

The Bush Administration's Unfinished Business in the Middle East

by [Ghaith al-Omari \(/experts/ghaith-al-omari\)](/experts/ghaith-al-omari), [David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](/experts/david-makovsky)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Ghaith al-Omari is a senior fellow in The Washington Institute's Irwin Levy Family Program on the U.S.-Israel Strategic Relationship.



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David Makovsky is the Ziegler distinguished fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations.



In-Depth Reports

On May 30, 2008, Ghaith al-Omari, Theodore Kattouf, David Makovsky, and Zvi Rafiah addressed The Washington Institute's 2008 Soref Symposium. Ghaith al-Omari is a senior fellow at the American Task Force for Palestine and former political adviser to Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas. Theodore Kattouf is president of AMIDEAST and former U.S. ambassador to the United Arab Emirates and to Syria. David Makovsky is a senior fellow and director of the Project on the Middle East Peace Process at The Washington Institute. Zvi Rafiah is a former congressional liaison with the Israeli embassy in Washington. The following is a rapporteur's summary of their discussion.

When asked about the prospects for a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict by the year's end, Ghaith al-Omari stressed the importance of a two-state solution. Although Mr. al-Omari described the situation in Gaza as bleak, he pointed out that Hamas is losing popularity yet no force is capable of challenging it. He believes the United States cannot impose peace, but it can help design and implement processes to help the parties reach a deal.

Ambassador Theodore Kattouf mentioned that the Syrian regime refuses to be isolated by forcing its way into conversations, and plays the spoiler game by clinging to Iran and Hizballah. Ambassador Kattouf also pointed out the level of distrust between Syria and Israel, suggesting that it is unlikely the Syrians will stop the arms flow from Iran to Hizballah.

While discussing Israeli domestic problems vis-a-vis the peace process, David Makovsky was unsure whether Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert will survive the latest round of problems facing him. He noted two emerging fears: that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be transformed from a nationalist to a religious conflict; and since Jews are a minority in the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, Palestinians may begin supporting the notion of a one-state solution. Mr. Makovsky pointed out that the differences between the two sides are narrow, and

since both Israelis and Palestinians want peace, it does not help to put forward half solutions.

Zvi Rafiah offered a special tribute to former congressman Charlie Wilson, who was originally scheduled to address this portion of the symposium but was unable to attend due to health reasons. ❖

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