

David Makovsky | The Biden Middle East Visit An Assessment and a Look Ahead

– Welcome back, everybody. It is my great pleasure and honour to have a friend, David Makovsky, the Ziegler Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations present to us tonight. He's also an adjunct professor in Middle East Studies at John Hopkins University, Paul Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. In 2013 to '14, he worked in the office of the US Secretary of State, serving as a senior advisor to the Special Envoy of Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations. David, thank you so much for joining us tonight, it is an honour and a pleasure to have you. We are looking forward to hearing about the Biden Middle East visit and your assessment and the look ahead. So thank you to you. Thank you, Carly. And yeah, we are looking forward to hearing what you have to say, over to you.

– Thank you. Thank you very much, Wendy, for having me and for organising this at Lockdown. Thank you, Carly. I look forward to our conversation. I'll just start by making remarks now and then we'll take it from there. Look, the Biden trip took out a lot of attention that this was his first trip to the Middle East since becoming president. The last year and a half, the presidency has kind of been shaped, I think, internationally by the three Cs is COVID, China and climate, and now you, the Ukrainian War, of course, a lot of economic issues domestically so, but the first foray into the Middle East and the whole element of how to deal with Saudi Arabia after the Khashoggi affair four years ago, the horrific killing of the Saudi journalist, columnist, that added a whole dimension as well. So the trip, just in terms of basic numbers was July 13th, sorry about that, July 13th to 16th. And like I said, it was first since going to the region since taking office. He went first to Israel, he met with Abbas in Bethlehem, and then he went to Saudis where they discussed a range of issues, the six GCC states, the six Gulf states plus three, that is, of course, Iraq, Egypt and Jordan. So this was his first really intensive engagement in the Middle East with Israeli leaders and Palestinians and with the Arab leaders as well. The Israel part of the trip had, I think, different elements. First, there was a way to showcase Biden's bond to the Jewish state, and really the Israeli public's love for Biden. He's the only prime minister of Israel, I mean the only president of the United States who could say that he knew Golda Meir in the 1970s. No Israeli leader can say that. There's no Israeli around today who had that interaction. He loves telling the story, and he told it more than once on the trip that he got his first briefing as the sec, as first trip abroad was to Israel, his wife was killed and a child in a horrific car accident. He's 29 years old, it's the eve of the 1973 war, and he says he gets this briefing and he's horrified by what Golda Meir says is the Egyptian plans for a war in '73. And she sees that he's very agitated, and she said, "It's going

to be okay, senator, we have a secret weapon." And he said after that briefing, "Can you tell me what that secret weapon is?" And she says, "Damn, senator, we have nowhere else to go." And I've heard him tell this story, I think, dozens of times. But that I think is Biden, he's a more of a visceral politician. you'll see the picture on your right, on him getting down on his knee, trying to talk, engage. And then he kisses these Holocaust survivors. He kind of tears up. He's of that generation of Americans who lived through the epic events of the 20th century, born during World War II, he was a boy when the State of Israel was born. And the Cold War, the '67 war, the '73 war, the 9/11, but the enormity of the Holocaust, taking his grandchildren to Dachau when they become teenagers, that's all part of it. He's believed the world owes the Jews a state. And at a time that Zionism is under assault worldwide, he gets off the plane and like almost the first thing he says is, "You know, you don't have to be Jewish to be a Zionist." He truly believes that he's proud of that. The question is, are there people who will follow him in the Democratic Party that will give that same sense of visceral love for the country that he is able to convey. I think also a piece of the visit to Israel was the first meeting with the new caretaker, Yair Lapid, who had just taken office, Naftali Bennet had resigned. These are two leaders that really represent the political centres of their respective governments. They are very aware that to get legislation passed, you have to try to work across the aisle. They each have people more to their left and their people more to their right, but I think they are big believers, both of them, that a liberal democracy is an asset and not a liability. And I think that they both support two states and the whole idea of regional integration in the Middle East, which we'll talk about. The Palestinian side was a little bit of a different, and I should say just on the issue of Iran, which maybe we'll get back to also, I'll just say on that one, they didn't make, I would say the talks in Vienna have been deadlocked. It's very possible the Iranians have overplayed their hands, we can discuss. And then maybe in the conversation with Carly, we'll discuss that more in greater depth.

But I think that he told Channel 12, which is Israel's most popular newscast network, when he was asked directly by Yonit Levi, the anchorwoman, he said, "Will the US attack Iran if it marches towards a nuclear weapon?" And he said, "As a last resort, yes." And that I think was something the Israeli public hadn't heard a president say. The actual element of the more conventional terms that Obama used it too in it what's called the Jerusalem Declaration. He did say, "You know, we're going to use all elements of American power to stop Iran." So I think on the Iran issue, there was some shift, but I don't think it was dramatic at this point. On the Palestinian issue, I think it was one of the few visits where the Palestinians, this Palestinian issue was not front and centre. As a matter of fact, with Yonit Levi on that Channel 12 interview that was taped the day before at the White House before he stepped on the plane and broadcast when he arrived, he said, "Look, there'll be peace with the Palestinians after

Israel is respected as an equal in the Middle East and then there could be some sort of accommodation." That's a shift in American policy from usually saying, "No, the Palestinian issue is the gateway. And only after you solve that, then you get to the Arab state." The Abraham Accords has shifted that around, but here's Biden, who's a Democrat, not a Republican and he said that, and that's something that I don't think even Trump said, but it is remarkable. And even in Bethlehem, he reiterated support for two states, but he said the time is not now, which is pretty dramatic for, again, for an American president to say that. There was some aid to hospitals that was called the East Jerusalem Hospital Network. He stopped at Augusta Victoria, and he had wanted to open up a consulate, reopen the consulate Jerusalem, but there was opposition in Israel. So he made this visit to East Jerusalem to humanitarian site instead. But I think his message, it seemed like to the Palestinians was, see how you can make the Abraham Accords work for you. As I keep saying, this should not be a bypass rope, but a bridge. But the Palestinians had opposed it and therefore, they are putting it as an either or proposition has not exactly been something that's been popular in the Arab world. And we'll talk about that more, we talk about Arab integration.

Now, what about like his trip to Jeddah? What were the objectives? Well, he sees the Great Power Competition. He wants to avert further regional gains by China, in particular, also Russia. He wanted to refute Arab fears that the US plans to leave the region. On the bilateral US-Saudi relationship, it's clear he wanted to increase oil production to ease dependency on Russian energy in Europe, but also, of course, to lower gas prices for Americans on the eve of the midterm elections. He wanted to reengage the Saudis after four years of enmity in the wake of the post-Khashoggi killing. This was not easy given that he had said some very tough words on the campaign that they were a pariah and that did not endear him to the Saudis, of course. The issue of Saudi-Israeli relations, which we will discuss to finalise this area near the Red Sea, actually, it's where the '67 war broke out with the Nasser's blockade near these Red Sea islands a place called Tiran. They were Egyptian in those days, now Egypt is very dependent on Saudi Arabia for assistance. They have over 100 million Egyptians and Egypt has been supporting that, is subsidising that. But Egypt has asked for a favour saying historically, they see the Tiran and Sanafir islands as Saudi. So the US agree, I mean Egypt agreed to give it back. But the Saudis said that we don't want these peacekeepers from the Camp David Accords. We weren't part of the Camp David Accords, we weren't part of that effort to blockade Israel. And so it seems like there would be a quid pro quo, open the airspace though for Israeli planes to fly over Saudi Arabia. And right now, Israel could fly in a corridor through Saudi Arabia to the Emirates in Bahrain in the wake of the Abraham Accords, the Saudis gave permission. Indian Air allows, there's been a carve out for Indian Air to fly from India to Israel, but no El Al could fly to India or other places in Asia through Saudi airspace, which makes longer and more expensive flights. There have

been talked about opening doors for the Hajj, that's the Arab-Israeli Muslim pilgrims that they should have now direct charter flights, Saudi-Israel flight, and that was another hope. This issue of an air regional defence structure, which we'll talk about, the whole issue of food security arrangements in the wake of the Ukraine situation for Egypt and Jordan, a huge percentage of their wheat comes from Russia and Ukraine. So here too, the Gulf has been subsidising these countries and there's going to be some effort to expedite wheat shipments. And now that it looks like Russia and Ukraine agreed to some understanding here is also helpful. Here's the whole Iraqi electricity grid. Right now, Iraq has been linked to the Iranian grid, and now they're going to be linked to the Gulf-Arab grid, which the United States is very relieved about. There's also been a 15, 16-week truce in Yemen that the US wanted extended. So how did it go? I mean, so this was the first bump seen around the world between Biden and Khashoggi. It seems that Biden, under the name of COVID, didn't want to shake MBS's hand 'cause he did shake other hands in Israel, but this was something that was seen as short of a handshake, but I think it made the front page of every newspaper in the world. He had a closed meeting with MBS, Mohammed bin Salman, the ruler of Saudi Arabia, though it's officially, if it's his father, but his father is having some really, I think, cognitive decline at this age. It was high political stakes for the president because people to his left wanted accountability on Khashoggi and other Americans wanted to hear about the oil prices. Some was wondering what was going to happen on Iran. There were also bilateral meetings with all these Arab leaders. None of them have been yet invited to the White House. Now it's clear that, and you know what, I'll come back to the regional integration in a second.

So how did it go? I think as one Arab ambassador said to me, "Look David, where could all these people are telling us from the Pentagon, 'We're not leaving the Middle East. We hear that the same number of troops are now there that there were before.'" It's since the Carter years. We tell them we're not deprioritizing the Middle East. But the Arabs don't believe American officials, 'cause they hear the three Cs, COVID, climate, China, they don't hear about the Middle East. They hear American politicians every day saying that America's energy self-sufficient, we don't need the Middle East anymore. So they think the US is walking away and will leave them alone. And that might have been one of the impetuses for the Abraham Accords to, to find a way to say, "If America's retrenching from the Middle East, maybe we got to draw closer to Israel." Biden didn't try to refute that. He said, quote, "We will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China, Russia, or Iran and will seek to build on this moment with the active principle of American leadership." So he's trying to assure them that America, we're here to stay in the Middle East and to try to allay these fears. How did that go over? You could ask. I mean you have to ask the Arab states, but I think Biden could not have been more emphatic by using the strategic argument saying, "America cannot allow

this vacuum."

On the US-Saudi relationship, it's still unresolved, but the prices are likely could decline. We've seen a, I think the Brent barrel has gone from like 120 to 103. How much of that is because of Saudi or how much of that is because of fears of recession? And when there's fears of recession and there's no sense of big growth in America, there's always a cut in oil production. And, of course, I think there's the re-engagement with Khashoggi on, I mean, excuse me, with MBS, in the wake of Khashoggi, of course. I would say on the Saudi-Israel part, there was a lot of excitement in Israel that this is always the big enchilada, the big fish has been, Saudi, Israel, and the deal had been known to the Israeli public. These islands go back and the peacekeepers are withdrawn. Although I think that there will be cameras and all sorts of high tech to make sure that there's not another '67 war. I don't think anyone's expecting that anyway. And, in return, Israelis can fly over Saudi airspace. But the Saudis did not mention Israel in the announcement. The Saudi announcement was a tweet by the Civil Aviation Authority, just that they're opening the skies, but no mention of Israel. I personally didn't think they would anyway, but I think Israelis were hoping there would be an explicit mention of Israel per se. The Hajj flights from the charter flights from Israel to Saudi will be discussed, but there is no announcement. I do think that Biden got excited about the regional cooperation issue, which he said, "New energy projects linking the region, a new free trade deal, investments between neighbours, like the Saudi investments in Egypt and Jordan. The more we build these connections, the more we'll see the benefits that return to our peoples and will grow." I think he is excited that like he's always seen the Middle East as a battlefield. He said that like, "I'm always here and that Americans are in combat somewhere, but I'm coming to the region for the first time since 9/11, the Americans are in combat nowhere." The Yemen truce talks were extended, there was \$1 billion on US funding on food security and also the Emiratis, Iraq signed this integration into the electricity grid. So I think these were some of the things. I think for those who wanted to hear MBS say, "We will dramatically ramp up oil production," they didn't get that. And they are also not just part of OPEC, but something called OPEC+, the Emirates are part of that and so is Russia. And some people saw MBS's hedging. The Saudis did not message what Biden messaged that he raised the Khashoggi issue with MBS. So I don't think the American public did not get a dramatic statement. But I think what it is it's a way of re-engaging after years of cutoff. And clearly, if the Abraham Accords is going to go to the next level, you're going to want the Saudis in there. So what does this all mean? you could say, "Okay, there's not a home run," as we would say in America, maybe not in Europe for on oil and you wish the Saudis, for their media, did not, was more explicit about Israel. But I think it's interesting to say like when the Arabs and Israelis use the word regional integration that Biden uses, I think they do mean different things. What Israel wants is a regional security architecture under

CENTCOM. CENTCOM is the US military command and it's actually based in Tampa, Florida. And it's one of the most dramatic developments. The media doesn't cover it 'cause you can't go inside CENTCOM, it's a military installation. But here you've got, for the first time, you have Arabs and Israelis sitting together, planning, sharing intelligence, doing things like looking at the same radar screens for drones and other air defence. They're engaged in a variety of ways in a way that was unthinkable. Just a few years ago, Israel was in EUCOM, that's the European Command. Arabs were in the CENTCOM, and they weren't sitting together. Now they're sitting together and I think it's even led to some Israeli military visits around the Gulf because now they're directly sitting with their Gulf and Arab counterparts. It's a revolution, it's an earthquake, and it's something the Arabs benefit from as well 'cause they're worried about Iran like Israel is. But this sharing, this coordination of radar systems, all these things are going on, but the difference is that Israel would like to publicise that. I see the defence ministers and also in an election period, he has his own party defence minister, Benny Gantz, and publicised, I mean like a public declaration of this. Their view is we don't want to be seen as the tip of Israel's spear against Iran. We're happy to work quietly behind closed doors via CENTCOM, but we want to avoid anything of public ties. And I think that's the real shift that they're willing to work with Israel. But when I was in Abu Dhabi, an Emirati official said, "David, the difference is that Israel's 1,000 kilometres from here and they've got the strongest military in the Middle East. We are maybe of the strongest air force among the Arab states, but we are on Iran's border and we've become Israel's best friend and we are concerned an Israeli attack on Iran is going to lead to an Iranian attack on the Emirates." So they don't want anything that smacks of an anti-Iranian alliance. Now on the economic piece here, I think there is a desire for more economic integration among the Arabs. And maybe I'll stop the screen share for now just so you'll see my face. But I think the difference is that they are very much of the view that these oil countries, when they keep hearing that America's doing its fracking and it's energy independent and maybe doesn't need the Middle East anymore, it has led the Arabs to look beyond oil wondering, you have all this technology, you have all these alternative sources of energy. how do we as Arabs diversify and digitise our economy? And that's where a startup nation comes in. As one Gulf official said, "David, we don't know what the United States could do, but we know there's one country that cannot leave the Middle East, that's the Israelis 'cause they live here. So they can help us in this digitization and in this diversification away from oil." You saw when what's called the I2U2 meeting, a Zoom session with Biden, I2 meaning Israel and India both starting with an I, U2, US and UAE discussing what are four-way economic projects we could do together? as the Emiratis always say to me, "David Israel's the startup nation, but we're the scale-up nation. We have markets all over Asia and Africa and we could do a lot of good things together."

So it will be interesting where these kind of permutations come together are the Arab states also can, I guess the last big point I will make, 'cause I want to keep to my time limit, I got three minutes to go, is that what's fascinating here is that the new normalizers, the Emirates and the others, they could create political space for the old normalizers. For Egypt and Jordan, it's largely been an intelligence relationship where the military share information about Hamas and Islamic Jihad and ISIS and Al-Qaeda. But the Emirates have a different view. Their view is oh yeah, all that's good, but we can go way beyond that. Maybe let's start in Jordan, look at they have a massive desert, a huge solar field that could provide electricity for everybody, all of its neighbours. Israel could provide desalinated water 'cause Israel has all these desal facilities. And so when Jordan's, sees the Emirates are willing to pay and to back these projects, Egypt say, "Hey, we want some of this too." So there's a new dynamic, and for Biden to say, "Wow, I never saw the Middle East as about regional economic opportunities before, it was always about terrorism and things like that." I think he got excited about this, that there are now opportunities here. And I think what's the most hopeful point is this. That the initiative for this, and this could be also now Morocco helping to fund the Allenby Bridge being a 24-hour operation for Palestinians to cross into Jordan is that it used to be all the ideas came from America and the region resisted it. Now the question here is do the Emirates, the Bahrainis, the Moroccans and others, and the Saudis in a tentative gradual way, do they think, look, if it's economically sustainable, that means it's in our self-interest. So it's that we're doing America a favour, they're imposing on us. It's that we want it because we see that Israel's economy is good for us. And I think these regional configurations are more likely to be sustainable if Arab states think they're not doing anybody a favour, but doing themselves a favour to look forward for this economic cooperation. Is it going to be a lot below the radar? Yes. But, I say there's a lot going on under the table, but so much going under the table, the table is starting to levitate and now there's more above the table. There's over 60 MOUs, memorandum of understandings, between the Emirates and Israel, including Israel is working with the Emirates on a space programme. They've got a space programme to Mars and one going to Venus, there is over a billion dollars there, and I expect it, I think, easily to double, triple in the not-too-distant future. 400,000 Israelis have gone to the Emirates during an epidemic for God's sakes, you know? And I think the potential here is huge. So I think we're just at the very, very beginning of it. And I'm hopeful because it's driven, in no small measure, by Arab self-interest, and that makes me think that if Arabs and Israelis think it's both good for them, they'll want to continue it. So, while the Biden trip, I think, you could argue on the specifics on the oil. Did he get what he wanted? Did he not get what he wanted? I think he's leaving the region with a good feeling that there's more opportunities than he's seen before. And if the Abraham Accords were associated with one party, this idea of broadening it

with this regional integration, not just diplomatic, but military, economic and all this, is something that I think will hook him. And, I see that he invited MBZ, who's really a very bold leader from the Emirates to come to Washington for the first time. He's just been named president, his brother died. He's the guy behind the Abraham Accords and if Biden, I wonder if he loses the midterms, a lot of American presidents, they wonder if they lose the midterms, they become foreign policy presidents 'cause they can't pass a domestic legislative agenda. And MBZ is the most associated in the region with this cooperation with Israel. So inviting him to come to Washington as he announced in Jeddah already to come towards the end of the year means that I think the president is going to want to do more of this going forward, and I think that's a hopeful sign. So why don't I stop here and I look forward to the discussion with Carly.

- [Carly] Thank you very much, David. That was a very impressive whistle stop all the way through.

- [David] Yeah.

Q & A with Carly

- So I'm going to follow up on a couple of pieces of Biden specifically and then when we can look at what's happened over the last few weeks since the trip. So one of the pieces that for the Palestinians was important and that was inevitably going to come up given her US passport, was the death of Shireen Abu Akleh and then the visits that followed with her family and Secretary Blinken this week. Now, I think the Palestinians were dismayed somewhat by the platitudes that they've seen. How do you see that shaping into this trip? And it was used by MBS as a kind of vague cutting remark when related to Khashoggi. But how do you see the Americans responding to that?

- To the critique on the Shireen?

- [Carly] Yes and also the visit with Blinken and her family yesterday, and perhaps is there any more than platitudes to come?

- I had a White House official say to me before the trip, "You know, we didn't want this trip to be about like Biden begging for a bullet, you know?" This was set up so that the Palestinians share the bullet and their findings with the US security coordinator a couple weeks before. Clearly, the US wanted kind of the findings of the security coordinator, who I know is a three-star general and I had just seen him. They wanted that done before the trip. Of course, given the buildup about this tragedy, you couldn't totally put it to bed of course. And so I think the idea of saying, "Look, we want to invite the family to Washington," was a way of trying to acknowledge the pain and suffering, but without letting it overwhelm the trip itself.

- And looking at this trip, and obviously you have watched a lot of US presidents go to the Middle East, some more or less successfully. What do you think Biden learnt from his predecessors or his team learnt from his predecessors that meant he framed this trip differently?

- I think part of it is be careful of grand American designs, you know? Like there were presidents that came saying, "I'm going to bring democracy to the Middle East." This is not that kind of presidency. Even Obama was associated with kind of trying to do something very dramatic to create distance between, in the wake of 9/11, a few years after 9/11, between mainstream Muslim community and Muslim militants. But each one I think had a more transformative kind of vibe to it, Biden wasn't here to transform, he was there to engage. He basically sees foreign policy as, in no small measure, I think this is an important point more than others do, as about leaders having personal relationships and engaging on that level. He spent his whole career in the Senate where that kind of, and he was the chairman of the House of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. So he always feels he has a flair for foreign policy. I think the idea of him going to Saudi Arabia was not crazy for him at all. I mean, United States deals with China, the United States deals with a lot of countries whose human rights records we don't always agree with, but the importance of engagement has its own value and diplomacy. And I think that's who this president is, he's a very much a people person. Like I want to engage with the leaders, I want to lay it out there, what can we do together? Where do we converge? Where do we diverge? So I think while the visit because of the Khashoggi dimension, had a worldwide, and it was the first one, had a worldwide kind of resonance, I think for Biden himself, it was, America's got interest, America's got values. We don't help anything by just boycotting anybody and we got to meet with people and we got to tell them where we stand. And so I think for him, where this is different than his predecessors is he's not trying to impose a grand vision. he wants to re-engage, he wants to stop the vacuum that he feels China is filling, at a smaller, extent Russia. And so I think he's, when you talk to his people as I do, it's clear that they are more about, don't get too utopian here, keep your feet on the ground.

- I think that's a very valuable lesson for him to have gleaned from his predecessors. So following on from that, obviously, many have concerns about the Democratic Party and where it sits on Israel and perhaps some of the challenges faced internally in the party. How do you think this trip played? And his performance, I think most are comfortable on Biden's position, but worried about what's going on behind the scenes?

- [David] Exactly. Right. I think that's an important question because I think Biden's trip was to say is the progressives are not going to define America's policy towards the Middle East. we released our intel

report about Khashoggi on who we thought was responsible, which the progressives very much wanted. We kind of made our views known, but we want to recalibrate the relationship, we're not out to boycott the relationship. And that's not the real world, the Saudi is a key player for the US. It's in part of trying to avoid this vacuum that China will fill, they will clearly fill it if we stay away. So I think he is, on that point, was a big message to the progressives, I'm not going to let you guys, we want to work together on domestic issues, but on foreign policy, just that we have some differences on domestic issues too, by the way. But on foreign policy, you're not going to define American foreign policy to the Middle East, and on Israel, we know you don't care for Israel, but I will embrace Israel. This will be a warm, warm embrace. And it was, and I think if you look at what they call the Jerusalem Manifesto, the Jerusalem Declaration, what it really was, I think, was a manifesto of what I would call the Biden Democrats and not the progressives. He came out against BDS, he talked about two states but for two peoples meaning, in a way, that the progressives don't use that phrase. He came out on a range of terrorism issues that were very much what Israel wanted to hear. And I think he's trying to say, "You know, I'm a proud Zionist." The progressives don't talk about Zionism often. So I think he was showing how we are not them and they will not define what I do abroad in the Middle East, it's an important region. Look, even if you look at the, I mean I was going through every communique that the White House put out of like his meeting with Sisi in Egypt. Now again, we might have some concerns about Egyptian human rights policy. Egypt though is valuable, the biggest Arab country, the Suez Canal, where that is crucial for navigation of American vessels, world vessels, the oil, all to Europe, all these important things. And, he called Sisi a valuable, valuable friend. He used the word twice even, I don't want to get too Talmudic, but I'm saying is he was not going to let the progressives tell him who we could talk to, when they could talk to them, what he's going to say to them. I'm sure he delivered quietly some messages, but that is his style is work behind the scenes. And look, he's done it, Carly, with Israel. I mean what separates him from, let's say the Biden era, I mean the Obama era is that he doesn't like to air dirty laundry, he doesn't. He said, "Look, we have a problem with them on settlements. Let's talk to them behind closed doors. We don't convene press conferences for that." We don't agree with them, and we let that general point known, but we don't have to hammer them every day from the State Department podium. So I think this is a different president, and by the way, you could say the Israelis kind of repay the favour on the Iran nuclear issue, which is we have differences, we, US and Israel, we discuss them behind closed doors. And so I think that's who he is in general. And he's very much, I would say an old-guard Democrat who believes personal relationships. solving difficult issues behind closed doors, that's the way you get things done. You don't just issue press releases and make yourself feel good.

- [Carly] So to talk about the Palestinians for a few minutes, you touched on the hope that Biden has that the Palestinians can find a way to use the Abraham Accords as a bridge.

- Yes.

- [Carly]we can all look back and realise that we're not in the Salam Fayyad era anymore.

- Yeah, yeah.

- [Carly] If Salam Fayyad was still the prime minister, we know through economic developments, through technology innovation opportunities that he would be looking to engage. But we're at Mahmoud Abbas's, 4 1/2, fifth term with no end in sight. And there was a tweet a few weeks ago of him back in a hospital room receiving treatment. I mean, do you think with the best will in the world, the Palestinian leadership particularly obviously focusing on Fatah on the West Bank, is in any way capable of taking advantage of the Abraham Accords?

- [David] I'm glad you asked that because I was just in Ramallah last month. I'm usually there three times a year. Like when I go to Israel, I engage at a senior level there. And my message to them, and I don't mind saying it on the record here, is they have an alternate peace process that they have to also cultivate is repair their relationships in the Gulf. people talk about like the UNRWA schools not being funded enough, the US funding level is even above the pre-Trump era, but the Gulf are not doing their part, why? They're mad at them, I think especially the Emiratis. But when you kind of hang MBZ in effigy at the time of the Abraham Accords, Mohammed bin Zayed, the leader, who made the breakthrough, and hang him in effigy, that's not going to win you friends in Abu Dhabi or Dubai. And I think they need to restore these relationships. Now I think many of the senior ones know that and they believe the Palestinian president knows that. But the problem is it's one thing to know that, but you have to act on it. Now if they don't want to see you, maybe you can go to the King of Jordan, maybe you go to the president of Egypt, go other ways, but make it clear that you want a sulha, a reconciliation. But I think unless there's a sign at the top of kind of returning to normal, even private sector to private sector, I don't think it'll happen because in these countries, the government relations have a big impact on the private sector. The private sector takes their clues, the music they hear from the very top. So the Palestinians, I mean the Emiratis can live without them, they're one of the wealthiest Arab countries around, they do business all over the world. the Palestinians have to decide, like maybe we blew it. I mean, look at the, Carly, the Zoom meeting that was held after the Abraham Accords, and every Arab leader rejected the Palestinian request that the Arab states don't go forward. They each said, "This is a sovereign national decision of an individual Arab state." Carly, what a change. Remember Khartoum 1967, the three nos, no to

negotiations with Israel, no to peace, no to recognition, yeah, okay, with Israel. Now Khartoum itself has made peace, although they're in a civil war, they're in a mess. But when you think about, remember Saddam in the '70s, the Arab League moved the seat, its headquarters, from Egypt for 10 years to Tunisia over this one issue. And now they're saying peace is everyone's sovereign issue. So without being too pithy here, I would say the Arabs have gone from Khartoum to Zoom. They really shifted and how they see things that peace between Israel and Arab state is a national decision, it's not a decision for the Arab League. And the region. Look, the big shift here is like look, take 2002, also very dramatic. There's something called the API, the Arab Peace Initiative, which was a front loaded, back loaded thing saying, "Israel, if you give the Palestinians what they want on the front end, on the back end, over the rainbow, after peace, we will normalise with you." And basically, I saw that as an Arab message that said, "You know, Israel's not so important to us. We can wait for 500 years." But what's happened between 2002 and 2020 is the sense that we can't wait anymore. We've waited 18 years from the API of 2002 and we need to find a way to normalise with Israel because we're looking post oil, we have to digitise our economy. We're worried the US is retrenching from the Middle East. We need, Israel's security involvement 'cause we share those concerns. And for a host of reasons, we can't wait for the Palestinians anymore. My hope is though that it's not a bypass road, it's a bridge. And the Palestinians, instead of saying it's either or, it's either the Arab states or us, they'll say, "Look, maybe we can get you Arab states to have more skin in the game, so to speak, and to do projects, economic projects like you're doing in Jordan, do it here in the West Bank, but use it." And also look, when the Emirates did their deal, part of the deal was no annexation by Israel for four years. So they were willing to use their muscle at the Saudis. Imagine if they opened a commercial office and they said, "Israel, you want us in Tel Aviv? Okay, but the price is you don't add new settlers outside the security barrier that could impede a two-state solution." So all I'm saying is I think the Palestinians need to be a little more imaginative. And I speak for someone who spent a good part of my life professionally on wanting a two-state solution, wanting dignity for both sides. But I think we got to look at the region as changing, and instead of looking at it as either or, look at it as a bridge and not as a bypass road. And I think that there, it's incumbent on the Palestinians, 'cause the Arab states have got a lot of other options as well.

- I think from Khartoum to Zoom could go on a bumper sticker. So obviously, whenever we talk about two states, we like to conveniently forget the problems in Gaza. Now Hamas looked for, on the way out opportunity to send some rockets over to Israel, make it clear that they won't be ignored. it was a gesture and thankfully not anything more. But today the IDF, for the first time ahead of a conflict, exposed Hamas sites in Gaza, civilian air is right next to Shifa Hospital. these are just the type of images that the IDF is always

trying to explain after the attacks-

- [David] Exactly right.

- This time, they managed to get the information out in advance, we'll see if anybody can absorb it. But, was any attention paid on this trip to Hamas in Gaza or is that still we leave that in the hands of Egypt and Qatar as and when in?

- [David] Yeah, yeah. You said it very well. It's in the hands of Egypt, the Israeli and Egyptian intelligence services work very closely. Egypt, I think, has done a very good job. They've also limited what goes in in terms of intercepting things better than Israel could do. The Qatari thing, I know for the viewers of "Lockdown University," they're going to say, "What? This is crazy." But welcome to the Middle East. I mean, on one hand, Israel's furious at Hamas, I mean at Qatar for being a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood, yet no Arab country is willing to put money into Gaza, and the Qataris, as much as Israel does not like them, Israel does not want to see people suffer. They don't want to see the lid blowing off of Gaza, they would like to see a more stabilised situation. So the Qataris work with the Israelis on defining where does \$30 million a month go to help Gazans. And that's critical, and when the check, if the Qataris don't send it in time, this is going to sound you bizarre, but the Hamas sends these balloons filled with arsenic stuff that could burn Israeli fields. Now, some people might send an invoice, Hamas sends a balloon. But sometimes, Israel has been sending its military officers and its Mossad to Qatar to work with them on, a lot of it is, a lot of money goes to the UN, I think Development Programme or World Food Programme, so for indigent people. But can I say that some money doesn't end up, yeah, it's not like the suitcases that came in during the Netanyahu period, but there's oil that comes in and you never know, there's bartering and secondary markets in oil and who gets that profit? So it's not perfect, but it's interesting that there's not exactly Arab countries besides Qatar, that are, no one's lining up to help Gaza, and Israel, as much as they're angry at Qatar, they feel it's better to work with them and to make sure the people in Gaza that are so poverty stricken that they have some relief. The PA is furious at them, so they've tried to cut them, and Israel's tried to argue with them on certain levels. No one's going to believe this, I mean, but just welcome to the Middle East. The reality is crazier than any fiction you can imagine.

- [Carly] So we've touched on the opportunities for Jordan and Egypt here. And one of the concerns of Israel and the US alike is, King Abdullah, his grip on Jordan and what that could mean for Israel and the region as a whole. Lapid today met with King Abdullah for the first time and that's a clear message. There's obviously slightly differing readouts from the meeting, but it happened. Do you think President Biden did enough on this trip to bolster King Abdullah and

how concerned should we be about Jordan?

- [David] Look, I think Israel has certainly got a vested interest in the Hashemite kingdom, the United States does. I think it's oh, there's economic issues that they always seem to be facing in Jordan. The relations I think have gotten better between Jordan and the Gulf. I think it's good, but you always worry. And that's why I think these massive projects on economics like the solar which will generate electricity for Jordan and water for Jordan, that's something that people need to pay more attention to and you need more of that. And, these combinations, Emirates, Israel, Jordan, you can do other combinations. I mean now all these combinations are possible in a way that were not easy. Now Israel basically feels about Jordan that the, and this is where Bibi's relations with Abdullah was almost poisonous and it was like a split-screen reality. The security establishments love each other. When you sit with them, they could tell you on a first-name basis on the other side who they work with, and it's a beautiful thing to see. But the political side has been difficult 'cause Bibi in particular felt that the king was not grateful for, doesn't tell his public the truth about to what extent Jordan depends on Israel for air cover, for if it's Iron Dome, if it's for some military assistance, if it's a range of issues, water, electricity, gas, and he feels that the king doesn't level with his own public. And the king, I think, is saying, "Listen, I know my public better than you do and I have to navigate it a certain way. I can't talk about all the great security things we do together or I won't be able to do it." So there's a frustration among some Israeli leaders. I think in the case of Bennett and Lapid however, there's a desire to avert the clashes that existed between the king and Bibi and not to highlight the differences. So it could be, I think that, and I talked to a senior Jordanian cabinet minister who said, "You know, we feel a new spirit in Israel that they want to work with us." And so we'll see how it goes. I think that people have tried to mourn the Jordanian, Hashemites for decades and they've proven to be very resilient. So I think they're going to continue to be resilient.

- [Carly] Yeah. Unfortunately, as is always the case with Israel, you just got to wait for another election to come around the corner before you know where that-

- [David] No shortage of those, that's for sure. If Israel could, if they had, a GDP of elections per capita, they would be at the top of the list.

- [Carly] Yeah. So in the last few minutes, I'd like to tackle Iran and, of course, and of course Hezbollah, kind of part and parcel. So, as you say, there was some robust comments by Biden and, that if ultimately all options need to be on the table, the last few days, the EU has been pushing the US on Iran, and then today, the advisor, Brett McGurk said that actually, it's highly unlikely that we're actually

going to make progress. Then, of course, you've got Hezbollah and their posturing that is always going on on the border with Lebanon. So what does it really mean, given that now a few weeks after Biden's visit, it very much looks like there's going to be no return to the table. Where does that leave the US, Israel and the world?

- [David] Oh, it's a great question. I tend to think the securities services in Israel have originally kind of assumed there would be a deal and they thought the key is get the uranium out of the country 'cause they're enriching at a 60% and 90% is full military-grade enrichment and that only takes two weeks. From 60 to 90 is no time, most in the public don't realise that. So I think the military in Israel is just like, "Get this stuff out, if it's a deal, it's a deal." But I think the political establishment has said, "Look, if the military establishment says, 'Look, we want like bridge over troubled waters, Carly, over the next eight years until the end of the JCPOA.'" We can use that time, time is on the side of the people who use time best and upgrade Israel's offensive capabilities, so Israel's position for a post-JCPOA world. But the political view doesn't take the military view that it's better a bad deal than no deal. They think maybe we could talk to the United States and get them to shift gears out of this deal into a much higher-level deal let's say call it JCPOA 2.0, longer and stronger, however you want to call the words, that deals with things like snap inspections, ballistic missiles, no sunset, and then maybe do like more for more, which is okay, lift sanctions on Iran if they have unlimited sunset. Sunset means that you phase out restrictions. Israel doesn't want Iran to phase out of restrictions, that's clear, that's the main point. And no sunset on enrichment restrictions that are supposed to be phased out by 2030, 2031. The US is sceptical. Is that like this sounds nice, but we can't get them even to read the book. How are we going to get them to see the movie? this is a much bigger thing that you're talking about. So right now, it looks like Iran overplayed its hand and by insisting the IRGC, the Revolutionary Guards is a part of the deal. The Biden people say, "Listen, what does this have to do with nukes?" And though they are clear that they want that 'cause, their guy Soleimani was killed. So they feel that this gets them protection if they're taken off the foreign terrorist list of the State Department. And the US said like, "Come on, man. This has nothing to do with this and you want to just keep pushing your luck and overplay your hand, no, the answer is no." So it's at an impasse. Will Iran pull back? I don't think Biden, when we're talking about also an election year or the midterms, I don't see him giving, I think it also offends his sensibility in many ways. Your point about Hezbollah is an important one because if I was a journalist trying to follow the story, I would want to follow what happens on the Israeli-Lebanese maritime border. This might sound boring to people, technical, but it isn't technical because Israel is drawing gas from its eastern Mediterranean positions. It would like Lebanon to have that ability believing it would stabilise it. Hezbollah would think twice before destabilising one of the only

sources of income Lebanon's going to get. It's a completely failed state, we saw with the bombing of the Beirut port. Unless, and we see the Saudis don't want to put much money into the French, the two countries that put money in Lebanon, they're saying, "Man, get your act together. I mean your currency dropped by 85%, electricity, running water, the most basic, basic, basic forms of government, you're not doing that." So I think there's enormous pressure on Hezbollah now to agree even though they fire these unarmed drones towards Israel, it could be that they are quietly, we're hearing rumours that they are backing Lebanon to cut a deal to find the line. Once you have a line, then Chevron or Shell or whoever it is, can do the exploration, and Israel will see that as a stabiliser. So I think we're in a countdown between now and September because I think that's been when it's talked that if there's a deal, I don't know if it happens at the UN General Assembly when Lebanon and Israel are there, maybe there's no joint signing ceremony because it's a border. It's just the US and Lebanon and Israel and the US, but this is, to me, one of the next shoes to drop. So I would say follow this space. I'm not here predicting a deal, I want to be careful, but I'm saying if you want to know like what is one of the next developments to look for, I think the Lebanon space is one of the places I'd look at.

- [Carly] David, thank you very much. We managed to cram an awful lot into the half an hour of Q&A there, so thank you. I'm going to hand back over to Wendy to wrap up.

- [David] Hi. Thank you, Carly. It was delight to be with you.

- [Wendy] Well yes, thank you. I'd just like to reiterate what Carly said, we sure did. We covered a huge spectrum. David, thank you for your really excellent insightful presentation. We are blessed to be living in these times when there's real integration between Israel and moderate Arab states.

- [David] Yeah, that's right.

- And clearly, we see that there is a new narrative when we think of the Middle East peace process and we actually heard the same optimistic sentiments that you have outlined from Jason Greenblatt just last week.

- Right.

- [Wendy] So we thank you.

- Can I throw in at one commercial, if it's okay at the end if it's okay?

- [Wendy] Of course.

- [David] Which is, I hope for your, you have a lot of people online here on Zoom that, and others will listen to it later. But I hope we're going to be starting a fourth season of our podcast "Decision Points," looking at Israel, looking at the US relationship, but also looking at Israel and the Arab state. And we're going to be interviewing authors who've written books on these issues. I'm on Twitter, @DavidMakovsky, trying also to keep up with developments. Dennis Ross and I did a book about four leaders of Israel that did historic decisions and it's also out in Hebrew, and this one I just did on settlements outside the barrier called "Beyond the Blocs." So I hope you look at our website at washingtoninstitute.org and I look forward to being with you again in the future. And I really just salute you, Wendy, for this fantastic initiative. talking about meeting the moment, it sounds like you guys have really met the moment of COVID and, and just all the success may go from strength to strength.

- [Wendy] Oh, thank you. Thank you very much, David. And we will share that with all our participants. We'll send out an email with those details. So just to sum up, just to say your insights tonight have left us all feeling really positive and upbeat about the future of Israel and Israel's relationships with her neighbours. And a huge thank you to Carly, of course, and to Lauren, for participating in this outstanding presentation. Thank you, David. Good luck and we look forward to having you back on "Lockdown University."

- [David] I'd be delighted to come back and thank you for.

- [Wendy] Brilliant.

- Good work.

- [Wendy] Thank you. Welcome to the family. Thank you, everybody, thanks for joining us, night, night.