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Before sunset: The Iran deal and what to do about it

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. JONES: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Is this on? Good evening. Sorry to interrupt the schmoozing, but we have some continuing programming for this evening. My name is Bruce Jones. I'm the vice president and the director for Foreign Policy at Brookings and it's a delight to join Martin and Haim Saban and welcome you here today. I hope you've enjoyed the proceedings so far. I think the pre-dinner conversation with John Allen is going to be a hard act to follow, but we've got a pretty juicy subject to continue with, which is 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal. As this audience knows very well, there has been no shortage of debate about the merits of the JCPOA since the P5 and one concluded their negotiations two years ago.

Proponents of the deals lauded its provisions for intrusive verification and monitoring and its reductions in Iran centrifuges and stockpiles of low and rich uraniums, but many have criticized the terms of the deal. Both as inadequate and short-lived; too fleeting to lessen the threat posed by Iran's nuclear capability or at least its latent capability. So for

that reason, the JCPOA serves as a starting point for our conversation we'll have tonight about whether we should keep the deal in place; can be amended; what options the United States, Israel and other states have for increasing their negotiating leverage with Tehran; and how can we curtail Iran's stabilizing regional behavior.

And to delve into this question, we plan very, very well and we had a great debate between His Excellency Ehud Barak, the former prime minister and minister of defense of Israel and the Honorable Tom Cotton, senator from Arkansas and chairman of the Armed Services Subcommittee on Air and Land Power. But sometimes in Washington politics trumps, so to speak and, unfortunately, Senator Cotton is caught up on the Senate floor with a, you know, I guess somewhat consequential bill on the tax issue. So he sends his deep apologies for his absence, but we're going to continue tonight's discussion in any case with Ehud Barak and Jeffrey Goldberg. And neither require much introduction.

Ehud Barak, as you all know, has been a strong defender of Israel security. Serving for 35 years in the IDF and then as the chief of the general staff, foreign minister, defense minister and prime minister.

Jeffrey Goldberg, who has been a long friend of Brookings will channel his inner Tom Cotton tonight as well as serving as editor in chief of The Atlantic, as you all know, a profound and careful watcher of the Middle East and of American foreign policy and his writings gives an incisive view into American thinking about the region. We're very grateful that they both could join us tonight, so please join me in welcoming Ehud Barak and Jeffrey Goldberg to the stage.

(APPLAUSE)

MR. GOLDBERG: Thank you, Bruce. Thank you, everyone. Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for being here. When I found out that Tom Cotton couldn't be here, I asked Joe Lieberman if he would play the role of Tom Cotton and then I realized that Lieberman is too hawkish to play the (Laughter) -- so I needed to find someone else. So I will channel my Tom Cotton.

Mr. Barak, thank you for being here. Why don't we start with Iran and since it's just the two of us, we could go range a little bit more widely to such issues as your future in Israeli politics, which I think some people in this audience would like to talk about. (Laughter) But let's start with Iran.

I remember five years ago sitting with you had leaving

a meeting with you and thinking, well, they're about to attack the Iranian nuclear facility, this was when you were defense minister and so let me start with a two-part question. The first part is why didn't you attack Iran when you had the chance? And two, why have you become a supporter of a deal that you told me and others you feared very much?

MR. BARAK: About the first part -- whenever too happy trigger about Iran, but we understood our responsibility; the situation that can be created; where there is bold operational capability; there's international legitimacy to do it; and compelling need to do it until certain date before it too late and under this circumstances, it might end up being totally irresponsible if you are not ready, not just to talk about it, but to execute it effectively and soberly. So that what we prepared. Unfortunately, we had the contact with the Americas. Not a big secret that we could not convince the presidents at the time. I talked personally one-on-one with two of them, could not convince them that's a good idea and be enthusiastic about it. We didn't ask for American enthusiasm. More problematic was the effect that we basically did not succeed in convincing our own both professional leadership and the crucial yield, not even a majority among the inner cabinet. So we found

ourselves, at the end, in a situation where the time had come; election came here, and the context about the coming deal or potential deal may undercut our legitimacy, international legitimacy to do it. We had also a big exercise with the American forces on an issue that was -- happened to be defense of Israel against missile attack from Iran. Out of all places, I was very close with formal elections. Was not the right time to consider it. So basically, we thought -- I think that we did the right thing in spite of all of the debates and so --

MR. GOLDBERG: Could it have worked? Do you think it could have worked?

MR. BARAK: Yeah.

MR. GOLDBERG: Work for all how long?

MR. BARAK: It probably could delay them, you know, at the early years, it might delay them by probably -- technically three years probably altogether in real life. Five years towards the end, it was a much shorter time. That was one of the problems every year, we got into a shorter framework. Probably in the last year we could think of one half year or one year, which makes it practically two years, but we have to bear in mind for all those who say that it doesn't make any sense to delay them just by three years, let's say. I want to remind all

of you that when we attacked the Iraqi reactor near Baghdad, we could not assume that we are delaying them by more than three years because they can easily import the same French company who built the reactor. Tell them now you will get 50 percent premium for the risk. Build it again within three years, it causes the same situation. The same scenario applies whatever - - whoever destroyed the Syrian reactor (inaudible) could not assume that it delays them by more than seven years because they could contact the same North Korean company who built it for them and ask them to build it again.

So I don't underestimate two or three years of delay. Of course, when it comes to almost ridiculous delays; if some of the ministers -- perhaps it's at a time around the table argue that we cannot delay them for more than nine months, which might be practically 18 months. That's a little bit disturbing.

MR. GOLDBERG: Why couldn't you convince your -- you're Israel's most dedicated soldier, why couldn't you convince the military leadership, the uniform leadership, and the intelligence service at the time --

MR. BARAK: I don't I don't think that I can dive into it and convince you. Probably some of them are here in the room.

MR. GOLDBERG: Most of them are here actually.

MR. BARAK: Convince them. I was asked once by the American President Obama, have you noticed that your own generals do not agree with you about it? I asked him, did not it happen to you as well, from time-to-time, that you think in the same way and your generals think separately, I explained to him the difference. I told him when the general's looking upward, they see, in our case, myself and Bibi, when we look upward, we see heaven. Might be someone there or might be empty, but it's clear that we have the responsibility and that's --

MR. GOLDBERG: I assume the beard means that there's someone there actually.

MR. BARAK: -- just in case there is someone there.
(Laughter)

MR. GOLDBERG: Just checking.

MR. BARAK: So that's our story. It's probably an issue for historians; probably for all psychologists. I don't want to dive into it. As a matter of fact, we failed to convince the -- I fear some of the people were deeply involved in trying to convince from all directions. We couldn't do it.

MR. GOLDBERG: So go to the issue of how you became

a --

MR. BARAK: I think that some --

MR. GOLDBERG: -- dove on the issue.

MR. BARAK: I think that some of the events which happened now in Nova Scotia and which I hope will be blocked from happening in Iran, will close some of us or some of the members of this decision-making teams to have a second thought about whether it was solved (inaudible) or so risky as some, saw it do -- to do it at a certain point. But, of course, always only if it were the last resort, then --

MR. GOLDBERG: But what I'm hearing from you, I don't want to stay on this river, what I'm hearing from you is, you think it was a mistake not to do it.

MR. BARAK: No, no. You don't hear me -- anything beyond what I say. (Laughter) I did say, the words exactly what I said that it -- but let me tell you about, you asked about the deal. I didn't change my mind. The deal is a bad deal. Whenever I'm asked what your feelings about this -- I want deal. I answer, mixed feelings. You know what is mixed feelings? It's when your mother-in-law takes your new BMW and drives it over the cliff. (Laughter)

MR. BARAK: That's something that everyone

understands. (Applause)

MR. BARAK: So it's really a bad deal and we don't need -- you know, I really regret that the Senator is not here because I prefer boxing over schmoozing, but I happen to listen to him several times on the TV and hear what he had to say about it. So basically, we Israelis, we don't have to get any lectures about the fact that Iran is bad; that the Ayatollah is a bad guy. There are really no moderate Ayatollah and that they're doing many bad things. We don't need any lectures about it. But when it comes to the decertification of the agreement or deal, you have to ask yourself, what's the meaning of it? What will happen? I thought it's a mistake, (inaudible) the following. Even if you decertify it or even if America takes a further step and pull out of the agreement, it's still then. It's a bad deal, but is a done deal. It's a done deal. It means that as a matter of fact, it's an apple, not a banana and it's something that you have to recognize.

So what will happen? It solves the problems to the Congress. The Congress probably have another two weeks or so. The congressmen do nothing beyond probably a short leaving temporary face-saving formula for the President. It will not change anything because there are other signatories. They will

not pull out of it, so it will not change anything for the Iranians. If it changes anything, it makes them in a better situation. So win-win, they can keep harvest the benefits of this agreement. At the same time, if the time comes when they decide to break out, it clearly a possibility in the second half of the timeline of the agreement, the deal. They will be able to argue that it is somehow legitimized by the fact that they're not stage lifting.

Now, the United States is busy now with North Korea. Basically, underneath all the rhetoric, don't spread the word, but I don't believe that the America as though being the mightiest power on earth and they can evaporate all North Korea, but that doesn't mean that they have a surgical military option to destroy the nuclear military plan of North Korea, so think of the outcome to the technical (inaudible).

MR. GOLDBERG: No, no, no, no, but I want to bring up North Korea. I want to bring up North Korea because you've said what would Tom Cotton say? What Tom Cotton would say is North Korea draws the lesson from the Iran deal that if you just stick with your program, eventually, you'll get international recognition for your program because what the Iran deal is, in fact, is delay international recognition for your right --

MR. BARAK: I think it's the opposite. The Iranians felt, learning from the North Korean experience, they learned that if they can defy the whole world for long enough, they might come out with it. In this regard, there is still work to do in terms of blocking and making sure the Iranians will not turn into military nuclear power in a terrible situation. The question, what it has to do with the deal? It's nothing to do with the deal right now. The North Koreans, which are now basically -- America's tried to grab them -- drag them into certain negotiation supported by the Chinese and the Russians somehow. They will ask, what the hell is that? How come you ask us to negotiate with the Americans if you can wake up after two and half years and find out that they just cancelled it? They don't have the mood to continue. That doesn't help.

Now, if somehow, Cotton was right, that it helps in the longer term. We have to consider it. And I listened to him, (inaudible) basically. Things that all of us know. The Iranians are keep doing bad things. They are developing long-range ballistic missiles, which ultimately might be able to carry nuclear weapons. They are spreading terror all around the region. They help the Lebanese and Syria and whatever. These are bad things. They are even extremely active on the cyber

front.

All these are bad things. But what the hell is the relation to the (inaudible)? If you, America, wants to put an end to the development of intercontinental ballistic missile, you don't need it intercontinental. You can announce that a missile, ballistic missiles of medium range in Iran which reach the heart of Europe is touching the vital national interests of the United States and start to work up on it. When you do it in relations to the deal, you make it more complicated. You make more complicated here, at the Congress. You make it more complicated with our allies. You make it more complicated in anyway, so the only reason -- I should have mentioned when I looked at it from all possible directions is that the real reason that they related the needed steps vis-à-vis Iran into this deal has to do with what I call ABB, anything bad begot. Not me and that's the only explanation why the hell you need the deal for?

MR. GOLDBERG: Let me stay channeling Tom Cotton for a minute. What Tom Cotton would say, listening to you is, you acknowledge Iran as a bad actor. You acknowledge Iran poses a serious threat to Israel. You acknowledge that they're not going to change their behavior. So why not deal with tomorrow

the problem rather than 10 years down the road when they're that much closer to be able to move to break out when they have a lot more money, a lot -- a better missile technology and so on? You're just avoiding the problem.

MR. BARAK: I'm not talking about dealing for 10 years. There are things that have to be done now, if you're ready to do it, but the talk about --

MR. GOLDBERG: Like what? Like what?

MR. BARAK: -- reaching the (inaudible), but reaching is through the deal and through destroying the deal and expecting that it will create better place to promote your interests is just an illusion. We know it from our experience. Sometimes the leadership create kind of a whole structural made of rhetoric that doesn't have the context, the substance in it. And you have to be convinced, but you cannot be convinced. It doesn't work this way.

There are many things to do. For example, if the missiles, as I mentioned, is bad thing, go negotiate with your allies. See whether you bring the Europeans to block them. It's about Europe first before they reach the United States. See whether you can bring together China and Russia. It would be easier if you don't attach it to the deal, but does it

independently. If they refuse, America's mighty enough to decide on its own that it's strategic interests in the United States, raise it on your own. Issue warning, initiate sanctions, but what the hell is that to do with this deal?

Now, I don't -- in regard to the deal, it's a -- we have to come behind closed doors, Israel and America, but for sure, America was the other signature and decide what constitutes a breakup. Detailed definition is need both for the IAA and for our intelligence communities, then decide what kind of sanctions you are going to impose if they'll pass this (inaudible), then try to move toward it. Okay, that's good. Then decide how you are going to respond with sanctions and other things. And all this won't work unless America will have the stick in the bedroom, namely, we mobilize the intelligence, the means and more than anything else, the political will to take even independent unilateral American operation to destroy. And I tell you, I used to scorn American presidents when we dealt with Iran. I told them, you know, when we are talking about surgical operation, we have in mind, scalpels. When you talk on surgical operation, you seem to think of chisel and 10-pound hammer. That's something different, but I should have made the last four years or five -- four years, America under

Obama and Panetta and the Pentagon developed extremely fine scalpels, much finer than what we have or can dream of having. So to all those who observed the observation that was promoted by the previous administration that it is either finding the deal or a major war with Iran that we look like Afghanistan or Iran, that's not true. There is a way to do it in extremely surgical manner and are very successful now. But you can do it now. You can do it in four years and you will be able to do it even in ages from now.

MR. GOLDBERG: Three or four years ago, you said that Iran poses an existential threat to Israel. Now, you say it doesn't post an existential threat, but it could post an existential threat. How do you judge when something has moved to existential? I mean, if they're sunset clauses in this, why isn't Iran remain a long-term existential threat to Israel?

MR. BARAK: I want to correct you once again. Go into the record, you'll find that I am like a robot, repeat the same words with the same language. At most, I translate it into a little bit poor English, but it's the same content exactly. I never say that they're out at any given point of the past has been an existential threat to Israel. But I warned, even the chief of staff in '92, I warned in a lecture at the university,

also on the record. I warned, let Israel should try to use this window of opportunity. I talked about '91 to 2000 before Iran turns into nuclear and before another wave of Muslim terror overwhelms the whole region and I was not the only one who warned.

So we saw it, the moment Iran tries to be a nuclear military power, if they succeed, they become potentially in the longer term an existential threat. But I was always -- even within our government, in a way more hawkish than Netanyahu and Lieberman about this Iran issue, but I never liked this catastrophic talk. It was both behind closed doors and sometimes they're public, talking about Europe in '38 and whatever, and (inaudible) with apocalyptic tinge. With even I always used to ask my colleagues in the government, what do you think a sober Jew had to do in Europe in '38? He had to flee out of Europe, so what is the (inaudible) going to do? What is the parallel right now?

I once told Netanyahu, assume for a moment the worst. Assume that the Iranians capitulated, capitulated on pressures, (inaudible) whatever. They destroyed Kashan and (inaudible). They exported -- moved to Washau, Kazakhstan, all the enriched uranium, they expel all the scientists. Can we wish something

better? No. Perfect situation.

Now, you wake up one morning, a year and a half later, and see on the news that there was a political meltdown in Pakistan and when the dust settles after two weeks, you end of finding that there was a half a dozen of nuclear weapons in Saudi Arabia and a half a dozen in Iran. And it's not just hypothetical guess, what I describe here. So are we going to rip our pecula, as we say in Yiddish and go back to North Africa and Eastern? No, we are here. We are here to stay. We are still the mightiest power around. And they will -- better be ware, even with the six nuclear weapons. So Israel is much stronger. The part of my debate was of the present government. We're so strong, the public just has to know we -- the Middle East is a much tougher kind of place. It's not like the Midwest and it's a really tough neighborhood, but as a result of seven decades of achievement, we are the mightiest power around. And backed by the United States and by technological edge, we will remain so for the foreseeable future, so can look at our reality, not with existential fields, not seeing just shadows on the wall, not mentioning the Hitler of the day and not looking for traitors from within. We should have in ourselves confidence to decide our future the way Zionism did from day

one.

MR. GOLDBERG: So, you say that you don't -- you say that you give interviews like robots, but -- like a robot, but I've read something recently --

MR. BARAK: No, I repeat my words, in order not to face such a question.

MR. GOLDBERG: No, but I've read some of your recent interviews and they are quite spontaneous in some of your expressions.

MR. BARAK: (inaudible)

MR. GOLDBERG: And I've read your Twitter.

MR. BARAK: I'm Trumping.

MR. GOLDBERG: Yeah, you're close. You're not quite there yet.

MR. BARAK: It worked here.

MR. GOLDBERG: You're close, but you're not quite there. But let me ask you the question. You said controversially that you'd be the best man -- the best person in Israel right now to be prime minister. Why do you believe that? And do you actually believe that Avi Gabbay would not be as good?

MR. BARAK: That's also what -- not what I've said,

but I -- use the opportunity, Avi Gabbay is here to tell you what I've said. I said that I got a poll. Someone sent me, an American guy sent me a poll that showed that if a direct election in Israel would be held now and I would run against Bibi, in the secular part of the Israeli population, I would win over. I even mentioned that in all the population, he would win, even with higher margin, but that none of us get 40 percent and 35 percent, see an acting prime minister on one end and all tweeting person on the other end, can't decide for whom to vote. So, I said, okay, objectively -- objectively, I'm more ripe and capable of running the country than any other country including Bibi who has experience, but doesn't have a lot -- the capacity to make decisions.

But I said, there is no direct election. I kid you not. My time as prime minister left enough scars on the left side of the body politic that if leftists have choice, they will not necessarily vote for the party where I am and that I'm not a great political manipulator and less than mediocre ego kind of (inaudible), a kind of ego schmoozer, and both these elements are very important in politics. So basically, I told Bramovich was the guy, that, yeah, objectively, I am better, but in practice --

MR. GOLDBERG: Right, right.

MR. BARAK: -- that and I continue to say that Avi Gabbay -- many of you either know him, but Americans learn about it, that he's very good.

MR. GOLDBERG: So let me go to --

MR. BARAK: I like you -- why do you stop me here right now? (Laughter) It's very good and he can become --

MR. GOLDBERG: So you're endorsing Avi Gabbay. You're endorsing him, all right, I got it. (Applause)

MR. GOLDBERG: I got it.

MR. BARAK: Full-heartedly.

MR. GOLDBERG: But my question is --

MR. BARAK: I started only myself and his mother which is about my age, believed in him, but now more and more believe. (Laughter)

MR. GOLDBERG: My question for you boiled down is this. Are you a businessman or are you a future political leader in Israel, in your own mind?

MR. BARAK: In my own mind, I'm worried citizen. I have been in almost any possible position in Israel and I liked it very much unlike some of my followers, I never complained. Never explained too much and I could not even mimic self-

victimization. I cannot be a victim, even for a moment, for sure. So it's -- I'm happy. I never felt any kind of bitterness. I know that I'm responsible to what happened whether people like it or not under my control and very proud of what I did and under the same uncertainties, I might have done the same once again. And so I'm satisfied, but I'm deeply worried about the direction the Israel's taking in the last three years, where for the first time, pure, right-wing government which cannot anymore hide its real agenda.

In the past, it can always complain, oh, well, we tried, but (inaudible) didn't let us, believe me, Barack is there. We cannot do what we want. Now, there are no excuses anymore, so it ends up that the real agenda of this government is one-state solution, creeping annexation of the West Bank, and it's certainly very practical, because none of us know whether it's even possible to think of any breakthrough in the peace process right now. But most of Israel, I can tell you, 70 percent of Israelis believes in two-state solution. Eighty percent believe in separation. I say, why, what's the difference? There is a difference. Israel never wants to be suckers. So two-state solution sounds as if you are yielding to a demand or a right of the Palestinians. Separation is

something more neutral. And 85 percent support divorce. A divorce is more kind of (inaudible).

MR. GOLDBERG: Let me -- we're going to --

MR. BARAK: (Speaks in foreign language). So basically, the right-wing government end up moving in an agenda which I believe is the real threat, existential threat, in the long-term to Israel. It's not the Iranians. I don't underestimate -- I don't know them. It's not the Daesh or Hezbollah or anyone else. All of those threats should be dealt with. The real threat is our internal strength, internal stability and it's threatened by this agenda because one-state solution will end inevitably (inaudible), including, I see here the leader of (inaudible). None of us can show a way out of this (inaudible). One-state solution will end up with either non-Jewish or non-democratic, probably both states, and deeply immersed into violence and debt can be a real tragedy that has to be avoided at almost any price.

MR. GOLDBERG: We're going to go to questions in a minute. (Applause)

MR. GOLDBERG: We're going to go to questions, but one more quick question for you, Jerusalem -- there seems to be a good chance that the U.S. is going to recognize Jerusalem as

Israel's capital net week. Do you agree with that move and, B, what do you think the regional and local consequences will be if the U.S. makes that announcement and actually tries to execute that?

MR. BARAK: I like that idea very much. I regret that it didn't happen 10, 20 or 65 years ago. I think that all embassies of all nations should be in Jerusalem. That's the nature of the situation. I don't think that, that alone will kill any options for dealing, but the sensitivities about the exact timing or the exact wording is something to be done by diplomats by prodding the water, (inaudible), and see probably there is some deal here we can go.

What really disturbs me is not this issue. I would be happy to hear that the embassy's move, not just there is a statement announcing the self-evident. Who thinks? Probably General Mattis thought that it's probably Tel Aviv when he was in the Congress, kind of interviewed. I don't think that he -- he knows also Jerusalem, so basically, everyone knows that it's self-evident. I don't see the great kind of --

MR. GOLDBERG: But what would be the consequences? You think they would violently erupt?

MR. BARAK: I don't think this is a consequential

event, especially if it would be the others will let be known in advance and explain to them that it doesn't close the door on any future American effort. It's much more consequential what kind of a plan will be proposed by the Trump administration. If it will be just kind of a situation of a possible way out that both sides will be invited to deal with, we will see something that we are seeing for the last 10 years, once and again. The blame game starts before even they end to be both sides. And to read the text, so it's true that the Palestinians, in my judgment, bare most of the responsibility to the fact that we are stuck. But when I ask myself whether we could do more, not because of them, not in order to satisfy any need or right of the person or justice for them. Because of our own interests to hold the moral high ground. What I see is a major problem for Israel that we lost this instinct that Zionism had from day one to always hold the moral ground, however, path the reality on the ground; however demanding the situation, sometimes we have to leave certain ambiguities, but always hold the moral ground in the minds of your own people in order to hold them united in the minds of the Jewish communities in the world; in the minds of friends in the advanced world. After all, Western Europe, North American, Australia, New Zealand, that's our reference

group. The rest of the 160 nations where we do a lot of mileage, we make visit, they visit, it's great for photo ops, the real core of our identity are those countries and we should make sure that we hold the moral high ground there.

When you look at the crisis that we have now with Americans, especially young generation and with many people who will -- devoted supporters of Israel for decades in their own nations, you see that the real underlying cause that we lost this instinct. The instinct to always find a way to make sure that if something is rejected it will be genuinely understood by objective observers and friends all around the world as being rejected because of the insistent obstination or whatever on the other side. Not because Israel was kind of framing it in a way that does not allow you to fly.

MR. GOLDBERG: We're going to go to some questions. Haim, do you have something?

MR. SABAN: Do you want me to pose a question?

MR. BARAK: Usually you have one.

MR. GOLDBERG: No, I just -- it's --

MR. BARAK: At least one.

MR. GOLDBERG: I have a Pavlovian response by this point.

MR. SABAN: Well, you asked the other question, he didn't answer so I'll ask the question again. Are you thinking -- not are you going to -- are you thinking about going back into politics?

MR. BARAK: About coming back to politics?

MR. GOLDBERG: Going to politics.

MR. BARAK: You know we learned in early --

MR. SABAN: It's a yes or no.

MR. BARAK: No, no, no. (Laughter)

MR. BARAK: I happen to know the two worlds and I know to choose them and when not. (Laughter)

MR. SABAN: I am not Goldberg. Yes or no?

MR. BARAK: Please listen. We learned at an early age in politics never say never.

MR. GOLDBERG: Yes.

MR. BARAK: I cannot -- (Laughter)

MR. GOLDBERG: Yes, we get another question. No, you just said yes.

MR. BARAK: No. And so, I cannot --

MR. SABAN: Hold on, now I'm confused. You said yes, he said no. What is this, Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong? No.

MR. GOLDBERG: He didn't rule out a political career which means he's ruling in a political career.

MR. BARAK: Haim, when we will ask Jeff Goldberg, are you going to enter politics, answering yes or no, take his word for him. When you ask me, I recommend to you to take my word.

MR. GOLDBERG: I'm taking a wait-and-see attitude myself.

MR. BARAK: I cannot exclude the situation where that will -- might drive me to contemplate it. (Laughter) But having in mind what kind of situation should be, I prefer that it will never happen and that Avi Gabbay will lead -- will come to. I rely on him and I trust him to do the right thing at the right moment and win. He already showed his capacity to win against everyone.

MR. SABAN: So yes or no? (Laughter)

MR. GOLDBERG: Can you go over there to Dennis?

MR. BARAK: No.

MR. GOLDBERG: Haim, watch, Dennis is going to have a much more sophisticated way of answering -- asking the question. It's over here.

SPEAKER: Ehud, you went through and you described

what is the real existential threat to Israel. You described how up to 85 percent of Israelis prefer divorce and yet --

MR. BARAK: I can't hear you. Can you --

SPEAKER: I'll repeat.

MR. BARAK: Yeah.

SPEAKER: It's an echo over here.

MR. BARAK: (inaudible) my ears after too many shots, it starts to influence my hearing, yeah.

MAN: Anyway, you said that the real existential threat to Israel is becoming a binational state, one state. You said 85 percent of the Israeli public would prefer divorce. And yet, there seems to be no real debate within Israel --

MR. BARAK: There seems to be no?

MR. GOLDBERG: Debate.

MAN: No real debate.

MR. BARAK: No?

MR. GOLDBERG: Debate.

MAN: Within Israel over the danger that you're describing, so how do you explain that?

MR. BARAK: I'm not sure that I have a full explanation. My feelings is the following. There is a difference in political culture between right and left, not just

in Israel, all around the world. The right electorate behaves like football club fans. They're always enthusiasts; they never lose trust within their team. They don't replace the team after three repeated kind of losses. They're always ready to jump on the referee to remind him what his mother was doing when she was young. (Laughter) Whatever needed, they want to win.

Left electorate behaves -- having now learned it -- behaves like a debate club in an ivy league university. You sit in an air-conditioned room with top-quality people and you contemplate normative issue, how the world should have looked like. Now, how to go outside and get power and start to drive the whole thing. So it's not easy. Really, I don't envy the leaders of left-wing anywhere. So, that's one element.

I remember talking to my general committee or central committee of the party, thousands of people, when it was eight years ago and I still was the head of labor, I told them, look, I'm 68, not now, I was then. I'm 68. Since I was born, we had only the Likud had only four leaders: Begin, Shamir, Sharon, Bibi. (inaudible) I have a grandchild, he's eight years old. Since he was born, we have six and I was most of the time. And as I mentioned earlier, I'm not a great politician. Shimon Peres is much bigger (inaudible) great political players. No

one survived. So it means that we have certain malaise and it's real malaise.

So, the passivity of the left is the malaise and the left should be shaken much more strongly in order to wake up. That's what I try to contribute in my kind of public behavior right now. Including the blatant kind of words that they choose just in order to help people to wake up.

Now, there is another more subtle layer. There is a different in the value sets of the right and the left, not just in Israel. The left being liberal basically have only a metrics made of three elements. (inaudible) categorical imperative of count, you know, don't do to others what you don't like will be done to you and so on; certain honesty, I don't cheat on you, don't cheat on me; a certain general belief that freedom is better than oppression. With these three elements, you're liberal, cosmopolitan, you can learn in Manhattan, Berlin, in Paris, you're among colleagues and comrades. It doesn't mean that they will really help you if you need something, but they are ideological colleagues and comrades.

The right-wing have a wider set, they understand these values of the individual: the need to be honest, they need to help each other, even that freedom is better than oppression.

But they have a wider fit, what is called the community values. They respect a group that they belong to smaller than the whole world. They accept authority. We know from long before we started to write and read that even the hunter, gatherers, if you have a band of more than 150, you should have a leader otherwise you're counting those cultures that could not adapt a leader disappear. And the part of the community values is a respect that certain things are sacred. Not anything and everything at any moment of the smallest whim is subject to discussion. It doesn't mean that there is no development of values and there is no learning from history and what happened, but there is a basic respect of certain elements should be sacred.

Now, think of it, the left-wing, if the leaders would not internalize, not just learn to talk about it, but internalize that when you talk to the public -- to the electorate -- you are talking the people who think of themselves in those terms, in those values, they want to belong to a group, they respect authority, they hold certain things sacred. If you do not respect it and they don't feel that it's genuine, they will not vote for you. So, it's a major challenge.

And now for the last element and I speak especially

for the Israelis here, the right-wing, especially Bibi and (inaudible), educated the Israel public to judge its identity, political identity through two filters. I call it the finger stand, laid out finger stand question. Question number one, inward-looking. Question number two, outward-looking.

Inward-looking. Are you first of all Israeli then Jew? Or are you first Jew and then Israeli? My answer for it: I'm a Jew and Israeli at the same time, at the same level exactly. But when you ask those question, they select you. If you're first Israeli, you are left. If you're first Jew, you are right.

Second is outward-looking question. Do you love Arabs or do you hate Arab? If you love Arab, you are left. If you hate Arabs, you are right. As long as we agree that these are the filters that should be used, the right-wing will be forever in power. It is only if we change it from this kind of identity questions into much more substantial ones. These identity questions are the traditional questions of any -- I don't want to use the word fascist -- any ultra-national movement. They always look for enemies beyond any reconciliation from the out and try to form within. So you have to make these different changes.

We need another court which is going with these 85 percent for divorce. We need to convince the public that the real questions at the -- on the table are the following: are you supportive or against the three pillars of the Israeli modern values identity? Number one, security above and ahead of everything else, every Israeli understands this. Second, (speaking foreign language), the integrity and unity of the people is ahead of the integrity of the unity, the great play to possess the whole biblical country under our control. And third, the declaration of independence is our de facto constitution. I tell you, I checked it 80+ percent of Israelis support those three elements.

So, how come that when you ask them this dividing questions, the finger stand question, more than half -- probably 60 percent are right. And when you ask the real substantive issue, what do you support and what you are against, 85 agree to it because the right-wing made years before the terms, fake news, alternative facts, or what-aboutism became -- got some traction in English, we had it without calling it with this name. The right-wing in Israel very successfully telling the people, we are for those three pillars. Of course, we are the greatest supporters of security ahead of everything else. We

are for (speaking foreign language). Lieberman enters the Ministry of Defense, he said, of course, I am for two states, I am for (speaking foreign language). And we are for the principles of the independence declaration. But when you look at the behavior, it's the opposite.

And that's the role of the opposition: to torn apart day and night, every day torn apart the masks and tell the public, you know, you have a leadership who plays a masquerade ball, I don't know how to call. They pretend to work for these three elements and they destroy them at the same time. Because I will tell you something even more severe, because the agenda of one state, everyone understands, in order to implement it, you will have to need practices and steps that which are plainly against the Israeli and international law. You will have to do it. So, when you understand it, you have to do something.

We are facing right now a direct assault by the government elected (inaudible). It's also my government. I don't like it, but it's my government as well. These government is attacking, assaulting the Supreme Court, the civil society, the free media, and even the ethical courts of the IDF directly head on. And if we -- the Israelis will not wake up and block it, we will pay the price. (Applause)

MR. GOLDBERG: Dennis, did that answer your question?

SPEAKER: Part of it. (Laughter)

MR. BARAK: That was the short version.

MR. GOLDBERG: Yeah. I have time for one more Tweet-sized question and Tweet-sized answer. Is that Danny in the back?

MR. BARAK: Two hundred eight.

MR. GOLDBERG: Yeah, a 280,000-character answer.

(Laughter)

SPEAKER: Mr. Barak, we will do it very briefly.

MR. GOLDBERG: I think a little bit down.

SPEAKER: I will do it very briefly, Mr. Barak.

MR. GOLDBERG: Please, very briefly.

SPEAKER: You describe the way right-wing people refer to the situation and answer questions and how the left in the air-conditioned philosophical debates and then you gave a typical left-wing answer to the question of Mr. Ross. I think that the reason -- the simple answer to the question of Mr. Ross is that Israel's overwhelmingly do not believe that the Palestinians are ready to have peace with Israel and actually, you are the first person that rightfully thought that the Israelis.

MR. BARAK: I will answer about it also in 220 -- 80. Look, we all agree among ourselves Israel, that probably the objective situation right now is even with Ohlmert or Rabin or Peres or myself or Bibi in the previous round, with the most generous proposal probably, we cannot fly right now. There still is a question. So, what are you doing in the meantime? I see (inaudible), it's a time to rid the (inaudible) the commanders for Israel security and also in English, dot-org. They describe what should be done according to our experts on security, heads of the IDF, Shabak, Mossad, police. And basically, the question comes to the following: we all agree that the settlement blocks and the neighborhoods in Jerusalem which include 80 percent of the settlement population should remain in Israel for any -- under any kind of permanent arrangement. We all agree that -- or the question remains what to do with the last 20 percent of settlers, about 100,000, was spread over what we call the isolated settlements, about 100 of them.

And the question is what are we doing in this window when there is no way still to have an agreement? Are we trying to strengthen Israel, fortify it, make kind of solidify our internal unity and our identity and always leaving the

opportunity for the divorce? Or are we deliberately trying to put sticks into the kind of probability of any divorce in the future so keep the creeping annexation keep putting and Israeli or developing Israeli settlement in between any two other Arab villages? I want to tell you just, you know, we are now 10 years after the disengagement from Gaza led by Sharon, out of all people, you know, it's kind of a gallant U-turn at the end of his career. And three examples are in front of us of a different relationship between Israel presence, settlement presence, Israel control of security, and what happens to (inaudible)?

There is the Gaza Strip, we pulled out both the settlements and the IDF and we do not have overall responsibility for security. The result, missiles, more than 10,000 covering two-thirds of Israel. We have Judea and the southern part of (inaudible). Well, our settlements beyond the settlement blocks. I don't talk about settlement blocks as part of the agreed part of Israel. There are isolated settlements and Israel is responsible for security. So, what we have there, we have daily friction because there are settlers and Arabs living inside each other, we have terror inside this area and we have terror from this area into Israel proper. And we have a

(inaudible) example, in a corner Sharon wanted to hint to the Arab world, to the Americans, or whatever that Gaza is not the end of the story. So, he evacuated four small settlements around Jenin.

So, now we have the whole area for (inaudible) just out of Nabulus until Jenin with a unique situation: Israel is still responsible -- overall responsibility -- for security, but there are no settlers. The result: there is no friction within, there is no terror within, and there is no terror from the out-world toward Israel. It's a food for thought. It tells us that not everything is lost and we have to behave responsibly along the way, in a way that we keep option rather than kill option.

MR. GOLDBERG: We're going to right into Havdalah now I think. (Laughter)

I want to thank Ehud Barak very much for coming tonight. Thank you very much, sir.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much to Jeff Goldberg and Mr. Barak. Everyone, we start tomorrow early because we have a very packed day and we're going to have to try and stick to schedule despite having dozens and dozens of Israelis. So, we will have breakfast available at 8:00 a.m. and 8:45 sharp, we need to be

inside here. Please try to stick to times so that later in the day we can have a proper break which I know everyone needs. Please remember today was on the record, but tomorrow unless explicitly said otherwise, everything is off the record which (inaudible) rule will explain in the morning so that people can speak frankly. And thank you to everyone for participating and coming and we'll see you in the morning.

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