

Lex Fridman Podcast #418 - Israel-Palestine Debate: Finkelstein, Destiny, M. Rabbani &

Benny Morris

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Lex Fridman

The following is a debate on the topic of Israel and Palestine with Norman Finkelstein, Benny Morris, Mouin Rabbani and Steven Bonnell, also known online as Destiny. Norm and Benny are historians. Mouin is a Middle East analyst. And Steven is a political commentator and streamer. All four have spoken and debated extensively on this topic. The goal for this debate was not for anyone to win or to score points. It wasn't to get views or likes. I never care about those. And I think there are probably much easier ways to get those things if I did care. The goal was to explore together the history, present and future of Israel and Palestine in a free flowing conversation. No time limits, no rules. There was a lot of tension in the room from the very beginning, and it only got more intense as we went along. And I quickly realized that this very conversation in a very real human way was a microcosm of the tensions and distance and perspectives on the topic of Israel and Palestine. For some debates, I will step in and moderate strictly to prevent emotion from boiling. For this, I saw the value in not interfering with the passion of the exchanges because that emotion in itself spoke volumes. We did talk about the history and the future. But the anger, the frustration, the biting wit, and at times, respect and comradery were all there. Like I said, we did it in an perhaps all too human way. I will do more debates and conversations on these difficult topics and I will continue to search for hope in the midst of death and destruction, to search for our common humanity in the midst of division and hate. This thing we have going on, human civilization, the whole of it is beautiful and it's worth figuring out how we can help it flourish together. I love you all. This is the Lex Fridman Podcast. To support it, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, dear friends, here's Norman Finkelstein, Benny Morris, Mouin Rabbani, and Steven Bonnell. First question is about 1948 for Israelis, 1948 is the establishment of the state of Israel and the war of independence. For Palestinians, 1948 is the Nakba, which means catastrophe or the displacement of 700,000 Palestinians from their homes as a consequence of the war. What to you is important to understand about the events of 1948 and the period around there, '47, '49, that helps us understand what's going on today and maybe helps us understand the roots of all of this that started even before 1948. I was hoping that Norm could speak first, then Benny, then Mouin, and then Steven. Norm?

Norman Finkelstein

After World War II, the British decided that they didn't want to deal with the Palestine question anymore and the ball was thrown into the court of the United Nations. Now, as I read the record, the UN was not attempting to arbitrate or adjudicate rights and wrongs. It was confronting a very practical problem. There were two national communities in Palestine and there were irreconcilable differences on fundamental questions, most importantly, looking at the historic record on the question of immigration, and associate with the question of immigration, the question of land. The UN Special Committee on Palestine, which came into being before the UN 181 Partition Resolution. The UN Special Committee recommended two states in Palestine. There was a minority position represented by Iran, India, Yugoslavia. They supported one state. But they believed that if

forced to, the two communities would figure out some sort of modus vivendi and live together. United Nations General Assembly supported partition between what it called a Jewish state and an Arab state. Now, in my reading of the record, and I understand there's new scholarship in the subject which I've not read, but so far as I've read the record, there's no clarity on what the United Nations General Assembly meant by a Jewish state and an Arab state, except for the fact that the Jewish state would be, demographically, the majority would be Jewish, and the Arab state demographically would be Arab. The UNSCOP, the UN Special Committee on Palestine, it was very clear and it was reiterated many times that in recommending two states, each state, the Arab state and the Jewish state, would have to guarantee full equality of all citizens with regard to political, civil, and religious matters. Now, that does raise the question if there is absolute full equality of all citizens, both in the Jewish state and the Arab state with regard to political rights, civil rights, and religious rights. Apart from the demographic majority, it's very unclear what it meant to call a state Jewish or call a state Arab. In my view, the Partition Resolution was the correct decision. I do not believe that the Arab and Jewish communities could, at that point, be made to live together. I disagree with the minority position of India, Iran, and Yugoslavia. And that not being a practical option, two states was the only other option. In this regard, I would want to pay tribute to what was probably the most moving speech at the UN General Assembly proceedings by the Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko. I was very tempted to quote it at length, but I recognized that would be taking too much time. So I asked a young friend, Jamie Stern-Weiner to edit it and just get the essence of what Foreign Minister Gromyko had to say. "During the last war," Gromyko said, "the Jewish people underwent exceptional sorrow and suffering. Without any exaggeration, this sorrow and suffering are indescribable. Hundreds of thousands of Jews are wandering about in various countries of Europe in search of means of existence and in search of shelter. The United Nations cannot and must not regard this situation with indifference. Past experience, particularly during the Second World War, shows that no Western European state was able to provide adequate assistance for the Jewish people in defending its rights and its very existence from the violence of the Hitlerites and their allies. This is an unpleasant fact. But unfortunately, like all other facts, it must be admitted." Gromyko went on to say, in principle, he supports one state, or the Soviet Union supports one state. But he said, "If relations between the Jewish and Arab populations of Palestine proved to be so bad that would be impossible to reconcile them and to ensure the peaceful coexistence of the Arabs and the Jews, the Soviet Union would support two states. I personally am not convinced that the two states would have been unsustainable in the long term if, and this is big if, the Zionist movement had been faithful to the position that proclaimed during the UNSCOP public hearings." At the time Ben-Gurion testified, "I want to express what we mean by a Jewish state. We mean by a Jewish state, simply a state where the majority of the people are Jews, not a state where a Jew has in any way any privilege more than anyone else. A Jewish state means a state based on absolute equality of all her citizens and on democracy. Alas, this was not to be." As Professor Morris has written, "Zionist ideology and practice were necessarily an elementally expansionist." And then he wrote in another book, "Transfer..." The euphemism for

expulsion, "Transfer was inevitable and inbuilt into Zionism because it sought to transform a land which was Arab into a Jewish state. And a Jewish state could not have arisen without a major displacement of Arab population. And because this aim automatically produced resistance among the Arabs, which in turn persuaded the Yishuv's leaders," the Yishuv being the Jewish community, "The Yishuv's leaders, that a hostile Arab majority or a large minority could not remain in place if a Jewish state was to arise or safely endure." Or as Professor Morris retrospectively put it, "A removing of a population was needed. Without a population expulsion, a Jewish state would not have been established." The Arab side rejected outright the partition resolution. I won't play games with that. I know a lot of people try to prove it's not true. It clearly, in my view, is true. The Arab side rejected outright the partition resolution. While Israeli leaders acting on the compulsions inevitable and inbuilt into Zionism, found the pretext in the course of the first Arab-Israeli war to expel the indigenous population and expand its borders. I therefore conclude that neither side was committed to the letter of the partition resolution and both sides aborted it.

Lex Fridman

Thank you, Norm. Norm asked that you make a lengthy statement in the beginning. Benny, I hope it's okay to call everybody by their first name in the name of camaraderie. Norm has quoted several things you said. Perhaps you can comment broadly on the question of 1948 and maybe respond to the things that Norm said.

Benny Morris

Yeah. UNSCOP, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine recommended partition. The majority of UNSCOP recommended partition, which was accepted by the UN General Assembly in November, 1947. Essentially, looking back to the Peel Commission in 1937, 10 years earlier, a British Commission had looked at the problem of Palestine, the two warring national groups who refused to live together, if you like, or consolidate a unitary state between them. And Peel said there should be two states. That's the principle. The country must be partitioned in two states. This would give a modicum of justice to both sides, if not all their demands, of course. And the United Nations followed suit. The United Nations, UNSCOP and then the UN General Assembly representing the will of the international community said two states is the just solution in this complex situation. The problem was that immediately with the passage of the resolution, the Arabs, Arab states and the Arabs of Palestine said no. As Norman Finkelstein said, they said no. They rejected the partition idea, the principle of partition, not just the idea of what percentage which side should get, but the principle of partition they said no to, the Jews should not have any part of Palestine for their sovereign territory. Maybe Jews could live as a minority in Palestine. That also was problematic in the eyes of the Palestinian Arab leadership. Husayni had said, "Only Jews who were there before 1917 could actually get citizenship and continue to live there." But the Arabs rejected partition and the Arabs of Palestine launched, in very disorganized fashion, war against the resolution, against the implementation of the resolution, against the Jewish community in Palestine. And this was their defeat in that civil

war between the two communities, while the British were withdrawing from Palestine, led to the Arab invasion, the invasion by the Arab states in May, 1948 of the country. Again, basically with the idea of eradicating or preventing the emergence of a Jewish state in line with the United Nations decision and the will of the international community. Norman said that the Zionist enterprise, and he quoted me, meant from the beginning to transfer or expel the Arabs of Palestine or some of the Arabs of Palestine. And I think he's quoting out of context. The context in which the statements were made that the Jewish state could only emerge if there was a transfer of Arab population was proceeded in the way I wrote it, and the way it actually happened by Arab resistance and hostilities towards the Jewish community. Had the Arabs accepted partition, there would've been a large Arab minority in the Jewish state which emerged in '47. And in fact, Jewish economists and state builders took into account that there would be a large Arab minority and its needs would be cared for, etc. But this was not to be because the Arabs attacked. And had they not attacked, perhaps a Jewish state with a large Arab minority could have emerged. But this didn't happen. They went to war. The Jews resisted. And in the course of that war, Arab populations were driven out. Some were expelled, some left because Arab leaders advised them to leave or ordered them to leave. And at the end of the war, Israel said they can't return because they just tried to destroy the Jewish state. And that's the basic reality of what happened in '48. The Jews created a state. The Palestinian Arabs never bothered to even try to create a state before '48 and in the course of the 1948 war. And for that reason, they have no state to this day. The Jews do have a state because they prepared to establish a state, fought for it, and established it, hopefully lastingly.

Lex Fridman

When you say hostility, in case people are not familiar, there was a full on war where Arab states invaded and Israel won that war.

Benny Morris

Let me just add to clarify. The war had two parts to it. The first part was the Arab community in Palestine, its militiamen attacked the Jews from November, 1947. In other words, from the day after the UN Partition Resolution was passed, Arab gunmen were busy shooting up Jews, and that snowballed into a full scale civil war between the two communities in Palestine. In May, 1948, a second stage began in the war in which the Arab states invaded, the new state attacked the new state, and they too were defeated. And thus the state of Israel emerged. In the course of this two stage war, a vast Palestinian refugee problem occurred.

Lex Fridman

And so after that, the transfer, the expulsion, the thing that people call the Nakba happened. Mouin, could you speak to 1948 and the historical significance of it?

Mouin Rabbani

Sure. There's a lot to unpack here. I'll try to limit myself to just a few points regarding Zionism and transfer. I think Chaim Weizmann, the head of the world's Zionist organization, had it exactly right when he said that the objective of Zionism is to make Palestine as Jewish as England is English or France is French. In other words, as Norman explained, a Jewish state requires Jewish political demographic and territorial supremacy. Without those three elements, the state would be Jewish in name only. And I think what distinguishes Zionism is its insistence, supremacy and exclusivity. That would be my first point. The second point is, I think what the Soviet foreign minister at the time Andrei Gromyko said is exactly right, with one reservation. Gromyko was describing a European savagery unleashed against Europe's Jews. At the time, it wasn't Palestinians or Arabs. The savages and the barbarians were European to the core. It had nothing to do with developments in Palestine or the Middle East. Secondly, at the time that Gromyko was speaking, those Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and others who were in need of safe haven were still overwhelmingly on the European continent and not in Palestine. And I think, given the scale of the savagery, I don't think that any one state or country should have borne the responsibility for addressing this crisis. I think it should have been an international responsibility. The Soviet Union could have contributed, Germany certainly could and should have contributed, the United Kingdom and the United States which slammed their doors shut to the persecuted Jews of Europe as the Nazis were rising to power, they certainly should have played a role. But instead, what passed for the international community at the time, decided to partition Palestine. And here I think we need to judge the Partition Resolution against the realities that obtained at the time. Two thirds of the population of Palestine was Arab. The Yishuv, the Jewish community in Palestine, constituted about one third of the total population and controlled even less of the land within Palestine. As a preeminent Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi has pointed out, the Partition Resolution in giving roughly 55% of Palestine to the Jewish community, and I think 41, 42% to the Arab community, to the Palestinians, did not preserve the position of each community, or even favor one community at the expense of the other. Rather, it thoroughly inverted and revolutionized the relationship between the two communities. And as many have written, the Nakba was the inevitable consequence of partition given the nature of Zionism, given the territorial disposition, given the weakness of the Palestinian community whose leadership had been largely decimated during a major revolt at the end of the 1930s, given that the Arab states were still very much under French and British influence, the Nakba was inevitable, the inevitable product of the Partition Resolution. And one last point also about the UN's Partition Resolution is, yes, formally, that is what the international community decided on the 29th of November, 1947. It's not a resolution that could ever have gotten through the UN General Assembly today for a very simple reason. It was a very different general assembly. Most African, most Asian states were not yet independent. Were the resolution to be placed before the international community today, and I find it telling that the minority opinion was led by India, Iran, and Yugoslavia, I think they would've represented the clear majority. So partition, given what we know about Zionism, given that

it was entirely predictable what would happen, given the realities on the ground in Palestine was deeply unjust, and the idea that either the Palestinians or the Arab states could have accepted such a resolution is, I think, an illusion. That was in 1947. We saw what happened in '48 and '49. Palestinian society was essentially destroyed. Over 80%, I believe, of Palestinians residents in the territory that became the state of Israel were either expelled or fled and ultimately were ethnically cleansed because ethnic cleansing consists of two components. It's not just forcing people into refuge or expelling them, it's just as importantly preventing their return. And Benny Morris has written, I think, a article about Yosef Weitz and the transfer committees. There was a very detailed initiative to prevent the return and it consisted of raising hundreds of Palestinian villages to the ground, which was systematically implemented and so on. And so Palestinians became a stateless people. Now, what is the most important reason that no Arab state was established in Palestine? Well, since the 1930s, the Zionist leadership and the Hashemite leadership of Jordan, as it's been thoroughly researched and written about by the Israeli-British historian Avi Shlaim, essentially colluded to prevent the establishment of an independent Arab state in Palestine in the late 1940s. There's much more here, but I think those are the key points I would make about 1948.

Lex Fridman

We may talk about Zionism, Britain, UN assemblies and all the things you mentioned. There's a lot to dig into. So again, if we can keep it to just one statement moving forward, after Steven, if you want to go a little longer. Also, we should acknowledge the fact that the speaking speeds of people here are different. Steven speaks about 10 times faster than me. Steven, if you want to comment on 1948.

Steven Bonnell

Yeah. I think it's interesting where people choose to start the history. I noticed a lot of people like to start at either '47 or '48 because it's the first time where they can clearly point to a catastrophe that occurs on the Arab side, that they want to ascribe 100% of the blame to the newly emergent Israeli state to. But I feel like when you have this type of reading of history, it feels like the goal is to moralize everything first and then to pick and choose facts that support the statements of your initial moral statement afterwards. Whenever people are talking about '48 or the establishment of the Arab state, I never hear about the fact that a civil war started in '47. That was largely instigated because of the Arab rejectionism of the '47 partition plan. I never hear about the fact that the majority of the land that was acquired happened by purchases from Jewish organizations of Palestinian Arabs of the Ottoman Empire before the mandatory period in 1920 even started. Funnily enough, king Abdullah of Jordan was quoted as saying, "The Arabs are as prodigal in selling their land as they are in weeping about it." I never hear about the multiple times that Arabs rejected partition, rejected living with Jews, rejected any sort of state that would've even had any sort of Jewish exclusivity. It's funny because it was brought up before that the partition plan was unfair, and that's why the Arabs rejected it, as though they rejected it because it was unfair,

because of the amount of land that Jews were given and not just due to the fact that Jews were given land at all, as though a 30% partition or a 25% partition would've been accepted when I don't think that was the reality of the circumstances. I feel like most of the other stuff has been said, but I noticed that whenever people talk about '48 or the years preceding '48, I think the worst thing that happens is there's a cherry-picking of the facts where basically all of the blame is ascribed to this built-in idea of Zionism because of a handful of quotes or because of an ideology, we can say that transfer or population expulsion or basically the mandate of all of these Arabs being kicked off the land was always going to happen, when I think there's a refusal sometimes as well to acknowledge that regardless of the ideas of some of the Zionist leaders, there is a political, social and military reality on the ground that they're forced to contend with. And unfortunately, the Arabs, because of their inability to engage in diplomacy and only to use tools of war to try to negotiate everything going on in mandatory Palestine, basically always gave the Jews a reason or an excuse to fight and acquire land through that way because of their refusal to negotiate on anything else, whether it was the partition plan in '47, whether it was the Lausanne peace conference afterwards where Israel even offered to annex Gaza in '51, where they offered to take in a hundred thousand refugees. Every single deal is just rejected out of hand because the Arabs don't want a Jewish state anywhere in this region of the world.

Norman Finkelstein

I would like to engage Professor Morris. If you don't mind, I'm not with the first name. It's just not my -

Lex Fridman

Okay.

Norman Finkelstein

- way of relating.

Benny Morris

You can just call me Morris. You don't need the professor.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay. There's a real problem here, and it's been a problem I've had over many years of reading your work. Apart perhaps from, as grandchild, I suspect nobody knows your work better than I do. I've read it many times, not once, not twice, at least three times everything you've written. And the problem is, it's a kind of quicksilver. It's very hard to grasp a point and hold you to it. So we're going to try here to see whether we can hold you to a point. And then you argue with me the point. I have no problem with that. Your name please.

Steven Bonnell

Steven Bonnell.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay. Mr. Bonnell referred to cherry-picking and handful of quotes. Now, it's true that when you wrote your first book on the Palestinian refugee question, you only had a few lines on this issue of transfer.

Benny Morris

Four pages.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah. In the first book?

Benny Morris

In the first book. Four pages.

Norman Finkelstein

Maybe four. I'm not going to quarrel. My memory is not clear. We're talking about 40 years ago. I read it. I read it. But then, I read other things by you. Okay. And you were taken to task, if my memory is correct, that you hadn't adequately documented the claims of transfer. Allow me to finish. And I thought that was a reasonable challenge because it was an unusual claim for a mainstream Israeli historian to say, as you did not - mainstream Israeli historian to say, as you did in that first book, that from the very beginning, transfer figured prominently in Zionist thinking that was an unusual, if you read Anita Shapira, you read Shabtai Tevet that was an unusual acknowledgement by you. And then I found it very impressive that in that revised version of your first book, you devoted 25 pages to copiously documenting the salience of transfer in Zionist thinking. And in fact, you used a very provocative and resonant phrase. You said that transfer was inevitable and inbuilt into Zionism. We're not talking about circumstantial factors, a war, Arab hostility. You said it's inevitable and inbuilt into Zionism. Now, as I said, so we won't be accused of cherry picking. Those were 25 very densely argued pages. And then in an interview, and I could cite several quotes, but I'll choose one, you said, "Removing a population was needed." Let's look at the words. "Without a population expulsion, a Jewish state would not have been established." Now you are the one... Again, I was very surprised when I read your book here. I'm referring to "Righteous Victims." I was very surprised when I came to that page 37, where you wrote that territorial displacement and dispossession was the chief motor of Arab resistance to Zionism. Territorial displacement and dispossession were the chief motor of Arab resistance to Zionism. So you then went on to say, because the Arab population rationally feared territorial displacement and dispossession, it of course opposed Zionism. That's as normal as Native Americans opposing the Euro-American manifest destiny in the history of our own country because they understood it would be at their expense. It was inbuilt and inevitable. And so now for you to come along and say that it all happened just because of the war, that otherwise the Zionists made all these plans for a happy minority to live there, that simply does not gel. It does not cohere. It is not reconcilable with what you yourself have

written. It was inevitable and inbuilt. Now, in other situations, you've said that's true with, I think it was a greater good to establish a Jewish state at the expense of the indigenous population. That's another kind of argument that was Theodore Roosevelt's argument in our own country. He said, we don't want the whole of North America to remain a squalid refuge for these wigwams and teepees. We have to get rid of them and make this a great country. But he didn't deny that it was inbuilt and inevitable.

Benny Morris

I think You've made your point there. First, I'll take up something that Mouin said. He said that the Nakba was inevitable -

Mouin Rabbani

As have you.

Benny Morris

- and predictable. No, no, no, I've never said that. It was inevitable and predictable only because the Arabs assaulted the Jewish community and state in 1947/48. Had there been no assault, there probably wouldn't have been a refugee problem. There's no reason for a refugee problem to have occurred, expulsions to have occurred, a massive dispossession to occur. These occurred as a result of war. Now, Norman has said that, I said that transfer was inbuilt into Zionism in one way or another. And this is certainly true in order to buy land, the Jews bought tracts of land on which some Arabs sometimes lived. Sometimes they bought tracts of land on which there weren't Arab villages, but sometimes they bought land on which there were Arabs. And according to Ottoman law, and the British, at least in the initial years of the British mandate, the law said that the people who bought the land could do what they liked with the people who didn't own the land, who were basically squatting on the land, which is the Arab tenant farmers, which is we're talking about a very small number actually of Arabs who were displaced as a result of land purchases in the Ottoman period or the mandate period. But there was dispossession in one way. They didn't possess the land. They didn't own it, but they were removed from the land. And this did happen in Zionism. And there's, if you like, an inevitability in Zionist ideology of buying tracts of land and starting to work it yourself and settle it with your own people and so on. That made sense. But what we're really talking about is what happened in 47/48. And in 47/48, the Arabs started a war. And actually people pay for their mistakes. And the Palestinians have never actually agreed to pay for their mistakes. They make mistakes, they attack, they suffer as a result. And we see something similar going on today in the Gaza Strip. They do something terrible. They kill 1,200 Jews. They abduct 250 women and children and babies and old people and whatever. And then they start screaming, please save us from what we did because the Jews are counterattacking. And this is what happened then. And this is what's happening now. There's something fairly similar in the situation here. Expulsion, and this is important, Norman, you should pay attention to this. You didn't raise that. Expulsion transfer whenever policy of the Zionist movement before 47, it doesn't exist in Zionist

platforms of the various political parties, of the Zionist organization, of the Israeli state, of the Jewish agency. Nobody would've actually made it into policy because it was always a large minority. If there were people who wanted it, always a large minority of Jewish politicians and leaders would've said, no, this is immoral. We cannot start a state on the basis of an expulsion. So it was never adopted and actually was never adopted as policy even in 48, even though Ben-Gurion wanted as few Arabs in the course of the war staying in the Jewish state after they attacked it. He didn't want disloyal citizens staying there because they wouldn't have been loyal citizens. But this made sense in the war itself. But the movement itself and its political parties never accepted it. It's true that in 1937, when the British, as part of the proposal by the Peel Commission to divide the country into two states, one Arab, one Jewish, which the Arabs of course rejected, Peel also recommended most of the Arabs in the Jewish state should be transferred because otherwise, if they stayed and were disloyal to the emergent Jewish state, this would cause endless disturbances, warfare, killing, and so on. So Ben-Gurion and Weizmann latched onto this proposal by the most famous democracy in the world, the British democracy, when they proposed the idea of transfer side by side with the idea of partition because it made sense. And they said, well, if the British say so, we should also advocate it. But they never actually tried to pass it as Zionist policy, and they fairly quickly stopped even talking about transfer after 1938.

Lex Fridman

So just to clarify, what you're saying is that 47 was an offensive war, not a defensive war -

Benny Morris

By the Arabs. Yes.

Lex Fridman

- by the Arabs.

Benny Morris

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

And you're also saying that there was never a top-down policy of expulsion.

Benny Morris

Yes.

Lex Fridman

Just to clarify the point.

Mouin Rabbani

If I understood you correctly, you're making the claim that transfer expulsion and so on was in fact a very localized phenomenon -

Benny Morris

Before 48.

Mouin Rabbani

- resulting from individual land purchases. If I understand you correctly, you're also making the claim that the idea that a Jewish state requires a removal or overwhelming reduction of the non-Jewish population was -

Benny Morris

If the Arabs are attacking you. Yes.

Mouin Rabbani

But let's say prior to 1947, it would be your claim that the idea that a significant reduction or wholesale removal of the Arab population was not part of Zionist thinking. Well, I think there's two problems with that. I think what you're saying about localized disputes is correct, but I also think that there is a whole literature that demonstrates that transfer was envisioned by Zionist leaders on a much broader scale than simply individual land purchases. In other words, it went way beyond, we need to remove these tenants so that we can farm this land. The idea was we can't have a state where all these Arabs remain and we have to get rid of them. And the second, I think, impediment to that view is that long before the UN General Assembly convened to address a question of Palestine, Palestinian and Arab and other leaders as well had been warning ad infinitum that the purpose of the Zionist movement is not just to establish a Jewish state, but to establish an exclusivist Jewish state. And that transfer forced displacement was fundamental to that project. And just responding to - sorry, was it -

Steven Bonnell

Yeah, Steven.

Mouin Rabbani

- Bonnell or Donnel?

Steven Bonnell

Bonnell, yeah.

Mouin Rabbani

With a B?

Steven Bonnell

Yeah.

Mouin Rabbani

Yeah. You made the point that the problem here is that people don't recognize is that the first and last result for the Arabs is always war. I think there's a problem with that. I think you might do well to recall the 1936 general strike conducted by Palestinians at the beginning of the revolt, which at the time was the longest recorded general strike in history. You may want to consult the book published last year by Lori Allen, "A History of False Hope", which discusses in great detail the consistent engagement by Palestinians, their leaders, their elites, their diplomats, and so on with all these international committees. If we look at today, the Palestinians are once again going to the International Court of Justice. They're consistently trying to persuade the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to do his job. They have launched widespread boycott campaigns. So of course the Palestinians have engaged in military resistance. But I think the suggestion that this has always been their first and last resort and that they have somehow spurned civic action, spurned diplomacy, I think really has no basis in reality.

Steven Bonnell

I'll respond to that. And then a question for Norm to take into account. I think when he answers Benny, because I am curious, obviously I have fresher eyes on this and I'm a newcomer to this arena versus the three of you guys for sure. A claim that gets brought up a lot has to do with the inevitability of transfer and Zionism or the idea that as soon as the Jews envisioned a state in Palestine, they knew that it would involve some mass transfer population, perhaps a mass expulsion. I'm sure we'll talk about Plan Dalet or Plan D at some point. The issue that I run into is while you can find quotes from leaders, while you can find maybe desires expressed in diaries, I feel like it's hard to truly ever know if there would've been mass transfer in the face of Arab peace, because I feel like every time there was a huge deal on the table that would've had a sizable Jewish and Arab population living together, the Arabs would reject it out of hand. So for instance, when we say that transfer was inevitable, when we say that Zionists would've never accepted a sizable Arab population, how do you explain the acceptance of the 47 partition plan that would've had a huge Arab population living in the Jewish state? Is your contention that after the acceptance of that, after the establishment of that state, that Jews would've slowly started to expel all of these Arab citizens from their country? Or how do you explain that in Lusanne a couple years later that Israel was willing to formally annex the Gaza Strip and make -

Mouin Rabbani

Of course it was.

Steven Bonnell

- 200,000 so people, those citizens, but I'm just curious, how do we get this idea of Zionism always means mass transfer when there were times, at least early on in the history of Israel and a little bit before it, where Israel would've accepted a state that would've had a massive Arab population in it. Is your idea that they would've just slowly expelled them afterwards or?

Mouin Rabbani

Is that question to me or Norm?

Steven Bonnell

To either one. I'm curious for the incorporation of the answer. Yeah.

Norman Finkelstein

There is some misunderstandings here. So let's try to clarify that. Number one, it was the old historians who would point to the fact and Professor Morris's terminology, the old historians, what he called not real historians, he called them chroniclers, not real historians. It was the old Israeli historians who denied the centrality of transfer in Zionist thinking. It was then Professor Morris who contrary to Israel's historian establishment, who said, now you remind me it's four pages, but it came at the end of the book. It was -

Benny Morris

No, no, it's at the beginning of the book.

Norman Finkelstein

- transfer.

Benny Morris

Yeah, transfer is dealt with in four pages at the beginning of my first book on the Palestinian refugee problem.

Norman Finkelstein

It's a fault of my memory, but the point still stands, it was Professor Morris who introduced this idea in what you might call a big way.

Benny Morris

Yeah, but I didn't say it was the central to the Zionist experience. You're saying centrality. I never said it was central. I said it was there. The idea.

Lex Fridman

By the way, it's okay to respond back and forth. This is great. And also just a quick question, if I may. You're using quotes from Benny, from Professor Morris. It's also okay to say those quotes do not reflect the full context.

Norman Finkelstein

That would be fine.

Lex Fridman

So if we go back to quotes we've said in the past, and you've both here have written, the three of you have written on this topic a lot is we should be careful and just admit like -

Steven Bonnell

Real quick just to be clear that the contention is that Norm is quoting apart and saying that this was the entire reason for this, whereas Benny's saying it's a part of that.

Norman Finkelstein

I'm not quoting apart, I'm quoting 25 pages where Professor Morris was at great pains to document the claim that appeared in those early four pages of his book. Now you say it never became part of the official Zionist platform.

Benny Morris

It never became part of policy.

Norman Finkelstein

Fine.

Benny Morris

Not to say, but it wasn't policy.

Norman Finkelstein

We're also asked, well, this is true. Why did that happen? Why did that happen? It's because it's a very simple fact which everybody understands. Ideology doesn't operate in a vacuum. There are real world practical problems. You can't just take an ideology and superimpose it on a political reality and turn it into effect. It was the British mandate. There was significant Arab resistance to Zionism, and that resistance was based on the fact, as you said, the fear of territorial displacement and dispossession. So you couldn't very well expect the Zionist movement to come out in neon lights and announce, hey, we're going to be expelling you the first chance we get. That's not realistic.

Lex Fridman

Norm.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay.

Benny Morris

Let me respond. Look, you've said it a number of times that the Arabs from fairly early on in the conflict from the 1890s or the early 1900s said the Jews intend to expel us. This doesn't mean that it's true. It means that some Arabs said this, maybe believing it was true, maybe using it as a political instrument to gain support to mobilize Arabs against the Zionist experiment. But the fact is transfer did not occur before 1947, and Arabs later said, and since then have said that the Jews want to build a third temple on the Temple Mount as if that's what really the mainstream of Zionism has always wanted and always strived for. But this is nonsense. It's something that Hussein used to use as a way to mobilize masses for the cause, using religion as the way to get them to join him. The fact that Arabs said that the Zionists want to dispossess us doesn't mean it's true. It just means that there's some Arabs thought that maybe said it sincerely and maybe insincerely.

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris.

Benny Morris

Later became a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is true because Arabs attacked the Jews.

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris, I read through your stuff. Even yesterday I was looking through "Righteous Victims."

Benny Morris

You should read other things. You're wasting your time.

Norman Finkelstein

No, no, actually no. I do read other things, but I don't consider it a waste of time to read you. Not at all. You say that this wasn't inherent in Zionism. Now, would you agree that David Ben-Gurion was a Zionist?

Benny Morris

A major Zionist leader?

Norman Finkelstein

Right. Would you agree Chaim Weizmann was a Zionist?

Benny Morris

Yeah.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay. I believe they were. I believe they took their ideology seriously. It was the first generation. Just like with the Bolsheviks, the first generation was committed to an idea. By the 1930s, it was just pure geopolitique. The ideology went out the window. The first generation, I have no doubt about their convictions. Okay. They were Zionists. Transfer was inevitable and inbuilt in Zionism.

Benny Morris

You keep repeating the same things.

Norman Finkelstein

Because as I said, Mr. Morris, I have a problem reconciling what you're saying. It either was incidental or it was deeply entrenched. Here I read it's deeply entrenched, two very resonant words, inevitable and inbuilt.

Benny Morris

Deeply entrenched. I never wrote it.

Norman Finkelstein

Well, I'm not sure.

Benny Morris

It's something you just invented.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay.

Benny Morris

But it was there.

Norman Finkelstein

Inevitable and inbuilt. Fine, fine.

Benny Morris

Let me concede something. The idea of transfer was there. Israel Zangwill, a British Zionist talked about it early on in the century. Even Herzl in some way talked about transferring population.

Norman Finkelstein

According to your 25 pages everybody talked about.

Lex Fridman

We keep bringing up this line from the 25 pages and the 4 pages. We're lucky to have Benny in front of us right now. We don't need to go to the quotes. We can legitimately ask: How central is expulsion to Zionism in its early version of Zionism and whatever Zionism is today? And how much power/influence does Zionism and ideology have in Israel? And the like - the influence - the philosophy, the ideology of Zionism - have on Israel today?

Benny Morris

The Zionist movement up to 1948, Zionist ideology was central to the whole Zionist experience, the whole enterprise up to 1948. And I think Zionist ideology was also important in the first decades of Israel's existence. Slowly, the hold of Zionism, if you like, like Bolshevism held the Soviet Union gradually faded, and a lot of Israelis today think in terms of individual success and then the capitalism and all sorts of things, which had nothing to do with Zionism, but Zionism was very important. But what I'm saying is that the idea of transfer wasn't the core of Zionism. The idea of Zionism was to save the Jews who had been vastly persecuted in Eastern Europe, and incidentally in the Arab world, the Muslim world for centuries, and eventually ending up with the Holocaust. The idea of Zionism was to save the Jewish people by establishing a state or re-establishing a Jewish state on the ancient Jewish homeland, which is something that Arabs today even deny that there were Jews in Palestine or the land of Israel 2,000 years ago. Arafat famously said, "What Temple was there on Temple Mount? Maybe it was in Nablus." Which of course is nonsense. But they had a strong connection for thousands of years to the land to which they wanted to return and return there. They found that on the land lived hundreds of thousands of Arabs, and the question was how to accommodate the vision of a Jewish state in Palestine alongside the existence of these Arab masses living on who were indigenous, in fact, to the land by that stage. And the idea of partition because they couldn't live together because the Arabs didn't want to live together with the Jews. And I think the Jews also didn't want to live together in one state with Arabs in general. The idea of partition was the thing which the Zionists accepted, okay, we can only get a small part of Palestine. The Arabs will get in 37. Most of Palestine in 1947 the ratios were changed, but we can live side by side with each other in a partitioned Palestine. And this was the essence of it. The idea of transfer was there, but it was never adopted as policy. But in 1947-1948, the Arabs attacked trying to destroy essentially the Zionist enterprise and the emerging Jewish state. And the reaction was transfer in some way, not as policy, but this is what happened on the battlefield. And this is also what Ben-Gurion at some point began to want as well.

Mouin Rabbani

One of the first books on this issue I read when I was still in high school because my late father had it, was "The Diaries of Theodor Herzl." And I think Theodor Herzl, of course, was the founder of the contemporary Zionist movement. And I think if you read that, it's very clear for Herzl the model upon which the Zionist movement would proceed. His model was Cecil Rhodes. I think Rhodes, from what I recall, correct me if I'm wrong, has quite a

prominent place in Herzl's diaries. I think Herzl was also corresponding with him and seeking his support. Cecil Rhodes, of course, was the British colonialist after whom the former white minority regime in Rhodesia was named. And Herzl also says explicitly in his diaries, that it is essential to remove the existing population from Palestine.

Benny Morris

Can I respond to this -

Mouin Rabbani

In a moment, please. He says, we shall have to spirit the penniless population across the borders and procure employment for them elsewhere or something. And Israel Zangwill who you mentioned, a land without a people for a people without a land, they knew then well it wasn't a land without a people. I'll continue, but please go ahead.

Benny Morris

Just to this, there is one small diary entry in Herzl's vast -

Mouin Rabbani

It's five volumes.

Benny Morris

Yeah, five volumes. There's one paragraph which actually mentions the idea of transfer. There are people who think that Herzl was actually pointing to South America when he was talking about that the Jews were going to move to Argentina, and then they would try and buy out or buy off or spirit the penniless natives to make way for Jewish settlement. Maybe he wasn't even talking about the Arabs in that particular passage. That's the argument of some people. Maybe he was. But the point is it has only a 1% of the diary, which is devoted to this subject. It's not a central idea in Herzl's thinking. What Herzl wanted, and this is what's important, not Rhodes, I don't think he was the model. Herzl wanted to create a liberal democratic western state in Palestine for the Jews. That was the idea. Not some imperial enterprise serving some imperial master, which is what Rhodes was about. But to have a Jewish state, which was modeled on the western democracies in Palestine, and this incidentally was more or less what Weizmann and Ben-Gurion wanted. Ben-Gurion was more of a socialist. Weizmann was more of a liberal westerner, but they wanted to establish a social democratic or liberal state in Palestine. And they both envisioned through most of the years of their activity that there would be an Arab minority in that Jewish state. It's true that Ben-Gurion strived to have as small as possible an Arab minority in the Jewish state because he knew that if you want a Jewish majority state, that would be necessary, but it's not something which they were willing to translate into actual policy.

Lex Fridman

Just a quick pause to mention that for people who are not familiar, Theodor Herzl we're talking about over a century ago, and everything we've been talking about has been mostly 1948 and before.

Mouin Rabbani

Yes. Just one clarification on Herzl's diaries. I mean, the other thing that I recall from those diaries is he was very preoccupied with, in fact, getting great power patronage, seeing Palestine, the Jewish state in Palestine, I think his words, an outpost of civilization against barbarism. In other words, very much seeing his project as a proxy for Western imperialism -

Benny Morris

No, no, I don't think that's the right word.

Mouin Rabbani

- in the Middle East.

Benny Morris

Not proxy. He wanted to establish a Jewish state which would be independent. To get that he hoped that he would be able to garner support from major imperial powers, but it wasn't -

Mouin Rabbani

Including the Ottoman Sultan -

Benny Morris

Yes, yes, exactly.

Mouin Rabbani

- who he tried to cultivate. I just want to respond to a point you made earlier, which was that people expressed the rejection of the partition resolution on the grounds that it gave the majority of Palestine to the Jewish community, which formed only a third. Whereas in fact, if I understood you correctly, you're saying the Palestinians and the Arabs would have rejected any partition resolution.

Steven Bonnell

Yeah, a couple of things that one, they would've rejected any. Two, a lot of that land given was in the Negev. It was pretty terrible land at the time. And then three, the land that would've been partitioned to Jews I think would've been, I think I saw it was like 500,000... It would've been 500,000 Jews, 400,000 Arabs, and I think like 80,000 Bedouins would've been there. So the state would've been divided pretty close to them.

Mouin Rabbani

I think you raise a valid point because I think the Palestinians did reject the partition of their homeland in principle. And I think the fact that the United Nations General Assembly then awarded the majority of their homeland to the Zionist movement only added in salt to injury. I mean, one doesn't have to sympathize with the Palestinians to recognize that they have now been a stateless people for 75 years. Can you name any country yours, for example, or yours, that would be prepared to give 55%, 25%, 10% of your country to the Palestinians? Of course not. And so the issue was not the existence of Jews in Palestine. They had been there for centuries, and of course they had ties to Palestine and particularly to Jerusalem and other places going back centuries if not millennia. But the idea of establishing an exclusively Jewish state at the expense of those who were already living there, I think it was right to reject that. And I don't think we can look back now 75 years later and say, well, you should have accepted losing 55% of your homeland because you ended up losing 78% of it, and the remaining 22% was occupied in 1967. That's not how things work. And I can imagine an American rejecting giving 10% of the United States to the Palestinians, and if that rejection leads to war and you lose half your country, I doubt that 50 years from now you're going to say, well, maybe I should have accepted that.

Steven Bonnell

Sure. So I like this answer more than what I usually feel like I'm hearing when it comes to the Palestinian rejection of the 47 partition plan. Sometimes I feel like a weird switch happens to where the Arabs in the area are actually presented as entirely pragmatic people who are simply doing a calculation and saying like, well, we're losing 55% of our land. Jews are only maybe one third of the people here, and we've got 45. And no, the math doesn't work, basically. But it wasn't a math problem. I think, like you said -

Mouin Rabbani

It was a matter of principle.

Steven Bonnell

- it was an ideology problem.

Mouin Rabbani

No, it was a matter of principle.

Steven Bonnell

Yeah. Ideologically driven that they as a people have a right to or are entitled to this land that they've never actually had an independent state on, that they've never had even a guarantee of an independent state on, that they've never actually ruled a government on.

Mouin Rabbani

That last point is actually not correct because for all its injustice, the mandate system recognized Palestine as a class a mandate, which provisionally recognized the independence of that territory.

Steven Bonnell

Of what would emerge from that territory, but not of the Palestinians.

Mouin Rabbani

It was provisionally recognized.

Steven Bonnell

But the territory itself was, but not of the Palestinian people to have a right or guarantee to a government that would emerge from it.

Mouin Rabbani

But it was the British mandate of Palestine, not the British mandate of Israel.

Benny Morris

The word exclusive, which you keep using is nonsense. The state, which Ben-Gurion envisioned would be a Jewish majority state as they accepted the 1947 partition resolution, as Steven said, that included 400,000 plus Arabs in a state which would have 500,000 Jews. So the idea of exclusivity wasn't anywhere in the air at all among the Zionist leaders -

Mouin Rabbani

I think it was there.

Benny Morris

- in 47-48, they wanted a Jewish majority state, but were willing to accept a state which had 40% Arabs. That's one point. The second thing is that Palestinians may have regarded the land of Palestine as their homeland, but so did the Jews. It was the homeland of the Jews as well. The problem was the Arabs were unable and remain to this day, unable to recognize that for the Jews, that is their -

Benny Morris

- today, unable to recognize that for the Jews, that is their homeland as well. And the problem then is how do you share this homeland, either with one binational state or partitioned into two states? The problem is that the Arabs have always rejected both of these ideas. The homeland belongs to the Jews, as Jews feel, as much as it does, if not more, than for the Arabs.

Mouin Rabbani

I think I would say Zionists, not Jews.

Benny Morris

I would say for the Jews. It's the Jewish people's homeland.

Steven Bonnell

Real quick, I just want for both of you guys, because I haven't heard these questions answered, I'm just so curious how to make sense of them. It was correctly brought up that I believe that Ben-Gurion had, I think Shlomo Ben-Ami describes it as an obsession with getting validation or support from Western states; Great Britain, and then a couple of decades later- [inaudible 01:08:44].

Mouin Rabbani

That explains the Suez Crisis.

Steven Bonnell

Yeah, exactly. Correct. That was one of the major motivators, the idea to work with Britain and France on a military operation.

Mouin Rabbani

An imperial stooge.

Steven Bonnell

But then the question again I go back to, if that is true, if Ben-Gurion, if the early Israel saw themselves as a Western-fashioned nation, how could we possibly imagine that they would've engaged in the transfer of some 400,000 Arabs after accepting the partition plan? Would that not have completely and totally destroyed their legitimacy in the eyes of the entire Western world?

Mouin Rabbani

No.

Steven Bonnell

How not?

Mouin Rabbani

Well, first of all, I think that the Zionist leadership's acceptance of the partition resolution, and I think you may have written about this, that they accepted it because it provided international endorsement of the legitimacy of the principle of Jewish statehood. And they didn't accept the borders, and in fact, later expanded the borders. Second of all-

Benny Morris

No, they didn't. They didn't expand the borders. They accepted the UN partition resolution, borders and all. That's how they accepted it. You can say that some of the Zionists, deep in their hearts, had the idea that maybe at some point, they would be able to get more.

Mouin Rabbani

Yeah, including their most senior leaders, who said so, and I think you've quoted them saying so.

Benny Morris

But they begrudgingly accepted what the United Nations, the world community had said; "This is what you're going to get."

Mouin Rabbani

Yes. And second of all, removing dark people? Darker people? It's intrinsic -

Benny Morris

Why dark? In Israel, Jews are as dark as Arabs. This is nonsense.

Mouin Rabbani

It's intrinsic to Western history. So the idea that Americans or Brits or the French would have an issue with ... I mean, French had been doing it in Algeria for decades. The Americans have been doing it in North America for centuries. So how would Israel forcibly displacing Palestinians somehow besmirch Israel in the eyes of the West?

Norman Finkelstein

In fact, even in the 1944 resolution of the Labor Party, and at the time, even Bertrand Russell was a member of the Labor Party, it endorsed transfer of Arabs out of Palestine. As [inaudible 01:10:55] pointed out, that was a deeply entrenched idea in Western thinking, that it doesn't in any way contradict or violate or breach any moral values to displace the Palestinian population. Now, I do believe there's a legitimate question, had it been the case, as you said, Professor Morris, that the Zionists wanted to create a happy state with a Jewish majority, but a large Jewish minority, and if by virtue of immigration, like in our own country ... in our own country, given the current trajectories, non-whites will become the majority population in the United States quite soon. And according to democratic principles, we have to accept that. So if that were the case, I would say maybe there's an argument that had there been mass Jewish immigration that changed the demographic balance in Palestine and therefore Jews became the majority, you can make an argument in the abstract that the indigenous Arab population should have been accepting of that, just as 'whites' in the United States have to be accepting of the fact that the demographic majority is shifting to non-whites in our own country. But that's not what Zionism was about. I did write my doctoral dissertation on Zionism, and I don't want to get now bogged

down in abstract ideas, but as I suspect you know, most theorists of nationalism say there are two kinds of nationalism. One is a nationalism based on citizenship. You become a citizen, you're integral to the country. That's sometimes called political nationalism. And then there's another kind of nationalism, and that says the state should not belong to its citizens, it should belong to an ethnic group. Each ethnic group should have its own state. It's usually called the German romantic idea of nationalism. Zionism is squarely in the German romantic idea. That was the whole point of Zionism. "We don't want to be bundists and be one more ethnic minority in Russia. We don't want to become citizens and just become a Jewish people in England or France. We want our own state -

Steven Bonnell

Like the Arab 23 states.

Norman Finkelstein

No, wait, before we get to the Arabs, let's stick to the Jews for a moment. Or the Zionists. "We want our own state." And in that concept of wanting your own state, the minority, at best, lives on sufferance, and at worst gets expelled. That's the logic of the German romantic Zionist idea of a state. That's why they're Zionists. Now, I personally have shied away from using the word Zionism ever since I finished my doctoral dissertation, because -

Mouin Rabbani

It was that painful.

Norman Finkelstein

Because as I said, I don't believe it's the operative ideology today. It's like talking about bolshevism and referring to Khrushchev. I doubt Khrushchev could have spelled Bolshevik. But for the period we're talking about, they were Zionists, they were committed to their exclusive state with a minority living on sufferance, or at worst expelled. That was their ideology. And I really feel there's a problem with your happy vision of these Western Democrats like Weitzman, and they wanted to live peacefully with their Arabs. Weitzman described the expulsion in 1948 as 'the miraculous clearing of the land'. That doesn't sound like somebody shedding too many tears at the loss of the indigenous population.

Benny Morris

Let me just respond to the word on sufferance.

Lex Fridman

Let him respond.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay.

Benny Morris

The on sufferance, I don't agree with. I think that's wrong. The Jewish state came into being in 1948. It had a population which was 20% Arab when it came into being, after many of them had become refugees, but 20% remained in the country. 20% of Israel's population at inception in 1949 was Arab.

Mouin Rabbani

80% went missing.

Benny Morris

No, no, no. I was talking about what remained in Palestine/Israel after it was created. The 20% who lived in Israel received citizenship and all the rights of Israelis, except, of course, the right to serve in the Army, which they didn't want to. And they had Supreme Court Justices, they have Knesset members. They enjoyed basically -

Norman Finkelstein

I think they lived under emergency laws until 1966.

Benny Morris

For a period, sure, they lived under emergency -

Norman Finkelstein

So, they didn't immediately have citizenship. This is just fantasy.

Benny Morris

No, no, no, no. Wait a minute. It's not fantasy. At the beginning, they received citizenship, could vote in elections for their own people, and they were put into parliament. But in the first years, the Jewish majority suspected that maybe the Arabs would be disloyal, because they had just tried to destroy the Jewish state. Then they dropped the military government and they became fully equal citizens. So if the whole idea was they must have a state without Arabs, this didn't happen in '49, and it didn't happen in the subsequent decades.

Norman Finkelstein

So, Professor Morris, then why did you say without a population expulsion, a Jewish state would not have been established?

Benny Morris

Because you are missing the first section of that paragraph, which was they were being assaulted by the Arabs, and as a result, a Jewish state could not have come into being unless there had also been an expulsion of the population which was trying to kill them.

Lex Fridman

Norm, I'm officially forbidding you referencing that again. Hold on a second, wait. We responded to it. So the main point you're making, we have to take Benny at his word, is there was a war, and that's the reason why he made that statement.

Mouin Rabbani

I think just one last point on this. I remember reading your book when it first came out, and reading one incident after the other, and one example after the other, and then getting to the conclusion where you said the Nakba was a product of war, not design, I think were your exact words. And I remember reacting almost in shock to that, that I felt you had mobilized overwhelming evidence that it was a product of design, not war. And I think our discussion today very much reflects, let's say, the dissonance between the evidence and the conclusion. You don't feel that the research that you have conducted and published demonstrates that it was in fact inherent and inbuilt and inevitable. And I think the point that Norm and I are making is that your own historical research, together with that of others, indisputably demonstrates that it does. I think that's a fundamental disagreement we're having here.

Steven Bonnell

Well, yeah, can I actually respond to that? Because I think this is emblematic of the entire conversation. I watched a lot of Norm's interviews and conversations in preparation for this, and I hear Norm will say this over and over and over again. "I only deal in facts. I don't deal in hypotheticals. I only deal in facts. I only deal in facts." And that seems to be the case, except for when the facts are completely and totally contrary to the particular point you're trying to push. The idea that Jews would've out of hand rejected any state that had Arabs on it or always had a plan of expulsion is just betrayed by the acceptance of the '47 partition plan.

Norman Finkelstein

I don't think you understand politics. Did I just say that there is a chasm that separates your ideology from the limits and constraints imposed by politics and reality? Now, Professor Morris, I suspect, would agree that the Zionist movement from fairly early on was committed to the idea of a Jewish state. I am aware of only one major study, probably written 40 years ago, The Binational Idea in Mandatory Palestine by a woman. I forgot her name now. You remember her?

Benny Morris

I'm trying to.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah. Okay. But you know the book.

Benny Morris

I think so.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah. She is the only one who tried to persuasively argue that the Zionist movement was actually, not formally, actually committed to the binational idea. But most historians of the subject agree, the Zionist movement was committed to the idea of a Jewish state. Having written my doctoral dissertation on the topic, I was confirmed in that idea, because Professor Chomsky, who was my closest friend for about 40 years, was very committed to the idea that bi-nationalism was the dominant trend in Zionism. I couldn't go with him there. But Professor Morris, you are aware that until the Biltmore resolution in 1942, the Zionist movement never declared it was for a Jewish state. Why? Because it was politically impossible at the moment, until 1942. There's your ideology, there are your convictions, there are your operative plans, and there's also, separately, what you say in public. The Zionist movement couldn't say in public, "We're expelling all the Arabs." They can't say that. And they couldn't even say, "We support a Jewish state," until 1942.

Benny Morris

You're conflating two things. The Zionists wanted a Jewish state. Correct. That didn't mean expulsion of the Arabs. It's not the same thing. They wanted a Jewish state with a Jewish majority, but they were willing, as it turned out, both in '37 and in '47 and subsequently, to have a large Arab minority -

Norman Finkelstein

In '37 there was a transfer.

Benny Morris

They were willing to have a large Arab minority in the country, and they ended up with a large Arab minority in the country. 20% of the population in '49 was Arab, and it still is -

Norman Finkelstein

They ended up for about five minutes before they were expelled. They agreed to it up until '47, and then they were gone by March 1949.

Steven Bonnell

What happened in between the rejection of the partition plan and the expulsion of the Arabs?

Benny Morris

The Arabs launched the war.

Steven Bonnell

Well, yeah. It wasn't random. There is a potential that-

Norman Finkelstein

I agree. It wasn't random. I totally agree with that. It was by design. It wasn't random.

Steven Bonnell

You can say that, but in this case, the facts betray you. There was no Arab acceptance of anything that would've allowed for a Jewish state to exist, number one, and number two, I think that it's entirely possible, given how things happen after a war, that this exact same conflict could have played out and an expulsion would've happened without any ideology at play. There was a people that disagreed on who had territorial rights to a land, there was a massive war afterwards, and then a bunch of their friends invaded after to reinforce the idea that the Jewish people in this case couldn't have a state. There could have been a transfer regardless.

Norman Finkelstein

Anything could have been, but that's not what history is about.

Steven Bonnell

History is about Palestinian rejections to any peace deal, over and over and over again.

Norman Finkelstein

As I said, when the ball was thrown into the court of the United Nations, they were faced with a practical problem, and I, for one, am not going to try to adjudicate the rights and wrongs from the beginning. I do not believe that if territorial displacement and dispossession was inherent in the Zionist project, I do not believe it can be a legitimate political enterprise. Now, you might say that's speaking from 2022. Or where are we now?

Mouin Rabbani

'24 now, I think. Yeah.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay. But we have to recognize that from nearly the beginning, for perfectly obvious reasons having nothing to do with antisemitism, anti-Westernism, anti-Europeanism, but because no people that I am aware of would voluntarily cede its country-

Steven Bonnell

Except for all the people that sold land voluntarily.

Norman Finkelstein

You can perfectly understand Native American resistance to Euro-colonialism. You can perfectly well understand it without any anti-Europeanism, anti-whiteism, anti-Christianism. They didn't want to cede their country to invaders. That's completely understandable.

Benny Morris

You're minimizing the antisemitic element in Arab nationalism.

Norman Finkelstein

You minimized it. In all your books, you minimized it.

Benny Morris

No, no, no. Husseini was an antisemite. The leader of the Palestinian national movement in the 30s and 40s was an antisemite. This was one of the things which drove him, and also drove him in the end to work in Berlin for Hitler for four years, giving Nazi propaganda to the Arab world, calling on the Arabs to murder the Jews. That's what he did in World War II. That's the leader of the Palestinian Arab National Movement. And he wasn't alone. He wasn't alone.

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris, if you read your book, Righteous Victims, you can read it and read it and read it and read it, as I have, you will find barely a word about the Arabs being motivated by antisemitism.

Benny Morris

It exists, though.

Norman Finkelstein

I didn't say it doesn't exist.

Benny Morris

Ah, you agree that it exists?

Norman Finkelstein

Hey, I don't know a single non-Jew who doesn't harbor antisemitic sentiments.

Benny Morris

We're talking about Arabs now.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah, but I don't know anybody. That's just part of the human condition.

Benny Morris

Antisemitism?

Norman Finkelstein

Yes.

Benny Morris

And among the Arabs?

Norman Finkelstein

So Professor Morris, here's my problem. I didn't see that in your Righteous Victims. Even when you talked about the first Intifada, and you talked about the second Intifada, and you talked about how there was a lot of influence by Hamas, the Islamic movement, you even stated that there was a lot of antisemitism in those movements, but then you went on to say, "But of course, at bottom, it was about the occupation. It wasn't about" - and I've read it.

Benny Morris

Yeah, but you're moving from different ages, across the ages.

Norman Finkelstein

No, I'm talking about your whole book.

Benny Morris

The occupation began in '67, the one you're talking about.

Norman Finkelstein

I looked and looked and looked for evidence of this antisemitism as being a chief motor of Arab resistance to Zionism. I didn't see it.

Steven Bonnell

Did he make that claim?

Benny Morris

I don't remember the word chief. It's one of the elements.

Steven Bonnell

Yeah. It's very binary thinking when it comes to -

Norman Finkelstein

Binary?

Steven Bonnell

Yes, binary.

Norman Finkelstein

Please, don't give me this postmodernism 'binary'. You're the one that said the chief motor -

Benny Morris

But you are thinking in terms of black and white. Steven has a point.

Norman Finkelstein

Do you have your book here? Page 137.

Benny Morris

You're talking in black and white concepts when history is much grayer. Lots of things happen because of lots of reasons, not one or the other, and you don't seem to see that.

Steven Bonnell

Can I ask you a question? Because it's for them to talk too. Can I ask you a very quick question? What do you think the ideal solution was on the Arab side from '47? What would they have preferred? And what would've happened -

Mouin Rabbani

Well, they were explicit.

Steven Bonnell

And then the second one, what would've happened if Jews would've lost the war in '48? What do you think would've happened to the Israeli population, the Jewish population?

Mouin Rabbani

I think the Palestinians and the Arabs were explicit that they wanted a unitary, I think, federal state, and they made their submissions to [inaudible 01:28:09], they made their appeals at the UN General Assembly.

Benny Morris

What do you mean by unitary and federal? I don't get that. They wanted an Arab state. They wanted Palestine to be an Arab state.

Mouin Rabbani

Yes. Yes.

Benny Morris

Put it simply. That word, unitary, federal, they wanted Palestine as an Arab and exclusively Arab state. That's what they wanted.

Mouin Rabbani

No, no, it wasn't an exclusively Arab state. I think we have to distinguish between Palestinian and Arab opposition to a Jewish state in Palestine on the one hand, and Palestinian and Arab attitudes to Jewish existence in Palestine, and there's a fundamental difference -

Benny Morris

Well, Hussein, the leader of the movement, said that all the Jews who had come since 1917, and that's the majority of the Jews in Palestine in 1947, shouldn't be there.

Mouin Rabbani

Well, he did say -

Benny Morris

They shouldn't be citizens and they shouldn't be there.

Norman Finkelstein

[inaudible 01:28:59]. The PLO charter said that in '64. I'm not going to deny it. Of course, it's true. I can understand the sentiment, but I think it's wrong.

Steven Bonnell

Also, [inaudible 01:29:11] because you had the used the words earlier, that it was supremacy and exclusivity that the Zionist state-

Mouin Rabbani

Well, I want to answer your question. Hussein did say that, and I'm sure there was a very substantial body of Palestinian Arab public opinion that endorsed that. But by the same token, I think a unitary Arab state, as you call it, or a Palestinian state, could have been established, with arrangements, with guarantees to ensure the security and rights of both communities. How that would work in detail had been discussed and proposed, but never resolved. And again, I think Jewish fears about what would've happened -

Benny Morris

A second Holocaust.

Mouin Rabbani

Well, no -

Benny Morris

That was the Jewish fear. A second Holocaust.

Mouin Rabbani

Well, that may well have been the Jewish fear. It was an unfounded Jewish fear.

Steven Bonnell

It was unfounded?

Mouin Rabbani

Of course it was unfounded.

Steven Bonnell

What about like in '48 and '56 and -

Mouin Rabbani

You really think that the Palestinians, had they won the war, were going to import ovens and crematoria from Germany and -

Steven Bonnell

I don't know about that, but in almost every single Arab state where there were Jews living, after '48, after '56, after '67, there were always pogroms, there were always flights from Jews from those countries to Israel afterwards. I don't think it would be -

Mouin Rabbani

I wouldn't say there were always pogroms in every Arab state. I think there was flight of Arab Jews for multiple reasons, in some cases for precisely the reasons you say. If you look at the Jewish community in Algeria, for example, their flight had virtually nothing to do with the Arab-Israeli conflict. The issue of Algerian Jews was that the French gave them citizenship during their colonial rule of Algeria, and they increasingly became identified with French rule, when Algeria became independent and all the French ended up leaving, out of fear, or out of disappointment, or out of whatever, the Jews were identified as French rather than Algerian.

Benny Morris

This is a bit of a red herring. There were pogroms in the Arab countries. In Bahrain even, where there's almost no Jews, there was a pogrom in 1947. There was a pogrom in Aleppo in 1947.

Mouin Rabbani

I'm not denying any of that history.

Benny Morris

There were killings of Jews in Iraq and Egypt in 1948/49. But the Jews basically fled the Arab states, not for multiple reasons. They fled because they felt that the governments there and the societies amid which they had lived for hundreds of years no longer wanted them.

Mouin Rabbani

Look, without getting into the details, I think we can both agree that ultimately a clear majority of Arab Jews who believed that after having lived in these countries for centuries -

Benny Morris

Way before the Arabs arrived there. Way before the Arabs arrived in Iraq.

Mouin Rabbani

- for centuries, if not millennia, came to the unfortunate conclusion that their situation had become untenable. I also think that we can both agree that this had never been an issue prior to Zionism and the emergence of the state of Israel.

Benny Morris

This isn't true. There were pogroms prior to Zionism.

Mouin Rabbani

Look, I'm not -

Benny Morris

Pogroms didn't begin with Zionism in the Arab world.

Mouin Rabbani

The issue is the point I raised, which is whether these communities had ever come to a collective conclusion that their position had become untenable in this part of the world. No, they were Arab Jews.

Steven Bonnell

Well, because untenable meant there was no alternative. But with the creation of Israel, there was an alternative, right? A place where they could go and not be discriminated against or live as second class citizens or be subject to Arab majority states. I also think it's interesting that when you analyze the flight of Jewish people, and I've seen this, I agree with you, it wasn't just a mass expulsion from all the Arab states. There were definitely push factors. There were also pull factors. Now, I don't know how you guys feel about the Nakba, but when the analysis of the Nakba comes in, again, it's back to that. Well, that was actually just a top-down expulsion. The retreat of wealthy Arab people in the 30s didn't matter. Any of the messaging from the surrounding Arab states didn't matter. It was just an expulsion

from Jewish people or people running from their lives from Jewish massacres. Again, I feel like it's a selective critical analysis of the -

Mouin Rabbani

Again, I'm a little uncomfortable always using the term Jewish here, because it wasn't the Jews of England or the Soviet Jews.

Steven Bonnell

Well, I say Jewish because prior to '48, saying Israeli -

Mouin Rabbani

I think it's useful to refer to Zionists before 1948 and Israelis after '48. We don't need to implicate Jews of all -

Steven Bonnell

Well, sure, but the Jewish people that were being attacked in Arab states weren't Zionists. They were just Jews living there, right?

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, I need to just comment on that. I was rereading Shlomo Ben-Ami's last book, and he does at the end discuss at some length the whole issue of the refugee question bearing on the so-called peace process. And on the question of '48 and the Arab immigration, if you'll allow me, let me just quote him. "Israel is particularly fond of the awkwardly false symmetry she makes between the Palestinian refugee crisis and the forced immigration of 600,000 Jews from Arab countries following the creation of the state of Israel, as if it were 'an unplanned exchange of populations'. And then, Mr. Ben-Ami, for those of you who are listening, he was Israel's former foreign minister, and he's an influential historian in his own right, he says, "In fact, envoys from the Mossad and the Jewish Agency worked underground in Arab countries and Iran to encourage Jews to go to Israel. More importantly, for many Jews in Arab states, the very possibility of immigrating to Israel was the combination of millennial aspirations. It represented the consummation of a dream to take part in Israel's resurgence as a nation." So, this idea that they were all expelled after 1948, that's one area, Professor Morris, I defer to expertise. That's one of my credos in life. I don't know the Israeli literature. But as it's been translated in English, there's very little solid scholarship on what happened in 1948 in the Arab countries which caused the Jews to leave.

Mouin Rabbani

Arab Jews.

Norman Finkelstein

Arab Jews, right. But Shlomo Ben-Ami knows the literature. He knows the scholarship. He's a historian.

Benny Morris

He comes from Tangiers.

Mouin Rabbani

He's from Morocco. [inaudible 01:36:10] from Iraq has written on this issue as well.

Benny Morris

And the Jews in the Arab lands were not pro-Zionists. They weren't Zionists at all. Certainly [inaudible 01:36:18] family was anti-Zionist.

Norman Finkelstein

And [inaudible 01:36:21], when he was interviewed by Marin Rappaport, on this question he said, "You simply cannot say that the Iraqi Jews were expelled. It's just not true." And he was speaking as an Iraqi Jew who left with his family in 1948.

Benny Morris

They were pushed out. They weren't expelled. That's probably the right phrase. They were pushed out.

Mouin Rabbani

Well, I think it's more complex than that. Sorry, I interrupted you.

Norman Finkelstein

No, you're not interrupting me, because I only know what's been translated into English, and the English literature on the subject is very small and not scholarly. Now, there may be a Hebrew literature, I don't know, but I was surprised that even Shlomo Ben-Ami, stalwart of his state, fair enough, on this particular point he called it false symmetry.

Benny Morris

No, no, Steven is right. There was a pull and a push mechanism in the departure of the Jews from the Arab lands post '48. But there was also a lot of push. A lot of push.

Mouin Rabbani

That's indisputable. There was push -

Lex Fridman

And on the point of agreement, on this one brief light of agreement, let us wrap up with this topic of history and move on to modern day. But before that, I'm wondering if we could just say a couple of last words on this topic. Steven?

Steven Bonnell

Yeah. I think that when you look at the behaviors of both parties in the time period around '48, or especially '48 and earlier, there's this assumption that there was this huge built-in mechanism of Zionism, and that it was going to be inevitable from the inception of the first Zionist thought that appeared in Herzl's mind that there would be a mass violent population transfer of Arab Palestinians out of what would become the Israeli state. I understand that there are some quotes that we can find that maybe seem to possibly support an idea that looks close to that, but I think when you actually consult the record of what happened, when you look at the massive populations that Israel was willing to accept within what would become their state borders, their nation borders, I just don't think that the historical record agrees with the idea that Zionists would've just never been okay living alongside Arab Palestinians. But when you look at the other side, Arabs would out of hand reject literally any deal that apportioned any amount of that land for any state relating to Jewish people or the Israeli people. I think it was said, even on the other end of the table, that Arab Palestinians or Arabs would've never accepted any Jewish state whatsoever. So it's interesting that on the ideology part where it's claimed that Zionists are people of exclusion and supremacy and expulsion, we can find that in diary entries, but we can find that expressed in very real terms on the Arab side, I think in all of their behavior around '48 and earlier, where the goal was the destruction of the Israeli state, it would've been the dispossession of many Jewish people. It probably would've been the expulsion of a lot of them back to Europe. And I think that very clearly plays out in the difference between the actions of the Arabs versus some diary entries of some Jewish leaders.

Lex Fridman

Benny?

Benny Morris

Well, one thing which stood out, and I think Mouin made this point, is that the Arabs had nothing to do with the Holocaust, but then the world community forced the Arabs to pay the price for the Holocaust. That's the traditional Arab argument. This is slightly distorting the reality. The Arabs in the 1930s did their utmost to prevent Jewish emigration from Europe and reaching Palestine, which was the only safe haven available, because America, Britain, France, nobody wanted Jews anywhere, and they were being persecuted in Central Europe and eventually would be massacred in large numbers. So the Arab effort to pressure the British to prevent Jews reaching Palestine's safe shores contributed indirectly to the slaughter of many Jews in Europe because they couldn't get to anywhere, and they couldn't get to Palestine because the Arabs were busy attacking Jews in Palestine and attacking the British to make sure they didn't allow Jews to reach this safe haven. That's important. The second thing is, of course, there's no point in belittling the fact that the Palestinian Arab National Movement's leader, Hussein, worked for the Nazis in the 1940s. He got a salary from the German foreign ministry, he raised troops among Muslims in Bosnia for the SS, and he broadcast to the Arab world calling for the murder of the Jews in the Middle East. This is

what he did. And the Arabs since then have been trying to whitewash Hussein's role. I'm not saying he was the instigator of the Holocaust, but he helped the Germans along in doing what they were doing and supported them in doing that. So this can't be removed from the fact that the Arabs, as you say, paid a price for the Holocaust, but they also participated in various ways in helping it happen.

Lex Fridman

Mouin?

Mouin Rabbani

I'll make two points. The first is you mentioned [inaudible 01:41:27] Hussein and his collaboration with the Nazis. Entirely legitimate point to raise. But I think one can also say definitively, had Hussein never existed, the Holocaust would've played out precisely as it did.

Benny Morris

Certainly. Certainly.

Mouin Rabbani

As far as Palestinian opposition to Jewish emigration to Palestine during the 1930s is concerned, it was of a different character than, for example, British and American rejection of Jewish immigration -

Mouin Rabbani

- an American rejection of Jewish immigration. They just didn't want Jews on their soil.

Benny Morris

Objectively, it helped the Germans kill the Jews.

Mouin Rabbani

In the Palestinian case, their opposition to Jewish immigration was to prevent the transformation of their homeland into a Jewish state that would dispossess them, and I think that's an important distinction to make. The other point I wanted to make is we've spent the past several hours talking about Zionism, transfer, and so on, but I think there's a more fundamental aspect to this, which is that Zionism, I think, would have emerged and disappeared as yet one more utopian political project had it not been for the British, what the preeminent Palestinian historian, Walid Khalidi, has termed the British Shield, because I think without the British sponsorship, we wouldn't be having this discussion today. The British sponsored Zionism for a very simple reason, which is that during World War I, the Ottoman armies attempted to march on the Suez Canal. Suez Canal was the jugular vein of the British Empire between Europe and India, and the British came to the conclusion that they needed to secure the Suez Canal from any threat. And as the British have done so

often in so many places, how do you deal with this? Well, you bring in a foreign minority, implant them amongst a hostile population, and establish a protectorate over them. I don't think a Jewish state in Palestine had been part of British intentions, and the Balfour Declaration very specifically speaks about a Jewish national home in Palestine, in other words, a British protectorate. Things ended up taking a different course, and I think the most important development was World War II, and I think this had maybe less to do with the Holocaust and more to do with the effective bankruptcy of the United Kingdom during that war, and its inability to sustain its global empire. It ended up giving up India, ended up giving up Palestine, and it's in that context, I think, that we need to see the emergence of a Jewish state in Palestine, and again, a Jewish state means a state in which the Jewish community enjoys not only a demographic majority, but an uncontested demographic majority, an uncontested territorial hegemony, and uncontested political supremacy. And that is also why after 1948, the nascent Israeli state confiscated, I believe, up to 90% of lands that had been previously owned by Palestinians who became citizens of Israel. It is why the new Israeli state imposed a military government on its population of Palestinian citizens between 1948 and 1966. It is why the Israeli state effectively reduced the Palestinians living within the Israeli state, as citizens of the Israeli state, to second class citizens, on the one hand, promoting Jewish nationalism and Jewish nationalist parties, on the other hand, doing everything within its power to suppress and eliminate Palestinian or Arab nationalist movements. And that's why today there's a consensus among all major human rights organizations that Israel is an apartheid state, what the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem describes a regime of Jewish supremacy between the river and the sea.

Lex Fridman

You're really tempting a response from the other side on the last few sentences. We'll talk -

Benny Morris

Propaganda, yeah, okay.

Lex Fridman

We'll talk about the claims of apartheid and so on. It's a fascinating discussion, we need to have it. Norm.

Norman Finkelstein

On the question of the responsibility of the Palestinian Arabs for the Nazi Holocaust, direct or indirect, I consider that an absurd claim, as [inaudible 01:46:46] said, and I quoted him, "The entire Western world turned its back on the Jews to somehow focus on the Palestinians," it strikes me as completely ridiculous. Number two, as Mouin said, there's a perfectly understandable reason why Palestinian Arabs wouldn't want Jews because in their minds, and not irrationally, these Jews intended to create a Jewish state, which would quite likely have resulted in their expulsion. I'm a very generous person. I've actually taken in a

homeless person for two and a half years, but if I knew in advance that that homeless person was going to try to turn me out of my apartment, I would think 10,000 times before I took him in. As far as the actual complicity of the Palestinian Arabs, if you look at Raul Hilberg's three volume classic work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, he has in those 1,000+ pages, one sentence on the role of the mufti of Jerusalem, and that I think is probably an overstatement, but we'll leave it aside. The only two points I would make aside from the Holocaust point is number one, I do think the transfer discussion is useful because it indicates that there was a rational reason behind the Arab resistance to Jewish or Zionist immigration to Palestine, the fear of territorial displacement and dispossession. And number two, there are two issues. One is the history, and the second is being responsible for your words. Now, some people accuse me of speaking very slowly, and they're advised on YouTube to turn up the speed twice to three times whenever I'm on. One of the reasons I speak slowly is because I attach value to every word I say, and it is disconcerting, disorienting, where you have a person who's produced a voluminous corpus, rich in insights, and rich in archival sources who seems to disown each and every word that you pluck from that corpus by claiming that it's either out of context or it's cherry-picking. Words count, and I agree with Lex, everybody has the right to rescind what they've said in the past, but what you cannot claim is that you didn't say what you said.

Benny Morris

I'll stick to the history, not the current propaganda. 1917, the Zionist movement began way before the British supported the Zionist movement for decades. In 1917, the British jumped in and issued the Balfour Declaration supporting the emergence of a Jewish national home in Palestine, which most people understood to mean eventual Jewish statehood in Palestine. Most people understood that in Britain and among the Zionists and among the Arabs, but the British declared the Balfour Declaration or issued the Balfour Declaration, not only because of imperial self-interest, and this is what you're basically saying, they had the imperial interests, a buffer state which would protect the Suez Canal from the East. The British also were motivated by idealism, and this incidentally is how Balfour described the reasoning behind issuing the declaration. And he said, "The Western world, Western Christendom owes the Jews a great debt," both for giving the world and the West, if you like, social values as embodied in the Bible, social justice and all sorts of other things. And the Christian world owes the Jews because it persecuted them for 2,000 years. This debt we're now beginning to repay with the 1917 declaration favoring Zionism, but it's also worth remembering that the Jews weren't proxies or attached to the British imperial endeavor. They were happy to receive British support in 1917 and then subsequently when the British ruled Palestine for 20, 30 years, but they weren't part of the British imperial design or mission. They wanted a state for themselves. The Jews happy to have the British support them, happy to date to have the Americans support Israel, but it's not because we're stooges or extensions of American imperial interests. The British incidentally always described in Arab narratives of propaganda as consistent supporters of Zionism, they weren't. The first British rulers in Palestine, 1917, 1920 -

Mouin Rabbani

Herbert Samuel.

Benny Morris

No, before Herbert Samuel. Samuel came in 1920. The British ruled there for three years previously, and most of the leaders, the British generals and so on who were in Palestine were anti-Zionists. And subsequently, in the 20s and 30s, the British occasionally curbed Zionist immigration to Palestine, and in 1939 switched horses and supported the Arab National Movement and not Zionism. They turned anti-Zionist and basically said, "You Arabs will rule Palestine within the next 10 years. This is what we're giving you by limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine," but the Arabs didn't actually understand what they were being given on the silver platter Hussein again, and he said, "No, no, we can't accept the British White Paper of May 1939, which had given the Arabs everything they wanted basically, self-determination in an Arab majority state. So, what I'm saying is the British at some point did support the Zionist enterprise, but at other points were less consistent in the support. And in 1939 until 1948, when they didn't vote even for partition for Jewish statehood in Palestine in the UN resolution, they didn't support Zionism during the last decade of the mandate. It's worth remembering that.

Mouin Rabbani

I'd like to respond to that. Speaking of propaganda, I find it simply impossible to accept that Balfour, who as British Prime Minister in 1905, was a chief sponsor of the Aliens Act, which was specifically -

Benny Morris

He changed his mind.

Mouin Rabbani

- Which was specifically designed to keep persecuted Eastern European Jews out of the streets of the UK and who was denounced as an antisemite by the entire British Jewish establishment. A decade later, all of a sudden -

Benny Morris

Changed his mind.

Mouin Rabbani

People changed their minds, but when the changing of the mind just coincidentally happens to coincide with the British imperial interest, I think perhaps the transformation is a little more superficial than he's being given credit for. It was clearly a British imperial venture, and if there had been no threat to the Suez Canal during World War I, regardless of what Balfour would've thought about the Jews and their contribution to history and their persecution and so on, there would've been no Balfour Declaration.

Steven Bonnell

May I ask real quick, it's a question on that, why did the British ever cap immigration then from Jews to that area at all?

Mouin Rabbani

Well, we're talking now about 19 -

Benny Morris

20s and 30s.

Steven Bonnell

But I'm saying that if the whole goal was just to be an imperialist project, there were terrorist attacks from Jewish-

Mouin Rabbani

Yes, but you're... I'll answer you.

Steven Bonnell

In the 40s.

Mouin Rabbani

And we're talking now about 1917, and as I mentioned earlier, I don't think the British had a Jewish state in mind. That's why they used the term Jewish national home. I think what they wanted was a British protectorate, loyal to and dependent upon the British. I think an outstanding review of British policy towards these issues during the mandate has been done by Martin Bunton of the University of Victoria, and he basically makes the argument that once the British realized the mess they were in, certainly by the late 20s, early 30s, they recognized the mess they were in, the irreconcilable differences, and basically pursued a policy of just muddling on, and muddling on in the context of British rule in Palestine, whose overall purpose was to serve for the development of Zionist institutions, Yishuv's economy and so on, meant even if the British were not self-consciously doing this, preparing the groundwork for the eventual establishment of the Jewish state. I don't know if that answers your question.

Benny Morris

Except they did turn anti-Zionist in 1939.

Mouin Rabbani

Yes, of course [inaudible 01:56:30].

Benny Morris

And maintained -

Mouin Rabbani

They were being shot off by [inaudible 01:56:33] -

Benny Morris

- that Zionist. No, no, before they were being shot off, but maintain that anti-Zionist posture until 1948.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay.

Mouin Rabbani

And if I may, just also one point, you mentioned Hajj Amin al-Husseini during World... Entirely legitimate, but what I would also point out is that you had a Zionist organization, the Lehi -

Benny Morris

300 people.

Mouin Rabbani

300 people, one of whom happened to become an Israeli prime minister, an Israeli foreign minister, a speaker of Israeli parliament-

Norman Finkelstein

Maybe you should give his name.

Mouin Rabbani

Yitzhak Shamir proposing an alliance with Nazi Germany in 1941.

Benny Morris

Shamir proposed a Nazi -

Mouin Rabbani

Well, no, the Lehi proposed -

Benny Morris

Some people in the Lehi proposed -

Mouin Rabbani

Of which Shamir was a prominent leader.

Benny Morris

This is a red herring also.

Mouin Rabbani

No, no. Well, if he's a red herring, Hajj Amin al-Husseini is a red whale, I'm sorry.

Benny Morris

The Lehi was an unimportant organization in the Yishuv. 300 people versus 30,000 belonged to the Haganah, so it was not a very important organization. It's true, before the Holocaust actually began, they wanted allies against the British where they could find them and they -

Mouin Rabbani

We're talking 1941 here, not 1931.

Benny Morris

1940.

Mouin Rabbani

'41 from what I recall.

Benny Morris

1940, they approached the German emissary in Istanbul or something.

Mouin Rabbani

And if I may, proposed an alliance with Nazi Germany on what the Lehi described as on the basis of shared ideological principles.

Benny Morris

They didn't share ideological -

Mouin Rabbani

Well, they said they did.

Norman Finkelstein

They said it.

Benny Morris

They did revile -

Norman Finkelstein

Why are you doing these things? Of course, they said that.

Benny Morris

The Lehi was reviled by the majority -

Norman Finkelstein

You know the state, but you know the -

Benny Morris

The Lehi was reviled.

Norman Finkelstein

You know what the statement said on the basis of a shared ideology. Why do you say no?

Benny Morris

The Lehi people were Nazi, that you say?

Norman Finkelstein

I'm saying that they said -

Benny Morris

No, you're saying that. Forget statements, you like to quote things, but where they -

Norman Finkelstein

I do like to quote things, it's called facts.

Benny Morris

Where are the Lehi Nazis? That's what I'm asking.

Norman Finkelstein

What did he just say?

Benny Morris

Some of them supported Stalin, incidentally.

Norman Finkelstein

He's saying that the basis of the pact was there agreement on ideology.

Benny Morris

There wasn't any pact. They suggested, they proposed an agreement.

Norman Finkelstein

Right, and what did the agreement say?

Benny Morris

They wanted arms against the British, that's what they wanted.

Norman Finkelstein

What did the agreement say?

Mouin Rabbani

Well, that's what Hajj Amin al-Husseini wanted also. That's what -

Benny Morris

No, no, but they didn't -

Mouin Rabbani

- others in India -

Benny Morris

Lehi people didn't work in Berlin helping the Nazi regime.

Mouin Rabbani

It's what the IRA wanted also.

Benny Morris

No, but this is what Hajj Amin al-Husseini did. You know that he was an antisemite. You've probably read some of his works. He wasn't just anti-British.

Mouin Rabbani

Yes, and -

Benny Morris

He was also antisemitic. He had a common ground with Hitler. It's as simple as that.

Mouin Rabbani

I think we can agree -

Norman Finkelstein

Not every antisemite is a Hitlerite.

Mouin Rabbani

I think we could -

Norman Finkelstein

That part -

Steven Bonnell

He literally worked with the Nazis to recruit people. He wasn't just a guy posting or -

Norman Finkelstein

And he was an absolutely revolting, disgusting human being -

Benny Morris

There's something happening here.

Steven Bonnell

But the problem is you're saying that Hussein was his influence... You're saying the move [inaudible 01:59:28] -

Norman Finkelstein

I don't even understand, of all the crimes you want to ascribe to the Palestinian people, trying to blame them directly-indirectly, indirectly, or indirectly, three times the move for the Nazi Holocaust is completely lunatic.

Steven Bonnell

Hold on. Wait, he's not blaming them for the Holocaust. He's saying that from the perspective -

Norman Finkelstein

Of course he -

Benny Morris

No, no, no.

Steven Bonnell

Wait, wait, wait, no, he's saying that from the perspective of Jews in the region, Palestinians would've been part of the -

Norman Finkelstein

That's not what he's saying.

Steven Bonnell

That is exactly what he said.

Norman Finkelstein

You have not read him. I've read him.

Steven Bonnell

You've read him and you don't understand him.

Norman Finkelstein

You've read -

Steven Bonnell

He's right here.

Norman Finkelstein

Believe me, I'm a lot more literate than you, Mr. Barelli.

Steven Bonnell

I'm going to believe the guy that wrote the stuff.

Norman Finkelstein

You read what Wikipedia said.

Steven Bonnell

That's great, and you don't even speak Hebrew and you call yourself an Israeli historian.

Norman Finkelstein

[inaudible 02:00:11].

Steven Bonnell

[inaudible 02:00:10] different grounds.

Mouin Rabbani

If I can just respond to you -

Steven Bonnell

No, no, I'm just saying that there were two tricks -

Norman Finkelstein

You said nothing, as you always do.

Steven Bonnell

That's fine. There were two tricks that are being played here that I think is interesting. One is, you guys claim that the Lehi was trying to forge an alliance with Nazi Germany because of a shared ideology.

Mouin Rabbani

That's what they said.

Steven Bonnell

Yeah, but hold on. No, no, no, no, wait, wait, wait, no, no, it's about what you said. You brought that up to imply that Zionism must be inexorably linked -

Norman Finkelstein

That's a fact.

Mouin Rabbani

I'm sorry. No, you're putting words in my mouth.

Steven Bonnell

Wait. Well, then what was the purpose of saying that the Lehi claimed that... The Lehi, who were a small group of people that were reviled by many in Israel [inaudible 02:00:44]-

Benny Morris

Not many, by everybody practically. They were called terrorists.

Steven Bonnell

[inaudible 02:00:47].

Benny Morris

The Zionist movement called them terrorists.

Mouin Rabbani

Yes and [inaudible 02:00:51]-

Benny Morris

And hunted them.

Steven Bonnell

[inaudible 02:00:52] shared ideology come?

Mouin Rabbani

Shamir called himself a terrorist. They were so irrelevant that their leader ended up being kicked upstairs to the leader of the Israeli parliament -

Benny Morris

That's Israeli [inaudible 02:01:02] in.

Mouin Rabbani

- to Israeli foreign minister -

Steven Bonnell

And Begin was also a part -

Mouin Rabbani

Yes, you want to characterize him as irrelevant as well, go ahead.

Steven Bonnell

No, characterize him as relevant or irrelevant based on what happens decades later. The timeline matters. The question is, what is the point of saying that the Lehi tried to forge an alliance with Nazi Germany based on [inaudible 02:01:19]?

Norman Finkelstein

[inaudible 02:01:19] the fact that it's relevant is bringing up the mufti of Jerusalem and trying to blame the Holocaust [inaudible 02:01:25]-

Steven Bonnell

No one [inaudible 02:01:26] Holocaust [inaudible 02:01:28].

Benny Morris

The mufti was the leader of the Palestine Arab National Movement. The Lehi was 300 people.

Norman Finkelstein

And he had as much to do with the Nazi Holocaust as I did.

Benny Morris

No, he recruited people for the SS. How can you get away from that?

Norman Finkelstein

No, he recruited soldiers in the Balkans, mostly Kosovars, which was disgusting. I have no doubt about that, but he had one [inaudible 02:01:50]-

Benny Morris

He was [inaudible 02:01:50] plenty with the foreign ministers saying, "Don't let the Jews out."

Norman Finkelstein

[inaudible 02:01:54].

Mouin Rabbani

Can I say -

Norman Finkelstein

[inaudible 02:01:55].

Benny Morris

The Italian foreign minister receive letters from Hussein during the Holocaust, "Don't let the Jews out." I'm not saying he was a major architect of the Holocaust.

Norman Finkelstein

He wasn't even minor, one sentence.

Mouin Rabbani

If we're agreed, that Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, collaborated with the Nazis during World War II and actively sought their sponsorship, why is it irrelevant -

Benny Morris

And probably wanted the destruction of European Jewry.

Mouin Rabbani

He probably wanted a lot of things.

Benny Morris

Okay.

Mouin Rabbani

If that's relevant, why is it irrelevant that a prime minister of Israel -

Benny Morris

Not prime minister. In 1941, he wasn't prime minister of Israel. He was a leader of a very small terrorist group.

Mouin Rabbani

So do you contend -

Benny Morris

Denounced as terrorist by the mainstream of Zionism.

Mouin Rabbani

Do you consider it irrelevant that many years ago, Mahmoud Abbas wrote a doctoral thesis, which is basically tantamount -

Benny Morris

Show me something about Mahmoud Abbas, but I didn't bring it up, you're the one who's bringing it up.

Mouin Rabbani

Yes, do you consider that [inaudible 02:02:58]-

Benny Morris

Belittling the Holocaust, that's what you're saying. The president of the Palestinian National Authority belittled the Holocaust saying it didn't happen, or only a few Jews died.

Mouin Rabbani

I think that's a fair characterization of Mahmoud Abbas.

Benny Morris

But I didn't bring it up.

Mouin Rabbani

I brought it up because my question is, then why is Shamir's antecedence irrelevant?

Benny Morris

He was a terrorist leader of a very small, marginal group -

Mouin Rabbani

Who became -

Benny Morris

Hajj Amin al-Husseini was the head of the movement at the time. There's no comparison.

Steven Bonnell

Also, the point of bringing Hussein -

Mouin Rabbani

There's no -

Steven Bonnell

The point of bringing up Hussein's stuff wasn't to say that he was a great further of the Holocaust, it's that he might've been a great further in the prevention of Jews fleeing to go to Palestine to escape the Holocaust.

Mouin Rabbani

Yes, but the point I made -

Steven Bonnell

That was the point.

Mouin Rabbani

And I explained why I think that's not an entirely accurate characterization. And then I wanted to make another point, if it's legitimate to bring up his role during World War II, why is it illegitimate to bring up a man who would become Israel's speaker of parliament, foreign minister? And also -

Benny Morris

He was a young terrorist.

Mouin Rabbani

And was also responsible for the murder of the United Nations' first international envoy, Folke Bernadotte, why is all that irrelevant? I don't understand.

Steven Bonnell

I think that the reason why he was brought up was because Jewish people in this time period would've viewed it as there was a prevention of Jews leaving Europe because of the Palestinians pressuring the British to put a curb that 75,000 immigration limit, yes, but it's not about them furthering the Holocaust or being an architect, major, minor player in the Holocaust. He was a major player in that region, so if you wanted to bring up -

Mouin Rabbani

Benny Morris made the specific claim that the Palestinians played an indirect role in the Holocaust.

Steven Bonnell

The indirect role would've been the prevention of people escaping from Europe.

Mouin Rabbani

Yes, and my response to that is, first of all, I disagree with that characterization, but second of all -

Benny Morris

How can you disagree with that? They forced the British to prevent immigration of Jews from Europe and reaching safe shores in Palestine. That's what they did, and they knew that the Jews were being persecuted in Europe.

Mouin Rabbani

Was Palestine the only spot of land on Earth?

Benny Morris

Yes, basically that was the problem. The Jews couldn't immigrate anywhere else.

Mouin Rabbani

What about your great friends in Britain, the architects of the Balfour Declaration?

Benny Morris

By the late 1930s, they weren't -

Mouin Rabbani

What about the United States?

Benny Morris

- happy to take in Jews and the Americans weren't happy to take in Jews.

Mouin Rabbani

And why are Palestinians, who were not Europeans, who had zero role in the rise of Nazism, who had no relation to any of this, why are they somehow uniquely responsible for what happened in Europe and uniquely culpable?

Benny Morris

[inaudible 02:05:41] the only safe haven for Jews, that's all.

Norman Finkelstein

Oh, really? The United States wasn't a potential safe haven? The only one was Palestine.

Benny Morris

At the time.

Norman Finkelstein

The United States had no room from the Atlantic to the Pacific for Jews?

Benny Morris

It did have room, but it didn't want Jews.

Norman Finkelstein

So, that wasn't the only safe haven.

Mouin Rabbani

Shouldn't you be focusing your anger and outrage -

Benny Morris

America should be blamed for not letting Jews in during the 30s and 40s.

Norman Finkelstein

They are blamed, but nobody blames them for the Holocaust.

Benny Morris

Well, indirectly -

Norman Finkelstein

I've never heard it said that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was indirectly responsible for the Holocaust. I never heard that. Now, maybe it's in Israeli literature because the Israelis have gone mad. Yes, your prime minister said the whole idea of the gas chambers came from the mufti of Jerusalem.

Benny Morris

That's nonsense. We all know that's nonsense.

Norman Finkelstein

But we also know that Netanyahu said it.

Benny Morris

Netanyahu says so many things, which are absurd [inaudible 02:06:36]-

Norman Finkelstein

And he happens to be the prime minister [inaudible 02:06:38]-

Mouin Rabbani

[inaudible 02:06:38] serving prime minister of Israel.

Benny Morris

I can't be responsible -

Mouin Rabbani

You're not responsible for them, but it is relevant that he's the longest serving prime minister of Israel.

Benny Morris

Unfortunately, it says something about the Israeli public, I agree.

Mouin Rabbani

Yes, and he gets elected, not despite saying such things, but because he says such.

Benny Morris

His voters don't care about Hajj Amin al-Husseini or Hitler, they know nothing about -

Mouin Rabbani

They will be [inaudible 02:07:00].

Benny Morris

His base know nothing about anything, and he can say what he likes and they'll say yes, or they don't care if he says these things.

Mouin Rabbani

You may well be right, but anyway, not to beat a dead horse, but I still don't understand -

Benny Morris

Let's not beat a dead horse, you're right.

Mouin Rabbani

I'll just conclude by saying I don't understand why the Mufti of Jerusalem is relevant -

Benny Morris

He is relevant, but -

Benny Morris

The head of the national -

Mouin Rabbani

- Yitzhak Shamir is not relevant?

Benny Morris

Shamir wasn't the head of the national movement. He represented 100, or 200, or 300 gunmen who were considered terrorists by the Zionist movement at the time. The fact that 30 years later he becomes prime minister, that's the crux of history.

Mouin Rabbani

And his history is not -

Benny Morris

Hajj Amin al-Husseini was the head of the Palestine Arab National Movement at the time.

Mouin Rabbani

Anyway -

Benny Morris

What can you do?

Mouin Rabbani

I think we're speaking past each other and I'll leave it there.

Benny Morris

We're not, I'm talking facts.

Lex Fridman

Let's move to the modern day and we'll return to history, maybe '67 and other important moments, but let's look to today, in the recent months, October 7th. Let me ask sort of a pointed question. Was October 7th attacks by Hamas on Israel genocidal? Was it an act of ethnic cleansing? Just so we lay out the moral calculus that we are engaged in, maybe -

Benny Morris

The problem with October 7th is this, the Hamas fighters who invaded Southern Israel were sent, ordered to murder, rape, and do all the nasty things that they did, and they killed some 1,200 Israelis that day and abducted them as we know, something like 250, mostly civilians, also some soldiers, took them back to dungeons in Gaza, but they were motivated not just by the words of their current leader in the Gaza Strip, but by their ideology, which is embedded in their charter from 1988, if I remember correctly, and that charter is genocidal. It says that the Jews must be eradicated basically from the land of Israel, from Palestine. The Jews are described there as sons of apes and pigs. The Jews are a base people, killers of prophets, and they should not exist in Palestine. It doesn't say that they necessarily should be murdered all around the world, the Hamas charter, but certainly the Jews should be eliminated from Palestine. And this is the driving ideology behind the massacre of the Jews on October 7th, which brought down on the Gaza Strip, and I think with the intention by the Hamas of the Israeli counter offensive because they knew that that counter offensive would result in many Palestinian dead because the Hamas fighters and their weaponry and so on were embedded in the population in Gaza, and they hoped to benefit from this in the eyes of world public opinion as Israel chased these Hamas people and their ammunition dumps and so on and killed lots of Palestinian civilians in the process. All of this was understood by Sinwar, by the head of the Hamas, and he strived for that, but initially he wanted to kill as many Jews as he could in the border areas around the Gaza Strip.

Mouin Rabbani

I'll respond directly to the points you made, and then I'll leave it to Norm to bring in the historical context. That Hamas charter is from the 90s, I think?

Benny Morris

1988.

Mouin Rabbani

1988, so it's from the 80s. I think your characterization of that charter as antisemitic is indisputable. I think your characterization of that charter as genocidal is off the mark.

Benny Morris

It's implicit.

Mouin Rabbani

And more importantly, that charter has been superseded by a new charter. In fact, it has been... Well, there is -

Benny Morris

There is no new charter. There is an explanation, a statement [inaudible 02:11:06]-

Norman Finkelstein

2018, a political statement.

Benny Morris

2000 and something.

Norman Finkelstein

2018.

Benny Morris

2018, supposedly clarifying things which are in the charter, but it doesn't actually step back from what the charter says, eliminate Israel, eliminate the Jews from the land of Israel.

Mouin Rabbani

In 2018, the Hamas charter, if we look at the current version of the charter -

Benny Morris

It's not called a charter. You're calling it a charter. It wasn't. The only thing called the charter is what was issued in 1988 by Yassin himself.

Mouin Rabbani

Anyway, it makes a clear distinction between Jews and Zionists in 2018. Now, you can choose to dismiss it, believe it, it's sincere, it's insincere, whatever -

Benny Morris

Insincere is probably the right word.

Mouin Rabbani

Secondly, I'm really unfamiliar with fighters who consult these kinds of documents before they go on -

Benny Morris

They're brought up on this in their education system. In the kindergarten, they're told, "Kill the Jews." They practice with make-believe guns and uniforms when they're five years old in the kindergartens of the Hamas -

Mouin Rabbani

At the instruction of the commissioner-general of UNRWA, right?

Benny Morris

I didn't say that. I said the Hamas has kindergartens and summer camps in which they trained to kill Jews, children aged five and six.

Mouin Rabbani

Secondly, you keep saying Jews, to which I would respond -

Benny Morris

They use the word Jews.

Mouin Rabbani

To which I would respond that Hamas does not have a record of deliberately targeting Jews who are not Israelis. And in fact, it also doesn't have a record of deliberately targeting either Jews or Israelis outside Israel and Palestine, so all this talk of -

Benny Morris

Unlike the Hezbollah, which has started targeting Jews outside of Palestine.

Mouin Rabbani

We're talking about October 7th and Hamas. If you'd also like to speak about Hezbollah, let's get to that separately if you don't mind. So again, genocidal, well, if that term is going to be discussed, my first response would be let's talk about potentially genocidal actions against Israelis rather than against Jews for the reasons that I just mentioned. And again, I find this constant conflation of Jews, Israel, Zionism, to be a bit disturbing. Secondly, I think there are quite a few indications in the factual record that raise serious questions about the accusations of the genocidal intent and genocidal practice of what happened on October 7th. And my final point would be, I don't think I should take your word for it, I don't think you

should take my word for it. I think what we need here is a proper independent international investigation, and the reason we need that -

Benny Morris

Of what?

Mouin Rabbani

Of genocide during this conflict, whether by Palestinians on October 7th or Israel thereafter, and the reason that we need such an investigation is because Hamas is... There won't be any hearings on what Hamas did on October 7th at the International Court of Justice because the International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide deals only with states and not with movements. I think the international criminal court, and specifically its current prosecutor, Karim Khan lacks any and all credibility. He's been an absolute failure at his job. He's just been sitting his backside for years on this file. And I think I would point out that Hamas has called for independent investigations of all these allegations. Israel has categorically rejected any international investigation, of course, fully supported by the United States. And I think what is required is to have credible investigations of these things because I don't think you're going to convince me, I don't think I'm going to convince you, and this is two people sitting across the table from each other.

Benny Morris

No, there's certain things you don't even have to investigate. You know how many citizens, civilians died in the October 7th assault -

Mouin Rabbani

Yes, but that's not -

Benny Morris

You know that there are lots of allegations of rape. I don't know how persuaded you are of those. They did find bodies without heads, which is -

Mouin Rabbani

There were no beheadings of infants.

Benny Morris

There were some beheadings, apparently.

Norman Finkelstein

The Israelis didn't even claim that in the document they submitted before the ICJ. Go read what your government submitted. It never mentioned beheadings.

Benny Morris

Well, as far as I know, there were some people who were beheaded, but -

Norman Finkelstein

We could bring it up right now.

Benny Morris

You also deny that there were rapes there.

Norman Finkelstein

I didn't deny. I said I've not seen convincing evidence that confirms it. I've said that from day one, and I'll say it today, four and a half months later.

Benny Morris

Do you know that they killed eight or 900 civilians in their assault?

Norman Finkelstein

Absolutely, that seems to me indisputable.

Benny Morris

- 900 civilians in the assault -

Norman Finkelstein

Absolutely. That seems to me indisputable.

Benny Morris

Oh, okay. Well, I'm glad that you're considering something -

Norman Finkelstein

I've said that from day one.

Steven Bonnell

Well, to be clear, you haven't. You did a debate - I don't remember the talk show, but you seemed to imply that there was a lot of crossfire and then it might've been the IDF that had killed a lot of -

Norman Finkelstein

I said that there is no question because the names were published in Haaretz. There is no question that roughly of the 1200 people killed, 800 of them were civilians -

Benny Morris

850.

Norman Finkelstein

850, fine. So I never said that, but then I said, "No, we don't know exactly how they were killed." But 800 civilians killed, no, 850, no question there. And I also said on repeated occasions, there cannot be any doubt, in my opinion as of now with the available evidence, that Hamas was responsible for significant atrocities, and I made sure to include the plural.

Steven Bonnell

There's a lot of tricky language being employed here. Do you think of the 850 -

Norman Finkelstein

There's nothing tricky. It's called attaching value to words and not talking like a motormouth. I am very careful about qualifying because that's what language is about.

Steven Bonnell

That's great. Then let me just ask a clarifying question, do you firmly believe that the majority of the 850 civilians were killed by Hamas?

Norman Finkelstein

My view is, even if it were half, 400 is a huge number by any reckoning -

Benny Morris

Why -

Steven Bonnell

Okay, wait. You didn't -

Norman Finkelstein

I said even if -

Steven Bonnell

Wait, wait, wait -

Norman Finkelstein

Because Benny, because Professor Morris, I don't know. I agree with Mouin Rabbani, I'm not sure if he concedes the 400. I'll say -

Benny Morris

Why 400? Whoever thought up the number, 400? 800 of the 850 were slaughtered by Hamas. Maybe a couple of individuals were killed in Israeli action -

Norman Finkelstein

I don't know. Professor Morris -

Steven Bonnell

You're saying from day one, you believed this particular thing, and you clearly don't. You clearly don't believe this thing -

Norman Finkelstein

I said from day one day one -

Steven Bonnell

You said people died. That's not controversial -

Mouin Rabbani

Wait. Hold on, hold on. If I may -

Steven Bonnell

That's not controversial.

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Bonnell, I attach value to words -

Steven Bonnell

Yes, you've said that. If you value them, stop repeating them so much.

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Bonnell, please slow down the speech and attempt to listen. When I was explicitly asked by Piers Morgan, I said there can be no question that Hamas committed atrocities -

Steven Bonnell

Committed atrocities. I've heard this, yes.

Norman Finkelstein

- on October 7th. If you want me to pin down a number, I can't do that -

Steven Bonnell

I didn't ask you to pin down a number. You can listen to what I'm -

Norman Finkelstein

You didn't ask me?

Steven Bonnell

No. My question is -

Norman Finkelstein

Okay.

Steven Bonnell

I'll ask a very precise -

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Bonnell, I cannot speak to you because you're not -

Mouin Rabbani

Sorry, excuse me -

Steven Bonnell

It's a very easy question -

Mouin Rabbani

If I understood your question correctly -

Steven Bonnell

My question is, do you think the majority of the people that were killed on October 7th, the civilians, were killed by Hamas, or are we subscribing to the idea that the IDF killed hundreds, four or 500 in the crossfire?

Mouin Rabbani

No, but let me explain why that's a difficult question to answer. The total number of civilians killed was 800-850. We know that Hamas is responsible, probably for the majority of those killings. We also know that there were killings by Islamic Jihad. We also know -

Benny Morris

No, we're bunching together the Islamic Jihad and Hamas. That's splitting hairs now -

Mouin Rabbani

But his question was specifically about -

Benny Morris

No, but he means the raiders. He means the raiders.

Steven Bonnell

I'm speaking in opposition to the conspiracy theory that people like... Do you prefer Norm or Professor Finkelstein? I don't know, how do you prefer to be addressed?

Mouin Rabbani

Well, it's not a conspiracy theory there because it's -

Steven Bonnell

Well, the conspiracy theory is the idea that the IDF killed the majority of them.

Mouin Rabbani

It's not a conspiracy theory -

Steven Bonnell

And there is also a theory that, as Norm pointed out on the show that he was on, that he thought that it was very strange that, given how reputable Israeli services are when it comes to sending ambulances, retrieving bodies, he thought it was very strange that that number was continually being adjusted -

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah, I did find it -

Mouin Rabbani

And do you know why -

Steven Bonnell

So when you say that in combination with, "Well, I'm not sure how many were killed by Hamas and the IDF" -

Mouin Rabbani

Do you know why the number went down? The number went down because the Israeli authorities were in possession of 200 corpses that were burned to a crisp that they assumed were Israelis who had been killed on October 7th. They later determined that these were in fact Palestinian fighters. Now, how does a Palestinian fighter get burned to a crisp?

Benny Morris

No, you're mixing two things. Some of the bodies, they weren't able to identify, and eventually they ruled that some of them were actually Arab marauders rather than Israeli victims. A few of them also of the Jews were burnt to a crisp and it took them time to work this out, and they came out initially with a slightly higher figure, 1,400 dead, and eventually reduced it to 1,200 dead Israelis -

Mouin Rabbani

And the reason is that a proportion of Israeli civilians killed on October 7th... I don't believe it was a majority. We don't know how many. Some were killed in the crossfire, some were killed by Israeli shellfire, helicopter fire and so on, and the majority were killed by

Palestinians. And of that majority, we don't know. Again, I understood your question is referring specifically to Hamas, which is why I tried to answer it that way. But if you meant generically Palestinians, yes. If you mean specifically Hamas, we don't have a clear breakdown of how many were -

Steven Bonnell

No, I don't mean specifically Hamas. But I just think when you use the word some, that's doing a lot of heavy lifting.

Norman Finkelstein

Who used some?

Steven Bonnell

That's fine. But some can mean anywhere from 1% to 49% -

Norman Finkelstein

Who used some?

Mouin Rabbani

But we don't know.

Lex Fridman

So the numbers here in the details are interesting and important almost from a legal perspective, but if we zoom out, the moral perspective, are Palestinians from Gaza justified in violent resistance?

Mouin Rabbani

Well, Palestinians have the right to resistance. That right includes the right to armed resistance. At the same time, armed resistance is subject to the laws of war, and there are very clear regulations that separate legitimate acts of armed resistance from acts of armed resistance that are not legitimate -

Lex Fridman

The attacks of October 7th, where do they land for you?

Mouin Rabbani

There's been almost exclusive focus on the attacks on civilian population centers and the killings of civilians on October 7th. What is much less discussed to the point of amnesia is that there were very extensive attacks on Israeli military and intelligence facilities on October 7th. I would make a very clear distinction between those two. And secondly, I'm not sure that I would characterize the efforts by Palestinians on October 7th to seize Israeli territory and Israeli population centers as in and of themselves illegitimate.

Benny Morris

You mean attacking Israeli civilians is legitimate?

Mouin Rabbani

No. That's not what I said.

Benny Morris

I didn't understand what you said.

Mouin Rabbani

I think what you had on October 7th was an effort by Hamas to seize Israeli territory and population centers -

Benny Morris

And kill civilians.

Mouin Rabbani

That's not what I said. What I said is, I would not describe the effort to seize Israeli territory as in and of itself illegitimate, as a separate issue from the killing of Israeli civilians in those cases where they had been deliberately targeted. That's very clearly illegitimate.

Benny Morris

Whole families were slaughtered in kibbutzim, many of them left-wingers incidentally who helped Palestinians go to hospitals in Israel and so on, even drove Palestinian cancer patients to hospitals in Israeli -

Mouin Rabbani

Again, I'm making a distinction here -

Benny Morris

But you don't seem to be very condemnatory of what the Hamas did.

Mouin Rabbani

Well, I don't do selective condemnation -

Benny Morris

I'm not talking about selective. I'm talking about -

Mouin Rabbani

I don't do selective outrage.

Benny Morris

- specific condemnation of this specific assault on civilians. I would, for example, condemn Israeli assaults on civilians, deliberate assaults on civilians. I would condemn them, but you're not doing that with the Hamas.

Mouin Rabbani

You know what the issue is?

Benny Morris

What?

Mouin Rabbani

I've been speaking in public now, I would say since the late-1980s and interviewed and so on. I have never on one occasion ever been asked to condemn any Israeli act. When I've been in group discussions, those supporting the Israeli action or perspective, I have never encountered an example where these individuals are asked to condemn what Israel is doing. The demand and obligation of condemnation is exclusively applied, in my personal experience over decades, is exclusively applied to Palestinians -

Benny Morris

No, this is [inaudible 02:25:04] Israel is condemned day and night on every television channel, and has been for the last-

Mouin Rabbani

I'm telling you about personal experience lasting decades -

Norman Finkelstein

You said quote -

Steven Bonnell

Uh-oh. Oh, no.

Norman Finkelstein

I'm trying to quote what you just said. You said -

Benny Morris

I shouldn't have said anything at any [inaudible 02:25:20]

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris?

Benny Morris

Yes.

Norman Finkelstein

You just said, "I would condemn anytime Israel deliberately attacks civilians." The problem, Professor Morris, is, over and over again, you claim in the face of overwhelming evidence that they didn't attack civilians-

Benny Morris

That's not true. I've said Israel has attacked civilians. In [inaudible 02:25:51] Israel attacked civilians, and I've written extensively about it. In Kfar Qasim, they killed civilians, and I've written that. So you're just admitting you're selecting... As Steven says, you cherry-pick. You cherry-pick.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, let's fast-forward. When you were an adult, what did you say about the 1982 Lebanon War?

Benny Morris

What did I say?

Norman Finkelstein

You don't remember? Okay, allow me.

Steven Bonnell

Uh-oh.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay. So it happens that I had no interest in the Israel-Palestine conflict as a young man -

Benny Morris

This is true.

Norman Finkelstein

- until the 1982 Lebanon War.

Benny Morris

Yep. He's lost the passage -

Norman Finkelstein

I'll find it.

Steven Bonnell

Okay, real quick while he's searching for that, you bring up something that's really important that a lot of people don't draw a distinction between, in that there is just causes for war and there is just ways to act within a war, and these two things principally do have a distinction from one another.

Mouin Rabbani

Correct.

Steven Bonnell

However, while I appreciate the recognition of the distinction, the idea that the cause for war that Hamas was engaged in, if we look at their actions in war or the statements that they've made, it doesn't seem like it had to do with the territorial acquisition.

Mouin Rabbani

No, no, no -

Steven Bonnell

By taking land back.

Mouin Rabbani

No, the point I was making was, what was Hamas trying to achieve militarily on October 7th? And I was pointing out that the focus has been very much on Hamas attacks on civilians and atrocities and so on. And I'm not saying those things should be ignored. What I'm saying is that what's getting lost in the shuffle is that there were extensive attacks on military and intelligence facilities. And as far as the other aspects are concerned, because I think either you or Lex asked me about the legitimacy of these attacks, I said I'm unclear whether efforts by Hamas to seize Israeli population centers in and of themselves are illegitimate as opposed to actions that either deliberately targeted Israeli civilians or actions that should reasonably have been expected to result in the killings of Israeli civilians. Those strike me as, by definition, illegitimate, and I want to be very clear about that. I have -

Benny Morris

Illegitimate means you condemn them?

Mouin Rabbani

Illegitimate means they are not legitimate. I have a problem -

Benny Morris

Condemning your side, yes.

Mouin Rabbani

No, not condemning my side. I have a problem with selective outrage and I have a problem with selective condemnation. And as I explained to you a few minutes ago, in my decades of appearing in public and being interviewed, I have never been asked to condemn an Israeli action, I've never been asked for a moral judgment on an Israeli action. Exclusive requests for condemnation has to do with what Palestinians [inaudible 02:29:01] And just as importantly, I'm sure if you watch BBC or CNN, when is the last time an Israeli spokesperson has been asked to condemn an Israeli act? I've never seen it.

Steven Bonnell

I don't think we condemn the Arab side either though, right? I don't think there's any condemnation -

Mouin Rabbani

No. But now that we're talking about Israeli victims, all of a sudden morality is central -

Steven Bonnell

Well, I think the reason why it comes up is because there's no shortage of international condemnation for Israel. As Norm will point out a million times, that there are 50 billion UN resolutions, you've got Amnesty International, you've got multiple bodies of the UN, you've got now this case for the ICJ. So there's no question of if there's condemnation for Israel -

Mouin Rabbani

But sorry, if I can interrupt you, in 1948, the entire world stood behind the establishment of a Jewish state, and the entire world -

Benny Morris

No, except Arab states and the Muslim states. Not the entire world.

Mouin Rabbani

Okay, but I think you know what I mean by that.

Benny Morris

The Western democracies, that's what you're saying. Western democracies supported the establishment of Israel.

Steven Bonnell

My quick question was, you said that you believe that... This is a very short one, you don't have to - you think that there's an argument to be made that the people in Gaza, Hamas and Islamic Jihad or whoever participated had a just cause for war. Maybe they didn't do it in the correct way, but they maybe had a just cause for war, which is -

Mouin Rabbani

I don't think there's a maybe there. The Palestinians have -

Steven Bonnell

Okay, you think they absolutely had a just cause for it.

Mouin Rabbani

Yes.

Steven Bonnell

Do you think that Israel has a just cause for Operation Swords of Iron?

Mouin Rabbani

No, of course not.

Steven Bonnell

Alright. You can say your quote.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay. First of all, on this issue of double standards, which is the one that irks or irritates Mouin, you said that you are not a person of double standards, unlike people like Mouin. You hold high a single standard and you condemn deliberate Israeli attacks on -

Mouin Rabbani

Civilians.

Norman Finkelstein

- civilians. And I would say that's true for the period up till 1967, and I think it's accurate, your account of the First Intifada. There, it seems to me you are in conformity with most mainstream accounts and the case of the First Intifada. Surprisingly, you used Arab human rights sources like Al-Haq, which I think Mouin worked for during the First Intifada. That's true. But then something very strange happens, so let's illustrate it -

Benny Morris

Wait, the something strange which happened is the Arabs rejected Israel's peace offers -

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, wait.

Benny Morris

That's what happened.

Mouin Rabbani

By accepting the Oslo agreements.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah.

Benny Morris

Not the -

Steven Bonnell

By rejecting - he's talking about Camp David and Taba.

Benny Morris

I'm talking about Camp David.

Norman Finkelstein

If we have time, I know the record very well, I'd be very happy to go through it with you, but let's get to those double standards. So, this is what you have to say about Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. You said, "Israel was reluctant to harm civilians, sought to avoid casualties on both sides, and took care not to harm Lebanese and Palestinian civilians." You then went on to acknowledge the massive use of IDF firepower against civilians during the Siege of Beirut which traumatized Israeli society. Morris quickly enters the caveat that Israel "tried to pinpoint military targets, but inevitably many civilians were hit." That's your description of the Lebanon War. As I say, that's when I first got involved in the conflict. I am a voracious reader. I read everything on the Lebanon War. I would say there's not a single account of the Lebanon War in which the estimates are between 15 and 20,000 Palestinian, Lebanese were killed, overwhelmingly civilians, the biggest bloodletting until the current Gaza genocide. Biggest bloodletting. I would say I can't think of a single mainstream account that remotely approximates what you just said. So leaving aside... I can name the books. Voluminous, huge volumes. I'll just take one example. Now you will remember, because I think you served in Lebanon in '82. Am I correct on that?

Benny Morris

Yeah.

Norman Finkelstein

So you will remember that Dov Yermiya kept a war diary. So with your permission, allow me to describe what he wrote during his diary. He writes, "The war machine of the IDF is galloping and trampling over the conquered territory, demonstrating a total insensitivity to the fate of the Arabs who are found in its path. A PLO-run hospital suffered a direct hit. Thousands of refugees are returning to the city. When they arrive at their homes, many of which have been destroyed or damaged, you hear their cries of pain and their howls over the

deaths of their loved ones. The air is permeated with the smell of corpses. Destruction and death are continuing."

Benny Morris

Yeah, point made. The point you're making actually -

Norman Finkelstein

Does that sound like your description of the Lebanon War?

Benny Morris

Forget my description -

Norman Finkelstein

Forget it?

Benny Morris

The point you're making -

Norman Finkelstein

The words are in print. We can't just forget them -

Benny Morris

Let me just finish my sentence. The point you're making, which you somehow forget, is that there are Israelis who strongly criticize their own side and describe how Israelis are doing things which they regard as immoral. You don't find that on the Arab sides -

Norman Finkelstein

I'm talking about you, Mr. Morris. I'm not talking about Dov Yermiya, I'm talking about you, the historian. How did you depict the Lebanon War?

Benny Morris

Because I believe that the Israeli military tried to avoid committing a civilian [inaudible 02:35:18] as I think they fail to do in Gaza now -

Norman Finkelstein

All the accounts by Robert Fisk in Pity the Nation -

Benny Morris

Robert Fisk is a anti-Zionist journalist -

Norman Finkelstein

I know.

Benny Morris

Has always been.

Norman Finkelstein

Right. So that's why you can say with such confidence that you don't condemn deliberate Israeli attacks on civilians -

Mouin Rabbani

Because there weren't any.

Norman Finkelstein

- because there weren't any.

Benny Morris

No, I didn't say there weren't any -

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah, you didn't?

Benny Morris

You agreed that I have condemned Israeli attacks on civilians.

Norman Finkelstein

I never quarrel with facts. Your description of the 1982 War is so shocking, it makes my innards writhe. And then your description of the Second Intifada, your description of Defensive Shield, they were worse than apologetics -

Benny Morris

When Arab suicide bombers were destroying Jews in masses in buses and in restaurants, that's the Second Intifada. Do you remember that?

Norman Finkelstein

You can try everything -

Benny Morris

Suicide bombers in Jerusalem's buses and restaurants, and in Tel Aviv -

Norman Finkelstein

I am completely aware of that, but if you forgot the numbers -

Benny Morris

I don't forget the numbers -

Norman Finkelstein

- it was three to one. The number -

Benny Morris

They killed mostly armed -

Norman Finkelstein

No -

Benny Morris

- Palestinian gunmen.

Norman Finkelstein

That's what you say in your book -

Benny Morris

That's what I say. That's what I think.

Norman Finkelstein

- but that's not what Amnesty International said. That's not what Human Rights Watch said-

Benny Morris

I don't remember what they said.

Norman Finkelstein

I do. That's not what [inaudible 02:36:45] said -

Benny Morris

I don't know whether their figures are right. My figures are right.

Norman Finkelstein

Listen, listen -

Benny Morris

In the Second Intifada, some 4,000 Palestinians were killed, most of them armed people. And 1,000 Israelis were killed, almost all of them [inaudible 02:36:59] civilians.

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris, fantasy, but I'm not going to argue with here. Here's a simple challenge - you said not to look at the camera -

Lex Fridman

Sometimes.

Norman Finkelstein

It scares the people. I'll make the open challenge.

Benny Morris

You are going to scare them.

Norman Finkelstein

No. Professor Morris -

Steven Bonnell

Open challenge.

Norman Finkelstein

- words are in print. I wrote 50 pages analyzing all of your work. I quote, some will say cherry-pick but I think, accurately quote you. Here's a simple challenge. Answer me in print. Answer what I wrote and show where I'm making things up. Answer me in print -

Benny Morris

I'm not familiar. I'm sorry, but I'm not familiar with what you wrote.

Norman Finkelstein

That's no problem. You're a busy man, you're an important historian. You don't have to know everything that's in print, especially by modest publishers. But now you know, and so here's the public challenge. You answer and show where I cherry-picked, where I misrepresented -

Benny Morris

Send me the article, I will -

Norman Finkelstein

Fine, I will, and then we can have a civil scholarly discussion and -

Benny Morris

I'm not sure we will agree, even if I -

Norman Finkelstein

We don't have to agree. It's for the reader to decide, looking at both sides, where this truth stands.

Lex Fridman

Norman, and if I may ask, it's good to discuss ideas that are in the air now as opposed to citing literature that was written in the past as much as possible, because of the listeners were not familiar with the literature. So whatever was written, just express it, condense the key idea, and then we can debate the ideas or discuss the ideas.

Norman Finkelstein

No, there are two aspects. There's this public debate, but there's also written words.

Lex Fridman

Yes. I'm just telling you that you as a academic historian put a lot of value in the written word and I think it is valuable, but in this context -

Norman Finkelstein

He's incidentally not the only historian who puts value to words. I also do, actually. Just so we -

Lex Fridman

Yes, but in this -

Steven Bonnell

More than just one or two sentences at a time.

Lex Fridman

But in this context, just for the educational purpose of teaching people -

Norman Finkelstein

Well, the educational purpose is, why would people [inaudible 02:39:05] what I have to acknowledge? Because I am faithful to the facts. Massive atrocities on October 7th. Why did that happen? And I think that's the problem, the past is erased and we suddenly went from 1948 to October 7th, 2023, and there is a problem there.

Lex Fridman

So first of all, you have complete freedom to backtrack and we'll go there with you. Obviously we can't cover every single year, every single event, but there's probably critical moments in time.

Steven Bonnell

Can I respond to something relating to that, the Lebanon War? I looked at the book that he got this from and what the quote was from. It sounds cold to say it, but war is tragic and civilians die. There is no war that this has not happened in, in the history of all of humankind. The statement that Israel might take care not to target civilians is not

incompatible with a diary entry from someone who said they saw civilians getting killed. I think that sometimes we do a lot of weird games when we talk about international humanitarian law or laws that govern conflict, but we say things like, civilians dying is a war crime, or civilian homes or hospitals getting destroyed is necessarily a war crime, or is necessarily somebody intentionally targeting civilians without making distinctions between military targets or civilian ones. I think that when we analyze different attacks or when we talk about the conduct of the military, it's important to understand, prospectively from the unit of analysis of the actual military committing the acts, what's happening and what are the decisions being made rather than just saying retrospectively, "Oh, well, a lot of civilians died. Not very many military people died, comparatively speaking, so it must have been war crimes," especially when you've got another side, I'll fast-forward to Hamas, that intentionally attempts to induce those same civilian numbers, because Hamas is guilty of any war crime that you would potentially accuse. And this is according to the Amnesty International, people that Norm loves to cite, Hamas is guilty of all of these same war crimes, of them failing to take care of their civilian population, of them essentially utilizing human shields to try to fire rockets, free from attacks -

Norman Finkelstein

Essentially?

Steven Bonnell

Essentially, yes. I'm just saying that, essentially, as in terms of how international law defines it and not how Amnesty International defines it. But Amnesty International describes times of human shielding, but they don't actually apply the correct international legal standard -

Norman Finkelstein

You don't know what's the correct international law -

Steven Bonnell

I know absolutely -

Norman Finkelstein

You haven't a clue -

Steven Bonnell

No, I absolutely do -

Norman Finkelstein

You haven't a clue because you can't find it on Wikipedia. You can't find it on Wikipedia -

Steven Bonnell

But I'm just saying... Believe it or not, Norm, the entire Geneva Convention is all on Wikipedia. It's a wonderful website. But I'm just saying that on the Hamas side, if there's an attempt to induce this type of military activity, attempt to induce civilian harm, that it's not just enough to say, "Well, here's a diary entry where a guy talks about how tragic these attacks are."

Mouin Rabbani

See, I think the problem with your statement is that if you go back and listen to it, the first part of it is, war is hell, civilians die. It's a fact of life. And you state that in a very factual matter. Then when you start talking about Hamas, all of a sudden you've discovered morality and you've discovered condemnation and you've discovered intent, and you are unfortunately far from alone in this. I'll give you - you know who for me is a perfect example?

Steven Bonnell

Wait, hold on. We're [inaudible 02:42:14]. We don't need examples -

Mouin Rabbani

No. Oh, go ahead.

Steven Bonnell

The false equivalency of the two sides is astounding. When Hamas kills civilians in a surprise attack on October 7th, this isn't because they are attempting to target military targets and they happen to stumble into a giant festival of people that -

Mouin Rabbani

Well, they did happen to stumble into it.

Steven Bonnell

They did, but -

Benny Morris

And they killed 300 people in the music festival -

Steven Bonnell

But when they stumbled into it, that wasn't an issue of trying to figure out a military target or not. They weren't failing a distinction. There wasn't a proportionality assessment done. It was just to kill civilians. Even the Amnesty International in 2008 and in 2014, and even today, will continue to say that there's likely types of attacks -

Mouin Rabbani

Look, I don't think you'll find anyone who will deny that Hamas has targeted civilians. You gave the example -

Steven Bonnell

But there's a difference because -

Mouin Rabbani

- of suicide bombings during the Second Intifada. Facts are facts -

Steven Bonnell

Sure, but I'm just saying that the Hamas targeting of innocent civilians is different than the incidental loss of life that occurs when Israel does -

Norman Finkelstein

Whoa, the incidental loss of life -

Mouin Rabbani

Genocide is the intentional mass murder -

Steven Bonnell

Well, genocide is a entirely separate claim.

Mouin Rabbani

Yeah, but the idea that Israel is not in the business of intentionally targeting civilians, I know that's what we're supposed to believe, but the historical record stands pretty clearly -

Steven Bonnell

No, it doesn't. I don't believe it does.

Mouin Rabbani

You've written about it yourself -

Steven Bonnell

Well, when you say historical, do you mean in the 40s to the 60s, or do you mean over the past -

Mouin Rabbani

I would say from the 30s of the last century to the 20s of this century. The way you characterized it, I think the best example of that I've come across during this specific conflict is John Kirby, the White House spokesman. I've named him Tears Tosterone, for a very good reason. When he is talking about Palestinian civilian deaths, war is hell, it's a fact

of life, get used to it. When he was confronted with Israeli civilian deaths on October 7th, he literally broke down in tears in public -

Benny Morris

But he understood that one is deliberate and one isn't. He understood that.

Mouin Rabbani

No, that's what he tried to make us understand.

Benny Morris

No, he was speaking facts. The Hamas guys who attacked the kibbutzim, apart from the attacks on the military sites, when they attacked the kibbutzim, were out to kill civilians. And they killed family after family, house after house. The Israeli attacks on Hamas installations -

Mouin Rabbani

You know better. You know better -

Benny Morris

No, I don't know better. You don't know Israeli pilots, that's the problem-

Norman Finkelstein

Thank God.

Benny Morris

No, you don't know Israeli pilots -

Norman Finkelstein

I know, thank God.

Benny Morris

They believe that they are killing Hamas snakes. They're given certain objectives and that's what they attack. And if the Hamas is hiding behind civilians, civilians die. Simple as that -

Norman Finkelstein

Every time they target a kid, I'm sure they believe it's Hamas.

Benny Morris

[inaudible 02:44:53]

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah. When they killed the four kids on the -

Benny Morris

They believed that they were Hamas snakes -

Norman Finkelstein

I know they believed it. Even though they were diminutive size, even though they were
[inaudible 02:45:03]

Benny Morris

You know from that angle, you don't see the sides -

Norman Finkelstein

No, they saw the sides, but let's see the side -

Steven Bonnell

Oh, I know what he's quoting, correct, but you've lied about this particular instance in the past. Those kids weren't just on the beaches as often stated in articles. Those kids were literally coming out of a previously identified Hamas compound that they had operated from. They literally -

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Borelli -

Steven Bonnell

You could Google it, Mr. Finkelstinker -

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Borelli, with all due respect, you're such a fantastic moron, it's terrifying. That wharf was filled with journalists. There were scores of journalists. That was an old fisherman's shack. What are you talking about? It's so painful to listen to this idiocy -

Steven Bonnell

And to be clear, on the other side, you're implying that the strike was okayed on the Israeli side where they said, "We're just going to kill four Palestinian people today for no reason."

Norman Finkelstein

Hey -

Benny Morris

Do you believe that?

Steven Bonnell

Do you believe that? Do you believe that? [inaudible 02:45:57] journalists, do you think that [inaudible 02:46:00]

Norman Finkelstein

Here we go -

Benny Morris

That they would actually kill four children?

Steven Bonnell

He went answer the question -

Norman Finkelstein

Here we go -

Steven Bonnell

He will never answer that question.

Norman Finkelstein

I will answer the question -

Benny Morris

The pilots were out to kill four children -

Norman Finkelstein

I will even answer the moron's questions -

Steven Bonnell

Because that was a strike, that was a drone strike, so that was approved all the way up the chain that we're going to kill children today. We're going to kill Palestinian children today -

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, you want me to answer or do you want your motormouth to go? Okay, answer. In 2018, there was the Great March of Return in Gaza by all reckonings of human rights organizations and journalists who were there. It was overwhelmingly nonviolent -

Benny Morris

And organized by the Hamas.

Norman Finkelstein

Whoever organized it -

Mouin Rabbani

It was organized by Satan, let's start with that -

Norman Finkelstein

Satan -

Benny Morris

No, by Hamas -

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, Satan. I agree. Let's go for the big one, the big magilla. It's Satan, okay.
Overwhelmingly non-violent. Resembled at the beginning the First Intifada -

Benny Morris

They threw bombs here and there.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, not bombs, but -

Benny Morris

They tried to make holes in the fence, obviously -

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, let's continue.

Benny Morris

Yeah.

Norman Finkelstein

So -

Benny Morris

But I'm not sure Israel behaved morally in that respect.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay -

Benny Morris

No, no, no -

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, wait, wait, wait -

Benny Morris

I'm willing to grant you that.

Norman Finkelstein

Please, please. Allow me to -

Benny Morris

You don't have to pursue it because I'm willing to grant -

Norman Finkelstein

Allow me to finish -

Mouin Rabbani

I don't know anything about this. I'd like to hear.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay. So as you know, along the Gaza perimeter, there was Israel's best-trained snipers. Correct?

Benny Morris

I don't know best-trained. There was snipers -

Norman Finkelstein

Fine. Okay. Alright. Because - hey, laugh. It's hilarious. This story's so funny -

Steven Bonnell

You're lying. The Great March of Return had aspects of violence to it. Even the UN says it themselves.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, okay, okay.

Steven Bonnell

But you only collect what the UN says that you like.

Norman Finkelstein

You see the problem, Mr. Morelli, is, you don't know the English language. You don't -

Steven Bonnell

I can read from the UN website itself. In regards to the Great March of Return, they said, "While the vast majority of protestors have acted in a peaceful manner, during most protests dozens have approached the fence attempting to damage it, burning fires,

throwing stones and Molotov cocktails towards Israeli forces, and flying incendiary kites and balloons into Israeli territory. The latter resulted in extensive damage to agricultural land and nature reserves inside Israel and risked the lives of Israeli civilians. Some incidents of shooting and throwing of explosives also reported" -

Norman Finkelstein

Talk Fast. Talk fast so people think that you're coherent -

Steven Bonnell

I'm just reading from the UN -

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah, but you're saying -

Steven Bonnell

I know you like them sometimes, only when they agree with you though.

Norman Finkelstein

You got the months wrong. You got the months wrong. We're talking about the beginning in March 30th to what -

Steven Bonnell

You just described that march as mostly peaceful.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, allow me to finish. So there were the snipers, okay. Now, you find it so far-fetched. Israelis purposely, deliberately targeting civilians? That's such a far-fetched idea. An overwhelmingly nonviolent march. What did the international investigation -

Benny Morris

It wasn't the march. It was a campaign which went on for months.

Norman Finkelstein

Whatever you want to call it, yeah. What did the UN investigation find? It found -

Benny Morris

Well, he just read it for you.

Norman Finkelstein

I read the report. I don't read things off of those machines. I read the report. What did it find? Brace yourself. You thought it was so funny, the idea of IDF targeting civilians. It found... Go look this up on your machine -

Steven Bonnell

I already know what you're going to say. You're going to say it found that only one or two of them were justified killings-

Norman Finkelstein

It targeted children, targeted journalists, targeted medics. And here's the funniest one of all, it's so hilarious, they targeted disabled people who were 300 meters away from the fence and just standing by trees -

Benny Morris

If this is true, if what you're saying is true -

Lex Fridman

Just a quick pause. I think everything was fascinating to listen to except the mention of hilarious. Nobody finds any of this hilarious, and if any of us are laughing, it's not at the suffering of -

Norman Finkelstein

[inaudible 02:50:00].

Lex Fridman

And if any of us are laughing, it's not at the suffering of civilians or suffering of anyone, it's at the obvious joyful comradery in the room, so I'm enjoying it, and also the joy of learning, so thank you.

Steven Bonnell

Can we talk about the targeting civilian thing a little bit? I think there's an important underlying-

Lex Fridman

[Inaudible 02:50:18].

Steven Bonnell

I think it's important to understand there's three different things here that we need to think about. So, one is a policy of killing civilians. So, I would ask the other side, I'm going to ask all three, because I know there won't be a short answer, do you think there is a policy, top-down from the IDF to target civilians? That's one thing.

Mouin Rabbani

Yes.

Steven Bonnell

A second thing is -

Benny Morris

He said yes.

Steven Bonnell

I'll write that down.

Benny Morris

Mouin answered yes.

Steven Bonnell

That's fine, but then the second thing is, or there's two distinctions I want to draw between. I think Benny would say this, I would say this. I'm sure, undoubtedly, there have been cases where IDF soldiers, for no good reason, have targeted and killed Palestinians that they should not have done, that would be prosecutable as war crimes as defined by the [inaudible 02:50:56]-

Benny Morris

And some have been prosecuted.

Steven Bonnell

And I'm absolutely sure -

Norman Finkelstein

According to you and your book, practically none.

Steven Bonnell

I'm sure that we would all agree for soldiers that that happens, but I think that it's important that when we talk about military strikes or we talk about things especially involving bombings or drone attacks, these are things that are signed off by multiple different layers of command, by multiple people involved in an operation, including intelligence gathering, including weaponeering, and they also have typically lawyers involved. When you make the claim that an IDF soldier shot a Palestinian, those three people, the three hostages that came up with white flags, that something horrible happened, I think that's a fair statement to make and I think a lot of criticism is deserved, but when you make the statement that four children were killed by a strike, the claim that you're making -

Norman Finkelstein

Deliberately, yeah.

Steven Bonnell

The claim that you're making is that multiple levels of the IDF signed off -

Norman Finkelstein

I have no idea what [inaudible 02:51:47]-

Steven Bonnell

That's great if you don't understand the process, then let me educate you.

Norman Finkelstein

You don't understand the process.

Steven Bonnell

I do understand the process. I'm telling you. I'm trying to explain to you right now.

Norman Finkelstein

Really? You're in the IDF?

Steven Bonnell

No, it's basic -

Norman Finkelstein

You're studying the IDF.

Steven Bonnell

You can ask anybody that talks about -

Norman Finkelstein

Aside from Wikipedia, can you tell me what your knowledge of the IDF is?

Steven Bonnell

You can talk to people who work in the military -

Norman Finkelstein

What's your knowledge of the IDF?

Steven Bonnell

Your audience can look this up. Do you think that bombing and strikes are decided by one person in the field? Do you think one person -

Mouin Rabbani

Can I respond to that?

Steven Bonnell

[inaudible 02:52:10] on a drone strike -

Benny Morris

[inaudible 02:52:11] a pilot doesn't do it on his own.

Mouin Rabbani

Can I respond -

Steven Bonnell

[inaudible 02:52:14] have entire apparatuses that are designed to figure out how to strike and who to strike, so when you say that four children are targeted, you're saying that a whole apparatus that tries to murder -

Norman Finkelstein

You made my argument better than me -

Steven Bonnell

- poor Palestinian children.

Norman Finkelstein

You made my argument better than me.

Steven Bonnell

Which is a ridiculous argument.

Norman Finkelstein

Oh, really? It's impossible at the command level, but you said that they couldn't have done it at the bottom if it weren't also at the top.

Steven Bonnell

You don't understand the strength of the claim that you're making. You're saying that from a top down level, that lawyers, multiple commanders, intelligence, all these people signed off -

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Bonnell, do not tell me what I don't understand.

Steven Bonnell

- on killing poor Palestinians, children.

Norman Finkelstein

It's true, I don't spend my nights on Wikipedia. I read books. I admit that as a -

Steven Bonnell

That's a waste of time, by the way. You're wasting time [inaudible 02:52:55].

Norman Finkelstein

I know, books are a waste of time. With all due regard, they're -

Steven Bonnell

Well, according to you they are. The only thing you take from them are two or three quotes that you use to push people around.

Norman Finkelstein

I completely respect the fact... And I'll say it on the air, as much as I find totally disgusting what's come of your politics, a lot of the books are excellent, and I'll even tell you because I'm not afraid of saying it, whenever I have to check on the basic fact, the equivalent of going to the Britannica, I go to your books. I know you got a lot of the facts right.

Lex Fridman

Benny Morris' books for the listener.

Norman Finkelstein

I would never say books are a waste of time and it's regrettable to you that you got strapped with a partner who thinks that all the wisdom -

Benny Morris

He didn't say they're a waste of time.

Mouin Rabbani

I'd like to respond to what you were saying. I think the question that we're trying to answer -

Benny Morris

I think you don't understand Israel, you know? Neither of you really understands Israel and how it works.

Mouin Rabbani

Let me finish, please. I think we're all agreed that Palestinians have deliberately targeted civilians. Whether we're talking about Hamas and Islamic jihad today or previously -

Benny Morris

I prefer the word murdered and raped rather than targeted. Targeted is too soft for what the Hamas did.

Steven Bonnell

I'm okay with it.

Mouin Rabbani

I'm not talking about -

Benny Morris

I'm talking about this now.

Mouin Rabbani

Yeah, but I'm trying to answer his question. Historically, there is substantial evidence that Palestinians have targeted civilians, whether it's been incidental or systematic is a different discussion, I don't want to get into that now. For some reason, there seems to be a huge debate about whether any Israeli has ever sunk so low as to target a civilian. I don't -

Benny Morris

No, we've agreed. We've both said.

Steven Bonnell

We just agreed [inaudible 02:54:50].

Benny Morris

I just said that this has happened here and there. We've agreed on that. What we're saying is it's not policy, which is what you guys are implying, that they kill civilians deliberately.

Mouin Rabbani

If I understand you correctly, you're basically making the claim that none of these attacks could have happened without going through an entire chain of commands.

Steven Bonnell

For strike cells that are involved in drone attacks or plane attacks or -

Mouin Rabbani

Yeah.

Steven Bonnell

Yes [inaudible 02:55:13].

Mouin Rabbani

My understanding of the Israeli military, and you could perhaps... You've served in it, you would know better, it's actually a fairly chaotic organization.

Benny Morris

No, that's not true, especially not the Air Force, extremely, extremely organized. The Air Force works in a very organized fashion, as he says, with lawyers, a chain of command, and ultimately the pilot drops the bomb where he is told to drop it.

Steven Bonnell

Protective Edge, was that 200 strikes in like 60 seconds, I think, the opening of Protective Edge? The coordination between [inaudible 02:55:43]–

Mouin Rabbani

You're talking about 2008.

Steven Bonnell

I think Protective Edge was 2014, but I'm just saying that the coordination in the military is pretty tight.

Mouin Rabbani

Well, my understanding of the Israeli military –

Benny Morris

It's very organized.

Mouin Rabbani

– is that it's quite chaotic and there's also a lot of testimonies from Israel, but be that as it may, I'm prepared to accept both of your contentions that it's a highly organized and disciplined force. Air Force under any scenario is going to be more organized than the other branches, and you're saying such a strike would've been inconceivable.

Steven Bonnell

Well, I'm not necessarily saying inconceivable. I'm saying that that would've required murderous intent on so many different levels. I don't think good evidence has been presented to say that – that's –

Mouin Rabbani

Your basic claim is that it would be fair to assume that such a strike could have only been carried out with multiple levels of authorization and signing off. Let's accept that for the sake of argument. We have now seen incident after incident after incident after incident where entire families are vaporized in single strikes –

Benny Morris

Who is in the families? Who lives in the house inside -

Mouin Rabbani

Family members.

Benny Morris

No, next to the house in which these families are killed?

Mouin Rabbani

We have seen incident -

Benny Morris

Do you know that Hamas [inaudible 02:57:02] weren't in that house? Do you know that their ammunition dumps weren't in those houses?

Mouin Rabbani

Why do I have to prove a negative?

Benny Morris

You are saying that they deliberately targeted families. If Israel wanted to kill civilians in Gaza, they could have killed 500,000 by now with the number of strikes they've done and the fact that they've only killed a certain small number [inaudible 02:57:22]-

Mouin Rabbani

30,000 is a small number?

Benny Morris

Small number in proportion -

Mouin Rabbani

You consider 30,000 a small number?

Benny Morris

Small number in proportion over four months probably is an indication that -

Norman Finkelstein

12,000 children is only -

Benny Morris

- targeted and that there are Hamas targets in these places.

Norman Finkelstein

12,000 children is 'only'? And if that's the case, why is it -

Benny Morris

Did I use the word 'only'?

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah, you said 'only'. Professor Morris, here's a question for you. If we take every combat zone in the world for the past 3 years - every combat zone in the world -

Benny Morris

In Vietnam, the Americans killed 1 million people.

Mouin Rabbani

Well, the [inaudible 02:57:58] killed 40 million.

Norman Finkelstein

I was in the anti-war movement, so don't strap me -

Benny Morris

The Americans killed 1 million people in Vietnam.

Norman Finkelstein

Fine. And 30 million Russians were killed during World War II, so everything else is irrelevant.

Benny Morris

[inaudible 02:58:13].

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris, here's a question. It's very perplexing. If you take every combat zone in the world for the past 3 years and you multiply the number of children killed by 4 - every combat zone in the world - you get Gaza. So, when you say -

Steven Bonnell

What is that supposed to prove?

Norman Finkelstein

I'm going to tell you - just shut up

Benny Morris

Firstly, you're lying on Hamas numbers.

Norman Finkelstein

No, I'm not lying [inaudible 02:58:44]-

Benny Morris

Hamas numbers are not necessarily true.

Norman Finkelstein

- the numbers that everybody else - I'm lying in the numbers [inaudible 02:58:47]-

Steven Bonnell

Even if we take the numbers though, what does that prove?

Benny Morris

Those are Hamas numbers - which may not be true. They could invent anything because you know that they are a mendacious organization.

Norman Finkelstein

I know mendacious, believe me -

Benny Morris

You like the word 'mendacious'?

Norman Finkelstein

Mendacious as in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So, here's the thing. You say they could have killed 500,000, but they only killed - 'only', that's your words - they only killed 30,000.

Benny Morris

You believe that they deliberately target civilians. They would've killed many, many more. The fact is that they don't deliberately target civilians.

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris, for [inaudible 02:59:24]-

Benny Morris

And you don't understand Israeli society.

Norman Finkelstein

I don't want to understand Israeli society.

Benny Morris

You don't want the truth.

Norman Finkelstein

I don't want to. I don't want to get inside their heads.

Benny Morris

That's the problem.

Steven Bonnell

[inaudible 02:59:33].

Norman Finkelstein

90% -

Benny Morris

A good historian tries to get into the heads of -

Norman Finkelstein

There's a limit.

Benny Morris

- the various protagonists.

Norman Finkelstein

There's a limit.

Benny Morris

A good historian does.

Norman Finkelstein

When 90% of Israelis think that Israel's using enough or too little force in Gaza, I don't want to get inside that head. 40% think that Israel is using insufficient force in Gaza. I don't want to get inside that head. I don't want to get inside the head of people who think they're using insufficient force against the population, half of which is children. I don't want to get inside that head, but here's the point, because your partner wants to know the point. You don't understand political constraints. One of your ministers said, "Let's drop an atomic bomb on Gaza."

Benny Morris

You think he really meant that?

Mouin Rabbani

He said it three times.

Benny Morris

No, no, no, it was said in a sort of a very questionable way. He didn't say they should drop an atomic bomb.

Mouin Rabbani

He said it the day after the ICJ met.

Benny Morris

This minister is a messianic idiot, but he didn't say drop an atomic bomb [inaudible 03:00:43].

Mouin Rabbani

He said it [inaudible 03:00:44].

Norman Finkelstein

None other Israel's chief historian, the justifiably famed Benny Morris, thinks we should be dropping nuclear weapons on Iran.

Benny Morris

Iran, its leaders for years have said, "We should destroy Israel." Do you agree with that? They've said, "We should destroy Israel. Israel must be destroyed." Is that correct? This is what the Iranian leaders have been saying since Khomeini.

Norman Finkelstein

I would say Iranian leaders have sent mixed messages.

Benny Morris

But some of them have said, including Khamenei -

Norman Finkelstein

If you don't know the evidence, why are you laughing?

Steven Bonnell

The slightest skepticism, it's very funny.

Norman Finkelstein

It's funny because -

Steven Bonnell

Iran that supports Hezbollah and the Houthis and Hamas, maybe they want Israel destroyed.

Norman Finkelstein

Brace yourself to the extent that the Houthis are trying to stop the genocide in Gaza, I support -

Steven Bonnell

[inaudible 03:01:37] ships. I know I selectively support international law when it agrees with you and then when it doesn't, you decide to throw international law to the wind.

Benny Morris

There's no genocide in Gaza.

Norman Finkelstein

If you like [inaudible 03:01:46]-

Lex Fridman

Hold on a second. Norm, Norm -

Norman Finkelstein

Let me read what you said -

Lex Fridman

Norm, Norm, stop, please. Norm, just for me, please. Just give me a second. You said there's no genocide going on in Gaza. Let me ask that clear question. The same question I asked on the Hamas attacks. Is there, from a legal, philosophical, moral perspective, is there genocide going on in Gaza today?

Mouin Rabbani

Is there a genocide going on in Gaza? Well, in several years we will have a definitive response to that question. What has happened thus far is that on the 29th of December, the Republic of South Africa instituted proceedings against Israel, pursuant to the 1948 convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide. South Africa basically accused Israel of perpetrating genocide in the Gaza Strip. On the 26th of January, the court issued its initial ruling. The court at this stage is not making a determination on whether Israel has or has not committed genocide. So, just as it has not found Israel guilty, it certainly also hasn't found Israel innocent. What the court had to do at this stage was take one of two decisions, either South Africa's case was the equivalent of a frivolous lawsuit and dismiss it and close the proceedings, or it had to determine that South Africa presented a plausible case that Israel was violating its obligations under the genocide convention and that it would on that basis hold a full hearing. Now, a lot of people have looked at the court's ruling of the 26th of January and focused on the fact that the court did not order a ceasefire. I actually wasn't expecting it to order a ceasefire, and I wasn't surprised that it didn't because in the other cases that the court has considered, most

prominently Bosnia and Myanmar, it also didn't order a ceasefire, and South Africa in requesting a ceasefire also didn't ask the court to render an opinion on the legitimacy, or lack thereof, of Israel's military operation. From my perspective, the key issue on the 26th of January was whether the court would simply dismiss the case or decide to proceed with it.

Benny Morris

And it decided to proceed [inaudible 03:04:35]-

Mouin Rabbani

And I think that's enormously -

Norman Finkelstein

I thought that was beautifully [inaudible 03:04:39]-

Benny Morris

But you said they committed genocide. You already said they committed genocide. Israel is committing genocide.

Mouin Rabbani

But if I can just -

Norman Finkelstein

Allow me -

Benny Morris

You used that word.

Norman Finkelstein

That's correct. I don't run away from my words.

Benny Morris

So Norman, you did say Israel was committing genocide.

Lex Fridman

Norm, can you let Mouin finish?

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah.

Mouin Rabbani

Well, the end of the story is you specifically asked whether I think Israel is committing genocide. I explained formally there is no finding and as you said, we won't know for a

number of years and I think there's legitimate questions to be raised. In the Bosnia case, which I think all four of us would agree was clearly a case of genocide, the court determined -

Benny Morris

You mean by the Serbs?

Mouin Rabbani

Yes. In the Bosnia case, the court determined that of all the evidence placed before them only Srebrenica qualified as genocide and all the other atrocities committed did not qualify as genocide. International law is a developing organism. I don't know how the court is going to respond in this case, so I wouldn't take it as a foregone conclusion how the court is going to respond, but -

Benny Morris

Norman has determined already.

Mouin Rabbani

I have too, because you're asking my personal opinion.

Lex Fridman

Personal opinion is [inaudible 03:05:50].

Mouin Rabbani

So as a matter of law, I want to state very clearly it has not been determined and won't be determined for several years. Based on my observations and the evidence before me, I would say it's indisputable that Israel is engaged in a genocidal assault against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.

Benny Morris

Which is a PLO line.

Norman Finkelstein

Get with the program, the PLO is long passed.

Benny Morris

Okay, the Palestinian authority.

Mouin Rabbani

As you were saying, genocide is not a body count. Genocide consists of two elements, the destruction of a people in whole or in part, so in other words, you can commit genocide by killing 30,000 people.

Benny Morris

[inaudible 03:06:39].

Mouin Rabbani

Well, 5 probably is below threshold.

Benny Morris

There is a problem of numbers.

Mouin Rabbani

Yes, but I think 30,000 crosses the threshold and not reaching 500,000 is probably irrelevant, and the second element is there has to be an intent. In other words -

Benny Morris

And you believe there's an intent?

Mouin Rabbani

Yes. I think if there is any other plausible reason for why all these people are being murdered, it's not genocide. And as far as intent to [inaudible 03:07:06]-

Benny Morris

What about hiding behind a human shield? You don't think that's a reason for them being killed?

Mouin Rabbani

Well, let's get the intent part out of the way first. South Africa's -

Benny Morris

Forget South Africa, they don't [inaudible 03:07:16]-

Mouin Rabbani

I'd like to finish.

Benny Morris

Hamas government, that's got nothing to do with anything.

Mouin Rabbani

I think they're pro-Satan as well, last time I checked.

Benny Morris

No, they pro-Hamas.

Mouin Rabbani

For some reason, you don't have a problem with people being pro-Israeli at the time of this, but if they support Palestinians' right to life or self-determination, they get demonized and de-legitimized as pro-Hamas?

Benny Morris

They supported an organization which murdered 1,200 people deliberately. That's my problem.

Mouin Rabbani

But supporting a state that has murdered 30,000 [inaudible 03:07:45]-

Benny Morris

But they haven't because these are 30,000 are basically human shields to get by the Hamas, in which the Hamas wanted killed. They wanted them killed. Hamas wanted these people killed.

Mouin Rabbani

Sure, if I could just get -

Benny Morris

You don't think they wanted them killed?

Mouin Rabbani

No, I don't.

Benny Morris

They didn't provide them with shelters. They build tunnels for their fighters, but not one shelter for their own civilians.

Mouin Rabbani

If I can get back to my point, you asked me about intent and the reason that I brought in the South African application is because it is actually exceptionally detailed on intent by quoting numerous -

Benny Morris

All sorts of idiotic ministers in Israel.

Mouin Rabbani

Well, yeah, including the prime minister, the defense minister, the chief of staff -

Benny Morris

The prime minister didn't say genocide [inaudible 03:08:27]-

Norman Finkelstein

According to Asa Kasher, the philosopher of the IDF, he said that Netanyahu was vowing genocide. Now, he's an idiot?

Benny Morris

I didn't say he's an idiot, but he's passed it.

Mouin Rabbani

So, the reason I raised the South African application is twofold. Hamas or no Hamas, it's exceptionally detailed on the question of intent. And secondly, when the International Court of Justice issues a ruling, individual justices have the right can give their own opinion. And I found the German one to be the most interesting on this specific question because he was basically saying that he didn't think South Africa presented a persuasive case, but he said their section on intent was so overpowering that he felt he was left with no choice but to vote with the majority. So, I think that answers the intent part of your question.

Steven Bonnell

So, for the ICJ case that South Africa has brought, I think there's a couple of things that need to be mentioned. One is, and I saw you two talk at length about this, the plausibility standard is incredibly low. The only thing we're looking for is a basic presentation of facts that make it conceivable, possible that -

Mouin Rabbani

Plausible.

Steven Bonnell

Plausible, which legally, this is obviously below criminal conviction, below -

Mouin Rabbani

Yes, of course. Think of it as an indictment.

Steven Bonnell

Sure, possibly, maybe even a lower level than even an indictment, so plausibility is an incredibly low standard, number one. Number two, if you actually go through and you read the complaint that South Africa filed, I would say that if you go through the quotes and you even follow through to the source of the quotes, the misrepresentation that South Africa does in their case about all of these horrendous quotes, in my opinion, borders on criminal.

Mouin Rabbani

16 ICJ judges disagree.

Steven Bonnell

That's fine if 16 ICJ judges disagree, but I'm going to give -

Norman Finkelstein

They must be awfully incompetent.

Steven Bonnell

They could be.

Norman Finkelstein

Even the American judge, she must have been awful incompetent if she was unable to see the misrepresentations that Mr. Bonnell based on his Wikipedia entry was able to find.

Steven Bonnell

So, this is based on the official ICJ report that was released. I'm not sure if you read the entire thing.

Norman Finkelstein

I read every aspect.

Steven Bonnell

Did you go through and actually identify any of the sources of underlying quotes?

Norman Finkelstein

Actually, brace yourself for this and Mouin could confirm it, Yaniv Kogan, an Israeli, and Jamie Stern-Weiner, a half Israeli, they checked every single quote in the Hebrew original and Yaniv Kogan, love the guy, he has terrifying powers of concentration, he checked every single quote. Is that correct, Mouin?

Mouin Rabbani

Mmhmm.

Norman Finkelstein

And Jamie checked every single quote in the English, in the context, and where there were any contextual questions they told us.

Mouin Rabbani

I think they found one.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah, I think they found one. So, I do not believe that those 15 judges – it was 15 to 2?

Mouin Rabbani

16 to 2, I think.

Norman Finkelstein

There are 15 in the court plus two, so it's 17, so it's 15 to two. I don't think those 15 judges were incompetent and I certainly don't believe the president of the court, an American, would allow herself to be duped.

Steven Bonnell

Well, let me read [inaudible 03:12:19]-

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Bonnell -

Lex Fridman

Hey, hey, hey, whoa, whoa, whoa, let him read.

Steven Bonnell

Sure, so this was taken from the South African complaint. There's tons of these, so here's one. In the complaint for the ICJ they said that, "On the 12th of October, 2023, President Isaac Herzog made clear that Israel was not distinguishing between militants and civilians in Gaza, stating in a press conference to foreign media in relation to Palestinians in Gaza, over 1 million of whom are children, 'It's an entire nation out there that is responsible. It is not true, this rhetoric about civilians not aware, not involved.'"

Mouin Rabbani

I saw that [inaudible 03:12:58]-

Steven Bonnell

"It's absolutely not true and we will fight until we break their backbone." If you actually go to the news article that they even state, they even link it in their complaint. The full context for the quote was, "It is an entire nation out there that is responsible. It's not true, this rhetoric about civilians not being aware, not involved, it's absolutely not true. They could have risen up, they could have fought against that evil regime which took over Gaza in a coup d'état, but we are at war. We are defending our homes, we are protecting our homes. That's the truth. And when a nation protects its home, it fights and we will fight until we break their backbone." He acknowledged that many Gazans had nothing to do with Hamas, but was adamant that others did. "I agree there are many innocent Palestinians who don't agree with this, but you have a missile in your goddamn kitchen and you want to shoot it at me. Am I

allowed to defend myself? We have to defend ourselves. We have the right to do so." This is not the same as saying there's no distinction between militants and civilians in Gaza. His statement here is actually fully compliant with international law to the letter because if you are storing military supplies in civilian areas, these things become military targets, and you're allowed to do proportionality assessments afterwards. So, if this is supposed to be one of many quotes that they've shown that is supposed to demonstrate genocidal intent, but it is very easily explained by military intent or by a conflict between two parties -

Mouin Rabbani

I saw that press conference.

Benny Morris

Wait, let me just say something. All of this talk is a bit irrelevant because it may sound to the listeners that the court in The Hague has ruled that Israel is committing genocide.

Mouin Rabbani

No, I think -

Benny Morris

It hasn't. It's just going in the next few years to look at the whole subject. There has been no determination at all. And as Steven says, some of the quotes are not exactly accurate quotes or taken out of context.

Steven Bonnell

A total discharacterization.

Benny Morris

Yes.

Norman Finkelstein

It is correct, as Mouin put it, that'll be several years before the court makes a determination.

Benny Morris

And my guess is that it'll determine there was no genocide. That's my guess. I'm just giving you my guess.

Norman Finkelstein

I can't predict. I got it all wrong actually, as Mouin will attest, I got all wrong the first time. I never thought the American judge would vote in favor of plausibility.

Benny Morris

So, you admit that you were wrong?

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah, of course. I think I tell Mouin twice a day I was wrong about this and I was wrong about that. I'm not wrong about the facts. I try not to be, but my speculations, they can be wrong. Leaving that aside, first of all, as Mouin pointed out, there's a difference between the legal decision by the ruling and an independent judgment. Now, South Africa was not filing a frivolous case. That was 84 pages. It was single -

Benny Morris

Even 84 pages can be frivolous.

Steven Bonnell

It takes an hour and a half to read. It was not a massive case.

Norman Finkelstein

It was single spaced and it had literally hundreds of footnotes -

Benny Morris

It can still be frivolous.

Norman Finkelstein

It's possible.

Mouin Rabbani

Of course, but this one wasn't.

Norman Finkelstein

I read the report. To tell you the truth, I followed very closely everything that's been happening to October 7th, I was mesmerized. I couldn't believe the comprehensiveness of that particular report. Number two, there are two quite respected judges... Excuse me, there were two quite respected experts of international law sitting on the South African panel, John Dugard and Vaughan Lowe. Vaughan Lowe, as you might know, he argued the war case in 2004 before the International Court of Justice. Now, they were alleging genocide, which in their view means the evidence in their minds - we are not yet at the court. The evidence in their minds compels the conclusion that genocide is being committed. I am willing, because I happen to know Mr. Dugard personally, and I have corresponded with Vaughan Lowe, I've heard their claim, I've read the report. I would say they make a very strong case, but let's agree plausible. Now, here's a question, if somebody qualifies for an Olympic team, let's say a regional person qualifies for an Olympic team, it doesn't mean they're going to be on the Olympic team, it doesn't mean they're going to win a gold medal, a silver medal, or a bronze medal -

Benny Morris

But they can swim, that's what you're saying.

Norman Finkelstein

No, I would say that's a very high bar -

Benny Morris

You're saying they can swim.

Norman Finkelstein

- to even qualify.

Mouin Rabbani

They can swim well enough to have a realistic prospect at winning a medal.

Norman Finkelstein

So, the even make it to plausible -

Steven Bonnell

That is not true. That is not what plausible means. It's absolutely not. You're dead wrong.

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Berelli, please don't teach me about the English language.

Steven Bonnell

So, the declaration judge [inaudible 03:17:53]-

Norman Finkelstein

I said plausibility is the same concept as qualifying.

Steven Bonnell

The court is not asked at this present phase of the proceedings to determine whether South Africa's allegations of genocide are well-founded. They're not even well-founded. You said that plausible was a high standard, it's absolutely not. It's a misrepresentation of the strength of the case against Israel, just like the majority of the quotes they have in this case are. And also you said it was an extremely well-founded case. They spent like one-fourth of all the quotations, some even pulled from the Goldstone Report, that actually deal with the intent part, which is, by the way, I don't know if you used the phrase *dolus specialis*, that the intentional part of genocide -

Mouin Rabbani

I don't know that term.

Steven Bonnell

I think it's called *dolus specialis*, it's the most important part of genocide, which is proving it is a highly special intent to commit genocide. It's possible that Israel could -

Norman Finkelstein

That's [foreign language 03:18:43].

Steven Bonnell

Yes, I understand the state of mind, but for genocide, it's called *dolus specialis*. It's a highly special intent. Did you read the case?

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah.

Steven Bonnell

It is a highly special intent [inaudible 03:18:56]-

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Berelli, I'm going to ask you again -

Steven Bonnell

Yes.

Norman Finkelstein

Please stop displaying your imbecility.

Steven Bonnell

I'm sorry if you think the declaration of the judge is imbecility.

Norman Finkelstein

Don't put on public display that you are a moron. At least have the self-possession to shut up. Did I read the case?

Steven Bonnell

I'm comfortable putting my display on camera if you're comfortable putting yours in books.

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Berelli, I read the case around four times. I read all of the majority opinion, the declarations, I read our own Barack's declaration [inaudible 03:19:27]-

Steven Bonnell

Then why are you lying and saying plausible is a high standard?

Norman Finkelstein

Because I said even reaching the benchmark of plausibility is a very high standard in the world. It's the equivalent of a regional player qualifying for an Olympics. It's still two steps removed, you may not be on the team, and you may not get a medal, but to get qualified, which in this context is the equivalent of plausible, you must be doing something pretty horrible. As it happens, Professor Morris -

Benny Morris

The court will rule there was no genocide. That's what the court will rule. Remember what I just told you, the court will rule there was no genocide.

Norman Finkelstein

I don't expect to be even around when the court reaches its final decision.

Benny Morris

Why?

Norman Finkelstein

Why? It'll take a long, long time.

Benny Morris

Two years, three years.

Norman Finkelstein

No, I don't think it'll take two or three years.

Mouin Rabbani

Bosnia, which was admittedly a special type of case, because they were accusing Serbia of sponsoring the Bosnian Serbs, that took I think 17 years from '90 -

Benny Morris

I assume they'll take two or three years.

Lex Fridman

But the point you're making, so this is a legal -

Norman Finkelstein

I'm saying that something horrible must be happening to even achieve -

Benny Morris

It is horrible, it's a war.

Steven Bonnell

That is true, yes.

Benny Morris

It's horrible.

Norman Finkelstein

Except they weren't rendering a ruling on the war, they were rendering a ruling on the genocide.

Mouin Rabbani

And I think the suggestion -

Steven Bonnell

And they said it was plausible, they also said it plausible that Israel is committing a military operation as well.

Mouin Rabbani

But I think the problem with your characterization is you're saying in so many words the South Africans basically only have to show up in court with a coherent statement.

Benny Morris

Right.

Steven Bonnell

That is correct.

Benny Morris

In today's atmosphere, that's probably correct.

Mouin Rabbani

They needed to do a lot more. They needed to persuade -

Norman Finkelstein

The American judge?

Mouin Rabbani

They needed to persuade -

Benny Morris

Judges go according to what the majority want to hear.

Mouin Rabbani

But they needed -

Norman Finkelstein

She was the president.

Mouin Rabbani

They needed to persuade the court that it was worth investing several years of their time in hearing this case.

Benny Morris

They're probably well-paid for it.

Mouin Rabbani

They're well paid whether they take this case or not. They have a full docket whether they accept or reject this case, and I don't think we should -

Benny Morris

Remember what I just said, they won't rule there was genocide. Remember what I said.

Steven Bonnell

Also, I recommend people actually read the case and follow through a lot of the quotes that they just don't show genocidal intent.

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Berelli, brace yourself.

Steven Bonnell

The Israeli minister of finance on the 8th of October, 2023, this is taken from the ICJ, this is from South Africa submission Bezael Smotrich - I can't read this.

Benny Morris

Bezael Smotrich.

Steven Bonnell

There you go, at a meeting of the Israeli cabinet that, "We need to deal a blow that hasn't been seen in 50 years and take down Gaza." But again, if you click through and you read the source, their own linked source, it says, as per this own source, "The powerful finance minister, settler leader Bezael Smotrich, I can't pronounce this, demanded at the cabinet meeting late Saturday that the army, 'Hit Hamas brutally and not take the matter of the captives into significant consideration.' 'As in war, you have to be brutal.' He was quoted as saying, 'We need to deal a blow that hasn't been seen in 50 years and take down Gaza.'" You

can't strip the quotation of Hamas, an entity we are at war with, and then [inaudible 03:22:38] there was genocidal intent.

Norman Finkelstein

[inaudible 03:22:40] Gaza.

Benny Morris

That's not genocidal intent.

Steven Bonnell

When the Ukrainians say, "We need to defeat Russia" -

Norman Finkelstein

[inaudible 03:22:41], that's not genocidal?

Steven Bonnell

No, when Ukraine says, "We need to defeat Russia," is that genocidal? Do they mean killing all Russian citizens?

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris, here's another one.

Benny Morris

It's ridiculous.

Norman Finkelstein

Ridiculous?

Benny Morris

Yes, ridiculous.

Norman Finkelstein

The American judge -

Benny Morris

He also doesn't determine policy, but that's neither here nor there.

Norman Finkelstein

The American judge read -

Benny Morris

You are holding the American judge to -

Norman Finkelstein

Well, she was the president [inaudible 03:23:07]-

Steven Bonnell

He'll appeal to authority when it agrees with him, and we won't deal with the actual facts of the matter, ever.

Norman Finkelstein

The American judge read several of the quotes.

Benny Morris

Look at the American Supreme Court today, they may support Trump. It shows you how worthy American judges are.

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris, without going too far afield, if you heard a statement by the defense minister, the defense minister said, "We are going to prevent any food, water, fuel, or electricity from entering Gaza" -

Benny Morris

Did Israel do that?

Norman Finkelstein

No, I'm wondering -

Benny Morris

Well, he said -

Norman Finkelstein

I'm asking -

Benny Morris

- isn't Israeli government policy.

Norman Finkelstein

But we're talking about statements now, intent. How would you interpret that?

Benny Morris

After 1,200 of your citizens are murdered the way they were, I would expect extreme statements by lots of politicians.

Mouin Rabbani

But you don't accept extreme Palestinians -

Benny Morris

But that's not a crazy [inaudible 03:24:02]-

Mouin Rabbani

Wait, but you don't accept -

Benny Morris

What he said isn't Israeli policy.

Mouin Rabbani

But you don't -

Benny Morris

- that's not Israeli policy.

Mouin Rabbani

But you don't accept -

Benny Morris

What he said isn't Israeli policy. They let in water. They let in gas.

Norman Finkelstein

Untrue. Untrue. Untrue.

Mouin Rabbani

But you don't accept extreme Palestinian statements after they lost their entire country, not just 1200 people.

Benny Morris

That's a good point. No, no, that's a good point.

Lex Fridman

And on that, on that brief moment of agreement, let's just take a quick pause. We need a smoke break. We need a water break, a bathroom break.

Norman Finkelstein

Take down Gaza is not a genocide.

Steven Bonnell

Defeat Russia is a genocide statement.

Benny Morris

What does take down Gaza?

Steven Bonnell

When we went to war with Iraq and we wanted to destroy Iraq, that was a genocidal statement.

Benny Morris

Take down Gaza.

Steven Bonnell

There's a reason why genocide is such an importantly guarded concept, and it's not to condemn every nation that goes to war.

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Bonnell -

Steven Bonnell

Wait, you do know how to pronounce my name. You're mispronouncing it intentionally.

Benny Morris

He made you an Italian all the time.

Norman Finkelstein

I'm so [inaudible 03:24:46] by your solicitude for international laws.

Steven Bonnell

You should try learning it sometime. It would help you sort out a lot of the civilian deaths.

Norman Finkelstein

Unfortunately, 15 judges disagree.

Steven Bonnell

You could keep citing the judges. You should actually try reading the actual statements.

Benny Morris

This is tiring. You've invited us to a tiring session.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. There you go. How are you guys doing?

Benny Morris

Okay. Okay. There are major things to discuss here, not just what some court is doing and the judge in two years time.

Steven Bonnell

Yes. Okay. So what you just said is my whole - one of the reasons why I feel so strongly about this particular conflict is because there are really important things to discuss, but they will never be discussed.

Benny Morris

They're not being discussed here.

Steven Bonnell

We're not going to talk about like Area A, B, and C or what a transference of territory. So we're going to talk about apartheid. We're not going to talk about the differences in how do you conduct war in an urban environment where people, we're just going to talk about genocide. We're not going to talk about what's a good solution for the Palestinians. We're just going to say ethnic cleansing,

Lex Fridman

Is it possible to be productive over the next two hours and talk about solutions?

Benny Morris

About solutions. I have no idea what to say. I mean, I don't see any solutions on if you wanted a positive end to this discussion, which is what you said at the beginning. I can't contribute to this because I am pessimistic. I don't see anywhere any way forward here,

Steven Bonnell

But the solution is easy. The reason why the solution is hard is because the histories and the myths are completely - there's a different factual record.

Lex Fridman

One of the things would be good to talk about solutions with the future is going back in all the times that it has failed. So every time -

Steven Bonnell

But even at that, we're probably not going to agree. He's going to say... You could write that. I can predict the whole line. He's going to say from '93 to '99, he's going to say, Israel didn't adhere to the Oslo courts ever, settlement expansion continued, raids happened into the

West Bank, that there was never a legitimate... That Netanyahu came in and violated the Y Memorandum, the transference. He's going to say all of this and he's not going to bring up anything of the Palestinian side. And then for Camp David, he's going to say that yeah, that Arafat was trying, that the maps and the territorial exchange wasn't good enough, that they were asking Palestinians to make all the concessions, that Israel would've made -

Lex Fridman

Well, lay it all out. Lay it out.

Benny Morris

You do talk quickly.

Steven Bonnell

Yeah, I know. Yeah.

Benny Morris

Yeah. My future book should interest you guys.

Mouin Rabbani

What are you working on?

Benny Morris

No, it's not working on, it's actually going to come out. It deals with Israeli and Arab atrocities, war crimes I call them in the '48 war.

Mouin Rabbani

Really?

Benny Morris

That's the book, just deals with that subject.

Mouin Rabbani

Because I know you've also talked about the closure of the archives and stuff.

Benny Morris

Well, it's marginal. It deals with that as well. But they have tried to seal off documents, which had already used and seen. Now they don't let people see them. That's happened. But it's marginal in terms of its effect on -

Mouin Rabbani

Were the British archives useful for you, for this new book?

Benny Morris

Yeah. Well, for this list it's mostly Israeli archives. The British and the Americans and the UN did deal with these subjects, but not as well as Israeli documents.

Mouin Rabbani

What's your casualty count for Deir Yassin?

Benny Morris

It's about a hundred. I think there's agreement on that by Israelis and Arabs, 100-105.

Mouin Rabbani

Because before they were -

Benny Morris

They used to say 245 or 254. Those were the figures. The British and the Arabs and the Haganah agreed on it at the beginning.

Mouin Rabbani

Because the Red Cross, I think was the one that first put out that number.

Benny Morris

I don't remember. Maybe it was, what's his name? Jacques de Rainier or maybe, yeah, maybe he came up with that number. But it was just they didn't count. They didn't count bodies. They just threw the number out and everybody was happy to blame the Irgun and the Lehi for killing more Arabs than actually -

Mouin Rabbani

Well, and they put it to good use as well.

Benny Morris

Well, they said that it helped to precipitate more evacuations. So they were happy.

Mouin Rabbani

I think Begin in his memoir [inaudible 03:28:33].

Benny Morris

Yeah. Yeah. They also use that number.

Lex Fridman

So, first of all, thank you for that heated discussion about the present. I would love to go back into history in a way that informs what we can look for as by way of hope for the future. So when has Israel and Palestine have we been closest to something like a peace

settlement, to something that where both sides would be happy and enable the flourishing of both peoples?

Benny Morris

Well, from my knowledge of the 120 years or so of conflict, the closest I think the two sides have been to reaching some sort of settlement appears to have been in the year 2000 when Barak and then subsequently Clinton offered a two-state settlement to PLO, Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat and Arafat seemed to waver. He didn't immediately reject what was being offered, but ultimately at the end of Camp David in July 2000, he came down against the proposals. And Clinton who said he wouldn't blame him, later blamed Arafat for bringing down the summit and not reaching a solution there. But I think there on the table, certainly in the Clinton parameters of December 2000, which followed the proposals by Barak in July, the Palestinians were offered the best deal they're ever going to get from Israel unless Israel is destroyed and then there'll just be a Palestinian Arab state. But the best deal that Israel could ever offer them, they were offered, which essentially was 95% of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, half of the old city of Jerusalem, some sort of joint control of the Temple Mount and the Gaza Strip of course in full. And the Palestinians said no to this deal and nobody really knows why Arafat said no. Some people think he was trying to hold out for slightly better terms, but my reading is that he was constitutionally, psychologically incapable of signing off on a two-state deal, meaning acceptance of the existence of a Jewish state. This was really the problem.

Mouin Rabbani

Of Israel or of a Jewish state?

Benny Morris

Of a Jewish state, the Jewish state of Israel. He wasn't willing to share Palestine with the Jews and put his name to that. I think he just couldn't do it. That's my reading. But some people say it was because the terms were insufficient and he was willing, but was waiting for slightly better terms. I don't buy that. I don't think so. But other people disagree with me on this.

Lex Fridman

What do you think?

Mouin Rabbani

Well, just briefly in response, Arafat formally recognized Israel in 1993. Yeah, earlier. I don't think actually that in 2000-2001, a genuine resolution was on offer because I think the maximum Israel was prepared to offer, admittedly more than it had been prepared to offer in the past, fell short of the minimum that the Palestinians consider to be a reasonable two state settlement. Bearing in mind that as of 1949, Israel controlled 78% of the British

mandate of Palestine. Palestinians were seeking a state on the remaining 22%, and this was apparently too much for Israel. My response to your question would be -

Benny Morris

Wait, wait. They were being offered something like 22 or 21%.

Mouin Rabbani

They were being offered, I think less than a withdrawal to the 1967 borders with mutual and minor and reciprocal land swaps and the just resolution of -

Benny Morris

The refugee problem was one of the problems.

Mouin Rabbani

Refugee question. Yes. I worked for a number of years with an international crisis group and my boss at the time was Rob Malley, who was one of the American officials, present at Camp David.

Benny Morris

Who was be thrown out of the State Department or whatever.

Mouin Rabbani

The point I want to make about Rob was he wrote, I think, a very perceptive article in 2001 in the New York Review of books. I know that you and Ehud Barak have had a debate with them, but I think he gives a very compelling reason of why and how Camp David failed. But rather than going into that, I'll -

Benny Morris

He wrote that together with Hussein Araj.

Mouin Rabbani

Hussein Araj, yes, who was not at Camp David. But in response to your question, I think there could have been a real possibility of Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli peace in the mid 1970s in the wake of the 1973 October War. I'll recall that in 1971, Moshe Dayan, Israel's defense minister at the time, full of triumphalism about Israel's victory in 1967 speaking to a group of Israeli military veterans, stated, "If I had to choose between Sharm El-Sheikh without peace or peace without Sharm El-Sheikh..." This is referring to the resort in Egyptian Sinai, which was an under Israeli occupation. Dayan said, "I will choose for Sharm El-Sheikh without peace." Then the 1973 war came along and I think Israeli calculations began to change very significantly. And I think it was in that context that had there been a joint US-Soviet push for an Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian resolution that incorporated both an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines and the establishment of a Palestinian state in

the occupied territories, I think there was a very reasonable prospect for that being achieved. It ended up being aborted, I think for several reasons, and ultimately the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat decided for reasons we can discuss later to launch a separate unilateral initiative for Israeli Egyptian rather than Arab-Israeli peace. And I think once that set in motion, the prospects disappeared because Israel essentially saw its most powerful adversary removed from the equation and felt that this would give it a free hand in the occupied territories also in Lebanon to get rid of the PLO and so on. You ask when were we closest, and I can't give you an answer of when we were closest. I can only tell you when I think we could have been close and that was a lost opportunity. If we look at the situation today, there's been a lot of discussion about a two-state settlement. My own view, and I've written about this, I don't buy the arguments of the naysayers that we have passed the so-called point of no return with respect to a two-state settlement. Certainly if you look at the Israeli position in the occupied territories, I would argue it's more tenuous than was the French position in Algeria in 1954, than was a British position in Ireland in 1916, than was a Ethiopian position in Eritrea in 1990. And so as a matter of practicality, as a matter of principle, I do think the establishment of a Palestinian state in the occupied territories remains realistic. I think the question that we now need to ask ourselves, it's one I'm certainly asking myself since October 7th and looking at Israel's genocidal campaign, but also looking at larger questions, is it desirable? Can you have peace with what increasingly appears to be an irrational genocidal state that seeks to confront and resolve each and every political challenge with violence? And that reacts to its failure to achieve solutions to political challenges with violence by applying even more violence, that has an insatiable lust for Palestinian territory, that a genocidal apartheid state that seems increasingly incapable of even conceiving of peaceful coexistence with the other people on that land. So I'm very pessimistic that a solution is possible. I grew up in Western Europe in the long shadow of the Second World War. I think we can all agree that there could have been no peace in Europe had certain regimes on that continent not been removed from power. I look at Southeast Asia in the late 1970s, and I think we all agreed that there could not have been peace that region had the Khmer Rouge not been ousted. I look at Southern Africa during the 1990s and I think we can all be agreed that had the white minority regimes that ruled Zimbabwe and South Africa not been dismantled, there could not have been peace in that region. And although I think it's worth having a discussion, I do think it's now legitimate question to ask, can there be peace without dismantling the Zionist regime? And I make a very clear distinction between the Israeli state and its institutions on the one hand and the Israeli people who I think regardless of our discussion about the history, I think you can now talk about an Israeli people and the people that have developed rights over time and a formula for peaceful coexistence with them will need to be found, which is a separate matter from dismantling the Israeli state and its institutions. And again, I haven't reached clear conclusions about this except to say as a practical matter, I think a two state settlement remains feasible. But I think there are very legitimate questions about its desirability and about whether peace can be achieved in the Middle East with the persistence of an irrational genocidal apartheid regime. Particularly because Israeli society

is beginning to develop many extremely, extremely distasteful supremacist, dehumanizing aspects that I think also stand in the way of coexistence that are being fed by this regime.

Lex Fridman

So if you look back into history when we're closest to peace, and do you draw any hope from any of them?

Steven Bonnell

I feel like in 2000, I feel like the deal that was present, at least at the end of the Taba Summit, I think in terms of what Israel, I think had the appetite to give and what the Palestinians would've gotten, would've definitely been the most agreeable between the two parties. I don't know if in '73. I'm not sure if the appetite would've ever been there for the Arab states to negotiate alongside the Palestinians. I know that in Jordan there was no love for the Palestinians after 1970, after Black September. I know that Sadat had no love for the Palestinians due to their association with the Muslim brotherhoods, attempted assassinations in Egypt.

Mouin Rabbani

Sorry, which? PLO and the Muslim brotherhood?

Steven Bonnell

Sadat was upset because there were attempted assassinations by people in - oh no, an assassination. It was a personal friend of his, Yusuf Al-Sabah. I can't pronounce that. He was assassinated by a Palestinian -

Mouin Rabbani

He was killed by the Abu Nidal organization, which was not part of the PLO and had nothing to do with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Steven Bonnell

Admittedly, he says as much, belongs to a [inaudible 03:42:05] group, not PLO directly. But I think that there was a history of the Palestinians sometimes fighting with their neighboring states that were hosting them if they weren't getting the political concessions they wanted. The assassination of the Jordanian king in '51 might be another example of that in Jordan. It feels like over a long period of time, it feels like the Palestinians have been told from the neighboring Arab states that if they just continue to enact violence, whether in Israel or abroad, that eventually a state will materialize somehow. I don't think it's gotten them any closer to a state. If anything, I think it's taken them farther and farther and farther away from one, and I think as long as the hyperbolic language is continually employed internationally, the idea that Israel is committing a genocide, the idea that there is an apartheid, the idea that they live in a concentration camp, all of these words, I think further the narrative for the Palestinians that Israel is an evil state that needs to be dismantled. I

mean you said as much about the institution, at least to the Zionist government. Israel's government is probably not going anywhere. All of the other surrounding Arab states have accepted that, or at least most of them down in the Gulf. Egypt and Jordan have accepted that the Palestinians need to accept it too. The Israeli state or the state apparatus is not going anywhere, and at some point they need to realize like, "Hey, we need a leader that's going to come out and represent us, represent all of us, is willing to take political risks, is willing to negotiate some lasting piece for us, and it's not going to be the international community or some invocation of international law or some invocation of morality or justice that's going to extricate us from this conflict. It's going to take some actual difficult political maneuvering on the ground—"

Mouin Rabbani

Of accepting Israel?

Steven Bonnell

Of accepting Israel.

Mouin Rabbani

Which they formally did in 1993.

Steven Bonnell

Which they formally did in 1993. But then no lasting piece came after that in 2000.

Mouin Rabbani

No. Because 1993 was not a peace agreement.

Steven Bonnell

Sure. The Oslo Accords didn't have a final solution.

Mouin Rabbani

- were an interim agreement. And Palestinians actually began clamoring for commencing the permanent status resolutions on schedule, and the Israelis kept delaying them. In fact, they only began, I believe in '99 under American pressure on the Israelis.

Benny Morris

I think you're being a bit one-sided. Both sides didn't fulfill the promise of Oslo and the steps needed for Oslo. There was Palestinian terrorism which accompanied Israel's expansion of settlements and other things. The two things fed each other and led to what happened in 2000, which was a breakdown of the talks altogether when the Palestinians said no. But I don't agree incidentally with this definition of Israel or the Israeli state as apartheid. It's not. There is some sort of apartheid going on in the West Bank. The Israeli regime itself is not an apartheid regime. That is nonsense, by any definition of apartheid, which -

Mouin Rabbani

Well, by the formal definition, I think it qualifies.

Benny Morris

No, it doesn't qualify. Apartheid is a race-based distinction between different segments of the population and some of them don't have any representation at all, like the Blacks in South Africa.

Mouin Rabbani

That's not a requirement.

Benny Morris

In Israel itself, the minority, the Arabs do have representation, do have rights, and so on. I don't think Israel is also genocidal. I don't think it's being genocidal. It wasn't so in '48. It wasn't so in '67, and it hasn't been recently in my view. And talk about dismantling Israel and that's what you're talking about is, and I think Steven said it correctly, is counterproductive. It just pushes Israelis further away from willing to give Palestinians anything.

Lex Fridman

Please, Norm tell me you have -

Benny Morris

Something optimistic to say.

Lex Fridman

- optimistic to say.

Norman Finkelstein

Even though I agree, I've thought about it a lot and I agree with Marine's analysis. I'm not really in the business of punditry. I'd rather look at the historical record where I feel more comfortable and I feel on terra firma. So I'd like to just go through that. I don't quite, I agree and I disagree with Mouin on the '73 issue. After the 1973 war, it was clear that Israel was surprised by what happened during the war, and it took a big hit. The estimates are... I don't know what numbers you used, but I hear between two and 3000 Israeli soldiers were killed during the 19-

Mouin Rabbani

It was 2,500.

Benny Morris

Yeah, 27. Yeah.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, so I got it right. I read different numbers. That's a very large number of Israelis who were killed. There were moments at the beginning of the war where there was a fear that this might be it.

Benny Morris

There wasn't.

Norman Finkelstein

No. The Israelis fear -

Benny Morris

This is nonsense. Everybody forgets Israel's atomic weaponry.

Norman Finkelstein

I know, but -

Benny Morris

So how could they have been defeated?

Norman Finkelstein

Because Dayan expressed -

Mouin Rabbani

Didn't Dayan talk about the collapse of the third temple?

Benny Morris

He did, but it was hysterical and silly because Israel had weapons. They wanted to stop the Syrians or the Egyptians.

Mouin Rabbani

But we're talking about perceptions.

Norman Finkelstein

I can't tell you if he was hysterical or not.

Benny Morris

No. He was. For a day, he was hysterical.

Norman Finkelstein

I wasn't in the same room with him.

Benny Morris

For a day, he was hysterical.

Norman Finkelstein

But I'm just saying, let's not bog down on that. The war is over and when President Carter comes into power... Carter was an extremely smart guy. Jimmy Carter, extremely smart guy, and he was very fixed on details. He was probably the most impressive of modern American presidents, in my opinion, by a wide margin. And he was determined to resolve the conflict on a big scale, on the Arab-Israeli scale. On the Palestinian issue, he wouldn't go past what he called a Palestinian homeland. He wouldn't accept -

Mouin Rabbani

Palestinian national home.

Norman Finkelstein

On the Palestinian national home. He wouldn't go as far as a Palestinian state. I'm not going to go into the details of that. I don't think realistically, given the political balance of forces that was going to happen, but that's a separate issue. Let's get to the issue at hand, namely, what is the obstacle or what has been the obstacle since the early 1970s? Since roughly 1974, the Palestinians have accepted the two states settlement and the June 1967 border. Now as more pressure was exerted on Israel because the Palestinians seemed reasonable, the Israelis, to quote the Israeli political scientist, Avner Yaniv, he since passed from the scene. He said... Yaniv in his book, Dilemmas of Security, he said that the big Israeli fear was what he called the Palestinian peace offensive. That was their worry that the Palestinians were becoming too moderate. And unless you understand that, you can't understand the June 1982 Lebanon War. The purpose of the June 1982 Lebanon war was to liquidate the PLO in Southern Lebanon because they were too moderate the Palestinian peace offensive. I'm going to have to fast-forward. There are many events. There was the First Intifada, then there's the Oslo Accord, and let's now go to the heart of the issue, namely the 2000-2001 negotiations. Well, the negotiations are divided into three parts for the sake of listeners. There's Camp David in July 2000, there are the Clinton parameters in December 2000, and then there are negotiations in Taba in Egypt in 2001. Those are the three phases. Now, I have studied the record probably to the point of insanity because there are so many details you have to master.

Benny Morris

I'll vouch for that, the insanity part, yeah.

Norman Finkelstein

Actually, I will vouch for it. I will personally vouch for it. There is one extensive record from that whole period, from 2000 to you could say 2007, and that is what came to be called the Palestine Papers, which were about 15,000 pages of all the records of the negotiations. I

have read through all of them, every single page, and this is what I find. If you look at Shlomo Ben-Ami's book, which I have with me, *Prophets Without Honor*, it's his last book. He says, "Going into Camp David" - that means July, going into Camp David, July 2000, he said the Israelis were willing to return about... Not return. But will withdraw from -

Mouin Rabbani

Relinquish.

Norman Finkelstein

Relinquish. 92% of the West Bank.

Mouin Rabbani

Ben-Ami was at Camp David.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah. Then he was at Taba. Oh, yeah. He was also at Camp David. Israel wanted to keep all the major settlement blocks. It wanted to keep roughly 8% of the West Bank. They were allowing for... You put it at 84 to 90% in your books. They put it at roughly 92%. Israel was willing to give up.

Mouin Rabbani

It also depends how you calculate.

Benny Morris

It depends what stage at Camp David because there were two weeks.

Norman Finkelstein

I'll get to that.

Benny Morris

The proposals changed during those two weeks.

Norman Finkelstein

So, Israel wants to keep all the major settlement blocks.

Benny Morris

Means the border area of the West Bank.

Norman Finkelstein

Well, not the border. We have Ari'el, we have Ma'ale Adumim. We have, as Condoleezza Rice called Ari'el, she said it was a dagger into the heart of the West Bank. So they want to keep 8% of the land. They want to keep the settlement blocks. They want to keep 80% of the

settlers. They will not budge an inch on the question of refugees. To quote Ehud Barak in the article he co-authored with you in the New York review of books, "We will accept..." And I think the quote's accurate. "No moral, legal or historical responsibility for what happened to the refugees." So forget about even allowing refugees to return. We accept no moral, legal or historical responsibility for the refugees. And on Jerusalem, they wanted to keep large parts of Jerusalem. Now, how do we judge who is reasonable and who is not? Ben-Ami says, "I think the Israeli offer was reasonable." That's how he sees it. But what is the standard of reasonable? My standard is what does international law say? International law says the settlements are illegal. Israel wants to keep all the settlement blocks. 15 judges, all 15 in the wall decision in July 2004, all 15 judges, including the American judge, Buergenthal ruled the settlements are illegal under international law. They want to keep 80% of the settlers under international law. All the settlers are illegal in the West Bank. They want to keep large parts of East Jerusalem. But under international law, East Jerusalem is occupied Palestinian territory. That's what the international -

Benny Morris

Well, not Palestinian, because there was no Palestine.

Norman Finkelstein

Excuse me. Okay.

Benny Morris

There's never been a Palestinian state. How could it be Palestinian?

Norman Finkelstein

I listened patiently to you.

Benny Morris

Sorry.

Norman Finkelstein

Under international law, if you read the decision, all territory, the 2004 wall decision, all territory beyond the green line, which includes East Jerusalem is occupied Palestinian territory.

Mouin Rabbani

With the exception of the Golan Heights.

Norman Finkelstein

According to the International Court of Justice, the designated unit for Palestinian self-determination, and they deny any right whatsoever on the right of return. I don't want to go into the details now. The maximum formal offer was by Ehud Omar in 2008. He offered

5,000 refugees could return under what was called family reunification, 5,000, in the course of five years, and no recognition of any Israeli responsibility. So, if you use as the baseline what the UN General Assembly has said and what the International Court of Justice has said, if you use that baseline, international law, by that baseline, all the concessions came from the Palestinian side. Every single concession came from the Palestinian side. None came from the Israeli side. They may have accepted less than what they wanted, but it was still beyond what international law allocated to them. Now you say -

Mouin Rabbani

Allocated to the Palestinians.

Norman Finkelstein

Allocated to Palestinians, yes. Thank you for the clarification. Now about Arafat, like the Mufti, never liked the guy. I think that was one of the only disagreements Mouin and I had. When Arafat passed, you were a little sentimental. I was not. I never liked the guy. But politics, you don't have to like the guy. There was no question. Nobody argues it that whenever the negotiation started up, the Palestinians just kept saying the same things.

Benny Morris

No.

Norman Finkelstein

No.

Benny Morris

They kept saying no.

Norman Finkelstein

No. Professor Morris, with due respect, incorrect. They kept saying, "International legitimacy, international law, UN resolutions." They said, "We already gave you what the law required. We gave that in 1988, November 1988, and then ratified again at Oslo in 1993." And they said, "Now we want what was promised us under international law." And that was the one point where everybody on the other side agreed. Clinton, don't talk to me about international law. Livni during the Olmert administration. She said, "I studied international law. I don't believe in international law." Every single member on the other side, they didn't want to hear from international law. And to my thinking that that is the only reasonable baseline for trying to resolve the conflict. And Israel has, along with the US -

Benny Morris

When has international law been relevant to any conflict basically in the world?

Norman Finkelstein

That's why -

Benny Morris

Over the last 150 years.

Norman Finkelstein

That's why the Palestinians have to recognize Israel because that's international law.

Benny Morris

But international law is -

Norman Finkelstein

[inaudible 03:58:00] have to recognize Israel because that's international law.

Benny Morris

No, but international law is meaningless.

Norman Finkelstein

That was UN Resolution 242.

Benny Morris

Conflicts are not solved by international law or in accordance with international law.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah. But then, Professor Morris, for argument's sake, let's agree on that, strictly for argument's sake. What's the alternative? Dennis Ross said, "We're going to decide who gets what on the basis of needs." So he says, "Israel needs this. Israel needs that. Israel needs that." Dennis Ross decided to be the philosopher king. He's going to decide on the basis of needs. Well, if you asked me, since Gaza is one of the densest places on Earth, it needs [inaudible 03:58:50]-

Mouin Rabbani

Tel Aviv.

Norman Finkelstein

Yes. It needs -

Benny Morris

It needs part of Sinai. That's what Gaza -

Norman Finkelstein

It needs a nice big chunk -

Benny Morris

Of Sinai.

Norman Finkelstein

Not Sinai.

Benny Morris

That's what it actually needs.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay. I don't even want to go there. It needs a nice big chunk, but I have to accept international law says no. Okay.

Benny Morris

International law is irrelevant.

Norman Finkelstein

Now, Benjamin says, "I think the Israeli offer was reasonable." Okay.

Benny Morris

And he's a reasonable guy. You know that.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, I don't want to go there. I've debated him and partly agree with you. But who decides what's reasonable? I think the international community in its political incarnation, the General Assembly, the Security Council, all those UN Security Council resolutions saying the settlements are illegal, annexation of East Jerusalem is null and void, and the International Court of Justice, that, to me, is a reasonable standard. And by that standard, the Palestinians were asked to make concessions, which I consider unreasonable or the international community considers unreasonable.

Steven Bonnell

I think that the issue is when you apply international law or international standards, I wouldn't say what Benny Morris says, that they're irrelevant, but I think that these have to be seen as informing the conversation. I don't think these are the final shape of the conversation. I don't think, historically, Israel has ever negotiated within the strict bounds of whether we're talking Resolution 242, whether we're talking about any General Assembly resolutions. That's just not how these negotiations tend to go. You might consider international opinion on things, but at the end of the day, it's the bilateral negotiations,

oftentimes historically started in secret, independent of the international community, that end up shaping what the final agreements look like. I think the issue with this broad appeal to international law is, again, going back to my earlier point about all of the euphemistic words, all it simply does is drive Palestinian expectations up to a level that is never going to be satisfied. For instance, you can throw that ICJ opinion all you want, it was an advisory opinion, that came in 2004, how Palestinians gained more or less land since that 2004 advisory opinion was issued.

Mouin Rabbani

So what would your standard be then?

Steven Bonnell

Both sides have to have a delegation that confronts each other and they assess the realistic conditions on the ground, and they try to figure out, within the confines of international law

-

Mouin Rabbani

See, the problem with that -

Steven Bonnell

[inaudible 04:01:13] both sides are reasonable for. But for instance, this statement of retreat from the West Bank. What is it? 400,000 settlers? How many settlers live in the West Bank now?

Benny Morris

Probably half a million.

Steven Bonnell

Yeah.

Benny Morris

Depends if you include the Jerusalem suburbs or not.

Steven Bonnell

Yeah. 4 or 500,000 people.

Norman Finkelstein

I think it's 700,000.

Benny Morris

With the Jerusalem suburbs, perhaps.

Steven Bonnell

Yeah. Half a million people are -

Benny Morris

But Israel calls that Jerusalem, not settlements.

Norman Finkelstein

I know that, but that's not what the law - the law calls it null and void.

Benny Morris

[inaudible 04:01:34]. The law is irrelevant.

Steven Bonnell

We can say whatever we want until we're blue in the face, but half a million Israeli people are not being expelled from [inaudible 04:01:41]. It's not going to happen.

Mouin Rabbani

My response - you're basically saying, if I understand correctly, there's only one way to resolve this, and that is through direct bilateral negotiation?

Steven Bonnell

Probably, yeah.

Mouin Rabbani

Okay.

Steven Bonnell

Or ideally.

Mouin Rabbani

So, I've taken over your house. Okay. You're not going to go to the police because the law is only of limited value. So you come over and sit in what is now my living room that used to be your living room and we negotiate. The problem there is that you're not going to get anything unless I agree to it. And standards and norms and law and all the rest of it be damned. So, you need to take into account that when you're advocating bilateral negotiations that, effectively, that gives each of the parties veto power. And in the current circumstances, the Palestinians have already recognized Israel.

Steven Bonnell

You keep bringing that up like it's a significant concession.

Benny Morris

It's not true. It's not true.

Norman Finkelstein

It's called the law.

Benny Morris

It's not even true.

Norman Finkelstein

It's called the law.

Benny Morris

Even though they signed a piece of paper -

Steven Bonnell

The recognition from Palestine isn't doing anything for -

Benny Morris

Hamas totally rejects -

Mouin Rabbani

I'm not talking about Hamas.

Benny Morris

Hamas is the majority among the Palestinian people. They won the elections in 2006.

Mouin Rabbani

Actually, they won a majority of the seats.

Benny Morris

Yes, exactly.

Mouin Rabbani

They didn't win a majority of the votes.

Benny Morris

Every opinion poll today says the majority of Palestinians -

Mouin Rabbani

That sounds right.

Benny Morris

- support Hamas.

Mouin Rabbani

That sounds right.

Benny Morris

And Hamas absolutely rejects Israel. So if Arafat, in 2003, 1993 or whatever, issued a sort of recognition of Israel -

Mouin Rabbani

It wasn't a sort of recognition.

Benny Morris

Okay, a recognition of Israel. It's meaningless. It's meaningless.

Mouin Rabbani

It's meaningless?

Benny Morris

Anyhow, I don't believe that Arafat was sincere about it.

Mouin Rabbani

Does it matter what you or I think about what he felt?

Benny Morris

Well, most Israelis do, and that does matter.

Mouin Rabbani

Okay.

Benny Morris

That does matter. But Hamas says no and Hamas is the majority today.

Mouin Rabbani

So, for years, the Israeli and US demand was that the Palestinians recognize 242 and 338. They did. But you're saying, "Okay, we demanded that they do this, but it was meaningless when they did it." Then the demand was that -

Benny Morris

It was a tactical thing. Yes.

Mouin Rabbani

Then the demand was that the PLO recognize Israel.

Benny Morris

Tactical.

Mouin Rabbani

Okay, we demanded that they did this, and they did it, but it's meaningless.

Benny Morris

And they never changed their charter, the PLO. You may remember that.

Mouin Rabbani

In fact, in 19 -

Benny Morris

They supposedly abrogated the old charter but never came up with a new one.

Mouin Rabbani

No.

Benny Morris

So, there's no new [inaudible 04:04:05].

Mouin Rabbani

But in 1996 -

Benny Morris

And Farouk Kaddoumi said, "Of course, the old charter is still enforced."

Mouin Rabbani

Yes, yes. But the point is, the Palestinians, demands are constantly made of them.

Benny Morris

And of Israel.

Mouin Rabbani

And when they accede to those demands, they're then told, "Actually, what you did is meaningless, so here's a new set of demands." I mean, it's like a hamster -

Benny Morris

There's no new set of demands.

Mouin Rabbani

It's like a hamster stuck in a wheel -

Benny Morris

No, no, let me tell you what the bottom line is.

Mouin Rabbani

- that will be told, "If you run fast enough, you'll get out of the cage."

Benny Morris

No, no. The bottom line is that Israel would like a Palestinian Sadat. It wants the Palestinians... Listen. Listen. Just let me finish.

Mouin Rabbani

This is really a worst-case scenario that you're talking about now.

Benny Morris

Okay, let me just... Because they shot Sadat, but anyhow.

Mouin Rabbani

For good reason.

Benny Morris

The Israelis -

Steven Bonnell

For good reason?

Benny Morris

- want the Palestinians - Israelis want the Palestinians to actually accept the legitimacy of the state of Israel and the Zionist project and then live side by side with them in two states. That's what the Israelis... I don't even know if it's true -

Mouin Rabbani

And what is the formal position -

Benny Morris

I don't even know if that's true today because there may be -

Mouin Rabbani

And what is the formal position of this Israeli government?

Benny Morris

No, no. I'm saying I don't know if it exists today.

Mouin Rabbani

Okay, its predecessor and its predecessor and its predecessor.

Benny Morris

I'm talking about [inaudible 04:05:13].

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris. Professor Morris.

Mouin Rabbani

Come on.

Benny Morris

That's what Israelis want.

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris.

Benny Morris

They want a change of psyche among the Palestinians.

Norman Finkelstein

Mouin has an interesting –

Benny Morris

If that doesn't happen, there won't be a Palestinian state. There just won't be.

Norman Finkelstein

Mouin has an interesting point.

Benny Morris

Forget international law and all the UN resolutions.

Norman Finkelstein

I know you want to forget it just like you want to forget the genocide charge. I know you want to forget that.

Steven Bonnell

Well, the Palestinians want to forget it too when it doesn't suit them as well, right?

Norman Finkelstein

But here's the problem, and it's exactly the problem that Mouin just brought up. Now, I read carefully your book, One State, Two States. With all due respect, absolutely a disgrace. Coming from you, coming from you -

Benny Morris

Most reviewers didn't agree with you, though.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah. Coming from you, it was like you wrote it in your sleep. It's nothing compared to what you wrote before. I don't know why you did it. In my opinion, you ruined your reputation, not totally, but you undermined it with that book. But let's get to the issue that Mouin wrote. Here's what you said. You said, formally... You said, "Yes, it's true, the Palestinians recognize Israel." But then you said, "Viscerally, in their hearts -"

Benny Morris

They don't.

Norman Finkelstein

"- they didn't really recognize Israel." So I thought to myself, "How does Professor Morris know -"

Mouin Rabbani

Cut open your chest.

Norman Finkelstein

"- what's in the hearts of Palestinians? I don't know."

Benny Morris

[inaudible 04:06:34].

Norman Finkelstein

I was surprised, as a historian, you would be talking about what's lurking in the hearts of Palestinians. But then you said something which was really interesting. You said, "Even if, in their hearts, they accepted Israel," you said, quote, "Rationally, they could never accept Israel because they got nothing. They had this beautiful Palestine and now they're reduced to just a few parcels of land. The two-state settlement -"

Benny Morris

So, they will never accept it.

Norman Finkelstein

Yes.

Benny Morris

Which is true.

Norman Finkelstein

So, you said there's no way they can accept it.

Benny Morris

No, I would say that as well.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah.

Benny Morris

The two-state solution, as proposed, doesn't make any sense.

Norman Finkelstein

Exactly as Mouin said, you keep moving the goalposts until we reach the point where we realize, according to Benny Morris, there can't be a solution. So why don't you just say that outright? Why don't you say it outright? According to you, the Palestinians can never be reasonable because according to you -

Benny Morris

They want all of Palestine. That's why.

Norman Finkelstein

According to you, they couldn't possibly agree to a two-state settlement because it's such a lousy settlement. That's what you say.

Benny Morris

Because they want all of Palestine.

Norman Finkelstein

But you said, rationally, they couldn't accept it, not their feelings.

Benny Morris

It's both.

Norman Finkelstein

You said rational. You went from formally, viscerally, rationally. So now we're reaching the point where, according to Benny Morris, the Palestinians can't be reasonable because, reasonably, they have to reject two states.

Benny Morris

They want all of Palestine.

Norman Finkelstein

So, Mouin is absolutely correct. There's no way to resolve the problem, according to your logic.

Benny Morris

They want all of Palestine. He said that himself. He said they should dismantle Israel.

Norman Finkelstein

I'm talking about -

Benny Morris

That's what he's saying.

Mouin Rabbani

What I said -

Norman Finkelstein

He didn't say that.

Benny Morris

Dismantle Israel.

Mouin Rabbani

What I said, and I've written -

Norman Finkelstein

I'm glad you didn't deny it. Go ahead.

Mouin Rabbani

I've written extensively on this issue, on why a two-state settlement is still feasible, and I came out in support of that proposition. Perhaps in my heart, you can see that I was just bullshitting, but that's what I actually wrote. That was a number of years ago. And just as a matter of historical record, beginning in the early 1970s, there was fierce debate within the Palestinian national movement about whether to accept or reject. And there were three

schools of thought. There was one that would accept nothing less than the total liberation of Palestine. There was a second that accepted what was called the establishment of a fighting national authority on Palestinian soil, which they saw -

Benny Morris

As a springboard.

Mouin Rabbani

- as a springboard for the total liberation of Palestine. And there was a third school that believed that, under current dynamics and so on, that they should go for a two-state settlement. And our friend and correspondent [inaudible 04:09:41] has written a very perceptive article on when the PLO, already in 1976, came out in open support of a two-state resolution at the Security Council. PLO accepted it. Israel, of course, rejected it. But the resolution didn't pass because the US and the UK vetoed it. It was both of them.

Norman Finkelstein

I think it was nine to five [inaudible 04:10:06].

Mouin Rabbani

Ah, okay. Yeah. But fact of the matter is that the PLO came to accept a two-state settlement. Why they did it I think is irrelevant. And subsequently, the PLO acted on the basis of seeking to achieve a two-state settlement. The reason, I think, and I think Norm, you've written about this, the reason that Arafat was so insistent on getting minimally acceptable terms for a two-state settlement at Camp David and afterwards was precisely because he knew that once he signed, that was all the Palestinians were going to get. If his intention had been, "I'm not accepting Israel. I simply want to springboard," he would've accepted a Palestinian state in Jericho, but he didn't. He insisted -

Benny Morris

That's something I've never understood. He should have logically accepted the springboard, and then from there, launched his next stage.

Norman Finkelstein

No, he understood what you don't understand.

Benny Morris

He should've done that.

Norman Finkelstein

He understood international law would put a real constraint on him once he accepted it was over.

Benny Morris

No, but also, I think, constitutionally, he was incapable of signing.

Norman Finkelstein

I don't know that.

Benny Morris

You're right that he should have -

Norman Finkelstein

I'm not his [inaudible 04:11:21].

Benny Morris

- accepted it.

Mouin Rabbani

But if you're correct, okay, that he was really out to -

Benny Morris

[inaudible 04:11:26].

Mouin Rabbani

- eliminate Israel, then he wouldn't have cared about the borders. He wouldn't have cared about what the thing said about refugees. He would've gotten a sovereign state and used that to achieve that purpose.

Norman Finkelstein

The springboard.

Mouin Rabbani

But I think it was precisely because he recognized that he was not negotiating for a springboard, he was negotiating permanent status, that he was such a stickler about the details.

Norman Finkelstein

Just as a factual matter, he wasn't such a stickler. When they asked him how many refugees, the numbers at the-

Mouin Rabbani

It was the principle rather than the numbers.

Norman Finkelstein

It was the principle.

Benny Morris

He said they would be pragmatic about it. [inaudible 04:12:00].

Norman Finkelstein

Yes. And the numbers that were used at Annapolis were between 100 and 250,000 refugees over 10 years. That was the number. Arafat, when he was asked at Camp David, he kept saying, "I care about the Lebanese... the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon," which came to about 300,000.

Mouin Rabbani

Those were his priority.

Norman Finkelstein

Which was a large concession from... whether you accept the number or not, that he wasn't talking about 6 million. He was talking about between 100 and 250,000 over 10 years. Now, the best offer that came from the Palestinians... Excuse me, the best offer that came from Israel was the Olmert offer.

Lex Fridman

Can we just pretend like we didn't all lay out the exceptionally pessimistic view of a two-state... Hold on a second. Two-state solution? Let's pretend that in five years, in 10 years, a two-state peace settlement is reached. And as historians, you'll still be here writing about it 20 years from now. How would it have happened?

Steven Bonnell

I think that, historically, I think that the big issue is I think that both sides have had their own internal motivations to fight because they feel like they have something to gain from it. But I think as time has gone on, unfortunately, the record proves that the Palestinian side is delusional. The longer that the conflict endures, the worse position they'll be in. But for some reason, they've never had a leader that convinced them of that as much, that Arafat thought that if he held on, there was always a better deal around the corner, that Abbas is more concerned with trying to maintain any legitimacy amongst Palestinians than actually trying to negotiate anything realistic with Israel, that Palestinians are always incentivized to feel like as long as they keep fighting, either the international community is going to save them with the 5 millionth UN resolution condemning whatever, that another ICJ advisory opinion is finally going to lead to the expulsion of half a million Jews from the West Bank, or that some other international body, the ICJ and the genocide charge, is going to come and save the Palestinians. As long as they, in their mind, feel like somebody is coming to save them, then they feel like they're going to have the ability to get something better in the

future. But the reality is all of the good partners for peace that the Palestinians had have completely and utterly abandoned them; Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf states. Whether you're talking bilateral peace or the Abraham Accords, most of the Arab leaders, in negotiating peace with Israel, have just not had as much of an interest in maintaining the rights and the representations of what the Palestinian people want. And the only people they have today to draw legitimacy from or to have on their side to argue with them are people that, I guess, write books or tweet or people in the international community that do resolutions or Amnesty International reports. And the reality is, we can scream until we're blue in the face on these things, none of it has gotten any closer to helping the Palestinians in any sense of the word. The condition has only gotten worse. The settlements only continue to expand. The military operations are only to get more brutal. The blockade is going to continue to have worse effects. As long as we use international law as the basis and there isn't a strong Sadat-like Palestinian leader that's willing to come up and confront Israel with the brave, peaceful negotiations to force them to acquiesce, nothing is going to happen. And I think that the issue you come up with is, whether it's people like Norm that talk about how brave the October 7th attacks were or how much respect they have for those fighters, Israel, in a way... And I think people have said as much about Netanyahu. The right wants violence from the Palestinians because it always gives them a perpetual excuse to further the conflict. "Well, we have to go in on October 7th and we've got to remove Hamas. Well, we can't trust these people in the West. We have to do the night raids because the Second Intifada made us feel like the Palestinian people didn't want trust with us." I feel like the biggest thing that would force Israel to change its path would be an actual, a real... not for two weeks, but an actual peaceful Palestinian leader, somebody committed to peace, that is able to apply those standards and hold the entire region of Palestine to those standards. Because I think, over time, the mounting pressure from without the international community and the mounting pressure from within because Israel hosts a lot of its own criticism, if we talk about B'Tselem, we talk about Haaretz, Israel will host a lot of its own criticism. I think that that pressure would force Israel towards an actual peace agreement, but it's never going to come through violence. Historically, it hasn't. And in the modern day, violence has just hurt the Palestinians more and more.

Lex Fridman

If you paint a picture of the future, now is a good moment for both Palestine and Israel to get new leadership. Netanyahu's on the way out, Hamas possibly is on the way out. Who should rise to the top such that a peaceful settlement can be reached? And I'd love to [inaudible 04:16:33].

Steven Bonnell

The problem is, as Benny said, yeah, it's difficult because Hamas enjoys so much widespread support amongst the Palestinian people. I think that... Well, I don't know. There's opinions on whether democracy or pushing them towards elections was the right or wrong idea. But with an Islamic fundamentalist government for Hamas, I don't know if a

negotiation with Israel ever happens there. And then when the international pressure is always '67 borders, infinite right of return for refugees, and a total withdrawal of Israel from all these lands to even start negotiations, I just don't see, realistically, on the Palestinian side, no negotiations are ever going to start in a place that Israel's willing to accept.

Mouin Rabbani

If you want to dismiss international law, that's fine, but then you have to do it consistently. You can't set standards for the Palestinians but reject applying those standards to Israel. If we're going to have the law of the jungle, then we can all be beasts and not only some of us. So it's either that or you have certain agreed standards that are intended to regulate our conduct, all of our conduct, not just some of us. So that's a fundamental -

Steven Bonnell

[inaudible 04:17:46] I'm saying to abandon?

Mouin Rabbani

Well, you're saying international law and the millionth UN resolution, you're being very dismissive about all these things.

Steven Bonnell

Well, I'm saying [inaudible 04:17:54]-

Mouin Rabbani

And that's fine.

Steven Bonnell

I'm not being dismissive.

Mouin Rabbani

But then you have to be dismissive across the board.

Steven Bonnell

I'm just saying, for instance, 242, that was a Chapter VI resolution. That's non-binding. But 242 [inaudible 04:18:01]-

Mouin Rabbani

It's binding.

Steven Bonnell

It's absolutely not binding.

Mouin Rabbani

It's binding.

Norman Finkelstein

What is binding? Do you know anything about how the UN system works?

Steven Bonnell

If you read the language of the resolution, binding is typically if it commits you to upholding a particular international law or if it establishes [inaudible 04:18:13].

Norman Finkelstein

What is Chapter VI? You just throw out words. You hear binding, not binding.

Steven Bonnell

Does 424 mention a Palestinian state?

Mouin Rabbani

Norm -

Norman Finkelstein

Of course not.

Mouin Rabbani

That's part of the problem.

Steven Bonnell

Yeah, exactly.

Norman Finkelstein

That was the reason why the Palestinians didn't want to recognize 242 because they only referred, at the very end, the refugee problem.

Steven Bonnell

Sure, but the PLO recognized 181 and 242 [inaudible 04:18:31].

Mouin Rabbani

Yeah, but hold on. Hold on. Every United Nations Security Council resolution, irrespective of under which chapter it was adopted, is, by definition, binding. Binding not only on the members of the Security Council but on every member state of the UN. Read the UN Charter. It's black and white.

Steven Bonnell

Sure. People can look that up [inaudible 04:18:53]-

Mouin Rabbani

Yes.

Steven Bonnell

- but the language even of 242 is kept intentionally vague such that it doesn't actually provide, again, the final [inaudible 04:18:59]-

Mouin Rabbani

It's actually not that vague -

Steven Bonnell

It's incredibly vague.

Mouin Rabbani

- because the term "land for peace" originates in 242. The idea is -

Steven Bonnell

Sure, but the part about territorial acquisition and Israel's need to give it up was kept vague. That's why, in '79, Israel thought that they fulfilled their obligations under 242 [inaudible 04:19:13]-

Mouin Rabbani

You asked a separate question.

Norman Finkelstein

Allow me points of information. The first principle in UN Resolution 242 is that the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force -

Steven Bonnell

Which is meaningless.

Norman Finkelstein

It may be meaningless to you, Mr. Bonnell.

Steven Bonnell

It was meaningless to everyone in the region.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay. Mr. Bonnell, that principle was adopted by the Friendly Nations Resolution, the UN General Assembly in 1970. That resolution was then reiterated in the International Court of Justice ruling, advisory opinion in 2004. That was the basis of the coalition against Iraq when it acquired Kuwait and then declared it a province of Kuwait.

Steven Bonnell

Which Arafat supported.

Norman Finkelstein

That's what's called -

Benny Morris

That's true. Arafat did -

Steven Bonnell

Arafat did support it.

Benny Morris

Arafat did support it.

Steven Bonnell

[inaudible 04:20:11].

Norman Finkelstein

It's not accurate. I'm not going to go there. I'm not going to go there.

Steven Bonnell

It's not accurate that Arafat endorsed -

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, I'm not going to go there.

Steven Bonnell

Okay. [inaudible 04:20:18].

Norman Finkelstein

It's called, under international law, jus cogens or peremptory norms of international law, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war. That is not controversial. It's not vague. You couldn't put it more succinctly. You cannot acquire territory by force under international law.

Steven Bonnell

On the West Bank before '67, who owned the Gaza Strip before '67?

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Bonnell, don't change the subject. If you don't know what you're talking about -

Steven Bonnell

It's not about [inaudible 04:20:50]-

Norman Finkelstein

- at least have the humility -

Steven Bonnell

How close has 242 -

Norman Finkelstein

You talk about Chapter VI -

Steven Bonnell

How close has 242 gotten -

Norman Finkelstein

You don't know Chapter VI -

Steven Bonnell

How close has 242 gotten the Palestinians to peace?

Norman Finkelstein

You don't know Chapter VI from tweet five. You have no idea what you're talking about. It's just so embarrassing. At least have some humility. Between us who have read maybe 10,000 books on the topic and you've read two Wikipedia entries and you start talking about Chapter VI. Do you know what Chapter VII is?

Steven Bonnell

Answer me. Answer the question.

Norman Finkelstein

Do you know what Chapter VII is?

Steven Bonnell

Norm, answer the question. How close has 242 gotten the Palestinians to a state?

Mouin Rabbani

Let me ask you this.

Steven Bonnell

How close has the 2004 advisory opinion gotten the West Bank settlement [inaudible 04:21:26]?

Mouin Rabbani

What's your alternative?

Steven Bonnell

The alternative is not this, whatever this making money off the conflict is. The actual alternative -

Norman Finkelstein

[inaudible 04:21:33] making money -

Steven Bonnell

The actual alternative -

Norman Finkelstein

Destiny should talk about making money off of idiocy.

Steven Bonnell

Yes. Yeah, you're a media [inaudible 04:21:37] when you go and talk to 50 million different people about your awesome [inaudible 04:21:40].

Benny Morris

But he has a point, though.

Norman Finkelstein

What point?

Steven Bonnell

But the issue is you have to negotiate -

Benny Morris

All these resolutions have gotten the Palestinians no closer to a state.

Steven Bonnell

Nothing.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah, but hold on. Because they haven't been enforced because of the US veto.

Benny Morris

They're not going to be enforced.

Norman Finkelstein

Wait, wait, wait, wait.

Benny Morris

They've gotten nowhere -

Mouin Rabbani

If I may, if I may -

Steven Bonnell

[inaudible 04:21:52].

Norman Finkelstein

You know what? You know what? Professor Morris -

Steven Bonnell

[inaudible 04:21:58] about the case for genocide.

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris, because of your logic, and I'm not disputing it, that's why October 7th happened.

Benny Morris

Oh my God.

Norman Finkelstein

Because there was no options left for those people. Exactly what Mouin said.

Benny Morris

And now what options are left? After October 7th -

Steven Bonnell

This has been the Palestinian mentality for 60 years.

Benny Morris

- what's the options left?

Steven Bonnell

The only option is conflict.

Norman Finkelstein

Listen to this.

Steven Bonnell

The only option is combat.

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Bonnell is now an expert on Palestinian mentality.

Mouin Rabbani

Hold on. You're contradicting yourself.

Norman Finkelstein

You know as much about Palestinian politics as you know about Chapter V.

Steven Bonnell

I only deal with facts. I only deal with facts. Egypt didn't find it necessary to -

Norman Finkelstein

Tell me about Chapter V.

Steven Bonnell

Egypt didn't find it necessary -

Norman Finkelstein

Tell me about Chapter V.

Steven Bonnell

- to negotiate peace [inaudible 04:22:34] the Palestinians. Jordan didn't find it necessary to negotiate peace [inaudible 04:22:36] the Palestinians.

Mouin Rabbani

Hey, if I may -

Steven Bonnell

The Abraham Accords [inaudible 04:22:37] the Palestinians -

Norman Finkelstein

Talk faster, faster, faster, faster.

Steven Bonnell

- despite all of the international law -

Lex Fridman

Everybody, Mouin.

Norman Finkelstein

Faster.

Mouin Rabbani

You're contradicting yourself. On the one hand, you're saying all the Palestinians do is fight and violence and terrorism and all the rest of it, but on the other hand, you're saying they're expecting salvation from UN resolutions and international court. Those aren't violent.

Norman Finkelstein

It's the law.

Steven Bonnell

No, but it's part of maintaining-

Norman Finkelstein

It's the law.

Steven Bonnell

It's the continual putting off of negotiating any solution.

Norman Finkelstein

[inaudible 04:23:06].

Mouin Rabbani

They've negotiated.

Steven Bonnell

As in when Arafat takes 10 days to respond-

Norman Finkelstein

I think he said -

Steven Bonnell

When Arafat takes 10 days to respond and hops on a jet all over the world to go and visit his friends, yes.

Norman Finkelstein

I think Mouin said -

Steven Bonnell

But it's for putting the conflict off indefinitely.

Norman Finkelstein

- they accepted two states in 1975. Brace yourself.

Benny Morris

They didn't.

Steven Bonnell

Why didn't they accept the Taba Summit then?

Norman Finkelstein

Brace yourself. That's 50 years ago.

Steven Bonnell

Why didn't they accept the Camp David [inaudible 04:23:19]?

Benny Morris

This is a legend.

Norman Finkelstein

That's a half-century ago.

Benny Morris

No, no, they didn't accept a two-state solution [inaudible 04:23:26].

Norman Finkelstein

He quoted a very good article [inaudible 04:23:28].

Steven Bonnell

You can quote Arafat talking about how he's lying and he's just going to use... In '94 and '95 when he's making trips around the world, how he just wanted [inaudible 04:23:35] starting ground.

Norman Finkelstein

Talk faster. Talk faster.

Steven Bonnell

I'm sorry. I can't talk slow. You can watch [inaudible 04:23:38] and slow it down to 0.5 speed if you don't understand what I'm saying.

Norman Finkelstein

Faster. Faster.

Mouin Rabbani

There's a very lengthy history -

Norman Finkelstein

Motor mouth.

Mouin Rabbani

- of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. You want to deny that those negotiations took place.

Steven Bonnell

Where it feels like there was a good-faith effort -

Norman Finkelstein

What it feels like.

Steven Bonnell

Where there was a good-faith effort -

Norman Finkelstein

Feels like.

Steven Bonnell

Where there was a good-faith effort -

Norman Finkelstein

We have a written record.

Steven Bonnell

With all due respect -

Norman Finkelstein

We have a written record, Mr. Bonnell.

Steven Bonnell

Mr. Pop History, you can't even read the written records. I don't know why you're referring to them. Okay.

Norman Finkelstein

Excuse me? I just said there are 15,000 pages on Annapolis.

Steven Bonnell

And I'm sure you cherry-picked your favorite quotes from all of them. Okay.

Norman Finkelstein

I don't cherry-pick.

Steven Bonnell

That's great. That's great.

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Bonnell, at least I had a quote to cherry-pick.

Steven Bonnell

That's great. [inaudible 04:24:12].

Norman Finkelstein

All you have is Wikipedia.

Steven Bonnell

I gave you quotes.

Norman Finkelstein

All you have is Wikipedia.

Steven Bonnell

Do you want quotes? Find me the information that shows the Palestinian cause has been furthered by any international law. You can't do it.

Mouin Rabbani

I think the problem is different. Okay. You want to say the Palestinians were only fighting. And then when I point out they've also gone to the court and the UN, you say, "Well, all they do then is these things and they should be negotiating." And I demonstrate that there was a lengthy record of negotiations. You said, "Yeah, but they didn't go in good faith." Again, you're placing the hamster in the wheel and telling him if he runs fast enough, maybe one day he'll get out of the cage.

Steven Bonnell

What was the best good-faith negotiation on the side of the -

Mouin Rabbani

Okay. Please, if I could just finish. I think the fundamental problem here is not what the Palestinians have and haven't done, and it's perfectly legitimate to have a discussion about whether they could have been more effective. Of course, they could have been more effective. Everyone could have always been more effective. The fundamental issue here is that Israel has never been prepared to concede the legitimacy of Palestinian national rights in the land of the former British mandate of Palestine.

Steven Bonnell

Then how do you explain Taba Summit? How do you explain Camp David?

Benny Morris

No, Barack and Olmert did accept the legitimacy -

Steven Bonnell

How do you explain Olmert's offer to Abbas? Yeah.

Benny Morris

- of Palestinian demands. But they didn't want to give the Palestinians all of Palestine, that's all.

Norman Finkelstein

No, all of Palestine? No, no.

Mouin Rabbani

You mean all of the occupied territories?

Benny Morris

You're talking about all of Palestine being occupied territory?

Steven Bonnell

Wait. What is the occupied territories?

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris.

Mouin Rabbani

The occupied territories -

Steven Bonnell

Is that all of Israel?

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris, could you show me -

Mouin Rabbani

The occupied territories are those territories that Israel occupied in June of 1967.

Norman Finkelstein

Could you show me -

Benny Morris

Palestinians often use that term to define the whole of Palestine, not just the West Bank.

Norman Finkelstein

Could you show me, Professor Morris, in all the negotiations, all the negotiations and all the accounts that have been written, can you show me one where the Palestinians in the negotiations, because that's what we were talking about, wanted all of Israel? The maximum -

Benny Morris

They can't say that because the international community won't accept it.

Norman Finkelstein

Oh, so you know it because you know what -

Mouin Rabbani

So, they didn't say it. They didn't ask for it.

Norman Finkelstein

- but you know what's in their hearts.

Benny Morris

No, Hamas did. Hamas always said all of it.

Mouin Rabbani

Hamas only negotiated with Israel about prisoner exchanges [inaudible 04:26:36].

Benny Morris

No, I know. But they represent -

Norman Finkelstein

So, we were talking about the negotiations.

Benny Morris

- a lot of the Palestinian people, you will agree.

Norman Finkelstein

The only place I saw pieces of Israel were the land swaps, and the land swaps accounted for about 2-5% of Israel. Nobody asked for all of Israel. Why do you say things like that?

Steven Bonnell

What do you mean? They asked for all of Israel in '48. They asked for all of Israel in '67. What do you think those reports were about?

Norman Finkelstein

Okay. Mr. Bonnell, you talk so -

Steven Bonnell

You're not going to respond to anything I'm saying because you have no answer.

Norman Finkelstein

I'll respond to you. Okay. Mr. Bonnell, we were talking about the diplomatic negotiations beginning with 2001.

Steven Bonnell

Yes, I understand, but you can't pretend that the first ask for Israel was in diplomacy. It was through war.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay. You don't know what you're talking about.

Steven Bonnell

Is the international law argument ever going to get the Palestinians closer to state? Is the Israeli state ever going to be dismantled? Do you think that's realistic coming up, ever, in the next 20 years?

Mouin Rabbani

Again, I'm posing a question, and the question is, regardless of what's feasible or realistic today, the question I'm posing is, can you have peace in the Middle East with this militant, irrational, genocidal, apartheid state and power?

Steven Bonnell

[inaudible 04:27:49] I don't think so, no.

Mouin Rabbani

Okay. And the question I'm asking is, can you have peace with this regime or does this regime and its institutions need to be dismantled, similar to the examples I gave of Europe and Southern Africa?

Steven Bonnell

How do you contend with the fact that most of the surrounding Arab states seem to agree that you can?

Mouin Rabbani

Yeah, you're correct. Several of them, most importantly, Egypt, Jordan, have made their peace with Israel. I should add that Israel's conduct since then has placed these relations under strain. I had very little... I didn't take the reports of a Saudi-Israeli rapprochement particularly seriously before October 7th, the reason being that it was really a Saudi-Israeli-US deal, which committed the US to make certain commitments to Saudi Arabia that would probably never get through Congress.

Steven Bonnell

Do you not consider the Egypt-Israeli peace deal legitimate then since the United States made a great financial contribution to Egypt?

Mouin Rabbani

I don't think the question is whether that deal is legitimate or not. I think that deal exists. But the point is, the core of this conflict is not between Israel and Egypt. The core of this conflict is between Israel and the Palestinian people. And the reason that Israel agreed to relinquish the occupied Egyptian Sinai and the reason that Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty was signed in 1979 is because Israel, in 1973, recognized that its military superiority was ultimately no match for Egypt's determination to recover its occupied territories and that there would come a point when Egypt would find a way to extract an unbearable price.

Benny Morris

Maybe just Israelis wanted peace.

Mouin Rabbani

Well, the Israelis wanted -

Benny Morris

Not just because they were afraid of what Egypt might do at some point.

Mouin Rabbani

If you're talking about the average Israeli citizen, I think that's a fair characterization. If you're talking about the Israeli leadership, I think they looked at it in more strategic terms of how do you remove -

Benny Morris

I think it's both.

Mouin Rabbani

- the most powerful Arab military states from the equation?

Norman Finkelstein

Two points. Simple points. What was the terms of that Egypt-Israel peace treaty? International law, Egypt demanded every -

Benny Morris

Nobody cared about international law.

Norman Finkelstein

Allow me to finish. Every single inch of Egyptian -

Benny Morris

Nobody [inaudible 04:30:30] about international law.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay.

Benny Morris

Begin and Carter and Sadat talk about the realities -

Norman Finkelstein

No, Professor -

Benny Morris

- of Israel occupying territory and wanting peace.

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris, I know the record. They demanded, as you know because you've written about it, they demanded every square inch, as you know. They demanded the oil fields be dismantled, the airfields be dismantled.

Benny Morris

No, not dismantle. They wanted the oil fields.

Norman Finkelstein

And they wanted the settlements dismantled.

Benny Morris

They wanted the settlements dismantled.

Norman Finkelstein

The settlements, the oil fields, and the airfield, they demanded all three back. You can't have -

Benny Morris

What do you mean "back"? The airfields weren't there when the Egyptians were there.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay. That's incorrect.

Benny Morris

What's incorrect?

Norman Finkelstein

You're incorrect.

Benny Morris

The airfields were built after -

Norman Finkelstein

They built an airfield. The Israelis built an airfield in the occupied Sinai.

Benny Morris

Yes.

Norman Finkelstein

And they wanted it back.

Benny Morris

They didn't want it back. It wasn't theirs.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay.

Benny Morris

They wanted the territory in which the airfields were built back.

Norman Finkelstein

The oil fields, the airfields, the settlements had to be dismantled.

Benny Morris

Yes.

Norman Finkelstein

Begin said, "I don't want to be the first prime minister to dismantle a settlement."

Benny Morris

But he did.

Norman Finkelstein

But he did. Why? Because of the law.

Benny Morris

No.

Steven Bonnell

No. It was because of peace - it was normalization -

Benny Morris

Nobody cared about the law. The law had nothing to do with anything. It was a negotiation between two states -

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Morris. Mr. Morris.

Benny Morris

- each of which wanted certain things.

Norman Finkelstein

Palestinians [inaudible 04:31:42] -

Benny Morris

The law had nothing to do with anything.

Norman Finkelstein

- as they said repeatedly in the negotiations -

Benny Morris

You're not listening. You're not listening.

Norman Finkelstein

I know -

Benny Morris

You're missing the whole point.

Norman Finkelstein

I've read the negotiations.

Benny Morris

The law has nothing to do with anything.

Norman Finkelstein

There were two foreign relations of US volumes on it.

Benny Morris

Nobody cared about the law.

Norman Finkelstein

The Palestinians kept saying, "We want exactly -"

Benny Morris

Forget the Palestinians. They weren't there.

Norman Finkelstein

Allow me to finish. The Palestinians kept saying, "We want what Egypt got."

Norman Finkelstein

The Palestinians kept saying, "We want what Egypt got. We want what Egypt got." Egypt got everything back.

Benny Morris

But nothing to do with the law.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay.

Benny Morris

Nothing to do with the law.

Norman Finkelstein

And number two, I'm not saying it's the whole picture, but as Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan said at the time, he said, "If a car has four wheels and you remove one wheel, the car can't move." And for them, removing Egypt from the Arab front would then remove any Arab military threat to Israel.

Benny Morris

Yeah, but it's got nothing to do with the international law.

Norman Finkelstein

No, the first part did, and that's what the Palestinians kept saying -

Benny Morris

I don't know what the first part is.

Norman Finkelstein

- "We want what each Egypt got from the settlement."

Benny Morris

Yeah, that's true, but forget the international law.

Norman Finkelstein

By the way -

Benny Morris

It had nothing to do with negotiations.

Norman Finkelstein

- one last thing on a personal note. The quote about Sharm El Sheikh without peace, that's the only thing you ever cited from a book of mine.

Benny Morris

I've cited from your book?

Norman Finkelstein

Yes. I was absolutely shocked at your betrayal of your people. That was pure treason.

Benny Morris

I apologize for that. I apologize.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, I accept.

Lex Fridman

Alright. Well, let me try once again, for the region and for the entirety of humanity, what gives you hope? We just heard a lot of pessimistic, cynical takes. What gives you hope?

Benny Morris

People don't like war. That's a good reason, that's hope. In other words, the fear of war, the disaster of war, should give people an impetus to try and seek peace.

Lex Fridman

When you look at people in Gaza and people on the West Bank, people in Israel, fundamentally they hate war?

Benny Morris

Yes, I think so.

Lex Fridman

What gives you hope?

Norman Finkelstein

There is no hope, no. It's an extreme - hey, I'm not happy to say that.

Steven Bonnell

Of course you are.

Norman Finkelstein

It's a very bleak moment right now.

Benny Morris

That I agree with. I agree with that.

Norman Finkelstein

Because Israel believes it has to restore what it calls its deterrence capability. I think you've written about it actually, I just realized. Israel has to restore its deterrence capability, and after the catastrophe of October 7th, restoring its deterrence capacity means - this part you didn't write about... the annihilation of Gaza and then moving on to the Hezbollah. So, the Israelis are dead set on restoring that deterrence capability. On the Arab side, and I know Mouin and I have disagreed on it, and we're allowed to disagree, I think the Arab side, the lesson they learned from October 7th is Israelis aren't as strong as we thought they were.

Benny Morris

That would be an unfortunate message if that's really what the Arabs come to believe.

Norman Finkelstein

And they think that there is a military option now. I think that it's a zero-sum game at this point, and it's very, very bleak, and I'm not going to lie about that. Now, I will admit my predictive capacities are not perfect -

Benny Morris

Are limited.

Norman Finkelstein

- are limited, but for the moment it's a very bleak situation -

Benny Morris

That I agree with.

Norman Finkelstein

- and I don't see right now a way out. However, at the very minimum, permanent ceasefire ended in human and illegal blockade of Gaza, and free the hostages.

Benny Morris

Why is it illegal? They were shooting rockets at Israel for 20 years. Why is that illegal to blockade Gaza?

Steven Bonnell

He thinks they're bottle rockets, that's what he calls them [inaudible 04:35:47].

Norman Finkelstein

Why is it illegal? I'll tell you why.

Benny Morris

You don't rocket your neighbor. You rocket your neighbor, expect consequences.

Norman Finkelstein

I'll tell you why.

Benny Morris

Expect consequences.

Mouin Rabbani

But that works both ways.

Norman Finkelstein

Yes.

Benny Morris

I know, and I accept that, it works both ways.

Norman Finkelstein

Professor Morris. I'll tell you why. Because every human rights, humanitarian and UN organization in the world -

Benny Morris

They're all irrelevant.

Norman Finkelstein

- has said that the blockade -

Benny Morris

You keep quoting them. Nobody cares about Amnesty.

Norman Finkelstein

- is a form of collective punishment -

Benny Morris

Nobody cares about Amnesty.

Norman Finkelstein

- which is illegal under international law.

Benny Morris

Forget illegal. The word illegal is -

Norman Finkelstein

You think a blockade which -

Benny Morris

You don't understand the way the world works. These things are irrelevant.

Norman Finkelstein

And you think confining, because that's the blockade -

Benny Morris

Yes, you don't shoot rockets at your neighbor.

Norman Finkelstein

- confining a million children -

Benny Morris

That's the choice of Hamas.

Steven Bonnell

Children?

Benny Morris

That's Hamas' choice.

Norman Finkelstein

Confining a million children in what The Economist calls a human rubbish heap -

Benny Morris

The Economist supported Israel in this war, and continues to support Israel.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay. What International Committee of The Red Cross called a sinking ship, what the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called a toxic slum, you think -

Benny Morris

It is a slum, of course it's a slum, but it's caused by the Hamas.

Norman Finkelstein

- under international law, you think it's legitimate -

Benny Morris

Forget the law.

Norman Finkelstein

Hey, I know you want to forget the law.

Benny Morris

What about morality? Forget the law, what about morality?

Norman Finkelstein

It's what every Israeli fears the most.

Benny Morris

What?

Norman Finkelstein

The law.

Benny Morris

No, no, no.

Norman Finkelstein

As Tzipi Livni said, "I studied international law. I oppose international law." Of course you don't want to hear about the law.

Benny Morris

That has got nothing to do with anything.

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, so here's the thing. Then don't complain about October 7th.

Benny Morris

Do you hear me complaining? I didn't complain.

Norman Finkelstein

If you want to say forget about the law -

Benny Morris

All I said was they acted like barbarians.

Norman Finkelstein

- when there is no international humanitarian law, there's no distinction between civilians and combatants -

Benny Morris

There should be, but it's got nothing to do with the law.

Norman Finkelstein

Now you're doing what Mouin said, you're becoming very selective about the law. If you want to forget about the law-

Benny Morris

People should be [inaudible 04:37:51].

Mouin Rabbani

Across the board.

Norman Finkelstein

- Hamas had every right to do what it did. It had every right to do what it did according to you, not to me, because you want to forget the law.

Steven Bonnell

Do you still support the Houthis shooting random ships?

Norman Finkelstein

Absolutely.

Steven Bonnell

Okay, that's a violation of international law, so you play the same game.

Norman Finkelstein

Absolutely. And were there are power during World War II who had the courage of the Houthis, were there are power that had that kind of courage -

Steven Bonnell

So, courageous to be bombing merchant ships while tens of thousands of people die of actual starvation, not the starvation that exists in the Gaza Strip where people before October 7th don't die of starvation. Not the concentration camp, as they say of the Gaza Strip. The Houthis.

Benny Morris

What about starvation in Yemen? Don't that have something better to do?

Norman Finkelstein

That was the Houthis.

Benny Morris

Yes, I know. Don't they have anything better to do?

Norman Finkelstein

That was the Houthis, and you know in three years they blew up 180,000 people.

Benny Morris

Shouldn't they be feeding the Yemenis?

Norman Finkelstein

You know, 60,000 Yemenis died in starvation?

Benny Morris

Why fight the western powers in Israel when you should be taking care of your problems at home, the Houthis.

Mouin Rabbani

Often the only allies of the dispossessed are those who experience similar circumstances.

Benny Morris

Don't you think that they should take care of the Yemeni problems?

Mouin Rabbani

As I said -

Norman Finkelstein

I'm very happy they're helping out the Palestinians.

Benny Morris

It's at the expense of the Yemenis. They'll pay for it.

Norman Finkelstein

Anybody who comes to the aid of those suffering the genocide-

Benny Morris

There's no genocide.

Norman Finkelstein

- half of whom are children - yeah, according to the most current UN reports, as of today -

Benny Morris

There's no genocide.

Norman Finkelstein

- one quarter of the population of Gaza -

Benny Morris

Is starving.

Norman Finkelstein

That means 500,000 children -

Benny Morris

Are starving.

Norman Finkelstein

- are on the verge of famine.

Benny Morris

They keep saying on the verge of.

Steven Bonnell

On the verge of. Didn't you quote that they said it was unlivable?

Benny Morris

I have not seen one Palestinian die of starvation in these last four months. Not one.

Mouin Rabbani

There have been documented cases.

Benny Morris

They are always on the verge. They're on the verge.

Mouin Rabbani

There have been documented cases.

Benny Morris

I haven't seen any.

Steven Bonnell

Yesterday Al Jazeera said six, and the day before that they said two, so those are the two.

Benny Morris

That number probably dies in Israel of starvation also.

Mouin Rabbani

I don't think there's famine in Israel.

Norman Finkelstein

You're so laid back, so blasé.

Benny Morris

There isn't. There isn't in the Gaza Strip either. It's something which is produced for the Western -

Norman Finkelstein

"I haven't seen any starving children yet."

Mouin Rabbani

There are infants dying due to an engineered lack of access to food and nutrition.

Benny Morris

I don't think it's engineered, I think that if the Hamas stopped shooting perhaps, or -

Norman Finkelstein

Unfortunately, most -

Mouin Rabbani

As I said, engineered.

Norman Finkelstein

I think Human Rights Watch called it using starvation as a weapon. That's called engineering.

Steven Bonnell

That's what they did, but you were pushed on this by Coleman Hughes to bring up an example of why is the Gaza Strip, by what metric are they starving? By what metric is it so behind the rest of the world?

Mouin Rabbani

If we're going to bring up -

Steven Bonnell

I want to hear an answer to that, because he didn't answer it before.

Norman Finkelstein

I'm happy to answer it. I just quoted you from the humanitarian organizations. They said one quarter of the population of Gaza is now verging on famine.

Steven Bonnell

Before October 7th.

Norman Finkelstein

I'm not going before October 7th.

Steven Bonnell

But you used that as justification for Hamas fighting. You said the conditions were unlivable, they had to fight.

Norman Finkelstein

I said to him -

Steven Bonnell

So my question is what made it unlivable prior to October 7th? What are the metrics that you're using?

Norman Finkelstein

There were about five, six or seven reports issued by UNCTAD, issued by the World Bank, issued by the International Monetary Fund, and they all said that's why.

Steven Bonnell

Why? Why did they say that?

Norman Finkelstein

That's why The Economist, not a radical periodical, described Gaza as a human rubbish heap.

Steven Bonnell

So tell me by what metrics? If you're a historian, if you do all this work to get to things, tell me what they said. Don't just tell me a sentence, tell me by what metric.

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Bonnell.

Steven Bonnell

He's not going to answer again.

Norman Finkelstein

I don't think I've avoided any of your questions -

Steven Bonnell

Of course you have, you've avoided every question.

Norman Finkelstein

- except when they breached the threshold of complete imbecility.

Steven Bonnell

So, you were about to tell me by what metric the Gaza Strip is a humanitarian crisis.

Norman Finkelstein

I'm going to answer you. You remember what I said a moment ago, I said to Professor Morris, I defer to expertise? I look at what the organizations say. I look at what the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights said.

Steven Bonnell

You're saying in more words that you don't know. You don't know or you don't care.

Norman Finkelstein

And I don't know.

Steven Bonnell

Okay, that's fine. That's what I said.

Norman Finkelstein

Have you ever investigated how complicated is the metric for hunger, starvation, and famine? It is such a complicated metric they figured out, if you asked me to repeat it now, I couldn't do it.

Steven Bonnell

And yet we have a Human Development Index where we rank countries, yet we can still measure infant mortality -

Norman Finkelstein

Okay, you go and call the news programs.

Steven Bonnell

- life expectancy, we can measure all of these things.

Lex Fridman

Mouin, I'm holding out for you here. You still didn't answer the hope question. What gives you a source of hope about the region?

Mouin Rabbani

Well, first of all, I would agree with Benny Morris and Norman Finkelstein that the current situation is bleak, and I think it would be unreasonable to expect it to not get even bleaker in the coming weeks and months. And we now, this conflict, really, it originated in the late 19th century, it's been a more or less active conflict since the 1920s, 1930s, and it has produced a tremendous amount of suffering, and regional conflict, and geopolitical complications, and all of that. But what gives me hope is that throughout their entire ordeal, the Palestinian people have never surrendered, and I believe they never will surrender to overwhelming force and violence. They have taken everything that Israel has thrown at them, they have taken everything that the West has thrown at them, they have taken everything that those who are supposed to be their natural allies have on occasion thrown at them. But this is a people that never has and, I believe, never will surrender. At a certain point, I think Israel and its leaders will have to come to the realization that by hook or by crook, these people

are going to achieve their inalienable and legitimate national rights, and that is going to be a reality.

Benny Morris

Well, what do you mean by that? You mean all of Palestine? Is that what you mean?

Mouin Rabbani

No.

Benny Morris

From the river to the sea?

Mouin Rabbani

Well, ideally, of course, yes. And what I was -

Benny Morris

Are those the inalienable rights?

Mouin Rabbani

No. What I was saying earlier, and then the discussion got sidetracked, is that I did believe that a two-state settlement, a partition of Palestine along the 1967 boundaries would have been a reasonable solution, because I think it also would have opened pathways to further-

Benny Morris

But now you believe what?

Mouin Rabbani

- further nonviolent engagement between Israel and the Palestinians that could create other forms of coexistence in a federal, or binational, or other -

Steven Bonnell

What do you think about refugees in regards to that? Do you think there has to be a resettlement of the five or six million, whoever wants to lay claim to be [inaudible 04:45:12]?

Benny Morris

A return?

Mouin Rabbani

I think there has to be an explicit acknowledgement of -

Benny Morris

Responsibility?

Mouin Rabbani

- of the responsibility -

Benny Morris

And the return?

Mouin Rabbani

- and of their rights. I think that in the framework of a two-state settlement, I think a formula would need to be found that does not undermine the foundations of a two-state settlement. And I don't think it would be that difficult, because I suspect that there are probably large numbers of Palestinian refugees who, once their rights are acknowledged, will find it exceptionally distasteful -

Benny Morris

To return from [inaudible 04:46:00].

Mouin Rabbani

- to have to live among the kind of sentiments that we've heard around this table today, to be quite frank. I mean, I was previously unfamiliar with you, and I watched one of your preparation videos. Very disconcerting stuff, I have to say. You were explaining two days ago, in the discussion about apartheid and how absurd it was, that in your view Jim Crow was not apartheid, but Arab states not giving citizenship to Palestinian refugees is apartheid. That's what I meant with my earlier comments about white supremacy.

Steven Bonnell

That's great, the white supremacy comment. Well, hold on, let me respond. My issue is that I feel like we have jumped on this euphemistic treadmill, and I think that's part of the reason why this conflict will never get solved, is because on one end you've got a people who are now convinced internationally that they're victims of apartheid, genocide, concentration camp conditions, ethnic cleansing, they're forced to live in an open air prison, with all of these things that are stacked against them, all of these terms that are highly specific, that refer to very precise things. And then when people like you say that they should -

Mouin Rabbani

Well, I would expect nothing less from someone who doesn't think Jim Crow is apartheid, but who does think that Arab states not giving Palestinians -

Steven Bonnell

The problem is you're morally loading. For you apartheid is when racists do bad things.

Mouin Rabbani

No. There's a definition of apartheid.

Steven Bonnell

That's great.

Mouin Rabbani

There is a very clear definition of apartheid.

Steven Bonnell

A specific top-down racial domination, enacted through top-down, like federal legislative policies or whatever, means that I don't know if Jim Crow would have qualified for apartheid. That doesn't make it any less...

Norman Finkelstein

Have you ever heard of Plessy v. Ferguson?

Steven Bonnell

Excuse me. Finkelstein, I'm talking right now. Excuse me, excuse me Twinklestein, I'm talking to your friend over here. I don't know if it would have qualified as the crime of apartheid, just like if Israel were to literally nuke the Gaza Strip and kill two million people, I don't know if that would qualify for the crime of genocide.

Mouin Rabbani

In your eyes probably not.

Steven Bonnell

Well, yeah, but because genocide requires a special intent. I think the issue is, instead of... And I think this conversation actually is emblematic of the entire conversation.

Mouin Rabbani

Then let me finish answering Benny Morris's question.

Steven Bonnell

Well sure, but you accused me of supporting racism.

Mouin Rabbani

Well, you did.

Steven Bonnell

I didn't.

Mouin Rabbani

And you are.

Steven Bonnell

Do you think I support Jim Crow laws?

Mouin Rabbani

Look, when -

Steven Bonnell

The fact that you can't even answer that honestly, right?

Mouin Rabbani

It doesn't matter what -

Steven Bonnell

You couldn't say that 800 civilians were killed by Hamas, you said, "Well, maybe 400 were killed by Israel. I don't know the number, maybe -

Mouin Rabbani

No, I didn't say that.

Steven Bonnell

You said 400.

Mouin Rabbani

No, I didn't say that.

Steven Bonnell

You co-signed the opinion.

Mouin Rabbani

No, I didn't.

Norman Finkelstein

No, he didn't. He said the majority [inaudible 04:48:20].

Steven Bonnell

Well, wait, how many? I think the word was some, that's what I heard.

Norman Finkelstein

No, I think your memory -

Mouin Rabbani

Well, you weren't listening.

Norman Finkelstein

- you memory's retarded.

Steven Bonnell

How many people do you think approximately, if you had to ballpark it, how many do you think were killed by Hamas on October 7th?

Mouin Rabbani

I think it's pretty clear that the majority of civilians that were killed on-

Norman Finkelstein

That's what he said.

Steven Bonnell

51%? Or 90%?

Mouin Rabbani

Don't ask me to put a number on something I don't know.

Steven Bonnell

I just want a ballpark. Those are two very different intuition.

Mouin Rabbani

First of all, when you say Hamas, do you mean Palestinians, or do you mean Hamas specifically?

Steven Bonnell

I mean the invading Palestinian force? I don't like to say Palestinians, because I don't think all Palestinian civilians were involved, so I'll say Hamas, Islamic Jihad, whatever, Al Quds, whatever other-

Mouin Rabbani

But that's how this discussion started. You said Hamas and I began to answer that, and then Benny Morris said, actually he means Hamas in addition to Jihad and the others.

Steven Bonnell

So, of the invading Palestinian force, how many do you think killed civilians versus the IDF? What do you think the ballpark, the percentage?

Mouin Rabbani

Well, the figures we have are that about a third of the casualties on October 7th were military, and about two-thirds were -

Steven Bonnell

That's not what I asked at all.

Mouin Rabbani

What's your question?

Benny Morris

He's asking about the two-thirds.

Steven Bonnell

What percentage of civilians do you think were killed by the invading force, a ballpark?

Mouin Rabbani

I think a clear majority, but I can't give you a specific figure.

Steven Bonnell

If you thought it was closer to 51% or 99% were killed by-

Norman Finkelstein

Why would he know that? How would he know that?

Steven Bonnell

Because it's interesting to actually stake out a position.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah, it's interesting -

Steven Bonnell

If you want to be completely, totally agnostic on it, that's fine.

Norman Finkelstein

Based on complete ignorance, because we don't know. Professor Morris doesn't know, Mouin Rabbani doesn't know.

Steven Bonnell

And yet you can speak with absolute certainty that the IDF is targeting and murdering Palestinian children intentionally.

Norman Finkelstein

Well, actually -

Steven Bonnell

Do you see the double standard?

Norman Finkelstein

No, I don't. You see -

Steven Bonnell

I know you don't. It was a rhetorical question, obviously you don't.

Norman Finkelstein

You know why?

Steven Bonnell

Because you're uneducated on the matter.

Norman Finkelstein

I looked at the UN report.

Steven Bonnell

Uh-huh. The Goldstone Report?

Norman Finkelstein

No. The UN report on the great march of return in 2018, and they said that the snipers were targeting children, medics, journalists, and disabled people.

Mouin Rabbani

Just as they are now in this conflict.

Norman Finkelstein

Exactly.

Mouin Rabbani

More journalists have been killed in the last several months in Gaza, than in any other conflict.

Norman Finkelstein

And in all of World War II.

Steven Bonnell

Do you acknowledge that Hamas... That's great, the comparison is fun.

Mouin Rabbani

Hamas is not killing journalists in the Gaza strip.

Steven Bonnell

Do you agree that they operate in civilian uniforms, that their goal is to induce that confusion, that that's the way that they conduct themselves militarily?

Mouin Rabbani

Let me finish my point. More journalists have been, more UN-

Steven Bonnell

I understand, and more children, and the-

Norman Finkelstein

He doesn't want to hear it, it's so boring.

Steven Bonnell

No, because it's virtue signaling.

Norman Finkelstein

Virtue signaling!

Steven Bonnell

You don't have a material, a substantial... It is virtue signaling. Yes, like when you say children, over and over again, that's virtue signaling.

Mouin Rabbani

You know you have this habit of mocking the dead.

Norman Finkelstein

But talking about how many Israelis were killed, that's not virtue signaling, because that's human life.

Steven Bonnell

I don't care if a hundred are killed or a thousand, I'm curious who you're assigning blame to.

Norman Finkelstein

You just interrogated him, 51%, 90%.

Steven Bonnell

The question, yes, that's not the number, that's the responsibility, Norman.

Norman Finkelstein

And then Mouin mentions that more journalists were killed in Gaza than in all of World War II.

Steven Bonnell

That doesn't further any part of the conversation.

Norman Finkelstein

And more medics were killed in Gaza.

Benny Morris

No, that's silly.

Norman Finkelstein

And then he says, it's virtue signaling.

Benny Morris

Journalists weren't in the area.

Norman Finkelstein

But when Israelis get killed, that's serious.

Steven Bonnell

I never said that. It's serious on both sides. I didn't say, respectfully-

Mouin Rabbani

It's called [inaudible 04:51:29].

Norman Finkelstein

No, you called it virtue signaling.

Steven Bonnell

No, I'm not virtue signaling, I'm asking a substantive question of who do you assign blame to, or do you play into Norm Finkelstein's conspiracies that the ambulances should have known immediately who was dead, that the numbers were changed because they were fake.

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Borrell, Mr. Borrell -

Steven Bonnell

Or that maybe 51% of the people were killed by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, but 29% were killed by IDF helicopters.

Mouin Rabbani

You asked me a direct question, and you got a direct answer.

Steven Bonnell

I didn't, I got majority, which could be anything from 51 to 99.

Mouin Rabbani

I said a clear majority.

Benny Morris

What percent is a clear majority as opposed to a majority?

Steven Bonnell

They live in ambiguity.

Mouin Rabbani

A clear majority, in my view, is well over 50%. Please don't ask me to be more precise, because I can't.

Benny Morris

You could say 80, 90, 95%.

Mouin Rabbani

If I knew that, I would say it.

Benny Morris

I think it's reasonable. It's a reasonable supposition.

Mouin Rabbani

Perhaps it is, but I -

Norman Finkelstein

Mr. Morris, you are not the best person to be asking that question. I read when you described Operation Defensive Shield, and you said a few dozen homes were destroyed.

Benny Morris

You're talking about what happened in a Judean refugee camp.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah. And you said -

Benny Morris

No, the Arabs said 500.

Norman Finkelstein

You said a few died -

Benny Morris

You guys said 500 Palestinians were killed in a Judean -

Mouin Rabbani

I never said that.

Benny Morris

No, but that was the statement from the PLO, the Palestinian Authority.

Norman Finkelstein

You said a few dozen homes -

Benny Morris

And that there were massacres there. Yes, a few dozen homes.

Norman Finkelstein

Yeah.

Benny Morris

That's right.

Norman Finkelstein

Well, it turned 140 buildings were destroyed-

Benny Morris

That's a few dozen.

Norman Finkelstein

- 5,000 people were left homeless.

Benny Morris

How many people were killed?

Norman Finkelstein

5,000.

Benny Morris

How many were killed?

Norman Finkelstein

You described it - no, I'm talking about homes destroyed. So you are not the best person to be criticizing what Mouin says when he says clear majority, but he can't say more. You know why he can't say more?

Benny Morris

He doesn't know.

Norman Finkelstein

He doesn't know.

Benny Morris

Yeah, I understand that. I understood that point.

Norman Finkelstein

I hope as a historian you understand that.

Mouin Rabbani

If I was trying to belittle, I would give you a very different answer. I would just say I don't know. I do know that some were shot, but -

Benny Morris

You know what the right phrase there would be? The overwhelming majority were killed by Arab gunmen, and a very small number were killed by Israelis by accident or whatever.

Norman Finkelstein

You're not speaking as a historian now.

Benny Morris

That's probably true.

Mouin Rabbani

I can state with confidence, a clear majority. Overwhelming majority? You may be correct, but I can't state that with certainty. I think there's a very easy way to find out is to have an independent -

Benny Morris

Forget independent.

Mouin Rabbani

Well, of course you forget independent.

Norman Finkelstein

I know you want to forget the law -

Benny Morris

Well forget, that doesn't mean anything.

Norman Finkelstein

Forget the law -

Benny Morris

Independent is the UN High Commission for-

Norman Finkelstein

- forget the independent commissioner. No!

Benny Morris

- Human Rights, whatever it's called.

Mouin Rabbani

Not necessarily.

Norman Finkelstein

Just repeat the numbers.

Benny Morris

They're all from barbaric countries. You know, a Syrian was the head of the UN Commission for Human Rights.

Mouin Rabbani

But if it was an Israeli, it would have been okay?

Benny Morris

He certainly would have been more honest than a Syrian.

Norman Finkelstein

Oh yeah, sure, of course.

Mouin Rabbani

Of course. Oh yeah, from your perspective.

Lex Fridman

Well, to disagree with Steven, I thought this was extremely valuable, and at times really the view of history, the passion. I'm really grateful that you would spend your really valuable time. One more question, since we have two historians here. Briefly, from a history perspective, what do you hope your legacy is as historians, Benny and Norm, will be of the work that you've put out there? Maybe Norm, you can go first, and try to say briefly.

Norman Finkelstein

I think there's a value to preserving the record. I'm not optimistic about where things are going to end up. There was a very nice book written by a woman named Helen Hunt Jackson at the end of the 19th century, describing what was done to the Native Americans. She called it a century of dishonor, and she described in vivid, poignant detail what was done to the Native Americans. Did it save them? No. Did it help them? Probably not. Did it preserve their memory? Yes, and I think there's a value to that. There was a famous film by Sergei Eisenstein, it was either Battleship Potemkin or Mother, I can't remember which one. The last scene was the Tsar's troops mowing down all the Russian people. He pans the scene.

Benny Morris

Not all the Russian people, just a few of them.

Norman Finkelstein

Well, he pan the massacre.

Mouin Rabbani

But he could have killed a lot more.

Norman Finkelstein

And the last words of the movie were, "Proletarians," exclamation point, "Remember," exclamation point. And I've seen it as my life's work to preserve the memory and to remember. I didn't expect that anyone would read my book on Gaza. It's very dense, it gives me even a bit of a headache to read at least one of the chapters.

Mouin Rabbani

You wrote a book on Gaza?

Norman Finkelstein

But I thought that the memory deserves to be preserved.

Mouin Rabbani

Amen.

Benny Morris

Well, I would say very briefly, unlike my colleague, I think writing the truth about what happened in history, in various periods of history, if I've done a little bit of that, I'm happy.

Lex Fridman

Thank you Norm, thank you Benny, thank you Steven, thank you Mouin. Thanks for listening to this conversation with Norman Finkelstein, Benny Morris, Mouin Rabbani, and Steven Bonnell. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now let me leave you with some words from Lyndon B. Johnson. "Peace is a journey of a thousand miles, and it must be taken one step at a time." Thank you for listening, and hope to see you next time.