



PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

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Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

“The Bush Administration and Middle East Peacemaking: The Final Six Months”

1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, 5th Floor Conference Room, 30 June 2008, 12 PM

The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars held a panel discussion regarding the future of Middle East peacemaking in the last six months of President Bush’s administration. Speakers included, **Rami Khouri**, Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center and Editor-at-large of the *Daily Star*, **David Makovsky**, Director of the Project on the Middle East Peace Process at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and **Aaron David Miller**, Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center and former U.S. Middle East Negotiator.

Khouri stated that over the past seven years there have been drastic changes within the region that has altered the American role in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. The greatest change according to Khouri is that **the Middle East has gone from a region defined by one conflict (Arab-Israeli) to a region defined by a wide variety of religious, military, cultural, and ideological conflicts**. The other change is that those in the region critical of U.S. policy have become more politically active in a way never seen before. The recent exclusion of the U.S. from diplomatic settlements in the region is an illustration of the loss of American diplomatic credibility, and that Israel is more willing to recognize the region’s new realities and find a balanced resolution. Khouri suggested that unless Bush is willing take into consideration a broad view of the interests of all sides than the peace process should be left as is and turned over to a new administration that sees the new regional reality.

Makovsky stated that the Israel-Hamas ceasefire is helpful to reducing tensions but its success turns on Hamas’ ability to impose the ceasefire on other factions and not merely use the respite to re-arm. He also suggested that **despite the problems with Hamas, talks between Israel and Fatah have gone better than thought and the two sides are closer on the problem of refugees and land than is assumed**. In regards to Israel-Syria talks, Makovsky said that it is an attempt to see if Syria can be peeled away from Iran, but under the Bush administration these talks will likely go nowhere if the U.S. and Saudi Arabia do not provide the economic and political support to help Syria make the strategic shift. He concluded with the hope that the Bush administration will help keep the Israel-Hamas ceasefire and Israel-Syria talks going in its last six months in office.

Miller said that over the past decade America has lost credibility and is neither feared nor respected in the region. Miller contended that the Bush administration try not to exacerbate the situation in the region and allow the diplomatic processes currently occurring to continue. According to Miller, the next administration must push for greater cooperation between **Ehud**

Olmert and **Mahmoud Abbas**, keep informal accommodation alive between Israel and Hamas, and help bridge the gap between Israel and Syria so that painful compromises can be made. This will require the next administration to make a concerted effort, and really decide if the U.S. is interested in solving the conflict rather than treating it with fleeting attention. However, Miller suggested that unless the raw material for a Mid-East peace deal exists there would be no diplomatic movement. **Miller concluded with the three propositions that the U.S. would require before it seriously utilized its diplomatic clout: a durable and equitable solution, credible and serious negotiations, and the ability of the U.S. to be able to play a critical role.**