

This is the second interview that we have conducted with people deeply involved in the horrors that are taking place in Israel and in Gaza at the moment. Our last interview was with Yuval Noah Harari, who's an Israeli and talked passionately about the experience of pain, the pain that he feels from the horrifying terrorist attack from Hamas. And now we have an interview with the Palestinian ambassador. Please remember in listening to these things that we are trying to get as many voices to be heard. This isn't our straw man endorsing particular positions. It's about our strong, strong belief that the only way that you can begin to understand this conflict and this tragedy is by hearing these voices from every side.

Welcome to the Restless Politics with me, Rory Stewart.

And me, Alistair Campbell. And this is a special episode of the Restless Politics with a very special guest, Usam Zomlot, who many of you may have seen in recent days on the media in his role as the Palestinian ambassador to the UK. And we're hoping we can go a little deeper than many of the interviews that he does manage to do with a man who was born in a refugee camp in Gaza 50 years ago, weeks before the Yom Kippur War, on whose anniversary the current crisis was unleashed

by the Hamas attack on Israel nine days ago. He's devoted his life to what we might call the Palestinian cause in various capacities, being an advisor to the UN, strategic advisor to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, member of his Fatah party's revolutionary council, ambassador to the US, until the Trump administration shut down the Palestinian mission ahead of recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital to much anger and distress in the Arab world and beyond. And he's now ambassador in London, totally plugged into the Palestinian Authority, which governs in the West Bank, though not in Gaza home, which is under Hamas control. Right now, October 2023, as the bombs fall and up to a million Gazans flee their homes, and as the world fears the conflagration that might follow, that Palestinian cause that they get their own homeland as part of the two state solution we've been talking about for decades feels a distant, if not impossible one. So how do we get here? And where do we go now? We're hoping that the ambassador can help with at least part of the answers.

So thanks for being here. I think I'd like to ask first of all about Gaza. I've been to Gaza, Roy's been to Gaza, but you lived there for much of your life. You grew up there.

At the moment, we're seeing Gaza in a way that is kind of pretty horrific in the pictures that we're seeing. But what's what's Gaza like in what I might call normal times, non crisis times? What's it like to live there? Beautiful, warm, generous, and a very strong sense of community. And it's very strategic location on the shores of the Mediterranean and just at the edge of all civilizations. You know, it's literally on the crossroad between Asia, Africa and Europe. Cyprus is only miles away from Gaza. And the people, the Palestinian people in Gaza have been renowned for being very well rooted. And Gaza as a city was a key sort of urban center of Palestine before the Nakba and the creation of Israel. And that's why Gaza now has more than 70% of its population. Palestinian refugees like myself, I am not originally from Gaza. My parents were forced out of their homes in the Nakba events of 1947, 49, and the mass expulsion of two thirds of the nation at the time that tells you the strength of the Gaza society to be able to do so. No other Palestinian city was able to accommodate and receive. So the Gaza culture is a culture of accommodation and generosity and welcoming. And this is repeated as we speak. My sister

lives in the south of Gaza and Israel has asked 1.1 million Gazans to move to the south. So she

has to accommodate in her small house. I call her every hour to make sure that she's still alive and her kids. But in between these schools, I see the beauty of that society. So did you enjoy growing up there? Absolutely. You know, I was born in a refugee camp to the very south of Gaza. And it has a story when my father and my grandfather and parents were forced out of their original homes in what become Israel from our properties. My grandfather used to ask his colleagues, are we still in Palestine? They would say, yes, yes. At one point in time, my grandfather asked, are we in Palestine? They said, yes. But Mr. Shahada, his name, if you cross, if you take one step, it will be Egypt. There I was born. He wanted to protect his family as much as possible from the Jewish militias at the time attacking the villages, but stay in the homeland. So that's the reason I was born in a refugee camp in Rafah to the very south of Palestine. And since then, when I was born and raised, I didn't know anything beyond the camp, the refugee camp. But that was my life. And that was the most beautiful life I've had. And, you know, because we shared a collective experience, everybody was being forced, everybody is a refugee, everybody comes from somewhere else. But that collective experience made such a sense of togetherness. Just to try to for a British audience. So if you go to somewhere like Nablus, you have a sense of a very, very ancient city, you have a sense of Roman streets, you have amazing Qanafi, you have very famous food, you have extraordinary histories of manufacturing of soap and beautiful Ottoman architecture. How does Gaza compare to somewhere

like Nablus as a place to live over the last 10 years? The last 10 years, no comparison. I mean, Gaza has been for the last at least 16 years, has been bought under draconian system of blockade. 2.3 million people have been taken hostage, primarily by Israel. The situation has been declining ever since. Yet in 1993, when we signed the Oslo Accords, Gaza was supposed to be our hub.

Just to clarify, to remind people, these were the agreements that were reached in the mid-1990s in Oslo. And that was the moment at which the Palestinian Authority recognized the State of Israel and signed up to a peaceful course. And the core of it was supposed to be three areas, Palestinian areas, mixed areas, and Israeli areas. And it was going to be the basis of what was to be what's called a two-state solution. In other words, a Palestinian state and an Israeli state. And that was not a process that Hamas joined. And I remember when Bill Clinton visited Gaza and when we opened that airport and when we started building the seaport, Gaza was sheer beauty. If we compare it to somewhere like Nablus or Bethlehem or Ramallah, how does it feel as a place to live before the current situation? So let's go back a year or two in terms of culture, food, architecture, daily life. Of course, there is one common thing between all these Palestinian cities, which is the Palestinian people. So we are one united nation and united people. And we have the same culture, the same dialect, you know, the language, the accent. We come from the same roots. So we are united in there. Our cuisine may vary here and there, but it's by and large the same. But each city has its distinct sort of history. If Gaza is renowned for anything, it's renowned for its leadership. Most of the Palestinian or most maybe too much, many of the Palestinian leaders are originally from Gaza. And Gaza is home to all Palestinian or major Palestinian political movements. Fateh was created in Gaza. Yasser Arafat, originally his parents are from Khanunis in Gaza, all the first leaders. So Gaza is renowned for that very strong national identity. And Gaza is famous. And because of the density of the population, that is such a ground for movements, for nationalism, for political action. Bethlehem is

the birthplace of Jesus. And, you know, it has that aura, that aura in it. And our people in Bethlehem also have refugee camps like in the Hesheh, what have you. But Bethlehem carries that moral authority, if you may, among us. Nablus is one of the most historic cities on earth. And it has a very sophisticated society of a long period of time, continued families.

So nonetheless, we can go on Jerusalem, Hebron. Hebron is one of the most special cities on earth. So don't get me started. I have a beautiful country. You're now just becoming a kind of tourism promoter. We want to go into politics now. Is that okay? As you say, your parents were expelled with the creation of the state of Israel. For those listeners who perhaps, you know, we have a lot of young listeners, some of whom perhaps this is the first time that they've really latched on to this as a kind of really big thing happening in the world.

What do we mean by Palestine? What do we mean by the PLO, Palestine Liberation Organization? What is the Palestinian Authority? And what is the difference between Hamas, which has launched this attack on Israel and Fatah Yopati? Palestine before 1948 was the land between the river and the sea, the Jordanian River or the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. And Palestine was inhabited by the Palestinian people. For millennia, we are the Canaanites. And Palestine is the cardinal of civilization. And almost every prophet you can think of is the or has passed through the, you know, it is the birthplace of Christianity and Palestine has been renowned for it being the cultural and economic hub of the region. And that's why when 48 happened

and after 48 catastrophes, the Palestinian people who became refugees in their own homeland and outside

have become the teachers and the professors and the lawyers and the doctors of the Arab world.

The story started not in 1948, it started in 1917 here in this very city, in this very country.

When Lord Balfour, the Balfour Declaration, the Secretary of State of the Time, the Foreign Secretary issued a declaration, a promise, promising our land, our country, Palestine.

And in that promise, completely denying us the definition of people's hope. So in that promise, the declaration was we see would support the creation of a homeland for the Jewish people, but then it continues without prejudice to the rights of the non-Jewish, can you imagine, the non-Jewish minorities, us for millennia, us who have exported every religion, us who owned at the time 98% of the land and were 96% of the population. And then it continued. Britain took over Palestine in 1919 with a contract with the League of Nations that they are there to prepare Palestine and the Palestinians for statehood and recognition. And so we were denied nationhood and peopleshood in 1917 and then 1919. Britain came and then it left in 1948, denying us our statehood and right to be recognized and giving birth to Israel without really even acknowledging that story as you've just told it. How does that make you feel about the United Kingdom today?

That it has a very serious, big, moral, historic, legal, and political responsibility. And that this is not about blaming the UK for what has taken place because there's a lot of blame elsewhere.

This is not just the only situation, but this is the most severe and the ongoing,

the last ongoing at such severity. Which most people in Britain don't even know about.

They don't even know about that. This whole started here in this country. There was that moment, Alistair, of colonial arrogance that led us to where we are today.

Okay. Now, PLO, Palestinian Authority, Hamas Fatah.

Well, after the events of the Nakba when my grandparents and parents were forced out of their homes, we were really, it was a catastrophic situation where we became scattered all over

the world, all over the region. It took us 20 years to regain our balance. And then in these 20 years, we started a revolution. That's the PLO. That's the National Movement. Yes, Arafat. In the late 50s, early 60s. And then we came together. We turned our refugees into freedom fighters. And we had a political platform and we made a huge noise all over the world that we have rights. We are a nation and our rights must be recognized. And our PLO is the sole legitimate organization of the Palestinian people, because in the PLO were all the political factions that were mobilizing for freedom. And the Palestinian Authority is the daughter of the PLO. The PLO created the Palestinian Authority in 1993 when we signed the Oslo Accords to take the PLO's responsibility to implement the Oslo Accords. So the PLO, the PA does not have external arms. I had the PLO office here. The PLO is recognized by the UK, the US and the world. The PA is primarily

has the responsibility to provide services, education, health, what have you to the Palestinian people and be the nucleus of the institutions of the state to be delivered five years after 1993. Can you then tell us about what happened between the PLO to put it in simple terms and Hamas in Gaza? How did Hamas end up taking over Gaza? When did it happen? How did it happen? What were the consequences of this for the PLO, for the people of Gaza? What was that situation?

Well, the PLO, as I said, is an umbrella organization of all the Palestinian national factions. Fateh is, of course, the mainstream, the biggest, Yas Arafat and President Abbas currently. Fateh is the Palestine National Liberation Movement. And national is the key thing that we believe that we are a nation. This is our land. We must liberate it and we must be recognized. Hamas was established 30 years ago, roughly speaking, so long after that history. And their thinking and ideology was more directed by Islamic teachings and that Palestine is primarily

a place that belongs to the Muslim nation. And there we had our disagreements that we are a nation and among us there are the Muslims and the Christians and the Jews, by the way. The history has been underestimated how many Palestinian Jews there were before Israel was created. And by the way, we still have now, in Nablus, Rory, you asked about Nablus, a big group of Palestinian Jews who live in the mountain there in Nablus. But nonetheless, we had our differences and disagreements, naturally so, which led to the difficulty of including Hamas since it has been established into the PLO. And therefore, until now, we couldn't find that balance and that equilibrium and that understanding that you cannot be part of the Palestinian umbrella if you do not agree on the ship and the leader of the ship, the captain, and the final destination of the ship. Our final destination in this national ship is ending Israel's occupation, establishing a state of our own with East Jerusalem as capital, resolving the issue of refugees in accordance with international law.

In 2007, Hamas basically kicked Fatah out of Gaza in a military assault and took control of the ship. Can you explain that situation, explain what happened in 2007?

Very unfortunate and has really did hurt our national project, our national standings and relations and our international standings. In 2006, there was national elections, parliamentary elections and presidential. The presidential was won by Fatah. President Abbas was elected by a majority. The legislative was won by Hamas, not all of it, but they had more seats than Fatah and we will talk, let's not get into the details of the system was complex and allowed for smaller factions, parties, etc. Nonetheless, they were handed the keys for the Palestinian Authority. Hani became the prime minister and they picked their own ministers,

all of them are Hamas. So the PA has become a fully Hamas sort of. Unfortunately, Hamas couldn't really handle the situation. Number one, the international community, the West primarily laid siege on the government because they didn't agree with the Hamas platform. The reason for this is that from the perspective of the West and many other countries, Fatah, which is the organization that the ambassador represents, was seen as having signed up to the Oslo Accords, having renounced violence and recognized Israel. A peaceful approach and Hamas was not committed to that process and was identified by many countries, not all, but by many countries as a terrorist organization. And that was one of the reasons why people were reluctant

to recognize them, even though, as you say, they won the elections.

Yeah, but the question is, why would they win elections when people give the verdict for Fatah for the presidential? And by the way, I represent the PLO, not Fatah here, I am Fatah, but I represent

the PLO, which Fatah is part of. But people were not really, I think, in that election, they were punishing us more than they were, you know, casting a vote for the other side. Simply because the peace process that we promised our people to statehood and liberation and independence and dignity and prosperity and equal rights has been made to fail by Israel, because our people saw that settlements quadruples that each Jerusalem is littered with settlements that the West Bank has turned into a Swiss cheese that settlers are forming into militias. Again, the settlement situation is very fundamental to this, because the way in which the agreements that came out of Oslo were formed is it was supposed to define what was Palestinian territory, what was mixed territory, and what was Israeli territory. And the whole idea of the two-state solution was based on trying to create a contiguous Palestinian state. At the same time, there was a settler movement and the extreme edge of the settler movement are men such as Smotrich, the current finance minister. And they very much do not accept

the Oslo Accords. They want to push settlements of Israelis into areas which are in international law, meant to be Palestinian territory. Hence this phrase, the occupied Palestinian territories. And when the settlements are created, the Israeli government, the state, the military then protects those settlements, meaning that Palestine then ends up with the settlements emerging. Some of them very, very aggressive, getting into big confrontations with people. And by doing so has divided up the Palestinian territory into more than 100 separate segments because the Israelis are attempting to keep the settlement enclaves and they're not stopping. The settlements are continuing and part of the problem. And this is within Israeli society, because Smotrich is not representative of all of Israeli society, but on the far right extreme of this, that part of the settlement movement, people like Smotrich are saying, he wants to take over the whole of Palestine, and he's saying that either you accept or you leave, or if you try to resist, militarily, we'll kill you. So I just wanted to explain the settlement situation back to you. That's very accurate, Rory, really, except that it's more than 100 isolated sort of, because it's increasing. And the Smotrich and Bing Veer have managed to create settler militias, and now they are committing whole sort of mass destructions and attacks on our villages on a regular basis. And I lost count, but yesterday was awful, seven Palestinians were shot primarily by settlers. So yes, you're right, settlers and settlements is the key reason why the two state solution and the Oslo process have failed or has failed. Is it dead now?

No, no, no, it's not dead. Nothing is dead. It needs a trick wise will, because Israel has to take all of its colonial settlements out of Sinai, out of South Lebanon, out of Gaza, and the real pressure, it could happen. The problem is Israel never faced any serious pressure or consequences since the signing of Oslo. It was supposed to receive serious pressure if it builds one brick, but it didn't receive any pressure, and therefore it continued unabated until today.

What horrible phrase, but we are where we are. Okay. Is this the low point? If Oslo was the high point in what I called your lifelong support for the Palestinian cause, is this now the low point? Can you see any way out of this that meets what you want? Yes, I think so, because the low point has been happening since we signed Oslo, that we were able to provide an alternative path. But in these 30 years, Israel, together with its allies, has managed to close every single avenue possible, political or league. You know, not only the settlements and the erosion of the two-state solution, but also our ability to resist peacefully, like going to the ICC. You cannot imagine the pressure not to do so by the US and the UK, like getting an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice a few months ago by the General Assembly of the United Nations, and the UK so aggressively oppose our attempts. So blocking all these venues has, in my opinion, led to a very low point. Is it not the case though that what drives them down the road that they go down is the feeling that the remain powerful forces within the Palestinian community, and which we've seen recent just nine days ago, that literally does want to wipe them out? That's what drives them to the extremes that you then say, what caused the problems for you, who is trying to be more moderate.

And Ambassador, can I just sort of reinforce that? Because I think there are sort of two different questions. There's the question of the territory which Israel took after 1967, and the territory where the settlements has been put in, and then there are the 1948 boundaries. And I guess the fear from some Israelis is that the demands of Palestinians are not just to return to the 1967 boundaries, they want to get rid of the 1948 boundaries, they want to get rid of the existence of Israel itself.

I know that argument which really doesn't stand, doesn't stand the logic, doesn't stand the international court of justice. Because you're right, Rory, the 1967 areas which we have accepted to establish our state on is 22% of historic Palestine, that's it. And we recognize Israel on 78% of historic Palestine. The question is, the moment Israel ends its occupation of the 67 areas, and we establish a state independent that can protect its own citizens, that state, and can enter into neighborly relations with neighboring states like Israel, then Israel has the right to say that, oh, we have existential fears. But before that, Israel is using this argument to simply make its occupational colonization permanent. That's it, that's it. It's an excuse. In my opinion, in my opinion, there can be enough and sufficient guarantees for everybody to provide security. This is an issue that-

Based on the Oslo Accord.

Based on international resolutions, which the Oslo Accord was based on, that Israel has to end the occupation that began in 1967. I'm sorry, Rory and Alistair, I'll have to say it.

The idea that you can bypass the Palestinian issue as Netanyahu has been trying to do has failed, and it will always fail. I have to say also, the idea that you can have security, but the other side do not have security, cannot sustain. Those who say the status quo is sustainable have been tested and they will continue to be tested. So there has to be a political solution.

I know you want to have a military solution. It's not possible. It is an impossibility in our situation. Okay, who's some Rory? Let's just take a quick break. I'm Dr. John Watson. For the first time ever, I'm a consulting detective. Every single Sherlock Holmes story God help me. Will be retold.

We believe there is a bomb on a tube train heading to Clapham Con. I know this.

Yeah, sorry, I was speaking to the listeners. For goodness sake, hold this. Oh my god, just don't pull the pin. Why on earth would I pull the pin? The game is afoot. Watson. A new weekly podcast from Goldhunter. Sherlock and Co. I'm now wherever you get your podcasts.

The challenge for somebody like me is I'm very sympathetic towards the two state solution and when Israeli friends said to me, it's necessary for us to control the Golan Heights to protect Israel or it's necessary for us to occupy these areas on the West Bank in order to protect Israel. I questioned that. Didn't seem to me to be a sensible military argument. The problem, of course, is that this recent attack from Gaza pushes this argument back because now many Israelis can point this and say, see, we told you all along, these areas are very dangerous to us. It's not true that we can just accept them because these can become basis for attacks against our people. Yes, and our position is very clear and we definitely reject the targeting of civilians from all sides. The Palestinian cause is a cause that needs to return and keep maintain the moral high grounds that our position is very clear. Hamas is not the government. We are

the government and we represent the Palestinian people here and we have signed Oslo and we remain

to be the interlocutors for the international community. And therefore we have a government in Israel, on the other hand, that we need to really hold accountable to international standards because Israel sits in the UN. It has a seat in the United Nations and it has acceded to all these agreements and provisions. Now, your question about the Israeli psychology, you see, okay, Hamas was not there really. It was established around Oslo. And before Oslo, there was complete denial of any possibility of a solution. I understand the difficulties faced, but the same rhetoric was used against Fatih before Hamas. I think this is an opportunity for the Israeli society, the public, the people to seriously think and think again. I think once they really passionately believe that they must grant the legitimate birth rights of the Palestinian people, that security architecture will be created. I don't think Palestinians are really oriented towards hurting anybody. And let me make absolutely clear, our history has been clear, you go back to it. We are a nation and a society that knows what is the meaning of living together in harmony, the real coexistence in everything. It's Jerusalem and Bethlehem. We know how to accommodate them. They didn't know until now how to accommodate us. They came up with a very exclusive

ideology, Zionism, that by definition could not see us as an equal nation. You can't deny that through that you can explain it, you can give people the context for it. You can't deny that if you're sitting on the Israeli side, you've seen a history that involves terrorism as they see it. You said earlier, in one of your earlier answers, you talked about how you had this united leadership, but actually what you've described is a very divided leadership because you have West Bank, where you guys are in control. You have Hamas in control of Gaza. That allows them to do things that you can then say, well, we wouldn't do it like that. We don't want to operate like that. And of course, his behind Lebanon.

First of all, I didn't say we have a united political factions. I said that we have a united people. Our people are united and our people are united by the fact of our oppression because we face the same oppression with the ring Gaza and Nablus in Jerusalem in Khalil anywhere. So we are united by oppression and we as a people united in our goals. We have one legitimate political system that is the PLO missing Hamas. So we need to find a formula, but unless we agree on the principles, that formula needs to be there and firm. Because for a lot of people, they don't understand how this works. Do you have any control over them at all?

Well, there were so many attempts at dialogue, including very recently, there were so many rounds of attempts at bringing them under the umbrella of the PLO and engaged in national elections again. So we renew our democratic process because we pride ourselves as Palestinians to be in a region that is not very democratic, but yet we are. So we offer elections and our actions are monitored by people like President Carter and they brag about how transparent and democratic it is. But that hasn't been on for a long time. Well, it hasn't been since that situation that Rory referred to. But please, I don't want to forget or to deflate from the discussion about the Israeli society because it's very important because this discussion, many Israelis, according to your questions, think that we are targeting them or they are being targeted or anybody is targeting them because they are Jews. Let me say this. By the way, the most adamant vocal voices for Palestine in the world are all Jewish, very strong voices from Naomi Chomsky downward and many of my friends. This is not an ideological or religious conflict. This is a political issue. You know, it's very ridiculous that people think that had our oppressors, colonizers, besiegers been not Jewish, we would have been okay with it. No, of course not. Our issue here is not the identity of our oppressors. Our issue at stake here is the fact of our oppression. That's the issue. And our situation is and what we are trying to do here is to say that we are in order, not with you as Jewish or with you as Israeli even, we are in order with you as an occupier, as a colonizer, as a soldier that imposes a system of racial domination, apartheid, very well documented by Amnesty International, by Human Rights Watch, by numerous Israeli and Palestinian Human Rights organizations, by the same amount I tell you, we are equal human being. Do not underestimate, this is my message to them, do not underestimate people's desire for freedom. And when they desire freedom and when they don't accept your control, they will find hundreds of ways to try and make their voices heard. Now, there are of these ways that we don't accept and our approach is very clear. We believe in the power of non-violence. But even those who try non-violence like myself, you know what the Israelis call me? Diplomatic terrorist. So they have a ready thing for anything. We are not allowed to use, you know, if you use armed resistance, you're a terrorist. If you use peaceful resistance, they call you a violent activist and they shoot you by the way. And if British people like yesterday or Saturday, tens of thousands in the streets of London and Manchester and everywhere, Scotland, they call them anti-Semites. If you really come out and support the rights of Palestinians, if Jewish people and many of them come in support of justice in Palestine, and I tell you, you will be amazed how many of them there are. They told themselves hating you. What are we supposed to do? If your political venues are blocked, your legal venues are blocked, your international venues are blocked. So what people are supposed to do? What the younger generation must be thinking about?

So what's the answer to that? What is the answer? Where do you take it? Where do you go? I think the answer to that is not solely the Palestinian experience. It has to be the global experience, the human family. We did not establish the post-World War II global order for nothing,

Alistair. It took us horrors, massacres here in Europe. Horrors. I mean, you know, the most heinous crime in history was the Holocaust. Six million Jews were slaughtered by the Nazis. And then we all learned the lesson never again, and they never again brought about the international system. The international system created two things, Israel and rules. Unfortunately, Israel and rules have been in order with each other for 75 years. We need to ally Israel and rules once and for all. Listen, we were talking to Prince Sayed, the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. And that's an interview that we'll be bringing out after yours, Ambassador. And he was talking to us about what he calls the tribalism of pain, the problem that people have empathizing with the other side. And we also spoke to Yuval Noah Harari a few days ago, and he said, you know, he had close relatives there being attacked by Hamas. He was seeing peace activists being murdered in their beds with their children. And he said that psychologically, it's almost impossible at the moment to feel for the other side. You know, he's somebody who's very committed to the idea of decent treatment Palestinians, but he finds it very difficult at the moment. And then he said that he imagined the same was true for Palestinians that Palestinians also at the moment find it difficult to empathize with the suffering of Israeli civilians that on both sides, there's a tribalism of pain. People cannot feel each other's pain. Well, if you allow me, Rory, can I pick a disagreement with that? That would be true if there is any sort of symmetry. We are not occupying any Israeli city. We are not colonizing any Israeli areas. We are not laying a siege on any Israeli population. We are not imposing a system of racial domination and apartheid. We're not. We are the ones under occupation. And therefore, you cannot equate between the occupier and the occupier. What Yuval said was that you can be victim and perpetrator at the same time. Okay. Okay. I guess what people and I've said, I've watched lots of your interviews and I completely understand you get frustrated. The same questions you, you know, you want to ask me why you know, ask me why you know, you know, please ask me why because you know, everybody thinks that I don't want to condemn violence. You know, I chose, I was a, I was a UN official and then academic and I studied here at the LSE and I went to Harvard. So I could have led a different path. I chose diplomacy because I passionately believe in the means of nonviolence to attain our rights. But I refuse the premise of that question because once you accept it, it's a framing mechanism whereby we become the aggressors. When in fact, the source of all aggression, the beginning of all aggression is the state of military occupation. But the beginning of peace of some might be the acceptance of each other's victimhood, if you like, the acceptance that both suffer pain and both therefore need to accept the pain of the other before they can actually get together and talk. Can I be very blunt here? Okay. We have been the ones massacred by Israel and we haven't done, okay, what happened on the 7th of October, we discussed it, has never happened before. Like this, at this scale and this scale. Like this. The Jewish people are not our victims. They are the victims of the Nazis and the issues here happened here. So practically Alistair and Rory, we are the victims of the victims. No, but to get from where you are now, but to get from where you are now. We are the victims of the victims. The victims of Europe should also have a place in their hearts for us. We haven't perpetuated. We haven't perpetuated the atrocities. You just said that many of the people who go in these marches are Jews. Many of them do

have that feeling. Yes, of course, of course. Right. Let me just ask you this question. You've been a diplomat. You've been an economist. You've been an academic. You understand this political scene inside out and yet you say you still have hope you can get there. Of course. Who do you negotiate with at the moment? Where does it go? How does anything start unless you can say, well, the international community do this and the other, but ultimately unless you, the Palestinians, have some mechanism by which you can build trust and mutual respect with Israelis, this goes nowhere, doesn't it? We will have to find a way to do the following. Number one, the settler movement in Israel has taken control itself. That's an Israelis to change. You can't change that. Yeah, but how do you negotiate with a person like Smotrich, who's now the finest man? Very hard. Yeah. And Rory is very accurate because Smotrich published what Rory said. He published it. It's public. Either you accept being a slave in your own land or you flee. Or we die. Or we kill you. I mean, you negotiate with such a mentality. The Israeli people need to come up with a leadership that believe there is a different future. Netanyahu was a politician, not a statesman. Israel had Rabin at once who decided, okay, this is the line in the sand. We cut it. Unfortunately, he was assassinated by Israeli and Israeli fanatic. And guess the supporters of that fanatic are now where they're in government, in government. And you know, these settlers in the West Bank, and this is the problem with Israeli public, and I'm going to come to the Palestinian public, the problem is they didn't make the link between what these guys are doing with us in the West Bank and what they started doing to the Israelis themselves. I mean, this whole judicial reform thing, they turned back against their own people. So there has to be the link in Israel, that occupation, colonization, besiegement, murder of people, arrest of people without charge and trial corrupts your own society. And the outcome of that is the big views and the Smotrich and the Netanyahu. One of the things I don't understand is what on earth Hamas really thought they were doing in this attack eight days ago, because they're not Islamic jihad. They had a state, they were a kind of government, they were running social services, they were running education. And by this attack, they have guaranteed that they're never going to be a government again. And also, I think most Muslims feel very strongly that you don't attack civilians. And most of my Muslim friends, you know, of course, they feel strong, strong solidarity with the Palestinian cause, but they are uncomfortable about Hamas killing women and children in this way. It's not comfortable for people. So what did Hamas think it was doing? I haven't, Rory, I haven't seen verified accounts of that and I'm really eager to see, but if this happened, I would be the absolute first, not only to condemn it, but to shout out that this is non-Palestinian, this is non-Arab, this is non-Muslim. We are innocent and we are absolutely, we disown such act because we belong to a culture that definitely forbids such thing. And we, as the victims of such attacks for 75 years, should always make sure that we do not blur the lines here. Having said all that, I don't know. Please talk to them. I don't know what has gone in their heads. I really, I truly, truly don't. They must have known this was the reaction. They must have known that a government like Netanyahu was going to do what it's now doing. I am surprised, like everybody surprised at the incident, but I have to say, I have been warning everywhere I go, in media, with governments here and elsewhere, that something is coming

because,

you know, politics is like physics. It does not fancy vacuum. And there is no international leadership for the last so many years, Trump and, you know, moving the embassy and completely trying to undermine the Palestinian issue. Netanyahu claiming that now he has made peace in the Middle East. He meant with Emirates and Bahrain. Israel was never at war with Emirates Bahrain. Israel is at war with us. Israel is at odds with us. And Israel can only achieve peace and security with us. But he was trying to do the abracadabra, you know, that peace is here. I have liquidated the Palestinian issue. That vacuum that was created, that lack of hope in the hearts of the millions of Palestinian youth was very dangerous. Very dangerous. How it would have been manifested, nobody knew. We have got to learn the lessons here. And the main lesson, the one lesson that we need to learn is that this is a political issue. It's a political issue. No matter how you look at it from a security situation, you have got to find political solutions. Now, you're the ambassador here. As you say, you were the ambassador in the United States until the

Trump administration closed the mission and went down the route of saying that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. So today, we're recording this on Monday. Rishi Sunak has just stood up in the House of Commons and said that six British people were among those killed. There are 12 more missing.

I just wonder, first of all, what you think of that, your reaction to that, but also whether you worry that that maybe makes your job here, because you are being put through this frame that you keep objecting to, which I understand, I get your frustration on that. But whether that makes your life here as a diplomat, as the ambassador of Palestine, more difficult?

I hope not, because the British government knows very well that this is Hamas, not us, and they make the clear distinction, the difference between the PLO and the government and the Palestinian legitimate representation Hamas. And Mr. Sunak, the prime minister, made it today in his remarks and the foreign secretary cleverly made it yesterday with me in Sunday morning BBC. So the distinction is there. And the British public also know that distinction.

You've been very critical of Britain's role historically. What's your assessment of the British government and British politics generally? And I guess the opposition is important. This because the opposition might become the government reasonably soon.

We talked about Oslo being the high point politically in the UK was Jeremy Corbyn leading the Labour Party, the high point for you, because he was so committed on this issue.

Well, this was never about one individual in the Labour Party. The issue of Labour government recognising Palestine was started by Ed Miliband to be accurate and precise. So this is a Labour movement and Labour Party progression of policy that got us to Labour being much more supportive and much more clear on the internationalism side and the international rule side.

And your assessment of the government is positioned now today?

Well, both the government and the opposition need to stick to the issue of international law.

That's the most significant part. And the first few days of the situation since the 7th of October, I felt that the government was off balance talking about Israel right to defend itself without any qualifications or adding that international law needs to be, especially international humanitarian law, needs to be adhered to. We were feeling that that will give the fanatics in this government a green light to commit the massacres.

In the Israeli government?

Yes, in the Israeli government, of course, the likes of Smotritch and Bing Fia, the green light, or it will be interpreted by them that this is just a license to do whatever they wish to do. But that balance is regained now by the statements that international law needs to be respected and civilians need to be protected.

So just as we come to the end, I just wanted you to reflect a little bit on what you've been through over the last 10 days. You've gone from a situation in which sometimes you must, as the Palestinian ambassador, have been struggling to get access to British news coverage. Now you've gone to the other extreme. You are basically in television studios all the time. I mean, you've come to us having just done hard talk, and I don't know how many, I mean, hundreds of interviews that you've done over the last week.

What does it actually feel like to become a sort of permanent media commentator?

Do you're adrenaline running, going from studio to studio, watching your words all the time?

I worry that as an ex-politician, and maybe Alistair feels the same, that when you're in the heart of that, arguing, fighting all the time, it's difficult to step back and have the time to think and to empathize and to see the bigger picture because you're being, you're attacking and defending all the time. Well, I'm not attacking. I'm really defending a beautiful people that I was raised by and I love passionately and I belong to. And it wasn't hundreds of interviews, maybe five, six, but it felt like hundreds because it went viral. People have attention on them. And I was strategic in my selection of these interviews, including with you now. So I did the CNN once, I did BBC twice, and I did Sky once, and now you and hard talk, and that's about it. But the rest of my time, which is the majority of it, is with the government, with the parliament, with political parties, with the civil society, and trying to really push for an immediate ceasefire, trying to save whatever we could save of our humanity, really, before we see further atrocities being committed against innocent civilians.

Much of the time is trying also to ensure that humanitarian aid and assistance is delivered immediately. And we, as much as there were some challenges at the beginning with the government and the opposition, we have so many friends here, friends of international law, friends of humanity, friends of justice. We have friends who believe that this cannot be, cannot end just at a ceasefire. The majority of people I speak to in the UK believe that this has to bring a political end to this conflict. You've got a lot of experience as well as the UK, the USA. And I wonder whether that kind of balance that you say the government and the opposition have rediscovered has been partly driven by the fact that Joe Biden has been kind of had that balance from the word go. And you mentioned Trump. I just wondered, you wanted your reflection on how much more dangerous

this might be if Trump had been in charge in America when this was going on.

Well, we don't know, really. We don't know. But given that it could come back.

Yeah, we don't know. And I was there when he was president. I met him with my president a few times,

met his team Kushner and Green Blot and others many, many times. And you know, Trump is very transactional. And what we really lack now is true leadership, statesmanship, wisdom, the world lacks it. You know, if we had the grand personalities as we used to have many years ago, this would not have happened. And if it happened, this would have been contained much easy. Stuff happened and it's very regrettable. And we all really ache and we are pained by what we have seen over the last nine days in all sides. But we are equally pained by the lack of

international leadership to see statements from very senior officials saying that it's Hamas that hides its operatives and soldiers in hospitals and in schools from international actors, meaning almost giving cover for Israel to bombard these schools and these hospitals is really beyond my own comprehension. Unconscious. We are desperate for international leadership and to do one thing, to say we apply rules equally. Look at Ukraine and look what the West did. And I always say, would you ask the Ukrainian ambassador to do this or that or condemn this or that? You know, the British government announced that the Royal Navy is off to the Middle East. And I said in one of my discussions with colleagues that I think they're sending it to protect the occupied, not to support the occupier. Maybe they're sending it to build hospitals, make shift hospitals in the sea to help all these civilians. So this is a time when we're, every nation, including the Palestinians, need to feel that there is such a thing as international system. There is such a thing as rules and there is such a thing as these rules are applied equally and there is no one race or one kind that is a lesser of a nation, lesser of a people or a children that are lesser of a God. My final question is really just to ask you, I heard you talking earlier about, you talk about your sister, you phone regularly, you've had other members of your family who've been directly hit, injured. Yes. So one, how are they and you're here working around the clock as you say, trying to kind of keep on top of things and influence government, influence opposition, influence media and so forth. But you're also having to deal with that. Presumably, can you get through to your sister every time you phone her? How is that working out? And what's happened? What happened with the rest of the family that got hit? Well, a cousin of mine, her husband, her four children and her mother-in-law and father-in-law were sitting in their home just at the beginning of the Israeli bombardment and boom, their home was bombarded by an Israeli missile. My cousin died, her husband died, two of her children, four years died. The other two who are twin are in intensive care. I heard last night that one of them, the boy, it's a boy and a girl, Carmel and Karim. I heard that Karim is in a very difficult situation. So it's really heartbreaking. And my sister lives in the south of Gaza. So when Israel asked people to leave on mass, i.e. mass expulsion from north to south, and you know what, Rory and

Alistair, it's important to remind people Gaza is only 300 square miles. It's one quarter of the size of London, one quarter of the size of London. It's a very small and it's inhabited by 2.3 million. So to ask 1.1 million to move from one dense area to another dense area is crazy. But then my sister, being the gorgeous lawyer she is and the very generous, opened her doors and her home, that should not accommodate more than seven. You know how many people live with her since the start of it? 150. It's almost like a movie of horror. Blackout, no electricity, no water, no food, no supplies. They don't know when the next Israeli missile will hit. She sent her child, my nephew, Ammar yesterday to a shop nearby, just nearby, to buy some groceries. Knowing that Israel has announced that the south from the valley of Gaza and southward will not be attacked, so people should go there. But she lives in the south, beyond that valley. And then the building where her son was going to buy was bombarded. And one of his siblings took a video of that. I bought it on my own social media. He was saved by a split of a second. He went out of this huge smoke. Ammar is eight years old and he is full of life. So I can't describe to you how reckoning that an entire people right now in Gaza, they have to make choices like, should we move? Should we leave our home?

Should we go to the south? Should we stay? How do I protect my children? I can't tell you how

people who have kidney failure and they must do dialysis every three days in a hospital. Now they can't. People who have diabetes who need a refrigerator to put their insulin. What Israel is doing is nothing short of war crimes. War crimes and crimes against humanity. They are punishing the people who have nothing to do with this. You know how many doctors were killed in the last few days? 41 healthcare workers were killed. Most prominent Gaza workers. They are even deprived Gaza of major health capacity. So injured people and ill people now are asked to leave hospitals. They bombarded the hospital the day before yesterday, the Al-Ahli Hospital, which belongs to the Anglican Church. So sponsored by the Anglican Church. And Israeli spokespeople appear. That's why I spend some time in the media because I hear all these lies. We will never and we will not attack a hospital. We are not after the Palestinian people. We are also only after Hamas. And when I hear these lies and I am on the phone every hour with my own family, I feel like it's a duty on me and on all of you to really call it out and stop these lies because words kill. How is it that we can think about beginning to get the political temperature down? Because this is so passionate. I mean, I come back to Zehraad's point about the tribalism of pain. We interview in Israeli and we hear the most horrifying stories about atrocities committed by Hamas. We interview you, we hear horrifying stories about these atrocities that your family are experiencing. And these are like two parallel conversations. Nobody is recognizing that there is the other story on the other side. It's as though there's only one story. How do we get to a world in which people can acknowledge that both are happening, that you can be the victim and the perpetrator at the same time? Well, first of all, my heart goes for every single family that lost loved ones. And I know exactly how it feels. Second, I don't think we need really to invent the wheel here. We need to do three things. Number one, we need to ensure that international humanitarian law is applied. That's it. That is it. The law is very clear and it was not created for no reason. It was created after what we did to ourselves in the Second World War. Second, we need to create accountability. All those from all sides, Rory, who committed crimes must be brought to international justice. Let the international criminal court come to Palestine. We, the Palestinian leadership, PLO government, have acceded to the Rome statute and we have acceded to the ICC, giving full jurisdiction to the ICC for the occupied Palestinian territory. So now they have full mandate to come and investigate any war crime committed by the Israeli occupation or by Palestinian groups. We accept that. And you know, this is the way forward, accountability, because we need to prevent next atrocities. It's a prevention act. It's a deterrence rather than just accountability for the past. Number three, when there is such a thing as security council that was created to resolve conflicts, that all the world sits on it, that Britain has a permanent seat there, and decides 50 years ago, many resolutions, we just need to set, create a venue to implement these resolutions. However, to expect the Palestinians to compromise even on 22 percent of the land, to sit with all successive Israeli governments who want to share part of the 22 percent, they want to meet us somewhere between Jerusalem in the West and Jericho in the East, they want to chop this piece of land and that piece of land. They don't really want to give us our full sovereignty on the occupied city of East Jerusalem. That formula has been tried for 30 years. It didn't work, and it will not work because it's a lose-win formula. I think we have the win-win formula. I think the international resolutions on the basis of the 67 is a win-win

formula. And I think this territorial appetite in much of the Israeli establishment has got to be kept. Well, thanks for so much time. You're very welcome. Thank you. Thank you, Ambassador. Okay, Royce, he gave us a lot of time there, but you pointed out that he'd been doing work, and he did look very, very tired by the end. I didn't jump in because it would just lead to another kind of toing and froing. I think it was pushing it somewhat to say there were no verified reports. There are definitely verified reports of women and children being killed. It's interesting, isn't it, how he kind of wants to condemn without condemning, in a way, and he got very... I've seen him in his interviews where he gets very frustrated with, you know, why won't you say what we want you to say in the way that we want you to say it, as it were. That's kind of what he sometimes feels, I think. But I thought that was...

I think, you know, what we were trying to get was the Palestinian perspective, and we definitely got that. And this presumably is something you're used to, I mean, I guess we saw that a bit when we interviewed Jerry Adams, didn't we? You know, I tried to push Jerry Adams on to get him to say that the Brighton bombing, in which, you know, innocent women were killed, was unacceptable. And he wasn't prepared even, I guess, 40 years later to condemn the Brighton bombing. So...

I think if the ambassador was still here, he would say he had a greater distance from what's happened in Israel in the last few days than Adams and the Brighton bomb. But I suppose what I'm getting to is that your experience of the Northern Ireland peace process, presumably it's an experience of recognizing that the two sides on this were not really willing to recognize each other. Yeah, but that's why I was trying to get him to ask him, who would you negotiate with now? And how do you... I can't see where this goes at the moment. I really can't. We didn't really talk about any Northern Ireland parallels, but there were moments where that felt like it was going absolutely nowhere, and it was done. So I was just trying to get him, as you were, to do the thing about being a victim and perpetrator at the same time, to accept that that's what's going on. But no, I think if you were absolutely locked in... You can't. And it's his job. It's his job, isn't it?

It's his job. And I guess it's awesome. And I was interviewing Theresa May on Friday, trying to get her to say nice things about Kirstin, which she was reluctant to do.

I guess when you're in, as it were, campaign mode, you find it very difficult to you don't want to give an inch. So clearly, we are working our way towards getting different voices on. And now that we've had an official Palestinian spokesman speaking, we will be looking for other Israelis to speak, because I think we feel... You're always teasing us and saying, we're not the BBC. It's not so much about balance, but it is about... I think the only way to really learn about this conflict is listening to these different voices from the different sides and realizing how little they often have in common. I mean, how much people are speaking in separate echo chambers. Yeah, absolutely. We're an exacerbated... We hadn't really talked about that, which maybe we should talk about this on the main podcast. I mean, the impact of social media is having on this thing is just utterly horrific.

And we've got an interesting interview coming with Zaid Raad, who was the Jordanian UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, coming later. I think, though, what we're doing here is good, which is long-form interviews, allowing people to express their views, and maybe not us analyzing and judging so much as letting listeners come to their own conclusions, hearing the raw stuff. There were lots of things that he said there where I could feel,

where an Israeli sitting on my shoulder would be saying, say this, and what about this, what about this, what about that. And I think what aboutary is one of the worst things that's happening at the moment. And actually, because there are so many people who are clearly following this quite closely, but don't really know that much about the history. I think the point he makes about Balfour, you mentioned it in your explainer, which I see is now had almost a million views on YouTube, Rory. You mentioned it in your explainer, but if you asked most people, even quite well-informed people, about the role of the Balfour Declaration in this, which he cleared it, it was the first thing he raised. He's basically saying, look, you know, he wasn't quite saying this, but he said that it wasn't for you lot, this wouldn't be in this mess. So I think that history is important. And I think it's also important, I thought actually he did pretty well in not being, there were moments where he was clearly just being the kind of, you know, the table thumping, it's all their fault. But I thought he was much more reflective at points. And I've seen him in the other interviews he's done. Yeah. Well, thank you. And we'll obviously discuss more about this in the pod tomorrow. Thank you, Alastair. Bye.