THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE
FOR NEAR EAST POLICY

2009 SCHOLAR-STATESMAN AWARD DINNER

Welcome
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TRUSTEE
THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE

Moderator
HOWARD BERKOWITZ
PRESIDENT
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Speaker
PRESIDENT WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON
42ND PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

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JEFFREY STERN: Ladies and gentlemen, if I could have your attention, please, for about the fourth or fifth person who has said that tonight. Thank you all very, very much for your patience and your indulgence. My name is Jeff Stern. It’s my great pleasure to welcome you to the third annual Scholar-Statesman Award Dinner of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. (Applause.)

This evening is the single most important event on the Institute’s calendar each year. And on behalf of my fellow dinner chairs, my wife, Susie, Martin and Ahuva Gross, and Marc and Cathy Lasry, we want you to know how grateful we are for your attendance and participation in what promises to be an exceptional evening.

I also want to thank our dinner cochairs Robert Fromer, Shelly Kassen, and Zach Schreiber. All of us are thrilled that you could be here with us. (Applause.) Tonight, this room is filled with wonderful people: trustees, friends, and supporters of the Washington Institute. You came from all across the country to be here, once again showing your deep commitment to the work of the Institute. We’re very grateful that you’re here.

Before we begin the program, I’d like to take a moment to recognize two people with us this evening. Now, I know that in a room like this, filled with dignitaries and friends, it’s always quite risky to recognize only two people. But I’m sure you’ll agree that they deserve our special attention. First, a woman who does such a wonderful job representing the state of Israel at the United Nations—not any easy task under any circumstances—please join me in welcoming Israel’s permanent representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Gabriela Shalev. (Applause.) And a person whose message of memory and meaning moves us, enriches us, and inspires us—Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, accompanied by his wife, Marion. Thank you for being here tonight. (Applause.)

As we begin, let me quickly tell you how our program will take place. In just a moment, I’ll have the pleasure of inviting my dear friend, new grandfather, and Institute president Howard Berkowitz to come up to the podium to introduce this evening’s distinguished honoree. Our honoree will then take the floor and, following President Clinton’s remarks, will share in Marty Gross’s honor, bestowing on President Clinton the institute’s Scholar-Statesman Award. Then, after President Clinton departs, our exceptional executive director, Dr. Robert Satloff, will come to the podium to explain the rest of our program, which promises to be a real treat. Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to present to you the president of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Howard Berkowitz. (Applause.)

HOWARD BERKOWITZ: Well, good evening. As you just heard, I’m Howard Berkowitz and I’m president of The Washington Institute. It is my great privilege to have the honor of introducing our evening’s honoree: the recipient of The Washington Institute’s 2009 Scholar-Statesman Award. First, a word about the award: A scholar is a person known for profound wisdom, knowledge, and judgment. A statesman is a person who exercises political leadership wisely. Two years ago, we decided that it was fitting and appropriate for The Washington Institute to recognize leaders who exemplify what we are all about—the intersection of sound scholarship and wise policymaking.

The Washington Institute is not like the ivory tower of a university. Nor are we a factory producing policy papers every other day. We are in business for a reason: because we believe that the scholarship on the Middle East—real knowledge built on the foundation of expertise in languages, cultures, history, societies, and politics of this vital area can help our leaders make wise and farsighted decisions about a region of the world that is fundamentally important to our nation’s future.
In establishing this award, we decided it was important for us to honor wise and great leaders who share a vision of the importance of scholarship—our ability to separate romance from realism in the Middle East and our passion to build a secure peace in the region. And so, in honoring them, we honor these core principles. For this reason, we are extremely delighted to have the opportunity to celebrate this year’s honoree. Every word that I’ve just said describes him perfectly.

President William Jefferson Clinton is a man of ideas. A young man of humble means, he was educated at Georgetown, a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, and a graduate of Yale Law School. And emerged from this incredible background, with the magical ability to soak up knowledge and turn it into practical ways to advance the human condition. As our nation’s chief executive, he presided over and helped to create an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity. And even, yes, even a budget surplus. (Applause.)

As a global leader par excellence in the decade since he left office, he has painted on an even greater tapestry. And the remarkable work of his global initiative and through that remarkable work, people on every continent are better off because of him. President Clinton was, and is, a peacemaker. He was greatly responsible for the peace agreements in Bosnia and in Northern Ireland—and helped Israel and Jordan in a historic peace treaty in July of 1994.

Creating peace in these countries was not easy. It required great vision, persistence, and the ability to identify with the issues of all sides. President Clinton has these attributes in abundance, and it has made him a peacemaker with great distinction. King Hussein of Jordan said, "I've never seen his equal in all the presidents that I have known." And he knew quite a few.

In the Middle East, Bill Clinton not only believed in the possibility of peace, but he understood the political importance of unleashing empathy and compassion as tools of diplomacy—and saw it helped melt decades of mistrust that had built up among Arabs and Israelis. Through his friendship with Israel’s leaders, like Yitzhak Rabin, he knew that the phrase “taking risk for peace” was something real, something meaningful, even fateful.

I am not divulging any secrets by noting that peace has not come to all of the Middle East. But this sad fact is despite, not because, of Bill Clinton’s heroic efforts. The pursuit of peace was one fight from which President Clinton never desisted. Leader, activist, visionary—a true scholar-statesman. It is my honor to present the forty-second president of the United States, William Jefferson Clinton. (Applause.)

PRESIDENT WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON: Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, Howard; thank you, Martin; thank you, Dr. Rob Satloff. I’d like to thank the dinner chairs and my friends Susie and Jeff Stern and Marc and Cathy Lasry, to whom I would never say no about anything. And I thank my friends Elie and Marion Wiesel for being here.

I was deeply honored to come here tonight because I respect the work of the Institute very much. And the whole idea that scholarship can have some bearing on the search for peace. I remember there was a book written shortly after President Bush took office about the power of United States to change reality. And one of the members of the previous administration spoke in rather derisive terms about me and about Colin Powell and several other Republicans.
He said the problem with those guys is that they live in a world of reality and facts and (laughter)—I’m not making this up, you can read it—because they don’t understand we can use our power to change reality. And someone asked me for a comment and I said I grew up in an alcoholic home. I spent my entire childhood trying to get into a reality-based world. I like it here. So that’s a little way of introducing my admiration for the emphasis that you have placed on scholarship and getting the facts right.

Just today I read, for example—it may sound like a little thing—but I read an article today about the current state of play in the Middle East, and there was an offhand reference to what happened when I was president. It said [that] after the breakdown of the Camp David peace talks, the second intifada began. Now, if that was just a matter of chronology, it would be factually accurate.

But it’s completely false. That’s not what happened at all. And it’s very difficult to understand what went on if you don’t know what happened. It is true that I spend most of my time today trying to deal with things that don’t involve direct peace negotiations. I try to help build reconciliation from the grassroots up by getting people to do real things together. In the Middle East the principal thing I did was to try to organize a Middle East–specific insurance program for people who made investments in the Palestinian Territories if they were subsequently lost to terrorist activity or other violence.

But I still think about this a lot. And I think what I’d like to do tonight, if you’ll forgive me, is just take about five or ten minutes to go over some facts that I think all of you know. But I think it will clarify where things are in the Middle East today—and what the president, the secretary of state, and George Mitchell are trying to achieve and what I hope the Israelis and the Palestinians will wish to achieve.

In the history of Middle East peace, the first big date, I suppose, is the Camp David Accords in ‘79 and the peace between Egypt and Israel—which held, but was curiously cold in many ways, even when I was president. It wasn’t like people were going back and forth and giving speeches in each other’s parliaments and doing the kinds of things that cost Anwar Sadat his life. And then, of course, the Oslo Accords were reached and then we had this big signing in September of ‘93 on the White House lawn, which everyone remembers.

That was independently politically significant because it was no longer some deal that was reached in secret. It was a public agreement signed off on by the leaders on both sides and sealed with a handshake that, I think, they were both reluctant to make in the beginning. I know Rabin was. And a lot of you read in my book, the famous story now, about how he said he would shake Arafat’s hand but there’d be no kissing. (Laughter.) And so we actually practiced how I would shake Arafat’s hands so if he couldn’t kiss me, he wouldn’t kiss Rabin.

But the point is, that began a process. And the most astonishing thing that I witnessed in all my eight years was the psychological hold that Rabin had on Arafat’s imagination. Yitzhak Rabin, by the time he was killed, could have told us or Arafat that three and two was four. And he would have said, okay, I always thought it was five but I’m sure you’re right. He had that effect on people and it was extremely beneficial in the process.

There was, at one point, when we were in the business of implementation—it happened, I think, in 1994 where, could have been in early ‘95—where we were signing off a lot of land in the West Bank that was going to go under the control of the Palestinians. But there literally were three copies of nine huge maps that were like so, and every little crossroads was demarcated about whether the Israelis or the Palestinian authorities would have jurisdiction.
There were literally thousands of details. And so we were supposed to go into the Cabinet Room of the Oval Office and they were going to sign, Rabin and Arafat, three copies of these nine maps—twenty-seven signatures. And I was going to witness them. And we got in the middle of it and I went out to take a phone call, and then all of a sudden Rabin comes and says, we got a big problem here. Arafat had decided in the middle of the signing, like on map five, whatever it was, there was a mistake. And a crossroads that was very important to him was denoted as belonging to the Israelis when he thought it belonged to the Palestinians.

And so I took him back into the private dining room. It’s on the other side of the Oval Office. And I left him alone for the first time. I said, “Look, this was near Jericho, this crossroads. I said, “I went to Jericho once on a Christian pilgrimage, neither one of you can identify with that. (Laughter.) And you don’t care that there was once a tax collector named Zacchaeus that sat in the tree and Jesus brought him down and went home with him. That doesn’t mean a thing to you. And this crossroads doesn’t mean a thing to me, you guys got to work this out.”

I closed the door and walked out on them. I had no earthly idea what would happen. And just before they closed the door, I said, “Let me remind you, we’re already fifteen minutes late and the entire world press corps is standing out in front of the White House waiting for us. Are you going to blow this deal over this crossroads?”

So anyway, ten minutes later they come out. They’re all smiles and Rabin was convinced that Arafat was right. That, in fact, the Israelis had meant to give jurisdiction over this crossroads, close as it was to Jericho, to the Palestinians. And the trust was so great that Arafat then went into the Cabinet Room and signed a map that was wrong. So that, as a matter of international law, he gave up what Rabin had just given him by his word. He thought Rabin’s word was worth more than a legally binding peace of paper that I had witnessed. Think how far we are from that today.

It was a shocking thing. It was a little thing. But it said worlds about what had happened. Then in ’94, as was mentioned in the introduction, we had the great peace agreement with Jordan and then in ’95, Rabin was killed. Had he not been killed, I am convinced there would have been a comprehensive agreement in the Middle East by 1998. It is one of the few examples in history when a political assassin got what he wanted.

John Wilkes Booth, as you all know, did not get what he wanted by killing Abraham Lincoln. He got a more severe Reconstruction and a more burdensome set of requirements on the southern states than would have been the case had President Lincoln lived. But the young man got what he wanted. And his parents still say today they’re very proud of him because he stopped this sinful giveaway of land.

Okay, so then we had—Shimon Peres was elected, succeeded, and became prime minister. And there was the controversial incursion into Lebanon, but the Arabs stayed with him, but he lost the Jewish-Israeli vote by so much that he lost by a narrow margin to Mr. Netanyahu. He became prime minister. But the progress continued.

And we actually had an agreement at Wye River in 1998 that turned over more of the West Bank, maybe, than the Authority is in control of today. But anyway, a lot; it was a very good agreement. And King Hussein, by that time, was on his deathbed, virtually. And he had a house out in Maryland, not far from Wye.
River, and he came and spent a couple of nights with us—so frail he could hardly stand. And I’m not sure we
would have gotten the agreement if it hadn’t have been for him.

And he sat there, and both parties knew that he didn’t have long to live. And that he was spending one
of his precious last days on earth trying to get them to follow the lead that he had already taken. So we had the
Wye River Agreement. And then Prime Minister Barak was elected and we continued to make progress. Oh, I
have to tell you this one story from Wye River because it will set up what I want to say later.

Most interesting thing to me about Wye River is that Ariel Sharon would not shake hands with Arafat,
but he did support the deal. The only member of the Netanyahu government who did not support the deal was
Natan Sharansky, who was, to that point, lionized by all the liberal circles in America because he’d been a heroic
political prisoner in the former Soviet Union.

And I loved Sharansky. I still do. I disagreed with him over that, but I finally said, "Why are you the lone
hold-out here?" He said, "It’s simple, I’m Russian." (Laughter.) And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I come
from the biggest country in the world to one of the smallest and you want me to cut it in half? No, thank you."
(Laughter.) I said, "Natan, you came here from a jail cell. It was much smaller than pre-'67 Israel." He said,
"Doesn’t matter, I’m Russian, no thank you." (Laughter.) Very revealing for later events. So we’ll keep going.

So the deal at Wye River was done, then Barak was elected. He really wanted to get the whole agreement
concluded. He made some specific commitments I’m not sure Rabin would have made, but he was not nearly as
experienced in politics. He, after all, became prime minister only three years after he left the military. And Ehud
Barak is one of the most interesting fellows I ever met. His great hobby is repairing complex old clocks and he’s a
concert-level pianist. But he’s very fixed in what he thinks is right and wrong.

I once told him, I wish you were an average jazz pianist instead of a great concert pianist because then
you would know how to ad lib. (Laughter.) But I respected him immensely because he realized full well that if he
tried and failed, he’d be viewed as weak and he’d be voted out. And he did it anyway; he thought it was
important. So then we come to Camp David. I never expected an agreement to be reached at Camp David. Ever.

But Arafat and Barak both said they thought it was important to try to get this done while I was still in
office so we could bring the weight of the United States to bear and because there had to be a referendum in
Israel on it. So I figured it would take us at least six months to finalize it even though everybody knew, within
fairly narrow parameters, what a final agreement would have to look like. And we narrowed it down at Camp
David with fits and starts and all kinds of chemistry challenges, personal chemistry challenges. And then we kept
working.

What caused the second intifada was the coming election and who would be the Likud leader. And Ariel
Sharon, in an attempt to head off a challenge from Mr. Netanyahu, decided that he would be the first leader since
Moshe Dayan said in 1967 [that] no Israel leader would walk on the Temple Mount—decided the al-Aqsa
Mosque and the Dome of the Rock to go up on the Temple Mount. And Ehud Barak said he couldn’t stop it. So
we gave him this massive escort—you may remember that.

So I called Arafat and I said this is going to be a big test of your leadership, and he started ranting at me,
said,"What do you mean a big test? We’re about to be humiliated. We have to react." And I said, "Don’t talk to
me about humiliation. I’m an expert on that." (Laughter.) I said—I said, "You cannot be humiliated by anyone
you do not give permission to humiliate you—by definition.” And I said, “Even if they take your clothes off and put you in prison, you have to give them permission—you have to feel humiliated. Don’t give them permission.”

He said, “Well, what would you do? What would you do?” I said, “I would find the most beautiful nine-year-old girl in the Palestinian territories. I would buy her the nicest dress I could afford. I would get her the most beautiful bouquet of flowers available, and when Ariel Sharon comes up on the Temple Mount, I would be standing at the other end with my crowd. I would take the girl by the hand, leave everybody alone. You walk alone with a little girl to the middle of the mount, have her give him the flowers, welcome him there, offer him a tour of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque and tell him when it’s yours, he can come back every day.” (Laughter.) He said, “I can’t do that.” I said, “Oh, yes, you can. You won’t do it.” Think of what would have happened in the chemistry of the whole Middle East peace if instead of the second intifada that had occurred.

It’s a cautionary lesson for all of us in our own lives, I might add, not just in the Middle East. So the intifada happened, but Barak didn’t give up; he kept on working and we got all the way to Taba and before that, I issued, late in 2000, finally once I realized the Israelis would accept the deal and I thought the Palestinians would, I publicly announced what I had privately proposed. And then my time in office left, and then we had, as I remember, another three weeks before the election. I think it was February sixteenth.

And in that whole time, Arafat wouldn’t say yes or no. Now, there are many people who have many theories about why he didn’t do this. But I can only tell you, in my heart of hearts, I don’t know, because I know two different Arab leaders he told he was going to take the deal. And because he begged me not to go to North Korea and end their missile program because he said, you know, “You have to make it look like you made me do this. We’ll have to orchestrate the whole thing.” And in the end, nothing happened.

So then we had—President Bush got elected, Ariel Sharon got elected. President Bush said to me, he said, you—he said, “You know every last corner of the old city—Jerusalem. You spilt your blood, you got nothing for it. I’m going to let him do whatever. I’m not fiddling with Arafat; I’m not fiddling with any of these guys.” So there was a hands-off policy for a while, which was wildly popular, I might add, among some elements in the American Jewish community when the settlements expanded a lot and not much happened.

And there was a lot of violence. But after four years, when you look back on it, I think it’s worth pointing out and the next four years, there were three times as many Israelis and Palestinians killed as in the entire eight years I was there. Average age of the Palestinians is eighteen and the average age of the Israelis, as I remember, was twenty-four. So the first lesson I have to say is, it’s—whenever America’s involved, fewer people die and that’s a good thing because the less blood that is shed, the easier it is to make compromises to make peace.

It’s also morally a good thing if young people don’t die well before their time. Then the Bush administration changed, and I remember right before President Bush announced the Roadmap, which was in the first term but didn’t get really going until the second term. Four days before he announced it, Arafat pops up and says, “I accept President Clinton’s proposal.” (Laughter.) Hello?

I mean, it was like—and I had gone to Tel Aviv University in 2001 and received permission from the Israelis to bring some of the Palestinians in to see me. This was a couple months after I left office, in the springtime, sometime. And they said, “What should we do?” I said, “Take the deal now. Do it right now.” He said, “Well, Sharon won’t give it to us.”
I said, "I don’t care. You’ve got to start something and that will at least change the—" So instead, they debated it for six or eight months, however long it was, until they waited until everyone knew President Bush was going to announce the Roadmap. So by then, Arafat had an Israeli public that didn’t trust him, an Israeli government that wouldn’t deal with him, and an American government that wouldn’t give him the time of day. Then he takes the deal.

So—and I told him back when I was ready to leave office and he called and thanked me and said what a great man I was, I said, "No, I’m not a great man; I’m a failure and you made me one." I said, "The first thing I heard about you when I took office was that you never made a deal until five minutes to midnight. And as I leave office, I want you do know something, your watch is broken. (Laughter.) And you will come to regret this." So you all know what happened after that.

Okay, so then he dies, new government gets elected. We make a little progress, then there’s a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza by Ariel Sharon who, by then, has become a very different politician. He even starts a whole new political party, and as far as I know, it’s the only place in the world where a political party was organized for the sole purpose of governance.

That is, it did not appear to him that the Labor Party could [get] enough votes in the Knesset and that the Likud Party would ever permit serious negotiations and he started a new party, the sole purpose of which was to permit a continuation of the peace process. And so they made some progress, and then the second tragedy occurred, next only to Rabin’s death, Sharon’s stroke. So finally, when he became a convert with the strength to pull this off, he lost the physical ability to do it.

I’ll never forget [that] after the second event, I thought God was truly determined to play games with our minds until the end of time. So Mr. Olmert came in, and finally he proposed an agreement that was basically what I had proposed but in even greater detail. But by then, because of his political standing, nobody took it seriously. President Bush’s administration tried to do much better in the second term. I think they did. And after Hamas won the election in Gaza, they did a lot of work with the West Bank government in training security forces, which continues to the present day with real, confident results.

And I think that the Bush administration deserves a lot of credit for what they did for that. And I think the West Bank government, the Fatah government, deserves a lot of credit. But when we have this new election, and Mr. Netanyahu wins and the Kadima Party under Tzipi Livni decides not to go under the government and Mr. Lieberman becomes prime minister and all the internal contradictions that are present today are thrown into high relief, and we are where we are.

President Obama gets elected on a promise to try to make peace in the Middle East and names Hillary the secretary of state and then accepts her recommendation to name George Mitchell as a special envoy because we had been totally blown away by the way he handled the Irish peace process. And because he cared a lot about the region because he’s half-Irish and half-Lebanese and he’s a man of extraordinary energy for his age—or any age.

But I think it’s worth looking, now, at what’s different and what’s not. You all know what’s different. For the Palestinians, they’re narrowly divided—who is Israel supposed to make a deal with, after all? But I would just point out that a lot of people have forgotten this—Hamas won those elections in Gaza, not with a majority.
of the vote, but with about, as I recall, 42 percent of the vote because the Fatah were so confident of their hold on the voters in Gaza.

After all, that’s where Arafat’s headquarters was, looking out on the Mediterranean, that their internal divisions were minimized, and they arrogantly went out and ran two different candidates from the two different factions in seat after seat after seat and 42 percent was enough to beat them.

If you go back and look at that election, there are few of those seats where the Hamas candidate got a majority of the vote. And if we were on the verge of a constructive election tomorrow, constructed agreement, and they had another election in Gaza, they wouldn’t win if they only had one opponent.

Meanwhile, the strength and the capacity of the West Bank government began to build. One of Israel’s legitimate complaints was that Arafat might have been good at causing trouble, but he wasn’t going to be very good at picking up the garbage, opening the schools, maintaining security, doing the things that a government has to do. It was legitimate to say we needed to increase the capacity.

This is a general problem, I might say, in all poor countries throughout the world. If you look at this healthcare debate in America, you see our challenge is overcoming entrenched interests to keep changing after a lot of money’s been divvied up from people who are good at keeping it. But in poor countries, the challenge is building capacity.

We have the capacity, but once we misallocate for a long time, it’s hard to change. And it’s not just America—it’s any advanced country. So that was a good thing. But here we are. So what’s different? The divided government among the Palestinians. But it’s best not to make too much of that, because if we ever had a real referendum against the backdrop of the peace agreement, I’m confident the government in the West Bank would win in Gaza as well.

On the other hand, if we don’t, they may not survive there. There’s a story in the press today, which I think is quite accurate about opposition building up in the grassroots to the Palestinian security forces because they accepted this new order and this new discipline, not only to be safer but because they were told it was a prelude to a Palestinian state that would exist within five years. And they were told that, as I remember, three years ago.

But—so you have more divided Palestinians. The second thing is, what’s left though, is both more honest and more capable than existed before in the West Bank. The Palestinian prime minister there is very good, and he left and he came back and I think they’re all working together pretty well. In Israel, the situation is more difficult because of the change in the population.

The most pro-peace Israelis are either the Israelis that were—the sabras—the ones that were born in Israel [or] the European Jews. In third place is probably the people who migrated from North Africa. And then the most anti are the ones who came from Russia and the other parts of the Soviet Union and the settlers.

And it’s very interesting because the Russians tend to be left-to-center on domestic issues, but against territorial concessions. The North Africans tend to be the small-business people, the strivers. They tend to be a little right-of-center on domestic issues, but understand the practical imperative of cutting a deal.
So it becomes—so when Mr. Lieberman became the foreign minister over and over again, the tape played of Natan Sharanksy saying I’m Russian, no thank you, I’m Russian, no thank you, I’m Russian, no thank you. And I understand that—the psychological disorientation that Russian people went through after the fall of not only the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall, but their whole system and way of life, was profound, even for those that didn’t like the loss of personal freedom.

So here we are. All that’s changed and made more complicated. The one positive thing that had it existed when I was president, I think we still might have gotten the deal for all of our problems is that the Arabs really want this to happen, now. They really want a long-term political, military, and security partnership with Israel because they think in Iran, they have a real adversary. So they no longer need a phony one to deflect attention from their own shortcomings.

And they’re—it’s a real deal. I spent hours talking to friends of mine in the Middle East. The other day, I was over there in Qatar giving a speech, and the king of Saudi Arabia asked me to come over and talk to him and all he did—he spent two hours talking to me, and about a third of it was bragging [about] his new university system and how it had more women than men in colleges and universities.

I don’t know how [they] get to class, they can’t drive; (laughter) but they are—there are more of them there. They have to live on campus, I guess. But he’s very proud of it. He talked about how they just separated twelve sets of Siamese twins without incidents. They saved the children, and he was determined to modernize Saudi Arabia.

And to be fair to him, for his generation, he’s way the best king we could have gotten, among all the choices available. And he’s really doing, I think, a commendable job, and he cares about this peace because he thinks. A third of the time he devoted to telling me about his problems with Iran. And a third of the time he devoted to saying, "I’m serious, I really want to be friends and have a partnership with Israel, but they’ve got to do this deal."

No self-respecting Saudi, being in charge of Mecca and Medina, could possibly act like this is okay unless there’s a resolution to the Palestinian issue. And he’s got, now, well over twenty other Muslim countries, including all the Arab countries except Syria, signed onto his deal. So those are the three things, two negative, one positive that have happened since then.

But the most important thing—the people say how can you continue to be optimistic, how can you continue to be optimistic? Because of the things that have not changed, except to grow worse. Fact number one is the population trend. The Palestinians are still having more babies than Israel’s Jewish population, and there’s a limit to how much more immigration we’re going to get.

So sometime in between twenty and thirty years, the Israelis will have to face a choice if they don’t make a deal, which is are we going to no longer be a Jewish democracy, we’re just a democracy, or are we going to disenfranchise the people who live beyond the 1967 borders and therefore we’re a Jewish state, but not a democracy. And it’s a Hobson’s choice for a country with a deeply ingrained commitment, both to the history and fidelity of the faith and the people, and to the idea of freedom and democracy.

The second thing which nobody talks about very much is the inexorable march of technology. Look, these rockets that the Hamas crowd fired from Gaza both terrified and enraged the Israelis. I think everybody in
the world got that, and if you remember in the beginning, before Hamas did the intelligent thing and kept hiding among thickly populated areas, there was worldwide sympathy with what Israel did.

The criticism was muted even in corners when you wouldn’t have understood it, because people got what it was like to have a bunch of people sitting in the peanut gallery launching rockets into your communities all the time. But it’s important to remember that, if my numbers are right, I think only three Israelis were killed by direct hits. There were more injuries, by all the slew of rockets that were fired in there, [but—]

It is just a matter of time till those rockets have effective GPS positioning systems on them, and then they will hit whatever they aim at, if it’s within the distance the rocket can fly. So the choice has not changed much except to become more stark. They either have to find a way to share the future by dividing the land and set up an operating partnership, or they have to face the chilling prospect, to me, that for decades upon decades, barring some totally unforeseen development, Israel will become virtually a garrison state and it won’t be much fun to live there.

And if I knew I was headed to—into—uncharted waters, in a land where I was outnumbered, I would want a partner or two. So I understand about the trust issues, but let me just ask you this: Marc Lasry was talking to me about this today because I spoke to a lot of his business associates.

For all the grievances that the Israelis have and all the terror to which they’ve been subject, and the nightmare memories of what happened in Europe, not just during the Holocaust but going back centuries before, it is worth remembering that there were periods when the Muslims were better to the Jews than the Christians [were].

And it is worth remembering that in modern history, there are people who suffered grievously sharing a small piece of land who have affected reconciliation. And most people like to talk about South Africa, but I think Rwanda’s a much better example. And I think—and I’ll say a little more about that in a minute—but I think if we live in an interdependent world, we have to find ways to move beyond in the words of game theories: zero-sum games to non-zero-sum games. You have to find a way where everybody wins.

That is the key to the survival of the world. It’s the key to finding a way to fight global warming. It’s a key to finding a way to have cooperation against terror and containing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It’s a key to finding a way to shave off the rough edges of the global economy, which has promoted so much opportunity and so much inequality simultaneously over the last thirty years. You have to look for win-win situations.

And I went to Rwanda in 1998 and apologized to them that we didn’t do anything to try to stop the genocide. And some people criticized me for it. We were trying to get into Bosnia and stop that. We still had a Congress that not only didn’t want me to go into Bosnia, it was mad because of what happened in Somalia. And the whole thing was over in ninety days and we just missed it, in a bad way.

And I thought it was important for me, because I tried to establish a new partnership between the United States and Africa, to go there and just say that—just say simply, we should have done something, we didn’t, and I’m sorry. And then I told them personally, I’d spend the rest of my life trying to make it up to them and I have. My foundation worked with Dr. Paul Farmer, a lot of you know him from his work in Haiti.
We’ve now rebuilt hospitals in all the regions of Rwanda that ran outside of Kigali when we started. We do the AIDS work there. We’re helping with malaria, with a lot of other things. We’re working on economic things. I helped raise the money for them to build their genocide memorial. And I spend a lot of time there. And I’ll just tell you two stories because every person who’s ever had a loved one die in the Middle East will identify with this.

In ’98, Hillary and I went to Rwanda and it was—the environment was still thought to be so dangerous that the Secret Service asked me to hold all my meetings in the airport in Kigali. So I did; I met with, first of all, leaders from the lake country to talk about problems in the Congo, and we were trying to work through that.

And then I asked to meet with survivors of the genocide. So they hauled in six people, and they were astonishing people. I remember one handsome young man had his arm hacked off at the elbow and he laughed that he was now a one-armed soldier for peace. He said it’s the only army you can get into with one arm. It was amazing, totally without self-pity and—but the last person to speak was this really attractive woman in the bright-colored dresses of the African lake district. She had [on] a beautiful blue dress on and no visible marks on her. And keep in mind, most of these people were killed with machetes.

Few were shot, few were burned. Most of them, 800,000, were hacked to death. And she said, in this very dignified way, she said, "You know, you may be wondering what I’m doing here because you can’t see any marks on me. They are all on my back." She said, "When they came to our village in the holocaust, our neighbors who were Hutus, the majority group, sold us out. It was quite a shock to us because our children played together every day."

"We shared meals at all the holidays, everything, but they were frightened and they gave us up. I was hacked on the back and they thought I would surely bleed to death. I awoke in a pool of my own blood to see my husband and six children lying dead around me. And I screamed out to God in anger that I had been spared."

"Then I realized it must have been some—for some reason, and it could be nothing as mean as vengeance. So I do what I can to help us begin again." What she did, to honor her children, was to basically open a private orphanage, and she took in children, who were orphaned from both sides, from all ethnic groups and she placed them with loving families without regard to their ethnicity, to tell people they had to begin again.

Okay, fast forward, a few years later, I go back to Rwanda and they finally finished the holocaust—the genocide memorial that I helped raise money for so they take me and—now, if you’ve ever been there—if you haven’t, you should go. The Africans are not nearly as hung up about bones as we are, partly because they have no embalming services.

So the genocide memorial in Kigali, Rwanda, is largely a massive crypt with the bones of 300,000 people who have been registered by their loved ones. And they brought their bones there, and they put them in these three crypts, cut into the side of a mountain with beautiful little gardens on top of each top. And then there’s this museum.

So this great-looking young guy gives us a tour. This kid looks like he’s an MBA from Harvard or something—great looking guy about, I’d say, twenty-seven years old, really articulate. And he takes us through, and it’s a small museum, but it graphically demonstrates how the shoot-down of the plane killing the presidents of Burundi and Rwanda was manipulated into mass fear and the killing and what happened.
So I said to this guy, I said, “Did you lose anybody?” He said, “I lost my parents, a brother, a sister-in-law, almost all my uncles and aunts, and their children.” He said, “If you stop at first cousins, we lost seventy-three people in my family.” And I said, “Isn’t this hard for you?” And he smiled, he said, “Oh, no, this is important for me. This is therapeutic.”

He said, “We have to purge ourselves of our hatred, and we can only do it if we are honest about what happened and about what our options are now about beginning again. This is important. This is part of what I do so that I can be well and whole and live again.”

And I said to him, “You know, you remind me of a woman I met the last time I was here.” I described that—the whole incident, the woman, the six children. He smiled and he said, “Well, I should remind you of her. She’s my aunt.” They are astonishing people. One more story.

There was a woman in Rwanda who was fifty years old, with ten children. Her husband and seven—her seven youngest—children were killed in the genocide. The only reason the other three survived is they were in the military and they were off. So there she was. She had to start her whole life again and no means of supporting herself, but she was a gifted basketmaker, so she went and found a Hutu woman in the other ethnic group who was reputed to be a gifted basketmaker, and she said you know, we have to begin again. The women have to lead this. First, there were more women survivors than men.

She said we’ve got to do this. Let’s go into business together and hire other young women and train them and do this. And their business took off like hotcakes. I bet 20 percent of the people in this room have bought Rwandan baskets made by cooperative. And eventually, they had so many women working there and more and more demand, and more and more sales all around the world, they started hiring young men and training them.

About a year after they started hiring young men, a twenty-six-year-old young man asked to see the boss and he came into see her. And he broke down crying. He said, “You know, you’ve been so wonderful to me. I’m so grateful; I can’t let this go on anymore. I murdered one of your children...I just can’t live with myself anymore.”

And she said—so he said to her, “I know your older sons are still in the military and so if you want justice, just send for one of them. I will stay here and work until he comes and he can kill me. That is all I can do for you, but I can do that.” And she looked at him and said the following thing: “What good would that do? I forgive you. Get up and go back to work.”

Now, I don’t know how many of us can do that. All I know is, ten years ago, the per capita income of Rwanda was $268 a year, less than a dollar a day. The per capita income in Haiti, where I work today for the UN, was $700 a year. Today, the per capita income in Haiti is $770 a year. The per capita income in Rwanda is $1100 a year.

They ... quadrupled the income of the country in a decade, and every Saturday, a different portion of the adults of Rwanda take the day off and clean the streets. Every adult in Rwanda, once a month, takes a Saturday and works cleaning the streets, from the wealthiest to the poorest. The president said, “We don’t have to be sloppy and dirty because we’re poor. We need to be proud. People will want to come here, we’ll bring more
tourists, we’ll bring more investors. People will see the fierce determination we have coming back from what happened to us.”

So, look, not getting this deal was the biggest disappointment, I think, of my life. But it wasn’t mine to get. It was the Israelis and the Palestinians to grab. There was nobody brokering the peace in Rwanda after the genocide. They did it. And everywhere in the world, whoever the “they” is, [they] have to do it. But if you look at every single problem the world has, one, we have this horrible financial meltdown. Why were people stealing from each other? Because they were living under this stupid illusion that you can really get somewhere in life by screwing somebody else. And in an interdependent world, it is not true. We have to find ways for everybody to win again.

And, look, I’m not naive. I’m worried about the Iranian nuclear program. I do all that. You know I’m not against the use of force under appropriate circumstances. But I’m telling you, the most important thing here is to recognize nobody’s going to turn back the population clock. Nobody’s going to turn back the technology clock. They can’t avoid being interdependent. It’s just a question of whether it’s going to be positive or negative.

Once you know that, all the other details become manageable. And I think we should all pray that they will be managed toward a conclusion, so that a hundred years from now, somebody will get this award for being for something besides peace in the Middle East because everybody there will be the third or fourth generation of people who [have] enjoyed the peace in the Middle East. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. BERKOWITZ: Thank you, President Clinton. You do great honor to our Scholar-Statesman award. I think the most important thing I’ve learned here tonight, though I learned a lot, was that we should immediately appeal the term limits law. (Applause.) So we’ll have to go back and figure out how to get that done. I’d like Marty Gross to come up and present the award to President Clinton.

MARTIN GROSS: To William Jefferson Clinton, scholar and statesman. Who, from humble origins in the heartland of America, rose to lead our nation to an era of international peace and prosperity. Who has infused his public life with a sense of compassion, a reverence for knowledge, and a commitment to embrace new ideas for the sake of the common good. In gratitude for his critical role in helping Arabs and Israelis pivot from an era of conflict and bloodshed to a new era, filled with the potential for a secure peace. In appreciation for his steadfast support of allies who took risks for peace, coupled with his own courage in facing down the adversaries who put peace at risk. In thanks for his decades of leadership and service to our country and in anticipation of the service that we hope you will continue to give to our country and to the peoples of the world in the decades to come.

We, the trustees and fellows of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, take great pride in bestowing upon you our 2009 Scholar-Statesman Award. (Applause.)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Bless you, thanks.

MR. GROSS: Thank you and bless you.

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you all. (Applause.)

(END)