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WEBINAR

THE WAR IN ISRAEL AND GAZA

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PANEL

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MALONEY: Welcome to all those who are joining us today for this very important event on the war in Israel and Gaza. I'm Suzanne Maloney, vice president and director of Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution, and I have the privilege of moderating today's conversation with four thoughtful and deeply informed experts.

You are all no doubt familiar with the horrific and tragic events that have precipitated today's conversation. The devastating surprise attack by the terrorist group Hamas on southern Israel from Gaza that took the lives of 1400 Israelis and took another 222 individuals, including some Americans and other foreign nationals, hostage into Gaza, has transfixed the world over the past several weeks. The details that have emerged of the torture of those who were killed, those Israelis who were killed on October 7th are utterly unspeakable. October 7th represents the largest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust and the first time since 1948 that Israel has lost control of parts of its own territory, even briefly. The security and intelligence failures will reverberate in an already contentious Israeli political dynamic. In response, Israeli leaders have launched an intense bombardment campaign in Gaza and mobilized 300,000 troops for an anticipated ground invasion. The stated goal of this response are to eliminate Hamas and to ensure that such an attack can never be repeated. Israel is also contending with sporadic attacks from the northern border by both Hezbollah and Hamas operatives in southern Lebanon, as well as unrest on the West Bank among Palestinians. And those in Gaza, of course, are suffering greatly. The latest death toll reported this morning suggests that as many as 5000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli bombs over the course of the past two weeks. Approximately 1 million Gazans have been displaced from their homes since the beginning of the conflict, according to the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The conflict has drawn world leaders, including President Biden, to Israel, both to sympathize with and consult with the Israeli people and their leadership. And there has been an outpouring of sympathy from around the world for both Israelis and Palestinians. But there have also been shameful displays of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

To discuss the war and its wider consequences for the region of the world, I'm pleased to introduce four wonderful experts. First, to Dr. Anwar Mhajne, assistant professor of political science and head fellow for the Center for the Study of Race, Ethnicity, and Social Justice at Stonehill College. I'm also joined today by my colleague Natan Sachs, who is a senior fellow and director of Brookings Foreign Policy Center for Middle East Policy. We're also joined by Tal Schneider, diplomatic and political correspondent for The Times of Israel, who previously served as Washington, D.C. correspondent for Maariv newspaper. And finally, we're also joined by Shibley Telhami, the Anwar Sadat professor - Anwar Sadat professor for peace and development, distinguished scholar and teacher and director of the University of Maryland Critical Issues poll. He's also a longtime nonresident senior fellow here at the Brookings Institution. Before we begin, I would like to note that we're live and on the record. Please send your questions to events at Brookings.edu or via social media using the hashtag Israel and Gaza.

I want to turn first to Tal Schneider. I'd like for you to give us a sense of how things look to you from Israel, where you're currently based. I also want to note that you have three children, two of whom are soldiers, one of whom is an officer who was called in on that terrible morning of October 8th and spent the next two weeks both in Sderot and kibbutz Be'eri where more than 120 people were killed. Give us a sense of how Israelis are reacting to this horrific series of events.

TELHAMI: You're muted.

SCHNEIDER: Okay. Sorry. Thank you, Suzanne. Thank you for inviting me. I appreciate the panel and the session. My son was actually on a vacation on October 7th, Shabbat, a Shabbat, a Saturday in the house here with us. And it was called on immediately in a Shabbat on the Saturday morning at 8 a.m. He was supposed to go to Berlin that night. But never mind that, it's not important. My daughter was also called on the same day. They're both still in the military since then. I wanted to add a couple of more information to what you just mentioned. There is the 1400 Israelis killed, slaughtered, murdered, some of them raped and tortured. Around 120,000 Israeli are internally displaced. That mean is that they don't have a home at the moment. They been internally displaced. Some of them were relocated to hotels. But right now there is no room anymore. So

Israel is now building a tent, a tent camp in the south of the country for the internally displaced people. In addition to that, we have 10 million people under rockets, maybe a little bit less, because the rockets do not cover some portion of the southern part of Israel. But other than that, everywhere in Israel, we are under rockets for 17 days in a row. This is unfortunately not new to us, but it's definitely the longest rockets attack we ever had. Even here, not far, not close to either borders, not the northern one and not the southern one, we are running to shelters a couple of times a day. It's horrific. And obviously there is no school. Kids are not going to school for two and a half weeks as of now.

So the situation in the country is very dire, upsetting. I think we have between 100 and 200 people who are unaccounted for, missing, which we don't know if they are abducted or killed. And 222 people are abducted, including elderly women, men, kids, babies, toddlers, sick people and more. Obviously, we don't know their whereabouts and their situation. As you know, Israel was agreeing in an indirect way for entry of humanitarian aid. I know it's a very little aid, maybe I think the second or maybe the third convoy went in by now. It's very little, it's not enough for the civilian population on the other side. But the Israeli who were abducted did not get anything up until now, no humanitarian aid and no nothing. We do we know there were two women released. So that was 22 and 224 people abducted, two released. And that's all we know. As per preparation for our military military plan, it's hard to tell, because I have to tell you, it's, they keep it under wraps. We don't know much. Obviously, everybody are very anxious and upset about about those plans, what's going to happen. They think that the terror organization Hamas has made, was waiting for the Israeli military to enter. And this includes, obviously, the entire underground tunnel city, which we don't know what's in there. We do know that for 17 days there are enough rockets to shoot at us every day. They say that they don't have, you know, food or fuel or or water, but they definitely have fuel for rockets. So the rockets are being thrown at Israel at all times, even as we speak right now.

MALONEY: Thank you so much, Tal. Let me turn now to Anwar. And I know you are based outside of Boston, but you're obviously following the situation very closely. And I wonder if you could give us a sense of what you're hearing, particularly from Palestinian friends and colleagues.

MHANJE: Thank you very much. Actually, I've been, I don't know, for a lot of people, if you really want to get an idea of what's happening on the ground in Gaza, there are a few reporters, Gazan reporters, who are reporting on Instagram what's happening. And I have a list of a few accounts where you see a kind of directly the impact of what's happening on the ground. So, you know, Suzanne, you mentioned the 5000 killed. The has the Gaza Health Ministry says 2000 of them are children. We know around 20 journalists have been killed, I think four of them since October 7th. One journalist that is very well-known to the Palestinian activists and I think he also met [inaudible], was killed yesterday. There are attacks on UNRWA schools, UNRWA facilities. I think about 29 UNRWA workers have been killed. There is a huge damage to infrastructure. I think around 5000 buildings were demolished. Neighborhoods were demolished. We have around 1 million internally displaced people who moved to the south. We talk about infrastructure, internet connectivity. A lot of people are worried about complete blackout soon. There is only one provider that exist right now in Gaza, and it's Paltel. And I think they said if there is more damage that happens to the infrastructure in Israel and in Palestine and Gaza, then they won't be able to provide some access to the internet. Hospitals are running out of fuel. They're they're putting 5000 patients in places that are meant for 700 people. We also see that if kids with incubators, if fuel doesn't get into Gaza, that's going to be a human catastrophe in that sense. Sanitation, since electricity and water pumps and all that is not working, then sanitation is very it's a it's like dangerous conditions there. Water, even though one of the water sources opened in Khan Yunis, people have to walk four and five kilometers to get water. Sometimes they have to wait in line for three or 4 hours. And by the time they get to the line, they don't have water. I think UNRWA estimates that only people are in Gaza are using three liters, which is their estimate is 100 liters per person. But in Gaza right now, it's three liters to wash, drink and do other things. Some main bakeries were also demolished in the bombing. So people are now also struggling to get bread. People have to wait in line for hours to get bread, among other kind of conditions that exist in the in the Gaza Strip right now.

And we know you mentioned, Tal, aid. I think the third shipment came in. But just to give you kind of an idea, Gaza used to get 100 trucks of aid a day and what they got in the past two days is not even, it's a drop in the ocean of what they need. So that's also happening. Yesterday was the most intense like heavy day of bombardment in Gaza Strip so far. Hamas claims that they prevented and and you know ground operation but Israel says it was just an operation to gather intelligence. So but the Hamas side is claiming that they they countered that. And then there is the issue of hostages, Abu Obeida came in in a video two days ago claiming that he wanted to negotiate the release of two hostages, but he claimed that Israel didn't pay attention to that. I don't know, I think I read a report, I haven't confirmed if that was confirmed or if it was just a statement made by Hamas. But also he in the video, he claimed that 20 people, 20 hostages died from the strikes because of Israeli strikes. And he said he doesn't really know the full estimate of that. So that's kind of the general picture of what's happening in Gaza, the perception there's very frustration with international media on the Gaza side that they're trying to dehumanize Palestinians, the way they're being interviewed. In the West Bank - we're all paying attention to Gaza in the West Bank - over 90 people were killed, about a thousand arrested. And I think 4000 Gazans who are working inside of Israel were arrested. That brings Palestinians in prisons around 10,000, according to estimates that I've seen. So there is that. 13 communities, Bedouin communities between the Jordan Valley and Ramallah have been displaced and pushed out by extreme settlers. Five out of the 90 were killed by armed settlers. And then I think about 13 communities, 470 individuals were displaced within the West Bank. Abbas is in trouble. There were protests calling for him to to step down, as we saw. So it's kind of it's a very complicated picture and very it's a human catastrophe in Gaza right now.

MALONEY: Thank you so much, Anwar. Shibley, let me now turn to you, and I wonder if you could say a few words about how Israel's neighbors are looking at this situation and the possibility of a wider war, as well as the prospects for getting aid to the Palestinians.

TELHAMI: Well, thanks so much, Suzanne, for moderating this. And thank you to Tal and Anwar for these heartbreaking reports. I mean, obviously, civilians are the first victims of every war, and this is a condition that is horrific. In fact, we have not seen this scale of killing and certainly killing of civilians in many decades or in my memory, really. It's a horrific two weeks. It's been a horrific two weeks, and my heart goes out to the Israeli and Palestinian victims. And we always have to keep that in mind.

Politically in the Arab world, this has really kind of propelled the Israeli-Palestinian issue to the forefront in ways that no one had expected. Obviously, the issue had been downgraded in regional politics, really since the Arab uprisings, but especially in recent years with the Abraham Accords between Israel and several Arab states. And then the talk of a Saudi-U.S., Saudi-Israeli deal that does not end Israeli occupation. And clearly, every Arab ruler, including those who have strategic interests that don't necessarily coincide with the Palestinians, that's one reason why some of them have made peace with Israel and plan to make peace with Israel regardless. Arab governments and rulers don't necessarily have the same interests, but the publics care deeply. And what we have seen in the graphic pictures, just like in Israel, where you have you see the horrors that they faced, the innocent people that have died, including including civilians. The hearts are hardened and and everyone is focused on their victims instead of - and being essentially blinded to the to the hurt of the other, to the suffering of the other. We see that a lot in much of the Arab and Muslim world right now. A lot of demonstrations, including in countries that have made peace with Israel, people calling for cancellation of normalization. In places like Morocco, we see Arab rulers who are having to say things they normally don't say, like the king of Jordan speaking in Cairo, who said, we we now know what the message is, which is that Palestinian lives don't matter as much as other, as Israeli lives, that the rule of law doesn't apply to everyone equally. He was reflecting a mood that is very pervasive in the Arab world. And and part of that is, not just angry with the bombings, obviously, even those who, you know, don't like Hamas, who who think Hamas is a problem, who don't like what Hamas did, who don't support the attacks on civilians, the degree to which that, you know, when you when you're talking about the numbers, the scale of destruction in Gaza, the the you know, more than a million displaced and devastation of housing

and the killed and wounded and and and with no no one to defend them. Right. This is this is really kind of a defenseless population being bombarded day in and day out with no way to defend itself in any shape or form. What they see is an American double standard. And there's been an incredible amount of anger with the Biden administration. Of course, Biden has said something about a humanitarian crisis that he wants to help address, but he has not, until, you know, just just now, recently we started hearing a little bit, he has not said anything about restraint in the Israeli attack and the Israeli bombardment is not mentioned. He's talked about the humanitarian issue as if it's a natural disaster, like you do with earthquakes or or you do with, rather than the direct result of bombings that many international organizations, human rights organizations, UN organizations call war crimes. Of course, Hamas committed horrible war crimes, as Tal described, but people call them on it. And so I think obviously, the president has principally been focused on supporting the Israelis and supporting their fight and standing with them. Initially, I think that was very appropriate. And people, you know, lauded him for it. But now, of course, he's got a bigger picture.

And the region is very worried not only about the humanitarian disaster and the anger of the publics, but also about the possibility of spillover, because the scale of this is such that further escalation on the ground could easily draw Hezbollah into the fight. And I think, you know, Suzanne, you know better than anyone else about the calculus of Hezbollah and Iran in this regard. They I don't think they are interested in getting into a fight right now. I think the Israelis are not interested. But it's not about whether they think it's good for them. They're going to, you know, we know how escalation works. And right now, I think there is - we're on an escalation path where they could easily be drawn in. And being drawn in means that the United States could be drawn in, particularly into a war with Iran. And the Israelis, as the president has always said, the Israelis have a right to, Israel has a right to defend itself. Of course, every state in the world has a right to defend itself. The question is whether those, the pursuit of that right, number one, is being done by according to international law. And number two, whether we can trust that all that the Israeli government is doing is just defend itself, knowing that we have the most extreme Israeli government in the country's history, who, with many ministers in high level positions whose aims neither coincide with American interests nor with American values. And I think that to the extent that there are American interests at stake, the president is going to have to reexamine the posture that he has taken so far.

MALONEY: Thanks so much, Shibley, and Natan, over to you. You are the director of our Middle East Policy Center, you work closely with both officials here in Washington and officials in the region and have spent an awful lot of time thinking about this conflict. I wonder if you can give us your perspective both on how the Biden administration is handling things and as well as how you expect things to evolve in the region.

SACHS: Thank you, Suzanne, and thanks to the other panelists. This horrific two weeks and unfortunately is just the beginning really brought to bear, I think, some fundamental differences in almost world view on what's happening. I think I'd rather talk about two distinctions. The first is that there is a very strong impulse, especially among observers, including the media, to basically go back to what they know the normal from previous rounds, but to simply think this is bigger. And I really think it's important to understand that it is not, especially it's not from the Israeli perspective. And that's very consequential. What Tal describe is not merely worse than what happened before, but for Israelis is a complete game changer. Israel is not the same Israel that it was. All four of us panelists know Israel very well. Israel is not the same as it was on October 6th. And this means and I think when people hear that, they often understand this to mean therefore Israel will simply be very, very aggressive in its punishment. And the criticism of the Biden administration stems from that, this feeling that now Israel is going to go crazy. Of course, there is an element of vengeance, there is an element of punishment, much like there was on 9/11, which was much smaller per capita than this attack, actually. But that is not the core issue. The core issue, from the Israeli perspective, is not about punishment, but about a question of how to prevent this from ever happening again. This feeling that what happened then may not be allowed to happen, no matter how many campuses burn, Israelis in effigy or anything else, no matter what they hear online, they will never, ever allow their children to be burned alive again. And that kind of sense means a very different operation, which I say with deep sorrow would also entail an enormous amount of

casualties on the other side. And this I caution also because when people speak both about the Biden administration's approach, but also about a need for unilateral cease fire and are sort of perplexed why Israelis feel so deeply betrayed by the left, even the Israeli left feel so deeply betrayed by the left abroad is because they are assuming they are simply calling for less punishment when what Israelis hear is they are calling for everyone to go back to the status quo ante, to go back to business as usual and hope that it doesn't happen again.

Now, this does not mean that Israel has an answer as to what it would do if it did to take full control of the Gaza Strip. And of course, it has no answer to the immense damage and cost and lives that it would suffer - but of course, the Gazans would suffer worse. There's no answer to that. And that is the main reason, in the past, Israel has never taken the Gaza Strip in any of these rounds and has never brought down Hamas before. But as I said, something fundamental has changed. I don't know that Israel will decide eventually to bring down Hamas. There's a lot of caution against it. Israel's also facing a bigger foe in the north that is already fighting, Hezbollah is already fighting quite actively. We also saw 19 missiles from Yemen shot down by Americans, actually, but aimed at Israel. So there's already a fight, an Iranian proxy fight, a very active one. And Hezbollah is a very dangerous foe for Israel. Nonetheless, a ground operation, I think, is very likely. What exactly its aims will be are not clear.

You asked about the Biden administration's approach. I think the Biden administration approach, the administration's approach has been similar to the past, which is to say it identifies with Israel's both anger and need to defend itself, but has actually been cautioning on just what I said, which is what is the, what are the goals? So the delay that we've seen on the ground operation are due, I'm speculating, both for Israeli caution and need to be prepared and need to gather enormous intelligence, especially about the hostages who are very central aim for the Israeli forces. But secondly, because of American caution, American desire both to try to free hostages, we saw two thankfully freed. But again, it's two out of 224 that we know so far. And secondly, because of a desire to, for Israel to have very clear and achievable goals for this operation. And third, as was reported just two days ago, a caution, a very strong caution against what Israelis were contemplating, this was also reported in Israel, at least some in Israel were contemplating a preemptive strike against Hezbollah, with the notion that as in 2006, a preemptive strike would be very effective, perhaps in limiting Hezbollah's ability to strike at Israel. And again, just to make clear, Hezbollah is far stronger than Hamas. It would be a very different fight if it happened. The Biden - Biden's approach, therefore, is again to hug Israel and to try to push it where he thinks it would be.

I would caution those who think that -- I completely understand what Shibley is saying, and I think in terms of the optics there, there's enormous ire against the Biden administration. I'll say in Israel, there's almost a sense that that he alone has stood up for what they see as the moral clarity of, that there is a difference between terrorism and conduct of war. But Biden has called and pushed privately much more than publicly but privately for an lawful conduct of war, which does not, unfortunately mean a bloodless one or one with no damage. Unfortunately, lawful war can also be extremely damaging. He has also called for, of course, less damage, which is a very crucial, important human point. There are 2 million people in Gaza Strip and the vast majority of them are completely innocent. But he has also tried to steer Israeli goals and policy. The last point, and I end on this and it's extremely important as well, by the words he use in his speeches, but especially by bringing two carrier groups to the Eastern Mediterranean and by shooting down the rockets from Yemen, he has more than signaled that he would take extreme measures to prevent the expansion of this war. That may not work. Hezbollah is already fighting. And it may be very difficult for the United States; I don't expect any American troops on the ground, but I would not be surprised if American naval firepower is used. If it is successful, that is, I think, easily the most important policy objective right now is to contain this from growing far bigger with enormous damage, not only in Israel and of course in Gaza, but also in Lebanon, which would be devastated if a war truly erupted there in a larger scale. I'll stop there for now.

MALONEY: Thank you so much, Natan. I'd like to bring Tal back into the conversation and perhaps you can expand a little bit about the sense from Israel that there is a need to demonstrate

and restore deterrence not just against Hamas, but against the wider array of very dangerous adversaries that Israel faces from across the region. We have seen, as Natan said, fire from southern Lebanon. But we've also seen, as he mentioned, the Houthis in Yemen getting into the action, as well as a much greater tempo of attacks by Shia militias in Iraq and elsewhere. How does it look from Israel? Do you think that the the campaign that is being developed at this stage is going to be successful in both restoring deterrence but also preventing the escalation of the war to the north?

SCHNEIDER: Hi. Yeah, I just want to stress one point referring to Natan's words. Natan already said that it's not revenge and not punishment. So it's important to me to stress this is not revenge or a punishment. Israel is a democratic country ruled by elected leader. People here are not working -- I mean, obviously, you have sidelines, you know, people are on the sidelines, but the 95% of Israeli society doesn't work by a revenge or punishment plan. This is not about it at all. This is about, you know, keeping us keeping us safe, making sure we are not slaughtered. As you all know, Israel is in a unique place, surrounded by hostile environment from all directions. And as you mentioned, the Iraqis, also mentioned the Houthis. We are under attack for 75 years, but we need to make sure that the area is secured. As you all know, the region where this slaughter and and the atrocities took place is a completely undisputed area - not that there is any excuse for any slaughtering - but this specific area is completely undisputed. So huge portion of those victims were actually peace activists were slaughtered in their beds. Everybody know the names. Obviously, it was a huge wakeup call because the Hamas organization did what it did in order to just ruin any possibility for progress with Saudi, which was on the table. You all know that, we were talking about, you know, normalization steps. I was in New York with the prime minister in September when he met Biden, President Biden. And then I went back to my hotel room to cover events and I opened it up to hear the leader of Saudi Arabia talking about normalization steps with Israel. And I was amazed, taken back, you know, hopeful and looking forward for something that is so important. And this Hamas and Hezbollah and Iran, they just, with the Houthis in Yemen, they just, in Yemen, they just looking to ruin everything people are trying to aspire for. So it's a devastating times. And I just want to make sure that everybody on this conversation understand that Israel not working by revenge or punishment. This is not the way that things are working here. It's not revenge and punishment are not a working plan for no one here in this country. As per the question was -- I'm so sorry. It's all very, very it's very tragic, so I'm apologizing for my the way I am answering.

The question was about the plan ahead? So we are in a waiting period. We keep hearing at all times that the Qatari government is working hard to get people out from the group that is abducted. I think the president actually thanked the Qatari government for doing the release of the first two women who were American citizens, both of them. We now hear that maybe they're trying to get out another 50 foreigners, people who are not -- or maybe they have dual citizenship, but maybe not. I'm not sure. It's all very sketchy. I think Israel's military is trying very careful to think steps ahead, how to conduct the stop of the rockets, the stop of the shooting. Obviously protecting from future invasions and future slaughtering. In order to do that, they still have to think from the other side about those 222 people that are held captive inside. So it's a gentle maneuvering with a very problematic mission. They called on society, civil society from the northern part of the Gaza Strip to to go to the southern part and to, in order, in order to try to avoid as much as they can, hurting from civilians, hurting civilians. I don't know how much is this, how much people are listening to them. I am pretty sure from what we heard, that the Hamas is preventing some people to go down south by taking their car keys or blocking the roads. It's you know, we must understand that even if the population moves down south and they do something up in the northern part, it's not like the southern part is safe for the Israelis. I mean, they can shoot rockets from the southern part. They can invade the country from the southern part. It's not, it's not solving the problem. So I don't know to tell you what's next. As for the northern side - very, very tense. Many Israeli are internally displaced, as we said, from all around the border area. And as of now, military tries to be more on the reaction and not on the preemptive. I don't know what you said preemptive, but I think the preemptive concept, military concept is unsuited for the situation. We are not in a preemptive situation because preemptive is when you have nothing is happening and you just strike in order to prevent. But obviously we had 20 missiles like anti, anti-tank missiles just yesterday in a couple of

hours, including casualties, people who are, you know, were killed from those rockets, not military, civilian population. As you all know, the northern part of Israel has a massive, massive Muslim population, about 21% of the population. Obviously the Muslim population in Israel, it's all over the country, but there's big concentrations up north and they are under attack as well. We're talking about 1% Druze, 1% Christian, and then around 20% which are Bedouin and Muslims. They are all under attack from those rocket rockets. Their schools are closed. They you know, they are they need to go into shelters as the rest of the country. Some of them, by the way, some of them are recruited and are helping. I went to buy food the other day in Tira, which is a lovely Muslim village, about maybe six miles from my house. We were looking to buy a big purchase of food on Saturday morning where many Jewish businesses are closed. And we traveled to Tira - in Hebrew, we say Tira - and I met the person who, it's a restaurant I always go to eat at. And I entered the restaurant and he said, we are so glad you came, guys. We don't have people who are buying here for 14 days. We have no money coming in. We are so thankful for you, for coming in and buying food here. And we are packing packages for soldiers, for evacuees, for the internal displaced people. We are making food for them. And this is how it goes. We need in Israel to maintain our society, which is a very fragile society. But we need to protect our Muslims. We need to protect our Christians. We need to protect our Bedouins and Druze, and we need to protect our Jews because this is our country and we have to do it together and make sure we don't get any rockets coming in from Lebanon or Gaza again.

MALONEY: Thank you so much, Tal. I'd like to bring Anwar back into the conversation, and I'm going to put a question. I know there's a topic that you want to speak to specifically around Israeli Arabs, but I also would ask that you and perhaps Shibley might also give us a little bit of a sense of the political dynamics among the Palestinians at this point. What happens if, in fact, Hamas is truly decapitated or even eradicated? Who would govern Gaza and what is happening on the West Bank? Where is the, what are the prospects for Mahmoud Abbas or any future Palestinian leadership to assume a greater role in trying to stabilize the situation?

SCHNEIDER: I just want a quick sentence. I just want to stress, Israel's police chief said yesterday that Israel's minorities are amazing and he sees, you know, zero events, not like the riots we had back in around almost a year and a half ago. So this is just to mention another really crucial point coming from officials in Israel saying minorities and majority are behaving now. The civil population are behaving just beautiful.

MALONEY: Thanks, Tal. And now over to Anwar and perhaps then to Shibley. And I would just note the bringing in some of the questions that are coming in from our audience, including from our colleague, Marvin Kalb.

MHANJE: Thank, thank you. I'm just that since I just mentioned that about Arab citizens of Israel, I do, Tal, have to talk about the risks that have been happening and distancing of Arabs inside of Israel from universities and colleges. So, social media, it's it's weird. I am. I do study social media. And usually people are very active on social media back home. And then out of the sudden, it's black. Nothing. No comment, no posts, nothing. It's dark. And it was very weird for a while. But then I attended a call with Academia [inaudible], Academics for Equality, where there were reports of Arab students who had been expelled or threatened to be expelled, groups targeting Arab influencers who post anything about what's happening in Gaza. There is a girl, an influencer that was arrested for posting a big fish eating a small fish picture, and she was released within three days and she was on home arrest. Dalal Abu Amneh, an Arab artist also, I think she put a dawa, which is like a - Shibley, how do you translate the dawa? It's like a prayer of some sort?

TELHAMI: The what? I'm sorry.

MHANJE: Dawa. Dalal Abu Amneh, when she posted a dawa and then --

TELHAMI: A call or -?

MHANJE: It's just like a something say --

TELHAMI: A wish or, yeah.

MHANJE: And she was arrested. Actually, she was arrested after complaining about being harassed. So it's important to also keep in mind that it's not all rainbows for Arabs inside of Israel. Right now people are afraid to say anything. They're worried about backlash. We know leftward-leaning activists like Israel Frey has been targeted and doxxed. His information were leaked and people have come to his house and he's now in hiding. But just kind of to bring that to the other side of Arabs in Israel. They are definitely helping in a lot of places and there hasn't been any communal violence, which is a good point to bring up.

As for I think Szuanne, you asked about the Palestinians, what will happen after Hamas? Honestly, I don't -- knowing the radicalization literature, knowing how people get recruited, knowing the ideology that exists, knowing the conditions that exist. I don't know what it means to get rid of Hamas. Right. I really don't, I don't understand it. So if we are talking about assassinating main leaders, some of them are in Qatar, Doha. Right. So in Doha, in Qatar, if we're talking about the ideology itself, how are we going to counter that? If we're talking about infrastructure like tunnels and weapons and all that? Couldn't this be rebuilt and restocked? How are we, what do we mean by that? Right? Getting rid of Hamas, preventing that from happening. I honestly don't see the military solution to this. I understand that Israel has been under immense pressure to respond, that it's hard for them now to stay with the status quo, that they need to do something. I just don't understand what that looks like. I can't envision what getting rid of Hamas looks like and I think that's for a lot of Palestinians. I mean, Abbas and the PA also don't have a huge legitimacy with Palestinians. As I said, the protests in Ramallah were asking for him to step down. So I don't know what that means. Maybe Shibley will have a better answer than mine, but I really don't know what that means. That goes beyond addressing the core causes of this, right. And this is also a tall order. It requires a lot on both sides. So I don't know what that would look like, but I'll let Shibley maybe he'll have better things to say than me. More hopeful. I don't know.

MALONEY: Shibley, please jump in. If you have either hopeful or even less hopeful thoughts to share.

TELHAMI: Well, I do agree with Anwar about, what is, I'm not sure what destroying or eliminating Hamas means and at what cost. I mean, you know, half of Gaza has been displaced. And so it'll probably mean destroying Gaza as we know it. Is that even a price that we're prepared to - are we going to destroy Gaza, quote in order to save it? And then what do you end up with the morning after? So it's the concept is not very clear at all. And also from, if you want to understand sort of where the Palestinian public is, including those who hate Hamas, not just disagree with it, there are people who consider themselves enemies of Hamas, obviously, and many of them. I think the question is, obviously, Hamas has not been governing in the West Bank and it isn't exactly paradise in the West Bank, there's 56 years of occupation, unending. Settler violence is increasing dramatically, even under the fog of war in Gaza. I was on a briefing with an agency of the U.S. government yesterday where the bureaucrats were recounting the, their worry about what's happening with settler violence now under the fog of war, settler violence against Palestinians that have killed just in the past two weeks, dozens of people and wounded over a thousand, according to this report. So it wasn't like, you know, there's no end in sight. The people were hopeless.

Yeah, there was a, you know, Tal mentioned the possibility of a deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel, but that the Palestinians saw that as coming at their expense. And for a long time, the Saudis had said they would never make peace with Israel until Israel ends its occupation of Palestinian territory. Well, that wasn't going to happen. So the deal was going to come at expense. Palestinians saw the Saudis as a big leverage for freeing themselves from occupation. Obviously, that was going to be off the table. So in part, some of the despair and frustration there, and even in Gaza, I mean, obviously, Hamas is a horrible organization that have carried out horrific attacks. Before it took over Gaza, there was no end in sight for occupation in Gaza. So it's not like people,

people, even people who blame Hamas for the attack or even for bad governance or that wanted to see it disappear. They know that the big elephant in the room is the fact that you still have occupation and domination and no freedom for Palestinians after a more than a half a century with no end in sight. And so unless you put something on the table that's credible, that's legitimate, that people can believe in, that people, that is viable, not just a smokescreen, "we're going to offer you two states," as they have been hearing for decades, it's going to be hard to win with a positive option that counters the militancy. That has always been my worry, particularly as we were taken off the table all of the international things that can be done to invest in just peace between Israel and the Palestinians, an end to the occupation with freedom for both and dignity for both, that that it is hard to win the hearts and minds of people. And people's hearts, as I said, harden. We see that in Israel. We see that in the Palestinian areas. So I'm not optimistic that, you know, that that sort of even if you can get a, quote, destruction of Hamas, I'm not sure, you know, that that is going to end militancy. On the contrary, I see it probably mobilizing more people as long as there's no political project that's genuinely legitimate, That's the only thing that could address it. And I don't see one on the horizon, frankly. So I think it's a, I worry about this maximalist, not maximalist in the sense that it's illegitimate, but maximalist in the sense that it's not, it's hard to define, as Anwar said, it's hard to know what it means. I fully understand that Israelis don't want this would be it. And obviously Palestinians don't want this repeated. I mean, look at look at what's visiting them right now. No one wants that to happen for the children, for their families, for for their loved ones. It's a cycle that is just horrific, that ought to stop. But this is not a conflict that can be resolved militarily. Yes, there's time for military action and everybody has a right to defend itself. But in the end, this is a political, political problem with us and we haven't come to grips with it. And then frankly, the Biden administration, with all its good intentions in the in the months prior to the Hamas attack on Israel, just was not doing enough to advance the needle and in fact was adding and fueling Palestinian despair by taking actions that made it harder for them to believe that peace was coming. And including, you know, axed at the United Nations to prevent condemnation of settlement building, which the U.S. always saw as a problem for for any peace. And it was an acceleration of that, and yet the Biden administration prevented any accountability at the U.N. And the the prioritizing the peace between Israel and Saudi Arabia and, Natan knows and I think, Suzanne, you know, I had voiced my concerns about it coming at the expense of the Palestinians because I thought that that was going to fuel more Palestinian despair. And that obviously leads to a sense of resignation and it makes it harder to point to alternatives for people.

MALONEY: Shibley, do you mind if I just jump in here? Because we we have only about 12 minutes left in our hour and we have so many questions coming in from those of you who are tuning in online. I do want to hand the mic over back to Natan Sachs. Perhaps you might want to talk a little bit about this sort of policy initiative by the Biden administration that some at least are pointing to as potentially being one of the antecedents that brought us to this horrific series of events, but also about the work that you have been doing in our Center for Middle East Policy, working with Israelis, with Palestinians, and with Americans about what a kind of normalization package that included some components that would address the quality of life among Palestinians and the political horizon for Palestinians. Is there any hope of reconstituting what would have been a historic development for Israel, for the region, and for all the peoples in the region? Is there any hope after this horrific attack of bringing back the normalization efforts?

SACHS: Thanks, Suzanne. And so, as everyone knows, I think the Biden administration, but also the Israelis and the Saudis have been very heavily engaged in an attempt to reach a three way deal, in a sense, with very large concessions from the United States to Saudi Arabia, both in terms of a defense pact, but also in supporting a nuclear, a civil nuclear program, ostensibly civil civilian. In exchange, in a sense, in the context of Saudi normalization with Israel, full normalization with Israel. And a big question that was part of those negotiations, and in fact, it was very a very short while ago, before this war started, was the question of what would be a Palestinian component. The Saudis have talked a lot about the need for a Palestinian component of it. I am of the view that would be extremely important to have a meaningful Palestinian component there, one that might pry open the possibility for conflict resolution, not anytime soon, but down the road, perhaps then improve quality of life, but not as a substitute for political change, but that would actually allow, for the first time since 2005, a real and real enlargement of Palestinian autonomy,

both in the sense of the territory of the Palestinian Authority, but also substantive autonomy, a possibility of Palestinians to actually govern themselves. And this is important since 2005 was, of course, the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. And I think this is important to remember also in the context of the conflict we have now. I've said elsewhere that, you know, abroad in English, when you say Gaza, it's a one-word argument for Israeli evil, the Israeli, the Israeli blockade, which is, of course, the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of the Gaza Strip. In Hebrew, Gaza is a one word argument also. It's a one-word argument for, you see, we we the Israelis left the Gaza Strip in 2005. They could have built a Singapore there. There are no settlements in the Gaza Strip. And instead, they elected Hamas and then Hamas also took over militarily. Now, of course, most of the people in Gaza didn't elect anyone, they're children. But nonetheless, the Palestinian government of the Gaza Strip is the one in charge leading its direction. And it's the one that decided to invade Israel yet again, but this time extremely successfully. And so from the Israeli perspective, right or wrong, from the Israeli perspective, this is a neighbor statelet that somehow international organizations say Israel still occupies and which is blockaded, of course, since it's at war with Israel, is the Israeli position. And if one major element is changed, it could be a completely different place. And that one element is a government of Gaza that is hell bent on fighting a far superior, stronger neighbor. So Hamas won't even have to surrender to Israel or give its weapons to Israel to transform the Gaza Strip and end the blockade. It would simply need to hand its guns over to the Palestinian Authority. Then we would see a completely different reality in the Gaza Strip. And I think this part of the narrative is correct. The, Hamas, Hamas' decision and of course, the fact that none of us is talking of that as a possibility, because it's not a possibility. Hamas would never do that, despite what that means for Gaza.

Back to your question, is there a chance you know -- Hamas, of course, as Shibley and Anwar said very well, Hamas is not going to be eradicated, it's first of all, an idea. But secondly, it's a very popular organization. It's one of the two main Palestinian parties. It's not disappearing tomorrow and no matter what happens in the battlefield. But Hamas' rule in the Gaza Strip? Perhaps. The costs are enormous. Absolutely enormous. But perhaps it will happen. I don't know. I don't think the decision has been made in the Israeli leadership about exactly what the war aims are or what exactly the battlefield is. Is it north or is it primarily only the south? But if we did find ourselves eventually in an extremely bloody and rather horrific process, eventually in a reality where Hamas is not in control in the Gaza Strip, probably fighting an insurgency and probably still existing, of course, but not in control, I don't know. It is possible that then perhaps one day normalization could be revived. I think the fundamental interests between Saudi Arabia and Israel and the United States have not changed. They were not changed by this war. This war was obviously planned long before that normalization took on much steam. This has been in planning for a very long time by Hamas. Perhaps then you could see the Arab world playing some role. We should be very skeptical. The Arab world is not coming to save the Palestinians, it's not going to save Israel. It's not going to do any of those things. But perhaps in the context of normalization, we should look for the silver lining or the opportunities in any crisis. Perhaps that could also be leveraged to try and transform the Gaza Strip. Fundamentally, in the long term, in my view, the only hope would be if there is a Palestinian Authority that has much more legitimacy than the one that does now, that is much more capable, and capable both in terms of its internal structure, but also in taking care of its own people and politically representing the Palestinians. That would also have authority in the Gaza Strip. That is a very, very tall order. I do not have a path charted for there, but if there is a goal one day for a better reality, fundamentally better reality for Gazans for Israelis, it would be that. And it's a very difficult question that I'm sure many people in the relevant capitals are working on very hard right now. We are certainly thinking about it here, about how one might inch towards that, even in the horror of this war.

MALONEY: Thank you, Natan. We have just a few more minutes left. And so what I want to do is acknowledge we've had many more questions that have come in and topics that we are going to be unable to address in this short conversation today. There are questions about the role of outside powers, whether that's Iran or Turkey or other regional states. There are questions about the proliferation of disinformation in the especially in the social media space on this conflict. There are questions about the safety of Americans who may be traveling to the region and others as well, of course. And there are many, many questions about the explosion of anti-Semitism, the the

protests around the world that have sought to raise the issue of civilian casualties in Gaza. But just generally about the conflict itself and where it may go from here. So what I will do is just assure you that this will not be the last conversation that we have on this topic. We will have many more here at Brookings and we will hope to broadcast some of our analysts here today in the future addressing some of the other issues as they evolve. I would also suggest that you please consult our website where we're doing an awful lot of publishing and analysis from across the Brookings Institution. So on issues like the economic implications of the conflict, which was the topic of one of the questions we received here today, I promise you, you will find, if not quite yet, very shortly, some analysis that may be useful. And with that, let me just turn to each of our speakers in turn to raise one final point that they think is particularly important for this audience to be aware of or to be watching as we move forward. And for that, I'll turn first to Tal and then to Anwar, to Shibley and to Natan. And I'd ask you all, please, if you may just be brief so we can fit all four of you in with some final remarks.

SCHNEIDER: Well, I ask you to take note that the other side is a terror organization. The numbers they provide are unreliable. We just seen this happening when they lied. They are killing their own people in the hospital parking lot with a failed rocket. The rocket was aimed towards the Israeli citizens. Obviously, it did not reach the destination. It killed their own people. Then they immediately said there are 500 deaths in this hospital, which was not true because the rockets hit the parking lot. Every life is sacred. I don't want to see any person in a parking lot being killed. Definitely not from the Hamas or Jihad people. This was not Israeli work. The world, the entire media went right away to blame Israel. So if you're listening to this, ask yourself why people were so fast to judge and say it's an Israeli. Why would you count? Why would you believe to a terror organization numbers and statements. It is a terror organization when you say the health ministry of the Hamas regime. This is not health ministry. This is a terror organization, activist, or terrorist sending data in order to fight Israel in the info world. This is not reliable information. People have to understand that when they say stuff, just don't take them for the word. Take a pause, try to listen and to see what really happened. I mean I mean, not everything that we hear here also is basically all truth. We are in a war, so there's a lot of disinformation. But, you know, a democratic country needs to check itself and make sure what happened in the Israeli military was not fast to say this is not us to blame. Took them 3 to 4 hours and they checked it. So please do not take Ministry of Health of the Hamas or the Jihad organization for whatever they send you. Just take a minute to understand what's going on. This is again, this is a democratic country against a terror organization. They not they should not be reliable in any way for what they are doing to their own people.

MALONEY: Thank you. Tal. Over to you, Anwar.

MHANJE: I think Tal's point about this information and not trusting what you see is very important because there is a lot of disinformation happening online, videos circulating from Syria, video game videos, pictures from Gaza being put on Israel. So there's a lot of things that are going on. But I want to say that it's one way to counter that is to follow those reporters on the ground and then said, if somebody emails me, I'm happy to send them the accounts of these journalists are working on the ground and reporting from the ground, that you see the footages yourselves and the data yourself. I think one thing that we didn't talk about when Natan was talking about the prospects for normalization maybe in the future, is that the Palestinian cause is a metaphor for a lot of Arabs, right? It's one of the most beloved causes in the Middle East, it mobilizes people because it's the West versus the East. It's the oldest, like, our lives versus their lives. But it also brings up tensions that are happening within the country. So the protests in Egypt after the hospital, you know, with me, when we assume that Israel bombed the hospital and then there are reports about the misfire. I think the damage has been already done because people will not believe that it's not Israel's, especially after shooting Abu Akleh and what happened with the report a year later, Israel took accountability for her killing. But it's also the chants that came out of Egypt where that "bread, social justice. and freedom," which were the January 25 chants. So it's important to also notice that a lot of these authoritarian leaders are paying attention to public opinion, because usually the protests about Palestine and what's happening in Gaza are going to probably reflect other tensions and they kind of become bigger than that about issues that are happening domestically. And that's

why you see they're under immense pressure. And there is that domestic tension. Even though they're authoritarian, they still have to be responsive somehow to the people, some in some ways. So that's one thing that I wanted to also bring up to the debate and highlight.

MALONEY: Thanks so much, Anwar, that's a very important point. Over to you, Shibley. For one brief final closing remark.

TELHAMI: Just one thing related to the casualties in Gaza, obviously, is a lot of misinformation and we can make a mistake on one or other. But, you know, the scale of the the damage and casualties is so huge that it's just undeniable. And we do have reports not just from reporters. We do have, you know, Doctors Without Borders telling us how awful and catastrophic the hospital situation is. We do have U.N. agencies that are hosting over a half million displaced in their own facilities with without resources to take care of them. So we have a we have a lot of information, enough to know It's absolutely horrific what what Palestinians are experiencing in Gaza now. And this is my final point, which is that, you know, I always start with our common humanity. You know, this is a horrific set of of violence over the past couple of weeks. And I think we cannot allow our hearts to be hardend, to be blinded to the suffering of the other. And I believe that our president is going to have to understand that when he's talking to the world, an aspiring world leader, a great power like the United States, he's not only talking to the Israelis. He should be talking to the Israelis, he's assuring them, he's reaching out to them, but he has a broader audience, and that audience does not see him project empathy in the same way toward these huge casualties on the Palestinian side. And he needs to do that.

MALONEY: Final word to you, Natan.

SACHS: Thanks. Very, very swiftly. So first, following up on Shibley, I think the common humanity point is extremely important. We're talking about a tragedy of an absolutely massive scale. And unfortunately, I think it's going to get much worse. The question is how worse? And I think it's worth trying to remember that even in the darkest times, I think we owe it to ourselves almost before anything else. I'll say, though, and this sounds like a contradiction or converse. It's not. I think it follows suit. Remembering humanity needs to be our guiding principle, I think. But it is not the same as policy. Policy requires thinking careful about what exactly is happening and how we prevent it from the future. That's not an easy question. That's why we're employed here. But I think these two things have to go together. And sometimes they can feel at tension. Sometimes calling for a unilateral ceasefire is not policy, I'm sorry to say. I understand where it's coming from, but it is not the same as policy. But nor is a policy that simply ignores human suffering or simply follows vengeance or something like that. That, I think, is the task for all of us to remember both how we actually try to change the situation fundamentally for the better, or at least minimize the horror that we're about to see, and guided by what Shibley said, guided by understanding of just the human, the horrendous human toll that we've already seen, and the then, unfortunately, going to see more.

MALONEY: Thank you, Natan, and thank you to all of our speakers here today. You have enlightened us all and we're very grateful to you for sharing your time, your thoughts, your expertise. Thank you to everyone who's tuned in. And please do come back to us at Brookings. Look at the web site for writing on the conflict, on how it fits into the broader array of challenges facing the world, including and especially Ukraine and China, and detailed analysis of the conflict as it evolves. Thank you all.