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## The U.S. Middle East Peace Plan: Prospects for Success, Implications of Failure

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### Unedited Transcript

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**SUSAN GLASSER:** Well, thank you and good evening to everyone. It's a dangerous thing to stand between an audience and dessert, so forgive us in advance. I want to thank Rob on behalf of all of us. I think, especially the journalists in the room, can appreciate that he did his very best to extract as much news as possible from that.

I am particularly delighted of course to have this panel of professional “peace processors” this evening because it seems to me that turnabout is fair play. You heard criticism in Jared Kushner’s remarks tonight about the failure of the professional “peace processors,” so I’ll turn it around for our first question.

First of all, two questions for everybody in a lightning opening-round. Number one: was there any news there? As a newspaper, I saw some tweets, but I’m not sure there was a big headline out of it. Number one, did we hear any news tonight about the peace process? Number two: did you hear anything in the conversation this evening that made you feel that a settlement is actually likelier than you thought coming into the dinner this evening? I guess it’s only fair to start with those who have been on the ground most recently, so General Herzog, I will go ahead and give you the first shot at this: What was the news?

**MICHAEL HERZOG:** There was not much news in what we heard tonight, but there were some important things that were said, and I would like to highlight one element which is his analysis of why we failed for the past 25 years. He said we studied your past failures and we drew some conclusions and translated them into our plan. And he said three things that I heard. One is that past efforts were more about general concepts and less about details and operational things, so he put forward what he called an “operational document.” Now, it’s as if he’s telling the parties, “You failed to draw the line, so we will draw the line for you.” The problem with this conclusion is that if you think that there will be an operational document someone has to operationalize it.

The problem is that the parties who are supposed to operationalize it are not interested in it, not interested in talking to each other and don't trust each other and don't want it. So who's going to operationalize it?

The second conclusion that he drew was that there ought to be a very heavy economic component. I think in a way he evaded Rob's question about what he's doing about political aspirations, it's more about the heavy economic component. I can tell you that in our region, I talked to Palestinians, the way they translated it was they are trying to buy us. Trying to get us to give up on our core positions with a lot of money. Secondly, who exactly will pay for that? You want the Arabs to pay for a plan they don't know? Who exactly will finance this?

His third conclusion was, don't listen to analysts and past negotiators, but go to the people. I don't take it personally, but I will say if you go to the people and you do opinion polling in our region, the people will give you hawkish positions. And if you ask me what is one of the biggest failures of leaders in the past 25 years is that they did not focus on educating the people to peace. That was a major failure in my view because we neglected it. It was all about leaders talking to each other. Ultimately, though, it's not the people that sign agreements but the leaders, and they are certainly not there.

GLASSER: Okay. So Ghaith, maybe you can tell us: Did you hear any news?

GHAITH AL-OMARI: There was news for the obsessives. If you're an obsessive peace...

GLASSER: I like that.

AL-OMARI: ...peace processor like myself, I heard two bits of news. One, I think for the first time in this administration I've heard them talk about reform, transparency, governance, et cetera. That may not be big news or headline news, but certainly a piece that if we don't tackle, there's no way we can move or make progress. That's one.

Two is, actually, there was some clarification. To a point where I might disagree with you, Mike. I think he went out of his way to say there is a political component. A lot of the reporting has focused on the economic, but he went out of his way to say that there is a political component.

Now the problem with this, though, is that what we saw this evening, I think was almost a live play of the dilemma they have to deal with. On one hand, for good reason, I believe, they do want to have kept it secret. And there are many good reasons for that. However, if you make it a secret, you cannot make news. If you make it secret, you can't get the people to buy in. They clearly they have done a lot of work, and I believe they have done work. I believe they are sincere and passionate about this. However, they're asking us to take it on faith. "Believe me, it's going to be good." And in a region where any decision is a fateful one, one of life and death, very few leaders will take it on faith. That's where I think a lot of the tension you see among the Palestinians and the other Arabs, Jordan et cetera, comes from this: They want to believe, yet they are given nothing to believe. So in that sense, we saw the dilemma: they want to make news, but they can't make news.

Finally, to a point that Mike said, the operationalization business. We saw almost a dismissiveness of diplomacy and the process, et cetera. Again, for good reason: there are leaders who have spent too much time on details and lost vision of the whole picture. However, if you do not do the legwork of engaging these issues you will not get buy-in from those leaders. Diplomacy gives you credibility. Diplomacy builds relations. These you have to cash in on these things when you do the deal. So I think there were a lot of good ideas but their unwillingness to go the extra step has made it difficult to make it a convincing case.

GLASSER: David?

DAVID MAKOVSKY: Susan, being that I was once a journalist myself many moons ago I have learned that the news sometimes not only what people say, but what they don't say. And compare what we heard

**GLASSER:** Only if you're really hard-up on deadline. [laughter]

**MAKOVSKY:** Compare what you heard tonight from the beginning of the administration: A focus on the outside-in, the role of Arab states, using the strategic convergence on Iran as being very central in trying to shape the positions of the parties. Virtually no mention of the Arab states tonight, and to me it reflects the evolution, that they've really evolved from where they began, that they don't believe the Arab states are going to be able to really temper Abbas' reaction. MbZ, the leader in the Emirates, Mohammad bin Zayed, and Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) I don't think have met for six or seven years. And so I think much less focus on Arab states than the rush, the interests, and it's a new Middle East, it's a new region, than when they came into office.

The second thing he said was kind of offhandedly, "Let's not say two states"; I mean I think some of the reporting had said that the administration was backing off from that but to hear it on record, those words, I think was very significant. I'll just pick up on one thing that Ghaith said here, and Mike did too, that they're trying to focus on a new paradigm. You heard that word, "new paradigm," many times over, economics.

But we're dealing with a region, as my colleague said here, that is basically going to judge this, and I know in this audience people will say, "unfairly," through an older paradigm of the five core issues that go back to the Clinton parameters that have been tweaked since then, maybe, but are basically the five same core issues: the borders, the security arrangements, refugees, Jerusalem, and mutual recognition. And so this could be "economics, plus-plus," but I have a feeling in the Arab world they will look at it as "Clinton, minus-minus." And instead of giving the new paradigm a chance on economics and even though correctly he said we wanted to solve all the "core issues," meaning all the five which is kind of the buzzword, but I think that the Arab world and the Palestinians per se will, fairly or unfairly or rightly or unrightly, look at it and do a compare and contrast the ledger between those and the Clinton plan. And I think that will be some of the commentary that will certainly come from the Middle East and may come out of Washington as well. So they want to focus on a new paradigm while saying they're going to have to deal with the older issues, but I think it's the older issues that people will judge the metrics against and ask, "How do they compare on those five?"

**GLASSER:** It's an excellent point. Dennis, you just came back from the region. Do you also think the lack of focus on the Arab states is notable tonight?

**DENNIS ROSS:** I wouldn't exaggerate that. I'm not persuaded that just because that didn't come up... It was more I think a function of the nature of that conversation than, if this had been a prepared speech and left the Arabs out, then I would've noted what David did, but I'm less certain that that is something that is noteworthy at this point.

There are a couple of things that leaped out at me, well more than a few, but I will start with a couple. One, I think there *was* news there and the news was: They're going to do this. And the president is invested in this. He [Kushner] kept saying that and I think there's been a lot of speculation that, when push comes to shove and he actually has to present this and actually maybe it does not look like it'll be a winner, as Rob was describing, or even as he suggested at dinner what it might be like. It will be hard to say this is a winner, but he was very clear that they are doing this. So I think that, actually, is news.

Secondly, this was raised before but I would like to amplify it a little bit. They are going to deal with the core issues, and that means borders. They talked about how you can't get people to invest; the economic side of this depends on major investment. He said no one will invest if there aren't borders, if there isn't a rule of law. Producing a rule of law soon obviously suggests this will be something that might be done over time, but if they are actually doing borders? I have worked on this for 30 years and I'm not going to try to draw the borders. So I think one thing to keep in mind is: This is very ambitious. This is more ambitious than I think most people think.

I guess the third point I would make, that has already been made but bears reinforcing: the Palestinians and the Arabs are going to want to be able to see this as well, and what we heard tonight is a desire to avoid any of the traditional buzzwords. Now you can argue that's because it might be revealing something in the plan before they want to reveal it, or it could mean that they are trying to address these core issues, the symbolic issues, by getting away from the symbols and focusing exclusively on the practicalities and having the parties be able to say, "Look, here's the way things will look and it's not up to your imagination for you to see the way they look and see how this will make things better for you." If it is put in a context where Arabs and Palestinians can say, "Okay, our national aspirations are being addressed with this plan," then you have a shot. But if they can't say, "Our national aspirations are being addressed with this plan," then you probably don't have a shot.

**GLASSER:** So this brings up the question I think that we have to get to next, which is: You refer to national aspirations. Jared Kushner, in his comments, he essentially twinned "one-state" and "two-state" and then dismissed both and said, "We're not going to talk about it." But I guess my question again, I guess this is one for everyone, but I'll go back to General Herzog first: Is the absence of reference to a Palestinian state a nonstarter? Is it impossible to even move the conversation forward if it doesn't matter if it's not mentioned in the plan, one way or the other?

**HERZOG:** Well, the administration is saying that, "We're not referring to two-states" because each and every one has a different definition of what the two-state solution is. I heard additional explanations from them: like what do you do about Gaza? Maybe three states [are an option] even and also they're saying that since they will have to have limitations on Palestinian statehood, maybe it's not exactly a state, but maybe it's what out [the Israeli] Prime Minister calls a "state-minus," and the question is: How big is the minus in this state?

However, if you want to market a plan and...Rob asked Jared about the "bar of success" and he evaded that question. My understanding from them is that the original goal was to get the parties to the table to negotiate. They now realize it's not going to happen, the Palestinians said, "no," so the alternative goal as I understand it is for the plan to remain there as a kind of point of reference for the future.

They will not say it, but I think they referred to the Clinton parameters, which were withdrawn but stayed there forever, and everyone regards them as a yardstick. So now they want the Trump parameters. But for the Trump parameters to survive and have an impact in the future, if they are rejected by everyone except Israel, [rejected] by the Palestinians, by the Arabs, and the Russians, and the Europeans, they would be done. They are not going to survive and have any impact in the future and to gain Arab support, even though I think he hinted that the Arabs are less interested in the Palestinian issue, they have less patience today, and that is probably true, but the Arabs have their own minimum bar to lend some support and to not dismiss the plan which is within the general contours of the Arab peace initiative, which he dismissed, in a way, and that has to be about the state and capital and most of all the sensitive, radioactive issues of Jerusalem and if the plan does not meet these bars, they will not be able to support it.

**GLASSER:** Well, that's why I asked, simply deleting the word "state" from the parameters doesn't necessarily mean you've deleted the debate about it. So, Ghaith, do you agree that this is a non-starter if it's not included?

**AL-OMARI:** I totally agree. What he was trying to do is to give you a rational explanation why they're not using it. And I think he used the word "rational" a number of times. This is the Middle East. Rational is not the only consideration. Symbols matter. I think for the Palestinians, that is a big part of the narrative: We're in this, we've made our compromise in 1988, accepting a two-state solution, and we want a state. For the Arabs, as Mike said, the Arab peace initiative, which is seen by the Arab states as a major policy move for them, particularly by the Saudis, whose former King Abdullah was behind it. It's a major thing for them. A peace plan that does not include the word "state," that does not include Jerusalem, is a very hard sell to Arab leaders because they feel their own risk that they have taken has been dismissed. So I think it's one where you have to be rational and accept people's symbolic needs if you want to succeed.

**GLASSER:** David, one thing I noticed as well, that you could say is perhaps was news, was that Jared Kushner specifically did not answer when pressed on the question of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's campaign statements that he was going to begin annexation. So, what do you extract from that and clearly we know there have been a lot of close consultations between the Trump administration and the Netanyahu government on this plan. People will see it somehow as a Netanyahu plan, even if it's not. Does that mean we should expect that annexation will be a part of this plan?

**MAKOVSKY:** It's an excellent question because it gets at something very core to the psychology of the region, what I would call the 'conspiracy psychology'. It is, as one Arab diplomat has said to me, "It's not where we end up, but where we begin from. That's our baseline. We start from the 'conspiracy psychology' and go from there." What I'm concerned about in the 'conspiracy psychology' thinking is that the people will say this is all a "two-stepper." The "two-stepper" is, they all know that Abbas is going to reject it and based on his rejection, Netanyahu swoops in and says, "By the way, I'd like to engage in selective annexation. Not drastic, don't listen to what I said 48 hours before my election, of course I didn't do this stuff for 13 years so I will not build Bosnia on the Mediterranean, but here are the places that even in the Palestinian plan will be Israeli." So there should be consequences for saying, "no" to the President of the United States. And that 'conspiracy psychology' culture, I am concerned, is going to mean that if it fails and people are expecting this they will say this was all baked into the cake. "Of course they knew Abbas would say no, this was all setting the predicate for Netanyahu."

Here I wonder if Abbas could surprise us. It's been so discounted that you have to be a contrarian every once in a while and say maybe he will surprise and say, "I'm not going to say no, not right away." Maybe he even tries to preempt the plan if he's assuming this is coming out after Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr in the second week of June or whatever and calls the president and says, "I want to sit with Prime Minister Netanyahu. We have not sat together since 2010." Most people in Washington don't know that. That they haven't sat for nine years, at least not publicly. They've had some phone calls, but they have not had a public meeting.

I wonder if when Jared Kushner said, "We want to be a catalyst," he did say that at one point and it also relates to the point that my colleagues made here and I hope I'm not being Talmudic when Jared Kushner said he wanted to "change the discussion," "elevate the discussion," and I do see an idea that this is creating a new yardstick, a new baseline that will be part of the mix for future peace plans for the next administration, that this will be different from Clinton, but as my colleague said, if it's repudiated by everyone it won't work. What I do wonder is does Abbas assume the 'conspiracy psychology' implicit in your question and say, "This is clear where this is going. They're expecting me to reject it so Bibi [Netanyahu] can swoop in and do selective annexation. He's not going to do any quid for the quo, by saying "I won't build outside the fence" and in so doing I'm setting him up as I've been set up." Can he preempt that almost conventional wisdom at this point in Washington and turn it around and say, "Leave your plan aside, Mr. President. I think it's time for the Israelis and me to sit down." That would be unexpected and would get him out of the rejection-esque way that people are trying to depict him and would be a chance to shift his relationship with this administration without conceding anything on the core issues like Jerusalem.

**GLASSER:** Dennis, I'm sure you have some thoughts on that, and I--

**ROSS:** Well first, I would say to David, that would be news. [Laughter] I would love to see it. It also completely contradicts the traditional way that Palestinians in general have operated and certainly the way Abu Mazen [Abbas] has operated. It would be a smart thing to do, but he's also positioned himself with his own public – his popularity is very low. It's actually gone up somewhat by being seen as being defiant towards President Trump, so I think it is out of character even if it would be the smart thing to do.

**GLASSER:** So, I want to ask you: Jerusalem was mentioned, which historically has been seen—

**MAKOVSKY:** By the way, Susan, can I just say, I just want to be clear in my answer: I was not saying that he should accept the Trump peace plan. I was saying preempt it.

GLASSER: I understand.

MAKOVSKY: Not accept it. It's very different.

ROSS: Even to preempt it the way you suggest would be out of character. Look, it would be a smart thing to do.

GLASSER: Well—

ROSS: We could go on like this. [Laughter]

GLASSER: Maybe we can convene a panel in Ramallah to give them advice on how to... So, one question, we've mentioned Jerusalem but only tangentially, what occurred to me in listening to Jared Kushner is that one of the ways in which this is most different in terms of the process, it's not insulting the experts, because that's a time-honored Washington thing, but is actually: the Trump administration and the president personally has made the unusual choice to go ahead and basically on the front end, make decisions that historically, presidents in both parties thought would be left as part of the final negotiations and the resolution of this issue. So we've got both Jerusalem, essentially off the table in terms of U.S. policy, and we also have this decision now to recognize the annexation of the Golan Heights. So Dennis, what is the effect of that and does that complicate the rollout of this peace process?

ROSS: I think it does have an effect. I might just start by saying that what you heard at one point was Jared saying, "We believe in telling the truth." In a sense, they do have a belief that it's very important for Palestinians to adjust to reality, lowering expectations. What is interesting is that the truth goes only one way. If there was a perfect opportunity with Rob's question of annexation, okay, so how about telling the truth on how we got the Palestinians to realize that Jerusalem is going to be Israel's capital. Yes, the boundaries still have to be negotiated, but they have to get used to the idea that it's fine and face up to the reality that there's always going to be a significant part of Jerusalem that will be Israel's capital. It is a fact. By the way, it *is* a fact. But why not say at the same time, unilateral Israeli annexations work against any peace plan. That would be also truth-telling. But we heard truth-telling only in one direction. That was point one.

Point two: I think the larger issue you are raising, think about the following. Because you can't talk to the Palestinian leadership, at least right now, you do need at least the Arab leaders to not reject this. By the way, what Mike said and what David also added I think is true. I think they very much would like this plan to become the new reference points. For it to be the new reference point, Arab leaders have to say, "We have questions about it and we have reservations but it's a serious basis." If you're going to get them to say it's a serious basis three things are required. First, don't make it harder for them to do that. So when you go ahead and recognize the sovereignty of the Golan Heights just before the election clearly for political reasons, there's a political consequence with Arab leaders. By the way, there isn't a single Arab leader other than Assad that wanted the Israelis to get off the Golan Heights because they're focused on the Iranians in Syria. But when you give it away like that in their mind you force them to adopt a position that makes it harder for them to embrace what might be coming even by saying it's a serious basis. There's an interesting irony here: The more you do those kinds of things, the more you raise the bar of what has to be in the content of the agreement to allow them to say it's serious. The irony on Jerusalem is you could have gotten away with two capitals for two states, that would have been fine for Arab leaders, but now in the plan they will look for a very significant part of Arab East Jerusalem being in the plan. This is simply because that issue was raised early by the administration.

GLASSER: Excellent point. The other thing, Ghaith, I wanted to return to was the issue of what do we think the administration's approach toward the Palestinians will be? Because what I heard was actually Jared's most negative comments this evening were reserved for the Palestinians. He said something very interesting, to the effect that they've received more aid than any people perhaps in history, but also suggested that perhaps they had been ill-served by leaders who haven't, in fact, given this aid to people. As we know, the administration has

cut off a large amount of that aid. So first of all, what did you make of that? I didn't hear him say anything equally critical of anyone else who'd been in this process. Basically I heard him trashing Washington, the experts, and the Palestinians.

**AL-OMARI:** I mean first, to echo what Dennis said: Without some kind of balanced approach, it is very easy, and I think now this is the image out there, to pin this administration as not only not an honest broker, but more actually anti-Palestinian. And as a former Palestinian negotiator, we always knew about the special Israel-American relationship. That was a fact. But, we also assumed a degree of fairness. This kind of narrative, this kind of messaging, does not help to change that image.

Attacking the Palestinian leadership, this is not the first president to do that. And it can be effective. When I look back at President George W. Bush who, I think in 2002 in the Rose Garden gave a speech that talked very clearly about the need for clear governance, for no corruption, et cetera, et cetera. And this was actually well received. Why was it well received? Because in the exact same speech he said the Palestinians deserved a state. So you put this criticism in a context where you are giving the Palestinians hope for the future and say that within this context of hope we expect x, y, and z from you. And he told the Palestinians what they already knew, that their government is one that 80% of Palestinians according to public opinion polls think their government is corrupt. But if you do not couch it in terms of "do this to get your national hopes," it would look exactly like you are trying to undermine us [them], attack us [them], to make us give up our national dreams. So yes, the trashing and the one-sidedness has actually made it very difficult for them. Once they produce a plan to convince the Palestinians it's a genuine one, because already they're coming from a place where they believe that it's going to be biased. So you're not starting from scratch, you're starting from below scratch.

**GLASSER:** Below scratch. Excellent. We're almost out of time and I want to make sure we get to dessert as expeditiously as possible, but I do want to ask quickly: On this question of what do the Israelis want and expect – the Palestinians are starting below scratch, we've just had an election in Israel, the prime minister has been reelected. Mike, what does this mean in terms of this Trump plan? Does it make it more or less likely for him to want to go ahead with it?

**HERZOG:** The truth is that in the public discourse in Israel, a peace process with the Palestinians is not a high priority. It wasn't an issue at all in our elections; people spoke about other issues. But now that Mr. Netanyahu got reelected and is going to form a new coalition, another right-wing coalition. I think that given the fact that Trump is going to present this plan, the talk by the prime minister about annexing Jewish settlements in the West Bank (he didn't speak about Area C, he spoke about settlements), is a serious one. He's not only under political pressure and there's his own legal issues and so on, but also he sees an opportunity with the Trump administration to move ahead and apply Israeli sovereignty over at least some of these, maybe, settlement blocs, and so on. We did not hear an answer here about this question. But I suspect that Netanyahu would not have made these statements, and they are very clear statements, without at least assuming the Trump administration would give him the green lights.

So probably, I think his scenario is that the administration puts forward the plan, Abu Mazen [Abbas] says no (he bets on it), he [Netanyahu] will say yes, and what does "yes" mean? It means, "I accept it as the basis for future negotiations," which he knows will not come. And then, once they say yes, he could apply, he could say, "I am now going to implement parts of the American plan." Given that the Palestinians rejected it, he may start with a settlement bloc like Gush Etzion or Maale Adumim, which is under consensus. This is a very serious development. It's a precedent. We haven't done so for 52 years and it has a lot of consequences which I'm not sure have been fully weighed by this administration, because they are the ones that can stop Netanyahu from going in that direction.

By the way, I would just add one more sentence: What I totally did not hear from Jared was any discussion of the risk inherent in their plan. We're talking about something radioactive. We're talking about a very, very

complex conflict that's triggered violence over the years. This is radioactive; it's like playing with matches over a barrel of fuel. I do not hear any word about the risks.

**GLASSER:** Lots of heads nodding, so I'm going to finalize with this: He didn't want to even answer the question of, "How do you define success?" But that's okay. Because you guys are brave. I want to know, from each of you: I want a number, tell me how do you assess the chances of, let's say better than 50%, less than 25%, that at the end of the Trump administration, there will be either a settlement of this dispute, or at least some success, something that puts us on the way? You get to start.

**HERZOG:** Zero. [Laughter]

**GLASSER:** Now you started with below zero, Ghaith, so...

**AL-OMARI:** No, no. Below zero when it comes to messaging. I cannot answer this question because I do not know what is in the plan, and that matters a lot. All of that said, all of that said: I don't think the politics is right, I think for political reasons there will be more of a push to say "no." So I think it's going to fail, and to me the real question is: If it fails, do you pivot toward further escalation, or do you pivot towards a series of stabilizing measures to make sure that what Mike talked about, the spiral, does not occur. The real concern right now, the focus is the day after the sides say no.

**GLASSER:** So wait a minute, that's more than zero, in the sense that you can envision some sort of a positive momentum for a renewed conversation of some kind.

**AL-OMARI:** I think it is a mistake to dismiss a plan off-hand before we see it. I personally believe that any effort to solve this conflict is worthy of support, if it really has a chance. And we will reserve judgement, I will reserve judgement, until I see what's in it.

**GLASSER:** So David, I think it depends on whether Abbas is going to listen to your scenario for—

**MAKOVSKY:** Well like I said, look—the Venn diagram between these two leaders on the five core issues, I think is just too wide. There's just not enough overlap. There's an effort here to swing for the fences, and we've tried three times: Clinton in 2000, Condoleezza Rice's in 2007-2008, our effort with Kerry in 2013-14. I agree with Ghaith about humility; we should always be humble. We don't see all the contents. We have to be careful not to have a tone of dismissiveness, and I certainly want to be respectful about that. But my hope is that the leaders realizing what Mike said, that the risks of escalation are such, that they pull back and say, "Look, you might want us to swing for the fences, but we want to hit a solid single. We want to deal with the culture of disbelief on both sides, and do at least something to make people think we can be a partner. We can't solve the great issues, the gaps are too wide. But we can do something to at least...because neither of us, Netanyahu nor Abbas, have an interest in a third Intifada. In my view. So they would want to pull back from the brink, where possible. That's my best hope. If you ask me, that'll be the catalyst for some sort of dialogue, but something less than a deal. A single: That would be, for me, fantastic.

**ROSS:** The bad news is, that's not what we heard tonight. They're not going for a single. But I'm like, Ghaith, look—I've spent 30 years working on this, so I want them to succeed. I'm hoping that part of what is driving them is a deliberate effort to do two things: One is, having driven down Palestinian expectations so low, they will come in with something that surprises the Palestinians by exceeding that. And two: Having done so much for Netanyahu up to now, they're in a position where they can ask a lot from Netanyahu. So if, in fact, the plan surprises us in terms of those two dimensions, then I have some hope. And look, for someone who's been working on this for 30 years, if I don't define hope by my very presence, what else does? [Laughter]



**GLASSER:** Because, Ambassador Ross, you've spent 30 years on this, we will not force you to give us a percentage chance of success. No but seriously, this has been a fantastic conversation. I have to say that I learned a lot, and I feel well-prepared.

**ROBERT SATLOFF:** Friends, please join me in thanking Susan Glasser, Dennis Ross, David Makovsky, Ghaith al-Omari, Mike Herzog...Let me just add a final word. I have a going bet with Dennis. Dennis just doubled down on his side of the wager. We have a bet on whether the president will even issue the Middle East peace plan that we heard tonight. You heard Dennis say, "Absolutely. Positively. No doubt about it." I take that bet.

I look forward to gathering a month, two months from now. I still think that this lightning bolt of a solution that he promised. Something unusual, something that no president has offered since Ronald Reagan tried a plan back in 1982. An actual solution. Ironically, for someone who kind of throws history out the window, there's a fascinating history here. What Jared Kushner proposed tonight was the traditionally Arab version of a "process." Which is, we know what the solution is, we can work on implementation. But we know what the solution is. He gave the Arab version of a "process," with a very pro-Israel version of the content. Will that succeed? My bet is, we never see it. And so, let's find out.