

In conversation with Salam Fayyad, former Prime Minister of Palestine

5 December 2023

Prof. Raphael Cohen-Almagor: I'm very happy to host you, Professor Salam Fayyad. What prompted Hamas to carry out the attack on the seventh of October?

02:58

Prof. Fayyad: This will remain a matter of speculation for some time, until we have some authoritative statements as to the reasons underlying that attack on October 7. At the time, the Hamas movement put out a number of reasons and factors that underlay that decision to launch that attack, including specially what was happening on the ground for quite some time now. That attack was dubbed the hurricane. For about a year at least, up until October 7, there was a lot of speculation that the next Intifada was going to erupt in the occupied Palestinian territories, not because of what was happening or not happening in or around Gaza, but because of what was happening in the West Bank: an intensification of settler attacks, including terrorism and war, the intensification of Israeli incursions into so called area C of the Palestinian Authority and the rest of it. There were a lot of real grievances that were cited by the Hamas movement early on, revolving around those issues. Those are all legitimate Palestinian concerns and grievances. One can speculate on a lot of factors that may have underlaid. But we are where we are right now. What do you do to get out of the predicament that we all find ourselves in now, the relentless war that does not appear to be - if it were left up to Israel - anywhere near its conclusion. I hope it is not going to be left, because all that is likely to continue to happen is a lot more death and destruction. There will come a time and place for speculation and for political analysts to analyse and go beyond the words and pronouncements made. But for now, I'm in that space really asking the question what needs to happen for this war to end?

Prof. Cohen-Almagor: How did the attack and the aftermath of the attack affect the popularity of Hamas and the PLO?

Prof. Fayyad: Hamas was for quite some time, on and off, up or down, but generally speaking they had been on the path of ascendancy, politically speaking. Since their inception, and particularly after Oslo I recall. Around the mid 90s, they were polling at about 12% - 13%. Over time, their popularity rose, and more and more Palestinians found themselves aligned with their ideology and world view, particularly because of the failure of the Oslo paradigm, the political process – the peace process. The realisation set in amongst the Palestinian public at large that this process was not going to deliver on its promise of freedom, and statehood for persons on the territory occupied by Israel in 1967. And with the prospect of that diminishing rapidly over time, past the year 2000, more and more Palestinians found themselves aligned to Hamas' world view. It is the failure of the peace process itself that really accounts for its ascendancy. There were also missteps in the way Palestinian governance was handled over the years. Third, the manner in which successive Israeli governments dealt with the Palestinian Authority by actions that undermined the PA's capacity to govern, project its authority and convince people that it was the nucleus of the state in the making. Through a lot of actions taken by successive

Israeli governments, the PA became progressively weaker and weaker, and the competing ideology or philosophy on the Palestinian political scene that was Hamas, and like minded factions, gained in popularity and standing among Palestinian people, wherever they are. On your question, where they are directly and how they're standing, people have been influenced by the events of October 7 and the subsequent war that continues to rage as we speak. We have witnessed previous rounds of escalation. None of them comes close to being as serious and massive in scale, relative to what we see continue to unfold now. But the closest intensity was 2014. Every day, even in the immediate aftermath of massive bombing, carnage, destruction and all, some people begin to ask questions as to what got us into this in the first instance. People go through mood swings. Early on you would find people rallying around the call to resist the Israelis who have been occupying us, besieging us, turning Gaza into the world's largest open air prison and now largest cemetery probably. As time goes by, as the 2014 rounds of escalation went beyond 30 days, people began to really ask questions. but when all is said and done, and this is what I believe must receive a lot of attention. Good consideration, what is this war about? And regardless of what happens in between the start of the war and the escalation, where it ends, you know, some swings back and forth. But if you look at Hamas' trajectory over the period since 2005, onward, going through the first round of violence in 2006, escalation and all on the whole, it has risen significantly. And it has, by and large, held steady, not only in Gaza, but in the West Bank, maybe even more so in the West Bank than Gaza, judging by the one of the very few forms of elections that still take place in the Palestinian political arena. People look at university student council elections as a barometer of where sentiments are politically. Going back to the last national elections in the Palestinian Territory in 2006, they were in the majority. So they were a force to be reckoned with. The theory that on the strength of the war and bombardment they can be decapitated politically, I don't know if this is really a worthwhile bet to continue to invest in. I don't think it's the way it's going to work out. And I think if anything, Hamas will emerge from this war, again, the swings that people normally go through psychologically, end of the day, I don't think this is the way to go. Hamas is a political force to be reckoned with, an ideology to be reckoned with. And you do not really deal or handle or attempt to start to gain ground on movements like this with religious orientation, strong ideology, strong alignment with where people are sentimentally speaking in terms of the conflict with Islam, and the rest of it, you don't really confront a movement like this by trying to eliminate it physically – that's just an exercise in futility.

12:31

Prof. Cohen-Almagor: What is the relationship between Hamas and the PLO nowadays?

12:37

There is no formal relation in the sense of Hamas, not having ever been a component of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. There were attempts to incorporate Hamas into the body politic that's the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people going back to the 90s. There were attempts made during the days of the late Yasser Arafat to really come to an understanding with Hamas amicably, by consensus or agreement, not in a formal way - to include them in the Palestine National Council, which is our parliament, an offering of a certain percentage of delegates to the PNC by agreement, not by elections. There was a difference of view as to what that percentage was going to be. It was going to be less than 50%, for sure. When you look at the history of those conversations that were taking place, and they were not really that public, but if you look at the composition of that, that's

where it started. Even if Hamas was not really looking for an outright majority in the Palestine National Council, they were looking for a large enough Hamas presence such that if they were to align themselves with enough independents on the PNC then they would have the majority. On the other side, what was on offer was something that was going to make that task a little bit harder to get in, typically, what you might expect of that kind of negotiation. That didn't pan out. It didn't happen, and there was no agreement with Hamas. After that there were several rounds of dialogue known as the Cairo dialogue leading to some understandings as to how the Palestinian body politic can be reconstituted. That takes into account the opposition to Oslo, represented in the main at the time by Hamas, but there were others as well. There are some factions within the PLO itself that beg to differ with the PLO, most notably the PFLP. The PLO delegation at the time was represented, in the earlier rounds anyway, by President Mahmoud Abbas. What they came up with was something that I thought made a great deal of sense. If Hamas and the PIJ could not join the PLO, because of differences over the platform, which is obvious, in terms of platform of the solution of conflict with Israel, then the best way was to keep the PLO as it was and create something that is broader. That was called the unified leadership framework, which is essentially the PLO executive committee, plus the Secretaries General of Hamas, Jihad and others who were not a part of PLO. That was a very sensible way of doing things. So they created this framework, except that it's continued to be theoretical. It never really was activated or dusted off the shelf, notwithstanding many, many rounds of negotiations trying to really get to an arrangement, an agreement on a platform everybody could agree to. So since then, 2005 / 2006, and then this operation in 2007, after Hamas took over power in Gaza, subsequent to that there were many negotiations. The first one was in 2007, with agreement to form the national government. But in the course of that the unified leadership framework was activated, and continued to exist somehow. For example, in July of this year, there was a meeting for the Secretaries General of all factions. So there exists some kind of arrangement. My own take on it is that it never was used in a serious way. For example, the meeting that was held in July of this year ended up with a statement read out by President Abbas that called for the formation of a follow up committee to follow up on the work of the follow up committee that was set up... I don't know when that kind of thing, as opposed to agreeing on a platform around which people can work. Now, that platform does not have to be a single vision kind of platform. It could be a multiple vision platform that could get people around the table. Those ideas were there for a number of years, but they were never really taken up in a serious way. Factionalism, if you will. Factional rivalries dominated the Palestinian body politic for many, many decades, not only in the aftermath of the creation or inception of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Prof Cohen-Almagor: You spoke about Hamas' popularity. There were elections in the Palestinian Authority many years ago, in 2005/6. Do you foresee any election soon?

Prof. Fayyad: Soon? Well, let's first see the war come to an end. But beyond that, for some time now, I thought we need to go through some transitional period where things are rearranged and the ground is set for conducting fair and inclusive elections. First of all, against the backdrop of what's happening right now, it's a waste of time to be talking about elections. Some are talking about elections as well. But I just don't see how, in the midst of the catastrophe we're going through right now. What can we do to seriously consider that possibility? But beyond that, if we are going to have elections in an open and inclusive manner as we should – and, by the way, as we did, back in 2006 – a lot has to happen to open up the Palestinian political space for participation by wide segments of the Palestinian public that

have been excluded effectively, either because of lack of interest, apathy, or because of state intimidation. How serious can one be in talking about elections? Once you have people summoned for interrogation for posting things on Facebook? There's something fundamentally wrong with this kind of thinking. Would you anticipate if you were to conduct elections against the backdrop of the very tense relationship between the state government institutions and civil society, the public at large, a large segment of the public, especially the youth, it is clear to me that actually, even if one were to abstract from the impossibility of conducting elections against the backdrop of the calamity that is upon us right now, even if one was to abstract from that, we need a period of time during which there are new principles that are put in place and respected insofar as respecting the status of citizens, to repair a badly damaged relationship between the government and citizens. That's absolutely essential. This is true both in Gaza and the West Bank. There are no heroes here. So it is very important to do that, and then have elections, that happens to be the case, that transitional periods of the kind that I'm talking about, would also be important enough to begin the arduous task of reuniting Palestinian institutions, after 16 years now of separation. This is not to distract from the disaster, that is the war that continues to rage on as we speak. But even before that, putting together the institutions of the PA, such that each activity was represented by one institution, both for Gaza and the West Bank. All of a sudden, we had two agencies for each governmental function. Now, anyone who really knows anything about managing government affairs will tell you, it's an extremely difficult task to put these things back together, involving decisions on personnel, and in a highly charged political environment, how difficult it is to do these things. While at the same time handling all the challenges that come with trying to do this under the reality of a highly oppressive and capricious occupational regime. That was true even before the war and destruction. Now, look at how much more difficult that's become. There is need of a lot of healing, also the burying of the dead to begin with healing to go through an immense task of reconstruction, that will take a very, very long period of time, maybe decades. But first things first, if there's a will to address if this is hell itself, let's just stop where we are. Let's stop digging. And what is really required is for this war to come to an end now. Now, not tomorrow, not next week, not until the government of Mr Netanyahu decides. It feels that they're really exacting revenge, if they're just about the resurrection of whatever it is that remained of their veneer of invincibility that they tried to project throughout the decades. Is it really worth 10s of 1000s of Palestinian civilians to perish before that objective is achieved? And it is not able to be achieved. But it is the real achievement by way of projecting that veneer of invincibility. Israel does not achieve its military objectives; this time around, they set the bar way too high. The aim of decapitating, eliminating, eradicating Hamas, all of them. And anyone would tell you that this is an exercise in futility, because we're dealing with a political movement with an ideology that cannot be destroyed. And it's time for Israel to stop. It's time for Israel to be told to stop because if it is not told to stop it is not going to. That's my reading of the situation.

Prof. Cohen-Almagor: Let's speak about the day after the war. There are all kinds of speculation. One of them is that Israel is going to remain in Gaza. Another is that the PA will take responsibility over Gaza. The third speculation is that there will be some sort of international community engagement, involving the United States, the UN, Europe: some international community organisation that is going to take over Gaza for a period of time. What in your opinion, is the preferred solution?

Prof. Fayyad: I think the preferred solution is something that I was amongst the first to talk about early on, which is for the Authority itself to assume that responsibility and not going first through transition, as

some have been kind of projecting as a possible way to go. It definitely beats the scenario of looking for some people in Gaza, to create out of them a forum or body to be interlocutors with the international community to manage the Hamas - less Gaza, or something like that. There are many reasons why I think this, not least important of which is that schemes like this, even if not explicitly, are definitely implicitly, based on the notion that the war is going to end only once Hamas is totally dislodged from power and destroyed completely so they're not part of the scene. They have no say in what was going on. There are many problems with that. Chief amongst which is the way I see things that will mean lots of lives of 10s of 1000s Palestinians, maybe 100,000. This is an insane adventure. So thinking about imposing an arrangement on Palestinians to manage Gaza, and the day after, is something that I really caution against. So that leaves us basically with possibilities about international involvement. Let me give you my first best option, given the history of this conflict, and given the length to which Israeli governments particularly the current one have gone, to really actually deny the reality, the reality of who they are and what they are about, and occupation. And to really stop referring to or not accept reference to the West Bank and Gaza occupied territory, if you will, to take that into account. And if somebody is really interested in bringing in the world I prefer that, let's turn this into an international custodianship. And by the way, not only for Gaza, but also the West Bank including Jerusalem. I didn't say East Jerusalem, I knew exactly what I said. That's what should happen. If you really want to bring in the world, and if you really want to go back to the basics, which I think by virtue of its actions, and recalcitrance, over successive governments, Israel has really managed to strategically lose massively relative to where it wanted to be by really taking this conflict back to its inception, not to 67, but to go to 48. I know exactly what I'm talking about right now and look at young people around the world and look at what they're saying right now. So there has to really be a serious moment of reckoning. For now the sentiments are high. But I think cooler heads must prevail, and people will need to take a look at it. So back to the question. That's my preference. If you want to talk about internationalisation, let's turn this into international custodianship for the occupied Palestinian territory in 1967. And given as well as international status, international law, have that also included in the mix, and just see where that takes us. If that is not palatable, the second best would be to have the Palestinian Authority assume control. We need to bring this conflict to an end. The two-state solution is the best way forward. And the way to really get out of this mess and deal with the root causes of the problem at source. A solution based on the model of two states, meaning the emergence of an independent Palestinian state on the territories occupied in 1967. It makes sense that something that was created in the context of the previous failed peace process, but nevertheless, it is a process, namely the Palestinian Authority. For it to really be physically there, and to actually assume that responsibility, there are a number of questions that are raised. First, is this an entity that can handle the chores of governing and rebuilding and healing a body and all of that, in the immediate aftermath of war? The alternative is weaker, because if you create a new entity out of nothing, just a few names, people who live in Gaza, apart from the problems that I refer to which presume the total destruction of Hamas or neutralisation of Hamas, with all that really implies for 10s of 1000s or more people. How has that Palestinian Authority weaker than a new body that you put together from scratch? It's not. I argue that it's not actually limitations on the PA, current limitations, its current capacity in the technical sense, that is the constraint here, rather than its political weakness, its lack of viability as a political entity. And it's not only in Gaza or relative to Gaza. But I would say it was back for a variety of reasons. Now, if you are this feeble, politically, you cannot, as a matter of logic, assume the tall order of managing in the aftermath of such a devastating war, and I hope it comes to an end very soon, coming to Gaza to govern and manage on the top of an Israeli tank,

you can do so only if you are prepared to reconstitute yourself, reconfigure yourself politically, to become a matter of national consensus, because then the decision to go together is a national decision. Then nobody is imposing the PA on the people of Gaza. Gaza is, was, and will always be an integral part of the Palestinian national project. And to do that, the PA must go there audaciously, backed by national consensus. Then the PA can immediately begin to assume that responsibility acting through a government that's consented to by everybody, including Hamas, including the PIJ, including all political forces that matter - that actually register on the scale of politics in Palestine.

Dr Cohen-Almagor: Salam, can you tell us a bit about your personal future in the Palestinian Authority? Or in Palestinian politics?

Prof. Fayyad: I honestly think of no such future. I think my role is, I hope I've been trying to look ahead, and speak with as much energy as I possibly can. My loss of voice that you have noticed is not without reason. That is really it. I try from the very beginning to see and project this for what it was. This never was Israel versus Hamas. This is Israel versus all of us personally. That's something that needed to be said from the beginning. I took the whole world on to accept that in my own words. And then a few days later, some conversation started about what's going to happen and how it's going to happen, who's going to do it. I cannot wait to move forward and put forward ideas that no one has said no to so far. We've tried to move the needle somewhat in terms of how the world perceives the task ahead. It's very important. Now beyond that, I did have the honour and absolutely the highest of privileges, serving people for the length of time I did. I do not look for a future myself. Not now. Not ever. All I'm really looking for now is to in every conceivable way, contribute to the effort to bring the conflict to an end today. That's the most important thing. And the only way that's going to happen is if the whole world stands up to Israel and says enough, already. Enough of this kind of war of vengefulness - that's all you're really trying to do. There has been no commission of inquiry yet. But everybody knows that Israel actually was asleep at the wheel, there was a massive intelligence failure. There was massive operational failure. There was massive institutional failure. And there was a credible report in the New York Times that suggests that Israel had that information but did not act on it. Why should we Palestinians in our 1000s die in an act of revenge? The international community cannot continue to hide behind "Israel has the right to defend itself". The war of aggression must stop. That's my role. That's what I'm trying to do to the last day of my life. That's what I'm really interested in. And I will pursue it.

Sir Tom Phillips: Thank you for the way you've sketched out the current situation and the passions involved on both sides. I'd like to go to what I see as the core issue. Do you still think a two-state solution is possible? When I go around the West Bank, I'm struck by the scale of settlement activity. I'm also struck by the political tendencies on both sides towards extremism, Hamas on the Palestinian side, and obviously, you've got a shift towards the right in Israeli politics. I'm struck by the number of Palestinian young people who've given up the hope of a two-state solution. How on earth can one get to a two-state solution? Is it possible? And if not, what's the alternative? But also, how do you get from where you are now? From where you hope to be the end of the war to any meaningful negotiation? How would you make it different from all the failed processes of the past? Do we have to have a stronger regional element than we've had in the past building on the Arab Peace Initiative and the

Abraham accords? Do we have to have be more open about the religious elements involved in this struggle and bring them to the surface as well?

Prof. Fayyad: First, a look at what worked and what didn't. What didn't work certainly outweighs by far what worked on that peace process. Second, we need to look at the reality of the situation, to describe briefly in terms of the landscape and the virtual impossibility of imagining a two-state solution in the way it was originally conceived, to still be a possibility. And when you talk about the reality, you also have to include, as you did, some reference to where people are both in Israel and Palestine, on the feasibility, or even the attractiveness, we will be talking about younger people on the Palestinian side, of the whole idea of an ideal solution, those who actually are inspired by a sense of natural rights and, and the continued attractiveness of the concept of a two-state solution. Then what needs to happen, to the extent that a solution along those lines, that kind of paradigm, can be attained, notwithstanding all of the difficulties, the failures. The difficulty is the reality as it exists today, both on the ground, and also in people's heads. Different people have different things in their heads. And this is one of the many failures of the process, what they said to sell it to those people when they thought the solution was possible - when there was majority support for it. It is not clear to me that there was ever a point when there was congruence on the Israeli and Palestinian sides simultaneously on what that really meant. It was not, it's not clear to me and politically speaking to them, what the centre of gravity was. It was only the body politic that was ever supportive of the idea of the sovereign Palestine and anything on a square inch of the territory of West Bank. Let's just set that aside. So what the Palestinians voted for when they entered into the Oslo Accords was the promise of statehood. It was not enshrined in the Accords, but it was very implied if you will. Home for but it was a promise, but nothing, nothing like that. So if we want to keep that possibility alive, number one. I'm not here to say exactly what it is that conclusion would look like. One that is acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians, 10 years down the road, 15 years down the road, 20 years down the road... we're at an important time, that has to be the product of what Palestinians and Israelis at the time decide is acceptable, or something they can live with. It may be vastly different from any notion of the two-state solution that people have entertained so far. So I'm not really into the detail of what that might look like.

But the precise contours of it, maybe that could be agreed to. And I don't think it's going to be tomorrow, as some are suggesting now, that the way to end the war is to go to a state tomorrow. But if somebody can do that, please suddenly, I'll be the first to go behind you. It's just not going to happen, it's going to take time. I believe that it is for the generations that will be in government or will influence government selection in Israel and Palestine at the time to decide for themselves what it is that they really are comfortable with, that they can live with conceptually, without getting the contours now. So dealing with what did not work, if we want to preserve in the language that is used now by President Biden, preserve a pathway to a Palestinian state as he describes it, it seems to me eminently logical to begin by dealing with the biggest mistake or structural defect, in the existing framework, that framework that is Oslo that was signed in September 1993. It actually did not have an adequately defined outcome. That process was to culminate in agreement, also called permanent status issues, without any parameters. There were no parameters for the negotiations. There were parameters subsequently, set first by Clinton, if you recall, but the process was to somehow miraculously culminate, not in the emergence of the sovereign state of Palestine, on the territories occupied in 1967, but by agreements with Israel that were difficult to agree to in 1993. If you really want to keep that doctrine alive, first things first, let's agree is this going to lead to a Palestinian state at the end of negotiation: come to a point, but

negotiation or not, let's be clear on the outcome. That's not to be fudged. Let's not talk about a process that will end up being about nothing but a process essentially, getting us to where we are right now. So let's first define the outcome. If in fact, it is a Palestinian state, not fried chicken, as Netanyahu is fond of politically saying, you only want to call it fried chicken that's fine with me. Yeah, that's what it was. And that's what it continues to be. So for us Palestinians, to be expected to engage in the process, that Israelis can say, you know, what emerges from it, you can call it fried chicken if you like. But that's not going to cut it - for all the talk about restoration, preservation, keeping alive the possibility of this solution. The outcome has to be stated at the outset. It has to be acceptance of the idea of the sovereign Palestinian state on the territory occupied in 1967. Then you ask me the question immediately: if the outcome is so predetermined, what do you need negotiations for? No, you do need negotiations – but those negotiations should in my humble opinion, never have been about principles. Negotiations should not be about either narrative or principles. Negotiations should be about arrangements and assurances. That's what they are. The principle that we Palestinians are a people, and therefore entitled to national rights as all other nations and peoples around the world, is something that is not open to discussion at all, at all, at all. That has to be accepted in the discourse for sure. We seek to find an expression of self-determination in the form of a real state on the territories occupied in 1967. That has to be accepted as the outcome of the process, as the principle. Now we negotiate. Of course we negotiate. We have to negotiate all of the issues that were set aside for negotiations later, none of them was negotiated fully or to an agreement before. We need to negotiate all of this but again, in negotiations, it ought to be about arrangements and assurances. This is especially true of the contentious issues like Jerusalem. The principles, let me give you an example, so that this is not really too abstract. What do I mean when I say, negotiation about principles? Post 1967, specifically. And certainly post mid 70s, when the PLO started to move the ship in that direction, it started to mean something concrete, it meant a sovereign Palestinian state on the territory occupied by Israel. That I view as a principle. So where that green line was, for sure, on the eve of the 6 Day War, that's the principle. So the principle ought not be subject to negotiation. Now that green line cuts Jerusalem through East – West. By definition East Jerusalem as part of the occupied territories, by definition, that is, that will not be something that is subject to negotiation, and it's a principle. Now, do we really need to negotiate with Israelis and others? People of all faiths and backgrounds have humanistic, cultural, religious, spiritual connectivity with Jerusalem. They obviously do need assurances that provide the assurance necessary, and I'm not talking about Palestinians and Israelis. These are important issues for all of humanity. So we definitely need to accept to be party to negotiation and the process, not about principles but about assurances, about arrangements that are necessary to get. I think what we would need to contribute to policy. If I would advise the leadership, I would say, yes, we should be open to negotiation. But let us not fall into the trap that we did before. Let us not engage in a transactional peace process. Let us engage in a principled peace process, one that begins by reciprocating that gold standard in the world recognition that the PLO had extended to the Government of Israel in 1993. Let's have our right to a sovereign state on the territories occupied in 1967 formally recognised by the state of Israel, and then we engage in negotiations tomorrow.

Sir Tom Phillips: You said earlier, when we were talking about possible Hamas motivations on the 7th of October that there was a lack of clarity at the moment. But surely, part of the message they've sent, including to many moderate Israelis, is that you can't trust a Palestinian state, because if one day people vote for Hamas and become something like Gaza... In fact, the Hamas action on 7 October

thoroughly set back the prospect of a two-state solution by creating a very deep psychological barrier. I'm struck talking to many liberal Israelis I know who are engaged in efforts for peace, they are stunned and startled and trying to sort out what they now feel. It is a huge setback, isn't it?

Prof Fayyad: For decades, Israel's most untrusted Palestinian was Yasser Arafat, and the PLO he represented. But then, in 1993, there was a famous handshake on the White House lawn. So this is not the first time that Palestinian leadership or that action is so characterised, and you look also at the experience of Europe and the extent to which people were at loggerheads on just about everything. There is a time and place for everything. Now, in the heat of the moment, people say all kinds of things. Sooner or later, people have to come to grips with reality. And the reality is, there is so much that can be done if you're resilient. To continue to try to get to where you think you need to be by excluding the other - the Palestinians - by canceling the other, by projecting the other the Palestinians as less human than you are, and their needs as less important than yours. So I think when we get to that point, that's when there will be meaningful peace because it is not before, you know, people take a step back and begin to really actually look at it through the prism of the other. For many, many decades, so to be excluded as a ritual to exclude, look, Israel came into being on that premise. This goes back to 1917. Read the letter of that famous Balfour declaration. In it we Palestinians are defined, thanks to you, by who we are not. We are defined as non-Jewish communities. We're not a people. When Israel would not use the word Palestinian, it's we are Israeli Arabs, Arab Israelis, we are Arabs, but we are not people - we are not Palestinian people. I say this, sometimes without enough academic scrutiny. But I would really love to be corrected on it. I need help with this. To the best of my knowledge, the only time Israel in an official document referred to us as the Palestinian people was in the letter Prime Minister Rabin wrote to our late president, Yasser Arafat, in response to a letter from Arafat. The response came from Prime Minister Rabin: "Based on your letter, Mr. Chairman, the government of Israel recognises the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people". Let's begin with that: we are a people, we exist, we are entitled to self-determination, our needs are no less important. We are not human animals, as described by the by the Defence Minister of Israel. We are not those others, who have an option of either leaving, or we are staying to be a lesser form of life, no political rights whatsoever, or if you choose to resist you die. That's who we are. They say all of that. Look in the mirror, listen to your own leaders. Prime Minister Netanyahu is very happy with being taken by the nose and driven in that direction, it looks to me. He's the first one to say forget about anything sovereign between the River and the Mediterranean other than Israel, He himself said that many times: "not on my watch". So they can say what they want. I'm not impressed by this. I was looking at news blogging, let's just quit this, look in the mirror, look at what the settlers are doing. Look at your goals. So Ben Gvir arms settlers not to defend themselves from personal attacks, but to go attack persons who are doing nothing but picking olives during the season? No, the sense of really, incredibly manufactured moral outrage, forget about that. I'm not impressed by that. You want to go on to call us terrorists, call us terrorists. And talk about your leadership through fear.

Sir Tom Phillips: Vincent Fean will be speaking after me. Vincent represents the Balfour Project. And you talked about the Balfour Declaration. Part of what the Balfour Project is seeking is a recognition by the UK and other states of a Palestinian state in advance of negotiations so that the two sides sit at the table on an equal basis. Would that actually help or is that such a hypothetical thing at this stage? That would be unhelpful?

Prof. Fayyad: Yes, that is a laudable objective. But moving from the language of the original Declaration of 2 November 1917 to the ideal that you're talking about, has to go through the station of moving from calling us not by our name, but by who we are not. We had no hand in drafting that Declaration with non-Jewish communities. That's who we are, in that text. And that's basically the backdrop against which there are many in Israel who believe that there's no other. And to the extent anyone claims, they are another, they are the other to be considered, especially they don't exist. A sitting member of the current Israeli cabinet gives us the choice of dying, emigrating - leaving the country - or accepting to live like slaves in our own backyard? Where are we at with this in the 21st century? So yes, to move from that beginning of visitors not counting us as anything, to where we are the people with rights meant that I think there's one important step, especially given the failures of the past. There was a lot of energy and I think, invested goodwill, that sprang out of the Rabin/Arafat handshake, and all that was going to be enough to lift the boat. It didn't. So we need serious lifting. We need really more principles enshrined, we need recognition of our rights. And then we negotiate as equals. In the end, if truth is going to prevail, it never is going to be based on a relationship between slave and master. That really is basically the living in peace, as we are projected to have to do. Israeli rhetoric is more of basically slavery, it's accepting to be a lesser form of life. And we're not superior, we're not superior to anyone. But we're not inferior to another either. No one should be treated that way. People are people, they begin to relate to each other. And to have a sense of humaneness. Problems can be solved. Because in the end, look at your situation: people are free to come and go. UK versus Europe now. But anyway, that's the conversation. But you're really talking about people who come and go freely. Things didn't really start that way for sure. It wasn't until your relations became characterised by confidence, by trust, by trade, by cultural exchanges, by all of those things and people really moved away from difficult history, that it was possible for them to live and coexist peacefully. There is war in Ukraine right now that really raises questions about sustainability or peace. That is something that should be considered separately.

Sir Vincent Fean: We were together in Palestine until 2013. You are the best Prime Minister that Palestine has had. It's quite a short list. But you are the best, and the best Finance Minister too. I'd like to ask about the outsiders: the West and the Arab states. You are now living in the USA. Blinken is working hard now on the hostage case and, I hope, seeking to change the way in which Israel approaches this war. In your time as Prime Minister and to date, how do you assess the attitude of the West led by the US but also the European Union, the UK, France, in regard to this conflict? You were dealing with us day by day, and now from your point of observation, please comment on the role that the West can play given the asymmetry of this conflict, the economic and military power of one side, and the right to self-determination of the other. How do you assess the West? What would you like us to be doing?

Prof Fayyad: I'll try to address the current situation because of its relevance to the need to end the war. But also go through the history of the ups and downs of our issue, and where it's registered on the radar of international diplomacy, and the West. Beginning with the Madrid peace process, and what predated the promises, a lot of that went into making that shift and meeting along the way, Madrid, then Oslo that, you know, the cause became a focus in international relations. Particularly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it became a defining issue, enough to for administration of George Bush Senior first being

preoccupied with it. And subsequently Bill Clinton, the parameters, Camp David. And then after some lack of interest early on in the George W. Bush Presidency, after September 11, then it rose up the agenda again, and the US became very actively involved, with the 2003 roadmap. The financial crisis of 2008/9, the failure of the Olmert / Abbas round of negotiation: ups and downs and ups and downs. Before we get to the Biden administration, when President Obama took office, one of his first acts was to appoint an envoy to the peace process. This was important to us. And he probably was under the impression at the time, that this is something that could be solved along the lines of long-standing policy. There was that kind of interest. That lasted a little bit, but it diminished, to be resurrected under John Kerry's diplomacy: everybody knows how that ended. And then Trump, thinking that he could deal with this as a real estate problem. The Trump vision, speaking of a two-state solution, you could call that a two-state solution, if you can describe it as such, but look at what it is. It's a Palestinian entity that's not sovereign, that includes only 70% of the West Bank and whatnot. But nevertheless, the Biden administration took office against the backdrop of certain models which I very quickly sketched just now. So, rightly in my view, it tries to come in, and on the basis of briefings that were prevalent before the elections took place, that it probably was not the best of time to try to really get that process started again, it's not time to really hit that restart button. Again, reset button, let's take a little bit of time, stabilise the situation, and all of that sort of thing. I said something for that at the time, it made sense, because clearly, your rapport is well, far apart. Israel ended up going through multiple rounds of inconclusive elections. Not that there was readiness on the part of the Israeli government to accept any reasonable settlement.

Not many people know this. But the reality is what I just described, and the one person who actually knows this more than anyone else is Donald Trump: Israel never actually endorsed the Trump plan. It was never actually accepted. Even the Trump peace plan. And if you remember that famous event in the White House, yellow drapes and all, and Netanyahu gave this incredible speech, saying President Trump could walk from here to infinity and back. When it really came time for the operative part of the speech? It was not "Mr. President, we welcome your plan. And we will negotiate. We will negotiate with the Palestinians on the basis of your plan". He said that Israel did not accept it so clearly. So who's really there, engaged? Abbas was right - because if we were to really enter negotiations, and against that backdrop, we definitely were going to lose. And many people, if you can believe this, blamed us for not having dealt really more imaginatively with Trump's plan. So that's what's on offer, if you want to be closer to the end of the state, we didn't take it. But we weren't allowed to take it either. Not many people know that pretty much like we're gonna have a famous resolution, but that's a conversation for another day. And so they were right in a way. And they also said that Biden was going to really engage in doing things that could stabilise the situation, and maybe set the stage for a more propitious beginning or restart or political process. There, I have to say, a lot of things happened that either didn't translate that policy into concrete action, because of just the usual lack of follow up or whatever, or because of other events happening around you. This was no longer the focal issue that it was before. And generally speaking, but for a couple of rounds of escalation here, Biden was in his first five, six months of office at the time in America. So not much happened. So events yes, but not much happened to really translate into concrete action by the US Administration on "small things" that were supposed to restore confidence and set the stage for a more promising start or restart of the peace process. And here to be honest, I think the Administration made a mistake and was wrong in not working on it as it promised to work on Day One generally talking about reopening the PLO delegation office in Washington DC, the

reopening of the US Consulate-General in Jerusalem. And they did neither. I myself was seized with much more issues, to be honest with you. The Americans could have chosen to reopen the Consulate, as Israel had threatened to retaliate by not offering their diplomats diplomatic immunity, which I don't think was going to really fly or live too long. But the US chose not to do this. But first of all, I think as a matter of policy, their failures came on the smaller issues, issues that people think are not important. I think they are important, because they're symbolically important as well as politically important. And they have a bearing on projecting seriousness, or lack thereof.

I was fond of reminding people constantly of Trump's declarations. One was to recognise Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. As a matter of fact, one he made in November 1919. And another he made in November 2020 after the elections. Trump had lost the elections and was literally on his way out. He signed off on his declarative statement that said products made in Israeli settlements are Israeli. That's Pompeo. That's acceptance of Israeli de facto annexation of West Bank territory. Here we have the United States of America choosing not to engage in a diplomatic top-down process, with good reason I have to say. I thought it was sensible enough of Biden not to do it. But then he dropped the ball on something as basic as this. And remember Biden promoted himself when he was running for office as the guy was going to restore values, norms to US foreign policy. It was a key element to his platform. Trump was all over the place. And how about turning the tables upside down? What are the norms of foreign policy when it comes to our issue? If they're not about calling the West Bank what it is: occupied territory... That's what it is: occupied territory under international law. And here they are basically saying products made in illegal Israeli settlements are the produce of Israel, meaning de facto recognition by the United States government of de facto annexation by the Israeli government. But that's what it is. So if the United States had really meant business, you know, coming in under the Biden Administration, the first order of business for Tony Blinken would have been to undo such a travesty of a decision or declaration made by Pompeo, his predecessor. Another statement that was made by Pompeo which also Blinken failed to rectify was the famous declaration that said settlements are not illegal. But Israeli settlements are illegal under international law. Pompeo summoned the lawyers braintrust of the State Department, and they wrote this opinion. Blinken then takes office. And the legal stuff is still the same. The same guys who drafted that decision, because Pompeo told them to. So it comes to Blinken and says, Oh, can you write me an opposite opinion? I can understand the difficulty involved with something like this, but for heaven's sake, why did he even hesitate, over the declaration or settlements, the conversion on the marking or labeling of products. In the bigger scheme of things, the little things set a trend. And we should not hesitate to call it failure, even when it pertains to small issues, because smaller issues sometimes carry a lot of significance that the United States acted on issues like this. I'll give credit to the current US Administration for something that went unnoticed that they did, when it came time to renew the next era agreement between Israel and the United States on funding of research. The United States insisted on making it clear that it did not cover settlements as it was intended. And when it was made in the summer, it is not to cover settlements, but it was not even visible to the public. Had the Administration acted and spoken on those issues, it would have given a sense of being serious. So while we're waiting, let's fix a few things we'll do that then act on the bigger things - something we're going to act on. The Administration did not act on smaller things that could have made a difference - except for this agreement that I talked about, I give them credit but I think they should have done more. There was a degree of US aspiration in 2021. And we saw the interest rise and then fall in 2021. In May, actually, after that Gaza war escalation, the Biden

administration engaged with the Palestinian Authority and made statements about that and said, something about the two-state solution and all of that, but then look at where we are, and things went back to a status quo, that somehow not only the United States, Europe, the region or countries assumed was going to really be the status quo in perpetuity. That was really a huge mistake. Europe could have done more during this period, particularly on those issues of principle. But that didn't happen. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. It basically continued to run that way. Everybody had started to have vested interest in the status quo, beginning with Israel, beginning with us. We saw strategic value in continuous separation of Gaza from the West Bank. Some strategic value in continuing to deal with Hamas in ways that actually ended up in a situation that added to the lack of legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority, whatever remains of that today. But all of these issues are important. And the issue of what the word was constantly, let's find money for the Palestinians, even at the height of recognition that things were not going well. Their emissaries are running to Arab countries. I'm not going to really mention names here. You know, this is going on in recent months, running to oil producing countries in the region saying give money to prisoners. It's as if it's really about money. Well, money is an issue, I was Finance Minister and I know how important money is. But if you really begin telling other countries that's all it is about, that's a mistake. Money is a problem, but it's not our biggest problem, to be honest with you. And that's why we were investing in ourselves. America was not there, could not give us money directly. But it was really trying to get companies in. But that's not what is really needed. We are where we are.

Now some remarks on the current situation, because that's important. Everybody knows from the early footage and images of this war the picture of the President himself, traveling to Israel, and the famous hug that he gave to Benjamin Netanyahu. And it was at the time, thinking in line, what is known about US diplomacy and how it conducts itself, and relations with Israel, which is not that different from the way you had this relationship with some other European countries. Similarly, the US is good at this. I was hoping that the US President would in addition to doing what he did, visibly, was going to really begin to signal or say quietly, things that are consistent with the need to end this war, coming against the backdrop of public statements, whether it says fully supportive of Israel's position, recognising unconditionally, and without any scrutiny is the right answer, but the right to self-defence, as reported repeatedly. But we have to really be fair. I watch what is said and listen here, it's important to look for an opening here, and one would be less than fair to say that there is no been no change, or the needle has not moved. A visible change has taken place in France, for example. That was probably the most obvious change in public posture from the statements made early on by Macron to what he's stating right now. The US here is especially important if you really look at how the rhetoric totally started to change, not to suggest that there was no internal or private conversation with Israelis. But I'm talking about public messaging. I draw attention to what the Secretary of Defence said about this turning into strategic defeat for Israel: prolongation of the war. That's an important statement to make. What was encouraging was the statements made by Vice President Kamala Harris, first in a TV interview that she gave to 60 Minutes about four weeks ago. Where I read words, where I read the Balfour Declaration carefully, I think it's fair to describe what she said in that interview as the most progressive statement on Palestinian rights ever made by a serving US official. It was important. I remember the words, I remember that she said Palestine has to have a right to security, safety, dignity and self-determination. To me out of this number of words, what security and self-determination we choose, told me that that's an acknowledgement of our rights. That's very important. If you listen to what she said recently in

Dubai, she authoritatively outlined four principles of US policy, the US being against forced dislocation, Gaza not to be shrunk in size etc. About the United States not being for occupation...

There is something there. You have the US Secretary of Defence - he's not acting off his own bat when he says this risks turning into strategic defeat - these are important words. And then some of what Secretary Blinken has said, combined with what President Biden and Bernie Sanders have said. So there is, to be fair, in recent statements made by senior US officials, some encouragement that we are on a path where things can begin to take a turn for the better. But I want to really say this very advisedly and cautiously. This is really a direct call through this distinguished forum to the US Administration. The time has come. The time has come. We will witness abject moral failure, if it does not put its foot down today and say enough already, publicly, because that I think can begin to move the needle in a serious way in Israel itself.

Sir Vincent Fean: My point is on mutual security. It's an issue that is not often aired. You've mentioned it, rightly. This terrorist activity of 7 October has demonstrated the futility of imposing security solutions unilaterally. Mutual security - which may well be what Kamala Harris was talking about - mutual security beats the unilateral imposition of security, because the interests of both parties are respected. And there is a degree of mutuality in the issue. I believe that Mr. Netanyahu never really meant two states. He gave his Bar Ilan speech in 2009. But did he mean it? And the current policy of the Israeli coalition government that preceded the war cabinet that all the land is Israel's, and Israel chooses what it wants. That was the publicly stated platform of the Netanyahu government with Smotrich and Ben Gvir. Can that change? Will that change slowly? Or do we need to take time, as you as you were implying, earlier, before we reach that desirable outcome of mutual security?

Prof. Fayyad: I think that's essential. Unless security is underpinned by a political accommodation, it's not going to be sustainable. That is clear. What you need as a basic minimum is a period during which there is an iron-clad commitment to basically nonviolence. You need that, as a matter of fact. So the kind of transition that I have in mind has that as a key component, that you need to have a commitment to nonviolence. That is something that even before the war Hamas was willing to consider. As a matter of fact, in its own conduct of its bilateral relationship with Israel through mediators. I don't know if they will be directly in touch. But in any event, it was clear that part of it was the internal Hamas leadership and something that they would consider acceptable. It is a policy that is an obvious requirement and expectation we need. Now to get to the point where you have security on a sustained basis and stability, you'd have to underpin it politically, and that requires agreement. That agreement cannot happen overnight. But it surely beats the status quo. If we begin a process by which you're telling us where we're going. People don't get on a train without knowing where it is going. We really need to begin that conversation by signaling the destination, and there has to be seriousness. And here, you know, the war trumps everything now: the war, the casualties and the misery. Imagine what life is like, whatever the needs are, for possibilities of life. We know that even during the temporary ceasefire only 25% of humanitarian needs will get into Gaza - no water, no electricity, no nothing. And high uncertainty about the possibility of continuing to live. This is a major catastrophe for us, besetting us for many, many decades to come. Dealing with the scars of this war is the foremost priority of a Palestinian leadership in a period that is part of rebuilding of the psyche, of the soul, of the spirit that we really need to put together to summon the will to persevere, to really get to where we're going. But we cannot and

should not ever forget what's going on right now. These are the big things, but you didn't need to begin with those blocks to really get we're going to help it along that process. If we Palestinians begin to see the words of the US Vice President as important though, as they are, and I really regard them as such. I'm terrifically impressed by the conviction with which she delivered that. It really caught my attention. We really need to see those words begin to translate into policy across the Atlantic as well. Europe is hugely important. And Europe itself was never really content with being the financier of the occupation. Please remember, we want Europe to be able to be a player, not just a payer. You don't need to take permission, don't tell me what to be - just go play. It's your field. It's your backyard. You don't need permission from anyone to do that.

Dr Lester Grabbe: Over to questions: did Israel create Hamas?

Prof Fayyad: No. I'm going by what we know happened. For much of the period, going back before the 70s, even after the Vietnam War, the PLO started to signal its willingness to shift in the direction of ultimately accepting UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. Meaning the state of Israel. It's no secret that Israel viewed the PLO as its arch enemy. Israel saw it as the world's worst terrorist organisation. No secret. Long before Hamas came into being Israel invested heavily in alternatives to the PLO, in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. Israel sought to reduce the importance of the PMO by trying to empower local leadership. That is what Israel was doing, similar to the kind of relationship Israel had with leaders in southern Lebanon. Up until 1988 Israel definitely did not favour the brand of Palestinian nationalism embodied by the PLO. I have attributed to Prime Minister Rabin saying that was their biggest mistake.

We are where we are, but history tells us something at the same time. The challenges of the moment are clear. We know that we fail if we continue to let these rivalries get the better of us. This party, Hamas, is a product of Islam. And that party, Fatah, is a product of some progressive thinking on the path to Palestinian nationalism. If we go back to creating these grades of degree to which our nationalism pH level is higher or lower than the other guy, we're not going to get too far. 1988 was a big year for us. Yasser Arafat addressing the Palestine National Council and the famous speech, in my book, the most intelligent political speech ever given, when he said, in the name of God and of the Palestinian people, I hereby declare the state of Palestine, everybody stood up cheering and in tears. On the flip side, nobody on the outside thought that way, that we were to declare as an answer to our problem that we need a territory on 1/5 of our ancestral land. That's essentially what happened. What Arafat got in return for that, five years later, was recognition by the state of Israel of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. That's all we got. If we continue to project ourselves as Hamas, Fatah, separate, we continue to lose, I'm afraid. And this is really the message more for my own countrymen and women. I think it's about time for us to understand that continuing to demonise each other, and to say "You're the product of Israel", and projecting yourself as the lesser of two evils – is a better alternative from Israel's point of view. We don't have any more concessions to give. Our best bet is to really have all of us united, within the confines of that which we struggle to have, and work for a national role. That'd be a role, whether itself, whether an expanded formulation that includes others, but this whole business of rivalry, pointing fingers - we all know where that got us. Partisan factionalism, factional rivalries, have largely damaged our goals. I think this is just an expression of it. Political parties everywhere take advantage of the opening they have. What Hamas felt at the time,

they had an opening, benefiting from less stringent rules on bringing resources etc. People can look at that. But what is the point? I'm a realist. I look at what exists. Hamas exists as a very significant political entity, a component of our body politic. You ignore that at your peril. If we continue to just pretend it's not there, that's not going to solve the problem. I'm really asking for us to unify. And for us collectively to have our representatives speak to the international community on behalf of everybody. So I'm not really invested in that school. This is for people to go out and look at or come up with any inferences. But I would not invest too much in it. So what is the conclusion? Hamas was made possible because Israel made it easy? Well, look at more recent history. The manner in which Israel dealt with the PA on the one hand, and how it dealt with Hamas, on the other hand, did really end up in actually strengthening Hamas? Look at the most famous prisoner exchange deal -for Shalit - that took place in 2011. In exchange for one officer Israel released 1,000 Palestinian prisoners. When for years we in the PA have been making the case to try to release Palestinian prisoners. The last round of formal negotiations via John Kerry broke down over failure to release 26 Palestinian prisoners from Israel. But in 2011, Israel cut this deal. Somebody needs to tell me if that did not validate Hamas resistance at the expense of the other competing school of thought that basically said no to violence. So yes, Israel was a mover, definitely. It does put its thumb on the scale and it influences. So how do we deal with Israel? By continuing to be fragmented? Instead, let's resolutely compete for the responsibility of representing our own people. That responsibility is central. We need to speak and negotiate with one voice.

5 December 2023