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24th Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference

U.S.-Arab Relations at a Crossroads: What Paths Forward?

Washington, D.C.
October 15, 2015

“THE PALESTINIAN FUTURE”

Chair:

Ms. Randa Fahmy – President, Fahmy Hudome International; Treasurer, Board of Directors, National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations; former Associate Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Energy.

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.

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.

Dr. Jim Zogby – Founding President, Arab American Institute; Director, Zogby Research Services; Vice Chair, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom; author, *Arab Voices: What They Are Saying to Us, and Why it Matters*.

Dr. Imad Harb – Distinguished International Affairs Fellow, National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations; former Senior Researcher in Strategic Studies, Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (Abu Dhabi, UAE).

Commentator:

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*.

Remarks as delivered.

[Ms. Randa Fahmy] Good morning. My name is Randa Fahmy and I'm on the Board of Directors of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. It is my pleasure to welcome you all here this morning on what, I believe, is one of the most timely topics today in light of what is going on right now in the Middle East.

The title of our panel today is "The Palestinian Future" and I would venture to say it's best we put a question mark after that because I am not clearly sure what the path forward is in light of the current events.

Luckily we have some expert panelists today who are going to answer some of those questions. Many of the questions have to do with what is the Palestinian Authority doing right now and we're honored to have the Ambassador and the representative for the Palestine Liberation Organization, Ambassador Maen Areikat, who I've had the pleasure of working with over the past few years and I'd venture to say he is one of the best, if not the best representatives, for the Palestinians here in Washington and around the country.

We also have the pleasure of Doctor Jim Zogby who is not only the President of the Arab-American Institute but hopefully will help us understand today not only what Arab-Americans are thinking, and he's written a terrific book about this, what the Arab world is thinking about Palestine, but also due to his political activity he has close relationships with the Administration and with Members of Congress and so we're hoping to hear a little bit about what Secretary Kerry and President Obama intend to do in the path forward.

We also have a very important individual here today, Matt Reynolds, who is the representative, the North American representative, for UNRWA. Many of you know that UNRWA is the key UN organization that provides the incredible humanitarian relief required by Palestinian refugees. Matt also has the pleasure, I think, of formerly working as the Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs in a former Administration and I hope he can give us some insight of what the Administration is thinking, particularly about the humanitarian crisis going on right now.

We have one of the foremost experts, Imad Harb, who is a senior scholar with us at the National Council to talk a little bit about the issues, policy issues in particular that are vexing with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

We also have the pleasure of having Tom Mattair who many of you know for many years has been working on this issue. He is now the Executive Director of the Middle East Policy Council.

And if I can just throw out an issue for discussion in light of the fact that we do have media coverage here, I hope one of our panelists will talk a little bit about US media

coverage of this issue which I think has been quite unfair in light of the violence going on in the region.

So with that I have the pleasure of introducing our first speaker, Ambassador Maen Areikat.

[Ambassador Maen Areikat] Thank you, Randa. Good morning everybody. First of all let me commend the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations for keeping this tradition of bringing experts and academicians to discuss a very important issue that seems to have been forgotten in the middle of what is going on in the Middle East region as a whole.

Today's session comes at a very difficult time as you have seen for the last two weeks tension and violence has escalated in Occupied East Jerusalem and other parts of the West Bank. To many here, Randa mentioned the media; it's funny how the media in this country and Israeli apologists just pick things when they started two weeks ago, as if nothing existed on the ground six months before, a year before, 48 years before. And they wonder why the Palestinians are reacting to what Israeli Occupation policies, to the Israeli Occupation policies.

This whole episode started more than a year ago when Israel started allowing for extremists to enter Al Aqsa mosque compound in East Jerusalem, allowed members of its cabinet, members of its elected parliament, the Knesset, to go there to provoke, instigate, incite Muslims in the hope of pushing this situation to the point where it is today.

So this didn't happen in a vacuum. It was a series of provocations that we warned repeatedly that is a very dangerous game to play by Israel. That they are playing with fire and they are turning this political conflict into a religious conflict at a time when the whole region is trying to stand up to extremists in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, everywhere.

So one wonders why would this current Israeli government push the region until a conflict like this conflict from a political conflict to a religious conflict. Whose interests are going to be served by doing such a thing and why continue to insist on the so-called Jewish State at a time when we are trying to neutralize – I'm not going to say neutralize because many Muslims will try to attack me – but to neutralize religion from politics and try to separate the two.

Two big questions that this Israeli government must be asked. One, why turn it into a religious conflict. Two, whose interests are trying to be served by insisting on recognition of a Jewish state, something Palestinians will never, ever do. So they need to put it to the side.

In addition to that we have witnessed an escalation of settlers' violence against Palestinians. Today in the West Bank we have three different regimes. One is

controlled by the Israeli military occupation. One is controlled by the settlers' settlements and the other is controlled by the Palestinians, which is the smallest of all. We only have total control over 18% of the West Bank. We share security; we share civilian control with Israel over 22% of the West Bank, while the bulk of the West Bank, 60% remains to be under total Israeli military and civilian control.

So basically we only have control over 18% of our land. Most of the escalation is happening in Occupied East Jerusalem, which is under total Israeli control. And the fact that the settlers have been carrying out attacks against Palestinians – the most abhorrent of all was the burning to death of a family of four in August in the village of Doma in Nabius. Until today, four months, three months later the Israelis have not even captured one single perpetrator. The Minister, the Chief of Staff of Israel declared they know who the culprits were but they don't want their arrest to interfere with the investigation. And even if they caught them only 15% of them will be brought to justice and will be prosecuted.

So basically you have settler gangs who are attacking Palestinians and only the first week of this month, 30 such attacks took place against Palestinians populations or civilians on the West Bank. 142 so far this year according to OCHA, settler attacks against Palestinians. So what do you expect the Palestinians to do?

A people under occupation, their human rights have been denied. An occupation that is the longest in recent history, approaching the 50 year mark in two years, a government that is not committed to peace, does not have an agenda for peace, or what they have done since they took over in 2009, increase settlement activity by 20%, and all that we are seeing on the ground is a consolidation of the occupation – more settlements. And then they expect us to honor the agreements while they themselves are not abiding by the agreements that they signed.

This current Prime Minister of Israel, himself, signed the Wye River memorandum of 1998 and signed the subsequent Hebron agreements, and until today he did not even implement the agreements that his signature are on.

So they expect the Palestinians continue to give, give, give when what we are getting in return from the Israelis more settlements, more occupations, more restrictions, more closures, and then on top of that they play the religious issue on Al Aqsa mosque pushing the two peoples to a religious war instead of confining it to a political war.

Now our leadership said clearly, the President said clearly at his UN speech and he repeated it yesterday. The Palestinians, we didn't say we are abandoning Oslo by the way, but this is the press here, the media, the New York Times, the Washington Post, they can pick whatever the headlines they like, it doesn't change the facts.

We said that as long as the Israelis are not abiding by their part of the deal we will not abide by our part of the deal. We were supposed to do certain things in order for

Israel to reciprocate and reduce its grip on the Palestinian people and the Palestinian land. What they have done is the opposite so far.

So as a leadership we cannot continue to give and receive nothing in return. And therefore if Israel does not honor its part of the agreement we will not honor part of the agreement. It's as simple as that. It's a simple equation. It's fair in any bilateral agreement. If two parties sign an agreement and one party does not commit to that agreement why do you expect the other party, the weaker party, the Palestinians, to commit and to honor their part of the deal?

Now as for any prospects for the political movement. Unfortunately I am not very optimistic. I do not think anything will happen from now until the next election. We hear statements from officials here, that they are committed. They want to do something. I, we believe them. We believe Secretary Kerry when he says that. We believe that he is sincere and genuine. But you need to take a different approach. You cannot continue for this explosion, and to the next explosion, and then you try to contain it, and then business as usual.

We cannot go back to the failed process or format that we had for 20 years that did not bring the Palestinians any closer to statehood and independence. There has to be a different approach. And the bilateral approach sponsored by the United States has failed. It's not a secret that it has failed.

So to continue on the bilateral approach where Israel and the Palestinians, Israel with all its military might. With all its political clout here in this country thanks to the Congress, and all its support that it gets versus a weaker party like the Palestinians, well why don't the two of you negotiate and we will just observe, is not going to work. There has to be a different approach. There has to be a more international, multilateral approach in which the United States will be an important party but not the only party that will oversee and help the sides reach an agreement.

And there has to be an agreement, not just an agreement. There has to be a commitment by both sides to implement their obligations, to accept the past agreements and to adhere to the terms of reference to this whole political process that was agreed many times before from the UN resolutions to the Roadmap, to all other pertinent agreements that we signed between the PLO and Israel.

Unless we come up with a different approach I don't see any way. Because this Israeli government believes that the status quo can continue forever. They believe that they can continue to build settlements, continue to pressure the Palestinians, and they expect the Palestinians to just hug them and say thank you for continuing the occupation. This is something that will not happen.

What is happening in Jerusalem should be a wake up call for the Israelis. They annexed Jerusalem in 1968. They call it the eternal united capital of Israel. And yet they are erecting roadblocks in Arab neighborhoods, preventing people from

moving from one area to another. And they are imposing closures on these neighborhoods. And we saw the Palestinians sending a very clear message to the Israelis in Jerusalem and elsewhere that they are fed up with this occupation. It is time that this occupation is ended and the United States and the international community must assume their moral responsibility in seeing an end to this brutal military occupation, allowing the Palestinians to exercise their right to self-determination and establish their own independent Palestinian state.

We are still for a two-state solution. We continue to be in favor of a two-state solution. I know many don't believe that. Maybe some in this room. But this is the only ideal way out of this conflict – a Palestinian State and the State of Israel. Unfortunately Israel today with its policies is pushing everybody towards the One State Solution. And what we are seeing today in the West Bank and in Jerusalem is a byproduct of these Israeli efforts to kill once and for all the two state solution.

I hope that we can still find partners in Israel. We continue to extend our hand for peace, an honorable peace, but not a peace that will allow Israel to control us for another 50 years or another 100 years. We are genuine in our intentions to end this conflict but it takes two to tango. And if Israelis want to do it on their own then they should be ready to pay for the consequences that we are unfortunately seeing right now.

Thank you very much.

[Fahmy] Thank you, Ambassador Areikat. I think what you've laid out what is the formal and official position of your government.

Now, we'll hear from Doctor Jim Zogby. And Jim perhaps you can give us a little color on what's going on here in domestic politics.

[Dr. Jim Zogby] Thank you, Randa and thank you Maen. I actually wanted to cover the terrain if you don't mind.

You asked, started in the beginning by talking about the role that Palestine plays in the broader Arab region. What I'd like to do is lay out some constants that cannot be ignored that define the political terrain that this issue finds itself.

First, in the broader Arab world. There's no doubt that the drama of Syria, that Yemen, that Libya, that Iraq have taken headlines everywhere. But in all the polling that we do, Palestine remains a central concern of Arabs everywhere. It is fascinating to me the degree of intensity that exists across sect line and across geographic lines, from Morocco to Iraq. Even in the depths of despair of what was going on in Iraq it still remains a central concern and so much so that I've come to see it as almost an existential defining issue in the Arab world.

Palestine is – and people here sometimes don't understand when you say it – but Palestine is for Arabs what the Holocaust was for the American Jews. It was a horrible thing that happened to people just like me far away but it reminded me of my vulnerability, it reminded me of my sense of loss. It reminds me of a sense of betrayal of the West. It reminds me of the denial of rights. All of the things that define in many ways the character and personality of people in Arab countries across the region are somehow captured in this Palestinian narrative. It's real and it grabs hold.

Second is how does it play out here in America. With all of the decades and decades of one side defining the terrain. I would argue that if you have two sides in a football game and one side plays and the other sits on the bench, guess who wins – the side that plays. And one side has been playing for decades and the other side hasn't and because they haven't been playing who defined the terrain. When you're strong you get to define yourself as a victim. When you're weak you get defined as the monster who is threatening the victim. So the Israelis have become fixed in the American mind as the victim in the time from the film "Exodus" on, which was actually funded as an effort to create a propaganda film more than it was just a movie. It was a clever conflation of the American narrative of the wild west and the poor folks on the frontier just carving out a piece of land for themselves trying to live free and start a new life. And threatened by these angry savages who were out to get them.

Leon Uris took that model, of that narrative of the American story and fixed it in Palestine and the Palestinians were the savages. They were actually called in the early history, the early Zionist settlers used to refer to them as "Red Indians." And people don't recall that in Arafat's speech at the UN he said we will not be "Red Indians" and people thought that it was a slur, but it wasn't. He was actually playing on a theme that had been part of that story for decades.

But there is a shift taking place in America. It's not a partisan shift. People look at it as that. It's actually a demographic shift. Clearly among minority groups who today are becoming increasingly less minorities up to almost 30 plus percent, almost a third of America, but also young people. If you look at young/old on almost every issue but also look at it on Palestine, look at it on issues for justice for Palestinians, you get almost a Red State/Blue State, the kinds of numbers you used to get on gay marriage you also get them on issues involving Israel and Palestine.

And so it's not so much partisan although it plays out as partisan because young people come one way and older people the other way; minorities one way and middle class whites on the other side, but it is in fact demographic more than anything. It is a long-term shift. It's the sort of thing that will play out over the next several decades before you get a decisive change but there is a change and it's real.

Nevertheless, without question while Israel can lose a fight on the nuclear arms deal in many ways Israel will be the winner as those politicians who voted to support the President on the arms deal will now deal with sort of hat in hand and bowing in

apology try to make it up to Israel both in terms of weapons favors and a refusal to apply any pressure. It is simply not going to happen as I had hoped it might happen, that the President and Congress might pivot from the Iran deal to a move to a comprehensive Middle East peace. I don't think that is going to happen, they simply don't have the wherewithal politically to do it.

Thirdly, I think in the political discourse here in the US one of the issues that has developed over the last several decades is either I call it this way. Your perspectives of the Middle East are shaped by ignorance, willed ignorance or ideology. You have the neo-conservative and the evangelical right who dominate now on Republican thinking – this is not the party of George Herbert Walker Bush or James Baker anymore. It's a different breed.

Listen to the debates that are taking place on that side. You have that crowd defining it. They don't want knowledge. They've got ideology and certainty. It's good and evil. We're good and they're evil and we're going to beat them no matter what the consequences.

And then you have the ignorance which unfortunately typifying too many in political life. It's simply, I don't know about it.

Then you have the willed ignorance and that's the guys who do know but when they do their political calculations it just does not pay to be smart on Israel-Palestine or be smart on any Middle East issue so they become purveyors of conventional wisdom because if I want to talk about the economy, if I want to talk about taxes, if I want to talk about benefits for the middle class, whatever. This becomes a distraction and it might end up getting me in political trouble. So, I know better but I'm not going to talk about it or I'm just going to say what everybody else says, "We're the unbreakable, unshakeable, blah blah blah, ally" and hopefully then they'll leave me alone so I can talk about the stuff I really care about. Given that I don't see change possible here anytime soon.

The President tried. I think this may be one of the last presidents for awhile who will try as this President tried both from the time of his Cairo speech to when he tried on the anniversary of that at the State Department to announce something that was so simple, the '67 border with land swaps which was exactly the same language with a variation of the theme of the George Bush letter to Ariel Sharon that conservatives celebrated which was the '49 Armistice Line with territorial exchange. The '49 Armistice Line is the same as the '67 border and territorial exchange is the same as land swaps. Nevertheless he got pummeled. Netanyahu was invited a couple of days later to the Congress, got 27 standing ovations and the President was put in a corner on that issue.

That has not changed. Like I said Israel can lose the Iran deal but they can still control the debate on this issue.

Then shifting to the region. Israel is clearly off the rails politically right now. I see no way a coalition gets formed despite the continued pipe dream of liberals here in America that somehow you'll form a moderate coalition, with Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister – he's not going away any time soon. There's no way you can form a coalition in Israel that does not have a far right bent.

Even if you get others joining that coalition they'll be used and abused and cast off as Ehud Barak was in an earlier Netanyahu government. He is an ideologue, a maneuvering ideologue. He's quite clever at it. But the game is up and most people know it. The question right now is that they are resigned to it.

There is, and I think we have to understand it; there is a pathology that has affected both Israel and the Palestinians. It's like two distinctive pathologies. Israel is the spoiled child in the equation. They get everything they want and they know it. And they know that there will be no punishment for even bad deeds. The worst they'll get is a sort of a stern, please show restraint and don't do it again.

But settlements have tripled since the Oslo agreement was signed with no punishment at all. When a spoiled child does bad things and does not get punished it only becomes enabling of more bad behavior. And Israel knows bad behavior is what is expected of them and they will get no sanction for it so they continue on that path. And at this point it has become solidified in terms of the politics of the country so that you can't move that dynamic easily at all.

On the Palestinian side the pathology is different. It's not the spoiled child. It's the abused child. And what the abused child knows is that even if I do a good thing I'm going to get punished so why bother doing a good thing, so I'm going to act up because when I act up I get attention.

And so these two pathologies have become so ingrained into the political culture on both sides that it's difficult – I can't see breaking that. The Palestinian, as dysfunctional as Israel has become, Palestinian political culture has become dysfunctional too. Between Hamas on one side, it's a political dysfunction between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority – but there are other dysfunctions as well.

Look the Palestinian Authority which was to be the institution that led to a Palestinian state has become a dependency on international donors. Asking Abu Mazen to break and suspend Oslo and throw it on the junk heap of history where many feel it would belong would mean throwing 100,000 plus people out of work.

Now understand when the peace agreement was signed at Oslo the single largest employer of Palestinian people was the State of Israel. They worked across the border on day jobs, day labor jobs like southwest L.A., they worked day labor jobs and that's where their income was. After Oslo there was a sealing of the border that resulted in people losing those jobs and because there was no import-export provision for Palestinians to grow their economy independently, they became

dependent again not only on working on settlements they became dependent on a civil service that didn't exist in Palestine.

It was not a huge government bureaucracy, but it was a way to absorb this large unemployed group of people. So the single largest employer now is the Palestinian Authority. To simply remove all of those people from a paycheck would be devastating to over a million people in the West Bank in particular, but in Gaza as well.

Third, is this issue that Maen spoke of. Youth despair. Think of Gaza. 80% unemployment among youth for the last, more than two decades. That means that a young person in Gaza has no job, no prospect of a job, no history of what it would even mean of having a job. Therefore the prospect of having a family, the prospect having a future simply does not exist. And that is now becoming the situation for many in the West Bank where youth unemployment is almost hovering at the range of 50%.

The fact is that when you take an entire culture of young people and deny them the opportunity to have a family and a decent life you create the conditions of despair that lead to this behavior being manifested in Jerusalem. It is nothing to celebrate that young people are so despairing. It is nothing to celebrate that people are taking the lives of others and their own lives in the process.

Suicide is not a normal human activity. It only comes when death appears to be a better option than life. That that has become a cultural phenomenon is devastating and it is something we need to understand and deal with. There needs to be a radical transformation of daily life creating hope for young people. It's not there. The Israelis don't see it. The Americans don't see it. And the Palestinians are hopeless to do it themselves.

So, what to do?

I am loathe, loathe to propose that the weakest party take the most courageous step but I can see far less chance of anything happening here and anything happening in Israel or the Europeans finally getting the guts to be able to act independently, or the Arabs finally doing something to take the Arab Initiative and not just try to sell it but finally put some kind of conditions on it and reinstitute a boycott and do what King Faisal did decades ago.

So it falls on the weakest party. But the weakest party has to have a strategy and it doesn't. It certainly can't be what folks have been calling for them to do here which is "some gestures" to the Israelis. It only enables bad behavior because it only plays into the Israeli pathology.

There needs to be a mass non-violent movement. There needs to be a mass movement, which has been absent. And it can't be stone throwing or knife wielding.

Because when you pick up a stone, they use a rifle. When you pick up a knife they bring in the tanks. When you pick up a gun they send in their army and take over the cities again.

To disarm the Israelis it must require a Palestinian movement of non-violence that actually is a mass movement that invests people in a significant way. And it's up to the leadership to do that. People I think are ready. But people don't have a leadership that is willing to put themselves on the line in that kind of effort. I really believe that we will not move this equation unless one of the factors in it is transformed.

Someone needs to break out of the pathology and do something different.

It's not going to be America. It's not going to be Europe. It's not going to be the Israelis.

I hope we can get some discussion on the Palestinian side on how to create that kind of movement that can alter the dynamic and create a different future.

[**Fahmy**] Okay, to just quickly summarize. I think we heard from both of our speakers that we need to try something different.

Matthew Reynolds from UNRWA.

[**Mr. Matthew Reynolds**] Great. Thank you. And thank you for inviting UNRWA which is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Now you know why we just use the acronym UNRWA – to participate in today's panel.

As the UN agency responsible for providing humanitarian and human development services to over five million registered Palestine refugees since beginning our operations in May 1950 in what remain our five fields of operation: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, the West Bank including East Jerusalem.

Now if you were given 30 seconds to describe landmarks of human history since 1950 what would you list? The Korean War and the start of the Cold War, desegregation here in the U.S., uprisings in Europe in the '60s and in the Arab world in the 2010s, say the end of colonialism or apartheid, the rise and the fall of dictatorships in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa; the Berlin Wall, built up, brought down; the destruction of the World Trade Towers in New York; genocides in Rwanda and Cambodia. And throughout this entire period Palestine refugees have remained refugees.

Here are some 65 years after the creation of UNRWA we should reflect on three fronts: on what it means to be a Palestine refugee today; on the work of UNRWA

towards bettering the lives of Palestine refugees; on being a living reminder of the failure to resolve a protracted human crisis.

Palestine refugees today face an existential crisis on many fronts. In Palestine they are facing 50 years of occupation. Being a Palestine refugee in Gaza where they are some 1.3 million – that's the size of Dallas, Texas – means being the victim of a blockade that affects every aspect of one's life, and being dependent on food aid while being educated and wishing to be self-sufficient. Sadly Gaza is on a descending path of de-development.

Being a Palestine refugee in [Ida] camp near Bethlehem today means living under the fear of daily incursions, live fire and detentions by the Israeli Army and the anguish of being denied access to opportunities.

Being a Palestine refugee in Yarmouk, Syria today means being a resident trapped by merciless siege and violence and being denied regular access to water, food, electricity and basic healthcare. The fear of contracting Typhoid in Yarmouk is real. You can see the suffering and hunger etched in people's faces.

Being a Palestine refugee in [Harabara] in Lebanon today means trying to cope with the frustration of still living in a miserable temporary shelter eight years after the destruction of the camp.

We speak today of over five million registered Palestine refugees in the region. You know that equates to the population of Minnesota or Colorado or for non-Americans Norway. We are sometimes told that UNRWA perpetuates the status of refugee hood. The reality though, is that a child of an Afghan refugee in Peshawar is a refugee even 35 years later. One big difference, however. The day the Afghan family decides to go home there is an independent country called Afghanistan to go to. This is not the case for Palestine refugees. Their isolation, exclusion and dispossession represent a time bomb for the region, a denial of rights and dignities that must be addressed.

Now reflecting on UNRWA's 65 years of service reminds us of the all too frequent crises faced by the Palestine refugee most recently the 2014 conflict in Gaza we sheltered 300,000 displaced persons in 90 of our schools. That's the size of Geneva, Switzerland being shoved into 90 schools. We provided life-saving aid to them under extreme circumstances of war including the shelling of seven UNRWA schools, resulting in 44 dead and over 200 injured.

During the ongoing war in Syria we continue to provide essential relief to hundreds of thousands displaced from Yarmouk and many other camps. We are dealing with essential survival needs but also still with education and health and innovative ways of working have been established. Equally significant is something that even our closest partners underestimate, the fact that with their support – and I would like to publicly thank you, the American people, for being UNRWA's number one supporter,

with the incredible, incredibly generous financial support and political aid you provide, UNRWA has contributed to one of the most remarkable dynamics of human capital development in the Middle East.

Our health and education standards remain among the highest in the region. 700 schools run by UNRWA with by 22,000 education staff for one half million boys and girls. If you parachuted the UNRWA school system into the United States we'd be the country's third largest system, behind New York and Los Angeles. But we run the system in areas experiencing war, occupation and blockade.

Addressing health needs are 131 clinics with 4,000 health staff and an annual average of three million served. UNRWA has invested in developing capabilities and opportunities for Palestine refugees against all odds. It has created human capital that many countries would today envy the Palestinians for, while Palestinians envy many others for an independent state of their own.

But there is a very painful dimension sapping away at this very positive human development. We are all witness to the failure to find a just and lasting solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees. Nothing would be more important today from the perspective of principle, international law and human dignity. It is a matter of common sense in an increasingly unstable Middle East where it is time for the international community to start addressing core conflict realities through a more concentrated and genuine political action. More than anything else, it is insufficient political will and action that has contributed to 65 years of UNRWA and refugee status for so many Palestinians.

Even if my agency didn't exist this large scale community of Palestine refugees which represents over one third of the long-term refugees world wide would continue to exist and would have needs and expectations and would have to be supported.

One cannot wish or sloganeer this issue away. It has to be dealt with first and foremost as part of a political response. Given all the multiple and growing crises in the region many people express skepticism about the possibilities of a breakthrough. I mean just look at the clashes at Jerusalem and Gaza. I returned from both places just six days ago and it is getting worse.

But skepticism is a luxury the world cannot afford. The consequences and costs in human terms are far too high and are growing exponentially. Not acting today when 65% of registered Palestine refugees are under the age of 25, when they are well educated but unemployed, determined to engage but with few prospects and limited freedom of movement to do so. This will lead many to despair or increasing numbers to choose the dangerous routes across the Mediterranean and beyond.

We can choose to close our eyes to the problem but we should beware of what the landscape will look like when we reopen them.

Allow me to conclude with something in short supply but terribly needed but in short supply for Palestine refugees.

Hope.

In August 2014 during the Gaza war in the rubble of a damaged UNRWA school in [Huzah] a schoolbook was found. It belonged to [Ruah Hudeh], a young student, aged 11. In it she had written a poem and expressed an understanding beyond her young years when she said, "Hope does not betray."

When we reinaugurated the school this past April [Ruah] read the poem. It sent a powerful message to all of us. Hope will never die but it needs a serious, serious boost.

Thank you.

[**Fahmy**] Thank you very much, Matt. And thank you for all the work that you and UNRWA are doing. I know you are working through some very difficult times particularly with respect to funding but you really have done a terrific job not only here in Washington and across the United States to promote the refugee situation of the Palestinians.

It is now my pleasure to introduce Dr. Imad Harb, one of our foremost scholars with respect to the Arab world to add his enlightenment on the Palestinian issue.

[**Dr. Imad Harb**] Good morning. I'm really honored to be here today with this distinguished panel although unfortunately the circumstances of what we're talking about are not really very auspicious or joyous to talk about the conditions that are happening today and what is expected to be the future of the question of Palestine.

I believe that everybody has already done a very good job in painting a rather somber picture of what's going on, the conditions on the ground in Palestine today and the dire situation looking ahead.

What I'd like to contribute, however, here are some remarks of what, in my humble opinion, I think can be expected for the future of this tragedy. It is a tragic situation that has and I say unfortunately so far, because it is going to continue, it has lasted for over 67 years of dispossession.

We don't kid ourselves anymore by repeating the dashed hopes of yesteryears with a peace process that could somehow reconcile something that has truly become irreconcilable differences. And by the way they are only irreconcilable because this hoped for peace was not allowed to really take root and flourish despite the innumerable attempts that either quickly became false starts or was stopped after a short period of time.

Obvious examples were obviously the Oslo Accords that finally had President Abbas declare that Palestine was not going to abide by any provisions while Israel is not abiding by what it is supposed to be abiding by.

This is an agreement that was signed almost a quarter century ago and nothing has come of it.

Another example is the 2002 Arab League Initiative which since then has been proposed, and re-proposed and re-offered by every Arab League summit meeting only to become a mere mention in a news cycle somewhere.

What today's circumstances and dire conditions present are actually the following:

One. A complete illegal Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Golan Heights and the later subjugation as merely occupied territory to be settled and colonized as if it had been uninhabited by people with a national identity and heritage and a historical claim to the land.

Two. Illegal and inhumane daily treatment of hundreds of thousands of people trying to make their daily living like any other community. Stopped unnecessarily at innumerable roadblocks, arrested for showing the slightest freedom of movement, attacked as they collect their harvest from the field, prevented from accessing educational institutions and healthcare facilities. The latest is actually some crackdown in East Jerusalem and closure down of some of its section.

Three. A daily reminder that violence begets violence and occupation of people yearning for freedom deprives them of the most basic human right of existence and personal safety.

Four. An international community too busy trying to extinguish unfortunate other fires in the area to be able to pay at least some requisite attention to the plight of millions of Palestinians.

What in this environment can be hoped to be a sane, or logical or reasonable projection into the future? Here is what my humble opinion and my humble opinion is a list of possibilities. None of them are palatable to any reasonable human being.

One. The final closing of a once promising window for a two state solution in which two peoples live peacefully side by side. To many involved in negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, and between Israel and the Arab world, the two-state solution provided a necessary and equitable compromise and an assurance that it could be a basis for a peaceful Middle East in the future.

But over the years many have questioned the efficacy of such a solution. Even when it had a reasonable chance of success on the grounds that it did not provide the

necessary guarantees for a secure and safe Israel. Many opined that sovereignty over Jerusalem cannot be divided. Others blamed the divisions within Palestinian ranks as prevented the arrival at the right mechanisms to actually implement the two-state solution.

Excuses of marauding Arab hordes descending on Israel, the island of democracy in the Middle East were liberally used to disparage talk of a two-state solution. The Oslo Accords themselves were a step toward a two-state solution. In the end the two-state solution was actually sacrificed on the altar of chauvinist revisionism and domestic Israeli politics.

Two. The triumphal arrival of a one-state solution in which the Palestinians are coerced into living as subjects in a state of discrimination and second class citizenship or yet as non-citizens subjects of a state with Bantustans for easy governance. This will not be a state like that envisioned by Palestinian visionaries in 1968 who saw a bi-national state on the state on the territory between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, but one where full citizenship and rights are enjoyed by Israeli Jews and substandard national rights are reserved for Palestinians.

In that event I suspect Israel will rarely be the subject of international ostracism and sanction given its support in Washington, but also a ground for continued violence and bloodshed.

Three. A continuing challenge for the Zionist movement to decide its nature and goal in light of the divisions in interpreting its tenets and mandate. The state of Israel affairs today shows a house divided over whether to continue in the name of the Zionist project to colonize and dispossess an entire community and nation.

What is also essential in this regard is the realization of the continuation and possible success of the colonizing project in the West Bank will mean the defeat of any pretense of a Zionist respect to human rights and dignity, and subsequently the defeat of the original project in its entirety. The politics of the possible in Israel domestic makeup and arena will likely lead the original ideological project to its demise. What is interesting in this regard is the seemingly nonchalance of the leaders of the project of this quite possible possibility.

Four. It would be naïve considering the present conditions and circumstances not to think that at least some of the Palestinian youth if not a sizable proportion of it may see that the best hope for restoring some rights is the resort to extremist ideologies that the Middle East has experienced and loathed for a long time.

Extremism is not merely a response to self-interested jihadi recruiters capable of weaving a yarn of jihad and martyrdom but specifically the brainchild of lost hopes and aspirations for a good life and a good future. In the absence of avenues for

changing the dire conditions on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, extremism is likely to flourish to the detriment of everyone's security and peace.

Five. Seeming continued confusion in Washington about the road ahead and the unfortunate attendant belief among Palestinians and the Arabs that the United States is really in on the whole process and approves of the dispossession of Palestinians and of the disregard of their rights, again to the detriment of American foreign policy and role in the Middle East. Once again political expediency and pressures cannot be the right determinants of the foreign policy of a country that prides itself on the respect of human dignity and rights.

What is happening and will happen in regard to the Palestinian question remains at the heart of Middle East troubles and essential to US policy in the Middle East and its standing among the Arabs and the people of the world, who have through their governments have recently approved the admission of Palestine as a member state of the United Nations and have approved the raising of its flag at UN Plaza in New York.

The United States cannot continue to be blind to it staring them in the face.

Thank you very much.

[Fahmy] Thank you very much, Imad. And now we'll here from Tom Mattair who will make some comments on the situation and some of the various comments that he has heard from the panel.

[Dr. Thomas Mattair] Thank you very much. Those were four very well crafted presentations and mine won't be because my job is to listen and tell you what I heard and comment on what I heard.

So what I heard from both Ambassador Areikat and Doctor Zogby is that they are not very confident that the political process can be revived by this Administration or even possibly by the next one. That's of course disappointing. I recall work written by William Quandt many years ago where he talked about the possibilities for making progress in the first year, second year, third year, etcetera of any Administration and basically concluded the eighth year was basically the best for making progress because you had less difficulty overcoming domestic pressure. But at least in the view these two panelists that opportunity will not be seized by this Administration. And I understand why.

Both of them, all of them, have spoken about the Netanyahu government and Netanyahu himself, who I agree, is not committed to the peace process and is not committed to the two-state solution. He did say in 2010 that he supported the two-state solution but I interpret that remark in light of other remarks that he made such as "I know what America is, America is something that can be moved very easily."

People spoke about how the promise of the Oslo Accord has not materialized which I think because it was an interim agreement and its final goals were not clearly enough announced and it took so long that opponents of the process were able to mobilize their efforts against it and one of the opponents was Benjamin Netanyahu.

This is one of the most serious problems. We can't mediate a peace process when one of the partners is not committed to the outcome that we want; the outcome that we say is in our national interests. And certainly, the President has said that the resolution is in the interest of the United States. So we have to think pretty clearly about what failure means.

We have said repeatedly that the status quo is unsustainable, but we are dealing with an Israeli government that believes that the status quo is sustainable, but can be managed, should be managed. It is better than the alternative of giving up territory.

Another point I'd like to make is this. Even if the United States, even if this Administration were to try again I think we are handicapped in the way that we proceed and that is because the people who are selected to do the work. I know many, many, many people in town and in academia who could have been good additions to the American negotiating team over the years and who were never asked.

Instead we had people who were working on the Obama Administration's last effort which lasted for I think twelve months and I think at the end of it, at the end of it, two of them gave an interview to a paper and said after the failure of the negotiations, and said, we did not realize that the Israeli government issuing new tenders for new housing construction in the West Bank would subvert the peace process, or it was intended to subvert the peace process. And we did not realize that the building of settlements in the West Bank involved the expropriation of Palestinian land.

Wow, wow, wow.

Most American undergraduates who study the subject know that. But two very important people running the program for the Obama Administration said they didn't understand that.

I don't know if that is what, Jim, you called ignorance or what you called willful ignorance.

[Zogby] It could be just dumb.

[Mattair] Could be. So because of our domestic politics I don't think we select the best people to represent us and to fight for this outcome that we say is in our national interest. And it clearly is. And other people have referred to the fact that it

is an issue that resonates deeply with the Arab people and it is an issue that does promote violence and promote extremism and foster extremism in the region.

It's not the only issue in the region, but it is the issue that .. through which Arabs really see America and our real values and our real intentions. And it is what diminishes their confidence in us and our political judgment and our actual professions of partnership with them. And it certainly isn't the only issue that contributes to extremism in the region, certainly not, but it is an issue which does contribute to extremism.

And I'll give you an example of that. Some years ago, when I was in Riyadh and I was at the Ministry of Interior and they showed us videos. I think I may have said this before because this is not my first year on this panel. They showed us videos that Al Qaeda was using to recruit people in the Kingdom and they were photos and videos of Palestinians bleeding in the streets of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Because that does matter to Arabs and it will get Arabs out of their seats and into one of these organizations. It's a good recruiting tool, something Osama bin Laden spoke about in his letters and his videos in the early 1990s as one of his principle motivations. So we have failed, in my opinion, and I'll leave it to the others to talk about what can be done now.

But I would say maybe just for the United States to get out of the way of the efforts of other actors in the international community. It might be the best thing we can do.

[Fahmy] Thank you, Tom. As you can imagine we have some very interesting questions here. I'll direct the questions to each one of the panelists so you can remain in your seats, as that might be the easiest way to answer the questions.

And Jim, if I can just note I love your analogy, your sports analogy. And I think as one who has worked on the Palestinian issue for a long time I think there is also something else which is called moving the goal posts. And I think what Israel, and frankly the United States, has been so effective in doing in these negotiations is moving the goal posts. It means there's always an excuse. Whether it's somebody's election, somebody's political capital, the timing isn't right, an American President doesn't feel it's appropriate. Once the goal posts keep moving there is no hope for the Palestinians.

Ambassador Areikat, we have quite a bit, as you can imagine, of questions for you. But the continuing questions that keep coming up have to do with the future of President Abbas. It's no big secret that he has made several statements that he is not willing to continue in his position. So the question is what happens to the PA, to the leadership if there is any sort of agreement between Fatah and Hamas moving forward. What does that look like? And weaving into that question, what about a one state solutions where Israel has to give citizenship to all the Palestinians. Why don't you call their bluff on that? So if I may, answer both of those questions.

[Areikat] Thank you, Randa. Well, I have to brag that maybe I am, maybe the only official in the Middle East who is willing to talk about the future of his president while he is still a president.

I think we do have well established institutions within the PLO. Keep in mind that President Abbas is not only the President of the Palestinian Authority he is also the Chairman of the PLO Executive Committee which is the highest executive branch in the Palestinian political system. And there are certain sequences of succession if and when President Abbas decides to step down.

It's not a secret that he has been trying so hard to hold elections. We haven't had democratic elections in more than, almost ten years now. And unfortunately because of the political divisions that exist between Hamas and the PLO we were not successful in having these elections being held.

I think the Palestinian people deserve the opportunity to exercise their democratic option of choosing their leadership. President Abbas is in favor of that. The majority of the Palestinian leadership is in favor of that. But if and when the circumstances arrive I am sure that our existing political establishment within the PLO will be able to handle this issue.

I remember before President Arafat died that everybody was saying that, oh, what is going to happen to the Palestinian people after President Arafat dies, and you know he passed away and the Palestinians managed to handle the situation just fine.

So as far as the reconciliation unfortunately nothing is happening in terms of agreeing politically with Hamas. It continues to be a cornerstone of Palestinian, the PLO policy to end these divisions. But once again many external factors are impacting such progress. It is unfortunate that it continues. We will continue to exert all our efforts to end these divisions, especially right now under the current circumstances.

The one-state versus the two-state, I think Dr. Harb summed it up when he said the creation of one-state by national one-state does not necessarily mean that the Palestinians have achieved their objectives in terms of political independence and preserving their national identity. I think it would only take our struggle to a different stage from that of political struggle, people under occupation fighting for justice and freedom, to a different level of struggle for social justice similar to our brothers in the 1948 areas who are almost, well 67 years after the creation of the state of Israel continue to fight for equality and continue to resist Knesset legislated discriminatory laws against them.

So we are still committed to the two state solution. I know again many are skeptical about this proposition but in our view this continues to be the best outcome for our conflict with Israel.

[Fahmy] Jim, we can sense the frustration in our audience by their questions so I'm going to give the tough ones to you. We have quite a few questions about the press and about the media coverage. And there's one asking whether or not if there were a massive non-violent movement by the Palestinians, would the press cover it.

And how can we combat the power of the Israeli lobby on Capitol Hill. One of the questions I find most interesting is how social media is galvanizing international public opinion, looped into that the movement of BDS, its similarities with South Africa and Apartheid.

I know, Jim, you've done a lot of work for many many years if not decades with the African-American community. Now we see the rise of the African-American community in solidarity with the Palestinians. Can you comment on those please?

[Zogby] Randa, thank you. That's the changing demographics on the issue that I noted. I frankly think the BDS movement is brilliant and is important and is eminently supportable. Will it change the fundamental dynamic here in the United States? I don't know. But it is the equivalent today with what my generation was doing with the Palestine solidarity and then the Palestine human rights campaign that I started. Young people have a different compass. And today they have an extraordinarily different compass. They're more globally minded than any generation. They're more tolerant. They're more respectful of diversity and they're more committed to justice, to social justice.

And so, yeah, the way social media is playing out which is largely a function of younger people than older people and the way the BDS movement is playing out on college campuses is a function of that. Add to that the role that African-Americans are playing and I think you have that shifting demographic that I noted. How long does it take to play out? I don't know. But what I do know is that a mass non-violent movement will serve to galvanize and even accelerate a shift in attitudes.

I can remember having this discussion with leaders in the PLO over there years ago and they would say to me, but if we mobilize the refugees in Lebanon and march to the border the Israelis will shoot at us. I said, they are already shooting at you. The point is that you change the dynamic when you use non-violent means and when you use the masses.

The problem with the Hamas suicide bombers and in the older days the Fedayeen attacks on here, there or whatever is that They are the sort of one person doing the one act. Not to mention that in the instance of terrorism they are immoral and they are heinous crimes and they end up besmirching the Palestinian cause. They end up making Sharon and Netanyahu into victims and heroes and they don't deserve to be.

What non-violence does is it turns the equation and mobilizes larger numbers of people. Would the press be able to ignore it? Of course they could not ignore it. They

could not ignore the first Intifada. They couldn't ignore the second Intifada. The second Intifada was horribly misguided. You never pick a fight that you can't win. And you can't win that kind of fight with the Israeli occupation.

It's something that Hamas never learned either. And yet they come out of these turkey shoots. That's that they are basically. Captive people being shelled from the air and shelled from the ground and being invaded at will. And they come away they have killed 70 Israelis and the Israelis kill 1400 of them and devastate the entire territory and they claim we have won a victory. How desperate do you have to be to declare that into a victory? That's not a victory. It's a massacre and it's a blow to your people who are still paying the price for this adventure. And we have to call it what it is.

Non-violence on the other hand turns the dynamic completely around. It's something that would cripple the Israelis. They don't know what to do in the first Intifada when it was stones. If there were no stones they would have known even less what to do with it. And those courageous people who are at the wall almost every week, but in too small numbers to make a difference. They're defining a strategy that will work. But there needs to be broader support.

Let me just say one thing at the end. All too often when we talk about this issue we talk about justice. I remember something Edward Said, said to me years ago. He said politics is not about justice. If it were the Indians would be running America. It is about having power and the ability to use that power to accomplish objectives you want. You have to find the tool to use and that's not logic. I mean it's logical you can think in your mind on how to solve this issue, but to translate it to political power requires levers and frankly we're not going to win that fight here. But Palestinians do have that ability through mass non-violence to use the lever of public opinion worldwide in order to change the dynamic and to increase their political power.

And I rest my case.

[Fahmy] Thank you. Thanks, Jim.

Matt, we've got two interesting questions for you. One is how the educated children of the unemployed adults are registered to vote in both the West Bank and Palestine or in the Gaza Strip. So voter registration of youth is an interesting question. I haven't thought about that. And I guess that leads to the idea of upcoming elections possibly in Palestine and who gets to vote and voter rights.

But the next one is that there seems to be some concern regarding funding for the United Nations, particularly for UNRWA, as the Palestinians accede to membership in the ICC and the activity of the Palestinians not only in raising the flag but their move toward a member sovereign state in the UN, the opposition in the Obama Administration and the backlash in Congress of cutting funds off.

[Reynolds] Great. Thank you. First I need to remind, or emphasize that UNRWA has a humanitarian and human development mandate and not a political one. There are other UN factors involved in the political part of it including the Secretary General's office who is part of the Quartet.

I'm going to fall back to my old days on Capitol Hill and punt the first one to the ambassador because we are not involved in any of the campaign or voter registration issues. We do register Palestine refugees but that's for the relief and social services and education purposes.

With regard to the funding of UNRWA, UNRWA is a voluntarily funded agency, which means that we don't get assessed contributions from the United Nations with the exception of the few international staff. So we're very dependent on the world to provide us with that assistance. We're also unique in the sense that UNRWA is the only agencies that is a direct service provider. So like other NGOs or UNICEF or others that go out and contract to others, we actually do it to ourselves. So we have about 30,000 Palestine refugee staff who are our doctors and our teachers and our social workers.

And we have faced a lot of funding shortages. You know the world is in some pretty tough economic times and so are we. The services and the needs are growing. You know we have a crisis in every single field of ours. Just to put this in perspective in Syria, a few years ago just before the war in Syria, there were only about 30,000 Palestine refugees out of the population of a half a million that required real social services, like in any society there is about 10 percent of your population that is disabled or needs assistance. Today it is 96% of all the Palestinians still left in Syria which is about 430,000 of them. So just exponentially the amount of just providing non-foot items, food items and emergency shelter is great.

We did face an important funding problems and it brought a lot of challenge to the Palestine refugee community in particular. Because one of the things they've always been able to count on has been education. And because we did not have enough resources to open the schools this year there was a great concern that UNRWA would not be opening the schools or at least delaying them for awhile, which brought a whole form of credibility and concern in the community.

So again I would say it's a challenge to all of us, as more and more fighting and wars take place, to fulfill that. But again we do very much appreciate the generosity of the U.S. which is our number one funder as they have been very generous to our sister agency the United Nations High Commission for Refugees as well.

Thank you.

[Fahmy] Thank you. Thank you very much. Imad, I have a global, sort of regional question from the audience regarding how the Lebanese government and their security forces might deal with the possibility of uprising within the Palestinian

camps in Lebanon and similarly how will the Egyptian community and the Egyptian government deal with the Rafah crossing and the possibility of the involvement of others including Jordan.

[Harb] The Palestinian situation in all the Arab countries is not good. I know in the Lebanese case Palestinians are disallowed from certain, actually a lot of jobs, a lot of employment categories. There is a lot of poverty among the Palestinians in the refugee camps. Security forces are outside the camp. Camp security is given to the Palestinian factions themselves to arrange for peace and order within the camps.

Sometimes things erupt within the camps and maybe if security officials cannot deal with it maybe they can call upon Lebanese police but in general Palestinians have not so far, have not been, A, concerned as far as the security situation outside the camps is concerned. Although considering Lebanon and the Lebanese state is not very necessarily able to stand on its feet because of certain political divisions, really deep political divisions. It turns out nobody really knows how the security situation in the country as a whole will shape up.

As far as the Egyptian treatment at the Rafah crossing, it is.. ..I don't think it really is good for the Palestinians. The crossing is more closed than open and it's open only on certain days, certain days of the month. You can only import so many things. You can't do certain other things and the Gaza Strip is really starving for anything to be imported into it.

There has been resort to digging tunnels and trying to basically smuggle things from Egypt into the Gaza Strip except the Egyptian authorities had a problem with trying to maintain the security according to how, number one, they understand it, and number two, they need to deal with it as far as concerns about security across the border with Israel.

Whether these things can be .. you know, Egypt has been flooding the tunnels. The last I heard was probably out of like 250 tunnels at one time only 20 of them have not been flooded yet. I'm sure the Egyptian authorities are looking for those to close down. So it's not necessarily only a Palestinian-Egyptian concern, but it's also a concern Egypt has to really with, because of its peace treaty with Israel.

[Fahmy] Thank you, Dr. Harb. We'll have a comment and response from the Ambassador and then final comments. And I have a question for Tom.

[Areikat] In regard to Palestinians in Lebanon and other host countries, the PLO and the Palestinian leadership has very clear, unequivocal policy to respect the host countries and not to interfere in their internal politics.

The situation in Lebanon is more sensitive than other countries. Of course Syria is catastrophic and tragic what happened to the Palestinian refugees there. But we

closely work with the Lebanese government on maintaining order within the refugee camps and we have open channels with them to make sure that no external elements exploit the Palestinian presence in Lebanon to destabilize Lebanon or any other countries.

So we are on the same page with the Lebanese authorities on this issue and we plan to continue to be neutral and not to get involved in the internal politics of any host country.

2:43:58

Just to respond to my friend, my dear friend, Jim here, on the violence. We've been having a Palestinian leadership since President Abbas won the elections in 2005, that publicly and against a lot of opposition from many Palestinians to denounce the armed struggle of violence, even in his speech yesterday he said that we will continue the political, popular, legal, diplomatic battle and we will never call on people to resort to violence.

Most of the escalation of the recent violence is happening in occupied East Jerusalem which is totally not under the control of the Palestinian Authority. I'm not saying that those people were not driven and given the reasons by Israel to resort to these kinds of acts. I think a starting point to defuse the tension would be for Israel to respect in deeds not only rhetoric the existing arrangement on Al Aqsa compound which prohibits extremists and Israelis from entering the compound to pray there.

They've done that at the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron in the '70s. They started by asking for time for them to go in and pray and ended up dividing it up between Muslims and Jews and now they have control of the Ibrahimi mosque. Whenever they want to close it they close it off. They don't allow Muslims. As if Abraham was Jewish and wasn't the father of all the prophets.

So we have seen precedents in the past by the Israelis and this is exactly their objective. They want to use prayer as a first step. Then they want to divide the place, time and place. And then they would have total control over Al Aqsa mosque. So one step forward would be to stop these provocations and that would contribute significantly to the de-escalation of tension and violence in occupied East Jerusalem.

Thank you.

[Fahmy] Thank you, Ambassador Areikat. And that's a great segue into the last question. Tom, I'm going to ask you to be a psychologist for a moment because many of the questions from the audience talk a little bit about the psychology of the Israelis, how they believe truly that this land was given to them by God, that it is a religious attachment to the land, that all of it, Greater Israel, is theirs. Therefore when they build settlements it's not only their right but it's not illegal.

What would it take for the U.S. Administration within the Security Council, within the United Nations to once and for all recognize that settlements.. ..in the U.S.

settlements is a matter of illegitimacy within a policy. It is not viewed as illegal. The rest of the worldviews settlements as illegal because this is indeed Palestinian land. What would it take for the Obama Administration to once and for all make that jump from illegitimate policy toward settlements to illegal settlements?

[Mattair] Political courage? I think it would take political courage. If I recall correctly it was our position before the Reagan Administration that these settlements were indeed illegal. He is the one who changed that situation and to go back to my earlier remarks I think that was the first Administration that had as a prerequisite for its Middle East team that they know very little about the Middle East and that's been repeated.

So, it's a matter of international law. The Geneva Conventions prohibit deporting the population of an occupied territory. They prohibit sending your own population into it. It's clearly a violation of the Geneva Convention. Our decision to stop saying it's illegal was a political decision not a decision based on the law. So I come back to political courage.

But I don't know how much difference it will make to the Israelis because the whole country is going to the right. Certainly the government is a right-wing government and it comes out of the revisionist Zionist movement which was all of the land is their God-given right.

So for example, once when I asked one of the people in a settlement near Hebron what did he think about the West Bank, he said, what is the West Bank? I've heard about the Bank of America but do you mean Judea and Samaria. So that was how that conversation started and it didn't end well.

[Fahmy] I can imagine. And I'll turn to Dr. Anthony for some closing observations and closing remarks.

[Anthony] This has been an excellent session in which various viewpoints, information, insights, facts, documented that have led to enhanced understanding.

Specifically, it was Herbert Hansel who was President Carter's legal affairs adviser in the Department of State who was the one who said that the settlements are illegal. But even prior to that the United States as a member of the United Nations by treaty in terms of our Constitution, Article VI, states specifically that all laws, treaties and international conventions to which the United States is a solemn signatory are to be the supreme law of the land.

And so when the United Nations Charter, it specifically addresses the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. You cannot get any clearer than that. And UN Resolution 242 and 338 which the Israeli government has accepted and which we helped to craft with Lord Carridon in the fall of 1967, specifically repeats the

inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, which the Israeli government has accepted rhetorically but implemented zero.

[**Fahmy**] Thank you, Doctor Anthony. I'd like to thank our panelists for our wonderful discussions today and although we may not have solved the problem, I think we have raised some very interesting and critical questions regarding the status of Palestine.

Thank you.

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