

## DISCUSSION ON ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

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### SPEAKERS:

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HILBOLDT: Good morning. Welcome to the Heritage Foundation in our Douglas and Sara Allison Auditorium. Of course, welcome those who join us on our [Heritage.org](http://Heritage.org) website on all of these occasions, remind our in-house guests to be so kind to check your mobile devices to see that they have been silenced or turned off, and, of course, for those watching online, you are welcome to send questions or comments at any time, simply e-mailing [speaker@heritage.org](mailto:speaker@heritage.org)

Following the initial presentation today, my colleague, Jim Phillips, will lead our panel discussion. Mr. Phillips is senior research fellow for Middle Eastern affairs at the Douglas and Sara Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies. He is a veteran foreign policy analyst and has worked for heritage since 1979, authored dozens of papers on Arab-Israeli security and foreign policy issues, as well as testified before Congress on a wide-variety of Middle East issues.

Hosting and introducing our special presenter is Luke Coffey, who serves as director of our Allison Center for Foreign Policy. Before joining us here at Heritage, Mr. Coffey served in the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence as a senior special adviser to then-Secretary of State for Defence, Liam Fox, he was the first ever non U.K. national to be appointed by the Prime Minister into this role.

Prior to this, he worked in The House of Commons as an adviser on defense and security issues for the conservative party, and he is also a veteran of the United States Army, having been stationed in Italy and the Southern Europe task force command. Please join me in welcoming Luke Coffey. Luke?

COFFEY: Thank you, John.

And welcome, everyone, here to the Heritage Foundation this afternoon to discuss a very important and timely matter about the Israeli/Palestine crisis and the recent announcement about the move of the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

So the timing couldn't have worked out better in terms of this event and the president's announcement. It's my pleasure to introduce Ron DeSantis, he's a native Floridian who has served in Congress since 2013. Prior to his election, he served as a JAG officer in the United States Navy, deploying to Iraq in 2007 during the troop surge, as an adviser to the U.S. Navy SEAL commander in support of the SEAL mission in Iraq. He has also served as a JAG officer at the terrorist detention center at Guantanamo Bay. And as a former U.S. military policeman who did detainee operations in Afghanistan, I know how important the JAG officer is through all of that.

He is currently a Lieutenant Commander in the reserve component of the U.S. Navy. In Congress, he has been a leader on issues pertaining to national security and he has also been an outspoken advocate for the State of Israel. As the Chairman of the National Security Subcommittee, and as a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, he is deeply engaged in developing policies to combat foreign threats supporting our allies in the Middle East.

The Congressman has also been a key player in the discussions surrounding the relocation of the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. He also has launched the Israel victory caucus to educate Congress on the shared challenges faced by our nations in support of peace in Israel.

So, it is my pleasure to welcome the Congressman and please join me in introducing him. Thank you.

DESANTIS: Thank you. Thank you. It's great to be here.

You know, one of the things, I think, that you learn around here is that there are a lot of things that just get repeated and that people will kind of just say that's conventional wisdom that really is—has no basis in fact and has been proven to not be true over and over again. And one of them comes to mind, it's the subject of this forum here today, is that, you will never have peace in the broader Middle East until you solve the Arab-Israeli conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. And it was until you do that, you can't do anything else.

I never bought into that from the time I got to Congress. But I—and I think that there are very few members of Congress who really think that that view carries water anymore. And I think the Trump administration is showing that that view is not the view that really represents the reality on the ground in the Middle East.

It's important to think about what this administration had inherited when they took over. You had a Middle East that really was in chaos. The Islamist regime in Iran was ascendant, obviously, flush with a lot of money due to that Iranian nuclear deal. They were fomenting problems in places like Yemen and Syria, funding groups like Hezbollah and were in de facto-control of Baghdad in Iraq.

You had the emergence and growth of the terrorist group ISIS that happened after American troops pulled out of Iraq in 2012 and, of course, the deepening conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and really, Israel isolated on the world stage in part by U.S. actions, such as the Obama administration's pursuing resolution 2334 at the end of the administration. Which, really, the U.N., I mean, I don't know, really, what they do other than attack Israel. In that year, they did 24 resolutions and 20 of them were against Israel.

But even by the U.N.'s very, very low standards, resolution 2334 was a disgrace. It basically said that even things like the Western Wall were considered occupied Arab territory and that would have been something that, I think, almost any administration previously would have vetoed, certainly this administration, would have vetoed.

And so, the Obama I think approach was first and foremost, empower Iran. They believed in a rapprochement and the Ben Rhodes idea that this is a new, they're going to turn over a new leaf with Rouhani and the moderation. That's kind of what they said publicly, but even people like Rhodes admit that that was nonsense.

They believed if you empower Iran, that that will be better for the United States in the Middle East. They also did things like fail to embrace leaders who may not necessarily be our cup of tea domestically in all areas, like President el-Sisi of Egypt, but who are very strong in identifying the threat posed by militant Islam. And somebody like Sisi, who is a devout Muslim, nevertheless wanting to be pro-Western in his outlook, and even

challenging some of the radical clerics in Egypt to reform some of these teachings that incite violence against other countries or other faiths.

But yet, they preferred groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to President el-Sisi. And, of course, they seemed to blame Israel for almost every problem in the region, it seems, whenever that was convenient. So that was one approach. And I don't think it was a successful approach. I was very much opposed to most of what the Obama administration was doing from the day I got into Congress. But I can tell you, I wish I would stand here and tell you that I was wrong about some of this stuff because I think it would be better for the country. But I think the results have been sub optimal to say the least. And so, the Trump administration has come in and they've pursued a different approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

And I think when the president did the press conference with Prime Minister Netanyahu early in his presidency, he basically said "Look, we want to be for Israel. We'll stand by Israel and what's good for Israel, we're good with." It's a much different posture than saying, this whole problem of Middle East conflict is because someone's building an apartment in parts of Jerusalem or in other parts of—so that was refreshing to hear. Now, they are trying to broker a peace. I don't know what's going to happen with that. I didn't think that was worth spending capital on. But it's being done from an unabashedly pro-Israel perspective.

And I think that that's a good thing. If you look at Trump's tweets, I guess it was last week, about the Palestinian incitement in support of terrorism, I don't remember very many people really—some of us in the Congress have been willing to use the power of the purse so that we're penalizing bad behavior by the Palestinian Arabs instead of always rewarding it.

But Trump said we need to stop doing this. Why aren't we insisting on better behavior. And if you look, we're sending hundreds of millions of dollars to the Palestinian authority. But yet, after all this time, they still incite violence and hatred against the State of Israel. They actually pay families of terrorists who murder Israeli Jews. They will name streets and sports stadiums and other public places after terrorists who commit really, really heinous acts. And so, you think about, is that something that is causing them to change their behavior if you keep sending the money.

So I would think that we should condition the funding on better behavior. You reward good behavior and you penalize bad behavior. But that was—you know, view was verboten in the prior administration. Trump has come out and done that and made those statements. We'll see if there's more meat on the bones, but I think that would be very, very fruitful to do because when you talk about the conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis, the number one issue of why there's a conflict because the Palestinian Arabs do not recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state in perpetuity. And that is the fundamental problem. The land and all this other stuff, they don't view Israel as having a right to exist. They want, potentially, a deal at some point only if it's a stepping stone to Israel's ultimate destruction.

And so, for us backing an ally like Israel, we should not be pressuring them to do a deal that would lead us down that road. So, I think that how the Trump administration has gone with this, and it was flushed out when the President made his Jerusalem announcement, is to look at the conflict and say, and Trump put it this in his tweet, look, we took Jerusalem off the table. I think that that makes it—I don't think it's likely we're going to get a deal, but I think that makes it more likely that you get a deal because people—they are not going to be under any illusions that somehow Israel is a transient country.

But with the embassy decision that the president made, I thought it was one of the best speeches that I can remember an American President making. It was something that I was invested in, admittedly, from the beginning of the president's term because had you other presidents that said hey, we're going to move the embassy. They would say the right things in front of the different interest groups. And it's not, I mean, American Jews support it, but American Christians really support it.

So it's not just a Jewish thing. They'll go and they will talk to evangelicals, they will talk and they will say we're going to move the embassy, we're going to do it. Everyone says it. Bush promised it, didn't do it. Clinton promised it, didn't do it. Obama, although I find it hard to believe he actually meant it when he promised it. But I think he did say something along those lines, at one point, and he obviously was never going to move the embassy to Jerusalem or recognize it.

Well, Trump made that promise. And I think the president is somebody who—he does not want to be somebody who is not following through with his word. It matters to him, his campaign, what he campaigned on and that he's going to deliver on those things. And so, I thought that history would not repeat itself. I just believe that—that he would make the change and that he would be willing to lead on the issues. So I organized a letter at the beginning of the year where we got over 100 congressman to say Mr. President-elect, when you take office, pull the trigger. Let's do this, and it will shake up the Middle East in a positive way and it will show your leadership. And so, he got that.

But I can understand why he didn't do it on day one. Because you don't really have your government in place yet. And lord knows there weren't too many people at the State Department who supported recognizing Jerusalem. So I understand that.

I then took a trip—I'm the national subcommittee Chairman for oversight and we do a lot of embassy issues. So I went to Israel in March and we identified all the sites, potential sites where you could establish an American Embassy. And I am engaged in this now, about what sites they're choosing and I think that we may find out very, very soon some very positive news about one of the sites we profiled. But so we did that. We had a huge press conference in Israel. And, basically, there was a lot of attention to this idea. Is he going to sign the waiver for stalling the Jerusalem Embassy Act for six months?

Other Presidents had done it. It didn't even make news when they did it. Well, now because of the promise and because people had a lot of expectations, and granted I was trying to heighten the expectations, it was a big question about whether Trump was going to sign that in May or whether he would recognize Jerusalem. I thought on the trip over there which coincided with Jerusalem Day, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Jerusalem and reunification, that he could do it then, that that would be good.

He decided not to do it then. So we didn't—we weren't deterred. We did a big hearing with some great guests like Dore Gold, Ambassador Bolton and others, highlighting why it would be good for America's national security interests to recognize Jerusalem. And there were a number of components to that. But one of them, I believe, is being borne out is that when in the Arab world, if you're acting swiftly and with strength, that's something that makes a big impression on a lot of those leaders, even if you're acting against their interests, if you're the strong horse, that's something they respect. When you show yourself to be backing down and be a weak horse, even if you're doing it in a way and taking a position that they agree with, that causes them to wonder whether you really can keep your word or not.

And so, I think for Trump's personal prestige, it was important. I also think it was good for the country. So, the waiver decision was coming and people were asking questions. It was going to be another media event. And the president, to his credit, I think, pretty much all his advisers except maybe the vice president, were telling him no, just sign the waiver. We don't want to ruffle any feathers or anything. But I can tell you from going and being briefed by people on the ground there with the State Department and with some of our other agencies, I did not find a single person in the career civil service who said that recognizing Jerusalem would be anything other than a major disaster that would cause the Middle East to erupt in flames.

I didn't find one person who said we could do it, it wouldn't be that big a deal. They were all saying that this would be something that would cause all these problems.

Well—so that—I think that was reflected in the president's senior leadership because that was the information they were being given. So I think that they expected that and the president, to his credit, said, no, no, no, we got to deal with this. I said, I would do it, what's the plan? Let's do it. And his decision to recognize, and he actually ended up signing a waiver, but he recognized Jerusalem and said I'm ordering the State Department to get this done, I thought, was a great act of statesmanship. And I'm excited that, if the plans that are being discussed now end up being implemented, that we could have a temporary embassy open sometime this year. So instead of saying next year in Jerusalem, at least for the embassy, we can say this year in Jerusalem, which would be nice.

So that posture of support towards Israel, I think, has been very, very important. And I think he had the freedom to do that because the administration took a different posture towards the Islamic Republic of Iran. Trump said it was one of the worst deals ever negotiated, said it was a disaster. Same kind of thing happened, in some ways, with the embassy where his adviser said, "Hey, you just got to recertify, recertify," so he did it, then he did it again, thinking like OK, why am I recertifying this, what are we going to do? And then, finally, he told them, hey, we need to—so that decision to, you know, where he wasn't going to certify under domestic law, I think, showed this is a president that understands the threat posed by Iran and posed by the Iran nuclear deal.

Well, that is music to the ears of the Gulf States, places like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates. They fear Iran's influence and do they want our embassy moved to Jerusalem? No. But are they going to cry a river over that when they need to work with us and work with Israel to combat Iranian influence? Of course not. Their interests were to align with the United States and with Israel to combat the Iranian threat.

And there's a lot of discussion about what to do with the nuclear deal. My view is that it was a bad deal, that you can't keep going on the way it is because I think it leads to an Iranian bomb. Either they cheat and get the bomb because we don't have access to all their sites, like their military sites, or they abide by the deal and get the bomb the next decade. Either way, that's bad.

And so, you have to do something different. Other targeted sanctions, other provisions, but have a different policy. And I still believe that. But I can tell you this, what's going on in Iran, right now, is potentially historic. And if I could pick just one thing to have happen, you know, in the world, I don't know that I could think of too many things that would be better for peace, in our time, than having those protesters overthrow this regime, which is, effectively, an illegitimate regime which denies basic rights, which has suffocated the Persian culture for decades and which spends most of its money on overseas adventurism and promoting terrorists.

The president has come out in support, that is much different than the previous administration because the Obama administration effectively sided with the regime in 2009 because they wanted this deal. I think that we

have to use whatever tools at our disposal can be effective. And you want to do it smartly and you want to do it strategically. But I don't think we can miss this opportunity to stand behind those protesters against one of the truly evil regimes in the world.

And just imagine if that regime were to collapse. We don't have to worry about—I mean, North Korea is still going to be an issue, but, you know, the most likely purchaser of their nuclear—some of their nuclear arsenal, is Iran. They're sitting on cash, they want it. So—so that threat would go.

Hezbollah's money starts to dry up. Baghdad could then, maybe, turn and be pro-Western instead of being an Iranian client state. Yemen will cool down. Syria may be able to be dealt with in a positive way. Israel would lose an existential threat to its existence. The dividends from that would just be absolutely phenomenal. And so, I hope the administration gets more engaged in this.

You don't want to do things that are going to undercut the protesters. And I've actually said with this decision on the nuclear deal now, I'm against the nuclear deal entirely. But I would make that decision, you know, with an eye towards how that is going to affect the facts on the ground. Can the regime use a decision you make to harm what's being done there? But this is an important, important moment and we all need to stand by them. So I just think that, where we are now, it is this outside-in approach. And I think it's much more effective. I mean, there's a lot that needs to be done. But I don't see how you could look at the world right now after one year of Trump's administration in the Middle East and say that we're worse off than we were when he took office.

Not even mentioning the Caliphate and ISIS crumbling. But that's, obviously, a major, major deal. So, it's been an exciting year, I think, in terms of international affairs. And I think the president has gotten his sea legs after making some of these tough decisions. And I think we can do a lot more in the upcoming several years. So it's an honor to be here. Are we going to take some questions or something? I'm happy to—I'm happy to take questions.

COFFEY: Thank you, Congressman, for that. For that great overview of the current situation in the Middle East, especially your depth of knowledge of not only the Israeli issue, but also the other issues facing the region and how they're all connected.

We do have time for a couple of questions. I ask that you please identify yourself, your name, your affiliation if there is any. And please keep your question pithy so we have time for as many questions as possible.

Gentleman in the front, then I'll go to the gentleman behind the gentleman in the front.

You first, sir, right there.

QUESTION: Thank you for coming. My name is (inaudible) at the Heritage Foundation. Just a question regarding North Korea. Can you comment on that? What's your take? It's really serious now, so.

DESANTIS: Sure. Obviously I give the president credit for engaging in the issue. The prior administration just neglected it and hoped it would go away. It's not going to go away. I think the fundamental issue is that Kim Jong-Un realizes his nuclear arsenal is his ticket to survival. And so, the pressure that's been applied, although I think it's been good and helpful, I don't think has been sufficient to convince him that his current course is actually more dangerous for his survival with pursuing the weapons.

I mean, if you had military political, economic pressure such that he feared that his regime would buckle or that he would lose his grip on power, then maybe he would be willing to come to the table. But we're not at that point yet. And I think it's a dangerous situation. The talks are fine that they just had. I think that's probably going to be beneficial just for the Olympics and maybe getting through that. But we're not even sniffing any negotiations on the nuclear program right now.

So that's his calculation. And, you know, if we change the calculation, then you can make headwind.

COFFEY: The gentleman here, with the microphone.

QUESTION: Hi, my name is Dmitri Paravachinsky (ph). First, I just wanted to say, to me, it was very disgraceful and sad that you said something as an elected official that is blatantly not true. The United Nations did not adopt 24 resolutions in 2016, 20 related to Israel. They adopted 76 and one was related to Israel, so I'd appreciate if you...

DESANTIS: I don't think that's right. Yeah.

QUESTION: Well, you can double-check your facts.

DESANTIS: I will. This stuff has been widely reported. I don't think it's much up for dispute.

QUESTION: OK, go ahead. Then you can check your facts.

So, my question is, how do you see the negotiations happening between Palestine and Israel? Do you see it as—with the U.S. as a third party, we are as a broker between Israel and Palestine? Do you see it going to a more multilateral form?

Thank you very much.

DESANTIS: Well, I don't think—we shouldn't be, necessarily, a broker because I think our interests align with the State of Israel. And I think that we have more affinity with Israel with both our interests and our values. It doesn't mean you can't try to work constructively. But I don't think we should take the posture of brow beating Israel to be offering all these concessions when the Palestinian Arabs, still, will not recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state.

And so that, to me, would be a precondition for negotiations.

COFFEY: The gentleman there. And then, the lady...

QUESTION: My first question...

COFFEY: Could you please state your name, please.

QUESTION: I'm just one of the participants. My question is that the way you were talking, do you—can you hear? Are you a representative of U.S. Congress or representing Israel, or interests of Israel? What I see the damage that Israel has been done to all of this...

COFFEY: The question is, I think, do you represent the U.S. Congress or the...

(Crosstalk)

QUESTION: Has created against the U.S. in the war is because...

COFFEY: Sir, due to time. We're running short. Just one question.

DESANTIS: No, no, you've had your say. So that's enough.

So, he mentioned my background. So, you know, I'm a military veteran. obviously swear an oath to the constitution. Of course, I represent my constituents and America's interests. I happen to think it's in America's interests to have a good relationship with countries that share our interests, from a security perspective, and that share our values.

And Israel does both of those. There's other countries in the region which share our interests, may not necessarily share our values. And if you listen to what I said, I said there's times you should be working with people like Sisi and working with Saudi Arabia to fight Iranian influence. If we share neither interest nor values, like with Iran, then it's very difficult to have any type of relationship with those countries. And so, it's all from the perspective of the United States. And I think your question was somewhat ridiculous.

COFFEY: And I think we have time for one final one. The lady caught my eye first, there. Thank you.

QUESTION: First of all, I want to thank you immensely, immensely. Thank you. And I want to thank President Trump, who I once doubted. There are millions of us who are thrilled at what he's doing and what you're doing. Two questions are—is, one...

COFFEY: Just one question.

QUESTION: One question, OK. How is the State Department taking this and what do you do about a State Department that has clearly been on the wrong side of history for a very, very long time?

DESANTIS: Well, I think it's a good question, in the sense of, you have the permanent bureaucracy, and then you have administration policy in the political appointees and the permanent bureaucracy. You know, they offer resistance from time to time. And I think this is one where you probably had close to as unanimous as possible an opposition to what the president decided to do. I mean, I'm not saying every single one, but I would say at least 90 percent of the people who have worked in that region would probably have said that.

And so—and then you hear reports about well, you know, we may have a temporary embassy in like four to six years or something like that. No, no, no, no, no. That's not going to be acceptable. So, I think it remains to be seen. What I've heard is I'm cautiously optimistic that you will see some action to implement the policy. And if there's not, there's people like me in the Congress who can conduct the oversight and make sure that the policy is being followed.

I mean, you know, the State Department works for the American people, not the other way around. And so, when we have an election, we have policies implemented, it's the job of the department to implement those policies. And it doesn't matter—it shouldn't matter your personal views. I mean, you had, in Kabul, on election night, 2016, the State Department at the embassy made a Trump piñata that they were ready to break open.

That's their views. That's fine. But you got to follow the policies that are being handed down. And if you're doing that, then I think, then it will be good. But I think that they have, at least had to have some introspection about the lack of fallout that they have predicted over this issue.



I mean, the fact of the matter is, all the predictions I was told, not one of them has come true from people who have been studying the region for a long time who work in the region, have been in the U.S. government for a long time. And that's just whether it's groupthink, whether, I don't know, but that's just the—it's not just the State Department. It was other agencies, as well. So we are where we are with that.

COFFEY: Great. Well, I'm afraid that's it in terms of time. I would like to thank the Congressman on behalf of the Heritage Foundation for taking time out of your busy schedule to join us today.

Please join me in thanking the Congressman.

(APPLAUSE).

DESANTIS: Thanks, guys.

PHILLIPS: OK. And we'll proceed with the rest of our panel at this point. Let me just introduce the panel. It's the Trump administration, like many administrations before it, has committed itself to fostering a peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinians. This goal has become the holy grail of the American presidency. As President Trump has called it, the ultimate deal.

Yet, there's been remarkably little progress on peace negotiations since the Oslo peace negotiations broke down in the 1990s. Is peace possible? And, if so, what should be the role of the United States in creating the conditions for such a peace? We're fortunate to have with us today two of the most distinguished conservative experts on the Middle East. And I'll introduce them in turn.

Our first speaker is Elliott Abrams. He's a senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at the Council on Foreign Relations here in Washington, D.C. He's carved out a long and distinguished career in the public service, serving as deputy assistant to the President and deputy national security adviser in the administration of President George W. Bush, where he supervised U.S. Middle East policy and the Democracy Human Rights and International Organization Directorates of the National Security Council.

He was an assistant secretary of state in the Reagan administration and received the secretary of state's distinguished service award from Secretary of State George Schultz.

In 2012, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy gave him its Scholar Statesman award. He was educated at Harvard, the London School of Economics and Harvard Law School. And before joining the Bush administration, he was the president of a think tank here in Washington, the ethics and public policy center. He also was a member of the U.S. Commission on international Religious Freedom, rising to become Chairman of the commission in 2001 and later serving a second term as a member of that important body.

From 2009 to 2016, he was a member of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, which directs the activities of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and he's a member of the board of the National Endowment For Democracy.

He teaches U.S. foreign policy at Georgetown University's Edmund A. Wall School of Foreign Service and is the author of five books including most recently "Realism and Democracy, American Foreign Policy After the Arab Spring," and he spoke about this at Heritage last fall.

So it gives me great pleasure to welcome Elliott back here again.

(APPLAUSE)

(Crosstalk)

ABRAMS: It's a pleasure to be here. And back at Heritage and to be with Daniel Pipes, who is a friend of a few years standing, we went to college together.

So, I think you asked the right question. Is peace possible? I say that because, frequently, the way the question is asked is, how do we get to the two-state solution? And that is not the right question. The right question is, how do we get to peace? The two-state question is derivative. If it helps peace, that's a good thing. If not, it needs to be rethought. The U.S., as you were saying, has been engaged in the peace process for decades. We invented the term, the peace process, or Middle East peace process.

And it's probably—there's a lot of writing about this. It's probably partly the American legalization of foreign policy. In fact, so many lawyers, like me, involved in foreign policy, like Congressman DeSantis, we all—lawyers like process. So you have the peace process. And keeping the process alive has actually become, over the years, more important than whether the process actually achieves anything. We've had this process. We've had Carter in Camp David. We had Oslo, of course, and the, kind of, current process since 1991. We've had Bill Clinton at Camp David in 2000. We've had Annapolis in 2008 -- 2007 and the negotiations that followed.

So, the process has been going on for decades, but it hasn't produced peace. And I would have to say, in my view, it is unlikely to do so because, in a way, the goal hasn't been peace. We fixed upon a goal early on, even if it wasn't announced, of an absolutely independent sovereign Palestinian state. And so, that's what we've been pushing for rather than saying, what's up? What's happening? What are the conditions in the West Bank, in Gaza, in the entire region.

It's also the case that it's very difficult to get to this achievement if the Palestinians keep saying no. And actually, they've been saying no for about 80 years. Starting from the pre-world war 2 discussions when Palestine, the Palestine mandate was in the hands of the British, Ehud Barak's proposals at Camp David in 2000, to which Arafat said no, Ehud Olmert's more liberal proposals in 2008, just before he left the prime ministership, where President Abbas said no.

I think the window for Palestinian statehood was opened widest from roughly 2000 to 2008. But I think it is closing. Why is it closing? For one thing, the Palestinian refusal to admit the reality that they have actually, and Daniel has written a great deal about this, they have been defeated, but with the support of many in the Arab world and in the Muslim world, in particular, and some in Europe, they've refused to acknowledge this.

And, of course, if you refuse to acknowledge reality of their defeat militarily by Israel, then you're going to have attitudes and approaches in the negotiations that are unreal. So that's one reason. The refusal to acknowledge reality.

A second, that outside support in doing so particularly from the Arab world. Our third reason is, just terrible leadership. I mean, sometimes you get lucky, you know, and you have Václav Havel, and you have Walesa and you have Mandela, and sometimes you don't get lucky and you have Haj Amin Al Husseini, and you have Yasser Arafat. The level of leadership has not been what anyone would have hoped for.

Would a Palestinian state be viable? That's a question we should ask if our policy is going to be to support Palestinian statehood. I mean, think of thought experiment. Let's assume you create a Palestinian state and counter factually, there's no security problem. There is no security problem.

There is no terrorism. It has been removed from the face of the earth. The Palestinian entity that you have just created has no port. It has no airport. It has no currency. It has no natural resources. It has no productive economy. So I would think that the logic would be that that entity is going to be tied to, you might even say, fall upon, one of its neighbors, either Israel or Jordan, for survival. And the logic of it, I think, is the logic that existed decades ago, which is, it makes a lot more sense for it to be related somehow to, or in a form of confederal relationship with, an Arab-Muslim-Sunni state rather than the Jewish state.

The logic is, it seems to me is that the major city you turn to is Amman, not Tel Aviv, the airport you turn to is Queen Alia, not Ben Gurion.

Now, people say it's unrealistic. It's unrealistic today. I don't think it's so easy to say it's unrealistic ten years from now or 20 years from now. The Jordanian population itself is changing. I mean, there are about a quarter of a million, it's population of about 4 million. A quarter million Iraqis who did not go back to Iraq and are not going to, I think that's realistic. There are over a million Syrian, Sunni refugees, are they going to go home or is that going to be another big change in the population of Jordan?

The Middle East is changing in many, many ways. So it seems, to me, that the notion that the only possible outcome is a truly sovereign independent Palestinian state needs to be thought about again. It shouldn't be so shocking actually. That would be a change in the American viewpoint. There have been other changes in the American viewpoint. I worked, as Jim mentioned, for George Schultz in the Reagan administration. The policy of the United States was to oppose the creation of a Palestinian state—clear stated policy.

And then we changed. So the notion that we could say, well, we changed because the world changed and the world keeps on changing. So we want to have another look. We could change again. In the short run, I'll close with this. It seems to me, short run meaning the next five or ten years, I wouldn't predict much of a change.

We all know that the, you know the line, the Israeli occupation is unsustainable. Well, 50 years is a long time for something unsustainable to be sustained. It strikes me that, if we were to come back and do this again in five years, you will invite us please, things will not have changed all that much. Things can get better. Certainly, the Palestinian economy can get better. Governance, in—particularly the West Bank, can get better.

The attitude of the United States, and more broadly, donors, can improve and help improve Palestinian politics. We see this in the Taylor Force Act, which is a statement to the Palestinian polity that the world is tired of and will no longer permit paying money to people who have committed terrible crimes of terrorism for those crimes. You see moves on the Hill now on ANERA, which suggests that the United States Congress is getting tired of a situation that perpetuates Palestinian, the Palestinian, quote, "refugee crisis", close quote, rather than doing what we generally do through UNHCR which is to try to solve a refugee problem.

And, finally, the, kind of, more general incitement and text book problem which needs to be addressed because, over time, one does want to create a much greater chance that Israelis and Palestinians, whatever their political relationship, can live together peacefully.

During the Bush administration, there was that famous phrase which actually was meant for domestic purposes, the soft bigotry of low expectations. Palestinians have suffered, I think, from the soft and sometimes not so soft

bigotry of low expectations. We should have higher expectations and we will get, I think, and they will, and that's the important part, they will get a much better outcome.

Thanks.

PHILLIPS: Well, thank you, Elliott.

Our next speaker is Dr. Daniel Pipes. He is the president of the Middle East Forum, which he founded in 1994, to promote American interests in the never-ending debates over Middle East policy.

He's one of the world's foremost analysts on the Middle East and Muslim history and he's been far ahead of the curve in diagnosing policy problems, particularly in identifying the threat of radical Islam long before 9/11. The Washington Post has called him, perhaps, the most prominent U.S. scholar on radical Islam. The "Boston Globe" concluded that if Pipes' admonitions had been heeded, there might never have been a 9/11. And those are strong words.

He's a graduate of Harvard University, seems to be something very common here, with both a B.A. and Ph.D. in history and he's been recognized as one of Harvard's 100 most influential living graduates. He's taught at Harvard, Princeton, Chicago, the U.S. Naval War College, and Pepperdine University. He's worked at the State and Defense Departments, held two presidential appointed positions, testified before Congress and worked for five Presidential campaigns.

Daniel's a prize-winning columnist formerly for "The New York Times" syndicate and now writing independently. He's also written 12 books and his writings have been translated into 35 languages. His website, [danielpipes.org](http://danielpipes.org), is among the most accessed sources of specialized information on the Middle East and Muslim history.

He has a stellar record of anticipating Middle East crises. For example, in 1993, within days of the signing of the Oslo peace accord he wrote, "Arafat has merely adopted a flexible approach to fit circumstances saying whatever needed to be said to survive. The PLO has not had a change of heart, merely a change of policy enabling it to stay in business until Israel falters and when it can deal a death blow."

In 1995, he wrote about radical Islam, "Unnoticed by most westerners, war has been unilaterally declared on Europe and the United States." Al Qaeda invited him by name in a September 2006 video to repent and enter into the light of Islam.

He declined. Saying, and he said, "I'm faithful to my own religion, to my own country, and to my civilization." I thank you for being such a faithful exemplar of all those.

Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to turn the floor over to Daniel Pipes.

(APPLAUSE)

PIPES: Thank you so much, Jim. And good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

What he didn't mention is I worked here for a summer in 1984. And what Elliott didn't mention is that last time we did an event together was 1971. So, in reply to the question before us, President Trump's ultimate deal is Israel-Palestinian peace possible? My answer is yes.

But I would like to propose a completely different approach. I do not think that the existing approach, which goes back 30 years, of peace processing, about which you've heard quite a bit now, is going to work. It can be improved, perhaps, which I think the Trump administration is doing. It's improved version. But it ultimately will crumble because it depends on Palestinian acceptance of Israel, which has not come about and is not coming about.

And therefore, that is the topic that needs to be addressed. That cannot be addressed in diplomacy. That needs to be addressed in a very different way. So I'd like to take a step back before proposing an approach. I'll start by giving you three dates—or actually six dates. First, three, and then another three. The first three are 1865, 1945, and 1975. The end of the Civil War, World War 2 and the Vietnam War. All of those were conclusively-ended wars. It ended. There was nothing more. The South never rose again, the Germans didn't rise again and we didn't try and go back to Vietnam.

Let me give you three other dates; 1917, 1953, and 1967. The end of, I'm sorry, 1918. The end of the First World War, the end of the Korean War, and the end of the Six-Day War. Those were inconclusive. Any day, the Korean War could restart, any day there could be hostilities between Arabs and Israel. The difference between these two sets of dates is the sense of defeat. In the former, there was a sense of defeat. It was over and the latter, there wasn't. Simply to lose a round of war is not to have a sense of defeat. Giving up on one's war goals means being defeated. That's what we Americans experienced in 1975.

Victory, I would define as, imposing one's will on the enemy. The enemy gives up. You've prevailed. When you take this and apply it to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, what one sees is, that for 45 years, from 1948 to 1973, the Israelis were seeking victory. After that, since 1993, since the signing of the Oslo accords in the White House Lawn, they have not been seeking victory.

They have been trying various different fancy approaches, appeasement, unilateral withdrawal, putting out brush fires, but they haven't been seeking victory. The peace process has been dominated, has been dominant in those years. The emphasis on diplomacy on assuming that what Arafat said on the White House lawn in September of 1993 was valid, that the Palestinians now accepted Israel. The war was over.

But it wasn't and it isn't. It continues. So ,what is needed is an approach that confronts this irreducible problem of Palestinian rejectionism. Palestinian rejectionism goes back a century. It means saying no to Zionism, to Jews, to Israel. No, no, no—no political contexts, no economic relations, no personal relations, no.

It's fractured. It's no longer as strong as it was a century ago, but it's still there. Palestinian rejectionism is the core of the problem and it is what needs to be confronted. And as Elliott pointed out, there's this delusion due to bad leadership, due to international support, I would add Islamic doctrine, Israeli security services mentality, there is this delusion that exists among the Palestinians that they can defeat Israel, that they can cause the Jewish state of Israel to disappear.

That needs to be confronted, that is what we, as a great power looking at this conflict, need to deal with. So what I'm suggesting is that the U.S. government should adopt a policy which encourages the Israelis to win—to win, as in 1865, 1945, 1975, to end the conflict by winning, by causing the Palestinians to understand that the gig is up and they lost. It's over, done with.

When they're really upset, they write a very strongly worded letter to the editor, saying, we're unhappy. OK. But enough with the U.N. resolutions, however many there are, and there are very many against Israel. Enough with building up militaries. Enough with the Campus BDS. Enough. Over. It's done.

I'm hoping that some president, this one or a future one, will say to his staff, "Diplomacy isn't working, we've been at this for decades, it's not going anywhere, is there some other alternative?"

And yes, there will be another alternative, which is, what we call Israel victory. And as you heard in Representative DeSantis' bio, he is co-chairman of the House Israel victory caucus. There are now 32 members. There are 26 members of the Knesset Israel Victory caucus, we just began it a year ago, under the auspices of Gregg Roman, who's sitting here, the director of the Middle East Forum, and E.J. Kimball who is sitting parallel on the other side, who is the head of our Israel Victory effort in Washington. We're building a political base for it and we are building the intellectual base by giving talks like this, having studies, commissioning studies, bringing this up as an alternative to the existing paradigm.

Let me emphasize that it is an approach. It is not a number of policies. We're not saying two-state or not two-state. I have my own opinions, but that's not the point. The point is, that Israel needs to convince the Palestinians that it's over. The conflict has been resolved by the fact that Israel is a flourishing, powerful state. The Palestinians have a very oppressive and weak polity that isn't working.

It's a long-term effort. The goal is not to change policy in the next few months, but it is, with time, to put something else on the table that fits the historical pattern. You don't end wars through negotiating. I mean, think of Vietnam. It didn't end through negotiations. It ended by the North Vietnamese army coming in and taking over. That's how wars end.

Wars end when one side gives up, and we have close relations with Israel, as Representative DeSantis said, we share interests and a moral base with it. It should be the side we want to win, we should help it win. And the ironic thing is, that once the Palestinians give up, then they can go on to build something good. When they give up this foul irredentist goal of eliminating the Jewish state, then they can build their own polity, economy, society and culture. And so, in the long run, the Palestinians will actually gain even more than the Israelis.

Yes, the Israelis will not be murdered on their way to the pizzeria and will not face this barrage of hostilities in the United Nations and elsewhere, but they live a good life, the Israelis do. The Palestinians don't. They live under oppression, backwardness. They will be able to build, once they give up this rejectionism, once they move on to something that's more constructive.

So I hope you will join us in advocating for this approach with your members of Congress, intellectually. I think it offers a new paradigm that pulls us out of the mire of this endless processing that goes nowhere that, in fact, is even counterproductive. I would argue to you, that Palestinian/Israeli relations are worse today than they were 25 years ago when the Oslo accords were signed. So, we need something new. We need new thinking, I offer this to you as new thinking and as a way for the ultimate deal to be achieved. Thanks.

PHILLIPS: Well, thank you, Daniel. Thank you.

I will open up to the floor after I ask one question. And the thing that troubles me is, in a lot of the analyses of peace prospects, there's an assumption or a presumption that, you know, the Palestinian Authority is the be all and end all and I think many analyses don't take into account what I consider to be the malign hammerlock that Hamas has on exactly what kind of negotiations are going to—going to produce.

I would say that, even if you could assume that tomorrow the Palestinian authority and Israel negotiated a perfect peace deal that satisfied all their various prerequisites, whatever those may be, that the next day, Hamas could explode it with another round of rocket terrorism.

And, to me, it seems like peace really is impossible until the Palestinians themselves come under a more unified government. And I wonder what either one of you or you or both of you think of this, you know, triangular—and now we have the Islamic state moving in to challenge Hamas and Gaza. I mean, how can there be peace given all of these cascading radical movements?

PIPES: By my analysis, over the past century, 80 percent of Palestinians have been rejectionists, and 20 percent have accepted Israel. And the goal must be to expand the 20 percent to 40 percent -- 60 percent. So it's not nothing. Don't start at zero, start at 20. And that 20 percent has been very important over the century.

And so, the goal, my goal, is to encourage an increasing number of Palestinians to recognize that the conflict is over. I'm less focused on leaders. I'm less focused on polities such as the Hamas one and the P.A. I think, you want a change of heart. You want to get people to recognize that it's no longer worth their while to engage in, say, suicide attacks because it's futile.

So long as you think that you were part of a movement that's going to lead to the elimination of the Jewish state, well, it's worth doing it. But if you see it as futile, you're not going to do it. So, I'm looking much more at the populace than at the leadership.

ABRAMS: I'll just say a word about the leadership. I think, what you're saying is—points to a real problem, which is, somebody has to do that negotiation, whether it's tomorrow or ten years from tomorrow, and the Palestinian leadership, today, has a declining legitimacy. This is partly because they won't hold elections because of Hamas. That is, President Abbas was elected in 2005. The parliament was elected in 2006. And those were the last elections. And the Fatah party will not hold elections, presumably because it's not confident that it will win those elections.

But that creates a situation where you have a Palestinian leadership of which whose democratic legitimacy has been severely undermined and which is looking over its shoulder at Hamas, knowing that, let us suppose it signed a compromise, we know exactly what Hamas would say.

Yasser Arafat wouldn't sign, you signed, you're a traitor. That's not obviously going to be a very practical proposition for anybody in the Palestinian leadership today. So, that makes the possibility that this leadership will sign such a deal much lower. I would add to that that the Palestinian people have not been prepared for the compromises that any, any agreement would require, so that you get Arafat backing away in 2000 and you get Abbas backing away in 2008. I think, because the genuinely wonder whether—I don't know if those numbers are right today, but they worry that, in fact, the majority of Palestinians would reject those compromises, which would, of course, be rejected by Hamas and Islamic Jihad and other groups.

PHILLIPS: OK. Let's go, at this point, to the floor. We'll ask this gentleman here and then this one.

QUESTION: I'm Morrie Amitay. Is there any Palestinian in any leadership position who has basically said, "OK, we've lost, now what happens to us?" And if one does, what is Israel's reply?

PIPES: Yes, there are. Bassam Eid comes to mind. Khaled Abu Toameh comes to mind and there are plenty of others. But they are part of the 20 percent that has no power.

QUESTION: So, what does Israel say? What happens to Palestinians?

PIPES: I'm encouraging the U.S. government to encourage the Israeli government to take those steps within legal, political, and moral bounds, which will encourage the Palestinians to change their behavior. Let me give you one example. Two days ago, an Israeli Rabbi, father of six, was murdered in cold blood.

Obviously, the Israeli government is going to try and find the murderer. But one of the Israeli leaders, Naftali Bennett, suggested that's not enough, that because this Rabbi lived in what is called, an illegal outpost, in the West Bank, that outpost should now be legalized, to say, OK, you know, you murdered someone, here is what we do in response.

That's the kind of thing I'd be pointing to. That would send a signal rather rapidly that murdering fathers of six is not really a helpful step for the Palestinians. In fact, it is counterproductive.

QUESTION: Yes, hello. Mariah Bass (ph) and I work at the Heritage Foundation. Thank you so much. So my question, although we're dealing with the question of whether peace is achievable, is what are—the U.S.'s next step should be?

And I wonder if there's a way, maybe this sounds cynical, but if there's a way for the U.S. to, somewhat, force both parties to finally sit and take these peace talks and process actually seriously versus nitpicking on small details, whether of importance or not on borders and so forth, would be for the U.S. to take a stronger move in either reducing or cutting the aid that it sends financially to the Palestinian authority, which is supposed to be going to helping fund infrastructure, fund schooling and education, and yet, has proven time and time again to actually help the Palestinian authority pay off terrorists and so forth.

So, is that a good next step that would actually force both parties to come and seriously take the peace talks, well, seriously?

ABRAMS: I sort of agree with you, or the implications about 50 percent that is, I think—I do not think it is sensible for us to force the parties to come to the table if they don't want to negotiate, because it won't succeed. And there are prices to pay when we do that, one price is, it's always bad for the president of the United States to fail at anything. Anything. It's bad for him, it's bad for the country. And if you have endless negotiations that don't go anywhere, it creates a kind of cynicism on the part of Israelis and Palestinians about the whole question of peace.

So I would not say, well, if you don't go to the table now, right now, we will cut this part of aid, that part of aid, but I would look at the aid program and the way that Congress is doing it. I mentioned Taylor Force and question of ANERA again. I think we should start rethinking, not with the goal of saying, you know, our purpose here is to cut the aid really low, but rather to say is the way we are giving aid actually helping the possibilities of long-term peace or not?

PIPES: And I'm against the negotiations, so I complete, 100 percent disagree with you. That's easy.

PHILLIPS: OK.

Yes, this man in the back here. Yes, sir?



QUESTION: My name is David Edman, on the board of the Middle East Forum. I wonder if the speakers could forecast what they expect Palestinian leadership and Palestinian governance to look like one year from now, and let's say, ten years from now.

ABRAMS: This violates the famous line of Yogi Berra, right? Never make predictions, especially about the future. One year from now it doesn't—I mean, because of President Abbas' age, Palestinians are thinking about succession issues. So that's a question one would have to assume he will not, ten years from now, be the Palestinian President and the head of the P.A., the PLO, and the Fatah party. One year from now, you know, the assumption would be, it will look pretty much the same.

I think Palestinians are trying to figure out now how changed is Washington. There is a story in "The Jerusalem post" today saying that Palestinian—that the PLO, which is officially the part that negotiates with Israel, in charge of foreign affairs, the PLO is thinking of saying, we're not going to work with the Americans anymore, the Americans—there has to be an international effort at negotiation, and we're going—the Israelis, and the Americans have killed Oslo, so—it's reasonable for them to say those kinds of things. The truth is that, no other country could substitute for the United States in trying to convene negotiations, whether it's a good idea or bad idea. The French can't do it. The British can't do it. The Russians can't do it. It's not sensible.

So, I think you'll hear a lot more of that rhetoric, but I—and—and, you know, the Palestinian ambassador from Washington was recalled, but I gather he's been sent back or is being sent back. So there will be a lot more friction, but I would suspect that, a year from now, things would look very much the same.

PIPES: I find it amusing and very happy that the Palestinians have decided to boycott the United States. Made my day. As for what things would look like in the future, should the existing paradigm be continued with the peace processing, which I call war processing, it will look the same. May not be Abbas, but it would be in that same tradition of rejectionism. Harder rejectionism or softer rejectionism, but rejectionism and we'll still have the same conditions we have today. Only if there's a complete shift will there be a prospect of something better.

But at this point, that's only something we hope for. There are no signs of it.

PHILLIPS: This woman right here, and then the man behind her.

QUESTION: I'm Darlene Jackson, with the National Black Republican Council, (inaudible). Also a member of the Heritage Foundation as well.

I want to thank—can you hear me? Oh, good. I want to thank the entire panel for taking the time out of your busy schedule to bring forth this (inaudible) data to us audience and we really appreciate it very much.

I also want to ask a question to Dr. Pipes. You mentioned that Israel would never be accepted due to the Palestinian rejectionism. And, of course, it's hard and soft. You just mentioned that. And you said, go back more than 100 years, it would bring us somewhere around the 19<sup>th</sup> century. 1900s? So, now we're in 2017, and my question to you is, with the bloom or the boom of social media, how does that affect the Palestinian rejectionism? Is it more harder or is it more softer?

PIPES: What's the impact of social media? I would say, it has led to it becoming harder. People tend to talk to their own. You are in discussion with people who share your views and whatever it might be. And, therefore, you tend to get more excited and stronger in your feelings.

So, I think, as you can see in this country, left and right have become harder, more hostile to each other. I think you'll find the same elsewhere. Let me point out, though, that we're talking about Palestinians. We're not talking about Arabs, we're not talking about Muslims. One of the striking things that happened, that Representative DeSantis noted, is the lack of response to Jerusalem step, and what's most especially striking is that the Arab states, of which there are 22, the Arab states, were quiet.

I mean, they made the modest condemnation and the Saudis called it irresponsible, but they didn't want to deal with it, and there was an extraordinary "New York Times" piece, a week ago, which had the tapes of an Egyptian policeman calling up talk show hosts and saying, "Leave Jerusalem alone." Remarkable. A policeman calling up a talk show host, saying stay off this subject. It's not an Egyptian national interest for you to talk about this. And that was—I mean, we only have that one complete incidence, but clearly across the board they weren't talking about it. So this is not Arab Israeli. This is Palestinian Israeli. It's very different.

And whereas there are so many more Arabs than Israelis and so many more tanks and so much more everything, in fact, the Palestinians are a very, very weak enemy. They have no economy, no military, to put it simply. And Israel looms very large over them. So, winning a war is rather simple. Not talking about winning against Morocco or Malaysia. I'm talking about the Palestinians, the Palestinians alone. And what is so striking also is, in contrast, to the Arab states being quiescent is that the hotbeds of hostility were in Iran and Turkey and in Europe.

PHILLIPS: This man right here.

QUESTION: Frank (inaudible), with the Center for a Free Cuba. My question is, how did the policy of President Obama toward Iran impact on the Israeli/Palestinian situation, and how is the current policy of President Trump impacting on the same?

ABRAMS: I think the main impact of the Obama/Iran policy was, oddly enough, to produce a kind of rapprochement between Israel and many of the Sunni states, because they have a common enemy, not Obama, Iran. That common fear of Iran, of its support for terrorism, of its support for war, has led to, what appear to be, improved relations.

I'm not even talking—I mean, one assumes there are lots of secret meetings, but you can see this in the tone of comments. Dan just mentioned the reaction to Jerusalem. It's striking to me now, when there is a terrorist attack in Israel, the official Saudi reaction on (inaudible) is always, we condemn this attack, we condemn all terrorism, this is unforgivable, period.

That didn't happen ten years ago. So I think it's—that is an oddly beneficial impact. I don't think there was much of a long-term impact on the Israeli/Palestinian situation. And if you think of it, there were eight years of no negotiations, despite considerable efforts by the president and especially by Secretary of State Kerry in the Obama second term. Tremendous amount of time put in on this, but nothing happened.

So I would say, I think it just kept the process going weakly for another eight years, but had no significant impact on it.

PIPES: As a historian, I savor the ironies of history. And one of them is that the huge amount of money that we pay to the Iranian government created a rise in expectations that led to the outbreak of revolts in the last few weeks. Looks like they've been suppressed, but it was a factor that, in the long term, I think, harms the Iranian regime more than helps them.

Another irony is that U.S.-Israel relations, I tend to like it when U.S./Israel relations are not so good. Because when they're really good, as, for example, during the Bush years—Elliott, don't listen to this—the Bush, George W. Bush years, the Bush administration would make demands of Israel such as, to be technical, leaving the Philadelphi corridor, which were dumb demands that the Israelis, because of the flourishing relations, just felt they had to do. But when there were tensions, as there were during the Obama years, then the Obama administration makes all these demands and the Israelis happily ignore them.

So, in general, I like tense, rather poor, not terrible. I don't want catastrophe. Just poor relations.

ABRAMS: Yeah, you know, that's a two-hour question and answer. But I would take exception on the detail of Philadelphi where I would argue that Ariel Sharon, as a General, came to the conclusion that if he was going to get out of Gaza, defending what is actually a line, was, simply, militarily nuts. So I don't think it was actually something that he did because of American pressure. I think it's something he did for military reasons, but you raise it, so...

PHILLIPS: This man right here.

QUESTION: Thank you very much for coming. I'm Max Ananagan (ph), a junior at Mt. St. Joseph in Baltimore, Maryland. Yesterday, President Trump had a press conference with the Norwegian President and he got a question regarding a comment a General made. He said that war is coming and specifically, you know, with his strategic—where he is in Norway, you would think it's with Russia. But where do you see Russia especially making strategic movements in the Middle East in the next few years?

ABRAMS: You want to start?

UNKNOWN: Well, I think Putin, to a surprising degree, has been able to reinsert Russia as a great power in the Middle East, and I think part of that was the Obama administration's policy in Syria, its failure to push back, and behind that, I think, also, was its focus on striking a nuclear deal with Iran and everything else came second. So I think Russia is back, and I don't think it's back to the extent that it was, say, before '73. I don't think it has much of a role to play in peace negotiations, but as a security force, I think it's back, definitely in Syria, and it has a growing alliance with Iran.

PIPES: I see two major vulnerabilities. One is the fact that Moscow has aligned with Tehran and has created hostility in so many other places. And secondly, Russia is a declining power. It's demographically and economically going down. So, you know, good luck. Make hay while the sun is out. China is the real issue, not Russia, Russia is transitory, China going to be the problem of the future, much, much more serious.

PHILLIPS: OK. This man right here?

QUESTION: Yes. Maybe Dr. Pipes addressed this in passing with reference to Naftali Bennett's recommendation, but how do you get—we are talking about the population, how do you get—how do you expand that 20 percent? And in the foreseeable future—oh, I'm sorry. My name is Louis Morano. I forgot to identify myself. In the foreseeable future, especially in terms of considering Abu Mazen's advanced age, would you anticipate any Palestinian leader, non-rejectionist, being able to survive physically, as well as politically?

PIPES: My focus is, for the reasons you're implying, not on leaders but on the populace; reducing that 80 percent rejectionist element to something less than 50 percent, so that eventually a non-rejectionist leader could

survive. But no, not now. It's a long-term project. It will take time. It takes, it will take, step by step, one Palestinian after another coming to the conclusion that hoping to eliminate Israel is a forlorn dream. It's just not going to happen.

ABRAMS: Let me ask a question. Where do you get the 80/20? Because I haven't seen that.

PIPES: I have it from a lot of statistics. I have a web log entry on this, going back to the 1920s, various surveys that have shown this. I'd be happy to send it to you. I think if you looked up 20 percent Palestinians, my website, [danielpipes.org](http://danielpipes.org), you'll see about ten different surveys and historical researches that point to this general number.

ABRAMS: There was, what I would call, a positive effort under Salam Fayyad as prime minister. That is, an effort to build—I'm not quoting, but as he put it more or less, we need to build Palestine, despite the occupation. forget the occupation. That's Israel's business. Our business is to build institution by institution, create a government, create an economy. It is a, sort of, Zionist concept. That is, the Zionist movement had no way of knowing would there be a Jewish state in 1918 after the war or in the '30s or in 1945 or in 1960.

All they knew is build, build, build, you have to be ready if and when the day comes, which is, I think, essentially what Fayyad was saying. Now, he only won—his party won two seats in the Palestinian legislature and he was ultimately forced out, forced out by the Fatah party, of which he was never a member. I just—there is impressionistic evidence—I will have to look at the data—impressionistic evidence, I have heard from a number of Palestinians, that younger Palestinians are more concerned with building a future than they are with some of the old formulae, like our future can only come when Israel is destroyed or even, perhaps, like our future can only come when there is an independent sovereign Palestinian state.

They're more concerned with how do I get an education, how do I get a job, how do I raise my children? Which is precisely what, in a sense, we would want. We would want people to be thinking less about politics and less about Israel and more about their own society. But I think—I mean, that's the right question. I'd say, one thing is for sure. That percentage, if it is 20 percent, cannot expand if a lot of money is being given to the people whose life's work it is to make sure it can't expand.

For example, by paying you a large amount of money if you try to kill Israelis. I mean, that should be obvious. and it can't expand if we continue the ANERA model, in which what we're telling you is no, no, no, despite the fact that you were born in, let us say, Jordan or Lebanon ten years ago, you're still a Palestinian refugee with the thought of, quote, "going back," closed quote.

So we are, by directing money in, American money, American taxpayers' money, to those institutions, practices, expenditures, hurting very much the cause of expanding the 20 percent to 80 percent.

PIPES: For anyone interested, the title of the blog is, "How many Arabs and Muslims accept Israel?" I began it in 2003 and have been following it for 15 years now.

PHILLIPS: I think we have time for one more question. This man in the back here.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. My name is (inaudible), with United State of Africa 2017, Project Task force. I was outside briefly and somebody here asked me out there, what did I thought about what you're doing? I said, oh, most of what they're saying is not of interest to me, I know about that, et cetera, et cetera.

I said, what Elliott Abrams made a statement which would be the future, they will either merge—they're not going to merge with Israel, but they will have to merge with Jordan, because smaller states like we know in Africa—that is what we are trying to—are not viable and very soon, the Palestinians will understand that.

HILDBOLDT: OK. Maybe at this point, if I could just ask the two of you just so sum—to sum up your comments. If you had to, you know, advise President Trump how to proceed on this issue, what would you say just, you know, the top two or three things?

ABRAMS: Well, the president, clearly, from everything we can see now, is still focused on trying to get a negotiated—a comprehensive agreement, what's called a final status agreement, something that eluded every president since Clinton.

I think that's very unlikely. And I think it would be more useful to focus on more pragmatic ways of improving the lives of Palestinians, the Palestinian politics, and the medium and long-run chances that Israelis and Palestinians and Jordanians and Egyptians, because Gaza is out there, too, will be able, at some point, to live together in peace. Or, let me just—or to live apart in peace, which may be more realistic.

PIPES: The Middle East is aflame. There are civil wars in Libya and Yemen and Syria, and arguably, in Lebanon and Iraq and Afghanistan. In Turkey, there is a near civil war, Sinai has something close to a civil war, there is anarchy, there are problems all over.

It is remarkable that we're still talking about a problem that is 70 or 100 years old when there's so much going on, when there's so much—I mean, think of the Syrian refugees. Half of the Syrian population, something, 22 million, has been displaced internally or become refugees outside the country. Huge numbers. Far, far beyond the numbers of Palestinians, which was 600,000 back in 1949. And this is not '49. This is 2018.

So, given this fact, given the Iranian rampage of aggression, given the fact that Turkey, hitherto a major ally, has become close to a rogue state, given the dramatic developments taking place in Saudi Arabia where, I think, Mohamed Ben Salman is undertaking a transformation, wishes to undertake a transformation as deep as that of, say, Meiji period in Japan or Atatürk period in Turkey, given all that's going on, I would say let's outsource the Palestinian issue to the Israelis, let them take care of it, and let's focus on the much bigger, more dramatic, and more dangerous developments that are taking place in the region.

PHILLIPS: And with that, I'd like to invite the audience to join me in thanking our speakers for a very illuminating presentation. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

END