

***Transcript from the Jared Huffman zoom meeting, May 10th, on updates of our demands from the Palestine Solidarity Committee within Marin DSA. Topics are noted in green. This interview has been edited for length and clarity. Last edited 11:38 AM on 5/20.***

### Why 17\$ Billion to Israel for Weapons

**Nicole:**

Why did you choose to sanction the \$17 billion over to Israel in weapons and lethal aid?

**Huffman:**

It wasn't the bill that I would have written or wished I could have been voting on but a couple things that to me were persuasive was, it was the only vehicle that I will get to vote on that includes humanitarian aid.

You might find that to be incongruous, humanitarian aid in the same bill where military aid that's supporting the war, but that was the package. And it also includes humanitarian aid for more than just Gaza and Palestinians; it includes the terrible humanitarian crisis in Sudan. It includes Haiti, it includes Armenian refugees and other pretty important needs so that was one factor.

Even though that had a sticker in it of course, it was contingent on you can't spend it through UNRWA, which, I'm fine with spending it through UNRWA. I support UNRWA unequivocally and I think there are ways to deal with a very small handful of UNRWA staffers in Gaza who did bad things without throwing out the most important humanitarian mechanism we have in a difficult place in the middle of a war. So I hate that about it and it just is what it is sometimes.

The vote on the military aid is the part that I know that you don't agree with and where I came down on that was: not for what some would say is a blank check to Israel's war plan, what I came down on was that there are better ways to try to pressure Israel's war plans than a full withholding of aid.

And the reason is I want Israel to be able to defend itself. It continues to be under some measure of attack, including a pretty significant minor war that's been happening on the Lebanese and Syrian border. We don't know what happens with Iran but it's a pretty delicate time for a country that you know is about the size of Marin County. Surrounded by heavily armed adversaries. So I do support Israel's defensive capability and I think what I wanted to see happen to try to pressure changes in the war plan is what Joe Biden is doing right now, so I totally support his withholding of the bombs and munitions that he thinks you know will have a pressure effect on Netanyahu and I hope they do. I think that's the right way to do it to pressure the war plan.

**Nicole:**

That is kind of confusing to me because you've already given them all the weapons and now, yes I think [Biden] paused [one] specific shipment of bombs, but if you think that's a good thing, I don't understand why the rest isn't? And you could say well I want them to be able to defend themselves but it's not really defensive munitions that were sent to them?

**Huffman:**

It's hard sometimes to tease out defensive versus offensive. I don't know anyone that's been able to articulate exactly where that line gets drawn. But my view was that a complete withholding of aid was a bridge too far for a country that I do support defending itself in a country that in my assessment is under some threat of potential attack from adversaries.

### But Israel's Human Rights violations?

**Nicole:**

You do recognize that they have committed multiple human rights violations in their warfare usage,

**HUFFMAN:**

It looks that way.

**Nicole:**

And we usually condition weapons deliveries that way regardless if we're interested in them getting protection or not?

**Huffman:**

Yeah so we already do have a default, and you know we have the Leahy Laws and we have some other safeguards that are supposed to kick in. My understanding is that there have been some classified assurances from Israel in response to those inquiries. I haven't gone into a classified setting to see them. I guess the fact that Biden took the extra step of withholding this latest round of things would suggest that they're not satisfied with what they received to date.

So I'm going to continue to support the Biden administration's judgment. They know way more than me on the types of weapons and the types of assurances that are under consideration with Israel and I think they passionately want to protect Palestinian lives and end the conflict and try to get to a ceasefire. I think that you know from ambassador Burns to the Secretary Blinken to the President himself they're working overtime probably more than anyone else in the world to try to get us there.

Why can't Palestine be militarized?

**Nicole:**

What is the explanation of us wanting to be an ally with Israel and defend Israel, and not defend Palestinians or allow them to have military aid? Why do we want Israel to have military aid and not Palestinians?

**Huffman:**

I think that the assumption is that in Palestinian state, which I really want to see, will not need to be militarized. That if we can come up with a peace they will probably need a police force like the PA and I've been there. They are armed, they look a little bit military-like uh and the US probably pays most of that funding for this debt security. But um we don't and I think we don't want um more militarization because it could lead to conflict.

Israel is making its own choices, why can't it fund itself?

**Jim:**

We know what Israel does with the West Bank that it refuses to allow a Palestinian state. That it continues to displace Palestinians in the WB. That it continues to destroy Gaza. They're making these choices, so why can't Israel find its own defense?

**Huffman:**

Well it may come to that if they continue to poke Joe Biden in the eye and if they're defiant and if they flout humanitarian standards and US assurance requests you know I hope it doesn't. I hope Israel is smarter than that. And I hope that they at some level at least have the same humanitarian values. But you know, right now I would rather not have a complete cutoff of military aid to Israel because I think they have genuine security needs and they are an ally.

No Armed Resistance, OR nonviolent? (BDS)

**Jim:**

Not only have you said no to armed palestinian resistance, and I can understand that, but you've also opposed non-violent resistance as in impact investment sanctions and all kinds of—

**Huffman:**

I think we've talked about the BDS movement in the past. I'm not going to call you anti-semitic, okay, I'm sure your intentions are not that, but there is an element in my opinion of a movement that is about delegitimizing the Jewish state that is tantamount to antisemitism. And I am concerned about that. I think there are better ways to try to change the Israeli policies I disagree with than to delegitimize people, which unfortunately I think is kind of a hallmark of the BDS movement. I know we don't agree on that but that's how I see it.

Was boycotting South Africa Apartheid Anti-White?

**Jim:**

Was boycotting South African apartheid anti-white?

**Huffman:**

No I don't so I mean I don't think they're completely analogous.

**Jim:**

We're supporting justice in the future. Creating justice that would create peace, it will protect Palestinians and Israeli Jews, so that's the opposite of anti-semitic.

**Huffman:**

I know there are some folks on the ceasefire side of this debate who don't want the state of Israel to exist. Who believes it is illegitimate. I've met with groups up and down my district. I've had a meeting with some folks mainly from the Northern part of my district who very strongly believe that Israel is an illegitimate state and that it is a colonial settler state that should never have been allowed to exist and I've heard the entire rationale for that. I strongly disagree with that. I strongly believe that it is okay and perfectly legitimate and necessary to have a Jewish democracy in Israel.

But that doesn't mean I don't want to see justice for Palestinians and the aspirations that they have for their own state. I completely support it. And there is an element of anti-semitism in the view of many in the sort of categorical opposition to the existence of the state of Israel. I know it's a little more complicated than that but that's my understanding of it and you can't deny the seeds of it is some of the rhetoric we hear.

Israel is an illegitimate, apartheid state?

**Nicole:**

I want it made clear that I believe Israel is a completely illegitimate state and has lost all legitimacy in international law, war crimes, apartheid—but I want to focus on what we can come together on.

**Huffman:**

I wouldn't necessarily disagree with you if you were just talking about the West Bank. Because I see a huge difference between Israel itself and how Israel manages the Occupied West Bank which begins to look a lot more like apartheid. And so like everything else in this I don't think it reduces to a simple binary like the whole thing is Apartheid or the entire state of Israel is illegitimate. I think the occupation is a disaster and I think it is a terrible policy and it does you know it compares much more with Apartheid than the actual State of Israel which is nothing like apartheid. I mean if we're parceling out I'm sure not every single one you have to parcel out because that's the reality and I've been there and I've met with Arab Israelis and seen them.

**Nicole:**

Well, imagine if somebody told you that Nazi Germany was apartheid for the Jews but not for the other Germans.

**Huffman:**

You know yeah that's not how I'm seeing it.

#### Actions to refund UNRWA??

**Nicole:**

I did want to discuss UNRWA with you. Have you taken any more steps to try and get it refunded? You keep referring to "other ways" you want to pressure Israel. I just want to know more of what those are?

**Huffman:**

Well, for example, I signed on to a letter with like several dozen colleagues after the terrible um targeting of the WCK group. That was atrocious. The President was awesome in speaking out and condemning it in the strongest terms and in that letter we not only condemned it but we called on the administration to seek very specific assurances and to consider withholding offensive military aid until we had. So this is the second time where I feel like I approached it. That's what I did.

**Nicole:**

We would love to see more than just letters condemning. We would love actual steps because I think we both agree UNRWA's the largest aid center in the area and the humanitarian disaster is the worst it's ever been.

**Huffman:**

Yeah it's terrible, so I wish I had the opportunity to take some of those steps I really do and I would if I could vote on that I would do it without hesitation. Sometimes I'm constrained by the lousy votes that house republicans because they're in the majority.

#### US Vetoing UN for Pali Statehood

**Nicole:**

As we know you're interested in recognizing a Palestinian state and the UN actually tried to put forward that and it was vetoed by the US. Have you considered—

**Huffman:**

Yeah I opposed that veto. I'm ready to stop doing those things. I think it's time for an act, I think it could be super helpful to have UN recognition of the Palestinian state. And I saw the GA I think approved something today or it's on the verge of approving.

#### Islamic Center Attack

**Nicole:**

Have you been following the Islamic Center Attack in Marin in Novato actually, where I am?

**Huffman:**

From most conversations, my understanding was that the person who did this was not committing a hate crime. With all the evidence that we have, this was a mentally deranged person who wandered in with, like, a gun that was not an actual bullet-firing gun of some kind.

And the Islamic Center had told law enforcement that they understood, they did not believe this or consider this to be a crime. Not sure if this is a crime, or whether it's a hate crime. It is a security issue. Because this person, you know, had a backpack with something resembling a weapon, and I guess he threw it in a creek. And so that's the lesser charge that's being brought. But it did not rise to the level of a hate crime, both on the evidence, and even from the member of the Islamic Center that was talking to police. So, if you have different information. I am happy to follow up on it but this sounds like someone

who is developmentally disabled and confused and paranoid. And just an unfortunate incident.

**Nicole:**

Well that's...I mean the famous line I feel like when—and I'm a white person—white people do a shooting it's always regulated to mental health and not a nationwide sanctioned hate against Islamic people right now. Which I feel like is rising and nobody is really talking about islamophobia. It's just constantly anti-semitism. The attack was during the muslim holy month in front of the Islamic center so I don't understand why it would not be a hate crime.

**Huffman:**

I was ready to light my hair on fire about this. I want you to know that for all the same reasons because it just didn't smell right all those circumstantial factors. There was also an incident somewhere in Michigan or the midwest though where a Jewish rabbi I think was shot under circumstances that looked strongly like an anti-semitic hate crime and it turned out to not be. And I think we've just always got to be careful and that's why I did follow up with the DA and with the police chief and with the Islamic center. I am open to new information but I am pretty confident that there was not an Islamophobic or a hate basis of what happened...Zachary was really familiar with all the facts and I know he is part of the Islamic center so I would urge you to talk to him. And if anybody believes there's more to this story where I'm missing something, I'm here to help. I'm not gonna gloss over or sugarcoat any hate crimes of any kind.

**Jenny (Huffman Assistant):**

I just looked up what happened too, Congressman. You did talk to the Police Chief, yeah we made phone calls it was Zachary Twist. Yeah and um that doesn't mean that wasn't very unnerving for everybody who of course doesn't know what's happening. That was a, you know, a really unfortunate situation. And I think some of the information of course is confidential...

**Huffman:**

Actually yeah I hope I didn't tell you anything that I wasn't supposed to tell you and

**Jenny:** they can't share their reports or what they can share which is also hard for the community and nobody should feel uncomfortable. So I just want you to know that we definitely have sensitivity to that situation. **SHE TELLS HUFFMAN HE DID NOT TALK TO THE DA**

**HUFFMAN:** Zachary was really familiar with all the facts and I know he is part of the Islamic center so I would urge you to talk to him. And if anybody believes there's more to this story where I'm missing something, I'm here to help. I'm not gonna gloss over or sugarcoat any hate crimes of any kind.

**Iran Embassy Bombing**

**Nicole:**

I'd actually like to move on to something that you mentioned earlier too about Iran. You I noticed condemned their counter-strike into Israel which had, I believe, zero casualties, except for the Iron dome firing a defense shot that hit a Bedouin girl.

**Huffman:**

Do you want me to criticize Israel's strike on the diplomat in Syria? Yes. I will. That was a dumb thing to do. It was a terrible thing, provocative thing to do. The Biden administration said as much. They were concerned about it. So, you know, I'm not. I'm not saying that Israel is blameless in that conflict at all.

**Nicole:**

But why then did you only speak out about the counter-strike?

**Huffman:**

I don't know what I spoke out about either, actually.

**Nicole:**

Oh, I thought that you condemned with a letter. About the strike on Israel. But maybe I'm wrong. Then that's actually great news.

HUFFMAN VOTED YEA ON HR 1143 Condemning Iran's unprecedented drone and missile attack on Israel 4/18/24: <https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/2024141>

**Huffman:**

I wouldn't have done that. I see nuance here. I think Israel does have some blame for the whole affair. So that's how I view it. Okay.

**Jim:**

Condemn it as a crime rather than a mistake.

**Huffman:**

You know, I try to get facts before I condemn things as crimes and, you know, kind of old school that way. So I would need to know more. I don't know enough about which IRGC individual.

**Jim:**

It attacked an embassy.

**Huffman:**

I mean. It was a consulate, I believe. And but it was, yeah, it was part of a diplomatic footprint. But I don't know enough about it. To tell you the truth. To say I wasn't thrilled about it. I was concerned. And the fact that Tony Blinken and others were critical of it. You know. I don't know. But it certainly suggests that this was a provocation.

**Huffman:**

But: let me be clear, the IRGC are not good guys. And, you know—

**Nicole:**

I'm sorry. Please. I can't even. Sorry. I can't let that one go. We don't kill people or sanction other people killing people in embassies. Right? It doesn't really matter?

**Huffman:**

Totally correct. Okay. What I don't know is whether there was some terror act afoot. And I. Well.

I just don't know.

**Nicole:** It literally could. I mean, it's an embassy. It's not. Whatever they're thinking right now. and talking about there...it's still an Embassy. If we don't have that, we don't have anything at all we—we have no countries could have an embassy.

**Huffman:**

But the Saudis chopped up Jamal Khashoggi in an embassy, so I'm not here to say that you know just because you walk in the door of an embassy you can do anything you want I just don't know enough about it I'll uh leave it at that.

**Nicole:**

I'm glad to hear that it wasn't a one-sided condemnation. I'm glad to hear that I was wrong.

## Police violence, Student Repression

### Nicole:

How do you feel about police brutality on campuses right now? On defenceless students? And how do you feel about the Prime Minister of Israel issuing a threat to the students?

### Huffman:

Let me give you a spoiler alert: I really don't like Netanyahu. I think he is a thug and a fascist and a really terrible part of this whole situation. So let me just leave it at that of course, he has no place lecturing the US or students or colleges or anything else about this. But it's also a little bit harder to answer a question asking what I think about police brutality.

I don't see a sort of binary here. I see some protesters who want world peace and are wonderful non-violent ideologies doing the same thing that peaceful protestors do...And I see others who have done that in the finest tradition of our country. And I see others who are nihilists and haters and want to fight and destroy things and I don't think that's okay. I see some Universities and some Police forces that I think have shown incredible restraint and struck the right balance in allowing protest versus protecting the public and other things, and I see others who have not...So I can't sort of offer a categorical position if you will on all of that. I can just sort of look operationally and deplore the way the counter protesters attack the encampment at UCLA. And also deplore the assault reportedly on the Jewish student that the counter protesters thought justified their violence. All of this is terrible in my opinion.

### Nicole:

Do you stand by the ability of free speech and peaceful sit-ins not being met with "less lethal" AKA rubber bullets? I don't want to see that happening in Northern California the way it happened at UCLA.

### Huffman:

Believe me I was on the phone with the folks at Humble Cal Poly late into multiple nights. During that stand off I was very concerned and I was urging restraint and non-violence at every step. So I'm really relieved that it ended without violence. I think when you get to things like rubber bullets, I mean that is pretty strong.

### Nicole:

It's *very* lethal. It's only *slightly* less lethal. Have you spoken to Newsom on how he's addressing UCLA? After that happened, official Israelis talked about how they ran a counter terrorism thing and something with Dr. Phil...and how they were undercover and state sanctioning the mob? (**NOTE: Referencing [this](#).)**)

### Huffman:

I guess I would feel a little weird, you know, talking about UCLA together. Maybe it's probably not my place but I certainly was fully engaged on Cal Poly Humble.

### Nicole:

Okay well it's good to hear that things will hopefully be different under your leadership with Northern California.

### Huffman:

I'll try. You know, it's...I'm a federal guy and that's a state university, and I don't know that I have a direct role rather than just you know maybe a community leader trying to urge everyone to avoid anything that would hurt people.

### Nicole:

I think it matters though because there was a Congressman in Mississippi, who commented on a video of a bunch of people screaming anti-black monkey noises at a black Pro-Palestine protestor, and he reposted the video saying: "ole miss showing us how it's done!"

**Note: Referencing this, which actually said: “Ole Miss taking care of business.”**

**Huffman:**

Probably one of my Republican colleagues.

**Nicole:**

It is. And I just am saying it really matters because it riles up hate in the community and sanctions violence.

**Huffman:**

I just want nothing but deescalation in those situations. So yeah, that's my only concern.

#### **New Antisemitism Definition**

**Nicole:**

I wanted to talk about how you voted on the new definition of anti-semitism positively.

**Huffman:**

Yeah I did and you know I can explain that if you want. It's another one of these votes that I really wish hadn't come to the floor. We've got a really good anti-semitism bill by my colleague from North Carolina Kathy Manning which is a very thoughtful approach to implement elements of Biden's anti-semitism policy and it doesn't rely on a single definition. It doesn't suffer from some of the problems of the bill that we saw.

But I also know how the bill—this is the Lawler bill from New York—I know how it's been characterized. And I got to tell you, you know I read the bill and I also read the Holocaust Remembrance Association's website that includes that definition and provides the contemporary example and things like that...I read as much as I could about this bill in my reading—and I'm a lawyer so I think you know I speak with a little bit of authority: the bill does not codify a definition of anti-semitism. It just doesn't and all of the headlines and the hysteria over it they're saying oh congress just codified a single definition of anti-semitism and it doesn't. It requires consideration of that definition, but it doesn't exclude the current process that the department of education uses for determining anti-semitism under the law that was an issue in that bill.

So that being the case I didn't it was terrible and I do want to show support for addressing anti-semitism because it's a thing, it's real, and it's raging right now. So is islamophobia and I'm going to take that just as seriously.

**Jim:**

I just wanted to mention that my grandparents fled fascist Hungary in the 1920s and I think one of the reasons was because of the leadership, and at that time anti-jewish violence there. And they fled and now in Hungary as you know is led by Gordon, who is also a great friend of Israel and vice versa. Anyway, I'd like to let you know, you mentioned earlier that Netanyahu was a fascist.

Wouldn't that be anti-semitic under the IHR definition?

**Huffman:**

No it's not.

**JENNY:**

It actually says you *can* criticize Israel.

**Jim:**

But you're comparing Israelis to the Nazis?

**Huffman:**



Well there were a lot of other fascists beside the Nazis. But yeah, I'm familiar with what you're talking about. I don't think I've triggered anything specifically...

That IHR website and that definition and the contemporary examples are all guidelines. It's never meant to be the singular definition of when someone is committed to anti-semitism. They're meant to be things to consider because it's more complicated than that and look I understand where the Holocaust Remembrance folks are coming from. I've been to Hashem and Jerusalem, I've been to other Holocaust museums and I've talked to survivors of the holocaust. They don't want to ever have another Holocaust and they believe the seeds of the Holocaust were in anti-semitism in 1920s and 1930s Germany so the whole point is to try to really sensitize people to those seeds of anti-semitism before it rises to the level and I support that. But I think, you know, kind of trying to reduce this to something you can "never say this word" you can "never you make this argument" it just doesn't work that way.

**Jim:**

But it's a criticism of the state of Israel using those examples. We can't put anti-semitism above everything else, from anti-palestinianism and anti-arab, anti-muslim racism or anti-black racism. It all comes together. We all have to stick together, we have to have solidarity with one another otherwise we don't have the future.

**Huffman:**

Well I'm anti-hate and I think it's uh that's the common thread that's what I've heard through all of those things.

Unanswered: Why Palestinians can't be armed

**Nicole:**

I just wanted to take this last moment to talk about why we support military aid to Israel and not to Palestinians.

**Huffman:**

Well the Palestinians don't have a state they don't have a military they have a police presence and the PA and we do support funding that and we have funded it and I support that but other apples and oranges—

**Nicole:**

Wait, I'm so sorry to interrupt. You recognize that then Gaza and the West Bank are occupied?

**HUFFMAN:**

Oh yeah but they also have palestinian police

**Nicole:**

So Israel has no right of defense against people that it occupies AND THEY [Palestinians] have the right to armed defense?

**Huffman:**

I don't support armed defense and that is why I condemn the October 7 attack and I certainly have conversations with people who rationalize.

**Nicole:**

It's not me who says that. The UN says that. I didn't make that up. I just thought you didn't think that it was occupied.

**Huffman:**

But I've never denied that the West Bank's occupied.

**Nicole:**  
No, Gaza.

**Huffman:**  
Well, Gaza was blockaded. It wasn't occupied before October 7th.

**Nicole:**  
Okay, so, but you just think it's just a stateless territory?

**Huffman:**  
It was occupied. It has been occupied before, but, um. It has previously been occupied, but it was not occupied on October 7th.

**Nicole:**  
Just, because I feel like we have it both ways with people. Like, you're not supposed to attack an area you occupy.

**Huffman:**  
I'm not saying it's okay. I think the policy towards Gaza was wrong, but I think we've got to be careful about the words we use.

#### **Nakba Recognition?**

**Jim:**  
I have a quick question. May 15th is the day Palestinians commemorate the Nakba. And you talked about how Israel won its independence, uh, it was a very legitimate state and everything. And it's very important to talk about the Holocaust, and I would never stop you from doing that. I would never stop anyone from doing that. And I violently protested against those who would. So I think about the Nakba. I think we need to talk about how tens of thousands of Palestinians were forced from their homes.

**Huffman:**  
True. I don't disagree with you. And I supported Rasheeda Tlaib when she was denied the opportunity to have a Nakba event in the United States Capitol a year or two ago. I thought that was outrageous. The Nakba was a real thing. It really did happen. And I think there are interesting debates about the scale of it, the reasons for it. There are some conflicting narratives about it, which I probably don't fully understand. But, uh, I think it's a real thing. that there's no question that thousands, tens of thousands of Palestinians were uprooted from their homes and were made refugees. And some were killed. And that happened, and I'm very clear about that.

**Jim:**  
Can you say, can you give a social media perspective on May 15th remembering the Nakba?

**Huffman:**  
Well, I'll think about it, but, you know, it's become a little bit loaded, because some people ignore the fact that many of those folks were told to leave by Arab countries. There are some people in other countries who said, uh, we will destroy Israel and you'll be able to return when we do. And there's, you know, you're not going to agree with those nuanced and counter-narratives, but I have heard them and I've found some credibility there as well. There were also just outright evictions and violence against some of those Palestinians. So I don't think we're clear about what we mean sometimes when we use the term, and I want to be careful about wading into that.