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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. POLLACK: Good morning and welcome to the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. And Happy Leap Day to everyone. Delighted that you could join us on our quadrennial Leap Day celebration, which, as you know, every Leap Day we try to do an event on an attack on Iran. Actually, it seems like every fourth week we simply do an event about an attack on Iran, and that is, in many ways, the starting point for this.

Obviously, in the last few weeks, last few months there's been a tremendous amount of speculation, a tremendous amount of attention, and a tremendous amount of hyperbole focused on the question of will Israel attack Iran, what would the circumstances be, why would they do it, why would they not do it, on what day, and should I buy or sell oil futures the day before.

It's understandable, but let's also all remember that we've been through this more than once. You know, as best I can tell, we've been doing this once every 3 or 4 months for about 10 years and I think the thing that we've been struggling with here at the Saban Center is how do we contribute to a debate that has been hashed over and over and over again. And that's what we're going to try to do today, is we're going to try to find some different perspectives, to look for other ways to bring some alternative views and some alternative analysis, to help people think about this issue in ways that they haven't thought about it before and perhaps shed some light on some dark corners that I think could actually play a very important role in the debate, in the considerations in Israel, over how the United States should think about it and all of the other related issues.

As always, we've got a tremendous panel for you today. You've got their bios. You know them, I think, at least two of the three, very well, so I'm going to give only very short introductions. We'll start off with a presentation by Dr. Shibley Telhami.

Shibley, I think, again, is very well known to this audience. He is both the Anwar Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland and, as I always say, far more importantly, a nonresident senior fellow here at the Saban Center.

After Shibley, he will be followed by our brand new Israel fellow, Natan Sachs, Dr. Natan Sachs, who we're thrilled to have with us, who will be making his maiden voyage up here on the stage of Falk Auditorium, his first but obviously not his last such appearance.

And then, finally, after Natan we'll ask Suzanne Maloney, senior fellow at the Saban Center, to come up.

Natan, I've asked to talk a little bit about Israeli politics because obviously a strike on Iran has tremendous ramifications for Israel for obvious reasons and the decision as to whether or not to strike is going to be a huge one in terms of Israel's own politics, and obviously those considerations are going to potentially drive whether or not Israel decides to go through with it.

So, we wanted to look a little bit at how the Israelis are thinking about it, how Israeli politics fit into this larger question of whether Israel will strike and, if so, when would they do so and why would they do so. And then I'm going to ask Suzanne to come up and talk about Iranian politics. Obviously, Iranian internal politics won't have much to do with whether or not Israel strikes, but they do have a lot to do with the relationship between Iran and Israel and that will be an input into the wider strike.

And in addition, obviously, there's some very important issues about Iranian politics that will have an impact well beyond this question of whether or not Israel strikes. The relationship between Iran and Israel is a tense one, is a potentially very dangerous and escalatory one regardless of whether or not the Israelis decide to actually attack Iran's nuclear facilities.

But first we're going to start it off with Shibley Telhami, who has done another one of his incredibly insightful polls and is actually going to try to provide, believe it or not, actual data, real, honest to goodness information about what's going on, what is related to the strike, how people are thinking about it.

So, let's start things off. Shibley, please come on up. The dais is yours.

MR. TELHAMI: Thanks so much for coming out on a rainy day. It's always a pleasure to do this and present here at the Saban Center at Brookings. This is -- I've done this, I don't know how many times, while Ken was chairing, that I predict every question he's going to ask now. But this is a particularly, you know, special day because, you know, this is the last time Ken will stand here wearing the uniform of the director of the Saban Center. He will go back to doing the things that he loved most as senior fellow at Brookings, to write and do research, and I just want to say thank you to Ken for an amazing job during his tenure as director of the Saban Center.

If you look at what happened, you know, the Saban Center really was already a very established center when Martin began his work with it, but Ken really expanded it. You can see the events that have become incredibly popular, insightful, through this town and elsewhere. The Doha Center, which has bloomed, was incredibly timely, particularly in covering the Arab awakening, and those of you who have worked with the Administration know that the amount of sacrifice that goes into it, people putting out the things that they love and the priorities, and so forth, to service others, I, frankly, don't know why people do it. I certainly have resisted that every time it has come my way, but he's done it and we're grateful for that, Ken. Thank you so much, and we're looking forward to more of your productivity here at Brookings and reading more of your work. (Applause)

The good news is our former colleague, Tamara Wittes, who just left the

administration as deputy assistant secretary of state, will actually become the new director of the Saban Center at Brookings as of tomorrow. And those of you who know her know how fabulous she is and I think that is one reason why Ken felt comfortable leaving because he knew it will be in good hands. So, I'm looking forward also to working with Tammy.

Let me just give you a very quick introduction to this. This is a brief presentation, so we really are here for the conversation. I want to give you information very quickly, but I want to tell you a little bit about this poll. We just did it, literally, Wednesday through Sunday, this is really fresh. I just got the data on Monday, so we are putting this out as soon as we got it. We just had the time to analyze it and make sure the data was weighted and is ready for you.

This was done in cooperation with the Dahof (phonetic) Institute in Israel. It's phone interviews, nationally representative sample of 500 plus or minus 4 percent. And we've done a similar poll back in November that we released in December here in the same place, and I'll refer to it a couple of times.

This was really mostly focused on Israeli attitudes toward Iran and the possible Israeli strike on Iran, as well as on our Presidential election.

So, the first question is: There has been increased talk of a military strike by Israel against Iran's nuclear facilities even though the United States, the UK, and Germany have advised against it. What do you think Israel should do?

Now, you could see the result here is only 19 percent of all Israelis, that is a combination of Arabs and Jews, say that Israeli should strike Iran even without U.S. support and 42 percent say only with U.S. support, 34 percent say don't do it regardless. Now, the interesting thing here is if you look at the right column, that is just for the Jewish population only. This is a national sample. It's 86 percent Jews and -- sorry, 84 percent

Jews and 16 percent Arabs. That is the sample here.

What do you believe the likely outcome would be if Israel strikes Iran? It would delay Iran's ability to develop nuclear weapons one to two years, three to five years, more than five years, it would accelerate Iran's nuclear program, it would have no effect. And you can see -- I mean, the interesting here is that only 22 percent say it would delay Iran's capabilities by more than 5 years. Among Jewish Israelis it's even less than that, 19 percent.

So, basically, a plurality of Israelis and only a plurality of Israelis think that it would delay Iran's program by one to five years. And you can see that, you know, another total of 30 percent say it would either have no impact or even accelerate Iran's program. So, the Israelis obviously don't have a very optimistic view of what might happen if Israel should attack pertaining to Iran's nuclear program.

To put it in perspective, in the November poll that we did and released here, we asked the question about if they thought that Iran would eventually have nuclear weapons or not and we had 90 percent -- 90 percent -- say that they thought that Iran would eventually get nuclear weapons. So, the Israelis were actually pessimistic about anything working to prevent Iran from having nuclear weapons.

Given America's recommendation that Israel not strike Iran, what do you believe the U.S. Government's reaction would be if Israel strikes Iran? Well, this is interesting because you might have thought that they want the U.S. not to -- they want Israel not to strike without American support because they may be worried about the consequences for U.S.-Israeli relations and those of you who know the issue know how important that relationship is to most Israelis. It's central, maybe even trumps everything else, as a priority in Israeli thinking.

And yet, you know, when you look at it, you find that only 15 percent of

Israelis think that the U.S. would punish Israel in some way or cut aid or reduce aid. So, you have a majority of Israelis, over 60 percent, really saying that the U.S. would continue its support, some, even 27 percent, say it would actually join Israel -- the war on behalf of Israel, and 39 percent say it would support Israel at least diplomatically.

So, it doesn't appear to be, frankly, the case that the Israeli reluctance to go without American support is due to the fear that the U.S. would retaliate, it's due to something else, and that needs thinking and it's useful to talk about in the conversation.

In your estimation, how long would an armed conflict with Iran last if Israel strikes its nuclear facilities? Now, this, too, I think, is central in their Israeli public assessment of the consequences and I think the Israeli reluctance is obviously very much related to the nature of their assessment of the consequences of war.

You've heard some politicians, some analysts here in Washington, and even some Israelis dismissing how long this would be, you know, that this would be -- Iranians are not likely to retaliate because they worry about the escalation or people here would think, you know, it would be more akin to the attack on the Syrian facility, so we've had those kind of terms that this would be a short war or short -- it's not even war, it's a strike in Iranian nuclear facilities.

Well, that's not what the Israeli public thinks. Look at this, a majority of Israelis think it would last at least months, 29 percent say months, 22 percent say years, only 18 percent say days, and another 19 percent say weeks. So, they're expecting something that is enduring and long-term, which is one reason they're worried about the whole thing.

If Israel strikes Iran's nuclear facilities, in your view, how would this affect the Iranian government, you know, does it strengthen it, does it weaken it? And you can see they're equally divided, at least in the national, you know, 44 percent say it will

strengthen it, 45 percent say it will weaken it. A little bit wider gap among the Jewish population only, you know, more people think it will weaken it, 49 percent think it will actually strengthen it, which is 38 percent. But still, it's not a majority, even among the Jewish Israelis thinking that it would actually weaken the Iranian government.

What about Hezbollah, which is a factor in -- obviously in Israeli thinking? Recall that 2006 is still in the memory of Israelis. You know, five weeks of rockets, you know, hitting Israel while Israel was waging a campaign on Lebanese territory, and what we see here is that, you know, the overwhelming majority of Israelis think that Hezbollah will join one way or the other. I mean, two-thirds think it will join even without being attacked and another 27 percent think they'll join only if they're attacked, and among Jews, even more. I mean, three-quarters of Israeli Jews think Hezbollah is going to join.

By the way, we don't know whether that's also the Israeli military thinking. I mean, that's worth thinking about because if they think that way then they would think they'd have to strike them first, which means a strike against Iran nuclear facility cannot be independent from a strike against Hezbollah, another interesting twist in all of this.

Now, I just want to just go back here and say that, you know, in -- I asked a few questions just specifically about our politics, not only because obviously it's an interesting question, you know, what Israelis think about American politics and the Presidential elections, but also because I wanted to see whether the heated rhetoric on Iran, here, that is being reported in Israel very widely, is having an impact on their preferences.

I didn't ask specifically the question about that, so it's really an inference, it's not really direct evidence, but I could tell you that just before we fielded this poll last Wednesday, we had -- the Israeli press was full of reports about presidential candidate



Rick Santorum's statements that the Obama Administration is throwing Israel under the bus and that it's helping Iran acquire nuclear weapons, and that certainly made headline news in Israel as you might expect.

So, the Israelis are very well aware of what is being said in our campaign, they're following it very closely. You know, no issue matters to them externally as much as this.

So, what did they feel, how did they feel? Well, we asked them, you know, how they feel about each one of the presidential candidates. We put, you know, Obama against each one separately. So, we have, if the Republican candidate for the Presidency of the United States is Mitt Romney, whom would you like to see elected? And you can see here that it's really, among all Israelis, it's tied between Romney and Obama, but among Jewish Israelis, interestingly, actually Obama leads Romney. Now, remember, this is still within the margin of error, which is plus or minus 4 percent, so it's basically a dead heat between the two.

If you look at the others, Rick Santorum, obviously, he's the one who has been most outspoken of late on this issue, particularly the issue of Iran. How do Israelis feel about him? And look at that. Obama beats him by far, 33 percent to 18 percent. Even among Israeli Jews you have 34 percent to 21 percent, so you have a significant number of people who basically would choose Obama over Rick Santorum.

And if you look at the competition between Obama and Gingrich, the outcome, again, is not all that different: Obama is preferred 32 percent to 25 percent; among Israeli Jews, 31 percent to 27 percent. And for Ron Paul, again, you know, it's very similar: 32 percent to 21 percent over all; among Jews 34 percent, 24 percent. And what's interesting about Paul here is that he does better than Rick Santorum. I mean, it is very fascinating because you have, you know, obviously if this -- we can't really say

that this is all due to the Iran issue because we don't have a direct study of it, this is an inference or hypothesis, but it certainly doesn't appear to be helping Santorum and hurting Paul because Paul performs better actually in this particular case.

So, this is an interesting side story to the attitudes on the Iran issue, and I think it opens up a number of questions that are worth discussing. So, what explains the Israeli reluctance to go and strike Iran without American support given that they don't seem to be fearful of the consequences for the Israeli-U.S. relationships? That's not what's driving their attitudes.

So, I'll end with that and then we'll open it for conversation. (Applause)

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Shibley. That was terrific. I love the fact that you ended on that last slide because it's given me so much to ponder along the lines of, you know, is that just kind of an Israeli response to generic Republican candidate because, clearly, I don't think they know who Ron Paul actually is based on that.

Okay. Let's shift gears. I think that was a great way to start things off with getting a sense for where the Israeli public is right now and I think that, you know, as always, Shibley has given us a lot of really interesting stuff to dig into.

And, so, let's turn things over -- I promised that I would not start until we were all mic'd up and, of course, you know, it's Leap Day, what can I say? Everything goes haywire on Leap Day. Let's turn things over to Natan.

Natan, tell us a little bit -- obviously, feel free to comment on the stuff that Shibley laid out there, but give us a better sense of how Israelis political leadership is thinking this through and how the dynamics of Israeli politics are going to come into play on this.

MR. SACHS: Well, I think the fascinating data that we saw here, also finding some very hard data on the questions; they reflect something very deep about the

way Israelis are thinking about this problem. And it looks like they're divided, if you look at the data, deeply divided between different options, on striking Iran, on what the outcome might be.

But I think maybe the takeaway point, more than divided, is they're actually very confused. They don't know what the outcome would be. They're not quite sure what to do. And, in fact, they're confused, I would say, for very good reasons, at least four reasons one could think of.

The first is that the stakes are very high. The stakes -- the Israeli psyche, in particular, on this question, are very, very high both if Israel does something and a war ensues with Iran and its proxies in Lebanon and maybe in Gaza, and also if it doesn't do anything. And Israelis believe Iran goes nuclear, and in the Israeli psyche again, this looms very large, I think much larger than people realize abroad.

Second, there is deep uncertainty, there's a lack of information in the Israeli public, just like we are lacking information. If we think just of the last recent years, the developments on the Iranian question such as the Stuxnet virus (phonetic) or the facility in Fordo near Qom. All these things we did not know about and certainly many of the leaders did, both in Israel and the U.S. and elsewhere, and so this lack of information, many Israelis are asking themselves, well, what is really going on? Is there another Stuxnet? Is there another Fordo that we don't even know about that is motivating the way the leadership is thinking about it now?

Israelis are also very confused because they're getting mixed messages, and this relates directly to the political arena that you asked about. They're looking in this realm of uncertainty and lack of information, they're looking for cues, they're looking for people who know what they're talking about and maybe people who are privy to the intelligence to tell them what to think, and they're hearing very mixed messages, not what

you would usually hear in a preparation for a war of choice or where the timing, at least, is of choice. And so they're not quite sure what to think of that.

Now, I want to just emphasize again the point that for Israelis, this fear of a nuclear Iran is neither new, nor is it a trend in sort of the papers. It is termed, often, an existential fear, which for Israelis touches on sort of the deepest and most morbid memories, Jewish memories, the possibility of holocaust.

Netanyahu, before he was prime minister, said, "The year is 1938 and Iran is Germany." And this kind of rhetoric is, of course, inflammatory anywhere, but for Israelis, it really is. It's the ultimate rhetorical weapon. You cannot get any more serious than that. And using the existential kind of term, some people even refer to the fact that there are some 6 million Jews in Israel now, and they use that rhetorically in all those connotations.

Just to illustrate, five years ago, the most popular television show in Israel, something called (speaking in foreign language 0:22:52), *A Wonderful Country*. It's a satirical show that looks a lot like *Saturday Night Live* or a fake news show. They cold opened their season, the whole season was opened with a scene of two of their main characters climbing out of a bunker in a totally destroyed Tel Aviv, and it was very clearly Tel Aviv. There were street signs and it was the skyline, and it was obliterated, obviously by a nuclear bomb, and the caption said, "Summer 2007." And then they started, in very typical Israeli dark humor, about now we're going to do it properly and you see Ahmadinejad, he's true to his word, not like our people.

But this is the way Israelis think about it. If you think about it, this is probably the most powerful show, at least quality show, and this was the opening scene of the whole season. And back in 2007, since then, the rhetoric has only gotten worse.

So, this question is huge. It trumps everything else. It trumps the

Palestinian question, by far, in Israeli psyche today. It trumps the Arab Awakening even, which has caused quite a bit of concern. It's the main issue.

And yet, when we look at the political scene, this divide, again, looks more like confusion, because if we try to trace what the camps are, who against whom, we don't find the classic right and left. The hawk, at least in the papers today, is Ehud Barak, former prime minister of the Labour Party. Not a great dove, by any account, but certainly not a son or scion of the right wing.

And on the other side we see many people of other kinds. The most vocal, former head of the Mossad, the Israeli equivalent of the CIA, Meir Dagan, certainly no dove, in fact an associate of Ariel Sharon, someone much more associated with the center right, very much a security-oriented, tough-minded kind of individual. He is actually the one most forcibly speaking against a strike, calling it "the most foolish idea I'd ever heard," and doing this even at the tail end of his term as head of Mossad, who answers directly to Netanyahu, and implicitly -- not implicitly, in fact, quite explicitly, criticizing Netanyahu and Barak, the people -- the political leadership in Israel, very dramatic kind of stuff.

And so, the leadership, we see this strange divide as well and we see this kind of confusion and we see a public that is looking to these leaders for cues to what should we think about this very deep threat and what are the chances of success. And just like the leaders don't know, like Dagan and Barak disagree both with sort of illustrious military backgrounds, just as they disagree dramatically about the chances of success, so the Israeli leadership just has no clue.

But I think unlike many others, Israelis feel they have to do something. A decision, whether to strike or not to strike, is a momentous decision; it's a life and death kind of decision.

So, again, if we think of the camps and the politic system and how they're dividing, we find people right and left on both sides. I want to caveat all that and say that in the establishment we see this kind of division. We see, especially former officials, Gabi Ashkenazi, who was a visiting fellow here not too long ago, has not been quoted but has been cited often as someone who possibly opposes a strike, and many other chiefs of intelligence and security services. Yuval Diskin, the former chief of the Shin Bet, the Israeli Internal Security Intelligence, has just spoken about the need to incorporate Arab-Israelis into the public -- into the Israeli society as more important than the Iranian question, something which is completely contrary to the way Barak is speaking and doing it right now.

But among those who matter, and this is, I think, something to observe here from Washington, which has been overlooked -- among those who really decide, we actually have very fewer voices. The main voice we hear is Barak and this seems to be orchestrated. Everyone else is too silent and Barak is too vocal for this to be chance.

Legally, in Israel, the prime minister is not the commander in chief. The whole form of the government, all the ministers, there are 30 now, are collectively the commander in chief of the military forces. Practically, there's a security cabinet of 15 or 14 ministers now that commands the military. And informally now, there is a forum of eight ministers -- it was six, seven, now it's eight ministers -- who have very discreet conversations about what to do with (inaudible), of course, and Barak and Lieberman or others are members in this.

By Israeli standards, and this is really shocking if you look at Israel, they have been very, very disciplined. Usually no meeting in Israel can end before something leaks to the paper because someone goes to the bathroom somewhere in the middle of the meeting, and so the papers know who's against whom. Moreover, the incentive to

leak is huge. Lieberman, the foreign minister, is a political rival of many of the people in there, such as the head of Shas, who is also a member of the eight. Certainly, Al-Buraq (phonetic), (inaudible), one very important minister, minister of intelligence, though it's not an official title, (inaudible), who's considered a dove now, and Netanyahu himself.

Israeli politics is usually crazy, usually preparing for elections, have actually managed to maintain, for the first time in many years, a forum, and not so small, where things are relatively discreet.

We have a map. Journalists have tried to sort of map out who's against whom, and Barak seems to be now on the hawkish side and maybe (inaudible) in the dovish side, but in truth, we don't really know, partly because Netanyahu himself came out with a very clear directive to all ministers, not just the eight, demanding silence on Iran.

And yet, in the last few weeks, Al-Buraq gave a lengthy interview to a pretty well known publication called *The New York Times* written by an Israeli journalist, who is very well known to the establishment. This is not by chance. Barak did not do this without consulting Netanyahu.

In other words, there is something orchestrated about this, and we can read this in two very different ways. On the one hand, the discipline does echo a very serious decision-making process. It could mean that Israel is weighing the options -- it does mean, in fact, that Israel is weighing the options very seriously.

The fact that Lieberman and others are able to rise above the politics and really deal with this question directly, means that they do see this as a generational challenge, as a patriotic duty to address this seriously.

We could also read it another way, which is that this is part of the posturing that Israel is taking to try and influence what the international community does,

what the United States does in particular, to sound hawkish, collectively, in a disciplined way, to get others in the international community to do things.

From a social science perspective, these are observationally equivalent. In fact, I think they're probably both true. Israel is probably doing both at the same time. It is taking this very seriously, but it is also trying to manage the message abroad to try and push international actors to be much more proactive on the Iranian issue.

Unfortunately for this leadership, they're not universally trusted the way that some leaders are. If Ariel Sharon, for example, no dove, was trying to orchestrate this, at least in the latter part of his career, people in Israel had more trust in his steady hand, more trust in his judgment.

There are many people in the establishment who don't have this kind of trust in Netanyahu. Netanyahu, abroad, seems very hawkish and very tough, in Israel is often considered to be very wavering, not a strong politician at all.

Barak, who's considered to be very cold-blooded and is, therefore, a natural pairing, although it is a strange pair, Barak and Netanyahu, former rivals, of course, is sort of the complement in this regard. But the fact that Dagan, in particular, the former head of the Mossad, would come out publically saying this, the fact that many journalists, some of the most important journalists in Israel, including people who are visiting here at Saban, have come out and cautioned about the cost of a strike, about what would happen if this were to happen -- this is not the kind of orchestra of voices you usually hear when a small country is preparing for war.

So, we try to read the tea leaves besides what Barak is saying, we see a stock market that has not plummeted, it's not doing terribly well this year, unfortunately, but it's not plummeted. It's doing just as well as most other stock markets in the world. We have real estate in Tel Aviv, which will be bombed if hit by missiles if -- probably -- if



war ensues. I should never prophesize about that. If not plummeted, real estate is still doing fine.

Israelis are not prepared in terms of the civilian population. Most, about half, people estimate, don't even have gas masks. Back in '91 we all wore gas masks when the first Gulf War started and Scud missiles were falling on Israel. Today, many of the population don't even have it, which in Israel is considered to be a criminal investigation waiting to happen if war ensues and people are unprotected.

In other words, it is a very mixed bag.

Let me summarize by a more cautionary note, I suppose. Although all this does look like it might be some blustering, this issue of Iran does not only loom large in the Israeli public, it looms especially large for the person in charge right now, Netanyahu. Netanyahu has been speaking about the Iranian question and thinking about it, writing about it, for many years, over a decade, perhaps two. And there is every indication to think that Netanyahu views this as an historical challenge that he's been confronted with, that if Begin was the man who made peace with Egypt, Netanyahu might be the man who stood up to the Iranian threat.

And just as Begin stood up to the Iraqi threat against the very explicit wishes of the United States, Reagan, against the advice of the head of opposition, the discreet written advice of head of opposition, he happens to be the president of Israel right now, Shimon Peres, against public opinion almost anywhere, he stood up and he took the risk of a failed strike and he bombed the Osirak reactor and Shimon (phonetic) eventually annihilated the Iraqi threat, so it is quite possible that Netanyahu views his role in history as this. And in this sense, the opposition might not be enough to stop him, even the U.S. opposition.

In terms of what we should look for, I think it would be very telling -- any

utterance from other members of this forum of eight are important, and we have had some. Moshe Ya'alon, he's known as Bogie in Hebrew, has spoken a little bit, (inaudible) has spoken some, but mostly they have maintained this line that what they have said is stop talking, and they have left the stage for the unofficial foreign minister of Israel, Ehud Barak.

And the other thing we should look for is political issues. A public that is this confused, divided split about what goes on, it backs Netanyahu right now. He is definitely the favorite in Israel right now, but it is not ironclad. If things go bad, public opinion can change dramatically. If the Israeli public perceives the government as going forward against the wishes of the United States while they, the public, are paying the price with rockets from Lebanon all across northern Israel, maybe as far as Tel Aviv, with perhaps ballistic missiles even from Iran, they do have the capability, and a flare-up in Gaza, public attention, public patience is very short. The public was behind the Lebanon war when it started, but when the missiles start falling, the rockets start falling, it can change very rapidly.

Netanyahu's a politician and he knows this, and so therefore, a war has political -- the risks are very, very high politically as well.

I'll leave it at that.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Natan. Suzanne, let's bring you in.

(Applause)

Congratulations on your first time up here. Suzanne, let me bring you in, and help us understand, again, the Iranian angle on this. And, again, obviously whatever you have to bring to bear on it in terms of how Iran is thinking about a strike, but let's go beyond that, if we can, to talk more broadly about Iranian thinking about the relationship, if you want to call it that, with Israel.

MS. MALONEY: Sure. And I can't hope to be nearly as nuanced and as, I think, illuminative as Natan has been and Shibley's poll results have been about Israeli, both public thinking and leadership politics, so I'll tend to speak a little bit more briefly, in part because I'm also looking forward to what I think is going to be a good conversation among the three of us and a good conversation with the audience.

Ken started off the discussion today by noting that this has been a kind of recurrent issue, it's déjà vu. Every few months there is this tendency of a journalist or a statement by a leader here or in Israel or in Iran to suggest that we are eminently on the brink of yet another war and that it is likely to be a war which is deeply devastating to a number of interests in the region.

I have been a persistent skeptic about the prospects of an Israeli and/or American strike on Iran's nuclear facilities, but let me just start by telling you where I am at at this stage, which is that I think we are at the most precarious moment in the long history of bluffing and signaling and rhetorical influence among these three countries.

And let me also just underscore something that I think was implicit in everything that Natan and Shibley, which the provision of data, of real information, as he suggested at the outset, in both their presentations, is that so much of this conversation among these three countries takes place through the mechanism of the most indirect and the most blunt form of rhetoric and public posturing and that you have publics that play some role, at least here and in Israel, and a lesser role in Iran, in formulating and influencing national security decision-making that are deeply confused, deeply anxious, have very strong opinions, but are not clearly in support of one policy or another.

That is a very precarious situation. I think it underscores the difficulty of navigating this time in which the Iranian nuclear program is achieving milestones that are deeply worrying, that do represent potential crossing of red lines that are "intolerable" to

use the phrase that has been adopted by various U.S. presidents as well as Israeli leaders, and a time in which there are elections taking place, at least in Iran on Friday, forward-leaning here in November, and potentially also in Israel. So, we've got, I think, a really interesting, but also potentially quite a dangerous time.

And if the signaling is unclear, and if the rhetoric, it may be a mixed bag and be sending mixed signals to the Israeli public, imagine how Iranian leaders are interpreting all of this, very much through the glass darkly. Their understanding of American politics, of Israeli politics, of the U.S.-Israeli relationship, is necessarily fairly immature because they don't have direct access to any of the decision-makers, they don't have direct ability to observe or participate in any of the dialogues that take place.

And so there is a tendency for, I think, a kind of bifurcated reaction, which is probably a broader tendency in Iranian foreign policy, both a sense of invulnerability, of Iran's inevitable ascendance that characterizes their response, this sense that fears of the spike in oil prices that would almost certainly ensue as a result of an Israeli strike might restrain an American president. You hear that again and again, not simply with respect to the prospects of a military strike, but also with respect to the likelihood that sanctions will be implemented in a robust manner.

But, you know, coexistent with this sense of invulnerability that I think feeds into Iran's aggressiveness is a deep-seated sense of paranoia and insecurity that dates back to the very founding of the revolution and, of course, the catalytic experience of the Iran-Iraq war.

And we now have a generation of leaders who are very firmly in control of the dominant trends in Iranian politics, whose primal experience was forged during that period, who see the world as inevitably, inherently opposed to Iran's continued existence if not to that of the regime itself. And so, you have both this sense of assertiveness that

is born of opportunism, of the sense that Iran is going to be a winner irrespective of whatever blows it might take, but also a deep-seated sense that the world is aligned against it. And that, I think, in an environment where you do have, you know, a great deal of difficulty in interpreting the signals coming from either Washington or from Jerusalem, I think is a very dangerous set of circumstances. It leads to the potential for miscalculation, for escalation.

The Iranians have said -- it was most clearly said by Ayatollah Khomeini in a sermon back in November, but it has been repeated again and again by all of the relevant body of decision-makers, particularly from the Revolutionary Guard -- that Iran will meet threat with threat. And I think we're beginning to see some of that in the trends of Iranian foreign policy, first with the reports of an assassination attempt against the Saudi ambassador planned last fall that came out, and then more recently with some suggestion that the Iranians have been involved with bombing campaigns against Israeli targets around the world.

I think we are returning to a period of the 1990s when Iran, beginning to curtail some of its activities against its Gulf neighbors, began to target Israeli and American operatives abroad in a much more significant and serious way. And that, again, leads to the potential of a military conflict, which does not arise out of a determination by an Israeli leadership to meet a historic threat, but one which arises out of a set of miscalculations and aggressive circumstances on the part of Iranian foreign policy.

Let me just mention two other factors to speak to Ken's question about the broader political dynamics within Iran, and one is sanctions. We are in a set of circumstances in which Iran is under the most severe sanctions of its 33-year history, a 33-year history in which the country has been persistently the subject of sanctions.

We've never seen anything like the sanctions that are in place today in terms of both the international coalition as well as the reach of those sanctions in impacting Iran's ability to do business as well as the direct implications for the Iranian population.

This is, in many ways, unprecedented. Iranians resent sanctions. They're aware of them, they recognize the restrictions that they impose, but never before have we seen the direct impact on the pocketbook, the crash of the currency that occurred in the aftermath of the announcement of Central Bank sanctions in December.

And that is clearly influencing, I think, the sense of the regime's ability to manage the situation. To the extent that they see sanctions as a survivable impediment, something that they can withstand through evasion, through mitigation, and through their well-honed networks of avoiding the impact of sanctions, then I think it contributes to this aggressiveness. If we see that sanctions are really beginning to impact the domestic stability of the country, then I think that you're going to see an Iranian regime which is both more dangerous, but also potentially more constrained because they will be more inward-focused and more attentive to the regime stability concerns.

And finally, we have Iranian Parliamentary elections coming up on Friday. I would hazard the guess that these will have no direct impact on Iran's nuclear decision-making if only because parliamentary elections, while endlessly fascinating to all of those of us who follow Iranian politics closely, have never really had a direct impact on Iran's foreign policy. That does not suggest that they're irrelevant either to this conversation or to Iran's future. This is, of course, the first time that Iranians have gone to the polls for a national election since the 2009 upheaval. That is an important historic moment for Iranians and how they participate, whether or not we see large-scale evasion or boycotts of the polls in major cities, I think, is going to be a key indicator of what the public sentiment might be.

On the other hand, if, in fact, these elections go relatively successfully, if we see very little pushback from Iranians as they wait in long lines to voice their political opinions for the very first time in public since 2009, then I think we'll see a regime which sees itself that much more solid, that much more capable of asserting itself across the region.

With that, I look forward to the discussion.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Suzanne. That was terrific from all of our panelists, as always. In particular, before I pose some questions to the panel, I just wanted to highlight a point that Suzanne made that I think is critically important. I saw both Shibley and Natan nodding as she was saying it as well, which is that, first, I share her assessment of overall skepticism of a likelihood of a strike. And many of you have heard me for 10 years say that there are very big reasons why -- good reasons why Israel won't do this. But I also share her concern that the stakes have never been higher, the likelihood has never been higher.

But beyond that, I think that one of the points that she made is critically important to understand, which is that there is a very real risk of conflict between Iran and Israel, between Iran and the United States, between Iran and Saudi Arabia, that goes well beyond this narrow question of whether or not Prime Minister Netanyahu makes the decision to strike.

Iran is already wrapped up in what it sees as a confrontation with these three countries, and throw in the British and the French and the Canadians, a whole variety of others, and all of this could escalate regardless of what the prime minister actually decides.

I want to put questions to each of you, and I think I'm going to do it in reverse order because, Shibley, the question I have for you I want to take you away from

the poll, I want to take advantage of your presence here to ask you about another area of your expertise, because we've already touched on this.

But again, I think it's something that really needs to come out and I'm going to give you some time to think about it, so I'll start with Suzanne and then Natan and then to you. But the question I'd like to put to you is to talk to us a little bit about the Palestinian angle to all of this. How will the Palestinians likely react? How will a strike affect Palestinian politics? Because obviously that is an issue in and of itself for a great many states of the region. It's also going to be a consideration for the Israelis to be thinking about.

Natan, the question that I have for you is, Suzanne raised this issue of the elections and, yes, 2012 is an election year in all of these countries, and for Israel, you know, first, what are your thoughts on whether or not Netanyahu will call for early elections at some point this year? And then, how does Iran play into that? How does Iran play into his decision whether or not to call them? And assuming he does, how does Iran play in there?

And then, Suzanne, I wanted to take you -- you already started to touch on this question of elections for Iran, but I wanted to take you past -- you know, give us your expectations of what happens with the election. And when we have that election behind us, what should we be thinking about in terms of longer-term Iranian policy toward this issue? And kind of a last piece I want to add to that is, do you think that the Iranians have an end game here? Do you think that they have something in mind? Or is this just a big open-ended confrontation, a big can of worms that they may now be opening for themselves?

So, Suzanne, why don't we start with you and we'll work our way back down the panel?



MS. MALONEY: Just a word on the elections. You know, Iran, despite the kind of repression that we've seen for much of the past three decades, and particularly since 2009, still has real politics and the parliament is the heart of that. It's a storied institution that has real value among Iranians, and it's also a pork barrel institution. Iranians know that having a representative who has some sway will ultimately benefit their local interests.

And so, the trends in terms of participation and the trends in terms of who, in fact, gets elected, may have less to do with these grand, national and international issues than they do, as here, with the fact that all politics is often local.

And so, I think we'll see reasonably solid participation nationwide. I would expect that in Tehran and other major cities we'll see relatively low voter participation. And I think it's still worth watching the parliament, even with respect to foreign policy, because you get a sense of where the political trends are going.

I would note that the attack on the British embassy may have come as a surprise to some here and in Britain and around the world when it occurred last fall after the announcement of new British sanctions against Iran, and yet, for years, literally, for a number of years the Iranian parliament had been agitating to cut off relations with Britain over its various policies.

So, you know, it is a sort of leading indicator of where politics are going in Iran, even if it is very constrained in terms of representing the wide variety of public opinion within Iran.

Obviously, the big battleground for Iran is the 2013 presidential election and how that plays out and where the sort of dual between Ahmadinejad and the more traditional forces of the Islamic Republic, who are presumed to be aligned with Ayatollah Khomeini, how that exactly shakes out. I think ultimately as interesting as all that is for

those of us, again, who follow the narrow politics of Iran's internal dynamics, I'm not clear that it has a direct impact on where Iran is going in terms of its foreign policy.

There's a certain consistency to Iranian foreign policy and one that reflects, I think, a leadership now that is very much dominated by those who see the world in confrontational terms.

And so I think we are likely to see a continuation of Iranian foreign policy and it is less a question today of who rules Iran in the same way that we spent, really, decades trying to interpret the politics between various factions, it's very clear now that hard liners and that Ayatollah Khomeini is ultimately in charge.

In terms of Iran's end game, I think the end game is regime survival and regime survival is a day-to-day calculation and a long-term calculation as well in the sense that they are prepared to hedge their bets, but this program has become integral to their own perception of their legitimacy and their ability to retain power and to project some sort of deterrent.

So, I think they're ultimately committed to retaining a robust nuclear enrichment program. How and where they're forced to compromise, you know, they may be willing to play around the edges including, I would suspect, at negotiations that may take place between the P5+1 and Iranian representatives over the course of upcoming months, but I think they're not likely to give any significant concession in terms of retaining a major enrichment program and in terms of projecting themselves as a nuclear power.

You know, the real question of will they test, will they cross whatever line that we've set out, and I think as Natan and others have said, some of our lines have been ambiguous over the years, or at least malleable, I think, you know, they are also hedging their bets on those questions as well.

But this program, at this point, is identified and will be, I think, irrevocable as far as this regime in Iran goes.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Suzanne. Natan? Elections in Israel?

MR. SACHS: Well, legally elections are required in the fall of 2013. It's very rare that an Israeli government survives its full term; it's sort of more the British style. At some point the prime minister, often the senior partner in the coalition, decides that now is an opportune moment and they go for it. And if one of the major actors wants elections, the ingredients are all there. Right now everyone is talking about something called the Tal Law, which is a law that allows ultra orthodox not to serve in the military unlike all other Israeli Jews or at least male Jews (inaudible), and this is extremely controversial, extremely unpopular among the general secular and traditional population. And so this is perfect political ammunition for, for example, Lieberman, of a secular party, or Netanyahu himself to decide to go on the ticket, suddenly a civilian ticket, break with the ultra orthodox, and actually probably win the center quite decisively. It's certainly also fodder for others. There's a new party around this.

All that is a side story to the real calculation. It's very hard to predict what their thinking is. I think it depends on one major question. It is quite possible -- it will, too, I suppose -- if the Netanyahu-Barak administration is serious about a confrontation and means to enter into some kind of strike, it may not be as dramatic as we think. It may be an escalation of what is already a covert war between the two countries. There have been explosions in Iran, by the way, not just assassinations. Much more important than the assassinations of scientists there's been the Stuxnet virus, there's been explosions in military compounds very important to missile production. These things are much more effective in my view than an assassination. They've already been taking place. So, stepping up of this could occur.

Then we have to think -- excuse me, and this is dramatically affected by the timeline they view. The election timeline perfectly -- Netanyahu would prefer to go to the elections before a crisis. A crisis is extremely unpredictable. It may be very prolonged. It may take months or years. It's not just the populace that thinks this. And if that's the case, Netanyahu would go with a clear mandate from the people, quiet on the political front for four, four and a half years, and an ability to focus on managing a very difficult conflict possibly.

But there is another timeline, and this is also, of course, President Obama's preference, everything happening after next November when he is -- in his view, hopefully if he's reelected then, he is free from those constraints in this regard.

If the Fordo question, the question of the uranium enrichment plant by Qom, near Qom, is as severe as Barak has been stating, if the Israeli fear of what Barak calls a zone of immunity that the Iranian nuclear program will enter -- it sounds better in Hebrew, by the way, if that happens soon, if that is genuine, if this concern is as severe as they're painting it, that may trump that. What I said before about they seem to be taking this decision quite seriously, abnormally for Israeli politics, this could trump the political question.

If there's an element of blustering about that, then the political calculus would say we should have elections first. We have all the ingredients for an election. And then we need to calibrate it properly with pressure on the U.S., with the U.S. general election, with our political partners, with damaging -- with letting Kadima, the main opposition party at the moment, have it's primary and then we can bash the new leader, all sorts of internal justifications -- use the Iran ticket as a rallying point around the flag and go to the elections.

On this particular point I'm slightly less Machiavellian. I believe they're

slightly less Machiavellian than most people think. I do think there is a genuine concern - and I think Barak is a good example of this.

Barak's political career is not looking good, to put it mildly. Barak is the former prime minister from Labour and he was head of Labour in the last election. They did poorly as usual, but he came into parliament as head of Labour.

Labour hated him, as it always did, and he broke with Labour, along with five other members, and has formed this independent party called Ha'Atzma'ut, Independence. Independence is not -- probably not even going to make it into parliament. Barak is deeply unpopular in Israel politically speaking.

It's almost as if Barak's only shot at remaining in politics is Netanyahu himself, his old rival. Netanyahu himself can appoint Barak as minister of defense in the next government even if Barak is not a member of Parliament, that's perfectly legal and has happened before, and he might even try to give Barak a seat on the (inaudible 0:56:10) list. Stranger things have happened.

These kind of things suggest if Barak, the politician, is thinking in these terms, it may be that things are trumping politics.

So, if that wasn't clear enough as to what I think, let me further say that, how would we know? Well, we would know, if elections are called, I think we could reasonably estimate that a strike -- a serious strike would be postponed until after an election. And an election in Israel, although they're called like the British ones, they're not nearly as quick as the British ones. It's not a matter of three weeks, it takes many months and it's also often a seasonal issue.

So, if elections are called, we can all breathe a sigh of relief in terms of the drama, at least for a while. If elections are not called at all, with all these ingredients in place, for Lieberman, for example, to break, for others, that probably lends credence to

the interpretation that something serious is trumping politics, which is a serious statement in any political system, and that might be echoed in what Barak has been doing in the last few years, and it they may be taking this very seriously.

And I would agree to you that, you know, if I were to wager on such a terrible thing, I would wager against an attack, but I'm not nearly as certain as I was a year ago. I have to be honest. I think the Israeli leadership, some of it is very serious about this and while Netanyahu, people have doubts about his resolve and his ability to do things despite his conviction in the historical aspect of this, Barak has the resolve. Barak has that kind of courage. He is cold-blooded, and the two of them together could be quite different than we're used to.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Natan. Shibley, help fill out this picture, tell us about the Palestinians.

MR. TELHAMI: First let me tell you -- answer your question directly about the Palestinians and the Arabs and then I want to come back to the conversation a little bit.

You know, on the Palestinian side recall an historical perspective that the Palestinians obviously want the peace process to be priority number one for them always. We know right after 9-11 Arabs generally, but Palestinians particularly, wanted the focus to be on the opportunity to go to peace with Israel rather than going to war with Iraq which was going to, you know, reshuffle the deck and postpone any possibility of focusing on the Palestinian issue. And clearly, a lot of people see this as a distraction. Clearly what we've seen over the past few weeks, the focus on Iran has, in fact, had the effect of taking the eyes off of the Palestinian issue.

So, the Palestinians, in general -- I'm talking about both government and elites, are always worried about this disruption of priorities that would lower the

Palestinian issue from the international agenda and the unpredictability.

Now, on the public opinion level, it's not just the Palestinians but even citizens of Israel who are Palestinian Arabs and also Arabs in Arab countries, they have a completely different perspective on the Iran issue. It's not that they like Iran. Some see Iran as a threat. But they have not the same fear that Israeli Jews have of Iran. We see that, for example, in the November poll that we released. When we asked Israelis point blank, do you support or oppose this strike without the U.S. being a factor, roughly 43 percent said yes among Jewish Israelis. Only 4 percent said yes among Palestinian Israelis.

The same thing happens in the Arab world even though if you ask Arabs and Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians on the West Bank in Gaza, do you think that Iran is developing nuclear weapons, they say yes. And in 2011 polls showed that they actually think it would be a negative if Iran were to develop nuclear weapons.

But yet when you ask them, should the international community pressure Iran to stop its nuclear programs, a majority of the Arabs across the board say no, even without a military strike, even sanctions, even pressure. And that is even true of Arab Palestinian citizens of Israel where a majority say no. And the reason for it, obviously, is the double standard issue in their view and that this is your targeting -- so the dynamics of the politics in the Palestinian areas, the Arab world broadly, and even among citizens of Israel who are Arab Palestinian, are very different.

Now, I want to go back, though, to this issue, which is central, you know, which is, so what is driving Israeli calculations. You know, how much is political? How much is strategic? How much is bluffing? How much is serious? And obviously a central question, and you could clearly make a case for either one, I mean, the bluffing is very easy to do. I mean, it had had the effect of, you know, reshuffling the priorities of the

administration. No one is talking about the Palestinian issue, it's all Iran, Iran, Iran, and obviously the sanctions have been increased, partly as a consequence of the elevation of this issue in the international (inaudible).

So, you could say this is primarily bluffing. But I think it's not, not just because of what Natan said and sort of equating them, but there are two things I want to put out there. One is our own government assessment. I mean, we're hearing a lot of reports in the press where officials are quoted as saying that they now think the Israel -- Israel's chance of striking is higher than 50-50. Now, that's coming out of somewhere because I think four months ago the U.S. Government assessment was probably that the prospects were less than 50-50 and they were interpreting it mostly as bluffing.

Something happened, what something happened is not just in this -- you know, is it this or is it this, there's something specific, obviously, they must have picked up that they then thought it was, you know, more serious than just the conversation, what Barak is saying or what Netanyahu is saying.

So, something is picked up somewhere, I don't know what it is, but it's not just, you know, kind of sitting there and making calculations. We have to take that into account, but there is a bigger question in my own mind as a student of the region, a student of international relations, a student of the politics of war, and I have to tell you that in my estimation I still think with all the politics, and the politics could take Israel away, the U.S. plays a role in the politics, you see it in the polls, the more opposition from the U.S., the more it becomes more difficult politically for the Netanyahu government to do so, so politics is still a factor.

But there is a strategic factor, whether it's thought of by Netanyahu or the establishment that Natan talked about that is, I think, sometimes underestimated because all of our assessment is based on the white noise about what if Iran acquires nuclear



weapons from the point of view of the threat they might pose.

But I don't see it that way. I see it -- when I look at it I'm seeing -- I am hearing echoes of the 1967 war and why -- it's not because the two situations are identical, they're not in any shape or form in terms of what the immediate prospects are for war.

What I'm seeing here is that if you look at the Israeli assessment ultimately to strike Egyptian and Syrian forces in 1967, it was really less a preemption -- it's called a preemption, but the prospect of a successful Egyptian or Syrian attack was not very high, which is why the U.S. opposed it. And even if it were to happen, the prospects of the success was even smaller.

So, the bottom line, the Israelis were not thinking about, you know, this is a preempting an Egyptian attack. They were thinking, this is a time of major transformation of power in the region and globally. The Western European powers were pulling out of the Persian Gulf. The U.S. was entangled in Vietnam. The big powers are rethinking about who are the countries that are important in the Middle East and who's going to be the one with whom to make relations.

And what would have happened if Israel didn't attack in 1967? If Israel didn't attack, it's not that Egypt would have necessarily attacked, it was that what would have been projected is that Israel is weak, Egypt prevented Israel from attacking Syria, which was the reason why Nasser mobilized, and that Egypt is the powerful country in the Middle East and Israel is the weak country in the Middle East. And that reputational issue that was so essential for Israeli strategic thinking, which is the long-term reputational effect, particularly in times of transition, was huge.

And if you consider in this particular case, if you're looking at a strategic -- from this perspective as saying, what if Israel doesn't strike Iran? The Israelis think, at

least, that Arabs think they're weaker than before. They see what happened to them in 2006. There is "the absence of fear" in the Arab world, in the Arab Awakening. Iran is projecting itself as a powerful country exhibiting its missiles in the same way that Nasser was exhibiting his in 1967. And if Israel doesn't attack and then Iran ultimately develops nuclear weapons, the reputational issue for Israel is huge and I think it is this thinking about the reputational consequences down the road where you start looking for opportunities to reverse it, to establish yourself, to change the psychology of the region, to establish yourself, again, as a powerful country.

And if you look at this year, you would have to say with all the political calculations, this is not a bad year for them to do it. Iran looks like an aggressor, at least, to the international community because of the nuclear program. Public opinion is not going to blame Israel in some ways if Israel were to attack. We're entangled in an American election that certainly is going to reduce the amount of pressure that might happen. And so it's an opportunity.

Whether or not they will do it, what I'm suggesting to you is that there is a bigger picture, I think, in the strategic calculation that we don't sometimes pay attention to that clearly was central, at least in the Israeli decision in 1967, when Israel in fact decided to strike Egyptian and Syrian forces and in the process transform the regional environment.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Shibley. Okay, I'd like to open things up to questions. I'm going to ask everyone two things: please -- actually, I'll make it three things -- identify yourself; second, please ask a question; and third, please keep the questions brief. As you can see, this is an incredibly complicated and emotion-laden issue and I want to make sure that we get as many questions in as possible and give our panelists time to respond.

Okay, we'll start here with Said.

MR. ARIKAT: Yes, good morning. My name is Said Arikat from *Al-Quds Daily Newspaper*. Very quickly, last Sunday David Stockman, Reagan's economic guru, said that the President should, this week, should tell Israel and the world unequivocally there will be no attack, that we will make sure that Iran will never acquire the bomb.

And to you, Ken, in particular on the Palestinian issue, you know, with the freezing of the peace process it has been completely nixed as a result of this heightened rhetoric. Do you think that in the long-term this renders the two-state solution completely unviable? Thank you.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Said. I don't know how it came to me on the Palestinian issue, but it goes all over the place. Let's take some -- a couple here and then we'll come back there. We'll take these two right down here and I'll come back over around here.

MR. BERRY: Yes, Nicholas Berry, Foreign Policy Forum. The Israelis have notified the United States government that it will not give prior information of an attack. As you all know, we have 24/7 radar surveillance of Israel and of Iran. What would the U.S. policy be? And do we know anything about it if we have that information that attack is beginning and we will have probably at least an hour and a half, two hour warning before the attack? What does the United States do?

MR. POLLACK: Nick, if you want to hand it to Steven next to you.

MR. STERN: Hi. Steven Stern. Building on where Shibley ended with a historical -- if not an analogy -- historical perspective and a transformational moment, if we get through this season without the attack and with Obama reelected, possibly Netanyahu reelected or about to be reelected, and I don't know what's going to happen in terms of Palestinian elections, there's something else in terms of the strategic mix and in

terms of the peace process with the Palestinians. I mean, it was said that a large part, if not the major part, of Rabin's decision to go for a transformational moment towards peace process was his view of the Israeli's -- of the strategic threat from Iran. Could we be looking at perhaps a little virtuous jujitsu if we get through this year in terms of that?

MR. POLLACK: Let's take the gentleman here, we'll take a couple down here, and then we'll come to the panel and then I'll get the back of the room in the next round. The gentleman right here on the end.

MR. GRINDSTAFF: Hugh Grindstaff. We've been talking about political fallout, but radioactive fallout, the bombing of the sites -- there's more than one site now -- would cause quite a bit -- almost as much as Fukushima, I would say, and you would have Kuwait -- all the oil-producing companies in the Middle East would be affected in some way by the radioactive fallout. So, wouldn't you have more of an economic disaster plus a personnel disaster with even a surgical strike?

MR. POLLACK: Let's take -- there were two hands down here. This one, this one.

MR. SULLIVAN: Yes, hello. Tom Sullivan. I just have a question, this is something that hasn't actually come up at all today but it's related, it's Hamas. I noticed that on January 3rd, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met in Jordan and then subsequently, Khaled Mashal, he visited Jordan on the 29th and met with King Abdullah.

Now, I find it hard to believe that Israel -- I didn't read that Israel or the U.S. had an adverse reaction to that and I know, of course, as we all know, that Israel and Jordan have a peace treaty, so I'm just trying to figure out what to make of that. Like, is this -- because I know, again, that the Israelis tried to allegedly -- tried to poison Khaled Mashal until they were pressured to give the antidote. But I'm just trying to figure out what to make of this. And also, is there a rivalry between Khaled Mashal, who's

abandoned Syria -- or seems to have, and Ishmail Haniya, who's the prime minister inside the Gaza Strip -- or the Hamas-recognized prime minister. Sorry.

MR. BURN: I'm Jim Burn. I'm a journalist here in town. There was a remarkable session on Iran last Friday next door here at Carnegie and a point -- they were all Iranians that were speakers at this thing and I see many faces here who were at that gathering. I was astounded at one of the speakers asserting that whether or not Iran actually builds nuclear weapons and uses them, which is a big question, that it's a religious issue, that the Islam -- the people serious about Islam would consider that immoral by the religion because they would be breaking their part of being a part of the Atomic Nuclear Weapons Treaty. And he was really making a strong point of this, and I was astonished to hear that. What do you think?

MR. POLLACK: Okay, let's take some answers from the panel. And, again, panelists: don't feel compelled to answer every single question, but Shibley, why don't we start with you and work our way back that way and maybe you can handle some of the Palestinian issues that have been put back on the table.

MR. TELHAMI: Well, let me answer two themes, one theme is about what would the U.S. -- what would the administration do if it were told that Israel is about to strike Iran -- if I understood you correctly -- and the second is about the Palestinian issue.

You know, I think when you look at the White House this is obviously a position they would hate to be in and this, obviously, is exactly what they're trying to avoid, but they know what is not possible. Number one, certainly they cannot possibly alert anyone of it. I mean, obviously, that would be impossible for any president to do.

Number two; they would want to send a signal pretty quickly right after to Iran that the U.S. is not behind it, that clearly much of it is going to depend on how the

Iranians react.

Number three, the American reaction beyond that is going to be -- the American reaction is going to be dependent on what the Iranians do. You see you have an article today in *The New York Times* talking about the possible scenarios of what Iran might do if Israel strikes, and obviously there are different response scenarios that the President is going to have.

But the immediate thing would be you have to expect that you might be at war with Iran, the first thing you would do is you call your war cabinet in session immediately because it is very easy to see, no matter what you do and what position you took before, that you are likely to be dragged into this and that is obviously something that the administration is losing sleep at night over.

Now, on the Palestine question, you know, whether or not the two-state solution is still viable is obviously hotly debated and it's hard to know if it's not -- if it's still viable it obviously didn't have much time, it's impossible to know except years later when you look back to see at what point this becomes impossible.

I do think, though, that I'm still one of the few people who maybe is talking more with my heart than with my head on this thinking that it's still possible, that no matter what, after the American election, whether or not there is war with Iran or not, there will be one, what might be thought to be, final attempt to broker a two-state solution.

If there's no war with Iran, there will be a lot of incentive to do so because the strategic picture is going to look different. If there is war with Iran, I expect that this war with Iran is going to complicate Israel's life far more than many Israelis may be assuming and in some way the Israelis are going to need to figure out how to live in the neighborhood because think about this, a potential war with Iran is not just another battle, it is starting a war with the Persians. The Israelis have never had war with the

Persians. The Israelis have rhetorical, you know, fighting with Iran right now and its leaders, but they have never been at war. The nuclear program of Iran is a popular one, not necessarily the weapons, obviously it's being denied that it's weapons, and an attack is going to clearly put Israel at war with the Iranians, with the Persian civilization, perhaps, in a way that is going to complicate Israel's life for years to come and in some ways Israel is going to have to figure out a way to manage its relationship with the Arabs.

So, regardless, I think that I would expect after the next election they're going to see an Israeli interest in -- and I say that because we're talking about the American elections. Obviously the American elections matter. This Administration is far more interested in a two-state solution at least than some of the expressed positions of Republican candidates, but I don't think that will be the primary issue for explaining -- for anticipating the prospects of moving forward.

MR. POLLACK: Natan?

MR. SACHS: I think on the Palestinian question, and this relates a bit to what you mentioned before, there are two views on this. One is that Israel will have much more of a need and especially with an Iranian threat and with the Arab awakening, but another way to look at it is Israel is often, I think, more likely to be willing to take real risks with the Palestinians. It's not just trivial; it's not just ideological. There are security issues that are serious. It is much more likely to do so under conditions of (speaking foreign language 1:17:55) speaking about the Iranian threat being a decade away with the world changing rather than a situation where Israel feels very insecure and finds the Palestinian question to be such an intractable distraction that even if we were to enter serious discussions would last for a long time, would have spoilers, would have Hamas trying to derail things with terrorism again. It is something that I think is much less likely to happen, unfortunately.

And I would also say that at least the common Israeli view of '67 and of this issue, there is a reputational issue involved in the sense that if Israel lets Iran -- if Israel, by the way, and the U.S., let Iran become nuclear now, there is a very serious loss of reputation for both of them. But I respectfully disagree that it is the central concern for Israel and it's not the common reading of '67 in Israel either.

The fear among Israelis in '67 and especially the fear of the ability to maintain deterrents in '67 in the weeks prior to the war and the fear in Israel today are very genuine and it is not just fear, it is also genuine -- it's also real concern, for good reasons. And I think a lot of these strategic calculations, whether you agree or disagree with them, come from a very reasonable point of view, even if ultimately the policy is misguided or not.

I would say just quickly on the contamination, this was a question, certainly, in '81, it was a question to strike the reactor before it might contaminate large parts of Iraq, it depends. The main targets, the main potential targets in Iran would probably not be the reactor today in Bashir, it would actually be the uranium enrichment programs, including Fordo, which is not yet fully functional, and so I imagine that actually could be controlled. Israelis are certainly aware of this question. They were aware of it in '81 and took it into calculation. I highly doubt that they would try to attack Bashir, which would contaminate the Gulf.

Finally, Khaled Mashal. Khaled Mashal visiting Jordan had probably much more to do with internal Hamas and Arab politics. Mashal just left -- Hamas, in general, just left Damascus. Khaled Mashal, himself, left Damascus and his deputy as well. There is, of course, tension with the Gaza leadership. Visiting Jordan was probably an attempt by him to get a new home, and a failed attempt at that.

Israel's approach to Mashal is very different than it was under the



previous Netanyahu government actually that tried to kill him in the same Amman. They let him go. In fact, they let much worse people, Ahmed Jabari and others go, I don't know with impunity, but let them travel freely. It's much more, I think, about the domestic issue.

MR. POLLACK: Suzanne?

MS. MALONEY: Quickly, in terms of how the U.S. would respond to an Israeli attack on which it was not notified, I think I would refer you to a great resource, a sort of crisis simulation that Ken oversaw and really spearheaded a few years ago. It should be on our website, the read out -- the short answer to the question, and it's in much greater detail in the report and the write up of that simulation of just such a crisis is that it very quickly becomes an American conflict, and so the decision of U.S. involvement and response becomes precipitated by Iranian actions, and I think that is a very reasonable expectation that still stands today.

In terms of the economic impact of a strike, it would be enormous. There is already evidence that demand in a reasonably robust world economy is such that oil prices are beginning to creep up, even without a strike, even without tremendous market trepidation about the security of Iranian supplies. And so I think one can anticipate catastrophic economic impacts from a strike.

But at the same time, it is the inability of sanctions to work, it is the inability of the world to simply forego Iranian oil supply that I think is playing into Israeli decision-making, the expectations that sanctions, even these incredibly severe sanctions that we have today, are not going to simply destroy Iran's cash flow and its state revenues from oil exports is part of the Israeli decision-making and the skepticism today that exists even about these sanctions.

And finally on the religious issue, I think it's a red herring. There's a long

debate about whether or not the fatwa exists or does not exist. But ultimately, you know, in 1988, the Islamic Republic endorsed the idea of the exigency of the state as the foremost principle of decision-making, and I think that's been clear in all of the regime's actions, before and since that time. And so if this regime saw a requirement for a nuclear weapon, if it perceived that as a strategic necessity, it would pursue one.

MR. POLLACK: Okay, let's take just a few more questions. We'll try to get them in very quick and we'll have very quick answers, and I promised Diane she'd be first.

SPEAKER: Anyway, Suzanne, you mentioned miscalculation but under that is misperception and it seems that this is motivated by -- gripped by an absolutely belief that Ahmadinejad intends to nuke Israel and probably a mistranslation of regime change. That he said it's like the Soviet Union or South Africa, like a bloodless regime change. So, could you speak to the misperceptions that are underlying the drive for this? And also the potential for some kind of third party intervention, like Turkey, mediation, conflict resolution to reduce tensions?

MR. POLLACK: The gentleman in the blue shirt in back?

MR. SHEPS: Thank you. My name is Sam Sheps. I'm an analyst here in D.C. Given that the consensus seems to be that the U.S. becomes involved in this strike, whether it wants to or not, and the difficulties involved that have been discussed in *The New York Times* and other places just logistically for Israel to carry out this strike, can you foresee any sort of red lines or tripwires that might be crossed which would encourage the U.S. to green light or approve of military action?

MR. POLLACK: With apology, I'm just going to take one more. The gentleman in white.

MR. MYER: Ken Myer, (inaudible) World Docs. The conventional view

is that as far as an Israeli attack on Iran goes, the United States is pretty much an innocent bystander unable to affect the course of events. I think that's patently absurd. If we could force the British and French to withdraw from Suez, as we did in 1956, we can certainly convince a podunk state like Israel over which we have near total leverage not to do something we don't approve of. I wonder if the Israeli public -- the Iranians, of course, as was suggested, have indicated they would consider an attack by Israel an attack by the United States. I wonder if the Israeli public foresees that. And if they do it seems like they would be more concerned about a negative reaction by the United States if they attack Iran than your poll indicated unless they perceived our public opposition as a charade --

MR. POLLACK: I think we've got it. We've only got a couple minutes.

MR. MYER: It's just half a sentence -- unless they consider our public opposition a charade that in private we're actually supporting if not encouraging an Israeli attack? What do you think the Israeli public thinks?

MR. POLLACK: Got it, Ken. Thank you. Suzanne, you want to start off?

MS. MALONEY: Misperceptions, I think there are misperceptions in all three capitals and among all three publics as well. What Ahmadinejad has been quoted as saying is a repetition of a phrase used by Ayatollah Khomeini and still widely used even during Iran's reformist periods which talks about Israel disappearing from the pages of time.

Whether or not that should be seen as threatening depends on where you sit, and given the totality of Ahmadinejad's rhetoric, I see actually no misperception in the deep sense of foreboding that Israelis see when they see him in the position of authority that he has today, although obviously not absolute authority.

With respect to the potential for third party mediation, I am one of the few who still believes that negotiations are ultimately the only appropriate response to the Iranian nuclear threat. I think it's going to be very difficult and a huge uphill climb and ultimately we -- both sides need the good offices of a third party, which, like Algeria in late 1980 and early 1981, can help interpret the motivations and intentions and help create a mutually durable agreement.

I don't know that there is a likely or an easily identifiable candidate for that and I think there are some difficulties remaining that were evident in the 2010 attempt by the Turks to broker an agreement.

With that, I'll turn it to the fellow panelists.

MR. POLLACK: Natan?

MR. SACHS: Just briefly on the Ahmadinejad question, I think there are quite a few Israelis who understand slightly the nuance, the possibility that Ahmadinejad didn't exactly mean to throw the bomb and there are reasons he might not, but many Israelis are very, very fearful of Ahmadinejad, in particular, of course, because of his rhetoric and his demeanor, but of a nuclear Iran even without the existential threat.

Many people, including, by the way, Barak himself, have said that we should not exaggerate what existential threat means. A nuclear Iran is a terrible prospect for Israel even if they're not going to throw the bomb or give the bomb to Hezbollah tomorrow.

And even if Barak himself is saying this, many believe this, many think Israel might be able to live for a while with a nuclear Iran, but they fear this prospect tremendously. So, the position is not contingent on this belief that a bomb is falling tomorrow.

On the perception of the U.S., yeah, I think the Israeli public shares a lot

of the world's sentiment that it's all behind closed doors, they just agree on everything, but with President Obama it's slightly different. I think they do believe that there is a difference of opinion here. They probably do see more distance than they would in another circumstances.

MR. POLLACK: Shibley, you get the last word.

MR. TELHAMI: Very quickly, I don't really think the primary issue is misperception. Misperception is always there. Certainly there's always an absence of full information in every conflict. I think this is a strategic conflict and the calculations are very deliberate, you know, even in the absence of full information.

I don't see any circumstances under which this Administration will give a green light to Israel in the -- certainly before the elections.

And finally, on the question of can the U.S. stop Israel, theoretically, of course. I mean, U.S. is definitely dependent on Israel. You know, Israel can act on its own and has in the past, but when you ask that question in theoretical perspective you have to talk about realism and what the President is going to be able to go against what is a pervasive sentiment of supporting Congress or, for that matter, public in an environment in which the pressure is going the other way.

It is just hard to conceive how that is doable even if it is theoretically at some abstract level possible.

MR. POLLACK: Well, I hope you found this useful and illuminating. It certainly isn't the last word to be said on the subject and my suspicion is that we'll be addressing the topic again at some point in the not too distant future.

Please join me in thanking our terrific panel. (Applause)

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