

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE
Suite 200
1200 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036-3011

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PASSING THE BATON

FOREIGN POLICY CHALLENGES AND
OPPORTUNITIES FACING THE NEW ADMINISTRATION

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THURSDAY
JANUARY 8, 2009

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PANEL 2: 11:15-12:15 A.M.
REINVIGORATING PROSPECTS FOR ARAB-ISRAELI
PEACEMAKING

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Room 202 B
Walter E. Washington Convention Center

801 Mount Vernon Place, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

PANELISTS:

DANIEL KURTZER

ZIAD ASALI

DAVID MAKOVSKY

MODERATED BY SAMUEL LEWIS

This transcript done from audio provided
by the United States Institute of Peace.

1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 11:15 a.m.

3 MR. LAZENSKY: My name's Scott
4 Lazensky. I work at the institute of Peace.

5 For those who don't know the
6 Institute of Peace, the Arab-Israeli issue has
7 long been a very central concern of the
8 Institute and all of our activities were
9 deeply engaged on this question in terms of
10 our grant making, nearly 100 grants in the
11 last 20 years, over \$5 million. Our research
12 and analytical work very much focused on this
13 question. Some of the reports are out in the
14 front. Our training and teaching activities
15 very much focused on dealing with the Israeli
16 and Arab teachers, lawyers, people in civil
17 society and our NGO work because we also are
18 active on the ground. We have Institute staff
19 working in the region on this question.

20 A couple of quick housekeeping
21 notes. Some members of the panel told me if
22 you're going to e-mail or text them during the

1 session, they will have their phones off. So
2 and if you could turn off your phones as well.

3 We're going to have a -- the first
4 half is going to be set. It's sort of a
5 conversation format and then after, we'll take
6 questions from the audience and we have
7 members of the staff with wireless microphones
8 and, you know, we'll try to call on everyone
9 and if we can't get to everyone, we can
10 continue the discussion off air afterwards out
11 in the hallway.

12 The event just to remind everybody
13 is on the record.

14 Just the very briefest
15 introduction of the speakers. You have fuller
16 bios in the materials and also for anybody in
17 this conference or in this room, you probably
18 know all four of them quite well.

19 The chair of the session,
20 Ambassador Sam Lewis who spent a little time
21 in foreign service and I think was ambassador
22 for the United States to Israel, but we love

1 him here because he was the first president of
2 the Institute of Peace in our early years.

3 He's going to be joined first by
4 David Makovsky who's one of the probably most
5 widely recognized commentators on this
6 question. He's a Senior Fellow at the
7 Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

8 Dr. Ziad Asali who's the only real
9 doctor on the panel from the American Task
10 Force on Palestine.

11 And Ambassador Dan Kurtzer who's a
12 great friend of the Institute and the coauthor
13 of a recent book I understand called
14 Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace. Ambassador
15 Kurtzer was Ambassador to both Israel and
16 Egypt.

17 So, with that, I'll turn it over
18 to Ambassador Lewis.

19 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: Thanks, Scott.
20 If you don't want to listen to me, basically,
21 you can listen to the people next door. You
22 have a choice. Not sure who that is, but we

1 have to share the space.

2 We thought we would do this as
3 Scott suggested in a little different format
4 and that's one reason why this screen is up
5 here. Because since we're not on a roster and
6 anybody after the fifth row can't see us, but
7 you can look up there and see us. I think.

8 I'm going to pose initially some
9 questions to the panel one at a time and then
10 we'll get eventually to the audience, but I'm
11 trying to encourage the panel to do this in
12 dialogue form and so, I asked them not to
13 prepare long statements to take up the first
14 half hour which is typically what happens in
15 panels and they were quite pleased since they
16 had to work less or they thought they were
17 going to have to work less.

18 It seems that events have
19 conspired to make this yet again one of those
20 moments in Middle East history when it's
21 appropriate to have such a discussion. There
22 are many of those moments over the years. Too

1 many.

2 But, the events in Gaza have
3 certainly focused everybody's attention on the
4 military side of the conflict as well as the
5 political side and so, the longer range
6 questions about peacemaking in this next
7 administration, we will get to.

8 But, I want to start with the
9 immediate crisis. I think that's on
10 everyone's mind, and certainly there was a new
11 development this morning with the report that
12 there had been some missiles launched from
13 Lebanon on Nahariya, an old folks' home
14 apparently was hit, probably by one of the
15 Palestinian groups in Lebanon, but nobody had
16 claimed credit for it when I was driving in at
17 least.

18 I want to start with David, David
19 Makovsky. David, in a few words, how long is
20 this going to last? What do you think the
21 outcome's going to be? How do you analyze or
22 comment about the reports of the splint in the

1 Israeli leadership about how long to go on
2 with this operation? Whether or not to have
3 a cease-fire agreement or whether just to stop
4 it without an agreement?

5 And such questions also if you
6 want to. How much of a complication will this
7 crisis be in Israel's politics? Will the
8 election be postponed as is now being
9 discussed very likely from February 10th to
10 somewhat later? How much can Lebanon
11 complicate the outcome in Gaza if there is
12 more exchanges of fire with Lebanon as
13 Israeli's have been worry about and preparing
14 for?

15 But, I think the first question
16 I'd like you to address is the first one. Is
17 there going to be a cease fire in affect
18 before the President-Elect takes office?

19 MR. MAKOVSKY: Thank you, Sam. I
20 don't know if you can hear me. I don't know
21 if the mike's work? Does it work? Okay.

22 I just want to say I'm very

1 honored to be here with you, Sam, and Scott
2 and many distinguished guests that I see here
3 in the audience. So, thank you very much for
4 having me.

5 Look, no one has a crystal ball.
6 So, the Middle East has a way of humbling
7 everyone. So, I'll try to just say what seems
8 from what I've been able to gather where it is
9 and where it's going.

10 It seems, you know, that this --
11 it's clear that this crisis was precipitated
12 by a security collapse. You had tahdiya, a
13 lull, a calm, a cease fire. However you want
14 to use this phrase for six months and on
15 December 19th, Israel was ready to renew it to
16 keep it going. So, if that would have
17 happened, we wouldn't be where we were.

18 Hamas decided to fire hundreds of
19 rockets from civilian areas indiscriminately
20 against Israeli civilian area believing it was
21 immune from retaliation.

22 Now, some say no, Hamas basically

1 viewed violence as a tool of negotiation.
2 They really were going to agree to a cease
3 fire, too, but they wanted to change it on
4 their terms.

5 But, you know, I don't think
6 Israel saw it that way and they were not about
7 to change the terms of the cease fire anyway
8 and they went in.

9 Now, what are its options now? I
10 think security-wise it could go one of two
11 ways. It's clear that the main issue it seems
12 to me is stabilizing that border of Gaza and
13 Egypt. That's where the rockets have been
14 coming from. There's no other place basically
15 it could come from. It could come from sea,
16 but that doesn't seem to be the case now.

17 The Grad rockets that have been
18 the ones that have hit Beersheba and obviously
19 hit places Gitara which is 20 miles south of
20 Tel Aviv, Israel's main city along it's coast
21 and that's all been smuggled during the tadia.
22 So, I think there's a sense that, you know, if

1 you didn't like the book, you know, you're
2 going to hate the movie and if you don't stop
3 the Grads, you're going -- within six months
4 there will be rockets that will be able to hit
5 Tel Aviv at will.

6 So, that leaves the Israelis, I
7 think, two options. One is their preferred
8 option. That Egypt basically create a
9 structure on its end not just in the Goli
10 (phonetic) area of the border, but, you know,
11 disrupted down field to make sure that there's
12 no tunnel, rockets being smuggled. But,
13 instead that they're interdicted and I think
14 both the United States and Israel do not see
15 this as a favor to the United States or
16 Israel, but Egypt. As top Egyptian generals
17 tell me, we don't want an armed Islamist state
18 on our eastern frontier. This is not good for
19 Egypt.

20 So, this isn't about doing anyone
21 a favor. But, it's about really defining a
22 priority and creating a strategy to meet that

1 objective.

2 And I think if that is the case
3 that there's some clear security measures
4 being undertaken, Israel will have no, you
5 know -- clearly would like to withdraw.

6 But, if it does not do that, then
7 I think that will create more pressure on
8 Israel on the ground to move into the
9 Philadelphi Road area. Something that it has
10 avoided doing until now because that brings
11 you into urban warfare with Rafah which is a
12 Palestinian city and, you know, urban warfare
13 is -- you know, could be very tragic for all
14 sides.

15 So, that is clearly a fall back
16 position, but I tend to believe it's a fall
17 back that Israel would contemplate if the
18 preferred position doesn't work.

19 I will just speak as a political
20 analyst here that I believe that you could be
21 in a very unusual situation. That how Egypt
22 decides on this issue may also have

1 implications on who is the next prime minister
2 of Israel. It seems odd that the next prime
3 minister of Israel will be decided in Cairo
4 rather than Jerusalem.

5 But, I think politically, you
6 know, if Egypt insists on certain terms the
7 person who will gain the most will be Mr.
8 Netanyahu who is right now waiting in the
9 wings and will clearly pick up the pieces if
10 he feels that this government is engaged in an
11 operation that doesn't halt the rocket fire
12 and doesn't stop the smuggling.

13 So, option one is preferred
14 clearly, but whether that option one
15 materializes, I think we'll know in a few days
16 and if it doesn't, I suspect Israel would
17 consider option two which is continuing the
18 military operation onto the Philadelphi Road
19 with tragic consequences for all side in the
20 Rafah area.

21 Clearly, I think Israel doesn't
22 want this to go on beyond January 20th, but if

1 it does so, that will be dependant on what
2 Egypt decides. So, we'll have to just stay
3 tuned at this point.

4 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: Thanks, David.

5 Do you think that the rising tide of
6 criticism. to put it mildly, in world capitols
7 and in the street of a lot of cities which is
8 now beginning to reach a high level. Fed, of
9 course, by unfortunate things like the
10 shelling of schools and the loss of life of
11 civilians from areas where Israel believes
12 that mortars were being fired, but so far, the
13 UN doesn't quite agree, are these kinds of
14 pressures from the horde of diplomats that are
15 going into Ben Gurion Airport almost every day
16 to try to get involved in the cease-fire
17 negotiations from different countries, does
18 any of that change any of the equation for
19 Israeli decision making? Briefly.

20 MR. MAKOVSKY: That's a good
21 question. I would -- look, the Cana situation
22 that tragically happened both in 1996 and 2006

1 did have an impact on the contours of the
2 operation. The first time, it brought it to
3 a halt. The second time, it clearly was a
4 turning point.

5 So, you have to be careful never
6 to say never and, you know, this is a horrible
7 tragedy. Anyone who knows my views knows that
8 I always believe you need a solution that
9 gives dignity to everybody. A solution that
10 doesn't give dignity doesn't -- isn't a
11 solution. So, that has to be the goal.

12 In terms of the United Nations, as
13 you know, Sam, it's a much more complicated
14 situation and as someone who tries to analyze
15 how they think over there in Israel, my gut
16 tells me the following. They will say what
17 moral authority or moral standing does the UN
18 have to pass judgment when they never convened
19 the security council when Israelis were being
20 shelled with 8,000 of these rockets since 2001
21 and, therefore, they will not see that as --
22 I think as being decisive, but, you know, they

1 will ask what will bring security for their
2 citizens and what will stop the next rockets
3 from landing in Tel Aviv itself.

4 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: Okay. Thank
5 you, David.

6 Ziad, let's move to the
7 Palestinian side for a minute. What impact do
8 you sense that this whole affair has had on
9 public opinion and more importantly, maybe on
10 the political futures for President Abbas and
11 Prime Minister Fayyad? Has the public support
12 of Hamas which has been written about a good
13 deal as being on an upswing now in the wake of
14 the invasion has it gone up in the West Bank?
15 In Gaza? Do we know? And what do you think
16 the longer term affect on the future of the
17 Palestinian authority is going to be from this
18 very destructive crisis?

19 DR. ASALI: Thank you, Ambassador
20 Lewis.

21 If I may just say a couple of
22 words about what David said.

1 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: Sure.

2 DR. ASALI: David is a friend of
3 mine. I hate to disagree with him on
4 anything, but I would like to say that the
5 status quo ante was as unacceptable to the
6 Israelis as it was for Hamas. The Hamas was
7 in Gaza with a siege all around the people of
8 Gaza and it had serious constraints applied on
9 its governing and on the miserable condition
10 of the people of Gaza prior to the attack.

11 So, it had an investment in trying
12 to change the status quo as in Israel. The
13 case that you made.

14 The resolution of -- or the time
15 when we reach to a cease fire will reflect how
16 these two parties perceive the results of the
17 combat, the military consequences as well as
18 the political complications. All of the
19 political implications.

20 I would like to now address the
21 Palestinian issue. Of course, the
22 Palestinians were geography, politically and

1 ideologically and physically divided in the
2 first place and the Palestinian authority in
3 the West Bank was pretty much in control of
4 the West Bank as Hamas was in the Gaza. There
5 was some opposition in both areas, but it was
6 controlled opposition.

7 Now, the question what is the
8 impact of what's happening now? At this point
9 in time, it's very clear that anybody, any
10 Palestinian or Arab or Muslim who stands up
11 for Israel, for the West, for the sense of
12 injured dignity of the Palestinians would
13 almost automatically gain support in the
14 street like you mentioned.

15 But, it also has been complicated
16 by our modern times and the implications of
17 pictures on TV and instant analysis and this
18 is a very, very watched event in the Arab and
19 Muslim worlds and in Arabs and Muslims in the
20 West who have access to Arab media by
21 satellite and that has definitely outraged the
22 people.

1 The perception of the Palestinian
2 authority has not been very positive. Of
3 course, it's eroded.

4 The initial position of the
5 Palestinian authority was Hamas should have
6 publicly stated, should have extended and
7 accepted the tadia and now, fewer people are
8 talking this language because of the anger in
9 the street.

10 Come cease fire time and United
11 Nations National Security decisions made and
12 they could happen sooner regardless of the,
13 you know, possibility that they are unlikely
14 to happen, they could happen. The terms of
15 the cease fire, the terms of the United
16 Nations Security Resolution will have
17 tremendous impact, political impact, on what
18 happens in the Palestinian authority. In
19 fact, it may have impact way beyond what
20 happens in Palestine.

21 If it reflects the fact that the
22 status quo prior to the fight has changed in

1 favor of Hamas, the Palestinian Authority will
2 be exceptionally repositioned as, in fact, the
3 Arab governments who have initially supported
4 it.

5 But, on the other hand, if it ends
6 up with a situation where people would say,
7 you know, we fought all this and we lost all
8 these losses and we end up with still the same
9 set of circumstances, Hamas is even in a
10 weaker position politically and decimated
11 military. Then, of course, by that time, the
12 position of the Palestinian authority would
13 improve.

14 But, I might just add a couple of
15 caveats. The Arab street or public opinion
16 are very important as they are everywhere
17 else.

18 But, let's look at the
19 Palestinian Authority's position. The
20 leadership has no alternative. It has no
21 credible alternative. There is no organized
22 opposition for it in the West Bank.

1 It has also a significant thing
2 which is control of the security apparatus in
3 the West Bank and it also has the legitimacy
4 up until now and will continue claiming the
5 legitimacy beyond the January 9th because of
6 the basic law requirement that the legislative
7 elections have to take place at the same time
8 as the presidential election. It's going to
9 be very, very difficult to dislodge the
10 Palestinian authority from the West Bank.

11 Having said that, everything is
12 going to be riding in the long range now. All
13 of these things are short term prospects for
14 the Palestine authority. In the long term if
15 the perception of the Palestinian people and
16 the Arab people is that Hamas' position has
17 actually paid off and its extracted
18 concessions and pushed back Israel, then it
19 will have the upper hand and that I'm sure
20 everybody's aware of this and that will be
21 reflected in the upcoming resolutions. But,
22 whether it's in the Egyptian/French proposal

1 or whether it's going to be reflected in the
2 -- what's happening now in the Security
3 Council Revolutions.

4 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: Thank you,
5 Ziad.

6 Now, our third panelist is Dan
7 Kurtzer and before I ask him the question, I
8 want to just make a comment about him.

9 Anybody who reads The New York
10 Times page 17 today will find his name
11 mentioned as a likely candidate for a high
12 position in ye ole State Department, but he
13 doesn't say anything about that and nobody
14 else does on the record and they won't.

15 So, Dan necessarily is
16 constrained, I think, just by the fact that I
17 read The New York Times. He's constrained
18 probably to say what he thinks the Obama
19 administration's going to do about this mess.
20 So, I'm not going to mention that. I'm not
21 going to ask him that question.

22 I have to find questions I can ask

1 him that I think he can answer. Hypothetical
2 kinds of questions. So, now, let's see how it
3 works.

4 Dan, come March 15th, let's say,
5 the President-Elect is now in office. He's
6 President. By this time, let's say there is
7 a cease fire in effect. And let's say also
8 that with that cease fire the immediate crisis
9 has calmed down. There has been an election
10 in Israel. We have this unknown new prime
11 minister, but the administration has had time
12 by then to consult with a lot of foreign
13 leaders who always flock to Washington during
14 the month of February and March and maybe has
15 sent out emissaries to go around a listen to
16 everybody which I imagine they will do and try
17 to figure out really what to propose.

18 I'm not going to ask you what they
19 should propose. You wrote about that anyway,
20 you and Scott, in your book basically.

21 But, the question is how much
22 impact do you think on the prospects for

1 peacemaking has this Gaza crisis produced?

2 For example, has the Turkish role
3 changed with respect to Syria? One of the
4 Syrian journalists, Hasame Mobjad (phonetic),
5 wrote a very interesting piece about how Mr.
6 Erdogan's view of Israel has changed
7 considerably over the last months and
8 particularly in the last two weeks.

9 And, of course, Turkey has been
10 playing a very important role in indirect
11 talks, mediating indirect talks, between
12 Israel and Syria. Has that -- will that be
13 different after this crisis and beyond that,
14 you talked a lot in your book, your and
15 Scott's book, about lessons we've learned from
16 this period of 30 years more or less of active
17 peacemaking by the United States that you and
18 I have both been involved in. How many of
19 those lessons will look relevant by March 15th
20 if any?

21 AMBASSADOR KURTZER: Well, thank
22 you, Sam, for being a reader of The New York

1 Times and saving me the caveat that I was
2 going to start with.

3 I will -- the fact of the matter
4 is that I have 21 undergraduates waiting for
5 me to teach a course at Princeton starting in
6 the first week of February. That's the only
7 fact on record right now.

8 In responding to your question,
9 Sam, I want to relate it to things that David
10 and Ziad said as well. Because anyone looking
11 at either of the broader conflict or the
12 narrower issue at hand in Gaza has got to
13 start with a question that I don't think
14 anybody has an answer to and that is what are
15 the goals that the various protagonists in
16 this drama are pursuing?

17 As Ziad indicated, that if you
18 look back at the status quo ante that both
19 Israel and Hamas were unsatisfied or found
20 that status quo ante unacceptable, I think if
21 you applied that same question to the status
22 quo post-conflict one is going to find the

1 same answer. That there will be an
2 unacceptable situation on the ground almost no
3 matter how this particular phase relates to
4 reality and the reason I say that is because
5 in normal conflict situation, I think you tend
6 to protagonists in one of three positions.
7 Either they are diametrically -- moving in
8 diametrically opposite directions or they are
9 moving towards each other in a conflict
10 situation. In other words, they actually want
11 to fight or they may find themselves moving in
12 parallel and you have a conflict management
13 phase.

14 What we're seeing particularly
15 between Israel and Hamas is much more akin I
16 think to that Monty Python skit of the 100
17 meter dash for runners who don't have a sense
18 of direction. Because you've got Israeli and
19 Hamas interests that don't correspond in
20 anyway. There is no mutuality of interests or
21 mutuality of goals that the two sides can or
22 have pursued that give us any sense that this

1 particular phase of the conflict can end in
2 any better situation than where we were 20 or
3 21 days ago.

4 Hamas has pursued a strategy since
5 its election in 2006 and particularly since
6 its takeover of Gaza in 2007 of legitimizing
7 itself as a potential government for all of
8 Palestine while also burnishing its
9 credentials as a resistance movement. In
10 other words, not only trying to govern
11 sometimes by persuasion and sometimes by
12 coercion, but also trying to maintain the
13 credentials that brought it to power in the
14 first place it believes and that accounts for
15 the rearming and reequipping and the training
16 that took place even during the cease fire.

17 On the other hand, Israel since
18 Hamas' election and more particularly since
19 Hamas' takeover of Gaza has been looking for
20 ways to bring Hamas down. Not to see it
21 become a legitimate interlocutor for
22 Palestinians or as a legitimate partner and

1 certainly has seen Hamas' efforts at rearming
2 and reequipping as a dangerous threat to
3 Israel both in immediate terms as we've seen
4 in the rocket fire against Israeli towns and
5 villages adjacent to Gaza, but also in larger
6 terms of the deterrent that Israel believed
7 that it lost or was weakened as a result of
8 the war in Lebanon in 2006.

9 So, you have the goals and
10 objectives of the these two players moving in
11 different directions. They're really not
12 clashing directly at all times nor are they
13 running in parallel, but at various times,
14 they go in directions that make it very, very
15 difficult to see any outcome either of this
16 round or of the subsequent rounds in this
17 confrontation lead us to a conclusion in which
18 there will be some mutuality of interest that
19 emerge from it.

20 In that respect, on March 15th, no
21 matter who wins the Israeli election and no
22 matter what other issues are on the agenda of

1 the new American administration, one of the
2 key questions that has to be asked is is there
3 a mutuality of interests in the larger
4 Arab/Israeli arena with which an American
5 administration can work and this, in fact, was
6 one of the main issues that Scott and I looked
7 at in the book that we put out a little less
8 than a year ago.

9 First of all, a point we made then
10 which will remain relevant in our view no
11 matter what happens in the weeks ahead is that
12 the issue of the Arab/Israeli conflict and
13 conflict resolution is a vital American
14 national interest. It's not a favor we do for
15 the parties.

16 And that's very relevant even in
17 terms of what President-Elect Obama has
18 already said about conflict resolution. When
19 he was in the Middle East in July, he told
20 Israelis and Palestinians that he intended to
21 see the conflict resolution process on the
22 part of the United States get off the ground

1 much faster and with much more vigor than the
2 current administration and hopefully having
3 assimilated the lessons of the past 15 to 20
4 years and being able to apply them.

5 Now, if that's the case, then the
6 United States on March 15th will have a very
7 clear set of goals in mind. Number one, it is
8 to try to bring about a conflict ending
9 resolution of the Arab/Israeli conflict.
10 Whether it's between Israelis and Palestinians
11 or Israelis and Syrians.

12 There's been a lot of talk in
13 academic circles even among policy makers of
14 whether or not all the parties know the way
15 this thing will end and there probably is a
16 division of views in this room, but that can
17 be tested. The issues have -- on the table in
18 both sets of negotiations have been vented and
19 articulated enough over the years that
20 exploratory phases or consultative phases can
21 probably be telescoped in relatively shorter
22 times so that we can get to a period in which

1 parties actually have to confront tough
2 decisions about territory, about the nature of
3 peace, about security, about the myriad legal
4 issues, water, the electromagnetic spectrum,
5 the air space. The range of issues that need
6 to accompany any kind of an agreement.

7 Economic relations.

8 These are all issues that I don't
9 want to say are ripe for resolution, but the
10 diplomatic toolbox relating to these issues is
11 not a mystery anymore and so, if you have an
12 American administration in which the
13 President-Elect has already said he wants to
14 get off to a fast start and if you have a
15 prime minister elected in Israel who is
16 prepared to move and a Palestinian president
17 prepared to move, then in one respect, however
18 the situation in Gaza emerges should not deter
19 an active round of diplomacy.

20 It will obviously influence what
21 our various envoys do. They're going to have
22 to spend time in a lot of clean-up operations,

1 reconstruction and humanitarian assistance in
2 Gaza, security frameworks involving Israel and
3 Egypt and Palestinians with respect to
4 smuggling, political issues that are going to
5 remain unresolved until there is some form of
6 national dialogue possible within the
7 Palestinian community, the regional
8 implications especially in light of the
9 overnight situation in Lebanon. If it's a
10 one-off firing of rockets, then the regional
11 implications issue may be controllable, but
12 what if it's not and what if, in fact, the
13 conflict spreads.

14 It doesn't mean, however, Sam,
15 that on March 15th the current situation needs
16 to become a kind of barrier to an effective
17 U.S. role to try to move this process forward.

18 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: But, Dan, do
19 you think that you can get past some
20 negotiating to an agreement with half of
21 Palestine?

22 AMBASSADOR KURTZER: Well, I think

1 this was a question that was -- has been well
2 debated since the Annapolis conference and
3 there was this, I think, ill-fated attempt to
4 think about what was called a shelf agreement.
5 That you could somehow negotiate an agreement,
6 put it in mothballs until such time in which
7 it could be implemented. That was never to
8 be.

9 But, there, at least, was a more
10 reasonable proposition that was articulated
11 during this period which suggested that even
12 if the Palestinian community needs to be
13 unified in order to implement an agreement, it
14 may be possible to have an agreement
15 negotiated with the legitimate authority of
16 the Palestinian government and then have that
17 agreement subjected to a referendum or a
18 national election where some test within the
19 Palestine community let the people decide
20 whether they like it or not. Because I think
21 there is a generally held view that it would
22 be impossible to implement an agreement

1 covering the West Bank and Gaza as long as the
2 Palestinian government is bifurcated. But, I
3 don't think we have fully tested the
4 proposition that it may be possible to
5 negotiate such an agreement and then have
6 Palestinians decide whether it's an agreement
7 that they want to see implemented and,
8 therefore, would require some form of national
9 dialogue, national reconciliation.

10 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: One of the
11 things which often arises is that newspaper
12 think they reflect public opinion or follow
13 it.

14 I was intrigued today by my
15 reading of The New York Times again. This
16 time the op-ed page. The New York Times is
17 not viewed as an anti-Israeli newspapers
18 except by some Israeli, but generally not in
19 the United States I think and it's fascinating
20 that you have three articles that really
21 dominate the op-ed page today on the effect of
22 the Gaza crisis. One by Nick Kristof who

1 always gets very worried about human rights
2 violations wherever they happen. So, he's
3 really strong on that. Rashid Khalidi who is
4 despite the views of some probably one of the
5 very best historians of the region in the
6 United States of Palestinian origin and a very
7 respectable figure in academia and Gideon
8 Lichfield from The Economist and all three of
9 them essentially are laying out some problems
10 for a new administration in my mind.

11 And it comes back to the question
12 I raised earlier. When Al Jazeera has free
13 access in Gaza, but no western journalists do,
14 it's not too surprising that all over the
15 world, not just in the Arab world, the
16 pictures of violent suffering by children and
17 the mistakes of the military create a kind of
18 atmosphere.

19 Now, the question that I wonder is
20 about the United States. We asked the
21 question about what affect does that have in
22 Gaza among the Arabs. What affect does this

1 dimension of the conflict, the human rights
2 dimension, undoubtedly stressed by UN
3 officials and by others and fed by pretty one-
4 sided television pictures, partly because the
5 Israelis don't want to let anybody else into
6 Gaza, how might that affect a new
7 administration's ability to launch a kind of
8 evenhanded or pro-Israeli and evenhanded
9 initiative around March 15th or March 30th or
10 is that really not something to worry about
11 for them?

12 Who wants to answer that? Dan,
13 you can if you want to. Do you want to try?

14 AMBASSADOR KURTZER: Well, I'll
15 start by suggesting that I think it would be
16 not credible to believe that human rights and
17 humanitarian concerns would not be on the
18 agenda. Let me put in a double negative.

19 First of all, one of the only
20 things that President-Elect Obama has said
21 during this crisis has related to his concerns
22 about the impact on the human condition in

1 both sides, and you know, therefore, that he
2 is thinking about this even as he clearly must
3 be thinking about the politics, diplomacy, and
4 security issues.

5 Secondly, while diplomats tend to
6 focus on diplomatic solutions, those solutions
7 have to operate within an environment which is
8 tolerable in the societies in which they're
9 being played out and in both Israel and
10 Palestinian society, the perception of human
11 rights abuses against ones own party are
12 serious enough that they become a part of the
13 mix.

14 Israeli society found it
15 unacceptable for a large part of its
16 population to be subjected in 2006 to the
17 threat of Hezbollah rockets and now in
18 2008/2009 to the threat of Hamas rockets, and
19 Palestinian society would find it equally
20 unacceptable that the response to those
21 rockets would carry such an intense civilian
22 cost to those who are not combatants.

1 And so, for those of us, you know,
2 whether in government or out of government,
3 trying to think about how you put the
4 diplomatic pieces together on this chessboard,
5 one can't ignore the fact that that chessboard
6 is populated by people who are being affected
7 everyday, and that's why I think the articles
8 in The Times today are so important because
9 it's a reminder of the context in which
10 diplomacy takes place.

11 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: Ziad.

12 DR. ASALI: Yes, I think this
13 crisis is just one more crisis that should and
14 hopefully it will be the last one to bring the
15 basic conflict into sharp contrast. What it
16 is about, what needs to be done about it, and
17 what exactly is the United States interest in
18 this whole issue.

19 There's been an emerging consensus
20 about the two-state solution. It's been
21 codified. There are a road map, quartet, et
22 cetera, et cetera. Nobody can claim with any

1 degree of seriousness that the implementation
2 effort has matched the policy that was
3 proclaimed.

4 So, this -- what is happening now
5 shows us once again that this conflict is not
6 a flat plateau. It is a downward slope. It
7 always and invariably gets worse. This crisis
8 will make it worse no matter what they agree
9 on.

10 The pictures, the TV coverage, it
11 is absolutely horrendous. These are not made
12 up pictures. These are pictures of real human
13 beings suffering, and nobody can be more
14 sensitive to the suffering and the threat of
15 the Israeli people than people who understand
16 that we need to have the Israeli people on
17 board to implement a two-state solution. They
18 need to see it as it is their interest to do
19 that.

20 This, again, brings us to the
21 issues of what can we do to make this not a
22 downhill slope until we are able to grope with

1 it. We need to buy time. Clearly, nobody's
2 quite equipped now to deal with it and give us
3 an agreement tomorrow.

4 What we propose and what I think
5 should be given more attention is how to
6 prevent this from being a downhill slope.
7 Categorically, I would say the one single
8 thing that has consistently made this issue
9 worse is the settlement expansion, settlement
10 building in the West Bank which have made the
11 creation of a Palestinian state less and less
12 feasible.

13 Whatever happens, I think this
14 should be on top of the priority list of the
15 incoming administration to find a way to give
16 cover to the Israeli politicians to maintain
17 this present status quo of settlement
18 expansion by freezing it and if the United
19 States new president who promises change and
20 all kinds of good things take this position
21 not as a coercive measure against Israel, but
22 as a friendly strategic alignment between the

1 interests of the United States and Israel,
2 that would be a very good thing.

3 And I do not say that this should
4 be done in a vacuum. There should be an
5 exchange. There should be something that is
6 given to the prime minister who would do this,
7 and there are many options that can be given.
8 But, you know, this cannot go on with any
9 expectation of a two-state solution being, you
10 know, credibly defended.

11 There are many things that we can
12 say that have weakened the position of the PA.
13 The major one was that what has your policy of
14 moderation given us?

15 This is something that can be
16 given and this is something that the Israelis
17 can give if they are really interested in a
18 two-state solution.

19 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: You know, I
20 have a whole long list of questions, and we've
21 got to get to the audience here I know. I
22 want to ask one more and ask for a pretty

1 quick answer.

2 David, what do you think the
3 impact will be on the Syrian/Israeli
4 negotiating track, and has it been damaged or
5 not by these events?

6 MR. MAKOVSKY: I tend to think
7 that the very interests that led Syria and
8 Israel to Turkey to talk to each other are
9 going to be the same interests that will
10 continue after this episode ends, and
11 Netanyahu of all people while I have -- you
12 know, we don't know how far he will go on the
13 Palestinian issue, I think a lot of our
14 assessments on the peace process has to be
15 contextualized by the outcome of the elections
16 in Israel should they be held next month.

17 I think actually on the Syria
18 track you would have more of a consensus
19 ironically to proceed with that.

20 I think Livni, if she wins, she
21 would proceed as well, but she would also have
22 her eye very firmly on the Palestinian issue.

1 Netanyahu may. It depends on the sort of
2 government. He might be part of a unity
3 government. Depends what the configuration
4 is.

5 But, I think what's fascinating on
6 the Syria track is that the biggest proponents
7 inside Israel for peace with Syria are not
8 let's say a group called Peace Now which is an
9 advocacy organization. But, it's the Israeli
10 military at its highest echelons that believes
11 peace with Syria is important for a new --
12 let's say a strategic reorientation in the
13 region.

14 They see -- you know, people talk
15 about the quartet meaning the U.S., Europe,
16 Russian, the UN. The other quartet is Iran,
17 Hezbollah, Hamas and Syria. That second
18 quartet only one of the four elements is not
19 an Islamist entity, and that is the Syrians.

20 And I think that a lot of Israelis
21 believe peace with Syria is a good within its
22 own right, but it could also have important

1 strategic consequences for the region. It
2 could break the chain so to speak of that
3 second quartet as the rockets go like a
4 double-play combination. Syria -- I mean
5 Iran, Syria, Hezbollah. So, I think that, you
6 know, this is something to look for.

7 Ironically, Netanyahu in 1998
8 tried through a confidant of his in the United
9 States. Had reached certain -- the
10 negotiations reached a very advanced stage
11 with the Syrians and might have been
12 concluded, but a fellow name Ariel Sharon
13 who's now in a coma tragically blocked it. I
14 think if he wins, he will pick up where he
15 left off, and I think if Livni wins, she will
16 also pursue that track as well because, again,
17 it is the military that is influential in
18 Israel. They are the ones saying what do you
19 have to lose by talking. Try it. See what
20 works.

21 And I believe that the parties are
22 sitting in Turkey not because the United

1 States twisted any arms, but because each side
2 from their own national interest and I don't
3 -- you know, I think on the Syrian side given
4 all their economic catastrophic situation
5 today see peace as their ticket towards a
6 better future and not just a return to
7 economic ties with the West, but also a return
8 to the Arab fold and Syria, let's be honest,
9 has been on the outs with many leading Arabs
10 like Saudi Arabia and Egypt because of their
11 relationship with Iran. Peace will be a fresh
12 start for Syria.

13 It works for both of these
14 parties. That's why they're in Turkey, and
15 that's why they're counting on the Obama
16 administration to be vigorous in support in
17 2009.

18 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: Well, I hope
19 you're right, David. That's more about Israel
20 than it is about Syria.

21 It's time for some questions, and
22 I see a guy who knows something about Syria.

1 Ambassador Ted Kattouf, you get the first
2 question.

3 Want to stand up, Ted, and there
4 are suppose to be mikes around here somewhere.

5 AMBASSADOR KATTOUF: Well, just to
6 follow up, Ambassador Lewis, on your question
7 and on Ziad Asali's comments about settlement,
8 I mean many of us who favor a two-state
9 solution do wonder when the sell-by date makes
10 it impossible precisely because of the issues
11 that Dr. Asali raised in the settlements, the
12 proportional representation system in Israel.

13 Meanwhile, as David Makovsky has
14 pointed out, even a Netanyahu-led government
15 would probably find it's way over some months
16 to picking up where things left off with
17 Syria.

18 So, I'd like to ask perhaps --

19 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: Well, what
20 about the Syrian reaction?

21 AMBASSADOR KATTOUF: Well, the
22 Syrian -- you know, we're only going to

1 ultimately know the Syrian reaction when it's
2 -- when they're tested.

3 The Syrians in my mind are ready
4 to proceed on a track sponsored by the United
5 States with Israel towards peace. Obviously,
6 they'd like to see something going on on the
7 -- on the ground in Palestine. They'd like to
8 see progress there, but I think they have said
9 both in the '90s and I think they've probably
10 hinted at it today that they're willing to
11 move forward in any case.

12 So, I think it would be nice if we
13 test the proposition because that's the only
14 way we're ever going to know whether they will
15 actually do a deal or not do a deal.

16 If everybody knows what the
17 parameters would have to look like, the
18 Syrians are fond of saying 85 percent of the
19 issues have been resolved. There might be
20 water issues relating to the Sea of Galilee
21 and tributaries and the like, but by an large,
22 everybody knows what this thing would have to

1 look like. So, it would appear to be low-
2 hanging fruit compared to the much more
3 complex and politically difficult Palestinian
4 track.

5 So, my question is, perhaps to
6 Ambassador Kurtzer, is what do you think an
7 Obama administration should do if approached
8 by Israel and Syria because they are going to
9 be almost certainly, and how would that fit
10 into what we're doing with the Palestinians?

11 AMBASSADOR KURTZER: Well, Sam
12 answered that question in introducing me.
13 Really, I can't speculate about what an Obama
14 administration can do as I'm sitting on the
15 transition team, but the question is a good
16 one.

17 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: We happen to
18 have an expert on Syria in the person of the
19 Syrian ambassador here on the front row. You
20 want to give us a quick statement about
21 Syria's point of view, Mr. Ambassador?

22 AMBASSADOR MOUSTAPHA: Yes, thank

1 you very much. I'll try to be as succinct as
2 possible.

3 I don't claim to be as expert on
4 Syria as the other gentlemen here in this
5 room, but I want to say the following.

6 Throughout this discussion, the
7 viewpoint of Hamas was totally, totally
8 absent. Well, this is usually the case here
9 in the United States except for today. While
10 I agree with you that The New York Times is an
11 ardent supporter of Israel, but an even more
12 ardent supporter of Israel, The Washington
13 Post, has published this morning a very
14 important article by Jimmy Carter who happens
15 to be the only person from the United States
16 of America that talks to Hamas, and he has a
17 very different, a very different story to
18 tell.

19 People here usually comfortably
20 sit on their arm seats and discuss what Hamas
21 wants or what Hamas does not want, but they
22 never talk to Hamas. The only other American

1 I know that has talked also to Hamas and Hamas
2 leaders happens to be a journalist, Seymour
3 Hersh. Both President Jimmy Carter and
4 Seymour Hersh have a very different story that
5 is never ever heard here in the United States.

6 Regardless, I'm not -- I'm only
7 suggesting that someone should discuss what
8 Jimmy Carter has written today in The
9 Washington Post.

10 Now, the other point that is very
11 important is the following. You know, the
12 massacres that is happening today in Gaza, the
13 primitive makeshift rockets that were thrown
14 on Israel, the settlements, everything else,
15 the rift between Hamas and Fatah are all
16 symptoms of the big elephant in the room that
17 was not mentioned one single time throughout
18 all this session since we started until now.
19 Not a single person mentioned the word
20 occupation.

21 The reality is even if you go to
22 the -- what is the status quo ante? It is one

1 nation under occupation, under humiliation,
2 under suffering because of the sheer military
3 superiority of another nation. This is the
4 problem.

5 The big question. Since I'm not on
6 the Obama transition team, I would say the
7 following. If President Obama and his
8 administration will move from the philosophy
9 of conflict management to the philosophy of
10 conflict resolution and address all the
11 issues, then we will have hope in our region.

12 Otherwise, the discussion about
13 the atrocities in Gaza, the atrocities that
14 took place in Lebanon two years ago and many
15 other atrocities will be repeated time and
16 again every couple of years. It breaks the
17 heart to say this, but this is reality.

18 Unless we will have a bold
19 strategic vision to address the whole issue of
20 the Middle East, making peace, ending
21 occupation, we will keep on going around and
22 around and around.

1 Thank you.

2 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: Well, thank
3 you, Mr. Ambassador.

4 I might just speak for Syria in
5 this case. I take what you've said to mean
6 that if the Obama administration launches such
7 a broad peace resolution policy, Syria will
8 not avoid taking part.

9 Thank you.

10 Let's get further back. The
11 gentleman in the middle back there. You want
12 to identify yourself?

13 MR. KALISHMAN: Matthew Kalishman
14 (phonetic).

15 I just wanted to ask people on the
16 panel. We've been talking about governmental
17 level, but how do we build a constituency for
18 peace amongst the people which is going to be
19 the most important part?

20 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: Which people?

21 MR. KALISHMAN: Oh, sorry.
22 Palestinians and Israelis.

1 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: Well, Ziad.

2 DR. ASALI: Yes. Adopt and
3 implement the right polices.

4 The Honorable Ambassador from
5 Syria mentioned that nobody talked about the
6 occupation. But, I think we talked about a
7 two-state solution which means establishing a
8 state of Palestine alongside Israel which is
9 precisely what it is that you're talking
10 about.

11 If the policies of implementing
12 the agreed upon -- the internationally agreed
13 upon two-state solution is not implemented,
14 then there is no amount of understanding
15 between Jews and Christians and nice people on
16 this side that are going to do anything that
17 is helpful.

18 That does not in any way diminish
19 the absolute significance of humanizing each
20 human being everywhere and this toxic,
21 poisonous, unacceptable public discourse where
22 Muslims, Arabs, Palestinians, Jews,

1 Christians, the West are denigrated into Satan
2 wherever, you know, the source of the -- has
3 to stop, and this has to be an international
4 project and this has to do very much with the
5 question that Sam asked about, you know,
6 what's happening with the public discourse.

7 What's acceptable in the public
8 discourse just should not be acceptable. More
9 voices have to be heard.

10 But, going back to the fundamental
11 issue, the right policies implemented and
12 let's see that the opposing forces understand
13 that there has to be a tomorrow. Nobody's
14 going to be able to get the whole cake. You
15 have to compromise. You must compromise.

16 And this has to be a policy that
17 cannot be managed. It has to be a conflict
18 ending policy.

19 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: David, one
20 minute.

21 MR. MAKOVSKY: It seems -- I'd
22 like to echo something Ziad says about we need

1 to change the discourse of everyone in the
2 region.

3 If the moderates cannot find a way
4 to acknowledge when the moderates on the other
5 side have done something, you will never build
6 a center in these societies and what has to
7 happen is also the regimes need to come
8 together and to de-legitimize extremism.

9 And if it -- the case of Hamas, I
10 would like to hope that we'd have Arab leaders
11 who will say that Hamas drives the hope of
12 Palestinian statehood farther and farther
13 away. What have these rockets achieved? All
14 they've done is harden Israeli attitudes that
15 peace is possible. Why would Israel want to
16 get out of the West Bank when they ended the
17 occupation in Gaza and all they've got were
18 these lousy rockets? So, this is crucial.

19 Now, you'd say on the other side
20 Israel needs to also de-legitimize its
21 extremism. Fair enough.

22 But, the discourse is crucial, and

1 it cannot be this mutual demonization that's
2 going on and frankly, I -- you know, I hate to
3 say it, but I think you see the demonization
4 much greater in the Arab media, and unless we
5 realize that that demonization, unless that
6 changes we're nowhere.

7 Not all Palestinians obviously are
8 terrorists. Ninety-nine point nine nine are
9 not, and we need to say that, too.

10 This demonization has to stop.

11 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: I think we've
12 got about time for one more question. Who's
13 really eager? There's a lady here's been
14 eager for a long time.

15 MS. WADALIA: My name is Aman
16 Wadalia (phonetic), Advisor for Mr. Hariri of
17 Lebanon.

18 My question is about Lebanon.
19 You're right, Ziad.

20 I was wondering today as we talked
21 before there were four rockets fired on Israel
22 from South Lebanon. So, somebody is trying to

1 drag Lebanon into another war and another
2 tragedy that we -- that we -- the same one we
3 had 2006.

4 Hezbollah denied any
5 responsibility. Nobody in Lebanon is
6 supporting that. The government said that
7 this is a violation of 1701. They're still
8 committed to it and to the cease fire.

9 So, my question is do you expect
10 if this continues of any regional conflicts
11 coming out of this, meaning between Israel and
12 Syria?

13 My second question is for
14 Ambassador Kurtzer. When you mentioned about
15 the March 15th and the kind of approach the
16 administration is going to have, you are
17 talking about having Israeli, Palestinian,
18 Syrian, Israeli negotiations. Even mentioned
19 Lebanon. What kind of role do you see for
20 Lebanon at this stage and what kind of peace
21 that will come of that -- in that track?

22 Thank you.

1 AMBASSADOR KURTZER: I don't want
2 to sound facile about the idea of a regional
3 conflict, but a regional conflict will only
4 happen if the parties want it to happen.

5 The Israeli government has made it
6 clear that it does not want to regionalize
7 this conflict. So far the Lebanese government
8 has said the same. I think the same can apply
9 for the Syrian government and so, if
10 everyone's careful about how they conduct
11 themselves and how they respond to untoward
12 incidents, this probably doesn't have to
13 escalate.

14 The Israeli response to the
15 rockets overnight was directly related to the
16 source of the fire and did not seek to expand
17 that particular area of conflict. One would
18 hope that there would be no fire from Lebanon,
19 that the Lebanese army would play a role that
20 we've been waiting for it to play for many
21 years and be able to take security control of
22 that area.

1 So, as long as the respective
2 governments involved both have no interest and
3 have indicated no particular desire for
4 regionalizing this conflict, it does not have
5 to happen.

6 With respect to Lebanon in the
7 context of the Arab/Israeli conflict
8 resolution process, there are all indications
9 that a Lebanese/Israeli dialogue could result
10 in a very quick agreement. Issues relating to
11 territory, relating to water, relating to
12 security are well known and the solutions to
13 those problems are well known. But, it's
14 going to require commitment on the part of the
15 Lebanese government to a negotiation to which
16 it has not agreed in the past.

17 So, if March 15th, April 15th, you
18 know, we're picking a date out of the air, but
19 if at some point the Lebanese government said
20 it's ready for negotiations, I have no doubt
21 that Israel would be equally ready and an
22 American administration ought to be able to

1 exploit that opportunity and move that rather
2 rapidly towards a successful conclusion.

3 AMBASSADOR LEWIS: Well, I'm
4 afraid we've run out of time. We talked too
5 much. You didn't talk enough, but I think
6 this has been a good frank exchange among
7 friends who disagree about some things. But,
8 generally, I think we all support the hope
9 that a new period of American peacemaking not
10 conflict management may come about in the near
11 future.

12 Thank you all very much.

13 (Whereupon, the panel concluded.)

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