

Transcript

Recorded Live — Full Session

Jen Muldinger:

[00:00:04] Hello and welcome. Thank you all for being here. My name is Jennifer Modlinger and I work for 70 Faces Media. We are so excited to be hosting this important event responding to anti-semitism amid rising authoritarianism along with our partner, the Nexus Project, a national Jewish organization that defends democracy, fights anti-semitism, and protects free speech. Now, I'd like to turn things over to Alan Solo, the board chair of the Nexus Project and former chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, who introduce our moderator and esteemed panelists. Alan,

Alan Solow:

[00:00:41] Thank you, Jen, and welcome to all of you who are joining us this afternoon for this important session. As Jen mentioned, here at Nexus, we're aligning the fight to save our democracy and to combat anti-semitism. If you'd like more information on us, you can always go to nexuspro.us. With that, let me introduce our panelists for this session. First, Ambassador Susan Rice.

Ambassador Rice served as the United States ambassador to the United Nations. She also was the national security adviser to President Obama and served as the domestic policy adviser to President Biden. In that latter capacity, she spearheaded the creation of the first United States National Strategy to Counter anti-semitism, released in May of 2023, bringing together more than 1,000 stakeholders across the Jewish community. The National Strategy, the first whole of society document to address anti-semitism, was met with widespread bipartisan acclaim across both the Jewish community and the entire political spectrum. Ambassador Rice has spent her entire career advancing human rights worldwide and strengthening democratic institutions both domestically and internationally. Ambassador Rice, we're so delighted that you're joining us today.

Ambassador David Sapperstein was appointed the US ambassador at large for international religious freedom under President Obama. He served for more than 20 years as director of the religious action center, the union for reformed Judaism's activist advocacy arm in Washington DC. He currently serves as director emeritus. Rabbi Aperstein has

spent his career as a leading Jewish voice for civil rights, religious liberty, and crossfaith cooperation.

He's an integral part of our efforts at Nexus. And Rabbi Sapperstein, it's always a pleasure to have you with us.

And finally, Jonathan Jacobe is the president and national director of the Nexus Project. He has led Nexus since its earliest days when it created the Nexus definition, which was welcomed by the US National Strategy to Counter anti-semitism.

Jonathan was the first director of the news was the first director of the new Israel fund and the founding director of the Israel Policy Forum. For more than 40 years, he has been a leading voice for peace and justice in the Middle East and for protecting democracy and fighting anti-semitism. With that, Johnny, I'm going to ask you to take the lead here and bring on our two experts.

Jonathan Jacoby (Moderator):

[00:03:24] Thanks very much, Alan. It's a pleasure to be here and it's an honor to be with you. Uh, Ambassador Rice and Ambassador Sapperstein. It's no accident that you're our guests today. As you heard from Allan, you have both been on the front lines of the fight to ensure Jewish safety and to preserve our democracy. And I say the fight in the singular because combating anti-semitism and countering authoritarianism today go hand in hand.

Nexus understood this early on when we drafted a definition of anti-semitism that didn't put it at odds with free speech and constitutional rights. And when this president was elected, we saw how he and his associated used anti-semitism as a political weapon to undermine democratic rights and and constitutional rights. We saw how the Heritage Foundation attempted to manipulate Jewish fears by demonizing critics of Israel in its so-called anti-semitism strategy, which they called Project Esther, which is really just a tool for implementing the infamous Project 2025. We released our own strategy for fighting anti-semitism and protecting democracy around the Jewish holidays, the Chauffar report with rejects the Heritage Foundation's vision. The chauffear report asserts that protecting democracy is a foundational strategy for combating anti-semitism. It offers recommendations to strengthen protections for civil rights and democratic institutions to invest in education and to build cross community alliances all in order to fight authoritarianism and anti-semitism.

So in that spirit, my first question to you is simply, how do you see anti-semitism being used to undermine American democracy? Ambassador Rice, thank you.

Ambassador Susan Rice:

[00:05:19] Well, good evening everyone. Uh, and thank you so much Jonathan and Allan for the invitation to join you. Uh, it's great to be uh, part of this discussion and to do it with uh, David Sabverstein is a a huge honor. So, uh I'm I'm very grateful. Um let me just uh try to address a question with initially with just a small bit of context uh and then um dive right in. Um, as Allan mentioned, I was honored to uh be able to lead the uh effort to develop and disseminate uh the first US national strategy to combat anti-semitism which uh was rolled out in late May of 2023.

And that strategy was uh focused around four pillars of action and over a hundred US government commitments plus hundreds of recommended steps for Congress, for society as a whole, the private sector, civil society, uh tech companies, etc. And the Biden administration fully implemented all of the commitments uh that it made on behalf of the executive branch within the timelines that were promised. But then just six months later came uh the horrific events of October 7th uh and the devastating terrorist attacks by Hamas against uh the people of Israel.

And thereafter, of course, campus protests ensued, anti-semitism surged, attacks on Jewish students and institutions uh likewise uh you know went to extraordinary uh extremes. And it's frankly been a nightmare from the vantage point of combating anti-semitism here in the United States and internationally ever since. And most recently, as none of you need to be reminded, we've seen the murder of the two Israeli embassy employees, the vicious attack in Boulder, the arson attack on Governor Shapiro's home, and it feels like, you know, we've meet we've reached a new low. And into this toxic mix has come Donald Trump again.

And rather than try to tamp down anti-semitism, he's weaponized it. and he has drawn as Jonathan said on project 2025 and the Heritage Foundation's project Ester to use anti-semitism as a weapon in his campaign to destroy American democracy and entrench authoritarianism. He's harnessed anti-semitism as a cudgel, as a pretext to bully and defund universities, to attack their students and faculty, to harass media organizations in order to silence any criticism of him. He's used it to eradicate diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility initiatives and to chill free speech and academic freedom. uh and also to discredit and to starve scientific research and medical research. Um, and to then of course as as is becoming increasingly uh and horrifically apparent, he is demonizing and disappearing immigrants uh as part of a sweeping campaign to cleanse the United States of immigrants and people of color and religious minorities all while politicizing and contorting definitions of terrorism in extremism. And when you add it all up, in short, this is

about an effort to weaken institutions that foster critical or independent thinking and that can oppose Trump's authoritarian campaign.

So, let's be serious. I mean, Trump could give a damn about anti-semitism. He's appointed committed anti-semites to key roles at the Department of Defense, the Department of Justice, and elsewhere. He's stoked hatred. He's used horrific anti-semitic tropes. He's recently defended Tucker Carlson and Nick Fuentes. He's undermined and dismantled efforts to combat domestic terrorism, hatefueled violence, and white supremacist organizations. And instead, he's invigorated and validated white supremacy under the guise of restoring so-called Western culture and values it is not uh less than an effort to return us to the 19th century.

And then when you look at what he's doing abroad, just read the the recently released national security strategy, which explicitly backs fascist movements in Europe like the AFD against our democratic allies while we jettison any pretense of support for democracy and human rights in our foreign policy. And all of that puts Jews at much greater risk at home and abroad. Uh and we are now leading the way uh in undermining democracy uh globally by the example that Trump is is rapidly setting here at home.

So I think the the answer, Jonathan, is that democracy uh is is a uh a tool that protects all of us and including Jews uh from the the worst that can happen. And the erosion of democracy uh is um is is a threat uh to Jews and to all Americans uh but particularly Americans who uh may be uh religious minorities uh racial minorities, ethnic minorities, immigrants, LGBTQ, disabled, uh you know, anybody who is is not in a very narrow uh white Christian nationalist elite. Um, and we are at a moment where of real true testing. Uh, and I look forward to to continuing the conversation about what we can do to meet that test.

Jonathan Jacoby (Moderator):

[00:11:38] Thank you. It's uh it's something that we've been talking about, but it's always hard to hear and appreciate the clarity with which you describe what's happening. Rabbi Sapperstein

Ambassador Rabbi David Saperstein:

[00:11:52] amend to everything that Susan writes just uh said if anyone had any doubt why she's been such a remarkable leader just listening now um just reminds us of the extraordinary career of good public service Susan that you've had I mean key advisor on both domestic and foreign you're probably the only person in history who held both roles am I right

Ambassador Susan Rice:

[00:12:17] Yes.

Ambassador Rabbi David Saperstein:

[00:12:19] I mean that alone just speaks to the remarkable gift you've given this nation ship here. Um so this week is an extraordinary moment in in uh in history uh Freedom House tells us just to set this in context. Freedom House tells us that and other groups that look at democracy around the globe. At the end of from the end of World War II through 2006, the midpoint of the growth of democracy and human rights was an expansive growth. Different things happen in different places in the world, but the midpoint of that was a constant growth of democracy and human rights from 2016 and through today we've had 19 years of consistent retrenchment.

um uh here. So this is a global crisis and the problem of anti-semitism and its role that we're dealing with here often those countries that were marked by moving towards autocracy mostly not by violent overthrow and coups but by people who took control through a democratic election and then use the power that they had to undermine the very democracy that uh elected them. But very often anti-semitism was already percolating there or quickly did after they took power and is instrumentally linked um uh to the growth of uh of autocracy um across the across the globe.

This as Steve Levitzky the Harvard professor and co-author of how democracies dies refers to this moment as competitive authoritarianism when because they took hold by uh democratic means have elements of democracy and autocracy work together in competition with each other and writes Leavinsky there are two bottom lines one you cannot plate a bully and two the time to resist such changes is while the democratic institutions are stronger and strongest the weaker they are allowed to become the harder it will be to resist that's what we face uh today um uh the indicia of the crisis we know the efforts to undermine the fairness of election exploiting the state institutions for party needs of personal gain dismissing key independent civil service leaders and especially the gatekeepers intended to keep the system honest and replacing all of them with loyalists, reducing civil rights, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom to protest, higher education, the things that have meant so much to the Jewish community.

I'm sitting in the conference room of the religious action center of uh reformed Judaism where because the leadership conference on civil rights largest umbrella civil rights group is located here for 30 years the civil right community contribution to the civil rights act of

1980 64 voting rights act of 65 um and all of the civil rights happened that legislation that took place and advocacy that took place through the early 1990s happened out of this very room I'm sitting in. And that brought to American jewelry more rights, more freedoms, more opportunities, more achievements than we have ever known in entire history of Jewish diaspora life.

This is something truly truly remarkable. And we are endangered when democracy is endangered. And so we have um uh the battle against anti-semitism and the growth of anti-semitism uh several deep connections to the fight for democracy. First, anti-semitism, the growth of hate crimes and hate speech in this country. much of it legitimized by the president of the United States in his rhetoric, ugly rhetoric of demonization in division um of different groups in the country. Um here when minority groups who are in in their rights are the indicitude of a vibrant democracy when they are shrunken and then divided to fight over the spoils of who's going to get attention, who's going to get help for their plight. um exactly the situation we placed by this administration lifting

[00:17:00] anti-semitism although it's more important than the battles of the of that against LGBTQ

Americans against Latino Americans against immigrants against the African-American community — still more hate crimes targeting blacks than any other hate crimes in America. They're all woven together. We won't succeed in fighting for democracy unless we are fighting for the rights of all peoples together. And the fact that, in the name of anti-semitism, this administration has, as Ambassador Rice said, sought to undermine freedom of speech, undermine freedom of the press, undermine freedom to protest, undermine civil rights, and undermine academic freedom — all in the name of fighting anti-semitism — divides us from key allies and weakens each of us being able to work together on our common concerns.

There's no Noah's ark that will protect the Jewish community if we lose the fundamental rights of all Americans in this country. The battle must go on — both focused on the individual plight of different communities, but working together to protect a democracy that protects us all. And anyone who uses us and our fight against hatred against Jews in the name of weakening democracy, in the name of furthering right-wing extremism, in the name of furthering Christian nationalism — anyone who does that really puts us far more at risk and undermines the future of our community in America.

Jonathan Jacoby (Moderator):

[00:18:59] Thank you. I nominate you to be my corporate rabbi.

Ambassador Susan Rice:

[00:19:04] Mine too. Please. Now, David, you captured it beautifully and powerfully. And I hope we'll have a chance to talk about the role of allyship, but you know, it was the fourth pillar of the national strategy to counter anti-semitism, and as Nexus has highlighted and as you've just highlighted, it's the essential element to saving our democracy and protecting the rights, freedoms, and security of American Jews — and Americans of all backgrounds.

Ambassador Rabbi David Saperstein:

[00:19:50] You know, Susan, I don't know if I've ever said this exactly to you. I really think that the national strategy was something truly extraordinary in the whole history of the Jewish people. There had never been a point in our long history, even in times when we were better off and had more freedoms and opportunities — in Babylonia, Alexandria in the first centuries of the common era, the golden age of Spain — there was never a time that the whole of society and the whole of government was called to and, in the case of government, committed to fighting to protect the Jewish community when they were vulnerable and being hurt. In all of our history, there's never been

Anything like that document. And I think it will rank with the Balfour Declaration and the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel as one of the great documents of this period of Jewish history, and we are all in your debt for your leadership of that.

Ambassador Susan Rice:

[00:20:54] That's incredibly kind and completely over the top, but thank you.

Jonathan Jacoby (Moderator):

[00:20:59] Well, I say amen to that. And I want to just ask you, Ambassador Rice, to expand a little bit on the role of allyship. This next section is about strategies. People talk about Jews being the canaries in the coal mine — that they come after Jews and they're going to come after everybody else. But there are many other coal mines with many other canaries now. And we as Jews, I believe, need to be allies and we need to have our alliances. I'd love to hear your thoughts about allyship, both in terms of how you put the strategy together and your thoughts in general.

Ambassador Susan Rice:

[00:21:36] Well, thank you, Jonathan. When we did the national strategy, we started in December of 2022. And there's a backstory even to the strategy, as David will remember — he participated in a summit we had at the White House in September of 2022 called *United We Stand*. It was united against hate and it brought together people of all backgrounds — Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus. It brought together Democrats and Republicans, evangelicals, Black community leaders, Jewish community leaders, Latino community leaders, disability community leaders, and LGBT leaders.

It was called in the wake of what had happened in Charlottesville, the Tree of Life in Pittsburgh, then in Buffalo, and later in El Paso — at the request of five major civil rights organizations, including the ADL. That summit was a great success and a moment of real unity.

Then, just in the next couple of months, Trump invites Kanye — well, sorry, Kanye goes off and says his horrific, hate-fueled, anti-semitic bile — and then Trump brings Nick Fuentes to Mar-a-Lago. It was just too much. How could we have had this summit *United We Stand Against Hate* and then just sit there and watch this devolve?

Congress had asked for an interagency task force on anti-semitism. We in the administration wanted more than a task force. Task forces are fine, but we said, “Yes, we’ll call you and raise you.” We’ll do a task force *and* we’ll put together a national strategy.

Then I was able to go to my former colleagues at the National Security Council, to the Second Gentleman’s office, to Ambassador Lipstadt, and to the folks at the Holocaust Memorial Museum — and pull together a very broad interagency group that spent the next five months in listening sessions.

We listened to over a thousand people from all elements of the Jewish community, but also from allied communities — from the Muslim community, from the evangelical community — to build the foundation for that strategy. And I’ll be honest, it was tough sledding. There were, as you well know, lots of differences within the Jewish community, some of which, frankly, I wasn’t fully appreciative of this until I got into the thick of it. At times, it seemed like there was more interest in fighting over the definition of anti-semitism than agreeing on and uniting behind concrete actions to combat it. But we all worked through it, and we had a lot of help from friends on the inside and outside, and we were able to put the strategy together — which was, as I said, really in significant part a call to and a reflection of allyship.

So in this context, what do we do now? Well, first of all, the Jewish community and their allies need to stand together to demand security and the resources for security. To demand respect and the freedoms to live and learn on campuses and elsewhere without being harassed, intimidated, or demonized.

We need to stand together for those rights and stand at the same time for free speech and for academic and intellectual freedom. And frankly, we need to stand up for science — because science is directly targeted since facts, truth, and analysis are antithetical to authoritarianism. It's very much related to the phenomenon we're experiencing.

Together we've got to speak out. But we also, as you said, Jonathan, need to recognize the dangers of what Trump is doing. As you said, and as I firmly believe, anti-semitism truly is always the canary in the coal mine when it comes to hate.

And as the national strategy emphasized — anti-semitism threatens democracy, and it threatens all minorities. Frankly, this is in large part about an administration and its cronies who truly want to take the United States back to a time in the 19th century when it was white, Christian, male oligarchs who controlled society and everybody else was subordinate or excluded.

And if you understand that — and by the way, I won't go into this — but they're also trying to take us back to the 19th century internationally when it comes to foreign policy, back to a time of great power spheres of influence. But this is an approach that excludes the vast majority of Americans.

So we need to unite — or I would say reunite. We need to join together in opposition to the threats against Jews, against any minorities, against all of us. We have the history and experience of the civil rights movement, which was arguably the high watermark for cooperation between Black Americans and Jewish Americans. We need to do that and more.

We need to broaden the tent. It needs to include everyone who is going to suffer: women, people of color, religious minorities, immigrants — whether you are a recent immigrant, gained citizenship by birth, naturalized, came on a slave ship, or are Native American. We all need to come together just as we did for the *United We Stand* Summit back in 2022.

I realize this is easier said than done. There is a lot of pain, anger, and mutual disillusionment, particularly since October 7th. We need to acknowledge it, own it, talk about it — but we also need to move beyond that. Because either we are going to join together and fight all forms of hate and recognize that a threat to one group of Americans is

threat to one group of Americans is a threat to all Americans, and we must stand up together for our democracy — or we're going to fall together, and so will our democracy. We need a mindset where we understand that an attack on one is an attack on all, and hate can have no safe harbor for any of us.

There seems to be, among some, a notion that in this authoritarian construct, Jews will be fine — particularly some of the richest and most outspoken allies of this administration. I think that's a delusion, and we need to call it what it is. It may appear, in the short term, that they are on the inside and somehow protected, but the project that Trump and his cronies are implementing does not include any but a very narrow few.

So what do we do? We need to fight authoritarianism as the existential threat that it is. That means we've got to go to school on history — at home and abroad. We need to study the civil rights movement and understand what tools succeeded, what peaceful resistance looked like, and where it succeeded or failed. We need to look at what's happened in other places — like Hungary, Turkey, even Israel today — and many other parts of the world where democracy has slid backward.

We need to organize. We need to be willing to shame and boycott those capitulating to authoritarianism — those bending the knee, whether they're media organizations, universities, law firms, or other corporate entities. And I believe the most critical thing we can do is engage in sustained, mass, peaceful, nonviolent protest. But it can't just be every few months on a Saturday. As good as the "No Kings" effort has been, it's got to be ongoing, relentless, and unified.

And finally, to come back to where I started — we've got to unite. I often recall the famous quote attributed to Martin Niemöller, who was imprisoned for opposing the Nazis as a German. His quotation is inscribed at the Holocaust Memorial Museum, whose board I briefly served on before being fired by President Trump. It reads:

- > "First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist.
- > Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist.
- > Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.
- > Then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak for me."

That encapsulates the moment we're in. We've got to stand together. We must recognize that an attack on one group is an attack on all of us. It's straight out of the authoritarian playbook — to demonize, divide, and disable any effective unified opposition — and we've got to ensure that fails.

So, Jonathan, that's how I would answer your question about what we do regarding allyship and where we need to take this effort. Because when we come back together in a few years, we don't want to say, "We didn't see this coming," or "We didn't understand what was at stake," or "We didn't think it would come for us." It's coming for all of us.

Jonathan Jacoby (Moderator):

[00:33:18] Thank you. David? You're muted.

Ambassador Rabbi David Saperstein:

[00:33:29] That lays out the agenda very clearly — what's before us. We know the key elements of what needs to be done, and one question is why we're not doing better in some of these areas than we are.

First, we resist the movement toward authoritarianism and autocracy by using the courts. Even with the Supreme Court in the hands of fairly far-right elements, we still have lower court systems that have blocked, again and again, things the president has tried to do. That's helped slow it all down and given us a chance to organize more effectively against it.

We're proud that many in the Jewish community have been parties to those court cases — although I would argue not vigorously enough. If you look at many of our national agencies, I think they could do better — more in line with how they engaged in the 1950s, 60s, 70s, and 80s on civil rights cases.

Secondly, what you can't do at the federal level, you can often do at the state and local level. Even in purple states, we're winning victories for women's rights, reproductive rights, and to stop many of the excesses happening elsewhere. We can still work to curtail a lot at those levels.

Third, protests — and this one's interesting. I'd love to hear your reflection on why we haven't done as well in the second term as we did in the first. Part of it, I presume, is that

he was doing things step-by-step in the first term — so the Muslim ban mobilized people, Black Lives Matter mobilized when the George Floyd tragedy occurred, and other issues helped people organize.

Now, though, he's doing things simultaneously across the board. One day it's an attack on immigrants, the next day an attack on the press, the next day an attack on the media — and it's overwhelming. I'd love to hear your take on why that is.

But I will point out something remarkable: if you look at Israel, they face many of the same attacks on democracy that we do. Benjamin Netanyahu and the right-wing elements of his coalition are degrading democracy. The same institutions I mentioned before — they're going after the gatekeepers: the press, judges, demonizing the judiciary, attacking the legal profession.

And yet, in Israel, we've seen extraordinary mass protests — week after week after week — on behalf of judicial independence, and more recently, protests motivated by freeing hostages and securing a ceasefire. Those sustained, peaceful protests — both in scale and duration — have been the largest in human history. It's really quite remarkable.

So why are we not able to do the same thing here? What will it take? I would hope that the day the Supreme Court says, "You can't do it," and the president says, "Separation of powers — try and stop me," we'd see hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people in the streets. But I don't know what it's going to take.

And as you said — coalitions. We cannot allow the president to divide us. We cannot allow ourselves to fall victim to Islamophobia, racism, anti-semitism, or homophobia that seeks to divide and weaken us. Hate speech, hate crimes, and hate actions against any group are nothing less than attacks on the core values and pillars of American society — the very guarantors of our freedom. They are a betrayal of the promise of America.

They erode our national well-being and are manipulated to achieve political goals that the far right is seeking. Those who commit hate crimes, those engaged in anti-semitism and other forms of racism, do so with the intent of tearing America apart. The best response we can have is a refusal to be divided when it comes to preserving democracy and ending all hate together.

When it comes to anti-semitism at the local level, we're not left on our own. There hasn't been a single act of traditional anti-semitism — attacks on synagogues, desecrating cemeteries, attacking Jews in the street — that hasn't been met with a widespread response from civic and interfaith communities across the country.

We cannot walk away from coalitions over difficult issues like Israel, where we find sharp divisions. If we withdraw from progressive coalitions — on the environment, economic justice, women’s rights — extreme anti-Israel elements will try to manipulate those coalitions to take positions that further isolate and alienate the Jewish community. That weakens both the coalitions themselves and public support for their causes.

We have to stay at the table. We must keep fighting for the broad, universal issues that Jews have historically championed and that have made such a difference in America’s progress. It’s more important than ever today.

Those strategies still hold true. I’ll say one more thing that’s descriptively partisan: if the Democratic Party does not take back at least one chamber of Congress in the next election, President Trump will have no restraints on what he will do. He’ll treat the election — no matter how narrow — as a mandate. He’ll recognize that the courts can’t act fast enough to stop him in his final two years, and we will have a very different country by the end of it.

I say that descriptively — because if Republicans find their courage and their footing and finally say “enough is enough,” then it’s not a partisan issue. Every major social achievement of the 20th century happened because of a bipartisan coalition of decency on Capitol Hill — and nonpartisan, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious coalitions of decency in communities across America.

We need to recapture that spirit. Until we do, we must stop the further erosion of democracy — or anti-semites will flourish in ways that will be extraordinarily damaging to America and its Jewish community.

Ambassador Susan Rice:

[00:41:42] Jonathan, can I just go back to something David said? I think this question of why we haven’t seen the same degree of protest — here or in Israel — is really important.

First of all, there **has** been some protest, and it’s been growing. It needs to be energized and sustained. But I think one of the things we’re lacking is ***courageous leadership*** — not necessarily from political leaders, though that would be nice — but from leaders of all sorts: civil society leaders, former government officials, religious leaders, civil rights leaders, community leaders, corporate leaders.

And instead, you know, Trump — I think you gave one part of the explanation — it’s just this constant flurry of things happening every day that are hard to keep up with. But beyond

that, we also have to acknowledge that Trump has very deliberately sought to intimidate and disable any vocal opposition.

The bending of the knee, the capitulation we're seeing in the corporate world, the university world, law firms, and the media — that's something we didn't see in Trump's first term. Congress has rolled over and played dead, and it's pathetic, embarrassing, and destructive to our democracy.

In that context, it's got to be regular people — all kinds of people — who stand up, including those of us who are leaders in our own spheres. We can't wait for some great Messiah to come down from on high and lead us to the promised land. We've got to stand up and do it ourselves. We've got to be brave and model courage.

We still have a Constitution. We still have a Bill of Rights. And yes — they're snatching American citizens out of their cars, banging their heads on the pavement, locking them up, disappearing them, and denying them access to lawyers and family. We have to call that completely unacceptable.

We have to be brave — just as people had to be in the 1960s. David, you remember, plenty of people got their heads beaten standing up for the right to vote — Black people, white people, people of all backgrounds. And, as you know, people gave their lives — like Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner. So it's...

Ambassador Rabbi David Saperstein:

[00:44:47] The intimidation is a big thing, though. It really is. We didn't pay enough attention to *National Security Presidential Memorandum 7* — and the ability it gives to target nonprofits or activists who are resisting, put them on terrorist lists, and take action against them.

His demonizing of religion, his calling judges and senators traitors — that, combined with the ability to shut off major funding streams for unrelated political goals — is dangerous. He'll stop DEI programs, cut off funding for medical and scientific advancement. The willingness to weaponize resources like that is something we've never faced before.

I know that even in the internal deliberations of every nonprofit board I'm part of, or coalition I work with, everyone is now thinking twice — “What will happen if they come after us because of this?” That fear has stilled people. And at a macro level, it's stilled the broader community from taking action. So I'm really glad you raised that point.

Ambassador Susan Rice:

[00:46:08] And we just have to realize that **that** is the strategy — and we can't succumb to it. He's weaponizing the Justice Department, and the list goes on and on. But the one thing that's kryptonite to all of it is when we come together — when we stand with courage and resolve.

Jonathan Jacoby (Moderator):

[00:46:34] I want to just say to that — and then I have one quick question for each of you. I want to say to that they are trying to weaponize anti-semitism. They are trying to use it to frighten us into not being courageous. And that's where we come in — that's where we have to be courageous. That's where we can't take the bait.

And in that spirit, I'd love to hear from each of you just one thought or one example of something that gives us hope for the coming days — something we can look toward and think about as we summon up the courage to take our next steps together.

Ambassador Susan Rice:

[00:47:25] There's a lot to be discouraged about, but frankly, one of the things that gives me hope is that the American people did **not** sign up for the wholesale revocation of their rights. They didn't sign up — when they were upset about high prices or concerned about border security — for losing their ability to speak, protest peacefully, or criticize their government.

They didn't sign up for censorship, or for massive federal and military operations in their cities, or for ICE and CBP pulling citizens out of their homes and cars and disappearing them. As it becomes clear that this isn't happening just to violent criminals or undocumented people — but to law-abiding individuals, many here legally and some who are U.S. citizens — I think people will recognize this is not who we are, nor what the majority of Americans support.

We need courageous leaders to model peaceful, nonviolent approaches to counter extremism. The American people didn't sign up for the mass demonization of entire groups based on the actions of individuals — whether Afghans, Somalis, Venezuelans, or anyone else. That's simply not who we are in the 21st century.

So even as bad as things feel, that reality gives me hope — because it can shock the system, and remind most Americans this is not tenable.

Jonathan Jacoby (Moderator):

[00:49:45] Thank you.

Ambassador Rabbi David Saperstein:

[00:49:52] So, one macro and one micro response — both based on things Ambassador Rice mentioned earlier.

First, on the macro level, Susan, to build on what you said: polling data backs you up completely. Even people who don't like our immigration policies or who support some of what Trump says *don't* like his specific actions that violate due process and fundamental rights — like family separations and other cruel measures. Many also disagree with his broader economic, social, and legal policies. That's encouraging.

Now on the micro level — I'll pick up your point about how some in the Jewish community have been more eager to fight over *definitions* of anti-semitism than to actually fight it effectively. My micro observation is this: if every entity in the country adopted the IHRA definition of anti-semitism tomorrow, it wouldn't change a single thing. It has nothing to do with actually making a difference. But Nexus has played an extraordinary role in the fight against anti-semitism — helping to slow down the idea that simply passing one definition would solve everything.

Nexus succeeded in raising awareness about the complexity of regulating speech — showing the difference between harassment or incitement to violence and what is simply ugly but constitutionally protected speech under the First Amendment. It laid out a path to protect our fundamental freedoms even as we fight anti-semitism.

It made clear that any attempt to secure the rights and safety of Jews that undermines the rule of law, weakens education, deepens division, and erodes the institutions of democracy ultimately harms Jews themselves. The vibrant debate that preceded the national strategy — and the way anti-semitism was addressed within it — stands as proof of that.

Johnny, I think that's a tribute to you and to all the founders of Nexus, and it's why I'm proud to be part of it. We've made a difference — and as the fight continues, I believe we have the capability to make an even greater one. Those are my two hopeful takeaways — macro and micro — that make me believe we can succeed.

Jonathan Jacoby (Moderator):

[00:53:01] I'll put in my two cents for my own idea of hope. Back to the national strategy — a reporter asked me recently about it and said, "That was a Democratic Party document, wasn't it?" And I said, "No — that was an American document." The people trying to make it partisan now are doing so to scare us away from being that kind of American.

If this administration had simply built on the strategy that was created — fully implemented it, as it called for — we'd be facing far less anti-semitism today and fighting it far more effectively. So I couldn't agree more, Johnny.

Each of you, in your own way and together, invested in hope and perseverance a long time ago — and we're grateful to see the dividends of that investment now. This is a long fight, and I believe — as both of you said — the fact that we are in it together is what will keep us together. Thank you both very, very much. I'll turn it over to Alan for a few final words.

Alan Solow:

[00:54:27] Thank you, Johnny, and thank you for leading this powerful conversation. Ambassador Rice and Ambassador Rabbi Saperstein — you've added so much to our discussion and inspired us all about how we can confront the threats to our democracy.

It's critical that each of us play our role. While no single leader can get us out of the predicament we're in, when we have leaders like the two of you — and others on this call who will be inspired to take action — we *will* win this fight.

What I want to ask everyone listening today is this — engage in this battle. Join us. Reach out to us at Nexus directly, or just as importantly, connect with your colleagues and allies in your local communities. Help us build the alliances we'll need to succeed — because if we stick together with our allies, we *will* win.

That's my first request. The second, as chairman of Nexus, is to remind you to visit **[**NexusProjectUS.org**](https://NexusProjectUS.org)**. And yes — you'll find a *donate* button there. If you want to help us strengthen this cause and expand these coalitions, please consider supporting us. We can't do it for free — we have a dedicated staff, and that's how we've been able to build our effectiveness so far. Your support truly makes a difference.

I want to thank you all for joining us today. We've had a wonderful crowd and a fantastic discussion. I couldn't be more delighted to have had our two guests — Ambassador Susan Rice and Rabbi David Saperstein — with us today. Johnny, as always, it's a pleasure to have you lead the conversation.

Thank you all for your thoughts, your ideas, your encouragement, and your participation.
Visit ****NexusProjectUS.org**** to stay involved. Have a good evening, everyone.

End of Transcript