THE HEART OF THE CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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WELCOME/MODERATOR:
Jessica T. Mathews
President
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

SPEAKERS:
Prince Turki al-Faisal
Chairman
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JESSICA TUCHMAN MATHEWS: Good afternoon. Ladies and gentlemen, I want to welcome you here to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. I'm Jessica Mathews, the president of the endowment. And I have the privilege today of introducing to you His Royal Highness Prince Turki Al-Faisal. I think everybody in this room knows the long and distinguished career that he has followed as a government leader, a diplomat and a philanthropist.

For nearly a quarter of a century, he served as the Saudi intelligence chief during a difficult, tumultuous time that included the Iranian revolution and the Persian Gulf War. He was later appointed by King Fahd as the ambassador to the U.K., where he faced the delicate task of shepherding the relationship through the aftermath of September 11 and the invasion of Iraq.

[1:25]

More than anything else, I think he's probably familiar to everybody else here for his service as Saudi ambassador to the United States from 2005 to 2007. He was an extremely effective spokesman for the kingdom at that time. And he was known for reaching out beyond the Beltway in an unusual way, traveling widely around the United States.

Today he is a cultural leader in Saudi Arabia. He helped found the King Faisal Foundation and chairs the King Faisal Center for Research in Islamic Studies in Riyadh. Earlier this year, we were more than pleased – honored that he agreed to join the advisory council of the Carnegie Middle East Center, an enormous addition to that group.

Today Prince Turki is going to be sharing his thoughts on the state of the Middle East peace process. As we speak, direct talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians, as all of you know, are on life support. Despite high hopes when Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas met here in early September, the negotiations stalled last month when the Israeli settlement moratorium expired.

The question before us today then is whether the talks can be rescued, how and, in particular, what role the states in the region, especially the kingdom, have to play in that process. As I'm sure all of you do, I look forward to hearing Prince Turki’s insights into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that, to everyone’s cost, has defined Middle East politics now for half a century.

I’d like to just close with a slightly more personal note. What has always struck me about our speaker today, beyond his impressive résumé is the fact that he is a deep and a creative thinker and someone who has been steadily committed as one of the Arab world’s leading moderates for a very long time, qualities that we desperately need in the region today, in the world today, until a solution can be found to this most intractable of conflicts.

[3:48]

So Your Highness, we’re very much in your debt and excited to have you here today and look forward to hearing your thoughts. Please welcome me in – please join me in welcoming – (applause).

PRINCE TURKI AL-FAISAL: Thank you very much. (In Arabic.) Dr. Mathews, thank you for the words of praise. I must say they’re more valuable because they come from you.

MS. MATHEWS: Oh, thank you.
PRINCE AL-FAISAL: Ladies and gentlemen, when I had lunch today at Carnegie, I discovered that it’s not because of intellectual exercise and capability that people come to Carnegie, but the food is so excellent as well. (Laughter.)

I would first like to thank you for having me speak to you today. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is an excellent institution that does important work by following the ideals of its founders to help establish stronger international laws and organizations. As Andrew Carnegie himself said, “As I grow older, I pay less attention to what men say. I just watch what they do.” This institution has definitely done just that. And the world is a far better place for it.

[5:12]

And in the spirit of going out and getting busy, I offer my most frank opinions on how the Israelis and Palestinians might arrive at peace after many, many years of conflict. My prescriptions will be based on the tenets of the Arab Peace Initiative proposed in 2002 by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. They will also be based on my own analysis of the situation, especially relating to some of the difficulties that seem to have stalled President Obama’s recent efforts to convince the two parties to cooperate for peace.

I speak to you of the actions that have fomented this core and sought to bring about instability in our region, of governments and quasi-governments that have tried to capitalize on the resulting existing troubles to further their own political ambitions and ideological influence, although they are lacking in merit. Further, I discuss what I believe to be mistakes on the part of various parties, politicians and pundits relative to the conflict. And finally, I tell you of what I believe to be the path to a true and lasting peace and remind all here of how the Saudi leadership has worked with our friends and allies to help realize this vital goal.

As this learned audience well knows, the Palestine-Israeli conflict is the cause of numerous threats to peace and prosperity in a wide number of locales around the globe. Yet despite this international resonance, I impress upon you what I consider to be the element that is the core of the conflict. I am speaking of the plight of the Palestinian people. For too long, they have been denied justice. For too long, they have been denied the basic human rights that many of us take for granted. And for too long, they have been denied what is absolutely reasonable for them to seek – the opportunity to live in an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital on the lands occupied by Israel in 1967, which are recognized by the international community as being illegally occupied by the Israelis.

[7:28]

Some of you may disagree with my definition of what is absolutely reasonable. But let me remind you that I am far from alone and that while, of course, all in the Arab world agree with me, there are also many Americans and even Israelis who share my view. Those of us who believe in this position take as our guidepost United Nations Resolution 242 issued shortly after the Six-Day War in 1967, an attempt to forestall further bloodshed by providing a framework to secure peace. The resolution called for, and I quote, “the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East with the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.”

There are numerous opinions as to the exact meaning of the resolution. To me, it is very straightforward. Occupied territories clearly means the lands taken by the Israelis in the 1967 war. There is no room for ambiguity in this. And the passage of time will, I believe, show that those who oppose this specific Israeli violation of international law are overwhelmingly in the right.
Since 1967, we have seen subsequent resolutions passed in the United Nations, each meant to breathe fresh life into a stalled process to force recognition of basic truth. Yet peace has remained elusive. And the conflict has enlarged and spread like a cancer across borders. Populations other than the Palestinians are now suffering the results of Israeli aggression.

For instance, Lebanon, which in 1948 accommodated the fleeting Palestinian refugees by the tens of thousands, has been ravaged by war and it has seen its lands invaded and occupied by Israel time and again. The Shebaa Farms and other areas remain occupied by the Israelis to this day in direct violation of U.N. Resolution 1407. From this bloody conflict initiated by the invasions of 1978 and 1982, to the bombardment and invasion of 2006, the people of Lebanon have suffered greatly. This has given rise to Hezbollah and allows it to supplant the role of the legitimate government and seeks to further its own political agenda. Even more, they do so while purporting to stand for Lebanon’s beleaguered people and even Islam itself.

The numbers of the dead and displaced by war in Lebanon are staggering. Before the Taif Accord in 1989, more than 100,000 people had been killed in the fighting there, many of them civilians. Over 900,000 had lost their homes. The Israeli invasions of 1978 and 1982 killed more than 50,000 civilians and wounded more than 100,000. In Lebanon, of course, foreign hands can clearly be seen manipulating the strings of this brutal tragedy. The 2006 attack on the Israelis and the capture of their soldiers was calculated for effect, and it had maximum effect.

In response, an onslaught of widespread destruction and indescribable horror was unleashed by Israel that destroyed villages and towns, neighborhoods and hospitals, killing more than 1,200 civilians and thousands more wounded. And whereas Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, has publicly expressed his regret for launching his provocative action, the Israelis have not issued a single word of remorse. Once again, the people of Lebanon, many of them innocent children, paid the price with their lives for foreign-led ambitions in the region.

Hamas has watched and learned from the Lebanese model and followed in its footsteps, capitalizing on Israeli brutality and aggression to gain a prominent voice in representing the Palestinian people as the Palestinians are drawn deeper into the morass of violence and suffering, which they have so long endured. Gaza is a land where there are no victors, save the brutality of the Israeli war-making machine. And the struggle between the extremists on both sides is sadly measured in the blood of innocents.

Two years ago, in only 22 days, there were more than 1,400 people killed in Gaza by the Israelis, with another estimated 5,300 wounded. Only a small portion of those killed, 236, were combatants for Hamas. And the targets sought by the Israeli forces seldom had any military value. Nearly half of Gaza’s clinics were damaged, as well as 15 of the 27 hospitals located there. Hundreds of factories and thousands of homes were destroyed.

Then to add insult to injury, Israeli commanders stormed the peace flotilla of ships this year that sought to bring food and medicine to the suffering people of Gaza, who for years have been enduring the inhuman, illegal and immoral blockade. So widespread and indiscriminate has the killing of Palestinian civilians by Israeli forces become that the United Nations Goldstone report characterized the events there as possibly falling into the category of war crimes or crimes against humanity.
I highlight these tragedies relative to Hamas and Hezbollah not only to point the finger at the Israelis, but also to show one of the most important, yet overlooked aspects of the conflict, which is the dampening effect on extremism in general that a lasting peace would have in the region. If we address the desperation of the people of Gaza, restore to them the dignity accorded to citizens of an independent Palestine, the appeal of violent resistance will wither, remove the yoke of crushing poverty imposed by blockade, lift the occupation and the denial of self-determination and the appeal of extremism wanes.

With the removal of extremism comes the growing friendship with the West. We have seen the bonds of friendship with the West strained where they should be strong. And we have witnessed serious mistakes that have lessened the West’s credibility in the region, credibility that is not only vital to the peaceful resolution of the Palestinian and Israeli conflict, but is vital to the progress of international relations between regions that benefit all people. In other words, it is deeply in the West’s interest to end this conflict, as it will serve as a major victory in the war against terror. For much of what we call terror is able to find its recruits due to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Since I am advocating that the West take a more assertive approach to ending the conflict, let me outline some of the principles that I believe should form the backbone of that approach. I do so by constructing my position and dismantling the position of the opponent. In this case, my opponent is the neoconservative philosophy in American politics. It has been almost 10 years since President George W. Bush took office, giving the American neoconservative philosophy, with its zeal for shaping the world through unilateral demands and military action, its days in the sun.

The starkest example of the ascendancy of this group was the war in Iraq. After enormous cost in human lives and treasure, as well as the tattering of American ideals at home and respect abroad, President Obama has begun to bring this country’s role in that debacle to an end, leading many Americans to believe that the neocon movement has died, the victim of its own failed delusional ambitions. However, recent declarations by neocon thinkers regarding the current Palestinian-Israeli peace process show it to be very much alive and still pushing inhumane and aggressive policies.

It is these policies personified by neocon advisors, American conservatives and Zionist extremists that continually throw a wrench into the progress of peace. This recent election will give more fodder for these warmongers to pursue their favorite exercise, war making. We must not only resist these dangerous policies if we want peace, but even those American advisors who do not consider themselves neoconservatives must realize that by not taking a strong enough stance against Israeli actions, they offer tacit submission to the neoconservative position, a position that has gotten us nowhere, save in the bloody rut we now inhabit.

For a summation of this position, I turn to one of its top advocates, Robert Satloff, the executive director of the pro-Israeli Washington Institute for Near East Policy. In a foreign policy article entitled “Three Temptations on the Road to Middle East Peace,” Mr. Satloff gives suggestions to President Obama on how he might conclude a successful peace deal.

In sum, these suggestions are: One, ignore the Secretary of State’s stance of “not one more brick” on the issue of settlements, which I prefer to call by their true name, colonies. Let the Israelis begin to build again and push the
Palestinians to not, between quotation marks, “inflate the significance of settlement construction.” Two, and
between quotation marks, “withstand the pressures to intervene prematurely at the first sign of impasse,” so that the
two parties, especially the Palestinians, can make, between quotation marks, “the compromise real agreement
demands.”

Three, given that, between quotation marks, “Israel and the Palestinian Authority are less likely to take proverbial
risk for peace when an ascendant Iran is able to withstand U.S.-led sanctions, Obama should prevent Iran’s march
toward nuclear weapons capability by projecting strength and resolution on the Iran nuclear challenge.” And while
not specifically declared, this would seem to imply the use of force, which is the United States’ last repository of
credibility.

Before exploring each of these suggestions and revealing them as fallacious, counterproductive and even dangerous,
it’s important to point out that they are par for the neocon course. They’re an apologia for Israel’s actions, a
depredation of all Palestinian bargaining positions, a denial of the injustice done against them and an attempt to
divert attention from the real issues via the Iranian boogeyman. And they would stand in the way of peace.

[18:57]

On the issue of colonies, it is astonishing and insulting for anyone to suggest that the Palestinians simply ignore the
fact that Israel is openly breaching its commitment to the roadmap by ending the moratorium on new colony
building. Not only does this suggestion ignore the Palestinians’ compliance with the roadmap, in the face of Israeli
activities such as incarcerating thousands of Palestinians, including pregnant men (sic) and women, but it attempts to
downplay an issue that the Palestinians have repeatedly declared to be central. Why is the colony issue so central?
Because it is the most glaring example of Israel’s indifference to international law and its continued willingness to
flagrantly sidestep agreements.

Let’s look at the facts. In the first half of 2010 during the colony moratorium, the West Bank sold 603 new housing
starts, 1,135 housing completions and 3,009 active housing-unit construction projects being carried out by the
Israelis. How, one might ask, could Israel justify such actions? It does through flawed legal arguments that entirely
misinterpret the British mandate authority over Palestine and the U.N. Security Council Resolution 242. The
Palestine mandate states that nothing should be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing
non-Jewish communities in Palestine. And United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 states that neither side
should gain territory, under the international legal principle of the inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by war.

[20:49]

No nation in the world accepts Israel’s curious legal justifications for going against these agreements. So is it not
unconscionable to ask the Palestinians to do so when it is they who suffer most directly as a result of them? As the
Reagan plan stated as far back as September 1982, and I quote, “The United States will not support the use of any
additional land for the purpose of settlements during the transition period. Indeed, the immediate adoption of a
settlement freeze by Israel, more than any other action, could create the confidence needed for wider participation in
these talks. Further settlement activity is in no way necessary for the security of Israel and only diminishes the
confidence of the Arabs that a final outcome can be free and fairly negotiated.” Asking the Palestinians, ladies and
gentlemen, to ignore ongoing colony construction is tantamount to asking them to accept subjugation from the start.

The second suggestion is that the United States restrain from making proposals in the course of peace talks. What,
one might ask, are the American mediators to do, other than to help bridge impasses? The neocon answer is simple.
They are to force the Palestinians to make concessions and to preserve the Israelis from having to do so. This can be seen in the reason Mr. Satloff gives us as to why American proposals have no place in the negotiations. They would, he says, transform the diplomacy into a U.S.-Israeli negotiation, relieving the Palestinians of having to engage in the business of bargaining.

Why exactly would American proposals transform the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations into American-Israeli negotiations? Because the American proposals would justly make demands on Israel, and that is exactly what neocons are desperate to prevent.

Finally, Mr. Satloff’s third suggestion – his most vaguely far-reaching and therefore, his most dangerous – is that the U.S. should do something, specifics withheld, to project strength and resolution on the Iran nuclear challenge. Why is this important for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process? Because apparently, Israelis and Palestinians will fail to respect America if Iran is able to gain nuclear weapons because America, having declared it will not allow this development, will be seen as weak.

Not only does this show a lack of insight about what is at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian problem, which predates the Iranian nuclear issue by many years, but it threatens to start a new conflict as a pretext for ending another. We’ve read this script before, in Iraq, and it does not have a happy ending. No one denies that a nuclear Iran is a major international danger. But claiming that the U.S. must take military action against Iran to push forward the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is to attempt to harvest apples by cutting down the tree.

Let us not allow the ideas of the neocons to crawl from their graves of failure, but let us instead take as our directive the Arab Peace Initiative set forth by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, which calls for fair and mutual compromises and commitments by both parties. This means to act directly counter to these suggestions, to demand colony-building cease immediately, to have the courage to push the parties toward compromises and to stop using the Israeli-Palestinian issue as a pretext for attacking Iran. The last thing the world needs now is another neocon fantasy predicated on threats rather than negotiation, force rather than diplomacy and war rather than peace.

And now by way of conclusion, I wish to summarize the position of Saudi Arabia toward the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which is declared so excellently in the Arab Peace Initiative. My country has struggled again and again to stress to its many friends around the world that Saudi Arabia stands against terrorists and extremists of any origin and we join America entirely seeking to defeat those who would use violence to pursue political means – to pursue political ends. Yet while Saudi Arabia goes about declaring this position and continually proving it in practice, we must sometimes ask ourselves, what about the Israelis? Where is the justice for those who suffer at the hands of Israel?

Ought not the world in general and the West in particular fight the continued occupation of Palestinian land by Israel, as Saudi Arabia fervently fights terrorism? Should not the clear barriers to peace represented by continuing colonization in the West Bank be vigorously opposed and the existing and illegal colonies be dismantled? Shouldn’t the world call upon the Israelis to tear down their apartheid war just as vigorously as it screams against Islamic extremists?
As we in the kingdom see it, the path to peace is clear. King Abdullah’s forthright initiative of 2002 laid the groundwork for an end to hostilities. If the Israelis withdraw from occupied lands, including East Jerusalem, to their pre-June 4, 1967 boundaries and address the refugee situation through mutual agreement, Saudi Arabia and the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference will end all forms of hostilities and commence normal and peaceful relations with the state of Israel.

The quartet charged by the U.N. with seeking resolution to the conflict should pursue this route on the road to peace. Until that happens, Saudi Arabia must do what it must. As the birthplace of Islam, as the custodian of the two holy mosques and as the world’s energy superpower and a leader of the Arab and Muslim worlds, the kingdom must hold itself to the highest standards of justice and law. And this is why it must refuse to directly or indirectly engage Israel until it ends its illegal occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights, as well as the still-occupied territories in Lebanon.

For us to take any steps toward any form of normalization with the Israeli state before these Arab lands have been returned to their rightful, legitimate owners would undermine international law and turn a blind eye to immorality. Ladies and gentlemen, Saudi Arabia stands for peace, but we cannot stand alone. We need Israel’s friends who should be the first in line urging her to seek peace, instead of pushing her for more war. We need our friends in the West to recognize the importance of this opportunity to regain its stature in the Middle East by joining us in an effort to resolve the longstanding plight of the Palestinian people.

The West has the ability to put out the flames of numerous regional fires by extinguishing the source of the blaze in the Middle East. By pressuring the Israelis to genuinely commit to a timetable for withdrawal from occupied lands, it will simultaneously defuse a host of lingering difficulties in the world, and that world and the region at large now faces. Let us together seek the goal of all reasonable people and nations that abide by international law. Let us pursue the victory of reason over violence, of ideas over raw emotions. Let all of us come to an acceptance of global standards of behavior that recognize the rule of law over the rule of force, of negotiation over bloodshed, of right over might. And let us meaningfully and substantively address those actions, which stand in glaring opposition to those standards.

And finally, let it be known that we will turn away from those who continue to seek violent upheaval, but we will extend our hands in friendship to those who seek true and just peace. The road to peace has been long and difficult. But as Andrew Carnegie said, do not look for approval, except for the consciousness of doing your best. Forging success out of the many failures in the Middle East requires a Palestinian state. Let us together do what is necessary to achieve this success, and may Allah bless us in our hearts. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. MATHEWS: There are microphones for those of you who would like to ask questions. I would ask that you introduce yourself and your organization. Let’s start right here.

Q: Thank you. Mark Katz, Middle East Policy Council. Your Royal Highness, thank you for your very, very interesting speech. I do have one question. You talked about the settlement of the Palestinian refugee issue, and I’m just wondering what you have in mind. Certainly Israelis I talked to, even those who can contemplate returning the occupied territories – this is the issue that frightens them the most, that the Palestinians would return.
What sort of – what sort of agreement would you realistically expect Israel to make a settlement on this particular issue? What is it that the Arab side would accept that has a reasonable chance of the Israelis accepting? Thank you so much.

[31:30]

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: Let me start by saying that you talk about what frightens the Israelis the most. I would respectfully add that we also have to consider what frightens the Palestinians equally, and particularly the refugees, having spent the last 50 years or so in refugee camps and so on. Their lives are not the best in the world. So an equitable solution for that has to come for redress to these injustices that they have suffered.

I wish I had a formula to tell you, quite frankly, what that is. But I think this is – the very essential part of having negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians is that they reach a mutual compromise, as the Arab Peace Initiative says, to that problem. If I were to say that a specific number of refugees will return to a specific area of land in Israel or that all refugees should return to a region in Palestine, I would be speaking as an outsider that has absolutely no effect on the negotiations. That is something for the Israelis and the Palestinians to reach together. And that’s what the Arab Peace Initiative calls for. And that’s why it is such a fair initiative because it allows both sides to mutually agree on such important issues like the refugee problem.

MS. MATHEWS: Judith?

[33:27]

Q: Prince Turki, a pleasure as always.

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: Thank you.

Q: What I’m going to say is more of a plea than a question. At the time of the Arab Peace Initiative, I thought and still think – and most people do – that it’s one of the major breakthroughs in the life of this conflict. And there have only been a few over the years. At that time, our good friend, Marwan Muasher, was foreign minister of Jordan. I was in Riyadh and I spoke to the Saudi foreign minister about the initiative and asked how would it be marketed because the Israelis – every Israeli really needed to understand what it was about, as well as people in the West, the United States, in particular.

To this day, the Israelis don’t know what it is and most interested Americans – not policy types like here, but across the country and you’ve crisscrossed this country, so you know that – don’t really know that this Arab Peace Initiative guarantees Israel full normal regular relations, to be at home in the neighborhood, when all the deals are done. We had a lot of ideas at that time with the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia. We discussed it with Marwan, this foreign minister of Jordan. But nothing happened.

It’s not too late now. Do you see any possibility that the kingdom would undertake really explaining what is this peace initiative to the Israelis and to the Americans?

[34:56]

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: Let me say, Judith, that I think in the Arab world in general has been deficient in its efforts to bring the Arab Peace Initiative its rightful exposure, not just to the American and Israeli people, but to the world
community in general. My agreement with you is there. And if you’d like, I’d be happy to work with you in doing as much as both of us can do to use such platform as Carnegie to talk about the Arab Peace Initiative. So I invite you to come along and we can do visits together to various places and do that.

But the Arab countries themselves have a duty to do that as well. I agree completely.

MS. MATHEWS: Arnaud?

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: My good friend, Arnaud.

Q: Arnaud de Borchgrave, CSIS. Prince Turki, you referred to the possibility that we might be pushed into military action against Iran, much the way we were pushed into the invasion of Iraq. I wonder if you could spell out for us what the consequences of such action might be for the region.

[36:21]

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: Well, I’ve been following your writings, Arnaud. You’ve put them very well in several of your articles. I think the consequences would be calamitous, not just catastrophic. I think destruction and bloodshed will ensue, not just in our part of the world, but on a worldwide basis. And a whole turning back of the clock to the peaceful aspirations, if you like, that we had for our part of the world by ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Syrian-Israeli conflict, the Lebanese-Israeli conflict by bringing stability and security to Iraq, et cetera. All of these things will be turned back, in my view, by such military action.

Nonetheless, and I think equally, the Iranians have to be aware of the explosive nature, if you like, of pursuing their present course in enrichment. The NPT allows them to do that. But everybody recognizes that they have not lived up to the requirements of the IAEA as far as inspections are concerned. So they have to come clean on whatever it is that remain as question marks to the world community, and not just to the United States and the West. There have been several United Nations Security Council resolutions passed, many of them unanimously, which indicate that there is a worldwide consensus that what is happening by Iran or being done by Iran is not acceptable.

And I think they have to be forthcoming in meeting the requirements that the world community has put on them. So there is much for us to do, not just preventing a war against Iran, but also for the Iranians themselves to do things to help prevent military action against them.

MS. MATHEWS: Margaret?

Q: Thank you. Your Highness, Margaret Warner from the PBS NewsHour. If Iran does develop nuclear weapons capability, do you think Saudi Arabia will follow suit?

[39:07]

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: No. And this has been stated many times by the Saudi leadership without question and without equivocation. What the kingdom has pursued, as has the Arab world in general, as a common objective, is the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. At the recent NPT Review Conference in New York, there was agreement by the world community, by at least the signatories to the NPT, that that zone should be established. And the United States, Russia, United Nations and Egypt, if I’m not mistaken, have
been designated the task of preparing a conference next year to bring together that possibility of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction.

In my writings and my public speeches, I have been proposing that such a zone, when it is established, should include a reward regime, as well as a sanctions regime to it. The reward regime to the countries that join would include technical and economic support, but equally importantly, if not more importantly, a nuclear security umbrella for the countries that join. And for the countries that don’t join that, there should be economic, diplomatic and other boycotts, but equally, if not more importantly, military sanctions by the United Nations Security Council permanent members to prevent them from nuclear or other mass destruction weapons for the countries that don’t join.

I think both these rewards and sanctions regime should be included in the promulgation and the construction of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction.

MS. MATHEWS: Right here in the middle.

[41:18]

Q: Thank you. I’m Raphael Danziger with AIPAC. You stated that Saudi Arabia will not take any steps to normalize relations with Israel until Israel has implemented every one of the stipulations of the Arab Peace Initiative. And the question is, do you think that the Arab states still have something to do between now and Israel complying with all those stipulations to help Israelis be convinced that, indeed, there’s seriousness on the Arab side and perhaps also to help the Palestinian Authority in its struggle against Hamas in Gaza, to help for the Arab states in order to be helpful in actually making it so it’d be possible to implement the Arab Peace Initiative?

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: Well, as AIPAC, you’re a friend of Israel. I have called on the friends of Israel to push Israel for peace. And I think all Arab countries would like to see those who call themselves friends of Israel urging the Israelis to be forthcoming on the peace issue. I would just take issue with your contention that we support the Palestinian Authority to fight against Hamas in Gaza if that is what I understood from you. If it’s not, then I’m sorry for my misunderstanding.

But what all of us are working for is an accommodation between Hamas and Fatah to overcome the present, unacceptable division that is taking place in the West Bank and Gaza.

MS. MATHEWS: Is there anybody in the back that I’ve missed? Okay, let me do right up front here.

Q: Your Highness, Viola Gienger from Bloomberg News. On the Arab Peace Initiative, what do you think the Obama administration could do currently in the current discussions that are going on to perhaps promote or further the Arab Peace Initiative in the process? And on the question of Iran, what sort of leverage – perhaps in the international energy markets – do you think Saudi Arabia might have in trying to persuade Iran to give up its pursuit, if there is one, of nuclear weapons?

[43:46]

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: As far as the Arab Peace Initiative on a personal basis – and I can’t speak for my government, of course. I’m sure this is where my government stands. We would like President Obama to say we adopt this initiative and we will work to make it come true. We have heard most recently at the ATPF, I think,
speech by Secretary Clinton a very clear definition of the Arab Peace Initiative as central to the peace process or the peace efforts in the Middle East. And that’s a welcome definition of what the initiative means to peace in the area.

But another thing I’d like to see, of course, is for the United States to push Israel to accept the Arab Peace Initiative. As you know and as I think I mentioned in my remarks, the Arab Peace Initiative has not been accepted by Israel. Under the previous government of Ehud Olmert, there were words like useful and workable and important to look at, et cetera, by Shimon Peres, by Tzipi Livni, by Ehud Olmert about the Arab Peace Initiative.

And the present government, I haven’t – I don’t think I’ve heard anything said by Mr. Netanyahu or any of his colleagues on the Arab Peace Initiative. So getting Israel to accept the peace initiative will be an important accomplishment for the American administration, if they can do that. As you all know, the Arab Peace Initiative is the end game that would come about having gone through negotiations between the countries that have lands still occupied by Israel and Israel. So if the U.S. can get Israel to accept the Arab Peace Initiative, that will be a good accomplishment.

On the Iranian and energy issues that you mentioned, the kingdom has publicly called on Iran to be forthcoming in its positions as far as the United Nations sanctions are concerned vis-à-vis the nuclear issue. And many times, if I remember correctly, a few years back when the Russians offered to enrich uranium for the Iranians, the king at the time publicly urged Iran to accept the Russian offer. Subsequent to that, our foreign minister made the proposition that perhaps there could be an enrichment plant in a neutral country that would be designated to supply our part of the world with nuclear – I’m not an expert, so – with nuclear energy and urged Iran to accept that proposition.

Alas, Iran never responded to these proposals by Saudi leadership. But as far as using oil, if that is what I understand from you, to affect Iranian nuclear ambitions at this moment, I don’t think anything we can do can affect Iranian ambitions there. It has to come from what I mentioned earlier, a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. Because if the Iranians see that there is a level playing ground for everybody, then they will be bound to play. It’s when you get into the different levels of playing fields that the Iranians can always point to the fact that they have been single handed, or that they’re treated differently from others.

MS. MATHEWS: The gentleman right here.

Q: Thank you. Shaun Waterman from the Washington Times. Thank you for speaking to us today. Two questions. Firstly, could you enlarge a little bit on your comments about the results of the elections, sir? I mean, is this the – you know, is this the Republican Party of William Kristol or is it the Republican Party of Ron Paul that you see now?

And on a different topic, I wondered whether you might, as an old intelligence hand, whether you might care to comment on the effects of the very detailed leaks about the intelligence that was provided by your government to our government about the recent Yemen package bombs. Is that going to interfere with cooperation in the future, do you think?

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: Well, let me say about the American elections, I follow American media. And I think in today’s Post or The New York Times, there’s a long article about whether the neocon philosophy has come back or
not. So I would refer you to that, rather than tell you whether it is Ron Paul or Bill Kristol that the Republican Party is going for.

But let me tell you another thing. And for me and I think for many of us in the Arab world and the Muslim world, your elections are lessons in place and in kind that we look at and hopefully try to learn from. And it’s a fabulous spectacle with lots of color and brouhaha and whatever you like. And it comes down in the end to a lot of show business. But where the substance is when these people get back to the Congress and produce resolutions. Regardless of what happens in the world, they stand by Israel. And regardless of what Israel does, Israel is always right. That’s where the matter is, and not in the means or the election process.

But your other question was about –

[50:24]

Q: About the leaks in the U.S. press.

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: I'm assuming that there was understanding beforehand, when the information was passed on, how to deal with this information. So my assumption is that when the kingdom presented these informations to America and to European countries and other in the Arab world that they will have also included a discussion on how best to treat this in the media. So I’m glad that it’s being given its full media exposure, including in the Washington Times, I must say.

MS. MATHEWS: Right back there. Yes?

Q: David Aaron, the RAND Corporation. Your Highness, nice to see you again. Could I go to a different election and that is the Iranian election and the aftermath? How has that been perceived by the Arab countries? Do they see Iran as weakened? Do they see the – and the regime as less legitimate? Do they see – is it less a model as some Arab political movements seem to think? Are you less concerned about Iran or are you more concerned that it appears that the Republican – or rather the Revolutionary Guard has emerged as a major factor? What are your thoughts on that?

[52:09]

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: I can’t speak for all Arabs on that. So I will speak for myself and say that the Ahmadinejad government or candidacy probably would have gotten a plurality of the votes, if not an outright majority, had they not tried to interfere in making it an absolute majority. So instead of getting the 79 or something percent that they finally declared that they got, they would’ve probably gotten something over 50 or 55 percent of the vote. And that would’ve been enough to elect him.

But unfortunately for him and for his party, the attempt to fix the figures, I think, was counterproductive and created the internal dissidence and problems that resulted from the elections. It is definitely, in my view, a reflection that the Grand Ayatollah Khamenei was uncertain, if you like, of how the election was going to turn out. And so he, as it were, came down from his heights as guide of the revolution and basically declared his support for one party over the other. And that inevitably has diminished the position of the grand ayatollah, as Khomeini had left it before when he died.

[54:07]
So there are going to be reflections on that, I think, within the religious establishment in Iran. As you know, there are various schools of Shia interpretation according to each merger or source of Shia jurisprudence. And those who have been critical of what Khomeini left behind, particularly the Wilayat al-Faqih, will have seen as I’m sure you’ve followed some of the writings and public statements in Khamanei’s intervention, if you like, in the elections as being contrary to what the original Wilayat al-Faqih left by Khomeini was meant to be, which is an umbrella-type of super-religious authority over all Iranian Shia factions.

And that, I think, has a historic dimension to it because it means that Khomeini’s philosophical outlook on Wilayat al-Faqih has been outstripped by time and by human nature, which is the result of all such direct-contact-to-God type of relationships.

MS. MATHEWS: All right. We have time for just a couple more. Can’t see a face. I just see an arm. Go ahead.

Q: Thank you. I’m Dave Pollock. I’m from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: Ah, a neocon. (Laughter.)

Q: No, actually – I’m sorry, Your Excellency, but contrary to your remarks, we are not all neocons at the institute. But that’s not what I want to ask you about. If you come to the institute, we’ll be happy to talk to you about it there.

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: I’ve been and I’ll be happy to do that.

Q: My pleasure. (In Arabic.)

[56:16]

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: Thank you.

Q: In Arabic, if you like. But my question for you is actually about Saudi-American relations.

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: Yes, sir.

Q: And it has to do with the impact that the Arab-Israeli conflict has or does not have on bilateral Saudi-American relations in areas of security cooperation, intelligence cooperation, weapons purchases, common strategy toward other dangers in the region and so on. It’s my impression over many years that, although I understand that this is a sensitive and serious issue for Saudi Arabia, there actually has not been a negative impact on U.S.-Saudi cooperation in all these other areas despite the continuance of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Can you imagine that this situation can continue? Or do you foresee a period or a time when this could become a crisis in bilateral Saudi-American relations? Thank you.

[57:17]

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: I just hope you’re not thinking in terms of Saudi Arabia having to prove that it disagrees with the United States on Arab-Israeli issue and therefore, it will go against other cooperation between Saudi Arabia and the United States.
PRINCE AL-FAISAL: The kingdom’s position as far as maintaining security, business, student exchange, et cetera, relations with the United States is with the distinct purpose of sharing mutual benefits with the United States. And we believe that those mutual benefits that have been shared over the last 60 years or so since the relations were established, if not more than that, have been good for both countries.

When there has been a difference between us over particularly the Arab-Israeli dispute as, let’s say, happened in 1973 with the oil embargo and the effects of that, the other matters were affected, whether it was on issues of arms purchases or security cooperation or business or otherwise. So the effect of the Arab-Israeli dispute is very, very apparent from a Saudi point of view. If it did not exist, imagine where we would be in our relationship more than where we are today. But the kingdom will continue to maintain its strategic friendship with the United States and hope that from that position of strategic alliance, if you like, with the United States, bring about with the United States a resolution to the Arab-Israeli dispute.

As you know, the Arab world, at the recent conference in Libya, agreed to extend, if you like, the time for the American attempts to restart negotiations further. I think, if I’m not mistaken, the time is almost over for that extension. And as the Arab leaders said in those meetings and in previous meetings to that, there are alternatives for the Arab world to go if the United States fails in its attempts to bring the Palestinians and the Israelis together and then the Syrians and the Lebanese. And those, of course, will be issues that are very much in discussion now, I am assuming, among various committees that have been set up by the Arab League that include countries like Saudi Arabia in the makeup of those committees to see what those alternatives are.

In the press, I’ve read an alternative of going directly to the United Nations to get recognition of Palestinian state and put that in reality and then go forward on the negotiations. But these are just things that I’ve read in the press. I’m not privy to the discussions by the Arab League committees. But there are several Arab ambassadors I see in front of me here, including the Arab League ambassador himself. I’m sure he would be more capable of answering something like that.

MS. MATHEWS: Okay, we’ll take one more. In the back, right here.

Q: Andrew Jones from BBC News. I was just wondering if you could kind of expand a little bit on what you think may happen with the peace process in regards to the Republican takeover of the House. Do you worry that there are more neoconservatives who may try and derail the process? Or do you think that they won’t actually have an effect on that at all?

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: Let me say that particularly in the Congress and the Senate, the bipartisan support for Israel has been enormous, if not exceptional. So it’s not just Republicans that are doing that. And I probably owe you an explanation of what I said in my presentation.

My concern is really more with the people who speak up for a more aggressive type of policy, as espoused by the neoconservative philosophy under President Bush, in which they will interpret these elections as, if you like, a return
to what they would consider to be their view on foreign policy in general, but from my point of view, particularly on the Middle East.

And these would be people like the Mr. Pollock’s organization and AIPAC and other such platforms, American Enterprise Institute, et cetera, where you find such spokesmen and women who promote that kind of foreign policy. I’m sure there are within the new breed, if you like, or new crop of elected congressmen and women and senators and other officials those who would espouse such ideas as well. As someone noted, Mr. Ron Paul is famous for his less enthusiastic foreign interventionist policies than others. But there are others who are more aggressively inclined.

So it is from that context that the reflection of this election, I think, will have an important addition to what we in the Arab world will have to consider, we have to deal with in dealing with the United States.

[1:03:51]

MS. MATHEWS: Okay, we have one more right there in the back. It’s always a mistake to take the last question.

Q: Jerry Hyman at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Thank you very much, Your Highness, for coming and for sharing your views with us. I have a bit of a sensitive question. And that has to do with the kingdom’s support for various religious organizations under, sort of, Taqwa kind of approaches in madrasas and masjids and so on, not only in the Middle East, but in Europe and in Southeast Asia.

And any number of analysts have traced some degree of extremism and terrorism, which you talked about, to some of these masjids, madrasas and other organizations, some of which have been supported by the kingdom. And I wonder if you could elaborate a bit on what the kingdom’s policy is in these organizations. And are you concerned because some of them are directed – some of the terrorism presumably is directed against the kingdom itself? Are you concerned about that? And how does the kingdom think about that effort religiously, but also the effects of these institutions?

[1:05:17]

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: I remember in 2002 when the World Economic Forum was held in New York after September 11, I had the pleasure at the time of coming to Washington to meet with Sen. McCain. I was out of office and he just simply wanted to talk on the issues. So I sat with him, and he mentioned the issue of madrasas and that there was a list of such institutions and other such charity recipient institutions throughout the world, which were actively supported by Saudi Arabia, in his view, and so on.

So I made the proposition to him that he should give me a list of these madrasas or other institutions, which I will happily share with my ex-colleagues in the government of Saudi Arabia by referring them to them. And he turned to his aide, I remember, and said, furnish our guest with this list. And as we were leaving, the office – he was going to vote on some other measure and I had to leave – I turned to the aide and I said, when can you give me the list? And he turned to me and he said, I’m sorry, Your Highness, but this list is – what is it – not confidential, but –

MS. MATHEWS: Classified?

PRINCE AL-FAISAL: Yes. Anyway, he couldn’t give it to me. And I’m not saying that to be facetious or anything. But I think there is a lot of misinformation and in some cases even disinformation proposed as far as Saudi Arabia’s role in that. The kingdom has supported in the past various charities, including schools for orphans, et cetera, et
cetera. And I’m sure some of that money went to schools that have produced, whether in Pakistan or in some other place, an extremist interpretation of Islam. But let me assure you that since September 11, particularly, all charity giving by the kingdom has been put within the framework of government oversight and approval or lack thereof from within the kingdom.

[1:08:04]

So anybody who wants to contribute money, whether government or otherwise, to any institution or any individual has to go to a bank and the bank has to report that contribution to the central bank authorities. And we joined FATFA (ph), I think it’s called, the financial authority of something or other, where we share that information with other countries. And I remember when I was ambassador here, we had officials from the U.S. Treasury and from other U.S. institutions who were based in the kingdom at the time to share such information with our people and to help us in setting up the bureaucratic structure that would be needed to pursue and follow the trail of any such activity.

So from within the kingdom, I can say without hesitation that no money has gone from there since September 11 to any party or group or institution without the government knowing about it and sharing that information with other interested parties, including the United States. And if there is any link to any of these transactions that have to do with extremism or with terrorism or so on, the kingdom takes action immediately.

As far as almsgiving is concerned – and I’m sure there is a question mark in people’s minds as to where Muslims stand on that and whether they simply allow people to acquire their money and do whatever they want with it – that happens. And I can’t tell you for sure that Saudis who live in Europe or who live in Asia or who live in other places, including the United States, have not given money to certain institutions that may have ended up in the wrong hands.

[1:10:11]

But there definitely has not been, nor will there ever be, an approved or even a semi-approved effort on the part of the kingdom to send money to people in order to turn them into terrorists or extremists. As I continually say to my American and other audiences, the kingdom was the first victim of al-Qaida and remains its most active opponent, if you like. Witness the recent tipoff to the United States.

But within the kingdom, the deconstruction of al-Qaida has taken the form of not just police action, but also an overhaul, if you like, of the social custom and practice and cultural attitude the Saudis have had on issues like almsgiving to the poor and other things to make sure that people follow how the prophet, Muhammad – peace be upon him – identified Muslims when he was asked when he started preaching, can you define who are Muslims?

And he said, we are a people of the middle – meaning, of course, that there is no zealotry on one side, nor laxness on the other side. And it is that line that the government pursues and follows even in allowing for charity to continue by Saudis to needy people. And let’s admit it, the needy are vast and huge in numbers throughout the world community. And the kingdom will continue to support them.

I hope I answered your question. This is as best as I can do it. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

MS. MATHEWS: Thank you very – and please join me. (Applause.)

(END)