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QI Panel:

Americans Eventually Rejected the GWOT. Will Israelis Reject Their War on Gaza?

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Annelle Sheline 0:00

Good morning. Thank you all so much for being here. I think there's still some people joining us, but I'm given that we just have an hour and a complicated topic, I'm going to go ahead so my name is anal sheline. I'm a research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible statecraft, which is a DC based think tank that pushes for a less militaristic US foreign policy. I have the honor this morning of being joined by Asli Bali who is a professor at Yale Law and a non resident Fellow at the Quincy Institute. I won't go into her to any of the panelists, very impressive bios beyond just a quick note, but please feel free to read them on the webinar site. We also have Ori Goldberg, who holds a PhD in Middle Eastern history, specializing in revolutionary Iranian Shia, thought, the author of two books, Ori is joining us from Israel, and we have Peter Beinart, who contributes frequently to the New York Times, is editor at large of Jewish currents, and writes the Beinart notebook on substack.com and it is a great honor for me to have the three of you here today.

And before I launch into the first questions, just a little bit about the premise of the webinar, as I was saying to the panelists, before we got started, there was a fair amount of pushback in this parallel drawing parallels between How the US responded to 911 and how Israel is still in the process of responding to October 7. There were many people who worried that by comparing them, it would somehow especially given that this is largely I am American, and the Quincy Institute is an American institution that for a largely American audience, the it would somehow justify the the genocidal reaction of the Israeli government. And one key figure I wanted to highlight there was the ways that the US military tried to reduce civilian casualties, the figure they provide, for example, the US occupation of Afghanistan was only 8% of casualties there were civilians. In contrast to the recent figure from the IDF, which is that 83% of casualties in Gaza are civilians. So thereby, to to draw parallels between these two is to undermine or ignore the ways that Israel is very much seeking to eradicate the population of Palestinians in Gaza. However, at the same time, I feel strongly that as Americans, we have never fully grappled with what it was that our country did after 911 and the scale of the destruction of the war on terror, even almost a quarter a century, a quarter of a century since 911. I think unfortunately, it is receding into the background, and I fear that we as a country will never fully grapple with what it was that we did and won't be held accountable.

So those are my thoughts on drawing the parallels, but I want to hear from our esteemed panelists. So the first question is for Ori, but I'm going to ask all three of you this question, which

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is the To what extent is it useful to compare how the US reacted to 911 and how Israel reacted to 10 seven. Is this a parallel that could that you consider worth drawing, or do you think it distorts our understanding? First to Ori.

Ori Goldberg 4:31

Well, I'll be the lifelong academic that I am, and answer annoyingly yes and no. It's worth drawing the parallel because like 911 710 was a tipping point. It was a shock. It was a moment where everything sort of flipped, and things were not the same after it happened. But unlike 911 710 is also. The culmination of a story that had been, had been told, had been realized, had been happening for decades and decades here, and also the flip that occurred in Israel on 710 has more to do with I guess I'd best call it changing places between our collective ID and our collective super ego, because the fantasy of ridding ourselves of Palestinian presence, and it's not the same as killing all the Palestinians, but of Being here alone, of not having our normalcy, quote, unquote, challenged. I think that is perhaps the broadest, or one of the broadest, elements of consensus that bind Israeli society, this notion that our ideal existence has us here without any rivals, and 710 came at a moment when, probably, as a collective, Jewish Israelis were as close as they had ever come to fulfilling that fantasy, because there was normalization with Saudi Arabia on the line, because there was a sense that Netanyahu, after decades of strenuous work and Israeli society that had voted him in time and time again, also expanded real effort there, but after decades of work, we had finally sold the world on the notion that Israel's occupation was proof of normalcy, that all was well, that we were capable of handling it, and that The Palestinians had two choices, either know their proper place in the great scheme of things, which was either away from here or with their necks under our boots.

And that meant that, you know, it was actually going to happen. We were actually going to see our lifelong dream realized. And 710 came and shattered that notion completely, and it came almost as that dream was about to come true. And in that sense, it's different from 911 because 911 was, you know, a blow to the heart of Western civilization, or whatever we'll be talking about Islam later on. But I don't think all of that was so organically interwoven into the American collective psyche. You know, it was a challenge, a challenge issued. There was a failure. It was a threat that needed to be answered, but it wasn't so it didn't happen in a place that was so deep. It didn't challenge a conviction that was so profoundly held, and it didn't come in that precise moment in time where it seemed like something along the lines of 710, would never, ever come again, because that was where most Israelis were, even if they didn't support Netanyahu and if they didn't like the occupation, the notion that this was about to be normalized, this was about to go away. This was about to be handled, if you will, was a very, very powerful one. S

So I think in terms of just you know the shock, the seismic shock of an event that unsettles pretty much every element of the power dynamic and power fabric that you had in existence regarding your sense of safety, stability, the future, immediate challenges, immediate existential challenges. In that sense, I think it's useful, but I do think it's different, because the Hamas attack on the morning of October 7, 2023 was directly aimed at a narrative that had been in

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existence for decades. It was meant to unsettle it. It was meant to disturb it, and it succeeded. And I also think that Israel's rage, Israel's inability to listen to or or to register any other kind of narrative, any chance at changing one's mind even let's be as cynical and blunt as calling it Israel's inability, Israel's refusal to place an expiration date on its operational plan. I think that had a lot to do with how close to home 710 hit in that respect. And there it's it's vastly different from 9/11

Annelle Sheline 9:38

Thank you, Ori, same question to Asli, to what extent is it useful to draw parallels between how the US reacted to 911 and how Israel is continues to react to 10 seven? And to what extent do you think it is not useful or distorting?

Asli Bali 9:57

So the parallel is an interesting one. And as you. So it was a parallel that was drawn almost immediately by Joe Biden as president on October 8 or ninth. And the idea was this thing that has happened on the seventh of October is X number of 911 for the Israeli public in terms of casualties. So what if we consider the parallel a little differently, just as a starting point, and asked how many 10s of 1000s of nine elevens had the Palestinian population of Gaza now experienced? And you know, to kind of visualize that, particularly as the destruction of Gaza City is being live streamed, imagine not two towers, but literally every high rise building in Manhattan being destroyed systematically, without any possibility of air defense or response of any kind, and the population of Manhattan being trapped in Manhattan with no egress but being told to move from Central Park to the Financial District to Harlem back to Central Park back to The financial district with no vehicles, no fuel, no electricity, no food, no water, no shelter, no infrastructure of any kind, rampant disease and famine, literally, on the heels of 10s of 1000s times the number, the casualty numbers. That would be a parallel that we don't hear at any point.

And so the thing I want to underscore just as the starting point is that the 911 post, 911 post, October 7 parallel, is conceived from the perspective of the perpetrator states, and is conceived in terms of harm to the US, harm to Israel, responses of the US, response of Israel. And what's completely erased from this which itself is a default background, racist, Islamophobic, anti Palestinian in this context, understanding is the experiences of those who are most directly impacted by this post event context. So just to push back for a moment on even the opening of the 8% or 10% civilian casualty rates that were alleged by the United States. Again, Gaza gives us a lens through which to understand the difference between those directly killed, which, again, as you rightly point out in the Israeli military's own calculus, is 83% and those indirectly killed as a consequence of the destruction of the infrastructure, the basic requirements for human subsistence. And in the case of the US response post 911 that cuts a swath from Afghanistan to Iraq, as you note in the framing introduction for our conversation today, but also travels from Pakistan to Yemen to Somalia to Syria, to Libya and so on. And accounts for hundreds of

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1000s, if not millions, of civilians killed as a consequence of US response. And the reason that the numbers are fuzzy like that, hundreds of 1000s, if not millions.

You can look to the cost of war project or others for projections of the numbers of civilians killed, is that we didn't bother actually keeping tallies of civilian death. And so that estimate provided from the military is not based on some statistical, you know, headcount keeping or important. It's just a projection based on their own understanding of their targeting choices. Now it still matters in the very way that you said. What it says is the US military claim to itself that its targeting was not deliberately of civilians, and that the tactics that they used were not designed specifically to kill civilians. And the reason that we now have claims that Israel is committing a genocide, not only by, you know, the United Nations human rights organizations, including Israeli human rights organizations like B'Tselem, but also by the preeminent associations of scholars of genocide, by international lawyers the world over, claims brought before the International Court of justice, indeed, cases being considered even against individual statesmen and architects of Israel's current military strategy in the International Criminal Court as a consequence of their for just one example, deliberate use of starvation as a means of war, which is exclusively targeted, ultimately, at civilians. All of this is going on in the backdrop.

And so as a consequence, we can see that the Israeli military strategy has not been to even claim to itself that it is not targeting civilians. And that is a distinction. So the 8% 10% number, the distinction there is the story the military tells itself, not the reality on the ground or the experience of populations at the receiving end, because both states didn't bother to actually keep any kind of record of the civilian lives destroyed. Another, of course, distinction is the live streaming, as you say, and here you do have a parallel between 911 and October 7, because the images that are seared in the minds of Americans are those of the towers coming down so. There is no iconic image of the death and destruction wrought by the United States, and continuing to be wrought, by the way, by the United States at this time as a result of the quarter century since that date. If there were an iconic image, it would be Abu Ghraib, and that would be the, you know, one of the rare parallels where photographic images of American barbarity became widely circulated globally and produced a measure of revulsion. And it is striking that despite the very clear photographic and video record of Israeli conduct, the same kinds of revulsion do not appear to be expressed by at least a substantial proportion of the Israeli population. So that is a worrying contrast.

But I just wanted to start by saying, as we approach the second anniversary of this genocidal onslaught against Gaza, we need to dispense with comparisons that began from the perspective of the perpetrator, and think about the comparison from the perspective of those at the receiving end. And so the real parallel to my mind relates to two countries that fight asymmetric wars in which they have vastly superior power, punching down against adversaries that can pose no meaningful existential threat to either visiting ruin and death on civilian populations, and in both cases, doing so against civilians in majority Muslim territories, which itself is relevant to the way in which the death that is occasioned reverberates in the rest of the world and registers as meaningful or not significant, or not worth noting, or not subject to tallies or not amongst particularly those in the West and so called Western democracies, and here

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another parallel, at least, to the war on terror that's worth noting is that Benjamin Netanyahu, currently the Prime Minister of Israel, already in the 1990s was actually the ideological architect of the idea of civilizational war, or a war on terror, having written a book fighting terrorism in 1995 that argued that democracies which should be read in the book, and in his telling of it, as the West and Israel are in a civilizational battle as far back as 1995 well before September 11, against Islamic fundamentalist terrorism that unites them as a single front against A common enemy, an enemy that's threat cannot be measured in terms of its military power, but rather in terms of ideas and has to be battled as such. And therefore, there is a sort of license for any quantity of violence to be inflicted in the name of destroying this adversary that purportedly engenders a kind of ideational threat to the premises of Western democracy and civilizational sort of conception of self.

So these are some parallels that I think are very clearly present between 911 and October 7. I think there are serious differences. Ori has spoken to them in the Israeli context, beyond what you describe as a thirst for revenge in the description of the framing of this webinar, there is also a long standing desire for territorial expansion, annexation and removal of population, not necessarily eradication of population, but removal of population, which has been described as the demographic challenge in the Israeli context, which is the challenge of having millions of Palestinians on a territory that Israel seeks to claim for itself, alone and for the for a as a Jewish nation and a Jewish democracy, and that demographic challenge, that idea of understanding Palestinians as a problem to be solved or removed, rather than community with which Israel must ultimately Have reconciliation and a future has long enjoyed enduring majorities in Israel. That is to say, while genocide may not enjoy majority support, question mark, the idea of understanding Palestinians as a demographic challenge to be resolved has a pre history of being a majority position in Israel, and as a result, there is no and this very much echoes Ori's point, there was no comparable long standing, constitutive strategic interest that the US public had been socialized to embrace, that animated that war on terror. It was simply launched in a conjuncture of a pre existing ideological framework, one of the architects of which was Benjamin Netanyahu, a Unipolar Moment and a set of American elite decision makers that understood the crisis that defied an American presumption of invincibility as an opportunity to achieve a series of desiderata, whether it be in Iraq or by establishing military bases the world over, or by having an open ended authorization for military force or for concentrating power In the executive or for introducing a national security constitution that put us on a permanent emergency footing.

So they had a lot of goals that they were able to pursue through 911 but eventually, the underlying public support that came from the puncturing of the sense of invincibility declined as a public weary of far flung wars with low stakes that sapped us treasure and us. Demanding so perhaps, and I'll end here, what's common to the two countries that is present in your framing is that the only thing that can stop Israel, beginning from the perspective of the perpetrator state, and asking what might stop, given that it is waging these this onslaught against an perceived adversary that at no time is able to bring an end to the conflict through its own victory. There's no military against which Israel has ranged its forces. What could stop Israel is not military defeat as a consequence, but rather some kind of conception of the harm that they do to themselves, indirectly, as a consequence of the atrocities they are committing. And that was the

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same logic and calculus for the US, not the direct cost of these atrocities for their victims, not the direct cost for the hundreds of 1000s and millions of lives lost at the receiving end of US military onslaughts, but rather the indirect sense that Americans and Israelis are somehow harmed by The harm they cause to others.

Annelle Sheline 21:20

Thank you so much. Asli. I really appreciate that. And in particular, that your point that in the end, the shift was not derived from any sort of reckoning with the the horrors the US had wrought. And similarly, for Israel, that it's more about how this is hurting the United States or Israel, not what their actions are doing. So final question or final, finally, turning to Peter, same question, and again, thank you so much for that response. But I will to try and get to all the questions. We'll try and keep responses a bit more concise.

Peter Beinart 21:40

So just, I just add one difference is that, you know, Gaza was under Israeli occupation on October 6, obviously Afghanistan, and to a greater degree, Iraq were, you know, were influenced by American imperial power, particularly Iraq, which was under US sanctions. So it wasn't as if the US didn't have wasn't wielding power over those territories. And it wasn't as if the Iraqis weren't suffering. They were suffering tremendously as a result of US sanctions. But those territories were not actually under US military occupation. Where, whereas, even though Israel had withdrawn its soldiers and settlers from Gaza in 2005 it had maintained its military occupation by controlling the airspace, the coastline, most of the land borders and even the population registry. So I think again, it's just important to say this, because the analogy you know, or you know, makes it imagines that Israel was attacked by a sovereign country. It wasn't attacked by a sovereign country. Was attacked by a territory. It was under its own it was occupy, occupation.

And I think that, you know, some other differences are that while both of these responses had huge amounts of kind of discourse of revenge, and there was while, as I think Ori rightly said, in Israel, this the revenge was fueled with, often a kind of a an idea of expulsion there was in the US, this kind of, this strange combination of, kind of hyper nationalist revenge sentiment, but also a discourse that was layered on it of liberation. You know that the US was going to liberate the peoples of Afghanistan and then Iraq from their oppressive rulers. And it was, you know, one we could debate how seriously we want to take that, you know, but in some ways, and it was always very, very much profoundly at odds with the kind of often racist, Islamophobic kind of language that was part of it.

And I think part of one way of understanding Trump was that he, you know, and what happened to the Republican Party after George W Bush is they just kind of, they very aggressively rejected this veneer and made it suggest, and suggested that the problem was the veneer right of any kind of universalistic language and and move to just embrace a fully, kind of nakedly Islamophobic discourse, Whereas George W Bush was kind of holding the two in these strange

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kind of holding the two in some ways together. I also think that the American America felt a tremendous sense of being victimized by October 7, but it didn't come up on top of the nearly as powerful a pre existing victimhood narrative as existed with Jewish Israelis and and so I think that this, this notion of October 7. You know, October 7 was immediately framed within a kind of historical lineage of Jewish victimization, the largest number of Jews killed since the Holocaust, of pogrom, which I don't think really, I mean, Americans might have talked about Pearl Harbor, but I don't think we had nearly the same kind of discourse of victimhood, which I think also then plays into the fact that I don't think there's quite there's not exactly an analogy in the post 911 era to the way in which opposition to Israel's assault on Gaza is seen for. Through the lens of anti semitism, right? That there, there was opposition around the world. Americans may have described that as kind of, Oh, those are just, this is these people hate America, but it didn't have nearly the force.

I think that that the anti semitism discourse has had, because it plays into this pre existing victimhood narrative, and now that anti semitism discourse is kind of, you know, wreaking havoc in a lot of ways, in terms of kind of American with American institutions. But I do think that they're kind of one basic similarity is a kind of refusal by political elites to think about these, this, these attacks in terms of cause and effect, to basically think about them as having something to do with what Israel was doing to Palestinians and what America was doing abroad, right? As opposed to basically a narrative of the kind of the pure evil of the attackers against a fundamentally innocent state, a fundamentally innocent population and and that refusal to reckon with and the refusal to be able to make a distinction between, between the refusal to be able to hold the reality that you can condemn attacks on civilians and think that they are war crimes and morally wrong, while also being able to have a conversation about the context in which they happen, so that they So the default doesn't just become, well, these are barbarian savages who have a bloodlust, and they're, you know, we there, of course, lays the groundwork for for massive, massive destruction. I think is common to both countries.

And I think it's it is that refusal to recognize the the kind of the the context and the interplay of these of violence that lays the groundwork for for the catastrophic violence that that follows, but also just means that, strategically, you end up failing right, because you you don't actually have a good diagnosis of the situation, right? So, you know, the United States is going to destroy the Taliban, right, and it's going to destroy resistance in Iraq without recognizing that actually, it's not going to be able to do that right? Because it's dealing with more fundamental problems of a population that's not that doesn't want to be under kind of Neo colonial control, and is not going to respond well, when you basically, even when you put, you know, huge numbers of US troops on the ground and on similarly, that you're not going to be able to destroy Hamas and you're going to exacerbate the deeper problem, which is that Palestinians don't want to be subjected to brutal Israeli control and domination. So I think those are some similarities.

Annelle Sheline 27:33

Thank you so much, Peter for the next question, thinking about the role of racism and specifically Islamophobia in driving the reactions. And for this, Asli, I hope that you could go first.

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And in particular, I was thinking about what you said. And for me, I mean, I remember when 911 happened, I was in high school, and the immediate Islamophobia even before it was clear. You know, it could have been another Timothy McVeigh, like we didn't know yet what, who had conducted the attacks, and yet, immediately the reaction was Islamophobic. And so I'm curious in particular about the ways that kind of the is the Israel Palestine conflict had already sort of primed Americans with Islamophobia. But welcome your thoughts on that in general, yeah, a couple of things.

Asli Bali 28:33

First, I'll be more concise. I promise that. By the way, the Oklahoma City bombing by Timothy McVeigh also triggered mass Islamophobia and resulted in a statute under the Clinton administration against terrorism that was focused entirely on foreign terrorist organizations, and is the framework that we now live with today, and in many instances, is continues to be used in ways that are extremely harmful in framing Muslims, notwithstanding the fact that actually it was not at all a foreign actor or somebody who, you know, identified in any way with Islam That was responsible. So even Oklahoma City, even the Timothy McVeigh instance, was an instance of Islamophobic response. I'm going to say something about Islamophobia in a minute, but I want to you know, borrow from Peter's excellent summary of some of the ways in which October 7 was framed as and here I'm quoting him, barbarian savages with a Bloodlust that's a racial framing of individuals that's available because of pre existing habits of mind, essentially, in which it's possible to believe almost anything, babies in ovens, you know, grotesque forms of sexual violence, etc, that Muslims are capable of.

And, by contrast, almost impossible to believe that those who are from the west could ever be understood as barbaric in any way, in the ways in which they visit violence and punishment on Muslim communities that represent a threat, by virtue of this kind of visceral belief about the kinds of violence that they might harbor, that idea, that habit of mind. Mind is why the word phobia is in Islamophobia, and actually it is a psychologizing of the Western lens on Muslims, which is more kind of, let's just say, again, viscerally available to Europeans. It dates back to long standing beliefs in Europe from the you know, enlightenment forward, about the barbaric and authoritarian quality of Muslim communities writ large, and the threat that they represented at the borders of Europe. So it's it's a register that wasn't necessarily intuitively available to Americans, except now, as you pointed out, anelle, post Israel-Palestine conflict, and more specifically, post 67 when the framings of Palestinians themselves as terrorists began to find their way into American discourse and American law.

So there's a great white paper by Daryl Lee for the Center for Constitutional Rights that tracks the presence of Palestine and Palestinians in the Congressional Record and in the language of every statute that references terrorism in the United States dating back to the 1960s forward, so that frame becomes available and becomes one that Americans identify with, largely through the lens of understanding themselves as aligned, precisely as Benjamin Netanyahu also suggested in his 1995 book with Israel in a common war against an enemy identified with Cultural and civilizational characteristics that rendered them sort of frightening and produced a

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phobia. Now I think Islamophobia is the wrong way, actually to describe it is the it emerges out of this history that I just described. But in fact, I think anti Muslim racism is the right way, because what it draws your attention to is the racial dehumanization that is a necessary condition for the contempt to civilian life that attends to these conflicts.

So the contrast here with Ukraine is the one that much of the world draws, which is Ukrainian civilians with names and faces and families and stories are identified as victims that anyone and this and the expectation is that this narrative would be valid the globe over right? Anybody can identify with these people as human beings at the receiving end of unbelievable, indescribable violence, and understand Russian action as atrocity. By contrast, even in contrast to what we've seen in Afghanistan and Iraq the Savior accounts of liberation, right? The claim that these are benighted people, particularly women, that need to be saved from a civilization and culture that victimizes them, and authoritarian governments that are, you know, cruel. We don't even have that script available for Gaza. Gaza, Gazans, Palestinian civilians in Gaza are basically the distinctions amongst them, alighted they're described in collective, numerical and statistical terms. Even the headscarved women of Gaza aren't worthy racially of being saved, unlike Afghan women and Iraqi women, the racial dehumanization is so thorough of the Palestinian population of Gaza that we simply speak in these collectivities, and it's possible in the in the midst of those collectivities to say there are no civilians in Gaza.

And that is a phrase that will be familiar to anybody who has followed the debates on the Israeli side around the suffering or lack thereof, the famine or lack thereof, the bombings and their toll on civilians or lack thereof in Gaza. What? What makes this possible is the capacity to essentially render a population effectively subhuman, not worthy of the same kinds of considerations. So that one is left wondering from a human rights register, is it that Palestinians aren't human when we describe them in these terms, or is it that some humans are are not entitled to rights, and these kinds of questions can only even emerge in a context of deep, profound racial dehumanization, which I think is the nature of the anti Muslim racism that has framed Palestinians today.

Annelle Sheline 33:56

Thank you so much, Asli, and I was going to post on Twitter the link to that excellent piece by Darrell Lee. But now turning to Peter, a similar question, but perhaps focusing a bit more on Israel, though, also, I leave it open to you if you'd rather talk more about the American perspective, but to the extent, do you think racism is driving the sort of ongoing popularity of the Israeli military's reaction in Gaza. How, kind of how would you characterize that Islamophobia, racism, Jewish supremacy, something else?

Peter Beinart 34:37

I mean, Ori, Ori is better positioned to answer this than me. But my my senses, as someone who's not in Israel, is that, you know, as I was saying, Jewish supremacy is simply, is simply the kind of the water that that the you know, that it's that people swim in. It's basically

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overwhelmingly accepted. I mean, you have people like. Like for a politician on the center left, like, quote, unquote, Yair Lapid has said that the notion of state for all its citizens is, for him, an epithet, right? So this is very, very broad. This is a very so Israelis are very Jewish. Israelis are very, very fiercely deep, divided about the figure of Benjamin Netanyahu, about the role of religion in state. And I think there is, again, Ori could correct me, I think there is a debate to some degree about management of and if you wanted to be crude about it, you could say that there's a debate between apartheid and genocide, right, that the kind of left wing position is, let's manage this apartheid system, which I think was the Biden position too, whereas people on the right, and you know, people on the right, have said, no, no, we can basically destroy this population. Get rid of it, and we won't even really have to worry about so much of a so much of an apartheid system, because we'll be in the situation that America is now in with Native Americans, where you don't even have to have really, you know, where you don't have to worry about it so much. I think that about say something about the United States.

I think what you see on the right today is a really weird and disturbing kind of reckoning with how to turn against Israel and be against what Israel's doing, while maintaining a framework of anti Muslim racism. So if you look at and it it's if it leads people to oppose us giving weapons that's good, but it also leads them in some very, very disturbing direction. So if you watch Tucker Carlson's interviews right, with a series of Palestinian Christians, now, to his credit, he's giving them a platform, right? These are not these people who's giving a platform. Are not themselves anti Muslim bigots, right? They're just Christians. Are talking about the things that all Palestinians go through, right? And and I, but the way Carlson talks about, talk to talk to them is, I can't believe that Jews are doing this to Christians, right? So he is kind of trying to maintain, he's maintaining the anti Muslim racist framework, while still trying to express outrage to degree this is happening in Christians. And then he frames it. He He's continuing. He just changing the civilizational framework, right? So instead of it being Jews and Christians against Muslims, it's now basically, it's now basically Jews against Christians, right? And so this is a way in which I think that the the racist framework framing can play itself out even when it's turned in a somewhat anti Israel direction.

Annelle Sheline 37:26

Thank you. I And that gets to what Asli was saying about kind of, you know, oh my gosh, Jews are doing this to Christians. It's sort of about, how is it hurting those who thought this was supposed to be helping? Or, you know, it's all sort of framed as that, as opposed to just grappling with the the the horrors of what is being done. The majority of the population, which are Muslim. So Ori to you for your perspective in you know, speaking as an Israeli?

Ori Goldberg 38:00

To follow up and what Peter just said, I think I have two main points. One is that this whole notion of Islamophobia or anti Muslim racism, in a way, I think, as far as Israelis are concerned, it's related to the way in which Israelis have fully internalized some of the basic tenets of global anti semitism, and perhaps the most important one is that Israelis and Jews stand alone, that

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Jews are a singularity and that Israelis are a singularity, that our uniqueness provides us with impunity and allows us to be the Ultimate aggressors, but it also makes us perennial victims, and perhaps more important than anything, it ensures that none of the rules apply to us. Now you want to call it Islamophobia. You want this to be a rant against Muslims or whatever? Sure you want this to be anti Muslim racism. That works just fine. It works on migrant laborers from Eritrea, just as much as it does on Palestinians.

But I think at heart, this is much broader, or perhaps much deeper. Israelis don't want to be a part of anything. They don't want to be. I mean, they'll talk about fighting the good fight. I mean, the rituals of mourning for Charlie Kirk in Israel were perhaps second only to the ones that are taking place in the United States. So they're happy to adopt the whole Judeo Christian culture that we're fighting for, I think. But it all sounds like lip service. It doesn't stick. Most Israelis I know don't see themselves as fighters for a Judeo Christian cause. Most Israelis want the world to understand that what is happening to us is happening to us alone, that we alone are capable of understanding the complexity. And the reason is exactly as Peter said, is. Is the profundity with which Jewish supremacy is just the basic the mother's milk that we all drink here, like that famous story about the two young fish swimming about and the older fish passing by and saying, Hey, kids, how's the water? And one of the younger fish turning to the other and saying, What's water? That's Jewish supremacy in Israel. It is just it's so basic, it's transparent, and it's ensuring Jewish supremacy. That is of tantamount importance. You know, that is the most important thing by far.

And we'll take whatever works to allow that to happen. We will kowtow to Trump and the MAGA movement and adopt an anti Islamic agenda, and because we're racists anyway, it all fits, you know, because our agenda is supremacist to begin with, it all fits, but it's not supremacist in a comparative way. It's not Islam is inferior and Judaism is superior. Ultimately, it's a solipsistic fantasy. We stand alone, except for us, nothing is real. I mean, look at the way Israel talks about what's happening in Gaza. This whole Israel is not responsible for a single death that occurs in Gaza, which is you can hear that in the rhetoric, but you can also see that in action, because no Israeli soldier has, for the past two years, being even investigated for any kind of wrongdoing that has to do with the death of civilians, not a single one. And I'm talking about an officer, the officer who was in charge of the execution of the Palestinian paramedics outside Rafa for example, these are not difficult cases, Israel has not done so because this is a tenet of faith. You know, this is a line that nobody crosses. You can't accuse us of this thing, and that is something that Israelis do actually fervently believe, which is why an argument with a great majority of Israelis, that includes Netanyahu acolytes, as much as fervent Yair Lapid fans, will amount to the same thing Israelis really do believe that Israel is not responsible for what is happening in Gaza. Israel is doing what it has to do.

And again, like Peter said, they might be peeved at Netanyahu with his mismanagement of the war, but they're saying exactly the same thing they're saying, let's get a deal. Let's bring the hostages back, as long as they're still hostages, and then we'll go back, or we won't go back, as long as we maintain supreme responsibility for regional security, for our own security. That's the only thing that matters. Look at the way Israel's been behaving in Iran, in Lebanon, in Syria, in

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Yemen, Israel doesn't necessarily want to accomplish anything. The illustrious 12 day war with Iran, I think, is proof positive of that Israel wants to demonstrate its new security doctrine that it can do whatever it wants to whomever it wants for as long as it wants, without any time, without paying any kind of price for it without bearing any kind of consequence. That is the important thing. Why? Because that underscores Israeli singularity. So it all works. Islamophobia works. Anti Islamic racism works. Anti Christian sentiments work. We just had an Israeli member of Knesset tweet today in the morning, that the British the Australians and the Canadians supported the Nazis once, and now they support them again. Israelis don't care. They don't care. Establishing supremacy is the only goal, not just the ultimate goal, but the only goal. And whatever we can use to do that, sign us up.

Annelle Sheline 43:46

So for the final question, the I wanted to turn to Peter first was kind of, do we see any way out of this. I mean, right now it's high level week for the UN General Assembly, as Ori just mentioned, the the recognition of of Palestine from from the UK, Canada and France. However, obviously that is not going to have any impact on ending the genocide or moving us out of this conflict. So if Peter, I would welcome your thoughts on, where do you think we go from here? Well, also, the original premise of this question was sort of that Americans, most Americans, rejected the war on terror. But I think as as our conversation has showed, we've not really come out of that. I mean, Laura Loomer tweeted last week that she rejected the premise of Muslim members of Congress. But as far as trying to move out of genocide, I would, I would welcome, first Peters and then your reactions as well, well.

Peter Beinart 44:58

I mean, I have seen things in the United States that give me hope, despite the fact that I don't know that, that the rational side of my brain thinks that this is likely, given that, given that for these there are profound cultural and political changes that are taking place in the United States, I think anyone who's paying attention notes can see those profound changes now can those changes. Even if those changes do turn into politics, into political change, they won't come nearly enough for the Palestinians for being who are starving to death and being killed, you know, continuously and will be for but it's also not, I don't know that they will manage to change it turn into political change, because we don't have a political system that that is very good at converting public opinion into policy, even under the best of circumstances. And I have no idea what the what American elections are going to be like in 2026 or 2028 and whether they're going to be, you know, whether they're remotely going to be going to give the OP, the OP the, you know, the opposition party, a chance to actually win.

But if, if they do, and the Democrats can win, I do think that the next Democratic president will be in a different place than Joe Biden, and I think it's even possible they will be closer to where Spain is than where France and Britain are, because public opinion is shifting so radically in the Democratic Party. And it's not just in the Democratic Party. I mean, if you the discourse in the Republican Party is different because it's less it's not as moralistic. But I mean, I watched this

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into this, this focus group that Charlie Kirk did with the leaders of turning point USA chapters talking about Israel. And when you you listen to that, you realize that a camp presidential candidate, or, for that matter, a Senate candidate who simply said something along the lines of, we don't have good health care at home. Israeli Jews have better health care than us. Why are we giving them \$4 billion that would be 90% support in the Democratic Party and probably 80% report in the Republican Party. So it's not actually just that. It's, it's a winning message in the Democratic Party. It has tremendous crossover appeal this kind of, I think, and and so I think there's the possibility, there's the possibility, again, because the Republican nativism, as racist as it is, is also leading it away from Christian Zionism in certain ways. And it's possible, because there's a movement that's emerging in the United States, which brings together lots of different people about basic human solidarity with Palestinians.

And I've seen it, and it's really taken my breath away. I went, I was asked to give a talk in Little Rock Arkansas. And I thought, Who cares about this issue in Little Rock Arkansas, and I went to a church which was completely filled with with white people, with black people, with Jews and Palestinians in Little Rock who had forged real, genuine connections and were protesting constantly, you know, and, and, and it's just remarkable. And I made me realize, you know, how out of touch democratic political leaders are, and so much and so many people in the media are with a movement that is really a genuine grassroots movement in which people are forging really strong connections with one another, and in the face of fascism and ethnonationalism violence, to see people this extremely diverse movements in which people are coming to know one another, built around the Basic idea of human solidarity, to me, is a source of hope in what obviously, are these extremely grim times.

Annelle Sheline 48:28

Thank you, Peter for the note of optimism. I want the other two panelists to have a chance to respond to that as well, but I also wanted to get to some of the questions there was so Ori, I was going to turn to you next, and if you could also there was a question about the state of civil society in Israel today, and whether there's a possibility there for any hope.

Ori Goldberg 48:54

I'm afraid the answer, my answer to both questions, is no. I mean the civil society in Israel today, but civil society accepts the basic premise that the genocide is inevitable, even if it is bad, even if it is mismanaged. This is what we have to do. There really is no other solution. You look at parliamentary opposition in Israel, they accept this basic premise, as long as this, as this basic premise, is accepted, the Netanyahu government is validated. There's a good chance he wins next election, be it a snap election or a regularly held election, and if that happens, then there's no reason to see any change, even if Israel is forced to stop fighting activists against the genocide, against the war, we are here in Israel, but we are a very, very small minority, and most of us are not even being threatened. Most of us are considered insane.

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So you know, no need to waste time as far as what will bring, what will make Israelis snap out of it, only firm action from the outside. I don't think Israelis have the capacity or the interest in doing so right now, especially since it's a self sustaining and actually self expanding vicious circle. Because once you get into this, this mode, once you make the choice for death, you know, for solipsism, everything just proves your point, the recognition of a Palestinian state, it proves the point that Netanyahu has been making repeatedly over the last few weeks, that this is about anti semitism as old as the world, as the world itself, which means that it's not about what Israel does. It doesn't matter what we do, they're going to hate us and revile us anyway.

And if that's the case, why shouldn't we do what we all know in our heart of hearts that we have to do? And that is a sentiment that echoes in Israeli Jewish society, I'm afraid. So as long as that happens, this will perpetuate itself. I doubt Israelis again, not just lack the capacity, but lack the interest. They don't want to. They're resigned to their fate, maybe years long, boycott like South Africa, perhaps. But we're not talking about that. We're talking about something that has to happen now. It won't happen, I'm afraid, because Israelis will help it along.

Annelle Sheline 51:17

Thanks. Ori, less less optimistic, though perhaps we will start to see that action from the outside. And as others have noted, no gene state has ever changed course without significant action from from outside. So finally, Asla, for your perspective, and I mean, it would be a big question to also think about moving forward for the United States, as we said, kind of the the we have not had to grapple with, the the horrors that we engage, that we committed in the aftermath of 911 and as you said, continue to commit so it's it's where, how moving forward for both the United States and Israel.

Asli Bali 52:07

Yeah. I mean, we're striking boats of the Caribbean Sea at this moment, and that is actually a continuation of the authorization to use military force from way back when, at least when defined in the ways that the government chooses to which is, everything is war. Everyone is an enemy. Anything can be struck. So it's a kind of mega version, if you want, of one aspect of ore's point around Israel's perspective on itself regionally, that it can strike anyone, anywhere from Qatar to Tehran to Damascus to Beirut, to any part of the Palestinian territories under its control. I mean, one of the things I think is striking is the super Sparta idea that Netanyahu now conveys to his own population, which really exemplifies both the Jewish supremacism that Peter described and Ori described, and also this idea of solipsism, and the challenge with it, and the danger of it is almost nothing can undercut it in the sense that external pressure simply is self validating, right? It's that it means we really are that alone, right? External actors are pressuring us, so we must act for ourselves. And the worry of widespread anti-semitism is just evidence that the world is against us.

And so the kinds of things that Peter is describing as part one of the pathways, there are some very optimistic and positive pathways in the United States that suggest that there are Jewish

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Americans coming together with Palestinian Americans or Muslim Americans or Christian Americans in solidarity, human solidarity with Palestinians. I think that's right. But there's also the Tucker Carlson path that he described, which is a kind of, you know, anti semitism, ironically, from amongst the anti anti semitism warriors, if you want. So on the one hand, anti semitism has been instrumentalized and weaponized in the United States achieve a set of cultural projects against diversity, you know, against higher education and autonomy at universities, etc. But at the same time, the Crusaders against anti semitism that are waging that cultural war are themselves anti Semites, who also are inscribing a series of beliefs, including the kind that are getting an airing on Tucker Carlson's show, and the worry that there will be widespread in the West, in Europe and in the United States, anti semitic backlash against both the degree to which the governments of the United States and Europe have supported Israel's war and generally speaking, characterizations of Israelis and that this will affect Jewish communities within these territories is very real, but at the same Time, again, just confirming of the Israeli narrative about itself in this moment.

And so these are dynamics that, unfortunately, instead of disrupting, as you might expect in another context, let's say a Rwandan Genocide disrupted by external pressure, they actually made double cause the government to double down and the remainder population to double down. Now I say remainder population in Israel because Israel. Is also amongst the countries that have the largest proportion amongst their nationals of dual nationals, and you see people voting with their feet and leaving, perhaps not in huge numbers at the moment, but still dual nationals relying increasingly on that second passport, who are not necessarily critics of the supremacist mindset, but skeptics of the future for Israel, given the path that has been chosen, and as a result, you may end up with an Israeli public that is even further right.

So you ask a question about Israeli civil society as a snapshot today, but a more telling question is what Israeli society may be projected to look like five years from now, with an accomplished genocide behind it, and that Israeli public will be one that's even more I would worry, susceptible to both the supremacist framings and the solipsism, and less even amenable to external pressure. So on the one hand, boycott divestment sanctions, the idea that there is a nonviolent means of expressing revulsion at current Israeli policies, I think is going to gain traction, and at the same time, their the capacity, both because it's a lingering project and because it has the peculiar character, because of the way that the Israeli government is presenting itself, of endorsing the Israeli government's own argument for why it is engaging in this kind of exterminationist violence, that Difficulty is almost impossible to imagine. How we get out of it in the near term, having said that, absent a world in which Israel successfully exterminates not just Palestinians in Gaza, but also Palestinians in the West Bank and the Palestinian population that are citizens of Israel or successfully cleanses them to other territories, forcibly expelling them, absent that it remains simply true that the only medium to long term future is that of a binational state.

And the question is, what conceivable world is there in which this tiny set of populations together on that territory can imagine post conflict reconciliation after this degree of genocide has been visited by one on the other. And it's worth noting, Israel, of course, is a post genocide

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society in the sense that it was founded in the ashes of the Holocaust and justified by virtue of the Holocaust. But the victims of genocide in Israel, that are Jewish, were victims elsewhere, on a different territory of other actors. And so the idea that you'll have two post genocidal communities, but one which will be the survivors of a genocide perpetrated by the other, makes that path of reconciliation look all that more difficult when to begin with, at the founding of the state, when Palestinians bore no responsibility for the genocide that Jews were fleeing from Israel, they were nonetheless punished and made to pay a price by those arriving Jewish immigrants to the state.

Annelle Sheline 57:47

Thank you, Asli, we uh, before the audience joined also, you did make the point that other societies have managed to see their way past genocide. But as you said, these, these are very uniquely challenging circumstances. I sincerely appreciate the questions from the audience. I'm sorry we weren't able to get to more of them, but I hope that the fantastic comments from our panelists were illustrating in other ways. And again, many thanks to you all for your time and in hopes that somehow we will continue to see additional external pressure building in a way that would at least result in an end to genocide, if not a clear path towards out of conflict or towards reconciliation. So again, I just want to thank the three of you and appreciate everyone's time for joining us today. Thank you.