

THE ISRAEL PROJECT

**CONFERENCE CALL WITH DAN DIKER
ON ISRAEL'S CRITICAL SECURITY NEEDS FOR A VIABLE PEACE**

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LAUREN APPELBAUM: On behalf of our entire team, I am very pleased that such a prominent group of journalists and others could join us today to hear from Dan Diker, director for strategic affairs at the World Jewish Congress and the foreign policy fellow at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Today's conversation is on the record.

Now, for those of you who do not know, The Israel Project is a nonprofit educational organization that provides factual information about Israel and the Middle East to the press, policymakers and the public. The Israel Project is not related to any government or government agency. We have offices in Washington, D.C., and Jerusalem. Our team of 44 experts and former journalists is always ready to help you get the facts you need to cover the Middle East, so please do not hesitate to contact us if we can help you in any way.

The information on our website is available in 10 languages: English, French, German, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese and Portuguese. Now, without further ado, I would like to introduce you to our speaker today.

Dan Diker, as I said earlier, is the director for strategic affairs at the World Jewish Congress. Since 2002, he has also been the foreign policy fellow at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, where he was editor and contributing author of their 2010 policy book, "Israel's Critical Security Needs for a Viable Peace". We have copies here today for everyone to take.

In 2010, he was also elected fellow at the Jerusalem Center. Prior to joining the Jerusalem Center, Mr. Diker was Knesset affairs reporter for Channel 1 English news. He also serves as a Middle East affairs commentator for Israel's Channel 1 English news, the Knesset Channel 99, which is Israel's C-SPAN, and provides political commentary for international news networks CNN, BBC, FOX and Arab networks Al Hurrah and Al-Jazeera.

He is also an adjunct fellow of the Washington, D.C.-based Hudson Institute and is a graduate of Harvard University. Now, without further ado.

DAN DIKER: Thank you very much, Lauren. Thank you for lunch, for those of us who had it. Those on the call, I hope we'll be having lunch soon together.

Thank you to The Israel Project. I think perhaps the greatest value of The Israel Project is that it really is interested in facts and context, and for those of us who live in the Middle East or know the Middle East, there is no region in the world that is in need of context, factual information and the understanding of the situation than the Middle East.

And clearly, Israel is a member of the larger Middle East, and it is in that spirit that I was most honored to accept an invitation of The Israel Project to come and share with you some of my observations, and a book that was just produced in the past few months at the Jerusalem

Center for Public Affairs, a book that, as Lauren told everyone is called “Israel’s Critical Security Needs for a Viable Peace.”

And I’d like to tell you, in the next few minutes, what the problem is, what motivated us to write the book, what the book lays out, and why it’s significant and important for you here today. And perhaps some larger observations about where we are, and where we’re not, in the peace process, and then open it up for questions and discussion.

I was told in New York City that the attention span, or the interest span, is about eight minutes in New York City. But in Washington, I understand that I may have close to 15 at lunch. So somewhere in between, is that about right? So I won’t go even for 15. I’ll try to really lay out the parameters of the discussion and then we’ll open it up for our friends here, presently, today, as well as those who were kind enough to call it.

It’s actually very appropriate that we meet today and discuss some of the issues of the peace process, as Prime Minister Netanyahu is in-country, having met with both the secretary of state and the vice president about these issues. And one really wonders what the devil is going on with the peace process. Is there a peace process? Is there not a peace process?

My wife reminded me that it is less of a peace process, perhaps, today than a miniseries like “Law and Order.” She likes the miniseries “Law and Order.” I don’t know if you’ve heard of it. It’s one of the longest-running miniseries in the United States, you know, for the last 21 years. And it only outdates the peace process by one year. It started in 1990. So there’s no less drama in the peace process – and ebbs and flows, and ups and downs, and yesses and nos – than there is in the miniseries “Law and Order.”

And offshoots. In other words, there’s “Law and Order” – like, there’s “Special Victims Unit.” That’s a good one for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, “Special Victims Unit,” for both sides. So you know, it’s in that spirit that I come with this message, one of three. The Palestinians have done a very good job at laying out exactly what they want. They have been clear, strategically, with the international community.

The Palestinian Authority wants a viable, contiguous Palestinian state on the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as its capital, and they have been consistent about that. I think the Israeli side has been less clear about exactly what they want, besides the noble goal of peace.

In fact, you hear less from the Palestinian side about peace and more about statehood, and you hear more from the Israeli side about the desire for a peaceful end of conflict solution – two states for two peoples; the nation-state of the Jewish people on the one hand and the nation-state of the Palestinian people on the other hand.

You hear an awful lot of about the word “peace” in the Israeli public discussion and Israeli leaders, but you don’t really hear about what are the strategic necessities or the strategic needs, the defense needs, the security needs, from Israel, and other vital interests, as you do from the Palestinian side.

That creates an asymmetry, and then in that asymmetry is a gap of confusion. So today, we are in, I think, another moment of confusion in which perhaps one can argue that it's unclear as to where we are going and whether, in fact, Chairman Abbas and Mr. Netanyahu, Prime Minister Netanyahu, will be able to reengage and what I have, and the Jerusalem Center of Public Affairs have done in order to close that gap, to create a symmetry of clarity between what Israel really needs, in terms of its security sense, its security needs, its defense needs, so that you can create a much clearer parameter, certainly, for the great efforts of the United States and our friends in Europe who are trying to help push this along. And also, I think, for the Palestinians, it would help them understand where the limits are.

People ask, is Mr. Netanyahu, and the Israelis – are they really serious about establishing a Palestinian state? Are they really serious about ending the conflict? Many say no. And the reason they say no is that I think they haven't heard completely and clearly the type of diplomatic messages that they were getting before Mr. Netanyahu. And let me explain what I mean.

Between 1993 and 2008, what the world was hearing from Israel is what I would define as concession-based diplomacy. The idea in Israel was that primarily Israel would make concessions. We would get to the core issues, which are, of course, Jerusalem, settlements, borders and refugees. We would struggle about those issues. We would try to come to closure on those issues and compromise on those issues. And once a peace agreement was struck, that peace would create security for both sides.

An agreement creates security. And what we found was, certainly in the last years, that the peace agreements are elusive and that security has gotten worse. And what Mr. Netanyahu did in this government was to change the paradigm from a concession-based paradigm – meaning, let's race to the final status, as Mr. Olmert did, and let's try to get closure on all the core issues.

And Mr. Netanyahu changed that paradigm. He went to a security-based diplomacy. He said, you know – and this Israeli government said, if we're going to get to an agreement, it has to be based on reciprocity. It has to be based on symmetry.

And we came out of a period of a lack of symmetry and a lack of reciprocity because Israel would offer concessions, the Palestinians would make their demands. If the Israeli concessions on borders, on refugees, on Jerusalem and on settlements were insufficient, did not meet Palestinian demands – if those two lines didn't intersect, there is no deal. And I think we saw this very clearly in 2008, in which Mr. Olmert made – Prime Minister Olmert, former Prime Minister Olmert made the most far-reaching set of concessions that any Israeli leader has, and many say, will make to Mr. Abbas and the Palestinian leadership.

And Mr. Abbas told Jackson Diehl, The Washington Post, in May of last year, that the gaps were wide. And this created a tremendous amount of concern in the Israeli public. Because the Israeli public said, my goodness, what could Mr. Netanyahu really offer – or any Israeli

leader, really offer the Palestinians, more than what Olmert offered and was rejected by the Palestinian side?

And Mr. Netanyahu took a different tack. And he said, you know, let's start from where our vital security, defense and national interests lie upfront. Because I don't want to get to a situation that plagued Mr. Olmert and that plagued Mr. Barak in 2000, in which there were all kinds of promises and negotiations, and hours and hours of discussion and argumentation, and they don't reach a deal.

And part of the reason that they didn't reach a deal in 2000 and in 2008 is that Israel did not put its vital security interests upfront so that people would have a framework to understand what Israel must have to survive in a very friendly neighborhood that has become much less friendly – not only for Israel but even for Israel's neighbors, with respect to the major threat facing the region, which is the possibility of an Iranian regime with nuclear weapons.

So in this context, Israeli has moved from concession-based diplomacy to try to reach a peace deal, in which a peace deal was the guarantor – according to the theory – of Israeli security, to a security-based diplomacy model, which is to say: Our neighbors, dear neighbors in the Palestinian leadership, we are going to tell you exactly what we need now. You may not like what you hear, but we want to be honest with you now, not in 10 months and not in a year and not in two years, and let's come around the table and discuss what the two sets of vital interests are, as opposed to Palestinian demands not meeting – in the former model – Israeli concessions.

So this is what the Israelis, in our view, meant when Mr. Netanyahu, in June of 2009, within 60 days of his election, stood at the podium at Bar-Ilan University and made an historic speech.

I don't think there is anyone in this room who – let me say it another way – I would be confident to say that most people in this room were surprised that Mr. Netanyahu would actually say that he accepts a Palestinian state. That is a reality for him. It's something that the Israeli government accepts, within certain – given – vital security needs for the nation-state of the Jewish people, for Israel, and under those security conditions – if they are met, so that Israel can continue to live as a viable state in the Middle East – than clearly it can have peace and wonderful relations with its neighbor. So that in June 2009, he said several things.

He said a Palestinian state must be demilitarized, which had been on the table since 1993. That was not new. Israel needed defensible borders. Israel needed a unified airspace that it would maintain responsibility for over the West Bank in a future statehood arrangement with its Palestinian neighbors.

Israel would continue to defend itself by itself, which means that Israel would never accept the presence of international forces in the West Bank or anywhere between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea because the experience that I think we've all seen with the United Nations forces in Lebanon has been less than ideal. In fact, it's been quite poor. And we have seen other examples, which I'll point out in a couple of minutes, that really point to the fact that Israel has never asked any foreign country to defend it and its very small piece of land.

Let's remember that Israel is only 10,000 square miles. It's about the size of Maryland, including the disputed territories of Judaea and Samaria, which is known as the former West Bank of Jordan in much of the rest of the world. And only the Israeli Defense Forces would be able to defend the vital interests of Israel in that context.

So on the issue of what Israel's vital security interests are, I would define them, and the book defines them, quite clearly. First of all, I want to – let me throw up a map, which is a map of Israel, to show you – you see the green line, which is the 1949 armistice line.

(Off-side conversation.)

MR. DIKER: Yeah, here is the major problem that gets lost in the discussion of, is Israel going to give another 60-day settlement moratorium? Is Chairman Abbas going to agree to continue negotiating without conditions?

All of the political back and forth, day-in, day-out, week-in, week-out; Mr. Erekat's threat that the Palestinians are going to go unilateral – all of that political discussion clouds some of the key strategic issues that are discussed in the defense establishment and the security establishment within Israel, and that the Israeli public is also discussing. Those discussions get lost.

Now, we're having a little bit of technical stuff here, but let me try my best. If you see, there is – the sea is to the left, and those of you listening in, my apologies, but you can imagine in your mind's eye because I'm sure many of you have seen a map of the state of Israel and can imagine what I'm – I'll try and describe it as accurately as possible so that without the visual, you will understand as well.

You see Israel and the Mediterranean on the left, and then you see the green line running north-south. And for that matter, if you grab books, you can see it as well. Israel is so narrow. Israel is nine miles wide between Qalqilyah and Netanya. And the narrow waistline of Israel means that it has no strategic depth, which means, if it has no strategic depth, it is – it would be impossible for Israel to survive on the 1967 line.

Israel has always, since it came into the territories of Judaea and Samaria – slash, the West Bank – when it defended itself in 1967, when it came into those lands, it was determined by every government between 1967 and well into the 1990s that Israel would never survive in such a narrow space.

The other issue for Israel is a serious topographical disadvantage. The West Bank, Judaea and Samaria or the West Bank, with regard to sea level, is 3,000 feet above sea level. So you have, as you can see – the plains area, that's the Tel-Aviv area and Netanya. Many of you have been there, Hadera, Jaffa and Ashdod, lying here. And above, as you can see – you can see it here in the book; you can see it on page 55. You can see it on page 56, and you can also see it – if you look at it on page 56, you can – oh, that's better.

All right, technical challenges solved for the moment. You notice there's a 9-mile width between Qalqilyah, which would be the western border, as it is being proposed – of a future Palestinian state – and the coast of Israel on the Mediterranean. Israel is between nine and 15, miles wide. And there's only 6 miles between Ben-Gurion Airport and the future potential western border of a Palestinian state if it is the 1967 line.

And Israeli military planners, the public at large, especially after the Gaza withdrawal experiment, have become enormously concerned that the topographical disadvantage – meaning, our neighbors, the Palestinian state, sitting 3,000 feet above the nation-state of the Jewish people, Israel. And in addition to the fact that Israel is very narrow, this creates a situation in which you could have extremists with very simple armaments – mortars, short-range rockets – standing on the hilltops, firing down on airplanes that come into Ben-Gurion Airport.

And that's a situation that nobody wants. I'm sure that Mr. Abbas doesn't want that, and I know that Mr. Netanyahu and the Israeli people don't want that. And I have confidence that the Palestinian people wouldn't want that either for us, because we have to have a peace, and a two-state solution, in which we have two viable states, both of them can survive.

In this scenario, with a lack of defensible borders – and you can see, we purposefully tried, through Photoshop manipulation, to show you the hills of the West Bank. It's a much hillier region. So Israel is too low, has no topographical protection and it has no strategic depth.

And that is why after 1967, when Israel came into Judaea and Samaria in that war, it vowed that it would never return to those pre-'67 lines, because it could not defend itself on those pre-'67 lines. And U.N. Security Council resolution 242 of November 22, 1967, which has been the governing U.N. resolution of all Arab-Israeli/Palestinian-Israeli peace initiatives since then, had recognized that Israel was neither secure – that Israel's boundaries were neither secure nor recognized.

And that is why the drafters of the resolution from the United Kingdom – Lord Caradon, specifically, and Ambassador Goldberg of the United States, and nearly every U.S. administration understood and was clear that Israel would not return to the vulnerable, fragile, 1967 lines, which the very dovish, brilliant foreign minister of Israel even called the Auschwitz line, that cannot be repeated – cannot be returned to.

This is a major challenge for us, and that is why when Mr. Netanyahu has said – the prime minister has said, on numerous occasions over the last year and a half, Israel will have to, for its physical security, to have defensible borders and proper security arrangements up front – it would have to have Israeli army presence on the eastern side of a Palestinian state, on the eastern side, especially in the Jordan Valley. The Jordan Valley is 1500 feet below sea level.

The Jordan Valley used to be, as we know, part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and that is the lowest place on earth. And the Jordan Valley – do you have a Jordan Valley map? The Jordan Rift Valley is the lowest place on earth, but then runs into – as many of you have been there – the hills, what are called the West Bank hilltops, or the Judaea and Samaria hilltops.

Those hilltops create a natural wall against any type of invasion from the east, or against any kind of armament infiltration from the east.

These are vital security requirements for Israel. You see the Jordan Valley here creates a wall to the east, so that the type of instability that we could see in Iraq, if American troops pull out of Iraq, or in the neighborhood – or weapons coming from northern Saudi Arabia or from southern Syria that could flow into the West Bank. If they flow in there and get to the hilltops – even to Beit Sahour, which is 3300 feet above sea level – they could easily fire on any Israeli city.

And what Israel has seen after two experiments – the one experiment, which ended in failure, was Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. And what happened after that? There was a buildup of Hezbollah weaponry to tens of thousands of rockets, and we know what happened in the 2006 war: 4,000 rockets landed all the way down to north-central Israel sending a third of the Israeli population into bunkers for the duration of that war.

And then again, following that – the Iranian regime has funded and armed Hamas, to the south, and the exact same thing happened after the 2005 pullout. The hope was that Gaza would become the first part of the Palestinian state. Instead, it became an Iranian regime hell on the Mediterranean for the Palestinian people themselves, who live under Hamas rule. And I would say most not too pleasantly.

And for the Israeli people, who were suffering from thousands of rocket attacks – 12,000 rocket and mortar attacks. There was a 500-percent increase in the number of rocket attacks from 2005 until 2006 alone, because of Israel's pullout and Israel's sacrifice of defensible borders.

So Israel must have defensible borders, and that means it must maintain its security responsibilities in the Jordan Valley – and that means on the high-tops, the hills dominating to the west and to the east, because that's the only way that Israel feels – and has always felt, since 1967 – that it can survive in this very unfriendly, at times, neighborhood, especially now, with the emergence of an Iranian regime that has a Hezbollah proxy to our north, that has a Hamas proxy to the south and even has some groups in the West Bank, like Palestinian Islamic Jihad, like al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, that, in the meantime, is being kept at bay by the Palestinian National Security Forces, who have done a very honorable job in creating an environment of security in the West Bank – Judaea and Samaria – in their areas, Area A, of the agreed-upon split, according to the Oslo Accords, of A, B and C.

But there's a larger sense of upfront security requirements that this government is putting forth, and that is the notion that in order for Israel really to have national security, at the highest level, besides its need for defensible borders and security arrangements – you know, let me just go back and say, besides defensible borders, Israel is going to have to have control of a unified airspace.

Because of the fact that it takes four minutes for a plane to fly from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, and any enemy aircraft would have to be knocked down at least nine

miles away from any major city – which means that the minute it flies over the eastern side of Jordan, it would have to be identified.

And then Israel Defense Forces would have to be prepared already to take it down so that people wouldn't get hurt, God forbid, if an enemy aircraft – as you can see on the graphic, it would have to be knocked down well before it reached Israel. And it would have to be knocked down, clearly, in areas that also wouldn't hurt, God forbid, the Palestinian citizens living in their heavily populated area. So this is a second sense of physical security.

The third sense is that Israel, again, would not accept international forces. International forces have failed completely in Lebanon. Following Operation Litani and the Taif Agreements of 1978, we had a major U.N. presence. We had a major buildup of Hezbollah in the south, under U.N. watch. We had the kidnapping in 2000 of three soldiers under U.N. watch – and some even say with collaboration with members of the U.N.

And then, between 2000 and 2006, we had a massive buildup of Hezbollah rockets with Iranian and Syrian complicity under the U.N. watch. And following the 2006 war, we have now had a buildup of weaponry, of rockets, that is even greater than pre-2006 – even getting to 50 to 60,000 rockets under the U.N. watch, which unfortunately shows that the third-party forces, especially the United Nations, have not been effective.

And there are many reasons for it. One of them is that they're frightened. They don't have the political will to turn down very tough customers, like the Hezbollah. And in fact, under Chapter 6, they're sent to Lebanon, as an example, under a Chapter 6 resolution, which means they have to check in with Lebanon before they take any particular action. And they want to stay neutral.

So by the very nature of their being there, and the constrictions – by the way, there are many caveats that restrict what they can actually do. They can't go out – in Afghanistan, for example, they can't go out – NATO forces can't go out on night missions, and can only take on certain types of missions, and are very limited in the types of armed response that they're able to issue.

So Israel has taken all this in and said, it's only Israeli forces between the Jordan River – and our security partners, of course, are the Jordanian National Security Forces, which are of the best security forces in the Middle East. And then Israel, of course, security forces, with local Palestinian security forces in between, in order to protect their future country.

But it goes beyond physical security. It goes into another idea, which is that Israel is very concerned – the public is very concerned that the Palestinian leadership forego terrorism, ideologically, and the notion of armed violence against the Jewish state. And I'll tell you what I'm talking about, which was missed in the international discussion.

In the internal order working document of the sixth Fatah conference, in Bethlehem in 2006, it was affirmed by the Fatah that they would continue to fight the Zionist entity by armed means until the destruction of the Zionist entity. That was a resolution that was affirmed.

Now, is that accepted by the entire public as being the main course of Palestinian politics? I don't know. But the Fatah is the leading party of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and they are the ruling power in Judaea and Samaria, in the West Bank, in their areas.

And this creates a great concern for Israel, when you hear this type of state-sanctioned, ideological commitment to ongoing – what was traditionally been known in Palestinian circles as resistance, armed resistance against Israel. It makes Israel very nervous. And this is another need that is mentioned in this book, and is mentioned by, really, some of the great generals of Israel that I'll mention in just a minute.

And the third aspect of Israel's national security, which Israel wants to put on the table now, not later, is the notion of building a culture of peace – and building a culture of peace means reciprocity, mutual recognition. Israel has been very forthright about its – even with Mr. Netanyahu, that nobody thought would ever agree to recognize that the Palestinians shall be neighbors, in goodwill, with a good economy, with a safe and protected state, as the nation-state of the Palestinian people.

And Israel asks the same honor from their Palestinian neighbors: that they be respected and recognized publicly as the nation-state of the Jewish people. Many people say, why is that important? Why is that important? Egypt didn't have to say: it's the nation-state of the Jewish people. The Jordanians didn't say: the nation-state of the Jewish people. We have peace agreements with them.

But the issue with the Palestinians goes much deeper because under international legitimacy, Israel was founded in the beginning of last century, in the modern period. It was the third Jewish commonwealth in history, of course.

And then the third Jewish commonwealth was recognized by the League of Nations that had incorporated the British mandate. And they talked about reconstituting – as a matter of international law – reconstituting the national home of the *Jewish* people. Meaning it was the League of Nations itself, in the beginning of last century, that recognized Israel's preexisting rights, preexisting claims. And they recognized this and it was passed through the United Nations through Article 80 of the founding charter.

And so in 1947, when the partition plan was accepted by Israel and by the United Nations, and rejected by the Arab League, it was on the basis of an Arab state and a Jewish state: an Arab state and a Jewish state.

Now, the Arab state ultimately became what we know today as the Palestinian Authority. But the frame of reference was an Arab state and a Jewish state, and this is exactly the type of public recognition and identification that Israel insists on today, because it really reflects the self-definition of the Jewish people. The nation-state of the Jewish people is not a theocratic state. It is not the Jewish equivalent of a Sharia state. But it is a nation-state that reflects the historical

destiny and self-definition of the Jewish people, whose history began there 5,000 years ago and continues today.

Israel wants to honor its Palestinian neighbors with the nation-state of the Palestinian people, and it asks that they honor them as the ancient, the nation-state of the Jewish people, with all rights given to minorities in Israel, whether they are Muslim, whether they are Druze, whether they're Circassian, whether they're Christian. But that is why the issue of recognizing Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people is a critical component of Israel's national security, and nothing short of that.

Let me just mention that the book itself was mentioned – and all of these points are mentioned in the book, and the graphics are clear. And those of you who are listening in, you can purchase the book at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs or get parts of it online, if you go to jcpa.org. You can also probably come right to the website of The Israel Project.

MS. APPELBAUM: In the e-mail that went out, there was a link where you can purchase it.

MR. DIKER: So let me just say: this was not put together – this book was not put together by the central committee of the Likud or the settler movement. This book was put together by the top generals in Israel, who had direct experience in the peace process from the very beginning.

And let me give you, for example, Maj. Gen. – today, reserve, but Aharon Ze'evi-Farkash, who was the former head of IDF Intelligence. And he was head of our intelligence under former Prime Minister Sharon.

And take, for example, Brig. Gen. Udi Dekel. Gen. Dekel ran the negotiating unit before Mr. Olmert in the Annapolis peace process. So he has spent hours and hours and hours with his Palestinian counterparts, trying to come to a peace agreement that – the idea was it would create security. And I think that Gen. Dekel today has, as a slightly more adjusted understanding, that he, himself, has moved from what we had called concession-based diplomacy now to security-based diplomacy, or, rights-based diplomacy, recognizing the other strategy had not worked.

Many of you have heard of Maj. Gen. Uzi Dayan, the nephew of Moshe Dayan, who was the deputy chief of staff under Prime Ministers Rabin and Barak and former national security advisors to those prime ministers.

So you have great generals who have been involved on the ground with their Palestinian neighbors in the peace process, facing radical terror as well. And so they are very qualified to weigh in on this issue and they weighed – they weighed in on a professional basis. They did not – this is not a political book; this is a professional assessment. And it is their best assessment about what Israel – what are Israel's critical security needs for a viable peace and that the attempt here is to create clarity and to say folks, this is what Israel needs. This is what Israel needs to survive in the Middle East and in order to be good neighbors with our Palestinian neighbors who also have their needs.

But let's not fool ourselves in thinking that we can negotiate a way behind closed doors that have doors in front of them and doors in front of them and come out of the secret cave called the negotiating cave with no agreement because Israel then retrofits, according to the old model, these security needs that it's putting out front now at the beginning of the process; it has been done in the end.

We want to avoid that type of cloudiness and we want to be very clear. I think Israel wants to be very clear about where it is going and what it – and what it needs.

And now I'm going to wrap up. That brings us to where we are today. Where we are today is that the Palestinians have, in my assessment, decided to create a state unilaterally.

I think that in an interview in Dubai just two days ago, Mahmoud Abbas said that essentially that he might even resign but, in fact, support a unilateral declaration, which is of statehood which is Prime Minister Fayyad's strategy. And he also favors a – the possibility of going to the Security Council and asking for a resolution that would propose Palestine on '67 lines, which is his preference.

There are a couple of other preferences which is trying to create a resolution, stopping all this Jewish and Israeli settlement east of the '49 armistice line and have that be passed. But that would, in my assessment, be a very, very troubling development and would only underscore the need for Israel – the stringencies of the Israel security requirements now.

This is a bilateral process. It's a process that needs to be negotiated between neighbors in goodwill despite all of the very difficult histories that the two countries – the two peoples have had with one another. Nothing can be done unilaterally. It would destabilize the Middle East. It will act against American interests and it will be a declaration of diplomatic warfare, frankly, against the United Nations and all past agreements that have been signed between the parties.

So within that context, I'd say those are Israel's needs and these are needs within the context of a bilateral negotiating relationship. And it is my hope that, that will continue and the sides will come all of the complexities that they both have to an agreement, but they have to stick it out for the long run and come to a bilateral agreement together and not do anything unilaterally. Thank you.

MS. APPELBAUM: Okay. We're going to take some questions from people in the room and then we'll get to some questions that were submitted by people who are on via conference call.

Q: Israel is not the only country with territorial challenge. So what would give Israel the right to say oh, you know what, I'm going to need the coastline to be able to control the border or anything?

MR. DIKER: You know, the question is what gives Israel the right to ask for – to assert its vital security needs?

Q: No, the right to say that, oh, I need to be on the brink line of this crest line so I can control the border with Jordan. I mean, a lot of countries have territorial challenges and they solve them in some way.

MR. DIKER: You're right; you're very right. I don't think that there's any country in the world today who faces an assault on its very legitimacy, even though that legitimacy represents the only case in the history of international relations in the modern period, in which the legitimacy of the state of Israel was twice affirmed by the United Nations, was twice affirmed in international forum – once by the League of Nations, once by the United Nations.

Despite that, there's no country in the world whose very legitimacy is under acute assault as is Israel today. Israel is surrounded by countries 650 times its size. I don't think that anyone would deny the fact that there's been no country in the world that has absorbed thousands and thousands and thousands of rockets from extremist groups as Israel has so that Israel has unique security requirements to survive.

I mean, that is the reality and in fact, they have to take that reality and then retrofit it in with their intense desire to live in peace and in good neighbor-relations with their Palestinian neighbors.

Q: In that case, the best way is to empty the West Bank and have the border freshly delineated on the Jordan River. I mean, there's always the challenge in finding peace and negotiating in securing borders. I mean, I can't think of any country who is happy with the border it has. There's always, oh, if only I was able to be there so I would control better. If I would be here, I would defend better. I mean shouldn't be a permission –

MR. DIKER: Well, I think – well, I think the answer is – I mean it's not a condition for negotiation. It's a condition to survive. And the issue is that if you take – it's a condition for survival. I mean if you just – if you look at every Israeli Labor government, whether it was Levi Eshkol, who you can accuse of being to the right of the Jabotinsky movement of Israel, or whether it was it was Golda Meir or whether it was Yitzhak Rabin, of blessed memory, or whether it was Mr. Sharon, who took a courageous move and tried to create – had tried to help the Palestinians.

Q: Now, it has been a couple of years where there is no border there and there is no rockets on Ben Gurion Airport, anyway.

MR. DIKER: Well, the reason that there are no rockets on Ben Gurion Airport is that the Israeli – as my friend, who was a senior Palestinian military officer told me, off the record, the reason that there are no rockets is in large part because the Israeli military – Israeli Defense Forces is defending Israel from outside in areas of the West Bank and from the outside. In other words, from outside the major cities.

And so therefore, their presence and their intelligence capabilities and their collaboration as well with the Dayton forces and with other neighbors in the region is what is, at this point,

helping prevent rockets on Ben Gurion Airport. But I'll tell you, if you lived in Southern Israel and took 12,000 rockets after clearing out the Gaza Strip for the Palestinians, I think you might – might – maybe, I'm not saying definitely, but I think you might have –

Q: That's the problem. I know it's also a challenge for peace.

MR. DIKER: It's a challenge for peace –

Q: I mean, using the same logic, Syria should be in Lebanon because it – oh I should protect my flag. Iraq should have stayed in Kuwait because oh, I don't have an access to the sea. I mean there are a lot of examples. You can't just –

MR. DIKER: Well, I think the only – the only point I'm trying to make here –

Q: I don't want to monopolize.

MR. DIKER: No, no, no. It's an open discussion. I mean the only point I would make is that Israel has a unique situation which is so small and it is so low and it has no depth. And it is surrounded by people that don't want it to be there. And in that particular situation, Israeli governance and very broad Israeli consensus in the public have recognized that there has to be protections in order to continue to survive in this region. And the major protection is defensible borders. Now, defensible borders means that there is every opportunity for there to be a Palestinian state and next, to a nation-state. The Jewish people –

(Cross talk.)

MR. DIKER: No, no, no problem, none at all. But let's remember. We have – there are all kinds of creative options. You know, back in 1985, I remember having a conversation with some of the founding members of the Fatah.

And they told me in 1985, one of the great moments is when Yasser Arafat approved the confederation agreement with His Majesty, King Hussein, in which there was going to be a – a confederation. At that time, it was considered that, that might be a great idea, which is not Jordan's Palestine.

I'm not saying that, but a confederation idea because it gives the Palestinians greater strategic depth and it gives the Israelis greater strategic depth, you know, in parts of Judea and Samaria, their historic homeland, where there are less – which is unpopulated, specifically the Jordan Valley.

The beauty of the Jordan Valley – the beauty of the Jordan Valley is that there are only about 40,000 people there and they live in Jericho. And Jericho, of course, is going to be part of the Palestinian state.

But the notion is – what I'm trying to convey to you is that there are all kinds of ways of creating a Palestinian state that allow Israel to maintain their absolutely vital security needs and

other vital interests and at the same time have a federal Palestinian state, a nation-state of Jewish people anchoring that state, having also a very good, perhaps, economic confederation with Palestine as well as the Jordanian – the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the east. So there's a very strong model to be had there.

But again, the reason that these peace processes have failed is that no one has come out and said up front, these are the real needs of the Israelis in order to survive in the region, which you know very well, as being much more of an expert in the region than I, what a difficult region it is, especially now.

MS. APPELBAUM: Any other questions in the room? We have a question from Bill Law of BBC News. He wants to know, how much of a security threat to Israel does rapprochement between Syria and Iran represent?

MR. DIKER: Well, we only have to look to the north to see what happened in the 2006 war, where Syria became the transit point for Iranian – for the Iranian regime weaponry to the Hezbollah in the Beqaa Valley.

Syria has played a very substantial role in housing almost every terrorist organization in the Levant as well as being responsible for killing – being a transit point a point for sending the mujahideen into Iraq that have killed many American soldiers and other coalition soldiers, men and women who are fighting or now, less so, but who were killing Iraqi soldiers.

And certainly in Lebanon itself, today Hezbollah in Iran control – de facto control Lebanon even though they are only about a third of the government. But Syria has become almost a nuclear-weapons power until that capability was – it was disabused of that capability just a couple of years ago. So that is a major threat. But clearly, the major threat that lies behind Syria is Iran. And without an Iranian regime threat, Syria would not – would probably be far less of a threat.

MS. APPELBAUM: On Iran, from E.TV News, Jose Manuel dos Santos asks about how Iran relates to the agenda in the Middle East and wants to know relationships between what's going on in Iran to the Middle East peace process.

MR. DIKER: Well, you know, in trips throughout the region, I've heard many Arab diplomats quietly share a tremendous concern which they see as being the possibility of a nuclear Iran, an Iran that can send nuclear weapons to terror groups, whether it's Hezbollah, whether it's Hamas, whether it's terror groups in the United States or whether it's Bahraini Hezbollah or whether it's terror groups in Iraq.

In other words, I've heard – and it's quite clear – that many states in the region, certainly in Sunni establishment, beginning with Saudi Arabia, moving to Egypt and to Jordan and to our friends in Gulf, that they are most concerned about what the region would look like if Iran acquired nuclear weapons and continued to colonize the Middle East.

And that is not to say – that is not to say that the Palestinian issue is not important. It is and it – and God willing, it will be solved with goodwill. But the major threat in answer to the question, to the Arab Middle East, of which the Jewish – the nation-state of the Jewish people is a member, is the possibility that we change the world forever if Iran got a hold of nuclear weapons and armed extremists and terrorists throughout the region and throughout the world.

And I think that it – I think that the American administration actually heard that quite clearly when senior diplomats would travel throughout the region, they would hear about profound concerns about the Iranian – the potential for the regime acquiring a nuclear weapon.

And they did hear about the Palestinian issue as well, clearly, because the lack of a resolution of the Palestinian issue makes it very difficult for some Arab countries to govern because Ahmadinejad has become very popular among many on the Arab street because he's looked upon as the one that can defy the West, that can be stronger than – I'm saying from an Arab point of view – that can be stronger than the United States and that can dictate the terms of the agenda in the Middle East.

So that is the urgency of solving the Palestinian issue, but the two are not linked. I would not link the two and just, again, emphasize what many of my Arab friends are saying quietly that they wouldn't say publicly for various reasons, but quietly, there is a tremendous concern that Iran must be stopped from acquiring nuclear weapons.

MS. APPELBAUM: Mike Siegel from Business Talk Radio Network wants to know about Israel's relationship with the United States and how much of Israel's security is dependent upon the United States.

MR. DIKER: Well, Israel – it's a very complex question because on the one hand, clearly, the United States provides to Israel as it provides to Egypt and other – and Jordan and other countries in the region with vital – and Saudi Arabia, as we know, with a massive \$60 billion deal with vital security and defense, means, weapons, systems.

But clearly, it's Israel that is ultimately responsible for defending itself. But there is, without a question, an absolutely vital partnership between Israel and the United States for the security of Israel and the region. And I think that our neighbors in Jordan, our neighbors in the Gulf and our neighbors. And I think Saudi Arabia would all agree to the questioner that is a – something that is profoundly appreciated by many states, certainly Israel, which is a great ally of the United States, but many other states that have friendships with the United States and are amenable to the West, would apply equally to all.

MS. APPELBAUM: Same questioner asks about Hamas, about how Hamas continues to call for the destruction of Israel in its charter. So what security issues are raised by negotiating with Abbas, who does not control the Palestinians in Gaza?

MR. DIKER: That's a very complex and important question and one that's – and very difficult to answer. It's one that I think Chairman Abbas has difficulty answering as well as do other Palestinian leaders because the issue is to have a final status solution between Israel and the

Palestinian Authority that would create a Palestinian state, it would be, in my estimation, unacceptable to the Palestinian people to make a deal just with the West Bank and not including the Palestinians in Gaza.

But the problem is that there is very little opportunity, chance for reconciliation between the Hamas – the only Muslim Brotherhood state in the Middle East and they have no intention of giving up that statehood – de facto statehood, and the West Bank and the Fatah in the West Bank and their PA partners in the West Bank.

And this is an open wound within the Palestinian internal discussions. Our Palestinian neighbors prefer not to discuss it publicly. They call it an internal issue. I believe it has to be discussed publicly and they have to come to some resolution because it is a very – my personal assessment is that it's an – for them, virtually impossible to solve it.

And that is why, perhaps, the best way to proceed is for Israel – for Israel – for Jerusalem and Ramallah to proceed down the path it sees and perhaps serve as an example so the people – the good people of Gaza will see what the possibilities are for stability, for economy, for good neighborly relations and then perhaps to upwardly create pressure on Hamas to make a shift. But of course, Hamas is a tyranny. Hamas is not a democracy, to put it mildly. So it remains a major, major Palestinian challenge.

MS. APPELBAUM: Any more questions from in the room? I have a question from someone you probably know, Joel Fishman, who is another fellow at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. And he asks, does the form of government of the PA have any bearing on the nature of negotiated peace?

MR. DIKER: It clearly does. I mean the – I would say let's get back to basics. Getting back to basics is recognizing that both sides have claims, recognizing the symmetry of those claims. I've tried to lay out a few of those – a few of those requirements, a few of those needs today. At the end of the day, what I think concerns the Israeli public tremendously is what is the nature of Palestinian society going to be like?

There are many reformers in Palestinian society. There are many human rights activists in Palestinian society. And I don't want to mention them because I don't want to endanger them. But there are many fine women and men of the Palestinian Authority who are in business, who are in law, who are in education and want to create a vibrant society very similar to Israel, by the way.

And many say, you know, 270,000 Gazans worked in Israel for many, many years between '67 and '94 until, unfortunately, extremists and terrorism forced Israel to close the border. And many came in also from Judea, Samaria/West Bank. And many fewer come, but even though more are coming again, but that Israel, for many Palestinians, serves as model society for what the Palestinian state could be as well.

But it's clear that a Palestinian state, in its finest form – and I think – I'm sure that Prime Minister Fayyad would agree, would be a free, democratic state with freedom of religion and if

you ask the Christians in Bethlehem what the situation is for them, it is not a question of freedom of religion today or the Christians in Gaza.

They would say it's not a question of freedom of religion today and freedom to sell land to Jews, if you so desire. And if you do that today in the Palestinian Authority, it is punishable by death. So these are issues of Palestinian – of reform that I think would be important. These are Palestinian interests, but these are – Israelis would be the beneficiaries of such developments.

But it would certainly be important for both societies to maximize their identities and their characters as democratic free societies as the United States is, and as the Europeans are. And you know they can't teach their children to idolize terrorists, can't be. And I know that's a challenge for Palestinian society. I'm sure it's one that they can overcome.

But this is one that takes a long time. This is not something that happens within a year. People are talking about making a deal within a year. There's nothing more dangerous in the Middle East, I think, than saying we're going to solve this in the next year because it's never worked.

The last time someone said that was former Prime Minister Barak. He talked about a year, is that right? Yeah, I remember he talked about a year. It's going to all happen in a year, in '99 and within a year, he was right. It wasn't the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that ended; it was his term in office that ended. (Chuckles.) So he was right about the time, but he was wrong about the solution.

MS. APPELBAUM: If no one else has any more questions, do you have any closing remarks?

MR. DIKER: Well, first of all, let me thank you all for joining – those who are listening and those who are here and just say that it's a very difficult situation, still, between the Palestinians and Israelis and the larger region.

I think – it's my stance that if we moved slowly and quietly and continue the bottom-up state-building efforts that Prime Minister Fayyad began with his statehood project plan in 2009 without threatening Israel and the international community with unilateral declaration or any kind of unilateral act toward statehood would be in a much stronger situation.

Both parties have completely legitimate claims. Both parties have completely legitimate rights. And both parties must respect the rights of the other so we can move forward in a symmetrical sense, in a symmetrical process and sit together in direct negotiations. It seems that, that is the only way to come – to come to an agreement.

And let me finally say that peace to the Middle East has come, generally, in the past, when Jews – when the Israelis and their neighbors have sat down together. It happened in Oslo. There was very little outside major intervention – remember when Oslo was signed?

Also with Oslo II, also with former – former President Sadat, made peace with Israel and that was done between him and Mr. Begin. That was done without major direct intervention. It ended up being signed and sealed and delivered and handshakes and hugs and kisses was at Camp David, but the actual work was done between the Arabs and the Israelis.

And it is the sense of many Palestinians that I speak with and many, I think in the region who would agree, let the people of the region sit together, work together, be helped by the skills of American diplomacy, but make it quiet, make it humble and let the – and let the technical and professional people who are good at building societies from the ground up work together.

I'm absolutely positive that there is – there are thousands of Israeli engineers, women and men both, and doctors and lawyers and contractors who would play an active role in actually helping to build a Palestinian state and everything that's required there.

But it should be done quietly without great ceremony and bombasts and that way, it would save, I think, Palestinian leaders, the senses of pressure and even embarrassment by putting – by being put in a public decision of having to make declarations that could end up hurting the process.

So a quiet process, a professional process, stage by stage and there is a sense of optimism that, please God, we can end up with a more peaceful two-state solution, two states for two people. And with that, thank you all so very much.

MS. APPELBAUM: Well, thank you very much for taking the time to join us. And thanks, all of you, who were able to make it in person and via phone. And as always, if there's anything The Israel Project can do to help you get the facts and sources you need to cover Israel, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Be sure to visit us at www.theisraelproject.org. We will be posting a video of this as well as a transcript on our website. Like I said, this is on the record, so feel free to use this in your reporting. And we are on Twitter. We live-Tweeted today's conference call and meeting. So please follow us on Twitter if you would like. We're @israelproject. So thank you once again.

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