

[Transcript] The News Agents / What is Israel's endgame?

This is a Global Player original podcast.

You have seen over the last three weeks what Hamas is capable of.

I'm not talking about Hamas, I'm talking about your vision of what comes next.

No, but don't you don't agree that the people of Gaza will be better off without Hamas?

That's the bottom line.

What is your vision for Gaza if and when you have succeeded and Hamas has gone?

So hopefully there will be a remember in Gaza and this is the thing that a lot of you...

That was Mark Regev, he's a senior advisor to Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's Prime Minister and he's struggling there to explain to us what the plan is for peace, for Gaza, for the people of Israel and for the Palestinians after this ground war ends.

But of course, before we get to that point, there is a humanitarian catastrophe.

There are 200 plus Israeli hostages being held by Hamas.

There is political turmoil within Israel over what has unfolded.

There is the international community growing increasingly restive.

This episode will be an extended interview with Mark Regev as Israel tries to answer some pretty difficult questions.

Welcome to the newsagents.

The newsagents.

It's John.

It's Emily and we are in newsagents HQ and we're going to bring you up to date on what has been happening over the weekend in that Israel-Gaza war because tanks have entered Gaza City and we understand that a key road has now been cut off.

It looks as if in all but name, the ground war has properly begun now and there were terrible scenes over the weekend where communication had been completely ended for many of the Gazans who couldn't even find out where their loved ones, where their colleagues, where their friends were at a time of heightened fear and raids on supplies, people starving, people looking for medicine, people looking for clean water and people scared that even if they moved, they would be bombed.

And even among the families of Israelis who have been kidnapped and are being held in Gaza, a growing unease unrest over the decision of the Israeli military to start phase two as it has been called of the land war into Gaza and what that might mean for their safety. So today we thought we'd take you into a much longer interview with somebody who is right at the heart of Israel's government, Israel's plans and can try and explain to us what the end game actually looks like and that is Mark Regev.

Thank you so much for being with us on the news agents.

It's three weeks since the atrocities that took place in southern Israel.

What is the mood of the country now?

I mean Israel has been going through a crisis and the effects of the October 7th massacre are still being felt.

Television programs constantly showing family members who lost a loved one in the murder or showing parents of children who have been kidnapped, other terrible things.

We're still digesting the scope of the calamity that we experienced and it is very much the public mood has changed dramatically on October 7th.

I myself on October 6th I was at a wedding of a friend and we were seeing a lot of people

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I've known for years and it was a great evening and then I woke up on Saturday morning and it just totally flipped and I think what my personal experience and the country's experience is parallel.

We were attacked by surprise, we didn't expect it and suddenly everything just collapsed around us.

And three weeks on, I mean three weeks ago the international community stood as one in support of Israel after an atrocity.

That has changed profoundly since then.

We've seen here in the last three weeks a whole series of world leaders who came to express not only solidarity after the atrocities but also to support our position that Hamas has to be destroyed.

Now destroying Hamas, disarming this terrible, brutal, horrific terrorist organization is going to require military action and that's going to be complicated especially since they use Gaza's civilians as human shields.

But I think there is still strong international support for the goal of destroying Hamas and if anyone has a better way to do it than what we're proposing I'm happy to live, to hear about it.

You use the phrase that's going to be complicated and I guess that gets to the heart of where we are now Mark.

The UN says that civil order is starting to collapse in Gaza, that Palestinians there are desperate for food, that their ransacking supplies, they say clean water is running out and the sewer systems are now at breaking point.

Was that part of the plan or has something gone wrong?

From the UN's point of view, you know, war is causing all sorts of damage and suffering in Gaza.

But then you have to ask what is the alternative?

The alternative is to let Hamas continue to rule the Gaza Strip, to have this terror enclave on our southern border and that, you know, every so often we'll just have to experience a massacre like we experienced on October 7th.

The UN has no plan to remove Hamas from office, the UN has no plan to disarm Hamas. And so, okay, give me a better idea, because if we just let's say, if we accepted these ideas for some sort of immediate ceasefire, so we're back to square one, it's 6 a.m. on October 7th in the morning and then Israel can just wait for the next attack, no.

This has to end with a new situation and just as ISIS was destroyed when it had its territory controlled in Syria and Iraq, we will destroy the Hamas terror caliphate, so to speak, to use their words in Gaza.

That's a very binary view of an alternative where both sides have to lose.

I guess what I'm asking is, when you look at the amount of aid that's getting in now, and as of yesterday, I think it was 118 trucks, used to be 500 a day, is that part of the plan?

Do you want to see more aid reaching Gazans now?

Definitely, definitely.

Our policy says, one, relentlessly pursue Hamas and destroy it as an organisation and in parallel to that, do what can be done for the civilian population.

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Ultimately, we're targeting Hamas, we're not targeting Gaza's civilians.

And I think, I mean, it's reported widely for the last two weeks longer, we've been calling on civilians to leave areas where we know there's going to be intensive combat.

And about a couple of hundred thousand Gazans and civilians have relocated to the south.

Sorry, just on that question, to leave places where there's going to be intensive combat, like for example, a hospital.

We know that Shelling has been taking place in a hospital in Gaza City.

You've warned Gazans to evacuate.

Is that so that you can bomb the surroundings and the hospital?

Before we go to the specifics, just answer me on that one if you can, because I think there are a lot of people in that area right now and they need to know whether they're going to evacuate because you're about to bomb the hospital.

So we've told everyone in northern Gaza to evacuate.

We've suggested them do so because there'll be intensive fighting and we don't want to see them caught up in the crossfire.

Now hundreds of thousands of people have relocated, there are still many civilians left.

We urge them, if they can, to leave.

We don't want to see them caught up in the crossfire between the Israeli Defence Forces and the Hamas terrorists.

Those who can't leave...

Sure, but what if they can't?

What if those people who are in intensive care or on drips or whatever, disabled, very young and incubators, there isn't the facility to move them?

So what happens to people like that?

So I have two answers if you'll let me.

First of all, we will continue to differentiate in a difficult combat situation between civilians and combatants, between the terrorists and Gaza's civilian population.

That is difficult, but we will make a maximum effort to do so.

We will not and do not target civilians.

But you have to know, as was shown by the Israeli Defence Forces in one particular case, but we know what happens in other cases, Hamas has deliberately embedded its military infrastructure underneath hospitals, because they know we don't target hospitals.

For them, it's a safe area.

Now, this is a war crime under the Geneva Convention.

You're not allowed to do that.

And in fact, according to the Geneva Convention, I think Article 13 of the additional protocol, it says specifically, if an enemy uses something like a hospital, a humanitarian site like a hospital, as for its military activities, it loses its immunity.

Now, we have no intention of bombing hospitals.

We worry about civilians.

But what Hamas is doing is a war crime.

And when you say to me, but people can't leave hospitals, I have to ask the question, to what extent is Hamas keeping them?

To what extent is Hamas telling people at gunpoint, you don't leave this place?

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Because if you leave here, we don't have our human shields.

I think that needs to be investigated.

Sorry, you actually think that Hamas is forcing people to stay in hospital so that you won't bomb the hospital?

You don't believe that there are injured people in those hospitals?

No, I didn't say you're taking what I'm saying and making it extreme and sound ridiculous.

What I'm saying is we have documented cases of Hamas forcing people to stay and not to leave.

They actually set up roadblocks to tell people you can't leave northern Gaza, which is amazing.

We're perceived as the enemy of the Palestinians and we're telling them, leave areas of conflict.

Yes, get out of harm's way.

And Hamas is saying, no, you must stay.

You must stay and become martyrs to our crazy extremist agenda.

It's ridiculous.

They want Palestinians killed.

But Mark, I suspect if you were to say to Charing Cross Hospital in London or St Thomas' Hospital in London,

you've got to evacuate now, even with the road infrastructure that we've got and everything else in this country,

the doctors would turn around and say, we just can't do that.

There are too many patients on life support or in incubators and we just cannot physically do that.

It is too dangerous to do.

So what all I'm saying is that everyone who can relocate should, it's common sense.

If you know there's going to be fighting, relocate.

OK, so we know there's going to be fighting there.

If Gaza is a place of bombed hospitals, of amputated and maimed children,

of a collapsed civil order, of an infrastructure on its knees

and a newly radicalized population of young Gazans, has Israel won that war?

So first of all, I think we have to ask why Gaza is in this situation.

And it's because it's been under the rule of Hamas for 16 years.

And Hamas has only bought the Gazans suffering and impoverishment.

And Hamas isn't just Israel's problem.

It's the first and foremost the problem of the people of Gaza.

They're living in a society where their rulers don't care about them.

Everything is subjected to this agenda of Hamas, which we saw so vividly on October 7th.

Hamas is causing suffering for people on both sides of the frontier.

The people of Gaza deserve better.

Now, all these people who say they, you know, protesting for Gaza, so to speak,

are they really interested in the preservation of this terrible Hamas regime

that treats people worse than ISIS?

Is that the point at which you say we've won this war?

We've shown Gaza what we were going to do and that's what we've left.

It's not about showing Gaza anything.

It's about eliminating Hamas, which is a threat both to the people of Gaza

and to the Israeli civilian population.

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Of course.

Hamas is a vicious, terrible terrorist organization, and it's just brought suffering to everybody.

Let's get rid of them.

They deserve to be eliminated.

You know, Mark, you're not just killing Hamas terrorists.

I mean, I don't want to get into numbers,

but you can see from the pictures of the damage you're doing.

And you must know that you are not just killing terrorists.

You must know that.

I do know that.

And we're doing our maximum effort to prevent that.

I'd like to be able to tell you here now that there won't be a single civilian casualty.

But obviously, I can't.

There hasn't been a war in history where civilians haven't been caught up in the crossfire.

But as a democratic society,

we will make a maximum effort to keep that sort of thing to a minimum

and target Hamas as surgically as we can.

It's very difficult because, as we said, Hamas embeds itself.

It uses Hamas's civilian population as a human shield.

In a country like Britain, in a country like Israel,

our militaries are to defend the people.

They protect the civilians.

In Gaza, Hamas inverts it.

They use the civilians as human shields to protect their military terrorist machine.

They have to be condemned for that.

We've seen the aerial bombardment taking place,

where whole blocks have been destroyed, blocks of apartments where a lot of people live, high civilian casualties.

And as Emily says, we don't want to get involved in how many injured, how many killed, debate.

But there is clear high levels of civilian casualties in that.

That is a pretty blunt weapon to be using.

I disagree.

Can I allow me please with respect to disagree?

Obviously, Hamas has an interest.

Hamas also controls the pictures that come out of Gaza.

There is no independent civil...

Well, let journalists get to film.

I'm sorry, but I have a lot of criticism if you'll ask me about the way the journalists are operating inside Gaza.

Because every time you interview someone in Gaza,

whether it's a doctor or a nurse or someone who represents at some local institution, they are living in an authoritarian society.

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Yes, it's like in North Korea.

What do you think about President Kim?

Do you like him?

What can people say?

Well, that's international journalists.

Yeah, where's the journalists in?

Western journalists who are dependent on Gazans for their information.

Well, I remember I worked at the Israeli embassy in China.

Everyone knew who the local staff was and who they worked for.

That was the... Everyone understood that.

But in democracy, you allow a press to see what's going on.

You don't tell them.

Can people in Gaza speak out against Hamas and live to see the next day?

I ask you.

What sort of regime is it?

You've seen the sort of brutality they're capable of.

Have you not?

I'm not arguing about that.

I'm just arguing that if there were Western journalists in who work for free news organizations, some of which you will like, some of which you won't like, but let them do their job and report back to the people so that we have journalists who we can trust that are on the ground.

And all I'm saying is that the Hamas, because of their control over the visual message, you will...

Have you seen one picture of a dead Hamas fighter since this started?

One?

And what's the reason for that?

Have you seen one interview with one Hamas person, with one Gaza who says,

we're angry at Hamas for starting this war with Israel?

They don't have to say they're like Israel.

They just have to say they're angry at Hamas for provoking.

Not one, have you seen?

Is that no one in Gaza thinks that?

Or is it just that they know that if you speak out of turn in Gaza, the doctors who've complained about the medical situation has one of them complained about Hamas embedding itself in hospitals?

Of course they can't.

If they did so, they won't be there to tell you the story the next day.

These things have to be understood.

Much more of Mark Regev to come after the break.

This is The News Agents.

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I just want to know whether you think you have the support of the hostages' families by going in like this, because you see the Missing Families Forum saying that it was their worst night so far when they heard that Israeli ground troops were going into Gaza. Look, you have to feel for the families of the hostages, yes? I just saw an interview on Israeli TV with a mother who's got two daughters under five who are both being held hostage in Gaza. It's terrible. You have to feel for them. You have to have empathy. And part of our war aims as a government is to achieve the release of the hostages. And then you have to ask yourself, how is the best way to do that? And to be frank, is Hamas suddenly going to become humanitarian and release all the hostages out of the goodness of their heart? And the answer is obviously, no. We believe the way to get the hostages out is to beef up the pressure on Hamas. We're doing that through military means. Hit them hard. At the same time, put pressure on their diplomatic allies around the world. Make them deliver. Pressure will get our people out. That's what we believe. They're saying the opposite, Mark. They're saying... Not all of them. No, no, no. You can find... I've spoken to these people. They came and met the prime minister a day before yesterday. You get a whole variety of different opinions. You can't say they say. One person can say two people. They have gone to meet your prime minister to complain about the impact of the ground operation on the well-being of their family members. It sounds as if Israel is no longer making those hostages their release, your priority. That's not true. They are a high priority. They're one of the aims of our operation. And once again, what is the alternative? They're not the first priority anymore. Hamas is not... No, they are the top priority. We will defeat Hamas and we'll get the hostages out. That's what this whole operation is about.

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Will you listen to people saying,
please stop this because we are putting more people at risk?
We think what we're doing is actually expediting their release.
We're convinced that the only way you're going to get them out
is by increasing the pressure on Hamas.

You're not going to get it.

Hamas, once again, is there an expectation
that Hamas is suddenly going to become like the Boy Scouts
and be nice and say, oh, we did a terrible thing
and we're going to release these 239 hostages?

Is that a likely scenario? I don't think so.

We know there's an internal inquiry going on
and you said at the outset of this interview
that what had happened was a failure.

Why was Netanyahu tweeting out at the weekend?

Yeah, it may have been a failure,
but it was nothing to do with me.

So first of all, he apologized for that tweet and he deleted it.

So it was foolish.

Yes, he said it was a mistake.

He said it was a mistake.

But first of all, let's be frank.

Everyone understands that what happened on October 7th
from a Israeli perspective was a failure,
a terrible failure that cost us in blood.

First of all, we didn't have advanced warning
that this was going to happen
and we pride ourselves on having very good intelligence services.

And here, obviously, there were mistakes.

And secondly, once they crossed the border,
how quick was the army and the police there
to stop them killing and murdering people
and obviously not quick enough
because we lost 1,400 people.

And as you know, over 200 people were taken hostage.

So Israel is not happy with obviously the way we've acted here
and when this is over, there'll be inquiries,
there'll be investigations and there'll be lessons learned
and there'll be consequences.

We've done that sort of thing in the past.

I mean, you don't have to be an expert on Israeli history,
but after the 1973 war, after the Lebanon War in 2006,
when there's been a military mistake or a level
where people have said the government hasn't done its job,

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we've had independent investigations,
we do that in Israel, we've done it before, we'll do it again.
Do you accept that the government was too preoccupied
with fighting its own internal battles
with the people of Israel all through the summer?
We remember the protests, the push for legislation,
the changes to the judicial system.
Instead of actually thinking about existential threats
to your country, you were just waging war
within your own system.
It seems crazy now, Mark.
It does seem a bit crazy.
I don't accept waging war,
but obviously Israeli politics had become very passionate
and very polarized and we were having demonstrations
and people liked the government.
And that was Netanyahu's fault.
Nobody was asking for judicial review.
There were people on the street saying,
don't clamp down on the democracy.
You can have any opinion you like,
but there was a strong constituency in Israel
for judicial reform.
You can't negate that.
But if we want to put it into perspective,
I'd say the following.
When Hamas entered Israel
and they started butchering people and massacring
and raping and burning people alive,
they didn't ask you if you voted left or you voted right.
They didn't ask if you liked Netanyahu or disliked him.
They didn't ask you what position
you have on judicial reform.
Yes? They murdered you because you were a Jew.
They murdered you because you were an Israeli.
And for many of us, I think that's a bit of a wake-up call.
We have to understand that we've got a common destiny
and that the people who don't like us
really don't care how we vote.
But the point of Netanyahu, surely,
was that Israel's security was meant to be paramount.
That his focus, his entire focus,
should have been on keeping his country safe
and he failed.

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Well, obviously, there's been a failure and there'll be investigations to see as to what level the Prime Minister, obviously, he bears overall responsibility. He is the Prime Minister. He's in the number one job. Do you think he will resign? He is at the moment committed to winning this war, right? And no one else is being resigned at the moment. I think the idea is we've got a team. The team has been expanded because, as you know, one of the opposition parties, a major opposition party joined the government in this, you know, Israel is one unity at this stage to defeat Hamas, to end this rule of terror in Gaza. So when it's over, there'll be plenty of time for politics. You just said something that struck me, which is you said after 1973, after the Yom Kippur War, there were lessons that were learned and that things happened as a result of that. It was the end of my year as Prime Minister. I mean, I just wonder whether you think it will be the end of Benjamin Netanyahu as well. I'd remind you that in December 1973, which is two, three months after the war, Golda Meir actually won the election and then she chose to resign four or five months later. But her party won the election under her leadership. I don't want to speculate what will happen in the future. There's politics. Let's leave that for politics and that'll happen when the war is over. At the moment, Israelis are united and we see it in the polls like never before. We have to defeat Hamas. We have to end its rule of terror in Gaza. Okay, they're united in a different way as well. Times of Israel poll from last week says 80% of Israelis believe Netanyahu must take public responsibility for October the 7th and 69% that's nearly seven in 10 of Likud voters think he should. They do not believe that Netanyahu is the right person to lead the country anymore.

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So we're a democratic society.

There will be elections.

There's a parliament.

There's a way these things, you know,
there's no dictatorship in Israel.

Yes, if the politicians in the Knesset
believe that the government has to fall,
that will happen.

But I would remind you that the opposite has happened
that actually a major center party that was until recently
the opposition has joined the government
for the duration of the war because we won victory.

When the war is over, when we've defeated Hamas,
when we've dismantled their military machine,
there'll be plenty of time for partisan politics.

Mark, I'm just struck by the fact
that you talk about dismantling Hamas.

There have been a succession of skirmishes, fights, battles, wars.

I was on the Israel-Lebanon border
when the last fighting took place.

Everything you say at the time, spokesmen like yourself
and often yourself, have come on and said,
this is to dismantle Hezbollah.

This is to dismantle Hamas.

The reverse has happened.

In all these battles, they have come back stronger.

Isn't the danger that even if you get rid of Hamas,
there will be another more radicalized body
who will take their place?

I don't think so.

In fact, I think Hamas is going to be shown to be a failure.

And that the path of Hamas, the radicalism,
the extremism, you know, Hamas says,
we reject Israel's right to exist in any borders.

Hamas says that every Jew is a legitimate target for murder.

Hamas says any Arab who negotiates with Israel
is a traitor to the Muslim world and to the Arab world.

Yes, that path of violence and extremism is a dead end.

And I think the people of Gaza can see that now
more clearly than anyone else.

They will be discredited.

And there'll be room, I hope, when Hamas is gone.

There'll be room for more pragmatic voices
because they'll see where that sort of nihilism,

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that sort of extremism, where that leads.
It hurts Palestinians more than anyone else.
Nobody is cheerleading for Hamas.
But the idea that this would somehow lead
to a pragmatic solution is just fanciful.
We see how Israel enters Gaza.
We can't see how you leave.
We can't see how you create a system
that's left amidst the rubble of people
who are suddenly welcoming to your big ideas.
Because without a peace project, without a political solution,
you can have no security.
And that's exactly my point.
Because Hamas has been opposed to any political solution.
Hamas says anyone who makes peace with Israel is a traitor.
So talk us through what you want to do then.
You imagine the end of Hamas somehow
with buildings raised to the ground
and however many thousands of civilians killed.
And out of that what?
Which we don't want. We don't want.
You then govern Gaza, do you?
You control Gaza. What happens?
You have seen over the last three weeks
what Hamas is capable of.
I'm not talking about Hamas.
I'm talking about your vision of what comes next.
But you don't agree that the people of Gaza
will be better off without Hamas?
That's the bottom line.
What is your vision for Gaza
if and when you have succeeded and Hamas has gone?
So hopefully there will be a remember in Gaza.
And this is the thing that a lot of people unfortunately
have forgotten.
Israel pulled out of the Gaza Strip
when Ariel Sharogma's Prime Minister.
We took down all the settlements
and we went back to the 1967 line, yes?
Theoretically, according to the international communities
a way of looking at the Arab-Israel conflict
there's no reason for conflict between Gaza and Israel.
There are no settlements.
There is no occupation.

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Well, there were very high walls
that trapped people in Gaza and stopped them from leaving.
Why are there high walls?
They weren't high enough.
They didn't keep them from coming and murdering us
and butchering us, yes?
Okay, so let's just step away then
from the idea that there was no occupying power.
Clearly there was because gardens were meant to stay in Gaza.
Who controls Gaza?
Israel controls Gaza?
 Hamas controls Gaza.
That's the problem.
Okay, but let us go on to, I mean,
I just really interested to know what you think comes next.
Because I suspect that one of the reasons
that support is hemorrhaging for what you're doing
is that people can't see beyond the destruction
what the plan is.
And we've asked you about four times now what the plan is
and you're saying, well,
we just hope that something kind of more moderate
comes out of it.
So we are convinced that the alternatives to Hamas rule
are preferable to Hamas rule.
 Hamas rule is clearly unsustainable
unless you want to tell the Israeli public,
get used to the idea that every year
you'll have a massacre like we had on October 7th,
which is clearly not acceptable.
But does Israel have a role to play in that?
That's what we're asking.
Do we have a role to play?
Do you have a role in what happens in Gaza next?
I mean, what does it look like?
So we're, I can't go into too much detail and I apologize.
Because you don't know?
No, that's not very nice of you to say.
Of course, I've been in meetings where we've discussed
with international interlocutors all sorts of scenarios
for what happens on the day after.
I'm not at liberty to discuss that.
If you want to think I don't know, that's fine.
But there are scenarios.

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We can't talk about them yet.

A lot of those scenarios talk about solutions that we believe can work.

And our interlocutors believe can work as well.

I can't share them with you at this time and I apologize.

But we are thinking two, three steps ahead.

We're not just thinking we've got to destroy Hamas.

Everything depends on that.

Without that, there is no solution.

And you think the solution is going to be working with, alongside, Gazans, the Palestinian people who will be welcoming your solution.

Is that right?

I don't think it'll be a dictated Israeli solution.

I think we can talk about something that will have an international backing behind it.

That's our hope.

Wouldn't it be better if people knew what some idea of what this plan is?

Because, you know, if you want to win hearts and minds, not just in Israel, not just among the Palestinian community but around the world.

At the moment, there is a vision which is we want to destroy Hamas.

There is nothing beyond that.

Yeah.

But in itself, that's a crucial, important goal.

Can I give you a British example?

You were part of the coalition that destroyed ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

You did a very good job.

You destroyed ISIS.

Now, maybe the situation in those territories which were once run by ISIS are not perfect today, but they're definitely better off than they were when ISIS was there.

And the goal there was to restore a democratic regime in Iraq.

And in Syria, and it's only partially being created.

Yes, there's still countless problems there, but it's better than it was under ISIS.

And I'm convinced that it'll be better in Gaza after Hamas is gone as well.

How long do you think this is going to take?

I don't know.

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I think because our goal is to bring about the destruction of Hamas.
In the past, you know, we never said we were going to destroy Hamas.
We wanted to deter Hamas.
This is the first time we're talking about the destruction of its military machine and its political control.
This could take longer than is expected, because we have to be in there for the long run.
There's no point of hitting Hamas.
Is expected.
So the three months was the one that we were sort of told.
It would take at least three months.
So where does expected stand now?
So I can't give you a specific figure.
I don't think anyone responsible can give you a specific figure.
We will eliminate Hamas.
We will destroy their military machine.
They will no longer be a threat either to the people of Israel.
And they will no longer have that dictatorship in Gaza where they can dictate and subjugate the Palestinians to their crazy extremist agenda.
Okay, you can't give a timetable for how long this goes on.
No one can, though.
It's not my friend.
No one can.
Okay, that's fair enough.
There's no point pushing you on that.
You're not going to give me a timetable.
But can you assure Palestinians, the international community, that whilst this campaign is going on, they are going to be fed, they're going to have desalinated water, and they are going to have medicines that will keep them alive?
So we've been talking to the international community about having this safer zone in the southern Gaza Strip towards the coast.

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And then supplies will be coming in through the Rafa crossing from Egypt. At the moment, it's a low level, but we believe that we can deal with some logistic issues and we can have more and more supplies coming in. And the idea is why the conflict is ongoing, that there'll be a safe zone for the people of Gaza. That's the goal. You've heard what people say, that they're not choosing where to live now, they're choosing where to die. I don't accept that. It's clear that hundreds of thousands of Gazans don't agree with you either because they've chosen to move to the south. They understand it's safer there. Last night, we saw scenes at Dagestan airport, the Russian enclave of Dagestan, that were very anti-Israeli. They were very anti-Semitic. They were anti-Jew. I want to understand now, Israel's relationship to Russia and the messages that this is sending out to you. Obviously, the Russian government has to do a better job at protecting the local Jewish community. But I think, unfortunately, this sort of extremism we're seeing in Europe, and I hesitate to say, maybe there are manifestations of it in Britain too. The Hamas ideology, which basically says, you've got to kill Jews, it's there. Does that alter your relationship with Russia and with Putin in your future dealings? We've had a problematic relationship with Russia ever since they formed their alliance with Iran. And Iran, we haven't mentioned Iran in this whole conversation,

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but Hamas wouldn't be the power it is without Iran.

Over 90% of its military budget
is coming straight from Tehran.

Yes, it's arms, it's training,
it's the logistic support,
it's funding is Iranian.

That we all know,
just like Hezbollah in Lebanon.

But you dismiss what I say.
Hamas obviously is part of the world,
a world movement of Muslim Brotherhood,
of extreme Islam,
and they are, unfortunately, not just in Russia.

There are other places too.

And I think a lot of Jewish communities
around the world are going through a difficult time.

They're worried about attacks.

Mark Regev, thanks very much.

Thanks for your time.

Thank you.

Thanks for having me.

Appreciate it.

This is The News Agents.

The thing that struck me at the end of the interview
where we tried to say,
okay, so what's the end game?

You know, you ask the question,
it's easy for troops to go in.

How'd you get out?

How'd you get out?

And what does that look like?

I thought he was incredibly vague
or deliberately obfuscatory
or maybe doesn't know.

Yeah.

I mean, the number of times he mentioned Hamas
and that first priority,
and I think we can assume that the hostage release
is no longer the top priority,
that the destruction of Hamas actually is paramount.
And if they lose hostages along the way,
that was a sense I got from what he was saying.

It won't be anything that they want,
but they are prepared to see that now.

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He reinforced the need to get rid of Hamas.
And if you ask for that,
and then what, answer came then on.
And I do think that that is a mistake.
I've got to say, I mean, you know,
far be it for me to try and advise anybody
when I'm not making these sort of life and death decisions
in government for any shade of people in power.
But you've got to surely be able to say
to the international community,
upon whose support Israel sort of depends,
and military support from America certainly,
that this is how we want to see us living in peace
or alongside or cohabiting
or whatever or sharing this small piece of earth
with our neighbors.
And I just thought it was kind of telling that there was,
it seemed to be the answer from Reg F was,
anything is better than what we've got.
Also, this idea that
gardens actually were living quite happily
before this happened.
They weren't occupied,
they weren't trapped or the rest of it.
And I said, well, actually,
there was a really high wall around there.
He said, knee-jerk reaction, not high enough.
And I was like, well, I think you've just proved my point there,
that there will be many gardens
who are deeply unhappy with the government of Hamas,
but it doesn't mean they're having a great time
that side of the wall.
It means that actually,
they were just trying to get on and live their lives.
But actually, I think the need to have a fairer solution
to this whole thing is staring everyone in the face.
And I think that there is,
he was sort of gave scant detail
of how they could get the humanitarian supplies in.
And I kind of just given the urgency
of the humanitarian crisis at the moment,
that so many gardens are facing,
whether it's food, whether it's medicines,
whether it's clean water, whatever it happens to be,

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the basics of civilized society,
that I thought there was kind of,
if you kind of want to assure people
that your target is not the Palestinians,
but it is just Hamas,
which is what he kept saying,
then Israel should be straining every sinew to be doing that.
And you just feel, actually, that's not happening.
Two things I'd say is that,
one, in previous interviews,
I've often heard Mark Regev push back at the numbers.
And this time, we took the numbers out of it.
And as a result, he actually had to admit
that of course civilians were dying,
of course children were dying,
and he kept on saying that's not what we want,
which isn't the same as that's not happening.
And so I think there is a very strong recognition now
that this is not only a huge human tragedy,
but that this is not looking good
for the Netanyahu administration
to be leaving many, many people injured,
maimed, dying kids.
You know, we've heard 10-year-olds having amputations
without medicine because they just can't get the support.
That is not where the Netanyahu government wants to be.
The other thing I'd say is,
is the use of the word target.
It's all very well-saying.
We've hit 72 targets.
What is a target?
Is a target a Hamas terrorist?
If so, please tell us you've killed 72 Hamas terrorists.
Is it a building where there might be something related
to a terrorism network in there?
Is it a hospital? Is it a target?
Could it be anything?
So when you use targets,
it sounds like it's very strategic
and very surgical and very clean,
but most of the time they're not hitting one terrorist.
They're hitting thousands or they're hitting many, many people.
And I was with a sort of number of military people
at the end of last week,

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and you were talking about rules of engagement
and the rules of engagement are normally
very strictly written.

And the problem of working,
it was US military and British military working together,
where you've got slightly different rules of engagement.

What are the rules of engagement
where if you think that there is one Hamas commander
in a block of flats where 200 people live,
300 people live,

can you bomb the whole building
in the hope of killing...

What's the value of a life?

Exactly.

And I think that those are the things where
Israel finds itself in the court of public opinion
and not doing very well at all.

So I think that, again,
the idea of surgical strikes is one of those phrases
that I think should be banned,
because often in military conflict...

It's meant to shut us up.

Yeah, exactly.

And there's very little that is surgical
when you're dropping bombs from above.

We're going now, but we haven't stopped worked.

We are running off to...

As if.

To...

I actually once did my marathon training to the O2,
not today.

We are going to find an alliance of responsible citizens.

We hope.

Well, it's the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship,
which sounds like kind of,
what does that actually mean?

Well, I think it's broadly speaking
a pretty right-wing grouping,
but they have attracted a lot of very senior right-wingers
from around the world.

America, Australia.

And we are going to dip our toes in the water
and see who will speak to us,

because there's one or two very high-profile Americans there,

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and we'd love to hear what they think.

Bye for now.

Bye-bye.

We'll be back tomorrow.

The news agents with Emily Maitlis,

John Sopo, and Louis Goodall.

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and a Persephoneka production.