

Norman Finkelstein and Mouin Rabbani

Debate Palestine, Geopolitics

In this wide-ranging discussion, Norman Finkelstein and Mouin Rabbani debate key fault lines in the global politics of Palestine. They disagree on whether the Arab world is genuinely “normalising” relations with Israel or whether this narrative overstates elite diplomacy at the expense of popular opposition. The conversation also examines China and Russia’s decision not to veto a UN Security Council resolution linked to the Trump plan—questioning whether this reflects cynical realist calculation or pressure and coercion from the United States. Finally, they assess the rise of far-right commentators presenting themselves as anti-Israel activists, and whether this phenomenon represents a tactical opportunity or a long-term political threat to the Palestinian cause. Support Independent media to remain bold: <https://patreon.com/IndiaGlobalLeft> Link for donation: <https://paypal.me/sankymudiar> Follow us on Substack: <https://substack.com/@indiagloballeft> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/Indiagloballeft> Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/indiagloballeft/> Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61559411353392> Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/show/69Y9iCWUv8ha3ATsPWtWk0?si=ee1f0de3de094f17> Telegram: <https://t.me/+WNlqoiv1Rhg5NjEx>

#Mudiar

Welcome to another episode of *India and the Global Left*. If you're new to the show, please smash that subscribe button. Also consider becoming a YouTube member, a Patreon, or donating a small amount through the link in the description box. But at the very least, watch the show, like, share, and comment. Without further ado, let me welcome our guests tonight, Mouin Rabbani and Norman Finkelstein. Both are scholars and activists on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Mouin and Norman—Professor Mouin and Professor Finkelstein—welcome back to *India and the Global Left*. Great to be with you again. Mouin, if we could start with you: we’ve been discussing Palestine and Israel since even before the beginning of the genocide, but it hasn’t gotten enough attention since the so-called ceasefire plan of October 10. So if you could help us by giving a correct framework to look at the period in the aftermath of October 10, that would be helpful for our viewers.

#Mouin

Well, on October 8th, I believe that was the date, Israel and the Palestinians signed an agreement in the Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh. It basically dealt with the immediate issues—the first phase of the Trump-Netanyahu initiative that had been unveiled there on September 29th. It covered an exchange of captives, a surge in the delivery of humanitarian goods and supplies, a partial withdrawal of Israeli forces from within the Gaza Strip, and, of course, a cessation of

hostilities. In terms of the situation on the ground, what has essentially happened is that, according to the Americans, the Palestinians—and specifically Hamas—have scrupulously fulfilled each and every one of their obligations, to an extent that actually surprised the Americans.

So they immediately released all the living captives. They searched for, found, and delivered all but one of the dead captives. They have fully ceased hostilities and have not tried to infiltrate the Israeli-occupied zone of the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, the Israelis, from the very outset, have systematically violated each and every one of their commitments. They released fewer captives than they had agreed to, and not from the categories that were agreed upon. Some who were supposed to be released to their homes in the West Bank were deported. Israel had committed to permitting the entry of at least 600 trucks a day into the Gaza Strip.

They have permitted at most 200 a day to enter. And now we've just had Storm Byron—fierce rainstorms and harsh winter conditions in the Gaza Strip. Newborn infants are freezing to death from hypothermia because, according to Jan Egeland of the Norwegian Refugee Council, there are tens of thousands of weatherproof tents sitting on the borders of the Gaza Strip, awaiting Israeli permission to enter, but they're not receiving that permission. And of course, Israel is continuing on a daily basis with the bombing of the Gaza Strip, including the zone from which it has withdrawn.

It's killed upwards of 400 Palestinians. It has now resumed assassinations of high-profile Hamas leaders. It is continuing with systematic attacks and the destruction of structures in the Gaza Strip. So Israel is essentially trying to empty the agreement of all substance, to transform it into one where the Palestinians are obliged to scrupulously adhere to their commitments, while Israel can pretend it never agreed to anything. So the genocide essentially continues, albeit on a lower and less visible scale. All the discussions now are about the second phase of the agreement, which deals with the formation of this neocolonial authority—the Board of Peace, also initially known as the Blair Witch Project—which, under the leadership of Trump and Blair, is supposed to be responsible for the administration of the Gaza Strip, with its international stabilization force acting under its authority.

The problem here is that the Trump-Netanyahu initiative lacks any political horizon whatsoever. In fact, it's designed not to have a political horizon. It's what Carol Kasabedi of the Carter Center has called "Oslo with helmets." And because of this, the states and governments—particularly Arab and Muslim states—that are being called upon to fund this entire exercise and supply the troops for it have so far refused to contribute, on the grounds that they need to see credible, irreversible political momentum toward a Palestinian state in order to participate, including guarantees that Israel will not resume the war with American blessing at a time of its choosing.

So we're heading toward a situation where the temporary becomes indefinite and eventually permanent—something the Palestinians, of course, oppose, something the regional powers are not comfortable with, something Washington doesn't like, but something Israel is perfectly comfortable with. Because it can indefinitely extend the current situation, it's inflicting misery upon misery on the Palestinian inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, in the hope that they'll start to leave in increasing

numbers—essentially being forced out by circumstance, or what Israelis like to refer to as “voluntary transfer.”

#Mudiar

Professor Finkelstein, could you share your thoughts on what would be the right framework to analyze the post-ceasefire phase of the Israel-Palestine conflict?

#Norman

Well, nothing I'm going to say can be called Monday-morning quarterbacking, because I said it at the time—I had conversations with Mouin about it. And I said then, and I'll say again now, the essence of what was agreed to was a restoration of the status quo ante October 7th, 2023—a return to what it was, with one big caveat, not a trivial one: the big caveat that Gaza is no more. So people are immured in a concentration camp, but a concentration camp devoid of the most basic life-sustaining materials—namely, shelter and food. There was no doubt in my mind that Israel would never admit sufficient humanitarian aid. It was clear that it was going to be a restoration of the status quo ante.

But again, with the crucial caveat: all the agricultural land—which is actually the main agricultural land—is in the green zone. But even the agricultural land in the green zone has been destroyed for at least a significant period of time; whether forever, I can't say. That's not my area of specialty. But it was already non-arable because of the Israeli bombing. So there's no basis now for domestic food production. Israel will turn the screws on humanitarian aid. It's made clear it won't cooperate with UNRWA, which, as the International Court of Justice—the main legal body of the UN—determined on November 17th, 2025, in its advisory opinion, was the only humanitarian organization capable of supplying, with technical competence and at scale, the necessary humanitarian aid that Gaza needs at this point.

I read now that they're talking about all these other organizations replacing UNRWA. It's never going to happen—American organizations, I should say. And also American organizations bidding for reconstruction—never going to happen. There's not going to be any reconstruction in Gaza until the population is emptied out. Now, Netanyahu at some point talked about thinning out the population, so it's possible they thin it out to, say, 300,000 people. Maybe then there'll be some reconstruction. So I believe it's a restoration of the status quo. The Israeli government was hoping for a stampede during those two-plus years of their genocide in Gaza. The stampede never happened.

So now they're going to have to settle for a trickle—Palestinians, by hook or by crook, Gaza Palestinians by hook or by crook, figuring out how to leave. And the only other point I'd make is that I never believed the ceasefire had anything to do with Gaza. Some people say it was because Trump was angling for the Nobel Prize—that's probably in the back of his head, and frankly, I have very little interest in what's in the back, the sides, or the front of his head, since the fact is it's empty. But

the real purpose, I said at the time—I even said it on the Piers Morgan program, when he was trying to drum up enthusiasm for this Trump ceasefire—he said, “So what do you think is the purpose?”

I said, well, the purpose is obvious. Trump is a real estate mogul. He's 78 years old—you don't teach an old dog new tricks, and the leopard doesn't change its spots. He's looking for money from investments in the Gulf. But the problem for Saudi Arabia was that it couldn't join the Abraham Accords while the genocide was going on in real time, right there on the computer screen. So he needed a fig leaf, and the fig leaf was to pretend there's a ceasefire. Then it gets off the front page of the news. If you look at the newspapers from the last few days, for example, the lead stories are about Rob Reiner and his wife being killed.

The second story is about the killings in Australia, and there's nothing on the front page anymore about Gaza. Once this so-called ceasefire was put into effect, what was the first thing that happened? Right after it was announced, the Saudi leader, MBS, went to the White House and got a royal welcome. That was the main purpose—to provide the Saudi Crown Prince with a fig leaf to go to the White House and lay the foundations for what Trump has all along been calling the “deal of the century.”

#Mudiar

Mouin, do you have any comments?

#Mouin

I generally agree with Norm, but I'd add one caveat: I don't think the Trump initiative, in and of itself, is going to be sufficient for Saudi Arabia to normalize relations with Israel. The Saudi leadership has repeatedly stated that, for it to do so in the context of the Gaza genocide, there would need to be credible, irreversible, and time-bound progress toward an independent Palestinian state. I don't think that should be dismissed out of hand as a fig leaf to cover their real intentions, because Saudi Arabia has a large, politically engaged population—and even in autocracies, public opinion matters.

And I think the Saudi leadership, including MBS, has reached the conclusion that they cannot afford to normalize relations with Israel just because a ceasefire agreement has been reached. What I'd add is that the agreement made it possible for the Saudis to start striking deals again, left and right, with the United States. And what's interesting here is that the U.S. is now pursuing relations with Saudi Arabia almost independently of its relations with Israel. So the Trump administration announced its intention to sell F-35s to Saudi—sorry, to Saudi, not Israel.

#Norman

To Israel.

#Mouin

Yeah, Israel already has them, of course. Sorry, I meant Saudi. The Israelis, you know, taking the prerogative of speaking on behalf of the U.S. administration, indicated that the U.S. would not be selling these weapons to Saudi Arabia unless Saudi Arabia first normalized relations with Israel. To that, Trump said, no, we're going to sell them, and we're going to sell them our top-of-the-line models. In other words, if the Saudis—unlike the Israelis—pay for them, they can have them.

And so we're getting this interesting dynamic where the access of key Arab client states like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE to strategic American goods—whether weaponry, computer chips, and so on—is no longer directly tied to their acquiescence to Israel in the way it has been in the past. But I do fully agree with Norm that the priority for the Americans is to continue consummating these Arab-Israeli normalization agreements. The question becomes: are the Americans willing to turn the screws on Israel to do what's necessary to make this possible? There's very little indication that they're going to be prepared to do so anytime soon.

#Norman

I agree—well, I don't say I agree exactly. I think Mouin's probably right that there may be more conditions from Saudi Arabia before it fully goes through with normalization. I was speaking more about what Trump's motivation was, rather than whether what he envisioned will actually come to pass. I just want to stress one point where I guess I sort of disagree with Mouin—not strongly—but it was the most remarkable capitulation by the Arab Muslim states, what they did on November 17th with the Security Council resolution. There's really nothing in the annals of that very sorry chapter that even came close to what they did in October or November.

November 17th, with the Security Council resolution. The UN Security Council resolution completely capitulated to Israel on all points. Almost certainly, they wrote the text themselves, with only minor tweaks. The resolution effectively annulled seventy years of UN history. And when I say seventy years of UN history, I'm referring not just to the Security Council, not just to the General Assembly, not just to various organs—the Third Committee, the Sixth Committee of the UN—not just the International Court of Justice, but every committee.

Every division, every subdivision of the UN—the record that was accumulated—and really, that record probably filled a medium-sized library. The amount of material that went into creating a near-unanimous consensus inside all of the UN organs over a seventy-year period—that whole record was annulled. It vanished. It evaporated. For those of you who look at UN resolutions, when a particular topic has a long history, usually a UN resolution begins with literally five to seven single-spaced pages rehearsing the record: "We reiterate this..."

#Mouin

Preambles.

#Norman

Preambles. "We reiterate this. We emphasize that. We strongly recall this. We recall that." Six or seven pages of that. This UN resolution had no preamble. It abolished the whole record. And it was so brazen—so brazen in its defiance of the International Court of Justice. The International Court of Justice ruled in July 2025 that the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza, was illegal, and that it had to end as rapidly as possible. That was what it ruled. Well, that was all gone. It disappeared in the resolution.

There's only talk about whether the Palestinian Authority reforms, although there's no explanation of what it actually has to do to reform. It just says, if the Palestinian Authority reforms, then it says that may—M-A-Y—open a pathway—P-A-T-H-W-A-Y—to a permanent solution. But for there to be a permanent solution, there has to be agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on what the terms of that solution would be. Well, it doesn't take Shakespeare to figure that out. If you add all that up, it's nothing. There was no— all the talk about the occupation being illegal... By the way, you know what else disappeared from the resolution?

#Mouin

Occupation.

#Norman

There's no occupation. Completely vanished. Gaza—if you read that resolution, you wouldn't have a clue, from a legal point of view, what Gaza even is. Is Gaza part of the West Bank? You wouldn't know that from the resolution. Is Gaza occupied territory? You wouldn't know that either. It's nowhere in there. Gaza is what they used to call, during the era of European colonialism, *res nullius*, which literally means "a thing belonging to nobody." It's just suspended in thin air. And that's what Gaza became in the resolution.

#Mouin

First come, first served.

#Norman

Exactly. Exactly. Because it belongs to nobody. So, first come, first served. So why did the resolution pass? It passed because all the Muslim and Arab states supported it. If I were to tell you the list—well, I can't even remember it off the top of my head—Egypt supported, Jordan supported, Pakistan supported, Indonesia supported, Saudi Arabia supported, Turkey supported, Qatar supported, and

the most—how shall I call it—egregious? Maybe “egregious” isn’t quite the right word, but the Palestinians’ most stalwart supporter among the Arab states outside the so-called resistance front was Algeria. Here’s how Algeria spoke about the resolution after it was passed: “At the outset,” said Mr. Ben-Jama from Algeria, “allow me to express our appreciation to the United States for presenting the resolution we just adopted, aimed at implementing the comprehensive plan endorsed by all parties. We acknowledge the efforts undertaken by President Trump in advancing peace worldwide.”

#Mouin

It sounds like Gianni Infantino, the head of FIFA.

#Norman

I mean, the level of self-abasement, of groveling, of sycophancy—it’s really kind of mind-boggling to read what happened. And that was not a trivial fact, because the Russians and the Chinese did have veto power, and they made it very clear they were not happy with the resolution. The Russians called it a black day in the history of the United Nations, and they ended their statement by saying, “Don’t say we didn’t warn you.” I knew this was going to be a disaster—“Don’t say we didn’t warn you.” The Chinese said the same thing: we wanted to veto the resolution, but then all of the Arab and Muslim states, including the Palestinian Authority, lined up with the United States. So they said it was just politically untenable for them to veto it.

So it was the Arab and Muslim states that enabled it. And I just want to say one last thing before Mouin goes. You know what was the most shocking thing about the resolution? I mean, it was full of shocking things. I was walking the streets, literally, for two weeks. And even today, I find myself cursing the folks who voted for that resolution. Because in a way, in a very trivial sense, it kind of hammered the nail into the coffin of everything I’d been working on for the last 30 years. All I did was go through the UN resolutions, the ICJ opinions, trying to build an impregnable record of support for the international consensus, which was being defiantly opposed by the U.S. and Israel. Well, all of that was annulled on November 17th.

That record is dead. And just one last point—when I said the most amazing thing about the resolution, I meant it literally. It gave Gaza to Donald J. Trump personally. It gave him the deed to Gaza. The presiding body in Gaza is now called the Board of Peace. The Board of Peace has no internal mechanism to hold Trump—who was named the head and director of the Board of Peace—accountable to anyone. None. The Board of Peace—its modalities, who will be on it, how it will operate—nothing in the resolution. It just names Donald Trump, because the resolution validated the so-called Trump peace plan, which named him the head and president of the Board of Peace.

And if there were any doubt about that, after the vote was taken, the U.S. representative at the UN stated, “Donald Trump is the head of the Board of Peace. And the Board of Peace is not accountable to any external organ—none.” The only thing Trump is held accountable for, the resolution

requested—it didn't say mandatory, it just requested—is that every six months the Board of Peace should send the Security Council a progress report. That's it. There hasn't been anything like that since King Leopold II was given the Congo at the 1884 Berlin Conference. There's never been anything like it. He was given Gaza. I can't stop saying that—it's breathtaking.

#Mouin

So everything Norm has just said is entirely correct and accurate. I would also add several other points. I mean, there are two antecedents to this. The first is that the initial iteration of the Trump Initiative was drafted on the basis of negotiations between Washington and a number of Arab and Muslim states who had met with Trump on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in the fall and basically told him, you know, this whole thing is getting out of hand—we need to bring it to an end. They formulated a 21-point plan, and then Netanyahu parachutes into Washington, manages to introduce key changes to these 21 points, reduces them to 20 points, and even manages to delete a clause in which Israel commits to not repeating its bombing of Qatar.

The Arab and Muslim leaders expressed their frustration and outrage but did absolutely nothing to insist that Washington revert to the version of the agreement they had negotiated, and instead accepted the revised one. So that was really the first capitulation. The second came before the UN Security Council passed its Gaza resolution. It had already passed a very similar resolution on Western Sahara, which basically tried to annul International Court of Justice rulings on the right of the Sahrawis to self-determination, and so on, and endorsed the idea of Western Sahara becoming an autonomous province under Moroccan sovereignty. That was another important precedent.

Hamas had come under enormous pressure from these Arab and Muslim leaders, including key mediators—Egypt, Turkey, and Qatar—to accept the revised Trump-Netanyahu initiative. Then the Palestinian Authority, despite being completely marginalized and excluded from this initiative, came under enormous pressure, particularly from the Gulf states, to endorse the Security Council resolution. Once it did so, it became impossible for Algeria, as the representative of the Arab group on the Security Council, not to accept it. And I think if you read the rest of the Algerian ambassador's remarks, in addition to the sycophancy, he also expresses some serious misgivings about this resolution, if I recall correctly. But he basically said, "The Palestinian leadership accepted it. All the Arab states accepted it. My hands are tied." The Russians and the Chinese—

#Norman

Sorry? I think—well, you can correct me—but I think he was the one who used that expression. He said, to quote the English saying, "You can't be more pious than the Pope."

#Mouin

Yeah, I believe that's the case. The Russians were very clear, and the Chinese—they have bigger fish to fry with Washington than Gaza. You know, the Russians didn't want to jeopardize negotiations over Ukraine on behalf of a Gaza resolution. The Chinese didn't want to jeopardize trade negotiations with Washington over Gaza. So the resolution passed exactly in the manner that Norm describes. Having said that, in 1993 we had something very similar. We had a document known as the Oslo Agreement that basically transformed the West Bank and Gaza Strip from occupied territory to disputed territory, which also sought to completely—although in a much less brazen and obscene way—annul the international consensus, international law, and all the rest of it.

The Clinton administration, acting through UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright, basically told the Security Council it should cease all dealings with the question of Palestine. That failed, and it ended up with the International Court of Justice last year declaring that the occupation is illegal. After the Security Council resolution passed, the General Assembly adopted another resolution reaffirming the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, sovereignty, and statehood. And just this week, with a very large majority, it passed a resolution endorsing the ICJ's more recent advisory opinion on UNRWA and on international organizations and their right to immunity and access in the occupied territories.

So what I'm trying to say is, we're now dealing with two competing visions of international law, of international institutions, of political struggle. And it's by no means a foregone conclusion which one is going to emerge on top and which is going to be defeated. But we all have a role to play, I think, in ensuring that the Trump initiative ends up in the same dustbin of history where Oslo ended. But having said that, we also need to remember that the dustbin of history is littered with just causes. So there's absolutely no room here for complacency either.

#Norman

I'm just going to qualify, or maybe disagree with, the general picture we both agree on. I mean, if you and I were debating destiny again, I suspect we'd be on the same side.

#Mouin

I wouldn't be in that room. Once was enough.

#Norman

Just a couple of points. First of all, I did not find the Russian statement cynical. Now, I'm quite aware that Putin is a ruthless thug — I'm aware of that. But I would also say, Mouin, so was Stalin. But I thought that Gromyko's statement in 1947 at the UN General Assembly was authentic. Obviously, they had a goal: they wanted to get rid of British imperialism from the Middle East. And they thought that if they ejected the British, you know, it would be a good thing. So they voted for it.

#Mouin

Can I just interrupt you, Norm? Apologies. But the difference here is that Gromyko's vote in 1947 reflected his statement, whereas the recent Russian vote contradicted it.

#Norman

I didn't feel it contradicted it, because I thought there were two difficulties faced by everyone — granted, even by the Arab and Muslim states. I'll grant that. Difficulty number one was that Trump blackmailed them. He said, "If you don't sign on to this resolution, we're going to give Israel a free hand to escalate its genocide in Gaza." Just like he's blackmailing them again now — he's saying, "If you don't supply forces to the International Stabilization Force, then we're not going to tell Israel to withdraw." So he's doing the same sort of blackmail. That was a legitimate consideration. I get that.

I'm not going to deny the facts. It was a legitimate consideration that Trump was blackmailing them with the threat: "If you don't sign on to this resolution, we're giving Israel the green light to escalate the genocide." Number two, the Russians faced the problem of being more pious than the Pope. They said that Trump lined up — you know, it wasn't just the members of the Security Council from the Arab and Muslim world — he lined up everybody in order to get the vote. And the Russians said they were strong-armed in their countries and strong-armed again at the UN in New York. The Russians were very straightforward.

I thought, if it were just a matter of realpolitik, some people said there was a quid pro quo — "We'll give you on Gaza if you give us on Ukraine." You know, that was the speculation. I don't think they had to use the language they did — "a black day in the history of the United Nations," "don't say we didn't warn you." I felt, like with Gromyko's speech, there was authenticity there. Whether authenticity makes any difference, I don't know. But that's what I came away with. And that's my second point. Yes, it's true, there was a lot of blackmail going on. But the Arab and Muslim states had the option to do what the Russians and Chinese did, which is to say, "What's going on here is disgusting."

#Mouin

Yeah, no, that's perfectly true.

#Norman

To heap praise on Trump?

#Mouin

No, you're entirely correct. But my point is, yeah, first of all, you know, it's become part of 21st-century diplomacy that you have to appease and suck up to the moron in the White House. That's certainly true. But what I'm saying specifically about the Russians—I'm not doubting the authenticity of their statement—rather, I'm saying I don't think their reason for not vetoing is exclusively tied to Palestinian and Arab endorsement of the resolution. I think, in the Kremlin, they also calculated that if they had sabotaged Trump's pet project, it would have been much more difficult for them to then try to strike a deal on Ukraine.

#Norman

Look, I have no problem with that. I have no problem with that. As I said, even in 1947, the British were supporting the Zionists because they wanted to eject the British from—

#Mouin

You mean the Russians—the Soviets, right?

#Norman

The Soviets, excuse me. I get that. But I still say—and you'll forgive me for repeating myself—there were five countries: the US, the UK, France, Greece, and I forget the fifth, who attacked Hamas forcefully during the UN Security Council debate on the resolution. Do you know that, except for one sentence by Algeria—one sentence by Algeria—there was not one word about what Israel did in Gaza after October 7th? Not one word. You didn't have to do that. You didn't have to be silent.

#Mouin

It's true. I fully agree.

#Norman

It was such a display of civility—of cravenness. It was revolting. Really, it just filled me with disgust. I can't tell you how my insides writhed each time.

#Mouin

It was like kissing the ring and telling the emperor how beautiful his clothes are.

#Norman

It's Kim Il-sung writ large across the whole world. It's like Trump's cabinet has become the world.

#Mouin

Well, Kim Il-sung, I think, is still formally the president of the DPRK. And I think the analogy may well prove very prescient, given the nature of U.S. politics these days. But I think the broader point is, taking everything you say into consideration, it's also important to point out that nothing is written in stone. And there was, as you well remember, an equal level of disgust, revulsion, fatalism, and all the rest of it in September '93 on account of the Oslo Accords.

#Norman

But I think you missed one point, Mouin. For a long time, Oslo was the only game in town. Yes, yes.

#Mouin

And unfortunately, this will be the framework within which this issue will be addressed for the foreseeable future. I think its initial period runs until 2027. I do have the feeling, for a variety of reasons, that history is going to move much faster in this case. But yes, you're entirely right—Oslo didn't disappear overnight, and this isn't going to either. I'm just pointing out that we are not dealing with something set in stone.

#Norman

You realize, Mouin, that the “foreseeable future” is what remains of my life. You know the famous quip by John Maynard Keynes—there was an economics conference where everyone kept saying, “in the long run, in the long run,” and then Keynes cut the conversation short by saying, “In the long run, we’re dead.”

#Mouin

Even in the short term, this is all going to, of course, come first and foremost at the expense of the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip, who are now once again being abandoned by those who demanded the acceptance of this accord—of this agreement, of this resolution—on the grounds that it was the best way to prevent the catastrophe they’re now experiencing.

#Norman

Its purpose is very straightforward: to get Gaza off the front page.

#Norman

Yeah.

#Norman

Succeeded. It's gone now. It's been replaced by Rob Reiner—the spat between, what's her name, Erica and Candace. Erica and Candace Owens. These are now the burning issues of our time. Well, today they are. I wonder if we may—I know this isn't part of your agenda, and we only have ten minutes left—but I'd like to articulate a thought that's troubling me. It's related, though not directly, but maybe it could be a kickoff to a future conversation. And this is my concern: neither Mouin Rabbani nor Norman Finkelstein, nor several others, are any longer the main or most prominent spokespersons for the Palestinians and the Gazans—their rights under natural law or international law. It's a wholly new ballgame. And in this new ballgame, the main spokespersons have now become the ultra-right in the U.S. So when people think about critics of Israel and critics of Jews, they don't think about me. They don't think about Mouin. They now think of Tucker Carlson. They now think of Nick Fuentes.

#Mudiar

Is this why Mouin is going to meet Nick Fuentes and Tucker Carlson tonight?

#Norman

And I now think of Candace Owens. And I have to say, I find this an extremely troubling development—that they're harnessing a far-right agenda to criticism of Israel. Harsh criticism, which is totally warranted—exposing Israel's crimes. For example, Tucker Carlson's recent trip to Qatar—I guess it was, was it Qatar or Dubai? Yeah, to Qatar—in which he showed images of what's been done to those children. It's now the critics, and also, not trivially, the machinations—the ruthless machinations—of the Jewish billionaire, Jewish supremacist billionaire class. That's no longer connected with myself or Mouin. It's now become a far-right cause. And I think a real danger lurks there, in what they may do with that cause—of Israel and American Jews.

And I have to say, I do think it's important to carve out—I don't know how comfortable Mouin feels with this term—but a left-wing account of what's going on. Now, there's going to be some intersection. As I said, somebody wrote me and said, you know, Tucker Carlson—this was the first day of his podcast about his visit to Qatar—the first night he said it got 20 million views. And I wrote back, well, I'm very happy about that. I'm very happy about that. So there's going to be, at some level, an intersection between what they're saying and what we're saying. And I'm not going to criticize the existence of that intersection. But I do believe there's a real problem here, because I do think—and I'm not going to name names—but I do think a lot of them just don't like Jews. And that's a problem. Let me give Mouin the last word, because we're running out of time, and I'd like to hear what you have to say about that.

#Mouin

No, I think you raise perfectly legitimate points, and I think it's the shame of the leftist gatekeepers—the Democratic Party establishment—that this has now reached a point where you're seeing people on the right take much more principled positions on this issue than the Democratic establishment ever has or ever will. I think you're also beginning to see real movement on the left. I mean, if you look, for example, at the Mamdani campaign in New York City, if you look at the younger generation, college students, even the Democratic Party base—Israel has irreversibly lost the left, the center, and is increasingly losing on the right. Now, it's losing in each of these constituencies for different reasons.

And I completely share your concerns about some of the things that are happening on the right and on the extreme right, much of which is beyond the pale. But having said that, when you're faced with such an emergency, with such a crisis, coalitions become necessary. You know, the Vietnam War wasn't ended solely by college students—it was also business leaders turning against government policy, and so on. So I think we need to find ways to, as you suggested, seek those intersections and strengthen them without in any way compromising our principles and our values, particularly that we are engaged in this struggle because we believe in the fundamental value of human equality rather than the superiority of one group over another.

#Norman

I'll just leave it at this: one of the problems is, if I can use the term, this hijacking of the cause by the far right. Why it's proven to be so troubling is that if you take, say, the top ten or fifteen podcasters, they're all on the far right. The left has no place there. If you look at the top people—Candace Owens, Nick Fuentes, Tucker Carlson—and I'll leave aside for the moment Joe Rogan, who's a grayer area—if you take the top people, Andrew Tate, and so on down the line, they'll get one to two million views a day. The left, at most, will get 150,000. The top person.

#Mouin

That means the left has work to do.

#Norman

Yes. So part of it is, by default, that this has happened because the left has no place in podcasting. As I said, it falls in the range of at most 150,000, and they fall in the range of one to two or three million. So it's partly a default effect. There's no substantial left in the podcasting universe. But the other thing is, I don't think there's been an attempt to clearly delineate what distinguishes us—our support for Palestinian rights—from their support for Palestinian rights. Where is the dividing line? I was on with one of those people, and before I knew it, I was hearing that all the survivors of the Nazi Holocaust were actually Bolsheviks who had killed millions—sixty million—Christians, and were now pretending to be Holocaust survivors. Well, hey, that's not where I'm coming from.

#Mouin

Look, I mean, you know, the differences, I think, are clear. Those on the right oppose Israeli policy because they think it's bad for the U.S., bad for the U.S.'s position in the world, and bad for U.S. interests in the Middle East, whereas those on the left oppose it because they think it's fundamentally morally wrong and bad for humanity. That's at least one distinction I can think of. I would say, Mouin... You know, are there also those on the right who are motivated by fundamental human decency? Of course there are.

#Norman

No, but I think it's different. I mean fundamental human indecency—when somebody like Jim Fuentes keeps repeating that he thought Hitler was really cool. No, of course not.

#Mouin

You have those types as well. You have people who are drawn to this issue by hatred of Jews. You have people who are drawn to it by hatred of Muslims, because they see it as somehow increasing Muslim immigration or whatever. And then you have people who are drawn to it by hatred of both.

#Norman

Yeah, but the problem is, they used to be—you were part of the Palestine Solidarity Movement.

#Mouin

No, I wasn't.

#Norman

For a long time, you recognized that the haters were pretty marginal. They were there, but they weren't the heart of the movement. But now, as I said, the problem is they've become the main exponents of the movement.

#Mouin

I wouldn't say that. I'd say there are certain individuals who already had a large pre-existing audience before they got involved in this issue. But I wouldn't describe them as the core of the movement. I wouldn't.

#Norman

Maybe I'm not conveying this with sufficient clarity. I was trying to say they've become the public face of the movement.

#Mouin

Yeah, to a certain extent, um, that is certainly true. And again, I would—sorry—if you consider that a problem, I consider that a failure of the left. The left has work to do and questions to answer. I'd rather not begrudge Tucker Carlson his audience than ask others, why is yours so much smaller? What are you doing wrong? Why can't you be as effective? Why can't you reflect the values of your own constituency the way those on the right seem to be doing successfully, for their part.

#Mudiar

I guess we have to place this in the context of the larger reality that we're living in an age of right-wing populism. I mean, the left is there, but the right-wing narratives—these simplistic binaries drawn along ethnic lines, or even going beyond the Israel-Palestine conflict—some of these conversations around capitalism, for instance, or opposition to big pharma, have become extremely popular in the U.S., cutting across ideological lines. That doesn't mean the right-wing narrative is comprehensive, because they reduce those questions to very simplistic ideas about what big pharma is. But when you try to look at the larger structure of how the economy is organized, they fail. And in a similar vein, if we want a more cogent and comprehensive narrative of the Israel-Palestine conflict, then I think the left-wing narrative has to be reinforced, even if the right-wing one might be more popular, given the digital age and the broader right-wing moment we're living in.

#Mouin

Jyotish, could I just add to that? I think it's also important to recognize that the far right—whether in the United States, Europe, India, or elsewhere—for the most part remains solidly pro-Israel. In many cases, it's both anti-Semitic and pro-Israel, but Israel is cultivating and promoting the far right for a very good reason: it's become the bastion of support, perhaps the last remaining bastion of solid and dependable support for Israel. And I think it's for that reason, too, that when you do get prominent right-wing figures who speak out against Israel, they become so visible, because they're somewhat of an anomaly within that milieu.

#Mudiar

I also want to add that opposition to Israeli crimes within the right is largely an American thing. I might be wrong about one or two countries, but in most of the societies and politics I follow, it's very, very marginal on the right. And part of the reason is the naked history of American empire and its brutality across the world, so even sections of the right now oppose the war machine. If you look at India or other such societies, within the far-right camp this kind of opposition to Israeli genocide,

crimes, apartheid, and occupation remains very, very marginal. I mean, I might be missing one or two countries, but that's the larger picture.

#Norman

Okay, I'm going to have to cut it short, but I'm listening closely to what both of you are saying. You're talking about the issue of race on a global level and saying I'm wrong about it—and you're right. Raising the issue of Israel continuing to cultivate the international far right, regardless of what might be happening in the U.S. domestic scene, those are, in my opinion, important qualifications to what I initially put out there, and I'll have to take them into account. I just personally, as I said, find it a troubling development. I don't know the extent to which the podcast universe is representative of the American population.

So, you know, even one or two million against 370 million is a drop in the ocean. But I find it a troubling development that I have, so to speak—and I don't say this with any kind of chagrin, I say it with political concern—been displaced by Tucker Carlson as the main defender of Gaza. I find that funny, I have to say, because it's funny in an ironic way, but also very unfunny given his politics and my belief that he has sufficient demagogic capacities to make it a worrisome development. I wouldn't say that about Candace Owens; I don't think she's cut from the same cloth. I would say it about Nick Fuentes.

#Mouin

I think Fuentes is a case that's pretty far removed from most of the others.

#Norman

But when I hear, "Oh, Nick is just trying to be transgressive,"

#Mouin

Yeah, but I don't think the other individuals you've mentioned would be caught making similar statements, frankly.

#Norman

No, they wouldn't—but that's probably because they're more diplomatic people.

#Mouin

Well, I mean, we have to go by what they say and what they write.

#Norman

I agree. And as I said, this is a subject for another time. It's just become a source of concern to me as I see what's happening right now, very rapidly. You know, these are developments that happen.

#Mouin

If you remember, during the '80s, at one point Israel's fiercest critic in the U.S. was none other than Caspar Weinberger. Right?

#Norman

You know, I'd actually forgotten that. Okay, guys.

#Mudiar

All right, we'll leave it there. Thank you so much, Mouin and Professor Finkelstein. Thank you.

#Norman

Take care.

#Ayushman

Hi, my name is Ayushman. I, along with Mudiar Jyotishman, have started this platform. Over the last two years, we've tried to build content for the left and progressive forces. We've interviewed economists, historians, political commentators, and activists so far. If you've liked our content and want us to build an archive for the left, I have two requests for you. Please consider donating to the cause—the link is in the description below. And if you're not able to do so, don't feel bad; you can always like and share our videos with your comrades. Finally, don't forget to hit the subscribe button.