

Israel's Hidden Victory: The 'Defeat' Of The West Is a Myth | Yakov Rabkin

Yakov Rabkin discusses Artyom Kirpichenok's reported detention in Israel, stressing the scarcity of confirmed information. He examines unequal legal protections, Western support for Israel, and the relationship between Zionism, colonialism, and Christian Zionism. Rabkin challenges claims of inevitable Western decline, arguing that regional fragmentation may serve strategic objectives. The conversation also explores Israeli education, surveillance exports, restrictions on dissent, and the limits of electoral change, before considering public pressure, diplomatic assistance, and Jewish opposition to Zionism through his published books. Yakov's Links: Yakov Rabkin's website: <https://yakovrabkin.ca/> Yakov Rabkin's Substack: <https://yakovrabkin.substack.com/> Zionism Decoded in 101 Quotes: <https://www.ipgbook.com/zionism-decoded-in-101-quotes-products-9781771864121.php> Israel in Palestine: Jewish Rejection of Zionism: <https://israelpalestinebook.com/> Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Support Neutrality Studies: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Neutrality Studies shop: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Time Stamps 00:00 Artyom Kirpichenok's detention 05:29 Security courts and unequal justice 17:06 Western support and double standards 28:30 Colonial pride and the "new Hebrew" 35:44 Britain and Christian Zionism 39:42 Israel's hidden victory and Western decline 46:56 Security laws and shrinking civil liberties 53:36 Helping Kirpichenok and finding Rabkin's work

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies today with an update by the brilliant Jakob Rapkin, Emeritus Professor at the University of Montreal. Jakob, welcome back.

#Yakov Rabkin

Thank you for inviting me.

#Pascal

Well, thank you very much for coming back. And just for context, you are, of course, the author of many books, one of them being Zionism Decoded in 101 Quotes, a book which is out also in Russian and many other languages. It has been translated into many of those. So you are a keen observer of what is happening in and around Israel and about Zionism. And recently we got that sad news from over a month ago, almost two by now, that a colleague of yours, who you know personally, has

been imprisoned in Israel, Artem Kirpichenok. I'm sorry if I pronounced this wrong, but he is an academic. He wrote the foreword for one of your books. And he is, as we speak, still held in an Israeli prison. Can you give us an update of what is happening to him?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, actually, I wrote a preface for his book. Kirpichenok is, well, a 51-year-old specialist in the Middle East. He lives in St. Petersburg, Russia. And I met him a few years ago when I visited St. Petersburg. And he was actually at the launch of that book that you showed, the Russian edition of my book, which is now, I think, in seven languages already. And he went to Israel, and I spoke with him literally before he left because he was supposed to take part in the roundtable discussion that I was organizing in St. Petersburg after his return. Well, he never returned, and we had the roundtable without him. But that's the least of the problem.

So he arrived on the 2nd of August in Israel and was immediately arrested. Now, we don't have any confirmation of that from official sources. We only have some information about him from a lawyer that apparently met him. And now it becomes a bit Kafkaesque because she was not allowed to see the accusations. That's quite normal in Israel. Many security prisoners not only get indicted, they get prison sentences without ever seeing the nature of the accusation because it's secret. It's a security offense. Israel is very strict in that sense. And I think that, well, what she said, the lawyer, is that he is accused of espionage, I find it very difficult for two reasons.

First, he doesn't live in Israel, so it's very, very difficult to spy on a country if you don't live there. Secondly, if someone would recruit a spy, I don't suggest they would recruit someone who writes critical articles about Israel. Well, it really doesn't square in my limited mind, but we'll see what happens later. Well, personally, I find it very sad, and I'm not surprised because there are over 8,000 Palestinian prisoners in the Israeli prison system. So here's one who is not Palestinian. And, well, we'll have to wait to see the results. I mean, unfortunately, I cannot say more. And I don't like to express hypotheses and guesses because I don't know.

#Pascal

But do you know if he is held incommunicado, or is it just—I mean, you're not connected to his family, so you don't have more updates, and there's no public information available about him. But I suppose there must be information that goes out to his family, I hope.

#Yakov Rabkin

No.

#Pascal

No.

#Yakov Rabkin

No, no. What we do know, I mean, officially, we know that a security prisoner was brought to court without naming him. A security prisoner was brought to court on serious security charges, and he was remanded by the decision of the judge. But we don't know if that's him, maybe someone else. We are just guessing. We are putting together two pieces, and we think that that must have been him. So the lawyer said that he was in a bad condition, and he—again, I haven't spoken with the lawyer. I only repeat what has been published, so I don't have any privileged access. What I think it shows, however, is the character of the Israeli penitentiary system and the Israeli justice system. I think that's very clear.

#Pascal

Maybe we should talk about this, because supporters of the Israeli cause, let's call it that, or of the Zionist cause, will never get tired of repeating that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East and has a separation of powers, and everything works the way it works in the West. It's a proper state and everything. But what does this tell us? I mean, how is it possible that a country can just arrest people like that on arrival for—I mean, we would suppose that this Israel criticism has something to do with this. But does he actually also have an Israeli passport? I mean, because he's an Israeli citizen.

#Yakov Rabkin

He lived in Israel, I think, for over 10 years. He served in the army. He did his graduate degree at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. So he's both an Israeli and Russian citizen. Apparently, the Russian diplomatic mission in Israel is trying to get more information, but again, they haven't disclosed anything. It's really—you have to realize that the lawyer was allowed to see Artyom after 20 days of interrogation. Oh, no. So in most countries, you don't say a word without your lawyer present. That certainly is not the case in Israel.

As to the image of Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East and so on, well, there have been many myths of Israel that have been dethroned, have been denied, and no one believes them. For example, one myth is that the Palestinians in 1948 left because other Arab countries called on them to leave. You know, this was a myth that was very present, that perhaps is still present somewhere. But there are many myths about Israel that little by little are being debunked. One of them is, of course, the judicial system. But you see, the judicial system works like in most democratic countries, except on security issues. So this is a very important thing.

#Pascal

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#Yakov Rabkin

You know, for example, before talking with you, I checked some statistics. Since 1967, since the occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza, Israel has imprisoned one million Palestinians.

#Pascal

One million?

#Yakov Rabkin

Yeah, we are talking about... So every sixth person has been imprisoned, which means every family knows someone or has someone who was imprisoned at one point by Israel. And one must say that the acquittal rate for Palestinian security accusations is less than 1%, which means that 99% plus are being convicted and imprisoned. So it's a system that has a very strong ideological component. You know, the judicial system is aligned with the Zionist ideology. It's not a neutral judicial system. And therefore, Palestinians are seen as enemies, and they are treated differently. There was an episode, I think, maybe 15 years ago. There was a demonstration of Palestinians who were citizens of Israel in the Galilee, near the town of Afula.

13 of them were killed by the police. Now, no demonstration of Jews in Israel would receive this treatment. You see, you have to realize that there are two standards, double standards concerning Arabs, even if they're Israeli citizens, and of course if they are not Israeli citizens. So the system works in most criminal cases, which are not security cases. It works pretty well. But I think that we have examples of countries where the judicial system was ideologically aligned with the regime. Say, well, the German judicial system was functioning perfectly in the '30s, but it was aligned with a dominant ideology.

So I think we have to realize that when that episode near Afula, when 13 people were killed, I saw the interview with the police commander who did this, and he was an immigrant from Romania, if I remember correctly. And he couldn't understand why he was interrogated. He says, "Well, I came to Israel to defend Jews, so what's the problem?" You see, for many people, many simple people, there cannot be the same justice for Palestinians and for Israelis, and even for, say, people like Kirpichonok. You know, I looked at the Russian-language social networks, which I usually don't look at.

There's so much hatred of him just because he criticizes Israel. So when you said that Israel is a democracy, it is a democracy. I agree. And as a result, the government you see and what it does reflects public opinion in Israel, which is not the case in other countries. You know, what, say, the German government does doesn't reflect what the German population wants, or even the American government doesn't. But, say, in America, the population is very much opposed to Israel now, but the government is entirely pro-Israel. But in Israel, I think there is a perfect alignment between the population and the government.

#Pascal

This is, I mean, on a political level here, the issue is that with Israel, we have a real-life example of what happens when you create a tyranny of the majority against an outcast minority. Not that the Jewish population of the territory that Israel controls is the majority, but it is the voting majority, and thereby can set the political agenda for what happens to the minority, even when the minority is population-wise in the majority, but not in one block and not inside the political system.

#Yakov Rabkin

Let me just, for our listeners, it would be useful to remind them that about two million Palestinians are citizens of Israel because they belong to the territory that Israel occupied in 1948, and they had not been expelled from it.

#Pascal

And they have Israeli passports, right?

#Yakov Rabkin

They have Israeli citizenship and they can vote. And then there are about 5 million Palestinians in the occupied territories who don't have Israeli citizenship and who don't have political rights. So you have a situation, say, on the West Bank, where Palestinians are subject to military justice, which I think the expression itself is a bit of an oxymoron, military justice. And people living next to them in a settlement, in a Zionist settlement, are subject to Israeli civil law. So, in other words, you have two systems that apply to people living within 100 meters from each other because they belong to different ethnic groups.

#Pascal

And the total number of Jewish Israelis in Israel is around seven million?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, something—seven, eight, ten—something like that.

#Pascal

So the question to me then is, like, this issue that you've worked on so much, you know, the difference between Zionism and Israel and Judaism and so on, that with Zionism we have an ideology that wants to create a Jewish state for the Jews only. And what we currently have is a state in which Jews have a different status, and even to the point where different judicial standards apply to them, officially and unofficially. But even within that kind of society, it's still possible that individual Jews, like your colleague, or you if you went there, might be subjected to a treatment that is completely different from civil law because it has national security implications, right? That's probably the allegation, right? That he is a spy or that he did something to undermine security, and therefore he doesn't get the usual protections of the law. Is that the situation?

#Yakov Rabkin

Yes, I think that's the case. Even though I don't think he will be judged by a military justice system, it will be the Israeli mainstream system that will be judging him. But, you know, the Israeli courts have accepted a lot of things, including applying physical pressure, or, to put it more bluntly, it's torture. But again, Israeli society—you can see what's going on in the West Bank. I think it's a very good illustration of what I'm talking about. Well, here you have militant vigilante settlers who run around, kill people, burn cars, burn houses, occupy villages, and nothing happens to them.

Virtually nothing. And the army sometimes looks the other way. Sometimes they slap them on the hand. But it's so clear that there are two systems of justice there, that many of the soldiers and officers sympathize with the settlers. Many of them are settlers. So you can't expect them, just in a very human way, to be applying law, particularly that they know that the dominant ideology is to have a Jewish state, whatever that means. So they think that they have to protect Jews, like most people in Israel think.

#Pascal

You know, the thing to wrap our minds around is that this is part and parcel of the political process of how this whole project is developing. Because if we look at the reaction from the European Union, for instance, or from the United States, they wag their fingers against illegal settlements, the evil settlers. They even put sanctions on illegal settlers, but they never put sanctions on the state of Israel, right? It allows for taking apart a thing that actually belongs together, right, and say, like, no, no, no, we uphold international law because we are very displeased with those illegal settlers, but the system that enables the settlements in the first place is left perfectly intact.

#Yakov Rabkin

You're absolutely right. And even the recent British initiative to apply sanctions, again, it's a slap on the hand. The Israeli settlements don't produce that much produce for export and all that. And even then there was a caveat for religious reasons. Again, Israel has been the darling of the West, of course. And I think that there is a tremendous reluctance to apply sanctions. Look, compare the ease with which sanctions have been applied to Russia with the absence of sanctions from the European Union or from the United States to Israel for something which appears to many people to be genocide. No one seriously talks about genocide in Ukraine. But in Palestine, in Gaza, it's quite clear. And yet sanctions are not applied. But I think that we live in different times when there is no shame, no embarrassment. It's open. It's in your face. This double standard is in your face. Israel, in a way, has been a leader in that. It had enjoyed impunity and it really didn't care. And now many other countries don't as well.

#Pascal

Yeah, but, you know, if we compare this to 30 years ago, the Oslo process and then the Oslo Accords and so on, I mean, we find the same similar kind of duplicity, but it was much better camouflaged in the language of humanitarianism, in the language of, "We are trying to achieve a two-state solution." Today, Ben-Gvir and Smotrich and even Netanyahu, they have no qualms whatsoever to go on a podcast and say, like, "No, no, never, ever two-state solution. We will do everything we can to expel them." I mean, they openly talk about that. That 30 years ago, in my view, was probably not possible. I mean, what does this degradation of also the language and the bluntness with which the Zionist project is now being implemented mean? Tell us about, you know, where the Zionist project itself stands.

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, I think it tells us not only about the Zionist project, but about the Western world.

#Pascal

Yep.

#Yakov Rabkin

The Zionist project has been pretty open about what it wanted. It did have wonderful diplomats like Abba Eban, who knew how to present the case and who were very eloquent and so on. Today, people say they don't really care about presenting the case because they lost it in public opinion. But they don't care about public opinion, but they have control of the government. I think that's very important, that support for Israel, in a way, is expressed by the ruling classes. And I don't mean only the political ruling class, the economic ruling class. Israel is a very important country, not only because it's an outpost of the West in West Asia, but also because it is an example of how you deal with dissidents, how you deal with opponents.

And what you see today in Britain and France and the United States, opinions are being qualified as terrorism. But this is new. This is new. And Israel has been a leader—and also another very important use of Israel by Western elites—oh, ruling classes, I don't like the word elites, but since everyone uses it, it sometimes slips into my vocabulary. Israel is a very useful supplier of technology, know-how, surveillance, and control of populations. They have had tremendous experience with Palestinians, and they export this know-how, tested on Palestinians, to many countries, including Canada, where I'm speaking from.

So that's why the governments usually are very supportive of Israel. They have to pay lip service, like these recent sanctions that will be maybe applied to the West Bank. But by and large, I think that someone like Chancellor Merz, he blurted out when Israel attacked Iran, "They're doing dirty work for us." And that's the feeling many people in the ruling classes have. Israel does dirty work for us. Well, then the United States joined that a year later—or not, half a year later. So we have to see Israel not as an isolated case, not as something that stands out, but something that leads the way of the Western world.

#Pascal

Yes, it does. I completely agree. I mean, in an essay that I recently wrote, I made the argument that we should rather think of Israel as an integrated part of the body politic of the West. That just then allows, you know, you throw the ball back and forth. There's things that Israel can do that the United States internally couldn't do. There's things that the settlers can do that the Israeli government cannot do. But overall, they work together as part and parcel of something that still, for all intents and purposes, is a colonial project of expansion of a system into the lands of another people that is now grinding down.

And when you look also at the warfare of Israel, it's at war with all of the surrounding countries. It's occupying Syria, it occupies Lebanon. I mean, it fights on so many fronts, and it has a war with Iran. This is like an integral part of an entire warfare approach. And if you look at the Europeans, they support that. Maybe they put sanctions on settlers, but that allows them not to put sanctions on the government. That still allows them to say, like, overall, Israel is a democracy, and we, as a value community, we stand together. We protect against terrorism. Terrorism is applied against the Arabs, never, never, ever as a term against the actions of the Israeli government. I mean, it just seems so all connected to each other.

#Yakov Rabkin

Yes, they are connected, and I'm glad that we're discussing Israel in the context of the political West because it is part of the political West. It's more outspoken. It's more in your face. But again, it definitely provides the example for the right wing and extreme right wing in Europe and elsewhere, but also to the people in power today who are not extreme right and who really learn from Israel.

You have to realize that the Zionist network has been extremely effective, not only in terms of public opinion, not in terms of purchasing CBS and CNN and TikTok to control the discourse, but also in infiltrating police forces. Now municipal police forces, they take policemen from somewhere in the Midwest for a trip to Israel to learn techniques and know-how from Israeli police. And we're talking about hundreds and hundreds of subsidized, financed trips. So the commitment of the Zionist lobby is extremely strong. And, you know, in a way, they put the money where the word is. Yeah.

#Pascal

Yeah. Yeah. And it works. That's the point. It's an integrated system that actually then, on the other end, produces the realization of the Zionist project, which is a relatively recent project, right? About, I mean, in its current form.

#Yakov Rabkin

Yeah. And I think also it's important to understand that the Zionist lobby is so important and so powerful because you have a soccer field and there's only one team on the field, right? We don't have a Palestinian lobby. We don't have a pro-Palestinian lobby. So, in a way, it's not surprising that they're winning. They're winning for the ruling class. They're not winning in public opinion. But again, we can talk about democracy in the political West. How is it that many of the policies pursued nowadays are not supported by the population, such as militarization and dismantling of the welfare state?

#Pascal

Yeah, they go together. But again, maybe just to come back, what this change tells us, because I don't know whether or not you saw this, but what's happening in Thailand at the moment, this is a very interesting case where Israeli tourists and long-term residents managed to get so much attention on their behavior, which has little or nothing to do with the Palestine issue, little or nothing with the settlement of Palestine, but everything with the way that now little mini-colonies are forming on a couple of islands in Thailand, and that now there's an indigenous Thai opposition to that form, not of colonialism, but of misbehavior and of abuse of the Thai legal system, because they managed to create vehicles that would allow them to control majority stakes in property and so on, which is supposed to belong to Thais, 51%.

There's a law about that. And that created an entire backlash, although the Thai population used to be quite supportive of Israel, especially after October 7th. Whether—I just wonder if the way in which the Israeli system is also, like, shaping minds at the moment, whether that now is creating its own backlash in the wider world, or maybe I'm over-interpreting. No, you're not over-interpreting. But let me give a two-part answer. You've used the word colonial in a pejorative sense twice.

#Yakov Rabkin

It's no longer working. Read Marco Rubio's speech in Munich. He called on Western countries to be proud of their colonial past and colonial inheritance and so on. And this is the world we live in. Yes, in the past, colonial was a bad word. I don't think it is anymore in the political West. So we have to realize that even if you call it apartheid, say Israel, say, well, so what? It's not a matter of being shamed. You cannot shame someone who is proud of what he's doing. So that's about colonialism. The settler colonialism, you know, I've written a lot about it, given interviews. But you have to realize that this whole colonial enterprise of the 500 years of the West has been, is being rehabilitated in front of our eyes. And it's a very important issue. Now, your question about Thailand and Israeli tourists there.

Well, in my book, not the one that you showed, but my book on Threat from Within, I explain in detail the Israeli education system. You see, Israelis are brought up—Jewish Israelis, except what they call the ultra-Orthodox—in the mainstream secular Israeli system, they're brought up to be strong, intrepid, uncompromising, and, of course, towards the Palestinians. But you cannot separate it very much. If you have this kind of behavior, you also show it towards the other Jewish Israelis, which is quite clear. In Israel, it's a very tense society, very tense. But also when they go abroad, particularly to—not only, I mean, you have this—even when they went to Amsterdam, you remember, the soccer [fans] went to Amsterdam and they caused the riot there. They behave like masters because they know they grew up with a sense of impunity, total impunity. So the same thing applies maybe to Thailand.

#Yakov Rabkin

It's a social engineering project to create a new Hebrew who would be different from Jews. Indeed, he and she are very different from Jews. I think that's a mistake many people make when they read about Israel. They think about their Jewish neighbor. Well, the Jewish neighbor is very different. But Israelis, for several generations, have been brought up to be these muscular, Muskeljude, as they used to say, the muscular Jew, who shouldn't care about others. And now, once, when my first time actually in Israel, I used the word "considerate," and my interlocutor didn't understand the word, to be considerate.

#Pascal

Really? The English language word, or the Hebrew? No, no.

#Yakov Rabkin

I knew the word. I knew the word both in Hebrew and in English. But it's considered a sign of weakness, a sign of lack of virility, masculinity. That's the culture of Israel. So you have to realize that it has been perpetuated by the school system. In kindergarten, you're prepared to serve in the army.

#Pascal

That's, of course, what you're writing about in your book, right? Jewish opposition to Zionism and how you're explaining how the actual traditional way of how Jews understand Judaism is actually in opposition to, or doesn't agree at all with, this Hebrew idea of the settlers of the Israeli lands or of the Palestinian lands. But it's ingrained in the school system. It's ingrained in the way also in which the media system works. And it is highly militant, right? Because it needs to be a very weaponized approach toward gathering the lands that are claimed.

#Yakov Rabkin

Indeed. And this book, which is in English, I think appeared in 2006, exactly 20 years ago. There is a shorter book, which I think you also have a cover of, the recent one called Israel in Palestine: Jewish Rejection of Zionism. It's a shorter one. It's easier to read, less theological, because the one you showed, it takes a little bit of patience to go through it. This one is easier to read. And they explain how this pedagogical project was brought about, because the founders of the State of Israel, those who came at the turn of the 20th century, they hated the Jews as they existed then.

They wanted to create a new Hebrew. And they expressed themselves in the most horrible anti-Semitic ways about the Jews of their times. They say they are, you know, they repeated all the anti-Semitic clichés. They said, "We are going to create a very different one." They didn't use the term, but I would say we're talking about the 1920s and '30s. They wanted to create an Aryan Hebrew, so to speak. And they're succeeding. Again, they've been extremely successful in that.

#Pascal

Why is it that this is so possible, like, that this was so successful? Because you also showed, you know, how the early Jewish Zionists were a minority. They were small, and a lot of other Jews looked at them in Europe and said, like, no way. I mean, you just want us to leave our native lands and so on. But then, of course, the Shoah happened, the Holocaust did take place, of course. But at the same time, this wouldn't have worked without all of the support from other Western countries, including the United States, of saying, yeah, let's settle them over there. Let's give them the lands of the Palestinians and then support this cause.

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, it was largely a British project. The United States didn't play a very important role in it. It was a British project. And indeed, the people who supported it, including Mr. Balfour, who wrote this famous letter in 1917 supporting the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, they were all anti-Semites. And you have to realize, if you're an anti-Semite, you don't want to have Jews around. Let them go to Palestine. Let them be there. And this also dovetails with Christian Zionism.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Yakov Rabkin

Because many of them were Christian Zionists who thought that you need to gather Jews in the Holy Land to speed up the Second Coming of Christ, and then the Jews will have a choice: either to recognize Jesus as Messiah or perish. And an Israeli scholar, I think Gershon Gorenberg, gave an interview about his book on Christian Zionism, and he said, you know, "It's a play in five acts, and we disappear in the fourth one." In other words, either you perish or you recognize Jesus as Messiah; you're no longer Jewish in the fifth act.

#Pascal

Yeah, which is, of course, the bizarre thing: the Christian Zionists are Zionists because the Jews will be gone at the end of the entire play. But it does, on a political level, create the breeding ground for all of this collaboration that we are seeing going on, right? Because the means to get there are the same.

#Yakov Rabkin

Yeah. Yes, indeed, you have to realize that Christian Zionism is a very, very potent movement today. We're talking about tens of millions of people. In the United States alone, Pastor Hagee said that there are 50 million. Well, I didn't count them, but there are many in Brazil, all over Latin America, in South Korea, in Africa. Christian Zionists are usually evangelical, so it has to do with missionary work. And for these people—and of course, not all of them are anti-Semites; that's certainly not true—many of them would say that they love Jews, and they want to help Israel. That's why they want to help Israel. So there is a tremendous sympathy developed for the state of Israel, including for the settlers, because they're redeeming the land for the Second Coming of Christ.

You see, this is very much a religious project, which dovetails with the geopolitical one. And that's the history of Zionism. It was in the 16th century that first English-language sources appeared on the ingathering of Hebrews in the Holy Land. But it took the 19th century, when Britain developed geopolitical interests in the area, that then this Christian Zionism, which of course wasn't called like that because Zionism didn't exist as a word, but these people, evangelicals, they supported British attempts, a British project to have a Jewish homeland. They never said what homeland means. It was a deliberately nebulous term. It doesn't have any trace in international law. But that was done deliberately so that you could say that we are not supporting a state, we are supporting just a homeland, whereas in reality they were supporting a separate state.

#Pascal

If we come back again to what this now, the development and the changes over the last decades signify, you know, the fact that we have this outspoken colonial, not just neocolonial but traditional colonial understanding of the West of, like, look, this is our heritage, we should be proud of it. And we should actually help the people who implement this. We have the in-your-face version of Zionism on the ground. We have the in-your-face version of this impunity now around the world that doesn't cloak anything anymore in the language of international law or humanitarianism.

Is this overall, to you, a sign of strength of, well, Israel and the political West? Or is it a sign of something breaking? Because we see that the war against Iran is stuck. Israel is stuck on its other fronts. It's stuck in Lebanon. It seems as if, though, the project still uses the jargon or goes back to the origins of the entire jargon and the movement. But it's kind of, at least it seems to me, that there is no path anymore that would redeem the project in the eyes of the entire community. And I mean, changing the entire community is such a large project. I just wonder if that ever can be achieved.

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, I think that the real drastic change occurred with the end of the Cold War, with the dismantlement of the Soviet Union. Then this unipolar moment, about which you hear quite a bit on your podcast, also had this effect on Israel because it was the best thing that ever happened to Israel. There's no counterbalance. There's no Soviet Union that would be supporting Arab countries, and they could do whatever they wanted. And that's exactly what they've been doing since. And that applies as well to the United States and to the wars that the United States have waged over the last 35 years, or 30 years, many. And I would like to say that perhaps my view is a bit different from what we often hear in this commentariat. I think the United States didn't lose these wars in Iraq and elsewhere. If the purpose was to fragment and weaken Israel's enemies, these have been successful wars.

#Pascal

Yes.

#Yakov Rabkin

So, in other words, you cannot talk about victory if you don't know what the goal was. And the goal had been spelled out in this paper, "Securing the Realm," written by Netanyahu, by Israel first, as in the United States, in 1997 or '96, where it was spelled out that you have to weaken, preferably fragment, all the countries around Israel so that Israel will have total hegemony. And that's what we observe today. Now, whether this hegemony is being translated into military victory, we're going to see. I don't know. I don't share—you know, I grew up in the Soviet Union, as you know, and I've heard throughout my life that capitalism is about to collapse. Well, it didn't, hasn't so far.

I hear often on the various podcasts that the United States is in terminal decline and the West is in terminal decline. Let's see. I'm not quite sure that that's the case. And particularly, you know, I'm not changing the subject, but one of the signs of decline of the United States was, look, Europe is becoming independent. It's arming itself because it cannot rely on the United States. I don't see it this way at all. I see that Europe is rearming according to NATO standards to be an independent American proxy, sort of macro-Ukraine in Europe. And the same—I don't know much about the MECA agreement among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, but these are the three most loyal allies of the United States in the area.

How much of it is coordinated with the United States, I don't know. Perhaps the United States has decided to farm out medium-tech and low-tech to local agents and maintain, as you know, because I'm not the first one on your podcast who says that, and maintain high-tech and AI capabilities that would be guiding all this. So you can have European countries producing cannons and drones and whatnot, but the satellites belong to the United States, and the AI largely too. So I'm yet to see the terminal decline. I see that there is turmoil, that there are some erratic statements emanating from the White House. But I don't see the system as giving up. Misery is part of the system.

#Pascal

Israel is part of the system. No, and you're very, very right. And it's very important to point that out when we talk about individual political groupings and so on. That's not the same as the system. The system is what allows the entire political process to foster and to recreate and to do its thing. And that's something that is quite entrenched. And you're also right to point out that we are, in the commentary act, ourselves also part and parcel of how this forms, right? On the one hand, we have a bit of ideology where we're like, yeah, we would like this system to not work anymore.

On the other hand, we have clickbaitism because you need to sell, you know, especially on YouTube and on all the social media. We rely on people clicking on our stuff to watch it. So the natural tendency is to overstate the case, right? So, "the decline of the West" and so on are titles that catch attention, and thereby we foster a certain impression on people. And that might create a false impression that, however, feeds into the system, because once people believe something's in decline, they maybe don't go out on the street and do that much against it anymore. So, I mean, it's part and parcel of the sociological development.

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, again, I would like to go back to what we discussed just a few minutes ago, that support for Israel has caused very important changes in civil rights laws in Britain and France and the United States. Support for Israel has undermined basic freedoms in many countries, and in Germany, of course. So we have to see that those laws that, again, identify ideas with terrorism may be applied outside of the realm of support for Israel. And I think this has to be understood: that democratic freedoms are being observed when the going is easy, when the going is a bit rough.

They're just disregarded. Institutions didn't help people during the McCarthy era in the United States. And now you have anti-terrorism laws in Britain, you know, the cradle of democracy in the Western world. And people like, you know, our mutual friend Richard Sakwa, a Sovietologist, specialist in Russia, is being investigated under this law. I don't think he can be qualified as a terrorist. But it shows you how much the erosion of democracy is happening in the West, first as part of the support for Israel, but it will be extended elsewhere.

#Pascal

And, you know, security is, in a sense, a classic political concept to overwrite the other political concepts, like freedom and freedom of expression and freedom of movement and so on, right? It's a classical one. The one that I never saw coming until it happened was health. Health could have the same status, right? Health overwrites any other consideration. That's what happened during COVID. But it just shows that certain issues can overwrite what we take for granted in terms of civil liberties in the West. And there might be other such concepts that can overwrite them. And unfortunately, that's the process we are in. And your colleague, who is still imprisoned now in Israel, is, in a sense, now a direct product of this kind of overriding of civil liberties in the West. Do you think that the way that the Israeli system is developing actually might be a role model for what is in store for Europe and maybe even North America?

#Yakov Rabkin

I think it has been. I think it has been. I mentioned police forces that get inspired and equipped by Israeli technology and know-how. And I think that support for terrorism laws are also very much present. But I think it's also important to realize, if some of our viewers read Haaretz, a relatively progressive newspaper in Israel, which is read by about 3% of the Israeli population. Three. Yes, three.

#Pascal

Only.

#Yakov Rabkin

Yeah, so it is very unrepresentative of Israel. And I think they keep it free because it creates a tremendous propaganda effect. And I respect very much Gideon Levy and Amira Hass, who write from the heart and from knowledge of Palestinian people. They write very important pieces. But the fact that they're allowed to write these things and publish them also creates the image of Israel as a more or less free country. What they write would not be publishable in the New York Times or on

Fox News or wherever. But in Israel, very few people read it. But those who want to support Israel, the so-called liberal Zionists, point to it, saying, well, look, Israel is still a free country. Look, this sharp criticism is being permitted.

#Pascal

Yeah, until it won't, or until it loses its usefulness or becomes a source of pain.

#Yakov Rabkin

Within Israel, it has no effect. You see, within Israel, those 3% may agree with that, but it has no importance. Whereas for the West, it creates the impression that Israel has a vigorous internal political debate. Well, if you look at the election campaign now, there have been several extremely brutal and cruel advertisements by several politicians showing how tough they are. So they're competing over who is more brutal than the other.

#Pascal

That's what works, right? That's what people want to see.

#Yakov Rabkin

Obviously. I mean, if you're competing on that basis, it tells you something about the population, doesn't it?

#Pascal

So the whole point that Israel is still a democratic state and that democratic elections can change a government gives us no hope to think that there will be fundamental change in the way that Israel will approach the Zionist project. I mean, they're competing on which version of brutality to implement the Zionist project, basically.

#Yakov Rabkin

Right. I don't think that actually today Prime Minister Netanyahu is kind of leftist in his government. And I expect him—and he may or may not keep the position—but I expect a much more nationalist government than you see today. And there are resources for that. Don't think that Smotrich and Ben-Gvir are at the end of it. There are others waiting.

#Pascal

It's a pretty bleak picture for what is in store, but maybe in the last couple of minutes that we have, Jakob, do you have any recommendations or something that can be done in order to help Artem Kiyopichenok or others? What would you think that people can do?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, what they can do is try to write to their governments that they should press Israel. Not that Israel will react to it, but it's important for strengthening public opinion in Western countries about Israel, which is already pretty negative about Israel. But it's another element that has to be added. Whether the General Security Services of Israel are going to react to it, I have strong doubts. Maybe there are some diplomatic behind-the-curtain actions that might help. I obviously am not privy to it, but this whole case is grotesquely Kafkaesque.

And, you know, there's a trial and we don't know—there's no trial so far—but it's all so murky. And I don't quite see what he could have done that would justify six weeks of total blackout on the nature of accusations. I just don't think he certainly is not privy to nuclear secrets of Israel or whatever. So what possibly could he have done that would justify six weeks of incommunicado and no announcement even of his arrest? Because the only announcement we know is that a security prisoner has been indicted or whatever, but we don't know if it's him, maybe someone else.

#Pascal

This is also the point where the Russian consular service should definitely try to help him, since he's also a Russian citizen. But does this also, just at the very end, mean that you will restrict your travels to Israel? Would you now recommend people who have been publicly critical of Israel to rethink travel schedules? Or do you think this is kind of a singular case?

#Yakov Rabkin

I can't tell you, really, because there's a heavy responsibility saying one way or the other.

#Pascal

Right.

#Yakov Rabkin

And I don't want to be held responsible for that. I don't know. But I think a lot of people around me would not travel to Israel for moral reasons. This is quite clear. They don't want to spend a penny in that country. And they don't buy—you know, some of my friends who observe Jewish law, they buy

kosher wine, but they make sure that it's not Israeli kosher wine. So there is a moral scruple that prevents people from traveling there. And as to whether it's advisable or not, honestly, I can't say anything.

#Pascal

And you don't have to. I mean, this is an attempt at doing some analysis of what's happening, not life advice. Yakov, people who want to buy your books or find you online, I think they should go first and foremost try to find, well, all of your many books that you wrote, including, of course, Jewish Opposition to Zionism, including Israel in Palestine and Zionism Decoded in 101 Questions. Is there any other place where people should find your recent publications and writings?

#Yakov Rabkin

I've started a Substack, as you know, and little by little, I'm publishing something there. I'm not very proficient in it, but I will. But I do have a website, which you may indicate in the description. And also there is a website in Academia.edu. So there are three sources that I would suggest. And for those who listen to us in English or in other languages, many of my books are available in Spanish and in German, even in Korean and Swedish. So before they buy the English book and struggle with it, perhaps it exists in their native language.

#Pascal

I will try to link to as many of your profiles as I can in the description box below, and also to a couple of your books. And we will certainly have you back on soon again, Yakov Rabkin. Thank you so much for your time today.

#Yakov Rabkin

It was my pleasure.