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Noam Chomsky: US role crucial to Israel's crimes

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Hideous. Sadistic. Vicious. Murderous. That is how veteran academic and author **Noam Chomsky** describes Israel's month-long offensive in Gaza that killed at least 2000 people and left almost 10,000 injured.

*Democracy Now!*'s Amy Goodman and **Juan Gonzalez** spoke to the US intellectual and world-renowned dissident, who has written extensively about Israel and Palestine, about Israel's latest bloody campaign of terror. An abridged version of the first part of the interview is underneath. The full interview, in two parts, can be watched at the bottom.

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**Forty years ago, you published *Peace in the Middle East?: Reflections on Justice and Nationhood*. Your 1983 book, *The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians*, is known as one of the definitive works on the Israel-Palestine conflict. What is your comments on what has just taken place?**

It's a hideous atrocity, sadistic, vicious, murderous, totally without any credible pretext.

It's another one of the periodic Israeli exercises in what they delicately call "mowing the lawn". That means shooting fish in the pond, to make sure that the animals stay quiet in the cage that you've constructed for them.

After this, you go to a period of what's called "ceasefire", which means that Hamas observes the ceasefire while Israel continues to violate it.

Then there is an Israeli escalation and Hamas reaction. Then you have a new period of "mowing the lawn". This one is, in many ways, more sadistic and vicious even than the earlier ones.

**What of the pretext that Israel used to launch these attacks? Does it have any validity?**

As high Israeli officials concede, Hamas had observed the previous ceasefire for 19 months. The previous episode of “mowing the lawn” was in November 2012.

There was a ceasefire. The ceasefire terms were that Hamas would not fire rockets — what they call rockets — and Israel would move to end the blockade and stop attacking what they call militants in Gaza.

Hamas lived up to it. Israel concedes that.

In April, an event took place which horrified the Israeli government: A unity agreement was formed between [the governments of] Gaza and the West Bank, between Hamas and Fatah.

Israel has been desperately trying to prevent that for a long time. Israel was furious. They got even more upset when the US more or less endorsed it, which is a big blow to them. They launched a rampage in the West Bank.

What was used as a pretext was the brutal murder of three settler teenagers. There was a pretence that they were alive, though Israel knew they were dead.

Of course, they blamed it right away on Hamas. In fact, their own highest leading authorities pointed out right away that the killers were probably from a kind of a rogue clan in Hebron, the Qawasmeh clan, which turns out apparently to be true. They’ve been a thorn in the sides of Hamas for years. They don’t follow their orders.

But that gave the opportunity for a rampage in the West Bank, arresting hundreds of people, re-arresting many who had been released, mostly targeted on Hamas. Killings increased.

Finally, there was a Hamas response: the so-called rocket attacks. And that gave the opportunity for “mowing the lawn” again.

**Why does Israel do this periodically?**

**Because they want to maintain a certain situation. For more than 20 years, Israel has been dedicated, with US support, to separating Gaza from the West Bank.**

That’s in direct violation of the terms of the Oslo Accord 20 years ago, which declared that the West Bank and Gaza are a single territorial entity whose integrity must be preserved. But for rogue states, solemn agreements are just an invitation to do whatever you want.

So Israel, with US backing, has been committed to keeping them separate.

And there’s a good reason. If Gaza is the only outlet to the outside world for any eventual Palestinian entity, whatever it might be, the West Bank — if separated from Gaza — is essentially imprisoned. It has Israel on one side, the Jordanian dictatorship on the other.

Furthermore, Israel is systematically driving Palestinians out of the Jordan Valley — sinking wells, building settlements. They first call them military zones, then put in settlements.

That means that whatever cantons are left for Palestinians in the West Bank, after Israel takes what it wants and integrates it into Israel, they would be completely imprisoned. So keeping them separate is a key goal of US and Israeli policy.

The unity agreement threatened that. Because one of Israel’s arguments is: How can they negotiate with the Palestinians when they’re divided?

**What do you make of the continued refusal of one United States administration after another despite official US opposition to settlement expansion, to call Israel to table over this?**

**Your phrase “officially opposed” is correct. But you have to distinguish the rhetoric of a government from its actions, and the rhetoric of political leaders from their actions.**

We can easily see how committed the US is to this policy. For example, in February 2011, the UN Security Council considered a resolution calling on Israel to terminate its expansion of settlements.

What happened? [US President Barack] Obama vetoed the resolution. That tells you something.

Furthermore, the official statement to Israel about the settlement expansion is accompanied by what in diplomatic language is called a wink — a quiet indication that we don't really mean it. So, for example, Obama's latest condemnation of the recent, as he puts it, violence on all sides was accompanied by sending more military aid to Israel.

**What about Israel's argument that Hamas is refusing to negotiate a ceasefire?**

**The broad response is that 100% of the casualties and the destruction and the devastation and so on could have been avoided if Israel had lived up to the ceasefire agreement from November 2012, instead of violating it constantly.**

With the siege of Gaza, Israel has been keeping Gaza on what they've called a "diet", Israeli official Dov Weissglas's famous comment. This meaning just enough calories allowed so they don't all die — because that wouldn't look good for Israel's fading reputation — but nothing more than that.

Israeli experts calculated precisely how many calories would be needed to keep the Gazans on their diet, under siege, blocked from export, blocked from import.

Fisherfolk can't go out to fish. The naval vessels drive them back to shore. A large part, probably over a third and maybe more, of Gaza's arable land is barred from entry to Palestinians. That's the diet.

Meanwhile Israel continues the ongoing project of taking over the parts of the West Bank that Israel intends to annex in some fashion, as long as the United States continues to support it and block international efforts to lead to a political settlement.

**What's your assessment of the impact on the already abysmal relationship between the US government and the Arab and Muslim world?**

First of all, we have to distinguish between the Muslim and Arab populations and their governments—striking difference. The governments are mostly dictatorships. And when you read in the press that the Arabs support us on so-and-so, what is meant is the dictators support us, not the populations.

The dictatorships are moderately supportive of what the US and Israel are doing. That includes the military dictatorship in Egypt, a very brutal one. Saudi Arabia is the closest U.S. ally in the region, and it's the most radical fundamentalist Islamic state in the world. It's also spreading its Salafi-Wahhabi doctrines throughout the world, extremist fundamentalist doctrines.

The US prefers radical Islam to the danger of secular nationalism and democracy.

And these Arab regimes hate Hamas. They have no interest in the Palestinians. They have to say things to mollify their own populations, but again, rhetoric and action are different.

But it's not just the Muslim populations. So, for example, there was a demonstration in London recently, which probably had hundreds of thousands of people, protesting the Israeli atrocities in Gaza. And that's happening elsewhere in the world, too.

It's worth remembering that—you go back a couple decades, Israel was one of the most admired countries in the world. Now it's one of the most feared and despised countries in the world.

Israeli propagandists like to say, well, this is just anti-Semitism. But to the extent that there's an anti-Semitic element, which is slight, it's because of Israeli actions. The reaction is to the policies. And as long as Israel persists in these policies, that's what's going to happen.

When you pursue a policy of repression and expansion over security, there are things that are going to happen. There will be moral degeneration within the country. There will be increasing opposition and anger and hostility among populations outside the country.

You may continue to get support from dictatorships and the US, but you're going to lose the populations.

It's not the only example in history. There are many analogies drawn to South Africa, most of them pretty dubious, in my mind. But there's one analogy which I think is pretty realistic.

In 1958, the South African government, which was imposing the harsh apartheid regime, recognised that they were becoming internationally isolated.

We know from declassified documents that in 1958 the South African foreign minister called in the US ambassador. He essentially told him, "Look, we're becoming a pariah state ... everyone is voting against us in the United Nations. We're becoming isolated.

"But it really doesn't matter, because you're the only voice that counts. And as long as you support us, doesn't really matter what the world thinks."

If you look at what happened over the years, opposition to South African apartheid grew. There was a UN arms embargo. Sanctions began. Boycotts began.

It was so extreme by the 1980s, that even the US Congress was passing sanctions, which Reagan had to veto. He was the last supporter of the apartheid regime.

As late as 1988, Reagan declared Mandela's African National Congress to be one of the more notorious terrorist groups in the world. So the US had to keep supporting South Africa.

Finally, even the United States joined the rest of the world, and very quickly the apartheid regime collapsed.

Now that's not fully analogous to the Israel case. There were other reasons for the collapse of apartheid, two crucial reasons.

One of them was that there was a settlement that was acceptable to South African and international business, simple settlement: keep the socioeconomic system and allow some Black faces in the limousines.

That's pretty much what's been implemented, though not totally. There's no comparable settlement in Israel-Palestine.

But a crucial element, not discussed here, is Cuba. Cuba sent military forces and tens of thousands of technical workers, doctors and teachers and others, and they drove the South African apartheid regime's military out of Angola, and forced them to abandon illegally held Namibia.

And more than that, as in fact Nelson Mandela pointed out as soon as he got out of prison, the Cuban soldiers, who incidentally were Black soldiers, shattered the myth of invincibility of the white supermen. That had a very significant effect on both Black Africa and the white South Africa.

It indicated to the South African government and population that they're not going to be able to impose their hope of a regional support system that would allow them to pursue their operations inside South Africa and their terrorist activities beyond.

And that was a major factor in the liberation of black Africa.

### **What about US rhetoric in criticising some of Israel's actions?**

What we have to ask is: What are they doing? There are things that the US could do very easily. You can look at the Indonesia-East Timor case. When the United States, [former president Bill] Clinton, finally told the Indonesian generals, "The game's over", they pulled out.

US power is substantial. And in the case of Israel, it's critical, because Israel relies on virtually unilateral US support.

There are plenty of things the US can if it wanted. In fact, when the US gives orders, Israel obeys. That's happened over and over again. That's completely obvious why, given the power relationships. So things can be done.

