



A Conversation on Security and Peace in the Middle East

Featuring HRH Prince Turki al-Faisal, Saudi Arabia, and Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yaakov Amidror, Israel

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ROBERT SATLOFF: Well, we just did the important symbolic act that I was going to start with—the handshake on the stage. So thank you very much, gentlemen—allowing us to get down to business. It really is a delight for us to be able to host this event. This event, of course, has vital symbolic value, but I don't think all four hundred of you are here tonight just for the symbolism. I think you're here tonight because these two gentlemen have between them decades, nearly a century, of experience in, together, helping their countries navigate the sometimes—shall I say, the often—turbulent, stormy waters of the Middle East. And it is a privilege that all of us will have the opportunity during our conversation to benefit from the insights that both of you bring to bear on the important issues that we all collectively face in the Middle East today. So with that, if you may, let's begin.

Gentlemen, in recent months and years, both of you come from countries that have had, shall we say, difficult moments with the Obama administration. [Laughter] You, Your Royal Highness, wrote, I think, a very compelling and blunt response to President Obama's use of the term “free rider” and his call for sharing the Middle East between your country and another country on the other side of the Gulf. And you, Yaakov, you and your government, well, you did a very good job restraining your enthusiasm for the president's signal achievement of the Iran nuclear agreement. So I'd like to begin with serious questions about America and your countries, and how you view the direction of your nations' relationships with America.

I think everyone in this room, if they've read one thing over the last couple of months, they have read the nineteen thousand words of Jeffrey Goldberg's “The Obama

Doctrine,” which, to encapsulate, projects the idea that the Middle East is less important to America than it used to be, that America should be more reluctant to engage in the region’s problems, and that our allies are often burdens, not assets. Some of this we’ve heard on the campaign trail over the last few months from various candidates as well. So I’d like to ask both of you: These ideas—do you feel that these are an aberration, or do you think that this is now deeply embedded in how America will approach the Middle East in the years ahead? Your Highness?

PRINCE TURKI AL-FAISAL: [In Arabic: “In the name of Allah the beneficent and the merciful”] First of all, let me thank you, Mr. Satloff, and the people here at WINEP for inviting me to be here and to meet with the general. I must say, when I last met with the board of WINEP, I invited them to come to Saudi Arabia. And some of them said they would gladly come. And I remember one of them said, will I be allowed to come? And I said, of course. But if you come there, we will not allow you to go back. [Laughter] But more seriously, of course, feel free to take this invitation, any of you, please, to come and visit—

YAAKOV AMIDROR: Including me?

HRH FAISAL: Well, sign the peace first, and then you can come. [Laughter]

On America, for us, in Saudi Arabia, America is a strategic partner. And it is a partnership that is not just confined to the governments. But we feel that we have a special link with the American people. Those of you who don’t know the Arabian Peninsula will not appreciate that for many years it was a place of warfare and poverty and disease and all of the ills that could befall any people. Until it was united in 1932, and a few years after that, the Americans were the ones who came and helped develop our oil industry. And I know there are many people who consider oil the worst commodity that can be used for either transportation or producing electricity or other things. But for us in Saudi Arabia, it’s been a lifeline. And everything that has come in the kingdom, without the resources that developed from that oil, would not have been undertaken. Now, of course, we’re in the position of having to go forward and try to find alternatives to oil, and that is going to be another challenge. And we hope that, inasmuch as we worked with the United States in developing our oil industry, we will continue to work with the United States—and, more particularly, with the people of

the United States—to go forward and develop the alternatives that we seek to replenish not only our economy but our well-being. And so that strategic relationship with America is going to remain, from the Saudi point of view.

Mr. Obama and other presidents have had disagreements with the kingdom on various issues—one of them, of course, is the issue of Israel and Palestine. But that has not interfered with or, if you like, affected the view from the kingdom that our relationship with the United States is a strategic one and that it will continue to be so.

One figure that I’ll give you today shows that view of the Saudi people, not just the government: there are more than sixty thousand Saudi students spread throughout the United States in your universities. And that is a reflection not only of the fact that our young people want to acquire their skills and know-how in America but also that the parents of these youngsters feel comfortable that their youngsters are going to be taught the skills and know-how in the United States.

SATLOFF: Ok, General Amidror.

GEN. AMIDROR: I share with Prince Turki the notion that there is no substitute for the United States of America in the Middle East. And all those who believe that others will do the job that the Americans did in the past, I think, are making a big mistake. And it is not going to happen; there is no substitute. From our point of view, the relations are going not through the White House but through the American people. And at the end of the day, it leads to the relations with the White House—not vice versa. So we have to work harder and to have the same relations that we did in the past in the future. And presidents are coming and going, but we will have to have strong relations with the American people and do whatever is needed to have these relations in the future.

I believe that although we have some disagreements, and not every word that the president said about the Middle East and the state of Israel we agree about, at the end of the day I think that we have very good relations in many areas which are crucial to Israel. If you ask today your people in the Pentagon and our people in the IDF, there never have been such good relations. The same goes for the intelligence community. I think that the position of the state of Israel in both the Senate and the House is very strong. If you go to polls in America and you ask about the state of Israel, the relationship between Israel

and the United States, you see a fantastic percentage of support for Israel.

So, with all the disagreements, and there are a few disagreements—one of them is about the Palestinian issue—I think that relations between Israel and the United States are very good. And we have to make all the effort so that it will be better in the future. I am not pessimistic about it, I am very optimistic.

SATLOFF: Ok, two very optimistic conclusions here. I'm going to keep on pressing. [Laughter] You both focused on the American people, which of course is the basis of our democracy and what gives strength to any president's decision to do any initiative. Now, we're celebrating this year the twenty-fifth anniversary since the United States sent half a million soldiers to the Gulf to liberate Kuwait. That seems like a light-year ago: four presidents, 9/11, multiple Middle East wars, thousands of American deaths. When you look back and you look to where we are today, do you still believe that the United States is as committed today to guaranteeing regional security as we were a quarter-century ago, and do you still believe that the United States is as committed as it was a quarter-century ago to dispatch the strength and power needed to secure its interests?

HRH FAISAL: I don't. And I think that the general situation has changed. And that's why there needs to be a reevaluation and a recalibration, if you like, of the relationship. I don't think President Obama's retrenchment, if you like, from committing the United States to the same degree that it was twenty-five years ago on liberating Kuwait is purely a personal reflection. I think America has changed, as we have changed in the area. So we have to work together to figure out where we're going. I think both of us recognize that we have common interests that bind us together, whether it is fighting terrorism, whether it is engaging in improving peace in the area, or in other such endeavors that benefit both our countries. But I think the American people also, because of those events that you mentioned since the liberation of Kuwait, perhaps feel that too much used to be expected of them and that they should not be in that position where they are obliged to undertake certain responsibilities that they used to do before. And I think this is where it is very important for both peoples and both countries—and, of course, the governments have to do it—to sit down together, identify where we agree with each other, where we can go forward

together, and agree to disagree on issues that we find difficult to come to terms with. That does not mean a divorce. On the contrary: I think it means a very mature relationship between adults, if you like, whereby we can, as I said, enhance what can bring us together and agree to keep the peace, if you like, on the issues that don't necessarily bring us together.

SATLOFF: General?

GEN. AMIDROR: I don't know if you know, but today was the Memorial Day for the Holocaust in the state of Israel. And next week is the Independence Day, the sixty-eighth Independence Day of the state of Israel. Based on our experience in the Holocaust, from the first day of our independence, it was a strong decision of the founders of Israel—Israel is not seeking foreign forces to be defended. We will defend Israel by ourselves. We did it in the past, and we intend to do it in the future. We don't ask any American soldier to sacrifice his life for the sake of Israel. If you have your own interests in the Middle East, and you want to send forces here and there, that's ok. From our point of view, Israel will defend itself by itself. And I think this is one of the cornerstones of our relations. We are more than happy to get money from the United States to buy weapon systems in America. We are more than happy to buy the first-class weapon systems in America, to share information and to exchange intelligence with America. We don't want any American soldier to sacrifice himself, his life, for the defense of the state of Israel. And we intend to continue with this policy in the future. So from our point of view, the decision is clear: Israel will defend itself by itself; it will cost us a lot—I don't know if you know, but around 6 percent of our GDP is allocated to security and intelligence and whatever is around it. It's a lot, but we are ready even to increase this, if needed, in the future because of the decision that Israel will meet its capabilities—with a lot of help from the United States of America, no question. But in the crucial issue of sacrificing soldiers, we don't ask anyone from the American side to be sacrificed for the state of Israel. So with all the changes that we see related to the Middle East, this decision, which is a cornerstone in our philosophy and grand strategy, will not change.

SATLOFF: Alright, since we've now been essentially speaking in parallel, let's see if we can speak together. And let me ask you about an issue in which historically both of

you have shared great concern—which is Iran. We're all faced with the reality of the Iran nuclear deal, we see Iran's role in Iraq, its role in Syria, its role in Lebanon, its role in Yemen—let me ask, from your perspectives, what do you see as the most serious threat Iran poses to you, and what would you like the United States to do about this range of challenges that I just listed? General, why don't we begin this question with you?

GEN. AMIDROR: The main concern relating to Iran from the Israeli point of view is that one day Iran will go nuclear. Either it will be a violation of the agreement, or toward the end of the agreement, after ten or fifteen years, in principle the Iranians can go nuclear. And from the Israeli point of view, this is a threat to our existence, and we will not allow it to happen. With the Americans, without the Americans, as I said, Israel is ready to defend itself by itself.

There are other issues that the Iranians are very much involved in. Terrorism, for example: the Iranians continue to build the capabilities of Hezbollah, which today has more than a hundred thousand rockets and missiles. And more and more of them are more accurate, threatening the center of Israel and very sensitive targets inside Israel. We are cooperating with the Americans in building antimissile systems, from Arrow to David's Sling to Iron Dome. But at the end of the day, this number of rockets and missiles means that a war with Hezbollah will be a devastating one—from our point of view—and very important for the people of Israel. But no question, it will also be devastating for the people of Lebanon, because to destroy all these missiles and rockets in Lebanon means that many Lebanese will be killed—not because we want this, but because the missiles and the rockets are now stored in the middle of civilian areas. And that will be a devastating situation. But we don't have any legitimacy to our decisionmakers to give up and not to try to destroy those missiles before they are launched into Israel. This is one area where the Iranians are very active. The second one is Syria. The Iranians tried to build in the Golan Heights another launching pad against Israel, and we will not let them build it, whatever the price is. So at the same time, they are continuing to build the international network of terrorism all around the world—from Africa to Asia, from Asia to Europe. And again, it's a constant war—by the way, in this war we are cooperating very closely with the Americans, behind the curtains. It's clear that we are working together to prevent the Iranians from building their

international network of terrorism. So in all these three areas, the Iranians are very active—and, look, they are testing every second month a new type of long-range missile. There is no logic in these missiles if they are not with a nuclear warhead. So we know what to expect from what's happening now in Iran. And we are preparing ourselves, and we are willing to pay the price, because we want to be more prepared when they will be in this situation after the period of the agreement—or in violation of the agreement. And in this case—this is a very good case in which better cooperation with countries in the Middle East, which have the same interests, might help both of us—all of us—to deal with the Iranians. Up till now, we are dealing with the Iranians based on the Israeli capabilities, and we are very determined to be in a situation to deal with this threat in the future, if it materializes.

SATLOFF: Prince Turki?

HRH FAISAL: If Israel has peace with the Arab world, I think we can meet any challenges. And the Arab Peace Initiative, which was presented by Saudi Arabia in 2002, in my view presents the best equation for establishing peace between Israel and the Arab world. From that context, I can't understand why the Netanyahu government doesn't seek to grab that offer that was presented in 2002 and work not just with the United States but with the Arab world in establishing a peace. As the general said, with cooperation between Arab countries and Israel in meeting the threats, wherever they come from—whether it is Iran or any other source—we will be much better fortified in a situation where there is peace between the Arab countries and Israel. And I don't see any particular difficulty in undertaking that. Many of you here obviously have not only read about but participated in the discussions and negotiations that have been going on since 1967 to establish a two-state solution. And there is nothing—there is no requirement, either for divine revelation or Einsteinian genius, to know what the peace is. It's two states, mutual swaps of territory, and a declaration of peace on both sides that will bring the Arab countries to recognize Israel and establish normal relations, in return for Israel's acceptance of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. And that is where mutual cooperation not just on issues of Iran—I always tell my Jewish audiences that with Jewish money and Arab brains we can go a long way together. [Laughter] And so if we can get that situation—think of what we can

do on science, on technology, on humanitarian affairs, on all the things that need to be looked at. Every year, there is a new disease that comes up. Every year, there is poverty that we have to look at. And I think there is much that can be not only resolved but initiated by a joint effort once the peace is signed between Israel and the Arab countries.

SATLOFF: General?

GEN. AMIDROR: First, I agree about the brains and the money. And, yes, if we cooperate, there's no question that the world will be much better. But I think that the biggest mistake is to give the key for this new Middle East to [Palestinian Authority president] Abu Mazen [Mahmoud Abbas] and his people. I think that after so many years in which some people here in this audience spent years and didn't succeed—and it is not one prime minister, with all due respect to this prime minister; it's prime ministers before him who didn't succeed. It's not only [Binyamin] Netanyahu, it's [Ehud] Olmert before him, and, with all due respect, [Yitzhak] Rabin and [Shimon] Peres didn't succeed. I remember myself, in my job, when they negotiated with the Palestinians, and the same day, those same Palestinians authorized other Palestinians to make terrorist actions in Israel. So it's not this prime minister. It's between the Palestinians and the Israelis that an agreement cannot be agreed. And instead of giving Abu Mazen and his people the key for the change in the Middle East, I think that we should think outside the box. And what should be done is to begin the change in the Middle East, and under this umbrella to bring the Israelis and the Palestinians to negotiate. If there is an umbrella of cooperation between Arab states and the state of Israel, and under this umbrella the Palestinians are brought to negotiate, we might have an agreement. If we wait till the Palestinians have an agreement with Israel, and then to build this cooperation within the Middle East, we don't have an agreement, and we don't have change in the Middle East.

SATLOFF: Is the Arab Peace Initiative such an umbrella?

GEN. AMIDROR: The Arab Initiative for itself is not an umbrella because there is not any cooperation in this initiative with the state of Israel. It's an offer to Israel to come—at the beginning, it was take it or leave it; now I understand it is to negotiate. And, remember, in 2002 Syria was in: do you see [Bashar al-] Assad with the Israelis—with all due respect to the initiation? Do you see the

Lebanese negotiating with the Israelis? Today, the Arab world is different. And the countries behind the Arab League are different from in 2002. It's a new opportunity, but instead of beginning with the negotiations, with which no one has succeeded up till now—see how many American presidents tried and failed, how many prime ministers in Israel tried and failed— So instead of going again the same path that didn't work in the past, let's change it. Let's build something in the Middle East along with countries with the same interests: fighting radical Islam, whether it is Sunni or Shiite, whether Hezbollah or the Islamic State, and then bringing the Palestinians and the Israelis to negotiate under this umbrella. If you take the other way and wait until the agreement, it's a long job.

HRH FAISAL: Another point of disagreement between us. And so this is something where I think America can play a role. Obviously, I don't agree with the general. And I think the Arab Peace Initiative, as I said, is the formula that can bring us together. But the general sees otherwise. He wants us to start cooperating with Israel, and do whatever is done in that journey, and forget about the occupation of Palestine and various other issues that deal with the daily occurrences that are taking place on the ground in Palestine, whether it is expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, whether it is the roadblocks—all the issues that you are all aware of, I don't need to repeat them to you. So this is a difference of view, and I'm very glad that I meet other Israelis who have views more similar to mine, rather than to the general's.

GEN. AMIDROR: It's a democracy.

HRH FAISAL: Yes, indeed. [Laughter] Absolutely. And I also meet with Americans who have different views than that.

GEN. AMIDROR/HRH FAISAL: Another democracy.

GEN. AMIDROR: By the way, I'm not saying to the Saudis or other Arab countries—forget or neglect the Palestinian issues. On the contrary: I think that the way to solve it in the end is to cooperate with Israel instead of dictating to Israel. If you cooperate with Israel, and there will be a Middle East umbrella under which Israelis and Arab countries work together to solve many problems— You spoke about a substitute for oil in Saudi Arabia; in many areas, we can contribute. And if we have such an agreement—it's

less than an agreement, it's an understanding—that we work with each other, it will be easier to bring both Palestinians and Israelis to negotiate. When it is about, finish the business and then we will build something new in the Middle East—it didn't work up till today and, I don't know, I'm not so many years in the business— But if I had to market something, to make people buy something, for so many years and it didn't succeed, I'd find another way. To go with the same old way, which didn't succeed, I'm saying it again—with all due respect to the prime minister—it's not Netanyahu. It didn't work under Olmert, it didn't work under Ehud Barak, it didn't work under Rabin and Peres. If you look for something different, do something different. And I believe that if you look outside the box—and, instead of going the same way again, you build something from the outside and bring both sides under this umbrella to negotiate—it will be much better as a beginning and even to conclude at the end; because there is something, a framework around it, which helps both sides make needed compromises—from both sides, by the way.

HRH FAISAL: This is the whole point of where I am coming from on this issue. You say, General, that the prime ministers have all not been able to reach an agreement with the Palestinians. Who, among those who are aware of where Abu Mazen has stood on the issue of peace with the Israelis, can say that he was not the man to negotiate with? He, in front of Yasser Arafat, the late Yasser Arafat, stood up publicly and said that the second intifada is wrong—that there is not a military solution to the issue with the Israelis, that we must have negotiations with Israel. In public. He said that at the time when Arafat was alive, and you know what could have happened to him, but it didn't. And when he became president in Palestine, the late Ariel Sharon made a point of putting him in a position where he could not go to his people and say that I have accomplished something through negotiations, whether it was on the roadblocks or on water for the West Bank, whether it was on prisoner releases. All the issues: the destruction of homes, the expansion of settlements, all of that. So it's not just the Israelis and Palestinians who are to blame for not achieving the peace that hopefully will bring us all to peace, but Israeli leaders are equally to blame for that. And I think it is because of that that we're facing the situation today where Mr. Netanyahu doesn't even recognize the

two-state solution anymore. And he says that he is going to expand Israeli sovereignty to the Golan Heights and consider them Israeli territory. This is, according to all international agreements since 1967— Mr. Dennis Ross is with us. He's been dealing with these issues extensively on those matters. The issue of sovereignty over occupied land in Palestine, or the Golan Heights, or any other Arab territory, is out of the question. And here is an out-of-the-box idea I give to the general: General, let the Israeli government say, we recognize a Palestinian state. That is out of the box. And we want that Palestinian state to choose negotiators for us under UN auspices of free elections and so on. That is out of the box. And then you can deal directly with the Palestinians and not consider the Saudis or the Americans or anything like that. But as long as Palestine remains an occupied territory of Israel, I don't think you're going to get anywhere in this situation.

SATLOFF: Just to pursue this for a second: to what extent do you believe that the Palestinians need Arab cover— Arab protection, Arab approval—to make whatever deep compromises they will need to make to match the compromises that Israel will need to make to achieve peace. To what extent is Arab cover essential to the Palestinians?

HRH FAISAL: As far as Saudi Arabia is concerned—and I can't speak for other countries—Saudi Arabia has said, whatever the Palestinians accept, we will accept. And I'm sure other countries have said similar things in the past. I'll give you an example: [A few years ago], an Arab League delegation came to the United States and talked to Secretary [of State John] Kerry on the issue of the Arab Peace Initiative, at which time the Arab states accepted the issue of a land swap on the Arab Peace Initiative—which had not been discussed before, particularly with the United States. And that was an indication of how far the Arab community at the time was willing to go in accepting that you need to negotiate on issues on land and other matters with Palestine. And so the Palestinians were there, and they, of course, need to accept that. So, yes, the Palestinians have—if you like, as you describe it—cover from the Arab world on these issues. But we need to have a serious negotiating partner from the Israeli side, and not someone who one day says, yes I accept the two-state solution, and the next day he says, no, I'm not going to accept it. That is not being serious.

SATLOFF: Yaakov?

GEN. AMIDROR: I don't want to go into all the details. I can argue about the facts—I don't agree with the facts, and what was the exact situation in which people said what they said and— I'm involved in these negotiations since '92, behind the curtains, and for a few years in front of the curtains. And I'm very familiar with all the details and, with all due respect, with some of the facts, I don't agree that these are the facts.

There is one crucial test. At the end of the process, after so many years, in the spring of 2014, after a long process that was handled by Secretary Kerry, traveling between Israel and the Palestinians—I don't know for how many hours—the Americans put a paper on the table. And they said, based on this paper, we want to invite both sides to negotiate. The prime minister was here. I was not then anymore head of the National Security Council. But I was familiar with the details.

HRH FAISAL: I thought you weren't going to go into details, General.

GEN. AMIDROR: No, no, of this event. I'm not going into the details of the history. I think that much of what you said is not correct, but I'm not going through these details. But this is very important, because that was after all these hours, and events, and chances, and processes, and governments, and presidents. The Americans put a paper on the table and said, we want to invite both sides—based on this paper. The prime minister looked at the paper and said, I don't like it. I have many reservations. But if this is an American paper, I'm coming. Then Abu Mazen was here. And they gave him the same paper—even a better paper. And Abu Mazen said, I have to consult my people in Ramallah. He is still consulting. So it is true that Abu Mazen is against terrorism. Yes, he understood that Palestinians are losing more than winning when they are using terrorism. Ok. But when it comes to real negotiations—when you have to compromise, not just to speak about it—there was one big test in which he didn't deliver. And that was the last time the Americans tried to convince both sides. The Israelis said, yes, but. Yes, we have some reservations, but we are coming. And the Palestinians didn't answer. So the expectations of some Arab leaders and states that Abu Mazen will deliver are behind his capacity. Maybe our optimistic view about the readiness of the Palestinians is too optimistic.

What I try to convince our colleagues in the Middle East is that if it didn't work in that way, maybe—I'm not sure, I don't know—maybe in another way, under an umbrella of cooperation between Israelis and Arab states, it will be easier for the Palestinians to negotiate. It will be, from their point of view—they will understand that they have more to lose if they are not taking part in the new cooperation in the Middle East. And, with all due respect, it is not connected in any way to the Golan Heights, which does not belong to the Palestinians, even if they—even Arafat agreed with that. It belongs to the nonexistent Syrian state. And I think that it would be a huge mistake to connect both.

HRH FAISAL: Well, I'm glad that you admit that it belongs to the Syrian state.

GEN. AMIDROR: It was, no question.

HRH FAISAL: Well, not according to your prime minister.

GEN. AMIDROR: No, according to—you cannot change the history.

SATLOFF: Gentlemen—

GEN. AMIDROR: With all due respect, I landed there with my paratroop battalion in '67, so I can guarantee you, that was Syrian soil. [Laughter]

SATLOFF: I'd like to ask—

GEN. AMIDROR: You know why I know? I fought Syrian soldiers.

SATLOFF: We'd figured that one out. I'd like to ask one more question on this theme and then move to a question about Syria, Daesh, et cetera. But before I leave this theme, I want to ask this, first to you, Your Highness: Your country has a special role as leader of the Muslim world, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. In a speech last year, you said, as an Islamic leader, the kingdom plays a special role in advocating for oppressed Muslims everywhere. In your view, is it reasonable for Israel, in a peace agreement, to ask the world to respect its unique status as the world's only Jewish state and the special role it may have on behalf of Jews everywhere? And, for you, Yaakov, precisely because of Saudi Arabia's special role in the Muslim world, do you think the Saudis have a unique role to play in contributing to the resolution of that thorny problem we call Jerusalem? Your Highness.

HRH FAISAL: Definitely, Saudi Arabia has a responsibility and a willingness to undertake whatever it can to support not just Muslims but, I would say, human beings throughout the world in their various issues of grievance and oppression and other matters like that. We worked for decolonization since the Second World War and continued to do so for Palestine, and also worked on humanitarian affairs through the UN humanitarian organizations and directly through the various programs, whether it is UNESCO, et cetera, et cetera. And, yes, Saudi Arabia has a feeling that it can contribute. We are not a perfect country. This is something that we as Saudis recognize in ourselves, and we feel we are still a work in progress. But we aspire to the higher ideals that we believe in, and hopefully, in that aspiration for those higher ideals, we can contribute to the welfare of humanity.

Whatever Israel chooses to call itself, that is for the Israelis to decide. It is not for me or, I think, others in the area to decide for Israel. States are states, and they can be recognized according to how they want to be recognized. But it is not for us to say, yes, we will accept that, or we will not accept that. Had Israel accepted the two-state solution according to the Arab Peace Initiative when it was first begun in 2002, these issues would have been included in the negotiations between the Israelis and the Arab world. I remember at that time there was a proposition made by a friend of mine who is an American and I'm sure you all know him—James [unclear]—who offered the idea that while Israel negotiated then with the Palestinians on issues dealing with the Palestinians, there could be a parallel track tied to the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations that can bring in the Arab world in negotiations with Israel on matters that deal with the wider Arab world–Israel connection. And when there is progress on the Palestinian issue, there would be progress on the wider regional Arab issues. That, as I said, unfortunately, did not come through. But it's on those issues that negotiations are important. And so you can't concede issues before you start the negotiations. Sit down at the negotiating table, engage with the other side, and then you can reach compromises—and there are going to be difficult compromises on everybody's side. All of us recognize that.

SATLOFF: Yaakov?

GEN. AMIDROR: I want to begin with a story which is not related to Jerusalem. A few months ago, I took a friend

of mine to visit a place near the Jordan River called Qasr el-Yahud, or Castle of the Jews. This is the area in which, according to the Christian tradition, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. And that was an amazing moment. On the other side of the river, there were soldiers from the Jordanian army, Muslims probably; on the Israeli side, IDF forces, most of them Jews probably. And in the middle between the two groups there, Filipinos on our side and people from France on the other side; you could hear them speaking. It's, you know, the Jordan River is a little creek, it's eight meters. [Laughter] And I thought to myself, this is the Middle East of today? On one side Muslims, on the other side Jews, and in the middle Catholic people are baptizing themselves. It's no place anywhere else in the Middle East where you can find it—with all due respect to all the others. And this is because we are ready to guarantee anyone free religious service whenever he wants—you know, with some restrictions when it comes to security. But other than that, Muslims, Christians, Bahai, whatever, you'll find in Israel. There is not anyone in the Middle East, from Gibraltar to Tehran, where this event can happen. So if at the end of the day, for reaching an agreement, some Saudis will have a job in the Temple Mount, I don't see it as a problem. But we have to remember, at the end of the day, it's a very important place for Palestinians and Muslims, but it is the holiest place for Jews. We don't have any substitute for the Temple Mount. We can't have one. And this is why it is so problematic to solve the problem, which is in a place which is the holiest for us and holy for others. But if a solution will include Saudis at the end, I don't see a problem.

HRH FAISAL: I don't see where that has anything to do with removing the Israeli occupation from Palestine. I think the Palestinian people are there and their humanitarian situation, by the recognition of even Israelis, is not the situation that it should be. There has to be a lifting of the occupation. The Palestinians have to have their own country. And as much as Israel has security, the Palestinians have to have security. And on those matters where political solutions can be reached, whether the Saudis or Jordanians or whoever, they can play a role in Jerusalem or something else. I don't see that that has any relevance to the issue at hand. All the United Nations resolutions, from 1967 up to the present, require a two-state solution, with negotiations between the parties concerned. And it

is from that route, I think, that we can reach the political solution of finding peace and having the vision of Israel and the Arab world, instead of sitting on the opposite sides of the Jordan, of being together.

There's a wonderful project—I don't know if you've seen it or not—that was proposed by the Rand Corporation of building a railway from the north of the West Bank to the south, connecting eventually into Palestine. If that project can be put in place, whereby it can connect with the various cities in the West Bank, across extension lines from there, and with joint Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, and with joint financing from the United States and world community, including the Arab world, that will go a long way to improve the lot of the Palestinians and give them a state and the land that they consider to be theirs—and give them hope that their children will have a future as Palestinians. But the way things are going now, nobody is doing anything on those issues. And it is a pity. Because as I said, we don't need Einsteinian genius nor divine revelation to know what the solution is: two states, mutual swaps, mutual recognition, and engaging with each other.

SATLOFF: Thank you. This discussion of peace might give the impression that the region isn't facing some of the most dangerous and threatening trends, which hover above all the countries in the area. So before I turn to three of my colleagues in the audience to ask their questions, I have to ask you gentlemen about Syria, Iraq, the Islamic State. What is more important to resolve: the terrible leadership of Bashar al-Assad, which has given such atrocities to the people of Syria, or the terrible Islamic State, which has given such atrocities, erased borders, and fed a refugee crisis throughout the world. How do we prioritize? What do you see as first comes first? Do we have to make this decision? Your Highness.

HRH FAISAL: Well, first of all, I wouldn't call it the Islamic State. My name for it is "Fahish." Those who know Arabic know what that means. Fahish means obscene, and it rhymes with Daesh. Daesh is not a denigration, by the way. It's the Arabic equivalent of ISIS. So those of you who think you are denigrating it by calling it Daesh, please, call it Fahish. [Laughter/applause] That is a more appropriate name for it than Daesh. And secondly, I blame all of us for what is happening in Syria today—because we're not doing what needs to be done. Bashar al-Assad is there, and

we know what he is—he's a butcher, he's a tyrant, he kills his people, he devastates them, and he makes them into refugees and so on.

And I told my European friends, when they started complaining about these hundreds of thousands of refugees going to Europe, take one refugee, and all these refugees will not leave Syria. Take Bashar al-Assad. [Applause] They did not, unfortunately. And I think the world community is responsible for that—us and the Americans and the Europeans and those on this side of the equation have not done enough to help the Syrian people defend themselves. All they sought was to defend themselves. They didn't seek tanks and airplanes and missiles and so on. No—they were seeking defensive weapons to strike the planes so that they don't come and bomb them; to hit the tanks so that they don't invade their villages and destroy their homes; and to stop the helicopters from dropping the barrel bombs and so on. But throughout the conflict, from 2011 until today, none of us has been willing or able to provide the necessary means for the Syrian people to defend themselves.

There is always someone who says, well, how can we be sure that these defensive weapons will not fall into the hands of the wrong people. Well, I say there are means of doing that. You can guarantee by selecting the people you train and making them responsible for these weapons. And, let's face it, you can even send people with them to make sure that they keep those weapons in hand.

ISIS is a symptom; it's not the main problem. The main problem is in Damascus, the main problem is in Baghdad, the main problem is in Sana, the main problem is in Tripoli. It's not ISIS; ISIS exists there because of the failing states in Syria and Iraq and Yemen and Tripoli [Libya]. Fix the capitals of not only politics and economics but, in the case of Syria, by providing the Free Syrian Army with the defensive weapons to prevent Bashar's butchers from killing the people; in Baghdad, by providing the inclusiveness of a government that recognizes the Sunnis as well as the Shiites and the Kurds as being part of the national makeup. And Tripoli [Libya] as well: by bringing the various parts of Tripoli together—the eastern part, the southern part, the western part, et cetera. That's how you deal with Daesh—because Daesh is like a cancer. It grows in bodies that are weak and have no ability to defend themselves. But if you provide the necessary means to build strength from inside these bodies, they will resist the cancer.

SATLOFF: General?

GEN. AMIDROR: One remark which is connecting these questions: I think there is a lot of exaggeration about the bad situation of the Palestinians. It's not that it is easy to live under occupation; I don't minimize it. But if the average Palestinian compared his situation with the situation of his brothers all around the Middle East, all around the Middle East, they are not in the worst position [Applause], and in many cases they are more secure than many Arabs in independent states. And I'm not minimizing the issue between us and the Palestinians. It is still a problem, and we have to solve it. And as the prime minister said, by having two states, one a Jewish one—the nation-state for the Jewish people, if you don't want to call it Jewish state—and the other one the Palestinian state. But don't exaggerate, and don't put it in the wrong situation related to the situation in the Middle East—with all due respect to the problems of the Palestinians. So if you look around the Middle East, you'll see much more problems for many more Arabs. More Arabs have been killed by Arabs than Palestinians by Jews. So put it in a real proportion, first.

Second, I don't think it's an Assad issue. If Assad first thing tomorrow morning will leave, the problem won't be solved. The blood between the 12 percent Alawites and the 85 percent Sunnis is not Assad's issue. It's much broader than that. And those who believe that Assad tomorrow morning is leaving to Tehran or to Moscow or to Washington are minimizing the problem. The whole Middle East today is shaped by strong friction between Shiites and Sunnis. It's not the person; it's not even the family; it's the whole sect. And why are all the Alawites behind Assad? Because they understand what I say. They understand that the minute that the other side will win, it's the end of the Alawites. It's not the end of Assad, or not only of Assad, it's the end of the Alawites. So it's more complicated than to take Assad out. It's to find a solution to the friction between the Kurds, the Sunnis—the Kurds are also Sunnis—the Alawites, the Shiites—in Iraq and in Syria. It's the same problem; it's not a personal issue. It's a huge mistake to focus on the person. He symbolizes and represents the attitudes and the interests of his own sect. The fact that he is a butcher—and how he treated people— Remember that we were recommended by the Arab Initiative to bring back the Golan Heights to this same person. So, you know, you cannot play both. You can't. It's the Middle East, you can play both, but I think

it's a mistake to think that it is Assad as a personal issue. It's much broader than that.

Israel's decision is clear. We are not taking part in this war between Shiites and Sunnis, Alawites and others in Syria or— Whenever it is going to our borders, we are determined to defend ourselves. And humanitarially, we are bringing into Israel everyone. It doesn't matter where he's from, if he comes to our border wounded or with severe problems—thousands of Syrians took shelter in our hospitals in Israel. We try to heal them and then they are going back to their homeland. So humanitarially, we are very open, but politically we decided not to take part in this war within the Arab world.

HRH FAISAL: On Palestine, and the fact the general says, let's not exaggerate, I remember I was in the United States in the mid-60s, when the civil rights movement took place. And people—not just in the South but even in the North in America at that time—were saying, Why are these black people demonstrating, and so on. Things are—don't exaggerate, they're living a good life. They can find jobs, things like that. So I think this is a comparable situation on the general's view of the welfare of the Palestinian people under the Israeli occupation. And I think it's the wrong thing to consider, because whatever is the case, nothing can substitute for the feeling of being who I am. I am a Saudi, and I have a nation, and I have a people, and I have a flag, and I have a history, and so on. And why do we deny that to the Palestinians? That is something that Israel has to reconcile itself to. And they went through that when they went through the issue of establishing Israel. They wanted a state for themselves. They wanted to have the Israeli state with the flag and the heroes and the history and so on. And they're denying that to the Palestinians.

And on Bashar al-Assad, I disagree with the general. It's not an issue of Alawite versus Sunni. Just look at the recent declaration by leaders of Alawite tribes, or clans, in which they disassociate themselves from Assad. And if you look at the composition of the opposition to Bashar al-Assad, it is composed of all the social makeup of Syria, including Alawites. And in the jails of Bashar al-Assad, there are proportionally probably as many Alawites in those jails as there are Sunnis and Christians and other compositions of Syrian society. So, yes, if you take Bashar alone out of that, maybe that is not going to change the situation. But it is not a Sunni-Shiite conflict in this case. It is the failure of the state structure itself that has led to not only the destruction

but also the emergence of groups like Fahish and Jabhat al-Nusra and so on.

SATLOFF: One of the best parts about tonight is, what we're succeeding in doing is defining an agenda for the long phase of Saudi-Israeli negotiations that will come in the future. I'd like now to turn to three journalists to briefly ask questions for our panelists, and then I'll have one closing, and we'll be able to conclude this fascinating exchange. First, from the *New York Times*, Peter Baker, here in front.

PETER BAKER: Thank you very much, Robert, I appreciate the opportunity to ask a question...I wonder if I could follow up on the Syria thing just one more time. General, from Israel's perspective, what is the best outcome in Syria at this point? What is the best realistic outcome at this point? And as you watch these negotiations play out with the Russians and Secretary Kerry and so forth, what is your message to the Americans about your priorities in your neighboring state? And for His Highness, I wonder if you could, on this question of Iran—last year, when Prime Minister Netanyahu was here and addressed Congress, he said that if the Iran deal was consummated, it would lead to a “farewell to arms control”—that was his phrase—and that there would be a nuclear arms race in the region. I wonder if you see any evidence that that has in fact begun? Is there an interest on the part of the Saudis at some point of a nuclear capacity, and if not, what would trigger that, given the current state of the Iran deal? Thank you.

SATLOFF: He wants to know if the Saudis are going to have a nuclear bomb. [Laughter] General, you get to go first.

GEN. AMIDROR: From our perspective, a democratic, free Syrian country is the best. We really believe that if there will be more democratic, free countries in the Middle East, the less the chances that we will have to go to other wars. But realistically, we know that this is not going to happen. And from our point of view, what's important is the security of Israel. We will not allow the building of Iranian bases in the Golan Heights. We will not let Hezbollah build its own launching pad in the Golan Heights. And we will continue to stop the transfer of game-changer weapon systems into the hands of Hezbollah, whatever will be the agreement about the future of Syria. And we are not going to give remarks or advice to the Americans or the

Russians on how to solve this problem, which I believe is more than Assad. It is true that there are some Assad supporters within the Sunni society, but you don't find Alawites within the opposition—because they understand the consequences, and because Israel is not ready to be engaged and we are not ready to pay for solving the problem. [We do not intend to take part in inter-Arab] wars. We are very narrow in our demands: not to put more risks toward Israel in any solution which will occur in Syria.

SATLOFF: Prince Turki, the impact of the Iran nuclear deal on nuclear proliferation more broadly, including the prospect of your own country pursuing that option.

HRH FAISAL: When King Salman visited with President Obama here, and when President Obama visited King Salman in Riyadh, both expressed acceptance of the fact that the present agreement between the P5+1 and Iran will prevent Iran from acquiring weapons for the duration of the agreement. I personally have not seen whether that duration is ten years or fifteen years. I hear different views, and I read about them in the press frequently. So, what's going to happen after that is open to question. And that's why I've always maintained that we, particularly, in the GCC states, the Gulf Cooperation Council, must consider all options, including the acquisition of nuclear weapons, to face whatever eventuality may come from Iran. And at the same time, while I was saying that, I've always been also saying that the best way to prevent the Middle East from going the route of a nuclear arms race is to have a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. We have seen that the NPT [Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty] review conferences from 2010 until 2015 have talked about a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. But nobody has said anything on the ground for that. And I have also mentioned that if such a zone is to be serious, it must be guaranteed by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, who will present to the zone the following guarantees: One guarantee is to provide technical and financial help to countries that want to develop peaceful uses for nuclear energy within the zone. And the other guarantee is to sanction any country within the zone that may want to develop, or seem to be developing, nuclear weapons—and those sanctions should include military sanctions by the five permanent members of the Security Council. Now, when I make that proposition—I remember I made it to a British ambassador when I first put it together a few

years back, and he turned to me and he said, Your Highness, that is a very elegant solution, but it's not going to work. Well, maybe it's not, but I think it should be put on the ground and put to the test. And the inclusion, in this view of having a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, of a formula for negotiations between the members of the zone on the issues bedeviling them, whether it is the Arab-Israeli dispute or Iran's ambitions or any other such zone-confined issues, can be part of the setting up of the zone and getting the five permanent members to guarantee that as well. These are things that are doable, in my view, if people are serious about them.

SATLOFF: Joyce Karam, the bureau chief of *al-Hayat*, an Arabic newspaper, here in Washington.

JOYCE KARAM: So I only have a question for Prince Turki. I'm from Lebanon, and I plan to spend the rest of my vacations there without getting into any legal trouble, so I will only be directing my question to Prince Turki. Your Highness, you're here at a very interesting time. Forty-eight hours ago, the Republican Party declared Donald Trump its presumptive nominee. It's interesting that Trump also thinks the Arab world is a bunch of "free riders." I'm curious what you make of the Trump candidacy and what is your message for the next administration, especially on the issue of rebalancing U.S.-GCC relations. Thank you.

HRH FAISAL: I've enjoyed, as a student, as I told you, in the '60s, and subsequently as a frequent visitor to the United States, the spectacle of the American elections. [Laughter] Truly, it is one of the most entertaining—sometimes uplifting and others the opposite—and I think this recent spectacle has been one of the most surprising, to say the least—not just for me, I think for you too. So I really haven't reached a judgment on Mr. Trump. For the life of me, I cannot believe that a country like the United States can afford to have someone as president who simply says, these people are not gonna be allowed to come in to the United States—or the other statements attributed to Mr. Trump. So it's up to you, it's not up to me. But I remember when I was ambassador here, I was invited by a group of members of Congress, new members of Congress, in 2006, to get to know each other, as it were. And at that time, I remember I told them that the world has become so small that any law, any statement, any resolution taken in the American Congress will have a direct

impact on me as a Saudi. And I followed that up by saying, because of that, I wish to have the right to vote in your elections. But I also followed that up by saying, when we have elections in Saudi Arabia, you can vote there too. [Laughter] So this is how closely connected we all are to each other, and I just hope that you, as American citizens, will make the right choice in November.

GEN. AMIDROR: I cannot answer a question that I wasn't asked, but—

SATLOFF: —but you're Israeli—

GEN. AMIDROR: ... I hope the Israeli government will declare immediately that we will work with any president which will be elected here in America.

SATLOFF: I do feel it incumbent as an American to say, Your Highness, that if you like the spectacle of our elections so much, you should try them sometime. Ehud Yaari, from Israel's Channel 2.

EHUD YAARI: A simple question: Saudi Arabia has regained sovereignty over the islands of Tiran and Sanafir, at the head of the Straits of Tiran, leading to the Gulf of Aqaba. And it is my understanding that Saudi Arabia has committed—and these islands, of course, are part of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty; there is an MFO, Multinational Force, presence there— And I understand that Saudi Arabia has committed itself to abide by the clauses of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty. And my question is, is Saudi Arabia now becoming a sort of third partner, silent partner, to the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt? Thank you.

HRH FAISAL: I can answer you only by repeating what our foreign minister said, which you yourself said: that we will abide by the conditions of the agreement between Egypt and Israel. I am not an official of the Saudi government, so I cannot tell you exactly where the Saudi government stands, but I repeat to you what the foreign minister has said. And on being a spectacle, it's better to be a watcher than a participant.

YAARI: I've heard the statement by Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir. But there are now technical issues which have diplomatic dimensions, such as: the presence of MFO troops—in this case, Americans—on Tiran island will necessitate some, maybe indirect, coordination between the Saudi authorities and Israel as to their deployment and operation. Thank you.

HRH FAISAL: I wish I could answer that, but I'm not in a position, because I'm not an official and I don't know what the intricacies are. But just a reflection on that: I read in the papers that the United States wants to withdraw its forces from the Sinai, so I'm sure that will be a point of discussion with everybody.

SATLOFF: Well, friends, we've come to the close of tonight's program. I just want to ask one final question of our guests. I was deciding whether to begin with this or to end with this, which is to talk about the significance of your session tonight and where we go from here between the two of you and between informal discussions of representatives of your countries. Recognizing the importance of the overall peace process, recognizing the differences that separate you, what's the next step? Can we see the two of you meet more regularly? Can we imagine nongovernmental officials from your two countries meeting regularly? Is this something that both of you would welcome in the pursuit of the common objectives that you both outlined tonight, despite the differences on many of the specifics? General?

GEN. AMIDROR: About me—an hour from now, I am going to Princeton, so this is the next stage. About Israel-Saudi dialogue, more seriously, on many occasions Israelis and Saudis meet each other in informal meetings. And in Israel it's very common. It's an issue of our DNA to try to reach as many Arab leaders as possible all around the world and to try to find common language and common interests and contribute to the relations between us and our neighbors, either Palestinians or others. I'm sure that it is not the only occasion in which Israelis and Saudis meet each other. And in Israel, it's not a problem. As we look around us and see the Arab countries which share so many interests with us, we understand why it is so important for Israelis to speak and to exchange views with and to try to convince Arab people around us. So I think it's very important that someone like Prince Turki, who is very high in Saudi Arabia's hierarchy, in the past and I don't know about the future— But from the Israeli point of view, we are ready to meet all over the world whenever there is an opportunity. So from the Israeli point of view, the fact that Prince Turki's here, this is very significant; the fact that I'm here, it's not significant. It's very clear for us the fact that we should meet any

Arab leader on any occasion that they are ready to speak with us. And I hope that we will find more ways to do it, because I really believe that there is no substitute for these open discussions between people from both sides. It doesn't always lead to an agreement, but it always leads to better understanding of the other side. And this is very important today in the crumbling Middle East.

HRH FAISAL: We're both exes, so don't expect too much from this. Already, before I came here, lots of tweeting is going on in our part of the world about this encounter—people saying that this is Saudi recognition of Israel, this is going to be the way forward, diplomatic relations, normalization of relations, et cetera, et cetera. And none of that is going to happen. It's unfortunate, but it's true. My highest wish—and I wish I could do it tomorrow—is to go and pray in the mosque in Jerusalem.

GEN. AMIDROR: You are more than welcome.

HRH FAISAL: I know—from your point of view. But unfortunately, there has to be an accommodation on the issue of the two-state solution before that can happen. And, you know, it's something that hurts but at the same time is something that is undoable for me. And I'm afraid it's not going to happen in my lifetime. My hope is that in my children's lifetime, and their grandchildren's time, we will have overcome these differences and become what I have expressed before: people who have reached peace and can work together for the betterment of humanity. So this is how it stands today: I will meet with the general again in, I'm sure, some other places, as I have met before. And I remember the first year I went to Davos was 2003. I had just been appointed ambassador to the United Kingdom. And at the official dinner there, across the table from me, was sitting Shimon Peres. He was still president of Israel at the time. And he addressed me saying, Your Highness, I would like to meet with you. And he said, we can meet in a room, nobody will know about it, and, you know, feel free to do that. I said, Mr. President, if I am going to meet with you, I'm going to meet with you in public. I'm not going to go into a secret room to meet with you. But you have to give me the opportunity to do that. And I think the only opportunity that someone like me, or others, who may wish to have the opportunity to go to these places in historic Palestine and present-day Israel is to have peace with the Israeli

country. And, please, you can do a lot about that from here. Just keep pushing—pushing us; not only the Arabs but also the Israelis.

There is an expression that I read in your newspapers about tough love. And I think that's what you need to do—not just with the Israelis, give us some of that love too. So

push us. Don't let us sit on our backsides and allow for this situation to continue. It's not healthy for either of us.

SATLOFF: Ladies and gentleman, please join me in thanking His Royal Highness Prince Turki al-Faisal and General Yaakov Amidror for this fascinating discussion tonight.

