

Iran versus the jungle - Max live on The Judge

Max Blumenthal joins Judge Andrew Napolitano's Judging Freedom

#Intro

Undeclared wars are commonplace. Tragically, our government engages in preemptive war, otherwise known as aggression, with no complaints from the American people. Sadly, we have become accustomed to living with the illegitimate use of force by the government. To develop a truly free society, the issue of initiating force must be understood and rejected.

#Andrew Napolitano

What if sometimes, to love your country, you had to alter or abolish the government? What if Jefferson was right? What if that government is best which governs least? What if it is dangerous to be right when the government is wrong? What if it is better to perish fighting for freedom than to live as a slave? What if freedom's greatest hour of danger is now?

#Andrew Napolitano

Hi, everyone. Judge Andrew Napolitano here for Judging Freedom. Today is Wednesday, May 13th, 2026. Max Blumenthal joins us now. Max, a pleasure, my dear friend. Thank you very much. The New York Times published a piece by a longtime journalist of theirs, Nick Kristof, which relates in graphic and stomach-churning detail the results of his investigation of former prisoners, former prison guards, former intelligence and military officials in Israel about the horrific sexual abuse of female and male Palestinian prisoners. The Israelis, no surprise, have responded, saying these are concocted stories of sexual abuse of females and males on October 7th. I'm sure you have some thoughts on all of this.

#Max

Yeah, I do. I've been writing about it since soon after October 7th. It was really November when Israel introduced what was a mass rape hoax about October 7th in order to manufacture consent for the genocide that it was committing in Gaza after its defense minister announced that they would starve and besiege the, in his words, human animals, or what Benjamin Netanyahu called the Amalekites inside Gaza, referring to the tribe that the Old Testament God had committed genocide against in the book of Deuteronomy. Israel has been, all along, while it was manufacturing bogus claims about sexual violence on October 7th—absurd claims, which we'll talk about in a second—

carrying out systematic sexual violence in places like the Sde Teiman concentration camp. And I'll read to you something from June 6th, 2024, which was buried in the New York Times.

That was actually reported at the time, referring to a prisoner, Al-Hamlawi, who was a nurse who I believe Nicholas Kristof wound up interviewing later. This was like in the 15th paragraph on the 16th page of the New York Times. He said a female officer ordered two officers to lift him up. And I don't even know if I can even repeat this just because I don't know what will happen to the YouTube clip of this. But he was essentially sodomized with a metal rod. And this happened again and again. Witnesses came forward to say this happened. They delivered these testimonies to B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights group, which produced a report called "This Is Hell" about Israel's archipelago of concentration camps, torture camps, where Palestinians were systematically sodomized, violently violated.

Then we learned that there was video evidence of this systematic campaign of sexual violence against Palestinians. And we found out late last year that it was Israel's chief JAG officer, its military prosecutor, who had released footage showing Israeli prison guards violently sodomizing a Palestinian prisoner on camera. She released that because the entire Israeli military prosecutorial system and political system were determined to bury this and destroy her. After she was exposed as the leaker, she attempted suicide, and she was arrested. The soldiers who were eventually put on trial for this systematic campaign of prison rape against Palestinian detainees became national heroes. Israeli reservists staged riots, invading Israeli military bases and the court where they were being held or put on trial in order to compel their release.

All of these men were eventually released and completely exonerated, even though there was video evidence. And some of them were even hosted on Israeli TV programs — on Channel 14, for example, the pro-Netanyahu channel — portrayed as heroes. We know who they are. They're unmasked, and they're proud of what they did. Some have even gone on Israeli TV programs and bragged about using dogs as a weapon of sexual assault against prisoners. And now the Israeli government is not saying, "We need to investigate this more and get rid of these bad apples," as the U.S. did after Abu Ghraib. "These are just bad apples. We're going to investigate. Let us conduct our own investigation instead."

It is calling Nicholas Kristof and the New York Times, comparing them to Julius Streicher, the Nazi publisher of *Der Stürmer*, who was executed at Nuremberg. They're actually calling for literally killing the messenger, their supporters. The Israeli government is totally denying that any of this happened, calling it, what else, a blood libel. Right. And this really shows you why. It's another reason why the apartheid system of Israel must be dismantled, because they're presented with the evidence of systematic prison rape, and instead of declaring that they will address it according to international law, they're declaring that the enemy is those who have proven it. And I can prove that this has been happening for decades, if you would like. Yeah. Is it rational?

#Andrew Napolitano

Is it even conceivable that Israeli leadership, senior political leadership — Netanyahu and his cabinet — did not know about this?

#Max

Of course they knew about it, but who's in charge of the prisons? It's Itamar Ben-Gvir. Ben-Gvir is the security minister who has said that he will make life miserable for Palestinian detainees. At his own birthday party recently, he was presented proudly with a cake emblazoned with a frosted noose to symbolize his desire to execute Palestinian prisoners. He has handed out golden pins of nooses, symbolizing his campaign to mass lynch Palestinian prisoners. He's filmed himself humiliating Palestinian prisoners. He's filmed himself with Palestinian prisoners who've been tortured. And Kristof in the New York Times called his office and asked him to comment for this article, and they simply refused to comment.

He knows about it. He's proud of it. This is what he wants. Does Israel have a death penalty? Technically, they do not. And so the Knesset passed legislation authorizing the death penalty for Palestinian prisoners. And Itamar Ben-Gvir and his lieutenants brought out champagne for the Knesset. This is the Israel that is America's unshakable ally, that celebrates mass killing with champagne in the middle of its war. The elected body, the Knesset, whose security minister has a giant noose on his cake for his own birthday. And he's clearly proud of this. As I said, Israeli prison guards and politicians have gone on national TV programs declaring that if someone is a Hamas commando, they deserve to be raped with a dog.

#Andrew Napolitano

From your personal research and understanding of the Israeli penal system, was the Kristof article documented and credible?

#Max

Well, the part that wasn't credible was his acceptance of bogus claims of systematic sexual assault on October 7th against Israelis. No one has come forward with the same level of evidence, such as 14 people who experienced firsthand sexual assault, which is what he gathered. He gathered 14, not just eyewitnesses, but people who experienced—prisoners who experienced—sexual assault. I should say, we also know the names of those who were killed by Israeli prison guards in this wave of torture, sexual assault, and abuse. Dr. Adnan Bursh, who was one of the lead doctors at al-Shifa Hospital, was kidnapped in Gaza City at his hospital. A beloved doctor was reportedly sexually assaulted to death by Israeli prison guards.

So we know the names. We know what happened. We know who these 14 people are. They've come out. From the Israeli side, this article was published in the opinion section, by the way, of the New York Times. The New York Times in 2024 published a scandalous piece, which has been

partially—one of the authors was actually fired. The article has been totally debunked. It was called "Screams Without Words." And no, no one came forward as a survivor of sexual assault on October 7th for this article. It was all hearsay from second- and third-hand witnesses who have been discredited. That was on the front page of the New York Times. This was buried in the New York Times opinion section. So go figure. Wow.

#Andrew Napolitano

Another article making the rounds this week was written by Robert Kagan, the husband of Victoria Nuland, the grandee of the neocons, the former national security advisor to Dick Cheney. And the headline of the article is "Checkmate in Iran: Washington Can't Reverse or Control the Consequences of Losing This War." Max, I've read the article twice. It could have been written by Scott Ritter or Colonel McGregor. It's an indictment of what Trump attempted to do. Now, there are suggestions in there about future bombing, which obviously wouldn't be in McGregor or Ritter's version. But his conclusions are a slap in the face to the neocons that have influenced Trump.

#Max

Well, I think everyone watching this knows who Robert Kagan is, as you mentioned, the husband of Victoria Nuland, who was Dick Cheney's chief of staff and then wound up serving under Obama and Biden as a major State Department official and architect of Project Ukraine. So Kagan's more aligned with the Democrats now and the pro-war wing. Actually, he fundraised for Hillary Clinton's 2016 run. And he is a ferociously anti-Trump figure who still obviously believes in the vision he spelled out with William Kristol, another anti-Trump ringleader from the neocon movement — his vision in the Project for a New American Century document of benevolent hegemony, his Council on Foreign Relations op-ed with Kristol, back in the heady days of unipolar, U.S.-controlled world hegemony.

And he would like to get back to that. And so he's lamenting what Donald Trump has done, correctly assessing that the U.S. has been resoundingly defeated in Iran and that this defeat will reverberate for a generation, much more than Vietnam or Afghanistan, which, as he points out, were costly but did not do lasting damage to America's overall position in the world. So he calls Iran possibly the worst defeat the U.S. has suffered militarily in its history. And he's probably correct. The difference between me and Robert Kagan is that I think that's a good thing. I think that's a great thing. Robert Kagan thinks that's a terrible thing. Why do I think it's a good thing? Do I want America to be destroyed and turned into a shell of its former self? No, that's not what I'm talking about.

It means that America will be chastened, that it could potentially learn a lesson. Vietnam syndrome was a good thing for America. It meant that there was a period of restraint before the U.S. went into Iraq the first time, which was all about overcoming Vietnam syndrome. Who was encouraging the U.S. to go into Iraq both times? Rumsfeld, I think. Cheney. Where were Rumsfeld and Cheney in the '70s? They were on the National Security Council of Gerald Ford. And back then, they oversaw a botched incident where the U.S. attempted to take over a ship called the Mayaguez in 1975, where

U.S. sailors were taken captive, I think, by the Khmer Rouge. And it was a failed operation designed to overcome Vietnam syndrome. So now Kagan is worried about an Iran war syndrome.

I think Iran war syndrome could be great for America because we'll start focusing on our own problems instead of trying to do what Robert Kagan has wanted us to do, which is to topple other governments, violate international law through these violent regime change projects, and destroy entire regions in the name of spreading democracy. Robert Kagan, again, I mean, I think this is an important op-ed. I mean, he's correct that the U.S. has been defeated. He's correct about why. But what Robert Kagan signifies is the imperial elite witnessing a massive setback for their vision. And in the second year or first year of Donald Trump's first term, Robert Kagan published his last book, which was called **The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World.**

And I'll read the argument from this book. Robert Kagan, this is the thesis, elucidates the reasons why American withdrawal would be the worst possible response, based as it is on a fundamental and dangerous misreading of the world. Like a jungle that keeps growing back after being cut down, the world has always been full of dangerous actors who, left unchecked, possess the desire and ability to make things worse. So what's he talking about with the jungle? The jungle is represented by countries like Iran or Cuba or Venezuela, the so-called rogue states, the axis of evil. And the U.S. is the leader of the garden, as former EU foreign policy director Josep Borrell infamously put it.

Europe is a garden. The U.S. is a garden, and we have to keep the jungle—keep mowing the lawn. The reality is, no, we are the jungle. That's why the Iran war happened. And it's a war that Robert Kagan had favored. That's why the Iraq war happened. That's why the U.S. destroyed Yugoslavia. And what happened when the U.S. destroyed Yugoslavia? The U.N., which had been basically taken over by U.S. power, declared that that war was not legal but legitimate in its 1999 report. All right, so the jungle is the part of the world that has destroyed international law. That's the U.S. and Israel. What is Iran saying right now?

It is saying we must have international law be respected so that, for example, our naval ship, the Dina, is not torpedoed in the Indian Ocean in international waters, with over 100 sailors on an unarmed ship slaughtered. International law must be respected so that 168 schoolgirls and their teachers are not slaughtered in Minab. And the Strait of Hormuz is the choke point for Iran actually taking the beating back the jungle. Iran is standing in the breach against the jungle, against savagery, against the barbarians who have said that they will destroy an entire civilization. So Robert Kagan's entire worldview and the thesis of his last book have been turned on their head by this war, and that's what he's upset about.

#Andrew Napolitano

Wow. What a terrific, terrific analysis. While all this has been going on, the rage over these two articles, what has the IDF been doing in Lebanon?

#Max

Well, I would encourage everyone to follow our correspondent, Wyatt Reed, from The Grayzone, who's now in Lebanon, has been in and out of southern Lebanon, and will be publishing reports from the field. Wyatt just left Iran, where one of his last reports, his dispatches, was published on our YouTube channel, where he documented the Israeli destruction of Gandhi Hospital, one of the most advanced medical facilities in Iran. And most recently, he attended the funeral of a family of nine that was slaughtered in an Israeli airstrike in southern Lebanon. The funeral had to be held away from their town of Jebchit because of the fear of Israel bombing the funeral. And if you put this in a wider context, here's what Israel's doing: it's attacking civilians, it's killing first responders.

Every day, two first responders are killed. It's bombing hospitals, schools. It's bombing churches, including those of its former Christian allies in southern Lebanon. It is decimating an entire population in order to create a Gaza-style buffer zone and then establishing a yellow line where no one can return to that area because it sees that entire population, the majority Shia population, as the support base for Hezbollah. And it recognizes that it cannot defeat Hezbollah militarily, so it must attack its support base and push them out, pretty much all the way up to the Litani River, to eliminate Hezbollah—Hezbollah's entire realm of control. This is failing for various reasons, one being the success of Hezbollah FPV fiber-optic drones to hit Israeli targets wherever they want as they attempt to occupy this area.

And that's not just hammering Israeli armored personnel carriers or excavators that are destroying civilian homes and making that place uninhabitable. It is penetrating the psyche of the Israeli public, which was told by Benjamin Netanyahu following the 2024 ceasefire with Hezbollah that Netanyahu had scored this gargantuan victory and weakened Hezbollah to the point where it could no longer threaten Israel. Israel now sees these soldiers coming back to Rambam Hospital in Tel Aviv or coming back in body bags, and it realizes they weren't told the truth. And what's more, the northern town of Kiryat Shmona in Israel has to be de facto evacuated. Netanyahu cannot create a safe space for people to return to the north. This is the second time this has happened since October 7th.

There's an election coming up in Israel. If the election were held today, Likud would lose, and Netanyahu's opponents in a coalition between the right-wing Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid would probably win. So this war is actually weakening Netanyahu and demonstrating also to the Lebanese public that their own leadership, which is due to negotiate with Israel and the U.S. tomorrow and Friday, has completely sold them out. They are not only violating the Lebanese constitution by negotiating openly with Israel, they're violating their own mandate because most Lebanese people do not support those negotiations, which are a not-so-clever, insidious mechanism for normalization with Israel behind the guise of peace. And they're not getting any peace in Lebanon right now.

#Andrew Napolitano

Well, while all this is going on, we keep hearing rumors of Trump family members and business acquaintances engaged in insider trading. Yeah, fortunes made in a couple of seconds after announcements made by the president. What can you tell us about this?

#Max

Well, there was a scandal that we discussed last week, and it, I think, is one of the biggest scandals of access journalism of our time. Just about 70 minutes after Axios reporter Barak Ravid released an article—his fifth in just 19 days by that point—stirring false hope in a U.S. deal with Iran, putting forward claims of a 14-point plan that the U.S. and Iran were right about to agree upon, 70 minutes after that report, \$920 million in crude oil shorts came in. And this enabled \$125 million in insider profits.

It has been very obvious that since the beginning of this conflict on February 28th, Barak Ravid, a former officer in Israel's Unit 8200 intelligence unit and a reservist in the Israeli military until 2023, has been a dupe and a lever for Steve Witkoff, Jared Kushner, and Donald Trump to manipulate markets and try to keep stock markets up while the war drove economic damage all across the world. Look at every report by Barak Ravid. It would say, "U.S. officials say," "Three U.S. officials tell me this," and they're always stirring false hope. And the stories are routinely, almost invariably, shot down by Iranian officials who will not negotiate on these bogus terms. So this, in most cases, would be cause for more investigation by the media.

One of our colleagues is actually being used by the most corrupt administration in history, which is making billions and billions of dollars of insider profits off this war, while Trump's sons are getting drone contracts from Pentagon contractors, including an Israeli company that is actually developing technology for the Iran battlefield. This seems very corrupt, but that's not what happened. Instead, the Beltway hacks—Dana Bash, Jake Tapper, the two Zionist enforcers at CNN, for example—and a who's who of Beltway hacks circled the wagons to defend their colleague Barak Ravid and to defend this corruption ring because they also participate in this kind of corrupt access journalism. And in doing so, what they did was they prevented U.S. mainstream media from investigating the worst scandal of access journalism of our time. There's no U.S. media coverage of this at all.

#Andrew Napolitano

Forget about the DOJ investigating.

#Max

Well, that's going to be a cover-up. I mean, they're investigating so they can cover up for the Trump family. That's what the DOJ is—Donald Trump's personal law firm.

#Andrew Napolitano

Unfortunately, what you say is correct. The statute of limitations for most of these crimes is five years. Who knows who will be running the DOJ investigation three or four years from now? Some of these crimes have longer statutes of limitations depending on how they treat these gains for tax purposes. Does Trump have any cards to play with President Xi?

#Max

With Xi? Certainly not. He's bringing 12 oligarchic, quote-unquote, business leaders to basically beg Xi for contracts and business. That's Donald Trump's main objective. And there's been very little preparation for this trip at all, while Donald Trump is pledging to offer China something. I mean, I'm seeing reports of like a trillion dollars' worth of investments inside the United States. I wasn't a supporter of Donald Trump or of his fake brand of America First, but I wonder what America First supporters think about that. I would expect that we'll see Chinese BYD electric vehicles on U.S. roads within the next five years. And they're cheaper and, in many ways, superior to U.S. electric vehicles. So maybe that would be a good thing. But U.S. car manufacturers, some of whom may have supported the concept of America First, they're not going to be happy about that.

#Andrew Napolitano

How about all those UAW members?

#Max

Yeah.

#Andrew Napolitano

Goodbye to MAGA. Max, as usual, you're a treasure house of information. Thank you very much, particularly for all the recitation on Nicholas Kristof and Robert Kagan. The great Phil Giraldi agrees with you. He's going to be on at 3 o'clock this afternoon, and he said to me, basically, half of what he said is true, half of what he said is untrue, but he is one angry man describing Kagan. Wow. Thank you, Max.

#Max

Thanks a lot, Judge.

#Andrew Napolitano

My regards to your family. We'll see you soon. All the best.

#Max

Great seeing you.

#Andrew Napolitano

Thank you. Coming up, if you're watching us live, in 15 minutes at 2 o'clock, on much of this as well as his new research on the use of chemical weapons in Syria—who really used them? Aaron Maté. And at 3 o'clock, the aforementioned, the great Phil Giraldi. Judge Napolitano for Judging Freedom.