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ISRAEL AND GAZA: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

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DISCUSSION

MODERATOR: SUZANNE MALONEY

Vice President and Director, Foreign Policy, Brookings

SALAM FAYYAD

Distinguished Fellow, Foreign Policy, Brookings

ITAMAR RABINOVICH

Distinguished Fellow, Foreign Policy, Brookings

NATAN SACHS

Senior Fellow and Director, Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings

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MALONEY: Good morning, everyone, who's joining us here in the United States. Good afternoon to those of us joining from around the world. I'm Suzanne Maloney, vice president and director of Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution on behalf of Foreign Policy and our Center for Middle East Policy. I'm pleased to welcome you to our discussion today on Israel and Gaza: Where do we go from here? We've convened at an urgent and sobering moment following a pause in over 50 days of brutal fighting between Israel and Hamas in Gaza and in Israel. This pause, which saw the freeing of dozens of Israelis and foreign nationals who were taken hostage by Hamas, also offers a moment to consider the policy choices available to resolve this ongoing security and humanitarian crisis, including freeing the rest of the hostages and meeting the needs of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who were displaced in, in Gaza.

Before we begin the discussion of these policy choices, I'd like to introduce my colleagues who will make up our virtual panel here today. We're honored to have such an impressive group of Brookings experts to discuss this urgent and important topic. Dr. Salam Fayyad is the former prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, serving in that position from 2007 to 2013. He's currently a visiting scholar at the School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and a distinguished fellow here at Brookings. Also joining us today is Ambassador Itamar Rabinovitch, who served as Israel's envoy to the United States and as its chief negotiator with Syria. He is currently professor and president emeritus at Tel Aviv University and vice chair of its Institute for National Security Studies, as well as a distinguished fellow here at Brookings. And finally, Natan Sachs is senior fellow and director of our Center for Middle East Policy here at Brookings, and he's an expert on Israeli foreign policy, its domestic politics, and U.S. policy toward the Middle East.

Lastly, I'll note that this event is on the record and we're streaming live. Please feel free to send your questions by email to events@brookings.edu and to continue the conversation during and after the event using the hashtag Israel and Gaza on Twitter and other social media. With that, I'd like to turn to you, Ambassador Rabinovitch, if you can give us a sense of how things look from where you sit in Israel. The pause in the fighting was extended for for another day today, just minutes before it was set to expire. What do you anticipate and how is the mood among Israelis?

RABINOVICH: The mood is a bit deceptive because the television channels and the newspapers are full with animating stories of the freed hostages who come home reunited with the families, and the public is enchanted with that. But that is that is temporary; it doesn't really cover, I would say, the existential anxiety that that many Israelis have in a sense that it's not at all clear how this is going to end and where it is all leading. Now we know that we only have, what, unquote, ammunition for two, three, maybe four additional days on the on the same basis that previous [inaudible] have taken place, and that in a few days, probably early next week, we'll come to a fork in the road to a moment of truth, where tough choices will have to be made, whether a way would be found for another mode or modality of exchanges and swaps, or whether we go to a resumption of fighting. So that's that's a crucial issue.

Fortunately, the ceasefire holds for Lebanon. Hezbollah is also keeping quiet, that that is an improvement, but if fighting is resumed in Gaza, Hezbollah will join in. And let me add another often overlooked front, the Houthis in Yemen. In fact, in fact, they are besieging the port of Eilat, Israel's southern outlet to, to Asia. And a naval blockade in the south was very much at the root of the 56 war and the 67 war. So it's not very much dealt with in the media or policy-wise, perhaps, because people just don't know how to deal with the Houthis. But it's an issue that that will have to be addressed as well as the issue of Hezbollah, when hopefully we find a way out of the current war in Gaza.

And finally, a domestic problem. And we have a government that, according to the polls, lost the faith of the public. A majority of Israelis would vote for the opposition and the government would be replaced if elections are being held. I'd like to give the prime minister Netanyahu the benefit of the doubt that he has the good of the country and is his foremost concern. But he is obviously very much concerned with his own political survival. He's buying the goodwill of his radical right-wing coalition partners, and they are playing politics at home. They are playing

dangerous games in the West Bank, and this is another cause for concern. So this pretty much constitutes the current agenda in Israel.

MALONEY: Thank you so much, Itamar. Dr. Fayyad, I'd like to turn to you, and if you could give us a sense of what this latest pause might mean for the Palestinians, both in Gaza as well as on the West Bank.

FAYYAD: Oh, thank you very much, Suzanne, thank you for convening this meeting. It's similar to what Itamar said about the mood in Israel. Actually, the mood swings from, on our side, from presuming that what started with the pause for humanitarian respite was going to continue, to anxiety about it not continuing. Count me in that camp myself. Just before going to bed last night, with the time difference with the region, there was no news as to the extension of even today. So I was thinking by the time we meet, the war may be back on, that second anxiety we have. And right now, as I speak to you, I cannot think what the situation is going to be like tomorrow if there's just one one day extension. But if it's not one, two, three, four, the extension anyway, whatever extension it may be, there's a question as to what's going to happen afterwards. And delegations coming out of Israel unfiltered suggests to me that the presumption is the war is bound to resume.

We can talk about that later in the conversation, but for now, I think the respite was absolutely essential. It did provide some room for maneuver on the provision of humanitarian assistance, even though that remains way behind and far short of what is required. UNRWA estimates 800 truckloads of humanitarian assistance are needed in Gaza Strip daily. Only 200 were coming in, meaning 25% of the requirement, with very little of that going to northern Gaza. Something is better than nothing, but that's really far short of what's needed on the humanitarian front.

But the bigger question is, to what end? If war is going to resume, whether tomorrow or 3 or 4 days, and I think important question remains as to whether there's not going to be some level-headedness injected in the conversation to ensure that this doesn't happen, because to me, at least - I can expand on this later in the conversation - what is at stake is simply and tragically, this entire loss of thousands of thousands more lives, because this is not really going to end well relative to the goal that the government of Israel seems to continue to uphold, which is the elimination of Hamas. It ranges, expressions variously from elimination, eradication, demilitarization, what have you. Again, we'll talk about the some more. But I think it's really important for that to really be kept in mind, understanding fully well that what will happen undoubtedly for sure is loss of more life. And the question is whether or not there is room and the space provided by by the humanitarian respite, that it may not be diplomatically better used to bring this to an end sooner rather than later.

MALONEY: Natan, let me bring you into the conversation. Obviously, Secretary Blinken is back in Israel for, I think, his third trip since October 7th. Bill Burns, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, has been deeply engaged in the negotiations around the the pause with the Qatari government. What is the United States looking to accomplish in this near-term situation?

SACHS: Well, even going in, the United States -- well, first, let me say thank you to the panelists for joining in this very difficult time. But the United States even going in had a very difficult juggling act. The president has set out different goals that in some ways contradict each other. Understandably so. The first was saying clearly with Israel that there cannot be a return to the status quo ante before October 7th. And that and that means, in a sense, removing Hamas from a governing position in the Gaza Strip, not eradicating it, but removing it from the Gaza Strip. At the same time, trying to stay Israel's hand in terms of the conduct of the war, make sure that it is in accordance to international law, as the president said, and also strong pressure on the humanitarian issue, as Salam mentioned still woefully inadequate, but very different from where the Israeli position was at the beginning, freeing of the hostages, of course, including American hostages, and then thinking about the day after.

When they're, right now, at this moment, there is a convergence of of exactly these difficult questions. On the one hand, freeing of hostages, and we've seen the American hostages freed as well, the president has referred to that. An attempt to get this cease-fire to last longer, to allow for more humanitarian aid to come in. Part of the cease-fire itself is humanitarian aid, but also just to allow the population, now mostly in the southern Gaza Strip, to gather its lives in some sense and try to make the best of a terrible situation. And in no small part, also, as the administration did at the very first weeks of after October 7th, to pressure the Israelis to have a clear plan for what they plan to do. Israel did not enter on the ground immediately, as you know, and the, part of that had to do with the American stance, pressuring the Israelis to have a clear plan as to what they will do, a plan that might convince the Americans better that Israel knows what it's planning. The same is true to some degree now. Israel has partially completed its goals in the northern Gaza Strip. But now the question is the south, with an enormous amount of people there not only residents of the southern Gaza Strip, but also IDPs from the north and what Israel might do next, might do next.

And lastly, I'll just point out a goal that is sometimes mentioned, but really is worth emphasizing, and Itamar touched upon it. Throughout, and that is true right now as well, for the administration, one of the key policy goals is to, was to prevent the dramatic widening of this conflict to a much wider conflict. If Hezbollah joined the fight in a big way, it did join the fight, but it could join in a much bigger way, or if Iran-backed militias in Syria and Iraq did so, we could see a conflict that dwarfs even the one we're seeing now. And so far, that's been the most remarkable policy success of the American administration. It was not simple. It included a lot of effort by the Pentagon and the armed forces. But so far, at least - we can only hope that lasts - it was successful. All these together are going on, and of course, not in the policy realm, but there's an enormous political question going on as well in the United States in the backdrop of all these efforts.

MALONEY: Thanks, Natan. Let me turn back to Itamar. I think all three of you have suggested that you anticipate that the military campaign will resume within days, likely, rather than weeks. What would be the next goals for the Israelis as they turn especially toward southern Gaza with with what Natan described as an even more complicated situation than they faced in northern Gaza?

RABINOVICH: I think that the Israeli government or Cabinet, it set a very high bar when they launched the military campaign, saying the total elimination of Hamas as a military and political force. This is very difficult to achieve. Hamas has been, has been beaten badly, but is still there, standing on its feet with about two-thirds of its military forces there. And it's in the south where waging war is going to be very difficult. So it's quite difficult to see how this very high goal is achieved, certainly not in a short time. And if some military planners in Israel believe that they have a month or a year to complete the task, they may be, they may be wrong. And I'm afraid so. That's one issue.

Second, there is a refusal by the Israeli government to discuss in detail the day after. I mean, what happens, let's assume that the goal is achieved and Hamas is not there. What is to happen with the Gaza Strip? Israel doesn't want to stay, doesn't want to administer or rule over another 2 million Palestinians. The only option, and to me, the desirable option is the return of the Palestinian Authority that was expelled by Hamas brutally in 2007. This is an anathema to the Israeli right wing, but to me, it is the right thing to do. It would also, it would also, should the Palestinian Authority prove that it does a good, it can do a good job in administering Gaza. It's its value and perceived value as a negotiating partner would rise dramatically in the Israeli public eye. Secondly, this should be supplemented with a return to the agenda of the two-state solution. I don't think that solution is available right now, but it should not be, should not have been taken off the table. Netanyahu once mentioned it and then took it back. I think it should be restored and there should be a resumption of the Israeli political diplomatic negotiation with the Palestinian Authority with that final end in in mind.

Thirdly, this would be to be the basis for building a coherent, effective regional alliance of pragmatic states oriented, or allied with the United States to confront the Iranian axis, and behind it, Russia and and China. And I define this war not just as the Gaza war, but as the first Iranian-Israeli war. The Iranians are very effective and very cynical. They would fight to the last Palestinian and to the last Lebanese, but they don't want to sacrifice any Iranian soldiers or individuals. A stop should be, should be put to that. And for that, only an effective American-led alliance would be the answer. The idea of pivoting away from the Middle East is obviously not not relevant anymore. It has been proven that if you leave a vacuum in the Middle East, somebody else will do it. And the U.S demonstrated, as I think Natan said, successfully what it can do and it should stay there, not be drawn into war, but stay there as the quote, a book that you will mention, as "Master of the Game."

MALONEY: Thank you, Itamar. Before I move on, I want to press you just a little bit on what you've outlined, because it from your own description, it sounds as though the plan for the return of the Palestinian Authority, for re-embrace of an effort to advance a two-state solution would be difficult, if not impossible, with the current government. So how does that government change transpire at a time where the country is at war?

RABINOVICH: There is no scenario, there is no scenario, and one should never underestimate the capabilities of Netanyahu as a politician who has been in power now since 2009 and survived many setbacks. And he's he's a, he's a very good politician and campaigner and so forth and so forth. But at some point, there would be such a pause or a lull in the war that people would not feel awkward to discuss domestic politics. At some point, Gantz, Minister Gantz and Minister Eizenkot who joined the war cabinet on an emergency basis will come out. This, I think, would signal the beginning of a resumption of domestic politics in Israel, and no one has a sense of how this will play out, that this will be the moment at which the and the conflict, the dispute over the future of this government and the prospects of replacing it will begin.

MALONEY: Thank you, Itamar. Salam, let me bring you back into the conversation. You obviously have a very keen perspective on what the Palestinian Authority might be capable of. And I wondered if you could comment on the prospects and the mechanics around extending the Palestinian Authority's governance to Gaza.

FAYYAD: I will, but not before I say that I remain wholly preoccupied with fear of the prospect of renewed or resumed war. And I agree with what Natan said about the prospect of that being a lot more, prospect of being a lot more devastating in the South than the North because of the displacement, displacement that has taken place. And regardless of the public messaging on this, use of terms like "surgical operations," what have you, knowing Gaza as most of you do, how densely populated it is, that can only mean tens of thousands more Palestinian lives lost. There's no question about that. So we should not lose sight of that.

Which takes me to something that Itamar said, about the government of Israel having maybe set the bar too high, he said, in terms of the objective of the military operation. There's no question that that is the case. If that objective is to eradicate, eliminate Hamas and all. And that rhetoric continues to be used to this day. But even something less than that, like demilitarization of Gaza, I invite you to examine and look back at what was said during previous rounds of escalation, most serious of which was in 2014. If you recall, language like demilitarization of Gaza was used at the time, and, you know, people at the time even forgot that Gaza was not demilitarized even when Israel was there, before it disengaged from Gaza 2005. Just about everything but advanced rockets existed in Gaza, including tunnels, including all kinds of weapons and all of that sort of thing. The question I have is if the bar was set too high. Is it not possible to achieve the lesser goals, lesser goals of reducing the prospect of this continuing to happen and recur, with the exercise being more more than kicking the can down the road? Is it not possible to achieve that which government says it wants to achieve diplomatically and politically? Because sooner or later, that is going to happen. Israel is not going to be able to eliminate Hamas. Israel is not, is not going to be able to demilitarize Gaza militarily, militarily. If that's the starting point of conversation, then

that, I think, could provide a better platform from which to uproot the government of Israel. I'm talking about the role specifically the United States can play in conversation with Israel, about the need to begin that conversation sooner rather than later, which, if it were to happen, would make the task of building a bridge toward the other objectives which Itamar talked about more doable, rather than that happening against the backdrop of a lot more casualties.

On the question of the Palestinian Authority resuming that, what that may require on the part of government of Israel, a return to the agenda as Itamar has put it, Yeah, that, too, is a tall order in many ways. [Inaudible] return to the agenda, he actually himself said, if the talk here is about the resumption of the political process leading to a two-state solution and rule, that's that was a distant possibility even before Gaza happened. And even if some are talking about it as if it's really the way out of this right now, realistically speaking, getting there will take time. There's no question about that. The question is what's going to happen [inaudible]? But first things first, war must stop, in my view. The role of the Palestinian Authority - if I was not first to suggest it, I was amongst the first to suggest it - the most logical thing for Gaza is for the Palestinian Authority, and I've argued that case repeatedly. including at Brookings events, for years now. The question was never to me whether or not the P.A. was willing, even though if it were willing to do this, it's not the relevant question. The relevant question to me was and continues to be, whether or not going it's to be able to do it. I had doubts - I wrote about this about a month ago - whether or not the P.A. would be willing to do it. But now the P.A. is on record officially saying they are willing to do it. The question I have is, what is it that the P.A. is doing right now in order for it to make it possible for it to assume that tall order of managing affairs of Gaza after this death and destruction, after this, this war, not to mention dealing with the difficulties and the weaknesses and source of weaknesses that that it has been having to contend with in the West Bank.

So, an expanded role of the P.A., logical as it may sound, and I'd be the first one advocate for it, has requirements that to this day do not appear to be on the front burner for the Palestinian leadership. So I think one of the things that I hope will happen as the effort continues to be on trying to gain a little bit of time - that's, that's important in the form of extending the cease-fire up to and including getting to the point where the war stops - the time is used urgently in order for the Palestinian Authority to reconfigure itself politically, to empower itself politically, to be able to assume that responsibility. It's not about the technical or administrative capacity. It's about political viability. It's about it being able politically, empowered to do that. Doing this after the war, after the destruction, it makes it that much more difficult, which requires the P.A. to begin right away, with the important task of putting the Palestinian polity together. That's that's the most important, I think, policy objective should be as such.

MALONEY: Can I press you just a little bit on that, Salam? You're suggesting that you don't anticipate Hamas to be completely eradicated or even completely disempowered. What specifically does the Palestinian Authority need to be doing now in order to be prepared to go back into Gaza, especially at a time where there will be some vestigial remnants of Hamas that will not, of course, welcome the P.A.?

FAYYAD: You know, once again, Suzanne, the objective of demilitarizing Hamas or decapitating it, eliminating it, was stated as an objective or policy before, during previous rounds of escalation when Hamas was not as strong as it is today and Israel was not able to accomplish the task. And the war, for example, in 2014, continued to go on until the cost of continuing to wage that war exceeded the cost of stopping for both sides and therefore stopped after 51 days and more more people getting killed. There's no reason for me to really think of the outcome here being a different from what it was in 2014 and in the round of escalation that happened subsequently. Israel's experience, its own experience with us Palestinians, including in Lebanon, so it suggests that this is really a dead end. If Israel is not able to really look in the mirror and come to that conclusion by itself, key responsibility of international players, amongst which for most, the United States, is to really tell Israel that right now.

Now to your question as to what the Palestinian Authority needs to do, I made a specific suggestion on this, which actually could provide a bridge toward a future that is based on, you know, political resolution, which would provide, in time, actually, basis for sustained stability and security, as opposed to reliance on brute force to accomplish that. An exercise in futility, as has been demonstrated time and again. Specifically, what I have suggested was, as it has always been for more than 16 years, the objective of putting Gaza back into the fold of Palestinian polity is absolutely essential, and that is something that was always important. It is really now urgent to do that, particularly against the backdrop of the Palestinian Authority having on record now said it's willing to assume that responsibility. I wonder how are you going to be able to do that given the state of political weakness that the Palestinian Authority has found itself in. No need to get into the reasons as to why that is the case, there is not time for that, but that's a useful conversation to have at some point. But first things first. What can be done? Specifically, I made the suggestion that something which should have happened a long time ago, years back, was to expand the the Palestine Liberation Organization, to include factions and political forces not represented in that body. The PLO has lost much of its representational capacity in the main due to the failure of the Oslo process. Anybody will tell you that. And it's not only Hamas, [Palestinian Islamic] Jihad, some factions within the PLO, but a lot of independents, many, especially young people, do not subscribe that much anymore, much longer to the PLO's platform. So, anybody can tell you that. So in order for the PLO to be that counterpart in a political process that Itamar is talking about, how is it possible, how is it going to be possible for it to really do that? When, in fact, its representational capacity is that much in question, and weak. It needs to rectify that. And the suggestion I made specifically was to do that and allow the PLO to do that, which was supposed to lead and turn over the governance part of the responsibility of Palestinian delegation to a Palestinian, to the Palestinian Authority, acting through a government transitionally consented to by the expanded PLO. That is the kind of political cover that could make it possible for the Palestinian Authority to assume that responsibility, out of consensus. If it doesn't happen that way, the theory that says the P.A., you know, with the help by the West, backing by Israel, that can do that, A) the Palestinian Authority would not be willing to assume that role - I have to say it would not be and it should not be in my opinion. Secondly, that if it were to happen, it's not go to work out.

MALONEY: Natan, let me bring you back to the conversation and give me a sense of what the United States is thinking at a time where U.S. diplomats are so deeply engaged with the kind of minute by minute diplomacy of the here and now, how the planning might be beginning to develop within the Biden administration for how this conflict is going to evolve in a way that can bring it to some sort of a close and bring us all to a position where we can think about serious diplomacy for the future. As you well know, our former colleague Hady Amr is the representative of the Palestinians. Is there the kind of effort that Salam has just described in terms of U.S. encouragement to the Palestinians to begin creating the conditions for the P.A. to move into Gaza?

SACHS: This is a multivariable problem. And if you look even at the way the president described it early on, he said no Hamas rule after this war, but also no Israeli occupation. And squaring that kind of, that kind of algorithm is, of course, very difficult. The, for, for the American administration, the question is what comes after, whether the Israelis retain a significant presence there or not? Obviously, the president made a very clear preference for not. What may replace them, if it's not the Israelis, an international force, perhaps including Arab states. There is quite a bit of wishful thinking, of course, out there in the way people speak about this. There are many states who have no interest whatsoever to come in. People have suggested NATO and many others, but of course none of these actors are very keen to conduct the kind of counter-insurgency that would probably be required, nor would they necessarily have the capacity to do so. So the Americans and the Israelis and many others are trying to figure out what might work. And there are no magical [inaudible], Fatah mostly there where Arafat and others left for Tunis. Here would not be the leaders of Hamas. I don't imagine, I don't think Israel would negotiate with Sinwar, Mohammed Deif, to leave peacefully. But you might imagine a situation where fighters, where Israel agreed to fighters leaving so that the war could end. It's hard for me to see Hamas agreeing to that. But of course, that depends on the kind of pressure Hamas is under. And Hamas has had ample opportunity to hand over weapons in the past 16 years of control of the Gaza Strip and solve

the siege there, and it never did that. So I am skeptical, but perhaps. The Americans have also thought about what could come. How would the Palestinian Authority be ushered in? What kind of reform would be needed of the Palestinian Authority, and how might it be ushered in? And that, to my mind, remains the question. As Itamar and Salam both said, that there really is no power besides the Israelis that could do it if it's not the Palestinian Authority. So the problem is that the Palestinian Authority is an enormous crisis in the West Bank, as well. It has a deep lack of legitimacy, very little trust. How can change happen in the Palestinian Authority itself? How can it be ushered in to the Gaza Strip, and especially what happens in the interim in terms of counterinsurgency, which likely would be in Israeli hands?

MALONEY: Thanks, Natan. Let me bring Itamar back into the conversation. You in particular have warned about the possibility of escalation, escalation in the north from Hezbollah, which of course, has been calibrated but active throughout this entire conflict, but also the question of Shia militias in Iraq, as well as the Houthis. Do you sense that the Israeli government has a strategy for managing the escalation dynamics at the same time it begins to prepare for resuming the war in Gaza itself?

RABINOVICH: Yeah, there actually is a division of opinion inside the Israeli cabinet about what to do with the north. Clearly, the issue has to be resolved because as long as Hezbollah has military presence on the border, about 80,000 Israelis have evacuated their homes near the Lebanese border and are not coming back. You also have people from the south who are exiled in Israel. The sense is that the small country is shrinking and this needs to be reversed. So the issue of Hezbollah's presence on the border and the military presence on the border, Lebanese border, not to mention the 150,000 rockets and missiles provided by Iran needs to be resolved. If it's not to be resolved militarily, then there will have to be a larger regional arrangement in which the United States would have to participate, and Iran would have to be persuaded to lean on its Lebanese and Yemeni proxies in order to stop the, I would say, eliminating the danger of a regional war. And the current policy of Hezbollah with Iran, that they only manage a limited conflict on the Israeli border, it could get out of hand at any moment. I mean, one missile hits a school somewhere and you are in a war. So that that needs to be defined, for all these reasons need to be dealt with. And there are those in the Israeli government who believe that if we are in a war and if the US Navy is present here and so forth and so forth, let's do it now now. Then those who say, no, no, let us deal with Gaza and let's avoid the war altogether on the Lebanese border, because there is that much that Israel itself, the region, and the world can, can take. So, I can't tell you that there is a prevailing view at this point, but clearly there is a very severe issue that needs to be addressed, not just by Israel, but by anyone who is interested in the peace of the region and the safety of the oil industry and so forth and so forth.

MALONEY: Salam, can you speak to the questions of violence on the West Bank? I think there's been a lot of attention, especially in recent weeks, to the provocations that have occurred, to the reprisals, to the fact that we're now seeing terrorist attacks from Palestinians on the West Bank take place in Israel proper. What what is the P.A. capable of doing at this point? And what risks are there that we could see something like another intifada erupt on the West Bank and create even more pressure?

FAYYAD: You mentioned the word intifada, and it is well to remind ourselves that up until October 7th, the conversation was about the risk of a third intifada erupting based on what was happening in the West Bank, not in Gaza. Settler violence, military raids, a lot of people getting killed. Record numbers actually, since the beginning of this year. Long before October 7th. And after that, that actually, if anything, intensified. Multiple nightly raids, different locations, refugee camps. On an ongoing basis, some 250 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since October 7th alone, actually. Multiple that number injured. Not to mention massive destruction in ways that the Israeli army did not do previously. Add to that settler violence. That's a highly combustible situation.

Speaking of a combustible situation, I also would want to say something about the prospect of regional escalation. Always viewed as a low probability, something, event, if you will. It may still be there, but it's the kind of thing with if it were to happen, it could turn out to be catastrophic in a big-time way, which can only add to the many reasons why, you know, this round of escalation be brought to an end sooner rather than later. Especially that, relative to the objectives that the government of Israel continues to actually say are important to achieve, this is going to be an exercise in futility. Maybe Hamas's power could be degraded some more. But is that really, number one, is that really worth the extra cost that everybody is sustaining, not to mention the political ramifications of this war continuing, in many countries around the world, including the United States. So something has to get.

So back to the question. If I have them correctly, and I apologize, Natan, the audio is not really that clear. But he said something about the role of the American in so far as what the P.A. may or may not do. Forgive me if I misunderstood. I think it's important, what I'm really talking about here is the need for the P.A. to move and to be encouraged to move now, because this could add to talking points, if you will, of diplomacy. When the Americans, for example, go engage Israel on the need to, if not completely stop, to at least reconsider what it is they're talking about, to be able to say the P.A. is about ready to assume that responsibility. So the talk about the day after, although premature, when we're looking at the prospect, serious prospect of a lot more people getting killed, but it could also be, advancing the conversation on this could also be helpful in in putting enough pressure on the government of Israel to bring this war to an end rather than later. And with the risk of escalation, you have the occupied territories, but also regionally as well. The, the, what has been happening in the West Bank was one of many reasons that the P.A. has found itself in the very feeble, weak political position it is in. It's not only that, it's it's it's a combination of factors. It's the failure of Oslo, it's it's what is happening on the West Bank, not only in recent months, that not only for a year, but for for for decades now, as a matter of fact. So these issues need to be addressed fundamentally. And I think it's really incumbent upon the P.A. to move and move fast. Failure to do so, I have to say, failure to do so is basically accepting to let this go on until to the bitter end. And the bitter end is what I describe it to be. Not - it's essentially accepting the narrative that says the war has to go on until Israel prevails against Hamas, in this sense, Israeli defiance prevailing over Hamas will be, which I think is really utterly irresponsible.

MALONEY: Natan, I want to ask you about something Itamar said in one of his opening sets of remarks, which was just that, the fact that the U.S. could, the idea that the U.S. could could leave the Middle East is no longer relevant or serious, that the United States is back. Obviously, the senior officials within the administration has invested an enormous amount of time and energy and bandwidth that comes at the expense of other U.S security priorities, whether it's China or Ukraine or the border. And of course there are political pressures as well at home on the Biden administration. Do you think that the administration is prepared to stay the course, to be as engaged as will, as I think both speakers have suggested would be necessary in order to bring this this conflict to not just a conclusion, but actually engage in the diplomacy that would be necessary to avoid a repeat of another Gaza war?

SACHS: An excellent question and I don't think there's a clear answer. On, the first order is, right now, the Biden administration is led by one man and that's Joe Biden. And he clearly has both strident and most strident views on this. He clearly viewed the attack of October 7th as a watershed moment and has identified with the idea that you cannot go back to the status quo ante of October 6th. On the other hand, Joe Biden also has many other pressures on him. As you mentioned, he was a little bit busy with just a few other things. And in fact, up until now, it was the first presidency in 15 years at least, that had managed to effectively pay more attention or much less attention, shall we say, to the Middle East. The global competition with the pacing challenge, as they refer to it in China, and of course the war in Europe and Ukraine, these were the primary issues in foreign policy that demand an enormous amount of attention. And although, of course the administration continued to be active in the Middle East, as it continues to be elsewhere, and there were people very engaged with the Middle East with big initiatives, including the possibility of Israeli-Saudi normalization, at the presidential level, there was - and not just his level, there was

also there was the ability to turn elsewhere. That's changed now. Obviously, the administration is now, has no choice but to spend an enormous amount of bandwidth and political capital in this case on this issue.

And that brings us to two questions. One, as we enter further into an election, presidential election year, what are the political pressures on the White House in terms of this? Will the president see through this this goal of genuine transformation in the Gaza Strip, which means that Hamas does not rule it? What happens to the organization is the second question, but that Hamas cannot rule the Gaza Strip. Or will the pressure be to to change course, given enormous pressure, especially on the left and among younger Americans and younger Democrats in particular, and to try to end the war short of that, which may, of course, offer the opportunity of another one. The problem is that this is not, as Itamar mentioned before, this is not merely an Israel-Hamas war. This is a war with other actors, Iran prime among them, which you, Suzanne, know the best among us here, but also others. Hezbollah, of course, being now a partner of excuse me, a partner of Iran in this and a potential belligerent. And the Houthis now in a quite remarkable change of history. To deal with all of this together will require enormous bandwidth. To answer your question, briefly, yes, the administration is set to hold and buy this issue, and there are people who are tasked with doing this and I'm sure will not stop doing so. But will it remain the issue that occupies enormous amounts of time of the president, as many other issues remain extremely important, as the fundamental logic of looking to other regions of the world has not changed, and as the president also enters further into an election year, that I'm doubtful to a certain degree.

I'll add one more wrinkle. It's not just the president. There are, of course, there's the question of who who may be the president after the next election. And that could also be Donald Trump, someone else. And it's also a question of Congress. Congress among Republicans is, of course, a lot of support for Israel. But there is a lot of hesitation about American support for foreign wars, in particular in the case of Ukraine. And we've seen the supplemental, the request for supplemental -- [internet interruption] -- which requests funding for primarily for Ukraine, but also for Israel and other issues. And that is being stalled in Congress and cut up. And it's not completely clear that the United States will even avert a shutdown coming January, although hope will. This kind of deep dysfunction in American politics in terms of funding, mostly on the Hill, by now, something we expect. The shutdown and the threat of shutdown, something we know, we all treat as normal. This is going to have a lot of effect on this as well. Just as people in Europe are looking to see what happens in the next election, to understand the American position on Ukraine going forward, there will be a lot of question of what the American policy might be if the elections produce a different administration. It will not necessarily be less pro-Israel, but what it is and whether it tries to promote a different kind of vision remains in question. And that hampers American foreign policy. Without the kind of stability, the kind of predictability that could sustain even a change of administration, as it was to at least a certain degree in the past, the American, the American hand is much weaker than it was.

MALONEY: Thanks so much, Natan. I'd like to pose a question to each of you. We're here today talking about Middle East diplomacy and war in the hours after the announcement of the death of Henry Kissinger, who, of course, among his many other diplomatic achievements and renown, is his role in the 1973 war. I wonder if you might want to say a word or two about Kissinger's legacy, about whether or not there is a Kissingerian figure who might be able to find a way out of the very difficult conundrum that we're in today. And just turn it over to each of you to speak to that question.

RABINOVICH: I'm willing to go first. OK, Suzanne? Should I? Yeah. It would be a very hard act to follow. I mean, there are not many, many individuals who will have the unique gifts and capabilities of Henry Kissinger. And you spoke about the load on the president. I mean, this this is the man did detente with the Russia, opened to China, ended the Vietnam War, and then have the phase of Middle Eastern diplomacy. In tandem with the with a very beleaguered president, but he did. Secondly, he had the unique combination of somebody who looked at centuries of perspective, always beginning with the peace of Westphalia to the to the present, and combined with the ability

to master the details and being manipulative and clever and cunning in conducting a negotiation. I mean, that's a unique combination, a very hard act to follow. And let me just make one other point. The question is asked, what can the United States do? The administration is in an election year, can it still be effective in the Middle East? Remember that Kissinger's achievements in the Middle East were done under the president in his final month in the midst of a huge crisis in American domestic politics. And yet he was able to do the disengagement between Israel and Egypt and Israel and Syria, and that persevered. That's something to think of.

MALONEY: Itamar, you've given us some reason for hope, I think there. Salam, over to you.

FAYYAD: Yeah, I think that's one last reason for hope, in my view. No doubt, Henry Kissinger's towering figure of international diplomacy, international relations, a unique combination of deep intellect, distinguished scholarship, highly skillful practice. Let's remember that he actually won the Nobel Peace Prize for working on on getting tough situations to an end war, end war. Let's just pause and think about that for a minute and see how much desperately we are in need for that kind of intervention, that kind of diplomacy to really actually diffuse the the current state of high tension and the prospect of resumption of a deadly, very deadly war, one that really actually risks broadening to a point of catastrophic proportions. We desperately need that kind of leadership right now. And I think it's really the U.S. is uniquely positioned to play that role.

MALONEY: Natan.

SACHS: I, Kissinger, of course is a very controversial figure in many parts of the world, certainly in Southeast Asia. And it's interesting that in the Middle East diplomacy, in the Middle East in general, a very different image of him is seen, or, not different, but one side of him, which is the master kind of diplomacy. And in that, I also recommend our former colleague and good friend, Martin Indyk's book, "Master of the Game: Henry Kissinger and the Art of Middle East Diplomacy," which really, I think is the sort of definitive history of this and is well worth a read, especially in this time. And Kissinger really was remarkable in terms of laying laying the groundwork for what became Middle East peace, especially Israeli-Egyptian peace. But I think one key aspect of it that is crucial and emerges also from Martin's book is, is Kissinger's view, very incrementalist, pragmatic, step by step view of how to advance peace. He was not searching grand idyllic peace and certainly not in one fell swoop. He had a much a view that was much more gradual and much more step by step, reminiscent perhaps of Yitzhak Rabin, who Itamar worked very very closely with. And in that sense, he set the stage on many different fronts, especially after the '73 war, of course, after also massively pursuing American interests during that war.

MALONEY: And I have Martin's book just behind us. He, of course, himself is a renowned Middle East peacemaker. Let me just pose one of the questions that we've had from the audience, which is really about what an international peacekeeping force might look like. And I'll append to that just the question of whether or not that can be in some way attached to one of the efforts that the administration here in Washington had been trying to advance over the course of the past year, which was an extension of the Abraham Accords to incorporate a normalization effort with Saudi Arabia. Is there an Abraham Accords peacekeeping force? Is or are we looking at something very different?

RABINOVICH: Let me let me be a bit dubious about the term peacekeeping. I think we know from experience that peacekeeping can be effective when there is peace. When peace has not been established and the so-called peacekeepers are there to separate between the fighting forces, they're not very effective. And unfortunately, UNIFIL, the so-called peacekeeping force in Lebanon, is is a very relevant example. Also that, for the countries, whether Arab or European, would be willing to send their soldiers in in harm's way. It doesn't have to be a very long period. I think that the Palestinian Authority will not come into Gaza directly after Israeli, doesn't want to come in, quote unquote, "on Israeli bayonets." And therefore, there has to be a separation. I think if we are looking at a short period of separation and just enabling the P.A. to come, the prospects of

getting European countries, or not necessarily European, we had in UNIFIL, Fiji and other non-European countries, and maybe a couple of Arab countries to participate in that exercise, maybe.

FAYYAD: Can I say something to this, Suzanne?

MALONEY: Please, Salam.

FAYYAD: I think Itamar and I may be talking about slightly two different scenarios about the role and timing of the P.A.'s return to Gaza, if I may call it that. Surely, you know, coming back on the back of an Israeli attack or being seen as doing so is not something that the P.A. would be eager to do, nor should it be something it should even consider doing, in my humble opinion. It should not play that role. What I'm really talking about is something different, and I raise it because it does have practical ramifications of consequences. If we think along the lines that I'm proposing, humbly that we really actually consider, if the P.A. comes in on the heels of a national reconciliation and domestic political accord, it can actually assume the responsibility sooner rather than later, virtually immediately, without, you know, the stigma of that being seen, being or being seen. It should not be and should not be seen as coming on the back of Israeli attacks. They should not play that role. Palestinians should not be in the business of subcontracting for the Israelis. Let us put that aside. If the P.A. does what it should do as a product of a process of internal reconciliation, something which it can accomplish very, very quickly and speedily. It tried to do so, but there was no sense of purpose, there was no sense of urgency. Many, many meetings of the kind I have in mind were convened before, and they actually ended with general statements about follow-up committees to follow up on something that needed to be followed up because there was no seriousness. Question, are you in or out? Do we want to do this or not? If the answer is yes, the P.A. can through a government go back into Gaza virtually immediately. That's that's my, and that has implications. It has implications for what Israel can and should be told by mediators, especially the United States, about the need to bring the war to an end.

Now, about the prospects of normalization. Normalization. Actually, to be very honest and own up to positions I took before, I was not really thrilled when the Abraham Accords were, you know, happened, and I'm on record actually having said, you know, this stands API, the Arab Peace Initiative on its head and it actually reinforces what Bibi Netanyahu had been for years saying. Forget about the Palestinians. You know, we can't really go into this, outside-in. We cannot normalize with our countries. We marginalized Palestinians. We know how wrong that was. Anyway. So I was not really thrilled by that, but it happened. In some strange way, actually, the combination of the accords that have actually been concluded with Israel, the so-called Abraham Accords, and the prospect of further normalization together present Israel with something it was not presented before. After the API became API in 2020, Israel was presented with the prospect, the promise of normalization. It didn't really jump in joy, it didn't jump on it, it didn't take. Now Israel is looking at a combination of the prospect of serious, deeper normalization with the region, and the talk is about the impending normalization with Saudi Arabia - you know, that was the conversation until October 7th. So Israel is looking at the promise of that and also the risks to the current agreements that are entered into if instability continues to be the norm. And so I hope the combination of these two things can be deployed constructively to really actually do that which needs to be done to underpin stability, political accommodation. Which takes me to my final point about peacekeeping. I mean, the idea - and I agree with Itamar - against the backdrop of what is peacekeeping required? If again, the theory is let's eliminate, eradicate, and do all of that which Netanyahu has been saying he wanted to do, that's a scenario that I, you know, I cannot really even, to be honest with, begin to contemplate. But if it is about providing assurances and that's what negotiations ought to be about, I understand the importance of the regional dimension of security, but that's the conversation that we Palestinians must be having with our Arab brothers to begin with. I do not want to really say more about that right now. And I think it could have serious implications. I mean, positively speaking, for a future process that could lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the territories or occupied 1967. But that's a conversation we should be having with Arab countries.

MALONEY: Natan, if I could ask you to say a word or two about normalization and specifically what it what a future process might mean for for re- reviving a process around the two-state solution, which is something I know you've done a great deal of work around and maybe just add any final points and then I'll turn back to Salam and finally to Itamar to give us their final thoughts on what are the most important steps that can be taken to put us on a better track forward?

SACHS: I think very briefly, for the sake of time, we've done a lot of work at Brookings previously before October 7th, thinking about what Palestinian aspects of normalization might look like and with the notion that normalization was moving apace - it may or may not have been concluded without October 7th, but it was moving of late. And a crucial question is what the Palestinian aspect might be. Now it becomes even more important, and I am of the view that although the hurdles are enormous and I would certainly not predict necessarily success, the fundamental interest behind normalization in the region have not necessarily changed. There is a different public opinion. That is certainly true. There's a different international attention. That is certainly true. But the fundamental interest of the parties involved, the governments involved have not changed. And so there is the potential for even Israeli-Saudi normalization, not now, but perhaps not too distant in the future. The main question, I think, for policymakers is how can that be leveraged to make a meaningful change? And a meaningful change does not mean bring about two state solution anytime soon because it's simply not available. But it does mean changing the vector of events toward conflict resolution instead of toward war. And with Gaza, with the need so enormous and with a need for an external out-of-the-box factor that might help usher in the Palestinian Authority, but also financing for reconstruction, which will be extremely difficult to find this time. I think there is room to leverage normalization and particular Saudi Arabia. Again, I'm not I'm not Pollyannish. I'm not saying this will be easier, necessarily, likely to happen, but I do think in terms of trying to think of options before us, I think this is a crucial one.

I'll just want to return to one last point that Itamar raised as well. The other enormous policy question facing Israel right now, and that affects how the United States approaches this, is on the role of the Palestinian Authority. There's a lot of criticism to be had about the Palestinian Authority, and Salam is better placed to make it than I, and voiced it much better than I could. But there is no other option besides the Palestinian Authority, and that is a debate starting in Israel. And even if Netanyahu is not the prime minister, at some point in the near future, it will probably remain a strong issue of debate even within the next coalition. And it's one on which the United States should have a clear voice to my mind. Reform, certainly, thinking carefully about how the Palestinian Authority is [inaudible], I think, in the Gaza Strip, certainly. But it has to be a vital actor in any kind of better future there for Israel and certainly for the Palestinians.

MALONEY: We're at the conclusion of our time. But I do want to give Salam and then Itamar a final word, if they would like.

FAYYAD: Well, thank you very much, [inaudible] maximum time for questions. Just to reiterate the importance I personally attach, along with many others, for the need to prevent the resumption of the war and extend the cease-fire for as long as possible. But then importantly, do not, you know, just limited to talking about the release of the captives and all. Use the space that may be carved by that in order to come up with ideas that are actually capable of paving the way to a sustainable stability. But the resumption of the war is is is definitely something that really preoccupy, preoccupies my thinking. I think that it should preoccupy thinking of of all of those who really have been trying to really do something about this. I think it may, the time may have come for the United States to begin to really express itself on this position with greater clarity and more publicly than it has been trying to do so far.

MALONEY: Itamar

RABINOVICH: Yeah, two points. One is that, I also would very much like not to see a resumption of the war. But to be practical, the Israeli government needs to be given and enable to

have an achievement that would enable it to not to resume the war. And it would be politically suicidal for them to do that. Secondly, in my mind, the real danger to Israel is not Hamas, but Iran. This is one one of the lessons of this. And if if one wants to allay the concerns of the Israeli public and to create a mood that enables diplomacy and authority and political solutions to move forward, there has to be a formula for the region and the world to deal with the Iranians with.

MALONEY: Itamar, I could not agree with you more. Thank you very much. Thank Dr. Fayyad and Natan Sachs, my very close colleague here at Brookings. To all of you for this very, very important and timely discussion. Appreciate your time, appreciate our audience's time and look forward to joining you again for another discussion on these urgent situations. Thank you.

RABINOVICH: Thank you.

FAYYAD: Thank you.