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JOHN TIRMAN: Hello, everyone. Welcome to the Starr Forum on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I'm John Tirman. And on behalf of the MIT Center for International Studies, I welcome you to the next hour and a half of discussion about this most pressing issue. We're co-sponsored today by the Security Studies program at the Center and we welcome that. Before introducing our two speakers, I just want to say that the Center has been involved with this issue in various ways for many years and with many voices from the region. Some of those events are on our YouTube channel. And I invite you to check those out. Still relevant, still informative, as today's event will be.

We have two speakers today who are members of our family. Stephen Van Evera is Ford International Professor at MIT'S Department of Political Science. He has written extensively on conflict, has written on conflict in the Middle East, and has been involved, in many ways, with the Israeli-Palestinian issue, over the years, including some track two activities.

Stephen will be followed by Peter Krause. He's an Associate Professor of Political Science at Boston College and a research affiliate of the Security Studies Program here, where he also earned his PhD. So without further ado, I'm going to turn it over to Professor Van Evera. Steve?

STEPHEN VAN EVERA: Thanks, John. And thanks, everybody, for joining. I'm going to run through seven points. And first of all, run through them quickly, just so you get a sense for where we're going, and then I'll run through them again in a little bit more detail. Basically, I'm going to talk a little bit from 20,000 feet about the big picture. How do we get to this point in the Mideast conflict? Where did this conflict come from? What are the big moving parts that gave rise to it? Is peace still possible? What kind of peace might be possible? How could we get there? If there isn't peace, where are things going to go? And who's responsible for the conflict now? Who, in other words, needs to be talked off the ledge that they've gotten themselves onto?

So Michelle has the seven points are up there on the screen. And just to quickly say what they are, how we got here. Of course, the trigger for the 2021 Gaza War was the impending expulsion of the Arab families from the Sheikh Jarrah housing settlement in East Jerusalem and then subsequent events, some provocations the Israelis-- mostly Israelis, there were some from the other side-- engaged in. But my main point there is that the causes of this recent war have not been dealt with. They are not off the table. So this whole truce should be understood to be very fragile. It's a very fragile situation. Those families are still slated to be removed.

Second point. Where will things go if there's no peace settlement? Is this a safe conflict you can just box up in your lunch box and manage it once in a while, or is it dangerous? My view is, it's dangerous. We will have more war, for sure, if we don't have a settlement. And it could be a big war. The tinder needed to light a big war on fire is on the floor of the forest. So people shouldn't assume that the future will look like the past and we'll have limited small wars. We used to have big wars in the Middle East. And there's major danger of another one.

Who is responsible? My short answer is, religious extremists on both sides are responsible. The problem is that the elites on both sides don't accept a two state solution. If they did, we could solve this. They don't for basically religious reasons. And we have to find some way of dealing with the domination of both sides' internal politics by religious extremism, which is not the case 30 and 40 years ago, but it's the case today.

Fourth, what kind of settlement is possible? Is a settlement possible? My view is, yes, it is, if the right pressure were put and people focused on the right terms. The only settlement possible is one quite narrowly focused on the terms that have been talked about often in the past. The Alayon-Nusseibeh Plan, a plan that resembles or can be fit within the framing of full withdrawal for full peace. That kind of settlement, full withdrawal for full peace, and then we can work on details, isn't possible. The publics on both sides are willing to accept it. It's the elites who aren't. And that's why we need to work on the elites.

How to get there? I'm an advocate of US government pressure on the two sides. The US government, people have the impression the US has, in the past, applied pressure to this conflict. But in fact, it never / the US has always mediated, but never, shall we say, leaned hard on the parties to accept any given terms. And my view is, the US government should define a peace plan and press the two sides toward it. The US has large cards to play. In the past, when the US used that sort of tactic, it got a lot done. And it could do it again. Think 1956.

And finally, just to locate my argument in the US debate, I am a two state advocate. And who, in the US debate, is advocating that on the pro-Israel side, it would be J Street. On the Palestinian side, it would be the American Task Force on Palestine. If you want to look up their work, I respect both of those organizations.

So saying more in detail about those arguments. I think I've said enough about how we got here. That really, there's two factors. The settlement expansion, Israel's pursuit, and the occupation that Israel is not abandoning.

Where will things go if there's no settlement? The Israeli government, in my view, has somewhat been mistaking the eye of a hurricane for a summer day at the beach. There's been a growing narrative in Israel that we got this. We've got the Palestinians in a box. We've built the wall, which greatly reduced the ability of Palestinians to use force within the green line. We've undergone, we've exploited the revolution in military affairs. We've got a much more technically capable military than we once had with Iron Dome and all the rest.

The Palestinians are much weaker, politically, in the region than they used to be. Partly because their own divisions and their inability to unite has exasperated a lot of their former Arab allies. The continuing division between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, partly because of the rise in the eyes of the Arab world, a threat from Iran. So all these things have created the sense that you don't need to deal with the Palestinians.

My view is, if you stand back from this and take a larger look, this is a false assumption. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict involves nationalism and religion. These are both phenomena which ebb and flow but never go away. If Arab nationalism is now at an abatement period, but I like to analogize the situation to the abatement and then resurgence of nationalisms in Europe over the past many years, that everyone thought Scottish nationalism had disappeared and that Breton nationalism disappeared and then French Canadian nationalism has disappeared. But these all flared back up, as nationalism does.

And same thing with religious passion or politicized religion. People thought, 40 years ago, that the whole Western world had permanently seen an abatement and secularization of the religious world, and that religion would not be a major cause of conflict anymore. That now looks like a really ridiculous point of view. Wrong, anyway. Same thing here. We're really seeing an Israel that is taking steps that could activate wider Arab nationalism throughout the region. And the Arab nation is about 420 million people. The total Sunni religious world is around 1.6 billion people.

And this conflict steps on those identities. And those identities are quiescent now. I see nothing, in the general history of both nationalism and religion, that would assure me that those sleeping giants won't be waked up by the measures that will be necessary to continue suppressing the Palestinians. And I've heard, this is also a conflict. There's nothing in the Constitution that says that really nasty weapons can't be brought to bear, that weapons of mass destruction will never be employed. So I think that the generalized emotion of both nationalism and religion in politics warn us that they are going to continue to be raw material for war, as long as the Palestinians are living under the Israeli thumb and being suppressed accordingly, which they will have to be.

Third, who is responsible? Religious extremists on both sides. One way to look at this conflict is that it used to be a conflict between two secular movements, which were both firmly opposed to each other. The secular Zionist movement of the '40s and the secular Arab National movement of that time. And there's been a race, over the last 70 years, really, between the secular movements, who have both become much more moderate over time and more willing to, essentially, make a peace that would work, and have converged on a two state solution, which has similar terms.

At the same time, there's been a rise of religious motivation on both sides. On the Israeli side, there's been a growth of religious politics and a radicalization of it. Religious parties in Israel used to be somewhat apolitical and not terribly concerned with foreign policy. Now, they've grown greatly in size and are much more radicalized, and they basically are affiliated with the settler movement and reject a two state solution, accordingly. Same thing on the Palestinian side. There was no important Islamic role in this conflict, back in the early day. It was a secular conflict. Now, we have the rise of, essentially, jihadi influenced or flavored religious actors, most importantly, Hamas.

Both the Israeli settler movement and Hamas reject a two state solution. They sometimes downplay that, when they talk to Westerners. They don't emphasize it. And by the way, they don't emphasize it when they talk about each other. But this is the key to the conflict, that we have two players, who are both, quote, rejectionists, meaning they do not accept a two state solution as a model for resolving the conflict.

Would peace be possible, if there was a flip in who dominates politics in these two places? What if the secular people were in charge? Is it too dreamy to talk about a two state solution? All I would say about that is, number one, the two parties nearly reached a solution in 2001 at Taba, when they were negotiating at the end of the Camp David efforts that Clinton organized. And I think they failed almost for really, not big reasons. I think Arafat failed to understand that he was up against the deadline. And he was. But the two parties were close. And they were close again, I think they were close, in 2008, when Olmert and Abu Mazen negotiated.

More interesting, and I think, more important, is that if you look at the history of mainstream public attitudes on both sides, the publics on both sides have shown, again and again, that they are willing to be led to a two state solution, or willing to accept one. The best source on the broad public view toward this conflict is the PCP CR research, by Khalil Shikaki, which has been polling Israelis and Palestinians since 2004. And again and again, it showed a significant majority of Israelis and a plurality of Palestinians-- sometimes, a majority-- agree on, essentially, the same terms which, in this polling, the terms are laid out at some length in the discussion between the interviewer and the people interviewed. It's in depth, a little bit, but it's essentially along the lines of quote, full peace for full withdrawal.

Similar, I mentioned, the Ayalon-Nusseibeh Plan, which is a very lean, simple plan that expresses those terms. And Shikaki's polls ask about what folks think about that. So you basically have a public that expresses pretty warm views toward a two state solution, even without being led by the elites on either side. In other words, these polls are taken of a public that has not been hearing from their leaders that this is a good idea. So if the leaders were behind it and selling it, then we'd have more approval.

I'll add that I think the case for rejectionism that the two religious elites are making is a very thin case. Very weak. Doesn't push any real hot buttons. There's no security case, on either side, for rejecting a two state solution, or for demanding more than that. On the Israeli side, holding on to the occupied territories is really a blow to both Zionism and security for Israel. It's a recipe for creating a binational state, and someday, an Arab majority state, if Israel doesn't somehow divest itself of the West Bank. And there's no security argument for holding these territories. There used to be, back in the days of conventional war, and before Israel was a nuclear power. The argument was that Israel is a state with very long borders, very thin territory at the middle of it, only nine miles from the sea to the West Bank. It needed buffer room. That was the argument. That argument is obsolete now, especially now that Israel is a nuclear power with a strong nuclear deterrent. Nobody's conquering Israel. It's not going to happen.

And on the Palestinian side, also, the practical case for rejecting a two state solution, really, is very flimsy. Mainly and most important, on practicality grounds. And also for the Israelis. I mean, how exactly will the Hamas ever propose to achieve its dream of achieving a state in all Palestine? It's competing with a nuclear power that has a secure deterrent. I mean, good heavens. We're not living in the real world when we talk about that as an option. Same thing with the Israelis. As I was saying earlier, the idea of dominating forever six million Palestinians and growing is a huge social, military, political task. So is it feasible? I don't think so.

So I'm elaborating on the whole idea of, is a settlement possible. The answer is that the case of rejection is very weak. The constituency for a two state solution is pretty strong. What kind of settlement? As I said, I'll say another word of what's necessary there. It's only a very narrow set of terms that will sell to both sides. I mentioned, full withdrawal for full peace. The Palestinian leaders need to be able to go back to their people and say, we got what Sadat got. We got what Hussein got.

Any settlement that might be negotiated, really, won't be full withdrawal. What there would be is boundaries that are negotiated, starting with the 1949 borders, but then, basically everyone pretty much agrees the Israelis would keep the suburbs around Jerusalem. It would keep some of the bits of the West Bank, parts of the West Bank. There would be land swaps that would compensate the Palestinians for that. The conversation really wouldn't be adequate, in any sort of economic sense, but it would be symbolic.

And in addition, there would be security guarantees for Israel. There would be no demographically significant return of Palestinians to Israel, but would be robust compensation to the Palestinian community for the lands, property they lost in the 1948 War. Hopefully paid for by the Europeans, who have a heavy responsibility for this disaster. So that's the nature of the settlement. It would start with a full withdrawal for full peace and negotiate outward for that, making changes on both sides.

How to get there? The US government has, I think, never proposed a peace plan, partly because of the danger of a conflict in Washington. It's been impossible to get Washington itself to agree on what terms would be agreed. And it's not because diplomacy that kind doesn't work, really. It's because the diplomacy within the city of Washington to get anyone to agree on what plan to push has always been too hard. But if Washington were pressed to do it, what I'm saying here is people of goodwill should be asking for this. Saying, it's time for the US government to basically propose the two state solution we all know has been talked about for decades and will work. And push it on the two sides, using carrots and sticks. US has huge influence here, and could change policies on both sides, if it applied that leverage. And so I'll stop there, John. Thanks.

JOHN TIRMAN: Thank you, Steve. We'll go to Peter in a second. I just want to remind our viewers that you can ask questions through the Q&A function at the bottom of your screen. We have a lot of people watching today. So I'm not sure we can get to everything, but I'll try to represent the general gist of questions, after Peter's intervention, here. Peter?

PETER KRAUSE: Wonderful. Thank you so much to John and to Michelle and to the Center for International Studies at MIT. It's an honor to be here, though obviously, a very tragic time. 230 Palestinians have lost their lives in this recent bout of the conflict, and 12 Israelis have died. So obviously, this is a heavy time to be discussing these issues. But it's an important one. And I think, one of the themes of what I want to talk about is, I know we have a majority American audience here. They're not entirely, but the types of stuff that we follow and how we follow these conflicts, and the types of trends that are going on the ground, that maybe we don't hear as much about, but that are actually much more important to the conflict in Palestinian Israeli lives that are there. So I'm actually going to share my screen with you here, as well. And I have some slides to go through and show you some stuff on the ground.

I just want to start with just an overview here. So I'm going to talk about five developments that are going on in the current conflict. The one that you hear the most about, and at least on a small, but positive, note that there's a potential cease fire that's holding at the moment, on rockets and airstrikes. And that's usually when this stuff gets covered in the news. Is that, OK, there's these types of things that unfortunately, can kill people very quickly and get covered in American news. But then, there's many other things that don't get covered as much. And I want to talk about those, too.

So Steve mentioned Sheikh Jarrah and changes on the ground, and I'm going to talk about that. I think, for many Americans, that's less well known about the specifics of that dispute and how that's changing the facts on the ground in Israel and Palestine. The changing notions of what it means to be a citizen in Israel is very important, as are potential changes in Palestinian identity and visions for what they want, as a state, which I don't think is necessarily the same as it was 20 or 30 years ago. I think that that's very important.

Next, to talk about Palestinian unity. Following a number of Palestinian friends and academics and following the news online in recent weeks, like I'm sure many of you have done, I see, in some a sense, of new solidarity among Palestinians across different lines. Not just Palestinians in Israel, but in the West Bank and Gaza and America, and I think that there is something meaningful there. And then, at the same time, as many of you may know, there's a lot of division, institutionally, among Palestinians and Palestinian leadership. And that's a key theme to understand, especially at the given moment, as there were supposed to be Palestinian elections coming up this month that have now been delayed, perhaps permanently, though we'll see.

And then finally, as Steve talked about from the American perspective, the US has played this role for a long time. It likes to call itself an honest broker. We can debate to what extent that's been true. But I will say that the US is currently lacking any type of engage, quote unquote, peace process. And to be fair, a majority of Palestinians and Israelis are pretty disillusioned with that process. And so they're not necessarily really upset about that, in some sense. But in the other sense, I think the lack of any potential peace process and the best we have to hope for here is a tactical cease fire on literally just one of these things, not on the others. There's not going to be a cease fire on these other issues. I think that's really important to understanding the context of the conflict, both today and going forward. So I'm going to talk through each of these today, and I look forward to the discussion with all of you.

So first, I want to just bring to bear a little about what we know in social science, from Israeli airstrikes and from some of the Hamas rockets. Because obviously, this is what you hear about the news. So I want to talk about for a couple of minutes. But then the majority of talk will be focused on other issues. So what do we know about this? Unfortunately, even though this is incredibly tragic, and as I say, a few hundred Palestinians have lost their lives and about 12 Israelis have lost their lives in these exchanges. It doesn't, unfortunately, have a major strategic impact, I don't think, on the conflict, in terms of the political terms, in terms of the relative strength of the two national movements.

What it does change, potentially, is it shifts electorates to the right. And so, there's been a good amount of social science research, both on the Israeli side and on the Palestinian side, about what this type of violence does. And so, there was a research study that looked at Israeli electorate, and basically, looked at areas in which they were potentially under fire from Hamas or from Palestinian Islamic Jihad. And they found that those who are in those areas, basically, were 2% to 6% higher percentage likely to vote for right wing Israeli parties. Now you might say, 2% to 6% is not that big of a deal. But when you think about elections, think about just elections the United States, how close they are. Israel's not that different. In fact, in some ways, elections in Israel are even closer.

This map, and you can see in these little pie charts here, the distribution of various parties in different parts of Israel, in terms of the voting, 2% to 6% can throw elections fully from one side to another. As you may know, Israel has had four elections in the past two years, and maybe heading for a fifth election. And if you change the electorate a few percentage points, all of a sudden, Benjamin Netanyahu is still the Prime Minister, or all of a sudden, he's not the Prime Minister. And so, this type of violence can actually shift election outcomes, and that can ultimately shift the nature of the conflict and the nature of the countries, internally.

I'll also say, on the Palestinian side, when you have Israeli airstrikes, as you have had into Gaza, extensively, that can also polarize the electorate. And unfortunately, for Palestinians, they have not had a free and fair election since 2006 for a variety of reasons I'm happy to get into. But you can also look back in 2006, when Israel was involved in significant air strikes in southern Lebanon. This is a flag that Hezbollah put there. Our blood has won, basically. And Hezbollah, not just a group that's armed, but also one that's one of, if not the major political parties in Lebanon, they campaign on this stuff. Right. They campaign on the fact that we are fighting against the Israelis, and when the Israelis are using violence against us, those claims seem more logical and more legitimate to many Lebanese. And so, it's important to understand that these rounds of violence, even though I don't think they change the nature of the conflict between the various sides, I think they can change the makeup of the leadership and people's political sympathies, both among Israelis and among Palestinians.

When we look at the Israeli strategy in terms of what's been going on the past couple of weeks, I think there's two important things to understand. What is that, for many Americans, I think that they look at this conflict and they think, what's the solution. And one of the first things that I noticed when I started doing research in Israel and Palestine about a decade and a half ago, is that many people, especially Israelis, don't necessarily think or talk in terms of solutions to the conflict. They like to use the term, managing the conflict. Many of them basically say, look, we're not going to come together. We're not going to be able to live in the same place and have all of our national dreams realized. And so we're going to manage it.

And so, the Israelis sometimes use this term which, again, many people consider to be quite objectionable. Because obviously, grass, in this case, is people. But the way Israelis will think about this is, they'll say, look, we're going to mow the grass. And the basic idea is, Hamas and us are irreconcilable enemies. That's never going to change. And so all we need to do is, every few years, we go in and we take out their rocket or missile capabilities. And then we get a few years of peace, because they don't really have the capability to significantly strike us and we reestablish deterrence. Now whether you agree or disagree with that strategy, that's a lot of ways how the Israeli security sector, I think, thinks about this.

I'll also say, you can't get around the personal aspect of what's going on right now, which you may know. Which is, Benjamin Netanyahu, now the longest serving Prime Minister in Israeli history, has surpassed David Ben-Gurion, is currently under indictment on corruption charges. He currently missed his window to create a new coalition to form the government of Israel, and some of his rivals, currently, have the ability to try to form that government. But very difficult to try to form a government, particularly one when you have an ongoing war. And I think Netanyahu knows this. So do I think he started this conflict because of it? No. Do I think it potentially was dragged on a bit, or he also recognizes that when he can be a security Prime Minister and miss this it, helps him politically? I do think so. And I think that's an important part of the conversation.

OK. The second thing, Sheikh Jarrah. So this is really important to understand, because sometimes, you read it and it seems like a very complex thing in the news. But it's not new. And it's certainly not new to the Palestinians and to the Israelis who are in Israel, as well as the Palestinians the West Bank who are dealing with this stuff. You can look at this and say, there's been diplomatic stalemate between the Israelis and Palestinians for the past three decades. And you would be right, in some sense. There have been gains, here and there. Steve mentioned some parts where things got closer or less close. But it wouldn't be wrong to say there's been a form of diplomatic stalemate for decades.

I will say, though, that there has not been a stalemate on the ground. The conflict today, and people's lives today, in terms of who can build houses, in terms of whose houses are destroyed, in terms of who can make claims, in terms of where they live, that has changed significantly, in terms of the facts on the ground, over the past few decades. So the reason Sheikh Jarrah became such a flashpoint is, if you don't know, I'll show you the map real quick. This is a map of Jerusalem. Now again, we can get to this whole discussion about how Jerusalem is even defined. And you see these overlapping borders here about municipal boundaries versus the green line, which is the armistice line at the end of the '48-'49 war.

But in the broader sense, you have this neighborhood. And you can see here, it's not perfect, but the colorization basically shows Palestinian neighborhoods and Israeli Jewish neighborhoods. And so Sheikh Jarrah is close to the old city, which you see there, in the pink. So it's an area that the land itself was owned by Jewish individuals, preceding the '48 War. But in the course of the '48 War, the Zionist Israeli forces conquered West Jerusalem. The Jordanian Arab Legion conquered, or continued to control, East Jerusalem, including the old city. And then you had refugee populations. And so you had, actually, about 20,000 or more Palestinians who lived in West Jerusalem who had to leave. And then you had about 2,000 or so, or a little bit more Israeli Jews, who lived in East Jerusalem who had to leave.

Now, what happened in the aftermath of the conflict, when Israel started to control all of Jerusalem after the '67 War is that they passed a law, basically, saying that Israeli Jews, who had land claims in Jerusalem that predated '48, could actually present those claims to court to reclaim their homes. The challenge with Sheikh Jarrah is that even though the land had previously been owned by Jews, in this period in the 1950s, the United Nations, in partnership with Jordan, actually built homes there for Palestinian refugees who had to leave or were forced out of their homes, in West Jerusalem or elsewhere. And so they are there. And the challenge is that some Israelis, and it got taken over, their land claims got taken over by some settler organizations, presented it and basically said, look, this is previously owned by Jews. We have this law, it goes to the Israeli Supreme Court. The Israeli Supreme Court, by the way, is historically more on the left in a lot of these areas. But nonetheless, following the letter of the Israeli law, potentially, they are making claims and making a judgment that's going to force these families to leave.

Now, from a Palestinian perspective, beyond potentially the specifics of this case being unjust, they will say, look, these are not even equal laws here. Because there are thousands of Palestinians who have land claims to home in West Jerusalem, let alone in Israel proper, who are not allowed to present those claims, not allowed to have those verified and move back into their homes. And so, there's inequality here, for sure, in terms of how this is adjudicated and what the laws are, on the books. So this has become, obviously, a major issue. And it's not something that's new. The dispute over Sheikh Jarrah goes back decades, and they've been various versions of it. But only recently have you started to see more aggressive pushing, through the courts or otherwise, to expel people from their homes here.

Now, the reason that this is important, beyond just Jerusalem and Sheikh Jarrah, is that if you think about changes in again, the front lines of the conflict, we look today and it's like, oh there's a cease fire, so the conflict has stopped. It's like, no. The nature of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians over the past few decades is house by house, place by place. And so, this is a map that I actually created with an Israeli co-author for an article that we wrote, looking at the spread of Israeli settlements over time. And the triangles just represent whether they're what we call, bottom-up settlements or top-down ones.

Bottom-up ones, which are the blue triangles, are basically ones in which the Israeli state was not taking a vote and saying, we're going to establish this settlement and then doing all these approvals, and then having people move in. That's the upside down triangle ones that are red, and then some of them are gray there. So early period, in the '60s and '70s, when actually, a number of Israeli left wing governments were establishing settlements, the majority of them were top-down, where the Israeli government was authorizing them for security purposes in the Jordan Valley, or things of that nature.

What's happened in recent years is, you have these bottom-up settlements, where you have motivated individuals or settler organizations that are establishing control of certain hilltops or elsewhere, and then some of them have been withdrawn by the Israeli government. But a number of them have been allowed to stay. And then in recent years, the Israeli government has passed laws to actually post hoc authorize them, as either parts of existing settlements or Israeli land, even if in some cases, it's on private Palestinian territory. And so, especially from the Palestinian perspective, but also many people internationally, they look at Sheikh Jarrah and what's happening as part of this broader context, of continued slow, seemingly, and maybe the international community is not seeing it all, but slow dispossession and changing of the facts on the ground, in terms of the amount of land that's being controlled by Israel or Israeli Jews versus Palestinians. And so that's not something that's stopped with this recent cease fire. And that's a really important context for what's going on.

The third theme I want to talk about is citizenship. And this has also changed in the past few years. So the dream of Zionism, the dream of having a Jewish state and having Israel, has always been a much debated thing, even among Zionists. What exactly does a Jewish state look like? Is it a state that not just has holidays on Jewish holidays and has a Jewish Prime Minister, but how does it deal with religious law and the Sabbath and all these types of things? Right, so this is an ongoing discussion and debate that's never going to end. And that's part of any society, of defining what it means to be Israeli, et cetera.

But one of the key changes that's happened, especially in recent years as the Israeli government has become shifting more to the right, is that it's changed from this concept of Israeliness. Which again, many Israelis still feel very strongly about. You can go back to the '96 election, when Benjamin Netanyahu was first elected, and he had a quote, basically, where he said, the Jews have defeated the Israelis. And you would think, well, the majority of Israelis are Jews. How could Jews defeat Israelis? What you had is, you had Netanyahu, who was appealing to people's Jewish identity and Jewish character, and Shimon Peres, who was appealing to their Israeli identity. Which certainly had a lot to do with Judaism, but also encapsulated the fact that 20% of Israel's population is non-Jewish. And so you have Christians and you have Arab Muslims, and you have others who are all Israeli citizens. And so some people want to push for that model.

Well, one of the things that's changed in recent years is that Israel doesn't have a Constitution like the United States does. But it does have this series of basic laws which are, basically, the most powerful laws you can have in Israel, that are difficult to withdraw. And so they passed this law in 2018, On The Nation State of the Jewish People. And what this law did is, it tried to, you can either say redefine, or from its supporters, more clearly define, what it means to be Israeli. And again, you can go right on the link here. You can read the specifics of the law. It's not that complex, it's about 14 or so points, I believe.

But there's some key things here, right? You can look at 1(c) here, the exercise of the right to national self-determination in the state of Israel is unique to the Jewish people. And so what this is doing is, it's changing the concept of what it means to be Israeli. To say, yes, can other people live here, who are not Jewish? Yes. But are they actually part of the nation of Israel, not just having citizenship? No. And then in terms of other things, downgrading Arabic as a language, saying that it's going to actively support Jewish settlement and Jewish housing, as opposed to other communities. It's setting up, again, what its detractors would say is this very unequal thing. Its supporters would say, maybe unequal, but that's what we're all about. This is the Zionism, this is the Jewish state. We're supporting our people. We're defining what the flag is, what the anthem is, et cetera. But this is an important change, in terms of the codification of some of these debates.

I'll also say, by the way, that identity on the Palestinian side or the Arab Israeli side is also going through an interesting time. So what's really fascinating leading up to this conflict is, you actually had an Islamist Arab party in Israel that had on the verge of being the quote unquote, kingmaker. So in Israel, you don't have direct elections for the Prime Minister. You have 120 Knesset seats, and then these parties, none bigger than 30 of the 120, but many eight seats, seven seats, who have to cobble together a coalition of 61 to become the leadership and have the Prime Minister. Well, you had this Arab party that had about four seats. And what's fascinating is that they weren't just an Arab party, they were an Islamist party. And yet, they had negotiations with Netanyahu and the Israeli right to potentially support him to become Prime Minister. But then, at the same time, also some talks with some of the center and left wing to do that, as well. That's never happened before, to have an Arab party potentially sit in the government. There was one, under Rabin, where they were a non voting, et cetera. But generally, it's not happened.

So in some sense, you've had Arab Israelis, Arab Palestinians inside of Israel, not all voting at the highest levels, but somewhat voting, having parties that are becoming, maybe, part of the regular political system. But then, at the same time, you're seeing the shift, I think, in Palestinian objectives, across these different communities. So Steve talked about the two state solution. And I'm happy to have that discussion. But it's also important to note, especially if you look generationally among Palestinians, the younger generation, in particular, is pushing majority for a one state solution. The idea that, either because of the spread of the settlements or whatever you want to point to, having a two state solution is not going to be possible, because of the power imbalance, et cetera. And so you have more and more Palestinians are maybe saying, OK, what I want is equal rights and equal citizenship inside of Israel or Isreastine, whatever you want to call it. And that there's an increasing number of Palestinians pushing in that direction.

To be clear, there's a number of Israelis who are also very disillusioned with the concept of a two state solution. They also want a one state solution, but a very, very different setup. It's going to look more like it is today, where there's a state of Israel, no state of Palestine, and not necessarily equal rights for those people, either. So I think that we're in this period now, because the two state solution has been so ineffectual at achieving its goals of the past few decades that you have disillusionment in both communities and people looking for different models.

OK, two final points. On the Palestinian side, I mentioned a few of these things. But one of the other things that sticks out to me from watching the videos and the events and all these things of the past few weeks is that none of these things are necessarily new, but all of them happening at the same time is potentially new. So in the upper left hand corner, this is a picture inside Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is the furthest mosque. It's the third holiest site in Islam. It's in the center of Jerusalem, in the Old City. This is a picture of some youth inside, and then you see the tear gas and some of the stun grenades and stuff that went in the doors around there, when there was protests and riots and things up on the Temple Mount, or the Al-Aqsa mosque in the Haram al Sharif, between Palestinians and some Israeli police. So that was certainly a flashpoint.

Then, in the upper right, this is live on Israeli TV, you had some far right wing Israeli protesters in Bat Yam. And they basically went up to this guy who was in his car and was like, are you Arab? And he was like, yes, can I help? And they pulled him out of his car and started beating him, basically, almost like a lynching. It's the type of things I think of when I see the Rodney King riots back in LA, when you saw some of that stuff, and get really, really ugly. And so you saw that.

Bottom right hand corner, again, this doesn't get talked about as much. But there was a massive general strike that was held, not just in the West Bank, not just in Gaza, in Israel, in all of these various places, where people are saying, look, we are going to nonviolently protest and have a general strike, hearkening back to the Arab uprising in 1936, or some of the times during the Intifadas. And again, it was across these boundaries of different Palestinian communities. So that's really important.

And then, finally, you do have Abu Mazen. You have Mahmoud Abbas, who is still the president head of the PA, but he's quite old. And his electoral mandate has far outlived itself. And so he has had some control over whether these Palestinian elections can happen. But you have new leaders on the ground who are emerging, just like you did during the first Intifada, when [AUDIO OUT]. When I see all of these things together for the Palestinians, I think you see solidarity across different Palestinian communities in ways, maybe, you didn't see before. And I think you also see new leaders, new objectives, and new potential approaches to how to engage with this. So yes, understanding what's happened before matters. But I think we're going to see new developments, as a result of the dynamics from this conflict, as well as how it's being talked about in the media and how people are covering it, which I think is also changing.

So, final point on the peace process. You can criticize the peace process, and I certainly do, and say whether it's a real thing or a fake thing or a fig leaf, et cetera. But I'll say this. There's not even a fig leaf now. And that's important, because when I see media coverage of the conflict and I see how people talk about it, I think there's been a change. And one of the reasons is, when you have the peace process, and the frame is, two national movements, the Palestinian movement and the Zionist movement, or Israel and the Palestinians, two people, even though they're certainly unequal in terms of power, Israel is far more powerful party. You still have these two national claims, the same piece of territory.

And so it's treated somewhat that way. Right? If all of a sudden you take away, whether you want to call it a fig leaf for not, of the peace process, between having these two national visions recognized in a two state solution or otherwise, and now it becomes one state, however you want to conceptualize it. Now the frame is much more, OK, well, not everyone's a citizen here. And not everyone's being treated equally here. And so whether it's housing, whether it's citizenship, or whatever, now all of a sudden, the frame is much more how we think of in the United States as the Civil Rights Movement or things of this nature. And so, I think that from the Israeli perspective, especially the Israeli right wing perspective, that's incredibly problematic. Because I think that that hurts their international sympathy and their support.

Whereas on the Palestinian side, I think, even though they're the weaker party in the conflict, I think some of the changes in terms of how people are perceiving it have been positive for them, even though it's been a tragedy in terms of the lives that they lost, which are in the hundreds from this and thousands wounded. So I think that that's really important. And I think another reason it's happened is that this conflict has been politicized in America. So if you look historically, support for Israel was strongly bipartisan. Democrats, Republicans, they get almost everybody in Congress who will vote pro-Israel on any different resolution. You can look just a year or two ago. I think Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar brought up a resolution about BDS and it was defeated 400 something to two or three.

But here's how things have changed a little bit. Whether it was Netanyahu with Romney vis a vis Obama, because Netanyahu and Obama didn't have a great relationship, or Netanyahu throwing his lot in war with Trump, and obviously, the polarization you see in the United States over the former President Trump, I think that that has polarized this conflict more in the US. And you can see that in the polls. Republicans, still very, very strong supporters of Israel. And again, we can get into what pro-Israel, pro-Palestine means, in this case. But still up there, if you ask them. But Democrats, much more of a splintering. And many more becoming more sympathetic with the Palestinians. And I don't think that trend is going away. And so I think that, like many issues in the US, it's becoming much more of a politicized conflict, in terms of how the US deals with it. And I think that that changes some of the game.

So you've heard today about the ceasefire. Oh, quick small plug. I wrote about this in January. One of the things I think the Biden administration is doing very poorly is that they're still using this model of saying, OK, two state solution. We'll just bring them together. We'll just talk, things will work out. For all the reasons that I said, things are far different and far beyond that. It's not that, to my mind, the two state solution is impossible, but it would take a massive effort by the United States to achieve. Not small little things here and there and have a couple of people talk, et cetera. But to my mind, what the Biden administration is doing is that they're saying, we want a two state solution, but they're not even coming close to put in any type of effort in terms of pressure, in terms of incentives, et cetera, to do it. And so it's just going to lead to nothing. At best, what they've achieved is this potential short term tactical cease fire. Not changing in terms of changes on the ground, not changing or engaging with the changes in conceptions of Israeli citizenship or Israeli and Palestinian identity, not really changing or making a difference in terms of unity for the Palestinians or pushing hard to have elections or whatever. Not really engaging in terms of a robust peace process.

So, again, is there a cease fire? Hopefully, will fewer people die in the immediate? Yes. I hope that's the case. But all of these other changes have been going on for a while now. And if they're not significantly addressed, the resolution of this conflict is not going to happen, and certainly, not going to happen the way the Biden administration is suggesting. So with that, I'll stop there. And I look forward to your questions.

JOHN TIRMAN: Thank you very much, Peter. That was a very rich presentation, to say the least. And we have a lot of questions, following up here. I have one that has, in my own mind, has troubled me in the last week. And that is, what I see as a new phenomenon. You mentioned it, Peter, and Stephen, you may have some thoughts about this, as well. The changing demographics in Israel, the large number of Orthodox that are purposely having lots of children, the voting patterns seem to be moving to the right all the time. I can remember, not so long ago, the Labor Party was strong and about half the populace behind them. And of course, it won several elections. Now they're all but gone.

And this seems to be manifested in its most ugly manifestation, I should say, in these gangs that were attacking Arabs in Israel. Do you see this as a growing threat within Israel, of lawless gang behavior on the part of these, what can you say, Jewish mobs, I guess?

PETER KRAUSE: Do you want me to answer first?

JOHN TIRMAN: Sure.

PETER KRAUSE: OK. So the answer is yes, and I'll say a couple of things about it. So whether it's Lehavah, which is an organization that's against Jewish Arab dating, or it's the La Familia, which, a lot of it comes out of some of the extreme right wing supporters of Beitar Jerusalem, which is a soccer group, or others, yeah. To me, it's incredibly worrying. To see people, if you want to protest and be pro-Israeli, I mean, I think there's no problem with that. That's what being a citizen, potentially, is all about. But if you want to go and form as a mob and coordinate on WhatsApp, as it has been going and like, we're going to go and beat up some people from X ethnic group, I mean, I think that's horrific. And I think it is a problem.

I'll say that the study I did with Udi Eiran, a professor at University of Haifa, we didn't just look at settlements. We also looked at this concept called price tag, or Tag Mechir, in Hebrew. And what it basically is that you have hilltop youth, or some of these younger, more extreme Israeli Jews, who are launching attacks. They firebombed a Palestinian home, but they also will attack the IDF. They will attack the Israeli Defense Forces. Why? Because they feel like the state is against them of pulling back from some of these outposts or elsewhere, and they coordinate the same way. When there's going to be a settlement withdrawal by the Israeli government, they will coordinate and get people from all of these surrounding settlements to go there and protest and use violence, and try to basically spark a conflict. Because they feel like if a conflict happens, the Israeli police military will be on their side. And so that's what they're trying to do.

And I think you see some of this type of phenomenon spreading, not just in Jerusalem, but parts of Israel, proper. And I will say that if you can also look at Lyd, you can look at Akko, you can look at these places that have significant Arab populations. And you have communities there who feel like not fully different from Black Lives Matter, stuff in United States, where they feel like, we're being treated as second class citizens. And we're very upset about that. And so there's protests. In some cases, the protests became violent, as well, against the police or against local Jews. And that's important to note, as well.

A lot of this conflict has been sparked by videos. We're all going to react to this, right? You see an Orthodox Jew being beaten up or you see a Palestinian being beaten up. Hopefully, you see both of those and you're angry at it and you want that to stop. And there are groups, I said Tag Mechir, there's a group called Tag Meir, which is an Israeli group designed to help create community bonds, which is great. But I think these days, there's less of that and there's more of people seeing the attacks on their community, getting very upset, and then not necessarily seeing or condemning the attacks that are coming from their own. And I'm not necessarily saying it's always equivalent. You have to look at the numbers, et cetera.

But unfortunately, there's examples that one can pull on and look at. And I think that is a real concern. Because whether you're talking about Israeliness or you're talking about a one state solution, all of these things require people from both communities living together, side by side. And so, those things are incredibly worrying, yes.

JOHN TIRMAN: Great. Now, we have a lot of questions, and please continue to send questions our way. There's several questions about the Human Rights Watch report and B'Tselem reports labeling the Israeli state as apartheid. Steve, would you comment about whether or not you think that's a fair characterization?

STEPHEN VAN EVERA: Well, to me, the objection to using the word apartheid have never made much sense to me. The Israeli occupation is a separation arrangement, in which one group rules over and subjugates the other, often by stern police measures. It's not justified by explicit reference to race, but it's rough, tough, mean, hard fisted occupation. I stay away from the word apartheid, because people read into it an argument that I don't think, the situations aren't parallel, in a way that the same language ought to be used for both of them.

But this is a very brutal occupation. It's more brutal than it looks from a distance. So I think the Israelis have to accept that if they want to have essentially one state rule while denying equal rights to the Palestinians, they're going to have to do it in a hard fisted way. It's going to look very ugly to the rest of the world. People are going to find harsh adjectives to describe it, and it's going to raise constant problems with Israel's relations with the US and the rest of the West, and with the Jewish diaspora.

JOHN TIRMAN: Another question, for either of you, about a two state solution. And that is, is dealing with the growing number of settlements in the West Bank, particularly that it's hard to imagine evicting the settlers, and it's hard to imagine having a viable Palestinian state with the settlers still, essentially, in it or nearby, how do you reckon with that problem? Peter, do you want to take that?

PETER KRAUSE: Sure. So the question, as far as I understand it, is, how you deal with settlements, in terms of, is it just in a two state context?

JOHN TIRMAN: Yes. Well, that was the question.

PETER KRAUSE: Yeah. So I think there's a couple of ways to think about it. The classic way with the two state solution, as Steve alluded to before was, look, even though I showed you on that map that there are these bottom-up settlements really deep in the West Bank, the majority of the Israeli settlement population, especially the early ones, was just over the green line. Like the Gush Etzion Bloc or some of these other areas. So the idea of the two state solution was, Israel would potentially annex those settlements that are just over the line and then give land swaps, either outside the West Bank or Gaza, which obviously has massive population density in exchange, and that that would be a way. And then, Israel would dismantle some of the deeper settlements in the West Bank, to allow for more contiguous Palestine.

I do think that that becomes less and less possible as the years go by. Not only do you have major settlements like Ariel in the middle of the West Bank, but you literally have universities there that are recognized by the Israeli government. And again, some of these bottom-up settlements that have been post hoc authorized by Israel. So now you're getting to more of this Swiss cheese model, which again, is not entirely unintentional, in terms of trying to potentially prevent a contiguous Palestine, from Ramallah to Jerusalem to Bethlehem and these other areas. So, yeah. I think that in some models, in any model, there are going to be Arabs/Palestinians inside of whatever is Israel, as there are today.

I think there's been more debate about, if there's a state of Palestine, would Israeli Jews still live there? I think many people would think that they would not. But there are some settlers who would say yes, we would live in this place, no matter what. We're here because of God or ideology, not because of the state of Israel. And so it's possible, at least theoretically. I think practically, it might be difficult. But it's a challenge. Because for the Palestinians, they look back to pre '48 and these periods, perhaps of the Ottoman Empire or elsewhere, they'll say, look, we had Jews living alongside us. In fact, if you go back to the charter of the PLO or otherwise, they talk about Jews who lived before '48 as being Palestinian. So it's not like they necessarily have a problem with having Jews living along with them.

I think what's happened over the course of the conflict is that one's identity becomes, obviously, very politicized. And people are seen as threats or enemies just based on that. It's why, again, when people describe Sheikh Jarrah as just a real estate dispute. In some sense, it is. But in a broader sense, of course, it's not, because it's people representing these broader communities. And buying or selling or controlling territory is not just an individual. It's part of this other stuff. So, yeah. I think it's not a surprise that a lot of the flashpoints, a lot of the violence we've seen has been in the West Bank, because you have settlement communities alongside Palestinian communities. And obviously, you have these shifting senses of authority, though a lot of that's been degraded. But you have the PA, at least nominally, controlling some of the major Palestinian cities, and then areas B and C, where Israel is operating more.

So I think if you want to say the hardest nut to crack for any potential two state solution, I think is Jerusalem. But the settlements are right thereafter, especially with the numbers these days.

STEPHEN VAN EVERA: I would just say that obviously, the settlements pose a huge problem. And the problem's gotten worse over many years, as it was designed to. Those settlements were originally installed in order to inhibit a two state solution. Right now, I think the total population of the West Bank is roughly 15% Jewish. I believe that's right. It's not as bad as that number would make you think. Roughly half of the Jewish population of the West Bank is in the Jerusalem suburbs, and it's sort of understood that the Jerusalem suburb will stay with Israel, and the Palestinian state will be compensated for giving up the Jerusalem suburbs by land swaps in the southern part of Israel and near the Gaza Strip.

Most of the remaining Jewish settlers are, in fact, economic settlers, not religious ones, if you just count the noses, according to David Makovsky. Meaning, they moved there because there were generous subsidies to folks who moved to the West Bank, offered by the Israeli government. And if they could be, if you will, induced to move in by generous subsidies, the argument is, they could be induced to move out by subsidies, as well. That does leave maybe 100,000 religiously motivated settlers, who are going to be a much more difficult problem to deal with. Would we deal with them by the last plan design, that I looked at, had a feature that people referred to as the balloon plan. Meaning, the settlements would be connected to Israel by thin territory surrounding roads. But there's no doubt that the remaining, shall we say, religiously motivated settlers are a problem, but they are, in fact, only a fraction of the settlers that live in the West Bank today.

JOHN TIRMAN: Turning to the United States and US policy, we've noticed, and it's been much commented on, that some Democrats in the House, particularly, have broken away from the largely consensus position of the Democratic party in the US politics, generally, of support for Israel, or an unblemished or unrestrained support for Israel. Is this the breakaway of the Ocasio-Cortez gang, so to speak, are they representing something new in American politics? And how viable is it, in the long term, for the Democratic party to become, say, more critical of Israel and more pro-Palestinian? Either one of you.

PETER KRAUSE: Do you want to go first, Steve? Or you want me to say something?

STEPHEN VAN EVERA: Well, I'll say, I think Peter, earlier, remarked on how harmful to Israel Bibi Netanyahu's decision to formally drop his advocacy of a two state solution has been. He did it without much fanfare, several years ago. He had originally, when he first took office for his most recent term, he announced, he was in favor of a two state solution. He used the words. But then after a time, he took it back.

And I think Peter makes a very important point when he says that that really matters a lot, because it takes away the fig leaf for Israel's policy of occupation and makes it very hard to defend. It makes it into a civil rights issue, basically. If you're not going to have a two state solution, you're going to get one state. If you're going to have one state, are you going to have equal rights or not? Will it be a state where the civil rights of all are respected, or not? And then you start colliding with the American creed, with the whole idea that all men and women are created equal, and that the government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed. And that democracy shall not perish from the Earth by and for the people.

How can the US feel warm and fuzzy about a country that's crosswise to all those American cradle ideas? And Netanyahu blew his own feet off, I think, by rhetorically taking away the fig leaf and starting that argument in the US. I think it's a very serious event that will erode support, especially among progressives and Democrats, for Israel. I think it's going to be a real problem for the Democrats, though, because the Democratic party will then become divided over the issue. But it's also a problem for Israel. And so I'll leave it there. Peter.

PETER KRAUSE: Yeah. I'll just add a quick follow up. I think this relates to one of the themes I brought up before, right. Which is, if the lens continues to shift in terms of how Americans view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I think you'll continue to see these trends. And what I mean by that is, if the lens is two warring communities, and the focus is on the rocket fire and the airstrikes and whatnot, I think that the Democratic Party will be more pro Palestinian than the Republicans are, but still probably majority pro-Israel, as it is today.

If the lens, however, continues to shift in a way of saying, OK, this is not two warring communities, but this is one single state, or at least one single territory, and let's look at how everyone's being treated and what their rights are, and it's being presented in the media, as well as by Palestinian leadership as, we just want equal rights and that's what we're pushing for, and we're doing this, again, generally nonviolently. And again, there's a lot of precedent for that, whether the general strike I just mentioned or things from the first Intifada or otherwise, and many stuff that doesn't get reported, I think that that can change many Americans minds, as Steve is saying.

You can look at similar things in Northern Ireland, where they model a lot of their movement on the US Civil Rights Movement. And when it becomes the IRA versus the various unionist militia groups, OK. Then people aren't as sympathetic. When it becomes, hey, [INAUDIBLE] want equal rights and equal opportunity for jobs and things like that, then you get a lot more sympathy in the population. So I think the narrative potential shift here is a really, really important part of it. It's tough to measure right away. It hasn't yet become overwhelmingly in that fashion.

But related to that, related to the question that was brought up before about this concept of apartheid, these are things that are becoming more discussed by the media. And people are more saying them in ways that, even five years ago, but certainly, 10 or 15 years ago, was not the way that people were seeing the conflict. And I think that that will have an impact politically, especially, on the next generation of Americans.

JOHN TIRMAN: Thank you both. Here's a question for Mr. Van Evera. How do you see the two state solution acceptable to both sides, with respect to Jerusalem, especially the Old City and the Palestinian right of return? The right of return is something others have mentioned. How does that figure into a peace settlement?

STEPHEN VAN EVERA: Great questions. I'll just take those backwards. Right of return. To me, the way to handle the right of return is to honor it. 700,000 Palestinians were driven out of greenlined Israel in the '48 War and lost property. The way to handle it is by compensating the families who lost property. The actual refugees themselves, of course, have mostly passed on. And polls actually show that a majority of their descendants would actually not want to move to Israel. If they had the option, they would prefer to be compensated in some way, because they've developed their lives elsewhere.

But it's very important, I think, as a acknowledgment of the wrong of the Nakba and the expulsion to significantly and importantly, compensate them. And the last serious negotiations, I think it was in 2008, there was talk about, what would the compensation for the right of return be? The number used, as I recall, it was \$40 billion. I mentioned, who ought to pay it? To my mind, all of the Christian West ought to pay it, because it's the anti-Semites in the Western world who made this mess, and they ought to help clean it up. But I think there should be a token. Most of the peace plans have recognized, a token return might be allowed, but not a return that's demographically significant. And I think in the end, the Palestinian community would accept that, if it was a generous and appropriate compensation. A real compensation.

Regarding Jerusalem, this issue, everyone waves their hands and says, oh, what can you do. In fact, I think I have a slide there that maybe Michelle can put up, that shows the Temple Mount, which is often thought of as the thorniest part of the Jerusalem problem. Where we have two Muslim mosques on top of the Plaza, under which is found the two most important Jewish ancient shrines, the two temples of ancient times. This is actually a model of the temple, as it looked 2000 years ago. A key feature there is that right in the middle there is the Holy of Holies, which plays a role in why this conflict might be resolvable.

And there's another photo of, it shows where the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock are. Dome of the Rock plays a very important part of the Islamic faith. It's the place from which Muhammad took his night ride to heaven. You see the golden dome there, in the middle. It's on top of Mount Moriah, which is also a key part of the Jewish scriptures. Abraham and Isaac, that whole event took place underneath there, according to Jewish religion. And then on the left, you have the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which was built later, in the 800s, afterward. And that's where the recent conflict happened, where the Israeli forces went in and used force against the folks who were inside, for reasons that aren't quite clear.

In any event, here you got two religions mixed up in one spot. What are you going to do? After the Six Day War, at the bottom line I'll just say is, the Israeli government, in 2000, did actually accept the Clinton Plan, which included a willingness to cede control over the Temple Mount, either to the Muslim authorities in Jordan or to God. One or the other. But it was willing to cede sovereignty over the Temple Mount. This reflected a long view, long Rabbinic stream of teachings in Israel, that it is not appropriate for an observant Jew to be on the Temple Mount. And so it should not be a place of large shall we say, large Jewish presence or praying or worshipping.

And why not? The argument that the rabbis made in 1967 was that we no longer know where the Holy of Holies is. I pointed to it earlier. It was that structure in the middle of the model. And the Holy of Holies is a very important place. It's the place where God resides. What is not supposed to be there, unless one is the chief rabbi, and one has been cleansed with the ashes of a red heifer. And otherwise, it's terrible blasphemy to be in the Holy of Holies. And since the Holy of Holies have been wiped away, no one knew where it really was anymore. And so the argument the rabbis made in '67 was, fine. Nobody should be up there. And there was a sign, I think the sign is still there, informing observant Jews that they should not be on the Temple Mount. And so that created the basis, the possible basis, for a Jewish, shall we say, refraining from claiming that physical possession of the top of the Mount was really key.

The actual reason for the rabbis making that ruling was somewhat different than maybe it seemed on the surface. They weren't trying to lay the basis for peace. They were trying to prevent the restoration of temple focused Jewish religious practice. They believed that the Jewish faith had developed since the Temple was destroyed into a Rabbinic Judaism, which was a much better choice than temple. So that was a hidden idea.

But in any event, this body of religious ruling really created a option for sharing the Temple Mount, that has been corroded now, because there's been a rising tide of pressure in Israel to allow Jews to worship on the Temple Mount, and of Jews who say they want to go there. But there still is this tradition of restraining one's own people from using the Temple Mount as a big worship site.

And I would also say, Jerusalem, in a larger sense here, is it impossible to divide Jerusalem. And oh my God, these people are all intermingled. Well, in fact, they really aren't. Jerusalem has two different bus lines, an Arab bus line, Jewish bus line. They're separated enough that if you want to have, shall we say, an inkblot type city, where neighborhoods abut each other a lot, but neighborhoods are also separate and distinct, it's still demographically possible.

And again, I would refer people back to the fact that there was an arrangement in Jerusalem that was agreed in the Clinton plan, which the Israelis have been very clear, they have said many times they accept it. They actually accepted it with reservations, but they accepted it.

JOHN TIRMAN: Peter, anything on this?

PETER KRAUSE: Oh, sorry. Can you hear me? I have things I can say, but there's so many other questions, I'm happy to take another one.

JOHN TIRMAN: OK. Well, here's one. Where is the condemnation of the Palestinian threat to Israel, within its Hamas leadership launching its terrorist attacks against Israel? What is Israel to do but fight back? Gaza was left unoccupied and the attacks only continued because Hamas never repudiated its original commitment to regain all of Palestine. What do you say to that?

PETER KRAUSE: Sure. So first off, I don't know if the question is directed to where is the combination from me or from the US or otherwise, but I'll speak for me. I'm happy to condemn Hamas rocket fire against civilian targets in Israel. As I mentioned at the outset, there's a disproportionate amount of death in this case. As far as I've seen in the numbers, 230 Palestinians and 12 Israelis. But one of the main reasons the Israeli number is so low is because of Iron Dome, the most effective anti-missile and anti rocket system in the world, developed, in part, through partnership with the United States. And when Hamas is launching these rockets, they're not just launching them at military sites or otherwise. They're launching them knowingly into civilian areas. And if it wasn't for that type of defense, you would see Israeli deaths in much higher numbers, let alone the fact that Israel has a very sophisticated system of air sirens and bunkers and things of that nature.

So I, without reservation, if you're asking me, I'm happy to condemn Hamas violence, in that way. What I'm trying to bring to the table here, again, I don't know if this is directed at me or not, is simply to analyze the current situation, what the problems are, and how, potentially, they can be addressed. I think that if we get into justifications for this or that, I think it's worthwhile and understandable. I'm an American. I'm an American Christian. I'm not someone who's Israeli. I'm not Palestinian.

And I do think that as an observer, I can analyze this stuff. But I also recognize that it doesn't always hit me the exact same. I'm someone who cares a lot about the region. I've lived for many years in Israel and Palestine. I have a number of friends and colleagues who work there. But it doesn't necessarily hit me the same way. So I understand the emotional part of it.

But what I would say is that, I think about a number of the books that are written about the conflict that have informed me. One of them is called *Righteous Victims*, by Benny Morris, who's an Israeli academic. And Palestinians and Israelis both have a number of righteously terrible things that the others have done to them. And that's a terrible thing. And at the same time, I don't think it can be used to justify x, y, or z. If you're shooting rockets in civilian areas, that's not justified. If you're doing airstrikes on civilians, that's not justified. If you're doing lynchings, et cetera.

So again, the condemnation thing is important. And I think that one of the most important things to me, and I say this from an American context, because we're dealing with our own polarization domestically. Is when I look at domestic violence or political violence in the US, is we see Democratic politicians who will criticize white supremacist groups or right wing anti-government groups, and we'll see Republicans who criticize Antifa, but then they'll both be silent on the people from their side of the political spectrum, if they commit political violent acts. I think I see a similar thing in this context, which is, I think that Israelis can feel justified and should, that Hamas violence in this way is unjustified. And Palestinians feel justified that dispossession or killing of Palestinian civilians is unjustified. And at the same time, again, I can't I can't speak for people or tell them what they can do.

But the ability to also call out things from your community is how a lot of these cycles can end. Now, it also can end because you have more powerful actors who can help make that happen. But all I'm saying is, I think condemnation plays a role. That's how I conceptualize it. I don't know if that individual was saying the US needs to condemn more, or we, as academics, do. But that's my basic take on a very complex issue, and I'm happy to talk more about it.

STEPHEN VAN EVERA: I'll just add to that. I think that's an excellent question. To me, I maybe didn't make clear enough that I am condemning rejectionism on both the Israeli and the Palestinian side, and specifically, religious extremism, which is the motive for the rejectionism on both sides. And Hamas is a quote, rejectionist player in the game. They still, in their latest 2017 reediting of their charter, spoke of the liberation of all Palestine as their goal, by which they mean, they want to take over Israel. And who's to remain in Israel once they've taken it over, they allow is how they will run a binational state and they will permit Jews to stay there. But when you read the fine print, they'll only allow Jews to remain there who are descended from Jewish families, who were present when the Zionist project was begun, in 1897. Meaning essentially, they are going to accept the legitimacy of any large Jewish presence in Palestine.

They also have said, they've made noises indicating, they will accept some kind of two state solution. But when, again, you read the fine print, they're not talking about a final peace settlement. They're talking about quote, a truce, meaning we'll make a peace for a while. And then, for some ominous reason, they're not saying they're going to wrap things up and make a final peace. So my view is, they're taking a rejectionist stance. They have to be called out on it.

I think, by the way, diverting a bit to the American debate here, I think American progressives who are unhappy with Israel have to attend to the Hamas extremism and rejectionism here. And they have to call it out. And they have to condemn it. It's very important that that outsiders who seek to referee this conflict, and to bring about something fair and just, have to ask all sides to be reasonable, fair, and just. Not just one side. And so I agree with the caller, that we have to.

And I don't think Hamas's radicalism is widely understood in the United States. I think that it's unfortunate that its rejection of a sensible settlement of this conflict is not widely known, and it really should be. And I hope everybody who's involved in this game, including the White House, will be leaning hard on the Palestinians to accept a two state solution, including all the players who aren't accepting it today.

JOHN TIRMAN: Let me follow up with that statement though, Steve. If Hamas should be condemned for the things you just outlined, where does that leave us with respect to the Palestinian population, which seems to be voting for Hamas in elections, both in the West Bank and Gaza? Is that a fair characterization? And if so, how do you deal with that, politically, going forward?

STEPHEN VAN EVERA: Well, I think Hamas has had good luck at the polls, partly because they're less corrupt than the PA. I don't think the population is really endorsing Hamas's foreign policy, which has been a complete failure. Failed to deliver anything. But in any event, I don't think American leverage on this, or the leverage of America's goodwill, it shouldn't follow elections in Palestine. It should seek to influence them by introducing into the whole debate, what's a reasonable solution here? Where is Hamas taking the Palestinian people? I think they're taking them down a rabbit hole. They don't have any answer. Well, what do they mean? What are they talking about, liberation of all Palestine? This is a preposterous idea. We should call it out and say so. This is a blind alley, or a dead end alley, that Hamas is taking the Palestinian people down. And let's say so, and then see if any change in attitudes can be brought about by putting a spotlight on it.

JOHN TIRMAN: Peter?

PETER KRAUSE: So, yeah. I just want to say, so I agree with where Steve's heart is, though I have to say, I made my first disagreement here on how to carry it out. I don't think the United States making anti Hamas claims is going to change Palestinian voting patterns. I think it could potentially backfire, given the US's reputation with the Palestinians in the region. I also think that the Palestinians, ultimately, are going to have their own elections and put forward their own leaders, and the United States, certainly, as an involved party, can make known opinions or whatnot. Again, that happens in all cases.

But to me, I think the real challenge, I think the United States can affect is, it can affect whether the Palestinians actually have elections, and whether they have institutions that are strong and that are potentially possible nonpartisan. Of course, we have that own challenge in our own country in the US, increasingly partisan electoral institutions or otherwise, as we see in debates. But to me, the biggest tragedy about a lot of this is that Palestine hasn't had an election in 15 years for the president, for the PA, for all these things. Look at the early years of the United States and the elections that happened, and the polarization over them, and the formation of parties.

If these things aren't allowed to happen, if there aren't elections and you just have these ossifying institutions like the PA or Fatah, where they can't translate over to a new generation, I think that that creates more problems than it solves. And we're in a situation with the Palestinians where literally, the hosting of elections is dependent on each of the parties thinking they can win them. So the only reason that the 2006 elections happened is because Mahmoud Abbas read Shikaki's polls that said Fatah was going to win. And so they had them. And his polls were wrong and Hamas won. Right now, they read the polls and they're like, hmm, we're maybe not going to win. And so we're not going to hold them. And vice versa, potentially, with Hamas.

So that's not the potential basis for a healthy political community. And again, it's not the United State's place to be making determinations for who the Palestinians can have as their leader. They can then have foreign relations one way or the other, but I think the key thing there is just the developing of those institutions. And I think that there are a lot of Palestinian leaders, whether youth or otherwise, on the ground, who care about that, who want to be able to lead their community, who want to be able to make political differences, but they feel like they're in a situation where their leadership doesn't represent them.

I mean, what is Abu Mazen doing in this current conflict? He's barely involved, in terms of these things that are happening, whether it's the strike or the response, et cetera. So he holds the keys, because he holds the monetary keys from Israel and from the US and the international community, and the various agreements from Oslo. But I think there are changed realities on the ground that are and not represented in Palestinian politics. And the longer that that's clogged up and not allowed to happen, I don't think it's good for the Palestinians, and I don't think it's good for the region, or for the United States.

STEPHEN VAN EVERA: Can I ask you Peter, though, a question? How strong do you think rejectionism really is amongst the Palestinian public, especially in Gaza? Do you really think there's a strong public groundswell of support for these ideas that are believed over the fancy coffees that the Hamas guys like to drink with each other? But do they really believe it's a big deal to liberate all Palestine?

PETER KRAUSE: So when you say rejectionism, you mean rejecting the two state outcome?

STEPHEN VAN EVERA: Yeah. Yeah.

EVERA:

PETER KRAUSE: OK.

STEPHEN VAN EVERA: I'm using that as a shorthand, meaning rejecting--

EVERA:

PETER KRAUSE: Yes. I think it's not just Hamas supporters who reject the two state outcome and reject US led diplomacy around it. Because I think that a, many Palestinians see the United States as being more on the Israeli side in these negotiations. But even leaving that aside, many Palestinians say, look, we recognize the US is bigger supporter of Israel, but we also recognize the United States is the only country that can really influence Israel. So they're a necessary thing to deal with in some sense with this. That's what many Palestinians, at least that I've talked to, have said, at least, in the past.

But you have a number of people who are like, hey. [AUDIO OUT] state solution, what's it going to look like? If you want to give me all the West Bank and East Jerusalem and Gaza, OK, maybe. Even if I claim everything as Palestine, I can reconcile that. But the two state solution, and I tried to answer a question about this in the chat. Again, there's much debate, as you know, Steve, about what exactly has been offered. But the data that I've seen has not offered the Palestinians to have real control of their holy sites in East Jerusalem and these areas, have not offered them significant or full portions of the West Bank. Some of the ones, maybe, some around the borders.

But I think from the Palestinian perspective, the term two state solution has been used, now, for decades. But I think its meaning changes, in terms of what it would actually look like. If you want to tell many Palestinians, OK, you get East Jerusalem and access to the holy sites and pretty much all the West Bank and Gaza, and there's not a right of return into Israel but into this new Palestinian state and recognition, I think you can get a majority of Palestinians to support that. I just think many Palestinians feel like that's a fantasy. Israel, as the more powerful state, is not going to allow that to happen. And that the process of pretending to do this over the past few decades has not been successful and has led to a weakening of their position.

So do I think Hamas rejects this idea because they consider all of Palestine a walk and they don't want to give it up? Yes. But I'll also say this. Hamas, kind of like Fatah, had a charter that said, we want the whole thing. And then a couple of years ago, they're like, well, maybe we'll take ahudna in the 67 borders. So one's position of power also makes a difference, in terms of these groups. But I will just say, it's not just Hamas who rejects the two state solution among the Palestinians.

And it's not just Palestinians. Significant portion of Israelis reject a two state solution, either because they think they can get more, or they're also disillusioned with the settlement freeze or these other things that they feel like have been unfair to them. So yeah, I think the two state solution is at a nadir, in terms of support in both communities.

STEPHEN VAN EVERA: I'll just add a final thought to what you said. I agree that the best friend to the hawks on both sides is the hawks on the other side. Because two big justifications on these two sides for rejecting a two state solution is religious ideas, on the one hand, which I think all should be challenged, even challenged on their own terms. Are these really true understandings of scripture? And second, the argument that we don't have a partnership. We don't have a partner for peace. That the other side won't deal reasonably with us, so let's not try. The Israelis have argued for years. We don't have a partner for peace with the Palestinians [AUDIO OUT] solution. Palestinians say the same thing.

Shikaki's polls, by the way, show that both sides underestimate the actual willingness of the other side to settle on reasonable terms. So another thing that needs dealing with is this perception on each side that the other is not a partner for peace. And it's another reason why it's important for the US to press both sides to come clean with a clear declaration, in both general terms and specific terms, that they do favor a two state solution.

JOHN TIRMAN: OK. I think we have time for one more question, and I'm going to try to combine a few. Would Israel's supposedly unassailable military advantage survive a cutoff of foreign aid and a robust BDS movement? And I would add to that, one of the conditions, or one of the reasons for cutting off aid would be if Israel is violating the terms of the military assistance they've gotten from the United States by committing war crimes, essentially, or something close to that. Either one of you.

PETER KRAUSE: Sure. I'll go first. So obviously, a lot of this depends on the person's definition of what a robust BDS movement means. But let's not just presume that they mean, I guess the US getting them. That's, again, that was defeated very soundly in Congress. So I don't see that. But maybe European states, more than they have, getting on board. Campuses being really strongly supportive, the type of thing that you saw with South Africa. So if you have a robust thing like that, the answer to the question, I still think, would be no, in the sense that Israel's military superiority, vis a vis the Palestinians, is so significant that even if there were significant sanctions and boycotts of Israeli companies or otherwise, I don't think that would change their qualitative military advantage.

If you want to say, would it make a little bit different vis a vis Iran or a closer peer competitor, perhaps. But vis a vis the Palestinians, the Palestinians have no military force to speak of. At best, they have this trained security force in the West Bank that doesn't have nearly the technology or otherwise that the Israelis have. So the impact of BDS, to me, is a variety of other things, in terms of how it's impacting the conflict. But I don't think at the end of the day, it would change the balance of power, militarily, between the Israelis and Palestinians.

JOHN TIRMAN: Steve?

STEPHEN VAN EVERA: I agree with Peter. On the margins, US military support helps Israel. US technology helps Israel. The Iron Dome is basically an American Israeli joint product. The US helps Israel with intelligence, with ordinance. But if the US gave Israel no help, Israel would still have crushing military superiority, today, in the conventional war that the Israelis most think about. So I agree with Peter that if the US gave less aid, it wouldn't change the military situation drastically.

To me, the big changes that Israel would have to worry about are the mobilization of a wider Arab coalition against Israel, which I think is not at all out of the question over the next many years, or wider mobilization even out into the wider Muslim world, against Israel, if measures needed to suppress the Palestinians are highly publicized and it could cause a backlash around the world. We've already seen how quickly that can happen in the last few years, with the mobilization of the Israeli Arabs against the state of Israel. We've seen this transformation of Arab opinion in Israel, in which we've seen the Israeli Arabs become mobilized on the side of the Palestinians in a way they weren't before. And we see this really, very striking and alarming picture of civil conflict happening in Israel, which was unthinkable five or 10 years ago.

And it just shows how nationalization can happen in a hurry. How, if events push the right buttons, you can have a community change its mind and decide to mobilize into a conflict in a way it wasn't before. So that's the thing the Israelis should be most worried about. I think it's likely that it's going to happen in the next decades, unless this conflict's resolved.

JOHN TIRMAN: Thank you, gentlemen. That's all the time we have. Thank you to our audience, our large audience. We couldn't get to most of your questions, unfortunately. But we really appreciate your attendance today and we hope you got something out of this. Many Thanks to Peter Krause, Professor of Political Science at Boston College, and Stephen Van Evera, who is MIT Professor of Political Science. Thank you. And tune in again, pay attention to our website, where we will have announcements of future events. Good day.

PETER KRAUSE: Thank you.

[OUTRO MUSIC]