

David Harris | A Conversation on the Issues Most Affecting the Jewish World Today Across the Diplomatic Arena

- Welcome, David. I'm so happy to have you here with us today. AJC CEO David Harris has led AJC since 1990 and has been described by the late Israeli president Shimon Peres as the foreign minister of the Jewish people. David is a leading Jewish advocate who meets with world leaders to advance Israel's diplomatic standing and promote international human rights and inter-religious and inter-ethnic understanding.

He has been honoured a total of 17 times by the governments of Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, Spain, and Ukraine for his international efforts in defence of human rights, advancement of the Transatlantic Partnership, and dedication to the Jewish people. 30 years ago, David took the reins of AJC and revolutionised what it means to be an advocate for world Jewry, and I'm delighted David has agreed to join us today to discuss the issues most affecting the Jewish world across the diplomatic arena. Welcome, David. I'm now going to hand the floor over to you and to Carly Maisel. Thank you.

- Thank you, Wendy. David, it's great to be with you today. Before we launch into our around world in 60 Minutes, as we've got a truly global audience, I wanted to give everybody an opportunity to learn a little bit more about AJC. So in the 10 years that I've been in this space, your name has been synonymous with leading world Jewry and everybody looks to AJC to understand the latest challenges and the opportunities. So I was hoping you could just give us a couple of minutes on AJC and its mission before we do our whistle stop tour.

- Of course, first of all, thank you Wendy, and thank you Carly for this opportunity. It's a great pleasure to be with the two of you and with everyone on this worldwide audience. The American Jewish Committee was founded in 1906. This is our 114th year. It was the first experiment in political advocacy here in the United States. And the focus at the time, Carly, was the pogroms in Eastern Europe, and the effort was to try and organise American Jewry to become a political voice, to encourage the US government to put pressure on the Russian government to stop the pogroms, and to end the discrimination and harassment against Jews.

That was the genesis of AJC, and in some respects, in the last 114 years, little has changed. Wherever Jews live, wherever Jews may be in danger, AJC seeks to be there to help as appropriate. And at the same time, you mentioned it in your introduction, and Wendy's, AJC also understood from a very early stage that the wellbeing of Jews is inextricably linked to the wellbeing of the larger societies in which Jews live. We cannot wall Jews off from others. So if countries, societies, governments respect all people, respect fundamental democratic values, equal protection under the law, then Jews will be safer. If not, Jews will not become an exception to the rule. And so that explains AJC then and now.

The only difference is that then it was literally a committee of just a few men at the time. Today

it's a global movement. We have nearly 2.5 million people in our social media community alone. We have 24 offices across the United States. We have 12 posts worldwide outside the United States and 37 partnerships with other Jewish communities. So it's gone from a small, if you will, elite group to an American and global mass movement.

- If I may say, currently led by a woman.

- Yes, yes.

- How kind.

- I hope our founders would be pleased.

- So I wanted to start off with a topic that's been in and out of the news for the last six months, but one that I know AJC has been working tirelessly on for decades, and that's Hezbollah and its position in Europe. So Germany announced earlier this year a ban on Hezbollah, and since then, Lebanon itself has had increased instability. And then the catastrophic explosion that really tore apart Beirut. And in fact on the front pages of Le Figaro online today is a letter to Macron on his way to Lebanon, urging for addressing the engagement with Hezbollah. And I understand that is an AJC led initiative. So I wanted you to reflect a little on why Hezbollah in Europe is so important and it's something that AJC's chosen to prioritise, but also what you see as the future for Lebanon.

- Sure. So I think it's certainly obvious to this audience that Hezbollah is a terrorist organisation. Its fingerprints are on many terror acts, not just in the Middle East, but in Europe, in Asia and Africa, and indeed in Latin America, including the two attacks in 1992 and 1994 in Buenos Aires against the Israeli embassy and then against the AMIA Jewish Community Centre building. So AJC has prioritised the issue of Hezbollah for decades, literally, and tried to encourage countries to acknowledge the truth of Hezbollah and list it as a terrorist organisation, and therefore ban its activities including fundraising.

But it's been an uphill battle, Carly, and I can take all 60 minutes of our around the world tour, which I will not, to talk about the politics of this. The good news, though, is that a number of countries, including of course the United States and Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, you mentioned most recently Germany, I would add Lithuania has followed Germany. There are now five Latin American countries, including Argentina, which have listed Hezbollah. And interestingly, the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and others have also designated Hezbollah a terror organisation.

The problem has been in Europe. Europe as a whole, the EU, Brussels. In 2013, we had our first kind of diplomatic breakthrough, and that followed the tragic Hezbollah attack in Bulgaria, which killed five Israeli tourists and one Bulgarian bus driver. And at more or less the same time, the arrest in Cypress of Hezbollah operatives that were sort of casing potential targets, because

many Israelis, as you know, visit Cypress. That forced the EU to confront the Hezbollah issue. But they took a half step, and that really was a concoction of the French. And the half step was to divide Hezbollah artificially into a political wing and a military wing, and to designate only the so-called military wing, but not the political wing. Now take any such group, ISIS, Al-Qaeda, the Nazi party, the Bolsheviks, whoever you wish, and try and apply the same principle of this bifurcation, meaning the political wing of Al-Qaeda is kosher, legal, and the military wing is not.

I mean, it's ridiculous on its face, but France has always had sort of special interest in Lebanon and neighbouring Syria and has always felt that it had sort of privileged understanding of the region. And it was therefore, as I said, at French behest that they created this artificial separation. In the last seven years, we've worked hard to try and overcome that. And again, the battleground is less in Brussels and more in Paris. We thought after recent developments in Lebanon that we might have a breakthrough.

It's not clear that we do, but as you said today in Le Figaro, which is one of France's two most influential newspapers, the other one being Le Monde, a group of very prominent former prime ministers, foreign ministers, intellectuals, and others, said very clearly to President Macron, it's time to designate Hezbollah in its entirety as the terror organisation. We'll see whether that changes the calculus here, Carly, we are determined to see this through to the end.

- So continuing with Germany, over the last several decades, and most recently under Merkel, Germany has become a key ally for both Israel and world Jewry. However, this week fascism quite literally tried to break down the doors of the Reichstag. And you know, those were three policemen trying to fight them off and not a lot else. So, where do you see Germany post Merkel, and are you concerned about these recent developments?

- Well, the moment you asked me as a Jew a question that begins, "Are you concerned," I don't wait for the end of the sentence. It's my DNA to be concerned. AJC has had a very unique relationship with Germany that actually goes back to 1949 and the establishment of the Federal Republic. And it was a very bold decision on the part of AJC when no other Jewish organisation in the world would touch post-war Germany that we had to engage Germany, not because we were eager to, but because Germany was simply too consequential. It would reemerge and how it reemerged mattered materially to the Jewish people.

So AJC began our post-war engagement in 1949. It continues through 2020. In fact, this year we had planned to have our global forum as we call it, which is our gala event that brings thousands of people together each year, we planned to have it in Berlin to mark the 75th anniversary of the war's end. And Angela Merkel herself was hosting it together with other German leaders. So Germany is a country that people simply can't write off, and that's implicit in your question. What's happening now in Germany is obviously of concern. The stakes are enormously high. And not only can we not walk away from it, not only can we not cynically say, well, that's Germany, what do you expect? We have to be in the fight.

And the fight, as you mentioned, is the reemergence of a strong, increasingly confident extreme right wing in Germany. But it's also a growing presence of, not Muslims per se, but jihadist Islamists within the growing Muslim population. And we have seen threatening events, anti-Semitic events from both corners, both from the extreme right wing, including, many of you will recall last Yom Kippur, the attack on the synagogue in Halle, where again, by the way, Carly, there was virtually no police protection.

The only thing that saved the 50 or 60 people inside the sanctuary was a very strong door that the terrorists could not penetrate. Had it not been for that door, we would be talking, I fear, about a very substantial death toll. And so we have this ongoing challenge with Germany, that Germany is so fearful of its own past, of its own sort of shadows, that it's very reluctant to use force, even when force, in our judgement, may be justified. In a way, many in Germany are afraid of themselves. So when they underestimate what happened a few days ago with the Coronavirus demonstration or at the Halle Synagogue, in many respects, it comes out of Germany's past, its fear of itself.

So we have to monitor Germany, we have to continue to engage with German leaders. And yes, Angela Merkel is expected to leave next year. And we'll see, I mean, we will see whether Christian Democrats continue to hold the reigns of power or whether people think it's time for a change, and we have to continue to hold Germany accountable. It's a massive task. But again, I stress, Germany is too important, too important to Europe, too important to Israel, too important to world Jewry, too important to the United States to simply sort of sit back on the sidelines and snicker and say, well, there's Germany being Germany again. Not good enough.

- So as we look to other parts of Europe, I wanted to talk about something that I haven't seen covered extensively in the American news, but as someone who still reads the BBC faithfully, I wanted to bring it up. So I wanted to talk about the situation facing the Jews in Belarus. And Belarus is described as Europe's last dictatorship. And the Jews, like the rest of the population, haven't escaped the recent clashes. Except the Jewish community don't attribute it to antisemitism. They are fearful of a militarist style policing system. What's your take on Belarus? And additionally, its central and Eastern European neighbours can't claim the same about antisemitism. And as we've seen over the last few years, there's also been a concerning rise in fascism there.

- Right, well, first of all, my maternal grandmother and grandfather come from Babruysk, which is a medium sized city in Belarus. So I've been watching Belarus for family reasons, not to mention professional reasons for a very long time. I come from a Russian speaking family. My mother was born in Moscow and spoke Russian at home with me. So this has been a part of the world that's very close to my heart. I think the observers are right in what you reported, that what's happened in Belarus to date is not specifically targeted at Jews.

And we don't have any information as yet that Jews as a community have somehow been singled out by the Lukashenko government. There may be individual Jews caught up, but the

sense we have is if they're in some way affected, it's because they've made a decision to join the protestors and therefore, like all the protestors, are vulnerable to whatever police response or excesses there may be. So the Jewish issue in Belarus has not been as prominent for us, neither now nor in recent years, as it has been in certain other countries in Europe, including certain neighbouring countries. And what's interesting, of course, is that Belarus is quite close to Russia. Many would say it's in a way a Russian satellite. And this brings up the question of Putin's own attitude towards Jews in Israel, which to the surprise of many, including myself, has been much more complicated than people might have thought.

And frankly, in some respects, much more, how shall I put this? Sympathetic. It's not a word normally associated with Vladimir Putin. I'm not one like President Bush who purported to look in his eyes and see his soul. I don't think there's much of a soul there other than the KGB soul, which sort of shaped the man who leads Russia today. But Putin has had this kind of unusual interest in, and if you will, connection to Jews, and yes, to Israel, and I think in some respects Lukashenko has reflected that as well. So is there a concern about growing anti-Semitism in central and Eastern Europe? Yes. In this case, does it largely draw from the extreme right? Yes. Does it draw upon sort of Neo-Nazi themed nostalgia? Yes, but I don't see it quite yet in Belarus itself, Carly.

- So we'll ask, given your comments on Putin, that you're careful with your food that you eat for the next few days. You should be safe in the Hamptons. So one of the initiatives that we don't hear that much about is the Greece, Cyprus, Israel recent agreements and the strategic importance of that access. So a lot of it has been around natural gas, but I know that those particular trio of countries and their increased relationship is proving particularly important, especially in light of perhaps steps by Turkey or others in the region to increase their aggression towards Israel. So I was hoping you could touch a little bit more on that trio and why you think the relationship is so strategically important.

- Well, first of all, if your Jewish viewers can accept some good news, 'cause I know some of us are genetically predisposed to always look for the troubling news, that worrying telegram, as the old joke goes. This is a good news story. It began in the 1980s. I can say that AJC was there at the beginning of the story. I had just joined AJC in 1979 as a staffer. And in the 1980s, Greece, Cypress and Israel, though neighbours in the Eastern Med, had very chilly relations. In fact, Greece was the last West European country to establish full de jure diplomatic relations with Israel. Hard to believe. And it did not come until 1990, forty two years after Israel was reborn in 1948. And Cyprus saw itself as one of the leaders of what was called, or is called, the Non-Aligned Movement, or the Group of 77. So it saw its destiny together with Arab Muslim majority countries and hands-off policy towards Israel.

We thought this was anomalous. We thought that if only these three countries could open themselves up to each other, they would discover enormous commonalities on every level. And we were lucky, Carly, because we had partners here, and the partners were leaders of the Hellenic community in the United States who saw the exact same thing. From the US, neither of

us understood why these three democracies in the Eastern Med were at odds with each other when they should be the closest of partners. That began to change in 1990. Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis, the father, actually of the current prime minister, broke the ice. Cyprus followed, and step by step over these last 30 years, the relationship has broadened and deepened.

It has survived different governments, including in Greece, far left governments, in the case of Cyprus, a communist president, and then social democratic and more conservative governments. So it stood the test of time, the relationships have become institutionalised, and all I can say on this phone call is for people who might be a bit cynical or sceptical and say, well, this all sounds very nice, but isn't this a bit of hype? What do Greece and Cyprus offer Israel other than good vacation destinations or some good olive oil or good music? The answer is a lot more. A lot more. A lot more in spheres that are far more sensitive, far more sensitive, but that are essential for Israel's security and wellbeing.

And if one sort of wants to probe more, and I don't mean to to tease here, just begin by asking the question, if you are the IDF, what is it that you need in light of the fact that Israel itself is such a small country, the size of, what, two-thirds the size of Belgium, or the size of New Jersey in American terms, what does Israel need, then? It needs space. So begin by sort of expanding one's imagination about the implications of that. And what we have today is what all three countries call a strategic triangle. Yes, it's about energy, it's importantly about energy. It's about much, much more, Carly, and our goal at AJC is not only to continue to deepen that relationship, but to expand it. And we have a few ideas on that front as well.

- So if we are using the "Eurovision Song Contest" as our map, all the way around.

- As long as you don't ask me to sing.

- No, controversially, because you might imagine this shouldn't be included in the "Eurovision Song Contest," I'm going to go to last year's host, Israel. So it's been a very busy week in the region, and I wanted to particularly focus on the last couple of days, the normalisation between Israel and the UAE, the formal cancellation of the boycott on Sunday, the landing of the plane Monday, and these pictures from The Louvre in Abu Dhabi where Israeli journalists, Israeli security figures, Israeli civil society broke bread, kosher, I might add, quite literally, with their UAE neighbours. And all the reports today indicate this is a very warm peace.

This isn't a standoffish leader to leader, we'll work to see what we can do, but it's an immediate embrace of ties. Now a lot of commentary has gone on and some of our guests would've listened to both Tony Blair and Ron Prosor last week. So I don't want to do a deep dive on the UAE itself, but I wanted to ask why do you think the UAE was the first to step forwards when indications were that Oman or Bahrain would've been more likely candidates until six months ago? And what do you see as the practical steps in the year ahead?

- Well, I did not hear what my dear friend Ron Prosor said. I would've loved to hear it, nor did I hear what Tony Blair, from my great admiration, said. But just to frame my answer, I mean, I have to say that this is a historic, I mean, I've written several op-eds on the subject in European papers. I've called this both historic and transformational. This is not, again, as the cynics or sceptics would like to suggest, this is not less than meets the eye. This is much more than meets the eye, I believe. And first of all, it breaks the negotiating paradigm.

The conventional wisdom over the years, Carly, was that unless and until the Palestinian issue was solved, no Arab government other than the bordering countries would dare to make peace with Israel. If Egypt and Jordan did, it was because they had claims for territory that resulted from earlier wars. In the case of the UAE, there were no claims, there were no borders, so this is transformational. Did it surprise us that the UAE was the first out of the box? Actually, no. We've been travelling to the UAE now for 25 years. I've lost count of the number of times we've been to Abu Dhabi and Dubai, but we've been going at the rate of one, two, three times a year. Most recently in June, we hosted the minister of state of the UAE, Minister Gargash, who actually was the minister who received the Israeli delegation on the tarmac yesterday.

And he spoke publicly to the AJC Global Forum, which should have been in Berlin, but instead became a virtual global forum. And that was considered a breakthrough as well. In fact, Alarbiya, the leading Arab media site, had a long piece that described the eight steps leading to the announcement on August the 13th. And one of the eight steps was Minister Gargash's public speech to the AJC Global Forum. So no, it did not surprise us because the UAE was becoming increasingly open in its engagement with Israel, number one. Number two, the Jewish community of the UAE, for whom we had worked for years to try and get them sort of public recognition, has in fact become official. It's no longer clandestine, it's no longer meeting for Shabbat quietly behind closed doors. It's now open, there is now a chief rabbi who travels from New York every month to be with the community.

And in fact, in Abu Dhabi, as some of your viewers may know, there's now under construction, at the Abrahamic Centre, of a synagogue next to a mosque, next to a church. All of this is being done by the UAE to convey a sense of, I hate to use the word tolerance, because I think it sets the bar too low, Carly, but a sense of respect for a new Middle East, a new set of relations between the UAE and other countries and other faith communities. So, no, I'm not surprised. I think the countries you mentioned are good candidates to be number two and three. Oman, because among other things, it hosted Prime Minister Netanyahu openly for a visit that he made to Muscat. Bahrain, because the relations with Israel have been very good, very warm. And by the way, on every single trip that we've taken to the UAE over the last 25 years, we have also travelled to Oman and to Bahrain.

So those three countries, to me, seem the leading candidates, a lot of attention on Saudi Arabia, perhaps down the road, and a lot of attention in North Africa, to both Morocco, and to, interestingly, Sudan. We met with the prime minister of Sudan quietly last September on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York. There is a new transitional government in

Sudan. This is not the government of Darfur, this is a very different government. So we think there are lots of opportunities here as far as the potential between the UAE and Israel, I would argue, as some of the buildings in the UAE suggest, the sky is the limit. And I mean that quite literally. This is a warm peace, as you said.

This is totally different than Egyptian and Jordanian peace treaties. This is a peace, not just at the 30,000 foot level of 10 UAE leaders with 10 Israeli leaders. This is a peace that you can already see as kind of trickling down to the street. It's fundamentally different, and therefore I think it holds great promise, and the more it succeeds, I think the more other countries will want to get on board.

- Ross Creel joined us a few weeks ago as a guest,

- Okay.

- And he spoke incredibly warmly of the support he's had from AJC and your colleague Jason. And I know that for the Jewish community there, I think without the help of AJC, we wouldn't be looking at such a successful and blossoming community. So at the risk of giving everyone indigestion.

- But Carly, just one second. I'm not sure that when Ross's wife began her kosher catering business, I'm not sure that she kind of visualised a couple of years ago that it really might take off in a very major way, and it has.

- And it seems that the Emiratis are looking to learn more about Jewish food. So, she seems to be off to quite a successful new business there. And at the risk of giving the Jews on the call indigestion with another optimistic story, I wanted to talk about the groundbreaking delegation to Auschwitz in January of this year with the Secretary General of the Muslim World League and the 62 member Muslim delegation that joined him, which you led, all of which was an incredibly positive sign and a real signal that perhaps there could be a change in the conversation about the Holocaust that generally takes place across the Muslim world. So could you tell us a little bit more about that delegation and how it came to take place, and what you see for the future of that?

- So we began meeting quietly with the Secretary General Dr. Muhammad al Issa, who I need to note here is headquartered in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, who is appointed by the king of Saudi Arabia. This is described as the most influential Sunni Muslim organisation in the world. And he was interested in exploring interfaith dialogue. And AJC has been in the interfaith trenches for decades. And we began meeting with him and he wanted to deepen the cooperation. And in April of two thousand and, losing track here, 19, we actually signed a memorandum of understanding publicly in front of the world's media, including the Arab media, an MOU between the Muslim World League headquartered in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and the American Jewish Committee.

And the first of the provisions in that MOU was a joint trip to Auschwitz in January of 2020 to mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the death camp. And true to his word, Dr. al Issa agreed to go and asked whether he can invite prominent Muslim leaders from around the world. And indeed, as you said, he invited 62 Muslim leaders, many of them from countries that have no official relations with the state of Israel either. And so we travelled together, the AJC delegation and the Muslim World League delegation to Auschwitz on January the 23rd. And I have to tell you, Carly, and at this stage of my life, I've seen a lot. I've been in the trenches since 1975. I began in the Soviet Union, not with, but in the Soviet Union, with Soviet Jews.

And I will tell you that in the last 45 years, I have rarely been as powerfully moved as I was during this visit to Auschwitz. And I remember most vividly that we were walking into the exhibit, some of you will have seen it, of children's shoes, of the shoes of inmates. And at that point, Dr. al Issa sort of stared and he just couldn't let go of the scene. And then he grabbed my left hand with his right hand and he just held it and he squeezed it. And I could just feel sort of through his arm into my arm, the emotion. I'm not sure, Carly, that prior to this visit, he or any of his colleagues had any real understanding.

They knew they needed to go. But my goodness, as you sort of hinted, in much of the Muslim world, the Holocaust is downplayed, it's diminished, it's denied. So how much of that might have worn off on some of them, I don't know, but I'm sure something. But then all of a sudden there he was staring at the shoes, staring at the suitcases, staring at the eyeglasses, staring at the hair, looking at the barracks, seeing the remnants of the crematoria. And whatever any of them may have thought, did AJC come the day before to kind of put this all up in a kind of Hollywood like scenario? It was so overwhelming that before we left and we went from Auschwitz to Birkenau, the Muslim delegation took out their prayer rugs and they offered a memorial service within feet of the remnants of the crematoria at Birkenau.

And it was captured on all the world's media. The New York Times had a couple of major stories on this visit. Why was it so important? Because first, it was the highest level Muslim delegation ever to visit a death camp, ever. And secondly, because the Holocaust, again, has been such a problematic issue within the Muslim world and its relationship to Jews, to Israel, and for this group to come, to see it, to attest to it. And my final memory, that night, we all travelled to Warsaw and the next day we spent the day together in Warsaw.

We went to the POLIN Museum of the history of Polish Jews, and we went to the synagogue, Carly. I don't think the synagogue in Warsaw had ever had a Muslim leader from Mecca, Saudi Arabia, speaking on the eve of Shabbat. And among the things he said, and I'm paraphrasing, was, "Anyone today who denies the reality of the Holocaust is a modern day Nazi." Now to have Dr. Muhammad al Issa, the Secretary General of the Muslim World League, appointed by the king of Saudi Arabia, say that publicly in front of the media, an hour before Shabbat began in a synagogue in Warsaw, Poland, was one of the more memorable moments in my life. And yes, it gave me some reason to believe that things can improve, can change for the better.

- I can't imagine what that must have been like. But I'd like to, before we leave the region, touch on Iran. So today, Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia commented that they stood by the Iran deal despite pressure from the US and despite the fact that in June the IAEA reported that the uranium stockpiles in Iran were eight times the limit in the agreement. So how do you assess where we are with the Iran deal, and what do you think the Iran deal might look like after November, depending on the US president.

- You tell me the outcome November.

- I couldn't possibly comment.

- Look, first of all, I think to be fair, we have to separate Russia and China from Britain, France, and Germany. I know they were on the same side on this issue. But nonetheless, they're two different blocs. In the case of Russian and China, it's obvious to anyone that they are carrying the water. I can make a bad pun and say carrying the heavy water, not the heavy lifting, but the heavy water, for Iran. They're also eager to sell weapons. We know about the draught deal between Iran and China that's valued at up to \$400 billion with a B dollars over the next number of years. So their interest is quite obvious.

They're looking for strategic advantage in the region, that they're looking to create still more challenges for the United States, that's obvious. Less obvious are Britain, France, and Germany. And by extension, the EU Secretariat, which was also part of the negotiation. I have to say, mindful of your accent, Carly, that most surprising here from me has been the posture of the British. I get that the Europeans have convinced themselves already in 2015 and to this day that they struck the best possible deal, and therefore they have a kind of political, diplomatic and psychological investment in preserving and protecting the deal and convincing themselves and others that it was a good deal, that it was not Munich 1938, it was not appeasement.

But I think so much of the evidence points in the opposite direction, that Iran has snookered the signatories of the deal. Iran never really had any serious attention of abandoning forever its WMD appetite, not at all. Iran never had any intention of moderating its regional behaviour, of ending its support for terrorism. And I have to say here, let me insert this, because I was there personally. I sat in the offices of Secretary of State John Kerry in intimate meetings with him and with the others leading this effort in 2015. And they assured us, me, that this was not just a transactional deal, this was a transformational deal, that this would strengthen the so-called moderates in Iran. That the money that would flow back to Iran would go for infrastructure delayed projects.

That they had created a kind of airtight narrative of their own, and they believed it. We did not, which is why we opposed the deal when it was announced in July of 2015. Nothing in our calculus had changed. Let me be clear, while the Obama administration tried to present this as a binary choice, either war with Iran or the deal, we never saw it that way. No one that I know

wants war with Iran, no one. But from our perspective, we were in an incredibly strong position then with the power of the sanctions and with the declining price of oil, which was central to Iran's budget planning. And we played a strong hand weekly. And Iran, with its weak hand, played its hand brilliantly.

I regret to say that if I were the dean of Harvard Business School, I would probably want to teach Iranian negotiating tactics as a case study in how to play a weak hand strongly. So I'm not sure now when the British, the French, and the Germans abstain at the UN Security Council because they dislike Donald Trump, they dislike American policy, they dislike the fact that he upended the deal, including their deal. Does that put them in position on October the 18th of agreeing to end the arms embargo, which by the way was one of the weaknesses of the deal. It's hardly imaginable that five years after the signature on the deal that Iran will legally be able to buy and sell conventional weapons on the open market.

Turkey is thrilled, Venezuela is thrilled, Syria is thrilled, North Korea must be ecstatic. Will the Europeans really go along with this? So if Donald Trump is reelected, more of the same, maximum pressure, and Iran, at least in the eyes of Donald Trump may have to reconsider its kind of brinkmanship because right now many believe that Iran is counting on a Democratic victory. And if there is a Democratic victory in November, Iran believes that the Democrats will want to go back into the deal because it was their deal. Because Joe Biden was vice president during that time. Whether Joe Biden, if he is elected, will go back into the deal as it was written, remains to be seen, though.

Too much has happened, Carly, in the last five years to simply go back into the deal. The arms embargo is ending. As I said, Iran's fingerprints from Yemen to Iraq, to Syria, to Lebanon, to far beyond, to Gaza, are all too evident to simply walk back into a deal which has proved flawed. So my hope is that if Joe Biden wins, he will seek to renegotiate the deal and he will do so from a position of strength and not weakness. If Donald Trump wins, my hope is that he will be able to expand the coalition. And by the way, I need to correct one thing, if I may, that you said earlier. Not correct, but edit. The United States is not alone.

The United States has the support of the Gulf Cooperation Council, of the six key Arab countries that are literally Iran's neighbours across the water. And of course it has the support of Israel. So one might argue that the countries closest to Iran are the countries that are most sceptical of the deal. The countries that are further from Iran and believe they can manage Iran from Brussels or Paris or Berlin or London, take a different point of view. But our hope is that if Donald Trump should win, and we're nonpartisan, we stay out of elections per se, that he will be able to persuade our European partners to join him, perhaps compromising a bit in order to ensure unanimity. But the last thing we should want, Carly, is for Iran to split the West. That they have Russia and China in their corner is a different story, but splitting the West does not help us, it helps Iran.

- So you made reference a few times to, are we in 1938? And that draws me to your article this

week in the Times of Israel, which you titled "Abuse of History." And you specifically talked about Donald Trump's foes making comparisons to the Soviet Union, but also about the increased reference to Nazi slogans that's going on around Covid rules and mask wearing. For those who haven't had a chance to read your article and also for those watching what's going on in the US with great concern, I was hoping you could elaborate a little bit more about those abuses you referenced.

- Well, with pleasure, in a manner of speaking, I'm a lifelong student of history. I'm not original, but I'm a lifelong product of history. In my case, as some on this call might know, I mentioned my mother was born in Moscow. My mother and her family were refugees from Stalin. They came to France, they lived in France for 11 years until 1940 when the Nazis penetrated the impenetrable Maginot Line, and by June, occupied France together with their Vichy partners. My father escaped Austria, fought during the war, was imprisoned for three years in a Vichy camp with a special regime, as a Jew. Escaped on his second try, served in the OSS, the American espionage services, behind enemy lines during the last two years of the war, and then was brought to America by the OSS to help found the CIA. So history for me is lived, it's not just studied, it's not just majoring in history.

I grew up in a family where Russian, German, and French were all spoken often in the same sentence. It was a bit confusing until I can sort these things out. I'm still trying. But it was tough going in the early days. But that's the family I grew up in. That's the media I grew up in. I grew up with survivors of the Bolsheviks and survivors of the Nazis. I went to the Soviet Union in 1974 on a US Soviet government exchange. It was one of the early products of detente. I was one of six Americans sent to the Soviet Union to teach. I taught, I was also detained by the Soviet authorities after several months, held for three days and two nights, and then expelled to Helsinki, Finland because of my involvement with Jews. And all my life, I've been engaged in one way or another with the Holocaust, with its legacy, with its survivors, with its eyewitnesses, with its rescuers, with the integrity of Holocaust memory.

And now what I see in this admittedly heated, polarised political environment that we have here in the United States, but not only, but here in the United States, I see this kind of hyperbole. Now, unlike the British, Americans have PhDs in hyperbole to begin with. So we already start with the fact that when we play a baseball championship, it's not enough that it's an American championship. It has to be called the World Series. So we begin from a very high base of hyperbole. But now in this sort of fraught political environment, hyperbole is being taken to new levels. So every sort of infringement on one's rights, the need to wear a mask, for example, in public, or the need to home shelter, or to perhaps close one's business or limit the opening of one's business can now be depicted in Nazi like terms, that those who tell me to do this, and they're often governors and mayors, many of whom, by the way, are Democrats, that they are by definition reflecting the Gestapo, the wishes of Hitler, that this is the next Auschwitz, that we are now living with the restrictions of say, the Warsaw ghetto.

And again, as a child of survivors, I simply can't accept this, this kind of demeaning of language,

this dilution of language, of its meaning, of what history means. And now, most recently I saw a prominent retired American diplomat who said, I spent my early years in the foreign service working in Moscow, and now I see what I saw in Moscow here in the United States. Now again, I'm not taking a position for or against Joe Biden or Donald Trump. We're strictly nonpartisan. And I'm fiercely nonpartisan, but I can't sit idly by while people now dilute history. I know something about the Soviet Union, I lived there. I was in the hands of a KGB.

As I said, I was expelled after being detained. I speak Russian. I worked after my expulsion for several years in Rome and Vienna, with thousands of mostly Jews who fled the Soviet Union, who fled that workers' paradise. So I know something about what the history of Nazi Germany means and what the history of Soviet communism means, and whatever one thinks about the United States and whatever one thinks about Democrats or Republicans or this or that regulation or stricture, we're not doing anyone a service, much less the millions of people who were murdered by both regimes, by making these kind of cheap analogies to both. The English language is rich enough to be able to find the right words to describe our situation, whatever side of the spectrum you may be on, Carly, without resorting to comparisons with the communist Soviet Union or with Nazi Germany.

- So continuing in that vein of the nuance and spirit of language, since Black Lives Matter took shape in 2013 to protest police killings of African-Americans, Jewish groups have struggled to strike the right tone in their response. Much has centred around the spirit of the movement versus the official organisation and the accusations of antisemitism against it. So how do you and AJC navigate that tension?

- Well, for us, the issue did not start in 2013 or anywhere close. It actually started over a hundred years earlier. AJC, as I tried to describe it in the beginning, understood that in order for us to secure the rights of Jews, we needed to work for the rights of all people in democratic societies. And that included early on African Americans. And one of the things I'm most proud of, though I was only a teenager at the time, was that in 1965, AJC honoured Dr. Martin Luther King with our highest award. And he used that occasion, and we have it on audio, to praise AJC for the fact that, in his words, "When few dare to speak," quote unquote, AJC was already active on behalf of the civil rights, the human rights, the equal protections under the law of African Americans in this country.

And by the way, I would add, Carly, at a time when Jews themselves were socially on the outs. We were not part of the WASP establishment, we were not part of the Mayflower establishment, far from it. So AJC has been involved in the civil rights struggle for well over a hundred years. We've been connected to every major legislative, judicial milestone in that struggle, including, I would note, arguably the single most important case of the US Supreme Court, in 1954, the Brown versus Board of Education decision, the nine to zero decision, which said that separate but equal is separate and unequal.

So fast forward to today, we're announcing this week that we are partnering with the National

Urban League, one of the preeminent African American civil rights organisations in the country, to have a Black Jewish unity week, the week of September 7th. And that entire week will be devoted to a lot of public programming, nationally, regionally, to bring Blacks and Jews together, and especially to educate younger Jews and younger Blacks about the common history. So the Black Lives Matter issue for us is a piece of the story, it's not the story itself. Some kind of have woken up only in recent weeks, months, years, and think this is the story.

The story is much deeper, it's much wider. And AJC is continuing to be very centrally involved in the search for equal rights, equal justice and equal protection under the law for African Americans and for all Americans.

- So coming from the UK, over the last decade or so, we often described our Labour party as a warning for the future of where your Democratic party could end up if we weren't careful. Now, I'm delighted to say that under the leadership of Keir Starmer in the UK, the Labour Party is making real changes. But I wondered if you could assess the health, as it were, of the Democratic party with regards to both Israel and the Jewish community.

- Well, I think there's good news here again, and there's some concerning news. The good news is that the worst sort of possibilities for 2020 did not materialise. The fear that essentially overnight the Democratic Party would Corbyn-ize did not happen. Again, I speak as a nonpartisan, but no one can accuse Joe Biden of coming from the, if you will, Corbyn-like wing of the Democratic Party. He's been in American politics for half a century. He's well known to many of us as a senator, as a vice president. He comes from the mainstream of the party and he's largely surrounded himself with other very familiar, and if you will, comforting mainstream figures.

So I think that the fear that the party would be, if you will, kidnapped, as Corbyn kidnapped the party for reasons that this audience knows well, and I don't need to explain, hasn't happened. And I think that's also been reflected in the platform. For the non-Americans on this call, each party in election years adopts a platform which essentially states what its views are on a range of issues, including foreign policy and including the US-Israel relationship. Again, there was great fear that the party platform this year might be changed by so-called Progressive or left-wing Democrats. It wasn't. The mainstream fought back. Joe Biden took a personal interest, and the language of the Democratic Party platform is very familiar, and I think to most people would be quite reassuring.

The concerning news is what's happening on the ground. And what's happening on the ground is that in the current climate in the United States, for a variety of reasons, the momentum seems to be with the left wing of the party, the sense that certain younger members of Congress who have challenged the mainstream of the party have the wind behind their backs. To give you one illustration, one congresswoman from New York, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, now has more than 8 million followers on Twitter alone. I'm not counting TikTok or Instagram or Facebook. She has more followers on Twitter than any member of the United States Congress, including people like

Nancy Pelosi, the speaker, who've been there for decades.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has been there for less than two years. And so there's concern, I mean, some of the younger people like Ilhan Omar from Minnesota got a lot of attention because of tweets that many asserted were anti-Semitic. Rashida Tlaib of Michigan got a lot of attention for opposing a two-state agreement and instead supporting a one-state agreement and referring to Israel as the apartheid state. There may be two or three people of that ilk who may join the group in Congress after the next elections. But I think that the centre of gravity and the Democratic party is still with the establishment. Last point, Carly, having said that, the establishment is not looking over its right shoulder, it's looking over its left shoulder.

And the question is, if there's this kulturkampf, if there's this cultural war inside the Democratic party with kind of Bernie Sanders as the titular head of the left wing of the party and Joe Biden as the, not that titular, but the actual head of the mainstream of the party, let's not get too carried away by sort of images of camaraderie between now and November 3rd. The goal between now and November 3rd for them, of course, obviously understandably, is to defeat Donald Trump. That's what the Democratic party wants to do.

But I don't underestimate for a moment that on November 4th and fifth and sixth and throughout the coming months and years thereafter, the culture war inside the party will continue, and how it plays out will have profound implications, obviously for the party itself, for American politics, and yes, for the Jewish and certainly the pro-Israel communities. Now, having said all of this, your question was about the Democrats. I don't want to suggest that there aren't issues afoot in the Republican party. We may or may not have time to discuss them, but I don't want to leave this audience with the belief that we don't have challenges in the Republican party as well. We have significant challenges. They're different challenges, but there's significant challenges, and they've taken the party quite far from sort of, if you will, your grandparents' traditional Republican party.

- I hasten to add, it wasn't my grandparents' traditional Republican party. So to quote your old friend, Shimon Peres, who aptly titled you the Foreign Minister of the Jews, and I think our audience can all see why. He also said that optimists and pessimists die the exact same death, but they live different lives. So for two Jews in conversation, I think we've done surprisingly well to have a lot of optimism in our discussion. So thank you very much for clinging on tightly as we went around the world pretty much in 60 minutes. And I'm going to hand back over to Wendy.

- David, Carly, thank you. You were absolutely brilliant. David, thank you for that insightful hour. With the seismic global developments and surging antisemitism, there is much to concern global Jewry. However, as we touched on today, there is also reason for optimism. Waking up on Sunday morning to see the formal ending of the Israel boycott in UAE was a day many dreamt of for our grandchildren. Never did we imagine we would get to see the first LR flight landing into Dubai as we did yesterday. Thank you to you and all your team for your continued perseverance and discreet efforts to achieve this.

I encourage all our listeners today to visit the AJC, the American Jewish Committee website, to learn more about your fantastic Zoom series. The Advocacy Anywhere programme has been second to none and given us all access to world renowned thought leaders, politicians, and civil society figures. This series is always tackling the most topical questions. All of world Jewry owes you, David, a tremendous debt of gratitude for being our foreign minister. This October, we will all be coming together around the world to celebrate your 30th anniversary, your tireless dedication advocating for strengthening Israel's place in the community of nations has born fruit in every corner of the world. Today we only heard a tiny snapshot. David, thank you once again. Thank you to Carly and to Shauna, and for all of you who joined us today, I want to say thank you and good day and goodnight. Thank you, David.

- And thank you, Wendy. It was a great privilege and pleasure. Good night, goodbye everyone.

- Bye-bye. Thank you.