

# RENAUD GIRARD

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## **Terry Martin, Journalist and TV News Anchor**

Meanwhile, though, we are going to give the floor to Renaud Girard. The floor is yours.

## **Renaud Girard**

Thank you. I am going to speak in my own language, French, because I had to work hard to learn it when I was young. So I'd like to try and use it.

October 7th is obviously an event with a major impact. Its causes and consequences are completely different from the terror attacks of September 11th, and the terror attacks of October 7th will have a considerable impact, not just on the region, but on the whole world. If I had to sum up my talk, it would be: a local conflict with a global price. And the same cannot be said of all conflicts. Recently, there was a conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, an area roughly the size of the West Bank or a French department, about 6,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh was driven out as a result of ethnic cleansing within a conflict which, if we take the conflict of September 2020 and the final days of the conflict, caused a number of deaths that is roughly equivalent to the October 7th attacks. It all went like clockwork. Nobody talked about it. Even bloodier conflicts are raging in the world right now, such as the war between the Tigrays, Eritreans, Amharas and Oromos in Ethiopia, which nobody talks about and is continuing to cause a much higher number of deaths and refugees.

So why is there so much talk about the Israel-Palestine conflict? First, because in international relations, feelings are much more important than reality. The perception of reality is what matters. And the perception is that a heinous crime was committed in Europe, and Westerners, particularly Americans, who did very little to save Jews— we are reminded of the conference at the Hôtel Royal in Evian, where they refused to take in Jewish refugees from Germany— the great powers of the time, and the Soviet Union for other reasons, wanted to make reparations for the Holocaust by committing another injustice, or what was perceived to be an injustice.

You will tell me that the problem is much more complex than that, because in Palestine there are two legitimate opposing claims. The Arabs' claim is legitimate because in 1880 there were 500,000 Arabs and 30,000 Jews in Palestine, which was under Ottoman rule, and the Zionists' claim is legitimate because the Jews from Europe built a state there. Before they arrived, Tel Aviv was a mosquito-infested swamp, and on it, they built a state. So there are two conflicting legitimate claims, but the feeling not only of the Arab nations and the Arab peoples—I am not talking about rulers, I am talking about the people—is that two wrongs do not make a right, an idea shared by non-Muslims on other continents. We saw extremely strong reactions to these



images in Latin America, for example, where they have no absolutely connection with the Israel-Palestine issue.

Like any local conflict, October 7th will have local and global consequences. The local consequences are very simple: we now have proof that in Israel the hard right is less good at protecting Israeli citizens than the progressive left. No left-wing government has ever had 1,400 citizens massacred. The mistake, an ideological one, was to leave the southern front unprotected. Instead of protecting kibbutzes within Israel's internationally recognized borders, Israeli soldiers were sent to protect illegal settlements and settlers who have behaved extremely badly since the beginning of the year, killing over 200 Palestinians with a kind of license to kill issued by Israel's right-wing and far-right government. This is the proof, and obviously the Netanyahu government, and Netanyahu himself, will have to pay for not protecting these kibbutzes, which, incidentally, were home to a generally pacifist population who wanted peace with the Palestinians.

There is also a problem with Hamas that we have not really mentioned and that is the reaction of Arab populations. On social media, Arabs have praised Hamas' military boldness, their use of motorized paragliders, etc, but there is a problem with their indiscipline and crimes against babies and old people. And throughout the history of the Middle East, no movements claiming to be resistance movements have behaved in this way. After the unannounced Israeli withdrawal in 2000, when they betrayed their Christian allies in the south, I personally witnessed Hezbollah take over the area. There was not one slap, not one theft, not one rape, only discipline. The discipline shown by Hezbollah explains why there will be consequences for Hamas for the shocking indiscipline of the soldiers who committed all these horrors.

Then there are the global consequences. As Dorothee said, the polarization between the West and the global South is growing, with the global South accusing the West of double standards. The sense is that we heard the West lecturing Russia and Vladimir Putin, particularly when Mariupol was destroyed. It is not just Muslims around the world who have rallied behind Hamas, but also people in Latin America and Africa, who are saying, "American bombs are doing the very same thing to Gaza that Russian bombs did to Mariupol." This is an incredible gift to Putin.

Another consequence is economic. At the United Nations, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced the creation of a new economic corridor between India, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and Italy, which would compete with the Silk Road project encompassing China, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Greece. Today, the new corridor announced by Netanyahu, like the Abraham Accords for that matter, is in real trouble.

In conclusion, the good news is that there is a global consensus. Perhaps not within Israeli society, although even there, many people agree that the Palestinian question must be settled once and for all. As you said, it is absolutely not correct to call this impossible. It is difficult, but completely possible. Just look at the Taba negotiations. East Jerusalem can of course be the capital of a Palestinian state. Just take a walk around Damascus Gate—the only people living there are Arabs. And land swaps are possible, so that the Palestinian state would take up the 22% of mandatory Palestine that Arafat accepted in Algiers in 1988. As Élie Barnavi, Israeli historian and Israel's former ambassador to Paris, said, a solution must be imposed on Israel for its own good because it is too strong. Only an international conference can impose a



solution on Israel. It would not be that hard to organize it because this is an issue where views converge. The Americans, Russians, Chinese, French, British, Saudis and Arabs all have more or less the same idea. The problem is that these major international players agree on the solution to the Israel-Palestine problem, but disagree on other issues.

Is such a meeting possible? It all comes down to diplomatic technique. The people at the World Policy Conference are the best, so I look forward to your suggestions.

### **Terry Martin**

Thank you very much. I appreciate your observations there, which gave us a sense of the global implications of this conflict, that it is not just an Israeli/Palestinian conflict, it is not just a regional conflict. The stakeholders in this go far beyond the region and the repercussions are, indeed, being felt all around the world. There is no doubt about that. We feel it in Western Europe, where I live. It is being felt in North America. It is being felt in Latin America, as you pointed out, and in many different parts of the world. There is a lot that is dependent on what happens next.

Thank you very much for now. I have to apologize. I have let most of our speakers go on a little longer than the allotted time, so my apologies to the audience for not leaving as much time for our discussion at the end as I would like.