CAN THE PEACE PROCESS BE SAVED?
FALLOUT FROM THE ISRAELI RAID AND
PROSPECTS FOR ABBAS’ VISIT TO WASHINGTON

MONDAY, JUNE 7, 2010
9:30 – 11:00 A.M.
WASHINGTON, D.C.

WELCOME/MODERATOR:
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SPEAKERS:
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Transcript by Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.
NATHAN BROWN: Good morning. If everybody could have a seat or grab a last cup of coffee and scone, we'll get started in just 30 seconds.

(Pause.)

[0:01:40]

Good morning. First, if I could ask people to turn off their cell phones, everybody else would appreciate it. I've set a model course here. Second, good morning and welcome to the Carnegie Endowment. Welcome to those people here. And we should also welcome CSPAN and their audience as well. They're covering this.

We're here to have a discussion with Michele Dunne, Taghreed El-Khodary and Henri Barkey on the peace process and recent regional developments. The specific occasion is a new paper that Michele has just written, which is available here, on suggesting a reorientation of American policy. But of course, we also are speaking in light of very recent events involving not simply United States and Israel and the Palestinians but also Turkey and several other regional actors.

So we've got a rich set of speakers today. We will go in a slightly different order than the bios in front of you. We will first hear from Taghreed El-Khodary, second from Michele Dunne and third from Henri Barkey. Let me introduce them now very briefly. You have their biographies in front of you so I will be very brief.

[0:03:01]

Taghreed is joining us here at Carnegie for a few months. She's a New York Times correspondent in Gaza; she's also worked for the International Crisis Group. While serving here as a visiting scholar at the Middle East Program at Carnegie, she is a Heinrich Böll fellow as well, so we should acknowledge Böll Foundation for making her visit here possible. And it couldn’t have come at a better time to inform discussions here in Washington.

The second speaker is Michele Dunne. Michele is a senior associate here; editor of the Arab Reform Bulletin. Her interest in American policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict goes back quite some time – at least a decade and a half, I think – when she was serving in the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem.

Our third speaker is Henri Barkey, who has the unique position – here a few years ago at Carnegie, we invented the category of nonresident associate, which I serve. Henri, as I understand, is the first resident-nonresident associate; that is to say, he is a nonresident associate who has an office here. And as you can tell from actually just the four lines here, he wears many other hats as well, so I think he must be a resident-nonresident in many different institutions; a permanent position at Lehigh University.

So we will go in the order that I just mentioned: First Taghreed then Michele and then Henri.

TAGHREED EL-KHODARY: Thank you so much for coming. Okay, so I would say that one element to bear in mind when it comes to the flotilla attack is the use of violence. And the use of violence has brought Gaza to the surface. It took a war for Gaza to be in the news and to have attention, and this time, it’s the violence. And this time, by Israel, of course – again, of course. And it brought Gaza into the surface.

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I’ve been here for a month now and I’ve been talking to different groups and of course on the impact of the siege on Gaza. And the reaction was always, but the policy of the siege is working and the policy is – it’s working to the direction of weakening Hamas, putting pressure on Hamas; Hamas lacks cash. That’s what I heard: Hamas is losing popularity.

To some extent, that was right. To some extent, Hamas lacked the cash. But they found ways out and they found ways out through coming out with revenues on the ground and also investing on real estate and on the tunnels.

And at the same time, the popularity of Hamas has been, of course, affected before, of course, the flotilla attack. Like, it has been affected when it comes to only the silent majority because we have the Fatah supporters; they’re still Fatah supporters. And the Hamas supporters are still there.

But when it comes to the silent majority, it’s divided. There is a segment within the silent majority that believes in Hamas; that still Hamas is not given the chance; the world is punishing Hamas.

And then, another segment that is sick of Hamas and they believe that Hamas cannot govern; the world is not accepting Hamas to govern, therefore why don’t they let go of government and go back to their work as a resistance movement.

And another segment within that silent majority that believes that way – they’re both sick of Fatah and Hamas. But the sad part for them, there is no alternative and the impact of the siege has not encouraged an alternative on the ground on Gaza.

And right now, the thing is that the policymakers tend to ignore that Hamas is in control of Gaza, period. Hamas has managed to come out with a security establishment that is very strong that will make them able to play with that card that is Gaza; that they are in control of Gaza.

So the deadly flotilla attack came out and it’s like kind of a boost for Hamas. The morale is high when you talk to the leaders this week if you compare – like, I talk to them from time to time. So two weeks ago, they were like, there was no way out for them, but still they say, we are in control of Gaza; we’ll never let that go; something will happen. And when you talk to them in person, they will say – you talk to them politics and you tell them, what’s the way out for you? And they will always say, God is with us.

And this time, flotilla came. And for them, it’s like, didn’t we tell you? On the phone, like, today, it’s like, God is with us. And that came from God, according to them, but it’s from Israel and it was really a free present from Israel to Hamas. The morale, really, it’s unbelievable how they feel very powerful and back to the circle again.

So let me talk about the situation on the ground in Gaza. The current policy – that is, the siege – is intentionally producing another reality; producing two entities. That is the West Bank by itself and that is Gaza.

And if we talk about the West Bank, okay, the American administration is intentionally strengthening Salaam Fayyad towards coming out with the economy, freedom of movement for the people in the West – for Palestinians living in the West Bank; education opportunities, access.
And then I was talking to someone who left Gaza to the West Bank and he’s like, you cannot believe it; you have cement everywhere in the West Bank. And the prices are really unbelievable in comparison to Gaza because in Gaza, they get the cement but it’s through the tunnels but it’s very, very expensive. So the entity in the West Bank is completely different from Gaza.

What the international community, what the American administration is producing by its support to this policy another reality that is really dark. I’ve been a witness of Gaza history and it’s unbelievable how you can observe how the middle class is vanishing completely due to this policy.

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Not only the middle class; it’s like, you have – the education is going down. Like, you have – (inaudible) – of course, which is different. It’s unbelievable how people are – tend to forget. The international community tends to forget that there are governmental schools in Gaza.

And these governmental schools, now, of course, they go under the government of Hamas, therefore you don’t support them. But what are you producing? It’s also like people are – why this class of population to pay the price? Why to create the division again when it comes even to education?

The sad part when it comes to education, you have the PA in Ramallah asking the employees – the governmental employees in Gaza to stay home. And it was very shocking that the PA asked the teachers in Gaza to stay home and not to go to schools in order to put pressure on Hamas in order for Hamas to be weakened and to fail in governance.

But to fill the gap, Hamas came out with an idea that helped them also by employing their own supporters as teachers. But the sad part, who’s paying the price? The students because these teachers are not qualified. They’re very young and newly graduate from Islamic university; they don’t have a background in education; they don’t have the experience the PA teachers used to have. And the sad part, PA teachers are paid to stay home.

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So in a way, this policy is producing a generation that is extremely dependent – this sector – the governmental employees haven’t worked. Whether they’re working in the health or education sector or you name it, they are asked to stay home and being paid by the donors. And it’s really – it doesn’t make sense. You are intentionally producing a population that is extremely dependent, that is not creative anymore. They are staying home for three years now.

So when it comes to the health also, it’s – of course, Hamas appointed people, of course, but they are not that qualified but people are so happy because they can observe that there is no corruption within the health sector; that the medicine is right there. There is no black market when it comes to the health, as it used to be under Fatah.

But at the same time, due to the closure, many people who are in need for medical treatment are not allowed to leave. Many – like, hundreds of people – are really, like, in pain. And I don’t know the exact number but a number died due to not being able to get treatment aboard. They used to go through Egypt for treatment in Egypt or Jordan or in Israel or the West Bank. Now, it’s so hard for many to go through these borders and it’s really a miracle to make it unless you have access. The PA can help somehow in some cases.
When it comes to the economy, the formal economy has vanished completely. And then the informal economy is emerging. That is the tunnels. And they are really, like, playing a role in keeping the situation alive in Gaza. And with the tunnels, I'm not talking about humanitarian. I'm talking about that, through the tunnels, people came out with creative ways to activate the private sector. Like, the young people are investing a lot.

But the tunnels have brought something that is a new class. You know, you have the middle class vanish completely and then a new class that has emerged and that is the Hamas. So the elite of the place now are the Hamas or any businessman that is affiliated with Hamas somehow.

When it comes to the young generation, no future. And that is the dark side of the siege, the effect of the siege. Because what’s happening, like if you heard the news, from time to time, you hear about small radical groups emerging in Gaza, and Hamas is taking control by putting them in jail or by – last summer, they killed the leader of one of the groups that is extreme. And this is what’s happening.

If you leave Gaza as it is and if the policy to continue as it is, what do you expect? Where the young generation to go? So some of them can afford to study in schools but the rest will be out of school. And those who studied or graduated from universities in Gaza, they will have no job. So where to go as the young?

Some young need to feel powerful and they go to these small groups or they join Hamas, if they agree with Hamas. If they don’t agree with Hamas, they go to groups that – to revenge Hamas. But it’s really a dark reality for the young generation because I think they are paying heavily.

When it comes to Fatah, there is no Fatah leadership in Gaza. The supporters are still there but all Fatah leaders escaped Gaza before the civil war. So you have Fatah supporters but there is an absence of leadership, so you cannot count on something when it comes to Fatah on the ground.

The question here, who is going to employ the flotilla attack to their advantage? If we talk about the U.S. administration, can they push Israel so hard to come out with a peace agreement – to go back into negotiation and to turn it into a reality? Or the U.S. to fail and then what will be the outcome for the region for everyone that Israel is above the law?

And then, when it comes to Israel, I would say, is Israel still interested in the vision of pushing Gaza into Egypt because there is this line within the hard line in Israel that is not with the two-state solution, that is happy with the current situation. West Bank by itself; Hamas to be pushed to Egypt. Or maybe this is wishful thinking but I was thinking Israel needs to improve its image internationally and maybe they will go ahead and offer something to Abu Mazen when it comes to a Palestinian state. So that can maybe do something to the image of Israel.

When it comes to Fatah, the question, what will he be offered this week during his visit? If he’s offered nothing, it’s the end of Abu Mazen as a leader. Like, he has nothing to offer. And bear in mind, Fatah was the party that promised its people for a Palestinian state. It wasn’t Hamas. Hamas never promised its people that, I will get you the Palestinian state through negotiations.

Hamas has been always critical of negotiations. They always say, negotiations for the sake of negotiations, and that is Fatah. And that’s the mindset of Hamas. And if Hamas promised people all the time something, it’s this
sentence that, we will never surrender. And that’s the only thing they promise their people. But they’ve never promised them for a Palestinian state through negotiations, so they will end up losing nothing with the failure.

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The question also when it comes to Hamas, how Hamas to employ the flotilla attack to its advantage once the flotilla attack to die in the news, the question what will be Hamas doing on the ground and maybe they will be motivated to increase the pressure on Egypt; to keep that crossing – Rafah Crossing open.

And also they will go – and there was someone within Hamas who said that we may aim for peaceful demonstrations at Erez Checkpoint and also at Rafah. The question that will really, of course, affect Egypt because Egypt has opened a crossing not as a political offer to Hamas. It was to ease the pressure because they didn’t want the opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood, to invest on that. So immediately, they opened and I think it was a good idea, but what if they close the border next week? What will Hamas do?

When it comes to Salam Fayyad, the creation of the reality in the West Bank is really – I think it’s working. But the weakness when it comes to Salam Fayyad, he has no political party behind him. And there is a division within Fatah. There are those who are not happy with Salam Fayyad, and that can hinder his option towards creating a different reality.

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Also, the weakness when it comes to this option is, how can you exclude Gaza from that? Intentionally excluding Gaza to put pressure on Hamas, that is the idea. But at the same time, how can you – if you think in the long-term, how can you implement the peace process? Whatever agreement you will come out, if you are creating two entities, is the goal to create a Palestinian state and only in the West Bank? What about Gaza? At the end, you will need to engage Gaza. But by leaving Gaza for a long time, you are contributing to create a different reality. And I think it will be hard to deal with or to engage.

Last thing I would like to add is what’s happening – like, who is in crisis right now? Of course, the American administration is, I would say, in a crisis when it comes to this. Also, Israel and Fatah and also Salam Fayyad. But also Hamas – where are they going from here?

But when it comes to Arab countries, also you have Turkey who has emerged as a non-Arab country that is pro-Palestinian; that is pro-injustice. And that has embarrassed all the Arab countries, and I mean here Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and of course others. And they are all viewed as parties that aim for the siege. And that is the sad reality. So it’s obvious for the children on the ground that all these parties are with the siege. They contributed to that.

If we want to discuss the way out, I think one must consider the moral responsibility towards the young generation. What will be the outcome? And it’s very important to bear in mind that the failure of the peace process has led to the emergence of Hamas. And I was really – I think education, focusing on the young generation is something, but also reconciliation because it’s a national demand.

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The U.S. administration must give the green light not only to Egypt to go ahead with the reconciliation talks but also to Fatah, to Abu Mazen – go ahead with it because it’s important. If you in the future want to implement a peace process, you need one party, one entity, not two entities.

Really, I think I will also talk about the private sector and how it’s important. If the international community, if Israel, if the U.S. administration to allow, for example, construction material in Gaza, immediately, one-third of the population will be working. So one-third of the population will be busy, will have a goal on daily basis.

So I will stop here. I’m sorry; maybe I was a little.

MR. BROWN: Thank you very much. You had two constructive suggestions at the end about national reconciliation and about sort of reviving the Gaza economy. Until that point, what I was hearing was everybody is in crisis: Israel, Hamas, Salam Fayyad, Arab states and so on. But if everybody is in crisis, Michele, can you help us get out? (Chuckles.)

MICHELE DUNNE: Sure, Nathan, no problem. Good morning. Well, I think that what Taghreed said leads directly into what I wanted to say. I want to focus a little bit more on U.S. policy and a little bit more on a specific area that I think the United States needs to address.

Of course, if we look at what the United States wants to do to promote the chances of a two-state solution, there are a lot of different areas, there are a number of different things. But I’m going to focus today on the issue of the Palestinian situation and Palestinian politics. And that’s what this paper that you had on your chairs is about.

Now, everyone is now saying the situation in Gaza is unsustainable. I mean, the U.S. administration and so forth is saying that. But I think most of that talk focuses on the humanitarian situation and the economic situation. I want to speak a little bit more about the political situation because I also think that the approach the United States has been taking to the internal Palestinian political situation is not sustainable and that this recent crisis – I think that was clear even before this flotilla crisis but it just highlights it all the more.

So I quite agree with Taghreed that if the United States really does want to foster a two-state solution and, of course, the creation of an independent Palestinian state as part of a two-state solution, living in peace side by side with Israel, has been U.S. policy explicitly since 2002, and of course, in a way, implicitly long before that.

I think this is going to require, as Taghreed said, the United States being more open to Palestinian – to reconciliation between Palestinian factions and a resumption of Palestinian internal politics – electoral politics.

So what are the reasons behind this? First of all, I think Taghreed illustrated amply the failure of this strategy of kind of starving Hamas out of existence or out of relevance. She also hinted at the kind of lack of a mandate that President Abbas now faces as head of the Palestinian authority based in Ramallah, his inability to make concessions to negotiate effectively, which is due partly to the weakness of his base of support.

As you know, his electoral mandate has long run out and the Palestinian Authority is effectively in control of only a small part of the West Bank. Let’s not forget that. It’s not as though they’re controlling the entire West Bank; only Area A of the West Bank and, of course, none of Gaza.
And we see that it’s been very difficult for President Abbas to be flexible to back down from any demands that he might have made regarding conditions for direct negotiations for Israel. And we see that he has had to resort to the Arab League for permission even to participate in proximity talks. And all these, of course, are indications of his weakness.

Also, the reform program presented by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad for the West Bank I think is a laudable program. I appreciate the can-do spirit of the program and I think the contents of the program are very good but I also think it is an illusion to think that this program can really be carried out without internal Palestinian politics.

So what do I mean by this? As you know, the Palestinian Legislative Council has not met in several years – certainly since the Hamas takeover of Gaza in 2007. Therefore, the Palestinian Authority has no ability to make laws. All they can do is pass laws by presidential decree by President Abbas. Even that now is questionable as he is past his electoral mandate.

Nathan Brown is the expert on this. (Chuckles.) He can add some thoughts to this if he would like to.

But the point is that, how can the Palestinian Authority really be building the institutions of a future Palestinian state if it can’t pass laws, if it can’t legislative, if it has to do everything by decree? And all of those decrees, of course, are very vulnerable to being overturned if and when the Palestinian Legislative Council does meet again.

And of course, the PLC cannot meet until Fatah and Hamas reconcile. I mean, they have for some time, I think, had enough members out of Israeli prisons to meet. It’s really the disagreement between Fatah and Hamas that keeps them from meeting at this point.

This paper spends a bit of time tracing sort of 20 years of U.S. policy on Palestinian politics. And of course, the episode after the 2006 elections and how the United States treated the Palestinian Authority headed by Hamas after those elections, that’s very well-known. But I try in the paper to go into the period much before that because I really think this goes back at least 20 years through the 1990s that the United States has sought at various times to ignore, frustrate, postpone or manipulate Palestinian internal politics.

Now, I am certainly not saying that all of the problems in Palestinian politics are the fault of the United States. Certainly, Palestinians themselves bear plenty of the blame. Israel and other outside actors have also been very much at work in manipulating Palestinian internal politics.

But since I’m an American scholar and I want to focus on U.S. policy, I focus here in sort of tracing, from the early 1990s to the present, many of the steps that I think the United States have taken that have been very damaging in terms of building – helping to encourage the creation of Palestinian institutions that can serve as the basis for a state.

And I wanted to do that because obviously I want to recommend a change. I want to recommend a different U.S. approach and I thought it was important to show how the approach that we’ve been taking repeatedly has been damaging.
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So what do I want to recommend that we do differently? First of all, I’m in favor of the United States pursuing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations – pursuing direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations – but I also think we really should do what we can to encourage serious institution-building for a Palestinian state.

And what I mean by that is, as I said, supporting the resumption of Palestinian politics, moving away from this approach that the U.S. has long taken, and that I, as a former U.S. diplomat, saw this from the inside and was part of this; that we consistently were always after a breakthrough in negotiations, the thing of the moment that we hope is right around the corner, and because of that, we don’t want inconvenient Palestinian politics to get in the way. And so we need to get away, as I said, from this approach of constantly postponing or manipulating political outcomes in order to serve short-term needs of the negotiating process.

I do agree with Taghreed that we should be signaling support for reconciliation. I’m not in favor of the United States engaging Hamas directly especially while that organization is still – explicitly espouses armed struggle against Israel. So I’m not really – I think there could be a lot of negative results of the United States engaging Hamas directly. But I do think we should get out of the way of internal Palestinian negotiations.

As Taghreed said, we should be removing the excuse that I think we’re currently providing for Fatah to remain isolated, to remain extremely dependent on U.S. and European support in all ways – diplomatic, financial, et cetera – and to work out the problems inside the Palestinian house, which will probably mean working out some kind of a power-sharing arrangement.

It might or not be something full enough to be called reconciliation. But obviously, we’ve seen several versions of this, most recently the Egyptian draft agreement that was on the table last fall and that the United States discouraged. So they would probably work out some kind of an internal power-sharing arrangement and pave the way for new Palestinian elections.

That will mean, I think, that the United States has to think about and has to discuss with Israel and also our quartet partners how we could work with and give assistance to a Palestinian Authority that might include Hamas in some capacity. There are a number of different models. We saw one with the Mecca agreement from several years ago that we rejected. And I think that the conditions that we have set through the quartet and through U.S. legislation and so forth are probably going to need to be simplified in order to be workable.

But I do think it’s realistic that we could say that we would work with a Palestinian Authority that would continue to prevent violence as the current Palestinian Authority in the West Bank is doing and also that would allow the PLO, which is the negotiating party, to negotiate with Israel. And I do think those are conditions that could be realistic and could come out of some sort of a Fatah-Hamas modus vivendi.

MR. BROWN: Thank you very much, Michele, and let me remind people here that there is a full paper that’s available here that I got to see a sneak preview of and I very much commend it to your attention.
Henri, we heard Taghreed say that Hamas was expecting an act of God, and so the question for you, I guess, is, is Turkish foreign policy a form of divine intervention? (Laughter.) You can recast the question if you need to. (Laughter.)

HENRI BARKEY: And what would happen if I were to say yes? (Laughter.) Good morning, everybody, and thank you for coming on a Monday morning. What I will do is try to focus on the Turkish-Israeli and Turkish-American relations and then wind this into what this means in terms of the peace process and also in terms of the future of relations in the region.

What I would like to do is basically say, first of all, that Turkish-Israeli relations were really on their way to a deep freeze but now, after the flotilla crisis, I think they have been transformed radically and they have now become essentially relations between two hostile countries.

And when you look at the rhetoric especially coming from Turkey and the way the Turkish press has reacted, you would think that Turkey has replaced, I don’t know, Greece and all of Turkish former enemies – I’m sorry, Israel has replaced – has become the new enemy.

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So is this really new, and what really is going on? What I would argue, that the Turkish approach to Israel, in particular, has been changing in recent years. And usually, people have ascribed this to the 2008-2009 Gaza war.

If you remember, at the time, the Turks were conducting secret negotiations between the Israelis and the Syrians. Ehud Olmert was in Ankara. He comes back. Four days later, he launches an operation in Gaza. And for everyone who had put a great deal of stake in those secret negotiations, this was a real insult, a slap in the face. It became really personal for him, and we saw the ramifications of that with the famous Davos incident between him and Shimon Peres.

And so this is what people ascribe the changes to. But I would argue that actually this is – it’s more complex than this. That in fact, there’s a larger game at hand. And the larger game is that Turkey has decided to become a very important international player.

It wants, in the words of its minister of foreign affairs, Davutoglu, it wants to be a “center of power.” It wants to use its strategic location, its economic prowess. It is the 17th largest economy in the world. It is also a very dynamic economy. Turkish goods are being sought after everywhere especially in the region – in the wider Middle East, in the Balkans, et cetera.

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And also use historical and cultural connection. And the historical connection is obviously the fact that Turkey is the inheritor of the Ottoman Empire and it sees that inheritance essentially as a positive one. And also, the cultural connection: i.e., the fact that Turkey is a Muslim country and it is also a Muslim country that is part of the West, is a member of NATO, is a candidate country for the European Union.

So they wanted to use these attributes to make Turkey far more important internationally. And it is true that in the past when you looked at Turkey foreign policy, it also used to punch way, way up below its weight. And the AKP, the governing party, has always wanted to change this. And it goes back to AKP’s antecedence. This is not
something new that is specific to AKP but AKP politicians who participated in other governments always had these ideas.

But the one unstated factor here is also that the AKP sees that the United States is weak – at least in the region, is much weaker. That in fact, when you look at the Syrian-Israeli negotiations that they started, those were in large measure the result of the vacuum that was created by the Bush administration following the Iraq invasion and the [38:46] that it created in the region, so the Turks essentially stepped into that void.

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But with the Gaza operation – I should say, following the Gaza operation and the collapse of the Syrian-Israeli negotiations, the Turks essentially changes tactics. Now, in the meantime, we also saw they had already built some of the, shall we say, steps to become more influential in the region.

I mean, they’ve opened – they’ve aggressively courted regional countries; they’ve aggressively courted countries all over the world, not just in the Middle East and the Caucasus and Balkans. They are members of the U.N. Security Council for the first time in 60 years. They’re a member of the G-20. One can go down the list of all the, shall we say, diplomatic chits they have accumulated over the years, which makes them, obviously, far more effective as a power.

But I actually think that what really happened after the Gaza war was that Erdogan decided – especially after the Davos incident when it resonated so positively for him both in the region and at home – that he was going to use, in many ways, Israel as his, if you want, whipping boy to push for his – push Turkey’s image and push the new foreign policy.

And if you look at almost every foreign policy speech he has given – I shouldn’t say almost; every single foreign policy speech he has given – he has harped on Gaza and harped on – and has been really critical of Israel, in a way in which no other – as Taghreed said earlier – no other Arab leader has done.

And in the process, he has essentially – he’s been very resourceful – and he has appropriated the most important Arab cause in this – the Palestinian issue. And as Taghreed said, he puts all the other countries to shame. And in the last two years, he has done more, in terms of isolating Israel internationally, than all the other Arab leaders put together. So in that sense, the reaction to him – I mean, he’s clearly the most popular leader in the Middle East today, but he also has done something else, which we tend to lose track of.

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As the discussions on Iran heated up – the sanctions, whether or not Iran is cheating, et cetera – Turkey has stepped, again, into the breach, this time culminating, of course, with the Brazilian-Turkish-Iranian deal of two weeks ago. But in reality, again, if you look at the rhetoric – again, at his foreign policy speeches and what they have been saying – it is that Iran is not the problem. The Iran nuclear program is not a problem because the Iranians have assured them and President Ahmadinejad has told Erdogan that the Iranian nuclear program is peaceful. And therefore, it is peaceful.

So the problem is not Iran; the problem is Israel. And it is Israel’s nuclear weapons. And he has really pushed on this over and over. But at the same time, it’s not just rhetoric. Both on the NPT review conference and also on the nuclear summit that President Obama held in April, this issue has come up and it has now – this is
another issue that he has, to some extent, used from the Egyptians, who used to be the ones – who used to be on the forefront of this issue.

So to Erdogan, the issue is the fact that Israel has nuclear weapons, and in that sense, obfuscating the debate that’s going on in terms of the sanctions, whether or not Iran, as a member of NPT, is cheating or not. But Israeli nukes may be a problem in the region, admittedly. I mean, the Egyptians have been saying this for a long time. But Israel is not the only country with nuclear weapons.

In fact, you have India and Pakistan. Israel, India and Pakistan are not members of NPT. On top of this, India and Pakistan not only have nuclear weapons; they’ve tested them and they’ve deployed them, which is something that the Israelis have not done. So why focus only on Israel? Why not also say, well, the Pakistanis and the Indians should also get rid of the nuclear weapon? So you see, now, a complete shift in Turkish policy on this issue.

So where does this take us in terms of the United States and Turkey? But before I say that, it is also very important to understand the other dimension of Turkish foreign policy, and that is its domestic politics – the domestic dimension of Turkish foreign policy. Yes, the major aim of the government is to make Turkey a power of consequence. They really have, some people say exaggerated, but they have this vision that by 2023, they’ll be one of the top 10 economic powers in the world.

And again, in the words of Davutoglu, what they want to do is, they want to determine the order in the Middle East. So they want to be the power par excellence in the Middle East. So insofar as they’ve taken the Palestinian cause, and now are supporting the Iranians, it’s a very interesting combination because they’re standing up to the Israelis; they’re standing up to the United States on the Iranian issue, but they’re becoming, if you want, the dominant Sunni power in the region, the Sunni power that talks to everybody – maybe not so much the Israelis these days because of the flotilla crisis – but still, protects the region against foreign influences.

But it is also important to understand domestic politics. For the first time in recent Turkish politics, except for the Cyprus crisis of 1974, foreign policy is a domestic issue. Domestic politics plays very, very well. And in this particular case, the flotilla crisis plays even better. I mean, it is much bigger than the Davos issue. And there is no question that the AKP is going to use this and is going to run very much, in the coming elections – there are elections due by July 2011.

But the AKP had already gone into election mode some three months ago, when you talk to AKP MPs. They were all telling me that they had been given the go-ahead to start campaigning for the 2011 elections. So this is definitely part of it. And it’s playing exceedingly well in Turkey. There’s almost no criticism of the government policy in Turkey, but I’ll come back to that, maybe, in the question-and-answer periods.

But there are two other aspects of this that we tend to, also, not see. One is, it is a major diversion from the Kurdish problem in Turkey. I mean, one thing that is not being – for example, this weekend, there was an enormous demonstration in the southeast, where, even before the demonstrators got on, they were met by security forces in a
very violent way with pepper gas. MPs who went to talk to the security forces were not even allowed to come near and they were immediately pepper-sprayed.

There are hundreds and hundreds of Kurdish activists being jailed, people being – I mean, so there is a serious crisis in Turkey, which, for the government which had a Kurdish opening, and which had announced a Kurdish opening, but backtracked because of reaction in some Turkish quarters, this is a very convenient – it helps them. I’m not saying they created this crisis because of the Kurdish question, but it definitely helps them.

But finally, there’s – in terms of domestic politics, given how popular AKP is now and how it’s riding, we also – there was a very serious clash potentially looming between the AKP and the constitutional court. I don’t see how the constitutional court, which had been considering, maybe, to ban the party or ban some of its politicians – they tried this in 2007 and ’08; it backfired – but there were serious talk that this may be in the offing again, especially before the new elections.

There’s also a referendum for constitutional changes that AKP is pushing. So there’s no way that the constitutional court will be able to stand up to the AKP. So in a way, this also helps the AKP to solidify its position at home. So it’s a win-win for them at every level, except – and the exception is, I think, the United States.

[48:11]

I am sometimes amused, when I read commentaries that, you know, Turkey is showing independence from the United States; Turkey is finally standing up to the United States, so on and so forth. I mean, this is so divorced from reality, one, because the Turks have always been a prickly customer for us, and they have never easily – they have never sat down or stood up and saluted whenever we’ve asked them something. It’s always been, actually, quite hard.

I mean, Turkish-American diplomacy over issues that were core to the Turks – the Kurds, democracy, Greece, Cyprus and Iraq – over Iraq, they changed their policy, now – used to be a very, very hard and difficult set of issues over which we had to negotiate and butt heads. But the difference is that previous Turkish foreign policy was, in many ways, very narrow, very, I would say, even provincial.

They didn’t care about the rest of the world; they only cared about those specific issues that affected them, and mostly affected them domestically. Now that you have – a government has international ambitions – the clashes are much more evident, right? But it isn’t because the Turks are suddenly standing up to the United States; it’s because they have shifted their foreign policy. I mean, their ambitions have changed and the arena in which they’re playing has changed.

[49:39]

And this will create problems. And it will create problems because, when you look at the reaction in Turkey with the flotilla crisis, the reaction against the United States, the mood in Turkey, I have rarely seen it to be so foul, in many respects. In many ways, I think there is a danger that the Turks are going to lose control over the narrative. And that will make U.S.-Turkish relations even worse.

But remember that the flotilla crisis is actually the icing on the cake, so to say. The real problem between the United States and Turkey was really about Iran. It was really about the Tehran-Brazil-Turkey deal, but it was also the fact that there is a vote coming up in the U.N. Security Council and the Turks are probably going to vote against new sanctions. And for the United States, I don’t want to go into what really happened in terms of who’s right and who’s
wrong, in terms of the Brazil-Turkey-Iran deal, but there is palpable anger within the U.S. administration at Turkey’s efforts, and especially the upcoming vote.

So in a smooth and in the – if the Turks vote no, now, or manage to scuttle, in one way or the other, the whole vote at the U.N. Security Council, the damage to U.S.-Turkish relations is going to be long-lasting. By that, I mean – and in some ways, it actually may be, lack of better word, good. In what way? I mean, I think we also need to change our policy towards the Turks.

I mean, we’ve always been – you know, because they’ve been very prickly customers, we’ve always tried to satisfy them in all the issues, whether it’s the PKK, it’s the Armenian question, it’s Cyprus. We’ve gone out of our way, even though they don’t necessarily think it to be that way. We have diverging interests. When we have common interests, I think we should pursue our common interests; when we have divergent interests, I think we should push for our interests, and take the Turks into consideration, but then not.

[52:05]

And finally, in terms of the peace process, since this is really about the peace process, this panel, and not Turkey-Israel and Turkey-America, if Turkey now is a dominant power in the region, if Turkey decides to take a very active role in the peace process, and in the process, actually become – and it has associated itself with Hamas. One of the things we also forget: In the Hamas/PA division, the Turks haven’t sided clearly with Hamas. And we can talk about why, maybe, later on.

So now, you have a very powerful, active player, which is going to be pushing, shall we say, the Hamas line. And you’re seeing, already, the Turks saying, Hamas has to be part of the – to quote the Turkish ambassador here – part of the final solution. And so you have a powerful regional actor that can exercise a great deal of influence. And to what extent will it affect – and I will leave it to Taghreed, maybe, to answer that question – will it affect the peace process? Thank you.

MR. BROWN: All right. Thank you very much. Let me switch hats very briefly here from moderator to discussant, and then we’ll open it up for questions. A discussant generally has three jobs. The first is to be brief, and that, I can do. The second is to sort of issue some pleasant platitudes describing the presentations as rich and nuanced, and that I can do, because the presentations were rich and nuanced. (Laughter.)

[53:43]

And the third is to criticize them for not saying what the discussant would have said, had the discussant been speaking. That’s hard. And it’s hard for different reasons. And let me turn, first, to Michele’s paper, and then to Taghreed’s and Henri’s paper. I can’t do it for Michele’s, because when I listen to her presentation and when I read her paper, my one comment is, yeah, what she said. That’s it.

I have – I think it lays out very clearly both a good, historical retrospective of how we got to where we were and lays out an interesting – a difficult, but an interesting alternative, and one which I would endorse. With regard to Taghreed and Henri, what we hear is all sorts of details and analysis that we didn’t know, but that we need to factor into our thinking – matters like the price of cement in Gaza, what’s happening in the health sector and so forth and so on. From Henri, I mean, we’re not used to having to think in terms of, okay, what is the relationship between what’s going on in Gaza and the upcoming Turkish elections.
That is a kind of thinking which we’re not used to doing. I think that when it comes to Arab-Israeli peace process issues in Washington, we tend to fall a little bit into the trap of looking at our feet. And we kind of know, vaguely, where we want to go. But the question is, okay, Abu Mazen’s coming to town; the proximity talks are going; how does what is happening over the last week affect, in very short-term ways? And what we’re hearing about from all three presentations is something a little bit more in terms of long-term analysis. It doesn’t make the problems any easier to solve.

But I’m – one analogy that I might make would be the situation we’re in now to the situation we were in, in Iraq policy, say, a decade ago, where we had a policy – and again, you could hear the same kind of terms. It’s unsustainable, right? There are certain things that – we had a policy in Iraq a decade ago that was leading to a series of changes in Iraq that were not exactly what we wanted. We were not getting regime change in Iraq.

But on the other hand, we had no clear alternative. It was also leading to some regional changes, and, sort of, the regional ground underneath that policy was shifting. But on a day-to-day basis, the policy was sustainable, from one day to the next. And ultimately, therefore, whatever you think of what the Bush administration did in Iraq in 2003, it was not presented with a set of attractive policy options for the long term.

The mess in Iraq was a long time in making because of a series of incremental, step-by-step decisions that had been made, basically, back to 1991. And I don’t know whether the three presenters would agree, but I’m hearing something that seems a little bit akin to that situation. None of the three presenters are saying that the fundamental American goal, when it comes to the American policy towards the peace process of sponsoring a two-state solution, is misguided. But they’re saying, look up from your feet and look a little bit at the horizon.

Look at what’s happening in the region. And the region is shifting in some ways that will make – if the United States is pursuing that kind of policy, will have to take into account. There are certain things happening on the ground in Gaza. We can’t simply say to Hamas and the population of Gaza, just sit still while we come up with a diplomatic solution and then we’ll get back to you in two or three years, and we can decide what to do.

It doesn’t sit still, and in some ways, problems get knottier. And what we hear from Michele, as I say, is both a historical review of how we got into this sort of – I mean, she used the word “short term” a couple times very explicitly in her presentation – sort of, a series of short-term decisions – but also a recommendation that we look up from our feet a little bit and perhaps, not necessarily march towards a different horizon, but at least be a little bit more aware of the stumbling blocks that are going to confront us very soon.

Let me, at this point, we’ve got about half an hour for questions or comments. If it’s okay, I suggest we take two or three at a time. If you could begin by identifying yourself – if your question or comment is directed to a particular panelist, please say so. Otherwise, we’ll leave it open. And if you could wait for the mike, yeah.

Q: All right. Michele Keleman with National Public Radio. I’m curious what, if anything President Obama can offer Abbas to make him look like a viable leader this week. And also, on Turkey’s role, can you see a role for Turkey in this reconciliation process, since it has a relationship with Hamas? Should the U.S. be encouraging that, because – to channel Turkey’s new ambitions?
MR. BROWN: Thank you. Let’s take a couple more. Marina, go ahead.

Q: Marina Ottaway with the Carnegie Endowment, and my question is for Henri. You read the reports in the press about the change in Turkish policy, and very often, it’s presented as, this is an Islamist government and, essentially, the policy is presented as the policy of a particular government. To what extent is this new, sort of, more ambitious foreign policy really related to a particular regime, or is this something that is more the policy of growing power, essentially, which we can expect to continue no matter who wins the next elections?

MR. BROWN: Go to the front here.

Q: My name is Said Arikat. I’m a freelance journalist. My question is to Mr. Henri Barkey. As Turkey assumes this prominent position in the region, is it likely – is there likely to be increased tensions with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the traditional leaders of that part of the world? And my second question, also to you, on Turkey, is suppose that the current government is removed, either by vote or by military coup; are we likely to see a dramatic change back to the old the policy with Israel? Thank you.

MR. BROWN: Thank you. We’ve got three questioners, five questions; four of those questions were about Turkey. This is unusual. (Laughter.) So let me first – why don’t we first turn to Henri, because most of them are for you? And then, there’s a question about Abu Mazen’s visit next week, and we’ll turn to Taghreed and Michele.

[1:00:43]

MR. BARKEY: Michele, I think on the reconciliation process, I’m not sure Abbas – and I will actually leave it to Taghreed to really answer that question, because the Turks will probably say, yes, they want to help and they would like to participate. In fact, when you look at Turkish policy in recent times, there’s not a crisis in the world that they don’t think they can’t resolve, so why avoid this one? (Laughter.) So – but I don’t know how Abbas would react. I mean, I think this is a really inter-Palestinian question.

Marina – is this a policy of a particular government? Let me be an economist and say yes and no, but it is the policy of a government in the sense that this particular government, when you look at its antecedents, it does come from, shall we say, a history of virulent anti-Israeli sentiment, anti-Jewish sentiment, also. I mean, after all, Erdogan and Gul and all these people were taught by probably Turkey’s most important anti-Israeli, anti-Semitic leader, Necmettin Erbakan, who saw the world completely divided into two.

So there is – certainly, there is a history. But in Turkey, two things are important to understand. One is the Turks, in general, are not very well-disposed to foreigners. But most importantly, on the Palestinian issue, irrespective of where you sit on the political spectrum, the Palestinian issue was always very, very, very popular. So whether you’re a secularist or a centrist or an Islamist or a moderate Islamist, it doesn’t matter.

[1:02:36]

What has changed, however, and with this government, is the emphasis on Hamas. Whereas, for a lot of Turks, Hamas is – I should say, for a segment of the Turkish population, Hamas is a problematic entity – not because of its violence, but because of its Islamic inheritance. Yes, Turkey has evolved; Turkey is different. And one – some of the ideas that Davutoglu has usurped are actually ideas of a former foreign minister, Ismail Cem, who was talking about the zero problem neighborhood policy way before Davutoglu came on the scene.
And yes, Turkey would still be much more assertive – I mean, they’ve learned that being an important international player – it plays well at home. So if you had a different government – there’s not going to be a coup, now, but if a government comes to power, loses – I mean, if the AKP loses, which I think is not in the cards, now, for a long time to come. It wasn’t in the cards even before the flotilla crisis, but now more than ever. Will the policy change?

The vehemence against Israel will definitely change, because there isn’t that much sentiment in the other parties against Israel – I mean, this kind of vehemence that you see now. I mean, the Turkish government is leaking and deliberately obfuscating facts at the moment. One of the things I saw is that the minister of the interior said, well, you know, all those people who Israel has released from the boat, they were tortured. You know, and he says this as an official person without proof, without anything. So I think it is a product of the party.

Will it go back to the old relations, as you asked? I think it’s going to take a long time, even if there’s a government change. If there’s no – I mean, ultimately, the AKP is going to lose power, I would think, at some point. But I would see, for the time being, for the next 10 years, we’re in for a rough set of relations between Turkey and Israel. If there’s a government change, it may take five years. I mean, things will stop – but they will not go back to the old days, that’s for sure.

[1:05:01]

Turkey will become a much more important power, and I think its economic powers is very – is important to understand. Part of what the Turkish government, now, is doing is also driven by – I didn’t talk about this – but is also driven by economics. They are pushing for markets everywhere. So that’s not going to change.

As a result of this, yes, Turkey will be a much more active player, but it is not going to take this kind of, shall we say, lack of better word, bellicose position on Middle East issues, and certainly on the Arab-Israeli. And on Egypt and Saudi Arabia, look, the Egyptians and the Saudis must be fuming at the moment. They were fuming before. You saw, during the Gaza crisis, the Turks tried to elbow the Egyptians out of the way. Eventually, the Egyptians won out, but you know, it took a lot of hard work to do it.

And the Turks also – there’s a way in which they are kind of looking at all the other Arab countries – I mean, they’re riding a wave of self-righteousness and of popularity. They think they’re superior to all these Arab leaders, et cetera, and they think they can go over their heads. I don’t know what the Arab world can do at the moment – the Arab leaders can do at the moment – but somewhere, I think, in a black book, somebody is writing something, and there’s going to be a price to be paid for that, too. But the Turks – at the moment, there’s no appearance of weakness in the Turkish position, and therefore, it’s hard for them to react.

[1:06:40]

MS. EL-KHODARY: I would disagree when it comes to what you mentioned, that Turkey took the side of Hamas during, you know, like, reconciliation talks. Turkey was very interested to be engaged in the reconciliation talks. The U.S. administration didn’t let them because they didn’t want to embarrass Egypt – that’s a fact – because Egypt wanted to take that role. And at the same time, you know, I think what is missing in, you know, today is a fair mediator. And you know, we have to admit that Turkey, now, is viewed in the region – not only in the Middle East; you know that Turkish flags are raised on minarets in Gaza and Afghanistan – so I think maybe the American administration must employ that fact.
You know, Turkey is viewed to be a realist on the ground, in the Middle East. You know, I’m talking about the people, here. They view Turkey as a party that is realizing and recognizing the facts on the ground, not ignoring, not marginalizing. I think, when it came to that talks between Hamas and Fatah, Fatah didn’t like the fact that Turkey will play a role because Fatah has no agenda when it comes to taking the side of Fatah. So that’s why they were not encouraged by Fatah, so the American administration listened to Fatah and listened to Egypt; therefore, you know, they sided with them.

[1:08:15]

And then, when it comes to, you know, Abu Mazen – what to offer Abu Mazen – I mean, the guy is really, like, paying the price, you know. He’s been paying the prince since he, you know, won the presidency. I mean, like, he offered a lot and for him, the logo (ph) is negotiations, and he promised the people, and so far, he got nothing. What to offer Abu Mazen is the miracle – a Palestinian state – something that people can realize.

And also, I think – but I think it’s wishful thinking. I don’t think Israel will – you know, like, the current government in Israel will approve so. I think maybe they will come out with an area C to be included – you know, back to Oslo model. Okay, let’s pretend that it’s Oslo and give more areas for the PA to control. But it’s not the solution. I think what is needed is a political solution. And so I’m really very pessimistic to what extent the American administration will help Abu Mazen at this stage.

[1:09:26]

MS. DUNNE: Right, so regarding what Obama can offer Abu Mazen, well, I mean, I think that the expansion of Palestinian – PA authority into the other areas – into area B and so forth, would be – support for that, explicit support for that, and working with the Israelis on that. While it isn’t the answer, it would be better than the usual, you know, package of confidence-building measures, lifting some road blockages, releasing a few prisoners – you know, this kind of thing.

So there are, you know, certain things that, obviously, if Obama wants to offer them to President Abbas, he’s got to get them first from President Netanyahu. Then there’s what Obama himself can offer. And of course, this was discussed even before this Gaza flotilla – would he hint at some kind of a possible new U.S. initiative that, assuming the proximity talks don’t succeed in yielding meaningful progress and yielding into direct talks, which is the goal at the moment, that Obama might consider launching some kind of a new U.S. initiative further articulating how the U.S. sees a two-state solution, and so forth. But I think that, that is something that can probably only be hinted at, at this point. My guess is that, if President Abbas wants that from the United States, he’s going to have to wait another five or six months for that.

Privately, though, I do think that Obama should be talking to President Abbas about the need to get the West Bank and Gaza back together, and, as we’ve said, the need to somehow encourage him to get the Palestinian house in order. Briefly, on the question of Turkey as a mediator, I don’t think the Egyptians are going to give up that role easily.

They consider it critical for them, with Gaza on their border. And I saw this morning that Amr Moussa, secretary general of the Arab League, will be going to Gaza to try to pick up the threads on reconciliation. And of course, you know, the Arab League means Egypt. Egypt is going to try to find a new angle into this.

[1:11:44]
MR. BROWN: Go for another round of questions. Why don’t we start here?

Q: Phil Wilcox, the president of the Foundation for Middle East Peace. Let’s go back to the closure in light of the flotilla crisis, which everyone says is no longer sustainable. There are even some voices in Israel who are saying that. Suppose the U.S. were to change its policy and become much more aggressive with the government of Israel and succeeded in persuading Israel to lift the closure.

What would be the consequences of this for internal Palestinian politics? Would there be a clear beneficiary on the Hamas side or on the Fatah side? Assuming that the U.S. were to change its policy, I suppose it’s likely that Abu Mazen would agree and become an advocate of the lifting of the Gaza closure in a way much more emphatic than he has in the past. Michele and Taghreed, could you discuss that?

MR. BROWN: Move over to this side over here.

Q: Dan Liebman, freelance writer. This is for Taghreed. If, say, Hamas was treated like any government entity in the world equally and Gaza was given all the freedoms – open borders, just like any country – can you make a little prediction of what, politically, economically and spiritually, also, that Gaza would look like in a few years? In other words, would it be a stable, growing country, or would it still be wracked with dissension and violence?

MR. BROWN: Yes, in the back, right there.

[1:13:49]

Q: Yes, hi. Joyce Karam with Al-Hayat newspaper. My question is to the gentlemen who was speaking on Turkey. I’m wondering why you’re framing this as a U.S.-Turkish sort of crisis. I mean, the Turkish foreign minister, yesterday, was clear in his remarks and he sort of welcomed the U.S. response and made it clear that this is an issue between Israel and Turkey. Also, I mean, can the U.S. deal with this like it deals with other allies in the region? I mean, Saudi and Qatar don’t get along, but the U.S. is friends with both of them.

MR. BROWN: Okay, thank you. Why don’t we go in reverse order, because this time, more, the questions were on the Palestinian side? Michele, Taghreed and then Henri.

[1:14:36]

MS. DUNNE: Right, so to Phil Wilcox’s question, I actually think it’s problematic to lift the closure and open Gaza up completely while it’s still under complete Hamas authority, where there’s no Palestinian Authority presence at the borders, and so forth – you know, in effect, moving down the road of recognizing Gaza as a separate entity under Hamas authority and so forth. So you know, this is one of the reasons why I think that, while there obviously needs to be, you know, some greater opening to relieve the pressure, and so forth, that this is one of the reasons why it’s imperative to press for a Palestinian reconciliation at this point.

MS. EL-KHODARY: Yeah, I mean, like, the question, who will benefit, if the siege is to be lifted – I mean, you know, like, all the policymakers – I mean, like, I’m talking here about the American administration – they think that Hamas will benefit. Of course Hamas will benefit if the siege is to be lifted. But at the same time, think about it: Right now, who is benefit – Hamas is benefiting, too, with the siege or without the siege.

Hamas is in control of Gaza, period. Hamas has established a security apparatus that is extremely strong. Hamas has been taking care of its supporters, despite the siege. Hamas has increased the supporters. You know, they
are employing them. They are listening to their needs, whatever. So this is – like, we have to take this into
consideration, that Hamas is the elite of the place. And who is going to benefit if the siege is to be lifted? Mainly the
people. I mean, like, it’s unbelievable, you know?

You’re talking about, you know, a collective punishment that is imposed on the people of Gaza. Why to pay
the price? That’s the quest – why the young generation to pay the price? And then everybody’s scared: Oh my god,
there are voices within Gaza among the young people that are, like, want to be al-Qaida. You know, hello? You
know, they’ve not exposed. They’ve never been out of Gaza in their entire lives. There is no education there, no
opportunities for them.

So they feel like their life is meaningless. They have no goal in life, so where to go? I mean, like, and with the
failure of the peace process, with the failure of policy that aims to the creation of a Palestinian state, Hamas has
emerged. And the Second Intifada was the model, you know, where you can really, like, study how Israel indirectly
made Hamas come out to the service.

You know, they really, like, indirectly helped Hamas. I was a TV reporter at that time, and I remember, I used
to do my TV reporting – like two minutes of reporting. And all of the elements of my story would be on Hamas, you
know, because they made the news. Israel killed them; Israel made they heroes; Israel made them, like, you know,
whatever they call – martyrs. And that is the feeling on the ground.

So we cannot be – we cannot stay blind. We have to realize that, you know, where these policies are aiming us
to – you know, I mean, like, intentionally, the American administration, Israel, key Arab countries are involved with
this siege. And I think something has to come out. Okay, everybody’s scared – you know, of course Hamas will
benefit if the siege is to be lifted. And Hamas’ objective, we have to understand, is international legitimacy.

And at the same time, of course, you know, they will never – one thing to consider, also – they will never agree
to go into another round of elections unless they show their supporters a year of governance with the absence of the
siege. And that’s, of course, a fact. But at the same time, you know, it’s – you know, we cannot exclude the fact that
they are benefiting a lot, you know, right now.

And also, when it comes to the West Bank, everybody thinks the West Bank is Ramallah. The story –
Ramallah is becoming, like, wow, the place, you know. Economy is flourishing; business, whatever. But they forget
that there are villages. You know, it’s like, Ramallah is one city, but it’s not the West Bank. You cannot exclude the
villages around, you know, and there are many voices that are suppressed in the West Bank.

So I mean, like, that, you have to consider. And then if Hamas is to be – I mean, like, Hamas is a reality on the
ground. And the failure of the policy made them, you know, a reality. And every day, they are becoming – you know,
they are shaping that reality. With the creation of another entity in Gaza that is different in West Bank, that entity will
be Hamas, because Hamas is in control.

And with poverty, people at the end, okay, they are coping, but at the same time, at the end, they will say,
Hamas is in power in that jail, so therefore, I will listen to the guy, you know, in church. So it’s common sense. I
mean – and I wish the unity government worked. I think the unity government, like the Mecca agreement worked out, that the international community helped with that. You know, I mean, but I don’t like to talk about the past, but I think we should move into the national demand that is reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, and at the same time, the peace process. Because you cannot work on one excluding the other.

MR. BARKEY: What I was trying to suggest is, if you remember, I used the expression, the flotilla crisis is the icing on the cake, in terms of Turkish-American relations. The problem between Turkey and America today is Iran; it’s not so much the flotilla crisis. I mean, yes, it created a crisis at the beginning and I still think it has made the American decision-makers a little bit – they were a little bit shocked by the reaction of Turkey.

If you remember, Davutoglu went out, said, this is our 9/11, and there has been no – to the extent that the flotilla was also encouraged by the AKP – I mean, the leaders of the movement that organized this – it very openly thanked the AKP and two other political parties in Turkey as they were leaving, saying they were the ones who helped us to push this together.

So in a way, this was an unnecessary, in view of the American leadership – an unnecessary provocation – that, you know, yes, the Israelis bungled the raid, but clearly, there was – it inflamed the situation at a time when, already, Turkish-American relations were on a very difficult trajectory because of Iran.

And you don’t underestimate how much Iran is important to the U.S. at the moment. I mean, I think what the Turks have failed to understand is that, for the U.S., Iran, at the moment, is a strategic issue. And on an issue of this importance, for the Turks, as a NATO member, to go around the United States and try to protect the Iranians is viewed very dimly. So the other stuff, in some ways, you can argue, it just aggravates the situation.

[1:22:31]

MR. BROWN: Let me steal the microphone just to make on brief comment about, sort of, the long-term argument that I was making that comes out of the views here. In terms of lifting the siege of Gaza, to me, the question of who would benefit becomes very different – or the answer becomes very different – depending on the time and the circumstances.

And it is no secret, in policy circles, that the siege was not leading to the policy results that were expected from it. Nobody – I shouldn’t say nobody – but I think that was fairly widely acknowledged through the last year or so. So if you’re going to end it, you end it on your terms and your time, or you wait until there’s a crisis. And right now, it’s a propaganda victory for Hamas. Turkish public opinion is now directly engaged. It’s a far messier situation.

You do it six months ago; you would – again, you would have confronted a very different set of circumstances. You do it as part of the Shalit negotiations – again, very different circumstances. We’ve got time for, perhaps, two very brief or one long-winded question. I’ll leave it – first, in the very back.

Q: I’ll try not to be long-winded, thank you. My name is Meredith Buel. I’m with Voice of America. What practical steps can be taken to lift the siege in Gaza and ensure that Israel has its security needs met and no weapons are smuggled in with the humanitarian aid? And what, if anything, can be done to legitimize the Israeli investigation into the flotilla incident so that the results would be accepted by the international community?

MR. BROWN: I’ll count that as a brief question, and take a second one from up here.

[1:24:22]
Q: Ted Feifer, U.S. Institute of Peace. I’m still trying to get a sense of where Hamas thinks it’s going. It is holding onto Gaza. It wants to retain control of Gaza without the siege to demonstrate it can rule. It’s prepared to go into elections. It’s not prepared to give up control of Gaza. It’s prepared to take as what it had in the last elections or more. So where, in fact, does it see itself going, other than divine intervention? And how will that help us two or three years down the road?

MR. BROWN: Yeah, why don’t we turn, I guess, for final comments, to Taghreed, Michele and then Henri?

MS. EL-KHODARY: Where Hamas is going – as I said, you know, Hamas’ main objective is one: That is international legitimacy. And they want the world to accept them. They want to be engaged, of course. And one interesting interview I conducted with Meshal in Syria that I still remember what he said, he’s like, we are willing – (inaudible) – we are willing, at this stage, to be partner in whatever – in the peace process, whatever.

[1:25:42]

I mean, like, hear that they won’t be, like – they won’t cause any destruction to any peace agreement, if Obama to go ahead with any. So that is – I think, really their main objective is objectivity – is international legitimacy. And I would say that they will do a lot to achieve that. This is their main goal. The current situation is really scary, and there are, you know, voices within Hamas that are extreme, of course.

But one thing to consider – one element to consider – is, those in control – those that are now in control, whether Hamas in Syria, whether Hamas in Gaza or the West Bank – are people that you can talk to. You can discuss with them politics. They believe in governance; they believe in elections; they believe, you know, in all of that. So I think it’s worth it, to consider it.

I don’t know how. That’s the question. Because it’s very hard. You know, they are very persistent on not recognizing Israel, of course, and not to renounce violence and not to accept the previous agreements. That’s – these conditions are not accepted by Hamas. And when you talk to them, it’s like, you know, why can’t you recognize Israel? Why can’t you accept the previous agreements, whatever?

This is their argument: It’s like, you have to remember that Arafat recognized Israel, but what was his end? He was given nothing at the end. And why to repeat the same mistake as Arafat? Why to give from the beginning? It’s like, you have to sit on the table to negotiate over things and then, you know, you can give and take. But why to recognize Israel first without getting anything in return? And that’s the mindset of Hamas, and it’s very selling, you know, among their supporters.

[1:27:44]

Steps to lift the siege, I think first, you want to go into reconciliation, first, because you want to engage Fatah when it comes to the borders. You need Fatah and Hamas. You need the security establishment. You need joint security forces. And that will be, of course, accepted to all.

So I think EU is willing to play this role, I mean, like, of engaging in this, I think. It will be really, like – you cannot go for lifting the siege unless you go ahead with reconciliation first. And I think you can start easily by the formation of forces that will be in charge of the border. I’m talking about the border here – the crossings. That’s where they can go first, and then they can move ahead with the rest of the reconciliation steps.
MS. DUNNE: Yeah, I agree regarding practical steps that can be taken. I mean, just – let’s remember, you know, what this flotilla crisis showed. This was not a humanitarian crisis. The flotilla crisis did not show that, you know, humanitarian conditions in Gaza were so deplorable, or whatever.

What is was about was that the international consensus about maintaining this closure of Gaza has broken down badly. And it’s no longer sustainable, because you have significant actors, like Turkey and others, who are willing to take actions to undermine the siege, and have done so effectively.

So you don’t have – and this idea that the Gaza would continue to be, sort of, an island with no internationally recognized authority at the borders, just sort of drifting off on its own, this is what has become unsustainable. And so just let me agree with Taghreed that whatever kind of steps can be put into place to allow access of goods to Gaza and give Israel some reassurance that those will not include arms, and so forth, have to involve the Palestinian Authority, and that it would really be a mistake – and I’m sure the United States would not move in this direction – to just give Hamas that authority on its own.

Briefly, what can be done to legitimize an Israeli investigation? I mean, what we’re talking about now, it seems to be an argument about, will it be an international investigation with Israeli involvement or an Israeli investigation with international involvement? And obviously, the latter is possibly acceptable to Israel. It’s something that the Israelis are arguing about amongst themselves now.

MR. BARKEY: I mean, let me just venture into the, what can be done in terms of alleviating – or in terms of lifting the siege. Look, we also have to understand that the Israelis have a domestic politics, and as long as Gilad Shalit is there, it’s going to be very difficult for any Israeli government to suddenly say, okay, we’re going to change our policy. So we have to come up with some kind of a global deal where, A, for the Israelis’ sake, Gilad Shalit is released, and then there are modalities as to the inflow of goods into Gaza, and third, some kind of assurances that there won’t be any more rocket attacks.

I mean, you know, somebody asked about Gaza being an independent area without any kind of international restrictions; part of it is, it has to live up to its responsibility that it’s not going to attack another country. So that also has to be part of the deal. I mean, if you – I don’t think – in Israel, given the debate that’s going on now and given the fact that the Israelis would like to get out of this corner that they find themselves in, that would be, probably, a very acceptable – Netanyahu may not like it, but still, he will have to go along with it because there will be domestic support for it. So we have to be imaginative and to figure out how to construct such a deal.

MR. BROWN: Okay, please join me in thanking Taghreed, Michele and Henri for a very refreshing presentation. (Applause.)

(END)