

**EVAN LIEBERMAN:** Hello, and welcome to today's MIT Starr Forum on the Israel-Hamas conflict, featuring expert perspectives on the ongoing crisis. I'm Evan Lieberman, professor of Political Science at MIT, where I direct the Center for International Studies, which is hosting today's event. And I want to thank all of you for joining us this afternoon.

The current crisis in the Middle East began just less than a month ago on October 7, with Hamas's horrific and unexpected attacks on Israel. Since then, Israel has retaliated with an aggressive military response in Gaza, rendering a devastating toll on human life. This has become a calamity of epic proportions with regional and global implications.

Now, while there's much to say about the right and the wrong of past and present, the point of today's Starr Forum is not intended to focus on such questions. Our goal today is to better understand some of the historic antecedents and the strategic pressures facing various parties to the conflict, including for Israel, Hamas, other actors in the region, and the United States. We're here to understand how such extraordinary levels of violence could occur and what this might mean for the future.

For this evening's panel, we've brought together four fantastic analysts to share their insights with us and context and consideration to our collective understanding. And the format of the event will be to allow each of our speakers no more than 15 minutes to share their remarks. And then we will conclude with a question and answer from our audience. Since we'll be sharing links to the full bios of each of these individuals in the chat feature, I'm only going to briefly introduce them here in the order that they'll speak.

So first, is Peter Kraus. He will be speaking on the historical context and Israeli strategy. Peter received his PhD from MIT in 2011 and is an associate professor of political science at Boston College and a research affiliate of the Security Studies Program at the Center for International Studies. Among other things, he's an expert on international security and Middle East politics.

David Kirkpatrick will be speaking on Hamas's strategy. David is a staff writer for *The New Yorker* and has worked for more than two decades as a reporter for *The New York Times*. He's a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. And he recently published a piece in *The New Yorker* on Hamas's strategy.

Marsin Alshamary will be speaking on the regional impact. Marsin graduated MIT with a PhD in 2020 and is an assistant professor at Boston College. She's an expert on religion, civil society, and social movements in the Shia Middle East. She's also a research affiliate with the Middle East Initiative at Harvard's Kennedy School, and a non-resident fellow at the Brookings Institution.

And Steve Simon will be speaking on US policy. Steven is a recent Robert E. Wilhelm fellow from the Center for International Studies. He served as the National Security Council Senior Director for the Middle East and North Africa during the Obama administration, and as the NSC Senior Director for Counterterrorism in the Clinton White House. So I will now, with those introductions, turn it over to Peter.

**PETER KRAUSE:** Thank you so much, Evan, for moderating. And thank you to the MIT Center for National Studies for the invitation. I've been very proud to be part of this community for two decades. And I'm proud that we are continuing our tradition of talking about important difficult topics from a variety of perspectives, while engaging the broader MIT and greater Boston communities.

Look, I've studied and engaged with the Israeli and Palestinian people for two decades now, and the past few weeks have been perhaps the toughest I've ever experienced. It's been all terrible news starting on October 7. And I've unfortunately never been more pessimistic about the leadership of the Israelis and Palestinian communities and the hope for peace.

Providing full historical context would take at least 15 days, not 15 minutes, as my students can tell you, who have been learning about the history of Israelis and Palestinians for the entire semester. I'm happy to answer questions on the October 7 attacks, the hostages, Israeli airstrikes, Iran, the axis of resistance, US policy-- anything in the Q&A.

Thankfully, I'm joined by some great panelists to help flesh out these and other issues. So I'm going to focus here on important historical precedents and developments-- those that the audience may not have heard or know as much about, but that can provide a deeper and broader perspective on why we are where we are and what might come next.

So with that, I'm also going to share some slides as well because I think visuals are helpful. And, you'll see, I've got a bunch of maps that I would love for people to check out as well.

So I want to start just for a minute or two talking about my first book. Because actually, a lot of what we're seeing today dovetails exactly with what I wrote about and what I researched. My first book answered two questions. When and why do national movements use violence? And when and why do they win and achieve new states? It focused on the history of the Zionist and Palestinian national movements.

What I found was that the key factor for both the use of violence and the achievement of victory was the internal structure of a national movement. The more organizationally fragmented that it was, ultimately, the more that it engaged in infighting, escalatory violence, and met with collective failure. The more that it had a hegemonic movement structure, where ultimately you have a single dominant organization to lead the movement, the more that it had a cohesive, focused strategy, and the more credible and successful it was.

Now, the Zionist movement and the Palestinian national movements found their greatest successes when they had a dominant political party or armed group, and their greatest failures and escalatory violence when they were internally divided. For the Palestinian national movement, this helps to explain some of what we've seen, not just on October 7, but in prior years where you had Hamas attempt to violently outbid Fatah and provoke Israel, not just to try to achieve a Palestinian state, but also, to improve its position of power in the movement.

Unfortunately for the Palestinians, the internal division between their leading actors has led to infighting, a lack of elections since 2006, and a Palestinian Authority that is seen as both illegitimate by most Palestinians and has not been governing Gaza since 2007.

Now, the structure of the Palestinian national movement actually has huge implications for the Israelis as well. Not only do the Israelis bear the brunt of violence from competing Palestinian factions, but their government has also played a role in fostering that fragmentation.

Prime Minister Netanyahu has always wanted to have it both ways. He wants to prevent the emergence of a Palestinian state, but he also wants to prevent violence against Israelis. Now, my research suggests that it is nearly impossible to do both, as they are the result of opposite movement structures. By marginalizing Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority and engaging more with Hamas, Netanyahu helped to further fragment the Palestinian national movement and made the possibility of a Palestinian state seemingly more distant than ever.

At the same time, his policy of managing but not solving the conflict, pushing for an economic peace, or mowing the grass, or believing that he had Hamas in a box in Gaza, controlled, transactional, deterred has failed. And October 7 was only the latest manifestation of that failure.

Now, make no mistake here. Hamas bears the responsibility for its brutal attacks on Israeli civilians and the numerous hostages that they took on October 7. But if we're talking about the Israeli perspective and strategy, it is important to note how Israel is not powerless to affect the trajectory of the Palestinian national movement both in its actions and its outcomes.

So Israel is now engaged in a major operation in Gaza that could take months. However, even though we see a lot of reporting about Israel's goals for the conflict-- remove Hamas from power and free the hostages-- we see far less on the Israeli vision for Gaza after, and that is no coincidence. Honestly, there is no clear consensus among Israeli political and military leadership about what should come next.

It's a really difficult question to answer-- what comes next? And to carry out the policy effectively, states and militaries don't like planning for the day after. Just look at the US in Iraq and Afghanistan-- how much or how little effective planning went into those operations versus the war itself, and how much, or definitely how little, the governments of Iraq and Afghanistan today resemble what the US predicted or desired.

But even though these are difficult issues, if Israel is aiming to destroy the ruling regime in Gaza, they need to have a plan for the day after if they want to escape the cycle of violence that continues to occur and escalate. It is not clear to me that they do. And it may even be the case that certain actors, including Prime Minister Netanyahu, are being deliberately vague, both publicly and privately, both to maintain flexibility, depending on the course of the conflict, as well as to avoid being judged later based on their own stated standards.

Potentially, they may also want to blame the military or security services for their failure to create a new preferable reality. Think that can't happen? Netanyahu just blamed the military and security services two days ago for the October 7 attacks, just as the Israeli invasion of Gaza began. Domestic political futures and positioning oneself to avoid accountability for when things go wrong are a part of the calculation here.

So what might Israel push for regarding Gaza? A focus on the past is instructive about what Israel has done and what it might do in the future. First, what about annexation? And, again, I include some maps here for those who aren't as familiar with talking about the Golan Heights or East Jerusalem or some of the other regions I'm going to talk about.

So Israel has annexed Golan and East Jerusalem, territories that were captured in the 1967 war. [AUDIO OUT] Israel ultimately annexed these territories is that, number one, they'd have significant strategic location. Especially, the Golan has significant water resources attached to it, major political and religious significance. And then in terms of demographics, especially in the Golan, it's not a large Palestinian population that Israel would be annexing and making citizens of the Israeli state.

When you look at the Gaza Strip, it has almost none of these characteristics from the Israeli perspective-- not the most important strategic location, not that religiously significant, doesn't have massive water resources, doesn't have huge political significance. And in terms of demographics, it's over 2 million Palestinians and no Israeli Jews that live inside that territory. So I think annexation is incredibly unlikely, especially in the near term. But honestly, even in the longer term for Israel.

OK. Next, what about potential expulsion, or transfer, or whatever label folks want to use? There is a historical precedent for this, unfortunately. And, again, going back quite a ways, but during the 1948 war, whether you take the examples of Deir Yassin or Lydda, you had Palestinian populations that were expelled from these towns.

Now, this was somewhat unique circumstances. The '48 war was a war from Israel's independence. It was one in which the existential nature of Israel was being threatened. And I don't think that we have that situation today.

Even though October 7 was the deadliest day in Israeli history since 1948, I don't think that the Israeli people and the government feel like this is an existential threat to the future of Israel. So I don't see this happening, in addition to the fact that I think there is significant moral objection and not support among most Israeli leaders, as well as, of course, international leaders as well.

So even though you can find some isolated Israeli politicians or individuals who might support something like this, I don't think it's likely to see. The most you could see is you could see attempts to try to get Egypt to accept some amount of Palestinian refugees or others in exchange for debt relief, et cetera. But I think the Egyptians are very hesitant to do that, and I don't think we'll see that in any large scale.

OK, next, what about resettlement? There used to be 8,000 Israeli settlers in Gaza. The Israeli government removed them in 2005.

I don't think that this is a likely scenario to recur, in part because the Israeli government and the majority of the Israeli population ultimately felt like even if they felt some historical ties to the land or otherwise, that this was not a place that they felt could be part of the future state, either for security reasons. They felt like their soldiers who were there were sitting ducks vis-a-vis Hamas and others. A number of other Israelis also just didn't support the idea of settling in this territory that was conquered in the '67 war.

And so in a broader sense, I don't think resettlement is likely. Although, again, you can find isolated politicians who might speak or talk about this. So these are all three scenarios that I don't see as very possible.

Coming into the realm of greater possibility, although, again, I think when we look at historical analogies, there's a lot of key differences here. Looking up in Southern Lebanon-- after Israel invaded Lebanon during the Lebanese Civil War in 1982 and then started to withdraw a bit in the mid-1980s, they created this kind of buffer zone where they both partnered with a local Indigenous Lebanese force and tried to have a buffer between the PLO, as well later on as Hezbollah and Israeli civilians and others in the north of the country.

This is possible, and you've seen some reporting about this being bandied about in the Israeli military establishment. But I'll say in terms of the Gaza Strip, the territory is much kind of smaller in terms of what we're looking at. There's very unlikely that you're going to find an Indigenous Palestinian force in Gaza that in any way is going to want to partner with the Israelis here.

So I don't think something like this buffer zone is very likely. At most, you might see some type of thing created by the IDF to try to make infiltration like we saw on October 7 harder. But I don't think something like what we saw in Southern Lebanon is very likely.

OK. What about some form of direct or mixed occupation or whatever label you want to use, a la the West Bank? I do think that there is more likelihood here, at least in the short term. Both in part because I think there's a sense among a lot of Israeli leaders that they don't want Hamas to be in power. But that if that's going to be the case, then they're going to have to at least take the job in the interim. And, again, to some extent, you do this stuff with the institutions you have.

And so I could see the Israelis taking COGAT-- basically, taking this institution that helps to govern and control the West Bank and having some of it actually go in for parts of Gaza, at least on the military aspect of it and civil aspect of it, until Israel hands it over potentially to someone else.

So that being said, I think a lot of the scenarios that are talked about here are also, if not fanciful, then difficult to imagine. In the aftermath of Israel potentially reoccupying directly Gaza, they just talk about a multinational force or one that involves legitimacy from Arab states.

Again, I don't necessarily see that many outsiders wanting to dive into the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of these very extensive Israeli air bombing, and now this invasion, to now control this population that's facing basically a major humanitarian crisis, all in service of what exactly the goal is beyond helping the Palestinian people there, which is certainly a worthy goal, but what's the broader political objective? Again, a lot of questions there.

So I think it's possible. But I also don't think that having a multinational force or something like that amidst Israel's military occupation is something that would happen right away.

So nextly, what about the policy that Israel has been following for a number of years now, again, called mowing the grass. And, again, for many this is seen as maybe an objectionable label because the grass at the end of the day is, of course, people.

And the idea here from Israel's perspective is, well, you can't solve the conflict with Hamas. So basically, every few years you have to go in, degrade their capability to fight or to threaten the Israelis. You get some period of months or years of peace. And then eventually, you kind of do it all again.

This was the model for a while. But, again, I think for the majority of Israelis, October 7 really blew up the idea that this is sustainable, or this is something that can be done to control Hamas or keep things safe and stable. So it's possible that the Israelis could kind of go to the next level here, and go beyond mowing the grass to like salting the fields.

But I also think at the same time there's a lot of pushback on this being an effective strategy. But, again, it's one that's been done before. There's some consensus. So I could see it happening, even if it wouldn't achieve exactly the goals that Israel has set out here.

Finally, I want to say it's in the realm of possibility that Hamas remains in power. It's not impossible that Israel fails to not only destroy Hamas, but to push them out of power. And so these are all things we need to think about.

Now, if you're sitting there saying, hey, it seems like none of these sound like great options and that there aren't many great choices right now. I think you're right. There aren't. But it's also important to understand that we did not come to this situation randomly.

The two governing powers that are fighting this conflict-- Hamas, as well as maybe their allies in Lebanon and Iran on the one hand, and the Likud, and their right-wing coalition allies on the other-- are the leading parties that actively spoiled the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. One could even call the current conflict "the war of the spoilers."

In fact, criticizing, generating distrust, and taking numerous steps to actively prevent the recognition of a secure Israel alongside a secure Palestinian state is one of the major reasons that Hamas and Likud gained power and held it over the past two decades.

Now, some of that wariness was warranted. And, indeed, majorities of Israelis and Palestinians today are skeptical about the possibility of peace or a two-state solution. But that skepticism didn't come from nowhere. And it's worth noting what visions the actors directing this war have offered to their people because it impacts the conflict we see now, how we got here, and what the future holds.

Hamas believes that the Jewish people are not a nation, have no real ties to the land, and that Israel should not exist as a state. Many members of Likud and the extremist Otzma Yehudits believe that Palestinians are not a nation, have no real ties to the land, and there should not be a Palestinian state, except maybe in Jordan.

The situation you see today is a result of these total rejections of the other, and the belief that total victory by force is possible for your side. In some sense, it's not a huge surprise that those who came to power by fighting against a peace deal are now unable to offer more than war and more war to destroy the other side. But neither can achieve what it wants because its logic is based on flawed assumptions.

Having lived alongside and known many Israelis over the years, I have news for Hamas and its supporters. You are not going to be able to destroy Israel or the Israeli people. They are a proud and strong people. Israelis and most Jews consider themselves part of a nation, and they have real deep ties to the land. They and the state of Israel are not going anywhere.

I also have news for Otzma Yehudit, Likud, and their supporters. Having lived alongside and known many Palestinians over the years, you are not going to be able to destroy the Palestinian people or their dream of a Palestinian state. They are a proud and strong people. Palestinians consider themselves part of a nation, not simply another Arab population that can just assimilate anywhere in the region, and they have real deep ties to the land. They and their desire for Palestine are not going anywhere.

So the Israelis and Palestinians are destined to live side by side in one form or another. Peace, security, and prosperity for one is significantly dependent on peace, security, and prosperity for the other. Strategies for the current conflict in Gaza and the broader Israeli-Palestinian relationship that reflect this realization at least have a chance of improving the situation over time.

Those that are based on the rejectionist assumptions of some of the current combatants destine their people for a future of tactical successes and strategic failures, violence without end, and two national communities who are unable to reach their incredible potential culturally, economically, and politically.

If I have hope at the moment, and to close here, it's because I work with and see amazing Israeli and Palestinian youth who have the potential to be the future leaders of their communities and chart a different course. Unfortunately, just as the current Israeli and Palestinian leadership came to power through the failure of previous leaders' approaches, changes in governance in Gaza, the West Bank, and in Israel may similarly require individuals in these societies to look at what is happening not just in the past month, but in the past decade or more and say, this is not the way.

Like many of you watching as an outsider I am deeply discouraged, but I still have hope. And I hope in my short time today I've helped you understand more of the context for the past, present and future. Thank you. I look forward to the discussion. And David, the floor is yours.

**DAVID** I'm here to talk about Hamas, the Hamas perspective, what's happening from Hamas's point of view. Let's be  
**KIRKPATRICK:** clear. There is no justification for the wanton killing of civilians. And I'm in no way intending to at all justify the attack on October 7.

But to understand what's happening we do have to ask the question, how does this look from Hamas's point of view? Why do they do this? And, in particular, why now, especially since Israel's massive retaliation and the damage that's been done to the civilians living in Gaza was very predictable, as predictable as clockwork.

So many people in the West and in Israel are saying, OK, this is it. Hamas has revealed its true character. What we're seeing here is that Hamas has always hated the Jews, has always hated-- they hated the state of Israel. All the vile anti-Semitism in its charter is its true nature, and it is reverting or revealing that true nature.

And yet, at the same time, I think it is actually a little bit more complicated than that because it is reasonable to ask if that was the case, then why now, notwithstanding all of the noise about political stalemate inside of Israel, all the reservists saying they're not going to show up for duty. I don't think there was any recent sudden weakening of Israel's defenses. There was no opportunity that was created for Hamas here.

And on the other side, I don't think Hamas's capabilities changed dramatically. So there's no new capability they had to carry out this attack that they didn't have last year, or really, probably the year before that. So my colleague Adam Rasgon and I set out to talk to people involved in Hamas-- Hamas supporters, Hamas members, Hamas leaders-- about why it was that they carried out this attack at such a terrible cost.

The first thing we heard is-- just as a matter of context, their view is that the world does not notice Palestinian suffering, that the world only pays attention or observes the conflict when Israelis bleed. Now, this was shocking to me to hear. In my world, which is populated by the liberal intelligentsia, there's quite a bit of hand-wringing about the predicament of the Palestinians. And yet, as these-- the weeks have gone on, I have to say they are not entirely wrong.

Even as the possibility of peace has grown incredibly, dismally, depressingly more remote since October 7, I now, for the first time in years, hear people across the Western media talking about it and about the need for it. So they're not entirely wrong that the quiet suffering of the Palestinians over a long period of time was not galvanizing the world's attention.

So when we talk to people in Hamas about why they did this, what you know why this made sense-- if you can speak of it making sense-- four things come up. And the most salient-- I think, obviously-- is the current right-wing Israeli government.

So from their point of view, there is a government in Israel now which has shown less interest in and more hostility to any kind of Palestinian self-determination than we've seen for a long time, or even from their point of view, Palestinian dignity really, or respect or equality under the law within the state of Israel.

We should be mindful that this two-state solution that we talk about so often really reached its APEX as a possibility around 1993 at the Oslo Accords. Most of the fighters who participated in this attack were born since then, and it is an increasingly remote possibility for them.

The second thing, which goes along with that, is the settlements in the West Bank. And really, the de facto annexation or the creeping annexation of the West Bank, which is certainly the way it looks to the people in Hamas and to many of the Palestinians, as those settlements grow in number and prominence so that they make the creation of a Palestinian state in the territory of the West Bank less and less feasible every day.

This year, prior to October 7, 200 Palestinians were killed by settlers and Israeli Defense Forces protecting those settlers in the West Bank. Since then, more than 100 more have died. That's a much higher rate of violence than we've seen in the West Bank in the past. From the Hamas point of view, this is about the expansion of the settlements and aggression, which is sometimes the case, of the settlers against the Palestinians around them.

And the third item is the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is highly significant as a kind of Palestinian national symbol and a religious symbol for Muslims. Itamar Ben-Gvir, the minister in the Israeli cabinet, has visited there with other Jews. People in Hamas complained that Muslim rights to prayer or hours for prayer are being limited.

When young Arabs and Muslims go to the mosque, they're searched and humiliated on the way in and out, that they-- in their mind, in their kind of paranoid fantasy, what Ben-Gvir and others are talking about is really taking that away and making it in their worst nightmare a kind of a synagogue. So there's a symbolic element to what we see on the ground in the settlements happening and in the management of the Al-Aqsa mosque from their point of view.

And then finally, for the fourth element of why now, you widen it out. You look at the Arab countries around them. And what you see is that more and more, the countries of the Arab world are abandoning even lip service to the Palestinian cause. They're recognizing Israel, as the UAE did, as Bahrain did. We now see Saudi Arabia kind of eagerly queuing up next. And beyond that, it's in all likelihood Indonesia waiting in the wings-- the country with the largest Muslim population in the world.

And so when they look out to the broader landscape, the countries which were their allies or supporters in the past, that's dissipating. The support-- the international support for the Palestinian cause from the people who cared about it most is crumbling.

So in short, with less and less pressure from any Palestinian entity or Palestinian supporters, the Israeli government is moving further and further to the right and not, in fact, relaxing towards Palestinians or warming up towards the idea of some sort of Palestinian state. Or obviously, the talk of a Palestinian state hasn't been feasible in Israeli politics for some time. But any kind of Palestinian-- even limited self-determination.



In 2021, Hamas agreed to participate with Fatah in elections for the Palestinian Authority. Abbas called it off. He called it off citing the lack of Israel's cooperation in elections in East Jerusalem, but whatever. That, too, was scotched. And so from their point of view it's a darker and darker world.

So again, we get back to why? Why, given all this? I see that things are going badly. How could this possibly make sense? So we got on the phone with Moussa Abu Marzook, who is a veteran longtime leader of Hamas.

And my colleague and I pressed him very directly. What's your game here? What is your hope? Did you think that this attack, which from his point of view, it was quite a serious one and killed many, many people. Do you think that it was going to hurt Israel in a long-term meaningful way-- trigger a kind of regional war? Would Iran come to their defense, and there would be some sort of grand conflagration that could actually harm the state of Israel?

He said, frankly, no. And he said it in a way that was very memorable to me because he basically said, look, we wish-- we, as Hamas, would love there to be a regional war. We have no such hope. We don't think Hezbollah is going to come to our aid. We don't think Iran is going to come behind them.

And honestly, he didn't say this in so many words. But the implication was that for both parties-- Israel and Iran-- the situation of October 6 before these attacks made a lot of sense. There was no reason for either one to jeopardize the position they were in before that just because Hamas had staged an attack.

So then the question in my mind, in our mind, turns to the situation of the Palestinian Authority. As we just talked about with the expansion of the settlements and the diminishing possibility of any two-state solution, the Palestinian Authority, which was a creation of the Oslo Accords, loses its reason for existence. Why is it there? What is it doing?

To a lot of Palestinians, it has become an organization which is self-serving. That is, the leaders of the Palestinian Authority, they receive various benefits-- their salaries, benefits from Israel. Their friends get access to certain business opportunities or cell phone spectrum. They can travel easily inside and out of Israel relative to other Palestinians.

At the same time, it creates a lot of jobs and patronage for Palestinians, and it helps Israel keep the peace. But none of that really amounts to credibility or legitimacy in the eyes of the Palestinians in the West Bank. And certainly, not in the eyes of Hamas.

So the Palestinian Authority is becoming more and more endangered. As this violence that we talked about a minute ago has risen in the West Bank, we see them increasingly clashing or trying to restrain Palestinians. So their position is becoming more and more vulnerable in that sense.

When we talked to Moussa Abu Marzook about this-- was this your gambit to try to upstage Fatah or outbid Fatah, as my colleague just said? And he was dismissive. He basically said the Palestinian Authority long ago ceased to be relevant. It is nothing. It is already gone.

When we look closely at the propaganda that Hamas was issuing on the day of the attacks, we heard speaker after speaker-- their military spokesman and their military leader-- saying very explicitly we are now calling on the people of the West Bank to rise up, the Palestinians the West Bank to rise up. This is it. Grab your gun. Grab your car. Grab your knife. Grab your Molotov cocktail. [AUDIO OUT]

It was clearly their intent. Obviously, that didn't work out from their point of view. But it's reasonable to think that an element of this was Palestinian politics, that what they were hoping to do on that day was to finish the irrelevance, to finish the erasure of the Palestinian Authority, and to establish themselves as the strongest, the main, the last voice of the Palestinian people.

So we pressed Abu Marzook, when we were speaking with him on the phone, why? Was this a question of opportunity? Are you trying to take out the PA? Or was it just a question of desperation because you're back against the wall. In other words, we asked him, is this a sign of strength or of weakness?

And he, I think, tellingly tried to have it both ways. He said, yes. Emphatically, we are the weaker party. Israel is much stronger than us we don't have any hope of changing that with this attack. And yet, he tried to say we have not despaired. That's what he said. This is, nonetheless, a demonstration of our strength. Those are his words, not mine.

And the point from his point of view is we are now fighting on their territory for the first time in decades. No longer is the fight them coming to us. And that, in itself, is a victory.

I mean, it's hard to wrap your mind around that given the enormous cost since then to civilians in Gaza, but that's what he said. Obviously, I'm not convinced by that. This kind of violence seems to be much more evidence of weakness than of strength. When you're strong, you don't need to kill civilians like that.

And yet, what now? The tragedy continues. Not only does it continue inside of Gaza, but astonishingly to me, as this has unfolded, we actually see Hamas gaining in popular-- I shouldn't say astonishingly. In some ways, it's very predictable-- Hamas gaining in popularity.

They clearly are losing in every military sense. And yet, the humanitarian toll on Gaza, the enormity of the Israeli retaliation does seem to dovetail with the Hamas storyline that they are the kind of heroic underdog resistance against a brutal occupation. And all signs are that that is having-- finding quite a bit of purchase among Palestinians, certainly, but also, Arabs around the region.

And why does that matter? It matters because we are still continuing to hear Israeli leaders and military leaders talk about destroying Hamas. And as Hamas becomes more and more popular and gains more sympathy, then you begin to wonder what could that even mean?

I think as this war continues, the likelihood that the idea of Hamas could be eradicated, meaning the idea of violent resistance to the occupation, becomes more and more remote. Even if you were to kill every leader of Hamas, if Hamas as an organization is perceived to have died a martyr, as you might say, then the idea of eradicating this concept, the motive, or the aspiration of violent resistance becomes, I think, even more and more remote.

So all in all, it is a very dark picture. And that about wraps up what I have to say about the situation. Marsin, do you want to take over?

**MARSIN**

**ALSHAMARY:**

Thank you very much, David and to Peter as well. Those were very valuable discussions. And thank you for bringing your research and your conversations to myself and to the attendees. Thank you to MIT for hosting this. I'm-- like Peter, as a graduate of MIT, I'm always very proud and happy to be part of these events. And I'm happy with the conversations that we have in this community.

Today, I just wanted to discuss the regional reaction to what's happening in the Israel-Hamas war. And particularly, when it comes to the Middle East, I think we should think about both the reaction of the Arab street, as well as the reaction of the governments, which can really diverge in some cases.

Even though most states in the Middle East aren't democracies by any means, they're still, in a sense, vulnerable to public pressure, and that has been mounting in recent weeks. Protests have absolutely flooded the Middle East and the world. The Israeli bombardment of Gaza has reawakened the Arab street, and by extension, some Arab leaders from their growing indifference and apathy towards the Palestinian struggle, that I think David spoke about briefly as well.

In the future, any steps that Arab leaders take towards Israel without a concurrent commitment to achieving gains for the Palestinians will be costly and likely publicly scrutinized. This doesn't mean an end to the peace process by any means, especially the one that has been envisioned. But I think we need to have a more frank discussion of the peace process, particularly the Abraham Accords, and to have a frank discussion about the likelihood of achieving them in any meaningful and true and genuine way.

While the reaction of the citizens of the Middle East has been straightforward and similar across the region in terms of their support to the Palestinians and their concerns about the increasing violence, we see different responses from the leaders. And to understand the mixed reactions of Middle Eastern governments, I think it's helpful to think about them across several planes.

The first one, of course, is their relationship to Israel, and by extension, to the United States, in some cases, as well as their relationship with their own citizens and the degree of authoritarianism in each country and the degree of representativeness.

So to understand the official government reaction across the Middle East, you have to divide it into the countries that formally recognize Israel and have diplomatic relations, those that have informal ties with Israel, but haven't fully-- don't have full diplomatic ties quite yet, and those who absolutely have no recognition of Israel or ties to it.

In the first bucket, that's countries like Egypt, which was the first to establish full diplomatic relations among the Arab states with Israel in 1980. It also includes Jordan, which established peace in 1994. Jordan is very significant because it contains the largest Palestinian diaspora community in the world.

So both Egypt and Jordan are in a very precarious and unique situation. They both border Palestinian territories. Jordan borders the West Bank and Israel, and Egypt borders the Gaza Strip. And most importantly, we know that Egypt has been a prime actor because of the humanitarian aid that goes through the Rafah border crossing.

Of course, Egypt and Jordan-- this escapes no one's notice-- are dependent on aid from the United States, and the economic situation in both countries, and especially Egypt, is quite dire. As a result, if you analyze and look at the way they've been reacting to events, Egypt has tried to assume the role of the regional mediator and the convener.

So, for example, it hosted an Arab League meeting on October 11 on the foreign minister level. In the meeting, the Arab League urged Israel to return to pursuing a two-state solution, and they condemned violence on both sides. Egypt also called for and hosted the Cairo Peace Summit on October 21. I'm sure people have read about this.

The summit had no practical achievements. It ended up mainly being a venue for Arab leaders to castigate their European counterparts and have it be publicized. For example, that was the venue in which King Abdullah of Jordan said, quote, "The message the Arab world is hearing is loud and clear. Palestinian lives matter less than Israeli ones. Our lives matter less than other lives. The application of international law is optional, and human rights have boundaries. They stop at borders. They stop at racism. They stop at religions." End quote.

His wife Queen Rania made similar public statements in an interview with Christiane Amanpour. And only today, the Jordanian prime minister-- deputy prime minister and foreign minister Ayman Safadi recalled the Jordanian ambassador in Israel, and asked that the Israeli ambassador to not return to Jordan.

But local context is very important here. Jordan experienced some of the biggest protests in its modern history as a result of the Israeli attack on Gaza. Jordanian protesters even attempted to storm the Israeli embassy, which had been vacated. And as I mentioned before, they have the largest Palestinian diaspora population with extreme cultural and ethnic proximity to Palestine.

The King and Queen for years have largely been seen as Western lackeys, essentially. So their silence would have been damning domestically. So it's unsurprising that they had to make these public statements to salvage whatever public opinion was left.

Egypt, too, has had large-scale protests against Israeli actions in Gaza. But unsurprisingly, many of them quickly turned into anti-regime protests and were shut down by the government due to the dire economic situation in Egypt itself. And Egyptian leaders have made it very clear that they fear that if Palestinian refugees enter Sinai, it would be a one-way migration, and it wouldn't be a situation in which they would return after the war.

Last time I spoke about this I had omitted Turkey, so I will not do that this time. I think Turkey is a very important actor. It's, of course, not part of the Arab world, but amongst the major countries of the Middle East. It's had diplomatic ties with Israel as far back as 1949.

Recently, there was a breakdown in diplomatic ties in 2018, but that was restored in 2022. And as recently as last September, we saw President Erdogan meet with Prime Minister Netanyahu at the United Nations General Assembly.

So Turkey's position is very precarious because of the leading party of Turkey right now, the AKP. Their base sees Israel's response to the Hamas attacks as disproportionate, and their foreign policy has generally promoted solidarity with Palestine.

If you remember, if you follow this closely, in 2010, Israeli commandos killed 10 Turkish activists that were leading a flotilla of humanitarian goods that was attempting to breach a blockade that was imposed by Israel and Egypt on Gaza. So there's that bit of history there in terms of public opinion. And then on the other hand, of course, Turkey is a big NATO ally. And its relations with the West are premised to some degree on its ties to Israel.

Erdogan's rhetoric has been strong and calling for de-escalation. But he did reach a point I think in late October where his rhetoric got even stronger, and he condemned civilian deaths caused by both sides. But he criticized the Israeli bombardment of Gaza. And even at some point, had described that Hamas was-- Erdogan described Hamas as not a terrorist organization, but a liberation group.

This was really a huge escalation in rhetoric for Turkey, and I think it received a lot of attention in the media. On the sidelines, however, Turkey did politely ask the political leader of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, to leave Turkey immediately after October 7.

So they're riding a fine line. Turkish public opinion is sympathetic to Gaza. This includes the opposition to Erdogan and the AKP as well. Erdogan's goal is to play a prominent role in mediation process. And he sees this as Turkey's natural role, given its position as a NATO ally, and its role in the Muslim world more broadly.

So these are the major actors that have relations with Israel. There's, of course, the countries that have signed on to the Abraham Accords most recently-- the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and to a lesser extent, Sudan, only because violence engulfed them before they can ratify.

Their reaction was quite similar. They were calling for de-escalation. Both Bahrain and the UAE condemned Hamas. The UAE talked about separating the economic from the political. And I think if you look at the US reactions to all these statements, the US has unfavorably compared the UAE's response to Saudi Arabia's response.

Now, Saudi Arabia is a very important actor in all of this because it was in talks with Israel. We know this because of an interview with MBS most recently on Fox News. So they were in talks about the Abraham Accords prior to October 7. And although this was started by the Trump administration, it's continued under the Biden administration. And as far as I've seen, policy circles in Washington are tremendously invested in it.

Saudi Arabia has nominally attached its normalization with Israel to the improvement of the situation for Palestinians, but it really hasn't signaled a dedication to using normalization as a tool to achieve any gains for the Palestinians. Rather, they're using it as a means to achieve gains for themselves, primarily from the US. There is even talk of a nuclear weapon.

I mean, not to get sidetracked, but this is part of a larger Saudi Arabia strategy to play East against West and extract as much as they can from each relationship. You can think of the Saudi invitation to join BRICS, for example.

So there's a belief that Saudi Arabia's willingness to talk to Israel about normalization triggered the attack on October 7. I mean, everyone must wonder why would Saudi Arabia's ascension in particular to the Abraham Accords alarm Hamas more than any other one?

Unlike the UAE and Bahrain, I think it's important to remember that Saudi Arabia has a huge population of nationals. Whereas, the UAE and Bahrain have a small population of nationals and a very large migrant-- international migrant population. It has 18.2 million citizens. It has a large middle class. And with that comes a lot more triggers for instability and a lot less ability to buy off people.

It represents the Arab street in a way that the UAE and Bahrain simply can't numerically. But what distinguishes it from countries like Egypt and Jordan or Morocco that are very heavily populated large middle class Arab countries is that the location of Islam's two holiest sites are in Saudi Arabia. And Saudi Arabia's king's title is the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.

The third holiest site in Islam, of course, is the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which contains the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. And that's the name that Hamas gave their attack-- the Al-Aqsa flood. So the religious symbolism surrounding this conflict can't be overlooked. And to add to that, the organization for Islamic Cooperation met in Jeddah to discuss these developments, which signals Saudi Arabia really seeing itself as the center of the Muslim world.

So there's been a lot of discussion about the future of the Abraham Accords for Saudi Arabia. In the immediate aftermath of the October 7 attack, Saudi Arabia blamed the escalation on the continued-- quote, "continued occupation and the deprivation of the Palestinian people of their legitimate rights."

Saudi Arabia is now leading mediation in the region. It's working on de-escalating the crisis. It's had meetings with actors across the board, ranging from President Raisi of Iran-- Saudi Arabia and Iran only recently have warmed their relations-- and the UK Foreign Secretary. The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman has already called the Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and emphasized that Saudi Arabia is trying to engage with all parties to help prevent escalation.

It's urged the international community to come together to meet the aspirations of the Palestinians. It's denounced the displacement of civilians, condemned targeting civilians. It also signaled that normalization talks were on ice.

However, as Israeli bombardment has continued in Gaza and as the death toll rises, Saudi Arabia's statements have also grown stronger. So on October 7, the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement that was very strong, expressing its condemnation of the Israeli occupation's continuous attacks on civilians despite numerous international appeals.

I just quoted a bit of it, but you can go and read it. It's quite a strong statement. And you see that with both Saudi Arabia and Turkey, the statements become even stronger as time has gone by and as the death toll rises in Gaza.

Time prohibits me from speaking about other countries that have relations to Israel that aren't direct. But I, of course, don't want to omit the countries that don't recognize Israel. And I think that's what everyone is concerned about when we talk about the potential for escalation and violence in the region.

Key among, of course, is Iran and its circle of regional allies. Officially, Iran claims that it only provides political support to Hamas. The US has said that there has been no evidence of Iran being responsible for the October 7 attack. Iran's supreme leader has denied involvement in the attack, but they openly celebrated and praised Hamas.

The thing about Iran is that it has very effectively mastered plausible deniability by grooming their regional proxies to be very self-sustaining, and they're not-- and so they're not impacted by the sanctions on Iran. And second, by becoming to a degree unpredictable and independent.

In the case of Hezbollah, I genuinely can't even call it a proxy anymore as much as a regional partner. There are various groups at various levels of development across the so-called axis of resistance. Some of them are nascent groups. Others are battle-hardened and are deeply embedded within their political systems and their countries.

This is very important for Iran because while it wants to weaken Israel and the US in the region, it can't afford a direct war, and it faces a lot of domestic unrest. So this is a potential for a rally around the flag effect.

There are many countries in the region with ties to Iran. They support the Palestinian cause, not because Iran told them to-- and I think this is important to highlight-- but because they've been committed to it themselves for years. So it's an alignment, not necessarily Iran pushing a strategy in this case.

We can take, for example, the country that I know best in the region, which is Iraq. Iraq actually was one of the only countries in 1948-- was the only country in 1948 that didn't sign an armistice with Israel. And both countries are technically still at war. This has meant that Iraq's policy towards Israel prior to 2003 and after 2003, despite the tremendous change in government, has been pretty much stable. And amongst Iraq's Shia and Sunni populations and officials, there's been a consensus around the centrality of the Palestinian cause.

It's also to remember that most of Iran's regional allies, whether in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, or Yemen, there's a difference between the official government position and the ability of a nonstate or parastate armed group to react unilaterally without representing the government, and with governments too weak to prevent their actions. In this case, they have more freedom to act because there's very little public appetite in criticizing them amidst the clear destruction being wrought on civilians in Gaza.

For example, only yesterday the IDF intercepted a missile fired from the Red Sea area about 1,000 miles away, in which the Houthis in Yemen took responsibility for. The concern here is that if these attacks escalate, it's going to be very destabilizing because most of these countries are recovering from civil war and are very internally combustible.

Within Iraq, some politicians have called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces. This is a rhetoric that comes and goes. This really arose when the US struck Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis on January 3, 2020. And since then, the Iraqi parliament had passed a nonbinding resolution for the withdrawal of foreign forces. So anytime something happens, politicians return to that resolution.

Of course, Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah in Lebanon, is expected to speak on Friday. But the fact that it's taken him this long to speak, this clear delay demonstrates that Hezbollah is reacting very carefully.

The issue with Hezbollah and other armed groups is that they so frequently and virulently speak against Israel that when an event does occur, it really diminishes their credibility when they don't react. So some may even see this attack by Hamas not necessarily just because of the Saudi normalization, but it could be putting pressure on their allies in Iran and Lebanon to reinforce their support to start not just providing lip service, but genuinely being involved. And I think David spoke about this as well. Like, Hamas believes that when it comes to it, Lebanon and Iran might actually not be there for them. So perhaps some view this as a means to get them involved.

The escalations are limited but growing along the Lebanese-Israeli border. I think it's a cause for alarm. Like I said, the region is combustible. This doesn't look good from any angle.

Israel has had a history of contention with Hezbollah and with Lebanon-- had invaded Lebanon prior. And Lebanon itself is reeling from a financial crisis and a political crisis. And despite sympathy with Gaza, there's very little appetite for Lebanon to be dragged into war from the population.

One final thing to note about these particular subset of countries, and within Lebanon and Iraq specifically, is that you see both their official leaders having expressed positions on the Palestine issue generally in media. So the Iraqi prime minister wrote in *Asharq Al-Awsat*, a prominent newspaper, that ending the war in Gaza is a key priority for Iraq. And at the same time, the Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati was interviewed by *The Economist*, and he has this peace plan.

So I'm just trying to illustrate that there's multiple paths in these countries, and that's how a lot of the proxies that we're concerned about work, and to really reemphasize the complexity when we talk about the group of countries that don't recognize Israel, or the ones in Iran's orbit in a sense.

What's important to remember about both Lebanon and Iraq right now is that despite the corruption, the flawed political system, they're as Democratic as we have for Arab states right now. And so because they do have regular elections and a multiplicity of actors and parties, it's important to examine public opinion in them, and to think about what we're hearing on those streets because it's as close as we can get to what a reflection of a democratic Middle East is, particularly concerning these recent events.

I just want to conclude by saying something that I've said in other venues as well, that reading the region and what Palestinians have said, what citizens of the Arab world have said, the Abraham Accords are a false peace built in spite of the Palestinians and in defiance of the will of the majority of the people of the Middle East. They're led by authoritarian regimes. And for many in the region and for Palestinians, they're a symbol of Israel's impunity. For the United States to champion these Accords while defending itself as a beacon of democracy is insincere.

The tragedies in Israel and in Palestine should serve as a reminder of that. Having the capacity to hold difficult conversations is the only way to have a genuine and peaceful solution. People have, in the past, raised a lot of concerns about the Abraham Accords and the fact that they were championed by some of the Middle East's most authoritarian and least representative rulers. But they were shunned and criticized for raising these, and they were accused of being opposed to peace. But there can be no genuine peace that is imposed through the will of authoritarian leaders.

On that note, I'll end and pass it over to Steve. Thank you.

**STEVE SIMON:** Those were powerful presentations. God, I learned so much. I guess you can't get everything from Twitter. I'm instructed to talk about US policy towards the Gaza crisis. I'm happy to do that. It won't take long.

Before the events of October 7, the US policy-- really, the marquee project of US policy towards the region was Israeli-Saudi normalization. The reasons for that-- the reasons for the administration's interest in normalization were multiple.

I mean, at the, I suppose, most significant level, it was a way to build in, I guess, firebreaks to Chinese access to Saudi Arabia, particularly in wartime. This was why the normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel-- which is a very good thing, but it doesn't impact so much on US interests one way or another-- was pursued.

I mean, there was this other agenda, which was of surpassing strategic importance. And this is why under the rubric of normalization, the US was prepared to offer Saudi Arabia-- the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia-- security guarantees which otherwise would seem like a very high price to pay for normalization process that was not-- certainly didn't contravene US Strategic interests, but didn't serve them terribly much either.



That's all on hold for the moment because October 7 was such a-- it was such a profoundly deranging event. At that point, the United States really had two interests to protect, I suppose.

The one was its interest in the conflict not escalating because escalation could well have gotten out of hand-- could still-- and in the process, implicate the United States in combat operations in the region, something that the United States has been trying to put an end to now since Barack Obama's second term and throughout the Trump administration.

The event forced the United States to look at the region in something of a different way. Not for nothing, has the administration had to walk back or explain comments of senior officials prior to October 7, that the region was quiet or manageable or what have you. But that's the nature of strategic surprise. You're surprised. And that's certainly what happened here.

The United States has its own access to intelligence about Palestinian politics and so forth. But, as in the case with many of its intelligence relationships, it gets its information via liaison with the host service, which is to say the Israelis at this point. Or the United States has direct contact with the PA, Palestinian Authority, security forces. So the United States was as surprised as the Israelis and needed to adjust its policy on the fly. And these-- and the policy was dictated by this concern over the possibility of escalation.

And secondly, by humanitarian concerns. And that reflected an ethical impulse, I suppose one might say, in the administration's policy. But it also took into account reputational damage to the United States caused by Israeli actions in Gaza that ran counter to international humanitarian law and the law of armed conflict and so forth and precipitated the deaths of tens of thousands-- or well, thousands, at this point, of Palestinians, but that number will undoubtedly grow.

So flowing from these interests the US took basically two groups of actions, I guess, or pursued two lines of action. The one on escalation was to deploy two carrier strike groups to the Eastern Mediterranean, in addition to the *USS Carney*. Those two strike groups have 180-- there's an embarked wing on each one. So there's a total of 180 aircraft. That's a lot of firepower. And they're in the neighborhood, so there's a lot of time on target. The sortie rates are high. I mean, if the United States did get involved, it could do so in a punishing way.

But the purpose of the deployment was to deter both Lebanese Hezbollah and Iran from acting on their rhetoric about the Gaza crisis, which has been to threaten at some future undefined point some vague intervention, including, according to the Iranian foreign minister, attacks against the United States.

So the US, I think, takes the view that both Lebanese Hezbollah and Iran are deterrable. They can be deterred. They can be deterred. By the threat of punishment or by the threat of denial of their objectives or what have you, they can be deterred. And this show of force would be important to that end.

The risks of escalation for the United States are serious. The US is already under attack in Iraq and Syria. Those attacks could get could get worse. And if you're in Washington, you just don't want to see that because if those attacks do draw American blood, particularly in a significant way, then the United States will respond militarily. It won't respond in the way that, say, the Trump administration did not to the attacks after the Trump administration's assassination, or targeted killing, really, of Qassem Soleimani outside of Baghdad. So the United States wants to avoid that.

Now, if there is escalation that includes Lebanese Hezbollah, then there's a-- the ensuing catastrophe will be really unimaginable, and not just for the Lebanese or Hezbollah, but also for Israel. And at that stage, Iran presumably comes into the frame in an Israeli response, and an American response if a Hezbollah rocket barrage killed a lot of Americans in Israel, which it would almost certainly do. And I'm not talking about American combatants. But there are a lot of US citizens or dual citizens in Israel who would presumably be hurt or killed in a Hezbollah rocket attack.

So escalation is a serious worry, and the administration has combined this show of force plus diplomacy to try and manage that. The humanitarian concern was also one of President Biden's main objectives thus far in the first speech that he gave on the crisis, which was widely applauded and was certainly welcomed in Israel.

Biden gave a speech that was very carefully structured. There was a big wind-up expressing Biden's, I think, certainly sincere horror at the nature of the October 7 attacks and support for Israel and so forth. But following that wind-up, the punch line was, but what differentiates the United States and Israel from the likes of Hamas is that we do not target civilians.

So right off the bat, there was a billboard that Biden brought to his presentation essentially that said, you got to be careful here, not just because of the loss of life, but because you're going to damage US interests. But his embrace of Bibi, of Prime Minister Netanyahu, was effective in producing results. It got an Israeli concession on a humanitarian aid corridor that broke a logjam. It probably put the kibosh on an Israeli plan to preempt in Lebanon.

And it postponed the Israeli response on the ground in Gaza enough so that some serious discussions could take place about the nature of Israel's objectives and its plan to achieve those objectives. And those discussions were carried out by an American three-star, General Glynn, who is still in Israel, I believe, maintaining his conversations with the IDF, with the Israeli Defense Force.

So that's been the administration's strategy. It's essentially crisis management, and maybe more specifically, managing the Israeli response to the crisis that could go just far. The administration kept a stream of senior visitors for several weeks on the grounds that, well, if there's a senior American or a European head of state, like Macron or Rishi Sunak in Israel, then it would be inopportune, to say the least, for the Israelis to launch a ground invasion of Gaza.

So those were all techniques that were used to postpone the Israeli invasion, which has-- which is a gathering storm at this point. The initial movements appear to be probes and with the aim of flushing out Hamas, testing its defenses and so forth, and preparing the ground for-- presumably-- for the isolation of Northern Gaza.

Now, the United States, at this point, doesn't have a whole lot of control over events. Certainly, it has little control over Iran and Hezbollah. And it has little control, I think, at this point over Israel. The United States is trying to enlist Saudi involvement. It has not succeeded thus far, but that will be necessary in any post-conflict arrangement.

And I'll just-- perhaps I'll close just by saying that the US government now is just beginning to wrap its heads around the day after. And they're thinking about this pretty carefully without having drawn any conclusions, and they're doing a lot of consulting and so forth with a range of interlocutors on this.

And those day after plans are geared to the proposition that Israel will have to hand off control of Gaza once it has satisfied or satisfied its aims in Gaza. It will have to hand them off, and it will have to hand them off to some kind of multinational-- multilateral entity, which will then, in the fullness of time, hand it off to an empowered Palestinian Authority, the empowerment of that Palestinian Authority like much else will depend on the nature of the government that emerges-- the nature of the Israeli government that emerges from this crisis.

And there are two views on this. The one is that, as I quoted Bernard Avishai, a scholar at Dartmouth in something I just did for *The Economist*, he says, well, the Israelis are waiting to cough up this current government like a hairball-- like a cat with a hairball. And there's some polling actually to back him up.

But on the other hand, one has to wonder what the longer term effects on Israeli public opinion regarding Arabs and so forth will be, and whether, in fact, the ultra right will be the main beneficiaries rather than the center or center right-- main beneficiaries.

And if that's the case, the scope for a resumption of Saudi normalization talks, which would be very important for the reconstruction of Gaza and a peace process to which presumably the administration wants to apply a defibrillator-- at this point, it's now presumed dead-- all that will not be possible in the future for Palestinians in Gaza, as well as for Israelis, I believe, will be really rather dark.

**EVAN LIEBERMAN:** All right. Thank you, Steve, and thank you to all of the panelists. That was really a terrific set of comments and generated quite a few terrific questions this evening. We've had between 400 and 500 people joining us, and many of you have posed questions. And we won't be able to get to all of them since we only have 15 minutes.

But this doesn't always happen in a panel, but you all actually did what was asked, which was to reflect on actors and strategies, and why various actors have done what they've done. But quite understandably, many of the people in the audience really are curious your views about what comes next.

What-- you've all given such a textured and troubling description of the many different difficult choices that are in this region and difficult strategic calculations to be made. But is there any possibility that you could see of a reasonable various sides agreeing to a peace settlement?

And one obvious one that was talked about for a long time, and certainly for quite some time now has seemed dead on arrival, but of course, there was this *New York Times* article saying maybe a two-state solution could actually work. Maybe this whole conflict could generate that. So that's one question that folks have asked.

And they've also asked about some World War II analogies. Would Hamas ever consider releasing all of the hostages, lay down their arms in order, just the way Japan and Germany did, to have this two-state solution with some international monitoring? Could one imagine a collection of countries to do a Marshall Plan for Gaza?

So I don't expect all of you to respond to all of that, but you can certainly understand that these questions of what comes next are of great interest. So I'll ask you all to try and keep it brief because we don't have that much time. But, Peter, perhaps you can go first.

**PETER KRAUSE:** Sure. So thanks again, Evan. I think great questions there. I tried to answer a bunch and put some resources in the chat. I'll try to do a couple more. But I'll just quickly say, what comes next is a whole timeline.

So what comes next I think in the short-term is probably a longer war. I don't think that Israel is about to back off anytime soon with their avowed goal to, if not destroy Hamas, then remove it from power. I do say-- we didn't talk about this as much, but if you look at polling from *Maariv* or Israel Democracy Institute or others, the hostages weigh significantly on Israeli public opinion. And there has been more and more talk about either an all-for-all deal, which I don't think is realistic.

I don't think the Israelis are about to release 6,000-plus Palestinian prisoners, especially given the fact that when they released 1,000 in the Gilad Shalit deal, some of them were involved in this recent October 7 attack. So I think politically and otherwise, that's unlikely.

But I do think it's possible, depending on how the course of the conflict goes over the coming days and weeks, that you could see a ceasefire emerge alongside some type of hostage deal or hostage trade. But, again, that's kind of a short-term tactical thing with the current round of conflict. It's not the broader peace deal that you're talking about.

And I'll just say briefly on that, you're right to say that the peace process-- people describe it on being life support or dead. And I think those are both accurate over the past decade or so. But I'll say this. Going back to my comments, to me it's one of the only outcomes that recognizes and institutionalizes both Palestinian nationalism and Jewish or Israeli and Zionist nationalism.

And so any other alternative, whether it's a one-state solution as we have today, with just Israel and no Palestinian state, or a Palestinian one-state solution that some support, which is everyone has citizenship and gets to vote, et cetera. Most Israelis would look at that and say, well, that ends our vision of a Jewish majority democracy, and so we don't want that.

So long and short, I do think that there is, again, correct criticism of a lot of the challenges of the peace process in the '90s and the 2000s. It didn't ultimately work out. But I think we're in an era now where for many Israelis and Palestinians they see the alternative.

And I don't think the alternative looks that great either because I don't know that the vision of the Likud or the vision of Hamas is one that's either going to, a, be achieved, or, b, be attractive certainly to the other side, let alone to many of its own citizens when they actually see the result of it.

So I'm not optimistic in the short-term. But if there's something I take from, again, the terrible things we're seeing now, and I wish we didn't have to go through them to get to this, but we live in an era of negative partisanship and people being motivated more by not just "I want this," but "man, I really don't want that."

And so people are experiencing things maybe that they don't want now. And so maybe they can come back around to what I see as the least bad solution here, where not everyone gets what they want, but everyone gets something that resolves a lot of these issues over territory, over refugees, over Jerusalem, et cetera.

Again, it's not easy. People tried for many, many years to make this happen. But I'm not-- I don't feel like it's gone forever. I think it's something where these alternative, to some extent, fantasies of a one-state solution by various sides that are either not possible or not realistic may fail. And then there may be more momentum again for this, but we'll see.

**DAVID** If I could just--

**KIRKPATRICK:**

**EVAN** We'll give David a chance to respond.

**LIEBERMAN:**

**DAVID** Yeah. Mark Landler, who wrote that article on the front page of *The Times* today is a friend of mine. I thought he

**KIRKPATRICK:** did a very good job, if your assignment is to examine the two-state solution at this moment.

I'm going to say that I don't think it was particularly responsible of *The New York Times* to put that story on the front page. I think in response to Peter, just because it is the only solution does not make it a viable solution. I think we should all be more realistic about the fact that there is not a tenable two-state solution, not just as a matter of the politics of the leadership on either side, but the facts on the ground. Like, those settlements aren't moving.

So we're not-- it would require a will on the Israeli side not only to make a peace and establish state-- to tolerate an [INAUDIBLE]-- excuse me-- to tolerate a Palestinian political entity which was responsible for its own self-defense and had military force. Not only would you have to have an Israeli leadership willing to tolerate that on its border, it would have to move those settlements. So that's not happening.

Cynics have said for a long time, oh, the Israeli right, the peace process. They love the process. They hate the peace. And I think it is not too soon for the debate in the American public to be about what do we do in the one-state solution?

We live now in a one-state solution. It will be a one-state solution with a lot of Palestinians under Israeli rule, or it will be another kind of one-state solution. But the trajectory-- it doesn't just have to bend to get to a two-state solution. It has to turn 180 degrees and go back 20 years. Steve, what do you think?

**STEVE SIMON:** Yeah. So a final status accord within the next six months is not in the cards, obviously. But I think if there's going to be an alternative to a permanent Israeli blockade of Gaza that controls it much more tightly than has been the case until now, and which becomes a free fire zone for Israeli opportunistic or dynamic targeting within Gaza, if we want to have some alternative to that, then there's got to be the handoff that I described earlier to some competent, effective body. And I've written about various options for this looking in a UN context.

Now, the Israelis, of course, are deeply suspicious of the UN. But you don't need the UN actually to do the mission. You just need the UN to authorize the mission. So I think there's a way around that.

But the ultimate handoff needs to be to the Palestinians. And you're not going to get a Palestinian-- you're not going to get a Palestinian government to do this, or to do it with any credibility, legitimacy, or effectuality unless that government has shown that it has won concessions from Israel on key issues of concern to Palestinians. They need to show that they can deliver. That will be the key to legitimacy.

Right now, there were ideas that were mooted during the Israeli-Saudi normalization talks-- the transfer of chunks of territory from mixed control-- that is, mixed Israeli and Palestinian control in the West Bank to sole Palestinian control, a halt to settlements, reining in the provocative activities of radical settlers on the West Bank and so forth.

So, I mean, one could add to that list probably ad infinitum, but that would be a start. And then you'd have talks. And who would broker the talks? Probably the United States. We will-- the United States will fall back on tried and true diplomatic processes and structures to do that. But this is the only alternative to the dark future. This is the Bedford Falls versus Pottersville view of what happens when the shooting stops.

**EVAN LIEBERMAN:** Great. Thanks. I'm going to turn to Marsin. Marsin, you can, first of all, comment on this particular question. But part of the future is also potential sources from the region on Hamas, so which some of the people in the audience have been asking about. So what can you share on that?

**MARSIN ALSHAMARY:** I mean, if you don't mind, I'd like to roll that into the bigger question that we're also answering about what's going to happen in the short-term future and in the long-term. I think with Hamas the two main actors who can exert pressure are Iran and Qatar to an extent, and Turkey to a lesser extent as well.

But the thing that's truly alarming to me is that I spend a lot of time thinking about what's going to happen in this conflict. And it doesn't appear that we're going to find a resolution that won't take us back to where we are today. We've seen this cycle happen over and over again.

And I hate saying this genuinely. But we've reached a point in which the people who have been acting in the name of Palestinians, whether or not Palestinians want them to, or Hamas, and the most extremist faction available, and on the Israeli side, as Peter laid out, we've also reached the position where a right-wing government is speaking on behalf of Israelis. So we have two most-- of the least wanting to have dialogue sides.

But for years, I've seen track two dialogues in the Middle East, and I used to scoff at them. But I think-- I genuinely think now that more dialogue involving more actors, and not really keeping anyone out because we think of them as being abhorrent or being-- or having views that we don't agree with-- I genuinely think having serious dialogues that don't just bring your friends and the people whose arms you can twist to the table, but genuinely everyone is important. And the US was able to do this on a different issue with JCPOA, for example.

So if we don't take this seriously as a commitment to dialogue as an international community, we're going to see more massacres for civilians on both sides-- for innocent civilians on both sides who are led by leaders who don't represent them.

**EVAN LIEBERMAN:** All right. Well, thank you, Marsin, and thank you to all the panelists. I know there are many more questions in the queue, and I know that all the panelists have more answers. But I want to be mindful of the fact that we are at our closing time, close to 6:00 PM.

So, again, I want to thank you. And on behalf of MIT Center for International Studies, thank all of you for joining us. We have two more Starr Forums this month-- a webinar on November 16 which is entitled "A permanent partnership? How Xi and Putin are shaping a turbulent world." And an in-person event on November 29, "Does democracy imply majority rule-- insights from the US, Israel, and around the world."

A link to get updates on all of our Starr Forums is in the chat. And for those of you who registered for the event, you'll be getting an email with a link to today's video, which will also have resources that were put in the chat. So, again, thank you very much, and good evening.

[MUSIC PLAYING]