

**MEAGAN BUREN TELECONFERENCE WITH  
THE ISRAEL PROJECT  
ON MONDAY DECEMBER 29, 2008  
AT 11:00 A.M. CENTRAL TIME**

**OPERATOR:** This is a Meagan Buren conference call on December the 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008 starting at 11:00 A.M. Central Time.

**LAURA KAM:** Welcome to the Israel Project Conference Call with Prime Minister of Israel's International Spokesman, Media Spokesman, Mark Regev. My name is Laura Kam, and I am the Senior Advisor at the Israel Project. There are almost 600 people on this call so I'm sorry for the delay, but we wanted to make sure that everybody was hooked in. Just a few words about The Israel Project before we start: The Israel Project is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that works to get facts about Israel out to journalists who are covering Israel and the Middle East. I want to thank all of you on this line who have donated online to the Israel Project. It is your support that has made this call and others like it possible. Please go to our website, [www.theisraelproject.org](http://www.theisraelproject.org) for further information about The Israel Project, and to find expert's lists, contacts of residents in southern Israel, as well as royalty photos that you can use as you're writing your story.

Onto Mark Regev. Mark Regev is the International Media Advisor to the Prime Minister of Israel Ehud Olmert. A career diplomat since 1991, Regev has served in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Washington where he was an embassy spokesman for five years. While based at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Headquarters in Jerusalem he served on the Jordan Desk, and most recently as Ministry Spokesman under Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom and Tzipi Livni. Mark will give an opening statement, and then we will take questions from you that you've e-mailed in. I'd like to thank you very much

again for joining us, and thank you Mark Regev, who has literally come in from the front lines to speak to all of you right now. Mark?

**MARK REGEV:** Thank you, and thank you for that kind introduction, and one thing I think I should start with about this conflict is this is not a conflict that Israel thought. At last week we were sending clear messages to Hamas saying if they were willing to abide by the understandings that had been negotiated through the Egyptians, the understandings that had created a semi-calm (sp?), if they're willing to honor those understandings we were too; and my prime minister gave deliberately, and we don't do it every day of the week, we call them one of the Arab satellite news stations, and he gave us a clear message. He said, quiet from Gaza will be answered by the quiet from Israel, and that was our preference, that's what we wanted to see happen. Unfortunately the Hamas had other ideas. Hamas publicly decided to abrogate those understandings negotiated through Egypt. Hamas publicly tore those understandings up, and at the same time Hamas initiated a series of rocket barrages into Israel. Those rocket barrages reached a crescendo on Thursday, on Christmas day, when unfortunately we had more than 80 rockets, missiles, and mortar shells coming into Israel targeting our people; and we were left in a situation whereby Hamas had said the ceasefire is off and they not only had announced that publicly, but they had acted to escalate the situation on the ground by conducting these rocket barrages. We were forced to act. We were forced to defend our people.

You know some 250,000 Israelis, a quarter of a million people, of them 100,000 children live in those areas close to the Gaza Strip, but on our side of the border, that have been living for weeks and months now in daily terror, constant fear of an incoming rocket, an incoming mortar shell, an incoming missile. I was down with our prime minister just two weeks ago in one of those cities, in the city of Sderot where we visited

the schools where the entire school has been concrete reinforced so as to protect the young children who study at that elementary school, and it's not a reality that anyone can accept. Now had Hamas chosen the path of calm, we would have honored our understanding through the Egyptians, but the minute Hamas deliberately tore up that agreement, the minute Hamas initiated an escalation we weren't going to play this by Hamas' rules, and Israel has responded in force, attacking Hamas military installation throughout the Gaza Strip.

Our aim now today is to create a reality, a new reality on the ground, a new security environment in which no longer will hundreds of thousands of Israelis have to live in fear. We want to try to neutralize the threats that Hamas poses to our civilian population. That is our goal, and that's what we're trying to achieve. We started off very effectively. The strikes on Saturday, we had technical surprise. We caught Hamas by surprise. We were very effective in hitting a series of military targets inside the Gaza Strip. Our strikes since then have been effective, but we have no doubt that the Hamas military machine remains strong, remains formidable, and remains lethal. Now we knew according to intelligence sources that Hamas had long-range missiles that they hadn't used yet, and we've seen them use them twice now since this conflict started, and just this morning, as you know, we had an Israeli casualty in the city of Ashkelon from one of those long-range rockets. This could get worse before it gets better, but our goal is clear. We are acting to protect the civilian population in the south, and the desire is, the aim is, the objective is to create a new reality in which Israel will no longer have to be on the receiving end of these rockets from Gaza.

What has actually happened that is of interest is that though usually in the Arab world when you have a situation of conflict between Israel and one of our neighbors there's an automatic phenomenon whereby all the Arabs sort of join ranks, close ranks and unite against Israel. We haven't seen this this occasion because in much of the

Arab world people simply don't understand why Hamas torpedoed the ceasefire and initiated this escalation. People don't understand why this is good for the Palestinians, and so you've had leaders in Jordan, in Egypt, in Saudi Arabia, and of course Palestinian leaders who come out publicly and pointed the finger at Hamas and have said Hamas is responsible for this terrible situation. Hamas is responsible for the escalation; and no one can really understand why Hamas has done this except to say that they are an extremist organization which really doesn't care about its own people; and here I think if you'll allow me, the ultimate truth is is that Hamas is holding hostage not just the civilian population in southern Israel, which is living under the threat of these rocket barrages, but it's also holding hostage its own civilian population in the Gaza Strip. They're holding them hostage to this very extremist and hateful agenda that Hamas is pursuing. I mean ultimately the people of Gaza have no interest whatsoever in this conflict with Israel because they know it can't turn out well for them. They have an interest in open borders. They have an interest in trade. They have an interest in peace. They have an interest in cooperation, and Hamas is opposed to all that. Hamas has deliberately torpedoed the calm, and has deliberately created a situation where this escalation has occurred, and for that reason that's why we're seeing so many people, even in the Arab world, pointing the finger at Hamas saying you are responsible for this situation, but more than that, even in the Palestinian street we're seeing divisions.

There are very interesting divisions. We had an intelligence briefing in the Cabinet meeting on Sunday. The heads of Israel's intelligence services briefed the ministers, and one of their analyses was very interesting. They said that Hamas is beginning to lose its own street, that people are frustrated and fail to understand what is the logic in Hamas' actions, and I think what we have to do, what is incumbent upon us, is to show the Palestinians that we are not fighting them, that our enemy is only Hamas. We have to be as surgical as we possible can. We have to target Hamas, and at the

same time we have to take shifts (sp?) to make sure that the innocent civilian population of Gaza will not unnecessarily suffer, and that's why we've had the crossings open.

That's why today we have some 120 trucks entering the Gaza Strip with humanitarian support. That's why the crossings were open yesterday, and that's why they'll be open again tomorrow and the day after. We want to show the people of Gaza that we are not their enemies. Our mutual enemy is this extremist Hamas leadership; and maybe with that I'll take whatever questions you want to throw at me.

**LAURA KAM:** Okay. Thank you, Mark. The first question is from the Times in London. Israel has many allies in the West. These allies understand that Israel has been under bombardment by Hamas from within Gaza, and that this accelerated in the run up to Christmas. However, given the proportionality of the attacks on Gaza, and of those by Hamas on Israel, especially in regard to numbers of deaths caused, how much consideration was given by Israel to consequences of alienating some of those allies, especially those who might waiver towards the Palestinian cause?

**MARK REGEV:** I think if the Palestinians themselves, including the official leadership of the Palestinian authority, have condemned Hamas for the way they've acted, this has got very little to do with the Palestinian cause. This is all about Hamas and their extremism, and once again one has to make that differentiation between the Palestinian people and between this extremist Hamas leadership. That's the first point I'd like to make. The second point I'd like to make, and I think this is, this has to be said, though it's probably pretty obvious. Hamas took over the Gaza Strip almost two years ago, and have tried to build a Taliban type regime where they have, they've deliberately acted to erode and destroy independent political institutions. They've destroyed independent civil society. They're creating a monolithic Taliban sort of society. It's not just Mark Regev

that said so; you speak to any of the human rights groups, the serious human rights groups that follow what goes on in the Gaza Strip. We saw that in a recent gun battle over the last few weeks, last few months where they took on different militias and different independent authorities to establish hegemony for Hamas.

Now the problem is today I did an interview earlier today on a radio station and they had before me some official from the Hamas Ministry of Health, and he was saying oh yes, in his hospital for every one Hamas fighter who's coming injured there are nine innocent civilians. There's no way to independently evaluate that sort of claim because they have destroyed all independent civil institutions, and there's a real problem here because it's clear Hamas has a propaganda interest in highlighting civilian casualties while minimizing those casualties that we've caused to their military machine, and this is a problem that we're dealing with. I would urge everyone to deal with the data coming out of the Gaza Strip with a necessary grain of salt, with necessary skepticism. I can tell you when the government briefings are being (inaudible) given by the military. We have been very surgical. We're being as surgical as is possible in keeping Palestinian, so in hitting Hamas military infrastructure, command and control facilities, weapons storage, training grounds, and so forth. We don't want to hit Palestinian civilians. We don't see the people of Gaza as our enemies.

**LAURA KAM:** Thanks, Mark. The next question, or let's say two questions is from the Congressional Quarterly in Washington. What are the prospects of Israel's opening talks with Hamas over long-term ceasefire? And what signals has Israel received from Obama's foreign policy team about his plans to tackle Middle East peace making?

**MARK REGEV:** On the first issue our position is clear, and it's identical to that of most of the international community. Because it's not just Israel that doesn't deal with Hamas,

it is the European countries, Canada, the United States, Japan, Australia. Most of the world refuses to deal with Hamas, including the United Nations because when Hamas first came into political prominence sometime back it was then Secretary General Kofi Annan of the United Nations who put three benchmarks on the table. He said the international community will deal with Hamas if, one, Hamas recognizes Israel's right to exist; two, if Hamas renounces terrorism and violence; and three, if Hamas is willing to support the Middle East peace process and the relevant UN resolution. Now some two, three years later Hamas has failed to even meet one of those three UN benchmarks, and as a result most of the international community, the United Nations included, refuses to have a political dialogue with Hamas. If Hamas were to change, if Hamas were to moderate its position, if Hamas were to become more moderate, then of course the door is open to negotiations, and if Israel, as the spokesman of the Israeli government I can say publicly, if Hamas were not to meet our benchmarks, but to meet those three UN benchmarks then the door is open to talk.

On the second question about the Obama team, I think the Obama team have been very clear. There is only one president at a time, and we've been working with the outgoing administration. That's the way the Obama team wants it. My prime minister has been speaking to President Bush. My foreign minister, Mrs. Livni, has been speaking to Secretary of State Rice. That's the way it's got to be. There can only be one government at a time apparently.

**LAURA KAM:** Okay. Mark, the next question is from another part of the world, China Radio International, but a number of journalists have asked the same question. What now is the future of talks with Syria? On Israel's agenda which one is more important, Syria or Palestine?

**MARK REGEV:** There's no reason that one has to be at the expense of the other.

Annapolis started a process that's very interesting and important in negotiations with the Palestinians. We've had important successes. I mean over the last year since the Annapolis peace conference at the end of 2007 we've seen important developments. It's true we haven't solved all the problems, but we've made important progress, and all those involved in this process, whether it's the Israeli side, the Palestinians, the Americans, the Europeans, everyone knows that process has been made on the economic level. If you look at any objective economic data you can see that the economic situation for Palestinians living in the West Bank has improved over the last year. Unemployment is down. Income is up. Standard of living is up. Tourism is up this year. I think tourism to Bethlehem over the Christmas period reached a high for the decade, and quality of life is up. We can see that there has been real improvement, substantial improvement for the Palestinians as the Annapolis process articulated. It's the same on security issues. We've seen a situation in the West Bank over the last few months where Palestinian security is finally taking control of the lawlessness. It's bringing in more law and order in Palestinian cities. For the first time in years we've seen Palestinian security deploy in cities like Tulkarm, Hebron, Jenin, places like that throughout the West Bank. It's not that we've solved all the issues, but we can see the process of nation building on the Palestinian side, which is so important. We've seen that process move ahead, and as Palestinian security has been able to step up, Israel security's been able to step down, and this ultimately is a much more healthy, positive situation as part of the Annapolis process; and on the big issues, the political issues, final status issues, we've had very interesting talks. My prime minister, Mr. Olmert was meeting the Palestinian president almost every two weeks. Mrs. Livni, the foreign minister, was meeting the head of the Palestinian negotiating team, Abdullah (sp?) almost every week. The negotiations were moving forward. We've now got some very

difficult issues like borders and security and refugees, even on the difficult issue of Jerusalem there were some ideas out there. Once again, the process is important and we have to keep at it; and for the peace process with the Palestinians is something that we want to keep moving on and something that we're committed to moving on.

In parallel, and not at the expense of the Palestinian track, we've started this process of indirect talks with the Syrians through Turkey, and we've had I believe four rounds of these, of these proximity talks. We hope this process will continue. I'm not sure how the fighting in Gaza will affect, but it's in the national interest of both Syria and Israel to move forward to a reconciliation. I hope it's possible.

**LAURA KAM:** From the Christian Broadcasting Network. Is there concern that Hezbollah may take this opportunity to launch attacks against northern Israel?

**MARK REGEV:** Yes, and we're watching the northern border very closely.

**LAURA KAM:** Okay, next question from The Independent in London. What do you say to suggestions that the timing of the Gaza strikes look like political opportunism given that elections are due in February?

**MARK REGEV:** The prime minister of Israel, my direct boss, Mr. Olmert is not a candidate in these elections. He's totally out of the election cycle. He's not involved in election propaganda. To say that he's doing this to election year is frankly ridiculous. I think it also has to be said the timing for this escalation is ultimately not determined by Israel; it was determined by Hamas. It was last week that Hamas publicly abrogated the understandings negotiated through Egypt. It was Hamas who last week escalated the violence, and that crescendo we saw on Christmas day, on Thursday with all those

rockets coming into Israel. The timing was Hamas' timing. We are responding to their aggression.

**LAURA KAM:** Okay. From Texas, how is the Israel's government media strategy better in this war than in the Second Lebanon War? Do you have any insights and/or analysis into the media strategy of Palestinians, Arab world, or Iran?

**MARK REGEV:** Well first of all I thought I talked before about the media strategy of Hamas, which is to use their control over all the civil society in Gaza to get out one message, and that one message is you know that Israel is guilty of all sorts of crimes and say all these very extreme things about us. Our strategy is basically to demonstrate the fact that we are defending our people; and here it must be remembered, and I think this is to our benefit that these attacks on the Israeli civilian population didn't start last week. This has been going on for some time. It's true that the ceasefire agreement was officially torn up by Hamas last week. It's true that there was an escalation last week, but the truth is a quarter of a million Israelis living in the south have been for weeks and months and even years living in fear of Hamas rockets coming in to kill them; and so because up until Saturday Israel in the main chose a non-violent response, Israel in the main just imposed sanctions on the Gaza Strip as a non-violent response to this aggression, to these attacks on our civilians, they were in fact building up, I think, greater international understanding for a time when Israel would have to act; and one of the reasons we're in our conversations with governments, including governments in the Arab world, have expressed understanding for Israel's need to act it's precisely because of those, that period when we exercised restraint.

I could also tell you that one of the reasons for the successes we've had on an operational level on Saturday and on Sunday and today is because during that period of

quiet, during that period of restraint our military of course was busy preparing different contingencies to meet the challenge that Hamas poses.

**LAURA KAM:** A question from Massachusetts. Israel left all of Gaza in 2005 in the hopes of peace. Do you think that Israel will reoccupy all or part of Gaza at this time?

**MARK REGEV:** That is not our desire. That's not what we want to do. We didn't pull out of the Gaza Strip in 2005 just to go back in 2008. That's not what we want. On the contrary, if Hamas would've abided by the understandings that were achieved through Egypt we wouldn't be in this conflict situation that we are today. Let me be very clear about that. We don't want to reoccupy Gaza. We don't want to rule the Palestinians. We are acting defensively to protect our people; that's our goal. How that will be carried out operationally, if that will only be use of Israeli air force, or will that involve other Israeli forces that's an operational issue and you will understand that I will not go into that.

**LAURA KAM:** From the Independent again in London. Is there any chance of peace in Gaza after the incident this weekend? What are the next steps for Israel?

**MARK REGEV:** We are willing to live in peace with Gaza. The question is is Gaza willing to live in peace with us? It was the Hamas regime that tore up the ceasefire. It was the Hamas regime that initiated this recent wave of violence, which we are responding to. We're hopefully going to create a situation in this, through our military measures a situation in which quiet will be restored. That's our goal.

**LAURA KAM:** A question from New Jersey. Is there any concrete proof of Iranian ties and military supplies to Hamas in Gaza? And are Iranian fingerprints shown on the missiles that fell in Ashdod today?

**MARK REGEV:** Yes, it's clear that Hamas has alienated itself in large parts of the Arab world through its extremism and its nihilism. I think the Iranians are their sole ally, and too of course Hezbollah as well, which is also an Iranian proxy. The Iranians are very active in arming Hamas, in financing Hamas. They've helped them develop their indigenous missile capabilities that help them import missiles into the Gaza Strip. They are probably today the most major and important supporter of the Hamas movement. I have no doubt that a lot of the rockets that land in Israel and the mortar shells and the missiles are of Iranian origin.

**LAURA KAM:** Again from, back on Syria, from the Middle East Times. What would you say is the biggest setback, or what in your opinion is holding back the possibility of finalizing a peace treaty with the Syrians? Unlike the dispute with the Palestinians where there are several points of contention, final borders, Jerusalem, right of return, et cetera, when it comes to negotiating with Damascus it seems straight forward. We know where the borders are and where they're going to be. There are no real outstanding issues such as with the Palestinians. So what is holding it back?

**MARK REGEV:** There are a series of issues. Israel is willing to move ahead, even quite energetically on the Syrian track. It's clear, and we understand what the Syrians desire in peace with Israel, and I think the Syrians know full well what we desire in peace with Israel. It's clear that if we have a breakthrough with Syria, Syria will no longer be an ally to those most extreme elements in the region who oppose this, and here I want to

say what is obvious. There are some 20, 22 members of the Arab League, of the Arab League. There is only one Arab country, which has a strategic alliance with Iran and that is Syria. There's only one Arab country that has formal strategic collaborative relations with groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, and that is Syria. What Syria has is an option to move, to move into the mainstream, not to become Zionists. It's my job to be a Zionist, but to give Syria an option to move into the Arab mainstream and to have peace with your neighbors and to live a better life for its own people. That's the options that Syria has. We know peace with Syria will demand painful compromises from Israel. If Syria is willing to make the choices it has to make, Israel is ready to take those painful steps.

**LAURA KAM:** There's a follow-up to this. Would you agree that if and when a peace deal is struck with Damascus it is of paramount importance to include Lebanon in the negotiation in order to get Hezbollah out of the context (sp?)? Do you agree that leaving Lebanon out of the process will leave an exit clause to anyone or party who wants to create unrest with the proxy of Hezbollah and the PSO, PC, et cetera?

**MARK REGEV:** If we did have a breakthrough with Syria, and I hope it's possible, obviously that would affect Syrian support and the Syrian alliance for those most extreme Jihadist groups that are currently receiving support through Syria, and that would affect a larger situation, and so that's why the Syrian peace deal, if it's possible, is very important. Obviously Israel would like peace with Lebanon too. We have peace with our neighbor to the south, Egypt. We've got peace with our neighbor to the east, Jordan. We've got, I mean if you think about it there's no logical reason whatsoever why we shouldn't have peace with both Lebanon and with Syria.

**LAURA KAM:** Question from DC. Can you speak about the placement of the weapon smuggling tunnels? How expansive are they? And how integrated into the civilian areas are they?

**MARK REGEV:** The smuggling of weapons into Gaza has been a serious problem. Hamas has adopted the Hezbollah model. Just as Hezbollah controls part of Lebanon, and then with the support of outsiders, Iran specifically, built a formidable military machine. That was the model that Hamas has in Gaza. They control the territory and they want, with the help of outsiders, to build a formidable military machine, and they're being, to a certain extent, successful, and we see that with their missile capability that took the life of one Israeli today in the city of Ashkelon. What is different here is Egypt. Egypt is not playing Syria's role. Egypt is not interested in seeing Gaza turn into a strategic center for regional terrorism. They're not interested in seeing Gaza become, Hamas becoming a powerful military force, and so we have an ally in Egypt on this issue and ultimately the tunnels, which have been used to smuggle arms have been a problem. That's why yesterday our air force specifically targeted those tunnels. I'm not sure we got them all, but I have no doubt that we have delivered a serious setback to that tunnel system, and that's good because ultimately when this is over we don't want to have a situation where Hamas can just rearm.

**LAURA KAM:** Okay. Do officials from the European Union countries privately express more understanding for Israel's action than does the official EU statement?

**MARK REGEV:** I think there is large understanding in the international community of why Israel (inaudible) and (inaudible) even stronger. Even in the Arab world there is

understanding for Israel's actions, and so if the Arab world has understanding how much more so is there in Europe?

**LAURA KAM:** Mark, from Washington: how are residents of Sderot, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and southern Israel dealing with what is happening on the Israeli side of the border now?

**MARK REGEV:** It's not easy. People are in bomb shelters. Hamas is shooting rockets into Israel, but there is a difference now because in the past those civilian populations who were on the receiving end of these Hamas rockets were very critical of the government saying when are you going to take steps to end this? I think now you see that there is a lot of support and people are saying we are willing to pay the price. We're willing to leave the inconvenience. Let's create a reality where no longer will we have to live in bomb shelters. So I think the feeling in the south today is more upbeat than let's say it was this time last year. That's ultimately obviously a good thing. We are acting; the prime goal of this operation is to help create a new reality, a new security environment that the people in the south will not have to live in fear, that's our goal.

**LAURA KAM:** From the Inner City Press in New York there's a question about the UN. Ambassador Gabriella Shalev spoke to Ban Ki-Moon, and his office said that it was purely a courtesy call. This was last week. We'd like to know if she gave notice under Article 51 of the UN charter.

**MARK REGEV:** I'm not sure. You'd probably have to ask the office of the United Nations Ambassador, but I do know this, that we are acting in legitimate rights of self-defense. We've got no doubt that we are acting legally in accordance with international law. When someone is lobbing rockets and missiles trying to kill your civilian population,

the ABC of international law says you have the right to defend yourself against that sort of aggression.

**LAURA KAM:** Mark, from the Cleveland Jewish News, what are the risks to Israel if Hamas and the Palestinian cause emerge from the Gaza (inaudible) even stronger and with more international support?

**MARK REGEV:** That would be a real problem, and our whole strategy is designed to weaken Hamas, to punish Hamas, to stifle (sp?) their military machine. Those are our goals. We want to achieve a new, as I say a new security environment in the south. That's what we're determined to do.

**LAURA KAM:** Also from New York, can you tell us about the specifics of the humanitarian aid that are going into Gaza now if there are any? I know that what just prior to the invasion supplies were going into Gaza. Is that correct?

**MARK REGEV:** First of all I'm not aware of any invasion. To be clear about this is we have, as I say publicly we've outlined a distinction between the civilian population of Gaza and the Hamas. Hamas is a legitimate target. The civilian population of Gaza is like ourselves is a victim of this Hamas regime, and that's why every day since the fighting has started we have allowed and we will continue to facilitate a humanitarian convoy (sp?) to make sure that the people of Gaza do not have to suffer unnecessarily. I'll tell you something that I was actually surprised about. Today 120 trucks went into Gaza with support, humanitarian support, foodstuff, medicines, and so forth. Yesterday we opened the border to humanitarian support as well. Only 20 some trucks went in and we were surprised, but the donor community, the United Nations relief agencies weren't

ready apparently. They are ready now, and we are open and ready for a continued flow of humanitarian support for the people of Gaza. Once again we don't see the civilian population of Gaza as our enemy. We see them as a victim of the Hamas regime.

**LAURA KAM:** A question from Texas. Do you anticipate Israel striking Iran to slow down nuclear development? If so –

**MARK REGEV:** Israel prefers a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis. We're looking forward in 2009 to working with President Obama, with the Europeans on effective international measures to pressure Iran to prevent them from going nuclear.

**LAURA KAM:** And another question, Mark, about Iran. Is Hamas getting direction from Iran? Or is it just funding and training?

**MARK REGEV:** It's receiving support. It is an ally of Iran. It is a proxy of Iran. It's not clear to me that they are directly receiving instruction. I think they have a semi-independent status. They are an ally of Iran. They are a proxy, but they're not a puppet of.

**LAURA KAM:** Okay, Mark. We've basically gone through the gist of the questions. I wonder if you can do five minutes of closing remarks and your hopes for peace in the coming days.

**MARK REGEV:** Well I've been speaking for 40 minutes (inaudible). I'll put it this way. We want this to finish and the situation that will reign in the south will be that of peace and quiet. Israel does not want to reoccupy Gaza. We're hoping that this will finish in a

way that there will be peace both for the people of Gaza and for the people of southern Israel, and ultimately we want to see the peace process invigorated again. So we want to see accelerated talks with the Palestinians, and we want to see accelerated talks with the Syrians. That's our goal. We know that the only solution here is political; it's negotiations, and that's our goal and that's what we're going to pursue. This violence is not something that we wanted. Unfortunately it was something that became necessary because it was forced upon us, but that's not our hope. Our hope is for a better Middle East, a Middle East based on peace and cooperation.

**LAURA KAM:** Mark Regev, thank you so much for joining us. I know how extremely busy you are. You've spoken to about 600 people on this conference call right now from literally across the world. Please note that on our website, [www.theisraelproject.org](http://www.theisraelproject.org), this conference call will be recorded. You will be able to access it, and there will be transcripts up there as well. So thank you very much, and remember [www.theisraelproject.org](http://www.theisraelproject.org) for the transcript of this call and other things that will help journalists get the story out. Thank you very much.