



LUNCHEON SESSION

Assessing the Israeli and American Roles in Peacemaking

Moderator: Congresswoman Nita Lowey (D-New York),
Chairwoman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Foreign Operations

Tzipi Livni, Leader of the Opposition and Head of the
Kadima Party

Congressman Howard Berman (D-California), Chairman,
House Committee on Foreign Affairs



The Saban Forum's luncheon session addressed the current stalemate in Arab-Israeli peace negotiations and focused on the role the U.S. should play, if any, in moving it forward. Participants agreed that the United States is integral to Arab-Israeli peacemaking, and some called for a more active U.S. role.

While participants stated that it is in the interest of Israel, the Palestinians, and the international community to end the conflict, an Israeli participant said that it is important to resolve certain issues before a Palestinian state is created, otherwise a peace agreement will not solve the conflict. In addition, although many may see Israeli security as primarily an Israeli interest, the participant said that ensuring stability and safety in the region is the interest of the whole international community.

An Israeli participant urged both sides to resume negotiations, not as a favor to either side, but because there is a high price for stalemate and stagnation. Specifically, division is growing among Palestinians, and people are coalescing around either extremists or moderates. A danger exists if Palestinians permanently split between those in the West Bank and those in the Gaza Strip. The participant said Israel must adopt an approach in which it continues to negotiate but also confronts Hamas and removes its legitimacy. For a Palestinian state to exist, Israel needs a legitimate government that accepts the qualifications of the international community and is committed to stopping terrorism.

An Israeli participant said that the current stalemate of peace negotiations was not caused by a lack of ability to reach an agreement, but rather by the political climate that has surrounded negotiations. The participant said that both sides must focus on laying the groundwork for implementing the basic understandings that exist between the Israelis and Palestinians.

Regarding the United States' role in peacemaking, an American participant argued that Washington should be an active mediator, offering substantive proposals when the Israelis and Palestinians reach deadlocks. However, there was some disagreement between an Israeli and American participant over the Obama administration's



decision to call for a settlement freeze. While an American participant felt the continued settlement expansion undermines the sincerity of Israeli peace efforts, an Israeli participant said the United States should not focus on the settlement expansion but rather on more important issues, like the creation of two nation-states that can live together peacefully. On this point, an Israeli participant articulated the importance of gaining the public's support in Israel, saying that the borders of Israel and a Palestinian state need to be clearly defined in a way that gives the possibility for most of the Israelis to live in their homes.

An Israeli participant concluded the discussion by arguing that any future negotiation must be comprehensive. Addressing each issue of a peace agreement—security, borders, refugees, and Jerusalem—separately would not accomplish much because the issues are intricately tied with each other. The only way to get the support of both the Israeli and Palestinian people is to present a complete package that answers the concerns of both people.