

**Lex Fridman Podcast #464 - Dave Smith: Israel, Hamas, Ukraine, Russia, Conspiracies
& Antisemitism**

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Lex Fridman

The following is a conversation with Dave Smith, an outspoken and at times controversial anti-war libertarian comedian and podcast host. This is the Lex Fridman Podcast to support it. Please check on our sponsors in the description. And now, dear friends, here's Dave Smith. You are a longtime libertarian, perhaps an anarcho-capitalist. We can talk about that. Can you explain the different variants, flavors of libertarianism and where you stand among those variants?

Dave Smith

Yeah, so there's almost like with left-wing schools of thought or right-wing schools of thought, there's many different camps and different thinkers. And so within the kind of broader theme of libertarianism, there was a lot of influence from people like Ayn Rand, Milton Friedman, Thomas Sowell. Those were I think some of the more mainstream figures. And then there's the Ron Paul round of Libertarianism, which is kind of distinct from that other camp where they're much more of an emphasis on foreign policy. All of them kind of fall into the radical minarchist points of view. And then there's Rothbard, anarcho-capitalist. And there's also David Friedman who's an anarcho-capitalist, but from a completely different perspective than Murray Rothbard. I would probably be most closely with the Rothbard School, which is very similar to Ron Paul. But even maybe a little bit further in that, the very little bit of government that Ron Paul might support.

Lex Fridman

You've been a big fan of Ron Paul. Can you explain what you admire about him?

Dave Smith

A big fan is an understatement. I think Ron Paul is the greatest living American hero. I revere him on the level of the founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson or George Washington, number one. I mean all of the major issues that he was correct in his understanding of them, his diagnosis of what caused these problems and his solutions. And in hindsight, there's just a million different examples of where almost everybody today would agree, even though his ideas were very controversial at the time, it'd be like, "Oh my God, if we had just listened to Ron Paul about that, we'd be so much better off." But I think there's something almost deeper than that about why Ron Paul inspires so much love from so many people is okay, so number one, the guy, he was a champion of these views for decades when there was no payoff for it at all. Where he was just kind of alone in the woods, they used to call him Dr No because he was a medical doctor. And then he would be the lone no vote in Congress all the time, on the bills that the entire Congress, bipartisan agreement, everything, and there's one vote against it. And that he would be that guy. He clearly kept doing what he was doing simply because he believed it was right, not because there was any benefit for him. In fact, he dealt with a lot of headaches for the views that he had. And then he was just a genuine person of integrity. He's the only congressman who I've ever heard this about. And DC insiders, people on the hill will say this. He was the only congressman of my lifetime who the

lobbyists simply stopped visiting. He was the only one who, they just stopped going to his office because they were just like, "There's just no getting through to this guy." He was just not playing politics like that. And you imagine what it must've been like from the lobbyist perspective when they first tried to go there and they'd be like, "All right, listen, we really need you to vote yes on this or that." And he was like, "The constitution doesn't authorize us to do that." And they're like, "What? Who in this town even talks like that?" I've met him many times at this point, and he is just genuinely, he's like one of those guys who's just from an older, better generation. He's the sweetest guy, but he's not a pushover. He was a tough guy in his day, and he was an athlete and he was in the Air Force and is married to the same woman for I think over 60 years at this point, has a big beautiful family. He was a country doctor. He was a baby doctor who delivered thousands of babies. He's like this kind of classic American figure. And I just think at the risk of falling into hero worship or something like that, I do think he's a genuinely great man, and I think great men are to be revered.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, as you said, there's integrity there. Can you speak to the ideas that Ron Paul represents? He says some of the things he's been right about. Maybe can you speak about the economics, the Fed, and maybe war and being anti-military intervention?

Dave Smith

Well, I think it all came from the same central thesis, which is that the highest political value ought to be liberty. And that the government, by its very nature, is an instrument of force and tyranny. And therefore, the more government you have, the less liberty you have. I think he was way ahead of his time in really calling out the corruption in DC and I think that's one of the things, it's a common through line between the Federal Reserve and government spending, and of course this crazy war industry that our country has. So there's a lot of components to that. But essentially Ron Paul was talking about draining the swamp way before it was this dominate mass message. And I think Ron Paul in many ways he laid the groundwork in his 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns. Not saying that he leads to Donald Trump, but he laid the groundwork for Donald Trump to be able to get up at the South Carolina Republican primary debate and look at Jeb Bush and say, "Your brother lied us into war." You know what I mean? And to have the Republicans agree with him. These were a lot of the same people who had voted for George W. Bush twice and supported the war and even mocked their liberal fellow countrymen for not being on board with it. And a lot of that was the work that Ron Paul did and people waking up to how messed up all these wars were. And I think that at least there were a couple of major things for me at the time. So I was a young man when I first found Ron Paul, it was in 2007 was when I first saw him, and then started obsessively reading all of his books. So I was young, born in '83. So what did that mean? 23, 24 when I first met him. So I was a young guy, and at least for me at the time, there were two categories in my naive mind where, okay, there were the liberals who supported big government at home, but were skeptical about big government abroad or they're skeptical about wars. And then there were the conservatives who said that they

supported small government, limited government at home, but were always on the side of whatever the next war is. And at least for me, and I think for a lot of people of my generation, Ron Paul was the first guy who came along and said, no, I'm for limited government here and abroad. And it was kind of like a portal where you could access a different perspective on the world. And then once you saw that, you were like, "Wait, that's actually what makes sense." What is it exactly that all the Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, and even Milton Friedman and guys like that, and Thomas Sowell, and it's like you want a constitutionally limited world empire? That's what you guys stand for, because that doesn't fit together at all. And so why is it that we were taking this as a given? And then of course, the more you look into it, you realize that, okay, those two things do make sense together. And then also that in the initial wave of the original progressives, people like Woodrow Wilson or FDR, these were people who were pushing big government at home and big government abroad. And that actually made much more sense as a cohesive worldview. And to oppose that would be the Ron Paul worldview. And then the other thing for me, and this was my introduction to Ron Paul, and this too, to me was kind of a portal in a way. At least in my naive, not fully functioned brain or fully developed brain at 24 years old or whatever, it was a way for me to get, I tapped into something that was outside the empire, and I had heard a lot. I was already against George W. Bush, and I didn't like the war. I had already figured out, I think this war in Iraq is bullshit. And I think that we were lied into it. And so I kind of got that. And then there were liberals and left-wingers who I knew. I grew up in New York City, so I was very familiar with the left-wing perspective who are critical of George W. Bush for fighting the war and signing the Patriot Act into law and things like that. But I had never really heard anybody break it down the way Ron Paul did when he basically was like, "Look, there's a reason why these terrorists hate us, and it's not what they're telling you. They don't hate us for our freedom." I remember the way Pat Buchanan put it, which I always loved, he said, "Dick Cheney makes it sound like Osama bin Laden stumbled in the deserts of Afghanistan. He stumbled onto a copy of our Bill of Rights somewhere." And he was like, "Oh my God, they're free. Look at this speedy trial. Are you kidding me? What is going on here? They can own guns and their women can wear mini skirts." And that just made people so angry that they were ready to suicide bomb themselves. That makes no sense at all. And then Ron Paul was just like, "No, look, here's the thing. If we think we can just go around the world killing people, propping up dictatorships, putting our military bases in the Muslims holy land and not engender hatred from that, then we do that at our own peril." And I thought it was such an interesting kind of... it had always been, I'm an '80s and '90s kid, and to me it was always a given that America's number one we're the force for good in the world. And it was an interesting introduction to the idea that there are people outside of that who are dominated by that who don't care for it very much. And that's what 9/11 was actually about. And for me, I was living in New York City, I was 18, I think when 9/11 happened, and that was the moment of my childhood. It was a huge thing to live through. I mean, we were attacked. This seemed like something that could only happen in a history book. That didn't happen to America in the '90s. 2001 was basically the '90s, and it was just like, "Oh." Finally, it clicked. It was like, "That makes sense." It's the first time I had ever heard an explanation and

an understanding of this whole thing that we're involved in now from 9/11 to the terror wars that actually just made perfect sense.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, we should also say that there's some degree of truth that the battle is not just militaristic, it's also cultural. And then many of those parts of the world don't want other people's values forced onto them.

Dave Smith

Right. But the way that George W. Bush and Dick Cheney and every right wing host in America, and Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly and everybody, what they were saying is that they hate that we are free, whereas it was much closer to saying they don't like us imposing on them. Even like all the hardcore neocons, Brett Stevens, The New York Times, he wrote this piece on the 20th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, so 2023 to cheer lead the war in Iraq. And he goes through the whole piece, and there's not one mention of the million people who died in the war. He literally just goes, the piece is just, measure life under Saddam Hussein verse life, were under the Shiite parliamentary system that they have now. Which one's better? And he's arguing this one's better, therefore it was worth it. But there's no mention. It's like, "Okay, but what about the 20 plus million people who were displaced? What about the million people who were killed? What about all the millions of people who were injured? What about the tens of thousands of our soldiers who have blown their brains out in the aftermath of the thing?" So many times it is true with government policy in general, people talk about the end result that they want, but you're like, "Yeah, but what about the process by which you get there and how much hatred, could you..." It's, not that hard for me to put myself in other people's shoes, and I have two little kids and a wife, and if anybody were to ever try to argue to me that they have to be the eggs that get broken to make some bigger omelet. Like, "It is okay, we're ultimately going to impose something on your society that's better than what you have right there. It sure does suck that your wife and kids got to be the one who get taken out." I mean, as I'm just saying this to myself, and this is not real. This is just a thought experiment I'm making up. I'm already pretty close to being a terrorist. My next thought is kind of like, "Well, okay, well, I hope you're going to like it when you watch your family die in front of you." Hopefully, even if that happened to me, I wouldn't go kill that guy's family. Maybe I'd just go after him or something. But I could understand, and I think most people who have kids could understand going to a level of the most evil dark place you could imagine if anyone ever threatened or actually did something to your kids.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, we'll have to remember the thing that's difficult to measure that you just mentioned, which is the hate that's created by every bomb that's dropped.

Dave Smith

It was a General McChrystal who was the general running the war in Afghanistan. He wasn't Ron Paul, you know what I mean? He was a, "Sir, yes, sir. How do we fight and win this war general?" And he's the one who coined the term insurgent math, that 10 minus two equals 20. It's like the more you keep, I was re-reading about this the other day because of the Trump's been bombing the Houthis in Yemen. And I think it was at least in 2009 is when Obama really stepped up the drone campaign with the then secret drone bombing campaign. And Yemen was one of the major theaters. And even back then when it really was just a... it was a war on terrorism. The main targets were always Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and their presence in Yemen, even then, so before the Saudis invaded. So from 2009 through 2015, AQAP just kept growing. It was doing all these targeted bombing campaigns, so they call them targeted. 96% of the people are innocent who get killed, but they call them targeted drone bombings. And Al-Qaeda and the Arabian Peninsula just kept getting bigger and bigger because every time you go in there, it's like, okay, you took out one target and then you took out three little girls. And every one of those little girls had brothers and uncles and fathers, and all of them just signed up to join the fight now. Ron Paul was the first one who really made this click for me. But it's in a way, and I'm not a leftist, I'm not an egalitarian, I'm not a cultural relativist. I'm not saying that all cultures are the same or that we all look at the world the same way. There's enormous differences between all of us, and I personally think some are better than others, but there are things that unite all of us. And in a weird way, I remember one time I was arguing with a Democrat guy on a S. E. Cupp show. I used to be a contributor on her show, and we were arguing, and it was after a terrorist attack here in New York, a fairly minor one. It was a guy, I think he hit someone with his car and then jumped out with a gun, and then the cops lit him up and killed him. This is back in 2017, I think, and he claimed to be ISIS inspired. I don't remember if there was a direct connection or not, but at the time, they were like, "Doesn't this mean we got to step up the war in Iraq or in Syria where ISIS's stronghold is." And I remember the guy saying to me, I went off on how these wars have been disaster and he goes, "Yeah, but Dave, what you're saying here is we're supposed to do nothing. This just happened and now we're supposed to do nothing." And so even though this guy had a suit and tie on, and we're in a cable news studio and we're in a first world country, we're in the United States of America and we're having that. The basic thing that he's saying is, "You're saying, we're not going to go kill some motherfuckers." I mean, he was just putting it as do something. But what's something? Something is dropping bombs on human beings when yes, some innocent people are going to die, but it's the same thing. It's the same after 9/11. We're like, "We got to go fucking invade some countries right now." That's the same impulse. It's like they killed some of our people. You think we're not going to show them who the real killers are. You think there's a chance that you could come here? And that is the most human instinct ever. It's like some other tribe just came in here and killed some people in our tribe. So what do you want to do about that? Well, I don't know. It's not going to take me too long to figure out we're going to go kill a bunch of people in their tribe. And I think that's the major motivating factor for both sides of the Israel-Palestine conflict. I think that's the major motivator for both sides of the

war on terror conflict. In a way, when you look at it like that, even though it's so dark and tragic, there's something almost beautiful about it where you're like, "Oh, we're all caught in this same cycle."

Lex Fridman

Yeah, it's deeply human, the warring between tribes, but especially in the recent years. But more and more through human history, there's almost like a third party, which is this military industrial complex, which is making money from the two tribes. So if you just have two tribes, one, I've been reading a lot about Genghis Khan, and this is why Genghis Khan banned this. It was very common in Mongolia before Genghis Khan to steal people's wives, like, "You're my wife now." And he realized that that creates a lot of conflict.

Dave Smith

Yeah, it sure does.

Lex Fridman

That seems natural and human, that kind of conflict. But whenever a third party rolls in and starts making money on the whole thing and then driving that forward, then the escalation of the conflict comes with this whole machine that makes de-escalation really difficult.

Dave Smith

Yeah. The military industrial complex in America, it's so big and it's so sophisticated. There's the intelligence agencies, there's the weapons manufacturers, then there's the people in the media who are either directly or indirectly just parroting, you know what I mean? All of their talking points. And so it's not just that you can make money when there's a conflict, but you have this entire apparatus to create the conflict and then create the public sentiment for that. And it's interesting, we're an interesting place because we're in this new frontier of now where shows like this can happen, and there's a lot of them, and a lot of them are humongous like yours, but for so long this just didn't exist. And it was just for so long it was the case that the New York Times and NBC and CBS and ABC and the Washington Post and the Associated Press, I guess they could just move the nation. I mean, if they wanted to be like, "Hey." Forget even after 9/11, the idea that in 1990, 1991, that there was any organic movement from the American people going, "We really got to see about this Saddam Hussein guy." The dictator in Iraq is having a slant drilling dispute with the Emir of Kuwait. We really got to do something about that. That is not something that organically came from any... that was not a few soccer moms hanging out watching their kids' game being like, "I think in a couple of years we're going to have to send these boys over to Iraq." They just, from the top down, were able to create this feeling that like, "Hey, there's a new Adolf Hitler on the rise over here in Iraq. We got to go see about this. There are these poor people in Kuwait, we have to do that." They were able to create this desire for war. It's really incredible when you think about it, because I think for the most part in human history, you would've had to have some type of plausible threat, some type of plausible reality to convince people

that we actually have to go to war in order to deal with this. Whereas the idea that in 1991, the United States of America would feel threatened by Iraq was just ridiculous. And yet they were able to do it.

Lex Fridman

Well, so to push back a little bit throughout human history, there was also a thing, you look at the Roman Empire where just the culture of values were different where military conquest was seen as a good thing. So we just almost assume in the United States war has been framed in the defensive sense where offensive war we're not doing that anymore.

Dave Smith

You make a fair point. It's certainly true that throughout human history, there's been overt empire building and wars of conquest and things like that. But I guess I'm just saying at least even there, you would have some type of sell of why we're going to go take these resources and why that will be good for us. Whereas the idea that Kuwait just needed to be defended by the Americans seems so, it seems so hard to convince anybody, and yet they were able to do it. If you read Neocon writing in the '90s, it was very interesting because they would tell the truth a lot more. Essentially, I think there was the Soviet Union had just collapsed. It was what Charles Krauthammer dubbed the unipolar moment. There was excitement, there was a feeling of invincibility. And also the Neocons weren't in power after '92 really. I mean, they were in the George H.W. Bush administration, but after '92, they really weren't. So they're just writing at these think tanks, and it just didn't seem as... they weren't as guarded. There weren't these accusations of Euro war criminal or something like that. But what he said, what Jonah Goldberg agreed with, I think the statement was every 10 years or so, America's got to find a puny little country and put them up against the wall just to let the rest of the world know that we mean business. And that was actually their mentality.

Lex Fridman

I'm sure there's people that agree with that. I happen to disagree with that. But the drums of war are beating a little bit over Taiwan and China.

Dave Smith

More than a little bit.

Lex Fridman

But I can't even see a justification of a just war. What is the long-term benefit to society if you do military intervention?

Dave Smith

Well, I also think, and I've been saying this for a while, but I do think there's this empire mentality that Americans have got to shake off. As if it's even a question of whether we should allow it or not. Are we in a position to allow or not allow that? I hope China doesn't

invade Taiwan. I hope Taiwan remains as free as possible. I hope China becomes free. I root for freedom and prosperity for everyone, but I also root for everybody to have a healthy marriage. But if you were talking to me and you were like, "Hey, the guy down the street is cheating on his wife, I don't think we can allow this." I'd immediately be like, "That's really not my place. And then on top of that, I also have no authority over what they do in their marriage." I have to be concerned with my marriage. And the idea that imagine if there were the political will to invade Mexico. If DC decided we're taking Mexico City, that's going to be part of America now, and we're taking it by force. And then China was like, "We're not sure if we can allow this." I think immediately most Americans would be like, "Allow? How the fuck do you think you are going to stop us from taking Mexico City? What are you going to do China? You're going to send your Navy ships over here to fight us off the coast of Mexico. Good luck with that." And at least from my understanding in almost all the war games that they've run, even if it doesn't come to nuclear weapons being used, in which case the whole world gets blown up. But even if we go to militarily try to stop China from invading Taiwan and everyone agrees to not use nukes, and we just fight a conventional war, we lose that war every time.

Lex Fridman

I think what you said applies to a lot of the wars we've been involved in, but China and Taiwan is a little bit different because of TSMC, right? Because there's an economic dependence.

Dave Smith

If that was the concern, then the response would be, "We need some type of Manhattan Project." And I'm not supporting a government project here, but there would be, "We need some type of Manhattan Project to say, 'We are going to make these things here.'" And look, I was running that experiment before saying, "What if we all pinky promise not to use nuclear weapons or something like that?" But that's not the reality of the situation. Look, even in Ukraine, everybody, the biggest hawks, the biggest pushers of this policy, and Joe Biden's policy to fund Ukraine, no one's suggesting we send in the 82nd airborne, which is really the only thing that could repel the Russians right now and restore the original sovereignty of the Ukrainian borders. But no one's suggesting we send in the 82nd airborne because we all know, well, we can't have a direct war with Russia. That's the end of the world. And same thing with China. So I'm not saying microchips or whatever aren't important, but we can find other ways to... Taiwan is not magical. We can produce these things in other places now.

Lex Fridman

So you have the humility to say that you don't really know much about the situation. It sounds ridiculous to say, but there's something magical about not Taiwan, but TSMC. Is incredibly difficult to manage the supply chain and manufacture at such a low cost that they are. And to add to that, China has been signaling about the one China policy, but you're absolutely right that you shouldn't be doing the Washington thing of beating the drums of

war. It's like completely the counterproductive thing. You should actually try to find partnerships with China, build friendships and cooperation. India's doing a good job of this, build friendships. This is the 21st century. Conflict, this Cold War thinking is going to be destructive to the economy, destructive to humanity, to the flourishing of the individual nations of the world. There's just nothing positive except making money for the military industry [inaudible 00:29:41]

Dave Smith

Well, yeah, and it was totally destructive during the original Cold War too, and almost led to nuclear war on a couple of different occasions. But look, I would just say, and I really, I'm no defender of the Chinese regime. I hate communism or fascism, whatever they, are some hybrid mix of the two.

Lex Fridman

They're paying you, aren't they?

Dave Smith

Yeah, no, fuck them. By the way, a lot of people speculate online, but I'm not getting any of these checks, man, and I'd really like them to start coming in. But even when you say China's asserting the one China policy, but the one China policy is the policy of the United States of America and has been for 50 years now. So I think what's happening there a lot of times is that essentially, even though officially the one China policy is the policy of the United States of America, all of these American politicians and different figureheads across powerful centers in America are saying that China doesn't have the right to go into Taiwan. And then China's in the position of being like, "Well, hey, wait a minute. No, that's not actually the policy. We maintain this one China policy, but we allow them to kind of do what they want to do." And the most obvious example of this was when Joe Biden actually said, "Oh, we wouldn't allow that and we would militarily intervene if they went into China." And this was so bizarre, then the White House, whoever that was, came out to correct the President of the United States and say, "No, the policy of the White House is the one China policy." Which look, I mean, again, I think the whole point of this is that the reason why whoever the hell was able to overrule Joe Biden and his administration, I don't know who that is, but the whole point is that if you say, and this is why there is some wisdom in America accepting the one China policy is that if you tell China that we recognize Taiwan's independence and that they're not a part of China, that might be the type of thing that would make China invade and say, "No, we're not accepting that." And so at least right now, it's like, "Okay." Look, this is the reality. It's something that you kind of run up against with the war in Ukraine a lot and with the situation in China and Taiwan is that there are constraints placed on us by reality. It's not all just how would you like the world to be? How would you like it to work? Obviously, I think we would all like that bigger countries don't invade smaller countries and bigger countries don't bully smaller countries around. That is not the way of the world. We are a big country that is the biggest bully in the world, so we're in no position

to let... but we're kind of in the position is just you're like, "Hey, we'd sure love if you don't do that. You can do it and you can get away with it, but we would sure love it if you don't." And so the goal would be to do everything we can to make sure that doesn't happen. When Vladimir Putin starts talking about like, Hey, if you keep pushing the idea of Ukraine joining your military alliance, I'm going to invade that country. The goal there or the move there would be to be like, "Okay, we'll stop talking about that. Is there something else that we can agree on?" Is there a way that you will promise you won't do anything to them and we'll promise we won't bring them in our military. That's the goal. You don't just go like, "No, fuck you, we're doing it anyway," over and over and over again until they do the thing.

Lex Fridman

I think we got to this discussion from the military industrial complex and military intervention, and Ron Paul, before that, if you could rewind a little bit. According to you, and according to various flavors of libertarianism, is there any amount of military intervention that's justified? That's okay?

Dave Smith

Well, I would say, at least to me, in terms of pure libertarian theory or just in terms of what I think is right or wrong, there is such thing as a just war. The most obvious example of that would be you're invaded by a military and fighting them off. So in that sense, also, even if you want to isolate from everything else- If you want to isolate from everything else, from all of the awful U.S. policy toward Russia, post Soviet Union, to all of the NATO expansion and color coded revolutions and all of these things... If you want to... Vladimir Putin invades Ukraine. I do think the Ukrainians have a right to fight and protect their land. There's an aggressor there, and you have a right to defend yourself. So certainly in that sense, I think the American Revolution was a just war. I think there can be just wars. In terms of pure libertarian theory, I think I would say that, look, you never have a right to kill innocent people. That's never morally okay. Now, there could be a scenario, just like this is true in life in general, right? There's lots of things that you don't have the right to do, but you could come up with some scenario where you might be in a position where you have to do it because there were all of these extenuating circumstances. You could think of something where... You remember the saw movies? Where they used these crazy horror scenarios, but it's like, "Okay, so there's a person, an evil bad guy has buried a key inside this person, and you have to kill that person in order to get the key, in order to unlock these 20 people to let them out of a cage." Now, look, you still don't have a right to kill people. It's horrible and wrong, and what you did there was still evil, but if you were taken to trial over it, you could probably explain to a judge and a jury be like, "I know, but the situation I was in was either these 20 people were going to die, or this one person was going to die, and under that situation, I chose to save the 20." So in other words, by perfect theory, no, you never have the right to kill innocent people. There could be a scenario where you were like, "Look, we had to take this military action and some innocent people did die, and it's so tragic and awful that we had to do this, but we are certain that many more people would've died had

we not done this." Now, in that case, I would look at that as number one, it's much like killing the one person to save the 20. It's still wrong. It's still an immoral thing that you were forced into doing. It's not justified. I would say that the overwhelming onus should have to be on you to demonstrate that you absolutely needed to do that. And that's how I feel about all these wars. It's not like... I think that let's just say if you could make World War II, you could reduce it down to the simplest caricature of what World War II is, and say there's no Joseph Stalin. We're not even partnering with him. There was a good guy in Russia who we were partnering with, and the British Empire had never done anything wrong. They were just nothing but good guys. And of course, FDR is nothing but a good guy, and Hitler was even worse than the real Hitler, you know what I mean? And in order to stop them, we had to go on this bombing campaign, and we only got Nazis. We only killed the bad guys, and we were able to take out the Third Reich, but one eight-year-old girl died and you did this thing that stopped the whole world from falling into subjugation. So I think almost everybody would agree, "Jesus, man, you have to do that. Okay, you have to do that because the whole world's going to be subjugated. There's nothing but good guys here. The Nazis are so evil, and there's one..." I still would say that every single time World War II came up, we should all just be somber and we should all just think about that little eight-year-old girl who died and what a horrible thing it is that we had to do that. And so when there are these campaigns where tens of millions of people are killed, the fact that anybody's ever spiking the football or this like, "Rah-rah, we were the good ones." And then also when you add in all those other complicated factors like... This wasn't the scenario at all. So I guess essentially I'd say no, you don't ever have a right to kill innocent people. It's never self-defense to be killing innocent people. I mean, short of some type of scenario where if you're holding a baby and coming at me shooting and I shoot back at you, and, "Okay, I was acting in self-defense and it happened to kill a baby," but I'm talking about the scenarios where you're dropping bombs on cities, it's never justified, and the overwhelming onus should be on you to demonstrate that you absolutely have to do it. And that should be the standard, because there's so many other standards that I see thrown out that I just think make no moral sense at all. People will argue about in Gaza, they'll argue about the civilian to combatant ratio, that to me doesn't really... That's not what counts. That's not the measure that's important. And also no one knows what the numbers are. They're all just pretend to. And then the other thing will be that people, as someone just recently argued with me about, they'll say, "Well, Hamas has to go. That's the starting point. Hamas has to go." And I'm like, "No, I don't think you get to say that, because the truth is that..." Look, you can make an argument that Hamas has to go, sure, you can make an argument that the Likudniks have to go. You can make an argument that Kim Jong Un has to go, or that G has to go, or that Putin has to go, or that Zelensky has to go, or certainly, I would make an argument that Joe Biden had to go, but just because a government has to go, that doesn't mean you could just go kill all their people.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. This should not be the starting point, the assumption, the axiom of the discussion. Yeah.

Dave Smith

The question is it... Is there no other option than doing it this way? It's like, okay, October 7th happened, we can all agree this was a horrific tragedy and an indefensible act of terrorism. Okay. Is it guaranteed that another one of those is going to happen tomorrow, or was this the biggest security failure in Israeli history? Okay, well, if it's the biggest security failure, let's just say not even going down the inside job rabbit hole or anything like that, but just saying it's a giant security failure, okay then put a bunch more men at that fence, first of all. And now you got to talk about how can you achieve your goal while inflicting the minimum amount of devastation on innocent people.

Lex Fridman

Let's talk about it, since you brought it up. October 7th. So what exactly do you think about the October 7th attack by Hamas on Israel.

Dave Smith

Well, I mean, what I just said that it was horrible, and by the same logic that I'm giving you now, it's always evil to target innocent civilians. I don't believe civilians can be held responsible for the crimes of their government. This was, by the way, the Osama bin Laden logic, which I think would also be the logic of Bill Clinton or George W. Bush or Barack Obama. But Osama bin Laden very explicitly said when he was asked, "Well, are you just going to target U.S. military sites or are you targeting U.S. civilians?" It was an interview in the '90s before 9/11, and he goes, "No, civilians are fair game too because you guys have regular elections, and you guys vote for your government, and therefore you're responsible for the crimes that they commit." Now, I think that's the logic of a fanatic like Osama bin Laden, and that's not the logic that any of us should follow. It doesn't make any sense, and it's not true that people are responsible for the crimes of their government. I think that that same argument is used quite a bit by people on the pro-Israeli side when they say like, "Oh, they had an election in 2005 and Hamas won a plurality, therefore, 20 years later, they have no rights." I think that's insane. Okay, so Hamas had no right to go after civilians. It's horrible, and you see these teenagers being killed, and you see the images of people who were held hostage for all this time. So it's like your heart breaks for those people. It's truly tragic. I do think that it was, in many ways, an indictment of so many different things. October 7th happening was an indictment of the entire occupation slash siege of Gaza and the West Bank for that matter. It was, I think... Should have probably forever destroyed the legacy of Benjamin Netanyahu, who is... I mean, this isn't like George W. Bush was. I mean, he was on the job for almost a year when 9/11 happened, but he was still kind of new. It was still kind of in his first year of being president. Benjamin Netanyahu was the longest serving prime minister in Israeli history, and had explicitly been like, "I'm the tough right-winger who's

going to be tough on these Palestinians, who's going to move away from the idea of coming to a two state solution, because this is what we need to keep us safe." The justification is like, "I'm going to be hard on these motherfuckers, because I know what it takes to keep us safe." And that culminates in the worst massacre in Israeli history. And then, I mean, the other big one is that I mean, and it's not like a... I wouldn't even say an open secret at this point. It's just out in the open. He had this strategy of propping up Hamas for years. And so he had this strategy of propping up Hamas for a myriad of reasons, but a major part of it was that, "Look, man, as long as there's terrorists in power there, there's never going to be any pressure on us to give the Palestinians a state, because look, are you telling me I got to negotiate with them?"

Lex Fridman

He was allowing Qatar money to float.

Dave Smith

Insisting that Qatar money float to them. When the Qatar money dried up, sent the Mossad in to insist that it gets back to him. Hundreds of millions of dollars, briefcases in cash. And he said in his own words that the reason for doing this was to keep, his words were, "Prop up Hamas, bolster Hamas," to keep them in power so that the West Bank and the Gazans were divided, and that the international community as well as the liberal Jewish community in Israel wouldn't be able to put pressure on them to make a deal.

Lex Fridman

But what are the options? So if he doesn't allow the money in, it also looks really bad for him, because if he's not allowing the money in, that means he's not allowing the quote unquote aid in to help the Palestinians.

Dave Smith

But Lex, I mean, the dynamic here is from 2007 to today, Israel's had a full blockade around the country. They won't let potatoes in. They won't let sugar in, and the justification is because they're dual use, they can be used to make rockets as well as they can be used to feed starving children. So we can't let that in because it's dual use. But cash to Hamas, does that not have dual usage? Is there nothing else that they can... So yeah, it's like, yes, when you have a full blockade around the country, you take on certain responsibilities. And I think this is the essence of really the whole struggle here, which is very tough, I think, for the pro-Israel side to grapple with. But the bottom line is that Israel hasn't occupied Palestine for a few months after a war or even a couple of years after a war, while they're figuring out what we're going to do with them. It's been over 60 years. We're talking about a one-week-long war, or a day short of a week long war, in 1967. Israel's had control of them ever since. And much in the same way that if you kidnap someone and you lock them in your basement and you don't feed them, you murdered that person. So in other words, stated differently, you're not allowed to kidnap people and lock them in your basement, but once

you do, you take on a responsibility to feed those people. You know what I mean? You're not allowed to keep someone and not feed them. That is a worse charge than just keeping them. So yeah, anyway, I guess my point is the solution to that, if you go like, "Well, I'm a bad guy if I fund Hamas, I'm a bad guy if I don't let the aid in," was to let the reputable international aid organizations bring aid in to the people of Gaza. Don't pressure the Qataris to send in briefcases full of cash, allow internationally recognized, reputable human rights organizations who are lining up trying to do it. Stop turning them away, let them in. And this is just, it's so long past due. I mean, it's just... I'm not defending Arab terrorism. I think really it's a tragedy that the Arabs embraced terrorism. I don't think it's unique to them. And in fact, I think it was the Zionist militias who introduced terrorism to that part of the world, but there was also... Look, terrorism persists because it works. This is true with state terrorism and with non-state terrorism. Terrorism has often worked for people. I think the thing... Early Yasser Arafat I know was very influenced by the Algerians who successfully kicked the French out, embracing terrorism. And it was almost like the major miscalculation of those Palestinian Arabs who did embrace terrorism, was that this isn't the French hanging out in some colony with their home country back home where maybe a few acts of violence could work enough to... The liberal population back home is like, "Oh, I really didn't like the response to that terrorism. We killed so many people. Forget it. This is too much of a headache. Let's get out of here." The Zionist settlers were there to stay. They weren't going anywhere. They weren't going back to Eastern Europe. You know what I mean? And so it's a tragedy that this whole thing went the way it did. But you always... Whenever you're talking about a conflict like this, the person who has... Or the party who has the power is the one who needs make concessions, and it's just indefensible that the status quo of the Palestinian people having no rights, literally no rights, being ruled by a government that they do not get to vote for or against, no right to do commerce with the outside world, no freedom of travel, no freedom of movement, no basic property rights, you can be kicked out of your home at any time, no right to a fair trial, no right to a lawyer, no right to a jury of your peers, I mean, the fact that that has been the status quo since 1967 is just indefensible. And then in the context that that has been the status quo, I guess I'm just not, even though I'm against it, it's like when you're just lecturing about the way in which they resist this. I think it's very tough to be on a strong moral footing.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, you have to really empathize with decades of suffering in the region. I suppose my question was grounded in how can the Israeli government, how can the world help the Palestinian people flourish? So you suggested allowing reputable aid organizations in, but that's kind of almost patching, just helping humans who are suffering. But that's not how you have a nation flourish. You have to build up the infrastructure. You have to build up a culture, the education system, the democratic processes of electing and regular elections so that the people are represented. And you have to form partnerships, friendships, normalization of relations with the Arab world, with Israel. You can travel back and forth and lessen the chokehold, the security chokehold, that you could say is justified in a militaristic situation,

but why is it a military situation? The question is there, where do we go from here? If we... We will talk about Netanyahu some more. He is very criticized inside Israel as well.

Dave Smith

Yeah, for sure.

Lex Fridman

Maybe less so after October 7th, because again, in the same way you can empathize with the Palestinian people, you can empathize with Israelis where October 7th touched, just like it did for Americans with 9/11, it touched some kind of primal thing of fear, of like, "Holy shit."

Dave Smith

Yeah, a hundred percent. Oh yeah, and the same thing I said before. I could also very easily go if one of my kids was at that rave or something like that and just got gunned down or kidnapped by... I could understand being, "Level the whole goddamn place." And I'm sure I would feel that way if that was one of my kids. So yeah, no, that's exactly right. I mean, there's lots of examples in the world of... Like France and Germany are right next to each other, and Ireland and England are right next to each other, and they're just totally living in harmony right now. There is just no... The thought of them going to war is inconceivable right now, not saying it could never happen in the future, but it seems pretty hard to imagine. And that being the case would've been very hard to imagine for a very long time. I mean, there's some serious levels of brutality between those two societies. And even more directly involved, Egypt and Israel went to war four times in a couple of decades. They went to war, and then in the late '70s, they made a land for peace deal, and they haven't been to war since. I do at least try to hold out that that is... It's not like Egypt is... You're not going to say they don't have an issue with radical Islam in Egypt. You know what I mean? That's not the answer. It's just that they made a land for peace deal, and once that was solved, it was easier to avoid the war. And I do like to think that there could be a solution to the Israel-Palestine question, but it's going to have to involve Israel taking their boot off of the Palestinians neck. And I know that that's scary, and I understand that there are legitimate concerns about that. There was the great Thomas Jefferson quote about slavery, which was, "We have the wolf by the tail, and we can neither afford to hold onto him, nor risk letting him go." Which is like you could see where that would've been a real concern of people right toward the end of slavery or whatever in the early 1800, say the first half of the 19th century, where you'd be like, "Okay, okay, okay, we recognize this is wrong now, but we've had these millions of people enslaved for all these years. If we let them go, they're going to fucking kill us. And what are you saying? They're citizens now, meaning the Second Amendment applies to them, meaning that the guy who I enslaved now can get a gun. You know what..." So okay, there are the... But I think in hindsight, looking back at it, we would all just go, "Yeah, but you can't enslave people. So whatever risks come with the next phase of this, unfortunately you are going to have to just deal with that and move. You have to start with abolishing slavery."

Lex Fridman

And it is good to also remember in the hopeful message you send, at any day, you can make a deal. That's one of the frustrating things I had with... I hosted a debate on Israel, and it was... It just felt hopeless. And a lot of people I talk to, it feels hopeless, but I have a lot of... I maybe naively see a lot of possibilities at peace there. I see, for example, normalization of relations with Saudi Arabia and Israel, and then Saudi Arabia taking some ownership over Gaza, something like that, some interesting... Where a big major player in that region takes ownership and steps as the middle man.

Dave Smith

Yeah, I agree with you. And you're 100% right, and even before October 7th, I think many steps had been taken away from the peace process and the feeling of that. I mean, really, I think since the second Intifada is when the appetite for peace, I think in Israel was greatly diminished. But to your point, I mean, it's going to take really painful concessions on all sides in order to get there. I think that the... Personally, I think... And I don't know if I say this for not necessarily the Arab world, but at least the nation states, their governments, I think are pretty much there. Like Saudi Arabia and UAE and Jordan and Egypt... If the Israelis... They're almost like, "Look, these are American sock puppets," for the most part. And so their thing is that, "Okay, 100% of my population is completely opposed to what Israel's doing to Palestine right now." And they just hate that Israel... That the nation was created at all, that all the Arabs were kicked out of what is very important land to them religiously. And so the governments there are like, "Look, we want to continue to have U.S. tax dollars flooding in here, and we'd love to make a deal with Israel, but you got to stop doing this to the Palestinians so my own people don't rise up against me." So I think as long... If the Israelis were like, "Fine, we'll do a two-state solution," or something like that, I think Saudi Arabia couldn't wait to broker... In fact, they proposed a two-state solution just a few years ago. I mean, they would love to be a part of that, normalize relations. Amongst the Palestinians, which again, I think this had been accepted multiple times, at least by their leadership. It's like, "Yeah, you're going to have to accept that you lost in '48. You're going to have to accept that you lost in '47. You're going to have to accept that the state of Israel does exist, and you're going to have to accept that the right of return is not going to literally mean that everybody can go back to where they were." And what Israel's going to have to concede is that it was awfully fucked up that they kicked a lot of people out of their land, and that the whole, "A land for people for a people without land," was never true. That was just a slogan that felt good to avoid what you guys actually did. And the fact that it was inexcusable that you guys occupied these people for 60 years, and that has to end immediately.

Lex Fridman

I interviewed Douglas Murray recently. He just wrote a book on Israel and Hamas called *On Democracies and Death Cults*. He makes, what I think is a strong pro-Israel case, focusing on Hamas as an evil organization, evil for its corrupt leadership who's essentially stealing money from the Palestinian people and allocating the money that is there towards terrorists, militaristic operations versus building up Gaza. Can you steel man the case for, and then against this perspective, centering... We've been talking about the people, about centering around Hamas, which is like this extremist religious organization. The perspective being like they need to be, as you mentioned before, eliminated before any progress can be made.

Dave Smith

Okay, so if I were... So steelman Douglas Murray's case, I would say, "Well, I guess the case is right." Look, Hamas is a fanatical death cult, essentially, which I do think is a fair description of them. There is no question that they have pursued... They have pursued a path that was just devastating to their own people. And there's no question, they have not spent the resources they have, their priority has not been uplifting their own people. Their priority has been, I think, essentially antagonizing Israel into this overreaction so that they can turn world opinion against Israel. I think they've been very effective at doing that. And again, I think the argument would come back to something like, "And the people voted for this in 2005, and the people sure do... We sure do see a lot of people cheering when Hamas is doing some pretty horrific stuff." And so, hey, you got that on one side, and you have a country that's much more similar to Western societies on the other side.

Lex Fridman

If we can just linger on that steelman, what do you make of the celebrations in Gaza after October 7th?

Dave Smith

I think it's sickening and incredibly disturbing. I guess the way I look at it... I always, and maybe there is a degree of naivete to this, or perhaps it's just that I just don't want to allow myself to go down a certain path because I think it leads to such dark outcomes, but I always try to be against the government for the people, against the powerful sympathetic to the powerless. I think that... Look, it's sickening. You see big crowds cheering on people with these people who have been in captivity for... I think some of them for over a year and a half. I also thought when Nikki Haley and other Israeli politicians are signing the bombs before they're launched into Gaza, I found that sickening. I think there's all types. I think mission accomplished banners and flying on... I mean, I think all of the... I think having Bob Hope specials at the end of the Persian Gulf War was sickening it. I just think all of it is horrific. I look at it and I try to say to myself, "Okay, we had one 9/11 in this country, and we all... Collectively we lost our minds as a society. We were ready to go bomb whoever the hell our politicians told us to bomb, and we didn't care how many people it killed, and we killed a

lot more than Israel or Hamas has killed doing it. And I try to think to myself, "Okay, imagine being trapped in what is..." People could call it whatever they want to. I do think Pat Buchanan and these guys were right to call it a concentration camp. You're trapped in a five-mile by 25 mile area where you cannot leave. You are stuck there. You don't have an airport, because the Israelis bombed it. You don't have a seaport, because they won't allow you. You have no access to trade with the outside world, and you're not suffering through a 9/11. You're suffering through a thousand 9/11s. Your whole life has been... The people in Gaza, their entire life has been being refugees, you know what I mean? Their entire life. There's generations of people who have been in this status now. And so if my society lost its mind after one 9/11, I just have a tough time judging the people who came up in this environment. But there's no question. It is, I mean, it's profoundly disturbing.

Lex Fridman

But I wonder how much of the indoctrination has really made the software of their mind permanently anti-peace, extremify them. And it doesn't justify anything, but it's more concerning for the prospects of peace.

Dave Smith

Well, I'd say... I get your point. It's an interesting question that I don't know if any of us know exactly the answer to, but I would say that... Even after, what was it, 80 years of the Soviet Union, and there were real debates back then about the new communist man, and whether the minds had been so warped of people that they would never even care about these things like liberty or national identity or independence. And then yet, at the end, it was all still there. It was very repressed, and it went underground and people weren't allowed to talk about, but they all still had it. And in fact, I was just listening the other day to this Murray Rothbard speech from the early nineties, and he was talking about how... There was something where there was a camera crew interviewed a Chinese family under a real deal Chinese communism, I believe it was before Mao Zedong died, and they were just saying all these this crazy to the camera. They were like, "Would you rather your sons are healthy and live good lives? Or would you rather they suffer, but be loyal obedience to the state?" And they were like, "We would rather they be obedient to the state," and blah, blah, blah and all these things. And Murray Rothbard was saying he saw this interview and he was talking to his friend. He was, "Oh my God, this is horrible. It's hopeless. These people's minds have been warped." And then he was talking to his friend who's like a China expert who had been there, and he was like, "No, they're not. That's what they say when the cameras are around. As soon as the cameras go..." So anyway, I'm just making the point there that there is... Look, even in the situation with Israel and Gaza, specifically Gaza, not even the West Bank, when... You could look at it, when the peace talks were going on, support for Hamas plummeted, when the peace talks fell apart, support for Hamas went way back up. Every time there's an aggressive military campaign, support for Hamas goes back up. So I just think that I'm more hopeful than not, that you could get to a place where... But it requires... You have to... If you do understand the Ron Paul point about blowback, the General

McChrystal point about insurgent math, you just realize that it's like you are fighting in a way that produces more of the thing that you're fighting. And so the first step is to stop doing that. Your cure is making the patient more sick. So stop doing that. And then let's see if maybe we could heal.

Lex Fridman

What about the case against... The Douglas Murray case of the death cults and that a fundamental part of this process, Hamas needs to be eliminated?

Dave Smith

Well, I mean, first of all, I would just say that, and I'm not saying this as a fan of democracy. I'm not a big believer in democracy. I believe in liberty, and I think democracy is often not in line with liberty.

Lex Fridman

The Chinese government paid you to say that as well?

Dave Smith

That's literally all I had to get out.

Lex Fridman

It's a plug.

Dave Smith

But I get to say what I want the rest of the podcast, but just that I had to... No, well, I don't... Well, no, I mean my beef with the Chinese government would not be that they don't hold regular elections. My beef with them would be that they silenced speech, that they put people in camps and things like that, the surveillance, that stuff. I think... Look, when you call Israel a democracy, which I guess is right in the title of his book, and I, full disclosure, I haven't read the book, but I have listened to some of his thoughts on this stuff, I think you've run up against a real problem, which is that the creation of the state of Israel, even though he tried to walk away from those comments as Norm Finkelstein called out Benny Morris for writing in his book 1948, which is a great book. His words were, "The Zionist project always knew it was going to involve transfer." That was Benny Morris's words. Now, when Finkelstein was grilling him on this on your podcast, he kind of said, "Yeah, but that doesn't mean ethnic cleansing. That could be voluntary transfer." You know what I mean? But the point is, the Zionist settlers, and they spoke about this openly, they all knew they had a major problem, which is like, "Well, you can't create a Jewish state if it's 50/50," which is... And in all of Israel, it was much less than 50/50, but even in the Israeli portion of the partition recommendation, it was very close to 50/50. Now, you can't really have a Jewish state with a 50/50 voter base, because now you're just in a breeding war for the next generation, or who turns out the vote... Any more than we could hope... It would be the

prospect right now of making America an official Republican state or an official Democrat state. "Well, how are you going to do that, man? It's like 50/50 between the two." And so I think what Benny... Do that, man, it's like 50/50 between the two. And so I think what Benny Morris was saying was that, they always knew some of these Arabs are going to have to get moved out of here so that we could have more of something, which ultimately where they got to like an 80/20, which is pretty much what Israel's maintained the whole time. Now, Benny Morris could quarrel about whether that necessarily meant voluntary, but when it happened, it wasn't voluntary, okay? So when it actually happened in effect, it involved a massive amount, somewhere between 700 and 800,000 Arabs being forcefully evicted out of this area. Now, that's one thing, a lot of nations are started on somethings like that. I suppose if you just did that, and then you were left with your 80/20 split and you go, "But we have elections from here on out." I guess you could claim it's a democracy, still seems like kind of gaming the democratic system a little bit, you know what I mean? If I just deported 80% of Democrats and then say, "Look, Republicans win every election." You might be like, "Yeah, dude, but you didn't exactly get there democratically. You got there through force." But forget that, I'll let that one go and just say, "I'll call you a democracy if you just kept being a democracy like that moving forward." The real problem is the occupation that starts in 1967. Because look, when you've occupied an area since 1967, you can't even really call it an occupation anymore, it's an annexation. You took these lands. You have control of it. You are what the definition of the government is. And you could call Hamas the government all you want to, but they're not the sovereigns. They're not the final decision makers. Israel's the final decision maker. Hamas does not meaningfully in any way decide the biggest questions about Gaza, I'm talking before this war, pre-October 7th. And so the problem Israel has in order to call themselves a democracy, is that there's somewhere between 5 and 6 million people, less now because they've killed a lot of them. But there's somewhere between 5 and 6 million people who live under Israeli control who do not have voting rights. And by any other reasonable, commonly held standard of democracy, we would not call that a democracy. I mean, again, I'm not even saying this to try to be inflammatory or try to pick on the Israelis. There's things about Israeli society I like, I don't hate the people there. I'm Jewish, I love Jewish people. But the fact is, that's not a democracy, that's an apartheid state. I'm not even trying to be inflammatory when I say this, it's just literally describing what's in front of you. If we in America right now said Black people no longer get to vote, and Black people can only live in these few neighborhoods, we don't get to call ourselves a democracy anymore then. And I'm not even coming at this from a pro-democracy point of view, I'm just saying if your defense of them is like, "Well, we're a democracy," which seems to be the case so much. Well no, you're really not. You're really not, as long as you got millions of people who have no say in their own government, then you're really not a democracy. And so again, so you could frame it as democracy versus death cult, was his language for Hamas?

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Dave Smith

And all right, it's a little bit difficult to accuse another group of being a death cult when the group you are supporting has killed so many more people than them. Now, I'm not saying that's the only metric. There's other things that are factors too. But the fact is that you have... I mean, I don't know to look over the numbers for the whole history of the conflict, but the amount killed by the Israelis on the Palestinian side, versus the amount killed by the Palestinians is 20 to 1 in Israel's killing more people, maybe more than that, I don't know exactly, I'd have to look at the numbers. But Israel's killed far, far more Palestinians than Palestinians have ever killed Israelis. And so it rings a little hollow to me to just call them a death cult. We're the democracy, even though there's millions of people who can't vote over who rules them, but they're the death cult. I mean, look, they kill people in a more primitive, barbaric way, I guess you could say. There's something a little bit cleaner about when it's done by a government, and it's collateral damage, and it was done with sophisticated weaponry. Okay, still innocent people on the end of those bombs.

Lex Fridman

Absolutely. But there is, I think, a powerful ethical difference when you mentioned about the 8-year-old girl, right? If in your stated goals of the war, is to do everything you can to avoid the death of that girl, versus saying, "We love death more than we love life" And Israelis democracy or not are pro-life for life.

Dave Smith

I mean, okay, I don't 100% disagree with you, but I think if I were to say the degree to which that matters... At a murder trial after somebody's been convicted and before sentencing, sometimes the judge will allow them to give a statement. And if their statement is like, "I'm very sorry for what I did, and I'm so sorry to the family, and this or that or that." That might be life without parole rather than the death penalty. You know what I mean? It might make that bit of difference in that. And if you get up there and you're like, "Hey, I'm happy for what I did, screw the family, [inaudible 01:13:22]." That might make a judge who was going to give you life without parole, give you the death penalty or something like. It's that type of margin around the edge. Let's say you're a really bad guy, and I want to kill you. And you are at home with a bunch of women and children, and I know there's women and children there. I know for a fact that if I blow up this building, it's going to kill all those babies. What I would be charged with is murder in the first degree. And the fact that I went in there and said, "Well, listen, hold on. It's a shame that I had to kill those babies, I really just wanted to kill that one guy, I wish the babies weren't there." And they'd be like, "Yeah, but you knew they were there, and you did it anyway. You get murder in the first degree." Maybe it would make some little difference tinkering around with the sentencing at the end of it, but it doesn't like in kind change what the crime is there. And so I just think at a certain point, if you're doing something like... Look, I'll say maybe with a little bit of an edge. Let's say Barack Obama wants to drone-bomb this place to kill a terrorist. And he thinks he can do it without killing any innocent civilians. Does it, and then it ends up killing some innocent civilians. That's one

thing. But once you've done it over and over and over again, and every single time it kills innocent civilians. And then there's a wedding and you order a drone bomb strike on a wedding. "No, you murdered those people. That's murder in the first degree. And so yes, whether you say out loud, "Oh, it sure is a shame that we got to kill all these kids." When you're doing it over and over, and you know the action you're taking is going to kill more kids. Yeah, it's a little bit different, but really not that much. It's still pretty much a... And then also when you mix in with that, the fact that, I mean, if you go... And I'm not taking an opinion on the word genocide, I don't even like to get into that conversation. I feel like it just derails it anyway. What Israel's doing, whether you think it's a genocide or not, it's certainly not what most people envision when they hear the word genocide. But if you could look at South Africa's case that they promoted at the International Court of Justice, the whole thing is just quotes from Israeli leaders. And I'm just saying, by the way, it's not like they're always saying, "Oh, it sure is a shame that we had to kill that 8-year-old girl." They like half the time they say that when they're talking to the international community, and then the other half the time they seem to basically be saying, "There's no such thing as an innocent 8-year-old girl." And so I guess I just don't find that argument to be very compelling, especially when the thing has been going on for so long.

Lex Fridman

There is some disagreement I have with you there. I think the thing you're implying is, whenever they state it's not quite genuine to some degree. Not [inaudible 01:16:10]-

Dave Smith

No, I'm saying it might be genuine by some people. I'm not saying it's necessarily not. I'm saying that when there's a lot of people who are saying the opposite, it doesn't seem like it's consistently genuine from the entire Israeli leadership class. And that even if it is genuine when some people say it, that's kind of not enough to get away from the fact that... When Tucker was on Pierce Morgan, he said the thing, he goes, "I don't like my tax dollars being used to intentionally kill children." And a lot of people really objected to that word, intentionally, because I think so many of the defenders of Israel fall behind this. Like, "No, no, no, that's not intentional, we're just trying to kill Hamas." But again, like I said, we would never accept that standard in a domestic murder case. The thing is that, if you know there are kids there and you know they're going to die, then that's intent.

Lex Fridman

I think I agree with you fundamentally because war is hell, and that's why I'm against war. But there is a difference. So I think we're mixing in a lot of things. I think you're fundamentally against war, and that's why to you, it really doesn't matter. It is murder. It's just murder, and we shouldn't do murder. And there's a lot of democracies with colorful flags that justify murder because they're trying very hard not to kill civilians. And then when you say you look at the reality of the Obama administration, the entirety of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, you're murdering civilians. Yes, you're trying to kill bad guys, but you're

murdering civilians. That said, on an ethical consideration on which kind of ideals, ideologies you can build a society after the war. One that even on the surface levels states that the value of every life, of every civilian life is equal and high in value. That's a good society. That's the concern with extremist ideology that basically is very difficult to build a flourishing society on. But then the argument against that is the one you said, which is, yeah, well, Hamas is really supported now because of the war.

Dave Smith

Right. But by the way, I don't disagree with the first part of your statement there, I just don't think it's in conflict with what I'm stating. Look, I understand first of all, that there is a difference between the way you're going to say prosecute crime domestically within your own country, and the way you can prosecute crime or a war between two different countries, right? Maybe it's not exactly the same. You don't have cops that you can just send in, you can't arrest somebody and put them on trial. It's not the same, so fine you could say. But the point I'm making is more like, I'm just saying how we would think about these things in a domestic setting. We're talking about morality here. And morality by its very nature, it rises above logistics, it rises above nationalities, or governments, or borders, or any of those things, what's right or wrong. If it's wrong to rape somebody in New Jersey, it's also wrong to rape somebody in Central Africa. And so I'm just saying you're committing the same act that we would consider murder in the first degree here. And then just to go one step further, I think particularly part of the reasons why people have different attitudes about the way two nations fight, what we think of as war versus what we think as say a policing issue. We would never accept the idea that, the logic that's used in wars, used in World War II, even used in Iraq and Afghanistan, especially used in the war in Gaza. If there was a bad guy, even a guy who had done something like October 7th, which we have school shooters and things like that here. If there was an active duty school shooter, and he's in a school shooting people, and we know he is already killed 25 people -

Lex Fridman

Blow up the school.

Dave Smith

Blow up the school. Hey, he's using him as human shields. No, it's not our fault. You see, listen, those deaths [inaudible 01:20:31] while tragic were the school shooter's fault because he used all these people as human shields. We would never for a goddam second if those were our kids in there, we'd never accept that excuse. We would be like, "What? Yeah, that guy was bad. You still had an obligation to do something else." That was never accepted. Now, we may look at things differently in the context of a war, but also... By the way, I'm not sure I completely do, but typically speaking, when people think of wars, they're thinking of this government versus this government, this military versus this military. That's not the situation here. So while Israel is saying, "Hey, they're using human shields." And that is true, I think, to some degree. I think the Israelis overplay it a little bit, but there have been,

I think, clear instances where Hamas is using human shields. But it's kind of a flip side of a different point. And the other point is like, "Oh, well why aren't they using their army, or their air force, or their navy?" Oh, right, because they don't have any of those. Oh, that's right, so you are fighting a war against people that don't have a government because you've denied them their right to have one. And so that's the thing where I do think if you've occupied the place since 1967, you almost now take on an obligation that you kind of have to almost conduct this as a police matter. Because now we are getting awfully close to the scenario that we just laid out. We're like, "Oh, there's a school shooter, blow up the school."

Lex Fridman

It's difficult to have a discussion about ethics when you're talking about war because really at the core of it all war is immoral.

Dave Smith

Yeah. I mean, by its very definition, it's innocent people dying almost always, right?

Lex Fridman

It's difficult to pick which is the just war. And even World War II because of the complexities that you mentioned is difficult because it's Stalin.

Dave Smith

Well, as my buddy Daryl Cooper demonstrated, I think we can have a reasonable civil discussion about these things without anybody blowing their lid. We can all just talk. I mean, World War II it's the third rail, like nothing else. Really, World War II and the Civil Rights Movement, I think are the third rails of American politics, if you have any type of view that is not the approved authorized view of how these events went, you're in a lot of trouble. If you wanted to compare Hitler to Stalin's body count, at that time Stalin was already a genocidal maniac, and Hitler had not gone genocidal yet. So there is a weird dynamic there. Now, in hindsight it looks a little bit better because you go, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, but he went so genocidal at the end there." But that's a weird decision at the time to ally with Joseph Stalin when he had already done the worst things that Joseph Stalin had done, or at least a lot of the worst things he had done. I guess, there were a lot more in the war as well.

Lex Fridman

I was curious though you didn't mention Mao, it's that funding again. Because he did even worse than Stalin. So is that the second thing?

Dave Smith

I'm not sure that's officially known. Do we actually know that Mao killed anybody? I mean, all right, I'll say it. Here we go, I'm going to blow my funding. Bad guy that Mao Zedong, do not care for him.

Lex Fridman

I think the Chinese government officially says, they have an actual percentage that he was 70% correct.

Dave Smith

Is that true?

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Dave Smith

They actually broke it down to that 70%? But the 30% was being the worst mass murderer in human history. That's such a communist thing to do.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, we measured it scientifically.

Dave Smith

We measured it, and perfectly, scientifically figured it out.

Lex Fridman

Since you mentioned Daryl Cooper, you're friends with him, can you tell me about him? And tell me about the whole saga about where he got attacked after the talker interview?

Dave Smith

Yeah, yeah. So I was just a big fan, and still I'm really just a big fan of him. We chatted a few times and I interviewed him on my podcast, and I consider us friends. Martyr Made Podcast is his show and it's just phenomenal. I found out about him from, my guy is Scott Horton, who's a very close friend of mine, and I think the best person on war in the country, he's just a genius. He runs the Libertarian Institute, and he's also been the editor at antiwar.com for many years now. So he first told me about Daryl, and what I knew of Daryl was just that he did a podcast with Jocko. And so they did their show together, and I listened to a couple episodes of it and really enjoyed it. And then it was Scott who was like, "Dude, you got to check out his podcast Martyr Mate, it's the best history podcast." The first thing I listened to of his was the Fear & Loathing in the New Jerusalem. He's done a few things on Twitter where he's kind of shit posting and stuff like that. But when you listen to his work, when he lays down like, I'm going to take years to put together a long presentation on the history of this conflict or the history of this. He has the utmost responsibility in the way that he tells the story and the way he presents it. I cannot understand how anyone would listen to his work, and come away with the feeling that this guy is any type of Jew hater, or Nazi apologist, or anything like that. It is just not who he is. What Daryl said on Tucker's show was that, he goes, "I'll say this to be provocative sometimes to kind of rib my buddy Jocko, who's

like Anglo-Saxon. So this kind of gets to him." And he goes, "And I'm being a bit hyperbolic when I say this, but I'll sometimes say that Winston Churchill was the chief villain of World War II." Now, he didn't commit the most atrocities, he wasn't the worst person there, but he was a guy who was hell-bent on kind of this thing becoming what it ultimately became. Whereas this might've just been an invasion of Poland, this may not have been this whole cascade of the worst thing that ever happened in human history. Now, the retelling of that is always, people go, "He said Churchill was the chief villain of the war." But it's like, no, not exactly. You know what I mean? He's making a point, and I think he's putting out right now a long series on World War II, he just put the prologue to it out, which was excellent, by the way. Listen, after it's out, maybe I'll come back and regret saying this, but I don't think I will. I really have trust that Darryl will handle this responsibly. And in fact, I think that he might be... And not because he's involved, this is his angle or what he's attempting to do. I think just that he's going to tell the truth and the truth will take you where it takes you. I think he's actually going to probably serve a function of bringing a lot of those types kind of back to reality. If you think he's going to be excusing the atrocities of the Nazis in this thing, I don't think you're going to be happy with the end product, if that's what you are coming into it for.

Lex Fridman

Okay. One thing I want to say is, I think calling Daryl Nazi and Nazi sympathizer is just wrong, and it does a lot of damage. I think he has a lot of value to his podcast. I think there's several things to sort of make very clear. I think he's a really interesting guy, I'm sure I'll talk to him in the future. But I just want to lay on the table that I think what he's saying about Churchill is just dead wrong. I think legitimately that statement, removing the trolling from it, is the revisionist history statement that I think is wrong, and the invasion of the Soviet Union would've happened no matter what. And possibly, which I'm actually learning a lot more, Stalin could have gone the other way as well. That was going to be a global war, no matter what. Churchill, the role of Churchill, we can debate. And I still don't think he was a main instigator of that expansion there, there's a lot of historical documentation of that.

Dave Smith

Well, look, that's a fair debate to have, and it'd be interesting to see you two kind of talk about that. Or maybe not even debate it, but just have a conversation about that, that would be great.

Lex Fridman

I think the broader point you're making, I mean, there's just a lot of trivialization of the World War II that happens in the West, in the United States especially. And that's used by neocons by warmongers to sort of shift-

Dave Smith

I've done a bunch of Israel-Palestine debates, I don't think I've ever done one where World War II wasn't invoked. Well, I mean Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, so you're going to tell me it's not okay. And immediately, if you just look at it like that, let's say the official narrative is 100% true in World War II, let's even say every aspect of the official narrative is really true. The lesson of World War II is that we should have gone to war sooner, which is essentially the dominant mainstream narrative that Chamberlain is the failure. That was the problem, the appeasement. Churchill was the solution. If only Chamberlain had been Churchill, or if only we had gone to war with Germany and whatever in 1933, it would've been better. Okay, let's say all of that's true. It still doesn't follow from that, that therefore in every situation appeasement is wrong, and aggression is good. It doesn't follow that, if that's the only lesson of history. And that now it's just okay to slaughter civilians. It's okay to go to total war against a civilian population because this one time it was necessary. Bobby Kennedy said this to me again, somebody who I really do love and admire in many ways, and I'm glad he's the health secretary. But I remember him evoking the Nazis and making a comparison between Hamas and the Nazis. And you're like, "Dude, Hamas doesn't even control Gaza really. The Nazis had most of Europe at one point. This is just not an apples to apples conversation. You can't even compare the two in terms of what type of menace or threat they are to the world." I mean, sure, maybe if Hamas had a lot of power, they'd use it in a bad way. But that's true with some homeless guy on the street too, but he doesn't have that power. So what are we talking about here? And so I do think that the way the World War II narrative is weaponized has been, even if World War II itself was necessary and just, the way that, that's been weaponized over the years has led to just countless catastrophes. You know what I mean, I guess it's just in some ways there might be something positive about the fact that everybody's always called Hitler if they're bad. You know what I mean? Because we make Hitler the face of what is evil eternally or something. He really does play the role of the devil in our society in a strange way. But there is Saddam was the next Hitler, and Gaddafi was the Hitler, and Bashar Assad was the next Hitler.

Lex Fridman

Trump.

Dave Smith

Trump is Hitler, Hamas is Hitler. Except the problem is that none of them are Hitler. None of them are even close, it's just totally different.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. And the amount of power is really important. It matters how much destructive power you have within you, the capabilities. But every major superpower with nuclear weapons has the potential to be that destructive, it is just unproductive to-

Dave Smith

And yet the only ones who ever have dropped them are us. I was arguing with one guy on a podcast, and he said that, he goes, "You can't allow dictators to have nuclear weapons because they might use them." And I was like, "But we are the only ones who ever used them." And he goes, "Ah, come on, that's naïve," or something. And you're like, "Wait, what? Shouldn't that be pointed out?" And I don't know. I mean, I'd prefer Iran not get nuclear weapons. I think we're pushing them to probably want to pursue that. And I also think there's been a lot of propaganda about the nuclear program in Iran. I know at least since the '90s, according to Netanyahu, they've been five years away.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. I think there's a lot of warmongering going on about all parts of the world, Iran especially. I have a lot of friends from Iran, it's one of the most beautiful cultures in the world, this just superpower of intellect and culture. And it's really sad and disappointing that the regime is basically suppressing that culture. You have to always remember, there's parts of the world where the people are beautiful, and we don't get to see it because of the suppression, the lack of freedom.

Dave Smith

Yeah. No, absolutely.

Lex Fridman

So all that said, there does seem to be a lot of hatred of Jews on the X. How much of it do you think is actual hate of Jews? And how much of it's just trolls and grifters and conspiracy nerds just cosplaying as Nazis?

Dave Smith

It's really hard to tell. I mean, I don't know. I don't know how you even figure it out. And I think this is one of the problems with outrage culture. It's kind of one of the unintended consequences of it, is that now you just have no way of knowing who's saying this just to get a rise out of you, or who really sincerely means it, or who's some version of both. You see, there's so many weird dynamics because there's no question, I see it all the time. I mean, I see a level of Jew hatred on Twitter that I've never seen before in my own replies and other people's things. And that's interesting. First off, you're like, "Okay, what's going on here?"

Lex Fridman

Interesting sociological phenomenon. Yeah.

Dave Smith

Right. Yeah. Concerning and troubling and all of that stuff. But then you also see people who will be asking completely legitimate questions, or making completely legitimate points that are called antisemitic. And then that, I think, does not help the dynamic at all because now

you're almost like, number one, you make the word meaningless, you take away the disincentive for anybody else to actually be a Jew hater. I mean, I think there's a lot going on. One of the things is that for young white men in America today, they've lived through the years of real insane progressive woke-sim. I'm 42, it's just a different thing for me, I come from a different culture in a different time. That just simply was not the case that when I was a teenager, or when I was in college, or when I was in my early 20s, that the school, the faculty, the politicians, Hollywood, all of them embraced racialism. They all said, "We're playing identity politics, and it is okay to dice people up along these racial lines," and have that first and foremost in your mind. And there is this weird feeling over this last year and now with Trump being reelected, that we snapped our fingers and woke-sim and went away or something like that. But these guys still came up in this era, and it was always the case that one of the dangerous elements of playing this game was like, hey, you think you're going to play this and that young straight white men aren't going to start playing this game too? Why the hell would they not? Why would they just accept, we'll just sit here while everybody else is allowed to have a racial identity, and a grievance about it. And yet we'll be the one group who, yeah, could just stomp all over us, we're the bad guys. And that's part of the reason why I always opposed the woken sanity. I mean, first and foremost, just because I think it's wrong, I think it's wrong to be shitty to people based on their racial group, and that includes white people too. But then also you're like, you don't see that this is going to result in something bad. So there's that. And what's weird to me is that, I guess it's because a lot of the people who are the most upset about the antisemitism also happen to be supporting Israel, there's a big correlation between that. But clearly it's a huge factor in this. It's not a coincidence that all of this rose up while Israel is just conducting this brutal campaign with our weapons and money. And so I always think with these things, whether it's with Putin, or with Al-Qaeda, or with whoever, and I'm not saying the guy who posts Jew-hating stuff on Twitter is the same as them. I'm just saying in all of these situations, you always kind of got to separate, what are legitimate grievances and what are, okay, you're wrong on that and you shouldn't be doing that. So it's pretty easy for me, if I listen to the Putin interview with Tucker, I thought his whole 30 minute opening thing was horrible and just kind of stupid, especially when you're talking to Tucker Carlson. This is for an American audience. You know how much that does not resonate with Americans being like, "We have a historic claim over another." Our entire society is founded on, we think that's bullshit. That's the entire history of our society. It's like, nah, it doesn't matter. Sorry. Literally read the Declaration of Independence, it just refutes everything Vladimir Putin said in the first 30 minutes. Our view of the world is that God wants us to be free, and we get to overthrow governments if they're infringing on our rights. So that was stupid. But then when he is talking about NATO enlargement, and bringing Ukraine into the American Military Alliance, you're like, "Okay, he's got a legitimate point there. We would not allow one of our neighbors to be brought into China or Russia's military alliance." And so likewise, when it comes to those guys, I do think that, look, it is just true. It is the case that America has fought many wars over the last seven years with Israel playing a very influential role in us fighting those wars. And this was a scheme that was cooked up by the neoconservatives and the [inaudible 01:39:03] in Israel

that we would go through this path. But this has been confirmed by four Star General Wesley Clark. He literally said, "It was a study paid for by the Israelis that we were going to topple seven countries in five years." And we didn't get there in five years, but we've made attempts to topple all of those countries since then. You see Trump's bombing the Houthis because they're pissed off about Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, and so they're trying to shut down their straits or whatever. So we're just bombing another group on behalf of Israel. And if you really are concerned about the rise of Jew hatred, I would say, look, sometimes people would argue, the thing I said in the beginning about the terrorists don't hate us for our freedom, they hate us because we're over there. And people would say, "That's just what Osama Bin Laden says." He just says he hates us for our military, but he really just hates us because he's an Islamist and we're free people or whatever. And you'd be like, "Okay, well even if that's what's in his heart, that sure is his recruiting shtick. That sure is how he gets other people to blow themselves up." And so even if you want to say, which might very well be the case, that some of these people just hate Jews, and it wouldn't matter if Israel was at war with Gaza or not. It's like, okay, but that sure is their recruiting shtick. That sure is how they get other people to go look at what these Jews are doing in our foreign policy. So I don't know. There's a lot going on. I think racialism of all different forms is stupid and wrong. It always just leads to sloppy thinking and bad results, it's always kind of ugly. And then weirdly, it also always ends up hurting the person, it's not good for you, it's not good for your soul. So I don't like seeing that stuff. I was saying before about there's this hierarchy of outrage that you got to have in order to think and act, you have to kind of put these together. It's something that, despite being described as a self-hating Jew, I am really not. I love Jewish people, I love Jewish culture. I've benefited a lot from it. It's in many ways made me the person I am, and I think it's influenced some of the best parts of me. But there is a whininess and a hysteria about this stuff that I think is just not healthy. I think it's not good. I've told many Jewish friends and family this privately, but the way I look at it is like, I'm an American, this has been a wonderful country to be Jewish. Jews are doing exceptionally well in this country. We are 2% of the population or so, and we are thriving by any metric. And if mean stuff on Twitter is our great burden to bear, I don't think we should be talking about it like we're in the middle of Nazi Germany or something like that. So I do think people get hysterical about it.

Lex Fridman

In a way that's completely not productive. But to me, I think of the Jew-hating nerds and trolls on Twitter as just the other side of the woke. ... And trolls on Twitter is just the other side of the woke leftist.

Dave Smith

I kind of get that, yeah.

Lex Fridman

It's almost like a response, like you were saying, it's just that the woke weren't censored and the response to the woke was censored. And now that on X, they're less censored or not censored, you just get to see it. And they're both annoying.

Dave Smith

I agree with that.

Lex Fridman

They don't really help the discussion on Israel, they don't help the discussion on anything. In fact, one of the reasons I stay away from that discussion of Israel, which I think is nuanced and really complicated in the way that we've been discussing, in order to have an intellectual exploration of ideas, you have to be able to misstep and try ideas for size. And if I'm going to be punished severely by these... I'm okay being criticized. But when they're low brain takes that are just lying about me en masse, you get a huge amount of engagement just because you're thinking out loud and reading history and it's just annoying. And by the way, I'm really interested about World War II, probably in the way that Dan Carlin and Darryl Cooper are interested because it's such an interesting first stage on which human nature was explored in all its forms, the geopolitics of it. Everybody on that stage was complicated. Also, there's a lot of fascinating military tactics and strategy and military technology plus the nuclear bomb, all of that. That's like a moment in human history. Listen, I love Genghis Khan, Roman Empire, Alexander the Great, those are all interesting studies of human history, of military tactics, of brutality, of human nature, all of that. That's why I want to be able to discuss that. It's fascinating that humans are able to do that kind of thing. What causes them to do it? What were the dynamics evolved, the propaganda on all sides? Could it been avoided or not? Plus Stalin is part of this picture. It's like, what the fuck? After the nuclear bomb you're just not going to get characters like that. You're not going to get a global war of that kind. It might be a different one, maybe a cyber war or maybe a war in space, but we're not going to get this kind of war ever again. That was the biggest and the last global war we're going to get. So I want to be able to mouth off and explore and, yeah, argue with Darryl Cooper about Churchill and say stupid in the process and Darryl says stupid in the process too, and together come up to the... So anyway, the trolls on the left and the right just make everything worse and it's annoying.

Dave Smith

Yeah, no, I agree with that. And I'm sure I'm not without my own bias in this because from my own self-interested perspective, I'm not saying this is the main reason to be annoyed with them or anything like that, but what I personally get is all types of, "Self-hating Jew," "Nazi apologist," all this literally just because I criticize the way Israel's conducting this war. So I think that's insane. But then I also feel like, and I just want to be clear, just explain this, I'm not saying this is the worst thing about people who are Jew haters on Twitter, but just from a personal perspective, I'm like, "Guys, you are not helping me, man." I'll get people in my

comments who I think are trying to catch my back who just don't know I'm Jewish and they're like, I'll say something critical of Israel, and then someone will argue with me and they'll be like, "Oh look, a Jew came in here to defend Israel." And I'm like, "Dude, first of all, literally you might as well be working for Mossad. You literally make the entire movement who's criticizing Israel look terrible, dude. You are literally the enemy that they would like to have." And so there's a very weird dynamic in the Israel-Palestine conflict where there's so many of the loons on both sides who almost seem like they're secretly working for the other side. When you see the Palestinian protests and they're chanting, "Death to America," and all this stuff, you're like, what are you doing? Are you trying to make people more sympathetic to Israel? Because if Rabbi Shmuley was working for Adolf Hitler or something like that, it would all make perfect sense. You'd be like, "Oh, I get it, you sent this guy out to make everyone hate Jewish people." And then with the Jew hating posts too, yeah, it just feeds right into the opposition side of how to caricature. It's like, "Oh, so their game is, they'll smear everybody who's a critic of Israel as being a Jew hater so your answer is to just really be a Jew hater? Like, all right, I don't think that's helping."

Lex Fridman

So maybe this is a good time to ask for your advice because these folks are the reason why I'm hesitant. So I've interviewed several world leaders recently, it is looking likely that I'll interview Vladimir Putin and several other similar level major world leaders. I've previously interviewed Benjamin Netanyahu for an hour. One of the biggest regrets I have about that interview is it was only an hour. I mean, I learned a lot, but I think he's a really important historical figure and I think it's impossible to have an effective conversation with him that's shorter than three hours. So it looks like he's interested now to do round two with me for three or more hours. And I've personally, so this is a bit of a therapy session, but I've personally been leaning against doing it and I hate that I'm leaning against doing it because the reason I'm leaning against doing it is because the very people you're talking about, because I just don't want them on either side, pro Israel, it doesn't really matter, but the chanting sheep of animal farm, Jew hating or otherwise, they follow you around everywhere online and make it difficult to think. I think whenever I come across these crowds, the woke left or the whatever you call the Jew haters, the woke right, let's call them, they just decrease the quality of my thoughts for the rest of the day.

Dave Smith

I get what you mean.

Lex Fridman

I feel dumber. It's like Rogan talks about when he hears a bad comedian, he feels like nothing is funny anymore. This is what I feel like when I read their thoughts, it's like, "I'm going to go read a book now because I need to recover my brain."

Dave Smith

Well, it's a dangerous kind of poison to let in your mind because then you're like, "Hey, I can't be thinking about you when I'm doing what I want to do. I can't be thinking about what your reaction to this is going to be." The way I always thought about it was when I'd get hate online, which I always get, it's always just like, I look at it like this, I got a great family and a great career and I really love what I do. I make really good money at what I do, and I do shows all the time, I get crowds of people who love what I do, I get a lot of people who listen to my podcast who love what I do. And it's like, so if I get all that and then the price that comes along with it is there's some people who talk shit online, it's like, that's a very good price to pay for all of this. And I just made a decision at a certain point that it's like, I'm just going to accept that that's the price of business here, that's what it costs and then okay, fine. And then sometimes I try to have fun with it or mock them or whatever to go back. But to me now, again, I can never tell you what to do because it's a very personal price that you have to pay, and it's a very weird psychological dynamic. I mean, it's almost something like that we were not evolved to deal with and is very artificial. If there's a group of thousands of people who hate your guts and are furious at you, we're almost hardwired to be like, "Well, I'm going to be killed now. That's the next thing that happens." You're not supposed to get to know what just someone in Arkansas thinks about you right now. So that's a very personal decision to make, but I kind of feel like guys like me and you have already made the decision that we're in the arena and we're going to deal with that price. So just from my perspective, I'm like, "Yeah, but how could you turn down getting three hours with Netanyahu?" That would just be so interesting. And I'm not even saying, I hate the guy, but I'm not saying you should interview him like you hate the guy or I'm not saying you even have to grill him, but just if you get three hours with somebody, something interesting is going to be revealed there. There'll be a benefit to that. It'll be interesting to just see him talk that way. There's also something about, as we kind of saw with Trump doing the podcasts and even with JD Vance doing some of the podcasts, there is something really interesting about this format, the long form podcast where it just gets people to let down their guard and reveal themselves a little bit more. It is not just the time factor. That's a big one, it's a huge, huge one. But there's something about if me and you are just like, we were having this conversation right now, but in the back of us was like a cable news background of red and blue and sparks and a ticker at the bottom of the show and then you just start interviewing someone, it's just a different thing. Whereas this you just fall into conversation mode. And I'd be interested to see him fall into that, Putin too. I just think it's great.

Lex Fridman

First of all, thank you for the encouragement. But to push back on the complexity of it a little bit, I think everything you said about your life is also true about my life except family, I want to have a family, you son of a bitch, you're bragging. On the podcast side, I can have a lot of incredible conversations, some of my favorites are talking to programmers or video game designers or to you about Netanyahu versus talking to a world leader is a very specific

thing and people don't understand that that, for example, you and I can mouth off, we can be super supportive of Netanyahu or super critical in a way that you can't do in front of the guy.

Dave Smith

Yeah, that's true.

Lex Fridman

If you want to reveal something about that person, there's a different skill involved there in order to reveal how they think, who they are as a human being, you have to, just like we said with Darryl Cooper, you have to humanize the person to a degree in order to let their mind flourish in front of you in order for them to let down the barriers they've put up. And Benjamin Netanyahu's put up a lot of barriers, internally in Israel he gets attacked insanely. There's a Game of Thrones constantly going on, and this guy has maintained power for a very long time so he is very good at putting up those barriers. Plus, globally gets attacked a lot. So the task there is difficult. And so each one is a puzzle and you have to make a decision, do you want to take this on as a project which might become a lifelong project because of the consequences? And you don't need to.

Dave Smith

There's a calculation there. I'm not saying it's not so self-evident that there is a correct and incorrect answer, and I do think that we've probably all had things, like certain type of ventures in life where you're like, "All right, no, I don't want to do that." But then you have to have a moment and be like, "Well, why is it you don't want it? Oh, is it just because it's going to be a lot of work? Is it just because you're scared of it? Is it just because this?" And those typically are not good reasons to not do something, you know what I mean? Now, there is a reasonable, I think, point that you made in there where it's like it is a different game to interview a world leader. That is a very different thing. Talking to some comedian about his thoughts on all this stuff is a very different thing than talking to a world leader and especially one who's conducting a brutal war as you're talking to them. And I don't know exactly what the way to navigate that is. I agree with you, it's not just to be hostile and be like, "I've got you here for three hours, I'm going to grill the shit," it's probably not the best way to do it. There's probably to have a conversation to talk to the guy, probably try to get some important questions in, but also give him a chance to breathe and be a person. From my perspective, but again, it's a very personal thing, for me I just do think that I'm going, "I hope you do it," because I'd love to see that podcast.

Lex Fridman

Okay, well see, this is why it's part of the reason I asked you is I get a Dave Smith endorsement on it.

Dave Smith

There you go, when this completely ruins it.

Lex Fridman

At least there's another guy who thought there's a chance that it might be a good idea. Because I don't know, that's the cool thing about the things we do, you've been through a lot of battles, you've walked into a lot of tough debates and it's like you don't know, this could be the conversation that ends you.

Dave Smith

I know. Well, I'll say I think that's one of the things that I love about doing debates, and there is something about that where I do kind of feel this... I'm a little bit of an adrenaline junkie. I mean, not really, I don't skydive or do stuff like that, but doing stand-up, there's always something about that that's like you're risking a lot by doing it, you feel alive and not the way you do when you first start. But there is something about that and there's something about... Well, first of all, there's kind of two things. Number one, I feel like I'm obligated, and I wouldn't say this for you, but I think this is true for me, I think I'm obligated to do at least several debates a year. And I think that if I'm going to go on shows like your show and Rogan's show and Tucker's show and Candice or whoever else, Patrick Bet-David and Tim Pool, and I go on these big shows for long form things and I'm sitting there and I'm being like, "Okay, it's like this and I think it's like this," and then if I'm going to do that, I kind of have an obligation to test myself against someone being like, "No, it's not like that," and then showing that I think I can stand up to these kind of challenges. So I feel like I'm kind of obligated. But then there is a feeling to it where you're like, "Hey man, my career is not a joke. I got little kids. This is how I support them." And I am kind of taking my career in my hands every time I go do one of these debates. If I just get smoked and this guy just totally beats me up, it's like, I don't know, I don't know, how's anyone going to look at me again after that? You'd be like, "Oh, you acted like you had such a good point and then this guy just totally destroyed your point." But that then motivates me to be like, "Okay, I got to really be on point. I got to really make sure I've done my homework. I got to make sure my argument's really tight. I got to think about this thing from all ends." And then on the other level, it's like if someone can do that to me, then kind of that's the way the movie's supposed to end. If there is some hole in my argument that I'm just not thinking of and then someone else can point it out to me and I got no response to it, then I kind of deserve to be humiliated publicly for that so all right. And I don't know, it's kind of exciting in a way.

Lex Fridman

Because the movie ends at some point.

Dave Smith

Well, that's true. Unless you and your genius friends can figure out how to give us eternal life or something.

Lex Fridman

I don't think I want to live forever. I think flirting with that idea too much is dangerous, this kind of transhumanism kind of idea. It's not a good way of thinking. Of course, I do want to heal diseases and extend human life, especially high quality of human life. But yeah.

Dave Smith

If we could be in much better shape and much healthier and extend life by a few decades, I think that would be great. But I agree with you. I think there's supposed to be an expiration date on it, I think we're supposed to... There's something about scarcity being a necessary component in a lot of different fields, you know what I mean? Where it's like life itself having a finite amount of time on it I think makes it more precious.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, at the individual level and then at the societal level, it just does seem like death is the way you get new ideas. It's like people kind of solidify their ideas and are unwilling to change their mind and the only way you get new ideas-

Dave Smith

Yeah, that's interesting, right? The next generation has to take them over.

Lex Fridman

You have to keep turning. All right, speaking of the trolls and Israel, I got to ask you about this. Let's talk about Jeffrey Epstein. I recently got attacked because a couple of conversations I had with Tim Dillon three and four years ago. I love Tim Dillon, he's hilarious.

Dave Smith

I love Tim too. I've known Tim for many years, love that guy.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, so I bring up Jeffrey Epstein often because it's a fascinating study of evil to me, whichever angle you take on it. And I think there, partially to talk shit, but I showed some skepticism that he's connected to Mossad. And I've evolved on that since then. By the way, I'm not actually sure it's Mossad, it could be any intelligence agencies, it could be CIA. But I was wondering if you could educate me. I did a little research on this last night, I looked into it a little more, and then I saw that you said he's definitely Mossad.

Dave Smith

Well, I don't know, I didn't say he was definitely Mossad. I don't know my exact... I mean, I made one kind of jokey post. As is the case with almost any intelligence operation, look, I don't want to poo-poo anybody's hopes here because I guess the JFK files just got released and supposedly the rest of the Epstein files are coming out and there's a major yearning right now to get to the end of the movie where we find out everything that happened. And I

think it's great that people have that desire, and I hope more and more does come out. I think the truth is that with any intelligence operations, we're probably never going to know all of the details of exactly what happened.

Lex Fridman

The funny thing about intelligence agencies, and I've been regularly accused of being CIA, FSB or Mossad depending on the group that's attacking me, but I think it's a fascinating topic and it's very difficult to know somebody's intelligence, but if you have any nuance and want to discuss the nuances, then the comment is going to be, "That guy for sure is Mossad," if we're talking about Mossad or so on. But yeah, that's one of the things I didn't know. And I saw the, what is it, Alex Acosta basically mentioned that Epstein is intelligence. That to me is like, "Okay, that's the piece of evidence, that's the really valuable piece of evidence that he's intelligence." And that was very not just intelligence, but Mossad. Because before that I thought it might be CIA because I kind of heard rumors-

Dave Smith

And I think it's quite possible that he was working with elements of both, I mean, as I think is often the case. I also think that's something that people get a little bit wrong when they think, "Okay, this guy was CIA, or, "This guy was Mossad." And then there's also, I think there's the possibility that there are rogue elements within those organizations. This is not necessarily coming from the director I don't know. But you look at the guy, the way his career trajectory tracks is completely unexplainable outside of being connected to intelligence. It's not just the one or two people saying that he's intelligence, it's like the idea that you're just like, you have no experience and you're a teacher at Dalton, which is this incredibly elite New York City private school, and then all of a sudden you're at Bear Stearns and within two years you've made partner and you're worth hundreds of millions of dollars and nobody knows where you made your money from? This just doesn't happen. And then you're just inserted into this world with all of the most highest level political leaders and cultural figures and stuff. But the thing that's amazing about the Jeffrey Epstein story is that it's like the level of evil and the level of corruption that it exposes, no matter what the answer is, no matter what the answer is, you're going to tell me that there was a pedophile ring in our country that involved... I mean, listen, dude, if you had said this before it came out, this would've been the wildest conspiracy theory, but a pedophile ring that involves the most powerful people in the United States of America and in the world to some degree touching the Royal family, the Clintons, all these people, and that this was known and covered up and then allowed to continue? I mean, there's a blackmail operation that relies on raping American children? And if this is, whether it's CIA or Mossad doesn't make one less, it's equally horrible. But then these elements were like, you're like, okay, so when he first got arrested and then he was given a slap on the wrist, a slap on the wrist and then the prosecutor says, "Well, I was told by the intelligence community that he's intelligence and to go easy on him," it's like, "Oh, okay, okay. And you didn't resign and discuss that day?" You know what I mean? I don't think that's too much to ask for. There was the ABC reporter who

said that she had the whole story, she's on the hot mic saying she had the whole story and then the network told her to squash it, and it's like, "And you stayed working there?" I'm sorry, I'm not saying we're all imperfect and none of us are heroes, but you are in a news network and you uncovered a child raping ring that implicated the most powerful people in our society and your news network told you, "We will not run this story because of our relationship with the royal family," and you did not resign in disgust that day and take this story to every single independent outlet that would maybe publish it? I'm sorry. It's like it's so damning to the entire apparatus that we did not, at the very least, see mass resignations over this, forget even at the very least expect that it would've been prosecuted and shut down. And then still to this day even it's like, and I think Tucker Carlson just said this recently, and I guess it's a little bit of a weird area when you're filming people raping children, but where are the tapes? Why is everyone talking about the flight logs and the files? Where are the tapes? This guy was clearly taping people to blackmail them. Where are those? I don't know what the legal process of this is, because I think technically it's child porn, so yeah, okay, you can't just distribute it out and let everybody watch it, but isn't there a way that somebody has to sit down and watch it and see who is implicated in this? And there's even, I think there's a lot of LARPing with this administration going on right now on this topic, but does anybody really expect that we're actually going to get to the bottom of this? Because I don't. And that in itself just tells you what a sham this god damn whole system is. One of the things that's so amazing about the Jeffrey Epstein story, I mean, you have all of that, and then of course, the end of it, which is just like, "Wait a minute, wait, what? Hold on. He's in the most secure prison and then the cameras go out and the correctional officers don't fill out the log and he's found dead?" I mean, but when you look at it in totality, there's just no getting around the huge indictment it is of this entire everything. And I mean, even the fact that even the Trump administration, when Pam Bondi goes, "We're going to release all of this information. We've only redacted what needs to be redacted for national security."

Lex Fridman

The meme.

Dave Smith

Why does anything need to be redacted for national security? I'm sorry, you're telling me there's a pedophile ring and we can't tell you everything about it for national security? Why would that be related to national security? And I do think there's something, and it's very interesting because we talked briefly, was that on air before, we were talking about Sam Harris kind of criticized me a little bit for not having the credentials to talk about some of this stuff, which I even said, "Okay, he has got a point," but it's one of the things that guys like Sam Harris will talk about a lot is that, "Look, we need trust in institutions." And this is his big thing where he goes, "These people like Joe Rogan and Dave Smith are just tearing down the institutions. And while I recognize that's an issue, I also think we need trust in these institutions."

Lex Fridman

That's a good Sam Harris.

Dave Smith

Yeah, well, if you talk in that tone, then it means you're not being emotional and you're only being logical and rational, which I actually don't think is appropriate when you're talking about a child rapist ring, but whatever, that's my take on it. But it's like, okay, so where are these institutions I'm supposed to trust, man? You're telling me there's a pedophile ring that is at least in some degree associated with national security? What? And how could you possibly have this story if you did care about trust in institutions, then you should be even louder than me talking about you got to tell the truth on this story otherwise we'll never have trust in these institutions.

Lex Fridman

I'm the same actually, I believe institutions, I think they have value. So this is where you and I probably disagree on the libertarian side. I think institutions, if they're run efficiently can-

Dave Smith

Who's the utopian now?

Lex Fridman

That's right. I mean there is the utopian notion to it for sure, but because it's very possible that bureaucracy has always destroy the productivity and the effectiveness of institutions. It's possible.

Dave Smith

It's a Lord Atkins kind of power corrupts type deal?

Lex Fridman

And you're absolutely right, if you believe in institutions, you should want to release everything about Epstein. You should want to be transparent as much as possible. Yeah. But the one thing, and it is very suspicious, so I'm more and more becoming convinced that there's some intelligence agency connected to it. But I also want to, setting that aside, just comment on one thing where again, it's super entertaining, but people say about me that I came out of nowhere and that's proof that I'm intelligence. So first of all, there is a track record of "where I came from". It's just people are too lazy. And there is something sexy about just saying Mossad. "Oh, he's denying it? Fucking Mossad." By the way, the Mossad thing is a new thing, it used to be FSB and CIA. What do I want to say about that? Oh, yeah, I've been gradually growing in popularity over the past 10 years, I've been doing interviews, lectures, podcasts, and it's actually very gradual. And I don't know what else to say.

Dave Smith

There's a difference, and I know I've experienced this too, right? There's such a difference in perspective because if somebody just found me and they just found out who I am, and they go, "This guy's brand new and he's doing all these shows," but you're like, "Yeah, well, I don't know, dude. Not from my perspective I'm not brand new. Dude, I've been doing stand-up comedy for 19 years and I've been podcasting for 15 years." And then when it starts taking off, everybody's like, "Oh, this guy just came out of nowhere." And you're like, "I mean, all right, I wish I had been aware that it was all this quick." But look, a lot of this stuff with so much of this too, it's just laziness and people searching for confirmation bias and people searching for a simpler story because that's easier. So if they believe that Epstein was Mossad and there's a clip of you where you're like, "I don't know about that," then they go, "See, he's Mossad too, and now that fits perfectly into my little story." I know the truth is that it's quite possible that people just aren't convinced. However, given enough time, Tim Dillon is always right about everything.

Lex Fridman

That's true.

Dave Smith

So eventually you'll have to admit that he got it right.

Lex Fridman

And not to say the cliché cheesy thing, but it is true that the comedians sometimes say the obvious thing that people are a little resistant to say, it ends up being true. Now we just landed some more credibility to Tim Dillon's insanity, great. Now I do want to comment on the other aspect of me that came out of nowhere, fine, but I do get to talk to world leaders, which I have to really admit I don't understand why. So the experience I've had is you basically gain a reputation, I talked to a lot of scientists early on, you gain a reputation like this is an interesting person to talk to, and that travels. And then over time you get fans and world leaders are humans too, they listen to this stuff and sometimes it's their family that listen.

Dave Smith

Yeah, oftentimes their kids, that seems to be a big one.

Lex Fridman

And so that's just how it happens. And so you sent an email, "Hey, you want to talk?" And then their team or them directly, in several cases, they just respond, "Yeah," and that's it. It's as simple as that. And they're human beings. And I think a lot of them as human beings are exhausted by journalists, by shitty journalists I should say. And it's hard for them to know which is the good journalist. By good, there's the cynical view that they want somebody who's just going to spout propaganda aligned with their propaganda. No, they just want a

good faith person in front of them. And I should also say that no single world leader has told me which questions to ask. There's this meme about my conversation with Modi that it's scripted, nope, there was zero oversight, I have full control.

Dave Smith

Well, it's also, I mean, obviously one of the major dynamics, which is just one of the most interesting kind of themes in the world, I think right now, but it's particularly true in America, is that the corporate media is just shrinking and shrinking and shrinking and whatever this is, which is so weird that we still all call them podcasts because just not the right name for them at all and none of us have had an iPod in quite a long time. And I don't know, it's just such the first person came up with it, "It's a cast on an iPod, it's a podcast," and we all still use that term. But whatever, these shows on the internet have the audience. And so that's a big factor, just that it's like, "Oh, this is where you can go to the audience." And then I would say, and I don't know exactly, I have no idea, I should say, the motivations inside any individual's heads, but I would say in the case of Vladimir Putin, he is completely blacked out in American media and to the point that even RT has been blocked out, they never play any of his speeches, they never allow you to hear, "Look, this is what this guy's perspective is." It's very interesting in the same way that they kind of all flipped out when Osama bin Laden's letter to America went viral on Tik-Tok, and then all the talks of banning Tik-Tok increased and stuff. So for him, say like when he did the Tucker interview or if he does an interview with you, well, that's a way for him to do an end around and allow his perspective to be heard, which I personally think is obviously a good thing. If you're going to go in a war, and we're kind of at a war with Russia right now, you should know what the other guy's perspective is, not that you should take it as gospel. And then from Netanyahu's perspective, I would imagine Israel has a lot of control in a lot of different areas, but they have been losing the internet battle very, very badly, and it's a major problem for Israel. I mean, I don't know, I still think in a very strange way everybody seems to be underestimating how grave the implications of all of this are. But the view of Israel from the world is never going to be the same as what it was before. And the generational divide on it is so stark. Everybody 40 and under, who very quickly, the time goes by quickly, pretty soon the 40 and over crowd gets aged out pretty quickly, and it's never going to be the perception of Israel that my parents' generation... It's never going to be the perception of Israel that my parents' generation had, ever again, because of this war. I'm sure, to some degree at least, Netanyahu feels like he has to try to get his perspective into that internet conversation area. In a way, it's shocking. And I guess Bobby Kennedy, when he was running for president, and Vivek Ramaswamy, when he was running for president, they were doing some of it even before Donald Trump was. But it is crazy in a way that it took this long for politicians to figure out that it's like, oh, I guess we got to go where the audience is. That's the point of doing shows. I mean, would you rather do a show with a million people or with 10 million people? It's like, you guys do CNN all the time. Why wouldn't you do Joe Rogan's podcast? It's just a bigger audience, and those people get to vote too.

Lex Fridman

You reminded me with Netanyahu that one of the goals I have with the podcast is to have the kind of conversation that a historian would find useful 20 years from now, which is tough to do because you're going to get punished for it. Because it's mostly I want to reveal as much information as possible without the signaling, without the... You just want to know who was this person.

Dave Smith

I think that's exactly right. And I think this was what Darryl was saying. I think that the part of the awful thing of always using World War II as the next example for the next war is that it's almost like you're never... They hate us for our freedom, or Vladimir Putin's just mad and he wants to reconstitute the Soviet Union. They always insist that we can never treat our enemies as people and be like this is a real person with real grievances. And even, they might be a fanatic also. I'm not saying they're not. There are these human qualities to it, and it's always whatever. Before Obama and Hillary Clinton did the regime change war in Libya, it was all this propaganda. They were like, "He's buying up Viagra to rape all the women and he's going to go genocide...". This guy who had been in power for decades. You know what I mean? And hadn't done that. And it's just like, oh, it's like the way you're supposed to think about war is almost like these people have been possessed by pure evil. They are monsters, and there's no talking to them. There's no dealing with them. It's just simply this. A good example, just this recent conflict with the Houthis, where you have the Houthis in Yemen, which Saudi Arabia invaded in 2015 with the full backing of the United States of America. And the Houthis maintained power for eight years through that. They maintained power until the Saudis finally gave up. It was literally the Saudis were just killing hundreds of thousands of people, and then the Houthis would get a drone off at one of their oil refineries or something like that. Eventually, they were just doing enough damage that it was like, ah, shit. All right, this isn't worth it anymore. So, they end it. Anyway. You have this thing. You're like, if they went through a total war for eight years, what you think, Trump sent in a few tomahawk missiles over there is going to stop them from doing this? But then, they didn't do anything. And this is according to all reporting on it. They didn't do anything during the ceasefire. It was only once the ceasefire broke down that they went back to attacking ships again that were coming through. You just see this thing where you're like... It's not saying right or wrong or who's good or bad, it's like sometimes there's a diplomatic solution and there's not a military solution. In this case, you're like, it just shows you if there was a ceasefire here, these guys will chill out. What do you want to do? Again, do you want to go to total war with it? Because we could overthrow the Houthis, if the US invades Yemen. That's what it would take. It's like, does anyone here really have the appetite for another catastrophic war in the Middle East against the poorest country in the Middle East? Or we could pursue this diplomatic route, which seemed... I'm just saying, based on the evidence that they weren't attacking ships during the ceasefire, seems like there could be a diplomatic solution here. There's just a lot. If you make everybody monsters and they're not human beings, you can't do diplomacy with monsters, you can't negotiate with monsters,

but you can with humans. To our earlier discussion, maybe there are times where you shouldn't negotiate or you can't negotiate with humans, but it's better if you can. We could use a lot more of that thinking.

Lex Fridman

Can we take that idea and move to the war in Ukraine?

Dave Smith

Sure.

Lex Fridman

What do you think is the path for peace there?

Dave Smith

I think what Trump is pursuing is infinitely preferable to what Biden was doing. What puts Donald Trump... And I don't think everything he's done has been perfect, and I really did not like that mineral deal that he was floating out for a while there. I think maybe that might be the best thing that came out of that Oval Office thing, is that maybe that Donald Trump is going to be very tough to do business like this, and it's like we shouldn't be doing this business deal anyway. And by the way, I don't think we should do it on a few... Number one, principally, I think it is like bullying Ukraine out of resources. From what I understand, they don't even have that many fine minerals, but whatever. But it's also, if he was selling it to Zelenskyy, that's a security guarantee. Because, hey, if we're in business, then if Putin messes with you, he's messing with us. But from my perspective, that's the whole point, is you don't want to get into the business of giving out security guarantees. This is why George Washington was against entangling alliances. You give out war guarantees to too many places, you might have to fight a lot more wars than you otherwise would've fought. And also, there's simply... We're in this weird position where America postures like they're so tough. But really, when it comes down to it, we're not going to war in Ukraine. There's no political will here. I'm sorry, try to convince the American people we should send our boys to... I understand you're from the region or you have roots from there, but to the average American, the idea of going to war over whether Luhansk is ruled by Kiev or Moscow is just... They don't even know what Luhansk is. And if they met someone from there, they would probably just assume they were Russian. You know what I mean? And they might be, but whatever. I think the first step to a path to peace is that you have to want to get a path to peace. I think Trump's doing a good job in that.

Lex Fridman

Do you think all three sides want peace, from what you understand? Obviously Trump legitimately, fully, with an urgency wants peace.

Dave Smith

I think, for sure, Trump wants peace. I also think Putin wants to wrap the conflict up. And I think that Putin has been willing to deal through the entire lead up to the war and pretty much throughout the war, and there's been a lot of solid reporting on this. I mean, the sources on it are pretty impeccable. The head of NATO... Stoltenberg? I always mess up his name. He literally said that in late 2021 that Vladimir Putin actually sent a draft agreement to NATO, and that his condition for not invading... He is like, I will not invade, but you have to put it in writing. He sent a draft treaty to them, "You have to put in writing that Ukraine will not join NATO.". And then Stoltenberg bragged about how he said, "No, because we won't let Vladimir Putin dictate to us whether we can expand NATO or not.". And then he was bragging. He was like, "And look what he got, more NATO expansion, Finland, and this and that, so look at that.". And it didn't even seem to notice that, wait a minute, you're admitting that you could have just promised not to bring Ukraine into NATO and saved hundreds of thousands of lives? Seems like it would've been a much better deal. It's going to be a much better deal than what Ukraine will ultimately end up getting. I think also Joe Biden's CIA director, who was a CIA director a whole four years, William Burns, when he was ambassador to Russia, he wrote the Nyet Means Nyet. And again, this was dumped by Julian Assange. This wasn't for the public. This was just him writing to Condoleezza Rice to tell the secretary of state his assessment. And he said that, his exact words were, "A decision Russia does not want to have to make.". This was the decision about whether to invade the Ukraine or not. He was like, "They say, if you keep pushing for Ukrainian entry into NATO, this could lead to a civil war and even worse. And in that situation, Russia would have to decide whether or not to intervene. A decision Russia does not want to have to make.". So, essentially I think it's pretty clear from all sides that Putin didn't want it to come to this. Even after the coup in 2014, he took Crimea, but he didn't invade the country. He may have sent special forces in, but I mean not the full-scale 2022 invasion. And even the civil war, going all that... I'm not defending the decision. I'm just saying it seemed like he reluctantly [inaudible 02:25:19]. What was it? In 2014 or '15, when they had the plebiscites in Crimea and in the Donbas region, and they voted to be independent, he didn't take them then. I mean, he could have used that as a pretense for, hey, they voted to be with us, and he didn't. I think he wants to end the war. Zelenskyy, from everything he's said publicly, seems like he still feels like... I'm just taking him at his word here, that it's like, no, we could end the war, but we got to end the war... It seems like he's moved from his position being like, no, we have to reclaim all of our territory, to now his position is like, all right, maybe we don't reclaim all of it, but we got to be given some type of security guarantee in the future. I think the problem with that is just, again... I don't mean to be cruel about this, because it sucks that there's little countries that are next to big countries that get bullied around about them, but there also is a bit of an entitlement to demanding a security guarantee. What exactly do you mean? From America? What? That we'll go to war if you're invaded? Why do we owe that to anybody? That's crazy. I'm sorry. You can't just sign up to say that we'll go to war if anybody invades anybody. I hope nobody invades anybody, but I don't want us to get dragged into... That's a recipe for always being at war, and I don't think that's right for our country. So

essentially, I think Trump and Putin want peace. And if that's the case, I think we'll ultimately get to an end of this war.

Lex Fridman

There's a lot of stuff to say here. Let's actually start at the beginning, at the foundation of this. I think the thing that we left unsaid that's important to say is that Putin invaded Ukraine in February 24th, 2022. And I think he is, at least from my perspective, the person who started the war. You could talk about NATO expansion. You could talk about any other thing that led to it. You could start at the collapse of the Soviet Union. You can go all the way back, as he did, 1,000 years. The reality is, and this goes to our deep discussion about the morality of war, no matter the reasons, the guy that pulls the trigger first non-accidentally and keeps pulling the trigger, that's the guy who's at fault.

Dave Smith

Oh, I agree. I'll say one standard, one standard for everybody. The standard that I laid out before is the same one I... Did you absolutely have to do that? Once you start killing people by the hundreds of thousands, was there any other option? Are you telling me you absolutely had to do this? And I don't think that's right. My friend, Scott Horton, who I was talking to you about, just a totally brilliant guy, even in his book, there's a whole chapter of all the other options of what Vladimir Putin could do. So, you're absolutely right. And there's a weird thing where people say, "If you say that the West provoked this conflict, that is a very different thing than saying that this invasion was justified.". In the same way that if you were at a bar and someone goes and spits in another guy's face and then he pulls out a gun and murders them right there, he's not justified in doing that. That is not okay. You don't get to murder someone because they spit in your face. Also, if you were talking about why did he murder that guy, I'd be like, oh, because he walked up and spit in his face. That's why it happened. And that is essentially my contention about this war. I think it's just crystal clear that that's why it happened. Listen, it may be right or it may be wrong, but if China or Russia ever backed a street putsch to overthrow the democratically-elected government in Mexico, and then install a pro-Chinese or a pro-Russian government, and then started pumping arms into that conflict, and then kept floating out the idea that they were going to bring them into their military alliance, DC would simply not allow that. You cannot do that, any more than the Soviet Union could put nukes in Cuba. Sorry.

Lex Fridman

That should be said that that's really Cold War, 20th century, and neocon thinking. It is the way the world works, but that's...

Dave Smith

I don't think...

Lex Fridman

You should still punish...

Dave Smith

Listen, whether you're talking about the neoconservatives or going way before the neo... Any other group that has ever had control of US foreign policy, going back to the Cold Warriors, the Truman administration, the Eisenhower administration, I think you could take this back to Thomas Jefferson if this happened in 1801, there is simply no way that they would allow a foreign great power to overthrow their government, and then bring our neighbor into their military alliance. I think there's no great power that would ever tolerate that.

Lex Fridman

First of all, we're in a post-nuclear world, so meaning post, there's nuclear weapons.

Dave Smith

Mm-hmm.

Lex Fridman

So, the threat of somebody being on your border is just not the same kind of threat, when you're in nuclear power. Which is why, you look at Finland...

Dave Smith

No, I think in some ways it's more of a threat in some ways.

Lex Fridman

Putin is not upset about Finland joining NATO nearly as much.

Dave Smith

I'm just saying, Vladimir Putin in his own words, what his issue always was, was the military hardware that comes along with NATO membership. It's not just that you get into NATO, but then you get all that military hardware there. And he made a huge deal about the dual-use rocket launchers in Poland, which George W. Bush put there after 9/11. I think all of those things are factors. I think Ukraine, Crimea being their only yearlong warm-water port, I think there's several elements to it. But I do think a huge part of it is that also the country's been invaded through Ukraine multiple times. I think very reasonably, grading on a curve of how reasonable governments are, he saw that as a security threat.

Lex Fridman

We should make very clear, because the way that comes across, the full responsibility of the invasion of Ukraine lays at the hands of Vladimir Putin.

Dave Smith

Sure. I completely agree with that. Vladimir Putin launched a war where... Again, I don't know exactly what the numbers are. I've read a whole bunch of estimates, some that contradict each other. But the consensus seems to be it's at least in the hundreds of thousands, possibly well north of a million, if you're talking about the casualties on both sides. Vladimir Putin launched a war that led to that, and he's responsible for that. That being said, you can also point out that really what we're talking about here is the George H.W. Bush administration, the Clintons, Bush again, Obama, and then Trump. And the people who were in charge of the foreign policy in those administrations, the same ones who gave us Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Somalia, Yemen, they were also in charge of our European foreign policy. The most reckless policy of all was their NATO policy, and that they drove up to this conflict with Russia, with nothing but off-ramp after off-ramp after off-ramp, and consciously decided that we're not going to take any of those, we're going to drive it all the way up to this point. Thomas Friedman for The New York Times interviewed George Kennan in 1998, and George Kennan was the Cold Warrior. He is credited as founding the containment strategy in the Cold War. He was talking about the first round of NATO expansion, which he and many other foreign policy graybeards opposed. He was like, "This is the worst thing we could possibly do after the fall of the Soviet Union, to now say that we had this alliance in NATO that was an anti-Russian military alliance, and now that the Soviet Union isn't there anymore, and it's Boris Yeltsin's Russia, that now we're going to expand NATO because of that.". He literally said in 1998, he goes, "The people advocating that we expand NATO are going to continue advocating it and advocating it and advocating it. And then there will be a Russian reaction. And then they'll say, 'See? That's why we were right to expand NATO.'. But they'll get this completely wrong."

Lex Fridman

When do you think a deal is reached?

Dave Smith

I really have no idea what the timeline's going to look like. I'm hoping sooner rather than later. I think Donald Trump would love nothing more than to have some type of big spectacle of ending this war, some type of big press conference or some type of... You know what I mean? My guess would be that's where Trump's mind is, is how to do this in the best way that sells him the best. I think that already we're in a position where Donald Trump has put a lot of political capital chips into the middle of the table that, "I can end this war.", and he's going to look very, very bad if he can't. So, he's very highly incentivized to get this thing done as quick as possible, and so hopefully that can happen soon. It would be great if it could happen in the next month.

Lex Fridman

People on both sides outside of Donald Trump are telling me that it's a process.

Dave Smith

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

There's a implication it's going to take a while, which I really hate. I really love...

Dave Smith

Yeah, it's a shame.

Lex Fridman

... Donald Trump's urgency.

Dave Smith

It's also terrible. There's something really awful. Innocent people dying in war at any time is terrible, but there is something profoundly awful... I'm old enough now that I've seen this a few times happen, or I've lived through it a few times, I've read about it happening earlier. Once you've already decided the war's over and people still die, there's something almost sadder about that, because it's always like, "Come on. You already know...". There'd be a bombing campaign in Afghanistan when we already knew we were a few months away from ending the war. You're like, "You got to kill more people on the way out. We already know we're leaving. We already know.", because there's something... At least in the beginning, they could hide behind this justification or they could be like, "Listen, we're going to overthrow the Taliban and we're going to install our new government. They're going to be a democracy. It's going really good. We have to do this in order to do this bigger project.". But then by the end, you're like, we're not even pretending anymore that we're doing anything more positive. It's just someone dying in a senseless thing we never should have been in.

Lex Fridman

In the spirit of that, that's why I traveled to Moscow, and will travel to Moscow again in the near future to likely interview Vladimir Putin, and hopefully travel back to Ukraine, which I did, to talk again with Volodymyr Zelenskyy or with whoever the future president is.

Dave Smith

You'll be the only guy who's interviewed both of them, I think...

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Dave Smith

... during this war.

Lex Fridman

And I have to say, the border crossing is getting increasingly more intense.

Dave Smith

Yeah, I went to Canada last week and I didn't care for that, so I'm sure.

Lex Fridman

Primarily, it's the nations at war, as it was in Ukraine. It's dangerous to do both.

Dave Smith

I think something that's a little bit foreign, no pun intended, to America is, we've fought in a lot of wars over the last, say, 25 years, 50 years, whatever. But all of them, including, in a way, the World Wars even in the 20th century, it's like... But it's been since 1812 that we fought one on our shores. And none of the other ones... I guess Pearl Harbor, but even Pearl Harbor, that was a one-off, and it was only... It was America technically, but it wasn't mainland America. So, we're fighting wars halfway across the world. But it is a very different thing for two neighboring countries to fight, and even though most of the fighting's been done on the Ukrainian side, not all of it. I think there still are areas...

Lex Fridman

Mm-hmm.

Dave Smith

... inside Russia's borders where there's action. There's something so much more real about that.

Lex Fridman

Mm-hmm.

Dave Smith

The wars we're used to are we send a military that is a hundred thousand times more sophisticated than anything it'll be meeting on the ground over to a third world country to go do that. As we've found out over the years, there's still a lot of challenges to that, even when your side has night vision goggles and the other one doesn't, and your side can call in airstrikes and the other one can't, and your side has all the sophisticated training and the other side's practicing on monkey bars, still very hard to occupy a people and dominate them and defeat an insurgency. But that's very different than two nation states right next to each other on the border. There's just a real feeling of survival in that moment. And I do think that probably I don't understand this as well as you do, and probably you don't even understand it as well as maybe an older generation of Russians and Ukrainians would. But there's also something about both Russia and Ukraine, in their own ways, got so absolutely fucked over in the 20th century, multiple times, in a way that Americans just... It is just too

foreign into us to even understand anything like that. Millions of people starving to death, being invaded, the entire nation collapsing. The Russian government collapsed twice in 100 years. That's traumatic. We just simply have never been through anything like that. When you have that trauma as a society and then there's a war on your border, I'm sure there's a whole lot of different kind of feelings that we just can't relate to.

Lex Fridman

Plus a history in both nations of super sophisticated and expansive intelligence agencies.

Dave Smith

Right, right, right. Yeah, that's a very good point. Yeah.

Lex Fridman

You host a podcast called Part of the Problem.

Dave Smith

Yes.

Lex Fridman

What have you learned through that whole process of interviewing some interesting people? And are there topics you cover that make you sweat still to this day, like it feels like going into the fire.

Dave Smith

What I've learned just from the podcast is that there's an interesting relationship that you build with your audience. I travel a lot, and I do shows a lot, so I meet people who listen to the show. I've had this experience before. I had this experience with you. Me and you met once, I think, before today. Me and you actually met on a very interesting night. I don't know if you remember this. It was before the Comedy Mothership was built, you came by a Joe Rogan and Friends Show at The Vulture.

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Dave Smith

It was while Joe was going through the shitstorm of cancel culture, and he was on the phone with Dana White and stuff in the back.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, yeah, in the back. [inaudible 02:40:54]...

Dave Smith

It was a wild night.

Lex Fridman

Quite a wild night, yeah.

Dave Smith

Then at the same time, even though we just met that one time, and then we talked on the phone and now we're doing this show, I know you already.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Dave Smith

I already know you, and it's not just that we have friends of friends, but I've just seen so much of your stuff that it's like I know who you are. And then it's weird because people come up to you and they're like that. It's like they know you. I've had this experience. I had this experience with Joe. I knew him before I knew him. That was one of the things that I really learned from doing the podcast over the years, was how much that's actually a relationship. You actually have a relationship with your listeners. In the same way that you can't lie to people in your life, you also can't lie to your... They're a relationship too. You can't lie to your audience. I think that there's often almost shortcuts that are presented before you, but there is a payoff to not taking the shortcuts and to doing it the way you want to do it.

Lex Fridman

What do you think is the number of hours it takes to form a relationship? Because I absolutely agree with you. First of all, I should say I'm a huge podcast fan. I've listened to you as a guest and your own show a lot. I think with you I've already crossed the threshold of hours where I feel like we're friends, one way, and I guess because you listen to me, it's the other way, which are separate, parallel [inaudible 02:42:20].

Dave Smith

Yeah, it's very weird. It's very strange in a way. It's very interesting. Also, there's something there, which is more your area of expertise than mine, but there's something there where technology is playing this wild role. We could have a two-way friendship...

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Dave Smith

... without actually having to meet each other, all facilitated by the machines that we built. It's very trippy.

Lex Fridman

I would say it's 50 hours. Maybe 20 to 50-hour range is when you're like, okay.

Dave Smith

It's interesting, in a way. Before the Joe Rogan experience and what was the thing that made comedians big, the things before that used to be Letterman and Leno and Conan. Comedians would get a seven-minute set on there. And even if you do great, if you killed, and someone watching is like, "I love that comedian, that comedian's amazing.", first of all, unless they were on social media and then went and [inaudible 02:43:18], there was no way to connect. They'd just be like, "Love that guy. Anyway. Back to my life.". And then maybe you'll remember him and maybe when he's coming to town, you'd see, oh, that same guy I saw in Conan is going to be at the local comedy club or something, maybe. But then Rogan became the main thing. And now, they didn't just see you do seven minutes of standup. They sat and listened to you for three hours. Let's just say even off that one three-hour podcast...

Lex Fridman

Yeah, that's right.

Dave Smith

... you come away knowing a lot more about that person. It is not just a little taste, you know a lot about it. I probably would put the threshold at 40 to 50 hours. If you've consumed 40 to 50 hours of somebody, especially when they're doing what we do on these shows, where you're speaking in a very unguarded manner, even though this is your show and you asked a lot of questions, you don't know exactly where this is going to go. Then you're seeing what I say, and then go, "Huh. Okay, let me ask something based off that. Let me make a point based off that.". We're both unguarded. When you consume somebody like that for 40, 50 hours, you do see into their soul. I think there's almost no way to avoid that. And also, I would say if they're not letting you see into their soul, you'll notice that...

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Dave Smith

... and you know that about them. This is a guarded person. This was ultimately Kamala Harris's issue. This is why she was probably correct not to do Rogan, even though everyone looks back at that and says, "No, no, no. This was the big disaster of her campaign.". It's like, "I don't know.". She was so guarded in every single interview that she ever did.

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Dave Smith

She was always, constantly not trying to let you see who she really was. And if she was going to try that on Rogan, that would've been so apparent to everybody involved.

Lex Fridman

You've had a lot of intense conversations on JRE. What do you appreciate most about Joe as a human being, as a conversation partner?

Dave Smith

I can't overstate how much I love Joe and how much I admire him.

Lex Fridman

Not as much as Ron Paul. Just let's be clear. There's a hierarchy here.

Dave Smith

He's close, man.

Lex Fridman

Wow. Holy shit.

Dave Smith

There's very few...

Lex Fridman

That means a lot coming through you.

Dave Smith

Ron Paul and Joe Rogan, those are like my generals, and I'm a soldier.

Lex Fridman

[inaudible 02:45:55].

Dave Smith

Those are my guys. If Joe Rogan pointed to some guy and said, "You got to go fight that guy right now.". I'd be like, "All right, I got to go fight that guy.". Ron Paul too. It's both very personally for me. Ron Paul introduced me to a set of ideas that changed my life, and I'm just enormously grateful for that. I was a huge Joe Rogan fan before the Joe Rogan experience. I'm an old-school Joe Rogan head. I used to go on joerogan.net when...

Lex Fridman

Holy shit.

Dave Smith

... websites used to end with that.

Lex Fridman

Before whatever it is.

Dave Smith

Before everything...

Lex Fridman

... 2003.

Dave Smith

I was a fan of his before he confronted Carlos Mencia. And the day he confronted Carlos Mencia, I watched the video on his website and was like, "Oh, shit. Joe Rogan called him out, dude. This is the craziest thing ever.". I was a fan that when he started the podcast, I remember going, "This is going to be big, because he's going to be so good at this, because he's got so much interesting shit to say..".

Lex Fridman

Interesting.

Dave Smith

I didn't realize it was going to be quite what it became, but I did think like, oh, this is going to be an awesome thing. So, there's that. I always really admired him and I was always a huge fan of his. Not only did he change my life, but he changed all of my friends' lives. It's a very weird situation. He's the Santa Claus of my world. I don't know, man. He's just a very genuine person. I think he really derives a lot of pleasure out of the fact that he gets to help...

Lex Fridman

Mm-hmm.

Dave Smith

... the people who he sees as the good guys, the guy's worth helping. I just think that's such an unbelievable thing. The first time Rogan had me on his podcast was, I believe, in 2016. I might've had 5,000 followers or something like that. I was completely unknown. I did nothing for him. It was just the fact that he heard me on Ari's show and he was like, "Oh, I like what this guy's got to say. I think this is cool. Let's talk about it.". Again, he's just been such a great guy to me. And at every little angle, everything you open for him, he takes care of you better than anybody else does. You'd work his club, his club pays better than anybody else does. He's always great to the people who are around him. I have a wife, I have two little kids. He's put me in a situation where I can provide a great life for them. Don't get me wrong, I did

something with the opportunity. It's not like he just gave me... He gave me the opportunity and I did something with it. But still, he didn't have to give me that opportunity. I will go to my grave being enormously grateful for his friendship and the platform that he's given me. I try not to abuse this, but there's been a few points over the years where I was like, "I really need advice on this.", and I've gone to him and he's been the absolute best, literally, every single time. I followed it a few times. A few times I didn't follow his advice, and I really regret not following his advice. But he was the absolute best guy to be like, "All right, let's talk about this.". And the last thing I'll say is that it's freaking crazy, because he's got more shit going on than anybody else in the world and is still very interested to take time out to discuss some thing that I'm asking him about, which is a really, really great quality.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, always takes a phone call. Yeah, you're right about the advice. His advice is spot on. For me personally, what's needed is he's been through so many fires that he's really good at making you feel like don't fucking worry about it.

Dave Smith

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

That he's really good at making you feel like, "Don't fucking worry about it. Just move on." It's the don't-read-the-comments thing, but generally.

Dave Smith

Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

Lex Fridman

Just like, fuck it. And he has that whole vibe, which kind of looks effortless, but I think when you look at it seriously, especially in contrast with journalists, there's a fearlessness there.

Dave Smith

100%. Yeah.

Lex Fridman

That not giving a fuck, I mean, he says it's because of fuck-you money or any of that. I don't think so. I think it's-

Dave Smith

It's more than that.

Lex Fridman

It's more than that.

Dave Smith

I mean, I'm sure that's a component of it, but there's people who have that who still don't have his fearlessness.

Lex Fridman

Most people who have money, a lot of money, are actually become more scared. They like the comfort of just normal life, because when you're taking risks, you're going to pay for it even if you have money. Not just financially, just like, it's going to hurt, it's going to disturb your life, it's going to create turbulence. Yeah. The guy is fearless and follows just his genuine curiosity. It's like an inspiration to me, friendships aside, just inspiration of how great of a conversationalist he is, and not ... He would generally didn't give a fuck, if he talks to any of the presidential candidates or not, he would just talk to friends just because he wants to. And there's no clickbaitiness to it. There's no giving a shit about views or likes or any of that.

Dave Smith

Yeah. I mean, during the COVID stuff, man, I mean he was interviewing Dr. McCullough. And who's the other one? Malone, Dr. Malone. And had Bobby Kennedy, all these people. Like at this time when it was so ... And he's had it with me before too, talking about Ukraine and Israel at the times when it's really white-hot, you know what I mean? And there's this huge penalty on not going along with the regimes' talking points. It's really hard to overstate it. I mean, there used to be nothing like this. It used to be that if CNN and Fox News agreed, well, then that was it. That was the line now. And now we got the biggest show in the country will actually allow the other perspective on and allow people to challenge the regime. I think it's been historic.

Lex Fridman

I think also there are shows, there are people, that just are constantly conspiracy theorists, which is fine also, but I sometimes feel that those lack genuineness, because they put themselves in a bin. Or everything, you question everything to a point where, I don't know, I feel like you're not getting closer to the truth when you question everything.

Dave Smith

There is something that some people in the conspiracy world do, which is they speak about something with certainty when they're really not certain about it, and it's fine to ask questions and it's fine to speculate about things, but you also have to ... It is true in general in life, you got to be really careful about presuming your conclusion and then working backward from there. And then sometimes when you have one ... It's a matter of being sloppy verse not being sloppy. I remember for a long time, back in the day in 9/11 truth movement, one of the huge smoking guns that they would point to was that in the '90s there was this one document, I'm blanking on the title of it, but it was from PNAC, the Project for a New American Century, and this was the think tank or one of the think tanks of the

neoconservatives. All the big neoconservatives were involved in PNAC, from Dick Cheney, to Rumsfeld, to Richard Perle, David Wurmser, all the big neocons. And there was this one document where they basically ... they were like, their Project for the New American Century was how we're going to have hegemony for another 100 years. Now that we won the 20th century. How are we going to win the 21st century? And they were like, "Okay, well here's what we want to do. We want to start multiple wars in the Middle East and we want to go ..." Like all the plans that they had. NATO expansion in Europe was a big part of it too. And then there was one line where they said, "It's going to be tough to work up popular support for these multiple wars we want to fight in the Middle East, short of another Pearl Harbor style event." And the 9/11 truthers would point to this and go, "See, clearly they did it. They did 9/11. They even say in their own words here that they want another Pearl Harbor event so they can do this." And it's like, well, look, that doesn't actually prove anything. I mean, it might just be the case that they were like, "Oh, we wouldn't get this without a Pearl ..." And then when 9/11 happened, they went, "Hey, we got our Pearl Harbor style event." And even if you like that story of 9/11 was an inside job, because it's kind of sexy and exciting and like, "Oh my God, what a crazy world we're living in if that's true." And I'm not even saying it's not true. I'm just saying, if you're not sloppy and you're scrupulous, you go, "That's not really evidence." It sounds like evidence, it's evidence-sy, but it's not actually a piece of evidence because that doesn't in any way demonstrate that they actually were in on the thing. And there's just a lot of things like that, there's a lot of things ... I even see, because it's a very popular conspiracy theory online now that Israel did 9/11, and I'm like, "I'm open. What do you got? What's the evidence?" And they'll be like, "Well, did you see that Larry Silverstein took out a huge insurance policy on the World Trade Center? How did he know?" And you're like, "How did he know that the number one terrorist target in the world might need a big insurance policy on it?" You realize that the same guys attempted to knock those towers down in 1993. And so there's just little things like that where if you're being sloppy and you already really want this conclusion, I see where you could see these things as evidence, but if you're just being a little ... if you're critically thinking about them, it's actually ... it's not as strong a case as you think it is. Again, I'll speculate every now and again on things, but I like to take on something where I feel like I can prove this case. I really have enough evidence that I think I can prove this. I think I can prove that the neocons didn't invade Iraq because they were worried about weapons of mass destruction and they actually had this agenda for at least a decade before the war broke out. There's strong tangible evidence for that. It's just sometimes the constant conspiracy guys, not always, but sometimes they just get sloppy when it comes to actually analyzing how strong the case is.

Lex Fridman

I mean, there's several psychological effects. I think there's a certain drug to the dogmatic certainty that you were mentioning. It really annoys me, there's something about human psychology, because when I say stuff, I usually show doubt and show the humiliated that I might not have the right answer and I sometimes look at multiple perspectives. And that's seen as weakness and lack of intelligence often. It just sounds like it. When I even listen

back to people that do that kind of thing, that certainty sounds like intelligence to people. If you say something with a lot of certainty, it sounds like, "This is a smart motherfucker." And I hate that about myself, about human psyche, that that seems to be the case, because then the dumb dogmatists are going to be the ones that are driving agenda.

Dave Smith

It is true. I've noticed that for a long time though. It's almost like in a weird way, it's like a prerequisite for leadership in a way. You kind of have to be certain about things. But then there's a real problem with that, which is that a lot of times you're just bullshitting or you're not correct to be this certain about this. It's at least debatable. And then the thing, I feel like at least for me is, which I try to do, I'm sure I fail at this a ton, but you try to at least go like ... You got to work on training your brain and you have to be conscious about it. And so you have to go like, "Hey, if there's something here that is confirming my bias," you start getting that little sense of pleasure of like, "Oh, great, here's another point that proves the thing I want to be true," then you have to be 10 times as skeptical about this. You have to really examine this one and be like, "Okay, am I sure that this one ..." Because sometimes you'll hear people even throw out things where it's like, "Oh, I know you liked that it was helping your case," but come on, think about this. This doesn't even make sense. It's like, okay, I want to make this argument and then everything that would support that just gets sucked in a force of gravity or something, and you're like, "Yeah, but half of these are bad data points."

Lex Fridman

I mean, for me, there's something definitely about my brain that is attracted to conspiracy theories.

Dave Smith

Yeah, me too.

Lex Fridman

So I'm very well aware that that gravitational pull is there.

Dave Smith

Well, if nothing else, it's a crazy story.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Dave Smith

It's like a movie, so it's like, "Oh, that's cool."

Lex Fridman

[inaudible 02:59:02] Epstein aspect of it is crazy. Every fucking aspect –

Dave Smith

Yeah, you don't need to work on Epstein [inaudible 02:59:05] story.

Lex Fridman

I don't understand. That's one of the big mysteries of our modern era is like, how the did fuck this guy get an island, this pedophile, and got smart, smart, I think really smart people to hang out with him, and what the fuck?

Dave Smith

I mean, obviously Ghislaine, however you say her name–

Lex Fridman

Ghislaine.

Dave Smith

... Ghislaine Maxwell, okay, she went to jail. It's like, has anybody else? Has anybody anywhere been forced to resign? I mean, just even, say, I don't know, at the FBI or something, just for not catching the thing sooner. Even if you weren't in on it, it was like, no ... There's a real problem with the American system and it's that, and I think this just went on for too long before the American people just wouldn't put up with it anymore. And this is why trust in every institution and the corporate media and Congress and all of it has evaporated, is that it's like, are you just saying of all the people who sold the war in Iraq, no one so much as got kicked out of polite society? I'm not even saying, oh, they went to jail for war crimes for life, but was just like, "Yeah, we're not looking to you for advice on the next war. Thanks. Go home." None of that. And it's like all these crazy things, nobody goes down for it. I mean, they lied us into war after a war. They've bankrupted the country, damn near destroyed the dollar. They locked down the country on the basis of pseudoscience, then lied through their teeth about what this vaccine would do as they were forcing it on people, and no one loses their job. No one even gets in trouble over any of this. And look, in any area of life, whether a business or a relationship or whatever, you cannot screw up that catastrophically and face no repercussions for it and think that your business or relationship isn't going to fail as a result of that.

Lex Fridman

I think ultimately there's been a lot of wake-up calls and I think we're going to build a better society from it, better institution ... I believe –

Dave Smith

I hope you're right.

Lex Fridman

... with more transparency, more authenticity. I think also the Democratic Party has learned a lesson of you have to have candidates that do ... I don't give a shit about podcasts, but do podcasts-like things, meaning reveal themselves as human beings.

Dave Smith

I think it's one of the best things that happened in this last election. I did think they were great, but I'm not saying that any of the Trump podcasts were perfect or maybe there'd be a better way that they could be done. But I will say that I used to say this for a while, as of the last few years, but I'd be like, so I'm me, and for me to do what I do, it's kind of expected that I'll probably ... I don't know, I get at least maybe 15, 10 to 15 times a year, I'll come do a show like this. A long-form show on a big platform where my ideas will be poked and prodded and tested and there'll be pushback questions and they'll be ... Sometimes they're more adversarial, sometimes they're more friendly. And then yet our standard for who is the commander in chief was like, you show up to these debates that are 90 minutes long with these really ... they are really stupid questions and you give a 90-second answer to it or ... And at least for the first time now it does seem like, oh, the standard is kind of you're going to have to do a long-form show where you really have to have ... And that I think is long term a real positive development. You just know going forward, the Democrats, which I think is what you were saying, you can't run a Kamala Harris if she can't do a long-form interview. You got to run somebody who's able to sit down and express themselves and have real genuine thoughts, or at least try to convince people they have real genuine thoughts at least. And that's very different in a way. I look back at the most talented politicians of my lifetime, which I'd have to say the two were Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, just the most talented, traditional politicians. Trump's the anti-politician, but they were the traditional and just unbelievably ... but they never had to do that. It was just a different time. Bill Clinton had to walk up and be like, "Oh, it's a beautiful baby you have here." Then go back and then play the sax, and then have a couple good answers to a small crowd, "I'm from a little town called Hope." That's not the game anymore. Now the game is like, can you sit down and actually have some ideas in a long form? And I think that's so much better, because it's so much more revealing of ... Kind of like what we were saying before, you reveal a little bit, it's not 50 hours, but in those three hours you reveal a little bit of your soul.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. And I think that process makes you actually a better person. I ultimately think that Barack Obama is a fascinating human being. And there was a choice made early on to do less interviews, be more behind the wall, I think. And that's a disservice, because I think it's a skill to be an authentic person, that you build, to be able to allow yourself to be yourself. It's very possible that Kamala Harris is a fascinating person, but she just-

Dave Smith

Yeah, we've just never gotten to meet her.

Lex Fridman

And I don't know if she has gotten to meet or by ... It's a practiced thing, to reveal yourself is a tricky thing. I think it's just good for the candidate. Well, I think what she did, I'm a critic, I don't think she's a good candidate, but what she did is pretty fucking incredible, meaning to raise that much money in that short amount of time. I think it was a terrible thing for the Democratic Party to do, I think she's a terrible candidate, but still, with the tools you got, use TikTok, use whatever.

Dave Smith

I'll say the fact that she came as close as she did to being president is pretty goddamn insane if you ask me. But yeah, the Democrats are a mess. They're a mess like I've never seen a political party before, but that in itself is I think a very good thing. And what comes from here is there's a lot of possibilities now. I don't know who the person is. I don't see anyone out there that I could think of that would fill this role, but there's never been a more ripe time for someone to Donald Trump the Democratic Party now. What Donald Trump did, people tend to forget this, because now it's also because the accusation from the Democrats is that, "The Republican Parties are all a bunch of Trump cultists," or something like that. But I'm old enough to remember 2016, and what actually happened was that Donald Trump came in and just really resonated with the voters and the establishment of the Republican Party hated it. They were openly talking about changing the rules at the Republican National Convention to deny him the nomination in 2016. What they were saying is that they were going to raise the number of delegates required so high that nobody could hit it and then say, "Hey, since nobody hit it, we select Mitt Romney again and we're going to run Mitt Romney again." They were openly, openly conspiring to steal the thing from him, and eventually he just had so much support on the ground that they couldn't do it. Right now, if someone could totally do that to the Democrats, but the thing is, it would have to be somebody outside of the three-letter agency control, because that's what everyone's rejecting right now. But if you were to actually sit there and go ... And even policies I don't necessarily agree with, but there are a lot of policies that if it was actually a pro-labor, working class party, you could ... Bernie Sanders showed you a little bit of what's possible, and this was from an 80-year-old socialist who didn't really have the balls to go through with it at the end of the day. If somebody younger and a little bit more with the current zeitgeist we're able to do that, that could happen.

Lex Fridman

I mean, I would generally think that AOC can develop into that candidate. She might not be there yet, but I think she can develop into that. And it could be out there, it could be -

Dave Smith

I don't know. I don't see AOC being the one to do it, but I could be wrong about that. She's got some qualities, unlike almost all the other ones you could think of. I don't see anyone right now who I think could be that person, but I never would've ... I mean, if you had asked me in

2014 who's going to come take over the Republican Party, I never would've guessed Donald Trump was going to come do what he did. So it might be the person we're seeing who we're not even thinking of, or it might just be some unknown. Same with Obama was an unknown. I mean, obviously he had very powerful people behind his presidential run. It's not like he was a true just grassroots guy, but he wasn't anyone we would've been necessarily thinking about. I mean, he gave that big speech at the 2004 DNC, but that was it. That was the thing he was known for, is he gave one great speech at the ... Besides that he was a state senator and then a junior senator. No one was thinking he was going to be the next president.

Lex Fridman

It could be like a Jon Stewart type character. Of course, I don't think he would ever ... I honestly don't think a comedian will ever run, but I never thought Trump would ever run, so.

Dave Smith

There is something about Jon Stewart that is ... And obviously I disagree with him on a lot of stuff too, but he is an authentic person. And there's something about that that gives you a huge advantage, particularly in our current political climate. People are so sick of the phoniness. And they're right to be, because you could only ... You can lie to some of the people some of the time. You can only lie so much before eventually nobody wants to hear you in that phony voice telling the same phony lies anymore. And at least Jon Stewart is, I will say, I think Jon Stewart is telling the truth the way he sees it. I don't think he's necessarily right about a lot of things. He is right about a lot of things, but I think he's wrong about a lot of other things. But I just get the impression that he believes what he is saying and there's something powerful about that.

Lex Fridman

Especially when he's surrounded by people that disagree with him, he's still willing to say it.

Dave Smith

Yeah, yeah.

Lex Fridman

That takes a certain kind of courage, yeah, and be funny doing it, but he's not going to run.

Dave Smith

No, I don't think so.

Lex Fridman

This is annoying. You have to be fucking crazy to run.

Dave Smith

That is one of the real problems. And then people attack Donald Trump for being a narcissist-

Lex Fridman

You have to be, I think.

Dave Smith

... and it's like, yeah, but who the hell else is going to ever do this?

Lex Fridman

Yeah. All right. What gives you hope about this whole thing we got going on, America and human civilization?

Dave Smith

Okay. This is not mine, but this is Gene Epstein, who's a ... is a really brilliant economist and a great guy. And he told me this once and I just always loved it, and so I call it Epstein's case, not that ... Different Epstein, Gene Epstein. No relation. I want to be clear on that. Okay. Let's call it Gene's case for radical optimism, and the way he put it was he goes, "So imagine you were sitting around in 1845 and you're at the height of the slavery and you were like, 'Hey, in 20 years slavery is going to be abolished across the West.'" And if you told that to someone, they'd be like, "Dude, slavery has existed for all of human history. Look around. It's not going anywhere. You'd have to be out of your mind to think we're 20 years away from abolishing slavery." And yet we were, I mean, it's just the greatest thing in the history of the world, and unfortunately America had to fight a bloody civil war to get there, but many other countries did and they just walked away from what had been the status quo forever and just stopped doing it. And now, look, you can argue there's slavery by other names and things like that, and to some degree, paying an income tax is some degree of slavery, but there is not chattel slavery in the way that there used to be, and that is an incredible advance for humanity. And then the other example he would give is he was talking about how at the beginning of the Reagan administration in 1981, that the neocons ... because when he was trying to have detente with Russia, the neocons were in the press, being like, "He just guaranteed another 100 years of Soviet dominance." And if someone had just been to you like, "Hey, listen, calm down, in 10 years there won't be a Soviet Union." It's just been like, "Okay, nice idea, but you're out of your fucking mind." And yet that was true too. And you can see some dynamics even in our politics today where ... Three years ago I was really concerned about whether they'd shut the whole thing down, us I mean. During the COVID times and during times where it was like everyone I knew was just getting strikes on all their channels, and if you just even wanted to talk about how there are people being vaccine injured, you'd lose your YouTube channel, people getting kicked off Twitter left and right. And I just saw it and I was like, "Dude, the grasp is just getting tighter and tighter and tighter. The regime is not going to allow these alternative voices in here. And they're just

getting too big and they're going to shut this whole thing down and I'm going to have to figure out what I'm going to do after that." And I was totally wrong. The trend totally went in the other direction, and things are now at a point where it's like, I couldn't even imagine it. I never would've envisioned Elon Musk was going to get \$44 billion together and buy Twitter and then he was ... And so I just think that if you zoom out, I think that the regime has lost their monopoly on propaganda, and this opens up enormous possibilities for what ... I remember so vividly, 2002. 9/11 happened in late 2001, we invaded Iraq in 2003, but all of 2002 was a massive propaganda campaign. Just constantly laying down the blueprints for this war that we knew George W. Bush was about to launch. And it was, "They have weapons of mass destruction. They were in on 9/11. They're friends with Al-Qaeda. They're going to hand this weapon that they don't have off to the terrorists they're not friends with, and then they're going to nuke Kansas." By the way, this is also, sorry for rambling a little bit here, but this is also one of the reasons why when the Jew haters will say things like ... They'll be like, "Oh, look, all of the Jews support Israel," or, "70% of the Jews vote this way," or, "70% of the Jews support the ..." It's like, listen, I don't like blaming ... Or even when the Palestine haters will say, "70% of Gazans support Hamas," or whatever. It's like, okay, look, I remember a time in this country, I know I'm going back 20 years, but every right-winger in this country was completely convinced that we have to go invade Iraq because he has weapons of mass destruction, and you're some type of leftist homo if you don't agree with that. That was the entire culture in this country. And it was the one thing that the New York Times and Bill O'Reilly and CNN and the Washington Post all agreed on, they were all on board selling this war. You could not do that today. They could not get away with that today, because if they did, how do you control this entire problem? You tell me, how do you control Joe Rogan and Tucker Carlson? How do you get these guys to go ... They're not going to go along with it. And in fact, they're almost definitely going to have people on their show who are just tearing it apart. And so I just look at that and I go like, "Yo, I mean, we're at a place now where we have this world of possibilities that would've seemed impossible just so recently." And so just thinking, all of that rambling stew, whatever all that was, that leaves me feeling very, very hopeful for the future.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, there's a lot of social and political progress in that rambling stew over the decades and the centuries. For me, probably some of the technological progress is really exciting. Me personally, it just fills me with hope whenever I see the rockets go up ... To clarify-

Dave Smith

Not the ones going into Gaza, the ones going into outer space, I assume.

Lex Fridman

You had to clarify the Epstein thing, the Epstein rule, to clarify exactly which rockets. SpaceX and Blue Origin rockets. So taking humans out to space and for us to be among the stars, it makes me feel like we're going to make it. Because the bleaker times throughout

human history, you think ... I mean, there's just a sense ... You're right, and during COVID, there was a sense of, for many reasons, maybe just a simple psychological human reason, it felt like bleak, like, fuck I don't think we as a civilization are ... If we can't handle this pandemic from a policy perspective, from a human perspective, economic perspective, this is like pandemic lite. There's going to be other bigger troubles coming our way. And then now you have this ... again, the rockets are going up. It's like, first of all, we'll colonize space and other planets. And we are inventive motherfuckers, we'll figure it out.

Dave Smith

Yeah. And then certainly for me, just personally because this has really touched my life, but the innovations in medical technology are just ... And my son had a congenital heart defect at open-heart surgery when he was three days old. And I mean, it's something that 20 years ago I would've lost my child. And he's fine. Just absolutely fine, because it's just amazing what these surgeons and cardiologists and neonatologists and all of them, what they do now is like goddamn magic. And so there was always something about that that would ... It was almost like that inoculated me against ever having a sense of like, "Well, I wish it was a previous time." Because now, sorry, in a previous time, I lose my kid, so I don't care. Whatever other challenges there are out here, I'll take that trade off where this baby survives and gets a shot at having a life." And there is a lot of that stuff is just easy to take for granted. And it's like, when it touches your life, you don't take it for granted as much, but it's just like now it really is ... There are miracles going on all over the place now that everybody in human history did not have access to.

Lex Fridman

All right, brother. It's great to finally meet a friend and have a conversation.

Dave Smith

Yeah, I really enjoyed this.

Lex Fridman

And I can't wait to talk to you again, brother.

Dave Smith

Absolutely. Thanks for having me.

Lex Fridman

Thanks for listening to this conversation with Dave Smith. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now let me leave you with some words from Ron Paul, "Real patriotism is a willingness to challenge the government when it's wrong." Thank you for listening and I hope to see you next time.