

Amir Tibon 9-16-2024 Transcript

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SPEAKERS

Amir Tibon, Maxxe Albert-Deitch, Hadar Susskind

H Hadar Susskind 00:12

Hello again and thank you everybody who is with us right on time, as always, I appreciate it. For those of you who don't know I am Hadar Susskind. I'm the president and CEO of Americans for Peace Now, and I am glad to be here today with you, with my colleague, Maxxe Albert Deitch, and also our guest, Amir Tibon, who we will introduce in more detail in a moment. But as those of you who are regulars on our webinars know, this is the moment where I partake in the time honored Washington tradition of filibustering for a minute or two as everybody gets into the Zoom. So thank you for your patience. Sorry if you hear loud lawn mowing noises in the background. That's what happens when we don't all go to the office every day, but it should be just fine. All right, it looks like folks are coming in. That is good. So again, I will just say hello, welcome, thank you for being with us. I am Hadar Susskind. I'm the president and CEO of Americans for Peace Now. We're pleased to have you with us today. I'm with my colleague who I'm sure many of you know, Maxxe Albert Deitch, and our guest is author and journalist Amir Tibon Amir. I also want to thank our friends from Canadian friends of Peace Now, who are co sponsoring this event with us. So welcome to all of our fine friends in Canada. Amir, you know, we want to hear, obviously, about the new book about Gates of Gaza, but also really about your experience, you know, in this whole year. So, you know, Maxxe and I have got a lot of questions. We've got we've got our questions, but why don't you just start by telling us about the book. Tell us, how are you doing? How's the family? What's going on?

A Amir Tibon 02:07

Okay, so hi everyone. Good afternoon. It's evening over here in Israel, but good afternoon to everyone joining us in North America. It's been almost a year since October 7, hard to believe, but in three weeks, we will be commemorating one year to this terrible day. My family, on that day was, we were at our home in Kibbutz Nahal Oz, which is small kibbutz 450 people, located directly on the Israeli border with Gaza -- basically half a mile from the border fence. It's the kibbutz that was built in the 1950s as part of the strategy at the time David Ben Gurion to build Israeli communities along the country's borders. And the kibbutz was attacked on October 7 by 150 Hamas terrorists who went from home to home, trying to murder and kidnap people. We lost 15, one-five, people on that day, friends and neighbors of ours. Our home was attacked.

There was a lot of...a lot of bullets were fired into our living room and windows and other unpleasant things like that. And we were at home, my wife and I, with two young girls -- at the time, three and a half and two years old -- trying to stay alive and keep them calm and quiet. In my new book, which you mentioned, Hadar, The Gates of Gaza, which is coming out in just about a week, published by Little Brown and Company in the US, and will also be available in Canada, I write about the story of that day in my home, in my family, but also in the wider context of my community and the Gaza border region area. And another thing I do in the book which is unique and differentiates it from other books of October 7, and a lot of good and important books have been published and will be published on October 7, because it's the most tragic day in the history of the state of Israel -- but what differentiates the gates of Gaza is that I also write in the book about the history of my kibbutz. Basically the book has two timelines. One of them is an October 7 timeline that begins at 6:30am when a mortar from Gaza explodes in our neighborhood. And the second timeline is the history timeline of the kibbutz going back to the 1950s and at some point, the two timelines meet one another. So that's regarding the book, and regarding our family, we've been evacuated since October 8, with the rest of our community to a small kibbutz in north central Israel, Kibbutz Mishmar haEmek. It's close to Haifa, so not that far north, not in the areas of the North, which today are bombarded, abandoned with the future unclear, but about an hour and a half from the Lebanese border, so a little more quiet here. My girls are doing well here. They have great kindergarten. They're happy. My wife and I, like everybody else in our community, is still...we're still struggling with the situation, more than anything, with the fact that two of our friends from the kibbutz are still in Gaza in the hands of Hamas as we speak, Tsahi Idan and Omri Miran, both of them fathers of young children. We had seven hostages taken on October 7, five of them were women and even two young girls, actually. All the women and the girls were returned alive in the deal that President Biden orchestrated in November, which is something I will forever be grateful for, to the president, because without his involvement, it simply wouldn't have happened. And we got five of our friends, neighbors alive. Unfortunately, since that deal ended in late November, we have not seen a second deal come through, and we're seeing more and more hostages dying in Gaza, some of them murdered by Hamas, others dying due to accidents like you know, we got news today that three hostages were accidentally killed in an IDF bombardment. You know, the military didn't know their location. Others are dying because the conditions are unbearable, and we really need a second deal to bring them back home, and this is our main focus right now. This is what we're fighting for. This is what we're demanding, a long answer to a short question, Hadar, but well summarizes everything.



Maxxe Albert-Deitch

Yeah, Amir, I want to echo Hadar's sentiment. Thank you for being with us. Thank you for speaking with us, especially so close to that anniversary. You actually spoke with us a few days before, I think, for a lot of us, the world changed that point.



Hadar Susskind 07:03

It's only the beginning. So first of all, Amir, just again, thank you for being with us. You know, I will say for myself, I'm sure it's true for many people. In the days following October 7, as we were all reading so many things, your article and the story of you and your family was just unbelievably powerful and brought us all to tears many, many times. So I'm just, I'm glad to hear that the girls are doing well, and that, you know, you guys are all doing as well as possible

in these very difficult situations. So before we keep going, just a moment of logistics, apologies, I want to remind everyone to use the Q and A button. If you have questions, post them there, and we will ask them of Amir as many as we can get to. So please, Maxxe, I turn to you.

A

Amir Tibon 08:08

I remember we had a webinar about Israel and Saudi Arabia right before October 7. This was what's in the news, what's going to happen in the Israel-Saudi Arabia talks, what's going to happen in the judicial overhaul the government was planning and...

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Hadar Susskind 08:24

Remember all those things?

A

Amir Tibon 08:26

Little did we know! Little did we know!



Maxxe Albert-Deitch

Really feels like a bit of a different world. So I do know a bit about the book, and of course, I've read, you know, the stories that you were publishing through Haaretz at the time. It is my understanding that the book encompasses more than just your family's story and the story of the people who were super close to you at the time. You've also collected dozens of interviews with experts, soldiers, fellow survivors, and you really do delve into that conversation about occupation and broader conflict. Can you tell us a bit about the process of gathering all of those stories and having all of those conversations?

A

Amir Tibon 09:06

Yes and it was a process, indeed. I started writing the book in late November, right after the first hostage deal. Until then, really, I didn't have time for anything. We were not really breathing, if I may say, we had, like I said, seven friends over there in the hands of Hamas. We had been evacuated from our home overnight. We lived, all of the family, in one small room, basically like a cube, sleeping on mattresses on the floor. We had to adjust to this reality. There was no time for something like this. Late November, there was the hostage deal. We got the five women and girls back alive. A bit of a routine had developed in our lives. We moved to a larger room. It was still a room, but it was a little larger. Miri, my wife, was thinking about going back to work. She eventually did. She's a social worker, and she works with children on the autistic spectrum, and she found a job in the area we were evacuated to. And I thought, Okay, now when I can breathe for a second, I need to sit and write this down. And I made two important decisions about this, one, to write it in English, although I later translated the book into Hebrew, and it's now being published in Hebrew as well, but first to write it in English, because I felt like it was more important than anything to tell the story to the world. There are so many people out there who are denying, minimizing or justifying October 7, and I felt it was

my mission to tell what happened and not to preach and not to opionate it, about it, but to simply tell the story, put out the facts, and to write it in English for an international audience. And the second decision I made was that I didn't want to only write about October 7, and this is for two reasons, and this goes to your question. Reason number one, because I don't want Nachal Oz my home, a beautiful place, an amazing community, to only be associated for eternity with this terrible, terrible day. Nachal Oz existed for 70 years. It had a long history with many achievements, a lot of ups and downs, you know, points of crisis and points of achievements and success. And I wanted to help people understand what is this kibbutz that was attacked, not just to create the attack at 6:30am on October 7, but to create the place that was attacked to tell the history. The second reason is because I really believe you cannot understand October 7 without understanding the broader history of the Israel-Gaza relationship, if I can call it that way. You know, we're used to talking about a conflict, and for many, many decades, it has been a conflict. But if you read the book, you will find out that there were also times when it was different. And there were times when people from Nahal Oz would go into Gaza, and go to the beach, and go to restaurants, and go to the dentist over there. And there were times when people from Gaza came to work in the kibbutz, came to weddings in Nahal Oz. And there's even this amazing event I write about, which I did not know about before I started working on the on the book. In August 1994, the kibbutz was basically...it was the first...I'll tell it a bit differently... There were two moments in the history of the kibbutz when hundreds of people from Gaza were inside Kibbutz Nahal Oz. The second time was October 7, when hundreds of terrorists and looters came into the kibbutz. And...you know what happened. But the first time was in August 1994, when busses with hundreds of people from Gaza came to the kibbutz to attend the Nahal Oz festival of peace, which took place on that summer. This is the Oslo time. It's, you know, around the time of the peace agreement with Jordan, there's optimism in the air. It's a new Middle East. And so we had a Peace Festival in Kibbutz Nahal Oz, and you had hundreds of people attending from Gaza. I found a video of this event, and it's really mind-boggling. You see Israeli and Palestinian flags, children playing soccer together, people dancing and singing. So this is a complicated history, and in order to understand October 7, you need to first of all read about this history. Otherwise you don't really see how we got to that point.

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Hadar Susskind 13:41

Were you there? Do you remember that festival?

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Amir Tibon 13:43

No, I wasn't. I wasn't living in the kibbutz back then. I wasn't born or raised in Nahal Oz. I actually tell in the book how I came to live there. It's a whole story. I'm not going to...I'm not going to go into that people will have to buy and read if they want to find that made me move there in the first place.

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Hadar Susskind 13:59

That story I know a little bit, but I want to read about the Peace Festival, so...



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Amir Tibon 14:03

I got you now.

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Hadar Susskind 14:05

Yeah, absolutely, okay, Maxxe?



Maxxe Albert-Deitch

And for all of our listeners and viewers, I do want to let you all know the information about the book, and you know where you can buy it when it's formally out is going to be in the description on the podcast, on the YouTube, on our website, so you will have access to the book to read out.

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Amir Tibon 14:22

I'll also send a link at the end of the conversation, in the zoom here, to the website of the publisher, Little Brown, where people can pre-order it. So thank you,



Maxxe Albert-Deitch

Wonderful, Amir, In addition to being an author and working on this book, you're also a journalist. You've been working for Haaretz, you've been covering conflict in the region, or, I think we could borrow your language and refer to it as relationships between all of the surrounding regions, for the past several months, including the ways that it affects people outside of Gaza. I do want to pivot the conversation a little bit to the West Bank, where extremist settlers have been targeting Palestinians, and that too has gotten both worse and more complicated since October 7. Can you speak a bit about the ways that post-October 7 tensions have affected the West Bank and other surrounding regions, and maybe get into some of the mechanisms that are or are not in place to deal with that violence or those changes in relationship?

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Amir Tibon 15:24

This is a very important question. Broadly. If we look at this from 10,000 feet, the main feature of the current Netanyahu government is a loss of control. It's anarchy, okay? For most of 2023 you had a lot of Israelis out in the streets protesting against the government because they feared dictatorship, because of what the government wanted to do in the judicial overhaul. But what we're really experiencing here is actually anarchy. It's a loss of control, and you saw it on October 7, when all the systems of the country collapsed. You're seeing it now in the north where you have entire communities abandoned, and Israel doesn't really have an answer to this. And you're seeing it in the West Bank. You're seeing it in the West Bank, where you have total loss of control. You have a crazy rise in the amount of Palestinian terror attacks against Israelis. And you have a crazy rise in the amount of terror attacks, violence, vandalism, all sorts

of things from violent extremist settlers against Palestinians. And the two things are related to one another, because usually when you have a more quiet time in the West Bank, you will see it both when it comes to terrorism or attacks by Palestinians, and on the other side, to what we call settler violence. But in the last year, there's a spike in both things, and it's really because this government has totally, totally lost control. Now in the West Bank, the more dangerous element is that you have over there, 10s of 1000s of armed Palestinian police officers and security officials of the Palestinian Authority, who today, 99% of them remain loyal to the Palestinian Authority. This is where they get their salary, and they are actually working with the Israeli military in order to try to contain and stop the attacks from groups like Hamas and the Islamic Jihad that are present in the West Bank and are becoming more and more active, more and more daring, and more and more dangerous. But you have in this government the finance minister Smotrich, who is on a crusade to dismantle the Palestinian Authority, because for him, this is one of his ideological goals. This is something very dangerous that supporters of Israel and the US need to be aware of if we get to a point where he succeeds in getting the Palestinian Authority to collapse, and he's using all kinds of economic measures through his position as finance minister to push for that, we are going to have these 10s of 1000s of armed people not getting a salary anymore, not belonging to some central government anymore, And this is what happened to the Americans in Iraq, right? The it was very easy for the American military to conquer Iraq and take down the regime of Saddam Hussein. It really was not, you know, it wasn't a fair game, right? Not in exactly a fair competition the most powerful military in the world against this Hussein regime --which was evil and sadistic and terrible -- but wasn't very strong. But after the Americans took down the Saddam Hussein regime, you had about 100,000 former soldiers, former policemen, who didn't belong to anything anymore. They were armed, they were trained, and they started fighting your soldiers. This is the scenario that Smotrich is trying to create for Israel in the West Bank. It's a very, very dangerous scenario. And at the same time, you also have, again, this loss of control over the violent elements in some of the settlements. Now I have to say, the vast majority of the people who live in settlements are not part of this phenomenon. They don't partake in it. They don't support it. Many of them denounce it. But you have this minority -- a lot of them are living in these illegal outposts that are illegal according to Israeli law. And you know, if you don't have the police and the military stopping this phenomenon, this is going to ignite entire areas. This is a very, very dangerous phenomenon, and we've seen the United States and other countries trying to put sanctions and put pressure on the people involved in this. But at the end of the day, what you really need is the military and the police here in Israel to stop these people -- if needed, make arrests -- because we're a country of laws, because we need to have order here, basically. And this is not happening. So taken together, again, from kind of like a big picture situation, it's important what you said and asked about, because the situation in the West Bank is like a powder keg that's waiting to explode.

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Hadar Susskind 20:19

Right, and you know, you just said it's Israel as a country of laws. And I think one of the biggest questions is whether those laws extend to the occupied territories and which ones.

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Amir Tibon 20:29

Well...that's that's a big part of the problem. That, you know, supposedly, at least when it comes to violence, okay, of course, the situation the West Bank, from a legalistic point of view, is very complicated, right? We haven't annexed the territory, but we are controlling it. This is

not new to anybody who's watching us, but at least when it comes to the issue of violent crime, there should be no distinction. There should be no distinction on that issue. And by the way, we also have a problem with the police inside Israel right now, this has been the bloodiest year in terms of, you know, murders on a criminal level and car accidents in many, many, many years, we are talking decades

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Hadar Susskind 21:18

Smotrich, obviously, Ben Gvir is...

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Amir Tibon 21:21

yeah, the minister of the police, is Itamar Ben Gvir who is himself, you know, very, very problematic figure, to say the least. And, and we're seeing this loss of control, this anarchy, as a main feature of the current government. And this is a problem, because right now, Israel is facing the most important challenges in the country's history. We are being we are being attacked on multiple fronts. Okay? Hamas opened its attack on October 7, and it's still holding 100 Israeli hostages, which is an unprecedented situation. We've never had something like this in the history of the country. Hezbollah has been attacking us from the north since October 8. Entire communities are abandoned. The Houthis are attacking us from Yemen. Just yesterday, they fired a missile that penetrated our aerial defense, and luckily, no one was hurt. It exploded in some empty field outside Tel Aviv. But you know, it's a matter of a few meters here and there, and this could be a totally different event. We had a terror attack two weeks ago in which three Israelis were murdered, when a terrorist from Jordan came to the Allenby crossing and murdered three workers. There. We have militias in Syria and Iraq firing towards Israel. We are being attacked on multiple fronts. We cannot allow this internal anarchy. And yet, this is what's happening. And again, it will if it continued, it will ignite the West Bank, and then we will have to fight an internal front, which would be perhaps the most dangerous of all.

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Hadar Susskind 22:50

So one of the things you just mentioned, a lot of important parts there, but obviously still 100 plus hostages being held in Gaza. This is unprecedented. One of the things that you know, there's, of course, the immediate impact for the families and the friends first and foremost, but the whole society feels this. The whole society feels not only the loss of those people who are still being held, but also the fact that I think it is, you know, if you can read the articles, look at the polling like broadly believe that the government is not, in fact, prioritizing bringing them home, and that is a whole, a whole additional tragedy. I mean, what do you think it means, again, looking looking past the obviously most important part of the people themselves, in their lives, but what do you think it means for the whole society, if that's, in fact, the case that the government is basically writing them off.

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Amir Tibon 23:41

I want to start by explaining this from a personal perspective that people outside Israel don't always understand, and even a lot of people in Israel don't understand. Even people ask me, will you go back to live in Nahal Oz? And here's the answer I give, very honest, going back to

Will you go back to live in Nahal Oz? And here's the answer I give, very honest, going back to Nahal Oz for my family means that we're going to live in a home, in a house where a neighbor was murdered in the house in front of us, and another neighbor was murdered in the house behind us. And I will bring my daughters back to a house sandwiched in between those two places. Every morning when I take my girls to kindergarten, I will pass by the home behind where the one neighbor was murdered, and every afternoon, when I go out with them to play, I will pass in front of the other house where a second neighbor was murdered. And you know what? I think we can do it. I think we can overcome this. But can I take my girls and pass by the homes of two friends who were taken into Gaza alive on October 7. And signs of life, you know, videos with them were published in the course of their kidnapping, you know, during the time they were in Gaza, and they will return dead...or never return. You see, I don't know if I can do that. This for me will be, I don't want to say will be, but very well could be a breaking point. And this, I'm one person, but I'm speaking for many. This issue of bringing the hostages alive is part of the Israeli DNA. It's something very, very important about the kind of country that we are. You know, that we, unlike our enemies, who celebrate death, we celebrate life. This is something we Israelis have been telling ourselves all these years now, I never believed in this slogan of make a deal, no matter the cost. If Hamas says, tomorrow, dismantle the Dimona nuclear reactor, of course, we're not going to do that, but within the bounds of what's currently being discussed. If you look at the Biden proposal, Netanyahu response to it. Hamas' response to it, I believe there's a deal there. I believe there's a deal there. We have a major problem with Sinwar. Sinwar is a messianic, fanatic, ultra religious zealot who is still hoping for an all-out regional war that would involve Iran and Hezbollah. That's been his dream since October 7, and he keeps doubling down, telling himself, okay, I didn't get it on October 7. Maybe I'll get it on April 13, when Iran attacked Israel, I didn't get it on April maybe I'll get it in August. And he still hopes for it, because once that happens, a lot of pressure will be relieved from him. A lot of pressure from him will be relieved, if and when, this becomes an all out regional war. So he doesn't feel any urgency for a deal. We need to create better conditions that drive the urgency to him. Some of that will require military activity, which needs to be more targeted, more specific, in order to hurt his weak points. But you also need to reach a point where the chances for a regional war decrease, because that's his dream. Then you have Netanyahu. Netanyahu, his most important goal is to remain in power. He knows that if he makes a deal for the hostages, his coalition falls apart. And here I'm going to say something very painful. Israeli soldiers in Gaza, including my brother, cousins, friends, are willing to die in order to bring hostages back alive. The last operation that brought back living hostages, which was in June, four hostages were rescued from a home in Gaza. The commander of the rescue force was killed in the operation. The idea that a Prime Minister, I'm not asking him to risk his life for this, but he's not willing to risk his coalition to bring back hostages? This is unfathomable...unfathomable, unbelievable. Now, I'm not saying all the blame is on him. It's much more complicated than that, really it is. I'm also not saying he doesn't have any blame. To understand the whole technical gene dynamic, you really need put aside this one, you know...

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Hadar Susskind 28:29

There's plenty of blame.

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Amir Tibon 28:31

Yes, it's a really complicated situation, but...but we do need to reach a point where the Israeli government is saying, you know, we're willing to do a lot more to reach a deal, and there also

government is saying, you know, we're willing to do a lot more to reach a deal, and there also needs to be more pressure on Sinwar. Both things have to happen. But what we're seeing right now, I think, is the worst of all worlds. The Israeli government's insistence on holding the Philadelphia corridor forever is basically sending a very clear message to Sinwar, we don't want a deal. At the same time, the chance for a regional war with Hezbollah and Iran is going up, so Sinwar feels like he's getting what he wants. We're to take military forces and military resources out of Gaza and move them to the north, so there will also be less military pressure on Hamas. And all of that leads us to a deal being incredibly unlikely. We're not in March anymore. We cannot delude ourselves and say, oh, we'll make a hostage deal after X right? You know, after we finish Khan Younis, after we enter Rafah, after we blow up the tunnels in Philadelphia, after we kill Ismail Haniya and Muhammad Deif -- the two senior Hamas leaders who we have killed in this war. We cannot say that anymore. We've done all of those things. What after the war in the north, which could last a year, who will be alive by then?



Maxxe Albert-Deitch

Yeah, it's...I mean, it's horrible all around, I think, is the only thing any of us can say at that point.



Amir Tibon 30:09

Yes



Maxxe Albert-Deitch

I almost hesitate to ask this next question, and please only answer to the extent that you're comfortable. You've alluded to it a bit already. What is the situation and mindset for those of you who were evacuated and either don't plan to or don't have a direct plan for going back to the communities that you were evacuated from?



Amir Tibon 30:38

Now this is a very important question as well. And honestly, right now, most people don't have an answer, because most people who are evacuated from their homes on October 7 or October 8, if it's the north, are in a wait and see kind of mode. I think most people want to go back home. Want to return to their homes, to their communities, but if you ask them, Are you going to do it? I think you're going to get, you know, 10 or 20% who say: absolutely, question about it. Some of are even coming back now. Then you're going to have a second group of about 10% to 20% who say: No way, I'm done with this, I'm going to move to Tel Aviv, or leave the country. We're seeing more and more of that set. And then you have about 80% who are going to say: I really want to go back, I don't know yet if I can do it, it depends on the security situation, it depends on the fate of the hostages, it depends on the economic investment in these areas, in the South and in the north. It will take a long time and effort to rebuild these places and create a better economic and social and educational, transportation, all these things have to be addressed. So people are in wait and see mode. This is what I'm gathering, both, you know, from people in my area, in the Gaza border area, and also I have a lot of friends in the north. I grew up in the north. I grew up in places that are now evacuated, bombarded. So

for me, this is, you know, this is a double situation. You know, my home where I raised my daughters, and then the home where I was raised as a child, they're both now empty. And by the way, this is, again, if you look at a big picture analysis of this reality...these are all places that were built and expanded and strengthened over decades. It took decades of hard work and people put their blood and sweat and tears into these places, and some of these places, like Nahal Oz by the way, were hit again and again and suffered all kinds of crisis and losses and and the communities regathered and grew themselves again. All of this effort, you know, dozens of years of proud Zionist history will now have to be started from scratch because of the failures of October 7. And this is such a big heartbreak for a lot of people. We have the older members of our community, people who are 90 years old, who came to establish this kibbutz when they were 20 years old in the 1950s. They're seeing the project of their life in a way, on the verge of failing. This is a very difficult moment. I do believe we can rebuild. We can do it. We can make all these places blossom again, but I'm afraid it will require a totally different leadership for Israel. The current leadership is not committed to these places. It's not committed to the Zionist value of maintaining civilian life on the country's borders as a way to say, you know, we're here. I don't think this is something they're committed to, and it's just the fact that all these communities in the north and in the South were destroyed and evacuated under their watch.



Maxxe Albert-Deitch

I'm glad that you are zooming this conversation out to an institutional and governmental level. I want to follow up and ask, what are the government structures and services that are in place to help you all as you're essentially starting over in new places.



Amir Tibon 34:30

In the first month of the war, the government was missing in action, basically. They were not involved at all. Everything was private initiatives. We came to this kibbutz. They took care of all our needs. We had volunteers from all parts of Israeli society come to help us here, religious, secular, Jewish, Arab, Druze, right wing and left wing. Everybody was here to help, and that was Israeli society at its finest hour. The one component that was missing was the government. On some levels, it has improved since October 7, and on others, it really hasn't. The government constructed two new agencies, one for the South and one for the North, that are supposed to help the evacuees. Guess what? Right now, both of them don't have a general director. The general director of the Southern agency resigned and has not been replaced. The general director of the Northern agency was never appointed, and the one person who is like, half officially appointed is about to leave as well. That's just a taste of the dysfunction we're seeing. And again, this is just it shouldn't be this way. Listen, Israel is full of talented, devoted, smart, capable people. It really is the startup nation. Okay, this is not just slogan, but somehow, right now, startup nation is being run by the gang that couldn't shoot straight, and this is what it's looking like.



Hadar Susskind 36:01

I was gonna say something about shooting straight, but I'm just gonna let it go. So I want to ask you a little bit of a different question. Put your journalist hat back on. You know, one of the things I've seen in the times I've been there in this past year and talking to people, and that

we're hearing so much is that many Israelis, many Jewish Israelis, are really not, not seeing, not hearing what's really happening in Gaza that, you know, maybe if they read Haaretz they get some or foreign press, you know. But as a journalist, what do you think about that is that, do you think that's primarily is that government censorship that's making it so? Is it self censorship? Tell us. Tell us more about that.

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Amir Tibon 36:50

First of all, I think there is something almost natural about this. People are still in trauma. We still have our hostages. We are picking up the pieces from the biggest disaster in the history of our country. It's very difficult for people to go beyond their own thing, understand the importance of it, I understand the urgency of it. But I'm also just putting out the fact that it's a very difficult time for people here. On top of it, I think the media is driven by ratings, okay? And when your ratings driven, if something doesn't bring you good ratings, you don't show it. And this is a very, very bad development for our society and discourse, but I think this is the main reason, you know, the editors on the television say: Oh, if I show these pictures now, the person will take the remote and, you know, flip to another channel. And that's why you know this Washington Post slogan -- democracy dies in darkness -- was never true. Democracy can also die in front of the glaring light of the screen, if the media is mostly driven by ratings and not by responsibility.

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Hadar Susskind 38:03

Yeah. I mean, it's just, it's interesting. I, you know, when I was there a few months ago, just speaking to Israelis who consume, who consume their their news, primarily in Hebrew, speaking with some friends who've, you know, been Israelis for 30 years, but are native English speakers, and maybe get some more of their news in English versus, you know, Palestinian citizens and others who are were watching Al Jazeera and getting their news in Arabic. It's just remarkable. I'll be honest, I was a little bit shocked. I had some conversations with friends who are very engaged, so not the people who aren't paying attention and very progressive, very left wing. So it's not, you know, who said to me: Oh, is it really that bad? I heard this thing happen, but really? You know, in terms of what's in terms of what's happening in Gaza, because they just are, you know, the most, sort of high end consumers, they just weren't hearing it, and they just weren't, weren't getting it in. And I think you're right. I mean, it's incredibly difficult. Everybody you know is still it's not, we've said it, and I think it's still true. It's not PTSD. Everyone is still in their trauma. Everyone those hostages are there. You're still not home. So many people are still dealing with that, and it makes it difficult, but probably all the more important also.

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Amir Tibon 39:27

Yeah, listen, this is a real problem. It's also impacting the way we understand the world's reaction to the war. Because, you know, people don't understand why other countries are reacting the way they are, because they're seeing a different war than we are seeing on their televisions. And this is the second problem that is impacting our own discourse and our own expectations of the war and of the level of support we can receive, and the limitations of that support. From our friends and allies. So I agree. I agree it's a it's a big problem. I understand

the emotional aspect behind it, but I'm not excusing the media conduct. If you get you know the distinction I'm making here, the media has a responsibility that the average citizen who says, I got 100 hostages there, and so many people died, and my friend from high school just died fighting. I mean, that's something else, but the media has a responsibility,

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Hadar Susskind 40:32

So in addition to the media, I mean, the follow up that leads me to is, you know, we've talked a little bit about the government, what they are/are not doing, both in terms of helping you and others who have been displaced and or how they're dealing with the hostage situation. Maybe talk a little bit about the political opposition, because one of the one of the questions that I have in talking to people is we're saying: Okay, it's difficult for people to, you know, get past their own their own traumas or their own issues and the responsibility of the media, but I feel like there's a responsibility, certainly, if they want to be successful, frankly, for the political opposition. What is that looking like? You know, we've watched a year plus, going back to the judicial coup, issues of protests, people protesting now more explicitly around the hostages and that being seen as anti Netanyahu. So where do you see? Where do you see the the opposition going right now?

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Amir Tibon 41:26

The opposition is looking at the political landscape and and this is what they're seeing: Since October 7, the Israeli public has shifted to the right in terms of perceptions on the conflict. More people are opposed to the two state solution, more people are suspicious of Palestinians in general and of negotiations. That's just fact. We're seeing it in all public opinion polls. At the same time, the parties that constitute the current right wing government, in every poll are losing a hypothetical election. In some polls, they're losing badly. In some polls, they're losing, you know, not that badly, but clearly losing. And in others, they're losing terribly. Now, how do you explain that, if the public is moving to the right? You know, you hear people who say something like, I believed in a two state solution, but after October 7, I understood it can never happen. Then why aren't the right wing government members benefiting politically? And the reason is because the government failed so spectacularly and mismanaged the war so spectacularly. But people are saying, Okay, this bunch of clowns has to go. Where does that lead us? It leads, at least according to the polls, stronger standing for politicians like Naftali Bennett, Avigdor Lieberman...Listen, it depends on your perspective, but these are the people who are getting stronger right now: it's Bennett, it's Lieberman, Benny Gantz. The voters who are disappointed with the government are saying, okay, you know, these politicians are also right wing, but they're competent. They you know, they're competent. They can manage the country. They can manage a war, unlike what we have at the moment. I don't know if this trend will actually hold and continue, and will there be a shift? It's really, you know, we are still in the aftershock of October 7. It hasn't been a year yet, and these things can have an impact for many, many years in public perceptions. But that's the situation right now that we're seeing. We're seeing a right wing shift in the public opinion, and at the same time, a shift away from the current right wing government into forces of opposition. Now this is leading the more centrist elements of the opposition, like Yair Lapid, to try to compete for the same votes that are, you know, going to Gantz and Bennett and Lieberman. On the left wing, it's leading to an attempt for consolidation. If you had Meretz and Labor in the election two years ago running separately, which was the stupidest thing ever done in Israeli politics, because it cost us the

country, basically. I mean, if Meretz and Labor had run together, Netanyahu would now have 61 members of Knesset, not 64 and the government would have long ago collapsed. But now we're seeing Meretz and Labor uniting, because everybody understands that at this moment in time, the left wing cannot avoid all kinds of internal splits. I think we're also going to see some kind of a reunification of the Arab parties, which also ran in three slates in the last election, one of which did not pass the electoral threshold, and that's how Netanyahu won a 64 seat majority with 49% of the vote. So I think you're going to see consolidation on the left. You're going to see the center strengthening, and you're going to see an alternative to the government rise from the right, which will say: Okay, we're right wing, but we're not crazy. We're not trying to dismantle the judicial system of the country. We're not setting the country on fire. We don't want anarchy. We don't want a police that doesn't enforce the laws. And we're willing to even work with the center and the left in order to bring back stability to the country, basically the kind of government that we had under Bennett and Lapid.



Maxxe Albert-Deitch

While we're talking about public perception, the last time that we spoke with you, just under a year ago, I mean, it seems like a different world now,



Amir Tibon 45:37

Totally.



Maxxe Albert-Deitch

We were talking about Netanyahu visit to the US we were saying that at the time. I mean, mid to late 2023 it was genuinely historic, due to the number of protests that took place against Netanyahu while he was on US soil. It was really significant that the bulk of those protests were led by Israeli expats. Obviously, things look quite different now, but the protests didn't stop. I mean, we at APN have participated in some of them, and I think we can't really talk about that protest movement without also addressing the protests in Israel. At the time, when we were talking about it a year ago, those protests were largely about the judicial overhaul. People were hauling around giant copies of, you know, constitution in the streets.



Amir Tibon 46:25

Yeah, yeah.



Maxxe Albert-Deitch

Now, it's, I think, a much bigger conversation. The hostages, Netanyahu, insistence on violent solutions, the refusal to rein in government officials like Ben Gvir, like Smotrich. Can you talk to us about the change of tone in the protest movement over the past year, as it's changed quite a bit in nature.

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Amir Tibon 46:44

Absolutely. First of all, in the first few months, the protest movement was almost non-existent. You had several 1000s of people participating. Everybody was, you know, in reserve forces or volunteering or piecing their life together. Think the protests began to grow again after Gantz and Eisen left the emergency government, and it's really been growing in the past few weeks around two understandings that are getting more and more traction in the public: number one, that Netanyahu has failed to bring back the hostages. Whether that's failure, you can argue, what's the reason for the failure? Right? Is the failure his own opposition to a deal, or is his failure not bringing Hamas to a place where Hamas accepts a deal? But either way, the bottom line is the same, the hostages are dying in the tunnels, and we're not bringing them back. So that's point number one, and point number two is that the government has no sense of shame, no acceptance of responsibility for what happened, and no intention to step down, which is what should be expected after a disaster like this happens on your watch, and they're not even willing to investigate it, right? I mean, there has been calls to create like a 9/11 commission for October 7, and Netanyahu has been blocking it. So that is causing more and more people to go out to the streets. But the demands in the protests are on a scale that goes from hostage deal to resignation of the government and new elections and other things in between. There is no coherent message that everybody is rallying around. I feel it like it's more just an expression of anger and disillusionment and disappointment over the mismanagement of the war, the disaster of October 7, the failure to bring back the hostages all at once.

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Hadar Susskind 48:48

So obviously, all the questions we're asking you, you know, Maxxe and I are both sitting here in the US, so we're asking from this side, but one that's particularly from that perspective. You mentioned before the fact that the US government has instituted sanctions on a number of individual settlers, some settler institutions, which is something we've been we've been supporting, because every time there's another event, another issue, another person killed, or something, you know, at this point, Tony Blinken saying, you know, we're very concerned we denounce it. It seems like there's a lot, a lot a lot of talk and very, very little action from the US government in terms of its relationship with the Israeli government. So I guess my question is, how much do you think both the government, the Israeli government, cares about these sanctions? Do they feel like there's any pressure from the American government and then within the Israeli population? Do you think that's something that is well known, that people feel?

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Amir Tibon 49:50

It's having a big impact on the people involved. They are very, very worried about it. They hope that after the US. Election, if Trump wins, it will be canceled. And they they fear that, you know, if Harris wins, it will get bolder and stronger. This has been their reaction to this. They take it very seriously. I heard people in the US who are very critical of the Biden administration saying, Oh, this is nothing. This is nonsense. Well, that's absolutely not true. This is having an impact. And again, the main question is, will it become something that is continuous, or will it be canceled half a year from now? And of course, that I cannot answer, but it will make all the difference in the world in terms of the impact it will have.

H Hadar Susskind 50:37
And do you think the government is feeling this? Are they?

A Amir Tibon 50:45
Yes, they're they're feeling it. They're feeling it in terms of pressure from their base, right?

H Hadar Susskind 50:50
Exactly.

A Amir Tibon 50:50
I think they're feeling it in terms of pressure from their base and disappointment from their base that the government cannot overturn this, right?

H Hadar Susskind 50:58
Because when the first round came out, I recall, you know, Smotrich saying, Oh, this is absurd. We're just going to ignore it.

A Amir Tibon 51:04
I know. Smotrich is not a smart guy. He's just not smart. There are very smart people that I have political disagreements with. I learn from people that I have political disagreements. I never look at someone who is, you know, they have a different opinion for me, and I say, Oh, they're just stupid and I'm smart. That's really not my way in life. Smotrich is not smart.

H Hadar Susskind 51:29
But he doesn't get these issues that they're not smart.

A Amir Tibon 51:31
Smotrich doesn't get international politics. He doesn't understand international law. He based he doesn't understand economics, he just doesn't get any of it, and that's why he's leading the Israeli economy to one of the most terrible prices in our history. But you see, the thing is, he thinks he's a genius, and that's why his reaction was what you said at the time, said, Oh, this is nothing. Well, actually, no, it's not nothing, and his own supporters had to come and explain it to him until he understood.

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Hadar Susskind 52:04

Yeah, actually, the economy piece you just mentioned is interesting because it's one of the others. As you know, we have a lot of conversations here. I say we, I mean people in America, about what are the possible, both levers of influence on the Israeli government and the Israeli society, but also just things that will influence it. And one of the ones that comes up is, obviously the Israeli economy is, you know, has been very damaged in this past year for a lot of starting with the events of October 7, but I think decisions since then. How much do you think people are feeling that, and how much do you think that's going to push the electoral system?

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Amir Tibon 52:47

It's a big issue here. It's a big issue. The government line is: well, this is only because of the war, but that's not true. The economic winds began to sail against us already during the judicial overhaul. Of course, the war made it worse. And of course, the mismanagement of the economy during the war made it even worse. You could have a war and say: Okay, now we're at an emergency point. First of all, we're going to shut down 10 government ministries that only exist as political bribe. You know that this is a bloated government. They have 30 something ministers, including a minister for tradition and a minister for heritage. Honestly, you could close you shut down both and you're living

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Hadar Susskind 53:30

As someone living in the diaspora, feel free to shut down Amichai Chickli.

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Amir Tibon 53:34

Yeah, the diaspora affairs ministry, to be fair, was created by the previous government, Bennett-Lapid. The relationship with the diaspora, which is very important, needs to be run by the professionals at the Foreign Ministry. Israel has excellent diplomats at the Foreign Ministry. One of their fields of expertise is working with Jewish communities abroad. It makes much more sense to let them handle this important issue than create a ministry for it, and again, waste a lot of money. So you would expect the government that understands the severity of the moment to say, first of all, we're going to shut down these 10 unnecessary ministries and save, like, a billion and a half shekels, if only to, you know, for personal example, and to show the public that we're also willing to pay a price. We're going to, you know, depart with our espresso machines and and drivers, but they're doing the opposite. And of course, the whole issue of the ultra orthodox education system, which is a ticking economic time bomb for Israel, because we are growing an entire generation here that is not learning English, is not learning math, is not learning science. And instead of trying to reform this education system, which is state funded, what the government is doing is that they're increasing the budget for it on the expense of the public education system. So we are prioritizing non scientific, non mathematical education. This is what Israel is doing. Some countries can get away with that stuff. Okay, if tomorrow morning, I don't know, thinking about, Scotland, okay, started doing this kind of craziness, slashing budgets for schools that teach math and science and giving them to schools that only teach

religious teachings from the Middle Ages. Maybe Scotland that's surrounded by an ocean and has a lot of territory, can get away with that. A country surrounded by hostile enemies that want to kill us in basically all directions, cannot get away with something like that. Of course, it's also hurting the economy, because if your economy is built on education and knowledge, right, we don't have reserves of oil. We have some gas, but not at a level that can sustain our current quality of life. Israel's economy is built on knowledge. So what are we doing here? I just want to interject with, Mickey's question. Thank you, Mickey, it's a good one. Israeli media is currently reporting that Gallant may well be fired in the next couple of hours, and if so, Gideon Sar would become the new defense minister. There are also hundreds of people currently protesting outside of Sar's house. How do you if that comes to pass, how do you think that that may end up affecting the situation as a whole, but especially on some of these topics that we've just zeroed in on? First of all, it's important to understand why Netanyahu wants to fire Yoav Gallant, the defense minister. You will see all kinds of manipulative headlines that it has something to do with the war in the north, and that's just absolutely not the issue here. The ultra orthodox parties have come to Netanyahu last week with an ultimatum: either in the next few weeks before Rosh Hashanah, you pass legislation that formally exempts ultra orthodox men from military service, which other Jewish citizens are compelled to do, or we bring down the government. The reason they're making this threat is because the Supreme Court has basically interjected into this issue after many, many years of patience and waiting and giving the government more and more time. The supreme court, because of the war, finally, a few months ago, came up and said: Enough with this unfair exemption, enough, with this illegal situation in which one Jewish citizen has to enlist at the age of 18 by law and another is exempt, the government needs to pass a law that basically makes this thing official. Okay, no more games, no more excuses. The IDF needs 1000s more soldiers in order to fight a war on so many fronts. Gallant as the defense minister, who also sees himself as the representative of the IDF within the government, has come and said, very clearly: I will only pass a conscription law for the ultra orthodox that takes into consideration the needs of the military and wins broad support, including from parts of the opposition. I will not pass a law that is only supported by the ultra orthodox parties and basically is a bluff. Basically, allows the continued exemption of the ultra orthodox men from service. So the ultra orthodox parties are stuck because they badly need this legislation, but Gallant is blocking it. So Netanyahu is going to fire Gallant and put in his place a defense minister that will allow the ultra orthodox to get away with whatever they want. This is the whole ballgame. In order to sell this to the public, he says, oh, Gallant. He's a wussy, he's weak. He doesn't want to go to war. None of this is even relevant to the conversation. It's not true, but it's not even relevant. The main issue here is the ultra orthodox conscription, guys, I think we have to finish in a minute. I think maybe one more question, if you want before we depart.

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Hadar Susskind 59:26

Oh boy. Well, thank you, Amir. Before we depart, I just want to remind everybody again, we will share, Amir, you can share it now in the link if you want that.

A

Amir Tibon 59:35

Yeah, I'm going to, I'm going to send it now.



H

Hadar Susskind 59:37

Look, we will, when we send out the recording of this, we will share with everyone, and happy to help.

A

Amir Tibon 59:42

Thank you.

H

Hadar Susskind 59:44

We are all looking forward to reading it, so I just actually, I don't even, I don't want to ask another question. I just want to say for myself and for I know everybody on here, thank you. Thank you for being with us today, and thank you for just being the voice that you know, that we all can hear from and read regularly. We really appreciate it, and I hope that that you and your family you know are doing well and can get back home soon. So thank you very much.

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Amir Tibon 1:00:12

If I can ask you to, because I only have permission to share the link with the host, so if one of you can just copy/paste it into the general chat, and then people can have a minute to click on it, and if they want, you know, to order a copy, it's a pre order. You will probably get it in a few days. And also, I want to thank your organization for continuing to fight the good fight for Israel. Your voice is important. And thank you for giving me, you know, the platform and the time to also talk about all these important things that are happening here right now.

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Hadar Susskind 1:00:47

Well, thanks again. The link is in the chat. Everyone can take a look. We will leave it up there for a minute. And, you know, we didn't get to it and we're wrapped now. But as I'm sure you know, Netanyahu is scheduled to be in New York in just a couple of weeks at the UN and we, and many, many colleagues, as Maxxe mentioned briefly, both America, pardon me, American Jewish organizations, uh, Israeli peace groups are going to be there to meet him loudly and clearly, just like people do in Israel every day, everywhere he goes. So the work continues on both sides of the ocean.

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Amir Tibon 1:01:19

Amen. Amen. All right, friends, thank you todah raba, and we'll talk soon.

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Hadar Susskind 1:01:24

Thank you everybody else, goodbye.

