



Imprisoned For Journalism: Jeremy Loffredo On His Detention In Israel, Censorship & More

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): Good evening, everybody. Welcome to what is for tonight the version of our aftershow. We will be back tomorrow night with a standard aftershow where we'll take your questions and be interactive. But for tonight, we wanted to show you an exclusive interview, a live interview that we are conducting that we think is very important. We're going to stream it for you exclusively. And then over the next few days, once the news cycle permits, show the full interview on the main live show, because we have been wanting to do this interview for a long time and we think it's important that as many people hear it as possible. The interview is with Jeremy Loffredo, who is an investigative journalist based in New York City. His work has taken him to Russia, France, Israel and Palestine, where he's covered issues such as economic unrest, state sponsored violence and war. His work is regularly published in outlets like The Grayzone and ZNetwork and his recent imprisonment in Israel for the crime of doing basic reporting and journalism in Israel, a country where he has done critical reporting, great reporting over the last year, has landed him in all sorts of issues regarding a free press in Israel, what kind of treatment there is of American citizens, what the role of our government is in that war and in Israel itself. And there's a lot we want to speak to him tonight about all of this. And Jeremy, it's great to see you. Thank you so much for taking time to talk to us.

Jeremy Loffredo (JL): Thank you, Glenn.

GG: All right. So let's start off with the event that happened in Israel in I think it was mid-October where essentially you were arrested in the West Bank, at a checkpoint in the West Bank and then detained and put into prison in some extremely alarming conditions. Talk about first, before we get to the conditions of the imprisonment, what it was that you were told about why you were being arrested and what your understanding is now.

JL: So over the past year, I've covered settler violence, military violence in the West Bank. I covered the humanitarian aid blockades at the Kerem Shalom border crossing. And also the military-backed settler-push to re-judaize and settle in the Gaza Strip. And so I just returned back to Israel Palestine, and my plan was to cover violence happening in the northern West

Bank in the Jenin camp. And I was at a military checkpoint outside of Nablus. And I was handcuffed, I was shackled...

GG: Can you just describe for people who don't know – sorry about that – what these checkpoints are? Kind of how they function?

JL: Sure.

GG: Is that where you got arrested?

JL: I mean, there's hundreds of these checkpoints in the West Bank. There are a few military Humvees, a few tents, very, you know, light infrastructure set up at arbitrary places during the road and the highways. And you're asked to stop. Sometimes you are asked to show your ID. Some Palestinians are turned away. Some Palestinians are asked to get out of their car and show more identification. But it's really just a spatial occupation. It's a way to control where Palestinians go and where they don't go. And so as someone who was driving with a Palestinian, which I was that day, I had to stop at this roadblock and I was forced to hand over my ID.

GG: And by the way, if you were not travelling with a Palestinian, would you have been able to move more easily and freely around the West Bank?

JL: I would have taken a different road.

GG: Right. One road that Palestinians aren't permitted to take. So when you got to this checkpoint, what is it that happened in terms of your arrest and what you're being told about the reasons for it?

JL: At first I was asked to hand over my ID and then after maybe an hour, I was asked to hand over my cell phone. I asked them: "I'm an American. I'm allowed to be in the West Bank. I handed you my passport, I handed you my press credentials, why do you need my cell phone?" They said: "I know. You have all the right paperwork, but you still need to hand us your cell phone". So my cell phone was locked. I handed them my cell phone, knowing that it was locked and there is nothing but a journalistic inquiry that's happening when I'm talking to people inside of my cell phone. And I handed over my cell phone, they made me sit on the side of the road. And then finally, after maybe an hour of sitting in the sun, they called me over to cross the road and speak to them at the checkpoint. And they said: "You're under arrest". And that's when they took out a blindfold. They wrapped it around my head and they shackled me and they handcuffed me.

GG: Now, these were IDF soldiers or Israeli police officers or what were they?

JL: These were soldiers.

GG: Right. So I just wanted to paint that picture because we were just talking about this alarm over some of Trump's appointees and how pretty much all of them, in fact, believe that

the West Bank belongs to Israel and oh my God, isn't this so radical? And in reality, the Israelis have already annexed the West Bank. They rule the West Bank, they govern the West Bank, with their soldiers with these checkpoints. Did you have any idea at the time what it was that you were being arrested for?

JL: No, I had no idea. I knew that before I got arrested, they were making phone calls, presumably to their superiors. They were on their computer, on their laptop at the checkpoint tent. And that's when they arrested me. So I'm assuming, you know, their superiors told them to take me in and I didn't ask any questions. They didn't tell me anything. They threw me into the [inaudible].

GG: Now, I should say, I mean, we've featured your reporting over the last year, and it has exposed a lot of things that the Israelis would prefer not to be exposed. Obviously, you do a lot of work with The Grayzone, which is highly critical of the Israeli government, the Israeli destruction of Gaza. So you're obviously someone who's not viewed very favourably the minute they look at that, as a journalist, just in terms of your journalism. So talk about the next couple of days where they took you, how they treated you and when was this that you first learned about the reasons for your arrest.

JL: So from the checkpoint, they put me in a military Humvee and they drove me about an hour, I guess it would be south to a military compound about seven miles from Jerusalem. And that's when they allowed me to take off my blindfold and they put me in a holding cell. And for the three hours that I was in that holding cell, they kept removing me from the holding cell. And with my shackles on, with my handcuffs on, they would have me go to the floor above me. And they would tell me to stand in front of a sign that said, you know, it's their nationalistic war slogan, war time slogan that says: Together we will win, in Hebrew. And they had me stand in front of this flag, the sign. And they would take photos of me. Not official photos. They didn't use a camera. These were photos taken by different police officers and soldiers with their cell phones laughing and smiling, telling me to smile, telling me not to smile. And they would take me upstairs, put me back in the cell, take me upstairs, take photos of me, put me back in the cell. And then finally, after about maybe four hours, now it's approaching 11:00, they tell me that there's a lawyer on the phone for me. And I go upstairs, I answer the phone, and the lawyer doesn't speak great English, so it's hard to communicate regardless. I only had like a minute to talk to this lawyer. But I answer the phone and she says: "Mr. Loffredo, I want you to think very hard, what you might have done. You're being accused, you're being charged with giving information to the enemy during war time. It's a very grave charge. It carries a minimum of 25 years in prison and a maximum death sentence. They're going to interrogate you. They're going to bring you to prison. And I'll probably see you tomorrow in court". And the phone call was over. She was able to speak to me for maybe, maybe 30, 45 seconds. And then the soldier came in, made me hang up the phone. And that was the only interaction I was able to have with my lawyer. And then the interrogation took place. And that's when they began asking me what I know about Israeli military censorship, the government censor. Why I published the report I published about the Iranian missile strike. If I have any friends in foreign governments, if I have any friends in foreign militaries.

And of course, I said no. And they re-shackled me. They re-handcuffed me and they brought me to the Russian compound in Jerusalem. There's a prison inside there called Al-Moscobiye. And I was put in solitary confinement. And that's where I spent the night.

GG: And now just about this whole cut part of the story with this unprofessional behaviour of forcing you to smile and not smile in front of these nationalistic signs and flags. I mean, if they're doing that to American citizens, obviously you can just imagine what they're doing to people they detain in Gaza and the West Bank. And there have been obviously horror stories from these detention facilities, including rape and sexual abuse and sexual humiliation. So I think the fact that you encountered some of this kind of just very, you know, extracurricular, highly unprofessional, intending to be humiliating behaviour, as an American citizen it is pretty indicative of what Palestinians must routinely face inside these facilities. So I remember the reporting at the time, I think when I saw it, and it was so bizarre because what had happened was this was right around the time when the Iranians launched the 180 or 200 ballistic cruise missiles into Israel and we watched them bypass the Iron Dome and saw a lot of them hitting the ground, impacting and exploding, including in reported military bases. And yet immediately, the US government, the Israeli government came out and essentially denied that any of those missiles had any impact at all, that they were all intercepted or essentially all of them were intercepted. And so what is it that your reporting actually showed and what was the intention of it?

JL: The intention of my reporting was to show the damage caused by the Iranian missile attack. But I mean, I think we should back up just a little bit. Mainstream media inside of Israel and American media situated inside of Israel, they did end up reporting on where these missiles fell and the damage that they caused. Like PBS NewsHour, the night it happened was in Tel Aviv, 1000ft in front of the Mossad headquarters, showing the damage to the ground, showing how close it was to the Mossad headquarters. WhyNet and The Washington Post, they were publishing next day satellite photos from above Nevatim Airbase, which was supposedly one of the main targets of the airstrike, showing that it did hit some planes, it did hit some hangars. So what was really interesting about this whole thing was the fact that I found myself in prison while the mainstream media in Israel and in America were reporting the same things I reported and in some cases in more detail and in some cases sooner. So why was I in prison and not the mainstream media? That was our question in court.

GG: What is the law, the kind of rules or wartime structures that dictate what it is that you're permitted to report about Israel while in Israel or what kind of approval you need from Israeli censors?

JL: So if you are a reporter and in Israel, you need a GPO card, a government press office card, and so long as you have a government press office card, you are mandated to go through the Israeli military censor, whether you're tweeting, whether you're posting to Instagram, Facebook, whether your information is going to end up in an article, that's the way the censor works. And I did not go through the censor, it's true. But all the information in my report I saw reported by the mainstream media, which did have to go through the censor. So I thought that I was in the clear.

GG: I mean, there are so many times when we see – and I just want people, I think this isn't really appreciated – there are so many times when we see things happening in Israel, missile attacks or the killing of Israeli soldiers either in Gaza or Lebanon or impacts from rockets, and you see it reported in so many Arabic language media or in Lebanese media, you see it reported by people in Gaza. And yet you can look at every mainstream Israeli newspaper and you won't see it because there is just a full scale censorship order imposed on any reporting in connection with the war. I mean, it's amazing how little disgust that is given that we're often told that the reason we have to fight for Israel is because it's the world's only democracy and the like. So first of all, were you at any time in the process of your imprisonment into these court proceedings, contacted in any way by an American consulate official or an official of the American government to try and offer you help or assistance the way normally they're supposed to do for an American citizen in that situation?

JL: The only thing that the American embassy or the American government did for me was during my second day in solitary confinement – and at this point, I had no food, I had no water, I was in solitary confinement – they told the prison to send me a social worker, they had to perform a wellness check. And this woman, she opened the steel slide on my solitary confinement cell, and she said, Mr. Loffredo: "I am a social worker". I said, this is great, maybe I'll get some food, maybe I'll get some water. And her first question was in an Israeli accent, she asked me: "Why did you hurt Israel?" And then she asked why I hurt Israel? She asked me if I love Israel. She asked me if I regret what I did. And then she closed the slide and she left. And so this militaristic Zionist "social worker", quote unquote, was the only help that the embassy gave me during my detainment and my time in an Israeli prison.

GG: And to this date, have they publicly spoken out about it? How now that you're back in the US, have they contacted you in any way to try and understand what happened and offer you any kind of assistance or anything like that?

JL: No. The day I got out, the State Department spokesperson, in responding to a question about my detainment, said that Mr. Loffredo has left Israel. And this is one hour after I got on a plane and left Israel. So it's clear that they were speaking about it. They were entirely aware of my situation. One hour after I got on a plane, they were ready to tell the press that I left Israel. But publicly and while I was detained, while I was shackled, while I was blindfolded, while I was starved, while I was accused of being an enemy of the state, they said absolutely nothing.

GG: And how long ultimately did you end up in detention for and how did you end up getting out?

JL: So I was in solitary confinement for three and a half days. On the second night, they purposefully moved a Palestinian detainee to the cell next to mine and brutally tortured him for approximately three hours. I heard his screams. I heard his cries. I heard the demands and the yells of the Israeli soldiers and the Israeli guards. And immediately after that, they took me in an unmarked police car to interrogate me in the West Bank at this police compound late at night. But they still only asked me about The Grayzone and this video I had published,

which I was fully capable of defending and telling them why I published it and telling them why I believe it was important and newsworthy and legal, and they would just play semantics and ask me questions over and over again in different ways, seeing if I would trip up or lie or something like that. But eventually a WhyNet journalist came to my court hearing and testified on my behalf. He said that he published the same information as me and the military censor told him that none of it was secret. And he was there to say: "Of course, maybe this is an American journalist from an outfit that we would consider anti-Zionist, but he's not a terrorist". And the judge looked at his phone, he looked at this journalist's correspondence with the military censor, saw that the military censor said that nothing was secret. And the judge looked at the police prosecutor and said: "I don't understand. If an Israeli journalist can publish these things and it's not secret, why can't Mr. Loffredo? And the judge said – this is in court transcripts – the judge said: "Because Mr. Loffredo does work and works for a publication that does not like Israel." And so the judge looked at him and as if to say, you should have told me that. And the judge called for my release at the end of day three. And then I was moved from the little prison to the bigger prison of Israel. And I was there without my passport, my phone or my laptop while they performed a sort of digital strip search of me. And I was mandated to go back to the West Bank and be interrogated whenever they asked me to. And they did ask me to, a few times. So my longest interrogation was in the West Bank for seven hours, and eventually they informally deported me; which is they tell me to book a flight, they give me my stuff back, but they leave my case open, to dissuade me from ever coming back and reporting in Israel ever again. So right now, I have an enemy of the state giving information to the enemy during wartime case open in Israel. So if I was to return, I would be detained and tried again immediately.

GG: One of the things that is so striking to me is there have been dozens, I think even hundreds now, over 100 journalists who have been killed in Gaza, many of them clearly targeted. There have been Al Jazeera journalists whose homes have been targeted while they were on the street reporting and then whose entire families were eradicated by the Israeli military. There have been, you know, all sorts of people who have spoken out against the Israeli war in Gaza who then were targeted as well. To listen to this story, you know, given that you're an American journalist and somebody who really had done very little in terms of reporting on what happened in Israel, because, as you say, so many other outlets, including mainstream ones, had reported the same thing – obviously, it's not a big deal to show, oh, no, actually, an Iranian missile landed here and did this damage – what does it kind of tell you – not that you probably didn't already know, but I assume it's in a more visceral way now – what the Israeli attitude is toward journalists, toward people who are critical of the government or toward their war?

JL: As you said, they've graduated from this type of digital censorship to its censorship in Lebanon and Gaza, its censorship enforced by rocket fire. They've raised the courage threshold to such a point where you have to be willing to give your life or be incarcerated, whether you're an American or whether you're a Palestinian, simply to report on the Israeli war efforts. They say censorship is cause for celebration. It shows how weak the Israeli military power structure is, that they know that they need to stop the truth from getting out in

order to maintain this moral high ground, which they barely have at this point. But they know that if factual reporting gets out, they will lose all of their moral standing in the international community, which is, you know, everyone's accusing them of genocide, of course. But still, they feel the need that the truth will hurt them, which is kind of a silver lining, I guess, to all of this.

GG: Yeah, absolutely. Well, look, I mean, I've been a huge fan of the work that you've been doing. It's been very courageous. You've done a lot of it from Israel, knowing the very repressive environment that's there. I'm glad you got out of Israel safely. I would definitely recommend that you not go back for at least a little while until your case is resolved. But yeah, it's a really harrowing story, not just because of what happened to you, but because, as I said, it just reflects what you know the Israelis are doing in the dark to people who don't have your platform, once you do get out, who aren't American citizens, who don't have the ability to draw attention to what happened as you did. And you can just imagine what's being done to them if they were willing to do this to you over something so minor. Well, Jeremy, congratulations on the work. I'm glad you're able to speak out on this. It's a story that I hope everybody will hear, and I really appreciate your coming on.

JL: Thank you, Glenn.

GG: Keep up the good work. Thanks.

GG: Thanks for watching this clip from System Update, our live show that airs every Monday through Friday at 7 p.m. Eastern exclusively on Rumble. You can catch the full nightly shows live or view the backlog of episodes for free on our Rumble page. You can also find full episodes the morning after they air across all major podcasting platforms, including Spotify and Apple. All the information you need is linked below. We hope to see you there.

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