

## Israeli Pager Attack: Self-Defense or Terrorism?

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**Glenn Greenwald (GG):** Ever since October 7th, I have interviewed all sorts of people, experts in the region, scholars and the like, journalists who cover the region as well. And one of the things that many, if not most of them have repeatedly said is that one of the most dangerous risks of the Israeli war with Gaza, the all out war with Gaza that is now spreading to the West Bank is that there are a lot of people in Israel who don't just want war with the Gazans or the Palestinians, but also really want war with Hezbollah on their north. They have disputed territory that are part of the Golan Heights that they've had for a long time, which Lebanon claims, which the Israelis claim, which the Syrians claim. Israel has made brutal incursions into Lebanon and all sorts of bombing raids on Lebanon, including on Beirut, some really brutal and deadly ones. And Hezbollah sees itself as a defensive force to keep Israel out of Lebanon. They have been having all sorts of border skirmishes since the beginning of the war with Hezbollah, sending some rockets – by no means their most sophisticated or damaging ones – into northern Israel primarily and then the Israelis sniping back. But increasingly over the last couple of weeks, with Benjamin Netanyahu's government seemingly falling apart and with increasing pressure on him to end the war and bring the hostages home – that's the war in Gaza – and with his obvious determination to continue the war as a way of staying in power and therefore out of prison, which might be awaiting him because of a corruption trial that he has been immune from while president, there's been a growing sense that Israel not only wants to provoke a war with Hezbollah, wants an all out war with Hezbollah in its north, but also involved the United States in that war, which the United States has made very clear by deploying military assets to the region, by promising through Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton that it would do everything to defend Israel, including in a war of this kind. So if Israel does provoke Hezbollah successfully into a war with it, as many comments throughout this last week from the Israeli government and various officials have suggested they intend to do, that won't just involve a new front in the Israeli war in the north. And they have very exhausted reserves and fighters who have spent a year now in Gaza fighting often street to street against Hamas, which continues to flourish whenever the Israelis leave, but they would then open a front against the much more effective fighting force in Lebanon that is Hezbollah. And so it's hard to understand why this would be in Israel's

interest other than because it's in the Netanyahu government's interest. But the Israelis carried out an attack today that was really unprecedented in terms of the way it was carried out, but also in terms of just the indiscriminate damage and casualties that took place. You've got to give credit where due. Quite ingenious, although we need to figure out exactly how it was carried out before we can give that kind of credit. But certainly it was a sophisticated operation, as I said, an unprecedented one.

The Wall Street Journal earlier today explained it well in this headline: *Hezbollah Pagers Explode in Apparent Attack Across Lebanon*. "Eight people were killed and 2,750 wounded, the country's health minister says". Now, this was earlier today. Those numbers have been updated as usually happens in cases like this. There's certainly more than 3000 reported deaths. I've seen 4000 from various people on the ground, journalists and the like, and hospitals. There's at least 4000 casualties. That death number has gone up to at least 12, including a couple of children. So we'll see what the death toll and what the casualty toll actually ends up being once everything is sort of processed. But here's The Wall Street Journal reporting, quote, "The affected pagers were from a new shipment that the group received in recent days, people familiar with the matter said. A Hezbollah official said many fighters had such devices, speculating that malware might have caused the devices to explode. The official said some people felt the pagers hit up and disposed of them before they burst. Hezbollah and the Lebanese government blamed Israel for the attack. Both said civilians were killed and Hezbollah threatened to retaliate. The Israeli military declined to comment. Lebanese Health Minister Firas Abyad, appearing on Al Jazeera television, said exploding pagers across the country injured 2,750 people and killed eight, including a child. The government said hundreds of people were in critical condition." Now, one of the things that I think is very important to note is that Hezbollah is similar to the Taliban in the sense that you cannot isolate who's a member of the Taliban and who isn't. The Taliban is basically an integrated part of the Afghan population. And then you have people who are official fighters of it. You have people who are supportive of it, particularly when there's a foreign army invading – people who are kind of tangential to it, but still work with the Taliban because it's the governing body in a lot of areas. It's the same for Hezbollah. And so even if it were true and it's clearly not, given the death of children and all sorts of people in civilian areas, that the only people injured were, quote unquote, "Hezbollah fighters" or "people associated with Hezbollah". That would still include a lot of people who are not fighters, who work with the governing group or the group that's considered Lebanon's protection from Israel. But clearly, it was far more indiscriminate than that. We're going to show you that just a bit in terms of where it happened, how many people were affected and what kinds of people. The State Department spokesman, Matthew Miller, was asked today about what role, if any, the US had in this attack. And here's what he said.

**Reporter:** Well, just to begin with in general, what does the US know about what happened? There have been a series of deaths and injuries apparently from exploding pagers. Does the US have any knowledge? What does it know now and when did it know?

**Matthew Miller (MM):** So we are gathering information on this incident. I can tell you that the US was not involved in it. The US was not aware of this incident in advance. And at this point we're gathering information.

**Reporter:** And what information are we gathered so far?

**MM:** We'll continue to collect information. I don't have any public readout to give now, but we're collecting information in the same way that journalists are across the world to gather the facts about what might have happened.

**GG:** Now, that's just insultingly deceitful. The US government is gathering information the same way journalists are? The US government is the government on whom Israel depends for their funding, for the payment of their military, for the arming of their wars. Obviously the US government has the easy, direct, immediate means of finding out, quote unquote, "what happened here" and who was responsible by picking up the phone and calling the Israelis and demanding that they explain to them what it is that they did. He kind of smirks, as he says, like, "hey, we don't know anything. We're figuring it out like you are. We're waiting, we're doing some journalism, figuring things out." That's preposterous! Everything the Israeli military does, everything – or its intelligence agencies do, has US involvement by virtue of the fact that none of that could happen without the US worker paying for it by force through taxation policies, and then transferring billions and billions of dollars to Israel or billions and billions of weapons that the American taxpayer also pays for.

Just to give you a sense for – in case you are imagining that these pagers went off on some sort of battlefield where a bunch of uniformed Hezbollah fighters were – here from Reuters is just a very illustrative video of the kind of places that it happened and where it happened. If you don't like seeing violent scenes, I would encourage you to look away. But for those who want to get a sense for how this was carried out and who affected it and the kind of civilian infrastructure on which it took place – here's a video that is clearly at a kind of fruit market where there's a bunch of civilians and employees sweeping up. People shopping for produce and the like. And then one of the people there had one of these pagers. That explosion was not a joke. If you have a pager like that in your pocket or in your hand, it's going to blow off a limb at least. That's why you have at least hundreds of people severely injured and some untold number dead. Now among the injured, according to Reuters, was the Iranian ambassador to Lebanon, which according to this headline, was injured by one of those pager explosions. Quote, "Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, was slightly injured on Tuesday by the explosion of an electronic pager, Iran's semi-official Fars news agency reported, as numerous such devices exploded across Lebanon. Quote, 'Amani has a superficial injury and is currently under observation in the hospital', Fars quoted a source as saying." Now, note that about a month ago, everyone thought because the Iranians were insisting that they were going to retaliate in a very serious way against Israel as a result of the killing of a Hamas leader inside Iran that Iran had invited as a guest of their inauguration of the new president. And obviously, if some foreign country carries out a murder of a guest that you invite a leader of some group or some country onto your soil is a violation of your

sovereignty. And if everyone sees it and you do nothing, then you're essentially signalling that that's not a red line for you, that you're either scared to or unwilling to or unable to retaliate in any meaningful way. And so Iran was making very clear that they would retaliate seriously, not in a sort of way calculated, not to do much damage as when they shot those slow, primitive drones and other weapons after the Israelis bombed their embassy in Damascus, knowing that they would be shot out of the sky very easily as they were kind of just a symbolic retaliation. But in this case, they vowed retaliation and they have not done anything, apparently. And, of course, Hezbollah is now vowing the same.

Here from Reuters, also today: *Hezbollah vows to punish Israel after pager explosion across Lebanon*. Quote, "Lebanon's Hezbollah promised to retaliate after blaming Israel for detonating pagers on Tuesday that killed at least eight people and wounded 2,750 others, including many of the militants group's fighters and Iran's envoy to Beirut. Lebanese Information Minister Ziad Makary condemned the detonation of the pagers – used by Hezbollah and others in Lebanon to communicate – as a, quote, 'Israeli aggression'. Hezbollah said Israel would receive, quote, 'it's fair punishment for the blast'. The Israeli military, which has been engaged in cross-border warfare with Iran-backed Hezbollah since the start of the Gaza war last October, declined to respond to Reuters' questions about the detonations." Now, it should be noted that unlike Hamas, which has some capacity to attack inside Israel, but not a very sophisticated capacity, Hezbollah has extremely serious missile capability. Very large, destructive, precise missiles that not only can reach into northern Israel, which has been the area where Hezbollah has typically been aiming its missiles over the last year. Prior to that, based on the idea that what the Israelis consider northern Israel is actually occupied territory, but they have the capacity to strike very destructively in major Israeli cities, including Tel Aviv. Now, obviously, if they were to do that, there'd be a massive response from the Israelis. But you can provoke a war of that kind at some point, especially a humiliating attack like this. You have a very good chance of provoking a serious reaction, although Iran had repeatedly vowed and people expected that Iran would do so and then they did it.

Now, some of the reactions from Israel's most fanatical supporters in the United States are so telling. Even as they were hearing that the casualty count was in the thousands, even as they were hearing that it injured or severely or killed young children, they couldn't hide their giddiness, their glee. They're so happy. Especially over the psychosexual part of this attack, namely that Hezbollah fighters had their testicles blown off. This was a major source of celebration from these kind of deranged supporters of Israel who often express their views in that manner. Hear from Erik Reiner, who is a very wealthy hedge fund manager – although he is an American citizen born in the United States – this is what he said, quote: "We were inside of Haniyeh's bedroom –" referring to the killing of the Hamas leader in Israel – "and now we are inside of Nasrallah's pants." Referring to the Hezbollah leader. So we were inside of his bedroom and now we're inside his pants. The disturbing psychosexual imagery of that is obvious. No one needs to point it out. But the question I had and I asked – I haven't got an answer from him yet – is: "Congratulations. Who is the 'we' in these two sentences?" We're talking here about an American citizen who apparently considers the "we" not his own country, not the the American government that he is subject to and supposed to be loyal to as

a citizen, but apparently Israel is someone that he considers "we". I think obviously, there are a lot of American Jews and American evangelicals who think that same way, even though under this new law that the House passed, that the Senate is preparing to pass, one of the prohibited ideas that would be constituted as anti-Semitism under this new free speech attack to protect Israel, as we've covered when the House passed it, is one of the ideas that is now off limits that would be instantly deemed anti-Semitic is to suggest that any American Jews have equal loyalty to or more loyalty to Israel than they do to the United States, even though so many of them say exactly that, admit that, make that so clear.

Here is an official account of the Israeli war room, and they simply posted the phone emoji, obviously taunting and celebrating the people who they blew up today. Here's Ben Shapiro speaking of American Jews who have at least as much loyalty, if not more so, to Israel. I'm going to say that while it's still legal. And he went on Twitter and said, quote, "Breaking: Hezbollah has been forced to rename itself Hez-ah after losing all of its balls." So now you see the nature of this attack and the reason why it's arousing so many of Israel's most fanatical supporters. Even if you think it's a justified attack, knowing that there were so many civilians who were injured or killed – should any decent person preclude this kind of celebration? But these people are the opposite of decent. Speaking of whom, Konstantine Kisin, who is a British and Jewish supporter of Israel, to put that mildly, said, quote, "What use is 72 virgins when you have no balls?" The long-time American Neocon Eli Lake, also a fanatical supporter of Israel, said: "Can't talk right now, my pager's blowing up." So they were having a lot of fun with this show of strength and obviously they identify very much with Israel, even though they're not Israeli citizens. Nominally, they're citizens of the US or the UK. Probably one of the most deranged people – but I don't even think he's more deranged, I think he just hides it less – is the actor Michael Rapaport, who has become one of the most obnoxious and vocal attention-seeking supporters of Israel. And as the news proliferated today that there were thousands of casualties, including children killed, this is what he went onto his phone and then social media to do.

**Michael Rapaport:** Beep, beep. Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Beep, beep. Ha ha ha ha ha ha. Beep, beep!

**GG:** All right. These people are just deranged. They're degenerates, to respond to violence, including the death of children in that manner. Here is the reaction of Edward Snowden, who particularly has an interest in things like mobile devices and telephones. That was a big part of his work. And he was very disturbed in particular by the way in which now not just our devices are vulnerable to surveillance or to malware that can allow governments or non-state actors to monitor and surveil everything that we do, which is something that they try to do – but also now the vulnerability that this shows that just ordinary supply chains have. In terms of, you could purchase devices at any sort of retail store and it may now be the case that that has been turned into a remote weapon. They may not be targeting you, but obviously when you send a bunch of rigged bomb devices inside Lebanon, you're obviously realising that there's a good chance that you may end up having those purchased by people who have nothing to do with Hezbollah, who are very ancillary to Hezbollah, which seems to be the

case. And here's what he said. Quote: "What Israel has just done is, via "any" method, reckless. They blew up countless numbers of people who were driving (meaning cars out of control), shopping (your children are in the stroller standing behind him in the checkout line), etc. Indistinguishable from terrorism." And he had added earlier, quote, "As information comes in about the exploding beepers in Lebanon, it seems now more likely than not to be implanted explosives, not a hack. Why? Too many consistent, very serious injuries. If it were overheated batteries exploding, you'd expect much more small fires and misfires." And I think it turned out to be right based on all the sort of reporting that we've been able to see about exactly how this was done. Now, it remains to be seen where these devices came from. There are suggestions that they came from a Taiwanese tech company which would suggest that the United States – which, of course, is the case, is very well integrated into the Taiwanese tech and defence industry, and the Israelis are as well. There were other suggestions that it came from Motorola, which has a long and notorious history of working with the US State Department and the US Pentagon and the intelligence community. So we're going to find out what the exact supply chain is that the Israelis were able to intercept and how.

I just want you to imagine what we would say if, let's just pick China or Iran – one of the bad countries – purposely knew that cell phones were coming to the United States. Let's say they knew they were coming to the US military. That the US military was importing a bunch of mobile devices, and the Chinese were able to intercept or collaborate with the manufacturer and put remote controlled bombs inside each device – thousands of them. Which means, you know, they would not only be with generals and military officials, but with rank and file soldiers, and also just civilians who work near them, maybe their families or anyone in their vicinity. If they're at a supermarket, which soldiers do go to. If they're at a shopping mall, they could injure and endanger anybody else around them. Obviously – what would we call that? We would call that terrorism. Nobody would actually be saying that that was some targeted attack. In fact, even when people do attack US military installations and kill only American soldiers, we call that terrorism. There have been several during the War on Terror where people went and entered Marine bases and killed a dozen or so Marines as well as other people who were there. That was called terrorism. The flying of a plane into the Pentagon, a classic legitimate military target – that was called terrorism. And obviously a lot of the October 7th attacks, even though it was purposely distorted by trying to say 1400 Israelis were killed, itself involved a lot of targeting of military and police bases by Hamas. A lot of those people, not 1400, it's been downgraded to almost 1150, almost half of them, if not more, turned out to be active duty soldiers in the Israeli military. Now, obviously, there were a lot of civilians killed in Israel, not just killed, but targeted purposely. There were Hamas fighters who committed war crimes by purposely targeting and killing civilians. But the ratio of legitimate military targets to civilians was better than 1 to 1, which is often the argument that Israel makes for why what they're doing in Gaza is justified, even though that ratio is a lie. Now, just to underscore how we can think about this, after 9/11, Noam Chomsky wrote a book that surprisingly became a bestseller. Or maybe not surprisingly, since he was one of the very few people deviating from the narrative about why 9/11 happened, what it means, what our goal of our foreign policy is – and he has been talking a long time about how terrorism is

wielded, how freedom fighters are wielded, how resistance fighters are wielded. We called the Mujahideen in Afghanistan freedom fighters. They were invited by Ronald Reagan to the White House to be celebrated while they were fighting against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. And the minute they started fighting against American occupation, they instantly turned into terrorists. We took people from Afghanistan, who were in Afghanistan, who were doing nothing more than defending their country and fighting against American forces occupying it and brought them to Guantanamo and called them terrorists, even though they were targeting and fighting against not civilians, but American soldiers in their country. That's how manipulated and flexible and meaningless this term is – terrorism and the like. He did a series of interviews with a lot of very adversarial people who were horrified by the things he was saying. And it gave him an opportunity to really lay out the premises of what he was saying. This was now 22 years ago. And I know Noam Chomsky has said a lot of controversial things since then, people in public life for 60 years – there's almost nobody who won't – try and set aside whatever you think he's done or said that was bad. That's unrelated to this topic. And just listen to what he was saying in the beginning of 2002, just a few months after the 9/11 attack, when he among very few people were willing to say this, and the fact that he wrote a bestselling book made his platform among the largest.

**Interviewer:** You seem to see this moral equivalence between bin Laden and Bush...

**Noam Chomsky (NC):** Moral equivalence is a term of propaganda that was invented to try to prevent us from looking at the acts for which we are responsible.

**Interviewer:** You said that there are plenty of bin Laden's on both sides.

**NC:** There are plenty of bin Laden's all over the world.

**Interviewer:** That's moral equivalence, that's polemic.

**NC:** That's not moral equivalence. There is no such notion. There are many different dimensions and criteria. For example, there's no moral equivalence between the bombing of the World Trade Centre and the destruction of Nicaragua or of El Salvador, or Guatemala. The latter were far worse by any criterion. So there's no moral equivalence. Furthermore, they were done for different reasons and they were done in different ways. There's all sorts of dimensions.

**Interviewer:** But why when the US is considering what to do about this, do you always go back to the past crimes?

**NC:** Not past, present.

**Interviewer:** Well, you mentioned Nicaragua.

**NC:** I mention that because it's uncontroversial since there's a World Court and Security Council resolution. But I can pick cases – since it's uncontroversial, it's a good example. I mentioned this case...

**Interviewer:** Are you kicking the US when it's down?

**NC:** No, I'm asking that we accept the definition of hypocrite given in the gospels. I think that's correct. The hypocrite is the person who refuses to apply to himself the standards he applies to others. I don't think we should be hypocrites.

**Interviewer:** To what aim do you do this, to what aim do you wish to point this out?

**NC:** Because I think we should try to rise to the level of minimal moral integrity. Once we can rise to the level of minimum moral integrity, then we can discuss these issues seriously. If we can't even rise to that level, there isn't even a point in talking. Minimal moral integrity requires that if we think something is wrong when they do it, it's wrong when we do it.

**GG:** All right. So that is basically the premise of Chomsky's dissent from US foreign policy for many decades. And if you just apply that to what happened today, you just imagine, as I said, China shipping in thousands of rigged phones with bombs that they then remotely detonate, regardless of where those phones are and who's carrying them – or if Hezbollah or Iran did that inside Israel and killed and injured thousands of people, including civilians, and detonated those bombs in restaurants and shops, supermarkets and street fairs, the way that Israel did today in the suburbs of Beirut, it's not very difficult to imagine exactly what everyone by consensus would call that. And the only thing different in these cases, in those actions, is who's doing it and against whom it's being perpetrated. And there's almost more of a reflexive instinct in the United States to defend anything and everything that Israel does as a noble act of terrorism or self-defence, almost more so than defending our own government itself. And I think that's a big part of why they want to implement a law banning a lot of different criticisms of Israel, including suggesting that there are Americans who seem to be more devoted to defending Israel than to their own government.

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**END**



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