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Anti-Zionism Is the New Anti-Semitism

Guests:

For the Motion: Bret Stephens, Einat Wilf

Against the Motion: Peter Beinart, Yousef Munayyer

Moderator: John Donovan

AUDIENCE RESULTS

Before the debate:**35% FOR****36% AGAINST****29% UNDECIDED****After the debate:****45% FOR****48% AGAINST****7% UNDECIDED**

Start Time: (00:00:00)

John Donovan:

It is really back now, anti-Semitism, the ancient, ugly, persistent, hostility towards the Jewish people. Of course, it was never really gone. But at least for the last half century or so here it he United States, we could perhaps convince ourselves that anti-Semitism had been meaningfully suppressed to the level of a minor threat. But that's over now with the Tree of Life synagogue shooting, and the Nazi rallies, and internet memes and conspiracy theories, anti-Semitism is indisputably breaking the surface again in major ways. But as that happens, how do we place the viewpoint that would challenge the state of Israel for being what it is, a state of and for the Jewish people?

Founded by the Zionist movement as a bulwark against anti-Semitism, but whose realization has come at the continuing expense of the Palestinian people. Is the argument that Jewish state has no legitimate reason to exist? An expression of hostility, even hatred, toward all Jews? Or, is it a principled, legitimate position presented in good faith and out of concern for the Palestinian experience?

00:01:12

Well, in all of this, we think we have the makings of a debate. So, let's have it. Yes or no to this statement, "Anti-Zionism is the new Anti-Semitism."

I'm John Donovan and I stand between two teams of two who are experts in this topic who have thought about it, and lived it, and they will be arguing for and against that resolution. Our debate, as always, will go in three rounds and then our live audience here at the Florence Gold Hall in New York City will choose the winner. And if all goes well, as always, civil discourse will always win. Our resolution is "Anti-Zionism is the new Anti-Semitism." Let's meet our debaters. Please, ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Bret Stephens.

[applause]

Bret Stephens:
Great to be here.

John Donovan:
Thanks, Bret. Just for folks who don't know, you're a columnist for the New York Times. You were editor-in-chief of the Jerusalem Post. You're also a veteran at Intelligence Squared. This is your fifth time debating with us.

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That puts you in front of -- and a small group of people who have made it to the five-timers, much like Saturday Night Live. We'll give you the smoking jacket. Bret, it's great to have you here.

Bret Stephens:
Good to be here.

John Donovan:
And let's welcome your debating partner, ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Einat Wilf.

[applause]

John Donovan:
Einat, you are a former member of the Israeli Parliament. You are the author of the forthcoming book, *The War of Return: How Western Indulgence of the Palestinian Dream has Obstructed the Path to Peace*. You have flown in here from Israel. It's great to have you here. Ladies and gentlemen, Einat Wilf and the team arguing for the resolution, "Anti-Zionism is the new Anti-Semitism." And we have two debaters arguing against that resolution. Please, ladies and gentleman welcome Peter Beinart.

[applause]

Peter, you're a contributor at the Atlantic, editor-at-large at Jewish Currents. You are author of three books, including, *The Crisis of Zionism*.

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Welcome to Intelligence Squared, it's great to have you here.

Peter Beinart:
It's great to be here.

John Donovan:
Thanks, Peter. And let's meet your teammate, ladies and gentlemen, welcome Yousef Munayyer.

[applause]

Yousef, welcome. You are a political analyst. You're a writer. You're the executive director of the U.S. campaign for Palestinian rights. It is great to have you on our stage at Intelligence Squared.

Yousef Munayyer:
Very nice to be with you, John. Thank you.

John Donovan:
Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, the team arguing against the resolution, "Anti-Zionism is the new Anti-Semitism." Now, let's move on to our debate. We go in three rounds. The first round, opening statements by all four debaters in turn. These statements will be six minutes each. Here to make his opening statement in support of the resolution is New York Times columnist Bret Stephens. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome Bret Stephens.

[applause]

Bret Stephens:
Well, good evening to all of you. Good evening, John. It's good to be back. I want to begin by clearing up a few points, so we don't waste your time debating them. First, when we say "anti-Zionism," we do not mean criticism of Israel.

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Not only is criticism of Israel not anti-Zionist, it is essential to Zionism. So, if you think that Benjamin Netanyahu is a horrible leader, I am not here to quarrel with you. If you think that Israel's occupation of the West Bank needs to end right now, I am not here to quarrel with you. I could go on. To criticize Israel legitimately is always legitimate. But anti-Zionism isn't criticism of Israel, it is a call, whether by force or other means, for Israel's destruction. It's the difference between wanting your friend to be better or wanting your enemy to be gone.

Second point: tonight, you will likely hear our opponents make the case that there are anti-Zionists who cannot be called anti-Semites, and they will say that there are anti-Semites who are Zionists. Both points are true.

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Among some very orthodox and very secular Jews, there are indeed a few Jews who don't believe there should be an Israel. Similarly, there are people who don't like Jews and therefore think they should all go to Israel. But to say there are exceptions to a rule does not disprove the rule, nor does it make the exception the rule. The truth is, for the overwhelming majority of Jews, Zionism and the state of Israel are central to our identity, our security, our history, and our hopes for the future. To insist that we be stripped of this by the elimination of Israel would be as destructive to our rights as Jews as repealing the 19th Amendment to the Constitution would be destructive to women's rights.

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Finally, we did not come here tonight to engage in name calling. I do not believe there are any anti-Semites on this stage. If some of you in this -- if some of you here in the audience think of yourselves as anti-Zionist, I am not here to call you a bigot. But I am here to tell you that you are deeply mistaken and that you are participating, however unconsciously and unintentionally, in an ideology that is usually an intense and always, in effect, anti-Semitic.

Okay. Now that I've cleared that up, let me tell you, as succinctly as I can, why anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism. But that requires me to say a word about what anti-Semitism is. Is anti-Semitism simply a form of racism against Jews? Well, sometimes, but not always.

00:07:01

Long before Jews were hated for supposedly racial reasons, we were hated for religious reasons. And long after many people stopped hating Jews for racial reasons, they hated us for other reasons. On the nationalist far right, Jews are often hated for being too international. On the internationalists far left, Jews are often hated for being too national. In other words, anti-Semitism, like a shape-shifting virus -- and anti-Zionism is one strain, is perhaps the most dangerous strain -- is -- excuse me. Anti-Zionism is like a -- or anti-Semitism as a shapeshifting virus and anti-Semitism -- and anti-Zionism is one strain of that. Sorry about that.

So how do we know it's the same disease? One way we notice this is that the tropes are so often the same. For instance, when Israelis are accused of committing genocide in Gaza or being, quote, "greedy" for other people's land, we hear an echo of ancient libels about Jewish bloodlust and avarice.

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Or when Israelis are being -- accused of being colonialists in Israel, despite an unbroken Jewish presence in the land for over 3,000 years, we hear the lie about Jews having no connection to the

soil. Here's another way we notice. Right now, India occupies Kashmir, Morocco occupies Western Sahara, Turkey occupies northern Cyprus, China occupies Tibet, Russia occupies Crimea. People in this audience may have different views about Israel's occupation of the West Bank. But when one claims that Israel's occupation of the West Bank means not only that it should get out of the West Bank, but also that it should not go on existing as a state, while never making any similar claims about India, Morocco, Turkey, China, or Russia, then a discriminatory standard is being applied. That is the definition of prejudice.

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Finally, ask yourself if Israel were to cease to exist, what realistically would be the ramifications? What would that mean? Not in theory, but in practice for seven million Jews living in Israel. Would they be safe? Or would countries in the West accept them with open arms despite this being an age of closing borders? Ladies and gentlemen, all of us in this room are aware that the hatreds that lead the Jewish people to tragedy in the beginning of the 20th century are stirring again. They are happening on the political right under one guise, but no less dangerously on the left under the other. Now is the time to call out prejudices with dangerous, real-world consequences by their proper name lest they insect us with their poison. That is why I urge you to vote for the motion that anti-Zionism is a new anti-Semitism and must be treated as such. Thank you very much.

[applause]

John Donovan:
Thank you, Bret Stephens.

00:10:01

And that's the resolution, Anti-Zionism is the new anti-Semitism. Our next debater will be making his opening statement against the resolution. Please welcome Peter Beinart, author of *The Crisis of Zionism*. Peter Beinart.

[applause]

Peter Beinart:
Thank you. Yousef will talk about how equating anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism hurts Palestinians. But I want to start by talking about how it hurts Jews. The number of Jews who oppose anti-Semitism, who oppose Zionism, is not marginal as Bret suggests. The Satmar Hasidim held an anti-Zionist rally in 2017 of 20,000 people. That's larger than APACS' annual conference. Two thirds of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel, the fastest growing Jewish population in both Israel and the American Jewish community, reject Zionism. And the growing -- the number of progressive American Jews who reject Zionism is growing, too. When you ask American Jews in polls if the two-state solution is dead, would you prefer one state in which millions of West Bank Palestinians lack basic rights or one equal state that is not a Jewish state?

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A majority of American Jews favor the one equal option that is not a Jewish state, the anti-Zionist option. If you vote yes on this resolution, you are calling those Jews anti-Semites. And if you think this doesn't matter, I would note that over the last two years a Jewish teacher has been fired and another forced to resign at New York high schools because they expressed anti-Zionist views. That's where this resolution leads. In the name of fighting anti-Semitism, Jews are denied free speech and lose their jobs. But it's not just Jews who this resolution unfairly smears as anti-Semites. Many non-Jewish anti-Zionists aren't anti-Semites either. We have data on which Americans hold anti-Semitic beliefs.

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The Anti-Defamation League periodically asked Americans whether Jews have too much power, Jews are dishonest in business. And studies show that the Americans who hold these anti-Semitic beliefs are disproportionately older and poorly educated. But when you ask which Americans have anti-Zionist beliefs, as the Pew Research Center has, it's demographically the opposite. Anti-Zionist Americans are disproportionately well-educated and young. In other words, a lot of Americans are anti-Zionist without being anti-Semites, and a lot of Americans are both Zionists and anti-Semites. That might sound strange, but it's not. Theodor Herzl himself wrote in his diaries that, quote, "The anti-Semites will become our most dependable friend." Why? Because if you hate diversity in your own country, like Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán does or the white nationalist Richard Spencer does or Donald Trump does, then the Jews in your country are a problem because they make it more diverse.

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But if you want your country to privilege one ethnic, racial, or religious group over others, you may admire Israel for doing just that. Besides which, Israel gives the Jews in your country somewhere to go. Of course, if you claim as a matter of principle that anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism, then it doesn't matter if an anti-Zionist shows no evidence whatsoever of animosity towards Jews. It doesn't even matter if that anti-Zionist is Jewish herself. But equating anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is as incoherent in principle as it is in practice. It's incoherent because there is no universal principle that says every ethnic group has the right to its own country. No one said it's bigoted to oppose a Kurdish or Catalan or Kashmiri state. The reason they don't say it's bigoted is because ethnic nationalism, a state that privileges one ethnic group over another, is not the only form of nationalism most people consider legitimate.

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There's also civic nationalism, in which a neutral, secular state tries to foster a common national identity across the ethnic, racial, and religious groups in a given territory. Bret may not -- may say that dismantling an ethnic nationalist state that already exists in Israel is different from opposing the creation of a new one. But when countries replace political systems based on ethnic nationalism with systems based on civic nationalism, we don't call that bigoted either. I don't consider Israel to be the moral equivalent of apartheid South Africa. But just to illustrate the point -- South Africa was built on Afrikaner ethnic nationalism. When apartheid ended, that

ethnic nationalism was replaced by a civil nationalism -- that privileged no ethnic or racial group in South Africa. That wasn't anti-Afrikaner bigotry. Nor is Macedonia -- as a nation-state of the Macedonian people -- but it also includes a lot of Albanians. When the constitution changed to remove those privileges for Macedonians over Albanians, it wasn't an act of anti-Macedonian bigotry.

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This is what several Palestinian members of the Knesset want in Israel now. Several recently proposed turning Israel from a state that privileges Jews into a state that favors no ethnic or religious group. They want to replace Jewish ethnic nationalism -- Zionism -- with civic nationalism. According to Bret and Einat, that's bigotry, even though civic nationalism -- a secular, neutral state -- is what we aspire to in the United States. Why are we having this debate? We're having it because Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump killed the two-state solution. More people -- including more Jews -- are saying that if there is to be one state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, better be one equal state than one in which millions of West Bank Palestinians live without citizenship, due process, or the right to vote. And so, in order to defend that unequal one-state reality that exists today, people call the anti-Zionists [unintelligible] anti-Semitism.

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And then, people in power use that logic to repress anti-Zionist speech, which leads to Jewish teachers being fired in New York because they expressed anti-Zionist views, and Palestinian-American teachers being fired in Texas because they won't sign oaths promising not to boycott Israel. That logic, morally, is upside down. It is not bigoted to call for people to live equally under one law. Thank you.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Peter Beinart. And a reminder of what's going on: we are halfway through the opening round of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. I'm John Donovan. We have four debaters -- two teams of two -- arguing it out over this resolution: Anti-Zionism Is the New Anti-Semitism. You've heard the first two opening statements, and now onto the third. Please welcome Einat Wilf, former member of the Israeli Parliament. Ladies and gentlemen, Einat Wilf.

[applause]

Einat Wilf:

So, I have to tell you -- I'm certainly not here -- I'm sure many of you are not -- for Talmudic discussion of the finer points of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism.

00:17:09

Bret and I readily concede that you will find anti-Zionists who are not anti-Semites, and vice versa. I'm here -- and I'm sure many of you are here -- because it's not about a theoretical debate. This topic, unlike many of the other topics, has real-life consequences for real people. And we are here because I think it's -- it burns in us to deal with this issue. We're talking, debating a matter that one day we'll see whether it was historical truth. Consider the historical possibility that anti-Zionism is, indeed, the new anti-Semitism. What are we actually saying? We're saying that what's going to happen one day in America is what happened in other places where, after World War II -- where anti-Semitism was thoroughly and horribly discredited -- anti-Zionism became the mask.

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And no one thinks the mask works anymore. In the Soviet Union, when they said, "We're only anti-Zionists, not anti-Semites," we know how it ended. In Poland, in the '60s, when they had their campaign of "Not Anti-Semites; only Anti-Zionists," it ended with the Jews being expelled and many committing suicide because they were vilified and couldn't take it. We know how it ended in the Arab world, where a million Jews were expelled for anti-Zionism, not anti-Semitism. It is a devastating thought to think that this might come to America. But consider the other possibility.

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What if anti-Zionism is not the new anti-Semitism? What if this is what you're going to vote? What are you saying, then? What are you telling me? That anti-Zionism is okay? It's legitimate? It's fine? Let me tell you something about my Zionism -- what Zionism has given me. Zionism is the reason that, as a Jew, I can walk with my head held up high, secure in the knowledge that I have a home; that I have a space where I am safe, where someone has my back. I am secure in the knowledge that we can have a vibrant, crazy debate where all we do -- pretty much -- is criticism of Israel.

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We do so much of it, I think, that we've turned it into an export industry. Zionism has enabled criticism of Israel. It's in the knowledge that I no longer have to ask people to decide whether my people live or die -- because I have power to defend myself, real power. Not imaginary power. Imaginary power is something Jews had for a long time. Real power. Not in the hands of others -- that we have -- to be finally able to decide for ourselves. This is what Zionism has given me. And when I listen to the notion that anti-Zionism is growing -- and it is; and especially in various circles in young people -- what I feel in my stomach is dread.

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The dread that I feel when I watch "The Handmaid's Tale" is the dread that I feel when I hear the data about anti-Zionism growing. It's the knowledge that a movement of liberation that has enabled the people to finally stand tall is fragile and can be rolled back. This is what I hear. This is my fear. And it is the curse of every successful revolution that it's taken for granted.

And just as some women think we no longer need feminism -- and some people think we no longer need Zionism -- I want you to consider the real-world implications of anti-Zionism.

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Are you telling me that for there to be rights for Palestinians, my liberty, my dignity has to go away? Are you telling me that for Jews to fight for a better America, they have to say that Zionism is illegitimate? I want to appeal to you to think that there must be another way -- a way that maintains the liberty and dignity of Jews in Israel, of Jews in America, and around the world -- a way that enables and maintains the dignity of Palestinians, that allows Jews to fight for a better America, and does not ask that the price of that be that Jews give up what is so dear to them and what has made it possible for them to stand tall. Thank you.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Einat Wilf.

00:23:03

The resolution again is Anti-Zionism Is the New Anti-Semitism. And here to make his statement against the resolution is Yousef Munayyer, executive director of the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights. Ladies and gentlemen, Yousef Munayyer.

[applause]

Yousef Munayyer:

Good evening. I oppose this motion, and I want to explain why you should too -- by telling you how I come to it personally. I was born in a town called Eilat [spelled phonetically] -- or, in Hebrew, "Lod [spelled phonetically]." If you know the geography, you know that this makes me a Palestinian citizen of Israel. In 1948, my hometown was ethnically cleaned of nearly all its inhabitants, by a man named Yitzhak Rabin. My parents -- children of survivors-- came to the United States when I was young. While we traveled back often, I grew up about five miles west of here, in a lower middle class New Jersey town that was predominantly Irish and Italian-American.

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My father worked for a local company owned by a Jewish-American family. They didn't always agree on politics, but they respected each other. He was a frequent guest at their family ceremonies as well as a regular guest at the annual Passover Seder. When it was his turn to read the passage from the Aggadah, he would do so in Hebrew, which is, to this day, his best language. Others at the Seder got a kick out of the fact that some of the best pronunciation at the table belonged to the Palestinian. I learned early on to respect people of all faiths. But I also learned a lesson about anti-Semitism in America in those years.

One year, things started to change at school after my teacher shared with our class that I had returned from spending the summer in Israel. “F-ing Jew,” I was called.

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I remember being roughed up on the playground and having pennies thrown at my feet. I distinctly remember one girl exclaiming, “Well, that’s why his nose is so big.” And in truth, it’s probably oversized, and it’s genetic. But what can you do?

[laughter]

As a Palestinian citizen of Israel living in the United States, my identity was hard enough for me to understand, let alone to try to explain to white school children who didn’t know Palestine from Poughkeepsie. But I knew even though I was not Jewish, that didn’t spare me from this experience. And so, I imagined how much worse it must be for kids who were. I knew whatever those mean kids were hearing in their homes, it was different than what I was hearing in mine. And so, I learned then, as an immigrant, that anti-Semitism had deep roots in this country. But interestingly, it was those same students who directed that anti-Semitic invective at this non-Jew that also during the first Gulf War insisted that Saddam Hussein had to be my uncle.

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It was those same students who, after the World Trade Center bombing insisted that because my name was Yousef, I was a terrorist. So, I learned then that not only are all forms of oppression connected, but you cannot morally oppose one form without effectively opposing others. It will always find a way to get to you. So, while I learned lessons in the schoolyard about anti-Semitism here in America, it is in being Palestinian that I came to understand Zionism. Zionism is a political ideology aimed at the very destruction of our peoplehood. It is the political ideology of Zionism that legitimizes the ethnic cleansing of my hometown and so many others. It’s because of Zionism that a Jewish person from Tallahassee or Tokyo can live on the land of a Palestinian refugee languishing in a nearby refugee camp, denied repatriation purely because they were born to the wrong religion.

00:27:06

It’s because of Zionism that my toddler, who is still in diapers, can be referred to in the most callous and racist language as a demographic threat, merely because he’s another living, breathing Palestinian. It’s because of Zionism that the state of Israel bars people like me from residing in my place of birth with my partner, a Palestinian from the West Bank because the prospect of another Palestinian womb is a source of anxiety. It’s because of Zionism that the state of Israel today rejects the idea of even being a state of all its citizens, and that it violently enforces policies of land seizure, denial of movement, siege and discrimination against Palestinians at various levels of society. The conflation of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is preposterous on its face.

The idea that merely opposing a particular political ideology makes someone a bigot and a racist is a ludicrous notion and one that seeks to effectively put a political ideology beyond reproach.

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But I ask you to specifically consider what position this conflation puts Palestinians in. It demands that either we accept the very ideology that oppresses us or accept that we are bigots who must be marginalized from the discussion about it. Know that if you support this motion tonight, that is precisely what you are demanding of Palestinians. Nothing could be further from the truth. To ask the Palestinian people not to be anti-Zionists is to ask the Palestinian people not to be. So, why are we talking about this today? The reason is that more and more people are learning what Zionism has meant to Palestinians. More people are criticizing the abusive policies of the state of Israel because they're increasingly seeing and hearing from Palestinians. When you start to see and understand what Zionism means for us, it becomes indefensible on the merits.

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So, its defenders seek instead to silence and marginalize its victims and those who would dare see them as fully human. Well, this Palestinian has a message for you tonight. We will not be silent, nor will we allow anyone to suggest that our desire to live freely and equally in our homeland is a racist endeavor. On the contrary, it is this very conflation, this device aimed at silencing our dissent against such racist policies that makes it a tool of bigotry we must all reject. I ask that you join me in rejecting it with your vote tonight. Thank you.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Yousef Munayyer. And that concludes round one of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate where our resolution is, "Anti-Zionism is the New Anti-Semitism."

00:30:03

Now we move on to round two and in round two, the debaters will address one another directly. They'll take questions from me and from members of our live audience here in New York City. The resolution is "Anti-Zionism is the New Anti-Semitism." We've heard two debaters argue for that resolution, Bret Stephens and Einat Wilf.

They are arguing very clearly from the beginning that they are not equating as anti-Semitic general criticism of Israel or of its policies. They are saying instead that what they are arguing against is the challenge to the very existence of the state of Israel, which would be embodied, in fact, in a single-state solution, non-Jewish state solution. They say that anti-Zionism fits into a long pattern of challenges to Jewish identity. That would be so fundamental, so undermining of the sense of self determination and security that Jews enjoy within Israel and without Israel by the existence of the state, that that is fundamentally almost a form of violence, a kind of assault in itself.

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The team arguing against the resolution, Peter Beinart and Yousef Munayyer are arguing, first of all, that they can see that there can be such a thing as an anti-Zionist who is not anti-Semitic and vice versa.

In fact, all sides agree to that. We're not going to be arguing at that level. But they're making the point, first of all, that there are so many people who hold anti-Zionist positions from the Jewish community itself that that's too many people simply to relegate the idea to the dustbin of evil ideas. They say that one-states solutions have come out of national situations, such as South Africa, showing that nationalism can be replaced without it becoming an act of bigotry. And finally, in the telling of a personal story of being a Palestinian, the argument was made that to ask a Palestinian not to be anti-Zionist is to ask him not to be. And it's a phrase and a sentiment that comes out of the experience of the Palestinian people.

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I want to -- we have a lot to go at here before we get to your questions as well. I want to go to the side arguing for the resolution. I'll go to you, first, Einat, to take up the point that Yousef just made that if you're a Palestinian, the collective legacy of disasters that have befallen the Palestinian people as a result of their experience since the founding of the state of Israel makes it -- first of all, legitimizes the position that he would be anti-Zionist, and secondly, to ask him not to be anti-Zionist is to be asking too much. So, can you take that on?

Einat Wilf:

That is actually precisely the key point. I want to look for another way. The setup that it is zero sum, one or zero, that to support the dignity of Palestinians, to support the Palestinian rights to self-determination in a state of their own, of necessity means that one has to be an anti-Zionist is with all the implications that I detailed, is one that I don't think is necessary.

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I don't think this is the world we want to be in. I do very much believe -- and it's not easy, and it's not simple -- but I do very much believe that we can support and promote Palestinian dignity and the right to self-determination without asking that the price of it be that Jews no longer have the ability to have their own dignity and their own ability to defend themselves. There can be both. And the setting it up of one or zero is the one that I find hard.

Zionists support the Palestinian right to self-determination. I support it. And I don't understand why the idea that Palestinians, as a matter of vision, will support the idea that the Jews next to them in part of the land that both of them call home will also have their right to self-determination. It doesn't have to be either/or.

00:34:08

John Donovan:

Okay. Let's take that very point. "It doesn't have to be either/or." Yousef or Peter, who would like to respond to that?

Peter Beinart:

I'm happy to respond. I'm a supporter, have been for a long time, of the two-state solution in which there is a democratic Jewish state alongside a democratic Palestinian state. I am a Zionist, but let's be honest about the reality that we face today. The Israeli government, with the support of the American government, is on the verge of annexing parts of the West Bank. The Israeli government has just announced it's about to build an E1, which people have for years said would make the viability of a Palestinian state impossible. And this is being done with the acquiescence, if not active support, of the organized American Jewish community. So, what you're essentially telling Palestinians is the -- you will not have your own state. It's becoming more and more utterly unrealistic to imagine it. And what you are demanding, we're demanding you ask, rather than asking for equality in one state, you have to accept permanent non-citizenship under military law without the right to vote for the government that controls your lives.

00:35:10

And if you oppose that, then you are a bigot. That's the Orwellian logic that's been put forth by this resolution.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Bret?

Bret Stephens:

Ironically, the view of our opponents is the mirror image of the farthest right corners of the Israeli political movement, which both Einat and I reject, which is to say there should be one state. Right? That's the right-wing Israeli view, and that's the extremist Palestinian view. The paradox of this debate, and I hope this comes across, is that if there were no Israel, the people of the West Bank, you call them Palestinian people, would likely be Jordanians. The people in Gaza would be Egyptians. Zionism and Palestinian statehood are actually codependent.

00:36:07

And the argument that they are making, which is that you must eradicate Zionism one way or another -- peacefully, I'm sure that's their view -- in order to create a Palestinian state is wrong in theory, and it's wrong -- much more importantly, because this is what this debate should be about -- it's wrong in practice.

Who do you think would be empowered? In Israel, if the results of this debate is that anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism, that anti-Zionism is a -- excuse my language -- a kosher political worldview, that would empower the right wing in Israel because they would say, "You see? It's a zero-sum game. Either we survive and fight and take as much as we can, or we lose."

Compromise becomes impossible in that vision. That's why it is so important, not for people like me, but for people like Peter on the left to call anti-Zionism for what it is, which is to say, to eliminate a component that is as essential to the identity of a majority of Jews as the right to vote is as essential to the identity of the overwhelming majority of women.

00:37:20

John Donovan:
Okay, so --

[applause]

John Donovan:
One thing, I don't want the debate to go very far down the role of policy choices here, because what we're really talking about is -- almost -- you almost put it this way in your opening, Bret -- we're talking about the intent of the position of anti-Zionism. Is the intent, consciously or unconsciously, anti-Semitic? Is it anti-Jewish? And so, we heard Yousef say, "I oppose Zionism, not because I hate Jewish people everywhere. I oppose Zionism because of what it did to my people."

00:38:02

Do you question that -- would you say that that position -- I'm not asking you to say whether he's anti-Semitic or not, you've already said you don't believe anybody in the state is anti-Semitic -- but to hold that position, isn't it -- is it in itself to express hatred for the Jewish people?

Bret Stephens:
Look, in 1947, in 1948, there was an opportunity that was presented at the United Nations for a Palestinian state to come into existence -- and look this up on your phones if you don't believe me. Okay.

Male Speaker:
Can you answer the question, Bret? Oh, sorry [unintelligible]

[laughter]

Bret Stephens:
Excuse me. Let me offer an answer.

John Donovan:
I do want to let him -- see where he's going with it.

Bret Stephens:
Okay.

John Donovan:
I'll allow it.

Bret Stephens:
An opportunity for a Palestinian state to come into existence with no war and no dispossession. Why? Because the Jewish Agency run by David Ben-Gurion accepted that partition. So, the tragedy that befell Israelis and Palestinians alike in that war -- and Israelis also had a tremendous loss of life and physical dispossession in that war -- was the result of that decision.

00:39:08

The truth is tragedies emerged from that war. I'm not justifying what Yitzhak Rabin did in Lord. Nobody should justify the opposite position of what happened in Hebron and elsewhere and other communities to the Jewish people. But the suggestion that Zionism is the root of the Palestinian tragedy is wrong. The root of the Palestinian tragedy, tragically, was an Arab decision to refuse to accept Zionism in any border.

[applause]

John Donovan:
Yousef.

Yousef Munayyer:
So, again, it's our fault that we did not accept our own dispossession. This is the logic that we are hearing today that somehow that then justifies all of the policies that follow this political ideology. Look, what we are calling for is a dismantling of the policies that follow from this ideology, many of which I laid out and how they affect Palestinians.

00:40:09

And we can achieve that, and the place can still exist, the people can still exist, and they can continue to live together in peace under the concept of justice. We dismantled segregationist policies in places like Alabama based on racist and supremacist ideas. And guess what? Last I checked, Alabama still exists, and it's a much better place than it was 50 years ago.

[applause]

Still a lot of problems, by the way, but a much better place than it was 50 years ago. South Africa is the same case. And I just want to make a point about self-determination, because it was raised earlier, and I didn't have a chance to respond. There are Jews and Palestinians on this stage who will exercise their self-determination in this country in November. There are lots of different ways to exercise self-determination. All right? Without doing so, that -- in a way that excludes other people or insists on dominating other people.

00:41:07

We can imagine a different reality where Jewish people can think about their existence in a way that doesn't require them to dominate others. And Palestinians can think about a way of living in their homeland alongside their Jewish neighbors in equality before the law. This is what we are talking about. It's not radical. When we look at the world that we are living in, we see thousands of ethnicities, thousands of ethnicities, and 195 states.

John Donovan:
Yousef --

Yousef Munayyer:
Anyone who can do the math knows --

John Donovan:
Let me break in.

Yousef Munayyer:
-- that this is more the norm than it is the exception.

John Donovan:
Let me break in to bring something that Einat said that goes directly to what you're saying. You're saying that she can find another way to do what she said -- to talk -- to do what she said she wants to -- Israel to be a place of identity, self-determination, security. You're telling her, "No. You don't need all of that. To hell all of those things."

00:42:04

Yousef Munayyer:
I'm not saying that at all.

John Donovan:
Are you not?

Yousef Munayyer:
No, of course not. I don't see why living with Palestinians --

John Donovan:
You're saying she doesn't need a Jewish state for that -- to have that.

Yousef Munayyer:
I'm saying that you don't need to oppress Palestinians and deny them equality to be able to express your identity as a Jewish person. I think it's actually fundamentally an anti-Jewish position to believe that that's a necessity.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Do you want to respond, Einat?

Einat Wilf:

Of course, that's not what I said. The idea is that the Jewish people have the possibility to finally exercise their self-determination. I talked about the curse of every revolution that is successful, that it's taken for granted. How recent is it that Jews can walk safely and freely in this world? Forty, 50 years? During all that time we have had the state of Israel.

00:42:59

So, I am being told, "Don't worry. It will be replaced by an Arab state which will have civic nationalism and equality, and the Jews will be a minority, and you will be fine." And even Peter in one of his writings conceded that that might not work. What if in the Middle East, a country with those two groups, will descend into what is typical of the Middle East, but not only in Lebanon, in Syria, in Yemen. And Jews are in battle, and we need to flee because we no longer have power, because we gave it up for that beautiful idea of civic equality. Who will take us? Can you tell us, can you promise me that it will be okay?

00:44:00

And when it's not, who will be there? You know, Hillel, the elder didn't just say, "If not now, when?" He, before that, said, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" The basis is that we have to first be able to have our dignity to defend ourselves, and then, if I am not for others, what am I? But it comes from being in our place.

John Donovan:

Can --

Einat Wilf:

If the Jews do not have their own country, their ability to defend themselves, will you be there? When it turns out badly? Will you open this door --

John Donovan:

Einat, let me jump in, because I think you've nailed that point.

[applause]

There's -- something I feel -- I observed going on here is that each side is imputing motives to the other side that I'm not sure would be recognized by the people accused of having those motives. So, for example, Yusuf, you are saying that it is a core tenet of Einat's Zionism to want to oppress Palestinian people.

00:45:07

You are saying Zionism needs to oppress the Palestinian people -- as though -- that that's the goal of Zionism.

Yousef Munayyer:
Well --

John Donovan:

And this side is saying that to hold the point of view of your opponents is to express -- consciously or unconsciously -- a hatred that's been going on for hundreds of years; and they're taking their place in that. And I'm not sure that either of you actually are holding the beliefs, at core, that you've accusing each other of. And I want to take that point to you, Peter, and see if there's anything to that, or if you have thought about that.

Peter Beinart:

Look. Einat is concerned that a bi-national state -- in which Jews and Palestinians live equally -- might not work out very well. It's true. It might have lots and lots of problems. But it's important to -- but let's remember --

Male Speaker:
[inaudible] --

Peter Beinart:

-- the -- that's why, partly, I've been fighting for a two-state solution, right?

00:46:06

But it is -- even if you believe that, practically, it might not work out well, it is not bigoted. For Palestinians lacking basic rights, every single day of their lives, with no prospect of a state of their own -- to ask for equality in --

John Donovan:

But Peter, my question to you --

Peter Beinart:

-- the state in which they live.

John Donovan:

-- is it a core tenet of Zionism to want to oppress Palestinian people?

Yousef Munayyer:

Can I just [inaudible] --

Peter Beinart:

No. But it is a core --

John Donovan:
All right.

Yousef Munayyer:
Yeah.

John Donovan:
-- Yousef?

Yousef Munayyer:
If I can answer this question -- look.

[applause]

We need to stop talking about this concept in the abstract, because, in reality, it doesn't exist in the abstract, okay? The idea of a Jewish state in theory -- of course it can exist in peace, and in democracy, and not be intentioned with any of its neighbors or the people who live within the state. But in reality, Zionism wasn't implemented in an empty box. It was implemented in a place where people lived. And the process of that implementation required certain things.

00:47:03

It required the ethnic cleansing of much of the towns and villages that existed there. It exist -- it required discrimination. It required -- where we continue to see on a daily basis. In theory, of course, Zionism, as Jewish nationalism, is not necessarily different than other forms of nationalism. In reality, though -- in reality, it had an impact on [unintelligible] --

John Donovan:
Let me take your point to Bret Stephens.

Yousef Munayyer:
And I would love to get an answer to my question -- or your question, actually -- about whether it is legitimate for Palestinians and those standing in solidarity with them to not be Zionists and to be opposed to it.

Bret Stephens:
Look, I'm glad that Yousef is moving away from theory to practice. You know, in theory -- in theory -- the doctrine of separate but equal that was enshrined by the worst Supreme Court -- second-worst Supreme Court decision in history -- Plessy v. Ferguson -- okay -- in theory, that's not a racist doctrine.

00:48:01

Separate but equal. In reality, we know exactly what kind of horrors that decision led to. So, in theory, we can have Peter's vision. We can have civic nationalism in the Middle East. It sounds fantastic from the comfort of Manhattan, where, miraculously, on this small island, we have

more or less figured out how to get along. In reality, you are signing a prescription for the destruction not only of the Jewish people on that land, but of the Palestinians too. Why would you want to legitimize that point of view?

John Donovan:

Bret --

Bret Stephens:

The Palestinians deserve a state --

John Donovan:

Bret? The theory-reality dichotomy is that I think Yousef was pointing to is that Zionism, in the abstract, in a -- you know, I believe it was Herzl who said, "A land for -- a land without a people for a people without a land," but there were people there.

00:49:01

And that from day one, you -- it was not abstract; that, from day one, Zionism came at a price to the Palestinian people. That's what he's saying is the difference between theory --

Yousef Munayyer:

And in reality, a Palestinian -- Palestinian national aspirations have also taken -- extracted a heavy price from the Israeli and the Jewish people. But what I am saying -- okay -- is that we believe that we ought to have a Palestinian state -- that that's a goal we should strive for, as I do, as Einat does -- then you have to recognize the necessity of Zionism. The two are not contradictory. They are twinned; they are married; they are inextricable.

John Donovan:

Can you be -- really -- 30 seconds?

Yousef Munayyer:

Yeah. Very, very --

John Donovan:

Because I want to go to audience questions.

Yousef Munayyer:

Very, very quickly. Look, as someone who comes from the Middle East, it really bothers me to hear this idea that the Middle East is some sort of barbaric jungle, okay, that is just rife with violence -- and that even if you afford the people there justice and equality before the law -- that, somehow, they'd be uniquely incapable of living in peace and justice with their neighbors.

00:50:08

We need to put this Orientalist stereotyped vision of the region in the past.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Okay. I want to go to audience questions now, if you can --

Yousef Munayyer:

Can I just say one thing?

John Donovan:

You can, in one --

Bret Stephens:

Syria?

John Donovan:

-- moment.

Bret Stephens:

Syria.

John Donovan:

Bret -- Bret -- just give me a moment.

Bret Stephens:

[unintelligible] happening in Syria is because they're from the Middle East?

John Donovan:

All right. Hold on a moment. I just want to get a question teed up, and then we can have this little exchange. Who would like to ask a question? Right down front. Sir, if you get read, a microphone is going to be brought to you. Meanwhile, engage -- Bret, you wanted to say? Syria?

Bret Stephens:

That's all I wanted to say.

John Donovan:

Okay.

[laughter]

Bret Stephens:

That this is -- you know, I -- as a -- you know, I remember very well when people said that South Africa could never be a liberal democracy because Africa was filled with dictatorships. In fact, there are political reasons that countries in the Middle East have had dictatorships and authoritarian governments. Jews around the world have actually done extremely well under liberal democracy.

00:51:03

Most Jews have fared very well under liberal democracies. There's something odd about the idea that Jews -- particularly American Jews -- who have been so benefited so much from liberal democracy in this country -- think that the idea is fundamentally anathema simply because it happens to be in the Middle East.

John Donovan:
Front row.

[applause]

Female Speaker:

Thank you. My name is Virag [spelled phonetically]. I'm Hungarian, so I already [unintelligible] but that's beyond the point. I am not Jewish, and I am Zionist. So, my question to you -- if I am, as a non-Jew, Zionist, on a daily basis, getting comments that "You should die in the gas chamber with the Jews," "You should die, you f-ing Zionist" -- do you think that these kinds of sentences do not impale [spelled phonetically] Juden Hafsted [spelled phonetically] -- Jewish hatred -- AKA anti-Semitism? Thank you very much.

[applause]

John Donovan:

I think what I'm hearing from the question is somewhat Bret's point that the anti-Zionism -- the conversation around the anti-Zionism has been, in some contexts, filled with the classic tropes of anti-Semitism that go back hundreds of years.

00:52:10

You know, Internet memes, et cetera -- that that is part of the conversation. I believe that's what you're getting at, and I think it's a legitimate question, because it very much goes to what Bret's point was.

Male Speaker:

Sure. There are anti-Zionists who are also anti-Semites, absolutely. There are also Zionists who are anti-Semites. If you look at the most bloody, violent anti-Semitism in the United States in recent years, it's mostly come from white nationalists, many of whom -- whose leaders actually think Israel is pretty great. Right -- Richard Spencer, the most important white nationalist leader in America, calls himself a kind of a white Zionist, right? So, the -- and anti-Semitism is, as Bret rightly said, a complex phenomena that can take many, many shapes. But the data -- the data suggests, actually, that the Venn diagram in the United States, between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, doesn't match very much at all, because the people that are anti-Zionist in the United States are young and well-educated, and the people who give the most anti-Semitic answers to the classic questions -- designed by the Anti-Defamation League to measure anti-Semitism -- tend to be demographically opposite.

00:53:17

They're not poorly educated at all.

Bret Stephens:
Just quickly --

John Donovan:
Bret or Einat?

Bret Stephens:
Just very briefly. Just because you're young and well-educated, doesn't inoculate you against bigotry. And just because --

Einat Wilf:
Of course not.

Bret Stephens:
-- you are old doesn't make you more disposed to bigotry.

John Donovan:
Einat, did you want to say --

Bret Stephens:
Of course it doesn't.

John Donovan:
Einat, did you have a formal response [spelled phonetically].

Einat Wilf:
Yes. I just want to address that what we're repeatedly hearing, a notion, is that this time it's different. Yes, every time after World War II where anti-Zionism became a main issue, whether in the Soviet Union, in Poland, or in the Arab world, ultimately, what happened is no Jews. And I'm being asked to believe that this time, it's different.

00:54:01

This will not be the same. This is different. And that Israel, Jews can forego their power and this time, it will be different. And all I have to say, I wish I could believe that. But really, by now, I can't anymore.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Yousef, do you have a response to that? Do you have a response to Einat's point that you and your partner are asking her to trust in a future that her history tells her she would be foolish to trust?

Yousef Munayyer:

Yeah. I mean, I think the answer is this. The reality is what is the alternative? The status quo is not acceptable. It's simply not acceptable. Any situation that continues to deny the rights of Palestinians is not a solution. And the idea that you can just box up the Palestinians in some fraction of the territory and say, "Hey, we're done," and "This preserves Zionism and so therefore, we have a solution." This is not a solution for Palestinians.

And the reality is when you look at situations like South Africa, guess who continues to be the privileged class in South Africa?

00:55:04

It's not the majority community, which is the Black community there. But actually, the white community here continues to be empowered and will continue to be empowered disproportionately for a very, very long period of time. The idea that we can't dismantle these structures of discrimination and still find a way to coexist despite differences is something that has been proven wrong all over the world, all over the world. And the idea that somehow Palestinians or Arabs are uniquely incapable of this is just anti-Arabic.

John Donovan:

Is that your point?

Bret Stephens:

Can I just make one point?

John Donovan:

Is it your point that Palestinians and Arabs are uniquely incapable of --

Bret Stephens:

Of course not.

Einat Wilf:

Of course not

Bret Stephens:

Of course not.

Einat Wilf:

And again --

Bret Stephens:

I'm just simply pointing -- and by the way, and just, let's take this out of the Middle East. Peter just talked about how Jews have thrived in liberal democracies. Well, not so much anymore because in France, Jews go to school under armed guard.

00:56:01

In Germany, it's not safe to wear a kippah in the streets of Berlin. And in Pittsburgh, it might not always be wise to go to [inaudible] --

Peter Beinart:
And it's not always safe in Israel either.

Bret Stephens:
So, the suggestion -- excuse me. but the suggestion that --

Einat Wilf:
[inaudible]

Bret Stephens:
-- Jews have had -- that Jews, especially today, especially in 2020, excuse me, the Jews are safe. The Jews in this room feel safer in America today than we did five years ago? I would wager the answer is not -- and let me just say very quickly to Yousef, okay? Very briefly. You cannot affirm the rights of Palestinians by denying the rights of Jews. Let's affirm the rights of both.

[applause]

Yousef Munayyer:
And I think the only way you can, I think the only way you can is under the principle of equality. That's the only way that it's possible.

Einat Wilf:
Two equal states.

John Donovan:
Thank you for that question. That opened up a very, very good line of conversation for us. I'd like to do another question. Is somebody higher up? Sir

Male Speaker:
This is for Yousef and Peter. And I want to talk about the physical well-being of those seven million Jews.

00:57:02

John Donovan:
Is this going to be to the point of whether anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism?

Male Speaker:
Exactly.

John Donovan:
All right. I'm listening.

[laughter]

I'm listening closely.

Male Speaker:
The Jewish community of Baghdad numbered about a third of Baghdad before the Second World War. That community is more than 1,500 years older than Islam itself. It has been eradicated to zero. Damascus, Aleppo, Cairo, Sinai [phonetic]. There are zero exceptions. Nowhere in the Middle East can you be a Jew and exist. Forget about expressing yourself, Yousef. Nowhere can you be a Jew --

John Donovan:
What -- can you get to your question?

Male Speaker:
-- and exist except under Jewish sovereignty. What do you do with those seven million people?

[laughter]

John Donovan:
It's a question to this team. Either of you can answer, Peter or Yousef. Peter?

Peter Beinart:
There was a -- the Middle East has a history of anti-Semitism. Yes. In fact, in those -- would you have rather lived in Poland or Ukraine or Russia, then in Morocco or Iraq actually Christian Europe had an even deeper history of anti-Semitism and yet you have managed in Europe the emergence of liberal democracies where Jews, despite anti-Semitism actually live.

00:58:12

So, to me, what so much of this boils down to, with all due respect, is the notion, although it's not stated. It's fairly under the surface, that Palestinians have some kind of instinctive desire to kill Jews simply because they want to kill Jews. And if given rights of equality rather than being -- living the same kind of decent lives, asking the same kind of things that we all want for ourselves; they would kill Jews because that's simply what they do. That's the undercurrent running through so much of the Jewish discourse around this. There's an anti-Palestinian bigotry, which is so deep that it's often unconscious in our community.

[applause]

John Donovan:

I'd like to let the other side, if you want to, to respond to Peter's point.

Einat Wilf:

Me?

John Donovan:

If you want to, Einat.

00:59:00

Einat Wilf:

Of course it's not what we're saying. But Peter, you, yourself, acknowledged -- I understand the vision. You mentioned John Lennon. I would love to one day live in John Lennon's world, one world, no borders, no religion, all humanity living as one. It's just that when the Jews are asked to go first, they get a little suspicious. That's all.

[laughter]

[applause]

So, all I'm asking to say, it's a beautiful vision. But what if you're wrong? At least concede that it might happen.

John Donovan:

Sir, thank you for that question. That took us in another good direction. Right behind the camera there?

Female Speaker:

Hi, so my name is Milan [spelled phonetically] and this is a question directed towards the "for" side. So, many of Einat's arguments have concerned the right of the Jewish people to self-determination within Israel and the importance of that. But do you believe that Palestinians within Israel should be able to exercise the same rights and enjoy the same freedoms that you believe Israelis should enjoy under Zionism?

01:00:04

[applause]

Bret Stephens:

Yes.

John Donovan:

Well --

Einat Wilf:

You mean --

John Donovan:

Well --

Einat Wilf:

You mean Palestinian citizens of the state of Israel?

Female Speaker:

Yes, who are being dispossessed and --

Einat Wilf:

Of course.

Female Speaker:

-- and disenfranchised currently.

Einat Wilf:

No. There might a bit of a confusion here with what I -- within the state of Israel, Palestinian and Arabs are citizens of the state of Israel.

And of course, I support the vote. They are elected. Within the West Bank and Gaza, my support is for Palestinians to rule themselves, govern themselves in a state of their own. They have that right to self-determination.

Yousef Munayyer:

So --

[applause]

And by the way, can I just add --

John Donovan:

Wait, let me let Yousef speak here.

Yousef Munayyer:

[inaudible] here as the Palestinian citizen of Israel on this stage. I want to try to help people understand in this room how citizenship in Israel differs from citizenship here in the United States. Because it's very easy to get them confused. Here in the United States, being a citizen and a national is the same thing.

01:01:03

It's not the same thing in Israel. Citizenship in Israel was actually created as a category of exclusion, as a way to include Palestinians under the law, but also allow for the privileging of nationals who were Jewish and also citizens. It is a fundamentally discriminatory system. And if you want proof of that, all you have to do is see how the resolution put forward by members of Knesset who were Palestinian citizens of Israel, simply calling on the state to define itself as a state of all its citizens was considered too radical to even be heard for consideration in the Israeli parliament. That's the reality of being a Palestinian citizen of Israel.

John Donovan:
Bret?

Yousef Munayyer:
And --

Bret Stephens:
We're getting into a confusion here, which is you are offering an absolutely legitimate criticism of the policy of the state of Israel when it comes to its Arab citizens. Israel has to work harder like every democracy in the world does to realize the promise of equality.

01:02:05

But let me say also this, most countries are organized in one way or another as nation states. So, for example, if you're Danish, right, you pay a tax to the Danish Lutheran Church. You think of Denmark as a pretty liberal state. But it does, in fact, privilege aspects of Danishness. Every country -- most countries in the world do so one way or the other. In that sense, Israel is no different. And what you're then saying is, okay, Israel has -- is defined as a nation state, like so many others are, aspects of its policy are wrong or repugnant to you, as they may be. Therefore, the entire basis of the state is illegitimate, and the state should go. I don't get that "therefore." Let's work to make the state of Israel better. Let's not seek to undermine the very foundation of its existence.

[applause]

John Donovan:
Question up on the aisle up there. If you could stand up.

01:03:03

Female Speaker:
Hello, my question is for Einat. I heard you say, "Will you be there when it turns out badly?" "Palestinian rights will take away Jewish rights." "An Arab state means Jewish minority." I hear fear. I wonder, when Palestinians are fearful, is their self-defense anti-Semitic?

Einat Wilf:

So, I've clearly spoken to my fear. That is what I have come to share with you. And what I ask of you, as you leave, as you think about it, is that there has to be a path. And I believe there. Where --

John Donovan:

You're not answering her question. I think that question was really well-framed. Is their self-defense anti-Semitic?

Einat Wilf:

Is Palestinians fight for a state of their own, of course not.

01:04:01

If they fight for the Jewish people not to have their state, then it's different. The question is, what are they fighting for?

[applause]

John Donovan:

What if they fight for equal rights? What if they fight for equal rights?

Peter Beinart:

I just want to say that I feel like a little bit, with all due respect, Bret and Einat are living in La La land. They keep talking about some mythical Palestinian state that's going to be -- that's going to emerge, right? I have been screaming at the top of my lungs for years and years that the policies of this Israeli government are destroying the possibility of a Palestinian state. And now it's virtually -- the last nail is in the ground. Annexation is on the horizon. The building is happening in Eiwán [spelled phonetically] So what's used as this mythical vision of, "Yes, we could support Palestinian rights one day in some state that is being destroyed," as is -- has almost no chance of being realized now is used as a justification for the present one-state reality in which millions of Palestinians live with fewer rights than an African-American in Mississippi in the 1950s, not even citizens of the state in which they live, and that's the position that's considered the non-bigoted position.

01:05:05

[applause]

To consider the position that you wanted to stay in that permanently. And for those -- last one -- for those who think that it is maybe dangerous for Jews to live in equality with Palestinians, and there may be dangers -- I want to point out that there are also profound, dangers, profound dangers to Jews living alongside 50 percent of the fellow people between the river and the sea who have no rights. How is that going to land? There's a potential cholera outbreak in Gaza that would spread to Ashkelon.

John Donovan:

Peter, I have to --

Peter Beinart:

Not in --

[cross talk]

John Donovan:

I need --

Peter Beinart:

Live alongside --

John Donovan:

I need you to yield. I need you to yield to give Bret one more track.

[applause]

Bret Stephens:

Look, I've written against Benjamin Netanyahu for years. And by the way, it's harder to do it on the right. But let's put that to one side. The guy who really is putting the nail in the ground, practically speaking, in Palestinian statehood, with all respect, Peter, is you.

01:06:00

And I'm telling you why.

[applause]

John Donovan:

All right. You know what?

Bret Stephens:

Okay? Let me just --

John Donovan:

I don't want to make this about Peter.

Bret Stephens:

Two sides --

John Donovan:

I think --

Bret Stephens:

Because this is this goes to the heart of the point.

John Donovan:

It's not what we do here. So I'm going to wrap it up, and I'm going to say that concludes round two of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate.

[applause]

[booing]

John Donovan:

Sorry. Where our resolution is, anti-Zionism is the new anti-Semitism. And now we move on to closing remarks. The debaters will stand up again. Those closing remarks will be two minutes each. And here to make his closing statement in support of the resolution, Bret Stephens, columnist of the New York Times, and you'd stand up for that.

Bret Stephens:

Do we stand up?

John Donovan:

Yeah.

Bret Stephens:

Okay. First of all, thank you for the debate. Thank you, Peter. Thank you, Yousef. If I impugned your motives, I apologize. That was not my intention. In 1947, a little girl and her mother walked into a grocery store in Milano, Italy, which had recently been under Nazi occupation.

01:07:00

And as the mother went to pay for the groceries, the woman behind the counter said, "Why don't you go back to where you came from?" Now, that woman had been born in Vilna, grown up in Moscow, had fled the Bolsheviks, had her father executed, moved to Berlin, and then in 1933 had to flee Germany once again. They had come to Italy before the race laws only to discover that Italy had become another place inhospitable to Jews. They spent the year, the war years in hiding from the Gestapo not far away.

In 1947, the doors to the United States were closed for them. In 1947, they could not go back to Germany, they could not go back to Russia, and there was not an Israel for them to go back to. Thankfully, that changed.

01:08:00

Now things are changing for us Jews here in the United States. Will we be where Germany or France or Britain are in a generation? We may well be. And we're going to want perhaps a place to go back to. I ask those of you in this room who are not Jewish to think a little empathetically about that historic dilemma when you say that anti-Zionism is -- when you say that anti-Zionism

is not a form of anti-Semitism, when you begin the legitimation of the destruction of a Jewish state, you are closing the door to Jews to their safety. Don't do that. Vote for the resolution.

[applause]

John Donvan:

Thank you, Bret Stephens. That resolution, again, anti-Zionism is the new anti-Semitism. And here to make his closing statement against the resolution, Peter Beinart.

Peter Beinart:

On December 28th of last year, on the seventh night of Hanukkah, a man with a machete walked into a celebration of Jews in Munsie, New York.

01:09:08

A 32-year-old man named Joseph Gluck saved the lives of the people around him by luring the attacker outside of the house and there -- and seeing the license plate of his car and calling the police. This month, that man, Joseph Gluck, was offered an award of 20,000 dollars by two American Jewish organizations. He refused the award because he's an anti-Zionist and would not take money from Jewish -- from Zionist organizations. To endorse this resolution, you have to say that Joseph Gluck is an anti-Semite. This notion that there's a distinction between calling -- between anti-Semitism and anti-Semites is sophistry. If anti-Zionism is the new anti-Semitism, then anti-Zionists are the new anti-Semites and Joseph Gluck is one of them.

01:10:01

And you have to call my friend Issa Amro, who, despite being beaten by Jewish settlers and imprisoned by Jewish soldiers bought my son of a Bar mitzvah present as we walked through the old Arab market in Hebron. You have to call Issa as well an anti-Semite because he does not believe in a Jewish state. You have to look Yousef in the eye and call him an anti-Semite. This is not the way. I care as deeply about Jewish welfare, Jewish dignity, Jewish safety as Bret and Einat do. I will wake up tomorrow morning, as I did this morning, put onto Stillen [spelled phonetically], read Talmud, and do my best to be -- to do proud, my tradition of the Jewish people and our welfare. But we cannot buy our own safety at the cost of millions of people who lack basic rights. Any definition of anti-Semitism that dehumanizes Palestinians is not a response to bigotry. It is an expression of bigotry.

01:11:11

[applause]

And that's why we must oppose this resolution tonight.

[applause]

John Donvan:

Thank you, Peter Beinart. Anti-Zionism Is the New Anti-Semitism. That's our resolution. Here to make her closing statement against the resolution, former member -- I'm sorry. Here to make her statement in support of the resolution, former member of the Israeli parliament, Einat Wilf.

Einat Wilf:

Thank you. I never wanted to stand here, and I never wanted to believe that anti-Zionism is the new anti-Semitism -- because what Zionism was supposed to do was to cure the world of this ancient hatred. Herzl believed what he was told -- that the day that the Jews will no longer be guests among the nations, when they will be in their own home, masters of their fate, the hatred will disappear. To agree to that is a devastating idea for me, because, as a Zionist, I want to believe that it's about what we do rather than who we are.

01:12:10

And for so long, that is what I followed, and this is what I've promoted in Israel. We should do this. We should be better on that. We should give this. And I did not see the ancient hatred disappear. It became stronger and stronger. And every time I said, "Take another pound of flesh. I'll give up this. I'll give up that." Is it okay now? And at one point, I had to take a step back and say, "You are asking for nothing less than all of it." Just like the Jews in Poland who were told "No, no, no, it's not anti-Semitism, it's not -- it's only anti-Zionism" -- and many of them have committed suicide because they realize nothing less was demanded of them.

01:13:01

So, I'm here to say that I am done, and we are done being Russia's fools. We are not going to give in everything just to pacify some idea. But it doesn't mean that we can't be better. I want you to leave here tonight and think that there has to be a way for Jews to fight for a better and more equal America, to fight for Palestinian rights and dignity without saying that the price of that is for the Jews to lose their home. Thank you.

[applause]

John Donvan:

Thank you, Einat Wilf. Anti-Zionism Is the New Anti-Semitism is our resolution, and here to make his closing statement against the resolution, Yousef Munayyer, executive director of the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights.

Yousef Munayyer:

About 16 months ago, a man walked into a synagogue in Pittsburgh and killed 11 worshipers, wounding others. He chose his target, not just because it was a synagogue, but because this particular synagogue had an affiliation with HIAS -- the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

01:14:11

He hated HIAS because they helped refugees -- including black, and brown, and Muslim refugees -- to resettle here in America. In a world of far-right ideology, there is a common

conspiracy theory that sees Jews as the vanguard of cultural Marxism -- behind an effort to undermine white Christian male-dominated society by subversively supporting dangerous things like feminism, immigration, and equal rights. He too believed his society would face an existential threat from a system that treated people equally, instead of simply privileging his group. Ethno-nationalism is not just dangerous here. It is dangerous, period.

At a time when white nationalism is rising in the United States, threatening us all, it is shocking and doubly dangerous that efforts to defend ethno-nationalism in Israel and silence dissent against it are cloaked in the language of combating anti-Semitism.

01:15:18

No political ideology should be beyond reproach, especially those that constantly fear-monger about demographics. It's usually a tell. Combating racism is a noble and necessary effort. But forcing a choice in Palestinians to accept the ideology that oppresses them -- or be shunned for not doing so -- is the exact opposite way to go about it. If you agree that political ideologies should not be off-limits to criticism, if you agree that this conflation puts Palestinians in an impossible and unfair position, you should vote against this proposition tonight. Thank you.

01:16:01

John Donovan:

Thank you, Yousef Munayyer.

[applause]

And now it's time to learn which side you feel has argued most persuasively. I want to ask you again to use your phones to register your second vote, once again. All right. While you're voting and registering your last vote, and then we'll be tabulating. And it takes us usually two or three minutes. I want to say this. This honestly was one of the more intense debates that we've had. I think probably there was more of a philosophical gulf between the two teams than we've seen in most of the debates we've ever done. I think the positions were deeply held, not at this point, highly reconcilable.

That said, I felt that and especially because that was the case, I felt that the demeanor with which all of you came to the stage showing respect for each other, speaking civilly kind of met the goal of what we try to do here at Intelligence Squared. So, I want to thank you, all four of you for the way that you did that.

[applause]

So, while we tabulate the votes, I just wanted to ask all four debaters a question that's not part of the competition.

01:17:04

Just sort of want to see where they are on this, and kind of for our audience, this is a very informed, very curious audience. Obviously, we can see that by the nature of the questions. I'm wondering if you could recommend just a piece of reading, an article, a book, not your own, that could further understanding from your point of view, could further understanding of the thing that we were debating tonight. What would be your recommendation? I'll start with you, Bret.

Bret Stephens:

Well, I'm a constant reader of Peter's columns because I like to see where he goes wrong.

[laughter]

But let me say that differently.

Peter Beinart:

No, it's okay.

Bret Stephens:

I want to hear the most intelligence case on the other side, and Peter consistently makes it.

John Donovan:

Wow, that's --

[applause]

John Donovan:

Now, that was a classy tidbit. Thank you.

Bret Stephens:

[laughs]

John Donovan:

Einat, how about you?

Einat Wilf:

My recommendation would be Paul Johnson's "History of the Jews." It's magnificent.

01:18:00

John Donovan:

Tell us a little bit about it.

Einat Wilf:

Paul Johnson is not a Jew. He's studied Christianity. He's a Catholic. And he goes through the entire span of Jewish history. And for people who are looking to really look and understand the story that is how Jews perceive history, their place, what role Israel and Zionism have in that, I think it's a magnificent book to understand our people.

John Donovan:

Thank you. How about you, Yousef?

Yousef Munayyer:

It's hard to think of just one thing. But I think the piece of advice that I would offer is that too often, these conversations are about Palestinians but don't include Palestinian perspectives. And I would say seek out things written by Palestinians about their experiences and become familiar with their voices. You need to hear them.

John Donovan:

Is there anything -- anyone -- or a few that you would recommend?

Yousef Munayyer:

So many, they're out there waiting to be read. And yeah. Look for Palestinian voices and make sure that they're included in the discussion.

01:19:03

John Donovan:

Peter?

Peter Beinart:

A couple of Palestinian voices that haven't had an influence on me would be Rashid Khalidi and his book, *The Iron Cage*. Raja Shehadeh's book *Palestine Walks*. But I think and Bret's [unintelligible] -- it's also very -- it's very important to challenge oneself from all sides. So, in terms of books that I think offer, I think, a thoughtful and kind of nuanced defense of the idea that a Jewish state can also be a liberal democracy, I would point to Chaim Gans' book, *A Just Zionism*, or the Rubenstein and Yakobson's book, I think it's called *Israel: Among the Nations*, which basically looks at the way in which Israel is similar and also different from many other governments that also have ethnic nationalisms with preferences for one group.

John Donovan:

Okay. Well, thank you for sharing that. I now have the final results of the votes, and I want to let you know also that you can continue to vote on this resolution online by going to our website.

01:20:01

Those votes will continue after the podcast is posted and after the radio show is released. But tonight, it's your vote that determines the winners of this particular moment in time. And when I say, "the winners," by the way, I want to point out that regardless of how the vote goes, it's always the case that both sides get to lay out their story, tell their story, make their case. It's always the case that people pull people from the other side. Votes has always bring [sic] somebody over from the other side. In our view, the winner or loser issue is not irrelevant, but it's secondary to the fact that the conversation was had. And when people listen to the podcast --

[applause]

When people listen to the podcast, they're not going to know to the end what the audience vote here was and they may not necessarily agree with it, but I just want to -- but nevertheless, it's the game we play. And so, we're going to play it. So, I want to remind you that you voted before the arguments were made and you voted the second time after the arguments were made. And we give victory to the team whose numbers changed the most between the first and the second vote.

01:21:04

So, here's what we have. On the resolution, anti-Zionism is the new anti-Semitism, before the debate was heard, 35 percent agreed with the resolution, 36 percent were against, 29 percent were undecided. A very balanced start. Those are the first results.

Let's look at the team in the second vote. In the second vote, the team arguing for the resolution, Anti-Zionism is the new anti-Semitism, their first vote was 35 percent, their second vote was 45 percent, they pulled up 10 percentage points, which is the number to beat. The team arguing against the resolution, their first vote was 36 percent, their second vote was 48 percent, they picked up 12 percentage points --

[applause]

-- which is enough for the team arguing against the resolution to make them the winners. Our congratulations to the against side. Thank you from me, John Donovan, and Intelligence Squared, U.S. We'll see you next time.

[applause]

[end of transcript]

This is a rough transcript. Please excuse any errors.