

A SPECIAL FORUM:

WAR or PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST: QUO VADIS?



JANUARY 2022

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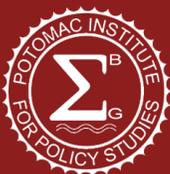
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During the past two decades, the world has faced an alarming upsurge of extremism and violence in the Middle East. Is the region currently at a brink of unprecedented disaster or beginning to build new peace-making processes? A distinguished inter-disciplinary panel focused on both challenges and opportunities, including a wide range of topics such as North Africa, Israel/Palestine, Syria, Iran, the Gulf, and other inter-regional concerns.

Video of the full conference may be found here: <https://youtu.be/yrBJd-3ca6s>

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“WAR OR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST: QUO VADIS?”

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| <u>TABLE OF CONTENTS</u> | | <u>PAGE</u> |
|-------------------------------------|---|----------------------|
| I. PREFACE: | Professor Yonah Alexander Professor Don Wallace, Jr. | 5 |
| II. SUMMARY OF MIDDLE EAST: REMARKS | Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat | 7 |
| III. SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS: | Drawn from the Forum's Participants | 9 |
| IV. CONTRIBUTORS' PRESENTATIONS: | Ambassador (Ret.) Gerald Feierstein Dr. David Pollock Dr. Wayne Zaideman Dr. Mir Sadat | 11 14 16 18 |
| V. COMMENTATORS' REMARKS: | Dr. Nicholas Rostow Dr. Ford Rowan | 20 21 |
| VI. QUESTION AND ANSWER DISCUSSION | | 22 |
| VII. ABOUT THE EDITORS | | 25 |
| VIII. ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS | | 25 |
| IX. ABOUT THE COMMENTATORS | | 26 |

I. PREFACE

PROFESSOR YONAH ALEXANDER AND PROFESSOR DON WALLACE, JR.

EDITORS

As we are entering 2022, the world once again has been facing an alarming upsurge of threats to peace in the form of terrorism, insurgencies, and outbreaks of full-scale wars. Some of the expanding manifestations of violence have been aggravated by ideological extremism, nationalistic fanaticism, ethnic hatred, racial prejudices, religious animosities and justified in the name of “rights,” “justice” and even “peace.”

The current security challenges amid the relenting Covid-19 pandemic include the renewed Palestinian-Israeli hostilities in Gaza, the raging conflicts throughout the region in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, as well as Iran’s continuing terrorism threats and nuclear ambitions.

The stopping of the unfolding violence and building a lasting peace is critical. Thus, the academic community has an obligation to participate in the international effort to advance the cause of peace in the Middle East and elsewhere.

In this connection it is important to note several relevant studies that were undertaken over the years. First is a book titled *Crescent and Star: Arab and Israeli Perspectives on the Middle East Conflict* edited by Yonah Alexander and Nicholas N. Kittrie and published by AMS Press in New York and Toronto in 1973. This volume focused on various questions that underlie the regional and global challenges. Some of the issues addressed were the following: a conflict between two antagonistic nationalisms; religious and ethnical tensions; violations of minority and human rights; expansionism and boundary disputes; conflict over the control of Jerusalem and the Holy Places; hostilities concerning the use of the Jordan River and freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba and Suez Canal; a competition among world powers.

The second academic effort was a study on *The Role of Communications in the Middle East Conflict: Ideological and Religious Aspects* by Yonah Alexander that was released by Praeger Publishers (New York, Washington, London) in 1973. This volume was conducted as part of a larger project on the role of mass communication in the advancement of international understanding sponsored by the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University. The main questions which were analyzed included the following:

First, is the confrontation between Arab nationalism and Zionism inevitable and therefore insurmountable? Or does it indicate a certain historical stage between Arabs and Israeli Jews and is likely to disappear?

Second, are the antagonists and their partisans using religion-based communications to fan the flames of conflict and thereby advance the cause of war? To what extent do they dampen the passion of strife and consequently promote the cause of peace?

Third, can religion serve as a more effective tool for peace communications and help to ease the frictions and lessen the tension in the Middle East and beyond?

Another relevant work is *Palestinian Religious Terrorism: Hamas and Islamic Jihad* authored by Yonah Alexander and released by Transnational Publishers in Ardsley, New York in 2002. This particular book exposes much of the mystique of these organizations and places them as two of the many other challenges facing not only Israel but also the entire international community in its war against terrorism, whether it is waged in the Middle East or elsewhere.

In addition to the forgoing studies, the Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies (IUCTS), organized numerous other academic research activities. Suffice to mention the publication of multiple selected books since 9/11 including: *Usama bin Laden’s al-Qaida: Profile of a Terrorist Network* (Brill Nijhoff, 2001) by Yonah Alexander and Michael S. Swetnam; *The New Iranian Leadership: Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East* (Praeger, 2007) by Yonah Alexander and Milton Hoenig; *Al-Qa’ida: Ten Years After 9/11 and Beyond* (Potomac Institute Press, 2012) by Yonah Alexander and Michael S. Swetnam; *The Islamic State: Combating the Caliphate Without Borders* (Lexington Books, 2015) by Yonah Alexander and Dean Alexander.

Among the other numerous reports released by the IUCTS include: “Arab Spring: A Year Later and Beyond” (March 2012)¹; “Combating Hizballah’s Global Network” (October 2013)²; “Tehran’s Bomb Challenge: Crossroads, Roadblocks, and Roadmaps to Rapprochement?” (March 2014)³; “Israeli- Palestinian Peace Process: Endless or Endgame?” (July 2014)⁴; “Combating the Islamic State: Is a New Strategic Blueprint Needed?” (January 2016)⁵; “Russia’s Strategic Puzzle: Past Lessons, Current Assessment, and Future Outlook” (March 2016)⁶; “Syria: Quo Vadis?” (October 2015)⁷; “The Holy Jerusalem: A Key to Middle East War or Peace?” (December 2016)⁸; “Terrorism in North Africa and the Sahel in 2016” (March 2017)⁹; “Preventing WMD Terrorism: Ten Perspectives” (August 2017)¹⁰; “The Role of Diplomacy in Combating Terrorism: Selected Perspectives” (March 2018)¹¹; “Biological Terrorism: International Dimensions” (June 2019)¹².

As the Covid-19 pandemic emerged in early 2020, our colleagues at the International Law Institute (ILI) and the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies (PIPS) organized a Special Ambassadors' Forum on the "Middle East Security Challenges: Past Lessons and Future Outlook" held on February 6, 2020 at the International Law Institute in Washington, DC.

This event featured Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat, a four decades-long policy maker, diplomat, scholar, attorney, and author who discussed his highly acclaimed book *President Carter: The White House Years* (St. Martin's Press, 2018). The video of the entire program is accessible here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUPk30xLuUM&t=106s>.

It is our honor to incorporate Ambassador Eizenstat's contribution in the current report, "War or Peace in the Middle East: Quo Vadis?" We are including a selection of Ambassador Eizenstat's remarks related to the Middle East prior to incorporating our colleagues' presentations from the July 22, 2021 event.

The program of this event began with opening remarks by Professor Don Wallace (Chairman, International Law Institute). The virtual Forum was moderated by Professor Yonah Alexander (Director of the International Center for Terrorism Studies and Senior Fellow at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies). Presentations and discussion were offered by Ambassador (Ret.) Gerald Feierstein (Senior Vice President, Middle East Institute); Dr. David Pollock (Bernstein Fellow, The Washington Institute); Dr. Wayne Zaideman (Retired Special Agent and Legal Attaché at the FBI, Middle East); Dr. Mir Sadat (Former Policy Director, U.S. National Security Council); Dr. Nicholas Rostow (Senior Research Scholar, Yale Law School); Dr. Ford Rowan (Chairman of the National Center for Critical Incident Analysis).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Professor Alexander wishes to express his deep appreciation for the decades-long academic and professional partnerships with the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies (PIPS) and the International Law Institute (ILI). He is most grateful to PIPS's Dr. Jennifer Buss (CEO), General Al Gray (USMC (Ret.), Chairman of the Board), and Gail Clifford (VP for Financial Management & CFO) for their inspiration and support. Likewise, he values the guidance and assistance of the ILI's Professor Don Wallace, Jr. (Chairman), and Robert Sargin (Executive Director). Additionally, special thanks are due to both Professor John Norton Moore and Professor Robert Turner, (Center for National Security Law, University of Virginia) for their continued contributions to our multiple educational programs over the years.

Finally, the internship program of the International University Center for Terrorism Studies (IUCTS), that is coordinated by Kevin Harrington, has provided research and administrative support for this publication. The IUCTS interns include: Victoria Airapetian (University of Maryland, College Park graduate), Steven Bergin (Mercyhurst University, graduate), Sydney Betancourt (Stetson University, graduate), Sarah Butcher (Texas Tech University undergraduate), Matthew Dahan (the American University), Daan de Zwart (the University of Amsterdam graduate), Caleb Dixon (University of California, Berkeley), Emma Goldsby (University of Kentucky), Riley Graham (William & Mary, undergraduate), Kaley Henryon (Mercyhurst University undergraduate), Stephen Mathews (Pennsylvania State University undergraduate), Matthew Phenenger (Ohio Wesleyan University graduate), Avgustina Peycheva (Moscow State Institute of International Relations, PhD), Rebecca Roth (Princeton University undergraduate), Maxim Ryabinin (Syracuse University), and Virag Turcsan (Erasmus Mundus Joint International Master's degree).

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ <https://potomacinstitute.org/images/ICTS/Arab+Spring+Report.pdf>
- ² <https://potomacinstitute.org/reports/20-reports/icts-reports/1151-combating-hizballahs-global-network>
- ³ <https://potomacinstitute.org/images/ICTS/FinalTehransBombChallengereportMarch2014.pdf>
- ⁴ https://potomacinstitute.org/images/ICTS/Israeli-PalestinianPeaceProcess_Report.pdf
- ⁵ <https://potomacinstitute.org/images/JanuaryISreport.pdf>
- ⁶ <https://potomacinstitute.org/images/RussiaStrategicPuzzle.pdf>
- ⁷ <https://potomacinstitute.org/images/PIPSyria.pdf>
- ⁸ <https://potomacinstitute.org/images/ICTS/TheHolyJerusalem.pdf>
- ⁹ https://potomacinstitute.org/images/ICTS/IUCTS_2016_Final.pdf
- ¹⁰ <https://potomacinstitute.org/images/ICTS/PreventingWMDTerrorism.pdf>
- ¹¹ https://potomacinstitute.org/images/ICTS/DiplomacyCT_Intl.pdf
- ¹² https://potomacinstitute.org/images/ICTS/Biological_Terrorism.pdf

II. SUMMARY OF SELECTED MIDDLE EAST REMARKS *

AMBASSADOR STUART EIZENSTAT

Former Senior Official with Three U.S. Administrations and Ambassador to the European Union

Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat presented an overview of his book “President Carter: The White House Years” (2018) at a Special Ambassadors’ Forum on the “Middle East Security Challenges: Past Lessons and Future Outlook” held on February 6, 2020 that focused on specific challenges faced by the President both domestically and abroad. Comprised of over 5,000 pages of notes and 350 interviews, the book demonstrates that President Carter was the most underrated, underappreciated and accomplished one-term President the United States has ever had. President Carter came to office at a difficult time on the global stage. The Soviet Union was at the apex of its power and The Peoples’ Republic of China was becoming a political force. Additionally, John Paul II became Pope and Israel, was close to literally losing its existence in the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

President Carter also had several impressive foreign policy accomplishments. Under his administration, the Camp David Accords and the Israel-Egypt Peace Agreement were enacted. He also reversed the post-Vietnam decline in defense spending which allowed President Reagan to bring the Soviet Union to its knees. President Carter also helped pass a significant amount of ethics legislation and took a tough stance at the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan.

Ambassador Eizenstat also discussed the imperfections of the Carter Administration as the 4 “I’s” which were inflation, Iran, inexperience, and interparty warfare. Many of the decisions made during the Carter Administration have an impact even today, especially with regards to the Middle East. Iran still poses a serious threat to Israel and to the Sunni states in the region. Yet, the Trump Administration deemphasized the Middle East in terms of foreign policy. The America First policy, as a means to an end to the endless wars in the region, is actually neo-isolationism. This is being implemented through reducing our presence to just a few hundred soldiers in the region.

Ambassador Eizenstat believes that before the next U.S. election, an Afghan peace plan will be the basis for the withdrawal of most if not all American and NATO troops. Additionally, other world powers will come and fill this vacuum, something that has already begun. The Chinese are filling it economically and the Russians are filling it militarily with a warm water port in Syria and by selling SS400 missiles to Turkey.

Ambassador Eizenstat views the plan as “extremely negative” in the long-term for Israel’s security. Several major changes within the region tend to display that Israel does not in fact have to deal with the Palestinians at all, and can instead do what they desire within certain limitations. These major changes include the movement of the Sunni states towards Israel and Israel’s economic situation, as well as Israel’s strong administrative support. Divided Palestinian leadership, which Ambassador Eizenstat described as “hopeless” when it came to peace negotiations, also contributes towards this. The Ambassador brings up Palestine’s rejection of Clinton’s parameters which provided Palestine 95% of the West Bank and East Jerusalem as a capital, the 2008 parameters that gave them 96%, and the 2014 Obama parameters.

However while Israel is in a position of power to do what it desires, Ambassador Eizenstat poses the question: “Is this good for Israel?” He then went on to answer that it depends on which kind of Israel is desired by its people.

According to the “Peace to Prosperity” plan put out by the Trump Administration, Palestine would only receive 60% of the West Bank, none of which is contiguous and is only connected through tunnels and overpasses, all of which is under Israeli sovereignty. The plan does not include a common border with Jordan, and the 82 settlements in these gaps between the 60% will become part of Israel. The capital of Palestine will also be in a suburban area outside of East Jerusalem, which cannot be reached because of the security wall. The Ambassador stated that all these factors are evident of the fact that we are heading towards a one-state solution for two inhabitants, in which one inhabitant enjoys democratic rights while the other does not. As such, the plan is an existential threat to Israel.

Ambassador Eizenstat further stated that the worst course of action would be to take on this plan without weighing its consequences. 77% of settlers already live in three main settlement blocks under Israeli control. To extend this to the additional 82 settlements can have a tremendous impact on the nation and the people. The ambassador explained that there are other ways to deal with the conflict despite weak Palestinian leadership, though likely not to full satisfaction.

The Ambassador added that a show of power and might towards Iran is important, and that Soleimani’s assassination was a good thing. However, the consequences should have been more thought through and Iranian retaliation was lucky to have not caused any deaths. He further expanded that the initial mistake made by the U.S. was not including Iran in the

* This section of the Report consists of a summary of remarks from Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat during a presentation made at a Special Ambassadors’ Forum on the “Middle East Security Challenges: Past Lessons and Future Outlook” held on February 6, 2020 at the International Law Institute in Washington, DC.

JCPOA so as to avoid underhanded tactics made against allies. The U.S. also made the mistake of pulling out of Iran and creating economic sanctions-both of which will lead to the election of more radical candidates.

Ambassador Eizenstat finally noted that, while President Jimmy Carter may not belong on Mount Rushmore, he definitely belongs in the foothills with other extremely impactful presidents.

III. SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS [DRAWN FROM THE FORUM'S PARTICIPANTS]

1. North Africa and the Middle East appear to be on the brink of disaster; however, new peacemaking processes are being established that may assist in averting this crisis.
2. Terrorism remains an unsolved issue in North Africa, as Al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the Sahel and splinter organizations operating in Mali, Chad, and Niger continue to destabilize the region.
3. Political uncertainty in countries like Algeria, Libya, and even Tunisia feed into the broader instability of the region as a whole, leading to a surge in extremism.
4. The conflict in Yemen will likely spill over into Saudi Arabia and other states in the Arabian Peninsula despite U.S. diplomatic efforts.
5. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan may allow Al-Qa'ida or the Islamic State to re-establish a foothold in the region, which could have globally destabilizing implications.
6. Iran's transition in leadership creates significant uncertainty surrounding regional security and stability, as it is unclear whether President Raisi will comply during U.S. negotiations or whether Iran will return to the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA).
7. There has been a global decline in the perception of authority that the great powers, like the U.S., have in the region, which has invited competition from countries like China.
8. The Covid-19 pandemic has also been a significant destabilizing force, as regional governments are unable to address health concerns, leading to political unrest and democratic uncertainty.
9. Climate change presents an additional destabilizing force, as evidenced by the recent Iranian water riots.
10. There are positive indicators such as: the U.S. negotiations with Iran in Vienna, the opening of communication channels between the UAE and Saudi Arabia, and Qatar rejoining the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
11. The Abraham Accords also provide a solution to long-standing issues, as regional tensions are reduced and communication channels between states are increased.
12. Despite the significant amount of media coverage that the Israel-Palestine issue receives, it is not necessarily the most urgent one in the region.
13. The Israel-Palestine issue cannot be pushed into the corner indefinitely.
14. One major development is that the Israeli Government has an independent Arab political party for the first time in its history.
15. Benjamin Netanyahu is no longer in a leadership position and this development could create room for dialogue between Israel, Palestine, and other regional players.
16. Arab public opinion increasingly appears to support normalization of relations with Israel and is critical of Hamas.
17. Hamas is facing an "internal crisis of legitimacy."
18. It is unclear whether normalization of relations between Israel and the wider Arab world will help the Palestinians in any way.
19. Hamas is unlikely to accept peace with Israel.
20. The Palestinian Authority is willing to cooperate on security, economic, and other issues.
21. The Biden Administration has made greater economic and diplomatic overtures toward the Palestinians.
22. The traditional U.S.-Israel alliance remains strong.
23. The Biden Administration also recognizes there will likely be no clear solution to the Israel-Palestine issue in the foreseeable future.
24. A future in which there is no hope for the Palestinians does not serve American or Israeli interests.
25. Iran is a dangerous situation because they are creating the "parts" of a nuclear weapon and then putting them on the shelf for later use.
26. Iran is not a country to be trusted because they believe in "Taqiyya" and lie to the world, in addition to funding terrorist groups as part of their regional and global ambitions.
27. Religiously-motivated terrorists are not concerned about public opinion or inflicting mass casualties; rather, they are solely focused on what God wants, and, therefore, Iran might use nuclear weapons if they had them.
28. The JCPOA signed in 2015 was flawed and would have given Iran nuclear weapons by 2025. In addition, it was viewed as temporary by Iran and the world was put in a situation where we could not verify it was being followed.

29. The Biden Administration needs to be careful in reversing sanctions, because it will be hard to sanction Iran again.
30. The U.S. cannot be a strategic military partner with Iran.
31. During the new talks regarding reentering the JCPOA, Iran has acted provocatively by delaying negotiations until Raisi is president, plotting to kidnap an American-based Iranian-American journalists, and enriching uranium to 60%.
32. It is clear by the election of Raisi that Ayatollah Khamenei wants to be more extreme regarding foreign policy, their nuclear program, and terror.
33. The Biden Administration does not seem to support the Abraham Accords.
34. We are living in a new operating environment in which the U.S. and its allies will be tested.
35. The U.S. footprint in Afghanistan should have been reduced to limit wasting resources that could have been allocated elsewhere.
36. The U.S. failed to do its due diligence in Afghanistan.
37. The decision to reduce force presence in Afghanistan by 95% was a shock.
38. Leaving some military present in the country would have allowed the U.S. to achieve its goals: continue the peace process, have the Taliban renounce its affiliations and support to terrorists, and continue the progress that the U.S. has made in the country.
39. There must be a differentiation between the colonial British or Soviet Russian presence in Afghanistan and the U.S. actions in the country.
40. The American occupation of Afghanistan was not an American occupation. It was 54 multinational countries plus the United Nations, European Union, and NATO.
41. Americans came as liberators to Afghanistan, but then they messed up the end game.
42. The United States, whether in Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria, never defined what its goals were in any realistic or precise way.
43. The U.S. went in with virtually unlimited resources.
44. As one former Ambassador to Afghanistan said, “when you have unlimited resources, you think you can fix every broken window. However, those aren't goals and strategies, but rather waste.”
45. We need to match up ends, ways, and means in strategy as soon as possible, which we have failed to do in the past 20 years.
46. The Congress and the people of the United States have not been forced to confront and consider policies.
47. The absence of a strategic and realistic view on the issue of Afghanistan gives rise to policies that are not thought through.
48. The message that this program should pass on is to desperately think long and hard about what it is we are trying to achieve in these areas, and how we should go about doing so in the most cost-effective method.
49. One technique that is cost-effective is to work with partners and allies to strengthen and create local capabilities to counter terrorist organizations.
50. Just like the UN peacekeeping missions in the Western Sahara, we have to accept that certain missions, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, cost huge amounts of money.
51. Doing nothing in cases of humanitarian catastrophes, like we did in the case of Syria, is not the solution.
52. The International Dialogue Initiative (IDI) committee looks for ways to analyze and overcome the psychological barriers to peace.
53. The members of the IDI committee include two members that spent time in Iranian prisons but are now living freely in Europe, four members—evenly divided between Israelis and Palestinians—are from Israel, and other members are U.S. military veterans.
54. Psychological factors can impede peacemaking due to the transgenerational transmission of trauma in which people are traumatized and retraumatized by the telling of violent stories from the past.
55. There is growing investment into environmental, social, and accountability (ESG).
56. ESG accounts now total \$1 trillion in the sustainable investment market; they are projected to grow to \$11 trillion in the next dozen years.
57. Economic consequences of social justice issues, climate change, and racism issues are often left out of the conversation of peacemaking.

58. It is important to look at the psychological aspects of peacemaking, not just for the older generations, but for younger generations as well.
59. Environment, climate, demography, and food security all present significant challenges for the region going forward and will complicate U.S. diplomacy efforts.
60. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan can be examined from two perspectives: the rapid withdrawal from the region created significant uncertainty and was a mistake, or that it is time for the Afghan people to resolve their own issues.
61. Long-term diplomatic solutions are the best way to reduce regional conflict and sustain democratic peace initiatives in North Africa and the Middle East.
62. Even though Hamas may not be all that popular now, it seems like Fatah and Abbas are even less popular.
63. It is difficult to trust Hamas or Fatah to work with in order to find a solution for the Israel-Palestinian conflict.
64. America must remain realistic while positive and optimistic towards solving difficult problems such as the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

IV. CONTRIBUTORS' PRESENTATIONS

This section of the Report consists of presentations made by the contributors at the Special Forum: "War or Peace in the Middle East: Quo Vadis?" that was held on July 22nd, 2021 via Zoom conferencing. Some updates and revisions were made by the invited participants.

AMBASSADOR (RET.) GERALD FEIERSTEIN

Senior Vice President, Middle East Institute

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here with all of you today and to talk about this issue that you have put on the table for us. Yonah asked if I would say a few words about the situation in North Africa and also in the Gulf and Yemen. They are the two extremes with the western end and the eastern end of what we typically consider to be the Middle East, and they're very disparate in terms of where they are and the direction that they're moving in. And so, where we are and the questions that you've asked are incredibly complex and difficult to respond to. In fact, there are two distinct questions that Yonah put on the table: One, is the region currently at the brink of unprecedented disaster? I would say the answer to that is yes. Then, the second question is: Are we beginning to build new peacemaking processes? I would say that the answer to that question is also yes. So I think we're in a very early stage, and let me just go through what I think are the key factors that lead to both of those responses. In terms of why do we think that we're on the brink of unprecedented disaster, I would say that there are a few issues out there that we need to look at. In no particular order, but beginning with the North Africa side: first of all, you have the continuation of extremism and terrorism that is coming out of the Sahel, not only AQIM, which you identify, but some of the splinter organizations that have spun off from AQIM in Mali, Niger, Chad and elsewhere that are also continuing to destabilize the situation in the Maghreb, in Libya, in Tunisia, in Algeria, and even, to a certain extent, Morocco. So, we have still that fundamental issue that we have not resolved, this issue of terrorism. In some ways, what we have seen over the past couple of years is really a resurgence of these extremist organizations. I'll talk for a moment a little bit later about what I see as critical feeders for that extremism.

The other aspect that's related to that is the continuation of political instability, particularly in Algeria, owing to an inability for the Algerians to really move forward on a political transition out of the Bouteflika era into something that is going to provide a way forward for the Algerians. While things are quiet at the moment, nevertheless those are unresolved issues. And then the other key question: Political stability in Tunisia, and where we're going forward. Tunisia, as we all know, is a bright spot in terms of the Arab Spring, in terms of their ability to work out a peaceful political transition to a more democratic, more open society; all very positive. Yet, they continue to be buffeted by a number of the winds that are blowing through the region, not only the rise of extremism, but also some of the other factors that are out there. Again we'll talk about that some of those in a moment. So you have the continuation of political instability in these countries that is feeding into broader instability and extremism. Then we also have, moving farther to the east, the continued stalemate in Yemen. Despite the efforts of the Biden Administration to use the weight of U.S. diplomacy and U.S. engagement as a way of moving the Yemen conflict into a more political situation, accomplishing a ceasefire in support of the United Nations-led negotiations there, trying to get that country beyond the current conflict, it has not moved ahead. We're continuing to see, in fact, not only is it not moving forward but there is an expansion of military operations particularly in northern Yemen, with spillover effects into Saudi Arabia and more broadly into the Arabian Peninsula.

Another factor that's there as we were looking at the potential negative consequences of U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan is the possibility that AQ senior leadership will be able to reestablish a foothold in Afghanistan, perhaps also with the arrival of the Islamic State in Afghanistan. That could also have implications for Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which has been diminished over these years of civil conflict, but could come back. And that of course would be extremely destabilizing, not only in the region but potentially globally. So, this is also something that should be watched. And then we have the fact that we're uncertain right now about what direction Iran is going to move in once Mr. Raisi takes over as the president and what are the implications going to be for regional security and stability. Again, there was hope, I think, at the outset of the Biden Administration that by reestablishing a dialogue between the U.S. and Iran, hopefully returning the United States to the participation of the JCPOA with, of course, also Iranian return to full implementation of its responsibilities in the JCPOA, this might have a positive impact on several of the regional conflicts that are going on, particularly in Yemen but also, of course, more broadly in Syria and now in Afghanistan as well. So, we don't know what kind of a direction Mr. Raisi is going to push Iran and whether that's going to be a stabilizing or destabilizing aspect. And then, just to kind of wrap up why I think that we are looking at a potentially disastrous situation in the region, there are two global issues that are out there. One is, again, the continued decline, at least in the perception that regional powers have, of the role of the United States and the U.S. commitment to remain engaged on security and defense issues, as well as the broader political challenges in the region. This has invited the resurgence of great power competition in the Middle East. So, we see the Chinese playing a more assertive role. Potentially their links to Iran could have serious implications in terms of regional security and stability. The role that they're playing establishing themselves in the Red Sea, again, as a potential destabilizer in the Horn of Africa and across the way in the Arabian Peninsula. And at least the nominal efforts that Russia is making to also re-establish itself in the Red Sea. Establishing a military agreement with Sudan that will allow it to base out of the ports in Sudan could introduce another element of great power competition into the Middle East. So that's one global factor. Then the other key

factor is, of course, some of the cross-cutting issues that we're looking at. If you want to look at the destabilizing elements in Tunisia, for example, the impact of the global pandemic of COVID-19 continues to be a potential destabilizer. It continues to feed into issues of extremism in Tunisia and the ability of the government to deal with a pandemic. They're going through another major outbreak of it right now, and that has created tensions that raise doubts about the success of this democratic transition. Tunisia is having other elements as well, and then you look more broadly at some of these other issues of climate and environment that are going to become bigger factors in the region over the coming years. Again, these are potential sources of major instability and conflict in the region. So those are the issues that I think are critical in terms of why I think that potentially we're on the brink of disaster.

But then I look at the other direction and the issues that I see out there that are more reassuring and more positive about how I see the region moving. Those factors would include Libya, which has made major progress in resolving its conflict over the past several months and is now on a much more positive trajectory getting away from the threat of overall collapse as a unified state. They've now come together, so we have a process in place that conceivably is going to lead to elections later this year for parliament, for president, the implementation of their new constitution, and a number of positive developments on the Libya side that I think were not anticipated really until very recently. And so that's one positive development. I would also say that even though Iran is a bit of a wild card and potentially playing into instability in the region, by the same token the fact that the U.S. and Iran are engaged in discussions in Vienna, as well as the fact that the Saudis and the UAE are also opening channels of communication with Iran, even though those are still at a low level, but nevertheless the fact that they're talking, is an important step. It reduces tensions in the region and potentially can help pave the way for not only the return to the Iran Nuclear Deal but also to address some of the other issues, especially Yemen, but potentially elsewhere that have been a source of tension and is, therefore, a positive development. I would also say as part of that, we've seen over the course of this year the repairing of the rifts within the GCC, the fact that Qatar, is to a great extent re-incorporated into the GCC, that many of the tensions that were creating difficulties for the U.S. pushing forward on mutual issues of security and defense and other kinds of cooperation have been more or less resolved or at least put aside for the time being. And that has helped to improve the environment for cooperation among the moderate states of the region, again a positive thing. And then, the last point that I would make on that side are the Abraham Accords, and I assume that we'll hear more about that from the other speakers. But again, the Abraham Accords being a positive step forward in terms of reducing tensions, opening up channels of communication in ways that are important in, perhaps, opening the door to the resolution of some of the long-standing issues, at least an improved dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians as well as opening the potential for broad economic, political, and other kinds of cooperation between Israel and the states of the Gulf and elsewhere in the region. And so again, just to wrap up, I would say that it is far too early to answer that fundamental question: "Where are we headed?" It's too early to say. The good news is that at least on the part of many of the governments of the region, as well as the United States, there is a desire and an interest and a capacity to move forward, to begin to address some of these long-standing issues and improve security, and yet we're far from there. I would stress the point that, beyond just the political issues that generally are the focus of these kinds of conversations, the fact is that we're looking still at the fallout of the global pandemic with the potential of other public health crises to come. Some of the other issues related to climate change, to the environment, or you can look at the water riots in Iran right now as being another aspect, another attribute of the potential impact of climate on regional stability as well as issues related to economics, demographics, and many other issues like food security. These are issues that are going to continue to pose threats to regional stability unless the societies in the region, as well as the international community, can take steps to address them.

DR. DAVID POLLOCK

Bernstein Fellow, The Washington Institute

Thank you so much Yonah, and thank you, Don, for hosting and organizing this event, and thanks to all my fellow panelists in our audience for being with us today.

I have to start out just by mentioning the obvious fact that we are approaching the 20th anniversary of 9/11 very soon, and I can't help but be reminded that 20 years ago, in May of 2001, when I was serving on the Secretary of State's policy planning staff, I wrote a memo to the secretary four months before 9/11 that started out with this line, which was subsequently declassified: "The United States can no longer live with Taliban support for terrorism." Of course, that memo was ignored. Because people at the time, well partly because I guess people at that time felt that the most important, immediate Middle East issue was not Al-Qaeda or the Taliban or terrorism or Afghanistan, but the Second Intifada, which was just getting underway between Israelis and Palestinians. And that leads me to start off my little segment of this discussion, by just saying this: what I've learned over the last 20 years from that incident, and many others, is that the issue that I agreed to talk about today, the Israeli Palestinian issue, is not necessarily the most important issue in the region, and not necessarily the one that has the most direct or urgent impact on American interests in the region, despite the very heavy media coverage, and other kinds of attention that it tends to get. Having said that, that is what I'm going to talk about, and because it's still an important issue, and it is one that is poised somewhere in between war and peace, much like the rest, it requires being willing to do many other aspects of regional geopolitics these days. And I want to just very briefly talk about what I think are four new things, and one old thing about the Israeli Palestinian arena right now and going forward, for the foreseeable future. And then what conclusion that brings me to this particular issue these days.

I'm going to be extremely telegraphic just to save time. I welcome any comments or questions later. One thing that's different about this Israeli government that was put together, just in the last several weeks, is that for the first time in Israel's history, it includes a truly independent Arab political party, as part of the governing coalition. And that, I think, is significant, not so much because of any impact that it might have on foreign policy or American interest per se, but as evidence about the nature of Israeli democracy. It's a very imperfect democracy; it does not extend to the occupied territories. But within the internationally recognized borders of Israel, it is a democracy that actually has moved toward greater inclusivity, not toward apartheid, or some of the other things that Ben and Jerry's, and other people are talking about lately. So that's number one. I think that actually that helps to explain the continued American political and security support for Israel.

Number two, this is the first Israeli government in over a decade without Prime Minister Netanyahu. And that's also a significant change. And I think it opens up potential for greater avenues of dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians, between Israel and some segments of American society and the American government, and also between Israel and other actors in the region, even perhaps when it comes to, for example, to take an immediate contentious issue, the Iran nuclear deal. I think we are very unlikely to see the same kind of direct public confrontation between this Israeli government and the U.S. government, whatever the future of the JCPOA, or American policy toward Iran. But despite those two, in my mind at least, quite positive changes, it's also a government that is probably the most internally divided ever in Israeli politics, and that's really protecting something. This is a government that includes elements of the pretty far right, elements of the pretty far left, and a scattering of other parties with unclear policies, and some of the major issues in the center, at the top positions, and the new Israeli Government. So it's not very clear, actually, and I don't think it will ever be clear. This is not a matter of waiting for the dust to settle. I don't think that this government will ever have a very clear or unified policy direction on the Palestinian issue in particular. And so, I will move on from that to what's new in American policy toward Israel and the Palestinians.

Well, there's a lot that's different, obviously, in the Biden Administration from the Trump Administration, or others. And so, let me just mention briefly three things that I think are new and important here. One is there is already much greater American diplomatic and economic and humanitarian outreach to the Palestinians in just the first half year of the Biden Administration than there ever was under Donald Trump, who was moving in a very opposite direction on that issue. Secondly, at the same time, this administration has come out very clearly and strongly in support of the traditional U.S. alliance with Israel. And that is perhaps to some people something of a surprise, given some of the statements from some of the so-called progressives inside the Democratic Party, and others. Third, I think maybe this is the key point, operational, the administration, as I see it, has recognized, unlike its immediate predecessor, and the Obama Administration before it, and many others, that there is simply no prospect and final status agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians in the policy relevant future. And therefore, the approach that the United States should take is one of incremental practical steps to improve conditions that might someday open the door to that kind of settlement, a two-state solution, but far in the future. And that's a very important, and I think realistic change in American policy.

What else is new? Number three, Hamas. Hamas is new in the sense, of course it's been around, it took over Gaza by force in 2007. It's been around as an officially designated terrorist movement for even longer than that, so that's not new in and of itself. But, what is new is the behavior of Hamas under its new leader, Yahya Sinwar, in Gaza. For the first time in well over seven years, Hamas decided to initiate armed hostilities against Israel, just a few weeks ago, in late May. And there is

some concern among Israeli analysts, although they aren't talking much about it very publicly, that this might represent a new phase in Hamas' behavior, much more aggressive self-confident, perhaps, and dangerous phase, in which Hamas will be tempted to renew hostilities against Israel every now and then, rather than existing in a state mostly of deterrence. That's one thing that's new, although we're not sure, at least I'm not sure about exactly how that's going to play out.

The second thing that's new is that Hamas is now in a rather different position when it comes to its international allies. I think that there is a sense in the region, and I see this reflected, not just at the government level but also at the popular level of public opinion polls that I run around the region every several months, that while Hamas is a factor in the equation, and cannot be ignored, it is not one that is deserving of air or international support. And I think that this sense of reality, not just the sense of greater isolation from some of its earlier allies, whether in Qatar or in Turkey or in Iran, and greater air pressure against Hamas adventurism on the part of Egypt and others may have a calming effect on what would otherwise be, as I just mentioned, the temptation for Hamas to renew hostilities.

And finally, I want to point to the internal crisis of legitimacy that Hamas faces. It's not as if there's ever going to be, in any foreseeable future, an election, that might vote Hamas out of power. It's not as if there's going to be a popular uprising against Hamas in Gaza. But every indication that I have is that this attempt to increase its popularity and legitimacy, by sending rockets and missiles into Israel has a very short-lived effect. Arab public opinion, in general, and even Palestinian public opinion, in general, are not supportive of Hamas, not before the conflict in May, and not afterwards. And because this is not a democracy that has only indirect effects on Hamas' behavior, and on the geopolitics, with this, but I think it does act as a restraining factor, so I would say taking all of these factors together, that the likelihood of a major conflagration again in Gaza is actually quite low.

Another new factor that was already mentioned by Ambassador Feierstein is normalization between Israel, and it's not just the UAE and Bahrain. It's also Morocco and Sudan, and this is extending, at least in less formal ways to many other countries in the region. Just today, for instance, there was a report that Israel was admitted as an observer to the African Union of all things, and we can see signs of greater cooperation. Sometimes not in very savory ways, as with the NSOs spyware issue between Israel and other Arab states like Saudi Arabia with whom it does not have any formal diplomatic relations. This is a very important new factor, and I want to say just again, three very quick things about it. One is that the Biden Administration supports this strongly, even though it was a Trump Administration initiative and the Trump Administration's success, by every indication. Whether its arms sales to the UAE, continued recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara, and its diplomatic and economic policies towards Sudan and other countries, and its diplomatic declarations the Biden Administration strongly supports this process, and that's important and I think positive.

Number two, normalization has a great deal of popular acceptance among the Arab publics that are most directly affected. It's not majority support. I have to say that, to be clear, but there is a solid core of about 40% of the public, not just the government or the elites, who support normalization with Israel, according to a poll that I just did, in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain that will be published in the next few days, so I'm giving you a bit of a sort of a scoop here. And that is in the immediate aftermath of the Gaza mini-war when many people were wondering whether normalization would survive that test, especially at the popular level. So that's also important, and I think positive.

Number three is much less clear. And that is, can normalization between Israel and some of these Arab countries help the Palestinians in any way? Can it be a bridge, not a bypass road, as one of my colleagues at the Washington institute often puts it, toward progress on the Palestinian issue? I think the answer to that is not at all. And unfortunately, it may just be the case that, as far as the Palestinian issue is concerned, this is not going to be a positive contribution, but rather, perhaps a source of anger and frustration and disappointment in the end.

Okay, now what's old? There's only one thing that's that I want to mention that's old, and that's Mahmoud Abbas, and his leadership, the entire leadership of the Palestinian Authority. And that's why, one more reason why, the prospect of any fundamental changes toward a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians are very remote, Abbas, I think, is interested, yes, and has already made personal contact with the leaders of the new Israeli government and of the Biden Administration, again something quite different from anything that we saw in the previous four years. But that doesn't mean that he's interested in any significant concessions, or any real give and take on issues of peace with Israel. In fact, the evidence so far is that the PA has presented, at least according to the leaks that I've seen, a list of 33 demands to the Israelis to even renew formal negotiations, and it's basically the same old stuff without. And, this is the key point. I don't mind so much if they just repeat the same old demands, but my question is, well, what are you offering in return? And the answer, so far, basically is nothing. So, I have to conclude that this not new, this actually very old and worn-out factor on the Palestinian side of the equation is one that points in the direction of continuous stalemate.

Where does that all leave us? I think it leaves us in a, my prognosis at least, facing the prospect of what many years ago, Gamal Abdul Nasir used to call the crime of no war, no peace. Meaning that, we're probably not going to see, I don't think a major outbreak of fighting between Israel and anybody on its borders or away from its borders in the foreseeable future. But, I don't think we're going to see any significant progress on peacemaking between Israelis and Palestinians either. And so, probably the best that we can all hope for, and not just hope for, but work for, is to, —and I do think that this is where American policy is heading— is to work on, as I said at the outset, incremental practical steps that would keep the door open for peace, at some point in the distant future. Thank you.

DR. WAYNE ZAIDEMAN

Retired Special Agent and Legal Attaché at the FBI (Middle East)

Thank you Yonah, and thank you to the participants today. I'm going to focus essentially on Iran as an existential threat. Iran may or may not currently possess nuclear weapons. But what is clear is that they have been and are currently enriching uranium, very close to weapons-grade, and they've developed missile and warhead technology. So, in a sense what they're doing is creating the "parts" of a nuclear weapon without assembling it and putting the parts on the shelf for later use. So, they have the enriched uranium which they're now enriching up to 60%, they have the warhead technology, and they have the missiles. That's why I believe that Iran poses a grave threat.

Iran practices a Shi'a concept called "taqiyya" which allows them to profess the contrary to their true beliefs and intentions. In a sense, it's a legal, religiously approved form of lying. (for the sake of Islam) And they basically are able to conduct a covert nuclear weapons program while publicly stating to the contrary; that they've frozen their nuclear program, which is to be used for peaceful purposes. Iran does not adhere to international norms. Iran has funded, trained, and supplied terrorist entities and governments. They have regional and global ambitions. For example, they've been supporting Hezbollah, Hamas, Iraqi insurgents, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Taliban, al Qaeda, and currently, the Houthis in Yemen. They have also been supporting President Assad's Syrian regime. They have influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Iran also has designs on Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, and the Emirates.

Will Iran use nuclear weapons if they have them? Secular terrorists are concerned about public opinion; how people view them, and they do not want to induce mass casualties. However, religiously motivated terrorists are not concerned about causing mass casualties or about public opinion. They have one audience, that audience is God, and they presume to know what God wants them to do. And when a population has allowed these clerics to speak on God's behalf, which happened after the 1979 revolution, they can't later criticize their actions because, in effect, they'd be criticizing God. Iran has a messianic theology, the Supreme Leader might cause a cataclysmic event, which will hasten the coming of the Hidden Imam, (al-Mahdi). The current Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, is getting older, sicker, and we don't know how long he'll be around. There's the belief that the possible successor will be Ebrahim Raisi who's becoming the current president; he takes office next month. His nickname is "the butcher," and he is a "true believer" and could pose a very serious threat if he was the Supreme Leader, because the Supreme Leader cannot be questioned. He has the final word on any policy or action.

The Obama/Biden nuclear agreement allowed Iran to maintain uranium enrichment and did not call for the dismantling of their nuclear facilities. The soon to be former President Rouhani stated, "We can leave international agreements whenever we wish." So, in a sense, it's the old concept of a "hudna," or a temporary agreement, which can be abrogated whenever they want to abrogate it.

Regarding snapback sanctions, when sanctions are lifted by the Biden Administration, it will be extremely difficult to get the "genie back in the bottle." It took a long time, and much work to institute those sanctions, and the countries who participated in the sanctions will not want to limit the revenue sources.

Not only did the Obama/Biden nuclear agreement allow Iran to enrich uranium, but it also promised Iran a path to nuclear weapons at a date certain. The agreement, if I'm correct, was made in 2015. It's now 2021. The agreement stated that within 10 years, Iran can legitimately become a nuclear power. And that would mean that in four years from now, Iran will legitimately become a nuclear power.

After the Obama/Biden nuclear agreement was signed, the Supreme Leader stated, "no unlimited access to international inspections." The IAEA gets access to sites by permission only. Iran has 24 days to file an appeal and go before a council. There is no unannounced access. Iran takes the samples for the inspectors. There is no access to Iran's military bases. The maxim was previously "Trust but verify." With Iran, "We cannot trust, and we cannot verify."

The Obama/Biden agreement had no provisions for modifying Iran's behavior. Iran is the number one state sponsor of terrorism; it spreads insurrections across the Middle East. And once Iran becomes a nuclear state, it will likely ignite a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.

What I can't understand is why the Obama/Biden Administration wanted to give Iran hegemony, in the Middle East. They wanted to turn Iran into the axis of the Middle East.

In my opinion, the U.S. cannot be a strategic military partner with Iran. Iran's goals are worlds apart from ours. Iran will export their revolution and will destabilize the world. Iran's ideology seeks to eliminate superpowers and make Shi'a Islam the predominant religion and political system worldwide. Iran seeks to be the leader of all Muslims. They see no need for secular legislation; all is contained in the Quran. Ayatollah Khomeini wanted an Islamic Republic...not a Democratic Republic, and not a Democracy. He considered Democracy to be anathema to Islam. Sacrifice becomes religious expression.

The 1979 revolution had two versions: domestic and export. The domestic version is reactionary. Iran uses repression to consolidate the power of the regime. The export version is revolutionary. Overthrow existing governments and replace them with Islamic Republics. This is "takfir". Iranian leadership is prepared to sacrifice to the last drop of Iranian blood for a confrontation with the West and Israel. This attitude towards sacrifice was demonstrated during the Iran-Iraq War, where they sacrificed millions of Iranians for the sake of Islam. The Iranian leadership considers non-Shia, to be subhuman, or in their own words "animals." They have no hesitation to inflict massive casualties.

Next month, Ebrahim Raisi, AKA, "the butcher" will come to power. Actually, he was selected rather than elected. There is a clerical council in Iran that determines which individuals are eligible to run for office. The winner is pre-determined. Among Raisi's work within the Justice system, he was part of a "Death Commission" that oversaw the secret executions of about seven thousand political prisoners. Amnesty International claimed that Raisi is guilty of crimes against humanity. There is talk that when the Supreme Leader dies, Raisi is a possible successor. There are approximately one million Iranian Revolutionary Guards members, (about a million terrorists), and maybe another 10 million people who are supporters of these terrorists. The bulk of the remaining population does not want the current Iranian government to remain in power. They would like to overthrow this government, but they are reluctant to take personal risks of jail and/or death. When the Iranian government deals with domestic protests, it does so brutally with the use of all government entities such as the police, internal security, intelligence services, courts, etc.

Current actions by Iran include suspension of the nuclear talks until Raisi comes to office. Also, the U.S. discovered an Iranian plot to kidnap Masih Alinejad, an Iranian-American journalist and American citizen residing in Brooklyn, and bring her to Iran. While the U.S. has been negotiating with Iran, Iran began enriching uranium up to 60%. Only countries making nuclear bombs enrich to this level. Raisi's selection to President is a clear indication of the Supreme Leader's decision to make Iranian conduct more extreme regarding foreign policy, their nuclear program, and terror. The Biden Administration has been cozying up to the Palestinians and seems to have put the brakes on further additions to the Abraham Accords. Biden has also reneged on some promises made under the previous administration. This is causing other Arab countries to fear that America does not have their backs regarding Iran. They are reluctant to take risks to further Middle East Peace, and are beginning to hedge their bets. I think that is one of the reasons why countries like Saudi Arabia recently opened communications with Iran; because they are hedging their bets with Iran, as opposed to creating further normalization agreements.

DR. MIR SADAT *

Former Policy Director, U.S. National Security Council

Asia is a body of water and clay, of which Afghanistan forms the heart. The whole of Asia is corrupt, if the heart is corrupt; its decline is the decline of Asia; its rise is the rise of Asia. The body is free only as long as the heart is free. The heart dies with hatred but lives with faith. - Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938).

America's resolve, and that of our allies' and partners', to uphold cherished values will be tested throughout the world. Every global engagement and disengagement causes a ripple of second and third order effects that can take years and decades to stabilize. The situation in Afghanistan is just a harbinger of things to come.

Afghanistan has been described as a great game between great powers – first tsarist Russia and colonial Britain – and later between communist Soviet Union and the leader of the free world, the United States. A few months ago, regarding America's engagement in Afghanistan, I wrote, "let's make sure we don't mess up the end game" – a late Congressman Charlie Wilson quote. And I added my work line, "Let's not mess up the end game in the great game."

I am an American whose parents were born in Afghanistan and sought refuge in the United States of America. I have been privileged to wear our nation's cloth and deploy on behalf of our nation to warzones such as Afghanistan. I have also advocated for many years now to reduce our footprint in Afghanistan, get most of our troops back home, and prevent further expenditures that do not need to be wasted in Afghanistan. The United States wasted a lot of taxpayer dollars that could have been invested more wisely in Afghanistan or could have come back here to build up America's inner cities and rural areas.

We did not do our due diligence in Afghanistan. It is not that it was a failure to try, it is that we failed to be accountable to our taxpayers, and that we did not have a continuous north-star strategy or end-state during our 20-year engagement in Afghanistan.

Similarly, the abrupt decision to bring all the troops home immediately like "thieves in the night" during the Afghan fighting season was absurd. The reduction of forces by 95% was a shock but then to go to zero is insanity. Our 2,500 troops plus the approximately 8,000 NATO allies and partners troops would have been worth it and quite sustainable especially to help us get to those negotiating points that we wanted from the Taliban.

In response to our blundered withdrawal, the Taliban are targeting and killing pilots in the Afghan military. And if you kill the pilots in the Afghan military, who will fly the aircraft that transport troops and provide logistics? Afghanistan's pride and joy are the special commandos because they do not belong to any tribe or group. These soldiers are nationalists. Recently, 100 of them ran out of bullets due to supply and logistics, and thus surrendered. The Taliban just shot them - prisoners of war. It was a message to the Afghan people: We are killing them, and we are coming for your wives and children. This is a direct result of our decisions to pull out contractors in March 2021 which prevented supply, logistics, and air support to the Afghan military.

Since 2014, the U.S.-led coalition played a supportive role, not a combat role in Afghanistan. There are some serious dangers if we do not take certain actions. When the Soviets left Afghanistan in 1989, the Afghan government had 200,000 hard-nosed national security forces. For three years, nobody took over Kandahar, Herat, Jalalabad, Mazar, Kabul, or any other city.

What happened was the Soviet Union and the United States agreed on something called negative symmetry. The Soviets withdrew supply, logistics, and air support for the Afghan government. The Soviet Union also stopped providing oil, rice, milk, water, and ammunition; and the center of gravity faded away but slowly over that three-year period. The Afghan government started to crumble, and the army started making side deals. The Soviets also sidelined the Afghan government when they started bilateral talks with the Afghan government's enemies – the mujahidin. We need to make sure that we do not let history repeat in Afghanistan because the parallels are too close. The coalition must support the Afghan government until a political solution is reached.

What happens and who do we blame when Afghanistan becomes the nest of terrorism again? What happens when al-Qaeda, ISIS, Daesh, or whatever you want to call them group has a foothold in Afghanistan?

The international community has a lowered footprint. And what does that mean for intelligence collection? Our own intelligence community has now joined the chorus of prediction makers because it lacks good intelligence. Suddenly, we hear that the Afghan government is going to collapse within a year, six months, or even 30 days. Testifying on the Hill, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said Afghanistan is not a Vietnam and that it is very different than Vietnam. And then a

* Dr. Sadat's opinions are his own, and do not necessarily reflect the official policy, position, or endorsement of any Department or Agency of the U.S. Government.

couple of days later he said what he sees in Afghanistan is really unnerving. For a top military official for a world power, to waffle too drastically based on provided intelligence is quite embarrassing.

Terrorists have little signatures in signals or electronics traffic or any of that GPS goodie stuff. In this new world, countering terrorism is going to be taxing. By us reducing our footprint in the region, we are going to depend on intelligence methods and collections means that do not work well against such an adversary. Furthermore, we are witnessing intelligence limitations comparable to the aftermath of the 2012 Iraq withdrawal. The question is: Will the Afghan government be up for the fight? Are we going to be the Soviet Union of 1989 and exit with our heads up high or are we going to run for the exits?

We justify our actions by arguing that it is a cheaper trade-off to withdraw in this fashion because we need to focus on China - the bigger threat to the United States. But you know what? Afghanistan also has rare earth minerals that China, Russia, and the United States are competing for around the world and even in space. We may have just given our strategic competitors the ability to outpace us if they can harness those minerals.

Also, China is not coming to the United States and blowing up our buildings or killing our Americans overseas. They are hacking into our systems because they crave technology and information. I am more concerned about what happens to safety and security from terrorist acts in our cities. What happens when our loved ones go overseas somewhere?

We accomplished nothing in Afghanistan. No ceasefire, no political agreements. No military arrangements to mitigate the onset of mayhem and civil war. Instead, we got a beautiful stealthy executed term of surrender and departure under the cover of darkness, while the Taliban successfully executed military solutions to a political conflict.

Worse, the White House comes out and says, "The British went into Afghanistan. They didn't succeed. The Soviets went into Afghanistan, and they didn't succeed. Who says we would succeed?" You know these comparisons to the United States of America are a travesty. Prior invaders went to Afghanistan and raped and pillaged in Afghanistan. They had butterfly bombs that they would drop in Afghanistan to maim kids. They bayonet Afghan women. By saying America cannot do better than the Soviets - we just uplifted the Taliban morale and inadvertently crushed the Afghan security forces.

We have many flaws but every day we strive for a more perfect union. We are a strategic leader on every front around the world and no other country even comes close. Yes, we brought troops home and made them account for mistakes. Did the colonial Brits or Soviets even care about that?

The effort in Afghanistan was not an American occupation. It was an effort of 54 multinational countries plus the United Nations, the European Union, and NATO in Afghanistan. If the world's mightiest militaries could not crush a group of ragtag Taliban, then what do you expect of a nascent military forming after almost 40 years of war? This was the largest coalition in human history.

What did the American presence mean for Afghanistan? After the 9/11 attacks, there was an email that went out by Tamim Ansary, a famous Afghan American writer who came to America decades before the Soviet invasion and he said "when you think about the Taliban, think of Nazis. OK, and when you think about Afghans, think of the Jews." The Taliban hung and lynched people. They killed women in stadiums because they wanted to read. They taught people to kill people who converted to Judaism and Christianity. You know the Buddha statues in Bamiyan were blown up by the Taliban. People hid their paintings and musical instruments. The Taliban took Afghanistan to the stone age.

The Americans came as liberators to Afghanistan. It was like Americans going into Nazi Germany. Little boys dancing in the streets. For the first time music was allowed and freedom of expression. Little Afghan girls dream about having meaningful roles in society.

It was a valiant cause, and we see that stuff there right now. One generation of Afghans grew up under freedom, education, and diverse culture. One generation of Afghans speak fluent English and are sympathetic to western democracy and ideals. Unfortunately, now they are standing vulnerable as the barbarians are at the gateway of Kabul.

The American legacy in Afghanistan is not the same legacy of the Soviet Union or of that colonial Britain. The Taliban may not have welcomed Americans, but most of the Afghans welcomed the Americans and the coalition. We also approved these special immigrant visa for the Afghans who stood shoulder to shoulder with us. These are people that we promised to bring to America but instead, we left them stranded there. Promises were made but not kept. Nobody will judge us on our decision to withdraw. People and history will judge the United States by the appalling manner our withdrawal was planned, communicated, and executed.

The late Charlie Wilson described this way the American support to the mujahidin: "these things happen, they were glorious, and they changed the world. But then we f—ed the end game." I would add that "we have unleashed another great game in this end game."

V. COMMENTATORS' REMARKS

This section of the Report consists of presentations made by the commentators at the Special Forum: "War or Peace in the Middle East: Quo Vadis?" that was held on July 22nd, 2021 via Zoom conferencing. Some updates and revisions were made by the invited participants.

DR. NICHOLAS ROSTOW

Senior Research Scholar, Yale Law School

I'd like to make a few points about the context revealed by the map. One is that it's really not an arc of instability, it's an arc of violence and to some extent chaos. And one of the most important parts of that arc is on the left of the map, which is Colombia and Venezuela. They are connected by the FARC—narco-terrorism. I have in my legal work had a case against the FARC on behalf of victims of narco-terrorism, but the scale of FARC narco-trafficking is astonishing. It controls 70% of the world's cocaine traffic.

The dominance of so many governments in the region, the connection to the Middle East through Hezbollah and other organizations, and its ability to generate revenue on a scale towards most countries' GDP, means that the FARC is growing, with a global reach, supported by virtually unlimited funding.

The second point I'd like to make is that the United States, whether in Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria, never defined what its goals were in any realistic or precise way. So, when we went into Afghanistan, we did not say our goal is to get Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar and send the message 'don't you ever do this again'. No, we went in with virtually unlimited resources. And as one former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan said, when you have unlimited resources, you think you can fix every broken window. Those aren't goals, those aren't strategies. It's nothing. It's waste.

And one of the goals of strategy is to match up and way means, and for 20 years, I would say, we have utterly and completely failed to do that. We need to do that now or else we're going to continue on a course that's going to lead to more retreat and more disappointment. Until American leaders have a candid dialogue with the American people about our international interests and goals and resources to protect and achieve them, respectively, I shall remain more pessimistic than optimistic even though I believe the American people instinctively know what our interests are that need to be defended.

And one area, which is not Middle Eastern, but I raise it here because it's part of the problem, is that the Congress and the people of the United States have not been forced to confront and consider what we would do if China were to use force against Taiwan. There has been no conversation about this. So, you know if China were to do it, the country would be totally unprepared.

If there's another terrorist attack, like 911, that emanates from Afghanistan, I know there will be calls to use nuclear weapons on Afghanistan just from people who are enraged. And that's one of the consequences of not thinking things through and not really having a strategic and realistic view. So I think that the message this program should pass on is to think long and hard about what it is we are trying to achieve in places, and how do we go about doing it in the most cost effective way. And one of the things that is cost effective in my view, is to work with partners and allies to strengthen and create local capabilities to find the Al Shabaabs of this world and the Taliban. But you don't deserve to say, "well, we've done it for 10 years and with that we're cutting off the pipeline." That leads to nowhere.

DR. FORD ROWAN

Chairman of the National Center for Critical Incident Analysis

I appreciate everything I heard this afternoon; it is helpful for understanding the situation in the Middle East and beyond. It is hard to feel upbeat about these comments. These include Zaideman's discussion on the impact of the Iranian religious tension; Pollock's comments about the very remote chance of agreement between Israel and Hamas; Sadat's insights about his family's homeland, and how with U.S. troop withdrawals, we accomplished nothing during COVID, and Feierstein's comments on the impact of the pandemic and climate change, and economic threats. These are all difficulties that will persist.

So, I will try to fill in a different context, focusing on the psychological as well as religious perspectives. I am active on the International Dialogue Initiative, which looks for ways to analyze and overcome the psychological barriers to peace. Many of the IDI fellows are psychologists, psychoanalysts, and academics. Two of our members have spent time in Iranian prisons, and now are free, living in Europe. And we have four from Israel, evenly divided between Israelis and Palestinians.

What I have learned in a dozen years listening to them is that you must look beyond today's anger, hostility, and hatred, and examine where it came from. We need to identify the psychological barriers to peacemaking, establish dialogue, and overcome such things as the transgenerational transmission of trauma. People have been traumatized and re-traumatized by the telling of the stories of the past, which get increasingly vicious and violent as the retelling goes on.

For most Americans, the Crusades are ancient history. Stories of the old battles for Jerusalem are just old stories. But for many who live in the Middle East the Crusades feel like current events. And trying to overcome them is enormously difficult. The traumas of the past cannot be ignored or wished away. The trauma lives on across generations and for centuries.

Trauma fuels social justice conflicts, racial and ethnic hatreds, economic issues including climate change. Racism is not just a problem in the United States; it followed every colonial conquest and continues to plague us all. These ailments not only intrude on diplomatic efforts, but they also compound economic problems as well. We are a global economy and there is growing investment in ESG: environment, social, and governance accountability.

ESG investment accounts now total \$1 trillion in the sustainable investment market, according to Bloomberg Intelligence. \$1 trillion, and it's going to grow in the next dozen years to about \$11 trillion according to their projections—I don't know if that prediction is correct, but, we better look at this, beyond the very important things that were discussed earlier, and think about the economic consequences regarding social justice, climate change, and racism around the world, which was pointed out in the earlier discussions. We have racial problems here in the U.S., we certainly do, but it is endemic around the world.

These psychological, religious, and economic issues are not the ones that are usually emphasized when we have these kinds of diplomatic conversations, and I only bring it up not to be critical, but rather to say it's a larger context and we should think about the psychological impact of this, and not just on us, but on the children that are going to grow up with all of this. I really appreciated Dr. Sadat's comments about his homeland, and about the attitudes of people, and the other underlying comments in several commentaries about some of the reports about atrocities that have happened.

It is not an easy thing to get beyond, but it is worth thinking about. Why? Because what we are doing right now does not seem to be successful. Other dialogues may be useful. As William Faulkner said, "the past is never dead. It is not even past."

VI. QUESTION AND ANSWER DISCUSSION

Selected comments by the contributors to this report during the discussion following the presentations. Some of the invited attendees from the United States and internationally participated during this segment.

AMBASSADOR (RET.) GERALD FEIERSTEIN

Thanks, Yonah. There certainly is a lot to discuss and fundamentally I would come back to my basic point and say that the jury is certainly out in terms of what direction the region is going. To pick up on Dr. Rowan's comments at the end. Certainly these broader issues, economic issues and, what I call the cross-cutting issues: Environment, climate, demography, food security. All of these issues are going to be huge challenges for the region going forward and they're going to be huge challenges for American policy. I think that is certainly where we are right now in terms of trying to reduce tensions and get back into the process of negotiation. You know, I certainly do want to comment on one thing in that the Biden Administration is certainly supportive of the Abraham Accords and I think perhaps David can speak about that more broadly. But it's something we're going to have to confront and try to work through some of these complicated issues. I do agree with Dr. Sadat and I would have preferred, if I were in the administration, that we would have continued our support for the Afghan military to help it move forward. On the other hand, I do understand the position of the Biden Administration, which is 20 years on it's time that the Afghan people stood up and decided for themselves where they want to go and not simply wait for the United States to provide these solutions for them. These are all extremely complicated issues, there are no easy answers to them. I think that is right to try to work through these things diplomatically, which in the long-term, is the only way that it's going to be sustained. I think that we need to start thinking about some of these long-term issues and not simply focus on the immediate problems in front of us.

DR. DAVID POLLOCK

Thanks for a very rich discussion. I really appreciate it. I want to just comment on Afghanistan, in relation to other countries and conflicts in the region in which the United States is involved. I agree completely that we are making a mistake and confusing a gigantic American military and economic and wasteful as he said, presence in Afghanistan. On the one hand, with a very limited continuing security commitment, on the other hand, we're throwing the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak, in a way that is I think a tragic mistake. The only silver lining that I can see is that the withdrawal from Afghanistan may help convince this administration that we can't just withdraw from every place, all at once, and pull our troops out of Iraq and Syria at the same time. And so, it may be that, and I hope this is the case, that we will end up at least in those two other countries maintaining a very small but very important military footprint in cooperation with our local allies, and not simply pack up and leave them flat.

At the same time, look, I wanted to say that when I was in graduate school, I learned about very long term cycles in American history and foreign policy, alternating cycles of inward looking and outward looking American policy, interventionism, and isolationism. And I think we're just up against a gigantic tidal wave right now. There is reaction against the 20 previous years of major American commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan and other Middle Eastern countries and elsewhere in the world. There is a very strong tendency in both of our major political parties, the media, in Congress, and in American public opinion to say, "to heck with all that, we're just going to concentrate on problems here at home" and turn inward. So, all of us who are interested in fine tuning that way, may be the best that we can do. But, we need to think really hard about what arguments to present to people who are not interested or not convinced that any of these foreign commitments are really relevant or worthwhile. We need to convince them that a short-sighted reaction against the previous 20 years is not going to be good for the U.S. It's just the way it was after WWI or just the way it was after Vietnam, or just the way it could well be today, we might end up paying a much higher price for it somewhere later down the road. If we just maintain a modest steady commitment now, I think it would much better serve our friends and ourselves.

DR. WAYNE ZAIDEMAN

I'd like to add a few things about the Israeli-Palestinian issue. I appreciate everything David said. One of the questions I have concerns the prelude to the current Gaza-Israel war. There was an announcement of presidential elections, between Fatah and Hamas and then it was cancelled because presumably Fatah knew that they would lose to Hamas if the election took place. Even though Hamas may not be all that popular among the voting public, it seems like Fatah and Mahmud Abbas are even less popular.

What in the current situation has changed that would indicate that there is any possibility of a negotiated settlement? There is Hamas and Fatah; neither one trusts the other or shares each other's objectives. Who does the U.S. deal with? If we were to reach a deal with HAMAS, will Fatah, or the other terror groups accept the agreement? It would be the same thing if we reached an agreement with Fatah. What is the solution?

The other question I have is historical; Arafat and Fatah were in Tunisia, and they basically became irrelevant because they didn't have borders with Israel. With the Oslo Accords, Israel and the United States brought them back to relevance, and set Arafat up in Gaza and the West Bank. Arafat declared to his audience in Arabic: "The Oslo Accords is no more than the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah," which means that as soon as the Palestinians get stronger and more powerful militarily and diplomatically, and gain sympathy and public opinion, they will abrogate the Oslo agreement. Under the Trump Administration, the U.S. basically had made the Palestinian Authority irrelevant and took away their veto power on any kind of normalization between Israel and Arab nations. This strategy worked, and as a result we have the Abraham Accords.

Once the Arab countries saw that we were again funding the P.A., we announced our intention to re-open a consulate for them in Jerusalem, we gave them an infusion of capital, and they saw we were re-entering the Iran nuclear agreement.... then the Arab countries that were considering joining the Abraham Accords, began hedging their bets.

The definition of insanity is to keep trying the same thing over and over again and expect a different result. Every time we've tried to mediate an agreement between the Palestinians and Israelis, it ends up failing; it ends up with another Intifada, even more violent than the previous one, and it depletes the United States' prestige in the world. I'm not optimistic at all about what the Biden Administration is trying to do now. Maybe you could comment on that.

The former U.S. administration went against the long-held U.S. State Department assumptions that there can be no peace agreements between Arab countries and Israel without first signing a peace agreement with the Palestinians. The previous administration made the P.A. irrelevant and took away their veto power over the normalization agreements.

It should be understood that the Islamic Extremists believe that our desire to negotiate, compromise and make concessions makes us look weak in their eyes. They only respect power. It is noble to continue discussions with the P.A., (peace is always desired) but we shouldn't appear desperate and weak. We hope that someday the Palestinians will get tired of their leadership and replace them with more pragmatic leadership who will be willing to make peace, accept Israel as a sovereign Jewish state, and will disavow the long held demand that Palestine will be "from the river to the sea," which means "no Israel." Only after this happens will there be true and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinian people.

DR. DAVID POLLOCK

Well, just really briefly, I understand a lot of those points. Yet, I would say two things: As far as Hamas is concerned, I agree with you. I don't think there's any prospect of anything more than at best a long-term ceasefire with Hamas. They are not moderates, they are not going to be moderates, and they are not going to accept peace with Israel. Unfortunately, that's the reality. But the Palestinian Authority under Abbas, or his potential successor is a different story. There hasn't been an Intifada under Abbas where there was under Arafat. And I don't think there will be, and in fact is actually under the surface, despite all the rhetoric and tensions and the real issues of occupation, and terrorism that continue, there is a lot of cooperation between the Palestinian Authority on security, economic, and other issues.

Number two is whatever else we might or might not try to do, the Palestinians aren't going away. There are millions of Palestinians who are an issue for Israel, and therefore indirectly for us, and for neighboring countries. It is true, I agree with you that this is not the central issue in the region, any more than it ever was. But it is an issue, and it cannot be indefinitely, just pushed, into the corner. It has repercussions inside Israel, and for other neighboring countries, and for the United States in terms of our own values, our credibility, and our alliances. And so, just trying to imagine a future in which there is no hope at all for the Palestinians is one that I think does not serve our interests or Israel's interests...It's a continuing story. I don't see a final status solution on the horizon that will bring real peace for some of the reasons that you said. But I do think it's important to try and improve the situation on the ground and keep the door open for peace, someday. The long term trend on the Arab-Israeli conflict is actually a positive one. Peace with Egypt, peace with Jordan, peace with other Arab countries, agreements with the Palestinians, short of, very far short of real peace, but still agreements with the Palestinians. This is a conflict that, even 40 years ago people thought was absolutely intractable, and it's not. It's very difficult. And it's very, let's say, slow to heal, but the long term trajectory is actually positive.

DR. NICHOLAS ROSTOW

When I worked at the U.S. mission to the UN, where James Baker III, the Special Representative and Secretary-General for the Western Sahara, presented the Security Council with essentially his plan for bringing the conflict between Morocco and Algeria to an end. And he ran into the then Irish ambassador to the UN. He responded to Baker by saying: "Yes it costs \$500 million a year for the UN peacekeepers in the Western Sahara working on these issues, but these are issues we just have to work for. And if it costs \$500 million a year to keep people from fighting, that cost is worth it." It's, not a happy solution, but it's not the worst solution. And Baker walked out of the room and promptly resigned.

PROFESSOR YONAH ALEXANDER

Very interesting. I want to turn it over to Professor Don Wallace, but before I do just to mention to David, that when I began to deal with this particular issue, I recall, that on October 12th 2000, we organized an event, also through the ILI, on the "Middle East Peace Process: Quo Vadis". At the time I had Ambassador Phillip Wilcox, Jr. from the State Department, our colleague and friend Jon Alterman, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). This was 20 years ago. The bottom line question to you: "Are we going to meet next in 20 years again to talk about the Middle East Peace Process: Quo Vadis?"

PROFESSOR DON WALLACE, JR

Well, I am a Pollyanna, but this has been an overwhelmingly factual panel. Gloom and doom aside, I think gloom is probably justified; doom is never justified. I do think there's the decision Afghanistan seems mistaken and we're putting that to one side. There is a note of hope and optimism. I mean, Nick is quite right, you just have to keep on working. I think that's the American faith, to be practical, and can do. I think one thing has been forgotten is that to some extent the Biden Administration is working itself out of a hole. I think the last four years were not exemplary and David suggested the last twenty haven't been perfect. So, they said that they are realists and have some optimism. You've got to bear that in mind. Secondly, I think China does loom awfully large in the minds of many Americans and while it shouldn't screw us up and intellectually, paralyze us, I think it is a problem. And I'll put to one side details like climate change. I think, I cannot agree with Wayne on Iran at all because that to me is the example of how not to approach things with all respect. To just endlessly state the problems and I don't dispute the reality of them and then say, "oye." That cannot be the approach. You've got to be a bit of a Pollyanna, you've got to be like Nick, and you've got to work things along. As for 20 years from now Yonah, I would suggest you have to have a perfect diet and do a great deal of exercise every day. You can be with us then. I think we should keep coming back to this, not in 20 years, but we should do this every year or two and see what happens. I do think that one of the great strengths of America has been our optimism. It's not just an optimism, it's rooted in reality. We are both realists and optimists at our best, and I think we just have to keep that attitude. And I think someone suggested, it was probably Mir, what's the alternative to the U.S.? There is no alternative, with all respect to my wife who is British, and I don't entirely accept Mir's characterization of the United Kingdom. There's a lot of truth there by the way, but I agree we should not compare ourselves to them or to all these other people. And I don't think we do. And I think we have to congratulate Yonah. Yonah was my client and I've known him for a long time. Despite, all sorts of annoyances and frustrations, Yonah never gives up. And I don't think we should either and I don't think we will. So, Yonah I think you're to be congratulated. And, you know, keep up the work and keep pulling us together. And I think Ambassador Feierstein probably captured the sort of right mix, you know, the negatives and the positives. You know, keep your eye on the ball. Accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. I think we just have, sort of an attitudinal thing, as Ford was suggesting, and I think we just keep at it. Anyway, so Yonah thank you very much.

VII. ABOUT THE EDITORS

PROFESSOR YONAH ALEXANDER is the Director of the International Center for Terrorism Studies (at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies) and the Inter-University Center for Legal Studies (at the International Law Institute). He is a former Professor and Director of Terrorism Studies at the State University of New York and the George Washington University. Professor Alexander also held academic appointments elsewhere such as American, Catholic, Chicago, Columbia, and Georgetown's Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). He has published over 100 books and founded five international journals. His personal collections are housed at the Hoover Institution Library and Archives at Stanford University.

PROFESSOR DON WALLACE, JR., Yale University BA, Harvard University, LLB, is a Professor of Law at Georgetown University as well as Chairman of the International Law Institute. He is a U.S. delegate to UNCITRAL, vice president of the UNIDROIT Foundation, a member of the American Law Institute, and the former chairman of the International Law Section at the American Bar Association. He is also the author and co-author of several books and articles.

VIII. ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

AMBASSADOR STUART EIZENSTAT is a partner at Covington and Burling LLP, where he heads the firm's international practice. In October 2020, President Trump appointed him Expert Advisor on Holocaust Issues at the U.S. Department of State. During a decade and a half of public service in three U.S. administrations, Ambassador Eizenstat held a number of key senior positions, including chief White House domestic policy adviser to President Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) and U.S. Ambassador to the European Union. Much of the interest in providing belated justice for victims of the Holocaust and other victims of Nazi tyranny during World War II was the result of his leadership as Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State on Holocaust-Era Issues. Ambassador Eizenstat has received seven honorary doctorate degrees from universities and academic institutions. He has been awarded high civilian awards from the governments of France (Legion of Honor), Germany, and Austria. He is a Phi Beta Kappa, cum laude graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and of Harvard Law School.

AMBASSADOR (RET.) GERALD FEIERSTEIN retired from the U.S. Foreign Service in May 2016 after a 41-year career. At the time of his retirement, Feierstein held the personal rank of Career Minister. Over the course of his career, he served in nine overseas postings, including three tours of duty in Pakistan, as well as tours in Saudi Arabia, Oman, Lebanon, Jerusalem, and Tunisia. In 2010, President Obama appointed Feierstein U.S. Ambassador to Yemen, where he served until 2013. From 2013 until his retirement, Feierstein was Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs. In addition to his career-long focus on the Near East and South Asia, Feierstein also played a prominent role in developing and implementing State Department policies and programs to counter violent extremism. As Deputy Coordinator and Principal Deputy Coordinator in the State Department's Counter-Terrorism bureau, Feierstein led the development of initiatives to build regional networks to confront extremist groups as well as to counter terrorist financing and promote counter-terrorism messaging. He continued to focus on defeating terrorist groups through his subsequent tours as Deputy Chief of Mission in Pakistan and as Ambassador to Yemen. Feierstein joined the Middle East Institute in October 2016 as a Senior Fellow and the Director of a new Center for Gulf Affairs. In November 2018, the MEI Board of Directors named him as Senior Vice President and director of the Institute's Policy Center.

DR. DAVID POLLOCK is a Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and Director of Fikra Forum, a Mideast policy blog for serious dialogue with regional experts and activists. He previously served 25 years in the State Department, including five years as Senior Advisor for the Broader Middle East and four years as a Member of the Secretary's Policy Planning Staff. In that capacity, he was officially commended for writing a memo to the Secretary in May 2001, four months BEFORE 9/11, warning that "the U.S. can no longer live with Taliban support for terrorism." He is currently completing a policy paper on how the Biden Administration can pursue its human rights and democracy agenda in tandem with other Mideast priorities.

DR. WAYNE ZAIDEMAN is an Adjunct Professor, teaching Political Islam at Florida State University. As a Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Zaideman worked Middle Eastern counterintelligence/counterterrorism cases. He was an Assistant Legal Attaché Tel Aviv (covering Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Jordan), and Legal Attaché Amman (covering Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon). Following retirement from the FBI Zaideman worked for MITRE Corporation for 5 years supporting the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. He then worked for Lockheed Martin Corporation for 2 years supporting the Defense Intelligence Agency. Zaideman holds a B.A. (English/Communications) and a J.D. (Law) from DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois; and an M.A. (Near Eastern Studies) and a PhD (Near Eastern Languages and Literature) from New York University, New York, N.Y.

DR. MIR SADAT has more than twenty-five years of experience in private industry, higher education, and the U.S. government. He most recently co-authored “U.S. Space Policies for the New Space Age: Competing on the Final Economic Frontier.” Mir is a nonresident senior fellow in the Brent Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security at the Atlantic Council. In 2021, Sadat also founded and has served as editor-in-chief of Space Force Journal focused on lifting up the unheard voices of diverse thinkers and practitioners interested in spacepower and the Space Force. Previously, Mir was detailed to the U.S. National Security Council (NSC), where, as a policy director, he led interagency coordination on defense and space policy issues. In that role, he supported the establishment of both the U.S. Space Force and U.S. Space Command in recognition that space has also evolved into a warfighting domain similar to land, air, sea, and cyber. While on the NSC, Sadat also prioritized national security decisions involving U.S. civil space and the commercial space sector. He led multiple efforts to reduce U.S. risk and critical dependencies in U.S. civil space and the commercial industrial base on foreign nations who view America as an adversary. Sadat pushed for innovative U.S. policies to power space vehicles with modular nuclear reactors, secure the space supply chain, improve strategic messaging for space, establish norms and behavior in space, and to prevail in a new era of strategic technical competition. Before his White House assignment, Sadat had spent more than 10 years in various assignments within the U.S. national security enterprise. He is a naval officer with intelligence and space qualifications. And in his preceding two naval assignments, he served as a space policy strategist with the chief of naval operations in the Pentagon and as a space operations officer with the U.S. Tenth Fleet/U.S. Fleet Cyber Command. Sadat has also served as a cultural advisor to two Hollywood productions—The Kite Runner and Charlie Wilson’s War. In addition, he has previously deployed to overseas contingency operations in the Middle East and Afghanistan, where he served as a strategic advisor to two International Security Assistance Force commanding generals. He has a PhD from Claremont Graduate University and has taught at various universities in California and Washington, DC. Sadat has written extensively on Space, U.S. national security, Afghanistan, South Asia, and the broader Middle East.

IX. ABOUT THE COMMENTATORS

DR. NICHOLAS ROSTOW is a Senior Partner with the firm of Zumpano, Patricios & Popok PLLC in New York, NY. He also is a Senior Research Scholar at the Yale Law School. Dr. Rostow has held numerous academic and government positions throughout his career, including the Charles Evans Hughes Visiting Chair of Government and Jurisprudence at Colgate University, The Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs at the State University of New York, Senior Policy Adviser to the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Counsel and Deputy Staff Director to the House Select Committee on Military/Commercial Concerns with the People’s Republic of China, Special Assistant to Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush for National Security Affairs, and Legal Adviser to the National Security Council under Colin Powell and Brent Scowcroft. He earned his B.A., summa cum laude, from Yale in 1972, and his Ph.D. in history and J.D., also from Yale. His publications are in the fields of diplomatic history, international law, and issues of U.S. national security and foreign policy.

DR. FORD ROWAN is chairman of the National Center for Critical Incident Analysis which was formed at the National Defense University after 9/11. Prior to that he was a news reporter for 20 years, including at NBC News and as host of the PBS program, International Edition. When he was the national security correspondent for NBC News, Rowan covered combat in the Middle East. He is an attorney and earned a doctorate in public administration; his dissertation was *Defending Against Bioterrorism: Lessons of the 2001 Anthrax Attack*. He is author of *Broadcast Fairness: A Reappraisal of Fairness Doctrine and Equal Time Rule*. In 2006 he co-authored *Weathering the Storm: Leading Your Organization Through a Pandemic*. Currently Rowan is a member of the Advisory Board of the Bioethics Institute at Johns Hopkins University and has been active in responding to COVID-19. He is a founder of the International Dialogue Initiative which identifies psychological barriers to peacemaking and encourages dialogue between nations and ethnic and religious factions. He has been involved in meetings in Jerusalem, Istanbul, Ankara, Berlin, Belfast, Oxford, Vienna, and Geneva. In addition to the IDI meetings, Rowan’s own consulting work has involved issues in China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Venezuela, Mexico, Tanzania, France, the UK, Ireland, Spain, Thailand, Israel, and Canada.

