

**Lex Fridman Podcast #463 - Douglas Murray: Putin, Zelenskyy, Trump, Israel,
Netanyahu, Hamas & Gaza**

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Lex Fridman

The following is a conversation with Douglas Murray, author of the War in the West, the Madness of Crowds and his new book On Democracies and Death Cults. We talk about Russia and Ukraine and about Israel and Gaza. Douglas has very strong views on these topics, and he defends them brilliantly and fearlessly. As I always try to do for all topics, I will also talk to people who have different views from Douglas, including the next episode of this podcast. We live in an era of online discourse where grifters, drama farmers, liars, bots, sycophants, and sociopaths roam the vast beautiful dark land of the internet. It's hard to know who to trust. I believe no one is in possession of the entire truth, but some are more correct than others. Some are insightful and some are delusional. The problem is it's hard to tell which is which unless you use your mind with intellectual humility and with rigor. I recommend you listen to many sources who disagree with each other and tried to pick up wisdom from each. Also, I recommend you visit the places in question as Douglas has, as I have, or at least talk face-to-face with people who have spent most of their lives living there. Whether it's Israel, Palestine, Ukraine, or Russia. Let's try together to not be cogs in the machine of outrage, and instead to reach toward reason and compassion. There is no Hitler, Stalin, or Mao on the world stage today. Plus, there are thousands of nuclear weapons ready to fire. Human civilization hangs in the balance. The 21st century is a new geopolitical puzzle, all of us are tasked with solving. Let's not mess it up. This is the Lex Fridman podcast. To support it, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, dear friends, here's Douglas Murray. What have you understood about the war in Ukraine from your visits there? Just looking at the big picture of your understanding of the invasion of February 24th, 2022, and the war in the three years since?

Douglas Murray

I mean, several things has political angles, which are forever changing. But on the human level, as you know, if you visit troops, frontline troops, you have that admiration for people defending their country, defending their homes, defending their families. Struck by the way in which that is at a remove from the sort of political noise and the media noise and much more. It's very easy to get caught up in the to's and fro's of today's news, but that to my mind is that's the single thing that struck me most in my visits there. Is just the people I've met who are fighting for a cause, which at that level is unavoidable, undeniable.

Lex Fridman

So, the thing that struck you that's different from the media turmoil is just the reality of war?

Douglas Murray

Yeah, of course. I mean, people who have either lived under Russian occupation from invading armies and then come back out into the world, having been liberated as in late 2022. Or the people now organized most recently there in recent weeks, who were just getting on with their job as soldiers whilst the world was talking about them.

Lex Fridman

When were you there early on in this escalated war of '22?

Douglas Murray

Yes, first time was, I was with the Ukrainian Armed Forces when they retook Kherson, and I was back in recent weeks. And was there when the Trump-Zelensky blow up happened. In fact, I was in a Ukrainian dugout at the front lines when I was watching it.

Lex Fridman

How's the morale? How's the way the content of the conversations you've heard different from the two visits separated by, I guess, two years?

Douglas Murray

One level, I mean, nothing has changed much. It is not a total standoff because intermittently each side gains territory from the others. I mean, there'd been no very significant military gains by either side in the interim period.

Lex Fridman

I think my experience of the soldiers, the people of Ukraine early on in the war, there's a intense optimism about the outcomes of the war. There's a sense that they're going to win. And the definition of what win means was like, all the territory is going to be one back.

Douglas Murray

Yeah, I certainly on the front lines facing Crimea was became quite familiar with people who thought that the Ukrainians in late 2022 would even be able to get Crimea back. And that struck me even at the time, and I thought that that was an overreach.

Lex Fridman

And now, I think the people, the soldiers, at least in my experience when I visited the second time, are more exhausted. The morale, the dreams, the certainty of victory has maybe faded from the forefront of their minds.

Douglas Murray

Well, three years of war will tire out anyone.

Lex Fridman

What did you think of the blow up between Zelensky and Trump as you're sitting there in the dugout?

Douglas Murray

Well, it was a very disturbing place to watch it from, perhaps anywhere would've been. And obviously, it was a meeting that shouldn't have happened. It was far too early.

Lex Fridman

Why do you think so? There's not enough actual pathways to peace on the table?

Douglas Murray

Well, I think the mineral deal, I mean, I love the fact that everyone's now an expert in Eastern Ukrainian mineral deposits, but-

Lex Fridman

I think as I've learned, and we'll talk about Israel and Palestine, I'm learning that everybody's an expert on geopolitics and the history of war on the internet.

Douglas Murray

And now mineral deposits, obviously.

Lex Fridman

Yes.

Douglas Murray

I'm really speaking of the edge of my mineral deposit knowledge here. But no, from what I could see the deal that the American administration was trying to get the Ukrainian government to sign, it was too early to force. The Ukrainians were ready to sign a deal, but were obviously under intense pressure. And I think certainly, Zelensky actually wasn't expecting to go until pretty much the day before, was obviously visibly tired and exhausted. Again, as you are after that amount of pressure for that long time. I mean, the thing that struck me, and I said this in my column, the New York Post from there, that the thing that struck me was I said to some of the soldiers I was with, what do you make of this? And one of them just said to me, "Well, we're advised not to follow too closely the ins and outs of the politics of this," but of course everyone has Instagram or scrolls and among dog pictures and the hot women or whatever is what happened in the Oval. But what struck me was this same guy and saying, "I've got a job to do."

Lex Fridman

Right. And there's a clarity and a wisdom to that. But your job is bigger than that, right? Is to understand the politics as well. And what do you think about the politics of that moment? Because that was a real opportunity to come together and make progress on peace, right? And by all accounts was not a successful step forward.

Douglas Murray

I don't think by any account, it was a successful step forward. Unless to some extent it was a play, from DC to say to Putin, "Look, we doffed off Zelensky and now give us something." That's the only remedial idea I have about what might have been behind it. But I think it was just one of those extremely, I mean, just awful political moments. Zelensky was obviously

deeply irritated by the interpretation of the war that he was hearing from Washington. It was only a week after the Trump comments about Zelensky being a dictator, and people and the administration implying that Ukraine has started the war. And I think that must be for Zelensky, a pretty Alice in Wonderland situation to be in. And I had significant sympathy for him in finding it bewildering because it would be bewildering.

Lex Fridman

I think the sad thing to me also on the mundane details of that meeting and just the unfortunate way that meetings happen, I think it's true that he was also exhausted. There was a dickhead, a reporter that was asked the question about outfit in a way that, listen, Zelensky, everybody has their strengths and weaknesses. He's an emotional being, for better or for worse. And there's a dumb dickhead of a reporter-

Douglas Murray

Margie Taylor Green's boyfriend. He is, yeah, yeah.

Lex Fridman

The things you know. See, you're a real journalist.

Douglas Murray

I'm all for opening up the White House press pool and all that sort of thing, but it means that you get some people in who are sort of, yeah, from a bloglanders. Nothing wrong with that, but it means that you get somebody who will do something like that. The problem with that interaction, as I saw it, was that guy asked that disrespectful question, and I think it was disrespectful. I'll very quickly say why. I think that when a man comes from the realm of war into the realm of peace, the people in the realm of peace should have some respect or at least concession that the other man has come from the realm of war. And that if you are sitting in a political environment where you talk about people being destroyed and decimated and defenestrated and much more to a man who's for whom, none of that is metaphorical. I think that's extremely hard to accept. And I think that probably also at that moment, there was a sort of sense of Zelensky is being disrespected by being asked about what he's wearing when as everyone knows, Churchill during World War II used to wear his fatigues on foreign visit. But [inaudible 00:12:19] just that is to remind people that you are coming from the realm of war. And I think that probably in that moment, one of the things that would've been going through his head would be, I mean, if this was Putin sitting here being assaulted by a journalist, you'd hope your host stepped in and defended you. Let me try this one out. I mean, if a journalist in the Oval Office, if Putin was sitting there or a putative journalist said to Putin, everyone knows you've had a lot of facial work done, and word is you've used the same guy that Berlusconi used to use. Can you comment on that? You'd say, well, that's a disrespectful question for journalists to ask, and it's a little bit off what needs to be gone over. And it is the same thing with Zelensky with his outfit. I think it was just petty and threw things off in a bad way.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, I know it was probably researched because I think Zelensky was explained this three years ago at the beginning of the war, why he wears what he wears, and he's been consistent wearing the same-

Douglas Murray

By the way, it's an example of the frivolity of a lot of the attempts to understand what's going on. I mean, my view is that since actually most people, in fact, everybody cannot be an expert on everything. One of the things that we always do is to seize on minor and really quite unimportant things. I mean, every site does it. Look at the way in which the American right for years talked about the Churchill bust leaving the White House Oval Office in the Obama years. I didn't want to hear another darn thing about the Churchill bust after eight years because it was in lieu of trying to understand and actually critique Obama's foreign policy. It was just an easy shorthand. I think it's the same, we're always tempted to that.

Lex Fridman

But the thing is, I think you mentioned Putin, I think Putin would've been able to respond himself to that journalist effectively, and he would've done it in Russian.

Douglas Murray

Oh, yeah, the language thing.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. So I wanted to sort of lay out several just unfortunate things that happened in these situations. I think it happens in all peace negotiations, and it's funny how history can turn in moments like this. I do think there's a dickhead reporter combined with the fact that, with all due respect, but Zelensky's English sometimes is not very good.

Douglas Murray

Yes. And apart from anything else, if had have agreed to have not done it in English, he would've bought himself the extra seconds in some of his replies that he needed. Yeah.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. And have the wit, the guys funny, witty, intelligent. He could do that in the native language of whether it's Ukrainian or Russian, to be able to respond and get the interpreter. So all of that is really unfortunate, because I think in those little moments, it's a dance, and there's an opportunity there. The Republicans, the right-wing in the United States have a general skepticism of Zelensky, but that doesn't mean it has to be that way. It can turn, it can change, it can evolve.

Douglas Murray

It's very interesting why it has happened. Why do you think it's happened?

Lex Fridman

Politics in the United States is so dumb that at the very beginning it could just be reduced to... Well, the left went Putin bad, Zelensky good. Rah, rah, Ukrainian flags. Therefore, the right must go the opposite.

Douglas Murray

Yeah. Definitely. Yeah.

Lex Fridman

Sometimes it's literally as dumb as that. Let's each pick a side and call the other dumb.

Douglas Murray

I had a line I used recently, the necessity of people who live too long online to try to wade their way out of the memes. It is sort like that, isn't it?

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Douglas Murray

Because yes, I mean, I can understand the people who find it very irritating that so many people who would put BLM flags or pride flags or trans flags in their bio then put Ukrainian flags in their bio despite almost suddenly not knowing where Ukraine was. And if that happens, inevitable instinct of a lot of people who aren't really thinking is to say, "That's really annoying. These people are really annoying, I'll sock it to them." But that's where you've got to try to rise above that and say, "Actually, funnily enough, the fate of a country doesn't depend on my tolerance for memes online today."

Lex Fridman

Yeah. So, I think the memes can be broken through in meetings like the one that happened between Zelensky and Trump. There can be real comradery. I've seen the skill of that just recently having researched deeply and interacted with Narendra Modi, here's somebody who has the skill for his country, for his situation, being able to somehow be friends with Putin and friends with Zelensky and friends with Trump, and friends with Biden and friends with Obama.

Douglas Murray

He was very skillful.

Lex Fridman

That while still being strong for his country and fundamentally a nationalist figure who's very non globalist, not anything but pro-India, India First, Nation First. In fact, Nation First with a very specific idea what that nation represents.

Douglas Murray

Sure.

Lex Fridman

And that Zelensky could do all of those things, but have the skill of navigating the Trump room. Because every single leader has their own peculiar quirks that need to be navigated.

Douglas Murray

Yes, the obvious one, I mean, I don't want to make it sound like it was all Zelensky's fault, I mean, the obvious one was at the beginning of the meeting to say, "Yet again, as he has done for three years, thank you to America and American people and American politicians from across the aisle for your support for my country in its hour of need, but we're deeply grateful." And because he for once forgot to say that.

Lex Fridman

I think it's not that simple. I think there's a-

Douglas Murray

It's not that simple. It's one reason.

Lex Fridman

I think saying, thank you. He didn't need to say, "Thank you." There's just-

Douglas Murray

Well, that was what Vance leapt in on.

Lex Fridman

He's just picking a thing to leap on. There's a whole energy. You have to acknowledge in your way of being that you have been very Biden buddy buddy with the left for the last four years. There's ways to fix that. Listen, these people are complicated narcissists, all of them, Biden, Trump. You have to navigate the complexity of that. And you basically have to say a kind word to Trump, which is showing... There's many ways of doing that. But one of them is saying, feeding the ego by acknowledging that he is one of the world's greatest negotiators, right? "I'm glad we're able to come to the table and negotiate together, because I believe you are the great negotiator/mediator that can actually bring a successful resolution to..." As opposed to have an energy of, it should be obvious to everybody that Ukrainian are the good guys and Russia is the bad guys. There's this whole energy of entitlement that he brought. He forgot that there's a new guy. You got to convince the new guy that this global mission, that this nation is on this war that is in many ways, the West versus the East. That there's ideals, there's whole histories here that this is a war worth winning. You have to convince them, right?

Douglas Murray

Yeah. No, sure. And they obviously failed on that occasion. But as I say, it must be bewildering to have landed in a place where people were seriously talking about Ukraine starting the war and Zelensky not Putin being the dictator. I did the front page of the New York Post the day after the president's comments on that saying that the big picture of Putin just saying, "This is a dictator." And I think the people can be live enough to be able to recognize that you can make criticisms of Zelensky or the Ukrainians, but it doesn't mean you have to fall for Putin. And again, unfortunately, a lot of people in our time don't have that capability.

Lex Fridman

Can we go right into it? What is your strongest criticism of Putin?

Douglas Murray

He's a dictator who's very bloody, as repressive as you can be of political opposition, internal opposition. He's kleptomaniac of his country's resources, has enriched himself as much as he could, as he has with the cronies around him. He's not just acted to destroy internal opposition in Russia, but has gone to other countries, including my own country of birth and killed people on our soil. As it happens, weapons of mass destruction, the use of polonium in the Center of London, not good. The use of incredibly dangerous nerve agents that could kill tens of thousands of people in a charming Cathedral City like Salisbury. Not good. If the sort of apologists of Putin would say, "Well, he's just a sort of tough man who's looking after his house business," he say. Well, I don't think even if you think he has the right to do that, he should be doing it in third countries deliberately using weapons that are meant to show that you could take out tens of thousands of British citizens. Yeah. I mean, that's just for starters.

Lex Fridman

Do you think he's actually popularly elected?

Douglas Murray

No.

Lex Fridman

Do you think the results of the elections are fraudulent?

Douglas Murray

Yes. I mean-

Lex Fridman

Do you think it's possible that it's just that the opposition has been eliminated and he's legitimately popularly elected?

Douglas Murray

It definitely helps the chap if he's killed all of his opponents.

Lex Fridman

Something about using the term chap in that context is just marvelous.

Douglas Murray

This is another, the sort of slightly Alice in Wonderland things recently about Zelensky as people are saying, "Well, he's a dictator because he hasn't held elections during a total war of self-defense." And it's like, "Well, if you are really, really passionate about free and fair elections in that neck of the woods, you'd at least notice that Russian elections are not free and fair in any meaningful sense." But this doesn't mean that you have to say that therefore, they should have Western style elections and freedom, that Russia is ready to go and become a western liberal democracy. It doesn't mean any of that at all. At least note that this is what Putin is.

Lex Fridman

What do you think is the motivation for his invasion of Ukraine in '22?

Douglas Murray

Well, it's what he's said for years, which is basically the reconstitution of the Soviet Union.

Lex Fridman

Do you think there is empire building components to that motivation?

Douglas Murray

I would trust most of my friends in East and Central Europe who certainly do think that. There's a reason why the Baltic countries are the countries that are spending highest in percentage of GDP on defense. And it's because they're very worried. I don't think they're faking it. I don't think they're faking it for me or for anyone else. I think the Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians and others are genuinely worried for the first time in some decades.

Lex Fridman

Do you think there's a possibility that the war continues indefinitely, even if there's a ceasefire in the peace reached, the war will resume, he will seek expansion even beyond Ukraine?

Douglas Murray

Yes. And the most obvious thing is that if Trump manages to negotiate a ceasefire, it'll be a temporary pause. And whoever comes in as president after Trump, Putin will use the opportunity to advance again. Yes. Again, one of the things that I have heard from parts of the American right and others is that all he wants is Ukraine. That that's all he wants, and

that he has no history of rhetoric or actions that suggest anything else. And again, it's one of the reasons why it's useful traveling to places and seeing things your own eyes. Because I very much remember being in the country of Georgia after Putin tried to invade in 2008. Again, people don't have to be the greatest supporters of the Ukrainian cause. Just to recognize that it doesn't seem to be the case that Ukraine is the only thing in Putin's vision.

Lex Fridman

Do you see value and maybe depth and power to the realist perspective of all this? Somebody like John Mearsheimer's formulation of all this, that in these invasions of Georgia, of Ukraine, it's using military power to expand the sphere of influence in the region in a cold calculation of geopolitics.

Douglas Murray

It's interesting. One of the fascinating things about the last few years is that there's been an act of sort of necromancy of certain figures were totally, totally debunked in the area of Ukraine, Mearsheimer, and in the case of Israel people like Finkelstein. And it's been interesting because these are people that one hadn't heard of for some years because they were not listened to, usually, for good reason. By the way, first of all, I'm very skeptical of the term realist in foreign policy because most people to some extent will say that they are a realist in foreign policy. Very few people are surrealists in foreign policy. Very few people are unrealists.

Lex Fridman

I would like to meet them.

Douglas Murray

A surrealist foreign policy analyst.

Lex Fridman

We did mention Alice in Wonderland, so.

Douglas Murray

Yeah. I mean, maybe we should introduce the term, but... I mean, if you want to say, if you want to look gimlet-eyed, eyed out across the world, you're a realist. I think the steel man of their argument would be Russia has or believes it has a sphere of influence. And is regrettable, but there's very little we can do about that. That would be about the best version of that argument that you can make.

Lex Fridman

Well, to expand on that steel man, isn't this how superpowers operate in the dark realist/surrealist way? Meaning the United States uses military power to have a sphere of

influence over the whole globe, really. China appears to be willing to use military power to expand its sphere of influence.

Douglas Murray

And political power, yeah, more importantly, in the case of China.

Lex Fridman

Political power.

Douglas Murray

Non-kinetic warfare to take over areas. Hong Kong being the obvious one.

Lex Fridman

Behind that, isn't there always a kinetic threat?

Douglas Murray

Oh yeah, of course. Yeah. I mean, you disappear some booksellers and students are protesting, of course. But to go back to this, yeah, of course. Okay. The countries believe they have or would like to have spheres of influence. I do think at some point that the so-called realists on that have to try to decide how much leeway that allows you to give to a fairly rapacious regime. I mean, it's not the easiest calculation always to make. You have to work out whether or not, for instance, it is true that if Putin had managed to go all the way to Kiev in the first weeks of the war in '22, he would've gone straight on to other places. And maybe he would've done, maybe he would've taken his time, maybe he wouldn't have done. And this is a very fine calculation that changes every week, let alone every year. My friends in Georgia I thought were wildly off the mark when they were believing that after 2008 they could get, for instance, either NATO membership or EU membership. And I thought that was completely unlikely. And I still think it's unlikely and almost suddenly undesirable for Europe and for NATO, because you've got to be very careful. And obviously, this is one of the issues with Ukraine and has been since the '90s, are you going to set up a trip wire to start World War 3? And that's not a small thing to consider.

Lex Fridman

So what do you think the peace deal might look like, and what does the path to peace look like in Ukraine in the coming weeks and months?

Douglas Murray

I just thought it would be regrettably the Ukrainian ceding territory in the east, and then making sure they rearm during whatever peace period comes afterwards.

Lex Fridman

And probably, all four territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson.

Douglas Murray

You couldn't lay any of that out because it has to be negotiated on. And I think the ease with which non-Ukrainians are currently speaking about the Ukrainian ceding territory is concerning because these territories include hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens who do not want to live under Putin's rule, and people who have families in the rest of Ukraine and much more. And I recently interviewed children who had managed to get out of the Russian occupied areas, and it's brutal for the Ukrainian to be growing up in that territory. So, when people say, "Well, obviously Donetsk has to be given to Putin." I think that is not as easier a thing if you are in Ukraine as it is if you're sitting in New York say. There is a school of thought that obviously President Trump to some extent was floating in recent weeks, which is that if a deal is done, a business deal in relation to minerals or anything else, you get a buffer zone of American businesses and investment. And therefore American business people in the region, which would effectively warn Putin not to invade. I don't follow that idea because not least there were Americans in the regions that were invaded in '22 and they left fast... ... in the regions that were invaded in '22 and they left fast. And we know from Hong Kong and other places, just because there are international financial interests in the region does not mean that a dictatorship will not, either militarily or covertly, take over. I don't see American miners as being an effective buffer zone against Putin.

Lex Fridman

By the way, what did you learn from talking to the children, Ukrainian children from those regions?

Douglas Murray

Well, it's heartbreaking because the only schooling is Russian schooling. Obviously, teaching the Russian language, Putin's view of history and, effectively, indoctrination. And people can quibble with that term but it's Putinesque indoctrination schools and any children or families that do not want that effectively have to hide and not go out. And I spoke to children and parents who'd had [inaudible 00:33:08], for instance, the Russians set up in '22 and '23 summer camps for the children of some of the areas that have been occupied and the children went off to the camps and then they didn't come back, they were just stolen. It's thought that around 20,000 Ukrainian children have been stolen in this fashion, that's not a small thing. It's not got very much attention but, yes, children who would hide whenever the Russian troops came to the door. One teenage boy who described to me how, when his mother was out, a woman came around the house, knocked on the door and gave him his papers and said that he had to attend the next week to sign up for the Russian army. This is not good and that's obviously what life is like for thousands of people behind the Russian lines in Ukraine. I just have it in mind when people say things like, "Well, obviously, these regions have to be handed over." It's very, very hard, if you're a Ukrainian, to concede to that.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. And even if they are, as part of the negotiation, to hand it over, I think it'll probably be generations or never that that could be accepted by Ukrainian people.

Douglas Murray

Absolutely, and I would have thought never.

Lex Fridman

What do we know about this kidnapping of children? The stories of the thousands of children that the Russian forces kidnapped?

Douglas Murray

Some of them were in orphanages in Eastern Ukraine, not all by any means, but some were. And it's a very complicated story, actually, because many children were taken from their families, many the Russians said, "Well, look at these Ukrainians, they don't even look after their children, therefore, we will look after them." And recently, when I was there looking into this story because it's a very interesting question as to why it hasn't had more attention. One thinks of, for instance, the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls some 12 years ago now in Northern Nigeria and the appalling abduction of 300 girls by Boko Haram completely gained the world's attention. And I was very interested into why the Ukrainian children who'd been taken by the Russians have not gained similar attention, there's a slight similarity with the war in Israel which I'm sure we'll come on to. And I do think that one reason is that they were effectively hostages and the Ukrainians knew, this is my estimation of the terrain, is that the Ukrainians knew that, if they made a great deal about this more than they did, that the children would effectively be the most effective bargaining chip. And I do think there's considerable truth in that because, if you look at, for instance, the way in which pressure has been put on the Israeli government by the Israeli population about the kidnapped Israelis, you'll see that it's a pretty effective tactic for any totalitarian regime or terrorist group to operate in a way that means that the population of the country you're attacking pressure their government to do something in terms of concession, it's a very effective tool. And I think that story was partly played down, not just outside of Ukraine, but also within Ukraine partly for that reason.

Lex Fridman

As a truth seeker, as a journalist, how do you operate in that world where, at least to me, it's obvious that there's just a flood of propaganda on both sides? Now, of course, when you go there and directly experience it and talk to people but those people are still also swimming in the propaganda. So, unless you witness stuff directly, sometimes it's hard to know. I speak to people on the Russian side and they're clearly, first of all, hilariously enough, they almost always say that there's no propaganda in Russia.

Douglas Murray

Of course.

Lex Fridman

Which makes me realize you can be completely lied to, maybe I am in the United States as well, and just be unaware. Maybe earth is run by aliens, maybe the earth is flat so I don't know.

Douglas Murray

Maybe you've taken mushrooms.

Lex Fridman

I have before this and I finally see the truth and it's you that are deluded, Douglas. Okay, but back to our round earth discussion, round earth shills that we are, how do you know what is true?

Douglas Murray

You can tell it when the bare facts become not true, you can tell it when somebody is willing to claim that everything caused the invasion of 2022 except for Vladimir Putin invading Ukraine.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, there's a hilarious thing that happens and I think you've actually speak about this that people are generally just much more willing to criticize the democratically elected leader.

Douglas Murray

Always, always.

Lex Fridman

So, the interesting thing that happens is these wise sages that do the narratives of NATO started the war which there is some interesting geopolitical depth and truth to that.

Douglas Murray

Sure.

Lex Fridman

That NATO expansion created a complicated geopolitical context, whatever.

Douglas Murray

Sure.

Lex Fridman

But they forget to say other parts of that story.

Douglas Murray

Well, yes, of course. And of course, to some extent, it's rather ... The most irritating type of question asker at any event is the person who says, "I was disappointed that, in your 30-minute talk, you didn't address X." And I tend to say, "Looking forward to coming to your next talk where, in 30 minutes, you'll cover everything that could possibly be covered." There's always stuff that's going to be left on the sides, there's always going to be stuff that's left unaddressed, there's always going to be other angles, there's always going to be somebody else who has this interesting perspective and you can't cover it. Nevertheless, if you cover everything other than the central things, then it's suspicious. Many years ago at a debate in London, there was a debate about the origins of World War II and Pat Buchanan talking of necromancy was one of the speakers and Andrew Roberts, the historian, was one of the people on the other side. And at one point, they got so completely stuck into issues of iron ore mining in Poland in the mid ... Something like this. And the moderator, I remember, it was just a melee, and the moderator turns to Andrew Roberts and says, "Andrew Roberts, why did World War II begin?" and he says, "World War II began because Hitler invaded Poland." And it was a magnificent moment because everything had been a marsh, they were just so lost in all the intricate and clever and interesting things that you can talk about about the origins of a war that you forget to mention the thing that's most important. And certainly, my experience as a journalist and writer is one of the reasons why you need to go and see things with your own eyes is because people are certain to tell you that what you've seen with your own eyes didn't happen or hasn't happened and it helps to steal you for that moment.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. It's a gradual thing that happens where the obvious thing starts being taken for granted and people stop saying it because it's the boring thing to say at a party. And then, all of a sudden, over time, you just almost start questioning whether the obvious thing is even true. I don't know how that happens in human psychology but it does.

Douglas Murray

Yeah, I think it does. I've observed it in a lot of different places which is the important thing is the only thing you do forget, everything else is what you remember. And some of us are, for some reason, wired in a way where we try not to forget the important thing.

Lex Fridman

Remember the obvious thing, yeah.

Douglas Murray

Yes. And as you say, not wanting to be the boring guy at the party who reiterates what is true because what a douchebag you'd be if you were that guy.

Lex Fridman

Nobody likes captain obvious at a party, okay. Is it possible that Donald Trump is a mediator, a successful negotiator that brings a stable peace to Ukraine?

Douglas Murray

It's possible, we'll have to see. I think it's just too early and complicated to tell. That he wants to bring a peace seems to me to be obvious, he stated it a lot of times. Whether he can, we're just going to have to see. It's extremely hard to see some of the parameters of the peace still. And I would suggest that the one, not the most difficult, but one of the most difficult is that there is no peace guarantee on paper that the Ukrainians can possibly believe. It doesn't matter because we in the West, some of the countries in the West have said it before that we'd secure their peace and we haven't. And so, what other than NATO membership, which is not possible in my view, what other than NATO membership would reassure the Ukrainians that they are going to have their borders secured and the peace of Ukraine secured, I can't see.

Lex Fridman

I think there's not going to be ever a guarantee that you can trust. I think the way you have a guarantee, implicit guarantee is by having military and economic partnerships with as many partners as possible. So, you have partnerships with the Middle East, you have partnerships with India, perhaps even with China, with the United States, with many nations in Europe.

Douglas Murray

All of which still suggests that, if there's enough financial interests in Ukraine, they would prevent another Russian invasion.

Lex Fridman

There would be financial pressure, yeah. Russia needs to be friends with somebody, either China or the West. I think a world that's flourishing would have Russia trading and being friends with the West and the East.

Douglas Murray

Thought it would be ideal. It would be ideal if the regime in Moscow wanted it but that's that not ... Again, you get into the thing of people accused of Russophobia but the ... I do believe that, after the fall of the wall, Russia was ill-treated by the West, not treated with some of the courtesy that it required, I do think that. And at the same time, that doesn't justify the actions of Russia in the last 20 years.

Lex Fridman

Right. But let's descend from the surrealist to the realist, it's very possible for Russia to be on the verge of military invasion of these nations and that being wrong while also not doing it because they're afraid to hurt the partnerships with the West and with China.

Douglas Murray

It's possible. But the alliance they formed with this rogue alliance with China to a considerable extent, North Korea, not useful and Iran is something they seem to find bearable. It's not a very good alliance in most people's analysis but it's an alliance.

Lex Fridman

It's bearable but I don't think, maybe you disagree with this, I don't think the Russian people or even Putin wants to be isolated from the West. I think it wants to be friends with the West and with the East and with everybody, he just also wants Ukraine. And there's ... How does the Rolling Stones song go?

Douglas Murray

Which one?

Lex Fridman

Not the satisfaction one.

Douglas Murray

Sympathy with the Devil?

Lex Fridman

That's the one. You got me on that one. No, there's interests, whether it's expanding the sphere of influence, that's one thing on the table but that can be put aside if you want to maintain the partnerships with these nations. And if Ukraine has strong economic partnerships with those nations, then that prevents Russia from invading.

Douglas Murray

I think the premise is one that I've seen before. There was a famous ... What was his name? Norman Angell. He wrote this book which was a fantastic bestseller in his day where he believed that Europe would be in a period of endless Kantian peace because the prospect of European powers going to war was so economically unviable. The book was reissued after World War I and I never got the second edition but I assume it was significantly rewritten.

Lex Fridman

That's a very cynical take that just because the book is wrong -

Douglas Murray

I'm not saying that the book is wrong, I'm saying that the idea that cooperation on an economic and other levels is any significant preventative device to madness breaking out is not something I see. It could deter some people, it could deter some very, very rational economically driven actors but it fails to take into account all of the other things that motivate people to go to war and to invade and to go mad.

Lex Fridman

Okay. Well, I would argue that, in the 21st century, one of the reasons we have much fewer wars is because of the much more-

Douglas Murray

Bomb.

Lex Fridman

Well, so there's a few tools here on the geopolitical stage. One of them is that we're just much more interconnected economically, globally interconnected and that is always a present pressure on the world to keep peace. There's a lot of money to be made from peace, there's also a lot of money to be made from war. There's a lot of interest, attention and I'm just presenting one of the tools that a leader should be using. The alternative is, what, military force? That is an interesting one, sometimes a useful one but, unfortunately, it has its downsides also. And after three years of war and the hundreds of thousands dead, you have to start wondering what are the options on the table.

Douglas Murray

I agree. I'm obviously for economic cooperation but my only caveat is not to think that that is something which is of ultimate interest or even at the top of the list of interests of despots, tyrants, extremists who want something else.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, but can you read the mind of Vladimir Putin?

Douglas Murray

No.

Lex Fridman

A lot of the ideas I hear about peace is Putin bad, victory must be achieved, NATO membership required. But what do you have to do? You have to come to the table to end the killing is one and, two, have different ideas of how to have a non-zero chance of peace.

Douglas Murray

Go on.

Lex Fridman

So, the options are ... It seems to me the only option, not the only option, but the likeliest option is a lot of strong economic partnerships. There's, of course, there other radical options. There's Russia joining NATO or something like this or there's flirting with World War III essentially, giving nukes to Ukraine or something like this. There's crazy stuff or a totally new military alliance with France and Britain and Germany and European nations and Ukraine or some weird network of military power that threatens Russia in some way or maybe some big breakthrough partnership between India, China and Ukraine, something like this, just some really out there ideas. And I think that's how the world finds a balance and realigns itself in interesting ways.

Douglas Murray

No, it could be. I hope your idea is right, I think it's about what's certainly the most peaceful way for this to be resolved. My only caveat, as I say, is and also never forget to factor in that people want different things in this world and some people don't dream as you dream.

Lex Fridman

I think we'll talk about that in your new book, Death Cults, that one is an easier one for me to understand to the story that you're describing. I am more hesitant to assign psychopathy to leaders of major nations.

Douglas Murray

Sure. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm not, by any means, urging you to regard Vladimir Putin as a millenarian madman who cannot be in any way understood.

Lex Fridman

I think he could be negotiated and reasoned with.

Douglas Murray

From your lips to God's ears.

Lex Fridman

Can you steer me on the case for and then against Zelenskyy as the right leader for Ukraine at this moment? Is he the right person to take it to the point of peace?

Douglas Murray

We'll see. If he can, then of course he is. He deserves enormous respect for galvanizing his people, for being elected in the first place, for galvanizing his nation at a time of incredible peril, for playing the international game of getting support for his country well. And sometimes the person who does that, not that there are many people like that, can be the person who also brings about a peace deal and sometimes not.

Lex Fridman

I think there's a degree to which he may have seen too much suffering of the people of the land he loves to be able to sit down at a table with a world leader who did the destruction and to be able to-

Douglas Murray

That is very hard.

Lex Fridman

... compromise on anything.

Douglas Murray

That's possible. Again, it puts the onus on him though. It slightly presupposes that Putin doesn't have the same human instinct on that. It is extremely hard, I've noticed this in a lot of conflicts, it's extremely hard the way in which outsiders come in and others who haven't seen what you've seen or gone through what you've gone through and say, "You know, it's time to get around the negotiating table and just ..." You think you didn't see what I saw or you didn't go through what I went through, who are you to tell me? It comes back to that thing with the visitor from the land of war and the visitor from the land of peace. The visitor from the land of peace can easily talk about getting around negotiating tables but the visitor from the land of war has seen other things and it's very hard for somebody who hasn't seen it to tell the person who has that they should act differently.

Lex Fridman

And the sad thing about humanity is both the person from the land of peace and the person from the land of war are right.

Douglas Murray

Yes, that's a struggle, that's definitely a struggle. It's like asking somebody to forgive, I've seen that at a lot of ends of conflicts. People say, "You know, the important thing is that we forgive and move on," and then the other person says, "You know, your child didn't die of shrapnel wounds."

Lex Fridman

Yeah, this is ... I got a lot of heat for an interview I did with Zelenskyy. By the way, people privately, the people that message me is all love and support and the people that disagree in Ukraine, soldiers. People online are ruthless, they're misrepresenting me, they're lying about-

Douglas Murray

People online are ruthless and misrepresenting and lying?

Lex Fridman

I know, yeah.

Douglas Murray

Good God, Lex, you've discovered a new phenomenon.

Lex Fridman

I'm a real radical intellectual.

Douglas Murray

Nothing misses your eye.

Lex Fridman

I see the truth and I'm unafraid to point it out. No, there's a degree ... This idea that you need to compromise with the person who the leader of a nation you're at war with and, in so doing, to some degree, are forgiving their actions. Because the actual feeling you have is you want it to be fair and the definition of fair when you've seen that much suffering is for him and everybody around him and maybe even all of the people on the other side to just die because you've seen towards suffering. But the other side of that is, yes, there's children that have died but you coming to the negotiation table-

Douglas Murray

Will stop other children from dying. Yes, of course.

Lex Fridman

And so, there is ... You had this way of speaking about it, embodying that perspective that it's naive to say to come to the negotiation table and it is for a person from the land of war. But the very smart, intelligent and not naive person from the land of peace that is often right in some deep sense about the long arc of history, for them it is the right thing to come to the negotiation table to end the more killing.

Douglas Murray

The one thing I would add to that though is don't forget that it also depends on whether or not there's a clear shot of winning.

Lex Fridman

Sure.

Douglas Murray

If there's a clear shot of winning and that's the most important. The most important thing in wars is not final negotiations or anything like that, it's simply winning and losing. And if you have a clear shot of winning and you can take it and you're near it, then having somebody

else come in and saying why not stop just before victory is very hard. That's one of the many, many complexities of the conflict we're talking about.

Lex Fridman

You know what's the other big complexity of that? Because the clear shot of winning is like a man walking through the desert seeing water. During war, it really is an illusion. So, here's what happens. The really complicated aspect of negotiation is, in order to negotiate peace from a place of strength, you have to have victory in sight.

Douglas Murray

Yes.

Lex Fridman

And so, the temptation from that position is to not negotiate, is to keep pushing forward to achieve victory. And this, I would say, hindsight is 20/20 But this is the failure in '22 and two occasions to achieve, to negotiate a ceasefire and peace. One in the spring because Ukraine was in a real big, I would say, position of strength having fended off the Russian forces around Kiev. That's one. And then, as you mentioned, in the fall of '22 with Kherson and Kharkiv, had a lot of military success, they were in a place of strength. And from that place, they've decided to keep going because victory was in sight but that was also an opportunity to make peace.

Douglas Murray

It's perfectly possible, yes.

Lex Fridman

That's the hard thing.

Douglas Murray

It's very hard, it's all hard. But again, victory can be won in wars and is often won in wars and, you're right, they can also grind on because nobody has the capability to make a breakthrough. It's a case ... The wisdom about civil wars tends to be that they burn out after about 10 years or so for similar reasons.

Lex Fridman

When you're in the war, can you actually know that a victory can be won?

Douglas Murray

It's a very good question. And you mean troops on the battlefield or military leaders or political leaders?

Lex Fridman

Military and political leaders. It just feels like, like I said, man in the desert seeing water. I think there's a sense that victory is so close, there's times in a war when you feel like victory is close.

Douglas Murray

No, you're right. It's [inaudible 00:59:13].

Lex Fridman

And then it just slips away.

Douglas Murray

Yes, it's an interesting insight. It's like the way in which there's a force in nature which is that, if you amass an army, amassing it will pull you in to using it. Extremely hard to amass an army somewhere and then say let's go back. Yes, you're right, no, it's one of many, many interesting aspects to warfare.

Lex Fridman

I think the sad thing about successful wars, at least in the modern day, is it takes a great military leader which I would argue that Zelenskyy really unified Ukraine in this fight in the beginning of the war. You have to be that and, like you said, after you amass the army and have military success, to be able to step back and make peace. Those two just don't often go hand in hand because, again, as a wartime leader, especially one who has seen the suffering first hand, walking away is tough. Especially, also combined with that, just the realities of war where there is probably corruption, that there is things, once the war ends, there has to be investigations. Because the war wasn't won, you might not turn out to be, when the history looks at it, the good guy and a leader doesn't want to ... A leader always wants to be the good guy. So, there's just all psychological complexities that are ... And you look at this whole picture, in a basic sense, if you want Ukraine to flourish, if you want humanity to flourish, you just ask the question, okay, so what is the thing I would like to see.

Douglas Murray

There's so many historical analogies you can give but just surely not rewarding Putin's actions in any way would be a good way to deter him and other dictators from trying to grab land in the future.

Lex Fridman

So, yeah, but this is nuanced because it's very probably good to be the boring person at the party that says dictatorships are bad, democracies are good, many of the ideals of the West are good.

Douglas Murray

Mostly the better.

Lex Fridman

Better? Yes.

Douglas Murray

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

That sounds like animal farm but, yes, two legs better. But yes, democracy is better and invading countries is bad but World War III is bad too. So, after you say something is bad, what's the next step? Because military intervention in a lot of these conflicts-

Douglas Murray

It'll be a bad deterrence.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, but what's effective deterrence?

Douglas Murray

That we're going to have to keep going over for a long time to come.

Lex Fridman

My question is how can we achieve peace in April? In May? The adults at the table all seem to tell me, "Well, it's a process, it's complicated," it just feels like this is a thing that might go into the next winter and there's still maybe initial ceasefire and then ceasefire is broken and there's more people dying-

Douglas Murray

For sure.

Lex Fridman

... and it's that mess. It seems like civility and politeness ignores the fact that people are dying every single day.

Douglas Murray

Of course, we are all ... Almost everybody, not everybody but almost everyone, would like the killing to stop immediately, of course.

Lex Fridman

No, I think that is the boring thing at the party. Yes, but they don't say it often enough, not often ... There has to be a frustration-

Douglas Murray

Perhaps I should say it more.

Lex Fridman

There has to be a frustration. I don't understand why Putin, Zelenskyy and Trump can't just meet in a room together without signing anything, leaders meeting and discussing and the human connection, there's so many layers of diplomats. It's the problem I have with the managerial class, they schedule meetings really well, they don't get shit done and I would love it if people got shit done. So, the soldiers get shit done, they're fighting the reality of the war and then the leaders have the capacity to get shit done on the scale of nations and geopolitics. But these diplomatic meetings and this-

Douglas Murray

No, I agree. I share your frustration about it, at the same time, I think ... I share your frustration because I've seen it all, a lot of- I share your frustration because I've seen it, a lot of it in my own eyes. There was a [inaudible 01:04:09] the other week and they were hit just after I left the base. You wouldn't believe what a thermobaric bomb can do to the human body. And I share your frustration with that. At the same time, one of the things that happens if you are rushing is that you do, and I've seen this elsewhere, you will put pressure on the people you can pressurize, and you will not put enough pressure on the people you can't pressurize. That is one of the worrying things that could happen with this. Simply, America can put extraordinary diplomatic, financial, intelligence, military pressure on Ukraine, and it can put significant pressure on Putin, but it's much easier to pressure Zelenskyy. That's one of the many things that makes it harder is that the temptation to rush for peace, accepting that peace is the most desirable thing and accepting the horrors of war, which we can linger on, but accepting all that. If somebody says, "We've got to get peace today," and the three of them around a table, the most likely thing is that it'll be the person who you can pressure most easily, who will be the person that you pressure, and as a result, have an outcome, which, yes, might stop the killing as soon as possible, but might also set up a situation which rewards the aggressor and effectively punishes the victim. That's an extremely ugly and common thing to happen.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, and that's the other boring thing to say, the boring truth, that the easy shortcut here is to punish Ukraine, and you just have to not do it.

Douglas Murray

Let's keep being the boring people of the party.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. Well, nobody's going to invite us. All right. Let's go from one complicated conflict to perhaps an even more complicated one. Israel and Palestine. Can you take me through what happened on October 7th as you understand it and as you outline at the beginning of the book?

Douglas Murray

Well, the book, *On Democracies and Death Cults*, is a mixture of firsthand reporting and observation interviews and a wider reflection, not just on the war that's been going on since the 7th of October, but the war that's been going on a lot longer. Also, I suppose on what, for me, is one of the overwhelming questions which I'm sure we'll get to, which is the reaction in the rest of the world. Obviously, on the 7th itself, it was a brigade-sized attack on Israel from Gaza. Hamas broke through the security fence and attacked all the softest targets they could. They swiftly overwhelmed things, like the observation base in Nahal Oz. They ran through the communities in the south, very peaceful, peacenik [inaudible 01:07:41] free communities of the kibbutzim as they're called, the communities, and murdered and raped and burned and kidnapped. Of course, they, from their point of view, had the great good fortune of also coming across hundreds of young people dancing in the early hours of the morning at a dance party, and rampaged through that with RPGs and Kalashnikovs and grenades and hammers and more, and got within, well, 20 kilometers into Israel, on places like Ofakim and Sderot, important towns, and carried out their massacres there as well. We now know that the plan was that Hezbollah did the same thing from the north. Hezbollah joined in the war within 24 hours by starting firing rockets again in very large numbers into northern Israel from southern Lebanon, but the plan was that they would do the same thing from the north and carry out similar massacres there and effectively be able to meet in the middle and garrote Israel from the center. The interesting reason why I think, it'll be found out in the future, but why they didn't coordinate better was Hamas didn't trust any line of communication to Hezbollah to let them know exactly when they were going to do it that wouldn't be intercepted. The Iranian revolutionary government in Tehran, which obviously funds Hamas and Hezbollah and trains and arms knew of the plan. It was a very successful attempt to annihilate the state, but they didn't get close to that, but they got worryingly closer than people might've thought they were capable of. I think from the Israeli side, it was obviously one of the most, if not the most, catastrophic intelligence and military failure since the foundation of the state. I think there are several reasons why. One is a perception problem, what a lot of military commanders and others described to me as the conception. The conception that had prevailed in Israel for some years in security, military establishment was that Hamas were content with being corrupt and governing Gaza and lining their pockets and living in Qatar and becoming billionaires, but that like many other terrorist groups and cults, that they would end up becoming just corrupt and not losing their ideology, but the ideology becomes secondary. That's the first thing was there was just a massive era of the conception in Israel. And then, the multiple manifold security and military failures of the day and leading up to the day. There already have been quite a lot of

people held to account for that and their, doubtless, will be in the future as well. The single thing I heard, which I heard most and which was most distressing in a way, was the number of people who described to me, who survived the massacres in the south, who said that they'd said to their children, "Don't worry, the Army will be here in minutes," and they weren't. In many places, it was many hours until the army got there. There are reasons for that. There are some reasons that will be military failings, leadership failings. Other things were very, I discovered, were very human failings. I don't want overstress the failure of the army, because actually certain units and things got down very fast. There's a unit, Duvdevan, who got down to the junction by within about an hour, 90 minutes of the massacres starting, and joined in the fight. And then, there were self-starters, who I write about in the book, extraordinary people who just broke orders and just realized the magnitude of what was happening and said, "We're needed in the south. Go." And fought very hard for hours, days in some cases. But the complexities on the ground were unbelievable, I mean, as usually happens in warfare, but what they call the fog of war is a very real thing. You can see it in hindsight, but you can't see when you are in it. And one of the things that made it very complicated was, for instance, Hamas coming in, taking uniforms off dead Israelis, wearing them, coming in with Israeli-style apparatus on them. There's a Muslim doctor I quote in the book, I interviewed, who describes how he was going to his... He's an Israeli Muslim Arab, and he's a doctor. He was going to his shift at the hospital at 6:30 in the morning. The rockets start coming in because the rocket started first and then the full invasion. He described to me how... He's one of the members of this group, United Hatzalah, which is a first responders group, and they get an alert and it tells them that a car has crashed nearby, and they put on their first aid kit and so on and go. He got one of those alerts at one of the junctions, and realized there was a car that something had happened and there were some dead bodies. He stops and he sees these men dressed as soldiers, and he's wearing his Hatzalah gear and they start firing at him. And he just thinks, "What the hell? What the hell is going on?" They turned out to be Hamas dressed as Israeli soldiers. They used him as a human shield to try to protect from any air assault. In the end, they shot him and left him, and he survived. He's a very, very brave man. So, there was a lot of confusion like that. There was a girl whose father I interviewed, she was at the Nova party. I met him at one of the reunions of the party and the weeks after, and the reunions of the survivors and the family and so on. He described how in the last moments of his daughter's life, she phoned him on her phone, like a lot of people. He reassured her that Army would get there and so on. Her boyfriend was shot in the head and was lying on her lap, and she was obviously panicked. They'd managed to get into a car and escape the party, but they went to a community where they thought they'd be safe in the south of Israel. They were told to stay where they were by somebody who she said was a policeman, and he wasn't the policeman. He was Hamas dressed as police and she died. She was shot and killed as well. So, there was a lot of confusion like that. Hopefully, the world will find out exactly what went wrong, Israel will find out exactly what went wrong that led to this catastrophe, but, I mean, it was a complete catastrophe.

Lex Fridman

Do you have a sense of how such an intelligence failure could have happened? There's a bit of a temptation to go into conspiracy land, because it's such a giant intelligence failure. It seems that there is some manipulation on the inside for political reasons or for-

Douglas Murray

Yes. You don't need to go into conspiracy land. I think there are people who say that there were parts of the intelligence network and so on that were withholding the information. I don't know. Again, people will find out there's an awful lot of politics inside Israel, and it's hard to know that at this stage. I think most people are still Israeli and not Israeli, including people who are anti-Israel, who just believe that Israeli military, and particularly intelligence dominance, is so strong that there must have been some kind of conspiracy. Otherwise, how could this have happened? I don't think you need to go into that. I mean, for instance, some of the young women at the observation base are on the record. I've spoken to them myself, who said that they had been warning in the weeks running up to the 7th, that they were seeing maneuvers and training by the border, which suggested that Hamas was going to do something like this. They say that they were ignored. Though you speak to some of the more senior commanders about that, and they say the thing is that this stuff was happening all the time, so it's very hard to know at the moment.

Lex Fridman

Can you talk through your understanding of who and what Hamas is, its history and the governing ideology of this group?

Douglas Murray

Well, Hamas, in a way, quite easy to understand, because they say what their ambitions are, they say what their beliefs are. They've said it from their governing charter onwards. And you also have the advantage with Hamas that they, as if we're trying to understand them, is that they tend to do what they say and act on what they believe. The primary aim of Hamas is to destroy the State of Israel and [inaudible 01:17:42]. They're not an unusual group, sadly. The bit of it that is hard for some people to understand, I think, is that they really do mean what they say and that they really do mean what they say they want to do. I give a number of examples in the book of this, but, I mean, the most obvious is the case of Yahya Al-Sinwar, the Hamas leader who is generally regarded as having orchestrated and arranged the 7th of October. We know a fair amount about him because he was in prison in Israel in the 2000s for murdering Palestinians in Gaza, and he was released in the prisoner swap for the... He's one of the more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners inside Israel who was released in a swap for Gilad Shalit, the abducted Israeli soldier. Yahya Al-Sinwar, in prison in Israel, talked to, among others, a dentist who ended up saving his life because Yahya Al-Sinwar had a brain tumor. This dentist identified this and actually sent him to the hospital. The Israelis famously removed the tumor and saved Sinwar's life. But this dentist used to speak to him in the prison not fairly regularly and has related, not at least to the New York Times, his

conversations with Sinwar. Sinwar said in one of those conversations, he said, "At the moment, you, Israel, are strong, but one day, you'll be weak, and then I'll come." And that's what he did.

Lex Fridman

Is it a hatred of Israel, or is it a hatred of Jews? Is it on the level of nations or the level of religion?

Douglas Murray

Both. It's both. I mean, it originates from a religious mindset, but it's, of course, political as well. I mean, the Hamas Charter, of course, some people think the Hamas Charter is of no significance in... I often notice this sleight of hand that people do. Again, it goes back to what we were saying earlier, forget everything other than the most important basic things. But the Hamas Charter, among other things, quotes the Hadith that the end times will not come until all of the rocks and the trees shout out, "Oh, Muslim, there's a Jew behind me, come and kill him." So, Hamas is both obviously anti-Israeli, obviously, and anti-Jewish, obviously. By the way, I mean, one of the many painful stories I tell in the book is of the fact that so many of the people in the communities that they attacked, it's not as if there'd be a right community to attack and a wrong community to attack, but the many of the communities they attacked were communities which deeply, deeply dreamed of the idea of living in peace with their Palestinian neighbors. There's a woman whose name has become relatively famous since, certainly famous inside Israel, Vivian Silver, who was a peace activist, who spent every weekend driving Gazan children from the border to... If they had very rare medical needs that could not be seen attention within inside Gaza, would drive them to Israeli hospitals. She spent every weekend doing that. Worked for all of the left-wing peace organizations in Israel. For a while after the 7th, her neighbors and others thought that she had been taken captive into Gaza. And actually, there was a hostage poster for her, and there were appeals by the various peacenik organizations for Hamas to hand her over. But it turned out she'd been burned alive in her home. This wasn't discovered for quite a long time because there was so little DNA left of her that it was very hard to identify the remains as being hers. So, there were a lot, just a lot of people in the Gaza envelope, as it's called in Israel, in the area around Gaza, who would've been the people who wanted to live peacefully with the Gazans some day. There's a certain, among the many, it's not an irony, but just among the pains of the days that is so overwhelmingly, these are the people that Hamas brought hell to.

Lex Fridman

The response to October 7th by Israel, can you steal me on the case that Israel went too far?

Douglas Murray

Well, the case that started from very early on, that critics of Israel had was the claim that... I mean, I think I first heard it on about the 8th of October before Israel had done anything in

response, was the claim that Israel must act proportionately in response. I have a critic of this that I've often expressed, which is that there is such a thing as proportionality in warfare. At the same time, Israel is always accused of acting disproportionately. The proportionality that much of the rest of the world seems to think Israel should express in warfare is to have an equal level of suffering or killing on both sides. I don't think there's any law of war that says that if you kill 1,200 people and you kidnap another 250, that as it were the other side's allowed to do the same back. But that's what a lot of people think. And then when they see the death toll escalating on the Gazan side, they say Israel has acted disproportionately and has overreacted. That one is tricky, because it's my belief that, I mean, again, this is a basic thing but it has to be stated, that 9 million citizens of Israel, if you extrapolate that out to what the 7th of October would've meant in American terms, you'd be talking about a day on which if the attack had happened in America where 44,000 Americans were killed in one day and 10,000 American citizens taken hostage, nobody can tell me that if such an atrocity occurred that America would not do whatever it needed to destroy the groups that had done that and to retrieve the hostages who'd been taken.

Lex Fridman

So just on that point, I agree with you 100% America would hit hard back, and I think a lot of Americans would feel justified in that. But it's also possible that the military industrial complex and the politicians would do something like the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, which means extend far beyond hitting back and actually do a thing that's destructive to everybody, including America financially and the flourishing of America, and the flourishing of humanity broadly, and the region and the stability and the war on terrorism, if that's a real thing. The war in Iraq and Afghanistan did not maybe succeed in defeating terrorism or even making progress. It probably made more terrorists than not. So, there's a justified feeling of hitting back and going after somebody like Bin Laden in the case of 9/11. And there's just the actual implementation. It seems like the implementation can sometimes, intended or unintended, have consequences that are bordering on war crimes, if not downright war crimes. Now, this is a general statement, and now we'll look at Israel where things are small land, everything is very compact. There's a lot of complexities that are well-studied that we've talked about extensively.

Douglas Murray

Well, the two stated aims of the Israelis after the 7th were to get the hostages back and to destroy Hamas. Many people said that you could do one but not both. I actually think they've gone a long way to doing both. By no means everything, there were still hostages as we are speaking held in Gaza, including a young American. And Hamas is not completely destroyed. It's very, very significantly degraded, but it's not completely destroyed. But those are the two aims. I believe that I've seen as much of the war as any outside observer. I don't know, some exceptions maybe, so I think I can say with considerable certainty what the Israelis have and haven't done. There were various operations at the beginning, various plans which didn't happen, like storming straight in and getting, for instance, as many hostages as

possible out of the Shifa complex, which is called a hospital, but also at the very least, the Hamas command headquarters. There was a plan to maybe go and do that fast, but it was avoided because of the number of deaths on all sides that would be likely to happen. The Israelis did actually hold back at the beginning. There was a period of making sure that when they went into Gaza, they didn't do so, in any way, blind. Gaza is a very built-up area, and population-wise is densely populated. Something, by the way, which the people who claim frivolously that Israel has been creating genocide never take account of, which is the fact that the Gaza population has boomed since the Israeli withdrawal in 2005. It's almost doubled. But yes, it's a densely populated area, and it's an incredibly difficult place for the train of war because of one thing in particular, which is that Hamas, going back a bit to our conversation earlier, but this is a much more extreme example. I mean, Hamas really don't play by the rules. In fact, they use the rules of war, the laws of war completely to their own advantage. It has to be reiterated. You are not meant to disguise your army as civilians. You're not meant to use places of care, like hospitals, as bases for your military operations. You're not meant to use schools and places of worship as operating centers of war. Hamas does all of these things and has always done so, and it does so with the very obvious reason that for them, the whole thing is a two-for-one offer. You get to operate everywhere. And if the Israelis operate anywhere, you claim that this is a war crime, because how could they attack this group of civilians, these people who are dressed as civilians, these people merely fighting from a mosque and so on. That's why everybody who's been to Gaza, who's seen the fighting, knows the same thing, which is this is just incredibly difficult, difficult warfare, of a kind that American troops have seen in the last 20 years in Fallujah and elsewhere. Kurdish militia, the Peshmerga saw when they were fighting as our frontline troops in the war against ISIS, similar house to house, but by no means with the same entrenched bases. Again, it can't be stressed enough that Hamas has used the years since the Israel withdrawal from 2005 to build this vast underground tunnel network. Again, it's obvious, but it has to be remembered. I quote one of Hamas leaders in the book saying this in an interview. When they build their tunnels, they do so in order their tunnels are used by them, Hamas, to store their weaponry, to secure their fighters, and to hold hostages. They do not build their underground tunnel networks for the safety of guards and civilians avoiding aerial bombardment. Every difference in the world seems to me to exist between a country which does build bomb shelters for its citizens and a government which builds bomb shelters for its bombs.

Lex Fridman

Can you discuss the flow of money here? How does Hamas, the leadership, use the money? You started to talk about the tunnels, but how much corruption is there? Can you just lay it all out? Because I think it's an important part of the picture here.

Douglas Murray

It's certainly corrupt. Every Hamas leader, who's now dead, died a billionaire.

Lex Fridman

With a B.

Douglas Murray

With a B. To say that they used Gaza's resources or the resources that came into Gaza for their own ends is to just vastly understate matters. Hamas used everything that came in to build the infrastructure of terror that allowed them to do the 7th and everything since. They militarized the whole of the Gaza. By the estimations of troops I've been with, every second to third house had weaponry stashed there. Bombs, RPGs, Kalashnikovs, rockets, tunnel entrances. The network that they just embedded all these years was total. One of the many, many tragedies of this is that whatever you are reading of the rights and wrongs of the Israeli withdrawal in 2005, it was an opportunity for the Gaza to become something else. It could have become a thriving statelet. It could have been a thriving Palestinian state. It's just that Hamas, like the PLO before them, decided that they wanted to destroy Israel more than they wanted to create a Palestinian estate. And that is to the great detriment of the Palestinians of Gaza to put it at its mildest.

Lex Fridman

So just to outline here, leadership of Hamas are stealing the money they get sent by Qatar, by everybody, so they're putting in their pocket and then the-

Douglas Murray

By the American taxpayer and by the European taxpayer as well. Yes.

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Douglas Murray

Well, yeah, but, I mean, it's not just about the stealing the money. It's about using the money and the infrastructure to annihilate your neighbor.

Lex Fridman

Those two things, but the corruption is a signal. From an economic perspective, it's just also a signal of deep moral corruption because they're screwing over the Palestinian people.

Douglas Murray

Yes, the cynicism, certainly. Yeah.

Lex Fridman

Okay. And then, the money they do spend on the Palestinian cause, they're not doing that to build up Gaza. They're doing it to strengthen the militaristic capabilities of the terrorist

organization of Hamas. You have, maybe you can correct me on this, have said that the people of Gaza have some significant responsibility for the actions of Hamas-

Douglas Murray

Yes.

Lex Fridman

... because they've elected them.

Douglas Murray

They elected them. The what ifs are endless, but very unwise of the George W. Bush administration to push for elections in Gaza after '05. But Hamas were elected, and they then, in 2007, killed the other Palestinian faction that was their main challenger, Fatah. Killed them through them off rooftops, dragged their bodies behind motorbikes through the Gaza. From that point, they had total control. This is difficult because you can get into the realm of being accused of advocating or in any way justifying collective punishment if you talk about this, but it should be born in mind that Hamas had effectively 18 years to run the Gaza. And that- ... run the Gaza. And that's the time that it takes from the birth of a child to the end of their formal education. And in 18 years they could have presided over and produced a generation of young Gazans who were productive for their people, for their society, for their neighbors, for the rest of the world, and they didn't. They spent 18 years indoctrinating the children of Gaza into a death cult and into a genocidal hatred, which obviously was most dangerous to the Israelis, but it was obviously disastrous for the people of Gaza. If you speak to soldiers who were there in 2014 when Hamas started a war again... One of a set of rounds of war since 2005. If you speak to the soldiers who were there in 2014 going house to house and who were also involved in the war since 2003, they all say the same thing, which is the marked radicalization of the Gazan population. The marked increase in just, I mean, the most... I mean, it's so banal in a way to even... The numbers of copies of Mein Kampf in Arabic in an average Gazan household, the protocols of the learned elders of Zion, there are so many what ifs and other paths that Hamas could have taken, but that was the one they took. They decided to take the path of using their time and power to build up their infrastructure, radicalize the population, and encouraged them to believe that they could destroy the state of Israel. And then on October 7th, they gave it their best shot. And by the way, there is no organized collective punishment of the citizens of Gaza. Collective punishment would just be dropping bombs with no purpose across civilian areas, carpet bombing, this sort of thing. This is simply not what the IAF and the IDF have done since the 7th. They have been fighting a house to house war against this terrorist group. They do do aerial strikes. Gaza is very, very badly beaten up as the buildings, I mean the infrastructure that existed. There aren't many buildings standing. But this is not the result of just wild and imprecise bombing by the Israelis. It's been extremely concerted. It's extremely difficult. But when people say, "Well, this must be collective punishment." I think that the people who say that simultaneously, that's not true. And also there is not a hostage

who's come out who... President Trump made his point recently. There is not a hostage who's come out who I've spoken with, who found any Gazan Palestinian who expressed even the slightest human kindness to them. If you look at the footage from the 7th, the Hamas recorded themselves of them taking young Jewish women into Gaza and so on. You will notice that the trucks and the motorbikes and so on are not stopped by horrified Gazan civilians saying, "Why have you got this Israeli girl whose tendons you've cut and why are you bringing her here?" It's all celebration. It's all celebration. And it's the same with those couple of cases of hostages who managed to escape from the civilian houses they were being held in who were immediately returned by the citizens they met.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, the celebration. I do wonder what percent of the population they represent, but there's something really dark. There's several ways to explain the celebration. It could be that there's a deep indoctrination where you do legitimately hate Jews, and there also could be a place of just deep desperation. And it's a kind of relief that you have to convince yourself that you're on the side of fighting for freedom in order to justify to yourself that this is the right way to fight out desperation out of extremely harsh conditions. Because the way we're speaking about this with a celebration, it's very easy to project a kind of evil on the populace that I just am very hesitant to project, especially on the general populace.

Douglas Murray

You don't have to project it onto them. You can just listen to their own words. I'm sure you've heard that one of many audio recordings you hear from the morning, but I'm sure you've heard the audio recording of the young man who ends up in one of the communities in the south of Israel and calls back home. Have you heard that?

Lex Fridman

Yes, I've heard it.

Douglas Murray

I quoted it in the first chapter of the book. He calls back home and he says to his father who picks up... It's on what? I think he's on phone, but he's saying, "Turn on to WhatsApp because I can show you." He says, "I've killed 10 Jews with my own hands. Oh, father, your son has killed 10 Jews." And his father is saying, "Where are you? Where are you?" "I want to show you, dad. I want to show you. I've killed Jews with my own hands, your son. Put mother on the phone." Mother comes on the phone, the brother comes on the phone. This is one of many, many stories from the day that suggests something, which I would say is not just indoctrination, but yes, evil.

Lex Fridman

First of all, those phone calls are somehow uniquely horrific. But I've also heard recordings of phone calls made by Ukrainian soldiers to their parents and Russian soldiers to their

parents and they have... Not as intense and not as horrific, but they have a similar nature to them, which there's an aspect of war where you dehumanize the other side in order to fight that war. We have to remember that element is going to be there in a time of war, in a time of desperation.

Douglas Murray

It would be a strange type of simple sort of, I don't know, pride in war to go into an eight-year-old woman's house and kill her on her floor and then film her dead body, her body in its final moments and send it round to all of that woman's friends on her phone, on her Instagram account. You may have heard different things from me, but I mean, I would be surprised if there were even the most vociferous of Russian soldiers phoning back home to Moscow and saying, "Mom, you won't believe my luck. I managed to rape and kill this 18-year-old woman." That's quite unusual, even in warfare. And that's one of the things about Hamas and what I describe as the death cult types, which makes them different from other people.

Lex Fridman

But that's the channeling of evil, and hatred, and anger in the human spirit. But that doesn't make that person evil.

Douglas Murray

No, I disagree.

Lex Fridman

You commit that once.

Douglas Murray

I think that there is such a force as evil in the world, and I think it can descend and it can be used. It's very hard to find a non-theological way to talk about this. But everything I've seen, there are actions that people like Hamas committed on the 7th that cannot be described as anything other than evil. The things that happened at the Nova Party were especially appalling. I mean, it was all appalling, but it was especially appalling because first of all, it's a party which people like you and I, or at least you and I when we were younger might have been at. And so everyone knows the world of a dance party in all night raving in the desert to commune with nature and the universe and to take some psychedelics and to expand your consciousness and your love and all of that sort of thing. The fact that people doing that at 6:30 in the morning then encountered people coming in to the party on trucks and military vehicles and just massacring them and raping them. I mean, I give examples of the firsthand accounts of people who survived, but I mean, it's beyond belief of almost anything else I've covered in war. And it's because it seems so... I mean, an army facing another army is one thing. A terrorist group in civilian clothing facing an army is another thing. A terrorist group facing a group of young people at a dance unarmed and doing what they did is pretty hard to

comprehend unless you use the lexicon of evil somewhere. So that stated, can you empathize with the suffering of Palestinians and Gaza with the destruction that resulted as a response? Yes. What has happened in response is terrible, terrible for the citizens of Gaza. I was there on the first time a couple of days early into the ground invasion when the citizens of Gaza were coming south. I was in the middle of the strip and the humanitarian corridor had been set up to try to stop the hostages being taken south deeper into Gaza and to try to stop the Hamas leadership from making it south. It actually didn't really work because they'd already got a lot of the hostages south. It was an attempt to keep Hamas there and fight them in the north so as not to be dragged all the way... In the end, dragged all the way in any way. But, yes, and I mean watching the citizens of Gaza moving through the humanitarian corridor and everyone was being checked for bombs, suicide vests, checked for particularly young men of military age. I mean, you look at this tide of human misery and you think, "This is terrible." But this is a terrible thing that had been brought upon them by the people who had been miss governing the place that they lived in. And of course, on a human level, you feel terrible that these people are going through this. At the same time, human empathy for them can coexist beside an unspeakable anger that they had come to this point because of the fact that they had elected a terror group to run their territory. And one of the things obviously is that a lot of people like to say, and it's true, of course, this didn't all start on October the 7th. Absolutely true. This particular round, this particularly intense round of war started on October the 7th without doubt. Hamas did not have to attack on October the 7th. It wasn't like they were forced to liberate themselves or something that some of the defenders of Hamas claim. But the conflict of course goes back a lot earlier. But you will have to always keep on contending with this fact that there is one central issue to the paradigm of that conflict, what used to be called the Arab-Israeli conflict and now has become interestingly rebranded, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But there is one absolutely essential issue to this which cannot be forgotten, which is do the Palestinians want a state or do they want to destroy the Jewish state? And if they want to destroy the Jewish state as they've tried many times, it's a disaster for them. It's a total disaster for them. If they want to create their own state, they've already had several very good shots to do it, one of which is Gaza post 2005. But they've never shown in their leadership the desire to live with a Jewish state, and that's the catastrophe for the Palestinians.

Lex Fridman

Can you still mount the case of the lived experience of Palestinians and pro-Palestinian voices that describe the Gaza situation as an occupation, West Bank too, and in the case of Gaza, open air prison?

Douglas Murray

To take them in order, there's nothing about Gaza that was an open air prison. They had ability to trade. They had the ability to move in and out in increasing numbers. Egypt wasn't so keen on allowing Palestinians from Gaza into Egypt. Still isn't. But at the time of the 7th,

there was actually an interesting... One of the things the international community was pushing for was more Palestinians to be coming into Israel every day through the Eretz Crossing and others to work in Israel because they can make a better living in Israel than they can in Gaza. And this the, as it were, normalization route was slowly being attempted. It as being pushed on Israel [inaudible 01:51:42] did a little bit too fast for Israel's comfort, but it happened. That completely came to an end, and that dream has gone since the 7th of October.

Lex Fridman

Can you clarify the dream, the normalization relationship?

Douglas Murray

The normalization dream.

Lex Fridman

Between Gaza and Israel?

Douglas Murray

Gone. There will be-

Lex Fridman

Really?

Douglas Murray

Yeah, no normalization. No, not after that. And one of the reasons is the number of people, again, who I've spoken with, who employed Palestinians, worked with Palestinians, worked alongside Palestinians, encouraged more Palestinians to be coming from Gaza in order to work in Israel, and these were their brothers and sisters and so on and so forth. One of the reasons why the massacres of the 7th were so successful in the kibbutz, in the communities in the South was because of the number of the terrorists who came in with detailed house to house maps of those communities. I spoke with one man who, his community, they had a security officer chief and Hamas came in. They knew to go and kill him and his family first, and then which families... I've seen the maps myself. They came in with incredibly accurate information about these communities. How did they have them? Because it was given to them by the brothers, by the workers, by the people of Gaza who were coming in and out. So there is nobody that will trust that ever again.

Lex Fridman

There's a lot of Palestinians that have lived and flourished inside Israel. What are they saying? What are they feeling and what are the Israelis feeling about them? Is there still camaraderie to some degree or is it completely destroyed?

Douglas Murray

My observation at the beginning was that everyone was extremely wary. I mean, if you've worked beside somebody and then found out they sold out your family, you will never trust again. And that particularly in a small country like Israel, the word of that happening goes out very fast. At the very beginning, there was intense, intense fear about that, including of the 20% or so of the population who are Arab Israelis. I actually think one of the few positive news stories of the period is that that population within Israel has by and large held. There hasn't been an Intifada. One of the reasons why there hasn't been more terrorist activity in the West Bank in Judea and Samaria is because the Israelis have been very careful along with the Palestinian authority to some extent, cooperating to keep that down. But there wasn't a full war on three fronts, for instance, which was at risk of happening. So I think that the coexistence within Israel has pretty much held. There are some terrible examples, far too regular, but not as regular that could happen of Muslim Arab Israelis carrying out acts of terror as it was sympathy with Hamas. I was in the middle of one such attack myself late last year and in a town called Hadera. And those things have happened, but it's not... That particular catastrophe has not occurred.

Lex Fridman

Can we talk about Benjamin Netanyahu? For a lot of people who spoke of evil, they refer to him as evil on the spectrum between good and evil. As a leader, where does Netanyahu fall?

Douglas Murray

Well, he's certainly not evil. Interesting if people looking at this conflict were to be reluctant to use the word evil of Hamas and eager to use it of the Israeli prime minister. It would be sort of telling, I would say.

Lex Fridman

Can we just actually linger on that point? There is a point you've made multiple times, which is we're more eager to criticize and maybe even over-exaggerate the criticism of democratically elected leaders.

Douglas Murray

Yes.

Lex Fridman

It's a dark, weird other quality of discourse at parties, aforementioned parties.

Douglas Murray

I mean, not to be flippant for a moment. It's a little bit like who do you show your worst sides to the people you love? My intense irritability is something that tends to be felt most by people who are closest to me because if I expressed it to absolutely everybody I met at the party or a social setting, it would be hard. I mean, there's a tendency to lean heavily on the

people who are closest to you, the people who will put up with it. And something similar happens in international politics. You pressure the people who will listen. I mean, one of the things you hear a lot in the last year, people ignoramuses in the governments in places like Britain will say, we need to put more pressure on the Israelis to do X. And you go, "Well, in part that's because they will listen." If you go, "We need to put more pressure on the Ayatollahs in Iran to persuade them that Hamas are really bad and they shouldn't be doing this," what the hell do you think they're going to do? Are they even going to listen to you? They don't give a damn. You're talking totally different worlds. Not just a different language. It's a different world. And by the way, that happens in Israel. I mentioned it earlier, but it happens in Israel. When the Hostage Families Forum came about, I spent a lot of time there. I got to know a lot of the families. And they're remarkable. But one of the things you did notice from them as well was that a lot of them, they protest outside Netanyahu's house. They use clacks and horns and make sure he can never sleep. They will put up great big posters by his house of him with bloodied hands and so on. I think as much sympathy as you can for these families, the plight of knowing that your child is sitting in a tunnel in Gaza for a year, a day, an hour is intolerable. But there's a reason why the families protested Netanyahu, and that's because Sinwar didn't care. That wouldn't work if you said, "Understand my plight. I'm a Jewish mother and my daughter is thing." You think Sinwar the heads of Hamas care? You think the leaders in Qatar who host them care? The Qatari emir's mother when Sinwar was killed, praised Sinwar. You couldn't talk that language to these people, but you can talk that language to the elected prime minister of Israel because that, first of all, he's somebody who might listen to your pressure, could be pressured. And secondly he's simply the only person you can pressure. There's no one else. Hamas doesn't care. Hezbollah doesn't care. Iranian revolutionary government doesn't care.

Lex Fridman

Let's just say once, again, the obvious thing that while it is possible to discuss Hamas soldiers as freedom fighters, I'm not one of the folks that can take that perspective. It's a tough one to take.

Douglas Murray

I don't see how you can call them freedom fighters.

Lex Fridman

So this goes to the man from the land of peace and the man from the land of war. There is a lived experience of what it means to grow up in Gaza. And if you fully load that into your brain in a real way, not using the words of good and evil, but in a very deep human sense, from that place, from that place of desperation, from your home and your family is destroyed, doesn't matter why, doesn't matter if there's evil all around you that caused it. It doesn't matter. The facts are the facts. And from that place, somebody who's fighting for you can feel like a freedom fighter. I think it should be called out that, yes, it can feel that way from the lived experience. But Hamas is very clearly since we're talking about

Netanyahu, Hamas is evil. Okay. Now, you can still in that context discuss the degree to which Netanyahu is the right leader for this moment, and whether he goes too far, whether he's too politically selfish in the decisions he makes, whether he's too much a warmonger, whether he's utilizing the war for his own political gains and is not caring about the death of civilians in Gaza, for example, but more caring about his own political maintaining power. That's a perspective that I could steal, man. And that's a perspective worth we're discussing, and that's a perspective of many in Israel hold. When they criticize Netanyahu. He's increasingly less and less popular.

Douglas Murray

That's wrong. Opinion polls last month when he was in Washington, it showed it was an all time high. But you were saying...

Lex Fridman

I make my own poll, and according to my poll, I'm the greatest. I'm the nicest and the coolest person in the world. A hundred percent of people agree.

Douglas Murray

Sorry, I didn't mean to laugh that much.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. You laughed a little too much.

Douglas Murray

Too long.

Lex Fridman

It's more than the joke.

Douglas Murray

But you were saying, I mean the...

Lex Fridman

Okay, let's steelman the criticism of Netanyahu. And then steelman, the case for him that he's the right leader actually.

Douglas Murray

Well, the most devastating thing that anyone could come up against Netanyahu is that the 7th happened on his watch. After the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Golda Meir who is very distinguished prime minister of Israel, and a remarkable woman, but she effectively took the political hit for the Yom Kippur invasion by Israel's Arab neighbors happening on her watch. And I would've thought that most critics, fair-minded critics of Netanyahu inside

Israel would always hold that against him. One of the criticisms you hear a lot as well is this thing of Israel being divided in the year before the 7th because of the judicial reforms. I think there's a strong case for the judicial reforms in Israel, but it's a niche Israeli governance issue, which we don't have to get into. The point is that Netanyahu and its government were pushing these reforms through judicial reforms, and it was very divisive and on the streets of Tel Aviv and other cities every weekend. There were protests. And the police were tired because they'd spent week after week on overtime policing these protests, which often turned raucous, not to say violent. Well, sometimes violent and you could say, "Well, if you see that something is dividing your country this much, might you stop?" There is a claim by some people that one of the things that prompted the 7th was that Hamas and its backers in Qatar and Iran saw the division in Israeli society, saw the Israeli population. Significant chunk of it every week on the streets, shutting down highways, shutting down services and so on, and thought, "Good. Now is the time." In other words, what I quoted Sinwar as saying earlier when he was in prison in Israel was this thing, "One day you'll be weak, and then I'll strike." Maybe that is one of the things that Sinwar thought Israel was very weak. It had been divided, and therefore the time to strike. There's an argument against that which is that the 7th was in preparation and being planned before the judicial reform process in Israel began. So you can look at it several ways, but you could use that. You could say, "Look, your nation was divided. Don't push through anymore on that." There's lots of things like that. You could say that Netanyahu was one of the people responsible for the conception. There were critics of his, including critics who were in the war cabinet who thought that he was too focused on Hamas and not focused enough on Hezbollah. Other people think he was too focused on Hezbollah and not enough on Hamas. There's them and many other criticisms that people make of him. I've interviewed, I think every political leader in Israel from right to left, pretty much, and I have to say, I don't think there's any of them that wouldn't have responded similarly to the 7th of October to the way he has.

Lex Fridman

Okay. So that's inside Israel. Outside of Israel, despite what he said, he is one of the most hated people in the world. Just the raw quantity. Relative, he's loved by a lot of people, but there's a lot of people that... there's a lot of psychological effects that might explain that.

Douglas Murray

I mean, it's sort of strange, if there is a widespread global loathing of the prime minister of a country of 8 to 9 million people.

Lex Fridman

That might mean something more than hatred of the military actions and the policies of the one person.

Douglas Murray

I mean, there's an awful lot of people to hate in the world. There's a lot of wars in the world. It's always of interest to me, and obviously some of the one things I go into on democracies and death cults is this question of why is this so galvanizing for so many people? And I think that is a very, very interesting question. Why? By the way, let me do a quick addendum to that. You can notice something else that when people talk about the Republican failures in foreign policy and the last 30 years or so, it's very interesting. There's a certain type of person who will immediately mention Paul Wolfowitz and they will say, "Well, Wolfowitz? You mean deputy undersecretary of defense under George W. Bush?" You think he guided everything? Why would that be? Other than the fact that his name, as Marc Stein once said, starts with a nasty animal and ends Jewish.

Lex Fridman

That's a good one.

Douglas Murray

So I do think that there are very deep things at play.

Lex Fridman

That's a good line.

Douglas Murray

There are very deep things at play. Netanyahu, irrespective of anything he does, for a lot of people is a kind of devil. And you have to say, "Well, why is that?" Now, of course, some people will say, "Well, that's because of his terrible hawkishness and his actions and so on and so forth." ... hawkishness and his actions and so on and so forth. The case for Netanyahu is that he sees it as his historic purpose to defend the only homeland of the Jewish people and that that's his life's mission. And on that basis, I think he's been, by any measure, historic leader, he has warned the world about the threat from the mullahs in Tehran. He warned about Iranian revolutionary expansionism across the region, across Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen. And after the 7th, he has held together a very, very difficult set of challenges to keep international pressure at a tolerable level to do all sorts of things, but most importantly to oversee the two war aims that he set out at the beginning. I thought, let me just express this, I thought like a lot of people, when I heard about the hostages, my immediate instinct was they're all dead, they're all going to be dead, we'll never see them again. And that was the attitude of a lot of Israelis. But although there are still hostages being held, and as I've always said the war could end tomorrow if they were handed back, or at least the beginning of the end of the war could begin tomorrow if they were handed back, nevertheless, because of the actions of not just Netanyahu but The Israeli government, most of the hostages have been returned, did not expect this to happen. Hamas has not been completely destroyed, but it has been very, very significantly degraded, and you end up in the definition of what a total destruction of Hamas would look like, but they are not

anywhere near the capability they were in November of 2023. Their leadership has almost all been killed. The second tier of leadership almost all gone, and this is a just response to what Hamas did. The moment Netanyahu's reputation in Israel was at a low early on because of what had happened, but there's no doubt, and as I say in the final chapter of the book, I mean General Slim had this phrase from Defeat Into Victory, Israel isn't a victory yet in this conflict. But when in September last year, there were a set of operational successes, so extraordinary that, I mean, it was just like every day's news was... There was one day, I remember when after the Assad regime fell, when the Israeli Air Force took out the entirety of the Syrian Air Force in a day because they didn't want it falling into the hands of the new Jihadist administration in Syria. It was story number four on the BBC News website. The leadership of Hezbollah, gone, gone. The second and third tiers of Hezbollah, gone or wounded. Iran's Rolls-Royce, destroyed. These are very, very significant military achievements and are, in my mind, a just response to the attempts by Hezbollah, Hamas, and other Iranian proxies to destroy the Jewish state. Would another Israeli leader have been able to hold firm as Netanyahu has? I don't know but I do know that any of them would've done something similar or would've tried to do something similar, because there's no country on earth, no democracy on earth, which could possibly not respond to such an atrocity.

Lex Fridman

To the underlying point you made of why do so many people want to call him evil, and so the implication is it's not just a hatred of Israel, there's an ocean of hatred for the Jews.

Douglas Murray

Yes.

Lex Fridman

Why is there so much hatred for Jews in the world?

Douglas Murray

I would say there's one reason in particular, it's a stupid and gullible person's easy answer. Why does certain things happen in the world? What is our explanation of chance or unfairness or any number of things? Easiest, easiest, stupidest person's explanation is there's a small group of people doing it.

Lex Fridman

Let's not say stupid because there's something in the human mind that craves a nice clean theory of everything that explains all the problems. It's not just stupidest-

Douglas Murray

Let me rephrase, lowest grade.

Lex Fridman

Right.

Douglas Murray

Lowest grade.

Lex Fridman

Because I have that desire too to simplify everything like-

Douglas Murray

Be a bit antisemitic, what?

Lex Fridman

We've all been a bit antisemitic here and there, and just get a few vodkas in me, no. To find, I mean, maybe it's a mathematician in me, it's like to find a simple explanation for everything.

Douglas Murray

Right.

Lex Fridman

Actually, that's nice for historians do this.

Douglas Murray

Absolutely. I agree.

Lex Fridman

Analyzing why the Roman Empire collapsed. It's so nice to have, especially if it's a counterintuitive explanation. It's one of the favorite go-tos, right? Is an explanation for all the problems in the world.

Douglas Murray

It's the lowest resolution analysis imaginable.

Lex Fridman

Why is there traffic? Why did my wife leave me? Why did my wife cheating on me? Why did I lose my job? Why did I not get the job? So even on the personal level.

Douglas Murray

Oh, especially on the personal level. Why did I not get everything? Somebody must have held me back.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, and it's just that hatred of Jews has been such a popular go-to throughout history that you just always return back to the hits, I guess. And what is it special about the Jews as a group that people love to hate? Is it just because it's small number of people?

Douglas Murray

I think several things.

Lex Fridman

Successful?

Douglas Murray

One is small and without by any means saying this is a general rule, but disproportionately highly accomplished in certain fields at certain times. Prominent is a word I would use, prominent slightly beyond their numbers in certain places. It's not a full explanation. I mean all sorts of historical reasons why Jews were involved in banking, but then there are lots of historical reasons why the Scottish people, my own, were involved in banking. And to this day, you don't find many people who blame all international finance problems on the Scots. So they were just like easy grooves for people to fall into, it seems to me.

Lex Fridman

We should also mention banking, for some reason, money is a thing that people go to, but Jews have been disproportionately successful in the sciences and engineering mathematics and the arts and so on.

Douglas Murray

A sensible person would try to work out why that is and see what is replicable. A, I don't use the word stupid again, now a different type of person.

Lex Fridman

I'm triggered already.

Douglas Murray

A different type of person would look at that and say, that must mean they took something from me, and that's the most zero-sum game there is. It's an endlessly fascinating subject, because it seems to me that antisemitism is almost certainly a sort of ineradicable temptation of the human spirit at its ugliest and cheapest. But because it's back in our day, it bears some analysis again, and I would say two things about it. One is, as I and others have said many times in the past, one of the fascinating things about antisemitism is that it can cover everything at once. So the Jews get hated for being rich and for being poor, both for being the Rothschilds and for being Eastern European Jews escaping the pogroms. They can be hated for being religious and for being anti-religious and producing Marxism for

instance, hated for religiosity and secularism. They can be hated for most recently not having a state and therefore being ruthless cosmopolitans and also hated for having a state. And that makes it something very unusual actually in the history of human bigotry and bias and ugliness. But the real thing is, one of my great heroes, Vasily Grossman, says at the center of Life and Faith, almost everything that is worth saying about antisemitism is Grossman's genius that he could say in three to four pages what most people couldn't say in an entire life, even after life of study. But there's this passage in Life and Faith that I quote in my book, which is I just bowled me over when I read it some years ago when he says the interesting thing about antisemitism. He says you can meet it everywhere in the academy of sciences and in the games that children play in the yard. But Grossman's great insight is he says everywhere it tells you not about the Jews, but about the person making the claim. And the most important gift he gives in his analysis is when he says, describes it as a mirror to the person who is making the claims, culminating in this phrase I've been trying to make popular, which is he says, "Tell me what you accuse the Jews of, I'll tell you what you you're guilty of." It's a searingly brilliant insight. The Iranian revolutionary government accuses Israel of being a colonial power. The Iranian revolutionary government has been colonizing the Middle East throughout our lifetimes. The Turkish government accuses the Jewish state of being guilty of occupation. Do you know Northern Cyprus? Turks have been occupying half of Cyprus since the 1970s. Cyprus is an EU member state and Turkey is in NATO. So you can do this on and on. The people who accuse the Jewish state like the people who accuse Jews of something almost without fail is the thing they're guilty of. Look at the supporters of Hamas and Hamas. One of the things they say is that Israel is guilty of indiscriminate killing. Hamas, hello? What were you doing on the 7th? If you see, they're these crazy guys online who claim, repeatedly claim that for some reason Israeli soldiers will rape Palestinians when they meet them, whether in a prison or on the battlefield or in a hospital. It just erupts occasionally. These people go around and say, "Oh, my God, the IDF are rapists." Excuse me? You are the ones who spent the years after 2016 saying, "Believe all women," then from the 7th of October said, believe all women except for Jewish women who say they've been raped or seen their friends raped, and then you say, "Aha, the Jews are rapists." You've been carrying water for rapists and then go and accuse the Jews of rape. It just works. Every way you do it, it works. I do think the thing of psychological projection in the case of Israel is wild. I mean, it is wild. By the way, there's an interesting thing on this that I tried to get into in the book, which is this thing of why did so much of the world respond the way it did? I mean, we're sitting in New York. There was not one protest against Hamas in New York after the 7th of October. The Believe All Women crowd didn't come out against Hamas's rapes. The Black Lives Matter movement did not turn their attention to the killing of Israeli children or anything. Nobody did it. Nobody did it. The one thing that did happen very prominently was that people came out to attack the people who'd been attacked. And as I say in the opening of the book, I saw that myself down the road from him at Times Square on October the 8th, October the frigging 8th, the protests are in Times Square against Israel, justifying the attacks that were still going on. And this is something that deserves deep self-examination on behalf of people in the West who've seen this

movement overwhelm parts of our society, I mean degraded parts but parts, bits of the universities and so on. And I think there's an explanation for it, by the way, which again goes back to that issue of projection. When you and I last talked on camera, we were talking about my last book, *The War on the West*. And I remember saying to you there that one of the things I was talking about in that book was the deeply, deeply, wildly biased, unfair, and inaccurate estimation of the Western past, whereby America's original sin had to be identified and the original sin is slavery. So America has an original sin. Does Ghana have an original sin? No one knows. No one really will think it polite to point one out, and you go on and on with these things that I identified in *The War in the West*, these sins of the West. And they have in recent years been reduced to the claim that countries like the one we're sitting in are guilty of what? Colonialism, settler colonialism, white supremacy, slavery, genocide, and a couple of others you can throw in probably. One of the things I remember saying to you when we spoke about that was that one of the deep problems of setting up that system of thought, pseudo thought, non-thought, would be thought is that there's nothing you can do about it. Even if it was true, there's nothing you can do about it. If it turned out that your ancestors in the 18th century once owned a slave, what are you going to do? There's no mechanism to forgive or be forgiven because you didn't do it, and there's no one in life who could accept the apology. And I remember setting it up there in *The War on the West*, I set up this very, very risky, dangerous, unforgivable, unforgiving thing that had been set up about our societies. But I would say that since October the 7th, there has been an answer for a certain type of person, which is I am from a society where I have been told I am guilty of settler colonialism, white supremacy, genocide, ethnic cleansing, and more. I've been told all of these things. I have been put in an ungetoutable of situation of moral burden that can never be relieved because I can't ask anyone's forgiveness and nobody can forgive me, but ah, here's a country which I can accuse of all of these things in the here and now, load my energies, my burdens onto and what's more I might be able to end it and by doing so would relieve myself. In other words, to slight just, I quote, I tweak Grossman with the people in America elsewhere who've fallen into this trap, I tweak him by saying, "On this occasion, tell me what you accuse the Jews of, and I'll tell you what you've been told you're guilty of."

Lex Fridman

Yeah, it's an interesting kind of projection. Just to observe some of the sociological phenomena here on top of all this, it does seem that hatred of Jews gets a lot of engagement online. So I watch it like a curiosity, like I'm an alien observing Earth, is this dangerous to you or is it just a bunch of trolls and grifters, let's say cosplaying as Nazis. It's just-

Douglas Murray

Could be both.

Lex Fridman

... fun to trigger the libs?

Douglas Murray

It could be all of this I think it is and a lot more. I mean taboos, taboos can be fun to break, I suppose. And I suppose there are some people online who have grown up knowing that since the Holocaust, antisemitism was taboo and they've run out of, goes back to what we were saying earlier a bit. They've got bored of that Holocaust smaller course. They'd say, "I've heard enough about that." And maybe those people have gone off in a funny direction as a result, but I don't think that's the main. I think that's a detail compared to the real thing. The real thing is that antisemitism is back and there is a certain type of person who's loving it.

Lex Fridman

Is it really back? So I watch a lot-

Douglas Murray

Well, it never goes away. It's just that since the 7th, I think that it's had a great resurgence. And this isn't to say, I assume and that doesn't mean that any criticism of Israel is antisemitic, no, it doesn't. But as I have often said, if you don't ever express any interest in the murder of Muslims in Syria, not any interest in genocide in Sudan, killing of hundreds of thousands of people in Yemen, but on the 8th of October, you are on the street with a placard attacking Israel, I'm sorry, you're an antisemite for sure. You may not know you are, but that's what's motivating you.

Lex Fridman

It gets a lot of engagement. I watched it.

Douglas Murray

It does. It does.

Lex Fridman

I watched it.

Douglas Murray

But I mean, it's one of several things you can always see get huge engagement. I mean, if you say that there's a massive pedophile ring run by prominent politicians, it might be total horse shit, likely to be total horse shit, but it'll also get a hell of a lot of engagement.

Lex Fridman

But that's still... so the pedophile ring like Epstein Island, that kind of stuff.

Douglas Murray

Yeah, all which is very interesting.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, it's like great, all right, cool. Let's get behind that conspiracy. But the Jews thing, the hatred of Jews is still, that's the greatest hits still.

Douglas Murray

It is. And I mean you see it with, I mean some of the people who've made minor celebrities of themselves, with a sort of made up version of history with a smattering of this and a little bit of that, and then the just asking questions. I'm not saying, but there are certain [inaudible 02:29:43] have helped this along. But as I said earlier, it's just the lowest grade explanation of a certain type of mind looking for a pattern and looking for meaning. I mean, I can give you just one quick example of why that in the case of Israel is so extraordinary, is the number of otherwise semi-intelligent people who will tell you that the problem is simply that the Israelis need to give the Palestinians and other state. And if they do, it will solve the problems of the region and the wider world and irrespective of the fact that the Palestinians agreeing given to several states, the claim that this particular land dispute would unlock every other injustice in the world should be seen on its face to be preposterous. There is no reason why if the Palestinians got another state either in Gaza or in parts of Judea and Samaria, the West Bank, there is no reason why we should expect the economy of Yemen to boom. It would not inevitably lead to the mullahs in Tehran giving equal rights to women or anything else. The most likely thing is you simply have another failed Arab state run by a proxy of Tehran. That's the best case scenario. And by the way, even lifelong defenders of the Palestinian cause like Salman Rushdie. He said recently, he said, "I've always been a supporter of the Palestinian people in their course, but it is an unavoidable fact that if another state was given to the Palestinians, it simply be at best another front for the Iranian regime in Iran." The best. So why the passion? Why the unbelievable wild passion about this? And I say some of it can be, should be argued out and so on, and some of it can be explained, but there's definitely a realm of it, a layer of it, which is simply at that level of this excites something within me, this excites something within me.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, there's something compelling to people about hating Jews.

Douglas Murray

Look at the prominence or semi-prominent people who are willing to play around with the idea that 9/11 was an inside job and somehow it's done by the Israelis or the Jews. I mean, look at this shit is going around.

Lex Fridman

I have to admit, there's a part of my brain that's pulled towards conspiracies. There's something compelling and fun about a simple explanation for things, what's really going on behind the scenes. Because the real world, when you don't look into conspiracies, first of all, it's complicated, and second of all, it's kind of boring. It's a bunch of incompetent people.

Douglas Murray

Usually opening up Pandora's boxes. They don't understand.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, it's pushing buffoons. I've walked around and hung around with a lot of powerful and rich people, and the thing I learned is they're just human beings. I've yet to be in a room where exceptionally brilliant psychopaths are plotting.

Douglas Murray

You never got that invite?

Lex Fridman

No. In fact, a lot of people in the positions of power, I mean, I'm just continuously disappointed that they're not ultra... I love competence. The places where I've seen competence inklings of it is in low-level like soldiers, like low-level, what do you call that? People that do stuff with their hands. So builders of different kinds like engineering, like craftsmen. I've seen -

Douglas Murray

Yes, because you've got a very specific task that could be highly complicated, but you get to apply yourself to and to solve.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. Over years, you've mastered it. It's passed across generations and so on, but states, craft and that kind of stuff -

Douglas Murray

Well, because there's so many variables. I mean, this is one when you're trying to lure me onto prognostications on Ukraine earlier. I was saying I've seen enough to know that I just don't know, because I know the amount of things that can change all the time. Some years ago, I was talking to a former public servant in the UK when Boris Johnson was prime minister and COVID started. I mentioned to this friend, I said, "Well, it's pretty bad luck for Boris that he came in to do one thing, which was Brexit, and then there's a global pandemic from Wuhan and he's got to mug up on that and then gets it really wrong." But anyway, and I was really struck by the fact that this man, man of great insight happened to disagree politically, but said to me, "But Douglas is always like this." And he said, "Look at Tony Blair

came into power in 1979 wanting to reform education in the UK, ends up trying to remake the Middle East." I mean, as I say, one of the reasons why I am scornful of conspiracy theorists and most conspiracy theories, not to say that there aren't some that do actually turn out to be to have something in them. It has happened. A lot of things are called conspiracy theories that turn out to be true. But in general, the suspicion and the scorn I have for people who fall into this is, as I say, it's a very low grade, low resolution. Look at the world by people who clearly have never seen the wildness of actions in the world and the way that they reverberate and the number of events. I mean, I once spoke some years ago to a politician who literally said to me, I won't name the country, but said to me, "Can you help us out with just how to cope with the day and understand the day-to-day struggle we're having with the cycle?" And I said, "What are you talking about?" And they said, "Our experience in government is that every day, something comes up, which we have to firefight," and that's what we do that day. And then the next day something else comes up, which we have to fight and we're not getting our policies done. And I just thought, for me, that rings an awful lot truer, than that country gets the odd phone call from a member of a Jewish family telling them, it's like, "Come on."

Lex Fridman

I do before I forget. When I ask you about Iran, what role do they play in this conflict? It's fascinating how it seems like Iran is, fingerprints are everywhere in the Middle East. And it's also fascinating that I have a lot of friends. My best friend is Iranian. It's fascinating that the Islamic Revolution in Iran took the country from the leadership perspective backwards in such a drastic way and that they're still in power. That confuses me because I know now it's possible. I don't know the people of Iran. Sorry to make the obvious statement, but I just have a lot of friends in Iran and a lot of them, everybody I know, they're opposed to the regime and they're brilliant, educated, thoughtful, worldly people. And it confuses me that this is one of the, I would say, one of the greatest nations on earth.

Douglas Murray

In one of the great cultures of earth.

Lex Fridman

The cultures and the people's Iran.

Douglas Murray

Yeah, I agree.

Lex Fridman

Then you look at that and then you look at the leadership when they're behind most of the terror groups,

Douglas Murray

In the region. Certainly, yeah.

Lex Fridman

Can you just speak to that and how is it still the same regime since 1979?

Douglas Murray

I know, as you know, I start *On Democracies and Death Cults* with the flight taking the Ayatollah Khomeini or other from Paris to Tehran.

Lex Fridman

The flight that you say you wish never happened.

Douglas Murray

I think it's one of the two worst journeys of the 20th century.

Lex Fridman

What's the other one?

Douglas Murray

Lenin's train getting to Petrograd.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. It's always about the transportation.

Douglas Murray

Yes, I know. I'm really a transport guy. No, wait until my book of 10 best journeys.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, across the world.

Douglas Murray

No, just as the train, the Finland station brought the basilis of Bolshevism into Russia. So the flight coming from Paris, bringing the Ayatollah Khomeini to Tehran, brought the basilis of Khomeinism, the most radical form of Shi'ite Islam to Tehran and to Iran. It's one of the great tragedies of the modern era, what happened there. You actually, I have a lot of Persian friends and I had the great good fortune early in my life to have a very close late friend who had grown up in pre-revolutionary Iran, was very fond of the Shah and so on. Her father had been an ayatollah before the overthrow of the Shah, and everyone had criticisms of him, but when you saw what came... criticisms of him. But when you saw what came after him, it was among other things, what I learned from her and other friends from that region, was that, I suppose two things. One is, of course, is that it's a sort of central conservative insight,

being that things can always be worse. They can always be worse. Never say this is rock bottom, because you might have a Shah with hundreds or even thousands of political prisoners in cells, but you could always have Ayatollah Khomeini butchering them all, including the people who helped him get to power like the communists and the trade unionists who simply were fighting against the Shah and then were very useful for the Ayatollah until he didn't need them anymore. But the other thing I learned from that particular friend and others was this thing that, and again, it's very hard for the western mindset, very hard for the American mindset in particular, that there is such a thing as fanaticism, real fanaticism and real ideological and real religious fanaticism, and the thing that I describe leads to the death cult mindset. That fanaticism is something which is very easy for the West to forget because we haven't seen it in a while. We get very distant echoes of it in our own societies, really, and we're highly attuned to hear them, which is good in some ways. But Khomeinism not only vastly set back the Persian people, the Iranian nation, but has managed to keep it in subjugation since 1979. And your question of why gets to one of the biggest questions, really, the answer to which has to be understood, which is, it's what Solzhenitsyn says at one point in *Gulag Archipelago*, in that passage where he describes, "When we heard the footsteps on the staircase and the knock was on our neighbor's door and we knew our neighbor was being taken away, why did we not stop them?" And in the case of the revolutionary government in Iran, it's the same answer as, whether it's Hamas governing Gaza with whoever the people in Gaza are who would've liked to have seen them overthrown, people don't realize that despite the rhetoric and everything else, everything changes if the other guy might kill you. And that when the Green Revolution in 2009 started in Iran, why was it put down? Why didn't it work? The sort of Iranians who I really hope one day get their country back, why did all these smart young students and others, why after they came out, why was it put down? It was put down because the Basij militia will shoot you in the head and they'll take you to a prison, as they did with the Iranian students, and they'll rape you with bottles and kill you. And even a little bit of that goes an awfully long way to tell the rest of society not to do it again. We know it happens like that from films, but too few people understand that regimes like that in Tehran operate like that on a grand scale, on the biggest of scales, and with the ultimate of brutality, and that's how they stay empower. And one other thing on that, by the way, which is, I was reminded of this the other day, thinking about this, what I've just described as a sort of a problem in democracies is that we like to think everyone thinks like us, and we'd like everyone to be like us, and we believe fictions that we're taught in films, like everyone basically wants the same things as us, and you go, you haven't stepped outside the walls of the city if you think that. But the second thing is this thing of the death cults of why we sort of singly fail to understand that this is possible. Khomeinism is both very specific and also very strongly linked to totalitarian and radical and extremist death cult movements that are not that far in our past. I mean, there's a moment when Oriana Fallaci interviewed Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, one of the very few western journalists to do so, she says to him, "These people in the street, this movement, this revolution you've begun, it's guided by hate, it's hate, it's all hate." And Khomeini says, "No, no, it's love. It's love." And it's actually a scene that appears in *The*

Satanic Verses of Rushdie where that exact same thing happens. But I was thinking about this recently because I was thinking, but how can you explain to a western mindset that that's something that's going on, that there are people directed by this hate that calls itself love? And I was reminded of a book I haven't read since I was probably a teenager or something, made a great impression on me then. Did you ever read the Tragic Sense of Life? Miguel de Unamuno, a great Spanish existentialist philosopher, died in the '30s. Unamuno had an encounter with students at the university in the '30s when he realized, I mean this is the early period of the Francoists, de Rivera and all those people. Unamuno is at this meeting and the chant goes up from the eager students who have fallen into this sort of Falangist Francoist ideology already, they end up chanting in front of him as he's trying to defend the principles by which he has lived his life. They end up chanting in front of him, "Viva la Muerte," long live death. Long live death. And he tries to explain to them, this is a necrophilic chant.

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Douglas Murray

But those young men in free Francoist Spain shouting long live death, they have their counterparts today. They are the people who taunt Americans, Westerners, Israelis and others with lines like, we love death more than you love life.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, that's the line you return to. That's a really difficult line to load in, because if you base your whole existence on that notion then, well, you're a danger to the world. That's a good foundation for committing evil. I have to ask, because you mentioned that interview, you had a good interview with Benjamin Netanyahu after October 7th, and I've been very fortunate to get the opportunity to interview a few world leaders, it looks like I'll interview Vladimir Putin and others. Want to have a general question about how do you interview people like this? Maybe to put your historian hat on of how do you approach the interview of world leaders such that you can gain a deeper understanding in the hope that that adds to the compassion in the world. So I have a deep sense that understanding people you might hate helps, in the long arc of history, add compassion to the world. But even just to add understanding is difficult in those kinds of contexts, and maybe it's more useful to think about, from a historian perspective, of how you need to interview somebody like Hitler or Stalin or Churchill, FDR during World War II. I think about this a lot, especially if it's a 2, 3, 4, 5 hour conversation.

Douglas Murray

Well, there's a lot of weight on you when you do those conversations, isn't there?

Lex Fridman

From where? So who's watching? Is it historians 20 years from then?

Douglas Murray

Who knows, I mean, the whole data might be wiped. I suspect there's a weight on you because every major world leader you interview, and you've done some amazing ones, but I mean, presumably you have a set of people saying, "You've got to ask him about this, you can't not address this." And that's a very challenging one because of course, although an interview with a politician should not be supine, nor can it be endlessly interrogative, because you're not the prosecutor, and they don't have to be the guilty party answering to you. And I've noticed the number of people who interview people, world leaders and others, who go in with a set of those things, and at some point the other party can just, "I don't need this." And people criticizing you don't realize that, you just can't do that.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, I suppose why journalists behave the way they do, although I have increasingly less and less respect for the journalists, the average journalists, have more and more respect for the great journalists as my respect for the average journalist decreases, because a lot of the journalists seem to be signaling to their own in group. But there is a lot of pressure on people in that situation to ask what I would say is the dumb question. Why is it the dumb question? The adversarial question that the world leader, the person, is ready for, they've answered that question, and what you're trying to do is I guess one, to signal that you've asked the question and to push them.

Douglas Murray

Yes, yes.

Lex Fridman

Two, you're trying to just create drama, because really what people that ask you to ask that question, they want you to embarrass that person. They hate them and they want you to make them piss their pants or something, or just start crying and run out off the room.

Douglas Murray

Walk out.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, walk out in a way that is embarrassing for them, they could be like, look at that pathetic person. And that reveals to me nothing except maybe the weakness of the interviewee that they can't stand up to a tough question.

Douglas Murray

Yes.

Lex Fridman

But mostly I have to do a lot of thinking because you get attacked a lot if you ask questions from a place of curiosity that actually have a chance to reveal who the person is.

Douglas Murray

There's a very interesting line that Robin Day who was quite a distinguished interviewer, a very distinguished interviewer back in the day, said about Jeremy Paxman, who was a very interrogative interviewer in the UK. Robin Day, who was quite good at being rude to politicians, but carefully, said the problem with the new approach as he saw it from the '90s of political interviewing was, he said, "If you think the person you're speaking to is a liar, you should get them to reveal that they're a liar, don't just call them a liar."

Lex Fridman

Yeah, yep.

Douglas Murray

I think that is, again, it's something that a lot of people sitting on the other side of the screen don't realize, is that it may satisfy them that you call a person a liar to their face, but it doesn't do anything, and it actually reveals nothing. If somebody is a liar and they reveal themselves to be a liar, then that's something else. But yes, I mean, I hear you, obviously you have a lot of different voices telling you what to do. It's also difficult because one of the things that I don't think anyone really understands is that in the end it's just you.

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Douglas Murray

I'm sure that you have this about Putin, people say, "I know exactly how you can..." They could give end endless advice, at the end it's you sitting down talking to him. It's like everybody knows how to behave on the presidential debate stage, but only a few people have done it.

Lex Fridman

In person it's actually pretty difficult.

Douglas Murray

It's very difficult, because you've got all this weird behind the scenes stuff as well. You've got all of the games that people play.

Lex Fridman

I mean, yeah, I interviewed Zelenskyy, I'm pretty fearless in general, and he was a very human and fascinating human. But there is soldiers with guns standing all around.

Douglas Murray

And you didn't have anyone? No one was packing on your side.

Lex Fridman

I had one friend, a security person, who's also Ukrainian, so you never know, he could turn on.

Douglas Murray

You have an infiltrator.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, exactly. No, I mean, that doesn't have any effect. And by the way, I should mention that, because it's hilarious to me, but process wise, with Narendra Modi and with anyone, they said it was scripted and all this kind of stuff, I would never do anything scripted, they don't get to have a say in anything I ask, I have complete freedom. Sometimes you'll have people on the team very politely nudge like, "Hey, can you," and I'll very politely say, "Thank you," smile, but that doesn't mean I have to fucking do it.

Douglas Murray

Right.

Lex Fridman

I can do whatever the hell I want. By the way, with world leaders it doesn't happen, it happens more with CEOs, because they have usually PR and comms people, they'll just be like very politely, "Hey, you know the thing about when they, the sexual assault harassment charges they've had, could we just, there's no reason to really linger on that."

Douglas Murray

We don't have to do that, yeah. One of my favorite things anyone's ever said, its only ever happened, I know a couple of cases of this happening in private. A friend of mine once years ago was debating against the, this is before the Civil War in Syria, was debating something to do with the Middle East, and one of the people on the other side was the then Syrian ambassador in London. The then Syrian ambassador in London says something about the Israeli treatment of the Palestinians, and my friend stands up and starts talking about Assad seniors' massacre of the Palestinians in Hama, where they killed like 10,000 Palestinians in a day. And my friend starts talking about the Hama massacre by Assad senior, and the big fat Syrian ambassador stands up to respond, and he says, "That is none of your business." And my friend was like, "Oh, I thought we were going to get a denial."

Lex Fridman

Let me just ask you one more thing about Netanyahu, because I also have the opportunity to do a three-hour interview with him at this stage. And I've been, if I'm just being honest, very

hesitant to do it, and I just don't know how a conversation there could help add compassion to the world. And that particular topic, no matter how well you do it, you do take on a very large number of people that will just make it their daily activity to hate you and to write about it and to post about it and to accuse you of things. In some sense, I don't want to lose the part of me that's vulnerable to the world.

Douglas Murray

People have very little understanding of things if they're willing to say that because you're sitting down and talking with somebody you are ergo platforming them, advancing their cause, being used, being a shill, or whatever like that. You might be actually just finding some things out, which I think is something you do expertly. And another thing that your critics wouldn't realize is that life is long, and hopefully, God willing, we're both around for a long time, and therefore you don't blow everything up at the request of some twat online. But I do think that a superpower of a kind is to identify the people whose opinion you care for and worry about their opinion, and no one else's, really, and you just keep your own guiding light. That's what's always done it for me, is that I've always said I wouldn't care if I was the only person with my opinion and billions of people disagreed. I mean, I might be curious if the whole planet disagreed with me, but it doesn't, fundamentally that's not why... I'll send you Churchill's great speech on the death of Chamberlain. I mean it. He says one of the most wise and brilliant things. I was thinking about it slightly earlier when you were talking about Zelenskyy, because one of Churchill's greatneses was his magnanimity, and when his great political opponent, Chamberlain died in 1940, and Churchill had just taken over as prime minister, he could have used the opportunity, and we might even say that some politicians in our day won't be able to resist the opportunity, he could have used the opportunity to say, you see, I was right, and Chamberlain didn't know what the hell he was doing and he's led us into this mess, and you should have all listened to me, because that would've been a good time. It would've been a good time to say that, that would've been one for the win, as they say. But Churchill doesn't do that in his great eulogy for Chamberlain. He talks about how hard it is for mankind to operate in the world, and how you can do it successfully. He very movingly says, he doesn't even mention the name of Hitler, he says, "What were Neville Chamberlain's flaws?" He says, "Desiring of human peace, to be seeking peace," and he says, "and the curse that he had was he was led astray by a very wicked man." But then he has this great passage where Churchill says, beautiful resonant passage about how, he says, "It's not given to men happily for them, for otherwise life would prove intolerable to foresee or to predict to any great extent the unfolding course of events." And he says, "In one phase, men seem to have been right and in another they're proved wrong," and then a different scale of values emerges. And he says, "What is the worth of all this?" He says, "The only guide to a man is his conscience, the only shield his memory, his rectitude, and the sincerity of his actions." In fact, he says, "It doesn't matter what happens, if you have this," finishes it he says, "However the fates may play, but if you have this shield to guard you," he says, "you march always in the ranks of honor." All that can guide a man is that. If you lose sight of it, and some people do, and maybe everyone does at some point,

then it's a challenge, and then you get buffeted by the tos and throes of the waves of popular opinion, and that's dangerous. But if you keep sight and hold onto what you believe, a million billion foes don't matter.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, that is the path. We were talking offline about the great biography of Churchill. Churchill himself made mistakes, then admitted the mistakes, and we can even say was proud of the mistakes. I mean-

Douglas Murray

He learned from them.

Lex Fridman

Learned from them, that's all the best you could do. The worst you could probably do is being afraid of making mistakes.

Douglas Murray

That's what T.R. famously said in the Man in the Arena Speech.

Lex Fridman

T.R. Yeah, the old T.R. Those two have made quite a few mistakes, but are, in the end, some of the greatest humans ever created. Norm MacDonald, Churchill, and Teddy Roosevelt.

Douglas Murray

Did we do Norm? I think we did him before coming on air.

Lex Fridman

Oh, before coming on air, yeah. Well, he's always everywhere in the air around us, one of the great comedians. All right, what gives you hope about this whole thing we have going on, human civilization? You've been covering some of the darker aspects, The Madness of Crowds, the madness of geopolitics, the madness of wars. Sometimes when the sun shines through the clouds and there's a smile on Douglas Murray's face, what's the source of the smile and the warmth?

Douglas Murray

Endless numbers of things. Endless numbers of things. I get enormous encouragement from smart young people, actually, that's just the best thing ever. I was in Kiev the other week and I was asked to speak to students at the university, and irrespective to the rather tricky situation that they are in, it's just great to, as you know, to speak to a roomful of students about things, and then hang around afterwards and just answer all the questions you can and hear from them about their lives and what they want to do, and remembering what you were like at their age and how goofy you were and how much you were going to get

wrong, and how much you had to learn and how much you were going to enjoy it, and seeing the opportunities they have in front of them if things go right. Just smart young people giving enormous encouragement all the time, that's the best thing, I mean, it's just-

Lex Fridman

Yeah, you can see endless possibility in their eyes, and they're not burdened by, let's say, the cynicism that builds up.

Douglas Murray

Even the cynicism though, I mean, you can resist that. I mean, I've got quite a deep well spring of it, but I mean, you can't only fall into that, because there's so much else it doesn't cover. It'd be like spending your life being ironic.

Lex Fridman

So that said, you have seen a lot of war, especially recently and directly, Ukraine, Israel, has that changed you? Has that dimmed some of that warmth and light?

Douglas Murray

That's a very difficult question to answer. I don't know. Differs day to day.

Lex Fridman

So sometimes there's a heaviness there because of the things you've seen?

Douglas Murray

Sure, yeah, at times, at times, yeah.

Lex Fridman

Do you regret going as much as you have to the front lines?

Douglas Murray

No, no. One of the reasons why a war is for a writer kind of the ultimate subject is because you see life weirdly at its ultimate. Very strange, strange thing, but it is the truth. Death, when it's in front of you, is something which gives a terrible clarity to everything, and you see how people will love and even sometimes laugh more, how they'll... There's an essay by Montaigne that's always on my mind called Why We Weep and Laugh at the Same Thing. Everything's just more, and the real thing is that you see the very, very best of people and the very worst, and they're beside each other.

Lex Fridman

There some... So I've gotten a bunch of chances to interact with soldiers on the front line in Ukraine, and there is some level of all the bullshit niceties, or whatever it is, of civilian life is all stripped away. It just seems more honest somehow.

Douglas Murray

Yes, absolutely, absolutely. Well, I mean, I couldn't agree more. And there's the wild clarity about things, not because of enemies or anything like that, but because of, I think I mentioned, I joked about this with some Ukrainian soldiers in '22 because they wanted a cigarette, and we stepped outside, I accompanied them outside because they weren't allowed to smoke indoors in this hotel, which there were rockets falling. And I said to them, "Isn't it strange that fear of secondhand smoke has superseded this?" But I don't know, it's-

Lex Fridman

And seeing the humor in that, when you're on the front line, when you're fighting in a war, the humor of that is somehow just perfectly delicious. You could just laugh all day about that. And the absurdity of life is just right there-

Douglas Murray

Yes, that's right.

Lex Fridman

And it's so honest and it's so beautiful. And that's why a lot of soldiers are traumatized, they're destroyed by war, but they also miss it.

Douglas Murray

That's right, that's right. Absolutely. Oh, my God. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Lex Fridman

There's an intimacy to the whole thing.

Douglas Murray

Absolutely. Well, that's right, I mean, everyone says, I never felt more alive, yeah, and I wouldn't do anything different.

Lex Fridman

Well, I hope, just like Churchill, you keep fighting the good fight and not listening to anybody, and I'll try to learn to do the same. Douglas, I'm a huge fan, thank you for doing this.

Douglas Murray

It's been a great pleasure, and right back at you.

Lex Fridman

Thank you. Thanks for listening to this conversation with Douglas Murray. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now let me leave you with some words from Bertrand Russell, "The problem with the world is that fools and fanatics

are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts." Thank you for listening, and hope to see you next time.