

106th Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust Dialogue:

Is Peace possible in the Middle East?

UCT, 1 March 2012

Speakers: Benji Pogrund

Bassam Eid

Chair: Lionel Louw

Lionel Louw: On behalf of the Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust I want to welcome each one of you to this dialogue session this evening; it's our second for the year, and we are very happy to see all of you present here this evening. We will circulate the attendance registers and we ask you please to complete those so that we can get an idea who the people are who constituted the audience for this evening. And our donors are certainly interested in wanting to know whether we say we had so many people - well, who are they that attended – so we ask you to please do that.

Now this evening we have two speakers, and whenever we raise the Israeli Palestinian relationship and the question of statehood, it evokes tensions and emotions. The boycott, disinvestment and sanctions campaign has heightened those tensions. For us it's the third time in, since today's the 1st of March, during the 13 months it's the third time that we are focusing our attention on that part of the world. On the 7th of February last year we had Professor Saree Makdisi who was the speaker. On the 7th of November last year we had Professor Jeff Halper as the speaker. Tonight we have Benji Pogrund and Bassam Eid as our two speakers. So in 13 months it's our third visit to that part of the world – and it never fails to evoke emotions and tension, sometimes within and other times after the session. Now Benji Pogrund is a former South African. He's the founder of the Yakar Center for Social Concern in Jerusalem. And we in the invitation provided further detail. Bassam Eid is the founder and director of the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, and he tell me that he's also been in South Africa, this is third visit. So one by virtue of having lived here and edited a newspaper, the other by virtue of visiting so often, is familiar with the country and the dynamics.

Tonight they will be speaking on the question: Is peace possible in the Middle East? Now before I hand over to them, let me just say this as a reminder to you that the fundamental aim of the Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust is to foster critical intellectual thinking, writing, debate and discussion, on themes related to social, political, economic and cultural conditions, including their historical genesis and their change. And that's one of the objectives that we pursue in this Trust. And so this evening,

in this third visit, it's another occasion for that kind of engagement with the dynamics as it relates to the Middle East. Now as we customarily do, our speakers will speak first and between them we have 20 minutes and 15 minutes speaking, and then we will open the floor for discussion. And what we do is to take four or five questions or comments before we give you an opportunity to respond. And then we will do another round and we will continue. We usually go on till about 7.30pm – so we will have a fair amount of time for questions and discussion. Again, what I am going to say right at the outset is we've had to do this in some of our sessions, where we've had to say to persons: Come to your question pointedly, crisply, pose your question; if you have a comment, make your comment and do so briefly. We do not want to have statements read – and it's not just about the Middle East, we've had it about other topics as well. Political parties sometimes come and they want to use the platform to raise and read a statement; so we do not want that. So that's just to set the rules as we will move forward. So with these words and we welcome to all of you and particularly our two guests – they must be pretty tired because they've been speaking since last night, but we are very happy to have you on this platform, to host you this evening and we invite you to come and speak to us. Benji is going to be the first speak, followed by Bassam, and then we will open the floor for discussion. We want to say again, thank you to Cape Town Television. They record our dialogues and they subsequently broadcast it to the Cape Town audience – it's a Cape Town television station; so while you will be speaking to this audience in front of you, in the next couple of weeks you'll also be speaking to a wider 1.2 million audience in Cape Town as well. Benji, over to you. [applause].

Benji Pogrand: Thank you. It unnerves rather to have to admit it but it's actually about 60 years since I first met Harold Wolpe. He was at Wits, I was at UCT – we were at the different ends of the political spectrum; he was on the left, I was in the liberal wing of NUSAS – but it's a great pleasure after all these year and having known Harold so long ago, to be here tonight. And thank you for inviting us and thank you for coming.

In the many meetings I ran in Jerusalem in the Center for Social Concern, I had a basic opening statement. There's very contentious material tonight: if you go away at the end of the night feeling worried and upset, the meeting would have worked. If you go away at the end of the night not feeling worried and upset – then you must really start worrying [chuckles from the floor]. So what from what you say I don't think I have to give that prelude today; this is a topic that does arise tensions and there are reasons for it, some real, some manufactured – so let's see where we go tonight. Peace is a big word in the Middle East and especially between Israelis and Palestinians. People yearn for it; after all the years of conflict, of violence, of killing, of damage done. Leaders speak about it all the time. They want peace. And the leaders, both the Israeli and Palestinian,

always say, let's get together and talk, let's resolve the issues, we can get over them – we must just talk. We must meet with no preconditions. No preconditions. Then the Israeli leaders say: but of course Jerusalem is ours, it's our capital, we will never divide it, we'll never share it with you – that is not negotiable. And the Israeli say: Of course we've got to retain control of the Jordan Valley; it's crucial for our security on our eastern border – it's not negotiable. And then they say: The settlements on the West Bank are ours, we cannot move them – they are not negotiable. And they say we must recognise Israel as a Jewish state; unless you do that there's no point in trying to meet. So they say: Unless you agree, there can be no talks without preconditions.

And the Palestinians in their turn say: You've got to stop construction of the settlements immediately otherwise we won't come and talk. And they say: Of course Jerusalem must be divided because it is also our capital. And unless you agree to that in advance, there's no point in trying to talk. And they say: Also we will never acknowledge Israel as a Jewish state. And they also then say: And we also insist on the right of return of Palestinian refugees, those who fled or who were expelled, 700 000 to 750 000 in 1948, apart from those who went later, now their numbers are 7 million throughout the world officially: We won't talk unless you agree to the right of return. So like the Israelis they also say: Unless you agree to these conditions there can be no talk without preconditions.

Now Israel has recently added another stipulation: As you've seen Fatah and Hamas are trying to negotiate, unity, and Bassam will no doubt talk more about that. Bu Israel is very unhappy about it and it says to them: If you want to get together – says it to Fatah because they don't talk to Hamas officially. Then there is no peace deal. Do you make up your mind, you either want peace with us or you want Fatah-Hamas government. It's not an unreasonable view with Hamas' stand wanting the destruction of Israel. The problem is just a few months ago, anyone with even a short memory will remember that one of the points Israel was making insistently: there's no point in making peace with you and Fatah and the Palestinian Authority because you don't represent all the Palestinians, you don't speak for the Palestinians of Gaza, so there's no point in going ahead.

Or as you will gather there's a lot of double-talk on both sides – there are no angels. There's a lot of evasion and a lot of lies, and of course each side blames the other and there's finger-pointing for the lack of progress towards peace. The basic problem is that neither Israelis or Palestinians have reached, or at least the leaders, have accepted that they must end the conflict; that it is ruinous, it is wrong, we're doing harm to each other. In our own case, talking as an Israeli, in regard to the occupation: apart from being against the occupation, I am enormously worried about the

brutalisation of our own young soldiers in enforcing an occupation. This is bad for all of us, except those who want to be there. We've got to agree on a compromise – but the leaders have not got to that stage. And this is hard for both sides. It's hard for both sides to make those compromises, however necessary they are, and that's we just haven't got there. Because in that tiny piece of the world, that tiny piece of land smaller than the Kruger Park, both Jews and Arabs have justice on their side; both can lay claim to that part of the world. History, religion, land, culture, you name it. The other opposes it, denies it – each one denies the other's legitimacy to be there, but both have got valid claims to say 'we belong here and we're not going to give way'. So that is the essential dilemma that we face there in trying to achieve peace.

The Palestinians have the right to freedom. They suffered the most grievous losses in 1948 and again in 1967. They suffer under occupation; they shouldn't be there. The refugees, the 750 000 originally and the million since then who are spread all over the world, and a lot of it is a fake and that's a story in itself to be looked at if anyone's interested. They've been left in limbo for years. Take Lebanon, there're about what, 400 000 – 500 000, appallingly treated; don't have the vote, herded into special areas, can't travel freely; not allowed to enter a whole lot of listed occupations, can't become doctors, lawyers, all sorts of jobs like that. Despised; every couple of years there's a series of riots and they get killed on mass. This should have ended years ago. People should have intervened and everyone's to blame, no one can escape blaming this one.

Palestinians have been badly served by their leaders right from the start. It's also been hard because Palestinians right from the beginning of the 20th Century opposed Jewish settlements. Palestinian nationalism goes back to the beginning of the 20th Century. You can find a newspaper Palestine in about 1911 in about 1911 which was warning against the Jews coming to that part of the world – it goes back that long ago. But the UN voted, life moved on, all sorts of things happened. My argument is the leaders served us badly and continue to do so. And that also informs on the hands of the Arab states which would use the refugees as an issue against Israel.

On the other side of the fence, Israel has every reason to worry about how best to achieve peace. It has been under attack even before it came into existence on May 14th 1948. It's like no other country in the world. When I say 'attack' that's like an understatement. Its existence has been challenged and imperilled time and again in one war after the other, and if there's not a war there are blood-curling threats. That's a matter of record, you can go and find it wherever you want to and Google, it just pours out there and the hatred for it. No other country has been subject to attacks of such ferocity and an ongoing nature. And yet with all that, with all the struggle simply to survive,

Israel has achieved phenomenal things. Those of you who've been to Israel will know a bit about it, the quality of life that has been maintained there. There are problems – problems of a normal society; poverty, transport, all sort of things – and abnormal problems specific there, as you've got specific problems here – every country has. It's a democracy, it's got problems, but it's basically a democracy – every citizen has a vote. There's basic equality. There's discrimination against the Arab minority: well, look at any other country in the world where there's a minority and look what happens to them – we don't do so badly. We're trying to go forward although there's some who're trying to hold us back – again, a normal society, that's the one.

We're the second Silicon Valley: your cellphones, you wouldn't have them working like that without Israeli technology. Your computers wouldn't be working without Israeli technology. If you want to pull the cost of your drugs down, you buy generics from Teva, the second biggest generic drug company in the world. Water, we've got a crippling shortage of water, serious in that part of the world; it's been a big political issue. Our next set of desalinisation plants are coming upstream probably next year and we'll be in a state to export water from then on. That's Israeli technology again ahead of the world. So the achievements are considerable – there are penalties, there's pain, people suffer – being worked on, it's nothing static, it's not a perfect society.

Now the Oslo Accord of 1993 gave hope – that's an unfashionable view among many both Israelis and Palestinians who see it as a curse that it was wrong. I believe, and many argue like this, it was a turning point. It was the first time that Israel acknowledged that there could be that there's was going to be a Palestinian state; the first time that Palestinians acknowledged Israel as a state, the existence of Israel. It got muddied and all things went awful after that, but the basic idea that's been placed there is still there. And the leaders on both sides still pay lip-service to the principles of Oslo; basically two states side by side. They go on paying lip-service, they talk about it. The trouble is on both sides, through their actions, they are destroying, undermining the possibility of a two-state solution. Netanyahu has gone on record, he believes in two states. But he encourages construction of houses on the West Bank; if he doesn't encourage it he looks the other way, which is the other way it gets done there. And every house that gets built, every *Mikvah*, religious ritual bath, every kindergarten, every school that gets built there, undermines the possibility of a viable Palestinian state – and he knows it and they all know it. And we're in this terrible situation now. The majority of Israelis, remember, are against the settlements. The figures have shifted, 60% at the moment, it could be a bit less, the figure is changing, but most people don't want the settlements. And we're in the hands now of half a million settlers – it's the 'tail wagging the dog' and all sorts of funny influences behind the scenes in government.

Palestinians are undermining the chance of peace, through the insistence on the return of refugees as prime demand. And also, because to round off that point, this is a code word, it's used by the critics of Israel, 'right of return' – it sounds good, it sounds fair, justice. It's a con. The right of return means the right of 7 million Palestinians, even if most of them don't want to come back, it's the right to return to their original homes. That's the end of Israel as a Jewish state certainly, and as most Israelis want it to be. That is what it means. And the people who keep using that slogan, I believe the leaders know exactly what they're saying; they know they're perpetrating a lie, and I think other people pretty understandably and reasonably say, hey, this is a good idea and it's right and proper. In fact, it's not true. It's also based on the erroneous reading of UN Resolution 194, which set up, which discussed the question of refugees. If you look at it, it's not the wording that the critics say it is; it's a very different story. But the reason I'm saying this probably is there is no chance of right of return, it won't happen. And those who are punting this, are doing an enormous disservice to everyone's cause and to the cause of peace. 99.9%, perhaps 99.8% of Israeli Jews will not agree to it – so how are you going to enforce it? Kill them? Shut them out? How are you going to do it? It's a nonsense and it's a fake to try and keep pushing this one, it's just not going to happen.

Add to these heavy impediments to peace, we've got a right-wing government, it's getting more right-wing by the moment. Part of that is part of the cycle of the western world – Germany, England and perhaps America later this year. Part of it is because of the forces inside Israeli society – to have Soviet immigrants from the former Soviet Union. The intifada, suicide bombings, it did an enormous of [indistinct] Palestinian friends, you guys are crazy, you've driven most Israeli Jews to the right through suicide bombings. All the [indistinct] centuries of Jewish persecution, the threats from Iran and all the crazies of the world – you're confirming it, you want to wipe us out. How do you think people are going to respond, lie down and die? They'll get up and say, 'I'll kill you before you kill me' – that's it. We have this push to the right and there are some very worrying things going wrong that came from that. The right-wing, they're pushing racism against Arabs, they're pushing anti-democratic moves against secular people or the democrats of Israel – it is worrying.

Now on the Palestinian side, Palestinians trying violence with intifada got nowhere; as I say, it was counter-productive, it pushed Israeli to the right. They also did themselves enormous moral damage because it was wrong. What the Palestinians did with suicide bombings was wrong, that's all there is to it. They've tried non-violent resistance – still trying it in places like Bel'im, have weekly protests. It could be good, it needs commitment, self-discipline, a commitment to sacrifice – and

some very great people are doing it, but I don't see a taste for taking on the commitment. So there's been BDS, boycott, divestment, sanctions – nothing wrong with boycott as way of expressing things. But my view is BDS as we know it now is dishonest. a) It uses the apartheid label – that's a lie, full-stop, it's a lie. I've spent the last two years working on a book about Israel and apartheid. I hope many of you will buy it when it comes, eventually when I finish it – because the subject is complex, but I've been going through deconstructing the criticisms. And every day, I must tell you, I am depressed by what I am coming across: the distortions, the lies – if you give me a bit more time I'll tell you some of them, I'll give you extracts from my book. The apartheid label is wrong, used by Israel itself, it's nonsense – there's no denying it, it's rubbish. About the West Bank, that's an occupation which is wrong, it's an oppression. To call it apartheid is to distort, it's muddying the water. You've got to concentrate on getting rid of the occupation. When you start calling it apartheid you are raising all sorts of other issues. It's also, I believe, faulty in the targets it selects for its purposes – and that's something we can perhaps discuss if it comes up again.

But the final point that I am going to make is more than the elephant in the room, is the [indistinct]. Egypt, we don't know what's going to happen in any of these countries. No expert, a lot of journalists making a lot of money and commentators, assessing what's going to happen and might happen or will happen. No one knows. There are forces at work there which cannot be contained. We know Egypt, that the tyrant went, but the military are in charge and whether they're going to let go, whether they're going to perpetuate the same as before and keep all their riches, and so on, we don't know. Libya's a mess. Lebanon we don't know. Syria is the key at this stage, and there no one is sure what's going to happen there either. Israel watches what's going on there with apprehension, doesn't know what to do, like everyone else in the world. Saudi is the enemy but is the known enemy – he's not going to start a war, everyone knows that, his army isn't up to it. He wants the Golan Heights back; nearly got there a few years ago but it fell down at the last moment. But the main worry about Syria is Syria arms Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and it supplies its own arms and arms from Iran, who is stoking things up behind the scenes. And according to reports, Hezbollah has got 40 000 missiles aimed at Israel – no one can be sure about the number, it might be 25 000, it might be 43 000, it's a helluva lot. And if Hezbollah is pushed, persuaded or what, as a diversion from Syria's internal trouble, to fire off a few thousand missiles at Israel, hitting Haifa, the northern port, the Galilee area, where a lot of Arabs live also by the way. If that happens, Israel will be obliged to go in there in force and that will be a real war and that will upset things totally. And with Iran, as you know, there's talk [indistinct] Israel bomb and so on, I don't know, I don't think anyone knows even the Israeli government. I hope to G-D they don't do it, it will be an

act of madness, I think, but there's talk of it and that raises the temperature and that [indistinct] like in the 1914 War, if you know your history, the rest of the western world slipped into that war without even intending to go to war – and that is the danger now. We live in a very dangerous period now. It's not a time when people would be encouraged to make changes, bold changes. Yet on the other hand it's precisely the time when bold changes should be made, because there's so many vacuums, so much uncertainties, this is the time to move in. For that to we need the leaders, Israelis and Palestinians to get together and to work things out – because we all know the answer, we know two states, Jerusalem shared, agreed borders, swap some land if necessary, agreement on refugees. It's all been worked out. The leaders have got together and they've got to have a sense, they've now got to do it. Thank you. [applause].

Bassam Eid: Thanks for the organisers, thanks for the university and of course thanks for the audience who give us such an important opportunity to come from far way, in turn to provide the first-hand information about what's really going in the Israeli and Palestinian conflict. I am a Palestinian, I am a refugee, I am a Muslim and I am an Arab, developed in a refugee camp for 33 years, from 1966, even before the Israeli occupation, till 1999. I remember that on the 13th of September '93, when Arafat was sitting with Yitzhak Rabin at the White House to sign the Oslo Agreement, a friend of mine called me in that time and he said, "Bassam, listen, peace is coming and no more violations of human rights will be committed, so you must have to change your job." I used to research violations of human rights. Then I start really thinking and I thought that I might be a very good tour guide, probably to the Israelis and to the Palestinians.

Then the Palestinian Authority arrived, as everybody knows, in May '94 and thinks looked wonderful – peace, a lot of donations, a huge effort, we succeed to build the Gaza Strip. Of course, thanks for the German for the \$ 80 million that the donated to the airport. And it looks like that we are nearby to complete the infrastructure of the Palestinian [indistinct]. In July 2000 when Arafat met with the former Israeli prime minister, Ehud Barak at the wine plantation, both of them failed to reach an agreement on the content. Then for no reason, in my opinion, an intifada took place, which we call it Al-Aqsa intifada, which is in my opinion, it's the most threatening thing which happened to the Palestinian cause for them. I think that the second intifada destroyed what remains from the Israeli [indistinct].

In 2005 the former Israeli prime minister, Ariel Sharon, decided to disengage from the Gaza Strip, in return to make process. You know, we in the Middle East like the word 'process' – whatever you are doing you can call it 'process'. Then the Israelis disengaged. Then we have elections in January

2006 and the Hamas won. We vote for the Hamas, of course. Hamas is the legitimate representative of the Palestinians, not only the PLO. I never vote for the PLO. So Hamas is empowered of the legitimacy to rule the Palestinians. But the problem that Hamas did, in my opinion, the revolution which took place in June 2007 in the Gaza Strip, where they killed 160 Fatah members and they kicked out all of the Fatah people, including the Palestinian president Abbas. And they confiscated his home and his home became a detention centre for the Fatah people. That's a big mass for the Palestinians. Gaza is now completely separated from the West Bank. Nobody from Gaza Strip is allowed to enter to the West Bank and no West Banker is allowed to enter to the Gaza Strip. That's because our leaders want that, not the Israelis. The Israelis is not related to that.

We didn't succeed since five years ago to reach any kind of reconciliation or to bring any kind of unity among ourselves. Then the Egyptians said, okay, we will try to provide help – come and go, come and go, many delegations went to Egypt and came back with [indistinct]. After Mubarak moved, was ousted from the stage to the Square, the Egyptian government succeed to bring the [indistinct]. That was in May 2011. The agreement said that within six months a new Palestinian must have to be formed in terms of to make new elections, which means if we signed it May last year, in November last year we were to have elections. But we didn't succeed, because for me as a Palestinian it looks like that the Hamas is so satisfied with what he has in the Gaza Strip, but the Fatah is also very satisfied in what he have in the West Bank. Then the agreement of Cairo didn't work. What we should have to do? Probably to find a new [indistinct] to the Palestinians. Then Qatar came by saying, okay we will have – everybody remember last month – a new agreement has been signed also in Doha between Mahmoud Abbas and Khaled. And the agreement say that Mahmoud Abbas will be the coming prime minister for the new government. I don't know really how much Mahmoud Abbas, how many positions Mahmoud Abbas can put in his pockets. You are the president of Palestine, you are the chairman of the PLO, you are the chairman of the Palestinian Authority, you are the chairman of the Fatah, you are the minister of defence for the Palestinians – why do you need such a position also as prime minister?

We remember of course in 2003 when Arafat pointed Abbas as the prime minister and he kicked him out after four months. We remember that, we know exactly our history. So is Abbas really suitable to be the prime minister? Now where is the problem? Okay, let's say Abbas will be prime minister. Khaled Meshal agreed on that; then the Hamas in Gaza said, listen, who is Khaled Meshal? He never informed us here that he is travelling to Doha to sign an agreement with Abbas. So this agreement is expired. Now we have a huge conflict within the Hamas between themselves. The inside don't want to recognise that which is outside. And that's the price a week ago why the Hamas

prime minister Ismail Haniya declared a week ago that Hamas in Gaza is supporting the Syrian revolutionary against [the gerasa*]. That his statement came after one year of bloodshed in Syria. After over 8000 people has been killed [inaudible], which is such a statement we never hear from Khaled Meshal – because he still looking for a shelter; he don't know exactly next month in which country he is going to be located. So the Hamas said in Gaza that we are not going to accept the Doha Agreement, and Abbas couldn't be the prime minister because Abbas has his own strategy. And Abbas' strategy is, his security cooperation with the Israelis – and we are not going to sit together in that same government with somebody who is coordinating and cooperating security with the Israeli – which is right. Imagine that I am a member of Hamas sitting in the minister's council meeting and Abbas received a call from the Israelis to arrest me. What will happen as a minister? What would happen?

So, we, the Palestinians have responsibilities – no doubt about it. We shouldn't have to be blamed. The assimilation of the Fatah and Hamas – Israel didn't play it, Israel never planned it. It's we – we must have to claim it on what's been going on within the Palestinian society. The occupation is horrible. But today if you will come to a Fatah member by asking him who is your real enemy, then he will say Hamas, not the Israelis. And now both sides are keeping a [indistinct] on what the occupation is doing.

So how we can really stop it with such kind of leadership? So I totally admit that there is a lack of leadership in both ranks – as I have not seen Abbas as a leader. I didn't see that Nathaniel is a real leader for the Israelis. And the question is, where we are going? How long? It will take time. Are we really going to seek peace or to reach peace? But that's [indistinct 41:06*] with the story of a Bedouin guy, that his son being murdered by the neighbour. But Bedouin took revenge to his son from the neighbour after 40 years. But then everybody ran to the Bedouin by saying, "You really did it so fast." [some chuckles from the floor] We are a patient people, by the way. We can wait at the checkpoint for three hours and after crossing it, start breathing – oh, thanks to God we did it fast. So this is the situation of the Palestinians.

This is the reality, let's say, ja. I couldn't add more reality. I am a person who believes in self-criticism; we must have to be criticised, no doubt. I don't the Israelis to criticise me – it's much better and respected for me if I will do so. So the Palestinians are waiting. If you will go to any ordinary Palestinian today and ask him, what are the most three priorities that you are seeking? Then he said: job to survive, to secure the education system and the health system for my children. That's it, this is what we are seeking right now. Nobody is talking about settlements. Nobody is talking about the horrible war which is dividing those from their schools, students from their universities, mothers from their place. Nobody is asking, nobody is talking. We want jobs to survive. I want health care for my children. Go and look today to the Palestinian hospitals in the West Bank: it's miserable because of the corruption of our Authority and our leaders. No doubt about it. I couldn't blame the Israelis on what's happening in the hospital in [indistinct]. We have a budget; we are receiving hundreds of millions of dollars a month. Where is the money? Where is the money? Almost 16, 18 years the Palestinian Authority exists in the occupied territories. I didn't see one university has been built by the Palestinian Authority. I didn't see one hospital has been built by the Palestinian Authority. So on which Authority are we

talking? Do the Palestinian Authority want us tomorrow to call the Israelis to come and to re-occupy us? We want to survive. We want to survive with the Palestinian Authority or without the Palestinian Authority we want to survive. We are people like any other people around the world – have children, have mothers, and have life and also have a future. And for the future of mine and my children I can fight forever. Thank you very much. [applause].

Lionel Louw: Now ladies and gentlemen, we heard our two speakers – it's the opportunity for members of the audience to raise questions, make your comments. First we'll come around to you – there's a hand here and there's a hand there. Thank you – go ahead, sir.

From the floor: I wanted to ask you, the gentleman in the red shirt, is the feeling generally in Palestine is that people wants to live, wants to succeed, to prosper – has there ever been a sense that maybe people need to start let democrats, experts, people who can build a company, create, to industrialise? Because it feels like the preoccupation with war, it's sort of from people who have nothing to lose – but once people are educated, once people have this sense that they [indistinct] then they are less interested in war [indistinct]. So are there leaders, are there people out there who can lead the nation sort of [indistinct] who are not [indistinct]?

Lionel Louw: Okay, thank you very much. Sir.

From the floor: Thanks a lot for your interesting presentations. I have a few questions for both speakers. I'll first start with Benji – you spoke about the reality of local apartheid or Israeli apartheid – you tried to demystify that. But in my reading of the Israeli conflict there's a differentiation when you look at the creation of civic nationalism and [indistinct] nationalism. It seems to me like the Israeli state does not actually subscribe to civic nationalism. And that is problematic and you've actually said that it's not apartheid, then we're doing a disservice on the word itself. So I'd to hear more of that. To Bassam, I always find the general dynamics of the Palestinian situation very interesting, and thanks for highlighting that. My question is in terms of the divided voice that Fatah and Hamas have – to what extent does that create polarisations in the international community when we look at the Palestinian conflict? And lastly my question is – there was no emphasis on the international community and the role that it plays. I was in Palestine myself in 2008 and talking to a lot of Palestinians. The discussion centred around Israel not being the enemy but rather the international community being an area and to a larger extent an enemy called the press, to peace and coexistence. So I'd like [indistinct] to that.

Lionel Louw: A third question there, there another hand.

From the floor: Yes, I have got a general question to any one of the speakers, and this is a very short question. My question is: how does Hamas takeover of Gaza affected the chances for a Palestinian state?

From the floor: Good evening, hi. My first question is: to what extent is the United States a force for peace or for some obstacle to peace? And my second question to Benji is that this thing to Bassam's account of the way

the Palestinian Authority functions or doesn't function, and it rather remind of our Bantustans here in South Africa where we essentially had corrupt puppet leaders installed and patronised by the National Party government. I was wondering if you think there's anything in that comparison.

Benji Pogrud: I'm sorry, I didn't quite understand the gist of the first question about civic civil nationalism, and so on. I'm a journalist, been a journalist most of my life. I lived in South Africa most of my life, I'm 26 years a journalist and then I went on in England and elsewhere. I investigated, analysed, reported, commented on apartheid. I think I have some idea of what apartheid is. That's what I apply in Israel: I know what I have here and I look what I've got there and that's the comparison I make. Sorry, I know I'm in a university setting and perhaps I should be talking in more academic terms but I talk in very practical terms. And if I may give a very personal example which I mention now and again – it's just nine years next month that I was very seriously ill in Jerusalem and I had major surgery in Hadassah Mount Scopus Hospital, one of the major hospitals in Israel. My surgeon was Jewish, my anaesthetist was an Arab. My nurses were some Jews, some Arabs. My doctors who looked after me for four and a half weeks were Jews and Arabs. Now this spirit [indistinct] doesn't operate throughout Israel but it tells you – you know, when people to me 'apartheid' – I say, 'What the hell are you talking about?' And I can tell you countless stories like that. And just to round it off, the surgeon who operated on me was the head surgeon, he retired about two years ago; his replacement, the head surgeon at one of the major hospitals is an Arab doctor who happens to be the leading liver transplant doctor. And you can repeat that story all over the place. Those are the practical details when you talk about apartheid that I apply.

Now international – that's a good question, thank you. It ties in with the Americans – because of course we're all subject there to international events which develop, problems. At the moment we're caught up in the Iranian [indistinct] where the consequences are still being played out. Certainly in terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the United States is the key, that is the dominant power. Although it's often forgotten, you know, America is blamed all the time for Israel's existence, that America supported the vote for Israel in November 1947 at the United Nations. It's usually forgotten the Soviet Union also voted, and so did the communist states. That's happened in history; so it's not just America, it was the world as it was at that stage in the United Nations which voted and the Resolution is clear, you can go and have a look at the words – they voted partition for a Jewish state and an Arab state – that's what was to be created. And it was a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly at the time. My view on this, and you will have gathered we're in a morass at the moment. In the 14 years I've lived in Israel and I've seen ups and downs and the terrible times, worrying times, stalemates not going anywhere – but there always seemed to be the hope that something would happen. I don't have it at the moment precisely because the two sides are each taking actions which are going to undermine the chance of it getting to peace – that is the danger at the moment, it's not just a stalemate, it's a sort of an active stalemate in which bad things are happening.

My one hope, for what it's worth, is that if Obama is re-elected this year, and if he's not too worried about the Democrats being re-elected four years later, that he will finally do what a lot of us hoped he was going to

do when he was elected the first time around, and actually intervene. And it needs a very basic action by the US: a threat to withdraw military aid or supply of arms. That's it. And this has worked before. When Shamir was prime minister, very right-wing, and he was intransigent. The US paid back loan guarantees; I think we had about three and a half million dollars, whenever it is, a helluva lot of money. We don't need it anymore, we're doing so well, we don't need those loan guarantees, we can raise all the money we need internationally. But arms is the critical thing because we need to defend ourselves. The arms is vital for our existence, and if the US whispers behind the scenes, hey, back-off on these settlements or else instead of the slap on the wrist they give us, then life would change. That's the hope, at least I cling to some kind of a hope of that sort. I think I've covered everything but there's one other point. Ja, sorry, I think I've said everything – there was something else but I can't see it. Thank you.

Oh, sorry, the Bantustans, that's an important one. You could be talking about the present South Africa now. Think about that. If you want to talk about corruption, I'm sorry to say it but I have a deep attachment to this country, but I come here and I see what I see and I read it every day – don't talk to me about corruption – the PA is not the Bantustans, that's nonsense, the comparison is totally illegitimate – and especially if you use the word 'corruption'.

Bassam Eid: Okay, the words experts and [indistinct] in the Palestinian Authority – I think that while the Hamas and the Fatah have divided, I'm no expert here [indistinct]. Because as I said, Fatah already established their own state in the West Bank; Gaza is already running their own state in the Gaza Strip – and that's it, and that's it. Now imagine that somebody will come tomorrow to the Hamas in Gaza by saying, listen, I'm interested to create a political party. I'm quite sure that he would go the [indistinct]. Then he would be considered as a spy either for the Israelis or for the Palestinian Authority from the West Bank. So nobody right now wants to put here his head among such a kind of conflict which is between the Fatah and the Hamas. And it looks like the Palestinians, in my opinion, I think that we all know is stuck between two big political parties which is the Hamas and the Fatah and that will continue running, I believe, in the coming 50 years at least.

Now, it is effecting the divided society, no doubt that it's making us so weak in front of the international community and of course in front of the Israelis. Imagine that Mahmoud Abbas tomorrow will meet with Nathaniel. I probably believe that Nathaniel would ask him: Listen, Abbas, who you are representing? West Bankers? Gaza Strip? Palestinians in the Diaspora? Who? – which is in my opinion, I believe that Abbas is only representing his two sons. [laughter from the floor]. Now, the Hamas of course made a big mistake by taking over the Gaza Strip. When I talk about the state and we are so close to complete the infrastructure of state, I'm talking about the year 2000 before the second intifada started – and the Hamas took over the Gaza Strip only in June 2007. So we have here about seven years in-between the state and the Hamas took over. Now the Hamas took over because the Hamas, in my opinion, are people who are obeying a completely foreign agenda. A foreign agenda. And the foreign agenda of the Hamas is the Iranian agenda. That's not giving any compliment of course to the Fatah because the Fatah also operating towards a foreign agenda, which is an American agenda. So imagine how the Palestinians disappear here in-between the Iranians' interests and the

Americans' interests. The Americans are not interested to seeing any united Palestinian government. But in the meantime the Iranians are not interested to see a united Palestinian government. So imagine where we are going. Thank you. [applause].

Lionel Louw: There was a question in front and at the back, the gentlemen in the brown shirt, if I was correct.

From the floor: During the apartheid era we used to refer to the Bantustans as [indistinct]; they had not apartheid walls and they had no apartheid roads. They did have [indistinct] were hugely corrupt, but they didn't have 700 000 [indistinct], 70 000 by the [indistinct] figures released last month – rather 500 000 settlers occupying land and taking water [indistinct]. Mr Pogrand agrees the settlements destroy the possibility of a viable two-state solution. And my first question is: if the right of return of 7 million Palestinian refugees is a con, why should Jews born anywhere in the world also have the right of return to Israel? And, secondly, if the comparison of apartheid in South Africa and Palestine is a lie, how do our speakers distinguish between the Palestinian Authority and [indistinct]? And, thirdly, if a two-state solution is now a non-starter thanks to 700 000 settlers, why not a one-state bi-national solution, per South Africa's example? [some applause].

Lionel Louw: Okay, gentleman at the back.

From the floor: Thank you. My question is directed to both speakers. What, if anything can we as South Africans do to help, because a lot of our people are trying very hard on both sides, [indistinct] in your view?

Bassam Eid: What South Africa can do?

Lionel Louw: Or how can South Africa help in any way. Third question.

From the floor: I'm sure I'm not alone feeling a little bit depressed about what we've heard tonight. But I'd just like to hear a little bit more on – we've heard what is hoped for from the United States, but what can we do as part of the international community to assist the process and assist in any way? We've had three dialogues in was it 13 months, and other groups here, religious groups are having inter-religious dialogues on the issue. Are these at all helpful? We've got now the Kairos Palestine documents. Is that going anywhere? Has that any weight to it? Is there anything we can practically or we should be doing here in Cape Town? Thank you.

Lionel Louw: There was one more hand, ja, here in front. And then we will give you an opportunity to respond.

Bassam Eid: When there are little questions, we can focus much more, by the way, I must have to say, ja, because then I might lose some questions that I couldn't answer.

Lionel Louw: No, no, no, no, we've got time.

Bassam Eid: Okay.

From the floor: The timing of your visit is amazing. There are posters going up all over campus about Israeli Apartheid Week, and I think I have to ask, is the timing of this visit purely co-incidental [**Benji Pogrund:** No] or is it part of a response to Israeli Apartheid Week.

Benji Pogrund: Probably. [laughter from the floor].

Lionel Louw: Bassam, do you want to start this round?

Bassam Eid: Yes, yes. Towards the bi-state solution, I think that this is, I can say that it, I can say that the Palestinians rejected it. Because you know what is the Palestinian demand today – it's a three-state solution [indistinct] [some laughter]. Believe me. Believe me. This is what's really going on. This is why we don't a kind of unity between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Hamas is still building their own infrastructure in the Gaza Strip and the Fatah is busy building their own infrastructure in the West Bank. Now, to where's the refugees – I don't know why the issue of the right of return is making so noise in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I visited all of the refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria and in [indistinct]. Very good Palestinian NGOs in 2004 conducted a survey among the Palestinian refugees in the Diaspora – I was so surprised from the results. What the results are: 70% of the refugees in Diaspora prefer to have the kind of compensation rather than to return to the Palestinian state with the '67 borders. This is very interesting. Why you don't want to come back to the '67 borders, which is the Palestinian state? Because he said, listen, I'm originally from Haifa – to send me to Gaza, then the Gaza people will continue considering me as a refugee and they must have 10 or 12 years to look after my homeland back.

Now I think I am a refugee. I am, by myself I am a refugee. I think that the issue of the refugees shouldn't have to be handled by the Palestinian Authority or any Palestinian people. I think that the refugees in Diaspora has the full right to determine their own issue. The problem is that each leader coming to the ground, they start jumping to the refugee camps, talking about the right of return – no peace without the right of return, which we know that there are understandings between Mahmoud Abbas and Ehud Olmert, the former Israeli prime minister, that the issue of the refugees will be solved by bringing of a few hundreds of thousands to the Palestinian state. We know that. *Al Jazeera* already published a lot of documents in that; [indistinct] get a heart attack from that, because the documents has been stolen from his office by an American agent. Imagine, imagine, by an American agent that he knows an agent and he allow him to work with him in the office – he knows very well. Because [indistinct] as an agent. So this is the problem of the Palestinians.

Now I know, I visited them. The situation of the Palestinian refugees in Diaspora is much more miserable than in the Gaza Strip. I lived with them. I was in Lebanon. I ate with them. I slept there with them; it's much more [indistinct]. I am as a refugee, I will never allow to myself to have a such kind of daily life in Lebanon or in Syria or [indistinct]. So this is our problem.

Now to [indistinct], first of all, this is my third time here in Cape Town. I love Cape Town, by the way, and I have no problem if anybody would invite me every day to come to Cape Town. [laughter from the floor]. Thank you very much. [applause].

Benji Pogrund: There seems to be some misunderstanding. 27th of November 1947, to repeat it, the United Nations favoured to create two states in the area of mandated Palestine: a Jewish state and an Arab state. The Jews accepted it. The Arabs didn't; they went to war -.

From the floor: And what about the Palestinians – can you please refer to them as Palestinians and stop using the word 'Arab' – you haven't used the word 'Palestinians' once.

Benji Pogrund: You're actually wrong, we're talking about Palestinians and Arabs interchangeably. Bassam himself said he's an Arab and a Palestinian. If you want me to do it I'll do it, but you're making a niggly point which is irrelevant to what we're talking about.

From the floor: It's very relevant [cross-talk - indistinct].

Benji Pogrund: It's not relevant, it's not in the slightest relevant.

From the floor: And I'll vote with my feet.

Benji Pogrund: Alright, good.

From the floor: Just remember there's something called the boycott and divestment campaign – that's the best way to [indistinct]. Thank you.

Benji Pogrund: Alright, good luck. The Jewish state came into existence, okay. The Jews accepted it. It's a Jewish state – exactly what a Jewish state means is not always clear. Exactly what a Jew is isn't always clear. But there's something called a Jewish state and the majority of people in that state want Jews only to be the majority. That's their right – just as it's the right of any country in the world to decide who the majority is. And this is not also -.

From the floor: [indistinct].

Benji Pogrund: Can I finish, please, can I finish? [indistinct] a bit of history.

From the floor: Ja.

Benji Pogrund: Will you listen to me?

From the floor: [indistinct].

Benji Pogrund:No, listen to me.

Lionel Louw: Can we allow this speaker – we'll give you an opportunity if you will disagree, but let's give him an opportunity to complete his statement. I think it's only fair.

Benji Pogrand: Now Israel is not unique in this respect. Ireland has the same sort of law. Lithuania has, and [indistinct] other countries in Europe. In fact, just today my nephew in Cape Town, preferring the Lithuanian passport because his grandparents came from there – and he's able to prove it, he's got a Lithuanian passport, which he wants for access to European Union. It's not an unusual thing. In Israel's case, it's a matter of Jewish history, Jewish survival. The losers were the Arabs, the Palestinians, who were either chased or fled network 1948. And that was a tragedy for them and for the world in terms of suffering. It's not unique; again, if we look at other history people in the world, of mankind – look where we come from. People sitting here, the colour of your skins in this country – I mean, for G-d's sake, what are we talking about? Israel is not a perfect society; it's done horrible things, nasty things – it's not unique, don't pick on it.

And in terms of the right of return, it's a Jewish thing, because of Jewish history, because of the Holocaust and everything that went with it. Because after the Second World War there were a few hundred thousand people, displaced people wondering around Europe who'd come out of the death camps of the Nazis and a home was needed for them. Between 1948 and [From the floor: inaudible interjection] 1951, 600 000 – 800 000 Jews came from the Arab countries, [From the floor: Please, sir, please] they've either traced.

From the floor: No, no.

Benji Pogrand: Please, please, no, no, I'm talking.

From the floor: Please, please, please -.

Lionel Louw: We will give you an opportunity. We will give you an opportunity to respond.

From the floor: Exactly, that is what we're suggesting.

Lionel Louw: No, no. No, no, we'll give you an opportunity.

From the floor: [indistinct] such suppression in another country in Europe.

Lionel Louw: We will give you an opportunity. I've indicated that we'll give you an opportunity to speak.

Benji Pogrand: Even on that point, I'm afraid you're incorrect. If you know your history of Zionism in the 20th Century – there was a flow of history; the Holocaust certainly speeded it up, it would have happened anyway because that's what was happening. Read your history of Zionism and you'll understand that a little bit better. But the right of return – well, that's what it is. The PA as a toy telephone – I don't know what you're talking about, it isn't. You know, just to say a thing doesn't make it that it is – it isn't, it's totally different, there's no comparison. The whole comparison with the Bantustans is false. It's totally different. You know that. The purpose of the Bantustans, may I remind you were to create reservoirs of labour, to draw blacks in when white

society needed workers in offices, mines, farms, and so on. The purpose of the boundaries that we've got is to keep Palestinians out; we don't want them. Palestinians want to come into work – we don't want them, it's a totally different thing. And the PA itself, we don't fund the PA.

From the floor: [indistinct].

Benji Pogrund: Ja, but we don't. In fact, we withhold money from them, wrongly I believe. We withhold -. Just to finish with the two-state solution and one state. I don't say the two-state solution is ended, I said it's in danger, there's the possibility, I'm worrying about it, but a lot of us are worried about it. There's still hope, I believe, for what it's worth. I go on working for it, as a lot of us do across the line – and by the way, is one of the points of hope in that part of the world – the number of people across the lines who continue to work together does a great deal, far more than what happened under apartheid. People, I am always amazed by coming across another organisation that is working, either Jews and Arabs inside Israel, Jews and Arab Palestinians inside the West Bank. That is a tiny bit of hope to me all the time.

A one-state solution, agh, tell that to the Sudanese. Tell that to the Scots. Tell that to the Kurds. Why should we be different? We don't want it; I told you. If I'm wrong it was 99%, 99.9% of Jews – 99.8% - what will you do with them? How will you persuade them if they say we are frightened, we don't want it. We are Jews, we want to be in our own safe environment. How are you going to do it? Can you tell me? Persuade them? Give the example, what? What example will we give them? You tell me just now. It's a nonsense. It's a wonderful idea; I'm a [one-worlder - sounds like] like you – or I think you are, anyway – so I don't [indistinct] Israel as you do because I think that's the basis to your question, you don't admit the existence of Israel.

From the floor: It's not [indistinct].

Benji Pogrund: No, not [indistinct], so we've had this exchange before – that's why [chuckles], there's a repartee going on here. But, anyway, sorry, I apologise for that. What South Africans can do: try and understand, try and study. What I've said to be one of the things when I come here, also when I'm there and I read the papers here, is the misinformation. There's a lot of it. The newspapers use material selectively; there's a lot of false information put out. I can show you stuff from here, I've got it in my file. I can show you flyers, stuff about right of return, which is false; apartheid which is false. I've got one thing that has appeared in England that's probably been picked up, used by BDS, where they compare the West Bank and Gaza to conditions in sub-Saharan Africa. I mean, what nonsense. Has anyone ever been to the West Bank and Gaza? Do you know the infant mortality statistics and life expectancy for Gaza and the West Bank? Although the hospital [indistinct] is not the greatest, infant mortality is around 20 -24 per 1000. In South Africa it's more than double that. 20 – 24 in the world is not so bad today. Israel's a lot better, but, you know, life, it's occupation, which is terrible, but it's not sub-Saharan Africa. When we flew into Cape Town, I said to Bassam, hey, look at all those shacks. [indistinct] in the West Bank, we don't have that, you don't see people in tattered clothing there. You don't see beggars in the streets. It's just not the same. And anyone who talks like that doesn't know what they're saying. You can help by understanding. The word, the phrase, 'constructive

engagement' unfortunately, what was the name, Chester Crocker of the US, I remember that in the closing years of apartheid – he gave it a bad name because he misused it. He used it as a code name for status quo. It's still though an important concept – and that's what we need. We need support. You've got to soothe Jews that they will not be murdered – that's the basic thing. People are frightened, they don't want to be killed and they'll fight. We've got to soothe them and say you will not be killed. I believe the boycott campaign, and boycotts are fine – but I think the way it's done is dishonest. The propaganda is dishonest and I think it's counter-productive. [applause].

Lionel Louw: Now there's obviously a difference of opinion and we'll give you an opportunity to speak.

From the floor: Thanks a load. I morally disagree with a lot of things that you have raised, and I think I'm entitled to that. The issue of [global apartheid - unclear] in Palestine is very real. What I'm trying to suggest was the whole notion of the Israeli state being based on ethnic nationalism, and that is an idea that incongruent to how western democracies have actually matured and developed over time – because western democracies have actually ensured that they protect the interest of minorities – which then we move civic nationalism – that is what countries like Canada, the United States, they will [conform - unclear]. And it is actually surprising that you talk about oppression and the Holocaust and yet the very same practices and tactics that are used in Palestine at the moment, the Israeli military occupation in the West Bank that incarcerates children illegally, military check points that actually exist across the World Bank and, I mean, not the World Bank, the West Bank – and Gaza Strip equally. I mean, what do we call that? Israeli [indistinct] of the war – isn't that re-enforcing ethnic nationalism? Is that an inclusive democracy at all? To me it seems like the reason why Israel wants to keep a two-state solution is because there's a demographic crisis inside Israel – because Palestinian families have more children and - and if you chose a one-state solution, in the next 20 to 30 Israeli Jews will be outnumbered in a one-state solution. Is that not the fear?

Benji Pogrand: Yes.

From the floor: Ja, and it sounds to me that all the arguments that you've actually proposed, are based on an unfounded fear, a fear of the Palestinians, fear of the expansion of peace and conflict resolution and to maintain a Jewish identity that does not assimilate.

Benji Pogrand: I agree. You're right. [laughter from the floor].

From the floor: But now not to call it apartheid is accepted. There's a professor who's doing work who visited one of [indistinct] Israeli [indistinct] against house demolitions [indistinct]. Thanks.

Lionel Louw: Thank you very much. We don't have to agree with one another. This is a platform for engagement and debate – and so I think it's been useful for us to have the experience – and there are different views, and I'm certain that there are more questions and more comments that can be raised, but I need to draw it to a close by saying thank you to our speakers, thank you to the audience. [applause]. And we from

South Africa simply have to indicate to you that remember very vividly in 1990 I was in a big march in Cape Town and we did not expect the announcement that was made by Mr de Klerk on that day when he opened parliament. In fact, we got a copy of the speech before it was delivered and we were taken by surprise. And so from the experience that we've had in South Africa, where there's great diversity and we now live within the same boundaries with all of the diversity that we have, we can only wish you well on your own pilgrimage in the Middle East and hope that you will be surprised as well by developments as they will now unfold in the future. [applause].

[END]