lebanon, the Sinai. This is what we're dealing with here. And the only way to put a stop to this madness and the slaughter is from the external imposition of a solution. That means, critically, Western government intervention, which can be accomplished simply by depriving Israel of all military weaponry necessary to carry out this diabolical project. If that does not happen, and there's, shockingly, no indication whatsoever, Zain, after eight months of brazen genocide, that the Western governments are changing their policy towards Israel, not the slightest indication, that means that this is going to end by means of war, and the war will escalate, and Israel will itself suffer grievous damage and possibly, irreparable harm from that war. It no longer has the ability to dominate the region. It's very clear, after watching Hezbollah's attacks on the northern regions of Israel over the past eight months and the newly published surveillance video, this is the second one – they've just put one out this week, showing about ten minutes of footage of sensitive military bases in the Golan Heights – they've shown that they can identify the targets, they can strike the targets, and there's nothing Israel can do to stop them from doing that. If Iran becomes involved, which has a much more formidable missile arsenal and a massive army relative to Israel, then it's all over for Israel. Israel will be destroyed. And so the ultimate irony of the absurd and dangerous policies of Western governments towards Israel is the very state that they purport to want to protect, which is Israel itself is being imperiled to an existential degree by Israel's own conduct. So, again, we need to intervene. We have the means to stop this, and we need to do it immediately or otherwise the entire region is going to go up in flames. There's no reason to believe that Israel will voluntarily stop the slaughter and the escalation.

ZR: You mentioned Hezbollah; that was going to be my next question. This situation, as you mentioned, between Hezbollah and Israel has been escalating, involving daily missile exchanges at their border. Germany's leading prime time news channel, The Tagesschau, has been reporting about this escalation on a regular basis. However, in each of their segments, they claim that Hezbollah keeps firing rockets into Israel while Israel is merely reacting. In their segment on July 2nd, for example, they stated that the Islamist Hezbollah militia in Lebanon is constantly firing rockets at the Israeli civilian population, and tens of thousands had therefore to be evacuated. They then proceeded to give a voice to an Israeli military spokesman, who explained that Hezbollah must leave the border region, either through an agreement or through war, in order for peace to return. Why is Hezbollah escalating the situation with Israel? Wouldn't it be safer for everyone involved if Hezbollah just simply withdrew from the region?

DL: Well, I've been to South Lebanon three times since October 7th of last year. I visited the border regions as missiles were being fired into Lebanon. Artillery shells were being fired into Lebanon. White phosphorus was being dropped upon Lebanon. I personally visited one site after another, which clearly was a civilian structure that had been flattened by the Israeli military. I showed up at a hospital in Bint Jbeil, a Lebanese village not far from the border, hours after it had been struck by an Israeli drone. I personally interviewed people who were standing at the entrance to the hospital and watched a missile come in and kill three innocent bystanders who were exiting the hospital, including a father in front of his son. I saw the shrapnel that had shredded vehicles that were dozens of meters away from the entrance to this hospital. And let's talk briefly about what the Western media itself acknowledges. The Western media itself acknowledges that the number of Lebanese civilians who have been killed is greatly in excess by a factor of five or six than the number of Israeli civilians who have been killed in the combat in the northern border since October 7th of last year. Hezbollah itself publishes, or at least it claims to publish the identities, the names of every single one of its fighters who've been killed. The number, I think, now is in the range of 350, whereas the Israelis claim that only about 15 of their own soldiers have been killed in the combat with Hezbollah. So by any rational measure, it is the Israelis who are the aggressors, and it is Hezbollah that has said consistently that if they stop the murderous rampage in Gaza, they themselves will stop attacking Israel. And finally, let's look at history. Who invaded Lebanon again and again and again? Who occupied Lebanon from the 1980s up until 2000? Who invaded it again in 2006? Who orchestrated the massacre of a thousand or perhaps even thousands of Palestinian refugees in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps? It was Israel who did all of that. This narrative that Hezbollah is the aggressor in the current round of fighting or historically, is preposterous. It's like everything else surrounding the Western narrative about Israel, it's a concoction of lies and fantasies. Let's look at the evidence, and let's understand that if we're going to bring an end to the warfare on the northern border and avoid that terrible escalation that I just mentioned, we are going to have to impose restraint upon Israel.

ZR: Last week, Israel's far right finance minister Bezalel Smotrich approved the building of 5300 units in five new illegal outposts in the West Bank. He stated that this is in response to unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state on the international stage. In the middle of this year, Norway, Island and Spain formally recognized Palestine as a state. Spain even asked to join South Africa's petition, which is accusing Israel of committing genocide in Gaza, the International Court of Justice, joining the Palestinian Authority, Colombia and Mexico. Smotrich vocally declared that Israel will establish a new settlement every time countries recognize Palestine on the international stage. As an international lawyer, could you explain why, despite such actions and even crystal clear statements from Israeli leading figures that so blatantly violate international law at most only draw condemnation from the West, but never elicit any holds in sanctions, as do, for example, when Russia annexes Ukrainian territory?

DL: So just people understand the strength of a legal case against Israel when it comes to the settlements. In 2004, the International Court of Justice unanimously ruled, with even the US

judge concurring, that the settlements violate the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel thumbed its nose at that. The United Nations Security Council itself, with the at least acquiescence, if not the support, of the United States government, has repeatedly condemned the settlements as a violation of international law. The UN General Assembly has done it over and over and over again. One legal expert after another has opined that the West Bank is occupied Palestinian territory, and the transfer of Israel's civilian population into that territory violates the Fourth Geneva Convention and constitutes a war crime. All of this is known. My government, the Canadian government itself, if you go to the website of the Foreign Ministry for many years it says, the position of Canada is that the settlements violate the Fourth Geneva Convention and that the West Bank constitutes occupied territory. And yet, not a single sanction has been imposed of any meaningful nature by any Western government on Israel at any time during the past 50 years. These settlements have been going on for over 50 years. When Smotrich or Ben-Gvir say we're building new settlements in response to the recognition of a Palestinian state by certain states, not only is that ludicrous, it makes no sense. Why would you respond that way by violating international law? But secondly, they're lying because there has never been a point in time at which Israel withdrew from the settlement project. It has constantly, for over 50 years, been expanding the settlements, and it would do it whether or not other states recognize a Palestinian state. So they're clearly lying. And the reason why Western governments won't do anything about it, frankly, I believe the only rational conclusion you can draw is because they want this to happen. They pay lip service to international law, but they want what is a Western bulwark. Ultimately, that's what Israel is. It's a Western bulwark. I have sometimes said a massive US military base masquerading as a country. The purpose that Israel has served from the time of its creation for the United States government and its allies in the West, is to enable the United States government and its allies to impose their will on the world's richest oil producing region. It was recognized in the aftermath of World War Two as being a, quote, "stupendous source of strategic power". That's what US military planners called it. And so they favored the creation of this Western bulwark, not because of their culpability for the Holocaust, enormous as their whole culpability was, I don't believe that was their primary motivation. The primary motivation was to establish Western hegemony over this region. And by expanding the zone of control of the Western bulwark over historic Palestine, including the West Bank, it becomes easier for the United States, through Israel, to impose its will on West Asia. That, I think, is the most plausible interpretation of why they refuse to sanction Israel in any way, despite paying lip service to international law. Why do they do this in the case of Russia? They impose sanctions. Again, it all comes down to power, to domination. Russia is a geopolitical rival. It refuses, for all of its flaws, simply to be a vassal of the United States. And for that reason, the United States and its allies have determined that Russia must be fatally weakened and possibly even dismembered. That's why they imposed these crushing sanctions. Not because they care about international law. They don't give a damn about international law. And we're seeing that in horrifying reality minute by minute in Gaza today.

ZR: Let us switch gears here and discuss Ukraine. Let me first recap the major developments over the last few months for our viewers. In spring of this year, the United States approved a \$61 billion military aid package for Ukraine that also included Army Tactical Missile

Systems, also known as ATACMS, that have a range of 300km. The Russian military then began its summer offensive in eastern Ukraine, making notable territorial gains. In response, the West gave permission to deploy western made missiles to strike targets within Russian territory that Russia may be using to support its offensive, while France announced that it would start sending military trainers to Ukraine. In June, there were some calls for peace. Russian President Vladimir Putin proposes a peace plan without any preconditions, and a ceasefire in which the current territories would be frozen as they are. While Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky held a peace summit in Switzerland, a visit to which Russia was not invited. Out of the 90 countries that came to this peace summit, 80 signed a communique that stated that international law must be upheld, Ukraine's territorial integrity is respected and it also condemned Russia's invasion. Both peace initiatives have seemed to have fallen on deaf ears as Russia just yesterday bombarded various cities in Ukraine. In Kyiv, Russia killed 33 civilians, which, according to Western media outlets, also included Ukraine's largest children's medical center. Ukraine also conducted a missile strike with US supplied ATACMS on Sevastopol in Crimea two weeks ago, killing four civilians and injuring another 150. What do you make of the peace proposals put forward by Ukraine and Russia? And is it even possible to talk about peace at this stage, given how many lives as well as political capital has been invested by both sides?

DL: I just want to start by commenting on this attack on the children's hospital. You know, both the Russian government, the Russian government contests, of course, that it attacked the children's hospital. It says that this was destroyed or greatly damaged by falling fragments from a missile that struck an incoming Russian missile that was heading towards another target, whereas Zelensky and his government insists that this was intentionally done. Anybody who claims to know, based upon what one side or the other is saying, is either a fool or a liar. They both have an incentive to lie, and the only way to actually determine who's telling the truth is for independent experts, not government experts from one side or the other, but independent experts to go in there and to examine the site thoroughly and to make a determination after they've been given access to all the evidence and have had an opportunity to deliberate. That's not happened. It may never happen. And so I myself refuse to believe one side or the other. I don't know what happened. I find both possible explanations to be plausible. And I'll say this, I think it's extremely unlikely that on the eve of a major NATO summit, when everybody knew that NATO governments were going to be talking about a potential further escalation of this war and giving billions of dollars more weaponry to Ukraine, it seems to me extremely unlikely that the Russian government would intentionally strike a children's hospital. I find it much easier to believe that this was an accident, either caused by an Ukrainian air defense missile or an errant Russian missile. But why in heaven's name would they give Western governments even more incentive to escalate the war by attacking the children's hospital on the eve of a major NATO summit?! That just doesn't make any sense to me. You know, in terms of peace, Zain, the proposal put forward by Russia does, of course, involve effectively a redrawing of the borders of Ukraine. And, I would not contest that the use of force to redraw the borders of a sovereign nation, which Ukraine is, violates international law. The problem is that the West has absolutely zero credibility when it comes to insisting upon the sanctity of the borders of Ukraine or any other country, because, for

example, they carved up Serbia and created Kosovo over the rigorous objections of the Russian Federation and other governments, including Serbia's. And what did they do in Kosovo? They installed a NATO military base. And as I just mentioned, they're effectively flouting the laws of war and the sovereignty of states and Palestinian aspirations in historic Palestine by supporting Israel and arming Israel as it steals Palestinian land every single day for over 50 years. So they have absolutely no credibility. And whatever the merits or demerits may be from a legal perspective of Russia's position or Ukraine's position, the fact is that Ukraine is not going to recover that land. That is a fantasy. It may recover small portions of it, but the idea that it's going to expel Russian forces from the Donbas, or even worse, from Crimea, is delusional. And so when you're confronted by that reality, what do humane people do? Humane people sit down at the table and say, we're not going to insist on strict compliance with international law, we are going to try to find a compromise solution to bring this slaughter to an end. A slaughter which, by the way, could end up in a nuclear war if we continue down the path of escalation. Russia's president put forward a proposal which would, whatever its merits or demerits may be from the perspective of international law, it would keep most of the 1991 territory of Ukraine under the sovereign control of the government of Kiev. They still would have access to the Black Sea, they still would retain Odessa, and the killing and destruction would stop. Is that an inferior option to continue in a war that's going to end in Ukraine's destruction and possibly the loss of far greater territory, in fact, likely the loss of far greater territory and potentially a nuclear war? Is that a better option than the option put on the table by the Russian Federation? At a bare minimum, humane, rational people who are interested in survival would at least sit down at the table with the Russian Federation and try to come to some sort of a compromised solution. Instead, there was outright rejection and a refusal even to talk to the Russians. And then we see Orbán going, I'm no fan of Viktor Orbán, but in this regard, what Orbán did, now as the head, I think, of the European Council, he's got six months, was an admirable initiative for which he should be praised. This particular attempt to go and to stimulate a dialog, a direct dialog between European countries and the Russian Federation is exactly what we should be doing. But instead we are pathologically committed, we in the West, to the path of escalation.

ZR: Let us end this interview with Julian Assange. At the end of June, Assange reached a plea agreement with the US government that allowed him to walk free after he pleaded guilty to a single count under the Espionage Act of 1917. He was sentenced to the time he had already spent in Belmarsh security prison, where he was held for the last five years of his life. In total, Assange spent 14 years in some form of isolation, first in the Ecuadorian embassy and later in Belmarsh. Instead of taking a clear stance, which the German media do time and time again, when it comes to the dissidents of countries that the West opposes, they reported on this case objectively and gave equal weight to both sides. Germany's leading prime time public news broadcaster, the Tagesschau, for example, called him a whistleblower in their 25th June segment and stated that for some he was a hero, when for others he was a traitor and a spy. In their report, they even gave a legal expert a voice to explain that this case represents a conflict between espionage and free speech. Can you provide your assessment of this development? And secondly, do you think that this case proves that the West, in

particular the US, still has strong democratic institutions? Given that a journalist, as is Julian Assange, was not tried and convicted after all.

DL: Let's be clear about what happened here and the evidence again is unequivocal. Julian Assange did not hack into some computer. Julian Assange was not in the position of confidence inside the US military or government. He was a publisher and a journalist. And someone inside the US military, it seems very likely to have been Chelsea Manning, provided massive amounts of classified information to a publisher. And the publisher found the content of that information to be highly newsworthy, primarily because it showed that the United States government had been committing heinous war crimes in Iraq. And he did what any sensible and principled publisher and journalist would do, he published the information. And he did it in a way which did not imperil a single US soldier. There is absolutely no evidence that any US soldier or spy was injured or harmed or compromised because of the publication of this incriminating evidence. So ultimately, that's what the evidence shows. It shows that Julian Assange was not a whistleblower. He was not a spy. He was simply a publisher and a journalist who did what our own mainstream media organizations failed to do again and again and again. And that is to tell the truth about the crimes of Western governments. And for this he was effectively subjected to torture, as a UN special rapporteur noted repeatedly over the past several years. This is an absolute scandal. And the thing that I find most really appalling about the scene is that people who are journalists, people who claim to be journalists and claimed to be committed to the revelation of the truth, are compromising the integrity of what this heroic journalist Julian Assange did at great, great personal cost, which was to reveal to the world evidence of the United States crimes in a war of aggression. We as journalists have an obligation to stand by people like Julian Assange, first and foremost, as a matter of principle, but also because if we don't, then our ability to do our job as journalists will be greatly compromised. And in fact, ultimately, we may find ourselves in a world where doing real journalism becomes simply impossible.

ZR: Dimitri Lascaris, independent journalist and lawyer. Thank you so much for your time today.

DL: Thank you again, Zain.

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