

What would you do if you got scammed?

Would you suffer in silence or would you do something about it?

Well, I got scammed once and this is the story of what I did.

I'm Justin Sales, the host of The Wedding Scammer, a true crime podcast from The Ringer, and for seven episodes, we're hunting a calm man, a guy with a lot of aliases, a guy who's ruined a lot of weddings, and with the help of some friends, I just might be able to catch him. Listen to The Wedding Scammer on Spotify or wherever you get your podcasts.

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leave ready. SAP has been there, done that, and can help you be ready for anything that comes next, because it will. So be ready with SAP. Today is a long episode, perhaps our most comprehensive and information-packed episode on Israel, Hamas, and Palestine. I want to begin in a surprising place, which is here in America, and the way that we sometimes seek to understand people and ideologies that initially seem foreign to us. Several years ago, the sociologist Arlie Russell Hirsch wrote a book called Strangers in Their Own Land. Hirsch wanted to understand the new conservative movement that was building in the South. So she spoke to several Tea Party and Trump supporters in Louisiana. And as she gathered interviews and perspectives, she began to fit together what she called the deep story of conservative America. The deep story. She said, imagine you are a middle-aged white man standing in a line that proceeds in an orderly fashion to the top of a hill. That line is the American dream. And one day, as you are patiently waiting in line, you realize that other people, outsiders, immigrants, women, non-white Americans, are pushing ahead or being given priority by people overseeing the line. That's not fair, you think. You've been following the rules, the old-fashioned traditional rules of the line that lead to the top of the hill, and now those rules have changed and you're falling behind. You need somebody to come in, someone from outside the system of the line to say the truth, the truth that this isn't fair, that the line is a lie, and that a rich man with big blonde hair can say only I can fix it. The point of this deep story was not that it captured a literal truth, but rather that it touched on an emotional truth, the resentment of falling behind, and the politics that emerge from that feeling of resentment. So why am I telling you about Arlie Hirsch and the psychology of a line? I think it's because what I've been looking for, ever since the attacks of October 7th, is a similar deep story that helps me to make sense of the senseless agony that is the Israel-Palestine conflict. I cannot tell you that I found anything that provided perfect clarity, no brilliant solution to a problem that has bedeviled the world for decades, but I have found two ideas, two frames, two deep stories that have struck me most deeply. The first observation has come from the Israeli author Yonah Harari in an interview that he

did just after the October 7th attacks. He said this, you can be a victim and a perpetrator at the same time. It's a very simple fact from the level of individuals to the level of entire nations, but it's impossible to accept for most people. You can be a victim and a perpetrator at the same time. The power and the utility that I found in that message is that I think it frees us to see the truth about the history of Israel and of Palestine, to see that Israel, which has so often been a victim of terrible attacks by its Arab neighbors, has also perpetrated terrible attacks on Arab neighbors, because you can be a victim and a perpetrator at the same time. And so many Palestinian militants whose families have for decades been victimized by Israeli violence and blockades have also perpetuated unfathomable, ghoulis atrocities, because you can be a victim and a perpetrator at the same time. The second frame that's made an impact on me, the second deep story that has really struck a chord came from an interview with the famous Israeli historian Benny Morris. Morris said that in many ways the psychology of Israel is very simple. It goes like this, a man is in a house and one day his neighbors break into his house to kill him. What man would not do everything possible to expel that violent neighbor from the house? What man wouldn't do everything possible to force his neighbors out of their adjacent homes to create a buffer of security to keep his family safe? Now you can hear this story as he profound deep story of Israel and you can also hear it as the deep story of Palestine.

Weren't Arab Palestinians a clear majority of this region in the 1940s? Should we consider them the original man in the house who for decades have been fighting to take it back from invaders? The point of the story again is not so much to arbitrate factual truth but to touch upon emotional truth. To touch upon the idea that some Palestinians might be morally justified, might feel morally justified to wage non-stop war and some Israelis might feel morally justified to launch non-stop rockets. But there is no solving a problem between two sides if he refused to see the deep story that motivates their worst behavior. And that brings us to the meat of today's episode.

We have two guests today, two historians of this conflict, who see history differently but who are both so talented at recounting the decades and the centuries that brought us here. First, to tell the story of Israel from antiquity to 1967, we have the eminent historian of Israel Benny Morris. And second, to tell the story of the origins of Hamas, we have the excellent and lucid Zachary Foster. I'm Derek Thompson. This is Plain English.

I'm happy to be here. I want to talk to you about history and I want to talk to you about the news, and I want to do it in some kind of chronological order.

Let's go way back to the late 19th century and do the story chronologically as you see it. In the late 1800s, early 1900s, what was happening in the region we now call Israel and Palestine? What were relations between Jews and Muslims in the Ottoman Empire like? How did they treat each other? You will want to go back to the 19th century. I'd like to go back 2000 years, just very briefly. The Jews or the Hebrews, as they were called at the time, reached Palestine or the land of Israel, as they called it, and they basically conquered it, or much of it, about 3,000 years ago. Then they set up kingdoms, David, Solomon, etc., Judea, and they lived here and ruled over the place intermittently for about 1,000 years until they were thrown out by the Romans. The Arabs came here. There weren't any Arabs here. The Muslims arrived here. Arab Muslims arrived here in the 7th century AD, about 1400 years ago, conquered the land, and gradually Arabized and Muslimized the area, which was basically Christian, pagan, and Jewish. They ruled here on and off for the next 1,000 years. There was a

Crusader kingdom in the middle, but they ruled here more or less continuously until the late 19th century, and the Turks conquered the land in the 16th century. They were Muslims also. They weren't Arabs, but they ruled here until the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century. In the 1880s, Jews started coming to Palestine, basically driven by pogroms in Eastern Europe in the Azarist Empire, anti-Jewish pogroms in which hundreds of them, eventually even tens of thousands, were killed by the early 20th century.

Most Jews, incidentally, fled from the Azarist Empire, fled this anti-Semitism in the pogroms, and went to America. About 2 million ended up going to America or the North America and the British Commonwealth countries, but a very small minority came to Palestine, immigrated here, established settlements here. The Turks weren't that happy about it, the Ottoman Empire, but they were bribeable, and so Jews managed to stay here and establish settlements, and gradually these settlements expanded, and Arabs, the local population here, didn't like it, and there was friction between the new arrivals, the new settlers, and the indigenous population, all ruled under the Ottoman Empire until 1917, 1918.

And while the history of Jews in the region is very old, Zionism, as I understand it, is a relatively new idea if we take the perspective of the late 19th century. So tell me a little bit about the origins of Zionism. I think it's just kind of interesting because we Jews have been saying next year in Jerusalem for many centuries, but the literalization of next year in Jerusalem through the ideology of Zionism is much younger, so tell us about how Zionism first emerged.

In the 19th century, with the rise of modern nationalism across Europe basically, Italy, Germany, these states just came into being, a Poland, Czechoslovakia, these peoples demanded independence from the Azarist Empire or from other conquerors, and there was a wave of nationalism

in Europe, and the Jews who lived in their communities among these peoples were touched by this wave of nationalism, by this idea of nationalism, and said, maybe we should also do it. And when the pogroms struck in the beginning of the 1880s, they said, well, we must also adopt nationalism and try and found or re-found our state where it had originally been in the land of Israel in Palestine. And so, as I mentioned, in small numbers, they began to emigrate to Palestine in very small numbers. About 30,000 came between 1882 and 1905, another 30,000, maybe 1905, 1915, very small numbers, but it turned out that this kernel of immigration was sufficient to start a Zionist enterprise in Palestine, based mainly on agricultural settlement.

Let's bring this story to the end of World War I. There are maybe 50,000, 70,000, 80,000 Jews in the area we now call Israel and Palestine. The Jews are a small minority in this area in the 1910s. What are relations like between Jews and Muslims in this period, and how does the project of Zionism pull us a little bit further toward what ultimately happens after World War II? Relations between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine from the beginning of the Zionist emigration in the 1880s until World War I are mixed. Jews purchase things from Arabs, Arabs purchase from Jews. Jews hire Arabs to do some of the labor on their farms and so on. There is also friction. The Jews buy land. The Arabs willingly sell land. The Jews buy it, and then the Arabs turn around and say, well, this wasn't exactly the plot. We sold you. We sold you something smaller. You're now irrigating or using your moving your sheep about on our land. So there's friction in terms of boundaries, of lots of agricultural lots. I think in general that the Arabs began to feel that the Jews were strangers, they were aliens, and they were infidels.

The Jews didn't speak Arabic. They didn't try to learn Arabic, except for very odd one or two, but they didn't learn the language and they basically weren't Muslims. This is what Muslims felt. They were strangers. So the Jews, when they came, there was a natural inbuilt friction there, though it wasn't in a sense nationalist. It was a proto-nationalist. It was religious.

And it was even class-based in the sense that Jews were understood to be wealthier, the incoming Jews, than the local natives. But in the intelligentsia among the Arabs, and there weren't many there, the Arabs were basically 90% illiterate. At the time, a small percent were literate and understood and read newspapers or whatever, sent their children sometimes even to study in France or Britain. They began to feel nationalism also because they were infected by nationalism via Europe and the traders and missionaries and others who came to Palestine, the Christians. So they began to think in terms of nationalism also, and they began to understand that the Jews were coming here in some way, and that's what they felt,

to displace them or certainly to set up their own sovereignty here or to displace them. All of this occurred under the Turks, who were the owners of the land or the sovereigns of the land, but the Turks, this was in a backwater. It wasn't very important to the Turks, this area.

This changes with World War I, when the British take over much of the territory that had been ruled by the Ottoman Empire. How does British control of the Middle East change our story? The British issued in November 1917, the month before they conquered Jerusalem, they issued the Balfour Declaration in which they basically said to the Jews, and this was a result partly of Jewish lobbying in London, partly to do with feelings of guilt among the British rulers, at least Lord Balfour, the foreign secretary, that the Christians had mistreated the Jews for thousands of years, persecuting them, killing them, inquisitions and God knows what, and here was a chance they could do something for the Jews, some form of compensation. So they in the Balfour Declaration said they would support the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. It didn't mean that they were going to give all of Palestine, it wasn't clear what the national home exactly meant, but they said that to the Jews. The Jews rejoiced and understood that this meant down the road a path to sovereignty

for the Jews. And then gradually, not very quickly, but gradually more Jewish immigrants after the British took over in Palestine began to immigrate here, and the British helped the immigration, helped the settlement and then the purchase of land from Arabs, built infrastructure, and the country developed, became more advanced. It was a well-run British colony essentially, was called the Mandate territory, but a colony. The Arabs, as a result of World War I, began to feel, as I said, the nationalism, the idea of nationalism, and began to fear the Jews.

In 1920, 1921, and 1929, there were communal attacks, which the Jews called pogroms, by Arabs against the Jews in Palestine. 1929 is famous because they were a massive slaughter of 66 Jews in Hebron by their neighbors. So before that, they'd been friendly, but then they just turned on them and murdered and raped and so on. So that was 1929. The next bout of violence was in 1936-37. The Arabs rebelled against the British presence, driven, if you like, by nationalism and by the example of the rise and successes of nationalism in neighboring Egypt and neighboring Syria. The Arabs in Palestine revolted against the British and against their Zionist wards. And in 1937, the British Peel Commission of Inquiry here called the Peel Commission.

[Transcript] Plain English with Derek Thompson / The Deep Story of Israel, Palestine, and Hamas

The Peel Commission issued its report about how to solve the problem in 1937. And the Peel Commission

said something very important, which is the basis to this day of Western ideas about how you solve the Palestine-Israel conflict. The Peel Commission said that the British can no longer rule in Palestine. Nobody wants them. The Jews wanted their own state. The Arabs wanted their state. So the British couldn't continue to rule. And the commission thought that the best, most just solution would be to divide the country, even though it's very small. It would have been easier to divide if it was the size of Russia, but it wasn't. It was very small. But nonetheless, they proposed to divide it into two states. A small Jewish state, the Peel Commission said, maybe 20% of the land for Jewish sovereignty, that would be the Jewish state. And the remainder, or most of the remainder, it would go to an Arab state, which essentially would be the West Bank, the Negev, and Jordan would be joined together, TransJordan, to form the Arab state. This is their proposal in 1937. So the Jews say yes in principle to the Peel Commission's proposal.

They're a small minority in the area. So of course, they're going to say yes to the promise of guaranteed land that they're immigrating to. Arabs say no. Attacks between Muslims and Jews continue for years. And this brings us to World War II. What happens to Palestine during World War II and what happens after? Palestine became a rear base basically for the British Eighth Army, which fought the Italians and then the Germans in North Africa. Some Jews did manage to get into the country, the 75,000, and some came in illegally. By the end of World War II, there was something

like 550,000 Jews in the country and about a million Arabs or 1.2 million Arabs in Palestine between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. World War II had one other important consequence,

which I must mention, and that's the Holocaust. The Holocaust news about what was happening in Europe seeped out gradually. By 1942, it was clear the Jews were being murdered in Europe.

And by 1945, the picture became completely clear. Six million Jews, who were Ben-Gurion and the heads of the Zionist movement, hoped would come to reinforce the Zionist presence in Palestine.

They were all dead, this potential manpower pool. But this, on the other hand, the Holocaust did two things. It energized the Zionist movement to demand immediate statehood in Palestine

and persuaded the West, especially America, but also Britain, even though the British government didn't go along with this, it persuaded the West that the Jews must get a state. The Jews, Zionism, had always demanded a state. It had no state. Six million Jews were therefore

killed because they couldn't protect themselves. Now the Jews deserve the state because

Christendom

had turned its back on the Jews before. And so there was a sort of a consensus in the Western democracies, which was given voice or expressed in the United Nations General Assembly Partition Resolution of 1947. The UN General Assembly basically looked back to the Peel Commission, took up the idea of a two-state solution, dividing the country into two states,

and said, recommended, it wasn't the Security Council, it was a General Assembly recommendation, but it said this should be the solution, divide the country into two states, November 1947.

And thus begins the 1948 war that you are very famous for writing about and that we're going to talk about in just a second. I want to state a few points here that I do think are relevant.

The new split under the UN Commission is closer to 5545 in favor of Jewish Israelis. Jews are

allotted about 55% of the country, some of it is desert, but that's larger than their share under the original Peel Commission. And that larger share is somewhat reflective of the fact that there are more Jews in the area. It's somewhat reflective of the fact I think that, tell me if you think this is wrong, that at this point the British have thrown in the towel. They've handed everything over to the UN Special Commission on Palestine. And I think that the UN Special Commission on Palestine is probably more sympathetic in this moment in the late 1940s, just after the Holocaust, more sympathetic to Jews than they are to Arabs. And they want to provide a political solution that is responsive to the moral catastrophe of the Holocaust. So it wasn't just the idea of a bad conscience. It was also the idea of solving the problem of refugees, which nobody wanted after World War II in their lands. In other words, Britain didn't want Jewish refugees flooding in. The Americans didn't. And the problem had to be solved. They had to be a place of haven for these refugees. So the commission did this for a number of reasons, gave the Jews slightly more of Palestine than the Arabs, even though the Arabs were two-thirds of the population of Palestine. We're about to get to the year that you are such an expert on, which is 1948. I want to pause here to say, you've told a story. It's sort of a multi-thousand-year story. It's definitely in more detail, a multi-decade story of the creation of what we now understand to be Israel and Palestine. You are an Israeli historian. What part of the history between the late 19th century up until 1948 that you've just told is most contended by Palestinian historians? If we had Rashid Khalidi on the show, what part of the previous 70-year history of Arabs and Jews in this area would he be most likely to say, Benny, I think your interpretation here is a little tendentious. I think it's a little bit to pro-Jew or pro-Israeli. What's the biggest point of contention of the history that you've just told? Well, I think point of finger at the Balfour Declaration, firstly. I think the Arabs, Arab historians, Arab chroniclers, the Arabs at the time thought this was tremendously unfair. Even a Jewish historian, a man called Avish Lime, called it a colossal mistake or colossal blunder by the British, promising essentially part of Palestine or all of Palestine. It wasn't clear, but at least part of Palestine for a Jewish national home when the majority of the population at that time about nine-tenths of the population of Palestine was Arab and only one-tenth or 15% were Jewish. This is a colossal blunder and immoral in their sense. So we arrive at last to the creation of Israel. November 1947, that's when the UN adopts the resolution to divide the British territory into Jewish and Arab states. In May 1948, Israel declares its independence and fighting breaks out almost immediately between Jewish settlements who can point to a legal document and say, this is our land and Arabs who can point to the last few hundred years and say, nope, this is our land. They fight each other. Each feels to use your language like the righteous victim in this fight. Let me start here. Was there any way to avoid war in 1948? Not really, unless the Arabs accepted partition and dividing the land between two sovereign states. But the Arabs always rejected that. The Jews shouldn't have any part of Palestine as their sovereign entity. So the Palestinian Arabs began a guerrilla war, a guerrilla war, a terroristic war against the Jews in Palestine. The Jews had organized better and once they were free of constraints by the departing British mandate government, the Jews unleashed a series of offensives and essentially beat the Palestine Arab militias. And some of the Palestinian population fled as the Jews took over more and more of the country. This led to the Arab invasion, the parent Arab invasion, the invasion by the Arab armies of Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq.

They invaded the country on the 15th of May. The Jews declared statehood in the area they had managed to hold or conquer on the 14th of May. The Arabs invaded on the 15th of May, these four Arab armies. And they were later supplemented by additional voluntary groups of Moroccans, Saudis, Sudanese troops, and so on. But essentially it was these four Arab states. The Jews managed to contain the Arab invasion. After beating the Palestine Arab militias, they contained the pan Arab invasion and getting more and more equipment and volunteers from abroad,

Jewish volunteers, but also Christian volunteers who came to help the Jewish state, especially pilots and people like that who had World War II experience. And the Jews managed to turn the tide and beat the Arab armies essentially and establish and maintain their state. Slightly larger than what the United Nations had promised them in the 47 Partition Resolution. Which was itself larger than what was proposed in the Peel Commission a decade earlier. You became very famous for a revisionist history of the War of 1948. It's my understanding that a lot of Israeli historians looking at the War of 1948 saw it as merely a series of heroic endeavors of Jewish settlers to turn back Arab militias. You pointed out that in fact there were lots of atrocities committed by Israelis against Arabs as well. Can you just fold in a little bit of that context into the story and why you think it's an important thing to grapple with? Because I feel like we're still today, if you look at these protests happening all over the world and the foundational documents of Hamas, we are still talking about this 1948 moment as a kind of original sin that we can't wash our hands of. So responsibly fold in the context that you uncovered as an historian. The basic fact, and this is what many of the protesters who don't like Zionism or don't like Israel continue to forget, in 1947 the Jews accepted the world's proposal, the United Nations General Assembly proposal for partition. The Arabs said no. The Jews said yes. The Arabs attacked the Jews. First the Palestinian Arabs, then the Arab armies. They were aggressors in both halves of the war, the Civil War part between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine and the Conventional War by the Arab states who invaded the Jewish state which had just been born. So that's the context in terms of the Jews thinking. The Arabs of course say well the whole of the Zionist enterprise was an invasion of Palestine, so our attacks on the Jews in 47-48 were just counter attacks. They were a response to a Jewish invasion. But that's not how the Zionists saw it. The Zionists saw that they were legitimately here, were legitimately endorsed by the international community and had a right to establish a state. The Arabs simply attacked them. Now in the course of the war, the shape of the country, the interspersal of populations, each road had a Jewish village, an Arab village, a Jewish village, an Arab village. Each town or many of the towns had Jewish neighborhoods, Arab neighborhoods, or they were adjacent to Jewish town and an Arab town like Tel Aviv and Jaffa. They were adjacent. The Arabs were shooting into Tel Aviv from Jaffa. This meant that in this Civil War between November 47 and May 1948, the only way one side could win essentially was it would have to clear out some of the Arabs from the roads, which as I said, each side controlled from their own villages and from the different neighborhoods in Palestine. The Jews were stronger, better organized, had much better morale, fought better. They took over parts of Palestine, Arab parts of Palestine, even some parts assigned to Arab states by the UN General Assembly Resolution. When the Arab states invaded this again, if you like, hardened the hearts of the Jews. They were being attacked by force sovereign states with armies. The Jews just essentially built their army in the course of the war. Here they were

being attacked by proper armies with combat aircraft and tanks and artillery, which the Jews initially did not have. It was regarded turning back to Arab invasion and eventually beating them as something of a miracle, basically to do with Jewish organization, Jewish higher levels of education, more courage. They fought better, the Jews. They also had at their back the memory of the Holocaust, which had just finished three years before. They knew if they were going to lose, that's how they felt, the Arabs would massacre them all. In the course of the fighting, the Jews ended up committing far more atrocities than did the Arabs, mainly not because they were worse or more evil, but because they overran hundreds of Arab villages and towns. Palestinian Arabs managed to take no Jewish settlement in the course of the Civil War. The Arab states managed to take

only about a dozen Jewish villages, whereas the Jews, as I say, took about 400 or the Arabs say even 500 Arab towns and villages in the course of the war, meaning that a large number of Arab population came under their control. When this happens, armies taking over populated areas, there are almost inevitably atrocities. The Jews also felt that the Arabs were their aggressors. They attacked them and killed a lot of Jews. We have to remember that 1% of the Jewish population died in the 48 war. If America, they went to war with somebody and 1% of Americans died in a war, that would be what? 3 million Americans would be dead, 3.5 million. It was a tremendous loss. People were vengeful that the Arabs had launched this war, attacked them, and there was vengeance

in the heart of many Jews. There were atrocities. There were massacres. There were shootings of young men captured in various places and they were executed. There were even a few cases of rape, very few, but there were even rapes. I have heard you make this metaphor before in other interviews where you say, quote, imagine a man is in a house and his neighbors come into the house to kill him. They claim that his house is stolen and they try to kill his entire family. Of course, the man, the woman, the children in that house will strike back against the neighbors with extraordinary vengeance in order to maybe not just kick them out of that house, but kick them out of the house as adjacent to that house to provide for their own security. What I find so interesting about this history, as you've told, is that I can see how that metaphor works for both parties.

The Israelis can, of course, tell themselves that we are the man in the house. This is our land. We've been here for thousands of years. We had every right to come here, every legal, international right to come here based on these declarations and United Nations commissions. It's our house. You attacked us. We can do whatever is necessary in order to protect our civilians. You can also tell the same story, though, for the Palestinians. They can say, this is our house.

Accept that the Jews agreed to divide the house between the neighbors and themselves. They said, okay, we won't get the whole house. You have a just claim also to the land. They didn't say that, but they understood that the indigenous population also has a rightful place in the house. They said, okay, you take half the house, we'll take half the house. The indigenous population said, no, you cannot have half the house. It's our house, all of it. So did the Arab states when they invaded, except the Jordanians, incidentally. The Jordanians invaded, but not in order to attack the Jews, but in order to take over the West Bank for themselves. That's how the war ended. They took over the West Bank and East Jerusalem for themselves. But essentially, the house was supposed to be divided according to the Jews. The Jews accepted

that. The Arabs said, no, and we're aggressors. That's how they ended up, 700,000 of them refugees. I want to be clear that I don't in any way deny Israel's right to exist or its right to defend itself when it's attacked. I do think that in my attempt to be sympathetic toward the Palestinian side here, I feel like if I'm living in a house and it has two floors and the local government forces me to give my basement to a neighbor that I've been fighting for several months, I'm going to be furious, right? And of course, I understand that this conflict is more serious than a metaphor about a basement, but a part of this huge question here hangs fundamentally on the issue of multiple claims to a finite piece of land. And that's why I think it's so important that before we talk about the news of the day, we tell the story, both the facts and the deep psychological story of whose land we can say this is. Let's finally connect this history that you've been telling to the October 7th attacks and to the shelling of Gaza. In 1947, Gaza is not part of the original partition. How does this land come into play here? The Gaza Strip was occupied by the Egyptian army in the war in their invasion of Palestine in 1948. The Israelis didn't manage to dislodge the Egyptian army from the Gaza Strip, and it remained in Egyptian hands from 1948 until

1956. Israel conquered the Gaza Strip in the Gaza, the Sinai Suez war in 1956, but was forced by the Russians and the Americans to withdraw from the Gaza Strip. And so the Gaza Strip reverted to Egyptian control until 1967. The Egyptians refused to give the Gaza population Egyptian, the refugees,

meaning most of the Gaza population, Egyptian citizenship, and basically kept them locked up in Gaza. They wouldn't let them go to Egypt either. And this was a situation until 1967.

1967, the Arabs forced a war on the Jews. The Egyptians essentially closed the straits of Tehran. They stationed their army next to Israel's border threateningly, and Israel struck out and they beat the Egyptian army. And then the Jordanians joined in, and the Syrians joined in, and Israel took the Golan Heights and the West Bank and East Jerusalem and ended up with these territories.

1977, a very brave Egyptian leader called Sadat said, well, I don't want to sacrifice Egypt in war after war with the Israelis on behalf of the Palestinians, and I want to make peace with the Jews. And he came to Israel, made peace with the Jews over a two-year negotiation, and Israel withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula as a result of this negotiation. And Egypt made peace with Israel. This is 1979. Israel should have tried to press the Egyptians to take back the Gaza Strip, but there were right-wingers in the Israeli cabinet. It was the right-wing government essentially led by Menachem Begin. They said the Gaza Strip is part of the land of Israel, which God had promised the Jews, whatever. And we're not going to withdraw from it.

The Egyptians also said we don't want the Gaza Strip. Who wants all these refugees who are just troublemakers? This episode is brought to you by Simply Safe. It may feel like fall just started, but the holidays are almost here. Don't worry, though. You still have time to get your home ready with both decorations and a good home security system. With Simply Safe, you can protect your home from break-ins, fires, floods, and more. You can even get 24-7 live guard protection and the

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You've been listening to my interview with the historian Benny Morris on the history of Israel from antiquity to 1967. We're going to bring Benny Morris back in just a second. But this is where I want to shift gears a bit and bring in another historian to connect our history to the rise of Hamas. My next guest is Zachary Foster. He is a historian of Palestine and he picks up here with 1967 at the end of the war.

So in 1967, Israel occupies Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. And already two months after Israel's occupation of those territories, it passes, it adopts a military order 101, which bans political activity in the West Bank and Gaza. It bans artwork made of green, red, white, and black. In fact, a Palestinian in 1982 sat six months in prison for a painting that included those four colors. Israel banned Palestinians from waving the Palestinian flag. It censored newspapers. It outlawed something like 1400 books.

So politically, Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza was brutal.

And I think that provides some insight into understanding the origins of Hamas. In 1973, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin founds this organization. It's not called Hamas. It's an Islamic charity.

It's called the Muzama al-Islamiyyah. And initially, for the first, call it 14,

15 years of the organization's existence, it was apolitical. It was nonviolent. It was dedicated to education and social services and preaching and youth sports, cultural activities, helping orphans. And so already in the early 1980s, the Israeli military is supporting this organization and funding this organization to act as a counterweight to the PLO, the violent and revolutionary secular leftist organization, a Palestinian organization in exile. And I think just to set us up for the story that follows, there was a fascinating poll that was conducted in 1986 on the eve of the First Sinti Fada. And it was a poll conducted among some 1000 Palestinians in the occupied territories in Gaza and the West Bank. And that poll found that something like half of Palestinian families in the occupied Palestinian territories had reported political arrest. They reported physical abuse or harassment at checkpoints. And something like 20% of families

had land or property confiscated and or had their homes demolished or sealed.

So, Zach, we have a picture here of an organization, Hamas, that is not yet political, not yet militant, not yet in power. We know that it eventually becomes a militant political power. So let's connect the dots slowly. What happens in the 1980s that begins to change things?

An Israeli truck driver strikes and kills four Palestinians in Gaza in December 1987.

And as we said, there had already been years of protests that were brutally suppressed by Israel.

We had years of Israeli military occupation, but this was really the trigger. This is what led Palestinians en masse to descend to the streets and protest and demonstrate and go on strike.

And boycott Israeli goods and shutdown shops and the infamous Palestinian kid throwing a stone at an Israeli tank. That was the first anti-foto. And it lasted really from the end of 1987, you could say, until really the Oslo Accords of 93. But to narrow in on that first year,

from December 1987 until the following year, Israeli military troops killed 142 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. At the same time that Palestinians killed zero Israeli soldiers or civilians in the Gaza Strip. It was a massacre. Palestinians would go out to the street and protest, mostly kids, by the way, and they would be gunned down in the streets. And so over the course of those four or five years of revolt, Israel killed 1200 Palestinians and Palestinians killed 160 Israelis. And I think it was that really that grotesque violence that Israel deployed on innocent Palestinians, primarily innocent Palestinian kids that led to the radicalization of Hamas. And what year does Hamas first start to attack Israelis? So the first attack I'm able to identify Hamas attack on Israeli civilians comes in December 1990, in which Hamas attacked three Israeli workmen in God in Jaffa. And their stated reason for that attack, by the way, was in response to Israel violently suppressing a demonstration in Jerusalem, which led to the death of 22 Palestinians just two months earlier. And so I think it was this series of Israeli violent actions against Palestinian protesters in the occupied territories from 1987 onwards. And then especially that one violent attack that killed 22 Palestinians in a single day in October 1990 that really radicalized Hamas. And just to round out the story, it's really even by the early 1990s, it's still hard to find very many Hamas attacks on Israeli civilians. They don't really start to pick up the violent attacks, blowing up cafes, blowing up buses, filled with innocent Israeli civilians. Those attacks don't really start until after 1994, after Baruch Goldstein infamously slaughters 28, 29 Palestinians in the Ibrahim Mosque in Hebron in 1994. So that's kind of how I would tell the story of Hamas' transition from an apolitical charity, Islamic charity organization to a violent resistance movement.

I apologize for fast-forwarding over so many years at this point in our history, but I want to bring us to the election of Hamas in Gaza in 2006. Give us the context we need to understand this election. Recall that the Oslo peace process from 93 to 2000 led to the creation of a number of Palestinian institutions, the Palestinian Authority, which was led by Yasser Arafat and Mohamed Abbas, his successor who remains in power to this day, but it also led to the creation of a PNC, a Palestinian National Council, a legislative body. And from 1993 until 2006 Hamas boycotted those elections because they themselves are part of this process that was recognizing Israel's right to exist and was recognizing Israel. And so Hamas stayed out of the Oslo process and decided not to run for these elections until 2006. But in the January 26 elections, there must have been a shift in thinking in Hamas and they must have deemed it that they would have more power within this political framework than from without. So they run for elections, they slate a bunch of candidates, and to everyone's surprise, they win by a narrow majority. But nevertheless, Hamas wins Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006. And this changes everything. Fatah, who's run by Mohamed Abbas and the Palestinian Authority refuses to give a power in the Gaza Strip. And there's basically a civil war. You can call it a coup. You can call it Hamas's legitimate right to take power on Gaza because they won legitimate free and fair democratic elections. Regardless of how you want to characterize it, Hamas comes to power in Gaza in 2007. Immediately afterwards, Israel imposes a blockade on the Gaza Strip with the full support and backing of the international community. And so from 2007 until the present, this Gaza has been in a state of siege and blockade, which the United Nations already in 2010 called it illegal under international law

because it was collectively punishing two million people and because the stated goal of the blockade from 2007 was to punish the people of Gaza for having elected Hamas. And I think that this is sort of the final stage in the history of Hamas, which is that it's come to power in the state of siege and blockade in which half of Palestinians are unemployed, in which 90% of people today in Gaza lack access to safe drinking water. This was before October 7th, by the way, in which something like 80% of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are dependent on food handouts. When you cannot import or export, you cannot have an economy. And so the entire population is dependent on aid from abroad. And that's sort of the status that we were living in for 16 years up until October 7th. Just to bring in another side here, I think what an Israeli partisan might say is, yes, we announced a blockade of Gaza in 2007, and yes, it had a terrible effect on the Gaza population. But the blockade of Gaza was a decision made in large part because Hamas had announced explicitly in a charter it did not believe Israel had a right to exist. And so there was a fear, a reasonable fear, that Israel's neighbor would use an open border to smuggle weapons into the country that would be used to attack Israelis just a few miles away. So you have the fact of the blockade, you have the justification for the blockade from the perspective of Israelis, that much is understood. What I want to understand here is there have been no elections in Gaza since 2006. What do we know or what do we think we know about how people in Gaza feel about Hamas today? This is a very tricky question to answer for lots of reasons. First of all, Hamas is an autocratic government. There's no right to free speech in Gaza. Hamas regularly executes people it thinks are collaborating with Israel, or people it thinks are its political enemies like members of Fatah. So it's very hard to get any kind of accurate polling data out of Gaza. What I would say, though, is that if you ask that question to an average Palestinian in Gaza, what they would tell you is that I think the types of responses I've heard are should I condemn Hamas before or after the Israeli missile blows up my house and kills my whole family. So I think the main problem for Gazans is the Israeli blockade in the siege, which has made life completely miserable. There is a secondary problem, which is that you have the government inside of Gaza, which is Hamas, which is doing all kinds of things like, like I said, arresting and executing political opponents and dissidents or people it suspects are collaborating with Israel. It also plays a heavy hand in the economy. If you ask any taxi driver in Gaza or any merchant trying to sell stuff on the streets in Gaza, they will share no lost love for Hamas because Hamas is pushing them out, trying to overtax them, trying to do what every government does, which is, you know, exert more control and more power over the state and the society that it operates in. And so I would say that there is not a whole lot of love for Hamas among young people. And just to jump in here, can you connect the 2006 election to the state of Hamas as a political organization? Like this must have been an organization that was brought to power with a lot of hope. And from its economic record, it seems pretty clearly to have failed. There's no question that Hamas has failed as a political party and as a polity in and of itself. And I think one of its greatest failures is its inability to come to any kind of reconciliation with Fatah. Because if you really think about what is needed here, what is needed is a political solution between Israel and the Palestinians. That is what will ultimately end the violence.

But when the Palestinians are divided between Fatah and Hamas, how is it that they're able to come to the negotiating table with Israel when they themselves can't even come to some kind of unity government? Why haven't the Palestinians in Gaza and the Palestinians in the West Bank been able to unite around a single more powerful political movement that they could use to negotiate

a two-state or three-state solution with Israel? There has been a huge amount of pressure exerted by the United States and by Israeli leaders over the past 15 years, a pressure on Mahmoud Abbas not to sign an agreement with Hamas. And I think it's pretty reasonable that Mahmoud Abbas has succumbed to that pressure because he is dependent on the international community for support. He is

dependent on Israel to exist in the first place. The only reason he is able to have a government in Ramallah is because the Israeli government allows him to. If the Israeli government decided tomorrow that Mahmoud Abbas is a security threat, he could be exiled, he could be assassinated, so he is living at the goodwill of the Israeli military authorities as well as at the goodwill of the international community. And so I think that's the first and probably the most important reason why Fatah has not come to an agreement with Hamas. I think the second reason is for ideological differences in those talks in 2012, in those reconciliation talks between

Fatah and Hamas, basically Abbas angered Hamas by declaring that the next government, this reconciliation government, would have to remain committed to the agreement signed by the PLO, i.e. the Aslan process. And according to Hamas, that was unacceptable. This was supposed to be a new government, not a kind of a reincarnation of the previous government and the previous negotiations between Israel and the PLO. So I think that ideological disagreement played a key role. And then I think the third reason why there has not been any real attempt at coming to reconciliation is because Netanyahu, over the past call it 10 years, has been doing everything in his power to strengthen Hamas and weaken Fatah. He's played an active role in driving a wedge between the two political parties because it is his belief, as it is many Israelis, that Palestinians are much easier to defeat when they're divided rather than united, but more importantly, that he has no desire to see a Palestinian state ever created. He's stated that himself many times. And the easiest way to prevent a Palestinian state from coming into existence is to ensure that Hamas and Fatah are divided. And so you don't have to negotiate with the Palestinians when there's two different governments to negotiate with and two different polities that are essentially at war with one another or at least in conflict with one another. He always can return to this defense that we have no need to negotiate. And so or rather, how can you negotiate with the Palestinians when on the one hand you have Fatah, which is weak and

corrupt. And on the other hand, you have Hamas, which is violent and committed to the destruction of Israel. And so I think those are the three main reasons why there has not been any type of negotiated settlement between Fatah and Hamas. And I think just to bring it all the way back to your question, which was like, what do people think of Hamas? How has Hamas governance been up until now? Well, I think one of the key failures is their inability to come to reconciliation with Fatah. Now, take us up to October 6th, before the attack, the day before the attack, and Israel's response to the attack. What have conditions in Gaza been like even before the shelling has so clearly

destroyed Northern Gaza? So from the humanitarian point of view, the UN said that Gaza would be unlivable by 2020. It's been three and a half years since 2020. And the reason they said that was because the conditions on the ground in Gaza long before October 7th were totally unacceptable.

You

have 90% of people that lack access to fresh drinking water. You turn on a tap in Gaza City, salt water comes out. You have 80% of people dependent on food handouts. Why? Because there's no economy, because 60% of young people are unemployed and 50% of the overall population is unemployed. You also have an electricity crisis. For the past decade, Palestinians get between two and 12 hours of electricity per day, depending on the needs at the time and depending on how much

electricity Israel allows in. There's a sewage crisis because you need electricity to filter the sewage and to treat the sewage. And that's why something like 27% of illnesses in the Gaza Strip are actually waterborne illnesses, because people are drinking unsafe water. So I think people in Gaza are living in a state of total despair and hopelessness. And when you're living in a state of total despair and hopelessness, you commit horrible atrocities, which is what we saw on October 7th. That's Zachary Foster. And one thing that both Zachary Foster and Benny Morris would agree on is that for much of its history, Hamas has received help from a surprising source, the Israeli government. Even under Bibi Netanyahu and the far-right government currently in power, Israel has helped Hamas grow by funneling money toward it, partially in an attempt to splinter the Palestinian political cause. Here we pick up again with Benny Morris describing the evolution of this policy, splitting the Palestinian political cause by bolstering Hamas under Netanyahu. In other words, he said, well, we'll give money to the Hamas, they will become more popular, both in Gaza and eventually in the West Bank. And therefore, since the Hamas says they refuse to recognize Israel, to make peace with Israel, they will be identified with the Palestinian cause and the West and the world will not support them because they're so extreme. Whereas the PLO sort of made motions that it wanted to make peace with Israel on the basis of a two-state solution. So what he did was he undermined the PLO and what's called the Palestinian authority, which took over from the PLO following the Oslo Accords in the 1990s. But all of this basically bolstered the Hamas and lowered the prestige and the power of the government in the West Bank, which was led by Mahmoud Abbas and is today the Palestinian authority.

We're moving to today an Israel's reaction to the October 7 attack. And I identified in a previous episode what I characterized as Israel's impossible choice here. I have two fairly strong feelings, one that is untenable for any modern state to allow a militaristic autocracy that borders that state to conduct terrorist attacks without going unpunished. You have to do something when the neighboring state, not just a terrorist organization, but the state itself has attacked you in the way that Hamas attacked Israel. And on the other hand, by punishing Hamas, as we've seen with aerial attacks in Gaza and with a ground invasion, they're clearly destroying homes and killing thousands of innocent civilians, which is not only morally abhorrent, but it seems to be destroying their reputation in the international community.

So I want to ask you about each side of this. First, as someone who considers himself part of the left, you have protests and open letters and there are people from the left all over the world right now who are imploring Israel to declare a ceasefire and just stop, just absolutely stop the bombardment of Gaza and just sue for peace. As someone who considers himself a part of the

left, how do you explain to a reasonable leftist why you believe this military campaign is necessary? The Hamas, which has always said it wants to destroy Israel, and as I say, initiated bouts of violence against Israel and especially the border settlements. On the 7th of October, unleashed an invasion of Israel's villages and towns along that border and slaughtered 1,400 people. They cut off babies' heads, they raped women, they took hostage babies and people who are 85 years old, 240 hostages, and took them back to Gaza. If the Hamas remains in power in the Gaza Strip, and I agree completely with the military in Israel today, if the Hamas remains in power, they will rebuild their military infrastructure and within a year or two will have a repeat of what happened now, maybe even worse. And this can't be allowed. No state, as America incidentally responded to the Twin Towers attack. You do not let people like this, not just terrorists, they're the most vicious kind of terrorists, get away with something like this. In the neighborhood, like the Middle East, you let them get away with it, you're inviting aggression from others, not just from a rebuilt Hamas, from the Hezbollah, from the Iranians, etc. They will think you're a paper tiger, rightly, if you don't respond. If it doesn't destroy the Hamas, the Hamas will return to the place and within months or years, Israel will have to continue facing terrorism. Israel's population along the border, the 30 or 50,000 people who've been evacuated from these devastated villages and towns will never go back to these devastated villages and towns if the Hamas is not destroyed. How does a successful military campaign end in your eyes? After this is over, after, let's assume that Hamas is overthrown. What comes next?

It ends with the death of Hamas leadership and basically all of its soldiers. And I think it can be done. I don't think that I think the Israeli army believes it can be done if it's given the freedom to do it by the international community or by the Israeli public. After that, the question is what do you do with the territory, which you control, which has been terribly devastated, the hospitals will be in terrible shape, the housing is going to be flattened or much of it will be flattened. It will require enormous amounts of Western money. Rule in the territory will probably have to be in Israeli hands for a while, but hopefully the international community or the Arab states will be able to provide a rule, perhaps with the PLO or the Palestinian authorities in the territories being the ultimate possessor or governor of the Gaza Strip as well. But this doesn't solve the problem. That's the problem. And as I view it, the 2 million or 2.3 million Arabs who live in the Gaza Strip, there's no solution to them. Once the Hamas is destroyed, they will lose some of their faith in the Hamas or in radical terrorism against Israel. But within years, a new generation will arise, which will again take up arms against Israel. And what do you do with these 2.3 million people? I don't know. Zachary Foster makes a similar point. He says many young Palestinians don't support either Hamas or Fatah. Instead, many of them are starting their own political movements, joining their own political causes. Many of these are militant in nature, but some of them are more peace-seeking. Yeah, if you're a Palestinian kid and you see your political leaders in fighting, you have a desire for change. You have a desire to see some new outcome. And I think that's why these movements, they reject Hamas. They reject Fatah. They say

we are independent of the main political, Palestinian associations and organizations. And so there's been this, I think, and by the way, it's not just, I would say, the Palestinian militant organizations which are starting. You have many Palestinian civil society organizations that have been blossoming over the past decade and decade and a half. And so I think, generally

speaking, young Palestinians today are not interested in the old factions dominated by 60, 70-year-olds who have become totally out of touch with the Palestinian people.

The ultimate solution should be a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. Perhaps the two states should be Israel in its 1948-49 borders. And the Arab states should be West Bank, Gaza Strip, most of East Jerusalem, and Jordan, a sort of a confederation of these territories that might assuage Palestinian national hopes. Maybe they may still, many of them may still say we want the rest of Palestine as the national movement has always wanted. But maybe if they give them that, they'll agree to that. The problem is that, as I say, A, they've never agreed to that. They've never agreed to sharing the territory with the Jews. And secondly, the Israeli public and governments have moved rightwards over the decades, including a vast settlement enterprise in the West Bank, which makes dividing the territory that much more difficult, maybe even

impossible. What's also made dividing this land nearly impossible is that the moderate parties of both sides have been evaporating. Israel has been pulled toward the far right, led by a fast-growing

Orthodox cohort that seeks to expand the problematic settlements in the West Bank.

And Palestine, too, lacks strong mainstream moderates and liberals. Here's Zachary Foster one more time. We've known since the 1990s that moderates on both sides have suffered the consequences

of their nonviolent actions. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was the one who originally signed the Oslo Accords with the Palestinian Liberation Organization in 1993, he suffered the ultimate price. He paid the price of his life and was assassinated in 1995, I believe by Yigal Amir.

It is really a right-wing extremist. And then the same was true on the Palestinian side.

Palestinian protesters throughout the 1990s and 2000s have been dealt very harshly with by the Israeli military. And we've already talked about how they've been killed in many instances.

And so the cause for peace has atrophied at both ends. What's left is a world where war feels like the only option left for both sides. Zach Foster, thank you very much.

Thanks so much for having me.

Benny Morris, thank you very much.

My pleasure.

I have one last thought about the decades of tragedy that we've been discussing on the show and that have set the stage for today's tragedy. And it relates to Zachary Foster's last point.

There is a gaping missing middle in this conflict. Israel's government is among the most far-right in its history. Hamas is a abhorrent government that has just committed perhaps the most atrocious terrorist attack in the history of this conflict.

And these groups exist in a kind of toxic symbiosis that make it impossible to find success or power as a moderate or liberal within this conflict. Because that issue is so important, this missing moderate middle. That's going to be the subject of our next show on this issue, looking for the missing middle. Until then, thank you for listening and we'll see you on Friday.