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*Framing and Charting the Region's Issues, Interests, Challenges, and Opportunities:
Implications for Arab and U.S. Policies*

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"THE PALESTINIAN FUTURE"

Chair:

Dr. Tom Mattair - Executive Director, Middle East Policy Council; former Research Scholar, Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research; author, *The Three Occupied UAE Islands: The Tunbs and Abu Musa* and *Global Security Watch – Iran: A Reference Handbook*.

Speakers:

H.E. Ambassador Maen Areikat - Chief Representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to the United States; former Deputy Head and Coordinator-General, Negotiations Affairs Department, PLO.

Ms. Karen Koning AbuZayd - Commissioner, United Nations Human Rights Council mandated Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic; former Under Secretary General and Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; Member, Board of Directors, Middle East Policy Council and the International Organisation of Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection.

Mr. Bill Corcoran - President and CEO, ANERA (American Near East Refugee Aid); former Vice President, Child Fund International.

Mr. Matthew Reynolds - North America Representative, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; former Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs; U.S. Department of State.

Mr. Yousef Munayyer - Executive Director, The Jerusalem Fund for Education and Community Development; former Policy Analyst, American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

Remarks as delivered.

[Dr. Tom Mattair] Thank you very much, John. Also thank you for having a panel on this issue. I was at a two-day conference recently in which there was no panel on this issue, which doesn't mean that the organizers aren't concerned about it. It only means that there are issues that are of such more immediate threat and concern to them that they need to deal with that. But it's not a subject that can be neglected, particularly by the United States in as much as we do have responsibility. So I'm glad to have this good panel here.

We will begin with His Excellency Ambassador Maen Areikat, who is the Chief Representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization to the United States, and a man who has extensive experience on the negotiating teams in the PLO. And followed by Ms. Karen Koning AbuZayd, who is a member of the Board of the Directors of my organization, the Middle East Policy Council, but is Commissioner of the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, which was commissioned by the U.N. Human Rights Council, and was formerly Undersecretary General and Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees. And then Mr. Matthew Reynolds, who's the North American Representative of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees and formerly was Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs. And Bill Corcoran, who is the President and CEO of the American Near East Refugee Aid, ANERA.

And so we have people who will be talking about the immediate efforts to promote human development in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and Lebanon and Jordan, and we will end with Mr. Yousef Munayyer, who is a doctoral candidate, University of Maryland, and currently Executive Director of the Jerusalem Fund for Education, and its educational arm, the Palestine Center, and someone who publishes and speaks on major networks ten times more often than most doctoral candidates anywhere. So that is the panel, and I'm honored to turn it over to His Excellency Maen Areikat.

[Ambassador Maen Areikat] Thank you very much. Good morning. Thank you, Mattair, and Dr. thank you for inviting me. There's always an advantage to be the one to start, and a disadvantage, and I was told that we need to stick to the ten minute limit, so I'm just going to go quickly over a few issues. Let me comment on what you said as there are more immediate issues in the region. We all know what is going on in the Middle East and we believe that these changes are very significant. The only thing that I want to say here - that the longer the Israelis and the Israeli government waits for things to settle down, the more complex the situation will become.

I remember three years ago when – I don't want to even call it anything – but when the events started to happen in the Middle East, Prime Minister Netanyahu said that Israel must wait until the dust settles down before they decide what their next move will be or would be. Three years later, Israel is not in a better position than they used to be, and the situation is not easy or the prospects for a political solution are not stronger. So the longer Israel waits, the less secure it will feel, and the more complex the situation will become. So I think this wait and see situation should not continue.

Over the last ten months, the region from a Palestinian perspective witnessed three important developments. One was the unraveling of the efforts of Secretary of State John Kerry, the nine month period, completely a collapse of the talks. It's important to reiterate here that the reason behind the collapse of these efforts was Israel's failure to honor its commitment to Secretary Kerry to release the fourth batch of Palestinian prisoners. When President Abbas was here in March and he met with U.S. officials, the Israelis asked the U.S. Administration to ask President Abbas to extend the negotiations beyond the nine-month period in order for them to release the fourth batch of prisoners. Something we could not accept because the two issues were separate. We went to the negotiations and we already made a concession to the United States by refraining from pursuing membership at U.N. agencies and international organizations. So that was our offer to the administration in order to give them the chance to work out a deal or a solution.

It does concern me that many in Washington, unfortunately a reputable, someone I respect very much writer like Thomas Freidman, two days ago, three days ago, in the "New York Times" talks about the Obama offer to President Abbas. So now Palestinians have three offers so far – Ehud Barak's offer at Camp David in 2000, Ehud Olmert offer, and now President Obama's offer. And there is no accuracy whatsoever about an offer that was made. We were discussing ideas. The United States came up with so many proposals. We had our reservations, Israelis had their own reservations, but to try to assign blame once again to the Palestinian President and to the Palestinian leadership is not fair and is not accurate. It's not an accurate presentation of the facts. We were waiting for a modified proposal by the United States following the meeting between President Abbas and President Obama that never was delivered by U.S. officials. So we don't want to get into this blame assigning game. They did it in the past and it did not produce any results.

So the collapse of these negotiations was a turning point that was followed by the Palestinians seeking membership in 15 international organizations and conventions, and then a sudden surprising development: the reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas in May of this year that was then followed

by the formation of a national consensus government and not a national unity government. A lot of people mix between the two. A national unity government is a product of a government that will be formed after elections between different political parties.

From the beginning Israel opposed this agreement because Israel has no interest to see the Palestinians united. Israel has no interest to see the Gaza Strip and the West Bank being one integral geographic unit, and they want to see the two areas separated, and they want the divisions to continue. The United States, surprisingly, took a rather positive, constructive approach, and said let's wait and see how this government will perform.

So as a result everybody knew that Israel was going to do whatever they can to scuttle the formation of this government or to undermine it, and they did not wait long until the three teenage settlers were kidnapped near Jerusalem to start the campaign in the West Bank that in three weeks left more than 19 Palestinians dead, many hundreds arrested. A campaign that continued despite the fact that three days later the Israeli intelligence and police knew that these teenagers were killed by their kidnapers. They probably carried out a cover up scheme not to announce the fact that they have found out that they were killed, and that of course led to the war in Gaza, which is the third important development with all the human toll - twenty hundred people, civilians - I won't say civilians - twenty hundred people killed, the vast majority civilian, including 500 children, 11,000 wounded, half a million displaced, 50,000 homeless, targeting on our schools, mosques, a church, as well as hospitals under the pretext of self-defense.

And the war on Gaza just proved what I said earlier that if Israel wants to wait longer then they have to expect more. If Israel wants to continue with its occupation of the Palestinian people and expect the Palestinians to sit idly by while they confiscate more land, while they violate their human rights then they are mistaken.

I was last week at an event and I was asked about the tunnels, about the rockets, and I said clearly if the occupation continues you will see more tunnels. If the occupation continues you will see more rockets. This is a natural right for people under occupation to defend themselves. Israel cannot have or cannot be told that it is self-defense on their part to fight a people that they are occupying.

A country does not qualify to have self-defense against the very same people that they are occupying.

And it struck me during the summer to hear many U.S. officials and spokespeople here saying that Israel has a right to self-defense. Israel is an

occupying power. An occupying power does have the right to self-defense if it was against another sovereign state like Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, but not against the Palestinian people who are under occupation.

So these three developments now have taken us to a very crucial juncture, which is what is next? Twenty-one years later after the Oslo process started it's clear that this process has failed. It's clear that this process has been used as a smokescreen by the Israeli government, this current government in particular, to expand settlements and to consolidate their occupation.

This is a government that does not have on its agenda any plans to end the conflict with the Palestinian people.

All what they are doing is positioning themselves for the next elections. It's all domestic politics in Israel. Members of the Israeli government, including the Prime Minister, are trying to outbid and out stage each other.

In the last month alone, Israel announced 2,600 settlement units, and another 1,000 just three days ago, and they are expanding their settlement enterprise while all what we hear from the United States is concern. Not helpful, not constructive.

The United States can actually do a lot to stop Israel from continuing its settlement expansion, which according to U.S. officials was the main reason Secretary Kerry's efforts failed because during the nine-month period Israel did not cease its settlement activities and continued to occupy Palestinian territories with more settlements and more settlers in contravention with Geneva Convention of 1949 which prohibits an occupying power from moving its population to the occupied territory.

So we Palestinians, what should we expect if the international community is covering up Israeli violations of international law and the human rights of the Palestinian people?

Why can't the United States do more to stop Israel and its settlement enterprise?

Why can't the United States dry up the sources of funding that goes to settlers and settlements in the West Bank including in Jerusalem. And organization called [unknown term] is registered as a 501C in this country, a non-profit organization that channels money to settlers to take over Palestinian properties in Jerusalem and elsewhere. A bogus, phony company called Kendall Finances, that we tried to research and find out information about it and we could not. Not

registered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Not registered anywhere that supposedly is used to channel this money.

Why can't the United States act to prevent money that is going to support something that the United States is publically opposed to? And it violates even the position of the United States.

Why do they allow funders like Abraham Moskowitz in Miami and Sheldon Adelson to continue to put money to add fuel to the fire there to provoke the Palestinians in order to bring us back to that cycle of violence.

The U.S. can do more. Words and rhetoric are not sufficient. They can issue advisories to their own citizens who hold also Israeli citizenship not to invest in the occupied West Bank, and they can boycott Israeli settlement products.

There is a strong support for this if they embark on a move like that within the United States, within the American Jewish community, and among Israelis as well. The settlements are not popular neither in Israel nor among the American Jewish community here. So why can't the United States take some complete steps instead of continuing to issue statements that mean nothing to us.

So in the absence to meaningful bilateral process that only contributed to the consolidation of Israeli occupation we find ourselves compelled to take this issue to a multilateral level. The United Nations, international community – they have to be involved. This bilateral process failed and we have to admit that it failed, and as Palestinians we cannot continue to give it more time.

Let's see, let's explore why Netanyahu and his government are not only making the two-state solution remote and far-fetched, but impossible.

Therefore when we say that we want to go to the United Nations, we are going to the United Nations to change the dynamics – there has to be a new approach to resolving this conflict – and that includes joining international organizations and conventions to defend the rights of our people and put an end to this Israeli military occupation.

That also includes supporting efforts to isolate the Israeli military occupation and settlement enterprise. We are not in the business of isolating Israel as a state or the Israeli people as long as they are within their own boundaries. But we have every right to isolate the Israeli military occupation and the Israeli settlers enterprises, and we have the right to support other to do so, and we will continue to do so.

Time is of the essence. The situation in the region is unpredictable, but we very strongly believe that solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will contribute to efforts to help in solving other issues.

You have heard recently Israeli leaders flirting with Arab countries and Arab officials about bypassing the Palestinians and trying to forge alliances supposedly to confront the same threat.

Something meaningful and real and serious is not going to happen between Israel and its Arab neighbors and the Muslim countries unless they put an end to this conflict, unless they allow the Palestinian people to live in dignity and freedom, and have their own state.

Thank you very much.

[Tom Mattair] Thank you, Ambassador. Karen, can you come to the podium?

[Karen Koning AbuZayd] I hate to come to the podium after Maen, with his passion and and so with much of it which I will also put in a very much drier way.

The thoughts I'm going to share with you this morning are very personal ones based on having been living with the Palestinians in Gaza from 2000 to 2010.

What I lived with then and continued to follow very closely until now, reinforced by my being a commissioner on the U.N. Commission of Inquiry on Syria, doesn't help to imagine with any certitude nor any optimism the Palestinian future, or that of the region more generally.

I intended to speak about the resilience and steadfastness of Palestinian refugees and the promise of Palestinian children, but I'm going to leave that to Matt Reynolds.

Therefore, I begin with what seems increasingly unlikely as a future for Palestine and Palestinians, but what remains a hope, which I believe I share with Palestinians themselves, and that hope is for an independent state of Palestine where Palestinians are fully in charge of their own government and politics, their own economy and social lives, and their own security.

What seems to be coming unfortunately clearer with the passage of time is the receding of that hope, the possibility of the once celebrated two-state solution, the more recently promoted one-state solution are constantly eroded by the deliberate, targeted, continual usurpation of West Bank and East Jerusalem land,

the interference with Palestinian governing and business, every day life, restrictions on the Palestinian Authority and on Palestinians wherever they live, and the repeated attacks on Gaza. These phenomena prevent anything resembling a normal life, economic activity, or statehood from developing.

Despite this bleak beginning, I believe in the strength of the Palestinian desire for independence and their intention to realize the conditions, which will grant them the universal rights that are promised to all people under international law. These are promises that should be promoted by all who believe in and value human rights.

Our first goal must be, as the Ambassador said, to end the occupation, to allow progress towards an independent united state governed by Palestinians with open borders for both people and goods, and one which is in a safe and secure relationship with its neighbors. Is this too much to aim for? Perhaps under present political circumstances, but if justice is to be served these must be the goals toward which we must work.

For those who are skeptical, I refer you to the recently published book on Palestine by Richard Falk entitled the "Legitimacy of Hope." His thesis is that hope keeps alive the struggle for liberation, playing a key role in achieving local solidarity and eventual decolonization in accordance with international law. I also recommend the work of an Israeli journalist, Noam Sheizaf, who wrote recently in his "972" magazine, and I quote, "It's time the Palestinian issue became a conversation on rights rather than diplomatic solutions. The failure to address the occupation casts a long shadow on the very concept of rights as a political and philosophical tool for bettering the human condition."

There are, however, practical developments which allow us to move from the poisonous effects of the discouraging and depressing past six decades, with many of those years spent in international and regional negotiation producing ever more deteriorating conditions for Palestinians in terms of their territory, their dignity, and their security.

First, having lived and worked with Palestinians and humbly learning of their dreams, observing their abilities, and I know what could be accomplished if their skills and talents were unleashed. I don't underestimate the difficulties of occupation or the tragic consequences personally and economically of events such as the recent Gazan war, but I want to draw attention to the willingness, even eagerness of the Palestinians to overcome their circumstances and make the best of the opportunities left to them. There is little, or only short-lived despair. Almost none of the giving up one expects to find among occupied people, especially those living through repeated cycles of violence and an ongoing,

firmly established system of oppression and humiliation, barely acknowledged or appreciated by anyone who's not lived under occupation.

What's emerging among Palestinians and - finally - those who interact with them on a political level but also among many others who are beginning to recognize the injustices, past and present, is that the oppression on Palestinians is long overdue for redress. Add to this the Palestinians of all generation, their refusal to give up their goals of freedom and independence, and you may agree there is hope for their legitimate struggle after all.

I'll mention just a few of these hopeful signs. A consensus government is in place. There has been a historic visit to Gaza by the Palestinian Prime Minister and members of his cabinet. The PA is working with the government in Gaza to take charge of the Gaza reconstruction and control the borders, we hope with the Israelis.

Private sector, international, and West Bank businessmen are responding with thoughts and plans for establishing links with Gaza businessmen, those devastated by the recent conflict to help rebuild and reinvigorate the local economy. The U.N. Secretary General visits Gaza and takes the opportunity to directly challenge the government and prime minister of Israel on the occupation and the expansion of settlements, calling the destruction he witnessed in Gaza a shame on the international community. He further initiates an inquiry on the Israeli attacks on U.N. facilities in Gaza, all bolder actions than any taken by a Secretary General previously. New, whether they give us any results or not.

Yesterday, the Jordanians took a request for an emergency session of the Security Council on settlements. Today, that emergency session has taken place, again, previously blocked by our United States representative to the U.N.

The Prime Minister of Sweden announces his government's intention to recognize the observer state of Palestine as the state of Palestine, and the U.K. Parliament votes 274-12 in favor of a non-binding resolution to give diplomatic recognition to a Palestine state.

The Irish follow suit, and Spain is moving towards a similar declaration. France makes tentatively positive remarks on recognition. All of these are symbolic, yes, but a new, meaningful, and unexpected European move in the direction of liberating the Palestinians and offering them a decent and humane future.

At the Cairo conference earlier this month on the reconstruction of Gaza, pledges of \$5.4 billion were made, beyond the goal of \$5 billion, half of which is earmarked for Gaza reconstruction. It's really a shame that it takes an

inordinately disproportionate attack; the third in six years, on 1.8 million Palestinians crowded into a tiny seven by thirty-two mile territory of Gaza, to illicit such a response to decades-long illegality, injustice, and inhumanity.

A caution, however – if the draconian conditions, some of which are already appearing in the U.N.-Israel-PA negotiations are imposed on these funds and the use of them, these pledges cannot be consummated in time to even protect Gazans from the coming winter.

The siege of Gaza must be lifted.

Previously uninvolved or even unfriendly organizations, media outlets, individuals have begun to speak and write about the injustice on Palestinians, and to call for more balance in attitudes to the region. This is particularly important here in United States, where many decision makers who follow or those who follow only the mainstream media are subject to believing only the stereotype of the Palestinians as one of the causes of an unsettled and problematic Middle East.

Therefore, I suggest that we build upon these transforming movements in favor of liberating Palestine by coupling these changes and opportunities with the strength on view every day among Palestinians, those in the West Bank and East Jerusalem who insist on confronting the daily struggle against impositions by the occupier, those who do not give up and take their skills and talents to where life would be easier, more profitable, more promising in terms of opportunities and potential achievements, and to the Gazans who despite facing unimaginable destruction time again and time again respond without fail to carry on doing whatever is necessary and in their power to ensure that brighter future for their children.

If there were freedom of movement and economic independence there is no limit to what the Palestinians will achieve on their own without any humanitarian aid. But there's no guarantee for progress with any of these positive signs unless we embrace them as an international community and support those who are already trying to promote and act upon them, non-governmental organizations, journalists, some in some governments, and the United Nations.

A final word – these were all “hows,” and this is another just repeat the “how.” Just to emphasize the plea for what has long been called for among those with knowledge and good will, the end of occupation, the opening of borders for both people and goods across the entire Palestinian territory – that's singular – and the end of impunity for the internationally illegal acts by the occupying power, the main factor which has sustained the cycle of violence in Palestine and

contributes to the unrest and the ever more frightening developments in the Middle East beyond.

Thank you.

[Dr. Tom Mattair] Yes, Matt. Please.

[Matthew Reynolds] Thank you. One of the challenges of course of being on a panel is there's always some repetition of things that are mentioned, but I think it's important because there are some items and concepts and issues that certainly warrant repetition and warrant thinking about repeatedly.

Since its inception in 1949 UNRWA, which is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. That's why we just go by UNRWA - it's a long name - has provided and continues to provide crucial humanitarian and human development services to the approximately 5 million registered Palestine refugees in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Gaza, and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. It is through this special lens that we witness many of the profound changes that have occurred in the Middle East over the past 65 years and how these events have impacted the Palestinians and their future.

While the new ISIS crisis in Syria and Iraq has expectedly garnered much media and public attention, the recent horrific war in Gaza reminds us that the Arab-Israeli conflict with its roots reaching deep into history is still with us today, and continues to cast a dark and unyielding shadow across the Middle East, touching virtually every issue affecting the relationship between its people. It remains the primary determinate of regional stability and prosperity. As is frequent with conflicts what is often forgotten is that in this case, too, peace is ultimately about people. There can be no peace with almost 5 million refugees living in a tentative existence and the Palestine refugee issue unresolved.

Palestine refugee concerns remain not only unaddressed, but are consistently removed from the narrative of negotiation and peace processing. There are even some here in the United States who believe that the Palestine refugee doesn't even exist. They claim that their status is perpetuated by UNRWA. In their view if UNRWA were to be eliminated or defunded there would be no Palestine refugees and poof, 5 million souls and one of the more complicated final status issues would simply disappear.

On the contrary, until a just and durable solution can be found to their plight, UNRWA will continue to provide a range of services that others can't or won't provide including education, health, and social support that not only sustain today, but build productive lives into the future.

Others on this panel have who have a more political mandate of which UNRWA does not are better suited than me to comment on the future of the now-stagnated peace process and how that bodes for the future of all Palestinians, but it is very clear that simply maintaining the so-called status quo is unsustainable and dangerous. While the goal must ultimately remain achieving a final comprehensive peace agreement, the currently deteriorating situation in the region, particularly facing Palestine refugees, necessitates action, albeit realistically of a more modest scope and impact.

With the exception of the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 67, and 73, UNRWA and the Palestine refugees have not faced this level of crisis in all five fields of operation until now. It is simply overwhelming. Nowhere is the need to change the paradigm more obvious than in Gaza, the home to 1.2 million Palestine refugees.

Over the past six years there have been three wars in Gaza as Karen pointed out, and Karen lived through one of these, a hard one in 2008-2009. This most recent was the longest – some 50 days – and certainly the most devastating. 2,254 Palestinians, 538 of them children, and 71 Israelis, mostly soldiers, but including five civilians and including a little boy were killed.

I was in recently in Gaza only a few weeks ago and I can tell you the situation on the ground is devastating. Entire neighborhoods in Gaza like Shuja'iyya were flattened by artillery barrages, not the much-proclaimed surgical strikes. Key infrastructure including electrical, water, and sewage systems were targeted and destroyed, many factories and large swaths of Gaza's very limited farmland were badly damaged. At the height of the conflict some 400,000 of Gaza's 1.8 million population was displaced, with 290,000 of them cramming and seeking shelter in 90 UNRWA schools.

It has been estimated that some 100,000 homes have been destroyed or damaged affecting 600,000 Palestinians. That's as if the entire Washington, D.C. was affected. Thirty-eight thousand of these homeless continue to live in 18 UNRWA schools, and as Karen pointed out winter is right around the corner.

In my professional career I have unfortunately been eyewitness to a number of wars. The disproportionality of this one is striking and disturbing. In this war not even the United Nations was immune from violations of neutrality. Both sides are guilty of breaking international law. The Palestinian militants for attempting to hide rockets and munitions in three UNRWA schools, and Israel for firing on seven UNRWA schools, including three incidents where UNRWA schools were sheltering thousands of civilians who evacuated their homes to these safe havens per IDF command, and resulting in 40 fatalities and scores of injuries. And this

occurred after multiple notifications of GPS coordinates to the IDF by UNRWA, something even noted publically by President Obama.

It's sad also to report that 11 of my UNRWA colleagues were killed in Gaza. No, this status quo is not sustainable.

For a start, Israel needs to ease or lift the illegal blockades triangle in Gaza. This can be done without compromising Israel's legitimate and serious security needs. Lifting the blockade is an essential parameter to enable Gaza to emerge from years of suffering, joblessness, and a lack of a functioning economy.

Continuing the status quo will only exacerbate these incubators of despair, desperation, and violence, likely leading to yet another war, probably sooner rather than later.

There is a positive alternative to be pursued. Allow for freedom of travel, to import and export, and to attain self-sufficiency. The Palestinian National consensus government can accelerate this process by engaging immediately and effectively in Gaza.

As IDF chief Benny Gantz said a week and a half ago, "At the end of the day 1.8 million Palestinians live there, and the quiet is also dependent on the trend of creating economic hope there." Read between the lines - it's time for a change. If the military can understand that why can't the politicians.

This is just one example in one field, Gaza, where modest but certainly positive action to support a better future for Palestine refugees. Time does not permit today, but there may be more examples. There are many more examples in all the other fields I could share, especially in Syria - let's not forget Syria, where 50 percent of the 540,000 Palestine refugees are internally displaced, 65,000 have fled the country, to many, many living in conditions far worst and unpredictable. Eighteen thousand Palestinians and Syrians remain besieged in Yarmouk with severe shortages of clean water, food, health care, and well, everything.

The title of this panel is the "Palestinian Future," while the picture for Palestinians and for Palestinian refugees in particular may look bleak, especially in the near-term. They're unwanted and unwelcome in some places, or facing collective punishment and discrimination in others. Despite the real challenges and obstacles ahead, I try to be an optimist, so I'm going to end on this recent experience in Gaza.

On Sunday, September 14, just about a month ago, I stood in the courtyard of the Abu tine school in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, for the official school opening assembly commemorating the opening of all UNRWA schools in Gaza.

I just want to point out, give a little shout out here – with herculean efforts my colleagues in Gaza were able to get a system of 252 schools with 241,000 students – that’s the size of the Broward County school system in Florida, the seventh largest in the United States, and oh, by the way, in Gaza schools UNRWA only educates grades 1-9. They were able to open and do all of that in just 18 days after the ceasefire.

While some students sadly portrayed the effects of shellshock and fright, others had that broad smile on their faces – they were happy to be back in school, happy to be back learning, back to dreaming of a future filled with peace and opportunity.

Despite the horrors they lived through, these ten year old Palestinian kids still have resiliency and hope. There can be a better future. Smart leaders on all sides of the conflict should understand and act on that, and it means changing, in the right direction, the status quo.

Thank you.

[Bill Corcoran] Let me mix this up a bit and work from the micro and extrapolate then to the macro about the future of Palestine, and I’ll do this in the context of Gaza again. Because I would posit that Gaza is a key indicator of where Palestine is actually going for this reason. If we look at the protocol and the frameworks that are adopted by Israel and imposed on all of us that will be concrete and illustrative of either a hardened attitude of perpetual occupation or a new openness to ending the status quo. So even the West Bank and Jerusalem should take notice of how the people of Gaza are treated.

The immediate task at hand is obvious. Gaza must be rebuilt and rebuilt quickly, and that requires a business-like approach that is both speedy and efficient because some of the early predictions by the Shelter Cluster, for instance, say that at this pace of reconstruction it will require another 20 years to rebuild Gaza.

Without equivocation that pace of rebuilding would be morally unacceptable and actually evil. The Palestinian Authority have offered a reconstruction plan, and I would commend it to your reading. It’s highly credible if not somewhat conservative in its estimate of dollars, but to implement it there are two major ingredients that I constantly look at as my benchmark of how we’re proceeding, and for an NGO those two benchmarks are cement and staff.

Cement. Cement is an absolutely critical element for rebuilding Gaza, and all building materials cannot be overstated. And in talking to the Palestinian Contractor's Union, for instance, they gave me some context of how desperate the situation is.

The amount of debris in this war versus 2009 is four times more. The targets that were involved in 2009 were Hamas facilities and ministries. This time we're talking about homes, factories, and apartment buildings. Therefore, the human impact is that much more visible. And finally, the supply chain - at least the alternative supply chain has been eliminated.

The commercial tunnels from Egypt are closed, and therefore this makes then Kerem Shalom, the Israeli cargo entry point, the only entry point for anything coming now into Gaza. And despite all of the press releases that have touted the entry of cement into Gaza, the reality is it was one shipment of about 30 percent of the monthly requirement, and it was delivered to the United Nations, and I congratulate them, but it's for the United Nations only, so the rest of us cannot access that.

The practical dilemma then is this - for someone like ANERA we have no framework for the importation of cement, and we see no one in near future that is being presented to us.

So private projects that we have lie dormant. ANERA has received money from the government of Kuwait to rebuild preschools throughout Gaza. We have identified them. We are ready to go, except we have insufficient cement. And the same goes for the projects we partner with USAID on. These are water and sanitation projects across Gaza, and we again are in negotiations with the Israelis and yet this still has not been approved.

So many neighborhoods throughout Gaza are only able to access fresh water when we deliver bottled water or tanker trucks. At this point after a disaster in traditional emergency management stages we should have finished the relief stage and we should have been moving on the reconstruction and recovery. To make it more real, since July ANERA has delivered \$5 million worth of projects to Gaza, and with the assistance of USAID another \$3 million. But tragically, of that \$8 million that's been delivered to Gaza it's been relegated to distributions of clothing, food, water, and medicine. And while they've all been desperately needed, a prolonged period of relief is counterproductive for Gazans. They want to be independent, not dependent. They do not want to be on welfare. And if cement were truly available now, that would not be needed because cement would unilaterally generate business activity as contractors employ laborers and

thereby stimulate the economy on their own. But now without cement we have 60 percent unemployment.

Another pitfall of not having cement is that we risk a rapid deterioration of public health as the winter rains approach. Until now the humanitarian community has congratulated itself on stemming the possibility of disease because while the sewage was running in the streets and while clean water was unavailable in many neighborhoods, and when congested shelters housed families who were unable to shower for days on end – we filled that gap in public health. But I submit to you that no matter what the NGO community did at that time, it was temporary. And as exposure to winter temperatures hits hundreds of thousands of people without proper shelter, and as the return of sewage in the streets comes with the inevitable winter floods, we can only see new threats for disease.

Quite simply, the public health infrastructure, the systems of water and sanitation are woefully inadequate to handle the stress of winter conditions, so massive physical improvements must be made now, and without delay, and again they all require cement.

In Gaza, let me offer you my second benchmark of how I'm seeing the future of Palestine, and that is the easy access and free passage of NGO staff. Sixteen of our 85 staff in Palestine are in Gaza. They're all Palestinians. They live there day in and day out during the days of bombing. They worked every week and they performed beautifully, but now they're fragile. Very fragile. This is their third war in five years. They went through 51 days of warfare as they sat in their living rooms wondering, and it's touched every single person on our staff including one of our program coordinators, who lost 22 members of his own family.

As a result the staff are working but they have not bounced back. They require assistance if they're going to be truly healthy and productive, but we can't treat them. We have attempted to bring into Gaza a Jerusalem doctor who's a trauma specialist, but the permit has been endlessly delayed. We have tried to bring our Gaza staff into Jerusalem for counseling with that person for meetings and for R&R, and all too many of our staff have been rejected for permits.

And then we have tried to infuse new energy into our Gaza office by bringing our own West Bank and Jerusalem staff into Gaza to be seconded there for a period of weeks.

One of our economists agreed to go into Gaza to work on land reclamation for farmland. Another, a pharmacist, agreed to go in and help repair clinics. And even after coordination with Israel they were turned back at Erez crossing. We

are coping with exhausted staff who are professionals but they are impaired in their rebuilding, and why? Because a protocol hasn't changed one bit since the invasion.

Let's not fool ourselves. Despite all the rhetoric and the promises and the press conferences, the ability of humanitarian actors to respond is hampered, and it's hampered by political decisions. We have exhausted personnel and a supply chain that doesn't function freely, and so the aid community profoundly needs the cooperation of Israeli authorities in approving a new and an enhanced regime.

What's the future of Palestine?

During deliberations recently in a board meeting of ANERA, a board member turned to me and said if there is no political progress or movement how is ANERA or any NGO for that matter work in a future of perpetual occupation, increasing regulation, and probably daily strife like we see in Jerusalem now.

If I were a Jerusalemite or a West Banker and looked at Gaza I would be very worried.

[Dr. Yousef Munayyer] Thank you all very much. Thank you to the council and my co-panelists as well.

The title of this panel is the Palestinian future. It is said that you cannot know where you are going until you know where you have been, and on this I completely agree.

For Palestinians where they've been, and this is central to understanding how to address moving forward in their future, where they have been, where they continue to be, where they continue to struggle is in a struggle against colonialism, one that began against the British prior to 1948, one that was then transferred to the Zionist movement in the State of Israel after that.

Palestinians continue to face a struggle against domination by forces that came from the outside of Palestine to control the native population. This is not just about the occupation of 1967. This is about multiple moments in the Palestinian history, which are central to understanding where they will go into the future. This is about the "Nakbah" and the refugees. This is about Palestinian citizens of Israel whose equality and freedom and dignity are no less important than Palestinians anywhere else. This is about Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza for whom self-determination and basic rights have been denied and must be afforded.

So what have been the attempts to correct these wrongs? What have been the attempts to create progress to move the situation forward and to find peace? We have seen in recent decades a state-led approach mostly dominated of course by the United States and the policy around this has been crafted in this very city, perhaps even by some folks sitting in this room and in rooms just down the street.

We saw the Oslo Accords, which called for the creation of a resolution – a Palestinian state, and a resolution to all outstanding issues by the year 1999.

Then we saw the roadmap for peace, which called for a Palestinian state by the year 2005. It is, you may note the year 2014 and we are many, many more settlements and settlers away from the creation of an independent Palestinian state, the so-called stated and desired outcome of the U.S.-led approach.

It's clear that this approach and the state-led approach in general has failed. And to make this point I would just offer two anecdotes that recently took place to underscore the extent to which the U.S.-led approach has not only failed, but failed in quite an absurd way.

Look just this week at the reaction, for example, from the State Department to the killings of two American citizens, one who was Palestinian, and one who was Israeli. Just a few days ago a Palestinian in Jerusalem, in occupied Jerusalem drove his car through what were a number of bystanders outside a train stop. This result in the death of a three-month-old American citizen.

The State Department immediately issued a statement that adopted the Israeli narrative of events. They condemned unequivocally what they called a terrorist attack. There was no question as to why this happened, how it happened, what the circumstances were, even though the family of the young man who has since died stated that this was an accident, it was unintentional, that the man was in fact mentally disturbed, that just this morning, the morning before he had been to a doctor to get a reference to go seek psychiatric help because the years that he spent being tortured by Israeli security services had left him, as his mother said, "a different human being."

But nobody asked those questions. Nobody asked why. The immediate response from the State Department was the adoption of the Israeli narrative of events. That man ended up dying even though his wounds were not severe enough to lead to his death, and an Israeli medical institute in fact in issuing his autopsy found that the cause of death was medical negligence because he was not brought to the hospital in time.

His body was ultimately released to the family but not until the Israeli state negotiated with them the number of mourners that would be allowed at the funeral, and it was then released to them at a late period of time in the evening so that there could not be the kind of funeral that the family wanted.

Contrast this with the killing of a U.S. citizen outside of the Palestinian village of Silwad a fourteen-year-old boy who was shot and killed by Israeli forces with live fire. The bullet entered the back of his neck and went out through his head. He was pronounced dead that evening.

The State Department said that they are calling for a speedy investigation into the events. Who was to do the investigation? The same forces that shot the child.

Look at the reaction and the difference in the reaction to the killing of what is essentially two Americans and the way in which the State Department simply could not say what needed to be said.

They could not condemn what was in fact the murder of an American child, a Palestinian child resisting the Israeli occupation, something that is fundamentally his right.

The second anecdote I will point to is one that is beginning to take place after the release of some interesting reporting yesterday in an article called the "Crisis in U.S.-Israeli Relations is Here."

Some of you may have read this report, and there's been a lot of name calling from senior Administration officials who are unnamed in this reporting about the Israeli Prime Minister using some language that I could not repeat before this audience here, but nonetheless recognizing him for his cowardice.

And I find it interesting that senior Administration officials who are in a position to actually use leverage over the Israeli state yet refuse to because of their own cowardice, because of domestic political calculations, take to the pages of their press to anonymously call the Israeli Prime Minister a coward.

We've all known the stances of this Israeli Prime Minister and his right wing government for a very long time, but what I think this underscores is that despite having the ability to create the change necessary, the real cowardice is here in this city because they simply do not want to take the steps necessary to pressure the Israeli State.

So where do we go to if this state-led approach has failed? There is as the ambassador mentioned the path of internationalization, going to the United Nations and going to the ICC.

Perhaps this is something that can work but where I would differ is that I do believe that the only path towards changing Israeli state behavior is isolating not just the Israeli occupation, but the Israeli state itself. Because the reality is even if we look at settlements for example as the root cause of the challenges to peace at the moment, these settlements don't sprout atop hilltops in the West Bank by themselves. They are supported by a state. They are supported by a state which is enforcing the discrimination against Palestinians in the West Bank in forcing the denial of resources to Palestinians in the West Bank, creating the infrastructure and the tax incentives for people to come from Brooklyn to live in Ma'ale Adumim so that they can continue to control what little is left of the West Bank and keep it for themselves instead of the Palestinians.

It is the Israeli state that is the problem.

And so while I appreciate for example the efforts of Kuwait who just the other day announced that they would boycott, not do business with 50 different companies that are profiting off of the Israeli occupation, more must be done to isolate the Israeli State in every possible forum.

In closing, we must remember where the Palestinians have been is a history of many rights denied, and only an approach that demands all of these rights, nothing more, nothing less - only then and through that way can we ensure that the Palestinian future is one of dignity and freedom for Palestinians and all those involved in this conflict.

Thank you.

[Dr. Tom Mattair] Well thank you. We started and ended with political issues. In the middle we dealt with on the ground, human issues.

I'd like to start the first question with a human question, and it is a question actually that the NCUSAR staff developed. Now, people have touched on ... So I want to begin with a question here in your booklet, and some people have touched on this, but let's focus on it.

Is there a possibility for another ceasefire agreement between Egypt and Hamas - negotiated by Egypt - that would be between Hamas and Israel? Would it produce terms that would be better than the protocols that exist now, and if not

what kind of pressure would you prescribe in order to bring that about? Any one of you.

[Ambassador Maen Areikat] I don't think it's an issue of extending ceasefires, and I don't think the problem in Gaza - it is humanitarian because of what Israel did during the 51 days of war against civilians there, but I think we should not be distracted from the root cause, underlying causes of this problem. Many speakers mentioned the blockade, the illegal blockade. There were no tunnels in 2007 when Israel imposed the blockade against the Gaza Strip. The tunnels were originally built to smuggle goods. People wanted to survive. They were besieged, not allowed to import goods, and then they were turned into, to be used for military purposes.

So I don't agree we should seek short fixes. This is a political issue.

It has to do with 1.8 million Palestinians living in an open-air jail, denied freedom of movement, and then the larger picture, which is Israeli actions and practices in the West Bank.

Israel is taking advantage of what is going on in the Gaza Strip, the focus on the Gaza Strip. The reconstruction that Bill mentioned is subject to Israeli restrictions to continue its annexation and the planting of additional settlements and settlers in the West Bank to completely render a two-state solution obsolete.

This is not an issue of extension of ceasefires. I think we need to focus on the larger picture. The only way we can relieve the pressure in the Gaza Strip, in the West Bank, and in Jerusalem like Karen said is if we allow the Palestinians to be able to run their own affairs.

If we can establish a state, exploit our potential, we don't need any humanitarian aid or any support from the international community. We have been trying for the last four years to convince the Israelis through the U.S. Administration to allow us to embark on a series of projects in areas near the Dead Sea that could create thousands of jobs and add between \$2.8-3.4 billion to our GDP. And the Israelis have been rejecting that. This is an economic occupation. It's a political occupation. It's a water-related occupation. So we need to end the occupation in order to deal with all these issues.

[Tom Mattair] I definitely take your point about the importance of the larger political issues, but for the record factually - maybe Bill you can address this - is there any reasonable prospect for another agreement being negotiated in the next month that would ease restrictions, and what role could the U.S. play in bringing that about?

[Bill Corcoran] In part of this, Tom, I'd be speculating as to what the timeline of the Israelis is right now. At this point we have seen draft frameworks that would be offered to NGOs for instance that could be used. I think the United Nations has signed a framework right now, but how this is going to spread out and how it's going to work quickly as a protocol for all importation of building materials is very, very unclear right now, and as I said before even the U.S. government has not been able to finalize an agreement with the Israelis for its projects within Gaza.

[Karen Koning AbuZayd] Tom, if I could just add. If you really want to see when I mentioned draconian conditions, it's because of what's been negotiated and so far agreed between the United Nations, the Palestinian Authority, and the Israelis on taking any of these materials in that relate to the donations that have been made at the reconstruction conference, and you can't believe they want to have cameras everywhere, cameras in every facility that's going to be receiving any of these things so that they can be tracked. It's just unbelievable. Everyone has to fill out long forms for a family that's going to have a home rebuilt. People are sort of dismissing it who aren't already trying to implement which we will still try to do, but it's a very big problem. And it's not just Hamas or Israel.

[Yousef Munayyer] Can I just add one thing to that, Tom? When it comes to ceasefires in Gaza the one problem that I think we're about to repeat that was evident in previous ceasefires - we saw in both 2008 and 2012 there we ceasefire agreements that worked for some period of time to some extent, but the reason that they fell apart is that there was no independent and credible monitoring mechanism to ensure that the stronger party, in this case the Israelis, did not take advantage of their position of power to continue to violate the agreement. So you'd see things like periodic shootings of Palestinians inside the quote unquote buffer zone, beyond the buffer zone, the arrest of Palestinian fishermen and the shooting of Palestinian fishermen - all these sorts of provocative acts that had no mechanism of redress.

And so without that, without that third party, without the mechanism what way are Palestinians left to respond to these provocations with other than through the use of arms. There's only a certain extent to which one can be pushed and abused before they're going to start fighting back. So the question now is - and we've seen a number of these incidents since the end of the major hostilities in the summer. Is that going to be addressed? And I think if not then we're really only setting up the situation for another rapid deterioration into the kind of hostilities that we saw this summer.

[Dr. Tom Mattair] Thank you. There are a number of question here, which are about the U.S. role. They're of a general nature, and then there are questions that are more specific, so the general kind of questions I'm seeing here are will there ever be a Palestinian future with the U.S.'s inability to change its relationship with Israel?

And then here's a factual question that is more specific. One person in the audience indicates that Jeff Goldberg is writing in the Atlantic that the U.S. – see this question will there ever be a Palestinian future with the U.S. inability to change its relationship with Israel presupposes that we can't do that.

And this question, which is more specific, suggests that maybe we can. Goldberg is saying that the U.S. may introduce a resolution at the U.N. criticizing Israel's settlement policy in lieu of recognizing Palestinian statehood. Have you seen any indication that this is really in the works? Would you welcome it? Would it be sufficient?

[Ambassador Maen Areikat] Well I think important observations during the war in Gaza showed that to some extent Congress and the Administration are detached from the realities on the ground. Even in the United States, a Wall Street Journal-NBC poll found that 53 percent of Americans, 53 percent of Americans urging the Administration to take an even-handed approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

That's a large number. And then the Millennial's gap that you have been all watching -- the age groups from 19 to 30, 30 to 44, and up -- the percentage of people who are questioned who opposed or didn't think Israel was justified in its war in Gaza. This shows that this overwhelming support for Israeli policies that members of Congress and Administration are projecting the shared values between a country like the United States that respects human rights within its boundaries, value the rights of every individual, respects, shows religious tolerance and everything.

What are the shared values between the United States and a country like Israel that continues to violate international law, violates human rights, commit war crimes, and then what we get like Yousef alluded to is a very, very indirect, soft reaction to these violations.

I think we are not seeking, we are not asking the United States to change its special relationship with Israel.

And we understand very well the domestic impact that Israel is not a foreign policy issue in this country, it's a domestic issue – we understand that.

But I think we are at the same time witnessing a growing movement in this country that is calling for holding all the parties accountable to the same principles, and that this conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis is turning into a conflict for justice and equality, and therefore it is getting larger and larger, and that's what you are seeing on campuses, that's what you are seeing among different segments of the U.S. society.

I think this is what will bring about the change and prove to members of Congress that they are not reflecting the true sentiments, the true feelings of those who elected them when they go out publically condemning UNRWA, calling for cutting off aid to an organization that has been providing humanitarian support, much needed for Palestinian refugees.

And they even attack the Administration for criticizing the settlement policy. I think these developments within the American society will eventually create enough leverage and pressure to make the United States not abandon Israel, but at least take a more even-handed approach that will hold Israel accountable to its actions.

[Karen Koning AbuZayd] Just to call attention to that resolution I mentioned, it was called for by Jordan, not the United States, yesterday and it's going to be debated today, which I think is quite unusual and it means that the U.S. representative did not lobby everyone against it. So that much has been accepted and let's see what the resolution says, and then let's see if the resolution is followed.

[Ambassador Maen Areikat] Just to allude it was done upon the request -

[Karen Koning AbuZayd] Upon request of the Palestinian Ambassador, yes.

[Ambassador Maen Areikat] Because Jordan is only Arab country in the fifteen members.

[Yousef Munayer] I would add I think in general the Ambassador is right about the change in the United States in terms of public opinion, particularly among certain demographics, but when we talk about, as this question referenced an article yesterday, "A Crisis in U.S.-Israel Relations,"

I found it sort of comical the title because while there may be some differences in opinion between individuals the relationship between the United States and Israel is far more complex than the relationship between individuals. I've never seen a crisis in relations between two countries where one continues to be among

the largest recipients of military aid of that country, right? So there are still very, very strong ties between Israel and the United States even if there may be personal conflicts between certain individuals.

This summer when you had massacres happening in the Gaza Strip that were happening with the use of U.S. weapons and the United States in fact opened up its arms caches for the Israelis so that they could effectively reload, right?

The United States very quietly sort of began to reevaluate its military assistance to Israel for certain types of weapons and so on, which was really not meant to be anything more than a slight message to the Israelis that we're not very much approving of what you're doing.

But what we saw in Gaza was horrendous. And if that's the most that the United States is prepared to do in the face of the horrific violence that Palestinians face in the Gaza Strip, yes there is change happening, sure.

But how long can Palestinians afford to wait for that change to really take place? And I think that we really can't. How much of Palestine is going to be left before that change actually takes place?

Sure, we can't rule it out, Tom, but maybe it takes 10 years, 20 years, 30 years – I don't know. In the mean time there has to be a different option. There has to be a different path forward.

If the state-led approach fails then I think this approach of boycott, the civil society approach is one that has to happen at least concurrently because Palestinians simply can't afford to wait for Washington to get in line with the program.

[Dr. Tom Mattair] And I might add that even if the United States were to write a resolution that doesn't necessarily mean that the United States would allow it to pass. We've written resolutions in the past that we've vetoed.

But here's another question that's of a general nature. Panelists talked about how this conflict and this situation on the ground is not sustainable, and gave reasons. But let's go back to it because there are members of the current Israeli government who believe the situation is indeed sustainable, that they absolutely can manage it, and that they intend to manage it rather than solve it.

So let's marshal a few arguments that would be persuasive to them. Anyone?

And we could add to that, because here's a question from the audience – how can the various factions of the Israeli lobby and the U.S. be persuaded that the status quo is not sustainable, that a mutually agreed upon peace settlement is in the best interest of all the parties?

[Matthew Reynolds] I can actually throw in something that's actually quite easy because of sustainability. If you look at Gaza, the United Nations put out a report on 2020 Gaza, the year 2020 in Gaza, and it's not just about sustainability of an economy.

You're going to have an entire aquifer with salt-water intrusion. I can tell you Mother Nature does not follow walls that are built on top of the land, so if you're even an Israeli you should be a little concerned about the disaster that's happening to the aquifer. That's the same aquifer that goes right up to Ashdod and Ashkelon

There's just a perfect example right there of how unsustainable it is through Mother Nature.

[Yousef Munnayer] I said before I think this is actually, well environmental sustainability, humanitarian sustainability is one thing, but politically I believe this is one of the big myths about this entire issue, that the situation is unsustainable.

We keep saying that, we keep hearing that, but the reality is nothing has sustained in the Middle East as long as this occupation.

And the reason that that happens is because from day one, not 1967, but from the days of the "Nakbah," the Israeli plan has been to manage the situation because they know that making peace requires the kind of compromises that they're not ready to make, and that continues to be the plan today.

And I think that unfortunately here in the United States we've given the Israelis every reason to believe that perpetual occupation is a perfectly viable option, and until that changes why would they make a different calculation if the United States is prepared to defend them from all costs of the occupation they're going to continue pursuing it.

So I think that in theory it could be unsustainable if a lot of things are going to change, but right now they're perfectly happy continuing this way because they're not paying any costs for it.

[Karen Koning AbuZayd] I think too that you have to look at the other parties in Israel who are even more right wing than Netanyahu, who even if he would like to give in, they will not, and the kinds of things that they're recommending and even doing now are much more serious than what the Israeli government itself is doing. I think there is that problem.

And I go back to what the Ambassador said, that its really I think up to the United States Government. That's what's sustaining the Israeli Government not just in terms of economics and guns and other sorts of things, but politically allowing them to get away with things in favoring them.

[Ambassador Maen Areikat] Who's more right wing, the one who calls for extreme right actions or the one who implements them? It's the prime minister who's implementing this.

So I have to disagree with you on that. I don't buy it that he finds people, but I don't think there is someone who is more right wing than the current Israeli Prime Minister.

[Karen Koning AbuZayd] Don't test it.

[Dr. Tom Mattair] Again if - but if we were trying to persuade them that it's not politically sustainable and not even good for them. There's the saying be careful what you pray for. You might get it.

If you were talking to the Israelis would you talk about the demographic changes that are going to take place in the future and the problems they're going to have with a Palestinian majority, or would it be valid to point out that 20 years after the 1967 war there was no Hamas, but after 20 years of no peace agreement Hamas did emerge, and that the longer this goes on the more extremism there is? And is it possible that you're going to get in the occupied territories something akin to Da'esh?

[Ambassador Maen Areikat] I think you can use all these arguments. You can use the demographic, you can use the fact that I mentioned earlier that Israel is less secure today than they would have been in 1999 had they implemented the Oslo Accords, allowed for a Palestinian state to be established.

You can use all these arguments, but the most important is for Israel itself to answer. Where does Israel see itself in 20 years, 25 years, and whether they really intend to be there in 25 years or 50 years, and if they decide, if they can answer that question themselves then they have to look at the region.

They will be surrounded by Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, Jordanians, Egyptians, Iraqis, and then go to the east to Pakistan, Iran, to the west to Morocco. These nations and countries are not going to disappear.

They're going to be there 50 years, 100 years from now. I mean I know some will argue that the changes that have taken place could affect the existence of some of these countries.

But it's Israel's question.

If they want to survive in that region they need to make peace with their neighbors.

They cannot continue to aspire to be part of the Western world, part of Europe, part of the Western culture and find themselves physically located in a country by Middle Easterners.

So they either co-exist with the neighboring countries or they have to answer the question of whether they will be able to sustain their presence for another 20, 30, or 50 years in that region. I think this is the fundamental question taking into account, all the factors or issues that you mentioned.

But that is a question that Israelis are not addressing, and many in Israel themselves are asking their government – I read something at the beginning of the war. I said I don't want to tell you where this country will be or where Egypt will be or where Saudi Arabia will be. Tell me where Israel will be in 20 years. And he addressed that question to the Prime Minister.

And I don't think they are giving serious thought about this issue, or giving enough importance about issue given all the changes that are taking place.

[Yousef Munayyer] I'm glad you asked this question because I think all of these arguments are deeply, deeply problematic. The reason is the premise behind all of them is Israel should stop violating Palestinian rights, should afford them their basic rights because it's good for Israel, right? No. Israel should stop violating Palestinian rights because it's wrong.

And when we tell the Israelis look this is really in your own interest the answer that the Israelis always come back with is thanks very much for your concern but we'll define what's good for our security. And the United States has always yielded to Israel on its own security and that's been kind of this red line.

So I think that that approach has really allowed the Israelis to dictate how and when the process moves forward instead of imposing it on them when they've really crossed lines that they have and consistently have for years now.

[Dr. Thomas Mattair] Okay then. Let's go to a question from the audience that your comment leads into this. Instead of persuading them about what's in their own interest, how can the U.S. play an appropriate role in its policies toward Israel - the word that's used here is that incentivizes Israel to change the status quo and agree to a sustainable peace settlement, and one or two other people have used the word pressure.

Nobody actually used the word sanctions. But is that what is necessary? Is it necessary for the United States to, instead of only taking out of its toolbox incentives to finally take out sanctions?

[Yousef Munayyer] My view on this is that it comes down to simple math. The occupation right now for the Israelis is a profitable enterprise. The cost of the occupation in terms of military spending related to GDP is half of what it was twenty years ago and a third of what it was 20 years before that.

And what they're profiting off of having the territory both economically and politically in terms of the natural resources, the mineral resources, the land resources, and what it's meant for the politicians who are catering to settler constituencies, you have every reason to continue this occupation until there's some weight put on the other side of the scale.

And right now there are fewer costs associated with the occupation than ever before. That's what has to change. And if that's going to come from the Americans or from the international community or from Palestinians or from the Arab world or whatever - anyone who can add to that side of the scale I think is pushing us in the right direction.

[Ambassador Maen Areikat] I think Israel right now is taking the United States for granted. I saw these reports about what Jeffrey Goldberg said, but only yesterday, two days ago, three days ago the Israeli Defense Minister who supposedly was not by the U.S. Administration signed a deal with the Pentagon to provide more F-35 fighter planes, \$2.7 billion worth.

I think in addition to Israel, Turkey is the other foreign country outside of the United States that are going to have these sophisticated fighter jets. And it's clear that from the beginning that Prime Minister Netanyahu wanted to buy as much time as possible until the term of this President of the United States is over.

It was clear that it was a matter of who will be able to, and with the mid-term elections, with all the projections that we're going to see a Republican majority in congress, Netanyahu I think falsely believes that this would strengthen his hand.

The answer to that is stop giving Israel too many carrots. We've been giving them carrots, carrots, carrots, carrots, hoping that they would change their policies and their position.

My advice? Let us deal with the Israelis. Sit on the sidelines. If the United States is not going to hold Israel accountable, sit on the sidelines.

Let us deal with them, and then we will see how Israel will function when the United States removes that political cover, especially at U.N. organizations and agencies. They are acting arrogantly and if the United States is not going to hold them accountable allow us to deal with them at international fora.

And we will be able to deal with the Israelis. But don't hold us hostage for a process. Don't keep asking us for more time, because it is not going to change anything on the ground.

This government has no intention, this Israeli government has no intention of ending the conflict with the Palestinians.

[Karen Koning AbuZayd] Just to add some details about how much they benefit from occupying Gaza, and even the reconstruction, 500 million - the estimates are that three quarters of that will go to Israel because one of the conditions is that all the companies that everybody has to buy everything from are in Israel, and everything that comes through the borders is given taxes to Israel, and so on.

As you said they're benefiting in every direction on this. I don't know if Paul Findley's going to be able to say anything about his little pamphlet going around and his approach that he's making to the government here, is on something called tough love.

And I wouldn't want to try to represent him but it is the very sort of the same things that you're talking about is that this government has to exercise tough love on Israel.

[Dr. Thomas Mattair] Sure. Congressman Findley.

[Congressman Findley in the audience] Our government is complicit in this illegal conduct. We should cease all supportive relationships with Israel until it behaves.

[Dr. Thomas Mattair] And if we don't. Then it brings us back to the issue of other actors and other processes that the Ambassador was mentioning, and maybe because there are a series of questions here on that subject we should take it up in the next five minutes because that's how much time we have.

Is the EU planning to conduct direct talks with Israel in order to save the two-state solution?

And let me combine it with another question. Whether it's the United States or the EU, is the rightward drift in Israel and the change in thinking among Palestinians and some of their supporters here that a one-state solution would actually be preferable because that's the - if there is no two-state solution eventually the world will not tolerate the situation and Palestinians will ultimately get equal rights in this one state.

Is it too late for the United States? Is it time for someone else? And even if someone else gets involved is it too late for two-states? I think that's the way to end it.

[Ambassador Maen Areikat] It is a fact that there is growing support even among Israelis for a one-state solution, and Palestinians, but we both call for a one-state solution for different reasons.

Israelis want a one-state solution so that they can completely destroy the prospect of an independent Palestinian state, while Palestinians believe that the two-state solution with all the settlement enterprises have become completely impossible, and let's go for one-state bi-national and switch the struggle from political to social justice and equality.

It doesn't mean that the Israelis will give in even if they become a minority after 15, 20 years. The struggle will continue. We will have a minority ruling a majority and it will take many, many more years to get that issue resolved. And you mentioned the role of Europe. Although I am encouraged by the recognition and the voting and everything, I don't think it's sufficient. Especially from a country like Britain who should rise up to its moral and ethical responsibilities to correct the wrong that it created in 1917 in issuing the Belfour Declaration and leading to this current conflict between Palestinian and Israeli, abandoning Palestine in 1947, allowing for the two sides to fight each other.

They are symbolic, but unfortunately they're not going to change anything on the ground.

Israel is not going to change anything on the ground unless there is a concerted international effort that will go beyond political statements urging the two sides to sit.

We cannot have peace more than the two parties; we cannot have peace unless the two leaderships are willing to engage.

I think there has to be a concerted international effort including Europe, United Nations, and the United States which is going to be very important player to make it clear not only to the Israelis but to all parties that it is in the interest of the international community to put an end to this conflict.

There is an international fatigue about the Middle East conflict, and donors at the Cairo conference made it clear they don't want to rebuild the Gaza Strip after two years, three years Israel will come once again and destroy it.

I would have loved to see Israel in that conference. I would have loved the participants to submit the bill to the Israelis to rebuild the Gaza Strip because they destroyed the Gaza Strip, not the international community.

And therefore unless there is an international, concerted international network where United States will play an important role but not a leading role, there will not be a resolution to this conflict unfortunately.

[Yousef Munayyer] In the pre-Netanyahu days the threats to the two-state solution that we were talking about were really about viability and contiguity of the would-be Palestinian state in the West Bank. You had settlements like Ma'ale Adumim and [Ariel (Phonetic)] which are cutting deep into the West Bank, and it would basically divide the West Bank.

Compounding that today you have this new challenge that the Israelis present to any possible Palestinian state, and that's really this question of sovereignty altogether.

Today you have the defense minister for example saying that at the greatest possible extent what Palestinians could hope for is some sort of autonomy. Not independence, not sovereignty. So this completely undercuts the notion of statehood.

And you have the Israeli Prime Minister saying things like well before we can even talk about a Palestinian state our security has to be guaranteed, long-term presence.

Basically what they're saying is that there is no two-state solution and there may never have been a two-state solution.

So I think Israelis what they're telling us today is that it's very clear not just because of the geography and the demographics but they simply don't want a Palestinian state to exist there, and they're perfectly happy to defend that well into the future.

[Dr. Thomas Mattair] Last comment, Matt.

[Matthew Reynolds] I might add that in the equation and all the complexities in talking about a one-state, a two-state, it's very important to remember there are 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Three million of them are outside of what was mandated Palestine back in 1948.

They're in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and their plight is quite great. And as I mentioned in this statement there is a lot of narrative but in fact the Palestine refugee is not really at the table and needs to be at the table. They are part of the equation.

[Dr. Tom Mattair] One comment from me and then we'll go to John who wants to amplify on what Congressman Findley said.

We talked here about how to hold Israel accountable and the other issue that ought to concern everybody in the audience is that ultimately the United States will be held accountable. We've already been held accountable. The anti-Americanism in the region is something to consider. The desire to exact revenge against us is something to consider when we formulate our Arab-Israeli policy.

John.

[Dr. John Duke Anthony] Yes. Just to add a codicil to what Congressman Findley offered. Within the last month no lesser like, or greater like than former President Jimmy Carter came out in support of what Congressman Findley has been advocating, almost word for word, close paraphrasing.

But as this context something to ponder that President Obama more than any president in living memory is himself one of America's foremost specialists on American Constitutional law. Indeed, he taught the U.S. Constitution.

Well ponder the following. Article Six of the U.S. Constitution states, and I paraphrase it, all laws, treaties, and international conventions to which the United States is a sovereign signatory are the supreme law of the land.

The United States is a member of the United Nations by law through the Constitutional processes of advise and consent. And in the preamble to the United Nations charter is the phrase “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.”

Point two is the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 which the United States and Israel led the world to pass with the wounds and ravages of the Holocaust still being raw and recent.

But we know what it prohibits the occupying power from doing. It prohibits the occupying power from expropriating the occupied peoples land, exploiting the occupied peoples resources, settling one’s own occupiers in the occupied peoples’ territory, expelling the occupied people from their territories.

In his weekly Presidential radio chat with the American people he need only say that as you know January of 2009 I swore to uphold the U.S. Constitution, and in that spirit and vein to the letter that’s exactly what I’m doing as of today.

I am suspending all American economic aid to all the parties in the conflict until there is a comprehensive settlement. Now there would be a howl, a cry, the media would have a field day, run amok in terms of bashing the President.

There would be calls in the Congress saying you cannot do that, that’s illegal. Or some others would say well if you’re looking for grounds for impeachment there they are right there. Impeach him.

Well we’ve had one president in living memory who was impeached as a result of a dalliance with someone somewhat younger than he was, and defending himself by saying well it depends on what you mean by is, or what is, is.

And not only did he survive that from being a politician, he became on the order of a statesman with the Clinton Global Initiative and lots of other causes. So there’s that aspect, and then when one would say well you can’t do it until and unless Hamas recognizes Israel’s right to exist.

Well the other side of the coin is what about Israel’s obligation to recognize the right of people who resist forcibly by their right, their forced occupation. So the question is, is America serious or not.

With regard to Vietnam where America lost 58,000, killed 1.3 million people. The U.S. chastened the Vietcong in North Vietnam for refusing to recognize the right of the Republic of South Vietnam to exist. Had the United States stood on that

principle we'd still be in Vietnam. Similarly with France and Algeria, where independence 1 out of 8.5 Algerians was an orphan, and had the French insisted that they would not leave until and unless the Algerians recognized France's right to remain sovereign, you can imagine the bloodshed that would have ensued.

So the question is are we serious or are we not? And do we not need not just leaders but like Abraham Lincoln, a statesman.

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