



Jeremy Scahill and Ro Khanna CLASH Over Palestinian Armed Resistance and Iron Dome

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Jeremy Scahill and Congressman Ro Khanna debate the legitimacy of Palestinian armed resistance, Israeli defense systems, and U.S. military aid to Israel, with Scahill pressing Khanna on what he sees as a double standard in denying Palestinians the right to attack military targets while accepting Israeli military operations.

SAŽETAK

This debate between journalist Jeremy Scahill and U.S. Congressman Ro Khanna centers on competing approaches to addressing Israeli military actions and Palestinian resistance. Khanna outlines his policy positions, including calls for zero military aid to Israel, no military sales used to kill civilians, and recognition of Israeli apartheid and genocide in Gaza. However, Scahill challenges Khanna's defense of Israel's Iron Dome system, arguing it enables Israeli military operations with impunity. The core tension emerges when Scahill asks whether Palestinians have a right to attack Israeli military bases—a question Khanna declines to affirm. Scahill argues this represents a double standard: if Israel can respond to October 7th attacks on military bases by bombing Gaza, why cannot Palestinians attack armed Israeli military targets? Khanna appeals to nonviolent traditions of Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi, while Scahill counters with references to justified slave rebellions and the constraints Palestinians face under occupation. The discussion also covers Palestinian perspectives on armed resistance as a response to failed diplomatic channels, the fracturing of Palestinian society under occupation, and the role of independent journalism in covering these contested questions.

KLJUČNE PORUKE

Khanna supports zero military aid to Israel, no military sales for weapons used against civilians, and recognition of Israeli apartheid and genocide in Gaza, but defends Israel's right to maintain the Iron Dome defense system.

Scahill argues that allowing Israel access to Iron Dome technology enables Israeli military operations with impunity, framing it as protecting 'the sniper' rather than genuinely defending civilians.

Khanna denies Palestinians have a right to attack Israeli military bases, while Scahill identifies this as a double standard when Israel is permitted to respond militarily to attacks on its military targets.

Khanna invokes nonviolent resistance traditions of Gandhi and King as a model for Palestinian resistance, whereas Scahill references justified armed resistance in history, including slave rebellions.

Palestinians have exhausted formal diplomatic channels including the United Nations and Oslo Accords; armed resistance is framed as a final recourse when nonviolent approaches fail.

Comprehensive economic sanctions on Israel—including restrictions on banking and corporations operating in occupied territories—are presented as an alternative to armed resistance and conditional military aid positions.

Khanna's position reflects a broader political pattern among American politicians who express Palestinian solidarity while carving out exceptions to Palestinian rights, contrasted with Scahill's willingness to articulate more absolute positions on Palestinian self-determination.

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Opening Remarks on Israeli Policy and Palestinian Suffering

Jeremy Scahill begins by acknowledging that many people deeply concerned about the apartheid state of Israel and the genocide in Gaza find it refreshing to hear a member of Congress speak critically on these issues. He notes that Congressman Khanna has used this opportunity to highlight specific cases of Palestinians. Scahill then pivots to asking what consequences Khanna believes Israel should face, not only for its military actions but also for the documented mass killing of roughly eight thousand people in Gaza—a figure he suggests is likely much higher, with a significant portion being children.

The Iron Dome Controversy

Scahill acknowledges having heard Khanna discuss sanctioning individuals and frame certain weapons as offensive or inherently lethal to civilians. However, he wants to press Khanna specifically on his defense of the Iron Dome system. Scahill contends that much of the critique from pro-Palestine advocates and Palestinians themselves is

that Khanna's position essentially amounts to ensuring "the sniper is protected so that he can continue sniping." This characterization sets up the central tension of their debate.

Khanna's Policy Positions on Military Aid

Khanna responds by laying out a comprehensive list of his stated positions. He says he has called for zero military aid to Israel and supports the Massie amendment to that effect, describing it as a major vote coming up that week. He has also called for no military sales to Israel used to kill civilians, no military integration, and led efforts to repeal sections 224 and 219, which he describes as Netanyahu's "end run" allowing co-production of military equipment. Khanna emphasizes that he has called for recognizing Israel as an apartheid state and acknowledging genocide in Gaza.

Khanna frames these positions on a scale of one to ten, saying they represent moving "from one to seven or eight," with the debate being whether to go to nine or ten. He distinguishes his position from a complete arms embargo, which he says he has not supported. His view, he explains, is that "anyone should be able to protect civilian life," though he clarifies that this is not about America supporting such protection. He argues the United States is not funding the Iron Dome system itself.

Immediate Actions for the Next Administration

Khanna suggests that rather than discussing abstract long-term peace processes, the next administration could take concrete steps within the first hundred days. These would include demanding the arrest of "Yonatan Levi and extremist settlers," demanding the destruction of every outpost and illegal settlement within that timeframe, and demanding justice for Palestinians to stop their terrorization. He frames these as directives that should come from the American administration, stating "Israel must do this," rather than as dialogue.

Scahill's Challenge to the Iron Dome Position

Scahill responds that he does not believe Khanna is adequately addressing the fundamental question. He pushes back on the distinction between Netanyahu and his right-wing government, pointing out that public opinion polling shows widespread support for openly genocidal policies in Israel. Netanyahu, Scahill notes, is often criticized by political opponents for not having "finished the job" in Gaza, Lebanon, or elsewhere. Scahill wants to understand why Khanna stops at defending the Iron Dome, given that his other statements represent clear recognition of the issues involved. He returns to his metaphor: "you still are saying, but the sniper needs to have protection."

Defining the Position on Military Technology

Khanna clarifies that his position and that of Bernie Sanders, AOC, and others is for zero military aid to Israel and no military sales of weapons used to kill civilians. Scahill counters that the Iron Dome itself is used to kill civilians because "it allows the Israelis to have this American backing to operate with impunity." He argues that by publicly supporting this military technology for Israel, Khanna is effectively saying that when Israel attacks other countries that have a right to fight back, the United States backs the sniper's ability to continue sniping.

Khanna denies this characterization, stating that he is not saying the United States should fund the Iron Dome. Rather, he is saying the United States "shouldn't be restricting Israel from being able to get the Iron Dome or be able to develop the Iron Dome technology." Scahill presses further: given everything else Khanna is saying makes sense, why stop there? To Scahill, this appears to be "trying to have it both ways on this issue," allowing Khanna to claim support for defending Israeli civilians while actually defending "the sniper's ability to keep killing because it won't face the ultimate accountability, which is a total embargo on all support for an apartheid state."

The Question of Innocent Civilians

Khanna raises the concern of innocent Israeli civilians, including the twenty percent Arab Israeli population. He argues there is no need to "put their lives at risk" to achieve the goals of stopping apartheid and occupation. Scahill responds that Israel itself puts Israeli civilian lives at risk by waging what he calls genocidal wars with the support of a significant portion of its own population. By allowing even qualified support for Israel's defense systems, Scahill argues, Khanna is enabling this dynamic. He contends that the accountability should lie on American policy toward Israel, not remain abstract or hypothetical.

The October 7th Confrontation

Scahill then shifts the debate directly to the question of Palestinian armed resistance. He asks Khanna pointedly: "Do Palestinians have a right to kill Israeli soldiers? Congressman, on October 7th, when they attacked the military bases in the Gaza envelope, did the Qassam Brigades and Saraya Al-Quds have a right to kill Israeli soldiers? Yes or no?" Khanna initially characterizes the October 7th attack as a terrorist attack. Scahill clarifies that the first targets hit on the morning of October 7th were multiple military bases, asking again whether Palestinian forces had a right to attack those military bases.

Khanna reiterates that he is "not for violent violence in any way" and wants to ensure the occupation ends, but he does not directly affirm a Palestinian right to attack Israeli

military bases. When pressed again—"Do they have a right to attack Israeli soldiers?"—Khanna says plainly: "No. I'm not going to say that Hamas had a right to attack Israeli soldiers or kill Israelis. Like I don't think that advances peace or advances Palestinian statehood."

The Double Standard Argument

Scahill then poses a parallel question: "Does Israel have a right to drop a single bomb on Gaza in response to October 7th?" Khanna responds that he believes Israel had the right to "get people who killed civilians," but not in the way it actually went about it, which he acknowledges constitutes genocide. Scahill seizes on this apparent contradiction: Khanna is saying Palestinians do not have the right to attack military bases that were running killing operations on October 5th or 6th, 2023, before October 7th. This, to Scahill, is a double standard—Israel can kill Palestinians, but there is supposedly never a condition under which Palestinians can attack armed, uniformed soldiers of an occupying force under international law.

Nonviolence and Historical Reference

Khanna appeals to the tradition of Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi, noting that his father and grandfather were imprisoned. He believes King and Gandhi would argue for a much more nonviolent approach by Palestinians, not armed resistance to Israeli occupation. Scahill challenges this, asking whether King would say "it's okay to attack the Viet Cong, but I don't want them to kill" the occupiers. He references slave rebellions, which he argues were justified against those "raping, hanging, murdering Africans who had been kidnapped."

Palestinian Voices and Resistance Framing

Khanna counters that he spends most of his time talking with and working with Palestinians. He says most of the Palestinians he meets are not talking about the kind of armed resistance Scahill is advocating for; they simply want to live in dignity and peace without Israeli settler oppression. Scahill acknowledges this but points out that Khanna, as a United States Congressman, is effectively justifying certain Israeli attacks on Palestinians while drawing a line that prevents any Palestinian from attacking the armed forces of a nation state backed by the United States. According to Scahill, Khanna cannot find justification for Palestinians to attack soldiers posted at military bases enforcing an illegal occupation through "murder and forced starvation and deprivation."

Effectiveness of Armed Resistance

Scahill asks how Khanna reconciles these two positions. He suggests that armed resistance will be ineffective given the power differentials involved—a position similar

to what Gandhi believed regarding nonviolent resistance against the British Empire. Khanna argues that civil resistance and moral force, appealing to the world's conscience, offer a much better chance of achieving dignity and peace than armed resistance. The debate ends without resolution, with the two men holding fundamentally different views on the legitimacy of Palestinian armed resistance and the implications of American military support to Israel.

The Great March of Return and Israeli Military Response

In 2019, the Palestinians organized the Great March of Return, which was a mass nonviolent mobilization at the gates of the concentration camp walls and fence in Gaza. Israeli soldiers responded by holding a competition to see who could shoot the most kneecaps of Palestinians. This incident provides important context for understanding Palestinian perspectives on resistance and the constraints they face.

Shifting American Opinion and the Question of Armed Resistance

Opinion is shifting in America regarding Palestinian tactics and approaches to resistance. The question of whether armed resistance is justified remains contested, particularly among American political figures and the broader public. There is disagreement about how to contextualize Palestinian resistance in relation to the occupation and the violence Palestinians face daily.

One speaker noted that Hamas would not exist if there was no occupation, and that the moment the occupation ceases to exist is the moment the need to resist ceases to exist. This framing suggests that resistance is a response to occupation rather than an ideological commitment. Another speaker pointed out the double standard in the debate: Palestinians living in the West Bank face constant violence and cannot even travel to where their children were killed without wearing bulletproof vests. Parents cannot defend themselves against settlers without risking being shot by Israeli police. The situation is fundamentally violent, and while peace is a goal worth pursuing, the immediate reality on the ground requires Palestinians to find ways to protect themselves.

One speaker recounted an encounter with an American citizen whose family home was invaded by 150 settlers. When she asked Israeli police why she didn't defend herself, they blamed her—yet if she had physically resisted, she would have been shot. This illustrates the asymmetry Palestinians face: while Americans invoke the Second Amendment as a right to self-defense, Palestinians are stripped of that same right. The speaker noted that while we might wish to be romantic about the situation, the practical reality is that sometimes the only way to defend yourself is through armed resistance.

International Approaches and Diplomatic Efforts

Palestinians have exhausted many formal channels for resolution. They have appealed to the United Nations, participated in the Oslo Accords, and pursued multiple diplomatic avenues. When these approaches have failed to produce results, armed resistance becomes a final recourse. The question then becomes not whether armed resistance exists, but how the international community should respond to a state that is relentlessly violent toward a captive population.

One speaker suggested that if armed resistance is not going to be acknowledged as legitimate, then the playing field must be leveled in other ways. This could include an arms embargo on Israel, stopping military sales and aid, ensuring trials at the International Court of Justice to hold people accountable for war crimes and genocide, and working internationally to prevent the protection of Israel's apartheid or genocidal policies.

Sanctions and the Israeli Economy

During a visit to the region, Rahm Emanuel made a notable statement about the need to sanction the Israeli banking system and any Israeli corporation operating in occupied territory. When challenged that this would effectively sanction the entire Israeli economy, Emanuel affirmed that this was necessary. One speaker indicated support for such comprehensive sanctions, noting that if banks cannot access international markets, they cannot fund settlements or purchase components like Iron Dome systems. While domestically produced weapons might still be manufactured, cutting off financial support for settlements would be significant—settlements would collapse without financing.

Political Positioning and the Role of Figures Like Ro Khanna

Ro Khanna, a U.S. congressman, has been willing to engage in conversation about these issues, which is relatively unusual for American political figures. However, his position reflects a broader pattern among politicians from AOC to Bernie Sanders: they project solidarity with the Palestinian people but ultimately carve out their own exceptions when it comes to Palestinian rights. Khanna's framing draws a distinction between what he views as moral but also politically possible in American politics, invoking the example of Abraham Lincoln, who was anti-slavery but not an abolitionist.

The Lincoln analogy is significant. Throughout his life, Lincoln opposed slavery but distinguished himself from abolitionists, who were viewed as radicals outside respectable politics. Abolitionists quietly supported Lincoln's election, believing he was with them even if he would not say so publicly. Lincoln built a coalition that included abolitionists while avoiding their rhetoric. In this dynamic, Jeremy Scahill functions as the "crazy abolitionist" willing to say publicly what others may privately believe, while

Khanna represents the politician building coalitions within the constraints of mainstream acceptability.

The Limits of Personal Testimony

While Khanna should be credited for engaging with these issues and traveling to occupied territories, his conversations over a few days cannot be taken as representative of Palestinian public opinion as a whole. Many Palestinians will not openly discuss armed resistance with an American congressman, particularly one visiting an area of the West Bank. The West Bank itself is not monolithic: there is a bourgeois class in places like Ramallah where official visitors are typically taken to meet with Palestinian Authority officials and dine in nice restaurants. This elite circle's experience differs dramatically from that of Palestinians in refugee camps in Tulkarem or Jenin, where armed resistance is more directly connected to daily violence and where Palestinians have been killed not only by the Israeli military but by the Palestinian Authority itself.

When public opinion polling on armed resistance in Palestine is examined, it shows significant support—support that cannot be dismissed based on selective conversations. Palestinian journalists and activists face arrest for expressing views similar to those being discussed here. Those with the resources and platforms to speak often do so at considerable personal risk. The fact that Palestinian colleagues frequently tell international journalists, "You're saying things that would get me arrested," underscores the constraints on Palestinian expression and the importance of international media coverage of these perspectives.

The Role of Independent Journalism

Journalists covering Palestine operate in a landscape where much of the media narrative, particularly from right-wing sources, frames coverage as dishonest and questions the patriotism of those reporting from Gaza and the occupied West Bank. Despite these pressures, independent media outlets have conducted numerous interviews and reported extensively on Palestinian perspectives and experiences. The responsibility of journalism is to present these perspectives even when they complicate relationships with political figures who are generally sympathetic to Palestinian concerns. This is particularly important given that some Palestinian colleagues have been murdered in the course of reporting, and given the deep personal stakes involved—knowing Palestinians whose entire families have been decimated, having Palestinian friends who have lost over 200 family members in Gaza.

The distinction being made here is not a gotcha exercise but a matter of journalistic integrity. When an American politician claims that Palestinians do not have justification for armed resistance while simultaneously accepting that Israel has justification for dropping bombs on Gaza, that contradiction deserves public scrutiny. It is precisely

because Khanna has done meaningful work on Palestinian issues that it becomes important to have this discourse with him and with other figures like Bernie Sanders—to clarify where consensus ends and where fundamental disagreements remain.

The Fractured Nature of Palestinian Experience

There are multiple experiences within Palestinian society, which is by design—the population is very fractured, and everybody has their own version of what the occupation means and how it is experienced. This fragmentation shapes how Palestinians understand and articulate their own circumstances.

Generational Shift in Palestinian Advocacy

My father's generation was the generation that made the argument to the world that Palestinians are human. Their plea was simple: just please see us as human. But I think we're past that point now. Palestinians are no longer asking merely to be recognized as human. We deserve the same rights as anybody else. We deserve a military. We deserve free access and connection to the world. The framework has shifted fundamentally.

We're past the point of looking at Palestinians as just victims. Now Palestinians are demanding recognition of their full political and civil standing. We're talking face to face now—it's not just a matter of asking for protection. It's a demand for equality and sovereignty.

Recognition of Complexity in Advocacy Work

I really appreciate what we saw here today, because I don't want us to fall into the practice of just applauding people for looking and speaking out. We need to be critical, especially when we see countries that have joined efforts like the Hague group but have simultaneously made millions through their relationships with Israel on the side. We are at a point in the movement where that kind of scrutiny and accountability matters.

That's a well-made point. We have Abdullah Al-Arian standing by, but Maisa Mustafa just did some really important reporting from the occupied West Bank, and we'll make sure to amplify that in the context of this discussion on our social media feeds. Maisa, thanks so much for being on the ground there and doing such terrific reporting.

#Palestinian armed resistance and self-determination

#U.S. military aid to Israel

#Israeli defense systems (Iron Dome)

#Double standards in international conflict

#Israeli occupation and apartheid

#Nonviolent versus armed resistance

#Palestinian civilians and occupation

#American foreign policy and Middle East

#International sanctions and accountability

