

Israel Is Turning Against Itself | Dr. Shir Hever

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Transcript

Chapter 6: The Pegasus Spyware Scandal

Zain Raza ... which gets very little attention in the German mainstream media. It's about Pegasus, the Israeli spyware developed by the NSA group, NSO group. Thank you for the correction. So before we discuss the latest revelations concerning Morocco, could you first explain what Pegasus is, how it works, when it was revealed, and what kind of scandals came to light? If I remember correctly, in 2021, the US government placed the NSO group on a blacklist.

Shir Hever , , this is this is a very very complex story. Basically, we're talking about spyware. , Pegasus is not the only kind of spyware, but it's the most famous one because in 2021, Amnesty International together with Forbidden Stories and together with Citizen Lab published an investigative report about how this company NSO Group sold the or actually received phone numbers of 50,000 potential targets around the world. and at the time they were asking for quite a lot of money to hack each particular phone. because like if you want make a deal with this company to hack a phone you pay them per hacking attempt.

But Edward Snowden commented at the time that this is a technology of scale, economy of scale which means that 50,000 numbers now would be 50 million in a couple of years. And I think we are now in this time where Edward Snowden's dire prediction is coming true.

The spyware has become extremely widespread and it's a very very dangerous tool. I don't want to say that it's a technology. It's not exactly a technology. It doesn't make your phone better. It subverts your own phone against you. You become a spy against yourself and against your friends without wanting to do it just because somebody remotely can activate your microphone and listen to everything that's happening around you, activate your camera, look at your face, go through all of the data that is saved on your phone. They can hack your phone in real time and listen to your conversations and see whatever you're doing. And they can also they can go back in time.

And the one of the most important points they can also create a clone of your phone so they can write something on your phone and it looks like you did it.

So if somebody would hack your phone with spyware and go on your social media accounts and place forbidden information like forbidden pictures, child pornography, things like this. Actually, there is no technical way to be able to know if you did it or somebody else did it. The only thing that the organization Citizen Lab can do is they can find evidence that the phone was hacked. Yes or no?

And just think about what it means that if indeed the police wants to use the phone as evidence against somebody who might be suspected of serious crimes then if this phone has been hacked by spyware then the evidence is contaminated and the police cannot use it in court unless of course -which I think is is often the case- unless the court doesn't understand what is spyware because the technology is so complex that a lot of People think spyware is actually the same as wiretapping. But wiretapping cannot place fake information into your phone. It can only listen but not write. This is an very important difference. This is spyware.

Now Israel sold spyware to more than 140 company countries around the world including countries like Belarus, Ethiopia, Uganda, Honduras, El Salvador. it was used against lawyers, human rights activists. it was used for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi.

Spyware is a weapon. The European Union only classifies it as a dual use item, which I think is a wrong classification. It's a weapon. , and a good indication that it's a weapon is that if you look through all of these cases in which spyware was used to commit these crimes, it's all spyware that was bought from Israel.

And that's not because Israel invented spyware. Actually, the US has it, Russia has it, China has it. but the difference is that countries like states like the US, Russia and China, they don't sell it. They want to use it themselves. They don't consider it to be a product. They consider it to be a very very powerful, dangerous weapon that they will only use for their own national interest, but in the hands of their intelligence agencies.

And I don't think this is a good thing, but what Israel is doing is much much worse because they are setting up a for-profit company Shalev who -his name Shalev that's the S in NSO- he goes around the world and sells this to customers for money and then they can use it and commit terrible crimes with it.

So, this is what spyware is. and now there's a new revelation from Morocco where a member of the Moroccan Secret Service actually came forward and reported how Morocco used Israeli bought spyware. Shalev Shalev made a visit to Morocco under a false name, sold them this very dangerous tool. They've used it against many officials in France which is also a violation of French sovereignty. France so far took no action against Israel. but one party in Morocco also used this against Spain.

Spain is a different story because in Spain the government used the Israeli spyware Pegasus against the Catalan separatist movement including against parliament members which is a violation of Spanish law. Sanchez ordered opening an investigation against NSO group to understand what was done when he came to power. he didn't come to this conclusion very quickly. it took him some time after a lot of pressure by civil society groups by BDS.

So that's something that we need to remember. and this investigation is actually now a step further and actually the court in Catalonia ordered charges being pressed against the management of NSO group.

So this is very important. and as you said NSO is also sanctioned in the US. but these sanctions are mainly to protect just American citizens. and some of Trump's advisers are working to dismantle them and just allow this kind of technology to be used by American companies to attack US citizens and break the monopoly that currently is held by the CIA in the US allowing basically just private companies to do it as well.

So, the one party in Spain actually called Sumar, they've actually demanded some action against Morocco and against NSO group for using this technology.

again, I've called it technology, but I think the word needs to be examined. but this official from Morocco said something that really stuck with me. He said when we are surveilling people we don't use this tool this is something we only use -it's like a very heavy weapon that we only use for very extreme cases because spyro is so dangerous

and I hope that now we can maybe bring this conversation a bit closer to Germany because I think many of our German viewers don't realize that Germany bought Pegasus as to use against German.

Chapter 7: Pegasus & Germany

ZR

Let me just pick up on that and then you can expand this. So Germany's federal criminal police office reportedly purchased Pegasus in 2019 and in 2026 January interior minister Alexander Dobrindt sign an agreement with the Netanyahu to expand the German Israeli cooperation on cyber security describing Israel as a center partner.

SH

I mean we've already seen the Verfassungsschutz put the watermelon. I mean they came up with a list which included symbols, slogans and list of organizations. For example, the watermelon is supposed to be a sign of extremism of pro-Hamas signaling and the slogan "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" is banned in the public. And also you can see like organizations like Jewish Voice for Peace and not just this, I mean we can expand this to other progressive or critical organizations.

ZR

I mean what do you think will the impact be of this? You've already mentioned the part of civil liberties, but can you comment on this further?

SH

Yeah, it's interesting that you mentioned the Verfassungsschutz, which in English is the guardian of the constitution. because I think this maybe explains the deep vulnerability of Germany to this issue. How unprofessional and naive the German security organizations are. the guardians of the constitution in Germany are an organization that didn't read the constitution. They don't know that it's their obligation according to their own charter to investigate German politicians who have violated article 25 of the German constitution which stipulates clearly international law stands above German law when it comes to matters such as sending weapons to Israel to commit genocide and instead the Verfassungsschutz, the guardians of the constitution, are wasting their time on deciding that watermelons are anti-semitic.

So I mean if this is the level of law enforcement in Germany then one can maybe understand why they think they need to go and outsource their security to others.

The choice to outsource it to Israel is critical here because first of all the agreement that you mentioned with the German criminal police, the BKA, was not with the Israeli government. It was with a private company and this was reported by the PGA committee.

The PGA committee, PGA for Pegasus, was established by the European Parliament to investigate the abuse of this technology, this Pegasus and spyware in the European Union and I met with many members of the committee and yesterday I found there was a report that was published by the organization Citizen Lab which does the forensic architecture, forensic analysis of phones that are being hacked. And they found evidence that a member of this committee, his name is Stelios Kouloglou, was repeatedly hacked by the company that they were supposed by NSO group, by Pegasus as they were investigating.

And I met Stelios Kouloglou and I have to say like I met many politicians in my work and he's one of the most friendly and honest and committed politicians. I was very much impressed by him and he was very interested in really coming to the bottom of this and understanding what kind of risk it poses.

And to think that, actually as we were talking, somebody was recording our conversation and my question as a European citizen is what should I do about it? I should file a

lawsuit against Stelios Kouloglou because his phone may have recorded our conversation against my consent. Of course that would be extremely unfair because he's a victim in this story. He's not a perpetrator.

maybe I should go to the German authorities but as a German citizen but the German authorities actually have decided that it will be Israel that will be in charge of protecting the security of Germans and I will get - I'll give you a little bit more detail on this point because this is a big claim that I'm just saying and I need to prove it and I will. ,

so I guess the only thing I could do is talk to the press. And here I am talking to you and telling you about my meetings with Stelios Kouloglou and how he was hacked by Pegasus.

And now I'll say what they did, what the PGA committee found.

First of all, they announced that this is technology that was tested on Palestinians, that Israel is the only country in the world that is selling this technology for money, and that they recommend implementing extremely strong regulation to prevent the use of this technology against European citizens or by European law enforcement.

They also pointed out that because you can write on somebody else's phone and generate fake evidence, this is not something that you can use for law enforcement. This is really a tool of oppression, not a tool of law enforcement.

So these were their recommendations.

France and Germany vetoed those recommendations and said that for national security reasons they still want to get to use this Pegasus.

But there is a very interesting part of the report in which the PEGA committee explains how Germany obtained Pegasus because the BKA, the German criminal police, spoke with NSO group and told them your tool is too powerful. If a judge gives an order to surveil a certain person for a certain period of time, what you give us with Pegasus is too much because you're surveying all of the time and you're surveying other people. that you're surveying far beyond what the judge court order allows. so we cannot buy it from you. and then NSO group really pressed and they went "no you should really buy it from us. but this is how it works. We cannot change it."

and eventually NSO group offered to create a kind of firewall basically to create a restriction within the tool of the spyware so that if a German police officer is using spyware to obtain information from somebody by hacking their phone then there will be a program that will cut this information into parts and only part of it will be allowed -the police officer will be allowed to see- and the other will be separated. but the firewall itself is manufactured by an Israeli company, by NSO group.

So this means that the German police is now under the regulation of an Israeli private company and the Israeli government private company

in a court case which they were sued by Facebook, by Meta, over the fact that they hacked WhatsApp. they admitted in the court that actually they get all the information also to their servers in Israel. They have a copy of all the information. So they can see all the information and they can decide "well the police in Germany will only get part of it but we have everything". So this is the level of law enforcement.

And indeed because Pegasus is so dangerous and so powerful,

there were two journalists in Berlin who are actually Russian journalists but opponents of Putin, of the Russian regime, and they escaped to Berlin and they were targeted with Pegasus.

and so the German authorities, Dobrindt, the minister of the interior of Germany, thought that Germany needs better protection from cyber attacks and he goes to Israel to sign an agreement. so you can see the absurdity of this situation -well it's more than absurd- I think it's criminal and I want to point out that he went to Israel to sign the deal. normally he would have a meeting with his counterpart in Israel. Who is the minister in charge of the police in Israel? Itamar Ben-Gvir. he wisely thought that it would be a very bad idea for him to have a photo opportunity with Ben-Gvir. So instead he shook the hand of the war criminal Ben Netanyahu who is sought by an arrest warrant by the international criminal court and as the person in charge of the German police he shook his hand of this criminal and fugitive and went back to Germany to announce that Germany now has a security cooperation with Israel.

ZR

so I hope that now maybe our viewers can see in what way this is something that endangers all of us. Dr. Hever, author and journalist, thank you so much for your time today. I personally learned a lot of facts even though I'm viewing the independent media that I didn't know before. So I'm pretty sure that our viewers gained that same perspective. Thank you again for your time and I'll have you back soon.

SH

Thanks. Goodbye.

Dr. Shir Hever is an independent economic researcher and journalist. He writes articles and research for various publications and gives lectures in political and academic settings. He is the author of *The Privatisation of Israeli Security* (Pluto Press, 2017) and *The Political Economy of Israel's Occupation* (Pluto Press, 2010).

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