

LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

TRUMP, NETANYAHU & THE WEAPONIZING OF FEAR ONE YEAR AFTER OCTOBER 7

LAURA FLANDERS - It is been a year since October 7th when Hamas fighters and others invaded Southern Israel, killing over 1100 people, over 800 of them civilians, and taking 251 more hostage. Since then, the Israeli government led by Benjamin Netanyahu has unleashed an assault on Gaza that has killed at a conservative count, 41,000 Palestinians, most of them women and children, and set off a land grab in the occupied West Bank that is killing hundreds more. As we speak, casualties are mounting in Lebanon and Northern Israel in an escalating war with Hezbollah to Israel's North. Today, we'll talk with three guests about how the past year has seen real human feelings of fear and sorrow and grief weaponized to devastating effect. We will end in Israel with Peace Activist Yoav Peck on where all this bloodshed has brought us. But we'll begin in the US where at events commemorating the October 7th attacks, Donald Trump has been claiming without evidence that the Jewish state will soon cease to exist if he is not reelected president, "It's total annihilation. That's what you're talking about," Trump told the Israeli American Council in September, "You have a big protector in me. You don't have a protector on the other side," he said. At the very same time, Trump and his campaign are deeply allied with Christian evangelicals, including extreme Christian Zionists, whose investment in Israel is tied up with a belief in Biblical "end times" when Jews convert or perish. So what is going on? For more, we go to Ben Lorber, a Senior Analyst at [Political Research Associates](#) and co-author of the book, "[Safety Through Solidarity, A Radical Guide to Fighting Antisemitism](#)." Ben, thanks for joining us. To start, track Donald Trump's relationship with the question of Israel, and specifically, Benjamin Netanyahu. Go back to 2016, and he cast himself as a kind of neutral guy in the Middle East crisis, this year, he welcomed Netanyahu to his Mar-a-Lago estate after that controversial address by the Israeli president to the joint session of Congress. What's happened?

BEN LORBER - Yeah, thanks for having me, Laura. Yes, Donald Trump, you know, occasionally, makes overtures to the so-called isolationist wing of America First and claims to want to dial down US involvement in overseas conflict. But really, he's in bed really to an unparalleled degree with the Israeli right, and with Christian Zionists in the US who support the Israeli right's Maximalist agenda. And during Donald Trump's presidency, you know, he moved the US Embassy to Jerusalem in violation of international law, a major provocation. He made moves to defund the Palestinian refugee agency, [UNRWA](#), which obviously, the Biden administration has continued. You know, he canceled the Iran nuclear deal. He basically fulfilled the entire agenda of the Israeli right. And this isn't only, as you said, because he loves BiBi Netanyahu as a strong man, you know, dictator, his core base here in the US is white Christian

evangelicals, who because of their deep Christian Zionism support everything the Israeli right does or believes.

LAURA FLANDERS - Give us some names. Who are some of these folks? Who's Paula White, for example, the woman who was there leading him in prayer before the last debate, and there right before January 6th at that rally that sparked the led to the insurrection.

BEN LORBER - Yeah, so folks like, you know, Paula Whites and Lou Engle and Ché Ahn are members of a Christian nationalist movement called the New Apostolic Reformation. They're really at the cutting edge of Christian nationalism and Christian Zionism. They basically want to christianize every aspect of US government and society. They call it taking dominion over the seven mountains, which basically is all of American politics, education, media, family, you know, business and culture. They want to impose a fundamentalist and theocratic agenda upon, you know, all Americans and ultimately upon the world. And supporting the Israeli right is part of this. As you say, they have an end times agenda that basically sees a future in which, you know, Israel will be engaged in cataclysmic war with its neighbors, and that will ultimately bring the return of Jesus, right? At which point, all Jews, all Muslims, all non-believing Christians in their view are forced to convert or perish. So this is not an agenda that will make Jews safe, you know, to put it mildly, nor is it good for Palestinians or for Muslims, or for anyone in the world.

LAURA FLANDERS - Now a lot of people have wacky beliefs out there. Do they go beyond spouting these strange views and opinions?

BEN LORBER - Well, yeah, the whole purpose of the New Apostolic Reformation and other Christian nationalist movements is to put it into practice. They aren't content with merely believing these things. They want to, you know, sculpt the world to meet their vision. So that's why they are intent at capturing all levers of power in the United States to impose their Christian Nationalist vision. You know, since October 7th, they have worked overtime to lobby the US government for increased aid to Israel, to lobby for war with Iran. And this isn't only, you know, pastors and influential advisors, it's also GOP House Speaker Mike Johnson. He's a Christian Zionist. It's even, you know, JD Vance. He's not part of the New Apostolic Reformation, but he has his own Christianity informed views of support for Israel. We're talking the GOP leaders across the board are informed by this Christian Zionism in one way or another.

LAURA FLANDERS - Is there money in the picture?

BEN LORBER - Yes, a 2018 investigation, by Haaretz, I believe, found that at that time, over the last, you know, decade over 65 million dollars has flown to the West Bank from Christian Zionists in America. And that was in 2018. So I'm sure the number has only grown, right? Christian Zionists are intent on helping the Israeli right colonize the West Bank because they

view it much like the Israeli right does as the biblical heartland, as Judea and Samaria. You even have many Christian Zionists who will go to the West Bank and volunteer to work for free on Israeli settlements in agricultural communities. Since October 7th, that kind of volunteer tourism has only increased. In fact, I believe back in November there were headlines about this group called Hayovel who had American cowboys from the Midwest. You know, complete with cowboy hats who went to volunteer in the West Bank, and they were very clear, we're standing on the frontlines of Western civilization in the fight against radical Islam, and that's why we're here. So they're very connected to the settlement movement.

LAURA FLANDERS - Is any of this making any of us any safer?

BEN LORBER - I think for a long time, Israel's defenders have used this false notion that criticism of Israel or Zionism tends to be inherently anti-Semitic in order to stifle free speech and in order in our era to bolster authoritarianism. That doesn't make Muslim Americans any safer. It doesn't make Jewish Americans any safer. It doesn't make Black Americans, all these groups are well-represented often at the forefront of this movement for a ceasefire. It's one of the most inspiring movements of our generation, and it doesn't, you know, bode well in a moment when all of our freedoms are under threat in this country. It doesn't make us any safer to empower the state to go after protestors in this way. And, you know, as a Jew, it's especially galling to me that it's done in the name of Jewish safety, supposedly because, you know, taking away people's speech rights, deporting people in the name of keeping me safe, doesn't keep me safe. What keeps me safe is social movements and being with my allies and being in community with other marginalized groups to fight for a better future in this country.

LAURA FLANDERS - Ben Lorber, Senior Analyst at Political Research Associates in Somerville, Massachusetts, you can obviously find them on the web. Ben, thank you for your work.

BEN LORBER - Thanks for having me.

LAURA FLANDERS - So why does weaponizing fear in this way work so well and what can we do about that? Joining me to reflect on that difficult question is my friend Phyllis Bennis, New Internationalist fellow at the [Institute for Policy Studies](#) in Washington, DC and the author of several books on the United Nations and the Middle East. Phyllis, you and I have been around this story our entire lives, and yet, it seems as if the weaponizing of fear works as well as it ever has, and the ability to stop it seems to be as much of a loss now as it was, for example, a year ago. So I'm coming to you, I guess with the question, why does it work so well? What's some of the history and where do you see, I don't know, some ways forward?

PHYLLIS BENNIS - It works partly because real antisemitism is on the rise in this country. Real antisemitism that is rooted not in criticism of Israel, not in Palestinian rights, not in calling for a ceasefire, but is rooted in white supremacy. So real antisemitism is on the rise, but the problem is with all the attention being put on the false claim, that criticizing Israel, that demanding a ceasefire, demanding an end to genocide, standing with South Africa, asking the International Court of Justice to hold Israel accountable for genocide. Those things are not antisemitic, but if you put all your focus there, you're not out there ending the kind of real antisemitism that comes from the right.

LAURA FLANDERS - And of course, we have seen this weaponizing of fear before, not just in the Middle East context, but in our own, I'm thinking back of course to 9/11

PHYLLIS BENNIS - As you and I remember Laura from that period, when the US went to war against Afghanistan, ironically enough on October 7th, then of 2001, just three weeks after 9/11. When the US went to war, 88% of the population of this country thought it was a great thing to do despite the fact that none of the hijackers were Afghans, none of them lived in Afghanistan, none of them went to school in Afghanistan, none of them trained in Afghanistan, none of them went to flight school in Afghanistan.

LAURA FLANDERS - And the people of Afghanistan were about as responsible as so many of the people of Gaza.

PHYLLIS BENNIS - Exactly. And at that time, there were clear options as there were in Israel after October 7th, 2023. There was a crime committed. Not everything that happened was a crime, but there was a crime in the killing of Israeli civilians and civilians from other countries who were there at the time and taking hostages. Those are crimes under international law. They could have been dealt with as enormous crimes. Israel could have asked for help to go after them-

LAURA FLANDERS - But have we any ways of actually implementing international law?

PHYLLIS BENNIS - Yes, we do. And that has to do with what this amazing act was of South Africa when they took the initiative to bring Israel to court, to the International Court of Justice, the highest court in the world. And of course, as we know, the court doesn't have, not only doesn't have an army, it doesn't even have a police force. It doesn't even have an investigative team, but it has the importance and the credibility of being the UN's court, the highest court in the world. And one of the things that means is that the court's initial ruling, that the temporary ruling that said that as far as they could tell so far, Israel's action in the war in Gaza do constitute plausibly, the crime of genocide. And as a result, they demanded that Israel stop killing people in Gaza, stop attacking the cities such as Rafah and making the situation worse. And they said that

every other country that has signed the genocide convention like the United States, has an obligation also to do everything in its power to stop that genocide.

LAURA FLANDERS - And could those, that architecture of international law also be used against the perpetrators within Hamas and Hezbollah?

PHYLLIS BENNIS - In the context of the International Criminal Court, yes, and that's exactly what is being considered there now. The prosecutor at the International Criminal Court has asked the judges to issue arrest warrants both for the leadership of Israel, Prime Minister Netanyahu and the the Defense Minister Gallant, and also against three top officials of Hamas, two of whom the Israelis of course, have already killed. But recognizing that that is about individual criminal responsibility. In the context of the International Court of Justice, the broader obligation goes against countries like our own. And that's why the general assembly of the UN overwhelmingly voted to implement this decision by the International Court of Justice, not the one on genocide, but the one that says that the entire Israeli occupation and apartheid system is illegal. So it's now a whole new world of decisions by the courts being implemented potentially by the United Nations. How that plays out, we still don't know. This is still too new, but the reality is that we now know how it could look. You ask what it could be like in the future, this is what it could be like, real law, not some notion of the international rules based order that we're going to make up as we go along, but existing international law. Wouldn't that be something?

LAURA FLANDERS - Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, DC. Thank you so much for your time and for your work. We end today's program with Yoav Peck. "The present brinkmanship is not inevitable. Those in power are choosing a direction, and they hold our lives in their hands," he wrote recently in a blog posting titled, "[Flying Off The Cliff](#)." Peck is an Organizational Psychologist and [Israeli Peace Activist](#) raised in New York. He's lived in Israel for 50 years. We reached him a few days ago at his home in Jerusalem. Yoav, thank you so much for joining me on this sober occasion. It has been difficult all year and it's especially so today to begin by asking, how are you? But how are you?

YOAV PECK - How I am? Well, you ask any Israeli these days how they are, they immediately distinguish between the personal and the national and it decreasingly that we can make that distinction because the national is personal and my country has been in a crisis for nearly a year. And so I'm in a crisis if you ask how I am, I'm very, very worried about the present and the future. I deal with feelings of helplessness in the face of a government that has no interest in its citizens. And that's how I am. On the personal level, my four kids, my four grandkids are okay and my wife is fine. And you know, you carry on living your life. But there's this heavy cloud hanging over all of us.

LAURA FLANDERS - Reading the posts that you have published online over the last year. I've seen you over and over again think, well, this moment is a moment where we can hope there will be a breakthrough. We hope that we can take a different direction. Okay, not this moment, but maybe this one. And now, you've started talking about a country that's driving over a cliff. Where do you think your hope has gone or where has your hope been resting?

YOAV PECK - My hope is in the fact that two positive things have come out of this crisis. One of them is that the Palestinian issue is on the table again after great effort was invested in disappearing the Palestinians and the Palestinian issue over the last years, concepts like managing the conflict have finally blown apart. And the Palestinians are here as they've always been here. They're here to stay and we must confront how we're going to build a future together with them. So that's good news. The other piece of good news is that hundreds of thousands of Israelis have come out of their living rooms and are marching in the streets and are manning and womaning the intersections across the country. People have awoken to political activism, starting with the judicial coup, the attempt at a judicial coup a year ago, people began waking up and now with the hostage situation, people are out there and active. And I have great hope that as we move forward, people will increasingly identify the disaster of the present moment to the 57 years of occupation of Palestine. And those, at least some of those masses will remain in the streets to demand that we reach an ongoing long-term settlement agreement with the Palestinians.

LAURA FLANDERS - Do you think really those who are in the streets today will stay there as the occupation continues?

YOAV PECK - It's really hard to say how this is going to play out, but you are right that many of the people during the judicial coup and also now, many of the people out there in the streets do not identify the occupation as something that is oppressing all of us. And they're much more focused on freeing the hostages in a pretty shortsighted way of viewing the situation. People are traumatized and re-traumatized and dwelling in October 7th. The media is supporting it every day, no matter when you turn on the radio, you can hear 11 months later, people telling terrible stories about October 7th. But October 7th is a year ago. And where we are now is a completely different place. So no, we have a major educational challenge ahead of us to get people to see the link between Israel's occupation of the Palestinians and the present situation. I would hate to be the parents of a soldier today, sending my child off to a war that has no future, no horizon. And Netanyahu continues to succeed in keeping a secret about what his plan for the day after the shooting ends might be. And that's because I believe he has no plan. And his plan is for us to escalate and escalate, as you've seen now spreading into Lebanon. I am an Israeli and my son lives on a Lebanese border, kibbutz. The the people of the North have been subjected to terrible bombardment for the last, ever since October 8th. So the assault has been two-sided, but the

thing that people keep forgetting is that Hezbollah has one condition for stopping the aggression towards us. And that's that we stop the aggression in Gaza.

LAURA FLANDERS - I want to go back to that word trauma because it's not unique to Israelis or Israeli Jews, or Palestinians. Heaven knows, we in the United States have seen our own traumas manipulated for political goals, and we too have bought the line that violence will make us safer. Why? Why is it so easy for that to work at the human level and what might work better? How could we rejigger, perhaps, our psychology in our response to these attacks and these feelings of fear?

YOAV PECK - You hit the nail on the head. Fear can be manipulated and has been manipulated. As I say, the media is complicit in this, in maintaining people's level of fear. And I just, you know, courage is what comes to mind at the moment. Until a year ago, I worked with the Bereaved Families Forum, an organization of 700 Israeli and Palestinian families who lost a dear one to the conflict. And all 700 of these people have said, we suffered a terrible loss, and what we are doing with that loss is turning it into working for peace so that no other families have to endure what we have endured. And that's the kind of courage that we're looking for. When the last shot was fired in Havana, Fidel Castro said, "Now begins the revolution." And that's what I'm waiting for, the day when we don't have to hide in our shelters, when we can come out and quietly, cautiously extend our hands to our neighbors and create a new reality here. And it's possible.

LAURA FLANDERS - I believe, I want to believe. Yoav Peck, thank you so very much. It's really been wonderful talking with you. That was Yoav Peck, Israeli Peace Activist. I want to thank Yoav and all our guests today. Ben Lorber, Phyllis Bennis. I'll be back in just a moment with a few thoughts. This was not an easy episode to produce, as you could have guessed. So many voices and perspectives to include and so many we have inevitably left out. Censorship and control and the threat to journalists mean that we are not getting equal reporting or coverage from every place. So one thought I had at the beginning of the process was to dispense with words and play music instead and invite our audience to imagine life for an Israeli in those first few hours of the October 7th assault, or for Palestinians in Gaza under the daily deadly bombardment and hunger and starvation campaign since. To imagine what it's like for Jews to live under generational antisemitism and for Palestinians to live under generations of displacement and occupation, can we exercise our imagination muscles to be more resistant to jingoistic leaders who tell us through war we will achieve peace? Can we exercise those muscles to be more resistant to calls for revenge when what we're really feeling is sorrow and pain and grief? Can we? I think perhaps, but those muscles need to be not just of the imagination, but also of the body acting differently in voting and in working with others and in the street and protest. Can we act differently? I think so, but it will take practice. So what better time? Let's practice.

Till the next time, stay kind, stay curious. For Laura Flanders and Friends, I'm Laura. Thanks for joining us.

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