

Israel's Zionist Self-Destruction

Euro-American Zionism (Jewish and Christian) has killed millions in West Asia, devastated the region, and it is the motor behind the Gaza Genocide. But Israel itself is under threat of falling prey to the deadly logic that birthed the state in the first place. Today we are holding a panel discussion on what makes Zionism such a dangerous and ultimately even self-negating force. I'm joined by 3 world class academics: Professor Yakov Rabkin of Montreal University, Professor Manuel Ramos of the University Institute of Lisbon, and Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Colombia University. Links: Yakov's books: *Israel in Palestine: Jewish opposition to Zionism*: <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/israel-in-palestine-yakov-m-rabkin/1148269128> *What is Modern Israel?*: <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/what-is-modern-israel-yakov-m-rabkin/1122667941?ean=9780745335810> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Goods Store: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction 00:00:48 Defining Zionism: Political, Religious, or Imperial? 00:16:38 Exclusionary Nationalism and Messianic Contradictions 00:23:30 The Imperial Lifeline: US and British Support 00:27:40 The Shift from Secular to Religious Zealotry 00:37:41 African Zionism and the Sacralization of State Power 00:45:51 Anti-Semitism, Persecution, and Weaponization 00:56:34 Conclusion: Radicalization and Democratic Deficit

#Pascal

Welcome, everybody. Today we are holding a panel discussion on Zionism with three world-class academics. I've got with me Professor Yakov Rabkin of the University of Montreal, Professor Manuel Ramos of the University Institute of Lisbon, and Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University. Gentlemen, welcome.

#Manuel Ramos

Thank you very much for the invitation.

#Pascal

We said we're going to do a panel on Zionism to explore this concept a bit more because, Yakov, you've been working on it for many years and you've written wonderful books, including about the Jewish rejection of Zionism. Manuel, in an earlier podcast you linked Zionism to the Crusades, and Jeff, you've been working on this topic for a while too. So, let's maybe start with the question of how we should understand Zionism. Should we see it as a Jewish project, a Christian project, a European project, or a transatlantic project? What's the best way to capture what Zionism is about? Let's start with Yakov.

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, Zionism is, first of all, a political movement. The idea is to bring Jews to the Holy Land by political or military means. This idea is very different from the messianic hopes you find in Judaism and, of course, also in Christianity. The idea of doing this actually comes from Protestant theologians beginning in the 17th century, who saw it as part of redemption, the second coming of Christ, and the end of the world. For them, it was extremely important to bring Jews from all over the world to the Holy Land so they could witness the second coming of Christ and either recognize Christ as the Messiah or perish if they didn't. So it's a very problematic scenario, to put it mildly.

And that scenario played out in the 17th, as I said, and in the 18th century. In the 19th century, it was reinforced by the geopolitical interests of Great Britain, which wanted to have a foothold in the Holy Land, not far from the Suez Canal, so it was very handy. When Jews embarked on this project, it was very late in the 19th century, and it was quite unpopular among Jews. We can talk later about why it wasn't popular. Today, Zionism is the official ideology of the State of Israel, and many Israelis see that Zionism, whatever streams it had before, has now resulted in racism. Avram Burg, former speaker of the Knesset, Gideon Levy, the journalist from *Haaretz*, and many other people say that today, in order to be a Zionist, you have to be a racist or a fascist. So that's the evolution of that movement.

#Pascal

Manuel, how would you describe it? You're the one who, in a previous program, made the connection to the Crusades and to this strong Christian fundamentalist belief about the Holy Land. What do you think is essential to understand about Zionism?

#Manuel Ramos

Well, I think Zionism is an offshoot of a larger ideological movement, which is Messianism. And Messianism is Christian, but it's also Muslim and Jewish. I think the history of Messianism is probably as old as humankind. The idea that we'll find perfection, that there will be a final day of judgment and then everything will be okay—that kind of expectation of a perfect future—is something quite general. In the history of Messianism, which, as I said, gives rise to this offshoot of specific Zionism, I think we have to go back, as I proposed before, to the Crusades and to the various movements in Christianity that were searching for a path to the end times.

And this project collided very early on with Muslim apocalypticism, because the idea of the Second Coming of Jesus is not only Christian but also Islamic. The idea of the Second Coming of Isa has been very deeply anchored in Muslim thought. So we have three Abrahamic religions that think about the end times and a final culmination, and this has created all sorts of variations. I've been interested—because I work in the Horn of Africa—in African Zionism, and also in South American Zionism.

They bear some relation, of course, to Western Zionism and Israeli Zionism, but they are quite different. I think we should also include these forms of Zionism in the discussion, because they don't necessarily tie to the idea that Zion will be established in Jerusalem. It's much more symbolic, and it's much more about the present. It doesn't project into the future but into the now—it's more of a today thing than a future thing. There's another element I'd like to bring in here. Sometimes we contrast the Western idea of linear time with the so-called Eastern idea—be it Buddhist, Hindu, or Taoist—of cyclical time.

And I think sometimes this is misdirected, because there are many forms of messianism and apocalypticism in Eastern religions. And maybe—this sounds a bit crazy—but I tend to think that the installation of the Kingdom of God after the Battle of Armageddon, after Judgment Day, is a return to the initial movement, the initial condition—the pre-original sin condition. So in that way, we can also see apocalypticism as a cyclical form. There is definitely this idea of linearity, but this linearity hides a cyclical form, which is not as pronounced as in Eastern religions. But I think we should also try to think of these ideas of the final times as part of a thinking of renewal.

#Pascal

Thank you, Jeff. The amazing thing, though, is that as a political movement, Zionism is largely atheist. I mean, you don't need to be a believer to be a Zionist, right?

#Jeffrey Sachs

Well, I think what's so interesting is all the different, and sometimes utterly contradictory, roots of this idea. But today, Zionism is the ideology that guides the state of Israel, so it's a political ideology—a movement, as Yakov said. If we look back, and just as these two great experts from whom I've learned—I'm merely a student of this, trying to understand the political and geopolitical implications—there's the strain of messianism, which Manuel talks about. There's also the strain of Christian, especially evangelical Protestantism, that sees the return of Jews to the Holy Land as a prelude to the parousia, the second coming of Christ.

There is definitely, even today, an element of this being a battle between Christianity—or Judeo-Christianity, as we say in the United States and Canada—and Islam, a battle over who controls the Holy Land. That's definitely a motivating force for many American Zionists: the idea of keeping the Holy Land in the hands of Christians or Jews, but not Muslims. This is clearly an imperial undertaking, both in the literal sense that modern Zionism was fundamentally enabled by the British Empire, through the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which placed the world's most powerful empire at that time on the side of a Jewish homeland.

And so this was an imperial undertaking. And as Yakov said, as was typical with the British, it was a very cynical imperial project led by a number of anti-Semites interested in control over the Red Sea, the Suez Canal, and soon enough, pipelines from Iraq to Haifa—basically to protect the crown jewels

of the British Empire. There was also the belief that announcing the Balfour Declaration would entice the United States to join World War I on the British side. So this was typical British imperial maneuvering that backed it. And now we have the American empire, which has been the great sponsor and backer of modern Zionism and the state of Israel.

It's a nationalist movement rooted in the very European, late 19th-century belief that each people needs a state. This is a crude European political ideology that has led to no end of misery, but it's based on the idea that there's no such thing as multi-ethnic societies or transnational empires—each people should have its own state. The Balkans need to be “balkanized,” with each place becoming a physical, geographic state for some ethnicity, meaning some linguistic group or ethnos. And this is the sense of Herzl, the main founder of Jewish Zionism, which is actually a late form of Zionism.

And as we know, Herzl was completely irreligious—ignorant of religion, uncaring or skeptical about it. He was concerned about anti-Semitism and nationalism in the sense that an ethnos should have a physical state. For him, whether it was Uganda, the Holy Land, or some other place was largely a matter of tactics. Now, today, Zionism is the ideology of an actual political state. The purpose of 20th-century Zionism was to create that state, to secure it, and to expand it.

So it is now an ideology that says many things, but one is that Israel is a state of the Jewish people, and Judaism is a nation, not necessarily a religion. It is a people who have a land, who had a land. This is their land, and it's their land again, and it's going to be their land. The strains of Zionism within Israel are quite varied. They all form around a political idea that this is an ideology of a state, which is significant. But for some, this is an expression of, I would say, late 19th-century nationalism—the idea that we have a state, and it's the only way we can be secure in a world of nations at war with each other.

That seems to be Netanyahu's idea. For others, it goes back to biblical redemption, so it becomes a kind of messianism—redeeming God's promise of this land, whatever that promise specifically is, maybe from the Nile to the Euphrates or something else. So it's a mix of ideas all centered around the state. What I think is so important—and I'm delighted to be meeting Manuel Ramos, honored to be on the panel—is that I've been a longtime student of Yakov Rabkin, who's taught me all of this. And for me, what Yakov helped me understand is that I had no particular attraction to any of this and was quite repelled by what Israel actually does in its behavior.

The point is, Zionism is not Judaism. Some strands of Zionism have a religious base; some don't have any religious base. They're a kind of crude nationalism, which I generally deplore. And many strands of Judaism are in absolute opposition to Zionism and always have been since Zionism emerged as a political ideology. That's very important and illuminating, in my mind. Zionism is not Judaism by any stretch at all—and that's historically true, and it's true today.

#Pascal

Yakov and Manuel, please feel free to react freely to what the others are saying. But maybe, Yakov, why do you think that although Zionism is not just a Jewish phenomenon, it's also a Christian one—and, as Manuel said, you even find it in other monotheistic beliefs—at the same time, Zionism is an exclusionary form of nationalism, as you put it in one of your talks? It's not integrative, like, you know, the Russian citizen can be of any ethnicity, or the French citizen is the *citoyen* from anywhere. Why is it that once it's tied to the land, it becomes exclusionary, but internationally it's actually multi-religious or multi-ethnic?

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, I think it's important to distinguish between the political ideology and the religious ideas that circulate in the three Abrahamic religions. And I think it's important to make that distinction, because those Jewish, Christian scholars and rabbis who oppose Zionism, at the same time, accept Jewish messianism. But for them, it's not an instruction on how to fly an F-35; rather, it's something purely theoretical that has to do with improving one's character and improving one's society. And that's how you repair the world so that eventually the Messiah would come. That's one of the central ideas, I think, in those messianic frameworks in Judaism.

And there are many of them. Since Judaism doesn't have a center—doesn't have a Vatican that can decide what's true or what isn't—there are all kinds of different opinions about the end of times, about the Messiah, and all that. However, today's Zionism has very little to do with that. It has to do with a very powerful nuclear state in West Asia that, as Jeffrey said quite correctly, uses the ethnic nationalism of Eastern and Central Europe, where Zionism was born. You know, Zionism was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Herzl was born in Budapest. So the idea that every ethnic group or nation has to have its own state was very common there, and still is very common there.

You see this very clearly today in the Baltic states, in Poland, and in the current regime in Ukraine. It wasn't like that before, but now it is. So the idea of exclusionary nationalism exists, and for Israel, it's a justification for ethnic cleansing and even genocide. In other words, they want to have a purely Jewish population in the land of Israel. They used to hide this idea; now they're much more explicit about it. But I repeat, there is very little in common between the political ideology of ethnic nationalism—which Zionism is, and racism too—and all these messianic theories that indeed have much in common among themselves. But they are not practically acted upon, except, of course, for the Crusades, which are a good precursor, if you like, to Zionist ideology.

#Pascal

Manuel, do you want to respond to what you heard today?

#Manuel Ramos

Maybe to add to that, I think there's another element here, which Jeffrey talked about—colonialism. Zionism, as it's conceived in Israel today, is a colonial product. And as Yakov mentioned, the issue of genocide is quite interesting to connect with what's happening at the International Court of Justice, because the country bringing the accusation is South Africa, which is significant. So, in a way, we have a South African country taking that stand. And, for instance, Brazil—Brazil is deeply, deeply Zionist. About 30% of the population is evangelical Zionist. You find it all over South America, and you find Zionism all over Africa. But it's a Zionism, as Yakov said, that is religious, but not only that. In Africa, and especially in South Africa, Zionism is not purely religious; it's also deeply political.

But it's interesting because South Africa and many other African countries are, by essence, anti-colonial. And it's interesting that you have this sort of tension between an anti-colonial stance and the Zionist stance. This has created quite a few clashes in South Africa and in other African countries as well. How can we think of Zionism on the one hand and believe in the coming of Jesus, and on the other hand, deal with a country whose ideology is Zionism—an exclusionary and colonial one? So I think it's interesting to look at these two forms of Zionism: one exclusionary, the other not at all, that are, in a way, clashing at the International Court of Justice at this moment.

#Pascal

Yeah, and it wouldn't work, would it, if there wasn't all this international support? I mean, we just saw this week, or a few days ago, that the Eurovision Song Contest organizers decided to include Israel in the contest, right? No other Middle Eastern country—none—just this one. And now other countries are saying they're pulling out. Jeff, I mean, without that international support network, this wouldn't function, right? The entire state of Israel, the way we know it today, wouldn't be what it is if it weren't for this massive support from Europe and the United States. How do you make sense of this international element of what Israel is, and what Zionism is?

#Jeffrey Sachs

Well, Israel was created by two main empires: the British Empire, up until the actual Declaration of Independence of Israel, and then the American Empire, which supported Israel after the UN vote on the partition plan. Continental Europe is a subsidiary player, I would say, in all of this—more divided on some of these issues. But it's been the British and the Americans who first made the so-called Jewish homeland through the Balfour Declaration, and then it was American arm-twisting in 1947 that actually passed the partition plan, which gave, at that time, 56% of British Mandatory Palestine to roughly a third of the population, who were Jews.

That plan was rejected by the Arab world, and Israel unilaterally declared independence. The United States backed that declaration of independence. Since then, the U.S. has basically been not only the protector of Israel but has gone to war several times on Israel's behalf—either because it's viewed this enterprise as something positive for the American empire and has regarded Israel as the "great

aircraft carrier” of the United States in the Middle East, according to some American strategists, or because the United States is in the hands of the Zionist lobby, which is, uh, absolutely true. And so, the U.S. military has been at the disposal of Israel repeatedly, especially in the past quarter century, in wars of choice.

For example, Iraq in 2003, which was cheer-led by the Zionist lobby and by Netanyahu, or the overthrow of Assad, which was a fourteen-year war—an operation tasked by the CIA, under Obama in 2012, to carry out that overthrow, also at the behest of Israel. So this is definitely an imperialist project, and Israel would not be in its current form without that. It wouldn’t exist without the imperialist backing of the British and the Americans. But I want to come back to one other point, which I’d love to get Manuel and Yakov’s reactions to. It seems to me that the underlying thrust—from Herzl onward to Ben-Gurion, to the declaration of the State of Israel, to the Six-Day War, to the occupation, and the ideology of Greater Israel—says, “We’ll control 100% of Mandatory Palestine and more, because we’ll go into Syria, we’ll go into Lebanon, we’ll go into places we want to go into.”

Well, that was essentially a nationalist, exclusionary, imperialist, colonialist project—all of those things. There has arisen, as a powerful force in the last 40 years, the religious strain as a motive force in Israeli society and politics, especially among the settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories, notably in the West Bank. And for me, this is very interesting. I first went to Israel as a high school student 53 years ago. Israel still had a patina of a socialist, secular ideology of statehood, but most of the people I met were—well, I mean, there were almost no religious types that I knew. When I went back in the ’80s, suddenly there were these young people with their yarmulkes, their skullcaps on, dancing in the streets and all over the place.

And I asked, “Who are those?” And I was told that’s something called Gush Emunim. They were young zealots—religious zealots, I would say—who were adopting a kind of religious Zionism that I think wasn’t really prevalent then, in the ’40s through the ’60s. It came to life through many influences: the politics of occupation, the arrogance and hubris of occupying Palestinian lands, but also religious teachings by Rav Kook, who was an early senior rabbi in Israel, and later by a very vulgar, violent American rabbi, Meir Kahane, who inflamed young people with a religious form of Zionism that turned it into this redemptive culture—but made it all the more exclusionary and, in fact, all the more genocidal.

And, uh, it harked back to some books of the Bible, which are plainly genocidal books also—so shocking to read, especially the Book of Joshua, which is basically a manual of serial genocides. God says, “Kill the following eight nations. Everybody. Don’t let anybody survive.” Or is it seven? Excuse me—kill seven nations, don’t let anybody survive. And if I’m not mistaken, King Saul is taken to task for having taken the Amalek king as a hostage rather than killing him as he was commanded. So it is a manual of genocide. And if you’re a religious Zionist these days, that’s your manual. But again, I’m just an amateur on this. I’d like to hear from the experts.

#Yakov Rabkin

Well, let me just add something to what Jeffrey said. Indeed, the origins of the Zionist movement are secular. They used the Bible as a justification for their being in the Holy Land. Actually, one of my Israeli colleagues put it succinctly. He said, in a nutshell, the Zionist claim on this land is very simple—and he was referring to the founders of the State of Israel: “God doesn’t exist, and he promised us this land.” And that was exactly how it worked. I’d say that’s how it worked until the Six-Day War, the war of 1967, because the people who built the country were secular socialists. Well, socialists, I would say. Another Israeli colleague, Ze’ev Sternhell, didn’t know how to call them. He said, “We can’t call them national socialists, because the term means something else.”

So we’ll call them socialist nationalists. Well, the idea is the same: you build a socialist society for your own people, not for others who are part of the polity. And that existed, and they were just as zealous as the Gush Emunim that Jeff was referring to. But they were secular zealots—you don’t need to be religious for that. What changed in 1967 was the tremendous jubilation among many Jews that the Holy Land was in their hands—the Western Wall, the Temple, Hebron, and all these places. And again, Jeff mentioned Rav Kook. Rav Kook the father died well before the beginning of the State of Israel, but his son, Tzvi Yehuda Kook, also a rabbi, educated a whole generation of activists—you may call them zealots.

And when the Six-Day War happened, many of these people from precisely those educational institutions became devoted settlers. They went with tremendous courage and integrity—sometimes against the will of the Israeli government—to settle those territories. They were very motivated. Actually, when I was on sabbatical in Jerusalem, my neighbor was an officer in Hebron. He told me that, I think it was in ’68 or ’69, a group of religious Jews approached him and said, “We’d like to spend Passover in Hebron.” He said, “Sure, go to the hotel.” Then he added, “I shouldn’t have allowed them to come in. They never left.”

So that’s how this movement began. Today, first of all, these people have a lot more kids than secular Zionists, and secular Zionism is indeed in decline. The most active, the most devoted part of the Zionist movement today—and of the State of Israel—are those religious nationalists. Now, what is their theory? What is their ideology? They call it **dati leumi**, national Judaism. National Judaism is essentially Zionist ideology for people who observe ritual commandments. I think that’s a good definition, because these people observe Shabbat, keep kosher, and all that. And on top of that, they have Zionist ideology, which is really indistinguishable from the ideology of the founders, because they also occupied territory and acted, perhaps without realizing it, according to a colonial logic.

You have a settlement. It’s surrounded by enemies, so to speak. So you want to expand the settlement. And then again, you have enemies. And then you expand and expand. That’s why Israel is so expansionist. In fact, Anita Shapira, a very prominent historian of the Zionist movement and of the State of Israel in Tel Aviv, explained that that’s the logic of colonial settlement: whenever you have a threatened minority, they want to expand—but it doesn’t help. And if you look at the history

of Israel, first it was the Palestinians that disturbed them, then the Arab states, then Iran. And, well, it'll end up in Australia—I don't know. But they always... you see, I just wanted to say that this expansionist logic—people may not even be aware of it—but they act according to it.

#Pascal

Manuel, do you see these traits in your anthropological work as well? And when you look at Zionism in Africa, please feel free to respond. Okay.

#Manuel Ramos

Well, yes. I mean, one of the oldest strains of Zionism in Africa, as we know, is in Ethiopia. You know, Ethiopians, literally, are the chosen people because the Ark of the Covenant was taken from Jerusalem—it's in Aksum. So by that act, the chosen people are no longer the Jewish people but the Ethiopians, if you take the *Kebra Nagast* literally. So there is an element of nationalist Zionism in Ethiopia, but it has also inspired movements like the Rastafari movement, which, as we know, is not nationalist at all and is, by its very nature, anti-colonialist. I think sometimes, when we talk about secular versus religious, we tend to gloss over the commonalities.

There's a very interesting—well, I think Shlomo sent this story, and Shlomo's take on this issue is that when the Ashkenazis reached Western Europe in the late 19th century, they cloaked themselves. That's his take. It's an interesting one. They cloaked themselves as lay and did away with their traditional religious outlook because that was the way to integrate into Western Europe. And so, as a result, it's an outcome of this cloaking. I think—well, there's this very interesting Belgian anthropologist, Luc De Heusch, who worked a lot on African religions and on the idea of the sacrality of power.

And his claim—and I think it's at least a claim worth considering—is that you cannot have centralization of power and the state if you don't have a sacralization of power. During the 20th century, the shift from a religious source of power, based on church authority, to a secular state didn't do away with the sacralization of power at all. That's why, in a way, we had all these authoritarian figures—dictators who were sacralized. Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler—these are religious figures, sacred figures, because that's the principle of the sacralization of power in a state.

So in a way, laicism, as he put it—or rather, I'd say it differently—political science, as he puts it, is just a discipline, a sub-discipline of religious studies. That is, you cannot do away with religion and sacrality when you think about the state. And so laicism is not, you know, a lay ideology. It's not that different from a religious ideology or the politicization of religion. So in a way, I think that sort of nuances the issue and helps us understand why a fundamentally lay project for Israel in the '40s has transformed into a religious project, or a politicized religious project. Because there's not that much difference. Yes, please.

#Yakov Rabkin

Yeah, if I may, I think there are two different aspects to it. One is the sacralization of power—the sacred banner and all these sacralities that we find in secular states. Take the statue of La Nation in Paris, which should be secular, but it's clearly sacred. They even use the term **La Nation Sacrée**, meaning "the sacred nation." This is one aspect, where a political state borrows elements of religious paraphernalia. But what we see in Israel is a combination. There's a second aspect: people who embrace the political ideology justify it—for themselves and for others—on the basis of their interpretation of religious books. Because Jeffrey mentioned the Book of Joshua, with its stories of genocide and all that.

Not only stories—commands of genocide. It's not stories. Now, what has Jewish tradition done with this? It has really diluted it through interpretation. In my book **A Threat from Within**, I talk about this. But a very brief example I can give: the patriarch Jacob in the Pentateuch says very clearly that he conquered the city with a sword and an ark. And when you look at the traditional commentary, it says he conquered the city through studying Torah and good deeds. This is typical of rabbinic Judaism. And what do they do with the genocide of the seven nations? Actually, it was said even before—well, there were a lot of invasions in the Holy Land, and we no longer know who these seven nations are. Therefore, the commandment is no longer applicable.

And I can go on and on showing how the sharp edges of those books were really transformed into something very different. So in rabbinic Judaism—and by that I mean Judaism after the destruction of the Temple in the first century of the new era—rabbinic Judaism has been very insistent on the inapplicability of military force to gain access to the Holy Land. And generally, whenever there was a military image, it was usually negative. In the Passover Haggadah, the text that many families read on Passover night, there are four sons: an intelligent son, and one of them is the evil son. If you look at editions of American Haggadot from the 1920s and 1930s, the evil son is often shown in military uniform, because there was an association of evil with violence. This is obviously not true today, and particularly not true in Israel.

#Pascal

Jeff, isn't it just a huge tragedy that, on the one hand, we have this rabbinic Judaism, which is even very pacifist, and on the other hand, we have this very secular, strange form of Zionism that has created extreme violence and actually bases that on what it interprets as the commandments from the book?

#Jeffrey Sachs

Yeah, I think it behooves us to add one more important theme here, and that is that we're making distinctions between rabbinic Judaism, what you could call secular Zionism, and now this new religious Zionism. But one of the themes of secular Zionism was not only the exclusionary

nationalism, which appealed, but also the motivation for it. I think it's fair to say, in Herzl's mind—and I know, say, in my own family or in the discussions—it was a different idea, which was secular, non-secular: Jews are subject to anti-Semitism that is absolutely unavoidable, unsolvable, incurable. And so this is the only remedy. So there's another ideology here, which is the Jews as excluded and vulnerable, and Zionism as the cure for that.

Zionism as the answer—not simply, say, like the Czechs wanting their own land or the Estonians wanting their own land—but the idea that the Jews can't escape their fate in the European lands or in the Russian Empire. They will face persecution, they will face pogroms, and so on. And this, in the early days, was very stark. Of course, the most extreme voice of that was the revisionist Jabotinsky, who said we need to create a new man. He was the mentor of Netanyahu's father, who was, I think, his second personal secretary, if I'm not mistaken. I know this from Yakov, so correct me if I'm wrong. But the point is, this was an absolutely prominent belief—that this was the escape from eternal persecution, and it was necessary. Of course, it didn't give even short shrift to the Arabs who happened to be there. That was an inconvenience. Therefore, it was better to say a—what is it—a lie? “A land without a people for a people.” Excuse me. Help me. “A land without a people for a people.”

#Yakov Rabkin

Oh, yeah. A land without a people for a people without a land.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Yes, exactly. A land without a people for a people without a land. That was the ideology—very convenient. We need to be there because we're going to be persecuted. And then, with the Holocaust, this became a self-evident truth. It's not a self-evident truth, of course. There are a million things to say about this, but this secular ideology became obvious—a religion of persecution: we must be strong, we must have a state, because otherwise we'll die. And this is a very, very strong belief among Jews in Europe and in other parts of the world. It's not our experience of being Jewish in the United States at all. I'm 71 years old, and I've never had, in my whole life, a single anti-Semitic incident.

Not in my career, not in my personal life, not on the street, not in a shop—anywhere. So for me, it's a foreign idea. For my parents, it was not a foreign idea. I don't know, partly because of what they experienced, but also because it was their cousins who lost their lives in the Holocaust, and their cousins who escaped to Palestine to help form Israel. So this is part of the secular idea. I think it's Netanyahu's idea—if I understand Netanyahu at all, whom I find to be a vile war criminal and mentally deranged—but aside from that, I think his idea is that this is saving the Jewish people from what otherwise would be their fate. I just wanted to add that to the list. It seems bizarre, but that's the paradox—that it turns into a genocidal state. That's the bizarre twist.

And it comes, I just wanted to mention, when Yakov mentioned the logic of expansionism, of settler colonialism, it's exactly Netanyahu's explicit political belief—his argument in his writings, his books, and in the document called *Clean Break*, which was written with his political advisors in 1996. He said, our Zionist project will inflame states in the region. They will support militancy like Hamas or Hezbollah. Our job is not to fight the militants; our job is to fight the states that are supporting the militants. You don't fight terrorists—you fight the states that fund the terrorists. And so this is why it's nonstop war in the Middle East: war in Lebanon, in Syria, in Iraq, in Iran, in Yemen, and in Africa—in Somalia, in Sudan, in Libya.

There's an Israeli hand in all of that. And moreover, it's the Zionist lobby telling the United States, "Go fight in all those places, send your CIA there, overthrow those governments, bomb them—bomb Gaddafi to obliteration, overthrow Assad, bomb Saddam Hussein, he's the new Hitler." This is Zionist lobby instruction. And so it's exactly that logic. But I just wanted to add that element. If there was a secular religion, it was the religion of overcoming persecution—that was the mentality, and a very, very powerful motive force. But it's not the motive force of Ben-Gvir and Smotrich and the religious Zionism now, which is this redemptive messianism. So it's many strains that have come together in all of this. But it is not rabbinic Judaism, that's for sure.

#Yakov Rabkin

No, but I think it's very important what you just said about anti-Semitism, because it has become a weapon—it's been weaponized. And you, being at Columbia University, I don't have to tell you how it works. Exactly.

#Jeffrey Sachs

So today... And by the way, Yakov, not to interrupt you, but just to say—my university is accused of anti-Semitism. You cannot imagine a more Jewish institution. In North America, maybe Yeshiva University—but forgive me for saying it—this is a Jewish university. I mean, it's a university, so open: Jewish faculty, Jewish students, Jewish ideas. And yet it's been weaponized, exactly as you say. Sorry to interrupt.

#Yakov Rabkin

No, but just in a few minutes, I'd like to say that anti-Semitism, which is a feeling of insecurity that many Jews have had and still have—and this is also inculcated in certain Zionist schools, where they're taught that the only safe place for a Jew is in their own country, which is Israel. So even though, say, American youth don't experience anti-Semitism, they identify as anti-Semitism any criticism of Israel, because Israel has become, in their minds, the collective Jew. And therefore, if you say that Israel is committing genocide, it's a blood libel. But blood libel is something very different. What they

do constantly is position Israel as if it were a powerless little boy in the ghetto of Warsaw in 1942. Well, Israel is a nuclear power, one of the most powerful militaries in the world, and it's very different.

Now, anti-Semitism was weaponized even before today's period, when any criticism is stifled with the accusation of anti-Semitism. Where it didn't exist, it had to be cultivated. So Zionists cultivated anti-Semitism, and this was certainly the case in many Muslim countries where Jews had lived for millennia. There were Zionist agents sent in to foment violence against Jews so that they would be afraid, and the Zionist emissaries would bring them to Israel. So anti-Semitism has been central to the Zionist project, and Theodor Herzl was well aware of it. In his diary he wrote, "Anti-Semites will be our best friends and allies," and he was perfectly right. Um, we're nearing the end, and we have to wrap it up. But Manuel, please, give us your thoughts, and then Jeff, you'll have the final word.

#Manuel Ramos

Okay, very quickly. I think we are in a moment of—well, it's been shown—a moment of radicalization. This Israeli expansionism, this genocide, it's a radicalization of elements that were already in the Zionist project. This radicalization, I think, must be understood in connection with major geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts in the world. It comes together with the perceived loss of Western hegemony and the emergence of a different, multipolar world. So I think this coincidence, this synchronicity, is not accidental. You could almost say it's the last cry, or the last shout, of a dying empire. This expression of total radicalization has to be seen in relation to the loss of hegemony of the West and the U.S.

#Pascal

It also ties in with where we've arrived. I mean, if the belief is that it's either be genocided or commit genocide, then the logic becomes, "Well, yeah, in that case, we're the ones who do the genocide." Because, right, not the other way around.

#Manuel Ramos

But the shrinking of an empire is always painful. And this is a channel on neutrality studies, on peace studies. I think it's important to see that this is a particularly critical moment, because we're in a time when a shrinking empire tends to do crazy things—and its vassals tend to do crazy things. And I live in a subcontinent, or rather a continent, which is Europe—a continent that's going completely crazy. I mean, I haven't seen leaders as crazy and as imbecilic as they are today.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Jeff, the final word goes to you. Oh, my God. I think Manuel gave us the final word—except to say that the one glimmer of hope is that there have been repeated expressions by the vast majority of

humanity, as voiced by their governments at the UN over the past year, saying Israel must go back to its 4th of June 1967 borders, stop the genocide, and live in peace with the state of Palestine. And the United States has blocked this up until now. It may continue to block it.

I'm just looking at the wires as we talk—Netanyahu is coming to see Trump late in December. So this is quite natural, probably leading to more standing ovations among the U.S. political class, which is in the hands of the Zionist lobby. But a glimmer of hope is that most of the world is aghast at what has happened, at what Israel has done in recent years. The internal dynamics, as we've been discussing, are not good. The U.S. dynamics are not good. But it's not as if the world is blind to these realities. And if that overwhelming view of the world can be brought to bear, we could still see a better way out of this.

#Yakov Rabkin

Pascal, if I may just say, what Jeff referred to and what Manuel referred to can be summed up with a certain phrase: "democratic deficit." Democratic deficit means that the majority of young Americans, the majority of Europeans, and the majority of humanity, as Jeff put it, condemn Israel and don't justify what it's doing. But just as much, they condemn the policies of their governments in other areas—without any effect whatsoever. What's very clear today is that, as Manuel noted, European leaders don't have much to be proud of. They have very low popularity ratings. Even Merz, who was quite recent, has now reached the bottom, along with Starmer and Macron.

In other words, there's a tremendous polarization between the vast majority of the population and the ruling class—and that is exactly what's explosive. That's where Israel becomes essential, because it has perfected surveillance and population control technologies. And what do you do? You call them terrorists. So far, we've only had, so to speak, narco-terrorists—you blow them up at sea for no reason whatsoever. But very soon there will be other "terrorists" who'll be treated pretty much the same. So I think if we put the emphasis on the democratic deficit, and therefore on organizing to overturn this deficit, that would be a very productive way forward, including in the case of Israel.

#Pascal

Thank you very much. I think we've found the topic for our next webinar. I'd like to thank you all—Yakov Rabkin, Manuel Ramos, Jeffrey Sachs. Thank you for your time.

#Manuel Ramos

Thank you. Thank you. Thanks. Bye.