

Transcript

The Twilight Zone Between Arabs and Israelis

Presenter:

Kai Bird, Gideon Levy, Adam LeBor, Fady Joudah, Navtej Sarna, and Hardeep Singh Puri. Thank you.

Hardeep Singh Puri:

Good afternoon. I'm delighted to be moderating a panel of such eminence and such distinguished people who have not only an intimate knowledge of what's happening in that part of the world between Arabs and Israelis, and between the Israelis and the Palestinians in particular. I don't want to stand between you and the free-flowing conversation we will have amongst ourselves, but in order to provide a perspective, I would, with your permission, just take a minute or two, to outline how I see the state of play.

To start with, I think Twilight Zone is an apt term to describe what is happening. We have a situation when the negotiating process, I think, suffered a severe blow after the breakout of hostilities between the Israelis and Hamas in the summer of 2014. The last successful attempt at negotiations was over 20 years ago, the Oslo Accords. For the young population on both sides, Oslo is only a memory, if one at all. Since then, violence levels have escalated, and more important, from my point of view, there seems to be a deep skepticism both amongst the Israelis and the Palestinians on the prospects of negotiations.

Having had the privilege of serving on the Security Council, I am of the firm view that the core, or the essential core of the problem, is the policy of settlements. The issue came before the Security Council in a Resolution, which was then brought by the one Arab state which was serving on the Council by Lebanon, and all 14, I would say, all 15 members of the Security Council were, I think, on the same page. Fourteen of us supported the Security Council motion, which said that all settlements post 1967 were essentially illegal. The 15th member, the United States, its Permanent Representative, Susan Rice, walked up to me and she said, "We essentially agree with you, the rest of the 14, but we are not going to use the word illegal, we are going to use the word illegitimate." To my simple way of thinking the two mean the same, but they used the word illegitimate, they still cast a veto, and that resolution did not come through.

The rest is history. The Palestinians went to this United Nations, and obtained what is called Non-Member Observer Status. After that, the Palestinians have also, on the last day of 2014, I think applied for membership of the International Criminal Court, and they will get membership by April 2015, if I'm not mistaken. How do I view the prospects for negotiated peace there? I use the word with my distinguished panelists as one of considerable pessimism, but I am here to hear your views, gentlemen, which one of you wants to start? You have the floor, Kai.

Kai Bird:

Well, Hardeep, just to be a contrarian, and because I'm naturally a naive optimist, you know, I think we all at this point, know what should happen. What the compromise is, it's a two state solution along the Green Line of 1967 with a one-to-one exchange of land and a two-state solution, but I also know that it's not likely to happen soon. I am hopeful, being a naive optimist, that the March 17th election will shake things up and that Israelis, who are in charge and driving the dynamics of this situation, will vote out this current government, and bring in a government that is more open. And I think the question in the March 17th election that Netanyahu himself has put on the agenda by supporting this bill calling for an identifying, defining Israel as a Jewish nation-state is wrong.

And Israel is not a Jewish-state in my view, it is a Hebrew Republic, and as such this, if you think of it in these terms, it's a way to open up Israel as multinational state that can incorporate Palestinian identity, and it's a way forward. And, in fact, there are two Israels, I'd be interested to know what Gideon thinks of this, but there's the Israel of Tel-Aviv, and the Israel of Jerusalem, and the Israel of Tel-Aviv is very much the Hebrew Republic - dynamic, secular, and I hope that is the future of Israel. So for those reasons I see a glimmer of hope, and I think we all know, we all agree, we historians, on the narrative. Everyone claims that there are two narratives and that they are in conflict, but I believe we are actually passed that. We all know that there were, there was ethnic cleansing in 1948, there was a war, there was injustice, there are two peoples on one land, and now we need to figure out the way forward. What is peace?

Hardeep:

Kai, thank you very much, and I'm glad that you've injected some cautious optimism into the discussion. Before I invite Gideon, I would say I just want to quote you what Martin Indyk, the Chief U.S. negotiator, if I may describe him, said. He said, "Annexing the West Bank and its 2.5 million Palestinian Arabs, as some Israelis on the right are calling for, is antithetical to Israel functioning as a democratic, Jewish state. If it remains democratic under this scenario, then the Palestinians will constitute a majority of the population. If it remains Jewish, then the Palestinians will be stripped of their rights." This is how I would view it after what you say, but Gideon, your call.

Gideon Levy:

Thank you, Hardeep. You are a professional diplomat, which I am not, so let me be more sharp. The settlements are neither not legitimate, nor not legal. The settlements are criminal. The settlements came with one goal: to prevent any kind of settlement, and it is a huge success because the settlements are the issue which prevents any kind of just settlement between Israel and Palestine, and this was their original purpose. It is all about real estate, and about real estate the settlements won, and we, few Israelis and many Palestinians, lost. But I want to get back to the basics because the name of our session includes the word "Twilight." Twilight Zone is the name of my column, my weekly column, but I think that we are not dealing with Twilight Zone. I think that there are certain

things which are black and white, mainly black, and everyone who thinks the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians, between Israel and Palestine, is a very complex conflict, it is not because there are some very simple things. There is a basic fact that - basic set of facts which nobody can deny: Israel had occupied the West Bank and Gaza in '67. No state in the world, including Micronesia, had ever recognized this occupation. This occupation is now over 40 years old. It's one of the most brutal tyrannies in the world today - the occupation, the backyard of Israel.

This occupation must come to its end one way or the other. The peace process that you mentioned, the longest peace process maybe in history, was never meant to put an end to the occupation. There was not a single Israeli leader until today who really aimed to put an end to the occupation. They had all kind of tricks to gain time, all kind of tricks to find all kind of ways to soften the occupation, but this basic, brutal regime of governing another people against its will for decades in order to possess more territory with all kind of cover ups: religious cover-ups and excuses, security cover-ups and excuses - all this was always the basic of Israeli policy ever since '48. And my problem is '48 that '48 never ended. That whatever was true in '48 is true today about Israeli policy, and therefore let's, before we get to the complexity, let's agree that there are some basic things which are unacceptable, and above all that this occupation continues. There are no excuses for this occupation.

Hardeep:

But Gideon..

Gideon:

Just one more sentence. There are no excuses that generation after generation Palestinians will live in those inhuman conditions. There are no excuses that the United States will continue to support this, and the entire world will keep silent. There is no excuse to tell a Palestinian young guy from Gaza or from the West Bank, "You have to wait now for another five years of peace.."

Kai:

I agree Gideon. Very quickly... an intervention.

Hardeep:

Please, come in quickly and then I would like to say something too. Yeah, please.

Kai:

I agree with everything you've just said, but don't you think that if tomorrow the Israeli electorate was forced to vote up or down a referendum on a peace settlement along the '67 line, and the Palestinian population voted in the same referendum up or down, that both peoples would say yes?

Gideon:

Both peoples would say, "Yes, the Israelis, there was always a majority for a two-state solution, but not now, not now, and maybe not here - somewhere else." All the talking about two-state solutions, the speeches, the slogans, and their polls were always aimed to something very unclear because we don't have a partner, because there is terror, because Arafat is an obstacle, because we cannot talk to them, we cannot trust them, we cannot do anything. All the excuses are still there, and I say here, all the excuses are valid nothing.

Hardeep:

Gideon, thank you very much, and I don't want to use the moderators prerogative beyond a point, but the facts of the matter are that the facts on the ground cannot change, that this is territory under occupation. I don't think there's any debate on that, but it would help as a starting point if further settlements at least they could be a halt to the settlement policy to provide a window of opportunity for peace talks to resume. I'm entirely with you, I mean, but it takes two to tango. The other side also have to come back to a sense of what is doable in a negotiating, and I know Navtej would want come on that part a little later, but may I invite you, Adam, to..

Adam LeBor:

Thank you. I think that I share some of Gideon's anger about the settlements, and think that the settlements are clearly a major obstacle to peace. But I also agree very much with Kai that one of the strange things about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is that opinion poll after opinion poll has shown that the people themselves, the Palestinians and the Israelis, there's always a majority for a peaceful two-state solution, and that it seems that the problems are coming not so much from the peoples who accept, by and large accept, the reality of each other.. They may not be very happy about it, they may not be jumping for joy, but most Israelis believe that ultimately there will probably be some kind of Palestinian state. Most Palestinians realize that Israel's not going anywhere, and they're going to have to live with it even though they may not like it, and there's a small minority among both of them who think really the way forward here is what Kai raises, as though what we might call the Tel-Aviv Solution. The Hebrew Republic Solution whereas Israel and Israelis focus much more on what it means to be an Israeli an inclusive Israeli identity also brings in the question of the Arab minority in Israel, which I think is one of the more fascinating aspects of this because a substantial proportion of the Israeli population is not Jewish, is in fact Arab, so there's always that contradiction. And I remember when I was writing my book, "City of Oranges," which traces the story of families, Jewish and Arab families in Jaffa, I interviewed many, many Israeli-Palestinians or Palestinians-Israelis as they define themselves, and I asked them, "Would you, if there was a functioning viable state of Palestine, would you become a Palestinian citizen?" And every single one from the most radical said, "No, I would not because there are certain things I have in Israel, which are the rule of law, there are independent institutions, I'm a citizen here, and it's true that I do suffer some discrimination, but I have basic mechanisms for dealing with the government and raising my grievances. Those simply don't exist on the other side." Now there's many reasons

why they don't exist, obviously the occupation is the prime one, but I think what I want to say is really that those are the two important aspects - that both sides, the peoples themselves are ready for peace, they're just very badly led on both sides. And also, I agree with Kai that the next election in Israel in March is going to be absolutely crucial because if again the Likud wins, and also even forces further to the right like Naftali Bennett and HaBayit Hayehudi, the Jewish Home party, then I think we can say goodbye to any kind of likely settlement for a very long time. However, if there's a move back to the center, I think centrist Israeli politicians also understand that the country is suffering from increasing isolation, increasingly unpopular around the world, and they want to see their country integrated, especially in the world of a globalized economy. So, what we can very much hope for is that Netanyahu loses the next election, and the center-left wins it.

Hardeep:

Thank you very much. Before I invite our next speaker, I get the feeling sometimes sitting in New York, that the number of people who have faith in a two-state solution is actually reducing, and that the alternates are so much more worrying, and we could perhaps come back to that later because you cannot predicate an entire approach on something which has gone as long as this conflict has on domestic political changes because you need to build constituencies, but we could come back to that later. Fady, you have the floor.

Fady Joudah:

Thank you. Well, I think that, you know, this, the way we sit up here, represents a major problem for what it's like to be a Palestinian. Everybody is willing, even if you are pro-Palestinian, to speak on behalf of Palestinians, and the Palestinians' permission to narrate is always limited. We're really not - you know, my Palestinian voice, for example, is reduced to an opinion poll where the idea of a Palestinian's right to actually express his and her deep wounds, as Gideon said from 1948 and even before, is not considered something that is allowed to be heard for the masses because the facts on the ground, we're always told, you know, you have to do realpolitik. You need real policy conversations, and for the public and the masses, so much knowledge gets diluted that you're confused - with illegal settlements, and opinion polls, two-state, one-state, and in the end, and especially in India with the history of British colonization, in the end what we are doing most of the time is speaking the language of power. We're not speaking the language of the vanquished if one wants to invoke, say, Walter Benjamin, for instance. And what interests me in speaking today is not to really give an opinion on anything that was said or that would be said, but to simply ask you deep inside to examine, as if you will, a cellular unit of what is your role as a citizen in the world toward common decency - the moral act that you hold inside you, an act of simple common decency toward the Palestinian plight. I'm not asking you to support any policies because probably none of us on this, in this space here, are going to change much. Netanyahu wins, Netanyahu loses, if we were to hold this panel again next year it'll be some other, pardon me for saying this, mumbo-jumbo jargon about political language. The Palestinians have been in a crisis of

liquidation for more than 60 years, and you cannot keep asking as an act of moral common decency to equate the vanquished with the massively far superior, and keep asking the Palestinians - the Palestinians are not saints, no human is more saint than another, but you cannot diffuse and dilute the right of the vanquished and go home and sleep on it and think you're okay with that. And before I move on, I would like to read a brief section from a poem by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. It's called "Murdered and Unknown."

No forgetfulness gathers them

(And it's about children)

*and no remembrance scatters them...they're forgotten
in winter's grass on the public highway
between two long stories about heroism and suffering.
"I am the victim." "No. I alone am the victim."
They didn't tell the author: "No victim kills another.
There is in the story a victim and a killer."*

And I want to stop at this because one of the things you have to grow up as a Palestinian in this bizarre imbalance of power that still spuriously blames the victim, is to say, like Edward Said said, for example, that, you know, the Palestinians are the victims of the victims considering the tragic history of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust and so forth, although the Palestinians are not really to bare. But the idea if you want to think in your minds about a simple morality away for the jargon of political language, which always serves the powerful - If a Palestinian kills an Israeli then, let's agree, that if a Palestinian kills an Israeli then that Palestinian at that moment is no longer a victim because he performed a sin of killing. I don't want to justify it by a single... I'm okay with that. If that's the case, and if you agree to that simple morality, then it means any Israeli, any Jewish-Israeli or non-Jewish-Israeli who kills a Palestinian is also no longer a victim, and no longer justified. Now, if we are the masses, the masses of the.. the citizens of the world are so confused by this jargon of politics that we end up losing the simple morality then Mahmoud Darwish says, "Look, I'm going to give you a simple equation. No victim kills another. There is in the story a victim and a killer. Please do the math, and then go home and ask yourself an honest question: How far are you willing to go to keep blaming the victims? Stop speaking the language of power. Stop blaming the victims."

Hardeep:

Thank you very much, Fady. Before I invite Navtej, I would say that all of us come from different worlds, but perhaps those who are most guilty of falling into the language of power are people who come from my profession, the diplomats, and Navtej has been in the same game, perhaps not as long as I have, but he has one additional advantage. He has served till very recently as India's Ambassador to Israel, so he can also bring to this discussion a perspective which I'm afraid is

not reflected too well on this panel. Let me be very clear - there is nothing that has been said by either of the three, my colleagues who have spoken, with which I could disagree. In fact, at the level of basic human decency, you cannot disagree with this kind of discourse. You only agree with it varying degrees of vehemence, but the fact is that you need to bring violence levels down, you need to have a negotiated settlement in order to prevent situations from exacerbating and becoming even worse, not only for future generations of people under occupation, but for the Israeli-state as well, and I think that should be the name of the game, but why don't you kick off now, Navtej. You were ambassador for four years, and even in Delhi you, I think, in Delhi as Secretary you deal with this issue, but I'm sure you will appreciate that here he will be speaking in his personal capacity.

Navtej Sarna:

Thank you very much, Hardeep. I fortunately or unfortunately in my present capacity I don't deal with the subject, which allows me to come on to this panel and speak in a personal capacity. But yes, I think the title The Twilight Zone is very wisely chosen for several reasons, and I think that therein lies some of the answers. I think it's a twilight zone essentially not between Israelis and Arabs alone, which means two very separate - gives the idea of two very separate bodies of people, but they are not really so separated, they are cousins, and the twilight zone between a terrible war situation like the Gaza Wars, and the utopian peace for which we are waiting. So essentially we, in choosing this subject, we have given up either. We have given up hopefully the idea of permanent war, and we have given up this idea of achieving a utopian peace, at least in the immediate short term. Because there are two levels at which you can see this problem, since you asked to speak on the negotiating aspects. One, I think is simply the diplomatic solutions and where do we go? This panel is not going to find that solution, nor does it need to find that solution. People have made, done doctorates, people have made entire careers on solving this problem. Geneva and Jerusalem are full of think-tanks who can at the drop of a penny bring you up a booklet say, "Here, this is how Jerusalem is to be divided. This is where the trucks will be stopped, this is where the buses will go through." They have it everything down in maps, details. None of that is lacking. None of the UN Resolutions are lacking, whether you call it illegitimate, criminal, or illegal, the point remains the same. The solutions are many. Why has it not happened at that level? Because it cannot happen, to my limited experience. This is a subject if it hasn't happened at Oslo and beyond, to come to a point of Oslo, and have a moment in time and history, and a political space, which certainly you don't have if you step back and look at the Middle East today. You certainly don't have that negotiating space of people willing to come up and make sacrifices, to people coming to take risky decisions. You don't have a Rabin or a Peres, you don't have somebody who is going to step up and say, "Yes, I am willing to divide Jerusalem." And until and unless you're willing to divide Jerusalem, I don't think any of the rest of it, frankly, matters because that ultimately is the heart of the problem. So, A - it needs certain personalities, at least one personality who's putting his life on the line, and saying, "I am willing to do this," or two, one on both sides, so that this guy doesn't have a chance to say he doesn't have a partner. So you need those two

statesmen; until that happens this is not a negotiation which can happen with "Okay, we agree to this and we..." It is too deep, and I'm afraid that my very distinguished interlocutors seem to not go beyond '48. This is a very, very deep problem.

This problem is as deep as the Judean hills, and I mean, there is that famous story which is also not very old of the 19th century when the Jews started coming to Palestine to buy up land, and they were told to say, rabbis were sent to go and say, "Look, go and see what the Promise Land looks like." And there were two rabbis who came back and went back and reported to their bosses in Vienna, "The bride is beautiful, but she's married to another man," and this is the a sense of the problem. Who came there first? Who owns this first? Whose... and those counter-narratives, I'm afraid, cannot be dismissed as pure propaganda - both sides. I think these are narratives by which people live, they spend their day and night. It's their religion. It's their food. It's what they believe in. I mean, you just have to walk in that one square kilometer of Old Jerusalem to know how deeply entrenched this problem is. Every inch is fought over, every inch. So, if you're going to solve this problem, or, I'm afraid, in the short term we're condemned to the twilight zone, and my suggestion would that all of us focus on how do we engage with the twilight zone? How do we engage with a certain dialogue in the twilight zone, which makes human dignity possible? Which takes... If we start naming victims, then everybody says he's a victim. Somebody's a victim of '48, somebody's a victim of '67, and somebody says we are victims because the Levant Arab countries threw us out and we are in Israel because of that. So, everybody has a label of victimhood. I think we have to get beyond that, but I'd be happy to come back. I don't want to hog the (ineligible).

Hardeep:

Well, thank you very much, Navtej. I'm glad you focused on the twilight zone. My own jottings as to what this meant - and I'll just share that with you before we proceed. I said it was an apt term for the current situation between Arabs and Israelis, past and present, and I'm glad you brought the past up even further before '48. An area just beyond ordinary, legal, and ethical limits. An area of ambiguity between two distinct states or conditions. An indefinite boundary that constantly keeps us in suspense. And I would like, therefore, to see what it is that some of us might see doable in so far as this twilight zone is concerned in the immediate or in the medium term? At the end of the day, I think the problem will require resolution, which is something on which the tools and the personalities don't seem to be on the horizons. The fact that a president of the United States is ending his second term has a meaning; an incoming president has a window of opportunity, then when you come up for re-election there are factors of, you know, how much leverage as U.S. president has considering the ground realities in the United States. But what is it that can be done - now you said, Kai, about the March 17th elections. Could those be a game-changer, and how? I know you spelled it out a little, but here I would like to imbibe some of your optimism, and shed some of my pessimism.

Kai:

Okay, well, I think Gideon will probably know more about the internal politics of this election coming up than I do, but I do believe, again, 100 years from now, these two peoples are going to have to be living together, and they, I think, 100 years from now people will look back and ask, "Why is it that we did nothing to make it happen sooner and thus save lives in the next war from happening." Why didn't we end the violence? Because it's clear what should happen, and to be pessimistic, in looking past these elections, time is running out for a two-state solution. Demographic facts on the ground are being created by the Israeli right wing who are determined to annex, and I don't know, Gideon, if they annex, what is... What are these people thinking? How are they going to control, occupy the Palestinians in an annexed, in a greater Israel? It seems like insanity.

Gideon:

My answer - that's a new position that I find myself as a spokesperson for the right wingers in Israel. I'm not sure I can do it, I can just try. I think they don't have an answer. I would rather ask you for the prescription for the medicines that you take to be so optimistic because whatever I try to do, I cannot reach this stage of optimism. For the question about the elections, I think look at the campaign! There's one issue that doesn't exist in this campaign, and that's the most fatal issue, and this is the continuance of the occupation. They deal with everything except of this, and therefore don't expect any kind of change. If Netanyahu will step down and Herzog will be elected, atmosphere will change, less racism, less nationalism within the country, less anti-democratic legislation, better atmosphere, better international atmosphere, the world will hug Herzog... One thing will not happen - the occupation will not come to its end, and, you know Navtej, when you speak about twilight zone, and you speak about 100 years... What do we tell to the Palestinians? Wait 100 years under twilight zone? Could you tell it to the blacks in South Africa? Go for another 100 years of twilight zone... And what does it mean this twilight zone? This twilight zone means occupation, but maybe in a more moderate way. Settlements, but maybe in a more limited way. This cannot go on, ladies and gentlemen, it is the 21st Century in which military occupations cannot last, in which no country can continue to ignore, in a brutal way, the international law, the international community. Show me one subject in which the international community is so united, one more subject in which China and India, Russia and the United States, Europe and even Micronesia are united, and that's recognizing the right of the Palestinian, recognizing the illegitimacy of the occupation. So to call for another twilight zone, to call for another 100 years means to tell the Palestinians: "You are worth nothing. Your life is worth nothing. Your dignity is worth nothing. You are not human beings like us, or like the rest of the world." And therefore, I come back to the issue that was raised here, another sign of Europeanism - you say that the two-state solution time is running out for the two-state solution.

Dear Kai, I'm afraid that time ran out already for the two-state solution, and this train left the station already. I wish I'm wrong, but if you think there will be ever any Israeli leader who will be able to evacuate half a million settlers, I mean,

maybe in my best dreams I cannot think about someone like this. Without evacuating the settlements, there is no viable Palestinian state, and without having a viable Palestinian state, we don't have a just solution, and without a just solution we did nothing. So, the two-state solution is still on the table. It's being used by many, many factors as a way to gain more time, to deepen this occupation, to build more settlements, and to speak about the two-state solution for the future to come. But the two-state solution, in my view, is a lost case because of the settlements. The settlements warn, the right-wingers warn, the nationalistic warn, and now we have to change the discourse and start to talk about something entirely different, and this is "one man, one vote." Sounds familiar to you? Yes. Does it implement for this part of the world? Yes, because in the West Bank, because in the backyard of Israel there is an apartheid regime and it's time to change it.

Hardeep:

Gideon, thank you very much. I tried very hard, Kai, to see if we can get a little tilt towards optimism. I don't think this discourse is heading in that direction, but we have a few minutes before we take questions, and I just wanted to ask you - the March 17th elections plus the fact that the Palestinians now have membership of the International Criminal Court, is there something that leverage which could be provided to, you see, that at least we can get a temporary halt to the settlement process? The oral question, I agree with you. I don't think any government elected there is going to say that occupation per se, is not on. That's not part of that narrative, but if you can get, say, a press on the pause button on the settlement process and to see if the talks can be revived with proper personalities... Anyone wants to take that for a few minutes before?

Navtej:

I just want to add, throw in a question more than a comment because I heard what Gideon said with great interest. The two-state solution is a lost cause... That's a terrible thing because that's the entire brunt of the entire international community has been working towards that. All your UN resolutions, etc., etc., have been working towards... Everything is predicated on a two-state. If that is gone, then I would go back into a deeper pessimism than what Gideon is feeling because then who do you expect to give "one man, one vote" in that situation?

Hardeep:

Yeah, I was going to come to that because if it is a question of a no-holds-barred, free-for-all then "one person, one vote," which is something that you look for in a democratic framework, and then there has to be a constituency which accepts the results. But here where there is a civil war, a likelihood with the rest of the area, there are sectarian fault lines that have opened up, you have problems of the ISIS or the ISL there.. I mean, to me, that would just amount to pouring more fuel into an already raging fire.

Gideon:

This is all true, but show me the scenario in which the two-state solution is still viable, is still relevant. I see all the difficulties in the one-state solution, but I still - but I believe that the two-state solution... This question should be raised to those who have demolished the two-state solution, and they did it systematically. To those who brought us to this situation in which the two-state solution is no longer valid, and if you believe that the world, Navtej, is favor of the two-state solution, where is the world? The United States could have brought the two-state solution within months, within months if the United States would just like it to happen, but the United States never wanted this solution in the Middle East, except of peace process, photo opportunities, clichés and slogans. Because Israel is depending on the United States like never before and the moment that an American president will really want to see peace in the Middle East or at least end of the occupation, this moment it will happen. Israel will have no other choice, and those big right-wingers, those patriots, those who call for standing against the United States, they are the first ones to realize that it's enough that American Air Force will declare that they stop supplying a certain screw to the Israeli Air Force, and the next day it's over. But this date doesn't come.

Hardeep:

But you know, Adam, we have a minute or two, and I would like to hear from you.

Adam:

Sure.

Hardeep:

But you know, I mean, only one comment: one is dependent on the other, but the other is also dependent on the other one, so there is something that can be worked out through testing the extent and limits of mutual dependence, but...

Adam:

I think the one-state solution that people talk about is no solution whatsoever. It can't work partly because of the reason that Fady has outlined because of what's in people's heads is a factor that's often very much forgotten here, is the Palestinians have their very strong narrative of dispossession, the Israelis have their very strong narrative as well, that they were dispossessed, many Israelis came from Arab countries as well and were also dispossessed, and those two narratives don't meet at all apart from on the fringes, and perhaps in places like this. There's very little interaction between them. So a one-state solution would clearly have a Palestinian majority so no Israeli, very few Israelis, you know, just a tiny percentage would ever agree to that because if it were to be a democracy Israel would be voted out of existence. If it were not to be a democracy Israel, the whole of Israel, would be a true apartheid state, and would be an international pariah, so I think Israelis realize themselves that the one-state solution is not going to work. The basic framework, and here I agree and disagree with Gideon because he says the framework for the two-state solution is dead, but he's also quite brilliantly outlined a solution in which it's completely

alive which is sufficient pressure from America saying again that, you know, we're going to stop supplying that crucial screw for your aircraft, and then there would be a psychic shift in Israel, a realization because Israel cannot survive without America. But I also think that what we haven't talked about too much is the international thing, which we've touched on, which is that changing international dynamic that the Palestinians rightly have proper Observer Status at the United Nations, they have this card which they can play to declare independence, and even bizarrely dissolve the Palestinian authority, which is a kind of nuclear option but would force Israel to take-over, would force a lot of attention on to the issue, and I think Israelis really don't want to, in that sense, run the Palestinian authorities day-to-day affairs. So, the two-state solution I think can still happen. There's been - there is movement for this on the Arab side. There was the Arab initiative, the Arab League initiative, I think, a good decade ago which laid out the parameters very clearly which are, you know, share Jerusalem, some return of refugees, independent Palestine on most of the West Bank, perhaps a few territorial swaps here and there, but the basic framework is there. It is the only framework. There is no one-state solution, it will never work, so we have to keep focusing on that two-state solution and are bringing sufficient pressure to bear on the Israeli government that it move towards it.

Hardeep:

Well, thank you very much. Before I invite questions from the audience, let me just say it's very clear that no matter what we think of the two-state solution, that's the only framework of reference on the table, and if there is pessimism on it, we have no choice to again keep going back to the two-state solution. Equally, that this will require discipline, rolling back of violence levels, and it will require some decisive weight-lifting by the United States of America at an appropriate time. And at that point of time you will also require the leadership on both sides that is the Palestinians and the Israelis to genuinely want to walk that talk. I think the Arab States, I don't think any solution is possible unless the larger Arab states also contribute to the peaceful solution, but that is a practitioner, somebody as, who you say, belongs to the world of power language. You know, that's how it seems, but I would throw this open now to the lady... Yes, could you please introduce yourself and confine yourself to a question. Yeah.

Audience Member #1:

Hello, my name is Chevandeni (SP?), and I wanted to know it's like you have already mentioned and we have seen, it's clear that international pressure isn't enough for this to work out. The first world clearly gets quite hassled when people die in their own regions, and not so much...

Hardeep:

A question, please. Confine yourself to a question.

Audience Member #1:

So, how do you see this working out with alternatives to international pressure like bi-lateral talks or anything else, or do you see this working out at all?

Hardeep:

We'll take a few more. The gentleman here, yes. No this gentleman, yes. And it would be useful if you are direct your question, and I mean question at one of the panelists. It'll make our lives simpler.

Audience Member #2:

Good morning. My question is to Mr. Gideon. I wanted to know his comments on the famous handshake on the White House lawns between Yasser Arafat and the Israeli prime minister, even the Nobel Prize was accorded on that handshake. If that was not an effort, what are your comments on that?

Hardeep:

Thank you. We'll take one or two questions more. The gentleman here. You want a pen? No problem.

Audience Member #3:

Turn it over to Gideon. I have a question to Gideon and also to Mr. Navtej. Now the idea of the two-state solution so far has been limited to a two-state framework, but the notion of the state and state-sovereignty needs to be fundamentally rethought. It is in context..

Hardeep:

Question please.

Audience Member #3:

Yes, this is a question. You know, how do we re-think the proposal of the two-state solution in the context of the five-state involvement and Middle Eastern community? My second question is the movements of non-violent movement of resistance in Palestine which also resonates with the non-violent movement in Israel. My question to Mr. Navtej is what is the geopolitical reason for India to have changed our position on Palestine, and has been so silent on Israeli brutality?

Hardeep:

The lady, yes. That's you. Yeah, please. (Points at member in audience)

Audience Member #4:

Thank you. Hello? I'd like to know from Fady what his position is on the one-state solution, please.

Fady:

Thank you! There is a Palestinian in the house! Thank you!

Audience Member #4:

Absolutely! And that's why we want to hear from you.

Hardeep: (points to member in audience)

Audience Member #5:

Hello, this is for the floor in general. We've talked a lot about how we're frustrated with the political processes for just not getting things done, so what is possible outside the political domain for the common man to sort of actively do as a solution?

Hardeep:

I read that question with some alarm, but anyway, I think we will respond to it. Yes? (points at member in audience)

Audience Member #6:

This is question to Fady, also, I'm so glad that you'll finally get a chance to say a little more than the others. Is like we have Gideon in Israel, which I'm very proud that in Israel we have Israelis who are very pro-Palestinian, within the Palestinian community, what is the debate within the Palestinian community? What are your issues? What are your challenges within your own community? What are your challenges in the Arab world? What sort of support or nonsupport are you getting? Why are, like, Palestinian refugees who are in Lebanon not allowed to own land, not allowed to work? What are those issues that you have?

Hardeep:

Well, we'll take one more question, the gentleman, yes. (pointing at audience member)

Audience Member #7:

It's a very general question to the floor itself. So, we just talked about Israel and the backing of the United States of America to Israel, also but what I didn't hear as a student of international relations was how the Arab League or Iraq or Iran or Saudi Arabia have been influencing the whole situation, with Iran getting involved, and mostly they don't even recognize Israel as a country, so what is the stand of the floor on that? So because Israel is a nation which does not have an ally is a 1000-mile radius, so doesn't it have to be a bit strict or stringent with whatever it does?

Hardeep:

Well, thank you very much. I think we've got quite a few questions which will enable us to make productive use of the remaining time. Gideon, do you want to kick off?

Gideon:

Yes. First I would like to say I'm not a pro-Palestinian Israeli, by all means not.

Hardeep:

You're pro-peace.

Gideon:

I am not even pro-peace. I'm pro-justice. The issue is justice, not peace, and not pro-Palestinian, and not pro-Israeli, and you can be and you should be an Israeli patriot only if you care for the justice of your country, and anyone who does not care about the justice of his country is not a patriot, in my view. With all due respect to the right-wingers who believe that it is justice to have a situation in which there are two peoples and one people will gain all the rights in the world, and the other people will gain nothing, those who believe that the Jewish people is the chosen people and all the rest don't deserve the same right. About Oslo, the question here - I don't know if Oslo was a trap or an illusion, but if you look backwards, it's a very easy way to judge Oslo. I was overwhelmed by Oslo, I was really optimistic then, like you now (pointing to Kai), and I really believed that we were opening a new chapter, but when I look backwards I am much more suspicious about Oslo, and there is one clear indication. Why didn't Oslo include an evacuation of one terrace in the settlements? One apartment? One building? At least as an indication for an intention to put an end to this criminal project, but there was none, and this makes me very suspicious about Oslo. Oslo, when you look backwards, made the Palestinian situation much worse. Most of the settlements were built after Oslo by Peace Nobel Prize winners like Shimon Peres who are responsible to the settlements project at least like Netanyahu, if not more so, because they are the establishing fathers of this project. But in any case, any kind of agreement which did not include evacuation of settlements tells us that the intention was not genuine. It was about gaining more time to deepen the occupation. About nonviolence resistance, the Palestinians are trying very hard, and I must tell you, it's very hard to keep a non-violent resistance in front of the IDF, of the Israeli Defense Forces. It's very hard because it turns into violence within minutes. I've been in so many demonstrations in which the non-violence became and turned into violence. It is a very adorable tendency in many villages which week after week they are demonstrating, including some Israelis who come to support, but this will not make the change, unfortunately. I want to say one word about the relationship between Israel and India. It's not only that you can be a friend of Israel, like India, or you should be a friend of Israel, but I think that today, real friendship to Israel, must include objection to the occupation, must include some kind of conditions for the friendship, which is the policy.

Hardeep:

And there's been no change in the policy, so any suggestion that a change in government in Delhi in May diluted our support for the Palestinian people is as far as I'm aware, and I can say it with authority, completely untrue. The support for the Palestinian people is total.

Gideon:

I'm happy to hear it.

Navtej:

May I add to that since the question was addressed to me..

Hardeep:

Well, you know, I was in your profession also for forty years, so there's a temptation, and if my good friend sitting there hadn't egged me on, I may have waited for your chance...

Navtej:

There's also a statement of the Foreign Minister on July 21 on the floor of the Parliament..

Hardeep:

Correct.

Gideon:

I'll just give one example to what I call "friendship." You might have a relative or a friend who is drug addict, and you care about him. There are two ways open for you. One way is to supply him with more money so he can buy more drugs. He will be so grateful to you, he will love you. Are you a real friend? Do you really care about him? The other way is to send him to a rehabilitation center. He's going to be so mad at you. He's going to resist, he's going to hate you, but this is real care, and there's no doubt, unfortunately so, that Israel is occupation-addicted and it needs some help from the outside.

Hardeep:

Thank you very much, Gideon. Yes?

Fady:

Yeah, I would like to redefine optimism, and I spoke to this earlier, and I think that some of you have heard exactly what I said repeated. Optimism is to stop using the language that favors the oppressive victimizer, and saying that there is no other option but the two-state solution. The Palestinians, the vanquished, the victims, not on the basis of history, not on the basis of narrative and '48 and '67 and 2001 or B.C., A.C., whatever. It is on the mere daily presence of dehumanized people, dehumanized people who have... We can sit here and I can tell you narratives about my cousins, my nieces, my nephews, and they are not singular to me or my family. Optimism will come in a one-state solution because it is humanity, short of a genocide, humanity will win inside Israeli hearts, Jewish hearts, Palestinians, everybody, and there is no viable option on the long term unless it is a co-existence in a one-state solution. We will come back here next year, ten years, it will be the same conversation. One is skilled in listening to the merry-go-round, the repeat button on the cassette recorder, when it comes to speaking about Palestinians, almost always in the absent voice. And I think that, you know, it is what frightens me, what saddens me, what breaks my heart is that for that point to happen, we may have to get to a bleak point, yet bleaker even. And I would also disagree. I would honestly say that as a Palestinian that a significant overwhelming number of Palestinians inside, outside and inside, you know, West Bank and in Gaza and in Israel would be more willing to accept a model of coexistence, not out of "spite," not out of "We'll finish your Jewishness" or all these kind of paranoid sort of reverberations that you hear, but simply

because life matters. Just that simply. To be able to go up in the morning and watch... Get up in the morning and watch your kids go to school safely, and come back safely, which no matter what you hear about what kind of security problem Israelis have, they enjoy that on a daily basis, where most Palestinians do not.

Hardeep:

Well, thank you very much. Navtej, you will have the last word because we have to wind up after that. You don't want to annotate the government of India's position beyond what I said?

Navtej:

No, I think that has been perfectly well answered, I just wanted to refer to the fact that we, the position is the same as that stance. I don't want to go into more details, but if you need, I can refer to you to many statements.

Hardeep:

Well, having it only remains for me to thank my very eminent friends on the panel. Thank you very much for being yourselves, for being candid, and at the end of the day I hope there was a little more optimism, at least some trace which we can try to infer. And thank you all very much for being here.