



PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

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The New America Foundation
“Examining the Next Year on the Israeli-Palestinian Front”
2200 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington DC
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The New America Foundation invited **Mustafa Barghouti, Daniel Levy, and Aaron David Miller** to discuss where Israeli-Palestinian relations are now, what we can anticipate in the next 6 months, and what is and is not possible with the new U.S. administration. Mustafa Barghouti is a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and former Presidential candidate. Daniel Levy is the Director of the Middle East Policy Initiative at the New America Foundation and Prospects for Peace Initiative at the Century Foundation. He is a former Senior Policy Adviser in the Israeli Prime Minister's office. Aaron David Miller served under six Secretaries of State, most recently as senior adviser on Arab-Israeli negotiations. Introductions were made by **Patrick Doherty**, Deputy Director of the American Strategy Program at the New America Foundation.

Mustafa Barghouti began his lecture by explaining how the Israeli policy of fragmenting Palestinian territory has undermined peace. He traced the dissolution of Palestinian settlements since 1947 and argued that if this policy continues until Palestinians are left with only a “cluster of ghettos,” the two-state solution will become a distant dream. Peace can only be made between two functioning and viable states. **The only solution to end the conflict is to rebuild democratic institutions among Palestinians.**

Daniel Levy warned that the Bush administration should avoid the failures of the Clinton era by not pushing for an “ill-prepared last minute dash” to the peace before his term is over. Another American failure will have devastating consequences. In addition, neither Olmert nor Abbas have the legitimacy to sign such an agreement and sell it to their constituents. He recommended that the US help **lock in some of the parameters being negotiated between Israel and Palestinians and to create a structure to keep the option of peace alive while preventing further deterioration.** The conflict in the region pays too heavy a price to our image, to our ability to lead alliances, and acts as a gift to our adversaries. In addition, because the US faces an inevitable decline, it is in Israel's best interest to use US power while it is relatively strong.

Aaron David Miller warned that any ceasefire agreements made is ultimately a road to nowhere until Palestinians can unify their government. The recent Syria-Israel talks will have only limited results because Syria is motivated by a desire not to be globally isolated Olmert by his desire to save some political power, rather than to actually create a sustainable agreement.

Miller warned that **“the primary threat to America a conflict-ridden Mid East region that the US is trapped in.”** Miller recommends that the next President pay attention to the failures of past policies and make peace a national priority. In regard to US relations to Israel, Miller stated that while it is beyond question that no US President will ever “sell out” Israeli interests, the next

President should consider how an exclusive relationship with Israel harms US interests. It has stripped the US of its flexibility, has caused us to “say yes to too many bad Israeli decisions and has prevented us from speaking to a friend as we should when it comes to bad behavior.” Ultimately, we need a special relationship with Israel, but it should not be an exclusive one.

During Q&A, **Barghouti** argued the Palestinians are facing a disastrous humanitarian crisis and a government that borders on illegality. **The only way to end the division among Palestinians is promote democracy, to hold elections, and to accept the results.** When asked whether Hamas will ever accept a two-state solution, Barghouti reminded the audience that like any party, Hamas has differences among its members. Now with the division, the extremist portion prevails, but with a unity government, moderates prevail. “We reached a crucial point, where **we don’t have time to wait to the next elections. If more time passes, and the policy continues, we might not have the possibility of a two-state solution, which would be terrible.**”