

# Transcript

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My name is Reihan Ismail. I'm a professor of contemporary Islamic studies at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. I'm also a fellow of Saint Anthony's, so welcome everyone to our panel discussion we have.

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Amazing speakers, so I'm very excited to say that this panel discussion will look at the axis of resistance.

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And before that, perhaps the phrase.

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Emerged as a counter narrative to President George Bush's access of evil, which he introduced in 2002, referring to Iran, Iraq and North Korea.

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In response, the same year a Libyan newspaper published an article titled Access of Evil or Axis of Resistance. So the article argued that the common denominator among Iran, Iraq,

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And North Korea was their resistance.

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Through the US and building on this perspective, the Iranian newspaper, also one of the Iranian newspapers, adopted the term in 2004. Over time, axis of resistance became.

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A catch phrase symbolising opposition to us and Israel's influence.

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In the region, so we have, you know, 3 speakers today who will be looking or will be talking about resistance and the axis of resistance. So Yasmin will probably, you know, we've already decided that we will start with Doctor Kamran Mateen.

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And Doctor Mateen will be looking at Iran. Doctor Mateen is a reader in international relations at the University of Sussex, specialising in historical sociology international theory.

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Nationalism and Iran and Kurdish politics and history.

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His current research focus focuses on the theory of uneven and combined development.

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Nations and nationalism and non western colonialism. So he's in as the author. Or is the author of Queer Identities in migration Iranian journeys which is published or soon to be published by Bristol University Press?

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We're coming, yeah.

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Initially our second speaker.

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Is Yasmin Aryani and she will be looking at one of the members of the Axis, the Houthi movement. Yasmin is a P HD candidate.

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At Tampere Peace Research Institute, specialising in conflict resolution and peace mediation, she also serves as the director, executive Director for knowledge production.

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At the Sonat Centre for Strategic Studies and she's working on a number of research.

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X and I'm very, very excited to have both of them excellent speakers and initially as you've seen advertised, we were going to have doctor Amel Sad, who was going to look at Hezbollah, but unfortunately she's unwell.

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And then I thought when we talk about resistance and the axis of resistance, we are referring to state and powerful non state actors.

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And yet NTU, as an anti Israeli sentiment, especially following Israel's war on Gaza.

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Captures grassroots activism in Muslim societies.

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And these are hidden forms of resistance, not led by the state.

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Not led by a powerful non state actors.

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Engaging BDS against what they view us hegemony and Israel's genocide in Gaza.

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And like a champion, the brilliant professor Neil Keckley stepped in last late yesterday afternoon and agreed to deliver a presentation. So I feel so fortunate that Neil has agreed to deliver a presentation on that. I think it's very, very exciting, particularly when we're looking at the subject that he'll be covering.

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Anne is a professor of politics in the Department of Politics and International Relations and also a Fellow of Saint Anthony's College and without further delay, I now invite Doctor Mateen to.

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Present. Thank you.

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Hi everyone. Thank you for being here. Thank you, Ryan, for this very generous introduction and also for inviting me. Thanks to Mariam as well as well as Middle East centre generally.

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For for having this event it's it's my privilege and pleasure to be here.

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My talk.

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Is supposed to be about Iran, but I will say a few more general words about the access before I'm moving on to to Iran in particular.

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So as you know.

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How much time do I have?

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So the axis consists of a diverse groups which are bound loosely by their historical marginalisation within the societies in which they have been operative. Apart from Iran as a state itself.

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And despite what sometimes it's thought, what binds them is not sectarian affinity. As you know, Hamas is a Sunni organisation.

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Iran is a sheer state who sees followers ID creed of Chism.

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Assad regime, before its fall, you know, they follow the Alabi Creed and these are not necessarily very close to each other at all. So it's not so much the sectarian bond which is binding the the members of the axis.

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It's as far as the non state actors are concerned. As I mentioned, historically until recently, at least in the case of Iraq, it was in.

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But after 2003, but before that, these groups representing communities which were politically.

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Marginalised and economically, also highly underprivileged.

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And for this reason.

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They were revisionist groups from the start, a revisionist both domestically and precisely because they were domestically revisionist actors trying to change the socio political order within the countries in which they were based. They also came into collision.

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With prevailing Western backed order in the region, which is why they also gravitated towards Iran Post revolution because Iranian.

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Islamic Republic of Iran, following 1979 itself was a major revolutionary and revisionist state in the region.

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So it is more their common sorts of hostility or attempt to change the existing order that brings them together. Then either ideology or or sectarian connections.

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So.

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The axis, as you know, doesn't have or didn't have any formal hierarchy. There is no central command as such. There is coordination. There is discussion and so on.

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But there isn't a unified sort of structure.

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And that's why Iran's role, which I'm going to talk about a bit more, is crucial because Iran acted as the strategic nodal point.

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Know creating the connection and communication between different elements.

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Of the axis.

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But you might ask why Iran is invested in the so-called access. Of course, Iran's.

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For Palestinian cause as well As for Hezbollah in Lebanon, goes before the rise of axis in the formal sense of the.

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And the reason for this is I think 3-4. It's ideological to the extent that Israel.

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Revolutionaries in Iran define themselves in a position to a state which was Pro West and Pro Israel, namely the Pahlavi regime which was toppled by the by the.

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By the revolution and of course, revolution took place in the same year, closely following the Cantevite settlement between Egypt and Israel, and therefore it made perfect sense for the for the Islamic Republic and and its leaders to to distinguish themselves from.

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Basically enemy enemy.

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And this created what I would describe as a path dependency because this ideological element was promoted so much that it makes it quite difficult for Iran to simply, you know, abandoned that kind of position which it adopted against.

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Israel and in support of Palestine there is also a geostrategic element which I think is probably the most crucial one, which is, to the extent that the Iranian regime after revolution, was fundamentally opposed.

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To western interests in the region.

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And to the extent that Iran before and after evolution had aspiration of a hegemonic power in the region, and we all know about the story of British withdrawing Iran kind of becoming the the policeman of of, of the Gulf, and so on and so forth.

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So to the extent that Iran did not have.

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Capacity to to to.

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Enter into a direct conflict with the US or Israel.

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It developed this asymmetric form of deterrence, relying on Allied forces across the region and with the development of Iran's nuclear project. This became even more important because, in the absence of access to latest weapons and technology which the previous regime had.

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Because it was part of the Western Alliance, it had to come up with innovative.

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Measures to to to create that deterrence, which it did partly through a missile project, a legacy of ilania raqour which probably we don't have to discuss here, but the other element was was the the axis.

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But there is also a domestic aspect which I don't think is sufficiently covered in the discussions in the media about Iran, and that is the fact that.

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The Islamic Republic, increasingly and especially from mid 90s onwards, I would say, suffers from a chronic legitimacy deficiency within the Iranian society.

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And to the extent that it deals with descents through coercion and violence, actually having a sort of chronic form of crisis externally present justifies and enables the Iranian regime to to suppress it's it's opposition groups.

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With, with, with sheer violence and.

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This reached a point that in 2009, protests following the the elections which were disputed by the then one of the candidates, Mayor Hossein Mousavi. People, came up with this a slogan which is quite uncomfortable for many people to hear, which was.

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Neither Gaza nor Lebanon I will die for Iran.

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And this was not so much an opposition, obviously, to Palestinian cause, but it was.

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Protest against what they perceive to be Iran's over investment elsewhere, where internally there was.

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Various chronic problems. So Iran therefore had an interest in maintaining the access as it existed before October 7th. But the events of October 7th obviously transformed this equation.

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I mean to start with that lack of unified command meant that Hamas did not consult any of the other Members and therefore Iran and other elements within the Axis were unprepared as to how to react to to the occasion. And in fact, because they they hesitated in fully committing.

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To to the war which had just begun, they were put in a back foot very quickly by the Israeli army.

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So.

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And the rest is very recent. You all know, I mean, the military capacity of Hezbollah has been severely diminished. Same with Hamas.

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And Assad regime fell only.

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I'm also so go a couple of months.



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So what does this mean? Therefore, for Iran, I think before moving to Iran specifically, I think.

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It's a mistake to believe that simply because Iran is unable to supply its allies logistically because of the land route being cut off following the Assad's fall, somehow this group simply disappear. Because, as I mentioned, they these groups began not so much as creation of Iran.

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They they came out organically from wherever they were.

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And I think in some ways.

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In the medium and longer run, it might be actually in their interest to have less structural connection to Iranian to Islamic Republic because they will be forced into socialisation, into domestic politics, representing their communities.

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Playing the political game, which is there, you know, free from the contingencies and requirements of Iranian geostrategic interests that might take time, but it's not impossible. And I think Lebanon in particular is very.

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Very light for that kind of change in orientation of Hezbollah.

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Now in terms of Iran, well, I just mentioned that, you know, Iran no longer is able to supply Hezbollah with with weapons. And, you know, the absence of a friendly Syrian regime.

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Has massive implications for its actual military strategy in, viz. A via the United States and Israel.

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It also means that political space for Iran's rivals in the region is widened so Saudis and others in Lebanon and elsewhere can in exert more influence in in domestic politics in a way that.

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Previously, Hezbollah's military power would limit.

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But the.

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The weakening of the axis and especially the fall off the BAS regime in Syria has created divisions within the Iranian establishment itself because there is, you know, very sometimes angry debates about why did it happen.

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You know, why couldn't we save?

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Help our allies.

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There are those who believe.

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The reformist elements within the state have hesitated in providing enough support and so on, and those who.

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Those who like Supreme leader himself, who actually came.

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On TV and said, well, we couldn't, we couldn't supply because the route was cut off by Americans and Israelis. Now that was a kind of double edged sword because to admit that.

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Iran could not actually, you know, transfer what was whatever was needed to to its allies was admission to weakness, something which Iran historically really averse to, to admit.

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And I think this is.

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To this debate is bound to continue within within Iranian different factions within Iran.

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Umm, So what next? Therefore, for Iran, especially following the Trump second term?

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Prediction in politics is extremely risky. As you all know. But.

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I think I can think of three scenarios. 1 is that Iran?

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Does not reach any understanding or settlement with the United States over its nuclear project and in the absence of access of resistance to act as one of its leverages, this is.

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Quite costly for it and this might lead.

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Either to intensification of the current sanctions and therefore an internal implosion because of socioeconomic crises, which is already there, or because the lack of a deal means military.

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Attack by Israel or by us, or by both.

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Them in both cases there is a possibility of regime collapse.

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But there are also serious challenges to this scenario 1 is that the Iranian opposition is very weak and divided, and of course the regime is actively trying to deepen these divisions.

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The United States is not interested in overseas wars, you know Trump. Isolationism is not something which is compatible with with a major large scale war with Iran. And there's a limit to political achievements through simply bombing from the air as.

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Various experiences in world history show and of course, and of course the.

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The regime itself has has.

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No scruples in using violence against potential protests in Iran, so the second scenario would be a deal with the United States with Trump.

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And this would amount to a sort of Fermi Dorian moment in Iranian revolution. As you might know.

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It's said in the literature that all revolutionary states tend to socialise into international order following a period of time. Their radicalism is diluted and they they begin to play by the rules of the game, which is designed elsewhere.

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Well, in Iran, it hasn't happened so far, but if it if they reach a deal with Trump of some kind, I think this will lead boundary to some sort of metamorphosis of the Islamic Republic as we know it.

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Because the way in which the entire identity of the state is defined over the last four decades and a half in terms of this opposition to Israel, opposition to the United States and no retreat and so on.

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So forth.

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Is is very very difficult to to retreat from without a major change within the regime. One possibility is that the supreme leader.

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Dies or naturally or unnaturally, and that allows for a new leader who can.

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Claim that he is opening a new chapter and all the problems which existed was because of the previous leadership and you may not believe it, but even his own son is implying stuff to the extent of the supreme leader mujahahm.

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Whose supporters have come into Iranian media implying that existing problems can be solved if someone like him is succeeding his father.

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And.

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So that's metamorphosis is possible and it's.

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Think the difficulty for that scenario is that the factions within the Islamic Republic are quite.

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Incompatible in many ways. Unlike unlike 80s, when Harmony was easily selected or elected to succeed. Khomeini these days there are so many claimants to the leadership because the existing.

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Figures all believe, probably justifiably, that they have the same theological and political.

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Kind of scales and progress and resources, so nobody is.

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Withdrawing from the race if you like easily and they are all connected, how many? 2 minutes? So that's also a problem. The final scenario I can think of is is a de facto deal in the sense that if Iranian nuclear project is somehow pacified, today's satisfaction of Israel and the United States.

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Then actually there are dynamics which would reduce the current tension between Iran and Israel, and the main reason is Syria, I would say because the rise of a Sunni dominated state very close to Turkey.

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Which has its own Neo Ottoman expansionism in motion for for.

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1520 years poses a potentially even larger threat to Israel, and that we know already that I mean Israel.

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Is quite worried about what you know, Jihadi and others might do in the longer run, so I it it might sound weird, but Iran and Israel actually both benefit from a.

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Syrian state.

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Which is dominated by the kind of hayatah sham and others.

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And if that's the case, then they would have less motivation for a kind of.

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Direct conflict, but on that point I would just add that the the perception of Israelis regarding Iranian nuclear weapons nuclear project is quite different from the Americans. So is there is no guarantee that Israel would not act alone if it can't?

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But I think there are.

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There are other forces which might reshape the current.

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And the hostility between between Iran and Israel without a formal sort of link between the two countries, but de facto on the ground, they might decide not to engage.

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Thank you. There's a lot has been said that I was going to touch the phone and I think I can expand on that a bit if I.

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Manage. But thank you all for being here and for the interest in the topic, I'll be focusing on the.

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One of the players of the access of resistance, who have recently again a lot of media attention.

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In the past 13 months at least, although for us who are following the the Yemeni file, we have been following the activity for for a much longer time.

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And.

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I think the.

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Thes within this mosaic of access.

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Since where a little bit of a wild.

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For for Iran.

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They ha it was a low investment, low expectations as well, and it's proved to be a winning card because they have they managed to do a lot more for the cause let's say, than was expected from them.

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Umm it's it's like the the unruly, unpredictable kids in the classroom who not no one expects anything from from suddenly.

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He outperforms his, his very bright peers. That's a little bit where the hotties are at the moment and I think they're they're also really relishing the moment they're getting recognition, they're being noticed and this is something that they also use.

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To expand their legitimacy on the ground, although we know also that their legitimacy in Yemen faces a lot of challenges and we'll get to that.

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A bit.

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But before I go into more detail about this, there's always the question of.

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Are they a proxy? Are they autonomous? Are they there agent agent or or not? And so I want to get this out of the way a little bit. Part of this debate is clearly semantics, but also part of it.

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An attempt to, you know, use one word to describe something that is a little bit more complex.

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So the relationship with Iran is no, they're not focused. I mean to say it clearly, it's they're not, but they are, there's.

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Lot.

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Dependence there, which means that they're not also completely autonomous, and they're not completely free agents.

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And I think it's important to think about it in in a couple.

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Ways first.

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There is a good reason why the Hoshies work in the way that they do in alignment with Iran. There is ideological alignment and there is agreement there. There is also military and financial support that they depend on, and that's definitely there and it has been.

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For a long time.

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And there's a strategic alignment in the sense that they have the same they share the same enemies and and share the same friends to some extent.

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And then there's this regional role, which is within the ambitions of the whole fees from the outset, actually it's in their their literature and their discourse to play a regional role, a bigger role, a more expansion.

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No one really believed what what they were saying before because it's it's it sounded like retroactive and too ambitious, but it looks like they're working to that.

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So there is, I mean at 4 levels. There is a reason why the hoses seem to be very much aligned with.

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And it doesn't necessarily mean that they're doing this because they're being ordered by Iran. However, there is a high level of dependency.

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And this dependency is increasing with the increasing power.

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The hope is.

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Gaining because of their regional role that they're playing, because what they're doing now directly impacts Iranian national interests.

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And this is where the the Iranians will exert pressure if they have to, on the Houthis and we need to see if they will respond to that or not. And in what way?

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But but we know from what was also said by Doctor Kamran is that.

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The the houses are essentially part of this strategic depth of Iran. It tries to avoid having any battle on its own soil, so it goes through proxies and it ensures that there are other levels and layers of defence.

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Before it reaches Iran.

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It's also a way that Iran projects power in the region, and visiting Saudi Arabia and others, and the whole these are especially integral for that. And so in essence, the houses are.

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Serving national interests of Iran by serving that role, and this is also something that complicates this discussion of proxy or autonomy.

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And we know also that the whole seas have said no before, but they have also responded positively to Iranian pressure.

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For example, during the talks with the Saudis and the personal with Saudi, that was a very critical moment for Iran and they asked the whole things to stop bombing.

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Saudi and UAE and they did it. And so this is this is evidence of how thieves responding to Iranian pressure.

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I believe that now, with their growing role.

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They're increasingly going to lose this autonomy.

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Or independence. And I mean things may move in different ways, but but I think that this is probably where they're they're going, because now they have higher responsibility towards the others in the.

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Of resistance.

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They have higher responsibility to.

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Ensure that they are well integrated within this this alignment, rather than a free player who does whatever they want.

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And so I think there's no room.

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To to play as freely as they have been in the past, and there's also a different level of appetite for risk.

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The the houses are non state actor, they can't. They have high appetite for for risk there they're ambitious and they really want to test the the new capabilities that they have while Iran is going.

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Towards the escalation in the region, it's trying its best or hoping to avoid any confrontation on its own soil. And so here you have also divergent.

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In the appetite towards risk between Iran and Turkey.

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But I think to understand also this, this relationship we need to think of.

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The axis of resistance not in its vertical relationship. The Houthis and Iran, or Hizbullah and Iran, but also in its horizontal relationship. So there is a lot of exchange between the Houthis and the other groups within this so-called accessible.

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There have been joint operations with some of the Arabic groups last June.

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There's also a lot of exchange with the with Hezbollah.

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In terms of technical assistance, training, intelligence and so on, and with Iran and the Houthis have been training in in Syria and Iraq.

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And so on. So there is a lot of exchange happening there. There is a lot of knowledge transfer and also comradery between between the the groups that.

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That I think shapes the relationship in a in a more complex way than thinking about it as visually or hoses towards towards Iran.

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Now to also understand where this sits within a whole fee's domestic ambitions, which I think is very important because sometimes that shapes how they behave outside of Yemen.

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Yeah.

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And there's also an important aspect in the sense of how the.

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Theory is.

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Operates with a population in Yemen. Was kind of legitimate. They have within that society. And how do they manoeuvre?

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Domestically, I mean in the last 10 years, they have been controlling.

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Parts of Yemen and the percentage of the population.

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And they are faced with adversaries who are quite weak and fragmented, and they are not really.

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You know, able to challenge the hoodies.

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But the houses also rely on some historic narrative, which is one way that they draw logic.

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See from.

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Which is basically that the north of Yemen has been ruled by Zaidi imamat for a long time.

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At that time.

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They especially they sada families or hashemic families from from the north, from the sects.

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Were considered to be socially superior.

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They claim sent to the Prophet and that gives them.

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Certain social status and also their right to claim.

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Leadership and and rule the country.

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And this is part of the narrative that they draw from, at least for their thoughts, loyalists.

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There's a notion that there was a past glory before the Republican revolution of 62, where Zeidi's ruled and where Sada also had that status in society.

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And where Yemen was independent from foreign intervention.

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Of course, it was partly. I mean, it was not independent, but there was less of the foreign intervention that we see today.

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Partly because there was a self-imposed closing of the country, isolation of the country during the economic.

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And there's also a sensitivity to the sectarian and underpinnings in, in, in society. This is not generally not well received in.

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In in Yemen?

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And it's people don't trust this kind of narrative because Yemenis have been living coexisting shafiri, and they'd be for a long time without this kind of language and discourse.

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There is another aspect which is about 10 year war between the former regime and the Houthis and the these ideas in Sada called the Sada battles.

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Between 2003 and all the way to 2010.

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And during this period, many people, you know, were part of the the militia group, and they they learned how to fight and they they learned how to to be resilient as well. And there is a inevitable victimhood.

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From these wars, which were quite devastating in the in southern.

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Now they use this to gain some legitimacy within certain circles, but they also are very much aware. I hope. I think they should be by now that there is.

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Dissatisfaction with the economic situation.

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That.

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There is also.

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People feel that the Houthis are power hungry. They extract a population that is very.

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In very severe, severely challenging economic situation, there is.

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The economic situation is quite bad for extracting that amount of taxation.

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Constantly.

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OK. And so this creates also this level, this level of dissatisfaction at the domestic?

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And and this is important because there's always a question of how many people you know, how to what extent do Yemenis support the Houthis? This is a difficult question to answer, but I think there are indicators that I that they don't.

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That much support, but you never know because there is no freedom of expression in.

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Areas and they rule with an iron fist.

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Now just last two points is that the Palestine issue was something that they know how to know very well is very important and appealing for for Yemenis. And they played on that.

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To to ensure that they they continue to control the population that was starting to show some level of resistance just before, I mean in September of 2023, just before the.

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September, October attacks.

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And that's that's part of their ability to also.

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You know, build on this popularity that is in social media. That's they are, you know, rejected as as being heroes within the this razza Wu and so on. And they are more popular outside of Yemen than in Yemen.

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With that regard.

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And just finally on on how this looks moving.

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The Houthis are trying to play a balancing act in in the sense of maintaining their autonomy, but also.

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Being completely integrated within the access of resistance and saying that new rule filling the vacuum.

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After what happened to Hezbollah and and and Syria, although.

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Presenting a different role in the Red Sea in Babel, Manda within that geographic area that none of the other groups within the Axis can can take. So it's very smartly playing. The Houthis are smartly playing that that position.

00:37:09



That geographic position.

00:37:13

In the sense of the response to what is happening, the international community basically sleep walked into this. They didn't foresee the the the whole Sea's ambition in the region and that they would be they would cause this level of disruption in the Dead Sea and.

00:37:30

Global commerce and so on.

00:37:33

And it's also important to see how you know, while the Houthis have this strategic thinking and long game, the the response is very unstrategic is is a reaction to things as they happen.

00:37:48

And we have seen a tragedy between.

00:37:54

Military campaigns to going into appeasement and direct talks and a hand me over concessions to extreme sanctions and terrorist designations.

00:38:08

And and now it it looks as though really there is no strategic thinking besides punishing the whole piece for what they're doing in the Red Sea. And I think this is one of the things.

00:38:20

Continues to.

00:38:23

To to create a situation where it becomes harder and harder to deal with an unruly group like that that is controlled.

00:38:30

The country and a big sensitive population.

00:38:40

Hello. I'm gonna speak with some slides.

00:38:40

Find.

00:38:45

So when the hen asked me at 1:00 yesterday if I could come and speak about resistance to the genocide in Palestine and Gaza.

00:38:56

My colleague was umbrus. Unfortunately, is not here. Awoke from his typically lugubrious slumber to interject with just one word, mafish. There isn't any, and let me try to convince you of otherwise in this talk. I should note that this is part of a broader project.

00:39:13

With my one of our brilliant D Phil students Amy, Tess Gergis and my colleague and friend Sean Lee, based at the American University of Cairo. And it's our response as political scientists.

00:39:25

Marshalling data, drawing on theory using empirical tools to try to respond to what's happening in Kazaa and it's that particular project is really about attempts to criminalise forms of boycotts of Israel and but as a spin off of this all of last year.

00:39:43

I was lucky to be a mid career fellow of the British Academy based in Cairo with my colleague Pascal Miner in front row and of course Sean at AUC.

00:39:51

And we were asked to write something by the American Political Science Association on this topic, and this is what came out of it. So hopefully I do not dishonour my much more competent and interesting authors. So what I'm going to try to convince you of and both arguing for and against.

00:40:07

Water armed. Bruce, is that there is actually very substantive and meaningful forms of novel activism that is being engaged with by millions of Egyptians in Egypt up until quite plausibly today. But this is a form of activism that often falls beneath the threshold of scholarly and academic.

00:40:29

In particular, and again, if we're thinking about resistance, political scientists tend to not like that term. It's too amorphous, and we tend to prefer things like contention,

activism and so forth. But there is one particular form of activism I would suggest that is emerged in Egypt.

00:40:43

Which is around a sustained economic boycott of Western companies, and this is a type of action that I think is both.

00:40:51

Sociologically interesting and very impressive both for understanding of the phenomenon, but also for the long run potential political implications. I should note as well. One of the things that motivated this is that I had a conversation with a, let's say, foreign policy practitioner.

00:41:06

Based in London, who, when I said I was convinced that there was significant Egyptian opposition to what was going on in Gaza, he insisted. But there are no protests and at first blush, I think that is correct. This is using acclaim data. I'm a political scientist.

00:41:20

This is obviously time series data and so on that Y axis is account of protest.

00:41:22

Morning.

00:41:26

This data is probably not very great, but it's actually government funded and government sources look at it. What we see is that indeed in October, actually there is a large outpouring of street level mobilisation of contentious action in Egypt. And then you can see broad sustained.

00:41:40

Demobilisation after this period it is the case that actually the Egyptian state initially encourages protests. So in a press conference I think it's with Angela. It's not whoever the German Chancellor is. The current President, Abdul Fatah Sisi, actually says.

00:41:57

Basically endorses a street level mobilisation, and in fact you get these remarkable pieces of basically lists.

00:42:04

A state.

00:42:05

Provides a list in every governor at this 27 governor to Egypt. They they designate one place in the government in which you can go and safely protest.

00:42:13

For Palestine against what was happening, no, you can't read this, but at the very top of the list is is the one for Cairo. And no, it is not Madonna dahia, right. It's it's it's in it's it's Sharia Nos in Medina Nos.

00:42:28

Right, and this is this gives us a flavour of this of the of the regime's kind of approach to this. Immediately when they say this, this, this provokes St level mobilisation across the country and of course the nature of contentious politics is to be unruly and rambunctious and to not obey authorities. And so of course what people did is they immediately went to Madame Tahrir and protested.

00:42:49

Terrifies the CC regime and of course in that kind of I think quite familiar mood now.

00:42:54

They engage in immediate reactive repression. Large numbers of people being detained, prominent activists, people like machialle, Muslims and others being detained. And I think this helps to explain the demobilisation right, at least of St level, visible, contentious action.

00:43:11

But what I'm going to suggest is actually what Egyptians do is they they do what a lot of people have done throughout history, which is that they.

00:43:18

And in this case they draw on an extremely familiar repertoire of contention. That is, boycotts, a term that probably a repertoire that probably has multiple points of invention but is most often associated with the term boycott from Charles Cunningham boycott, a tool again in an imperial or colonial context.

00:43:36

Used by.

00:43:38

Irish Irish land League activists against this particularly apparently quite odious individual.

00:43:44

Where he is ostracised and boycotted, and this gives the name and indeed this then diffuses. We actually have a nice account from the Chicago Herald Daily, which is one of the kind of the breakthrough publications that helps to spread this as a terminate and a mood of activism.

00:44:00

In which boycotting is a term added to the popular vocabulary of Ireland, a peaceful means of coercion, an efficient mode of intimidating an actual violence. This is all tragically ironic because this feeds into our bigger project. It's actually in Illinois with this newspaper. It's published that actually passes some of the 1st.

00:44:15

Anti PDS legislation in the United States with bipartisan support.

00:44:20

Now I would also insist that boycotts have a long and rich history in the Arabic speaking Middle East. I was having this discussion with Eugi Turgon. He could anticipate what I'm about to say just the other day, we think the first boycott is probably in 1890 in Iran, around tobacco in the Arabic speaking Middle East.

00:44:37

Like all or many good things, it probably happened first during the 1919 revolution. In this case, a sustained boycott. This is a protest telegram, but they found this is from the Egyptian National Archives, again using the word note. They use Mata. They say boycott explicitly. It's a part of the language of.

00:44:54

Contention.

00:44:56

And we think that as in the case of 1919, where you see this quite innovative use of the Telegraph Telegraph to communicate a very low cost way of making claims, deliberate claims on central political power. We also see novel creative forms of coordination both online and offline to be able to sustain.

00:45:16

And build this boycott.

00:45:18

So in terms of traditional offline mobilisation, this is a photographic took in January last year that the colour of the.

00:45:26

Is is what sky should look like in.

00:45:29

But what you can probably see this is the. This is the Egyptian writer syndicate on the right hand side, you can't see this, but these are company logos like Starbucks, McDonald's.

00:45:37

And so forth. This is quite prominent simple.

00:45:40

Like often at the very beginning, in October of 2023, it was very common in WhatsApp groups that just get lists of companies with their with their, with their logos. It was often the case that we often saw a lot of other kinds like anecdotally and want to do auto ethnography. But I had a lot of experience. You were going to shops and people would pick up items and people would take, you know, that's boycott.

00:46:01

My daughter in an Egyptian school.

00:46:05

They would police what would the students with police, what was going into people's lunchboxes? Sometimes I can say some autotnography children would also police their parents about what they could and could not.

00:46:18

Purchase, but what I really want to also point out is that there is really quite creative uses of online spaces, spaces that the regime struggles to police and patrol in a somewhat low capacity state. So this is using Google Translator so we can see what people are searching over time using search terms.

00:46:33

This is a little misleading because this is actually for the entire region. I didn't have time to do it just for Egypt, but trust me, if you look, you can search it yourself. It's it's it's the same trend. This is searching for the term.

00:46:43

Boycott in Arabic, there was a lot of self initiated bottom up searching for tools and tactics.

00:46:51

People.

00:46:52

Draw on to be able to actualise their political preferences, and indeed this also takes the form of again quite novel and creative modes of coordination.

00:47:03

To be able to get people to act, you know, in a way that would be concerted, absent formal organisation that might be subject to repression. So what we also see is the proliferation of of mobile phone apps. This is just one of them. So my my calls right like.

00:47:19

We would often say like.

00:47:20

The Palestinian call.

00:47:21

Wars and you can download these and.

00:47:27

They are. This is just one of them. So this is this is made in Egypt. We can get the analytics online. So this is it's launched in October of 2023, it's almost an immediate response. It has about a million downloads within a month, 4 million downloads at the time that I I looked which was yesterday afternoon when I made these slides.

00:47:44

And it's they're very novel. You can type the company name into it and it tells you if it should be boycotted or not. So in this case, I've typed in Starbucks and you can see.

00:47:53

The result right? But it also allows you to scan barcodes. You can walk around the shop with it and you can and it will again give you the same response. There are also online forums that people are using to be able to add things to the list, so there are forms of novel coordination and communication.

00:48:11

There are unfolding again, often beneath the threshold, with the radar visibility, the threshold of visibility from the state, and often I think from social scientists. So I will say this is a final point, just want to reflect on the effects of this.

00:48:25

You know, heartwarming people power and sociologically interesting in its own right. But I also think we can talk about quite substantive effects and these are essentially lasting, both in terms of the economic effects of companies that have been boycotted but also potentially in long run changes in consumption habits and business practises.

00:48:44

So it is actually well documented that a number of very significant companies, Starbucks, McDonald's, others have announced significant hits to their profits. This \$11 billion, this is their market cap cap, right? This is their.

00:48:58

Is this is not just from Egypt, but in Egypt in particular.

00:49:00

Particular, there have been a number of store closures in my own. Again, like if you want some kind of some human flavour to this in the Sports Club that we go to Neddy Lath. It's in, it's in Zemelic there was.

00:49:14

A Starbucks kind of kiosk Kush and you know it was you business as usual and then obviously things start to unfold and it is deserted. Nobody will go there for months. It sits with its employees, it's staffed. Nobody goes there after several months.

00:49:31

They tried to rebrand and so they have exactly the same kind of green and black. You know, that kind of colour scheme, but with no Starbucks logo. It's on any of the cup holders on their uniforms. It's basically been like these Starbucks at 5:00, but it's still Starbucks and nobody falls for it.

00:49:47

Nobody goes back. OK, this is not a. This is not a fleeting, superficial commitment to this. This is real. I mean, I really think it's real.

00:49:57

It's also the case we can talk about other kind of consequences. There has been, I think, a general general shift in consumption patterns as a kind of political scientist. I'd really



love to see some like long run Labour force surveys, consumption surveys, because I think you can probably track the effect.

00:50:13

Of this on how people consume both culture, but also food and and and and so forth.

00:50:18

We've seen companies that are being boycotted. This is an example. This is from Shaun Teklith the other day. This is mahadi. It's basically man foods. This is like the franchise holder of McDonald's in in Egypt, saying we stand with the Palestinian people. There's been a lot of kind of like public CEOs, the kind of captains of industry, the labour market insiders who.

00:50:39

Who have come out very strongly to disavow what's?

00:50:43

In Gaza, at the same time, we've seen a profound shift, I think in preferences, there's been a lot of stuff in the a lot of number of articles in the Egyptian media talking about the growth in local alternatives in terms of bottled water, in terms of fast food.

00:50:57

In terms of other consumption practises, so I really think this is potentially quite substantive. So let me conclude this is a good time. Great.

00:51:05

So I'm really influenced by. There's a there's a Palestinian political scientist, Donna Al Kurd, who has this wonderful piece in democratisation, where she talks about Palestinian activism as being a gateway for other kinds of activism in the region. But it's often the case that in these highly autocratic contexts.

00:51:23

Regime struggle to to justify the suppression of activism in the name of Palestine, and in consequence this acts as a kind of ecology that's generative of other kinds of stuff.

00:51:34

All my students in the room have to read this article in a couple of weeks. I'm sorry, so I'm rehashing it now and I think that's what's happening here. I think this boycott is, is, is you're seeing novel forms of political participation and meaningful action. This is contentious politics. It's collective, it's political. It inflicts a cost.

00:51:49

Right. And this is going to be generative of new. You know, if you were a policy maker, you would say, you know, there is trouble in store, right? This is this is this is a whole new generation of newly politicised people who know how to act contentiously, how to evade, how to be creative.

00:52:01

Mm.

00:52:04

In this what I would suggest is that this is not simply a kind of cookie cutter. Copy and paste of BDS. One of the striking things we looked at boycott targeting is that actually the boycott list itself didn't matter. So BDS does have an official list and people were not adhering to this.

00:52:20

This was a general boycott of the West of Western companies. You could be a western company, you could be Nestle. I don't think Nestle has any obvious who knows? I I I I don't know it. But they were coming. It didn't. You would talk to people and say well have they, are they involved etcetera. And they say I don't care.

00:52:37

OK, I want the Egyptian version alright. I think this is I think this again this is I really think this is real and I said this is an empirical scholar who often suggests that we have to understate the effects and importance of protest. But in this case it it really is substantive. And finally I think I'll just leave you with a with an ironic development.

00:52:56

It is the case that boycotts and these forms of nonviolent activism are a cherished right in liberal societies and.

00:53:01

We see.

00:53:02

Concerted, calibrated attempts to try to criminalise them.

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And this is ironic, right? Because in the most autocratic societies in the region, you can now freely practise something that we have once thought of as being a cherished right. And I think that requires some reflection on all our parts. Thanks.

00:53:26

Thank you very.

00:53:27

Much.

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And also Kamran and Yasmine, I think 3 excellent presentations.