

The myth of Israel's "democracy"

Israel cannot be a colonial power and a democracy

Interview by Chris Hedges* with Ilan Pappé**

Israeli historian Ilan Pappé reframes 'the only democracy in the Middle East' as a colonising force that is inherently undemocratic due to its necessary subjugation of Palestinians.

Israel's status as a bona fide democracy is often taken to be a self-evident truth, but a more critical look at the history and reality of Zionism calls this into question. After all, how can a democracy exist in a country constitutionally defined as an ethno state that can only exist through the suppression and gradual elimination of its Others?

Israeli historian Ilan Pappé joins The Chris Hedges Report for a discussion on Israel as an inherently colonial, and therefore anti-democratic, project.

Introduction

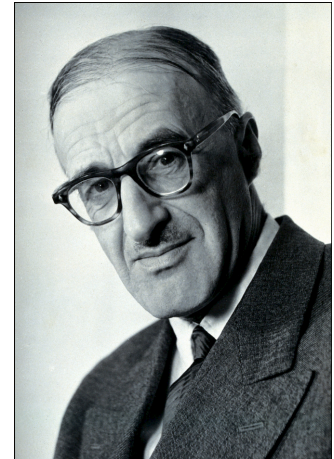


Chris Hedges. (Picture chrishedges.com)

Chris Hedges: The scholar, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who Isaiah Berlin called the conscience of Israel, warned that, "If Israel did not separate church and state, it would give rise to a corrupt rabbinate that would warp Judaism into a fascistic cult. Religious nationalism is to religion what National Socialism was to socialism," warned Leibowitz, who died in 1994. He understood that the blind veneration of the military, especially after the

1967 war that captured the West Bank in East Jerusalem was dangerous and would lead to the ultimate destruction of democracy. "Our situation will deteriorate to that of a second Vietnam, to a war and constant escalation without prospect of ultimate resolution," he wrote.

He foresaw that, "The Arabs would be the working people and the Jews the administrators, inspectors, officials and police, mainly secret police. A state ruling a hostile population of 1.5 million to 2 million foreigners would necessarily become a secret police state. With all that implies for education, free speech, and democratic institutions. The corruption characteristic of every colonial regime would also prevail in the state of Israel. The administration would have to suppress Arab insurgency on the one hand and acquire Arab quiz links on the other. There is also good reason to fear that the Israeli Defense Force, which has been until now, a people's army would, because of being trans-



Yeshayahu Leibowitz, (1903–1994), Israeli physician, religious philosopher, historian and humanist, professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. (Picture <https://wellcomeimages.org/wiki/pedia>)

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** Ilan Pappé was born in 1954 in Haifa. In 1978 he graduated from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in 1984

he obtained a PhD from the University of Oxford, dedicating himself in particular to the relationship between the United Kingdom and the birth of Israel, a theme that would accompany him throughout his life. Between 1984 and 2006 he was a senior lecturer at the Department of Middle Eastern History and the Department of Political Science of the University of Haifa. Today, he is a professor with the College of Social Sciences and International Studies at the University of Exeter in the UK, where he directs the European Centre for Palestine Studies, and co-directs the Exeter Centre for Ethno-Political Studies. He is the author of several books, including *The biggest Prison on Earth: A History of The Occupied Territories* (2019) and *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*.

formed into an army of occupation to generate and its commanders who will have become military governors, will resemble their colleagues in other nations.”

He warned that the rise of virulent racism would consume Israeli society. He knew that prolonged occupation of the Palestinians would spawn concentration camps for the occupied, and that in his words, “Israel would not deserve to exist, and it will not be worthwhile to preserve it.”

The decision to obliterate Gaza has long been the dream of Israeli fanatics, heirs of the fascistic movement led by the extremist *Meir Kahane*, who was barred from running for office and whose Kach Party was outlawed in 1994 and declared a terrorist organisation by Israel and the United States. These Jewish extremists who today make up the ruling coalition government are orchestrating the genocide in Gaza, where hundreds of Palestinians are being killed or wounded a day. They champion the iconography and language of their homegrown fascism. Jewish identity and Jewish nationalism are the Zionist versions of blood and soil. Jewish supremacy is sanctified by God as is the slaughter of the Palestinians who are compared to the biblical Amalekites massacred by the Israelites. Enemies, usually Muslims, slated for extinction are subhuman who embody evil. Violence and the threat of violence are the only forms of communication those outside the magic circle of Jewish nationalism understand. Millions of Muslims and Christians, including those with Israeli citizenship, are to be purged.



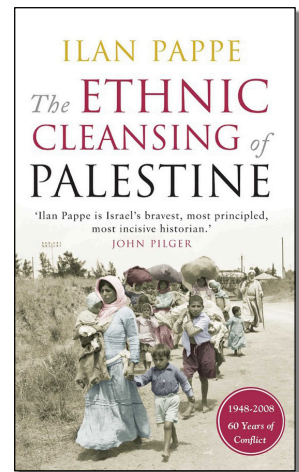
Ilan Pappé. (Photo shark1989z/wikipedia)

Joining me to discuss what the occupation of Palestine has done to Israeli society and what the results of the current murderous campaign in Gaza and the West Bank portends for Israel in the future is *Ilan Pappé*, Professor of History of the University of Exeter in Great Britain, who has described what Israel does to the Palestinians as incremental genocide.

He has written numerous books including “The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Occupied Territories” and “The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine”, which his French publisher has

ceased publishing despite a surge in sales since the October 7th attacks. It is part of the concerted campaign by Zionists and their supporters to discredit and censor narratives that are critical of Israel.

I’d like to begin with a look at post Israel, the Zionist project that begins in the 1920s, and see whether the project itself, even before the creation of the state of Israel had built within it the seeds of its own destruction.



Since the 1920s –

Land without people or people without rights

Ilan Pappé: Yes, I do think it did. You are right in pointing to the 1920s because of course the Zionist movement existed before, but I think it’s in the mid-1920s when it started to purchase land and evict the people who were living on that land. That happened around 1926. It became a settler colonial project and not just a project for salvaging Jews from anti-Semitism or a national cultural redefinition of Judaism as nationalism instead of as religion.

The moment that happened, it was very clear that it’s going to impose itself by force on an indigenous native population. Therefore, it was not just the classical settler colonial imposition of settlers from abroad imposing themselves on a native population. It was also kind of creating the idea that they can produce or establish a European state amid the Arab world, very much like the white supremacists in South Africa. There are two facts: on the one hand you are trying to implement a project of displacement and replacement of an indigenous population and on the other hand you are trying to create a cultural political entity that would alienate the area it belongs to and will then be sold. I think it had been sold in the 1920s. We can see the effect of this to our days, no doubt.

Chris Hedges: And yet there was always a tension within the Zionist project. I – you may have known him too – I knew *Abba Eban* and *Teddy Kollek*. When I was in Israel, they outlawed *Meir Kahane’s Kach Party*. The people around *Netanyahu* now are of course the heirs to the

Kach Party. Later, this very right-wing rabbi was assassinated. I want you to talk about that tension because it was there. Teddy Kollek was mayor of Jerusalem when I was there. He was building sewer systems for Jerusalem. It was a different approach to colonisation, or perhaps I have that wrong?

Ilan Pappé: It was a different approach, but it remained colonisation. If I'm a bit more abrupt about it, I would say that there was definitely an ideological stream within Zionism that believed that you could be a progressive coloniser or an enlightened coloniser. And yet from the colonised people's point of view, even if you provided some benefits in economic terms, in infrastructural terms, the colonisation was still there. And the colonisation was translated not only in terms of whether you provide sewages for Jerusalem or not, but by the fact that Teddy Kollek as the mayor of Jerusalem oversaw the ethnic cleansing of quite a large number of Palestinians from East Jerusalem in order to make space for building new Jewish neighbourhoods, which should rightly be called Jewish colonies or settlements.

So, at the end of the day, the Zionist vision, even in its most liberal version, meant that the Palestinians at best, could be tolerated as individuals in limited spaces within Palestine. That would be determined according to the Israeli notions of national security. At worst, they're an obstacle that must be removed. And as the time went by, most of the Israeli Jews said, "Why just be content with limiting their presence? Why not get rid of them altogether?"

Split between the state of Israel and the state of Judea

Chris Hedges: And yet these figures represented a secular strain of Zionism. I want you to talk a little bit about Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who you knew, who I quoted in the introduction. He talks about this religious strain within Zionism where the land itself becomes sacred as particularly dangerous; I think he even uses the word fascist. There is that split. Abba Eban e.g. spoke better English than I did. He was Oxford educated and urbane. So, talk a little bit about that tension between secular and religious Zionism. Of course, ultra-orthodox religious Zionism has essentially proved triumphant.

Ilan Pappé: Yes, I call this tension, which you rightly point to, the struggle between the state of Israel and the state of Judea. The state of Judea grows up among the national religious groups and becomes particularly potent after '67. It's headquarters in a way or its habitat if you want, were the settlements in the West Bank, and before that, even in the Gaza Strip. They become a force to reckon with and they combine exactly what Leibowitz was talking about, and he saw it in the making. In hindsight and to his credit, I say that he saw it and predicted it happening. Today we have the benefit of time to see that he was absolutely right.

So that state of Judea, what you can call the settler state, is a combination of a messianic kind of Zionism combined with fundamentalist interpretation of Judaism. A wish to create a theocracy in which also secular Jews are the enemy, not just the Palestinians. And they became stronger. They used to be on the margins, and we used to think that they are not really relevant, but now they are a central power in Israel. And against them stands the state of Israel. That is the kind of pre '67 Israel that wanted to be a liberal democracy, pluralist and secular. But they lost that in the struggle against the state of Judea.

What is so interesting and frustrating about this struggle is that it does not concern the Palestinians at all. As you probably know – and we forgot it because of the dramatic events that occurred after 7th of October – but until the 7th of October, we witnessed in Israel a kind of a mini civil war between those two states that I'm talking about. The state of Israel and the state of Judea when hundreds of thousands of secular Israelis demonstrated daily trying to defend the kind of Israel they want.

But when Palestinian citizens of Israel ask them, "Can we join you? And can we also include a rejection of the occupation as part of our struggle for a better Israel?" They were chucked out of this movement of protest because it was not against the occupation, it's not against the semi apartheid or full apartheid of Israel, depends on where it is. What kind of apartheid should we have in Israel? A liberal democratic one for the Jews or a theocratic one for the Jews?

But unfortunately, it does not evolve around the main issue. The most important issue that

we started our conversation with, is the question: can you impose yourself militarily and violently on millions of people against their will?

1948 – “A massive ethnic cleansing”

Chris Hedges: I want to talk about 1948, the war of independence. All settler colonial projects are implanted by violence as was the one in the United States. The difference is that I think by 1600, over a 100-year period, 56 million indigenous inhabitants in North, Central and South America were obliterated through either diseases or violence so that by 1600 you only had about 10% of the original indigenous population there. That wholesale extermination essentially allows a settler colonial project to survive because physically there's no opposition. That's not true in Israel.

You have about 5.5 million Palestinians living under occupation, 9 million living in the diaspora. This is a huge problem for Israeli leaders. How are they going to cope? The demographic time bomb is real in terms of Arabs having larger families. There is a huge flight, a kind of brain drain from Israel. I think there's a million Israelis living in the United States. But let's look at 1948 and how they deal with the problem. And then we'll go to 1967 when Israel occupies what is the remaining part of Palestine, the West Bank and Gaza.

Ilan Pappé: Yes, as you rightly say, settler colonial projects have always these two dimensions: geography and demography, or if you want space and population, you want the space without the population. And the more space you take, the more unwanted population you have. So, the Zionist leadership exploited the end of the mandate. The circumstances that developed 1948 in the region and in the world three years after the Holocaust were implement for a massive ethnic cleansing that left half of the Palestinian refugees and expelled half of the Palestinian population, destroyed half of the Palestinian villages, more than 500, and demolished most of the Palestinian towns.

So, within the borders that were kind of established after 1948 – that is Israel today without the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – Israel was unable to fully complete the ethnic cleansing. It had a relatively small Palestinian minority that did not endanger the demographic majority of the Jews. So, you could even have a demo-



During the "Nakba" in 1948, thousands of Palestinian families were expelled from their land by militant Israeli organisations, such as the Haganah. (Picture Keystone/EPA Photo/STR)

graphic state because you always knew that democracy and demography would go hand in hand. Although because of the paranoia of *Ben-Gurion* until 1966, although the Palestinians in Israel had the right to vote and to be elected, they were under a very harsh military rule as it is.

Now, it's not surprising that David Ben-Gurion, the big architect of the ethnic cleansing of 1948, was trying to pressure the government of Israel. He was out of effective politics already in 1963, but he was trying after June '67 to convince the Israeli government to get out of the West Bank, almost saying to them, "I was able to get rid of about 1 million Palestinians, and now you are incorporating even a larger number of Palestinians under your rule." The kind of leadership that followed him, some of them were young generals during the '48 war and some other politicians like *Levy Eshkol* and you also mentioned *Abba Eban* and *Teddy Kollek*, they decided there is no need for massive ethnic cleansing in order to keep the demography in such a way that it doesn't endanger the Jewish democracy.

So, what did they do? They decided to keep millions of people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip without the right to take part in the Israeli political system. When some people said to them, "Okay, that's fine, but can you in return give the Palestinian the right to determine their future in a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip?" They didn't accept that either. So, they really believed that they could somehow contain the Palestinian national ambition and resistance within that idea of a West Bank and a Gaza Strip that is our enclave controlled by Israel, maybe with some autonomy for the Palestinian inside, and convince the world that

this is the best solution and even call it a kind of a two-state solution. Of course, it had nothing to do with a two-state solution.

So historically speaking, it's the same problem all the time, as you rightly say, Chris, it's having the territory without the people, but because of circumstances and things that changed, '48 is not '67 and '67 is not 2023, and because of that, the methods of maintaining this balance between territory and population changes. But the vision is still the same, and the purpose is still the same, and the failures are the same. The massive expulsion didn't work. The idea of keeping people without citizenship rights is not working, and even putting them under siege as we have seen before the 7th October is not working. Whatever the Israelis have in mind for Gaza, I can assure you, without knowing how it would unfold, it's going to be a huge failure, which unfortunately will have an incredible human cost, mainly for the Palestinians.

1967 – The beginning of an apartheid system

Chris Hedges: Leibowitz really takes the 1967 war, which sees Israel seize the remaining land of Palestinians as the dividing point. He defines himself as a Zionist. He seems to argue that the pre 1967 borders known as the Green Line could work. But '67 for him – and the refusal on the part of the Israeli leadership to give up the occupation – or move back to the pre '67 borders, is in many ways the death now of Israeli democracy and civil society, as Leibowitz argues quite passionately. Can you explain that?

Ilan Pappé: Well, first, I would say the seeds for this end or implosion from within had been sown much earlier in the 1920s. But let's go along with this thesis although I think it was doomed to fail from the very beginning. But there's no doubt that the occupation of 1967 accelerated these processes by which you had a legal system, a political system, and the culture system that justified a daily violation of the human rights and the civil rights of the Palestinians, at least inside Israel. In the pre '67 Israel, there was an attempt all the time to improve the situation of the Palestinian citizens in Israel. And as we said, they had the right to vote, they had the right to be elected, and finally they even were allowed to create their own national parties and so on.

But at the same time, the direction in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was going towards a

different kind of a future. A long and never-ending building of two mega prisons: one in the West Bank and one in the Gaza Strip maintained by at least hundreds of thousands of Israelis. They had to be involved in maintaining this mega prison of policing millions of people every day. Leibowitz warned Kollek and Abba about their sense of separating because there will be this democratic liberal pluralist Israel within the pre '67 borders, and there will be something less admirable, less fortunate, but hopefully manageable beyond the Green Line, beyond the borders of Israel. And he warned rightly so that you will not be able to contain it, that it would spill over into Israel, and you will not have, in the end of the day, two entities, namely a liberal democratic Israel next to an occupied Palestine.

No, in the end of the day, you will have one apartheid system that may have varieties in the way it controls the lives of Palestinians, but in essence, as indeed Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International eventually understood recently, would have to be ruled through segregation, discrimination, and oppression. It doesn't matter whether we talk about Tel Aviv and Haifa, or about Nablus and Gaza. It became one organic country where the Palestinians are subjected to a variety of legal regimes and military regimes that violate the basic civil and human rights.

Chris Hedges: I just want to say that Israeli Arabs, even though in pre '67 there were moves to incorporate them inside, nevertheless did not serve in the army or the intelligence units. That's correct, right?

Ilan Pappé: Yes.

Squaring the circle – democracy or oppression

Chris Hedges: It's not just that the occupation for Leibowitz is not sustainable, but it's what it does, how it deforms Israeli society. I wonder if you could speak to what happened. I'm especially interested in why you believe these Zionist fanatics and bigots and crypto fascists, these people surrounding Netanyahu, why they became ascendant?

Ilan Pappé: Well, I think that there are two crises at work here. One crisis is what you can call the Zionist left. This attempt to, to square the circle to somehow say to yourself, I can be both an oc-

cupier and a socialist or a liberal. This failed to work on so many levels. First, the Palestinians were not impressed by that. They understood, as I once put it, that when a Zionist has a boot on your face, it doesn't matter whether he holds the Book of Marx or the Bible, what matters is the boot. I think that's one reason the Zionist left was not working.

Secondly, there was a sense among the Israeli Jewish electorate that this is a deception. They said, "You think like us, but you would've liked it to be nicer. You would've liked the world not to be fully aware of it. You don't want to lose international legitimacy. It's not because you have a different moral approach, but you have a more functional approach to it." And that did not convince the Jewish electorate.

So, one crisis was what I call the failure to square the circle and take universal values and say that they can coexist with the values of colonialism and oppression. The second and no less important crisis is the failure or the collapse of the idea that you can redefine Judaism as nationalism. There was an attempt to create a Jewish culture, a Jewish identity, which is secular, and it didn't work. There are some successes. No doubt there is a Hebrew culture. I dream in Hebrew. Hebrew is my mother tongue so I'm fully aware of the success of Zionism to create a Hebrew culture. But the Hebrew culture is not a substitute for Judaism. It creates a culture around language but doesn't have the power that a religious affiliation has.

And what happens was that while the religious Jews had a clear idea what Judaism is, Israeli Jews never knew what it meant to be an Israeli Jew. As you probably know, in our identity cards, our nationality is not Israeli. No, Israeli has a nationality identity of being an Israeli.

In my ID, it's written that my nationality is Jewish and in the ID of my neighbour who is a Palestinian Israeli, it says that his nationality is Muslim, not Palestinian or Christian. They try to impose this idea that they can play with religious identities and even impose it on Christians and Muslims. It doesn't work. And I think no matter where in the world the attempt to create a state identity that is equivalent to a religious identity in the modern world is not working.¹

This crisis has led to the return of many Israeli Jews to Judaism as a religion, including the Arab Jews who were more traditional anyway. And then they asked themselves similar things

that are happening in political Islam. Can we translate the Jewish scriptures into political documents of our day? Can we impose the imperatives of the religion on the public domain, on the state policy, both the domestic one and the foreign one? Now for secular Israelis, this is something they cannot coexist with. But they don't really have a very good answer. So, what does it mean to be a Jew if it's not to be a religious Jew? What is a secular Jew? What is a secular Muslim for that matter? Or a secular Christian? That's a crisis that may also exist in other places, but not like in this pressure cooker in Israel where these questions become vital and existential.

Chris Hedges: When *Thucydides* talked about the expansion of the Athenian Empire, he wrote that, "The tyranny Athens imposed on others, it finally imposed on itself". To what extent is the tyranny that Israel has imposed on occupied Palestinians now being imposed on itself?

Ilan Pappé: Well, we had clear indications. They were there before, but I think the 7th October was a pretext for this tyranny to be directed towards freethinking Israeli citizens who are also Jewish by definition. We have a clear case in the person of the history teacher *Petah Tikva*. All he did was to share with his pupils some alternative views to the ones they hear in the Israeli media. He was arrested for a few days before he was released. Any attempt by Palestinian citizens of Israel or anti-Zionist Israeli citizens to express doubts or even say that you must understand the context of the 7th October is regarded by the police as incitement to terrorism. So inevitable, as any historian would know, this can never be contained towards one group of people, and eventually you use these powers against your own people, and it depends on who is the one who uses the power.

There are some very important critical sociologists in Israel, which I am not one of them, but they followed the way that the upper echelons of the Israeli Security Service, the upper echelons of the army, are now populated by what I call the state of Judea, namely settlers. National religious settlers are now occupying very important position. You have, of course, the ultimate example, and this is the terrorist from the Judea state, *Ben-Gvir*, as Minister of Internal Security. So even at the top, you have someone who doesn't hesitate to use the same means as he wants to use against Palestinians also against

free thinking Israelis, regardless of who they are, Jews or Arabs. He may be a bit of a joke even in the eyes of his own subordinates, but there are more serious people below him who supposedly are part of the civil service and are not politically elected, but they come from this ideological hotbed that sees people like myself, if you want, as dangerous as any Palestinian, and that is something that is now spreading in Israel.

October 7th – direct consequences

Chris Hedges: Let's talk about October 7th, both the micro impact and as a historian, the macro impact.

Ilan Pappé: Well, the micro impact is really bizarre and I'm trying to get it into my head. I am beginning to understand it. Let's start with the Israeli Jewish society. There is this almost impossible mixture of total disbelief in the ability of the Jewish state to defend you or even provide you with the most fundamental services. So, it's a total breakdown in the confidence of the state to provide for you. It was not only because the military failed to fend you, but the way the state was not there after the 7th October. I don't know how many people are aware of it, but the state did not function for about two months in terms of providing social and economic services. It was all done by the civil society. The government did not function at all in terms of helping people who were evicted from the north or the south.

So, on the one hand, there is this breakdown in believing in the state. On the other hand, there is a total support for the genocidal policies in Gaza. It's a contradiction, but one can understand where it comes from, and that's one of the micro kinds of impact you have, that you will have an even more intransigent, inflexible, theocratic, fanatic Israeli Jew society in the post 7th October Israel.

As for the Palestinians, I think some big questions would be asked also by the Palestinian national movement because it's a big responsibility to stage an operation when you probably know beforehand what the Israeli reaction would be.

I had a webinar with some people from Lebanon and we talked about it, and I think there are similarities. People say to me, "But Hamas was kind of building on the legacy of 2000 when Hezbollah bravely succeeded in pushing the Is-

raeli army outside of Lebanon". So, there is an example of an Arab paramilitary group being a match to the might of the Israeli Army. But I said, "Yes, but there's another legacy. That's a legacy of 2006 when *Hasan Nasrallah*, the leader of Hezbollah, said, 'Had I known that Israeli reaction to the abduction of three soldiers would be the destruction of Beirut, I would not have ordered that operation.'"

So, he did talk with responsibility of when you strategise. You have responsibility also for your own people. It would be interesting to see on the micro level, first how the Palestinians are reacting to the Israeli retaliation, beyond of course their ability. I also think they were able to galvanise public opinion to show that however one condemns or doesn't condemn the service of October, it does not weaken the basic growing solidarity with the Palestinians.

Now let's talk about the macro. The macro impact is that Israel is not going to defeat the Hamas that easily and is going to be stuck there. In order even to maintain some sort of success, victory, they would have to stay there for years in direct occupation. This could easily escalate into an uprising in the West Bank and attack from the north by Hezbollah, and who knows, even undercurrents in the Arab world that would change the Arab tolerance of Israel that we have seen so far. This can escalate into a regional war. That's the bleak scenario on the one hand.

The more positive scenario on the macro level is that the civil society that is now very much pro-Palestinian and even supports boycott and divestments from Israel, may succeed in convincing some governments in the Global North, and definitely in the Global South, to move beyond actions of civil society into sanctions and pressure on Israel. Maybe a total new perception grows about the need to pressure Israel to give up its supremacist policies, its oppression, and so on.

It's too early to judge which of the two processes will unfold. They may even unfold in conjunction, namely, the more violent the region would become, the more willing maybe the international community would be willing to change its basic perceptions of what is the essence of the problem and what is the way out of it.

Washington's role

Chris Hedges: But isn't Washington the key? I mean Israel, along with the US, is already on this

issue. They are pariah states, as we saw with the vote in the UN. As long as there's unconditional support from Washington, Israel can resist any kind of pressure, can't they?

Ilan Pappé: Well, that's a very big question because I think that the Global South also has power. I taught in a Chinese university recently in September, and it was very clear that China, for instance, is still reluctant to be involved in the question of Palestine. It's because Chinese foreign policy, contrary to the way it's portrayed in America, is interested in economic gains more than anything else. Palestine is certainly not an economic bonanza these days. So, I don't think they're likely to be involved too much in it.

But I do think that there are other powers on the international map that could challenge the American hegemony on the question of Palestine, that's one point. And secondly, yes, America is still a key. However, something is happening in the American civil society. Israelis and pro-Israelis in America like to call it the rise of new anti-Semitism, which is a very superficial analysis of the fact that the younger generation of Americans, A, is much more knowledgeable than the previous generation about what goes on in Palestine. B, it is far more committed. Some people would say they are naive, but they are more committed to moral dimensions of foreign and security policies. That includes large chunks of the young American Jewish community. So, I'm not sure that this determinist view of an American policy is the right approach, either. I do think there's a chance of a different American policy as well.

Two different coalitions

But I do think Chris, probably the best way to do it is by saying there are two coalitions now when it comes to Palestine. One I call global Israel. Global Israel is still made up of western governments, multinational corporation, military industries, security industries, communities of Christian Zionists and Jews who continue to provide Israel immunity for almost everything it does, almost automatically, like a kind of faith. Against that is global Palestine. It is made up of civil societies and some governments in the Global South who are not only pro Palestinians, but they really believe that the struggle for justice in Palestine connects very well with their own struggles against injustice in their own societ-



26 October 2023: Jews in the USA demonstrate against the current policies of the Israeli government. (Picture Keystone/ EPS/ Sarah Yenesel)

ies. And this is the younger generation of the world.

I think that this is a battle that goes beyond Palestine. It connects ecological issues, poverty issues, rights of minorities issues with Palestine, and therefore I don't think the balance of power is just America versus the rest of the world. I think there are two much more complex global coalitions, which are relevant not only to Palestine. I see the relevance mainly in the case of Palestine because I'm interested in it but I'm sure they can also be exposed in other places of contention and where conflicts are still raging.

Looking at Gaza

Chris Hedges: Let's close by looking at Gaza. First, I want to talk about intent. The UN says that half of Gazans now face starvation. I was in Sarajevo during the war, that was 300 to 400 shells a day, four to five dead a day, about two dozen wounded a day. This is just by comparison. I don't want to minimize what happened in Sarajevo; I still have nightmares about it. But that's nothing compared to what's happening in Gaza in terms of the level of bombing. What is the intent? Is the intent to create a humanitarian crisis of such extremity that the international community is forced to intervene and become a partner in ethnic cleansing? What do you think? You know the mindset of the people around Netanyahu better than I do.

Ilan Pappé: Well, first, I think that there really was an inertia of revenge to begin with, rather than a very careful planning. Not everything should be attributed to clear and systematic planning. As the days went by, it was clear to at least one group within the policymakers who thought that the war gives a pretext to get rid of Gaza, a more system-

atic planning. So, the result, as far as they're concerned, is the depopulation of the Gaza Strip from as many Palestinians as possible either to Egypt or to other parts of the world, because Gaza, if it's not sustainable now, it wouldn't even be less sustainable in the future. I think there is one component among the Israeli policy makers who believe that they have the power to do it.

There are more moderate, or to my view more pragmatic people like *Benjamin Gantz*, *Gadi Eizenkot*, it depends. They joined the government in the last moment from the opposition. I don't know how influential they will be for the day after. But if they're still influential on the day after, they have a certain end game in mind, which is to annex part of the Gaza Strip directly to Israel. This would leave a very small piece of land with a huge number of people living in it and the hope that someone else would run the domestic affairs of Gaza, whether it's the PA or a multinational force.

However, they don't think that it's even possible to discuss the day after scenarios before they fulfil what they promised to the Israeli public, which is something they cannot fulfil. That's one of the reasons for the carnage that we are seeing that they are after this victory photo. After a kind of triumphant photo that shows that the Hamas is nowhere to be seen in Gaza, or at least nowhere to be seen as a military force. I don't think they can achieve it, but they still believe they can.

Until that happens, they continue relentlessly continue, [by that, endangering the lives of the still 130 and so Israeli hostages still held by the Hamas in the Gaza Strip even more]. They claim that the two objectives of what they call the land manoeuvre is to destroy the Hamas as a military power and to salvage the hostages. It's very clear from the way they're acting that they have given up on the hostages. But they still believe they have the power to get this picture that they want, either a dead *Sinwar* or an expelled *Sinwar*, the scenario of Lebanon 1982 with *Arafat* leaving for Tunis with the rest of the Palestinian leadership. These are the scenarios they have, and all the means seem to be justified in their eyes to achieve that.

Chris Hedges: So, you are arguing they won't. So, what happens when they don't achieve that?

A bleak future for Israel?

Ilan Pappé: That's what I meant before. What will happen is that they are going to be stuck there for much longer than they think, involved in a guerrilla warfare which is much longer than they think, thereby endangering an escalation any day that could bring other factors and other actors into that conflict with dire consequences also for Israel itself. Can you imagine, Chris, what would have happened if on the 7th October, Hezbollah would have coordinated with the Hamas a similar attack on the North? Remember, the main military problem for Israel was that most of its army was in the West Bank helping to defend the settlers and helping them with their ethnic cleansing. So, there were not enough soldiers in the North and not enough soldiers on the Gaza border to prevent an operation like the one the Hamas conducted. Imagine what would have happened if the Hezbollah would have joined in. How would Israel have got out of that. Somehow this lesson has not been learned by the Israeli policymakers.

So, I think that they are going to take Israel into a very dire future, even for the Israelis themselves, in terms of casualties, in terms of international isolation and in terms of economic crisis. Relying all the time on the American Congress, is not the best and most solid pillar in the world to build a future for a younger generation and tell them that they live in the best place the Jews could be in the world right now. In a way they are digging their own hole here because they don't want to see what the problem is and what price they must pay if they really want to build a different future.

Source: The Chris Hedges Report, The real news network – Interview by Chris Hedges with Ilan Pappé
The myth of Israel's 'democracy' w/Ilan Pappé: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1PKIV1JMBU>

(Transcript and postediting "Swiss Standpoint")

¹ [(Edit.) "In Israel, however, citizenship and nationality are – and should be – different. The State of Israel maintains a national population registry in which every resident is classified by both 'citizenship' and 'nationality'. The citizenship of all Israelis is listed as 'Israeli'. However, under 'nationality', they are defined as belonging to different ethnic and religious groups, among them Jewish, Arab, and Druze."

Source: Israel Democracy Institute IDI Vice President Prof. Yedida Stern and Jay Ruderman, Is "Israeli" a Nationality? 2014]