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WEBINAR

KISSINGER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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PARTICIPANTS:

Introduction:

SUZANNE MALONEY
Vice President and Director, Foreign Policy
The Brookings Institution

Moderator:

NATAN SACHS
Fellow and Director, Center for Middle East Policy
The Brookings Institution

Panel Discussion:

NABIL FAHMY
Founding Dean, School of Global Affairs and Public Policy
American University in Cairo

MARTIN INDYK
Distinguished Fellow
Council on Foreign Relations

KORI SCHAKE
Fellow and Director, Foreign and Defense Policy Studies
American Enterprise Institute

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. MALONEY: Good morning and good afternoon, good evening to those of you who are joining us from outside the Washington area. I'm Suzanne Maloney, vice president and director of the Foreign Policy program here at The Brookings Institution. And I'm genuinely delighted to welcome you on behalf of the program and our Center for Middle East Policy, to today's event, "Kissinger in the Middle East."

We gather virtually this morning to welcome back to Brookings a very special guest, our dear friend and former colleague, Martin Indyk. Martin served as President Obama's special envoy for Israeli/Palestinian negotiations, and previously held multiple senior policy roles in the Clinton administration as special assistant to President Clinton and senior director of the National Security Council, assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs, and twice as the United States ambassador to Israel.

In his long career at Brookings Martin was the founding director of what is now known as our Center for Middle East Policy. And he held senior executive positions, including vice president for Foreign Policy and executive vice president of The Brookings Institution as a whole. He is currently a distinguished fellow with the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, but he will always be a cherished member of The Brookings family.

Martin is the quintessential combination of diplomat, scholar, and institution builder. He has devoted his career to two intertwined missions: that of advancing peace in the Middle East and beyond, and also that of furthering in-depth, non-partisan, diverse research on international politics and security.

All of us at Brookings, especially in Foreign Policy, are indebted to him for his leadership, his mentorship, and his commitment to serious scholarship. For that reason it is a true honor and special privilege for me to help kick off this conversation with Martin today on his extraordinary new book "Master of the Game, Henry Kissinger and the Art of Middle East Diplomacy," which he began researching and writing while he was at Brookings.

In this book, which has received praise from many, many sources, including the Wall

Street Journal and the New York Times, Martin examines the groundwork laid by Kissinger for what became the Arab/Israeli peace process and led to the Israeli/Egyptian Peace Treaty of 1979.

We are thrilled to have an outstanding panel of experts joining Martin on the screen this morning. Nabil Fahmy is a career diplomat who served as foreign minister of Egypt from 2013 to 2014. In his distinguished diplomatic career he also served as ambassador of Egypt to the United States from 1999 to 2008, and ambassador to Japan from 1997 to 1999.

Alongside him I'm really pleased to welcome our friend Kori Schake, who is a senior fellow and director of Foreign and Defense Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute, just two doors down from Brookings.

Kori has served in numerous roles at the State Department, the Department of Defense, and the National Security Council. And she herself is a distinguished historian of American foreign policy, including toward the Middle East.

Moderating our conversation today is my colleague, Natan Sachs, who directs our Center for Middle East Policy here at Brookings and is himself an important expert on these issues and on Israeli politics.

We will be taking questions from viewers, which can be submitted by email to Events@Brookings.edu, or via Twitter at the #KissingerMiddleEast. With that, I'm very much looking forward to this important conversation.

Congratulations, Martin, and let me now turn the mic over to Natan to get us started.

MR. SACHS: Thank you very much, Suzanne, thank you very much to our panelists, and thank you, Martin, I can only join in the congratulations and the heartfelt emotions expressed by Suzanne.

I want to get straight to it; we have many questions, and we have an hour to go. We've already got some very distinct questions from the audience. Martin, one of the questions was an important one. What caused you to write this book, how did you get to it, and maybe I'll focus a little bit more, where were you on October 6, 1973?

MR. INDYK: Thank you very much, Natan, thank you Suzanne, it's a real pleasure to be back at Brookings, even if it's just virtually.

As Suzanne said, I began this book at Brookings, and am very grateful for the support that I received at Brookings, particularly from you and my colleagues there. So it's wonderful to have this opportunity to talk about the book at Brookings.

I am also very grateful to Nabil and Kori for joining this discussion. Nabil was especially helpful in writing of the book for reasons I guess we'll get into. But I'm very grateful to him for the help that he extended to me and his graciousness throughout this project.

So, I don't think the world really needs another book on Henry Kissinger. There are his three huge volumes plus the other books he's written, and I have three groaning bookshelves of books on Kissinger. But in all of that there hasn't been a study of his Middle East diplomacy. And that is in a way strange because the four years in which he was Secretary of State is almost entirely dominated by his Middle East diplomacy. And in those days, back in the 1970s, '73 to '76, he was a real celebrity because of what he did in the Middle East, not because of Dayton and the Soviet Union, which had become controversial by that time, or the opening to China, which had put him into the stratosphere in terms of his celebrity status. But his plodding, relentless diplomacy between Israel, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan that laid the foundations for the American led peace process.

And so that was one reason why I decided to go back and write that. But the real reason behind it all was the fact that, as Suzanne says, I was Special Envoy under President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry and engaged in another failed effort to try to resolve the Israeli/ Palestinian conflict. I wasn't the only one to fail, essentially, we've had four Presidents who have tried, administrations who have tried and failed.

But I did have the dubious honor of presiding over the last Israeli/Palestinian Final Status negotiations. Since 2014 we haven't had any final status negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians at all, and I don't expect that we're going to see them any time soon. And there's a reason for that. At the end of the negotiations that I oversaw, the parties were further apart than they were at the beginning of that negotiation.

Now I'll take responsibility for that, but it wasn't just because of my failings. And I thought it was important to go back to where it all began and try to understand how Kissinger made peace.

Because unlike us, he'd been very successful. And I wanted to learn from the master of the game about how to and how not to make peace in the Middle East. That was the essential justification for writing the book.

MR. SACHS: Thank you. It is interesting you write about Kissinger from the dubious appropriate move, and that's sort of the game, the art of Middle East diplomacy. It's interesting, it's Middle East diplomacy, it's not Middle East peace, and in fact perhaps the central thesis of the book, a very interesting one, is Kissinger's strong emphasis not on peace as you call it, but on order. Or maybe you write in the context of Syria, peace as an absence of war.

This is very different. It's very different from your attempts or the various attempts you were involved in and took the simple role in. Can you elaborate a bit on that, the logic of it and the legacy of it? How do you evaluate that in retrospect? Was he right, was he right then, would he be correct today?

MR. INDYK: So this was a surprise to me. I mean it was the outcome of a long intellectual exploration in the archives, the American archives, the Israeli archives in particular, that I came to understand that Henry Kissinger was pursuing order rather than peace.

I set out to, as I just said, write about Kissinger's peace diplomacy. And I say I discovered this because it's not obvious. If you read about his efforts in his books, he doesn't make this clear. But I began to wonder what was going on when I would see these exchanges that he had. And they're all documented, every conversation he had just about with Arab and Israeli leaders is now available, declassified. And as I went through those, I kept on coming across Kissinger arguing, first of all with Sadat, then with Rabin in particular, and even Assad at the end. While they were talking about peace, about taking big step toward peace, he was saying no, no, no, you don't want that, you know, that's not worth having. And he was very down on the idea that they should aim for peace treaties. Indeed he told me that had he been reappointed, if Ford had been reelected in 1977, he would have pursued non-belligerency agreements, not peace agreements.

And the reason for that became very clear to me when I went back and re-read the first book that he ever wrote. Which was his Doctorate Dissertation, but he published as a book called A

World Restored by Nick Castlereagh, and the problems of peace. And there it was, right in the title of the book, the problems of peace. For Kissinger peace was problematic, as he explains on the first page of this book, that the pursuit of peace with too much energy and passion ran the considerable danger of achieving its opposite, that pursuing peace would disrupt the order and could lead to war.

And this was partly a product of his own experience as a German Jew fleeing the Nazis and seeing how appeasement led to the Second World War.

And that really, I think affected his whole jaundiced view of efforts to end conflicts. He never really believed in it, he thought states pursuing national interests would inevitably clash. And the challenge was to build an order that would limit conflict, that would prevent the outbreak of major wars. And that that was enough, from his point of view. What was essential was to create an order, which is what he did in the Middle East, an order that the United States dominated, that more or less maintained the peace for about 30 years.

The model he had was the Metternich/Castlereagh model of post-Napoleonic 19th Century Europe. And that order kept the peace for a hundred years. So he didn't do quite as well as his forebears, but that's what he was essentially aiming at. And the art in his diplomacy was his recognition, and he learned this from Sadat, that the only way in which he could stabilize the order in the Middle East was to have a peace process to legitimize the order, to give the Arab states a stake in the order, in maintaining order, rather than disrupting it in the pursuit of their efforts to regain territory that Israeli had occupied in 1967.

MR. SACHS: So let me press this one point further on this, and I'd like to bring in the panel and I'll circle back to you of course.

What would Martin Indyk, who wrote the book on Kissinger or maybe Kissinger now himself, say to a younger Martin Indyk involved in the '90s with Bill Clinton, or even more recently in the effort you led, the last effort to date? You were pursuing peace, you were pursuing at different stages at least, also final status agreements. Was that a mistake, would you not say that, would Kissinger say that?

MR. INDYK: Kissinger would definitely say it. You know, I didn't put this in the book, it

only occurred to me afterwards, that when I had my first meeting with President Clinton to talk about what to do in the Middle East, I told him then that if he put his mind to it, he could have four Arab/Israeli agreements in his first term. One between Israel and Jordan, one between Israel and the Palestinians, Israel and Syria, Israel, and Lebanon, and we'd be done with the Arab/Israel conflict in his first term. And he looked at me and he said, "I want to do that." And that's what we embarked on attempting, an end to the Arab/Israeli conflict.

Kissinger didn't believe that that was really possible. And that, as I said before, it was dangerous to try for that. I had none of Kissinger's caution. All of the Arab states were engaged in direct negotiations with Israel, Egypt of course had already made peace. But as a result of the Madrid Conference that Bush and Baker had put together, they were all in direct negotiations with Israel. They were all negotiating peace, and it felt in those days like we could get it all.

And so we proceeded without Kissinger's caution, and we proceeded with no regard to his incremental gradual step by step approach to really abating the conflict. And, you know, in the end it blew up in our faces eight years later with the failure at Camp David to resolve the Israel/Palestinian conflict and the inter fighting that then broke out and consumed the edifice of peace that we had constructed, completely. Thousands of people dead on both sides and since then it's been impossible to put the Israeli/Palestinian peace process back together again.

MR. SACHS: Thank you. I will get back to this.

But I'd like to turn to Ambassador Fahmy. Thank you very much for being with us. It's an honor to have you back at Brookings, certainly not your first or second time.

Martin described Kissinger's building a world order or a visual order where countries were pursuing their interests. Could you tell us a little bit about the Egyptian calculation? You have an intimate knowledge of that time and a very long government service of course. What was Egypt after, and in particular the second hero of this book? But first is Kissinger, but I think it's very clear who the second hero of this book is, and that's Anwar Sadat.

What was Sadat thinking and planning? How did he see the Egyptian interests and how did the rest of the leadership around him see it?

MR. FAHMY: First I want to thank Brookings. I very frequently used to walk to Sheraton Circle into their headquarters, and I had to be picked on for an hour or so or enjoy the intellect clutters to discussions. But it was always interesting and useful.

And secondly, I want to start by congratulating Martin. This is an exceptionally well written book; a lot of detail includes analysis. I'm very happy to engage on it for a lot of personal reasons. One, I wrote across the table from Martin, as he said, we have agreed and disagreed on many different circumstances. But he's always been clear, he's always enunciated his positions in a very lucid fashion, and whether I agreed or disagreed with him, I never took him lightly. So it's always interesting to read his contributions.

And I can tell you I read the book once, and I will probably read it several more times every time I have a bit more time. But, Martin, congratulations. It's really a work well done irrespective of whether I agree with some of the conclusions or not.

But I also frankly am very happy to discuss Kissinger. I have known Kissinger from the day I graduated from the University, because my father was his counterpart in '73. And then up until the pandemic I used to have breakfast with him every time I came up to New York. And to my amazement he hasn't changed at all, diminished his intellect.

But let me address your question. I actually believe that nobody should underestimate the implications of Kissinger's efforts on Middle East diplomacy rather than peace process, rather than peace, because it did have an effect.

So that's one thing. The other thing I don't think one should exaggerate the implications of his work either. And I'll tell you why. I completely disagree that Kissinger was the instigator of the peace process. He wasn't. It was Sadat. Sadat was the one who first made initiatives to go towards peace, then Kissinger ignored him, so he went to war and then he came back towards peace.

Kissinger was not, and this was his second objective, the main reason why the Soviets left the Middle East, it was Sadat again. Sadat asked the Soviets to leave Egypt in '72 before the war, and that's what was said at the time. And I would argue that I remember Nixon saying to our Foreign Minister on his first visit, that if you had told us that you were going to throw the Soviets out, we would

have offered you something in exchange.

Thirdly, the Egyptians particular said that, wanted to change the Egyptian theatre, he wanted to change Egypt domestically, he wanted to look more around the world. And Mark mentions this. He did not want to look simply towards the Soviet Union. He wanted to modernize, he wanted to end the endless war, and he was ready to take risks.

At the beginning he was not taken seriously by anybody, including by Egyptians. And it's only when Sadat created a crisis that Kissinger actually started to pay attention. So you can't ignore what he did in the negotiations. But I don't think it's correct to give him credit for either the diplomacy or getting the Soviets out.

The other point I'd make is in all honesty, I actually think that, let me put it this way. I differ seriously with Kissinger's approach in terms of trying to create order rather than peace. And the irony behind this is if you read the Arab documentation about Kissinger, that's what they've been saying since '73, about the U.S. Western documentation has been saying the opposite. Arabs, from Day One felt that Kissinger did not want peace, that he wanted to create a status quo and that that was detrimental to peace in the long term.

I say this because frankly, and I'm, well you could say I'm saying it because I'm Egyptian, that's also true. But it's a serious point. I actually believe that peace would only be possible with Egypt starting it. And frankly it's not going to be possible without Egypt being there. Without Egypt being part of the tactics, the Israeli's don't have enough of an incentive to take the risk for peace.

And that's really where I challenge the step-by-step approach. I don't challenge it as an approach, I challenge it if it doesn't have a strategic objective that goes beyond order.

So why then, you would ask, did Sadat take Kissinger so seriously? Why did he really try to take advantage? Because he was enjoined, because he was extremely smart, because he had both the Machiavellian temperament and the intellect to try to engage all the different sides and really get them to move as much as they could.

The question I throw out however, is Egypt and Israel signed a peace agreement after Kissinger. I'm not sure if Kissinger would have pursued a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel.

And frankly, that's clear indication of where the policy is problematic. I think somebody of Kissinger's intellect, and I say this, and I have admiration for his skills, somebody of his intellect should have had a strategic, a clear strategic objective that encompasses all the tactical measures of creating an order. In the absence of that you create an indefinite disorder rather than a clear order.

MR. SACHS: Thank you. A little bit deeper on Sadat's decision making. Obviously, he was very controversial, controversial even among his own leadership. And in retrospect of course was very controversial among other Arab countries. Can you give us a bit of an assessment looking back to Ronan, but also how was he seen in Egypt and in the broader Arab world in the decision to go with Kissinger and eventually also to sign a peace treaty with Israel with Kissinger's successors. There was a break here, and there was especially a break from the Palestinian issue, which of course was included in the Camp David Accords and the peace treaty, but not to their satisfaction, and ultimately, I think many would say perhaps to their detriment.

Could you give us a little bit of an assessment in retrospect?

MR. FAHMY: Sure. But let me give you an assessment in real-time realities. Once Sadat came into office as President, he on the one hand, the first thing he did was create some domestic openness. And he on the one hand was a breath of fresh air, but nobody took him seriously because we were all focused on Nasser and that form of government in the past.

So, and his first success was domestic when he decided to stop topical phone calls, burning all the tapes and all that kind of stuff. Then he started, because he's a visionary in a hurry, coming up with one initiative after the other. And every one of the initiatives were ignored by the Israelis, ignored by the Americans, ignored frankly also by many Egyptians.

And, Martin, and I repeat here, I think whether I agree or disagree with Martin on some of his conclusions, and I did both, he was very honest and straightforward in his assessments.

That's clear in the book that Sadat did offer things that nobody took seriously, and that's to his credit. So at the time, Sadat was a breath of fresh air that came into the room and left very quickly, but nobody was going to follow him in the direction until he proved himself. When he went to war it became exact opposite. Because '67 broke Arab, if you want, prestige and dignity, '73 brought it back.

'73 allowed Arabs to negotiate and forced Israelis to negotiate. Because then they had somebody to negotiate with who they had to negotiate with rather than somebody they could ignore.

When, I mean the issue with Sadat is he is a visionary rather than a technocrat.

Therefore he wants to get things done, he wants the big pictures, he doesn't want to get into the details or be pulled back by them. And again, Martin refers to this repeatedly in the different styles of Egyptian and Israeli negotiations. They get into every T that the cross and every I and interpret it theologically and particularly, while we simply look at we have around 7,000 units, will it be here tomorrow.

So again, that was a problem and that's what caused tension even between Sadat and his own colleagues and his own administration. That is where it was, it wasn't where he wanted to go, it was what's the best way to get there.

I think the Arabs made a mistake, I understand what they did, but I think they made a mistake in boycotting Egypt. My father resigned when I said I went to Jerusalem, and I agree with that. But I don't think you should boycott Egypt because at the end of the day needed it to move forward.

And a point that you just mentioned, I remember discussing this with Israelis and Americans. Even though we have an Egyptian/Israeli peace agreement and earmarked for peace for the Middle East, the Israelis then said, Bakin Van said, I'm not committed to anything that my negotiating partner is not there at the table. So he was open about it from the beginning. He was signing a bilateral agreement; he wasn't getting into a commitment moving forward.

I therefore very much applauded the efforts by the Americans and the Russians, with a little r, to put together the Madrid peace process because it once again brought us all together at least at partners in the process. And it was again, Egypt repositioned itself, trying to use its diplomatic weight rather than its military weight to push the process forward.

And let me conclude by just picking on Martin for a second. I actually believe the second-best opportunity to move a comprehensive peace forward, which the Americans missed, was immediately when Obama was elected. He was larger than life, nobody wanted to say no to him, everybody was looking for a way not to say yes but nobody had will to say no and focusing on settlements versus incitement rather than these are the elements of peace, it's a comprehensive package, this is what you

get for the whole deal, and this is what you pay for it I think was a deal.

We cannot achieve peace without major power support, particularly the U.S., but trying to do it through the U.S. has proved to be a failed exercise and we need to take a more direct role in that.

MR. SACHS: Thank you. Dr. Schake, Kori, I'll turn to you. Thank you again for being with us, it's really a pleasure.

And part of what is wonderful about this book, and I really learned a lot reading every page, is the interweaving of global affairs and Kissinger's dealing with the Russians, sometimes in Moscow, sometimes on the phone, sometimes in Washington with the Ambassador. And then dealing with Assad or with Sadat or with the Israelis, and of course with his rivals in Washington.

Reading it you get the strong sense of the Middle East for Kissinger was a residual of his global order. He was looking to solidify his position vis a vis the Soviets, not to start for the Middle East so to ameliorate things in the world.

How does that relate to today? The Middle East of course is in a very different position, but I wonder if you could tell us from your experience too. Middle East and global affairs, we've taken for granted that it's the center of everything, and of course those of us from the Middle East believe that firmly is the center of everything. Is it possible it's not? Is it possible that it's a residual of global affairs, not the other way around?

MS. SCHAKE: Absolutely. It's both possible and true. You know, Martin, at the start of the book, outlines what he says are four objectives of Kissinger. And treats them as though they are mutually important objectives. But I, like Ambassador Fahmy, wasn't persuaded by the central argument of the book that Kissinger was a unique mastermind creating an international order that the Middle East was marginal but important too. That is that the Middle East was a tool for American objectives with the Soviets. That I think Martin proves very well.

This is such an important book and parenthetically also a great read. But the central proposition that Kissinger was creating an international order, as Martin says in one of the chapters on the '73 work, where middle and small powers, interests can be ignored. I think that is fundamentally untrue. I also think it's fundamentally untrue, it's inconsistent with the international order the United

States created after 1945.

The nature of the American order precedes from the basis that we are building with consent of the middle and small powers and that what's different about the American led order and what makes it manageable for the United States to support and enforce is because we have not just the consent, but the active participation of smaller and middle powers that they can shape the rules. And that that does make them active participants in upholding the order. And that's what makes it a cost-effective order for the United States.

I think Secretary Kissinger fundamentally doesn't believe that. He wants to be Metternick and he wants the order to be the post-Napoleonic peace, and that is just not the order the United States created. And the blinders that he brings to it are the reason he ignored Sadat's openings, the reason he didn't understand Jordan's fundamental contribution the Middle East peace and the reason he thought it was a tangential theatre. One in which he could run eye-popping risks at a time where the President was basically not up to doing his job.

I mean one of the things that was so shocking to me reading this account was the ease with which Nixon's cabinet went to DEFCON 3 without the President's knowledge or participation. And Kissinger is responsible, both for encouraging the Israelis to ignore the cease fire and what that produced in Brezhnev and the Soviet's behavior.

I found it genuinely, like white knuckle reading, to see the ease with which we risked going to war with the Soviet Union with a President who was absent from the scene. And I kept thinking of all the ways this could have gone wrong and what a different assessment we would make if Henry Kissinger, if any of the many contingent evolutions had materialized.

MR. SACHS: Fascinating points. I wonder if we can go back a bit to exactly this question of inside administration. And even before Watergate blows up, even when Nixon is still very much in power and in practice, not just in theory. Kissinger is spending a lot of energy, as Martin describes, not just on foreign leaders but very much on Secretary of State Rogers and on the Pentagon and on winning the bureaucratic battles in Washington.

Could you give us a sense from your experience and scholarship of not just Kissinger,

but the role of National Security Advisor and Secretary of State after Kissinger? He was, of course a towering figure in both positions and everyone afterwards, not only him but also refers back to him. Could you give us a sense of how that's evolved? Do you think Dick Sullivan is now trying to maneuver Tony Blinken out of every room? Do you think that's going to happen?

MS. SCHAKE: Well I think the most interesting legacy and the way Secretary Kissinger did his job, both as National Security Advisor and as Secretary of State, is that nobody's really attempted it since then. Right? I mean Scowcroft, his most important disciple, wants a very different kind of interagency than Kissinger created. One where you have discipline enforced by the NFC where you have the President at the center of the constellation and where the National Security Advisor is the President's closest counselor but clearly subordinate in a way it's not at all clear Kissinger viewed himself or the Nixon Administration function.

So I think, you know I worked in Colin Powell's joint staff and one of the things that has been so interesting of Powell's legacy as Chairman is that no subsequent President wanted a Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as powerful, as capable, as manipulative successfully, and I mean it as a compliment, as Colin Powell was. And I think Kissinger's legacy both as National Security Advisor and as Secretary of State is that no President wants a Kissinger.

MR. SACHS: Martin, I'm going to let you respond to the various issues raised and then I'll have another question. But, please, rebuttal to you.

MR. INDYK: No, no need to rebut, just a comment I think. First of all, I agree completely with Nabil about Sadat's role, and Kissinger would be the first to agree as well. He said to me, I wouldn't been able to achieve anything without Sadat. And I document in the book where Sadat was at every point, critical point, he was one step ahead of Kissinger. He was leading him, not following his lead.

And that was exactly as Nabil said, because Sadat was the visionary who was seeking to change the region and to make peace. And so his vision was different to Kissinger's objectives. And he kind of dragged Kissinger along with him, even though Kissinger was not willing to go as far as Sadat was willing to go.

And, you know, I did ask Kissinger at the end, my last interview with him, I said do you

regret not trying to achieve peace between Israel and Egypt because it's clear that Sadat was ready. Two years later he made peace, he went to Jerusalem. And it was clear from the dialog with Rabin that he, too, was ready for what Rabin called the Big Step. And Kissinger said to me no, he said no, I don't regret it, I'm glad it happened, I don't regret it. Because I always feared that if I pushed too hard I would break it.

And this is the point I try to make at the conclusion of the book, which is, yes, Nabil is right that Kissinger's objective of order did not take advantage, full advantage of the opportunities that existed at that time. It was a plastic moment as a result of Sadat going to war and the Arab oil embargo that followed it. And he did not take full advantage of. But at the same time we saw, I lived through, I was part of, the effort to take full advantage of the Madrid process and the fact that all the Arab parties in Israel were sitting together in negotiations.

The problem of going forth, of trying to go for an end of conflict agreement and the way in which that blew up. So Kissinger's caution, there was reason for Kissinger's caution. But he was, you can say in retrospect, too cautious.

And so there's the challenge for American policymakers, which is there's a tendency, and we've seen it in the Middle East since Kissinger, to overreach, to try for too much, whether it's an end to conflict or making the Middle East over as democratic realm in our image. We've seen how the dangers of overreach, but there are problems with under reaching, with aiming too low. And I try to point out in the book where Kissinger missed opportunities because he was always so cautious and conservative.

Which leads me to Kori's very interesting point about Kissinger's shortcoming. Yes, he definitely saw the world in hierarchical terms, and he wanted to deal with the states that were at the top of the hierarchy, the superpowers, the great powers, and the regional powers. While he didn't take Sadat seriously and nevertheless when Sadat went to war, he immediately changed his view, and he did take him seriously after that. And he took serious seriously in Saudi Arabia as well because they could have fit the regional order. But Jordan was a lesser state and because of this believe in the hierarchy of power, he missed the opportunity to have Jordan engaged in resolving the Palestinian conflict. And I think that that would have changed the context and facilitated the subsequent efforts to resolve the Palestinian

conflict.

Nabil might not agree with me here, but the fact that the Palestinian's were not a state, did not have the institutions of statehood, were nothing but the exact opposite of Egypt with its 5,000 years of civilization and centralized control, or Jordan for that matter with its British established institutions. Palestinians had none of that and still basically have very, very weak institutions. And that made a huge difference in terms of what we were dealing with here and the ability to get the Palestinians to commit to things and to live up to those commitments.

That's not to say we didn't have problems with the Israel as well, but I do think that solving the Palestinian problem in a Jordanian context, but the opportunity was there, as I show in the book in '74, '75 and Kissinger missed it because of his belief in the hierarchy of power.

And so on the one hand he was able to do, you know, great things like toppling the Soviet Union and opening to China because he was focused on them, great powers. But there were costs, as Kori points out, and I think it was a very good point that what he missed there.

MS. SCHAKE: Now, Natan, may I pick up?

MR. SACHS: Yes.

MS. SCHAKE: Is I'm so intrigued by your suggestion in the conclusion, Martin, that the possibility exists for a confederation of the Palestinian state and Jordan. Can you talk that through a little bit more? That was a big surprise to me.

MR. INDYK: Well it's not a new idea. The King of Jordan, King Hussain of Jordan, King Abdullah today, are quite happy to call for a confederation as long as there's a Palestinian state established first. And then it can confederate with Jordan. And ultimately to get to a Palestinian state being established, the federation between Israel, Palestine, and Jordan could make a lot of sense. But that's the hang-up. Palestinians need their own state.

By the way, Kissinger would agree with that because he's a westfailian man, he believes in a state based international system. And he talks himself about the need for the Palestinians to have attributes of statehood, to be a state in the making. And I think now what we see, and I'd be interested in Nabil's view on this, what we see is Egypt taking a bigger role in Gaza. A fascinating development in my

view. Where again you've got a state with real institutions and capabilities that's coming in to help stabilize the situation and potentially that could lead to some breakthrough as a result of Egypt's stepped-up role.

Jordan is going to be very reluctant to play that role in the West Bank. But without Jordan being connected in some way to the resolution of the Palestinian problem I think it's going to be just impossible to do on its own.

MR. SACHS: Mr. Fahmy, I'd love to hear your thoughts on this. And I'll press a little bit further. For a long time, well since exactly the period that Martin is writing about, we've heard Egyptians speaking very vehemently about the fact that they will not be the ones to resolve the Gaza question for Israel. They demanded every, as one Egyptian official said to me, they demanded every inch of Sinai and not one inch of Palestine. And yet here right now you do have presence moving more, leaning forward more on the Gaza issue than in previous times.

Is there more there than meets the eye, or should we be rather circumspect about it?
You're muted, sir.

MR. FAHMY: Sorry. Let me again just first say in reading Martin's book and thinking about the whole process, the idea that this engagement did not occur on the Jordanian side is something one needs to reflect on, was that really useful or not. I don't think at that early point a confederation had evolved, the idea evolved yet.

But I do believe, frankly, and here Martin and I actually agree on things when we don't think we agree on things. I actually believe this engagement there would have created a territorial concept that would have made the next steps easier to move forward. And I say this in all candidness. I know Egypt did not actually want that approach at the time. Not because we were against it but because we were focused on getting our track moving quickly.

Could you repeat your question, however?

MR. SACHS: Certainly. On Egypt's current approach to Gaza --

MR. FAHMY: Sure, sure.

MR. SACHS: -- willingness to get involved.

MR. FAHMY: A great point. Egypt 2013, was all about security. They were looking westward towards the Libyan border, how to deal with security issues. We were looking towards Gaza with these security issues, and we were looking domestically about security issues. Since then we've slowly regained our confidence and our more comprehensive outlook towards solution. Therefore while we're still worrying about Libya and the composition there, it's not only the security, it is security plus solving the problem there. Which again goes to the point that Martin so intelligently makes about Kissinger, is it creating a status quo or solving the problem so it doesn't become a terminal problem.

This enterprising guess, Hamas is an Islamic organization, it is very uncomfortable for us. But they are on our border so, yes, we are there, and we will be there even more so. Not because we like it, but with clear indications that this is what's allowed across the border and what's not allowed, we will help you create an environment within Gaza, one, for it to be more humane, secondly with the hope that from our perspective, that it will push Palestinians more and more towards working together at West Bank and Gaza, toward a peace process. We are committed to incremental steps, but they all lead to a Palestinian state.

MR. SACHS: I'd like to push all of you actually on this one exactly. The conversation in the United States and already previously in Western Europe on the peace process is that, as that you described at least the origins of at least in this historical sort of a duration, Martin. The conversations that it's over. That peace process ended, perhaps your last effort was the last sort of in earnest effort and there was the Trump deal of the century, which was very different. But the peace process as such is sort of a thing of the past. Two state solution is now usually regarded as a platitude, people describe the one-state reality.

Is there still a peace process? Are we talking, is this an historical retrospective book or is this a book that's still relevant to the Biden Administration or the next administration after that for re-engaging in the same peace process?

MR. INDYK: I think it's highly relevant because having tried and failed repeatedly to resolve these very Palestinian conflicts, we return to the idea of a step-by-step Kissingerian approach, gradual incrementalist.

You know, it's interesting, and again one of my discoveries, as it were, was that Rabin, when he introduced the Oslo Accords, accord with Paris, took a Kissingerian approach. The Oslo Accords was a step by step, three-phase, withdrawal of Israeli armies from territory in the West Bank and Gaza without specifying what the end game would be. There's no mention of a Palestinian state in the Oslo Accord, or Jerusalem or refugees.

And there was no sacred timetables, as Rabin kept on saying. And that actually was a process which also suited Arafat. He did not want to go to Camp David and try to end the conflict, he wasn't ready, and he told us that. Well we demanded that he go, and he basically, when he went, he was looking for a way to escape, not a way to make peace, to end the conflict. Because he didn't believe he could make the compromises necessary or convince his people to make compromises necessary.

So here we are again having tried and failed. The Israeli government, which cannot agree amongst itself on what the end game should be. Half the cabinet opposed a Palestinian state, half the cabinet supports it. They are proposing to take steps, economic steps, but there's a willingness to take some steps and I think the role of the United States and others like Egypt and Jordan, as I said, need to get behind that effort and push it forward. The steps need to be bigger.

And most importantly at all, again, if we're going to draw on Kissinger's lessons, it needs to have a territorial component. Kissinger was always very clear about that, that the peace process that he was promoting required territorial withdrawals from territory that Israel occupied in 1967 to lubricate that process. Without territory it wouldn't have legitimacy. And that's exactly the point today. If we want to encourage again a belief on the Palestinian's side in the viability of a two-state solution it needs to have a territorial component. But I think that that is the only way that we can move forward. We cannot get from where we are today to a final status negotiation that will end the conflict, and any attempt to try will fail just like it's failed every other time since 2000. Instead we've got to take an incremental approach, but we have to infuse it with credibility, and that requires territory.

MR. SACHS: Thank you. I'd like to open up the same question and turn to you also Nabil Fahmy and Dr. Schake, but I'd like to add one element that also came up in a question we got from the audience. And as of course the major change in Israeli/Arab relations in recent years which is the

Abraham Accords between Israel and the UE and Bahrain, but also Israel and Morocco and in a different way Israel and Sudan as well. Do they change the calculus? We're not talking now about Egypt alone with peace for Israel but six Arab countries that have relations with Israel in some form or another. Does this change the same calculation of what Martin is just describing now as perhaps a path forward?

MR. FAHMY: Well, sure, well on the first point I also am skeptical that the present Israeli government is one that can actually pursue a peace process because of their own political differences from extreme left to extreme right.

That being said, we've been doing this for a long time and there have always been ups and downs in the process. And what's important is not to lose sight of objective and the tenants of the peace process. Because things change. If you want the story, and then I'll answer the second part of your question.

I remember personally asking Rabin, what made you change your position on Oslo. And he looked me in the face and there was nobody else in the room, and this is a tough, if you want, right of center Israeli leader. And he said there are only so many bones I could break. And he realized, and he was admitting to an Egyptian diplomat that for his own sake, for Israel's sake, he needed to have peace with the Israelis.

Now Martin is completely correct, Oslo with all its incremental steps, and that's just one of the problems of Oslo, it went on too long, but another debate. Ultimately did not define the facts, but we shifted on our position towards Oslo from initially being very skeptical to being more supportive. When the Israelis started to use language like (speaking Hebrew) in a Palestinian nation. When they started to deal with that, we immediately shifted from these guys are becoming serious here, here's an opportunity.

On the Abraham Accords. Look, Abraham Accords were done between some Arab countries and Israel. Those are national sovereign decisions which the countries are free to do, and I have actually my Palestinian colleagues, I understand your anxiety because it appears to be another one of the tools taken away from you. But don't waste your time criticizing the Arab countries, focus on how to pursue your rights, now to be treated equally, humanely, and so on and so forth.

The other point I make is I support full normalization with end of withdrawal because then

things are normal and you will actually get normalization. But normalization starts with us, 40 years ago, and it hasn't been normal between people because people are still anxious about the Palestinian issue. So will it make a difference? Sure it makes a difference in the calculations. Will it bring us closer to peace? I'm not sure. Because if Egypt wasn't a big enough incentive, I'm not sure a few more agreements with countries that are not on your borders and at war with you will be enough of incentive to push the peace process forward.

But the longer we wait for pushing this process forward the more difficult it becomes. And that's why while I respect instrumentalists, one has to be rational. It always has to have the target clear, it can't be the objective in itself. And I say this, let's negotiate the process, let's negotiate details, monitoring stations, you name it, all that kind of stuff. But let's not negotiate national rights or the (inaudible).

MR. SACHS: Thank you. Kori, I listen to you, but I'd like to pile one more question on top of that because we're running short on time, and I'd love your thoughts on this. We also got questions of course on the oils boycott which was very central to the story and very wonderfully covered in the book and so central obviously to the considerations in Washington.

And we're seeing a very interesting moment in time to discuss this because right now oil prices are very high and we do not yet see, at least the United States or anyone else, managing to get OPEC or OPEC Plus to turn the spigots higher.

What leverage does the United States have today, particularly on questions like that that are central to us? So pick and choose from all those questions on your plate.

MS. SCHAKE: Yes. So to again disagree with the premise in the book, Martin argues that the lack of America's ability to deliver a stable order and subsequently peace in the Middle East is a metric of America's declining power. But I think the oil embargo of '73 is a perfect example that our leverage was always limited. And that we sometimes look back to a mythological age of America's ability to do what it wants in the world that is mostly a constrict of our frustration at the limitations of the present, not an accurate example of the past. I do think we have leverage.

To answer the first question about the Abraham Accords, I do think their consequential

and it strikes me that it's possibly because Israel adopted the Kissinger and Metternick state centric approach where you can ignore the interests of middle powers. Because of course the people who pay the price for the Abraham Accords are the Palestinians.

Is Israel going for the support of peer states as a way to ignore solving the problem of the Palestinians and to demonstrate that even for the UAE and other countries, Palestinian interests are subordinate to their bigger national interests.

So I think the Abraham Accords are significant. I don't think they really increase America's leverage. What has decreased America's leverage is Israel's growing strength since the 1970s, something to be celebrated and revel in, that Israel has great autonomy from America's interests because Israel has made itself a much stronger state.

What leverage I think we do have on oil markets is the leverage of making them decreasing relevant. You know, if we had intervened as oil prices climbed to preserve African companies that were engaged in oil fracking, I think that denotes leverage. Dealing with the Russians in different ways, expanding supplies and using the European Union's market rules and using regulatory mechanisms to diminish the power of Russia to use oil as a weapon in Europe. I mean I think asymmetric responses that pressured the region or the oil producers have a lot more potential than using the Middle East peace process for those purposes.

MR. SACHS: Martin, I'll come to you for last words since we're almost out of time. Thoughts for the future, in particular with the U.S. position in the Middle East today. Is it possible that our whole premise that thinking that the United States is still the indispensable broker here, that the United States even has an interest. You've written about diminished American interest in the Middle East and even in the peace process.

Maybe the premise here is wrong, maybe peace will come without the United States at all and we should be looking for the next Sadat but not the next Kissinger at all.

MR. INDYK: Well first of all let me say to Kori that we basically do have a disagreement here. The United States, in my view, was the dominate power in the Middle East as a result of both the collapse of the Soviet Union, but that process started with Kissinger, who with Sadat's help sidelined the

Soviet Union and we became the dominate external power. That doesn't mean we could have our way. It's one of the, it's in the nature of things, it's called the power of the week, I wrote my doctoral dissertation on it. When superpowers cannot dictate to lesser powers except when their vital interests are involved. And we certainly see that in the relationship with Israel.

But nevertheless, you know, the United States dominated the order in the Middle East. It was an American-led order and because of our overreaching, we first failed in the peace process and then we failed to maintain the order by essentially overreaching in Iraq and opening the gates of Babylon to the Iranians.

Those are all acts that we undertook that led to a decline, the diminishment of our influence in the region. And, you know, that's just the way I read the history of it. That's what happened. Now it's true also that our interests have changed. But we know, we all know, I think we can agree on this, that turning our backs on the Middle East is going to be highly problematic for the United States. We cannot afford to do that. We have to find a way to walk and chew gum at the same time, to pay attention to the rise of China and, in Kissingerian terms, balance China's rise as we are doing in Asia today.

But we also have to find a way to stabilize the order in the Middle East. And in that regard, I do think that one of the advantages of the Abraham Accords is that it takes out of the closet, as it were, the common interest between Israel and its Arab/Sinai neighbors, starting with Egypt and Jordan, but going to the Gulf and to North Africa. Two of these countries coming together can help stabilize the order and we can shift from dominating the region to supporting their effort to stabilize the order. And I think that's beginning to take place. And the Abraham Accords is an expression of that. But it also makes it easier to develop that kind of role shift for the United States.

But, come back to the point that I know Nabil would make and I certainly believe it myself, is that the Palestinian issue is one that needs to be tended to. That just like Sadat was ignored and Kissinger thought the status quo in the region would be sustainable without a peace process, he discovered that when Sadat went to war that it wasn't so.

And it just feels like that again today. We all operate on the assumption that the status quo between Israel and the Palestinians is sustainable and that, you know, that's probably true until it

isn't. And I can look at the dynamics now and see a growing potential for it to blow up again. And if and when it does, that will have a profound impact on the viability of the Abraham Accords and using that a basis for establishing order.

So we have to find a way to attend the problems of the Middle East as well. And that includes the Palestinians, and as I say, I think there is a way to do that incrementally in a Kissingerian way that can help to stabilize the order as he would have wanted.

MR. SACHS: I want to push one point further. I'm all out of time but I will do so anyway.

A central point in this book and central too to what you just touched upon is individual figures. Kissinger's relations with the various leaders involved. And some people would argue today, a lack of leadership or a stagnated leadership in various parts of the Middle East, including around the Palestinian issue.

Our colleague, Marvin Kalb, who was with Kissinger on many of his travels, and you mentioned several times in your book, also wrote about Kissinger, together with his brother, about exactly these relations throughout the world. Kissinger's intimate relations with Golda and all the way to the Paris Peace Conference.

Is that really as central as we think? Maybe some of the premise here is mistaken and it's maybe less about the towering figures and maybe at the end of the day, as you pointed out now, it's going to be structural issues. From climate to economy to the basic question of how Palestinians and Israelis deal with one another.

Are you still as convinced as you were when you started this book of the importance of these towering celebrity figures and who is more of a celebrity in diplomacy than Kissinger?

MR. INDYK: Well I'm glad you mentioned Marvin Kalb's book that he wrote with his father, Bernie, because it is a great book. I think informed at the time by Kissinger himself. But it certainly provide details that I found very useful in writing my book that weren't available in the documents.

When it comes to these personalities, and they were in retrospect, giants, compared to particularly what we seem to be dealing with in the Middle East today, I don't know that they were so giant in those days. Certainly Sadat proved himself to be, he was dismissed as a fool and he showed himself

to be, as Nabil said, a visionary and capable of committing Egypt to the course that he was determined to pursue. And that is I think what I think distinguishes those leaders from the leaders of today, and it was what enabled Kissinger to be successful. It was that they could commit their nations and bring them along with them. That was the kind of leadership. Kissinger's skill was in convincing them, particularly the Israelis, to go with him, to take risks and to make concessions, tangible concessions.

But when he finally convinced them, they were able to bring the people behind them and survive it. Evan Yao agreed to give up 13 percent of the West Bank after a year and a half of effort on our part to persuade him to do so, his government collapsed. And that was the last time he ever considered giving up territory.

And so, you know, I think that that is the difference there. Kissinger had leaders who could deliver, and that made him successful.

MR. SACHS: I want to thank you all very much for joining Ambassador Fahmy, Dr. Schake, and Martin, truly a mentor and a friend and a former boss and a colleague, for just a wonderful book. I truly learned so much from it, and as Kori said, I devoured it, it's such a wonderful read. So I recommend it to everyone very much.

And I thank you all again and I hope to see you again soon at Brookings, hopefully in person, post-pandemic in a different world.

Congratulations, Martin.

MR. INDYK: Thank you very much, Natan. Thank you, Nabil, thank you, Kori.

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