

[Transcript] The News Agents / What is Netanyahu's next move?

This is a Global Player Original Podcast.

That is the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressing the nation last night.

And the translation of what he says is, we are the people of the light.

They are the people of darkness.

We shall realise the prophecy of Isaiah.

It is almost as though he is announcing a holy war, a biblical justification for what is about to unfold in 2023.

How that plays in the rest of the world is arguable.

Netanyahu wouldn't be the first person to invoke God or religion before an act of war.

And I guess it just throws into relief now what we are on the cusp of.

A ground invasion, which we have been told will go ahead.

There is no timescale.

We do not know the urgency of this, but we know it's going to happen.

Today we're going to analyse what it could look like and what the end is in sight for Gaza and for Israel itself.

Welcome to the newsagents.

The newsagents.

It's John.

It's Emily.

And a little bit later on in the podcast, it's almost like a comic interlude, we're going to be talking about the travails of finding a speaker for the House of Representatives in the US.

They've finally done it.

The well-known household name that is, hang on, looks at his notes, Mike Johnson.

Yeah, this is what happens if you've gone through every other member of the House of Representatives before you finally find one that they will vote for.

We'll bring you all that and explain what the importance is a bit later.

But back to Israel and to Netanyahu, who has vowed to fight Hamas above ground, underground, in Gaza and outside Gaza.

And don't forget that Netanyahu, I guess, if you were going to reduce him to one idea or one abstract noun, it would be this idea of security.

He is Mr. Security.

He's not a particularly touchy-feely politician.

He's not known as somebody who gets into the weeds of civilians' needs or the day-to-day running of the country, but he sees himself as the protector-in-chief.

And what happened on October the 7th has laid bare the fact he manifestly failed.

He manifestly failed to protect his people.

So the kind of language that is coming out from him now, and don't forget, you know, he is, if you like, one of the original populist leaders.

He's an authoritarian populist leader who has managed to shut down opposition, not least by sort of telling those who oppose him, telling those who criticize him that they were not passionate enough about Israel enough, they were not patriotic enough.

And he is invoking God, the Bible, Isaiah, this sense of light and darkness in order to wage a war that he and I think many other Israelis now believe is just and is justified.

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Yes.

There is undoubtedly a strong sense of Israeli public opinion that feels that Hamas has to be rooted out, that the status quo can't be restored, where Hamas is still in control in Gaza and able to launch another murderous attack.

Everyone can agree on that.

That's quite straightforward for Israeli public opinion.

But how you do it, how you weed out a group that is so deeply embedded into Gaza's society, I mean, kind of literally, it's not like there is an army with army bases.

These are people who hide their rocket launchers in public buildings like schools or hospitals or wherever it happens to be and wheel them out and wheel them back in again.

How do you fight in that situation?

And that is where Netanyahu has seemed to have been dithering.

It may be that there has been a lot of tough language.

The IDF, the Israeli Defense Force, has been ready to go and they have been saying, apparently to the Prime Minister, make your mind up.

What's going to happen?

Are you going in or are we not?

Yeah, I don't like the word dithering because actually ahead of war, I do want to have people in power who are thinking really hard about what they're going to do next.

And whether it's about making sure that you are asking civilians to vacate areas that you know you're going to bomb, whether it's making sure that your own soldiers are fully equipped, whether it's making sure that you have the international community supportive and I think we're going to come on to that a bit later because this is a really big area and we know as we were talking about yesterday on the news agents, it's all very well saying we back Israel's ability to defend herself.

What that actually looks like in practice is a very different thing.

But I think the fact that he has slowed down to this point, which is honestly, it's not that long.

I mean, it's two and a half weeks.

It's not that long a pause before you go and raise a place with two million people to the ground, which is what may end up happening, I think is really important.

And I think it also speaks to what they are nervous about.

So last night, we know after he spoke to the nation, after he talked about the Sons of Lightness and Darkness, they did actually incur a raid and it was a tentative, I guess, attempt to see what would happen on the ground there.

Will they find Hamas?

Will they find the network of tunnels?

Will they incur the wrath of their American allies in particular?

Will they face retaliation at home?

And I suppose that was what this was.

It was literally an exercise, an exercise in what happens if we do this.

You're right to pick up on the word dithering.

But the military, if you're in a state of readiness, you need to go.

I was in the Kuwaiti Desert in 2003 waiting for the order for American and British troops

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to go in to get rid of Saddam Hussein.

You've got guys, thousands and thousands of troops standing there ready.

The temperature is getting hotter in the Kuwaiti Desert each day.

Yet the cool was coming out.

Well, give the weapons inspectors more time.

You just simply couldn't leave troops there for much longer in a state of readiness.

So I suspect there is that sense of, look, we do need a decision one way or the other.

So yeah, there is a balance to be struck between reflection.

Are we making the right decision and dithering when you've got an army ready to go?

Let's hear now from Shashank Joshi, defence editor of The Economist.

And Shashank, tell us about the raid that took place last night.

What happened last night?

Was this a test to see how public opinion would react?

How Hamas would react?

Take us through it.

There's lots of things that could be happening here.

The IDF described what they did as a raid.

And in traditional military terms, raid means that you're going in somewhere with a typically slightly smaller force and your aim isn't to capture the ground.

It is to destroy some objective, perhaps cause some sort of harm, have a psychological effect on the enemy, prove that you can do that, stretch their forces, make them move their defensive forces around, and of course, also potentially testing the waters, seeing what, for example, is a disposition of their forces.

Do you run into electronic warfare and jamming?

Do you run into anti-tank weapons?

How well-prepared are their fortifications?

So I think what's happening is, in part, Israel may have been looking for hostages on the basis of intelligence, although I think that's more unlikely given they'll have been held further away from the borders of Gaza.

It may have been testing Hamas positions and it may have been softening up the ground in preparation for the ground invasion that I still think is inevitable.

And Benjamin Netanyahu has promised now within the last 24 hours.

And what is your sense of timing on that from what happened last night, Shashank?

My gut feeling, Emily, is soon, sooner rather than later.

And the reason I say that is because they have waited a long time.

It's been two weeks, more than two weeks since the events of October 7th.

The IDF did need a few days to get ready.

They didn't have all their armor in place.

They needed to call up reservists.

Reservists, you know, these are people who may not have had military training in a while.

They may need to brush up on their skills.

So I understand why it wasn't immediate.

But there is a sense of impatience in the IDF from the sources that we're talking to.

There's a sense of itchy feet.

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They're waiting for the war cabinet to make up its mind.
They're also waiting for the Americans to get all their forces into position in the region in case it kicks off.
But they can't stay at this level of readiness for weeks on end.
No military can.
It just isn't possible.
You've got soldiers in forward positions outside of their typical barracks.
You've got vehicles fueled up, ready to go.
People have, you know, emergency procedures to be on alert against rocket attack.
They can't do this for, you know, two, three more weeks.
They are going to have to go in, I think, within days.
And you've explained clearly the military, the strategic delay that we might be seeing.
What about psychologically?
Do you think anything that the US is saying or that the EU is saying or that other Arab nations in that region are saying is having an effect on Netanyahu's plans now?
I think the single most important factor in his judgment will be what the Americans are saying to him.
For Israel, they always fight their war against the backdrop of what they see as international pressure for a ceasefire.
That always happened.
It's happened for decades.
It's not new.
And they know the Arab governments will be criticizing them.
That's just background noise to them.
They know the Global South, Turkey, China, others will be criticizing them again.
That's always the case.
What really matters is what the Americans say, because they are providing them with critical ammunition, with arms, with intelligence.
And if things really kick off, if Iran enters this conflict or if Hezbollah does so in force, American firepower in the region could be very important.
So if the Americans say, wait, hang on, let us get everything in place.
Or if the Americans say, you've had one week on the ground, wrap this up, those kind of messages will make a difference.
The rest, Europeans, others, I just think they will be filtering it out.
And do you think that explains the delay between the readiness of the IDF to go in and their itchy feet, as you just described it?
Yes, I think the biggest factor here is the northern front, which we've talked about before, but the northern front, the possibility of Hezbollah with its 150,000 rockets, many more of them precision guided than was the case in the last big Israel-Hezbollah war of 2006.
And therefore, a much more fiendish challenge for missile defense, because you can no longer ignore half the rockets that are flying off into open terrain.
They'll all be landing on military targets.
You've got to intercept them all the need to prepare for that both on the ground, on the Israeli northern front, in the air with the preparation for missile defense, with

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attacks on American interests in the region.

We've seen attacks on US forces in Iraq, an incredible figure of 24 Americans, I think having died in the last two weeks in these attacks.

You know, that's astonishing.

That would be headline news in any other week.

And that's almost part of this drumbeat to war on this occasion.

So getting that ready is the primary reason, I think, for this delay, as well as the degree of political dithering among what is a kind of cobbled together war cabinet composed of political rivals inside Israel.

You use that word inevitable about a ground invasion.

I mean, just to ask you to step back, what is their aim?

I mean, I understand the state of aim.

The state of aim is to get rid of Hamas.

But do you understand from talking to the IDF, from talking to your sources, where they would stop now?

I mean, how many casualties they would be willing to see, what they would want to do with Gaza afterwards, what the end game is, really?

I confess, I have not got a clear sense of that.

We did hear the Israeli Defense Minister Galant say the other day that visage an operation that could last for up to three months, which is actually very short.

You know, the battle to clear Mosul from ISIS several years ago, that took nine months, along with a much longer period of preparation.

So I'm realistic about that, what they can achieve.

I also think we heard him say that the end game was a three stage operation, the preparatory phase now, the ground operation.

And then he effectively said, we're going to remove our responsibility for Gaza.

Now, there's a problem between those two statements, because in three months or even four or five months, Hamas is still going to be in Gaza.

Hamas is going to be in Gaza.

Just to give you a sense of this, to step back in 2001, when America toppled the Taliban, I think the Taliban had been in charge of Kabul for about four or five years, five years, I think Hamas have been in charge of Gaza for 16 years. They are really embedded in.

So to that end, I think Israel is going to have to choose between an open ended occupation to fight house to house for over a year, or a lesser campaign in which they pull out, but Hamas will be there at the end of it.

And they will then really have to decide do they conduct further incursions, further air attacks or agree to some kind of ceasefire as they have in every other campaign, which seems unlikely to me at this stage.

So this could go on, even though they say three months, it could go on actually much, much longer.

Absolutely.

You know, look at the history of urban war.

It's not just Mosul, it's Fallujah in Iraq, it's Ramadi.

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It's all sorts of other examples I could give you.

There's just no campaign, which in three months has with the fourth ratios that Israel has, which is, I think if you count them all up, could be at best 10 to one in favour of Israel, which is what you need for an urban operation. But in practice, it's looking more like three to one, which is really going to mean a much slower operation.

None of those campaigns will have eliminated the enemy, not least with tunnels, I think I spoke to you about last time in this period of time.

It has to be a land campaign if it is going to succeed in its stated aims.

But they are talking about hundreds of thousands of Palestinian deaths then.

I know Israel always questions the numbers and they say that the numbers coming out of Gaza are inaccurate, but really bluntly, that's what they are thinking of now, right?

Well, I'm cautious about hundreds of thousands.

That's very high.

But if you look at similar wars in dense urban areas, even ones where there's been extensive use of precision guided munitions, armies that have been quite cautious in how they approach the issue, you're looking at extremely high civilian casualties. That is absolutely unavoidable.

I'm wary of getting a number, but I mean, I think we're looking at many, many thousands of deaths and it depends partly where the civilian population evacuates and how Israel proceeds.

But I will say that Israel is fighting with a conscript army, right?

These are people who are not professional soldiers in large part, and it puts a particular premium on protecting those lives of those soldiers.

They're not professionals, they're civilians, they're drafted, most cases.

And so it will use more force than a Western army might to try and, you know, for example, use firepower, artillery, air attack to suppress the enemy than a Western army might in the same circumstances.

Last one Israeli official said to me last week, it's us or them.

This is just viewed in those us or them existential terms.

And for them, they just cannot envisage a situation in which the group that perpetrated October 7th is still running Gaza at the end of this.

And that will allow them and push them into accepting, I think, very high civilian casualties in Gaza.

Well, we talked a little bit about international response to what Israel is doing now, and clearly, I think it's fair to say there is a real growing unease in this country, not with Israel's right to defend itself, but with what impact that is now having on the people of Gaza, on the Palestinian people, many of whom are now dying in their droves.

And it's something that Labour MPs with large Muslim constituencies have been putting pressure on their own leader to confront.

And yesterday, as we were describing, Kirstahmer and Angela Rayner were in a meeting with, I think, around 12 of their Muslim parliamentarians

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after Prime Minister's questions to get a sense of what they are now asking for and what their constituents are telling them on the doorstep.

And also, the backdrop to that meeting was that there had been a number of resignations of local councillors saying they could no longer support the Labour Party. And in Oxford, it had cost Labour Party the majority on Oxford City Council. There were other areas around the country, too, with big Muslim populations where councillors had resigned.

And there was even talk that shadow cabinet members, a couple of shadow cabinet members, might go. So there was a pretty feisty backdrop to this meeting that Kirstahmer had with his backbench MPs.

And we've been trying to gauge, well, is it peace and love now in the Labour Party or is there an uneasy truce?

So let's speak now to Khalid Mahmoud, the Labour MP for Birmingham, Perry Barber, because he was at that meeting yesterday.

The meeting was very cordial. We had our views first, and then he responded and he wanted to make sure that he did respond to all of our views.

And so did Angela at the end as well.

And what were your views?

Our views concerns that are raised by our constituents in relation to how they feel. Everybody condemns Hamas.

And every time Hamas has acted, they will always put the lives of Palestinians in danger. And this is no different.

But what we wanted to do is to support those very people that Hamas uses as a shield as well.

So it was important for us to look at how we can support those people, how the Labour Party can support those people.

That was your position.

Where was Kirstahmer?

Because I think you want him to say there needs to be a ceasefire.

I think there are a number of issues that we raised.

I just want to know where you think Kirstahmer is.

Well, I think I think I don't think there is much of a gap at the moment.

His key's objectives generally are that there now has to be clear aid supporting the people of Gaza.

There has to be support, medical support for them.

And there has to be a pause in order to deliver that.

And that's the way forward.

So I mean, what can he do?

What are you actually asking him to do?

Because this is clearly outside his hands, right?

Well, of course.

But what we wanted to do was all of us to get together and allay the concerns of our constituents and explain.

By saying what?

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But just by saying some of the things that we raised in relation to how do we support the people in Gaza?
It wasn't just to show that everybody is in support of Hamas.
We we condemn the actions of 7th of October.
But what we really want to do is ensure that those people in Gaza are supported and protected.
And there has to be a way around this rather than just full on military action in the region.
Do you think he's been in the right place so far?
Look, I think it started very suddenly.
And I think he has.
Obviously, there were issues that with the LBC interview with Nick Ferrari.
That's been corrected by Enlarge.
And I think he is in a positive place to move forward on this.
The idea of the meeting was to start to push that in that direction and get us to move forward, but also not the only meeting we're going to have.
There's going to be lots more meetings in process.
Hasn't one we need them.
That's what we've been offered.
You spoke a moment ago about your constituents and their concerns.
How widespread is the anger at the stance that's been taken by the Labour leadership among your supporters in Birmingham, Perry Barr or, you know, other Muslim MPs, other MPs around the country?
Because we've seen resignations and people saying, I'm not going to vote Labour anymore after this.
People to make those sort of decisions very premature.
What we've got to see is how we move forward and how we deliver the issues that are important to us, which is predominantly the aid to people.
Ensuring the lives.
And I understand all of that.
And I understand all of that.
And you've made that point very eloquently.
I just want to kind of the mood of people in your constituency, ordinary Muslims that you're talking to about the stance that Labour has taken.
They were not happy originally, obviously because the media reports that came through, Sir Keir's move to try and lay those fears and has moved forward, clarified that position.
We've now had a meeting with it.
So I think people see that there is a dynamic forward and discussion with the members of parliament.
And so we can move that forward.

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And that's exactly what we're doing.
This won't be an only meeting.
There will be a number of meetings.
As we see that more issues are raised.
And Sir Keir has given us a guarantee that he's prepared to meet us
whenever we call for that meeting.
Do you think Keir Starmer should call for a ceasefire?
Look, I think ultimately I want there to be a ceasefire.
At the moment, the position is that let's go for a cessation
in terms of a pause and try and get the yade in.
So pause means, obviously, that they would start that again, right?
I mean, you're prepared to see further incursions or even a ground war.
Well, no, I'm not prepared to see any further incursions or a ground war.
I don't think that's helpful to the IDF or to the people of Gaza.
And certainly, I think in terms of the Hamas, that just has to be finished.
I think we need to get the regional people, players in board,
and to ensure that we can get somehow Hamas out and a proper election
and allow the people to move forward.
You've been unambiguous, condemning what Hamas did.
And you say you've always been opposed to Hamas.
Given the fact that 1400 Israelis died,
do you believe that Israel has the right to defend itself?
Israel has to, as a right to defend itself, within international law,
has all democracies.
But yes, but if you've got Hamas hiding in hospitals or schools,
what should Israel do?
You know, you say, in theory, they've got the right to defend themselves.
But what does that look like when Hamas are hiding in the civilian population?
Well, this is what I say, that you have to have local partners engaged in that.
So what we want to do is to resolve the issue of Hamas.
But that can't be just done by blowing things up.
What we have to do is look for a decent way of moving that around.
So it doesn't have to be resolved by a full on ground invasion.
I think there are other ways of doing that.
And when you're talking to Kerstama, I mean, this idea of a pause,
as I've said, suggests that military action will then take place again.
What's his sense of a ground invasion?
What's his sense of continued military action?
I mean, well, any action as far as he's concerned,
and this was quite clear, is that has to be in compliance with international law.
It has to be compliant with human rights and civil liberties of people.
It has to be in compliance as far as I'm concerned, in terms of Geneva Convention.
So all those issues have to be dealt with where there's a huge.
But he didn't say to you yesterday, I do not want to see Israel go into Gaza.

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No, we've had this and just isn't one discussion that we've had.
All of us had to say he responded to that.
And I think that was positive.
And the fact that we all came out of it being positive.
And what we want to do is get back further into there,
when perhaps we come back after the kids after the break and for the King's speech.
Perhaps we can have another meeting and see where the issues are going.
So we have to look at this.
I think a grand war is not in support of the IDF or in support of anybody else,
because all there's going to be is much more casualties.
And that's what we have to avoid in any kind.
And if Kerstama gets it wrong,
misjudges the mood among your colleagues.
Resignations, do you think that's possible?
Well, anything's possible.
But I don't see at the moment from the meeting that we had yesterday,
that any of my colleagues from the front bench, I'm not on the front bench,
but any of my colleagues on the front bench are looking to do that at the moment.
And I don't feel that at all.
But equally, Kerstama's got to stay listening.
Otherwise, there could be.
Well, look, that's already been agreed.
Kerstama has already agreed that he's listening and people were happy with that.
And one of the things that was raised from this issue is that we're in a political party.
And in order to get our say, we have to engage in the political process
within our party to move us to a position where most of us, most of us as Muslim MPs,
but a lot of other MPs who have Muslim constituents also to be in that place.
So what we're doing is interacting with our democratic right within our party
to move that forward.
So that's the most important thing.
Resigning doesn't help that.
Thank you.
Thanks for coming in. Thank you very much indeed.
Thank you. Thank you.
I mean, that was a man who did not want to create any waves between himself,
his group and the Labour leadership.
And you heard him continually refer to the fact this was one meeting of many
and they've been trying to play down the strength of the feeling,
at least publicly to us, to many journalists.
My sense is it's still there.
Oh, of course. Yeah, definitely.
I think that's absolutely the correct reading.
I thought it was instructive.
And I think that it speaks to Keir Starmer and Angela Rayner having done enough

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to reassure that they are being listened to, that their concerns are going to be met.
They might not see eye to eye on absolutely everything, but the door is open.

We want to keep a dialogue.

We don't want this to get out of control.

And I suspect that Keir Starmer is going to be waiting and watching and seeing what unfolds. We are going back to the first conversation with Shashank Joshi.

When there is a land incursion, well, maybe Labour's tune will change slightly.

I think it's very difficult, isn't it?

Because you can land on your language like humanitarian pause.

But the implications of that are once you have paused, then the fighting starts again.

And a lot of people are using the language of legal war, right?

Within the parameters of the Geneva Convention, within the parameters of international war, I guess at some stage we're going to have to move away from legal definitions of what is allowed and what isn't.

Because if the number of civilian deaths keeps rising, then I'm going to assume that Keir Starmer will not feel in the same position, will not be able to hold on to that same position that he has for the last two weeks.

Yes, you can keep saying it is Israel's right to defend herself.

And you can keep saying Israel wants to find, root out, destroy Hamas.

But we know that the people of Gaza, Palestinians, have been as much victims of Hamas as anyone else, and they are now the ones suffering from this retaliation.

I agree with all of that, except for the fact that I'm sure that Keir Starmer, when he was having to decide what he was going to say on the Gaza situation following the events of October the 7th, he and his advisers, and Starmer is a cautious politician, he doesn't do hot-headed remarks.

I think he would have war-gamed what the likely response is going to be, what could be the Israeli response and saying, am I comfortable with this position?

I think that if America is still supporting and Rishi Sunak is still supporting, it will be a very bold move for Keir Starmer to say, they've got it wrong.

We think there needs to be a ceasefire now.

I think that Keir Starmer is hunkering down for what could be a long battle on this and perhaps taking a lot of criticism from his own MPs and many within his own party for the stance he's taking.

Yeah, probably right.

This is The News Agents.

Hang out the bunting, let the brass band strike up,
let the confetti rain down in red, white and blue.

One Johnson is back in a place of huge power and leadership.

Not that Johnson, this Johnson.

I don't believe there are any coincidences in a matter like this.

I believe that scripture, the Bible is very clear
that God is the one that raises up those in authority.

He raised up each of you, all of us.

And I believe that God has ordained and allowed each one of us to be brought here

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for this specific moment in this time.

This is my belief.

I believe that each one of us has a huge responsibility today to use the gifts that God has given us to serve the extraordinary people of this great country and they deserve it.

That is Mike Johnson, the new Speaker of the House of Representatives.

After three weeks where everybody has thrown their hat into the ring, and their hats have been crushed, one man emerged.

We discussed it on the call whether he was Billy No-Mates in that he had only been there so recently.

It was actually that he was Billy No-Enemies.

He hadn't been around long enough for anyone to take exception to him.

And so finally, this guy that no one has ever heard of has now the third most powerful person in the US Constitution after the President and Vice President.

It's absolutely brilliant, isn't it?

We're going to tell you a little bit about him

because he comes from Louisiana.

He's only been a representative for congressmen for seven years.

I hear you saying, well, I don't remember Donald Trump having actually been a politician before he became President of America.

Come on, he toasted the apprentice.

That's a great qualification to be leader of the free world.

But this guy, just if you want to know three things about him, here they are.

He's from Louisiana.

He's a strong Christian believer.

He's very anti-gay marriage, very anti-abortion.

And he was part of the committee

that tried to help Trump overturn the 2020 election result.

Just let that sink in for a moment that the person who is now going to be America's third most powerful leader was on the side of Trump against America's Constitution.

He did everything he could to get Trump to stay in power when he hadn't won an election.

And that makes him in some ways

everyone's worst nightmare, who believes in democracy.

But for a lot of Democrats, happy days.

There is someone who is seen to be on the maga extreme of American politics, who is now in a position of power and authority.

And you mentioned anti-abortion, fiercely anti-abortion.

But that has cost the Republicans very dearly the fact that the Supreme Court has overturned Roe versus Wade, and abortion has become much more difficult.

And everywhere where abortion has been on the ballot as something to vote about, people have been voting to give women the right to choose.

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And so the idea that this could be politically popular actually comes with a very huge price tag attached. And we don't know what he's going to do about the call by Joe Biden to fund Ukraine, Israel, the border wall. We don't know what he's going to do about future legislation, about the government shutdown, which has to be decided on three weeks time. So you've got a guy who nobody knows anything about in this position of immense power. He said he's going to run the house like a well oiled machine. And he also had this take on democracy. Democracy is messy sometimes, but it is our system. This conference that you see, this House Republican majority is united. There is a sense that the real winner of that vote last night was exhaustion. They'd just gone through too much. They'd gone through too many candidates, too many rounds. We're sick of sitting in that room. And it's a bit like when you just give into your kids and give them pizza. I'm done here. You can have what you want. TV and pizza. I'm out of here. Little Eliza, our two-year-old granddaughter, is kind of, you know, really bashing over the head. Well, you know, yes, you can have a device. You can have your iPad on and watch Peppa Pig. So that's what they've got. They've got a guy who none of them hated enough, unlike the others, to vote out. But there's one other bit that we've just got to bring you because his wife wasn't there and there were people saying, well, hang on, where is Mrs. Johnson at this huge moment? And of course, the wives play a very important part in American politics. Donald Trump's wife, Melania, hasn't been seen for weeks and weeks and weeks. But I don't think we will hear Donald giving this explanation about why my Johnson's wife wasn't around. She spent the last couple of weeks on her knees and prayed to the Lord. And she's a little worn out. Two weeks, a long time. To be on your knees, praying. Yes, but it works. What can we say? Well done, Mike Johnson, a name now to be reckoned with. We'll no longer be making jokes. We'll be just admiring the awesome power that you can now wield. Speaker Johnson will be back in just a moment. This is The News Agents. We've been working very hard on a story of our own today. And it is about Rachel Reeves' book about famous female economists.

[Transcript] The News Agents / What is Netanyahu's next move?

Yeah, we worked quite hard on this.

Yeah, we worked quite hard by opening the Financial Times, which actually had done the work.

And so, yeah.

So we're just doing our own bit of plagiarism as well, because it is an astonishing story.

Rachel Reeves has written a book.

Well, most of it, it would seem.

But there are certain paragraphs and sentences that look as though they have been lifted straight from Wikipedia and also straight from something that Hillary Ben wrote.

I mean, to be fair, to put this in context, her publishers say the book was about the economists and their lives and their work, not about the details of their family life.

But it's not a great look if you've just brought out a book and you can't even claim that the stuff that's inside it wasn't at least your own work.

And it also doesn't reflect very well on whoever was editing it, that they didn't spot that.

But the FT did, and they didn't even do it through a sort of plagiarism machine.

They just did it by hand and it sounded familiar.

They just thought that some of these sentences sounded a bit clunky.

So they just thought, I know, I'll look at Wikipedia and oh, there is that sentence.

So a spokesperson for Reeves has said, we strongly refute the accusation that's been put to us by this newspaper, the FT, about plagiarism.

There were inadvertent mistakes and will be reflected in future reprints.

Does that sound like pulping?

What does that sound like?

It sounds like pulping.

It does, doesn't it? Oh, God, not a great, not a great October.

No. And no plagiarism at all.

We'll be back tomorrow with your questions.

Actually, all plagiarised because we literally read out what you wrote us and ask. But we credit it.

So therefore, it's not plagiarism.

OK, you're fine. We're fine.

In the references and footnotes, we've got it all covered.

At risk. Bye. See you tomorrow.

The news agents with Emily Maitlis, John Soaple and Louis Goodall.

This has been a global player, original podcast and a Persephoneka production.