

[Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / The New Axis of Evil: Condoleezza Rice on War in Israel and a Changed World

I'm Barry Weiss, and this is Honestly.
We're good, we're ready when you are.
I think I'm pretty good, so we're rolling.
Thursday afternoon, I sat down with former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at Stanford University.
Condoleezza Rice, thank you so much for joining me.
It's a pleasure to be with you, Barry.
I had planned to talk to Secretary Rice about mostly domestic politics, 2024, growing isolationism, the changing Republican Party, but obviously, given the war in Israel, I ripped up that script.
I was so grateful for the time to sit down with her in this moment.
After all, Secretary Rice not only served as National Security Advisor and Secretary of State through five Gaza wars, she also led our nation as National Security Advisor on 9-11.
As one of the most powerful people in the world at a turning point in American history, Secretary Rice knows firsthand about leadership amidst unthinkable crisis.
And that's what I wanted to talk to her about today.
We also talk about how this war might play out in the coming days and weeks, about whether Hamas has killed prospects of a two-state solution, or whether that can be revived, about Iran's crucial role in aiding Hamas, about the prospect of Israel's normalization with Saudi Arabia, and about the dangers of America pulling back from the world stage.
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We had this conversation scheduled for a while,
and I had a very different kind of conversation planned.
I planned to ask you about 2024, growing isolationism in the Republican Party,
about all kinds of things.
But my plans changed in the wee hours of Saturday morning
when I began to get text messages from friends in Israel
saying something absolutely terrible had happened.
That was when Hamas launched the worst massacre on the Jewish people since the Holocaust,
and we now know exactly what happened.
Hamas, which rules Gaza, streamed over the border.
They came by truck and by car and by foot and by paraglider and by boat
with one goal, which was to kill as many Israelis, Jews, of course,
but also other people as humanly possible.
The reporting that I have done this past week
and that we've seen all over the news and certainly all over social media
is unlike anything I have ever seen in my entire life
and the crimes that they have committed are unspeakable.
You know this area of the world incredibly well.
When you were Secretary of State and National Security Advisor,
you were in charge during five, well, I guess we call them flare-ups,
but some sort of less-than-wars in Gaza.
How is what we are watching this week different
from all of those things you oversaw when you were in the government?
Well, I was absolutely shocked when I read the news on Saturday morning
and when the extent of the barbarity and the brutality began to come out.
You're absolutely right.
I was therefore, I would say, five, even five-plus Gaza crises
during my time as National Security Advisor and as Secretary of State,
but they were missiles being fired into Israeli cities along that border.

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It's Dorot is a name that was very often on my desk as Secretary of State because it was often under fire, but this was very different.

This was an invasion of Hamas and Pitch, Palestinian Islamic jihad, onto Israeli territory to kill Israeli citizens, to massacre them, to cut the heads off of babies.

This was untold brutality and like nothing we had seen in that regard.

And I think we have to call it out as something very different because unlike the times before when Iron Dome or the Israeli IDF able to perhaps even proactively avoid or deter a major attack, it succeeded and it succeeded in horrific fashion.

I think the question on everyone's mind is how this happened.

How was Hamas able to carry this out?

Of course, one of the answers is Iran, but that is sort of a policy and strategic question that's going to take weeks, months, maybe years to answer.

I think a question that is more answerable in this moment is how we got here ideologically.

How we allowed the normalization of a group among many smart people in the West that literally calls for the genocide of Jewish people in its charter.

We're sitting here on Stanford's campus right now and I want to read to you the first statement that this university offered from the Student Affairs Office on October 9th two days after the massacre.

Stanford University as an institution does not take positions on geopolitical issues and news events.

It took less than 24 hours for Stanford's former president to condemn the war in Ukraine.

Stanford also issued a statement from the president of the university on the day of January 6th.

It was only after tremendous pressure from faculty and students that the interim Stanford president, Richard Seller, and the dean sent out an email a few days later that said, as a moral matter, we condemn all terrorism and mass atrocities. This includes the deliberate attack on civilians this weekend by Hamas.

Why did it take so long for a university, one of the greatest universities of higher education in the world for getting America to issue a condemnation of sheer terror against innocent people in one of America's greatest allies in the world, and what does it reveal about the moral rot at institutions like the one we're sitting on right now?

Well, let me start with your first question about Hamas and how anyone could think of anything but a terrorist organization.

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Obviously, it is actually declared a terrorist organization by the United States government, by all decent governments around the world. It is an organization that doesn't even recognize the right of Israel to exist, and it is an organization that is dedicated to the destruction of the state of Israel and to the extinguishing, in a sense, of Jewish identity in that state. And so I can't answer for those who somehow did not, after what had happened there, reflect on what even the international community has called Hamas. I remember very when I was Secretary of State, and Ariel Sharon decided to withdraw from Gaza. I remember when Hamas won a quote-unquote election. And I remember at that moment that the world came together, even Russia and the European Union and others, to say you have to recognize the existence of the state of Israel if we are going to do any work with you. And so Hamas has long been on the list of terrorist organizations. I am glad that at Stanford, our president and provost issued the statement that universities are complex organisms. I used to be provost to complex organisms. And there is always a lot of weighing of what to say and so forth. I did say to someone who asked me, I said, look, this actually is not a communications challenge, because this is a pretty low bar when you're being asked to condemn this. This was a terrorist attack, and it was a horrific terrorist attack on civilians. And it wasn't even just a terrorist attack, it was kidnappings. And it was abducting people and threatening to execute hostages and summarily shooting people at a festival, a music festival. And so this was nothing but a terrorist attack, and it's not hard to say we condemn terrorism. Universities are complex entities. I think that the statement that our provost and president did make is a good one. And I will stand by that one. I will say we here at Hoover spoke as well. I attended the vigil that was put on by the Jewish community, but not just the Jewish community. People here who wanted to show solidarity with the people of Israel. By the way, Americans were killed, of course, in this as well. There's dozens of also American hostages. And dozens of Americans who are missing. And so I think I made it clear where I stood. Hoover, we've sent out a statement to our Hoover community, and this very evening we are going to gather on the front steps of the Hoover Tower to acknowledge the horrors of what took place. There are student groups at some of our most elite universities, including Harvard.

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I'm sure you saw the statement signed by 32 Harvard student groups. There's a clip I just watched of students at another university singing Glory Bee to the Martyrs. Do you think that this is going to be a watershed moment to expose the nature? When I see things like this, these people are not advocating for the liberation of the Palestinian people who languish in Gaza under the jackboot of Hamas. They are celebrating and glorifying bloodshed on some of the greatest college campuses in the world. Do you believe that this will be a watershed moment in terms of the moral outrage toward that position? Well, it can be, but it also has to be accompanied by what you mentioned earlier. People have to be educated about what's going on here. The idea that Hamas is somehow the great liberator of the Palestinian people or that Hamas is somehow representing the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people is so far from the truth. If Hamas has time and time again crashed and dashed the legitimate hopes of the Palestinian people because every time we get close to a place where perhaps the Palestinians can have their state alongside the democratic state of Israel, Hamas, a Palestinian Islamic jihad, and their Iranian sponsors find a way to destroy that hope. So anybody who wants to say to me, this was about the plight of the Palestinian people, I say, yeah, it is about the plight of the Palestinian people and how Hamas has never ever cared about the plight of the Palestinian people. It's done everything that it can to keep the Palestinian people in bondage. Speaking about educating people and the amount of misinformation out there, you can talk to a very educated person and they'll talk about the occupation of Gaza. But Gaza, of course, has not been occupied since Israel pulled out, as you mentioned, under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2005, which was your first year as Secretary of State. They dismantled the 21 Israeli settlements that had existed in the Gaza Strip. They handed them over to the Palestinian Authority. And of course, this was the key test of the idea of land for peace, right, that Israel would hand over land and they would get peace in exchange. Formerly did it, of course, with the Sinai Peninsula giving it back to Egypt. Now, of course, the land in Gaza was handed over, but the peace never came. And I wonder looking back on it, of course, I don't want to do Monday morning quarterbacking here, but looking back, was that very paradigm, that idea of land for peace a mistake and was it a mistake for Ariel Sharon to have pulled out of Gaza? I am not going to question Ariel Sharon. Ariel Sharon, no one could question his bedrock commitment to the security of the state of Israel, his love for Israel. I remember his Herzliya speech in 2003 when he said, it pains me as a Jew to know that we will have to divide Judea and Samaria. I do not wish to rule over the Palestinian people, he said. And Judea and Samaria, of course, also referred to as the West Bank.

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Exactly.

And all of a sudden, that set off the possibilities of a two-state solution supported by a wide range of Israeli people, a wide range of ideological views.

When the deal was on the table in 2000 with President Clinton having brought to Yasser Arafat a possible deal, that was largely the labor side, the Israeli liberal side were racking that deal.

What Ariel Sharon and later Ehud Olmert would bring was something that was backed by Likud, backed by the Israeli right.

I had an interesting conversation about when Sharon actually went into the Gaza to tell the, and he went personally into the Gaza to tell the Israeli citizens they were going to have to leave, and one of them said to him, Prime Minister, you personally put that Mrs. above our door, because you told me that I was rightfully extending the state of Israel into our historical lands, and now you tell me I have to leave.

The IDF was prepared, if necessary, to forcibly take Israeli citizens out of Gaza. They did.

And when it was, they did.

I personally got contributions from private Americans to buy the greenhouses that Israeli citizens had put there, and in a week they were all destroyed by the terrorist in the region.

So anyone who wants to say that Israel has not tried to help Palestinians toward a different life in Gaza is simply historically wrong.

And so I would hope that what we could do in our environment, which is an academic environment, is to once passion's cool, even a little.

Let's really rehearse the history of land for peace.

I still think a Palestinian state is the best hope, ultimately, for security for both peoples.

But we're further away from it today than we've been in a very long time, and that is thanks to Hamas and the massacre of innocent civilians.

I've always identified as someone on the center left when it comes to Israeli politics.

I have always supported the idea of a two-state solution, the idea of Israel occupying another people.

It seems to me that it ultimately would corrode the very soul of the Jewish state.

And yet we see what happened in Gaza, and how could anyone not come to the conclusion?

I'm kind of thinking, this is what I'm thinking in my heart this week,

that if Israel had pulled out of the West Bank, Judea and Samaria, as the Israeli left has long wanted, that there wouldn't be another terrorist statelet at its border, and ultimately the total destruction of the Jewish state.

What is the way out of that paradigm?

Well, that is what we were really trying to work toward.

And Barry, I went 24 times to Israel and the Palestinian territories to try and find a way toward some kind of solution to this crisis.

I went to Novelis after there had been terrorist activity there

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and helped Salam Fayyad, a decent Palestinian leader, to build the equivalent of a boys and girls club there.

I went to Bechem to help them open a hotel to try to give the Palestinians a tax base for a better life. I do think that there are reasonable and indeed a decent Palestinian leaders who do see that future. But there hasn't been enough courage to say to the Palestinian people, when it is a deal, both sides will have to give.

The Israelis will have to give land.

Some of those settlements will have to be given back.

But right of return isn't going to happen.

Thousands and millions of Palestinians are not going back, quote unquote, to cities that are now Israeli cities.

And that inability to come to grips with the truth of how we would get to a two-state solution was for me extremely frustrating.

But I can tell you at some point we're going to have to try again.

And this has a larger context this time because the other thing the Iranians couldn't stand was that Israel was actually coming to the end of the state of war with its Arab neighbors.

It had already happened with the UAE and Morocco and others.

It had long ago happened with Egypt and Jordan and now possibly with Saudi Arabia.

And that would have been the end of the Arab pretence that Israel did not belong in the Middle East.

And who would have been isolated, Iran?

And so when I hear and I see statements like, well, we don't have evidence that the Iranians were involved or whatever,

everybody knows that the Iranians are the funders, the trainers, the equippers of Hamas.

And Palestinians Islamic jihad, which was a little bit of a joke early on.

They weren't very good.

And even Hamas used to say, oh, Pidge, you know, they keep blowing themselves up.

That was until the Iranian coups force took them over, trained them and turned them into the fist of Palestinian terrorism.

And so there is a history here to be written.

Israel has not been perfect in this regard.

You know that when it's come to settlements and etc.

But there is so much to this story about the effort that Israeli leaders have made to make it possible for a Palestinian state

and that some decent Palestinian leaders have made.

That story needs to be told.

And then I cannot believe that anyone would stand up and say that what Hamas did was somehow justified by what Israel has done in the past.

And so we are, to go back to your original question, we are a university.

We are an educational institution.

And I would just encourage people to read in as dispassionate way as they can the actual history of how hard people have tried.

Let's talk about how Israel should respond right now.

We're speaking five days into the war on Thursday, October 12th.

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And it looks like this is going to be the beginning of a long and protracted war, potentially with other actors getting involved.

The IDF has begun airstrikes on Hamas targets in Gaza.

It has mobilized 300,000 reservists, presumably preparing for a ground war.

Every woman I know in Israel is alone with her children and in a bomb shelter because their husbands and their fathers are off to war.

What should Israel's military strategy look like?

Do you think a ground invasion is the right move?

And, you know, the fact that there are more than 100 hostages there, including citizens of America and other countries, how does that figure in to their strategy at this moment?

Well, I obviously can't tell the Israelis what to do at this point.

I can tell you that in the past with some of these Gaza crises, we were always concerned about a ground incursion because it is so dangerous.

I was with General Jim Mattis earlier this morning and he was talking about the fact that he as a Marine has done door to door neighborhood to neighborhood fighting and it's not pretty.

And it's not pretty for the civilians on the ground, for the IDF itself.

It's a really dangerous and difficult thing to do.

I think this time the Israelis are more than likely to do something on the ground.

I can't advise them, but I would hope that and maybe the reason that they're taking some time rather than just lashing out is to have a very good sense of what they intend to try to do.

They do know a lot about Hamas and its organization and its leadership and perhaps being more surgical about what they go after and who they go after.

I'm certain that the hostage crisis really complicates the whole matter because Hamas in typical terrorist fashion has said they will execute hostages and of course they might do exactly that given who they are.

So it seems to me that the Israelis are taking their time to plan how they will go about this.

I'm glad that they've come to a unity government to try to deal with this because as you know the state of Israel has been divided in the recent year or so.

And after something like this you really need to be unified.

I suspect that there are conversations going on with the Qatari and maybe Hamas and maybe even Pidge about what to do about the hostages.

Maybe something can be done there.

The Egyptians would be involved in trying to help identify how to get rid of some of these tunnels and the like.

Remember that Egypt is no fan of Hamas.

Hamas is from their point of view the Muslim Brotherhood operating in the Palestinian territories. And so I wouldn't jump to the conclusion that the Arabs in the area are going to cry any tears for Hamas.

Hamas is not popular with these states who have themselves suffered very often with Hamas calling them all collaborators and so forth.

The one thing that I will say is I hope that there can be some way to think about the pressures on the civilians in Gaza.

And sometimes we were able to organize humanitarian pauses or the likes where people can get

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medicine and food.

That kind of thing I hope is being thought through as well.

But I'm not going to presume to tell the Israelis what they need to do.

I think everybody thinks they need to destroy as much of Hamas as they possibly can.

Right now Israel has cut off food, electricity and water to Gaza saying that it's not going to be re-established rather until the hostages are released.

Many people are calling on Egypt to allow refugees from Gaza into that country and Egypt is refusing.

What do you make of that?

The Egyptians and the other Arabs have never been very kind about the idea of Palestinian refugees. Jordan is the one state, 70% of that population is actually Palestinian.

But it actually Gaza, it's a longer story.

But one of the reasons that Gaza is the awful place that it is is that the UN mission there has not been very well structured.

And the UN, the UNRA as it's called, has not always done things that would have made it easier for the people of Gaza to get out of refugee status and begin to get some help to build normal lives.

And the consequence of the way that UNRA functions is that Palestinians have been kept in refugee status.

There has also been policies that lead to huge numbers of births so that Hania, the putative prime minister, has something like 13 brothers and sisters.

He's got 11 kids.

If and when we get to the place that Hamas has been weakened or hopefully even destroyed, it would be a very good thing to think about what really might work for the people of Gaza.

I think there was a moment of hope when the Israelis withdrew from Gaza in 2005.

And oh, by the way, not just from Gaza, but four settlements in the West Bank as well.

Because we wanted to make the point in the Israelis agreed that it wasn't going to be Gaza only.

And so maybe somebody will really take the interest of the truly depressed and difficult circumstance for the Palestinian people in Gaza seriously if Hamas can be eliminated.

In 2011, Israel traded 1,027 Palestinian prisoners, many of them hardened terrorists in exchange for a single Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit.

What kind of precedent do you think that that set?

And many people that I've spoken to over the past days are the parents and siblings and children of the hostages.

And they're basically saying, that is what my government did. Do that for me now.

What do you say to those people? How do you grapple with the moral question here?

I remember when Gilad Shalit was taken, of course, because we were in office and I remember the anguish.

It says something good about the Israeli people and their government that they have a mantra that you don't want to leave one Israeli behind.

I always find these questions very difficult because, you know, when you're in those circumstances, it's hard to say, all right, you did the wrong thing to bring that person back home.

But of course, it sets up a kind of perverse set of incentives for those who would take people and the like.

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What we're hearing at least about this particular potential prisoner swap is that it might be women and children for women and children.

Maybe that's more palatable in some ways.

But I've always been very, someone who is very careful.

Israel remains a viable state through the will and the resilience and the toughness of the Israeli people and the grace of God.

Because given where they sit with everyone since their founding, trying to destroy them,

I've always been a little cautious about telling them exactly what is right and what is wrong.

A lot of people are saying that this is Israel's 9-11.

The death toll as of today, and I'm sure it will go up, stands at 1,200 people, which proportionally is 10 times the loss of life in America on 9-11.

It would be as if 29,000 Americans died that day.

That is the scale for Israel.

And of course, you were national security advisor on 9-11.

And one thing I was reading online today that I found really incisive and interesting was the notion that the choices that were made after that barbaric terrorist attack on this country were in retrospect, maybe not the right choices.

People look at the war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan.

We could spend five hours talking about that.

We're not going to.

But things like the Patriot Act and other surveillance systems.

What lessons do you draw from the policies that America pursued in the aftermath of 9-11 that could serve as a lesson or a warning for the Israelis in this moment?

The first thing I would say is I've been saying to people, yes, 9-11, but plus, because it's as if somebody had gone into the suburbs of Buffalo and started massacring people.

And so in that sense, much more kind of up close and personal experience, I think, for Israelis.

But I was the national security advisor on that day.

And I will tell you, Barry, that the next day, the only thing that we thought was, don't let it happen again.

And if you are in a position of authority when 3,000 people die, some of them jumping out of 30-story windows to their death, 80-story windows to their death.

And by definition, you didn't do enough.

Then you're going to do everything that you can not to let it happen again because you have such great remorse.

And while I understand that remorse is not a policy, I really challenged those who say we tried to do too much.

I really challenged those who say that the Patriot Act was the wrong response or that going into Afghanistan to try to clean out those terrorist nest so that we wouldn't be attacked again.

We can talk about Iraq and the implications of that. Iraq was actually a different set of security concerns.

But I just have to tell you, I heard somebody say once, a very important American leader, they led from fear.

You bet we did because every day you came in and every day there was a new plot line.

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And one day it was that there was going to be a radiological attack on Washington, D.C. on the weekend of October 30, October 31.

And another day it was that there was going to be a smallpox attack on the country.

And the next day it was that Botulinum toxin had been released into the White House.

Yeah, we lived from fear.

And so while I understand those who now want to second guess what were some very tough decisions,

the President said, anything within our law and consistent with our values, we will do to protect the country.

And my gratitude that there was not another attack on our territory in the time that we were there.

My gratitude that I think we dismantled the kind of al-Qaeda that could do what they did.

I'll take the criticism that we did too much.

What are the answers or the lessons for the Israelis?

In some ways, we were newer to this.

There had not been an attack on the territory of the United States since the War of 1812.

We had had, of course, the attacks on our embassies.

We'd had the World Trade Center in 1993.

But the shock to us was that our oceans didn't protect us in the way that we had always assumed.

Israel, that's not the shock in Israel because Israel has been under attack since its founding in 1948.

The shock to Israel was that something of this magnitude and brutality could happen across its borders.

When I think the Israeli intelligence and Israeli military thought that they could really protect the country,

and I can imagine that that's the shock.

There will be a reckoning.

There will be their equivalent of a 9-11 commission.

I testified before ours.

They will go back and they will look at what happened and why were Israeli outposts overrun and was there too much reliance on technology, not on human intelligence and so on and so on.

But for now, I think that the focus of the country is in the right place,

which is to, in a unified way, try as quickly as possible to make sure that Hamas and Palestinian Islamic jihad can't do this again.

Obviously, it's going to be a lot of time before Israel has its version of a 9-11 commission.

Yet, a lot of people are starting to insist on answers to the question,

how did the start-up nation, how did the most militarily sophisticated country in the Middle East come to its knees in this way?

What are some of those answers?

I don't know because I don't know what they were looking at.

I will tell you this, sometimes it's a failure of imagination.

It's the low-tech attack that is a problem.

For us, it was the failure to imagine airplanes flying into buildings that somebody would use the civilian aircraft as a missile.

It was just outside of our imagination.

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And maybe this particular coordinated attack, the Lansi air drones, people on motorcycles, maybe it was just not imaginable in that sense. But that time will come again for right now, as people have said, as President Biden has said, Israel has the right to defend itself. And that means making sure that the terrorists are cleared from those villages and those towns and then doing their very best to destroy the Hamas. And it's not just the leadership, it's the infrastructure as well. It's the command and control for Hamas. It's, as I mentioned, these tunnels through which they go. There's some reports that there's been some Israeli firing on the supply lines up in the north that Hezbollah might use. That happens on the Syrian border. That happens fairly frequently, actually. It's not unusual that Israel will just degrade those supply lines. So right now, if I were in a position to advise, which I'm not, but I will anyway, I would say that everybody should put aside the how did it happen, unless it bears directly on can it happen again in this relatively short period of time? Because all of the energy now needs to be on what is going to be a very difficult task of trying to root out Hamas and watching very carefully that northern border so that Hezbollah, which George Tenet, our CIA director once called the A team of terrorism, doesn't decide that this is the time to take advantage of the situation. A few days before the attack, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, by its National Security Advisor, boasted that the Middle East region is quieter today than it has been in two decades. What is that? Is that a failure of the imagination? I have to say, I said similar things because of the possibilities with the extension of the Abraham Accords negotiated by the Trump administration and then the possibility of the United States making some kind of security arrangement with Saudi Arabia. Now Saudi Arabia would normalize relations with Israel. As we've been saying, the state of war between Israel and its Arab neighbors would have ended. I said not too long ago that I didn't usually use the words optimism and Middle East in the same line, but I was prepared to do it. What we have to remember is that that's one of the reasons this happened. Because for the spoilers, for whom a peaceful Middle East in which Israel is a recognized country, recognized member of the Middle East where normal trade relations and travel and economic relations could take place for the spoilers, and that means Iran and their surrogates, that's the worst possible Middle East. Okay, well let's talk about Iran, which has come up a few times. One of the answers to how this happened, we can say with certainty, is Iran.

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And one of the foundational principles of the Obama administration and now the Biden administration

was, I don't know what word to use, an embrace of Iran in the form of the Iran deal, which was sort of the foundation of both administration's Middle East policies.

Obama believed the Iranians to be the only power strong enough to sort of,

I don't want to say run the region, but with America sort of receding as the world's policemen to step into the breach.

The Biden administration, of course, has given Iran some \$16 billion in recent weeks in exchange for Iran not pursuing its nuclear program, even though in my view they probably are.

Is this going to cause a wholesale reassessment of that view?

And talk to us about how that view came to be a sort of orthodoxy in the Democratic Party over the past two decades.

Well, I believe that the Biden administration has done a lot of things right.

In Ukraine, for instance, would have done it faster, but in Ukraine, I have no quarrel.

I think trying to follow on to the Abraham Accords and normalized relations with Saudi and Israel, very good.

I've always said that even though I am always cautious about criticizing my successors, because I know how hard it is in there, the Iran policy should have really been reset a long time ago. It could have been reset, for instance, when the Iranian regime was beating up its own people in the streets.

In the Green Revolution.

And then the murder of activists, and really people who were just trying to advocate for a better life. If you didn't know the nature of this regime, you saw it in the streets.

And so I would have thought a reset was probably necessary then, but we could go to other elements about Iran.

We know that Iran continues to stir trouble in southern Iraq.

We know that Iran is the funder of Hamas and Pitch and Hezbollah.

And we know something else.

We know that when the monies went back to Iran in the first Iran deal,

that the Iranian activists themselves revealed that that money didn't go to the budget to help the Iranian people.

It went to fund Hamas and Hezbollah.

And so knowing that, I just don't really believe that a reset with Iran is wise policy.

I never particularly supported the Iran nuclear deal, which I thought just gave Iran time to learn to enrich and reprocess.

Let's give steelman for me why the Obama administration and then the Biden administration since picking up that policy pursued the policy they did toward Iran.

What is the strongest version of that argument?

It is so hard for me to understand it.

You're going to ask me to do something I actually ask my students to do all the time, so argue the other side.

So I'm going to try. I'm going to try.

Consistently articulate it for me.

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I think the argument that they would make is that Iran is there to stay.

It's a powerful and dangerous power in the region and that by engagement with it and trying to give them some stake that perhaps you can mitigate some of the worst tendencies of the Iranian regime. I think that's the argument that they would make a little bit like you may not like this regime, but they're there and you have to deal with them.

Frankly, after we left Afghanistan in the way that we did, a country by the way that has a 900 kilometer border with Iran and why we would want to give up military assets in a place that has a 900 kilometer border with Iran.

I don't understand.

But again, I'm making the argument, not my own.

I think that would be the argument that maybe you can over time make Iran from a revisionist power in the Middle East to, if not a status quo power, just one that is more neutral.

I think that if you wanted to make that argument initially, say early Obama administration, because we had tried to get Iran into nuclear negotiations.

We created the P five as it was called, which was the permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany to try to negotiate the Iranian nuclear deal.

By the way, we did have a Security Council resolution that said Iran should not be allowed to enrich and reprocess signed on to by China and the Russians and the administration gave that up in the first negotiations with Iran.

But given all of that, I could say in the first instance, all right, give it a try.

But repeatedly, Iran has shown now that this is not a policy that works with the Iranians.

You they are going to continue to be a revolutionary revisionist power.

There are two Iran's there the the Iranian government that we deal with and that shows up at international meetings.

And then there are the bad boys, the cuts force and the IRGC that goes around funding Hamas to carry out massacres of innocent civilians.

And so at some point you have to say this isn't working.

And even if I make the best argument and accept that you might try that with the Iranians, there's no evidence that the Iranians want to play by those rules.

A lot of people sort of just tuning into this or asking, listen to Jake Sullivan a few days before the attack and said, yeah, things are looking up.

Wow, there's actually like normalization between Israel and many Gulf states.

It didn't seem that far off of a statement to make days before obviously the whole world has changed.

But a lot of people are asking why now and the answer is Saudi Arabia.

Can you explain that a little bit for people?

Mary, I first went to Saudi Arabia in 1999 and I went as a director of the Chevron Corporation and I was going to some meetings there.

They actually asked the CEO what I want to go to the meetings because I was a woman.

He said, yes, he thought I would want to go to the meetings and I had to be escorted from my hotel room to the meetings and back to my hotel room because women couldn't be seen without men escorts.

Saudi Arabia is not a, don't get me wrong, a liberal democracy and the MBS has a darker side, but

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the liberalization of Saudi Arabia on many scores is pretty remarkable.

It's a different place than it was even just a few years ago.

It is a place where women work.

I knew that something was going to happen to have to happen when I was told that 50% of the college graduates over the last 10 years in Saudi Arabia have been women.

There is no way women were going to put up with what was going on.

So I can't tell you whether MBS was leading this or MBS was following the train, but the parade, but clearly some things have happened.

It's also the case that the effort to normalize with Israel was based on Saudi's interest in breaking out of its isolation as just a place that people go to drill for oil.

You've seen them by golf leads.

They know their oil is going to run out at some point and they're making all kinds of moves and trying to become a more, quote, normal state.

And so for all of those reasons, if you want to improve technologically, the technological 800 pound gorilla in the region is real.

And so you want to have a relationship with oil, but brainpower.

And so I do think what's happening in Saudi Arabia is notable.

We should remember that there are still massive human rights problems in Saudi Arabia and we should speak out to them.

But we should also note that this is a place that's changing.

We'll be right back.

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One of the things that happened in the aftermath of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan was this idea that America does more harm than good when it attempts to be the world's policeman.

Do you think that that view is going to be reassessed, not just in light of Hamas' war against Israel, but Russia's war against Ukraine, China's potential war against Taiwan, and all of these other... I saw that headline the other day that said, America's New Cold War. I'm like, New Cold War, the world's New Cold War.

I'm like, it's a hot war. There's burning places all over the world.

How do you think we're going to reassess that sort of fundamental idea that American power is fundamentally a source for stability in the world?

Well, I fully understand, and I was in office and partly responsible for some of the decisions that we took in the Bush administration.

But I would say this first of all about Iraq and Afghanistan.

Well, if you really think the world is better off with Saddam Hussein murdering a million people and putting them in mass graves, be my guess.

If you really think it was a better Afghanistan when women were beaten in stadiums given to the Taliban by the UN and women couldn't go to school and girls couldn't go to school, well, be my guess.

The United States is not a perfect power. There's no such thing.

But I would argue that on balance, the United States has been a force for stability in the world that a lot of what we think of as a stable international system, not to mention a prosperous one, is because the United States has been willing to step up and to try to be the provider of a security commons, the provider of an economic commons, sometimes with not much benefit to ourselves.

So when I hear this, I think, you really think the world's better with the United States stepping back?

Well, take a look out of your window at Vladimir Putin.

Take a look out of your window at Hamas.

Take a look out of your window at what Xi Jinping is doing in the South China Sea or in Taiwan.

You really want the United States to step back? That's what you're going to get.

And oh, by the way, it's not just American power, but it's also American compassion.

The United States has been the largest food aid donor in the world for decades.

One of the things I'm most proud of is the Presidency Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief that saved 25 million, 25 million lives in Africa.

And that doesn't even count the orphans, the people who would have been orphaned and the like.

When we think about not just what the U.S. government has done,

I'm going to have a chance to be honored at the Points of Light,

which President George H.W. Bush and Mrs. Barbara Bush started,

to recognize American civic society and citizens who do good in the world.

And so America's not perfect.

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I come from segregated Birmingham, Alabama.

I was a little girl at a time when you could not go to a movie theater or to a restaurant.

I had a talking of terrorism.

I had a classmate killed in the 16th Street bombing of that church in Birmingham in September of 1963.

It's just been the 60th anniversary of that.

So I don't look at the United States through rose-colored glasses, but I can tell you there is no country like it on the face of the Earth

with this kind of power and this kind of capability that has tried,

sometimes a little bit clumsily, sometimes a little bit failingly,

but has tried to provide for a more prosperous and democratic and safer world.

And sometimes the thing that worries me most is our impatience.

When I hear that Afghanistan was our longest war,

well, no, actually our longest war would have been Korea,

where we are still in an armistice and still protecting the Korean Peninsula.

I'm worried.

I'm worried that there aren't leaders who are willing to stand up and say,

if you really think that America can step back,

look at what that world will look like.

And I believe that Americans carry simultaneously in their heads two very different thoughts.

One is, haven't we done enough?

We defeated the Soviet Union.

We unified Germany.

We liberated Eastern Europe.

We were able to defeat at least Al-Qaeda and there can ISIS.

Haven't we done enough?

Can't somebody else do it?

And I understand that sense of exhaustion, if you will.

But on the other hand, Americans carry in their heads,

I can't watch Syrian babies choke on nerve gas.

I can't watch a massacre of people in Storot.

I can't watch as a large country decides to extinguish its smaller neighbor to rebuild an empire.

And then Americans say, all right, if not us, then who?

And under those circumstances, Americans can be led to take this burden if you want to call it that or this obligation to be a part of a more stable world.

And I'm just looking for American leaders who are willing to say that.

When America steps back, others obviously step in to fill the vacuum.

Explain if you would the reality of the current situation with Russia.

We've touched on Iran, but with Russia, your area of expertise and also China.

Well, you're seeing the reemergence of great power conflict,

something that I didn't think I was going to see again after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

But great powers bring a lot of chaos with them because they bring a lot of military power and they bring economic assets.

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And we're seeing Russia that even though its armed forces are really quite terrible, is still able to wreak tremendous destruction.

The only reason that we are where we are now is because of the bravery of the Ukrainian people who are willing to fight for a world in which big powers don't extinguish their neighbors and we owe them our support.

They're not asking for one American boot on the ground.

They're just saying, help us to do this.

And by the way, if Putin wins this war, you can be guaranteed that countries to which we have an article five that is an attack upon one is an attack upon all obligation will be next in line.

And we will be dragged back in.

You have China, which is threatening Taiwan Xi Jinping, who sees himself as in the pantheon of Chinese leaders next to Mao.

That means he has to restore China.

He restored Hong Kong to China.

It's just a province of China these days.

And he wants to do the same for Taiwan.

Who's going to stop him?

Who's going to deter him?

Because nobody wants to see that shooting war.

And the United States is the only country with our values, with our interests that can do this.

Our allies, and we have good allies.

We have a strengthened NATO.

Who would have ever thought that Finland and Sweden would be a part of NATO?

We have allies and friends in the Indo-Pacific like Australia and like India and like Japan in the Quad.

So we have not just our own power, but they can't do it without us.

And so I often say to myself, Barry, I know that there are those who think it's politically smart now to talk about,

you know, well, we should just pay attention to our own business.

Or, oh, by the way, Ukraine isn't important.

China is the only thing that's important.

I'd just like to see the day when somebody elected on that platform has to say to the American people,

the victory march that Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin are now undertaken because Ukraine has been defeated.

And I could have stopped it.

Is that really a speech you're going to want to make to the American people?

So I would really suggest to those who want to lead us to think twice about arguing that American power is not necessary

and that we can pay attention to our own, to ourselves.

And I would say to those who say American power is not good, I would say, do you have a better idea?

Is that what you would say to the 29 Republican lawmakers who wrote that letter last month to the White House Office of Management budget opposing further aid to Ukraine?

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Yes, that's precisely what I would say to them and a few others as well.

I'd say one other thing, Barry, you know, I like to tell people there are three dates that I keep in mind.

One is a war broke out in 1914 and by 1917 we'd been dragged in despite the fact that we didn't want to be.

A war broke out in 1938 in Europe and by 1941 we were dragged in despite the fact that we did not want to be.

And then in 2001 we thought that we had bought a peace dividend with the end of the Cold War and that war came to us.

And so there is simply no way for America to get out of the business of keeping the peace.

And I hope we understand that.

As you mentioned earlier in the conversation, Israel has been in intense internal conflict over what some call necessary judicial reform with what others call a constitutional crisis.

We're not going to get into that conversation, but I can't remember a time in my life other than frankly the pull out of Gaza.

Maybe the Camp David Accords and the idea of the peace process where there's been more internal division inside of Israel.

And you could make the argument that that internal division was noticed by Hamas.

What kind of lessons should Americans take from what we're seeing right now in Israel about what internal, the kind of danger, true danger, not culture or danger, that that kind of internal division can create?

There is no doubt that when the bad guys out there, the authoritarian, the troublemakers, the revisionist states,

think that America is preoccupied or looking inward that you start to get bad behavior.

And so I would say, could we just get our act together?

Could we just release the nominations and the confirmation of all of those flag officers whose files are sitting on the desk of one Alabama senator

because he has some bone to pick?

You know, pick another bone.

We need our American military leadership intact.

And I would say to those who seem to want to debate every small issue and not really pay attention to what's going on out there in the world,

this is going to require a unified effort.

The one thing we had going for us for the entire period of the Cold War and it's why we ultimately want it.

We had a lot of differences around this tactic vis-a-vis the Soviet Union or that tactic vis-a-vis the Soviet Union,

but we knew what we were fighting and we knew who we were.

And we knew that the Soviet Union's victory would be a very bad outcome for our values and for our interests.

And for the most part, in a bipartisan fashion, we hung together.

We're going to have to do that again, not to mention the divisions within parties over these measures.

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Because if we're going to enter this very dangerous world in a way that we can begin to roll back some of the damage that has been done,

we are going to have to look hard at our defense industry base, which has eroded our shipbuilding capability, which has eroded.

We're going to have to look at the fact that for the second straight year, our armed forces are missing their targets for recruitment for each of the services of recruiting to the volunteer force.

We have a lot of work to do. This is serious and we need to get serious about it.

One of our interns at the Free Press is a Stanford student. She was at the vigil this week on campus and she saw you speak and you said this.

This attack on Israel was also an attack on the United States of America.

And I think unlike the Cold War, we don't have a sense intrinsically of why that is, especially among young people.

Explain if you would, why? Why was this also an attack on the United States of America and why should it matter to every single American, not just Jewish Americans?

It was an attack on a country with whom we have so many ties of kinship and of tradition and of values.

It was an attack on a country. There are reasons that Americans died there because Americans go to Israel and it's a part of us and we are a part of Israel.

But it was also an attack on decent values that I would like to think as America we have defended and upheld.

And that is that there should never be a terrorist attack on innocent people in which you do the most awful things that we've seen really since the horrors of before World War II.

It was an attack on America because it was an attack on American friend and a lie.

It was an attack on America because it was an attack on Americans who happened to be there.

And it was an attack because it was an attack on who we are as a people, our values, not just our interests but our values.

And it's in that vein that I feel tremendous, not just sympathy for the victims there but solidarity with them.

And I just want to say to every Israeli family, to the Israeli people, I've actually been in touch with some of my Israeli friends.

You're in my prayers constantly.

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